Standpoints:
The Dramaturgy of Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden

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Abstract

The political popular theatre which has developed in the West since the 1960s challenges the current hegemony in Western cultures by attacking its basic models of knowledge, yet little critical attention has been paid to the dramaturgies particular to this form. An application of the Possible Worlds theory, the concept of ludic framing, and feminist "standpoint" theory to the Irish stage plays written by Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden after they left the "legitimate" stage, shows how the dramaturgy of this theater is a critical part of its strategic challenge to the status quo. This analysis shows how D'Arcy and Arden foreground the encompassing Theatre Possible World, within which the performance takes place, in order to cast doubt on the natural character of generally accepted meanings, and to induce the audience to consciously choose the frames within which it makes sense of action.

Résumé

Le théâtre populaire politique qui s'est développé en Occident depuis les années soixante s'attaque à l'hégémonie actuelle de ces sociétés en mettant en cause ses modèles dominants du savoir; pourtant les critiques n'ont prêté que peu d'attention à sa dramaturgie particulière. Une application de la théorie des Mondes Possibles, du concept d'encadrement ludique, et de la théorie féministe du "positionnement" aux pièces Irlandaises écrites par Margaretta D'Arcy et John Arden, après qu'ils aient quitté le théâtre officiel, démontre l'importance de la dramaturgie dans la contestation stratégique du statu quo. Cette analyse montre comment, en attirant l'attention sur le Monde Possible du théâtre, dans lequel a lieu la représentation, les auteurs remettent en question le caractère naturel des sens acceptés, et encouragent l'auditoire à choisir consciemment les cadres qu'il utilise pour construire un sens à partir des actions.

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Chapter 1 Introduction
What Is Political in Political Theatre?

Many critics have assumed that the political theatre of the twentieth century can be defined exclusively in terms of the left-wing political themes and positions it foregrounds. Few have paid much attention to the dramaturgy particular to this theatrical form: only a minority of the texts in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.3 of my bibliography, for example, focus on this question. Some critical texts on left-wing theatre go so far as to assume that there is an innate contradiction between aesthetics and political content (e.g. Clinton, Hayman, Schvey, Wellwarth). Yet practitioners of various forms of political and popular theatre have consistently been preoccupied with questions of form The history of political theatre in the twentieth century, as reflected in the writings of those who have practiced it, is a history of the search for better theatrical techniques for knowing the world. Bertolt Brecht, who is undoubtedly the best known practitioner of political theatre in this century, wrote very little about the specific political positions or organizations he supported or thought audiences should support. Most North American theatre students have heard of Brecht's theories of estrangement or "alienation" in theatre performance. Some even know about the notion of Gestus and about the early experiments with plays-for-learning. Very few know anything at all about the Weimar Republic, the political parties active within it, or the huge workers' cultural organizations which provided the basis for Brecht's theatre experiments. Yet despite the evidence of their own knowledge, many remain convinced that Brecht is important only for his political views, and not for his formal innovations.

It should, of course, immediately be added that the formal experimentation which is so characteristic of political theatres in the twentieth century is not simply a search for novel sensations and spectacular effects. Formal innovation in the popular theatre movement which has arisen in Europe and the Americas since the 1960s has been motivated, as was the case for Brecht, by the sense that the old ways of knowing about the world are inadequate for the discussion of contemporary concerns. In discussing Brecht's political theatre, Barthes points out that "ce que Brecht prend au marxisme, ce ne sont pas des mots d'ordre, une articulation d'arguments, c'est une méthode générale d'explication" (87). Lenore Champagne, in her book The French Theatre Experiment Since 1968 links the changes in form made by the young companies directly to the new ideology of that period:

> The young theatre companies were anti-authority, anti-bureaucracy, anti-institutions, and the goals of self-determination and "autogestion" were central.... The conventions of a linear narrative dramatic structure and psychological characterization were rejected along with the playwright. (2)

The new popular theatres were challenging not only the overt political propaganda of the ruling classes but the more deeply imbedded, and thus more elusive, cultural hegemony of their societies. Raymond Williams distinguishes this concept of hegemony from earlier leftist notions of ideology in the following terms:

> Hegemony is then not only the articulate upper level of "ideology," nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as "manipulation" or "indoctrination." It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of

> ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values--constitutive and constituting--which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (110)

This description of hegemony accounts well for the dominant critical reaction to the new political theatre of the post-68 period: rather than discussing the relative merit of the performances, many critics simply dismissed them on the grounds that they were not really theatre. This perception, while antagonistic, was not altogether without foundation. Whereas earlier popular theatre experiments like those by the Volksbühne, the Théâtre National Populaire, and even the Royal Court, had largely concentrated on different themes or different target-audiences, the new politicized popular theatres were questioning accepted notions of what constitutes theatre. In other words, their innovation was not simply thematic and popularizing, but also epistemological In genre terms, they strove to build a theatre around popular forms such as the ballad, music hall, puppetry, commedia dell'arte, circus, traditional pantomime and mummery, etc. These forms carried with them a particular epistemological stance. Gone was the pretense that what happened on the stage was not a performance and that the performers were unaware of the presence of the audience. Gone too was the centrality of the Eurocentric "universal" man whose values and personal crises had been assumed to reflect the condition of the species as a whole (including oppressed nationalities, peasants, women, etc.) Instead of attempting to create a perfect reflection or even a mediated mimesis of "reality," the new troupes attempted to create accurate

models for understanding how the "real world" functioned and, more importantly, how it could be changed

It is unfortunate that critical and theoretical work on these new dramaturgies has to date been scant. While more mainstream publications (e.g. TDR, Modern Drama, Plays and Players) are recognizing the existence and importance of popular political theatre, little work has been done to find and develop the tools necessary to deal with the new patterns of knowing which these dramaturgies represent The result is that all too often the plays themselves do not get the attention they deserve.

Response to the post-68 stage plays of John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy is a significant example of just such a lack of attention. This team of playwrights is of particular interest because the development of their careers mirrors the developments in English and Irish popular theatre since the emergence of the "new wave" of radical English playwrights in 1956. Arden's early plays at the Royal Court Theatre are generally acknowledged to be an important part of the "breakthrough" in English theatre which followed the production of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger in 1956 (cf. Anderson, Brown, Chambers and Prior, Hilton, Kitchin, Taylor, Williams). One of the plays of this period, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, is considered important enough to be included as a set text for English "A" level exams. But, while he was considered a "political" playwright even at that time, Arden himself admits that his "concept of political drama was one of plays written upon political subjects," and that his initial skirmishes with theatre managements stemmed not from any fundamental questioning of their social role, but from his desire to find "some far more 'electrical' method of putting the stuff across" (To Present, 50).

But D'Arcy and Arden did not restrict their activities to the "official" London theatre of protest. During this period they were also experimenting with community drama outside London In 1960 they produced a Nativity play, The Business of Good Government, in a church in Somerset; in 1963 they organized a month-long participatory arts festival in Kirbymoorside; in 1964 D'Arcy directed Ars Longa, Vita Brevis with a group of Girl Guides in this same community; and in 1966 the couple produced The Royal Pardon with a community group in Devon These participatory entertainments culminated with the organization of the War Carnival with New York University students in 1967, an event which Arden credits with being "something of a turning point in [his] career as a playwright" (To Present, 47).

Catherine Itzin explains the importance of these experiments for the later development of political theatre in Britain in her history of the post-68 popular theatres, Stages in the Revolution.

> Insofar as John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy were drawn in these instances to non-theatre audiences in non-theatre venues during the early sixties, they were laying foundations for the "alternative" (touring and community) theatre movement that mushroomed in Britain between 1968 and 1978. (27)

In the aftermath of these experiments D'Arcy and Arden reacted to the events of 1968 by getting involved with an overtly socialist theatre troupe, CAST (Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre), and working on one of their first professional productions to make extensive use of popular forms, The Hero Rises Up. In 1969 D'Arcy and Arden returned to live fulltime in Galway, Ireland. The entry of the British army into northern

Ireland shortly before their move, and the political troubles that ensued throughout Ireland, have had a major effect on their political consciences and their theatre practice Arden describes this change in To Present the Pretense:

> The work I have done with D'Arcy in Ireland ... will be seen to have been much more closely connected with the practical politics of parties and doctrines than anything heretofore. Our joint experience in India, 1969-70, of course has a good deal to do with this: but really it began much earlier. (83)

The journey to India to which Arden refers, though originally conceived as a research project on non-violent methods of social change, moved him to a Marxist stance and a much more active involvement in political struggles to create new forms of theatre One of the first of these struggles involved a major challenge to the management of the Royal Shakespeare Company in a 1972 dispute around the production of Arden and D'Arcy's Island of the Mighty

The Island dispute is important to an understanding of D'Arcy and Arden's later work for several reasons. The root of the dispute, according to the authors' article "Playwrights on Picket," was a serious disagreement about the way in which the director's use of the traditional conventions of the naturalist theatre distorted the authors' expression of meaning. Albert Hunt qualifies the result in the following terms:

> Gags which should have been light and quick were slow and laboured.... And in place of this lightness and speed the RSC company offered a post-Stanislavski concentration on inner motivation, a grasping for intensity of feeling. The extrovert, circus-like quality of the Ardens' script was turned into an introvert meditation about the decline of a kingdom. (Arden: A Study of His Plays, 159)

D'Arcy and Arden were particularly disturbed because the end result was a performance text which appeared to support British imperialism, the same imperialism that was at the root of the "troubles" in Ireland. Their way of attempting to deal with the problems of interpretation of their play was typical of the new thinking among political theatre workers in the early 1970s. While Royal Shakespeare Company officials have consistently referred to the dispute in terms of artistic problems and personality clashes, D'Arcy and Arden approached the problem by questioning the basic structure of traditional theatres. They refused to settle for private meetings with the director and artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company to try and work out their differences. Instead they questioned the director's role as employer and insisted on meeting the whole cast and crew to discuss their differences with the director over interpretation and meaning. When this was refused they declared themselves on strike, and with the backing of their professional association, the Society of Irish Playwrights, they set up a picket line outside the theatre to put pressure on management to accede to their demand for a full meeting of all those involved in the production. This meeting did finally take place, in a rather unorthodox manner, when the authors' supporters made such a fuss in the theatre on the occasion of one of the previews that D'Arcy and Arden were able to take to the stage. Arden then asked the audience if they wanted him to speak only to be refused by the majority of those present and the playwrights, "deciding that in effect, they had had their general meeting, and that their part in it had been voted redundant--left the theatre and prepared to go home to Ireland" (To Present, 165).

Since this incident D'Arcy and Arden have seen no professional productions of their plays in a major British theatre. The three stage plays they have written since 1972 have treated Irish issues in a non-naturalistic style and have been presented exclusively outside the "legitimate" theatre, with first productions (except in the case of The Little Gray Home in the West) in Ireland. In this sense their recent work is typical of the new trends which the German critic Günter Klotz identifies as crucial to understanding the post-68 alternative theatre in Britain[1]. The first of these is a "sudden interest in local history and in the traditions of the working-class struggle," the second "a deeper and internationally more complex analysis of the basic contradictions within the capitalist system and of the moving forces in present history," and the third a concern with "the methods of social change, with the theoretical assumptions and practical prerequisites for a revolution of society, with its moral implications, and with the dialectics of the objective laws of historical development and the subjective agents in that process" (154-56). Yet critical discussion of the newer works of these two important playwrights has dwindled: while 27 texts are available on Serjeant Musgrave's Dance , there are only ten articles dealing specifically with the post-72 Irish plays, and none of these discusses Little Gray Home in the West (cf. Malick's bibliography and my own).

Further, a good part of the criticism that is extant seems not simply ill at ease with D'Arcy and Arden's more radical political commitment, but also to consider it as either irrelevant or detrimental to their dramaturgies.

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1 I do not want to imply by this that D'Arcy and Arden's collaborative works since 1972 should be considered British. They are Irish and should be so viewed. But even by British standards, they are not aberrations.

9 under her husband's) published since 1968 only two, those by Albert Hunt and Frances Gray, identify political commitment as an important positive factor in determining Arden and D'Arcy's dramaturgy. Malcolm Page and Glenda Leeming are more cautious in their assessments. Page praises the later plays but tends to be apologetic about Arden's political commitments, while Leeming doesn't mention Arden's political views at all in her discussion of the post-68 works. Hayman, who published the earliest book-length assessment of Arden's work in 1969, clearly believes that political commitment has damaged the playwright's work; in a BBC interview in 1980 he stated "Arden hasn't given up writing plays. He's just given up writing good ones." (quoted in Gray, 16) Ph.D. dissertations since 1972 follow much the same patterns. Flaumenhaft, Malick, and McKernie see Arden's political commitment as an important positive influence on his dramaturgy and explore the popular conventions he uses to make his points. Clayton, Roberts, and Steinbeck-Lafon are wary about what they define as didacticism in Arden's work, but identify the emphasis on community as an important left-wing position and study the dramaturgy particular to a non-commercial theatre. Clinton and, to some extent Shiller, view Arden's political commitment as a weakness that undermines the quality of the dramaturgy in his later works with D'Arcy. There is however one thing on which most of the critics do seem to agree: theoretical tools developed for the study of naturalist drama are not particularly useful in dealing with Arden and D'Arcy's work.

While the neglect of the post-Island stage plays is certainly inspired in part by a reluctance to deal with controversial issues like the British occupatio of northern Ireland and a socialist response to British

occupation of northern Ireland and a socialist response to British colonialism in that country, I believe that it is also the result of the scarcity of theoretical tools suitable for the study of popular political drama. To find these tools, I think we must start from the assumption that the playwrights' goals are not as simple as critics of didacticism would too often have it. D'Arcy and Arden have never limited their political agenda to "selling" particular political issues or activities. In fact D'Arcy specifically criticized "one-issue" politics during a 1977 symposium on "Playwriting for the Seventies" sponsored by Theatre Quarterly:

> The weakness of "progressive" politics in this country [England] is reflected in the political theatre of this country--which is always on single issues. That is the way the capitalists stay in power. They let us all waste our energy pursuing these issues in isolation. (TQ 24, 49)

Arden, when discussing his decision to take sides in writing political plays, has always done so in terms of point of view more than in terms of convincing people to take particular actions at particular moments. The title he chose for an essay where he discusses his opposition to British imperialism in Ireland is telling; Arden speaks not of a particular political action but of a "Shift of Perspective" (Awkward 13-20). In this sense both D'Arcy and Arden are part of the new tradition of political popular theatre, which challenges the current hegemony in Western cultures by attacking its basic models of knowledge.

In this thesis I hope to contribute to an understanding of the dramaturgy specific to this form of theatre by applying three theoretical tools borrowed, in part, from other fields of endeavour much concerned with models to a discussion of the neglected Irish stage plays written after

D'Arcy and Arden left the "legitimate" theatre definitively in 1972. These tools are: the Possible Worlds theory; the concept of ludic framing; and feminist "standpoint" theory. I believe that they will allow me to demonstrate the ways in which the dramaturgy of political popular theater is a critical part of its strategic challenge to the status quo.

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Chapter 2
Tools for the Study of Dramaturgy in Popular Theatre

One important tool for the study of dramaturgies which emphasize modeling over mimesis is the theory of Possible Worlds. This concept has been "repatriated" to the study of fiction, and particularly of the semiology of theatre, from the philosophy of logic, where "fiction [has begun] to serve as a means of checking the explanatory power of logical hypotheses and models" (Pavel, 2). The key word here is "possible," for the theory of Possible Worlds concentrates not on the truth or falsehood of a particular statement, nor on the values it embodies, but on the conditions that would have to obtain for the statement to be true. For example, Possible World theory does not ask if the working class will or should take control of the state. Instead it explores the conditions that would have to prevail in order for this to happen. Whether or not working class control of the state is theoretically POSSIBLE is determined by our ability to describe a set of conditions, or "world," in which the working class does take control of the state. In Van Dijk's words: "we say that p is possible, if there is AT LEAST ONE IMAGINABLE SITUATION in which p is true" (29).

In this light fiction is neither a "mere diversion," nor a delusion, but an important tool for exploring possible alternative epistemologies. We must note here that while this approach may be new to philosophers, it is hardly new to creators of fictional texts, for as Benjamin points out in "Der Erzähler," "die Ausrichtung auf das praktische Interesse ist ein charakteristischer Zug bei vielen geborenen Erzählern," of whom it must be asked "ob seine Aufgabe nicht eben darin besteht, den Rohstoff der Erfahrungen--fremder und eigener--auf eine solide, nützliche und

einmalige Art zu bearbeiten?" (441 and 464). It seems clear that this fashioning of experience corresponds to the formulation of new Possible Worlds: the storyteller is describing the situation in which a particular conflict could be resolved, and is thus verifying possibility by defining the conditions under which it would become truth. This is certainly how the Philosopher of Brecht's Messingkauf Dialogues (GW 16, 500-657) proposes to use the theatre, and it is on this point that Benjamin distinguishes Brecht's epic theatre from Aristotelian catharsis: "statt in den Helden sich einzufühlen, soll das Publikum vielmehr das Staunen über die Verhältnisse lernen, in denen er sich bewegt." ("Was ist das epische Theater?" 535). The usefulness of Possible World theory for the study of popular theatre is evident, for how better to define what popular theatre does than as an exploration of the possible through the imaginary creation of the conditions necessary for its existence?

Such a definition of fiction as a tool of inquiry depends, of course, on a pluralist vision of epistemology such as that promoted by Pavel's "tolerant epistemologists," who:

> [by] replacing the classical idea of a reality unique and undivided with a multiplicity of equally valid world versions, have come to look at fiction as just another of these numerous versions, by no means less worthy than its competitors (2).

This is the approach taken by Teun van Dijk in Text and Context; Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse, where he describes a Possible World as the situation in which a set of propositions is satisfied, or as a state of affairs that might have been. He emphasizes, however, that we are dealing here not with an actual physical state, but with a structure of meaning:

> Note that the notion of a possible world should not be identified with our intuitive ideas of (our) "world," "reality," etc. but as an abstract construct of semantic theory (model theory). Thus our actual world is just one element of a set of possible worlds.[2] (29)

This is an important distinction for a theory of Possible Worlds in the theatre, where the physical presence of human beings who act out a narrative before an audience could lead one to intuitively assert that the Possible World is actually physically present on the stage. In fact, as numerous semioticians have pointed out, even when endowed with three-dimensional presence, the map is not the territory, and stage activity must be taken as a map which serves to induce the Possible World in the minds of the spectators. Eco provides a particularly valuable description of this process of meaning-creation in his discussion of theatrical signification as ostension. He points out that the theatrical sign is not actively produced in the way a word or drawn image is produced, but is instead picked up from existing physical bodies, then de-realized or de-semanticized by showing it to an audience in a manner which reduces it to those of its features which are pertinent to the signification of a whole class of objects. It is the showing of this de-realized object to an audience which constitutes ostension, the most important theatrical form of signification (110-11). In this light the agents, objects, and relationships on the stage are signs, chosen for their ability to evoke a reality other than the actual physical reality of their presence. In their capacity as signs they cannot, by definition, have the same ontological status as agents, objects, and relationships in the empirical

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2 While I am aware that this last sentence raises the whole problem of the relative status of the fictional Possible World and the Empirical World, or "everyday reality" of the spectator, I do not intend to enter into this debate here, as it is not central to my argument.

world. So the Possible World is an abstract construct and not simply the "world" enclosed in the physical space of the stage.

How then is the creation of a Possible World to be completed in a theatrical setting? The answer cannot be found by looking at the stage alone. We must also consider the spectators, who must mentally organize the various classes of objects ostended to them in order to form a sense-making pattern within which meaning can be attributed to dramatic events. Elam describes this process as one of translation on the part of the spectator, who:

> derives from the conventionalized onstage happenings a range of dramatic information which enables him [sic] to translate what he sees and hears into something quite different: a fictional dramatic world characterized by a set of physical properties, a set of agents and a course of time-bound events (98).

Yet clearly the spectators' creation of the Possible World is not, in fact cannot be, constituted only from information presented on the stage. Unlike the closed Possible Worlds of logicians which contain only those propositions specified in their definition, fictional texts must define the Possible World in relation to the empirical, everyday world as it is known by the audience. If Eco's reference to classes of objects is to be realized, then we must posit the ability of the spectators to organize objects into classes on the basis of information they already have when they enter the theatre. Pavis points to the process of comparison necessary to produce meaning in the theatrical setting when he states: "Ainsi il devient nécessaire pour comprendre la fiction qui nous est proposée de comparer le monde possible

16 de l'univers dramatique avec le monde réel d'un public à un moment donné de la réception" (17).

This statement also implies that different groups of spectators will compare the fictional world to different versions of real worlds. The question of how this affects the creation of fictional Possible Worlds is an important one, for it opens the door to the possibility that many different Possible Worlds can be created from one performance text, depending on the information the audience brings to the task. Suvin underlines this point in his article "The Performance Text as Audience-Stage Dialog Inducing a Possible World," where he describes the creation of a "specific Possible World" in terms of "the interaction between the existents, events, and relationships being ostended and the audience for which they are ostended" (15). The term "interaction" indicates that not only will the stage information condition the spectators' creation of a Possible World, but that spectator reaction will also affect the information about the Possible World which is ostended from the stage. Examples abound in theatre circles of audiences who have not reacted as expected to a performance. Anyone who has seen a performer attempt a dramatic scene only to be met with laughter from the spectators has witnessed a conflict in the creation of the dramatic Possible World. The discomfort we often feel in these situations is, I think, largely due to the conflict that ensues as the performer struggles to define the Possible World as one in which this particular expression means "romantic hero," while the audience tries to define it as one in which this particular expression means "pompous fool." One of three things generally happens in such cases: either the performer wins out by ostending a series of signs which negate the spectators' initial framing, or the performer seeks

to please the audience by "hamming it up" and thus confirming their frame, or some new frame is created between the two in which this set of signs can mean "romantic hero as pompous fool" (or vice versa). One way or another, if the performance is to have any meaning at all, performers and spectators must project a common Possible World on the basis of some coherent underlying logic.

It is important to note to that the interaction we are discussing does not take place between individuals on a one-to-one basis, but as a rule between groups of performers and spectators. The performer cannot maintain the "romantic hero" Possible World if other performers start reacting within a "pompous fool" Possible World. On the other side of the equation, as both Suvin and Ubersfeld point out, spectator reaction in theatre is a group reaction in which the individual spectator is aware of the reaction of other spectators and must frame her/his reaction in relation to it. (cf. Suvin "Performance" and Ubersfeld École). We must then conclude that the Possible World is neither the world of the stage nor the sole creation of individual spectators, but a "meaning-bestowing frame of relations" (Suvin, "Performance" 5) created by an interaction between stage and spectators.

This vision of the construction of a fictional Possible World by interaction between performers and spectators has an important implication for critical work: the critic needs to know not only the dramatic and performance texts but also to know something about the audience. While it is clearly impractical to follow every audience through every performance in order to discuss the creation of dramaturgic Possible Worlds, one can identify the audience for whom a given performance text

is intended, for as Bakhtin/Vološinov points out in Marxism and Philosophy of Language, utterance, and in fact any form of communication, "is constructed between two socially organized persons" and "word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might be." Further "expression-utterance is determined by the actual conditions of the given utterance - above all, by its immediate social situation" (Volosinov, 85). So we cannot describe the "meaning-bestowing frame of relations" that constitutes the fictional Possible World by looking only at the signs emanating from the stage. Completeness demands that we look also at least at the kinds of audience implied in the performance text and in such social conditions of performance as national territory, institutional venue, and organization of theatre space.

The counterfactual, "as if," nature of the fictional Possible World also has important implications for critical work, and nowhere more so than in popular theatres which treat themes and show actions that, if taken as part of the empirical world, might be subject to severe legal sanctions and/or dangerous reprisals So, the critic must look at the specifically theatrical means popular theatres use to create a distinction between the empirical world of the theatre and the dramatic Possible World. Since popular theatre is trying to establish new ways of knowing, it cannot simply count on traditional theatre conventions to orient the spectators' interpretation of the action in the theatre; it must invent new ones. Theories of ludic transgression, and particularly of the creation of the frame necessary for ludic transgression to take place safely, provide important tools for exploring this problem.

Some of the most influential early work on ludic activity was done by Gregory Bateson who set out to understand how certain activities, human and non-human, are bracketed as "play" and set off from everyday life He asserts that play has a particular cognitive status in which the players are functioning on two levels of signification simultaneously. "In primary process, map and territory are equated; in secondary process, they can be discriminated. In play, they are both equated and discriminated." (185) He explains this process of double signification as resulting from metacommunication, or the communication not only of a message but of a frame of understanding which assists in the interpretation of the message Goffmann follows on this work in Frame Analysis, where he identifies and explores the functioning of frames in terms which recall both Eco's arguments about the organization of ostended information and Bakhtin's arguments about the situational nature of communication:

> Taken together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture, especially insofar as understandings emerge concerning principal classes of schemata, the relations of these classes to one another, and the sum total of forces and agents that these interpretive designs acknowledge to be loose in the world (27)

In this light, Goffman describes the theatrical frame as one in which "the central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on the stage" (125) and goes on to describe those "practices of transcription" which differentiate theatrical communication from its everyday equivalent. While this discussion is valuable, it is limited to the kind of activity which one might expect to take place within the context of the conventions of a

traditional commercial theatre. As explained in the "Introduction," it is with these conventions themselves, and the epistemology they represent, that popular theatre takes issue. Bakhtin's description of the attitude towards games in medieval popular culture would seem more useful in the context of a discussion of popular theatre:

> The images of games were seen as a condensed formula of life and of the historic process.... At the same time games drew the players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberated them from usual laws and regulations, and replaced established conventions by other lighter conventionalities (Rabelais 235).

A return to the theories of games and play in the works of Huizinga and Caillois helps clarify the procedures by which a counterfactual world, like that of play, is distinguished from the everyday empirical world. In describing the conditions which characterize play these two writers emphasize the presence of strict physical and temporal limitations, of rules particular to the play activity, and of a limitation of consequences to the sphere of play. All of these characteristics can be seen in the theatrical creation of Possible Worlds. As Ubersfeld underlines in L'École du Spectateur, theatre is an art which is characterized by strict spatial distinctions, such as that between stage space and audience space. Further, rules of interpretation are specified in various ways, generally by indirect convention in traditional theatres, but in popular theatre just as often by an "epically" direct chorus or narrator. Finally the physical consequences of actions within the fictional Possible World are strictly limited to the performance area.

As I noted earlier, this last point is especially important. It is the establishment of the ludic frame which makes not only transgression of

ordinary social rules, but also the exploration of potentially frightening elements of a new Possible World, tolerable. To look at but one example: there is an old stage adage that says that a gun, once brought on stage, must be fired. Yet within the ludic frame of the theatre I am not unduly frightened when I see a gun brought on stage. In this context I know that the gun will not be fired at me, nor will it be used to do such damage to a performer as would have effects outside the Possible World of the stage. My reaction would undoubtedly be very different if I met a person carrying a gun on a Belfast street, or if an audience member suddenly produced a gun. All of the theatre's framing conventions serve to distinguish worlds in terms of these separate spheres of consequence.

As popular theatre refuses many of the conventions of traditional theatre practice, critics of popular theatre must consider how new framing devices are established. When we can no longer take for granted that audience and stage will be separated by a proscenium arch, we must look for other signals, such as spectacular costume or processional movements, which indicate to the spectators where the audience ends and the performance begins. We must also pay particular attention to metacommunicational instances, such as narrators or choruses, which explain the rules for interpreting a given ludic activity. In general, in the absence of fixed conventions, we must pay much more attention to the metacommunication which helps the spectators identify the border between the empirical world of the theatre and the Possible World of fiction, as it is this border that defines transgression as ludic and the dramatic Possible World as counterfactual.

One question must still be asked, however, to gain real insight into the construction of new epistemologies in popular theatre: how are the "as if" hypotheses at the basis of Possible World formation generated, and how is this refracted in the theatre? To answer this question I will refer to feminist "standpoint" theory, and particularly to its discussion of positionality. First formulated by Lukács in History and Class Consciousness, standpoint theory seeks a material ground for consciousness and explains why groups which are marginalized in dominant social discourse are in the best social position to generate new knowledge.

It should be clear that this is not a romantic "noble savage" argument based on a belief in the essential "goodness" of the oppressed. Nor is its feminist version an essentialist argument of the "biology is destiny" type. Rather, feminist standpoint theory seeks to understand the generation of knowledge in terms of the position of the knower in a given social system. This position cannot be reduced either to a static "viewpoint" or to an unmediated knowing-through-participating.

> It is not the experiences or the speech that provide the grounds for feminist claims, but the subsequently articulated observations of and theory about the rest of nature and social relations--observations and theory that start out from, that look at the world from the perspective of, women's lives. (Harding 9)

Standpoint is the theoretical recognition that the ways in which we know, not just about ourselves but also about the world, are determined by how we actually interact with the world we are seeking to know. Hartsock, in Money, Sex, and Power, explores how the historically determined

material realities of women's and workers' existences are translated into particular ways of knowing about the world:

> Women and workers inhabit a world in which the emphasis is on change rather than stasis, a world characterized by interaction with natural substances rather than separation from nature, a world in which quality is more important than quantity, a world in which the unification of mind and body is inherent in the activities performed. (Hartsock 234)

Both Harding and Hartsock argue that the position of marginalized groups provides not only a different but a privileged view of the world, because they are in a position to view the basic dualities imposed by the hegemonic discourse of their society from both outside and inside, from the positions of the body and of the mind. Dorothy Smith elaborates this point in a section of her book The Everyday World as Problematic entitled "The Line of Fault," in which she discusses the ways in which the "point of rupture between experience and the ideological modes of interpreting and reading it" (59) forces women to formulate new ways of knowing in order to interpret their own lives. As we can see from these few examples, the core of the feminist standpoint theory is the notion that epistemology is determined by the ways in which socially constituted beings actually interact in/with the world, and that women, and others marginalized by the current social hegemony, are in a privileged position to understand the world because they see it both from within and from outside that hegemony's discourse. It is noteworthy that all of these formulations use strong images of the body in space, in contrast to the mind in an indeterminate discursive universe, to formulate their understanding of feminist epistemology.

These basic metaphors bear a striking resemblance to those used by numerous theoreticians to describe theatre as a genre. Ubersfeld, for instance, calls attention to both the active positioning of different bodies and to the simultaneous representation of material and discursive practices on the stage in her definition of theatre space as "un espace où évoluent des corps parlants" (École 53). In his essay "Littérature et Signification," Barthes defines theatricality in terms of this simultaneous presentation of several sign systems and points out the important cognitive implications of the informational polyphony thus created. Brecht was much concerned with using the theatre to develop ways of knowing which integrated sense perceptions based on the thinker's place and functioning in society, with her/his thoughts about that society. His writings on his own plays for learning, or Lehrstücke, make it clear that Brecht's vision of the role of popular theatre was defined by its ability to induce new attitudes and positions in the empirical world. It was in these discussions that Brecht developed what is probably the most useful conceptual category for discussing the relationship between standpoints in the empirical and Possible Worlds. To describe this concept he coined the term Haltung, which can be translated into English as bearing, stance or positioning. As Suvin points out in his article "Brecht: Bearing, Pedagogy, Productivity," this term is a useful fusion of the notions of "a subject's body-orientation in spacetime and of that body's insertion into major societal 'flows of things' " (12). A concern with bearing pushes us to look not only at the relative positions of the bodies on the stage, but also at the directionality of the dramaturgic agents they represent, at their attitudes to the events taking place in the Possible World of the stage, and at their intentions in carrying

out these actions. It allows us to explore alternative epistemologies by helping us identify the physical and social positionings which give rise to them and which are, in fact, an integral part of their structure.

It is by exploring these bearings that we can identify reported speech and the interests motivating the reporting. As Bakhtin points out, reported speech always, but more or less overtly, presents "an active relation of one message to another" which is expressed "not on the level of the theme but in the stabilized constructional patterns..." (Vološinov 116). Bearing is, I believe, one of the key theatrical constructional patterns which allows us to identify the standpoint at the root of particular alternative epistemolgies in popular theatre and consequently to explore the interests which have lead to the formulation of the particular set of "as if" conditions which are the basis of the Possible World of the stage.

Chapter 3
The Non-Stop Connolly Show: The Role of the Audience in Creating Possible Worlds

The most striking thing about D'Arcy and Arden's first major work after their break with the legitimate stage is its length. The Non-Stop Connolly Show is a cycle of six plays, which were first presented as a continuous twenty-six-hour-long performance on Easter weekend 1975 in Liberty Hall, the Dublin headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. While D'Arcy conceived of this style of presentation as a "kind of giant 'pop festival' for the Left--a long night of plays, films, etc." in the spirit of the Angry Arts weeks which were held in New York and London during the Vietnam War (D'Arcy and Arden, "Socialist" 118), critics viewed it as a test of endurance. Subsequent performances in Belfast and elsewhere in Ireland were cut to a "mere" twelve hours (Archer 40) and a series of lunchtime presentations in London in 1976 presented the texts in fourteen fifty-minute-long episodes. However it seems clear that the text was conceived for the context of its original performance. In this light it is important to account for the dramaturgic choices implied in a performance which lasted twenty-six hours and included meal breaks and entertainment by other performers.

Many critics seem to assume that the length of The Non-Stop Connolly Show was an expression of the self-indulgence of propagandists who put their message before their art. Henry Schvey is among the most virulent in his attacks on the artistic value of D'Arcy and Arden's efforts. After informing his reader that such a lengthy performance "must be lively, emphasize visual action, and not be too intellectually demanding or dependent on a complicated plot," he asserts that

> the Ardens' [sic] interest in a dogmatic approach to Connolly's life clearly outweighs their concern for the spectacle as a work of art or even as effective theatrical propaganda.
>
> Judged by the standards of conventional drama, the plays rely almost entirely on caricature, cliché and slogan to make their principal point of the necessity for a socialist revolution (65-66).

This succinct expression of the critic's standpoint on both aesthetic and political questions in theatre criticism provides a valuable guide to interpreting even the reactions of more sympathetic critics, because it foregrounds some of the basic assumptions about popular political theatre which underlie their critiques too. One of these assumptions constructs a hierarchy of discourses within which academic or other professionally institutionalized discourse has the highest power to understand all others, and concludes that material with which the academic critic has difficulty must be completely incomprehensible to any other audience. Even a sympathetic critic like Kane Archer falls into this trap when he characterizes the Dublin performance as "didactic and insufficiently clear-cut, confusing even to the mind trained to pick out the thread of academic discourse"; it is worth noting that Archer found De Leon, who is portrayed as a dogmatic intellectual, the most captivating character in the Dublin performance text (40). Yet there is no reason to believe that academics were the ideal audience for whom D'Arcy and Arden wrote this piece. The choice of performance setting, theme, and theatrical style all indicate that D'Arcy and Arden wrote The Non-Stop Connolly Show for Irish trade unionists or for people involved in left-wing political groups that respected both Irish and working class traditions of thought. D'Arcy and Arden insist on this point when they cite intertwining Celtic serpentine motifs as one of the inspirations for the form of this play ("Interstates"). A further Celtic

influence may be seen in the portrayal of wishes which come true and yet have unforeseen consequences (e.g. Connolly's return to Ireland), as happens in so many Irish fairy tales. Many passages participate in trade-union discourse: for example, in Part 6 we see a rowdy union meeting in which the only thing on which Larkin and O'Casey can agree is that questions of personality cannot be considered relevant to a trade union debate (396). Once these factors are taken into account, the crucial question becomes not "How does this play correspond to Schvey's 'standards of conventional drama'?" but "What standards of dramaturgy does this way of knowing demand?" In other words, an understanding of the dramaturgy of The Non-Stop Connolly Show must proceed from an understanding of the epistemology particular to its ideal audience.

A first step in defining any epistemology is the identification of its presuppositions, including what it considers to be relevant thematic questions and sense-making strategies (cf. Angenot). For instance, as noted above, in trade union discourse questions of personality are not considered relevant themes for evaluating the success or failure of any particular action. As this stands in direct contradiction to the standards of conventional individualist drama, which demand character development through the exposition and resolution of crises in personal values, new conventions must be found to express this way of knowing on the stage. Further, these conventions must take into account the preferred sense-making strategies of the ideal audience. In the case of trade unionists, an important role in knowing the world is attributed to direct personal experience, and this in itself may partly justify D'Arcy and Arden's choice to lead the audience through a twenty-six hour marathon in order to

demonstrate the problems of long-term political struggle. When the professional critics complain of exhaustion induced by such a lengthy presentation, we must consider the possibility that working-class audiences may construct quite different meanings from the same physical sensations. One of the important features of The Non-Stop Connolly Show is the portrayal of Connolly's determination to continue the struggle for workers' rights despite his own exhaustion and in face of overwhelming odds. Whereas a traditional intellectual and middle-class audience would generally state that their sensations of exhaustion undermine the credibility of this portrayal, workers in the audience might well find that their own physical sensations in the theatre setting help them better understand Connolly's situation. This, in turn, could only enhance the credibility of images of exhaustion and regeneration in the fictional world Connolly inhabits. Desmond Hogan lends credence to this conjecture when he describes his experience as an actor in the first Dublin performance, and recounts not mainly the "message" the critics were so eager to track down, but what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feeling": the sense of "irony" at leaving Liberty Hall at about the same time as the strikers had during the original Easter Rising, the cold of the hall, the determination of the actors, the dynamic climax, the "uncanny tension which locked these scenes together, a poignancy for those of us who were educated on the sanctity of 1916" (552). In another instance, D'Arcy and Arden's reference to Celtic serpentine motifs evokes a strategy of sense-making alien to the Cartesian intellectual tradition of structuring an argument as a linear development. Those familiar with the Celtic strategy might well prefer to organize the information presented in the performance text by constructing patterns of contact and rupture, instead of sequences of cause and effect.

This in itself would make a cycle structure more accessible because it would allow for inattention and even temporary absences on the part of individual audience members, provided they followed enough of the narrative (directly or through reports from other audience members) to construct an overall pattern.

Two of the dramaturgic strategies which D'Arcy and Arden chose correspond to these alternative ways of knowing. In the first place they approached the Connolly story as a story of collective social actions, rather than one of personality. In their own words: "The conflict of his life was on the whole impersonal -- it is only to be discovered in the conflict between his class (the working class) and the classes which oppressed it" ("Socialist" 96). Further, the development of this conflict is not structured as a chain of battles leading directly and inexorably to the Easter Rising of 1916, but "as a series of digressive stage-presentations of the events of his time which influenced his political views and consequent actions" (Connolly v). Second, they reject naturalistic conventions in favour of an overtly fictional theatricality which they describe as "not so much the real truth as a reconstructed emblem of it" ("Socialist" 94). In this light, it becomes clear that The Non-Stop Connolly Show functions in much the same way as the semiotician's Possible World: it presents the audience with a counterfactual model in which a possibility (in this case armed resistance of the working class to bourgeois power) is verified by the imaginary creation of the conditions necessary for its existence (or falsified by their absence). It demonstrates that such a strategy makes sense given a certain set of conditions, and thus proves that it is a possible strategy in the struggle to ensure social justice for working men, women, and children.

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The six major sections of The Non-Stop Connolly Show are all framed by direct presentations to the audience, which focus attention on the question of defining what is possible and under what conditions. The cycle starts with a prologue in which Connolly's mother presents the values underlying a socialist world-view as self-evident presuppositions, and then directs audience attention to the conditions which must prevail in order for these values to be put into practice:

> It is the right of every man on earth
> (Who for his life must bend his back and work)
> To own, control, and finally enjoy
> The produce of his labour at its greatest worth.
> Did I say every man? Each woman, girl, and boy
> Is equally entitled to such a right--
> If not, why do we live? But yet we have not got it:
> Through all of history it has been withheld:
> Though frequently, after a fearsome fight,
> Some grudging portion has been slowly granted
> Only because the mighty were compelled
> By greater might of those whom they oppressed. (Connolly 1)

When she is interrupted by the capitalist "demon king" Grabitall, who warns the audience that to take such discourse seriously is to endanger his domination, Mother Connolly reacts, not by denouncing his values, but by asserting the possibility of winning social justice in face of Grabitall's dire predictions of the cost of struggle: "you can and shall be beaten!" (my emphasis) The play ends with this same emphasis on possibility. In its last speech Connolly, tied to a chair and shot by Grabitall's men, does not try to justify his armed revolt nor to understand its immediate failure. Neither

does he preach about what must or should be done. Instead, he discusses his actions in terms of the possibility of positive change for oppressed peoples: "We were the first to show the dark deep hole within/ Could be thrown open to the living sun ... " (448, my emphasis).

The key question in a cognitive strategy whose aim is to examine possibility is: "How could this come about?" Throughout The Non-Stop Connolly Show, audience attention is directed to social conditions as a locus where an appropriate response to this question can be found. In contrast to individualistic and naturalistic drama, the audience is not encouraged to search for a tragic flaw of character which prevented Connolly from achieving his goals, and the cycle's individual plays do not encourage a concentration on the evolution of desire in individual dramaturgic agents by surprising them in mid-action. Instead, each play begins with a formal presentation of the state of affairs (analogous to the "set of conditions" of Possible World theory) which the protagonists must transform if their desires are to become realities, and with a simple statement of the values which will be tested in the ensuing action. Far from taking a dogmatic approach to the ideals Connolly embodied, D'Arcy and Arden use The Non-Stop Connolly Show to subject them to a pragmatic test. This process culminates in Part 6 when a prologue, in folk-legend style, on a separate stage demonstrates that while broken prohibitions may lead to the end of the state of affairs the prohibitions were designed to protect, this end (and by extension any change of state) should not be assumed at the outset to be negative for all participants (343-48). Shortly thereafter the Bird confronts Connolly with a series of prohibitions appropriate to a doctrinaire socialist consciousness. Connolly rejects each of them with references to the

problems of carrying them out in the world in which he lives. When told to look for strategic advantage "on the next full page" he replies that "the book is closed and glued/ With soot of cordite/ And with blood" (411); when told he must win the support of Protestant workers he replies "I piped to them, they did not dance./ It is too late: they now must take their chance." (413) Finally he sends the Bird away because it has no positive plan, and he is convinced that "to do nothing/ Will do nothing to relieve their pain" (415).

Prohibition is one of the ways in which the necessary conditions for the success of the hero's quest are expressed in legends and folktales, and D'Arcy and Arden's choice of this form to model the problems in Connolly's Possible World of rebellion is significant. Whereas in the traditional folktale it is quite clear that the magical helper has the wisdom and authority to articulate the conditions of the hero's success, the new political parable calls for pragmatic questioning. Ideals, even socialist ideals, can no longer be accepted on the basis of the authority of the speaker. Instead, every ideal must be tested in terms of conditions which must exist in order for it to be put into practice. After subjecting the Bird's prohibitions to such a test, Connolly must reject them because he deems the social conditions they require to become reality politically unacceptable.

The dramatic model D'Arcy and Arden chose to organize their emblematic theatrical strategy was the Mystery play, a pre-individualist form of drama. In the European Christian tradition, it was originally performed by amateurs on religious occasions, such as Easter, to inculcate basic teachings of Christianity by leading the faithful through a series of tableaux representing the major events leading up to and in Christ's life. In

this form of drama significance is attributed to events exclusively in the public sphere, and every action is understood in terms of its role in "the grand scheme of things." D'Arcy and Arden refer to the Hindu Mystery plays they witnessed during their 1970 visit to India as the source of the theatrical style of The Non-Stop Connolly Show (D'Arcy and Arden, "Socialist" 103). However, it seems virtually certain that Irish audiences would best be able structure the information in the cycle in meaningful ways by reference to the remnants of the Christian mystery cycles in such religious activities as the liturgical year in general, and processions through the Stations of the Cross in particular. That D'Arcy believes in the possibility of re-functioning these religious rituals (in the Brechtian sense of "umfunktionieren," cf. Benjamin, "Der Autor als Produzent" 691) is implied in her essay "The Voice of the Bitch Goddess," where she discusses the pre-Christian images of the Goddess carried in the processions in honour of the Virgin which were held in the Dominican convent where she was educated (69-70) Reference to the Christian death and resurrection myth is quite explicit in Connolly's last speech, where he uses imagery of the opening of Christ's tomb on Easter Sunday: "We were the first to roll away the stone/ From the leprous wall of the whitened tomb" (448). Michael Etherton makes direct reference to the Stations of the Cross in his analysis of The Non-Stop Connolly Show, where he suggests that the backcloths used to set each scene allow the audience to follow the evolution of the narrative in much the same ways as painted panels guide the Christian through the Easter story in the Catholic ritual (221). D'Arcy and Arden specify in their preface to the printed text of The Non-Stop Connolly Show that the intended function of these backcloths is to encourage the

audience to actively create the Possible World in which particular actions will be meaningful:

> We have suggested a series of backcloths which can be fixed singly or two-at-a-time to give the overall atmosphere of each section of the cycle.... The style we have in mind should be based on the formal emblematic tradition of trade union banners, and should be carried out in bright colours with no attempt at impressionism or naturalistic representation. The cloths should include appropriate slogans and captions. (vii)

The scenes portrayed are not simply landscapes, but montage-like images that focus attention on the basic contradictions against which new possibilities are tested, and that give the audience clues as to the breadth of the Possible World they must create in order to make sense of the scenes played out before them. Scenes between Connolly and his wife Lillie, for instance, must be interpreted as events of public significance when they are played out in front of backcloths which do not portray the interior of a home but an emblematic image of the society which governs their domestic relations, as is the case in the pauper's Christmas scene of Part III, which is played before a banner representing

> converging processions of demonstrators representing socialist and nationalist ferment from different parts of the world, in a variety of costumes and with a variety of slogans on their banners in many languages. The whole contained within a border of watchful police of no particular nationality. (123)

Instead of reinforcing the dominant viewpoint that desire is a personal and psychological phenomenon, this contextualization encourages the audience to identify the ways in which the Possible World determines the forms personal relations can take, and obversely to view personal relations as constitutive of the conditions that allow a given Possible World to

function. In a song at the end of the cycle, Lillie verbalizes the ways in which personal relationships can be structured to maintain unjust social conditions, telling the audience directly that she would "rather let him roam/ With the wildest in the world/ Be they women or be they men/ Than lie beside me night by night/ With broken heart and frozen brain--/ For the life of his wife he must go to sleep again?" (435). For his part, Connolly demonstrates how one can attribute meaning to personal relationships by putting them in a social context. In the dream sequence in which he weighs the pros and cons of involvement in the Easter Rising, he replies to the Bird's prohibition against deceiving himself that he is justified in making "private wars" by referring to Lillie's sufferings on his behalf: "Perhaps I do make war/ For no-one else but her--/ What's wrong with that: she is a legion, I can't count/ How many of her there are ..." (415).

Whereas backcloths give the audience visual clues as to the breadth of the Possible World needed to make sense of the action, costumes in The Non-Stop Connolly Show give indications of the degree of precision necessary in creating the agential relations of the proposed Possible World. In their description of masks and costumes D'Arcy and Arden divide the dramaturgic agents of The Non-Stop Connolly Show into three (sometimes overlapping) relational classes: figures which are essentially social functions (military, ecclesiastical, bourgeois-political, and judicial); agents who represent groups (members of the working-class and national liberation movements); and well-known individuals (Connolly, Countess Markiewicz, Larkin, etc.) The first group wear stock masks and uniform, the second are unmasked but show a uniform-like similarity of costume, while in the third case (with the exception of Connolly, who was made to

look like historical portraits) "there was some attempt at accuracy of atmosphere rather than precision of detail" (D'Arcy and Arden, "Socialist" 129). Following Eco's suggestion that ostension in theatrical performance functions by inducing the identification of a class of objects familiar to the spectator, we may conclude that, in this emblematic style of costuming, the degree of individualization indicates the degree of precision to be attained in determining the class to which the particular performance refers. In some cases it is important to identify an agent with a particular historical person, in others the agent serves only to describe the conditions in which the protagonists must test their ideals. In this sense it is important to note, as does Schnabl, that the degree of historically individualized reference indicates the agent's position in the main conflict of the cycle: "Auf der Seite der Sozialisten handelt es sich um geschichtliche Personen, wohingegen die Seite der Kapitalisten mit Ausnahme der Politiker von typenhaften Unternehmern, Offizieren und Geistlichen nebst dem monströsen Archetyp Grabitall bevölkert wird" (111).

While critics like Schvey react negatively to this type of emblematic presentation, others, like Archer, appreciate the stylistic devices which ask the audience "to accept exaggeration for what it is" and which make the autho.s' standpoint clear (40). Clearly, such an appreciation is based on the understanding that dramaturgies can be founded on sets of presuppositions other than those that govern conventional bourgeois drama. This understanding demands that the critic explore the sense-making strategies, and the particular stylistic devices, available to authors who work with non-traditional theatre audiences. Only then can s/he claim to evaluate the

effectiveness of a dramaturgy which contests the hegemony of the society in which it is presented.

Chapter 4
Vandaleur's Folly: Challenging "Natural" Meaning

In their preface to the printed text of Vandaleur's Folly D'Arcy and Arden describe their vision of this play

> as a useful contribution to a better understanding of Anglo-Irish conflict: how reformist advances have continually been set back by aggressive reaction, driving the Irish people again and again to "terrorist" methods: and how this process has so constantly been connived at and assisted by the blindness to their own inbred imperialism of even the most progressive British political and social groups. (ix)

They then go on to describe their difficulties working with the left-wing English 7:84 theatre company, "an organization devoted--as its name suggests[3]--to attacking the capitalist structure of society by means of theatre brought primarily to the working classes" (Vandaleur ix). Their main complaint against 7:84's presentation of their text was that the performers, once D'Arcy and Arden's directing duties were over and they no longer formed part of the collective, removed the news-cuttings and handbills which put the performance into the context of the contemporary Irish troubles. The result was that a "play-plus-context as political activity in itself had been replaced by a play, tout court, that just happened to include some politics in the plot" (Vandaleur xi-xii). The focus had been shifted drastically, from D'Arcy and Arden's concentration on the ways in which audiences know the world to an empiricist portrayal of the "facts" about the early Irish commune. Not surprising then that a reviewer like Robin Thornber, writing in the Manchester Guardian (and apparently

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3 The name 7:84 refers to the fact that 7% of the population of Great Britain controls 84% of the wealth, and this information is included on the company's publicity materials, in connections with its name.

unconscious of the way in which his own certainties confirm D'Arcy and Arden's presuppositions about the English) criticizes the play for not adopting the more British form of David Hare's Fanshen, which in a very English way concentrated on an exposition of empirical facts, and then declares: "I can't go along with the extension of the Orange Order's oppression of the Catholic peasantry to the more complicated situation in Northern Ireland now" (Thornber 12). Tony Allen and Mary Ann Lysaght, writing in the London Plays and Players, reflected this same British preoccupation with empiricism when they complained of D'Arcy and Arden use of the conventions of burlesque melodrama in Vandaleur's Folly,

> the style of which is ridiculously at odds with much of the serious subject matter. The material that cannot be caricatured is therefore sacrificed; consequently there is hardly any exploration of the internal life of the co-op or of the poor peasant Irish who were its members.

This same review ends with the statement that "the thing lacked humour and bawdy, ... it lacked, in a word, Irishness" (33). On the other side of the water, D'Arcy and Arden report that some Irish audience members apparently left at intermission because it did not occur to them that the plot might finish by putting in an ironic light an interpretation based on acceptance of "benevolent paternal landlords with their efforts blessed by the clergy of both denominations" (Vandaleur xii). The strength of these reactions is perhaps best explained by the tense political situation in which Vandaleur's Folly was presented. In discussing Israeli reception of a performance text of Sartre's The Trojan Women during the war with Lebanon in 1983, Avigal and Weitz argue that:

> Exceptional circumstances of utterance, such as the war in Lebanon, intensify all code activation, especially the relevant national codes. Under such circumstances, tolerance and pluralism give way to polarized, antagonistic and even fanatical views. Any theatrical text staged at such a time, will be interpreted in relation to the immediate scene; spectators will tend to focus on signs which may relate iconically to the local reality, and apply the same ideological codes they operate when relating to the historical-national conflict. (Avigal and Weitz 431)

In this light D'Arcy and Arden's choice of melodrama as the dramatic model in which to construct their criticism of unconscious imperialist attitudes is an important strategic move. Historically, melodrama is a form characterized by highly polarized agential structures and associated with exactly those "exceptional circumstances of utterance" which Avigal and Weitz describe. Pixérécourt is generally acknowledged as the first to have shaped this genre's "code" with his plays produced during and after the French Revolution, and the genre was most popular during the crisis periods of the 19th century Industrial Revolution in England and the United States. But as Elam points out, "the histrionic codes ruling Victorian melodrama, for example, survive today only in the form of parodic 'quotation' (i.e. they are still recognized but no longer applicable)" (54). In other words, this particular dramatic model is one which late 20th-century audiences are capable of using as a sense-making frame but whose results they do not take seriously, in contrast to other models which are so habitual that they appear to simply reflect a naturally existing meaning. By using such a code, D'Arcy and Arden embark on a consciousness-raising strategy symmetrically inverse to the one they used in The Non-Stop Connolly Show. Instead of verifying a disputed possibility by the imaginary

creation of the conditions necessary for its existence, the authors use a model which is generally considered as indicative of unrealizable (or purely fictional) Possible Worlds, but they do this to challenge the automatized use of hegemonic sense-making strategies by foregrounding the artificiality of the frame which is necessary to construct meaning.

Traditional melodrama is built around four stock types which Steele identifies as the Villain, the Hero, the Virtuous Woman and the Fool (4-5). These types have such distinct visions and aims that they effectively define separate Possible Worlds: these are partially accessible to one another, but they presuppose different sets of conditions (e.g. profit-based relationships versus mutual-aid relationships). The tension of the melodrama is often built around the uncertainty as to which of these Possible Worlds will predominate, though a basic rule of the genre is that virtue must triumph over vice. Melodrama's extensive use of fixed tableaux, in which performers stop the action in the fictional Possible World (further PW) to pose for the audience, would indicate the aesthetic use of a fifth PW, the theatre spacetime itself (Meisten 58-59). The five PWs of Vandaleur's Folly follow the same pattern, but with significant differences.

The first, and concentrically encompassing, PW in Vandaleur's Folly is the Theatre PW, in which performers carry out actions to be observed by spectators. The performers are identified mainly by the fact that they wear theatrical versions of 19th-century garb and speak in such a way as to be heard by all present. While audience members are restricted to a specific seating area, performers may be seen both in this area and on a simple platform stage, set with a painted backcloth of the type used in The Non-Stop Connolly Show, and (in an ideal performance text) framed by display

boards covered with newspaper clippings, posters, and handbills concerning the Troubles in contemporary Ireland.[4] Presumably programmes or publicity material will have identified the play as "an Anglo-Irish Melodrama," but the first clues the audience receives from performers about the frame to be used to interpret the action are in the form of a prologue in which the Presenter asks directly, "What came you into this wilderness to see ...? (Vandaleur 3). During this same scene voices all around the audience cry, "End British Rule, Get out of Ireland now, Troops out, Brits out...!" while a Singer presents a traditional Irish tune, with lyrics which link the fictional action to the contemporary political situation: "How long will it fall, O as sharp as a knife?/Till the dogteeth of England let go of our life./Let go of our heart and the voice in our throat:/Till the day of that good-morning, no end to the fight...." (4-5) Attention is again drawn to this PW during the scene in which Robert Owens lectures in Dublin, where performers sit amongst the audience and so model possible reactions to the various discourses about the Irish situation (23-29). A final direct use is in the Epilogue, in which one dramatis persona repeats the Irish song, another explains to the audience what happened after Vandaleur's disappearance, and a third again links the fictional worlds to the contemporary Irish nationalist movement (95-97).

The four other PWs which form the inner circle or "stage PWs" of Vandaleur's Folly follow closely the basic melodramatic model, and each is defined by a distinct set of agents, imaginary spaces and forms of relationship, which are described largely by the way the agents organize and

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4 I deduce this organization of the theatre space from D'Arcy and Arden's prologue, stage directions within the printed text, and the photograph of the production which appears above Allen and Lysaght's review of the performance text in Plays and Players.

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the Orangeman Baker-Fortescue and including Wilberforce, the gentlemen of the Orange Order, the High Sheriff, Hagan, Hastings, and the Soldiers. This world is centered in the suggestively named Hellfire Club and is characterized by its predatory relationship with all the other fictional PWs and by its inflammatory discourse. In close proximity to this is the Utopian Socialist PW, which is centered around Vandaleur's estate and which is controlled primarily by the Vandaleur and Craig, with the support of other upper-class philanthropists--Owen, the Lord Mayor, and the Archbishop. It is marked by an empiricist narrowness of vision which refuses to see particular experiments in the light of larger struggles, and which often isolates its chief agents by the use of excessively formal language patterns (e.g. Vandaleur addresses his wife as "Mrs. Vandaleur"). In this sense the Utopian Socialist PW parallels the world of the active but uncomprehending Fool, who, in classical melodrama, "usually speaks in dialect and uses a great deal of slang ... [and] in addition to providing comic relief...helps bring the play to its conclusion" (Steele 5). The Peasant Rebellion PW, which is centered on the fields and coastline of the imaginary Ralahine and is formed by Michael and the other peasants, corresponds agentially to the Virtuous Woman who is "victim of the Villain's misdeeds ... often bold, can at times defend herself and is willing to suffer rather than see the Villain gain his despicable goal" (Steele 5). Its relationships are characterized by common efforts to change material reality, so that its agents form a collective intended-beneficiary of the play's plot, and its discourse refers constantly to a mythic sense of Ireland's past. The last PW, which Steele identifies with a Hero whose duty it is "to protect the innocent, rescue the victim of the Villain's misdeeds and finally to completely defeat the schemes of the Villain," is controlled by Roxana,

45 Roisin, Anna, and Thompson, and is characterized precisely by its lack of a fixed spatial center (Steele 5). Agents in this Potential Saviour PW display a consistent ideological and therefore spatial "otherness", and the boundaries of their PW are determined mainly by the bodily presence of one of its agents. Significantly, the agents around whom this PW is built are all betrayed by their bodies: Roisin is a hunchback, Thompson dies of tuberculosis (only to leave his brain to science!), Roxana is a social pariah because of her mixed race, and Anna cannot get recognition as an intellectual because she is female. Further the Potential Saviour PW is itself split into two sub-worlds whose agents never come in contact with each other: that of the intellectual Thompson and Anna, and that of the physically active Roisin and Roxana. This in itself is a metaphor for the problems of the Irish rebellion in which all the elements for successfuly challenging the Colonialist hegemony are present, but are unable to structure themselves into any form of collective agency. The itinerant or nomadic character of the bearers of this PW does, however, assure them virtually complete access (either discursively or physically, depending on their subworld) to other the PWs in the play. In fact, their attempts to save the colonized consist mainly of moving through the other fictional PWs to discover hidden information (e.g. Hastings' whereabouts, Wilberforce's mission in Ireland, the real reasons behind the revolts of the Irish peasants). The only other agents with any capacity to consciously enter a PW other than their own are those centered in the Peasant Rebellion PW. Michael and the other peasants have no choice but to act out the roles set out for them by the Colonialist hegemony (e.g. victims or fugitives) or by the Utopian Socialist PW (the English dance at the harvest celebration), yet they succeed in maintaining their own centre of identity in their particular

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PW. The agents of the Colonialist PW clearly have no interest in simply accessing another PW; when Baker-Fortescue sets out to hunt his servant-maid in the commune's fields, or lures Vandaleur into the Hellfire Club, he is attempting to destroy the PW he encounters by taking both ideological and spatial control. This is exactly the flaw Vandaleur has carried from the Colonialist PW into his new Utopian Socialist PW: not only does he not attempt to enter the Peasant Rebellion PW, he only barely succeeds in recognizing its existence, as demonstrated by his shock at Hasting's death and his ignorance of the existence of a secret society. In fact, much of the action of the Utopian Socialist PW is directed at imposing its values and methods on the peasants, while maintaining control through "scientific" management and the ownership of the land.

There is a fundamental incongruity in the arrangement of agents in these four PWs in Vandaleur's Folly. While the classical categories of melodrama can still be used, these are populated by agents who by reason of class, nationality or gender would not normally be associated with them: an English landlord dedicated to the well-being of the peasants on his estate plays the Fool, a male guerrilla-fighter and his peasant co-workers play the "damsel in distress," and an American female of mixed race, dressed in men's clothing, saves the day. D'Arcy and Arden's use of melodramatic structure in Vandaleur's Folly is a classic example of ludic transgression embodied in carnivalesque uncrowning procedures, which expose the artificial nature of hierarchical social systems by using traditional forms to organize material generally considered incompatible with them. In such a system the sense-making categories continue to function, despite their "unnatural" contents, and so the observer is forced to create PWs which can

account for the combination of a known frame or convention and an unaccustomed message. In doing so s/he must foreground her/his presuppositions in a manner similar to that which applies to the declaration of rules in Huizinga's game or Bateson's play situations, where spectator attention is drawn simultaneously to the message and to the frame necessary to interpret the message.

As Bristol makes clear in Carnival and Theatre, travesty is one of the key compositional elements of popular uncrowning procedures, in which "identity is made questionable by mixing of attributes--'code switching'--or by grotesque exaggeration" (65). In Vandaleur's Folly, uncrowning is largely played out through travesty of gender. Baker-Fortescue is portrayed as a grotesque example of "a man's man," and important use is made of "code-switching" in the presentation of agents in both the Peasant Rebellion and the Potential Saviour PWs. On the simplest level this is effected by disguising an agent in the clothing of another gender: peasant guerrillas disguise themselves in women's shawls to avoid detection as they murder Hastings. But this scene, which is the audience's first introduction to the fictional worlds of the Irish setting, already contains a warning that appearances are not reliable indicators of identity, for once it is established that the agents wearing shawls are in fact male peasants, the female Roisin appears on the scene in the same garb. A later scene in which Roxana and Emily attempt to pass themselves off as men in the Hellfire Club gives a more reliable clue to the type of identity construction used in the PWs of this dramaturgy: it is not the attire, but Roxana's "extravagant feats" with a pair of pistols that settles the question of their gender. Emily draws the lesson for the audience when she returns to the hotel: "Doesn't she know

lesson for the audience when she returns to the hotel: "Doesn't she know that Baker-Fortescue is called what they call him [the rapist] because he does? Oh, cousin, you do know, you crafty colonial, oh that's why you have me out of it in the very heat of apprehension..." (32 and 36). Both the women physically disguise themselves in the clothing of the masculine gender, but only Roxana is capable of acting the part well enough to be identified as masculine. This agrees with Judith Butler's contention that "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time--an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (270). D'Arcy makes a very similar argument in her essay "Lift the Taboo," in which she explains the demand that female performers be allowed to play male roles:

> We are perfectly accustomed to a youngish man playing the aged King Lear, to an Irish actor playing a German, to a twentieth-century actor playing a sixteenth-century character, to a mother of children playing the virginal Juliet, and as we watch their performances we are well aware of the discrepancies: but if the actors know their business we very soon forget to notice them. We are in the theatre to be persuaded by the exercise of artistic skill, which is in turn dependent upon the actor's training and many years of theatrical tradition. (Awkward 148)

D'Arcy and Arden put into practice their belief that gender can be acted out regardless of sex in their insistence that in professional productions of Vandaleur's Folly, after the publication of the text in 1982, the male roles be played by women. While no such performances have taken place to date, it would seem reasonable to assume that the extension of the travesty of gender into the theatrical PW could only enhance

audience awareness of the artificial nature of gender as a sense-making structure.

It is also important to underline, in light of the phenomenological argument on which Butler bases her conclusion, that emphasis on activity as the primary constitutive element of identity has repercussions far beyond gender identification. As Elin Diamond points out, "gender in fact provides a perfect illustration of ideology at work since 'feminine' or 'masculine' behaviour usually appears to be a 'natural'--and thus fixed and unalterable--extension of biological sex" (84). Thus, the question of gender is an important locus for discussion not only of relationships between men and women, but also of the more general relationship between the naturally existing body and the socially-constructed discourse by which meanings are attributed to it. This relationship between nature and socially constructed meaning is a constant image-set throughout Vandaleur's Folly, where the plot develops as a moving away from the dominance of the PW in which meaning is made to appear "natural." The Villain Baker-Fortescue, who is at the centre of a world in which agents assert naturally-existing meaning but can only maintain this pretension by force, is subject to a series of socially motivated defeats. These start with the peasants' collective refusal to let him ride through the fields of the cooperative in pursuit of a servant and culminate in the scene in which he is forced to shoot himself in order to protect the honour of the Orange Order. Vandaleur, who searches for naturally existing meaning through the study of agriculture, is defeated because his preoccupation with physical realities is matched by an insensitivity to the socially constructed reality around him, as demonstrated in the introductory scene in which he is so preoccupied with

opposed to agency), either when he defeats Baker-Fortescue by accidentally causing the latter's pants to fall with a shot to the belt-buckle, or when he loses the cooperative at a gambling table. In contrast, Michael and the other peasants are extremely conscious of the importance of social constructs in ordering material reality, as evidenced in both their terrorist activities under the aegis of the mythical Lady Clare and in their questions, when the cooperative is proposed to them, about rent and decision-making powers. Finally, action in the Potential Saviour PW is constructed almost entirely around verbal manifestations of social meaning-construction: Thompson and Anna's writings (as opposed to the community-centre roof), the paper with which Roxana will prove that Baker-Fortescue and Wilberforce are involved in the slave trade, Roisin's plaintive song telling the moral of the tale during the epilogue. This is why the salvationism remains only potential and is presumably one of the main reasons why the peasant rebellion is defeated. Yet despite its defeat in the play, it is the Peasant Rebellion PW, which functions both in discursive and in material systems, that is seen to continue through the founding of the Republican Brotherhood in America.

With Vandaleur's Folly, D'Arcy and Arden are gambling on making an audience conscious of the frames it habitually uses to make a series of events mean something. This consciousness should ideally induce the audience to give up automatic responses conditioned by the contemporary hegemony, such as "the blindness to their own inbred imperialism" denounced in the prologue (Vandaleur ix). The process of learning new frames is made more tolerable (an important consideration given the crisis situation in contemporary Ireland) by clearly delimiting the time and space

denounced in the prologue (Vandaleur ix). The process of learning new frames is made more tolerable (an important consideration given the crisis situation in contemporary Ireland) by clearly delimiting the time and space within which the experimentation with new possibilities takes place; here is where the frankly fictional, and even parodic, nature of melodrama on the modern stage comes into play. The clearly delimited fictional nature of the model makes it relatively safe for the audience to attempt new combinations, since there is no apparent requirement for automatized transfer of these presuppositions to the everyday empirical world. But D'Arcy and Arden's insistence on the inclusion of newsclippings about the contemporary Irish Troubles and on the use of female performers to play male roles testifies that this does not at all mean such a transfer--once de-automatized--is not desirable or necessary. The point is precisely that, once new frames have been tested in the relatively safe counterfactual world of the theatre, they should be added to the audience members' repertoires of strategies for making political sense of the world in which they live their day-to-day lives.

Chapter 5
The Ballygombeen Bequest and The Little Gray Home in the West: The Development of a Standpoint

Because the last of D'Arcy and Arden's Irish stage plays, The Little Gray Home in the West, is a rewritten version of The Ballygombeen Bequest, the first of the series of Irish plays, it invites analysis of the ways in which D'Arcy and Arden's dramaturgy evolved through the 1970s. The Ballygombeen Bequest was initially presented in an amateur production at St.Mary's College in Belfast in 1972, and was then taken up by the 7:84 Company for the Edinburgh Festival and a tour of England. Presentations of The Ballygombeen Bequest were stopped at the end of 1972 as the result of a libel action, which was settled out of court in 1977 by an agreement which prevented any further publication or performance of the text. Fortunately for scholars, the original text was published in the American periodical Scripts, and it is to this version that I will refer here. The Little Gray Home in the West was first given a full production by the Drama Department of Bristol University, and published by Pluto Press, in 1982 (Page, Arden on File 46-47). A comparison of the two versions reveals not only changes which would protect the authors from further libel actions, but also a changed emphasis in the dramaturgy itself.

The printed text of The Ballygombeen Bequest reflects a performance style typical of 7:84 productions of the period, which were designed to be played in working-men's clubs and bars as part of the regular evening entertainment. In an article entitled "Mediating Contemporary Reality" John McGrath, 7:84's founder, identifies the characteristics of this style as directness, comedy, music, emotion, variety, effect, immediacy, and localism (McGrath, A Good Night Out 54-58). In other articles in the same

book, McGrath explains at length both the pragmatic and the aesthetic reasons for these choices, which range from the difficulty of getting and holding audience attention in a non-theatre venue like a miner's club (73-75), to the fact that working class audiences raised on pantomime have the "sophistication of the audience of the folk tales, [and are] able to shift ground with ease if given secure guidance" (29). The Ballygombeen Bequest, whose form takes these considerations into account, is played in a style which most resembles music hall or the traditional Christmas pantomime, and which prefigures some of the dramaturgic strategies to be developed in the later Irish stage plays. Like The Non-Stop Connolly Show, it constructs emblematic images of the conditions which make rebellion against exploitation and colonialism possible. Like Vandaleur's Folly, it calls attention to the artificiality of the frames within which the audience habitually makes sense of stories of resistance. Ten years later, D'Arcy and Arden's dramaturgy in The Little Gray Home in the West shows more sophistication in combining these strategies to contest hegemonic patterns of knowing through an increased emphasis on what I shall here discuss as "standpoint" (see pages 22-23 of this thesis).

Both The Ballygombeen Bequest and The Little Gray Home in the West are identified as melodramas by D'Arcy and Arden, and are constructed, as is Vandaleur's Folly, around the five PWs common to the melodramatic form (see the preceding chapter). The Theatre PW is used extensively. Direct addresses to the audience, songs, asides, and on-stage costume changes foreground the fact that this is a performance and that it aims at influencing the audience. The Villains in both texts are centered in a Business PW in which profit is the key to meaning construction and

defines human relationships for colonialists and the bourgeois Irish nationalists alike. Both the colonialist English landlord (whose name is changed from Hollidey-Cheype to Baker-Fortescue between the two versions, presumably to deal with the libel action) and Hagan, the "nationalist" exploiter, can conceive of relationships only in terms of the money to be made through them. In both texts the English Landlord is introduced as he discovers he has inherited the Irish property. His reaction makes it clear that, though this is an inheritance, he has no personal or emotional link to the property, and that he can only understand it in terms of a market-based epistemology: "No, no, it's a dead loss: I'll not accept: I'll sell it." (Ballygombeen 6, Little 13) Hagan is presented in a similar manner by Theresa, who questions his reliability in conversation with Seamus "That Hagan'd tell you anything. Doesn't he dilute the very petrol from his pump with a pint of paraffin to every gallon?" (Little 17) Spatially this PW is centered in institutions of leisure and consumption, such as the landlord's club in England or Driscoll's bar in Ireland. It should be noted that linking of the two capitalist camps in one PW is in itself a radical strategy in an Irish context, for it sets the principal contradiction in the play as between capital and the people, rather than between Irish and English.

On the other side of the melodramatic equation, the intended beneficiaries, or Virtuous Victims, function in an Irish People's PW, in which relationships and physical use define value. The O'Learys are the main agents in this PW, but are clearly to be taken as an exemplum of the other Irish folk, such as those whom Mulholland and Padraic later try to organize. This PW is also introduced by a reaction to the inheritance, in which Seamus announces Lord Ballyhob's death to Theresa, and she

55 responds that the news had already been in the newspaper. Seamus demonstrates his reliance on relationship (and his dependence on captialist authority) to structure knowledge by replying: "Oh, it was: but I've confirmed it. I had it quite definite from Tim Hagan at the petrol pump." (Ballygombeen 9, Little 17) In this PW land and property are described not in terms of profit-making potential, but in terms of their particular physical characteristics and their ability to sustain life: the vermin in the unrepaired thatch of the cottage, the poor workmanship of Hagan's renovations, Theresa's pregnancy and nursing, and illness caused by poor housing and working conditions--all are foregrounded in both texts. The imaginary spatial centre of this PW is the O'Learys' cottage and working farm, and it is the O'Learys' work on the land, and their relationship to those who have previously worked on it, which establishes their claim to it.

As is generally the case in the melodramatic genre, the O'Learys in their Virtuous Victim role are affected by the Villains' actions, but have very little ability to move the plot forward on their own initiative, so two more PWs must be established to allow plot development. In the first case, a Collaboration PW functions as a satellite of the Business PW, into which the agents centered in the People's PW pass when they attempt to profit from some of the Business PW's rules. In the Collaboration PW, the People's PW agents play the role of the fool in the melodramatic genre by taking actions whose negative consequences they do not foresee, but which do move the plot forward. Seamus enters this PW when he follows Hagan's advice after a visit to Driscoll's bar, and tries to negotiate his rights with the landlord, only to put in peril his family's traditional relationship to the land. Padraic too enters this PW when he accepts McCreek's advice

56 to cross the border to sell his ponies in order to raise money for legal fees. It is noteworthy that in both cases, the move from the People's PW to the Collaboration PW is marked by a move into an imaginary space controlled by the Business PW, be it Driscoll's bar or Ulster.

The Potential Saviour PW is marked as in most melodrama, by an inverse movement, in which an outsider arrives on the scene to save the victims. In both The Ballygombeen Bequest and The Little Gray Home in the West this role is played by Padraic and Mulholland, who arrive from outside to assure the dominance of the People's PW over the Business PW, and who attribute meaning to relationships according to the potential contribution these relationships can make to this change. While these two firmly identify themselves with the people, their PW is one of "otherness," a non-specific imaginary space of exile whose location is defined mainly in a negative sense: it is not the everyday living space of the Irish people. However the exact nature of the imaginary space in which the Potential Saviour PW is centered changes between The Ballygombeen Bequest and The Little Gray Home in the West. While the same five PWs exist in both texts, the increased emphasis on standpoint in the later play leads to important differences in the construction and accessibility of its PWs.

Throughout The Little Gray Home in the West bearing and material context are delineated much more clearly than was the case in The Ballygombeen Bequest, and nowhere are the effects of this change more important than in the construction of the Potential Saviour PW and its relationship to the Business PW. Whereas Padraic's introduction to his family's conflict with the landlord comes immediately after his entrance in The Ballygombeen Bequest, through the reception of a letter sent to his

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dead father, in The Little Gray Home in the West Padraic is portrayed first meeting Hagan in front of Seamus' grave. Rather than describing the conflict to the audience through the verbal device of the letter, D'Arcy and Arden demonstrate the complex relationship between the Irish nationalist section of the Business PW and the Potential Saviour PW in this scene. Hagan tells the audience that he doesn't care for Padraic's political rhetoric, then pretends to befriend Padraic in his grief for his dead father by offering him the job that would allow him to stay in Ireland, only to end the scene by declaring to the audience:

> They've told him nothing of the state of affairs. Life-tenancy Agreement - ha! When he finds out, there'll be ructions: and Tim Hagan is now established as the sympathetic friend and compassionate counsellor. I am, you see, a business man/ I look for the main chance where I can. (42)

At the same time it is established that there is a material reason for Padraic's exile, and his later discussions of what he learned during his years in Manchester, and of how it might apply to his current situation, demonstrate that his interest in political organizing is not purely intellectual, but the result of experience. The same is true for Mulholland in the revised text. In The Ballygombeen Bequest Mulholland appears briefly out of nowhere to describe the strategy of the Official IRA in organizing factory workers and to offer to solve the O'Leary's problems with a bomb (39-41). In The Little Gray Home in the West Mulholland enters with a paint pot and a brush and, rather than talking about political work, actually puts up posters with slogans representing the positions of the Official IRA. Further, he does not appear out of nowhere but explains that his exile was due to seven years of internment and that his support of the

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Civil Rights movement, like Padraic's support of the labour movement, comes not from indirect knowledge but from experience (47-48). In this sense the Potential Saviour PW becomes a section of the People's PW, which functions completely with its boundaries, (just as, in 1970s political rhetoric, the revolutionary fish must function in the popular sea) and into which agents who have been forced into exile can return with new knowledge which feeds the struggle of the People's PW from within. The importance of this change in D'Arcy and Arden's view of the Potential Saviour PW is underlined by a change they made in Hagan's criticism of Mulholland. In both texts Hagan considers Padraic a greater danger than Mulholland, but the reason for this distrust changes substantially. In The Ballygombeen Bequest both Mulholland and Padraic are portrayed as romantic heroes who are somewhat contemptuous of the people they attempt to enlighten, and whose political action can be evaluated exclusively on the level of discourse. In this light Hagan fears Padraic more than Mulholland because he thinks his discourse more dangerous to the Business PW:

> For Mulholland, Ballygombeen is peripheral, he has said:
> For all his clear speech he is very thick in his big head.
> But Padraic O'Leary is a threat of a different size.
> Educate, Agitate-and bloody well Organize...
> He would drive down the rich to bring up the poor:
> I don't want that class of beggar come battering at my door! (41)

In The Little Gray Home in the West, Hagan considers Padraic the more dangerous of the two political organizers, not because of any difference in his discourse (there is indeed much more unity between the

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two agents), but because of his positioning or bearing in space and time. Speaking of Mulholland he says:

> Now that feller, passing through the place twice a year with his begrudging pamphlets, is no danger to anyone, unless and until he slaps his mildew into the groin of a young man with a legitimate grievance who is determined to remain here and bloody root himself.... (59)

While the changes in The Little Gray Home in the West allow a much greater degree of access from the Potential Saviour PW to the People's PW, this change implies that that something more is needed for a successful challenge to the Business PW hegemony. D'Arcy and Arden seem to be proposing that a way must be found for this access to be available without the need to pass through an intermediary spacetime of exile. While the suggestion that the border between the Potential Saviour and the People's PW must become more directly, and mutually, permeable is not fully realized in the script, such a possibility is announced in the Theatre PW when the still-living Theresa and Siobhan are linked with the dead Padraic at the closing song and dance.

It is in this encompassing Theatre PW that D'Arcy and Arden's new emphasis on standpoint has led to some of the most striking changes between the two variants of this play. In The Ballygombeen Bequest the fact that the audience is dealing with a counterfactual world is underlined by the continuous presence of a stage band, one of whose members is the Narrator. This agent contributes information the audience needs to construct the appropriate PWs, as in his first intervention: "Nineteen hundred and forty-five/ Not only the Lieutenant-Colonel is glad to be

alive" (6). He also moves from the ideologically, and therefore spatially, undefined universe of the theatrical presentation into the villainous Business PW to play a number of relatively minor roles, including those of Hagan and the Officer, as the plot requires. Throughout The Ballygombeen Bequest, the Theatre PW and the Business PW are thoroughly, and almost exclusively, accessible to one another. It is Hollidey-Cheype who first adresses th audience in this PW and who most frequently uses it to tell the audience directly how he expects them to interpret the action on the stage: stage directions in the scene of his first meeting with the O'Learys specify that his asides are addressed directly to the audience, while all but two of those made by Seamus and Theresa O'Leary are addressed to each other (10-13). This pattern continues throughout the play, and the limited accessibility of the Theatre PW for dramaturgic agents other than those of the Business PW effectively creates a structure in which the Business PW controls the description of rules for making sense of the action. On the other hand, the People's PW is portrayed as an object of study in which conflict can be demonstrated but not directly articulated in discourse. This pattern is, of course, common to all melodrama, where it is the Villain's actions and not the victim's that move the action forward. In order to demonstrate the artificial--and therefore transformable--nature of this sense making strategy, these limitations on direct discourse must be transgressed, and this is what Padraic, as Potential Saviour, does in his first and last appearances on the stage in The Ballygombeen Bequest. His entrance at the beginning of Scene 4, where he describes his father's death and his own late arrival for the funeral, marks the first time an agent from a non-Business PW introduces himself directly to the audience. And the play ends with a classic example of ludic uncrowning, as Padraic provokes a custard pie fight

31 between the two Villains, then addresses the audience directly to underline the fictional nature of the action on the stage and the possibility of learning from it to take action in the everyday world:

> When you act in a play it is easy to say
> That we shall win and never be defeated
> When you go from here it is not so clear
> That power for the people is predestined-
> Giddy-i-aye but don't forget
> Giddy-i-aye you must remember
> Giddy-i-aye tiddle-iddle oo
> There are more of us than them (50).

In contrast, the Theatre PW in The Little Gray Home in the West functions not mainly as a site of transgression against the Business PW hegemony, but as a site of conflict between competing discourses. The first step in achieving this effect is the elimination of the Narrator, the only agent in The Ballygombeen Bequest who was centered in the ideologically and spatially undefined Theatre PW. In his place stands Padraic, who now makes the first address to the audience in a prologue which, like the introductions to the major segments of The Non-Stop Connolly Show, directs audience attention to the conditions that enable them to make sense of a particular state of affairs: "My tongue is in another's throat/ Explaining, arguing, persuading fruitlessly how it should all come about/ That I am dead and cannot walk alive upon my own" (11). Padraic further sets up the performance as a verification of his own standpoint by introducing the English landlord in terms of the effects he will have on the O'Learys, by closing the first act with the suggestion that it was only a prologue to the real story of his death, by introducing the second act with an analysis of the

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world political situation, and by delivering the same epilogue as in The Ballygombeen Bequest. This pattern is reinforced not only by Padraic's constant presence as an observer of the action in the other PWs, but also by his role as a guide who provides information necessary for the construction of each of the PWs, and who can gain access to any PW through minor roles like that of the club servant, the postman, and himself as a small boy. However, while Padraic controls the Theatre PW of The Little Gray Home in the West, he does not have exclusive access to it, and agents from the other PWs, and particularly the Business PW, also address the audience directly to assert their own rules of sense making. So for instance, when Padraic describes the political context of the action in 1958, the landlord Baker-Fortescue proposes an opposing version of what the world events mean:

> Padraic: The Americans have a prodigious huge bomb
> That can bring the whole world to an end
> If we do not do what they tell us to do
> We cannot be their little small friend.
> They will leave us alone to cry and to groan
> Like Anthony Eden with his face to the wall
> Who weeps and weeps for the Suez Canal.
>
> Baker-Fortescue: Serve him right. Yellow belly. Doesn't know where his bread's buttered, Personally I find the Yankees exceedingly civil: provided one remembers their idiosyncrasies. (23)

By setting up the Theatre PW as one of conflicting rules of sense-making, D'Arcy and Arden construct The Little Gray Home in the West as a struggle between conflicting discourses that calls for a conscious choice of a sense making strategy. By choosing a dead man as the main representative

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of an alternate political discourse, the authors foreground their own standpoint as creators of a theatre whose purpose is to give voice to those positions and opinions which cannot be freely expressed in the society in which they live. Padraic's own end stands as a stern warning to those who wish to avoid making such a choice, for it is when he decides to forget politics for a moment, in order to deal with supposedly "simple" economic necessity, that he falls into Baker-Fortescue's trap by crossing the border to sell his ponies (66). By doing so he has effectively accepted the supposedly ideology-free marketing epistemology of the Business PW, and entered a world within which he can only be a victim. But The Little Gray Home in the West does not end here; the uncrowning scene of The Ballygombeen Bequest is left intact and Padraic maintains control of the Theatre PW by returning to attribute his own meaning to the events the audience has just witnessed. The result is a text which demonstrates that, while conflicting discourses and Possible Worlds are a material reality within which all of us must position ourselves, our intervention in the world cannot be reduced to taking a stand. Ultimately, D'Arcy and Arden would seem to say that like Padraic, we must learn to change the world both by acting and by observing action, for, when all is said and done, the meaning is in the telling as much as in the tale.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

Most post-68 political popular theatre is characterized by a preoccupation with the ways in which meaning is attributed to events. In their Irish stage plays, D'Arcy and Arden have developed particular dramaturgic strategies to explore this problem. Chief among these strategies is the foregrounding of the encompassing Theatre Possible World within which the performance takes place, and in which performers guide the spectator in the choice of appropriate frames for making sense of the action in the inner or "stage Possible Worlds." On the simplest level this foregrounding is achieved visually, through the use of such emblematic presentational devices as painted backcloths, masks, stock costumes for groups of agents, cross-gender casting, and on-stage costume changes. All these elements are designed to draw attention to the fact that the events the audience is observing are not "really" happening but are being presented to them by performers who are structuring the presentation to influence the audience in particular ways. By drawing attention to the "unreal" nature of the performance, D'Arcy and Arden create an atmosphere in which there is a greater likelihood that spectators will feel safe enough to explore alternative sense-making structures. Given the context in which these authors work, the importance of this safety factor cannot be overestimated. D'Arcy and Arden themselves have been sued for libel over The Ballygombeen Bequest, and D'Arcy has twice been jailed for participating in public protests against the conditions of Irish nationalist political prisoners. In "Censorship and Cultural Consensus" the authors detail their experiences with "indirect and self-induced censorship" around issues of

Irish nationalism. Among the most striking of these instances is the message, conveyed through their agent, that

> London subsidised theatre and the BBC would not look at joint Arden/D'Arcy work D'Arcy--an Irish citizen--was assumed to be the political activist in the partnership, and--as Martin Esslin of the BBC put it--only genuine Arden work was thought to be acceptable. (49)

Still, safety is no more than a necessary condition for the real work of political theatre, and D'Arcy and Arden do not stop at this relatively superficial level; their use of a foregrounded Theatre PW serves to expose the ways in which different sense-making structures, expressed in the theatre as Possible Worlds, interact in the context of the current cultural hegemony. As I have shown in the previous chapters, their two basic strategies for doing this are ludic transgression and the confrontation of competing standpoints. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, but are used in various combinations, and on various levels, to make audiences aware of their automatized modes of sense-making and to reinforce non-hegemonic alternatives.

Ludic transgression in the Theatre PW of D'Arcy and Arden's work takes many forms On the simplest level it may involve the use of female performers to play masculine roles, or the use of puppets, lost trousers, and custard pie fights to make respected and/or feared authority figures look ridiculous. As we saw in Chapter 4, all these manifestations have the effect of casting doubt on those sense-making instances which, by virtue of constant repetition over a long period of time, have come to appear to have a natural meaning. On another level, D'Arcy and Arden use variable individualization of dramaturgic agents to achieve the same end. In all the

Irish stage plays capitalist agents are the least individualized and revolutionary agents the most. Grabitall, in The Non-Stop Connolly Show, is actually played in a mask and Baker-Fortesque, in both Vandaleur's Folly and The Little Gray Home in the West, and Hollidey-Cheype, in Ballygombeen Bequest, are so one-dimensional as to function in the same way as masked characters, who are only of interest when viewed from a particular angle. For D'Arcy and Arden, this angle is clearly that of the social conditions they represent. On the other hand rebels like Connolly, Roxana, and Padraic are all shown as having internal conflicts though, as a rule, not over values but ways to put them into practice: Connolly debates strategy with the Bird of the legend-time prologue, Roxana has to decide whether to confront the man she loves with the evidence of his involvement in the slavetrade, Padraic hesitates about returning to England with his mother and sister. Agents in all the Saviour PWs must choose the world they will live in, whereas agents in Villainous PWs try to enforce their notion that they, and their subordinates, are in their "natural" places. The main conflict in these plays is over the question of the enforcement or defeat of "natural" meaning. It is this dramaturgic device and epistemological focus that allows D'Arcy and Arden to show rebellious agents triumphing over rulers in the Theatre PW, even when they have lost in the thematized conflict. All of these plays end with direct presentations to the audience by agents who, because of death or exile, are no longer centered in the imaginary space of a stage PW, and yet who maintain control of sense-making in the Theatre PW by literally "having the last word."

Once doubt is cast on the natural character of generally accepted meanings, the question becomes: what are the new sense-making strategies and how can they be created? It is clearly not enough to simply invert traditional meanings, as would be the case if D'Arcy and Arden were content, for instance, to show that gender-inversion is possible in the traditionally highly gendered roles of the melodramatic form. To stop at this would be to leave intact a system of stage worlds in which Victims would always have to simply await the arrival of Potential "Saviours," and where these "Saviours" would never succeed in consolidating the spatialized centre necessary to pose a real danger to the hegemony of the Villain. D'Arcy and Arden subvert this system by concentrating on the standpoints, or bearings in time and space, which can generate new sense-making structures. In The Non-Stop Connolly Show they construct their whole Theatre PW around the use of a non-traditional but culturally coded performance space, in the form of the Dublin headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. Rather than imposing the conventional meaning-structures of bourgeois dramaturgy on the usual inhabitants of this space, they attempted, as I have shown in Chapter 3, to use the sense-making structures which inform regular trade-union work in Ireland to support a new dramaturgy. This same pattern can be seen in the conflicts between the inner stage worlds of all the Irish plays. The stage PWs are all defined around a spatial centre of agential activity, and it is this activity which gives rise to new ways of making sense of the action. Villain PWs in the three melodramas are, for example, centered around institutions of consumption and leisure, and the discourse of their inhabitants is one of consumption of previously existing wealth, while

their action when they move outside the central space of their own PW is characterized by destructive movement over, but not settling down into, the other PWs. So for instance, Baker-Fortescue in Vandaleur's Folly tries to ride over the fields of the cooperative, and his namesake in The Little Gray Home in the West walks over the property but never actually lives (or even spends the night) there. The Victims, for their part, are generally concerned with simply holding their ground and keeping the Villain from carrying off the profits of their labours. Fools can see only the empirical structures, and not the power structures, of other PWs so that they are trapped within a system which works to the advantage of the Villain. The Saviours have the problem of finding a territory to call their own and their main activity is a search for information and support. In D'Arcy and Arden's best works, among which I would include The Non-Stop Connolly Show and The Little Gray Home in the West, agents representing these different standpoints confront each other in the Theatre PW by making direct addresses to the audience, which aim to control this PW's frame-setting function according to the rules of their respective stage PWs. This forces the audience to consciously choose the frame within which they will make sense of the action. That the choice is heavily weighted in favour of working-class agents in plays like The Non-Stop Connolly Show and The Little Gray Home in the West must be considered a new use of the principle of ludic transgression, for it has the effect of exposing and challenging the hegemonic sense-making structures which audiences raised on conventional theatre (and on "normal" print and electronic media) use habitually. More importantly though, it proves the possibility of building new sense-making structures, by demonstrating the conditions necessary for these structures to become reality, in the form of a set of fictional but

significant agents, anchored in time and space, who do actually make sense of the world in these new ways.

This, I believe, is the most important political gesture in D'Arcy and Arden's political theatre: the creation of a dramaturgy that induces the audience to explore new sense-making structures, and ultimately, to transfer the most useful of them into their everyday political world.

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