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The Search for Irishness (Chapter One of Buffoonery in Irish Drama: Staging Twentieth-Century Post-Colonial Stereotypes)

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The Search for Irishness

A striking feature in Irish culture since at least the late 19th century is an impulse to define what constitutes “Irish,” seemingly to establish the qualifications of those who claim to be Irish. It is an impulse that manifests itself in literature as diverse as George Bernard Shaw’s play, *John Bull’s Other Island*, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or Seamus Heaney’s *Station Island*. The same impulse is at work in the public lives of figures like Oscar Wilde, who while exiled created a fascinating persona for himself; Patrick O’Brian, who refashioned himself as an Irishman despite no Irish background at all; or Martin McDonagh, who has only summered in Ireland but who represents himself as an Irish playwright writing about Ireland. One’s proximity to Ireland, whether through heritage or other association, is used both to embrace identity and to gain distance from it.

Defining Irishness is the main objective in a recent and controversial best-seller in Ireland, Terry Eagleton’s *The Truth about the Irish*, in which Eagleton, a British academic, sets out to destroy the myths about the Irish today. The book is marketed primarily for (and indeed addressed to) tourists coming to Ireland, ostensibly to help explain away some of the confusion they might feel upon finding Ireland to be otherwise than expected. Tongue in cheek, Eagleton claims there is not just one Irish type: “The nation as a whole is made up of culchies and jackeens, yuppies and yokels, saints and Satanists, travellers and settled people, nationalists and anti-nationalists, heroin addicts and holy water addicts, mystical monks and atheistic intellectuals” (104). These types run contrary to tourist expectations of the stereotypical Irish: simple and goodly people

who will drink and sing and give you the shirts off their backs and who will certainly fight and die for their faith and their politics. While humorously guiding the reader through the mysteries of modern Ireland (what does “B&B” stand for, why is the General Post Office such a big deal, who are Wilde and Joyce), Eagleton asks the central question prevalent in much of Irish literature: What elusive quality makes a person Irish?

Like mercury, then, Irishness is a slippery thing to wrap one’s fingers around....So is being Irish a matter of belonging to a state, or is it a state of mind? Is it cultural, or ethnic, or political, or territorial? Is it like being Belgian, or is it more like being a Buddhist? Are you Irish if you think you are? (108)

Eagleton first suggests the Irish themselves are not that interested in their image except as a marketing ploy:

All those jokey postcards and sentimental tea-towels are part of the way the country faithfully panders to the tourist’s starry-eyed image of it, without actually believing it in the least. Irishness is the intoxicating liquor which the country is best at distilling. Consumed too freely, it produces more fantasies, hallucinations, false hopes, weepiness, bravado and phony checriness than Bushmills ever did....Irish intellectuals are an eloquent, quarrelsome bunch who talk non-stop about themselves and their country. The Irish are endlessly fascinated by themselves, which among other things is the mark of a small, parochial nation. That’s why some of them are reading this book right now. French or English intellectuals don’t talk much about being French or English because they don’t need to. It’s only a marginal people who have an identity problem, and so keep examining themselves all the time. (39, 119)

And yet, when Eagleton comments, “Parading your Irishness is infrequent in Ireland, since the Irish don’t usually go around thinking of themselves as Irish any more than turkeys go around thinking of themselves as turkeys” (135), he seems to contradict himself. This apparent contradiction is representative of the dichotomy that continues to be seen in Irish writing, Irish culture, and particularly in Irish drama, and is handled both seriously and lightly. Particularly evident in the drama written in the twentieth century, that contradiction is the locus of this project, pointing up the circularity of what happens with stereotypes: part of the identity problem that the Irish experience actually comes from stereotypes created by the Irish themselves, stereotypes which are then perpetuated and spread through their literature, and which exist because of anxiety about identity.

Throughout the twentieth century and indeed through part of the nineteenth, playwrights have been concerned with reinventing the Irish image as it has been appropriated and then derogated by the dominant, hegemonic culture. As Irish drama has been produced in England, for example, the representation of the stage Irish figure becomes exaggerated and then eventually accepted as the “true” type so that the Irish feel the need to once again set the record

straight. Each generation of Irish playwrights attempts to refashion a new vision for the Irish character on stage, making him or her more correct or current, more in line with what is true, and yet that new figure is also appropriated for comic purposes until the next generation comes along to repeat the efforts. In the end, the comic figure devolves into a hybrid, in the sense of a degradation of the original. Trying to gain subjectivity and a voice for themselves, the Irish must reinvent themselves in defiance of the comic, until that new invention becomes “tainted” by colonial desire. The tension of colonial desire is at the crux: those who are colonized mimic those who dominate in an effort to gain power, but they also try to remain true to their origins and culture. They create an “almost-but-not-quite” similarity, the hybrid of identity, which is neither one thing nor the other. As well, the culture that dominates wants to retain power while it attempts to live side by side with those who are colonized. The stereotypes arise because of this tension, functioning to distance the two cultures from each other by fomenting misunderstanding and a certain dehumanization. Homi Bhabha, post-colonial theorist, avers that a stereotype remains static and unchanging, especially within the colonial structure, that the images which are created are effective tools of resistance because they don’t change, connoting “rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (66).

The stereotypes, however, are embattled through colonial discourse so that they do change. One of the means for changing self-image is literature, especially drama, because of the dynamic exchange between audience, performer and author. As the stereotypes shift, they become a slippery tool for subversion for those who are colonized. The iteration of identity does not need to change because it was inadequate to begin with; rather, the iteration needs to change because identity changes coming into contact with the historical environment around it, the result of colonial desire. Any audience may misread the attempts at reinvention because that audience sees everything through the lens of what came before, what is familiar, a lens which is necessarily colored by colonialism. An Irish accent will provoke laughter because audiences are cued to expect humor.

The phenomenon of colonial desire begs the question of whether a marginalized group can ever be wholly in control of its own image in the world. Invention/reinvention seems to be an unavoidable process, as long as a nation continues to be marginalized. As Seamus Deane has explained:

In the attempted discovery of its “true” identity, a community often begins with the demolition of the false stereotypes within which it has been entrapped. This is an intricate process, since the stereotypes are successful precisely because they have been interiorized. They are not merely impositions from the colonizer on the colonized. It is a matter of common knowledge that stereotypes are mutually generative of each other, as in the case of the English and Irish. Although the stereotyping initiative, so to speak, is

taken by the community that exercises power, it has to create a stereotype of itself as much as it does of others. Indeed, this is one of the ways by which otherness is defined. The definition of otherness, the degree to which others can be persuasively shown to be discordant with the putative norm, provides a rationale for conquest. (1990, 12)

The search for and the articulation of identity is at the heart of much twentieth-century drama, a fact which obliquely supports Declan Kiberd's theory that Ireland was not truly a nation before it became diasporic, and that it is only through being identified by non-Irish, by the "Other," that it actually came to recognize itself as a coalesced country, with traits that are common to many of its people. Thus the Irish people came to be identified as Irish by the Other who needed to categorize them; without the perspective of the Other, Ireland would not have, presumably, this angst about identity and autonomy.

The relationship between the Other and the Irish, however, is complicated by the diaspora, ostensibly the very element that creates the relationship. In a diasporic world, who gets to be Irish? In a diasporic world, how can Otherness be determined when Irishness evidently cannot be? Indeed, attempts to define Irishness must address emigration, immigration and exile: are those who no longer live in the country still considered Irish? Are those who were born elsewhere Irish? The list of Irish dramatists who have written many of their works while living abroad is long and impressive, including George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Sean O'Casey, Emma Donoghue, Thomas McGreevy, Padraic Colum, Austin Clarke, James Stephens, Paul Vincent Carroll, and Hugh Leonard, to name just a few. Who gets to wear this badge of Irishness? Who qualifies as the "dispossessed"? Does exile necessarily mean a forfeiture of national identity?

These questions are inherent in most of the dialogue about the Irish. There are scholars now who have "splintered" off from discussing Irishness only in terms of Ireland, who are discussing art, literature, history and culture in terms of Irish-Americans, Anglo-Irish, Irish in Australia, the Irish exile, the diaspora and, recently, Irish in England. The implicit assumption in these discussions is that, of course, these people are not "really" Irish, that somehow they have not earned or retained the privilege of being considered Irish. The intersections of colonialism and identity make such questions unusually complicated; because of the way that colonialism inflects identity, this study will be solely concerned with the way those Irish from Ireland represent themselves for Ireland. While the drama that comes from outside of the country, or that is produced for consumption outside of the country, might very well be attempting to create new definitions of Irish identity as well, the drama which is written by, and purportedly directed at, the resident Irish is more conflicted. That drama relies upon the Irish people's awareness that they are not, despite what stage Irishness

might suggest, interchangeable, but it also relies upon the knowledge that stereotypes are often rooted in reality and “interiorized.”

Eagleton’s project, although certainly controversial in its efforts to define Irishness from the outside, is nothing new. Rather, it is indicative of an ongoing interrogation about Irish identity and self-image. Writers throughout the century, from the North and South, from the great to the relatively obscure, have written on the same subject. Many critics have noted the theme of identity in Anglo-Irish writings, Christopher Murray and G. J. Watson among others, but they generally focus on well-known texts to make their cases. This study examines some relatively obscure playwrights to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the quest for national identity in much drama written in the twentieth century, not just within the texts considered more canonical and familiar.

The quest for elements of particular Irishness is not, of course, limited to drama. In the 1910s, George Birmingham wrote several books with titles such as *Irishmen All*, *The Lighter Side of Irish Life*, and *An Irishman Looks at His World*, all of which attempted to define who the Irish were and describe what they were about. Making some fascinating and sweeping generalizations to explain the bemusing behavior of the Irish, he illustrates the various Irish types, including policemen, priests and ministers, farmers, publicans, officials, and servants. Birmingham identifies the Irish type by vocation and class, while English concepts of type (as C. G. Duggan points out throughout his book on the stage Irishman) have more to do with personal traits and actions than with social position. Birmingham comments on regional differences, particularly differences of North or South, Belfast or Dublin. These distinctions were virtually ignored by foreign writers portraying the Irish, and Birmingham seems to imply that only insiders were aware of nuance in self-identification. Despite the assertion of nuance, however, he is aware that stereotypes are often based on truth, and that the Irish themselves prefer conformation to type:

Irishmen...dislike erratic personalities. We prefer men who are true to type. We recognise without resentment the existence of various types and we are on the whole fairly tolerant. In Ireland a man may be a Protestant or a Catholic, a Nationalist or a Unionist, without suffering any serious inconvenience. He may choose his fold, but he must be a sheep. We do not like wild animals. And, unfortunately, the man of letters is usually, the man of genius always, an eccentric creature who cannot be kept in an enclosure. He insists on looking at things from odd angles and seeing them not at all as other people see them. He keeps on describing things and drawing pictures of them, not as we know they are, nice and clear and flat, but as they appear to him through distorted glasses of his absurd temperament, all messed up with each other. We do not want people of that kind among us. It is far better for them to go away somewhere else, to London or to New York; which, indeed, is what such Irishmen generally do. (1919, 118)

Many people have participated in the project of identifying Irish type. W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and John Millington Synge, Brendan Behan, Sean O'Casey, James Joyce, Edna O'Brien, Lord Dunsany, Frank O'Connor, Eavan Boland, Austin Clarke, John B. Keane, and Thomas Cahill have all attempted such books which try to illuminate Ireland and the Irish. Some of these books resemble tourist guides, a *la* Eagleton's, claiming they will reveal the "truth" about what Ireland is like and often including pictures and bits of poetry or song; others are written as autobiographies that reveal another kind of insider truth about what life is like in the "Emerald Isle." Some of them are comic, a wry look at the amusing quirks of a people and a place, and some are serious, purporting to set the record straight. A remarkable number of writers spend time discussing Irishness, explicating and defending mutually, trying to express whatever it is that represents that kernel of being, that essence, that makes someone Irish.

Thus, when the Irish first began to write plays with themselves as subject, they remained within a well-established type, copying the stage Irish figure they saw on the English stage, catering to audience expectations. This stage Irish figure is the version of Irishness that the world consumed before the Irish had a say, most often portrayed in English drama as a figure of comedy, with his drinking and his "abuse" of the English language and his endless cheerfulness masking an underlying insidiousness. C. G. Duggan has quite thoroughly traced the history of the stage Irish figure in English-speaking drama (primarily that written by the British) from its earliest manifestations up through the first third of the twentieth century, giving the most complete analysis of who that figure is. Quoting a publication in 1913, Duggan assures his readers:

"The Stage Irishman habitually bears the general name of Pat, Paddy or Teague. He has an atrocious Irish brogue, perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking, and never fails to utter, by way of Hibernian seasoning, some wild screech or oath of Gaelic origin at every third word: he has an unsurpassable gift of blarney and cadges for tips and free drinks. His hair is of a fiery red: he is rosy-cheeked, massive, and whiskey loving. His face is one of simian bestiality with an expression of diabolical archness written all over it. He wears a tall felt hat (billicock or wideawake), with a cutty-clay pipe stuck in front, an open shirt collar, a three caped coat, knee breeches, worsted stockings, and cockaded brogue-shoes. In his right hand he brandishes a stout blackthorn, or a sprig of shillelagh, and threatens to belabour therewith the daring person who will tread on the tails of his coat. For his main characteristics (if there is any such thing as psychology in the Stage Irishman) are his swagger, his boisterousness and his pugnacity. He is always ready with a challenge, always anxious to back a quarrel, and peerless for cracking skulls at Donnybrook Fair."...The first stage representation of Irishmen was clearly drawn from the life. (289)

That Duggan could think, as his editorializing last line suggests, that this representation was true to life divulges something about the pervasiveness of such representations, images which people other than the Irish were perpetuating. These are the versions of "Irishness" that the Irish were desperately trying

to eradicate, recognizing as they did that the stage versions were accepted as truthful representations by many audiences. In his book, however, Duggan has virtually ignored the treatment of the stage Irish figure by the Irish themselves. It is a curious omission, as the eradication of the stage Irish figure has been at the forefront of Irish drama since the middle of the nineteenth century, with each successive wave of dramatists striving to be the ones who would portray the Irish with dignity. Duggan gives the very representation dramatists reacted against, but also within which they had to work. Still colonized, the Irish were in a position of what Bhabha would call the “mimic man”: trying to behave like appropriate colonial subjects in performing the “almost-but-not-quite” versions of themselves as Irish subjects of England, they were also beginning to explore their own subjectivity and autonomy in defiance of England. While they knew what worked for audiences, they had to negotiate an identity for themselves somewhere between the unflattering image of the stage Irish and the truth.

Although this project primarily addresses the twentieth century, the impetus towards a new conception of the stage Irish figure really began in the middle of the nineteenth century with Dion Boucicault, an Irish playwright who wrote for a variety of audiences, including Irish, English, and American, at a time when other countries in the world were developing “national theaters.” Henrik Ibsen, for example, created his national theater in Norway in 1850, and was greatly influential throughout Western Europe. Although this specifically nationalist tendency would not manifest itself in Ireland for some years (Shaw and Yeats both acknowledging their indebtedness to Ibsen’s groundbreaking work), the portrayal of national characteristics was becoming more prevalent in much drama. European intellectuals were at a point in “scientism” when they believed in finding scientific reason, some form of essentialist determinism, for the differences in various peoples, for cultural permutations. The desire to be able to define others in qualitative terms was increasing, as cultures began to protrude into each other more and more through travel and emigration. Drama was a particularly effective means of exploring and perpetuating concepts of essentialism, providing a stage on which one might perform nationality, as it were. Boucicault, ever the capitalist, did what would sell and portrayed the stage Irish figure the world had come to know and love, doing so in a way that represented a decisive dissatisfaction with that identity, showing a knowledge of and a respect for the Irish people that extended beyond the simplistic stereotype ordinarily presented on stage. He establishes, subtly but effectively, the beginning of the rebellious colonial subject.

Boucicault’s career, in fact, seems to support Declan Kiberd’s thesis that the Irish only really gained awareness of themselves as a discrete “nationality” when they began to leave Ireland and were forced to perceive themselves as Other, through the eyes of the Other. After Boucicault’s American tour, his stage Irish figures began to change. Despite the continued use of stock charac-

ters and plenty of humor, Boucicault allowed for greater dignity and integrity in his portrayals, writing characters who might undercut the stock characters, allowing for the possibility of more realistic and palatable representations on the stage.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Boucicault was accused of creating a new stage Irish figure rather than eradicating the previous ones. The Irish Revivalists reclaimed the stage Irish figure as part of their project, insisting that a true National Theatre would represent true and glorious Irishness, not the figure of ridicule most often found on the Irish stage. Lady Gregory's oft-cited statement upon the establishment of the National Theatre bears repeating:

We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (1991, 378-79).

The Abbey project was, as much of twentieth century Irish drama has been, concerned with getting at the "truth" of the Irish character, showing to the world who the Irish really were, revealing some authenticity that has been clouded by the "misrepresentations" of the English. Their project was embraced by the audiences and critics as well, and plays were panned throughout the twentieth century because of their failure to succeed in presenting authentic Irishness.

Adrian Frazier points out the absurdity, to those for whom theater has never been central to a nationalist movement, of judging a work of imagination such as a play on whether it is representative of reality, on whether it remains true to the type of a particular people. However, since Yeats had assured his audiences "he was going to show the Irish people who they really were" (Frazier 7), their judgment, according to Frazier, was fair: audiences and critics took umbrage to "misrepresentation" that was no better than they had borne from the hands of the English. Far from embracing Oscar Wilde's exhortations that "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art" (628), the Irish have traditionally demanded an element of truth to the characters who allegedly represent them on stage. With great fervor, critics have disparaged plays on the grounds that the stage characters are not truly Irish, that these "people" would never be found in Ireland and that therefore they should not be presented on the stage, as though the stage were necessarily the site of performance for nationality rather than for creative explorations of various intellectual or imaginative musings. The fury at finding seemingly untrue portrayals is arguably (see Watson and Dean) at the base of the famous "riots" surrounding the performance of John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and *In the Shadow of the Glen*, but certainly doesn't stop there. Many other plays have been attacked, albeit less spectacularly, on similar grounds. The Best Play of the

2000 Dublin Theatre Festival, Macnas's *The Lost Days of Ollie Deasy*, was criticized in the newspapers for creating characters untrue to the Irish nature, on the basis that one wouldn't find people like that on the Irish buses. The audiences as well as the playwrights are involved in the project of reappropriating their own identity as a discrete people.

At the end of the first quarter of the century, however, after the Treaty resulting in the partition of the island and the establishment of the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, yet another form of identity crisis emerges in Ireland, one that affects both North and South: What is a nationality when the geographic entity is no longer united, when part of the island remains colonized and the other part is post-colonial? The drama created after 1921 reflects this crisis in interesting ways, becoming deeply concerned with class and economic issues, as well as with a national image that tries to assert a new kind of authority. Many of the plays, such as those by Paul Vincent Carroll, Austin Clarke, and Louis D'Alton, have an interesting turn toward socialism and Marxism as a way to assert authority: now the Irish are in charge of themselves and the typically English-affiliated and oppressive ruling classes are left out of the conversation.

Participation in socialism marks the Irish as part of a global economy rather than a national one. Only somewhat recently, however, for a variety of reasons, has Ireland truly become part of a global economy. Its current national image is global and urbane, a far cry from the rural and naïve image it once had. The new image surprises and, if Eagleton is to be believed, dismays many visitors, especially those members of the diaspora who return in hopes of encountering a romanticized version of Ireland, but also those who know that modernization destroys a real enigmatic "something," even though not many agree on what that something might be. A sense of this loss is reflected in the more recent drama of, among others, Dermot Bolger, Tom Murphy, Christina Reid, John Coulter, Declan Hughes, Mark O'Rowe, Owen McCafferty, Enda Walsh, and Marina Carr. Recent playwrights present characters and situations urban and rural, North and South, which are concerned with religious issues (but not in the way that Lady Gregory was), and are concerned with politics (but not in the way that W. B. Yeats was), and are concerned with urban issues (but not in the way Sean O'Casey was), and are concerned with history (but not in the way that Christine Longford was). Over the course of the twentieth century, playwrights' visions of Ireland changed quite a bit, encompassing people who are still focused on regional differences but less focused on the project of stipulating national identity. Some playwrights remain focused on national identity, albeit a version still propagated outside of the country, a national identity which is exposed as false and even treacherous. What seems to have changed in Ireland is the need for such particular self-definition, as the Republic moves beyond post-colonialism and Ireland (North and South) continues to globalize culturally and economically.

The difference between the drama produced today in Ireland and that produced elsewhere about Ireland illuminates this shift toward globalism and the rift between a post-colonial country moving towards globalization and a colonized country that remains torn by internal conflict. Regional distinctions are particularly relevant to the Irish themselves in a way that does not hold true for outsiders seeking to hold on to an Irish stereotype. This is not to say the Irish were unaware of regional differences earlier in the century; such an awareness can be seen in the establishment of the Ulster Literary Theatre, a theatre which propounded a very different agenda from that of the Abbey and which produced plays reflecting the differences between North and South. Earlier in the century, when Irish nationalists were striving for recognition as a nation, the stereotypes tended to be limiting and rural, as in Birmingham's discussions of Irishmen. Today's stereotypes, perpetuated even within the country, have less to do with the Irish as a unified whole and more to do with these regional differences. John Wilson Foster has elucidated this difference in *Colonial Consequences*: even within Ireland there are convoluted considerations of who is authentically Irish, whether the Ulster Protestants, the Southern Protestants, or the Catholics get to consider themselves the "real Irish," and how regionalism works to formulate identity, especially in the North. Regionalization, as a project, however, extends far beyond illustrating the differences between North and South, to making pronouncements about the different traits of people from Belfast or Derry, from Cork or Galway or Dublin, or even within the various areas of Dublin. Eagleton mocks these distinctions in *The Truth about the Irish* when he illustrates prejudices about Dublin 4, the Dublin postal zone accepted as posh but which is, to the average tourist, not only indistinct but almost unrecognizable as a geographical area. He claims these distinctions have more to do with regional stereotyping than with the truth. The project of reinvention of national identity is still one of trying to identify who the Other is, even when the Other is another Dubliner.

The maintenance of regional or national distinctions requires assumptions about authenticity and truth, and, as mentioned above, authenticating characteristics, the source of much strife within the theatre movement in Ireland for well over a hundred years, remains a concern today. At stake here is the people's right to construct an identity of their own, with identifiable national distinctiveness that transcends stereotypes and lends credibility to "ancient idealism."

As those who began the Irish Literary Theatre knew, the stage is a site of contestation for identity, easily recognized by the public as a place where the Irish can be held up to ridicule and contempt or to praise and admiration, where the various emanations of a people trying to sort out who they are might be performed and processed. The idea of a National Theatre grew quite naturally from this desire, even though Seamus Deane argues the idea of nationalism is provincial, bordering upon racism. Deane also stipulates, however, that op-

pression necessarily creates the need to identify with a nation, to cling to a fixed sense of identity:

Nobody can live in perpetual deferment of their sense of selfhood, or free themselves from bondage without a strongly affirmative consciousness of who they are. Without such self-consciousness, one would not even know what one lacked; and a subject that thinks itself complete feels no need to revolt. In this sense, the “negativity” of an oppressed people — its sense of itself as dislocated and depleted — already implies a more positive style of being. (1990, 37)

While for Boucicault the movement towards exonerating the stage Irish figure of ridicule was not overtly political, it was certainly political for Yeats and the Revivalists, and it remained so for those writing during the Civil War in Ireland, through the Partition of the Counties, and through The Troubles in the North, indeed all through the twentieth century. The representation of the Irish upon the stage became the site of much more than play, a kind of acclamation of identity and reclamation of a power that the Irish felt had been taken from them. This reclamation consisted of more than just an establishment or creation of a positive Irish identity, as it included a repudiation of all things English as well, from sports to language to products, portrayal of Irish identity becoming grounds upon which the Irish would accuse each other of everything from faithlessness to treason. It is interesting that, as Declan Kiberd notes, those who were not nationalist enthusiasts “were often called ‘unIrish’, because Irish nationalism too often defined itself by what it was against” (141). Irishness became a political stance with all that might entail, defined by many in terms of what it was not rather than what it was, and many nationalists were thought to be too fanatical. The Irish themselves couldn’t agree on what it might mean to be Irish:

According to *Sambain* [Yeats’ magazine published in 1904] what makes an Irish writer is not that he writes in Irish, pleads the national cause, expresses Irish morality, or creates typical Irish characters; not even that he is inspired by Irish literary traditions; certainly not that he executes in his plays the will of the people, or any will but his own. It becomes difficult to see what is left for a writer to do who wishes to be Irish. For Yeats, however, that person’s wish should be to make himself not Irish but a writer. Do that and he would be Irish enough. Ultimately, Yeats says, only five or six people have the right to call themselves Irish, people who usually belong, he believes, to the leisured class (read Protestant population), whose thought is *harder* and *more masterful* than that of others; these have, he adds, an *essential nearness to reality*. (Frazier 105)

The idea that there are only a few people who have earned the “right” to call themselves Irish, beyond any ethnic or native origin, beyond birth, race, or even geography, seems ludicrous, but it is emblematic of the weight put (by the Irish themselves) on their given labels and on the recognition they received as a cultural group. Paradoxically, while for Yeats only the members of the leisured

class get to call themselves Irish, because their thought is “harder” and “more masterful” than that of others, the characters portrayed on stage as representative of the Irish were, almost invariably, members of the peasant class. The Abbey Theatre (the home of the Revivalists) produced primarily kitchen dramas, plays dealing with the rural, “simple” peasantry. Looking back from a modern perspective, a critic such as Fintan O’Toole can remark:

If England was urban, Ireland had to be rural. If England was industrial, Ireland had to [be] pastoral. Instead of looking clearly at Irish life in all its diversity, the new cultural movements tended to look for an Irishness that was defined in these ways, and that therefore excluded much of the reality of Irish urban life. (1996, 107)

Again, Ireland was defined by what it is not rather than what it is. The argument continues throughout the *Field Day* project, with Seamus Deane urging the Irish to try to transcend the same old dissensions:

The Irish character apologetically portrayed by the Banims, Griffin, Carleton, Mrs. Hall and a host of others has been received as the verdict passed by history upon the Celtic personality. That stereotyping has caused a long colonial concussion. It is about time we put aside the idea of essence — that hungry Hegelian ghost looking for a stereotype to live in. As Irishness or as Northernness he stimulates the provincial unhappiness we create and fly from, becoming virtuoso metropolitans to the exact degree that we have created an idea of Ireland as provincialism incarnate. These are worn oppositions. They used to be the parentheses in which the Irish destiny was isolated. That is no longer the case. Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten — i.e. re-read. That will enable new writing, new politics, unblemished by Irishness, but securely Irish. (1983, 58)

Concerns about Irishness and its portrayal, its “Hegelian ghost,” despite the “worn” character of the “oppositions,” must be resolved before anything new can be written; yet the warning itself appears to reinscribe the same concerns it seeks to mitigate. What does it mean to be “unblemished by Irishness” and yet still remain “securely Irish”? According to Foucault, “one of the main moral obligations for any subject is to know oneself, to tell the truth about oneself, and to constitute oneself as an object of knowledge both for other people and for oneself” (177). This truth-telling is precisely what the dramatists of the twentieth century were trying to do, using the “techniques” that Foucault attributes to Habermas, as well as the technique of creating a new kind of truth, of producing oneself in specific ways, a “technology of self” that allows people within a society to produce subjectivity, and therefore identity, in specific ways. There are, says Foucault, “techniques of production, techniques of signification, and techniques of domination” (180).

In terms of Irish drama, a consideration of Foucault’s techniques of signification leads to a more in-depth look, in the next chapter here, at the questions of authenticity. Part of the anxiety about identity is an anxiety about origins,

production, and truth, such that the Irish, in order to assert subjectivity, must first assert that without colonization, they would have been secure in a nationality to which all could have adhered. They must establish that they lost some part of their essence only through oppressive force, and they now hope to recuperate it; the idea of some great Golden Age lies behind the efforts to recreate greatness.

From the conversation about authenticity, Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence arises as a technique of domination. This ambivalence surfaces when those who are colonized try to operate within the structure of authority while still functioning as members of the marginalized society (thus becoming what Bhabha calls "the mimic man"). The ambivalence of desire resides in the conflict between the longing to be part of the establishment with all its incumbent status and influence, and the desire to retain the culture and tradition that helps to form originary identity, to begin recuperating that authentic Irish type. The exegesis of several plays will show how the Irish operated dramatically within the ambivalent position to explore its benefits and drawbacks.

Tied up with a performance of ambivalence is the idea of reputation as part of the technique of dominance and signification. Reputation is used to establish leverage within the dominant discourse. In the chapter on reputation, the technique is not quite the same as with ambivalence; here, self-awareness is wielded in terms of producing identity for a particular end. The issue at hand is not the way the English represented the Irish, but the way that the Irish perceived the English as looking at them, and the way they then manipulated that perception to achieve their own goals. The "politics of truth," as Foucault would discuss it, reinforces their sense of how to use reputation as a tool for production of self.

And yet, despite the ambivalence of their position and the manipulation of reputation, failure still occurs, leading to yet another reinvention of the stage Irish figure. How does the mimic man fail to construct a new stage Irish figure? The site of the failure appears to be at the site of translation: somewhere between the playwright, the actor, and the audience, the effort fails. This gap is between the audience and its treatment of the material it witnesses, a gap defined as mimesis rather than mimicry, and is discussed in the next chapter. The performativity of language, the use of language itself, is implicit in the way the plays are received and interpreted, and elucidates my original theory: as long as an identity is marginalized, that identity will continue to tend towards denigration. Bakhtin's concept of a double-voiced discourse as well as J. L. Austin's theory of performative language are most helpful in this argument, and will lead to a further discussion of language as subversive. Towards the end of the century, Irish playwrights use language in more and more interesting ways, adapting it formally to demonstrate that reiteration of a narrative is, while remaining an iteration of truth, still only an iteration of someone else's story in someone else's language, despite efforts to co-opt the language. The consideration of au-

dience as affective of meaning relates to Foucault's technique of production as a means of co-opting power.

Few critics have analyzed the reasons for these reinventions, and much of the work that has been done focuses on either close readings of texts or on enumerating those texts that have an identifiable stage Irish figure. Duggan, for example, has looked at representations of the stage Irish *man* (omitting any reference to the women), but gives no weight to who is doing the representing; in excluding Irish writers he gives them no credit for efforts which are central to Irish drama as a movement. Primarily a review of instances where the stage Irishman has occurred in literature, Duggan's book includes no analysis of why changes have come about or how the representations impacted the self-image of the Irish. David Krause, in analyzing comedy in Irish literature, reviews the history of the stage Irish figure in terms of comedic theory. While he does look at the antic impulse to subvert current political dogma, he does not examine the success of that subversion or the ways those efforts shifted. Anneliese Truninger does consider the differences between the stage representations of the Irish written by the English and the Irish, concluding that the Irish tend to exaggerate their image for purposes of gaining status in their colonized position while the English exaggerate theirs for the purposes of deprecation, but Truninger does not evaluate the changes. More recently, Dawn Duncan explores the way several representative playwrights operated within a post-colonial context, but her work remains primarily a close reading of texts rather than an analysis of post-colonial influences. I hope to show, in this work, that the evolving stage Irish figure allows the Irish to be complicit in the creation of their own stereotypes, stereotypes iterated even today.

Concluding my argument is an analysis of Irish drama at the end of the twentieth century; as Ireland moves away from post-colonialism and towards globalization, it requires an entirely new paradigm for discussion. While the push towards globalization and regionalization, and away from nationalization, allows the Irish to escape some of the derogatory connotations of the stage Irish figure, and indeed allows the stage Irish figure to be nearly eradicated from the stage, the success of these efforts at reinvention is due to global assimilation rather than national identification. While late-twentieth-century Irish drama still self-identifies as Irish drama, the characters being presented are no longer presented as Irish types, but as complex people, like everyone else, who just happen to live in Ireland. Perhaps reflective of the way Ireland is beginning to look in this time of the "Celtic Tiger," assimilation, or at least a lessening of the angst over identity, is viewed with relief by some and with nostalgia and regret by others. Either way, the question of whether the Irish can ever transcend the derogations of type remains unanswered, because the type itself becomes obliterated in the push to globalization.