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'Riot', 'Revolution' and 'Rape':
The Theatre Relationship and Performance
Breakdown

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Abstract

This thesis considers theories about the relationship between theatre makers and audience members in theatre – how this relationship is established and how it can break down. The thesis posits that the breakdown of a theatre relationship is manifested in audience behaviour which, when it is severe enough, can lead to interventions in performance and, potentially, the breakdown of that performance. The thesis argues that audience intervention in a performance constitutes a seizure of ‘performance power’ from the theatre makers, which is sufficiently difficult to achieve that successful and sustained interventions can only be carried out by groups of audience members and, probably, organized in advance. Further, the thesis suggests that in its most extreme form, such interventions may bring about a transfer of roles and power between audience members and theatre makers such that a new quasi-theatrical ‘performance of protest’ is created.

The thesis surveys three historical cases in which theatre performances were disrupted by deliberate audience interventions. In each case the nature of the intervention was slightly different and the effect upon the performance was also different. In the first example, the *Plough and the Stars* riots (Dublin, 1926) a preplanned protest occurred in the playhouse and, despite interruption, the performance continued. In the second instance, the audience at Living Theatre’s *Paradise Now* (California 1969) erupted in spontaneous protest within the theatre and the performance was almost entirely subsumed. In the final study, the Mervyn Thompson case (Auckland 1984) the protest took two forms: first there was a vigilante-style attack on Thompson himself which took place well away from any theatre event but had strong theatrical references; then several of his performances were affected by organized lobbying, pickets and interruptions. The thesis asks why the rupture in the theatre relationship occurred in each case and considers what these instances have to tell us about the breakdown of theatre performance as a social phenomenon.

The thesis finds that in all three cases the audience members carrying out the interventions belonged to pre-existing groups with prior experience in protest action. The thesis also finds that the protesters had all had direct experience of some other ‘dramatic’ or ‘theatrical’ event in their own lives; experiences that made the performance seem less relevant. Given this, the thesis argues that, in these cases, the propensity to disrupt was brought to the theatre relationship by the audience members rather than being a direct response to the performance, even where that performance was confrontational.

These findings have implications for theatre study and practice: in particular, the thesis raises questions about how we look at performance breakdown. Rather than assuming audience protest is a simple response to the performance, the findings suggest that such events must be considered in the light of the wider social and political context of the performance, most particularly the audience members’ pre-occupations. Finally, the thesis asks whether audience protest, however theatrical it appears, can ever become substitute theatre in the true sense of that word.

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Introduction

For as long as there has been theatre, there have been those prepared to disrupt it. In his *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Jonas Barish offers a survey of opposition to theatre, from the times of the Ancient Greeks and spanning a range of cultures. Barish concludes:

The fact that the disapproval of the theatre is capable of persisting through so many transformations of culture, so many dislocations of time and place, suggests a permanent kernel of distrust waiting to be activated by the more superficial irritants.ⁱ

Where Barish's study chiefly explores ideological or moral opposition to the very idea of theatre – within philosophical or religious writings for example – this thesis is concerned with more immediate manifestations of opposition; specific instances in which audience members have deliberately intervened in a theatre performance as an act of protest against that performance or against the makers of that performance.

Protests by audience members have played an important part in theatre history, more so in some periods than others. For example, in the London theatre of the 1700s audience members felt a sense of authority over the stage, not shared by modern audiences, so that vociferous and sometimes violent interventions by audience members were common:

The town's displeasure with a manager's decision, or a dramatist's script, or a player's performance or non-appearance, could result in varying degrees of disruptive behaviour, from full-scale rioting and pelting the stage with fruit and other objects to hissing players and demanding apologies.ⁱⁱ

In modern times, with fewer theatregoing occasions and changes in behavioural codes, audience protest occurs less frequently, though it is perhaps more significant as a result. For example, in December 2004, a production of Sikh playwright Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's play *Behzti* was cancelled after 400 or so Sikh protesters smashed several windows and attempted to storm the theatre – a protest apparently motivated by the play's portrayal of murder and rape scenes in a Sikh temple.ⁱⁱⁱ This occurrence was all the more shocking for the fact that violent responses to theatre performance are an uncommon phenomenon in contemporary

Britain. Whether rare or commonplace, audience protests tell us much about the nature of theatre and the social and aesthetic exchange taking place within the auditorium.

Audience protest represents a significant challenge to theatre performance because theatre depends on audience members for its existence, not only financially but also aesthetically. As Semiotician Keir Elam has put it, 'it is with the spectator, in brief, that theatrical communication begins and ends.'^{iv} This thesis recognises a definition of theatre that includes the importance of the audience member. The definition could be expressed as follows: having produced a work with a set of intended meanings, theatre makers establish a relationship with audience members who agree to attend the performance and, to the best of their abilities, adopt the required aesthetic and social conventions for the purposes of reading the meanings into the performance. According to this definition a performance cannot be considered complete and it cannot be considered *theatre* without at least one person to receive and interpret it. Of course, there are examples of dramatic art with no audience, such as the educational process drama of John O'Toole and others^v or 'Happenings' like Allan Kaprow's *Self-Service: a piece without spectators* (1967) which took place across three American cities over a four month period and simply consisted of participants choosing and carrying out at least one of thirty-one specified activities.^{vi} However, performances without audience, though they may be dramatic in nature, fall outside the definition of theatre offered here.

If theatre depends on the presence of an audience, it also depends on the consent of that audience. As Martin Maria Kohtes insists:

Theatre requires . . . the awareness of both actors *and* spectators that the situation presented occurs within the domain of the play: the 'as-if' which does not have any immediate and practical consequences for their lives.^{vii}

Again, non-consensual performance is possible, as in the 'delusional' tactics of some theatre in education programmes,^{viii} so-called 'guerrilla theatre', confrontational Happenings and, most famously, the 'Invisible Theatre' of Augusto Boal.^{ix} Nevertheless, Kohtes' concludes that the non-consensual nature of imposed performance means it cannot be

considered as theatre and is more correctly defined as some other form of action with theatrical elements.^x As Kohtes points out, the element of agreement or consent is sometimes overlooked in definitions of theatre, even when the importance of the audience's role is acknowledged. Examples include Eric Bentley's suggested formula 'A impersonates B while C looks on'^{xi} and Peter Brook's famous statement on the theatrical potential of 'empty space':

A man walks across this empty space while someone else is watching him and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.^{xii}

In response to this, Kohtes offers a useful extension of Bentley's definition: 'A impersonates B while C *aware of this quality* looks on'.^{xiii} The element of consent is fundamental to the definition of theatre in place for this thesis: performance is seen as being dependent on a consensual relationship and audience protest, particularly that which actually disrupts a performance, is seen as an extreme form of withdrawal of that consent.

Though audience interventions in performance are important for what they reveal about the nature of theatre as an art form, there has been little in the way of serious theoretical study of the phenomenon. Very often, audience protests are remembered in an anecdotal way that may be less than accurate. Gabriel Fallon, an Irish actor who was present during one of the disruptions studied in this thesis, later complained of the exaggerated retelling of that event:

Listening to them I have been reminded of the Duke of Wellington's reaction to another's description of Waterloo, 'My God, was I there at all?'^{xiv}

Given its value as social scandal, particularly if violence is involved, and given that there are often many witnesses who tell and retell the story of what they saw, it is little surprise that the oral accounts of audience protests become distorted and exaggerated. Similarly, written records including press coverage, may exaggerate details in search of a good story. Stories preserved in the form of theatrical anecdotes may also be exaggerated in the interests of humour or for dramatic affect, as in William Donaldson's *Great Disasters of the Stage*^{xv} or Gyles Brandreth's

Great Theatrical Disasters.^{xvi} To understand audience protest behaviour, and to discover how that behaviour came about, it is necessary to avoid anecdote and to place each event within its historical and cultural context.^{xvii} This is what this thesis aims to do.

This thesis examines three occasions of audience protest, occurring at different times and within markedly different contexts. All three took place within the twentieth century Western Theatre tradition. The first is Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, disrupted by Nationalist protesters at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1926. The second concerns the Living Theatre's performance of *Paradise Now!* which received a hostile reception from student radicals at the Berkeley Community Theatre, Berkeley California in 1969. Finally, the thesis examines a case from 1984 in Auckland, New Zealand, when the playwright and lecturer Mervyn Thompson became the target of an act of vigilantism and his plays, *Coaltown Blues* and *Songs to Uncle Scrim* were picketed and blocked by feminist protesters. These three occurrences are dealt with in chronological order, and in terms of the degree of severity of the protest. The first and second of these case studies have received substantial critical consideration, but with little attention paid in terms of the audience's protest behaviour.^{xviii} The third case, though notorious at the time, has received very little critical treatment either within New Zealand or elsewhere.^{xix}

Each case study is contextualised using the same three-chapter structure. First, the bare facts of the event are given. Then the case is examined from the perspective of the theatre maker and contextualised in terms of the theatre maker's intentions and the wider theatrical times. Finally, the case is considered from the perspective of the audience, with an examination of the wider political and social context from which the audience emerged. So, in the first example, the intentions of the playwright and the Abbey Theatre's Board are discussed within a wider context of Irish cultural history, while the audience members' actions are placed within the context of the nationalist and suffragist movement of the times and set against recent events in Ireland's history. Similarly, in the second case, the Living Theatre are contextualised by examining their intentions and setting them within the theatrical context of the late

1960s, while the audience are framed in terms of as a history of student radicalism at Berkeley. The third case study is treated in the same way: Thompson's intentions as a theatre maker are set against the backdrop of New Zealand theatre at that time, while the audience's response is seen as emerging from a particular social and political climate, specifically the radical feminist movement and the student culture of Auckland at the time.

The contextualising of the case studies is not intended to be exhaustive: it is always possible to provide more detail behind the detail: the discussion of artistic influences on the Living Theatre, for example, is mostly limited to influences from other theatre makers and from the visual art community, even though significant influences may have come from other places, including the music of Dylan, Hendrix or The Doors. The intention is to consider the general social, political, artistic and personal elements from which the performance emerged. These may then be compared and contrasted with the social, political, artistic and personal elements from which the protests emerged.

In all three case studies, the protests were documented in some way. Both the protesters and the theatre makers wrote about what had happened in forms that remain in the public domain. All three protests received some degree of press coverage and all three attracted letters to editors of newspapers (some in support and some in opposition to the protesters' actions). In the first and third case studies the protesting audience members released some kind of written statement justifying their actions and even in the second case, though nothing was written by the protesters themselves, the audience members' perspective and many of their comments were recorded in written form by a sympathetic observer.^{xx} In all three cases, the theatre makers also went on to publish accounts of the protest from their own point of view. I deliberately limited my research to material in the public^{xxi} because I was less interested in uncovering a single objective 'truthful' version of events, even assuming such a thing were possible, than I was in assessing how the participants publicly recorded their perspectives. One of the contentions of this thesis that audience protest behaviour can become distorted or 'mythologized' in the way that it is recorded. By

juxtaposing the, sometimes contradictory, versions published by theatre makers and audience members new considerations emerge.

The desire to permit dual or multiple versions of a given event into the field of study raises challenges in terms of methodology. The thesis confronts this by drawing on a range of critical approaches rather than adhering to one strict paradigm. The events took place at different times in different conditions and theory best suited to discover how and why these events took place has been utilised. In this way, the thesis avoids the traditional struggle between those theories that view theatre in terms of intended meaning and those that emphasise audience response and received meaning. As Henri Schoenmakers has written:

Concerning the theoretical study of the theatrical arts and media at least two approaches can be distinguished:

1. One focusing on analysis of the stage images (performance analysis; theatre semiotics);
2. The second focusing on (empirical) research of response.^{xxii}

The thesis is structured so that when emphasis moves from the theatre makers' perspective to that of the audience member, the critical perspective is able to shift too. However, the thesis does more than shift between semiotic and response paradigms. Within this duality, a number of other approaches are utilised, depending on the pre-occupations of the principal subject of that chapter. Thus, when writing about O'Casey, for whom the text was of paramount importance, a more literary approach is taken. If the focus is on audience members' individual experiences, as in the case of the Nationalist women in the Abbey audience, the approach shifts to accommodate this and becomes more phenomenological and autobiographical in tone. The socio-political aspects of events in the thesis, as in the case of the Berkeley audience, have drawn on sociological terminology, while the gendered aspects of the relationship between Thompson and his audience, are described from a feminist perspective. As this study has progressed, it has become clear that the entire thesis could have been written using any one of these approaches in isolation: in particular, feminist models of historiography and performance theory would have proved fruitful.

However, the decision to orientate critical material around the preoccupations of the subject seemed to better serve the objective of portraying the contrasting perspectives of theatre makers and audience members in each case. It also gave equal validity to theatre makers and audience members' perspectives and minimised the taking of sides when forming my conclusions. All three case studies polarised people and caused anger and upset on both sides: the Thompson case in particular is one still fraught for those involved. It was helpful, then, to avoid critical approaches that might have 'favoured' one side or the other. True neutrality is never possible; but the attempt has been to render both sides of the argument as fairly as possible.

The range of critical approaches in use in the thesis is discussed in the first three chapters and provides key vocabulary and concepts in use. In Chapter One, the nature of the relationship between theatre makers and audience members is examined. In describing a theatre maker's intended meanings, a semiotic approach suggests itself, and the chapter draws on Structuralist semiotic studies of theatre such as Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*^{xxiii} and the work of Post-structuralist critics including Patrice Pavis, Elaine Aston and George Savona, Marvin Carlson and others. Post-structuralist studies, which strive to acknowledge the role of audience members in generating meaning, are particularly significant here.^{xxiv} As well as providing key concepts and terminology, Aston and Savona's *Theatre as Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* provided a structure that has informed my own. The book is divided into two parts: *Text* and *Performance* and it attempts to examine 'the active engagement between the structures of the text on the one hand and the decodifying activity of the reader' on the other.^{xxv} Carlson's *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* attempts even more of an audience-centric approach and is particularly important for the way it opens semiotic analysis up for interplay with response-based approaches to theatre.^{xxvi} In light of these studies, and the so-called 'social semiotics' of Klaus Jenson, which attempts to take into account the 'situated social'^{xxvii} aspects of signs, it would seem possible to locate a discussion of the theatre relationship entirely within semiotic discourse. The chapter does not attempt this, however. This is because, for all their

efforts to stress the role of the receiver in generating meaning, semiotic approaches have been unable to do so even to their own satisfaction. As Dominic Strinati puts it: 'Semiology does not recognise that meaning is not a quality of the sign itself but of the social relationships in which it can be located.'^{xxviii} It seems it is difficult for semiotics, with its tendency towards synchronic rather than diachronic analysis, to fully embrace the dynamic nature of theatre conventions and, more particularly, of response. Within the chapter, and within the thesis as a whole, semiotic models are used primarily in discussions of the theatre maker's intended meaning. When discussing the audience member's side of the theatre relationship, response based approaches would seem to offer richer possibilities.

Chapter One also uses key concepts from theories of reception and response as it explores the aesthetic, social and behavioural aspects of audience membership. In terms of the generation of meaning in performance, the chapter adopts Stanley Fish's notion that it is 'interpretative communities'^{xxix} rather than the texts or performances that are ultimately responsible for meaning.^{xxx} This notion of 'interpretative communities' has even more resonance within a theatre context than a literary one, since the community, in this case the audience, is physically gathered at one time and place to receive the performance in a body. The chapter also explores the aesthetic and social effects of being part of what one literary critic has called the 'exclusive collective' of a theatre audience.^{xxxi} The chapter goes on to examine the derivation and function of theatre conventions. The discussion of how audience members learn and adopt conventional behaviours is informed by Jauss' concept of the 'informed reader': an idea very similar to Umberto Eco's 'Model Reader'^{xxxii} and Marco de Marinis' 'Model Spectator'.^{xxxiii} All these terms suggest that performances, by being dependent on conventions, anticipate an ideal audience member 'supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them'.^{xxxiv} The chapter suggests that though both sides of the theatre relationship have a set of ideals in mind about the other partner in the theatre relationship, these ideals are often tempered with the realities of the particular situation.

Another key concept from response theory that emerges in Chapter One, is Hans Robert Jauss' hypothesis that there is a 'horizon of expectations' held by audiences at a particular period in time.^{xxxv} Jauss' conception (something akin to 'framing', discussed below) suggests that the 'specific disposition' of a given audience can be determined by predicting a horizon of expectations based on three factors; the familiar norms or 'immanent poetics' of the genre, the 'implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings' and the 'opposition between fiction and reality'.^{xxxvi} Within my discussion, the 'implicit relationship' emphasized is that between the individual audience member and the theatre makers and this is taken to include an implicit understanding about the organisation of fiction and reality boundaries as well as the 'immanent poetics' of the genre and the social and behavioural codes in place for theatregoing at that particular time. In his discussion of the notion of 'horizon of expectations' Holub points out that it can only ever be a hypothetical construct: he defines 'horizon of expectations as 'an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a "system of references" or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text'.^{xxxvii} Within the theory chapters, the discussion of 'horizon of expectations; can only be in the abstract. Within the body of the thesis, however, where I take a case study approach, the 'hypothetical' aspects of the horizon of expectations are reduced since I refer to recorded facts and I narrow the field down to a particular audience (even individuals within that audience) and a particular performance event.

As well as drawing on semiotic and response-based theories, the first chapter also uses approaches drawn from sociology, most particularly the notion of 'framing', expounded by sociologist Erving Goffman^{xxxviii} and developed in a theatre context by Ian Watson^{xxxix}, Marvin Carlson^{xl} and others. This approach provides a way to describe how people attending theatre and other social activities understand or 'frame' what is going on and how they learn and select appropriate behaviours to participate. The notion of framing also permits as significant those elements of the theatre experience not offered by the theatre maker as self-consciously semiotic (not meant for reading) since,

as Carlson asserts, anything an audience sees may have meanings read into it by virtue of being 'framed' into a performance construct^{xlii} and, furthermore, audience members are easily 'coerced' into understandings by the responses of those around them.^{xliii} The idea of framing is useful here as it grants the audience member, rather than the theatre maker, the ultimate 'say' over what is or is not within the performance frame. Elizabeth Burns' description of frame as the interface between the different 'realities' within theatre and everyday life^{xliiii} informed my thinking on the organisation of 'realities' within the theatre relationship and my discussion of how conventions develop.

Having, within the first chapter, built up an idea of the theatre relationship and how it is sustained, Chapter Two discusses how the terms of that relationship can be breached by theatre makers. The chapter explores the financial, aesthetic and behavioural aspects of 'sufficient' and 'insufficient' performance. The notion of 'sufficiency' is taken from a prologue by Ben Jonson^{xliiv}, and backed up in the findings of response critic Carlos Tindemans, who found that audience members expressed an expectation that performance would fulfil a 'minimum requirement'.^{xliv} As well as drawing on the semiotic and response-based theories already mentioned, Chapter Two also draws on the phenomenological work of Bert States^{xlivi} and others. Phenomenology permits one, in Mark Fortier's words, to focus 'not so much on the social subject as on the individual consciousness, conceived in part as autonomous of social fabrication and capable of insight and reflection'.^{xlvii} A phenomenological approach might appear to be the most apt way to approach performance according to the definition I have supplied: phenomenological studies view performance not as a single definable entity but a set of simultaneously occurring experiences happening for individual participants. The limitation of the approach, however, is the inevitable subjectivity and imprecision that results. Within this chapter and within the wider thesis, a phenomenological approach has been found most useful where the focus has been on an individual audience member or theatre maker's personal experience of a theatre event.

Chapter Three is also concerned with theorizing the breakdown of the theatre relationship: this time by audience members. In this chapter, theories of framing are foregrounded once again, along with phenomenological discussions concerning the nature of engagement, or ‘energy’ between stage and auditorium. However, the chapter draws most heavily on the work of critics who have taken a sociological approach to theatre audiences. These include Susan Bennett, whose *Theatre Audiences* centralises the audience’s role in all stages of theatre, including production, and sets up a challenge to existing theories of production and reception.^{xlviii} Bennett’s work, with its insistence on ‘the necessity to view the theatrical event beyond its immediate conditions and to foreground its social constitution’^{xlix} was a significant influence on the chapter and on the thesis as a whole. Similarly influential was Maria Shevtsova’s three-part *Sociology of the Theatre*, which provided some useful vocabulary for viewing theatre as a social event.¹ Perhaps the most significant influence, however, is the work of Athenaide Dallett. In her unpublished thesis *Theatre as Government*,^{li} Dallett theorises theatre in terms of political theory and considers how different forms of government within wider society – including sovereignty, despotism and revolution – are mirrored by different forms of organisation within the micro-society that is theatre. Dallett’s published paper *Protest in the Playhouse* looks specifically at audience protest as a form of revolution, or overthrow of performance power. Dallett’s work has been crucial to this thesis, particularly her work on the Living Theatre’s experience at Berkeley.^{lii} Chapter Three concludes by examining the crossover between audience response and audience protest. Here, Elizabeth Burns’ writing on the theatricality of behaviour in everyday life was a significant influence, as was Baz Kershaw’s paper the subject of popular protest, which posits the idea of a dramaturgy for protest behaviour.^{liii}

From the range of theoretical fields surveyed in the first three chapters, a number of key terms and concepts emerge which are used throughout the thesis and which should be clarified here. For example, the broad objective of this thesis is to study ‘theatre performance’ (or rather the breaking down of it). I use the term ‘theatre performance’ to refer to a specific occasion in which a piece of theatre is presented to a

particular audience. Like Shevtsova,^{liv} I prefer the term 'performance' to other possibilities such as 'play' or 'production' as it seems to me to emphasise the point of exchange between the two parties involved and to embrace the whole process of creation rather than privileging a particular aspect of it, such as the written play text. However, other terms are used where there is a different emphasis. For example, the term 'theatre event' is used when I am discussing the social aspects of the occasion from the perspective of audience members, or the word 'play' might be used to reflect the playwright's input into the performance. I have tended to use the word 'theatre' as a descriptor, as in 'theatre performance' or 'theatre relationship', thus avoiding the term 'theatrical', which seems to have negative connotations to do with over-exuberance or showiness. Where I do use the term, as in, for example, my discussion of the 'theatricality' of a particular protest, I use it in its literal, rather than its colloquial sense. As for describing the two parties involved in theatre performance, where some critics have described the fundamental exchange as being between 'the performer' or 'the actor' and 'the spectator' or 'the audience' as a collective whole, I have elected to identify the two parties as 'theatre makers' and 'audience members'.

The term 'theatre makers' is taken to include all who participate directly in the presentation of a particular theatre performance to an audience. This may include playwrights, performers, directors, lighting and sound designers, costume and prop makers, stage crew, designers and those responsible for front-of-house and publicity. The term acknowledges that performance relies on a range of skills even where, as sometimes happens, a single individual carries out more than one of the theatre making tasks, such as writing directing and acting, for example. Within this thesis, the term is not generally assumed to include those with an indirect input into performance, such as Theatre Boards, sponsors and governments though it is acknowledged that these may have a very strong influence on theatre makers.^{lv} Likewise, it does not stretch to include audience members though, as Bennett points out, audiences do affect the content of performance in that theatre makers will often make changes to subsequent performances after previews, or in response to audience feedback.^{lvi} For the purposes of this thesis, the

term is limited to those with direct input in the performance. The term may be criticised for implying that those who create theatre always do so with shared objectives when, as we will see, theatre makers just like audience members can have considerable differences of opinion and intention. However, the word can be defended in as much as theatre makers do ultimately come together in some manner to manifest a shared expression in the form of the performance, and because those receiving the performance generally hold the whole performance, rather than individual contributions, as their object of attention. The word 'theatre makers' is also useful in that it allows for the fact that all the elements of performance play a part in the audience's interpretation of that performance. It suggests the 'opaque' and layered quality of performance; the way members of an audience can be aware of the actor behind the character, the director behind the actor, the skills that have gone into the lighting and so on.^{lvii} While I have opted for a broad, all-embracing term to describe those on the performance-generating side of the relationship, the opposite is the case when defining the other side of the relationship, what is generally called 'the audience'.

The term 'audience' seems to me unsatisfactory as it suggests a single receptive and interpretative body. In this thesis I refer to 'audience members' which, although more ponderous, reflects the individuality of audience reception and response. It serves as a reminder that although a group of audience members can appear to be a homogenous mass (especially in a conventional theatre and especially when viewed from the stage) their responses are always their own, as Peter Handke points out in his confrontational play 'Offending the Audience':

You are sitting in rows. You form a pattern. You are sitting in a certain order. You are facing in a certain direction. You are sitting equidistant from one another. You are an audience. You form a unit. You are auditors and spectators in an auditorium. Your thoughts are free. You can still make up your own mind.^{lviii}

Ironically, as this extract implies, the very elements of the conventional auditorium layout that appear to unify the audience serve in other ways to emphasise the individual's separateness. The conventional fixed seating, facing in one direction, often with arm rests between each seat,

offers the assurance of minimal interaction with other audience members, as well as separation from those on stage. As Richard Schechner says, 'the seats become 'little properties that spectators rent for a few hours'^{lix}. Efforts by Schechner and others to change or eliminate the conventions that emphasise separateness may achieve a greater sense of physical mixing but this is no guarantee of greater responsive unity.

An audience is always both an interpretative community with a loosely shared horizon of expectations and a collection of individuals in a personal relationship with the theatre makers. During a performance there may be moments when individual audience members feel a strong sense of responsive unity with those about them. They may demonstrate this by a collective gasp, or a spontaneous burst of applause. Since such collective moments are usually a response to something impressive from the performers, they are considered aesthetically valuable; marks of a successful performance. So, while an audience is responding positively to a performance, response appears to be a collective act, both to audience members and performers. However, as we shall see, in a negative experience, where audience members may feel divided against performers and against others in the audience, the individuality of response is more clearly demonstrated.

In order for theatre performance to take place, audience members and theatre makers need a loosely-defined sense of agreement about what is going on. My chosen term for this is 'theatre relationship'. Others, including Burns, have used the word 'contract' to describe the same sense of agreement^{lx} and in some ways, the use of contractual language has interesting possibilities in this context.^{lxi} However, I have opted not to use legal contract language for a number of reasons. For one thing, the legal terminology implies a certain rigidity of understanding: usually a 'contract' is a fixed and determined thing with legal status whereas 'relationship' seems to me to more aptly describe the non-specific, loosely defined social engagement between theatre makers and audience members.^{lxii} The word 'relationship' also implies a two-way agreement rather than the sense of 'obligation' implied by the legal term. Finally, there is a sense in which a 'contract' is either maintained or

broken, whereas the word 'relationship' permits degrees of disagreement and breakdown: a 'relationship' can continue long after a 'contract' between two parties is broken. So, for the purposes of this thesis, the word 'relationship' is used and the breakdown of a theatre relationship is seen as the point at which the two parties stop cooperating, or seeing the relationship in the same terms, particularly when they disagree in terms of the distribution of power (specifically the power to perform in front of others).

As well as 'relationship breakdown', the thesis also talks about 'performance breakdown'. This is taken to mean that the original performance is disrupted to a point that it cannot continue, or cannot succeed in communicating to audience members (I would describe what happened at *The Plough and the Stars* as the breakdown of performance even though, as we shall see, the performers resolutely continued over the din in the auditorium). Performance breakdown only occurs if audience members make it happen through protest of some kind. In other words, relationship breakdown may lead to performance breakdown but does not always. The word 'protest' is used to describe audience members' actions (whether individual or collective) that occur as a result of a breakdown of the theatre relationship and which may result in the disruption and ultimately the breakdown of performance. Other terms that are used in specific ways within the thesis, including 'convention' and 'performance power', are defined as they are introduced.

The thesis begins by exploring the idea of theatre relationships more fully. Chapter One looks at how theatre relationships change over time and across genres and how the theatre relationship in place for a particular performance is formed. Chapter Two describes how theatre relationships can be broken down from the theatre maker's side. Chapter Three looks at ways in which audience members can cause the relationship to break down and how this can lead to disruption of the performance and, sometimes performance breakdown. This discussion will explore the difference between accidental and deliberate breakdown as well as individual versus collective attacks on the relationship. Then, in Chapters Four to Twelve the three case studies are examined. The

three case studies all involve cases of extreme relationship breakdown, where audience members did protest against the performance and the performance was either sorely affected, or broke down completely.

The thesis will ascertain what was unique about each event and will also draw out parallels between the three. The underlying causes of the performance breakdown will be examined in order to understand what kind of breakdown it was and to consider whether the critical histrionics (referred to in the use of the words 'riot' 'revolution' 'rape' in the title) are justified. The form of the protest behaviour will be scrutinised, particularly in terms of its theatricality. The question of power relations will also be addressed, specifically the seizing and seizing back of power within the theatre relationship. The audience member's personal and group relationship to the subject matter of the play will be considered as will their attitudes to the theatre makers. The thesis will consider the degree of pre-meditation in each case, and will ask whether the audience's actions were a response to the performance, or some other cause; perhaps a pre-existing grievance against the theatre makers, a different conception of what the theatre relationship should be, or a repudiation of the theatre experience in general.

- ⁱ Jonas Barish *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, p.4
- ⁱⁱ Judith Fisher 'Audience Participation in the Eighteenth-Century London Theatre' in Susan Kattwinkel (ed) *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* Praeger: Westport, Connecticut, 2003, p. 56
- ⁱⁱⁱ
- ^{iv} Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* London: Methuen, 1980, pp.96-7
- ^v See for example, John O'Toole & Julie Dunn *Pretending to Learn: Helping Children Learn Through Drama* Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia, 2002
- ^{vi} Allan Kaprow 'Self Service: A Happening' in *The Drama Review* vol.12 no. 3 (Spring 1968), pp.160-164
- ^{vii} Maria-Martin Kohtes 'Invisible Theatre: Reflections on an Overlooked Form' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol. 9 no. 33 (Feb 1993), p.87
- ^{viii} In my M.Phil thesis I discuss the 'delusional' quality of participatory TIE programmes such as *Holland New Town* by Bolton-Octagon TIE Company (1973) in which the performance, which lasted for a day and a half, was framed as a real event – a class in town planning. See Viv McKeogh *Theatre Audiences: Confrontation and Contract* Unpublished M.Phil thesis, University of Wales, 1993, p.164
- ^{ix} Augusto Boal *Theatre of the Oppressed* London: Pluto, 1993, p.144
- ^x Kohtes, p.87
- ^{xi} Eric Bentley *The Life of the Drama* London: Methuen, 1965 p.150, cited by Kohtes, p.87
- ^{xii} Peter Brook *The Empty Space* London: Granada, 1977, p.9
- ^{xiii} Kohtes, p.87
- ^{xiv} Gabriel Fallon quoted by Micheál Ó hAodha 'The First Production' Programme notes for Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* Abbey Theatre, 1984
- ^{xv} William Donaldson *Great Disasters of the Stage* London: Arrow, 1985
- ^{xvi} Gyles Brandreth *Great Theatrical Disasters* London: Granada, 1982. Brandreth's book contains the following description of *The Plough and The Stars* riots 'the theme of the play – and the sight of the national flag displayed on stage – raised the audience to a passion. On the fourth night the passion exploded into a full-scale riot', p.131. This is hardly an adequate or accurate description of events, as we will see.
- ^{xvii} The thesis will occasionally refer to anecdotal accounts of audience response (even some recorded by Brandreth and Donaldson), but this will only be to illustrate a point where the anecdotal quality of the description is less important. In the three main case studies, all accounts will be more carefully critiqued for exaggeration and accuracy,
- ^{xviii} An important exception is the work of Athenaide Dallett, [see endnotes 50-51, below](#)
- ^{xix} Thompson personally reflected at length on the case in his autobiography *Singing the Blues* Christchurch, NZ: Blacktown Press, 1991 and in various press articles. Just about the only counter-point to Thompson's perspective are Chris Atmore's feminist readings of the event in 'Branded: Lesbian Representation and a New Zealand Cultural Controversy' in *Antithesi* vol.6 no.2 (1993), pp. 11-25 and 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy: A Feminist Deconstructive Reading' *New Zealand Sociology* vol.9 no.2 (Nov 1994), pp.171-215
- ^{xx} See Renfreu Neff *The Living Theatre USA* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1970
- ^{xxi} I did attempt to contact people from the Living Theatre audience, by placing ads in the Berkeley Alumni newsletter. I did not hear from anyone who attended the performance, but I corresponded by email with one resident who gave me useful insights into the Berkeley of the times.
- ^{xxii} Henri Schoenmakers *Performance Theory: Advances in Reception and Audience Research 1* Utrecht: European Committee for Reception and Audience Research, 1986, p. 3
- ^{xxiii} Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, [see endnote 3, above](#)
- ^{xxiv} Pavis refers to 'the general trend of theatre semiotics, reorienting its objectives in the light of a theory of reception' Patrice Pavis 'Problems of Translation for the Stage' quoted in Mark Fortier *Theory / Theatre: An Introduction* London: Routledge, 1997, p.27
- ^{xxv} E. Aston and G. Savona (eds) *Theatre as Sign System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* London: Routledge, 1991, p.15
- ^{xxvi} Marvin Carlson includes a chapter entitled 'Theatre Audiences and the Reading of Performance' in *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1990, pp.10-25. See also Fortier's comments on Carlson's work, p.23
- ^{xxvii} Klaus Jenson *The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication* London: Sage, 1995, p.57
- ^{xxviii} Dominic Strinati *Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* London: Routledge, 1995, p.126 Strinati is referring here to signs within popular culture rather than in the context of a theatre performance where the 'intention of the sender' and the 'reaction of the receiver' is more circumscribed. Nonetheless, his observation remains valid.
- ^{xxix} A criticism of Fish's approach is that it can appear to devalue the status of the performance text or of the theatre maker's intentions. If meaning is considered to be located purely in the audience's response, this might seem to imply that the intended meaning of the theatre maker is unimportant. In this thesis, though audience members are seen as ultimately 'responsible' for meaning, audience responses are always measured with reference to the theatre makers' intentions.
- ^{xxx} It should be noted that Fish and Iser's work on reception was not exclusively concerned with readers of books but also included analyses of theatre audiences.
- ^{xxxi} This term is drawn from a study of reading behaviour, (specifically the sense of belonging and reinforcement of values felt by subscribers to Mudies Libraries in Victorian London) but is useful in discussing the motivations of Western Theatre audiences too, particularly in a Twentieth Century context, where theatre going has become a more 'exclusive' activity and valued as such. See N.N. Feltes *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* London: University of Chicago Press, 1986
- ^{xxxii} Umberto Eco *The Role of the Reader* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979
- ^{xxxiii} Marco de Marinis 'Dramaturgy of the Spectator' in *The Drama Review* vol.31 no.2 (1987), pp.102-3
- ^{xxxiv} Eco *The Role of the Reader*, p.7
- ^{xxxv} See Robert C. Holub *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* London: Methuen, p.59
- ^{xxxvi} All these descriptions are from Carlson *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*, p.12
- ^{xxxvii} Holub, p.59
- ^{xxxviii} Erving Goffman *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* Boston: Northeastern

University Press, 1986

^{xxxix} Ian Watson 'Naming the Frame: The Role of the Pre-Interpretative in Theatrical Reception' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol. XIII, no. 50 (May 1997), pp.161-170

^{xl} Carlson *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life*, see endnote 25, above

^{xli} *ibid* p.7

^{xlii} *ibid*, p.12

^{xliii} Elizabeth Burns *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in Theatre and Everyday Life* London: Harper and Row, 1972, p.15

^{xliv} Ben Jonson 'Bartholmew Fair' in *Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedies: A New Mermaid Anthology* London: Ernest Benn, 1984, p.310

^{xlv} Carlos Tindemans 'Preconditions of Spectatorial Attendance Frame to be Discovered by the Method of non-directive Probing Interviews' in Willmar Sauter (ed) *New Directions in Audience Research: Advances in Reception and Audience Research 2* Utrecht: International Committee for Reception and Audience Research, 1988

^{xlvi} Bert O. States *Great Happenings in Little Rooms: On The Phenomenology of Theatre* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985

^{xlvii} Fortier, p.29

^{xlviii} Susan Bennett *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* London: Routledge, 1990

^{xlix} Bennett, p.184

^l Maria Shevtsova 'The Sociology of Theatre, Part One: Problems and Perspectives' *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.5 no.17 (Feb 1989), pp. 23-35; 'Part Two: Theoretical Achievements' *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.5 no.18 (May 1989), pp.180-194; 'Part Three: Performance' *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.5 no.19 (Aug 1989), pp. 282-300

^{li} Athenaide Dallett *Theatre as Government* Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Harvard University 1996

^{lii} Athenaide Dallett 'Protest in the Playhouse: Two Twentieth Century Riots' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.12 no. 48 (Nov 1996), pp.323-333

^{liii} Baz Kershaw 'Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968-1989' *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.13 no.51 (Aug 1997), pp.255-276

^{liv} Shevtsova 'The Sociology of Theatre: Part Three', p.283

^{lv} There is one exception to this. In the second case study, the Abbey Theatre Board is included within the scope of 'theatre makers'. This is partly because audience members felt a strong sense that they were in a relationship with the Theatre itself, as well as with the playwright, performers and others who created the play. It is also because members of the Board had a direct role in the editing of the text and the direction of the performers. Moreover, as we shall see, on the evening in question, one member of the Board, Y.B Yeats, even took to the stage as a performer, with a prepared speech – thus becoming very much the active theatre maker.

^{lvi} Bennett, p.20

^{lvii} Elam, p.86

^{lviii} Peter Handke 'Offending The Audience' in *Offending the Audience and Self-Accusation* (trans Michael Roloff) London: Methuen, 1971, p.14

^{lix} Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theatre* New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973, p.31

^{lx} Elizabeth Burns *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in Theatre and Everyday Life*, see endnote 42, above. See also Nichols Grene in *Shakespeare, Jonson, Moliere: The Comic Contract* London: Macmillan, 1980, Clyde Taylor in *The Mask of Art: Breaking the Aesthetic Contract – Film and Literature* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998 and Athenaide Dallett, *Theatre as Government* and *Protest in the Playhouse*, see endnotes 50-51, above

^{lxi} *The Oxford Companion to Law* gives a definition of contract that includes the following: 'The essentials of a valid contract are that both or all parties must have at the time of contracting . . . have reached agreement on all the material terms of their bargain, normally by communication of offer and acceptance thereof . . . and the agreement must not be objectionable as intended to effect an impossibility.' David Walker (ed) *The Oxford Companion to Law* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980, p.285. This definition has interesting parallels with theatre practice and could be said to reinforce the points made earlier about the element of consent being central to theatre performance. Similarly, the legal definition of a breach of contract is significant in light of the examples of relationship breakdown examined in this thesis: 'Contracts may be vitiated by mistake, misrepresentation, fraud, duress, undue influence, or similar factors, factors which in some cases render an apparent contract wholly void, and in other cases leave it voidable, or challengeable, by the party imposed upon.' Walker (ed), p.285. As the title of my M.Phil thesis suggests (see endnote 6, above) I have opted to use contract language in the past. For the purposes of this study, however, I have made a different choice.

^{lxii} Interestingly, the word 'contract' appears to be problematic even in its legalistic context. A handbook for lawyers to assist in the precise use of terminology, describes the word as having 'General Slipperiness' and goes on 'One moment the word may be *the agreement* of the parties; and then, with a rapid and unexpected shift, the writer or speaker may use the term to indicate *the contractual obligation* created by law as a result of the agreement' (my emphasis) B. Garner *A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.151

Chapter I

The Nature of the Theatre Relationship

Theatre performance needs the participation of two bodies of people, theatre makers and audience members.ⁱ It also requires a space to bring the parties together. This space is often a specifically designed theatre building, though it does not have to be, as Peter Brook points out: 'I can take any empty space and call it a stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to take place'.ⁱⁱ Brook's definition of theatre may have limitations, as has already been discussed,ⁱⁱⁱ but it does illustrate how, as soon as it is used for performance, any space becomes a stage. Theatre performance can take place in any empty space – on a beach, in a school, in a disused warehouse, under water, on a wooden cart or in an elaborate auditorium. Theatre performance can take place anywhere but must take place somewhere. Space is an essential component of the theatre experience. Also unavoidable is the wider context within which the physical space fits. Every performance takes place in a specific geographical location, within a cultural context and at a particular point in history. Audience members are drawn from that context (what Stanley Fish calls the 'interpretive community')^{iv} and so their responses resonate with reference to the historical events taking place around them, the particular political climate and the cultural and aesthetic norms of the time. In sum, the core requirements for theatre performance are theatre makers, audience members and space (collectively we can call these the performance 'triptych') operating within an overarching context.

For these elements^v to work together and create a successful performance, audience members and theatre makers must agree about how they will be arranged. The successful performance requires a loosely held understanding between the participants as to how the space will be organized, how theatre makers and audience members will behave and what the performance itself will contain. This understanding forms the basis of the theatre relationship. There are many ways of organizing the performance and there are many ways of establishing

and sustaining the theatre relationship. An essential point for this discussion is not simply *how* the elements of performance are organized but *that* they are: that both parties in the theatre relationship share a loose understanding which makes performance possible. The key to a successful performance is not so much in the particular terms of the relationship as in the fact that both parties understand and agree to the terms.

The primary thing theatre makers and audience members need to agree on is how the fictional elements of the performance will be organized in relation to the 'real'.^{vi} That is, they need a loose understanding about how to treat the fictional events in the performance, what the appropriate level of engagement will be, how distinctions between actors and characters will be understood and so on. There are several ways in which these elements can be organized. Within the theatre relationship operating in most Western theatres, participants agree to approach the performance with a dual awareness. Using the human faculty Augusto Boal calls 'metaxis'^{vii} audience members agree to treat the performance as real enough on an emotional level to allow for full emotional engagement whilst at the same time retaining a residual awareness that it is a fiction. This is the principle of 'voluntary suspension of disbelief', first attributed to Samuel Coleridge^{viii} and described here by Elmer Rice:

A play is most effective when the performance creates an illusion of reality so strong that it enables the audience to identify itself in some way with the characters and to share their joys, sorrows and perplexities. Yet this 'voluntary suspension of disbelief' is never so complete that it destroys the audience's awareness that it is all pretence.^{ix}

The notion of 'voluntary suspension of disbelief' is a key concept in Western theatre making, as reflected in the degree of critical focus on the phenomenon. As Daphna Ben Chaim observes: 'the double perception of the reality of the medium and the fictionality of the image is the common basis for virtually all theorists writing on the phenomenon of the art experience'.^x The practice of suspending disbelief is valued for the emotional experiences it can offer. Maintaining a dual awareness of

illusion and reality means that audience members can vacillate between objectivity and empathic involvement. Rice comments:

There is nothing more amazing than to see an audience that has been torn to shreds by the enactment of an emotional scene burst into thunderous applause the moment it is over.^{xi}

So, this particular way of organizing the fiction permits a particular type of emotional engagement that, for many Western theatre makers and audience members, is considered a core value of the form.

Other theatre relationships may be predicated on entirely different ways of organizing the fiction and reality and the differences can be seen to reflect the theatre makers' aims and values. The epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht, for example, took a very different approach from the relationship just described. Brecht's primary aim was to bring about change in audience members' attitudes and he believed that the traditional theatre relationship with its voluntary suspension of disbelief and empathic relationship with the fiction prevented this:

The dramatic theatre's spectator says: Yes I have felt like that too – just like me – It's only natural – It'll never change – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are inescapable – That's great art, it all seems the most obvious thing in the world.^{xii}

As an alternative, Brecht endorsed the use of *verfremdungseffekt*, or alienation devices, in which the actor distanced him or herself from the character and never allowed audience members to become emotionally engaged. The result, claimed Brecht, was a more astute, questioning type of audience response, one that might bring about change in the real world.

The epic theatre's spectator says: I'd never have thought it – That's not the way – That's extraordinary, hardly believable – It's got to stop – The sufferings of this man appall me, because they are unnecessary – That's great art, there's nothing obvious about it.^{xiii}

Though Brecht's methods of organizing reality were quite different from those of traditional theatre, in terms of formulating a theatre relationship the principle was still the same. He organized reality and fiction in a

certain way and his audience members needed to understand what that was. Theatre makers and audience members entering a performance need to loosely understand how the fiction 'works' for this performance and this understanding needs to be shared for the relationship to function successfully.

Another thing theatre makers and audience members need to agree on is the matter of who has ultimate power over the performance; who will make the creative decisions, how the creative process will be conducted and turned into performance and, crucially, who will perform in it. This sense of ownership over the creative direction of the piece is a central concept to this thesis and I will call it 'performance power'. Athenaide Dallett describes a similar concept which she calls 'sovereignty' because, as she points out, the process for ceding performance power in the theatre relationship is a little like the electoral process in society: 'in which members of the larger society give up a measure of freedom in order to form a government for their mutual benefit'.^{xiv} In the majority of modern Western theatre relationships, the audience members agree to give up their performance power (their ability to make creative decisions, to speak and move around), whilst theatre makers retain those capacities but agree to limit their actions and speech to the prescribed course of the play. In this context, audience members are happy to invest performance power in the 'experts' for their mutual benefit. As part of this, audience members hand over creative responsibility or 'sovereignty' entirely to theatre makers and agree to be subject to conventions decided by them. From this position of power, theatre makers make all the creative decisions. They rehearse and perform the work. Audience members agree to attend and respond to the work and to behave according to the conventions most suited to the event. In this kind of relationship, no active participation by the audience is expected. Even the organization of space within traditional Western theatre buildings reflects this, in that performers and spectators enter the building separately, prepare themselves separately and remain separate for the duration of the performance. Within the auditorium, too the distinction between auditorium and stage is made clear spatially and may be emphasized with the use of lighting, drapes, a proscenium arch

and other devices. Once again, however, this way of sharing performance power is by no means the only possibility.

Just as there are many kinds of government, there are many ways of organizing performance power in the theatre. Indeed, as Dallett and Judith Fisher have pointed out, the distribution of performance power has not always been the same even within the Western theatre tradition.^{xv} Both suggest that in the eighteenth century it was audiences who held sovereignty over theatre makers and, indeed, over the whole direction of theatre in the period:

The documentary evidence compiled from contemporary reviews, commentary, letters, pamphlets, and plays, suggests that the participation of the audience did as much as, perhaps even more than, that of the 'star' players and powerful managers to direct the course of theatre throughout the eighteenth century.^{xvi}

Studies of audience behaviour in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century would seem to support this contention.^{xvii} It was expected and generally accepted, that audience members would disrupt plays they did not like: catcalls, and hisses were commonplace and physical interventions on stage were frequent enough to induce London theatre managers to fit iron spikes along the front of the stage. Moreover, audience members' power within the theatre relationship extended beyond the 'right' to make interventions into the performance itself. Evidence of the audience members' wider sovereignty over the stage is found in the frequency of large-scale (and, from the audience members' perspective, successful) riots that occurred during this period.

The form and frequency of theatre riots in London and New York in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries clearly show how audience members in these two cities, as elsewhere, enjoyed an enormous sense of power, including performance power, within the theatre relationship at this time. The riots were often motivated by conservative or nationalist sentiments^{xviii} – in 1749, an English audience rioted in response to the appearance of French actors on stage^{xix} while the 'Kean riots' of 1825 were a protest by American audience members against British actor Edmund Kean's refusal to play in Boston some years earlier.^{xx} The

bloody Astor Place riots of 1849 were sparked in a similar way when thousands of American audience members gathered to demand the replacement of English actor William Macready with American rival Edwin Forrest.^{xxi} In this case, the National Guard fired on the crowds with the result that twenty-three people died and more than one hundred were wounded. Quite apart from what these riots reveal about the reactionary tendencies of audience members in both countries, and what they tell us about the political and social status of theatre in the period, they certainly indicate that audience members in Britain and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth century felt they had a right to dictate what should be happening on stage.

Perhaps the most flamboyant, and certainly the most sustained demonstration of audience sovereignty in the period occurred at Covent Garden in London in 1809 during the 'Old Price riots'.^{xxii} These demonstrations, which lasted for 67 days, were partly motivated, once again, by objections to the hiring of a foreign star, in this case Italian singer Angelica Catalani.^{xxiii} A more immediate cause of grievance was were the changes made to the newly upgraded Opera House, where the management had brought in higher ticket prices, increased the number of private boxes and changed the angle of the stage so that some in the pit were unable to see the performers. The methods chosen by the protesters to make their point have particular significance in a discussion of performance power:

Rioters in the pits wore OP hats, danced the OP dance, sang OP songs, raised OP placards, and circulated satirical OP handbills. At one point, rioters organized an 'OP ball' to take place within the theatre.^{xxiv}

These were highly theatrical protests. Audience members turned their backs on the stage and even came up with alternative entertainments to take place within the auditorium itself. By disrupting the performances night after night in this way, the OP rioters left the theatre makers in no doubt that they, the audience members, had substantial performance power in this theatre relationship. Also significant, in terms of the distribution of power in the theatre relationship, was how the theatre makers dealt with this and other riots.

If the frequency, duration and theatricality of theatre riots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrate the audience's sense of sovereignty over the stage in this period, so too does the tendency for capitulation on the part of the theatre makers. For, under the terms of the theatre relationship in place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, theatre makers conceded a much greater degree of power, including performance power, than an audience member would be likely to feel in attending a performance in the same theatre buildings today. In general, the custom was to cancel a play if it met with disapproval, or at least to beg the audience's indulgence for it.^{xxv} In the case of the Old Price riots, the theatre's manager, John Kemble held out longer than most: he attempted to ride out the disruptions, dispatching soldiers and police to the theatre and arranging for the riot act to be read out on stage.^{xxvi} In the end, however, the riots only came to an end when Kemble agreed to make a public apology, restore the old prices and remove most of the private boxes. If he was left in any doubt as to the audience's sovereignty over him he was reminded of it in the next season when his attempt to retain some of the expensive boxes led to further disruption and 'he swiftly withdrew'.^{xxvii} The reasons for theatre makers' tendency to capitulation were, perhaps, understandable. As one historian notes 'the theatre and its company could not thrive on thin houses. No matter how much power the actors exerted, that power was ultimately circumscribed by the audience'.^{xxviii} The result, however, was significant in terms of audience attitudes to theatre as both a social event and as an art form. As Fisher suggests, these audience members regarded drama as their property and the theatre makers as their servants. It was not until the behavioural conventions began to shift (aided by the arrival of theatre lighting which accentuated the divide between stage and auditorium) that performance power gradually began to be handed back to theatre makers and performances in Western theatres generally became more settled events.^{xxix}

If eighteenth and nineteenth century theatergoing was characterized by disruptive audience members then the beginning of the twentieth century, with the onset of Modernism, can be described a period where disruption was explored by the other side of the

relationship – the theatre makers. The ‘embracing of disruption’^{xxx} was a central tenet across all forms of art in the period, both in terms of the method of production and of presentation of art works, as art makers experimented with deliberate attempts to provoke outrage in their audiences. In theatre making, the ‘embracing of disruption’ is often deemed to have begun with the work that provoked the most famous example of theatre disruption in the modernist era, and, arguably in the whole of Western theatre history – Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* (1896).^{xxxi} At the first performance the audience erupted in anger at the play’s opening word: ‘Merdre!’ (‘Shite!’).^{xxxii} Angry exchanges continued in the auditorium throughout the performance and the ripples from the controversy continued to permeate through theatre for years to come:

The *Ubu* explosion sent shrapnel flying into the next century. Dada, Surrealism, Pataphysics, Theatre of Cruelty, the Absurd – all owe a debt to Jarry.^{xxxiii}

As with other examples of audience protest, the *Ubu* disruption has been somewhat ‘mythologized’ in the retelling. For example, the idea that the audience’s expressions of outrage were a spontaneous response to a single word, belies the fact that the text of the play was available for six months before the opening so that, as one historian notes, ‘those who were to attend had ample opportunity to study the play carefully’.^{xxxiv} In terms of the arguments pursued in this thesis it is significant to note that the audience members arrived at this most famous of disruptions predisposed to protest. Nonetheless, the *Ubu* riots stand as a marker point of a time when disruption started to become part of the horizon of expectations for theatre makers and audience members alike. The aesthetic of disruption was embraced particularly strongly by theatre makers within the Dadaist and Surrealist movements that emerged after World War One. These theatre makers employed disruptive strategies during their own plays as well as deliberately disrupting the work of others.^{xxxv} Though none of the case studies considered in this thesis were directly modernist, Dadaist or Surrealist, they were nevertheless all twentieth century events and it is important to recognize that an awareness of the potential for disruption was part of the horizon of expectation for anyone participating in any theatre event after the 1900s.

Modernist theatre makers may have had a particular interest in disruption, but the concept of sharing performance power with the audience has long been a part of theatre tradition. Theatre makers throughout history and across a range of genres have experimented with participation techniques, which alter the balance of performance power by allowing, encouraging or forcing audience members to join in the performance. Techniques range from momentary experiences of shared performance power, such as the ritualized chants that are part of British pantomime tradition,^{xxxvi} to more sustained participation of groups like the Living Theatre (one of the case studies for this thesis) in which audience members become ‘creative agents’ within the performance.^{xxxvii} Once again, the different approaches to the sharing of performance power can be seen to reflect the particular aims and values of the theatre makers using them. For Boal, working with oppressed people in Brazil, in the 1950s, participation techniques in, for example, Forum Theatre, allowed audience members (termed ‘spect-actors’)^{xxxviii} to be actively involved in theatrical representations of their situations. The goal of this type of participation was to empower audience members not only aesthetically but also socially. By simulating the actions needed to bring about change in their lives, Boal believed, they were more likely to carry these actions out once they left the theatre situation:

We are used to plays in which the characters make the revolution on stage and the spectators in their seats feel themselves to be triumphant revolutionaries. Why make a revolution in reality if we have already made it in the theatre? But that does not happen here: the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality . . . The practice of these theatrical forms creates an uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action.^{xxxix}

Boal’s Forum theatre offered a theatre relationship that distributed performance differently from a naturalistic approach. The relationship on offer for a contemporary avant-garde performance could share performance power in another way. A pantomime performance could be different again. In terms of the theatre relationship, it does not matter how the power is distributed so much as that theatre makers and audience members share an understanding of this.

Decisions reached about the organization of fiction and reality and the distribution of performance power, carry with them understandings about the behaviour conventionally used to sustain the performance in these terms. The conventional behaviours may be quite complex. In a naturalistic performance, performers agree to act as if they are not performers, as if the fictional events are really happening and they do not know the outcomes. In Erving Goffman's words:

The person playing the hero acts as if he doesn't know what the villain is going to do, the villain acts as if he can hide his intent from the hero, although both these individuals have a common and full knowledge of the play.^{xi}

Performers also agree to act as if there are no audience members present, treating the audience as representing the 'fourth wall' of the room in which the action is taking place.^{xii} The convention is not absolute, however, in that performers speak and move in ways that permit them to be heard and seen clearly. They may pause for applause, they may allow laughter to interrupt them or they may engage in direct address such as soliloquies or asides in which the audience's presence is openly acknowledged for a period of time. Audience members sustain the performance by demonstrating their voluntary suspension of disbelief. They agree to act as if the performance is real enough to respond to emotionally, and they signal this by laughing, crying, or applauding. At the same time they agree to remain physically separate from the performance by staying seated and not intervening. These conventions are understood to sustain the organization of the fiction and the distribution of performance power in the Western theatre. Other ways of organizing the performance carry with them different conventions. For example, audience members may expect to heckle (as in stand-up comedy), call out responses (as in pantomime), even hiss, boo and throw things (as in melodrama). The question is, how do participants know what conventions are required and how do they learn them in the first place?

Conventions are customary behaviours associated with particular events. They function, as Elizabeth Burns puts it as 'ways of arriving at co-ordination of social behaviour without going through the procedure

of explicit or tacit agreement'.^{xlii} This makes them particularly useful in the theatre relationship and explains why theatre is such a highly conventionalized activity. Conventions are carried in the cultural memory from performance to performance and are assumed to be generally 'known'. In this sense, conventions are not under the control of either theatre makers or audience members but are drawn on by both sides as the starting point for understanding and participating in the event. Individuals learn about convention through experience and induction, as Keir Elam describes:

In the absence of any explicit contract stipulating the respective roles of actor and audience or the various ontological distinctions in play . . . the spectator is bound to master the organizational principles of the performance inductively, that is, by experiencing different texts and inferring the common rules.^{xliii}

Elam suggests that 'initiation into the mysteries of the dramatic representation' begins in the earliest play experiences of childhood and that, as the individual's exposure to theatre increases, so does their 'theatrical competence'. People learn by continual reference to past experience, by observing and copying those around them. This process is mostly invisible, becoming obvious only when conventional blunders occur, as in the case of initiated audience members at a classical music concert clapping between movements. In the case of conventional 'blunders' like this, another phenomenon can also occur. If enough people join in the non-conventional behaviour, the convention may be eased out of use (as can be observed, in the gradual acceptance of the kind of applause just described). So, theatre makers and audience members can make assumptions about how the performance is organized and how they are expected to behave based on their understanding of how they, or others, have organized the experience in the past. As Elam puts it, 'appropriate decodification of a given text derives above all from the spectator's familiarity with *other* texts (and thus with learned textual rules)'.^{xliiv} The process of using past experience to understand current actions is usefully described by Goffman and fellow social scientist Gregory Bateson as 'framing':

Given their understanding of what it is that is going

on, individuals fit their actions to this understanding and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting.^{xlv}

According to this conception, an audience member will 'frame' a performance according to the conventions s/he is familiar with. The performance may follow convention or depart from it in some way, but conventions will be the reference point.

Though it is possible to describe conventions as generally 'known' in a particular time and place and for a particular type of performance, conventions do shift over time and between genres, between countries, even between venues in the same town. In a single evening, potential audience members might choose from a wide variety of theatre experiences available across a wide spectrum of genres. These could include a low budget piece of alternative theatre staged at a disused warehouse, a lavish opera at a sumptuous theatre, an intellectual literary classic staged in a university theatre, a pantomime at a church hall or a smash hit musical at a city theatre. The theatre makers behind each of these events offer a different experience, and a different type of relationship, each founded on its own customs, conventions and values. For example, the conventions of modern pantomime include calls between auditorium and stage, of the 'Oh yes he is' or 'She's behind you' variety. These behaviours are essential to pantomime; they sustain a performance and are therefore an expected part of the relationship. Audience members would expect these things to be part of their pantomime experience. They would not, however, anticipate them at a mainstream performance of a play by Beckett or Ibsen. These plays are part of a genre sustained by emotional engagement rather than physical or vocal interaction. Audience members familiar with the conventions of these two genres also understand the difference and can move between them and adapt their expectations to support the different relationship on offer.

One of the reasons audience members find it possible to cross between genres is that many conventions cross the boundaries of different theatre styles, genres and periods. For example, the use of applause to mark approval is a convention used in almost every genre of

performance. Audience members understand it, even if they have to learn the particular ways to apply it (like not applauding between movements in classical music). Overlaps in convention allow audience members to transfer from one genre, venue or country to another without much difficulty (in the same way that people acquire basic table manners that allow them to adopt the successful behaviours to eat at a barbecue one day and at a formal banquet the next). Although we talk of 'different audiences' for different types of performance, and although there are different skills and understandings required to sustain different performances, audience members seem to be able to take up and set down the conventions as they are required and successfully move between genres. The same applies to moving between theatre performances of different cultures, though this can be difficult where the conventions are vastly at variance. Elam describes the potential difficulties for an audience member used to the conventions of Western theatre, encountering the stylized conventions of traditional Chinese theatre for the first time:

European spectators at Chinese plays always find it surprising and offensive that attendants in ordinary dress come and go on the stage; but to the initiated audience the stagehand's untheatrical dress seems to be enough to make his presence as irrelevant as to us the intrusion of an usher who leads people to a seat in our line of vision.^{xlvi}

As Elam suggests, the audience member faced with a new set of conventions needs to build a new relationship with this unfamiliar style. Audience members initiated in the conventions of different theatre relationships can move between styles and genres with greater ease.

With the variations that time, place and genre can generate, it is apparent that there is no such thing as the single theatre relationship across all time and all theatre experience. One size does not fit all. It is as problematic to talk of '*the* theatre relationship' as it is to talk of '*the* theatre'. Every performance is organized around its own unique relationship. Indeed, every time a performance is given, even two consecutive performances of the same play performed in the same venue by the same company, something new and different takes place, before

new and different audience members, requiring its own relationship to be established. Like Ben Jonson's mock contract for *Bartholmew Fair*, any theatre relationship can only exist for the particular performance event. In Jonson's case, this particular context is:

At the Hope on the Bankside, in the County of Surrey
 . . . the one and thirtieth day of October, 1614, and
 the in twelfth year of the reign of our sovereign Lord,
 James, by the grace of God King of England . . .^{xlvii}

Even this insistence on the theatre relationship being specific to each performance, may not be a narrow enough definition. For within the overall theatre relationship between theatre makers and audience members, there may be a number of other understandings specifically related to areas of the performance. An example of this might be a play in which a famous actor appears. Audience members may have heightened expectations of this person's performance based on their stardom; a relationship to this person quite different to their expectations of a member of the chorus. When audience members at a Broadway production observe the convention of applauding a star actor's first appearance on stage, they demonstrate not only their recognition of the actor within the character (opacity) but also their special relationship with that actor. The theatre relationship, then, is a loose understanding on how the performance will be sustained. It is based on conventions. It is in place for a particular performance, and it may contain further relationships within it. The next question to ask is who is responsible for the terms of the relationship on any particular occasion?

By definition, it is the theatre makers who set the terms of the theatre relationship for a particular event and offer these terms to audience members. It is theatre makers who define the situation and, as Burns puts it 'order the realities for their production'.^{xlviii} Any alteration to this, like Boal's Forum Theatre, where audience members can intervene and make decisions about the direction of the performance, effectively changes the status of audience members so that they become theatre makers too. Boal's use of the word 'spect-actor' only emphasizes the blurring of the distinction between audience members and theatre

makers in his experiments. Even in situations like Forum Theatre, where audience members are granted some input, the decision to allow this remains under the control of theatre makers. In this respect, audience members are subordinate to theatre makers in the process of establishing theatre relationships. This is not to imply that audience members have an inferior status or a weaker position in an overall sense. As has been discussed, audience members have significant power in other ways. However, the power to decide the terms of the relationship for a particular event is always invested solely in theatre makers.

Theatre makers use a variety of means to set out the terms for the relationship on offer. For many centuries, theatre makers framed the performance using an induction, or prologue, as in this example, which begins *Faustus* (1624) by Christopher Marlowe.^{xlix}

Not marching in the fields of Thrasimene
Where Mars did mate the warlike Carthagens,
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love
In courts of kings, where state is overturned,
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds,
Only this, Gentles - we must now perform
The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad¹

The prologue serves more than a practical purpose of drawing the audience member's attention to the performance, though for Jacobean travelling players performing out of doors, with the minimum of artificial illumination, perhaps in competition with other noise and activity, this was a real issue. The prologue indicates the type of performance on offer, 'the form of Faustus' fortunes good or bad' and invites audience members to adopt their receptive role: 'And now to patient judgements we appeal / And speak for Faustus in his infancy'.^{li} Any prologue or induction is a declaration of intent, an opportunity for theatre makers to set out the terms of the relationship on offer. In his induction to *Bartholmew Fair*, Jonson makes the invitation so legalistic as to be comic:

The said spectators and hearers, . . . do for themselves severally covenant and agree to remain in the places their money or friends have put them in, with patience, for the space of two hours and an half, and somewhat more. In which time the author promiseth to present them, by us, with a new

sufficient play called Bartholmew Fair, merry, and as full of noise as sport, made to delight all, and offend none - provided they have either the wit or the honesty to think well of themselves.^{lii}

Though they rarely went to such pedantic detail, many theatre makers in the past used the prologue as a means to communicate their proposed terms to the audience.

The use of prologues continued long after theatre had moved into buildings, which shows that theatre makers found them useful for more than practical reasons. Even so, the technique is rarely used today. The change could be attributed to that shift in sovereignty from auditorium to stage that Dallett suggests took place at around the turn of the nineteenth century.^{liii} Certainly the apologetic tone of many prologues from before that time seems to lend support to Dallett's contention that theatre makers felt audience members held sovereignty over them. For example, Thomas Dekker's prologue to *Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600) clearly shows the sovereignty of the audience over the theatre maker (in this case the audience included the actual Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth I, towards whom these comments were directed):

. . . our hap is such
That to ourselves ourselves no help can bring
But needs must perish, if your saint like ears
Locking the temple where all mercy sits
Refuse the tribute of our begging tongues.^{liv}

The pleading tone of Dekker's prologue is also a reflection of the very real consequences, including imprisonment, which could arise from offending against the sovereignty of the audience, particularly the crown.^{lv} As the nature of theatre has changed over time, so has the way the relationship is established and prologues are no longer the norm, though they are sometimes included.^{lvi} Preliminary chats with the audience may still be deemed helpful, particularly if the audience members are unfamiliar with the material. One example of this was Herbert Blau's extraordinary production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in San Quentin penitentiary in 1957, where the director took a moment to talk to inmates before the performance, encouraging them to treat the performance as they might a piece of Jazz, and to look for their

own meanings.^{lvii} According to Martin Esslin, the prisoners took this advice and ‘what had bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts’.^{lviii} One wonders how much Blau’s prologue-like framing helped the audience members on this occasion.^{lix}

In modern times, theatre going is less commonplace than in the past. It is also more diverse in style, more expensive, and has to compete for audiences with large numbers of alternative entertainments. To capture audience members, theatre makers need to offer the theatre relationship more attractively than ever – hence the importance of publicity material. Through publicity, theatre makers target particular types of audience members and audience members select a particular theatre experience. Publicity material acts as a filter by which the two sides of the theatre relationship choose each other. It also frames the performance though in a more subtle and indirect way than in the prologue. Great care is taken to select images, wording and details such as print fonts and paper that will attract the desired audience members. For example, the poster used to advertise a recent production of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, by the Royal Shakespeare Company, illustrates how the aim is not simply to attract anyone, but to appeal to the ‘right’ group. This production was programmed at Stratford from December 1999 to February 2000, the most high profile slot in the theatre year and the poster was dominated by an image of the actor playing Lear. This was Nigel Hawthorne, a familiar face to many British television watchers. Although he was pictured in a pose suggestive of Lear’s mental confusion – hands held to temples, furrowed brow, eyes staring left of camera – Hawthorne was not made up or in costume, as he was in the production itself. The aim was clearly to use the identity of this well-known actor to draw audience members familiar with his work, including audience members more used to television than theatre. In its presentation, the poster used black and white only, with stark contrasts, and sparse lettering. Black and white seem to connote sophistication, so the poster reflected the emotional ‘darkness’ of the play and at the same time seemed to sell the experience of theatre going as a classy, sophisticated pursuit. The producers of this poster, it seems, wished to

appeal to a broader than usual audience pool and offer the opportunity for a new or rare experience of sophistication with the added bonus of seeing a favourite star in the flesh.

Once audience members have responded to the publicity material and made the decision to attend, they have begun the process of accepting the relationship on offer. Often, the next step is to purchase a ticket. This might be done some time in advance of the performance, or sometimes 'on the door' immediately before the performance starts. Ticket buying behaviour may indicate something about audience members' commitment to the event. Purchasing in advance would seem to suggest a greater commitment to attending while buying 'on the door' may indicate that the audience member made the decision later, or that they were not concerned about availability. As for the ticket itself, it serves as a legal document, a token of the financial commitment that an audience member has made. It often also gives the date, the time and place that the performance will take place and even the particular seat the audience member will occupy. As audience members enter the auditorium for the performance they show or surrender their tickets as proof that they have 'bought in' to the theatre relationship. So the ticket serves to set out the basic contractual obligations between theatre makers and audience members. It does not usually convey much aesthetic information though. This is the domain of the programme.

Theatre programmes can take a range of forms. As Susan Bennett puts it, the programme may be a 'simple sheet of paper listing the names of those involved with a particular production about to be staged, [or] it can also be an elaborate publication which provides the audience with several points of entry to the production'.^k At its simplest the programme functions as an extension of the ticket, simply naming actors and those involved backstage. Or, like the programme for a production of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* at the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London (September 1999) it can include details about the theatre, biographical details about the playwright and a brief plot outline. Programmes may also contain material designed to help the audience to frame the performance, such as notes from the director setting out his or her intentions. The programme for *Anthony and*

Cleopatra has an interview with the director about the artistic decisions made while rehearsing the production (which included, in this case, casting a man in the role of Cleopatra). He writes: 'I hope that after the first sensational moments of seeing Mark as Cleopatra, the story and the character's lives will take over and the audience will forget the casting'. Clearly, his statements are an appeal to audience members to understand his approach to the play. On other occasions, like the lengthy prefaces of Edward Bond, director's notes can be more polemical in tone.^{lxi}

As a device for laying out the terms of the relationship, the programme has both potential and limitations. It functions something like a prologue (and indeed the tone of appeal in the director's notes just quoted recall the appeal within the prologues of old) and, like the prologue, is positioned somewhere between publicity material and the performance itself. Clearly the theatre makers at the Globe hope that audience members will read their programme before the performance, as they use it to give direct practical advice to the audience: 'If you haven't eaten or drunk enough water today, DO! Oak makes a distracting sound when people faint against it'.^{lxii} At another point, audience members are given guidance as to how to receive the play. They are urged not to feel daunted by the work:

If you want to measure the quality of the play, don't think you have to compare it with another production or judge it by the latest theory. Have no concern if you don't know how good the actors may or may not be or how authentic. Just measure it against your own life.^{lxiii}

The theatre makers at the Globe use the programme to set out the terms of the theatre relationship on offer. They specify the behavioural and aesthetic expectations in place and conclude with an appeal to audience members to accept the relationship on offer; to share in the entire experience of theatregoing at the Globe: 'We'll let you be in our dream if we can be in yours.'^{lxiv} So, programmes can be highly potent tools for theatre makers to spell out their terms for a theatre relationship. However, there are several issues that limit their usefulness. They may not be available to all audience members, they may be unread or they

may be ignored. Another issue is expense. Often programmes are only available for a price, and sometimes they can be extremely expensive. The expensive quasi-books, known as 'souvenir programmes' are often designed more as a keepsake to be read after the event rather than before it so their value as framing devices is limited. Increasingly, theatre makers are depending less on the programme as a vehicle to communicate their intentions and more on press coverage, publicity campaigns and previews to frame the performance for their audiences.

Whether the details of the theatre relationship are presented through pre-production publicity, interviews, the programme or a prologue, it is theatre makers who control how a performance is framed. The task for audience members is to decide whether they accept the theatre relationship on offer. If they do decide to enter into the relationship they become collaborators in the performance and it can go ahead. As in any relationship, the theatre relationship has potential benefits for both parties and in return places expectations on both parties. These can be seen as aesthetic and sociological. It is the aesthetic element that lies at the heart of the theatre relationship. An audience member gives his or her receptive presence and in return expects what Jonson calls 'a sufficient' play. The difficulty is to describe aesthetic sufficiency without seeming to commodify theatre; especially since, very often, audience members enter the relationship by giving their financial commitment to it, so that aesthetic sufficiency is tied up with the idea of value for money. Financial commitment is an important part of the theatre relationship but a play's sufficiency is not measured by a performance being of the requisite length, or having the right number of costumes or sufficient words. The length of a play may have a bearing on the sufficiency or otherwise of a performance but the true measure of its sufficiency lies in its substance.

One measure of aesthetic sufficiency is the degree of entertainment offered by the event. The word 'entertainment' is often associated with amusement or diversion, so that some forms of theatre such as musicals or comedy might be considered more 'entertaining' than others. Bernard Beckerman argues that this degeneration of the word is unfortunate:

The word has become associated with the most

superficial, most passive response of a titillating kind, that its value as a description of audience pleasure, has been debased.^{lxv}

Beckerman argues that a true sense of the meaning of entertainment can be found in the etymology of the word,

From the French *entretenir* from the Latin *inter tenere* - to hold between. Combining the notions of sustenance and interplay, the verb 'to entertain' is infused with tremendously compressed energy of a vivid give-and-take . . . Something must be held between the presenter and the receiver. Such and such an action, being entertained, should effect entertainment in the audience.^{lxvi}

Entertainment, in this sense, is the attaining of engagement between audience member and theatre maker. The word suggests an exchange of energy between auditorium and stage that certainly is not limited to superficial or diversionary performance. Even if the word is used in a narrower sense, every form of theatre provides entertainment in that it is different from everyday life. Theatregoers chose the activity on the assumption that they are going to 'enjoy' what is on offer, whether it is romping old time Music Hall or a darkly experimental student piece. Even the most polemical theatre makers acknowledge that their message can be layered on top of the basic requirement for entertainment; that their basic objective is to provide a 'good night out' for their audience.^{lxvii}

Another aesthetic element to the theatre relationship may be the pleasure of watching the theatre making craft. Theatre performance is valued not only for its content (the story or characters) but also for how well its participants do their job. As phenomenologist Bert States points out, the fact that theatre is produced 'live', means that audience members are particularly aware of the artistry behind the performance: 'there ought to be a word for . . . something as powerful as the pleasure we take when artistry becomes the object of our attention'.^{lxviii} Audience members attend theatre to see skilled theatre making. This is true across the spectrum of theatre experiences, from attending a West End musical like Lloyd Webber's *Cats* to watching a performance of the 'poor theatre' of Grotowski. The skills that are valued may be very different but in both cases there is an expectation that skills will be evident. In *Cats*, the

value is represented by impressive stagecraft, visual effect, spectacle and scale. Words such as 'dazzling' and 'smash hit' used in reviews demonstrate that audience members contracting into this experience value richness and spectacle^{lxix}. In contrast at Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory, the presentation was pared-down and ascetic, with all technical considerations subordinated to the actor, as in *Akropolis* (1964), described here by Ludwik Flaszen, literary advisor to the Theatre Laboratory:

The strictest independence from props is one of the main principles of the Theatre Laboratory . . . There are no 'sets' in the usual sense of the word. They have been reduced to the objects which are indispensable to the dramatic action . . . Everything is old, rusty, and looks as if it had been picked up from a junkyard.^{lxx}

Audience members in this kind of relationship tend to value the technique displayed by the highly trained performers, as this review of *The Constant Prince* (1965) shows:

A sort of psychic illumination emanates from the actor. I cannot find any other definition. In the culminating moments of the role, everything that is technique is as though illuminated from within, light, literally imponderable.^{lxxi}

Whether the theatre on offer is rich or poor, or somewhere in between, the performance is expected to show the talent, training and skill of the theatre makers at their particular art form.

For many audience members, especially at professional theatre, it is expected that theatre makers will demonstrate superiority at their craft. They go to theatre do see it 'done well'. On some occasions, though, audience members enter into a theatre relationship on the understanding that the theatre making will not be particularly skilled. People willingly make allowances in some circumstances, such as for a performance by children where a lack of skill is inevitable. As well as personal loyalty, political loyalty can outweigh audience member's expectation of theatrical skill. For example, *agit prop* performances of companies like Red Ladder in Britain in the 1960s attracted a loyal following despite being, at times, of low quality as pieces of theatre. For

this left-wing theatre company and for its audience, theatre was a vehicle for propaganda and this was more important than its artistic possibilities:

The general feeling of the Red Ladder people at that time was that they did not come out of the theatre tradition; they did not see themselves as theatre workers for a long time. They saw themselves as doing political propaganda in a particular form. The main impetus was political rather than theatrical.^{lxxii}

Members of a 1970s Theatre in Education team expressed similar sentiments in an interview about their work:

You can't start with the objective of presenting Art. If you're going to communicate clearly and make use of the resources available, then your work is bound to be artistic. But . . . in TIE we start from what it's useful for people to know about . . . We aren't interested in Art as such. We have no use for it.^{lxxiii}

In some cases, then, the technical skill and even the aesthetic value of the performance is deemed less important than its political or pedagogical content. All other aspects of the relationship are subordinated to these values. The theatre relationship is not threatened as long as both parties agree on the priorities.

Audience members, too, are judged on how well they do their job. Theatre makers will talk of having performed before a 'good' or 'bad' audience and there is little doubt that the energy feeding back from an audience directly influences the performance. As Peter Brook points out, the French word for watching a play is '*assistance*' and this is what the performer experiences when the theatre relationship is functioning well:

On what he calls a 'good night' he encounters an audience that by chance brings an active interest and life to its watching role – this audience assists. With this assistance, the assistance of eyes and focus and desires and enjoyment and concentration, repetition turns into representation. Then the word representation no longer separates actor and audience, show and public: it envelops them: what is present for one is present for the other.^{lxxiv}

Brook writes about his experiments in which different levels of audience attention were generated and their effects on actors measured.^{lxxv} He

concludes that active, positive attention does indeed encourage and 'feed' the actors' performances. However, he also identifies the essential contradiction in this finding: since active positive attention is always a response to the performance rather than something audience members can generate at will, then the responsibility for the 'quality' of the audience lies with the theatre makers.

If good theatre depends on a good audience, then every audience has the theatre it deserves. Yet it must be very hard for spectators to be told of an audience's responsibility. How can this be faced in practice? . . . Once within a theatre an audience cannot whip itself into being 'better' than it is. In a sense there is nothing a spectator can actually do. And yet there is a contradiction here that cannot be ignored, for everything depends on him.^{lxxvi}

Each side of the theatre relationship expects the other to do their job well and each depends on the other to assist them in this aim. In this respect, the parties in the theatre relationship are inter-dependent.

For some, the most important aspect of the theatre relationship is the belief that theatre can provide insights into existence not accessible in daily life. 'Some people want to grow in their souls', says playwright Howard Barker in his *Arguments for a Theatre*,^{lxxvii} and later 'People will endure anything for a grain of truth'.^{lxxviii} It is Barker's belief that the search for the 'grains of truth' which theatre can contain, must be carried out individually by audience members and that to really 'honour' the audience, theatre makers must offer performance which avoids the easy answers often found in naturalism:

The restoration of dignity to the audience begins when the text and production accept ambiguity. If it is prepared, the audience will not struggle for permanent coherence, which is associated with the narrative of naturalism, but experience the play moment by moment, truth by truth, contradiction by contradiction.^{lxxix}

For Barker, the 'lurking truth' in theatre is found in contradiction and ambiguity.^{lxxx} Other theatre makers and audience members might find it elsewhere. Bennett suggests that one measure of the 'sufficiency' of a performance is how well the inner frame (of the performance) seems to

the audience member to relate to their outer frame (the 'truth' of their personal experience).^{lxxxii} In contrast, for practitioners of Theatre of the Absurd such as Eugene Ionesco, truths may be discovered in theatre by portraying the apparently untrue as, for example, in *Amedée* (1953), where a mysterious corpse grows to giant proportions, a woman operates a telephone exchange in her apartment and her husband evades the police by floating into the sky.^{lxxxiii} Absurd plays seek truth by pointing up, as Peter Brook puts it, the 'absence of truth in our daily exchanges, and the presence of the truth in the seemingly far-fetched'.^{lxxxiii} Whether the search for truth comes, as in Barker's plays, through the unrelenting redefinition of the self in all its despair and contradiction or, as in Ionesco's work, through the supplanting of reality with the comically surreal, the goal is related. Theatre makers from different schools of thought may have different approaches to the insights theatre can offer. Audience members, too, may differ in their views of where the richest experiences are to be found, but many share this sense of 'the lurking truth' that can be found in theatre.

This quality is something theatre shares with other art forms. All art forms, it seems, are valued for the glimpses of truth that they can offer; insights into human nature, experience and existence. It is a belief that there is a special quality to the truth within art which, as Martin Esslin points out, transcends verisimilitude: 'the Van Gogh painting will have a higher level of truth and reality than any scientific illustration, even if Van Gogh's painting has the wrong number of petals.'^{lxxxiv} The belief (expressed, in this case, about visual art but also applicable to theatre) is that art can touch on profound, universal truths that resonate beyond the experiences of the characters in the play or the petals on the canvas; truths that relate directly to audience members' lives and experiences. In his chapter on 'Experience of the Theatre' in *Notes and Counter Notes*, Eugene Ionesco writes about this sense that theatre events, characters or locations resonate with universal meaning. He describes how, in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Richard's prison cell becomes a symbol for, and expression of all prisons, physical and metaphysical:

So it is not history after all that Shakespeare is

writing, although he makes use of history; it is not *history* that he shows me, but *my* story - *my* truth, which, independent of my 'times' and in the spectrum of a time that transcends Time, repeats a universal and inexorable truth. In fact, it is in the nature of a dramatic masterpiece to provide a superior pattern of instruction: it reflects my own image, it is a mirror: it is soul-searching; it is history gazing beyond history towards the deepest truth.^{lxxxv}

It is significant that Ionesco attributes qualities of 'universal and inexorable truth' specifically to the dramatic masterpiece. The quality of 'truth' within theatre would seem to be equated with its greatness. It is not expected of every piece of theatre that it will 'repeat universal and inexorable truths' but it is part of the attraction of theatre going that sometimes plays can do so.

As well as the aesthetic elements of the theatre relationship there are several sociological aspects. Theatre can provide a variety of social experiences, and benefits depending on the particular type of offering. For one thing, theatre making and theatre going can both be occasions for social display. For those who perform, the opportunities for display are obvious; any performance draws attention to the performer even if they are not on a stage or under a spotlight. For theatre makers who do not perform, theatre does not offer such opportunities for social display, except vicariously, though the display of their work and, perhaps, their name in the programme. For audience members, the type of social display has altered over time and has been catered for differently at different periods of theatre history. In the past, the architectural design of theatre buildings permitted display within the auditorium itself. London playhouses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided prominent boxes and balconies for rich patrons in which a view of the stage was a secondary consideration. Many of these attention-seeking boxes remain intact in theatres today and, as Bennett notes, to sit in them is to feel oneself on display: 'In these seats, sight of the stage is notoriously bad but the patrons accommodated are a focal point for the rest of the audience (the majority)'.^{lxxxvi} Even more focus would be placed on audience members seated on stage, as young gallants were sometimes permitted to do in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. For example, an illustration in Phyllis Hartnoll's *Concise History of the Theatre* shows several young male audience members seated on both sides of the stage of the Blackfriars Theatre of 1597.^{lxxxvii} For these audience members, the occasion was as much an opportunity for their performance as that of the theatre makers, as they engaged in banter and ribaldry with those onstage and with each other. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the focus of the auditorium became directed more or less exclusively towards the stage. As this occurred, the auditorium layout also changed. The concern became to allow audience members to see and hear the performance clearly. Opportunities for display within the auditorium, which might interfere with this primary concern, were thus reduced.

The layout of the auditorium in many conventional Western theatres buildings emphasizes anonymity. Often there are identical, equidistant seats perhaps with armrests between them. These seats (the 'little properties rented for a few hours')^{lxxxviii} are often ranged in regular rows, all facing the stage. The sense of separateness from other audience members is reinforced by other conventions, such as the dimming of the lights in the auditorium so that visual awareness of other audience members is limited in contrast to the stage that is often flooded with light. Far from being the site of social display and interaction that it once was, the conventional auditorium has become a resolutely non-social location. Perhaps the one remaining means of social display within this style of auditorium is the kudos of being seen in the 'better' (more expensive) seats. Unlike the boxes of the past, the 'better' seats are now assumed to be the ones that give the best view of the performance. In contrast to the patrons of earlier times who paid for the chance to stand out from the crowd, audience members accustomed to anonymity may feel somewhat embarrassed if they are seated in a way that singles them out from other audience members. For instance, The Peacock Theatre, the intimate space at Dublin's Abbey Theatre (rebuilt in 1967) has a small row of seats set at ninety degrees to the main seating block. These seats, informally known as 'the luge' are usually the last to sell even though they offer a good view of the stage.^{lxxxix}

As with other conventions, the use of space is under the control of

theatre makers even though possibilities may be limited by the way the theatre has been constructed. Theatre makers have experimented with other auditorium layouts, offering experiences other than the traditional anonymity. For example, performances may be presented 'in the round', with audience members seated all round the performance space. Some theatres like Manchester's Royal Exchange are permanently set up in this way. In this arrangement audience members have a different social experience, remaining vestigially aware of each other at all times. Other theatre makers have incorporated spectators right into the action on stage, thus denying them any anonymity. For example, in *Kordian* by Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory, platforms and beds were used to suggest an asylum and audience members were 'incorporated into the action as patients'.^{xc} Photographs from the performance show audience members sitting in and on the bunk beds with the action taking place inches away from them.^{xcⁱ} The experience of attending *Kordian* put audience members on display within the auditorium but this was display of a very different sort from being in a box or an expensive seat.^{xcⁱⁱ}

Many conventional modern theatre buildings provide opportunities for social display in the foyer rather than in the auditorium. This means that the type of display is quite different and separated from the performance. As early as 1871, Charles Garnier's proposals for theatre buildings included foyers in which audience members were free to observe and be observed.^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} Many modern multi-stage venues such as London's National Theatre (completed in 1976) or the Aotea centre in Auckland continue Garnier's ideals by incorporating common foyers for different auditoria. In these venues, as in many modern theatres, the foyer space is designed to be welcoming but in a way that is open and communal rather than private or intimate. The materials and the layout of the foyer emphasize the collective, communal side of theatre going and are in marked contrast to the anonymity of the auditorium. There is a dominant use of glass walls and balconies that serve to layer the space and draw attention to the numbers of people present. Comfortable seating is provided, as in the auditoria, but here the emphasis is on grouping people around tables, or

sharing bench seating; a contrast to the separated seating of the auditoria. The feeling of communality is increased by the provision of bars and restaurants, which provide opportunities to extend the theatre going experience into a broader kind of social event. The opening up of theatre foyers is a celebration of the shared experience of theatre going and acts as a foil to the opposite experience offered in the auditoria of the same venue. Audience members using these venues thus enter a theatre relationship that combines experiences of anonymity (in the auditorium) and communality (in the foyer).

Another sociological factor in the theatre relationship comes from the expense and relative inaccessibility of theatre. It may seem odd to suggest that audience members include expense and inaccessibility as something they value but the fact that theatre going is, for many people, a rare 'treat' may add to its sociological value. In modern times, in Western societies, theatre going of any kind is a minority pursuit that competes for audience members with a wide variety of other, more accessible art forms including cinema and television. Some people never attend a theatre performance. For others, attendance at a performance is a rare event. For these people, and even for more regular attenders of the theatre, the relative inaccessibility of theatre may serve to enhance the experience, by making it a rare and special experience. Often the decision to attend the theatre involves some level of expense and organization. It may involve a great deal of both. For someone living in a rural area, the decision to attend a show in the city might entail dressing up, spending money on tickets, a meal in town, transport, babysitting and so on. These arrangements might increase the sociological value of the event by turning the trip into an 'occasion'. The value of the experience is often supplemented with other social activities like dinner and drinks, a night in a hotel, new clothes and so on. For such a person, the rarity of the experience has an impact on the relationship for that event – they have a greater investment (emotional, financial and temporal) in its success.

Another sociological aspect of the theatre relationship is the chance to feel part of a select community of people participating in a minority pursuit. By attending the theatre, the individual becomes one of the

'club' – one of a community of theatregoers. The feeling of belonging to an exclusive group is enhanced further if the individual attends the theatre regularly. Regular attendance at theatre provides not only repeated exposure to a preferred form of art and an increased understanding of that form but also, an increased confirmation of one's exclusive status. By regular attendance at a particular style of theatre or a particular venue, the individual can feel part of a selective group, in a special relationship with a particular set of theatre makers and other audience members, part of what has been called an 'exclusive collective'.^{xciiv} Membership of an exclusive collective is not limited to those who attend theatre that is expensive or rare or which has aesthetic or intellectual status. A similar sense may be engendered by regular attendance at any type of performance. Aficionados of any specialist genre, be it old time music hall, stand up comedy or post modern performance, may value the feeling of membership of an exclusive collective who understand and appreciate the particular form. The smaller size of the collective is, the greater the feeling of exclusivity that results. For regular, informed audience members the membership of an exclusive collective may be one of the sociological values of theatre and the opportunity to experience this may be part of their expectations for the event.

The exclusive collective has potential benefit for theatre makers, too - for sociological, financial and aesthetic reasons. Loyal, involved audience members equate to regular ticket sales and also give theatre makers a sense of their audience base. It is beneficial for theatre makers to feel they are producing work for audience members who are engaged with their methods and messages. Indeed, some theatre makers are only interested in performing before such people. Theatre makers including Grotowski, Barba and others have seen it as part of their work to foster an audience of people initiated in the methodologies of their approach. In his treatise on theatre, Howard Barker eschews any idea that theatre should be democratic and argues for the unapologetically elitist approach to audiences:

Some people want to grow in their souls / But not all
people. Consequently, tragedy is elitist . . .

People will endure anything for a grain of truth / But
not all people. Therefore a tragic theatre will be
elitist.^{xcv}

As well as being beneficial, the exclusive collective may be unavoidable in some instances since the audience pool is inevitably more limited for challenging or avant-garde work. As Eugene Ionesco wrote with regard to his own avant-garde theatre making: 'for the very reason that it is exacting and difficult to follow, it is obvious that before it becomes generally accepted it can only be the theatre of a minority.'^{xcvi} For audience members who are part of an exclusive collective with this theatre maker, a sense of elitism ingrained in their theatre relationship can only increase their sense of minority, exclusive status.

Some theatres foster the exclusive collective through subscription schemes with names like 'Friends of the Globe Theatre'. They may offer financial incentives such as early booking opportunities, discounts, or a phone line exclusively for 'friends' use. Or they may mount special performances with extras such as drinks, backstage tours or opportunities to meet the cast. These strategies generate income for theatre makers by offering audience members a privileged relationship not available to ordinary audience members. However, the privileges on offer are not related to the performance itself and fundamental terms of the theatre relationship are not changed. Invitations to meet the cast or discuss the play are invitations into a different kind of relationship, a non-theatre one. This may explain why, for some theatre makers, particularly those engaged in the creative acts of performance or direction, such events are to be tolerated rather than really enjoyed. Where theatre makers appreciate an exclusive collective most, is in the performance itself, where they benefit from performing for audience members who are engaged with their methods and messages.

Whatever the form or style of theatre on offer, people are drawn into the exclusive collective by virtue of their shared values. Membership of the exclusive collective is membership of a group of like-minded people with similar artistic tastes and, often, similar political and social values. Theatre performance and other exclusive collective activities, offer participants the opportunity to experience the

dissemination, re-expression and confirmation of these values. It may be, that one of the attractions of performance is that it offers theatre makers the chance to express their values and beliefs and offers audience members the opportunity to have their values confirmed.^{xcvii} Subscribers at the opera may enjoy having their middle- or upper-middle class values supported. For audience members at a piece of avant-garde performance, it may be transgression, fracture and alienation from society that are emphasized. Whatever the particular values inherent in a performance, theatre makers and audience members are drawn together by their collective valuing of it.

It is possible to go further than this, and suggest that a performance will not only affirm existing values but may help to establish them in the first place. Research by sociologist J.S. R Goodlad appears to support this contention, at least in relation to popular drama.^{xcviii} There were four main findings from this research: firstly, that popular drama was dominated by themes of love and morality; secondly, that socially elevated milieu were over-represented in comparison to the real world inhabited by audience members; thirdly, that protagonists seen to be motivated by a desire for power and advancement were generally seen as negative (the more positive motivation being love); and fourthly, that happy endings were predominant in popular drama.^{xcix} In an appraisal of these findings by Manfred Pfister, Pfister states:

Goodlad concluded that these results vindicated his hypothesis that the public goes to see popular drama in order to have its experiences of society, particularly with regard to socially accepted behaviour, structured and affirmed *and that this kind of drama is instrumental in the dissemination and definition of the moral values and norms upon which the predominant social structure is based.*' [my emphasis]^c

The implication of Goodlad's findings is that popular drama may not merely reflect back to its audience members their own values, but also has the potential to be a tool used by 'the dominant social structure' to mould these values in the first place. Whether Goodlad is correct in this assertion or not is not the issue here. The debate over the efficacy of theatre goes beyond the scope of this thesis. What is relevant is that some people *believe* theatre can change and mould people's values

(certainly much political theatre operates on this assumption).^{ci} This belief means that theatrical efficacy may be one of the elements in a theatre relationship. The question of theatrical efficacy is as much an aesthetic as a sociological issue. So, once again, we see that theatre relationships are founded on a combination of aesthetic and sociological expectations and interrelations between the two.

Since this thesis will focus on occasions when the theatre relationship has broken down it is pertinent to ask why it is usually observed. On the majority of occasions, theatre makers propose a relationship, audience members discern the terms of the relationship and it operates successfully. The reasons why people generally cooperate with each other go beyond theatregoing behaviour, of course. There are coded behaviours and roles that people willingly take on in every aspect of social life. Knowing the unwritten rules of social interaction (how to behave on the underground, in church, at a football game) helps these events run smoothly and enables participants to behave in ways that are physically safe and avoid embarrassment to themselves or others. Easily recognized roles make social interaction easier. It would seem, too, that people like to display social competence. According to role theory (a branch of sociology), the individual is drawn to act conventionally out of a concern to successfully partake in society – to demonstrate their ability to fit in:

Not only does society provide the individual with positions and the techniques for performing the roles attached to them, the individual is also made to realise that he can only become a part of society by performing such roles.^{cii}

The fact that theatre going is often seen as an activity with social status attached to it, possibly adds to the desire to demonstrate awareness of the codes of behaviour.

Another suggestion as to why individuals tend to act conventionally, is offered by Burns. She suggests a perceived general increase in concern for social order has grown up since the start of the twentieth century, since industrialization has made society increasingly complex and understanding it has been 'inculcated in the more or less universal process of socialization and formal education, essential to the

maintenance of the complex institutional processes of advanced industrial societies'.^{ciii} If it is true that modern citizens survive the complexities of modern life by resolutely clinging to convention, then it is unsurprising that theatre, as one of the most highly ritualized, conventionalized institutions of advanced industrialized societies, is a place where great care is taken to observe the mores in place. Of course, adherence to the conventions of a performance is not always the same thing as adherence to wider social convention. Theatre relationships may sometimes permit or expect behaviour not permitted or expected outside the performance, as in Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in '69*, for example, which encouraged audience members to take off their clothes and indulge in simulated, or actual, sexual contact with the performers.^{civ} In this case, the extra-societal permissiveness of the theatre relationship may have been part of its attraction for audience members. Their participation may have demonstrated their wish to act outside social norms, but audience members indulging in these actions were behaving conventionally within the terms of the relationship.^{cv}

Whatever the behaviours asked of them, audience members who have committed to the event are inclined to perpetuate the chosen activity. The experience of theatre going, like any socialized activity, is a process of seeking out, and applying the correct frame. We are socialized into feeling a sense of embarrassment when something makes us stand out from a crowd during certain, highly ritualized, occasions including theatre going. This feeling seems to only apply to certain types of occasion, notably formal and quiet ones. On other occasions, such as attending a football match (an equally social and convention-loaded occasion) some individuals go to great length to stand out, by decorating themselves, carrying banners and making as much noise as possible.

Apart from the individual's concern to act conventionally (which might sound somewhat limiting) there is also a sense of protection in upholding the theatre relationship. Theatre performance, taking place as it does in 'real time' is a risk for all participants. For the audience member, the vulnerability comes from the fact that the performance is uncharted territory. Previous theatre going experience and information gleaned from reviews may give them a fair idea of what

their experience of the performance will be. They are also given a degree of safety in numbers if the audience is of any size. Ultimately, though, the audience member's physical and emotional welfare is in the hands of the theatre makers. The theatre relationship sets limits to this. Theatre makers are vulnerable too – particularly, though not exclusively, those who appear on stage. Whatever the level of preparation and rehearsal, there is always the possibility of technical or artistic failure. This is even more so where risks are taken, such as improvisatory techniques or complicated stage effects. Many of the things that make theatre makers vulnerable are not really legislated for in their relationship with audience members (the theatre relationship can only control those bits of theatre that can be controlled, such as auditorium behaviour or relationship between the fiction and reality). Nonetheless, the sense that they are in agreement with audience members might mitigate the insecurities of the theatre maker a little. It cannot prevent them from forgetting their lines or dropping a prop but it can make it less likely for actors to be attacked by the audience as they do so. It should be said, too, that participants do not always wish to be protected from the insecurity and vulnerability of theatre. Indeed, the frisson of uncertainty that is present at any live theatre is part of its aesthetic and social value for audience members and for theatre makers; part of their shared sense of participating in the completion of the artwork. Whatever the deeper sources of the fear and uncertainty inherent in live performance, they are present, and participants welcome conventional and psychological boundaries to contain the event.

There are many persuasive reasons for both theatre makers and audience members to uphold the theatre relationship and follow the conventions in place for a particular performance. In the positive scenario that usually pertains, theatre makers are intent on presenting their work and audience members are intent on receiving it. A successful theatre relationship can be established where theatre makers offer a relationship that audience members understand and accept. Their shared understanding of convention and their commitment to sustaining the event help them to conduct the relationship successfully. However, the success of the performance is always provisional on the success of

the relationship, as Julian Hilton points out:

No contract can compel the opposing parties to the impossible, to understanding each other when the conditions for communication are not to hand. No amount of promising entertainment will guarantee its occurring; no degree of insistence on a desire to communicate will ensure that communication does indeed take place.^{cvi}

As with the best of relationships, there are times when the theatre relationship breaks down, either because of a misunderstanding or through an act of will by one party or the other. These breakdowns are the subject of the next chapter.

- ⁱ This is not to ignore the presence of another important group of 'participants' – the characters generated in performance. These 'people' are a significant element in the process of theatrical interaction, as suggested by Eric Bentley's formula for theatre: 'A impersonates B while C looks on.' See Introduction, endnote 11. In performance, audience members and actors alike may feel that they are interacting with characters rather than directly to each other. In immediate concrete terms, however, the interaction takes place between two bodies of people.
- ⁱⁱ Peter Brook *The Empty Space* London: Granada, 1977, p.9
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Introduction, p.3
- ^{iv} Stanley Fish explores the concept of Interpretive community in 'Interpreting the Variorum' *Critical Inquiry* 2 (Spring 1976), pp.465-85
- ^v I use the word elements with some caution as I am aware that it has specific meaning in certain contexts, as in the *Arts in The New Zealand Curriculum* document (2000) where the 'elements' of drama are defined as role, time and space, action, tension and focus. My discussion here is about the organizational requirements needed for theatre performance to take place rather than the elements required within the performance itself.
- ^{vi} I am aware that this bi-partite definition of reality in the theatre is limited. Performance is a site rich with ontological possibilities and there are many possible levels of reality and awareness. For more detailed discussion of the levels of reality present in theatre performance see Elizabeth Burns *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in Theatre and in Social Life* London: Harper and Row, 1972. However, it is fair to say that the onstage and offstage realities are the ones of which participants are most aware. Furthermore, as Burns points out, 'the completeness of the illusion depends less, on the sophistication of the techniques involved than on the consensus attained by actors and audience, the agreement about which . . . 'definition of the situation' is being used' Burns, p.15
- ^{vii} Augusto Boal *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy* New York: Routledge, 1995, p.43
- ^{viii} Coleridge's phrase, described in *Brewer's Dictionary of Quotations* as 'one of the most famous phrases ever coined' p.104, comes from Chapter XIV of his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Though originally coined with reference to poetry, Coleridge describes a state of receptiveness necessary for any work of art,
- ^{ix} Elmer Rice *The Living Theatre* Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959, p.271
- ^x Daphna Ben Chaim *Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response* Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981, p.73
- ^{xi} Rice, p.271
- ^{xii} Bertolt Brecht 'Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction' in John Willett (ed) *Brecht on Theatre* London: Methuen, 1964, p.71
- ^{xiii} Brecht in Willett, p.71
- ^{xiv} Athenaide Dallett 'Protest in the Playhouse: Two Twentieth-Century Audience Riots' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol. XII, no. 48, Nov 1996, p.232
- ^{xv} See Dallett, *Theatre as Government* Unpublished PhD dissertation, Harvard 1996 and also Judith Fisher 'Audience Participation in the Eighteenth Century' in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* Susan Kattwinkel (ed) Praeger: Westport CT, 2003
- ^{xvi} Fisher in Kattwinkel, p.56
- ^{xvii} See, for instance Marc Baer *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* New York: Clarendon Press, 1992
- ^{xviii} This point is made by Susan Schuyler in 'Theatre Riots' retrieved from <http://shl.stanford.edu/Crowds/galleries/theaterriots> on 18 Aug 2005, p.1
- ^{xix} See Schuyler, p.1
- ^{xx} See Schuyler, p.1
- ^{xxi} See Wayne S. Turney 'The Astor Place Riot' retrieved from www.wayneturney.20m.com/astorplaceriort.htm
- ^{xxii} For a study of the Old Price riots, in particular the theatricality of the audience's behaviour, see Baer. See also Helen Cook 'Theatrical Experiences in London' retrieved from www.jasa.net.au/london/theatre.htm on 18 August 2005
- ^{xxiii} See Schuyler, p.1
- ^{xxiv} Schuyler, p.1
- ^{xxv} Fisher gives various examples of this custom. Fisher 'Audience Participation in the Eighteenth Century' in Kattwinkel (ed), p.61
- ^{xxvi} Cook, pp.2-3
- ^{xxvii} Cook, p.3
- ^{xxviii} James J. Lynch quoted by Fisher in Kattwinkel (ed) p.59
- ^{xxix} In his study of theatrical disturbance, Baer claims that theatre riots actually have a stabilizing effect (both on theatre and wider society) so that riots like the Old Price disturbances helped to lead to the 'more settled' theatre relationships of modern times.
- ^{xxx} The phrase 'at its core was the embracing of disruption' comes from the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia's* entry for 'Modernism' retrieved from www.wikipedia.org on 18 Aug, 2005
- ^{xxxi} Alfred Jarry 'Ubu Roi' or 'Ubu Rex' in *The Ubu Plays* (trans. Cyril Connolly and Simon Watson Taylor) London: Methuen, 1968 (1993), pp.1-58
- ^{xxxii} In the Methuen edition, the word is translated as 'Pschitt!' see Jarry 'Ubu Roi' p.5
- ^{xxxiii} Charles Marowitz quoted in preface to Jarry 'Ubu Roi', p.i
- ^{xxxiv} Maurice Marc LaBelle *Alfred Jarry: Nihilism and the Theater of the Absurd* New York: New York University Press, 1980, p.88
- ^{xxxv} See Annabelle Melzer *Dada and Surrealist Performance* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994
- ^{xxxvi} For a comprehensive survey of the different kinds of participation involved in English pantomime see Dawn Lewcock 'Once Upon a Time: The Story of the Pantomime Audience' in Kattwinkel (ed), pp.133-148
- ^{xxxvii} Kattwinkel, 'Introduction' in Kattwinkel (ed), p.xvi
- ^{xxxviii} Augusto Boal *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* London: Routledge, 1992, p.2
- ^{xxxix} Augusto Boal *Theatre of the Oppressed* London: Pluto Press, 1979, pp.141-2
- ^{xl} Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986, p.135

- ^{xli} The 'fourth wall' convention developed with the naturalism of dramatists including August Strindberg, who expresses the intentions behind such naturalistic devices in his Preface to *Miss Julie* (1888) in *Strindberg Plays: One* (Trans. Michael Meyer) London: Methuen, 1964
- ^{xlii} Burns, p.40
- ^{xliiii} Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* London: Methuen, 1980, p.93
- ^{xliiv} Elam, p.93
- ^{xliiv} Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p.247
- ^{xlivi} S. Langer, in Elam, p.89
- ^{xliiii} Ben Jonson 'Bartholomew Fair' in *Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedies* London: Ernest Benn, 1984, p.310
- ^{xliiii} Burns, p.15
- ^{xlix} Christopher Marlowe Prologue to 'The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr Faustus' (1624) *Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedies: A New Mermaid Anthology* London: Ernest Benn, 1984, p.146 lines 1-8
- ^l *ibid*, p.146, lines 9-10
- ^{li} *ibid*, p. 147, lines 20-22
- ^{lii} Jonson 'Bartholomew Fair', p.310
- ^{liii} Dallett *Theatre as Government*, p.130
- ^{liiv} Thomas Dekker 'The Prologue as it was pronounced before the Queen's Majesty' from 'The Shoemaker's Holiday' *Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedies*, p.71
- ^{liv} Jonson was amongst those who spend time in prison for the 'sower-mislike' caused by his play *Isle of Dogs* (1597).
- ^{lvi} See, for instance Trevor Griffith's *The Party* London: Faber and Faber, 1974. This play includes a prologue with confrontational asides to the audience: 'Wake up madam, I'm talking about you. Give her a nudge will you sir? Thank you so much', p.10
- ^{lvii} This incident is described by Martin Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd* London: Penguin, 1991, p.19
- ^{lviii} Esslin *The Theatre of the Absurd*, p.19
- ^{lix} This is not the only example of a prison audience responding well to Beckett's play. Later in the thesis, I discuss Sidney Homan's performance of *Waiting for Godot* at the Florida State Prison, see chapter 3 endnotes 7-10. Given that in the Florida case, there was no preliminary chat before the performance, this suggests that the messages in Beckett's play may have had particular resonance for prisoners and may have got through to them with or without the advice.
- ^{lx} Susan Bennett *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* London: Routledge, 1990, p.145
- ^{lxi} This point is made by Bennett, p.145
- ^{lxii} Mark Rylance Programme notes for Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* Globe Theatre July 1999, no pagination
- ^{lxiii} *ibid*, no pagination
- ^{lxiv} The degree of instruction and guidance presented in the Globe programme is necessary because of the particular type of relationship on offer at that theatre. Just as the materials and designs used in the theatre building reproduce closely the conditions of the original Globe (thatch, timber, wattle and daub) so, it is the theatre maker's intention (and presumably the audience members' desire) to recall the 'authentic' experience of Shakespeare's original audiences. This is particularly so in the groundlings area where audience members stand in an uncovered part of the theatre close to, and below the level of, the stage. Audience members are playing a new, and more elaborate role than the usual one of theatregoer. They are also 'being' Shakespearian theatregoers. For some, this role is unfamiliar and they need help to know what to do, hence the guidance offered in the programme. For others, the adoption of this novel role has led them to exhibit behaviours loosely considered 'authentic' such as booing, cheering, moving around, eating and drinking during the performance (the programme specifies that no glass should be brought into the auditorium; not a requirement that often needs to be specified in a theatre relationship).
- ^{lxv} Bernard Beckerman *Dynamics of Drama* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970, p.145. Jonas Barish imputes a different motive for our attraction to the uncertainty of theatre. He suggests that humankind has a deeply embedded, philosophical antipathy to theatre performance, due to its perceived effects upon us, so that we are quietly pleased to see it fail. This argument would seem to be backed up in the delight people (including theatre makers) take in recounting theatre disasters and writing books about them. See Jonas Barish *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981
- ^{lxvi} Beckerman *Dynamics of Drama*, p.145
- ^{lxvii} This point is reflected by director and founder of 7:84 Theatre Company, John McGrath in his choice for the title of his book on Socialist Theatre *A Good Night Out* London: Methuen, 1981
- ^{lxviii} Bert O. States *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* London: University of California Press, 1985, p.65
- ^{lxix} See for example Bernice Olveczky 'Cats: Innocent feline fun' in *The Tech* vol. 119 no 48 retrieved from <http://www-tech.mit.edu/V119/N48/Cats-theater.48a.html>
- ^{lxx} Jerzy Grotowski *Towards a Poor Theatre* New York: Clarion Books, Simon & Schuster, 1968, p.67 & p 64
- ^{lxxi} Review of *The Constant Prince* by Josef Kelera, in Grotowski, pp.64 -5
- ^{lxxii} John Hoyland in Catherine Itzin *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* London: Methuen, 1980, p.43
- ^{lxxiii} Roger Phillips of Exeter Theatre in Education Company in 'Theatre in Education: A Way out of the Rat Race?' in *Plays and Players* vol.20 no.5 (Feb 1973), p.23
- ^{lxxiv} Brook *The Empty Space*, p.140
- ^{lxxv} *ibid*, pp.22-25
- ^{lxxvi} *ibid*, p.21
- ^{lxxvii} Howard Barker *Arguments for a Theatre* London: Calder, 1989, p.12
- ^{lxxviii} Barker *Arguments for a Theatre*, p.13
- ^{lxxix} Howard Barker Programme notes for *The Bite of the Night* play reading at The Royal Court April 1987 in David Ian Rabey *Howard Barker: Politics and Desire* London: Macmillan, 1989, pp.7-8
- ^{lxxx} 'Lurking Truth' or Cwmni'r Gwir Sy'n Llechu is the name of the Welsh theatre company of David Rabey, Charmian Saville and others, which has worked closely with Barker's plays and his Theatre of Catastrophe principles.
- ^{lxxxi} Bennett, p.166

- ^{lxxxii} See Ionesco's 'Amedée or How to get Rid of it' in *Absurd Drama* (intro by Martin Esslin) London: Penguin, 1965
- ^{lxxxiii} Brook *The Empty Space*, p.53
- ^{lxxxiv} Esslin *Theatre of the Absurd*, p.423
- ^{lxxxv} Eugene Ionesco *Notes and Counter-Notes* London: John Calder, 1964, pp.30-31
- ^{lxxxvi} Bennett, p.141
- ^{lxxxvii} The illustration of the interior of Blackfriars Theatre 1597 described is found in Phyllis Hartnoll *The Theatre: A Concise History* London: Thames and Hudson, 1968, p.85
- ^{lxxxviii} Richard Schechner *Environmental Theatre* New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973, p.31, see Introduction, endnote 54
- ^{lxxxix} This information was obtained in a conversation with staff from the Abbey Theatre box office in 2001.
- ^{xc} *Kordian*, based on a text by Slowacki is described with performance photographs in Grotowski p.130. No date given
- ^{xc1} See illustration Grotowski, pp.95-96
- ^{xcii} The arrangement of spectators in *Kordian* is not 'representative' of Grotowski's approach. For other performances, very different arrangements were made (including separating audience members from performers with a high wall in *The Constant Prince* and giving them roles in the action, as in *Cain*) As Grotowski writes, 'the essential concern is finding the proper spectator – actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements', p.20
- ^{xciii} See Bennett, p.139
- ^{xciv} The term 'exclusive collective' is taken from a study of reading behaviour, specifically the sense of belonging and reinforcement of values felt by subscribers to Mudies libraries in the 1800s. See N.N. Feltes *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* London: University of Chicago Press, 1986
- ^{xcv} Barker *Arguments for a Theatre* pp.12-13 This quote also appeared in my earlier discussion on the 'grains of truth' to be found in theatre, see endnote 79, above
- ^{xcvi} Ionesco *Notes and Counter Notes*, p.42
- ^{xcvii} The confirmation of beliefs can be seen as part of the theatre relationship, as it was for the Mudie's subscriber: 'The middle-or upper-middle class reader who exchanged his volume regularly under Mudie's dome received, besides entertainment, confirmation or definition of many of his beliefs' Griests in Feltes, p.27
- ^{xcviii} J.S.R. Goodlad *The Sociology of Popular Drama* London: Heineman, 1971
- It should be noted that Goodlad's research covered popular dramatic forms including television, a medium with much greater potential coverage and accessibility than theatre. However, popular drama in theatres was included in the research and deemed to be a vehicle for the dissemination of information and values.
- ^{xcix} This summary of Goodlad's findings is taken from Manfred Pfister *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (trans John Halliday) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.34
- ^c Pfister, p.34
- ^{ci} See Itzin for various viewpoints about theatre's potential for political efficacy (specifically, in this case, with regard to the political theatre of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s).
- ^{cii} Burns, p.128
- ^{ciii} *ibid*, p.47
- ^{civ} Richard Schechner (ed) *The Performance Group: Dionysus in '69* New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970 (no pagination)
- ^{cv} In his commentary on the production, Schechner notes that some performers had difficulty with the degree of permissiveness offered in the theatre relationship for *Dionysus in '69*. Schechner quotes one female member of the company who said: 'I didn't join the group to fuck some old man under a tower'. In time, the terms of the relationship were gradually altered to eliminate some of sexual interactions between performers and audience members.
- ^{cvi} Julian Hilton *Performance* London: Macmillan, 1987, p.134

Chapter II

Breakdown of the Theatre Relationship by Theatre Makers: Venue Failure, Performance Insufficiency and Confrontation

The theatre relationship can break down and there are a variety of reasons why. Failure in any one of the elements in the triptych of theatre maker, audience member and space can compromise the relationship and thus affect the sustainability of the performance as a whole. Of course the co-dependent nature of the theatre relationship means that the reasons for breakdown are often complex and may not always be attributed to a single cause. As discussed in Chapter One, the theatre relationship is built on a loosely constructed set of shared understandings and the 'horizon of expectations' that audience members and theatre makers bring to the theatre relationship is not always predictable. Neither are their responses. Neither are venue issues. So, it is not always realistic to trace a single definable source for the failure of a given performance. However, some generalizations can be made, especially where something is done or not done by the other partner in the theatre relationship (the audience member walks out because they consider the play to be substandard in some way, or an actor is unable to give of their best because the audience does not seem to be giving their full attention). This chapter uses examples to explore how the theatre relationship can come under threat from forces outside the relationship; from failures in venue or from something the theatre makers do or fail to do.

Performance can break down because of the actions of a party outside the performance relationship. An example of this occurred at a performance I attended of Peter Flannery's *Singer* at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1989.ⁱ Midway into the first half of the play the performance was interrupted by a bomb threat and the theatre was evacuated. The performance was not resumed. Given the prestige of the venue, the star status of the lead actor and the good reviews that the play had been getting, there was a high level of disappointment on the part of audience members. Many had invested substantial time and money in the experience, traveling some distance to the venue and bringing very

high expectations of a quality social and aesthetic experience. The audience's response was one of irritation towards those who had phoned in the threat (which was rightly assumed to be a hoax) rather than at the theatre makers. Some did seek recompense by asking for a refund – an action that would seem to imply that they felt those running the venue had some degree of culpability, even if they were not at fault for what happened. However, the immediate cause of the performance breakdown was not the failure of theatre makers, audience members or venue. As this case demonstrates, performance breakdown can occur for reasons outside this triptych. It is much more likely, though, for the performance to break down through a failure somewhere in the performance triptych.

A failure in venue is a possible reason for performance breakdown and this would seem to absolve either theatre makers or audience members of any responsibility, though in reality the situation may not be so clear-cut. For example, in December 2001, a matinee performance of Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* was terminated because the auditorium was too cold. As the *Daily Press* reported next day, 'dancers for the English National Ballet decided they could not perform because the temperature was 18C, a degree below the health and safety requirements stipulated by their union'.ⁱⁱ Members of the audience became quite upset, as one seventy-one-year old audience member who had taken her daughter and granddaughters to the performance explained:

As we sat down we could hear the orchestra tuning up and all the children were getting excited. Nothing happened at 2.30pm and a few minutes later a man came on stage and said it had to be cancelled because the temperature wasn't right. The pity of it was there were so many children there. It was full of little girls dressed up in pretty frocks. There were two little children who were brokenhearted, saying to their mummy that they hadn't been naughty. I could have wept for them.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this case, a computerized heating system failed, so one could say that the performance broke down due to the failure of the venue. Or, one could suggest some culpability on the part of the performers for their

inflexible adherence to the safety standards, as the newspaper coverage did with its title ‘Dancers say it’s just tutu cold’.^{iv} Certainly, the theatre’s manager (representing ‘the venue’ in our triptych) tried to shift responsibility onto the performers when he noted ‘at the end of the day it was one degree off and the ballet company chose not to perform. I have no jurisdiction over that’.^v If, as in this case, moral or aesthetic implications can be drawn even where the immediate failure is that of venue rather than any human element, they are even more likely to arise when performance breakdown is caused by either theatre makers or audience members.

At first sight it would appear to be theatre makers who are most likely to ‘cause’ performance break down in that they are the ones engaged in the creative act. They produce the performance as an offering for reception, completion and assessment by audience members and, since response is a subjective thing, there are as many potential opportunities for disappointment as there are audience members. Perhaps the key issue for audiences is the perceived quality of the performance but this is a difficult thing to express in general terms: what is ‘quality’ in theatre making? Ben Jonson’s mock contract for *Bartholmew Fair*, quoted in chapter one, refers to his undertaking to produce a ‘sufficient play’. In Jonson’s case the term is certainly overlaid with satirical irony, part of the play’s attack on the emerging business values of his society – what L.C. Knights terms Jonson’s ‘anti-acquisitive attitude . . . from first to last’.^{vi} Whilst the word ‘sufficient’ does imply a sense of transaction rather than human interaction it is nonetheless a useful starting point from which to consider what might cause the breakdown of a performance.

The notion of ‘sufficiency’ depends upon the idea that spectators bring with them a sense of basic standards or requirements that they expect the performance to fulfill. There is some evidence that audience members do have this sense – certainly audience members surveyed in an empirical study by Carlos Tindemans expressed this view:

Each respondent reveals, when asked to speak out about his appreciation of the performance, something we call a minimal requirement to which performance has to answer if the respondent is not bound to feel

betrayed or deceived. Non-fulfilling of this minimal requirement implies rejecting the performance. This seems to be tied to a more general social contract, the minimal requirement as conventionalized by society.^{vii}

It is difficult to be precise about what the 'minimal requirement' for a particular performance might be. The audience members in this study were not asked to be specific about what the 'minimum requirement' was in their case. As he acknowledges, Tindemans' research is subject to the inevitable limitations of surveys, in that audience members were self-selecting and were answering questions that may have biased their responses. It is nevertheless significant that audience members had a sense that they would know if the performance had been insufficient.

If sufficiency depends on whether spectators believe that the 'socially conventionalized minimal requirement' for the particular performance is met, then sufficiency or insufficiency can mean different things in different contexts. If the aim is to achieve spectacle and entertainment, then the degree to which this occurs is the measure of a performance's sufficiency; if the aim is to achieve primal dialogue between audience member and performer, then the measure of sufficiency is the degree to which this is achieved. The 'aims' of the performance may be expressed explicitly through advertising material, publicity, manifestos etc or implicitly through their previous work, choice of venue etc. However the aims of the piece are communicated, sufficiency is a quality shared between the theatrical partners – the theatre maker sets up the terms by which the sufficiency of the piece is to be judged and the audience members decide on their success. Problems arise when the two sides of the theatre relationship are measuring performance sufficiency according to different criteria.

One sense in which theatre could be 'insufficient' is in terms of its length, particularly in relation to how much it cost the audience member to attend. Though Jonson and other theatre makers might lament the financial aspect of the theatre relationship, value for money appears to be an important aspect of an audience's 'minimal requirement' as Tindemans found in his research:

Each respondent has formulated in some way this minimal requirement to be answered so as to be able to reach any positive appreciation; he then expresses his conviction that he is entitled to this since he has invested time and money. Apparently in our times a theatre visit is regarded as a kind of financial transaction based on moral laws of society.^{viii}

This may seem like a crude measure of sufficiency but a look at two very brief theatrical pieces demonstrates that there is, indeed, a quantitative component to the concept of sufficiency. One example is *Negative Act* – a piece of anti-theatre written by two Italian Futurists, Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli:

A man enters, busy, preoccupied. He takes off his overcoat his hat, and walks forward saying *What a fantastic thing! Incredible!* He turns to the public, is irritated to see them, then coming to the apron says categorically *I – I have nothing to tell you – bring down the curtain.* Curtain falls.^{ix}

Another example is Beckett's *Breath* (1969).^x This piece consists of an inward and outward breath, two cries and increases and decreases in light. The sequence lasts for approximately forty-five seconds and is so short that Beckett submitted it on a postcard. The production of either of these short pieces of theatre in isolation would be an unreasonably provocative act, as it would seem to offer 'insufficient' return for an audience member's attendance, financial outlay and emotional engagement. Indeed, it is notable that in both these cases, the brief performance was offered as part of a wider whole. Corra and Settimelli's work appeared alongside other Futurist works, as part of a music-hall style 'variety theatre' event,^{xi} whilst *Breath* was written as part of *O Calcutta!* and, in a recent Beckett festival in Dublin, was performed on the same evening as other 'shorts'.^{xii}

Quantitative aspects of notions of sufficiency may also be tied to ideas about quality. Judgements about quality occur in specific cultural, social and artistic contexts. This latter is perhaps easiest to assess. How 'good' the performance is may be measured according to the criteria of a particular genre in which it is presented. The two short pieces, just cited, can be considered in this light. In the case of the first example, it is not only the brevity of the piece that makes its sufficiency questionable. It is

also its complete refusal to offer any interpretative possibility to the audience. The only purpose and meaning on offer to the audience is a confrontation and questioning of the theatre relationship itself. Beckett's piece, however, is different. The sequence lasts for only a few moments but is layered with interpretative possibilities concerning life, death, existence, the nature of theatre itself, presence and absence and so on. The brevity of the piece is crucial to its message. All of life is 'reduced to a brief interval of dim light between two cries and two darknesses'.^{xiii} In terms of quality, the suggestion is, the piece could stand alone. It has stimulated as much critical discussion and interpretative debate as any full-length play, especially within its context as part of the Beckett canon.

Context plays a central role in the social and cultural expectations of audience members. Thanks to the long tradition of theatre in Western culture its associated expectations are generally 'known'. Audience members and theatre makers will have a broadly based understanding about things like professionalism, craftsmanship and commitment; what might be called 'standards'. If standards are not met, audience members feel that some or part of their experience was 'insufficient'. Perhaps it did not meet the minimum requirement expected for that performance – bearing in mind that the minimum requirement will vary widely – a performance by school children does not generate the same expectations as one by a professional theatre company (though both could be judged as sufficient or not on their own terms). Put simply, the audience member expects the theatre maker to 'do their job' to the best of their abilities given the type of theatre and the conventions which they have elected to work within. So, within the conventions of twentieth or twenty-first century naturalistic performance, missing an entrance, forgetting lines or drifting in and out of character would be understood to constitute a lapse in professionalism. Western theatre history is full of examples of such professional lapses, often recalled as theatrical anecdotes, with a delight taken in the terrible frisson felt at being witness to a failure in live performance. William Donaldson's book *Great Disasters of the Stage* is one such publication, and contains the following anecdote:

As a young actor Paul Scofield played Malcolm in Macbeth at Stratford. One night he was chatting in Donald Sinden's dressing room and missed his cue for the scene in which Macduff says 'your noble father's murdered' and Malcolm replies 'Oh, by whom?' They heard shouts and the stage manager suddenly appeared in Sinden's dressing room. Scofield was up the stairs like a rocket and arrived in time to be told by Macduff that his noble father was murdered. 'Oh . . .' said Scofield, and then realized that he had a cigarette in his mouth. He removed it, threw it to the floor, stubbed it out and continued, '. . . by whom?' Later it was pointed out to him that he had also forgotten to put his wig on.^{xiv}

The significance of context is such that a serious professional lapse in one context, such as actors appearing under the influence of drink or drugs, may be acceptable in another. For example, the Living Theatre's performance of *The Connection* in 1959 simulated the use of drugs on stage.^{xv} The performance did not glamorize drug use, but it did celebrate the use of narcotics and jazz as a 'liberating force'.^{xvi} Given the experimental nature of the performance and the use of drugs among many in the Alternative Theatre scene, audience members may have forgiven, or even appreciated the genuinely intoxicated performance. A breakdown in performance would have occurred if the influence of the drugs rendered actors incomprehensible to the point where audience members disengaged, but on the whole intoxication, simulated or otherwise was accepted.

Whether professional glitches lead to a total breakdown in performance would depend on the degree of grievance felt by audience members and this in turn would depend on issues such as the severity of the professional glitch, how often it occurred within a performance and, perhaps most importantly, on the sufficiency of the rest of the performance. The sense of grievance will also depend on which elements of a performance are substandard, given the elements of performance valued most highly in the particular performance type. For some audience members the surface elements are most important. They may attend the performance in order to enjoy the spectacle, or the beautiful costumes in which case, if these are disappointing, the sense of grievance will be strong. For others it is the primal engagement between performer

and spectator that really matters. Ultimately, the judgement of sufficiency or insufficiency may come down to something as intangible as a feeling, as expressed by Martin Esslin:

In performance a play either works or it doesn't work, which is to say that the audience either finds it acceptable or not . . . he will very soon be able to judge whether the experience feels right.^{xvii}

It is one thing if the performance breaks down through a lack of quality where theatre makers have tried to create a work of quality but have failed. This is an accident and this fact must mitigate the sense of grievance felt by the audience. On other occasions the audience may be entitled to feel outraged.

By the 1960s, in response to the 'embracing of disruption' of the Modernist era, some theatre makers began to take deliberate risks with theatre relationships by using confrontational techniques. Here, the word 'confrontation' echoes Richard Schechner's term 'confrontation theatre'^{xviii} and is used to describe performance in which theatre makers deliberately subvert the theatrical conventions within which they have chosen to work. Schechner's experiments with confrontational techniques took place in the 1960s, and that period provides many instances of confrontational performance in Western theatre practice. However, confrontation of the theatre relationship might occur at any time and in any genre. Theatre makers may not intend to confront audience members when they confront convention but this can be the result if the unfamiliar practices cause audience members to feel affronted.

Theatrical performance is so highly conventionalized that many types of confrontation can occur. The setting or costume may cause a shock, as at the first performance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) where audience members at the Royal Court Theatre were confronted with something very different from the usual charming drawing room setting. One commented, 'It was the first time I'd seen an ironing board on the stage' and the character of Alison was revealed 'not only ironing but standing ironing – in a petticoat!' ^{xix} Explicit violence or language may confront an audience, as in the case of Howard Brenton's

controversial *Romans in Britain* (1980). Performances of this play caused outrage to be expressed in the press and Parliament over its relentlessly aggressive language and graphic violence including an attempted sodomy. One critic summed up his objections as follows:

This play is a nauseating load of rubbish from beginning to end. It is written in a ludicrous pseudo-poetic yob-talk; such themes as it possesses are banal beyond belief and the intended bravery of the acting company amounts to no more than an embarrassing exhibitionism.^{xx}

The confrontation was made more extreme in this case, by the fact that Brenton's play was staged in Britain's National Theatre, a venue widely recognized as Britain's 'cultural holy of holies'.^{xxi} Sometimes it is the way the venue is used that does not correspond with the audience's expectations, as in Schechner's experiments of the late 1960s where he reconfigured the orthodox auditorium, doing away with regularized seating, shunning costume and casting light on audience members.^{xxii} Whenever conventions are confronted, this challenges audience members' expectations and forces them to experience the theatre relationship in a new ways. In return the audience member may feel unsettled and, at times, affronted. Audience members can feel this way regardless of the artistic intentions of the theatre maker. If the feeling is strong enough it poses a risk to the theatre relationship. Potentially, the theatre relationship may be rejected and the performance may fail. Thus confrontation has both aesthetic and sociological implications for the theatre relationship.

Any confrontational of convention has the potential to unhinge the theatre relationship. Some confrontation carries this potential more overtly because it 'crosses the footlights' in some way and subverts the audience's understandings of their role *as audience*. This sort of confrontation is an attack on the sociological status of the event as much as on the artistic aspects. It is, as Goffman puts it, 'an open frontal attack upon the ground rules of a social occasion – the frame of official action'.^{xxiii} As the ones who set up the organizational frames around the performance, theatre makers have a capacity to deliberately dislodge these frames and create a feeling of confusion in their audience.

Confrontation of this sort involves theatre makers questioning, reworking and on occasion deliberately sabotaging, the theatre relationship. The theatre maker sets up the terms of an apparent theatre relationship, encouraging audience members to frame the experience in a certain way only to quite deliberately offer something that does not fulfil the criteria they have set up. As Erving Goffman observes, 'what is entailed is a violation of the conventional arrangement between social occasion and the main proceedings, the inner realm, which the occasion can encase'.^{xxiv} Examples of such experimentation include the anti-theatre of the Dada movement, and the 'emptied performances' of the 'Happening' movement in the 1960s.^{xxv} Another example is John Osborne's *A Sense of Detachment* (1973), which consists entirely of an attempt to induce a performance breakdown.^{xxvi}

Osborne's attack on the audience is evident from the very start of the play as the characters issue torrents of abuse at people in the audience. These people are actors planted in the auditorium so the apparent breach of convention is, at least at first, a part of the fiction. However, Osborne makes it clear that the plants are not there to divert the attack away from audience members but to draw them in. He hopes to provoke genuine heckling and disruption and he expects the people playing his characters to perpetuate it:

If there are any genuine interruptions from members of the audience at anytime, and it would be a pity if there were not, the actors must naturally be prepared to deal with such a situation, preferably the CHAIRMAN, the CHAP or the GIRL.^{xxvii}

Osborne goes on to recommend responses that the actors might make to genuine hecklers. These he says 'could be obvious, inventive or spontaneous'. 'Piss off', 'get knotted' and 'go and fuck yourself if you can get it up which I doubt from the look of you' are some of his suggestions.^{xxviii} He also suggests comments should be based on 'appearance or apparent background'. Osborne makes no secret, in the text or stage directions, of the fact that his aim is to provoke the audience into leaving the performance relationship. He does not fear driving the audience out of the theatre and curtailing the entire event, as the stage

direction which opens the second half makes clear: 'As the audience returns, if indeed it does return, the house lights are up'.^{xxx}

Any attack on the organization of the spectacle / game frame is also an attack on the whole activity of theatre. Every component of theatre is rendered uncertain and open to question. Goffman terms this 'totalistic attack' and describes how it renders the performance unstable: 'any attack on any other specific element of the frame can be extended to a whole episode of framed activity, threatening thereby to flood the game into the spectacle and mingle performer with onlooker, character with theatergoer'.^{xxx} For theatre makers, the use of this technique may have a didactic intention: if audience members are forced to reconsider the presuppositions of the theatre event this may provoke a questioning of wider social or political structures. In Osborne's case, the use of the technique seems to fit with his attested aim, expressed in 1957, to 'make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards'.^{xxxi} There is directness in this that is characteristic of all Osborne's work. When he came to write *A Sense of Detachment*, this writer was feeling enormous contempt for his art form and his audience and, as his biographer Ronald Hayman observes, 'he is open enough as a person to be able to hate with real violence'.^{xxxii} These may be valid aims and well-founded cynicism but the result is a play that it is predicated on a theatre relationship that cannot be fulfilled – a sort of anti-relationship. Like the anti-theatre of the Dadaists, the play's 'success' is also its failure. Its aim is simply to nullify itself.

It is a curious approach to the theatre relationship to set up a work designed to drive an audience away. However, it is just as curious for an audience member to agree to enter into such a relationship. If the audience member did not know what to expect or attended the theatre with other expectations, then the play may well have offended them and driven them to hostile reactions or abandonment of the theatre. However, any audience member who attended a performance of *A Sense of Detachment* aware of its content was, to an extent, a willing partner in the event. Informed audience members, even those who were eventually alienated and offended by the performance, could not really complain that the theatre makers broke with what was proffered for this event. In a

perverse sense, it was those audience members who found the experience fulfilling as a curiosity piece, or a challenge, who actually prevented its 'success'.

Osborne's aim was to generate behaviour in his audience that would lead to performance breakdown for its own sake, as an expression of disgust or a piece of provocation. Other theatre makers have tried to provoke audiences towards behaviour that breaks down the performance, but with the aim of enhancing a point being made in the performance. For example, Peter Brook's *US* (1966), about the Vietnam War, concluded with an actor burning what appeared to be real butterflies. This was to continue 'until a member of the audience felt sufficiently moved to climb onto the stage and stop him'.^{xxxiii} This activity attempted to delude audience members into believing that something fictional (the burning of paper butterflies) was actually something socially real (the burning of real butterflies). The aim was to make them feel so strongly about it that they were prepared to jeopardize the theatre event and intervene. Certain aspects of this piece of provocation protected the audience from too much of a sense of grievance. In the first place, this kind of deliberate confrontation was a feature of 1960s political theatre, part of the attack on theatre convention that accompanied a questioning of society as a whole. So audience members may have been familiar with being confronted or at least ready for the idea that it might happen. Secondly, the activity took place at the close of the performance and so even if audience members did disengage, they had already received a 'sufficient' play. Thirdly, the use of the device at the end of the play may also have made it less socially embarrassing (though still difficult) for audience members to intervene. Finally and most importantly, the action was legitimized by its significance to the subject of the play. In creating the moment of crisis for audience members, Brook was paralleling the contemporary situation in Vietnam, suggesting that the atrocities of the war were such that audience members should act to oppose them even if this was socially difficult. Confrontation, even where it pushes the audience to breaking the performance down, need not alienate the audience if the action carries aesthetic weight. Of course this is a difficult balance to achieve; audience

members may feel so annoyed at being tricked that this outweighs the aesthetic considerations.

Another difficulty for theatre makers in employing confrontation effectively is that, as long as it takes place within the frame of the performance event, the audience will always know it is 'just a play'. This may be important in maintaining the theatre relationship and avoiding performance breakdown but if the theatre maker's intention is to create something that genuinely disturbs the audience, that feels 'real', then the presence of the frame, the reassurance of knowing this is 'only a play' may diffuse the impact of confrontational techniques. This point is illustrated an article written in 1968 by Walter Kerr, entitled 'We who Get Slapped' in which Kerr calls into question the effectiveness of confrontation within American theatre at that time:

The real thing, in the theatre, instantly becomes the wrong thing, the false thing, just as in 'Big Time Buck White' the moment a debater actually collars a member of the audience and hurls him violently up the aisle, you know – for certain now – that the man being manhandled is a plant. He can be nothing else. The management certainly isn't risking law suits by thrashing the daylights out of genuine customers. The nearer the action comes to seeming an actual confrontation, the bigger and more transparent the lie being told'.^{xxxiv}

Kerr's account illustrates the fundamental artifice of confrontation and recalls phenomenological observations on the 'irreducible thingness' of things on stage. Bert States, for example, discusses how seeing certain 'real' things on stage, like ticking clocks, child actors, live animals or running water cause a sort of discomfort in the observer, as if the reality of the thing dominates over its representational value. As States says: 'with running water something indisputably real leaks out of the illusion'.^{xxxv} States suggests that such 'real' objects seem to remain lodged in the real world of the audience rather than becoming part of the fictional world of the stage and the very fact that they are so 'real' reminds the audience member that the event is artificial. Thus, potentially, aesthetic response becomes subsumed in the pragmatic as the audience begins wondering how the illusion was created rather than responding to the performance. It is likewise with confrontation. The

more 'real' the confrontation attempted, the more likely the audience member is to recognize its artificiality. The more extreme it is, the more the audience member is likely to *need* to recognize its artificiality to remain assured about their safety. With this irony in place, theatre makers are forced to consider whether their confrontational aims would be more effectively addressed within the aesthetic frame. As Kerr concludes:

Direct theatre, theatre that abandons art for the actual, thus has an automatic cut-off valve built into it, a moment when it turns into artifice, after all. Mightn't it, then, have been better as honest artifice – as art – to begin with?^{xxxvi}

Kerr's comments also demonstrate how confrontation is, inevitably and innately, a short-term phenomenon.

Once audience members become familiar with a something confrontational it becomes part of their horizon of expectations and is unlikely to unsettle them again. For example, the frame breaking experiments of Luigi Pirandello, which so unsettled audiences when they first appeared – such as the 'false start' that opens *Tonight We Improvise* (1932),

A Gentleman from the orchestra: What's happening
up there?
Another from the balcony: Sounds like a fight.
A third from a box: Maybe it's all part of the show.
xxxvii

– have since been absorbed into the gamut of theatrical conventions under the label 'Pirandellian'. Such techniques could not be expected to unsettle a theatrically literate audience today. If anything, they are likely to be viewed as somewhat staid. While audiences may initially feel provoked to the point of performance break down, later audiences may accept, even laud a performance for the confrontation it contains. As Martin Esslin observes in his preface to *Theatre of the Absurd*:

The speed with which the incomprehensible avant-garde work turns into the all too easily understood modern classic in our epoch is astonishing and is only equalled by everyone's readiness to forget his own first reactions when confronted with works of art that break new ground.^{xxxviii}

The first performances of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* are further examples of how the confrontation can become the conventional. Both plays were initially met with confusion, hostility and rejection from some audience members. The impact of these genre-breaching plays on the 'unwilling sensitivities' of audience members was such that it did lead to performance breakdown in the first instance. However, only the members of the first few audiences for these plays could really say they were unprepared for the assaults of these theatre makers. For, as the plays confrontational style became known, so audience members became armed against possible offence. Audience members with prior knowledge about the content of the performance entered a relationship aware that this was part of the offering and aware that it had offended or confused others. For some, indeed, curiosity about the piece's scandalous elements was a key attraction. It is in the nature of conventions that they evolve and change. It is also in the nature of great art that it is not always immediately recognized as such. It is not necessarily the role of theatre makers to offer audiences what they want. Sometimes, it is the role of the theatre maker to challenge audiences; to offer them what they do not know they want even if the immediate result of this is performance breakdown.

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- ⁱ The production was Peter Flannery's *Singer* (1989) in September 1989, starring Antony Sher. The event took place at a time when IRA bomb threats on mainland Britain were a reasonably frequent occurrence.
- ⁱⁱ Clare Tolley 'Dancers say it's just tutu cold for the winter ballet' *Daily Post* 18 Dec 2001 Retrieved from <http://icliverpool.icnetweork.co.uk> 19 July 2002, no pagination
- ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*, no pagination
- ^{iv} *ibid*, no pagination
- ^v *ibid*, no pagination
- ^{vi} L.C. Knights *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* London: Penguin, 1937, p.191
- ^{vii} Carlos Tindemans 'Preconditions of Spectatorial Attendance Frame to be Discovered by the Method of non-directive Probing Interviews', in Willmar Sauter (ed) *New Directions in Audience Research: Advances in Reception and Audience Research 2* Utrecht: International Committee for Reception and Audience Research 1988, p.135
- ^{viii} Tindemans, in Sauter (ed), p.135
- ^{ix} Bruno Corra and Emilio Settimelli in Adrien Henri *Environments and Happenings* London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, p.13
- ^x Samuel Beckett 'Breath' in *Breath and Other Shorts* London: Faber and Faber, 1971
- ^{xi} See Gunter Berghaus *Italian Futurist Theatre 1909-1944* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p.161
- ^{xii} The Beckett Festival was a festival of all Beckett's works staged by the Gate Theatre, RTE and Trinity College, Dublin 1-20 Oct 1992.
- ^{xiii} Programme notes from Beckett festival, Gate Theatre, 1992
- ^{xiv} William Donaldson *Great Disasters of the Stage* London: Arrow Books, 1984, p. 19
- ^{xv} *The Connection* by Paul Goodman was performed in 1959 by the Living Theatre (at The Living Theatre, 14th St and 6th Ave, New York).
- ^{xvi} Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre* New York: Horizon Press, 1972, p.47
- ^{xvii} Martin Esslin *The Anatomy of Drama* London: Abacas, 1976, pp.23-4
- ^{xviii} Richard Schechner *Environmental Theatre* New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973, p.38
- ^{xix} Audience member interviewed on *Carry on Up the Zeitgeist* presented by Edward Blisher. BBC Radio 4, April 8, 1992
- ^{xx} Anon, quoted in Richard Beacham in 'Brenton invades Britain: The "Romans in Britain" Controversy' in *Theater: Contemporary British Playwriting* Yale School of Drama Spring 1981 pp.34-36, p.36
- ^{xxi} Beacham p.37
- ^{xxii} Schechner *Environmental Theatre*, p.38
- ^{xxiii} Erving Goffman *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* New York: Northeastern University Press, 1986, p.428. Goffman's book contains two highly useful chapters on 'Breaking Frame' and 'The Manufacture of Negative Experience', often using theatrical events as examples.
- ^{xxiv} Goffman *Frame Analysis*, p.399
- ^{xxv} For examples of Dada anti-theatre, see John Herbert Matthews *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism* New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974
- ^{xxvi} John Osborne *A Sense of Detachment* London: Faber and Faber, 1973
- ^{xxvii} *ibid*, p.14
- ^{xxviii} *ibid*, p.14
- ^{xxix} *ibid*, p.27
- ^{xxx} Goffman *Frame Analysis*, p.399
- ^{xxxi} Ronald Hayman *John Osborne* London: Heinemann, 1968, p.78
- ^{xxxii} *ibid*, p.78
- ^{xxxiii} David Ian Rabey *British and Irish Drama in the Twentieth Century: Implicating the Audience* New York: St Martin's Press, 1986, p.119
- ^{xxxiv} Walter Kerr 'We who Get Slapped' in *The New York Times* December 29, 1968, cited in Goffman *Frame Analysis*, pp.419-20
- ^{xxxv} Bert O. States *Great Happenings in Little Rooms – On the Phenomenology of Theatre* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, p.31
- ^{xxxvi} Kerr, in Goffman *Frame Analysis*, p.420
- ^{xxxvii} Luigi Pirandello *Tonight We Improvise* London: Samuel French, 1932, pp.7-8
- ^{xxxviii} Martin Esslin preface to *The Theatre of the Absurd* (2nd ed) London: Methuen, 1969, p. ix

Chapter III

Breakdown of the Theatre Relationship by Audience Members: Uninitiated Spectators, Lack of Commitment, Flooding Out, Individual and Group Protest

Theatre makers may be more immediately empowered to break down the theatre relationship, but they are unlikely to do so because it is not usually in their interests to shift the balance of power or to disrupt the performance. Audience members, on the other hand, though they have less immediate powers within the theatre relationship, may have more reason to wish to break it down. As Erving Goffman observes:

It is apparent that those presumably not in charge of the activity can intentionally attempt to create negative experiences for those in presumed control. And often they can succeed, at least for a moment.ⁱ

Audience members are often immediately responsible for the breakdown of the theatre relationship, and even where theatre makers are 'responsible', any breakdown in the relationship is inevitably manifested in the behaviour of the audience. This is simply because if theatre makers confront audience members and audience members permit this, then the relationship and the performance continue: in essence, the theatre maker's actions become part of a new relationship. Other than those occasions where the performance is prevented or stopped by external factors such as the venue failures discussed in the last chapter, it is only if audience members object and manifest their objection in some way, that a breakdown in performance may occur. So, while both sides of the relationship can carry out actions that could be said to breach the terms of that relationship, it is audience members alone who can be said to have the power to cause a performance to breakdown. Audience members can break down the relationship in a number of ways and for a number of reasons. These range from unwitting disruption caused by a lack of awareness of conventions in place, through to actions which express mild or more extreme rejection of the performance, right up to active organized protest which aims to disrupt the event. This chapter surveys these different kinds of audience disruption.

The unwitting disruption of a performance can occur as a result of a lack of experience or socialization into the conventions of theatergoing. Practitioners of Theatre-in-Education, and others making theatre for young audiences, are made very aware of the difficulties of performing for children who lack experience of theatrical convention. Aside from the challenges presented by any group of children, such as fidgeting, short attention spans, the potential for timidity or over-exuberance, there are specific problems around how to impart the conventions necessary for understanding a fictional performance. For example, Theatre-in-Education practitioner John O'Toole illustrates the difficulties young children may have in conceptualizing the division between actor and character, particularly when children recognize an actor from a previous performance:

Many actor / teachers know the moment of panic when they have impressively announced: 'I am Prince Rupert's Master of Horse', or some such role, and a perplexed but logical and very loud voice complains, 'No, you're not, you're Dennis the Duck!'ⁱⁱ

As for attempting to get around this problem by introducing the actors by name, as O'Toole says, with young children, for whom actor and character alike are exciting, undifferentiated ideas, it can bring its own brand of confusion:

'I am Prince Rupert's . . .' 'No, you're not, you're Jim'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Where young audience members experience these sorts of difficulties with theatrical convention the performance may be disrupted as a result. However, it is understood that such disruptions do not necessarily indicate a lack of commitment to the event or to the theatre relationship. Indeed, the opposite may be true. Objections and questioning by young audience members could indicate a curiosity with theatre and how it works. This sort of engagement with the art form of theatre is a first step towards gaining an understanding of its conventions.

As children get older and gain experience of theatrical convention, their understanding shifts. So, breaches of convention by older children may be attributable to other things than simply a lack of initiation. It

becomes more likely that audience interventions into the performance also indicate a lack of commitment to the theatre relationship, or a prioritizing of some other aspect of the experience. For example, at a performance of *Macbeth* in Christchurch in 1999^{iv} a group of students from the local boy's High School threw coins and shouted down the players until the performance was aborted. In a radio discussion about these events, the director of the performance, Elric Hooper, argued that these audience members simply needed to learn, or be taught, how to behave: 'Obviously they hadn't been primed about the play very well . . . these people are not ready for live performance'.^v There may be some truth in this but even if they were unsure how to behave, these young people were old enough to have adopted the conventional behaviours of those around them if conformity and commitment to the performance had been their priority. Perhaps they were uncomfortable with convention in general or chose to resist it. This is particularly likely if they were not used to attending the theatre or did not want to be there. It is also possible to suggest that for these students, it became more important, or more interesting, to demonstrate their social status to each other than to demonstrate knowledge of correct audience behaviour. As part of a pre-formed social group, they prioritized the behaviours applicable to membership of that group (showing off and boisterous self-assertion) over the behaviours applicable to membership of this audience (passivity and respect). The theatre relationship on offer from the theatre makers, with its unfamiliar and awkward conventions, was evidently less attractive than the familiar, empowering terms of the pre-existing relationship with their social peers.

Adults are not exempt from such breaches of convention. They can arise whenever audience members are uninitiated or uninterested in conventional behaviour. As with child audiences, the theatre relationship can survive breaches in behaviour conventions as long as the ongoing commitment to the performance is not threatened. This was the experience for theatre maker Sidney Homan during his performance of *Waiting for Godot* given in a Florida jail.^{vi} Homan reports that his company, who had performed the play more than fifty times for

'straight' audiences and had learned to anticipate their reactions, were stunned to find that the prison audience behaved very differently:

Almost from the start, inmates began to rise up and address one or more of the 'characters' on stage: 'Why did you say that to him?'; or 'You two guys shut up and come down here 'cause I've got something to say to you'; or 'Now wait, what did you mean by that?'^{vii}

The prisoners interacted with the characters, generating what Homan describes as 'creative profound additional dialogue'.^{viii} After the performance had finished they demonstrated their desire to interact with the performers too, even breaching the prison's conventions to do so:

The performance ran way overtime and at the end the warden, angry with me for having fouled up the bed-check routine, ordered the men to line up and return to their cells . . . suddenly, unexpectedly the inmates, ignoring the warden's order, broke rank and charged towards the stage. What were they going to do to us? Would we be attacked? . . . What the inmates wanted to do was to talk about the play . . . we held a discussion, some two hours of the most eloquent conversations I have ever had with an audience, or with students, even with my graduate students.^{ix}

According to Homan, this was not an isolated incident. Following this experience, he received a grant to take the play on tour to the other nine state-run prisons in Florida:

In every instance the experience was exactly the same: the inmates refused to be an audience in the conventional sense, insisting instead on breaking into the script, talking with characters as if they were real, as if Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky were fellow prisoners.^x

By interacting directly with the characters in this way, audience members exhibited behaviour that fell outside the gamut of convention predicted by the theatre makers and the theatre relationship was unsettled. There are a number of possible reasons why this happened.

One possible explanation is that inmates simply did not realize that this was a play and simply mistook the fiction for reality. However, as Keir Elam points out, such 'gross errors in primary framing' are

extremely rare in theatre.^{xi} Tales do exist of audience members attacking actors or even puppets out of a mistaken conviction that they are real, but these are mostly apocryphal.^{xii} As Elam also points out, such framing errors are more common in mass media drama (he gives the example of flowers and clothing sent to a studio after a television or radio soap opera ‘birth’) since in live performance ‘transactional conventions are sufficiently powerful to ensure that there is no genuine ambiguity concerning the frame (i.e. everyone in the theatre knows more or less what is going on)’.^{xiii} In the case of Homan’s jail performance, inmates may have been somewhat naïve about theatrical performance – witness ‘John’ who suggested that the company ‘bring *Endgame* here tomorrow and do it for us’^{xiv} – but they were aware of the fictional status of the performance. Homan tells us that the fictional frame had been placed firmly around the presentation by the warden: ‘you [so-and-sos] better behave and shut up! These visitors from Gainseville have been kind enough to come here and bring you slobs a little culture!’^{xv} The problem was not that audience members did not realize they were watching a performance. Neither does their lack of familiarity with theatrical convention entirely explain their behaviour.

The reason for the disruption in this case may have been an overwhelming emotional engagement with the performance, a prioritizing of response over frame. Beckett’s play may have had particular resonance for the prison audience, dealing as it does with waiting, isolation and despair. The play had received extraordinary responses in prisons on other occasions, including the performance directed by Herbert Blau, described earlier.^{xvi} The local paper reported the reception of that performance as follows:

From the moment Robin Wagner’s thoughtful and limbo-like set was dressed with light, until the last futile and expectant handclasp was hesitantly activated between the two searching vagrants, the San Francisco company had its audience of captives in its collective hand . . . those that had felt a less controversial vehicle should be attempted as a first play here had their fears allayed a short five minutes after the Samuel Beckett piece began to unfold.^{xvii}

The San Quentin inmates may have responded with rapt attention rather than the direct interventions of Homan's experience but the audience demonstrated a similarly intense engagement with the performance and the characters. Prisoners commented that 'Godot is society', and 'He's the outside', while the prison newspaper lead with an insightful article on the play's resonance for a prison audience:

It was an expression, symbolic in order to avoid all personal error, by an author who expected each member of his audience to draw his own conclusions, make his own errors. It asked nothing in point, it forced no dramatized moral on the viewer, it held out no specific hope . . . We're still waiting for Godot, and shall continue to wait, When the scenery gets too drab and the action too slow, we'll call each other names and swear to part forever – but then, there's no place to go.^{xviii}

On both these occasions, the theatre makers felt that the prisoner's responses were very genuine and unsullied by preconceived notions about what theatre should be; notions which had obstructed the understandings of more 'sophisticated' audiences. Homan notes that, though they initially found the interventions unsettling, they soon came to value the challenge of receiving direct, genuine engagement with the material:

At first these interruptions threw us, yet we soon realized that the inmates were sincere, serious - that this prison audience, knowing nothing of the stultifying theatre etiquette that often characterizes Broadway, were unable to, or perhaps refused to, make a distinction between their world offstage and our onstage. For them, the 'stage', properly, embraced both the boards and the house.^{xix}

Rather than feeling negatively towards the inmates, for their unconventional responses, the theatre maker's comments imply criticism of more conventionally aware audience members.

Where the audience member has such a strong emotional response to a performance, it may be that knowing it is 'only a fiction' no longer matters. The fictional frame is forgotten, or ignored, rather than mistaken. Goffman calls this 'flooding out' and gives a number of examples from theatre and everyday interaction.^{xx} As Goffman points

out, all social activity is vulnerable to this phenomenon, but live performance is particularly prone to this kind of response:

Scripted dramatic presentations and presented contests seem especially vulnerable in this regard, owing, perhaps, to the complex frame structure of these undertakings.^{xxi}

This prioritizing of response over frame can occur on both sides of the performance relationship. Performers have experienced such immersion in a role that they have been emotionally overwhelmed:

Soprano Anna Moffo threw herself into her role of Lucia Monday night in Detroit. She had completed her death scene in the touring Metropolitan Opera's 'Lucia di Lammermoor' and was taking a curtain call when she collapsed in a faint. A psychiatrist who examined her said she so immersed herself in the role that she thought she had died. The singer quickly recovered.^{xxii}

Audience members, too, can experience intense emotional engagement with a performance to the point of being overwhelmed, as in the example of a young woman in the audience for an early performance of *Look Back in Anger* who attacked the actor playing Jimmy:

Crying 'he left me, he left me' Joyce Geller, 25, began striking British actor Kenneth Haigh, who portrays an adulterer in the play. 'Why do you treat this girl this way?' she cried. Haigh warded off her blows as a fellow actor came to his aid. The two herded her toward the wings and actress Vivienne Drummond called for the curtain. Miss Geller, who later said she identified her own life with the scene, said the sadistic treatment meted out by Haigh was too much for her. She calmed down backstage and apologized and was released without charge.^{xxiii}

The behaviour of Homan's 'disruptive' prison audience may have been motivated in a similar way, so that audience members had such a keen sense of personal engagement with characters that the fictional frame that had been placed around events was forgotten or overruled. Though their behaviour was initially disruptive and was not generally acceptable behaviour, neither was it deliberate sabotage. It was an intense emotional involvement and, far from demonstrating rejection, demonstrated the aesthetic and emotional impact of the performance. As long as the

audience member does not renege on the most important part of the relationship, the aesthetic relationship, the theatre relationship can survive and adapt. Indeed, performers may sometimes find non-conventional responses richer and more fulfilling, as Homan did. A more significant threat to the theatre relationship, and therefore to the sustainability of the performance, comes when audience members actively reject the theatre relationship for some reason.

The most straightforward way for an audience member to opt out of the theatre relationship is to reject it altogether. This may simply involve staying away from the performance and not buying into the relationship in the first place. Or, if the rejection is active enough, the potential audience member may try to induce others to stay away too. He or she may write letters, stage pickets or otherwise disrupt the intention to stage the performance. In its most extreme form, this kind of active rejection of the theatre relationship has led to rejection of the whole idea of theatre. This is no new phenomenon. As Jonas Barish notes in *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, negativity about theatre has a long history:

The prejudice turns out to be of such nearly universal dimension, that it has infiltrated the spirits not only of insignificant criticasters and village explainers but of giants like Plato, Saint Augustine, Rousseau and Nietzsche.^{xxiv}

As previously discussed, it is Barish's thesis that people's ambivalent views about theatre are indicative of some deep-seated and largely unacknowledged ontological malaise in humanity^{xxv} even if the language people use to express their views may not reveal these deeper reasons. As Barish's survey also shows, the expression of anti theatrical sentiment often comes from those with a clear moral or religious standpoint.

Moral opposition to theatre performance has been expressed throughout history, never more vigorously than during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when a protracted and public exchange of views occurred between several noted 'men of letters' within English society. Those opposed to the stage during this period included Jeremy Collier with his *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage* (1698) and Arthur Bedford who produced both *The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays* (1706) and *A serious Remonstrance in behalf of the Christian Religion*

against the horrid Blasphemies and Impieties which are still used in the English Play Houses (c.1706).^{xxvi} The very titles of these works show the intensity of their author's feelings about what takes place in performance. Their moral objections are not only against the subject matter of plays at that time which they see as guilty of 'smuttiness', 'scandal and meanness', 'lewdness' and 'licentiousness'^{xxvii} but also to the very form and notion of theatre, which they evidently believe can change people in unwholesome ways. For example, Collier argues that theatre performance may stir up uncontrollable passions in the viewer:

Young people particularly, should not entertain themselves with a Lewd picture; especially when 'tis drawn by a Masterly Hand. For such a Liberty may probably raise those Passions which can neither be discharged without Trouble nor satisfied without a Crime.^{xxviii}

Collier seems to be asserting here that the better the performance is, the more reason there is to dislike it; an attitude directly at odds with most audience member's assumptions about theatre performance. Collier also implies a suspicion of theatre's dependence on disguise and deception when he declares 'It wears all sorts of Dresses to engage the Fancy, and fasten upon the Memory, and keep up the Charm from Languishing'.^{xxix} With such strong objections to the very idea of theatre, it is perhaps unsurprising that these authors call for the wholesale abolition of theatre, which Bedford terms 'a chief cause of the vices of the age and the bitter root that brings forth gall and wormwood'.^{xxx} The theatres, Bedford states, are the 'synagogues of Satan' and are beyond reform:

Should they be reformed a little while, for fear of shame and punishment, yet this fear will soon be over, and when once they think that they can sin securely, they will return to their former vomit and wallow in the beloved mire.^{xxxi}

A hundred years later, some Victorian critics continued to echo Bedford's sentiments that the absolute abolition of theatre would be desirable. One such critic argued:

Theatrical representations are, in their general nature, or in their best possible state, unlawful [and] contrary to the purity of our religion . . . writing,

acting or attending them, is inconsistent with the character of a Christian.^{xxxii}

Presumably such strong objections to the very idea of theatre would prevent potential audience members from entering a theatre relationship at all, although it is clear from the number of plays quoted in their tracts that these objectors attended numerous performances or read many plays in coming to their points of view.

Audience members who do attend and enter into a theatre relationship can withdraw from it at any time. All that is required is for an audience member to abandon the receptive role in some way. The break might last for just a moment, with a brief withdrawal of attention to glance at one's watch or blow one's nose. These momentary withdrawals are unlikely to threaten the performance unless they are unduly distracting to performers. Indeed, Goffman argues that they may actually serve to strengthen the ongoing relationship. 'One finds, then, frame breaks that come from below but leave the superordinates – typically performers – in charge, indeed may ultimately function to ensure this'.^{xxxiii} However, sometimes these momentary withdrawals can be symptomatic of a larger dissatisfaction. Elmer Rice comments:

If there are coughs, yawns and restless squirmings you may be certain that the interest is slackening and that, for one reason or another, the contact between stage and auditorium has been broken. In fact, the nonrespiratory cough is an almost infallible signal: an attentive spectator does not cough.^{xxxiv}

Rice's comments assume that audience members in a good theatre relationship attain a focused receptive state. Peter Brook would seem to agree. In an article entitled, 'Any Event Stems from Combustion',^{xxxv} he identifies the energy audience members bring to the performance; an energy he claims must be focused for performance to really succeed. Brook describes the focusing of audience energies in musical terms, and clearly implies that it is the theatre makers' task to tune the audience in, or at least to create the environment in which this is possible:

The audience represents multiple sources of energy, as many as there are spectators, but these sources are not concentrated . . . An event will only occur if each one of these individual instruments becomes

attuned. Then all you need for something to happen is for a single vibration to pass through the auditorium – but it cannot be produced if the thousand harps that represent the audience are not tuned in the same way, to the same tension.^{xxxvi}

Brook suggests that if focused receptive energy can be attained, this energizes performers and enhances performance. When it flags, the atmosphere is affected and the theatre relationship suffers. It may even die completely since the further away the audience member moves from this state of focused engagement, the more likely he or she is to separate from the performance relationship. As the audience member becomes individuated and acts, not as a member of anything, but as an individual aware of his or her discomfort, the decision to challenge or leave the relationship becomes more likely.

Audience members may manifest the failure of the theatre relationship in a number of ways. Leaving the auditorium is the most straightforward of these. If just one person leaves the auditorium this may not seem terribly significant, particularly from the performers' perspective. However, there are a number of reasons why it could be seen as a major event. For a start, if one person is inclined to leave this may mean that others will be too, given that audience members are a self-selecting group brought together by overlapping horizons of expectation. Socially, too, the decision by one person to get up and leave may increase the likelihood of others following suit. By leaving, the audience member has demonstrated that leaving is a legitimate response to what is being offered. Perhaps more importantly, even if no one does follow suit, the loss of one audience member is still a significant rupture from an artistic point of view. Under the response-based definition of theatre posited by this thesis, the performance only comes to full fruition in the audience member's reception of it: in Susan Bennett's words, 'a performance can activate a diversity of responses, but it is the audience which finally ascribes meaning and usefulness to any cultural product.'^{xxxvii} From this perspective, the act of leaving is highly significant as it terminates any potential for the performance to come to life within that person. Even one audience member leaving can be viewed as a significant rupture.

Given the significance of the rupture created by the departure of audience members, it is also important how this is done. The least disruptive option is to wait until the interval or a scene change and slip out quietly. This may be done out of concern for social decorum and a desire not to disrupt things for other audience members. There may also be a sense of respect for the performers. Leaving the theatre means walking out on live, present performers who are still in the throws of producing their craft. For all these reasons, audience members who do not wish to disrupt proceedings are likely to be careful to withdraw with care and tact. However, if the audience member is sufficiently upset about the performance, their desire to express this may dominate over their concern to act conventionally and they may not care about disrupting the performance. If an audience member expostulates, bangs up the seat and stamps out of the auditorium this is clearly a more public act than quietly slipping away and the performance is likely to be more unsettled as a result. The more upset an audience member is, the more likely they are to express this before leaving. Ultimately, if they are upset enough audience members may not leave at all but instead stay to protest.

If the audience member stays in the auditorium and makes their feelings clear through some kind of protest, this is potentially much more disruptive to the theatre relationship and to the performance. Rather than simply terminating the relationship, the audience member challenges it and changes its terms. Anything that takes place in the auditorium works in opposition to the primary event, the performance. So, the longer the audience member takes over expressing his or her displeasure before either settling back into the theatre relationship or terminating it, the greater the disruption will be. Sometimes the organization of frames may allow expressions of displeasure to be 'keyed in' to the event. For example, convention traditionally allows for the audience to express its feelings during the curtain call. This apparently occurred at the opening night of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894) after the author had been called to the stage:

The curtain came down . . . and the audience broke into tumultuous applause, with one notable

exception. 'Rubbish' shouted a lone man at the top of his voice. 'I quite agree with you, my friend Shaw called back from the stage, 'but who are we two against the hundreds here that think otherwise?''^{xxxviii}

Though this protest took place in the auditorium, it did not directly threaten the performance because, according to convention, the performers had stepped out of role and the fictional frame had closed. Other ways of factoring in the possibility of protest include 'stand-up' comic routines where there is an expectation that audience members may 'talk back' to performers, especially in response to direct address. On the whole, though, outbursts from audience members during the performance itself represent a significant disruption of events.

If an audience member disrupts the performance this is a significant threat to the theatre relationship and the theatre maker is likely to try to restore order, as in this account of a protest during the opening run of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*:

One night when Vladimir said to his companion, 'I am happy' and Estragon replied 'I am happy too', a man in the stalls called out 'Well I'm bloody well not'. Attempts to silence the protester simply provoked him further 'And nor are you. You've been hoaxed like me'. This led to fighting in the fifteen-and-sixpenny seats, during which another member of the audience, actor Hugh Burden called out: 'I think it's Godot' – an intervention that caused enough laughter for the management to be able to bundle the original heckler out of the auditorium during it.^{xxxix}

At its most extreme, audience protest may take the form of deliberate interventions into the performance. Where an audience member disrupts the performance in this way, the action is no longer a personal response. It becomes a significant social act. Unless the performance is organized in such a way as to permit disruption or unless the theatre relationship is rewritten to accommodate it, the audience member's action is confrontation in the sense defined by Goffman: a 'frontal attack upon the ground rules of a social occasion – the frame of official action'.^{xl} It is as much of a confrontation to the theatre relationship as the confrontational acts of theatre makers described in the last chapter. In effect, the relationship is changed completely. The relationship becomes an

adversarial rather than a co-operative one and, since the disruption comes from the subordinate partner in the theatre relationship, this represents a significant challenge to the theatre maker's status as the ones 'in charge' of events. It is therefore to be expected that when disruptive behaviour is exhibited, it will be followed by a concerted attempt by those confronted to re-instate their position and continue the performance.

As Goffman points out, tolerance of the attack by those affected partly depends on the status of the attacker *vis a vis* the performance. Goffman gives an example of this in which Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Chairman stood to berate black actors taking part a performance by the Afro-American Students' Union at the University of California in 1968 and was allowed to speak for some time before being asked to leave.^{xii} The production, *Mock Trial for Huey Newton* was based on a real event and it was set in a mock courtroom. Seale claimed that Huey Newton's mother objected to the play and he stood to make his objections known. He was finally silenced when the court judge, played by a real judge, banged his gavel and stated: 'this trial will continue with no further disturbance'.^{xiii} Certainly the format of the performance in this case allowed Seale's intervention to fit into proceedings more easily than another kind of performance might have done, but it is also clear that Seale was given a hearing because of his credibility in relation to the material being presented. However, even here, where audience members and theatre makers respected the views of the protester, the theatre makers felt the need to re-assert their authority over events. When a protesting audience member intervenes in the performance, the survival of that performance depends on what happens next: what theatre makers do to attempt to 'restore order' and reassert their control over the event and whether other audience members object to the protester, as in the case of the *Godot* protest described above, or whether they decide to join the protest.

The character of any protest is inflamed greatly if it involves more than one audience member. Clearly, it is more difficult for theatre makers to assert their authority over a group of people than over one or two. More than this, though, there is a significant distinction to be drawn

between individual intervention and group action. As soon as protesters are acting for a collective, not purely for themselves, the action becomes more than personal expression or even social act. It becomes political action. In her article entitled 'Protest in the Playhouse'^{xliii} Athenaide Dallett argues persuasively that whereas disruption of performance by a few 'may be mere lawlessness or anarchy',^{xliv} protest action by a collective of audience members can be paralleled with social revolutionary behaviour of the sort discussed in the contract theories of Locke and Rousseau:

When a good part of the audience joins in a riot it is usually the case that the rioters deem their uprising a justified response to some sort of abrogation of the theoretical contract by the performance. In such cases these incidents can most usefully be regarded as exercises of a right to revolution, as articulated most notably by the social contract theories of Locke and Rousseau.^{xlv}

Dallett suggests that in theatre, as in a social revolution, when the subordinate partners in the theatre relationship feel that their superordinates are despotic they will tend to assert their 'natural liberty' and subvert the sovereignty previously granted to their leaders. Audience protest may be likened to social revolution even where participants are not acting in a consciously 'political' way since, as Dallett points out, the theatre relationship replicates the power structures of ruler and ruled in wider society: 'In Western culture the contract of the stage resembles that of the state'.^{xlvi} If protest by a group of audience members that intervenes in the performance can be seen as a significant social upheaval, then the same time it also represents a significant upheaval in the artistic aspects of the theatre relationship.

Where an audience gets together to protest and 'take over' performance power, the overthrow is also artistic in that the original theatrical performance is subsumed into a new performance – the performance of protest. To refer to protest as substitute performance is not merely rhetoric. Even outside of a theatre, protest is very often theatrical in form and expression, drawing on elements of theatre performance including chanting, oratory, costume, mask and props. Several critics including Baz Kershaw have even attempted a

'dramaturgy of protest'^{xlvi} based on occasions such as the anti-Vietnam demonstrations on the White House lawn in 1971 in which veterans incorporated a number of performance elements into their protest:

They wore white-face, carried toy guns, and had their real purple hearts, silver stars and other war decorations pinned to their combat fatigues.^{xlvi}

The props, costumes and ritual activities described here were highly theatrical in nature, even referencing (in the use of white-face) traditional practices of popular theatre. Even without such self-consciously theatrical elements, any protest taking place in any public place takes on theatrical resonances by virtue of being publicly 'performed' for witnesses. This is so even in the absence of TV cameras which, when they come into the equation, emphasize the performative qualities of protest still further by mediating it to a wider audience.^{xlix} If protest is theatrical wherever it takes place then clearly there is an added significance where it occurs in a setting that is already theatrical. When theatre audiences intervene in theatrical ways, then their protest begins to take on the form of that which it is protesting against. This has profound implications for the theatre relationship. As long as the intervention continues, transgressive audience members become performers and the original theatre makers are forced into a receptive role. There is a transfer of roles between theatre maker and audience member. Put simply, the theatre relationship is turned on its head.

I have suggested that group protest is both a political act and a substitute performance. This is so whether the response occurs spontaneously or is planned in advance. However, where a group's protest action is premeditated, as in two of the three case studies studied here, it takes on an even more theatrical quality. If protest is substitute performance, then premeditation could be said to be the 'rehearsal' of that performance. Premeditation allows the theatricality of the protest to be more conscious: protesters can include substitute actors (the protesters) with substitute 'lines' (chants, rehearsed speeches), substitute musical numbers (whistles and other instruments, songs), props (things to throw or make noise with) and substitute costume. A substitute setting may even be imposed if, as in one of my case studies, the

protesters carry out their protest somewhere other than the setting decided on by the original theatre maker. Premeditated group protest is the most thoroughly theatrical form of audience protest. However, by the same token it may also be the furthest from being genuine audience response to a performance. For, if audience members prepare their protest in advance, then their actions can no longer be defined as a response to that performance. In choosing to stage a protest, the protesters' role within the theatre relationship changes from being receivers to being performers: their actions move from being 'response' to 'performance'. It would seem that audience members and theatre makers are at opposite ends of the theatre spectrum and it is not possible to become one without moving right away from being the other. If premeditated audience protest does not represent response to the performance, this suggests that it might be motivated by something other than the performance, too.

Where a group of audience members attend a performance predisposed to disliking it, and prepared to disrupt it, this can only be for reasons beyond the performance itself. They could possibly be responding to personal experience of a previous performance of the same work, though it is extremely unlikely that a protest group would form solely on the basis of their shared experience of past performance. Even if they did, one could argue that their actions were, strictly speaking, a response to the earlier performance not the latter one. Alternatively, protesters may claim to be reacting to pre-conceived ideas of what the performance might be like. Again, however, this is not really response to the performance but to their notions about it. A premeditated group protest may emerge out of personal dislike of the theatre maker or makers. This occurred at a performance of Gallo's *Squalls* at the Nancy Festival in 1973 where audience members attended carrying rotten vegetables and buckets of water to throw at the performer. In this instance the audience's sense of outrage was really about Gallo's lifestyle rather than his work:

Frank Gallo is gay. During the preparation of *Squalls* he was seemed to flaunt the fact. He was seen frequently around Nancy wearing fanciful, revealing, and unusual leather and plastic clothing. It was

apparently this personal image and the way of life it suggested that not only offended many people but also provoked them to the violent protest in the theatre.¹

In this case, these audience members were not just refusing to accept the theatre relationship on offer, they were refusing to accept the theatre maker himself. Simply his attempt to offer a theatre relationship offended them. Once again, however, the audience's actions were not a response to the performance so much as a manifestation of attitudes within themselves. Almost by definition, premeditated protests by theatre audiences are likely to be staged by people from pre-existing groups with shared interests or concerns that precede the performance. Certainly, this is the case in the two examples of premeditated group protest examined in this thesis. This raises the question of whether it is theatre performance that 'causes' the protest, or whether the performance acts as a trigger or catalyst for pre-existing grievance or indeed whether the 'issue' that causes the protest is, in fact, brought to the theatre relationship by the protesters themselves.

Whatever its fundamental cause, premeditated group protest represents the most extreme form of performance breakdown. The theatre relationship is never fully established for the performance and consequently everything that the theatre relationship would usually clarify becomes obfuscated or overturned. Theatre makers become audience members, audience response becomes performance, aesthetic and social understandings are shifted and the normal power relationships are subverted. Successful framing is impossible. The theatre makers' status as the creators and controllers of the spectacle is undermined and thus the status of the theatrical event itself is uncertain. The enormity of this upheaval may help to explain the potential for aggression that such events contain. As Donald Kaplan points out, when audience members are driven to disrupt performance, their behaviour can be extremely aggressive – a marked contrast to the usual concern to conform and demonstrate awareness of social codes.

Aggressive insurgence by audiences is a lively chapter in the history of theatre. Audiences have been reported to have pommelled actors with all

manner of debris, to have stamped their feet and hurled obscenities, rioted, even rushed onstage and stripped the costumes from the actors' backs. No other occasion of apparent decorum ends up in such manifest aggression.ⁱ

Perhaps the extremity of behaviour is an indication of how strongly audience members must feel before they are driven to try to disrupt the performance. Perhaps, too, the violence exhibited by protesting audiences is a saturnalian reaction against the usual 'apparent decorum'; an unleashing of behaviours usually suppressed by convention. Or it could be that the intensity of response relates to the intensity of the relationship. It is Kaplan's view that theatregoing involves a search for 'primal dialogue' with the theatre maker (specifically with the performer). Kaplan suggests that the spectator's appetite for this communion with other living things is more fundamental than we realize – more fundamental than our appetite for food – and he illustrates this by contrasting the potential for aggression by an audience member in the theatre with the generally less extreme behaviour of an individual who receives bad food at a restaurant. Theatre, he argues, meets a need for primal dialogue in a way it cannot be in other art forms or social activities, including dining. The denial of this need, he concludes, generates primitive fear and aggression.ⁱⁱⁱ This primal frustration may help to explain why instances of audience insurgency are often marked with violence.

To conclude, performance breakdown can occur for a variety of reasons, including failure in the venue, a perceived lack of quality in the performance, confrontation of conventions or confrontation of the audience's role. Whatever the cause, the failure of a theatre relationship will be manifested in audience withdrawal. The manner of this withdrawal has significant repercussions for whether the performance can be reconstructed and continued. Sometimes, withdrawal will be compounded by protest and intervention in the performance. This is a significant social act. When this protest becomes collective it also becomes political and may be seen as a substitute performance. At this point, the theatre relationship is overturned in a way that causes significant social, aesthetic and psychological upheaval for both theatre

makers and audience members. The result is likely to be a power struggle in which theatre makers seek to wrest back their performance power and return the theatre relationship to its previous state.

- ⁱ Erving Goffman *Frame Analysis: An Essay in the Organization of Human Experience* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986, p.423
- ⁱⁱ John O'Toole *Theatre in Education: New Objectives for Theatre – New Techniques in Education* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976, p.21
- ⁱⁱⁱ O'Toole *Theatre in Education*, p.21
- ^{iv} This was a performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* directed by Elric Hooper at the Court Theatre, Christchurch, attended by a group from Christchurch Boy's High School in March 1999.
- ^v Elric Hooper on *Arts Week* NZ National Radio April 1999
- ^{vi} Sidney Homan *The Audience as Actor and Character* London: Associated University Press, 1989, p.156
- ^{vii} *ibid*, p.156
- ^{viii} *ibid*, p.156
- ^{ix} *ibid*, pp.156-7
- ^x *ibid*, p.157
- ^{xi} Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* London: Methuen, p.89
- ^{xii} Goffman gives the example of a drunken Virginian Mountaineer who fired a rifle at a puppet performance in *Frame Analysis*, p.363. See also Ian Watson's discussion of this phenomenon in 'Naming the Frame: the role of the Pre-interpretative in Theatrical Reception' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.13 no 50 (May 1997) pp.161-170. Watson refers to a passage from Jane Campion's film, *The Piano* (Miramax Films, 1993) where local Maori attack a shadow puppet play, 'appalled at the European spectators' unwillingness to intervene' when a man threatens a young girl with an axe, p.162.
- ^{xiii} Elam, p.89 Diana Wichtel reports a similar 'gross error' in framing after an episode of Granada Television's long-running soap opera *Coronation Street* in which a well-loved character, Deirdre Rachid (née Barlow) was on trial and one 'bewildered fan' send the television channel a cheque for five thousand pounds 'made out to the Deirdre Rachid Appeal Fund', see Diana Wichtel 'She Made us Watch It' *New Zealand Listener* 31 Oct 1998, p.71. Once again, while this is a good story, its veracity is uncertain.
- ^{xiv} Sidney Homan *The Audience as Actor and Character* London: Associated University Press, 1989, p.158
- ^{xv} *ibid*, p.158
- ^{xvi} This performance, referred to earlier in the thesis (see chapter 1 endnote 57) took place in November 1957 and is documented by Martin Esslin in *Theatre of the Absurd* London: Methuen, 1962 (1968). Homan makes reference to The San Quentin performance in his own book - he refers to Blau's 'howling success' with the play - but adds that he had not heard about it at the time of his own performances.
- ^{xvii} Esslin *Theatre of the Absurd*, p.3
- ^{xviii} *ibid*, p.3
- ^{xix} Homan, p.157
- ^{xx} Goffman *Frame Analysis*, p.369
- ^{xxi} *ibid*, p.369
- ^{xxii} *ibid*, p.362
- ^{xxiii} This was a production of *Look Back in Anger* staged on Broadway. Reported in San Francisco News March 13 1958 and cited by Goffman *Frame Analysis*, pp.362-3
- ^{xxiv} Jonas Barish *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981, p.2
- ^{xxv} See Introduction, endnote 1
- ^{xxvi} Jeremy Collier 'A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage' and Arthur Bedford 'The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays' in Arthur Freeman (ed) *The English Stage: Attack and Defense 1577-1730* New York: Garland, 1972. Arthur Bedford's 'Serious Remonstrance' cited in James Plumtre *Four Discourses on Subjects Relating to the Amusement of the Stage* Cambridge: Francis Hodson, 1809, pp.35-6.
- ^{xxvii} Collier, in Freeman, pp.4, 5 & 6
- ^{xxviii} *ibid*, p.4
- ^{xxix} *ibid*, p.5
- ^{xxx} Bedford, in Freeman, p.195
- ^{xxxi} *ibid*, p.204
- ^{xxxii} James Witherspoon quoted by Plumtre, p.7
- ^{xxxiii} Goffman *Frame Analysis*, pp.425-6
- ^{xxxiv} Elmer Rice *The Living Theatre* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959, p.272
- ^{xxxv} Peter Brook 'Any Event Stems from Combustion: Actors, Audiences and Theatrical Energy' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.8 no 30 (May 1992), pp.107-112
- ^{xxxvi} Brook 'Any Event Stems from Combustion', p. 108. Brook's descriptions of states of 'focussed receptive energy' recall the trance-like states striven for by Grotowski (a marked influence on Brook) in his 'Holy Theatre'
- ^{xxxvii} Susan Bennett *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* London: Routledge, 1990, p.167
- ^{xxxviii} Gyles Brandreth *Great Theatrical Disasters* London: Granada, 1982, p.137
- ^{xxxix} *ibid*, p.139
- ^{xl} Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, p.428
- ^{xli} Heintz, Debbie 'Panther Criticizes Student Drama; Interrupts "Mock Trial" Production' in *Daily Californian* 28 May, 1968 p.1 discussed in Goffman *Frame Analysis*, p.432
- ^{xlii} Goffman *Frame Analysis*, p.432
- ^{xliii} Athenaide Dallett 'Protest in the Playhouse: Two Twentieth Century Audience Riots' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.12 no.48
- ^{xliiv} Dallett, 'Protest in the Playhouse', p.323
- ^{xli v} *ibid*, pp.323-324
- ^{xli vi} *ibid*, p. 324
- ^{xli vii} Baz Kershaw 'Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968-1989' *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.13 no.51 (Aug 1997) 255-276
- ^{xli viii} *ibid*, p.265. As if to emphasize the overlap between the 'performed' and 'real' aspects of protest, Kershaw reports that these soldiers also paraded mock prisoners whom they subjected to physical abuse, some of it

'for real', p.266

^{xlix} *ibid* p.257 See also Ian Watson 'News, Television and Performance: The Case of the Los Angeles Riots – how television creates a frame that makes news into 'performance' in *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.14, part 3 no.55, pp.210-219

^l Michael Kirby *A Formalist Theatre* Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1987, p.98

^{li} Donald Kaplan 'Theatre Architecture: A Derivation of the Primal Cavity' in *The Drama Review* vol.12 no.3 (Spring 1968), p.111

^{lii} *ibid*, pp.110-111

Chapter IV

'A Whirlwind in Dublin': *The Plough and the Stars* Riots, Dublin,

11 February 1926

On Thursday, 11 February 1926, at the Abbey Theatre Dublin, Sean O'Casey's (1880-1964) play *The Plough and the Stars* was disrupted by violent protests from audience members. The details of this event 'something of a whirlwind in Dublin' as O'Casey called it in a letter to a friend,ⁱⁱ are fairly well known but are worth repeating here as certain details have received insufficient critical attention.

The play had been running for three days before the disruption occurred, and, though its opening had attracted a great deal of public attention, this had been largely positive. The *Irish Times* called the first night a 'high water mark of public interest'ⁱⁱⁱ whilst the *Irish Independent* reported that 'bookings [had] broken all Abbey records'.^{iv} On opening night, according to Joseph Holloway (1861-1944) the renowned theatre diarist, there was 'electricity in the air'.^v Though the theatre had been booked out for some time, large numbers of people queued in the rain in the hope of standing room or a seat in the back pit, and the theatre 'thronged with distinguished people'.^{vi} In line with Abbey tradition, an orchestra played at the commencement of the performance and between the acts.^{vii} The programme advised audience members about the refreshments available in the vestibule – 'served in the theatre if desired' – and also conveyed the following firmly worded reminder: 'NOTICE – Owing to numerous complaints, the Management insist that ladies Sitting in the Stalls shall remove their hats.'^{viii} The performance began at 8pm.

The first performance was extremely well received by almost all the theatre critics and audience members present. Observers noted the attentiveness of audience members: 'the play was followed with feverish interest',^{ix} wrote Holloway, and 'the play progressed to its inexorable climax without the interest flagging for a second'^x wrote the reporter from *The Irish Times*. The article went on:

The first curtain went up with the packed theatre in a state of tense expectation, after each of the four acts there was a demonstration of approval, and when the end came the author received an ovation.^{xi}

On the whole, then, the press response was rapturous, but not universally so. *The Manchester Guardian* reported hisses mingled with the cheers and cries for 'Author!' at the close of the play.^{xii} *The Guardian* also recalled the huge row that met J.M. Synge's (1871-1909) *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 and, in a presage of the trouble to come, suggested that O'Casey's play might have similarly provocative elements:

Twenty years ago Dubliners would have tried to wreck the performance for O'Casey flatters Irishmen in this 'Plough and the Stars' no more than Synge did in the 'Playboy' and some of the language was undeniably plain and broad.^{xiii}

Holloway's diaries also report some private grumbles from fellow audience members, including one who said 'the play leaves a bad taste in the mouth'.^{xiv} At this point, however, there was no obvious indication of the furore to come.

Tuesday's and Wednesday's performances were played to packed houses and O'Casey was the toast of the town. Holloway describes how, on the Wednesday night, O'Casey was 'besieged by young ladies on the balcony asking him to sign their programmes'.^{xv} Nevertheless, the first signs of trouble were stirring in the audience. Holloway's diary reports that on Tuesday there were objections from some in the pit to a scene in which the Irish flag is carried into a pub while on Wednesday 'a sort of moaning was to be heard . . . from the pit' during the same scene.^{xvi} It was on the fourth night, Thursday 11th February that the audience's protests erupted.

Interruptions began as soon as the play started. There was hissing, shouting and stamping of feet throughout the first act. This was distracting but did not wholly prevent the performance. When the curtain rose for the second act, a group of audience members heckled, booed, sang and occasionally delivered speeches, rendering the dialogue

on stage inaudible. According to the *Irish Times* it was clear who the protesters were: 'When the lights went up at the end of the second act, everyone could see many women who are prominently identified with Republican demonstrations in the city'.^{xvii} These included several well known widows of Easter Week, including the mother of Padraig Pearse (1879-1916), leader of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Mrs Tom Clarke, wife of the first signatory on the Declaration of Independence and Mrs Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington (1877-1946), the prominent feminist and Republican activist were also there. Also present was the famed muse of poet, playwright and Abbey founder W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne-McBride (1865-1953). She was an ardent Republican but seems to have taken no active part in the protest: she 'sat in silence in the theatre while those around her shouted their anger'^{xviii} although her son, Sean MacBride (offspring of her dissolved marriage to Major John MacBride – one of the fourteen executed leaders of Easter Week) was identified as one of the hecklers.^{xix} Most of the protesters were seated in the pit although some, including Mrs Sheehy-Skeffington, were further back in the balcony.

The performers responded to the interruptions by resolutely ignoring them, keeping on with the play 'in dumb show' as the *Irish Times* put it.^{xx} Finally, during act three, some of the protesters made a rush onto the stage. This description of events is taken from *The Guardian*:

Twenty women rushed from the pit to the stalls. Two of them succeeded in reaching the stage, where a general melee took place. The invading women were thrown bodily back into the orchestra. A young man then tried to reach the stage, but was cut off by the lowering of the curtain. This he grabbed, swinging on it in a frantic endeavour to pull it down. Women rushed to his aid in his project, but he was suddenly thrown into the stalls by a sharp blow from one of the actors. The pandemonium created a panic among a section of the audience, who dashed for the exits and added to the confusion. As soon as the curtain was raised again, up dashed another youth to the stage and got to grips with two actresses opening the next scene. Immediately a couple of actors rushed from the wings and

unceremoniously pushed off the intruder. Another man had got on the stage by this time and was attacked by a number of players. He retaliated vigorously, and after several blows were exchanged, a hardy punch on the jaw hurled him into the stalls.^{xxi}

Members of the audience not involved in the protest reported feelings of confusion and panic amidst the noise and swarming of people. One audience member describes talking to those around him in an attempt to discover the reason for the row: 'I tried to gather from all around why the people were so infuriated'.^{xxii} Along with the violence on the stage, altercations also took place in the auditorium between members of the audience who supported the protesters and those who wished to see the rest of the play. Another eyewitness observes that 'scuffles, wordy and otherwise, went on in all corners of the auditorium' and adds, 'we were all, I think, a little uneasy about fire'.^{xxiii} The situation was, for a short time, chaotic. The curtain was brought down and the stage was cleared.^{xxiv} Some protesters were hustled out of the theatre by attendants and male members of the cast, reducing the number of audience members by half, but the remaining protesters remained vocal.

It was at this point that Yeats made an entrance. He went onto the stage and made a speech in which he compared the protests to the riots which met J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in the same theatre in 1907:

Is this going to be a recurring celebration of Irish genius? Synge first, and then O'Casey! The news of the happenings of the last few minutes here will flash from country to country. Dublin has once more rocked the cradle of a reputation. From such a scene in this theatre went forth the fame of Synge. Equally the fame of O'Casey is born here tonight. This is his apotheosis.^{xxv}

Eyewitness accounts of Yeats' address vary widely in tone according to the writer's feelings about the man. Some use respectful, neutral language, simply saying Yeats 'came forward to speak'^{xxvi} 'wav[ed] his hands in dramatic gesture' and then 'retired'.^{xxvii} Others describe him with more ridicule, as 'stiff, pompous and furious'^{xxviii} or as adopting 'a

Sydney Carton attitude, correct pose; arms raised in studied movement'.^{xxix} All accounts, however, emphasize his appearance rather than the content of what he was saying, since his words were almost entirely drowned out by the boos and hisses issuing from the remaining protesters who had moved from the pit to the empty seats in the stalls. At some point in Yeats' address uniformed and plain-clothes policemen arrived in the auditorium. They positioned themselves around the auditorium and, according to *The Guardian* 'the noise ceased almost entirely'.^{xxx} The curtain rose, Act Three was re-started (to cheers from many in the audience) and the play was continued.

Although Yeats' words were lost in the din, they were reported in the *Irish Times* the next day. According to more than one account, Yeats visited the newspaper offices in person to make sure that they were.^{xxxi} Holloway writes, 'W.B. Yeats moved out from the stalls during the noise, and Kathleen O'Brennan, who came in afterwards, told me Yeats went round to the *Irish Times* office to try to have the report of the row doctored'.^{xxxii} Indeed, some sources claim that he handed in the speech before he gave it, even that he prepared it in advance; in anticipation of the protests. This comment is from Cowasjee:

This rhetorical outburst was perhaps not as spontaneous as most critics believe. It appears that Yeats had come to the Abbey with a prepared speech, but as the row began he soon found that his words would be drowned in the protests of the audience. So he hastened to *The Irish Times* office and handed in his speech. On his return to the Abbey it became imperative for him to speak whether he could be heard or not, for in the morning *The Irish Times* would be coming out with his speech. And so Yeats spoke to an audience which couldn't catch a word of what he said.^{xxxiii}

Cowasjee's claim that Yeats' speech was a premeditated piece of self-aggrandizement is certainly at odds with Lady Gregory's diary entry of the following day in which she writes, 'Yeats said that last night he had been there by accident, for he does not often go to more than one performance'.^{xxxiv} These contradictory accounts illustrate how widely

people differed in their opinions of Yeats, his motives, and what had actually taken place.

The protests did not stop immediately. A few people continued to interrupt the performance with singing and shouts, but were forcibly ejected by police. One of the people escorted from the theatre was Mrs Sheehy-Skeffington who protested vociferously about the fact that she was leaving 'under police protection'^{xxxv}. She roundly criticized those who would be disloyal to the heroes of Easter Week and to their country:

I am one of the widows of Easter Week. It is no wonder that you do not remember the men of Easter Week because none of you fought on either side. The play is going to London soon to be advertised there because it belies Ireland. All you need do now is to sing 'God Save the King'.^{xxxvi}

As with Yeats' address, accounts of Mrs Sheehy-Skeffington's words and actions are extremely varied. Some portray her critically: *The Irish Times* does not report her words, only mentioning her 'high staccato voice' and noting 'From start to finish the whole thing was a women's row, made and carried on by women'.^{xxxvii} Others describe her with more dignity. The *Guardian* reporter simply observes that she 'rose', made her announcement and 'She then left'.^{xxxviii} The *Observer's* eyewitness is almost affectionate. He calls her 'Mrs Skeffy', repeatedly refers to her speech as 'orating' and at the height of the protest says mildly 'I could not hear a word save Mrs S'.^{xxxix} The gradual removal of the remaining protesters saw the performance continue to its end, apparently finishing only a few minutes later than usual. There are no reports of any protests after the performance, either inside the theatre or outside it. After the remaining audience had gone home, the performers gathered in the Green Room where Yeats praised their determination and repeated his assertion that the events of the evening would only serve as further advertisement for the play.

Yeats seems to have been right, as the play ran for the rest of its week to packed houses, although some anxiety continued. According to

Lady Gregory's diary, there was talk of a threat made against the actor playing Fluther:

A motor with armed men had come to his house and demanded to see him. But he was not there; someone had said that he now lived elsewhere, but when I spoke of it he told me he had not gone home that night, had some little suspicion of it in his mind. I said, if taken, he would now be wandering the Wicklow Mountains like some man who has lately been carried off. It was thought safer for the players to stay in the Theatre between matinee and evening performance. So there was a meal made ready for them.^{xi}

Despite this sense of unease, however, no further harm was done to the theatre or to any of the people involved. No further organized attempts to halt the performance were made (though stink bombs were thrown in the auditorium during two of the remaining performances). The scandal over the play that continued to rage occurred mostly outside the auditorium.

Protests took place on the pavement outside the theatre, however. According to Holloway, when he passed later in the week 'ladies with placards stood at the kerb in front of both entrances to the theatre with policemen in numbers about, and Maud Gonne MacBride, Mrs Despard and Mrs Skeffington in command.'^{xii} For the most part, though, the controversy was continued in the press. 'Letters to the Editor' appeared in Monday editions of nearly all the Dublin papers, including a lengthy letter from Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, published in the *Irish Independent*, that set out what the protests had (and had not) been about:

The demonstration was not directed against the individual actor, nor was it directed to the moral aspect of the play. It was on national grounds solely, voicing a passionate indignation against the outrage of a drama staged in a supposedly national theatre, which held up to derision and obloquy the men and women of Easter Week.^{xlii}

O'Casey's answer, which began, 'A space, please, to breathe a few remarks opposing the screams and the patter antagonistic to the

performance of *The Plough and the Stars* in the Abbey Theatre . . .',^{xliii} was published a few days later. In it he countered each of Sheehy-Skeffington's points and claimed that his right to speak his mind on stage was as clear as the right of a politician to speak on a political platform: 'The drama is my place for self-expression, and I claim the liberty in drama that they enjoy on the platform (and how they enjoy it!), and am prepared to fight for it.'^{xliv} And fight he did.

In the weeks after the play appeared, strong views continued to be exchanged in the press, including contributions by noted literary figures Austin Clarke and Liam O'Flaherty. O'Flaherty, writing in *The Statesman*, published a sweeping attack on the play, which stated '*The Plough and the Stars* is a bad play' and roundly criticized Yeats for his pompous defence of it: 'Our people have their faults. It is a good thing that artists should point out these faults. But it is not a good thing that pompous fools should boast that we have been "cut to the bone".'^{xlv} In response, Gabriel Fallon (one of the actors in the play and a personal friend of O'Casey's) also wrote to *The Statesman*, countering these criticisms.^{xlvi} Such press debates became as much a source for discussion as the play itself, especially for those who had not actually seen the play but who, nevertheless, had their opinions.^{xlvii} Finally, after several more 'bristling letters between the central protagonists'^{xlviii} a public debate was proposed. This took place on 1 March 1926 and was attended by O'Casey, Sheehy-Skeffington, Gonne, members of the social and literary worlds and the Abbey actors. The debate was conducted, according to Holloway 'in the most peaceful way and in the best of good humour'^{xlix} with each side representing their point of view forcibly and eloquently, though O'Casey was suffering very poor health and evidently 'broke down', unable to continue.¹

The play finished its run at the Abbey after a few weeks and transferred to the Fortune Theatre in London. One month later, O'Casey also headed for England where he resided for the rest of his life. In an article in *The Daily Sketch* explaining his move, he wrote of his desire to write a play about London people but his comments also made it clear

how personally hurt he had been by the debacle surrounding *The Plough and the Stars*:

Besides I have to find a place for my feet somewhere, and people don't seem to like me in Ireland anymore. I should not care to write a play about Ireland just now with a possible bitterness in my heart.^{li}

O'Casey's relations with the country and with the Abbey in particular, worsened with the rejection of his next play *The Silver Tassie* later in 1926 and the very public row he had with Yeats on the subject of that play.

Ironically, *The Plough and the Stars* went on to become the most frequently revived play at the Abbey (with 457 performances by 1965 when the old Abbey building was destroyed by fire).^{lii} It was performed many times around Ireland and overseas, particularly in America and it was adapted for television and film and even turned into an opera.^{liii} Despite its popularity, however, the play remained controversial. During its first revival at the Abbey, in May of 1926 (three months after its premier), Yeats received a warning that the Abbey might be blown up by 'anti-Casey republicans'.^{liv} He took the threat seriously, especially since several cinemas had been damaged in this way a few years earlier. In 1966, the committee in charge of the fiftieth anniversary commemorations of Easter Week refused to allow the play to be performed in Dublin as part of their event.^{lv} To this day *The Plough and the Stars* continues to be associated with the violent protests that met its inception.

- ⁱ O'Casey letter to Sara Allgood in Krause (ed) *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-1941* London: Macmillan, 1975, p.174
- ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p.174
- ⁱⁱⁱ Anon 'The Plough and the Stars: Mr. O'Casey's New Play' *Irish Times* 9 Feb 1926, p.7
- ^{iv} Anon 'Sean O'Casey's New Play *The Plough and the Stars*' *Irish Independent* 9 Feb 1926, p.9
- ^v Joseph Holloway *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: A Selection from his Unpublished Journal 'Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer'* (ed Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill) Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P. London: Feffer & Simmons, 1967, p.251
- ^{vi} Holloway, p.251
- ^{vii} See 'programme from world premiere' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976) pp.162-3
- ^{viii} *ibid*, pp.162-3. It is interesting to contrast the tone of The Abbey's reminder to ladies about their hats with the programme notes for the London premiere of *The Plough and the Stars*, three months later. The London version says 'Ladies are respectfully requested to add to the comfort of the audience by removing their hats.' The tone of the reminder may be indicative of The Abbey Theatre's superior attitude towards their audience members, as discussed in the next chapter.
- ^{ix} Holloway, p.251
- ^x *Irish Times* 9 Feb 1926, p.7
- ^{xi} *ibid*, p.7
- ^{xii} Anon 'A New Play at the Abbey' *Manchester Guardian* 11 Feb 1926, no pagination
- ^{xiii} *ibid*, no pagination
- ^{xiv} Holloway, p.251
- ^{xv} *ibid*, p.251
- ^{xvi} *ibid*, p.251
- ^{xvii} Anon 'Abbey Theatre Scene' *Irish Times* 12 Feb 1926, pp.7-8
- ^{xviii} Margaret Ward *Maud Gonne: Ireland's Joan of Arc* London: Pandora, 1990, p.152
- ^{xix} Ria Mooney, the actress playing Rosie Redmond, identified Sean MacBride as the young man who shouted up to her that she was a 'disgrace to her sex' see Ward, *Maude Gonne* p.152
- ^{xx} *Irish Times* 12 Feb 1926, pp.7-8
- ^{xxi} *Guardian* 11 Feb 1926
- ^{xxii} Anon 'New Play Resented' *Evening Herald* 12 Feb 1926, p.1
- ^{xxiii} Stephen Gwynn 'The Dublin Play Riots' *Observer* 14 Feb 1926, p.16
- ^{xxiv} One striking occurrence amidst all the violence was not reported by the newspapers, but is claimed in a letter from Yeats to a friend. According to Yeats, one of the men who rushed on stage did so out of a conviction that the actress playing Mollser, a consumptive invalid was truly weak and vulnerable. He wrapped her in a cloak and carried her from the stage, demonstrating, writes Yeats, that 'she was not the actress in his eyes but a consumptive girl'. It is impossible to know whether Yeats' claim for this 'curious effect of fine acting' is true or not but the acting must have been very fine indeed to generate this level of conviction in an audience member who was unable to hear the performance and who was surrounded by violence so clearly not a part of the fictional world of the play, see Allan Wade (ed) *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954, p.711
- ^{xxv} *Irish Times* 9 Feb 1926, p.7
- ^{xxvi} *Irish Times* 12 Feb 1926, pp.7-8 and *Guardian* 11 Feb 1926
- ^{xxvii} *Guardian* 11 Feb 1926
- ^{xxviii} Gwynn *Observer* 14 Feb 1926, p.16
- ^{xxix} *Evening Herald* 12 Feb 1926, p.1
- ^{xxx} *Guardian* 11 Feb 1926
- ^{xxxi} Holloway, p.253
- ^{xxxii} *ibid*, p.253
- ^{xxxiii} Saros Cowasjee *Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays* London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963, p.81 The same claim is made by Michael O h Aodha, writing in an Abbey Theatre programme for a 1984 production of *Plough and the Stars*.
- ^{xxxiv} Daniel Murphy (ed) *Lady Gregory's Journals* Vol.2 Gerrard's Cross: C. Smythe, 1978, p.62
- ^{xxxv} Gwynn *Observer* 14 Feb 1926, p.16
- ^{xxxvi} *Guardian* 11 Feb 1926
- ^{xxxvii} *Irish Times* 9 Feb 1926, p.7
- ^{xxxviii} *Guardian* 11 Feb 1926
- ^{xxxix} Gwynn *Observer* 14 Feb 1926, p.16
- ^{xl} Lady Gregory in Murphy (ed), p.64
- ^{xli} Holloway, p.267
- ^{xlii} Sean O'Casey letter to the editor *The Irish Independent* 15 Feb 1926, p.8 reproduced in Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin* London: Greenwood Press, 1984 pp.57-8
- ^{xliii} Sean O'Casey letter to the editor *The Irish Independent* 26 Feb 1926, p.8 reproduced in Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, pp. 58-61
- ^{xliv} *ibid*, p. 61
- ^{xlv} Liam O'Flaherty letter to the editor *Irish Statesman* 20 Feb 1926, pp.739-40 reproduced in Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin* pp.65-66
- ^{xlvi} See Robert G. Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin* London: Greenwood Press, 1984, p.70
- ^{xlvii} See, for instance Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.70
- ^{xlviii} *ibid*, p.99

^{xlix} Holloway, p.266

ⁱ *ibid*, p.266

ⁱⁱ *The Daily Sketch* 7 July 1926, quoted in Holloway, p.269

ⁱⁱⁱ Blythe *The Abbey Theatre* Dublin: National Theatre Society, c1963, no pagination. Also cited in Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.92

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Televised version of *The Plough and the Stars* by Leila Doolan RTE / BBC 1966-67: Opera version by Elie Seigmeister, premiered in Louisiana 1969: film version directed by John Ford 1936, starring Barbara Stanwyck, Preston Foster and three Abbey actors – Barry Fitzgerald, JM Kerrigan and Una O'Connor (the film bore little resemblance to the original play – with Jack and Nora walking off into the sunset at the end).

^{lv} Yeats reveals this information in a postscript to a letter to Olivia Shakespeare on April 22 1926. He writes 'I have had a hint from an important republican that the anti-Casey republicans are going to blow up the Abbey the week after next when we revive *The Plough and the Stars*. We shall of course be well guarded but I shall not tell the company. Lennox knows and is seeing to the fire extinguishing apparatus. Nothing will happen but it shows the state of feeling . . . The man who has warned me is certainly not a friend – rather the reverse' in Wade(ed), p.714

^{lv} Ronald Ayling *Sean O'Casey* London: Macmillan, 1969, p.195

Chapter V

The Theatre Makers: O'Casey, Yeats and The Abbey Theatre

In assessing the theatre relationship from the point of view of the theatre maker in this case study it is useful to begin by returning to the notion of the 'trptych' of theatre maker, audience member and context.ⁱ In this instance, all three elements of this triptych were fairly new. *The Plough and the Stars* was a new play written by an emerging writer, performed within a relatively new theatre within a culture that was defining itself theatrically for the first time. Therefore, to understand the theatre makers' side of the relationship in this case, it is not enough to examine the intentions of the play's author, Sean O'Casey. One must also look back to the foundation of the Abbey Theatre itself and the strong personalities and high principles behind it. The idea of an Irish National Theatre was first promulgated in 1898 by the Irish Literary Society; a group comprised of poet and playwright William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory (1859-1932) a member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, and Edward Martyn (1859-1923) an avowed Nationalist and executive member of the cultural organization known as the Gaelic League. From the time the theatre opened, and still in 1926 when O'Casey's play was performed, it was this group, along with John Millington Synge (1871-1909) and the Fay brothers, Willy (1872-1947) and Frank (1870-1931) who were collectively identified in the public mind as 'the theatre makers' behind the Abbey Theatre. Furthermore, since all of them were associated in some way with Irish Nationalism, the theatre was also associated with this political movement.

The Abbey Theatre was a product not only of strong personalities but also of a particular political and cultural climate in Ireland in the nineteenth century. This period, known as the 'Celtic Twilight' saw a huge upsurge of political and cultural pride in the country. Its origins can be traced back to a number of events. In his chronicle of the Abbey (published by the aforementioned Irish Literary Society) Ernest Blythe suggests that it began with the 'imposing ceremonies' held nationwide in

1889 to mark the centenary of Wolfe Tone's 'gallant but unsuccessful' uprising against the English.ⁱⁱ Another theatre historian, Robert O'Driscoll traces the growth of cultural Nationalism back to the publication in the 1760s of the Ossian Sagas, which, though later discovered to be fakes, drew the attention of the literary world to the existence of an Irish Literary tradition.ⁱⁱⁱ O'Driscoll also sees the formation in 1791 of the United Irish Society (a Nationalist and non-sectarian society which aimed to educate its members in ancient history and legends) as highly significant.^{iv} The foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 by Dr Douglas Hyde further fed the revival of interest in Irish language and culture so that, by the end of the 1890s, a unique climate was generated in which cultural pride, patriotism and Nationalism flowed together. It was this climate that produced the Abbey and which, in a very real sense, the Abbey came to represent.

The founding principles for the new theatre were set down in writing in 1898 when Yeats (with Lady Gregory)^v wrote a pamphlet for the purpose of raising funds for the Literary Society. The words were also published in *Samhain* (an occasional publication edited by Yeats, which served as the organ for the Society) and are therefore known as 'the *Samhain* Declaration'. The Declaration as reproduced in Lady Gregory's *Our Irish Theatre* reads:

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

all the political questions that divide us.^{vi}

Unlike most theatre relationships, where the terms of the relationship are only implied, the *Samhain* Declaration was effectively a written proposal, setting out the terms of the relationship on offer and asking for particular audience behaviour in return. Specifically, the theatre makers offered to present unapologetically Irish plays and to present Ireland in a new and more positive way as ‘the home of an ancient idealism’. The audience were asked to allow the theatre makers to experiment, to realize it might take them a while to learn their craft and to be prepared to attend to the results. The final few words of the Declaration even suggest that the theatre relationship could have a unifying effect, by over-riding the political differences in Irish society.

The first goal expressed in the Declaration – to ‘put on Celtic and Irish plays’ – means two different things. First of all there is a commitment to producing work in the Irish language. This may have been included partly as a gesture of support towards the Gaelic Leaguers and others working to revive the Irish language.^{vii} If so, it was no small gesture, for even when the Irish language had been widely spoken, dramatic literature as a form had not been used. As Maurice Bourgeois puts it ‘the history of the Irish Theatre for upwards of nine centuries remain[s] a total blank’.^{viii} By proposing to generate a dramatic literature in Irish the Declaration was not committing to reviving an old art form so much as to inventing a new one. The other intention of this first goal was to address the perceived lack of truly Irish writing in the English language. The centuries of political and cultural domination by Britain had had an enormous effect on how theatre was conducted and perceived in Ireland. By the late 1800s, it was very much perceived as an English, or Anglo-Irish pursuit. Ireland was included on the tour circuit for successful literary plays from London and there was a thriving popular theatre culture of melodrama, revue and pantomime in the English tradition, performed in venues with names like ‘The Theatre Royal’, the ‘Gaiety’ and ‘The Queen’s Royal Theatre’, exactly like those

found in towns and cities in England.^{ix} However, there was a distinct lack of theatre making with a distinctly Irish flavour and a similar lack of local theatre makers. Indeed, such was the deficit of indigenous actors that before being joined by the Fays, even the fledgling Abbey used English actors in its performances and, according to Blythe, the audiences 'scarcely regarded the casting as incongruous'.^x The Declaration expresses a vision of a literary theatre on the English model, but one that could develop its own indigenous forms of expression out of Irish traditions and experiences.

The second goal expressed in the Declaration is to foster a 'school' of indigenous theatre makers and writers working with 'high ambition'. Ireland had produced important and successful theatre makers in the past but they tended to subdue their Irishness to fit the conventions of the imported art form. For example, among the giants of 'English' Literature are Irish-born playwrights Sheridan (1751-1816), Farquhar (1677-1707) Goldsmith (1792-1774) George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Though Irish by birth all these writers were distinctly English in terms of their backgrounds, their outlook, their language, their writing style, their subject matter and their intended audience. They wrote for the London stage, rarely used Irish characters and were not concerned with Irish subject matter. It might be argued that an artist's origins will always influence their work: that, as Bourgeois puts it, they remain 'Irish in spite of themselves'^{xi}. Perhaps Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde and other Anglicized writers display an essential 'Irishness' in their work (Irishness is apparent in, for example, Oscar Wilde's love of wordplay and banter) but this was not enough to make the work of these writers match the intentions of the Declaration. The declared goal was to establish an environment in which writers would not subsume their Irishness, nor wish to do so.

If Ireland's literary theatre makers were Anglophile in nature, the popular theatre tradition had produced work that was more 'distinctively Irish' in flavour, notably the melodramas of Dion Boucicault (1820-1890) several of which were Irish in subject matter and

title, such as *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1865), *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) and *The Shaughraun* (1874). However, work from the popular theatre tradition fell short of the terms of the Declaration too, for a number of reasons. For one thing, the Abbey's founders considered the quality of the writing to be poor: the storylines tended to be too crude and unsophisticated for a theatre founded on literary ideals. Most theatre historians tend to agree with their judgement: Hugh Hunt declares that pre-Abbey melodrama is 'best forgotten' and Blythe makes much of how 'fallow' the field was before the Abbey appeared:

It is sometimes forgotten that, prior to the initiative which led to the founding of the Abbey, not only were there no plays at all in the Irish language, but practically no specifically plays in English were current apart from crude patriotic melodramas which, anyhow, were meant to appeal to the Irish in America more than the Irish at home.^{xii}

A key problem with popular work, as Blythe suggests, was that it tended to be primarily produced for foreign consumption. This was a very different goal from the Declaration's insistence on creating an Irish audience for Irish work. In this way it was no more truly Irish than the Anglophile literary writing mentioned earlier.

Perhaps the biggest objection to existing theatre, in both its popular and literary forms, was the way it tended to portray Irish people. This is something the Declaration confronts quite openly. For, by the early 1900s, though there may not have been a 'distinctively Irish drama', there was a distinctive way of portraying the Irish character, in the so-called Stage Irish figure. This comic archetype had appeared for centuries in both popular and literary theatre including countless melodramas, musical hall acts, the works of Shakespeare (Captain MacMorris, in *Henry V* iii, 2), Sheridan (Sir Lucius O'Trigger in *The Rivals*), George Bernard Shaw (Tim Haffigan in *John Bull's Other Island*) and many others.^{xiii} The figure also appeared outside the theatre context in cartoons, novels etc. The Stage Irishman, though never exactly the same in each incarnation, was recognizable by common stereotypical traits. He was

usually a buffoon with a thick brogue, generally a drinker, given to swearing, fighting, sentimentality, jokes and verbal badinage. Jack B. Yeats sketched a drawing of the figure, complete with knee breeches, shillelagh, leering expression and a clay pipe stuck in his felt hat.^{xiv} One of the issues for the founders of the Abbey was that Irish writers were among those perpetuating the use of the Stage Irish figure and Irish-born actors like Boucicault, made their names representing him on stage. A further insult was the way non-Irish actors would often be used to portray this stereotype. For example, Boucicault always used non-Irish actors, including his Scottish wife to portray the roles he wrote. Yeats's Declaration makes it very clear that this Stage Irish figure was anathema to the proposed theatre: the intention was to convey 'the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland' rather than 'buffoonery and easy sentiment'.

The dismissal of the Stage Irish figure made in the Declaration coincided with a general mood in Irish society at the time. The growth in national pride (Bourgeois calls it 'ethnical dignity'.^{xv}) had brought about an increased weariness with the Stage Irish figure. Audiences were ready for something more. Within a few years of the Declaration being written, weariness erupted into revolt both in Ireland and overseas. In 1900, Irish actors in America refused to act in a piece designed for the St. Louis exhibition in which the Irish figured as buffoons.^{xvi} On other occasions, audience members disrupted performances in Dublin, Liverpool and New York.^{xvii} In 1906, Irish journalist Steven Gwynn wrote that, 'the mere hint of "stage Irishman" will banish all tolerance from the minds of most of our acquaintance.'^{xviii} The words of the *Samhain* Declaration indicated that the Abbey's founders were aware that their audience wanted something different.

Within the Declaration, the Abbey's founders sought to offer a new relationship for a new theatre within a brand new theatrical context. What they asked of audience members was to carry over some of their prior knowledge of conventions from English-style theatre (such as behavioural and semiotic codes) but to leave other conventions (such as the stage Irish figure) behind. As discussed earlier, audience members

are capable of moving between theatre relationships and adapting their behaviour to accommodate any rules or customs that might be different (like knowing that it is acceptable to call out at a pantomime but not at a Beckett play)^{xix} but the knowledge of how to behave is generally learned from observing other audience members. There was a particular challenge in this case as the theatre makers were asking the audience to move into a new and unfamiliar relationship where the behavioural codes were not yet established. If the *Samhain* Declaration is a little vague on the detail of about what was expected of the audience this is understandable since its authors did not know quite what kind of relationship would emerge. Furthermore, even if the Declaration had attempted to be specific and spelled out exactly what was expected of the audience members, this would only have represented the view of one or two of the theatre makers behind the Abbey theatre. In reality, the audience had to build a relationship with the collective.

Despite the existence of the Declaration, it would be misleading to present 'the theatre makers' viewpoint' in this case as if this were a single entity. In reality the individuals involved in the theatre had their differences and there was much disagreement and dispute behind the scenes, particularly in the early days of The Abbey.^{xx} Establishing 'the theatre maker's perspective' on which to build the theatre relationship proved fairly difficult and for some time the theatre struggled to find an artistic identity. There were machinations over which plays should be chosen for performance and how they should be chosen^{xxi} – a delicate issue when the founders of the theatre were also the key authors of the plays performed (the Literary Society's first play was *Countess Cathleen* by Yeats, and the theatre performed a number of plays written by Gregory, Martyn and Synge). There were also differences in opinions over casting, directing and stylistic direction. Yeats had a personal interest in non-naturalistic 'verse drama', a lyrical form which in many ways reflected his interest in the occult and spiritual side of humanity. Others such as Synge were firmly grounded in poetic realism. Only gradually did the theatre makers develop a sense of joint identity. Under

the influence of the Abbey Board (principally Yeats, Synge and Gregory) and under the direction of the Fays, the theatre projected a political identity that was broadly Nationalist, Protestant and Anglo-Irish and an ensemble performance style that was predominantly natural, and spontaneous and used actors to serve the text; a significant departure from the 'star system' which operated in America and, to some extent, in Britain.^{xxii} Irish theatre had been born.

The birth was an uneasy one. The Abbey theatre makers were subject to opposition from the beginning and this had its own effect on the identity of the theatre and its theatre makers. The very first production of the Literary Theatre, Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*, in 1899, was disrupted when formal objections were raised by members of the Catholic University offended at certain 'impieties' in the play (including a scene in which souls are sold for gold). Pamphlets were issued decrying the piece and some students caused disorder during the performance at the Antient Concert Rooms.^{xxiii} Though the disruptions were fairly half-hearted^{xxiv} the response to *Countess Cathleen* seemed to set a precedent. Even after the Society moved to the Abbey, and a core of popular support for the theatre began to grow, there was always the sense that disruption was possible. A rather different form of opposition came from the press, where, as Blythe notes, reviews of the theatre's work were highly exacting and critical and tended, certainly at first, to be negative in tone.^{xxv} As a result, it is fair to say that it became part of the Abbey's identity to make theatre despite objection, and in defiance of opposition. The theatre's founders had high ideals and protests from audience members and the press made them, if anything, more determined to stick to them.

The theatre makers' defiance towards their audience members was also tempered with a sense of superiority and this had huge implications for how the theatre relationship was manifested. In her diaries, Lady Gregory expressed it this way: 'We went on giving what we thought good until it became popular'.^{xxvi} Though light hearted, the tone here is one of benign artistic superiority – the theatre makers are seen as having

a level of aesthetic understanding superior to that of their audience. Yeats revealed something of the same attitude, though with an altogether darker tone, in a letter he wrote to Lady Gregory replying to her suggestion to stage Euripides' *Hippolytus*:

It is altogether too soon for us to stray away from Irish subjects. Above all, it is too soon for us to put on any non-Irish work of such importance as the *Hippolytus*. It would be playing into the hands of our enemies. On the other hand, if we get through this season keeping our own audiences with us and playing a considerable variety of good, new Irish work, we will be able to do as we like.^{xxvii}

Yeats expresses his concern to please his audience but it is also clear that, to use Dallett's terminology, he wishes to assert his 'sovereignty' over them.^{xxviii} His ultimate aim is to 'do as we like' and this evidently includes moving the theatre away from the focus on Irish plays that he included in the *Samhain* Declaration.

Yeats was very aware that he had enemies and, though in his letter he describes the audience members as 'our own audience' – suggesting that he considers them to be on his side for now – he also seems aware that this loyalty could shift. Significantly, Yeats had witnessed at first hand the notorious audience unrest at the opening night of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* in 1896,^{xxix} where he had been in the audience. His famous written response to the event, 'after S, Mallarme, after Verlaine, after G. Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God'^{xxx} expresses his awareness that disruption was a growing phenomenon within European theatre and his fear that this kind of behaviour could get out of control. It is interesting to compare Yeats's tone here with the words delivered in the auditorium during the *Plough and the Stars* unrest where he claimed that the audience's actions were 'rocking the cradle of genius' and assuring O'Casey's fame. By 1926, it would seem (having experienced audience disruption not just in Europe but also, as we shall see, within his own theatre) Yeats had come to the opinion that audience

protest was a badge of honour – an achievement. One might even suggest that he welcomed the protest because, in his eyes, by attracting such a response the Abbey was proving itself as a valid part of European theatre tradition, in which the ‘embracing of disruption’ was such a key feature. In the early years of the Abbey, however, he was more fearful of the consequences of audience protest. And he was not alone in this view. Similar sentiments about the Abbey audience were expressed by James Joyce in 1901 in an essay-pamphlet entitled *The Day of the Rabblement*. In this essay, openly addressed to Yeats, Joyce warned him about ‘surrendering to the trolls’ in the Abbey audience by limiting the Abbey to Nationalist fare.^{xxxii} The fears of both men were realized a few years later with the disruption of Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*.

The Playboy of the Western World opened on 26 January 1907 and the row that erupted from its second performance onwards remains one of the most famous and most extreme examples of audience disruption in theatre history. More significant, from the point of view of this case study, is the way the row crystallized the schism between the Abbey and its audience, making disruption of the performance part of the horizon of expectations for theatre audiences at the Abbey. To describe the events in brief: Synge’s portrayal of peasant life on Ireland’s West coast, his confrontation of the myth of rural Ireland as a place of purity and innocence, his storyline (which involved an Irish village idolising a man who claims to have killed his father) and the indelicate use of the word ‘shift’ (referring to an item of women’s underwear) all caused offence and these elements of the play, along with personal and political antagonisms towards the Abbey and Synge himself, combined to create a hostile reaction.^{xxxiii} On opening night, the performance was met with angry noises from members of the audience and the next day, outrage was expressed in the Nationalist press. The *Freeman’s Journal* called the play ‘an unmitigated protracted libel upon Irish peasant men and, worse still upon Irish peasant girlhood’^{xxxiii} while a correspondent signing herself only ‘A Western Girl’ described it as ‘stilted, impossible, uninteresting and un-Irish’.^{xxxiv} Violent protests continued to disrupt the

next three performances accompanied by an angry exchange of correspondence in the press. Both sides of the argument recruited people to attend the theatre for the sole purpose of protesting for or against the play.

The responses of one audience member are of particular interest here, given his unforeseen relationship to the disruption of *The Plough and the Stars* twenty years later. Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, who was to play such a gallant role in the Easter Rising and whose wife, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, would act as leader and spokesperson for the protesters at O'Casey's play, attended the first night of *The Playboy of the Western World* and wrote a letter to *The Irish Times* in which he expressed his opinions about Synge's play. The letter outlined certain reservations about the piece but at the same time expressed support and sympathy for Synge himself. Sheehy-Skeffington appealed to the Dublin public to judge the play for themselves:

I hope that no one interested in Irish drama will condemn 'The Playboy' at second hand. It will be produced all this week and there is ample opportunity for theatre-going Dublin to form an opinion independent of any published criticisms. The excellent work Mr. Synge has already done entitles him to so much consideration from the public.^{xxxv}

Frank Sheehy-Skeffington's advice was typical of his fair-minded individuality. It was an appeal to the Dublin public to judge the theatre maker not only on the strength of this offering but to bear in mind his previous work and to frame all this within the larger context of the Abbey's endeavours. Clearly, this was an audience member who was conscious of all aspects of his theatre relationship with The Abbey and could see the theatre makers' perspective in the case. One wonders, then, whether Frank would have approved of his wife's actions twenty years later when she led the protests against *The Plough and the Stars* proceeding to condemn the play 'at second hand' without having personally 'formed an opinion independent of any published criticisms'. In any case, in 1907, as in 1926, few people heeded this advice.

According to Synge's biographers, D.H. Greene and E.M. Stephens, the common explanation within Ireland itself for the audience's rejection of Synge's play was that it was a reaction to the characterization: 'a resurgent Ireland would no longer passively accept the caricature known to generations of theatregoers as the stage Irishman'^{xxxvi} The biographers themselves challenge this and argue that the riots were politically motivated: 'a clash between two groups of dedicated people', the Nationalist leaders on one hand and the artists of the Abbey on the other.^{xxxvii} However, as Dallett says, 'neither theory adequately acknowledges that the offence *Playboy* gave to many . . . was greatly exacerbated by the accompanying sin of betraying the audience'.^{xxxviii} She explains:

In another theatre playgoers who took umbrage at the production may not have expressed their outrage so strongly, but at the Abbey Theatre the audience felt that performance had broken the implicit social contract the Abbey entered into with its spectators with every production it mounted; and the audience responded with what it considered to be legitimate revolutionary protest.^{xxxix}

In Dallett's view, the audience members at *The Playboy of the Western World* considered the theatre makers to have reneged on the terms of their own Declaration by presenting a play that satirized Ireland rather than glorifying it. Audience members felt the theatre makers had already breached the terms of the theatre relationship and, in return, they organized to bring about the breakdown of the performance.

The disruption of *The Playboy of the Western World* and in particular the theatre maker's response to it was a defining moment for the developing relationship between the Abbey Theatre and its audience members. The theatre makers might have bowed to the protests and allowed the audience members sovereignty over the performance – this was what the Nationalist press desired and, as we have seen, there was a historical precedent for such capitulation in other theatres, but this the Abbey theatre makers would not do. Or, the theatre makers could have

acknowledged the audience's difficulties with the work, particularly in light of their own earlier Declaration. This might have occurred at the public debate held by Yeats on the Monday after the first performance but Yeats was more interested in re-affirming and clarifying the terms of the theatre relationship as he saw them:

Yeats' courageous challenge to meet Synge's opponents in open debate on the following Monday provided a further opportunity for a demonstration of mindless antagonism and did nothing to convert the opponents. It did, however, give Yeats a chance of restating his unwavering belief in the freedom of the artist – a chance he was never slow to seize.^{xi}

In the event, the theatre makers chose to resist the protest in the strongest and most inflexible terms. Police were called in to arrest dissenting audience members and the Abbey's floors were padded with felt to lessen the effect of stamping feet.^{xii} An advertisement appeared in the newspapers appealing to people to attend the theatre in support of artistic freedom:

Support Abbey Theatre against Organised Opposition –
He who strikes at freedom of judgement strikes at the
soul of the nation. New play every evening until further
notice.^{xiii}

This advertisement shows that the theatre board was canny enough to realize the controversy also meant good publicity for the theatre and sure enough the run of *The Playboy of the Western World* was extended and the increased door sales rescued the Abbey from financial difficulty for a while. Mostly, though, the play was kept on as a point of principle. Indeed, principle seems to have taken precedence over the performance, as evidenced by the instructions of Willy Fay (playing the lead) who 'arranged with the cast that they would simply walk through the play'^{xiiii} without attempting to perform over the din.

It was in this response to the protest that the theatre makers clarified their attitude to their audience. The audience (or at least, some members of it) had become the enemy Yeats always feared it might.

From its inception, the theatre had worked under pressure from British and American cultural influences, the Catholic Church and Nationalists. Now it was also facing opposition from its own audience base. From the theatre makers' perspective it was the Abbey's right and duty as a national theatre to fight for artistic freedom both within the performance and in the wider context of the artistic direction of the theatre. The response to the riots showed that the theatre makers could put this principle ahead of the audience's sensitivities. That same principle was still operative when Sean O'Casey started writing for the Abbey.

Even though he had not yet become a writer himself at the time, O'Casey was well aware of the disruption of *The Playboy of the Western World* and the underlying reasons behind the events. In his autobiography, O'Casey devotes a whole chapter (entitled 'Song of a Shift') to the riots in the theatre and the subsequent debate about Synge's play.^{xliv} Although he describes Dublin resonating with 'this great cry of Shift' and the city 'afame with the thoughts of holy reprobation'^{xlv} O'Casey is also clearly of the opinion that the opposition had little to do with the play itself and came from people who did not know anything about the author or the play. 'Who is this Singe or Sinje, or whatever his name may be . . . and what did he say exactly?' O'Casey asks before being told 'It's not a matter of what he said, but of what everybody says he says'.^{xlvi} O'Casey's account vividly portrays his sense that the audience's behaviour was motivated by a general attitude of negativity towards the Abbey and the audience's sense of its own strength within the relationship, rather than any real knowledge of the play itself:

We'll make them feel the sacred animosity of Catholic Ireland, feel it sharp an' sudden always! This pagan-minded, anti-Irish ravisher of decency, Yeats and his crony Synge; ay, an' that oul' hen behind them, Gregory with her pro-British breedin' oozin' out of everything she says an' does, must be taught a lesson!^{xlvii}

Though O'Casey had not personally seen any of Synge's plays,^{xlviii} his experience as witness to these riots and his insights about the Abbey

audiences may have prepared him for the disruption that would meet his own work.

When he wrote *The Plough and the Stars*, Sean O'Casey was an Abbey writer, operating within the terms of the overall relationship set up by the theatre's founders, but he had his own ideas of what the theatrical relationship should be. Much of what O'Casey offered the audience can be seen as a reflection of his personal life experiences. Like Synge before him, O'Casey was born into a Protestant family, but whereas Synge's family was of landowning Anglo-Irish stock, O'Casey was firmly of the lower middle or working class. Though O'Casey was born into 'comfortable circumstances', the family gradually declined into poverty following the death of their father in 1886.^{xlix} In 1889 (when Sean was in his ninth year) they moved to a poorer area of Dublin. A further move, in 1897, saw the family living in two rooms of a house.¹ It may be that, as Hugh Hunt suggests, the hardship of O'Casey's youth is often somewhat exaggerated in the telling:

When Michael Casey died the family under its indomitable mother had to face a severe, and no doubt humiliating, fall in living standards, but at no time was this respectable lower-middle class family reduced to living in the appallingly overcrowded conditions of Dublin's slum tenements, as eagerly reported by the press, and luridly described by some of his biographers.ⁱⁱ

O'Casey himself could be accused of playing up his image as the 'tenement poet', particularly within his autobiographies where he portrays the rigours of his early life with some relish.^{lii} However, whether O'Casey actually lived in the tenements or not, he lived near enough to them to draw on their richness for his plays and to be concerned to portray this strata of Dublin life on stage. A large part of the theatre relationship he offered was that of portraying to Dubliners the ordinary people of their own city in a new and not necessarily comfortable way.

Apart from providing the content of his work, O'Casey's early experience also informed his politics. Throughout his life, O'Casey

remained resolutely socialist and humanist, always focussed on the interests of the ordinary working people he grew up with. O'Casey was heavily involved in the political world in the years leading up to the Easter Rising^{liii} and it is in this light that *The Plough and the Stars* needs to be considered. As Robert Lowery says:

O'Casey's role as a radical and militant agitator and organiser should not be underestimated. From 1906 to 1914 he was in the mainstream of Irish nationalist, then socialist, activity.^{liv}

O'Casey's blend of Nationalism and socialism was his own, and it did not fit comfortably with the broad Nationalistic aims of the Abbey or its audience. Initially a staunch Nationalist^{lv} and member of the Gaelic League, O'Casey found his sympathies swaying towards the socialist movement after watching Larkin give a speech in 1910. In O'Casey's own words, 'from that day on I stitched a wide strip of crimson into the Irish Tricolour'.^{lvi} The crimson strip was to become more and more dominant as O'Casey became increasingly disenchanted with Nationalism and used his writing as a means to express his criticisms about the Nationalist movement and some key figures within it. For example, though O'Casey admired Pearse's magnetism and his capacity to draw people to the cause through oratory, he was horrified by his tendency to glorify violence and bloodshed and felt some impatience with the blind faith he induced in his followers. This passage from O'Casey's Autobiography *Drums Beneath the Windows* illustrates this ambivalent response to the man:

Beside Pearse, men might listen to the jangling bells and think them musical; might watch men bend slick, sleek knees and think they honoured humility; might see men fast, and still think it sensible; might drink insipid water, and taste the wine; for your austerity was ever bright, your snowy mantle of rigid conduct was ever girdled by a coloured scarf, and golden buttons closed it over you; nay on the very head of grinning Death itself you stuck a smiling star.^{lvii}

A similar attitude emerges clearly in Act Two of *The Plough and the Stars* when Pearse is caricatured in the form of a shadowy orator through the pub window, while the audience watches the mesmerizing effects of his oratory on the drinkers within. Clearly, it was part of O'Casey's intention to confront the audience with his own mixed feelings about Nationalism and the oratory of its key figures. Socialism, his other political cause, did not escape his criticism either.

O'Casey moved from the cause of Nationalism towards a type of militant unionism, though he was ultimately to withdraw from that cause too (this tendency to engage and then withdraw from organizations was to become something of a motif in his political and artistic life). As secretary for the Women and Children's Relief fund during the General Strike of 1913, O'Casey was close to the action in October of that year when two people were killed and hundreds injured during a police baton-charge against a demonstration being addressed by Larkin.^{lviii} The experience fuelled his political anger and gave him an awareness of the potential for violence within collective action that must have resonated for him during the unrest at *The Plough and the Stars*. Following the strike, O'Casey became more heavily involved in socialism until, once again, personality differences brought disillusionment. Appointed secretary of Larkin's new militant organization in 1914, O'Casey was responsible for drawing up the organization's constitution but resigned later the same year following Countess Markievicz's attempts to draw the Citizen's Army into her Nationalist organization. O'Casey's two causes had come together at last, but with Nationalism taking precedence over socialism, O'Casey did not approve. O'Casey developed further disaffection for the socialist Citizen's Army when James Connolly, who succeeded Larkin as leader, prioritized Nationalist principles over humanist ones:

The high creed of Irish Nationalism became his daily rosary, while the higher creed of international humanity that had so long bubbled from his eloquent lips was silent forever.^{lix}

O'Casey never forgave Connolly for putting the needs of his country higher than the needs of the working people and, unable to find a place to belong in the political world, O'Casey withdrew, opting to express his beliefs through his writing instead. If this withdrawal was a political act, it was also a personal one.

O'Casey's personality was a factor in the relationships he built up with those around him, including his relationships with his fellow theatre makers and with his audience. Apart from his genuine political differences with others, his tendency was to become personally disillusioned with organizations in which he was involved. As Raymond Porter puts it, 'at some point there was always an argument followed by resignation'.^{lx} In his years as a Nationalist activist, his personal difficulties with people in positions of leadership provoked O'Casey to resign from both the Gaelic League and the Republican Brotherhood. In particular, O'Casey seems to have particularly despised the aristocratic Countess Markievicz (a popular figurehead described by one historian as 'the Jane Fonda of the Irish Struggles')^{lxi} of whom O'Casey scoffed:

She never reached the rank of failure, for she hadn't the constitution to keep long enough at anything which, in the end, she could see a success or a failure facing her.^{lxii}

'Never', he says elsewhere, did he see her do 'anything anyone could call a spot of work'^{lxiii}. O'Casey's attitude seems to have been a product of his working class origins, which made him highly critical of anything that smacked of vanity or privilege. To him, it seems, political life was about working hard to make a difference (an attitude he personified in his own activism and, later his theatre work) and he responded to differences of principle by withdrawing himself from relationships with others. It was this sort of personal disenchantment that would eventually arise in his relationship with the leadership of the Abbey Theatre and with the audience who rejected his work.

By 1916, and having quarrelled with both Nationalists and socialists, O'Casey took no active part in the lead-up to the Easter Rising a fact that did not escape the protesters at *The Plough and the Stars*, whose

husbands had died in the event. Not only did he eschew involvement, he also maintained serious criticisms of the Rising and the events that lead up to it. O'Casey's resignation from the Citizen's Army came just as they prepared for military action, along with the Irish Volunteers, a paramilitary Nationalist organization, formed in 1913. The Citizen's Army and the Volunteers were soon carrying out joint military manoeuvres round the Dublin streets, dressed in full uniforms and carrying guns and, though O'Casey originally approved of the purchase of the uniforms, he came to despise the vanity (and to recognize the sense of theatricality and performance) associated with the parades:

There was a dire sparkle of vanity lighting this little group of armed men: it sparkled from Connolly's waddle, from the uniformed men stiff to attention, and from the bunch of cock-feathers fluttering in the cap of the Countess.^{lxiv}

O'Casey's objections were also tactical. He believed that 'any fight would have to be an underground one',^{lxv} and that the best chance of success lay with the use of guerrilla tactics rather than open warfare with Britain. O'Casey's view is expressed by the Sean character in *Drums* who exhorts the men to 'take off your uniforms . . . and keep them for the wedding, the wake, the pattern and the fair. Put on your old duds that make you indistinguishable from your neighbours'.^{lxvi} O'Casey's opinion was largely ignored by those around him, just as Sean's view is ignored in the autobiography. As the tragic events of the Easter Rising would show, his criticisms had some justification and he never changed this view. Ten years later in *The Plough and the Stars*, he sought to remind his audience of what 'really' happened and, more particularly, to remind his audience how they, as Dubliners, had felt about the Rising at the time.

Public reaction, and that of O'Casey's eventual audience, had changed a great deal between the Rising and the performance of O'Casey's play. It even shifted during the Rising itself. In the first few days of the Rising, when Pearse and Connolly occupied the General Post Office (GPO) and Pearse read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on

the steps outside, onlookers regarded the action with some indifference considering it as the leaders did themselves, to be a largely symbolic act.^{lxvii} Little attention was paid, either, to the rebels' attack on a largely deserted Dublin Castle. Poorer inhabitants of the city responded to the Uprising by looting goods from city shops – something that features strongly in O'Casey's play – and by the second day large numbers were raiding shops, even stealing furniture from off the rebel barricades. The public's attitude began to shift on the third day, when the first British reinforcements started to arrive and when the British gunboat 'Helga' demolished Liberty Hall and inflicted damage on other buildings in the city. On the same day, the British suffered heavy casualties fighting against a group of rebels (now calling themselves the Irish Republican Army, or IRA) holed up in the Royal College of Surgeons. Most of all, however, it was the final days of the Uprising that would remain in the public consciousness because it was in the last few days of fighting that the public were directly affected. The city was impounded so that no food could be brought in and British reinforcements started to arrive in greater numbers. The GPO and other key buildings in the city were shelled and severe fires spread through the city. Civilians were hurt and killed in the fighting as some were mistaken for rebels, many of whom did not wear uniforms. Rumours circulated about atrocities committed on both sides of the fighting.^{lxviii} A turning point came when the GPO caught fire and had to be evacuated. The rebel's final stronghold was the Four Courts on King's Street, where:

It took some 5,000 British troops, equipped with armoured cars and artillery, 24 hours to advance about 150 yards against some 200 rebels almost all of whom had been fighting, without sleep, for five days.^{lxix}

By the following day, when Pearse signed the order for surrender, a large number of casualties had been sustained on both sides^{lxx} and the city was devastated. Public opinion had moved from indifference to fear, outrage and shock at the Uprising. However, an even greater shift in public opinion was to come.

Immediately after the Rising, with high casualty numbers and large parts of the city in ruins, public opinion, for a large part, was against the rebels. The arrested rebels were marched across Dublin to prison, and were jeered at and booed. However, opinion began to change over the next two weeks as the British tried and shot fourteen of the ringleaders, including Pearse and Connolly. Markievicz was one of only two leaders spared. Public opinion began to view the dead men as martyrs. In England, too, the intellectual left spoke out against the killings. George Bernard Shaw wrote:

It is absolutely impossible to slaughter a man in this position without making him a martyr and a hero, even though the day before the rising he may have been only a minor poet. The shot Irishmen will now take their places beside Emmet and the Manchester Martyrs in Ireland, and beside the heroes of Poland and Serbia and Belgium in Europe; and nothing in Heaven or earth can prevent it.^{lxxi}

Shaw was right. In the years between the Rising and O'Casey's portrayal of it, in *The Plough and the Stars*, the lost rebels had become martyrs in the public eye, rather than the criminals that the public had seen at the time. O'Casey's view however, was not swayed by popular sentiment. For him, the Rising remained a tragic blunder. Nor were his opinions about the Citizen's Army or its leaders compromised. *The Plough and The Stars* was O'Casey's attempt to remind the Dublin public of the truth, as he saw it, of the Rising and its aftermath.

O'Casey's background, his political beliefs and his views on the Easter Rising all set him apart from the Abbey's founders.^{lxxii} Other issues also contributed to his highly individual views on what a theatre relationship should be. The first of these were his lack of formal education and his literary and theatrical influences. O'Casey was largely self-educated having left school at a young age.^{lxxiii} Though not widely read, he was an avid reader of Shakespeare, Ibsen and Chekhov and the influence of these writers can be seen in his Shakespearian love of poetic language, his Ibsen-like portrayals of domestic tragedy and his

Chekhovian use of the tragic-comic mode. In terms of prior theatre experience, O'Casey's influences were narrower yet more eclectic than others at the Abbey. His early experience of 'serious' theatre was minimal and he did not write out of much personal experience of the Abbey tradition. According to his autobiography, O'Casey never attended the Abbey, at least not before the upset at *The Playboy of the Western World*. In 'Song of a Shift', O'Casey comments:

Sean wished he had seen Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, so that he might know more about the man; but a shilling was too much for him to spare for a play. He wished he could see this play by Singe or Sinje, so that he might know more about him too.^{lxxiv}

Later in the chapter, when Sean goes down to observe the ructions at *The Playboy of the Western World*, it is apparent from his comments that he has never visited the Abbey before. 'A tiny building for a theatre, thought Sean' and describes it to the reader before he and his colleagues opt for a pub opposite where they 'furnish[ed] themselves with a bottle of stout apiece'.^{lxxv} This account presents O'Casey as a total stranger to the Abbey. This was not quite true. Later in life, O'Casey gave more accurate information in a letter to his biographer, when he wrote: 'I never had the money to spare to go to the Abbey. I went twice before I wrote plays – once paying for myself in the shilling place; and once through the kindness of a friend.'^{lxxvi} However, with just two visits as an audience member, it is fair to say that O'Casey was not overly familiar with the Abbey Theatre before he began writing for it. Unlike Yeats, O'Casey preferred popular theatre. His older brother, Archie was involved in amateur dramatics and took him to professional productions at the Queen's Theatre. Thanks to Archie, O'Casey gained a little acting experience too, being called on to play a minor role in Boucicault's *The Shaughraun* at the old Mechanics Theatre (the building that later became the Abbey).^{lxxvii} O'Casey's familiarity with popular theatre forms is reflected in the writing of *The Plough and the Stars* including, for example, his use of bawdy songs, melodramatic and farcical elements and

working-class characters. The result of these eclectic influences is what Krause calls an ‘impure drama’, one that he claims is ‘usually more pleasing to popular audiences than to severe critics.’^{lxxviii}

The fact that O’Casey began his writing career as a political essayist, may also have contributed to his notion of what the theatre relationship should or could be, although it rarely seems to affect his play writing. His style could be strident when writing political essays, yet, as Lowery points out, there was a marked difference between his essay writing and his playwriting style, at least for as long as he was writing for the Abbey:

His political essays at the age of 80 are very close in style to those essays written before 1916. They are still passionate clarion calls for class struggle or they are discursive and analytical stream of consciousness visions of the progress of Mankind. Only rarely did O’Casey allow himself to combine the essayist’s style with that of the dramatist’s (*The Star Turns Red* [1959] is the best example).^{lxxix}

It may be that O’Casey’s tone was less strident as a playwright than as an essayist in order to conform to the Abbey’s requirements: certainly, his later plays, written after he left the Abbey were a lot more overtly political in tone. Or, perhaps in his earlier years O’Casey chose to write plays of political subtlety as a reflection of his literary and theatrical influences. Whatever the reason O’Casey was a wordsmith and, from his perspective, the writer and the text would always be at the heart of what the theatre relationship was about. As he said himself, theatre provided him with ‘my place for self expression’ – a liberty he claimed he was prepared to fight for.^{lxxx} O’Casey’s prioritizing of the play text and his elevation of the status of the writer meant that his view of the theatre relationship differed from the principles set out by his fellow theatre makers at the Abbey Theatre. It was also different from the ideas held by his audience.

O’Casey was awed by the Abbey Theatre and to an extent seems to have allowed himself to be schooled and moulded by the Abbey Board,

at least initially. His early letters express an ardent admiration, even veneration, for the place, as in this example from 1922:

I shall be only too happy to submit any play I may write to the Abbey, for that theatre, the country, the National Gallery and the Botanic Gardens – with certain Authors – are the only things I worship.^{lxxxix}

His veneration continued after *The Plough and the Stars* was accepted: he commented to Lady Gregory ‘Mr Yeats said he thought ‘The Plough’ a wonderful play and I am very pleased to rank with you, and Yeats, Robinson and Synge in the great glory of the Abbey Theatre’.^{lxxxii} At the start of his relationship with the theatre, he formed a strong friendship with Lady Gregory and, under her influence, widened his reading and learning about theatre. Their correspondence is full of references to books or play texts she has lent or given him that influenced him stylistically.^{lxxxiii} He also received detailed feedback on his work from members of the board, including Yeats. However, in a repeat of his behaviour within political organizations, his view of the Theatre changed over time and he became more irritated with the Abbey’s leadership and more aware of his own ideas of what he wished to offer an audience.

O’Casey served an extensive apprenticeship before he was accepted as an Abbey writer. His early work was not to the Abbey Board’s tastes. O’Casey’s first two plays *The Harvest Festival* and *The Frost in the Flower*, submitted to the Abbey in rough, handwritten form in 1919, were both rejected as being ‘interestingly conceived but not well executed’^{lxxxiv}. The characters were deemed to be too stereotypical ‘as unreal as the Stage Irishman of twenty years ago’^{lxxxv} and the plot was not interesting enough. Two further plays *The Crimson and the Tricolour* and *The Seamless Coat of Cathleen* were rejected in 1921, though there was much deliberation over the artistic merits of the first piece, and parts of it went on to become Act Two of *The Plough and the Stars*.^{lxxxvi} Yeats was particularly critical of O’Casey’s early work. As anonymous ‘reader’ for *Crimson and the Tri-colour* he commented, ‘I find this discursive play very hard to judge for it is a type of play I do not understand. The drama of it

is loose and vague'.^{lxxxvii} He also accused the play of being akin to the much-loathed Irish Melodrama. However, O'Casey had a staunch advocate in Lennox Robinson, the Abbey's manager and Lady Gregory was also supportive. Yeats, too, could see O'Casey's writing talent and his final comment as a reader was that: 'If Robinson wants to produce it let him do so by all means and be damned to him. My fashion has gone out'.^{lxxxviii} Yeats's comment seems to acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, that the theatre was moving away from the heroic lyrical forms that were his own ideal. The negotiations between O'Casey and the Abby Theatre at this stage seem to have been about recognition of talent on the one hand, and on the other, O'Casey's attempts to produce discursive plays, of high literary merit but with a popular theatre flavour.

Yeats had clear advice for O'Casey. In an interesting parallel to the earlier advice he famously gave to Synge (to go to the Western Isles and write about the peasant life he knew so well), it is said Yeats told O'Casey to abandon plotlines about the failings of the rich and write about what was familiar to him. In Lennox Robinson's words, Yeats 'implored him to write of life as he knew it – it chanced to be the life of the Irish slums'.^{lxxxix} O'Casey apparently took this criticism and valued it, as shown in an inscription he later wrote in a book for Yeats: 'To the man who, by criticizing a bad play of mine, made me write a good one'.^{xc} In November of 1921, the Abbey's board accepted *Shadow of a Gunman* (originally titled *On the Run*) and after some amendments, the play was performed in 1923. The play's success was important for O'Casey's belief in himself as a writer – he was able to leave his work as a labourer and became a full time writer – the play also set the tone for his future writing, including *The Plough and the Stars*.

With *Shadow of a Gunman*, O'Casey found a form and subject matter that made him very successful and that he would use as the basis for future plays, including *The Plough and the Stars*. Like *The Plough and the Stars*, *Shadow of a Gunman* is an uncompromising re-appraisal of recent Irish history, in this case the 1920 Anglo-Irish War that had taken place just a few years after the Easter Rising. The action of the play recalls *The*

Playboy of the Western World as it revolves around the experiences of a frustrated tenement poet, Davoren, who allows his neighbours to believe he is a gunman, because he enjoys the glamour of the role, only to suffer tragic consequences when Auxiliary guards raid the tenement and Davoren's sweetheart is shot.^{xcii} Despite its less than romanticized view of history, *Shadow of a Gunman* was an immediate success, on a scale that surprised everyone but O'Casey. The theatre was packed for the short run of the play, and it grossed over ninety pounds, a fact that came as a huge relief to the almost-bankrupt Abbey.^{xciii}

With the success of *Shadow of a Gunman*, O'Casey's relationship with the Abbey changed and the Abbey's relationship with its audience also altered. O'Casey had shown that it was possible to present the Dublin public with work that scrutinized Irish history without being unthinkingly Nationalistic and that such work could be successful. His satirical treatment of the recent past was a shift in the terms of the *Samhain* Declaration, which had promised to present an image of Ireland as 'the home of an ancient idealism'. However, from both a financial and artistic point of view, the Abbey now needed him.

O'Casey's popular success continued, though not entirely unabated. Following *Shadow of a Gunman* came *Cathleen Listens in*, a one-act fantasy that received a very cold reception (perhaps because it was rather hastily written and was in such a different style from *Shadow of a Gunman*)^{xciii}. Apparently it was greeted with dead silence from the audience; O'Casey recalled, 'not so much as a timid handclap'.^{xciv} However, O'Casey's next play, *Juno and the Paycock* was even more successful than *Shadow of a Gunman* had been. In *Juno and the Paycock* O'Casey dealt once again with recent events in Irish history: this time the setting was the Civil War that took place after Settlement with England in 1921 between the Free-Staters who accepted settlement and the Die-hards who opposed it. Once again the setting was resolutely domestic and working class. Once again the heroic characters were women, including the glorious Juno whose lyrical lament at the loss of her son has become one of the iconic speeches in Irish literature.^{xcv} Once again,

the strength of characterization and the force of O'Casey's tragic-comic portrayal of tenement life, won the approval of audiences and critics alike. One (modern) critic tries to imagine what it must have been like for the first audience to see this play on the Abbey stage:

It is more than a mirror led up to nature. It is nature itself – human nature, so living and quick that Dublin must have forgotten proscenium and footlights as it watched.^{xcvi}

The play ran successfully in Dublin, London and New York. After *Juno* came another one-act play *Nannie's Night Out* which appeared as an after-piece to Shaw's *Arms and the Man* in 1924, and received a reasonably warm reception. *The Plough and the Stars* followed in 1926.

Having established a successful format, O'Casey could be forgiven for thinking that his next play would be greeted with similar acclaim. In *The Plough and the Stars* O'Casey continued his practice of revisiting Irish history in a satirical way. This time, however, it was 1916 and the Easter Rising itself. To give a brief précis of the play: Act One begins in the relative comfort of a living room. It belongs to Jack Clitheroe (a bricklayer and erstwhile member of the Irish Citizen's army) and his wife Nora (a materialistic young woman who has begged her husband to give up the army for her sake) and it is a space described by O'Casey in his stage directions as shabby but 'furnished in a way that suggests an attempt towards a finer expression of domestic life'.^{xcvii} Here we also meet the other tenement dwellers: the good natured but dim witted carpenter, Fluther Good, Nora's strutting and opinionated Uncle Peter, the communist Covey, the nosy and shrill Mrs Gogan and the vitriolic Orangewoman Bessie Burgess. The second act takes place in the local public house where a prostitute, Rosie Redmond, plies her trade and the tenement dwellers come to drink, brawl and air their responses to a meeting of the Irish Citizen's Army, taking place just outside. Act Three brings the action of the Rising even closer to the tenement. It is set on the street outside the tenement door as the events of the Rising unfold nearby and the tenement dwellers indulge in looting the city shops. The

final act returns to the interior of the tenement, not to the comfortable rooms of the Clitheroes but to Bessie's attic room where there is an 'unmistakeable air of poverty bordering on destitution'.^{xcviii} By the end of the final act, the Rising has brought death and insanity to the tenement; the building is barricaded up and most of its residents are gone, supplanted by English soldiers.

As in the earlier plays, *The Plough and the Stars* does not tell the familiar, glorified version of events. Instead, true to O'Casey's socialist convictions, the history of the Rising is retold from the point of view of the working class people of Dublin. Rather than taking place on the steps of the GPO or outside the Four Courts of Dublin, where the principal events of the Rising occurred, this play is set in and around a tenement building. Once again, O'Casey finds his heroes, not in the political figures of the time, such as Connolly or Pearse, but amongst the ordinary, working class residents of the tenement. This shift of focus serves to stress the real, human implications of violent historical events. It also serves a satirical purpose, exposing the myths and idealism that had built up around this period of history and playing these off against the trivialities of everyday reality. In many ways, then, this play was not so different from the previous two successful Dublin plays. It took a piece of recent Irish history and retold it with a working class perspective and a satirical edge. So what was it about this particular play that made it so provocative to its first audience?

The key difference was in the particular piece of history chosen. In the years since the Rising, as has been noted, the Dublin public had gone through the very shift in perception that Shaw had predicted; the leaders of Easter week were now regarded as martyrs and the events as heroic. It was perhaps acceptable to satirize the War of Independence and the Anglo Irish War, but the events of Easter Week were sacrosanct, especially in the minds of the widows of that tragedy. For these women, the choice of subject matter alone was provocative. Further, *The Plough and the Stars* presents the audience with an uncomfortable version of the events. By emphasizing the personal and domestic consequences of the

Rising, the play insists that the tenement dwellers were the real victims and the real heroes of the story. By emphasizing their suffering, the status of the Dublin public's popular heroes and the importance of the events is diminished. This shift of perspective happens quite literally in the staging of the play.

In every scene, the 'important' political events occur just beyond the edges of the domestic scene we are witnessing and are consequently reduced in importance, or placed in ironic juxtaposition with the domestic in the audience's view. In the looting scene, for example, gunfire is heard, an injured soldier is carried on and characters appear to report what is going on just 'offstage':

They're breakin' into th' shops, they're breakin' into th' shops! Smashin' th' windows, battherin' in th' doors, an' whippin' away everything! An' the Volunteers is firin' on them. I seen two men an' a lassie pushin' a piano down th' sthreet, an' th' sweat rollin' off them thryin' to get it up on the pavement; an an' oul' wan that must ha' been seventy lookin' as if she'd dhrop every minute with th' dint o' heart beatin' thryin' to pull a big double bed out of a broken shop-window!^{xix}

History is being made nearby but the staging of the play keeps the audience's focus on the tenement door and the individuals going in and out of it. One result of this tactic is that the events of the Rising are portrayed much as they might have been experienced in reality. Indeed, the scene just quoted recalls very closely O'Casey's own autobiographical recollections of the Rising:^c it is a fragmented set of impressions, highly visceral and personal, told from the point of view of an observer commenting on the scene. The other intent of this staging technique is the satirical comment it allows.

O'Casey's satire is at its most cutting in the pub scene where the tenement dwellers drink and squabble whilst a political rally takes place outside. The orator addressing the political rally is clearly supposed to represent Padraig Pearse; in a letter written some years later, to a director working on the play, O'Casey makes this explicit: 'I knew this "Orator" well – Padraig Pearse, and there were none more charming, gentle and

brave than he'^{ci} but even without this clarification, the reference to Pearse would have been clear to the original audience, as the Orator's words 'bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing' are lifted almost verbatim from one of Pearse's speeches.^{cii} O'Casey's satire of Pearse works in a number of ways. First, the great hero figure is reduced to a minor character, just a shadowy figure at the window with his high blown rhetoric only heard occasionally against the banter of the 'main' characters. On top of this, O'Casey chooses to quote what Thompson calls 'the most absurd, the most banally sabre-rattling, the most ignorantly heroic speech in all of Pearse's four volumes'^{ciii} so that his words sound ridiculously high-flown in such a setting. Then, the sense of the words is satirized by juxtaposing them against the bawdy interactions taking place in the pub.

Mrs Gogan [*dipping her finger in the whisky and moistening with it the lips of her baby*] Cissie Gogan's a woman livin' for nigh on twenty-five years in her own room, an' beyond biddin' the time o' day to her neighbours, never yet as much as nodded her head in th' direction of other people's business, while she knows some as are never content unless they're standin' senthry over other people's business . . .

Voice of Speaker: The last sixteen months have been the most glorious in the history of Europe. Heroism has come back to the earth . . .^{civ}

There is clear and deliberate irony in the juxtaposition of the petty squabbles of the tenement against the grandiose political struggles taking place outside. The play seems to suggest that the Nationalist struggle is simply another form of human bickering, dressed up in fancy rhetoric and uniforms. In a final layer of satirical irony, O'Casey has Peter and Fluther rush into the pub, quoting Pearse's words and infected with patriotic idealism:

As the speech is repeated and handled by these comic characters, the sacred becomes the profane and the speech contagiously becomes infected with the comedy of the absurd buffoons who have been lifted to such heights of enthusiasm.^{cv}

As Peter and Fluther gulp down their drinks and rush out to fight for Ireland, O'Casey confronts his audience with an unflattering caricature both of Pearse's words and their effects on people. The satirical force of this scene must have been felt very strongly and taken very personally by its original audience. Furthermore, the satirical force of the tenement characters does not only lie in their juxtaposition to the heroes of the outside world. The tenement also serves as a satirical emblem in its own right.

The tenement seems to represent a microcosm of Ireland and the tensions between the inhabitants parallel the conflicts within the country as a whole. No political cause is spared from the satire and this was a further confrontation for those early audience members. For example, there are the exchanges between the stalwart Nationalist Peter and the communist Covey who continually 'twarts' him with socialist banter: 'there's only one war worth havin' th' war for th' economic emancipation of th' proletariat'.^{vi} These rows parallel the tensions between the Nationalist and socialist causes within Ireland and perhaps the tensions within O'Casey himself. In the tenement, as in the country it represents, religious bigotry is added to political difference, in the vitriolic exchanges between Mrs Gogan and Bessie Burgess. Mrs Gogan (the Southern Catholic) hands her child over to Peter and stands over Bessie (the Northern Protestant) 'in a fighting attitude', creating a momentary tableau of the sectarian violence that has existed in Ireland for centuries. Meanwhile, the tensions between Jack, who has quit the Irish Citizen's Army because he was not promoted, and Nora, who is desperate for him to abandon politics altogether, personify the friction between political beliefs and private life, as well as the oppositional pull between love of country and love of a woman. Through all these different characters can be seen all the differences in political viewpoint that led to the Rising. The Ireland represented by the tenement is riven with petty infighting and prejudice and finally overrun and destroyed by English forces. This was not a version of themselves that Irish audience members were likely to find comfortable.

Although they are representative figures, the characters are not two-dimensional and this, in a sense, is a further provocation in that it denies the audience the opportunity to simply reject or accept any character or viewpoint. Being populated by complex and contradictory characters, the play suggests that the reasons behind the Rising were complex and contradictory too. There are no traditional heroes or heroines in this play but rather acts of personal heroism by flawed individuals. Indeed, every positive attribute seems countered by a negative and vice versa. For example, the Clitheroe's attempt to make the best of their shabby conditions is admirable but also tends towards pretension, vanity and 'notions of upperosity' as Mrs Gogan puts it.^{cvi} Jack's love song, with its pastoral images of 'golden-rob'd daffodils' and 'trees birds and bees' is tender and romantic but seems incongruous and unrealistic against the squalor of Dublin life and the insults the couple were trading moments before. Each character has a mixture of attractive and unattractive attributes and this denies the audience a chance for easy identification with any of them.

O'Casey also challenges his audience by using his least sympathetic characters as the mouthpiece for the wisest words. Nora is perhaps the clearest example of this combination of the despicable and the sympathetic. She seems possessive when she burns the letter telling Jack of his promotion in the army, and even more so when she urges him to abandon a dying comrade and come to bed with her: 'No, no, no I'll not let you go! Come on, come on up to our home, Jack, my sweetheart, my lover, my husband, an' we'll forget th' last few terrible days!'^{cvi} It seems abhorrent that she should make a 'scene', clinging to her husband and beseeching him to opt out of the fighting especially in the presence of the bleeding Langon, a visual reminder of others' preparedness to die for the cause. Yet Nora's words have an undeniable ring of truth, admitting the fear of death and expressing a disgust for war which O'Casey himself shared. Here she indicates the fear on another soldier's face:

Turn round an' look at him, Jack, look at him, look at him! . . . His very soul is cold . . . shiverin' with th'

thought of what may happen to him . . . It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you from recognizin' th' same fear that is in your own heart!^{cix}

It is fair to suggest that O'Casey sought to trouble the audience by stirring up contradictions between heroic attitudes and human frailty.

O'Casey's also critiqued the sentimentality attached to the Rising by making the most flawed characters be those most capable of acts of selflessness and bravery. In this version of the story, the crisis of the Rising exposes the truth in each character's personality, one that often opposes the surface impression. For instance, O'Casey encourages us to laugh at the dull-witted alcoholic Fluther with his over use of the word 'derogatory', but it is he who braves the fighting to fetch an undertaker for Mollser, Mrs Gogan's consumptive child. As Mrs Gogan says,

When all me own were afraid to put their noses out, you lunged like a good one through hummin' bullets, an' they knockin' fire out o' the road, tinklin' through th' frightened windows, an' splashin' themselves to pieces on th' walls! An' you'll find that Mollser, in th' happy place she's gone to, won't forget to whisper, now an' again, th' name o' Fluther.^{cx}

By the end of the play, it is our earlier laughter that seems 'derogatory' in light of Fluther's good heartedness. An even greater revelation takes place in the character of Bessie, the vociferously offensive Orangewoman. Not only does Bessie act as nursemaid to Mollser, 'never passin' her without liftin' up her heart with a delicate word o' kindness', as Mrs Gogan says,^{cx} she also takes care of Nora as she loses her premature baby, her husband and ultimately her mind. Bessie's strong dislike of Nora only serves to highlight her selflessness. Like Fluther, she dodges bullets to fetch a doctor for Nora. The fact that we actually see her do so^{cxii} makes her heroism even more vivid than Fluther's. At the end of the play Bessie makes the ultimate sacrifice and loses her life, shot by a sniper whilst pushing the raving Nora away from a window. The crazed Nora remains frozen in terror and Bessie dies a painful death,

very far removed from the glorified image of bloodshed portrayed earlier in the play by the 'speaker at the window':

This is what's after comin' on me for nursin' you day an' night ... I was a fool, a fool, a fool! Get me a dhrink o' wather, you jade, will you? There's a fire burnin' in me blood! [pleadingly] Nora, Nora, dear, for God's sake run out an' get Mrs. Gogan, or Fluther, or somebody to bring a doctor, quick, quick, quick! [as Nora does not stir] Blast you, stir yourself, before I'm gone!^{cxiii}

At this moment of heightened ironic tragedy, the audience is faced with the heroism of Bessie's action but also the meaningless of her death and the hopeless isolation she feels in sacrificing herself for someone she so dislikes. The irony is even more savage in that Bessie, the only Protestant loyalist in the house, dies by an English bullet. For the Nationalist audience, this figure made the most uncomfortable heroine possible.

The character of Bessie continues O'Casey's tradition of strong women characters and, true to his sense of comic juxtaposition, the play also contains very weak male ones. In this play, as in *Juno*, and *Gunman*, there is a marked difference between the female tendency for instinctive good sense and the male tendency towards weakness and swagger. This may have been provocative to the first audience: even though some of the women who protested were avowed feminists, they were also widows of men. In all O'Casey's plays, the male characters are easily seduced by the bombast and idealism of those ultimate male pursuits, politics and war. In *The Plough and the Stars* this unthinking fervency comes to a head in the pub scene: 'Ireland is greater than a mother' declares Lieutenant Langon, mesmerized as by the speeches outside. 'Ireland is greater than a wife' responds Clitheroe, similarly excited.^{cxiv} Then, after listening to the speaker a final time they snatch up their flags and chorus, 'Imprisonment for th' Independence of Ireland' 'Wounds for th' Imprisonment of Ireland' 'Death for th' Imprisonment of Ireland' 'So Help us God!' and rush out to join the fighting.^{cxv} The women characters, for all their flaws, seem to be endowed with a practical

common sense and an ability to see beyond the rhetoric. Even little Mollser, weak and coughing, closes Act One with the comment 'Is there anybody goin', Mrs Clitheroe, with a tither o' sense?'^{cxvi} O'Casey uses his women characters to express his own frustrations with sentimental idealism and to suggest where the best hope for the future lies. As Ellen Bailie writes,

His male characters, caught up in egotism and illusion, often fail to live maturely and robustly. His women, however, are in touch with the pulse of life and ready to confront crises and make changes. They embody the virtues of courage and continuity in the midst of unrelieved poverty, disease and hunger. They manifest compassion.^{cxvii}

The play seems to suggest that the true site of heroism and the greatest source of potential change are not in the male world of politics, war and idealism but in the female domain, grounded in a hard domestic reality. This was clearly a new way of thinking of about the Rising, and an implied criticism of it for which his audience may have had little sympathy.

O'Casey's preference for strong female characters in his plays is interesting in light of his personal responses to the real women who opposed *The Plough and the Stars*. O'Casey's characterizations of these strong women was a lot less sympathetic. He clearly had some respect for the protester's chief spokesperson Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, whom he described as 'a very clever and a very upright woman.'^{cxviii} His main criticism of her was that she insisted on taking the debate into wider issues when he wished to focus discussion on the merits of his play:

Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington . . . saw it the other way, or thought she saw it so, and turned the dispute into an academic question, because – Sean often thought afterwards – she wished him to do the same.^{cxix}

O'Casey's tone here is respectful though perhaps slightly condescending in its implication that Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington does not know her own

mind. Elsewhere in his writing, however, O'Casey betrays a more misogynistic attitude towards the protesters, as in this extract from his autobiography, where he confesses that he found it difficult to deal with Sheehy-Skeffington and the others because he did not consider them physically attractive:

There wasn't a comely damsel among them. Sean noticed this with some surprise. They were all plain, provoking no desire in him to parley words with them, as a pretty face would have done, had one been among them. So after listening for awhile and saying a few words, he left them . . .^{cxv}

The same emphasis on physical appearance emerges in O'Casey's description of Maude Gonne during the public debate on *The Plough and the Stars*. In his autobiography, O'Casey does express his political differences with Gonne, whose unwavering Nationalism seemed to him an unthinking idealism:

Here she sat now, silent, stony; waiting her turn to say more bitter words against the one who refused to make her dying dream his own.^{cxvi}

Once again, however, O'Casey focusses most attention on the physical appearance of his opposer, describing the once-beautiful Gonne as, amongst other things, 'crinkled' and 'querulous'.^{cxvii} Evidently the traits O'Casey valued in women in the real world were somewhat different from those he vested in the heroines of his plays.

O'Casey did not reserve such personal comments for individual protesters, he actually expressed his anger at the Irish people's rejection of his work by characterizing the whole country as a woman. Mid way through his description of the protests, in a tone of palpable disgust, O'Casey characterizes Ireland as an unattractive, sneering old woman – a grotesque transformation of the mythical Cathleen ni Houlihan figure:

For the first time in his life, Sean felt a surge of hatred for Cathleen ni Houlihan sweeping over him. He saw now that the one who had the walk of a queen could be a bitch at times. She galled the hearts of her children who dared to be above the ordinary, and she often slew

her best ones. She had hounded Parnell to death; she had yelled and torn at Yeats and Synge, and now she was doing the same to him. What a snarly old gob she could be at times; an ignorant one too.^{cxiii}

Here, O'Casey's attitudes towards his country seem to carry a clear message about his feelings towards women. In this way, O'Casey's responses to the disruption of his work were much more clearly loaded with gendered images than, say, Yeats's speech on the subject. O'Casey's position was not clear. On a personal level, O'Casey conveyed his feelings of loathing towards his protesters and his fellow countrymen by picturing them collectively as ugly, hateful old women. At the same time, on an artistic level, the same playwright seemed to challenge such stereotypical responses to women by setting up ugly, 'hateful old women' like Bessie as the heroines of his plays and the speakers of some of the wisest words. O'Casey's attitude to women, it would seem, was another area of ambivalence.

Returning to O'Casey's portrayal of women in his plays, another idea that O'Casey challenges through his female characters is the idea that Irish wives and mothers were glad to give up their menfolk for the country – the sort of the sentiment expressed by Padraig Pearse's mother, who wrote of her own son's death, 'I have only done what every Irish mother should do willingly as I did, give their beloved ones for Ireland and for freedom'.^{cxiv} This issue must have had particular resonance for the women in the first audience and, arguably it was provocative of O'Casey to question this sentiment. For O'Casey's women do not respond to their losses in this way. Their sentiment is nearer to O'Casey's own, expressed in a letter to *The Irish Independent*: 'A mother does not like her son to be killed – she doesn't like him even to get married'.^{cxv} Nora expresses this in her hysterical search for Jack: 'They said th' women must learn to be brave an' cease to be cowardly . . . me who risked more for love than they would risk for hate [raising her voice in hysterical protest] My Jack will be killed! My Jack will be killed!'^{cxvi} O'Casey's strong women, the Junos and Bessies are more resilient than Nora and

slower to despair but they respond to their losses with a grief that is deep and instinctive. In every case, the women in O'Casey's plays stress the personal level of the tragedy and lament the human stupidity of it all, with an insight that seems to evade the men. The most famous expression of this is Juno's lament at the end of *Juno and the Paycock*:

What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love!^{cxvii}

This speech, with its evocation of a mother's loss and its appeal for an end to sectarian killing, still resonates today. Apart from its content, this speech is elevated by its heightened, elegiac tone – part of the range of language O'Casey explored in his writing.

O'Casey's dialogue was based, like Synge's before him on an Irish dialect with which he was familiar but whereas Synge drew on the peasant idiom of the West, O'Casey used the drawl of inner city Dublin as the basis for his poetic language. It might be argued that this use of Dublin English was itself a provocation to the Dublin audience, as it gave a status to the slang that most people found unsavoury. Dublin English was (and still is) as Krause puts it, 'highly flavoured' with 'distinctive idiom of alliteration and emphatic rhythms, peppered with Gaelic language references'^{cxviii} So, there was much that was real and familiar to O'Casey's audience in the dialogue of *The Plough and the Stars*. This might have been a shock. However, like Synge, O'Casey's writing was much more than an accurate record of colloquial speech. It was street language elevated into poetry.

O'Casey was really the first to find, or claim, the innate poetry within the 'imaginative non-book English' of the Native 'Dub'.^{cxix} These characters may not use language correctly in the formal sense but they express themselves very successfully and eloquently in their own way.

For example, we are encouraged to laugh at Fluther and his recurrent use of the term 'derogatory' to express any type of negative, but there is also a sense in which his words become poetic by their repetition and emphasis. Elsewhere, characters use flows of words with added alliterative force or flamboyant imagery, as in the rantings of Mrs Gogan:

I'm not goin' to keen an unresistin' silence, an' her scatterin' her festherin' words in me face, stirrin' up every dhrop of decency in a respectable female, with her restless rally o' lies that would make a saint say his prayer backwards!^{cxxx}

It is only when the tenement dwellers abandon their own language patterns that they sound stilted, like the Covey in his communist 'conversation' with Rosie the prostitute: 'Look here, comrade, I'll leave here tomorrow night for you a copy of Jenersky's *Thesis on the Origin, Development, an' Consolidation of the Evolutionary Idea of the Proletariat*'. He regresses to tenement language when he realizes her intentions – 'None o' that, now; none o' that. I've something else to do besides shinannickin' afther Judies'^{cxxxi} – language with much richer colour and greater truth of expression.

Typically, the character's instinctive eloquence seems to increase when they are agitated about something. Here, Peter produces one of his habitual tirades against the Covey (attacking Fluther, too, in this case):

As long as I'm a livin' man, responsible for me thoughts, words, an' deeds to th' Man above, I'll feel meself instituted to fight again' th' sliddherin' ways of a pair o' picaroons, whisperin, concurrin', concoctin' an' conspirin' together to rendher me unconscious of th' life I'm thryin' to live!^{cxxxii}

In anger or despair, the characters express themselves in copious flows of words, producing their own working class rhetoric to rival that of the orator. The language of some characters is elevated in a different way, becoming almost elegiac in tone, when biblical language is mixed with the Dublin idiom, as in this speech Bessie delivers at the close of Act 1 of *Plough*:

There's th' men marchin' out into th' dhread dimness o' danger, while th' lice is crawlin' about feein' on the fatness o' the land! But you'll not escape from th' arrow that flieth be night, or th' sickness that wasteth be day ... An' ladyship an' all, as some o' them may be, they'll be scattered abroad, like th' dust in th' darkness!^{cxviii}

There is a potency and weight in this 'exalted colloquial speech' as Krause calls it.^{cxvii} The irony, as Krause says, is that the characters themselves are unaware of their eloquence; it is an 'instinctive' love of word-play that they display.^{cxviii} Perhaps it was provocative of O'Casey to suggest that ordinary Dubliners could be worthy of such expressive flights. Even more challenging, in that case, was his inclusion of bawdy language.

The offensive language within *The Plough and the Stars* caused serious dissention amongst the theatre makers even before the play went in to rehearsal, and rumours about this were circulating around Dublin before the play opened. In a very early response, Board member Michael Dolan told Lady Gregory:

At any time I would think twice before having anything to do with it. The language is – to use an Abbey phrase – 'beyond the beyonds'. The song at the end of the second act, sung by the 'girl of the streets' is impossible.^{cxvix}

O'Casey conceded that the song should be removed, saying 'Yes. It's a pity. It would offend thousands. But it ought to be there'.^{cxvii} The play's author was well aware that his piece was provocative, as was the government's representative on the Abbey Board, George O'Brien, who drew attention to:

The possibility that the playwright might offend any section of public opinion so seriously as to provoke an attack on the Theatre of a kind that would endanger the continuance of the subsidy. Now I think the play as it stands might easily provoke such an attack.^{cxviii}

Whereas O'Brien as a member of the government, felt inclined to listen to public opinion and back away from such an attack, other members of the Abbey Board took up their traditional stance of prioritizing artistic

freedom over public sensitivities. Lady Gregory and others saw O'Brien's reference to the subsidy as a veiled threat and her answer was clear: 'If we have to choose between the subsidy and our freedom it is our freedom we choose'.^{cxix} Even before rehearsals began, the theatre makers were conscious of the response the piece might generate.

During rehearsal, the controversy grew still further as certain cast members expressed concerns about the lines they were expected to say. Eileen Crowe and John McCormick refused to speak certain lines on religious grounds, having taken counsel from their priest.^{cxl} Signalling their fear of a repeat of the kind of hostility they met at *The Playboy of the Western World* the actors reminded the board that Synge had allowed them to leave out words that they were uncomfortable with. O'Casey's response was to declare:

I am sorry, but I'm not Synge; not even, I'm afraid, a reincarnation. Besides, things have happened since Synge: the war has shaken some of the respectability out of the heart of man; we have had our own changes, and the USSR has fixed a new star in the sky . . . As I have said, these things have been deeply pondered, and under the circumstances and to avoid further trouble, I prefer to withdraw the play altogether.^{cxli}

O'Casey was adamant that he was not Synge and that the times had changed sufficiently to allow, even to demand, the provocative elements within his play. However, the fact that he makes this reference to Synge, even to deny the parallels, indicates that he and the other theatre makers were aware of the similarities; that these theatre makers deliberately entered the theatre relationship with the awareness that the play probably would offend people and with an awareness of how that might manifest itself in the audience's behaviour.

In his use of language, his characterization, his settings, his staging and his uncompromising retelling of the story of the Rising, O'Casey sent out a challenge to his first audiences. *The Plough and the Stars* was a provocative play in many ways but was it a didactic one? Though O'Casey's own personal standpoint on the Rising is known, critics differ

on whether there is a predominant political standpoint expressed in the play, particularly given the mixed political messages embedded in the characterization.^{cxlii} The work has been seen by many as pacifist, and anti-war but this view may lack complexity. Fellow playwright, Denis Johnston, in the introduction to his own play about 1916, commented that:

The Plough is essentially a pacifist play, implying that if only man had 'a tither of sense' these outbreaks of destruction would never occur. As a quiet man who, nevertheless, is not pacifist, I cannot accept the fact that, theatrically, Easter Week should remain indefinitely with only an anti-war comment, however fine.^{cxliii}

O'Casey certainly came to see himself as a pacifist later in life, and his play does suggest that the volunteers were seduced by the cause and, perhaps lacking in common sense. However to describe the play as 'anti-war' may be to oversimplify it. Others have seen the play as expressing, not so much an anti-war sentiment as an appeal for people to realize the full horror of war. This is something O'Casey expresses in his autobiography *Drums under the Windows* in his description of the Irish Republican Brotherhood:

They were immersed in the sweet illusion of fluttering banners, of natty uniforms, bugle-blow marches . . . All guns and drums but no wounds. Not a thought, seemingly about the toil, the rotten sweat, the craving for sleep, the sagging belly asking silently for food; the face disfigured, one eye wondering where the other had gone; an arm twisted into a circle or a figure of eight; the surprised lying, bullet-holed, gasping for breath; or the dangling leg, never to feel firm on the ground again. All these thoughts he [O'Casey] forced before them, asking them to think of ways now by which they might be made less terrible.^{cxliv}

In this passage, O'Casey uses his writing to portray the reality of the suffering brought about by war. By writing so graphically he deliberately 'forces his thoughts' before the reader, just as he says he tried to do with his Republican brothers. Perhaps this was his aim in *The Plough and the Stars*, too. It is the opinion of Jack Lindsay that in this play as in his

autobiography, O'Casey had a much more specific aim, which was to criticize the tactics employed by the Republicans in choosing open warfare rather than the guerrilla tactics he himself advocated:

He wants guerrilla fighting, not an open challenge to Britain's vastly superior forces, which can only result in a maximum of slaughter and a bad defeat. That O'Casey has a fundamental humanism in his approach then proves nothing.^{cxlv}

O'Casey may be finding fault with the IRB but his reasons can still be seen as fundamentally humane ones – he objects to their failure to make the fighting 'less terrible'.

Critics are equally divided over whether the play expresses or is at odds with O'Casey's professed socialism, particularly given his satirical treatment of the Covey who would seem to be mouthing many of the communist dictums held to by O'Casey himself. What this critical debate shows is the way *Plough* evades a simplistic political reading. O'Casey writes from a perspective which points up the failings of any belief systems, even those he held himself. As Lindsay puts it,

O'Casey expresses throughout the play the deep human aspiration to peace, happiness, brotherhood and shows how it is ceaselessly confused, distorted, wrecked by the play of divisive forces, so that even the best impulses and hopes of men can turn out to be futile.^{cxlvi}

This impossible tension between human failings and human ideals – between the earthbound plough and the celestial stars (as depicted in the title of the play) is perhaps the key. It is this tension that runs through the whole play giving it its ironic tone, making the play a deliberate provocation to its first audience.^{cxlvii}

To conclude, the group of people who made up the theatre makers in this instance were strong-minded individuals with their own priorities for theatre. Between them, with *The Plough and the Stars*, they offered a theatre relationship that was complex and operated at a number of levels. At the broadest level, the theatre makers sought to represent Irish people themselves. It had always been the Abbey's intention, as

expressed in the theatre's own Declaration, to show Irish people their own stories and to express Irish identity. So, this theatre relationship invited audience members to acknowledge this version of their recent history. On another level, theatre makers wished to represent the art form of theatre: this theatre relationship was part of an ongoing effort to establish an Irish context for theatre and to overcome its Anglo-Irish image and its tendency to strengthen negative stereotypes. Indeed, the theatre makers saw themselves as defenders of theatre. From their perspective, the history of dissent at the Abbey had demonstrated the need to defend 'their' theatre from attacks from all sides, even from its own audience members. The theatre relationship for *The Plough and the Stars* was offered on the implied understanding that any such opposition would be strongly countered. On another level, these theatre makers also saw themselves as representatives of cultural standards. As we have seen, certain of the Abbey theatre makers considered it a part of their task to educate their audience members aesthetically. Thus the performance was offered on the understanding that it was of good quality and it was 'good for' the audience members. O'Casey offered a drama that satirized and questioned the myths and ideals underpinning Irish society and recent Irish history. Thus, the theatre relationship asked audience members to accept O'Casey's critiquing of themselves as part of their maturation as a society and as an audience. All in all, this was a difficult and challenging relationship for audience members to accept. The theatre makers, whilst convinced of the validity of the terms of their theatre relationship, were well aware that audience members would find it difficult to accept those terms. They were fully prepared for another fight. And that is just what they got.

ⁱ See chapter I, p.19

ⁱⁱ Ernest Blythe *The Abbey Theatre* Dublin: The National Theatre Society Ltd, c.1963, no pagination

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert O'Driscoll *Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971, p.10

^{iv} O'Driscoll, p.10

^v Blythe's history also records Martyn as one of the authors.

^{vi} Lady Augusta Gregory *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* Gerrards Cross: C Smythe, 1972, p.144

The words are generally ascribed to Yeats in particular, since his was clearly the dominant voice behind the Declaration apparently later described by Gregory as 'rather pompous'. See Blythe *The Abbey Theatre* (no pagination).

^{vii} Certainly the Irish language was struggling at this time. F.S.L Lyons records that, before the famine of the 1840s and the emigration that followed there had been four million Irish speakers - by 1850 the population of the country as a whole was reduced to six and a half million of whom just twenty three percent spoke Irish and five percent were monolingual. F.S.L. Lyons *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, p.9

^{viii} Maurice Bourgeois *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre* New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1913 (1965), p.101

^{ix} A glance at the typical theatrical fare available in Dublin at the end of the nineteenth century would include operas, plays and musicals on tour from London, Irish melodramas (the Queen's specialized in Irish melodramas written by JW Whitbread, O'Grady, John Baldwin Buckstone and Edmund Falconer), regular performances of Shakespeare, a choice of pantomimes during the Christmas season and any number of popular music revues. For a calendar of theatre performances see Stephen Wyatt 'Appendix' in *Joyce, O'Casey and the Irish Popular Theatre* New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991

^x Blythe, no pagination

^{xi} Bourgeois, p.106-7

^{xii} Blythe, no pagination

^{xiii} Bourgeois, p.108

^{xiv} This picture is reproduced in Bourgeois, p.108

^{xv} Bourgeois, p.113

^{xvi} *ibid* p.112

^{xvii} See Bourgeois, p.112. See also James Kilroy (ed) *The 'Playboy' Riots* Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1971, p.6

^{xviii} Stephen Gwynn 'The Dublin Play Riots' *Observer* 14 February 1926

^{xix} See chapter 1, p.31

^{xx} Political and personal tensions also occurred, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the group encompassed people with such diverse backgrounds and opinions ranging from the ardent Nationalism of Martyn to the confirmed unionism of Annie Horniman. These differences came to a head quite quickly in 1910 when the theatre stayed open following the death of King Edward VII rather than closing as an act of respect and Miss Horniman withdrew her subsidy in protest. The departure of Horniman may have reduced some of the personal friction but it also meant that for the next fourteen years the theatre suffered severe financial difficulties, only relieved when Lady Gregory secured a government subsidy in 1924 (making the Abbey the first theatre in the English-speaking world to receive direct state funding). The subsidy, while securing the theatre's financial position, was itself a source of friction as it meant that a government representative was elected to the board, raising concerns about state control.

^{xxi} Initially this was done on a general vote but after the Society became a Limited Company, decision-making was vested in a board consisting of Yeats, Gregory and Synge. Blythe records that several players resigned at this point 'in protest against the establishment of what they regarded as a dictatorial system'.

^{xxii} Bourgeois devotes several pages of his history of the Abbey to describing the actor-training regime of the Fays. He mentions their insistence on good elocution and a lower volume of delivery than was the conventional norm. He also describes the new directing emphasis: 'The Irish players were taught to obliterate themselves as much as possible in order to concentrate the onlookers' attention on the speakers. Also, they were made to stand almost stock still and not move about or indulge in unnatural gesticulation and stage 'business' after the absurd fashion of English actors . . . whilst English acting may be defined as the art of shewing off one's self, the Irish actors are used to shew off the plays.' Bourgeois, p.130

^{xxiii} According to Mason and Ellmann, one student from the Catholic University refused to join in the protests of fellow students and applauded the performance vigorously. This student was James Joyce. See E. Mason & R. Ellmann (eds) *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* London: Faber and Faber, 1959, p.68

^{xxiv} Holloway's diary recalls how the enthusiastic applause of the rest of the audience 'drowned their empty headed expressions of dissention' Holloway, p.6

^{xxv} See 'Disputes and Secessions' in Blythe, no pagination

^{xxvi} Lady Gregory *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* Gerrards Cross: C.Smythe, 1972, p.103

^{xxvii} W.B. Yeats letter to Lady Gregory 2 Jan 1904 in Allan Wade (ed) *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* London: Robert Hart-Davis, 1954, pp. p.419-20

^{xxviii} See chapter 1, endnote 14

^{xxix} See chapter 1, endnote 31

^{xxx} Annabelle Melzer *Dada and Surrealist Performance* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994, p.118

^{xxxi} James Joyce 'The Day of the Rabblement' in E. Mason & R. Ellmann (eds) *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* London: Faber and Faber, 1959, pp.68-72

^{xxxii} The underlying causes of the 'Playboy riots' are, of course, more complex than this and cannot be conveyed in just a few sentences. For fuller explanation and exploration see Kilroy *The Playboy Riots*. See also Bourgeois *J.M. Synge and the Irish Theatre* and Dallett *Theatre as Government*

- xxxiii Anon 'The Abbey Theatre: The Playboy of the Western World' *Freeman's Journal and National Press* 28 Jan 1907, p.10
- xxxiv Letter from 'A Western Girl' to *Freeman's Journal* 28 Jan 1907, p.10
- xxxv Francis (Frank) Sheehy-Skeffington letter to the editor *Irish Times* 29 Jan 1907, p.8
- xxxvi D. H Greene and E.M Stephens J. M. Synge New York: New York University Press, 1989, p.269
- xxxvii *ibid*, p.269
- xxxviii Dallett *Theatre as Government* Unpublished PhD Dissertation: Harvard University 1996, p.200
- xxxix *ibid*, p.200
- xl Hugh Hunt *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre 1904-1979* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979, p.75
- xli Samantha Ellis 'Curtain up Archive no.6' *The Guardian* 16 April 2003 retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk 25 July 2003
- xlii This advertisement appeared in *The Dublin Evening Mail* 30 January 1907 p.2 alongside a report of the charges laid against disturbers of the night before.
- xliii Ellis in *The Guardian* www.guardian.co.uk
- xliv Sean O'Casey 'Song of a Shift' in 'Drums Under the Windows' in *Autobiographies vol.1* London: Macmillan, 1963 (1992), pp.506-519
- xlv *ibid*, p.510
- xlvi *ibid*, p.511
- xlvii *ibid*, p.516
- xlviii In a letter to David Krause, O'Casey claims that he did not see any of Synge's plays until after the productions of his own plays *Shadow of a Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock*, see Krause *Sean O'Casey: The Man and his Work* London: Macmillan, 1975, p.36
- xlix John Casey apparently died when he fell from a ladder whilst reaching for a book in the family library – a fact that suggests the family were living in relative comfort at the time, see John Cowell *Where they lived in Dublin* Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1980, p.74
- ¹ Nesta Jones *File on O'Casey* London and New York: Methuen, 1986, p.7
- ² Hugh Hunt *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre 1904-1979* Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1979
- ³ O'Casey's autobiographies seem to emphasize the poverty of his early life as in this description of the visit from the 'dung dodgers' who carried baskets of human waste and ashes from the back yards, through the houses into the street (O'Casey here refers to himself as 'Johnny', the name he was christened by): 'Johnny waited there, fiddling with the spray of hawthorn, till ashpit and petty had been emptied, and the dung-dodgers had moved on to the next house, then he went back to give a hand to his mother to coax cleanliness back again to the soiled flooring of their home. With the aid of a neighbour's broom, they swept the crushed cinders and ashes and some of the slime from the flooring. Then Johnny poured hot water from a kettle into a bucket, while his mother used a blue-mottled soap that made her hands shrivel and sting, washed and rubbed, time and time again, to make the first cleanliness of the place come to life again' Sean O'Casey 'Pictures in the Hallway' in *Autobiographies vol.1* p.216
- ⁴ Due partly to his love of words and partly to his debilitating eye disease, O'Casey's activism mostly took the form of secretarial work or political writing.
- ⁵ Robert G. Lowery 'Prelude to Year One: Sean O'Casey Before 1916' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976), p.93
- ⁶ O'Casey recruited for the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood and became secretary of the Wolfe Tone Memorial committee.
- ⁷ Sean O'Casey 'James Larkin: The Lion of Irish Labour' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* Vol. 1, Issue 2 (Spring 1975), p.27
- ⁸ O'Casey 'Drums Under the Windows', p.624
- ⁹ Jones, p.9
- ¹⁰ O'Casey *History of the Citizen's Army* cited in John O'Riordan 'O'Casey the Peerless Ploughman' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976), p.178
- ¹¹ Porter, Raymond J 'O'Casey and Pearse' *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976) 104-114, p.111
- ¹² Lowery 'Prelude to Year One', p.94
- ¹³ O'Casey 'Drums Under the Windows', pp.596-7
- ¹⁴ *ibid*, p.595
- ¹⁵ *ibid*, p.647
- ¹⁶ *ibid*, p.648
- ¹⁷ *ibid*, p.649
- ¹⁸ One observer described the response to Pearse's proclamation speech as 'chilling; a few thin perfunctory cheers, no direct hostility just then, but no enthusiasm whatever'. William Thompson *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, 1916* New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, p.98
- ¹⁹ Some British troops (particularly the South Staffordshire Regiment) were accused of shooting on sight, while on the other side, British soldiers were incensed to find that the rebel rifles fired 'dum dum' bullets – intended to inflict terrible wounds.
- ²⁰ Constantine FitzGibbon 'Easter Rising 1916' retrieved from www.users.bigpond.com/kirwilli/1916 on 2 April 2005
- ²¹ Opinions vary widely as to the number of people killed and injured in the fighting. Nesta Jones puts the figure at 46 killed, 2,600 wounded on the Irish side alone, p.9. Thompson suggests that 56 rebels were killed, 130 British soldiers and 200 citizens, p.102. FitzGibbon puts the figures at 500 British and 1000 Irish including the rebels.
- ²² Shaw, quoted in Thompson *The Imagination of an Insurrection*, pp.103-4
- ²³ Yeats expresses his own mixed responses to the Rising in his poem *Easter, 1916* in which he laments how he, and others did not take the revolutionaries seriously but shrugged them off with 'polite meaningless words'. With their sacrifice, he concluded in the refrain of his poem, 'a terrible beauty is born.' W.B. Yeats

- Selected Poems* London: Macmillan, 1959, pp.171-173
- ^{lxxiii} O'Casey left school in 1890 as a result of his eye disease.
- ^{lxxiv} O'Casey 'Drums Under the Windows', p.519
- ^{lxxv} *ibid*, p.517
- ^{lxxvi} Krause *Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work*, p.36
- ^{lxxvii} Jones, p.7
- ^{lxxviii} Krause *Sean O'Casey: The Man and his Work*, p.47
- ^{lxxix} Lowery 'Prelude to Year One', p.100
- ^{lxxx} O'Casey used this phrase in a letter to the editor *The Irish Independent* 26 Feb, 1926, p.8 reproduced in Robert Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin* London: Greenwood Press, 1984 pp.58-61, see also chapter 4, endnote 43
- ^{lxxxi} O'Casey to Lennox Robinson 23 April 1922 in David Krause (ed) *The Letters of Sean O'Casey* vol.1 London: Cassell & Co, 1975, p.102
- ^{lxxxii} O'Casey to Lady Gregory 11 Sept, 1925 in Krause (ed) *Letters of Sean O'Casey*, p.48
- ^{lxxxiii} See, for instance O'Casey to Lady Gregory 29 Aug, 1924 in Krause (ed) *Letters of Sean O'Casey*, p.115
- ^{lxxxiv} 'Readers Opinion' 26 Jan 1920 in Krause (ed) *Letters of Sean O'Casey*, p.91
- ^{lxxxv} *ibid*, p.91
- ^{lxxxvi} O'Casey later wrote of his earlier play, 'It went in with but a few minor changes' R. Ayling & M. J. Durkan 'The Genesis of *The Plough and the Stars*: a Bibliographical Note' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976), p.89
- ^{lxxxvii} 'Play Critique by W. B. Yeats', in Krause (ed) *Letters of Sean O'Casey*, p.102
- ^{lxxxviii} *ibid*, p.103
- ^{lxxxix} Lennox Robinson quoted in Saros Cowasjee *Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays* Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd, 1963, p.27
- ^{xc} *ibid* p.27
- ^{xc1} There are autobiographical elements to this storyline - O'Casey experienced a raid at a friends house in 1920 and Cowasjee gives details in *Sean O'Casey: The Man Behind the Plays*, pp.32-34
- ^{xcii} Krause *Sean O'Casey: The Man and his Work*, p.37
- ^{xciii} This is the appraisal offered by Cowasjee, p.42
- ^{xciv} Cowasjee, p.40
- ^{xcv} See endnote 127, below
- ^{xcvi} D. Byrne 'The Story of Ireland's National Theatre' quoted Cowasjee, p.43
- ^{xcvii} O'Casey, opening stage directions 'The Plough and the Stars' in *Collected Plays, Volume One*, London: Macmillan, 1957, p.161
- ^{xcviii} O'Casey 'The Plough and the Stars', p.239
- ^{xcix} *ibid*, p.224
- ^c Compare Bessie's description to this extract from O'Casey's autobiography: 'Oh, looka them breakin' into the shops! Isn't that provokin', ma'am? After all, th'boys are out for somethin' higher. Looka this fella comin' along with a gramophone. Eh, sonny boy, where'd you get that? Didja hear that answer? Go an' find out! Uncivilised lot. Looka these comin' with a piano, no less! Didja hear that? Give them a shove! Cheek, wha?' O'Casey 'Drums Under the Windows', p.652
- ^{ci} O'Casey letter to Prof. Ronald Rollins 30 March 1959 reprinted in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol. 2 no.2 (Spring 1976), p.165. In the same letter, O'Casey clarifies the nature of his criticism of Pearse: 'the "Orator" is not vain; he is dangerous sincere; so sure that he is ready to kill or be killed for his Ideal.'
- ^{cii} Padraig Pearse's original speech contains the lines 'We may make mistakes in the beginning and shoot the wrong people; but bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood' in *Collected Works: Political Writings and Speeches* Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1952, p.99.
- ^{ciii} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.212
- ^{civ} O'Casey 'The Plough and the Stars', p.202
- ^{cv} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.213
- ^{cvi} O'Casey 'The Plough and the Stars', p.203
- ^{cvi} *ibid*, p.163
- ^{cviii} *ibid*, p.233
- ^{cix} *ibid*, p.236
- ^{cx} *ibid*, p.250
- ^{cx1} *ibid*, p.251
- ^{cxii} *ibid*, p.238
- ^{cxiii} *ibid*, pp.258-9
- ^{cxiv} *ibid*, p.213
- ^{cxv} *ibid*, p.214
- ^{cxvi} *ibid*, p.191
- ^{cxvii} Sister Ellen Bailie 'Bessie Burgess: Cathleen Ni Houlihan of the Tenements' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* Vol.2 no.2, Spring 1976, p.209
- ^{cxviii} O'Casey 'Inishfallen Fare Thee Well' in *Autobiographies vol.2* London: Macmillan, 1963, p.152
- ^{cxix} *ibid*, p.152
- ^{cox} *ibid*, p.150. Another perspective on O'Casey's interactions with the protesters is offered by Sheila Richards, the actress who was playing Nora in the Abbey that night. Her unpublished autobiography includes the following account: 'I slipped away from the stage to see how the ladies (very brilliant and well-known ladies who had been involved in the 1916 Easter Week tragedy and the Civil War) were, and what they were up to. When I reached the top of the stairs and opened the door to the little landing, where we had incarcerated them, I found them happy, smiling-faced, listening to somebody, hidden from me, who was talking to them

soothingly and wittily. I had to look to see who had turned these wild ladies of ten minutes ago into sweetly smiling pretty female beings – it was Sean O’Casey!’ Gabriel Fallon ‘The First Production of *The Plough and the Stars*’ in *The Sean O’Casey Review* vol.2 no. 2 (Spring 1976), p.176

^{ccxi} O’Casey ‘Inishfallen Fare Thee Well’, p.152

^{ccxii} *ibid*, p.152

^{ccxiii} *ibid*, p.150. There are clear parallels between O’Casey’s imagery here and his description of Maude Gonne, who had literally represented the role of Cathleen ni Houlihan in an early Abbey production.

^{ccxiv} ‘A Mother’s letter’ *Irish Press* April 27, 1966 p.12, cited in Raymond Porter ‘O’Casey and Pearse’ in *The Sean O’Casey Review* vol.2 no 2, Spring 1976 p.111

^{ccxv} O’Casey in Porter, p.111

^{ccxvi} O’Casey ‘The Plough and the Stars’, p.220

^{ccxvii} O’Casey ‘*Juno and the Paycock*’ in *Modern Irish Drama* (ed. John Harrington) New York: W.W Norton & co, 1991, p.253

^{ccxviii} Krause *Sean O’Casey: The Man and his Work*, p.237. Many of the expressions used in the play “Ne’er a one at all” or “G’up ower o’ that”, as well as having poetic attraction, could be heard on the streets of Dublin to this day.

^{ccxix} O’Casey also reproduces Dublin English’s Gaelic language references, sometimes directly with the use of Gaelic words such as ‘gom’ (short for gomach – clown or simpleton) and sometimes indirectly through Gaelic style inversions such as ‘He’s after leaving me now.’ See Krause *Sean O’Casey: The Man and his Work*, p.237

^{ccxx} O’Casey ‘The Plough and the Stars’, p.205

^{ccxxi} *ibid*, p.198

^{ccxxii} *ibid*, p.253

^{ccxxiii} *ibid*, p.191

^{ccxxiv} Krause *Sean O’Casey: The Man and his Work*, p.239

^{ccxxv} *ibid*, p.234

^{ccxxvi} Lady Gregory’s Journal, cited in Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.10

^{ccxxvii} Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.10

^{ccxxviii} *ibid*, p.14

^{ccxxix} *ibid*, p.15

^{ccxxx} *ibid*, p.19

^{ccxxxi} *ibid*, p.19

^{ccxxxii} For a survey of attitudes to O’Casey’s politics See Jack Lindsay, ‘*The Plough and the Stars* Reconsidered’ in *The Sean O’Casey Review* vol.2 no.2, Spring 1976, p.187-195

^{ccxxxiii} Denis Johnston in ‘Up the Rebels’ *The Dublin Magazine* Spring 1966, p.70 cited in Ronald Ayling ‘Ideas and Ideology in *The Plough and the Stars*’ in *The Sean O’Casey Review* vol.2 no.2, Spring 1976, p.123. The title of Johnston’s play *The Scythe and the Sunset* is, as Johnston states, ‘an obvious parody’ of O’Casey’s title.

^{ccxxxiv} O’Casey ‘Drums under the Windows’, pp.550-1

^{ccxxxv} Lindsay, p.189

^{ccxxxvi} *ibid* p.193

^{ccxxxvii} The title of the play is taken from the socialist banner of the same name, which depicts the plough and stars to symbolize the combining of toil and idealism in the socialist movement.

Chapter VI

'A Woman's Row'ⁱ: The Dublin Protesters in Context

As with the theatre makers, the audience members' attitudes and behaviour in this case cannot be understood without placing them in a broad historical context. Context is always of prime importance when considering audience response, but particularly so when the national historical context is also an intensely personal one. The audience at *The Plough and the Stars* on that February night in 1926 included a number of the widows of Easter Week and these audience members had a personal relationship to the historical issues of the play that was a crucial factor in their response. Indeed, as Irish people, all the members of the audience carried with them a deep and personal sense of a wider history that fed in to all their social relationships including the theatre relationship. The *Irish Times* editor writing in 1907, in relation to *The Playboy of the Western World*, described the Irish people as having 'a marked gift for remembering history' and a tendency to 'carry our political prejudices and passions into every aspect of life.'ⁱⁱ This suggests that in 1907 events from centuries past still resonated in the everyday lives of the Irish people, influencing every part of their lives. For the audience of 1926 there was an obvious recent history to remember in relation to *The Plough and the Stars* and this was layered on top of a vast and ancient shared history. Indeed, given the vastness of Irish history and the 'marked gift for remembering' it, one problem is to how set a limit to the contextual horizon: as William Thompson puts it in the introduction to his study of the Easter Rising, 'for every beginning there are a dozen other obscure beginnings that preceded it' and if one pursues these beginnings in any detail 'he will end up in the dark abyss of time'.ⁱⁱⁱ However, certain key strands of Irish history can be identified as feeding into an Irish identity and informing every aspect of Irish life including the theatre relationship in place for this performance.

One historical strand, which originated in the religious vacillations of Henry VIII in the fifteen hundreds^{iv} and still resonated in 1926, was

the religious divide between Catholic and Protestant. This divide was deeply rooted and created prejudice on both sides. As Lyons has noted, the fact that the Reformation of the seventeenth century coincided with the conquest of Ireland led to the 'unhappy consequence' that Protestantism became identified with 'civilization' and Catholicism with 'barbarism'.^v From a Protestant perspective, their religion brought civilization to a disordered and undeveloped peasantry. For Catholics, theirs was the religion of true Ireland, and clearly associated with Nationalism. The stringent subjugation of Catholics^{vi} in the seventeenth century meant that by the eighteenth century the country was fully divided along religious lines with Protestants (representing 10% of the population) wielding almost all of the political and economic power. Though the penal laws were abolished in 1782, inequalities continued and entrenched attitudes remained on both sides. For audience members in 1926, the majority of whom would have been middle class Catholics, religious affiliation would still resonate with associations begun in the time of Henry VIII.

Another strand of history that influenced all of social life was Irish people's ambiguous relationship towards England and things English. On a political level, there was a proud tradition of resistance to English^{vii} conquest, which began with the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1171 and still continued in 1926. The long history of conquest and rebellion meant that for some at least, rebellion against things English had become a part of Irish identity. At the same time, many people found certain aspects of English society, particularly English culture, fashions and material goods very attractive. Since the Eighteenth Century, with the improvements in mass production and transportation, Irish people had been continually exposed to English fashions in clothing, journalism and advertising, books and plays, concerts, paintings, sports and pastimes. As Lyons describes in his *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland*, these cultural and material goods were valued as the products of a powerful, rich and culturally advanced nation and, through a process Lyons calls 'cultural diffusion', they became a fashionable part of Irish culture.^{viii} Irish people's exposure

to, and desire for, these manifestations of Englishness, increased during times of famine and hardship in the Eighteenth Century when the massed movement of Irish people from country to town and from Ireland to overseas made people all the more aware of the material benefits and social trappings of newly-industrialized, prosperous England, even if they could not afford them. Given their impoverished condition when faced with these material temptations it is unsurprising that, as Lyons says, Irish people 'longed for them with an insatiable hunger'.^{ix} However, this hunger for things English combined somewhat uneasily with the traditional rebellion against English political dominance. Irish people had a sense of at once loving English goods and culture and loathing English encroachment. Audience members attending the theatre in 1926 would have been as aware as anyone of this tension. Indeed, as an Anglo-Irish institution committed to producing Irish works, the Abbey Theatre perfectly represented the ambiguity in action.

A further historical strand that influenced the Irish sense of identity in 1926 was the special status given to rural peasant culture and 'the land' particularly that found in the West of Ireland. In part, the idealization of 'the land' stemmed from the fact that a succession of monarchs from King John onwards had seized lands and property for distribution to English interests, making ownership of land a point of resistance.^x In part, too, the Irish popular mind saw the rural way of life as a symbol of what it meant to be truly Irish – the West of Ireland was the place where ancient crafts and cultural practices continued and it was the home of the Gaeltacht, the only region where Irish was still spoken. No doubt the geographical status of the West of Ireland – its remoteness and its distance from England, were also attractions: as one historian puts it: 'when a man directed his gaze towards the Aran Islands he turned his back on London.'^{xi} For all these reasons, the West of Ireland and its inhabitants gained a special status in the public mind through the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries and they were idealized in melodramas, songs and paintings of the period.^{xii}

The idealization of the peasant life of the West was further strengthened by the growth in Nationalism in the early Twentieth century. As part of their search for an Irish identity, educated Nationalists commonly took pilgrimages to the region to practice their Irish and take in the culture. Thompson has another suggestion for why the 'cult of the peasant' gained particular strength after World War One (1914-1918). He suggests that for the first time, the Irish people saw European nations beyond England as evil, leading them to view the 'civilized' European elements within Irish society in a new and suspicious light:

A new situation was created whereby the 'best' elements in society were the most guilty for they were best in the cultured ways of the foreigner. It was the peasants who now became the collective representation of national identity.^{xiii}

Suddenly simplicity and lack of sophistication were valued as virtues and an important part of being Irish. As part of this, associations were formed between the West of Ireland and notions of 'innocence' and 'purity'. Even when a more complex look was taken at the rural idyll, by authors such as Joyce in *The Dead*^{xiv} and Synge in his peasant dramas, the idealized image of the West persisted. The reconsidered status of the peasant at the turn of the century was also tied in with the growing sensitivity towards cultural stereotyping in the period.

Cultural stereotyping can be seen as another historical strand that fed into the Irish sense of identity and informed the theatre relationship. By 1926, Irish people had endured some very disparaging stereotypes for many years: as Thompson puts it, 'the Irish were the negroes of nineteenth century Great Britain'^{xv} Just as Irish people were caricatured on stage in the form of the Stage Irishman, similar, or even worse stereotypes were perpetuated elsewhere including in cartoon portrayals of the Irish in London magazines:

The Irishman of the London illustrated magazines had the features of a monkey, crossed a puddle of urine to

enter his cottage where he lived with his pig and slept with his wife and children.^{xvi}

The portrayal of Irish people as brutal or apelike was not only used for comic effect. Similar animalistic imagery was used by Charles Kingsley after a visit to Ireland in the 1860s, to express his horror at the living conditions of Irish peasantry: 'I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country . . . if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours.'^{xvii} Clearly, Irish people had to deal with some deeply racist stereotyping from others. However, as Lyons points out, Irish people were also responsible for constructing stereotypes about themselves as a reaction against the traditional negative ones:

Against the accusation of barbarism they constructed a consoling image (which had indeed a foundation in fact) of an ancient civilisation, a land of saints and scholars, a commitment to monastic Christianity that had laid much of Europe in its debt. And against the almost casual English assumption of superiority they opposed a highly artificial concept of nationality which stressed alike their difference from their English masters and their aspiration towards complete independence from them.
^{xviii}

Lyons' description might be applied to Yeats's language in the *Samhain* declaration where he, too, could be said to perpetuate the 'saints and scholars' stereotype of Irish identity, as he did in his early plays.^{xix} By 1926, members of the audience were fully cognizant of both kinds of stereotypes. In their search for self-definition, it seems many felt a growing sensitivity about the disparaging images generated by those outside Ireland and an attachment to the complimentary, consoling ones constructed from within.

All these strands from history fed into a collective sense of an Irish identity. Audience members attending the Abbey Theatre in February 1926 were steeped in their history and carried its passions and prejudices into the theatre with them. Within this broad picture of what it meant to be Irish in 1926, we can also paint a narrower picture of what it meant to

be a member of the Abbey's audience. Right from its inception, Abbey audiences were primarily composed of the largely Catholic middle classes. Members of the largely Protestant ruling class attended occasionally, particularly at the first night openings of new plays, which were important dates on the social calendar. Ordinary working class Dubliners did not regularly attend, though there were cheaper seats available (it has already been noted that the shilling-a-seat ticket price had been too much for O'Casey to afford during his time as a labourer).^{xx} Yeats' 'model spectators', to use Marinis's term,^{xxi} were the thinking middle classes and that is what he got. The theatre was seen as a respectable, literary, mid-to-highbrow institution and it attracted these kinds of people. So, how did these audience members feel about the theatre and how did they see the theatre relationship on offer?

From its inception, many audience members felt a sense of personal involvement and even ownership over the Abbey Theatre. The sense of being part of an 'exclusive collective'^{xxii} was an important part of the experience for many audience members. In his history of the Theatre, in a chapter entitled 'To Whom Did the Abbey Belong?' Frazier suggests that audience members saw it as 'their' theatre – a self-declared National Theatre of Ireland, founded in their name.^{xxiii} This may have translated into what Dallett identifies as a sense of 'sovereignty' – a feeling that they had some say over the content and artistic direction of the theatre and this in turn may help to explain the tradition of audience protest against unpopular material. The audience's sense of personal involvement was enhanced by Dublin's small size and homogeneity. Audience members were likely to see the Abbey personalities on the street or in the teashops or to know someone directly involved in the literary movement. The insularity of the city is very apparent in biographies of the time where, it seems, everyone knew everyone: Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's biographer, for example, talks about the Sheehy family's friendship with James Joyce and notes that in Hanna's youth the Sheehy residence was 'a notable venue' for social gatherings of people 'from many different walks of life'.^{xxiv} One result of this insularity was that, as O'Driscoll puts

it, 'as well as being a name on a theatre programme, the dramatist was a personal presence'.^{xxv}

The Irish public's sense of connectedness to the theatre was further enhanced by the practice of open correspondence in the newspapers, and the fashion for public debates, meetings and pamphleteering. As we have seen, the disputes over *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Plough and the Stars* were characterized by protracted discussion and social debate, as were many contentious issues in Dublin society in the early twentieth century. For example, amongst Yeats' letters to Lady Gregory is one in which he writes about his exchanges with Nationalist figurehead Arthur Griffith:

Did I tell you my idea of challenging Griffith to debate with me in public our two policies – his that literature should be subordinate to nationalism and mine that is must have its own ideal.^{xxvi}

In this case the debate never took place but the letter illustrates the general sense that important issues rightly belonged out in the public arena. The letter also brings into focus the sharp difference between Yeats' objectives and the expectations of his Nationalist audience.

Nationalist audience members held particular expectations about what this 'National' theatre should be. As Frazier points out, the vocabulary used by Yeats in the *Samhain* declaration was the same as that used in political discourse; vocabulary which was loaded and susceptible to appropriation: 'the key terms in literary and political discourse were *national*, *politics*, *literature* and, of course, *Irish* each of which has a fundamental instability of suggestion'.^{xxvii} Thus, even if they had not read the *Samhain* declaration, Nationalist audience members were in a 'rhetorical conflict'^{xxviii} with Yeats from the start. To express this in Jaussian terms, the 'implicit relationship' as understood by audience members differed dangerously from the understandings held by the theatre makers. For an audience steeped in instinctive Nationalism it was a natural assumption that something declaring itself a 'National' theatre – representing the country's artistic self-determination – would *ipso facto*

be a Nationalistic one, pushing for the nation's political self-determination. Though Yeats' early writings strongly urged the distinction between art and propaganda and cautioned against nationalistic fervour,^{xxix} these writings went unnoticed or unheeded by Nationalists especially when the early plays, seemed to fulfil their nationalistic expectations.

The Abbey's early plays, particularly Yeats's own *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, appeared to offer straightforwardly nationalistic fare. The play has been described as a 'thinly disguised call to arms'^{xxx} and Yeats himself later fretted whether the play had contributed to the Easter Rising:

All that I have said and done
Now that I am old and ill
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answer right
Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?^{xxxi}

To Nationalist audience members, an affirmative answer to this question might be taken as a credit to the work: this was the kind of material they wanted from the theatre. As time went on, the theatre seemed to offer less and less of it and, as Thompson says, audience members became unsatisfied:

Yeats called his theatre the Irish National Theatre and that is precisely what Dubliners wanted: more stirring propaganda pieces . . . Yeats, obstinate in his own Irish way, was intent on giving them art, and for the Irish, Yeats' art had the distinct smell of Europe.^{xxxii}

From a Nationalist perspective the Abbey seemed, over time, to sell out to European tastes or, worse still, to the (Protestant) Ascendancy establishment, particularly with the plays of Lady Gregory and other figures seen as 'West Britons'.^{xxxiii}

Apart from becoming disillusioned with the particular plays on offer, or the personalities behind the theatre, it is also possible to suggest that Nationalists gradually became disillusioned with theatre itself. This

is Thompson's well-argued contention. He suggests that the growth of popular nationalism in Ireland had various phases and that during the first of these, the literary phase, the Cultural Nationalism of the Abbey was key, particularly in its idealization of the peasant; a 'rejection of civilization'.^{xxxiv} But, says Thompson, the next phase, the political phase that emerged around 1905, saw the rejection of genius including creative genius:

The marked characteristic of the second phase of the movement, the political phase, was the alienation of the literary geniuses and the displacement of the non-political cultural leaders.^{xxxv}

Thompson further argues that these two phases were stages in an overall process of simplification, a simplification that was, perhaps, necessary to fuel the revolutionary spirit but which also sacrificed complexity and subtlety of thought in favour of propaganda:

This second phase was a continuation and an intensification of the first for in both phases the general tendency was toward the romantic simplification of complexity. The dismissal of evil, civilisation and genius amounts to a progressive simplification of consciousness in which ideas were turned into slogans and the slogans turned into occasions for action.^{xxxvi}

According to Thompson, the theatre makers at the Abbey were amongst the victims of this popular shift away from intellectual and literary movements. As Thompson concludes, 'inevitably and most painfully for the artists involved, the political simplifiers saw the protests of genius as an apology for the status quo'.^{xxxvii} The Irish public's suspicion of genius must have been further inflamed by the superior tone adopted by Yeats and the other theatre makers, determined to 'give the public what was good for them'.^{xxxviii} It was these complex and deep-running resentments that underpinned the fracas over *The Playboy of the Western World* and which need to be understood as a context to the reception of *The Plough and the Stars* twenty years later.

The hostile response to *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 was only in part a response to the text. Certainly the audience were offended by the portrayal of Irish peasantry, but the protests were motivated by other resentments too. These resentments included feelings about what the Abbey should be and objections to the personalities of Yeats and more particularly Synge, who was another Protestant and a somewhat private man who could appear surly. There was also a more general sense of impatience with the pretentiousness of art and art makers as expressed in this comment from *The Leader* in 1907:

They claim that their works are unsuited for the common air; they are precious plants, and need the neurotic atmosphere of the Abbey in which to thrive.^{xxxix}

The language here is revealing: the Abbey theatre makers are depicted as ‘them’ – a collective ‘other’ as opposed to the ordinary people gifted with commonsense that the writer thinks of as ‘us’. This writer conceives of a Dublin public grown weary of the theatre’s artiness, and the superior airs adopted by Yeats, Gregory and Synge. This attitude may still have prevailed twenty years later when *The Plough and the Stars* was produced.

Something that did progress, perhaps, in the twenty years between *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Plough and the Stars* was the public’s sense of its own cultural steadfastness. Thompson argues that, in 1907, at the start of the nation’s cultural awakening, aesthetic judgement was both unsophisticated and lacking in confidence. He suggests that having had limited experience of indigenous theatre, Dubliners were unused to seeing their country depicted on stage, let alone satirized up there and did not know how to react. Lacking a sophisticated artistic response mechanism to call on, says Thompson, the audience responded defensively: ‘the rigid minds of the orthodox lacked the mental confidence and flexibility to see the humour of the ridiculous’.^{xl} By the time O’Casey’s play was produced, the audience were more accustomed to seeing their culture satirized and had gained greater cultural confidence even if some of the defensiveness remained. Another factor that may have changed by the time *The Plough and the Stars* was written

was the audience's preparedness to draw on frames of reference other than Catholicism. Though untrained in audience response at the time of *The Playboy of the Western World*, the Irish public were very well trained in obedience to Catholic doctrine, so drew on these capacities to frame the event. As Thompson points out, the Catholic doctrine of the time was uncompromising:

For the Irish Catholic aesthetic of the time, to be conscious of evil was to be morbid, neurotic and evil oneself. There was simply no other way of coming to terms with the Vision of Evil except through dismissal and repression.^{xli}

Under this mindset, a work of art is corrupt simply because it contains corrupt elements. The question of how those elements appear, or how they are treated, becomes irrelevant. This ethos may, indeed, help to explain why audience members reacted with such force to Synge's play. The audience at *The Plough and the Stars* had twenty more years of audience response in their collective experience so they may have been less inclined to resort to Catholic responses to frame the event, though some individuals still did so.

In some ways the world inhabited by the audience of Synge's play was not so different from when *The Plough and the Stars* was staged and certain parallels can be drawn between the two disruptions. However, in other ways, the world had completely changed and many of the motivations for the audience's actions were specific to the times. This is how the difference between the world of *The Playboy of the Western World* and the world of *The Plough and the Stars* is summed up by Lowery:

The essential difference . . . between the two periods was that the Ireland of 1907 was going somewhere; the Ireland of 1926 had been there. The former had its head in the clouds; the latter had crashed to earth. In 1907 there was life; in 1926 there were only martyrs.^{xlii}

In the period between 1907 and 1926 Irish people felt their sectarian, political and class differences more keenly than ever. First of all, tensions over the Home Rule issue caused hostility between North and South,^{xliii}

then the General Strike and lockouts of 1913 brought social conflict exacerbated by the police brutality. Finally, the strike and the activities of the Citizen's Army meant that middle class Dubliners could ignore the terrible conditions of the slums no longer. An element of religious fanaticism was even added when, during the strike, the Archbishop of Dublin refused to allow Catholic families, threatened with extreme privation, to send their children to stay with sympathetic working families in England because those families were Protestant. All Ireland's historical prejudices seemed to be inflamed and, as Thompson remarks, it is important to remember the ugliness of this period as the real background to the 'noble and heroic' events of 1916:

The Dublin of 1913 was anything but noble and heroic, and Irish men, rather than fighting the *Sassenach* were tearing each other to pieces.^{xliv}

There was little to be proud of on the domestic or international front. With the outbreak of war with Germany in 1914, Home Rule was delayed and a further period of division and infighting followed between Nationalist factions in Ireland.^{xlv} By 1916, Ireland was a country still hoping for independence, longing for some kind of unifying action and desperate for heroes. Eventually these were provided by the Easter Rising and its aftermath.

The events of the Easter Rising were discussed in the last chapter because they provided the subject matter for O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. For O'Casey's audience, the events were not only a recent and traumatic memory, they also had special elevated status as a symbol of nationalist aspiration and personal tragedy. As we have seen, the glorified version of the Easter Rising took some time to build up in the public consciousness. O'Casey's autobiography points out that for most ordinary people during Easter 1916, the fact that it was the end of Lent was the main thing on their minds:

The Easter vigil was nearly over. Thousands were crumbling tobacco in the palms of their hands, preparing for the first smoke in seven long Lenten

weeks of abstinence . . . steak and onions, bacon and cabbage, with pig's cheek as a variation, would again glorify the white-scrubbed kitchen tables of Dublin workers . . . Dancing for the young . . . older ones, thinking of their children would be getting ready for a trip to Portmarnock's Velvet strand, or Malahide's silver one; and those who weren't would be poring over the names of horses booked to run at Fairyhouse on Easter Monday.^{xlvi}

This was a quiet time. A holiday. The public were expecting to witness Easter parades across the country by the Volunteers and these parades might have raised concern since, according to O'Casey, 'it had been whispered, only whispered, mind you, that it had been planned by a few of the remember-for-ever boys to suddenly change the parade from a quiet walk into an armed revolt.'^{xlvii} However, the chief of staff of the Volunteers, Eoin MacNeill, had called the plans off.^{xlviii} No one had any idea that Clarke, Pearse, MacDermott and Connolly had decided to go ahead with the Uprising despite MacNeill's interventions. Not even the participants were informed of the plan. Thompson suggests that 'of the 1200 men that gathered, many thought they were on the usual practice drill.'^{xlix} The public were used to the sight of armed men drilling on the streets and so, as the offensive began, they took little notice:

Few paid attention to the lines of shabbily uniformed men, for the sight had become a familiar one to Dubliners. A few must have laughed, but many took no notice at all.¹

As the fighting developed and the British forces arrived, the Dublin public could no longer ignore the Rising but their response was not what the rebel leaders had hoped.

As the Rising went on, some politically committed members of the public supported the rebels, but many others saw their activities in a negative light. Different people reacted to the event in different ways but this comment from Thompson matches the version of events as told in O'Casey's autobiography and later in *The Plough and the Stars*:

The middle classes, with thoughts of their own children who were fighting and dying in the Great War, cheered the British soldiers and served them tea; and the lower classes, rather than rallying round Connolly's Plough and Stars, swarmed out of the slums and fought with one another for the loot that spilled onto the sidewalks from the broken store windows.ⁱ

The public's outcry against the rebels continued to mount as they listened to the artillery, witnessed the devastation of their city and experienced the terror of widespread fires. According to some reports, the arrested rebel leaders were booed as they were marched to prison.ⁱⁱⁱ As mentioned before, it was only after the executions began that Irish public opinion shifted. With the deaths of the rebel leaders and the benefit of hindsight, Easter 1916 began to be recalled as what Yeats called a time of 'terrible beauty' and sacrifice.ⁱⁱⁱ

With this shift in attitude, the Uprising began to take on a legendary status. It may have been a failure, but as such it followed in the honourable tradition of failed rebellions against England. Success or failure was not the point. Glorious defiance was all. In reaching this point, as Thompson points out, the public were only 'catching up' with the rebel's point of view: 'The imagination of the poet-rebels had been so far beyond the reality of the nation that it took the nation three years to catch up.'^{iv} The leaders themselves apparently embarked upon the adventure without any expectation of success. Connolly is said to have remarked 'we are going out to be slaughtered', recalling Pearse's frequent use of sacrificial imagery in his speeches.^{iv} To these leaders, the symbolic importance of what they were doing was more important than the practicalities of achieving the goal.^{vi} After their deaths, the stories of martyrdom seemed glorious and romantic. The stories gained an extra edge of romantic tragedy when Plunkett married his sweetheart, Grace Gifford, in a candlelit ceremony held in his cell the night before his execution. There was added bitterness, too, with the news that Connolly, too badly wounded to stand, had been tied to a chair for his execution.

The martyrs of Easter week became heroes, joining the ranks of the legendary rebels of Irish history such as Wolfe Tone.

The new martyrs were of a sufficient range of types to allow most people to identify with a hero figure. Pearse was a poet, journalist and founder of an experimental school who appealed to cultured Nationalists. Tom Clarke was a Fenian dynamiter with strong connections to the Irish-American Republican movement. The working class would have particularly mourned Connolly, the Socialist leader of the Citizen's Army. Apart from their differences, it was their shared idealism that made them suitable hero material in the public mind. As Thompson points out, the attitude of the Irish towards the mythical rebel (particularly one killed by the English) is traditionally very different to the personal experience of a rebel in action.^{lvii} In life, they had been trouble makers; now that they were dead, to point out the hopelessness of the rebels' actions and the waste of their lives, would not only have been disrespectful and unkind, it would be missing the point. Ireland clung to its heroes becoming, if anything, more attached to them during the fighting that followed Easter Week.

It could be argued that the Irish public framed the events of Easter Week as a drama – a piece of theatre that suited their ideals of what theatre in Ireland should be about. It was a drama populated with mythic heroes, grand speeches, romance and high tragedy. Some critics have even suggested that the Rising was consciously staged as a drama with a priority given to costuming and speechmaking over political tactics. As F.X. Martin concludes: 'there is no doubt that Pearse and his companions showed an unerring theatrical instinct in the *mise en scène*, in the roles they chose and the lines they spoke'.^{lviii} In a very real sense, by the time they were watching O'Casey's play, the audience had already had their 'theatre'. Certainly they had had a rich poetic and dramatic experience.

Thompson suggests Irish people's response to the Rising showed their penchant for poetic abstraction and their tendency to prioritize imagination over pragmatic fact. This was not O'Casey's way, though he

recognized it in his fellow-countryman, The same tendency was also recognized, and cautioned against, by the man who tried to prevent the Rising, Eoin MacNeill. MacNeill's memorandums show him trying to quell the patriotic fervour of the volunteers, calling for pragmatism and common sense rather than idealized abstraction. His tone and opinions sound a lot like O'Casey's own:

We have to remember that what we call our country is not a poetical abstraction, as some of us, perhaps all of us, in the exercise of our highly developed capacity for figurative thought, are sometimes apt to imagine – with the help of our patriotic literature. There is no such person as Caitlin Ni Uallachain or Roisin Dubh or the Sean – bhean Bhocht, who is calling us to serve her. What we call our country is the Irish Nation; which is a concrete and visible reality.^{lix}

With sentiments like these, MacNeill would never be recorded as a hero, though one suspects that O'Casey might have approved of the level-headed pragmatism of his interventions to try and debunk the Rising. MacNeill recognized that there was a close relationship between patriotic literature and patriotic action in the Irish mind and he rightly predicted that the Irish people would be stirred into action by ideals rather than good sense. The same 'highly developed capacity for figurative thought' which lead the 'audience' of the Easter Rising to characterize it as high drama would later be a crucial factor in how the same people responded to O'Casey's play.

The period of Irish History between the Easter Rising and the year when O'Casey's play was written was a terrifying and confusing one for the Irish public, making them cling to their idealized version of history all the more tightly. Following the elections of 1918, Republicans set up their own assembly under De Valera. The aim was to resist the British administration and secure Republican status for the country. At the same time, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was formed to provide military support for the cause. The fighting that ensued was of a very different kind than that seen in the Rising, less romantic but far more deadly and effective in real terms. Michael Collins, minister in De Valera's cabinet,

used guerrilla tactics (closer to those previously advocated by O'Casey), which depended on subterfuge, surprise and anonymity. Rather than a full-scale uprising against the English, Collins organized a series of well-planned attacks in which non-uniformed individuals shot their targets before melting into the crowd. Collins' methods were similarly uncompromising towards his own side and people suspected of informing on the IRA were killed. The Irish public, who had been so outraged at the treatment of the rebels of the Rising, now witnessed similarly brutal acts carried out by the survivors in the name of the Republic. They may have understood the necessity for such action, but this was a disturbing time. Dubliners witnessed further acts of brutality when the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, responded by sending the 'Black and Tans'. If anything, the Black and Tans helped consolidate public opinion behind the Republicans as they had a reputation for indiscriminate shooting. The fighting culminated in Bloody Sunday on 21 November 1920 in which fourteen British agents were shot dead and twelve others were killed when the Black and Tans opened fire on players and crowd at a Gaelic Football match. Ireland was a violent and dangerous place and the events of Easter Week must have seemed even more consoling from such a perspective.

The violence only escalated further following the signing of the *Treaty for the Irish Free State* with Britain in 1921. As had so often been seen in the past, the Irish engaged in factional infighting over the terms of the Treaty. 'Free-Staters' saw it as the first step towards full independence, whilst ardent Republicans, nicknamed 'Die-Hards' refused to accept Ireland's Dominion status with the continued oath of allegiance to the crown. One can imagine that it must have been soul-destroying for Irish people to watch their leaders, former allies, attacking each other. After five years of fighting, the outcome appeared to be only fragmentation and more violence. One can understand, perhaps why the slain heroes of Easter Week seemed pure and unsullied by comparison. By 1923, when De Valera finally called to an end to the violence, eleven

thousand were in prison camps or jail, Griffiths was dead and Collins had been assassinated.

When *The Plough and the Stars* was performed three years later, the country was still reeling from the violence. Though the Rising had taken place ten years before, the rubble of damaged buildings still lay in the streets around the Abbey Theatre^x and many people were still mourning the loss of family and friends. Any play about these recent events would be difficult to take: for a public still clinging to their idealized version of the Easter Rising as a way to survive its terrible aftermath, any play that undermined these ideals was likely to be unbearable. The audience had already experienced two plays by O'Casey *Shadow of a Gunman* and *Juno and the Paycock* and they were aware that his approach was to satirize and reframe history. Whereas they had been able to receive the earlier works positively, *The Plough and the Stars* was different because it dealt with the hallowed events of Easter Week itself. For this audience, the Easter Rising was a matter of personal memory and personal tragedy, intimately tied up with their memories of people they had lost and people they had made into heroes. Since their involvement with the Rising was a personal matter for the audience, they made the theatre makers' involvement with the Rising into a personal matter too.

The audience members may have felt some resentment that the Nationalism of the Abbey Theatre had not translated into personal engagement by any of its figureheads. Just as the country created its heroes of Easter Week it also created anti-heroes out of those who had not participated and the theatre makers at the Abbey, including Yeats and O'Casey, were prime targets. Yeats, who had been associated in the public mind with the outspoken Republican Maude Gonne, had withdrawn from active politics some time before. Yeats's letters from around the time of the Rising indicate that over Easter 1916 he was engrossed with theatrical and literary matters rather than political ones. On 10 April he wrote to Lady Gregory about the latest Abbey play *At the Hawk's Well* and added:

Now that it is over I find myself overwhelmed with work – introduction to the book of Japanese [plays] for my sisters – two books of verse by Tagore to revise for Macmillan who has no notion of the job it is, and a revision of a book of my own for Macmillan.^{lxi}

O'Casey, having withdrawn from active politics, did not have any conspicuous involvement in the Rising either. According to his Autobiography, he was taken prisoner, held overnight and released in the morning. At best this could be seen as vestigial involvement in the action. Even for those audience members who did not lose loved ones in the Rising, the ineffectual actions of the theatre makers may have caused some feeling of resentment in the audience. For those who had been directly affected by the Rising – the widows of Easter Week – the feelings of resentment would have been stronger still. However, it was not only as widows of Easter Week that these women came to the play. They had other experiences motivating their actions too.

The *Irish Times* reported that the disruption of *The Plough and The Stars* was 'a women's row' and indeed, it is important, when assessing the protests against *The Plough and the Stars* to realise that the women involved were experienced campaigners who had been actively involved in politics for many years as members of Nationalist organizations and as participants in suffrage campaigns. By 1926, Irish women had been active, but disenfranchised figures in Irish political life for many years. These women had grown up in a society that held some deeply entrenched ideas about 'a women's place', and in which women were generally excluded from membership of political organizations. For example, The Irish Republican Brotherhood, as its name implies, did not allow women to join, while Maud Gonne's biographer describes her determined efforts to resist the ban on female membership of the National Land League:

Once again Maud was to tell an embarrassed man that she was ready to do any work suggested, and once again she was to be told that women could not join. This time Maud loftily replied, 'Surely Ireland needs all her children.'^{lxii}

Having never had the vote, Irish women traditionally found their political voice by lobbying the men folk or providing an alternative voice through women's organizations like the Women's Land League, founded in 1881.^{lxiii} These alternative organizations were highly effective, though not always appreciated by their male counterparts (the head of the Land League, asked about the successes of the Women's Land League, apparently commented that, 'they did too good work and some of us found they could not be controlled').^{lxiv} Clearly, any woman with Nationalist sympathies needed to be prepared to fight for more than her country.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Irish women had become more widely educated, more politically aware and more determined to play a part in their own destinies. The first nationalist feminist organization, *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, was formed by Maud Gonne and others in 1900 and this provided a community for Nationalist women and a training ground for speaking out on issues of importance. A 1909 edition of the *Inghinidhe na hEireann* journal gives an insight into the mindset of its members at the time.^{lxv} A message headed 'to our sisters' gives the *raison d'être* of the movement as being 'to awaken Irishwomen to their responsibilities and duties'. The duties in question seem to be partly practical – such as the buying of Irish goods, and partly personal and political – becoming 'brave enough to speak on the side of Ireland and Ireland's women against the whole world if need be'. The tone is not overtly feminist: the writer appears to be at pains to point out that the organization is not anti-men (though she jests elsewhere that men 'talk very big and do very little' and that they are 'largely what their womenfolk have made them'). But the clear message is that it is time for women to join together and speak out:

Our desire to have a voice in directing the affairs of Ireland is not based on the failure of men to do so properly, but is the inherent right of women as loyal citizens and intelligent human souls.^{lxvi}

Whilst Nationalist groups were marshalling women in terms of their 'duty', women were also being urged into politics as a 'right', by the women's suffrage movement.

The suffrage movement provided another training ground for protest. Within Ireland, an Irish women's suffrage group had existed since 1876^{lxvii} but, the 1900s saw the beginning of more active suffrage campaigning in Ireland, inspired by the high-profile activities of the Pankhursts in England.^{lxviii} Irish feminists, including Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and her husband Frank, heard about suffragette activism through the media including the suffragists' own newspaper, 'Votes for Women'.^{lxix} The Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) was formed in 1908 with Hanna elected as secretary. It grew very quickly, from five members in its first year to 1,000 in 1912 (plus 160 male associate members).^{lxx} The League was designed as a militant group and it trained its members in protest techniques including demonstrations, marches and rallies. According to Hanna, the group was significant not only in terms of its political aims but also for the new direction and purpose it offered its members.

It developed a new camaraderie among women, it lifted social barriers, it gave its devotees a new ideal . . . it helped women to self-expression through service . . . for the first time in history, not for a man's cause but for their own.^{lxxi}

Like the Nationalist movement, the suffrage groups brought their members a new sense of collective empowerment and actively encouraged self-expression on matters of importance.

The Nationalist and suffrage movements had their differences, even though many of their goals and methods were similar. For suffrage workers, the fight for the vote was the most important priority, even though the parliament was based in London. For Nationalists, fighting for the vote in a foreign nation was anathema; the establishment of a separate republic was the primary goal, with women's enfranchisement to follow. IWFL members were disappointed that Nationalist feminists

would not join them in suffrage demonstrations in London and Irish participation in these actions caused some resentment amongst Nationalist women. Despite the frictions between the two movements, Nationalist and suffrage groups in combination provided an important new outlet and a new image for women in the early twentieth century. From the 1910s onward women were often seen handing out leaflets, speaking out of doors, heckling at public meetings and carrying out acts of civil disobedience. Having no voice within mainstream politics, this body of women became trained to raise their voices around the edges of politics –including using the tactics of organized protest.

The protest against *The Plough and the Stars* was not the first time these women had protested at a public event. Indeed, it was one of the key tactics used by women's groups, particularly the suffragists, to hijack public occasions and use the public platform to speak out in support of their cause. Sheehy-Skeffington's biographer describes numerous occasions in which she took part in organized heckling at public events. She notes that, 'Ireland was small enough to ensure that busy suffragists were able to make their presence felt on each occasion a politician attempted to hold a public meeting',^{lxxii} and points out that the tactic was successful enough for one political party to ban suffragists from its meetings.^{lxxiii} Often the interruptions were choreographed and rehearsed: for example, women would set up rhythmic chants in a pre-arranged sequence so that as one was dealt with another would take up the cry.^{lxxiv} Clearly, Irish suffragists were very accustomed to using social occasions for their own grandstanding. Moreover, though political meetings were seen as a particular target within Ireland, the English suffragists, more militant than their Irish sisters, had shown that any event where there was a large body of people present could be used for the purpose. In that country a far wider range of social occasions had been disrupted including church services and horse races.^{lxxv} Significantly, a number of theatre performances had also been targeted, beginning with a production of Shaw's *Andronicus and the Lion* in London in September 1913, where suffragists shouted out about the analogies between their

position and the Christian martyrs in the play.^{lxxvi} Although they took place in England, such interruptions clearly set an important precedent for the *Plough and the Stars* protesters. Well before their own experience of transgressing the theatre relationship, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and the others had just such an intervention modelled by their political sisters and had seen the kind of publicity such an action could attract.

The women protesters were also very accustomed to dealing with a hostile crowd. Ward's biography includes numerous descriptions of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington being roughly treated by hostile crowds unhappy with her tactics. For example, she tells how in 1910 she pursued John Redmond (leader of the Irish Party and noted opposer of feminism) to Limerick and successfully tricked herself onto the platform where he was speaking about Home Rule, only to be roughly hustled off the platform by a group of men including her own cousin:

At the gate women tore her hat from her head, an old man spat in her face and she found her hands being held with such 'cousinly firmness' that she was unable to defend herself.^{lxxvii}

Not only was she well-used to handling hostility, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was noted for her ability to 'turn' a crowd. She demonstrated this ability on being offered a police escort out of the Limerick situation:

Being a strong disliker of police by nature, distrustful of protection, I declined with an inspiration, 'I will not go to the Police Station. I want no police protection from a Limerick Crowd.' I answered. It worked like magic, and I was allowed to go my way in peace, and to clean the spit from my face. Crowds are queer things.^{lxxviii}

Hanna successfully protected herself from the crowd by rightly suspecting that their suspicion of the police would be stronger than their antipathy towards herself. Her words to the Limerick crowd were similar to her statement about 'police protection' at the *Plough and the Stars* protest. On both occasions, she appealed, with some success, to the innate Nationalism in the popular mind.

Apart from becoming used to public opposition, and skilled at managing the mob, ten years or more of practicing civil disobedience meant that women in the suffrage movement were also accustomed to arrest, court appearance and imprisonment.^{lxxix} When arrested for breaking a window or some other minor infringement, the suffragist practice was to refuse bail and court imprisonment and to confront Irish society with the uncomfortable spectacle of women being held as political prisoners. From 1912, the women prisoners also began engaging in hunger strikes, experiencing illness and weakness as a result:

One hears one's heart pound, and it awakes one tossing in the night. Water applied to one's head evaporates as if a sponge were put on an oven; one gets slightly light-headed. The sense of smell becomes acute – I had never smelt that before. A dying woman craved for a rasher, and it was fried somewhere nearby (perhaps to tempt us?) That was tantalising.^{lxxx}

There can be little doubt that such experiences made these women hardened campaigners, accustomed to standing up for their beliefs against personal and social retribution. As audience members, it must also have made them much less afraid of the consequences of failing to follow the conventions of social behaviour.

The protesters were not only accustomed to protest, they were keenly aware that it could be a very effective tool. Between 1914 and 1916, with the outbreak of the First World War in Europe and the Easter Rising in Ireland, women in both Nationalist and suffragist camps were more politically active than they had ever been. The height of suffragists militancy in Ireland probably came in 1914, when a hatchet was thrown at Prime Minister Asquith's carriage as it passed through the streets of Dublin and later the same day, an attempt was made to burn down the Theatre Royal, where he was due to speak. The increased militancy brought retribution: a suffrage rally was attacked and women campaigning on the Dublin streets were verbally and physically assaulted. At this stage, according to Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's biographer, 'it was said that no woman walking round the city was safe

from assault^{lxxxix} but at the same time it was widely conceded that an important shift in public opinion was taking place throughout Britain and Ireland. Women were learning that direct action was effective. The outbreak of the war against Germany saw something of a loss of momentum as some women dropped away from the suffrage movement, to focus instead on issues of national security. Within Ireland, the movement was also overshadowed by the Easter Rising, as many women turned to Nationalism as their priority. If anything, however, this change of focus brought new opportunities for women to display their political strength and leadership.

Nationalist Women were in the forefront of political activity in the build-up to the Rising and many took an active role in the Rising itself. In March 1914 a Nationalist women's movement, Cumann na mBan, was formed as an auxiliary to the Volunteers. The subordinate status of this organization, and the fact that the Volunteers did not accept women, was a source of some irritation to feminists, including Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, who never joined.^{lxxxii} Women were, however, permitted to join the Citizen's Army, (it was Constance Markievicz's joint membership of both the Citizen's Army and Cumann na mBan that was such an annoyance to O'Casey). When the Rising took place, women were amongst those who took an active part in the fighting: Countess Markievicz was in charge of the squad that took over St Stephen's Green and other members of Cumann na mBan were armed participants.^{lxxxiii} Many other women, including Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington served as nurses, cooks and messengers for the rebels.^{lxxxiv} The events of 1916, as well as providing masculine heroes for the nation, also allowed women in the Nationalist movement to prove themselves as political and military activists. For some, the Rising also left a profoundly personal legacy.

For Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, as for other women protesters at *The Plough and the Stars*, the Easter Rising brought the death of her husband and changed her political outlook forever. The circumstances of Frank Sheehy-Skeffington's death were not those of the rebel fighters

recorded in legend but they did attain notoriety. An ardent Nationalist, also a pacifist, Frank Sheehy-Skeffington refused to take an active part in the fighting. He was more concerned about the disorder and looting on the streets and he attempted to organize a citizen's militia to regain order. He spent the second day of the Rising 'armed only with a cane'^{lxxxv} attempting to stop the looting of ruined shops. O'Casey's autobiography paints an impression of the scene that might have been lifted straight from the dialogue of *Plough and the Stars*:

What's that fella in beard and knickerbockers doin'?
Pastin' up bills. Willya read that – callin' on the citizens
to do nothin' to dishonour the boys. Why doesn't he
mind his own business? Sheehy-Skeffington? Never
heard of him. One o' Ireland's noblest sons? Is in on for
coddin' me y'are? If he was less noble an' less unselfish,
I'd ha' heard a lot of him? Maybe; but he's not goin' to
be let dictate to me. It's none o' his business if I want to
rifle, rob and plundher . . .^{lxxxvi}

Later that day, Frank Sheehy-Skeffington was arrested. After being detained overnight, he was shot dead by English Army officers.^{lxxxvii} The circumstances of the detention and murder caused public outrage in Ireland and intense embarrassment for the English government.^{lxxxviii} It also led to Frank Sheehy-Skeffington being remembered as a different kind of hero. O'Casey's respect for the man is clear in the extract already given, and this was echoed in his *The Story of the Citizen's Army* where he characterized Sheehy-Skeffington as his idea of the true hero of Easter Week.^{lxxxix} This labelling of Frank as a hero is ironic, perhaps, given Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's role as key protester against O'Casey's denigration of the 'true' heroes of Easter Week.

After the death of her husband, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington became an even more significant political figure than she had been before, because she, like the other widows of Easter Week, was now a symbol. There was much public sympathy for the wives and mothers of the slain rebels, the so-called 'women in black.' Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, whilst not exactly a rebel widow, was closely associated with this group of Nationalist women. She had always been an erudite and tireless

campaigner for suffrage and this did not dwindle but after the Easter Rising she, like other women, found that Republicanism offered the only possible response to the horrors she had been through. So, she moved away from the suffrage cause and became active within Sinn Fein, where she was a skilled propagandist and a popular speaker on the lecture circuit within Ireland and America (Ward notes that in just eighteen months, from 1917, she spoke at 250 meetings in twenty-one of the American states).^{xc} So, it was as an experienced campaigner, a public speaker, Nationalist feminist and a widow that Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington led the protests against *The Plough and the Stars*. In her case, the intensely personal was allied with a refined political sense, a high intellect and vast experience as a speaker and performer. She made a formidable opponent for O'Casey or any other theatre maker. And she did not act alone. She was part of a group of women with similar viewpoints.

The protest on this occasion was collective and organized. It is not entirely clear when the protests were planned, though this may be significant. It may be that the decision to protest was made before the play opened, on the basis of rumours about the content of the play that were flying around Dublin. As Lowery says, 'O'Casey's play was no secret to Dubliners.'^{xc} The main points of the play had been published in an *Irish Times* article on 12 January,^{xcii} and the controversy over cuts and arguments within the cast were no secret either: as Gabriel Fallon recalls, 'the Dublin of that time was one which responded with alacrity to excitement of this nature. Rumour ran like wildfire through the city.'^{xciii} Even if the women did not plan their protest before the play began, it is fair to say that the seeds of discontent were sown at this point, and the subsequent action was a response as much to the pre-publicity and rumours as to the play itself. It is possible that the decision to protest was made after the play opened. Although, as Lowery says, the entire one-week run had been booked out ten days in advance,^{xciv} the programme for the first performance suggests that a few tickets, for the back of the pit (where most of the protesters sat)^{xcv} could be bought on the door.^{xcvi}

So, it is possible that the women organized their protest in the short period between the opening of the play and the Thursday night. Even then, the decision to protest may have been as much to do with recognizing a political opportunity, as reacting to the play itself.

Ward's description of the planning of the protests implies that a primary concern was with political positioning. She describes how the Nationalist Cumann na mBan women organized the protests and how Hanna was chosen as a figurehead a little later:

Cumann na nBan were more than willing to disrupt the proceedings, but they needed someone capable of standing up and making a speech while chaos surrounded her. Hanna was the obvious choice.^{xcvii}

Ward suggests that Hanna was chosen for strategic reasons – because of her reputation and also her appearance: ‘who would want to be accused of having mishandled or mistreated such a woman, and someone who, disconcertingly looked rather like everyone’s favourite aunt?’^{xcviii} During the protest itself, Hanna was seated away from the active protesters up in the balcony. Whether this physical detachment was a deliberate tactic or not, it allowed her to proclaim loudly over the action proceeding below, and increased the drama of her own removal from the scene.

The fact that this was organized, collective protest raises questions about whether the women’s actions can be considered to be ‘response’ to the performance of O’Casey’s play. Certainly, the women’s actions were not response in the most straightforward sense. Most of the play was not heard on the night in question, so the women’s actions do not fall into the same category as the spontaneous moans and other ejaculations exhibited by audience members on earlier occasions. Neither is there any evidence that Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington or any of the other protesters personally attended the Abbey earlier in the week, so their actions were not a matter of some kind of delayed personal response to the play. The women’s action might be framed as a secondary response to the earlier audience members’ reactions, or to rumours about the play’s content: Ward suggests something of the sort in her account: ‘the implication that

their heroes might have enjoyed a drink touched a raw nerve for those suffering the grimness of defeat. *Word spread.*^{xix} Several commentaries present ‘the Abbey audience’ of that week as if the audience members on each subsequent night were a single responsive body, whose responses represented a building force with riot as the inevitable outcome: ‘the theme of the play and the sight of the national flag displayed on stage raised the audience to a passion. On the fourth night, the passion exploded into a full-scale riot.’^c However, this ignores the fact that the ‘Abbey audience’ present on the night of the riot was specifically different from audiences earlier in the week. It also overlooks the level of pre-meditation in the protesters’ actions.

These audience members carried out a breach of the theatre relationship that was both deliberate and extreme. They attended the performance with the express purpose of disrupting it. They had made up their minds about the performance and were not interested in giving the play a hearing, as Frank Sheehy-Skeffington had urged Abbey audiences to do twenty years before. They arrived as a pre-formed group determined to subvert the performance and substitute their own quasi-performance of protest. The group was well trained in protest tactics and the substitute performance was well-rehearsed (based on previous experiences of protest) and included scripted speeches, songs and actions. It even had its own substitute actor/protagonist. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington fulfilled her role admirably and declaimed over the noise and activity of the other protesters, before representing the protesters’ case outside the theatre, in the press and at the public debate. It was she, perhaps more than any other protester, who was able to articulate the true reasons behind the protest.

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, unlike some others in the debate over *The Plough and the Stars*, was able to frame the protest in terms of the theatre relationship. She did, like other people, raise objections to the form and content of the play – for example, in this extract from *Irish World* where she criticizes O’Casey’s characterization:

Not a single character has a gleam of nobility or idealism; the men are all poltroons, drunkards, slackers or criminals, inspired by no motives save that of vanity, greed or empty boastfulness, while the women are backbiting harridans, halfwitted consumptives, neurotics or prostitutes.^{ci}

But she also made it very clear that, at heart, her protest was a reaction to a perceived breach of the theatre relationship on the part of the theatre makers. Her problem was not with the skills, or 'sufficiency' of the play, but the usefulness of its message. Specifically, she considered the theatre makers to have sold out on what a 'national theatre' should present. In her biographer's words:

As someone who had been going to the Abbey for over twenty years and who had enjoyed plays such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan* which had 'helped make Easter Week' she hated the fact that the Abbey, 'in its subsidised, sleek old age, jeer[ed] at its former enthusiasms'.^{cii}

Her letter to the *Irish Independent* spelled this out:

It was on national grounds solely, voicing a passionate indignation against the outrage of a drama staged in a supposedly national theatre, which held up to derision and obloquy the men and women of Easter Week. It is the realism that would paint not only the wart on Cromwell's nose, but would add carbuncles and running sores in a reaction against idealisation. In no country save in Ireland could a State-subsidised theatre presume on popular patience to the extent of making a mockery and a byword of a revolutionary movement on which the present structure claims to stand.^{ciii}

This letter shows Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's consciousness of the wider artistic and social issues of the theatre relationship; she is even able to identify the issue of State subsidy as an irritant.^{civ} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's determination to debate the play in terms of the wider theatre relationship and her awareness of the subsidy and other wider contractual issues, accounts for O'Casey's complaint that she seemed determined to debate the row as an 'academic question', when he could

not. O'Casey, as ever, was focussed on what they thought of the play. The audience considered themselves to be in a theatre relationship that was much wider than that. The protesters at *The Playboy of the Western World* may be unable to recognize or articulate the 'contractual issues' as the real cause of their disquiet, but at least one of the protesters in this case was able to see the bigger picture.

We must conclude that the relationship in place for *The Plough and the Stars* on the night of 11 February 1926 was doomed before the performance even began, though not entirely for the reasons that might be assumed. Audience members and theatre makers were not hugely at odds. Indeed, in one sense, the problems arose because the two sides of the theatre relationship had so much in common. Audience members and theatre makers shared broadly common goals in terms of their political and artistic objectives but they found themselves differing sharply on the ways to achieve those goals. Neither was the riot wholly 'caused by' the content or subject matter of the play. Yes, the play was a provocation. The theatre makers knew this, and presented it in full anticipation that it could cause offence. They predicted disruption and when it occurred everyone involved, even the protesters, blamed the play. What very few of them identified was the wider reasons for the protest, which were to do with the dysfunctional theatre relationship in place and the personal experiences and concerns of the protesters. The theatre makers saw the audience members as potential foes in a fight for artistic integrity and they were fully prepared for battle, including being ready to call the police and to symbolically 'continue with the play' though not a word could be heard. In doing this the theatre makers were, perhaps, bullying and superior in their tactics but, crucially, they did not deviate from their role as theatre makers. The audience members on the other hand, entered the relationship for the express purpose of expressing their refusal to accept it. In terms of audience-theatre maker relations, it constitutes unreasonable audience behaviour to attend a performance for the sole purpose of disrupting it – especially if they were not prepared to give the play a hearing before deciding to protest. This

performance of *The Plough and the Stars* provided an apt platform for an organized, personally motivated action carried out by experienced protesters determined to generate their own performance for their own ends. Even Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's sympathetic biographer concedes this point when she characterizes Hanna's involvement in the protest as 'an ill-fated decision out of a desperate attempt to regain some semblance of political relevance'.^{cv} It is, perhaps, important to recognize that some reasons for protest can be as simple, and human, as that.

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- ⁱ Anon 'Abbey Theatre Scene' *Irish Times* 12 Feb 1926
- ⁱⁱ Anon 'Untitled' *Irish Times* 7 Feb 1907
- ⁱⁱⁱ William Thompson *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916* New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, p.3
- ^{iv} In 1541 Henry VIII confiscated monastic property in Ireland, driving the religious orders to seek shelter with the Gaelic Irish.
- ^v F.S.L Lyons *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* New York: Oxford University Press, p.11
- ^{vi} Under Charles II, Catholic education was restricted as was participation by Catholics in business, politics and the legal profession.
- ^{vii} Like Lyons, I have elected to use the terms 'England' and 'English' rather than the more correct nomenclature 'Britain' and 'British' on the grounds that Irish people themselves (outside of North East Ulster) have traditionally seen their relationship with their neighbour in these terms. The words 'England' and 'English' are more resonant with associations about ancient feuds between Celts and Anglo Saxons and so, as Lyons says 'the term British has always seemed a little anaemic'. See Lyons, p.7
- ^{viii} Lyons, p.8
- ^{ix} *ibid*, p.8
- ^x For example, under the reign of Elizabeth I, huge areas of land were awarded to English adventurers, whilst under Charles I, the 1652 Act of Settlement saw 10 million acres of estate land handed over to English loyalists.
- ^{xi} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.32
- ^{xii} Rural life was associated with the speaking of the Irish language because following the famine there was a huge migration of Irish speakers to the West (and the North).
- ^{xiii} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.31
- ^{xiv} James Joyce 'The Dead' in *Dubliners* New York: Modern Library, c.1954
- ^{xv} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.33
- ^{xvi} *ibid*, p.31
- ^{xvii} Charles Kingsley *Charles Kingsley, His Letters and Memories of His Life* London, 1877, quoted in Lyons, p.12
- ^{xviii} Lyons, p.11
- ^{xix} See chapter 5, endnote 6
- ^{xx} See Krause *Sean O'Casey: The Man and his Work*, p.36, see chapter 5, endnote 48
- ^{xxi} See Introduction, p.7
- ^{xxii} See chapter 1, endnote 94
- ^{xxiii} Adrian Frazier 'preface' in *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and the struggle for the Abbey Theatre* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990
- ^{xxiv} Margaret Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington: A Life* Cork: Attic Press, 1997, p.12
- ^{xxv} Robert O'Driscoll *Theatre and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Ireland* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971, p.9
- ^{xxvi} W.B. Yeats letter to Lady Gregory in *Letters of W.B. Yeats* London: Robert Hart-Davis, 1954, pp.421-422
- ^{xxvii} Frazier, p.65
- ^{xxviii} Frazier, p.65
- ^{xxix} See, for instance Yeats's statements on the difference between propaganda and literature in 'An Irish National Theatre' in *Samhain* Sept 1903, reproduced in W.B Yeats *Explorations* London: Macmillan, 1962, p.103
- ^{xxx} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.63
- ^{xxxi} W.B. Yeats 'The Man and the Echo' in Richard Finneran (ed) *W.B. Yeats: The Poems* London: Macmillan, 1983, p.345
- ^{xxxii} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.68
- ^{xxxiii} The origin and definition of this disparaging term for Anglo-Irish people, is discussed in Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.64
- ^{xxxiv} *ibid*, p.67
- ^{xxxv} *ibid*, p.67
- ^{xxxvi} *ibid*, p.67
- ^{xxxvii} *ibid*, p.68
- ^{xxxviii} See chapter 5, endnote 26
- ^{xxxix} Anon 'The Playboy in the Abbey' *The Leader* 9 Feb, 1907
- ^{xl} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.68
- ^{xli} *ibid*, p.72
- ^{xlii} Robert Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin: The Plough and the Stars Riots* London: Greenwood Press, 1984, p.5
- ^{xliii} After the General Elections of 1910, with the Irish MPs propping up the Liberal party in the English parliament, Home Rule for Ireland seemed imminent. This brought hostility from Ulster Unionists and in 1911 they formed the Ulster Volunteers to defend the Empire. In response, the Southern Volunteers appeared in 1913.
- ^{xliv} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.83
- ^{xlv} After 1914, the Volunteers were split between those under Redmond who supported the war effort, those under MacNeill who wished to pursue republican aims but favoured waiting for the end of the war and those under Arthur Griffith and Pádraig Pearse who wished to press on regardless.
- ^{xlvi} Sean O'Casey 'Drums Under the Window' in *Autobiographies, vol. 1* London: Macmillan, 1992, p.650
- ^{xlvii} *ibid*, p.650

- xlviii This decision came about following the arrest of Roger Casement and the interception of the German weapons he was trying to slip into the country,
- xliv Thompson, *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.97
- ⁱ *ibid*, p.97
- ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p.102-3
- ⁱⁱⁱ See FitzGibbon '1916, The Rising' retrieved from www.users.bigpond.com 2 April 2005
- ⁱⁱⁱⁱ W.B.Yeats 'Easter 1916' in *Selected Poems* London: Macmillan, 1959. See chapter 5, endnote 72
- ^{liv} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.103
- ^{lv} See Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.97
- ^{lvi} This is Thompson's argument, persuasively set out in *The Imagination of an Insurrection*. He goes into some detail about the psychological and imaginative reasons why the rebels were inspired to act in this way, against the pragmatic advice of MacNeill.
- ^{lvii} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.104
- ^{lviii} F.X. Martin '1916 – Myth, Fact and Mystery' quoted in O'Driscoll, p.16
- ^{lix} F.X. Martin 'Eoin MacNeill on the 1916 Rising' *Irish Historical Studies XII* (March 1961) pp.226-71 quoted in Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, pp.94-5
- ^{lx} The G.P.O was not rebuilt until 1929, see Suzanne Barrett 'The Road to Freedom' retrieved from www.irelandforvisitors.com 24 April 2005
- ^{lxi} W.B. Yeats letter to Lady Gregory in Allan Wade (ed) *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954, pp.611-2
- ^{lxii} Margaret Ward *Maud Gonne: Ireland's Joan of Arc* London: Pandora, 1990, p.22
- ^{lxiii} The Women's Land League was founded in 1881 following the Land Wars of 1879-81, in which Irish farmers resisted English landlordism and the government declared the Land League illegal. Women responded by forming an alternative society, Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.3
- ^{lxiv} Tim Harrington, quoted in Ward *Maude Gonne* p.22
- ^{lxv} Reproduced in Ward *Maude Gonne*, p.148
- ^{lxvi} Ward *Maude Gonne*, p.148
- ^{lxvii} Ward notes that 'A Dublin Women's Suffrage Association had been formed as early as 1876 by the Quaker couple, Anna and Thomas Haslam.' *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.15
- ^{lxviii} In England, The Pankhursts formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 and over the next few years, suffragists in that country were engaged in high profile activism. There were deputations to parliament, large-scale demonstrations and planned acts of criminal damage designed to result in imprisonment to draw attention to the cause. Perhaps most notorious, was the occasion in January 1908 when English suffragettes chained themselves to the railings outside Downing Street.
- ^{lxix} Ward notes that Gretta Cousins, a close friend of the Sheehy-Skeffingtons, had each copy of *Votes for Women* sent to her from England and she says the publication was 'immensely important in introducing ideas of the militant suffrage movement to an audience far removed from British centres of activity.' Ward, *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.46
- ^{lxx} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.48
- ^{lxxi} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington 'Reminiscences' quoted in Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.48
- ^{lxxii} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.70
- ^{lxxiii} This was John Redmond's Irish Party. See Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.70
- ^{lxxiv} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.71
- ^{lxxv} Antonia Raeburn *The Militant Suffragettes* London: New English Library, 1973, p.268
- ^{lxxvi} *ibid*, p.268
- ^{lxxvii} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, pp.69-70
- ^{lxxviii} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington 'Reminiscences' quoted in Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.70
- ^{lxxix} This deliberate law breaking began in 1910 when six members of the IWFL spent time in a London jail for stone throwing following an unsuccessful petition to parliament. Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.72
- ^{lxxx} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington 'Reminiscences' in Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.96
- ^{lxxxi} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.93
- ^{lxxxii} *ibid*, p.136
- ^{lxxxiii} Ward refers to armed CuB women carrying out various actions including holding up trains, see *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.156
- ^{lxxxiv} On the second day of the Rising Hanna went to the GPO taking supplies of food and volunteering as a messenger to rebel outposts. Her precise contribution for the rest of the day is uncertain but she met with Frank in the late afternoon 'having just sought help for a wounded man' Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.156
- ^{lxxxv} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.155
- ^{lxxxvi} Sean O'Casey 'Drums Under the Windows', p.652
- ^{lxxxvii} Ward also claims that the morning before shooting, Frank Sheehy-Skeffington was taken out on a raid by the soldiers and used as a human shield: 'Everyone knew what that most notable of non-conformists looked like – even at a distance his knee-breeches and red beard blazoned his identity . . . no one would risk wounding that particular captive' Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.157
- ^{lxxxviii} There was outrage when it was discovered that the body of the murdered man had been buried in a sack in the grounds of the army barracks. The outrage increased when it was discovered he had not died by the first shot and there was more anger when the officer charged with the murder (one Bowen-Colthurst) was found guilty but insane and released after eighteen months of incarceration.
- ^{lxxxix} O'Casey writes of Frank 'his beautiful nature, as far as this world is concerned, was consumed, leaving behind a hallowed and inspiring memory of the perfect love that casteth out fear, against which there can be no law' Sean O'Casey *Story of the Irish Citizens' Army* Dublin & London: Maunsell & Co, 1919, p.64
- ^{xc} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.187
- ^{xc} Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.20

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- ^{xcii} Anon 'The Plough and the Stars: Mr. Sean O'Casey's New Play' *Irish Times* 12 Jan 1926 cited in Lowery *Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.20
- ^{xciii} Gabriel Fallon 'The First Production of *The Plough and the Stars*' in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976), p.173
- ^{xciv} Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, p.20
- ^{xcv} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, was seated away from the active protesters, up in the balcony, in a seat that presumably must have been either pre-booked or became available on the night.
- ^{xcvi} The programme includes this remark: 'All seats in the theatre with exception of back pit may be booked.' Programme reprinted in *The Sean O'Casey Review* vol.2 no.2 (Spring 1976), pp.162-3
- ^{xcvii} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.274
- ^{xcviii} *ibid*, p.274
- ^{xcix} *ibid*, p.274 (my emphasis)
- ^c Gyles Brandreth, *Great Theatrical Disasters* London: Granada, 1982, p.131, see Introduction, endnote 16
- ^{ci} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington in *Irish World* 13 March, 1926, quoted in Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.273
- ^{cii} Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.275
- ^{ciii} Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington letter to the editor *Irish Independent* 15 Feb 1926, p.8 reproduced in Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, pp.57-8 See also Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.275
- ^{civ} As Ward has suggested, the Abbey's receipt of a state grant in 1925 ('unremarkable in these days of government sponsorship of the arts, unheard of in a country struggling to define itself in the midst of grudging acceptance and downright hostility') contributed to the sense of distance between audience members and theatre makers since 'the suspicion was that the new Irish government, desperate for allies, had resorted to buying its friends' Ward *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.273
- ^{cv} Ward, *Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington*, p.268

Chapter VII

'Revolutionary or Otherwise'ⁱ: *Paradise Now!* Berkeley California,
20 February 1969

The focus of this case study is a performance of *Paradise Now!* by the Living Theatre Company which took place at the Community Theatre in Berkeley, California on 20 February, 1969. *Paradise Now!* was the final offering of a three-night bill in Berkeley (the Company had already performed *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* on 18 February and *Frankenstein* on 19 February). The plan for *Paradise Now!* as represented on a paper given to the audience members on their way in to the venue,ⁱⁱ was for seven 'rungs' of actions and rituals performed by the actors with audience involvement. These rungs were designed to lead ultimately to 'Paradise': a pre-revolutionary state of mind in which actors and performers together would stream from the theatre into the street. Audience members had paid between three and five dollarsⁱⁱⁱ for the performance, which began at 8:30pm and was expected to last for three to four hours.

Pre-publicity for the performance had been minimal, as the company had been experiencing financial problems^{iv} but the theatre was full. The play's reputation had spread following controversy it had caused elsewhere on its tour of America. On the opening night of the very first show in Yale, Julian Beck (1925-1985) Judith Malina (1926-) and three other members of the company, along with some audience members, had been arrested for indecency when they had left the theatre unclothed.^v Since then, every one of the 103 performances around the country had attracted the close interest of the local authorities. On one occasion the play had been cancelled.^{vi} *Paradise Now!* had acquired a reputation as a confrontational performance with a high level of audience participation and a message of sexual, political and spiritual liberation.

Before the performance began on that Thursday night, the atmosphere in the theatre was described as 'extraordinary'.^{vii} The

audience were buzzing – not simply with the promise of the play to come but also with what had taken place on the streets that day. Since the founding of the student-led Free Speech Movement in 1964, Berkeley had been the hub of intense student activism, mostly centred round the University Campus, a few streets away from the theatre. The Free Speech Movement was active on many issues and on that Thursday 20 February, students were in the twenty-ninth day of a strike in support of demands for the foundation of a new autonomous college of ethnic studies.^{viii} Just a few hours before the performance was due to begin, Berkeley had seen some of the most serious confrontations between students and police it was ever to experience.

The pre-show atmosphere was highly charged and the audience, a potent mix of street-wise activists and radical artists, seemed very positive about the theatre experience to come. As one reporter commented: 'I have never been in a situation more congenial to the kind of spontaneous interaction of a true hippie group situation'.^{ix} Indeed, 'spontaneous interactions' began before the performers even appeared as the audience engaged in their own performance moments within the auditorium:

All sorts of audience-generated theatre events had already rippled through the crowd, evoking enthusiastic audience response: groups of people linking arms, chanting, sheets of plastic unfurled from the balcony.^x

The audience seemed enthusiastic at first. However, the audience's attitude quickly changed with the start of the performance itself.

The first rung began, as it always did, with 'The Rite of Guerrilla Theatre'. This involved actors chanting slogans at the audience, repeating them over and over in rising tones of anger. The slogans included, 'I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana'; 'You can't live without money' and 'I'm not allowed to take my clothes off' along with exhortations to the audience to become more politically active – 'Be the students at Colombia' (a reference to the political activism also taking place on that campus). At this point, according to Neff, audience members set up their

own chants of 'Bullshit! Bullshit!'^{xi} From this point on, Neff's account describes a building sense of antagonism, sustained heckling and, ultimately 'pandemonium' as angry students demanded that the box office proceeds be turned over to the bail fund for people arrested during the day. Neff also observed exchanges in the lobby between an actor and several enraged audience members:

A lady lawyer is commenting that New York must be 'very provincial' to have swallowed this. They are echoing the sentiments being vehemently expressed inside the theatre. Pointing to Julian who stands in the midst of the chaos on stage, the actor says, 'He's the manager. Go up and tell him how you feel.' 'No,' says the lady. 'That's just what he wants us to do, and we're not interested in that game'.^{xii}

Neff's version of events clearly suggests that audience members had specific objections with what was being presented to them and that the anger was fairly focussed. Other reports suggest that proceedings fell apart in a more confused way.

It appears there was so much noise and confusion amongst the participants that many people simply could not hear or see what was going on. According to the reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner* 'infants cried, dogs barked, children ran screaming through the aisles, for starters' while 'people milled about on the stage (at least half of the audience and the performers) so that anyone sitting in the seats for which he had paid \$5 had no chance of seeing the action' and 'it was necessary to climb on stage and even to stand on chairs to observe anything'.^{xiii} According to Judith Malina's diary, further confusion was added when someone set off the fire alarms and axe-wielding firefighters in raincoats mingled with the spectators.^{xiv} Malina notes, 'everyone makes fun of them. They are presumed to be the allies of the police. People are rude to them.'^{xv} Reading the different accounts, it becomes uncertain whether the audience's responses expressed anger at what was on offer or indifference born of a preoccupation with doing their own thing.

Audience members expressed a range of responses ranging from appreciation of the performance to angry rejection of it. Some audience members (around 100 'devotees' according to the *Tribune's* reporter)^{xvi} stayed to the end, participating and, presumably appreciating the performance. The vast majority simply left the theatre. Some stayed to grumble about the amount of money they had paid for their tickets. Others attempted to engage in the 'debates' being offered by the performers – the tone of these is described with some irritation in *San Francisco Examiner's* review: 'bursts of savage and irrational invective, directed by the inarticulate actors at the much brighter groovier youngsters in attendance'.^{xvii} Still others engaged in openly sexual behaviour: 'several young couples . . . decided to enliven the dull proceedings by making unabashed love on the stage'.^{xviii} In this case, it is unclear whether they were expressing their rejection of the theatre relationship on offer or an appreciation of the liberation it offered. There was so much noise, and confusion, the audience was so divided and fluid that individual audience members must have experienced the event very differently.

What is clear from all accounts is that the audience really dominated over the theatre makers:

The evening consisted of the spontaneous carryings-on of a gradually dwindling audience, methodically punctuated every 15 minutes or so by a Living Theatre 'bit'.^{xix}

This comment, from a newspaper critic within the audience, is backed up by comments from the actors themselves. In her diary, Judith Malina, sick with the flu and unable to perform, describes sitting in the dressing room and listening to the performance disappear into 'the Paradise Party'. She describes how 'one by one the exhausted actors staggered into the dressing rooms panting "they really have us", "we can't get through to them" "They don't hear us."'^{xx} In the almost universally negative press response, one reviewer acknowledges a moment of 'real and direct contact with a real audience' when the Living Theatre,

renowned for their non-violent beliefs, began to denounce the Berkeley street fighting.^{xxi} Other than in this moment, the theatre makers – drained already from an exhausting tour schedule, battered by past confrontations with unhappy audiences, dogged with ongoing financial and health problems and unsettled by the violent events of the day – felt very little control over ‘their’ performance.

The evening came to an end at 12:30 although the performance had not been completed. The evening had been slowed down considerably by the heckling, the firefighters and all the other occurrences. At some point, also, agents from the Internal Revenue Service arrived at the theatre. They attempted (unsuccessfully) to impound the box office takings and announced that they would be seizing all future takings.^{xxii} By 12:30 the performers had only staggered through the first five ‘rungs’ of the eight ‘rungs’ of *Paradise Now!*. Their contract with the theatre included an agreement to close the theatre at midnight so the performance was ceased. Malina describes the exit of the dispirited performers.

We file out between the flashing lights of the fire engines
that surround the building. There is a midnight curfew.
Nobody is together enough to even suggest defying it^{xxiii}

This description is a marked contrast to the planned ending of the piece in which performers, chanting slogans would lead audience members out to the street towards revolution.

Apparently, someone from outside the troupe suggested leading the audience out the back way, through a door, which would bring them out in front of the police station. Malina’s recollections show how flat and lacking in revolutionary fervour the group were feeling at this point: ‘Julian opens the back doors of the theatre but nobody chooses to make this the time to be hit on the head’.^{xxiv} The final irony of the evening (‘either interesting or superfluous to note’, says Neff ‘depending on your point of view’) is that the Berkeley performance of *Paradise Now!* was the first to attract no attention from the police or other authorities.

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- ⁱ This was the headline for a report on the Living Theatre's visit to Berkeley, that appeared in the *Daily Californian* 28 Feb 1969, pp.11 & 18
- ⁱⁱ It is not entirely clear whether the programme, which acted as a map of the performance, was handed out at the Berkeley performance of *Paradise Now!* None of the press commentators make mention of having received the programme but, equally, none of the performers mention its omission.
- ⁱⁱⁱ This information is taken from an advertisement for the Living Theatre in *Berkeley Barb* 7-13 Feb 1969, p.25
- ^{iv} Renfrue Neff *The Living Theatre: USA* Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1974, p.205
- ^v The actors wore jockstraps and bikinis, the minimal legal requirement of clothing. Some audience members, including the young man arrested stripped off completely.
- ^{vi} Productions of *Antigone* and *Paradise Now!* scheduled for 7-8 November at MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts were cancelled by MIT administration, see Neff, p.240
- ^{vii} J. Rockwell *Oakland Tribune* 22 Feb 1969, p.53
- ^{viii} A more recent provocation was Governor Ronald Reagan's threat to dismiss a University of California professor, Herbert Marcuse, because of his leftist views. Herbert Marcuse, the author of *One Dimensional Man* was a professor at UC, San Diego, see John Tytell *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage* New York: Grove Press, 1995, p.254
- ^{ix} Rockwell, p.53
- ^x *ibid*, p.53
- ^{xi} Neff, p.168
- ^{xii} *ibid*, pp.168-9
- ^{xiii} Rockwell, p.53
- ^{xiv} Judith Malina *The Enormous Despair* New York: Random House, 1972, p.184
- ^{xv} *ibid*, p.184
- ^{xvi} Rockwell, p.53
- ^{xvii} Jeanne Miller 'Play and Clothes Fail to Come Off' *San Francisco Examiner* 22 Feb 1969 p.8
- ^{xviii} *ibid*, p.8
- ^{xix} Rockwell, p.53
- ^{xx} Malina, p.183
- ^{xxi} Rockwell, p.53
- ^{xxii} Neff, p.169
- ^{xxiii} Malina, p.185
- ^{xxiv} *ibid*, p.185

Chapter VIII

The Theatre Makers: Beck, Malina and The Living Theatre Company

The Living Theatre has been described as ‘the most influential of the experimental groups which emerged from America’ⁱ and, as ‘perhaps America’s most influential political company.’ⁱⁱ The group also has the distinction of being one of the most long-lived alternative theatre companies to emerge in the 1960s – it is still in existence at the time of writing, forty years on.ⁱⁱⁱ The current Living Theatre website includes the following ‘mission’ statement which reveals something of the group’s underlying philosophy:

Mission: To call into question who we are to each other in the social environment of the theatre. To undo the knots that lead to misery. To spread ourselves across the public’s table like platters at a banquet. To set ourselves in motion like a vortex that pulls the spectator into action. To fire the body’s secret engines. To pass through the prism and come out a rainbow. To insist that what happens in the jails matters. To cry ‘not in my name!’ at the hour of execution. To move from the theatre to the street and from the street to the theatre.

This is what the Living Theatre does today. It is what it has always done.^{iv}

Though this statement was written many years after the performance that is the focus for this case study, many of the group’s ideas have remained unchanged: as the statement says ‘this is what the Living Theatre does today. It is what it has always done’. Then, as now, the group’s over-riding focus was on personal growth (‘to undo the knots that lead to misery’), aesthetic challenge (‘to pass through the prism and come out a rainbow’) and an engagement with political and social issues (‘to insist that what happens in the jails matters’). The intention was to spark the audience member into political activity (‘to set ourselves in motion like a vortex that pulls the spectator into action’) and to achieve this through a physical corporeal experience for both spectator and theatre maker (‘to fire the body’s secret engines’). *Paradise Now!* was

driven by just these concerns and it was this work, more than any other, that epitomized the Living Theatre's other major objectives – to challenge the theatre relationship ('to call into question who we are to each other in the social environment of the theatre') and to break down the barriers between theatre and social reality ('to move from the theatre to the street and from the street to the theatre'). Thus, just as the *Samhain* declaration provides a written statement of the Abbey theatre maker's intentions, the Living Theatre's mission statement provides a useful, though retrospective, starting point from which to assess the theatre maker's view of the relationship in this case,^v and just as the *Samhain* document was easily identified with Yeats, the philosophy behind the Living Theatre was always clearly that of its founders.

Like the Abbey Theatre, the Living Theatre was always strongly associated with its founding figureheads, in this case husband and wife Julian Beck and Judith Malina who founded the group in the late 1940s. The Living Theatre's figureheads were even more clearly in control than the Abbey's had been. Though the company was an ever-changing body of people, numbering up to sixty men women and children,^{vi} its identity, and philosophies came almost entirely from its founders. Jack Gelber (a playwright who worked closely with the Living Theatre over a number of years) makes it clear just how dominant the two were:

Make no mistake about who ran the Living Theatre. Julian Beck did not let control slip from his fingers. Julian ran the Living Theatre. Judith did all the directing. And together they are synonymous with the dream they christened the Living Theatre in the late 40s.^{vii}

So, in order to portray the theatre makers' intentions in this case, it may be sufficient to talk about the aspirations of the two people whose 'dream' it was. It was their personal and political beliefs and their artistic experiences and influences that fed directly into the content, form and intentions of their work, including *Paradise Now!*.

Beck and Malina, like O'Casey, were political activists in their early life and this clearly influenced the way they saw the theatre relationship. As Gelber says, 'Julian Beck was a revolutionary leader . . . one has to appreciate that fact'.^{viii} Their politics were different from O'Casey's in that the Becks were unswerving anarchist-pacifists (attending meetings and demonstrations from the late 1940s onwards). They also differed from O'Casey in that they made no distinction between the polemic style of political essay writing, and the style of their performances. It was their intention that every performance should have an uncompromising political message:

Let every play you do proclaim or sneak in some of the poetry of man . . . Say again and again break down the walls, even if you cannot find a good way to say it, it will help.^{ix}

As this statement suggests, the political was given such a priority within the Living Theatre's performances, that it took precedence over everything else, including the aesthetic quality of the performance. From these theatre makers' point of view, the 'sufficiency' of their work was measured by the message rather than the medium. This was a version of the theatre relationship with which, one suspects, O'Casey would have disagreed. It was one that some audience members found hard to take. Whilst they placed political impact at the heart of their theatre relationships, Beck and Malina's work did have artistic aims and these evolved out of their artistic experiences and the context of the times.

Much of the Living Theatre's later work, including *Paradise Now!*, was based on improvised, spontaneous performance. This valuing of the spontaneous can be seen as a product of the 1950s art scene in America into which the Living Theatre first emerged. During this period there was a concern with improvisation and spontaneity running across all art forms: 'gesture' painting and 'beat' writing are the best known examples of this approach but, as Daniel Belgrad points out:

the impulse to valorize spontaneous improvisation runs like a long thread through the cultural fabric of the

period, appearing also in bebop jazz music, in modern dance and performance art, in ceramic sculpture, and in philosophical, psychological and critical writings. To study each of these media in isolation is to miss the general importance of the spontaneous gesture as a sign of the times.^x

This 'aesthetic of spontaneity' attracted Beck, Malina and other young people in the late 1950s because of its sense of artistic licence and also as a symbol of shifting social mores.^{xi} For a generation emerging from the Second World War, the 'aesthetic of spontaneity' was a way to articulate their disillusionment with humanity and social norms and to reject the two dominant art forms on offer – xenophobic 'popular culture' and establishment 'high art'. The embracing of the spontaneous can be seen as closely akin to the 'embracing of disruption' that had characterised the modernist period, and there are clear associations between the avant-garde risk-taking of Jarry and other European modernists, discussed earlier,^{xii} and the energy that drove the development of 'alternative' or 'counterculture' in the America of the 1950s and 1960s in which the Living Theatre was to play an enthusiastic part. Having stated earlier that all three of these case studies occurred in a twentieth century context, where disruption was part of the horizon of expectations, it is nevertheless important to recognise that the theatre makers involved with the Living Theatre were the most conscious of their avant-garde antecedents. Though they started their theatre careers working with scripted theatre (including their own translation of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*), by 1969 they had fully embraced an aesthetic of the spontaneous and this was at the core of the theatre relationship on offer for the performance of *Paradise Now!*.^{xiii}

Beck and Malina's early years as avid theatregoers, frequenters of art galleries and voracious readers of literature and philosophy, provided them with a diverse set of creative influences across a range of art forms. Before founding their own theatre, Beck and Malina read a wide range of plays and attended an extraordinary number of performances – up to four per week.^{xiv} They also wrote many letters to

the theatre makers whose work they had seen, seeking their advice and guidance in setting up a theatre.^{xv} Malina spent two years from 1945 training with Erwin Piscator (she later wrote: 'he never knew how I trembled before him or how all my work is in his honour')^{xvi} and certain aspects of the Living Theatre's staging, such as the towering metal stage set of *Frankenstein* (1965), could be seen as being influenced by his epic designs.^{xvii} Meanwhile Beck's largely unsuccessful^{xviii} efforts to become a serious painter brought them into contact with some of the key figures in experimental visual art during the 1950s including Robert Rauschenberg^{xix} and Jackson Pollock.^{xx} These visual artists were questioning the basis of their own art form, challenging their viewers to think in new and uncomfortable ways about their relationship to art and the artist. As Beck wrote later, 'the painting of Pollock and De Kooning was implying a life which the theatre didn't know existed.'^{xxi} In many ways, the Living Theatre was formed out of an urge to carry the revolution that was happening in visual art through to theatre performance. Beck and Malina were also influenced by their exposure to other art forms, notably the anti-harmonic musical experimentation of John Cage^{xxii} (who was a personal friend), the dance of Merce Cunningham and the poetry of Charles Olson and M.C. Richards. Cage and Olson's early experiments with 'Happenings'^{xxiii} staged at the Black Mountain College were an important stimulation.^{xxiv} With these influences, it was perhaps inevitable that the work of the Living Theatre would be highly experimental.

The Living Theatre began life as part of the 'Off-Broadway'^{xxv} scene in New York and this was where Beck and Malina served an apprenticeship in text-based theatre before they moved into the devised approach that would culminate in *Paradise Now!*. Their work on the 'Off-Broadway scene' in New York, saw them exploring Absurdism and avant-garde text-based theatre.^{xxvi} At this stage of their development, they offered a very different kind of theatre relationship from that which

would emerge in their later work: here their principal concern was with the transformative power of spoken language:

The Becks were convinced that only the purity of language wielded by poets would be an effective salvo in the fight to change theatre, to change the mind-set of the public.^{xxvii}

Beck and Malina would later reject their early work as naïve and uninteresting: in 1963 Beck wrote, 'we said we'd make a theatre that would do something else. – now fifteen years later, we know we haven't'.^{xxviii} Certainly they moved right away from their beliefs about poetic language: their later work including *Paradise Now!* was more concerned to explore the limitations and inadequacies of language. However, although they turned their back on 'Off Broadway', its influence continued to be important in their later work.^{xxix}

The most lasting influence of the 'Off Broadway' period, as Theodore Shank argues in his *Alternative Theatre*, was the way the Living Theatre continued the Absurdist's obsession with centralising and questioning notions of the 'Real'.^{xxx} The Living Theatre continued to explore the 'real' in a number of ways right through the 1960s and this was a critical part of their theatre offerings. First of all, there was an unremitting search for 'real' images, in reaction against the 'phoneyess' of Broadway, expressed here by Beck:

I do not like the Broadway theatre because it does not know how to say hello. The tone of voice is false, the mannerisms are false, the sex is false, ideal, the Hollywood world of perfection, the clean image, the well pressed clothes, the well scrubbed anus, odorless, inhuman, of the Hollywood actor, the Broadway star. And the terrible false dirt of Broadway, the lower depths in which the dirt is imitated, inaccurate.^{xxxi}

The Living Theatre also had a desire to engage with the 'real world', in the sense of engaging with the social reality going on outside the theatre: as Shank puts it, 'for these social activists it was essential that the audience be made to focus on the real world where the changes were

needed.^{xxxii} Finally, there was a focus on ‘realness’ in terms of the engagement between the ‘real’ live performer and the ‘psychically present’ spectator. Over the years, the Living theatre experimented with different ways to engage the audience in ‘genuine’ relationships. They developed an acting style that emphasized the realness of the actor and through them the realness of the issue being addressed. They also made increased use of participation and spectator-initiated performance, as we shall see later in the chapter.^{xxxiii} So, ‘realness’, in its various forms as distinct from ‘falseness’ was in the foreground of the theatre relationships on offer and this particularly true of *Paradise Now!*. Another aspect of ‘Off Broadway’ that stayed with The Living Theatre was its anti-commercial approach to theatre making.

The Living Theatre was always non-commercial, even anti-commercial and this fed into the content and practicalities of their performances. As anarchists, Beck and Malina sought to question the role of money in society: all their performances had a pared-down esoteric feel to them and *Paradise Now!* even included a direct challenge to audience members to tear up or burn their money. At the same time, they were a professional theatre company so, in terms of their own operations, the issue was more complex.^{xxxiv} There was always a tension between their beliefs and the practical necessities of running a functional business, as Gelber observes:

Half of Julian worked to eliminate cash as the enemy of the good life, while the other half made dozens of day-to-day decisions about the green stuff. Business was determined by principles other than the profit motive. How to live with irreconcilables was a pill Julian took more than once a day.^{xxxv}

One of the Living Theatre’s irreconcilable issues over money was whether, or how much to charge the audience for their performances. The group struggled with the idea of charging their audience money for tickets – at one stage they only asked for donations.^{xxxvi} Even in later years, some performances were given for free or, where admission was

charged the policy was that people unable to pay should be allowed in.^{xxxvii} Though audience members at *Paradise Now!* in 1969 paid a reasonably high ticket price for the performance, this was largely because the show was part of an organized tour and some sort of financial return was necessary: the Becks never changed their view that money made people slaves to ‘the whole blood-money, man-barter system.’^{xxxviii} The group also ran into problems because of their inability and reluctance to pay taxes to a government they did not support: it was a protracted dispute with the US Revenue Department that led the Living Theatre to leave the United States in 1957.

1957 was also the year that Beck and Malina had their first experience of jail, when they each spent thirty days in prison for demonstrating against a Civil Defence air raid drill.^{xxxix} The experience shook them badly and influenced their theatre making thereafter. Tytell says that for Malina, prison was a ‘turning point’ while for Beck ‘the experience had shaken his foundations and changed his bearings’.^{xl} He goes on:

Prison hardened Judith and Julian. They would become even more vocal in their opposition to an age of apathy and abundance, both on- and off-stage.^{xli}

The effects of this time in prison would emerge in the Living Theatre’s work in quite specific ways. From this point on, including in *Paradise Now!* the Living Theatre’s work often expressed outspoken opposition to prisons and other forms of state punishment. As the mission statement says, it remains a concern of the group to this day to ‘insist that what happens in the jails matters’. Beck and Malina would spend more time in custody in future including, as we shall see, for indecency and public order offences related to *Paradise Now!*. If 1957 was a critical year personally and politically, it was also the year in which the Beck’s encountered their most seminal artistic influence – the writings of Antonin Artaud.

Beck and Malina were introduced to the work of Artaud by M.C. Richards of Black Mountain who had been translating Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* into English, and left her galleys with Beck; making him, as Tytell points out, one of the first Americans to encounter the work in English.^{xiii} Beck found much inspiration in Artaud's manifesto, particularly his criticisms of the traditional forms of Western theatre that appeal to the rational mind and thus can not, and do not try to, affect the spectator in any lasting way: 'No more personal poems benefiting those who write them more than those who read them', urges Artaud.^{xiii} Beck was excited by Artaud's vision of a 'Theatre of Cruelty' and his belief in the power of theatre to transform the subconscious mind through the body:

Theatre is the only place in the world, the last group means we still possess of directly affecting the anatomy, and in neurotic, basely sensual periods like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking that base sensuality through physical means it cannot withstand.^{xliv}

Artaud's writing, his attitude to the audience and his belief in the transformative power of the excoriating theatre experience, articulated for Beck and Malina much of what they believed theatre could be: 'total theatre' in which images predominate over words, psychological clarity is avoided and the aim is to 'affect every facet of the spectator's sensibility' by putting them, with the actors, through an experience of theatre something akin to the scourging effects of a plague.^{xlv} Beck was particularly affected and from the time he was exposed to Artaud's theories, his writing and planning increasingly took on the tone and language of Artaud's approach, as this extract from a journal demonstrates:

To make something useful. Nothing else is interesting. Nothing else is interesting to the audience, the great audience. To serve the audience, to instruct, to excite sensation, to initiate experience, to awaken awareness, to make the heart pound, the blood course, the tears flow, the voice shout, to circle round the altar, the

muscles move in laughter, the body feel, to be released from death's ways, deterioration in comfort. To provide the useful event that can help us. Help.^{xlvi}

After 1957, as they became increasingly disillusioned with Off Broadway and moved towards forging a new identity, the Living Theatre's work became more and more an exploration of Artaud's ideas. So, the later work including *Paradise Now!* may be seen as an attempt to realize an Artaudian theatre relationship in actual performance situations, something that Artaud himself was never to do.^{xlvii}

It was some time before the Living Theatre staged a piece that was consciously Artaudian in approach. Pierre Biner suggests 'this was not to come until several years later with *The Brig* (1964) Kenneth Brown's play about the inmates of a prison.^{xlviii} However, it is possible to see early signs of Artaud's influence on the Living Theatre's main 'hit' during their time on 14th Street - Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1957). It is also possible to see certain ideas in the play that fed forward into *Paradise Now!*. *The Connection* was a 'supernaturalistic' work in which actors played drug addicts waiting for a fix.^{xlix} It was not framed as a conventional performance but as if a real group of drug addicts was gathering to film a movie one of them had written. Against a collage of spontaneous jazz music, performed live by musicians, the actors appeared to shoot up for real and exhibited the effects of the drugs in a disturbingly convincing manner. Biner comments:

Not resting content with merely performing, being intent on playing on the spectator's nerves as well as on his mind, these were the signs of a spontaneous move towards Artaud'.¹

Beck's comments about the play, given in an interview to *Theatre Arts* magazine, also give an insight into his thinking at this time. He appears to be attempting to marry Artaudian concepts with his continuing interest in poetic language:

We believe in the theatre as a place of intense experience, half dream, half ritual, in which the

spectator approaches something of a vision of self-understanding, going past the conscious to the unconscious, to an understanding of all things. And it seems to us that only the language of poetry can accomplish this; only poetry or a language laden with symbols and far removed from our daily speech can take us beyond the ignorant present towards those realms.ⁱⁱ

In spite of Beck's claims for the necessity of poetic language, *The Connection* did mark an Artaudian shift away from poetic texts towards the highly physical performance style that would characterize their subsequent performances.

The Connection contained several other features that would also become hallmarks of the Living Theatre's performance style in the future, including in *Paradise Now!*. One enduring feature was the raw, untutored acting style. After producing *The Connection*, Beck and Malina never again trained members of the company according to traditional ideas of stage movement and voice. Actors were accepted into the group not for their acting talent but for their willingness to work in new experimental ways. Spiritual and even sexual openness were as important as technical skill. Biner claims that 'the only criterion [for entry into the group] is the possibility of harmonious development as a member of the community.'ⁱⁱⁱ Subsequent productions also continued the idea of employing simple costume and an uncomplicated set: in most productions after this time the group would wear only their ordinary street clothes. For *Paradise Now* they wore the most minimal clothing possible, placing the emphasis on the body itself. As for set, often there was none and where there was, even a production like *Frankenstein* with its towering three-storey metal set, retained a low-budget feel. In part this esoteric approach reflected the realities of the Living Theatre's financial situation. In part it was a continuation of that exploration of the real that had begun with the Absurdists. In part, too, the raw style was a political statement, as Beck describes:

Judith and I have worked to build a company without the mannerisms, the voices, the good speech, the

protective colouring of the actors who imitate the White House and who enact the trifles and suffering of the bourgeoisie. The world of conscious experience is not enough.^{liii}

With this play, then, the group defined some important aspects of its aesthetic for the future. Another aspect of *The Connection* that had implications for the group's development was its popular success.

Though initially rejected by critics, *The Connection* was eventually lauded by critics and audiences alike. It ran for more than 700 performances at the 14th Street theatre, and the group was awarded three 'Obies' for best Off Broadway play, best director and best performance.^{liv} Four years after it opened, one article described the opening of the play as 'a historical event' and linked it in importance to Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in the development of the 'New American Theatre'.^{lv} For the first time, the Living Theatre found itself popular with middle class audience members and writers on theatre.^{lvi} However, the response of the group to this success was to try, if anything, to avoid such a thing happening again. In an interview in 1961 Malina said 'I wonder whether all this current popularity is because of what we really are, or because suddenly we're 'in' and fashionable',^{lvii} and Beck added:

We don't reject success because that means we're communicating – which is important – but simultaneously it makes us keep taking stock and wondering if we aren't doing something wrong.^{lviii}

When assessing the 'success' or 'failure' of later plays including *Paradise Now!* it is important to remember that the Becks had their own notions of what 'success' meant and a suspicion of anything that looked like official approval from the state. As Beck put it, 'when the state heaps honours on art it is a way of saying this art is safe for the ruling class. Beware of approval and official support.'^{lix} Possibly, given their anarchist politics and their alignment with Artaud, they felt more of a sense of achievement where they alienated audiences or upset the authorities, as

they did with *Paradise Now!*. If so, they would have felt very pleased with their next production, *The Brig*.

With *The Brig*, the group became more consciously Artaudian in their approach and with this they put in place some principles for theatre making that would inform their future creations, including *Paradise Now!*. The play, written by Kenneth Brown, was an attempt to evoke the atmosphere of a high security prison for marines. Twelve inmates appeared in a large wire cage, separated from the audience by barbed wire. The performance is described here by one audience member who called it 'the most unpleasant, frustrating, and surprising experience I had in the theatre all year':^{lx}

Outside the cage are four sadistic guards who force the prisoners to do menial tasks, to obey stupid rules, to stand up straight while being punched in the solar plexus. The prisoners are known only by their given numbers (or by the common address of 'maggot' or 'worm') they may read nothing but the Marine Corps Manual; they may not talk to each other or receive messages from outside; and each time they intend to cross any of the white lines scattered around the stage they must address the guards, "Sir, prisoner number . . . requests permission to cross the white line sir."

In a precursor to the non-scripted approach the Living Theatre would adopt in future, the performance did not include any sense of plot, characterization or traditional stage action other than the moment when one inmate cracks under the strain and is dragged off in a strait jacket. There was no traditional script either: the 'text' consisted of forty pages of detailed instructions for routines, to be followed closely by the actors (something that may have inspired the chart that supplied the structure for *Paradise Now!*). The routines, as with *Paradise Now!*, were designed to be difficult for the audience to endure. The audience member quoted earlier describes the experience of watching the performance:

The production is, to be honest, uncompromisingly excruciating, for the stage noise – feet stamping, unison shouting in response to commands, the endless repetition of requests for permission – is incessant and

stupefying. . . After several minutes of racket, we feel the impulse to leave (and many do exit); the “show” is simply too hard to take. And, if I understand the purposes of the Living Theatre, we are supposed to want to leave.^{lxi}

In *The Brig* as in *Paradise Now!*, the terms of the theatre relationship did not include comfort or entertainment. Instead, true to the principles of Artaud’s total theatre, the aim was to put actors and audience members alike through a gruelling experience. In this case it was for the purposes of recreating the dehumanising rigours of prison existence.^{lxii} In future, it would be intended to bring about personal and social transformation. In both cases, the audience were not intended to ‘enjoy’ the experience but be emotionally and physically confronted and challenged by it and, indeed, to ‘want to leave’. If confrontation and challenge towards the audience became a confirmed part of the Living Theatre’s oeuvre with *The Brig*, they were also central to the actors’ experience of this play.

Malina directed *The Brig* in an unusual and challenging way that affected relationships between members of the group and was to inform rehearsal practice into the future. In an attempt to put the actors through an experience akin to the rigours of the Marine brig, the director instituted a set of rigid rehearsal doctrines:

Rehearsal Discipline Rules:

Actors will sign in before Rehearsal Time is called. Actors should arrive five minutes prior to called time, in the auditorium, to be ready for places when called.

During Rehearsal Time, actors who are not on stage will remain in the auditorium, ready to be called unless specifically dismissed by the stage manager.

During Rehearsal Time, there is to be no business or discussion other than that relating to the rehearsal.

No eating during Rehearsal Time.

Actors not required on stage may smoke in the first rows of the auditorium, where ash trays will be provided. No

smoking in other parts of the auditorium. Backstage rules will be posted by the stage manager.^{lxiii}

Actors were punished for chatting, causing delays, being uncooperative or wearing the wrong clothing. Jewellery and other decorative items were not allowed and the actors were expected to attend rehearsal in the T-shirts and pants or the uniforms they would wear for performance. This approach placed an enormous strain on the company, particularly because they were accustomed to working in an informal way.^{lxiv} Nonetheless, this holistic, experiential approach to rehearsal – an embodiment of Artaud’s principles – was an approach to which the Living Theatre aspired in all its future work. The other way in which this play had lasting resonance for the company was in the circumstances of its final performance at the 14th Street theatre.

By the time *The Brig* was performed in 1963, the Living Theatre was facing collapse through lack of funds. Debts were mounting, actors and others had not received wages and there was an unpaid tax bill of \$23,000. Things finally came to a head in August 1963 with the seizure of the Living Theatre’s 14th Street premises by the IRS (Inland Revenue Service). The Living Theatre responded by staging a sit-in inside the theatre. This lasted for three days and attracted widespread press attention.^{lxv} From the Living Theatre’s point of view this was not only good publicity, it was also a political act – a piece of anarchist direct action:

It had to do with something real as opposed to something abstract, with something warm as opposed to something cold, with something which was saying we want a society in which taxes don’t count and in which art and human beings do . . .^{lxvi}

The most important moment occurred on the Friday night with a ‘siege’ performance of *The Brig*. Audience members found ways into the building, over the roof and through windows, and a performance took place in the sealed-off auditorium, under the noses of the IRS men. To

the Living Theatre and their supporters, this performance had huge symbolic importance:

It was a performance which was in itself an act of civil disobedience. It was not a message play, not a play of protest, it was a protest against a whole life in which everything is measured by Mammon's thumb. No.^{lxvii}

Whereas to others, the Living Theatre's actions seemed like 'the most adolescent kind of law breaking',^{lxviii} to the members of the group, the siege performance was a triumph. In a sense, the siege performance represented the ideal theatre relationship from the Living Theatre's point of view: it saw theatre makers and audience members engaged in a theatre event which by its very presence was an act of rebellion against the forces of the state. Though a hopeless act, the siege performance felt like a glorious moment of non-violent opposition to societal forces. One could argue that the impetus behind later performances, including *Paradise Now!*, was an attempt to rediscover the intensity and relevance in a theatre relationship that they found in this siege performance.

The Living Theatre thrived in this atmosphere of challenge and opposition and they fed this image of themselves into their theatre relationships from this time on. After the closure of their theatre, Jack Gelber, maintains that Beck worked hard to cultivate the group's image as 'embattled revolutionaries, misunderstood artists and disturbing theatre people'^{lxix} in order to validate them to their peers and their audiences:

Every revolutionary movement needs its mythology; and as a leader, Julian promoted this fighting underdog image. The artist as victim went over well with writers, painters and musicians who were also trying to survive the claustrophobia of the '50s. They were the eyes and ears the Living Theatre wanted to reach.^{lxx}

If the mythology around the siege performance of *The Brig* did the Living Theatre's image no harm, neither did their subsequent 'exile' in Europe. For, *The Brig* was to be the Living Theatre's last production from an American base.^{lxxi} In 1964, after a trial in which they were found guilty,

fined and sentenced to prison, they left the country for Europe where they had a contract to perform *The Brig*^{lxxii} and they opted to stay there in self-imposed exile until the 1968 tour of which this case study was a part.^{lxxiii} The coverage they received in Europe, saw them portrayed as political activists thrown out of their country for their beliefs and this further enhanced their image. With the change of continent and change of image came several important changes in the style of the Living Theatre's work.

After the shift to Europe, the Living Theatre's work became more overtly political and less text-based. Beck and Malina had always been active in political causes outside of their work^{lxxiv} and from 1964 onwards they began to express their anarchist-pacifist views more openly in their theatre making. As part of this change of emphasis they moved away from performing scripts written by others to devising their own works through which they could express their political beliefs more directly. The first of these devised works was *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, which would go on to become the most successful of the Living Theatre's European productions. *Mysteries* was probably the most important predecessor to *Paradise Now!* in terms of its structure, content and intentions. The performance took the form of nine 'ritual games' based on the techniques used by the company in training – an episodic structure that would be repeated in *Paradise Now!*. Through these rituals the group expressed their unique blend of the political with the artistic and the spiritual. Beck and Malina had a growing interest in Eastern religions and elements of these were now incorporated too. The performance included long periods of stillness and silence, a marching scene reminiscent of *The Brig*, a Hindu chant, a political poem by Jackson McLow,^{lxxv} a series of *tableaux vivants* – flashes of light which revealed actors randomly posed in plywood frames and a version of the 'Chord' – a group humming ritual introduced by Joseph Chaikin.^{lxxvi} Already, the group was implying the link between personal transformation and social change; a philosophy that would be central to *Paradise Now!*. Politically,

the piece offered fairly straightforward messages. Artistically, with its non-narrative, non-textual structure, *Mysteries* came closer than previous performances to achieving Beck's attested goal to 'shake off the shackles of theatrical strictures'.^{lxxvii} As before, the performance required no set or special costumes and only basic lighting. It did not even need to be performed in a theatre building. More significantly, for this discussion, it also featured the company's first real experiments with audience participation and confrontation.

There were a number of different versions of *Mysteries*, and the variations involved the company 'playing with' the audience in different ways. In all versions, the audience's senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell were tested with the use of light and darkness, silence and noise and the passing round of incense. Audience members' sense of patience was tested too, as the play included passages that were deliberately long and drawn out. At times the actors brought the action right up to the audience and forced them to engage: later versions of the performance concluded with a graphic plague scene based on Artaud's description of the plague of Marseille in 1720^{lxxviii} in which, for over half an hour, the actors enacted the effects of the plague on the human body, struggling with 'long-repressed vices' awoken by the disease before going into agonising death-throes:

Some actors clutch their bodies – spluttering, blubbering, groaning, gasping – writhing on the ground. Overcome by fear and panic, the actors drop to the floor; others roll off the stage and lurch into the audience. In tears, salivating, staggering, shuddering, actors grasp the arms of the aisle seats, doubling over at the feet of audience members.^{lxxix}

At other times the audience were provoked by disengagement, like the start of the performance where 'an actor [stood] at attention on an empty stage, completely motionless, lit from the side only.'^{lxxx} The scene would only proceed after some sort of reaction had been offered from the audience. As Tytell says 'this ploy was pure provocation. By expecting that some audience response would begin the play, the Living Theatre

was signalling its priorities'.^{lxxxix} The group were beginning to shift performance power, forcing audience members to begin to take an active role, something that would become even more central in *Paradise Now!*. However, perhaps the most extreme experiments with the theatre relationship occurred with the very first production of *Mysteries*.

The first time *Mysteries* was performed, the evening concluded, not with the plague scene but with an experiment in totally 'free' or 'jazz' theatre in which participants could improvise in whatever way they chose. This experiment with free theatre, and the company's reasons for not repeating it, are interesting in light of the later development of *Paradise Now!*. The audience were a group of Paris-based artists and students who, according to Malina were particularly open to an experimental theatre relationship. Malina recalls that the improvisation went on for something like three hours:

A great many spectators took part in it, and it spilled out into the auditorium, the lobby, the street . . . Some of them performed 'choices' that were really beautiful and absorbing, although some were sort of extravagant, more foolish than horrible..^{lxxxii}

Performance 'choices' included a moment reminiscent of John Cage's experiments, in which a musician climbed into a grand piano and played it from inside and another where audience members piled the seats into a huge pile and proceeded to climb on top, doing Nazi-style salutes and screaming 'fuck your mother!'^{lxxxiii} It is clear that the occasion caused some disagreement in the group between those, like Malina, who appreciated the spontaneous gesture and those, like Beck, who found it facile. In an interview with Pierre Biner, Malina says they discussed it endlessly before deciding 'not to talk about it anymore, so as to appease everybody'.^{lxxxiv} Within the interview, Malina argues that it is impossible to pass value judgement on the spontaneous gesture: 'when you do "free theatre" you cannot say that this is bad and this is good' while Beck expresses some impatience with an approach that allowed audience members to 'act like eight year old kids':

Trouble is that when a spectator in a free theatre shouts 'fuck your mother' it is an idea rather than a burst of creative sound.^{lxxxv}

Beck makes the case for performance power to be reserved for those who are able, through rehearsal, to reach beyond consciousness and attain a special level of inspiration. Though he suggests that spectators can be involved in this privileged process, he seems to be arguing for the preserving of the traditional division of performance power within the theatre relationship. This is significant given that *Paradise Now!* would appear to offer a different dynamic. Though they never repeated their experiments in free theatre, it was clear that experiments with audience relations were to be central concerns of the Living Theatre's work in Europe.

After *Mysteries* the group began living communally; a major lifestyle change that had a marked influence on their relations with each other and on their future projects. The Living Theatre group had not lived as a unit in the USA: as Gelber observes, 'what prevented the company from gelling into a cell, tribe, or extended family was New York life itself.'^{lxxxvi} Now based in Europe, the 'gelling' process really began. In November 1964, they moved into a borrowed farmhouse at Heist in Belgium. Apart from a brief period of dislocation when Malina and Beck served their prison sentences back in America, the farmhouse was to be their base until early 1965. With communal living the group dynamic became stronger and more intense. As Shank observes, communal living was something of a feature of alternative theatre groups in the 1960s and 'for the individual participant, the theatre companies frequently served as a total community'.^{lxxxvii} Though Shank is writing about the scene in America, his comments apply even more strongly to the Living Theatre living in an isolated farmhouse in a foreign country:

The theatre group and the work in which they were engaged provided the individual with family, work, education and recreation. It also provided a social

experience not usually available in the established culture as membership of these companies cut across traditional lines.^{lxxxviii}

The 'social experience' on offer to those in the Living Theatre community included the extensive use of recreational drugs and a culture of sexual openness. These elements had always been part of the Living Theatre lifestyle and only strengthened after they became an isolated 'total community'. Communal living allowed the group to return to the repertory system they had long preferred and which they would continue to use right up to 1968. Having all their past work in production at once led to an exhausting schedule^{lxxxix} but must have given the group a real and immediate sense of the progression of ideas threading through their work so that new projects, including *Paradise Now!*, emerged as a true culmination of past ideas. In terms of the shared sense of who they were as theatre makers, the group's identity had never been stronger. At the same time, communal living increased the tensions and difficulties within the group.

There had always been significant and ongoing differences of opinion between the members of the group. Individual actors had always come and gone. Some had disagreed with the Becks' philosophies, like Joseph Chaikin who had left because he considered the group's work to be too overtly political. Others left for more personal reasons after falling out with former partners in the group, suffering from the effects of too many drugs or cracking under the strain of the training techniques. With the shift to communal living, especially in the harsh conditions of the farm, which had no running water and was exposed to the sea, these frictions were bound to increase. In interviews, and in the diaries of group members, members of the group record many disagreements and debates on issues ranging from the approach to performance to the rights and wrongs of using violence to bring about social change. Sometimes these disagreements were felt to be negative and unproductive:

I must say that there's a lot of bitterness in the company on the part of actors who believe that others aren't interested enough in creative work. The critical spirit is highly developed. The actors argue an awful lot. In friendship or in anger, whichever the case may be. Once again, everything is not as it ought to be.^{xc}

At the same time, disagreement and debate were a pivotal part of the devising and rehearsal process. All in all, membership of the Living Theatre was an intense, highly-charged experience and it was out of this environment that a series of works emerged, leading up to *Paradise Now!*.

The Living Theatre's next production, Genet's *The Maids* (1965) was a very different style of production from *Mysteries* or the plays that came afterwards. Though in some senses *The Maids* marked a glance backwards in the Living Theatre's development^{xcii} – it was a scripted work with a plot^{xcii} and traditional staging,^{xciii} – in other ways the play was an important precursor to *Paradise Now!*. For one thing, the play was anti-authoritarian: Genet wrote the play in prison at a time when he was in correspondence with Artaud, himself incarcerated in a madhouse and one can see how this might have increased the appeal of the play for two admirers of Artaud, especially as Beck and Malina were in prison themselves when they worked on the play. Tytell suggests that a further attraction for Beck was the chance the play afforded to him to explore his homosexuality: all the women characters were played by men, as Genet had originally intended, and Beck made a striking 'woman'. The company, says Tytell, appreciated the chance to confront the audience with the cross dressing and the shocking storyline:

Genet was an arch rebel, a gob of spit in the eye of the middle class public. Since the Living Theatre came to Europe with the reputation of being beleaguered exiles persecuted by American Puritanism, their decision to perform Genet was entirely consonant with their rebellious image.^{xciv}

The play's message of non-conformism, particularly its sexual questioning, gave the group an opportunity to begin exploring issues

that would be central to *Paradise Now!*. The next projects continued to explore these themes of sex and identity in more innovative ways.

The Living Theatre's next production, *Frankenstein* was inspired by the concepts in Mary Shelley's famous gothic tale, in which a scientist attempts to create life without the aid of a woman. The group did not overtly stress the homosexual implications of this story of sexless reproduction, however. For Beck, the story was about man's attempt to take control of the universe through science:

. . . the attempt to create life in order to create servants for man, the attempt to eliminate the strugglesome aspect of work in this world and the tragic effects of this kind of thinking.^{xcv}

As with most of the derivative versions of Shelley's story, including the film versions,^{xcvi} Beck placed the emphasis on the spectacle and horror surrounding the creation of the monster as opposed to exploring its effects on social and domestic life, as the original novel had done. In devising the work, the group sought to work once again within the tradition of Artaud.^{xcvii} Beck expressed his aim as being to conjure up a performance,

which through ritual, horror and spectacle might become an even more valid theatrical event than much of the wordy Theatre of Ideas which has dominated our stages for so long.^{xcviii}

The performance drew on a wide range of other sources apart from Shelley's novel, including Shakespeare, Ibsen, ancient mythology, Raja Yoga and Jewish, Christian and Buddhist religious rites. The result was a work so convoluted that it is impossible to say what it was 'about' with any concision. Pierre Biner devotes thirty-one pages to an examination of the themes traversed by the play, and even then stresses that his words do not convey all its facets.^{xcix} This complexity was something it would share with *Paradise Now!*.

With *Frankenstein*, the group came as close as they would ever come to devising as a group. By now, the individuals making up the Living

Theatre had changed^c but the intensity of group life was as strong as ever. By the time *Frankenstein* was in development, the group had left Heist. They lived on the road for a while before finding free accommodation for one month in Spandau prison, Berlin where the evolving production of *Frankenstein* was discussed and worked on collectively. The devising process was slow and intensive: as before, the group were experimenting with creative, spiritual and political processes as well as personal development:

The word community Julian maintained, grew out of communication and by creating their next play together, by talking it out almost as a form of group therapy, the group might achieve an unprecedented binding and unification.^{ci}

The state of group awareness was heightened further by the wide use of LSD within the group. The intention was to generate a collective consciousness that could translate into performance. This perhaps explains why the work remained in a state of flux – the initial version presented at the Venice festival in 1965 differed substantially from that presented at the Cassis festival, Italy in 1966. Biner comments, ‘In all there were a mere fifty-one European performances of both versions of the play. None has satisfied the Living Theatre so far’.^{cii}

Frankenstein was a very different show from what had gone before and what would come. At the same time it continued certain traits from earlier productions and foregrounded elements of later work including *Paradise Now!*. Its towering thirty foot high set, comprised of a multi-layered grid of metal, wood and tubular lighting was reminiscent of the setting for *the Brig*, though much more overwhelming. Like *Mysteries*, the performance began with a period of silence – this time half an hour of it – during which time the actors tried to make one of their number levitate. When this failed the actor would be carried through the audience in a coffin. The death imagery, reminiscent of the corpses in *Mysteries*, continued as different actors were ‘executed’ in a variety of violent and graphic ways before the corpses were used to provide the body parts for

the creature. Frankenstein's monster in this instance was portrayed in the form of a huge silhouette, collectively formed by seventeen actors. This use of actors' bodies to form collaborative shapes would reappear in *Paradise Now!* where the group formed the words 'ANARCHY' and 'PARADISE NOW' with their bodies. The final act of *Frankenstein* in which actors searched the audience with flashlights, continued the group's experiments with pushing the action of the play into the audience's midst.

During the evolution of *Frankenstein*, the Living Theatre found their public image changing yet again. Formally seen as an endearing bunch of rebels, even by the authorities in their host countries, the company began to be treated with more hostility after repeated legal run-ins. During 1965 there were arrests for intoxication, accusations of drug use and complaints about an actor appearing naked during one of the *tableaux vivants* in *Mysteries*. Relations were particularly strained in Italy, where the opening performance of *Frankenstein* was marred by an argument between Beck and the director of the Venice Festival during which Beck spat at him. Following the performance, the company were informed that they had been banished from Italy and were escorted to the border. Events such as these brought the Living Theatre a certain notoriety outside of their performances, and audiences continued to turn out to see them as much from curiosity as anything else.

The group continued to provoke their audiences within their performances too, deliberately shoving them into new and uncomfortable theatre relationships as a means to question what that relationship could be. The confrontational attitude to the theatre relationship was demonstrated very clearly on the group's return to Italy in 1966 when they offered an evening of 'free theatre'. Instead of offering a performance, the group elected to simply sit in a silent circle for three quarters of an hour before quietly leaving. Audience members became increasingly agitated and the police were called. Asked why they had refused to perform, Malina replied that the intention had been to pose

the question 'what is a theatrical event?'^{ciii} Clearly, this was the question the group were insistently asking themselves at this point in their development and they wished to provoke audience members to ask themselves the same question by presenting them with an unfulfilling experience of non-theatre. This deliberate attempt to produce 'insufficient' theatre might be compared with the Futurist *Negative Act*, discussed in an earlier chapter,^{civ} except that in the case of the Living Theatre, the insufficient piece was all that was offered so the confrontation was even greater.

The next production to be developed in Europe was Malina's translation of Brecht's *Antigone*.^{cv} Like *Frankenstein*, *Antigone* continued certain elements from past Living Theatre performances, and also served as an important precursor to *Paradise Now!*. The production was pared down as *Mysteries*; no set, no curtains, no special costumes or lighting. Once again the emphasis was placed on the 'real' actor and the stripping away of artifice. In a prelude to the physicality of *Paradise Now!* Malina's direction used actors' bodies to represent everything the play required:

When a seat for Tiresias was called for, an actor would lie down on his back, raise his backside and provide a prop for the seer . . . when a battering ram had to be raised against Argos, two actors would lift a third with flexed muscles above their heads and move him in the manner of a steam hammer.^{cvi}

Antigone also used the signifying power of the actors' bodies in terms of sound. The actors used their bodies to create an almost constant stream of sounds and rhythms that ran behind the images and dialogue. Stylistically, the performance also reflected the group's increasing interest in the communicative potential of rites and symbolic actions. The focus on ritual and the exploration of the raw signifying power of the human body would both be central to *Paradise Now!*. Another significant precursor to *Paradise Now!* was the way members of the audience were pulled right into the action. For example, at the start of the play, the audience was 'cast' as the enemy Argives and the company, playing

Thebans, evinced hostility towards them. Malina also rewrote Brecht's opening so that the battle that killed Antigone's brother, Polynices, was enacted as a war against the audience:

Brecht's version begins with a prologue in which two sisters emerge from an air-raid shelter after the Second World War to find their brother, tortured and dead, hanging from a butcher's hook. Judith replaced this scene with the murder of Polynices in the laps of the audience.^{cvi}

Brecht's intention that the audience should be implicated in the action was pushed to become a physical involvement. The performance was an attempt to bring the theories of Brecht and Artaud together, bringing home to the spectator their responsibility for what is wrong in the world while at the same time stimulating them on a sensory level to bring about a change of perception and stimulate action. Malina's idea was that by directly and physically involving the audience in the action, they became personally implicated in the terrible deeds taking place on stage and might feel motivated to change things. As Beck put it:

If people feel how atrocious it is to kill each other, if they feel it physically, then perhaps they'll be able to put an end to it.^{cvi}

In this way, *Antigone* took the most sophisticated approach to the theatre relationship of any of the Living Theatre's productions to date. The play took an important step towards combining the personal, political and creative goals of the Living Theatre in one performance.

By 1967, it was as if the Living Theatre's sense of the theatre relationship they wished to offer had clarified. Overall, the three years they had spent in Europe could be characterized as a time in which their work, their lifestyle and their politics had become more and more entwined until there was no discernable difference between them. The group's communal lifestyle, the co-operative devising process, their spiritual and political beliefs and their belief in the transformative

potential of the theatre experience, were all inter-related aspects of the group's identity. Julian Beck put it this way in 1968:

Life, revolution and theatre are three words for the same thing: an unconditional No to the present society.^{cix}

The group found themselves working towards a production that could express these inter-related personal, political and artistic beliefs in one performance. They worked on the piece over a six-month period from January 1968 (the first three months were spent at an off-season Club Med resort in Sicily, the second at Avignon in France where The Living Theatre were booked to play at the town's theatre festival). The performance that would emerge as *Paradise Now!* would come to represent the political, artistic, spiritual and personal high point of the Living Theatre's existence. 'The whole thing' as Pierre Biner puts it 'was an incredible trip'.^{cx}

Apart from being influenced by the Living Theatre's previous work, *Paradise Now!* was also very much influenced by the turbulent international atmosphere of the times. In the lead up to the first performance in 1968, members of the Living Theatre read about anti-Vietnam demonstrations and racial unrest taking place in America. Similar unrest was happening nearer at hand, with anti-Vietnam protests throughout Europe and especially on the campuses of universities and colleges. There was a seething atmosphere of resistance, particularly amongst young people and Beck and Malina welcomed this as the preliminary stages of the revolution to come.^{cx} Their aim with *Paradise Now!* was to harness this revolutionary spirit in their audience members but also to redirect it: to show how revolutionary goals might be achieved through non-violent means. 1968 itself was an even more potent year. The assassination of Martin Luther King on 4 April led to mass riots in many places in America and raised the tension across Europe. Beck and Malina found themselves, as Yeats and O'Casey had done, somewhat removed from the real drama taking place in their

country. They were, however, directly affected by the May uprising in Paris, in which they took an active role.

The events of the Paris Uprising of May 1968 had a direct influence on *Paradise Now!* and also gave Beck and Malina an opportunity to engage in their favourite form of revolutionary 'theatre' in the real world. As the Uprising blew up, Beck and Malina, who happened to be in Paris as part of unsuccessful negotiations for a television contract, took up residence at the Sorbonne, where student activists, anarchists and artists were meeting daily to plan revolutionary activities. According to Tytell, Beck was instrumental in persuading the committee to occupy the Odeon Theatre:

On 16th May, Julian and Judith led the insurrectionary crowd of insurgent students, workers and actors singing the 'Internationale' and waving black anarchist flags. This throng managed to transform the venerable building into what Julian called 'a place of live theatre in which anyone could become an actor'.^{cxii}

As with the siege performance of *The Brig*, the occupation allowed Beck to experience his preferred form of drama – the performance of 'real' occupation. The experience excited and re-energized Beck, who later described the debates that took place on stage at the occupied Odeon as 'the greatest theatre I've ever seen'.^{cxiii} Beck was disappointed, however, when the Uprising ended in violence rather than following the non-violent path he advocated. He later used one section of *Paradise Now!*, which opened just after the Uprising, as a tool to revisit and recraft the events of the Uprising, inviting the audience to re-enact the non-violent ending he had envisaged. This was just one example of how national and international events fed into the eventual form and content of *Paradise Now!*.

Paradise Now! was different every time it was performed but it did have an overall structure, devised by Beck and Malina. The piece was supposed to be a group effort: Beck and Malina declared their intention to withdraw from directorial control over the group^{cxiv} and much of the

content was devised out of group process. Nevertheless, Beck and Malina were solely responsible for the structure of the piece. According to Tytell, they withdrew to a unit on the Club Med resort, emerging a week later with 'an arcane map of the eight levels of revolutionary action necessary to achieve liberation' with a ritual, an action and a vision within each level.^{cxv} This map or chart formed the structure of *Paradise Now!* and it provides a focus from which to discuss the piece, which is useful considering that it was so fluid. As Tytell puts it, 'Instead of an enactment that could be repeated night after night, Julian declared he wanted the act itself, primary and unrepeatable'.^{cxvi} The chart at least shows that there was a common set of intentions behind each of these diverse performance events. The chart is also significant because a copy was given to audience members as they arrived. Though it was obscure and audience members may not have understood it, the chart was an expression of the theatre makers' understanding of the relationship they were offering. It depicted the 'necessary' steps towards revolution and also served as a guide to would take place during the evening. As mentioned in the last chapter, it is not clear whether the audience members at Berkeley received a copy of the chart or not.^{cxvii} Even if they did, the effectiveness of such a device always depends on an audience member being able to understand it, and prepared to follow it.

The chart was dense with imagery and not easy to comprehend. It showed two human figures, feet at the bottom, heads at the top of the page. According to Biner, these represented the idea that social, spiritual and political revolution begins within the individual and that man is a microcosm of the universe within which he functions:

The human being whose body lives in complete harmony with his brain, and whose mental faculties are happily balanced, attains a state of physical, mental and spiritual jubilation that eradicates all urge of destruction towards his fellow man.^{cxviii}

The two figures also represented the Cabalist and Tantric traditions, which the Becks and others in the group were interested in. The ancient

Jewish Cabalist tradition was expressed in the Hebrew inscriptions on the body on the left, while the body on the right expressed the Tantric motifs of the elements and the chakras or 'energy nodes' in the body. Elsewhere, the chart incorporated references to various other spiritual philosophies and ideas of interest to the group. It included coded questions and answers pulled out of the *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese book of divination associated with Confucian and Taoist philosophy, and references to the significance of light and shade and number continuums. In the centre of the chart were represented the seven 'rungs' comprising the steps needed to bring about revolutionary change and achieve 'Paradise Now'. These seven steps also provided the sequence of events carried out in the performance.

Each rung consisted of three stages: a Rite, a Vision and an Action. Each of these had its own title, which was displayed on the chart. What was not made explicit was the way each one also required something different of the actors and audience members in terms of the way performance power was distributed. The Rites were designed to place the actors in a preparatory state. They were usually some kind of physical activity and were carried out by actors only. In these sections of the performance, the power to perform and make decisions about the performance remained firmly in the hands of the theatre makers, who often used it in a confrontational way. Some of the Rites involved the actors making contact with audience members. In Rungs I and II, this took the form of spoken contact. For example, in the first Rite, the 'Rite of Guerrilla Theatre', actors approached audience members as they entered the theatre and made declarations about what was wrong with the world, including: 'I am not allowed to travel without a passport'; 'you can't live without money'; 'I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana'; and 'I'm not allowed to take my clothes off'. After repeating each declaration for two minutes or so, in tones varying from neutral acceptance to anguished outrage, the actors joined in a yell of release and a period of silence before beginning a new statement. Again, in Rung II actors

approached audience members and spoke to them individually, this time making comments on their appearance whilst affirming the sanctity of everything 'holy hair' 'holy nose' 'holy glasses' etc. With performance power vested solely in the theatre makers for these interactions, audience members were not encouraged to respond or participate in the Rites.

Audience members who did try to participate during the Rites found themselves regarded with hostility by the performers. When critic Henry Luce tried to engage one of the performers in dialogue while she was chanting 'I can't travel without a passport', he soon realized that this wasn't on offer:

I asked one girl to sit down in the seat beside me and really talk it over. She wouldn't and seemed even angrier at me than at the passport people. But I realized the poor girl was just generally upset.^{cxix}

During the same performance, the hostility became even more palpable when fellow critic and audience member Richard Schechner responded to the disrobing of the actors by taking off all his own clothes, making a small bow and sitting back in his seat. Luce reports that 'the actors in the aisles, who were busy undressing down to minimal bikinis and jockstraps, gaped at Schechner with alarm and hostility. How dare he share in free expression? Could it have been they were jealous because he had undressed with more dash and dispatch than they?'^{cxx} Here, Luce misses the point (or pretends to) about the real reason for the actors' hostility. From the theatre makers' perspective, though, Luce, like many other audience members including Schechner, mistook the terms of the theatre relationship on offer and assumed that the theatre makers had vested performance power in audience members at this point in the performance. Perhaps the most revealing comment Luce makes is this one:

Under normal conditions had Mr Schechner done such a thing – which, of course, he wouldn't have – he would have outraged the audience and probably been arrested for indecent exposure. But at *Paradise Now*, it was the appropriate, brotherly thing to do.^{cxxi}

Schechner's actions were appropriate, perhaps in the minds of audience members, but they were not so to the theatre makers – at least not during a Rite. What Luce reveals here, is that the two parties in the theatre relationship had quite different understandings of its terms. This put the relationship under threat.

In other Rites, the contact with audience members became more physical and the rules about how performance power was distributed became even harder to discern. In Rung IV, 'the Rite of Universal Intercourse' the actors formed into couples or groups and touched, caressed and embraced those around them. Biner suggests that this Rite involved the actors only. He states that 'owing to legal strictures they do not perform the act of love' and also notes that 'the spectators gather round.'^{cxix} However, other reports as well as photographs and diary entries of the participants, suggest that audience members were often more intimately involved in this caress. Tytell's description of this part of the performance rather differs from Biner's:

Spectators are invited to speak out about sexual taboos, to undress, and to join the 'body pile' – a gathering onstage of actors and audience groping for each other.^{cxix}

There is some suggestion, too, that the contact may have been fully sexual in some performances. Tytell is clear that 'some of the actors had engaged in open sex with spectators' and adds that one actress, Jenny Hecht 'believed she had to be as generous and open as possible in order to convince anyone of her revolutionary stance, and consequently, she would give of herself as often as she was asked.'^{cxix} As Tytell comments, 'this was clearly beyond all theatrical precedent.'^{cxix} This was one Rite that broke the mould and fully involved spectators as participants. Even here, however, while audience members were handed a degree of performance power, the theatre makers remained in control of where appropriate boundaries for behaviour lay.

Other Rites took the form of ritual actions or meditations taken from yogic or acting exercises known by the group. Within these Rites

the distribution of performance power changed again. The group were focussed inward and were much more separate from the audience. For example, in Rung III the actors sat in a spiral formation carrying out Tantric gestures with their hands and fingers whilst chanting mantras. At other times, they focussed on an individual subject within the group. In Rung V the group watched over an individual actor as s/he struggled with demonic forces, while in Rung VI another subject emitted a sound while others manipulated his or her body. The objective, says Biner, was to achieve a therapeutic or cathartic effect on the subject – the performer.^{cxxvi} The audience member meanwhile was hardly noticed, let alone given any vestige of performance power. Biner's comments on this suggest, perhaps surprisingly, a seeming acceptance of traditional views on the capacity of theatre to stimulate the passive receptive audience member through an experience akin to catharsis:

Although the spectator is not generally invited to participate in Rites and Visions, he nevertheless experiences what his senses and his subconscious registers; and, stimulated by the energy thus created, may then release his own energy in Action.^{cxxvii}

As Biner indicates here, the performance power that was largely withheld from audience members within the Rites, was withdrawn almost entirely during the segments of the performance labelled 'Visions'.

The Visions took the form of dream images resulting from the Rites and once again, audience members were not usually invited to join in. The Visions tended to be more theatrical in nature. They involved lighting changes and stage effects and were based on symbolic enactments similar to those found in traditional theatre performance. In almost every case the actors took on representative roles. For example, In Rung I actors became totems, representing Native American people. In Rung II, four actors represented the four poles of the compass while others represented explorers at the North Pole. In Rung V they represented people in opposition to one another ('Christian / Jew'

'Young / Old' 'Black / White' etc). In Rung VII they became spacemen and planets and in Rung VIII groups of actors became the Tree of Knowledge. Like the Rites, the Visions were often openly political, as in Rung IV where the group enacted violent executions (reminiscent of those in *Frankenstein*) designed to send a message of anti-violence. In the Visions, even more than in the Rites, the audience were expected to behave as an audience in conventional theatre; that is to relinquish performance power and simply receive the performance.

The Actions were the part of the performance where audience members were more directly involved. Actions were introduced by a text and then improvised 'with the collaboration of the audience'.^{cxxviii} The nature of the collaboration differed between the Rungs but in each case audience members were invited, or even required, to take on some performance power and take the Action forward. Sometimes they were given a symbolic role as, for example, in Rung VI, where they were invited to 'be the music of Africa' using rhythmical dance and movement. Elsewhere, the intention was something like the Forum Theatre techniques of Augusto Boal, in which spectators became 'spect-actors', playing out roles in scenarios of current political interest.^{cxxix} For example, in Rung II they were invited to represent participants in a violent struggle taking place somewhere in the world.^{xxx} They were then challenged to replay the roles in non-violent ways (it was in later versions of this Rung that participants were invited to replay the Paris Uprising of 1968, adding the non-violent conclusion that the Becks and other advocates of pacifism had been unable to bring about in reality). The Actions were quite practical in their purpose. The intention was to provide practical training for revolutionary action (once again, a Boal-like goal). For example, Rung III's Action, 'the Revolution of Gathered forces' was about urging spectators to organize for a non-violent revolution in their own locality. As Beck and Malina put it:

The primary function of the Revolution of Gathered Forces is to rally those who are ready and to ready those who are open.^{xxxii}

To lend immediacy to this Action, the company would gather information about local social problems, numbers of prisoners in local jails and the nature of political activism in the vicinity and then incorporate these facts and figures into the Action. This Action was one of the most successful parts of *Paradise Now!*. It was the only part that received positive feedback during the Berkeley performance. It is worth taking time to consider why this is so.

There was a very different feel to this part of *Paradise Now!* because the group seemed to shift from offering its own answers to spotlighting the experiences of local people; that is, the audience members themselves. It seems the more work the group did on this research, the better chance the theatre relationship had of surviving. Neff tells how, earlier in the tour, at the University of Chicago, the group spent a whole afternoon with representatives from local liberal and radical groups to discover 'the civic condition and how it affected . . . disaffected . . . the people'.^{xxxii} She notes that after this meeting, the Living Theatre seemed much more on top of their material and that this influenced their relationship with their Chicago audience:

The lengthy afternoon meeting had wrought a serious change, and by [*Paradise Now!*]'s mid-point not only had much of the hostility given way to less random confrontations, but an almost reverential mood had set in, and by finish it proved to be a particularly good performance . . .^{xxxiii}

Neff also notes that on this occasion a much larger number of older audience members than usual stayed for the duration of the performance. A similar benefit seems to have come from occasions when Beck and Malina were able to give lectures at some point before the performance. Such talks permitted them to set out some of the behavioural expectations for the forthcoming performance, and counteract the word-of mouth publicity that gave a false impression of *Paradise Now!* – 'a forecast which told them it was a freak show in which they could take over and do what they wanted to do'.^{xxxiv} Unfortunately,

for the most part the theatre makers were unable to give these pointers in advance and it was left to audience members to figure out what the rules of behaviour were.

Even without its false reputation as 'free theatre', there were significant challenges for audience members seeking to understand and adopt conventions that would support a performance of *Paradise Now!*. In offering a theatre relationship where the distribution of performance power shifted and changed within the course of the performance, the theatre makers were asking a great deal of the audience members. Usually, behavioural expectations remain the same throughout a performance but in this case, as the distribution of performance power shifted from Rite to Vision to Action, behavioural expectations shifted too. In the Rites and Visions, the expectations were similar to a traditional theatre presentation in that the actors performed and audience members were expected to behave as spectators. Within the Actions, however, the theatre relationship changed entirely and the performance depended on the audience members to carry it forward by taking over performance power and becoming theatre makers for a while. It was this shift of performance power that made *Paradise Now!* so different from the Living Theatre's previous productions. Whereas in past performances such as *Mysteries* the audience were invited to participate in the action, in *Paradise Now!* they were required to do so. The experience was much more unnerving and less traditionally 'theatrical' as a result. As one newspaper critic described it, 'To call it 'theatre' is no more or less accurate than to call it "art", "dance" or "music". It is a confrontation, a stylized encounter'.^{cxxxv} The question is whether audience members could be expected to understand the rules of this 'stylized encounter' and thereby successfully accept the relationship on offer to them.

With the complex and shifting expectations placed on them, it was easy for audience members to get it 'wrong' and this posed some problems for the theatre makers. At times during their tour of America

audience members assumed the right to take over performance power elsewhere in the performance: for example, the Rite belonging to Rung VII – an auditory exercise where actors tried to produce sounds as unlike human, animal or electronic sounds as possible – was eventually cut out because the audience kept joining in and taking over:

The company notices by and by . . . that the sounds weren't audible to the audience who were preoccupied with producing a semblance of African music. Out of practical considerations, then, it was necessary to eliminate the Rite of New Possibilities which was, it was realised, destined for the solitary ear.^{cxv}

This exercise was part of a 'Rite' and therefore not intended for participation. When audience members joined in and took over performance power, this took the exercise in the 'wrong' direction and it was cut even though the audience members' participation occurred out of an enthusiastic engagement with what was going on. There were also occasions when audience members carried behavioural codes learned from *Paradise Now!* over to other performances by the group, and attempted to participate in these. The Living Theatre had to counter this by programming *Paradise Now!* at the end of their performance season in each town. Despite its popular image as a sexy free-for-all, *Paradise Now!* was, in reality, a performance in which the theatre makers sought to maintain their performance power for most of the time. Indeed, even in the Actions, where they appeared to hand over performance power to audience members, they actually maintained ultimate control.

The Actions were the element of *Paradise Now!* most open to manipulation by the audience and sometimes the Living Theatre welcomed this but only if it suited their purposes. For example, Rung VII, conceived as a representation of Vietnam after the anarchist revolution – 'No money. No laws. No bureaucracy. Breathe. Get high. Fly' – took a more literal form after Avignon where spectators and actors leapt from a height into the arms of others below them. The company decided to keep this 'flying' activity in the performance because it

seemed to represent the breaking down of constraints and the trust-building required to bring about change in society. In this instance, the audience's choice was deemed a 'right' one; it suited the theatre makers' purposes and so it was kept in. However, other improvised contributions stood a good chance of being deemed unsuitable, especially if, like Schechner, audience members tried to participate in the 'wrong' section of the performance.

In judging the audience's choices like this, it could be argued that the theatre makers were maintaining their authorial control over the performance at all times, even during the Actions. Indeed, the theatre makers asserted their control each time they decided that an Action had worked its way through and it was time for the next rung. Biner's description of the transition out of the first Action is revealing: 'when the actors feel that the improvisation with the audience has run its course, they begin the Rite of the second Rung'.^{xxxvii} These words describe a situation where the theatre maker is still in control of performance power. Even if audience members have been allowed to do their own thing, the commencement of a Rite is, effectively, a signal for the performance power to be handed back. As long as the theatre maker maintains the right to ask for the power back, he or she has not fully relinquished this power. Perhaps, despite being anarchists themselves, the theatre makers had learned from the anarchy of their previous experiments in free theatre and they did not wish to hand performance power over entirely to audience members.

As a result of *Paradise Now!*'s structure, audience members were always limited in how much influence they could have. In *The Enormous Despair*, Malina accepts the fact that the group fell short in the amount of freedom it gave the audience's opinions or actions. She gives the examples of one audience member she dubs 'The Old Man of Chicago' who was 'floored by a love hug' from Beck when he tried to protest at the obscenity of the Rite of Universal Intercourse, and of 'Marge of Madison' who shouted 'Don't spit at me' and became hysterical when

Beck replied 'I'm not spitting at you, I'm covering you with my body fluids!' Malina concedes that the audience members had limited options at times like these:

We ask the audience to say whatever they want but we don't warn them that they are going to be beleaguered for what they say.

Both Marge and the Old Man felt they had been physically assaulted, though they were not. Both reacted extremely. But both are failures from our point of view, one because it took two hours to get her out of her state of suffering, and even then not to Paradise, and the other because he called the cops.

. . . along with our victories there are such failures as these two. We cite them and use them as examples when we talk about our problems in this changing play.^{cxviii}

Malina's words combine a concessionary tone with a continued insistence that she, as theatre maker is the arbiter of what was reasonable behaviour, as for example, when she decides that the audience's experiences were not assault. The fact is that, whatever its creators' claims to the contrary, *Paradise Now!* was still a piece of theatre with performance power invested in the theatre makers. However much it was a 'changing play' it never changed in this fundamental way. There was only one Action where the audience were not asked to hand performance power back to the actors and this was the final one: Rung VIII, 'The Street'.

In the final Action, the doors of the theatre were opened and, as Biner describes it 'the actors spill[ed] out into the audience, mingling with the people and conducting them into the street'.^{cxvix} This time, the theatre makers did not take back performance power at the end of the Action but left it to the spectators to decide what would happen next. Often, audience members simply went home. Sometimes they continued the Action into the streets: the second performance at Avignon was followed by 'an incredible procession' in which the crowd linked arms and, emitting a humming sound, marched through the streets until two

in the morning.^{cxl} Except now that the performance had moved across the threshold from theatre into every day life, audience members were not simply being asked to improvise as theatre makers, they were also citizens operating within social reality. This brought its own complications, particularly on those occasions when audience members emerged from the theatre to find themselves confronted with members of the police, now inadvertently 'cast' in the ongoing performance but far more inclined to respond in terms of their social role. By taking the theatre into the streets in this way, the theatre makers were fulfilling their own objective, to 'take the theatre to the street and the street to the theatre' but by blurring the edges between performance and reality they were also leaving audience members exposed to the consequences, including arrest. This was a deliberate tactic on the theatre makers' part, designed to make the audience's experiences more 'real', but arguably this was an unreasonable use of the theatre relationship.

Perhaps even more unreasonable was the way the audience was left uncertain as to the overall objective of *Paradise Now!*. What was left unclear, was whether the Living Theatre were suggesting that the play itself represented the beginning of the revolution – that by climbing the rungs and opening the doors, they had paved the way for revolution to begin right then – or whether the intention was to symbolically show the route towards revolution – to send audience members home in a heightened state of preparedness to work for the revolution. Even members of the group disagreed on whether the cry 'paradise now!' was a symbol for the future or a demand for present action. Biner denies that the play itself professed to be the start of the revolution:

Some critics wanted to take the play for the revolution and the paradise the play speaks of. It is not so. Even if the audience feels, when they truly enter the structure and add to its beauty by their actions, a physical and mental exaltation bordering on ecstasy, the play remains, nevertheless, a *didactic practicing of joy*^{cxli}

The point is emphatically made, and seems to suggest that the intention behind *Paradise Now!* was along the lines of Augusto Boal's work; using theatre to 'rehearse' for the revolution so that one can later carry it out in reality. However, this does seem to be at odds with Biner's earlier protestation that the work was not a theatrical representation but a real life event.

It would seem that the theatre makers were not clear about whether the theatre relationship they were offering was symbolic or transformative in nature. As revolutionary anarchists they wished to bring about social change and their various spiritual beliefs led them to avow that social change was sparked by transformation of the individual. As followers of Artaud, they also believed in the capacity of theatre to stir up the metaphysical energies between people and manifest change. Presumably, then, they considered transformation to be possible within the event itself. They certainly constructed an event designed to take participants through the steps deemed necessary to manifest those changes. Biner claims that:

What the Living Theatre wants to accomplish in *Paradise Now* is a *realisation* in each spectator that a transformation of his whole being is both possible and urgent; that he may pass from an imperfect state to lesser and lesser imperfection' (my italics).^{cxlii}

However, they seemed to set the event up to offer much more than a 'realization' of possibilities: they offered an environment for audience members to actually pass through the transformation process, or at least to believe they were doing so. The audience member swept up the euphoria of the event who actually burned his own money, made love or got arrested may have been carrying out symbolic acts but he was also making tangible changes to his actual life.

If the Living Theatre, as theatre makers, never successfully grappled with the issue of the difference between reality and performance, they had the same difficulty tackling the divide between spectator and theatre maker. Almost as a point of principle, *Paradise Now!*

sought to overthrow the traditional theatre relationship as one of the relics of the oppressive past:

All social orders are maintained by tacit and hypocritical agreement among their members, the relationship between performer and audience in traditional theatre being but one example among many.^{cxliii}

But this overthrowing was not absolute. Despite Biner and others attesting that 'the barrier separating stage from audience has disappeared'^{cxliiv} or that the audience's participation 'may lead, theoretically, to the total abandonment of the play's original scheme in favour of the itinerary proposed by the audience',^{cxlv} in fact the structure of *Paradise Now!* placed limits on the spectator's freedom and the barrier between performer and audience member was never forgotten. Perhaps this was inevitable or even necessary: in her study of audience participation, Kattwinkel notes 'the possibility that in fact the separation between spectator and performer must remain clear for participatory performance to question the relationship between the two.'^{cxlvi} The important thing is that the Living Theatre did not see it this way. They maintained the barrier whilst claiming they were not. *Paradise Now!*, as much as any performance in the theatre, depended on a 'tacit' and possibly 'hypocritical' agreement between performers and spectators. As in any theatre relationship the terms of the theatre relationship covering form and content of the performance and appropriate behaviours of participants were set by the theatre makers and the audience members chose whether to accept or not. In short, the group presented theatre whilst claiming it was not theatre.

Paradise Now! had a tumultuous opening at the Avignon festival in 1968 and its reception there helped to establish the play's image as a confrontational piece, as well as being a key reason why the Living Theatre decided to leave Europe and tour America. The festival was disrupted by the recent Paris Uprising^{cxlvii} and the political atmosphere was even more tense because of impending mayoral elections at a local level. One mayoral candidate used the group's arrival as an opportunity

to berate the incumbent mayor with the words: 'Who receives, who nurtures those bums, those Freudians of the Living Theatre whose immorality is an offence to our youth and our workers?'.^{cxlviii} Responses to *Paradise Now!* were extremely polarized. Some of those sympathetic to the revolutionary movement loved it, including the 'Enragés' who had participated in the Uprising. According to Tytell it was Enragés in the audience who greeted *Paradise Now!* with such jubilation and paraded through the streets. Others, though, were less enamoured. Some revolutionaries objected to the group's non-violent message, seeing violence as an inevitable part of revolutionary action. At the same time, the right wing press attacked the group on moral grounds: 'the Avignonnias are shocked by the behaviour, clothed or unclothed, of this beast'^{cxlix} and the actors were heckled by right wing Gaullists who, according to Tytell, also threw buckets of water 'on several occasions'.^{cl} The Living Theatre found themselves under attack from both sides of the political spectrum. They also found themselves unpopular with the organizers of the festival, and *Paradise Now!* would only be performed three times there.

The group were accustomed to attracting controversy but the events of the next few days led them to withdraw from the festival completely. Once again, as with *The Brig*, the Living Theatre found themselves pitting their work against the authorities as a principled, political action. When the mayor of Avignon served The Living Theatre with a summons demanding that they substitute *Mysteries* or *Antigone* for *Paradise Now!* as it disturbed the peace, the group refused. They were further outraged to find their attempt to perform *Mysteries* as a free street performance blocked by police.^{cli} They decided to withdraw from the festival, and Beck issued a long letter to the town giving their reasons, which included the following words:

Because you cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time, you cannot serve the people and the state at the same time, you cannot serve liberty and authority at the same time, you cannot tell the truth and lie at the

same time, you cannot play *Antigone* (which is about a girl who refuses to obey the arbitrary dictates of the state and performs a holy act instead) and at the same time substitute *Antigone* in the place of a forbidden play.^{clii}

Having withdrawn from the festival and been evicted from their accommodation by police, they gave a free performance of *Paradise Now!* in Ollioules and five others to paying audiences in Geneva before embarking on a ship for America on 31 August 1968. The group found themselves travelling away from Europe for many of the same reasons they had exiled themselves there four years earlier.

As they left for America, the Living Theatre's position in Europe was very different from when they had arrived there in 1964. Their group identity was very intense, but somewhat fraught with division and power struggles. They still attracted large audiences and a loyal following but they had also been in trouble with the authorities in every country they had visited and their image as artistic rebels was somewhat dented. Their political enemies saw them as dangerous or risible and their pacifist-anarchist message was not well received even by those on the same political side. They were used to opposition from audiences and the authorities, indeed they thrived on it, but in *Paradise Now!* they had a work they felt to be their most important yet and which they believed could play a part in transforming a world ripe for their style of non-violent revolution. Now they were taking this work to America, the hotbed of a very different kind of revolutionary activity and a country that had changed completely in the four years since they had turned their backs on it. In America, most particularly in Berkeley, they would encounter an audience with very different views on what a revolutionary theatre relationship could be.

ⁱHartnoll, Phyllis (ed) *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, p.498

ⁱⁱKing, Bruce (ed) *Contemporary American Theatre* London: Macmillan, 1991, p.238

ⁱⁱⁱ Following the death of Beck in 1985, Malina teamed up with another member of the company, Hanon Reznikov, and opened a new Living Theatre on Third Street in Manhattan. These premises were closed by the Buildings Department in 1992 and since then the company has been based in Europe with tours including the United States.

^{iv} Living Theatre 'Mission' retrieved from <http://www.livingtheatre.org> 29 Jan 2004

^v The website is by no means the only declaration of intent made by the Living Theatre. Beck and Malina expressed similar objectives in a wide number of forums including books, articles and newspaper interviews.

^{vi} Jack Gelber 'Julian Beck, Businessman' in *TDR* vol.30, no.2 (Summer 1986) p.6

^{vii} *ibid*, p.6

^{viii} *ibid*, p.6

^{ix} Julian Beck 'How to Close a Theatre' in *The Drama Review* vol. 8 no.3 (Spring 1964), p.180

^x Daniel Belgrad *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p.1

^{xi} *ibid*, p.1

^{xii} See chapter 1, endnotes 30-31

^{xiii} *ibid*, p.1

^{xiv} This figure is given in Tytell *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage* New York: Grove Press, 1995, p.356. According to Tytell, Beck made a log book of his theatre attending - recording fifty-one theatre visits in 1941 and fifty-eight in 1942

^{xv} Tytell says 'they wrote some fifty letters to artists they admired', p.359

^{xvi} Tytell, p.213

^{xvii} Piscator may have been an influence politically too, as Beck notes: 'Judith studied with Piscator who knew that radical politics and social action were the Way' Julian Beck *The Life of the Theatre* New York: Proscenium, 1986, p.13

^{xviii} Beck had some works displayed alongside the work of Jackson Pollock and others in 1945 - at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery 'Art of the Century' - before Guggenheim rejected his work, see Tytell, pp.25-6

^{xix} See www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/rauschenberg 13 Nov 2003

^{xx} See website of National Gallery of Art, Washington www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/artist1.html 13 Nov 2003

^{xxi} Beck *The Life of the Theatre*, p.13

^{xxii} John Cage 'An Autobiographical Statement' retrieved from www.newalbion.com/artists/cagej/autobiog.html 13 Nov 2003

^{xxiii} John Tytell describes the first happening thus: 'Near the end of the summer, Cage conceived a theatre piece where each performer was assigned a time bracket determined by chance in which to enact a particular activity . . . There was no rehearsal, no script, no costumes . . . Cage read a lecture on Zen, then the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence. Richards and Olson were speaking from other ladders while Merce Cunningham danced around all the ladders to music provided by Rauschenberg playing Edith Piaf at double speed on a windup phonograph. All this occurred simultaneously while films were projected.' Tytell, p.88

^{xxiv} Black Mountain College operated as an experimental educational centre between 1933 and 1956. Communal living, informal class settings, rigorous discussion and lack of formal examinations characterized the approach, which was based on the educational theories of John Rice. Teachers at the college included Cage and Olson. Rauschenberg was a student there. Retrieved from The Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center website www.blackmountaincollege.org 13 Nov 2003

^{xxv} For more on the Off-off Broadway scene and the Living Theatre's role within it, see Theodore Shank *American Alternative Theatre* London: Macmillan, 1982

^{xxvi} The fare included plays by Brecht, Pirandello, Lorca, Picasso, Genet, Strindberg, Paul Goodman (another personal friend) and William Carlos Williams. The Living Theatre's final production at the Cherry Lane Theatre was their translation of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*.

^{xxvii} Gelber 'Julian Beck, Businessman', p.8

^{xxviii} Beck *The Life of the Theatre*, p.13

^{xxix} Later absurdist work featured by the Living Theatre included a Beckett evening in Jan 1960 and Genet's *The Maids* produced in July 1964, after their shift to Europe.

^{xxx} Of course, it might be argued that all theatre, whether experimental or not, is addressing the issues of the Real by virtue of *being* theatre rather than video, painting, novel or some other form of expression. By choosing the genre, with its live encounter between real people, theatre makers automatically take on the debate about the status of Reality. However, the new ways in which alternative theatre makers of the 1960s and 1970s, followed on from the absurdist's overt discussion of the Real, stripping away the layers of illusion, placed issues of the Real right at the forefront of any discussion of alternative theatre, never more so than in the case of the Living Theatre.

^{xxxi} Beck *The Life of the Theatre*, p.7

^{xxxii} Shank, p.5

^{xxxiii} *ibid*, p.5

^{xxxiv} A similar struggle with the issue of money occurred in the way the big record companies worked to promote the songs of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez in the 1960s.

^{xxxv} Gelber 'Julian Beck, Businessman', p.6

^{xxxvi} When the Living Theatre was housed in 'the Studio' (1954-5) admission was by donation only.

- xxxvii Tytell states that 'free admissions had been an unstated policy of the company since its beginning: as an extension of the idea of street theatre, anyone who said he or she could not pay had been allowed into performances without charge.' p.256
- xxxviii Judith Malina quoted in Pierre Biner *The Living Theatre* New York: Horizon Press, 1972, p.xviii
- xxxix The US government had been carrying out such drills since about 1955 in response to the threat of nuclear attack. Protesters refused to participate in the drills, arguing that they gave civilians a false sense of security.
- xl Tytell, p.135
- xli *ibid*, p.136
- xlii *ibid*, p.149
- xliii Antonin Artaud 'The Theatre and its Double' in *Collected Works Volume Four* (trans. Victor Colti) London: Calder & Boyars, 1974 p.60
- xliv *ibid*, p.61
- xlvi Artaud uses plague imagery throughout the book, as a metaphor for how theatre can both purge and purify.
- xlvii Beck *The Life of the Theatre*, p.9
- xlviii Robert Brustein *The Theatre of Revolt* London: Methuen, 1965, pp.363-4
- xlix Biner, p.51
- l 'Supernaturalistic' is Biner's term, p.50
- l *ibid*, p.51
- li W. Glover 'The Living Theatre' in *Theatre Arts* vol.XLV, no 12 (Dec 1961) pp.63-75 p.63
- lii Biner, p.165
- liii Beck *The Life of the Theatre*, p.7
- liiv Biner, p.54
- liv The Becks were also invited to take the play on tour to Europe in 1960 and 1961, see Richard Krostelanetz 'The New American Theatre' *Stand* vol. 6, no 4 (June 1964), p.53
- lvi The Living Theatre's profile was lifted further at this time by their successful poetry evenings, including readings by Paul Goodman and Alan Ginsberg in 1959.
- lvii Glover, p.63
- lviii *ibid*, p.63
- lix Beck *The Life of the Theatre*, p.15
- lx Krostelanetz, p.58
- lxi *ibid*, p.58-59
- lxii It is not clear whether Kenneth Brown, the author of *The Brig* saw the play as Artaudian or not. In an interview for TDR, Brown says the play was written out of his experiences in a marine brig at the age of 19. 'I wrote down both the elements and the events which took place there in a simple prose narrative which I then put away for future use'. He describes attempting to turn his experiences into poetry and story form before tapping into the potential for stage performance, 'as I got further into it, I began to see it as an indictment of the senses in order to reach the soul' See Kenneth Brown 'Interview' in *The Drama Review* (Spring 1964), pp.212-213 Brown seems to be articulating something like Artaudian sentiments here, though he is generally not very coherent about his objectives. In an article in *Plays and Players* magazine, he claims his theatre is about revealing the spiritual ignorance of society and seeking the alternatives. Other than this, the article includes very little about the play itself but a great deal about his personal ideas on God, love, truth and beauty (including a call for sexual openness and free love), see Kenneth Brown 'Theatre of God' *Plays and Players* vol.11 no.12 (Sept 1964), p.11
- lxiii Biner, p.66
- lxiv Pierre Biner, a member of the company, tells how actors were consumed by the process and their real-life relationships were affected: 'Their behaviour was becoming the behaviour of victims and tormentors. They felt the world was hemming them in from all sides and they felt ill-protected', see Biner, p.67.
- lxv For example, the *Tulane Drama Review* ran a special supplement to its Spring edition 1964 called 'Living Theatre and Wider Issues'. This included interviews with the Becks and Kenneth Brown (conducted whilst the siege was going on) a complete transcript of Brown's playtext and letters of comment on the closure of the theatre written by the heads of significant theatre companies around America.
- lxvi Beck, 'How to Close a Theatre', pp.189-90
- lxvii *ibid*, p.189
- lxviii This comment comes from a letter by Herbert Blau printed in 'Living Theatre and Wider Issues' *The Drama Review* (Spring 1964), p.195
- lxix Gelber 'Julian Beck, Businessman', p.11
- lxx *ibid*, p.11
- lxxi With their own theatre lost, they continued to perform the play for a while (under the banner of 'Exile Productions') as guests of other theatre groups.
- lxxii Beck and Malina were found guilty of impeding federal officers and other offences. Beck was sentenced to sixty days in prison, Malina to thirty. They also received substantial fines of \$26,000 and \$10,500 respectively. The Living Theatre Corporation was fined \$2,500.
- lxxiii Though Beck and Malina returned to the country in Dec 1964 to serve their prison sentences, the rest of the group stayed in Europe.
- lxxiv By 1963, Beck and Malina had been arrested six times for pacifist activities and in that same year, Beck helped organize the World Wide General Strike for Peace involving members of the Living Theatre
- lxxv This poem was delivered in the style of an incantatory mantra by Beck, sitting in a harsh white spot light
- lxxvi Chaikin was an actor with the Living Theatre before leaving in 1963 to form the Open Theatre Company
- lxxvii Beck quoted in Biner, p.98
- lxxviii See Biner p.90

- lxxxix Tytell, p.200
- lxxx Biner, p.85
- lxxxix Tytell, p.200
- lxxxii Biner, p.92
- lxxxiii See Biner, p.92 and Tytell, p.200
- lxxxiv Biner, p.92
- lxxxv *ibid*, p.93
- lxxxvi Gelber 'Julian Beck, Businessman', p.16
- lxxxvii Shank, p.2
- lxxxviii *ibid*, p.3
- lxxxix In 1965 alone, the Living Theatre toured Europe with *The Maids*, (which they performed more than fifty times), *The Brig* (performed fifteen times) and *Mysteries* (performed more than fifty times). These figures are taken from Biner Appendix II, pp.235-7
- xc Beck quoted in Biner, p.164
- xcii According to Biner, the members of Living Theatre themselves soon took a detached view of the production, regarding it as belonging to their earlier phase of theatre making, see Biner, p.102
- xciii The plot concerns two servants who dress in their adulterous mistresses clothes and plot to murder her before one of the maids eventually commits suicide
- xciv The setting consisted of Beck's elegant set and detailed costumes, designed whilst he was in jail.
- xcv Tytell, p.206
- xcvi Julian Beck letter to director of Venice Biennale reproduced in Tytell, p.208
- xcvii The most famous movie version of *Frankenstein* was directed by James Whale in 1931 and starred Boris Karloff. The full text of the original story, plus plot summaries of play and movie versions is found in Cynthia Hamberg 'My Hideous Progeny' www.home-1.worldonline.nl/~hamberg/ retrieved 26 April 2005
- xcviii Inspiration came from Artaud's outline scenario 'The Conquest of Mexico' which, writes Tytell, 'stressed the sensory impact of cries, groans, apparitions, brilliant lighting effects and the use of masks and surprising objects' Tytell, p.208
- xcix Beck letter to director of Venice Biennale in Tytell, p.208
- c Biner, p. 124
- c Tytell reports that a third of the twenty five Americans in the company who had made the shift to Europe had returned home 'some unhappy about the scanty spending allowance of a dollar fifty a day, others by the demands of the incessant travel and collective creation', p.209
- ci Tytell, p.209
- cii Biner, p.124
- ciii Tytell, p.215
- civ See chapter 2, endnote 9
- cv The play had long appealed to Malina as 'a true celebration of civil disobedience'. She had been working on her translation since 1961 and continued to modify the performance after it opened in 1967. She directed and took the role of Antigone, with Beck as Creon.
- cvi Biner, p.149
- cvii Tytell, p.221
- cviii Beck, quoted in Biner, p.158
- cix Shank, p.209
- cx Biner, p.166
- cxii See Tytell, p.231
- cxiii *ibid*, p.233
- cxiv *ibid*, p.223
- cxv The Becks declared in a *Times* report that they intended to 'wither away' as directors. See Tytell, p.226
- cxvi Tytell, p.226
- cxvii *ibid*, p.226
- cxviii As mentioned in the last chapter, it is not entirely clear whether the charts were given out at the Berkeley performance, see chapter 7, endnote 2
- cxix Biner, p.175
- cxix Henry Luce 'The Man Who Dared to Enter Paradise' *Life* 22 Nov, 1968, p.124
- cxix *ibid*, p.124
- cxix *ibid*, p.124
- cxix Biner, p.196
- cxix Tytell, p.228
- cxix Tytell, p.259
- cxix Hecht's level of commitment may have been beyond endurance as well as 'beyond theatrical precedent'. She left the troupe fairly early on in the US tour suffering from what Tytell describes as 'mounting paranoia' and later committed suicide, see Tytell p.150 & 294-5
- cxix Biner, p.205
- cxix Biner, p.181
- cxix *ibid*, p.180
- cxix See Augusto Boal *Theatre of the Oppressed* London: Pluto, 1993
- cxix Biner, p.191
- cxix Bolivia was the original setting for this exercise but, as Biner points out, as time went on the focus shifted towards campus protests going on around Europe: 'other locales are substituted such as Prague, Mexico, Madrid and the various cities where students carrying on their own kind of guerrilla activity have clashed with the police' Biner, p.195

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- cxviii Renfreu Neff *living Theatre USA* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill Co, 1970, p.130
- cxviiii Neff, p.130-131
- cxviiii Neff, p.205
- cxviiii John Rockwell 'Living Theatre: Paradise Now Wins Converts' in *Oakland Tribune* 22 Feb 1969, p.58
- cxviiii Biner, p.209 Biner's comment here is very different from his assertion elsewhere that the original structure of the performance could theoretically be abandoned in favour of the audience's ideas.
- cxviiii Biner, p.135
- cxviiii Judith Malina *The Enormous Despair* New York: Random House, 1972, pp.169-170
- cxviiii Biner, p.213
- cxlix *ibid*, p.213
- cxli *ibid*, p.172
- cxliii *ibid*, p.170
- cxliiii *ibid*, p.172
- cxliv *ibid*, p.169
- cxlv *ibid*, p.168-9
- cxlvi Susan Kattwinkel 'Introduction' in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* Susan Kattwinkel (ed) Praeger: Westport CT, 2003, p.xiv
- cxlvii Of the five theatre groups scheduled to appear in the Avignon festival, only the Living Theatre and one other group participated.
- cxlviii Biner, p.214
- cxlix *ibid*, p.214
- cl Tytell, p.235
- cli *ibid*, p.236
- clii Letter from Living Theatre to the people of Avignon 28 July 1968 quoted in Biner, p.217

Chapter IX

'Their Theatre is the Confrontation with the Cops': The Berkeley Protesters in Context

The audience at Berkeley Community Theatre on 20 February 1969 was comprised of perhaps the most politically active young people to be found anywhere on the planet at that time. Other than some journalists and representatives from local alternative theatre groups, some members of faculty and a few people from the local Berkeley community, the audience was made up of student activists who arrived 'gassed and beaten' after the day's confrontations with police on nearby Telegraph Avenue.ⁱⁱ These young people's experiences, both immediately prior to the performance and in a longer-term context, gave them a very particular horizon of expectations and this explains why they reacted to the performance as they did. We have seen how the ten years leading up to *Paradise Now!* was experienced by the members of the Living Theatre, but what had the same period been like for their audience, growing up in some of the most turbulent years of American history?

The decade coming to a close had been enormously turbulent on the political scene. The period began with the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960, followed in 1962 by the Cuban missile crisis and in 1963 by Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, Texas. In this three-year period alone, American people had been taken to the brink of nuclear destruction and had witnessed the murder of their iconic leader. Kennedy represented so many values of American life both as an individual and as a president that his death was more than the passing of a person. It was, as Malcolm Bradbury puts it 'a kind of psychic watershed for the nation'.ⁱⁱⁱ The end of the Kennedy presidency seemed to mark an abrupt transition from the 1950s – described in *The Chronicle of America* as 'a time of tranquillity and prosperity . . . when the USA lead[s] the world'^{iv} – to the uncertain, turbulent 1960s. Most of the students attending *Paradise Now!* would have been schoolchildren when the assassination occurred. We can get a sense of what this might have

been like from *What Really Happened to the Class of '65*, in which a student from a suburban Los Angeles High School recalls hearing the announcement of Kennedy's shooting over the school's public address system:

I was in a classroom with a teacher that did more harm in that moment that I think I saw in any other experience in school. She came apart. She was a little bit crazy . . . she said, 'The United States has just fallen apart. Our government has obviously failed. I see nothing but the imminence of being taken over,' She went bananas. I remember watching most of the girls in the class bursting into hysterics, saying, 'My God, our life is over. We won't ever leave this school.'^v

Of course not everyone responded so hysterically but the extract shows how genuinely scared people were and how the threat of nuclear attack from the Russians seemed very real. Even after the imminent fear of nuclear attack had passed, Americans were left with their confidence in their country profoundly shaken. As one student puts it, 'our universe could never again be entirely secure'.^{vi} A little like the audience members in the previous case study, these young people had experienced an upheaval in their history that had left them with a sense of insecurity and a new awareness of the fallibility of their nation's ideals.

As the 1960s progressed and these young people moved from school age to college age, the national mood of division and crisis grew even stronger, fed by several key events that seemed to symbolize and feed that mood. In the early part of the decade, gender and race issues were at the forefront as women and Black people's demands for equal rights forced males and the white majority to confront some deeply-held beliefs and prejudices. As we shall see, Berkeley was a centre for the burgeoning student protest movement that grew up in support of these causes. The early optimism of the civil rights movement, epitomized by Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech of 1963, soon eroded with the escalation of race riots, beginning in Harlem in 1964. By 1967, the issue of America's involvement in Vietnam had added fuel to the protest movement. American military engagement began in 1965 and escalated

rapidly bringing with it loss of life for those in the field and increases in taxation for those at home. As casualties mounted, and the draft was brought in for young men of college age, a growing number of Americans expressed strong opposition to the war.^{vii} The anti-war cause was not only taken up by the already-politicized students and blacks but also, as Bradbury points out, by middle class and upper-middle-class white Americans affected by the draft:

As the war continued and the voracious requirements of the American military effort required the draft to creep gradually up the social scale so that the sons of the wealthy, white upper-middle-classes began to find their lives at risk, opposition to the war became not only more vociferous but also more respectable, better organized, better financed, and better argued. By 1967, millions of ordinary Americans felt personally bruised by what their nation was doing, and took to the streets in protest.^{viii}

The young people in the audience would have been directly affected by the drafting issue and as for the anti-war protests, these were nowhere stronger than at Berkeley.^{ix} The issue was a much more immediate and personal one for the students of Berkeley than it was to the members of the Living Theatre who were too old for the draft and who, in any case, lived outside America from 1964.

By the end of 1967, then, American society was more conflicted and insecure than it had ever been. As Bradbury puts it:

The black ghettos were aflame every summer, the campuses every autumn, and Vietnam every day of the week. As 1967 gave way to 1968, sane men predicted apocalypse.^x

Sure enough, 1968, the year before the Living Theatre's return to America, was to bring further shocks to the country's system. In February, after the devastating 'Tet' offensive in Vietnam, American public opinion swung to a majority anti-war position and president Johnson announced he would not be standing for re-election. The same month also saw sieges on the Columbia University campus, where one

banner seemed to sum up the disaffected atmosphere of the times: 'If You're Lost You've Come To The Right Place!'^{xi} In April, the assassination of Martin Luther King precipitated further race riots and disorder – the violent death of this advocate of non-violent protest seemed, like Kennedy's assassination had a few years earlier, to symbolize the destruction of core American values. June brought the assassination of another Kennedy, Robert F, the man who had seemed to many to represent the values needed to lift America out of its turmoil, while in August the Democratic Convention in Chicago was rocked by unprecedented levels of violence and protest. Unlike the members of the Living Theatre, who only read about these events in their newspapers, for the students at Berkeley the disruption of the period was experienced much more directly.

The young people in the audience, like other youth around the country, responded to the upheavals of the 1960s in a number of different ways ranging from escapism to political activism. The result, as Bradbury suggests, is that the counter-culture of the times had a 'soft' and a 'hard' element:

. . . people who looked to Zen Buddhism for solutions and others who looked in the direction of the gun, hippies who talked of love and revolutionaries who spoke of the overthrow of society, some who were 'turned on' by the Beatles and others who preferred the progressive snarl of the Rolling Stones.^{xii}

In the late 1960s, the Bay Area, including Berkeley was the world centre for both 'hard' and 'soft' elements of counter-culture. On the 'soft' side, there were the anti-technological^{xiii} 'tune in turn on and drop out' generation of beatniks and bohemians, many of whom would go on to become 'hippies' with values not so very different from those of the Living Theatre in their European commune.^{xiv} Many also experimented with drugs and Berkeley was a centre for this too – the area was well known for the way its inhabitants openly sold and used a wide range of substances.^{xv} Again, this was something the Living Theatre shared with their audience. On the 'hard' side, another possible response to American

life in the 1960s was to protest against it (as the women in 1920s Ireland had opted to protest against their lot) and many of the Berkeley students were, like Beck and Malina had been, active protesters. However, where Beck and Malina had, certainly 'spoken of the overthrow of society' they were insistently pacifist and, therefore 'soft' in Bradbury's terms. Many of the Berkeley students, on the other hand, did not eschew violence but took it as a necessary means to a revolutionary end. These people 'looked in the direction of the gun' and this was to prove an important point of difference between them and their theatre makers. Another point of difference was their age.

The Berkeley protesters were part of an emerging youth culture in which young people began to assert themselves as a separate group, as distinct and vocal as other interest groups such as blacks and women:

The young demanded and received recognition of their distinctiveness as a group bearings (sic) its own values, possessing a unique culture, and dedicated to its own ends.^{xvi}

Berkeley was at the heart of this emerging youth culture and by 1969, the Berkeley campus had a worldwide reputation as the hotbed of student politics. Its reputation grew up fairly rapidly and surprised a nation where, as one commentator wrote in 1965 'most criticism of student bodies in the past has been directed against their political apathy'.^{xvii} So, who were the students of Berkeley and what was it about this particular campus that made it so politicized? The answers to these questions go a long way to explaining the students' behaviour during *Paradise Now!*.

We can assume that the students in the Living Theatre's audience were intelligent, academic achievers, since in the 1960s as today the University was esteemed as an academic institution. One commentator describes it as 'probably the most impressive and prestigious state university in the country' with 'a world famous faculty that includes a half dozen Nobel Prize winners'.^{xviii} Most students were middle class and reasonably well off, though one student claims many of his peers came from lower-middle or working class homes because Berkeley was state

supported and so did not cost as much as, say Stanford.^{xix} They attended a university that was attractive, well equipped, culturally alive and reasonably affordable:

There is something there for everyone: a sprawling, pleasant campus, top-notch recreational facilities (including an outdoor country club and swimming pool nestled in the Berkeley hills), a huge library, and excellent medical facilities. A constant flow of illustrious and exciting speakers and performers appear on the campus: everyone from U Thant to the Budapest String Quartet to Joan Baez. The resident student gets all this, plus his education, for approximately one hundred dollars a semester.^{xx}

The University provided a social, cultural and political focal point for student activities. The wide plazas and coffee houses around the campus became meeting places and chat-rooms for students interested in politics. The climate was a further advantage – being warm and dry all-year round made it easier for people to gather and demonstrate. So, these students had plenty of opportunities and advantages but these alone do not really explain why Berkeley became so politicized.

The living circumstances at Berkeley may have been more of a contributory factor in the students' politicization. Most Berkeley students lived at least part of the year either on campus or in the local community near the university. They did not need to commute to university (as, for example their peers at UCLA did) and this brought a sense of belonging to a large student body. It also meant a proximity to the local community and its issues, which student leader Mario Savio suggests, brought a sense of engagement with local issues and, in turn, political action.^{xxi} There was some tension between students and conservative elements in the community, including the local press, which, according to Miller, was 'only too happy to abet the friction between the University and California taxpayers.'^{xxii} This may have fed the political atmosphere further. More important were the student's ongoing grievances with the University itself.

Aside from the usual social and familial pressures experienced by all students – pressure to get good grades, to focus on a career and to manage on a limited budget – there were some issues that were specific to living and studying at Berkeley. Prime amongst these was the sense of ‘alienation’ many students felt at not being part of a ‘scholarly community’ within the university.^{xxiii} Berkeley was an enormous university with 27,500 students on one campus.^{xxiv} Undergraduates had minimal contact with their professors, other than across 700 feet of a lecture hall, as the majority of teaching was done by graduate teaching assistants. According to Wolin and Schaar, themselves professors at the university in the 1960s, ‘it (was) possible to take a B.A. at Berkeley and never talk with a professor.’^{xxv} The sense of alienation was exacerbated further by the image of the university as promoted by its President, Clark Kerr^{xxvi} whose critics accused him of turning the university into a factory-style institution: what he termed a ‘multiversity’ serving ‘the knowledge industry’. The fact that Berkeley had recently been incorporated into a state-wide University of California and that it had research links with the government, the military and big corporations, further incensed many of these young people, who despised corporate America. The way that the university continued its traditional *in loco parentis* role, setting rules for behaviour, speech and conduct (including for example, arbitrary hours for women students) was another irritant.^{xxvii} The students’ lifestyle within the University was far removed from that within the Living Theatre’s commune and they craved more of the sense of liberation and community the Living Theatre had achieved.

These issues all contributed to making Berkeley the political place it was. However, C. Michael Otten’s history of the University shows that the politicization of the student body was also a conscious process, led by an organized group. This is a crucial point: it means that, as in the last example, we find the audience protest was mounted by people who belonged to a pre-formed group specifically organized for social action. The conscious politicizing of the Berkeley campus began with the foundation in 1957 of a group known as TASC (Toward A More Active

Student Community). Otten describes how this group, later renamed SLATE, actively strove to politicize the students of Berkeley raising their awareness of political and sociological issues on a local, national and international level:

At various times, the group ran a slate of candidates for student offices (hence its later name), opposed capital punishment, fought for civil rights, demonstrated against the House Un-American Activities Committee, attacked compulsory ROTC, protested nuclear testing, and confronted the administration on various campus issues.^{xxviii}

Under the influence of SLATE, Berkeley experienced almost a decade of deliberate consciousness-raising activity of a kind unmatched on other campuses. By 1969, Berkeley was known internationally as one of the most politically aware campuses in the world. Otten even attests that some activists, were so serious about their politics, they regarded their social and political activism as their primary learning activity at university:

At one extreme, a few simply gave up on the university, which they thought was hopelessly enmeshed in the racist-militarist-industrial status quo. Building a radical student movement was their aim, the university their tool. Learning to them was inseparable from action.^{xxix}

Otten does stress that this extreme attitude was unusual but it does illustrate the extent to which, for some at least, political activism was the major imperative for being a student. Like the women at O'Casey's play, these audience members were operating within a politicized mindset.

Once again, political awareness was associated with political action, including militant protest. Otten's survey of political activity on the campus shows how, as the sixties went on, the Berkeley students' political awareness became more and more translated into political action:

More important than the mere quantitative increase in political interest was the qualitative change from discussion to action. University rules to the contrary,

students began acting as well as listening. In fact, Berkeley students, taking the leadership role in a Bay Area-wide protest movement, soon became the national symbol of the activist generation.^{xxx}

Under the tutelage of SLATE, Berkeley students became rapidly accustomed to activism on a range of socio-political causes including civil rights, housing, employment and nuclear testing. They also became accustomed to a variety of different protest tactics which, from 1962 onwards, became more sophisticated, more militant and more theatrical. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement in the South (and, consciously or unconsciously, echoing the tactics of the suffragists discussed in the last case study) Berkeley students increasingly tended towards acts of civil disobedience, some of which had a strong element of performance about them, making a conscious link between demonstrations and the guerrilla theatre and happenings taking place on the Art scene. For example, during 1965, in a series of actions designed to put pressure on big employers to improve employment for black people, students participated in sit-ins and shop-ins (in which protesters would fill a trolley with groceries, allow the operator to pass them through the checkout and then walk away), and even sleep-ins in fancy hotels.^{xxxi} There was also the occasion where hundreds of students crammed into a small room to demonstrate the inadequate size of nuclear fallout shelters^{xxxii} By 1969, it is fair to say that the Berkeley student body, like the women in the last case study (and, indeed, the members of Living Theatre themselves) were accustomed to being actors in their own 'performance of protest'.

Like the suffragists, in the last chapter, students at Berkeley were also used to dealing with any legal consequences of their actions – frequently the protests were difficult for university and state authorities to control because participants did not fear getting into legal trouble. Indeed, the intention was often to attract the authorities and get large numbers of people arrested. With such numbers ('hundreds in arrests and thousands in demonstrations')^{xxxiii} the university and state

authorities would often be overwhelmed. For students, this meant a growing sense of their own collective power and an increasing disdain for the power of rules and regulations – both of which have implications for audience behaviour. If this wasn't enough of a challenge for the Living Theatre, the Berkeley students also had direct experience in revolutionary activity.

The student's 'revolution' occurred in 1964 after university authorities attempted to clamp down on political activity taking place on a small strip of land at the entrance to the campus.

This particular strip happened to be the place where students traditionally conducted political activity involving solicitation of funds and members for off-campus political activity, without interference.^{xxxiv}

In their response, the Berkeley students showed themselves to be very capable of organising for a revolution. They organized themselves into a protest body, the Free Speech Movement (FSM) demanding wholesale reform of university rules and regulations relating to political activity on campus. The organization of the FSM occurred with amazing speed and efficiency.^{xxxv} The steering committee had a central command office (the fact that this was situated just above the drama department could be taken as symbolic if one was searching for symbols of the 'theatre of protest')^{xxxvi} and it carried out what was, for the time, a fairly sophisticated communications system:

FSM members, in touch with a central command post, covered the campus from one end to the other with walkie-talkies, and were able to learn of speeches and actions taken at closed faculty meetings as they occurred. The steering committee systematically rounded up the 'right' faculty members to attend meetings and vote.^{xxxvii}

The description here, as in other accounts, shows the FSM as working with almost military precision. In the battle to follow, students successfully disrupted the university between September 1964 and January 1965. There were protest meetings, rallies, and silent vigils,

attended by crowds of up to 7000. Civil disobedience continued.^{xxxviii} On two occasions hundreds of police were massed on campus. Three sit-ins occurred, during the last of which the central administration building was occupied by 800 students and then cleared by 'an almost equal number of police'.^{xxxix} Staff became involved, too, and a sympathy strike, launched by teaching assistants, severely interrupted classroom routines. Faculty members expressed their sympathy for the students' actions by including references to the revolt within topics for discussion and even exam questions.^{xl} In short, thanks to the organizational skills of the FSM, 'one of the world's largest and most famous centres of learning was brought to the edge of collapse'.^{xli}

In the last chapter, we saw how the earlier '*Playboy* riots' were an important precursor to the protests at O'Casey's play in 1926. I suggest that the events of 1964 were, likewise, a significant factor in the audience behaviour exhibited in 1969 and that parallels may be drawn between the role of the FSM in the lives of the Berkeley students and the role of the women's suffrage and Nationalist movements in the lives of the *Plough* protesters. While the protests in the theatre may not have been directly organized by the political groups, in both cases the protesters had a structured organization in the background; an organization that had deliberately fostered an anti-authoritarian approach to social relationships and which had provided them with the tactics and the experience of opposition and disruption. Like the Nationalist women, this group of students as an entity had experienced an organized, unified and almost-successful revolution. Though the individuals making up the student body might have changed by five years later (just as the individuals making up the Living Theatre had changed), as a group and even as individuals, members of the Berkeley student body had shown themselves inclined to question the rules and regulations by which society was structured. As audience members, they might be less inhibited about exhibiting behaviours that breached the theatre relationship than other audience members might be. This claim could be made even if the students' political activity had subsided after 1964 but it

did not. Students in 1969 were very much still engaged in active protest mode.

The period after 1964 brought some shifts in the political atmosphere on campus as students realized the limited effects their revolution had had. Immediately after the revolt, observers described a palpable optimism amongst the students and a sense that their revolution really might have changed something:

. . . an authentic, campus-wide feeling of community in the air; of professors and students greeting each other by first names; of innumerable plans cropping up to give students more control over course content and professors over student discipline; of traditional divisions between campus cliques - bohemians, 'dormies' even fraternity and sorority types- having been bridged.^{xliii}

Within two years, however this sense of victory had 'hollowed out': students were frustrated to find that few of the changes they had pushed for had actually been made. To make matters worse, as Wolin says, 'the quality of student leadership had declined and the Regents were in a strident and vengeful mood'.^{xliiii} Berkeley students did not give up on politics, however. Indeed, if anything, they took a tougher line. For a time, the FSM lost members and changed its name^{xliiv} but many of the FSM's structures continued in existence, ensuring that the next generation of students would be similarly politicized. After 1964 students at Berkeley were rarely out of protest 'mode': the students became more accustomed than ever to acting deliberately provocatively (and theatrically) as they maintained a kind of rolling protest on a wide range of issues.^{xliv} For example, there was the 'obscenity crisis' in which student activists used obscene language to goad university authorities:

Seeking to test the widest limits of the commitment to no restrictions on speech, various individuals . . . carried signs of, or chanted, the word 'fuck' in Sproul Plaza.^{xlvi}

As protests became more provocative and as activism spread amongst other campuses in the country, responses from the university and state

authorities became quicker and more heavy-handed. For example, in 1966, when students at Berkeley staged another sit-in and strike, the police were quickly called to the campus and the strike was brought to an abrupt halt. The ongoing protests seemed to be designed to maintain the students' image as opponents to the system, and to continually demonstrate their potential to seize power as before. Having experienced the euphoria and frustration of revolution in practice, Berkeley students were unlikely to accept any simplistic messages about 'changing the world' such as the Living Theatre would offer them.

After 1964, students developed a new kind of political identity and this, too, set them apart quite markedly from the Living Theatre:

Although the student movement was fragmented and querulous, some unity was provided by a vague but pervasive ideology composed largely of vulgar Marxism, the populism of C. Wright Mills, and elements of hip culture. From the meeting of the two cultures, political and hip, a new politics began to emerge, new in style, language, rhythm, and tactics.^{xlvii}

As this extract says, the students' political stance was 'vague' and hard to define using the normal labels. One university researcher at the time described it as 'a sort of political existentialism' and added 'all the old labels are out'.^{xlviii} The term most commonly used to describe the students' stance was 'New Radical' and though the term is a loose one, encompassing a wide range of beliefs and approaches, some common strands can be identified. For example, many New Radicals identified a moral basis to their political thinking. Miller and Gilmore note that students responded most readily to 'immediate and morally unambiguous issues, such as Negro rights, free speech etc.'^{xlix} Allied to this moral sense was a feeling that American society was 'corrupt' in its present form and should be changed to represent what it claimed to represent. As one FSM committee member told Tillin, 'It's really a strange kind of naiveté. What we learned in grammar school about democracy and freedom nobody takes seriously, but we do. We really believe it.'¹ Like the Living Theatre themselves, these young people were

idealists who wanted their country to be all that it could be. Thus, as in the last case study, the breakdown in the theatre relationship in this case was not caused by a difference in broad goals – these were quite similar – but by a difference of opinion in how to achieve those goals. So what was the Berkeley students' position?

Unlike the women of Dublin who were clearly united under the banner of Nationalism, the Berkeley radicals seem to have been largely suspicious of any single ideology as a solution for society's ills. This suspicion of 'easy answers' or pure ideologies may be identified as another feature of the New Radical student and this was perhaps the biggest pitfall for the Living Theatre: their seven-step plan to attain Paradise may have seemed just too utopian. As Gilmore puts it,

Most FSM leaders make no attempt to disguise their deep alienation from American society, but they regard allegiance to any specific alternative as utopian, divisive, immobilizing and - perhaps most significant - not their 'style.'^{li}

In part the suspicion of easy answers was a result of the student's earlier disappointments in 1964. In part, too, it may have been a backlash against the pure communism of the previous generation, which had, indeed, proved utopian and divisive. It also reflected the spirit of the times where individuality was valued. Whatever the underlying reasons, the New Radical tended to be less concerned with finding a group to belong to than with building a personal relationship to political and social issues. Several commentators draw attention to the tendency of New Radicals to make politics personal – to measure political commitment in terms of individual commitment, personal integrity, lifestyle choices and individual action (one manifestation of this emphasis on the personal act was the widespread fashion for wearing badges carrying political slogans).^{lii} According to Gilmore, New Radical thinking saw the 'personal' act as even more important than taking action as part of a group: 'their radicalism is vague and non-ideological; it places a heavy stress upon individual integrity, perhaps more than

collective action.^{liii} This might seem a surprising claim when one considers the FSM's tactics of involving large numbers of students in protests but it is important to remember that the large numbers were made up of individuals from a range of different political persuasions (one badge spotted during the protests was worn by members of the Cal Conservatives for Political Action and read 'I Am a Right Wing Extremist').^{liv} Large numbers of people participated in demonstrations but, suggests Gilmore, they felt themselves to be participating as individuals. Coming from this standpoint, the intense collectivism of the Living Theatre would have been very unattractive.

The students are also often described as being suspicious of 'all authorities'^{lv} and suspicious of people older than themselves. Savio recalls that 'don't trust anyone over thirty' was a motto of the FSM.^{lvi} Suspicion of the older generation was, in part a gesture of defiance by the emerging youth culture, keen to identify its own strengths, and in part an expression of the feeling that the older generation was to blame for society's ills. The lack of trust even extended to a dismissal of older radicals and their ideologies – a fact lamented by some commentators at the time: 'they are too suspicious of all adult institutions to embrace wholeheartedly even those ideologies with a stake in smashing the system'.^{lvii} With this innate suspicion and questioning attitude, Berkeley students were going to make tough, uncompromising audience members for any theatre group. When the theatre makers in question were the Living Theatre, the relationship became even more problematic.

To summarize, though their leftist, anarchist inclinations may have lined up with the Living Theatre's politics, several of the traits associated with the 'hard' approach to counter-culture favoured by the New Radicals put the Berkeley students directly at odds with the 'soft' counter-culture that the Living Theatre seemed to them to represent. The Living Theatre was a group of people, many of whom were over thirty and therefore 'not to be trusted'. The group operated as a commune with strong figures of authority – both of which, as we have seen, the students were suspicious about. Perhaps most important of all was the fact that

the work on offer, *Paradise Now!*, claimed to be offering a single answer to bring about social, political and spiritual change. The students, suspicious of single solutions were liable to question this approach and, given their activist background, to do so vociferously.

If the Berkeley students had significant political or ideological differences with the Living Theatre, they may also have had differences at an artistic level that contributed to the failure of the performance. The relationship on offer from the Living Theatre relied on audience members being shocked and discomforted but this audience may not have been as shocked as others with the confrontational tactics of *Paradise Now!*. Partly this can be put down to the fact that theatre performance had changed a great deal in the forty years since *Plough and the Stars* and even in the four years since the Living Theatre had left the country, so that the horizon of expectations for alternative theatre in America allowed for many of the confrontational elements of *Paradise Now!*. For example, one of the most striking features of alternative theatre in the 1960s was the degree of nudity and sexuality explored on stage. A double page of theatre advertisements from New York's *Village Voice* in October 1968 includes at least four Off-Broadway plays containing nudity and several others with sexuality as their theme.^{lviii} Nudity was even starting to be seen in mainstream theatre, most famously in the Broadway musical *Hair*^{lix} so the Berkeley audience may not have been too shocked at its inclusion in *Paradise Now!*. It was also part of an audience's general horizon of expectation that theatre could include experiments with audience participation and the Berkeley audience would have been much less unsettled with this than the *Plough and the Stars* audience would have been.

As discussed earlier, theatre makers had been experimenting with different forms of participation and deliberate acts of disruption since modernist times and, over the years, audiences had become aware that the division between performer and audience member might be flexible in a theatre relationship. By 1969, the horizon of expectation in this area was very broad. An audience member at a piece of alternative theatre

might anticipate being addressed directly, shouted at, touched or caressed. Perhaps the most notable contemporary example of this kind of experimentation was the Performance Group's *Dionysus in '69* which was running in New York while the Living Theatre was on tour, and included direct interactions between performers and audience very like those used in *Paradise Now!*. For example, there was the 'group caress' scene described here by director Richard Schechner:

The people in the audience, experiencing a total sensory immersion, were surprised by loud screams, and bites, and scratches. This transformation was not altogether sudden, but passed through a phase familiar to lovers when the stimulation intensifies and strokes become clawings and nibbles bites. Often, pandemonium filled the room with the screams of the audience joining our own.^{lx}

This section had certain similarities with the rite of universal intercourse from *Paradise Now!* and anyone who had experienced Schechner's work would have a frame of reference for this kind of participation.^{lxi} Of course, Berkeley is a long way from New York, which was acknowledged as the centre of experimental theatre in America in the late 1960s, but it is likely Berkeley students would have at least heard about this kind of audience participation before being subject to the Living Theatre's version of it. In any case, the Bay Area was home to some of America's most respected alternative theatre companies including the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Berkeley audiences would have had opportunities to come into contact with happenings, guerrilla theatre and environmental theatre performances. So, part of the reason for artistic differences between the audience and the theatre makers was, simply that they were used to such confrontations. This would have been true for any Alternative theatre audience in America, however, and many others responded positively to the work. Perhaps more important was how Berkeley students' experiences with theatrical protest had made them familiar with using guerrilla tactics to make a point. This raised the bar to the point that whereas others (even the alternative theatre crowd

in New York) might have been pushed out of their comfort zones by aspects of *Paradise Now!*, the Berkeley students found the confrontation weak and pointless.

Berkeley students may have experienced alternative theatre forms in the past but a brief survey of local newspapers from October 1969 shows that there was little alternative theatre on offer in Berkeley around the time the Living Theatre arrived in town. The Living Theatre's appearance may have been something of a high spot when the only other theatre performances on offer were *The Importance of Being Earnest*^{lxii} at The Theatre on College Ave and a 'season of distinguished American drama' by students at the university's theatre *The Playhouse*.^{lxiii} Films on offer at the time were also fairly mainstream including *Bullitt* with Steve McQueen and *Half a Sixpence* with Tommy Steele, although the first annual Student Film Festival was held in Berkeley just before the Living Theatre arrived. There were a number of live concerts to choose from: Joni Mitchell had appeared at the Auditorium Theatre on the previous Friday.^{lxiv} Possibly the most challenging night out was to be had by attending a talk given by a prominent figure from politics, academia or some other field. The 'what's on' pages show a range of such talks and lectures at the time Living Theatre arrived. Perhaps some students who attended *Paradise Now!* on the Thursday evening had been among the 1000 plus who attended a lecture on 'psychedelic psychology' given by Timothy Leary the night before.^{lxv} In notable contrast to the Living Theatre's experience to come, Leary's talk was rapturously received. The audience's response was described as follows:

...often roaring with laughter, clapping and stomping, yet in some moments so quiet you could almost hear the thoughts in their heads, the listeners gave 'Saint Timothy' their full attention as he laid his trip upon them.^{lxvi}

Clearly, it was possible to be a hit with the Berkeley students if you delivered a message they wanted to hear.

What did the Berkeley students know about the Living Theatre before the performance began and where did their impressions come from? It is possible that some of the students attended the performances of *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* and *Frankenstein* earlier in the week, but Neff notes that audience numbers were very low for these nights.^{lxvii} Other than this, we can assume that most, if not all of the Berkeley audience were seeing the group for the first time, given their long absence in Europe. Student audience members would have been still children when the group were resident in the US, aside from which the group had been based on the other side of the country, in New York and even with the success of *The Connection* they had only reached a relatively small audience. We know that there was minimal formal publicity for the Berkeley performances due to lack of money^{lxviii} so audience members must have been largely attracted to the performance based on its reputation from the tour to date, and this was reasonably substantial. By the time they arrived in Berkeley, the Living Theatre had performed over ninety times in forty-two different venues.^{lxix} They had also received coverage in the press and on TV.^{lxx} If the Berkeley students were at all aware of the press response to the tour to date, they could not fail to notice that it was predominantly negative in tone, sometimes aggressively so.

It is possible students might have read favourable reviews and been attracted by these, though of the thirty-three articles written about the Living Theatre's tour only seven were straightforwardly positive about the Living Theatre or their work. Critics who were complimentary tended to be very much so, as in this comment from Meryle Secrest of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*;

The genius of the Living Theatre would seem to lie in its ability to jolt the viewer into an immediate and challenging re-examination of his personal shibboleths and society's irrational taboos. The effect is immediately devastating and finally exhilarating, rather like a crash course in group therapy.^{lxxi}

The favourable reviews made it clear to potential audience members that the experience of a Living Theatre performance was a confrontational and difficult one but this was presented as something to be appreciated. If Berkeley students had read, or heard about, these positive reviews, this might have induced them to attend. Students might also have been attracted by those reviews expressing mixed reactions and several did just that. Several reviewers oscillated between extremes of positive and negative responses, with statements like, 'the performances . . . combine in unequal quantities brilliance and boredom,'^{lxxii} or 'the effect is immediately devastating and finally exhilarating'^{lxxiii} and 'it is at times terribly pretentious, confusing; at other times maddeningly phoney, and yet, for the most part, it is extremely dramatic'.^{lxxiv} The following comment from Eric Kraft sums up how, for many critics, the Living Theatre's work was a dichotomy:

The Living Theatre is at once great and ghastly, highly disciplined and completely self-indulgent, skilled and incompetent. In the areas where they succeed, they are brilliant and where they fail, they are miserable.^{lxxv}

Such comments would not necessarily deter an audience member. Indeed they might make them more curious.

Most of the reviews rejected the Living Theatre and their work and it is likely that the students were aware of this. While most critics acknowledged the serious aims and earnestness of the group, they attacked them on a number of grounds. Some claimed that the performances were pretentious and 'phoney', like this critic, from *Chicago's American*:

They've practised yoga, can counterfeit the wordless wail of Japanese Zen-Buddhists, and perform all manner of conniptions, but their work – their method – remains gutless and futile . . . the problem is not making sport of these intellectually empty antics – too ersatz, too eclectic to be called degenerate – but taking it seriously as a viable and valid theatrical form.^{lxxvi}

Others criticized the troupe for being strident and humourless, as in this response to *Frankenstein*:

That it is full of solemn symbols and significance is obvious enough. That it is meant as something very important, very meaningful is also true. But it doesn't work. It doesn't catch at the mind or the heart or the spirit. And it is so utterly humourless, so totally devoid of anything like the joy of affirmation, that it becomes painful.^{lxxvii}

Some attacked the troupe on political grounds as in these comments from the *Boston Globe*: 'let me make it perfectly clear; the Living Theatre is a platform for anarchy and nothing more'.^{lxxviii} Many also doubted the aesthetic worth of what they had seen, as well as questioning the skill of the actors:

Mr Beck seems to insist upon clouding his production with a great deal of unprofessional theatrics. A greater amount of discipline in performing is needed if the Living Theatre wishes to avoid a premature death.^{lxxix}

All the plays in the Living Theatre's repertoire received negative criticism, but *Paradise Now!* came in for the strongest attacks.

Paradise Now! was described among other things as 'a full scale disaster',^{lxxx} and 'a self-consciously phoney attempt to break the boundaries of conventional theatre done as if by dirty schoolboys'^{lxxxi}. The latter comment shows how some were shocked by the near-nudity and sexuality of the play. The confrontation of the audience also attracted criticism 'the cast physically unattractive, strident, usually aggressively baiting the audience.'^{lxxxii} Once again, some critics also drew the wider conclusion that the play and the group as a whole were artistic failures or, worse still, fraudsters:

Paradise Now! is a fraud and a disgrace and I don't mean morally, I mean artistically. The Living Theatre panders to its own politics and cheapens everything it touches. It offers platitudes for solutions, pretensions for concept and prattle for theatre.^{lxxxiii}

Several reviewers expressed this kind of loathing not only for the performance but also the artistic and political ‘pretensions’ of the company.

The most sustained attack on the Living Theatre was Eric Bentley’s sizeable *New York Times* article of October 20th, uncompromisingly entitled ‘I Reject the Living Theatre’. Among other comments, Bentley slated Beck and Malina for their unintelligent political ‘errors’ (citing as an example an interview in which Malina attacked Eugene McCarthy as a ‘letter-writing murderer’ and Beck stated a case for astrology). He accused them of being out of touch with political reality:

The LT *has* taken leave of its senses. I approve of that as a momentary thing. ‘The man who cannot lose his head has no head to lose.’ But as a permanent state of affairs? As a position publicly taken?^{lxxxiv}

Bentley also criticized the lack of dialectic debate within the company’s work, claiming that any intelligent people in or out of theatre require a sense of the interplay of opposite opinions, or ‘counterthoughts.’ He argued: ‘no one on the Becks’s stage ever has such thoughts. Or any other thoughts. Only their original “convictions”.’^{lxxxv} On top of these political errors, Bentley added his criticism of the aesthetic shortcomings of the company, which he saw as stemming from ‘false psychological assumptions, both as to what is the normal relation of audience and actor, and as to what can be done to upset it.’^{lxxxvi} He accused them of confusing their hatred for society with their attitude to their audience:

An effective theatre of commitment, however dim a view it takes of the society at large, must, perforce, receive its own guests with courtesy. I am not talking public relations only, though the relation of actor to spectator is a public relation par excellence. I am talking politics and therefore ethics.^{lxxxvii}

Bentley’s article sparked something of a debate in the press and *The Times* followed up with an article from Clive Barnes in which he rigorously defended the Living Theatre against Bentley’s accusations. In terms of the effect this controversy had on the Berkeley students, it is

likely that, if they read the articles, this would only have fuelled their interest. Far from deterring the Berkeley audience, the negative response to the Living Theatre, particularly *Paradise Now!* may have been an inducement. Students and young people might have been attracted to attend this performance in defiance of the negative reviews written by critics – presumably from that older generation who could not be expected to tune into something like *Paradise Now!*.^{lxxxviii}

The Berkeley audience may also have heard something of the responses from audiences earlier in the tour. On some occasions the group had been met with rapturous appreciation, as in New Haven or even more notably Ann Arbor, where the students' enthusiastic participation helped to produce what several commentators considered the 'best *Paradise* ever.'^{lxxxix} On other occasions audience members had rejected the performance and chosen to break the theatre relationship in different ways. Audience members had exhibited behaviour within the first two levels of rejection behaviour discussed earlier. On many occasions audience members had chosen to leave – the least disruptive form of relationship breakdown. On one or two occasions, audience members had gone to the next level of rejection behaviour and stayed to tackle the theatre makers. Two examples of this kind of rejection are highlighted here, not just because the Berkeley audience might have heard about them, but also because they illustrate two different kinds of performance breakdown that the Living Theatre had experienced before Berkeley.

On the first of these two occasions, in Castleton, the audience simply reacted with intense hostility throughout the performance by heckling and resisting any opportunities to participate. This reaction appeared to the company to be born out of a fearful rejection of the work:

We never did find out what the hell we were doing there, and it was pretty hairy. These kids were scared, up tight, and to them the Living were all those Commie fags they'd heard about, Commie Fags out to get Mom and deflower their sisters, move next door and take over America.^{xc}

In this instance, the audience's anger and resistance were strong enough to make them want to stay and fight the theatre makers. It would seem, however, that the Living Theatre maintained performance power and the audience were subdued.

They did go through some changes though . . . the initial lack of comprehension soared rapidly to frustrated violence, reaching its climax in hysteria, and by the end a mood of hostile fascination had settled in, bringing its own discomforting aura. It was a steady struggle of rock-bound wills, the students lashing out and resisting every possible contact, and the Living going at them relentlessly, shaking them up *torturing them* simply by being there.^{xci}

The audience may have been hostile and unreceptive in this instance, but the theatre makers never lost performance power. Another performance, twenty-four hours later at the all-female Bennington College, was a scene of a different kind of hostility.^{xcii}

The audience on this occasion were initially positive about the performance and participated enthusiastically. Indeed, some members of the audience (reputedly members of a local commune, rather than college students) unbalanced the performers by unabashedly joining in the stripping at the start of the show. As the show went on, however, audience members became increasingly upset by the hostility of the confrontation. One woman screamed back at the actors during the opening 'rite': 'I don't hate you because you're black, I hate you because you're spitting in my face'^{xciii} while, later in the show things got so heated between an actor and audience member that he slapped her face (this was an audience member who had earlier fully entered into participation, forming part of one of the body piles). It would seem that here, again, the theatre makers were very concerned to hold on to performance power and to assert the terms of the theatre relationship, which expected audience members to be unsettled by the confrontation, not enjoy it.

Of these two examples, Bennington was nearer to the Berkeley experience in that audience members were initially pre-disposed to enjoy

the performance but became disillusioned. The difference was that whereas the Castleton audience were stunned into submission and the Bennington audience got upset and walked away, the Berkeley audience were more disposed to protest if upset or offended. As Neff puts it:

At Castleton the actors had eventually succeeded by turning animosity into a reluctant fascination . . . At Bennington it was taken with polite indifference; at Berkeley it would be turned into a full-blown fiasco.^{xci}

At Berkeley, the Living Theatre would experience the next level of audience rejection behaviour. Audience members would seize performance power and take over the role of theatre makers.

The group had also had run-ins with people other than their audiences and any knowledge of this would have fed the Berkeley students' expectations too. Controversy began with the very first American performance of *Paradise Now!* (only the seventh ever) in New Haven, when, as the audience spilled into the streets, Beck was arrested along with another member of the cast and a member of the audience, and charged with indecent exposure. Arrests also followed the performance in Philadelphia and interactions with the police became a regular feature of the ending of the play. Busy as they were with their own battles against the police, anything they had heard about the group's legal run-ins, would presumably only have increased the students' respect for the Living Theatre. On the other hand, it is also possible that the Berkeley students heard about the Living Theatre's less public disagreements with political activists they met on the tour. If so, this might have had a deleterious effect on their expectations.

The first disagreement with student activists occurred after the second performance of *Paradise Now!* at New Haven where members of local political organizations including radical black militants and student groups came backstage, as Neff recalls,

. . . all with disdain and animosity, to challenge the Living Theatre, to put its members down for being out of touch and not knowing where the revolution was at in this country.^{xcv}

The Living Theatre's non-violent message seemed out of touch and irrelevant to many young dissidents and this night's confrontation was to be repeated on a number of occasions through the tour. For example, students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) asked the Living Theatre to support their harbouring of an AWOL soldier from Vietnam. The Living Theatre offered a 'Chord' exercise but declined to be part of anything that might lead to violence. Some students on that occasion rejected the Living Theatre as 'a bunch of bullshit actors and hippies'.^{xvii} These students, accustomed to political action, had a very different understanding of what the theatre relationship might be: 'the students wanted more direct action, a demonstration – *do something*'^{xviii} and they felt let down by their theatre makers. If any of these responses had reached the Berkeley students, they may have felt negatively inclined towards the group. Even if the Berkeley students were not *au fait* with all these issues, it can be assumed that some idea of the controversy that the tour was generating would have filtered through ahead of the Living Theatre's appearance at Berkeley.

Even more immediate than the theatrical expectations these audience members held, were the pre-occupations they brought from their own social reality. Like the audience at *Plough and the Stars*, these people had already had their 'theatre'. In this case, though, it had taken place earlier on that same day. In February 1969, when the Living Theatre arrived in Berkeley, students were engaged in one of their periodic strike actions, precipitated this time by teaching assistants and members of the Third World Liberation Front (a student organization). The protests that took place on the day the Living Theatre was to perform *Paradise Now!* were some of the most violent in the history of the university, with students setting fires, throwing bottles and overturning cars and police using tear gas in return. State Governor Reagan, on a visit to the campus at the time, had declared a state of emergency and the state troopers were on standby. The students within the Living Theatre's audience were part of something that felt truly and immediately revolutionary – part of a continuing legacy of action that had been going

on for several years. Perhaps any performance would have felt extraneous after the dramatic events of the day. Certainly, it seemed this way to Judith Malina, who recalls:

When the Berkeley *Paradise* began, the audience had already begun its play. They came in off the area on campus; their theatre is the confrontation with the cops. All they had in them now was to dance. They were all doing their thing on stage, in the aisles, in the balcony. One by one the exhausted actors staggered into the dressing rooms panting. 'They really have us.' 'We can't get through to them.' 'They don't hear us.' *Je n'ai pas le droit* is crowded out by the big party"^{xcviii}

Perhaps, as Malina suggests, the audience never intended to give the performance a hearing. But if they only wished to party, why they would pay the entrance price? Perhaps, too, the audience misunderstood the nature of the relationship on offer and thought they were entitled to take performance power into their own hands from the start. If so, given that they were accustomed to protesting theatrically, it was not difficult for the Berkeley students to overturn the performance and supersede the theatre makers. What seems more likely is that, as Neff suggests, the audience's rejection of the performance was because they felt they were being condescended to; that in Neff's words 'students, faculty, residents of Berkeley, they were all ahead of the Living Theatre'^{xcix} whose message sounded like empty rhetoric in comparison to the real theatre taking place outside on the street:

"I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana" - a joke when it is sold and smoked on the streets; "I'm not allowed to travel without a passport" - this is not the young audience's idea of a trip . . . "Be the students at Columbia" . . . this line was tossed out in Berkeley where revolt has been a reality for at least four years.^c

To the students of Berkeley, suspicious of easy solutions (especially when those solutions opposed what they saw as necessary violence) and suspicious of the older generation (especially an older generation who had chosen to live overseas, far from the political events that they

themselves grappled with every day), the Living Theatre had little to offer.

It has also been suggested that the performance breakdown was caused because of some resentment that the Living Theatre had failed to take part in the protests during the day. Certainly, for Neff (who had travelled widely with the company), the group's lack of action on the streets of Berkeley was a turning point:

Before the tensions exploded . . . I had crazily anticipated, no, hoped for, something – the materialisation of the Living *en masse*. They had kept abreast of what was happening here; for the past month they had been reading and talking about these demonstrations and following them on television, and now they were just a few minutes' walk to the campus from the hotel. Surely some of them must have had sense enough to round up the others and get up here to support the students. The police had managed to clear the demonstrators from the centre of the Plaza, barricading them around its periphery; the Living would just have to pass the cordon and walk into the emptied space in their funny costumes, a 'Chord' would ease the tensions. Given their unpublicised circumstances, it would have seemed a simple matter of public relations that could win a few friends and influence some serious people for a change. But it was a fantasy that never materialised. Too spaced, too lazy too fucked up on drugs, they never showed up to try to prevent the three o'clock riot.^{ci}

Neff's version of events suggests that the group were too involved in the escapism of drugs and shopping in the Washington holiday sales to participate in the political reality they purported to stand for. If the students had noted the Living Theatre's absence this may, indeed, have added to their annoyance. However, there is no evidence that audience members voiced this kind of sentiment and the tone of Malina's diaries does not reflect the apathy of which Neff accuses the group. Rather, her entry for the 20 February conveys a strong sense of the turmoil and personal crisis she went through over the best action to take:

I see everything politically much more clearly. The place to be a pacifist is, in spite of everything, on the

battlefield, and this battlefield, Kurushtra, Ghandi showed us, is in the heart . . . I say I should walk out between the lines of cops and students and Carl says 'And cause bloodshed over your beaten body' . . . I fly into a fierce rage about all the pussyfooting around the peace politics . . . For years I have been dazed by the magnitude of the problem and here is the cold ice of it . . . My blood boils (under impact of the ice).^{cii}

Clearly, for Malina, events in Berkeley made her challenge and question her own non-violent principles and she felt the helpless inadequacy of any contribution she might make. But this is not to say she was too apathetic to show up. The Living Theatre had already experienced misunderstanding and resentment about their resolute pacifism earlier on the tour. They may have been aware that since they would not engage violently with the police the students would not have welcomed their presence.

Furthermore, although Beck and Malina did not appear on the streets that day, it is not entirely fair to say that the Living Theatre did not participate in the action. According to Malina's diaries, her own absence was more to do with the fact that she and others in the group were sick with flu and exhaustion at this stage of the tour. Despite this, her diary tells how some members of the company did go to the campus, returning 'with the smell of tear gas and strong mixed feelings about what they saw.'^{ciii} Even Neff, while anxious to blame the company for opting out of the action on campus, reports that three members of the company did take part. Evidently, one of the three actors then boycotted the performance, feeling it to be inappropriate to perform after the day's events (indeed, according to Neff, he continued to refuse to perform for the rest of the tour, and finally left the group).^{civ} One suspects that if the three who took part had been Beck, Malina and another, the Living Theatre would have been considered to have been represented at the protests. Even if one accepts the version of events which considers the Living to have been absent from the action, one still needs to ask whether the feelings of resentment which this generated would be enough to make the students in the audience reject the performance before it even

began, and to decide that the contract with the performers was null and void based solely on non-theatrical, personal and political reasons. If so, then some audience members may have attended the work already negatively disposed towards the group, in a similar way that the dissenting audience members did in the case study of the *Plough and the Stars* riots. If Malina's diary is to be believed, however, the Berkeley audience's mood was one of partying rather than wilful disruption. They were not the same as the *Plough* disrupters – they attended prepared to enjoy the performance or, more precisely, to enjoy themselves.

Whatever the students' preconceptions about the performance, they might have responded favourably to an experience that reflected their beliefs or expressed their experiences. As it was, the Living Theatre's pronouncements were seen as risible, offensive and out of touch with Berkeley's realities. Instead of acknowledging the political pedigree of their audience and adapting the play accordingly, the group preferred to see every audience as hostile, and worked hard on breaking down hostility even if it was not there. The Living Theatre had encountered plenty of hostility throughout the tour. At Berkeley, however, they were dealing with a group of people much less inclined to be polite and restrained than their other audiences had been. Members of this audience were a pre-formed group, actively politicized and well trained in expressions of disruptive outrage against perceived systems of control. When they discerned that the original offering had little to offer them, they found it easy to move to the next level of protest behaviour and stage a collective 'revolt' against the theatre relationship. Audience members at the Berkeley performance of *Paradise Now!* attained a genuine revolution, even if it took a rather different form than that envisaged by the theatre makers.

- ⁱ This is what Malina wrote in her diary about the difficulty of performing *Paradise Now!* on that night in Berkeley. Malina *The Enormous Despair* New York: Random House, 1972, p.183
- ⁱⁱ Renfrue Neff *The Living Theatre :USA* Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970, p.166-7
- ⁱⁱⁱ Malcolm Bradbury and Howard Temperly (eds) *Introduction to American Studies* Harlow Essex: Longman, 1981, p.276
- ^{iv} *Chronicle of America* C. Daniel, J. Kirshon and R Berensi (eds) Missouri: JL International Publishing, 1993, p. 784
- ^v Wasserman in M. Medved & D. Wallechinsky *What Really Happened to the Class of '65* New York: Random House, 1976, p.10
- ^{vi} Wasserman in Medved & Wallechinsky, p.10
- ^{vii} See for instance 'Wave of anti War protests sweeps country: May 15, 1966' in Daniel, Kirshon & Berensi (eds), p.811
- ^{viii} Bradbury & Temperly (eds), p.278
- ^{ix} Berkeley Students and faculty participated in 'teach-ins' in 1965 and took part in massive demonstrations including one in San Francisco in April 1967 that attracted 50,000 marchers.
- ^x Bradbury & Temperly (eds), pp.278-9
- ^{xi} This point is made by in Bradbury & Temperly (eds), p.279
- ^{xii} Bradbury & Temperly (eds), p.280
- ^{xiii} According to Wolin and Schaar, 'There is something like a romantic revolt against both technical and liberal knowledge going on on the campuses', see Sheldon S. Wolin and John H. Schaar *The Berkeley Rebellion and Beyond: Essays on Politics and Education in the Technological Society* New York: Vintage Books, 1970, p.14
- ^{xiv} This phrase was coined by the so-called 'acid prophet' Timothy Leary. Leary, who advocated a psychedelic revolution of free love and drugs, was appearing in Berkeley at the same time as the Living Theatre's tour there, see Phineas Israeli 'The God Game: How to Win as Told by Tim Leary' *Berkeley Barb* Feb 14-21 1969, p.16
- ^{xv} On the same day as the Living Theatre's performance of *Paradise Now!* 29 Feb 1969, The University Newspaper ran an article in its regular column on 'drugs'. This casually mentions the four types of barbiturates that 'the reader has probably had contact with' including their street names 'blue devils', 'red bullets' and 'goof balls', see Peter Libby 'Drugs: Barbiturates' *Daily Californian* 20 Feb 1969, p.12
- ^{xvi} Wolin and Schaar, p.119
- ^{xvii} Sidney Hook 'Academic Freedom and the Rights of Students' in *New York Times* 3 Jan 1965 reproduced in Michael V. Miller & Susan Gilmore (eds) *Revolution at Berkeley: The Crisis in American Education* New York: The Dial Press, 1965, p.32
- ^{xviii} Sol Stern 'A Deeper Disenchantment' in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.225
- ^{xix} Mario Savio in Hal Draper *Berkeley: The New Student Revolt* New York: Grove Press, 1968, p.2
- ^{xx} Stern in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.225
- ^{xxi} Savio in Draper, p.2
- ^{xxii} Michael Miller 'The Student State of Mind' in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.58
- ^{xxiii} 'Alienation' was the word favoured by students, to describe their condition 'by which they mean a sense of not being valued members of a genuine intellectual and moral community', see Irving Howe 'Berkeley and Beyond: Introduction' in Miller and Gilmore, p.xvi. Presumably the word 'alienation' was also chosen for its Marxist associations
- ^{xxiv} A. H. Raskin 'The Berkeley Affair: Mr. Kerr vs. Mr. Savio & Co.' in Miller and Gilmore (eds), p.88
- ^{xxv} S.M. Lipset & S.Wolin (eds) *The Berkeley Student Revolt: Facts and Interpretations* New York: Anchor Book, 1965, p.361
- ^{xxvi} Since his appointment in 1959, Kerr had brought a new style of leadership, 'the rational, mediating style of the modern manager', see C. Michael Otten *University, Authority and the Student: The Berkeley Experience* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970, p.160
- ^{xxvii} Howe in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.xviii
- ^{xxviii} Otten, p.168
- ^{xxix} *ibid*, p.182
- ^{xxx} *ibid*, p.165
- ^{xxxi} *ibid*, p.168
- ^{xxxii} *ibid*, p.168
- ^{xxxiii} *ibid*, p.168
- ^{xxxiv} Lipset & Wolin (eds), p.xi
- ^{xxxv} See, for instance, Michael Miller's comments on 'the striking . . . interplay of spontaneity and efficient organization' during the protest in 'The Student State of Mind' in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.55. The speed and efficiency of the FSM has led some commentators to conclude that some of the driving energy came from non-students, perhaps members of extreme political organizations who infiltrated the organization, though the FSM leaders always denied this, see Calvin Trillin 'Letter From Berkeley' Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.273
- ^{xxxvi} A.H. Raskin certainly found the theatrical symbolism compelling when describing the FSM committee's office to readers of *The New York Times Magazine*: 'The visitor climbs a flight of wooden outside stairs and finds himself in a barren room that is dark despite the dazzling sunlight outside. The nearest thing to a real piece of furniture is a battered green sofa, with sags where the springs should be. A square table with a telephone fills one corner, and there are a half-dozen camp chairs. Under the table is a mound of picket signs. The mood is *Waiting for Lefty* done off-Broadway', Raskin in Miller & Gilmore (eds), pp.78-79
- ^{xxxvii} Lipset & Wolin (eds), p.345

^{xxxviii} With large numbers of students deliberately infringing both university rules and civil laws this in turn, sparked a debate about the principle of 'double jeopardy' - whether university and state authorities could punish students separately.

^{xxxix} These facts are taken from Lipset & Wolin (eds), pp.xi-xii and my words paraphrase their summary of events. Perhaps because it took place in a university, the 1964 revolt was promptly and thoroughly analysed by staff and students and there are a number of histories and commentaries available that tell the story from different points of view. However, all roughly agree on the figures given here.

^{xl} According to Sidney Hook, one assistant professor listed the term 'civil disobedience' among the topics for discussion on his biochemistry course, another biochemist included the following question on his final examination paper: 'In your opinion, what were the events, conditions, acts and other factors which led to the campus turmoil of the last few months and, in particular, to the sin-in at Sproul Hall and the campus-wide strike?' Sidney Hook 'Second Thoughts on Berkeley' in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.145

^{xli} Lipset & Wolin (eds), p.xi-xii

^{xlii} Miller in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.61

^{xliii} The unpleasant mood was compounded by a continued mistrust between administration and students and a greater sense of isolation from the community around the university, whose attitudes had shifted to the right in response to the revolt, see Wolin & Schaar, p.43

^{xliiv} At first the FSM lost some members but when it moved out of its 'crisis-born' structure and became the FSU (Free Student's Union) it recovered membership and student backing.

^{xli v} As has already been noted, Vietnam and the draft were a major focus as were issues of race and equality, both nationally and on campus.

^{xli vi} Lipset & Wolin (eds), p.346

^{xli vii} Wolin and Schaar, p.43

^{xli viii} Paul Jacobs quoted by Raskin, in Miller & Gilmore (eds), pp. 79-80

^{xli ix} Howe in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.xxi

^l Trillin in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.275

^{li} *ibid*, p.274

^{lii} Miller recalls seeing protesters wearing an enormous array of 'buttons' with messages on national and international issues ('Get out of Vietnam' or 'I Am Not Now Nor Have I Ever Been a Member of the House Unamerican Activities Committee') as well as ones specific to the university crisis ('A Free University in a Free Society' was one of the most commonly worn), Miller in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.255-6

^{liii} Howe in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.xxi

^{li v} See Miller in Miller & Gilmore (eds), p.255-6

^{li v i} See Wolin and Schaar, p.94

^{li v i i} Savio in Draper, p.6 (Savio notes there were a few over thirties who were seen as exceptions to this rule, including Hal Draper the author of the book)

^{li v i i i} Raskin in Miller & Gilmore, p.79, see also Howe in Miller & Gilmore, p.xxi

^{li v i i i i} Two of the advertisements contain drawings of naked bodies, whilst tag lines include the phrases 'frequent and prolonged nudity' and 'Orgasmic frenzy', see 'New York Happenings' in *Village Voice* 17 Oct 1968, p.48

^{li x} *Hair*, created by James Rado and Gerome Ragni originally opened at the Public Theatre in New York on 17 Oct 1966. It hit Broadway on 29 April 1968 where it played for 1,742 performances. Information retrieved from 'The Hair Pages' www.geocities.com/hairpages/hairhistory.html on 20 April 2005

^{li x i} Richard Schechner (ed) *Dionysus in '69 The Performance Group* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970, no pagination

^{li x i i} It is possible that Beck and Malina were themselves influenced by *Dionysus in '69* if they saw the show when they were in New York in 1968, although by this time, of course, much of the work had been done on *Paradise Now!*. An advertisement in *Village Voice* in October of that year shows that the Living Theatre appeared with the Performance Group as part of an anti-war theatre benefit event see 'Up Against the Wall Theatre' Featuring Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Pageant Players, Performance Group *Village Voice* 17 Oct 1968, p.49

^{li x i i i} This production of Wilde's play was poorly reviewed by the student newspaper, see Dekema 'Overstated Scoff' *Daily Californian* 20 Feb 1969

^{li x i i i i} The second play in the season, 'Awake and Sing' by Clifford Odets, premiered on the same night that *Paradise Now!* was performed, for reviews see William Carlsen 'Theatre for a University Town' *The Daily Californian* 28 Feb 1969 and Dekema 'Awake and Sing Opens' *Daily Californian* 27 Feb 1969

^{li x i v} C.Silvert and Marti Keller 'Joni Mitchell: Two Views on Same Concert' *Daily Californian* 18 Feb 1969, p.22

^{li x v} An advertisement for Tim Leary's lectures can be found on the same page of the *Berkeley Barb* as the Living Theatre's bill (alongside advertisements for flavoured cigarette papers, organic foods and falsemoustaches!). The Living Theatre's advertisement is strikingly larger than Leary's - about three times as big. Another noticeable feature is the difference in entrance price. Where Leary's talks are \$1 (or free to FUB members), the Living Theatre ticket prices are much higher at \$5, \$4 and \$3, see *Berkeley Barb* 7-13 Feb 1969, p.25

^{li x v i} Anon 'High Priest Points Ahead to Happy Era' *Berkeley Barb* 14-21 Feb, 1969, p.15

^{li x v i i} Neff, p.162

^{li x v i i i} See Neff's comments on this, p.162

^{li x i x} 'Living Theatre Itinerary' in Renfrue Neff *The Living Theatre USA* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1970, pp.239-244

^{li x x} The Becks had appeared on *Newsweek* and a two-part documentary featuring extracts of their plays had played early on in the tour

^{li x x i} Meryle Secrest *Philadelphia Inquirer* reproduced in Aldo Rostagno *We, The Living Theatre* New York: Ballantine Books, 1970, p.54

^{li x x i i} Anonymous *Vogue* review reproduced in Rostagno, p.97

^{li x x i i i} Secrest in Rostagno, p.54

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- lxxiv William A. Raidy *Long Island Press* 3 October 1968 reproduced in *Rostagno*, p.133
- lxxv Eric Kraft *Boston After Dark* reproduced in *Rostagno*, p.219
- lxxvi Roger Dettmer *Chicago's American* reproduced in *Rostagno*, p.18
- lxxvii Elliott Norton *Record American* 2 Nov 1968 reproduced in *Rostagno*, p.133
- lxxviii Kevin Kelly *Boston Globe* 6 November 1968 reproduced in *Rostagno*, p.217
- lxxix Jerry Stein *The Post and Times-Star* 7 Dec 1968 reproduced in *Rostagno*, p.70
- lxxx Kelly in *Rostagno*, p.221
- lxxxi Norton in *Rostagno*, p.199
- lxxxii *Vogue* in *Rostagno*, p.97
- lxxxiii Kelly in *Rostagno*, p.185
- lxxxiv Eric Bentley 'I Reject the Living Theatre' *New York Times* 27 Oct 1968: section 2, p. 11
- lxxxv *ibid*, p.11
- lxxxvi *ibid*, p.11
- lxxxvii *ibid*, p.11
- lxxxviii An advertisement for the movies alongside a review of *Paradise Now!* (*New York Times* 15 October 1968 p.39) reads 'Close the Generation Gap . . . Take an Adult to see . . . *What's so Bad about Feeling Good?*'
- lxxxix Neff, p.119
- xc *ibid*, p.107
- xc1 *ibid*, p.107
- xcii The audience on this occasion numbered around 300, with a more-or-less equal mix of female students and male visitors, see Neff, p.109
- xciii Neff, p.110
- xciv *ibid*, p.109
- xcv *ibid*, pp.43-4
- xcvi *ibid*, p.101
- xcvii *ibid*, p.100
- xcviii Malina, p.183
- xcix Neff, p.167
- c *ibid*, p.168
- cl *ibid*, p.165.
- cii Malina pp.179-180
- ciii *ibid*, p.179
- civ Neff, p.166

Chapter X

'Victims and Vengeance'ⁱ: The Thompson Affair, Auckland,

1 February 1984

On the night of 1 February 1984, playwright, actor, director and Auckland University Lecturer Mervyn Thompson (1935-92) answered a phone call in which a woman that he believed to be a student, asked him to meet her. He agreed to do so, and travelled by car to an address near the Auckland zoo. When he arrived he was assailed by a group of six women who covered his head, pulled him into the backseat of his car and drove him to another location. There, the women chained him to a tree and daubed the word 'Rapist' on his car. The attack was interrupted by the arrival of a family in another vehicle and Thompson's assailants disappeared. Thompson was unable positively to identify the women (he saw five of the six clearly enough to be sure they were not his own students) and no charges were ever brought in the case. The morning after the attack, the assailants contacted press, radio and other media organizations to publicize what had happened. They identified themselves as members of feminist organizations and claimed that their victim (whom they did not identify)ⁱⁱ had used his position of authority to commit 'two or three' rapes on young women. The intention of the attack, they said, had been to publicize this man's guilt and to role-model direct action as a response to sexual harassment: 'to encourage women throughout New Zealand to take action themselves if they are not satisfied that justice has been done within the court system'.ⁱⁱⁱ Although the attackers positioned the action as a piece of political activism, it had distinctly theatrical resonances.

The attack was strongly reminiscent of a scene from *Setting the Table* – a play by another New Zealand Playwright known as Renée. Thompson had helped to develop the play and he had directed it in performance two years earlier. In Renée's play, a group of women conspire to trap and attack a known rapist. They begin by stabbing the man in the arms:

SHEILA: So when he was down on the ground,
bleeding like a stuck pig I dragged him to the nearest

fence, tied him to it, pulled his pants down – Jesus was he frightened – he actually shat – tied the ribbon round his spout and put the sign round his neck. ‘This man is a rapist’.^{iv}

Thompson did not experience anything like this degree of brutality or humiliation but some elements of the attack; the abduction, the threat of castration, the chaining up and the written accusation, were similar enough to make the link very apparent to those who knew the play. Thompson was in no doubt that Renée’s play ‘was used as the model for my assault.’^v Renée herself (who has always made it clear she was not involved in any way in the attack) was not prepared to acknowledge any association with her play, commenting that, ‘the women are intelligent enough to think for themselves. They don’t need me to advise them’.^{vi} At the same time, the link between the play and the attack was not made explicit by the protesters in their press release, nor was it explored in anything other than a superficial way within the intense media and public response immediately following the attack.^{vii}

Arguments about the Thompson affair continued for the whole of 1984, fanned by coverage on television,^{viii} in the mainstream and feminist press and by Thompson’s own writings about what had happened to him. These media discussions tended to focus on the narrowly personal aspects of the case or the wide-ranging socio-political issues arising from it, rather than the theatrical aspects. On one side of the debate, Thompson and his supporters denied his culpability as a rapist (an accusation based on his sexual relations with a former student) and made it clear that in their view what had happened during the attack was itself akin to rape. Thompson put it this way:

My present symptoms are those of one who has been raped. My perception of the outside world has changed utterly. From being a person who smiled at dogs, small children and adults on the street, I have found myself exploring every face with suspicion, sweating with fear if I am left alone at night, and quite frankly frightened whenever a member of the opposite sex comes within sight.^{ix}

On the other side of the debate, former students and members of the burgeoning radical feminist movement of the time justified what had

happened to Thompson. From their perspective, he was seen as symbolic of the white male oppressor and his attackers were portrayed as avenging angels. One correspondent put it this way:

If men's fear of wimmin, or of attack by wimmin, is what it is going to have to take to stop sexual violence by men on wimmin and children, then that is the way it will have to go.^x

Others objected to Thompson's use of the word 'rape' to describe his own experience: 'Thompson may have been assaulted, but this is not rape . . . Thompson knows nothing of what it is like to be raped.'^{xi} Thompson's opposers also criticized the amount of coverage he received compared to female victims of rape and violence.

The aftermath to this single case of women's assault on a man makes me curious about what would happen if even half as much violence was perpetuated on men by women as occurs the other way round now.^{xii}

The Thompson case polarized public opinion in a way that would come to affect not only the theatre maker but also his relationship with his audience members and his relationships with other theatre makers.

The first work compromised by the incident was Thompson's new play *Coaltown Blues*, an autobiographical solo work based on his early life in a coalmining town on the West Coast. This play was in development at the time when the attack took place and was due to open at the end of March. Two weeks after the attack, Theatre Corporate decided to postpone the opening of this new play, citing Thompson's ill health as their reason.^{xiii} According to Thompson, the directors of the theatre, Roger McGill and Paul Minifie also acknowledged that they were worried about gaining unfavourable publicity and alienating their audience:

McGill brings the real issue out into the open. There's also the matter of the backlash of opinion that now operates against you, he says. We don't want our theatre to be subject to the wrong kind of publicity – or to political pressure. If it comes – and it will – it will be from the very groups that Corporate depends upon for its audience. 'It'll be better for everyone,' he says carefully, 'if you wait.'^{xiv}

Having failed to persuade the directors of Theatre Corporate to change their minds, Thompson opted to tour the play himself. He decided to open at the Maidment Theatre (based at Auckland University) on 12 June, after giving a single performance of *Coaltown Blues* at the Playwright's Workshop, held at Auckland Teacher's college in May. However, the season at the Maidment was very nearly cancelled too.^{xv} In a series of meetings from 16 April, the University Student Association threatened to use its majority vote on the Theatre's Management Committee to have the booking cancelled. Sebastian Black and other University lecturers put pressure on the Association through their own Union, petitioning the University Council to suspend funding for the theatre until the issue was resolved. The Committee also came under pressure from the theatre profession with Actor's Equity and the Writer's Guild both threatening to withdraw their members' services from productions in the theatre unless *Coaltown Blues* was staged. Eventually, the Students' Association abstained from voting on the matter and the production went ahead.

In the interim, members of the University Students' Association organized a campaign against *Coaltown Blues* or, rather, against its creator. They distributed fliers about Thompson in various places but especially around Auckland University where, Thompson claimed: 'every lavatory seemed to carry an anti-Thompson slogan.'^{xvi} The fliers repeated the accusations about Thompson's sexual activities and also alleged inappropriate conduct and assessment within his University drama courses.^{xvii} On the opening night of *Coaltown Blues* the theatre was picketed by a vocal group of protesters who heckled audience members for attending and handed out pamphlets decrying Thompson. There was also a hostile presence within the audience (whom Thompson described as 'an audience of ghouls')^{xviii} though no organized protest took place inside the theatre. Picketing continued throughout the run of the play in Auckland and on a number of other occasions in different venues on the subsequent tour of the show. In Wellington the performance was interrupted by noise from outside the theatre and protesters also sprayed graffiti on the theatre building repeating the allegation: 'Mervyn Thompson is a rapist.'^{xix} These protesters made it very clear that their

target was the theatre maker not the work. However, by attacking the theatre maker, the work did suffer: Audience numbers at *Coaltown Blues* were low and Thompson lost money on the tour. Nor was *Coaltown Blues* the only play of Thompson's to be affected.

During the same period, the Depot Theatre in Wellington decided to scrap their planned production of *Songs to Uncle Scrim* (1976) – Thompson's song-play about the social and economic conditions in New Zealand in the 1930s. A majority of cast members refused to perform the play after they had met with a number of groups from the city including Women Against Pornography, the women's committee of the Wellington Trades Council, Women's refuges, the University women's group and the Wellington Unemployed Worker's Union.^{xx} Once again, those opposing the play made it clear their objections were a response to the theatre maker rather than the subject matter of the play. Indeed, the head of the Unemployed Worker's Union, Jane Stevens, praised *Songs to Uncle Scrim* as 'an important play because it brought the issue (of unemployment) to the public eye'.^{xxi} The decision to cancel was openly based on sensitivity around the allegations against Thompson and concerns about the continuing fallout from the attack in Auckland. At this point, the focus of 'the Thompson Affair' shifted somewhat. The debate moved away from the question of Thompson's guilt or innocence as a rapist towards a discussion of his rights to free speech as a theatre maker.

To the members of Women Against Pornography and others opposed to Thompson, the scrapping of *Songs to Uncle Scrim* was welcomed as a gesture of support for women and they argued, 'this is surely a basic right of actors and actresses, a right which should be respected'.^{xxii} Thompson considered that the theatre's decision was an act of censorship – a denial of his right to free speech as an individual and a denial of his position as a theatre maker.

The world has obviously gone mad. Here is a play which, though set in the 1930s, has obvious and painful relevance to the 80s, and here are the officials of the Unemployed Workers' Union trying to stop it!^{xxiii}

From Thompson's perspective, the blocking of his work became the most important aspect of the whole affair, even more important than the initial debate over his guilt or innocence as a rapist. To add to the insult, the piece chosen to replace *Songs to Uncle Scrim* was Simon Wilson's *Down the Hall on Saturday Night*, a play in which a respected peace musician is discovered to be the maker of pornographic videos. Thompson later claimed that audiences started confusing the plot of this play with the truth about him and assuming he was a pornographer.^{xxiv}

Thompson received some support for his position. Some people, including some feminists, expressed disquiet at the blocking of his work, and at the use of violence in the initial attack.^{xxv} There were also outraged editorials from the *Evening Post*^{xxvi} and *The Listener* in which A.K. Grant protested:

Actors depend for their livelihood on writers being able to exercise freedom of speech: theatre managements should be as vigilant to resist pressure as newspaper editors. The cast which refused to perform *Songs to Uncle Scrim* should have been sacked and another cast brought in that *would* perform the play.^{xxvii}

Perhaps the most forthright defence of Thompson's position came in an article by Carroll Wall in *Metro*^{xxviii} though some aspects of Wall's inflammatory article actually worked against him. Wall's exposé of the 'fascist fringe of feminism in Auckland'^{xxix} attracted a strong backlash from feminists (and from Thompson himself) for its anti-lesbian sentiments,^{xxx} while her portrayal of a rape 'scenario' between an 'ex-teacher' and a student^{xxxi} also did little to help Thompson in his protestations of innocence. Apart from these articles, Thompson received little support from the press, from the theatre establishment, or from audience members.

In time, organized protest against Thompson's work died away but the issues raised by the affair continued to resonate within New Zealand society for some time. Shortly after the 'Thompson Affair', the University of Auckland took steps to establish proper processes for the reporting of sexual harassment and other grievances. At least one commentator asserts that these changes would not have happened so

swiftly without the publicity from the Thompson case.^{xxxii} Apart from these procedural changes, the Thompson affair continued to be revisited and debated by people on both sides of the debate, for years to come.

One year after the attack on Thompson, an article by Jonathan Lamb (a colleague of Thompson's in the English department at the university, who had appeared in a departmental production of *Setting the Table* in 1983) made a significant contribution to the debate by resolutely exploring the symbolic, literary and psychoanalytical aspects of the events rather than the personal aspects that had tended to dominate responses to that point.^{xxxiii} Other than this, however, the debate continued to be personally charged. For his part, Thompson felt personally and professionally undermined by what had happened to him, and he was to revisit the issue in different ways throughout the rest of his career. First he published *Singing the Blues*, an autobiography giving his version of the attack and its aftermath. Then he included the incident in *Passing Through* (1991)^{xxxiv} an autobiographical play about his life in New Zealand theatre, which he wrote and performed whilst suffering from terminal cancer. On the other side of the debate, Chris Atmore published two feminist readings of the Thompson affair, in 1993,^{xxxv} and 1994,^{xxxvi} in which she examined the use of language and the representation of women, particularly lesbian women, in the coverage of the affair. The details of the case resurfaced once again in 2002 with the publication of Stephanie Johnson's 'The Shag Incident', a fictional novel based loosely on the Thompson affair in which the Thompson figure is portrayed in a sympathetic light as a victim of mistaken identity.^{xxxvii} A further article by Murray Edmond, which explores the Thompson affair as the 'playing out' of a wider crisis within New Zealand's political and cultural identity in 1984, was published shortly after this thesis was presented for examination in May 2005.^{xxxviii}

The Thompson case, then, continues to resonate to this day. However, in all the discussion and all the framing and reframing of the event, there has been little or no attempt to theorize what happened in terms of a theatre relationship.^{xxxix} This is what the following chapters attempt to do. For, it is possible to see the initial attack on Thompson and the subsequent lobbying for the cancellation of his work as

manifestations of extreme audience protest behaviour. The initial attack could be said to represent an overthrowing of the theatre maker, with audience members refusing to enter the theatre relationship on offer and creating a quasi-performance of their own. Next, the picketing of performances of one play and the successful lobbying for the cancellation of another can be viewed as attempts to keep the usurped performance power away from the theatre maker. The fact that theatre managers sided with audience members can also be said to raise important issues of 'sovereignty' within the theatre relationship. Finally, Thompson's subsequent writing and theatre making can be seen as his attempt to reclaim the power he felt he had lost. So, within this case study, the Thompson affair is explored as an extreme example of performance breakdown: a protracted struggle for performance power between a theatre maker and potential audience members that evolved out of a specific political, social, artistic and personal context.

ⁱ This phrase was used as the title for Mervyn Thompson's article about the attack. See 'Victims and Vengeance' *New Zealand Listener* 14 April 1984, p.21

ⁱⁱ It was Thompson who identified himself as the victim of the assault whilst, at the same time, threatening legal action against the Auckland Student's Association magazine *Craccum*, if his name was published, see Mervyn Thompson 'Another Life' Part 1 *Metro* Dec 1986, p.208

ⁱⁱⁱ Thompson 'Victims and Vengeance', p.21 (the statement is in quotation marks, quoting from the women's own press release)

^{iv} Renée 'Setting the Table' from *Secrets and Setting the Table* Wellington: Playmarket New Zealand Playscripts, 1984

^v Thompson 'Victims and Vengeance', p.22'

^{vi} Renée in *New Zealand Listener*, quoted in Lisa Sabbage 'No Skeletons Under the Table' *Broadsheet* Oct 1988, p.14. Though she took this line at the time, some years later Renée commented that she was 'angry with the women for dropping her in the mess' – inferring that she did feel the link with her work was evident, see Sabbage, p.15

^{vii} Carroll Wall's article on the controversy is perhaps the most overt in its use of theatrical imagery. See Carroll Wall 'All the World's a Stage and All the Men Merely Rapists: The New Feminism' *Metro* July 1984, pp.96-110. The title of the article sets the tone, and the attack on Thompson is clearly framed as an extension of Renée's text. Wall gives the history of the play and then concludes: 'One evening in high summer, it returns for one final performance. This takes place in the theatre of the real.' However, after labelling the attack as a piece of quasi theatre, the article does not develop the idea any further.

^{viii} Thompson appeared on *Eyewitness News* on 8 April, in an interview that Thompson considered used unsympathetic lighting and editing to make him appear in a bad light: 'the face being exhibited to the nation was that of a human wreck, lined vulnerable and 'guilty'. I was no longer a playwright but a specimen under a microscope, a rat in a cage.' Thompson 'Another Life', Part 1, p.218

^{ix} Thompson, 'Victims and Vengeance', p.23

^x Sally Ruth letter to the editor *New Zealand Listener* 5 May 1984, p.10

^{xi} L. Crossley letter to the editor *New Zealand Listener* 5 May 1984, pp.10-11

^{xii} Henri Maes letter to the editor *New Zealand Listener* 12 May 1984, p.10

^{xiii} Mervyn Thompson *Singing the Blues* Christchurch: Blacktown Press, 1991, p.11

^{xiv} Thompson *Singing the Blues*, p.12

^{xv} This information on the Maidment negotiations is taken from Thompson 'Another Life', Part 1, p.222

^{xvi} Thompson, *Singing the Blues*, p.9

^{xvii} The flier is reproduced in Thompson 'Another Life', Part 1, p.212. The allegations are refuted by Robert Leek, a colleague of Thompson's in the English Department, in his letter to the editor *New Zealand Listener*, 2 June 1984, p.10

^{xviii} Thompson *Singing the Blues*, p.7

^{xix} *ibid*, p.26

^{xx} See Lorna Massov 'On Behalf of Women Against Pornography' *Broadsheet* June 1984, p.14. See also A.K. Grant 'The Silencing of Uncle Scrim' *New Zealand Listener* 28 April 1984, p.29

^{xxi} Grant 'The Silencing of Uncle Scrim' p.29, see also Thompson *Singing the Blues*, p.17

^{xxii} Massov *Broadsheet* June 1984, p.14

^{xxiii} Thompson *Singing the Blues* p.17

^{xxiv} *ibid*, p.15

^{xxv} See, for example Sarah Calvert's contribution to the discussion 'Rape Fight Back' in *Broadsheet* May 1984, p.12

^{xxvi} Michael Nicolaidi 'Vigilantes Rape Natural Justice' *Evening Post* 13 April 1984

^{xxvii} Grant 'The Silencing of Uncle Scrim', p.29

^{xxviii} See endnote 7, above

^{xxix} Wall, p.99

^{xxx} Thompson expressed his feelings about Wall's article in 'Another Life' Part 2 *Metro* Jan 1987 p.227

^{xxxi} In this fictitious 'scenario' the ex-teacher suddenly 'throws his friend back against the bed and has sex with her against her will'. Wall seemed to be implying two things: that Thompson may have acted in this way and that this kind of behaviour is not 'really' rape.

^{xxxii} Fay Hercock *A Democratic Minority* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994, p.102

^{xxxiii} Jonathan Lamb 'The Uncanny in Auckland' *And* no.4 (Oct 1985), pp.32-45,

^{xxxiv} Mervyn Thompson *Passing Through and other Plays* Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992

^{xxxv} Chris Atmore 'Branded: Lesbian Representation and a New Zealand Cultural Controversy' in *Antithesis* vol.6 no.2 (1993), pp.11-25

^{xxxvi} Chris Atmore 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy: A Feminist Deconstructive Reading' in *New Zealand Sociology* vol.9 no.2 (Nov 1994), pp.171-215

^{xxxvii} Stephanie Johnson *The Shag Incident* Auckland: Vintage Books, 2002

^{xxxviii} Murray Edmond 'The Terror and the Pity of 1984' *Landfall* vol.209, pp.13-28, see Introduction, endnote 59

^{xxxix} Atmore's article 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy: A Feminist Deconstructive Reading' is significant for the way it makes conscious use of theatrical metaphors in its structure and language: the article is structured in two halves with an 'interval' and it uses notions of performance to describe Thompson's handling of the case. However, while Atmore is cognizant of the theatrical overtones of the exchange this is not the focus of her argument. Rather, she attempts to deconstruct and critique the binary oppositions in contemporary responses to the controversy and to defend a radical feminist reading of events, see Atmore 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy', pp.171-215

Chapter XI

The Theatre maker: Mervyn Thompson and New Zealand Theatre

The attack on Mervyn Thompson was both personal and professional. It took the form it did because he was a theatre maker and in the public eye. The seizing of Thompson's power as a theatre maker had direct implications for his future theatre making. It also raised important questions about the nature of power within theatre relationships. To understand where Thompson's power as a theatre maker came from it is necessary to look at what sort of theatre maker he was and the type of theatre relationships he offered to audience members. Thompson's priorities within the theatre relationship changed over his theatre-making career. In a talk given at Massey University in 1984,ⁱ Thompson described his career as having passed through different phases from 'Doing Plays' to 'Doing Political Plays' to 'Doing New Zealand (political) Plays', including performances of his own work. He described his transition to the last phase as a kind of religious revelation: 'I rediscovered New Zealand. (To believe in country you first have to undergo conversion to the faith).'ⁱⁱ Having undergone this conversion, Thompson's vision for theatre in New Zealand was akin to that of the Abbey Theatre makers in Ireland. He became 'passionately committed to a national drama honestly rooted in the New Zealand experience'.ⁱⁱⁱ So, by the time of the attack upon him and his work, Thompson had been engaged for ten years in a struggle to foster and create a distinctly New Zealand theatre.

Mervyn Thompson's working class background was an extremely important factor in his theatre making. It shaped him and directly informed the kind of theatre relationships he sought to offer his audience. Born in Kaitangata, South Otago, the eldest of five children, Thompson spent his early life moving from place to place around the West Coast of the South Island. In his first autobiography *All My Lives* he vividly describes the family's poverty ('we were a poor family even by Runanga's standards')^{iv} and the unsettled, even horrifying elements of his childhood: his father's bad temper, gambling and involvement in mining politics, his mother's depressive phases leading to her death by

suicide when Thompson was fifteen years old and the gradual breakdown of the family's structure following the father's remarriage to a woman Thompson loathed. Thompson reflected on his childhood in theatrical terms:

I see that mine is the kind of childhood story from which clichés are made. All the stock ingredients of melodrama are there: the heavy father (not alcoholic, but you can't have everything), the oppressed mother, the wicked stepmother, poverty, insanity and violence; and of course the TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE (my mother's suicide) that can be carried through life like a torch to light up dark corners or burn through the smug barricades of the privileged.^v

Thompson's 'childhood story' did indeed provide a metaphorical torch to light up his future theatre making. Three of his plays were directly autobiographical; *First Return* (1974) *Coaltown Blues* (1986) and *Passing Through* (1991) were all based on the experiences that had shaped him. Even his larger scale works *O! Temperance!* (1972) *Songs to Uncle Scrim* (1976) and *Songs to the Judges* (1980) reflected his beginnings, as each presented an aspect of New Zealand history – the Temperance movement, the Depression and Maori / Pakeha relations, from the perspective of the underdog.^{vi} All Thompson's work exuded a personal and political anger that his childhood experiences had engendered in him.

Like O'Casey, Thompson was politicized by his working class origins, and it was always one of his key objectives to champion the cause of the working classes in his theatre making. This was not always easy in a society where, according to Thompson, few people admitted that a working class even existed:

Few people in the artistic classes were prepared to admit that a class system even existed in this country – or that working people suffered the oppression, both economically and in the colonized outposts of the mind, that they quite palpably do.^{vii}

Like O'Casey, Thompson aimed to confront theatregoers from the 'artistic classes' with images of working class life with which they may not have been familiar, or comfortable. Thompson's characters, like

O'Casey's, were the ordinary people of his country. Sebastian Black notes that:

The people he has written about are the large majority of those who live in the country: the workers, the housewives, the rugby players, the race-goers and even, in his most recent unpublished play^{viii} the readers of *Truth*. His world is a world which he believes artists and intellectuals have too contemptuously disregarded.^{ix}

As well as seeking to confront a middle class audience, Thompson also wished to reach the working class audience he was convinced was out there.

Thompson was personally aware of the lack of a working class theatre audience in New Zealand. He had no prior experience of theatre before he joined his local drama group in the 1950s when he was working as a coal miner and his autobiography makes it clear that an interest in drama was considered unusual for a working class male at this time (although his first attendance at the drama club was at the suggestion of a fellow miner). Thompson's workmates in the mine teased him about his interest: 'Right, Hamlet, get behind the brattice. We'll turn our lights on you, and when we clap you can come out and do a speech.'^x To these men, as to many working class New Zealanders, the theatre was something unfamiliar and elitist.^{xi} Later, when he became director of Downstage theatre, Thompson sought to address the lack of a working class audience for theatre. He said his objective was that 'as many plays as possible were to be performed for audiences outside the normal charmed ring of middle-class theatregoers.'^{xii} This saw him taking performances to Labour Party Conferences, schools clubs and halls around the country.

As well as informing his theatre making, Thompson's working class origins made him vulnerable to his attackers and framed his responses to what happened to him. For a theatre maker so dedicated to taking performance out of 'the normal charmed ring of middle class theatre goers' it was a savage irony that he should be the victim of a piece of aggressive quasi-theatre that took place in very much a non-traditional setting. The class implications of the attack were more

complex than this, however. By becoming a playwright Thompson had in many ways transcended his working class background but he always defined and defended himself as working class. In selecting him as a symbol of male oppression, his attackers seemed to be defining him as middle class; as having, in the words of one correspondent, passed through a process of 'embourgeoisment.'^{xiii} Thompson resented this implication enormously:

What my correspondent is attempting to do is deny that the first twenty-four years of my life have any validity. So you experienced poverty? You don't now, mate. So you suffered from the low self-esteem common to all working-class people? You don't now, mate. So you had to leave school at fifteen? You're educated now, mate. So you worked five years down a coalmine? You escaped, mate. You're not 'working class' any more, mate. You're a bourgeois male in a position of power . . . The only thing we're interested in hearing from you is the admission that as a white, privileged male, you're an exploiter of women, in short a rapist.^{xiv}

For Thompson, the sensitivity of being miscast in social terms was both personally painful and politically ironic; a fact picked up by Bruce Jesson in his *Metro* article on the affair, when he calls the attacks on Thompson's work 'a peculiar inversion in which Thompson is being attacked as a representative of the very social forces that he has spent his life opposing.'^{xv}

If Thompson considered that the attacks on his person and his work were class-based, so was his own response to these attacks. Thompson was very sure that his attackers and those who led the pickets were middle class women: 'daughters of privilege' as he called them,^{xvi} and he expressed a suspicion of such women not because of their gender but because of their class:

It's not fashionable to say so, but the daughters of privilege are no more to be trusted than the sons from the same stable. In working class circles, middle-class radicals are often suspected of being opportunists and fly-by-nights.^{xvii}

Just as he felt very aware of the class differences between himself and his opposers, Thompson felt he experienced for himself the

‘contemptuous disregard’ of artists and intellectuals when the majority of middle class theatregoers stayed away from *Coaltown Blues*.^{xviii} His sense of isolation as a working class theatre maker was further exacerbated when the directors of the theatres he worked in (a group of people amongst whom he had never quite belonged) took the side of the audience and refused to stage his work.

Thompson’s commitment to representing people he considered to be marginalized within New Zealand society extended beyond his own working class identity. He also championed other groups, including Maori and women. The matter of how to write appropriately for and about Maori was a huge challenge for Thompson, as for any pakeha (non Māori) theatre maker working in post-colonial bicultural New Zealand. As Ian Cross has written:

We are, to our great benefit, heirs to European culture: most New Zealanders respond to the arts according to that influence. But culture – and this cannot be said too often – is a people’s response to their own environment . . . so an inevitable tension slowly arises in a post-colonial society between the imported and the indigenous practice of the arts.^{xix}

As Cross suggests, the relationship between the ‘imported’ art of theatre and indigenous Maori tradition has not always been a comfortable one in New Zealand. Historically, non-Maori theatre maker’s attempts to include Maori themes and performance elements took quite preposterous liberties with tradition. An early example was *Tapu*, presented in Wellington in 1903. This was a comic opera starring a very Pakeha ‘Miss Nellie Wilson’ and including mock poi dances, faux haka and a storyline based around cannibalism.^{xx} Maori representation and participation in mainstream theatre performance continued to be largely tokenistic and generally minimal right through the early twentieth century, though Maori performers often featured in popular theatre, particularly musical entertainment, and the ever-popular ‘concert parties’ which featured traditional Maori performing arts and popular songs for the entertainment of locals and tourists. The first steps towards self-determination for Maori in theatre did not occur until the 1960s, when the Maori Theatre Trust dedicated itself to presenting ‘indigenous

culture'. These first Maori theatre makers were faced with significant challenges in their search for autonomy, as expressed by a reviewer of their work:

How much local material is available in the way of plays for the Maori theatre to work on? Are theatre members acting for the Maori, for the pakeha, for all of us? – and if for all of us, should we expect their work to conform to our European theatrical convention? Do they wish to restrict themselves to plays about the Maori people (usually written by pakehas)?^{xxi}

These questions were important ones for Maori and non-Maori theatre makers alike and they still resonate to this day.^{xxii} For his part, Thompson had his own response to the question of how to represent Maori appropriately in New Zealand theatre.

In every phase of his theatre making, Thompson was committed to work that empowered Maori and told their stories. In 1974, he directed Bruce Mason's *Awatere* with Don Selwyn and a cast of Maori actors – persisting even when such actors proved difficult to find. The Maori actors Thompson did find all seemed to be either inexperienced, committed to other jobs or suspicious of him.^{xxiii} Despite these difficulties, the play was a success in artistic and social terms. Indeed, in *All My Lives*, Thompson describes the rehearsals as 'occasions for ecstasy'^{xxiv} due to the rich depth of cultural interchange that went on between pakeha, Maori and Samoans in the cast. An even more notable contribution to the cause of Maori theatre was Thompson's *Songs to the Judges*. This work was Thompson's most controversial and overtly political work – a provocative dramatization of 'the law courts of our land and the way they impinge on the Maori'.^{xxv} In directing *Songs to the Judges* Thompson once again had to work in an atmosphere of some hostility when he found himself criticized by both pakeha and Maori:

On the one hand the pakeha establishment refused to countenance the show, a well-known judge refusing to lend his name to the title. On the other hand there was at one stage the threat of a picket by Maori radicals, who were obviously suspicious that I might be trying to rip off their culture or even attack it.^{xxvi}

After initial opposition, the play was well received. It received standing ovations during its initial run and it has been revived on a number of occasions, including a sound recording.^{xxvii}

If Thompson made particular efforts to advance the cause of Maori in theatre, he placed similar emphasis on the role of women. Thompson was widely known for his support of the Women's Movement (based, he said, on what he had seen of his mother's life on the West Coast: 'It wasn't much of a place for women').^{xxviii} His support for women in theatre went beyond simply encouraging women playwrights or writing plays with strong female parts though he did both these things. He advocated a wholesale change in thinking about women in theatre. Of his time at Downstage, Thompson wrote:

My theatre would continue to strive for sexual equality, both in the numbers of women employed and in the quality of parts available for them. A politics which excludes half the human race is not politics but tyranny; and the same thing goes for political theatre.^{xxix}

Though he was a champion of women's rights he was impatient with those who took extreme stances on feminist issues – an attitude which put him in the firing line and may have contributed to his choice as a target for the protesters. Even more provocatively, Thompson made no secret of his own sexual appetites and activities at a time when women were becoming increasingly angry about exploitation. In his autobiography he described himself as looking for 'a love partner who will accept my brand of sexual restlessness'^{xxx} and he never denied that he had had sexual relationships with at least one of his female students though he always insisted that the sex was consensual.^{xxxi} Personally, his behaviour may not have been exemplary but politically Thompson always considered himself to be pro-feminist, and he was accepted as such by many in the Women's Movement. For example, in 1982 he was the only male writer invited to address a feminist educational conference in Auckland.^{xxxii}

All in all, Thompson considered himself to be a champion for marginalized groups within New Zealand society. This made the attack upon him, carried out in the name of women, even more hurtful. In

Singing the Blues Thompson wrote, 'Less than a year ago I was the darling of the feminists. The present about-face is bewildering and it hurts.'^{xxxiii} Thompson felt he came under attack from the very people he felt had always fought for in his theatre making. His initial sense of betrayal was deepened when the fallout from the original attack was used as justification to silence a play that was itself a study of social justice. This seemed to Thompson and his supporters to smack of hypocrisy. As A.K Grant wrote in defence of Thompson:

The Nazi book burners were more honest than that. They simply said the books they were burning were degenerate. They didn't claim that the books were fine works of art which they were burning with a heavy heart.^{xxxiv}

When his work was blocked, Thompson felt disappointed at the limited support he received from those he had previously defended. Furthermore, it seemed that by attacking him, his opposers were attacking themselves. A colleague from the University of Auckland put it this way:

A . . . most deplorable fact is the incalculable damage these vigilantes have done to the cause of women's rights and to the widening concern with, and active awareness of, the injustice of sexual discrimination and the social evil of sexual violence.^{xxxv}

Thompson's response to the attack on his work was something like O'Casey's in that he was sorely disappointed not to be judged on the basis of the work itself, and the political beliefs espoused therein.

Along with his working class origins and his political beliefs another important influence on Thompson's theatre making, his career and his relationships with audience members was his personality. Perhaps the most significant of Thompson's personality traits in these terms, was his openness. Thompson's capacity for excoriating self-examination is evident in all of his writing: in his plays, autobiographies, letters and his journal articles. Here is an example from his autobiography:

I have a need for approval; the pleasure I receive from a thousand words of praise can never equal the pain which accrues from a single word of criticism. I

am insecure, continuously vulnerable to feelings of worthlessness and shame.^{xxxvi}

The depth of Thompson's confessional self-revelation was not always an advantage to him. As Sebastian Black has commented: 'Mervyn Thompson has written so compellingly about himself that the nature of his achievement as a playwright has been obscured.'^{xxxvii} Neither did Thompson's openness necessarily make for comfortable relationships with his audiences. His entry on the New Zealand Book Council website observes that Thompson's autobiographical writing is open to the point of 'inducing some discomfort at his confessional vulnerability'.^{xxxviii} By placing his personal experiences (including his reputation as a sexual philanderer) out for public scrutiny Thompson made the theatre relationship a very personal matter.

Thompson's desire for openness and directness was emphasized in his performance style, particularly in his solo performances where he tended to ignore the fourth wall convention and address the audience directly:

I believe that audiences respond to being looked at directly and played to directly and appealed to directly and acknowledged as being there directly . . . And that's what my work's about – direct contact with an audience.^{xxxix}

His preference for direct address was identified by Thompson as 'a working class thing.' It was derived from the popular theatre tradition.^{xl} More than this, though, it was indicative of the relationship he sought with audience members; a relationship based on directness and personal connection, rather than the pretence he considered to be inherent in naturalism. By offering himself so completely and making himself so vulnerable, he seemed to ask his audience members for the same kind of commitment in return. This may have been uncomfortable for audience members involved in a live encounter with him. Thompson's attackers seemed to pick up on the directness of Thompson's own theatre relationships and to mirror this intensity in their substitute performance of protest. It was almost as if to fully subvert the power relationship, the protesters needed to make the substitute performance as intensely personal as the original offering. Under the terms of their subverted

theatre relationship, Thompson was made to feel more vulnerable than ever.

Apart from this brutal self-criticism, Thompson was a passionate and difficult person with, as one biographer puts it, '(a) fatal instinct for giving his enemies the fight they wanted'.^{xii} As Thompson said himself:

I have genius – or something approaching it – for making enemies, particularly of the mean spirited kind; and I do not expect my temper, which is legendary, to improve much with age.^{xiii}

Throughout his life, Thompson was openly critical of those with whom he disagreed – a tendency that contributed to his tumultuous career during which he 'passed through'^{xiii} a number of prestigious positions in New Zealand theatre and academia. He was co-founder of the Court Theatre in Christchurch, Junior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, Director of Downstage Theatre in Wellington, Lecturer in Drama at Auckland University and Writer in Residence at Canterbury. Like O'Casey, Thompson was someone who found it difficult to function comfortably within organizations where he had personal or political differences with those around him and though he served some thirteen years as a lecturer in Auckland, he did not stay long in his other positions. Of course personality was not the only issue in Thompson's lack of professional longevity. As Black notes, Thompson also 'wrote himself out' of traditional theatre contexts as he explored more experimental forms of theatre making.^{xiv}

Though he was difficult, there were aspects of his personality that won Thompson many friends and loyal admirers. In particular, they admired his rigour about standards in everything he did and his efforts in recognising and championing the work of others. In their biographical notes Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie mention that 'his generosity of judgement was one of his special qualities'.^{xv} As a director, Thompson fostered emerging New Zealand playwrights including Carolyn Burns, Renée and Greg McGee, whose *Foreskin's Lament* (1980) Thompson described as 'the only New Zealand Play I wish I had written myself'.^{xvi} Thompson's capacity to infuriate and inspire people, his ruthless self-

examination and his tempestuousness combined to produce a theatre making style that might be described as a series of battles.

The key battle seems to have been the one Thompson waged with himself – with his own sense of insecurity about his right or ability to be a theatre maker. References to his personal insecurity litter his autobiography, as in his description of the initial effort it required to attend his first drama club meeting: ‘not *me* I say to myself. I’d be out of my depth.’^{xlvii} Autobiographical vulnerability also characterizes his dramatic work, as in this extract of *Passing Through* in which he recreates the experience of being taught by Ngaio Marsh as an undergraduate:

Watching all this is the actor Ngaio has cast as Worcester. I’ll never be a performer, she’s made that abundantly clear. But now for the first time I begin to wonder: could I possibly be – a Director?

‘Don’t get up yourself, Proc, Who the hell do you think you are!’^{xlviii}

Marsh may have been critical but it is notable that the loudest and most critical voice in this extract is Thompson’s own internal one. Thompson’s battles with his internal demons of self doubt are represented most graphically in the expressionistic scenes of Thompson’s first play, *First Return*.

Thompson always knew that his first play would be a highly personal work: ‘The Confession. Tortured into some cranky expressionistic form, The Confession would be an autobiographical play or novel of unusual candour’^{xlix} In *First Return* the protagonist, Simon (an autobiographical figure played by Thompson himself in the first production),¹ literally wrestles with the demons of his past. A menagerie of figures torments Simon over aspects of his past and his personal failures and doubts.

ACCUSER: You came to believe that success would be granted in this new world only if you got rid of us (*Menagerie characters rear up like ghosts*) So shame led to silence. And silence back to pride. *You* would not cry out, *never*. You would not admit your difference though you knew it as inescapably as you know pain. And when you did get round to writing that confessional novel you punished yourself for your own weakness by burning it!

GIRL: Unmanly to confess, Simon!

CHORUS: Unmanly!^{li}

Simon's doubts are clearly Thompson's own, and the confessional novel Simon's accusers taunt him about is clearly a dramatized symbol for this, Thompson's confessional play. The important difference between Simon and Thompson is that where Simon burns his novel, Thompson sees his work through to performance – even playing 'himself' in performance. Though he did not expect to play Simon, the eventuality seemed fitting given the personal relationship he was seeking with his audience:

In retrospect the whole series of accidents which had led me into the curious situation of playing the leading character in my own autobiographical play seemed to have a peculiar inevitability about it.^{lii}

For Thompson, then, this first play and much of his later theatre making represented his triumph over personal demons of self-doubt.

Throughout his life Thompson would continue to elaborate on 'The Confession', punctuating his larger-scale, collectively written political works, with two further autobiographical pieces *Coaltown Blues* and *Passing Through*. In performance these plays offered audience members an even more intensely individuated theatre relationship. Like Bruce Mason's *End of the Golden Weather* (1968) a play that was an important influence, *Coaltown Blues* and *Passing Through* were solo pieces in which Thompson featured as the subject matter, the writer, the director and the sole actor. Essentially, audience members were being invited to enter into a theatre relationship with just him. If Thompson made himself vulnerable in all his theatre relationships this was particularly true in these solo works, where he presented himself as someone trying to come to terms with his own story and trying to convince himself and his audience of his personal and professional worth.

Another ongoing personal struggle for Thompson throughout his career was the question of how to operate as a male, specifically a heterosexual male, within the New Zealand theatre scene and in the university environment. At every stage of his career, it seemed, issues of gender, sexuality and power played a part in Thompson's professional

relationships. First of all, the amateur dramatic movement was a predominantly female world. After World War Two, the movement suffered from a lack of male members, as McNaughton points out in his history of New Zealand theatre,^{liii} and as Thompson was to discover when he was eagerly greeted at his first Reefton drama club meeting:

‘The faces turn as one. All the women smile as one.
“A man!” they say.’^{liv}

If Thompson felt something of an outsider within the amateur movement, he may have felt something similar upon entering the professional theatre scene, which was one of the few places in New Zealand society where a male homosexual could be cautiously open about his sexuality (which was still illegal at that time). Thompson never expressed any sense that he had difficulty with the sexual orientation of people he worked with, other than to joke: ‘I sometimes wonder if the theatre is not just an old whore. Certainly she doesn’t seem to have much time for heterosexuals!’^{lv} However, for someone in his position, already an outsider because of his class difference and his lack of theatre training, his different sexual orientation may have felt like yet another reason he did not fit in with the theatre ‘set’. As a lecturer, Thompson entered another predominantly female environment in that in the 1980s, the number of women enrolled in arts courses far outweighed the number of men.^{lvi} Moreover, as we shall see in the next chapter, New Zealand Universities in the 1980s were becoming politicized with issues of gender, sexual orientation and power relationships right at the forefront of student concerns. In such a climate, the professional and personal relationships Thompson formed with young women he taught were fraught with issues every bit as complex as those encountered within his theatre relationships. All in all, it must be acknowledged that the overtly ‘gendered’ aspects of Thompson’s contextual horizon, along with the sexual nature of the allegations against him and the sexual overtones of the attack, together form an undercurrent of sexual, gender and power issues that runs right through the case study, in a much more obvious way than in the previous two case studies.

Thompson faced other, less personal, battles in his role as a New Zealand theatre maker. One of the major challenges for Thompson, as

for any New Zealand theatre maker was how to deal with theatre's image as a colonial art form. As has already been mentioned, theatre was 'imported' into New Zealand with the arrival of European settlers in the nineteenth century.^{lvii} Maori culture, which predates European arrival by around a thousand years, does not include theatre performance in the Western sense, though it has a strong emphasis on dance, oratory and other performance skills.^{lviii} Early settlers began making theatre very soon after their arrival – the first recorded dramatic entertainment took place as early as December 1841^{lix} and purpose-built theatres began to appear from 1843.^{lx} However, these early theatre makers were not interested in seeking a distinctively New Zealand voice or asking what 'New Zealand theatre' might become; they simply attempted to duplicate what they had known at home. This was, as McNaughton puts it, 'the drama of colonization . . . a showcase for Old World fashion'.^{lxi} This trend continued for upwards of fifty years and even when Thompson started his theatre making in the 1970s, the vast majority of New Zealand theatre was comprised of English or American plays.^{lxii}

One vigorous and largely unrecognised^{lxiii} counterpart to the imported, Anglo-centric theatre making of the 1960s and 1970s was the experimental theatre making of groups such as Red Mole, Theatre Action, the Living Theatre troupe (not related to the American group discussed in the last chapter) and Amamus theatre. In his study of these groups, Murray Edmond describes how they were influenced by the sort of avant-garde theatre making that was occurring in Europe and America at this time; for example the Living Theatre troupe were influenced by The San Francisco Mime Troupe and Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet theatre, Theatre Action's original members were all trained in the Parisian school of Jacques Lecoq, while Jerzy Grotowski's 'Poor Theatre' approach was the dominant influence on Amamus.^{lxiv} As Edmond also points out, the emergence of these groups in 1960s and 70s New Zealand had a unique quality to it, given the fact that the fabric of mainstream theatre making in the country was not yet fully formed:

The new theatre had to destroy the old. But here, in New Zealand, the new theatre had to be something

of this place, of here. It had to be ours, in our place. Like nothing else, like no other theatre. The situation was, as Martyn Sanderson said in 1964 “the theatre we were rebelling against was not operating here”. For this reason, the avant-gardist and nationalistic aims of experimental theatre were as one here.^{lxv}

Thompson may well have been influenced by some of the experimental theatre that he saw in the 1960s – for example, an aggressive, distorted version of the popular song ‘10 guitars’ which Thompson would use in his *Songs to the Judges* in 1980, may have been influenced by a similar version used by Amamus in their show *Pictures* in 1973.^{lxvi} Certainly, Thompson shared many of the goals of these groups, with their use of popular forms and their commitment to engage with New Zealand issues. His concern, however, was to offer his audience quality work with New Zealand settings, characters and themes in a *mainstream* theatre context.

In wanting to prove that local material could be taken seriously, Thompson also found himself battling a tendency amongst New Zealand theatre makers to treat New Zealand material in a light-hearted way. Once again, this tendency could be traced back to the earliest theatre makers. The first examples of New Zealand theatre to draw on local themes fell almost exclusively into the popular theatre category. They were melodramatic, satirical, or designed for visual effect. George Leitch’s *The Land of The Moa* (1895) was a ‘colourful and melodramatic entertainment’ that apparently included amongst its nineteen scenes a portrayal of the eruption of Tarawera!^{lxvii} The elaborately titled *Kainga of the Ladye Birds, or Harlequin Prince Tumanako, the Fair Ataahua, and the Demon of Colonial Finance* (1879) by a Mr Griffen of Wanganui^{lxviii} was a satire on local politics and politicians, highly reminiscent of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. This type of theatre was clearly local in the sense that it included reference to local themes including Maori place names and traditions, though these were treated with little respect. The light hearted treatment of local themes was the norm in New Zealand theatre until the 1920s, when cinema began to fill the role occupied by popular theatre and New Zealand theatre making was forced to redefine itself. The years of association between ‘home-

grown' New Zealand theatre and popular forms had a lasting impact upon the image, form and content of New Zealand theatre, including Thompson's own work. In a positive sense, popular theatre was accessible and catered for the popular taste, both important precepts for Thompson's work half a century later. However, there was also a negative implication that, in New Zealand, local themes were not considered sufficiently important to be given serious treatment. Thompson sought to unsettle this bias with his historical works including *O Temperance!* about the Temperance movement and *Songs to Uncle Scrim*, based on New Zealand of the 1930s.

In his historical works, Thompson aimed to reclaim New Zealand history and validate it. A key objective was to give New Zealand audience members a sense of recognizing their own stories. Thompson wrote about this when reflecting on the success of *O! Temperance!*

Highly entertaining the show may have been, but the greatest joy it provided was ultimately the joy of recognition. 'This is us! This is ours!' the audiences would say. If a play is doing its work properly that is what they will *always* say.^{lxxix}

Thompson's autobiographical version of history tends to present him as a lone battler in this movement towards nationalist drama in New Zealand. For instance, in *All My Lives*, writing of his vision for a New Zealand drama, he chooses a metaphor drawn from his mining experience: 'Anyone who has worked in a coalmine knows that darkness cries out to be pierced and that small suns are better than none at all'.^{lxxx} However, Thompson was not operating entirely alone in the darkness: when *O Temperance!* opened in 1972, Downstage was running a season of New Zealand plays and there was a burgeoning interest in New Zealand drama represented in the work of Amamus in Wellington and Theatre Action in Auckland.^{lxxxi} If the work of these and other experimental theatre companies is taken into account, Thompson can be more correctly seen as part of a movement of theatre makers engaged in a battle to reclaim New Zealand history.

Another battle for Thompson was a lack of professionalism within New Zealand theatre. This was partly due to the fact that, until the 1920s

and 30s, almost all professional work that appeared in New Zealand came from overseas. As Harcourt says:

The 'theatre' was something that came from abroad: professional companies from Australia, Great Britain or the United States presenting Shakespeare, melodrama, plays that were currently popular in London or New York and the latest musical comedies.^{lxxii}

In 1926 the plays featuring on the theatre bills in Auckland or Wellington were not so very different from those on offer to the *Plough and the Stars* audience in Dublin. Even the performers names may have been the same from time to time, as companies toured from Europe and elsewhere. Even after New Zealand started to produce its own professional companies in the 1950s, the image of professional theatre as something foreign (specifically European) and elitist, lingered on.^{lxxiii}

During the 1940s and 1950s New Zealand, experienced what might be seen as that country's quiet equivalent of the Celtic Twilight in Ireland – what Murray Edmond has described as 'the flowering of a well-nurtured cultural nationalism'.^{lxxiv} This brought with it an increase in cultural activity as an expression of a new sense of national identity. However, as Edmond points out, though New Zealand established a number of national cultural institutions during this period, including the National Film Institute (1941), the National Orchestra (1947) and the National Ballet Company (1953), the country never established a National Theatre equivalent to the Abbey Theatre in Ireland.^{lxxv} The nearest thing to a National company, claims Edmond, was the New Zealand Players, a small group founded by Edith and Richard Campion in 1953.^{lxxvi} The Players emphasized quality of production over fostering indigenous work, thus exacerbating the image of New Zealand theatre as a Eurocentric and privileged form. The company also had a lasting influence on the image of New Zealand theatre in other ways: when the New Zealand Players folded in 1960, this set a tone for arts funding policy which has ever since been directed at promoting theatre on a regional level rather than attempting to form a national theatre company.^{lxxvii}

The experience of the Players had demonstrated that geographically and economically, it was difficult and expensive to make professional theatre accessible across the whole country – one reason, argues theatre historian John Thomson, for the greater success of poetry and the short story in the same period.^{lxxviii} While the New Zealand players had tended to limit their touring to main centres, another professional group, the Community Arts Service formed in 1947, concentrated on delivering theatre to rural areas, by touring a small company three times a year until 1962.^{lxxix} Other than this, however, professional theatre was rarely seen outside of Auckland and Wellington. To rural people, professional theatre continued to be an unfamiliar and ‘foreign’ phenomenon. This is not to suggest that drama *per se* was non-existent at a local, or rural level in New Zealand. Amateur dramatics had flourished across the country from the 1930s onwards. Ironically, however, the very success of the amateur dramatics movement was another reason for the limited professionalism Thompson encountered in New Zealand theatre.

When Thompson walked into his local amateur dramatic club’s meeting in Reefton in 1957, he was catching the tail end of an enthusiastic amateur dramatics movement that had flourished in New Zealand for twenty years or more. The movement had grown rapidly following the initiation of a New Zealand branch of the British Drama League in 1932 and by the 1950s most small towns had their own group based in the local hall. In 1945, the groups were organized under the New Zealand Drama Council, which ran residential schools of acting and theatre production and sponsored local one-act play competitions which were well supported by local societies. Though widespread and enthusiastic, the amateur dramatic movement did little to foster the kind of theatre Thompson wanted and which he eventually came to represent. A key problem was lack of funding and expertise. As McNaughton puts it:

The first four and a half decades of [the] century . . . were a period of protracted amateurism, marked fitfully by the efforts of individuals in a theatrical environment which generally lacked the resources

and professionalism, and hence the audiences, necessary for their survival as playwrights.^{lxxx}

The proliferation of amateur dramatics demonstrated an interest in drama but this did not translate into an interest in New Zealand work. Drama League competitions encouraged amateur societies to produce locally written plays but the vast majority of writers continued to use English themes, settings, characters and structures for their plays. John Thomson claims that anyone who attempted to write a more local play was likely to be 'met with indifference, distaste or even hostility.'^{lxxxi} John Thomson argues that the reason for this negative response to local work was a reflection of the mood of society at large in this period – that New Zealanders did not wish to see themselves portrayed on stage:

Like an adolescent, that society was unsure of its identity; it wanted to be praised and, unwilling to expose itself to analysis, was unduly sensitive to criticism. And unsympathetic criticism was what most playwrights tended to offer.^{lxxxii}

Thompson's theatre making confronted New Zealand's social insecurity and raised the difficult questions about identity that the amateur movement had avoided for so long

For the most part, then, Thompson's theatre making was a struggle against a New Zealand theatre dominated by imported successes and an amateur theatre that lacked funds, resources, expertise and any commitment to local themes. There was, however, a strand of New Zealand theatre history that provided a more positive inspiration and that in some respects can be seen as a more significant precursor to Thompson's work than the amateur movement from which he emerged. This was the left wing worker's theatre movement of the 1930s and 1940s. That movement was 'committed to staging plays of immediate social relevance'^{lxxxiii} and managed to sustain a small but committed audience for such theatre, often outside the conventional theatre circuit, at union meetings and other political gatherings.^{lxxxiv} The worker's movement is not well documented but of the few play texts that survive, examples include *The Reichstag Fire Trial* (date unknown) by Alun Faulkner and *Falls the Shadow* (1939) by Ian Hamilton.^{lxxxv} The content of such plays set an important precedent for Thompson in terms of their

socialist thinking, their opposition to the imported Englishness of the Drama League and their reliance on historical facts. Stylistically, too, Thompson's work can be seen as descending from the worker's theatre with its use of pared-back agitprop presentation, sketches and musical numbers with strong political messages.

One offshoot of the worker's theatre movement, and a direct influence on Thompson, was Unity theatre in Wellington, founded in 1943 by a small but influential group of theatre makers including Bruce Mason (1921-82). Unity began as an unashamedly socialist propagandist group before becoming gradually more mainstream. Like Thompson, the theatre makers at Unity strove for a high degree of professionalism along with a commitment to plays of social relevance and sincerity.^{lxxxvi} Unlike Thompson, Unity always relied on overseas work, though it did also foster local writers like Mason. Thompson recalls the significant influence of Bruce Mason's *End of the Golden Weather* (1959), which he saw performed by Mason himself. This play was to have an immediate and lasting effect on New Zealand theatre in general and on Thompson's personal career:

... watching this man, in whom is contained a whole parade of characters, I am moved as never before in a theatre . . . My programme falls to the floor. As I pick it up I tell myself: Bruce, you have shown me the way. You and Firpo.^{lxxxvii}

Though Thompson later admitted to a certain amount of poetic licence in this description (he confessed: 'It's not absolutely true that I came to the conclusion [Mervyn you must write] at that moment'),^{lxxxviii} the respected theatre maker was clearly an important influence on Thompson. From Mason, Thompson learned the power of using memory as a source material and the possibility of delivering a range of characters within a one-man show. Here, too, was a theatre maker who insisted on telling New Zealand stories through his drama. However, Thompson was always aware of the differences between his stories and Mason's:

I can't help being reminded how different his class background is from mine, 'There was Us, safe and solid, warm at night, and there was Them – hungry

and persistent, but separated from us by an incrossable gulf." Whatever might have happened to my surfaces, in my heart I was still one of Them, a hungry guttersnipe from across the tracks.^{lxxxix}

Though they were significant influences on him, Thompson, who always retained his socialist agenda and his working class focus, could not accept the kind of elitism displayed by Unity and others in the cultured 'set' in the 1950s and 60s.

When Thompson began his interest in theatre in the 1950s, theatre making in New Zealand was still strongly Euro-centric and elitist. According to McNaughton, one reason for the continuing elitism during the period was 'the overseas experience of returned servicemen, many of whom had seen London and the Mediterranean'.^{xc} Another was 'the growing importance of the universities'.^{xcⁱ} At Canterbury, Ngaio Marsh was establishing the beginnings of a professional theatre, but her methods resolutely emphasized English models of production and she insisted on English speech patterns from her actors.^{xcⁱⁱ} In 1951 she was involved in organising a tour of British actors calling themselves The British Commonwealth Theatre Company. The tour enjoyed 'only moderate success'^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} but reinforced the impression that 'real' theatre came from overseas. Another factor feeding this impression was a lack of local professional training, which meant that people had to travel overseas to train. Those returning were determined to promote theatre in New Zealand but, being trained in a European model, tended to be contemptuous about the standard of local efforts. For example, in 1957, just after he had returned from England, Mason and fellow theatre maker John Pocock, published a book of correspondence entitled *Theatre in Danger* in which they lamented the poor quality of New Zealand amateur dramatics and the standards attained by the New Zealand Players. Here, Mason wonders whether New Zealand audiences of amateur dramatics are capable of discernment:

I admit, of course, that in many groups, there are people who sit through nonsense with discomfort, but if they suffer, the poor dears cannot make their voices heard over the clamour from the respectable majority, who stick to nonsense and will have nothing else.^{xc^{iv}}

McNaughton suggests that the culturally superior tone of this correspondence was not so different from that of the first settlers, a hundred years earlier:

Mason's attitude of cultural superiority on his return to New Zealand after the war in fact echoed that of the first colonizers, exhibiting a contempt for much local drama that was of a completely different intensity from that of most other writers who were conscious of overseas models.^{xcv}

Mason dedicated his life to lifting the standards of New Zealand theatre and to producing a distinctly New Zealand voice within the art form. He sought to place local, often Maori themes within the aesthetic conventions of European theatre, as a way of analysing and critiquing both cultures. As his entry in the New Zealand Book Council file states, his plays 'exhort us consciously and energetically to choose a culture and live in it'.^{xcvi} Thompson, who directed Mason's *Awatea* in 1974 found some of Mason's ideas about the interplay between Maori and pakeha culture to be somewhat idealistic: he described Mason as 'a Don Quixote tilting away at a landscape that doesn't quite live up to his heroic expectations'.^{xcvii} At the same time, Thompson admired Mason greatly, not least because he believed in the cultural worth of New Zealand.

Thompson abhorred what Black terms 'the elitist myths of "Kiwi philistinism"^{xcviii} the tendency of some New Zealanders, particularly pakeha New Zealanders, to disparage their own country and to elevate Europe as the repository of 'real' culture. He explored this attitude in *First Return*, in exchanges between Simon and Christine (a character modelled on a former partner and the many other cultured friends Thompson had who chose to leave New Zealand for Europe). Christine expresses the 'accepted' view of New Zealand as a cultural desert:

CHRISTINE: O I love you, Simon, if you don't know that by now you'll never know anything. But if what goes with loving you is *that place*, then I have to say *no*. That cold, unforgiving light, that emptiness, that oppression of spirit – I rejected those things seven years ago. I reject them still.^{xcix}

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Thompson never rejected New Zealand. A trip to England in 1970 left him briefly torn^c but, ultimately,

he returned with a renewed sense of cultural pride and a determination to begin the process of establishing quality theatre for New Zealand audiences with New Zealand subject matter. Eventually, Thompson's advocacy for his country developed a personal edge. Like Simon in *First Return*, Thompson developed a strong sense of identification with his home country, to the point where he took slights against New Zealand as slights against himself:

SIMON: It's funny, I could never bring myself to hate those islands

ACCUSER: And you take other people's hatred so personally that a dismissal of your homeland becomes a dismissal of you, I wonder why.

CHORUS: I wonder why.^{ci}

If Thompson's sense of identification between himself and his country was strong, his sense of representing New Zealand *theatre* was even stronger. This was no simple task.

Thompson, like Mason before him, encountered a lack of support for New Zealand drama within the country itself. For example, in a controversial article in *Landfall*, in 1975, Thompson lambasted New Zealand educationalists for their dismissive attitude toward attempts to establish a New Zealand drama. He reported that he had encountered 'hostility, discourtesy and rudeness'^{cii} when addressing educational gatherings in New Zealand earlier in that year and concluded that, for the most part, this hostility was because people did not believe in the possibility that what he called 'a New Zealand drama' could exist:

Most of the hostility . . . seemed to be aimed at the very *idea* that a New Zealand drama did exist, could exist or *should* exist.^{ciii}

Thompson accused the Educationalists of 'enmity and jealousy' towards those in the professional theatre. He urged them to embrace the prospect of a New Zealand theatre and to support work by himself and other local writers. Not only did Thompson find New Zealanders unwilling to accept the idea of a New Zealand theatre, he also considered that they anticipated, and even delighted in, its failure.

Well before the attacks upon his person and his work, Thompson was engaged in an ongoing fight against what he saw as the New Zealand public's tendency to anticipate artistic failure from amongst their own. In this respect, his *Landfall* article referred to, and echoed comments made by Mason in the introduction to his play *Awatea*. Mason's play had not been a success in its initial manifestation and in the foreword, Mason wrote very elegantly about a New Zealand readiness to gloat over artistic failure rather than realising that failure is an inevitable part of experimentation:

I find it remarkable that in a country where the arts, far from flourishing, have barely taken root, an artistic failure can evoke a furious satisfaction. Were one a scientist conducting an independent experiment which failed, it would not lead to professional extinction, one would try again on another tack . . . The right to fail is conceded everywhere to scientists, but not yet to artists.^{civ}

On this matter, Thompson felt inclined to agree with him. Like Mason, Thompson felt he was under pressure; expected to fail, taunted when he did fail and barely noticed when he succeeded. Thompson's sense of working in a besieged and misunderstood profession can only have exacerbated the personal and professional insecurities he brought to the theatre relationship.

Thompson was not only part of a besieged profession, he also felt isolated within that profession. We have already seen how Thompson may have felt an outsider because of his gender, and how much he was aware of a class difference between himself and someone like Bruce Mason. Not only was he working in opposition to theatre makers of previous generations, Thompson's objectives for New Zealand theatre also differed from his contemporaries. For example, perhaps the most successful figure on the New Zealand theatre scene during the 1970s and 80s was Roger Hall. Hall's comic presentations of New Zealand life (which began with his hugely popular *Glide Time* (1977), set in a public service office) achieved something very few others were able to do, in that they attracted an audience to the theatre to see New Zealand characters and stories portrayed on stage. *Glide Time* achieved another first in that it was a New Zealand work that attained success in London

and on Broadway. In his autobiography, *Bums on Seats* Hall expresses his sense of pride in this accomplishment:

I was often asked, why did *Glide Time* take off in the way it did? My answer was because it was the first time a New Zealand audience could truly recognise themselves on stage. Almost everyone was familiar with the public service in one guise or another, and people who worked in banks or insurance companies found they could identify with it completely, too. Audiences all knew Jims and Beryls. They all knew Beryl's Mum even though she never appeared on stage.^{cv}

Hall's ability to attract audiences and to show New Zealanders their own stories on stage certainly matched Thompson's intentions, but he was bound to be opposed to the conservatism inherent in Hall's plays. As Black writes, 'Thompson's work shows he cannot accept the complacency with which [Hall's plays] apologize for the essential decency of a middle-class status quo.'^{cv} Thompson also objected to Hall's perpetuation of the myth of New Zealand as a sterile and uninteresting place:

So many of our artists have this notion – and it dies hard – that New Zealand is a dead place, God's Own Cemetery Plot. Its inhabitants, especially those of the middle classes, are seen as being boring, conformist, lacking in vitality and imagination . . . It's very odd, really. What was once an *elitist* theme in the older literary forms is now projected as a *popular* theme in the newer ones . . . In theatre the plays of Roger Hall and Robert Lord, in particular are full of it.^{cvii}

In Thompson's eyes, Hall's writing did little to further the cause of New Zealand theatre. If anything, Hall's plays – with their dependence on British style humour and their easy transferability to the West End – were a glance back to the Eurocentrism of the past.

Apart from content and genre, Thompson also rejected the predominant forms of existing New Zealand theatre, inherited from its Western origins. Thompson's writing experimented with various different forms including expressionism – this was yet another way in which his development as a writer paralleled O'Casey's. Most notable, however, was Thompson's development of a form he called 'song play'.

This was a consciously Brechtian style of performance, probably also influenced by the work of Joan Littlewood that Thompson had witnessed in London. In this form, most fully realized in *Songs to Uncle Scrim* (1976), *Night At the Races* (1977) and *Songs to the Judges* (1980) spoken dialogue is reduced, or dispensed with altogether, and songs are used to recreate a historical period, to pass comment on historical happenings or to lambaste traditional theatre forms. Sometimes familiar songs are subverted, as in *Songs to the Judges*, where the Maori actors launch into '10 guitars', a standard favourite of the Maori concert party only to sing it 'against its normal grain – with great force and hostility'.^{cviii} Elsewhere, lyrics and music appear in ironic counterpoint to each other, as in this chorus from the judges, delivered in a pastiche of Gilbert and Sullivan:

B: We think you ought to die / It's logical you should
/ For you are black and primitive / And we are white
and good.

PAKEHAS: For you are black and primitive / And we
are white and good.^{cx}

As Black says, 'In *Songs to the Judges* the lyrics at times evoke Pakeha self-righteousness, while the tunes underline the dark side of this complacency'^{cx}

Thompson's development of the song play form was part of his eschewing of literary theatre and his search for a popular theatre form that would appeal to the working classes without offending Māori. Black writes:

Thompson believes that a major reason why theatre has not achieved a popular base is because of the gap between the cerebral appeal of the word and the emotional pull of the music.^{cx}

and elsewhere,

In his plays the stage has a primacy of meaning over the page . . . here music becomes an equal partner with the word.^{cxii}

Thompson's use of 'song play' positioned his work closer to the popular theatre tradition than the mainstream literary theatre, while the close

collaboration it required between writer and musicians (Stephen McCurdy on *Scrim* And William Dart on *Songs to the Judges*) must have gratified Thompson's socialist preference for collective creativity. The song play could also be seen as Thompson's attempt to find a more comfortable meeting-ground between Western theatre culture and the Maori culture with its emphasis on waiata.

In all his experimentation, Thompson always shied away from naturalism. This, claims Black, was partly a political choice, reflecting his rejection of conservatism:

Thompson dislikes naturalism, which he associates with plays in rooms, because he considers it a 'highly critical' theatrical technique: 'a way of presenting people from the outside ... much of our writing allows the person watching to adopt a stance of superiority *over* the people he's watching and to laugh *at* them'.^{cxiii}

Though Black identifies political reasons for Thompson's rejection of naturalism, Thompson's own comments suggest a less political, more visceral reason for his standpoint. Reflecting on his early student production of *Marat Sade* Thompson writes of his enduring desire to make 'total' theatre capable of reaching a spectator something like D H Lawrence's ideal – 'a man in his wholeness wholly attending'.^{cxiv} To Lawrence's image, Thompson adds, 'with heart, brains, blood and balls . . .' He goes on:

It is that spectator my production sought out and, I hope, rewarded. Then, as now, I had little to offer grumblers in search of television – scale naturalism and the banal images of everyday life. One gets more than enough of everyday life every day.^{cxv}

This sentiment reveals much about Thompson's attitude to traditional theatre forms and also shows what he is looking for in the theatre relationship. He sought a way of making theatre that would communicate to someone prepared to respond 'with heart, brains, blood and balls' – the viscera that he himself committed to the theatre relationship.

The theatre relationships Thompson offered his audience members were an inextricable mix of the political, the professional and the

personal. Politically, Thompson's working class politics and his concern for the underdog drove everything he did. Professionally, his theatre making was characterized by high standards, a passionate commitment to New Zealand work, a rejection of naturalism and a search for popular forms. Personally, his difficult temperament, his openness (including sexual openness) and his sense of insecurity were all significant influences on his work. In many ways, Thompson pushed the personal aspects of the theatre relationship to the forefront. This was most obvious in his autobiographical plays where Thompson consciously placed himself at the centre of his work. Even in his non-autobiographical work, however, Thompson's desire to present the stories of real New Zealanders (including working class New Zealanders) was in large part gaining a sense of belonging and validation for himself. In the introduction to his *Selected Plays* Sebastian Black puts it this way:

Throughout [his plays] Thompson is searching for a New Zealand in which he can live and of which he can be proud.^{cxvi}

At the very heart of the matter, Thompson's theatre making was about personal validation. In this way, the theatre relationship he wanted to offer was an intensely personal, visceral arrangement. It was also one that left him very vulnerable. This was particularly so in the case of *Coaltown Blues* the play he was working on at the time of the attack.

Though the play itself was not the target, from Thompson's perspective it was significant that he was in the final stages of preparation for *Coaltown Blues* when the personal attack and subsequent protests took place. This was another solo work in which Thompson planned to explore some of the intensely personal and difficult themes from his early life, including his mother's suicide.^{cxvii} Thompson was proud of his emerging work and hoped that this might just be the play that would banish his insecurities about his status as theatre maker: he later referred to the play as 'the culmination of my career' and 'the most compassionate thing (I) ever wrote'.^{cxviii} In these circumstances, the attack that so completely wrested away his theatre making power was all the more undermining. It was as if the attackers had joined forces

with the demons Thompson was battling within himself. Thompson had already demonstrated with *First Return* and in his autobiographies that his way of dealing with his personal demons was by turning them into theatre. By lobbying and picketing his plays, the protesters denied Thompson this chance. Describing the first night of *Coaltown Blues*, Thompson wrote 'What is taking place here is not a performance but an exorcism. Except that the demons will not go away.'^{cxix} The demons, it seemed, had taken over and become the theatre makers.

Thompson's theatre making was an inextricable combination of the political, personal and professional. An attack on any one of these aspects was likely to hurt him on all three levels. In a sense, the protester's actions targeted the personal and the professional separately: first they attacked Thompson bodily, then they lobbied against his work. To Thompson, however, an attack on his person was already an attack on his work, and *vice versa*: the two were indistinguishable. After the abduction, even before the pickets began, Thompson considered his work to have been negated:

What my attackers have done is negate my work . . .
But my work is me; it is a continuation of the person I
am. If I am what they say I am then it is nothing;
thirteen years of hypocrisy.^{cxx}

From Thompson's perspective, his personal identity was so closely bound up with his work that the attack impacted on both. The second part of the protest, the lobbying against his work, was much more consciously targeted at Thompson's professional identity but, once again, it would have huge consequences for his personal and political identity as well. It was perhaps one of the most unsettling aspects of the protest for Thompson that it used theatre as a weapon against him, when theatre was the very medium by which he validated himself and controlled his 'demons.'

The implications of the attack on Thompson seemed to him to go beyond professional or personal pride. As we have seen, Thompson saw himself as representative of a certain kind of New Zealand theatre and even felt a sense of personal identification with New Zealand itself.^{cxxi} Thus the attack on him seemed to him to also be a symbolic attack on his

country, or at least on the culture of his country which he identified with and had worked so hard to build up. This was not the first time Thompson had been attacked as a representative of New Zealand drama but this time the representative of New Zealand theatre had been 'cast' as a white male oppressor, a rapist. The original attackers may have been unconscious of this symbolism, focussed as they were on the personal and political aspects of the attack but for Thompson the symbolism was very real.

Whether his attackers were conscious of it or not, the targeting of Thompson's work was an exercise in seizing professional power from a theatre maker. The picketing and leafleting might be characterized as traditional audience protest behaviour in that the performance was disrupted but the theatre maker retained performance power and was able to continue. However, when Thompson's opposers successfully lobbied to prevent his plays from being performed, this was a wholesale take-over of power. What is more, it was one in which Thompson's co-theatre makers collaborated against him. The theatre managers who decided to scrap *Coaltown Blues* and those who agreed to cancel *Songs to Uncle Scrim* did not take Yeats's principled line that the show must continue. Instead they took the part of the potential audience members. Perhaps they did so as a gesture of concern about adverse publicity or falling audience numbers or perhaps, as they told him, they were concerned at the impact the furore was having on Thompson's health.^{cxvii} Perhaps they agreed with the protesters that the wider issues of rape and sexual harassment were more important than the work of one man.^{cxviii} Whatever their reasons, they were essentially returning to the eighteenth century notion that audience members, not theatre makers, have final sovereignty over the stage.^{cxviiii}

Thompson was prevented from offering a relationship to audience members because the theatre directors refused to enter into being co-theatre makers with him. From his perspective, and that of his supporters, this was nothing short of censorship. While his opposers may have wished to keep the emphasis on issues of injustice and sexual offending, from Thompson's point of view, censorship and his rights as a creative artist soon became the most significant issues within the

whole affair. Indeed, he complained later that the press had underestimated the censorship issue, interpreting the events (falsely, in his view) as 'being on the level of student politics and therefore unworthy of serious attention.'^{cxv} By shifting the discussion onto the issue of censorship, Thompson highlighted what was important to him. However, in doing so he also diminished discussion on the matter that is central to this thesis: that is, the question of how theatrical this power struggle was.

Thompson's initial accounts of the attack upon him did concern themselves with what Thompson recognized as the 'weird symmetries and oppositions'^{cxvi} that appeared to link the attack upon him to Renée's *Setting the Table* but they quickly moved away from the symbolic import of what happened and into the realm of personal acrimony and a discussion of censorship.^{cxvii} As Jonathan Lamb points out, Thompson's concern as victim of this crime, was to 'supplant the spectacular (representation-of-crime-as-punishment) with the forensic ('a clear analysis') in order to justify the performance not as mimesis but as an arbitrary and decisive act of retribution.'^{cxviii} Thompson's only discussion of the theatricality of the event was to express the view that the attack was directly based on Renée's playscript. In response to a *Listener* article's conclusion that: 'the only parallel between the play and the incident is that in both, women took action against men outside the legal process',^{cxix} Thompson wrote:

I cannot prove, of course, that *Setting the Table* was used as the model for the assault. But even if it could be proved that it was not, there are many more parallels between the play and the assault than the *Listener* article allowed.^{cxx}

Thompson's analysis of the protester's actions did not go much beyond this recognition and he never explored the event as it is considered in this thesis, that is, in terms of a seizing of performance power. Rather, Thompson's explanation for what happened is expressed in terms of the power of theatre (in this case Renée's play) to tap into the human psyche. He writes:

At certain times in history, the theatre becomes a focus for the most potent fantasies of a generation –

and these fantasies have a knack of releasing themselves into the 'real' world.^{cxxx}

Although this statement would seem to imply a certain respect for the power of Renée's writing, Thompson moves quickly into personal criticism of her for denying the link between the attack and her work. He goes so far as to suggest that Renée was implicated in the attack, not directly but in her subsequent failure to descry the women's actions and her associations with the feminist groups who blocked his work.^{cxxxii} This descent into personal acrimony is a pity in as much as it deflects from the valid observations Thompson is making about the theatricality of the exchange. As victim, perhaps, Thompson was too close to the case to consider the theatrical implications to be the most significant aspect of the exchange. Jonathan Lamb's article, *The Uncanny in Auckland*, however, insists on doing just this.

Jonathan Lamb theorizes the attack on Thompson in terms of Freud's writings on the 'uncanny' (the point at which symbolic things can seem to take on the characteristics of the things they signify) and also in terms of what Freud called the repetitive compulsion (the deep-seated desire of human beings to return to and repeat painful experiences – perhaps to defeat them, or perhaps to diffuse them). Lamb explores the many complex layers of repetition and revisiting that emerge in a psychoanalytical / literary reading of the attack. As Lamb points out, not only was the attack on Thompson an 'uncanny' revisiting of an earlier playtext, the ritual acts of retribution (both the fictional and the 'real' one) were themselves a memesis of the act of rape 'To the extent that rape is the violent, and often permanent, removal of a person's sexual initiative, choice and pleasure, this mock-castration is also a mock-rape: a ritual repetition of the crime in the punishment.'^{cxxxiii} Lamb also examines the ways in which the structure and form of Renée's play (much of which involves the characters rehearsing sketches for a feminist revue) is itself based around repetitions: '*Setting the Table* is in every sense a rehearsal, the preparation of a revue of feminist sketches forming part of the larger preparation of the 'table' on which the 'dinner-party' of liberation will be celebrated.'^{cxxxiv} Significantly, Lamb insists that the layers of 'acting' and 'revisiting' within the attack on

Thompson are valid objects of study *whether or not they occurred consciously*, purely because they are ‘uncanny’ in the Freudian sense:

Unlike the repetition of a joke or a proverb, which loses power in proportion as iteration makes it familiar, the echo of one event in another or of a fiction in a fact is disquieting because it unstitches the sequence of cause and effect, embarrasses the reason, supplants the familiarity of the first sort of repetition with its opposite: excitement, surprise, even fear.^{cxxxv}

As a literary critic, Lamb is unapologetic about exploring the attack in this way – he comments: ‘I am claiming the right of a literary critic to talk of literature, even if it has transformed itself into life’.^{cxxxvi} Likewise, the same claim can be made for framing the attack as a subverted theatre relationship.

I would argue that the protester’s actions can, indeed, be framed in a theatrical way and that the abduction and subsequent media attention can, indeed, be seen as an extension of the original ‘text’ of *Setting the Table*. I believe this approach can be defended even if the link was not a conscious one in the minds of the attackers, not only, as Lamb says, because of the ‘uncanny’ resonances, but also by virtue of the fact that Thompson himself perceived the association to be there. Perhaps even more important, in this respect, than the parallels between the original play text and the actions carried out (and not carried out) by the protesters is the sense in which the attack symbolized a seizure of performance power from Thompson.

The initial attack was highly theatrical (again, the description applies whether the references to Renée’s play were conscious or not). The elements of ritual and the forcing of Thompson into a representative ‘role’ (‘this man is a rapist’) made this an exchange with many of the features of a theatre relationship – whether it was truly ‘a piece of theatre’ will be discussed later. Having carried out the most extreme form of audience protest they could in the attack upon his person, Thompson’s opposers continued to exert a *specifically theatrical* pressure upon him by successfully lobbying against his work. It is a central contention of this thesis that as audience protest becomes more serious it becomes more theatrical in form. In this instance, the symbolic seizing of

power that went on in the initial attack was then cemented into a real seizure of power by the successful attempts to block his work. Looked at collectively and symbolically, the protesters' actions can be seen as a process of declaring themselves theatre makers and then demonstrating their ownership of performance power. This not only minimized Thompson's capacity to perform his desired role as theatre maker, it also denied him access to the means he habitually used to affirm his identity and self worth. Thompson's response to this was the response of a theatre maker in a protest situation: he struggled to regain and retain the power that had been taken from him.

In the immediate term, Thompson's reaction to the breakdown of the theatre relationship was to feel a violent anger and shock. After the initial anger had died down, Thompson went through what might be described as a reclaiming process, gradually taking ownership of the story of the attack and reasserting his performance power. Or, to describe the process in psychoanalytical terms, as Lamb does, it could be said that this reclaiming process represented Thompson's irresistible 'compulsive urge' to return to his painful experience again and again – an urge born, says Lamb, of Thompson's denial of the symbolic import of what had happened to him:

The lesson is that you cannot shut the uncanny up simply by taking literature – its language – away from it, for then it will start speaking its repetitions in your life, and in mockery quote you out of the originality you claim.^{cxxxvii}

Lamb's words, written quite shortly after the event, seem 'uncannily' prophetic themselves, given the degree of revisiting and reframing that the Thompson affair has gone through in the years since they were written.

Thompson's process of reclamation, or revisiting, began from the moment he decided to reveal his name as the victim of the attack and wrote his article for the *Listener*. As Atmore has pointed out, the manner in which he approached the attack was in many ways a continuation of Thompson's autobiographical explorations. He positioned himself as the writer, performer and character in this real life drama. Atmore points out that 'Thompson wrote his own scripts in many of the dominant

media stories'^{cxxxviii} though she also points out that what appeared to be a 'one-man-show' was not, in fact, a solo performance:

Its representation as such was the product of a number of discursive positionings in which first-person authorship and eyewitness status gave Thompson's version of the story the 'ring of truth.'^{cxxxix}

Atmore is concerned here with the extent to which Thompson's 'ownership' of the story mediated public ideas about the 'truth' of what had happened. I am more concerned with how Thompson went about reasserting his role as theatre maker – taking ownership of the story, populating it with his own characters, themes and tensions and presenting it to the world.

Thompson's next step in the reclaiming or revisiting process was his decision to stage *Coaltown Blues* independently and then to insist on performing it again and again in the face of organized opposition. His determination to put *Coaltown Blues* on stage and to keep it there, was as much a symbolic move as a practical one. Like the Abbey players performing in dumb show, or Yeats striding on to the stage to proclaim over the rioters, Thompson was asserting his right and his capacity to make theatre against the odds. Thompson continued his reclaiming process by writing at length about what had happened: it seems he took the advice of a friend who said, 'words are your best weapons. Use them.'^{cxl} *Singing the Blues*, Thompson's autobiographical account of the attack and its aftermath, was published in 1991. Perhaps the inevitable final step in this cyclical process was for Thompson to include the experience of the attack within a theatre performance of his own devising.

In *Passing Through* Thompson once again dealt with his demons by turning them into theatre. The play was to be Thompson's swansong (he performed it whilst battling with the cancer that would kill him a short time later) and was an autobiographical journey through Thompson's experience of theatre in New Zealand including the attack and subsequent blocking of his work. Within this play, Thompson was able to achieve closure on the events of 1984 in two significant ways. First of all, he regained a connection with those middle class audience members

whom he had never really forgiven for staying away from *Coaltown Blues*: performances were well-attended and one audience member recalls the palpable sense of forgiveness and acceptance in the theatre during the shows.^{cxli} Secondly, by dramatizing the attack within this play, Thompson was able to reassert his status as theatre maker within the theatre relationship. He could make the story his own and reverse the subverted theatre relationship played out on that night in 1984.

The reclamation was not without bitterness or bite. Thompson had always enjoyed the Brechtian tactic of tongue-in-cheek 'happy endings' bolted on to dramas where there is no easy conclusion^{cxlii} and *Passing Though* employs just such a tongue-in-cheek approach with its forcedly positive 'Happy Ending Song'.^{cxliii} By choosing to end his play in this way, Thompson seems to have been making ironic comment on his own search for resolution. The self-referential irony operates at another level too. As one reviewer points out, the imagery of *Passing Though* is of a journey not easily travelled:

The sense of travelling is constantly undercut by images of entrapment, entombment, stasis and mortality – the mine, the strait-jacket, the prison, death in the family, the mine again.^{cxliv}

These images of entrapment in his life journey imply, perhaps, a sense of Thompson's struggle in his professional and personal journey towards regaining his power as theatre maker. As it turned out, even this difficult journey, once completed, did not mark the end of the reclaiming process. Having, in Jonathan Lamb's terms 'spoken its repetitions' time and again in his lifetime, the uncanny aspects of the attack upon him continued to resonate even after Thompson's life had ended.

The reclaiming of Thompson's side of the story continued even after his death when, in 2002 New Zealand writer Stephanie Johnson, described as 'an early defender of Thompson',^{cxlv} used the events as the basis for a novel entitled *The Shag Incident*. In Johnson's book, the attack is moved forward one year to 1985 and the Thompson figure becomes a fictional figure - prominent former All-Black, Howard Shag. However, there is no mistaking the derivation for the storyline which opens in this way:

1985

The two women running on either side of him are tall, muscular and broad shouldered. He knows they're women because he can feel the softness of their breasts against his pinioned upper arms. He wonders if they are rugby players, or netballers perhaps – that new breed of giantess created by a powerful alchemy of human genes, steroids and hormone rich food. Surely they have practised this manoeuvre, one on either side, each with an arm around his waist so that his bare feet hardly touch the ground. Someone pounds directly behind him, hands vicious on his shoulders.^{cxlvi}

Johnson does not simply use the Thompson case as the basis for her book, she changes it in several key ways. First of all she makes the details of the attack even more graphic and violent than their real derivative. The victim in Johnson's story is beaten, gagged, stripped and tied to a tree and has the word 'rapist' burned into his skin with a cigarette lighter before being left for the night. He is discovered next morning, semi conscious and half naked, by an elephant and her keeper, out walking from the nearby Auckland zoo. Johnson also makes it clear that her accused rapist is a victim of mistaken identity, thus making him even more guiltless than Thompson who, whilst strenuously denying it was rape, never denied the sexual encounter he was accused of. Furthermore, whereas Thompson very publicly fought back against his attackers, in Johnson's book the experience leaves Shag physically and emotionally scarred for life; suffering from hapte-phobia (a morbid fear of human touch). He becomes a recluse until the facts of his innocence are uncovered. Johnson's altering the details of the Thompson story is a significant act in several ways.

In one sense, Johnson's book completes the reclaiming process on behalf of the Thompson camp; she presents the New Zealand public with a final, posthumous 'version' of the story where the victim's status as victim is affirmed and the perpetrators of the attack are gently mocked and consigned to history (the next chapter will explore in more detail how Johnson does this). At the same time, by changing the facts, she avoids the open and confessional tone that Thompson himself always displayed in his work. Equally, it could be argued that Johnson's

work deprives Thompson of his own 'last word' on the subject that he had achieved with *Passing Through*. Perhaps by reworking and adding another layer onto the story, by changing the identities of the protagonists and the facts of the attack, the novel undermines Thompson's own attempts to reassert his ownership of the story and his status as theatre maker. After all, Johnson's novel removes two key things from the story – Thompson's personality and the historical facts – the two elements he himself always placed at the heart of his theatre making.

- ⁱ This talk was published as 'Drama: Theatre and Working Class Politics' in *Sites: A Journal for Radical Perspectives on Culture* 16 (Autumn 1988), pp. 19-23
- ⁱⁱ Thompson 'Drama: Theatre and Working Class Politics', p.19
- ⁱⁱⁱ Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (eds) 'Mervyn Thompson' *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998) retrieved from www.bookcouncil.org.nz 5 Sept 2004
- ^{iv} Mervyn Thompson *All My Lives* Christchurch: Whitcoulls Publishers, 1980, p. 14
- ^v *ibid*, pp.28-9
- ^{vi} Members of the Temperance Movement tended to be privileged, middle class leaders of society but as Thompson pointed out in an interview, when their movement failed they became 'losers' and therefore underwritten in New Zealand history, see Dick Corbalis 'Interview with Mervyn Thompson' in *Sites: A Journal for South Pacific Cultural Studies* issue 29 (Spring 1994), p.73
- ^{vii} Thompson 'Drama: Theatre and Working Class Politics' p.20
- ^{viii} Black refers here to *The Great New Zealand Truth Show*. This has since been published. See Mervyn Thompson *Passing Through and Other Plays* Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992
- ^{ix} Sebastian Black 'Four Plays in Search of an Author' Introduction to Mervyn Thompson *Selected Plays* Dunedin: Pilgrims South Press, 1984, p.8
- ^x Thompson *All My Lives*, p. 57
- ^{xi} This had not always been the case in New Zealand. Indeed, the earliest theatre pioneers, like James Marriott, had been concerned to live down the unruly reputation of popular theatre inherited from England where the new Victorian working class had altered the dynamic of theatre attendance. Much emphasis was placed on the respectability of performers and patrons and determined efforts were constantly being made to keep them so. There were sad stories of failures in the Australian colonies and these made Marriott and his colleagues in other parts of New Zealand all the more anxious to avoid the same disasters on this side of the Tasman. See Peter Downes *Shadows on the Stage: Theatre in New Zealand- the first 70 years* Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1975, p.14
- ^{xii} Black Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.8
- ^{xiii} Mervyn Thompson *Singing the Blues* Christchurch, NZ: Blacktown Press, 1991, p.18
- ^{xiv} *ibid*, p.18
- ^{xv} Bruce Jesson 'Politics, Theatre and Mervyn Thompson' in *Metro* June 1984, p.26
- ^{xvi} Thompson *Singing the Blues*, p.19
- ^{xvii} *ibid*, p.19
- ^{xviii} See endnote 9, above
- ^{xix} Ian Cross, quoted in Peter Harcourt *A Dramatic Appearance: New Zealand Theatre 1920-1970* Wellington: Methuen New Zealand, 1978, p.8
- ^{xx} Downes, p.138
- ^{xxi} Jenny McLeod in *Landfall* quoted in Harcourt *A Dramatic Appearance*, p.141
- ^{xxii} These questions still resonate for Maori theatre makers to this day and even with the emergence of companies such as Taki Rua and Koanga Maori Theatre Company the growth of Maori theatre has been slow. As late as 2004, Koanga Maori were still described as 'Auckland's first Maori theatre company' see Nigel Gearing, review of 'Te Awa I Tahuti at TAPAC Theatre, Western Springs' in *New Zealand Herald* 6 July 2004, retrieved from <http://www.nzherald.co.nz> 10 August 2004
- ^{xxiii} Thompson *All My Lives*, p.115
- ^{xxiv} *ibid*, p. 117
- ^{xxv} *ibid*, p. 161
- ^{xxvi} Mervyn Thompson author's note to 'Songs to the Judges' in *Selected Plays* Dunedin: Pilgrims South Press, 1984, p.147
- ^{xxvii} The play was recorded as *Songs to the Judges* (KIWI SLD 69) Kiwi Music Limited, 1982. One song from the play 'Gather up the Earth' was also included on *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance* (MMT 2033) Morrison Music Trust, 2000
- ^{xxviii} Thompson, in Corbalis, p.74
- ^{xxix} Thompson *All My Lives*, p.149
- ^{xxx} *ibid*, p.170
- ^{xxxi} In his autobiography, Thompson makes this rather bitter comment in his own defence: 'I hope that that young women, who may have talked to the wrong "friend" and set in motion the whole nightmare, is sleeping well. She certainly didn't when she sat on top of me last December. Either time.' *Singing the Blues*, p.10
- ^{xxxii} Thompson *Singing The Blues*, p.66
- ^{xxxiii} *ibid*, p.11
- ^{xxxiv} A.K. Grant 'The Silencing of Uncle Scrim' *New Zealand Listener* 28 April 1984, p.29
- ^{xxxv} Robert Leek Letter to the Editor *New Zealand Listener* 2 June 1984, p.10
- ^{xxxvi} Thompson *All My Lives*, p.125
- ^{xxxvii} Black Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.6
- ^{xxxviii} Robinson & Wattie (eds) 'Mervyn Thompson' from www.bookcouncil.org.nz
- ^{xxxix} Thompson in Corbalis, p.79
- ^{xl} *ibid*, p.79
- ^{xli} Robinson & Wattie (eds) 'Mervyn Thompson' from www.bookcouncil.org.nz
- ^{xlii} Thompson *All my Lives*, p.170
- ^{xliii} Thompson seems to have recognized this tendency in himself with his choice of title for his final play - Mervyn Thompson 'Passing Through' in *Passing Through and other Plays* Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992
- ^{xliv} Black, Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.18
- ^{xlv} Robinson & Wattie (eds) 'Mervyn Thompson' from www.bookcouncil.org.nz
- ^{xlvi} Thompson *All My Lives*, p.157
- ^{xlvii} *ibid*, p.53
- ^{xlviii} Mervyn Thompson 'Passing Through', p.143
- ^{xlix} Black Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.6

- ⁱ Thompson did not write the part for himself but took the role after the actor who had rehearsed the role was taken ill on the eve of the first dress rehearsal. See Thompson *All My Lives* p.120
- ⁱⁱ Thompson 'First Return', p.56
- ⁱⁱⁱ Thompson *All My Lives*, p.120
- ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Howard McNaughton 'The Drama of Colonization' in Terry Sturm (ed) *Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* (2nd Edition) Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.338
- ^{liv} Thompson *All My Lives*, p. 53
- ^{lv} Thompson *All My Lives*, p.163
- ^{lvi} The Department of Education Statistics for 1984 show that female students at Auckland University outnumbered men in all humanities subjects (except Hebrew where there was one male student enrolled), despite the fact that total numbers of male students vastly outnumbered females. See Dept. of Education *1984 Education Statistics of New Zealand* NZ Govt: Wellington, 1984, p.103
- ^{lvii} See endnote 19, above
- ^{lviii} McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.322
- ^{lix} The earliest recorded theatre event in New Zealand was an evening of 'Entertainments', advertised by one Mr D. Osborne, 'to commence with a new Extravaganza entitled *The Lawyer Outwitted by his Apprentice*' Downes, p.11
- ^{lx} In her study of colonial theatre in Auckland, Karen Sherry notes that the first permanent theatre in Auckland was the Fitzroy, a building boasting 'an elegant and commodious dress circle' which opened in 1943 and in which plays were performed weekly. Sherry also notes that theatres in this period were 'generally small and constructed from wood. At first they were lit by whale oil lamp, with footlights screened by round topped shields of japanned tin, and this, no doubt, accounts for their frequent destruction by fire'. See Karen Sherry *Theatre in Colonial Auckland 1870-71* MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1987
- ^{lxi} McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.322
- ^{lxii} For a survey of early New Zealand Theatre Making see 'The Emergent Drama 1840-1914' in Howard McNaughton *New Zealand Drama* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, pp.15-27
- ^{lxiii} The terms 'vigorous' and 'unrecognised' are both taken from the abstract to Murray Edmond's thesis *Old Comrades of the Future: A History of Experimental Theatre in New Zealand, 1962-1982* Ph.D thesis – University of Auckland, 1996
- ^{lxiv} Edmond *Old Comrades*, p.8
- ^{lxv} *ibid*, p.23
- ^{lxvi} This connection was drawn to my attention by Murray Edmond in his examiners report on this thesis, August 2005
- ^{lxvii} Peter Harcourt *A Dramatic Appearance: New Zealand Theatre 1920-1970* Wellington: Methuen New Zealand, 1978, p.19
- ^{lxviii} See McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.325. Peter Harcourt suggests that 1882 work *Weighed in the Balance* by Josiah Clifton Firth was the first true New Zealand play, in that it was written by a New Zealander on a New Zealand subject. However, the play was not intended as a text for performance being, as Harcourt puts it 'little more than an elaborate private joke (and quite unactable) at the expense of the Governor, Sir George Grey.' Harcourt *A Dramatic Appearance*, p.19
- ^{lxix} Thompson *All My Lives*, p.111
- ^{lxx} *ibid*, p. 100
- ^{lxxi} See Thompson in Corbalis, p.71
- ^{lxxii} Harcourt *A Dramatic Appearance*, p.14
- ^{lxxiii} The first fully professional theatre company in the country, the New Zealand Players was formed in 1953, see McNaughton *New Zealand Drama* p.42 and p.49
- ^{lxxiv} Murray Edmond 'The "Original" Downstage and the Theatre of its History' in *Australasian Drama Studies* no 36 (April 2000), p.39
- ^{lxxv} Edmond implies that Downstage Theatre, certainly in its first two years of operation, came closest to being a true 'National' theatre in that its founders were not trained in Europe and, unlike other regional theatres that followed its model, it questioned the art of theatre itself, see Edmond 'The "Original" Downstage,' p. 39
- ^{lxxvi} See endnote 73, above
- ^{lxxvii} See Edmond 'The "Original" Downstage', p.41
- ^{lxxviii} John Thomson *New Zealand Drama 1930-1980: An Illustrated History* Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.31
- ^{lxxix} Bruce Mason *New Zealand Drama: A Parade of Forms and a History* Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1973, p.4
- ^{lxxx} McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.321
- ^{lxxxi} Thomson, cover flap
- ^{lxxxii} Thomson, p.28
- ^{lxxxiii} McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.336
- ^{lxxxiv} See Thomson, pp.11-25. See also McNaughton in Sturm (ed), pp.336-8
- ^{lxxxv} McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.337
- ^{lxxxvi} Thomson, p.30
- ^{lxxxvii} Thompson 'Passing Through', p.149
- ^{lxxxviii} Thompson in Corbalis, p.75
- ^{lxxxix} Thompson 'Passing Through' p.147-8
- ^{xc} McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.339
- ^{xcii} *ibid*, p.339
- ^{xciii} In a recent interview, Elric Hooper, one of Marsh's protégées, disputed this idea that she used to insist on English speech: 'She is often blamed for knocking the New Zealand speech, but what she disliked was its lack of energy and fullness, its inability to express the widest range of vigour and emotion. It wasn't the sounds she was despising, but the meanness of the sounds.' From 'Elric as Student, Actor and Trainee Director' www.nzine.co.nz/features/elric
- ^{xciii} Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattier (eds) 'Ngaio Marsh' *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998) retrieved from www.bookcouncil.org.nz 12 Aug 2005

- xciv Bruce Mason and John Pocock *Theatre in Danger: A Correspondence* Hamilton and Auckland: Paul's Book Arcade, 1957 p.49
- xcv McNaughton in Sturm (ed), p.340
- xcvi Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (eds) 'Bruce Mason' *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature* (1998) retrieved from www.bookcouncil.org.nz 5 Sept 2004
- xcvii *ibid*
- xcviii Black, Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.8
- xcix Thompson 'First Return', p.62
- c Thompson *All My Lives*, pp. 99-101
- ci Thompson 'First Return', p.62
- cii Mervyn Thompson 'Downstage, Educationalists, and the New Zealand Drama' in *Landfall* vol. 29, no.4 (Dec 1975) p.323
- ciii *ibid*, p.323
- civ Harcourt *A Dramatic Appearance*, pp.153-4
- cv Roger Hall *Bums on Seats: The Backstage Story* Auckland: Penguin Books, 1998, p.130
- cvi Black Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.9
- cvi Thompson *All My Lives*, p.172
- cviii Mervyn Thompson 'Songs to the Judges' in *Selected Plays* Dunedin: Pilgrims South Press, 1984, p.167
- cix *ibid*, p.156
- cx Black, Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.17
- cxii *ibid*, p.17
- cxiii *ibid*, p.15
- cxiv Thompson *All My Lives*, p. 86
- cxv *ibid*, p. 86
- cxvi Black, Introduction to Thompson *Selected Plays*, p.7
- cxvii Mervyn Thompson *Coaltown Blues* Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986, p36-7
- cxviii Thompson *Singing The Blues*, p.62 and p.70
- cxix *ibid*, p.7
- cxx *ibid*, p.37
- cxxi See endnote 101, above
- cxxii See chapter 10, endnote 13
- cxxiii In a letter to *The Listener* John MacDavitt defended the actions of the Depot theatre, seeing it as a case of 'artists having views about the world and being prepared to let those views influence them'. Another correspondent on the same page argued that 'Mr. Thompson is not the issue'. *New Zealand Listener* 12 May 1984, p.10
- cxxiv See chapter 1, endnote 14
- cxxv Thompson 'Another Life', Part 1, *Metro* Dec 1986, p.233
- cxxvi Thompson 'Another Life' Part 2, *Metro* Jan 1987 p.114
- cxxvii This shift of focus is also identified by Jonathan Lamb in 'The Uncanny in Auckland' *And* vol.4 (Oct 1985), p.43.
- cxxviii Lamb, p.43
- cxxix *New Zealand Listener* 15 Sept, 1984, quoted in Thompson 'Another Life' Part 2, p.115
- ccc Thompson 'Another Life' Part 2, p.115
- ccxi *ibid*, p.114
- ccxii *ibid*, p.112. It should be noted that Renée insists she was never involved in lobbying against Thompson's play, see Sabbage, p.16
- ccxiii Lamb, p.34
- ccxiv *ibid*, p.35
- ccxv *ibid*, p.32
- ccxvi *ibid*, p.42
- ccxvii *ibid*, p.45
- ccxviii Chris Atmore 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy: A Feminist Deconstructive Reading' in *New Zealand Sociology* vol.9 no.2 (Nov 1994), p.193
- ccxix *ibid*, p.193
- cdi Thompson 'Another Life', Part 1, p.220
- cdii Personal comment from conversation with John Davies, lecturer in Theatre Studies at Waikato University, in 2003
- cdiii Brecht uses this tactic in, for instance, *The Good Person of Schezwan* which concludes by encouraging audience members to come up with their own happy ending: 'ladies and gentlemen in you we trust: there must be happy endings, must must must!' see Brecht *The Good Person of Schezwan* (trans. John Willett) London: Methuen, 1986. Thompson discusses his appreciation of the technique in Corbalis, p.95
- cdliii Thompson 'Passing Through', p.172
- cdliv Roger Robinson 'Autobiography as Drama: Thompson Agonistes' *New Zealand Books* vol.1 no.2 (July 1991) p.8
- cdlv Felicity Monk's review of the book, in *The New Zealand Listener* (vol. 189 no 3299) includes this comment 'Johnson was an early defender of Thompson and says he never really recovered from the attack'. Retrieved from *The Listener Archive* <http://www.listener.co.nz> 9 May 2004
- cdlvi Johnson *The Shag Incident*, p.9

Chapter XII

'Don't Get Mad, Get Even': The Auckland Protesters in Context

Though the women involved in the attack on Mervyn Thompson remained anonymous, it is not difficult to provide a context for their actions. In their press release the day after the initial attack, the 'six angry women' identified themselves as representatives of women's groups in the city of Auckland.ⁱⁱ They described their action as a piece of direct political action carried out on behalf of women who could not gain justice through the courts for sexual harassment and their victim as a man who had carried out 'three or four rapes'; (their motto, they declared was 'Don't Get Mad, Get Even'). By identifying themselves in this way, and only in this way, the attackers positioned themselves within a particular socio-political context: the Women's Movement of New Zealand, and it is within this context that the protests will be examined here.ⁱⁱⁱ This is not to suggest that the actions of these women represented the attitudes of everyone involved in the Women's Movement at the time. By 1984, the Movement was such a fragmented organization that no one could claim to represent it, and many in the Movement objected to the attack, particularly because of its violent nature.^{iv} However, the attackers did claim to represent an aspect of the Movement and therefore that Movement is of interest.

More specifically, the protests will be framed in the context of what one historian describes as the 'mood of radical activism' at Auckland University in the 1980s.^v The connections between the protesters and the University's student body can only be inferred but the justification for inclusion is clear nonetheless.^{vi} These women were not Thompson's students, as he confirmed: 'none of the women involved in the assault was known to me (I saw only five of them clearly; so I could be wrong about the sixth)'.^{vii} They may not have been University students at all. However, in their attack on Thompson and his work they *represented* Thompson's female students, specifically the student, or students, that he had had a sexual relationship with. Just as Thompson became a representative figure in his theatre relationships, these women saw themselves as taking a representative stance in the exchange with him.

The attackers even took on the 'role' of a student in a literal sense in the early stages of the attack when one of their number impersonated a student in order to lure Thompson to the zoo on the pretence of meeting her. Once again, it is appropriate to portray the attackers in the same way as they presented themselves; that is, as representative figures.^{viii}

The so-called 'second wave'^{ix} of the Women's Movement began in New Zealand in the 1970s. Internationally, the Women's Movement emerged out of the anti-nuclear, anti-Vietnam and Civil Rights protests of the 1960s. Involvement in other protest movements gave women the tools and the motivation to push for women's rights, though as Maud Cahill and Christine Dann suggest in their history of New Zealand feminism, women also organized because they could see the limitations placed on them within the protest movements:

Women initiated or joined protests but they rarely led or directed them. Dissatisfied with male domination in the protest movement as well as in the wider society, but still influenced by the radicalism and militancy of the [protest] movement, women began meeting in small groups to form what became known as the Women's Liberation Movement.^x

Women's Liberation was a worldwide phenomenon and as Michael King writes in his *Penguin History of New Zealand*:

The ground for such a movement in New Zealand was fertile because of what most women – and many men – could see was the second-class status of women in such areas as employment opportunities, rates of pay, excessive domestic responsibilities and education.^{xi}

Before the 1970s, women in New Zealand had 'second class status' in a number of ways. Whereas today New Zealand has a number of women in positions of influence within business and government (including the Prime Minister and Attorney General), in the 1970s such role models were rare. At this time, there was still a social expectation that women would work until they married and became mothers. Key issues for the emerging Women's Movement therefore included lobbying for adequate childcare facilities for working mothers and state support for single mothers,^{xii} raising awareness about the levels of domestic violence and

sexual violence in New Zealand^{xiii} and campaigning for wider access to contraception and abortion services.^{xiv} Behind all these issues, and perhaps the most difficult thing to fight for, was women's desire for recognition in a predominantly male society.

The women involved in the attack had grown up within a society with a strongly male cultural identity. Despite being the first country to give women the vote, from the point of view of a feminist in 1970, every aspect of New Zealand society, culture and lifestyle seemed to be defined by male values. The very idea of what it meant to be a New Zealander was closely bound up with the very 'male' traits of struggle, hard work and ingenuity that had been necessary for survival in both Pakeha and Maori history.^{xv} As for pastimes, with the exception of amateur dramatics, which, as we saw in the last chapter, was largely a female pursuit, New Zealanders' leisure hours were dominated by outdoor recreations and sport, particularly rugby.^{xvi} In social terms, New Zealanders traditionally valued the non-nonsense, down-to-earth approach of the 'good bloke' or 'kiwi joker' – both distinctly male constructs^{xvii} while the New Zealand literature of Frank Sargeson and others critiqued a male archetype identified by Sebastian Black as 'the inarticulate kiwi, strong silent hero or brutal backwoodsman'.^{xviii} Behind these social and literary archetypes, as Black implies, there was an underlying suggestion of male domination and violence, of the sort experienced by Thompson as a child. As late as 1981, in a survey of 300 New Zealanders, 86% of women and 92% of men interviewed stated that they found it acceptable to discipline a child by hitting them. 4% of the men found it acceptable to beat a child and the same proportion 'agreed that a spouse could beat his or her partner'.^{xix} In the face of attitudes like this, as King suggests, feminists in New Zealand society were looking for more than equality: they were trying to change the attitudes of men and women alike:

As the women's movement grew . . . more and more women began to insist that they did not want equality in a man's world [but] the feminization of society.^{xx}

As students at Auckland University discovered, an attempt to ‘feminize’ the culture of University life would be a particularly difficult task.

Before the 1970s, student life at Auckland tended to mirror that of wider New Zealand society and to be dominated by male pursuits and a macho social code. Certain sectors within Auckland University were even more staunchly male than others, most notably the Faculty of Engineering. This Faculty had a strong sense of its own identity, strengthened by the fact that it was sited on a campus twenty miles from the rest of the university. As early as 1947, according to Hercock, the faculty established a ‘reputation for hard drinking and stunts’^{xxi} and for boorish behaviour at student meetings and during capping celebrations. This reputation was still very much in place through the 1970s and 1980s. The Engineer’s traditional ‘haka party’, in which students donned grass skirts and mock tattoos in a pastiche of Maori tradition, was another ongoing point of contention (within student politics and at a national level, issues of racial equality ran alongside issues of women’s equality right through this period). However, while the entrenched attitudes embodied by the Engineering Faculty would always represent a challenge to the emergence of feminism on campus, not all university students were so conservative. Indeed, according to Christine Dann in her history of the New Zealand Women’s Movement, University students were actually more understanding and open to women’s issues than most of New Zealand society:

Despite the sometimes hostile and patronising reaction of some male students to feminism, in retrospect it seems that university students were the most open to understanding and acting on Women’s Liberation.^{xxii}

Students at Auckland were to play a pivotal role as the Women’s Movement took root in the country in the 1970s, despite the fact that before that time political activity on campus had been somewhat limited.

In general, students at Auckland were slower than their international peers to pick up on the worldwide phenomenon of student protest during the 1960s – something Hercock suggests was due to the absence of a sense of collective student identity across the campus.^{xxiii} As late as 1968, the *Craccum* editor felt moved to challenge students to stir

themselves out of their political apathy in an article entitled 'Can't We Speak Up?' The article was a response to a paper given by the registrar of Waikato University earlier that year in which he criticized New Zealand students for staying silent on issues of national importance. The *Craccum* editor wrote:

Let us in 1968, take this task seriously. We must come to grips with what it means to be both critical and constructive so that rather than having the public exhorting us to speak up, they will be shouting at the tops of their voices for us to shut up. Then we may be getting somewhere.^{xxiv}

Student's attitudes, behaviour, dress and political opinions certainly changed a great deal during the 1960s as they shared in the cultural changes that were taking place throughout the Western World. Socially, as Hercock puts it 'Rebellion was in style.'^{xxv} Politically, however, the rebellious spirit was less manifest. There was some awareness of global political issues, particularly those with local impact such as French nuclear testing in the Pacific and the issue of Maori participation in the All Black's tour of South Africa of 1959-60. Small numbers of students and university staff worked within larger community-based organizations to participate in protests on these issues. However, for the first half of the 1960s, as Hercock says, 'active involvement in these movements remained the province of a small minority of students'.^{xxvi}

During the second half of the 1960s, however, greater numbers of students started to become involved in protests, particularly on issues directly related to them. A student protest about government tertiary education policies in 1965 attracted 2000 protesters and prompted a *Craccum* headline 'AU Active at Last!'^{xxvii} Another significant student protest took place in 1966 over the case of David Godfrey, an employee of the government's Security Intelligence Service, enrolled as a student in political studies. Godfrey was accused of attempting to recruit students as informants and scuffles occurred when police were called to break up a demonstration outside the Department of Politics.^{xxviii} Also notable were the anti-Vietnam demonstrations of 1969, which included marches through Auckland and a 100-strong protest outside the University Law Library when the American Ambassador attended to

gift some books.^{xxix} The increase in student activism did not happen on its own. Like the Berkeley students in the last case study, the Auckland students of the 1960s experienced an organized effort to politicize them, led by a small number of radicals within the student body.

One of the most notable of the radical leaders was Tim Shadbolt who joined the University in 1966 and, astounded at the lack of a student protest tradition, formed the 'Auckland Society for the Active Prevention of Cruelty to Politically Apathetic Humans,' or AUSAPOPAH:

Loud extravagant and colourful, an insult to the quiet rational intellectual crap that's supposed to flow around the university precincts. We all made large flowing red and black capes and wore bowler hats. Forum at Auckland University in those days was a sick little one hour masturbation session for frustrated students who liked to pretend they had free speech. Ausapocpah took it by storm.^{xxx}

Over the next few years, Shadbolt and his group helped to change the atmosphere on campus and developed a fringe culture of radicalism. In particular, students developed a tradition of political pranks or stunts. For example, in 1966, students infiltrated the Devonport Navy Base and 'renamed' one of the Navy's cruisers. In 1967, as part of the capping procession, a huge effigy of finance minister Rob Muldoon appeared, trailing a fifty-yard-long 'black budget' held up by sixty students. In 1968, a giant butterfly was discovered on the exterior of the Hotel International, while on the central police station a sign bearing the word 'FUZZ' was suspended between the sixth and seventh floors. In 1969, Shadbolt used dynamite to blow up the flagpole in Waitangi and, during the same year, an army Land Rover was stolen and driven to the campus.^{xxxi} In 1972, no longer a student, Shadbolt joined the editorial team at *Craccum* and used the paper as a medium for his radical messages. In particular, he was at the forefront of opposition to the Springbok tour in 1972 when he called for the 'necessity of creative, transcendent and artistic violence.'^{xxxii} Shadbolt may have had less success than his Berkeley counterparts in his efforts to radicalize the students of Auckland. He may have been, as Hercock puts it, 'in tune with only a minority'^{xxxiii} but he did set a tone for radicalism within the

AUSA that persisted through the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, his penchant for 'creative, transcendent and artistic violence' in the form of stunts might be seen as a significant precursor to the creative, artistic violence carried out on Thompson a decade later. With the increased politicization of students, and the influence of overseas models of protest, the creative tactics employed by the small body of radicals on campus, became more sophisticated and targeted. For example, Hercock describes anti-war demonstrators employing 'guerrilla theatre tactics' in their protests against the Vietnam War in 1969 and photos of an anti-Vietnam march show students carrying a mock 'corpse' to stress their anti-war message.^{xxxiv} It was into this marginalized but creative mood of radicalism that the Women's Movement arrived on campus.

The development of feminism at the University of Auckland was also fed by a general growth in numbers of female students in the 1970s where, for the first time, women made up one third of the student population. Historically, late Victorian feminism had resulted in large numbers of female students enrolling in the early years of the university but relatively low numbers of these women attained matriculation.^{xxxv} Feminist activity on campus in the early part of the twentieth century was limited to individual activity according to noted New Zealand feminist Elsie Locke, who said of her years at the university in the 1930s: 'those of us bent on ploughing our own furrow just went ahead and did it'.^{xxxvi} Women were involved in the activities of the University's Student Association, originally called AUCSA, though they were rarely appointed to leadership positions (in 1947, the constitution of the student association was amended to limit the number of women on the student executive to 3, compared to 7 men and AUCSA had only one female president before the 1960s). The first stirrings of feminist activity began in 1967 with a campaign for a student crèche. In 1970, the first women's groups were formed on campus and from 1971 the university newspaper *Craccum* published a special 'Emancipation' issue to coincide with women's suffrage demonstrations taking place in the city. From this time on, the Student's Association and its newspaper *Craccum* would be strongly associated with feminism.

The 1970s saw the rapid growth of the Women's Movement both on campus and across New Zealand as a whole. The Movement started with a rapid spread in consciousness-raising groups across the country and continued with the United Women's Conventions held in Auckland (1973), Wellington (1975), Christchurch (1977) and Hamilton (1979). As women organized, the Movement spread quickly, gaining a huge membership in only a few years. Two hundred people attended the inaugural Women's Liberation Conference in Wellington in 1972. Just one year later fifteen hundred met in Auckland for the first United Women's Convention.^{xxxvii} The United Women's Conventions were remembered fondly by many women as occasions of political awakening as well as opportunities for celebration and fun. Playwright Renée describes how attending the 1975 Convention changed her life:

It was just like being converted to a religion. I felt that I was coming home. I discovered a lot of the reasons why I had been angry. And apart from that it was just such fun, it was just so great!^{xxxviii}

Renée recalls that the last words spoken at that convention were 'Go back to your homes and do something about it'.^{xxxix} Her response was to return to her home town of Wairoa and open a women's centre. She concludes, 'There was no turning back after that'.^{xl} Renée's words convey the sense, shared by many women at the Conventions, of an almost religious conversion to the cause of women's rights and a strong commitment to the doctrine that political change could be brought about through personal and collective action.

In the early days of the Women's Movement, many women were also politicized by their exposure to the new literature being written on women's issues. In Cahill and Dann's collected 'herstories' as in the retrospectives recorded by Sue Kedgely, almost every woman writing about their awakening feminist consciousness, mentions reading books by Betty Freidan, Germaine Greer or other international feminist writers of the time. They are very clear about the huge influence these books had on them. These comments, from a woman called Marilyn, are representative of many:

The minute I started reading the book (Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique*) I was very excited. It opened up all sorts of idea (sic) for me, and everything started to fall into place in my mind like a jigsaw.^{xli}

The profile of overseas feminist writing was raised even further during Germaine Greer's much-publicized visit to New Zealand in 1972.^{xlii} In the same year, several important New Zealand publications were produced, with titles including *Sexist Society*, *Down the Aisle with Caution*, *Please* and *Women's Liberation – are NZ Women ready to examine the Case?*^{xliii} From the start, there was a big emphasis on reading and disseminating literature within consciousness-raising groups. Many local branches had book collections or networks of access to material. The development of Women's Studies courses on campus from the mid 1970s onwards meant that students had further opportunities to study feminist works.

For many women, joining the Women's Movement was a matter of intense conviction, and their awakening gave them a sense of political purpose and a group identity. For some, like Sue Kedgely, their induction into feminism was akin to a religious conversion:

Some women, like myself, experienced a flash of insight, a moment of revelation, when suddenly a series of random and seemingly unconnected happenings fell into a wider feminist perspective. For us the rhetoric of women's liberation was music to our ears and we set out unhesitatingly, and with a messianic zeal, to change our lives and the lives of as many other women as possible as well.^{xliv}

For others, the 'rhetoric of women's liberation' was crystallized by some kind of personal experience of injustice or lack of choice, as was the case for 'Jean':

The first time I made any personal connection with feminism was when I got pregnant and had to go to Sydney for a backstreet abortion . . . I finally had one done by a Polish doctor and I remember him shrieking at me when I was lying on the table feeling terrified that if I didn't pull myself together he would throw me out in the street. When I came back to New Zealand abortion became a big issue for me.^{xlv}

Women who had believed themselves to be happy in their roles as wives, mothers and workers now began to question their whole lives. Many made big personal changes. For example, one woman recalls how in 1970 she was:

Twenty eight years old · trying to be a good wife and mother . . . · certain that the things that were wrong in my life were my own fault · living in a bungalow with a deck, barbecue and rose gardens on Auckland's North Shore · back-combing my hair, shaving my legs and making my own dresses . . . ^{xlvi}

By 1990 she had become 'a radical lesbian feminist with both socialist and separatist tendencies' living in a house with other women, tutoring in women's studies and passionately engaged with social issues of the day. Most of the New Zealand feminists interviewed by Cahill and Dunn in their study, describe some level of significant transformation, if not in their personal and social lives then certainly in their ideas. Most of all, being part of the Women's Movement gave its members a sense of group identity and strength, described here by one New Zealand feminist:

... I went off to a women's seminar to discuss the abortion legislation and suddenly I found myself with all these amazing liberal women . . . That meeting was the turning point for me. I was fascinated by all these incredibly able and articulate women who could stand up and say exactly what they thought. ^{xlvii}

Thus, like the students at Berkeley and the Nationalists in Dublin, the women who attacked Thompson acted from a base of strong personal conviction and political anger. They gained the confidence to act as they did from the fact that they were part of a pre-formed group, with a special political energy.

Like the students at Berkeley and, perhaps even more like the women who protested against *The Plough and the Stars*, Thompson's attackers were part of a strongly bonded, pre-formed group of people whose collective identity was defined by opposition to existing social relationships. The Berkeley students stood against the relationship imposed on them by the university and the older generation in general.

The Nationalist women of Dublin strove to move their country further away from its historical relationship with England and also fought to shift the franchise relationship within Ireland itself. The Women's Movement that emerged after 1970 was similarly defined by its opposition to socially defined relationships – in this case their relationship with the patriarchal structures within New Zealand society, including Universities. One of the major concerns of the Women's Movement was to critique the education of women at every level of the New Zealand education system, from pre-school to tertiary. This included examining the content of material taught to students as well as critiquing the hierarchical structures within educational institutions themselves. Government research conducted in 1979 and published in 1982 as the Teacher Career and Promotion Study (TEACAPS) revealed what women suspected; that 'men with the power to make appointments (within educational institutions) preferred to elevate male colleagues,'^{xlviii} while in 1984 the Human Right's Commissioner reported that women were consistently underrepresented in tenured university positions, despite the fact that 'overall and on average, women students performed better than men.'^{xlix} This kind of critiquing of patriarchal structures led women to question the social relationships between women and health providers, women and workplaces and even between women's groups. Since their reason for forming into a group was to question and contravene the terms of socially sanctioned relationships, it could be argued that they would be more likely to question and contravene the terms of others, including theatre relationships. To echo what I said of the Berkeley audience members, these women would have made tough audience members in any context.

As in the previous case studies, these women were not only predisposed to contract breaking on this particular occasion. They came from a culture of protest. By 1984, protest action had become a regular feature of activity both within the Women's Movement and on the University campus. Women had sent countless letters, signed petitions and made submissions in their campaigns. They had also experienced numerous picket lines, marches and demonstrations like the one outside the Miss Universe Contest in Auckland in 1980. As well as protesting on

issues specific to women, members of the Women's Movement had lent their support to a range of political protests for other causes including the occupation of Bastion Point in 1982; an occupation, carried out in support of Maori land claims, which saw women and Maori clash violently with police. Women's groups and Auckland students were also at the forefront of the extraordinary nationwide protests against the Springbok Rugby tour in 1981. The Springbok protests, which spread right through the country, were violent in a way that alarmed and unsettled New Zealand society:

In a land where it was thought only an Act of God could disturb the national sport, four hundred demonstrators stormed a ground while thousands raged outside. A game in the heart of the North Island's wealthiest, most peaceful farming community was called off. During the following night many of the protesters were savagely assaulted by law-abiding citizens whose pleasures had been interrupted by political passions. Week after week similar scenes of conflict and division were presented to astonished viewers.¹

As Black says, the Springbok protests shattered some of the entrenched myths about New Zealand: the people of this 'quiet country, conservative, civilized, if a little dull, where there were more sheep than people, and where the people were more English than the English'^{li} were suddenly forced to recognize a new radicalism in their young people. Though the country as a whole was slow to take notice, these audience members, like the audience members in the previous case studies, were receiving a sort of 'training' in contract breaking activities. And many of the protests, particularly in the early days of the Women's Movement were highly theatrical in form.

Protests carried out by the Women's Movement during the 1970s and early 1980s were often strikingly theatrical, even more so than those described in the previous case studies. This tendency was established with the very first protests by the Women's Movement. One of the earliest public events was a march organized to mark suffrage day in 1971. It is described here by Sue Kedgely:

Hundreds of Aucklanders gazed with disbelief as forty women, all dressed in black and carrying a

coffin, marched in a mock funeral procession to Queen Victoria's statue in Albert Park.^{lii}

From this point on, it seems, most events had their theatrical elements, including the protest against the Miss Universe contest where a plastic sex doll was paraded in a "Miss World" Sash^{liii} or the welcome given to Germaine Greer in 1972 at Auckland airport, described here by one of the participants:

We dressed as Halloween witches in whiteface, and pranced shrieking around a mass of women huddled beneath 'the grey blanket of mediocrity'. We howled and thrashed and upstaged the hostesses, who were most put out when Greer sailed down the stairs and invited me to have dinner alone with her the following evening.^{liv}

Clearly, these women were very aware of the potency of performance as a medium to convey a protest message. And the use of performance as a medium was by no means limited to protest.

Over the years, women within the Movement used a variety of forms of theatre performance to impart feminist messages. Sometimes, the forms of theatre used were directly akin to protest action: as Dann says, 'Guerrilla theatre was popular with the first WL groups as a way of getting a political point across, and is still used in this way from time to time'.^{lv} Clearly, any experience the protesters had in guerrilla theatre would have set an important precedent for the imposed 'performance' of February 1984. Other forms of theatre were also mastered. For example, street theatre, and agit-prop performance was often used as a political weapon, as Fern Mercier recalls:

We performed street theatre in shopping malls and gutters. I remember playing the role of Slenderella in a skit which foreshadowed the present concern with anorexia nervosa, but at the time was a direct assault on sex-role stereotyping.^{lvi}

At other times, women became theatre makers in more traditional ways. For example, in the early 1970s, an all-female theatre group, known as 'The Cure-All-Ills-All-Star-Travelling-Women's-Medicine-Show' toured New Zealand from its base in Dunedin and in 1977, The Backstreet Women's Theatre troupe toured with a play focussed on abortion. In a

country where, as we have seen, touring theatre was still something of a rarity, these shows made quite an impact with local women's groups. Within Auckland, the Auckland Women's Centre drama group performed short pieces at feminist events and were videoed by the Auckland Women's Community Video Group.^{lvii}

Out of all this theatrical activity, a number of feminist playwrights also emerged. The most successful of these was Renée, author of *Setting the Table* – the text which provided the prototype for the attack on Thompson. Renée started writing in the 1980s when she was in her fifties. As a mature student at Auckland University she found herself moving between the feminist environment on campus and the predominantly male-dominated world of theatre in the city, as she recalled in an interview later in life:

I was in a position where I could judge for myself what was going on in Auckland and I started to think that I wasn't seeing any decent women's roles.^{lviii}

Renée's play *Wednesday to Come* achieved mainstream success at Downstage Theatre and was published in 1985 and the playwright was an important figure in the growing acceptance of women's theatre in the period. Interestingly, Renée later equated the acceptance of women's theatre with the acceptance of New Zealand theatre as promoted by Thompson:

Because New Zealand theatres had found that New Zealand plays were worthwhile, and that they had something to say, their minds weren't entirely closed to women's plays. But it was a bit of a struggle.^{lix}

Renée's work meant that the Movement's 'struggle' to be heard as theatre makers took place right across the spectrum of theatre from guerrilla theatre and protest actions to mainstream performance. With this range of experiences women across the Movement experienced a range of different types of theatre relationships, often as the *makers* of the spectacle, or theatre event. The range of experiences meant that these women were accustomed to experimenting with non-traditional theatre relationships, including work that was confrontational and imposed on its recipients. When the women in Auckland generated their subverted

theatre relationship with Thompson they did so out of an existing context of subversive theatre making in place within the Movement.

In the decade between 1970 and 1980, the Women's Movement went through significant changes both internally; in terms of its objectives and structure, and externally; in terms of how it was perceived. In the first few years, the Women's Movement was a broad-based organization focussed on empowering women across a range of issues. From about 1973, the Women's Movement became more organized and 'project based'^{lx} with different subgroups organized around specific issues across a broad spectrum of issues from the Women's National Abortion Action Committee (WONAAC) formed in 1973, to Auckland Rape Crisis Centre, which opened in 1975 to the Women's Electoral Lobby, a group also formed in 1975 with a focus on getting politicians to take women's votes seriously. At around the same time, the Women's Movement also began to have an impact within Government and Educational institutions. Accredited Women's Studies courses appeared in New Zealand Universities, beginning in Waikato in 1974, then Victoria in 1975 and women's officers and equal opportunities programmes were put in place in a wide range of government and other work places. Small victories occurred at a social level too. One campaign, started in 1972, was for the introduction of the term 'ms' to provide a term of address that did not label women according to their marital status. Controversial at first, the term began to be used from 1972 and to appear on official forms towards the end of that decade.^{lxi} With successes like these, women began to question and confront the legal structures of New Zealand society and the attitudes that lay beneath.

However, as the Women's Movement became divided into different concerns, women's groups also tended to become divided amongst themselves and the Women's Movement lost some of its cohesiveness. 'Some women's liberationists' writes Dann, 'came to consider that this 'project' orientation had caused the death of the movement proper'.^{lxii} Successive United Women's Conventions were marked by stronger and stronger expressions of discontent from those groups who considered they were marginalized within the women's movement, notably lesbians and Maori. The 1979 Hamilton Convention

was so divisive that, to use Dann's words 'no one offered to organize another'.^{lxiii} The Movement also experienced something of a backlash from the mainstream media, which tended to represent feminists according to the strident, bra-burning stereotype.^{lxiv} Women particularly resented the coverage given to the Women's Conventions, which failed to capture the true spirit of these events. The popular image of feminism changed markedly between 1973 and 1980, as Dann found in research for her MA thesis. In 1973, when she mailed out a questionnaire to 260 students and received 243 responses: 'feminism was "in"; everyone wanted to know'.^{lxv} By the mid 1980s, although feminism was achieving institutional and political acceptability, in terms of its image in the popular mind, as Dann puts it bluntly, 'it was out'^{lxvi}. A similar backlash was experienced at Auckland University, too.

Between 1970, and the beginnings of feminism on campus, and 1984, when the attack on Thompson took place, the political tensions between radical and conservative elements at Auckland University became gradually more heated and divisive. A sector of student culture had always objected to feminism. For example, a *Craccum* article in 1973 assured readers that 'radical feminism was the result of deep-rooted sexual anxiety . . . the bizarre rhetoric of the sexually deranged'.^{lxvii} At the same time, the political structures within the AUSA and the wider university had changed over the same period to accommodate women's concerns. In 1972, students had pressed for equal pay for the female staff employed by the Student's Association. A women's officer's position had been created in 1976, a female-only 'Womenspace' had been created and AUSA had women presidents in 1974 and 1978. 1979 saw the election of Janet Roth, a radical socialist feminist, to the position of AUSA president.

Roth's presidency was to bring several issues to a head. First of all, Roth wished the AUSA to align itself more clearly with the trades unions and tackle more social issues. Under her presidency, the unions received much greater coverage in *Craccum* than ever before. At the same time, 'anti-radical' groups on campus were arguing for a return to 'student issues only' and receiving the support of large numbers of students for this position. Roth also took on the issue of race when she

campaigned vigorously for the completion of a Marae that the University authorities had started planning for ten years earlier. She also defended the actions of a group of Maori activists who came onto campus and fought with members of the Engineering Faculty during a rehearsal for their traditional 'haka party'. According to Hercock, 'In the tense atmosphere of the times, the incident was seen as one of serious, even sinister significance' and Roth's statement about the incident which 'placed the "haka party" incident in the wider context of race relations and anti-feminism' was seen as provocative and threatening.^{lxviii} The AUSA executive disassociated itself from her remarks and she was voted out of office. For feminists on campus, this was a huge blow. As the 1980s began, by which time women accounted for forty percent of students enrolled at the university, the Student Association continued to be characterized by clashes between conservative and radical elements and tensions between members of the executive and *Craccum* staff.

1983, the year before the attack on Thompson, was the University's centennial. However, for the AUSA this event was:

Less a complacent reflection on one hundred years of achievement than a turbulent debate between radical and conservative camps over the university's performance in the fields of race relations and women's issues.^{lxix}

In March, the Student Representative Council passed a motion to say that the AUSA would not participate in the University's Centennial celebrations 'due to the University's record in race relations and women's issues'^{lxx} though this motion was overturned at a later general meeting. Disagreements at *Craccum* continued and almost an entire issue of the publication was found at the foot of a cliff. Meanwhile, a vote of no confidence was passed against the AUSA president John Broad after he produced what Hercock describes as 'a confused financial report on a student work scheme'.^{lxxi} At the packed general meeting called to consider the no confidence issue, conservative supporters of Broad called in return for the dismissal of the editor and staff of *Craccum*. They also called for the reversal of positive discrimination on campus including redefining the 'Womenspace' as a General common room, and the deleting of the position of women's rights officer from the AUSA.

The meeting voted against Broad and for *Craccum*. However, the issue did not end there. In another meeting in September students voted that Broad's dismissal had been unjust. In September, too, race issues flared up again as Maori students protesting against the continuing delays in establishing a Marae, constructed a 'tent Marae' on the steps of the Registry building. It was out of this atmosphere of political tension and frustrations that the attack on Thompson took place.

As well as the political tensions on campus, there were also wider social concerns facing women in 1983-4, which fed directly into the attack on Thompson. Across the country, women were fighting against proposed cuts in welfare from a right-wing government. They were also actively campaigning on Maori sovereignty and peace issues. For many women, though, the major issue of the period was violence, particularly sexual violence, and women were campaigning in this area in a number of ways. There was a call for greater support for rape victims, after local research had revealed that as few as one in five rapes was reported to police.^{lxxii} Women also sought to change the perception about rapists, after the same research found that most rapes happened in the home and that over four-fifths of the women questioned knew their attackers.^{lxxiii} The Women's Movement were also campaigning for a change in the processes for trying rapists, after several recent high-profile cases in which rapists had received light sentences or rape victims seemed to have been blamed for what had happened. One such case, highlighted in the feminist newspaper *Broadsheet*, was the story of Sharon Kroot, a 17-year-old farm worker who committed suicide during the trial of the three men who had sexually assaulted her. The judge in this case noted that 'the defendants came from caring families and were well-regarded in the Dargaville community' and the men were sentenced to six months periodic detention.^{lxxiv} With cases like this, *Broadsheet* concluded that the New Zealand legal system seemed determined to acquit men of sexual attacks unless the victim was 'a nun, over 80 or a schoolgirl' and complained that 'a sexually active single woman whose attacker is white and someone she knows, has the least chance of seeing him brought to justice'.^{lxxv} With this frustration at the legal system, women began organising against violence for themselves.

By 1983, in the run up to the attack on Thompson, the Women's Movement was organising against sexual violence on a number of levels. 1983 saw a growth in the number of women's refuges, the first of which had opened a few years earlier. Auckland's Women's Refuge had been the second to open and had been running since 1975.^{lxxvi} 1983 also saw the founding of the first Women Against Pornography group, in Wellington. The Auckland group, which was formed in 1984,^{lxxvii} would be vocal in their support for Thompson's attackers. Women Against Pornography was part of a continuing tradition of protest against violence against women in movies, TV and other media. For example, in Wellington in 1977, a group picketed a cinema showing the movie 'The Mutilator', which was being shown with the following warning to patrons: 'The management warns that owing to the horrific content of this film, no unaccompanied women will be admitted alone to this picture.'^{lxxviii} In 1983 in the same city two hundred women protested against the screening of the sexually exploitative film 'Centrespread'. On both occasions, arrests were made. Women Against Pornography also directed their attentions to the degrading and violent representations of women to be found in advertising: the feminist newspaper *Broadsheet* published a collection of the worst of these, including the following:

'It's black and easy to lay' (Slogan for Wanganui Asphalts Ltd, 1980)

'A Spanking Good Deal' – accompanied by a picture of a man spanking a woman over his knee (Slogan for Bill Turei, N.Z. Motor Corporation, 1975)

'Label Anything' – accompanied by a picture of a labelling machine applying a label to a women's breast (Advertisement for Sato Speed labeller, 1977)^{lxxix}

As the dates of these examples show, it was a matter of some frustration to women within the Movement that such images continued to appear up to ten years after the onset of feminism.

Feminist students and Union members were similarly frustrated in their efforts to get sexual harassment taken seriously as a workplace issue. In 1983, a short book highlighting sexual harassment at the Ford Motor plant in Lower Hutt *No Laughing Matter* was produced. At the

same time, women across all sectors of society began pushing for proper procedures for the reporting and redress of sexual harassment in Universities and workplaces. The lack of such procedures at Auckland University was declared as a key impetus behind the attack and one of the positive outcomes of the turmoil after the Thompson case was that procedures for the reporting of sexual harassment on campus were drawn up and instituted a few months later.^{lxxx} Another, less formal, response by the editors of *Craccum* was to encourage students to contribute to a 'hot and cold lecturer's file' based on questions like 'Does the lecturer use sexist language or racist language / jokes? If you approached them concerning this, what was their response?'^{lxxxi} On an individual level, many women opted to face up to violence by taking self-defence classes.

Self-defence was a key aspect of the feminist response to rising sexual violence and, by 1984, large numbers of women were attending classes run by police or martial arts teachers. Dann describes how one course in Auckland, run by Sue Lytollis on feminist principles, was 'swamped with requests' by 1983 and had spread to YWCAs all round New Zealand by 1984.^{lxxxii} Dann describes how empowered and strengthened many women felt by learning the physical and psychological skills to help repel attack:

The feminist approach does not treat the learners as weak and defenceless; it puts personal assaults within the wider social context of male power and control; it demolishes the myths about rape and explains what women really have to watch out for; it attempts to empower women psychologically and socially as well as physically.^{lxxxiii}

As well as strengthening themselves individually, women were also empowering themselves collectively. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, several 'Reclaim the Night' marches were held in cities across New Zealand. A photograph of the 'Reclaim the Night' march held on International Women's Day in Auckland on 8th March 1984, shows women bearing banners that read 'Dead men Don't Rape' and 'Stamp out Rape – Keep Men off the Streets'.^{lxxxiv} These messages reveal the level of anger in evidence at the time (just weeks after the attack on

Thompson). The women who attacked Thompson were operating within a context where women were feeling increasingly physically and psychologically empowered to face up to violence both individually and in groups. They were also being encouraged to view attacks by men on women as symbolic, 'within the wider social context'. It would certainly seem that they wished their own attack to be viewed in such a way.

Another important piece of the contextual jigsaw leading up to attack on Thompson, is to look at other militant actions by women frustrated by the issue of sexual violence and its trivialization in society. The attack on Thompson was not the first time women in the Movement had carried out what might be described as public shaming rituals on men suspected of violence.^{lxxxv} The first such event occurred in 1973 in a Wellington bar when a group of women decided to confront a suspected rapist using a vocal 'performance':

Several women began their accusations in a whisper, gradually rising to a crescendo, and forced the rapist to leave (they were themselves ejected soon afterwards by an irate management).^{lxxxvi}

In a similar action, in Auckland in 1982, women set up a picket at the workplace of a man suspected of beating his wife and distributed leaflets aimed at 'shaming him in front of his workmates'. Another tactic, used a number of times, was to picket judges and lawyers thought to be favouring men over women in abuse cases.^{lxxxvii} These occasions of militancy provide a context for the more publicized attack on Thompson – the event was not an isolated incident, but fitted within a wider context of rising anger and protests, often theatrical protests, being carried out at that period. What made the attack on Thompson different was that its victim was himself a theatre maker, and accustomed to a very different kind of power relationship.

What becomes clear from this contextual detail is that Thompson was chosen as a target by his attackers not because of the content of his work but for personal and professional reasons. Thompson was never accused of portraying women in degrading ways within his plays. Indeed, as we have seen, several of the groups who lobbied to block *Songs to Uncle Scrim* acknowledged it as an important piece, allied with

their own political objectives.^{lxxxviii} He was targeted because he had become a symbol. On a personal level, his alleged behaviour seemed to the attackers to symbolize everything they had been fighting against in their decade-long battle against deep-seated prejudice in New Zealand society. Women had been fighting for rape to be taken seriously and for proper harassment procedures to be put in place. Thompson was seen to represent that problem. Professionally, Thompson was a white male educator and, however much he saw himself as working class and pro-feminist, Thompson became a symbol of the dominant patriarchy within education that the women also wished to attack. Thompson was also a theatre maker and this, too, had huge symbolic resonance when he and his work were attacked. As a theatre maker, Thompson had developed a reputation for offering himself in a very public and personal way within his performances. The attackers were not to know that Thompson's next play *Coaltown Blues* was to be posited on an even more personal relationship than before. But they did understand that he was a theatre maker who offered such relationships and this is what made both parts of their attack upon him so effective.

The first part of the attack, the theatrical ritual, was an exchange between a professional theatre maker and potential audience members in which the 'audience members', trained (culturally, if not personally) in the theatre of protest and tactics of physical aggression became quasi theatre makers. They co-opted the techniques of earlier protest 'performances' and elements of a play script written by one of their number, to impose an act of guerrilla theatre on the original theatre maker. This was surely an attack not only on his person but also on his very public and vulnerable status as a theatre maker. The fact that the attack referenced an existing written play text further increased the theatricality of what was, already, a subverted theatre relationship. It diminished Thompson's personal and professional status by overlaying this other (feminist) writer's work and imagery over his real life. The protesters successfully generated a highly dramatic substitute performance that attacked Thompson personally, lessened the value of his work and drew public attention away from his work. Just as in the previous case studies, for Thompson's future audiences there would

always be a sense in which the 'real theatre' had already happened in the form of the attack.

In the subsequent lobbying against Thompson's work, Thompson's opposers exercised the most extreme form of audience protest behaviour it is possible for an audience member, or potential audience member, to manifest. Not only did they refuse to accept the theatre relationship on offer (for *Coaltown Blues*) and take action to dissuade others from attending, they refused to accept Thompson as theatre maker in the first place. They successfully persuaded Thompson's co-theatre makers not to allow him to be able to fulfill the role of theatre maker. It was as though they continued to vest the role of theatre maker in the women who had attacked Thompson. In terms of the power within the theatre relationship, the piece of pseudo-theatre that the original protesters had created, with Thompson as unwilling actor and the New Zealand public as audience members, was validated. Performance power was not returned to Thompson, the original theatre maker. Between them, these potential audience members successfully manufactured a complete subversion of the relationship on which theatre is based. From Thompson's perspective, this was censorship. From the women's point of view it was a victory because, from their perspective, the issues they were pushing for were more significant than Thompson's right to free speech.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Thompson's supporters were quick to shift the focus away from the issue of sexual harassment, that the protesters had hoped to highlight, and onto an argument about censorship. Feminist responses to the attack, expressed in letters to the editors of *The Listener* and other publications, showed less of a tendency to discuss the theatrical implications of the affair, either in terms of the initial attack or the subsequent blocking of Thompson's plays. Responding to the initial attack, feminists tended to focus on its violent nature, rather than its theatricality: some feminists criticized the attackers for their use of violence while others defended the attackers and became incensed when Thompson sought to portray himself as victim of something akin to a rape:

Who's ever heard of a rape victim who four weeks after the attack could write an article for the *Listener* and then promise to write a book? Whoever heard of anyone being interested?^{lxviii}

In an article in *Broadsheet* surveying feminist responses to the affair, surprisingly little is made of the links between the attack and Renée's play. Only one correspondent mentions Renée's play and then only from the point of view that the action might bring Renée (a well known lesbian-feminist and part of the *Broadsheet* team) into 'danger from the authorities and others'.^{xc} The theatrical aspects of the attack itself are not examined. The same correspondent comes closest to exploring the wider theatrical implications in the picketing and blocking of Thompson's plays when she comments: 'When we know what it's like to have our words suppressed how can we condone this sort of action?'^{xcii} For the most part, however, feminists were less concerned with the theatricality of the exchange than the issues that prompted it. The discussion of censorship, though it might have been the central issue for the Thompson camp, seemed to the feminists to be a typical sidelining of the 'real' issue of sexual harassment that had motivated the protests.

Despite Jonathan Lamb's assertion that Thompson's attackers, like Thompson himself 'fell under the dominion of the repetition compulsion' and were drawn to revisit the issue over and over,^{xciii} it would seem that in the long term, from the perspective of the Women's Movement and perhaps from the perspective of New Zealand society as a whole, the affair was sooner forgotten. This was inevitable, perhaps, given the unsustainable tension caused by such polarized responses to the events. In Thompson's own view, the public's ability to forget was probably part of a weakness in the New Zealand psyche – the same weakness that manifested itself in the tendency to jump to those polarized positions in the first place, without being fully appraised of the facts:

It is the old familiar New Zealand problem. A controversy arises and instantly the whole country rushes to one side or other of the barricades. No actual thinking takes place; the knees jerk, the rationalisations begin, and there we are again, New Zealanders engaged in those peculiar rituals we use

as substitutes for civil war . . . it happened with Arthur Allen Thomas;^{xciii} it happened with Erebus;^{xciv} it happened with the Springbok tour^{xcv} and the homosexual Law Reform Bill;^{xcvi} it happened again with me.^{xcvii}

Thompson was not the only one to comment on the polarized public responses. The same issue is a central focus of Chris Atmore's deconstructive reading of the affair.^{xcviii} Whether the result of cultural habit or an inevitable consequence of the issues involved, polarization was the result and this, it seems, added to the country's need to leave the issue alone and move on.

After initial discussion and exchanges of view in the feminist and mainstream media, the subject quickly seemed to recede into something to be joked about. For example, *Broadsheet* magazine in September of 1984, referred back to the events of February as part of its humour section – letters to 'Feminist Fanny':

Dear Feminist Fanny, I've organized a men-against-drama lecturers march, cake stalls for the men's centre and crèches for feminist ovulars. Still feminists won't be nice to me. What more do women want?^{xcix}

while on the same page, a letter from a fictional figure named 'MacAdamia', author of 'Wet Dreams' reads, 'I am an English lecturer at University and I'm scared of being chained to a tree. What should I do?' To which 'Feminist Fanny' replies (using the nickname of an actual Auckland University lecturer) 'Dear Mack. If the chain fits, wear it'.^c If the feminist media's response was to quickly move on, the same can be said of New Zealand society in general. Perhaps the affair prompted some people within society to challenge their personal feelings about issues of sexual harassment and rape. Certainly, this was so for Kai Jensen who, in an essay about male sexuality written a few years after the attack, identifies the Thompson affair as a trigger point for him in his own journey to becoming 'someone working to promote male change' in awareness of feminist issues.^{ci} Other than this (and Johnson's novelized version of the story, discussed in a moment) there is little documented discussion of the affair beyond the end of the 1980s – the case does not merit a mention in Michael King's *History of New Zealand* published in

2003. Even within histories (or 'herstories') of the Women's Movement, not much attention is paid to the Thompson case. It is mentioned but only in passing. This could be because the writers prefer to emphasize other, more positive milestones or because they are ashamed of what happened. Or it could be, as Dann and others have claimed, that the incident was taken over and given disproportionate coverage by the media and Mervyn Thompson himself.

Certainly it is fair to say that over time, the events, which began with the actions of a group of women, focussed on the issue of rape, shifted their focus to become Thompson's story, focussed on the rights and wrongs of what had happened to him. Some in the Women's Movement predicted this, and lamented the fact that, by remaining anonymous and thus unable to defend their actions the group would give Thompson the last word. Others urged against boycotting Thompson's work on the grounds that, as Jenny Rankine wrote in *Broadsheet* 'Men will turn the focus of the argument on to censorship then, rather than rape.'^{cii} What the attackers had not realized, perhaps, was that a theatre maker's natural response to having performance power wrested away from him, is to try and take it back. This, as we have seen, is precisely what Thompson did.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Thompson reacted to the attack and the blocking of his work by systematically reclaiming the story, and thus his power as a theatre maker. In the process, however, the women were portrayed in ways that supported Thompson's version of events – true to his profession, Thompson populated 'his' story with his own characters, plot, setting and dramatic tension. Thompson's use of language, and his portrayal of the women attackers has been usefully critiqued by Chris Atmore in *"Branded": Lesbian Representation and A New Zealand Cultural Controversy*.^{ciii} As Atmore says, Thompson was careful to portray the attack as serious and violent and to evoke vampire-like imagery to describe the women:

Associations like 'brutish' helped produce the attack on Thompson as real and serious. The attackers were also described as 'all claws and fangs' . . . the vampire associations are particularly apparent.^{civ}

Atmore positions Thompson's *Listener* article and the resulting furore within the context of other writing which uses gothic tropes of monsters, vampires, hunters or other bizarre images to describe lesbianism as violent and scary. In her subsequent article, in which she attempts a feminist deconstructive reading of the affair, Atmore points up the amount of loading of language and images of 'the truth' that went on, on both sides of the issue:

Bare facts were not relayed in unmediated fashion into the true story about the Thompson incident. Rather, they were constructed and then resourced by conflicting interpretations as part of a battle for truth
...^{cv}

If Thompson's attempts at reclaiming the story could be accused of repositioning the story and misrepresenting the women participants, this is even truer of Johnson's fictionalized version of events in *The Shag Incident*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Johnson's version of the Thompson story reframes the readers' perceptions of the original story and reclaims him as victim. In the process, she also reframes the women who attacked him. Whilst every character in the novel is portrayed with some sympathy the novel accentuates the peculiarities of women on the feminist scene in Auckland in the 1980s in a comic, almost scathing way. Here, for example, one of the novel's narrators recalls his days living with his mother (one of Shag's attackers) and her lesbian partner in a commune in Auckland:

I wasn't a sporty type then, but even if I had been Lena and Scottie would never have let me join a rugby club. Or even a cricket club, which would be not only sexist but classist. They were bringing me up to spearhead the sexual revolution for my gender, they said – to break with masculine tradition. I was to be raised by wimmin, shaped by wimmin; I was to live and breathe feminism. I would never oppress a wommin.

Taihoa a mo. 'Spearhead' was never in the dialect – its phallic. Phallacist? They would never had said it.^{cvi}

Johnson's final, fictionalized version of the Thompson's story, frames the attack as a violent mistake with horrific circumstances and Thompson's

attackers as driven by misguided political fervour. As such, it could be seen as disempowering and diminishing the genuine concerns of women who carried out the original attack.

The publishing of Johnson's novel brought 'The Thompson Affair' briefly back into the public consciousness and nudged people's memories about the original event. What this nudging chiefly revealed was how much society had moved on. Some readers enjoyed the opportunity afforded by the book to look back and laugh at a segment of New Zealand history that they now found amusing:

What will show when this book is dipped into the well of our recent memories and sensitivities? Hopefully, that we've got the balls (a very unfeminist expression, that) to face our past, ridiculous as some of it is, and have a laugh at our own expense.^{cvi}

At the same time, critics of Johnson's novel (including 'JS' who contributed the following comments to her online book group) claimed that the book trivialized the incident, and served to gloss over the important issues out of which the attack emerged:

This was a time when lesbians were put in mental institutions, women who were raped were 'asking for it', birth was compulsorily medicalized and women couldn't take out mortgages. The Thompson scenario was extreme measures in extreme times. Young women students constantly hit on with no recourse to harassment laws was also shocking. How soon we forget. Johnson's Shag Incident has helped us trivialize and forget this time of change.^{cvi}

These comments serve to remind us that the Thompson Affair, like the other cases studied here, emerged out of its own specific socio-political context. If the specifics of that situation are altered or transmuted it is easy to misread the underlying reasons for what happened.

The breakdown of the theatre relationship, and the failure of performance in the Mervyn Thompson case, was not related to the performance of *Coaltown Blues* in any direct way. Murray Edmond does suggest a tenuous link to the subject matter of the play, when he argues that the attacks on the play were also, symbolically, attacks on the image Thompson was trying to convey of a New Zealand that no longer existed.^{cix} However, Edmond does not try to claim that this was a

conscious 'cause' for the protests. Rather, like the French people described in an earlier chapter, who threw eggs at Frank Gallo because they disapproved of his blatant homosexuality,^{xx} the potential audience members in this case were expressing their objections to having 'this kind of person' as a theatre maker; casting him as a symbol for their grievances. The performance was a catalyst, in as much as it offered a social event as a platform for protest and in as much as the audience felt the very idea of theatre offered by such a person was objectionable. But the performance itself was not the cause for objection. In this case, as in the cases examined previously, the real motivation for the action lay not within the theatre relationship but within wider society and, specifically, within the concerns of the audience members.

ⁱ This was the slogan used by the women in their press release about their action.

ⁱⁱ See 'Women in Strength-Fighting Rape' in *Craccum* vol.58, no.7 (27 March 1984) pp.6-7

ⁱⁱⁱ The amorphous term 'Women's Movement' is something of an oversimplification. In reality, 'the Movement' encompassed a broad range of groups with widely different political, personal and social agendas. As Christine Dann notes at the start of her history of New Zealand feminism, 'there are many kinds of feminist and many kinds of feminisms'. See Christine Dann 'preface' *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand 1970-1985* Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1985 (no page number). See also Curtis and Devene's chapter 'A Plurality of Feminisms' in Catt and McLeay *Women and Politics in New Zealand* Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1993 pp.6-26. As these writers stress, in 1984, it made a real difference whether one identified as a 'radical' feminist, a 'liberal' feminist, a 'separatist' feminist (along race or sexual lines), a 'socialist' feminist or some other kind of feminist - not to mention the fact that many women working to bring about change in women's issues did not regard themselves as 'feminist' at all. Often, to the women within these groups, the differences between them were as important as any similarities. However, as Dann also says, 'it soon becomes difficult (and frequently pointless) to distinguish between the different strands of feminism when writing a history of practice rather than theory'. Dann *Up from Under*, p.v. The focus here is not on feminist theory and so the general description will suffice.

^{iv} See, for example, Kathleen Ryan's contribution to *Broadsheet* in which she writes, 'I can see why Thompson was roughed up; making someone do what you want means being prepared to use physical force. But recently I've heard of repeated kicks to the balls and cigarette burns and I feel uneasy . . . I question using violence to confront violence. What I do and how I do it are important. 'Rape Fight Back' *Broadsheet* May 1984, p.11

^v Fay Hercock, *A Centennial History of the Auckland University Student's Association* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994 p.111

^{vi} It is interesting to note that the official history of the Auckland University Student's Union includes mention of the attack and infers that it was associated with student activity, see Hercock, p.111

^{vii} See Thompson 'Victims and Vengeance' *New Zealand Listener* 14 Apr 1984, p.22

^{viii} I acknowledge that my approach here runs against an important principle of feminist discourse, which tends to celebrate difference rather than similarities between women and their stories. Du Pleiss and Alice have written: 'Whereas the construction of 'women' as a political category was a major achievement of nineteenth century suffragists and contemporary feminists, recent feminist scholarship has been dominated by the need to attend to differences among women. Assertions about women's communality are often contested and assumptions about language and representation are 'deconstructed'. R. Du Pless and L. Alice 'Introduction' in Du Pleiss and Alice (eds) in *Feminist Thought in Aotearoa New Zealand: Connections and Differences* Auckland: Oxford University Press New Zealand, 1998, p.xv.

^{ix} The 'first wave' of feminism was considered to be the suffragist movement of the nineteenth century, which contributed to women gaining the vote in 1893. The terms 'first' and 'second' wave were used internationally. Germaine Greer's book *The Female Eunuch* begins with the words 'This book is a part of the second feminist wave' Greer *The Female Eunuch* London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970 p.11

^x Maud Cahill and Christine Dann (eds) *Changing our Lives: Women Working in the Women's Liberation Movement 1970-1990* Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991, p.2

^{xi} Michael King *The Penguin History of New Zealand* Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003 p.462

^{xii} The Domestic Purposes Benefit was first introduced in New Zealand in 1973.

^{xiii} Reported cases of rape went up from 268 in 1975 to 396 in 1981 according to Warren Young *Rape Study: A Discussion of Law and Practice vol.1* Department of Justice and Institute of Criminology, Victoria University, Wellington 28 February 1983, p.1

^{xiv} Until the introduction of abortion legislation in 1977, women with unwanted pregnancies had to either prove themselves to be mentally unfit for motherhood, access 'backstreet' abortions or travel to Australia for a termination. Not until the Contraception, Sterilization and Abortion Act of 1977 did women have improved local access to family planning services and even then many women protested that the legislation was too restrictive. See 'History of FPA' (New Zealand Family Planning Association) <http://www.fpanz.org.nz> retrieved 12 May 2004.

^{xv} In his history of male archetypes in New Zealand, Jock Phillips identifies a range of male types in the Pakeha culture specifically the 'pioneer man', the 'boozier', the 'decent bloke', the 'hard man', the 'man's man', the 'family man' and finally the 'bloke under siege' [from feminist challenges]. Jock Phillips *A Man's World? The Image of the Pakeha Male - a History* Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987 (1996)

^{xvi} As recently as 1988, a survey of New Zealander's recreational interests made the headlines when the figure for those interested in the Arts (at 42.6 %) slightly exceeded that for those interested in Rugby Union (at 41.8%). See *The New Zealand Listener* April 2, 1988 p.42

^{xvii} No female equivalent for these phrases ever emerged in the New Zealand dialect - the nearest, 'Sheila' was adopted from Australian slang and was commonly used to describe a female 'usually single and probably good looking' see 'NZ English to US English Dictionary' retrieved from www.Aussieslang.com 1 Feb 2005

^{xviii} Sebastian Black 'Aggressive Laments: New Zealand Theatre in the 1980s' *New Literature Review* vol.13 (1984) 5-16 p.12

^{xix} Jane Ritchie and James Ritchie *Violence in New Zealand* Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990, p.31

^{xx} King *Penguin History of New Zealand*, p.463

^{xxi} Hercock, p.68

^{xxii} Dann *Up from Under* p.89

^{xxiii} Hercock p.69

^{xxiv} *ibid*, p.88

^{xxv} *ibid*, p.72

^{xxvi} *ibid*, p.72

^{xxvii} *ibid*, p.73

^{xxviii} *ibid*, p.88

^{xxix} *ibid*, pp.89-90

- xxx Tim Shadbolt *Bullshit and Jellybeans* Wellington: Alister Taylor, 1971, pp.97-98
- xxxii Hercock, p.91
- xxxiii *ibid*, p.92
- xxxiiii *ibid*, p.91
- xxxv *ibid*, p.89, see also Shadbolt, p.104
- xxxvi Hercock, p.21
- xxxvii *ibid*, p.32
- xxxviii These figures are from Cahill and Dann (eds) *Changing our Lives*, p.2
- xxxviiii Renée 'Passing it On: Interview with Peter Beatson' *Sites: A Journal for Radical Perspectives on Culture* Issue 16 (Autumn 1988), p.36
- xxxix *ibid*, p.36
- xl *ibid*, p.36
- xli Sue Kedgely *The Sexual Wilderness: Men and Women in New Zealand* Auckland Reed Methuen, 1985 p.33
- xlii Greer lived up to her outspoken reputation during her visit to New Zealand, receiving a fine for saying the word 'bullshit' in public. See King *Penguin History of New Zealand*, p.459
- xliiii *Women's Liberation – Are NZ Women Ready to examine the Case?* was produced by Wellington Organization for Women, as was *Down the Aisle With Caution, Please* (edited by Nola Neas). *Sexist Society* was edited by Sue Kedgely and Sharyn Cederman
- xliiv Kedgely *The Sexual Wilderness*, p.7
- xli v 'Jean' in Kedgely *The Sexual Wilderness*, p.12
- xli vi Pat Rosier in Cahill and Dann (eds) *Changing our Lives*, p.152
- xli vii 'Sarah' in Kedgely *The Sexual Wilderness*, p.16
- xli viii Dann *Up from Under*, p.96
- xli x Prof. Margaret Clark, Human Rights Commission News, Sept 1984 quoted in Margaret Wilson *Report on the Status of Academic Women in New Zealand* Association of University Teachers of New Zealand, July 1986. Even as late as 1986, Wilson found that 'the traditional subordinate role of women appeared to have been transferred into the university system' and that there was a need for an affirmative action programme to address the inequalities experienced by women, see Wilson, p.3
- l Black 'Aggressive Laments', p.5
- li *ibid*, p.5
- lii Kedgely *The Sexual Wilderness*, p.1
- liii See photograph in Dann *Up from Under*, p.102
- li v Mana Wahine 'Seeking Meanings for Ourselves' in Maud Cahill and Christine Dann (eds) *Changing our Lives*, p.29
- li v i Dann *Up from Under*, p.117
- li v ii Fern Mercer in Cahill and Dann (eds) *Changing our Lives*, p.50
- li v iii Dann *Up from Under*, p.19
- li v iiii Renée 'Interview' in *Australasian Drama Studies* no.10 (April 1987), p.23
- li x *ibid*, p.27
- li x *ibid*, p.16
- li xi See Dann *Up from Under* p.105. Dann notes that some institutions held out against using the new form of address for some time to come (the *New Zealand Herald* still had a policy against 'ms' fifteen years later).
- li xii Dann *Up from Under*, p.16
- li xiii *ibid*, p.23
- li xiv Dann writes about how the 'bra burning' image evolved from the earliest protests of American Women's Liberationists in which corsets and under restrictive undergarments were symbolically burned. The image was used extensively in New Zealand media through the 1970s and 1980s despite the fact that, in her words 'Women's liberationists in New Zealand were wised up by the American experience. They never even looked at a bra with murderous intent, let alone attempted to make a political point by destroying one.' Dann *Up from Under* p.103. A sign of how persistent the stereotype was, is revealed in Curtin and Devene's research into New Zealand attitudes to feminism in 1990: asked to define a feminist, one respondent replied: 'the women who go and stand up and burn their bra and all that sort of thing' Curtin and Devene in Catt and McLeay, p.17
- li xv Christine Dann 'The Liberation of Women is Women's Work' in Cahill and Dann (eds) *Changing our Lives*, p.80
- li xvi *ibid*, p.80
- li xvii Hercock, p.102
- li xviii *ibid*, p.106
- li xix *ibid*, p.109
- li xx *ibid*, p.109
- li xxi *ibid*, p.110
- li xxi i Auckland Rape Crisis Centre 1981 *Questionnaire on Rape* Auckland, 1981, p.5
- li xxi ii *ibid*, p.2 & p.5
- li xxi iii Sandra Coney 'The Crown V Sharon Kroot' *Broadsheet* June 1984, p.15
- li xxi v *ibid*, p.14
- li xxi vi The first Women's refuge was opened in 1974. See Dann *Up from Under*, p.17
- li xxi vii *ibid*, p.26 & p.140
- li xxi viii *ibid*, p.140
- li xxi ix Offensive advertisements such as these were sent in to the feminist newspaper *Broadsheet* and featured in the 'Hogwash' section. These particular examples are taken from 'Worst of Hogwash' in the ten year anniversary edition, *Broadsheet* July / August 1982, pp.74-75
- li xx *See Craccum* vol. 58 no.9 (1 May 1984) p.4 and vol.58 no. 10 (29 May 1984), pp.4-5
- li xxi *Craccum* vol.58 no.5 (March 1984), p.8
- li xxi ii Dann *Up from Under*, p.136
- li xxi iii *ibid*, p.136
- li xxi iv *Broadsheet* May 1984 p.9 and p.13 These photographs were used to illustrate the magazine's coverage of the Thompson case.

- ^{lxxxv} In his 2005 article on the affair, Murray Edmond describes the attack on Thompson in terms of 'Charivari', the custom of performing acts of revenge at a community level. See, Murray Edmond 'The Terror and Pity of 1984' *Landfall* vol.209 (May 2005), p.17. The concept of charivari certainly provides a useful lens through which to view the audience's behaviour, both in this example and in the case of the Dublin audience.
- ^{lxxxvi} Dann *Up from Under* p.134-5. The women's behaviour here was akin to contract breaking in theatre – they deliberately broke the rules of socially acceptable behaviour in a social setting (on this occasion a bar). In so doing they took over the power within the relationship until it was reclaimed by the manager who ejected them.
- ^{lxxxvii} See Dann *Up from Under*, p.135
- ^{lxxxviii} See chapter 10 endnote 21
- ^{lxxxix} B Breaker 'Rape Fight Back' letter to *Broadsheet* June 1984, p.2
- ^{xc} Sarah Calvert 'Rape Fight Back' in *Broadsheet* May 1984, p.12
- ^{xc} *ibid*, p.12
- ^{xcii} See Jonathan Lamb 'The Uncanny in Auckland' *And* vol. 4 (Oct 1985), p.41
- ^{xciii} Arthur Allen Thomas, a convicted murderer had his conviction quashed and received \$1,000,000 compensation in 1980 after it was found that police had planted evidence against him.
- ^{xciv} An Air New Zealand plane crashed into Mount Erebus on 28 Nov 1979, killing the 237 passengers and the crew. Public opinion remains divided over the findings of the subsequent enquiry into the case, which blamed failings in the computerized navigation system.
- ^{xcv} For a description of the protests against the Springbok tour and the divisions caused see endnote 50, above.
- ^{xcvi} The Homosexual Law Reform Bill was passed in 1986, an event that caused huge controversy amongst conservative and church groups.
- ^{xcvii} Thompson 'Another Life' Part 1, p.225
- ^{xcviii} Chris Atmore 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy: A Feminist Deconstructive Reading' in *New Zealand Sociology* vol.9 no.2 (Nov 1994)
- ^{xcix} *Broadsheet* September 1984, p.29
- ^c *ibid*, p.29
- ^{ci} Kai Jenson 'Naked Change: Revising Sexuality' in Michael King (ed) *One of the Boys? Changing Views of Masculinity in New Zealand* Auckland: Heinemann, 1988 pp.219-236. In his article, Jenson describes how his responses changed over time from anger and identification with the victim to a position of empathizing with the women's position. His letter describing the attack as 'the worst PR blunder feminists have ever made' was published in *New Zealand Listener* 23 June 1984 p.10, His subsequent letter withdrawing from this position was not published.
- ^{cii} Jenny Rankine 'The Media and Mervyn' in *Broadsheet* June 1984, p.12
- ^{ciii} Chris Atmore 'Branded: Lesbian Representation and A New Zealand Cultural Controversy' in *Antithesi* Vol.6 no.3 (1993) As has already been noted, there was also some criticism expressed by *Listener* staff at the time who felt that his article had been published without sufficient journalistic investigation.
- ^{civ} Atmore 'Branded', p.18
- ^{cv} Chris Atmore 'The Mervyn Thompson Controversy', p.174
- ^{cvi} Stephanie Johnson *The Shag Incident* Auckland: Vintage Books (Random House) 2002, p.114
- ^{cvi} Margie Thompson, review of *The Shag Incident* in *The New Zealand Herald* 16 June, 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.book-club.co.nz/books/13shag.htm> 9 May 2004
- ^{cvi} 'JS' contributor to '2001 book club' (New Zealand). Retrieved from <http://www.book-club.co.nz/books/13shag.htm> on 9 May 2004
- ^{cix} See Edmond 'The Terror and the Pity of 1984', p.23
- ^{cx} See Chapter 3, endnote 50

Conclusion

Theatre relationships can break down in a number of ways, but from the instances described in this thesis it would seem that causes are under the control of either theatre makers or audience members. Theatre makers can be responsible for a lack of aesthetic, professional or temporal 'sufficiency' in the performance,ⁱ or they may carry out deliberate acts of confrontation.ⁱⁱ Audience members can cause the breakdown of theatre relationships by unwitting action, (where there is a lack of awareness of the conventions in place)ⁱⁱⁱ or by deliberate actions ranging from spontaneous individual protest^{iv} to planned group activities that become quasi-theatrical in their nature.^v Self-evidently, the breakdown of any theatre relationship is most often manifested in the behaviour of audience members.^{vi} None of the breakdowns in the case studies under consideration here occurred because of intervention from outside the theatre relationship: in every case something happened between theatre makers and audience members, or potential audience members, to cause the relationship to fail. Nor were these breakdowns the result of the inadvertent behaviour of those unschooled in theatre conventions.

The Living Theatre, for instance, had experienced the breakdown of theatre relations on earlier occasions. On one occasion, audience members wrongly assumed that they had been invited to partake in 'free theatre' and enthusiastically followed the conventions associated with it. But this was not what happened at Berkeley. These case studies did not involve the sort of 'flooding out' described by Goffman,^{vii} which, though disruptive, may be understood and even appreciated by theatre makers as a deepened emotional response. Nor did audience members take against the 'sufficiency' of the performance in terms of its length, quality, professionalism or value for money. It is true that some members of the Abbey Theatre audience voiced objections as to the sufficiency of the performance, and members of the Berkeley audience demanded their money back, but these accusations were voiced in retrospect, as a

secondary cause. Audience members did not feel provoked to protest because of a deliberate disjuncture of temporal or spatial frames or the organization of performer/spectator roles. The Living Theatre might be accused of causing some confusion in this regard, but this was not done deliberately and on the occasion in question role confusion was not the prime irritant. In fact, in all three case studies, the theatre makers provided opportunities for audience members to frame the performance successfully as evidenced by the fact that numbers of audience members did so, even as others staged their protests.

The significance, in all three case studies, of audience members who continued to behave conventionally (that is in ways that would sustain the performance) should not be underestimated. In the Abbey audience there were those who attempted to quell the protests and appeal for the play to be given a hearing and many more simply stayed in their seats to listen and observe the drama unfolding around them.^{viii} At Berkeley too, though the event overall was described by one journalist as 'an unfortunate failure', the same report carried the headline '*Paradise Now* wins converts' and noted that the evening ended with 'about 100 devotees' onstage with the performers.^{ix} For these audience members, the experience of the performance was clearly very different from those who rejected it. They demonstrated their acceptance of the relationship by continuing to follow the structure of the evening as best they could. In the Thompson case, too, there were audience members who ignored the pickets and the protests and attended the performances of *Coaltown Blues*. Thompson makes a point of thanking them in his autobiography:

Though Wellington was largely a nightmare, good things happened there too. Remember that. Many people – too many – supported the boycott, but a few hundred denied it. Walked past the pickets. Came to see for themselves.^x

In each case, audience members are present whose behaviour suggests that the performance and the theatre relationship could have been understood and sustained. It suggests that the choice to reject the

performance was exactly that; a choice made by some audience members.

It is often assumed that the content of the performance is a prime motivator for audience rejection. On first appearances this seems to be so. At least two of the case studies were confrontational in terms of the content of the performance. What is more, protesting audience members themselves identified performance content as a prime cause for their dissatisfaction. The Abbey audience objected to what they considered to be the disrespectful treatment of the Easter Rising and there were specific moments in the performance, such as the appearance of the prostitute and the flag in the pub, which provoked spontaneous objections in other audiences. Berkeley audience members may have objected to the Living Theatre's confrontational style: they were spat at, shouted at, touched and challenged by the performers. Nevertheless, in both these cases, audience members present at the moment of the breakdown in the theatre relationship were aware of the potential for provocation before they entered the theatre. Members of all three audiences were operating in a twentieth century theatre tradition where disruption was part of a general horizon of expectations and might, sometimes, be welcomed. It might even be said that, in both cases where the performance was attended, provocation was not only expected, but was an incentive to attend. The Abbey protesters attended in order to express their disgust; the Berkeley audience welcomed the idea of being provoked to think and participate. It is perhaps only if audience members respond to provocation by staying away from the theatre that one is able to argue for performance content as the reason for the failure. Or, if audience members attend the performance unaware of potential provocation and simply choose to leave, as indeed many audience members did nearly every time *Paradise Now!* was performed then, once again, performance content might be blamed. This does not, however, explain the situation in these case studies.

When audience members enter the theatre relationship in anticipation of confrontation and ready to respond to it, the nature of

that relationship is changed. In each of these three case studies the content of the performance, even if confrontational, was not the prime factor in causing the breakdown of the theatre relationship. The fundamental cause lay in the audience members' predisposition towards protest behaviour; a disposition formed by influences outside of the theatre makers' control.

These three case studies took place in different eras and in different places. They were chosen because they seem to represent three stages on a continuum of protest, in which the protest becomes stronger or more extreme as we move closer to contemporary times. More importantly, as the strength of the protest grows, so the performance itself seems to become increasingly irrelevant. For instance, audience members at the Abbey responded to the idea of the play or the rumours that were circulating about it rather than responding to the performance itself. They made up their minds about the performance before they had seen it and were uninterested in doing so. In the case of the Abbey Theatre, the performance was relevant only as a symbol of its own reprehensibility. For members of the Berkeley audience the rumours and expectations were positive and they came to the performance prepared to value it. Once present, they decided to reject the performance, but their real objection was to the supposed values of the theatre makers which, once understood, were deemed irrelevant in the context of real protest. In the Thompson case, audience rejection was not based on any rumours or expectations about theatre performances initiated by Thompson which were, in any event, largely positive. The breakdown of the theatre relationship in this case occurred on the strength of on rumours about his person and the subsequent attack upon him. The performance was rejected and supplanted before it began and, in this extreme form of audience protest, the performance was rendered almost completely irrelevant. In all three case studies, performance as a factor in the breakdown of the theatre relationship weakened in direct relationship to the strength of audience rejection.

The relevance of the actual performance was further diminished in all three case studies by the fact that audience members had already had some sort of dramatic experience in the 'real world'. In two of the three cases this 'real world' experience was specifically related to the themes and content of the theatre makers' performance. The Abbey audience, for example, along with the rest of the population of Ireland, had just emerged from decades of intensely dramatic conflict. The tendency to dramatize and glorify that conflict is well documented by, for instance, the historian William Thompson.^{xi} With regard to the Easter Rising, Thompson suggests that 'Irish revolutionaries lived as if they were in a work of art' and that it was as a work of art that the Rising was remembered by those commemorating it.^{xii} It may be that any attempt to turn the Easter Rising into a work of art during the period was bound to fall short. As for the students of Berkeley, they too had already 'had their theatre' having spent the day engaged in highly dramatic street fights with police and being beaten and gassed before they arrived at the theatre. The language of contemporary press reports illustrates the conscious theatricality of the street battles. The *Berkeley Daily Gazette* declared on the morning of the riots that: 'All the Players in the University of California strike will be on the Berkeley Stage today.'^{xiii} Judith Malina recorded the event from the perspective of the performers by suggesting that: 'When the Berkeley *Paradise* began, the audience had already begun its play . . . their theatre [was] the confrontation with the cops'.^{xiv} In the Thompson case, too, there was a sense in which the 'real theatre' took place somewhere other than at the performance, in this case in the highly dramatic attack on Thompson. In all three case studies, the drama inherent in the 'real world' occurrences seems to have affected audience members more than the content of the performance, which after all, occurred within the 'safe' frame of the theatre.

If the failure of the theatre relationship in these cases cannot be attributed to outside factors or lack of awareness and if objections to form, structure or content of the performance were not the primary motivators, it therefore follows that some failure in the theatre

relationship itself was to blame. For the parties in these theatre relationships, certain ideas about the other had been formed that were not met by the reality. In the case of the theatre makers, all three offered their performance with a particular audience in mind. In short, they expected what Eco might refer to as a set of 'model spectators'.^{xv} These paragons did not exist. Or if they did, they were far removed from the audience that protested. O'Casey envisaged a group of critical thinkers who would allow the play to speak for itself and would be ready to think through the issues. The founders of the Abbey had appealed for a broad minded and independent audience who would not judge emerging Irish writers too harshly. If such an audience did not exist, they felt they would have to mould it.^{xvi} For their part, The Living Theatre conceived of a group of uninformed but keen young people who needed preparation to get radical; the sort of audience they had encountered at Ann Arbour and elsewhere. Meanwhile, Thompson aspired to reach an audience comprised of passionate people like him, who were prepared to commit 'blood, brains and balls' to the business of audience membership.^{xvii} He hoped this might include working class people who would recognize their own stories. In all three cases the reality was very different. The theatre makers seem to have recognized that the reality was very different from their ideal but nevertheless persisted with the performance they wanted to give – either as a matter of principle, as with Thompson and O'Casey, or out of desperation and a lack of alternatives, as with the Living Theatre. The discrepancy between the imagined audience and the one that in fact turned up, played its part in the breakdown of the theatre relationship.

Audience members too, in these case studies, envisioned an ideal theatre maker with which the actual theatre makers could not compete. Members of the Abbey audience, suspicious of theatre as an Anglo Irish pursuit but conscious of a proud and ancient tradition of oratory, yearned for Nationalist works to glorify their heroes as Yeats' early Nationalistic plays had done. For the Berkeley students, perhaps the most important qualification for validity as a theatre maker was to be

'relevant'; that is connected with their own reality and pre-occupations. It was for this reason that, the night before, they or their peers had lauded Tim Leary's drug-inspired philosophy. The potential audience members in the third case study were also disappointed in their theatre maker for not representing their ideal of what a theatre maker should be in his personal life. As a white male product of working class New Zealand Thompson could never be the 'model' feminist theatre maker that his audience seemed to expect. The failure of theatre makers to embrace the 'model', contributed to the failure of the theatre relationship. However, while the theatre makers seem aware that their ideal audience is illusory, the audience, for their part, felt betrayed. The audience, in all three case studies seem to have felt that the theatre makers had set themselves up as a representative of an ideal that they had then failed to fulfil. The disappointment, disapproval and resentment experienced by the audiences in the case studies, came, not simply from the theatre makers failure to measure up to an ideal, but because of an entrenched understanding, on the part of the audience, that they had once measured up to this ideal.

To the Nationalist audience members at the Abbey, it seemed their 'model' theatre that existed in the early days of the Abbey was now failing them. As Dallett comments of the riots that met *The Playboy of the Western World*:

The rioters felt betrayed not just because "they wanted to think of [the Abbey] as a national theatre" . . . but because the Abbey had presented itself that way.^{xviii}

The Abbey's founders had consciously constructed a Nationalist identity, they had made a written promise to present a respectful depiction of the Irish race and they had set about doing just that before the satires of Synge and later O'Casey brought a change in direction. So, the audience members who protested against *The Playboy of the Western World* and those who opposed *The Plough and the Stars* were motivated in some part by a sense that the theatre makers were breaching the terms of an

agreement that on earlier occasions, they had fulfilled. Dallett's comments about *The Playboy of the Western World* apply equally to the disagreement over *The Plough and the Stars*:

In another theatre, playgoers who took umbrage at the production may not have expressed their outrage so strongly, but at the Abbey Theatre the audience felt that the performance had broken the implicit social contract the Abbey entered into with its spectators at every production it mounted; and the audience responded with what it considered to be legitimate revolutionary protest.^{xix}

What to the audience members was 'legitimate revolutionary protest' seemed, to the theatre makers with a different set of priorities, to be an attempt to prevent freedom of expression. The difference was one of perspective.

The situation with the Berkeley students was a little different in that, unlike the Abbey audience members, this was their first experience of the theatre makers. They did not have any ongoing understanding with them and therefore did not feel quite the same sense of personal betrayal. They did, however, have a certain set of expectations. It seems that they, like other student radicals on the tour, assumed the Living Theatre represented their 'model' theatre makers. They thought the performance would express their politics: radical, anti-police and pro-revolution at whatever cost and so they experienced a sense of disapproval when they found they were wrong. Instead of the deep personal resentment felt by the Abbey audience members, these audience members were inclined to be disappointed but dismissive.

As for Thompson, he too had an image based on his previous work including biographies and plays. His espousal of feminist values had previously led to his acceptance by the feminist movement. Once again, the sense that he had previously attained 'model' status led the audience to a deeper sense of betrayal over as details of his personal life emerged and the accusation of rape was made. From the audience member's point of view, the fact that these theatre makers had made public, even written statements of their intent and then failed to live up to them, constituted a

breach of trust something akin to a breach of legal contract. Protesting audience members felt that the theatre makers had already breached the terms of the relationship and their own actions were, in fact, legitimate re-actions against this.

What also clearly emerges from these three examples is the sense that a key cause for disagreement between theatre makers and audience members might be the very similarities between them. For all their violent disagreements, the two sides of the theatre relationship in each case were strikingly similar in their overall intentions. The audience at *The Plough and the Stars* shared a broadly Nationalist philosophy and a sense that Ireland deserved a National theatre producing work of literary quality. Members of the Berkeley audience were, like the members of the Living Theatre, representatives of an alternative or 'counter-culture' with broadly similar objectives and a shared antagonism toward authority and cultural norms. In the same way, Thompson and his attackers appeared to share a feminist world-view and to have similar objectives both theatrically and politically. The cause of friction in each case was not the overall goals, but a difference in opinion as to how to achieve those goals. The sense of personal betrayal described earlier would not be so sorely felt on either side, had not the audience members and theatre makers previously believed they had so much in common.

If false hopes and a sense of betrayal played a role in the breakdown of these relationships, so did issues of power. Dallett has suggested that functional theatre relationships depend on audience members willingly ceding power to the theatre makers, just as societies depend on citizens ceding power to others to act on their behalf.^{xx} She also notes how, within the terms of a social contract, citizens may rightfully seize that power back in certain circumstances; if, for example they believe that their freedoms are being unreasonably restricted or if their representatives take on too much power.^{xxi} She argues that this can happen in a theatre setting too: audience members who consider that their representatives have misused the power granted to them, may seek to wrest that power back. This is a useful metaphor for what occurred in

these three case studies. In each case, these audience members did not simply refuse the relationship and avoid the performance, though other audience members did this, particularly in the Thompson case. Had they done so, the theatre makers would have retained the power over the performance and the power of performance. Instead they opted for one of several courses of action designed to take that power for themselves or, if one accepts Dallett's political analogy – to *reclaim* that power from their representatives.

In the case of *The Plough and the Stars* the audience's seizure of power was organized and deliberate: the Abbey protesters chose to enter the relationship specifically so that they could storm the stage and attempt to drown out the theatre makers. At Berkeley, too, audience members opted to stay and take over the performance. The reclamation of performance power on this occasion was a confused process. It had not been organized in advance and the participatory portions of the Living Theatre claimed to hand that power to audience members anyway. Paradoxically, the audience members who seized power and brought about a revolution within the theatre relationship were being urged to seize power and bring about a revolution by that theatre relationship. One could argue that the Living Theatre relationship was fulfilled beyond their wildest hopes. In the case of Thompson, there was no such incongruity. The circumstances of the attack and the later blocking of Thompson's work represented an organized and conscious stripping away of his performance power along with all that it embodied for him. If there were any doubt that seizure of power was an issue in these relationships, one need only look at the way theatre makers attempted to regain it.

In each case the theatre makers engaged in a struggle to retain or regain the power that protesters had attempted to remove. In the Dublin case, everything the theatre makers did demonstrated their retention of performance power. The performers agreed before the event that they would proceed in dumb show and restarted the play as soon as the stage was physically cleared. Evidently, keeping hold of their performance

power outweighed the necessity to successfully impart it. Similarly, Yeats' speech may have been impossible to hear, but his presence on the stage symbolized the fact that the theatre makers had won that territory back from the protesters.^{xxii} Perhaps a little chilling, given Dallett's characterization of the theatre relationship as a mirror for social order, was the way the Abbey board organized for plain-clothes police to enter the auditorium, arrest the protesters and ensure that the play could progress. This was both a heavy-handed action and a symbolic one, given the well-known British tactic of employing such plain-clothes police to carry out surveillance on those who resisted the power of the state. For the Living Theatre, no plans were made in advance to retain performance power. They were unlikely to employ the services of the police, who were seen as a common enemy to theatre makers and audience members alike. These theatre makers, tired and sick, attempted to retain some sort of control, (perhaps aware on some level of the incongruity of doing this in relation to their call for anarchist revolution) but gave up, ultimately conceding not only to their audience but also, ironically, to the terms of the police-imposed curfew. Thompson's process of reclamation of power was a more conscious and long-term effort. In terms of his later writings, the struggle dominated the rest of his career and even continued after his death.^{xxiii}

In all three cases there were underlying political issues driving the protests; issues which lay outside the bounds of the performance itself and were brought into the theatre relationship by the audience members. In the case of *The Plough and the Stars* the protest was an expression of Nationalist sentiment, sparked off by a combination of sensitivity about the subject matter of the play and a sense of disappointment towards the theatre makers and the Abbey theatre itself. For the Living Theatre the students' real grievance was with the authorities and their university or, perhaps more generally with the older generation of which the theatre makers, disappointingly, appeared to them to be a part. Thompson's audience members acted out of anger about the status of women in society, specifically the issue of rape and the lack of proper procedures

for reporting harassment on the university campus. On their own admission, the women used Thompson as a symbolic figure in a wider fight.^{xxiv} In all three cases, then, we can say that the underlying reason for the breakdown of the relationship was not simply some failure within the theatre relationship (though this may have occurred) but also something happening in the wider socio-political context within which the performance was taking place.

All three examples took place at a moment in history where that particular nation's ideas of social normality had been rocked in some way. Thompson referred to the times in which he was writing as 'this flayed and quivering point of our history'^{xxv} and one could use the same description to sum up the mood in Berkeley in 1969 or to describe the Dublin of 1926. Perhaps, as Murray Edmond argues, the audience members in each case were engaged in a social process of "'acting out' (psychologically and theatrically) the panic induced by the loss of the social model into which they had been born'.^{xxvi} More specifically, however, the audience members involved in these interventions had previously become members of interest groups defined by their political opinions and it was in this capacity that they entered, or refused to enter, the theatre relationship. So it may be that for these people the theatre event – a social occasion in which many people would be gathered – was not so much the catalyst for protest as a platform for wider issues to be expressed.

The fact that all three of these cases involved audience members acting in pre-formed interest groups is significant in terms of the process that individual audience members would have used to frame the performance. These audience members prioritized their membership of their interest group over their membership of the audience and this influenced their response, both aesthetically and behaviourally. In semiotic terms, their 'reading' of the performance (if they even got as far as receiving the performance) was filtered through the belief systems of the groups with which they identified. The strongly Nationalist beliefs of the Abbey protesters, the New Radicalism of the Berkeley students and

the feminist mindset of those who opposed Thompson's work all implied certain ways of reading and interpreting the work; readings which were implicitly hostile even before the performance was received. The audience members shared an unusually consistent 'horizon of expectations'. In behavioural terms, like the schoolboys described in the introduction who disrupted the performance of *Macbeth*,^{xxvii} there were behaviours and values associated with being a member of the group and these took precedence over any attempt to assimilate into an audience. Faced with these resistances it is difficult to see how any theatre maker could hope to 'win over' an individual audience member into an acceptance of the theatre relationship. This is particularly so in the cases studied here, given the tradition of protest that characterized these groups.

In all three cases, the audience members came from a tradition of public protest and many of the audience members were seasoned protesters. The Abbey women were well used to using vociferous protest in both the Nationalist and suffragist movements. They chose as their figurehead Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington – someone above all others in Irish society who had devoted her life to acts of civil disobedience. The Berkeley students, too, had a proud tradition of resistance to authority and engagement in protest was a defining feature of their group identity. Those who opposed Thompson's work came from a background where protest, and specifically theatrical protest, was an important political tool. These were not isolated incidents: in each case there were precedents for protest if not within the theatre, then in similar sorts of settings. Suffragist women were accustomed to disrupting political and other public events and the Abbey audience could not fail to know about the famous riots that had accompanied *The Playboy of the Western World*. The Berkeley students had experienced disruption of public speeches and classes on campus during the history of student strikes, quite apart from their encounters with police earlier in the day. Thompson's attackers operated out of a University context where political pranks were something of an established tradition and within the Women's

Movement highly theatrical public protests and highly personal private shaming rituals were favoured. These audience members, trained in breaking convention, were less likely to comply with the social constraints of conventional theatre going behaviour even if (as in the second case) they had not decided on their actions before the theatre event began.

An important difference between the first and third case studies and the second one is the degree of pre-meditation that went on. In the first and last cases, the protest was not spontaneous but was carefully planned and rehearsed before the event. I have argued that pre-meditation alters the nature of audience protest in that it does not occur as a 'response' in the true sense of that word, to the performance. It is, rather, a form of social action. There are reasons, of course, why audience members feel the need to organize in opposition. Dallett's parallels with the social contract help to illustrate this. In wider society, anyone wishing to overthrow the state cannot hope to do so alone. Similarly, in the highly conventionalized setting of a theatre performance it is difficult for audience members to seize performance power. In the theatre, as in society, acts of individual protest are generally quickly quelled and the performance continues. In order to stand any chance of a successful 'revolution', audience members, like citizens of a state do need to act together. In these three examples, this collective action required collective organization, or at least a pre-disposition to act in this way. The Living Theatre's audience were only able to succeed because they were highly practiced revolutionaries and, even then, the seizure of power was much more chaotic and unfocussed than in the other two examples.^{xxviii} However, just as revolutionaries who succeed must then become the rulers of state, so planned audience protest action starts to take on some of the features of a theatre performance. It is as if, in wresting away power from the original performers, audience members become performers themselves.

The theatricality of these audience interventions, as in other historical examples, is striking. Like the Old Price demonstrators

described at the beginning of this thesis,^{xxix} the Abbey audience members brought placards, whistles and stink bombs into the auditorium with them. Like the OP rioters, too, they had also learned speeches and prepared songs ready for their substitute performance. Those involved in the attack on Thompson were even more theatrical in their references in that they appeared to base their attack on an existing play text by a fellow-feminist – one with which they knew their victim was familiar. Their quasi-performance mirrored Thompson's own work in being intensely personal and engaged with issues of immediate relevance to New Zealand society. Even the audience members at the Living Theatre's performance, though they had not rehearsed their protest, engaged in improvised acts of their own that the original offering failed to deliver. Given the Living Theatre's preference for spontaneity and improvisation, one could argue that it was fitting that their audience should improvise their protests rather than plan them in advance. If protest is a kind of substitute performance, it is perhaps appropriate that in each case study the protest mirrored the kinds of performance offered by the theatre makers. However, the question remains whether audience protest can ever really take over and become a substitute performance.

In the three case studies examined here, audience protest behaviour was sufficiently severe as to cause the actual performance to break down. In some respects the audience's actions were highly theatrical in nature, just as aspects of Irish history or the Berkeley street fighting were also theatrical. All protest and conflict has theatrical elements as Baz Kershaw has argued,^{xxx} and the theatricality is particularly noticeable in a theatre context where audience members have successfully stripped theatre makers of their power to perform. However, there is one crucial element, central to the definition of theatre operating here,^{xxxi} which is missing in each of these substitute performances. That is the element of consent. Unless the original theatre maker consents to hand over performance power to the audience member, unless s/he allows that audience member to become theatre maker and allows him or herself to become a willing receiver and audience to the performance what occurs is not

theatre as it has been defined here. When the theatre maker does consent to a hand-over of power then the transfer of roles becomes an integral part of the theatre relationship on offer. Either it always was or the theatre maker decides to accept it. In any event, once the theatre maker accepts a transfer of roles the audience member is no longer breaking the terms of the relationship, but fulfilling them. In the case of true audience protest, then, it is impossible – however theatrical that protest may appear to be – that it should become a substitute theatre in the fullest sense. Audience disruption and the breakdown of theatre relationships may occur for many reasons, but power, inevitably and always, remains with the theatre maker.

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- ⁱ See chapter 2, pp.63-4
- ⁱⁱ See chapter 2, endnote 18
- ⁱⁱⁱ See chapter 3, pp.78-9
- ^{iv} See chapter 3, pp.86-7
- ^v See chapter 3 p.91
- ^{vi} See chapter 3, p.76
- ^{vii} See chapter 3, endnote 20
- ^{viii} The *Manchester Guardian* reported that the resumption of the play after the interruption was 'hailed with a wild burst of enthusiasm from the general body of the audience in which the counter demonstration was entirely drowned' in Robert Lowery (ed) *A Whirlwind in Dublin* London: Greenwood Press, 1984, p.34
- ^{ix} John Rockwell *The Oakland Tribune* Feb 22, 1969, p.53
- ^x Mervyn Thompson, *Singing The Blues* Christchurch NZ: Blacktown Press, 1991, p.39
- ^{xi} See William Irwin Thompson *The Imagination of an Insurrection: Dublin, Easter 1916* New York: Oxford University Press, 1967
- ^{xii} Thompson *Imagination of an Insurrection*, p.ix
- ^{xiii} Terry Sellards 'All Players on Berkeley Stage for UC Drama Today' *Berkeley Daily Gazette* 21 Feb 1969, p.1
- ^{xiv} Judith Malina *The Enormous Despair* New York: Random House, 1972 p.183. Previously quoted Chapter IX footnote 93
- ^{xv} See Marvin Carlson *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, p.12
- ^{xvi} Lady Augusta Gregory *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* Gerrards Cross: C Smythe, 1972, p.103. See chapter 5, p.117
- ^{xvii} See chapter 11 endnote 115
- ^{xviii} Athenaide Dallett, *Theatre as Government* Unpublished Ph D Dissertation: Harvard, 1996, p.200
- ^{xix} *ibid*, p.200
- ^{xx} *ibid*, p.12
- ^{xxi} *ibid*, p.114
- ^{xxii} The *Irish Times* noted that 'It was difficult to see how it was done but the stage appeared to be cleared in very quick time', see Anon 'Abbey Theatre Scene' *Irish Times* 12 Feb 1926, pp.7-8, while the *Manchester Guardian* noted how 'dramatic' Yeats' appearance was, particularly his use of hand gestures, see Anon 'A New Play at the Abbey' *Manchester Guardian* 11 Feb, 1926, no pagination
- ^{xxiii} See chapter 11, pp.330-31
- ^{xxiv} See chapter 12, p.359
- ^{xxv} Mervyn Thompson 'Victims and Vengeance' *The New Zealand Listener* 14 April, 1984, p.23
- ^{xxvi} Murray Edmond 'The Terror and the Pity of 1984' *Landfall* vol.209 (May 2005), pp.13-28
- ^{xxvii} See chapter 3, endnote 4
- ^{xxviii} See chapter 7, p.197
- ^{xxix} See chapter 1, endnote 22
- ^{xxx} Baz Kershaw 'Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968-1989' *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.2 no.3 (Spring 1968) pp. 74-5
- ^{xxxi} See Introduction, pp.2-3

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