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THE VITAL ROLE OF TOM MURPHY'S WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

THE VITAL ROLE OF TOM MURPHY'S WOMEN

By

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Tom Murphy is a highly respected contemporary Irish playwright whose work usually centers on the conflicts of men, but the women characters form a vital foundation for his writing. In Ireland, a woman's role traditionally is delineated by her relationship with a man: she is defined by her father, boyfriend, husband or son. The playwright has an empathetic view of women, and he acknowledges that women in Ireland fulfill roles that society places upon them.

Murphy's daughters are ignored by their fathers, and lacking a father's care, the young women become independent, resourceful and determined. The daughters sense a lack of adult leadership in the home, and sometimes they fill this vacuum by assuming parenting roles. Because Ireland reveres family and motherhood, Murphy's girlfriends diligently work to secure marriages and children. The wives in Murphy's plays have no equal voice in their marriages, and they often become self-reliant survivors in the face of their husbands' apathy. The only real power a woman traditionally has in Ireland is in the home, and Murphy's mothers are tenacious, manipulative and domineering; their relationships with their husbands have eroded, so the mothers exert control through their children.

Murphy feels that the women in Ireland are often treated like slaves. While the female characters usually have supporting or minor roles, the women emerge as a pivotal force in Murphy's dramaturgy. Tom Murphy stated

in a personal interview that women are the "anchors" of his plays. Murphy does not use the term "anchor" to denote a major character; rather, the females have contrasting voices, and they try to ground the men's fantasies in reality. This dissertation, in the form of a descriptive analysis, explores the vital role of Murphy's women: although they are treated like slaves, the women anchor the plays through hope, resourcefulness, practicality and reason.

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Introduction

Tom Murphy is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential playwrights in Ireland today. Between 1961 and 1989, he wrote seventeen plays and four adaptations. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Abbey Theatre and has been Writer-in-Association with the innovative Druid Theatre of Galway. Murphy is a member of the Irish Academy of Letters for distinction in literature and has won many awards for his writing. In the spring of 1987, the Irish University Review devoted a complete issue to Murphy's plays. In the forward, Irish critic Christopher Murray states:

> Of those with an interest in Irish drama, few can be unaware of Murphy's impact on the Irish theatre in recent years, especially since the extraordinary production at the Abbey Theatre of The Gigli Concert. It is high time that his work was given the sustained critical attention which a special issue affords.[1]

Murphy's work has had a great impact in Ireland, and Theatre Ireland describes The Gigli Concert as: "the most significant event in European theatre since the premiere of Waiting for Godot in Paris in 1953."[2] Murphy's plays have also been produced in London, and his work is becoming increasingly well known in America.

Most of Murphy's plays, like those of other contemporary Irish dramatists, center on the conflicts of men. This focus reflects a strongly male-dominated society. Currently, the President of Ireland is a woman, but Elizabeth Coxhead in her book Daughters of Erin states, "Ireland, more than most, is a man's country . . . the famous talk is

masculine talk; the new ideas are sparked off in clubs and bars which are still largely a male preserve" (13).

In Murphy's plays, the situation of the female characters is a reflection of a male-dominated society, and the women are usually not the major characters. Nevertheless, the woman's presence is indispensable. Murphy considers the female characters in his plays to be the anchors of his work: the females symbolize hope, reality, survival and constancy. The playwright also acknowledges that women in Ireland fulfill "roles that had been forced on them by life."[3] A woman's role in Ireland is usually delineated by her relationship with a man, rather than by her individual worth: she is her father's daughter, her husband's wife, or her son's mother. In Ireland, as in many societies, women's needs are usually subordinated, while the desires of the men are valued.

Murphy's view of women has been influenced by John Connolly's book Labour in Irish History. In this work, Connolly, the father of Irish socialism, states: "The worker is a slave of capitalistic society, the female worker is the slave of that slave."[4] Connolly's writing helped to increase Murphy's interest in the role of women in Ireland. The playwright has an empathetic view of women. Kimball King in Ten Modern Irish Playwrights states that Murphy "is equally critical of the demeaning treatment of women in past and present societies."(87) Critic Fintan O'Toole observes that Murphy's plays reflect "a new awareness of the whole way that women had borne so much of the ignorance and narrowness of this society."[5] Murphy's female characters are neglected and sometimes they are beaten and abused, but Murphy does not advocate this treatment. His plays hold a mirror to his society, reflecting both the beauty and the dark side of his culture.

This dissertation examines the hypothesis that while Murphy's women characters are often treated like "slaves," they also play the vital roles of being "anchors." It seems contradictory that the woman in Murphy's dramas can play the vital role of an anchor while she lives in a society that treats her like a slave, but this study demonstrates that the paradox is possible: while Murphy's women often have a subordinate position in the plays, their presence is indispensable.

A review of the literature reveals that many articles have been written analyzing specific plays or trends in Murphy's drama, but the role of women in Murphy's plays has not been extensively analyzed. Various research techniques have been used in this study. The author studied Irish dramatic literature at the University College Galway and was granted two lengthy personal interviews with Tom Murphy. Reviews, articles and interviews were gathered at the Abbey Theatre archives. Also, the author saw the Abbey Theatre's productions of A Whistle in the Dark (1987) and The Gigli Concert (1991), as well as a video version of the Druid Theatre's production of Conversations on a Homecoming. Fintan O'Toole, the author of The Politics of Magic: The Work and Times of Tom Murphy also granted the author a personal interview. The findings from this research substantiate the indispensable role of Murphy's women.

Murphy's female characters are a great contrast to the women characters of the Irish Renaissance. At the turn of the twentieth century, when Ireland was fighting for independence from England, women played a significant role in the literary, political and artistic life in Ireland.[6] Irish women "fought, plotted, planned, wrote, painted, acted alongside their male comrades as equals."[7] (emphasis added) Accordingly, in the literature of this period, female characters have dominant roles:

one remembers Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan and the Countess Cathleen from the plays bearing those titles; Synge's women are extremely vital, including Maurya in Riders to the Sea, Nora from In the Shadow of the Glen and Pegeen Mike from The Playboy of the Western World; O'Casey wrote tremendous women's roles, including Juno from Juno and the Paycock, Minnie in The Shadow of a Gunman and Nora in The Plough and the Stars.

Women were influential in helping Ireland gain sovereignty, and the female characters in the plays written during the Irish Renaissance were powerful. However, in 1922 when the Irish Free State was established, women were not rewarded for their efforts. Coxhead also states:

> when victory was won [the women] were thanked and sent back to the domestic hearth. Those who made nuisances of themselves in protest were visited with the utmost opprobrium and resentment, traces of which still exist.[8]

This is the Ireland of which Murphy writes: a male-dominated society where the women's opinions are discouraged.

The female characters in contemporary Irish drama have a much smaller role than the women of the Irish Renaissance, but their voice is still crucial. The women are infrequently the central characters of Murphy's plays because his writing accurately reflects a male-dominated society, yet Murphy calls the woman in his plays the anchor. How does the term "anchor" apply to the women in Murphy's writing? Literally, an anchor is of relatively small weight in comparison to the ship; similarly, the women's roles in Murphy's plays are frequently much smaller than the men's. When an anchor is in use, it is not visible above the water, but its effect is strongly felt; much of the women's power is below the surface, and, like an anchor, their presence creates stability. The women act as mainstays of strength as they try to keep their fathers, boyfriends

and husbands on a practical path.

The women are sources of reality, and they often work to keep the men from drifting into dreams and fantasy. An anchor digs into the ground at the bottom of a body of water, and it keeps the boat from being carried "off course." Similarly, Murphy's female characters tightly hold onto their goals and dig in deeply to keep the men in their lives from slipping away; this often causes many male characters to see the women as threatening, negative, suffocating presences.

An anchor is tied to the boat with a cable, and many women characters bind themselves to the men with cords of guilt, duty or perseverance. Often, the men want to escape the strong pull of the women, but they seem unable to completely sever the cord. An anchor can keep a ship from disaster in a storm, but it can also keep a boat from sailing freely in good weather. The female characters often act as restraints; the women think they are keeping the men they love from crashing on the rocks, but the men would rather brave the storm and ride the rough winds.

Murphy's women want the stability of a ship safely anchored at harbor, while the men want to confront the uncharted waters of the sea. The female characters may not be able to keep the men in the "safe harbor," but they strongly make their presence known, slowing the men down as they try to sail toward fantasy. Murphy's women characters are not consciously set on destroying the men's dreams; rather, the women want to help create a life that is stable and realistic. These goals are often in complete conflict with the dreams of the men, and this divergence creates great struggles between the sexes.

In Ireland, women are usually not allowed to be the <u>rudders</u>, so Murphy's female characters are never allowed to "guide" the ship while a

man is present; instead, they try to stabilize the ship during a storm. Murphy's women can never actually steer the ship away from disaster; as anchors, the female characters can only try to slow the ship down as danger approaches. Instead of being proactive, the women are forced to be reactive; this keeps the females the slave of a slave.

Women in Murphy's dramas fulfill a vital role in the lives of Murphy's men, even when the females are secondary or minor characters. The daughters are usually rays of hope for the cynical adults; the girlfriends are a source of reality and stability; the wives represent survival in the midst of very difficult circumstances; the practical mothers are often anchors in a negative way, because they tie down their husbands and children. The women in Murphy's plays are anchors because they try to ground the men in reality; their voices are often small, but indispensable to Murphy's dramaturgy and his vision of contemporary Ireland.

Notes: Introduction

[1] Christopher Murray, "Forward," Irish University Review Spr. 1987: viii.

[2] "Tom Murphy," from the program of the Druid Theatre's production of Conversations on a Homecoming: 7

[3] Joe Jackson, "Making the Words Sing," Hot Press 4 Apr 1991: 20.

[4] John Connolly, Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History, The Reconquest of Ireland (Maunsel and Company Limited: Dublin and London, 1917) 292.

[5] Fintan O'Toole, personal interview, 25 march 1991.

[6] Coxhead 13.

[7] Coxhead 13.

[8] Coxhead 14.

CHAPTER I: The Daughters

The daughters in Ireland are at a disadvantage because traditionally, Irish mothers have had a closer bond with their sons than their daughters. This may be because the mothers often become economically dependent on their sons. Because Tom Murphy's daughters have unsatisfactory relationships with their mothers, the daughters look to their fathers for affection, but none of Murphy's daughters has a loving relationship with her father. The young women learn, therefore, to depend on themselves.

In 1964, Murphy read Labour in Irish History by James Conolly, the founder of the Socialist movement in Ireland. Conolly states, "The worker is the slave of the capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave."[1] This statement increased Murphy's interest in the status of women, and he began to explore the concept that the woman in Ireland is the slave of a slave.[2] Connolly adds:

> The daughters of Irish peasantry have been the cheapest slaves in existence . . . the peasant in whom centuries of servitude and hunger has bred a fierce craving for money, usually regarded his daughters as beings sent from God to lighten his burden through life.[3]

Murphy's fathers are often confused and disillusioned, and the men allow their daughters to work like slaves and carry a great deal of burden.

Daughters in Ireland are faced with a difficult role: traditionally, they have been raised to be independent because the girls are likely to immigrate or marry a man who lives away from the extended family. Sociologist Tom Inglis states that Irish daughters are: "reared to be responsible, competent and independent, which gives them a greater sense of autonomy."[4] Murphy's daughters yearn for affection, love and a cohesive family unit, but the young women are often neglected; the positive aspect

of their upbringing is that the daughters are encouraged to rely on themselves during times of difficulty, and Murphy's daughters become strong and capable. Their fathers do not protect them, show them affection, nor do the fathers comfort the daughters. Instead of relying on their fathers, the girls come to realize their inner strength.

This chapter will discuss Petra in Too Late for Logic, who is torn between her separated parents; Anne, the daughter of an absent alcoholic in Conversations on a Homecoming; Maeve in Famine, a young woman who starves while her father refuses to immigrate; and Maudie in The Sanctuary Lamp, an orphan whose grandparents neglect her. These young women are not victims; instead, they are victors, because they emerge from the trials of family life and become stronger individuals.

Murphy's daughters have all been forced to take on adult responsibilities at an early age, and Petra in Murphy's most recent play, Too Late for Logic, (1989) is no exception. The play begins as Petra's father, Christopher, is trying to decide if he should commit suicide. The fifty-year-old philosophy professor has left his family six months earlier to devote himself to his research, and he is scheduled to deliver a prestigious, televised speech on Schopenhauer's two day visit to Ireland in 1802. He is at the height of his career, and he may be awarded the position of department chairman, replacing a colleague who has just died. We hear: "A report from the gun,"[5] which signals that Christopher has killed himself. The scene becomes surrealistic as shadows come onto the stage. The play then takes the form of a flashback, and we learn the circumstances that have led to Christopher's suicide.

Petra, who is sixteen, and her brother Jack, who is eighteen, arrive at their father's door. They find that their father has just had to have

his dog, Chokki, put to sleep, but he is oblivious to the fact that his sister-in-law, Cornelia, is dead. Cornelia was not only his wife's sister, but she was also his brother's wife. She died the day before, but Christopher does not know because he routinely turns down the volume on his answering machine when he realizes he is receiving a call from his wife, Patricia. His apathy forces his children to act as diplomats, going between their mother and father.

Petra feels torn between her devotion to her mother and her love of her father, and she functions as an artful negotiator. Petra means "rock," and her name suits her well, because she is the source of stability in the family. When she and Jack arrive at their father's room and see that he is ignoring a call from their sobbing mother, it is Petra who answers the phone and assumes the responsibility of trying to comfort her mother. Petra realizes that her father should try to be supportive of Patricia, and she feels anger and resentment at her father's callousness, but she still keeps the lines of communication open with her father, and gives him every opportunity to renew his relationship with her.

Petra and Jack ask their father to go with them to the Priory, a vacant church that has been turned into a disco; here, they hope to find Michael (Christopher's brother and Cornelia's husband) whom they hear has threatened to commit suicide. As they wait for Michael at the pub, Petra constantly tries to get her father's attention. In Ireland, some people consider it unladylike for a woman to have a full pint of beer, but the sixteen-year-old Petra orders a full pint, partially to see her father's reaction. Petra has tried many positive ways to get her father to notice her, and when that does not work, she begins behaving in a way that might

at least shock him.

Petra drinks, smokes and swears in front of her father; she is hungry for any reaction from him, even if it is negative. Petra rolls a cigarette, which annoys her father because it reminds him that she is no longer a child. He says to her, "Why aren't you at home with your mother?" (17) to which an affronted Petra replies, "I could ask the same of you, couldn't I?" (17). Christopher feels that Petra does not belong in a pub, but one wonders if this is not partially an excuse because he is uneasy spending time with his children.

He demands to know why Petra will not go home, and she defends herself, explaining that Patricia has gone out for the evening. Petra does not understand why her father cannot try to relax and enjoy their time together; his tenseness and his critical attitude wound her, and she moves away from him. As she goes to another table, Petra adds, "I just didn't want to miss - the fun" (17). She stays in the pub out of a feeling of loyalty: she wants to be there to help if her Uncle Michael arrives, and Petra also hopes that her father might eventually show her some affection.

She plans to get her Uncle Michael extremely drunk so he will not kill himself or hurt anyone else. When he arrives, he is: "beyond a state of being simply drunk," (17) but Petra dutifully gets him more whiskey. She is like his guardian angel, watching over him and plying him with alcohol, hoping to anesthetize his suffering. Her motives are to help her uncle, but Murphy's stage directions note: "It's doubtful that Michael ever registers - recognizes Petra in this scene" (21). She wants so badly to help her uncle, but he literally does not even know she is there; similarly, she wants to help her father, but he will not acknowledge her

presence, either.

Besides helping her uncle, Petra continues to try to comfort her mother. She sneaks away from the action several times to call Patricia and see if she is home yet. As the play progresses, one begins to notice that the parenting roles have been reversed. The daughter calls to see if the mother is safely home, and Petra becomes the care-giver to her mother, father and uncle. No one notices Petra or gives her support, but then again, she acts as if she does not need anyone's help.

She fends for herself and she tries to act like a grown woman, but the adult world is full of pain and conflict. After Monica, the barmaid, finds a gun in Michael's pocket, Petra tells her brother:

> Two girls, Jack - children - from my school attempted suicide last year! I think one of them succeeded . . . Fuck! Five girls - I know them personally - have done that little trip, for that little operation? . . . Some of them didn't come back! (26).

Petra talks of the young women at her school as "children," and this reminds us that Petra is still, in many ways, a child; but girls her age are often forced to make adult decisions. Several of her friends have taken the "little trip" to England where abortion is legal, and some girls have never come back. Maybe they are too ashamed, or the "operation" may have caused severe complications; regardless, Petra realizes that the adult decisions young people make sometimes have long-term ramifications.

Petra is extremely loyal, and she comes to her father's defence when a drunk picks a fight with him. Intervening, face to face with the drunken man, she says, "Did you want to hit someone? Do-you-want-to-hit-somebody? Hit me then! Go on! You extremely stupid person! Go on, hit me! Hit me!" (29). The drunk finally does hit her and his blow sends her sprawling, while her brother puts the man in a hold that renders him

ineffective. Petra tries to prove her faithfulness and dependability to her father, and Jack also comes to his rescue. After the fight, the children's resentment begins to build when they realize that Christopher does not even seem grateful.

Michael escapes during the brawl, and when the group finally catches up with him, it is Petra who goes forward to comfort her uncle. Initially, Michael does not recognize his niece, but when he remembers who she is, he says that he has not seen her in months, oblivious to the fact that she has been watching over him all evening at the pub. Petra chooses words that will reassure and comfort him, and he cries at her feet. The pressure of bearing the burdens of the adults in her family becomes too much for her, and she finally acknowledges her own grief. Petra has been repressing her sorrow all day and she finally begins to weep. Christopher's apathy has kept him from assuming the role of the comforter, so Petra has come forward to fill the vacuum; but she is only sixteen, and the emotional burden of being the "rock" for both her mother and her uncle has become too much for her. She disappears into the shadows as the others come forward to care for Michael.

Christopher finally tries to comfort Petra, but he has pushed her aside too often that evening, and the gesture of kindness has come too late. She explodes at her father, reminding him that she has tried to be a model daughter, saying:

> Did I get pregnant, did I commit suicide, did I have to go away and have an abortion?. . . does any of it matter - does anything matter to you? Will I drop out of college, will I drop out of life, will I walk out on my family when I have them, will I know how to be a parent? Man! Do you know the meaning of trust, trust, trust, trust? Big deal, the man of letters, the speech maker, the professor! Oh! and Jack-Jack-Jack is back there for you! You shit! You nothing! . . . Mum is at home now. Nite! (33).

She has never given her father any cause to worry about her, yet he refuses to compliment or reassure her. Petra resents the fact that the small amount of affection Christopher feels is directed toward her brother, Jack. Nothing positive she has ever done has caught her father's attention. She has been a "good girl," yet he has not given her a second glance, so she drinks pints of beer, smokes cigarettes, stays out late and swears to try to get his attention. None of her tactics have worked, so she finally gets Christopher's attention by a direct frontal assault.

Petra's passionate speech to her father often caused audiences to break into applause.[6] The audience empathizes with her frequent attempts to please her father; when nothing seems to work, we feel a small catharsis when she rebukes him for his thoughtlessness. After this upsetting altercation, Christopher has a nightmare where he realizes that he has made a mistake in valuing his career more than the needs of his family.

The next time Petra appears is at the reception after Cornelia's funeral, and her mother is finally introduced on-stage. After a lengthy delay, Patricia has signed the legal separation papers, and she tells Christopher that the past six months have been very difficult for her, but now she is "happy and relaxed" (42). He is startled to find that his wife is at peace about their separation. Christopher has brought a rose for Petra, but he is unsure how to present it, so he puts it down near her. She moves away from the rose a little later, hoping that her father will actually give the flower to her.

He never makes the first move to reach out to her; this has been the perpetual pattern in their relationship: Christopher expects his daughter to always make the first move, physically and emotionally. Petra leaves

the flower where her father placed it until she is ready to go. Her father never gives her the rose, so she must take it herself. As she picks up the flower, Petra asks if it is an olive branch. Christopher could have made a small gesture of reconciliation, but he denies the emotional meaning of the flower and says: "No, it's a rose" (53). The rose becomes a metaphor for their father/daughter relationship: Christopher occasionally does try to express his feelings for Petra, but he expects her to do most of the emotional work in their relationship; he expects her to always come to him.

Christopher cannot bring himself to openly admit that he cares for her at all. He has tried to reestablish an avenue of communication between them by giving her a rose, but he never actually presents it to her. Petra realizes that if she wants a relationship with her father, she must meet him more than halfway. As she leaves, Petra senses something is wrong, and again the daughter takes the parenting role. She asks her father, ". . . Are you alright?" (53) and he nods. Although he has disappointed her by not openly showing her affection, Petra still does not feel she can go until she is sure her father is all right.

This is the last time he sees his daughter, and when Christopher leaves the funeral reception, he realizes that he has completely alienated his family; he is horrified to realize that they can survive without him. Christopher kills himself, and the Voice Over relays a chilling metaphor from Schopenhauer's Paralipomena; humanity is like:

> a group of porcupines on a cold winter's day crowded close together to save themselves from freezing by their mutual warmth. Soon, however, they felt each other's spines, [quills] and this drove them apart again. Whenever their need brought them more closely together, this - evil - intervened, until, thrown this way and that, between the cold and the spines, they found a moderate distance from one another at which they could

survive best . . . (54).

These final words of the play leave the audience with a dismal comparison: like freezing porcupines, people must find a tolerable distance between each other; humanity must achieve a suitable compromise by finding the happy medium between being close to each other (and hurting each other) or being distant from one another (and freezing to death.)

Christopher tries to remove himself from the jabbing "spines" of family life, but Petra keeps reaching out to him. He has devoted his life to philosophy, but the title of the play reminds us that it is too late for logic, the basis of philosophy; human relationships are often not logical. Christopher wants to be self-sufficient, but Petra's gentle presence keeps reminding him that a family offers warmth in addition to the pain.

Petra, like Murphy's other daughters, is a strong contrast to her father. She is very life-affirming; Petra is the strong one, while Christopher becomes fatalistic and kills himself. The daughters work to negate futility, and there is hope for Christopher's family because of Petra's strength. She tries to act like an anchor, pulling her father back to a life with his family. Her brother, Jack, faces the same difficult confrontations, but he does not seem nearly as strong as his sister. Desmond Rushe, drama critic for the Irish Independent, calls Jack: "anchorless."[7] Jack is two years older that his sister, yet it is Petra who strives to give her family stability.

Petra is an integral part of this play, and her role is far larger than any of Murphy's other daughters. She appears in all but two of the eight scenes in this play, and her presence is bold and brash. Petra is strongly allied to her mother. She deeply resents the injustice

Christopher has done to her mother and she becomes Patricia's standard-bearer. Petra has a fierce protectiveness of those whom she loves, and this gives her a strong power.

Standing firmly in her convictions, Petra is very vocal in defending her beliefs. Jerry Moriarty of the Irish Press agrees that: "The strong characters in this play are women . . . the men in the work revolve around them as bewilderingly as electrons around a nucleus."[8] Petra has been forced to mature quickly; she does not have her father's guidance, and her mother has become very needy, so Petra assumes the role of the parent figure in this play. She has a resolve and strength that Christopher seems to envy.

Murphy, like the character Christopher, is legally separated from his wife, and Murphy acknowledges that he was, in some aspects, thinking of his own daughter when he created Petra.[9] He describes Petra as:

> A sixteen-year-old girl trying to 'bring up' her parents - a sixteen- year-old girl fighting for attention, validly, as is her right. I found a tremendous courage [in Petra] and I think her gentleness is lovely - that she's so caring - the 'child-woman' as I describe her, is a fascinating period in a woman's life . . . the extremes of rage and gentleness and caring - I think that in the male counterpart the extremes are fuzzed - there seems to be greater confusion [in the men].[10]

Part of the reason Petra goes from the extremes of rage and gentleness is because she has taken on many responsibilities for a person her age.

Christopher's emotional distance enslaves Petra, as she constantly tries to please him, but each time he hurts her, she forgives him and comes back to his side. Petra, the "rock," is loyal, kind, nurturing and generous; she feels a void of adult leadership in her family, and she rises to fill the vacuum. Most of the time she puts on a brave front, and her optimism reassures those around her. She is constantly holding out an

olive branch to her father, and she tries to stabilize her family as it is drifting apart. Petra attempts to be an anchor, but her sheer will power cannot hold her family together. Christopher is too proud to rely on his daughter's strength; had he leaned on her stability, she might have kept him from crashing on the rocks.

Anne, the pub owner's daughter from Conversations on a Homecoming, (1985) also acts as an ambassador between her parents. Her father, JJ, is an alcoholic and her mother, Missus, neglects her, yet Anne's independence and optimism give hope to Michael Ridge, who returns to Galway after he has tried to work in New York as an actor for ten years. Anne's father had encouraged Michael to pursue acting, and after failing as an actor, Michael comes home to renew some of the optimism of his youth, which JJ had inspired.

Anne is seventeen years old, and she loves her father although the people of Galway scorn him. Ten years earlier, JJ tried to model himself after President Kennedy, and he encouraged freedom of expression, optimism and liberal thinking. After the President's assassination, JJ fell into a depression. Now, he rarely comes home, leaving his wife and daughter to tend to the everyday details of running the pub. There are only references to JJ, who never actually appears in this play. His daughter is an anchor and a source of hope, because she never gives up her belief in her father, though everyone else dismisses him.

Anne plays a small, but significant part. Conversations on a Homecoming begins and ends with her starring out the window, waiting for her father to come home. Most of her actions in the play are either centered on waiting for a man (her father) or serving a man. Anne is

definitely treated as a slave in this play; she cleans the bar and runs errands, and no one but Michael pays any attention to her. It is significant to note that Anne is Liam's intended wife, yet during the play, all he does is say hello to her. Liam never asks her how she is, and when he leaves, he does not say goodbye to her. In agreeing to marry Anne, he has made a business arrangement with Missus, and he is unenthusiastic in the way he treats Anne, probably because Liam thinks that the "deal" with her is already finalized.

When he marries Anne, Missus will make sure that Liam becomes the manager of the pub. He realizes how much the real estate could be worth, as tourism is growing in Galway, and Anne becomes a pawn in a good business deal. Junior, Peggy and Michael all comment on how pretty Anne is, but she is attractive to Liam because she will inherit her mother's pub.

Anne spends most of the play looking for her father in other pubs, but when she returns toward the end of the play, she has been unsuccessful in locating her father. When Anne meets Michael, she likes him because he remembers her father warmly. Anne quickly agrees when Michael asks her if she would like to go for a walk in the woods later. This seems innocent enough, but she is promised to Liam, and the men become very possessive of her. Michael's former best friend, Tom, considers Anne to be: "Liam's territory."[11] Liam defends his "territory" and he says to Michael, "Don't start messin' fella. Invested time and money. My - our territory" (72). Liam's description of Anne is definitely in terms of a business asset, because he has invested time and money. Liam does not say that he cares for Anne, nor does he suggest that she has any affection for him; instead, he speaks of Anne as if she is a financial transaction.

Anne wants to spend some time with Michael because she senses that he still loves her father, while everyone else in town ridicules JJ; the love they have for JJ is a common bond. But the backlash of the men is too strong, and Michael regretfully breaks the date with her. Anne is crucial because although she suffers many disappointments, she represents hope. Murphy states:

> Anne has five or six lines in the whole thing, but she is central - she's very, very important to the play. And it's interesting in my point of view that the hope that is vested in the play, in the end, is in Anne. Michael has discovered something about himself and his hometown and is returning to America saying, 'They've probably cut down the woods now anyway,' and she says, 'There's still the stream.' It's a much more affirmative attitude towards the women.[12]

Michael had invited her to go for a walk in the woods, but Tom's cynicism has made Michael skeptical, as well. Galway has changed so much since he left, and Michael remarks sadly that the woods must be gone, too. Anne counters that statement by saying: "There's still a stream" (74). Her emphasis, in contrast, is on what is there, rather than what may be gone or changed. Her youthful optimism acts as a salve to soothe the anger and torment of the raw emotions that have been exposed during the play. During the drunken evening of male bonding, anger is mingled with storytelling, jokes and singing. Sometimes the reunion is full of hilarious drunken antics, but at other times, the tone of the dramatic action is searing. Were it not for Anne, this would be a very bleak play.

Michael decides to return to America the next day without even seeing Anne's father. He says to her, "Tell him [JJ] I love him," (74) as he leaves. Anne remains optimistic; although she would have enjoyed having some time with Michael and her father, his parting words reaffirm that someone else still cares for her father, too. She is disappointed that

Michael is leaving, but this is diminished by the fact that he still loves her father, and this gives Anne encouragement. The play ends as she "continues in the window as at the beginning of the play, smiling her gentle hope out at the night" (74).

Murphy creates the image that Anne is a ray of light, surrounded by darkness, anger and a sense of fatalism. At the end of the play, she sits in the window and in Murphy's stage directions, she is able to radiate hope into the night. She refuses to give up her faith, and in the midst of the dark, she exudes warmth. Anne's hope succeeds in convincing us that confidence and trust are warranted, even when hurtful circumstances cause us to be cynical. An anchor can act as a ballast, and Anne keeps the play from drifting into an atmosphere of cynicism. Her youthful hope is vital, and it shines like a candle, making the skepticism and fatalism that surround her seem less harmful and desolate.

Anne is the daughter of an absent alcoholic, and her mother ignores her unless she needs her to do something; she is promised to a man who is almost twice her age who treats her as an acquisition, yet it is Anne who has a very positive attitude about life. Several adult characters have become very bitter, and Anne's youthful optimism is a necessary contrast. Murphy adds: "Life hasn't hammered her. The background has obviously been very, very difficult - not having her father, a rundown business . . . [but] Anne does not yield up her <u>belief</u> in life, her hope or her ideals either."[13] Her belief, hope and optimism are indispensable, because they help to balance the harsh emotions of the disenchanted adults around her. JJ may have forgotten his dreams, but his daughter has inherited a sense of hope from her father, and her optimism shines through the despair that is woven into the play.

In Conversations on a Homecoming, Anne is surrounded by skepticism and anger, but in Famine, (1968) the daughter, Maeve Connor, is surrounded by death; she and her family are trying to survive the Famine of the 1840s, during which more than one million Irish starved to death, while another one million five-hundred thousand immigrated, hoping to escape the disease and starvation.[14] The major conflict in this play focuses on the contrasting views taken by Mother and John Connor concerning their survival. Maeve is not a central character, but she is integral to the plot because she, unlike her siblings who die, is a survivor.

In the first scene of the play, the Connors are giving a wake for Maeve's sister. The young woman is the second Connor daughter to starve to death, and the girls have died because their father, John Connor, insisted on reserving enough potatoes for seed to plant that season's crop rather than feeding his family with part of those potatoes. Surviving with Maeve is her mother, father and her younger brother, Donaill.

The play is divided into twelve scenes, and Maeve appears in seven of those scenes, although she has lines only in five of them. She is a significant character because she is resourceful and determined, and this is a clear contrast to her father, who appears to be immobilized by the horrors of the Famine. While most of Murphy's daughters represent hope, almost all of Maeve's optimism has been destroyed by hunger. Maeve is essential because she represents survival. She is the starving voice of reality, which contrasts greatly with Connor's fantasies of hospitality and being a good village chieftain. Maeve learns to rely on herself, and it is she, not her father, who emerges as a victor at the end of the play.

Initially, Maeve embodies the loyal, obedient daughter, and she, like all Murphy daughters, is neglected. Maeve does not have a close

relationship with her father. He has let two of her sisters starve to death, while he lavishes food on the mourners at the wake. Maeve must feel that she, too, is expendable. She knows she is not a priority in her father's life, and this is evident when he forces her to generously distribute food and drink to the mourners at her sister's wake. Connor says to the mourners, "Drink. Drink up . . . Bring out more food, Maeve. Call the fiddler. 'Tis a poor class of wake ye're giving my daughter . . . We can't send them off mean."[15] Tobacco could have been sold for food, and it must be unbearably difficult for Maeve to graciously give refreshments to the guests, knowing that this food might have saved her sister's life. At the beginning of the play, Connor has the food to feed his family, but he keeps it stored away, saved for some special occasion, ironically, like a wake. This sends a strong message to Maeve: if she wants to survive, she must fend for herself, because her father will not protect her.

Maeve's father has noble motives, and she is torn between admiration of her upright father, and fear that he has no practical plan to help his family survive. Connor says: "Welcome be the holy will of God. No matter what he sends 'tis our duty to submit. And blessed be His name, even for this, and for anything else that's to come. He'll grace us to understand it" (20). Connor appears virtuous and benevolent in his words, but Maeve must realize a sad irony: the actual root of her father's character is a stubborn pride.

Connor seems like Agamemnon who sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to appease the gods so that he will have a successful battle against Troy; similarly, Connor has sacrificed two of his daughters to the Famine, to show God that he is a selfless, strong leader, hoping that God will then

bless him in his battle against the elements. Connor may believe that his motives are worthy, but he has let his daughters starve so that he can appear generous to the community.

After the funeral of Maeve's sister, Connor and Maeve dig in the blighted fields, and they look for a few salvageable potatoes. The stage directions note that her industriousness contrasts with the idleness of the men who watch the guarded harvest wagons pass. Maeve: "is foraging with her hands," (23) and she is very hardworking. She is not afraid to exert herself to help her family, but hunger has made Maeve sullen and bitter.

Guarded crop wagons pass as Maeve and her father work. Micheleen, a hunchback, offers to steal a handful of oats for Maeve as a wagon goes by. She says: "Would <u>you</u> get it for me?" (23). The emphasis is Murphy's, and this implies that Maeve knows her father would never break the law to help her. Connor is very ethical, but his neighbors' opinion of him is a higher priority than his daughter's welfare. This makes Maeve determined to care for herself.

Later in this scene, the crowd descends upon Mickeleen when the priest reminds them that he accepted soup from the Protestants a year earlier. During the Famine, some Protestants' relief kitchens gave soup only to the starving who converted to the beliefs of the Reformed church. Maeve turns against the man who had earlier offered to steal some oats for her. She joins in the crowd as they attack Mickeleen, yelling: "Souper! Souper! . . . Kick him!" (29-30). The way that Maeve and Connor react to the attack on Micheleen reveals how different the father and daughter are. Connor tries to be the village peace-keeper, but Maeve feels justified in berating someone whom the community believes has betrayed them. She

finally has a means to release some of her internalized fury by attacking Mickeleen. Maeve would probably like to confront her father, but physically and emotionally, she does not have the strength; instead, she feels somehow vindicated by denouncing Mickeleen.

Maeve's rage is incited because she is starving. Her mother has been mixing cow's blood with weeds, hoping to give the weeds some nutritional value; this is all the food the family has to eat, but Connor insists on sharing anything they have with their neighbors. This is consistent with the Irish tradition that a family should never allow anyone to be turned away hungry from their door; also, Maeve's family is descended from the ancient kings of Ireland, and her father feels the need to act as the noble village chieftain. He values his position as village elder more highly than his position as father, and hunger causes Maeve to have a harshness "more suited to a bitter hag" (43).

In the "Love Scene," Liam asks Maeve to marry him, and he offers her nuts and an apple. As she eats, "progressively she becomes a sixteen-year-old again" (45). Hunger has stolen Maeve's youthfulness, but when she is given food some of her enthusiasm for life returns. During this scene, Maeve finally begins to relax and enjoy being a young woman. Liam kisses her three times, and then they laugh and sing. One senses healing in Maeve, as she acts like a carefree girl for the first time during the play.

Until this scene, Maeve has never relaxed, but after she is nourished by the food, she laughs as she relays an ironic story. Maeve explains that a magistrate and the rent collector both came to take the family's cow in partial payments of debts; the men nearly came to blows, and her father, the eternal peace-keeper, even intervened to help mediate between

the magistrate and the rent collector. Maeve tells Liam that the magistrate finally took the cow, and she laughs at the ridiculousness of the situation; her father will go to a great extent to be the chieftain peace-keeper, yet an unspoken war wages in his own home, because Mother is willing to go to any extent to assure her family's survival, while Connor seems intent on peacefully waiting for help to arrive while he shows hospitality to his community.

Maeve senses that there is something wrong with her father, and she fears he is not thinking clearly. She says: "And my mother saying what's come over my father, and saying he's soft. And I think the same" (46). She is worried that her father does not understand the direness of their situation. At the basis of the relationship between Maeve and her father is the fact that she does not feel protected. Connor intervenes to protect Mickeleen when the crowd attacks him; Maeve's father even arbitrates to keep peace between the magistrate and the rent collector. Maeve senses the significance that her father never once intervenes on her behalf. He makes no attempts to shield her or guide her, and the lack of her father's care or affection forces her to harden herself against any vulnerability. Murphy's daughters have all been forced to act like mature, grown women while they are still young.

Emelie Fitzgibbon states that Murphy's characters: "have a vision, a yearning to sing, yet time and time again they are forced to suppress the vision and to dam up the song."[16] In the "Love Scene," Maeve finally sings and enjoys herself, and when she is at her most happy and vulnerable, she becomes a target to be terribly wounded; as she and Liam sing together, the moonlight reveals the bodies of a mother and her two children who have crawled under a bush to die; next to them is a dying man. The chaos of

the unburied dead sends Maeve reeling. She learns from that experience never to let down her emotional guard. Maeve hardens her heart because she hopes to shield herself from the horrors around her, and she returns to the brutal circumstances that force her to be a severe adult. This scene reminds us that she should be a carefree young woman, but the Famine, and her father's lack of affection and care, have forced her to take on the difficult responsibilities of an adult.

Maeve's circumstances become much more critical when she and her family are evicted from their home. She tries to find her father before the gang tears down the house, but she cannot locate him. Maeve says to her father, "We couldn't stop them - I couldn't find you - We're to move . . . Didn't you know this would happen? . . . But you've done nothing" (78). A drunken Connor takes offense at his daughter's remark and he tells her to make a shelter from the remaining doors. Maeve has been loyal and obedient, but this moment is a turning point for her; she has lost all respect for him and she does not obey. The Famine and Connor's lack of protectiveness have forced her to depend on herself, and as an adult, she rebels against her father.

Connor offers his wife and daughter whiskey, and they drink. The whiskey makes Maeve retch. All her father can offer her is alcohol; it is ironic that when he finally shares something with Maeve, it makes her ill. If Maeve had some food in her stomach, the whiskey might have warmed her; instead, on an empty stomach, it makes her nauseous. The whiskey symbolizes Connor's attempts to provide for his family, and it is too little, too late.

Maeve feels betrayed by her father, and she later betrays him. Earlier in the play, he kept food from her while he fed the community.

When Mother returns from a fourteen-mile walk with some bread for Connor, in a hunger induced act of retaliation, Maeve eats it herself. For months, Connor has neglected his one remaining daughter, and in a rebellious gesture, she provides for herself while she punishes her father for his neglect. Maeve finally asserts herself, showing her father that he cannot ignore her any longer because she has learned that she must take care of herself if she is to live through this crisis.

Maeve has learned to fend for herself at any cost, but stealing the bread from her father takes away Mother's will to live. Connor kills his wife because she begs him to do so, rather than to let the Famine take her at its whim. Maeve escapes Connor, but he also kills his son. She is the only Connor child to live through the Famine, and Maeve endures because she does not meekly allow her father to make a sacrifice of her as well. She has mental determination, and the bread has given her the physical strength to survive.

As the play ends, food finally arrives to feed the starving. Liam brings food to Maeve, but she will not accept meal from him, because he worked for the Agent, helping to evict starving farmers and toppling their homes. Liam did what he must to survive, and so has Maeve; this refusal shows Maeve's stubbornness, and she says she will accept help only from the O'Learys. Malachy O'Leary killed the Justice of the Peace and at least one policeman in an act of retaliation. She admires the fact that Malachy did not wait like a sheep for the slaughter, and she respects his revolutionary spirit. Maeve says, "O'Leary is the only name I'd accept anything from" (87). This implies that she would not accept bread from her father now, even if he were to finally offer it. In admiring O'Leary, Maeve is also denouncing her father's nonviolent approach to the Famine.

She values O'Leary because he did something, although he resorted to violence, rather than passively waiting for help, like her father. The Famine has claimed her mother, brother, two sisters, as well as countless friends, and Maeve feels that her family has died partly because her father made no plan to help avert the starvation. She breaks any allegiance to her father by aligning herself with a violent revolutionary who stands for everything her father opposes.

The final lines of the play reveal Maeve's bitterness. She says: "There's nothing of goodness or kindness in this world for anyone. But we'll be equal to it yet" (87). She contradicts Liam when he says their situation will improve. Her heart has been hardened by the Famine, and she refuses to show any vulnerability, but when Liam puts bread in her hands, she begins to cry. Crying signifies the beginning of emotional healing, because as she cries, Maeve finally allows herself to acknowledge the catastrophic sorrows she has suffered. Her tears are a sign of recognition, resolution and the beginning of the healing process.

Gerard Stembridge, a playwright and director in Dublin states that Maeve is the: "voice of the exploited."[17] John Waters adds that through Murphy's plays we see: "the starvation of the spirit, the spirit screaming out for expression."[18] Maeve usually stifles her screams. She tries to be a good daughter, but her father continually ignores her emotional and physical needs. She has not only been denied food, she has also been denied affection, and Murphy states that: "Famine to me meant twisted mentalities, poverty of love, tenderness and affection; the natural extravagance of youth wanting to bloom - to blossom - but being stalemated by a nineteenth century mentality."[19] Maeve suffers from a poverty of love; she could have endured far more easily if her father had given her

any guidance, comfort or affection.

Even when her father has no food to offer her, he could have fed her spirit with words of encouragement, but Connor never does this. Maeve and her family live in an environment where "endearments are luxuries that they cannot indulge in."[20] Her father takes Maeve for granted, and she learns to protect herself. What makes Maeve an indispensable anchor and what makes her a victor is the fact that she emerges from the Famine by realizing that she can rely on herself. Maeve relies on her inner-strength; she does not need a father to defend her, because she learns to endure through her own resources. Murphy's other daughters tend to be symbols of hope in a much more obvious way, but Maeve's mere survival is cause for optimism. She has been ignored and treated like a slave, but her practical, life-affirming attitude and her tenacity make her an anchor; she is self-reliant and she will endure.

Maudie in The Sanctuary Lamp (1975) is a very strong example of the power of hope because she also offers the sure existence of forgiveness. This play is very controversial because it strongly attacks the Roman Catholic Church and the power and love of the Trinity. When it opened at the Abbey Theatre, audience members loudly stormed out of performances, and the play: "provoked a reaction which was compared at the time to that which greeted The Plough and the Stars in 1926."[21] A central theme in this play is that humans have been orphaned by God, and that people must find a replacement for Christianity. The Sanctuary Lamp suggests that modern man will find solace in a much more general understanding of the spiritual world and afterlife, rather than in the specific teachings of Christianity.

The presence of two daughters is a crucial aspect of this play. One daughter, the remembered Teresa, creates a feeling of peace in her father's heart. The other daughter, Maudie, is an actual presence. Maudie is an orphan, and Harry "adopts" her. The memory of Harry's dead daughter and the presence of his adopted daughter are indispensable to this play, because the daughters create the possibility of reconciliation between the angry men. Maudie is the embodiment of peace and forgiveness in the sanctuary, while the memory of Teresa hovers around the church, helping to set her father's heart at ease. The major conflict in this play is between the men, and the daughters lie on the periphery of the main action, but Teresa and Maudie strongly anchor The Sanctuary Lamp in the power of hope and forgiveness.

The 1984 revision of the play begins as Harry Solomon, a disheveled Jewish man in his forties, is sitting in a church. He is an out of work circus strong man who has turned to begging, and when the Monsignor offers him the job of church clerk, Harry accepts. That evening when Harry is alone in the church, he reveals that he has been part of a circus act, along with his wife Olga (a dancer and contortionist), Francisco (a juggler) and Sam (a dwarf). Francisco seduced Harry's wife, and the former strong man laments the fact that Francisco and Olga are now openly living together.

Harry and Olga had a two-year-old daughter, Teresa, but she died, and Harry blames his wife for neglecting the child; he also blames Francisco for tempting Olga away from her husband and daughter. Harry is tormented by a desire to kill Francisco. The Sanctuary Lamp has an atmosphere of anger and bitterness, but the memory of Harry's daughter is like a delicate spirit in the sanctuary, helping to counterbalance the raging

fury of her father. Teresa never appears in the play, but her memory helps to calm Harry when he is angry. The gentle presence of Teresa (in her father's memory) gives Harry a sense of reassurance. While she lived, his daughter's smile was able to soothe Harry's anger. He often thought of revenge on Francisco, but: "then I'd look into her eyes and I'd feel I must cry, or my breastbone must certainly snap in two."[22] During her short life, Teresa had a great effect on her father, and now that she is dead, Harry cannot bring himself to kill in her memory.

Harry is homeless, and he plans to spend his nights secretly in the sanctuary. Maudie, a sixteen-year-old runaway orphan, has been staying undetected in the church at night, and when she finds Harry there, she is frightened. The two decide to stay in the church together. Harry feels sheltered within the church, and he offers all he has to her.

The orphan Maudie has run away because her grandfather beats her. She has been visited by what she feels is the spirit of her mother, and her grandmother says that her mother's peaceful spirit signifies forgiveness. When her grandfather finds out about the visions, he calls Maudie a: "whore's melt" (22). Her grandmother calls her a: "millstone," (22) and both neglect the girl. The family unit is the cornerstone of Irish society, and Maudie is an outsider in many aspects. Murphy states:

> I seem very much interested in the outsider, the people who are outside society, outside the church. I know a friend of mine whose sister was refused a burial in a cemetery in his hometown because she died giving birth to a baby, and she was unmarried. It [the Roman Catholic Church] seemed to be very, very lacking in any form of humanity or generosity.[23]

Francisco and Harry reflect this anger toward organized religion, but the runaway orphan has a gentle faith that helps to anchor the men, who would otherwise be overwhelmed by feelings of anger and futility.

Maudie's faith is not based in a strong understanding of Christian principles. Harry asks her if she adores Jesus, and after he says that he does not, Maudie says, "Neither do I" (19). She does not adore Jesus, but she is impressed with the fact that Jesus: "gives forgiveness . . . and he likes children, doesn't he?" (19). She and Harry look at statues of the Holy Family, and Maudie's eyes fall upon the baby Jesus. "I like him best," (20) she adds. Later Francisco asks Maudie if she is Catholic, and she replies, "I think my mam were" (49)[sic]. She does not adore Jesus, nor is she Catholic, but she is sure of the eternal because of the visitation of the spirit of her mother; this faith helps to give her the strength to survive on her own.

Maudie, like Murphy's other daughters, assumes adult responsibilities at an early age. She raises herself because her parents are dead and her grandparents do not care for her, and Maudie, like Maeve in Famine, emerges from her trials with inner strength and self-reliance. Although she is frail, Maudie exudes a great power; her religious understanding is not sophisticated, nor is her knowledge extensive, but the persistence of her belief in forgiveness gives her an inner-calm and an ethereal power.

Before she ran away, Maudie enjoyed climbing to the top of neighborhood lampposts, and pulling herself up above the light. The neighborhood children cheered her, and sometimes when Maudie got down, in a rush of excitement, she ran inside her house, took off her clothes and opened a window to: "stick my bottom out at them" (24). Maudie speaks with fear in her voice when she tells of two big boys who lured her outside. She cries when she talks of them, and she wants to finish her story, but Harry insists on changing the subject.

Maudie is still a very naive and innocent young woman, but her

unfinished story implies that the boys molested her. Harry asks her what she wants, and she replies, "Forgiveness. Forgiveness" (24). Harry has the desire to protect Maudie, and he puts the confessional box in a horizontal position so she can sleep in it. He is an ironic contrast to the biological fathers in Murphy's plays who have little desire to nurture or protect their daughters. He shares the small amount of bread he has, and later Harry leaves to get them some more food. While he is gone, Francisco (who has finally been able to locate Harry) sneaks into the sanctuary.

While Harry is gone, Francisco helps himself to altar wine, and he explains his bitter anti-Christian view of life to Maudie. Francisco does not believe in forgiveness, and this agitates Maudie greatly. He tries to convince Maudie that Harry will not return, and he suggests that she should come home with him. It is obvious that he is interested in her sexually, and Maudie pulls away from him. She later confides the reason she seeks forgiveness. Maudie gave birth to an illegitimate baby, Stephen, who died. She has been visited by Stephen's spirit too, but she has not yet sensed his forgiveness.

When Harry returns, he is angered to see Francisco, and Harry shares the fish and chips with Maudie, purposely excluding him. Harry and Francisco compete to keep Maudie's attention as they recall stories from their past. The men fight, argue and drink altar wine; Harry seeks to protect Maudie as a daughter, while Francisco wants to seduce her, thereby taking away another woman from Harry.

Francisco reveals that Harry's wife is dead. Harry and Francisco argue and battle during the play; Francisco tries to hit Harry with a candlestick, and Harry later threatens Francisco with a knife. The men

struggle with guilt and anger, but the play ends as Harry forgives Francisco. The men and Maudie each settle into a separate compartment of a horizontal confessional booth. She falls asleep as Harry and Francisco patch their friendship back together. Harry speaks of a spiritual reunion with his family in the afterlife, when their souls will be like "silhouettes." The image of the daughter is still significant, because Harry hopes he can heal Teresa when they are reunited after his death. He says:

> If a hole comes in one of the silhouettes . . . a new one is called for. And whose silhouette is the new one? The father's. The father of the damaged one. Or the mother's sometimes. Or a brother's, or a sweetheart's. Loved ones. That's it. And one is implanted on the other. And the merging - y'know? Merging? - merging of the silhouettes is true union. Union forever of loved ones, actually (emphasis added) (53).

Harry believes he will eventually be reunited with his wife and daughter in a: "true union," (53) and he is therefore able to forgive Francisco, although Francisco has previously boasted that there is no forgiveness. The memory of Teresa is a crucial part of Harry's life because she gives him hope and keeps her father from revenge.

Maudie and the memory of Teresa help give peace to the men. Maudie has been forced to grow up very quickly, and ironically, she seems more mature than the feuding men. She has a goal, while the men wander aimlessly; she believes in peace and forgiveness while the men allow their hearts to be eaten up by rage; her belief in the eternal has a significant effect on the men. In a pendulum where Harry represents revenge and Francisco represents guilty defiance, Maudie stands between them, anchoring the play in a spirit of forgiveness.

Maudie has been searching for peace from outside sources, and she believes that the spirit of her dead son can bring her forgiveness. The

play ends as she realizes that she can never regain her son, and Maudie comes to a very mature realization: she must forgive herself and those who have wronged her, and proceed with her life. She resolves to return to her grandparents, which suggests that she forgives them for their neglect and abuse; as she peacefully falls asleep in the church, one senses that she has also forgiven herself. Her character challenges us, because Maudie is only sixteen years old, yet she has a very mature view of life; she makes us see that hope, peace and forgiveness are present even in a seemingly irredeemable situation.

Maudie is young, but she has already suffered a great deal of abuse; she has been beaten and molested, but she does not have a "victim" mentality. All three main characters have suffered devastating losses; while the men rage at each other in a power-play of revenge, Maudie acts as a crucial foil, sitting in the background, emanating peace; her presence is indispensable because she is such a strong contrast to Harry and Francisco. The sanctuary lamp symbolizes the constant presence of God in his church; Maudie and Teresa are like the sanctuary lamp, because each is a gentle presence illuminating the shadows of the church. Maudie is the actual embodiment of peace, and Teresa is the gentle spirit of hope; like the sanctuary lamp, the presence of the daughters is always there, reminding the men of forgiveness and guiding them toward a peaceful resolution; their presence is indispensable.

The daughters in Ireland have a difficult role: they are often neglected by both parents and this lack of affection could have a very negative effect on the young women; instead, sensing a vacuum of adult leadership, the girls often become sources of strength. The daughters in

Murphy's plays are resourceful, determined and mature. They are the peace-keepers of the family. Maudie helps to create a reconciliation in her adopted family, because she mediates between Harry and Francisco, reminding them of the importance of love and forgiveness. Both Petra and Anne act as messengers, going between their parents who rarely speak, and the daughters try to create a positive atmosphere. Even Maeve keeps peace within the family by giving away generous amounts of food at her sister's wake, because that is the wish of her father. The young women try to be supportive, they usually encourage those around them and their presence adds stability and hope to the home.

Each daughter is asked to face adult situations, and they endure difficult circumstances with dignity. Petra and Maeve rely on defense mechanisms to survive; Petra assumes a calm exterior in an attempt to give peace to those around her, while Maeve becomes bitter and tense, hoping that people will not take the trouble to confront her. Both Petra and Maeve try to shield their hearts from pain by pretending that they are not hurt. Anne and Maudie have a more naive innocence, and their gentleness and kindness is inspirational. Murphy describes Anne as giving hope into the night; she is a ray of optimism in the darkness. Maudie is like the sanctuary lamp, because she helps to illuminate the shadows of anger and revenge, bathing these harsh emotions in a light of reconciliation. Murphy's daughters are often like candles in the night, representing hope.

All Murphy's daughters face pain in their family relationships, but the daughters' attitudes help to create optimism. Murphy says of Anne, "Life hasn't hammered her . . . Anne does not yield up her <u>belief</u> in life, her hope or her ideals either."[24] This observation applies to Murphy's other daughters as well. The young women believe in life and they work

diligently toward specific goals; they serve as indispensable contrasts to the anger and confusion of the adults. Their encouragement and their giving spirits often soothe the nerves of the cynical adults. The daughters work against fatalism, and their life-affirming attitudes help to negate the sense of futility that the adults sometimes feel.

Monica, the barmaid in Too Late for Logic says, "I know that it's hard to keep facing reality, but women have to do it all the time" (15). The reality of the daughters' daily family life is difficult, but they emerge from these trials with power and resolve. None of the young women sees herself as a victim or focuses on the sadness of her circumstances. Murphy's daughters are vital characters because they endure great difficulty with dignity and strength. In the midst of traumas that baffle and paralyze the adults, the daughters react capably; they do not allow life to "hammer" them. They are anchors because they embody hope, emerging as vital counterpoints to the fathers; the daughters assume the responsibilities of adults, and even when they are minor characters, they serve as rays of strength and illumination, giving life-affirming hope when the adults despair.

Notes: Chapter I

[1] John Conolly, Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History, The Reconquest of Ireland (Maunsel and Co. Ltd.: Dublin and London, 1917) 292.

[2] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[3] Connolly 292.

[4] Tom Inglis, The Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society (Gill and Macmillian: Dublin, 1987) 211.

[5] Tom Murphy, Too Late for Logic (Methuen Drama: London, 1990) 2. All references are to this edition.

[6] Declan Hassett, "Fragments of a Tragic Life - Sensitively Done," Cork Examiner 5 Oct 1989: N. Pag.

[7] Desmond Rushe, "Murphy's Logic is a Familiar Labyrinth," Irish Independent 4 Oct 1989: 6.

[8] Jerry Moriarty, "Tom's Last Word on our Dark Forces," Irish Press 7 Oct 1989: N.Pag.

[9] Wendy Fitzgerald, "Love and Death through the Thoughts of Tom Murphy," Irish Independent 16 Sept 1989: 13.

[10] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[11] Tom Murphy, Conversations on a Homecoming (Gallery Press: Dublin, 1986) 72. All references are to this edition.

[12] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[13] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[14] R.F.Foster, Modern Ireland: 1600-1972 (Penguin Books: New York, 1988) 324.

[15] Tom Murphy, Famine (Gallery Press: Dublin, 1977) 19-20. All references are to this edition.

[16] Emelie Fitzgibbon, "All Change: Contemporary Fashions in the Irish Theatre," Irish Writers in the Irish Theatre, ed. Masaru Sekine (Barnes and Noble Books: Totowa, New Jersey, 1986) 39.

[17] Michael Etherton, Contemporary Irish Drama (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1989) 131.

[18] John Waters, "The Frontiersman," In Dublin 15 May 1986: 29.

[19] Tom Murphy, quoted in the Program for the Druid Theatre's production of Famine, 1984: 7.

[20] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[21] Fintan O'Toole, The Politics of Magic (Raven Arts Press: Dublin, 1987) 13.

[22] Tom Murphy, The Sanctuary Lamp (Gallery Press: Dublin, 1984) 16. All references are to this edition.

[23] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[24] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

CHAPTER TWO: The Girlfriends

The women characters in Tom Murphy's plays sometimes suffer emotional neglect and verbal assault, but they are resilient in the face of adversity. The girlfriends encounter a unique challenge: they want the stability of married life, yet their boyfriends deeply cherish independence. The boyfriends frequently live in a fantasy world; some dream of having prestigious jobs, and others imagine how wonderful life would be if they could leave Ireland. The girlfriends in Murphy's plays embody the desire for security, and their lives are usually much more strongly rooted in reality than their boyfriend's. The conflict between the desire for constancy and reality (represented by the girlfriends) versus the need for independence and fantasy (represented by their boyfriends) usually creates an atmosphere of anxiety and tension between the sexes in Murphy's plays. The terrible irony is that the harder the women try to draw close to the men, the stronger the men try to break free.

Murphy admires women greatly, and he states, "I feel that women have a much greater sense of direction, they feel less lost than men."[1] He adds: "The purpose of women is to teach men how to live, and I don't care if that annoys militant feminists. That's not the point - we're all slaves."[2] Murphy believes that because women have a greater sense of direction, they are able to provide a civilizing quality and a stabilizing force. Murphy senses that young women are less confused than young men. He states:

> a woman seems to know her <u>role</u> in life, and I don't mean necessarily childbearing. A male would arrive at puberty at the same time, but his confusion lasts fifteen to twenty <u>years</u> - if you look at my [male] characters, that confusion still prevails, the confusion of male youth . . . a woman seems to have a better

> sense of what it's all about. There's a confusion in a man's head about his role in life. In most men I've written, they're confused and they're running around in circles. And, of course, that confusion is not conducive towards survival. The clearer one sees one's purpose, the greater possibility there is of achieving a purpose and a constructive, full life.[3]

Murphy's girlfriends and boyfriends reflect these polarities: the women are sensible and they work toward goals while the men tend run in circles. The girlfriends clearly see their "purpose," which is to secure a home and children, and they pursue this goal with single-mindedness. Ireland reveres motherhood and the family, and the girlfriends work diligently to assume the role of wife and mother.

Murphy's men are often hostile toward their girlfriends, partially because the economy in Ireland keeps many men "slaves"; the men's feeling of resentment is frequently redirected from the rightful causes (difficult economic times and unsatisfying jobs) toward an easier target, the women. Murphy acknowledges that the men may feel terribly guilty because the women have declared their dependence on the men, emotionally and usually financially.[4] The men often are insufficient as providers, and they feel inadequate emotionally. "Maybe it is in this absence of being able to do anything constructive, that they [cause] hurt,"[5] Murphy assesses. The boyfriends in Murphy's plays are all doing work they find unsatisfying, and they feel neither challenged nor appreciated. The men boost their sagging self-esteems by demeaning their girlfriends. Examples include the relationships between Mona and John Joe in A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant, Tom and Peggy in Conversations on a Homecoming, Rosie and James in The Morning After Optimism, and Mona and JPW in The Gigli Concert.

Fintan O'Toole believes that there is: "an unbridgeable gulf between

the men and women"[6] in Murphy's plays. This gulf is caused by severe communication problems between men and women in Ireland. The relationship between Mona and John Joe in The Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant (1962) exemplifies this gulf. Mona actually interacts with her boyfriend, John Joe, in only two of the play's twelve scenes, but she appears in two more scenes in John Joe's dreams. She loves John Joe, but they are from different social classes, and he feels uncomfortable being seen with her in public, so he forces her into the periphery of his life, and she remains on the outskirts of the play.

Mona, who recently graduated from school, has established her independence by moving away from her wealthy parents and working at the bank. The family unit is the cornerstone of Irish society, and John Joe is intimidated by a woman who lives alone and supports herself. Fintan O'Toole observes that Ireland traditionally has been:

> a terribly conservative society where the woman's place is in the home. They don't just say it, they wrote it in the Constitution. It was a very oppressive society towards women, one has to remember that.[7]

Mona does not draw attention to her accomplishments, because her boyfriend is not very successful. In contrast to Mona, John Joe Moran still lives at home at age thirty-three. The son of a grave digger, he is a clerk in a local grocery. In 1958, he is making the equivalent of less than eighteen dollars a week.

John Joe feels trapped in an unsatisfying job, and he is threatened because Mona has a white-collar position, while he works at a grocery. His resentment and confusion surface in humorous, surrealistic dreams that show his true needs and fears. For example, John Joe's terror of intimacy arises in his dreams. Mona wants a close relationship with her boyfriend,

but he is frightened by his sexuality. His frantic nightmares focus on the concerns he tries to ignore during his waking hours. He fears a commitment and marriage to Mona, and in his dreams she makes sexual advances, begging him to marry her. She is scantily dressed in his dreams, and this terrifies John Joe. "Tickle me and I'll tickle you,"[8] Mona teases in his dreams, and when she tries to seduce him, he panics. He is also tormented by the fact that they are from different social classes. John Joe says: "you're not of our ilk," (102) but Mona continues her seduction. She bends over him to kiss him, but the holy medals around her neck drop into his mouth instead, and John Joe bolts out of bed. He is overwhelmed by guilt and fear, and he says: "You're not too good for me at all" (102). John Joe sees Mona as a great source of conflict: he is attracted to her, but he feels guilty about his sexuality, and her social position threatens him immensely.

Mona and John Joe have been secretly dating. They walk to a country barn to talk, and this comprises their socializing. John Joe is uncomfortable with intimacy, and although they are in complete privacy, they never have any more contact that an occasional kiss. When she tries to snuggle up to him, he pulls away. Murphy observes that as he was growing up: "There was a type of rigidity that existed between the men and women. The sexual repression prevailed, and perhaps does, to a certain extent."[9] This rigidity is reflected in the cautious way John Joe treats Mona.

John Joe does not want to be seen in town with her, and he has not introduced her to his family. The Morans have no modern conveniences, including no telephone, and when she wants to communicate with him, Mona has to write to him in care of the store where he works because he does

not want his mother to know that he is receiving mail from a woman. Mona's family's wealth makes him feel very uncomfortable, so he attempts to hide their relationship from his family and friends. Mona cares for him so deeply that she is willing to withstand his behavior.

In contrast to the other people her age in town, Mona lives independently and supports herself by working at the bank. All the other people in their late twenties or early thirties are still treated like children by the older people in town. The parents control their lives very strongly and call them by childhood nicknames. John Joe feels intimidated by Mona's success, and in his dreams he also fears her wealthy father. John Joe has never met Mona's father, and in his dreams he substitutes his employer, Mr. Brown, for Mona's father who demands:

> Who are your people, I say who are your people? Any blue blood, red blood, sheeps' blood, black blood? Any insanity in the family? - have you a Communist in the cupboard . . . Any doctors, lawyers, teachers, vagabonds, blackguards, idiots, jailbirds, fiddlers? I say, any jailbirds? Have you been to uni [university] oony, bo-bo-bing, or West Point? How many letters have you after your name? Have you a gas cigarette lighter? Did you shoot Patrick Pearse? Do you know what a la carte means? Is your mother a washer woman? Is your father a Greek scholar? Are you a genius? And who will make a suitable speech on your side of the family at the wedding breakfast? (156).

Although Mona is very careful never to flaunt her social standing, the mere fact that she comes from a wealthy family makes John Joe feel very insecure. He fears that Mona's family will think he is not a suitable husband, and he is also afraid that people in town will ridicule him for dating above his social class, so John Joe will not be seen in public with her.

Mona has been very patient with John Joe because she has fallen in love with him. She has written to her mother, telling her that she is

dating John Joe. Mona teases him saying, "Well I couldn't tell her, could I, we were engaged, could I? Because you never asked me. Could I?" (122). She hints about marriage, hoping that John Joe will see her interest and have the courage to propose, but her eagerness only frightens him.

John Joe quits his job in a rage and is seriously thinking of immigrating. During their next secret date, Mona suggests that they go to England together, and she reminds him that she has money. John Joe is unwilling to go from a dependence on his mother to a dependence on Mona. She continues to hint broadly about marriage, and she even mentions that her brother once said she had: "very good childbearing hips" (160). Later, Mona begins to cry and she openly suggests marriage, saying, "We could hitch" (162). John Joe feels pressured, and he rebels by saying:

> Oh - but he has high notions - you know, the grave digger's son has . . . I'm tired of this romance. We'll finish it! It's ridiculous . . . What do I mean to you? No more than to anybody else. What do I mean to anybody else <u>besides my mother</u>, and what good is that? . . . I've never felt anything for you . . . You mean nothing to me. You are a silly, stupid bitch . . . Mummy, big farm; daddy, the priest plays golf with daddy; the bishop knows daddy; money in the bank. Where does John-Balls-Joe come in? For favours, pity? . . . In love, Jesus, in love! (emphasis added) (163).

This speech is significant because it makes Mona finally realize that she and John Joe have no future together. She has endured a great deal of neglect, but his abusive words finally make her lose respect for him. John Joe's mother has convinced him that she is the only person in the world who truly cares for him, and this has stripped him of the belief that he can sustain an adult, mature relationship with a woman. His mother has reared him to stay emotionally dependent on her, and when Mona wants him to transfer his emotional allegiance to her, John Joe is unable.

This play raises important social problems in Ireland: the sexes

cannot communicate well, mothers smother their sons, the economic climate does not provide young people with financial independence, class distinctions create problems in relationships and the tight family structure does not allow young people emotional independence. Comedy is usually based on serious subjects, and although the actual conflict between Mona and John Joe is not humorous, the tone of the play as a whole is comic. Murphy, like Aristophanes, raises significant social issues, and he is able to do so by allowing us to smile at ourselves. The concerns of financial security and emotional independence are universal, and Murphy makes us see the humor in our frailty.

Mona is not a central character in this play. The major action focuses on John Joe at home and at work, and he does not allow Mona to see him in either place. She is in only four of the play's twelve scenes, but Mona is a crucial character because she contrasts so strongly with John Joe. Mona represents emotional maturity and adulthood. She is in her early twenties, yet she is more mature than the thirty-three-year old John Joe. Mona is reliable and patient, and her character is a vital foil to the childish, volatile John Joe.

Unlike John Joe, Mona is independent financially, and she also displays an emotional independence. After John Joe breaks off their relationship, she does not brood and feel sorry for herself. Instead, she begins dating a local school teacher, a man of her own class who is much more likely to make her happy. Mona is an anchor because she embodies the desire for a mature, satisfying adult relationship. She could give John Joe constancy and emotional security, but John Joe equates stability with dependence, and he fears that Mona is an anchor who will emotionally drag him down and suffocate him, like his mother. Although John Joe fears she

would be an anchor who would suffocate him, Mona's strength has a positive affect on Joe. Her independent nature works as a catalyst which encourages him to rely more strongly on himself, rather than his overprotective mother.

Peggy in Conversations on a Homecoming (1986) is an example of a passive girlfriend who, although she is a small character, is still vital and three-dimensional. The main conflict of this play focuses on Michael who has returned to Galway after trying unsuccessfully to work as an actor for ten years in New York, and his former best friend, Tom, who has given up his dream of becoming a writer. (see Chapter One) Tom hates his work, and although he is in his late thirties, he still lives with his parents, signing over each pay check to his mother. Tom's fiancee, Peggy, lies on the outskirts of the action, but she is crucial to the play. She is a quiet observer to most of the conversation, which revolves around the reunion of the men, but her role is significant because at the end of the play, she is the one who provides the voice of peace and helps to cool the temper of her volatile fiance.

Peggy, who is forty, joins the men at the pub, but Tom immediately makes her feel excluded from the reunion. Tom resents her presence, and one strongly senses that he believes a woman does not belong in a pub. She is delighted to see Michael after his ten-year absence, and as they happily exchange greetings, Tom quickly adds: "Will you sit down and stop making a show of yourself" (30). All Peggy has done is warmly welcome home an old friend, but Tom immediately lets her know that she should be quiet around the men.

The play is presented without an intermission, and a night of

drinking progress from the first round, through the drunkenness and extreme inebriation, to a stage where the anger and confusion of the evening begin to sober the men. The play has serious themes, but drunken humor is interwoven throughout. Critic Nicholas Grene suggests that one aspect of Conversations on a Homecoming is: "a realistic night out with the boys, the study of a group, of the disillusioned 70s aftermath of the ideals of the 60s, an Irish dramatic equivalent of that undervalued movie The Big Chill."[10] The play also is filled with "the inconsequential sequence of talk, of anecdotage and argument, of maudlin confidences and belligerent hectoring of a standard male-dominated bull-session."[11]

In the midst of anger and confusion, the men drink, laugh, joke and sing. Drunken humor is vital to the atmosphere of the play. Peggy is on the periphery of the men's conversations, and she also is excluded from the male-dominated humor. Peggy sometimes tries to be "one of the boys," as she laughs shrilly at jokes she does not find funny. This only serves to further alienate Tom. Conversations on a Homecoming has a comic side that sometimes causes the audience to smile in recognition, and at other times the audience bursts with laughter. The humor, however, is dominated by the men.

The atmosphere of an Irish pub is very different from that of a bar in the United States. This play takes place in the 1970s, and in Ireland, the pub was a male stronghold, a place where men could speak freely among themselves and escape their wives and mothers.[12] It was not until the 1960s that women were allowed to go in the Irish pubs for the first time. A wife was allowed in the pub with her husband if: "she had first organized and catered to his needs and to those of her children. And provided she knew her place."[13] Single women were not allowed in the

drinking establishments, and the wives were usually only taken to the pubs by their husbands to celebrate a special occasion. Like children who had been given special permission to stay up late for an adult party, the women in the pubs knew to be polite and quiet, and they were only to be observers.

Peggy is mainly an observer of the conversation, occasionally offering her opinion, only to be stifled by a mean word or a cutting glance from Tom. Mary O'Donoghue (the wife of Noel O'Donoghue with whom Murphy wrote his first play) states that in Conversations on a Homecoming: "The woman's unimportance in the scheme of things is striking. The tensions and the obsessions of this play are revealed in the conversations of the men. The drama belongs to them. It is true and achingly familiar."[14] As a single woman, Peggy is breaking cultural norms by joining Tom at the pub. Murphy adds that traditionally in Ireland:

> the pub was the terrain of the male . . . There was some sort of Puritanical attitude to it all. I'd imagine a bar stool was a fairly high thing to sit on, and perhaps a woman shouldn't show her ankles, or that she shouldn't be propped up on a stool, and that this would appear to be unseemly for a woman, but not for a man.[15]

Peggy retreats into the background of the play. She seems conscious of the fact that Tom feels she does not belong there.

The forty-year-old Peggy has been engaged to Tom for ten years, and she feels a terror of growing old alone. She tries to hide her age and her deep fears behind a facade of girlishness. Peggy sticks out her tongue, pokes the men with her finger, and her pretense of youthfulness sometimes surfaces in a shrill laugh. Peggy's giggling is very grating, and it aurally reminds us that she does not fit in, because her laugh clashes with the laughter of the men. She hopes that her behavior is cute

and coquettish, but her forced girlishness becomes shrill and annoying.

Peggy feels that she must be youthful and charming for Tom, but in forcing herself to be something she is not, Peggy becomes strident. She is a sad contrast to the pub owner's seventeen-year-old daughter, Anne, who has youth, charm and inner-calm. Trying to pretend to be Anne's contemporary, Peggy says "Dreadful people, the nuns. Dreadful. Sister Bartholomew is the worst, don't you think so, Anne?" (54). When Anne replies that Sister Bartholomew is dead, Peggy laughs shrilly and berates herself. Peggy is startled at the difference between Anne's youthfulness and her aging self, but she covers up her pain (as always) and tries to laugh. Peggy laughs because she feels powerless and she desperately wants to have a sense of belonging.

Michael remembers Peggy with affection, and he treats her with respect and kindness. To Michael, she is a talented, loving, loveable woman, and she begins to feel confident when he talks with her. When Tom leaves to go to the men's room, Michael has a few moments to renew their friendship. He remembers that she studied voice, and he asks about her singing. Michael enquires about her friends and wonders what she has been doing to occupy herself. He talks <u>with</u> her, not <u>at</u> her (as Tom does), and she blossoms, revealing hopefully, that she may get a job at the tourist office that will be opening the following year. When Tom returns from the men's room, she says, "we were having a lovely time while you were out" (41). This statement is very revealing, because when Peggy is treated with kindness, she begins to drop the forced girlishness, and she becomes a sweet, sensitive woman; when she is treated with respect, she can enjoy herself. While Tom is around, Peggy is so busy either trying to please him or dodging his attacks that she has no opportunity to relax.

During an unpleasant moment between Tom and Michael, their friend Junior tries to break the tension by suggesting that Peggy sing. Junior is finally able to convince her, after much "girlish" shyness on her part, and she begins to sing a hymn, "All in a Summer's Evening," a song that has a great deal of sentimental meaning to all of them. Peggy begins seriously, but when she realizes that she is the center of attention, she giggles and continues by "fixing herself into the pose of an amateur contralto at a wedding, and singing deliberately off-key and 'poshly' distorting words" (59). She then sits abruptly, giggling and covering her mouth with her hands.

Peggy cannot allow herself to succeed, and deliberately singing off-key is a cry for help. She has been pushed aside all evening, and when she has the chance to shine, she sabotages her success by making a joke of her talent. Peggy is used to failure; her relationship with Tom is a failure, and she has given up singing and dressmaking. Besides doing the bookkeeping for the veterinarian once or twice a week, her days are spent keeping house with her mother. Failure is a known quantity with Peggy, and success is not. She ruins even a small chance of success, her singing, because she has come to expect failure.

As the evening progresses, the men become very drunk, and Tom's resentment toward Peggy increases. Tom has not paid for a single round of drinks the whole evening, and many rounds have been consumed. As he roots in his pockets for coins to pay for the round, Peggy twice openly offers him money. He tries to ignore her each time, and when she keeps insisting Tom bellows, "And who asked you to pay for it! . . . Will-you-put-that - away!" (62). Tom feels inadequate because he does not have enough money to even pay for one round of drinks. Peggy has only tried to be helpful,

but in offering Tom money in front of his friends, she has deeply hurt his pride.

She asks him to take her home several times, but he ignores her. Finally Tom lashes out at Peggy, saying: "Well go! Who's stopping yeh? My God you walk up and down from your house twenty times a day with your short little legs! No one will molest you! We're all mice!" (68). When Tom says that the men in Galway are mice, he is admitting the powerlessness he experiences. Tom lives at home, his mother insists that he give her his paycheck, and he feels like a mouse. He is a "slave," and Peggy, the slave of a slave, receives the brunt of his wrath.

After the previous verbal attack, Peggy runs outside the pub in tears. She badly wants for someone to comfort her, but Tom keeps Michael from checking on her three separate times. Peggy softly sings the gentle hymn to herself:

> All in the April evening, April airs were abroad
> The sheep with their little lambs passed me by on the road
> The sheep with their little lambs passed me by on the road
> All in the April evening I thought on the lamb of God (69).

Peggy has been on the periphery of the action the entire evening, and now she is outside the pub completely, but her song has a calming effect on all the men. Her quiet, reflective tone soothes the anger and the raw emotions that have been exposed. Peggy's song:

> achieves a genuine expressiveness, and the play achieves a moment of real significance . . . her song is made to express a genuine feeling associated with the <u>nearly silenced femininity</u> at the edge of the stage filled with competing male egos.[16] (emphasis added)

Peggy's song significantly calms Tom, although he does not acknowledge this; it is not until after the song that he apologizes to Michael.

When Peggy returns to the pub to get her coat, she is finally able to

persuade Tom to leave with her. It is getting late, and Peggy teases, "Your mother will have your life," (72) reminding us of the powerful hold Tom's mother has on him. As they exit, Tom and Peggy seem the happy couple, and in the original Druid Theatre production, Tom put his arm around her as they left together. Peggy is relieved, but he has treated her very badly during the evening, and one wonders why she is so glad to be leaving with him. Tom has diminished her self-esteem so deeply that she feels lucky to have a man in her life, at any cost.

Although Peggy lies on the periphery of the action of this play, she is crucial to it. As with most of Murphy's women, Peggy is not the "rudder"; she is never allowed to directly guide the action. All she can attempt to do is anchor Tom in the safe harbor of married life. Although her presence has a positive, stabilizing affect, Tom sees her as a weight around his neck. He feels suffocated by her closeness, and he tries to break free. She represents reality, and Tom would rather not face what he sees as a harsh truth.

Peggy is also an indispensable character because her presence has a sobering effect. As the men become very drunk, she nurses two drinks. Peggy is giddy and sometimes silly, but she never is drunk. The men become angry and defensive, partially because of their drink. Peggy acts as a foil, and by contrast, we realize how completely intoxicated the men have become. At the end of the play when she sings the hymn with heartfelt emotion (rather than making a joke out of her talent) her vulnerability becomes very clear, but Peggy also reveals some of her inner-strength; in this moment, she is able to calm the raging conflict of the men and anchor the play in reconciliation.

The Morning After Optimism (1971) introduces the girlfriend Rosie. This play differs from Murphy's other works in several aspects because it is non-realistic. The play takes place in a stylized forest where great "tree trunks stretch up so high that we cannot see the branches."[17] Breaking from realism, Murphy is able to explore the relationships between men and women in a fairy tale environment. Upon an initial reading, this play might seem menacing and cruel, but Murphy emphasizes that it has elements of the farcical Irish playwright Dion Boucicault. Murphy believes that the play is more of a comedy than a tragedy. We sometimes have unrealistic expectations in our relationships with the opposite sex, and The Morning After Optimism, in its farcical context, shows us that impossible expectations must be destroyed before true communication can begin.

Rosie is enslaved because she is a prostitute for her pimp/lover, James, but she is also an anchor because she deeply desires a home and children. She and James are inextricably bound by cords of guilt, anger and fear. They seem like two sides of a coin: Rosie wants security and commitment, while James fears any emotional responsibility. This lack of stability causes Rosie to feel pain, guilt and anger. She clings to James because she believes she is unsuitable to be anything else but a prostitute.

Although James repeatedly refers to himself as: "everybody's victim," (13) it is the thirty-seven-year old Rosie who is the true victim. She was reared in an upper-class home and became involved with James against the strong warnings of her father, a judge, and her uncle, a bishop. James took advantage of her naivete, and after winning her trust, he turned her to prostitution. Rosie feels stripped of self-respect and she

lacks any feelings of worth. She clings to James with a combination of need and revenge.

Rosie had been well educated, and she knew how to play musical instruments. The fact that she was raised in an upper-class home makes her present situation even more unbearable. She says: "I feel so guilty. Once upon a time I knew the name of every bird" (emphasis added) (11). As a young woman, she enjoyed music, nature and bird-watching, and now the guilt of her present life style sometimes overwhelms her.

She has been pressured to have abortions, and several times Rosie chants, "My brains are danced on like grapes to make abortions" (9). She feels that her mind is worthless - it has been trampled, and Rosie feels used. She aches because the "fruit" of her body, her unborn children, have been destroyed. Rosie wants some semblance of a home, and she begs James to allow her to rent a cabin, which would give her a sense of stability. James ignores her, and as they bicker, Rosie relates the story of a woman who lost her sanity because of repressed grief:

> Yes, I know a person who, when she found out that things are really as they seem, and not what they're supposed to be, instead of manifesting her reaction into a little tear, held back and clung to her pain. Until one day, as she was silently hanging out the wash on the line, a gander came hissing from the end of the garden, chasing her indoors. Then she cried. But it was too late. To this day that woman believes she's a goose . . . I learned a lot from that woman's case history (emphasis added) (12).

Rosie says that she has learned a lot from that woman, but she internalizes her sadness and clings to her guilt and her pain. Rosie suffers greatly but never cries, and one wonders if she, too, is on the brink of her sanity.

Although James finally agrees that they can rent a cabin (which symbolizes a home and stability), he and Rosie have a very destructive

relationship. They are contrasted with the perfect melodramatic hero and heroine, Edmund and Anastasia. Edmund is James' long-lost upright younger brother, the archetypal hero. Anastasia is a young beautiful maiden who is James' ideal fantasy woman. Edmund and Anastasia fall in love, and their story-book romance infuriates Rosie and James because it reminds them how sterile their own relationship has become.

When Rosie meets Edmund, she is immediately attracted to him. He is startled by Rosie and draws his sword; she "sinks to her knees, trying to protect her head and ribs with her arms" (29). These are the actions of a woman who has been beaten; "customers" may have hit her, or James may have attacked her, but she reacts as a woman who has been physically abused. Later, she draws Edmund's attention to her good legs, but when he is not interested, she pulls up her skirts and says: "What's your game?" (29). She hopes that Edmund will like her, but she has been a prostitute for a long time, and she does realize the flirtations that she thinks are playful and alluring are really vulgar; her obscenity offends Edmund.

He seems like a prince, and Rosie says: "I have dreamed, you see, that someone someday'd come along and turn my working blanket into a magic carpet. Away! Just once would be enough" (30). She reveals that she knows James, and he is the man whom Edmund seeks. Edmund starts to leave, but she offers to lead him to James. Rosie's bitterness toward James surfaces as she relates that she needs glasses. She fears telling James, because he will ridicule her. Rosie also is wary of returning to her "profession alone needing spectacles" (32). If she is to continue as a prostitute, she needs James as a pimp because of her poor eyesight.

The thought of a squinting prostitute may be amusing, but Murphy reveals a serious side to Rosie. She explains her relationship with James:

> Spiritually, we have nothing. Except the poxy habit of time. And ask myself to recall when his intimacies meant other than a client's, and my memory only shrugs and shakes its head. Granted. I've grown accustomed to being used . . . that my gift of sex to James is taken as bas-relief and nothing more. It's therapy, they say . . . My daddy and my uncle were right. What do I know of the ponce [pimp]? (32-33).

Murphy describes Rosie as "a dated whore" (7). She deeply regrets not listening to the advice of her father. Her uncle was a bishop, and this multiplies the guilt she feels about her profession. Sometimes she takes the Lord's name in vain, but then she catches herself, winces and says: "And little Jesus" (32). Rosie turned her back on her family and her church to be with James. She devoted her youth to him, but now Rosie has neither security, nor a man's love; she has neither James' respect nor self-respect.

Rosie leads Edmund to James, but James will not admit that he and Edmund are brothers. He starts spending time with Edmund, hoping to sully the young man's innocence. James tells his brother: "I wouldn't give any woman a baby. I would be afraid to give any woman a baby, Edmund. Once a woman has a baby she's first-rate happy then. And the man isn't so . . . so-so-so, yeh know, anymore" (43). Rosie has been denied a child because James is frightened that he will become Rosie's second priority. James, who has a very manipulative view of women, has captured Anastasia and tied her up in his closet. Rosie suffers because James treats women with a lack of respect, and she feels no self-worth; she therefore hopes that Edmund will appreciate her.

Despite James' attempts to separate them, Edmund and Anastasia are reunited, and the young, ideal couple happily plan to marry. Rosie tries to seduce Edmund, but he is repulsed by her advances and calls her a whore. She wounds him by telling him that he really is James' brother.

When Rosie and James realize that they cannot attract Edmund and Anastasia, they decide to kill the joyous newlyweds. Seething with jealousy, Rosie says:

> Kill them. The two of them. But be especially cruel to her . . . Make them writhe, toss, implore for the end, like when sleep won't come the second night . . . Give them the pains of the lack of motherhood . . . the pain of the small bust longing for the big bust and the big bust longing for one a bit smaller . . . Nothing achieved but memories - that pain. Not being able - Don't let them be able - kill them, kill them, kill them (91).

When Rosie and James come upon the happy couple, he admits that he is Edmund's brother, and James challenges him to a sword fight. James finally drops his sword, pretending that he can no longer fight his brother. When Edmund embraces him, James stabs him in the back, killing him. Rosie then kills Anastasia with Edmund's sword. James and Rosie have never allowed themselves to cry, but they weep over the death of Edmund and Anastasia. Rosie realizes the cleansing nature of tears and says, "It's nice to cry, James" (98). He adds as they exit, "We might be laughing in a minute," (98) reminding us of the overall comic tone of the play.

Rosie has become accustomed to being used, and she hopes that a prince will come and rescue her; when she realizes that Edmund is not that prince, her resentment begins to boil. She and James are both forced to face the fact that Anastasia and Edmund have not found them desirable. The clean and the pure characters make them seem even more base in comparison. Rosie feels hollow because her life has been filled with guilt, disappointment and betrayal. She began life with all the advantages, but Rosie has achieved nothing; she has only accumulated: "memories that pain," (91) and that is a bitter legacy.

The play does end on a note of hope though, because after Rosie and

James kill Anastasia and Edmund, the pimp and prostitute cry. Tears symbolize their acknowledgement of failure and the beginning of emotional healing. The Morning After Optimism ends with the hint of optimism, because after their escapades in the forest, James and Rosie: "have arrived at a kind of dark acceptance of themselves."[18] In a metaphorical sense, the play deals with the death of illusions. Murphy feels that this play is about "the tyranny of the idealized self."[19] Once James and Rosie are able to kill their ideals of perfection (symbolized by Edmund and Anastasia) then they can accept themselves as human beings with flaws and progress with their lives. In a moment of catharsis, they purge themselves through their tears. The Morning After Optimism suggests that Rosie and James will forgive themselves for their inadequacies and make a new start with their lives.

Rosie qualifies as a female anchor because she wants stability and decency. Three times during the first four pages of dialogue, she asks James if they can rent a cabin, which symbolizes a home. He finally agrees that they can rent a cabin, but James is unwilling to make a commitment to a woman whom he does not respect. He treats her like a slave, seducing her into prostitution and insisting on her abortions, but after the death of the idealized self, they are be able to cry, laugh and possibly forgive each other. They no longer aim at perfection in a mate, and this gives us hope, because they may then find the other more desirable.

Mona, in Murphy's highly acclaimed masterpiece The Gigli Concert, (1983) has also been disappointed by her boyfriend. She is a married woman who is having an affair with JPW, an English "dynamatologist" who

lives in Dublin. Dynamatology teaches that the "mind is the essence of being alive,"[20] and it focuses on self-realization, preaching that "anything is possible" (13). JPW is a failure who tries to keep his career afloat, and at the beginning of the play, it has been a long time since he has seen a patient.

JPW is in love with another married woman, Helen, about whom he dreams and fantasizes. To him, she is the: "Irish colleen, apron, you know? darns my socks, that kind of thing. I am very fond of her and she is very fond of chintz" (26). JPW's emotional investment is in his fantasies of the unattainable Helen, but Mona is the woman who actually loves him and cares for him. JPW has toast and vodka for breakfast, he lives in his trashy, rundown office and sleeps on the hide-a-bed. Mona is the one who brings him groceries and offers to give him money so he can get his phone turned on again.

The Gigli Concert has eight scenes, and the play centers around the relationship between JPW and an Irish man who dreams of singing in the actual voice of the Italian tenor Beniamino Gigli. When we first meet the Man (he never gives his name), he tries to pretend that he is Gigli, telling JPW of his life as a boy in Italy. We learn that the Man is a very rich and successful builder of real estate developments. His marriage is in shambles because he bullies his wife, and his negative behavior has destroyed the communication between them. The Man suffers from severe bouts of depression, and he feels a void in his soul; he believes that if he can sing like Gigli, he will somehow be made whole. The play is a "metaphysical quest for wholeness."[21]

JPW becomes obsessed with helping the Man, and during the play, the dynamatologist goes out of his way to try to find ways to guide the Man,

whom JPW fears is insane. The first act ends with JPW's manic monologue where he plans to find a way to heal the Man. "We are God," (51) JPW says, and he realizes that he only has "three more days" (52) to help the Man. Toward the end of his monologue, Mona appears at his door. JPW hears her knocking and she call his name, but he ignores her, and she goes away. This becomes a potent metaphor for Mona: she is the unanswered knock at the door.

The rich man goes through annual attacks of severe depression, and in the past the Man has "cured himself" (62) by isolating himself or by being promiscuous. Toward the end of the play, the Man claims that he has again cured himself; he has realized the importance of trying to make his marriage work, and instead of yearning for the unattainable in trying to sing like Gigli, the Man acknowledges, "It all boils down to the wife for us all in the end" (72). He stops chasing fantasies and decides to focus on the actual possibility of healing his marriage; underlying the Man's recovery is the fact that JPW has listened to his painful story and has shown him compassion and true human concern. The Man is "healed," but JPW takes on his obsession of singing like Gigli. JPW consumes a potentially lethal dose of pills and alcohol, and in a surrealistic sequence, he does sing in the actual voice of Gigli. In the 1991 Abbey Theatre production, JPW's drab office literally cracked in two, revealing a star-filled heaven as he sang an aria in the voice of Gigli. JPW survives the experience, and leaves his office triumphantly.

The central conflict in <u>The Gigli Concert</u> is between the men, but Mona plays an indispensable role in this play. To understand Mona, we: "must be happy to be provoked to think."[22] Her character is much more vital than the surface of the play might reveal, because although she only

appears occasionally on stage, Mona is the anchor of this play. Patrick Mason who directed the original Abbey Theatre production and the 1991 revival observes:

> Mona is sort of a fulcrum point. She is a touchstone to JPW and to the Irish Man. Without Mona, there is no center to the play, there are only polarities. She is important also because she is the only woman and has the female energy to counterbalance those two men. She is significant in giving a spectrum, a full spectrum, of emotional range.[23] (emphasis added)

While the men in the play try to achieve the fantastical and the impossible, Mona reminds us that there is a real world outside JPW's insular office; the men dream of singing in the actual voice of Gigli, while Mona takes care of the practical aspects of life, such as bringing JPW groceries.

Mona is a thirty-five-year old married woman who has a great many lovers, including JPW. She talks often of her god-child, whom she adores. In her final scene with JPW, the audience comes to understand the significance of her attachment to the little girl, as well as why she has so many lovers. As a sixteen-year old, Mona gave birth to an illegitimate son, and the nuns forced her to give up the child for adoption. She has never been able to conceive again, and she feels a horrible void in her life. Mona dreams of becoming pregnant, and she says to JPW:

> I've been trying to repeat the deed ever since. I picked you up. And if I had a child by you, or any of the others, I don't think I would have told you. I'd have been the one you wouldn't have seen for dust. Pregnant into the sunset. But preferably by you. Others weren't so gentle in how they - regarded me. But it couldn't be done. And maybe that's as well now (71).

Mona is not a nymphomaniac; she has become a slave of men in general as she goes from lover to lover, trying to have another baby. Her marriage has not produced any children, so she hopes to help her odds of conceiving by sleeping with many men. She has been mistreated by some of these men,

and she cares for JPW because he contrasts with her other lovers, who: "weren't so gentle in how they - regarded me" (71). Mona is a grieving woman who desperately wants to replace the child she was forced to give up, whom she misses terribly.

Her sense of loss is magnified by the fact that she is dying of cancer. Shortly before leaving JPW's office for the last time, she tells him that she has cancer of the lymphatic system. As she goes to check herself into the hospital, she tells JPW, "I love you" (71). JPW, who has never told her he loves her, waits until she is gone to express his bottled up emotions. He cries out:

> I lo-! (love) I love! I-! I-! Fuck you! I love! Fu-! fu-! fuck you! I love! - I love! Fuck you - fuck you! I love (71).

He has never admitted his feelings, partially because he has kept the fantasy of Helen alive for so long. When he finally realizes that he loves Mona, he tries to vocalize his emotions, but his rage at losing her can only be expressed in obscenities.

<u>The Gigli Concert</u> questions the meaning of human existence, but the play is also marked with moments of great comedy. Mona tells comic vulgar stories and is a source of physical and sexual humor, but her more important function is bringing JPW back to reality. The men in the play feverishly run after fantasies; JPW dreams of his perfect woman, Helen, while the Man is obsessed with singing like Gigli. Mona also has a dream, but her dream is based in an accessible possibility. The mistress does not want to sing in the voice of a great opera singer; she has the earth-bound desires of bearing a child. Mona has not been able to conceive in the nineteen years since she was forced to give up her son for adoption, but she keeps trying. She adds: "Life, my friend, is bouncing back" (37).

Patrick Mason, the original director of this play, believes The Gigli Concert is about "the pain of the soul in a soulless world."[24] Mona seeks to ease her pain and loneliness by bearing a child, and sometimes Mona's song is mournful and needy; at other times she inspires us with her generosity and calmness. Mona is a source of caring in JPW's sterile world. She tends to his needs and loves him. During her last visit, in addition to bringing groceries, Mona brings a plant, the symbol of life. JPW gives her nothing in return, and even in the face of his apathy and her own likely death, she is kind, concerned and life-affirming.

In 1986, a radio play of The Gigli Concert was produced in Ireland, and this version eliminated the part of Mona. As a result: "the whole feeling of the play [changed] to comedy,"[25] and "the deeper reaches of feeling are lost."[26] Murphy's women are indeed crucial, even when they rarely appear on-stage. Mona grounds this play in the realities of life. Mason adds: "I think without her it becomes very unbalanced. The male energies unbalance the play . . . She is an extraordinary central figure in the middle of these two polarities."[27] Between the men's flying fantasies, Mona stands as a vital anchor of reality based in hope.

Mona in A Crucial Week, Peggy from Conversations on a Homecoming, Rosie from The Morning After Optimism and Mona in The Gigli Concert each represent a deep desire for a home, children and consistency. The women are never allowed to "steer" the ship or be the rudders; instead, they play the vital roles of trying to stabilize the men by acting as anchors. Mona in A Crucial Week proposes to her boyfriend, but he pulls away from her; Peggy loyally stays with her fiance of ten years, hoping that he will finally commit to marriage; Rosie rents a cabin so she and James will have

some semblance of a home; Mona in The Gigli Concert keeps trying to conceive a child, which would give her a true sense of home. The men are torn between their attraction to their girlfriends and their fear of intimacy and suffocation; the girlfriends are a significant contrast to the men because they are unswerving in their desire to create a true home.

The girlfriends are enslaved, partially because they live in a society where the men control the action, and the women subordinate their desires to keep peace in the relationship. Ireland reveres the family and motherhood, and Rosie echoes the sentiments of all the girlfriends when she feels: "the pains of the lack of pains of motherhood" (91). Mona in A Crucial Week speaks of having good childbearing hips, Rosie regrets her abortions, and Mona in The Gigli Concert grieves for the child she was forced to give up and her ensuing barrenness. Peggy, too, probably wants a child, but Tom has kept her waiting until she is forty, and she likely wonders if she is capable of bearing a healthy child.

Murphy's women all deal with disappointment, but they do not allow their frustration to make them disillusioned and cynical. Peggy realizes that life with Tom will be full of setbacks, but she loves him and consistently tries to make their relationship work; her sweet singing of the hymn "All in the April Evening" changes the tonality of the entire evening, like a blessing hovering in the air; she offers a glimpse of a gentle aspect of life that seems inaccessible to the men. Her small voice makes a powerful, positive difference. Murphy's women reaffirm survival in the face of adversity. They eagerly work toward becoming wives and mothers, and although they suffer many difficulties, the women are amazingly resilient. The girlfriends in these plays are vital because they are a tenacious form of encouragement; as Mona in The Gigli Concert

says, "Life, my friend, is bouncing back" (37).

Notes: Chapter II

[1] Kate Shanahan, "Murphy - A Playwright Who Can Love Words too Much," Irish Press 20 March 1991: 18.

[2] Jerry Moriarty, "Tom's Last Words on our Dark Forces," Irish Press 7 Oct 1989: N. Pag.

[3] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[4] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[5] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[6] Fintan O'Toole, The Politics of Magic (Raven Arts Press: Dublin, 1987) 25.

[7] Fintan O'Toole, personal interview, 25 March 1991.

[8] Tom Murphy, A Whistle in the Dark and Other Plays (Methuen Drama, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1989) 101. All references are to this edition.

[9] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[10] Nicholas Grene, "Talking, Singing, Storytelling: Tom Murphy's After Tragedy," Colby Quarterly Dec 1991: 211.

[11] Grene, Colby, 214.

[12] Mary O'Donoghue, "Liberator," program notes from the Druid Theatre's production of Conversations on a Homecoming, 1985: N. Pag.

[13] O'Donoghue, "Liberator," N. Pag.

[14] O'Donoghue, "Liberator," N. Pag.

[15] Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[16] Grene, Colby, 215-216.

[17] Tom Murphy, The Morning After Optimism (The Mercier Press:Dublin, 1973) 7. All references are to this edition.

[18] Jacket notes, The Morning After Optimism.

[19] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[20] Tom Murphy, The Gigli Concert (Gallery Books: Dublin, 1988) 13. All references are to this edition.

[21] Rudiger Imhof. "'The Gigli Concert' Revisited," The Crows Behind the Plow:History and Violence in Anglo-Irish Literature, ed. Geet Lernout (Amsterdam:Rodopi, 1991) 124.

[22] Leslie Taylor, "Joy at Gigli," Evening Herald, 20 March 1991: N. Pag.

[23] Patrick Mason, "Directing 'The Gigli Concert': An Interview," Irish University Review Spring 1987: 106.

[24] Mason, "Directing," 100.

[25] Mason, "Directing," 107.

[26] Mason, "Directing," 107.

[27] Mason, "Directing," 107.

CHAPTER THREE: The Wives

In Ireland, women are not raised to believe that they should have an equal voice in a marriage. Sociologist Jenny Beale in her book Women in Ireland: Voices of Change states: "Men and women are not brought up to see each other as equal human beings" (70). Traditionally, marriages in Ireland were often pragmatic financial arrangements where:

> The relationship between husband and wife was the least important part of the partnership. Marriage was primarily an economic contract which served the needs of the farmers and fitted in with the political ideology of the self-sufficient state based on family units.[1]

Historically, the wife's chief emotional bond has been with her children rather than her husband, and the woman is expected to make her marriage work, even if her husband neglects or abuses her.[2] Communication between the husbands and wives is often strained, and Beale notes: "In the traditional marriage, silence and withdrawal were common ways of coping with disagreements and hurts" (67).

Fintan O'Toole states that in Ireland "there is an unbridgeable gulf between men and women."[3] Part of the reason for this "gulf" is the fact that the sexes have been strongly separated in the Irish society. While Murphy was growing up, he felt that there was "an extraordinary demarcation between the sexes."[4] The men even sat on one side of the church at mass, and the women sat on the other side.[5] Traditionally, the men and women were not encouraged to intermingle and communicate as they grew up; when they married, the men found their emotional support in their friendships with other men, while women drew their emotional support from their children as well as the men and women of their extended family.

Important changes in the structure of Irish society strongly affected

the role of women. The West of Ireland, which is where Murphy was born and where many of his plays take place, did not become industrialized until the 1960s. As people moved away from the farms and into the towns, women suffered by being separated from the emotional support system of their extended families. In the traditional Irish agrarian lifestyle, the wives turned to brothers, sisters, parents and cousins for emotional support, but as people moved into the urban areas, the emphasis on the nuclear family arose.[6] This change in focus from the extended family to the nuclear family created strains on the marriages in Ireland. According to Beale:

> The danger of the modern marriage ideal is not that a woman should expect a man to offer friendship, companionship and love, but that she should look to him as the only source of all these. The isolation of the nuclear family can thrust a woman into over-dependence on her marriage relationship (emphasis added) (69).

The urban husbands feel frustration because their wives depend on them to fill the void created by the loss of the extended family who remain in the rural areas. The wives feel discontented because they are lonely without the extended family, and communication rifts emerge between the spouses as they deal with their frustrations in separate ways. The mothers often turn to their sons for emotional support, while the husbands either draw within themselves or seek the companionship of other men at the pub. Murphy's plays vividly reflect the tension in marital relationships in Ireland.

The woman as wife in Murphy's plays is characterized by emotional unfulfillment, which she seeks to avoid by revitalizing her stagnant relationship with her husband, through her sons, and occasionally in the arms of another man. (A rare exception is depicted in Too Late for Logic

where the wife finally agrees to sign legal separation papers.) Divorce is illegal in the Republic of Ireland; the wives seek a completion in their husbands, and when the men are distant, this becomes a form of emotional enslavement. The wives are also anchors because they are survivors and they learn to become self-reliant. Like the daughters, the wives offer hope because they endure great difficulty and grow stronger because of their pain. They acknowledge the grim face of reality, however dull or ugly it may be, in hopes that their perseverance will be rewarded; in contrast, their husbands escape into a world of fantasy or they surround themselves with excuses.

Sometimes the frustration in the home erupts in violence. Murphy states:

> All my violent characters are people frustrated in love . . . very few people can communicate with each other. Oh, the frustrations of this undemonstrative race . . . with families who cannot declare love . . . not being able to say it.[7]

The Irish are often undemonstrative in a marital relationship, partially because of the strict teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Sociologist Tom Inglis in his book The Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society reveals that in Ireland "women especially were made to feel ashamed of their bodies" (199). Repressed sexuality helped to create a sternness and a severity in some Irish women. Murphy observes: "I found, when I was growing up, a great hardness in Irish women - even if there was a beauty in the younger ones. Hence the fact that I married an English woman made total sense to me."[8] (emphasis added)

The protagonist in Murphy's first full length play, Michael from A Whistle in the Dark, (1961) also marries an English woman, Betty. Like the Irish women in Murphy's other plays, she is an anchor of strength,

goodness and patience in the home. Betty is enslaved because for most of the play she subordinates her own desires, but she is one of the few Murphy wives who finally escapes an abusive relationship.

A Whistle in the Dark was produced in London when Murphy was only twenty-six. The action of this play focuses on the conflicts faced by Betty's husband, Michael Carney, who has immigrated from Ireland to work in Coventry, England. Betty and Michael have a seemingly successful marriage until his brothers come to visit from Ireland. Harry, Iggy and Hugo overstay their welcome, and they put a great deal of strain on their brother's marriage by treating Betty with a complete lack of respect. Harry offends his sister-in-law by working as a pimp, and he frequently makes insulting and sexually harassing comments to Betty. She asks her husband, "Which one of your brothers will make the bid to sleep with me tonight?"[9] The situation is very serious, but Michael constantly makes excuses for his brothers' demeaning behavior.

Further stress is placed on the marriage when Michael's youngest brother, Des, and Dada, their father, arrive from Ireland. The Carneys have a very destructive history, and Dada enjoys baiting his sons in fights against each other. Dada is a bully who beat his sons as well as his wife, and the tension in the home increases greatly upon his arrival. Betty knows that her in-laws must leave if her marriage is to survive, but Des plans to stay and find a job in Coventry.

The hostility in the home becomes even more volatile when the Carneys are challenged to a fight with the Mulryans, another Irish family living in England. Michael's brothers are eager to uphold the family name, but Betty realizes that if they ever want to get away from Michael's family, she and Michael must be the ones to leave.

Michael suffered many beatings as a child, and as an adult, he hates violence. He cannot decide whether to join his brothers in the fight with the Mulryans, and this exposes an underlying source of resentment in Betty: she is very weary of Michael's indecisiveness. Betty has been the brunt of countless jokes and she feels like a prisoner in her own home, yet her husband never rises to her defense; he is paralyzed between defending his wife and reprimanding his offensive brothers.

Betty knows the Carney men do not respect Michael, and she feels that if he joins his brothers, he will "have more influence over them" (50). Michael complains about his family behind their backs, and then he makes excuses for them to his wife. She is tired of always being told to "shut up" whenever she makes an observation. Most importantly, Betty is angry that Michael never does anything to protect her from his brothers' insults and demeaning behavior. Betty challenges Michael to do <u>something</u>:

> You won't put them out, you won't leave - what are you going to do? . . . Fight!. . . Fight! Fight! Fight! <u>Do something</u>! Fight <u>anything</u>! . . . They'll think more of you. Respect you. I'll think more of you. If it matters anymore. Well do something then. We'll go or they'll go (emphasis added) (51).

Betty is not a violent woman, but she knows that it is very important to Michael that his brothers respect him. She will also respect him if he actually takes a stance, rather than always making excuses.

Left home with a drunken Dada, Betty wonders if Michael has gone to join his brothers. When Des, Harry, Iggy and Hugo return from the fight, Dada convinces them that he was kept from the Mulryan brawl because on the way he was attacked by three thugs. Actually, he waited safely in a pub during the fight, drinking while his sons defended the family name. A drunken Michael returns, and when Betty tries to steer him away from his brothers, he pushes her hand away. Betty demands that Michael's family

must leave the house, but Michael orders her to go upstairs. She begs him to come with her, and as she tugs at his arm, he pulls himself free and hits his wife. When asked to chose between his wife and his family, Michael becomes violent. Betty loses the struggle, physically and emotionally when Michael strikes her, and she exits upstairs. Through this act of violence against Betty, Michael symbolically swears allegiance to his extended family.

Murphy reveals the motivations behind Michael's action, and the playwright acknowledges that when Michael strikes his wife, it is:

> a terrible moment on stage. I think one of the reasons he hits her is because she is the weakest, physically, and that is a very cowardly act. But another reason could be . . . a terrible guilt. She has declared a type of dependence on him, a demand for affection. They are a young married couple, and he cannot provide this. So maybe it is in this absence of being able to do anything constructive that they [cause] hurt. I've found in my own life, and indeed in some of the characters that I've written, that when you offend somebody - you offend them in an appalling way - the instinct then is not to apologize, but to exceed yourself.[10]

Michael does not apologize for striking Betty, and he "exceeds himself" by allowing his brother to call her "Bitchey! Polly! English trash! Whore!" (73) as she leaves.

By striking his wife, Michael has stooped to the violent level he hates in his father. Later, Betty comes down stairs with her coat and suitcase, and she asks Michael if he will go away with her. He refuses to go with her, listening idly as Des shouts obscenities at Betty as she leaves. After she is gone, Dada baits a fighting match between Des and Michael. Des hits his oldest brother three times, and the brothers cheer. Michael grabs a bottle to defend himself, hits Des over the head and kills him, unwittingly. The curtain falls as Dada babbles that he has done his best in raising his sons, and none of this is his fault.

Betty lies on the periphery of this play, and her voice of reason is ignored, yet she is a vital presence. Betty is the voice of rationality: it is not logical that Michael should value his relationship with his brothers more highly than his marriage, so she patiently waits for her in-laws to leave. Even when he and his family show her no respect, she is usually able to maintain her dignity. This makes her a crucial contrast to the Carney men, who sometimes seem irredeemable. Betty is indispensable because her inner-resolve and courage are a strong contrast to the obscenity, violence and crudeness of the Carney men.

From the beginning of the play, Betty tells Michael that he must choose between his wife and his family. She says:

> I married you, not your brothers. Since you asked them here, we've hardly gone near each other. If I'm on my own here, I'm standing in there (kitchen) afraid to make a sound: if I'm upstairs I'm afraid to make a sound. That's just natural, is it? . . . That's the way every young married couple is, isn't it . . . What about you're responsibility to me? You're married now, you know . . . Which comes first, which is more important to you, me or your brothers? . . . To hell with Des and the rest of them! It's us or them. Which is more important to you? (14).

The visit of the brothers has put a burden on Betty's relationship with her husband in many ways. First, it has disrupted their sexual relationship. They are a young married couple, and Betty is frustrated at their lack of intimacy. Secondly, the brothers have made Betty feel like a prisoner in her own home. They demean her and insist that she must keep silent while she is around them. Also, the brothers have slowly worn away at Michael's loyalty toward his wife, because he makes excuses for them at her expense. Michael constantly defends his brothers, but he never defends his wife; she realizes the significance of this and begins to lose respect for her husband. Betty knows that Michael will need to make the

difficult decision of choosing his brothers or her. She cannot bear to remain in a home where neither her husband nor her in-laws treat her with dignity or respect.

Betty is not represented as being unreasonable in making Michael choose. She shows remarkable patience with the brothers' abusive behavior. They ruin her home, breaking windows, cups and dishes, and they treat her with a great deal of rudeness. Harry pokes Betty in the ribs as she passes (9), the brothers harass her verbally, and they make fun of her because she is English. Talking to her in a mock Cockney accent, Harry says: "English women is no good, 'cept for maybe readin' true love stories. (Calls to the kitchen where Betty is) Oi! No use English birds . . . No value for money is English flesh" (emphasis added) (10). Harry says that Betty is useless, but even more offensive is the fact that he refers to her as "flesh," reminding us that he is a pimp who has no respect for women.

When Harry constantly torments Betty, she patiently tries to ignore him. He says:

> Betty Batter bought a pound of butter! Sly lickle Betty does be earwiggin' at keyholes . . . There was an old woman called Betty. You know that one? . . . There was an old woman named Betty, she slipped off the back of a settee . . . (20) [sic].

Harry is rude and obscene to his sister-in-law, and he never gives Betty the respect of acknowledging her as his brother's wife. He tells Michael that she is: "the one that caught you" (47). Harry does not believe Betty is a part of the family, and he treats her like a servant or an intruder whom he resents.

When Betty tries to express herself, Harry becomes hostile, saying: "Now, Bitchey, how would you like to keep your English mouth out of it,

and let the man of the house talk?" (21). Harry is vulgar, he refuses to pay her the courtesy of calling her by her name, and he says: "Stay where you are, English Polly, or whatever your name is. Listen to Tarzan" (48). Hugo calls her: "bitchey" (56) and: "that little bitch" (59). As the verbal abuse continues, Betty loses all respect for the man she once loved because Michael never once admonishes his brothers.

Dada is initially cordial to Betty, and he calls her: "ma'am," (22) but when Betty questions where he was during the Mulryan fight, he becomes vicious. Dada says:

> Oh, this is serious now, ma'am. I see. My fidelity is in doubt. Where was I? Is that your question? Boys? . . . You see, my sons, my own haven't the audacity, but I must answer you, a stranger. And a stranger I know nothing about! (emphasis added) (56).

Dada continues to call Betty a stranger, reinforcing the fact that no one has accepted her as a part of their family. The Carney men do not acknowledge her place in the family because Michael does not insist that they treat her with respect. By allowing his family to insult Betty in his own home, Michael is reinforcing their unacceptable behavior.

Betty's relationship with her husband is deeply affected by the fact that he comes from a dysfunctional family because the memories of his parent's stale marriage haunt him. His mother was shown no respect in their home, and his father beat her. Now, Michael has difficulty shielding Betty from abuse because he was not raised in an environment where a woman was treated with dignity. When his brothers mistreat Betty, it is easier for him to follow the pack, rather than forge a new trail and defend her. Tim Harding, a critic for the Sunday Press in Ireland states that A Whistle in the Dark: "shows humanity at its worst . . . where male aggression is so dominant over female values."[11] Betty tries to be

hospitable to men who insult and harass her, but she is outnumbered by the sheer force and viciousness of the five Carney in-laws.

The norm in the Carney extended family has been violence, and Con Houlihan, writing for the [Irish] Evening Press, notes: "Violence is as Irish as bacon-and-cabbage: it is a part of the cancer in our soul."[12] Murphy adds, "I'm Irish and I choose to write about a race I know, but I can't be held accountable if some people refuse to acknowledge the dark, primal forces in our nature."[13] The Carney men are dark and primal because they value violence over civility, and they enjoy manipulation and power at the expense of women. Michael Etherton, author of Contemporary Irish Playwrights, adds that the men characters in A Whistle in the Dark reflect a:

> strangely attenuated misogynist world which seems to exclude all positive relationships with women . . . there is discussion of the film star Hopalong Cassidy, who is approved by the brothers because he never got involved with girls - except for one [girl] who was dying once.[14]

This atmosphere affects Michael because he refuses to acknowledge the importance of his marriage; his need to bond with his brothers is stronger than his desire to be loyal to his wife. This untenable situation enslaves Betty, because Michael's loyalty should lie with her; if his strongest wish is to be reunited with his brothers, she has no way to compete with the Carney men.

Betty is an anchor because she appeals to a voice of reason; she tries to stabilize the Carney family and counterbalance their destruction, but she is one woman against six men, and she is not strong enough to moderate such disaster. By subordinating her own needs, Betty attempts to keep her marriage alive. She tries to continue as if nothing is wrong, and she keeps the path of communication open by sharing her concerns and

disappointments with her husband. He does not heed her apprehensions, which are rooted in the stark reality of the Carney's destructiveness. Michael prefers to fantasize that his relationship with his brothers will heal if he is patient, overlooking the fact that the abuse from his family toward Betty becomes more frequent and pronounced.

Betty, like all Murphy's women characters, faces reality. She acknowledges the painful fact that her husband values his brothers more strongly than his marriage. Betty is one of the few Murphy wives who is able to free herself from an abusive relationship. She tries to be a stabilizing force in a destructive home, but the men scorn and resent her efforts. As soon as her moderating presence is gone, death occurs. While Betty is in the home, though the men resent her, she acts as a stabilizing force to offset their viciousness. It is no coincidence that once her influence is gone, Michael, overcome by rage, mistakenly kills his most beloved brother. Murphy believes that women have a:

> civilizing influence. In general, men are destructive and go to war and do the fighting. Men do the fighting in the pubs, men do the fighting in the streets, men are the muggers. And I don't think, in this case, that it has to do with the physical difference between men and women. Women are gentler . . . they seem to be more in tune with the finer things in nature.[15]

When Betty leaves, her "civilizing influence" is taken from the home; the men are set adrift, and without the steadying force of Betty's quiet strength, chaos ensues.

Murphy's work includes many unhappy marriages, but it is not until his most recent play, Too Late For Logic, (1989) that a legal separation occurs. Patricia, the wife in this play, is shattered when her husband, Christopher, a fifty-year-old philosophy professor, asks for a legal

separation and moves out of the family home. He relocates at the college so he will have more time to devote to his research. Christopher has the possibility of becoming the next department chairman, and he is scheduled to give a prestigious televised lecture on Schopenhauer. During the course of the play, he comes to realize the sterility career and the importance of his family. As in A Whistle in the Dark, when the wife finally agrees to end her marriage, a death occurs.

Patricia senses that although Christopher consciously separates himself from his wife and his children, subconsciously, he still wants to be reunited with her. She therefore takes six months before she finally signs the legal separation papers. Critic Wendy Fitzgerald states:

> Tom Murphy is on record as saying that he wanted to write a play about love, not about sex - there is a distinction . . . one of the play's previous titles - it had several - is Impossible Man - man who seeks love and flees from it at the same time.[16]

Dramatic critic Fintan O'Toole also believes that Christopher actually wants a reconciliation with his estranged wife. In his newspaper review of this play, O'Toole states that Too Late for Logic is: "Murphy's Orpheus in the Underworld,"[17] and Christopher is "in search of his estranged Eurydice, his wife, Patricia."[18] Patricia does not want the separation, and it is only after he completely disregards her during a family emergency that she is able to break the bond between them.

The theme of lost and betrayed love is reflected in the music of this play, and while Christopher tries to ignore Patricia, a mournful aria reminds us that their true desire is reunion. Ciaran Carty, a critic for The Sunday Tribune observes:

> The framework is twelve scenes which flow into each other, with music as an integral part. Maria Callas's aria as the deserted wife in The Marriage of Figaro keeps welling up, weaving in and out of the play . . . the whole texture of the play is shot

through with the grief of a woman alone and betrayed.[19]

The music reinforces the theme of betrayed love.

Patricia appears in the final scene of the play, but before this, she has repeatedly tried to contact Christopher on the phone. She leaves extensive, heartbroken messages on his answering machine, but he either screens the call and listens as she speaks, or he turns down the volume and refuses to listen when he recognizes her voice. Although he knows Patricia is calling because she is grieving the death of her sister, Christopher refuses to return any of her calls. Patricia leaves many long messages regarding Cornelia's death, and she even apologizes about disturbing him again. The messages reveal that she still cannot find Michael (Christopher's brother and Cornelia's husband) and she does not want to make funeral arrangements without him.

Mixed among the facts of the death, she reveals her true feelings in the message. Christopher is screening Patricia's call as she says, "Come away my love my dove my fair one come away with me . . . My love my dove my fair one . . . My beloved is mine and I am his . . . My love my dove" (9). Mixed among questions about funeral arrangements, Patricia adds, "My love, my dove . . . My beloved is mine and I am his" (9). Talk of the death of her sister snaps her back into reality, and she says, "I thought if matters could not be altogether lovely ever again, they could at least be pleasant. At least that" (emphasis added) (9). She is deeply wounded that her husband cannot be civil enough to return an important message regarding a family emergency. Patricia hopes that their communication can be mature and congenial, and she is shocked when Christopher does not even attempt to be helpful during a very difficult situation.

The death of Cornelia has made Patricia realize that her marriage is

also dead. She sobs, "Sorry . . . But I thought I got over . . . (a sob) Sorry . . . another kind of death" (9). This other death is her relationship with Christopher; she drones on and on in her recorded messages, yet he will not return her calls. This forces his children, Petra and Jack, to act as ambassadors between their parents. Christopher tries to convince his son that Patricia agreed to the separation, but Jack says:

> She didn't agree, you agreed. To pursue your career, whatever reasons. Fine by me: I understand: I watched the battle. I'm a man, too. You know? But it's reprehensible, you know, to deny the truth . . . the reprehensible thing is not that you walked out of a house or that you deny it, but that you did it to bury your head deeper in - a book! That makes no sense to me! . . . the very best way to stop thinking is to become a philosopher - or shoot yourself in the head! (27-28).

Jack's speech reinforces the fact that Patricia does not want the separation, and his final comment is prophetic.

The enslavement of Patricia is evident through two interesting devices: her disembodiment via the telephone machine messages and the illuminating and the alluring manner in which Christopher tries to distance himself from her. Christopher acts as if he never thinks of his wife, yet he refers to her with pet names, and affection sometimes arises in his voice. He speaks of Patricia in the third person, calling her:

> his casual amour, his water sprite, and <u>temporary</u> wife (emphasis added) - was that what she was?. . . And when they stopped, the kisses of the casual amour of twenty years duration, instead of love letters, did he send to her for signing affidavits, orders, papers! to achieve that right of man to be alone? For what? To escape, <u>ease</u> the pain of boundless love. For what? In order, in isolation, to achieve that other state, the terror. Memories and guilt, mocking impotence and failure in a jumble of words (41-42).

Christopher's description is revealing: he calls Patricia his <u>casual</u> love, but then he chides himself, as if twenty years could constitute a casual

relationship. He calls her by an old pet name; she was his water sprite, but she is also his temporary wife. Christopher rebukes himself for sending Patricia legal separation papers rather than love letters, and he wonders why the idea of boundless love terrifies him. He berates himself for choosing a sterile academic environment over a relationship with his wife, but he makes no effort to create a reconciliation. Knowing he will see her at Cornelia's funeral reception, Christopher decides to wait until then to speak to her.

At the funeral reception, Patricia talks and laughs congenially with Monica, whom we earlier learn had an affair with Christopher. This emphasizes Patricia's gentle nature, because she easily could have snubbed a woman who had an affair with her husband. Christopher also had an affair with Cornelia, who was both his wife's sister and his brother's wife. Patricia is forgiving and gracious toward Christopher, a man who destroyed her marriage as well as her sister's marriage with his adultery. Christopher returned none of her grief-filled messages about the funeral arrangements, and this act of selfish thoughtlessness is what finally motivates Patricia to sign the legal separation papers. She thinks she cannot live without him, but his apathy finally makes her realize a painful fact: she loves a very selfish, hurtful man, and she will be better off without him.

She loves her children, and they love and respect her. Patricia will survive, and this knowledge gives her the peace she has been lacking. She finally realizes she is better off alone. Patricia says:

> And those papers from the solicitor [lawyer] that I've been neglecting to sign . . . I was at his office yesterday and I took the opportunity. And, I find I am at peace now. You have been extraordinarily kind and patient. Thank you (emphasis added) (53).

Signing the legal separation papers is the most difficult decision of her life, and she formalized the separation the day before her sister's funeral. This is a very difficult time for her, but she is gracious and gentle. Patricia even apologizes for taking so long in her decision. Other women under similar circumstances might be bitter and vengeful toward their husband, but she is the epitome of decorum. Her generous, kind spirit makes Christopher realize what a treasure he is losing. Patricia is a kind woman with a very nurturing soul. She lets a young pregnant young woman stay with her when the girl's father throws her out of the house, (10) and she is also supportive of her children. Her children cherish her and she has learned to depend on herself. Patricia is finally at peace, and she is at peace without him; she will survive without him.

Although Patricia has a great deal of strength, she fears that she is weak, and for months she has clung to the instinct that she needs Christopher in order to survive. The death of her sister and Christopher's refusal to be of any assistance teaches Patricia that she has inner resources she never dreamed she possesses. Her sister's death is a trial by fire, and she emerges from the flames with strength and a sense of resolve. The stage directions describe her as "relaxed and happy" (42). When Christopher realizes that his family can exist without him, his devotion to his research seems sterile and meaningless. He realizes the bleakness of his life without his family, and he commits suicide. Patricia has learned to become self-reliant. In contrast, Christopher realizes, too late, that he cannot live without his wife, and he takes his own life.

Murphy's women are forced to make many adaptions, and Fintan O'Toole

makes an interesting observation when he states that Murphy's men have a:

> very static sense of the self - that they are somebody, and that it's not a process; it's not a sense of change and growth and movement - that they're sort of stuck with themselves . . . falling in love for them seems to be something that happens once and for all, and therefore, they can't change within that, they can't grow within that. And all that's sort of left for them is a sense of loss. You always get that quite strong feeling about Murphy's men that in their relationships with women there is an enormously strong sense of something which is lost, and never a sense of something which might be gained or regained.[20]

This statement emphasizes a very important point: Murphy's women are vital characters, partially because they are a strong contrast to the static men; the women learn to be flexible, and because they are able to change and adapt to new circumstances, they are able to survive. Change is an inevitable part of life, and change is an inescapable part of growth. Patricia is an anchor because she tries to keep her family together, but when that fails, she becomes an anchor in an even more significant sense because she shows her children that she can be strong and self-reliant.

Patricia is a crucial character because she strongly contrasts with her husband. Originally, she is afraid of change, and the thought of a legal separation initially terrifies her; but she is able to adapt and emerge as a peaceful, independent woman. Christopher wants freedom from his marriage, but he does not want his wife's love to change. He pulls away from her, but he is secretly sure that she will always need him; when she no longer does, he cannot adapt. Murphy's women are forced to be flexible; in a storm it is the trees that bend with the wind that survive. Christopher is too proud to bend, and instead he snaps; he retains a static sense of self. In contrast, during this conflict Patricia learns to depend on herself and to be resilient.

The Gigli Concert speaks very strongly about the relationships between husbands and wives. The wife in this play is seen only through the eyes of her husband, the Man. She never appears on stage, and as he comments about her place in his life, one sometimes wonders if he may be distorting the truth. Progressing from Betty in A Whistle in the Dark (1961) to Patricia in Too Late for Logic (1989) to the wife in The Gigli Concert (1983), the role of the wife appears to be getting fainter; while the wives may not appear as frequently on-stage, their importance is constant, strong and resonant. Although we never meet the Man's wife, she is a vital voice in the play as a whole.

The husband in The Gigli Concert (the Man) comments about his wife and reveals a great deal about the communication problems in his marriage. She, like Murphy's other wives, adapts to a very difficult situation. The Man comes for counseling to JPW, an English "dynamatologist" who teaches that all things are possible. The Man wants to sing in the actual voice of the great Italian tenor Beniamino Gigli. His marriage is in shambles, and he feels that being able to sing in Gigli's voice will bring beauty and wholeness to his empty existence.

The Man's wife is very patient with her husband's unhealthy behavior. He isolates himself and listens to Gigli records, and he takes out his frustrations on his wife and his young son. He says:

> Now I'd prefer to walk a mile in the other direction than say how yeh or fuck yeh to anyone [sic] . . . But I always managed to keep my obscenities out of the house until lately. Now they're the only things that break the silence (17).

The Man is either a recluse or he shouts vulgarities at his wife and son. He acknowledges that he has not spoken to his wife at all in a whole month. The distant relationship with his wife is apparent by the fact that

he never even mentions her name. The stress of his behavior severely affects her, and he says: "I've seen her age before my eyes. She's aged ten years in the past three months" (17). He resents her presence, but he feels bound to her. The Man senses a terrible void in his life, and he uses silence as a weapon to make himself feel more powerful.

The Man's wife is the voice of reason and calmness. His depression begins when the itinerants (a homeless subculture) arrive to stay on the outskirts of his property. The Man's wife is able to call the police in time to keep him from killing the itinerants. He is filled with rage and pent-up violence, and he reveals that he not only wants to kill the itinerants, but he also sometimes has a secret desire to kill his wife (18).

The Man tells JPW that his destructiveness and silence are pushing his wife to the brink of her sanity. He states:

> My wife is near nervous breakdown. She's barely holding on. She says I look like an old man. Hah? . . . She looks like an old woman. She was a princess. You should have seen her. Even three months ago. She's holding on for me she says, not the child. The child too, but why on earth for me? And I burned all his toys last night. I rooted them out of every corner (29).

The Man says that his wife used to be a princess. He puts his wife on a pedestal, but he does not know how to communicate with her or share the burdens of life with her; this makes him become volatile, and he unleashes his fury toward those whom he loves. She tells him that she is holding onto their marriage mainly because of her love for him, rather than keeping the marriage together for their son's sake. This makes him feel inadequate and undeserving of her love, and he asks, "but why on earth for me?" (29). Despite his severe depression, his wife wants to rebuild their marriage, but the Man keeps distancing himself from his wife, through his

silence and unacceptable behavior. His rage even moves him to burn his son's toys.

In a striking monologue, the Man summarizes the problems in his marriage, which center around the fact that he will not communicate with his wife. He tells JPW:

> My wife came down last night. Nightdress, long hair. I pretended I didn't hear her come in or that she was watching me. And I kept listening to the music. Then she came and stood beside my chair. Smiling. And she said, what are you listening to? I use the headphones at night. Elgur, I said. I don't know why I said that because the only thing I listen to is him [Gigli]. And. You off I said. To bed. And she said yes, it's ten past one, heighho. And. You coming up she said. And I said, in a little, I said. Then she knelt down and put her head on my knees. And then she said talk to me. Talk to me, talk to me, please love talk to me. And I couldn't think of a single thing to say. And she said I love you so much. And I said I love you too . . . but not out loud. And. Then she got up. And she said pull yourself together, what's the matter with you, for God's sake get a grip on yourself, pull yourself together. She was trembling. She'd let go for a moment. And then she said goodnight. When she left I stood up. Out of respect. I knew she would've stopped in the hall. She usually does. Just stands there for a few moments. Before going up. And then it came out. My roar. Fuck you, fuck you . . . fuck you (emphasis added) (29).

During this speech it appears that the Man does love his wife, but he is not able to tell her. Murphy says that the men cannot profess their love because the male characters "don't trust themselves."[21] The Man's wife longs for him to talk to her, but he insists on isolating himself. She usually keeps her pain contained, but when she finally shares her deep fears about her husband's reclusive, destructive behavior, he remains unresponsive. He stands when she leaves, out of "respect," but this is in ironic contrast to the way he ignores and hurts his wife. His roar of obscenities is made while she is out of sight, but still within hearing range. He finds communication impossible, and when he does speak, he can only muster vulgarities.

Later, the Man reveals to JPW that his wife left him the night before, and she took his son. He was drunk when he left JPW's office the previous afternoon, and his wife was frightened that he would hurt their child. The Man shouts:

> I don't want her back . . . I'll never forgive her. She says she's afraid I'll hurt the child. I never hurt her! So how can she say such a thing? . . . I started shouting. My son, crying, down the stairs, 'She's only trying to help.' She's only trying to help! It was brave of him, brave little boy, yes, but she's only trying to help. She'd went upstairs, haggard face, up to bed, only trying to help me? And I was feeling very well . . . I <u>roared</u> at the child. Obscenities. Brave little boy. But now she'd got her suitcase. And took him with her. His face to the back windscreen, driving away, tears running down his face, waving bye-bye, bye-bye, like a baby . . . and I just stood there, the lights fading away, don't go, don't go (53).

The Man's wife withstands a great deal of hurtful and destructive behavior, and she does not leave until he starts spewing obscenities at their son. The Man will not apologize, and he does not ask her to stay until the lights of the car are fading away, and <u>she is out of hearing range</u>. He does not communicate with her until it is too late and she cannot hear his words of reconciliation.

In the next scene, the Man is embarrassed because during an earlier drunken moment of vulnerability, he revealed some details from his difficult childhood, and for two pages of dialogue he denies his drunken remarks. Clearing up the honor of his family name is much more important than telling JPW of his wife's return. The Man finally states:

> My wife is back. And yes I made my first attempt in months to make conversation with her at lunchtime. I told her I was simply bored to distraction: she took it as a reflection on herself and left the room in tears . . . I left her there - why shouldn't I? - and drove out to the country for myself (62).

He is still unable to communicate, but a significant change occurs, because he has realized that he must at least attempt to talk with his

wife. His early remarks are clumsy, but he moves in the right direction because he is finally trying to initiate communication. Still, when he hurts her by his thoughtless statement, he is too proud to apologize or go after her.

The next time we see the Man, his depression has lifted. He has been able to pay the itinerants to leave, and he comes to a vital conclusion:

> I was doing my sums going home in the car and it came into my head. Supposing my life depended on it, who would I turn to? I went through mothers, brothers, relations. The wife. It all boils down to the wife at the end. So we're going out for the evening. I left her (down the road) with some friends for a few minutes (emphasis added) (72).

The itinerants have been a painful thorn in his side, and once they are gone he realizes how frail life can be. The itinerants keep all their worldly belongings in a wagon, and the Man sees that a fanatical obsession with his business has kept him from financial poverty, but his monetary compulsion has resulted in the poverty of his marriage. He comes to a startling realization when he acknowledges that in a life or death situation, he would turn to his wife. In the past he has always been too proud to lean on her strength, but now he realizes: "The wife. It all boils down to the wife at the end" (72).

The Man is the only husband in Murphy's dramaturgy to make this discovery and act upon it. The Man acknowledges that his wife is more precious than his extended family (a distinction Michael Carney in A Whistle in the Dark is never able to make), and one senses that this vital revelation has a great deal to do with his "healing." Ironically, his wife never appears on stage, although the Man admits she is the crucial relationship in his life. The wife is an offstage presence, yet she anchors her husband by making him realize the importance of their

marriage. She gives him stability and reassurance, and she is an essential part of his emotional healing. Murphy and the Man seem to be acknowledging that the women play a vital role, even when they never appear on stage.

Murphy's wives are usually not central to the main conflicts in these plays. The dramas revolve around the dreams, desires and fantasies of the men, and the women live on the periphery of the main action. Still, they are indispensable to the plays as a whole. If the wives were removed from these plays, chaos would ensue. Murphy believes the women in his plays are anchors because they give stability to the men. The wife is a rational, moderating voice who tries to create a foundation of constancy. The husbands rebel against the wives' parameters, although these boundaries are meant to give stability to the home.

The wives in Murphy's plays are also essential because they are significant contrasts to their husbands. The women may play small roles, and sometimes they do not even appear on stage, but they are able to face conflicts with dignity and strength. The women sometimes learn that independence and self-reliance are their only means of endurance, because their husbands have almost invariably ceased to care for them. The wives become victors because they learn to believe in themselves and trust in their own self-worth. Betty from A Whistle in the Dark realizes that she has to leave an abusive situation in order to survive, and once she is gone her husband unwittingly kills his brother. Patricia from Too Late for Logic is the only wife to become legally separated from her husband, and this action is initiated at her husband's wishes; she adapts to this decision with grace, but her husband kills himself. The wife in The Gigli

Concert temporarily leaves her husband, but she returns when she senses that he is not a threat to the safety of her child; her constant support leads to his emotional healing. The women have a resiliency that allows them to adapt to difficult circumstances, and this contrasts with the destructive rigidity of most of the men.

The Man in The Gigli Concert is the only husband in Murphy's dramaturgy to realize the vital importance of his wife. Michael in A Whistle in the Dark values his extended family more strongly than his wife. Christopher in Too Late for Logic places a higher priority on his career than on the needs of his family; when he finally understands the importance of his wife, she has learned to live without him. The Man is the only husband who sees that his wife is a crucial part of his happiness, and he finally realizes the vital role she plays in his mental health. The wives will endure because they have learned to fend for themselves and adapt to difficult circumstances, but when the men are set adrift from the anchor of their wives, destruction invariably occurs. As the Man states: "The wife. It all boils down to the wife in the end" (72).

Notes: Chapter III

[1] Beale 63.

[2] Beale 63.

[3] O'Toole, Politics, 25.

[4] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[5] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[6] Beale 69.

[7] Diedre Purcell, "Into the Dark," The Sunday Tribune, n.d.: N. Pag.

[8] Joe Jackson, "Making the Words Sing," Hot Press 4 April 1991: 20.

[9] Tom Murphy, A Whistle in the Dark (Gallery Books: Dublin, 1984) 13. All references are to this edition.

[10] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[11] Tim Harding, "Sinister Darkness," The Sunday Press 12 Oct 1986: N. Pag.

[12] Con Houlihan, "Through a Broken Glass Darkly," Evening Press 7 Oct 1986: N. Pag.

[13] Jackson 19.

[14]Michael Etherton, Contemporary Irish Playwrights (St. Martain's Press: New York, 1989) 116.

[15] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[16] Fitzgerald 13.

[17] Fintan O'Toole, "Murphy in the Underworld," The Irish Times 7 Oct 1989: 5.

[18] O'Toole, "Underworld," 5.

[19] Ciaran Carty, "Asides," The Sunday Tribune 1 Oct 1989: N. Pag.

[20] Fintan O'Toole, personal interview, 25 March 1991.

[21] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Mothers

In A Crucial Week, Famine, A Whistle in the Dark and Conversations on a Homecoming the vital role of the mother character in Tom Murphy's plays becomes evident. None of the marriages in these plays are healthy, and some mothers seek to reclaim their influence by dominating their children. Murphy believes that Ireland "is still a matriarchy."[1] His father immigrated to England to find work when Murphy was young, and he grew up: "almost without a father and so my mother was the figure of authority in the house - she was the matriarch."[2] Murphy's mother was the dominant figure in his home, and very strong mother figures appear in his writing.

The mothers are the voice of practicality, and they are often forced to adapt to difficult situations in order to survive. In America, some may have an idealized view of the self-sacrificing Irish mother, but Lorna Reynolds in her essay "Irish Women in Legend, Literature and Life," paints a more accurate picture:

> The stereotype of an older Irish woman - the benign, silver-haired lady, framed in an archway of roses - is as false and misleading as that of the colleen. The truth is that the Irish women of legend, literature and life are women of formidable character and tenacious will . . . even the saints among them, such as Saint Briget, are not far removed from their prototype, the White Goddess, and can punish severely those who anger them.[3]

In Irish legend, the White Goddess (also known as the Mother Goddess) is partial to the hawthorn, and she kills the children who pluck the flowers.[4] During the Bronze Age in Ireland, the "dominant divinity had been female, the great, all powerful Mother Goddess."[5] In Irish mythology, the Mother Goddess is tenacious, quick-tempered, domineering and full of retribution. Similarly, many of Murphy's mother characters are forceful and commanding.

Mother in A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant, like the Mother Goddess, is domineering and tenacious. She is the quintessential example of the sacrificing mother who will do anything for her son, but her sacrifice is also a means of control and manipulation. When Murphy began this play, he believed he was writing a tragedy, and he was amazed when people laughed aloud when they read the script. Murphy did not initially realize that A Crucial Week is a comedy.[6] People laugh in recognition, and much of the humor is embodied in the fact that Murphy captures the overbearing mother very well.

This play focuses on "a son tied to his mother's apron strings, emotionally hung, drawn and quartered by his desire to escape and his fear of leaving home."[7] Mother is an anchor in a very negative sense; she binds her son to her through guilt and manipulation, and she tries to stifle his dreams by constantly making him believe that he cannot exist without her.

In this play, Mother tries to suffocate any of her thirty-three-year old son's desires for independence by trying to convince him that she is the only person who truly understands and loves him. She attempts to make John Joe believe that he could not survive without her by taking care of the many details of his daily life for him. During the morning ritual of getting her son out of bed and to work, Murphy describes her: "Now she appears near tears, clucking, pulling at her hair, rubbing her thighs, biting her fist. But she does this every morning (emphasis added) (104). During the play, Mother polishes her son's shoes, wheels John Joe's bicycle across the kitchen to check the pressure of the tires, and she frantically searches for a pump. Mother tells him what shirt and tie to wear, and no matter what his choice of clothing is, she prefers that he

wear something else. Her critical tongue incapacitates her son, because he can never please her, yet he feels bound to her because of her many efforts on his behalf.

Mother constantly reminds her son that she is the only one doing any work in the home. When he sleeps late on a work day (yet again), she remarks: "I'm up since half-past six ironing and mending for the town, but you stay there now [in bed]. That's the thing to do, that's what everyone else is doing. Don't go to work" (128). Mother in an interesting combination of negative words and seemingly positive action. She tries to make herself indispensable to her son, yet she drives him away with her constant complaining. Mother says, "I took an extra blanket off our bed yesterday thinking you might be cold," (159) but she reminds him that she is: "Slaving away here for you. Eating only half-enough myself" (168). She revels in the position of the martyr.

John Joe's brother, Frank, is in an America jail for being drunk and fighting with a policeman. Mother is terrified that John Joe will immigrate to America or England, leaving her alone with her husband. She works diligently to keep Frank's circumstances a secret, and she desperately fears losing John Joe, too. Mother even betrays her own brother, Alec, in hopes of keeping her son in town. Alec has applied for an old age pension, but he does not declare that he owns a small shop as income. Mother turns in her own brother to the pension authorities, thinking that he must give up the shop in order to receive his pension. She hopes that her son will inherit the shop, and Mother dreams that this will insure her son's permanent employment at home.

The pension authorities assure Alec that he needs only to fill out new papers, and that he will likely not have to give up his shop, but

after the encounter with the man from the pension board, Alec: "is now a tired old man, the jauntiness is gone" (148). Mother is willing to sacrifice anything, including the welfare of a member of her extended family, to assure that her son will stay near to her. She is divisive and sometimes heartless in her single-minded goal to keep her son within her power.

Because her manipulations are stifling, John Joe secretly resents his mother. As she clings tightly to him, he eagerly tries to plan an escape. John Joe says, "if I was rich, the first thing I'd do is pay her off" (124). He feels that financial independence represents adulthood, and with his meager clerks salary, he fears that he will always remain a child. Mother will not acknowledge that her thirty-three-year old son is a grown man.

She clings to John Joe, while she has no real relationship with her husband. Mother has pushed her husband away with her critical tongue, and she pays her husband no attention at all. Fintan O'Toole notes that by the late 1950s, when this play takes place, the Irish family was in a state of crisis. He states the:

> absolute reverence for family as an institution went hand in hand with an official disgust for sexuality, a mistrust for relationships between men and women, which gave Ireland the lowest marriage rate in Europe . . . [in the late 1950s] 64% of the Irish population was single; 6% widowed; and only 30% married.[8]

Mother displays no affection for Father. Her character is called Mother, not "Mrs. Moran," and this is likely because her sense of self is found in being a mother rather than being both a mother and a wife. Mother is able to manipulate John Joe, and her complete emotional investment is in her <u>son</u>, rather than her husband.

She ignores her husband completely, and Father is: "a defeated and emasculated being, wandering sadly and effectually in and out of the action."[9] Mother polishes her son's shoes and takes them into his bedroom, yet her husband wears dirty, old boots, and she "is scarcely conscious of his existence" (105). In the traditional marriage in Ireland, Murphy adds that the sexual aspect of the relationship is merely:

> a cow and bull situation, and affection and love are forgotten. Under attack [the husband and wife] show some degree of solidarity, but it's pretty dire. I suppose it is the way of most marriages. From the ardent lovers, they seem to loose it and become silent.[10]

Mother's marriage has atrophied completely, and this deeply concerns her son; he fears that if he marries Mona, they will also develop a relationship like his parents.

John Joe is the center of his mother's life, and her overwhelming devotion has not allowed him to think or act for himself. Mother's constant mothering has not taught John Joe discipline, diligence, concern for others, nor honesty. John Joe hopes to immigrate, so he asks a friend to steal a suitcase for him. Mother has tended to his every need, and she has raised a selfish, lazy son.

Part of an Irish mother's strength comes from her alliance with the clergy, and when John Joe is fired, his mother arranges for the priest to get him another job. While talking to the priest, John Joe says:

> Well a cat has kittens, and after a time, the kittens leave, well, home. To seek better conditions and . . . well, the kittens, if they stay, well, <u>they get between the mother and the father</u>, and maybe become opponents of the parents. And, well, we're all - we're all animals (emphasis added) (142).

John Joe realizes that it is unhealthy for his mother to have a stronger emotional investment in him than in his father. Mother's neglect of her husband also has a negative affect on John Joe because he has never seen

a healthy relationship between a husband and wife. John Joe is afraid to introduce his girlfriend, Mona, to his mother. He fears his mother will not approve of the fact that he is dating, so he keeps his relationship with Mona a secret. John Joe has been unable to break away from his mother enough to have a good relationship with a girlfriend; he is terrified of commitment, partially because Mother has succeeded in convincing him that she is the only one who truly loves him.

Mother dominates his waking hours, and she even invades his dreams. John Joe's concerns and desires arise in humorous surrealistic dream sequences, which are always interrupted by his mother barging into the room. She literally destroys his dreams of independence by binding him closely to her, and Mother figuratively destroys his dreams by jarring him into reality from his sleep each morning. In his dreams, John Joe sometimes communicates in baby talk, showing that his mother still treats him as a child. He dreams of immigrating and sending money home to his mother, saying, "See that big box over there? Treasure, gold. Big box - the big box - bigger box - the biggest one! To be sent home to Mammy, cause now I'm of use" (127). He dreams of the day he will be financially secure, because his Mother has used his small income as another way of dominating him. John Joe must live at home because he is not able to afford other living arrangements.

Mother's strong presence has also made her son fear his sexuality. In his dreams, he sometimes sees himself as a powerless child, and when Mona appears scantily clad in his dreams, instead of becoming aroused, her presence <u>terrifies</u> him, and he is: "immobile with fear" (101). In another dream, he thinks Mona is knocking on the door, but he awakes to realize that it is his mother (127). It is significant that Mona disappears in

his dreams as his mother appears to wake him. Mother tries to make John Joe believe that she is a suitable replacement for Mona, and this is symbolized as images of Mona melt away when Mother enters the room. John Joe breaks off his relationship with Mona, and in a very telling line he says, "What do I mean to anybody else <u>besides my mother, and what good is that</u>?" (emphasis added) (163). Mother's forceful personality has succeeded in convincing her son that she should be the only woman in his life.

Mother is horrified to find that her constant, domineering manipulations finally force John Joe to rebel. She pressures her son, and like a catapult, he springs, but in the other direction. At the end of the play, he is finally able to say, "I don't want anyone slaving for me! . . . I never asked it! Jesus, I'll be thirty-four years of age next month, and you keep talking to me as if I were a child!" (168). His pent-up frustration continues:

> This house is filled with your bitterness and venom. A person can hardly breathe in the street. I don't know what started it. Whether it's just badness or whether it came from a hundred years ago, or whether it's your ideas of sex, or whether its - No, you'll listen to me - . . . No! You'll listen to me for a change (169).

John Joe uses harsh words to describe his mother, creating the image that she is a poisonous snake, and when the pressure of the repression he feels explodes, John Joe's backlash is strong. Mother tries to silence her son, but he insists that she will finally listen to him.

John Joe wonders if Mother's problems "came from a hundred years ago," (169), and he is referring to the emotional destruction of the Famine. Mother is the product of the Famine, because she desperately and proudly clings to all she has, mainly her son. Dr. Riana O'Dwyer of the

University College Galway states, "Fear of famine and the consequent clinging to security and respectability were an unacknowledged but powerful legacy underlying mid-twentieth century living in the small towns and country sides of Ireland."[11] Mother tightly holds onto the one security that she has, John Joe, but in doing so, she suffocates him.

A Famine mentality has made Mother deeply desire respectability. She never even mentions Frank's name because he is in jail, and she does not want to shame the family. Mother raises John Joe to be dependent on her and she tries to instill in him a need for secrecy which she hopes will ensure their respectability. In an act of independence, he rebels against his mother and shouts: "Frank! My brother Frank done jail in America. Fourteen months, drunk and fighting a policeman. Say a prayer for him" (170). John Joe feels a surge of power as he dashes his family's pretenses.

He also destroys his neighbors' illusions by yelling down the alley: "Mrs. Smith let Agnes [her daughter] go [to America] with only a five pound note and her ticket. And we know Mrs. Smith has £582 in the post office. And in her <u>own</u> name (170). This is a cathartic moment for John Joe, and he feels purged by exposing the secrets of his family and neighbors. Breaking some of the confining pretenses of small-town life gives him a sense of freedom. "We're half men here," (174) John Joe declares to his mother, and he vows to begin asserting his independence.

Mother is an interesting example of how the Famine affected the Irish people long after the Great Hunger ended. <u>A Crucial Week</u> takes place in the late 1950s, a century after the Famine, yet Mother shuns the idea of spending money on what she considers to be frivolous items. Mother says:

> Let them afford their toothpaste and cosmetics. Let them afford

> their love and their clean long legs. We will stick to our own in the soot, as we did through the centuries (emphasis added) (104).

This speech reveals an extremely significant concept: Mother believes that she cannot afford cosmetics, but much more importantly, she feels she cannot afford love. The reality of poverty forces her to focus on survival; with neither electricity, running water, a telephone nor amenities, her main concern is on daily survival rather than love.

Murphy senses a: "poverty of love and tenderness"[12] in Ireland. He says that as he grew up, he thought the Famine was about a scarcity of food, but he realizes that the Famine is also about a poverty of affection. Murphy believes one of the terrible legacies of the Famine was the fact that: "It's human nature to be extravagant, and this was exterminated by the nineteenth century mentality, and in that way, I felt I was a Famine victim."[13] Murphy's stage directions describe Mother as being: "harsh in expression and bitter; a product of Irish history - poverty and ignorance; but something great about her - one could say 'heroic' if it were the nineteenth century we were dealing with" (104). In the twentieth century, Mother is hot heroic; instead, she is manipulative and stifling.

Mother is practical and she is a survivor; she is an anchor in a negative way because she tries exclusively to dominate her son while she ignores her husband. She has no real relationship with her husband, and her son Frank is in an American jail. Mother feels that she cannot afford love, and the next best thing seems to be power gained through guilt. Pragmatically, in her old age she must depend on John Joe. Through daily rituals of guilt and martyrdom, she hopes to bind herself to her son inextricably, to assure her own survival. She lives in a society where a

woman's subsistence is dependent on a man, and John Joe becomes the symbol of stability in her old age. In a desperate bid to keep a grip on her son, Mother ignores her own strength and focuses on him as the means to her happiness. Like a spider, Mother daily binds John Joe more tightly in her web, and she is terrified when he finally begins to break free.

Mother is a sad figure because she lives a life bereft of love. Her husband is an emasculated presence in the home, and her son fears her. Alec, her brother, is the only character who speaks to her with any affection, and she betrays him. She is a manipulative anchor, dragging down all those around her. Mother thinks she is being practical and realistic, but she does not realize how destructive she is.

Murphy's solemn play Famine explores the emotional devastations of the Great Hunger. This play contains a mother who is tenacious and resourceful; she also tries to hold onto her meager belongings with deep determination. In Famine, Mother faces a situation that is literally life or death. She is quick to perceive the lethal power of the potato blight, and she tries repeatedly to make her husband realize the severity of the Famine. Her husband, Connor, is not nearly as practical as she, and had he listened to his intelligent wife, he might have kept his family from disaster.

As Famine begins, Mother and her family are starving to death, and two of her daughters have already perished. Hunger has robbed Mother of some of her physical strength, but she is a character who exudes great inner power. Sociologist Tom Inglis states: "Before the Famine, women's economic contribution was so essential to the family economy that they enjoyed considerable independence."[14] Before the potato blight, Mother

might have enjoyed some amount of independence, but after the destruction of the blight begins to ravage the country, she subordinates her needs and follows the wishes of her husband.

The marriages in Ireland during this time were usually pragmatic arrangements to help create stability in the agrarian community. Mother shows loyalty to her husband, and she obeys his will, but very rarely is there any affection in their relationship. Murphy states that in a traditional marriage: "Under attack [the husband and wife] show some degree of solidarity, but it's pretty dire."[15] In the face of disaster, Mother joins with her husband to present a unified front, and she allows her husband to make all the major decisions for the family.

Murphy feels that the Famine "is perhaps the biggest punctuation mark in the history of the country,"[16] and the devastation of this disaster had a severe effect on the family unit. During the Famine, over one million Irish starved to death because of the failed potato crop. Mother joins with her husband in solidarity because of the Famine, but the play shows the conflict between Mother, who will do anything to assure the survival of her family, versus Connor, who places the needs of the community more highly than the concerns of his family.

In Famine, Murphy consciously explores the different perspectives of the husband and wife: "What I was looking for there was the distinctive attitudes of the male and female. In the time of crisis, a woman is forced to face reality."[17] This play explores how men and women react differently in a time of a disaster. Mother and John Connor are two sides of a coin; she is a realist who will do anything to assure her family's survival, while her husband is a dreamer who focuses on being the ethical village chieftain. This play is written so that it is difficult to

understand Mother as a separate entity; she is the foil of her husband, and she is his direct opposite. This analysis will emphasize how she is a vital character because she is an anchor of practical endurance. Mother contrasts with her husband, who often lives in a fantasy world.

Mother, whose first name is Sinead, is the anchor in this play because she is the character who recognizes the bleak reality of their situation. The play begins as Mother has lost her second daughter to starvation; the child need not have died, because at the wake Connor insists that Mother and her only surviving daughter serve generous amounts of food to the mourners. Her husband has hoarded the food, and had he fed his family with this excess, the daughter who starved to death might have lived. The death of this girl shows the contrasting priorities of Connor and his wife: Connor is obsessed with upholding the family name and appearances, while Mother is haunted with providing for the welfare of her family.

During her daughter's wake, Mother dutifully does as her husband orders: she serves food to the mourners, gives the men tobacco (which could have been sold for food), and she calls the fiddler (who must be paid for his services). She does not say one word during the wake, until the very end. For eleven pages of dialogue she is a silent servant, but she finally can no longer contain her grief. The scene ends with her eloquent keening, as she finally mourns her dead daughter:

> Life blood of my heart-
> For the sake of my girl I cared only for this world.
> She was brave, she was generous,
> she was loved by rich and poor.
> She was comely, she was clear-skinned.
> And when she laughed - Did ye hear?
> And her hair - Did ye see? -
> golden like corn.
> But why should I tell what everyone knows?

> Why go back to what never can be more?
> She who was everything to me is dead.
> She is gone forever.
> She will return no more.
> No!
> Cold and silent is her repose (22).

Mother's words and actions in this scene contrast with those of Connor and all those around her. During the wake, the men have discovered that the new potato crop is blighted, and the mourners' panic turns into a mad, manic dance of celebration in the face of death. This reaction is reminiscent of those who tried to escape the plague in Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Masque of the Red Death." Mother takes no part in the crazed revelry. She is pragmatic and realistic, and she knows that the merrymaking is a futile attempt at evading the inevitable. Instead of hiding from the Famine, as the dancers do, she faces its destruction directly, shaking her fist in the face of the Famine, as she openly mourns the death of her child. Connor keeps a facade of strength, but the death of her daughter is not a casualty which Mother can ignore. She hardens herself to survive, but she also acknowledges the devastating loss of her child.

Mother's focus is on the practical aspects of weathering the Famine. She even mixes cow's blood with weeds to feed her family, hoping to improve the nutritional value. Mother worries that the cow will not live through many more bleedings. Connor wants to share their meager meal of weeds and blood with the neighbors, but Mother realizes that the conflict over whether they should feed the neighbors is literally a struggle between life and death. Mother says, "Neglecting your own. What class of a change has come over you? . . . You've gone astray on us . . . We've lost enough of them . . . There's no one inside there has anything to do

with you but your own" (emphasis added) (32). Brehon Laws, guidelines that have been passed down since the seventh century in Ireland, state that hospitality must be shown to all, regardless of the circumstances: "Whoever comes to your door, you must feed him, or care for him, with no questions asked."[18] Connor stringently vows to uphold the long-held rules of Irish hospitality, but Mother believes that traditions must be overlooked in a crisis.

Contrasting with her husband, who wants to be moral and generous, Mother is the pragmatic voice of survival. She says, "We've lost two of them! . . . I'm only asking then: don't get lost on us, in meetings or what's right, and forget us" (emphasis added) (33). She is terrified that her husband will continue to do what is ethically right, helping others in need, while he neglects his own family, and her words are hauntingly prophetic.

She knows that the neighbors are hoarding food in their homes and then taking advantage of Connor's generosity. He takes the philosophical view of their struggle and says: "There's more ways to live besides food," (37) but Mother knows that her family will not subsist on the scraps she has for them if their meals must be shared with friends as well. She hints that the neighbors should leave before she serves her dinner of blood and weeds, and she says, "May God go with ye now," (emphasis added) (41) encouraging the non-family members to leave. But Connor will not allow his neighbors to depart unfed. He looks directly at his wife when he says, "We're only sorry to be able to offer so little" (41). His words imply that Mother has purposely made a small meal because she fears she will have to share the food. She does not want to waste large amounts of food if it will not all go to her husband and children.

Mother plans ahead for the likelihood that her husband has not made any specific provisions for the family. Connor thinks in generalities, assuming that if they all behave ethically, humanitarian aid will arrive. Mother, in contrast, thinks in very specific terms, and she carefully plans the practical elements of her family's survival. A neighbor asks Connor, "But there must be some one thing at least we can do?" (42). Connor is speechless, and he does not have a single specific idea. His wife first waits for the men to think of an idea; she is a diplomatic woman, and Mother "allows a suitable pause for the men to come up with a suggestion" (42). All along she has a plan, but she mentions her idea only when she feels it will have the best chance of succeeding. No one else has any ideas, so she suggests that the men make coffins with spare wood to sell in the countryside.

They have the materials to build a commodity that will be very much in demand, and even if it will be grisly work, it is a specific plan that will help feed the family. Mother thinks in specific, precise terms, and her idea makes a great deal of sense. Her neighbor Dan adds, "You have a head on you, Sinead, you have, God bless it" (42). She has an agile, creative mind, but Connor usually ignores her ideas. Mother has the practical nature to suggest the idea when neighbors are around to support her suggestion. Connor does not often listen to her thoughts, and he likely would have dismissed the idea had Dan not been pleased with the venture. Dan realizes that the coffins will "be in demand" (42). Mother is wise in two respects: first, she comes up with a good, practical idea; secondly, she suggests the plan in front of neighbors who will likely show support the plan. Many good ideas are ignored because they are suggested

at a bad time; she knows to avoid that pitfall.

Mother appears in the first scene during the wake and in the third scene when Connor forces her to share their meal with the neighbors. The focus of the play then moves to Connor and his moral battle against the ravages of the Famine. Mother returns to the action in scene ten, when the family is evicted from their home. Connor refuses to immigrate, while many neighbors take advantage of the opportunity for free transport to Canada. The Connor family appears on the side of the road, next to their home which has been destroyed because they were late paying their rent. The land agents realize they can make more money grazing cattle on the land than collecting rent from the farmers, and during the Famine, the Protestant land owners were often quick to evict the Catholic farmers. Connor has been warned of this upcoming reality, but has done nothing to prevent his family's eviction.

As scene ten begins, Connor is drunk, and he speaks in optimistic generalities, reminding Mother that the Connors were kings once, but she, in contrast, is speechless. The reality of the situation devastates her. During the wake of her daughter in the first scene, she did not join the revelry with the mourners who danced and celebrated, and now in scene ten, she does not pretend, like her husband, that all will be well. The direness of their future has temporarily paralyzed her because she acknowledges the reality of the lethally precarious nature of their situation.

Connor begins to drift into fantasy, and he tells her that meal will be arriving soon to help the starving. As he starts to fall asleep, she tries to keep him awake, suggesting her continuing efforts to get him to <u>do</u> something. Her spirit is not yet completely broken, though she is

exhausted from constantly trying to prompt him to action. Trying to keep him from sleep, she asks: "Did you say your prayers?" (79). This short line is significant because she has not yet given up her efforts to challenge her husband to literally wake up and take control of their situation. Mother has worked valiantly to plan how to keep food in her family's mouths, while her husband has waited passively for humanitarian aid to arrive. Now they are evicted and Connor has no plan for their future, but she still will not let the man sleep.

She continues, "Don't go to sleep," (79) as he begins to drift into slumber. Mother tries to jolt him into reality by speaking in distressingly specific terms. She says that Father Hogan has: "gone strange from all that's dying without oil . . . Johnny?" (79). Even hearing about the unanointed dead does not jar Connor from his drunken sleepiness. He snuggles up to her and croons to her in Gaelic pet names. Connor tries to seduce her, but she wants to concentrate on taking some sort of practical action to give them shelter. She does not want to make love, then Connor says: "And, sure, you don't want to freeze" (80). He tries to convince her that if they make love, they will at least stay warm, but Mother becomes enraged and pulls away from him. Murphy states:

> I heard in my youth that the itinerants, the tinker people who travel the country, have a phrase 'fuck or freeze.' When you think about it, without heat, you can freeze to death, and it [sex] becomes a function - just to keep warm. And that is poverty.[19]

Their relationship has decayed to the place where making love is a function to keep warm, and even more than their homelessness, Murphy suggests that the bankruptcy of their emotional and sexual relationship suggests their true poverty.

Mother feels betrayed by Connor: he allows two of their daughters

starve to death while he hoards food, he refuses the opportunity to immigrate, and now they are evicted from their home. Her suppressed fears pour forth:

> We should have went! They're there [in Canada] now, eating their nough, Marcus and the rest. The only wonder is we're still alive . . . They say it isn't too hard to get to England . . . Do you hear? England isn't so far away . . . But what's to become of us? No roof, no plan. How can we escape, and the fever on top of it now? There's hundreds making safe voyages . . . Johnny? (emphasis added) (80).

Mother is frantic because their options are dwindling. Earlier, she made the decision to steal from her neighbors rather than let her children perish. Mother tells Connor that she stole a neighbor's turf and sold it for flour; the neighbor died soon afterwards, and now she feels so guilty that she cannot even pray. Mother says: "I as good as killed him . . . We'll all die here" (80). She makes an immoral "plan" when she steals from her neighbor, but Connor has never made any plan to provide for his family, and she feels she must do something to compensate for Connor's lack of action.

Mother sees the specific destruction of the Famine, while Connor again talks in generalities. Furious that Mother has questioned his authority, Connor tries to shame her into silence by telling her that they must stick together. He reminds her of the importance of their family name; but the family name will not feed their children.

As scene eleven begins, Mother is returning from a fourteen-mile walk to a Protestant soup kitchen. She had even prepared to forsake Catholicism if she were asked to renounce her faith. Mother gets the bread to feed her husband; her loyalty is overwhelming. The irony of this situation is striking, because he does so little, if anything, to provide for his children and wife. Before Connor can eat the bread, his daughter

Maeve steals it. She quickly consumes the bread, and Mother struggles with her, but only crumbs are left. Mother demands that Connor get a stick and beat Maeve to punish her. Mother cries out:

> The crumbs I went through hell to get! . . . Connor! Will you move now? Or are you still engaged, defying all, standing in the rubble of all you lost? What bravery! But he's doing what's right he says. Right. Our noble men can afford what's right. Will I keep stealing from the dying? . . . Did ever the vicious Connors of yore foster their likes? The leaders and the chieftains? (emphasis added) (84-85).

Mother mocks Connor for his supposed bravery, and she confronts him with a double standard: why is it acceptable for him to do what he feels is ethical and right for the community, while she resorts to stealing from the dying to feed her children. She lashes out at her husband, "You forgot us! - You forgot us! . . . no right or wrong or raimeis [foolish] talks, but bread, bread, bread" (85). Connor has always been good at rationalizing the problems that surround them, while Mother listens to his rambling and takes action herself; now, she is the one who must speak.

Mother is usually able to keep silent when she is upset. She does not say a word during the wake, until her keening at the end of the scene. When her husband insists that she feeds her neighbors in scene three, Mother obeys his wishes and does not contradict him in front of his friends. She waits until there is a long silence from the men, who are unable to come up with a plan, before she suggests that they make coffins out of the spare wood. When they are first evicted, she keeps silent and offers no angry words to her husband. But when Maeve steals the bread from her husband, this is too much, and Mother snaps. She has held her tongue too often, trying to present a front of solidarity in the face of disaster, but now she explodes.

Mother is terrified at the futility of their situation. She feels

that she is "always the slave, the slave of a slave, day after day, to keep us alive" (85). Here, Murphy uses Connolly's phrase that woman is the slave of a slave, because Mother feels twice removed from any power: her husband is the Catholic slave of Protestant land owners, and she, as his slave, feels completely incapacitated. Mother fears that she is powerless and all her efforts have been useless, because there seems to be no end to the disease and starvation around her. She is the one who has had the responsibility of providing for her family, and her strength is dwindling.

The fear that she is powerless makes her realize that she still has one choice left: she can keep the Famine from taking her at its whim by having her husband kill her. She says:

> You wouldn't go . . . Are they to have my life so easy? Would it be right?. . . Johnny, I've understood your defiance, the hope you picked out of nowhere, I've understood all along, but it's not my kind, nor can it ever be . . . <u>They gave me nothing but dependence</u>. I've shed that lie (emphasis added) (85).

Mother acknowledges that Connor can rely simply on hope, but blind optimism will not console her; she needs specifics rather than generalities in order to have the will to live. Mother makes an independent choice: to die by her husband's hand, rather than starve at the whim of the Famine. This death gives her, in her own words, a "moment of freedom" (85).

"Are they going to have my life so easy," (85) Mother asks with quiet intensity. "Now they have me prone," (85) she adds. Her passion increases as she says: "And in this moment of freedom you will look after my right and your children's right, <u>as you promised</u>, lest they chose the time and have the victory. Take up the stick" (86). Mother goes into their only shelter, which consists of the doors from their former home

leaning against each other. She lies down in the darkness of the shelter, and we hear Connor bludgeon his wife to death. Mother feels her death is a moment of freedom and victory, because she finally moves her husband to action. Also, she determines her own fate and keeps the Famine from taking her at its whim.

When meal finally arrives that spring, Connor calls the names of the living, the dead, as well as the names of those who have immigrated; but his dead wife's name is the first that Connor calls. He has survived the Famine by living in a fantasy world, and now that help has come, he starts to see the reality of the situation. Murphy's stage directions state: "In his isolation he is beginning to sense what he has been through, and to understand that his family, village and army are gone" (87). Mother had been an anchor of reality who tried to dispel her husband's illusions; she attempted to get Connor to function in the real world. Her legacy is that now he is beginning to realize there is no escaping reality.

Mother and Connor face the life threatening reality of the Famine in a completely divergent manner, Murphy states that this play was:

> the first time I tried to explore the distinctions between husband and wife; I decided, like O'Casey, that the woman was the <u>real</u> heroic figure. And in exploring mentalities of Irish people that had been twisted by their history I found I began to understand more about women and the roles that had been forced on them by life, particularly here in Ireland. It was at that point I began to understand a little more about my mother.[20]

This statement reveals two vital concepts: first, Murphy feels that the women characters are the true heroic figures in his plays; secondly, he acknowledges that the women in Ireland are strongly molded by roles that have been forced on them by their society. The only real power a woman in Ireland traditionally has is in the home. Mother in <u>Famine</u> initially tries to assert herself with diplomacy; she is supportive of her husband

because she lives in a society where she must abide with his decisions.

Mother is stronger than Connor, and she tries to strengthen her husband by encouraging him while she makes provisions for the family; she is capable and determined, but Connor's ambiguity creates a vacuum which she cannot fill. Mother hopes to fortify her husband with her own strength, but instead, he succeeds in sapping the stamina from his wife until she no longer has the will to live. Had the gender roles been more malleable, Connor might have taken his wife's sound advice, thereby saving his family. Mother realizes that a woman's role is "nothing but dependence," (85) and she can no longer coexist under these circumstances.

She is the pragmatist who focuses completely on the specifics of survival, while Connor feels comforted by much more general reassurances. Fintan O'Toole observes that in Famine: "there is no possibility of the man and the woman coming together in any sense of having any common purpose; they're so completely different."[21] Her role is absolutely vital, because she is a significant contrast to her dreaming husband. Mother did not live through the Famine, but she created a model of endurance for her daughter. Maeve survives, partially because of the example of Mother, who quietly taught her daughter that a woman must provide for herself and defend herself. Mother's requirements and her husband's dreams cannot both survive, so she makes a sacrifice of her needs, and finally of her own life; she is triumphant partially because her vital presence teaches Maeve how to endure.

In A Whistle in the Dark, the mother is significant, even though she never appears on stage. This play shows the subtle strength of a mother's power, although she is only mentioned in dialogue. The mother of the

Carneys has been the victim of domestic violence, but unlike Betty (Michael's wife in this play), Mama stays in an abusive relationship. Mama is an extremely hardworking woman, but Dada shows his wife no respect for her diligence. Despite her efforts, Mama is left alone at home in Ireland while her husband and sons go on an extended vacation to visit Michael in England. Mama has not seen Michael in ten years, and her absence greatly affects her eldest son.

Michael is concerned that his mother should not be left alone too long. When he simply asks Dada how Mama is, Dada becomes defensive, and he "feels there is an accusation in such a question" (22). Dada finally says that she is:

> Fine, fine. Sent her love. To all of you. I wanted her to come over with Desmond and I'd stay at home. Didn't I Desmond? Or even come with the two of us. Yes. But you know your mother. Somebody might run away with the house, and Hah-haa! (22).

Dada is a perpetual liar, and he begins twisting the truth as soon as he arrives. He does not want his wife to join them; Dada has a history of hitting her, and he is pleased be away from her and have some time alone with his boys. He is unemployed, and it is not until the end of the play that the main reason she cannot come to England to see her son becomes apparent: Mama is the only family member in Ireland with a job, and she has to stay home to work. At the end of the play, a strong irony arises: her husband and sons go to England on an extended vacation while the aging mother is left home alone to work as a cleaning lady. Dada is aware of this truth, and it embarrasses him, so he covers his feelings of inadequacy with laughter.

Although Michael's mother is a scrub lady, Dada does not want Des to work in a factory because there are: "too many bosses in that factory job.

Slave drivers" (27). He wants his sons to: "lick no one's shoes" (27) and Dada ridicules Michael for working in a factory. But Mama is scrubbing floors, creating a striking double-standard: Dada does not want his sons to work at a factory, yet it does not seem to bother him that wife works like a slave.[22]

Murphy sees women as a civilizing force. When Iggy, Hugo and Harry are separated from their mother, they become vicious and violent without her moderating influence. Harry becomes a pimp and wants to use the front room of his brother's home for prostitution. The men act like animals and make sexual advances toward their brother's wife. Iggy becomes an extortionist, running a protection racket for black workers. Fintan O'Toole feels that "Harry's contempt for Betty's homemaking skills draws immediate attention to the fact that he and his brothers are, in Coventry, motherless."[23] They resent Betty for trying to discipline them, a duty which they believe belongs to their mother. The Carneys ignore Mama, and they treat Betty (whom they feel is her usurper) with a complete lack of respect.

Mama does not appear on stage, but her presence is strongly felt; she was abused in the home as the boys grew up, and as adults, the Carney men lapse into the example they remember from childhood. Their mother was demeaned in front of them, and as adults the Carney brothers also belittle women. This is no excuse for the men's attitudes, but A Whistle in the Dark suggests that children who are raised in an abusive home often perpetuate the abuse as adults.

Dada strikes his wife because he is a weak, unemployed failure who needs to feel powerful. He brags about associating with architects and doctors, and this infuriates Michael who says: "And you smoking cigars and

drinking brandy with them and your wife on her knees scrubbing their floors" (72). Dada tries to reverse the situation, saying: "Don't talk irreverence about your mother, boy! . . . D'ye hear him? What he's saying about your mother, boys? D'ye hear him?" (72). When Dada is attacked with the truth of Mama's occupation, he tries to rally his other sons to his side. Dada tries to appear strong, but he is a "defeated, emasculated man, dependent on the generosity of his sons."[24] This play is haunted by the image of a hardworking woman; Mama devotes herself to her sons and her husband, and now, in her old age she is being ignored. Dada is sixty, so Mama is likely in her early or mid-fifties. She should not be on her knees scrubbing floors, but she is the sole source of income for her healthy husband and sons. While her husband (an unemployed policeman)tries to socialize with doctors and architects, Mama is an anchor in this play because she represents brute economic reality.

She differs from Betty because she does not leave an abusive situation, but this may be because she has five sons. Mama is enslaved because she subordinates her own need for what she feels is the greater good of her family. She suffers abuse in an ironic attempt to keep peace in the home. In doing so, she allows herself to be demeaned, and unfortunately this sets a very destructive example for her sons.

Missus from Conversations on a Homecoming, is similar to Murphy's other mothers in some aspects. She, like the other mothers, has a distant relationship with her husband. Also, Missus she works like a slave in the pub that her drunken husband avoids. She is similar to the other mothers her hostility seeps out in subtle ways. Missus is an anchor of realism, and although she is often a comical character, she also has an

angry, cynical side. Sometimes she is a great source of humor, while at other times she alienates those around her.

She has one daughter and no son, so Missus places her hope in the fact that her seventeen-year-old daughter is promised to marry Liam, a very successful thirty-one-year old auctioneer. Because she has no emotional relationship with her husband, and she has no son, Missus takes all her emotional satisfaction through pleasing her future son-in-law.

Liam is especially important to Missus because her marriage has failed. She "pinned all her hopes" (46) on her husband, JJ, when she married him. The play takes place in the late 1970s, but a decade earlier, JJ had been a popular Kennedy figure. In the 1960s, JJ called their pub the White House and he encouraged liberal thought. Missus was "the first lady," (19) but in the intervening ten years, bad economic times have caused disillusionment and cynicism, and JJ has become an alcoholic. Missus has changed noticeably, as well, and she no longer takes care of herself. The disappointment of a failed marriage has aged Missus greatly in the ten years since Michael has seen her. She is "in her early fifties, carelessly dressed (a dirty house coat); a worried slow-moving drudge of a woman, senses a bit dulled by life, but trying to keep the place together" (12). Missus comes in and out of the action of the play, serving the men drinks.

In many instances, Missus is hilarious. Upon reading the play one can easily underestimate the importance of her character because she has so few lines. Missus is an interesting woman, because she is a source of both humor and venom. She says such things as: "Aa, the boys," (18) "Now, boys, yas," (23) "Now, yas, that's the boy, Liam," (33) "Now," (34) "Now, Liam. That's the man" (35). While reading Missus' lines, one can easily

overlook their humor. Missus speaks slowly, with a great deal of mental preparation, and as the audience waits for her to say something, we anticipate a great pearl of wisdom to come out of her mouth, but all she may say is a resounding, "Now." In the original Druid production, whenever Missus said "Now," it became a source of hilarity, because she made the word seem as if it had a great deal of meaning. The actress turned the word "Now" practically into a small monologue, full of hidden meaning, reflecting her feelings about what was happening in the stage action. Missus becomes a great source of humor, partially because of the economy of her speech.

Despite the fact that Missus is comical, anger and anxiety sometimes surface in her character. She says to Michael, "But you mother is delighted, yas, the surprise of your visit" (emphasis added) (18). In the original Druid Theatre production, Missus put emphasis on "surprise," as if to imply that there was something wrong in the fact that he came home on such short notice. Her comment embarrasses Michael, and it becomes evident that she uses words as weapons.

Ireland is famous for its emigration rate, and largely because of high unemployment, "half of the population born in Ireland since 1820 have emigrated."[25] Junior is one of the men who has come to see Michael, and Missus commends him for settling down in Galway and marrying. Junior works at his father's gas station, which he stands little chance of inheriting, for the equivalent of a few dollars a week. Missus says, "A nice wife and baby and a home of his own to go into. The way everyone should be . . . A nice sensible girl, and not to be roaming the world" (19). This is Missus' subtle way of attacking Michael, who has deserted his friends and family to go to America. Niall O'Dowd, publisher of Irish

America magazine discusses the complexity of the Irish attitude toward immigrants. He states that there is: "the feeling that somehow those at home retain their birthright, while those who went abroad have forfeited it."[26] Some people in Galway resent Michael for leaving, and while Tom strikes out at Michael in a deliberate attack, Missus' censure is much more subtle.

Missus' comments about the merits of Junior's family life reflect a contrast to the atmosphere in her own family. Divorce is not legal in Ireland, and many unhappy couples stay together because there is no other option. This causes tension and anger in the home. JJ feels trapped and suffocated, so he avoids Missus at all costs, drinking in other establishments, while she is left to manage their pub. JJ's absence causes Missus pain, but she is a pragmatic woman. When she says, "A nice wife and baby and a home of his own to go into. The way everyone ought to be," (19) there is an ironic twist to her words, reflecting the emptiness of her own marriage; but Missus spends no time feeling sorry for herself.

She frequently fires wounding barbs at Michael, who still deeply cares for her husband. For example, Missus says, "When will you be on television, Michael, we do be watching" (33). In the Druid Theatre production, the actress said this with a bit of malice in her voice, which made Michael very uncomfortable. His friends sense that he has failed in America, but the men never confront him. Missus, in contrast, says hurtful things to Michael to embarrass him.

Although Missus wounds Michael occasionally with her words, she is still a source of humor. She is very slow in serving the men drinks, and her turtle-like pace becomes a running joke. Junior is usually kind and calm, but he finally loses his composure, saying: "as well as the pint

you're filling now you might start filling another pint for whoever is buying the next round" (42). Missus has no control over her husband, so she takes an excessive amount of time in serving the men as a subtle way of controlling them.

Michael tries to stay cheerful, and he suggests that Missus might want to have people sing and tell stories in the pub to attract tourists. He is genuinely trying to be helpful, but Missus takes offense, saying, "Isn't that what they're doing, some of them, living with the hens to make room for the tourists" (52). Michael does not mean to upset her, and he offers to pay for the next round of drinks, pulling a large roll of bills from his pocket as Missus continues her tirade.

Many Irish keep their savings accounts at the post office, and earlier, Missus saw Michael's mother there withdrawing a large amount of money. Missus says, "Yas, your mother is delighted: I was talking to her for a minute this morning in the post office, and she drawing out a wad of money . . . That's the woman with the money" (53). This line is timed so that just as Missus says "she drawing out a wad of money," Michael pulls a large roll of money from his pocket. His friends realize the money he is spending is his mother's, and Missus somehow feels vindicated by humiliating him in front of his friends. She enjoys using words to wound Michael, because of his continuing loyalty toward her husband, who encouraged Michael in his acting. Wanting nothing to do with dreams or fantasies, Missus slowly jabs away at his illusions.

The only man Missus ever tries to please is Liam, who is promised to marry her daughter, Anne. Missus compliments him, serves him first, and invites him to tea later in the week. Missus sends Anne out to look for her father, or she hands her a broom so she can clean up after the men,

but Missus never pays any real attention to her daughter. Missus compounds Anne's loneliness by denying her a mother's affection, but Missus receives a great deal of emotional satisfaction from pleasing Liam.

Missus is truly a slave because her old age is joylessly spent taking care of the pub while her drunken husband avoids her. She entered the marriage with the pub, and that is all she has left, besides her daughter, whom she ignores. At the end of the play, never bidding her daughter goodnight, she says, "Leave the light on in the hall, Annette, in case" (73). Missus still hopes that her husband will return, but even if he does not, she will keep going. She in an anchor, sometimes in a very negative sense. Her dreams of a happy home do not materialize, so she tries to pull Michael away from his fantasies. Missus is faced daily with a disappointing reality; when she thinks others have far-fetched fantasies or illusions, she feels it as her job, like an anchor, to pull them down.

Murphy's mothers are essential characters who are strongly rooted in a grim reality. Their relationships with their husbands suffer because the men either live in their own worlds (like Father in A Crucial Week) or in dream worlds, like Connor in Famine, Dada in A Whistle in the Dark and JJ in Conversations on a Homecoming. Because the mothers have little or no communication with their husbands, their relationship with their children often becomes more significant. Mother in A Crucial Week barely knows her husband exists, but she strongly manipulates her son; Mother in Famine tries to make Connor realize the direness of their circumstances, and when he will not act for himself, she begs him to think of their children; Mama in A Whistle in the Dark spends her old age sacrificing for her sons by earning the only pay check; Missus in Conversations on a

Homecoming rarely sees her alcoholic husband, but she gets satisfaction from arranging a match for her daughter, so she can have Liam for a son-in-law, whom she showers with attention. The mothers often realign their priorities from their husband to their children, and sometimes, the children are not comfortable being the complete source of their mother's emotional satisfaction.

Murphy's mothers are practical women who learn to adapt to the disappointments of a failed marriage and the harshness of life. Mother, in A Crucial Week, fiercely clings to her son when her relationship with her husband dissolves; the mother in Famine tries to compensate for her husband's inability to act with decisiveness; Mama adjusts to the fact that in her old age, she is the sole economic provider for her healthy husband and strong sons; Missus' drunken husband never works, so she manages the pub herself; The mothers are vital characters because they represent reality, while the men in their lives are dreamers. None of the fathers communicates well with the mothers, nor do they value the women's opinions, yet the women are creative and practical anchors who try to steer the men toward the harbor of home.

Notes: Chapter IV

[1] Ray Comiskey, "Tom Murphy: Different but the Same," The Irish Times 1 Sept 1988: 12.

[2] Jackson 19.

[3] Lorna Reynolds, "Irish Women in Legend, Literature and Life," Women in Irish Legend, Life and Literature ed. S.F.Gallagher (Barnes and Noble Books: Totowa, New Jersey, 1983) 12.

[4] Reynolds 12.

[5] Reynolds 12.

[6] Ray Comiskey "Tom Murphy: Different but the Same," The Irish Times 1 Sept 1988: 12.

[7] Declan Hassett, "A Play to Leave One Drained," Cork Examiner 28 Sept 1988: N. Pag.

[8] O'Toole, Politics, 58.

[9] O'Toole, Politics, 64.

[10] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[11] Riana O'Dwyer "Playacting and Myth-Making: The Western Plays of Thomas Murphy," Irish University Review, Spring 1987: 33.

[12] Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[13] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[14] Inglis 190.

[15] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[16] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[17] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[18] Mary Dowling Daley, Irish Laws (Appletree Press: Belfast, 1989) 29.

[19] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[20] Jackson 20.

[21] Fintan O'Toole, personal interview, 25 March 1991.

[22] O'Toole, Politics, 60.

[23] O'Toole, Politics, 58.

[24] O'Toole, Politics, 56.

[25] Niall O'Dowd, "The Shamrock Chain," Irish America March/April 1993: 6.

[26] O'Dowd 6.

CHAPTER FIVE: Baileagangaire, a Synthesis

In Baileagangaire, Murphy writes his only play to date which deals solely with women characters. This play is a synthesis for this study because it focuses on Mary, a daughter and girlfriend; Dolly, her sister, who is a wife and mother of two sons; and Mommo, their aging senile grandmother, who has also been a daughter and wife. Baileagangaire also introduces a synthesis because the women in this play finally obtain a goal of Murphy women: they form a true home. Ironically, the one true home in Murphy's dramaturgy is a family solely of women.

Murphy created these women specifically because of some criticism he received after the opening night of A Whistle in the Dark in London in 1961. Murphy recalls:

> A woman came up to me after the play, and she said it was very good, and so on, but, 'if you don't mind, Tom, you know nothing about women.' So I wanted to write a play for three women, not just based on that incident of the first night, but it did contribute to it.[1]

Contemporary Irish drama "has all too often been an exclusive men's club,"[2] but Baileagangaire is a play focusing on the needs and concerns of Mommo and her two grandchildren. Critics agree that in this play, Murphy: "showed an understanding of the female that transcends gender."[3]

Murphy was conscious of George Orwell when he wrote Baileagangaire in 1984, but his world contrasts with Orwell's. In Baileagangaire, Murphy states that there is "really no Big Brother watching these three women; they're forgotten."[4] (emphasis added) The female characters in this play take care of each other because there is no man in the home, no "Big Brother." Dolly's husband works in England, and although he sends her money each week, he does not communicate with her, nor does he love her.

Mary, her sister, has never married, and she has learned to depend on herself. Both women must care for Mommo, their eighty-year-old grandmother, and they are her only living relatives. In this home, the women take responsibility for themselves and for each other; a family emerges, independent of men.

This complex play exists on two levels: the conflict between Mary and her pregnant sister Dolly is in the present; this contrasts with Mommo who lives in the past, endlessly repeating the story of a deadly laughing contest. These two levels are intricately interwoven, and the conflicts of both the present and the past are resolved in a cathartic final scene.

The forty-one-year old Mary has a: "spinster frame,"[5] and the stress of tending to the many needs of her difficult grandmother has Mary: "near the breaking point" (9). She returns from working as a nurse in England to care for Mommo, who sits in her bed in the middle of the living room. Mommo either ignores Mary, or she treats her like an unreliable servant, although Mary works endlessly to keep the house clean and take care of Mommo. Irish daughters are raised to be competent and hardworking, and Mary is extremely industrious. She works constantly during this play, but this sublimation does not replace the lost men in her life. Her father, uncles, grandfather and brother all died sudden, tragic deaths when she was young, and she pushed away her former boyfriend, Steven, to tend to her responsibilities at home. Steven has married her sister, Dolly, and now Mary regrets having spent her whole life caring for others, because now there is no one to care for her.

In Ireland, a woman's sense of self usually comes from her role within the family. Mary is a daughter with no father, a former girlfriend, and she has no husband. She has learned to rely on herself,

but she is very lonely. This pain is magnified by the fact that today is her forty-first birthday, and no one remembers. She hopes that Mommo will realize who she is so they can celebrate together, but Mommo does not recognize Mary, partially because she was away in England for so many years, working as a nurse. Mommo knows the power of silence. She either ignores Mary or makes cutting remarks such as: "Do I know you?" (11). Mary tries to remain strong, but she admits, "I'm so lonely" (15).

Mommo's continuous story-telling adds to Mary's frustration. She is also angry because her sister, Dolly, has not arrived yet to help with their grandmother. Mary battles her feelings of emptiness by throwing herself into her work. Murphy's stage directions describe her industriousness:

> She puts on her apron mechanically, then sets to work. Progressively working harder: scrubbing that part of the floor that Mommo spat upon, clearing away and washing up the crockery, washing clothes that have been soaking in a bucket . . . Later in the play, working, working: sheets to be put soaking in a bucket overnight, a bucket of mash for the hens in the morning, bringing in the turf (15).

Mary works to escape her loneliness and to give herself a sense of purpose and identity. She tries to gain Mommo's approval, but nothing she does pleases the old woman. Mary does not realize that her isolated diligence sometimes makes her appear aloof. She admits, "I may have been too bossy, at first . . . But I wanted to bring about change. Comfort, civilized" (19). Mary wants a well-ordered home, but the harder she works to please Mommo, the more her grandmother resents her, possibly because Mary's continuous efforts remind the old woman that she cannot care for herself.

When Dolly finally arrives on her motorcycle, she brings a bottle of vodka. Dolly never takes off her coat, which angers Mary, because this suggests that she will only make a short visit. Mary hopes the vodka is

a present for her birthday, but Dolly brings it to compensate for not coming to help with Mommo the night before, because her son is sick.

Mary cares for Mommo's every need, but it is Dolly whom Mommo loves and to whom she shows affection. Mommo recognizes Dolly, and as she and Mommo chat, Mary "stands isolated, but watching the scene. She would love to be included. The smallest gesture of affection or recognition would greatly help" (25). No one shows Mary any warmth, and all her efforts go unpraised. She desperately needs to feel wanted, but neither Mommo nor Dolly senses this, because Mary always appears to be self-sufficient. Mary longs for companionship, and she says to Dolly: "I'd like to go out sometimes too . . . I need to talk to - someone!" (26-27). Mary has no husband, no children, no parents, and aside from her sister, she has no extended family to lend her emotional support.

When Mary worked in England as a nurse, Dolly cared for Mommo by herself, but now Mary is angry that Dolly is not helping enough with Mommo. She and Dolly get into a fight, and Dolly becomes angry and leaves. Dolly is promiscuous, and she decides to work off her frustration by finding someone to seduce. Her sister's departure reminds Mary of her own emptiness. She calls to Dolly when she is out of hearing range:

> It's not fair . . . Steven called me 'dearest'! . . . Wanted a child by me! . . . A girl, he said, so that she'd look like me . . . But you'll never know a thing about it! . . . Your husband wined and dined and bedded me! (27-28).

She resents Dolly for marrying the man she loved, and she calls her: "that bitch" (28). Turning forty-one reminds Mary that she is growing old alone, and she becomes even more resentful and discouraged.

As the older grandchild, Mary feels the responsibility of holding the home together. As the firstborn, she believes that she must take the

place of her dead mother and father by giving stability to their home. A birthday is a time of reflection, and memories of Steven fill her mind. By paying more attention to Mommo than Steven, Mary pushed her former lover away. She still reminisces about Steven, and she works his name subtly into conversation, hoping her sister will relate information about him.

Murphy notes that Mary: "appears almost happy when she is working constructively," (30) but keeping busy does not completely anesthetize her pain. She recalls: "And other offers of marriage . . . plenty of them," (29) but she dwells on Steven. Mary repeats herself, saying that he: "Wined and dined and bedded me" (29). She deeply regrets letting him go, and she still broods about her loss. (When Steven married her sister, one wonders if he did it to punish Mary?) Soon after marrying Dolly, Steven immigrated to England to find work. There were available jobs at home, but he insisted on leaving. Mary has only her memories, and she plays this situation over in her mind.

Mary pushed Steven away so she could care for her grandmother, and she is deeply wounded when Mommo treats her like an unsatisfactory servant. Mary says: "Miss: as if I didn't exist. That's the thanks I get - (Winces to herself) It's - not thanks I'm looking for. What am I looking for, Mommo? I had to come home. No one inveigled me. I wanted to come home" (28). Mary left a good nursing job in England where she was respected, well paid and independent; but a career is not enough for Mary. She desperately wants a place where she feels safe, where her contributions are recognized and where she feels welcome and wanted. Mary sadly recalls how happy their home used to be. Mommo is the consummate story teller: "People used to come <u>miles</u> to hear you tell stories . . .

There was happiness here too, Mommo. Harmony" (30). Mary seeks harmony in the home which she feels will come from Mommo's recognition and acceptance of her. She, like all Murphy women, longs for a home where she will be loved and appreciated.

As Mommo continues her tale, Mary begins to realize that the story must have a strange significance or Mommo would not repeat it constantly. She decides to encourage Mommo to finish the story, and Mary starts telling the story to prompt Mommo into continuing. She senses that Mommo's story is a way for her grandmother to mourn. Mary hopes that if she forces Mommo to finish her story, her grandmother's emotional wounds might heal. By insisting that Mommo concludes her never-ending tale, Mary, the nurse, hopes to effect a cure, both for Mommo, and also for herself.

Dolly returns from her sexual encounter, and she feels guilty when she realizes she has forgotten her sister's birthday. Mary cries at the emptiness of her life: "I wanted to come home . . . I wanted to come home . . . This is our home . . . This is our home" (43). She verbalizes the desire of all Murphy's women characters, but there is no harmony in her home. Dolly comforts Mary, and they eat some of her birthday cake. Dolly wants to speak to Mary, but she is too busy listening to Mommo's story. When Dolly finally takes off her coat, Mary sees that her sister is pregnant.

Dolly is afraid that Steven will kill her if he finds out about the illegitimate baby. She tells Mary that last Christmas her husband beat her black and blue while he was home, and she sleeps with other men in retaliation. She asks her sister to move away and take care the child, but Mary refuses. Dolly also suggests that she will pay Mary to pretend

that the child is hers and raise the baby there in the house with Mommo. Dolly offers to get the roof slated, buy enough turf for the winter and sign over her half of the house to her sister if Mary will raise Dolly's baby. Knowing how lonely her sister is, Dolly teases Mary saying the child will be: "Company for yeh" (55). Mary remains uncertain about adopting the child.

There is constant tension between the sisters. Dolly unwittingly married her sister's former lover, and Mary hurts her sister by sometimes displaying a superior attitude. Mary is jealous of Dolly's husband and children, and Dolly is jealous of Mary's academic achievements. Dolly says:

> You-had-it-easy. The bright one, top of your class! . . . Top marks! - Hardly had your Leaving Cert. and you couldn't wait to be gone . . . State Registered nurse before you were twenty . . . A Sister before you were twenty-five, Assistant Matron at the age of thirty . . . Yes, S.R.N., C.M.B., D.D.T. . . . Couldn't get away fast enough (57).

Mary went into nursing to help compensate for the fact that she could not save the life of her brother who died when they were children. Dolly hopes to engender her sister's sense of responsibility toward her child by reminding Mary that she is a nurse.

Mary resents this emotional blackmail, and she is unsure about taking on another "patient," partially because Mommo will not acknowledge her existence. Mary says to Mommo:

> . . . No, you don't know me. But I was here once, and I ran away to try to blot out here. I didn't have it easy. <u>Then I tried bad things</u>, for a time, with someone. So I came back here, thinking I'd find - something - here, or if I didn't, I'd put everything right. Mommo?" (emphasis added) (61).

She still feels guilty about her sexual relationship with Steven, and she refers to making love as trying some: "bad things" (61). Part of the

reason she pushed Steven away was because of her guilt about sexuality, and her failed relationship with Steven made her feel the need to run away to England. She says to Dolly: "I'm not the saint you think I am," (61) but Dolly does not know that her husband and Mary had earlier been involved sexually. Mary hopes to "put everything right," and she is saddened by the tension in their home.

When Mary feels depressed, she remembers the kind words of a terminally ill patient whom she came to regard very closely. The elderly lady told her: "you're going to be alright, Mary" (67). Mary adds: "Simple remark. But it took me by surprise. Like as if it were a promised blessing" (67). She quietly claims that blessing, and like Murphy's other daughters, Mary becomes a ray of hope among anger, confusion and cynicism, holding onto the promise that she will be all right.

Mary deals with two conflicts: she must decide whether to take her sister's illegitimate child, and she also tries to encourage her grandmother to tell the end of her story. As Mary has guessed, the completion of the story is vital to Mommo's mental health; as she finishes the tale, Mommo acknowledges her mistakes and she forgives herself for the guilt she has been repressing. When Mommo acknowledges her own human failing, she is also able to forgive Mary for leaving her and going to England. Mommo has internalized her sorrow for thirty years, but after she finishes her story she says: "And sure a tear isn't such a bad thing, Mary, and haven't we everything we need here, the two of us" (emphasis added) (76). In Mommo's last speech, she finally calls Mary by name, and she assures her granddaughter that they will have a happy home together. Earlier, Dolly has fallen asleep, and Mary pulls the covers over her

sister.

Mary begins to cry, and: "Her tears continue to the end but her crying is infused with a sound like the laughter of relief" (76). Since Mommo has recognized, forgiven and accepted her, Mary realizes that she can do the same for her sister. Mary feels that raising her sister's child will help complete their home, and she says: "But in whatever wisdom there is, in that year 1984, it was decided to give that - fambly [sic] . . . of strangers another chance, and a brand new baby to gladden their home" (76). The play ends as Mary cries in relief, because Mommo has recognized and accepted her. Mary will adopt her sister's baby and have her own family. Mommo and Dolly fall asleep in bed together, and one senses that Mary will finally have her true home.

The end of the play gives Mary a very clear sense of resolution. As the first born, she has always had a very strong sense of responsibility. Mary pushed Steven away, partially because she had to take care of Mommo, and partially because she feels guilty about their sexual relationship. She enters nursing, a field where she can help others and take responsibility for them, but this never fills her need for a sense of home. When the play concludes, she has much of what she has always wanted: a home where she feels appreciated by her grandmother, and where she will feel loved and needed by her adopted child.

The only element in the home that is missing is a man, but Murphy's dramas do not include one happy relationship between a man and a woman. Mary seems relieved to have most of her dreams come true. She is an anchor because she is a practical hardworking woman who wants the stability of a happy home. The guilt of her sexual relationship with Steven has enslaved her, and although she was able to break free from him,

she never has escaped the remorse that the relationship caused her. When she finds that he routinely beats her sister severely, Mary seems at peace becoming an adoptive mother and having her true home without a man.

Dolly dreamed of a happy marriage that would allow her to escape life with Mommo, but when her husband deserted her to work in England (while jobs were available at home), she adapted and learned how to weather conflict. Her parents died when she was young, and as a child, Dolly had no father figure; as a wife she has an absentee husband. Irish women's roles are delineated by their relationships with men, and Dolly is unhappy and adrift. She resents raising her sons alone, and she mourns the loss of what she dreamed would be a happy marriage.

Many women characters in Murphy's plays are neglected or verbally abused, but Dolly is one of the few overt examples of a battered wife. When her husband Steven returns for his annual Christmas visit, he viciously beats. She retaliates by being promiscuous while he is away. Even her own sister calls her: "That bitch Dolly . . . In heat again" (14). As the play begins, a damaging cycle of abuse and promiscuity is all ready in motion.

Dolly is thirty-nine years old, and she has little communication with her husband, aside from the fact that he wires her money each week. He makes enough working in England for Dolly and their sons to live very well. She owns a new home with carpet, a motorcycle, and a video with a remote control. Dolly enjoys buying clothes, and she is: "like her name, dolled-up, [in a] gaudy rural fashion" (16). Dolly and her sons have come a long way economically from the thatched-roofed cottage were she was raised; but she is not happy, because material goods do not negate the

fact that her husband does not love her, and she feels used and betrayed. As a little girl, Dolly had been: "like a film star and she was grandad's favorite," (75) but now she is no man's "favorite," and her sister accuses Dolly of being: "spoilt, you're unhappy, you're running round in circles" (60). Dolly has plenty of money, but emotionally she is unfulfilled.

Dolly is very cynical, and she is sometimes loud, bawdy and vulgar. She says: "Fuck him. I don't know what to do with the money" (23). Dolly has started a savings account with her surplus cash, and she explains the form of retaliation she is planning: "I've made the preliminary enquiries. That little service of fixing someone is available - 'cause it's in demand - even around here. I've discussed that" (57). Her savings account will go toward having herself sterilized, which is illegal in Ireland. Dolly will be free from the burden of future illegitimate pregnancies, and she will be able to punish her husband by giving him no more sons.

Dolly is six or seven months pregnant with another man's child. She is not sure who the father is, but she says: "I have my suspicions" (56). Dreading her husband's Christmas visit this year, she says: "Steven'll kill me . . . Or cripple me" (55). As she describes her relationship with her husband, one realizes that this is a reasonable fear. Dolly recalls his last Christmas visit:

> Jesus how I **hate** him! Jesus how I **hate** them! Men! Had his fun and games with me that night <u>and</u> first thing in the morning. Even sat down to a hearty breakfast I made. Me thinkin', still no warmth, but maybe it's goin' to be okay. Oooo, but I should've known from <u>experience</u> about-the-great-up-stand-in'-Steph-en-evra-body's-fav-ourite. Because the next thing he has me by the hair of the head, fistin' me down the mouth, Old Sharp Eyes [Steven's mother] there, noddin' her head every time he struck an' struck an' kicked an' kicked an' pulled me around the house by the hair of the head. Jesus, men! (Indicating outdoors where she has her sex) You - think - I enjoy! I - use - <u>them</u>! Jesus, hypocrisy An me left with my face like a balloon - you saw a lot of me last Christmas, did yeh? - my body black and

> blue . . . Jesus, how I **hate** them! I **hate** her (Mommo) - I **hate** this house - She **hates** you -I **hate** my own new liquorice-all-sorts-coloured house . . . She! - She! - She **hates** you . . . And I **hate** you (58-59).

Dolly uses the word "hate" often in this speech, and although she sometimes appears glib and flippant, bitterness and fury surface at unexpected moments. The basis of her frustration stems from the fact that she has been severely abused. Dolly describes her marriage: "You don't know terror, you don't know hatred, you don't know desperation" (59).

In some aspects, Dolly is a dreamer. On one hand, she is ruthlessly beaten and neglected by her husband, yet she still fondly remembers when she and her husband were dating. She fantasizes about the early part of their relationship (because the time that is furthest away is the easiest to glamorize), but even before they were married, she never sensed any tenderness from Steven. Dolly says she: "Never once felt any - real warmth from him - what's wrong with him? - but he's my rescuer, my savior. But then no rhyme or reason - He could have got a job at the plant, but he couldn't wait to be gone either" (58). Dolly refers to her husband as her rescuer and savior, and this reinforces the concept that her self-image is dependent on a relationship with a man. She feels no self-worth, so Dolly sleeps with nameless men, hoping to rekindle her sense of self.

Everyone leaves Dolly; her parents, her brother, her uncles and grandfather all die when she is young, and later, her sister moves to England. Even Mommo has been mentally leaving her, as she recedes further into the past, endlessly retelling her story. Since Steven has immigrated to England, (where Mary worked) Dolly feels deserted, lonely and betrayed. She ridicules herself for: "waiting for my hero, my rescuer, the sun shining out of his eighty-five-pounds-a week arse, to come home at

Christmas. No interest in me - oh, he used me" (58). Steven has used her, and now Dolly feels somehow vindicated when she uses other men.

Dolly is a vital character because she focuses the stage action on the present. Were it not for Dolly, arriving on her motorcycle and talking of videos, Bailegangaire would be too centered in the past and Mommo's tale of the laughing contest.[6] Also, "Dolly's raucous vitality and unrepentant hedonism . . . [give] a necessary jolt to Murphy's play."[7] While Mary works to keep the home spotless, her sister jokes about killing the old woman. Dolly says:

> Kill her. And it wouldn't be none of your fancy nurses' potions either. Get them out of bed, the auld reliable, start them walkin'. Walk the heart out of them. No clues left for the coroner for Dr. Paddy. And that's how many's the one met their Waterloo (42).

Dolly provides wry comic relief amid the sadness and disappointment in this play.

Adversity has forced Dolly to mature. Her grandfather fawned over her when she was a little girl, and as an adult, she longs to be treated like a pampered child. Her husband's weekly check makes luxuries possible, but Dolly still does not feel cherished. She withstands abuse, hoping that her husband will eventually treat her with warmth. Dolly finally comes to a significant realization, vowing: "Steven'll never raise a finger to me again" (59). At the end of the play, she sleeps, and Mary acknowledges: "You're going to be alright Dolly." (73) At the resolution of Bailegangaire, the audience is left with the hope that Dolly will break the cycle of domestic violence, creating optimism for this battered wife.

Mommo, the main character in Bailegangaire, is one of the most challenging and magnificent roles ever written for a woman. She lives in

the past, endlessly retelling the story of the laughing contest, because the present is too painful for her to face. She is an eighty-year-old widow who feels directly responsible for the deaths of her husband, her grandson Tom, as well as the untimely deaths of all her sons. Her story focuses on how the town of Bochtan (from the Gaelic "bocht," meaning "poor") came to be known as Bailegangaire, which is Gaelic for: "town without laughter." Mommo must laugh, because since the death of her grandson and husband she has not shed a tear.

The story Mommo tells is in third person, although it becomes apparent that she is speaking of herself. Mommo endlessly tells the tale of the "strangers" (she and her husband) who after a disastrous Christmas market, face the bleak prospect of returning home to their three grandchildren (Mary, Dolly and Tom) with no Christmas presents. Tom dreams of getting a harmonica, but all Mommo has for the children are three pieces of rock candy which later get trampled in a brawl in the pub.

After the Christmas market, the roads are slick, and she and her husband take an alternate route home, stopping in a pub in Bochtan to warm themselves. Mommo's husband challenges a local man, Costello, to a laughing contest. The two men laugh for hours, and wagers on the outcome are placed. They laugh at the misfortunes of life, and the poor people have ample topics. "Nothing was sacred an' nothin' secret," (71) as they laughed about crop failures, cattle disease and unbaptized stillborns.

Mommo's story becomes "hypnotic"[8] and a "ritual";[9] the audience is pulled into the rhythm of her tale, listening with increasing expectation about the strange laughing contest. Mommo explains that five or six hours into the competition, she suggested that the contest be to the death. The aging woman finally reveals the part of the story she has never finished.

Mommo led the laughter by telling of the untimely deaths of all her sons. She feels very guilty about the death of her boys, and she wonders why she drove them all away. As a mother, she believes she betrayed the memory of her sons by making their deaths the topic of a laughing contest. It appears that her husband wins, because his opponent is dying from a respiratory convulsion, but Mommo's husband, showing compassion, lets Costello have the last laugh before he dies. When Costello dies, the townspeople beat Mommo's husband, kick in his ribs and cut his face.

Mommo explains that after the beating, she and her husband did not get home until dawn, and Mary is able to remember what happened next. She and Dolly and their little brother Tom were alone while their grandparents went to the Christmas market. Tom, in excitement and anticipation of their gifts, did not pay attention to the fire, and he tried to rekindle the blaze with paraffin. The little boy caused an explosion and enveloped him in flames. He was taken to Galway, where he died two days later, and their grandfather died two days after that. The audience is so strongly drawn into Mommo's story, and when the tale ends, we, like the women in the play, feel purged.

Mommo finds an emotional cleansing and a renewed ability to mourn when she finally ends her tale: "The story of <u>Bailegangaire</u> begins in the <u>fruitless grief of mutual isolation</u> and achieves its healing atonement through moments of shared laughter,"[10] (emphasis added). Mommo, Mary and Dolly have each been grieving individually, and the play suggests that by sharing in their sorrows, as well as their laughter, that healing will occur. Mommo is finally able to: "bring the family narrative to a conclusion . . . and the three women are collectively able to follow through on Mommo's thirty-year-old suggestion and laugh at their

misfortunes."[11]

Mommo is a monumental character, and critics have compared her to Maurya in Synge's Riders to the Sea, Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan,[12] King Lear[13] and even Job.[14] Mommo strongly resembles Synge's Maurya because there is "the absence of male figures in the lives of both women."[15] Critic Nicholas Grene, in his article "Murphy's Ireland: 'Bailegangaire,'" also discusses a contrast:

> where Maurya is seen as the stoic sufferer struggling with her impersonal and all-powerful adversary the sea, the pain of Mommo's memories is shot through with remorse and guilt . . . In place of Maurya's tragic vision of an implacable fate dooming to death the riders to the sea, Bailegangaire unfolds a vicious cycle of cause and event, character and circumstance, in which the mother is both agent and curse upon the family (emphasis added) (246-247).

Mommo feels responsible for the disasters that have befallen her family, but she emerges from these trials with new resolve and strength. Mommo has King Lear's pride, she suffers destruction like Job, and like Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan, Mommo is a symbol of the strength of Ireland. When she realizes the sadness that comes from isolating herself and mourning in silence, there is renewed hope for Mommo, as well as hope for her family.

Mommo is an extremely complex character, who in her memories sees herself as a daughter, a wife and a mother. She is a strong, independent woman who grows, "tired of waiting male intelligence," (69) [sic] and boldly speaks her opinions. She achieves much of her sense of purpose through her domineering communication style, but in reality, Mommo had a very empty relationship with her husband and her sons. Murphy describes Mommo as "old and senile," (9) but Mommo says of herself: "I'll out do the fox" (10). When the pain of her memories becomes too much, she retreats into the world of her story.

Mommo had been a popular young woman; she says: "They [men] were always after me," (25) and when Dolly asks her if the men caught her, her grandmother replies, "The ones I wanted to" (25). Although she was well-liked, Mommo still seems to be more interested in receiving her father's attentions. The aged Mommo reveres her father, she misses him, and she calls out for him when she feels hurt, guilty or confused. As more is revealed about Mommo's father, we realize how similar she is to him. Mary repeats her grandmother's words, saying: "he was a man to give a tongue-lashin.' An 'twas from him I got my learnin'" (35). From the critical nature of her father's tongue, Mommo learned to use words as a weapon.

Not only was Mommo's father verbally hurtful, he beat his daughter as well. She says of her father, "I'm waiting for someone . . . Oh an' he <u>will</u> come yet. And he has a big stick" (13). She is not waiting for her husband, her sons, nor her grandson, possibly because she feels that she has wronged all of them; instead, she waits for her father. Although he used to beat her and criticize her, Mommo's father made her believe that security lay in discipline, even to the extent that safekeeping lay in a beating; in her old age, she seeks that security.

Mommo's father beat her, and he also hurt her with his unending fatalism. When her father found that she had participated in the laughing contest, he rebuked her severely, because in laughing at their state on earth, Mommo had taken part in: "'a <u>double</u> insolence at heaven.' We weren't meant to be here at all! 'Making mock of God's prize piece, its structure and system'" (71). First, her father suggested that man's very existence was an insolence toward heaven, because man was the flaw in God's creation; secondly, he criticized her for the double insolence of laughing at the handiwork of God. He reminded Mommo: "God will not be

mocked" (72). Mommo learned to be fatalistic and critical from her father, and he taught her that a beating helped to set boundaries in life. She mirrored her father's attitudes and actions in her relationship with her own husband, sons and grandson.

Mommo's father strongly believed in the importance of boundaries, and he instructed his daughter never to step on a snail, or even the trail it leaves behind:

> 'For the snail knows his place,' he groaned,'and understands the constant parameters - and the need for parameters - in the case under consideration, God's prize piece, the earth. And therefore the snail is free, and all he does is in innocence' (emphasis added) (37).

Mommo's father taught her that God's prize piece was not man, but the earth. Her father believed that man was the flaw in creation, and he put man in the same category as the earwig:

> 'I have wrestled with enigmals [sic] (all) my life long years. I've combed all of creation,' that man intoned, 'and in the wondrous handiwork of God, have found only two flaws, man an' the earwig. Of what use is man, what utility the earwig where do they fit into the system? They are both specimens desperate, without control, and therefore unfree. One cocks his head,'says he, 'an' the other his tail. But God will not be mocked. Especially when he was so clever in creating all things else. Still, God must have said, 'I'll leave them there and see what transpires'. An', says me father - (she winks shrewdly) 'Maybe the earwig wasn't doin' too bad at all' (emphasis added) (72).

Mommo's father teaches her a very fatalistic view of life, where man is the flaw because he has no use in God's creation. Her father leads her to believe that man is desperate, and because he has no control, he is not free. Therefore, her father, sets strict "parameters" for his daughter through his verbal criticism and beatings.

Still, Mommo reveres her father, and she anxiously waits for his return; but she anticipates the reappearance of a dead man. All the men whom she has loved are dead, including her father, her husband and all her

sons. One of Mommo's sons (who was the father of Mary, Dolly and Tom) drowned when the children were very young, and his wife later died in childbirth. Tom, Mommo's young grandson, died in an explosion. Mommo and her granddaughters have endured great tragedy, and Mommo: "has suffered an experience so traumatic that she cannot accept it; she must insist that it has happened to someone else."[16] Her story seems to be therapeutic, as she tells it over and over again, repeatedly mentioning: "Tom is in Galway. He's afeared of the gander" (39) [sic]. She hides in the past, (when her husband, father and grandson were still alive) repeating her story like a litany, hoping to absolve herself of guilt.

She deeply regrets leaving her grandchildren alone when she and her husband went to the Christmas market. Mommo feels responsible for her grandson's death, because she left the children without supervision or "parameters." Speaking of herself, Mommo says: "Sure she should've known better. An' she's sorry now. She is. She is. (Whimpering) I wanta see mah father" (38). Mommo describes her father as having fierce rolling eyes, (37) yet she cries: "I wanta see ma father . . . I wanta go home. And he has a big stick" (38). Pretending not to recognize Mary, the old woman orders her granddaughter out of the house, fearing that her father will not return because: "He doesn't like calling when there's strangers in the house" (65). Again she repeats, "I wanta see ma father" (70) [sic]. Mommo's relationship with her father was abusive, and she never learned how to properly communicate with a man; this causes severe ramifications in her relationship with her husband.

In her story, Mommo refers to herself and her husband as the: "strangers" (12). They are literally strangers at the marketplace, and no one will buy from them, but they are strangers to each other as well. She

describes them as an "unhappy couple," (14) and her husband, a small man of sixty, was "unlucky" (14). Mommo is critical of her husband, although she describes a kind, efficient man. In her story, night was falling as they traveled home after the market, and when a hill became too steep, her husband:

> was a decent man, and he took not the belt - nor the buckle end of it as another would - to the noble animal that is the horse . . . No. But spoke only in the gentlest of terms, encouraging the poor beast to try once more against the adversary (13).

Her husband, whom she never calls by name until the very end of the play, was a good and decent man, and she feels guilty because, "An' times, maybe, she was unkind to him" (emphasis added) (14). Here, as in the rest of the story, Mommo is speaking of herself when she uses the third person "she." The events of the story are too painful if she consciously acknowledges that they actually happened to her.

Mommo continues to describe her husband, saying: "the same grey eyes were growing in handsomeness as the years went by. She noted it. But she'd never commented on this aspect of his mein, for strange, it saddened her too. It did" (emphasis added) (15). Over the years they stopped speaking to each other, and Mommo dreaded:

> the silence, save the tick of the clock . . . An' why didn't she break it? She knew how to use the weapon of silence, and why didn't he? A woman isn't stick or stone. The gap in the bed, concern for the morrow, how to keep one foot in front of the other (emphasis added) (16).

Mommo knows how to use silence as a weapon, and so did her husband; both were too proud to be the first to speak, and slowly, the daily anxieties of poverty took all joy out of their relationship.

After selling nothing at the market, she and her husband were: "At the end of their tether . . . They were acquainted with grief" (40).

Mommo felt resentment boiling within her, because her husband was embarrassed that she was crying, and after bringing her a drink, he moved away from her. Being left alone in the corner to cry hurt Mommo, and she began to dwell on the emptiness of their marriage. Mommo says:

> But what about the thing that had been vexin' her for years? No, a woman isn't stick or stone. The forty years in the bed together an' he to rise in the mornin', and not to give her a glance. An' so long it had been he had called her by name, she'd near forgot it herself . . . Bridgit? . . . Hah? . . . An' so she thought he hated her . . . An' maybe he did. Like everything else . . . she hated him too (15).

Mommo fears the men in her family hated her. Mary obviously loves her, and Mommo pushes her away, possibly because the old woman fears she is not worthy of love.

In the story, Mommo's husband wanted to forget the contest and leave the pub because the weather was clearing. Mommo questioned her husband's manhood when she reminded him that he was walking away from a challenge. She defiantly looked at her husband and said, "he's challe'gin' [challenging] ye, he is" (51). Her husband knew he would look weak if he did not participate in the laughing contest after Mommo reasserted the challenge, and: "at a crucial moment of the contest it is the stranger's wife who drives her husband on, in resentment at a long frozen marriage."[17]

An amazing change took place during the laughing competition. It had been so long since Mommo and her husband had laughed together, that they began to look affectionately at each other. Mommo says: "An' didn't he ferret out her eyes to see how she was farin," (68) signifying that her husband is looking to her for approval. She was laughing and slapping her sides, and her husband felt reassured that he was doing well. Speaking of herself, Mommo adds:

> and wasn't she titherin' with the best of them an weltin' her

> thighs. No heed on her now to be gettin' on home. No. But offerin' to herself her own congratulations at hearin' herself laughin'. An then, like a girl, smiled at her husband, an' his smile back so shy like a boy in his youth. An' the moment was for them alone. (emphasis added) Unawares of all cares, unaware of all others. An' how long before since their eyes had met, mar gheal dha greine [Gaelic for: as bright as a sun (beam)][18], glistenin' for each other. Not since long and long ago (68).

Mommo fondly remembers this moment, as she and her husband warmly gazed into each other's eyes. Her husband's opponent tried to catch his breath to ask how they would decide a winner. Mommo did not want the contest to end so soon, and she made the challenge to the death, not realizing that her grandson would be near death himself when they got home. The sad irony is that Mommo and her husband were enjoying each other's company for the first time in many years, but their grandchildren were alone, and when Mommo and her husband were at their happiest, tragedy struck at home.

After Costello died in the laughing contest, Mommo and her husband barely escaped the angry crowd, and he was beaten badly and cut in the process. They returned home to find that Tom was badly burned in an explosion, and both Tom and her husband died during the next four days. Mommo says, "poor Seamus," (75) finally calling him by name on the next to the last page of the script. Seamus and Tom are buried in the same plot, and Mommo did not cry then, nor has she cried since (54). She internalizes her grief, and as time progresses, she decides that it is easier to live in her story world, rather than in the present.

Mommo's past is filled with disillusioned ghosts, and she fears that the way she treated her sons was unforgivable. She had a sterile marriage, and sensing she had lost all influence with her husband, Mommo became a tyrant to her sons. All her sons died untimely deaths, including the father of Mary, Dolly and Tom. Part of Mommo's guilt comes from the

topic of the laughing contest.

Since the old woman has never spoken of the deaths of her sons, she begins a part of the story that neither Mary nor Dolly has ever heard. She speaks of her eldest son, Pat, who married a widow against his mother's wishes. Mommo retaliated by denying him two sheep that belonged to him. Her only power was over her sons, and when her eldest son married a woman whom Mommo felt was not worthy of him, Mommo was alarmed because she saw her power dissolving. She reasserted her strength by forcing a younger son to fight Pat when he tried to reclaim the sheep that rightfully belonged to him. The younger son did not want to fight his brother, but Mommo bullied him into fighting Pat. She says:

> a brother was one thing, but she was his mother, an' them were her orders to give Pat the high road, and no sheep one, two or three was leavin' the yard. <u>They hurted each other</u>. An' how Pat went back empty to his strap of a widdy [widow]. An' was dead within a six months (emphasis added) (70).

The fight was brutal, and her eldest son finally left without the sheep. For the sake of her own pride, Mommo destroyed her relationship with both sons that day; she could have been less stubborn and blessed Pat's marriage, but instead she felt the need to dominate her sons, and this led to the erosion of her relationship with them. Six months later, Pat died of consumption, and because of the old woman's pride, she had never given him her blessing. He died estranged from his mother because she would not recognize that her son's loyalty rightly belonged with his wife.

She deeply regrets setting brother against brother. As she explains the details of the deaths of her sons, Mommo begins to laugh, but it sounds "more like tears trying to get out rather than a giggle" (70). She adds: "Oh she made a great contribution to the role-call of the dead" (70). The significance of this statement reverberates, emphasizing the

fact that she feels directly responsible for the deaths of her sons.

Mommo lost two other sons who drowned in a flood. A ewe was being washed away, and she sent one son to rescue the sheep. When he was pulled under by the current, another brother tried to save him, but both sons were drowned. Mommo says: "An' for the sake of an auld ewe was stuck in a flood was how she lost two others" (71) [sic]. One of the drowned sons was the father of Mary, Dolly and Tom, and Mommo wonders why she valued a sheep over the safety of her sons.

Willie, another of Mommo's sons, moved to America. She demands of herself: "an' <u>did</u> she drive them all away - never to be heard of ever again?" (70-71). Willie died in Kentucky of peritonitis. Mommo raises the death of her sons as a topic of laughter in the contest, and the guilt she feels for laughing at these tragedies overwhelms her. At the time, Mommo laughed because she could not weep; in the intervening thirty years, she has still not learned to mourn, and the old woman continues laughing at her misfortunes. Mommo's mean-spirited, domineering attitude (which she learned from her father) helped to ruin the communication in her marriage, and it also drove her sons away.

Mommo also mistreated her grandson, Tom. Following her father's teachings, she hit Tom to discipline him. She says: "Tom is in Galway. I bet [beat] him with nettles [a coarse herb with prickly, stinging hairs] . . . D'yeh think he remembers?" (65). She sincerely regrets hurting the child. Mommo believes she indirectly caused the deaths of all her sons; by keeping the laughing contest going, she feels she has indirectly caused the deaths of her husband and grandson, as well.

Murphy masterfully creates the old woman in such a way that "we are made to feel with compassion and understanding for Mommo's losses, her

deprivation of the spirit and the destructiveness they produced."[19] Poverty, grief and disappointment enslave Mommo, but she is still a marvel of strength and survival. Mommo has not allowed herself to cry in almost thirty years, but in the cathartic conclusion of the play she softly weeps. Mommo heals as she allows herself to cry, and the play ends as she leads her imagined grandchildren in a prayer:

> to thee we cry. Yes? Poor banished children of Eve . . . To thee do we send our sighs. Yes? For yer mammy an' Daddy an' grandad is in heaven . . . An' tell them ye're all good. Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. And sure a tear isn't such a bad thing Mary, and haven't we everything we need here, the two of us (75).

Bailegangaire ends almost in a benediction,[20] and as Mommo prays, she allows herself to grieve the deaths of her loved ones.

This play concludes with a great feeling of hope. Mommo acknowledges Mary; Mary will have a home with a child; and Dolly, having verbalized her anguish, vows never to let her husband beat her again. Murphy states:

> In the last three or four plays that I've written . . . there is always hope at the end of the play . . . in Bailegangaire . . . there's an expression of hope for the future as the child is about to be born. He is born, if you like, as a symbol of new life and a better one. I seem to be looking for hope, always.[21]

This play ends with optimism because "the ability to mourn has been restored."[22] As in The Morning After Optimism, the characters realize the importance of acknowledging sorrow. When Mommo finishes her story, and admits her pain, she allows herself to grieve and heal.

Bailegangaire is extremely significant because never before has Murphy written a play where the women are all at peace at the play's resolution. Fintan O'Toole observes that at the end of this play, Mary has: "acquired something that no Murphy character has ever had before - a home and a refuge."[23] All Murphy's women are on a journey looking for a

home, and the one true home emerges among women. Murphy's other plays do not imply that a home of women is the only true home, but Bailegangaire's conclusion suggests that it may be the only alternative to the volatile communication problems between husbands and wives. The women in Bailegangaire fight and disagree as well, but they are able to compromise and work together for the good of the family. Mary, Dolly and Mommo are competent, resilient and adaptable, and together they form Murphy's only true home.

Notes: Chapter V: Bailegangaire

[1] Anthony Roche, "'Bailegangaire': Storytelling into Drama," Irish University Review Spring 1987: 117.

[2] Roche, "Storytelling," 117.

[3] Shanahan 18.

[4] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[5] Tom Murphy, Bailegangaire (Gallery Books: Dublin, 1986) 9. All references are to this edition.

[6] Roche, "Storytelling," 126.

[7] Roche, "Storytelling," 126.

[8] Nicholas Grene, "Murphy's Island: 'Bailegangaire,'" Literature and Nationalism ed. Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson (Liverpool UP: Liverpool, 1991) 244.

[9] Grene, "Murphy's Island," 244.

[10] Roche, "Storytelling," 127.

[11] Roche, "Storytelling," 128.

[12] Roche, "Storytelling," 117.

[13] Roche, "Storytelling," 114.

[14] Vivian Mercier, "Noisy Desperation: Murphy and the Book of Job," Irish University Review Spr 1987: 19.

[15] Roche, "Storytelling," 117.

[16] Alec Reid, "Impact and Parable in Beckett: A First Encounter With Not I", Hermanthena CXLI, Winter 1986: 16.

[17] Grene, "Murphy's Ireland," 242.

[18] Grene, "Murphy's Island," 253.

[19] Grene, "Murphy's Island," 247.

[20] Grene, "Murphy's Island," 250.

[21] John Waters, "The Frontiersman," In Dublin 15 May 1986: 28.

[22] Riana O'Dwyer, "Play-Acting and Myth-Making: The Western Plays of Thomas Murphy," Irish University Review Spr 1987: 40.

[23] O'Toole, Politics, 194.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Murphy's women live in a male-dominated society, and they endure disappointments and crises that arise when women subordinate their needs to keep peace in the home. Because the women in these plays usually place their desires below the dreams of the men in their lives, the female characters may appear to play a small role in the plays as a whole. Regardless of the size of the women's roles, however, their presence provides a vital element. The female characters are usually the realists, and they struggle to create a stable home life with men who often focus on their own fantasies.

Much of the women's power lies below the surface: in The Sanctuary Lamp, Maudie's quiet presence brings forgiveness and reconciliation to disillusioned, vengeful men; Betty, from A Whistle in the Dark, has an unspoken civilizing quality balancing the violence of her in-laws, and it is not until she leaves that disaster occurs; Maeve, from Famine, has an inner resolve that keeps her alive while the rest of the Connor children perish. The women have a subtle strength that has a definite effect on the men, although their power is often not overt.

Because the women have so little obvious power, they cling tightly to their goals and dig deeply to keep their plans from slipping away: Mona in A Crucial Week hints at marriage often, and she finally asks John Joe to marry her; Petra in Too Late for Logic is a diligent ambassador, trying to reunite her parents and her family; Dolly, from Bailegangaire, goes to a great extent to hide her adulterous pregnancy from her husband, and in doing so, she realizes her own strength, vowing never to allow her husband to abuse her again; Missus in Conversations on a Homecoming has a hollow

marriage, so she arranges a marriage for her daughter in order to have a satisfying relationship with her son-in-law. The women usually do not have much overt authority, but the power that they do wield has significant repercussions.

Murphy's women characters act as anchors, stabilizing the family in difficult circumstances, and they attempt to restrain the men when they race toward danger. These females represent stability, hope, survival and reality, and the men often become indignant when the female characters show their inner strength.

Murphy has great empathy for his women characters and he feels that the females have a civilizing quality over the men. His women characters have been influenced by Margaret in Goethe's Faust and Solveig in Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Murphy quotes from these plays:

> One of the last lines [in Faust] is, 'It is through womanhood we are uplifted,' and that's the conclusion at the end of that magnificent work. Ibsen took the Faust legend and wrote it as Peer Gynt. At the end of Peer Gynt, Peer Gynt has returned from his wanderings as an old man. His wife is now old, and she asks him, 'Where were you?' and he says, 'I was looking for myself,' and she says, 'How could you have found yourself when you were with me here all the time.'[1]

Murphy believes that women are uplifting, and the quotation from Peer Gynt suggests that the husband cannot find himself without his wife. This is reminiscent of the Irish Man's statement in The Gigli Concert when he says, "The wife. It all boils down to the wife" (72). Murphy's female characters are inspiring, and the men are bound to their wives, even when the husbands are distant.

The women's goals are often in complete divergence from the desires of the men. The women act as foils, helping us to better understand the men; the females are a counterpoint to the men, illuminating the chasm

between the sexes. Fintan O'Toole observes that Murphy's female characters are:

> absolutely essential, but they're essential because they're outside, precisely because they're set at a bit of an angel to the course of the main action, so they have this ability to enter into the action at a crucial time.[2]

The women are similar to a Greek chorus, which is not a part of the main plot, but which comment on the action and raise concerns. The women characters in Murphy's plays occasionally fulfill a similar function: vocalizing questions the audience may have and making observations about the decisions of the men. Like a Greek chorus, Murphy's women play a vital role.

The majority of Murphy's dramaturgy revolves around the conflicts of men, and his plays reflect a society where the concerns of men are dominant and the women's desires are subordinate. Murphy holds a mirror to society, reflecting both the beautiful and the dark aspects of his country. His drama speaks deeply of the Irish experience, but in exploring the pain of the individual, he also addresses a universal concern. In most societies, the women's needs are secondary, and Murphy's plays clearly explore the dire results of a lack of communication in the home.

The needs of Murphy's daughters are usually ignored, yet they have a substantial influence on the plot because they offer hope in dismal situations. Traditionally, the mothers in Ireland lavish most of their attention on their sons, and, on the whole, the daughters have no loving father-figure either. In Too Late for Logic, Petra is the "rock" of strength who keeps trying to bring her family together, no matter how often her father pushes her away; Anne in Conversations on a Homecoming

inspires Michael with her optimism, although her drunken father does not come home; Maeve in Famine offers a bleak hope because she is able to survive the unspeakable horrors of the Famine, and she has learned self-determination; Maudie, from The Sanctuary Lamp, unendingly pursues forgiveness, and that search, coupled with her strong belief in the afterlife, helps to reconcile the feuding Harry and Francisco; also, the memory of Teresa brings Harry peace. The daughters are strongly life-affirming, and even when they are minor characters, they are usually sources of optimism. Often ignored, they are nevertheless symbols of hope, and the young women encourage those around them.

The girlfriends are vital because their attitudes contrast strongly with the confusion and lack of commitment of the boyfriends. Home and the family are the cornerstones of the Irish society, and the girlfriends strive toward stability as they try to establish their own homes. When Mona in A Crucial Week is able to realize that John Joe will give her nothing but pain, she begins to date a man from her own class who is much more likely to make her happy. Peggy stays with Tom and acts as his encourager, hoping that they will finally be able to have a home of their own. Rosie is able to kill the idealized image of herself, and forgive herself for her mistakes; this new understanding suggests emotional healing, which gives her a greater likelihood of achieving her goal of a home. Mona in The Gigli Concert sleeps with many men hoping to conceive a child, while she lavishes affection on her godchild; although she is married, Mona feels that her home is incomplete without a child. The girlfriends are essential because by pursuing a home and children with a single-minded focus, they remind us that the family is still the cornerstone of Irish society.

There is not one happy marriage in the plays of Tom Murphy. The wives are neglected, ignored, abandoned and sometimes beaten. The younger wives occasionally show some assertiveness, but many of the older wives have stopped communicating with their husbands completely. The wives are anchors, because in the face of adversity, they represent survival. Betty, from A Whistle in the Dark finally leaves her husband in order to free herself from the endless conflict; Patricia in Too Late for Logic signs the papers for a legal separation and is finally at peace; the wife in The Gigli Concert leaves her husband, but she returns when she senses that he will not be a threat to the safety of their son. The marriages in Murphy's plays are often empty and sad, but the women become strong in the midst of great difficulty; the wives learn to be self-reliant when their husbands fail them.

The mothers represent practicality, and they often try to dispel other people's illusions. The mothers are self-sacrificing, but usually in a way that controls and alienates their sons. These women gain little emotional satisfaction from their relationships with their husbands, so they overcompensate by making their children the center of their lives. Mother in A Crucial Week builds her life around her son, and she almost succeeds in completely immobilizing him with her all-consuming neediness; Mother in Famine is sincerely self-sacrificing, and she even steals from her neighbors to feed her children when she realizes that her husband has no concrete plan to help assure the survival of their family; Mama in A Whistle in the Dark works as a scrub woman to support her healthy sons; in Conversation on a Homecoming, Missus is married to an alcoholic who avoids her at all costs. Since she has no son to take the place emotionally of her husband, Missus arranges to have a desirable son-in-law, over whom she

fawns; Mommo in Bailegangaire had a hollow, sterile marriage and she compensates for the deteriorating relationship with her husband by dominating her sons. Murphy's mothers are often the anchors of the family in a negative way, and they manipulate their children through guilt and shame. As wives, they have been neglected, and controlling the children gives them a sense of purpose.

None of Murphy's couples is happy, and progressing from daughters, to girlfriends, wives and mothers, the hope in the relationships between the women and men becomes less distinct, but the hint of a positive change is usually present. Murphy states: "I see the under-side [of life] as hopeful."[3] He deals with very challenging topics, but the situation is never irredeemable. In his own words: "there is a hope of filling the darkness."[4] Critic John Waters states: "Much art gives off harsh light and little illumination. Tom Murphy succeeds because he acknowledges the constant likelihood of failure."[5] Murphy's dramas give both light and illumination, and piercing through the cynicism is a sense of hope. Murphy acknowledges how frequently we fail, and Murphy's women characters become strong even when their relationships deteriorate. The playwright states: "I found, like O'Casey, that the woman was the real heroic figure."[6] The women in Murphy's plays are usually the victors because they are able to adapt and become the survivors, which offers optimism for the female characters.

The women may not succeed in their relationships with the men, but the female characters often triumph individually. At the end of A Crucial Week, Mona is free from the selfish John Joe, and she begins a new relationship with a man who is much more likely to make her happy; Maeve survives the Famine with her senses intact, while her father calls out the

names of the dead when food finally arrives; Murphy's women are practical, capable and resilient, and they become strengthened by adversity.

Murphy's females are not the women of the Irish Renaissance: they do not dominate the stage with strength and authority. Instead, Murphy's women are sometimes relegated to the shadows, but their voice is still crucial. Despite the circumstances, the women adapt, make a new plan, and endure: like trees in a storm, they bend to survive. These women are not impervious to pain; as Mommo in Bailegangaire says, "A woman isn't stick and stone" (51). They feel stung by betrayal but the women are tenacious and practical, and they pull power from within themselves to counterbalance the men's lack of care.

Murphy is a humanist, and he reaffirms the belief in the dignity of the human spirit; like Aristophanes, Murphy enables us to smile at our human weaknesses while he deals with serious social concerns. His work shows that people can rise above dire circumstances and create beauty around them; sometimes the beauty is small and almost imperceivable, and at other times a modest act of kindness radiates warmth and hope.

Murphy's women face difficult obstacles with courage and perseverance. As Mona in The Gigli Concert says, "Life, my friend, is bouncing back" (37). Her tone is revealing, because although she has lymphatic cancer and is probably dying, this line is said with a smile. While Mona lives, she will bounce back, and her words become a metaphor for the resilience of Murphy's women as a whole. Murphy's theater is life-affirming; he acknowledges that we must: "go down into the abyss to reach the source of more than a glimmer of hope."[7] His women face the abyss, and through their trials they become tempered and strengthened; the female characters lay a firm foundation of stability, hope, survival and

reality, and they emerge as the vital anchors in Murphy's dramaturgy.

Notes: Summary and Conclusion

[1] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 20 March 1991.

[2] Fintan O'Toole, personal interview, 25 March 1991.

[3] Tom Murphy, personal interview, 28 March 1991.

[4] John Waters, "Wounded Lion," Magill September 1988: 57.

[5] Waters, "Lion," 57.

[6] Jackson 20.

[7] Jackson 20.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Murphy's women play an indispensable role in his dramas. This study explores that aspect of his work, but many additional topics of research exist within Murphy's dramaturgy. Another significant topic to be explored is the strong power of characters in Murphy's plays who never appear on-stage. Some of these characters include: Teresa and Olga in The Sanctuary Lamp, Mama in A Whistle in the Dark, the wife in The Gigli Concert, JJ in Conversations on a Homecoming, Frank in A Crucial Week, the dead family members in Bailegangaire, Steven in Bailegangaire, and Cornelia in Too Late for Logic. Some of these characters are dead, others have immigrated, while some are close by but never appear on-stage. Each of these characters has a great impact on the resolution of the plot, even though they never appear on-stage. The power of absent characters is a meaningful topic for further exploration.

Future study might include Murphy's powerful use of poetic language and the crucial element of music in his plays. Also, both A Whistle in the Dark and The Gigli Concert have been produced in Chicago; future studies might explore the American reaction to these plays, compared with the reception the plays received in Ireland and London. As critic Brian Brennan states in 'Late Great Logic': "Theatre will find new shapes as it moves towards the 21st century and brilliant innovators like Murphy are laying the stepping stones" (19); future studies of Murphy's work might explore the combination of styles that the playwright uses in his innovative writing.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A Time Line of Tom Murphy's Works

1935 - Tom Murphy, the youngest of ten children, is born in Tuam, Ireland. His father immigrates to England to find work as a carpenter when Murphy is nine, and his siblings eventually all immigrate to find jobs; as a boy he is at home with only his mother.

As a boy, Murphy attends a Christian Brothers school. He later trains as a fitter-welder and eventually earns a scholarship to become an industrial arts teacher. Murphy takes a position at Mountbellow Vocational School, teaching metalwork, math and religion.[1]

1959 - Murphy and Noel O'Donoghue write the one-act play "On the Outside."

1961 - The Iron Men, Murphy's first full length play, wins the All-Ireland Amateur Script Competition in Athlone.

1961 - In September, the play, renamed A Whistle in the Dark, receives a production at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East in London. The following month, the play transfers to the West End, when Murphy is only twenty-six.[2]

Very soon after the opening of A Whistle in the Dark in London, Murphy receives inquiries about the film rights. The London Evening News has the headline: "His first play hits the jackpot,"[3] and the story says that "A

schoolmaster's first play . . . is on its way to Hollywood."[4] Peter Rogers buys the film rights, but the censors state, "We'll be watching this one,"[5] when they see the first script. Rogers later loses interest in the project, and the film is never made.

1962 - A Whistle in the Dark is produced at the Olympia Theatre in Dublin; Ernest Blythe, the managing director of the Abbey, intensely dislikes the play and earlier had refused it for production.[6]

1962 - Murphy moves to England, giving up his position as a metal-work teacher.

1962 - On the Outside is broadcast by Radio Eireann.

1962 - Murphy completes the script The Fooleen,[7] which will later be renamed A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant. Murphy sends this play to Ernest Blythe at the Abbey, but it also is rejected.

1962 - in September, Murphy begins writing A Morning After Optimism.

While he is in London, Murphy writes several TV plays, selling The Fooleen to the BBC.[8] He takes classes in play writing at the Royal Court (Tom Stoppard is among his classmates), and he begins writing Famine.

1963 - A Crucial Week is provisionally accepted to be produced by the Dublin Theatre Festival, but they later decline to produce the play

because it has a large cast and requires an enormous set.[9]

1965 - The Patriot Game is commissioned by the BBC TV to be shown the following year, which will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916, but the script is later deemed too expensive to produce.

1966 - Murphy marries Mary Hippisley, an aspiring English actress. They later have three children.

1966 - Murphy submits Famine for the Irish Life Prize in play writing. The play does not win the competition, and the judges announce that: "the entries had been so low that year that no prize money would be awarded."[10]

1967 - a television version of A Crucial Week is screened by the BBC.[11]

1968 - Famine is first produced at the Peacock (the studio theatre in the lower level of the Abbey building); later that year, the production transfers to the Abbey stage.

1968 - in February, A Whistle in the Dark is produced by the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven.

1968 - Orphans is staged at the Gate Theatre for the Dublin Theatre Festival.

1969 - Murphy is commissioned to write a screenplay of Mary Webb's novel Precious Bane. John Houston is to direct, and Paul Newman is to star in the film, but this production does not come to fruition.[12]

1969 - A Crucial Week (written in 1962) is produced at the Abbey. This play predates Brian Friel's Philadelphia, Here I Come! by two years, but Friel's play is produced first, in 1964. Much of the initial impact of A Crucial Week is lost: "because of its outward similarity of theme of Brian Friel's very popular play."[13]

1969 - in October, A Whistle in the Dark is transferred to an off-Broadway venue, the Mercury Theatre. Time calls the play worthy "of every tribute,"[14] and it runs at the Mercury for 102 performances. A New York Times survey votes A Whistle in the Dark the most powerful contemporary drama.[15]

1969 - in November, Famine is produced at the Royal Court in London.[16]

1970 - Murphy returns to Ireland with his wife; he had lived in England for eight years.

1971 - Murphy is asked to join ICEL, the International Commission on the use of English in the Liturgy, a group that works to translate the masses, rites and prayers of the Catholic church from Latin into English. He is one of two laymen on the committee and serves with them for two years.

1971 - the Abbey stages The Morning After Optimism.

1972 - The White House is produced by the Abbey and is well received. The play consists of two parts: the first is subtitled Conversations on a Homecoming and is set in the present; the second half is called Speeches of Farewell, and it takes place in 1963, at the time of John F. Kennedy's assassination; later the order of the two parts is reversed, so they play in chronological order.

1972 - Murphy receives the Irish Academy of Letters Award for distinction in literature.

1972-1983 - Murphy serves on the Board of Directors of the Abbey Theatre.

1973 - The Morning After Optimism is produced at the Manhattan Theatre Club.[17]

1974 - On the Outside receives its first professional stage production at the Project Arts Center, Dublin. The play is directed by Murphy.

1974 - On the Inside is written as a companion piece to go with On the Outside. Both plays are presented at the Peacock Theatre, later transferring to the Abbey stage; they are directed by Murphy.

1974 - Murphy's adaptation of The Vicar of Wakefield is produced at the Abbey Theatre.

1975 - The Sanctuary Lamp opens at the Abbey, causing a reaction that is compared to the riot at O'Casey's The Plough and the Stars. Murphy's play, which is critical of the Church. The President of Ireland rises to its defense, saying that it "ranks in the first three great plays of the Abbey Theatre - The Playboy of the Western World, Juno and the Paycock and The Sanctuary Lamp."[18]

1976 - Murphy's The J. Arthur Maginnis Story is produced by Irish Theatre

1976 - After the adaptation of The J. Arthur Maginnis Story, Murphy gives up writing for several years and buys seventeen acres of wooded land in the foothills of the Dublin mountains.

1976 - On the Outside/ On the Inside are produced at the Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut.

1977 - the Abbey revives The Morning After Optimism.[19]

1977 - RTE produces a televised production of The White House.[20]

1978 - Murphy directs Famine at the Project Arts Theatre in Dublin.[21]

1979 - At the Abbey, his Epitaph under Ether, which is a compilation from Synge, prefaces Murphy's production of The Well of the Saints by J.M. Synge.

1980 - The Abbey produces The Blue Macushla, (Murphy's return to writing)

which was "an obvious parody of American gangster movies."[22]

1981 - Murphy's adaption of The Informer is produced by the Olympia Theatre.

1982 - the Abbey Theatre produces Murphy's adaptation of She Stoops to Conquer, which he places in an Irish setting.

1983 - in May, the Project Arts Theatre produces The Morning After Optimism.

1983 - in October, the Abbey Theatre produces The Gigli Concert as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. After a successful run at the Abbey, The Gigli Concert tours Ireland.[23]

1983-1985 - Murphy collaborates with the Druid Theatre of Galway as Writer-in Association. The Druid revives and tours Famine, and they produce Murphy's one-act On the Outside. Both Conversations on a Homecoming and Bailegangaire premiere at the Druid during this time.[24] The Druid is also responsible for helping to spread Murphy's reputation internationally, touring Conversations on a Homecoming to New York and Australia, and taking Bailegangaire to London.[25]

1984 - the Abbey Theatre's revival of The Sanctuary Lamp closes after a brief run.

1984 - in December, The Gigli Concert is produced at the South Coast Repertory Theatre of Costa Mesa.[26]

1985 - in April, Conversations on a Homecoming premieres at the Druid Theatre.

1985 - the Druid Theatre Company stages a successful production of Famine, later touring the production to small rural communities.

1985 - in December, the Druid Theatre premieres Bailegangaire.

1985 - A Thief a Christmas premieres at the Abbey.

1986-1989 - Murphy works as Writer-in-Association with the Abbey Theatre.

1986 - The Druid Theatre takes Bailegangaire to London.

1986 - The Abbey Theatre finally produces A Whistle in the Dark, twenty-five years after it was written.

1987 - The Irish University Review devotes the Spring issue to Murphy's works.

1987 - Murphy completes the unpublished play Brigit, which focuses on Mommo (from Bailegangaire) when she is younger; RTE TV presents Brigit.

1987 - the Druid Theatre takes Conversations on a Homecoming to London.

1987 - A Whistle in the Dark is revived at the Abbey by popular demand.

1988 - Murphy travels to Chicago to direct the Body Politic's production of A Whistle in the Dark.

1989 - Too Late For Logic premiers at the Abbey Theatre.

1991 - the Abbey Theatre produces a successful revival of The Gigli Concert

1991 - in May, the Abbey produces Murphy's The Patriot Game at the Peacock.

1992 -in February, the Abbey Theatre produces Conversations on a Homecoming.

1992 - in March, the Court Theatre in Chicago produces The Gigli Concert.

1992 - in November, the Abbey Theatre produces A Crucial Week.

1992 - in November, the Abbey produces On the Outside and On the Inside at the Peacock.

1993 - In October, the Abbey Theatre produces Famine for the Dublin Theatre Festival.

Notes: Appendix A

[1] Brian Brennan, "Late Great Logic," Sunday Independent 8 Oct 1989: 19.

[1] Jackson 18.

[2] Fintan O'Toole, The Politics of Magic (Raven Arts Books: Dublin) 9.

[3] O'Toole, Politics, 11.

[4] O'Toole, Politics, 11.

[5] O'Toole, Politics, 11.

[6] O'Toole, Politics, 7.

[7] O'Toole, Politics, 44.

[8] O'Toole, Politics, 71.

[9] O'Toole, Politics, 12.

[10] O'Toole, Politics, 72.

[11] O'Toole, Politics, 14.

[12] O'Toole, Politics, 14.

[13] O'Toole, Politics, 62.

[14] "Fall of the House of Carney," Time 17 Oct 1969: 71-72.

[15] Wendy Fitzgerald, "Love and Death and the Thoughts of Tom Murphy," Irish Independent 16 Sept 1989: 14.

[16] O'Toole, Politics, 15.

[17] Christopher Griffin, "The Audacity of Despair: 'The Morning After Optimism,'" Irish University Review Spring 1987: 63.

[18] O'Toole, Politics, 13.

[19] Griffin, Irish University Review, 63.

[20] O'Toole, Politics, 13.

[21] O'Toole, Politics, 12.

[22] O'Toole, Politics, 122.

[23] Patrick Mason, "Directing 'The Gigli Concert: an Interview,'" Irish University Review Spring 1987: 108.

[24] O'Toole, Politics, 15

[25] O'Toole, Politics, 15.

[26] Mason, Irish University Review, 109.

APPENDIX B

Personal Interview with Tom Murphy
March 20, 1991

HILL: I read in an earlier interview [in A Paler Shade of Green by Des Hickey and Gus Smith, published by Leslie Frewin in 1972] that you had been influenced by Tennessee Williams and Federico Lorca. How did these playwrights influence you?

MURPHY: Part of my first reaction was because they weren't Irish. Growing up in a small town in the West of Ireland (or indeed any part of Ireland) would appear to most young people to be dead-end lives, and, I suppose, attendant on that would be a degree of national inferiority.

When I discovered Lorca, my response was to some sort of poetic quality he had. I had played in a production of [Synge's] Playboy [of the Western World] and that obviously stirred my imagination. It was perhaps ten years later that I discovered that Lorca was influenced by Synge, so I was finding my way back to Synge through Lorca. Lorca's plays were generally about the rural type community, and I suppose I could identify with that aspect of the work.

Before I go onto Williams, I don't think I've at all got an academic point [of view], in the sense that I ever studied anybody. I never studied drama - that may be fortunate or unfortunate, it's not for me to say. (I'm explaining of the things I said in the sixties, in that I was influenced by this work or that one, and really, I don't know what I was influenced by. Frequently when people say that they were influenced by

other writers, it's because they have studied them: there are degrees of consciousness about their interest in those writers, which would have been greater than my interest in Williams or Lorca. My attitude is more instinctive, I think.

On the Williams side of things: there was tremendous admiration for Arthur Miller [in Ireland] - I suppose we were beginning to spread our wings a little in terms of looking for plays outside of Ireland. I accepted the opinion that Miller was the greatest. My way to Williams was a fairly round-about one. My sister (the next in age older than me in my family) and some other girls in town had been in the Legion of Mary. A film was coming to town called A Streetcar Named Desire and they were warned [by the Legion of Mary] not to go to the film. Some of them did go, including my sister, and the five of them were expelled from this group because they went to the film.

That, I suppose, made me more watchful of Williams, and, when on a handcart outside a second hand book shop I came across a copy of A Streetcar Named Desire, I read it. And I thought it was a knockout. I responded to the language that Williams wrote in, though I wasn't able to analyze it in any conscious fashion; I responded to a poetic element. It seemed to be charged with a form of energy.

Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, and so on, and indeed, now, Miller, appeared to be chalk marks on the wall - I read that, I read that. But A Streetcar Named Desire was a real punctuation mark for me. I encountered dialogue for the first time that became meaningful for me. With the Russians and the Swedes, and in Miller, there's an awful lot of moralizing, whereas in the best of Williams, he never moralizes, which I think is a superior form of drama. So when I talk about influences in my

life, that is the sort of way I'm influenced by Williams: his dialogue, the energy in it, and he does not moralize.

Synge: I like his extravagant language. I like his sense of the outrageous. I recall a remark that a colleague of mine made ten or fifteen years ago: a playwright named Tom Kilroy said that there wasn't enough lunacy in the theatre, and I subscribe to that. The theatre I try for has broader strokes: I'm searching for a big sort of drama, hence, the extravagance of Williams, the extravagance of Lorca, the extravagance of Synge, they sort of suit my personality, they appeal to me.

HILL: Your work contains many styles. One critic states that your play Famine is like the Theatre of Cruelty because the devastation of the Famine was like the plague, and Artaud likens theatre to the plague.

MURPHY: I never read Artaud and his theories on the theatre. In my approach to theatre - I don't know if it's a debit or a credit - I've generally tended to go my own way. I have come across people who have said that my characters can be extremely harsh, but my characters are sheep or lambs in wolf's clothing - they are innocent underneath. There is a terrible lie that I feel can be in the theatre, which would be the reverse of that - the wolves in sheep's clothing. In The Little House on the Prairie or The Waltons, when life is presented so simplistically, there would appear to be a total denial of any dark color that exists within us. I try in my writing to celebrate the possibility of that which leads to dark colors.

Usually, the harsher characters, such as Harry in A Whistle in the Dark, have been unduly idealistic in youth or childhood, and the

subsequent disenchantment brings on extreme harshness. It's as if those characters are interpreting life as a betrayal. They've been given a lie, and that life has betrayed them - so they react very harshly.

It's a bit of a tangent, but when A Whistle in the Dark was first done in 1961, thirty years ago, women didn't like the play. But when it was revived three years ago, I'd say that out of the one-hundred people who came up to me during the run, here and in London, to say 'well done,' I'd say ninety of them were women. That in itself is almost worthy of some sociological study. I had a feeling that the women sympathized greatly with Harry. We know he's the most vicious and violent - he's a pimp. He's up to all sort of nasty things. I think Harry speaks for the "thick" people of the world. I wondered if the feeling of second-class citizenship that has been put on women, that perhaps there was some sort of a note that the women got from that. Harry, whether you like him or not, is the most honest of them. It is unfortunate that things are black and white. Harry would not accept the gray of it.

HILL: A Whistle in the Dark has been called naturalism, and in A Crucial Week there are dream sequences that are surrealistic and sometimes seem a bit absurdist. Is there any style in which your writing could be categorized?

MURPHY: No. I'm sure that there are stylistic trends in my work, but I find that the subject matter dictates the style that the play is going to be written in. I'm not sure, at this stage, who the guy Tom Murphy was who wrote A Whistle in the Dark. I was twenty-four when I wrote it - I hadn't even seen perhaps five professional plays at that stage. (My

background was more film. My reward for the week was to go to the cinema - a Sunday matinee.) The style of A Whistle in the Dark is dictated by the subject, but it was also dictated by the limit of my knowledge about plays. It's in the mold of what used to be called the well-made play, the mold of Miller, the three-act type of play.

Frequently, when one reads a book on how to write a play, [it does not discuss] the nonsense element that goes into writing. The stupidity of a writer can be an asset, peculiarly. All those books tend to forget, above all else, that the writer is human, and to be human is to err and to be capable of incredible nonsense. Sometimes the nonsense, at the end of the draft, can be much more significant than the stuff that one starts out with, thinking the original stuff more important.

I'm unsure about how the style comes upon a play, but one of the reasons, for instance in The Grocer's Assistant, would be that the central character John Joe is very much a silent type. I seemed to have a principle character here who would appear to have nothing to say. Perhaps, then, the device that arose in my mind is that he has dreams, so that in dreams he vocalizes, he articulates, his confusion and frustration. The surrealistic style of the play could have derived, therefore, from the fact that the man, at the outset, had nothing to say. I'm sure there is some sort of autobiographical aspect in that character - in terms of the guy who can't live in his hometown and can't leave it. I had to find some sort of device whereby a silent man could articulate his problems and concerns.

The Morning After Optimism: I'm very wary of those felicitous phrases that pretend to encapsulate the meaning of a play, but let's say that it is about the tyranny of the idealized self, to use that grand phrase.

That's very much interior stuff, and it's not in my manner, and it doesn't interest me in the slightest to try to write in a Pinter fashion or a Beckett fashion. But, because it is interior stuff, and it is about the idealized self, that in turn would seem to suggest to me that it is a fantasy, so I set it in a forest.

There's another aspect of my work which compliments, to some extent, what I'm talking about. The first play I wrote was in collaboration with a friend of mine [Noel O'Donoghue] called "On the Outside." It's set outside a dance hall. I was standing in a square in my hometown after the last mass on a Sunday and my friend said to me, 'Why don't we write a play.' It was as casual as that. And I said to him, 'What will we write about?' And he said, 'One thing is for sure - it won't be set in a kitchen.' There seems to be something in my writing that tries to get away from the knives and forks and soup spoons - the 'pass the salt, darling'. When Pinter writes 'pass the salt darling,' that could possibly mean 'I hate you' or 'I want to kill you.' I'm not interested in that. I need something more extravagant, so we get the outside of a dance hall in On the Outside. We get a forest in The Morning After Optimism.

I had been predominantly associated with the Abbey, and it's a notoriously difficult stage, so formal. They were always putting in false prosceniums, false arches, and so on, to narrow the space. Also, in those days - I think it was a tradition that had come from the so called 'Golden Age' - if you had a pillar on stage, it would be truncated. Deliberately on my part, in Morning After Optimism, I said the trees stretch up so high that I do not see the branches. I wanted trees twenty-eight feet high. I wanted to use all that space, whether the budgets could afford it or not - not these broken off things. Similarly, in Sanctuary Lamp, great columns

dwarf the human form. When my characters come on stage, particularly a stage like the Abbey, subliminally, one sees them as victims immediately, because they're dwarfed by the trees, by the columns in the church.

Because we've been talking about the sets and the style, it's interesting that in Bailegangaire (which happened twenty-five years after A Whistle in the Dark) that I returned, but very deliberately, to the kitchen. The kitchen, at this stage, was almost unnormal in Irish theatre. It's associated with plays that were written in the forties and before that, but I deliberately wanted a kitchen in this case. The characters are close to the earth, they're earth-bound. They cannot remove themselves from the past; they cannot get into the future, so I returned to the kitchen.

I was writing it in 1983-1984, and we associate 1984 with George Orwell. I thought, there's really no Big Brother watching these three women; they're forgotten. It is forgotten that people are crawling on the face of the earth. I'm not saying that it would be desirable to have Big Brother watching, but we have, as of late, become so incredibly sophisticated, biomechanical, etc., but there are a lot of people crawling on the earth. I go to the West [of Ireland] quite a lot, and I notice a guy bagging turf, peat out of the bog, in a plastic bag, and he's up to his knees in mud - he's like a primitive man. But he's got a Walkman on his head - those contradictions happen. These three women are living their lives in this thatched house, and down the road there's a Japanese plant making some sort of data processing equipment, and they haven't a clue even what it's for. These strange anomalies happening - a data plant, Japanese owned and run, and you've got three women living in a thatched house.

HILL: In Bailegangaire the women all have severe problems with the men in their lives. Fintan O'Toole, in The Politics of Magic stated that your plays reflect: 'a failure of communication between the sexes, often erupting into violence. Men hunt in packs and women hang on, often becoming the victims of the men frustrations . . . in almost every case, the women are abused by the man who loves them . . . Love frustrates and paralyzes Murphy men.' Could you comment on O'Toole's observation?

MURPHY: Well, it's a very difficult thing for me to do - my response is instinctive. I don't seek to reflect upon the manners or mores. I seem to absorb what is happening around me, and indeed, what is happening within my own life. But what I absorb from a fairly full life (in the first sense of living one's life, and in the second sense from what I read and see in the theatre and film) - that is gestated in some sort of way by me and then reflected back. I don't set out to think about it. I don't set out to present it as part of a wisdom that I have acquired.

I think that a mistake is made, in the suggestion of Fintan O'Toole's (and he is one of the better critics and commentators) and from academics in general. They assume that there is some sort of scientific, analytical process at work. One could say that it's as if they think, predominantly, that a play is a presentation of an intellectual process. I don't set out to be a reporter, but in the way that I grew up, there was an extraordinary demarkation between the sexes, in the sense of going to church - that women didn't sit beside their husbands, in general. There was the women's side of the church and the men's side. In the fifties, when I was growing up, women started going into the pubs then, but they didn't sit on the bar stools. That was frowned upon.

HILL: Why was that?

MURPHY: The pub was the terrain of the male. Practically all of the country, leaving Dublin out of it, is a rural community. There were some sort of puritanical attitudes to it all. I'd imagine a bar stool was a fairly high thing to sit on, and perhaps a woman shouldn't show her ankles, or that she shouldn't be propped up on a stool, and that this would appear to be an unseemly place for a woman, but not for a man. Also, in the habits of those days, the woman never bought a round of drinks - it's totally acceptable now. There was a type of rigidity that existed between the men and the woman. The sexual repression prevailed, and perhaps does, to a certain extent.

My present interest [is] the pursuit of the woman in my plays. I find them infinitely more interesting. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that I'm bored to death with men. One of the reasons women interest me is that, it would appear that their function in life is more clearly defined. I'm <u>not</u> saying keep them pregnant and keep them in the kitchen, but that at least the first function of life would appear to be to recreate the species. Though essential, the role of man fertilizing the egg is of very brief duration, and very insignificant compared to the biological function the woman has in <u>creating</u> the child. And a child is something that is <u>tangible</u>. A man can write as many plays as he likes, but man generally tends to deal in abstracts. The woman has a greater sense of direction.

I was talking to three woman friends here one evening about a year ago, and they started to talk about theatre. I think that the statistic is that 7% of the roles in the whole canon of dramatic literature are for women, and why should this be? The obvious answer is that men write, and

have written these plays. Women playwrights have been few and far between. And then we went from that to why aren't women writing plays. They had interpreted my remark simplistically, and perhaps I put it too simplistically, but I was claiming that women don't have to write plays. I'm not saying that they should not be creative, but that man is chasing his own tail, forever in abstracts - whether it's literature, or art, he seems to be going round in circles.

An example that I found myself giving a year ago - I was asked to do this Yeats festival every year at the Peacock [the studio theatre at the Abbey Theatre]. A few of us would be asked to read a favorite Yeats poem. I did 'Salley Gardens' - and talk about it for a few minutes. Then I talked about Goethe's Faust. Goethe took sixty years to write it, although he wrote a vast amount of things in between. One of the last lines is, 'It is through womanhood we are uplifted,' and that's the conclusion at the end of that magnificent, massive work.

I talked about Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Ibsen took the Faust legend and wrote it as Peer Gynt. At the end of Peer Gynt, Peer Gynt has returned from his wanderings as an old man. His wife is now old, and she asks him, 'Where were you?' and he says, 'I was looking for myself,' and she says, 'How could you have found yourself when you were with me here all the time?'

I then talked about 'Salley Gardens'. In the 'Salley Gardens,' Yeats does the same thing, as far as I'm concerned, in eight lines. 'But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.' The three pieces that I mentioned come back to the woman's role as the anchor.

In my own case, in Famine, there was a very conscious attempt on my part, in the opening of scene three. The mother figure comes out to talk

about the reality, and her husband starts to talk about this abstract right. What I was looking for there was the distinctive attitudes of the male and female. In times of crisis, a woman is forced to face reality.

In 1964, I read Labor in Irish History by James Conolly, and I came across the phrase, 'Man is a slave and woman is the slave of a slave,' and that has been a great source of promotion of my interest in the status of women. The phrase may be obvious, but it's the obvious that usually is the surprise. In fact, I use a version of that phrase in Famine.

It's possible that men are jealous of women . . . I'm trying to interpret Fintan's remark about the brutalizing of the women. Maybe Fintan [O'Toole], got it from A Whistle in the Dark when Michael hits Betty, which is a terrible moment on stage. I think one of the reasons he hits her is because she is the weakest, physically, and that is a very cowardly act. But another reason could possibly be - I don't know - a terrible guilt. She has declared a type of dependence on him, a demand for affection. They are a young married couple, and he cannot provide this. So maybe it is in this absence of being able to do anything constructive that they [cause] hurt.

I've found in my own life, and indeed, in some characters that I've written, that when you offend somebody - you offend them in an appalling way - the instinct then is not to apologize, but to exceed yourself. A guy said to me one night about a fight he'd had, and indeed, I could see there were tears in his eyes. He was not a violent man, but he said, 'I hit this guy - and because I hit him the first time, I hit him the second time.'

HILL: You said earlier that the woman is the anchor in your plays. Is she

the anchor of the family - the anchor of relationships?

MURPHY: I'd say it's Mother Earth in the make up of a woman. I tend to talk about biology - in the menstruation, lactation, the function of the womb. I mean, I've got tits also, but they're useless to me. The woman seems to fit into the order of things more. In Gigli, when JPW talks about his father, he sums up an attitude I have that men feel spare, that men feel lost. JPW is looking at his father and he says, 'But fathers, you know, frowning, looking at their flowers and vegetables as if they were puzzled by them. I think that they feel a little spare, and that is a pity.' Men may pretend otherwise.

I go to this pub up the road where I have lunch most days, and last week I saw a party of young business women, from a bank. They were sitting around a table chatting. They chatted right through the meal, in a most natural fashion. That particular day I saw two men at a table, and one had a sculptured mustache and a cellular phone. There were long pauses in the conversation with the men. And the one with the phone, perhaps he did validly have to make a call to somebody, but it seemed a very rude thing to do. Would one of the women have done that? She would leave the company to make the call. But frequently, I see these guys with cellular phones, and it's like men with toys.

HILL: In The Gigli Concert, neither King nor the Man is able to tell the woman in their lives that he loves her. That was such a moving moment last night [at the opening of the Abbey revival of The Gigli Concert] when the Man was telling the story to JPW about how his wife knelt before him in her night dress, with her long hair, resting her head on his knee, and

she told him that she loved him. The Man said, 'I love you too, but I didn't say it out loud.' And then as Mona leaves, she says to King, 'I love you.' And it's not until she's gone that he says that he loves her. Why can't the men tell the women they love them?

MURPHY: It's that they don't trust themselves. And they might be telling lies. I set out to find a symbol of Irish manhood, the Man [in The Gigli Concert], in this case, and clearly he represents a type in this country. He has sold his soul for his wealth, and he has absolutely no self-esteem. He can count his assets; he probably drives a Merc. He lives in a big house, but in terms of integrity, in terms of being true to the spirit that still faintly sings within him - a spirit he remembers but that is gone. He's dirty, and perhaps that is part of the reason.

I can't define it. I'm not evading the question; it's something that I apprehend rather than comprehend. What I think I try to do in writing is to recreate the feeling of life, not to represent it. As I said earlier, I don't think writing is a presentation of an intellectual process. I try to recreate the feeling of life.

I think that writing is retaliation, of a form. I'm not talking about a petty or petulant or 'hard-done-by-life' reaction - I'm not talking about retaliation in that sense. 'Retaliation' in inverted commas. I resent the fact that, let's say, there is a God, and that in quite an arbitrary, whimsical sort of fashion, He can decide that I cry at this moment, and I laugh at the next. It's almost as if life, in the manner or person of God, is a puppet-master, and He's manipulating my emotions and my aspirations. When I say that writing, or art, is possibly a retaliation (that if I can recreate the feeling of life), then I'm

saying, 'Look, I can do it, too!' And, therefore, I become more alive in art, because I am mastering life, in a sense, by recreating life.

When people say to me on a first night, what did you think of the reaction, I have said, 'I couldn't care less.' I could. I want people to clap; I want them to stand up, if possible. I want them to keep coming to the theatre. But that again, it's like a 'vindication' when the thing works. Obviously the whole business is a collaborative one, but writing - creative writing, creative anything - anything in the arts is an anti-social business. In a sense it's voluntary solidary confinement. I live alone. I choose to live alone. I live a separate existence, at least geographically, from my family. When a play works, there is some form of vindication in it of my way of life . . . The vindication happens if the thing works.

I was talking about what I set out to do - recreate the feeling of life. I think religion is feeling. It is not equation, it is not liturgy . . . religion is feeling. It is again an apprehension of the divine: the divine within ourselves, the divine that is in all mankind - rather than a comprehension. I don't think we can understand it. In a play, what I set out to do is recreate the feelings of life - it seems to be ultimately about feelings.

HILL: You mentioned that religion is not liturgy. You served on a committee that put the liturgy into English. Could you explain your responsibilities?

MURPHY: It's an American based organization. It's called ICEL, which is the International Committee on English in the Liturgy. It's Washington

based. In 1971, I was very surprised to get an invitation to join this international committee. We were a committee who advised bishops, an advisory committee to the Episcopal committee. There are, I think, seventy million Catholics in America, and this organization ICEL would supply the text, if you like, for the mass for the vast majority of the English speaking Catholic world. The committee met usually twice a year, and usually somewhere in the English speaking world, though we met on a few occasions in Rome, Toronto, Washington and London.

I think the reason I was asked to join this organization was because there had been one meeting in Dublin which coincided with a play of mine, The Grocer's Assistant, which isn't particularly flattering to the church (which surprised me the more, that I should get this invitation). I think also, that since the playwright writes for the spoken word, and that the liturgy is meant to be spoken, they thought I would have a contribution to make. At the time, I was fed up with my own bitterness about the church, and sick to death of meeting my contemporaries and the same old subject would come up: what they did to us at school. They were Christian Brothers or priests - tired old subject. [In other interviews, Murphy related that the brothers beat the students at the Catholic school he attended]. I felt, well, here's an opportunity to do something constructive, so I wrote back saying that I was interested, but that I felt that they should know, at the outset, that I wouldn't wish my Catholic background on anybody. So they wrote back and said something to the effect of, we're all having our problems, but we'd still like you to come along, and I did. I stayed with them for two years. We were re-doing all of the missives, which is a vast undertaking.

The first thing I came upon was the usual twelve man committee. Ten

of them were theologians and just two of us were laymen. There were no women on the committee at that time. The first piece of work I was involved in was 1,800 prayers - the opening prayers, the communion prayer, the post-communion prayer. We were trying to find a new shape to the presentation of those prayers. I found I was good for about six - but 1,800 of them! They're like cockroaches coming at you. You can kill the first six.

We had joint meetings with the bishops and a cardinal or two. It was a wonderful experience, and a privilege, to watch and be with bishops and cardinals 'talking shop.' They were very, very fine people individually, all of them. But I felt that collectively, it didn't make sense to me - all these formulas and equations. And also, I think I had some naive hope that I was going to find some sort of personal salvation in the church of my background through this experience. But I found that it was completely wrong of me to be working on this kind of material that was very meaningful to other people around the world, but that I didn't believe in it at all, so after two years, I resigned.

HILL: In the <u>Sanctuary Lamp</u>, it's the goats rather than the sheep that Francisco says will come to paradise. [Jesus said the goats would be damned.] Why do you have the <u>goats</u> coming to paradise?

MURPHY: Well, I suppose that in my childhood I was very frightened by the kind of religion I was being given - the thought of dying in one's sleep and going straight to Hell. 'He will come like a thief in the night.' When I was growing up, if you said the word 'fuck,' it was a mortal sin. I'm sure the priests didn't consider it as such, but that was my belief

and other children' belief.

Just to get back to ICEL for a while, apart from those prayers, we were dealing with various rites, the extreme unction. I was pointing out that there was an undue emphasis on the recipient of extreme unction (whether he or she could speak) that they were asked to say, 'forgive me for my sins.' I found that there was an awful lot of cruelty there. Suppose that this person is dying, and they're receiving the sacrament. One is looking for solace, not to be made to feel guilty.

The street that I grew up on eventually became a street of widows, almost. It was markedly widows, my mother being one of them, and I think that I saw three women kiss the corpse of the departed husband, and the final words were, 'I'm sorry.' The woman was saying that to the man. I understand it more now, but it's a dread business coming out of a culture (and our culture is so imbued with religion) that after this shared mystery of life together, that the final good-bye was an apology for life. I'm not sure that it's related, but the church is creating this feeling of guilt, or helping to compound the idea of guilt.

At the age of sixteen, I had one of those retreats at school when one observes the silence for three days and makes a general confession. I remember being refused absolution because I had a girlfriend. He asked me the usual list of sins: took the Lord's name in vain, was rude to my mother, and 'company keeping' - that was the phrase. The priest said, 'How often do you meet?' She was a girl in a convent school nearby, so it was roughly every two to three months that I'd buy her a six-penny ice-cream or something. And he said, 'Do you write to her?' And I said, 'Twice a day.' And he said, 'Arousing your passions!' I was a very late developer. I didn't know what he was talking about. In any case, there

was no absolution for me: he said I'd have to give her up. I held my silence. He said if I changed my mind to come back at half-three. And I'm proud of myself to this day that love triumphed.

But I was in dread for the next few nights when I went to bed. I thought I was in a state of mortal sin. And then on a Saturday night, I went to another priest and told him the same thing. He absolved me and said, 'Say three Hail Marys.' But I knew my mind wouldn't rest easy. I said I'd been refused absolution, and I told him the story. He said, 'Say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys.' He couldn't let his colleague down. The other guy was obviously a bit of a nut-case.

I seem to be very interested in the outsider, the people who are outside society, outside the church. I know a friend of mine whose sister was refused a burial in a cemetery in his hometown because she had died giving birth to a baby, and she was unmarried. It [the church] seemed to be very, very lacking in any form of humanity or generosity, so I say that it's the goats that will be saved, taking The Sanctuary Lamp again. It's been called the most anti-clerical play ever staged in this country. People said that Francisco was a blasphemer - they said that he was probably Irish and his name was probably Sean or Seamus. I said, but the blasphemer is closer to God than the person who observes all the rites of the church, because the blasphemer would appear to be constantly thinking about God, and fighting God - rather than you or me going to church on Sunday or observing our Easter duties.

I don't think I'm unduly perverse in my attitude. I do tend to say that I don't believe in God, or heaven or hell, but supposing there were to be that, I say that I would like it to be the case that the goats are the ones to be called in [to heaven]. I'm not saying that the good should

be punished because they're good. It's the facade of the church - pretending to be Christian - that the Catholic Church is the one true church. (I like goats!)

I claim not to be overtly political, but one can't escape certain things that are happening on this island in the North. During the seventies, I'd read that the churchmen were going to sit around the table to see what they could do, and I thought to myself that they'd cause the Third World War.

I don't want to sell ICEL short, but there was a discussion about 'Our Father who art in heaven' or 'Our Father which art in heaven,' and the opposing sides appeared to be unyielding. I put it forward then that the resolution would appear to be to drop the pronoun entirely and say 'Our Father in Heaven,' so you don't have a 'who' or a 'which.' They continued unyielding.

I don't see the church has much to offer humanity. There's another pet one of mine. Within Christianity, we're told that we're all brothers. I say we're not all brothers, and that history has proven this. Man has fought man since Cain and Abel. If you declare we're all brothers, I say no we're not. If you want to base it on a lie and say that we're all brothers from the start, then I think it's going to be more difficult to evolve a civilization.

In The Sanctuary Lamp, Harry has murderous intentions towards Francisco, yet the two of them have talked themselves sober at the end. They have talked themselves into a new civilization. There's a shade of the Oresteia in it - an influence, added to Williams and Lorca. It's very sparse knowledge I have of Greek theatre, but it excites me. In the Greek theatre there is a deus ex machina who is there to descend and resolve the

problems.

In The Sanctuary Lamp, the gods only provide the venue, which is an empty church. (There is no dues ex machina.) There's an indication from Harry at one stage that the gods - not only are they unable to help us - but they're in wheelchairs. At the end of the play, it's humanity itself that the solution is derived from (not from a church or from a God). In fact, looking at it religiously, the play could be boiled down to the second of the two great commandments, of loving your neighbor, which is forgiving your neighbor.

I think that to invest the idea of forgiveness in an institution is a cop-out by mankind. It is much better that we, as humans, try to resolve with each other, rather than praying to so-called gods. In Gigli, I wrote, 'God made the world in order to create himself'; thus, we are god. It's a repeating interest that wouldn't have struck me at the time, but now I can see my hacking away at that.

With the goats, there's a sense of sin, shame and guilt, so personally, I'm reacting as a creative writer, and I try to make that reaction artistic. I like goats!

HILL: Famine is a magnificent work. Could you please explain how the Famine affected you a hundred years later?

MURPHY: I read The Great Hunger and I was enthralled by it. It was a compulsive read. I found it difficult to put down. One of the reasons I reacted so strongly was the nature of my upbringing. Generally, the people in the country seemed to have the mentality that seemed to belong to the last century. The ideas and notions of thrift that are inculcated

in me, in terms of frugality - I felt like a Famine victim.

[The Famine] is perhaps the biggest punctuation mark in the history of our country. I thought that the famine dealt with scarcity of food, but the famine is also about a poverty of love and tenderness - the natural extravagance that is within humans to blossom and flower. It's human nature to be extravagant, and this was exterminated by the nineteenth century mentality, and in that way, I felt I was a Famine victim.

The play is more about survival - survival, but at what cost? You've got John Connor who was stubborn man. It's not the atrophying of the physical embodied in the Famine that makes him choose the pacifist line; it's the abstract. It goes back to a conversation we were having earlier about 'right.' In any case, that's the explanation I have of what I felt. I was born in 1935 and I felt a poverty of love.

HILL: How does the term 'poverty of love' affect the characters? There is a lack of tenderness and intimacy in the relationships between the men and the women characters. Does this have its roots in the Famine?

MURPHY: I'm very reluctant to pin anything down to one moment. When I work with actors and we have to analyze a play, they'll say 'Why that?' and, maybe unfortunately for them, I'll give them six reasons, so they have to dig it out and integrate them. Similarly, I don't think that the problems to do with the distorted mentality (if the Irish have a distorted mentality) started solely with the Famine, but it was a major factor. And indeed, back to Gigli and the Irishman being unable to reply 'I love you, too.'

There's a scene in Famine that has the ironic title 'The Love Scene.' It's really trying to make love in a graveyard. Not among the dead people, but the living dead out there as well. In the shape of that scene, I had the sixteen-year-old girl, and her attitude is more like that of a bitter old hag. And then, through a gesture of kindness (a very small thing, an apple) almost against her will, she becomes a sixteen-year-old again, and they become tender. It's when they're at their most tender that I introduce the poverty and the imminent death of the stranger.

In that play, the first scene is deliberately much more poetic than the others, to try to show a softness and a tenderness that existed. The action of the first scene isn't as soft, but the language is deliberately softer. To go back to an earlier question, the environment that those people are trying to live in creates the situation whereby endearments are luxuries that cannot be indulge in.

More relevant to what we're saying with the man/woman relationship, in the scene 'The King and the Queen,' I deliberately gave them the name Connor. They would have been from the O'Connors [an ancient ruling family in Ireland]. In his playing in the abstract, he develops a sense of grandeur about his ancestors - they were kings. But [in that scene] he wants to make love to her. I heard in my youth that the itinerants, the tinker people who travel around the country, (many of them called Connor) have a phrase 'fuck or freeze.' When you think about it, without the heat, you can freeze to death, and it [sex] becomes a function, just to keep warm. And that is poverty.

When I was working in the sugar factory in Tuam, there were country people who cycled in six or seven miles in the morning, and it was not

unusual to hear that a guy would see the itinerants when cycling in. They frequently were living in tents on the side of the road, and they wouldn't be water-proof; they'd be made of old bags. And they'd see a child's legs sticking out under the tent covered with frost - a baby. So they're familiar with that kind of poverty. But it's interesting that you bring up Famine and the poverty of tenderness and love. That prevails in grasping Irishmen.

APPENDIX C

Personal Interview with Tom Murphy
March 28, 1991

HILL: In a recent interview with Kate Shanahan, she asked about an earlier statement you made that a woman's role was to teach man how to live. You answered her with a quotation from Goethe's Faust . . .

MURPHY: 'It is through womanhood that we are uplifted.'

HILL: Yes. Are there any other ways you see women teaching men?

MURPHY: Again, I'm prefacing whatever I say with that it's not an intellectual concept that I pursue or follow up. I see the whole fabric of woman as a civilizing influence. In general, men are destructive and go to war and do the fighting. Men do the fighting in the pubs, men do the fighting in the streets, men are the muggers. And I don't think, in this case, that it has to do with the physical difference between men and women. Women are gentler, in the gentle way that nature evolves. They seem to be more in tune with the finer things in nature.

I don't see myself as a feminist or an anti-feminist. There are pros and cons to each side and dangers in people declaring themselves to be preponderantly for career or for marriage. But on the credit of the career type, I think it's terrific that more and more women are becoming involved in politics.

HILL: In an article written by Mary O'Donoghue [the wife of Noel O'Donoghue, with whom Murphy wrote his first play, "On the Outside"] she said that you had always taken women seriously, and that was very unusual for the time. She stated that you listened carefully to what women had to say, and she was very impressed by that. Was this unusual for a man to listen carefully to a woman?

MURPHY: I don't know if she's talking about the 'great divide' [between the sexes] that I was talking about earlier. Incidentally, Mary O'Donoghue is one of my oldest friends. She's flattering me to a large extent, and I wouldn't believe everything you hear! But in church, for instance (we all went to church every Sunday) the men sat on one side and the women sat on the other . . . sexuality was repressed.

I suppose it was a question of: there are <u>people</u> and there are <u>women</u>, you know? I'm surprised by it because I didn't believe that I was different. As regards listening seriously, perhaps I did.

HILL: Have you seen the role of the women characters change significantly in the thirty years you've been writing?

MURPHY: I think that the women I write at the present time are becoming fuller. I have matured . . . I'd liken it to my self-consciousness, say twenty years ago, when I set out to write an English man or an English woman, I was very self-conscious about that. I felt comfortable with Irish people. I'd be just as uncomfortable then, say, with Americans. Americans would be completely different types of human beings. I don't mean that they're offensive or threatening, but an alien race. The

easiest thing for me to do is to write Irish people. It's difficult - I'm self-conscious writing about the English and Americans. That's the same sort of thing I used to feel when writing about women. They were alien people.

A writer grows up in a country, and the line of least resistance is to write about himself. A male writes about a male. I suppose education has a lot to do with that. The segregation I mentioned before - obviously the repressed sexuality that was engendered in us . . . It's not only that I'm much more comfortable writing about women now, I much <u>prefer</u> to write for women now. I find them <u>infinitely</u> more interesting. I don't see them as aliens anymore, and I don't think it is necessarily just the novelty of writing for women. They're more <u>interesting</u>.

Hill: Why do you find women more interesting?

MURPHY: Well, I suppose part of my attitude in writing is, if you can do it, why bother? If you <u>can't</u>, try it. It's a greater adventure for me. Obviously, as a man, irrespective of the kind of culture I came out of or the 'divides' we've been talking about, it's more challenging for a man to write about women than a man writing for a man.

HILL: The women characters in your plays are very diverse, but are there any characteristics that unite them?

MURPHY: I think that the mother figure in <u>The Grocer's Assistant</u>, the mother in <u>Famine</u> and Mommo [from <u>Bailegangaire</u>] have things in common, in that the three of them would definitely appear to be a product of Irish

history, history that goes back to the last century and earlier. There seems to be quite a bit of harshness in the three, and there also seems to be a degree of tears in them.

In terms of the younger women, I'm very pleased with Petra in Too Late for Logic. She was one who excited me the most. In the ups and downs, the evolution of a play, the dynamic of Petra kept me going. A sixteen-year-old girl trying to 'bring up' her parents, fighting for attention, validly, as is her right. I found a tremendous courage [in Petra] and I think her gentleness is lovely, that she's so caring - the 'child-woman' as I describe her, is a fascinating period in a woman's life.

I don't think there's an equivalent in males, or if there is, it's spread out over a much longer period. Petra has arrived at puberty - menstruated perhaps two years before - a big punctuation mark . . . womanhood seems to declare itself - it's all within, say, four years - that a woman knows she's a woman. I may be wrong - it may be that I'm misreading the whole thing, but a woman seems to know her role in life, and I don't mean necessarily childbearing. A male would arrive at puberty at the same time, but his confusion lasts fifteen to twenty years - if you look at my characters - that confusion still prevails - the confusion of male youth.

I don't know if I mentioned this to you last time, but again today, I went to eat at a pub for lunch, and I was watching the women across from me at a table - the natural conversation and laughter of them. The men about the place were eating, but they seemed pretty spare.

The 'child-woman ' thing in Petra [reflects] the extremes of rage and gentleness and caring. I think that in the male counterpart, the extremes

are fuzzed; there seems to be a greater confusion.

It's interesting in Conversations on a Homecoming, Anne has five or six lines in the whole thing, but she is central - she's very, very important to the play. And it's very interesting in my point of view that the hope that is vested in the play, in the end, is Anne. Michael, who has discovered something about himself and his hometown and is returning to America says, 'They've probably cut down the woods by now anyway,' and she says, 'There's still the stream.' It's a much more affirmative attitude coming from the women.

HILL: Why is Anne hopeful at the end of Conversations on a Homecoming? Her father has not come home?

MURPHY: That's the way she is. Life hasn't hammered her. The background has obviously been very, very difficult - not having her father, a run-down business - and she's a very self-conscious young woman. She knows how her father is regarded in the town; he's laughed at. Her instinct joins with Michael and his personality. He's a romantic, I suppose, ultimately, but she recognizes in him (without any lengthy conversation with him) that he has a love for her father. And of course, his love for her father is a need to believe in hope, and to have ideals. Her personality clicks with Michael. When he suggests that they go for a walk, he is astonished when she says, 'yes - what time?' - the forthrightness in that. Michael refuses, eventually, to yield up his romanticism. It is extreme. [Anne] does not yield up her belief in life, her hope or her ideals either.

HILL: The women all seem to be survivors. What gives them that resiliency?

MURPHY: It could be as simple as the fact that in my first knowledge of the world is through the male, and my first knowledge of destructiveness comes from the male - the male in me - being knocked around and so on. A woman seems to have a better sense of what it's all about. There is a confusion in a man's head about his role in life. In most men that I've written, they're confused and they're running around in circles. And, of course, that confusion is not conducive towards survival. The clearer one sees one's purpose, the greater possibility there is of achieving a purpose and a constructive, full life.

HILL: In your writing it often seems that there are two men who make a whole. Tom and Michael in Conversations, for instance, are referred to as the "twins," and someone even says "the two of you would make one good man." Why is it that two men make a whole, rather than a man and a woman making a whole?

MURPHY: That never struck me, frankly. I think it's a very, very interesting question. It's always the obvious that surprises . . . It will take me a long time to process that for myself. Anyway, I don't know that I'd be able to adjust my personal life to seek for a completeness or wholeness through a relationship with a woman. There may be something - I'm totally speculating - in the ego of the men . . . There's a pride, even though there's a confusion there - there's a pride and a superiority, perhaps, that the male feels. This may very much be part of the reason

why inequality still prevails. The male will not yield to the female, or that is how he would perceive it if he were to say, 'I'm going to find my personal salvation in life through a woman.' I think perhaps his pride wouldn't allow that. I think also that the cynical in the male would not allow him to dwell on that.

To get back to where we started from, sometimes I'm curious of this thing you call the 'twin' characters: the extravagantly romantic one and the guy that's based on facts and definitions. Because somebody said that some years ago, I think that other people have tended to read it into every play. I don't know that in theory in a script, that one can write complete characters, or a fully rounded character. One is hard pressed in a novel. I don't know whether any novelist [can], whether it's Tolstoy or whoever you like, writing four-hundred pages of description about one character - it still doesn't constitute a full character.

A playwright is conscious of the distinctions of the characters. If you go back to a more old-fashioned form of play writing, playwrights from the forties and earlier, they would have been talking about the 'dominant' feature of a character. One is a funny man and one is a serious man - one runs a hotel and one is a customer - the hotel owner is rich and the other man is, perhaps, poor. Then an academic comes along and says, 'Murphy is at it again. There's a poor man and a rich man, and if the two of them came together there would be a balance.' I think too much is read into those things.

I'm conscious that there's a duality in us all. I'm conscious of it, but I don't hold it up in front of me as I'm writing. There's a duality in all of us which has to do with the sense of the heroic that we feel. The other part of the duality is that we're earth-bound. Swift wrote

about it when he talked about Stella. I can't get the exact quotation, but he was likening her to a goddess in his great love for her, and then he says, 'but yet, she shits.' One can have these heroic feelings - one is singing in La Scalla in one's imagination, and one is singing very well - or one is able to fly - and one can find oneself sitting on the lavatory bowl while having these thoughts. There's an element of that that flows through some of these plays.

I was conscious when writing Conversations that one fellow went away and the other didn't. I was conscious of it. It seems a natural thing to me, in the way that the dialogue evolves. There are six or seven people sitting around the table having a conversation, and there are two main ones who are bouncing off each other all night. Just as the audience can see it, someone at the table says, 'Jesus. The two of you together would make a decent man.' But the academic approach can read all sorts of things.

HILL: The academic approach can see too much into that?

MURPHY: See too much into that - yes.

HILL: The last time we spoke, you said that some of the men see life as a betrayal. Do the women see life as a betrayal as well?

MURPHY: I would say they do. I know plenty of women who feel hard-done by life. The obvious cases, I suppose, are due to their unsatisfactory relationships with the men or the man in their lives. I don't think men have the monopoly on disenchantment.

HILL: In most wedding ceremonies, there is a quotation from scripture, 'The man and the woman will become one flesh'; this implies a spiritual as well as a physical union. That spiritual union between a man and woman often does not occur in a marriage. There does not seem to be tenderness and intimacy in the characters in your plays; the two people do not come together as one.

MURPHY: That thing about 'the man and the woman shall be one flesh,' in our culture, generally, (with the attitude again towards repressed sexuality) I would say that the male would think that's the euphemistic way that we'd talk about what we would be doing on the honeymoon. That aspect that you point out, that it also suggests a spirituality - of two spirits merging - that's lost. The Church (I don't want to blame the Church for <u>everything</u>) but in repressing sex, that makes people much more conscious of it, and there's very little else they can think of.

HILL: The last time we met, you said that the best drama does not moralize. Does that mean that there is not a conscious message in your plays? Is there something to be learned from your dramas?

MURPHY: There <u>is</u>, but what is to be learned is not a message. Even the thought of putting a message in my plays makes me uneasy, shift and squirm at the presumptuousness of that. I think that the ideas in art - in plays - comes from recreating life and hopefully <u>transcending</u> life. It is a presentation of humanity at work, which would be <u>in</u> art. The best stuff I've seen written by other people, I just want to celebrate that part of humanity in reading.

I'll give you an example. I must have been having a 'down' mood one morning, and I heard my wife and her sister talking away, having coffee or tea. I had a book of Chekhov stories beside the bed, the early stories, and I read five or six of them. The last one was a story called 'Let Me Sleep,' which is basically about a girl, thirteen, and she's a slave in the house. She has to mind the baby. The story is sad - she's singing a lullaby, trying desperately to get the baby to sleep, and she is utterly exhausted. She has to get up early to draw the water and get the wood and be prepared. She nods off occasionally, but the baby keeps waking her. Eventually, she comes up with a solution to her problem, and she takes a pillow and smothers the baby. And that sounds like a grim tale; indeed, it is grim. But I finished the story, and I felt the blood drain from my head.

Earlier, I'd said my wife and my sister-in-law were in the kitchen, and I had thought, 'which of them will I insult first,' feeling mean. I read the story, and I thought, 'which of them will I <u>kiss</u> first,' and I wanted to get up and go out and celebrate, because I'd seen the heart of human nature in the great genius of Chekhov. Indeed, that's the sort of feeling that I would like to achieve through what I'm trying to do. It's utterly wonderful, that part of life that is fully alive, <u>art</u>. The harsh realities of life have now been transcended into fantastic art. The man who has created this art has transcended himself. We create the <u>feeling</u> of life, and transcend it. The story transcends life, but it is <u>about</u> life, and celebration can be the result of great art.

HILL: You've mentioned earlier that the women characters are more firmly based in reality and that the men deal in the abstract. But the women

have dreams as well. Mary, in Baileagangaire, has the dream of a true home. In your future writing, might we see the dreams of the women explored?

MURPHY: Yes, yes, I think so. I am so much more conscious of women, and my sheer interest in women. They're not there to be operated upon by men. There's something that's clinging in my head from a previous question. I declare myself to be a person with very little interest in politics, and yet of course I'm interested in politics, and aware of the socio-political situation that prevails. But I'm beginning to discover that when I say that I'm apolitical, it isn't quite true. I try to protect my plays from the labels, 'this is a political tripe.' But there is a political consciousness in me; politics are a part of life. But if politics were to dominate my plays, in any way, that would create a totally wrong balance.

HILL: There was an interesting quotation in David Nolan's review of Gigli. Referring to Helen and Mona, he speaks of the women as the madonna or the whore. What are your thoughts on that idea?

MURPHY: I remember saying in an earlier interview that when I was growing up, that women appeared to belong either on a pedestal or on their backs. I was asked if I thought that way as a writer, and I said, 'no,' but I was brought up in that culture. I think that Nolan wasn't right in introducing that in his review. I don't see that it applies. Helen is idealized, but she is a married woman, and it isn't that Mona is a whore - she's also been called a 'nympho' on a few occasions.

HILL: She doesn't seem like a nymphomaniac to me.

MURPHY: No. She wants to become pregnant. She has a husband, and it hasn't worked well, so she uses other men. [Mona was forced to give up her illegitimate baby boy when she was sixteen, and she has never been able to conceive again. Murphy quotes Mona's lines, saying:]

> I've been trying to repeat the deed ever since. I picked you up. And if I had had a child by you, or any of the others, I don't think I would have told you. I'd have been the one you wouldn't have seen for dust. Pregnant into the sunset. But preferably by you. Others weren't so gentle in how they - regarded me.

She's had a terrible time. I don't know what gave rise to the term nymphomaniac.

HILL: The older couples also intrigue me: Dada and the mother who was left behind in Ireland in Whistle in the Dark, the Mother and Father in A Crucial Week - there seems to be no communication at all between them. With time, have they simply grown their separate ways?

MURPHY: That's part of it. I don't attribute everything to the Church or the Famine, but the actuality of the Famine and that the sexual relationships have been so guilt-ridden - people do grow apart. To get back to the sexuality: it's a cow and a bull situation, and affection and love are forgotten - it's sex. Under attack, they show some degree of solidarity, but it's pretty dire. I suppose it is the way of most marriages. From the ardent lovers, they seem to lose it and become silent.

HILL: In The Morning After Optimism, James has stopped treating Rosie with any affection. What is the meaning of the title? There seems to be little optimism there.

MURPHY: A lot people, because of the title, think it's a play about pessimism . . . I suppose there's a degree of irony in the way I use the word optimism. To a large extent, when I'm writing about James, I'm writing about a lie that was given - a Hollywood lie - the stuff we've been fed on from fairy tales. And to understand the title, now, in retrospect, you could almost put optimism in inverted commas. That would explain it. As James says, 'I've got so much crap to unload, you would not believe.' He idealizes women, and he conjures up Anastasia. She is like Cinderella - or rather like 'Little Red Riding Hood.' He is older and tries to be a good wolf, but the wolf, of course, comes out in him.

I'm really not quite sure what degree of consciousness I had in writing the play. I'm wary of those felicitous phrases that are meant to encapsulate the play: 'the tyranny of the idealized self' . . . if Rosie and James can shed the worst crap - there's some sort of hope for a future. I suppose I'm fairly consistent in this . . . I see the underside as hopeful. They kill their romantic, idealized selves, but there's still goodness.

HILL: They kill their romantic, idealized selves by killing Edmund and Anastasia?

MURPHY: Yes, that's it.

HILL: In an earlier conversation, you mentioned that there was an element of [the Irish playwright Dion] Boucicault in tying Anastasia to a chair. I found that very interesting, because when I read the play it seemed menacing. Was the actual production farcical?

MURPHY: Yes, yes it has more comedy than tragedy in it. It's a fantasy. Edmund comes flying in on a rope to rescue her. James is evil, the archetypal villain. He should have the mustache, and so on - a shady character.

HILL: Is there anything else you care to add in the direction you see your writing taking?

MURPHY: I don't have a ten-year plan or a five-year plan. I thank God I'm still working!

APPENDIX D

Personal Interview with Fintan O'Toole, author of
The Politics of Magic: The Work and Times of Tom Murphy
March 25, 1991

HILL: When did you first become acquainted with Tom Murphy and his work?

O'TOOLE: Relatively late - I started to write about theatre in the late seventies. The first play of his I ever saw (I was aware of A Whistle in the Dark, I must have read it), but I saw The Morning After Optimism in a student production at UCD [University College Dublin] and I thought it was an extraordinary play for somebody Irish to have written. It changed my whole notion of what the field of Irish drama might be like.

I certainly became terribly curious and I read every play of his I could get my hands on, but there was actually a period where it was difficult to see a lot of his work. I think his first professional production [in Ireland] was a production of Famine in the Project Arts Center in the late seventies - a production that Tom Murphy directed himself, which was extremely good. It was as different from The Morning After Optimism as you could possibly imagine, and I was intrigued by the notion that somebody had written both of these plays, which seemed so incredibly different, with such a wide range of interest.

[Famine] had a sort of visceral content, which a lot of Murphy's work had. And I think it was quite late before I actually got to review a new Murphy play; The Gigli Concert [in 1983] was the first . . . I suppose I came in on Murphy's work in a very active way at its very peak. Then you look back and say, how did it [Murphy's work] get here? How does somebody

manage to reach that level of writing, and how do you not explain it, but how do you place a context on work which can seem to be so strange and difficult? And because of Famine, I saw a huge gap between myself and his work. There was a large impulse to try to fill in that gap.

HILL: You mention that you were surprised that The Morning After Optimism had been written by an Irish playwright. Why did that surprise you?

O'TOOLE: I think that the first thing, in formal terms, the use of stereotypes, the use of something which has the elements of Theatre of the Absurd about it . . . for a start, the whole form of the play - the way in which it deals, not with characters and not with naturalistic, psychological motives, but with some sort of archetypal level of things, was, to me, wonderful and strange. And, just the way in which it completely blew apart one's whole notion of Irish plays that happen in kitchens or tenements or the notion of the very realistic setting which has always remained very strong in Irish work. Even the best of the [traditional] work, and the most adventurous of the work had almost always had a kind of naturalistic kind of setting. It might go beyond that, but it was grounded there. And to see a work like The Morning After Optimism, which is such a kind of free flight, which doesn't give you any sort of social grounding. I just thought it was wonderful.

I remember buying a copy of "On the Outside"/ "On the Inside," those two short plays. Murphy explains there how he started writing plays, standing in the square in Tuam with Noel O'Donoghue saying, 'Let's write a play.' [Murphy asked:] 'What will we write about?' [O'Donoghue replied:] 'One thing's for sure, it won't be set in a kitchen.' That

impulse of "it's not going to be like that" was one which made an awful lot of sense when you started to see the work.

HILL: The women of Murphy are very diverse, but are there any characteristics that unify them?

O'TOOLE: I suppose the most obvious one is that the women represent (in most of the plays) a sort of realm of the possibility of something which is, left outside the terrible fallen male world, and it must therefore have an extraordinary power.

Having said that, I think there is a big change in Murphy's work in relation to the women characters. If you look at the early plays, the women tend to represent the actual, and the real nitty-gritty business of living. Even in his first play, "On the Outside," it is the men who are the fantasists, the ones with yearnings, and it's the women who represent brute economic reality. [There is] a sort of judgment that the women make on the men, it's economic. What class does he come from, would he make a good husband? While the men are desperately playing these games of pretending they're brain surgeons!

Even in something like A Whistle in the Dark, where the presence of the woman is not very strong (or certainly not very strong on stage) you do still have the sense that the women are the kind of reality. Michael's wife, Betty, clearly represents the business of getting on in the world - getting on with life. Even the woman who isn't there, the Ma, who's left at home - is a very strong dramatic force in the play even though she doesn't appear at all; but again, you're aware of her as a sort of contrast to the fantasy of the father, the fantasy that he keeps spewing

out of how great the Carneys are and how wonderful they are. Mother is down on her knees cleaning other peoples' floors. The woman is still used very much as reality which is set against the male fantasies.

In A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant, it's the Mother who begins to take on a mythic status for the first time, but she is the one who is there to try to keep reality going, to hold it all together, to be the person who acts as the foil to John Joe and his rambling about what is he going to do and the dream world that he exists in half the time.

That begins to change in Famine, where it gets rather more complex. That sense of women as being the ones who are real and the men are the ones who can engage in all sorts of mental gymnastics, starts to take on a whole different sort of shading. The person in Famine who is most like the Mother in A Crucial Week is actually John Connor, it's a man. He is the one who, on one hand is desperately trying to keep things going, but on the other hand, he's like John Joe [from A Crucial Week because] he has this fantasy and this sense of his own place - his role as a tribal chieftain. Connor is very interesting because he is almost like one character in which you can put together both the male tendencies and female tendencies in the previous Murphy plays. Connor is Nineteenth Century Ireland in the same way that the Mother in A Crucial Week is Nineteenth Century Ireland. You almost feel if you went back to A Whistle in the Dark and put the father and mother together: sort of the reality of desperate poverty and the gradual closing down of the mind through that - and the sense of being a tribal chieftain, the sense of being a great man at the head of a wonderful male line, of dominance and glory. If you'd put those things together, you'd get something like John Connor.

I think Famine is a crucial Murphy play in all sorts of ways. I think, particularly in this context, we're beginning to get a deepening of that whole notion that it's no longer a case of reality being there and the fantasy moving away from it and trying to break out of it. [Instead,] you sense a world in which neither is possible, and which, in a way, there is no such thing as a fantasy and no such thing as reality, because no hope, no human compassion, no generosity, no sense of spirit can ever be better than the world that the play shows us. Everything is so desperate; even the kind of realism that John Connor's wife shows is also a fantasy. Even her sense of bitter survival isn't really possible either; nothing is possible. I think you begin to get this much more complex sense of the interaction that's going on. It remains a place where there is no possibility of the man and woman coming together in any sense of having any common purpose; they're so completely different.

What Murphy manages to do, to a large extent thereafter, is to give you a sense of the women characters as being those who represent economic reality and those who have to struggle and hold things together in that context . . . to make that mythic, to make it not just that it's the men who are the mythic characters who have all the force of fantasy, with the language and everything going on in their minds. He manages to make a myth out of female survival, and to write at that level, which I think is a remarkable achievement.

I suppose that culminates in Bailegangaire, where the kind of thing which is starting in Famine (where women can be both a representative of brute survival and of yearning, hope and fantasy themselves) culminates in Bailegangaire. Then you can get two women who play those roles against each other (rather than being male/female), so you get Mary and Mommo.

Mary, in one sense, seems to represent the brute reality and Mommo represents the fantasy in the language, but what is actually much better than that is that each of them represents both [fantasy and reality]. Mommo is a representative of that Nineteenth Century Irish Famine mentality [which is based in harsh reality], as well as having the story she keeps on telling. Mary, on one level she represents Twentieth Century Ireland (the kind of reality of surviving in the place that you are). But the other level isn't that at all; her sense of yearning, her search for home goes well beyond the economic and goes well beyond just trying to survive in the world. She wouldn't have come back at all [to Ireland from her nursing job in England] if it were simply a question of survival. She was doing perfectly well in England. She was respected and well liked, and economically secure, and yet she has uprooted herself in the way that many of Murphy's male dreamers are uprooted.

So, you get this strong sense in Murphy that you never really get a full communication between men and women; it's always a search in some way that's going on in the play. The cruel opposition of men and women is broken down in itself in the way the plays work. He is reaching towards women characters who sum up, within themselves, both the male and female dimensions of what maleness and femaleness had been in earlier plays. And that, maybe, holds out some sense of where communication can happen.

His last play Too Late For Logic [1989], actually goes back very much to the impossibility of contact ever being made [between men and women]. The strongest image in the play is of the answering machine; there is no possibility in the play of things actually meeting.

HILL: That struck me very strongly at the end of Too Late for Logic when

the Voice Over speaks of the porcupines who try to come together for warmth; they end up hurting each other with their quills, but they keep going back and forth, trying to find a happy medium of warmth. That seemed like such a sad metaphor.

O'TOOLE: Yes, yes, it is. Whether it's a final one - I'm still not convinced that it represents any sort of final conclusion on Murphy's part - that kind of search has to go on in some way. It's implicit in the work that communication is possible, actually . . . but whether it will ever be reached is a question; but the tension is always there . . . and the transformation, moving beyond the way things are into some other level - would certainly seem to imply that he has to find some way of making it work: of creating characters who do communicate. I don't know if he will or not.

There's a sort of fatalism in Too Late for Logic which I don't quite believe. With most writers, when they're being hopeful, you actually don't believe it, you feel that it's been patched onto the work. With Murphy it is the other way around: when he's being fatalistic, you don't believe him, really. The basic impulse is one of hope. That's basically why I don't think Too Late for Logic, although it's a wonderful play in a lot of ways, is one of his best plays.

HILL: You just mentioned that the basic impulse is one of hope, but some of the plays end with a situation that does not seem hopeful. At the end of Famine, the Mother and the son are clubbed to death; at the end of Conversations on a Homecoming, everyone's illusions have been stripped away; in The Morning After Optimism, two people have just been murdered.

Where does the hope lie?

O'TOOLE: What everybody in the play ends up doing is loosing their illusions, and you do get plays which end, simply, with the illusions lost and therefore, there's nothing left, in some ways. That in itself seems to imply a wider need; what Murphy shows you is that when you actually strip away the illusions, there's nothing left for people. That implies that illusions, of some sort, are necessary, or if not illusions, some sort of images of hope, images of transcendence.

I think if you look at Murphy's greatest plays, the really big plays, they do precisely that. They are about that leap from the world in which the illusions need to be stripped away and need to be lost, and that once all the illusions are lost, then you become incredibly free to reinvent yourself. I'm thinking of the strain of work that goes through A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant and The Sanctuary Lamp . . . that whole idea that 'I don't believe in God anymore, but I can invent a new religion,' that whole thrust towards making the impossible happen.

Bailegangaire is overwhelming about that kind of transcendence, about the fact that once the story stops (once the illusion is broken), then it's not just that everybody is left with no illusions, it's that they can begin again and start a whole new process - not necessarily the same process, but they can hopefully have a better chance of creating a set of images that frees them rather than binds them.

Gigli is obviously about that process of the loss of illusions. Precisely what happens to JPW is that he is confronted with the idiocy of his own set of belief. He's confronted with the loss of his fantasy woman, Helen; he's confronted with the loss of his real woman, Mona;

everything is taken away from him, every sense of all those kinds of illusions that he has [are gone], and when that has finally been done, then he can sing like Gigli, then he can actually achieve the impossible and get out of that office and start living.

Murphy, essentially, is a writer whose imagery is concerned with a sort of conflicting imagery; it's concerned at the same time with puncturing the false consciousness of who we are and how we live, and, at the same time, of the absolute importance of having some set of ideas and images that you can work towards.

HILL: In the Irish Renaissance, the women characters had a very strong effect on the resolution of the plot. In contrast, many of the women in contemporary Irish drama are in the background, such as Mona in A Crucial Week of Peggy in Conversations on a Homecoming. Is it fair to say that the women in contemporary Irish drama have less control, or is it a different kind of control, than the women characters of the Irish Renaissance?

O'TOOLE: I think what you're asking is very true and very striking - the almost dominance of strong women characters in much of the early work . . . on one hand you can see woman as being the reality, as being people who have to carry on with life without the fantasies of men (actually, that's very strong in Sean O'Casey's work); on the other hand, you have a very strong element of the woman as Mother Ireland, as the symbol of the country, as sort of spiritual embodiment of what the place is. Those kinds of contradictions are often not completely soluble from many of the early writers. At their very best, of course, those two things come

together, that contradiction [between symbol and reality] ceases to be a contradiction, and you have what you get in some of Murphy's plays: which has the sense that the woman is both the symbol of the country, both some sort of communal image, and the absolute reality, the bedrock, the grounding for life.

It happens most obviously in Riders to the Sea, Synge's play, where you do have that sense of the woman as being both a kind of emanation of the place and summing up the spirit of the place, and just brute reality: the person left with getting on with things, surviving. The whole point of Riders to the Sea is that the woman does survive. The whole irony is the old woman left, with all the other people dying. It's very strong. I think that some of Murphy's sense of doing that possibly comes from Synge's work, particularly.

What you have to be aware of is the obvious irony that even while women characters have been incredibly important in the Irish theatre, women writers, by and large, have not. Again, the fact that (to a large extent) women became, if anything, less important as writers and actors as major creative forces in the theatre as time went on; usually, you would expect it to be the other way around. Obviously, the theatre was founded largely by a woman [the original Abbey Theatre building was a gift from Miss Annie Horniman, an English admirer of William Butler Yeats] and kept going by a woman in its early days [Horniman also subsidized production expenses for the first seven years].

Many of the images of the Abbey from the early days are of the women, of the actors. [They] were very strong creative forces, after a period of ferment and of change. Obviously, you've got a terribly conservative society where the woman's place is in the home. They didn't just say it,

they wrote it in the Constitution. It was a very oppressive society towards women, one has to remember that, and certainly the number of women who are hugely prominent in the theatre tend to be less and less. There are notable exceptions. It has been notable that a number of the new writers (from the late fifties on, that new generation - particularly Murphy and John B. Keane) wrote with an impression of a new awareness of the whole way that women had borne so much of the ignorance and narrowness of the society.

But you have terribly few women themselves who were willing to say these things, and, therefore, there was always this lack of balance: it was men who were trying to make the case of the importance of women in the society, which is a self-defeating process in certain ways. Certainly, I think you're right to say that up to Baileganqaire and, in Brian Friel's case, Dancing at Lughnasa, the women are essentially peripheral characters. In no great play is there such a thing as a peripheral character, but they're not the people who are central to the whole thrust of the plot and the way that the play itself is worked out.

In Murphy's case, they're absolutely essential, but they're essential precisely because they're outside, precisely because they're set at a bit of an angle to the course of the main action, so they have this ability to enter into the action at a crucial time. If you think of the importance of Mona in Gigli, it is terribly important that she has her best effect at the time when the men are so enclosed in each other's fantasies; then Mona's announcement of her own impending death is important, but precisely because it comes from completely outside and you're not expecting it.

Peggy, as well, in Conversations on a Homecoming, can only carry the weight of aspirations or yearning precisely because she isn't locked into

the little struggles that are going on between the men. And that's clearly a problem: there's no doubt about the fact that we're still in the Irish State largely seeing women through men's eyes. That's something we're very aware of here [at the Abbey Theatre] If you look at the situation now, it's actually worse than it was in the really 'bad old days' in the 40s and 50s when the Theatre was run by Ernest Blythe, and it was an incredibly conservative institution. We still had more plays by women going on here than we've had in the past fifteen years. It's made all the worse by the fact that you have something of an explosion of women's writing in general, in fiction and in poetry, and that has not been reflected in the theatre; if anything, quite the opposite.

The new generation of women have seen the theatre not as a place for them, and that's something we have to address very seriously. I think the best thing you can do is not to say that we're going to wait until we get a work of great genius by a woman writer, but I think you've just got to say we're going to put on plays by women, and then make it happen. It normally does come out of breaking the sense that women have - that theatre is not a place for them as writers. Obviously, the [Abbey] Theatre is now run by a woman [Garry Hynes], and women have become much more prominent in the management and power structure of Irish theatre, but that has not reflected itself in the actual writing.

But I think you're absolutely right in the way in which that sort of 50s generation, and even subsequent writers, tended not to focus directly on women . . . one of the dangers of seeing women characters only through men as writers - you can get into a sort of fixed sense of what it was like to be a woman, with no sense of future, no sense of possibility, no sense of how it might develop.

HILL: In The Politics of Magic you state that: "Love paralyzes and frustrates Murphy's men." Why is that?

O'TOOLE: It's a very difficult question to try to get some sense of. I think the sense of being paralyzed has to do with many of Murphy's men carrying around a very static sense of the self: that they are somebody, and that it's not a process. It's not a sense of change and growth and movement - that they're sort of stuck with themselves. It's almost like there was an empty vessel and someone has filled it with something, and that's it. Love, if it is anything, is a process, a making of a connection which then goes on into the unknown; but falling in love for [Murphy's men] seems to be something that happens for once and for all, and therefore, they can't change within that, they can't grow within that. And all that's sort of left for them is a sense of loss. You always get that quite strong feeling about Murphy's men that in their relationships with women there is an enormously strong sense of something which has been lost, and never a sense of something which might be gained or regained.

The whole thrust is to try to get back to something that was there before, but what affects them generally is that sense of being stuck at a particular point in terms of your emotions, and not being able to grow. And I think it has to do with all these things we've talked about, with a sense of illusion. Love itself becomes one of the illusions, because it can only be seen [by the men characters] in a sort of static way: something which you try to hold onto and not something you change through and with.

HILL: There is a lack of intimacy in the relationship between Murphy's men

and women, even the younger characters. Then, as they get older, the gulf seems to worsen. You talk in The Politics of Magic about sexual segregation and a tradition of a lack of communication. Do you see that as the root of the problem, or are there other motivations that cause this communication problem? The lack of intimacy in the relationships is very striking.

O'TOOLE: With all of Murphy's works, you're always dealing with things on two levels: one is a very realistic, social level (and I have no doubt about the fact that he is reflecting the very specific social situation in the way he writes about it). If you think of segregated schools [by gender]; if you think of the general prevailing [repressive] atmosphere in relationship to sexuality in Ireland (up to very recent times); if you think about the lack of any notion that marriage was anything that went very much beyond the pragmatic; and the way in which Murphy shows that happening very directly in his work: that marriage becomes that expression of your economic condition, not an expression of yourself, which, again was very, very true.

Ireland, about the time that Murphy was beginning to write, had the lowest marriage rate in the world. They actually had reached a crisis in relation to marriage and sexuality which was very profound. People had stopped marrying each other, and it wasn't because they were having sex outside of marriage. There wasn't even a sufficient sort of basis for sexuality to allow for marriage - I mean you'd actually gone that far.

But you're always also with Murphy dealing with a second level, which is psychic and spiritual, which comes out of the economic and the social, which is what Famine is all about. It does show you how history and

economics and politics and social life shapes the mind, shapes spirituality and generosity, and all those things as well.

But I think there is something [more], there's another sort of level, a psychological level, of this kind of separation in Murphy's work: you always have a sense in Murphy (and in an awful lot of his works a terribly strong sense) of brothers, particularly. If sexuality is about sort of having a vacuum in yourself which can be filled by somebody else . . . and that you, in turn, can fill a vacuum in somebody else's sense of themselves, then part of the problem with Murphy's men is that they have those vacuums, but they are within the [same] sex; it's as if each of them is half of one whole. But the other side of the whole is not woman: the other side is another man.

[Murphy's work has] the whole sense of the lost brother, the absent brother, which is always there in the work, right up to Too Late for Logic. The relationship between the two brothers is still an issue there, and I think you can explain it in a lot of ways. With Murphy, particularly, [there was] the experience of growing up in a family where everybody has left, where there's this huge spread of ages, and by the time he was ten, it was just himself and his mother at home. [Murphy's nine brothers and sisters and his father immigrated to England to find work when he was young.] They were all away, totally - that big sense of gap. I don't quite know where else it comes from. It's like you're a twin, a missing twin, and you can never be satisfied until the other twin is found.

In A Whistle in the Dark, there's the whole sense of brothers, in A Crucial Week the absent brother is such an important force, and if you think of The Morning After Optimism there's also the two halves. It

continues on then, even when people aren't literally brothers, there's a very same kind of feeling there all the time there.

HILL: In Conversations on a Homecoming, Tom and Michael are referred to as the "twins."

O'TOOLE: Yes, 'the twins.' I don't know if it might also have to do with a kind of 'locked in' world. It's partly a Catholic thing, of course. [There is] in Catholicism a huge sense of loss, the huge sense of a Garden of Eden which was there and was lost and which must be regained. The world is only a 'valley of tears,' while we're waiting for something else to happen. And I think that there is that strong element in the structure of Murphy's thinking, but maybe it's also on a social, wider level to do with an interned society, which is very much what Murphy comes out of.

It's like there is a level of accommodation of difference which has never been reached. I don't know if it's going too far to say that precisely what happens in modern Irish history is that process of, rather than a marriage ever taking place, you've got a struggle between brothers - the whole sense of the nationalist movement - the whole loss was a loss of how do you accommodate the difference? How do you put together Protestant and Catholic? How do you "marry" two opposing things? And instead, what we got was the Civil War where literally, and actually in many cases, the struggle that was brother killing brother. It's a very strong image in Irish history.

Whenever we talk about the Civil War (which is not very often - it's still very untalked about) the image that everyone comes up with is brother turned against brother . . . It is sufficiently strong an image in

the culture to have some bearing on the way that that whole tension works in Murphy's plays. But obviously, when you have that circumstance where the need is for your lost brother, then that sense of need for the woman isn't there in the same way. [There does not appear to be] the need for somebody who is different . . . that's why you've got the this terrible yearning for women in Murphy's men, but never the possibility of bringing it together.

HILL: In The Politics of Magic you state: "the family is the shape which disaster takes"; this is a very strong phrase. Your book also talks about the universal failure of the family. This strikes me as ironic, because in America, I think we tend to believe that the Irish family is more stable than the American family, possibly because of influence of the Roman Catholic Church, and also because there is no legal divorce here. Americans might tend to idealize the Irish family. Is that just a fantasy that we have?

O'TOOLE: It is more stable, but whether that's something profound or whether there's no choice, I suppose, is the real question. It seems to me that what you have to bear in mind is that marriage, in terms of the modern nuclear family (Mommy and Daddy meet, fall in love, have kids, stay together) is actually a reasonably recent phenomenon in Irish history. First, you've got the extended family, which was the typical social structure, the sort of 'tribal' family, which is what operates in A Whistle in the Dark. Here's a man [Michael] who is desperately trying to set up a nuclear family, which in any other Western society that's absolutely normal, and yet this extended family keeps descending on him.

And you also have, within that sort of extended family, match-making, [which] was a very important part of the set-up in relation to marriage for a very long time (really up to forty years ago, or so). Again, it's economic. It's not the romantic notion of marriage where you meet someone and you fall in love.

[It was not until] Post-War Ireland when you start talking about what we take to be the typical, normal marriage pattern. And even then, [there was] a lot of delayed marriage, a lot of single people, particularly single men. If you go to the West of Ireland you'll still see so many men on their own, in their fifties and sixties, who are the back-wash of that period, and will never marry. So the notion that the Irish family is very stable is a difficult one.

The Irish family clearly did have a very strong coherence, partly because it remained the extended family, until recently. You had a very highly structured set of social relationships. The Irish family, although it hasn't had divorce, has been threatened very much by economic circumstances . . . the fact that people leave. [When] you're talking about mommy and daddy and the young kids, maybe there is a sort of stability to family life, but when people start leaving [immigrating] at eighteen, seventeen, it does scatter a family very, very strongly, which is a huge factor in Murphy's plays.

You also have, I think, a very strong sense that the family (precisely because it was a strong structure) was a place where so many of the tensions were played out. In a society like the States, where the family isn't stable, that instability might seem to be just an aspect of the general instability of the society. Whereas in Ireland (which on the surface is incredibly stable, and unchanging society) it's almost as if

the forces of tension and change are forced downward, and many of the tensions will be played out in family life. Again, that is quite strong in Murphy's work. So maybe, in answer to your question, you could possibly say that precisely the importance that society gives to the family means the family becomes the arena for drama. If it doesn't happen there, it won't happen anywhere.

In spite of appearances, Ireland, in recent years (the last forty or fifty years) has been very unpolitical in a lot of ways. You haven't had highly developed political argumentation. You <u>have</u> had very strong political parties, with a strong tradition of political involvement, but very little debate or criticism or argument, and not too much of that going on at any other level for our type of society, in the media or anywhere else. So things tended to be just forced inwards and downwards, and happen at a more fundamental level than might happen in a more diffused kind of society.

When you've got a society like our society, which has in it's Constitution that the family is the fundamental unit of society, which talks about the family in capital letters all the time, maybe you just happen to get something of that similar sense that if <u>this</u> falls apart, everything falls apart. It's not just an individual problem if someone is unhappy in their family life: it has a sense of a much wider resonance.

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