

THE THEATRE SHOP 10TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

Friday, October 3, 2003

Liberty Hall, Dublin, Ireland

**NEW WRITING, NEW AUDIENCES:
COLLABORATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS**

CHAIR: Loughlin Deegan, Director, Irish Playography, Theatre Shop, Dublin

SPEAKERS: Iris Turcott, Dramaturg, CanStage, Toronto

Paulo Eduardo Carvalho, Vice-President, Portuguese Association for Theatre Critics

Philip Howard, Artistic Director, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

Jocelyn Clarke, Literary Manager, Abbey Theatre, Dublin

LOUGHLIN DEEGAN: You're all very welcome, and I'm delighted to welcome my distinguished panel here today. What we're here to discuss is new writing, but in a way that we don't necessarily talk about it normally in Ireland, and that is the way in which we can capitalise on the amount of new writing that we do, and promote that work on the international stage. Obviously, an awful lot of the success of Irish writing abroad is well-documented at this point, and indeed, an awful lot of the new delegates who come to Theatre Shop at our invitation every year are as often as not looking for new plays as they are looking for new productions. A lot of people are not necessarily shopping to bring the production, but are looking for the next big hit to come out of Ireland. Theatre Shop, in a way, has responded to that by the development of the Irish Playography project which, for those of you who don't yet know what it's about, it's basically going to be an online catalogue of all new Irish plays produced professionally, initially back in 1975, with detailed information on plays, the original productions, and how to get your hands on the copy of the script, and, indeed, clear the rights if you're interested in producing the work.

In that context, we decided to invite people here to talk about how people can best capitalise on the strength of the new writing we're doing here in Ireland, and the models

and the opportunities that are available internationally to promote that work, and how people can go about that.

I'll introduce you to our panellists, who are all going to speak for about ten minutes each, and then we'll open it for an open discussion to the floor.

Without further ado, we're delighted that Philip Howard, in advance of flying back to Edinburgh this afternoon, agreed to join us on the panel. Irish theatre's relationship with the Traverse at this point is very known, and the work that the Traverse do is very much admired here in Ireland, as a new writing theatre but also as a theatre that is absolutely committed to writers and to the development of new plays and of writers. The Traverse is also, I think in many ways, leading the field in terms of the research into international new writing, and to the relationships that they're establishing with companies around the world, and particularly in the non-English speaking world.

PHILIP HOWARD: The Traverse, for those of you who don't know us, brand ourselves as 'Scotland's new writing theatre' because we're the only theatre in Scotland that only does new writing, whereas in, say, England, you have four theatres in London alone that do new work. And that obviously gives us a very particular remit, and a very privileged position, in some ways, particularly in the last decade when Scottish writing, for various reasons, has been extremely strong.

The Traverse was founded in 1963, so we're currently celebrating our 40th anniversary. The last six, seven, eight years have been particularly strong, as I say, and we've built on that by doing a lot of commissioning and developing, and as Loughlin has implied we have begun to open the borders a bit and work a little bit more internationally. I see the previous decade as being about trying to get Scottish playwriting up to a particular level of flourishing, and the next decade about being working more internationally. That's a kind of pretty broad brushstroke, but I think you know what I mean.

I suppose the central tenet of what we try to do is twofold. One is to understand that to be a writer's theatre, you not only have to give playwrights some sort of voice in the whole way that the place works, so that they're, I don't really like the word 'empowered', but you know, that's the kind of sense of it, that they have some idea that they're controlling their own destiny. And the other thing is, I suppose, to make damn sure that the work doesn't go on stage and in front of an audience until it's ready, and that's obviously the big challenge of any new writing theatre, particularly in any western European, poorly funded theatre culture like the UK and Ireland.

We are guilty all the time of programming plays before they're ready to do, but that's done on a kind of complex idea about when a play might be ready, so we might programme something that's not ready but we'll assume, or we'll make damn sure that by the time it does go into rehearsal, it will be ready. That's all about programming in advance, but at the same time doing all the R&D you need to do to do the work better.

The final thing, I suppose, is we believe very strongly that you mustn't develop work for its own sake. I think there is a tendency in certain London new writing theatres to hold up the idea of development as this great new Holy Grail, you know, we must give writers all this support, but we know damn well that the productions are going to be too expensive to do, so we won't really bother about them. I think that that's terrible for writers because, you know, the only way you really learn how to write a play is to actually have it done, hopefully by a director who's at least half good.

And so, when we were working with the Dublin Fringe Festival and Rough Magic on their Seeds project last year, during a feedback session, I noticed one of the writers saying, I thought very generously, that the experience had been so good for them in terms of kick-starting a whole way of looking at the development of new Irish work that, to be frank, they were happy with the process alone. To the credit of Rough Magic and the Fringe Festival, they've not taken that as being a pat on the back, far from it, they've done lots of work to make sure that some of those plays do find a means of production. So they're not taking the writer's compliment too seriously. And all credit to them,

because I think, you know, they understand, as I am saying, you do need to actually do the work.

I suppose, the other thing to slip in is a particular project that we do that fulfills this idea of working more internationally. The kind of quandary that we've got is, on the one hand, you see, because the last decade has been so much about trying to work with Scottish playwrights and get the Traverse to the point where it really is serving as broad a constituency of playwrights as possible in the country— I think our critics would probably say that we were too inward-looking. And I suppose, almost, probably too nationalist in the insistence on promoting Scottish work.

I suppose I have some sympathy with that criticism, and I suppose maybe that's behind this move to work a little bit more internationally. But the quandary is that we're so broke all the time, at least we feel we are— I'm sure, compared to some very under-funded fringe companies, we're not, but we feel broke— and the number of productions we produce every year, of course, relentlessly spirals downwards: say, for example, in our current financial year, we have public money to do five productions.

Those of you who work for very small companies, please don't pelt me with apples, but five isn't really enough, because we have the staff, the energy, the enthusiasm, and certainly the writers to be producing an awful lot more than that. And if we get other funding in from private sources or other producers or partners, then we can easily produce nine or ten shows a year, we have the capacity, the kind of space, if you like, to do that much. So you can see why I feel that five isn't enough.

If you're only doing five, and you have a stack of really excellent new Scottish plays commissioned and on your shelves, waiting to be done, then it is quite hard to say to them, 'Well, we're not going to do you, we're going to do an obscure Lithuanian playwright that we discovered last year on holiday.' So the solution invented by my rather brilliant international literary person, Katherine Mendelsohn, is actually to kill two birds with one stone, when we do international plays, by commissioning a Scotland-

based— notice, I say Scotland-based, not Scottish— playwright to do the translation or rather, the version, because they rarely speak Lithuanian. So, Katherine will find, as is her job, the best new international plays to do, and then we will have some fun matching them, the writer of that international play with the Scottish-based playwright that we consider most suitable, most akin to the international playwright. If they don't speak the language, we'll commission a literal translation, and then we'll ask the Scottish-based playwright to do the version.

And the production is then presented with almost equal billing, if you like, because the translating playwright, who is a real playwright and not just a good translator, obviously is contributing very much to the collaborative process. We've done four of these so far, and we're about to do another couple, we've done a playwright from Norway, a playwright from Finland, a playwright from the Flemish half of Belgium, and we're about to do a Chinese play, and we've got a Japanese playwright and Portuguese playwright that we're looking for. The Finnish play was done in a version by a Scottish writer called Linda McLean, which was directed by Lynne Parker, and Rough Magic are doing a second production of that, so it's been really, really pleasing for us to see that particular project also having another life.

There are no rules about this. For example, the Belgian play we did was relocated entirely by its Scottish translating playwright to Scotland whereas the translation of this Finnish play, *Olga*, while it's in a kind of Scots-accented English, the play is still kept in Finland, so it's still a Finnish play. I am forgetting Canada, we have long relationship with French-speaking Canada, because of the alignment between Scotland and French Canada, the state of Quebec—it's a long, long relationship for political as well cultural reasons. We have a long relationship with the work of Michel Tremblay; the last play of his we did was his extraordinary piece, *Solemn Mass for a Full Moon in Summer*. So that was actually translated by a pair of translators who probably would be reluctant to call themselves playwrights.

So we have kind of rules about the way we're working, which kind of gives our own playwrights a job as well as opening ourselves up internationally.

DEEGAN: Can I just ask you to elaborate very briefly on the channels that Katherine Mendelson uses to find those scripts? Do you think, 'Let's do China,' and she then starts making contacts?

HOWARD: You make it sound like we're playing Risk or something—

DEEGAN: How does she source the scripts, just in terms of companies producing work here in Ireland, what channels should they be aware of, that people are looking for scripts through?

HOWARD: She has an understanding of a whole kind of matrix of international dramaturgy, which I don't profess to know about, but the British Council are very, very good at connecting us with sibling organisations. Often, it comes down to personal relationships – she will meet a Chinese theatre person at conference and get talking. What we try not to do is to follow British Council funding prerogatives too closely. The British Council in Scotland, who have a strange relationship with the rest of the British Council, they, because they're small, have limited target zones. And we try not only to go where their funding points us. But there is bit of that that goes on, because we're only human.

DEEGAN: I know from a recent trip actually to Sweden, at the invitation of Edward Buffalo Bromberg, who's here with us today, who also translates Irish work into Swedish, and visiting the Stadttheater there, and the dramaturgy department, who have a staff of five, and every theatre you visit in Europe, they all have their telescope pointed at the Royal Court and the Traverse. There seems to be somebody inside who reads the scripts as soon as they're published and as soon as they're produced. There is an absolute network of dramaturgy going on that people need to start thinking about clicking into.

On that note, we'll move to Canada. We're delighted to have Iris Turcott here, from the CanStage Theatre company, previously called the Canadian Stage Company, which was an amalgamation of the Toronto Free Theatre and Centre Stage. They again have amazing projects in place in terms of new play development, but also intriguingly for Irish companies, they are here to talk to people about the notion of co-commissioning, which I presume might then lead to co-production, but we'll wait and hear.

IRIS TURCOTT: Just before I start on that, I want to mention something that you said which is French-speaking Canada's, or Quebec's, relationship with Scotland is extraordinary. CanStage actually commissioned the English translation of *Solemn Mass* and then, of course, didn't do it, partly because Tremblay writes in a kind of Quebecois patois that does not translate very well in English. One of his most important plays, *Les Belles Soeurs*, which the English translation doesn't have an English title— that's the title. When it was taken over to Scotland, it's *The Good Sisters* and the translator of Tremblay for 20 years went to see *The Good Sisters* and said, 'I will never translate again, I can't do it', it was that good. So it's really interesting, it's not just the rhythms or the cadence, it is a political underpinning connection that's very successful with you guys. And I wish it was true for us.

I'll start with one of the projects that didn't go well for us, which was a co-commission with the Melbourne Theatre Festival. We sent down a lot of scripts to Melbourne because they wanted to choose a Canadian writer, and they chose Michel Marc Bouchard who is a fantastic Quebecois writer, and through the Canada Council and a cultural exchange initiative, they gave us money to go down there. We did the first workshop, the play is now called *Written on Water* – it's had about 15 titles – down in Melbourne, obviously with Australian actors. Michel Marc's English is great conversationally, but he heard his play in the translation, by Linda Gaboriau, for the first time in Australia with Australian accents. He was just mystified, and it made working on the play very, very difficult, and we were always planning to do it two years later in association with Melbourne.

Eventually we did another workshop in Canada, in English, and he still had not heard his play in French, and it was breaking his heart, he actually said at one point, 'I've lost the soul of my play. I don't know where it is.' So we made a decision to let the play premiere in French first, in Montreal, and we're doing the English world premiere in January. Eventually it did work. It's funny, Canada is theoretically bi-cultural and bi-lingual, it just doesn't work that way, and the theatre worlds are so completely different, the aesthetic and very often, the content, and the desire to speak and what you speak is quite different.

In terms of other cultural initiatives, we began about four years ago, we did a co-commission with the Royal Exchange in Manchester, where we took three British playwrights and three Canadian playwrights, a huge project. We didn't really know whether this was going to be a co-production, or how this was going to work, but we just wanted to exchange culturally and artistically any kind of ideas and methodologies that we had. All of the writers were different. I don't know if you know Brad Fraser, Judith Thompson and Adam Pennell, and Jonathan Moore and Abi Morgan for the Royal Exchange... and I can't remember the other person's name because they didn't finish their play.

What happened is we brought those guys over to Canada first and we had them for a week. We did workshops of what they had ready, some of them had a scene, some of them had nothing, they just generated music, in terms of the musical, and other people, and they met the other writers. So they spent a week in Canada, and then some of the writers went over to Manchester. What has happened since is all three of the Canadian plays have been produced. Sunday Father by Adam Pennell has been produced by the Hampstead Theatre in London, not at The Royal Exchange; the Royal Exchange produced Judith Thompson's play, and Brad Fraser's. We did not produce Brad Fraser's play. The three English plays are still not produced. So it's very interesting— you don't know who's developing what. It's an ongoing relationship, we're still waiting for Abi Morgan to finish her play and she will, and I think we'll probably, I think it will be a serious contender for production.

The other kind of co-commissioning we've done is with an artist called Ronnie Burkett, and his Theatre of Marionettes: he's internationally renowned. We've just entered a four-way co-pro with the Barbican, us, Vienna, and one other theatre I can't remember. When I fly back next week and go straight into rehearsals with him for the world premiere that starts in Edmonton, then goes to Vancouver, then goes to London, England, and eventually kind of goes all over the world for the next two years.

We've got a couple of other ones. Obviously we're here also to speak to the Abbey who feel like a sister company to us in the sense of their construct and their structure. We're a large not-for-profit theatre with four different venues, we're subscriber-based, our A house, our big house basically subsidises the development and production of new, more risk-taking work. I guess that's that.

DEEGAN: Could I just ask you to explain the relationship with the Royal Exchange in Manchester? How did that come about, how did you get the point where you were co-commissioning writers?

TURCOTT: Strangely enough, it was a literary agent's idea in Canada, who represents two of the three playwrights that ended up being co-commissioned. And we talked to the Canada Council and they said, 'Yeah, that's a great idea,' and everybody won all around.

DEEGAN: Excellent. Next up, we have Paulo Eduardo Carvalho who interestingly works for The Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics. So I'm surrounded on both sides by sometime critics. He's also a translator, and most importantly has translated quite a lot of Irish work into Portuguese, particularly the work of Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness. Paulo's going to talk about that process and hopefully as well somewhat about the way in which he chooses what plays he's interested in translating and why he thinks they might work in Portugal.

CARVALHO: Thank you very much. Good morning. Allow me first to thank the Theatre Shop and particularly Jane Daly because she was my contact for this generous invitation to participate in this panel. It was quite an unexpected invitation, because I contacted Theatre Shop by email – I had seen in the web page of The Dublin Theatre Festival a reference to this session. I asked permission to attend and she replied asking me to participate in the panel, so thank you very much.

As you are aware, and you have just been told, I'm Portuguese, and according to the information conveyed by Jane Daly, this is the first time this ten-year conference has a participant from Portugal, a situation that somehow increases my sense of responsibility.

I will ask your indulgence for some very brief words to present myself, not so much out of pride, but just for you to see a kind of connection, at least for most of you, with your Irish reality and the Irish theatre.

I am described in the programme as a member of the current board of directors of the Portuguese Association for Theatre Critics. This association played a very, very important role in my country during the 70s and the 80s, that is, in the years immediately after the Carnation revolution in 1974, which was really the revolution that introduced a democratic regime in Portugal. Due to a very complex set of reasons, this same association, we draw from a more public participation during the 90s, and only recently a group of old and new members have been trying to give a new life to this association, and to devise new sets of initiatives capable of contributing to an increase of debate and discussion of theatre in Portugal.

A very important and meaningful change introduced in this second life of the Portuguese Association for Theatre Critics is a broadening of the understanding of what theatre criticism means or could mean. Not only the review of specific productions, but everything that regards the information, the study and even the theorisation of the field of performing arts.

I'm not, I've never been, a theatre critic in the more strict sense of someone who writes for the papers, reviewing a given production. I'm more of a scholar and a researcher with a special interest in theatre who frequently addresses and writes about the historical and current reality of Portuguese theatrical and dramatic activity.

At university back in Portugal, after completing my degree on Portuguese and English Studies, I decided to attend an MA programme, during which I had occasion, for the first time ever in my life, to study some works by authors like George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett. When I had to decide what I was supposed to do for my MA dissertation, I very accidentally came upon the first volume of Brian Friel's selected plays, published by Faber. I ended up truly fascinated at the time by those plays, doing my dissertation on Field Day Theatre Company, so mainly on the plays Friel wrote during the 80s, both on those plays and on the other plays that were produced by that company in that same decade. My first visit to Dublin in 1992, and to the Dublin Theatre Festival, was precisely due to this research. That was the real beginning of what has become a continuous interest in most everything Irish, but more particularly on Irish playwriting.

After the completion of that work, I felt I had to give it some immediate and more practical continuity, so I decided to translate *Translations*. Having since my youth, since at least first years at university, dealt with theatre groups, amateur and professional, I decided to send my Portuguese translation of *Translations* to a theatre company in Lisbon— I live in Porto, which is a northern town— but I knew someone from a company with very social and political concerns in Lisbon, so I sent the translation. So after some months (I was already without hope at the time) I got a reply and they were thrilled to produce that play.

This was in '96, and in that same year another Lisbon company asked me to translate *Dancing at Lughnasa*. So since '96, I've been coordinating all my teaching and researching activities together with a very regular activity as a theatre translator— not only Irish drama, also English and British drama. This is a very demanding situation that

in 1988 got even a bit more complicated, when together with other colleagues in Porto, where I live, we decided to found another company, another structure of production which has a very odd name in English. I mean, the name is Portuguese, and better translates into harassment, not sexual harassment, as it's really the more etymological idea of attacking a castle or attacking a fortress. The company is now celebrating its fifth year of regular activity next week.

In it, what role I've been playing is something that in English could be translated as literary manager or dramaturg. So I suggest plays, I read scripts, mainly foreign scripts, I will explain to you why. I try to do some research on context et cetera, translate some texts only to help people preparing production, I coordinate the programme, this kind of thing.

So everything I share with you today stems from this double, sometimes a bit schizophrenic capacity of both theatre practitioner and someone who studies theatre and drama.

To help me organise this information, I asked— no, I more than asked, I demanded Jane Daly to send me some items, some guidelines— the guidelines she sent me were the following: what is your impression of Irish playwriting; why is there an interest in translating contemporary Irish plays into Portuguese; how are the productions received by audiences; and what are the criteria you apply when you are selecting work for translation?

So after all I've been telling you, you may well imagine what my impression of Irish playwriting may be like. Even if you consider all the Irish dramatic output of the twentieth century, leaving strategically aside the Anglo-Irish tradition of Wilde and Shaw, we are dealing with an impressive body of work, impressive seen from a Portuguese point-of-view, by the variety of forms and experimentation, but also impressive because of the way Irish drama has emerged, survived, and renewed itself in a

very, very close dialogue with the society it addresses, and from which it draws its materials.

One of the most peculiar dimensions that I still question, and that I've been trying to question even further, with more depth, both as a translator and as a foreign scholar, is the way so many parochial concerns, and I use 'parochial' in the sense that Patrick Kavanagh used the term, achieves such a world-wide resonance. I'm well aware that this is not a quality of all Irish playwrights, for instance the difference between the international reputation of, say, Brian Friel and Tom Murphy, is not surely a measure of the intrinsic quality of their work. It's due to other, perhaps more complex factors.

So this very brief and somehow crude characterisation is all the more relevant seen from a Portuguese perspective. And why? Our own theatre system in Portugal has suffered for many, many decades, some would say for many centuries, from a lack of a relevant body of plays and playwrights. The situation has been changing in the last decade, and I was glad, listening to my colleague from Scotland, that they're planning to produce a Portuguese playwright. I believe that because the situation is really changing, but the fact remains that we have such a reduced number of classics in the Portuguese repertoire—and let me add that Portugal as a country, as a nation, exists since the twelfth century—and the persistence of a divorce between Portuguese writers that write for the stage and theatre artists has led to a theatre system that is heavily on the import of foreign drama.

Just to give you a very, I hope, impressive figure. I did a research study in 1997, and out of the 160 theatre productions of the year, all over Portugal, only 55 were based on Portuguese texts. And out of these 55, only 33 were plays—the other remaining ones were short stories, poems, et cetera. So this leaves us with more than 100—that is two thirds—of productions of foreign plays. Now I'm sure that it comes as no surprise to you that out of that 100, around 40 were originally English language plays.

So the first and most honest answer to the first question suggested by Jane Daly – why is there an interest in translating contemporary Irish plays into Portuguese – is simply, this

is the first level, they are part of a vast group of plays written in the English language, be they English, Scottish, North American, or Irish.

This is not the whole answer to the question. For a fairer reply, it would be necessary to investigate the ways and mechanisms used for the circulation of plays during the history of theatre. The global world in which we live is a very, very unbalanced one, and for many of the English speaking people here, it's very important to bear this in mind, of course. You should have no doubt that regardless of the importance and quality of Irish playwriting, it has benefited immensely from the fact that it has been written in English.

If I try to give a full explanation for the significant presence of Irish drama in Portuguese stage, I will have to add the more, I don't know, unpleasant, suggestion, that many of the plays, for instance, during the 90s in Portugal, reached the Portuguese stages not directly via Dublin or any other Irish town, but in most cases via London. If you check the handouts that some of you have, just out of curiosity, you'll easily notice that at least during the 90s and up to this year, many of the plays that were translated and produced in Portugal, were either premiered in London, or they at least achieved success on London stages. It was that fact that attracted the curiosity and attention of Portuguese companies.

So this is the case, for instance, at the beginning of the 90s you have Frank McGuinness's *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, the first Frank McGuinness play produced in Portugal. Then you have Conor McPherson with *This Lime Tree Bower* and *The Weir*, then Martin McDonagh's *Cripple of Inishmaan* which premiered at The National in London, then Mark O'Rowe's *Howie the Rookie*, and, more recently, Marie Jones's *Stones in His Pockets*.

So I should also add—and I'm coming to a conclusion—that the Irishness of those plays is not what really attracts Portuguese actors and directors. It could attract me, myself, I mean, I regard myself as an Irish scholar, but translation in itself and theatre production is not such an unselfish activity, it's not that they want to convey Irish culture that they decide to choose those plays. And in some cases, for instance in the case of McPherson's

plays, the two plays that were produced in Portugal, they were adapted, they were totally and utterly changed, nothing Irish about them.

One of the things that is more recently attracting Portuguese producers and theatre artists is this tendency that can be identified during the 90s and the last years, this tendency in Irish drama for the monologue form and the recovery of the storyteller structure. Many of these kinds of plays have really been very attractive to Portugal.

The way the productions are received by audiences—another question Jane Daly asked me—this is very difficult to assess. I could use, for instance, theatre reviews but theatre reviews are not the same as audiences. The theatre system in Portugal is really sometimes very difficult to assess. For instance, some plays only have five, six, seven days of presentation. It's quite impossible to assess how an audience received a play which was only presented for seven days. Some of them had more time, a month or two, but it's really something that is very difficult, at least at this stage of my information, to answer.

What I can say is that, opposite to what happened not many years ago, now there's a current awareness of the Irish origin of these plays. At least that. Brian Friel's first play, *Lovers*, produced in the 70s, I have some clips from the press at the time, where he was a British playwright, no doubt. There's even one, because of the success of the play on Broadway, who thought that he was North American. Nowadays, we don't have that kind of problem. Due to the fact that between '96 and 2003, seven of his plays have been produced in Portugal, Brian Friel is assuredly the Irish playwright that the Portuguese audience, with some variation of course between Porto and Lisbon, know and love better. Younger audiences, and younger actors and directors, would eventually prefer, for example, the rougher dialogue of Mark O'Rowe, more easily inscribed in recent trends of British theatre, which also has a very, very strong presence among us. But that doesn't affect the prestige of Friel, facilitated by the fact that four of his translations have been published.

I regard myself as responsible for the Portuguese production of six of those plays by Friel: *Faith Healer*, *Translations*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Molly Sweeney*, *Afterplay*, and *The Yalta Game*, as well as Frank McGuinness's *Bag Lady* and McPherson's *Rum and Vodka*, and Marie Jones's *A Night in November*. With the exception of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which reached Portugal served by the huge production both in London and New York, all the other plays were far from clear successes, particularly when you can see that they're travelled by their translation into another culture.

So my own and very personal criteria for the selection of work for translation, be it Irish or not, has been a mixture of very, very different factors. Personal taste, conviction in the artistic validity of the plays, a vague idea that they could translate well, and circumstances such as the feeling that I have the right group of actors or the right director with the right sensibility and awareness for the play.

Just to conclude, I have very, very fond memories of all the Portuguese productions of all the Irish drama in which I participated, but I am especially proud of two, both for the many, many, many doubts concerning the transference to a Portuguese context, and for the splendid artistic results obtained: Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*, which is a masterpiece of contemporary world drama, and Frank McGuinness's *Bag Lady*, as moving and as lyrical a play as perhaps Yeats had ever imagined possible.

Just a very brief note to conclude: I remember some years ago, perhaps in 1999, or 2000, when there was here the Friel Festival, I think it was 1999. I read a small note, I think it was by Brian Singleton, in the *Irish Theatre Magazine*, before the festival. The programme was already announced, and he was complaining and suggesting that why there wasn't in that splendid programme of new productions of the plays some foreign productions. And for me, as a foreigner, that couldn't have made more sense, because I'm perfectly aware and sure that a large degree and amount of Irishness in these plays is lost when translated into another language.

But the fascinating thing is that especially in a theatre system like the Portuguese, which is not writer dependent but is heavily director dependent and actor dependent, we achieve and we produce magnificent productions of some foreign plays. And the kind of either physicality or the visual dimension of those productions, I'm sure they could be extremely stimulating, even for Irish audiences. Perhaps this could be either from the point of view of producing and programming something to think about because from the point of view of scholarship, this is also very timidly emerging. Professor Nicholas Grene, from Trinity, two or three years ago at a conference in Galway, spoke about what could be a collective project addressing the diaspora of Irish theatre. Why not try to study what has been happening to Irish drama, being produced abroad. And I'm sure, based on what has been happening in Portugal during these last decades, some very stimulating findings could be achieved. Thank you very much.

DEEGAN: That's very interesting. Finally, I think everyone here knows Jocelyn Clarke, the commissioning manager of the Abbey Theatre. He's going to speak somewhat about the Abbey Theatre's new writing policy with particular emphasis on international work, but also about the CEAD project that he was just recently involved in, and I know people here from Bedrock as well were involved in a similar project in the past.

JOCELYN CLARKE: I'll actually kick off with the CEAD project. CEAD is Centre d'Essai Autre Dramatique, a Quebecois organisation, which is attached to no producing theatre. Now, it's an organisation which has 250 writers, and it's a writer-led organisation, essentially for the promotion and development for Quebecois writing.

The project that we're engaged in is to translate an Irish playwright into Quebecois French, and I stress the word 'Québécois' French, and I'm going to be boring about it, because Québécois French is very, very different from French French, much to the chagrin of the French, and much to the pride of the Québécois. To translate an Irish play into Québécois French, to translate writer into English Irish or Irish English. So two weeks ago, I was in Montreal at a translation colony where Hilary Fannin's work was translated into Quebecois French by François Le Tourneau, and Stéphane Hogue's play,

Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe, which is This Is Not a Pipe, was translated into English. Then an English Canadian playwright, Matthew Edison, who is currently appearing in Amadeus, and also playwright in residence, was translated into Québécois French and another Québécois play by Francois Le Tourneau called Teach was translated into American English.

What is interesting about this colony was that it was about the translator as a cultural mediator, rather than the process that you described, which I think is equally fascinating, which is that you actually try and match a playwright from your country with the playwright via a literal translation. You'll find that a lot of, for example, Frank McGuinness's translations, and he correctly uses the term version, are about working from a literal translation. And what was interesting is the notion of, how do you begin to translate a work using a translator, and what are the kind of cultural ramifications, and the mediation of that for an Irish audience and in terms of a Québécois audience?

So that's one project. The other project that we're engaged with is a co-commission project with CanStage, which is again to co-commission a work together of not only a Canadian playwright, an English Canadian playwright, but also an Irish playwright, and to develop it between the two theatres, and between the two cultures, and between the two countries. It's at the very kind of figuring out stage, how to do that negotiation, because as Iris pointed out, sometimes it succeeds wonderfully, and sometimes things kind of fall apart. Either plays are not completed or even they're not produced.

But this whole area of how you find networks, I think that's a really important issue. There is a thing called the European Theatre Convention, I don't know if you know of this, which kind of links various literary departments and theatres together and is a kind of very helpful information network. I know that you had your network which is quite strong as well, but you have a dedicated officer or person to look at developing international work, not only in terms of bringing it in and organising translations, but also to sending the work out. The National Theatre in London has also started a network as well and is kind of piggy-backing.

But fundamentally, at core, what is so interesting about this, and how the CEAD project came into existence, is about people meeting people. It can be random, it can be accidental, but there is no in-place structure, and I think that what Paulo said, a lot of it is determined by how people meet one another, it's a lot to do with personal taste, it's a lot to do with how you think the work will impact or contribute to the theatrical dialogue of your country. These are all very, very interesting questions, and in terms of the commissioning of Irish work, it's hugely interesting that in the 80s and the 90s Irish theatre had a huge success in London, and that was a jumping off point for how people looked at and thought about Irish writing, because for the first time, it had very much an international dimension, and how people accessed that.

But here, I think, in Ireland, we have very little international work, except for example, the Rough Magic initiative with Scandinavian writers, which I think is hugely interesting and successful, and there are productions arising out of that, or Rachel West's project with the Dublin Theatre Festival last year, where she focused in on German playwrights, and the Peacock is looking at Québécois writers. It's a slow process bringing in these works, and the reason why I'm interested in commissioning and co-commissioning international writers is that there's something about the writing, whether in the individual artist's style or in the actual cultural experimentation in regards to theatre that is interesting, that the sheer introduction of Otherness is by itself a very interesting way to not only talk about international work but also to talk about Irish work.

For example, we did this series of readings called Americana, which was to introduce an audience, in a very, very simple way, to what I thought and Ali Curran thought were interesting American writers. They ranged from Sam Shepard all the way to David Hancock. To expose an audience to a series of kind of styles and personalities in the writing, to say that in America, being a very, very big place, there are other kinds of writing out there and how to excite an audience about that. One of them, in fact, well, two of them, David Hancock's piece is currently in a little room in a bar which you should go

and see, and then the other one is Homebody, which is a monologue form, but which is actually being produced in the Peacock, I think, at the end of November.

So there are certain similarities and differences which are exciting and interesting. At the moment, we have under commission two international writers, and the hope is to continue this idea. The first one of course is Aaron Sorkin which everyone seems quite intrigued by because of *The West Wing*. Aaron Sorkin is an interesting writer to me simply because he's a writer who directly and explicitly engages with issues of national politics, and national mission, whether they be American or otherwise. And the other writer we're looking at is a young English-Asian writer called Neil D'Souza, who is writing a play set in Ireland with Goan Catholics and a young Irish woman, and how that kind of works together. These are projects which are slowly and surely developing.

DEEGAN: Can I just ask you, very quickly, do you get a sense in terms of Irish plays kicking off internationally from either Edinburgh or London, do you get a sense now that international directors are looking at the Abbey as the main writing house?

CLARKE: I don't think so, I think they're also looking at Rough Magic, and I think that other theatres— they come to the Abbey because it is the Abbey Theatre, and it has a national and international profile, which is always astonishing to me because we think of her as the old Shabby, but in fact has a level of respect which is unusual. But also, I think, because companies like Rough Magic, like Corcadorca, have travelled, people hear about them and there is an association now I think between the company, the work produced, and the playwright. Because the world, in this kind of new culture of Anglobalisation, which is my new favourite word, and Anglobalisation is the globalisation of Anglophonic culture and the dominance of that culture, is that people are communicating much more— I mean, I think it's amazing to listen to Paulo, who travels backwards and forwards to conferences— there is much greater fluidity in terms of communication. But I don't think that necessarily the Abbey is the first port of call, I think it's actually the writers. And then through the writers or through a production that they begin to attract the theatre companies.

DEEGAN: We've got about twenty minutes left, so I'll happily throw it open to the floor if you have any questions.

ANNA OLSON, ABOUT FACE THEATRE COMPANY, DUBLIN: We're a small fringe company, and I'm just curious, the translating and stuff like that is fascinating to me— the bigger world than what sometimes we think about, because we do a lot of North American plays. We're not at the stage where we can commission work, but I'm wondering how we can get some of the newly commissioned work or work that hasn't been produced in Ireland?

CLARKE: If I can answer that question. I think there is a huge problem by the dissemination of information, about what is available out there, what is published. We have spoken about different kinds of networks, and of people meeting people. But I think the National Theatre has published a document which you can get, if you call them up in London, which is European plays in translation, so that's one way of looking at it. I always find that Amazon is extremely helpful in terms of tracking down new work.

And the other thing to look at is a great bookstore in New York called The Drama Bookstore, which has its own website, and that's a really good way of tracking down— and also, getting magazines: it's so interesting that Paulo refers to Irish Theatre Magazine, and that he actually gets it quite regularly in terms of subscription, which I think is great, but I think that you have to subscribe to various European and North American regional theatre magazines as a way of accessing that.

OLSON: But also, about what you said before, about putting a face to the name— once you meet people at conferences— all the guys that we know now, whether it's Steppenwolf— we've met them, and 'Oh, you need to read this new play', and we're not even talking published, it's a first draft. You know, if you develop a lot and network a lot, it's a script exchange, and it's done at this level through dramaturgs and literary managers. The other, smaller theatres that we work with, that we're a resource for, we

cannot always, obviously, produce everything we develop, but your heart and your passion for the writer, you're gonna get it done, and so a lot of my job is yelling at directors and artistic directors to look at this script, it's fantastic. So don't feel that you can't pick the phone up and say, 'I have this theatre company and do have anything that you can't produce or that you think might be the right sensibility for my audience'.

DEEGAN: The other thing, there's a fascinating publication which I think is produced by the European Theatre Convention, which every year they ask a leading theatre professional in every country, within the convention, to suggest five plays that they believe were the strongest five new scripts in each country in they year, and they list a synopsis and a description. Jocelyn was involved in compiling the 2002 version, and for the first time three Irish scripts were recommended around the world. It's not widely publicised, but you can usually get it from the organisation that represented your country, so do the Abbey have copies?

CLARKE: We actually don't have copies which is very odd. Because I went looking for a copy recently and we in fact don't have it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We have loads of copies in the Abbey if you want them.

CLARKE: Oh, so we do have loads of copies.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think the selection of five new plays is actually a separate thing that's just showing the programme for the next year.

CARVALHO: If I may add to that... When one is really curious, and wants to know more about totally unknown realities, now we have the net, and we can search the web and we can find something. But, for instance, in the cases of countries with minority languages, some years ago, I was involved with the Dutch, and usually in these cases, if you contact the Embassy or something like that, they would give you an indication of

services or centres or institutes they have. I know for instance in Holland, they have a splendid institute for Dutch theatre that has many, many plays by Dutch authors translated internally, either in French or in English, and they convey them to you, and sometimes even offer to support the production, paying the fee of the translation... In cases of small countries or minority languages, it's always important to try to find about these things.

DEEGAN: Also, when we were putting together the Irish Playography, we did a lot of research into other online databases or tools, and there's an intriguing one for Scandinavia called dramadirectory.com where you actually download PDF scripts directly from the site, if you represent a professional theatre company. We are hopefully going to be facilitating that on the Playography database. Any further questions?

JANICE BELTON, BACKSTAGE THEATRE, LONGFORD: Jocelyn, you spoke about 'exciting audiences.' I wonder do you find is there a kind of a reluctance with regards to new plays when you're talking about audience, and coming to see the play, like, they tend to wait until they hear word of mouth and good reviews?

CLARKE: That's such a big question. It's interesting I think that the title of this is 'New Writing, New Audiences' because the implication is that somehow if new writing won't work, new audiences won't come. I think that they're actually separate issues. I think primarily it's a marketing issue, it's an educational issue, but new writing in and of itself should be interesting because in some ways it's about the creation of a repertoire of the future, and somehow, your participation in that by attending a theatre event is a participation in the creation of a repertoire of the future. And that, in and of itself, should be, and is, an exciting idea.

It gets complicated, however, when the reviews are not very good, when the ticket prices are very, very high, when there are short runs, when the funding is being cut, et cetera. And somehow the idea, the experiment, the idea of creating a repertoire of the future, gets lost. So I think that, philosophically, you have to constantly foreground that idea with

regards to new writing. I also think that new writing, as a general observation, is getting the shit kicked out of it, frankly, and people are using phrases like ‘new writing is in crisis.’ I actually think it’s going through a very interesting period of kind of introspection. I think that playwrights from all environments, all backgrounds, all ages, all styles, all concerns, are trying to figure out what the new stories are—in a very crude sense, of how to deal with a rapidly changing socio-political and cultural environment. So that we are watching a series of attempts to try and figure out what that is, and necessarily you find that there is an emphasis now on adaptations or on translations of existing classics, to try and figure out how to orientate oneself. And so I think that new writing is attempting to find different kinds of orientation, and that as a theatre community and equally in terms of the representation of that idea to a larger public, we have to begin to embrace that idea and take risks more.

HOWARD: I have a moderately depressing anecdote which kind of answers your question as well. As I was explaining earlier about the Traverse’s limitations in producing enough of its commissioned scripts, we’re obviously particularly reluctant to revive plays from the past – actually I think it’s a very good idea because it allows you to take another look at them – but we just can’t justify that in the face of all the living playwrights that are waiting to be done. A bigger new writing theatre like the Royal Court, certainly under Max’s tenure, did some really interesting stuff once every two years deliberately doing a classic, and that was particularly articulated as being about looking at new plays refracted through revivals of these classics. Certainly, if we were bigger, that’s something it would be fascinating to do.

However, it being our fortieth birthday, we decided to give ourselves a big present, which was just this once we would revive not just one play, but three in the shape of John Byrne’s famous Slab Boys Trilogy, because they were probably one of the Traverse’s most famous exports, we thought it would be great to do them again, and the other excuse, I think, was that the directors involved also had a particular idea about these plays needing to be done in a slightly different way in order to take a fresh look at them, as directors do.

So we're doing them, they started rehearsals this week. And, I know this is stupid to be knocked like this, they are selling in advance incredibly well, and the days in which you can see all three days are practically sold out. This is for February, and we've never had box office like it. And because we're so small still, I mean, it's a great privilege being small because you don't have a huge great theatre to fill, and during the Edinburgh Festival we're extremely lucky because there's a kind of captive audience there. So our audiences are pretty strong at the moment, but they don't book in advance, which is what you were saying about waiting until the smell about a new play begins to emanate from the theatre. I've persuaded myself that it's ridiculous to be depressed about something selling well, so I've got kind of over that one, but just for a minute I was beginning to think, you know, you do all this work and then you go and do an old play for the first time in ten years and everybody wants to come and see it without even finding out how good it is. Admittedly they are strong plays, they are kind of cultural totemic plays in Scottish culture, so I suppose it would be disgraceful if they weren't selling well, but it is sobering to reflect that.

TURCOTT: And it's recognisability. From the administration side, the pressure put on us for programming in terms of balancing the season, and we're subscriber-based, and talk about losing an audience globally now, subscription as a concept is kind of a dying form. So the challenge is how do you maintain what you have and build a new audience for new writing? We've considered very seriously having one revival a year as paying homage to the legacy of the main theatre, to a writer who has an existing canon, if you will, and I think it's a wonderful idea—I'm sorry you're depressed—but I think that people recognise that play title and if you position it and contextualise like, 'OK, you know what, that guy on the other stage is gonna be that next guy.' Somehow we've got to invite our audiences to celebrate their own audiences and their own writers, and to look towards investing in the development of the new guys they don't know.

HOWARD: Can I just say something else very quickly about audiences because it also answers that question? We haven't really talked audiences that much. This is a little bit

politically incorrect but I've started so I'll finish. After ten years of working for one theatre, I've suddenly realised that I don't feel confident I know our audience, and that I know what audiences want, any more than when I started. After ten years of filling in Arts Council applications and filling in pie charts and boxes about audience demographic and the Traverse, which is of course a fundamentally elitist organisation, and I'm English, and it's all a nightmare – after all that, I was getting to the point where we were beating ourselves up so much about which postcode area our audience were from, and actually (it's going to sound very kind of hippy), I've actually stopped worrying about it because I realised I wasn't getting anywhere.

I've decided that the Traverse's fault is that it's completely enslaved to its writers, as a writers' theatre we produce work according to our attempts to give the best for our writers and manage their careers to some extent, and so we are guilty occasionally of doing plays that maybe are not the writers' best work just because that play has to be done. And, you know, sometimes our box office isn't strong, occasionally we'll do something and it won't work, and we do get a hard time about not always doing stuff that everybody wants to see. But I'm fed up with trying to second guess what audiences want, because I don't know— maybe I'm just not in touch enough. But I've decided that the future is only to do the work you believe in, and hope that people come and see it.

CLARKE: Just speaking of audiences, because I actually like audiences a lot – everyone uses the word 'audience development', and one of the curious things to me about Irish theatre is that when I went into the Abbey almost two years ago, one of the things that I wanted to do was have post-show discussions. And the amount of resistance I encountered, not only from directors, but equally from actors, that the idea that you would invite an audience to ask questions about they have seen, or, in some, to use that very kind of therapeutic phrase, to have an ownership of what they have seen was deeply troubling. Because there is this is odd kind of relationship between theatre practitioners and the theatre community and its audiences, that the audience is in the dark, it's a beast that has one eye, a big mouth, and it breathes, and you can hear it, and it will eat you.

So there is this kind of relationship of fear. And the idea that an audience can be filled with individuals is deeply alarming because it means that there are more monsters than just the one. The fact that they would actually ask questions is deeply troubling. I do think that a very strong idea in audience development is to actually welcome audiences into the theatre and to say that your presence, your attention, your engagement is hugely important in this. Jean Gilles Lecat made a very interesting point about the Abbey lobby which is this: you know, we have this beautiful new red carpet. But once you go into the foyer, the carpet is brown. And that there is no connection between the foyer and the theatre, and if you look at a lot of theatre's design, you will find that the carpets in most Irish theatres are different colours between the foyer and the lobby. And sometimes even the colour schemes—

But it was a very interesting philosophical point and that's why he works for Peter Brook, which is this, a theatre experience is a totality, and that once you enter the front doors, you are already participating in that theatre experience, and that audiences must be included in that. The idea of theatre artists— I love little old ladies, they are my favourite dramaturgs, they ask sometimes the smartest questions; they also ask very fundamental questions which is like, 'How did you do this? How did you sit down and make this play? How did you think about this role?' if you're an actor or 'How did you know that she should walk across at that moment there?' if you're a director. And I think that they're very fundamental, important questions but it means that there is, in some ways, a hunger, a curiosity about how theatre is made. And we forget this, I think, in all of our concerns to fill in forms and to use a certain kind of 'artspeak' that people don't have access to these very fundamental things, we don't teach theatre in schools, we teach theatre through literature, and then we drag our teenagers off to see very bad productions of Shakespeare, and so why would you go to the theatre?

DEEGAN: We're running out of time now, so we're going to take two more questions.

THOMAS CONWAY: Just two related questions on translations and the issues that have come up about translations. One is, how much do you involve the traditional

writers, actively involve or seek their consent in the work that you translate? And secondly, what do established writers bring to translations when they're working from a literary translation? Is that simply a marketing ploy or is there something else to be gained from a dramatic intelligence refracting the play again, even though they're getting it through English? And Paulo, in particular, have you ever had a response or feedback from Brian Friel or Frank McGuinness on any of the plays you've translated? Are they aware of the productions or have they ever acknowledged these plays? What about the issue of relocation of Translations to another culture, do the playwrights themselves agree to this or are they simply just waiting for the cheque of the royalties, and passing off the responsibility in some way?

TURCOTT: Judith Thompson, who is done in the States, and also when we did the play in Manchester, and who writes in English, obviously—and forget translating into French or Portuguese, even the cultural references, like when they want to change certain locales or cultural references, she makes the decision on every one. She won't let them do it sometimes, she'll say, 'No, it has to be that,' or 'Oh, you don't know, they won't know who that is so I'll change it,' so she has, through her agent, complete control over what they change and don't change: she's very involved.

CARVALHO: I have a wide variety of experiences—I was almost never asked to send a translation before the opening of a production. The only time that happened was precisely with a French Québécois playwright. And it was frightening, I can tell you, that experience was the only time. What has already happened when sometimes they really like to check the translation is if there is a chance of publishing, for instance, that happened with me. I had already translated three plays by Martin Quinn, a British playwright. His plays are, I could say, mathematical. They are really filled with echoes, they are, at the same time, fascinating from the point of view of translation, but at the same time they are really maddening if you want to obey and to replay that kind of game with echoes, and repetitions, repetitions with differences. The first time I had the opportunity to publish two of his plays, and for the publication the agent asked for the

translations to be sent, and someone with a proficiency at the Portuguese language looked at the translations and identified two or three places where the echo wasn't there.

So usually— for instance with Friel, he has no knowledge of Portuguese, he has never really cared. As far as I'm concerned, I could perfectly be the worst translator ever translating his works into Portuguese. I met him for the first time in my life last Tuesday. What I've been doing – because before translating Friel's works, I had met Thomas Kilroy at a conference in Glasgow and he told me how he loves to know what is happening with his plays – so I start sending him some photographs and clips et cetera. And one time I asked his help when I was translating *Dancing at Lughnasa*, I decided not to keep *Lughnasa* in the title because it was silly for a Portuguese audience, it could be enigmatic. I had so many alternatives—so many, I had two or three— and I asked him what do you think about this, about that, this one could lead in that direction.

In another totally different situation, I also translate from Italian, and I've already translated two texts from an Italian contemporary playwright called Luigi Lunari, and he's a very, I wouldn't say wealthy or a rich man, but he's quite content in his life. He was a translator for Giorgio Strella for many decades, and in this case even advocated to increase the amount of fees paid for the translator. He came to see the two productions, he helped with this and that. It's a wide variety.

DEEGAN: We're running out of time, and I want Philip to say something about the remarkable relationship between Laura and Linda, the writers of *Olga*, who are actually in Dublin for the first two days of rehearsals.

HOWARD: I think it's a fine question about why are you using a playwright to translate, rather than a translator, and the simple answer to that is because, I don't know about Ireland, but I do know that in the UK we are plagued with slightly academic translations... which is kind of a difficult criticism to make because some of these translators are brilliant scholars and fine theatre people, but I personally, and my

colleagues, feel that there is sometimes just something missing, often about timbre and theatricality and all the great things you would expect a great playwright to bring.

So in the case of this Finnish play, translated into Scots-accented English— and I think that what I'm really interested to see is how that works for Irish audiences— because what I hope you will see, as well as the fact that translator is a wonderful playwright in her own right, and understands the Finnish original playwright and her work very well, I think for an Irish audience my hope is the Scots English of the version will act as kind of mediator for the Finnishness of the piece, if that makes any sense.

And your other question, which was very, very good, was about, do they just wait for the cheque to come in? Well, apart from the Tremblay plays that we've done, all the other plays that we've done according to the system that I described earlier, the whole point has been to have the original playwright in rehearsal, and working actually face-to-face with the translator. So it's not just a status thing— I mean, we haven't been doing it with, apart from Tremblay, with sort of star playwrights. I mean, our project wouldn't work unless both playwrights were working together.

DEEGAN: I'm going to have to finish it there. I'm going to break protocol somewhat and give three plugs, because obviously the people in this audience are interested in new writing. Replay Theatre Company in Belfast is running a script lab from the 23-25 of October, the culmination of a project in which they invited five playwrights to engage with five professional theatre directors to develop new writing for young audiences. Also, in this venue, tomorrow and Sunday, there is a project called Playing Politics, a series of readings of plays in their original languages, indeed English and plays in translation, and discussions dealing with the issues of theatre and politics and war. And finally I encourage you all to check out irishplayography.com which will hopefully provide a path for people to locate plays here in Ireland without them having to go to London first. So without further ado, I'd like to thank our four panellists, I think it was a very interesting discussion and enjoy your lunch.