

True on the Inside: Narrative Authenticity and
Community in Irish Oral Performance

by

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Introduction

Storytelling is one of the most essential means of human communication. Stories are used to lull children to sleep, to pass along traditions, to communicate daily experiences and to dramatize events. Stories, intrinsically linked to their communities, are particular products of their cultural origin. There are a number of different kinds of storytelling, and the act is referred to differently in various disciplines. Oral tradition, verbal art, and oral performance are the forms that will be discussed throughout this study. Within these forms of storytelling, there are different modes of conveying story.

The purpose of this project is to examine why Irish oral performance is an effective storytelling medium, and what are the elements that contribute to its being resonant within multiple communities. The most important component of research for this project was the performance of *Our Day Will Come*, a project constructed to explore the questions of narrative authenticity and community in Irish oral performance. For this project my role was as actor/dramaturg, and I worked alongside two other actors: Zach LeClair and Emma Sherr-Ziarko, under the guidance of director David Jaffe. The role of the dramaturg is usually to research and provide context for a play. For this project that role was somewhat modified. My research not only provided context for the frame we constructed, but helped us to determine exactly how we would structure the performance. This project was born out of Seamus Heaney's text *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone*, a text chosen because of its Irish sensibility and relationship to Irish tradition as well as its

flexibility as a text, which proved necessary for constructing our interpretive frame. For our purposes, we placed the Antigone world within a “meta-world” in which friends were gathering in a pub for the purpose of mourning their friends, characters in the Antigone story. Through this play, I explored various storytelling means to determine how narrative authenticity is established within this performative form, whether the audience/performer community is readily established, and how universality of audience plays into a performative experience. Throughout the creative process of *Our Day Will Come*, we considered Irish oral tradition, as well as questions of orality and relationship to audience. My research was used as the basis for much of our motivation and consideration. In order to gauge audience response, we handed surveys to each audience member following the performance and asked them to respond to the following two questions: What did you connect to in the play? And what moments stand out to you from the play? The audience response was particularly important, as it was from these surveys that I was able to understand whether or not the story resonated and the audience felt engaged in a community with the performers. Relating this performance experience to the theories of Walter Fisher, Walter Ong, Richard Bauman and Raymond Williams, among others, is the primary objective of this study.

As mentioned above, these questions of narrative authenticity and formation of community are explored through the primary means of *Our Day Will Come*. Irish oral tradition is unique in that its literary and oral forms have intersected seamlessly. Like most oral traditions, the Irish form has its roots in a primary orality, which has in many cultures either remained purely oral or become completely replaced by a

literary performance culture (Nagy 276). It is not possible to say that the Irish oral performance culture is the only oral performance culture to lie in the space between oral and literary forms, but it is certainly one of the richest and most well-known performance cultures of this type. It is necessary, therefore, to create a lexicon for a form that is neither entirely oral nor truly literary. Furthermore, it is this intersection between oral and literary that allows for the kind of performance experience that fosters the sense of community found in both the field research and performance research components of this study. The dramatic context of oral performance (or oral tradition or verbal art, but we will refer to the act as oral performance for the time being) is particularly important to this project. There are qualities to a strictly performative story, such as mimesis and dialogue, which do not exist in a monologic context. However, it is possible for stories to lie in a space between monology and performance—this is the case for Irish oral performance as was evidenced in the performance component of this study.

Before going into further discussion of this argument, it is necessary to briefly discuss the field research I conducted during the summer and fall of 2009 that lent itself to the development of this project and inspired the form of *Our Day Will Come*. Most of my field research took place through observation of music sessions at an Irish pub in Chicago, as well as through interviews with performers, primarily musicians. Much of Irish performance stems from a musical tradition such that the relationship between musical performance and other storytelling forms is seamless. The pub in Chicago, O'Shaughnessy's is a recently established Irish pub in Chicago where Irish culture and tradition are particularly revered through their weekly pub sessions and

specific catering to the Irish immigrant community. The interviewees were Michael Buckley, an Irish immigrant and musician, Maire O'Brien, an Irish opera singer, originally from Dublin, Brian Hart, an American Irish balladeer, who teaches Irish language and Irish studies at Washington University, and Len Graham, an Irish balladeer from Ulster, famous for the ballad style from that region. These four unique perspectives on Irish oral performance allowed for a breadth of understanding about the form of narrative and community built within Irish oral performance.

The performance of *Our Day Will Come* was based on the story of *Antigone*. This play, originally penned by Sophocles, is the story of a rebellious young woman in Thebes, who defies authority to do honor to her brother, who has died in combat. Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus, the infamous king who murdered his father and wedded his mother, and she seems doomed to continue paying for the sins of her family. Her two older brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, killed each other during a recent war, her brother Polyneices having betrayed Thebes, fighting for the other side. Because of this betrayal, King Creon of Thebes orders that Polyneices not receive a proper burial, but be left hung out for animals to feed on. Anyone attempting to bury him will be killed. Antigone, placing the honor of the dead above all else, defies Creon and the advice of her sister and tries to bury her brother. She is caught and sentenced to death. King Creon's son, Haemon, is Antigone's betrothed and he tried to argue for his beloved's life, but the King will not see reason. Even when Tiresius, the famous seer, recommends that he reconsider, King Creon will not amend his decision to kill Antigone. She is sent away to be killed. Eventually the King realizes that what he has done is terribly wrong and he tries to save Antigone. But he is too

late: she has killed herself and Haemon, who followed her, has taken his own life as well. Creon's wife, upon hearing the news of her son's death, also commits suicide, thus Creon's punishment is complete; everyone he loves is dead. Seamus Heaney's text of *The Burial at Thebes* is very true to the original Greek play. It is through our interpretive frame and understanding of the underlying Irish meanings and contexts Heaney imposed that *Our Day Will Come* became an exploration of Irish oral performance.

Authenticity and audience are inextricably linked to one another in a performance; audience being the group of people who have come together for the purpose of experiencing a story, authenticity the mutual understanding between audience and performer that the story is an honest retelling, and the performance as the act of performer conveying the story to the audience. Authenticity is required for an audience to accept a story, thus Irish oral performance is effective because of its establishment of narrative authenticity and because of the way in which community is formed as a result. This would be untrue if the audience as I have defined it had no understanding of the value set defining authenticity, but because of "good reasons" which will be defined in the following chapter, and the universality of Irish oral performance, audiences and performers generally share the values of narrative authenticity. Audiences receive information as a web (Fisher 135), rather than in a linear form, and therefore narrative authenticity lies in the performers' ability to convey the story with novelty, ingenuity and virtuosity. Through the fieldwork I conducted at O'Shaughnessy's pub in Chicago over the summer, as well as through interviews with Irish performers in Chicago and in Connecticut, I have found Irish

oral performance to adhere to the aforementioned conditions of narrative authenticity and that community is readily established. I used this information in preparation for and fulfillment of *Our Day Will Come*.

Chapter 1

Orality and Narrative Theory in Discussion

Irish oral performance has its roots, like any oral tradition, in primary oral cultures. Walter Ong describes primary orality as the purest form of orality, in which oral forms are used as the primary communication, and literate forms are not used at all. Thus a primary oral culture is any illiterate culture in which all information and tradition is passed orally. In fact, language, and therefore communication, is so oral that of all the thousands of languages, only about one hundred have been written down to an extent that they are considered literature and most have not been written at all (Ong 7). This speaks to the influence that orality has on audiences. Human beings traditionally receive information through speech and conversation, not literature. Words when spoken have a certain inherent power. A listener reacts to the language itself, which is “a mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought” (Ong 32). Listening and telling are active, whereas reading is passive. This does not mean that an intersection between literate and oral forms cannot be powerful, or that literature cannot have an equally powerful effect, it is simply that oral forms of communication are the most basic, human modes of relating information. Even so, “written texts all have to be related somehow, directly, or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings” (Ong 9). Thus it is impossible for a written text to be completely separated from speech—the oral component must still be present. It is this relationship that is integral to this study of

Irish oral performance, with specific regard to the research guiding, and questions surrounding the performance of *Our Day Will Come*.

In Ireland, the traditions of storytelling and oral performance date back to pre-Christianity. At that time, storytellers were part of a privileged class, like druids or other spiritual leaders (Nagy 274). The storytellers were called *filidh*. Their training was extensive, and involved over a decade of apprenticeship wherein memory and concentration techniques were learned. Memory was considered one of the most important skills, since a wide repertoire was necessary to being a good storyteller. The forms learned were also sung and metrical, like Homeric poets, or the Slavic poets studied by Alfred Lord in *The Singer of Tales*. When literary traditions emerged in Ireland, these oral artists were forbidden to write their stories down, so as to preserve their art and the value of memory¹. With the rise of Christianity, the druids and bards (other classes similar to the *filidh*) withered, but the *filidh* managed to survive, and took on secular and religious functions formerly performed by the druids and bards (Nagy 274). They became, in addition to storytellers, repositories of great knowledge, teachers of the knowledge, advisors, and even seers. Storytellers as repositories of information remained a large part of the *seanechal*'s (the Irish word for storyteller) role through the 20th century, as storytellers were often the holders of a town's genealogy and other information. Furthermore, a large number of storytellers in the 20th century were known as "tinkers" and would travel from town to town to barter, share stories and pass along news from other townships (Curtis 26).

These stories took many forms, including folk and fairy tales. The idea of imposing a realistic truth on a tale was of little importance, and what constituted such

a truth was founded on a more plastic set of principles. What happened in stories was accepted, because the view of the reality of the world, and the existence of magic, was very different. This is possible because the world was defined with the understanding of a certain spirituality, a “reciprocity of give and take in spiritual as well as actual social relations” (Schneider 182). Fairies and spirits were accepted as real, and Ireland to this day struggles to reconcile its understanding of magic with the necessity of modernity (Panzer 6). This understanding of the world, which was widespread, resulted in a universal audience comprised of Irish people with the same value sets. It is only with shared values that an audience readily accepts a story’s authenticity (Fisher 98). Once literary forms began to infiltrate Ireland with more force during the Middle Ages, and religion became a literary influence, the role of storytelling and orality shifted. The *filidh* were still important as a spiritual and traditional group, but their role was more complicated once issues of literacy and Christianity were more present and intertwined. A *fili* was now not only an oral performer, but a “man of reading [learning]” (Nagy 274). It is this transition toward an integration of literary and oral forms that led to Irish oral performance becoming an intersection between the two forms. While it began as purely oral, Irish performance had two modes of transmission following approximately the sixth century. Although other oral traditions have had related literary traditions, the Irish tradition is unique in that the literary tradition was incorporated into the oral tradition, and the two worked in tandem with one another. In most literate cultures, the oral tradition becomes relegated to a sub-tradition, encompassing lore rejected by the literate classes (Nagy 276). In Ireland, however, the *filidh* were able to successfully

incorporate literature of the “greatest social prestige” and the oral tradition that had been present for centuries (Nagy 276). It is because of this intersection that Irish oral performance is both literary and oral today. Furthermore, the relationship between the past and present, and the myths and history of tradition, are intertwined in Irish oral tradition.

Studies of Irish performances have also been conducted in Ireland, specifically with regard to the relationship between the traditional beliefs and a contemporary context. Interestingly, most of this research has been done by storytellers themselves. Eddie Lenihan, a contemporary storyteller, folklorist and researcher says that, “stories represent something ‘truly Irish’ because they come out of a traditional storytelling process and because of what they add to our understanding of the past. The stories are important whether they relate personal memories, clarify an historical event, or delve into aspects of the supernatural” (Panzer 7). Regular dialogue between storytellers (and sometimes others) is reflective of an anecdotal mode of speech. The idea of a conversation is also present in many Irish music sessions, held in pubs both in Ireland and throughout Irish immigrant communities. During these sessions, the musicians relate to one another as though their music, their story is a conversation rather than a performance for an audience. The musicians sit in a circle, and play off of one another, riffing and taking solos, in a manner similar to American Jazz music. Even in these moments of improvisation, however, there is an integration of pre-composition as well as composition in performance, given that the songs are pre-existing but the musicians

build upon them. There is a modal structure that the song follows, and there are rules to which the musicians must adhere while composing (Interview with O'Brien).

One of the most important aspects of orality, and one particularly present in the Irish tradition, is that of interiority. Interiority is that meaning derived from the individual's own or existential experience with the sound of the words. It is the way sounds make feelings in the body of the listener. Maire O'Brien, an Irish musician living in Chicago, was unable to describe what was uniquely Irish about Irish music, except when discussing a piece by Samuel Barber: "there's a sound that he gets with ornamentation that seems like he heard traditional Irish music. He captures the sound of the countryside—the wind whistling through the thrushes." Interiority is closely related to sound, and the way sound can be immersive. Thus, "the phenomenology of sound enters deeply into human beings' feel for existence, as processed by the spoken word" (Ong 73). O'Brien's understanding of something sounding Irish, even when she does not know exactly why is an example of this economy of sound. O'Brien was not the only interviewee to respond to this aspect of Irish orality; whether it was called "assonance" or "ornamentation" or described as a particular modal structure, almost everyone interviewed mentioned the sound of Irish music and the cadence of its poetry as being recognizably "Irish."² Furthermore, in Irish music performance, the ornamentation is unique to each singer, so it is not a certain ornamental structure, or even mode that is "Irish," it seems to be truly unquantifiable, something completely associative related to the sound of the music or the cadence of a story. It is perhaps also in patterns of language and specific idiomatic phrases. Most Irish folktales begin with "once upon a time, and a long time ago it was" or something

similar, and is as familiar as “once upon a time” is to an American audience. Richard Bauman discusses this form of story opening as a keying aspect of performance, specifically a “special formula” that designates performance (21). The particular musical quality of Irish dialect must be considered when discussing interiority. Although not all Irish storytelling is done through music, indeed many storytellers historically and today in Ireland tell their stories without any music at all, the rhythm of spoken language and melody of speech is something very particular to Irish dialect. The melody with which a story or song is heard and received is influenced by dialect as well, which is also related to interiority of sound. There are perhaps other sensory influences to interiority depending on association, but interiority is primarily an aspect of a phonetic experience, and is therefore an integral element of what makes Irish oral performance effective.

Many of the ballads common to Irish balladeers are still learned by ear. Len Graham, an Ulster Balladeer, retold stories of having picked up a song from someone he ran into at a pub, or outside a bathroom. This passing of songs seems to have occurred in the following way: the other singer sang the song to Graham, and after listening to it a couple of times, he picked it up. Whether or not anything specific changed with the passing of the song, there is a certain way that Graham learns and sings music that is different than whoever taught him the song. This is the process of learning to be a singer that Alfred Lord describes (24). However, Lord discusses it in the context of learning the craft, whereas in Graham’s experience it happened from song to song. Similarly, Graham is literate and also learns songs by book. However, this relationship again brings up an interesting intersection between traditional forms

of passing stories in primary oral cultures and the ways in which literate cultures transmit. More specifically, music sessions also function with this style of transmission and learning. Musicians and singers learn by sharing and doing. In true oral performance, the singer establishes authenticity because he himself is writing the song as it is sung—thus the veracity is inherent. Perhaps in a tradition such as Irish orality, some residual authenticity is established because, although the tradition of composition in performance is gone, the memory of the authenticity of those performances remains in the cultural memory.

Irish oral performance falls into a somewhat unique category of “verbal art,” as Richard Bauman calls it. Irish oral performance cannot be classified as ordinary speech—it is heightened and certainly performative. At the same time, Irish oral performance is not necessarily a pure performance, in which there is a performer and a listener, because these roles are troubled in Irish oral performance. The traditional understanding of the performer-audience relationship, as well as the “fixity” of the language is modified in Irish oral performance, placing it in a somewhat in-between category that Bauman describes using the Chamula “genres of verbal behavior” (Bauman 23). According to the Chamula, there are three categories of speech: ordinary speech, speech for people whose hearts are heated, and pure speech. We would define ordinary speech as everyday dialogue; the speech present in day-to-day use. Pure speech is the most performative type of speech, in which there is the presence of more verbal art conventions, and a specific definition of form. Speech for people whose hearts are heated lies in between ordinary speech and pure speech. There is a certain degree of defined form, but fewer conventions are used and

improvisation is more present (Bauman 23-24). In some ways then, it is parallel to the performance in-between purely oral performance and literate performance. In occupying this in-between space, Irish oral performance can deviate from a traditional audience-performer paradigm, as was explored during the process of *Our Day Will Come*. The effectiveness of the storytelling within Irish oral performance lies in the unconventional relationship that is formed between audience and performer.

This relationship has been explored theoretically in several ways. Throughout his career, Raymond Williams experimented with the idea of a “structure of feeling.”³ In his *The Country and the City*, he establishes this idea through the understanding that if narrative authenticity is assumed, then an 18th century reader’s life can be understood through analysis of the literature he was reading. He expands this idea in his later works and the “structure of feeling” comes to indicate a cultural bond within a community through an external source. At the end of *The Country and the City*, after having established the similarities between the cultures of the two in literature, Williams introduces the idea that in the city, new means of communication have been established in order to form community. It seems that Irish oral performance functions in this way also, allowing members of a particular community an external bond through which the emotional and cultural center of the community can be more specifically established.

Similarly, narrative is a way of understanding the human experience. It is through storytelling that information or tradition is transmitted. Thus in the Irish community, storytelling and music sessions in pubs and in parlors are a means of sharing in a communal understanding of shared experience and culture, through

music and storytelling. Within narrative rationality, human beings operate through identification, that is, through receiving and building the symbolic acts of a narrative. In this narrative paradigm, a “good” narrative is determined by whether or not it satisfies the requirements of narrative rationality—that is, is it a reliable, trustworthy and desirable guide to belief and action (Fisher 95). Narrative rationality is defined as reason, value and action. Thus narrative is only a part of what makes up Irish oral performance, and coupled with the need to establish narrative authenticity, the audience must receive the information as “good.” In this way, a community of performer and audience is formed.

The key to understanding the community formed by a performance is that the relationship between story, narrator and audience is one of mutual identification and understanding (Ong 46). An audience, in receiving the information of a performance, must connect with the story on both rational and emotional levels. This is how a relationship can form between audience and performer and this relationship is what determines if received information will be taken as honest and authentic. “Good reasons” are “those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical” (Fisher 107). The narrator’s “good reasons” must be accepted by the audience in order for the narrator to be authentic. In fact, “narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time—at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique

situation, for in oral culture an audience must be brought to respond, often vigorously” (Ong 42). This is at the heart of the relationship between narrative and community. “Good reasons” are those ideals that are socially accepted and that are present in order for an audience to accept an establishment of narrative authenticity. They are intrinsically related to social values and audience members apply those values, inherent to socialization, to all performance.

There are two levels of warrant in any narrative. The first level is that of the claim-evidence relationship. This is the warrant that Stephen Toulmin discusses and that rhetoricians use. The second level of warrant is that of the ethos of the argument, that is, the right of the argument-maker to be making that argument. The authority of the narrator derives from this second level of warranting; they are connected to the ethos of the narrator, and not the claim or evidence of the narrative itself. For *Our Day Will Come*, the “good reasons” were what underlay the choices made by the actors to exert their authority as tellers of this story, their authorial choice of interpretive frame. The interpretive frame itself cannot be called a good reason as it is not a warrant, but rather is a means through which “messages being communicated are to be understood” (Bauman 9).

Coupled with “good reasons” is the importance of the narrator to foster a sense of respect for individuals and groups such that the audience feels a sense of pluralism (Fisher 127). This also leads to the importance of values, and specifically how the audience accepts a narrative.⁴ The good reasons defined above are the criteria on which the audience assesses whether a story fits their value set. This affects the establishment of authenticity and an audience’s willingness to invest in the

community formed. It is through this lens that Walter Fisher discusses the “narrative paradigm” which seeks to account for how people behave and how they came to hold certain beliefs, and is based upon a foundation of good reasons and rationality (98). Through this narrative paradigm we may begin to define how audiences prioritize their values and respond to performance. According to Fisher, justice can be defined as the value paramount to audiences, as it is a “universal value,” and reasoned audiences (the assumed audience for any performance) value it as such. Similarly, Fisher argues that love is considered the “highest virtue” of life, informing and motivating all human decision-making and action, thus it too is a value of highest importance to audiences (Fisher 136). In *Antigone* justice and love are the two values that fall under Creon’s scrutiny. The definition of justice, through law, is the main subject of controversy throughout the play, with both Creon and Antigone believing that their version of justice is more righteous. In the end, it is Haemon’s love of Antigone that leads to his death, and Creon’s further suffering. Beyond the importance of values, there is the question of how audiences receive the information a performance gives them. Perelman writes that, “Non-formal argument [storytelling, e.g.] consists...of a web formed by all the arguments and all the reasons that combine to achieve the desired result” (Fisher 135). Audiences respond to the received information as a whole, not as a series of arguments within a performed piece. That is, audiences do not parse out each piece of argument within a story, the values, etc., instead it is received in its entirety, with all of the elements woven together. This is related to the question of subjectivity. Subjectivity is at the heart of human communication, thus the application of “good reasons” is also subjective (Fisher

110). How the web of information is received and the importance of certain values is subjective, as demonstrated, but ultimately rely on the same rationality of audience as “good reasons.”

Pubs are specifically important to the formation of community within Irish performance and Irish populations. In Ireland and abroad, pubs function as community houses. They are centers of performance, networking, and general revelry. For immigrant communities, pubs play an essential role. Importantly, pubs in Chicago can act as an antidote for homesickness. O’Brien told a story about an afternoon when she and her husband were at O’Shaughnessy’s. The owner of the pub, also a native Irishman, was walking past their booth and noticed her. He stopped and asked her how she was, and she replied, “Oh, I’m grand. I’m grand.” Then, he offered her a pot of Barry’s (a brand of tea), which she said was exactly what she wanted, “I don’t know how he knew I wanted a pot of Barry’s! I have Barry’s tea at home!” That familiarity and understanding is something unique to the space of Irish pubs. Pubs also serve the important function of being places of networking for new immigrants. Michael Buckley, who immigrated to the United States in the 80’s, said that the pub community was really important, and that music played a role in that it was through the music that everyone would congregate and meet one another. It was in pubs that immigrants found work and made connections for job opportunities. Pub sessions also foster an important sense of community in pubs. The atmosphere surrounding pub sessions is really interesting. O’Brien described them as having “their own code,” in which a sense of reverence for the musicians is necessary, and audiences are very quiet, taking in and listening to the music. The relationship

between the musicians during a session is equally important in the establishment of their community. The musicians act more like they are having a conversation than performing, responding to one another, and taking turns, as in a dialogue. This relationship between musicians draws in audience members, and makes them a more equal part of the experience.

It is through Irish oral performance that communities in these spaces are formed and re-formed with each experience. Performance is a means of establishing relationships both through the shared cultural consciousness and the interiority of sound. This community of relationships is connected to the idea of establishment of authenticity, as the two are really inextricably linked. As an audience experiences the establishment of narrative authenticity together, their community is solidified. It is the process of the performers establishing their authority that allows this audience community to form and integrates the performers into that community.

Chapter 2

The Burial at Thebes as an Irish Text

Seamus Heaney called his play *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone*, and in doing so drew focus to the main event of the story: Antigone's (attempted) burial of her brother. The text is a translation of Sophocles' play, but it has a definite Irish sensibility. In studying the text of the play with the understanding of narrative authenticity, my question became: what about this play is Irish? And furthermore, how can this traditional Greek story become an Irish oral performance? I answered these questions through a two-month process of analyzing the text as a literary form, and exploring the possibilities for enhancing the presence of orality in the performance. I used this extrapolation of performance, narrative, and orality theory to examine the text and construct a performance that had immediate and discernable ties to Irish oral performances as witnessed during field research. The result was an Irish performative experience, in which narrative authenticity generated the formation of the audience-performer community. It was necessary also that I investigate the effectiveness of Irish oral performance even on a non-Irish audience. The process of preparation largely involved the understanding of narrative authenticity and how it was established in the text. Furthermore, I examined how the performers could establish narrative authenticity orally, as the performance was in a world between purely oral and literary texts. I took care, therefore, to understand what about the text was explicitly and implicitly Irish, aside from the fact that it was written by an Irish poet. Heaney's play is not a translation, it is a version of

Antigone—taken from direct translations from the ancient Greek and other interpretations. But the play is not simply a return to the Greek form. Heaney's *Burial at Thebes*, is quite unique, theatrically Greek through the style itself, while integrating particularly Irish aspects into both rhythm and language.

Throughout the play, Heaney inserts Irish words and idiomatic phrases in lieu of the more traditional anglicized words. The most obvious instance of this language choice is Heaney's consistent use of the phrase, "keening" rather than, "mourning" or "grieving". A keen is a song of lament in Ireland. One generally sung over a dead body, retelling the story of the deceased's life and death. It is a form of grieving that is specific to Irish culture, and it is the type of mourning mentioned specifically in the play. Heaney inserts other Irish phrases into the text as well. In the first scene between Creon and the Guard, the Guard calls himself, the "old dog for the hard road" (Heaney 19). This phrase comes from the Irish proverb, "The old dog for the hard road and leave the pup on the path" and refers to aging and wisdom. Tiresius mentions that the birds began to "skirl" (Heaney 57) above his head when attempting rites to see what lies ahead for Thebes. Skirl is a word that references the sound a bagpipe makes when the reed is overblown and the pipes screech. Perhaps this is not a purely Irish reference, since bagpipes are equally common in Scotland, but the word remains in the Irish lexicon. "Beyond the pale" (Heaney 31, 53), a phrase mentioned twice in the text, both times by Creon in reference to Antigone, is not necessarily an Irish idiomatic phrase, but it has historical significance in Ireland, the Pale being the part of Ireland that was under English control from the time of the Middle Ages. It shrank through the 15th century by which time the Pale was only Dublin and some

surrounding areas. The reference to British/Irish relations with this phrase is equally important, since it mirrors the Creon/Antigone relationship. Creon, in calling Antigone, “beyond the pale” is assuring her role as a protestor and sympathizer with the Republic, those desiring real political change. Creon, then, becomes allied with the Nationalists, or the Unionists, desiring to remain close to the status quo. These choices of language and style are particular to Irish speech and give the text an Irish feel, even if an audience member does not recognize their Irish significance specifically. This innate understanding of something feeling Irish even if an audience member were not sure of the origins of the language choices would be because of the interiority described in Chapter 1.

In a note following the play, Heaney discusses his process in writing *The Burial at Thebes*, particularly as several Irish playwrights had written versions of *Antigone* before he was commissioned to create this play for the Abbey Theater in Dublin in 2003. His connection to the play was through the relationship he found between Antigone and the author of an 18th century Irish lament, known in Irish as *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*. This translates to *The Lament of Art O’Leary*. This poem is an interesting link to orality because even though it was written in 1774, the poem exists today in only two modern sources, both of which had to be acquired from oral sources (Greene xxvii). It was in this poem that Heaney found inspiration for his translation of *Antigone*. He says in the afterward:

What gave me the poetic go-ahead was the sudden discovery of a note that connected the distressed heroine of Sophocles’ tragedy in the fourth century BC and the author of the great eighteenth century lament...I remembered the opening lines of Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill’s lament, an outburst of grief and anger from a woman whose husband has been cut down and left bleeding on

the roadside in County Cork, in much the same way as Polyneices was left outside the walls of Thebes, unburied, desecrated, picked at by the crows (77).

The similarity between heroines is important, as it relates to the connection between the story of Antigone and the Irish interpretation Heaney gave it. Eibhlín Dhubh wrote the keen on May 4th 1774 following her husband's murder at the hands of a British official. It recounts his life and death and is written as a traditional keen; it was likely set to music originally (Greene xxvii). The similarities between the two women, Eibhlín and Antigone, lie mostly in their situation and passion. Both grieving for a beloved family member, stuck down at the hands of an enemy, they seek justice and closure.

However, Heaney's use of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* as a parallel to *Antigone* extends beyond theme. At the 2004 Jayne Lecture at the American Philosophical Society, Heaney, in speaking about his *Burial at Thebes*, said that "theme and tune coalesced" when he remembered the keen (423). He was looking to give urgency to the rhythm of speech in the play, and in so doing found the musical underscore for the text. He writes, "it was the drive and pitch of the Irish verse that clinched it: in the three-beat line of Eibhlín Dhubh's keen I heard a note that the stricken Antigone might sound in the speedy, haunted opening movement of the play" (77). The meter for much of the verse in the play was inspired by the meter of the keen. The relationship between the two becomes more profound with this understanding, as it relates to interiority. Regardless of whether or not an audience would recognize the similarity, and it is unlikely since the meter is a rather common one, the verse of *The Burial at Thebes* is imbued with the presence of the lament. Heaney calls what he borrowed from the lament, "a tune" and composed the rest of

play within that same score. The language of the play was born from an Irish inspiration and traditional Irish rhythms and speech. Frank O'Connor's translation of *Caoinéadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* begins:

My love and my delight
The day I saw you first
Beside the markethouse
I had eyes for nothing else
And love for none but you.

I left my father's house
And ran away with you,
And that was no bad choice...(Greene 241)

Although not yet similar in theme or character, this text is clearly linked to the sound of the first lines spoken by Antigone:

Ismene quick come here
What's to become of us?
Why are we always the ones? (Heaney 5).

As the lament continues, the characters do become intrinsically similar, not only in their text, but through the tone and rhythm of their speech.

The sound of the text becomes thusly related, at least in part, to the sound of a keen. The aural element of the text is closely related to interiority of sound, or the phenomenological relationship between sound and cultural understanding that allows sound to recall an association, discussed in chapter 1. The meter and cadence, as well as the choices of language with a distinctly Irish feel, have the same result as the ornamentation Maire O'Brien noted in the Samuel Barber song that captured the sound of the "wind through the thrushes" and evoked the Irish countryside. Since interiority of sound is integral to the establishment of narrative authenticity, it is important to mention that it is not only an Irish audience who would be affected by

the association of Irish-ness. It is not only within a culture that the particular elements of that culture resonate, there is a universality to interiority. If nothing else, audience members connect to the interiority of other cultures through reason, even when the association recalls a particular aspect of culture. Heaney described this by saying, “In poetry, we only believe what we hear.” It is the form of the language, and the meaning inscribed in that form, that gives an audience the opportunity to respond to a story. The response to the dialects in the performance of *Our Day Will Come* was very positive. This will be further discussed in the following chapter, but here it is necessary to note that audience members were fully able to connect to the story on all levels, in part because of what they were hearing, including the Irish dialects.

Sources other than the text itself, theoretical research, and interviews were useful in constructing *Our Day Will Come*. The films *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* and *The Commitments* were both useful during the process. The films served as background research both for dialect and for a greater understanding of Irish tradition and culture. Furthermore, each film played a unique role in the research process because of its theme and relationship to storytelling. *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* is a study of the relationship between the Irish and British before 1916 and the compromise through the Treaty⁵. This film was enlightening in terms of the roles of the IRA and the Nationalists during the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. The film follows the actions of two brothers, Teddy and Damien, who are members of the IRA. Most interestingly, the two brothers ideologies are set at odds following the Anglo-Irish Treaty, in which the Republic of Ireland was established. It is at this point that Ireland was granted Dominion status and the IRA split over

whether to keep fighting, or to accept this for now, end the violence, and continue to bring about change through lawful means. Considering the parallels that can be drawn between Antigone and the Republic, and Creon and that British, the story of the two brothers with disparate ideas about freedom and justice in early 20th century Ireland holds certain significance to the Antigone story.

The Commitments was useful for less historic and thematic reasons, but provided necessary context of storytelling and a portrayal of young people in Ireland, trying to find their way, much as our characters were trying to do in *Our Day Will Come*. In order to establish narrative authenticity, we included dialect work in our rehearsal process, since the text was so reliant on cadence and meter. Irish speech has a unique musical quality that American speech does not possess. In order to invoke interiority of sound, the music of the text needs to be present. It is equally important to present the sounds as Heaney imagined them, in this way marrying orality and literacy in the in-between performance referred to as “speech for those whose hearts are heated” (Bauman 23). To be genuine, the sounds of the words and the melody of the story must follow their intention. The three-beat meter that Heaney borrowed from the *Lament for Art O’Leary* sounds different when spoken in an American dialect and an Irish one. The process of dialect work was based in both text and melody. *The Commitments*, set in Dublin, contained some wonderful examples of Dublin accents. Beyond its usefulness as a dialect resource, *The Commitments* is about young people trying to tell their story and incorporates music and song. Friends in Dublin decide to form a soul band, and though they don’t become famous, their experiences in performance begin to shape their adult lives. Those relationships,

although not directly parallel to the relationships of *Our Day Will Come*, proved useful as exploration. The relationship between a meta-world and a performative world was also present in the film, as it was present in *Our Day Will Come*.

The meta-world of *Our Day Will Come* was the most drastic change that was made in the process from *The Burial at Thebes* to the end result. *Our Day Will Come* was comprised of Heaney's text, with some very important modifications, such as the pub setting in which the audience sat at tables in and around the action of the play. Because the emphasis was on the storytelling itself—on telling the story as purely as possible, the moral of the text was less important to the work. For that reason all of the choric odes, in which the elderly men of Thebes speak their part, were struck from the working text. With the commentary of the chorus eliminated, there was space and necessity for some other frame. Taking Bauman's discussion of interpretive frame into consideration, in which the frame is a "defined interpretive context providing guidelines for discriminating between orders of message" (Bauman 9), the idea of a meta-world was introduced. Similarly, the frame of the research provided a non-performative context for the project. It is important to mention that Bauman is discusses frame in terms of a performance itself. Bauman wishes to explore the frame that any performance gives speech, transforming that speech into something with added meaning. In applying Bauman to an external frame, we are seeking to define the interpretation of both levels of performance. The frame, then, becomes a means through which the audience can interpret both the Antigone-world and the meta-world, in relationship to one another.

For the purposes of this play, the idea of a burial was a through-line, giving the Antigone-world the frame of grieving friends, attempting to find peace through mourning their friends and telling their story. Heaney aptly named his version *The Burial at Thebes* because “putting burial in the title signals to a new audience what the central concern of the play is going to be” (Heaney 426). With that in mind, the idea of burial became present throughout the explorations of the meta-world. The focus turned to the young people of the Antigone-story: Antigone, Haemon, Ismene, and *The Burial at Thebes* text was meant to honor them and tell their story, given that they had died—it was their keen.⁶ The process of understanding the importance of the burial was a long one, and the meta-world went through some less conducive versions of frame as well. Once the burial relationship was established, the meta-world became not only a second layer of story, but a significant tool in understanding the Antigone-world. Similarly, the end of the play was completely reconstructed such that *The Burial at Thebes* text ended after the description of Antigone and Haemon’s deaths. This telling of *Antigone* was not about Creon as a tragic character, therefore his final downfall in the original text was not necessary to effectively conclude *Our Day Will Come*.

The impact of *Our Day Will Come* was meant to be received emotionally. The purpose of this piece was not ideological, and while it is true that theater can play an important political role, and is certainly a political weapon as we see within many movements of grassroots theater, for the most part, Irish oral performance plays a more emotional role. This pathos is largely founded in tradition. Ultimately, the relationship between the story, the performers, and the audience, was effective on a

more emotional than ideological level.⁷ The emotional motivation greatly influences the ways in which the story is conveyed and the audience can respond. The desired response was not intellectual, but visceral. This is not to say that there was no political message present in *Our Day Will Come*, and in many Irish ballads and other forms of oral performance. The country has, after all, a tumultuous political history, but their oral tradition was not often used as a “call to arms” or to invoke political change. Generally, the message was intended to inspire on an emotional level, and would be written or composed about the past, almost posed as a warning against future violence. Similarly, ballads don’t generally call for political change, but are framed by love stories, in which a woman lost her love, who was a soldier, in a war. Sometimes, the pointlessness of the war is discussed, but more often, her anger over losing her love become an impassioned nationalism. In the famous ballad, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, a young man chooses to fight for independence instead of staying with his love. She ends up being killed by enemy fire and the young man seeks vengeance by killing enemies at “Oulart Hollow”, also known as the Battle of Oulart Hill, a famous battle won by Ireland against the British in 1798. The *Wind that Shakes the Barley* begins:

I sat within a valley green
 I sat me with my true love
 My sad heart strove to choose between
 The old love and the new love
 The old for her, the new that made
 Me think on Ireland dearly
 While soft the wind blew down the glade
 And shook the golden barley

Tw’as hard the woeful words to frame
 To break the ties that bound us
 But harder still to bear the shame

Of foreign chains around us
 And so I said, "The mountain glen
 I'll seek at morning early
 And join the bold United Men
 While soft winds shake the barley."

This ballad, although about war, independence, and nationalism, is framed by a love story. It is certainly political, but it doesn't incite revolution through politics, like Stokely Carmichael, for example. Instead, the emotional relationship formed between listener and story is what drives the message. *Our Day Will Come* functioned in a similar way. The political message of *The Burial at Thebes* is certainly present, and we have touched on the implications in the story to both an Irish, and universal audience. However, within the mode of Irish oral tradition, the politics are framed by a love story, that of the meta-characters: Sinéad, Colleen and Paddy, keening their dead friends. At the beginning of the play, Paddy stops the music and tries to introduce the event. He is unable to, and ends by saying, "we've all lost good friends". Similarly, the use of the ritualistic whisky shots at the end of the play displays the respect and love these three characters had for their dead friends. Even within the text of *The Burial at Thebes* the motivation for political action is largely emotional. Antigone, when defending her burial of Polyneices, states:

Not for a husband, not even for a son
 Would I have broken the law.
 Another husband I could always find
 And have other sons by him is one were lost.
 But with my father gone, and my mother gone,
 Where can I find another brother, ever?
 The law of this same logic I obeyed
 When I disobeyed Creon. It's a rule of life.
 But all Creon can see is a crazy girl
 He must get rid of (Heaney 54).

With this, it is clear that Antigone was working out of love and an emotional need to bury her only remaining brother. At the heart of the issue, this is not a political statement, although her beliefs are founded in religion. Antigone needs to grieve, to follow the ritual of her culture, in order to heal and find peace. Her emotional, instead of intellectual, connection to her brother, is what connects performers and audience to her story. It is through this emotional link that community is further formed. In his discussions on “structure of feeling,” Williams encompasses both ideology and “collective desires and concerns below the conscious level” (McConachie 36). The ensemble did this in *Our Day Will Come* through the meta-world frame, by which the audience was brought into the performative world through a display of grief and recovery, a very relatable event.

Chapter 3

Theory in Practice: *Our Day Will Come*

Certain characteristics of Irish oral performance are particular and integral to the ways in which a performance is received. As a result, throughout the process of *Our Day Will Come*, we focused on emulating the feel and environment present during sessions in pubs and described by those interviewed during the research process. The performance was set in a pub, because of the community environment and close relationship between audience and performers inherent in that space. Related to this choice was the idea that the spatial distinction between audience and performers be unclear. During many of the pub performances I attended in Chicago, the musicians, as well as interacting with one another, would interact and chat with the audience, bringing the entire group together. This feeling was re-created by having no real separation between audience and the performers--the actors walked through and performed in the same space as the audience, even including audience members in toasts and direct communication. The focus of *Our Day Will Come* needed to be on the story, such that the actors played the role of storytellers as opposed to each taking on a certain character and creating a singular alliance, as is traditional in theater. With this in mind, the actors did not to play particular roles, but rather each played a number of characters throughout the play--in this way the focus was on the story as a whole, and the themes and frame, rather than on any singular performance by an actor. In constructing this play, the focus was on the event of the piece rather than only on the acting or relationships to the characters. Even so, a great

deal of text work and exploration of the text went on during rehearsals in order to make the story an honest and vivid retelling, as is necessary in order to fulfill the conditions of narrative authenticity. The goal was also to create an event between audience and performers in which the whole community exists and experiences together.

This process was specific in terms of the relationship between literary and oral performance. While the base text, *The Burial at Thebes*, was the main source of text in the play, all of the dialogue in the “meta-world”—the world of the three Irish people in the pub—was created through improvisation and varied from performance to performance. Similarly the relationships between those meta-characters had a slightly different dynamic with each showing of the play. This intersection between oral composition and literary performance complicates both the oral and pre-composed elements of the piece. In attempting to model this relationship of oral and literary off of the complex one found in Irish oral tradition, it is necessary to consider the ways in which narrative authenticity is established, and therefore, that a community is formed from the experience. In primary oral cultures, the performer was the “singer, performer, poet, composer” (Lord 13). Authenticity was inherent; the performer was the creator of the story and his telling of it had to be honest and true for that reason. The performance of *Our Day Will Come* sought to re-create that kind of performer, by having the meta-characters re-tell the story through the lens of their own experiences. The use of the Antigone myth as a story based in the present of those meta-characters does not necessarily work against their orality, since the retelling of a myth or other well-known story was common even to Homeric poets and

other poets of primary oral cultures. Instead, by relaying a well-known story through the experience of the meta-characters, the performers were able to establish who they were in telling this story and their specific relationship to the Antigone characters. This came from the frame of the play, in which three young people were mourning the deaths of their friends. Furthermore, the structure of storytelling was enhanced through the removal of the choric odes within the text of *The Burial at Thebes*. Without these odes, which create distance from the story and become didactic, the frame of the play became all the more important and present within the story.

Equally important to the relationship between oral and literary work during this process was the choice of storytelling over play-acting. Each of the performers was first and foremost a storyteller. The exploration was about telling a story effectively and with veracity, not about an alliance with a character and the performance of each actor in a role. Conveying the story as a whole was the goal of the project, since Irish oral performance is generally a shared experience of storytelling, and not about any one performance. This led to an emphasis during the rehearsal process on understanding and clarity of text, written and oral, as well as silent. In the following section I will examine *Our Day Will Come* as it was performed and analyze the choices made in the context of the performance.

The Space and Meta-World Introduction

Through the transformation of the theater into a space that did not delineate traditional actor-audience boundaries, the performance began before any of the actors entered the room. Many audience members responded to the space of the pub. One

did not understand why the piece was set in a pub, but found it interesting nonetheless. Another wrote, “I felt like I knew the characters because I was a part of the environment. The events that occurred felt more real to me than they would if I was watching from a true outsider perspective.” Some audience members spoke about the setting in terms of “mood” or “atmosphere” or even “format,” stating that because of unique position of the audience, they felt a part of the story and fully drawn in. The pub as the setting for the play was important for several reasons. It was a replication of the space studied during a summer of field research and a communal space, both within the meta-world and the Antigone world. The importance of the pub as a space in the meta-world is rooted in the experience of a pub as a community house for Irish populations. The relationship between audience and performer is blurred in this environment and that blurred relationship is necessary in order for a community to be formed during the performance experience. Similarly, the resonance within the Antigone story is palpable. A pub is literally a public house, and there is much discussion by Creon about the events of the story taking place in a public forum. In his first speech he is addressing the citizens of Thebes and mentions that Polyneices is to be “publicly humiliated”. This emphasis on the world of the play occurring in public made a pub is a perfect space for this piece. Similarly, the moments that would perhaps have been occurring in private, such as the first scene between Ismene and Antigone, was actually occurring in the same pub space. This moment in which private becomes public implicates the audience in Antigone’s choice and directly involves them in the action of the scene.

The space of the pub was constructed with the help of Hanafin's Irish Pub, an actual pub located in New London, Connecticut. The owner of Hanafin's supplied furnishings and posters all of which helped to give the space a uniquely Irish pub feel. Guinness paraphernalia, oak barrels, and even a poster dedicated to the memory of the assassinated signatories of the 1916 Proclamation were all used to define the pub. Originally, we intended to set the performance in an actual pub, but given the weekend performance time, it was impossible to find an available space. Time was taken, therefore, to recreate a pub space with great accuracy. Ushers were present in the form of bouncers and waitresses, who offered beverages and snacks to audience members.

Once the audience was settled, the actors entered the pub at a staggered pace. The order varied with each performance, but it was always the last person who brought on the bottle of "whiskey"⁸ that was finished throughout each performance. The performance began in the meta-world, with the characters of the three Irish friends, who had been named Sinéad, Colleen and Paddy during the rehearsal process. The use of the meta-world frame was an integral part of the process of exploration for this project. Bauman quotes Gregory Bateson as saying, "Any message, which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, *ipso facto* gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame" (Bauman 15). Furthermore the frame is a unique tool in establishing narrative authenticity. Within the world of the play, the meta-characters were honest, believable narrators because they were re-telling a story they experienced. The characters of Antigone, Haemon, and Ismene were the friends they had lost and were mourning. Their

authority was intrinsic to the frame as it established the story as their own. Thus the actors were believable, since the audience was seeing them through their meta-characters. This was manifested in terms of the audience-performer relationship. Audience members responded to the “intimacy” shared between audience and performer that is not usually present during performance. An audience member wrote, “I felt a connection to the moments where narrative broke--the depiction of Irish (American) identity and its modern manifestation.” The response to the lives and relationships of the meta-characters was generally stronger than the response to the characters within the Antigone story, and only enhanced the relationship audience members felt to the Antigone story.

The three meta-characters began with a brief explanation of what they would be trying to do. Paddy mentioned that the three meta-characters have lost some good friends and want to share their story, to “shorten the road, as they say.” The phrase “to shorten” something indicates storytelling. George Gmelch writes of travelers or “tinkers”, the storytellers who would move from town to town sharing news and stories, would often ask one another to “shorten the road,” that is to tell each other stories to make the time pass more quickly. After establishing the three friends telling some story, the meta-characters all took a shot of whiskey, and *The Burial at Thebes* began.

Scene 1: Antigone/Ismene

The Antigone-Ismene scene was not blocked, in fact there were not pre-composed movements throughout the entire performance. The actors were free to

move within the space and work with the present audience at will. There were physical moments that were sketched out, but even these occurred in slightly different places in the space from performance to performance. This inclusion of audience worked along with narrative authority to form a performer-audience community. Audience members responded to “moments when the actors addressed/interacted with the audience” and one audience member wrote specifically, “I liked the close personal feeling created—the camaraderie.” Another audience member commented on, “The experience of being addressed as a member of the chorus.” All of these responses speak to the environment created by the performance style within both the meta- and Antigone-worlds, with emphasis on storytelling, allowing the audience to feel a part of the play as a whole.

We cannot ignore that the story of *The Burial at Thebes* also holds thematic significance and audience members found connections within that world as well. The Antigone-Ismene scene at the beginning, as well as the one later on spoke to an audience member who had been having difficulty talking with her sister. Another audience member connected to the story primarily on the Antigone-level, since it is her favorite Greek tragedy. Some audience members were able to relate their own lives to at least one level of the story. Someone wrote about connecting to the idea of “honoring the dead people you love, because I’ve experienced loss lately.” Responses like this blur the line between the Antigone-world and the meta-world since the idea of loss was so important in connecting the two. These responses demonstrate a successful establishment of narrative authenticity. The audience was able to accept these worlds and connect to them in very personal ways. The

universality of the Antigone story is mirrored by the universality of Irish performance; the medium of telling this story is as important as the story itself. It is both of these things working in tandem that, in this case, aided in both establishment of narrative authenticity, and in formation of the performance community. The first Antigone-Ismene scene is particularly important, though, as it brought the audience into the second world of the piece and allowed them that additional layer of understanding. After a moment of breath following the Antigone-Ismene scene, which was perhaps not noticeable to most audience members, but during which the actors moved back into the meta-world for a split second, Creon began his speech to the citizens of Thebes.

Scene 2: Creon's Speech

Creon's first expository speech to the citizens of Thebes was important in establishing the public space. It is during this speech that direct references were made to the public nature of the events to follow. In working on dialect, this moment, in which one actor is heard continuously for a large portion of time, a return to text was necessary and important. The text of *The Burial at Thebes* is written in verse. Therefore, attention was paid to the arrangement of verse and choice of punctuation, as well as the ends of lines. This return to the text indicates again that the event of the piece, although framed by the interpretive meta-world, was also heavily reliant on *The Burial at Thebes*. The use of dialect was also important in establishing authenticity. There was concern that the dialect would actually alienate the audience and distance them, since the actors would sound different and the audience might get

caught up in the dialect instead of the story, but in the end the dialect proved effective in helping to tell the story. The cadence and rhythm of Irish speech is specific such that in order to evoke the same interiority of sound present in traditional Irish performance, dialects were necessary.

Scene 3: Guard/Creon

The transition into the first scene between the Guard and Creon was simply Sinéad standing, taking a shot, and starting in as the Guard. The dialect work was also useful at this moment, since the Guard had much more of a brogue than many of the other characters. This change in dialect from Sinéad's first role as Ismene, further indicated to the audience the two worlds present in the piece. The Guard was still Sinéad, and no longer Ismene. This scene between the Guard and Creon, introduced that "The corpse. Somebody has as good as buried it. Somebody's after attending to it right. Casting the earth on it and all the rest" (20), and was significant in terms of its physicality. The actors generally maintained short distances, including the audience as much as possible in the events. At the end of this scene, however, there was a physical moment in which Creon threatens the Guard and grabs her shirt. Because they were not played often, and because the audience already felt so engaged, these physical moments were quite effective. When asked about moments that stood out, one audience member specifically mentioned, "the shirt gripping. The physical change in distance was powerful." This scene was also not blocked, so the paths of the actors changed with each showing, but this physical moment was sketched and specifically placed such that it stayed physically the same with each

performance. This physical act played in such close proximity to the audience troubled the audience/performer relationship. The audience reacted to its being “powerful” because they were jolted by it. In this way, the connection between actors and audience was brought into question, and the audience was given to think about their relationship to the performers and the space, and to be moved by the performance in a visceral way.

Transition 1: Sunday Bloody Sunday

The first major moment of transition back to the meta-world solidified the understanding that this was a unified story. Following the Guard-Creon scene, the meta-characters spoke to one another for the first time since their introduction. It was lighthearted speech, in which they playfully talked about the scene they had just done and Colleen suggested they play some music. Paddy was eager to hear U2, and Sinéad responded with, “Oh, no—you’re not going to make me listen to Bono now, are you?” These moments in the meta-world, particularly little snippets like this, also worked to make the narrators honest, whole people, who could be trusted and appreciated by the audience. One audience member said, “I enjoyed the dig at Bono,” while another, in a more general comment, appreciated, “the moments where [the characters] moved out of the story for a second. From the start they revealed a reverence.” Sinéad, Colleen and Paddy spoke to one another for a brief time, and Sinéad stuck a letter to the dartboard in the corner. What the meta-characters were saying to each other couldn’t necessarily be heard by the audience over the music, nor

was it imperative that they be able to. It is through the establishment of the meta-world that the frame of understanding of *Antigone* was created and made effective.

Music played a very specific and integral role in the forming of the performance. In Irish oral tradition, stories are often told through music and ballads, as they are remnants of the primary oral culture Ireland once had. Because of this, music is extremely important to Irish oral performance. Festivals of Irish performance, in pubs or in homes, always include both music and storytelling, or music accompanying storytelling. The relationship between the two is such that they cannot be separated. Music was used in two ways in *Our Day Will Come*. A stereo “jukebox” was used for pre-recorded music such as “Sunday Bloody Sunday” or “Zombie,” which played at the end of the piece. Ballads were also sung in several places throughout the performance. In this way, both traditional and contemporary modes of incorporation of Irish music were used—as they are in pub sessions or other performances. At the same time, these musical interludes offered a moment of distance from the performance, time for the audience to connect to the piece on a different level and to relate the meta- and *Antigone*- worlds.

Scene 4: Guard/Creon to Creon/Antigone

The transition into the Guard/Creon scene was another abrupt physical moment. Colleen and Paddy, having been standing by the stereo across the room from the bar, begin with Colleen shutting off the music and throwing Paddy down with, “This is the one. We caught her at it./ Attending to the corpse. Where’s Creon gone? He’s needed...(26). With that, Colleen has become the new Guard, Paddy is

Antigone, and Sinéad, still at the bar, becomes Creon. This was the first moment in which Creon was not portrayed by Paddy, and was in fact being played by a woman. Similarly, it was Paddy playing Antigone. The gender distinction was not taken into consideration when determining who would take which character in each scene. Much as when in telling a story, one storyteller must play or sing both male and female parts, the three meta-characters played all parts regardless of gender. In numerous ballads, both men and women are present and have parts that are in their own voice. Since these ballads are generally sung in their entirety by one singer, he or she sings both parts, and both genders. This was thus simulated through portrayal of both men and women by all of the actors. This became particularly poignant in the Creon/Haemon scene, which will be discussed later on.

This Guard, although the same Guard as in the previous scene, was a very different character textually and in performance. The first Guard's speech was in prose, the one in this scene was in verse. This coupled with the change in mood between the two scenes, lent itself to the portrayal of a different type of Guard. Whereas the first guard had been nervous and bumbling, this guard was calm and composed as he described the scene of Antigone's discovery.:

And then what happens? A whirlwind. Out of nowhere.
Leaves whipped off trees. Flying sand and dust...

But then it clears

And this one's standing, crying her eyes out.
She sees the bare corpse and lets out a screech...
She was like a wild bird round an empty nest.
She lifted dust in her hands and let it fall...
Taking care to do the whole thing right,
And showed no signs of panic when we trapped her,
Denied no thing she was accused of doing
Then or earlier (28).

This change in the guard's characterization was emphasized through the switching of meta-character to play the part. The Guard is dismissed once Antigone's actions are described, and then the scene becomes about Antigone and Creon's conflicting values, and the idea of law and justice. The two contrasting views on the law and proper execution of it, play to the value sets of the audience and help both to establish narrative authenticity within the piece, and to allow formation of community through the shared values.

Transition 2: "Taking" Creon

Paddy interrupted Creon at the end of the Creon/Antigone scene, saying to Sinéad, "I'm taking Creon." By directing the "Get Ismene out here" line at Colleen, Sinéad indicated to her that she'd be playing the role of Ismene. So the distribution became Paddy as Creon, Colleen as Ismene and Sinéad as Antigone. Colleen, reticent to begin as Ismene, was pulled up by Paddy and he became Creon as he kissed her sharply, then pulled away yelling, "You bloodsucker. You two-faced parasite" (34). After that moment, it became clear that Ismene and Creon have had some sort of sexual or romantic relationship. Much of this scene though is directed at Ismene and Antigone, who were played by the opposite meta-character as they were in the first scene.

Scene 5: Creon/Antigone/Ismene

The Antigone/Ismene relationship was further explored in this scene, as Ismene now wants to ally herself with her sister and Antigone will not allow it. More

physicality was explored here—as well as the Ismene/Creon kiss at the beginning of the scene, Antigone slapped Ismene and Ismene tried seducing Creon into letting Antigone go. These physical moments worked similarly to the first one, giving them distinction from the generally distance-heavy physical score of the piece.

Transition 3: Foggy Dew

This was the first time that a ballad was sung by the three meta-characters. Colleen began this song and the other two joined in almost immediately. The song was the only element present in this transition. Text from *The Burial at Thebes* came immediately before it and after it. The sung pieces worked differently from the pre-recorded music in terms of the relationship the audience perceived between the music and the characters. One audience member, in discussing the music generally wrote, “the songs, they helped me connect the "bar story" with the Antigone story.” The music was used as a through line, in both the meta-world and the Antigone-world, since music is such an important part of the performance experience as a whole. In describing the ballads specifically, one audience member wrote, “I largely connected to the music in the plays specifically when the characters came together in song. I was caught off guard and found it very powerful.” The effectiveness of the sung music is partly in its power to surprise. Another audience member wrote, “The a cappella songs particularly stood out for me, creating the most concrete connection between the play and the setting for me. The songs were perfectly chosen for the content of lyrics used.” The ballads were chosen for their relationship to the content of the Antigone story. The Foggy Dew verse that was sung went:

As down the glen one Easter morn to a city fair rode I
 There armed lines of marching men in squadrons passed me by
 No fife did hum nor battle drum did sound its dread tattoo
 But the Angelus bell o'er the Liffey swell rang out the the foggy dew

This ballad, a war song, in both meter and melody conveys a sense of battle. In using the ballad in the transition from the confrontation between Creon, Antigone and Isemene and the argument between Creon and Haemon, the battle between the morals of Antigone and Creon was highlighted. Similarly, the general senses of tension and violence were amplified through the ballad.

Scene 6: Creon/Haemon

It was during this scene that gender roles were truly manipulated. The two meta-characters who played Creon and Haemon were Colleen and Sinéad. This was partly necessary, since the gender dynamic between the two characters must be equal and there were two women and only one man present. The choice was received well, however, with one audience member stating that, "The scene during which Haemon challenges his father stood out to me acutely. The casting of women in the role of men in the scene created an ironically dazzling effect." That coupled with another audience member's connection to "when Creon spoke to Haemon about the fate of his bride. The words and emotions spoken by the actors transcended the gender of the roles they were playing," indicates that the actors and audience reached an understanding about the use of storytelling within the piece. The audience bought into the role switching and gender-play because of the importance of the story over the characters. Ong noted in primary oral cultures, that characters were primarily static, and that it was the story itself that was paramount (152). In this story, the

characters are quite dynamic, but the need for the story to transcend all other elements still held.

Transition 4: Trying to Read the Letter

During this brief transition, Sinéad attempted to read the letter she had posted on the dartboard at the beginning of the play. Colleen, clearly not ready to read it, took it away from her and saying, “I’m doing Creon. You’re Antigone,” began the next scene quickly.

Scene 5: Creon/Antigone’s Sentence—She Moved Thru the Fair

This relatively short scene was where Creon sentenced Antigone and sent her away. It also contains her final plea to the citizens of Thebes not to forget her or what she stands for. Following that plea, she began to sing. This was the only moment of song within the Antigone story, and in fact, this was a moment somewhere in between the Antigone- and meta-worlds, not scripted by Heaney, and constructed by the actors. Here, Antigone/Sinéad began to sing with Paddy and Colleen joining shortly after. The ballad didn’t finish however, as the three characters, by then certainly the meta-characters, were unable to complete the song. Instead, they trailed off, and took a moment to collect themselves. In this moment of quiet, Sinéad and Paddy met. Paddy at this point became Tiresius, and Sinéad, the boy guiding him. Colleen remained Creon. As the piece was being constructed, the company realized that She Moved Thru the Fair was Antigone’s anthem throughout the play. It goes:

My young love said to me
My Mother won’t mind

And my Father won't slight you
 For your lack of kind
 Then she smiled and walked away from me
 And this she did say
 It will not be long love
 Till our wedding day

Because of the relationship between Antigone and Haemon, and the conflict between their families, this ballad voices succinctly much of the conflict seen throughout the play.

Scene 6: Tiresius/Creon

Tiresius's monologue was the most resonant aspect of this scene, according to audience response. His speech is incredibly narrative, and much like the work at the end of the play (to be discussed below) is entirely about telling the story. This pure narrative was very effective in establishing narrative authenticity, both because it recalled the meta-characters, who were the audience's connection to the events of the Antigone-world, and because it was straightforward storytelling, which holds in it a cultural memory of primary oral performance, in which the storyteller was also the composer and poet (Lord 13).

Transition 6: Shots Center/ Scene 7: Creon changes his Mind

This transition moment was very brief. In it, one of the bar stools was moved to the center of the space and the Jameson's was brought as well. Shots were taken and the meta-characters moved into the next scene, in which all three actors voiced Creon's conflict. Here, again, was explored the effect of telling this story with three storytellers. By splitting Creon into all three characters, even for just a moment, the

audience's expectation of roles was brought into question. This reinforced the notion of the story as the most important element of the performance, and kept the audience from becoming complacent as observers, continuing to involve them directly in the action of the play. This final performative exploration of story was particularly essential given that it was the final moment in which any of the Antigone story was played. Following this moment the characters gave way to storytelling completely.

Scene 8: Meta-World—Telling the Story—Reading the Letter

At this moment, the meta-characters drop the premise of their performance and simply tell the story of what happened to Haemon and Antigone. Their text was still taken from *The Burial at Thebes*, but they played no characters and none of the moments were physicalized. Instead, Paddy began with, "I can tell you the whole thing now. There's no sense/ In making a liar of myself" (67). The meta-characters then went through Creon's discovery of Antigone and Haemon in the cave.

Antigone was there,
Hanging by her neck from a linen noose,
And Haemon on the ground beside her
With his arms about her waist, imploring
The underworld, lamenting his dead bride
And shouting execrations against Creon.

But Creon couldn't help himself and went
With open arms to the boy and started pleasing,
Calling him "son," saying he'd had a fit
And to watch himself. But Haemon spat in his face
And made a quick lunge with his two edged sword
And would have got him if Creon hadn't dodged.
Then before we knew where we were, he had turned
The sword on himself and buried the blade half-way
In his own side (68).

This moment was an example of what Richard Bauman calls “Speech for those whose hearts are heated,” what is in between ordinary speech and truly performative speech. It is in this in-between space that we have established most Irish oral performance lies, and it is because of this in-between space that the distinction between audience and performer is blurred and the performance community is formed. Thus with this moment, and the solidification of *Our Day Will Come* within this particular type of speech, the community of audience and performers is established. This is clear also from audience response to this moment. One audience member remarked that, “The monologue about finding Antigone hanging” was the most resonant moment of the play, ending on the poignant, “And as he was collapsing/ His arms still clung to the girl and blood came spurting.../ Out of his mouth all over her white cheek.../ That was the kiss he gave his bride to be” (68). The simple telling of the story then led to the reading of the letter Sinéad had brought in at the beginning. She began by holding it up and saying, “these are her words.” With that, she read Antigone’s final ode. The choice to read Antigone’s ode (as it is written in *The Burial at Thebes*) as a letter supported the narrative element of storytelling. The distance that the audience had from Antigone as her words are read in a letter allowed them to form relationships to her that would not have been possible had she said the words in front of them as a character. Another audience member stated that, “the end sequence, beginning with the reading of Antigone's words, nearly brought me to tears. It was a really powerful union of the culture portrayed and the timeless tragedy.” The lack of imbued emotion and proximity to the character allow an audience not only to feel

Antigone's pain, but to understand it on a rational level, and for an audience to become a true community, their reason must be involved.

Scene 9: Zombie—9 Shots

Drinking is closely tied to music and performance in Irish tradition. This was displayed through the final moment of the play. Following the letter, Paddy turned on the stereo to The Cranberries' "Zombie"⁹ while Sinéad and Colleen made the nonverbal decision to finish the bottle of Jameson's still on the bar stool in the middle of the room. Nine shots are filled and the three friends lift the first round, toasting each other, then the audience, and drink. This is repeated for the second shot. Before the third shot, the three say, "To our friends," and drink. Each time that the characters turned to the audience to include them in the experience, the audience lifted their own glasses and drank with them. The relationship between audience and performers here was clear. The audience was there with them, experiencing this event as they were. One audience member wrote, "The idea of using drinking and storytelling to cope with pain stands out to me because I think there's real truth to it."

Transition 9: Leaving the Space

Following "Zombie" there was little left for Sinéad, Colleen and Paddy to do. They had told their story and tried to find some kind of catharsis through the act. Whether or not they succeeded was unclear. At the end of the piece, Colleen said that she wants to go home. Sinéad offered to take her and the three retrieved their coats

and headed out, thanking various audience members on the way. Sinéad turned for one final thank you before heading out the door.

Our Day Will Come took most of its text from *The Burial at Thebes*, but the meaning of the play was completely altered by the frame and context of the meta-world. Whereas in *The Burial at Thebes*, the Antigone story as Sophocles originally penned it is carried out, in *Our Day Will Come* the Antigone story becomes a medium through which the three meta-characters explore their own grief, and use storytelling as a means to mourn and experience catharsis. The end of the performance becomes not about the battle, or a conflict, it is about the meta-characters having this experience and sharing it with the audience.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of *Our Day Will Come* can be attributed to the two basic elements important to oral performance: the authentic narrator, and the community between audience and performer. Narrative authenticity is paramount in terms of establishing that a narrator is qualified and able to effectively convey a story, and is based on a communal understanding between audience and performer of value sets and a narrative paradigm. The community that is then formed between audience and performer is one created through the joint understanding of narrative authenticity and engagement with the actors.

Irish oral performance is not the only form that employs these techniques. There are numerous oral performance and literary performance traditions that exhibit similar qualities. The purpose of this study was to examine why and how the practices of Irish oral performance are effective, not to argue that Irish oral performance is more or less effective than other forms. This examination was taken primarily through practical application in the form of the performance *Our Day Will Come*. Research relating to the performance was taken from theoretical sources and field research in Pubs in Chicago, as well as through interviews with Irish musicians and performers.

For *Our Day Will Come*, the ensemble explored how this mode of storytelling troubles the relationship between audience and performer, bringing into question ideas about narrative authenticity and community formation. We created a piece around what was most Irish about the text of *The Burial at Thebes*, presenting to an

American audience something universally understood and emotionally resonant. The relationship between research and practice was symbiotic during this process, the research serving as a frame, and the performance project itself engendering further research for the study. This experiment was meant to determine how narrative authenticity is established through an interpretive frame during performance and what its effect on the audience/performer relationship. The performance was analyzed in the context of theorists of orality, oral performance, narrative and community, bringing together works that define a specific oral performance space. This may be the original contribution of this work.

Stemming from Ong's notion of primary orality, Irish oral performance has blended oral and literary forms in its long history since the *filidh*, with much of its performance now in between a purely oral or literary form, and is one of the most well-known performance cultures of this form. It is through this intermediary form that a sense of community develops between audience and performer within Irish oral performance. This relationship was clear from much of my field research, when audience members in pubs were reverent and respectful of the Irish musicians, even once when a baseball game was playing (although the musicians did become distracted by the game once or twice). Audience members sang along to well-known tunes, and clapped or tapped their feet along to songs they knew less well. The atmosphere was participatory, and the relationship between the performers and the audience was nearly equal. These experiences were supported by anecdotes from the four musicians interviewed during the course of this project. All of these subjects had very different experiences as performers, but each of them spoke to the sense of

community formed with each performance, regardless of location or audience.

Brian Hart, a young American professor of Irish Studies at Washington University, who is also an balladeer, stated during an interview that Irish music is “not just taught it is passed on” (Hart Interview Sept. 17, 2009), such that a natural relationship occurs in the passing on of the music, through sharing. Irish performance then, is reciprocal and a relationship is formed between audience and performer through the sharing of the story. Hart related this to the giving and receiving of gifts as in the Potlatch of 19th century Northwest Coast Native Americans. It is more related to Marcel Mauss’s discussion of the *Hau* the Maori idea in which the spirit of the gift-giver is present in the gift itself. It is this presence that compels the gift-receiver to reciprocate. The piece of the gift-giver’s soul is not returned until the gift is reciprocated. In gift-giving, the formation of the relationship is one to one, between gift-giver and gift-receiver, which is the definition of a relationship. Perhaps Irish performance also functions in this way. The gift, being the performance, is given to the audience and a bit of each performer’s being is given with it, only returned when the audience reciprocates, in the form of acceptance of the story. When the reciprocal relationship is established, the community is formed. In *Our Day Will Come*, when the audience raised their glasses to toast along with the characters, they conveyed a sense of community with the performers, giving back to their “friends” in the form of engagement and participation. In performance the formation of a relationship is one to many, actor to audience, which is the definition of a community. This theory was formulated once research for this project had already begun, and as a result, it is not possible to argue with certainty that Irish oral performance is reciprocal in this way.

However, a relationship between performance and Maussian gift-giving could certainly lead to the communal performer-audience relationship seen in Irish oral performance.

This kind of relationship is one way to understand the universality of Irish oral performance. The question here is why this form appeals to all audiences, and not simply to Irish ones. There are a number of performance traditions that lie in a similar in-between space of literary and oral forms, and the likelihood of a potential audience member having been exposed to one of them is high. The Chamula were discussed earlier as a people who have very specific verbal behaviors that are closely related to the oral-literary verbal form of Irish oral performance. The Chamula “speech for people whose hearts are heated” is defined by Gary Gossen as “intermediate forms of emotional speech [which] contain predictable stylistic devices but do not contain predictable content. They can be said to be idiosyncratic” (Bauman 92). This form of oral performance, a dynamic product of both pre-determined and improvised speech, is in a similar verbal space to Irish oral performance. Intermediary speeches, between pure orality and pure literacy, are also present in more monologic contexts. Bedtime stories to children lie in a similar verbal space. The storyteller constructs a story based on a familiar paradigm, such as extant fairytale or lore. The migration of these styles can also account for a universal understanding of and relationship with this form. The music culture of Appalachia, for example, originally Scots-Irish, is founded in much of the same principle as traditional Irish oral performance, giving birth to American Blue-Grass and early American hymns. Because Americans are familiar with these musical forms, for

example the Blue-Grass, or a Creole Blues model, we are able to understand and relate to similar forms of oral performance, such as the Irish model.

It is possible that this theory can also be applied to non-verbal forms of performance. The relationship between authenticity and audience does not necessarily change when there is a non-verbal narrator. There are forms of dance in which a structure is established, but particular moments are improvised or modified from performance to performance. Similarly, the good reasons and universality of performance are still present in non-verbal storytelling forms, such as the Butoh tradition of Japan, the tango tradition of Argentina, or the Kathakali tradition of India. It holds then, that a study of non-verbal performance could prove equally effective in establishing narrative authenticity and community through the performer/audience relationship. This topic is deserving of further investigation.

The culminating project of this work, *Our Day Will Come*, was a successful experiment in the elements of performance, providing a deeper understanding of the interplay between orality and literacy, performer and audience, story and reaction. Through the frame of dramaturgically constructed performance, a practical application of the theoretical research and field research could be explored. The questions of narrative authenticity and formation of community were paramount and considered in both the rehearsal process and during each performance itself, particularly since the performance varied slightly each night. Recognizing that the performance was a living component of the research, the ensemble modified the piece each night, adjusting based on what felt better or worse with each showing and the effectiveness of the story with each version. It was through this performance, along

with the theory applied to it, that it was possible to see specifically how the audience-performer relationship was created and what was special about that relationship.

Through this work the performers experienced a heightened sense of audience engagement and the audience responded. The experience of this mutual relationship is present throughout Irish oral performance. A storyteller was telling stories to a group of children in Ireland. When the storyteller finished one child asked, “is that story true?” Before the storyteller could respond, another child answered, “it may not be true on the outside, but it’s true on the inside” (Marsh 21).

Notes

¹ “The spoken word held the power of breath, was literally inspiration, which was considered a gift from the great goddess Brigit, patron of poetry and divination. As such the spoken word could make magic, invoke the divine” (Freeman 2).

² In interviews with Brian Hart, Len Graham and Michael Buckley, each one recognized what they find uniquely Irish within Irish oral performance, but none could describe it objectively—only in terms of their own reactions to it and their relationships to it.

³ Williams expanded his idea of a “structure of feeling” throughout his career, making it difficult to cite. For more information on the “structure of feeling,” see chapter 9 in Williams’s *Marxism and Literature* (Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.), or consult Jenny Bourne Taylor’s article (Taylor, Jenny B. “Structure of Feeling.” *Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. Print.)

⁴ Whenever a work is relevant to an audience’s response, that work becomes a rhetorical work (rather than a poetic one)—because it relies on the values of the audience and their experiences (Fisher 161).

⁵ The Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) resulted in the aftermath of the Easter Rising of 1916, and granted dominion to an Irish Free State, with a government in Dublin. Northern Ireland, with its government in Belfast (established by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act also in the aftermath of the Easter Rising) would have the option remain in British control, which it chose to do (Irish National Archives).

⁶ While Ismene does not actually die in the Antigone story, for the purposes of this process and eventual setting it was helpful to consider her among the rest of her generation, and she was assumed to have died somewhere following the deaths of Antigone and Haemon.

⁷ This emotional understanding of the work should not be confused with an emotional portrayal of the piece by the actors. While the motivation for the play is founded in pathos, rather than logos, the actors were still careful not to imbue their characters with unnecessary emotion and to give the text credence above all else.

⁸ It is important, particularly given our discussion of authenticity, to mention that the actors were not drinking real whisky, as drinking alcohol in a theater performance space is actually quite dangerous. We substituted apple juice, which has a similar color to many Irish whiskies.

⁹ The choice of the song “Zombie” by The Cranberries deserves note. The Cranberries are an Irish band who integrate specifically Irish cultural and historical themes into their music. “Zombie” is specifically about The Troubles, a period in Irish history in which British rule was particularly oppressive and the IRA was extremely violent.

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