

# The Big Fella

## Education Workpack



Workpack produced by Out of Joint with Camilla Seale

## **Introduction**

### **Aim of Workpack**

The resource materials in this pack are intended to enhance students' enjoyment and understanding of *The Big Fella*. The activities are variations of the techniques used by Artistic Director Max Stafford-Clark during the rehearsal period, and present creative and practical strategies for learning in a classroom setting. The workpack also works alongside the workshops Out of Joint provides for *The Big Fella*, led by the Artistic Director, the Associate Director or the Education Manager.

The resources are primarily aimed at students aged 16+ who are studying Drama at BTEC or A level. The workpack is in two main sections – Researching and Rehearsing the play.

Please Note: Scenes from the play included in this workpack contain strong language.

### **Researching the Play**

*The Big Fella* follows a New York based unit of the Provisional IRA from the 1972 – 2001. Artistic Director Max Stafford-Clark always encourages rigorous research before and during the rehearsal process, and with the play set among real political occurrences, sensitivity to fact and an understanding of the Irish Troubles was integral to the rehearsal process.

This section includes an introduction into the play's setting, a timeline and glossary of the Irish Troubles, case studies of some of the most significant events that occur during the play and a rehearsal diary of when a former marine who served in Northern Ireland for the British Army spent a day in rehearsals.

### **Rehearsing the Play**

This workpack covers Max Stafford Clark's rehearsal techniques, such as 'actioning', 'status' and 'intentions'. Each section includes classroom activities and improvisations taken directly from the rehearsal room.

Members of the company give an insight into the rehearsal process with extracts from their diaries, including an in-depth exploration of *actioning* in one of the scenes.

We hope you find the materials interesting and enjoyable. If there is anything more you would like to know about the process of page to stage of an Out of Joint production, or you would like to book a workshop, please contact Panda Cox on 020 7609 0207, [panda@outofjoint.co.uk](mailto:panda@outofjoint.co.uk).



Director Max Stafford-Clark and writer Richard Bean in rehearsals.

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## **An Introduction to the Characters in the play**

### **David Costello** – American, played by Finbar Lynch

Is 37 at the start of the play, 64 at the end.

He is known as 'The Big Fella'.

He is Commanding Officer of the unit, and commands respect from the other men.

The character undergoes huge emotional turmoil during the course of the play; his only daughter dies of a heroin overdose, his wife leaves him, and he begins to question the moral integrity of the IRA after the bombing of Enniskillen.

Towards the end of the play he confesses to informing to the FBI, and returns to the safehouse apartment to be killed by his men.

### **Michael Doyle** – American, played by David Ricardo-Pearce

Is in his 20s at the start of the play, and his early 50s at the end.

The play begins with his acceptance into the unit, offering his Brooklyn apartment as a safehouse to Ruairi and later Elizabeth Ryan, whom he begins a relationship with.

His reasons for joining the Provisional IRA are his Irish heritage and anger at the Bloody Sunday events in Derry in 1972; he was born in America, and has no personal experience of British oppression.

Michael is relatively taciturn, but his love for Elizabeth and friendship with Tom Billy is evident, as is his growing respect for Costello.

### **Ruairi O'Driscóil** – Irish, played by Rory Keenan

Is the same age as Michael, 20's at the start of the play and late 40's when we last see him.

Irish born and bred, Ruairi began as a petty criminal before he joined the IRA. He was busted out of a British jail for shooting a British soldier. Rather than smuggle him out of USA, his orders are to stand trial as a political prisoner (he maintains that he didn't shoot the soldier and was only the driver). Induced by a Visa and an opportunity to fulfil a life-long dream to become an architect, he becomes an informant for the FBI.

His guilt for 'betraying' the unit, along with a sense of disillusionment at the violence caused by the IRA grows, and he gets out.

**Tom Billy Coyle** – American, played by Youssef Kerkour

Is the same age as Michael and Ruairi, 20's at the start and late 40's by the end.

A Brooklyn born Irish-American Police Officer, Tom Billy is passionate about the cause, but lacks the articulacy and intelligence of the others. He punches first and thinks later.

**Karelma** – Puerto Rican born, played by Stephanie Street

An attractive woman in her 20s who Ruairi picks up in a bar at the start of the play, she is later revealed to be an undercover FBI agent who turns Ruairi and later Costello.

Intelligent and aware, she has a closeness to Ruairi that hints at an understanding of what he has done in his life.

**Elizabeth Ryan** – Irish, played by Claire Rafferty

Extremely bright Irish woman in her 30s, she is brought to the Brooklyn apartment after being exonerated at a Court Marshal when she was suspected as a possible tout for the Brits in 1981.

She is accused of falling in love with a British diplomat she had orders to be in a relationship with, and makes it very clear that she was set up due to institutionalised sexism within the organisation. She begins a relationship with Michael before being knocked out and taken to her death by the Unit in front of his eyes.

**Frank McArdle** – Irish, played by Fred Ridgeway

In his 50s, Frank is a terrifying member of Security in the IRA, sent to the Bronx apartment from Ireland to find out who might be an to the FBI and kill them.

A recovering alcoholic, Frank is emotionally outwitted by Costello when he attempts to interrogate the Unit.

## The Troubles : A Timeline

*The Big Fella* spans 30 years in a Bronx safehouse apartment in New York, from 1971 – 2001.

Here is a timeline including the key events of the Troubles to help you understand the context in which the play is set.

**1798** – The death of Theobald Wolfe Tone, the leading figure in the United Irishmen Irish Independence. He cut his own throat in prison with a penknife rather than be hung for his part in the Irish Rebellion of 1798.

Costello: Name the greatest Irishman.

Ruairi: Er...Michael Collins? No? William Butler Yeats. No. Johnny Giles? Er...fuck. What was the name of that Fucking play writer fellah?

Costello: Who was the father of Irish Nationalism?

Ruairi: Oh, I didn't know you were going that far back. Wolfe Tone, o'course.

Act 1 Scene 1

**1905** – Foundation of Sinn Fein (*ourselves alone* in Irish): Irish Nationalists who want their own parliament, separate from Great Britain.

**1914** – Home Rule bill for Ireland passed by The House of Commons.

**1919** – IRA formed.

**1921** – Partition of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

**1968** - Craigavon Bridge incident: civil rights activists march despite a ban and are violently attacked by RUC officers.

**1969** – IRA splits into Provisional IRA and Official IRA

- Burntollet Bridge incident: Loyalists attack People's Democracy Marchers and RUC does little to help, 80 P.D marchers arrested but no Loyalists.

- The Battle of the Bogside: 2 days of rioting in Derry (known, under British rule, as Londonderry) following a Protestant march.

- Arrival of the British army: Northern Ireland appeared to be on the brink of Civil War.

**1970** – The Falls Road curfew: 3000 British soldiers, acting on out of date information, searched the Catholic Falls Road for guns and explosives, a 35 hour ordeal, 4 dead and 75 injured

**1972** – Bloody Sunday: 14 unarmed men and boys shot dead and 13 wounded by British paratroopers at a Civil Rights Association march.

Costello: *Just over a month ago, in Derry, thirteen unarmed Irishmen were murdered in cold blood by foreign soldiers!*

Prologue

Following this was the introduction of Direct Rule from Westminster.

Costello: No direct rule, Brits out!

Prologue

**1981** – Bobby Sands – hunger striker, member of UK parliament– dies. 10 hunger strikers now dead.

Costello: Bobby Sands! Carried my bag. Polite. He will go down in Irish history, but the others. Who gives a fuck about who dies sixth or seventh?! I bet none of you can name any single one of the others.

Act 2 Scene 2

**1987** – Enniskillen bomb: 11 Protestants killed on Remembrance Sunday by a Provisional IRA bomb.

Costello: You fucking tell me right now what moral purpose there is in the cold blooded murder of six women on Remembrance Sunday as they stand by the graves of their sons and husbands long dead!?

Act 3 Scene 1

**1995** – President Bill Clinton invites Gerry Adams to a reception at the White House.

**1997** – Real IRA formed.

**1998** – Belfast Good Friday Agreement signed - establishes the Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved legislative powers.

Real IRA bomb Omagh town centre, killing 29 people.

**1999** – Martin McGuinness, ex IRA Commanding Officer is appointed Education Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

## **Glossary of terms**

**Curfew** – a restriction placed on people, usually preventing them from leaving their home after a certain time.

**Home Rule** – measure to give Ireland its own parliament to rule itself, but leaving Ireland within the British Empire.

**Internment** – policy of arresting and holding suspects without trial.

**IRA** – Irish Republican Army - republican paramilitary organisation.

**People's Democracy** – political organisation with the aim of a socialist republic for all of Ireland.

**Provisional IRA** – A split in the IRA, formed in 1969. Led by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.

**Loyalism** – hard line Unionism – ‘loyal to the monarch of the United Kingdom’.

**Nationalism** – political view which wants a united Ireland free of all connections to the United Kingdom.

**RUC** – Royal Ulster Constabulary – police force of Northern Ireland.

**Sinn Fein** – Republican political party with close links to the IRA.

**Troubles** – conflict in Northern Ireland, can describe conflict of 1919-21 or from 1969 onwards.

**Unionism** – political view supporting the parliamentary union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

## A Closer Look at Events

**The IRA – aim:** a united Ireland completely separate from Great Britain.

The IRA was losing popularity and numbers during the late 60s and the views of many Catholics were that they were not protecting them against the abuse and attacks of the RUC and the Loyalists. The nickname 'I Ran Away' became popular in describing the slow reaction of the IRA to protect their fellow Catholics.

However, small scale incidents such as Craigavon Bridge and the Falls Road Curfew started to gather support for the IRA as the Catholics were seen to be innocent victims of discrimination and unprovoked violence. Following Bloody Sunday, support increased hugely and the USA's enormous Irish-American population donated millions of dollars to organisations such as NORAID, a front for the IRA.

In 1969, the IRA split into the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA. Put simplistically, the Provisional IRA believed that in a Marxist agenda, and sought to establish a United Ireland as a Socialist Democratic Republic. The Official IRA were led by a generation of older men who had fought with the IRA in the 1930s and 1940s.

### The Troubles

The Troubles in Ireland are one of the longest standing unresolved issues in history.

The events described below are all talked about in the play, and will help you to understand the political context behind *The Big Fella*.

### Bloody Sunday, Derry, January 30<sup>th</sup> 1972

Bloody Sunday remains a key event in the history of the Troubles today, due to the innocent lives lost and the fact that it happened out in the open by the British soldiers in front of so many witnesses.

The march was organised to protest against Catholic internment: at that point 340 people had been interned without charges, a trial or formal investigation. Some were subjected to experimental interrogation techniques such as sleep, food and water deprivation. Unsurprisingly, support for the IRA grew dramatically:

Costello: I guess what happened in Derry got you angry? I celebrated.

Michael: I guess the more we're attacked the stronger we become.

Costello: Exactly.

Act One Scene One

On Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972 a crowd of 15,000 protesters marched through the streets of. Since the beginning of internment, all marches had been made illegal. British troops claimed that they had been attacked first, but no nail bombs or guns were recovered from the scene. In total, 14 people were killed, and 13 injured.

It is argued that the British soldiers opened fire due to the expectation that there would be considerable violence from the protesters, as seen in previous marches with incidents such as at Craigavon Bridge and Burntollet Bridge (see timeline).



*He suddenly gasped and threw his hands in the air and fell on his face. He asked me: 'Am I going to die?' and I said 'No', but I administered the last rites. I can remember him holding my hand and squeezing it ...I knelt beside him and told him, 'Look son, we've got to get you out', but he was already dead. He was very youthful looking, just in his seventeenth year but he looked only twelve.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Father Daly describes the death of a victim of Bloody Sunday, p.13, Barry Doherty, *Northern Ireland since c.1960*

## The Hunger Strikers

When the British government withdrew Special Category Status for paramilitary prisoners, a blanket protest started whereby the prisoners refused to wear prison uniform and went either naked or fashioned clothes out of their blankets. This aimed to regain their political status by re-establishing the 'Five Demands':

1. The right not to wear prison uniform.
2. The right not to do prison chores.
3. The right of free association with other prisoners and to organise educational and recreational pursuits
4. The right to one visit, letter and parcel per week.
5. Full restoration of remission lost through the protest.

The protest attracted little public interest so soon it developed into the 'dirty protest' where the prisoners covered their cell walls in their own excrement and refused to wash. But even parts of the IRA viewed it as a diversion from basic objectives:

Costello        I'll tell you what I didn't do! I didn't cake the walls of my car rental cabin with my own excrement! MY WAR is not a whinge against capitalism.

Act Two Scene Two

Soon the protest turned into a hunger strike. When Bobby Sands, who had been elected as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone died while on hunger strike, a huge surge of support followed and 100,000 people attended his funeral. Recruitment to the IRA rose and increased international media coverage drew wider attention to the Republican cause.



## Enniskillen bombing, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1987

12 people were killed and 63 injured in a time bomb that exploded at the town's war memorial at a Remembrance Sunday ceremony, held to honour those who died serving the British Army.

This bombing caused a huge uproar, as we see in the play:

Costello:        So Frank, tell me, as a member of the IRA council of war, you fucking tell me right now what moral purpose there is in the cold blooded murder of six women on Remembrance Sunday as they stand by the graves of their sons and husbands long dead!?

Act 3 Scene 1

One of the bystanders killed was Marie Wilson, daughter of Gordon Wilson, who went on to become a prominent peace campaigner. He gave an emotional interview to the BBC the same evening of his daughter's death.

"I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night." – *Gordon Wilson, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1987*

Costello:        ...do you know who the real Big Fella is?... Gordon Wilson, I mean can you think of a more British name.

Frank:            (*Weak.*) And who the fuck is Gordon Wilson?

Costello:        We killed his daughter at Enniskillen...and he is big, and gracious enough not to hate us for it...he is as good and true an Irishman as any that ever put on boots.

Act 3 Scene 1

In 1997, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams formerly apologised for the bombing.

"I hope there will be no more Enniskillens and I am deeply sorry about what happened in Enniskillen. But I think we can only have a guarantee of a peaceful future when we tackle the root causes of the conflict and when we resolve them."  
– *Gerry Adams, published 8<sup>th</sup> November 1997 by BBC News*

## Belfast Good Friday Agreement signed

The signing of the Belfast Agreement was a major turning point for relations in Ireland. In the mid 90s, progress was beginning to be

made with an IRA ceasefire, but various tensions still existed and eventually the negotiations for a ceasefire stopped when an IRA bomb exploded near the Canary Wharf building in February 1996. Things started to change in 1997 when Tony Blair came into power. Blair invited talks with Sinn Fein on the condition of a ceasefire, and talks resumed in the autumn.

At 5.36pm on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> April 1998 Senator Mitchell announced the contents of the Good Friday Agreement between all parties.

## Actioning and analysis

In a rehearsal period of five weeks at Out of Joint, as much as the first two are spent analysing the text, primarily using a process called 'actioning', which encourages the actors to explore their *intentions* in every line, rather than simply their thoughts *behind* it.

An action is a transitive verb, which means something that you want to *do* to the person you are talking to (whether physically present or not). The way to remember transitive verbs is that it is something one *does* to someone else. *Sad* isn't a transitive verb, but *sadden* is. You might tell someone a piece of news in order to shock them, please them or impress them. The *shocks* or *pleases* or *impresses* is the *action* of the line.

Have a look at this extract between Costello, Elizabeth, Ruairi and Michael in Act 2 Scene 2:

Costello: What am I!? Ruairi!

Ruairi: A squid lover. Now sit the fuck down!

Costello: Am I a Muslim? Am I a communist!?

Ruairi: No. I'll tell yer what yer are. Yer the very definition of the American dream. Yer started with fuck all and yer've ended up with too much.

Costello: Am I a communist?

Ruairi: We've done that one!

Michael: For me, Mister Costello, you're a soldier. And you're an inspiration to me.

Costello: Thank you son. Miss Ryan. What do you see?

Elizabeth: I see a man usurped. A man who wanted to serve his country, to be remembered as a great Irishman, to do the right thing –

Costello: - to go down in history!

Elizabeth: But his country looked to someone new. I see a lover usurped, rejected.

(Silence)

Ruairi: Ah fuck. This is me only night off yer know!

Costello: She's right! Go on.

Elizabeth: Ten years ago you gave us the Armalite rifle. I stood next to you in the cemetery at Bodenstown.

Costello: The respect!

Elizabeth: I was nineteen. Shoulder to shoulder with a hero in the rain.

Ruairi: Ah! Now it was raining?! Well fuck me!

Elizabeth: Somebody pointed you out. "That fellah, there, the big fellah, he's the American".

Costello: The American. That's what they called me!

Stanislavski, the pioneer of naturalism (believable acting) thought that everything a character does or says must have an established 'objective'. In the scene above (in its most simplistic form) Costello (who is drunk) wants to assert his authority, Ruairi wants eat his Chinese takeaway in peace, Michael wants everyone to calm down, and Elizabeth wants to find out what orders Costello has received for her. To dig deeper within the context of the scene, Costello may want to confirm his position because he is about to carry out orders to kill Elizabeth. Ruairi, who is starting to consider what else he might achieve in life doesn't want to get drawn into an argument. Michael, relieved by the (misleading) knowledge that Elizabeth won't be sent to Libya wants to enjoy his evening with his friend, lover and admired 'leader'. Elizabeth, buoyed by the belief that she may only have to go as far as Canada enjoys the opportunity to engage intellectually with Costello. But it would be dull for Michael to simply play the scene 'relieved', or for Costello to play it 'drunk'. These directions would give no texture to the lines, or richness to the scene. To take Ruairi's character for example, there are numerous ways an actor can portray someone wanting to avoid a big political discussion. He could deflect tension through humour, or by belittling another character's comment. His 'actions' therefore could be 'dismisses', 'jokes', 'denies', 'avoids', 'rebuffs'... to name just a few.

'Actioning' encourages an actor to play with the text and to make more specific decisions, and helps to map the emotional journey of the scene. If the company feels that the scene steadily builds in tension, then the actions could rise in intensity with each line, or thought within a line. For example, to 'focus', to 'alert', to 'warn', to 'grip', to 'shake' and to 'horrify', as actions in a sequence would ensure that the scene develops towards a more natural climax.

Now read the same scene with the actions for each line. You should feel a sense of direction as the actions pinpoint the intentions behind the lines.

Costello: (challenges) What am I!? Ruairi!

Ruairi: (dismisses) A squid lover. (controls) Now sit the fuck down!

Costello: (enbitters) Am I a Muslim? Am I a communist!?

Ruairi: (prepares) No. I'll tell yer what yer are. (flatters) Yer the very definition of the American dream. (deflates) Yer started with fuck all and yer've ended up with too much.

Costello: (incites) Am I a communist?

Ruairi: (joshes) We've done that one!

Michael: (flatters) For me, Mister Costello, you're a soldier. (binds) And you're an inspiration to me.

Costello: (binds) Thank you son. Miss Ryan. (challenges) What do you see?

Elizabeth: (levels) I see a man usurped. (teaches) A man who wanted to serve his country, to be remembered as a great Irishman, (butters) to do the right thing –

Costello: (helps) - to go down in history!

Elizabeth: (awakens) But his country looked to someone new. (warns) I see a lover usurped, rejected.

*(Silence)*

Ruairi: (lightens) Ah fuck. This is me only night off yer know!

Costello: (quells) She's right! (encourages) Go on.

Elizabeth: (binds) Ten years ago you gave us the Armalite rifle. (uplifts) I stood next to you in the cemetery at Bodenstown.

Costello: (encourages) The respect!

Elizabeth: (draws in) I was nineteen. (uplifts) Shoulder to shoulder with a hero in the rain.

Ruairi: (undercuts) Ah! Now it was raining?! Well fuck me!

Elizabeth: (intrigues) Somebody pointed you out. (flatters) "That fellah, there, the big fellah, he's the American".

Costello: (encourages) The American. That's what they called me!

Actioning can be particularly useful in very energetic or emotional scenes. The danger with highly emotional scenes is that an actor wants to escalate the emotion with each performance, and so the scene loses shape. In such a scene as the following, the actions are key in grounding the scene and the actor's objective.

Elizabeth: (galvanises) Michael! They're gonna kill me!

Costello: (orders) Ruairi, put some fucking music on!

*(During the next Ruairi goes over to the record player and sticks the needle on the album which is on the turn table. It's side 1 of Roxy Music's Country Life album. Ruairi clumsily sticks the needle on the first track "The Thrill of it All". He turns the volume up.)*

Elizabeth: (galvanises) Michael! Michael!! Help me!

Tom Billy: (silences) Shut the fuck up!

*(Tom Billy goes into Elizabeth's room and comes out with her coat, which he throws at her. She picks it up and throws it back at him. Tom Billy draws his revolver and points it at her.)*

Elizabeth: (entreats) Come on Michael! You can help me now! Michael!  
(instructs) Break that door down!

*(Michael is barging the door and Ruairi struggles to keep it closed. Elizabeth starts to snatch books from the shelves and throw them at Tom Billy. )*

Costello: (warns) Keep outa this Michael! (orders) Get back in there!

*(Michael eases out of the door, pushing against Ruairi.)*

Elizabeth: (galvanises) Michael! (instructs) Take the gun off him.

*(Costello brandishes his gun. Michael backs off. The door is closed again.)*

Costello: (quietens) Keep quiet. Keep calm.  
(To Ruairi) (orders) Turn the music up!  
(To Tom Billy) (orders) Knock her out!

*(Tom Billy approaches Elizabeth. She throws books at him.)*

Elizabeth: (threatens) Don't you fucking touch me!

Costello: (orders) Knock her out!

*(Elizabeth and Tom Billy wrestle. Tom Billy eventually has her pinned to the floor where she screams.)*

Elizabeth: (horrifies) Michael! Help me! They're gonna kill me!

Tom Billy: (directs) Give me the gun!

*(Tom Billy pistol whips her. She lies unconscious. Costello turns the music off.)*

Now try actioning the next scene. You could work with a partner, or try it by yourself. The key thing to think about is what the character's objective is. Obviously they will have their own personality and emotions, but the way this manifests in their intentions is what really gives purpose to the scene. Remember that the action has to be something the character wants to *do* to the other, whether they successfully fulfil this action or not.

This is a good example to use for actioning because it is a tense scene with a lot of subtext, hidden emotion behind the lines. Ruairi is tense and knows that Frank is a violent man, so is wary of him. But perhaps he also wants to impress him because he is high up in the IRA. Frank is also trying to suss out whether Ruairi has been leaking information to the RBI – he has been sent over to New York as Security to question Michael and Ruairi. Read the extract through and then add actions to each new line or thought.

Frank: I shot the fucker.

Ruairi: What?!

Frank: Through the head. He died instantly.

Ruairi: Yer shot Shergar!? How could you shoot a beautiful horse like that?!

Frank: He was going mad, kicking the fucking fuck out of the fucking horse box.

Ruairi: Sure, did yer not think of trying him with a carrot first?

Frank: I thought of that aye, but it was already dark and all the shops were shut. Is that what you wear for work?

Ruairi: I been at a client's. It's Hugo Boss. Do you like it Frank?

Frank: Makes you look like a cunt.

Ruairi: Aye.

Frank: You got a good job then now?

Ruairi: Architect.

Frank: Fucking hell.

Ruairi: I was born on a cow farm but I always knew that wasn't for me.

Frank: What's wrong with cow farming?

Ruairi: Nothing, nothing, no, no, no. We all godda eat eh?

## Playing Cards: Status and Intensity

Max Stafford-Clark is well known for using playing cards in workshops and rehearsals. They can be used in a number of ways; for provocation, working out the dynamics of a scene, developing a character, and for fun. However Max chooses to use the cards, it is always for an exercise relevant to the scene or play he is working on.

Two of the most frequent uses of cards are for determining *status* and *intensity*.

### Status

A person's status in a given situation often feeds into their behaviour. The most simplistic example is at Court; A Queen or King is the highest status (a 10 card) and will walk, talk and behave in a particular way. A knave is a lower status than a monarch (perhaps a 7 card) and a servant would be a far lower status than both other character (a 2 card). A scene between these three characters is enriched by their varying statuses, because the knave will act in a different way to the Queen (he will lower his own status) than to the servant (where he will play it higher).

### Exercise

- 1 Everyone in the class gets a playing card (take out the court cards, and only use 2-10) which they can look at, but not show anyone else. They must then go around the room, chatting to everyone and playing their status. After 5 minutes the group must place themselves in order, high to low, depending on their status, and reveal their cards.
- 2 Everyone is given a card, but this time they must stick it facing out on their forehead, so that everyone else can see their status but they can't see their own. Repeat the exercise above, this time learning about ones own status by the way in which they are treated by others.
- 3 With 10 students, arrange 10 cards with two of each even number (2 2s, 2 4s, 2 6s, 2 8s, 2 10s). Hand them out, with the students seeing their own card but not looking at anyone else's. Repeat the exercise of walking round the room conversing, but this time with the intention of finding your 'mate', the person with the same number card as they have.

The above exercises, though perhaps simple, are very useful introductions into the idea of status in a scene or play.

During the exercises, how did people play their status? It is easy, when playing high status to puff out one's chest, storming around the room being loud and obnoxious to people. But there is nothing in a high status to determine that the person cannot be extremely polite and friendly to others. 'Happy High Status', for example, is how the Queen would behave. If she visited a house that was dirty and was offered a cup of tea that was cold, she would politely accept the invitation and be gracious. In other words, her status is fixed so high that she doesn't need to belittle others or enforce herself too strongly to remain a 10. Max always says that, "*A bully is a 9 who picks on a 4, and a bore is 4 who thinks he's an 8.*"

There are obvious statuses within hierarchical institutions; a teacher has a higher status than a student due to their job. But in all societies, friendship groups, work environments there are varying degrees of statuses for a number of reasons.

Look at the characters at the start of the play.  
What are their statuses?  
How do their statuses change throughout the play?

With regards to Costello, does his status drop from his first rousing speech in the prologue to his confession in the final act?  
What is Costello's status in his final scene, where he essentially comes to the apartment to be assassinated?  
Does his defiant decision to face his killers himself raise his status, or lower it?  
Does his status in his final scene, whichever card you think he may be holding, affect Michael's decision to pull the trigger?

Choosing a status and understanding that it can change and adapt is an excellent way of honing in a character's position in the group. For *The Big Fella*, a play that is centred around a cell of people essentially working for the same cause, pinpointing Ruairi or Tom Billy or Frank's status will feed into the scene, and play, as a whole.

## Intensity

Cards are also used by Max to determine how passionate a character is in a scene; this could be a political standpoint, or to assess their feelings for one another. For *The Big Fella* the actors could be given cards to determine how passionate they are about the IRA cause.

## Exercise

Choose a subject to debate; for the *Big Fella* this could be the case for a United Ireland against British rule, or you could play around with another subject, such as abortion, Arts Funding cuts, the closure of a local library to build flats etc.

Give each person a playing card. The colour determines whether they are for or against the subject (red = for, black = against) and the number determines how passionately they believe in their side. Engage in an argument, with each person playing their card without showing it to anyone else.

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As you delve deeper into a scene and a character, it becomes clear that there is often more than one feeling, or action, occurring at the same time. Elizabeth, for example, is in a relationship with Michael, but she is also a passionate member of the IRA.

Take this scene between the two characters, a couple of pages in:

Michael        They might want you to go to Canada.

Elizabeth      That's why it's important we don't do the love thing.

Michael        Let's get married.

Elizabeth      No fucking way. Marriage is the institutionalised oppression of women, and brings on a capitulation to sameness.

Michael        What does that mean?

Elizabeth      After a while we'll start wearing matching anoraks.

Michael        I don't understand why it's me.

Elizabeth      You, yer stuck out, like a beautiful sore thumb. When you came round the corner at the funeral, heading up that bunch of phonies you got the nerve to call a pipe band

Michael        - the award winning New York Hibernia Society Police Band.

Elizabeth      It was comical, but there was something compelling about you, you I mean, Michael. Some kind of innocence. I might even be here to save yer soul, who knows.

Michael        For me... when you walked out of the Ard Fheis that time, just, you know, you shouted something to the leadership, all those men, I don't remember what you said, but I watched your faces, and you walked out and they were scared. And I don't know what it was you'd said but I knew that you were right.

Elizabeth      "Welcome to the misogyny club AGM!"

Michael        Yeah, that was it. What's a misogynist? Is that like –

Elizabeth      - a sexist, anti-women.

Michael        I worked it out.

Elizabeth      We don't mention 'us' to the Big Fella. Ok.

Michael        Ruairi will have blagged us already, you can put your life on that.

Elizabeth      Aye, I guess. I doubt the Big Fella's got any influence over the decision.

Michael        If it's Canada -

Elizabeth      - Don't! We don't know where I've got to go lover. We can't make plans.

Michael        I'll just walk outa the firehouse. I could do it. I can find work in Toronto.

Elizabeth      You won't. I won't let you. You can visit if it's Canada, but it might be Libya, and I don't care how much you love me I can't see you popping over to Tripoli for a fuck every other weekend.

Michael        We don't have anyone in Libya

Elizabeth      After me court martial O'Neill said, after he said I was fucking lucky to be alive, he said Libya had become a posting.

Michael        Why did he say you were lucky to be alive?

Elizabeth      Because the Court Marshal wasn't unanimous.

Michael        But you were told to set the guy up!

Elizabeth      I'd been seeing a Brit for two years. That was enough for some of them.

Michael        But it wouldna been two years if Belfast had hit the guy when they shoulda hit the guy.

Elizabeth      But they didn't.

Michael        Why didn't they?

Elizabeth      I dunno.

Michael        Did you fall in love with him, the Brit?

Elizabeth      Frig no! I was sick of the fucking oik. The truth is Michael I was a threat to Belfast, they didn't like me, they hate women you see –

Michael        - Misogyny!

Elizabeth      - so they let me go with the Brit for long enough to make it look like a fucking relationship, which made me look like a tout. That's the top and bottom of it. They didn't want a woman in the leadership.

Give the actors playing Michael and Elizabeth 2 red cards each. The numbers represent how much they love each other. Now play the scene adhering completely to the number on the card. As the pick of cards is luck, they may not work with the scene. For example, if Michael were a 2 then the performance would be incongruous to the script. But by committing to playing the scene as the cards dictates, you are exploring all the possibilities before choosing which card best suits their intentions.

Now try giving the actors two cards each. One represents how much they love each other; the other represents their level of anxiety about Elizabeth's fate. If, for example, Elizabeth has an anxiety card of 8, and Michael of 3, the actors can explore potential tensions in their conversation. To develop this further you can explore the reasons *why* a character has their number. If Michael is a 3, is it because he is being self-involved? Is it because he is less intelligent? Is it because he has absolute faith that Costello will defend and support Elizabeth? By playing with cards and intentions you have a starting point to ask these pertinent questions, and experiment with the answers.

### **Other ideas for Intentions Exercises**

- Costello: how convinced is he that Michael is suitable for membership of the IRA?

If his trust is low, then Michael must work hard to convince him, as we learn in the text that of course Costello is satisfied with him and his apartment as a safehouse.

If the trust is high, then perhaps the scene can be played that it is Costello who is essentially 'winning' Michael over, and the intention (and indeed status) takes a different turn.

- Karelma: how much she knows about the PIRA cell when she meets Michael. Note that only during the mid 70's (a few years after the first scene) did the FBI begin to develop specific expertise about Ireland.

If she suspects a lot, how good is she at hiding it? Or Ruairi and Michael naïve not to see her as a potential threat, and what does that tell us about their characters? Is she genuinely terrified of Costello coming in with gun? Is she enthusiastic about the prospect of meeting 'The Big Fella'. Does she want to show that fear, or leave sulkily so that the cell don't worry that she knows too much?

## Improvisation

Max Stafford-Clark uses improvisations throughout the rehearsal process. In the first few weeks when the actors are actioning the text, it's an excellent way of freeing them up from the table, and developing the characters beyond the text. Rehearsals are not just about blocking the scene and learning your lines; they about creating a safe environment to play with ideas, try things out that may not work, or may lead to a scene or a character's entire emotional direction.

With *The Big Fella*, a play that spans 30 years, it is important to 'fill in the gaps'. With a writer like Richard Bean: sparse, witty and direct, improvisations can help flesh out the character and relationships to earn the quick repartee between them.

Camilla Seale is a young woman on work experience at Out of Joint, who kept a rehearsal diary in which she writes about the improvisations that the company did when working on Act 2 Scene 3. Below are some examples of improvisations that you can do yourselves to gain a deeper understanding of the characters, and perhaps discover additional strengths and flaws in them.

### 1. 1.1:

Ruairi: Yer've nailed a musical instrument to the wall so! Frank McArdle, he'd kill yer for less.

Michael: Who's Frank McArdle?

Ruairi: South Armagh alcoholic. I was in the Kesh with him. For this, Frank, he'd blindfold yer, drill yer kneecaps, beat yer till yer were lard, set fire to the lard, and piss on yer to put yer out, so's he could beat yer, and light yer up, all over again. He's a big music lover yer see.



**Improvisation:** Jail: Ruairi's first meeting with Frank in the Kesh. Think about what we already know about the characters: Ruairi has, maybe, shot a British soldier; does this give him elevated status? When we meet Frank he has quit drinking; was he even more violent and aggressive when he drank? Did Ruairi admire Frank, or was he afraid of him, or both? Did Frank see something special in Ruairi, did he have potential?

## 2. 1.1:

Karelma: So does this money go to the IRA?

Ruairi: Hell no! What makes yer think I would be involved with them fucking, thieving, murdering bandits?

Karelma: Cos last night, in the pub, you told me that you were an IRA freedom fighter on the run, busted outa some jail in Ireland by the IRA and had been hiding up in New York for six months waiting to get smuggled into Canada by the IRA.



**Improvisation:** Karelma and Ruairi in the pub the night before.

We learn later that Karelma was working for the FBI when they first met. Was she assigned to spy on him that night, or did she take the initiative? Was Ruairi really bragging (drunkenly) about the IRA, or does Karelma only tease him about it get a reaction? These are a number of options that can be played in the improvisation, neither of them right or wrong, just ideas to work with.

### 3. 3.2

Karelma: - now is a good time to talk to Costello.



#### **Improvisation:** Conversation when Karelma 'turns' Costello

This was a particularly interesting rehearsal improvisation. Max Stafford-Clark and the Associate Director Blanche McIntyre met in the morning in a café down the road from the rehearsal space. It was arranged that Finbar Lynch (Costello) and Stephanie Street would meet in a Turkish supermarket down the road, and then go for a coffee in the café. Karelma's objective was to 'turn' Costello into an FBI informer. That was the only direction they were given, and Max and Blanche watched from a few tables away as Steph got to work on Finbar, trying a variety of tactics from compassion to threatening, until Finbar agreed. This scene does not of course appear in the play, but gives Finbar a 'memory' of the event that will feed into his performance.

### 4. 2.2

*Elizabeth: Michael! Help me! They're gonna kill me!*



**Improvisation:** Michael, Costello, Ruairi and Tom Billy after Elizabeth's murder.

The next time we see Michael he is still a part of the cell, defending Ruairi and respectful of Costello. Does he now understand why Elizabeth was killed? Was he persuaded that it was necessary, or that she was a tout? By playing out a scene after Elizabeth's death, we can learn more about the men's solidarity, and how Michael could 'forgive' the murder of the woman he loved.

## The Design of The Big Fella

A few months before rehearsals started, Max Stafford-Clark had his first meeting with the play's designer, Tim Shortall. Tim had already read the script and came to this initial meeting with a few ideas for the set, including how many scene changes there needed to be to create all the different locations, as well as some more artistic ideas (for example, the suggestion to predominantly use the colour green). At this initial meeting, the designer and director discussed their ideas for the set, as well as thinking about some practical considerations such as how long each scene change might take, how many exits and entrances there needed to be, and how many doors (representing 'other rooms') there needed to be in the set. They discussed the two scenes in the art gallery which don't take place in the apartment.

About two months before rehearsals started, there was a larger production meeting involving the Director, Designer, Lighting Designer, Producer and Production Manager. This was the stage at which the Designer presented the 'white card' model, a small scale model (all in white) showing his plan for the set of the play. The white card models look a bit like rooms in a doll's house (with small figures representing actors so the Director can get an idea of the size of the set). There are also small models of pieces of furniture. This is the point at which the Lighting Designer also starts to plan his lighting design, for example working out where there are 'external windows' that can be lit through to show the time of day outside.

### 1) White Card model for Michael Doyle's apartment in The Big Fella:



The white card meeting is where things start to get more practical, and the Production Manager and Producer can start to think about whether the set will come in under budget or what practical problems there might be for touring the set. For example, the wooden floor imagined in the white card model above was eventually replaced with a painted green floor both for economic reasons and because there were practical issues with laying floors in every theatre on tour.

There were also a few other changes and additions to the model shown above before the final set was built. These included adding dressing to the wall (e.g. a poster of Janis Joplin to suggest the period in which the first scene is set, and sporting memorabilia to add more detail about Michael and his American upbringing). He also added detail such as tiles and the edge of a bath to the bathroom (which can just be glimpsed beyond the main room of the set), largely because he wanted to set the scene for a room in which one of the play's final climactic events occurs. You might also notice detail in the white card model such as a window into Michael's 'bedroom' (the middle door in the back wall). These internal windows are a fairly common feature of American apartments, and Tim Shortall suggested adding one here so that Michael's reactions and distress could be seen when he is shut in his room while Tom Billy abducts Elizabeth Ryan just before the interval.

Furniture (e.g. tables, chairs, sofas, coffee table) was bought during rehearsals by the stage management team, in consultation with the designer and director. The furniture subtly changes throughout the play to represent each different time period. The action also makes particular demands on the furniture; Michael and Elizabeth have just had sex on the sofa before the scene begins.

The picture below shows the apartment in Act Two (1980s), with the same sofas as in the first scene:



The picture below shows the apartment in the 1990s (after the interval). The sofas, rug and sideboard have changed during the interval, both to suggest the passing of time and that Michael and Rory have grown slightly more prosperous (with Rory's increased income as an architect and Michael's eventual promotion to Lieutenant). In the final scene of the play, there is extra detail such as a slow cooker for one person, which Michael turns on at the start of the scene (suggesting that he will now lead a slightly lonely existence as a bachelor for the rest of his life).



2) White Card model showing the piece 'flown in' from above to represent the gallery location, including a Mondrian painting:



As you can see, the initial plan from the Designer was to lower an entire wall from above the stage to represent the gallery, with a Mondrian-style picture on the wall. In reality, some theatres we were touring to did not have the flying (lowering and raising set from the ceiling) capacity. The 'Mondrian' painting is significant because it reflects Rory's appreciation of art and architecture (and in fact his paintings later in the play are revealed to be copies of Mondrian). Again, practical considerations (including the need to avoid expensive copyright fees) mean that the painting is not a reproduction of a real Mondrian, but specially commissioned and painted for this production by an artist who painted something more loosely inspired by Mondrian's work. However, like most of the set it is remarkably similar to the painting envisaged by the designer months before rehearsals started.

## **Rehearsal Diary for 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2010**

### **By Camilla Seale, work experience placement**

The rehearsal room at Out of Joint is a perfect cliché – assorted books and furniture make it feel comfortable and homely with duct tape marking out the stage and the set. Rehearsing hours are from 10 – 6 but the cast are given their calls the day before, so no time is wasted. To begin the day it's just Finbar (Lynch) who plays Costello, and we go through his opening speech with actions and then try it on stage. A couple of people are put on laughing duty and when Rory (Keenan) and David (Ricardo-Pearce) turn up we have a mini performance. Before a late tea break at noon, we rehearse 1.1 on stage, going backwards and forwards until everyone is (reasonably) happy.

A central feature of Max's work is actioning, and it is made use of considerably throughout rehearsals. Actioning is extremely useful for providing focus to the scene and making the actors pinpoint exactly what emotional charge each beat or line needs. They are not set in stone, but they provide a useful reference point if the scene begins to lose its way.

The best moments so far are definitely Rory's rendition of the traditional Irish song The Hair Fell Off Me Coconut and Tom Billy's line "Men. Holding hands. In America. ". This play is quite dark at times and so the comic overtones provide a perfect lightness. We then listen to Elvis singing Danny Boy, which Max felt proves the treacly sentimentality with which Irish Americans regard their homeland. Elizabeth's scene contains some stage violence so we briefly ran through it before lunch, as the fight director Terry King is coming at two. The scene involves much book throwing, and the pistol whip takes a lot of practise to get right. You begin to realise how much work goes into stage violence, but by the end of day the hit looks pretty convincing. The scene seems particularly brutal due to the vast difference in size between Youssef (Kerkour) and Claire (Rafferty) who's a tiny thing and according to Youssef "light as a feather".

After Terry leaves, Max and the actors talk about the background to Michael and Elizabeth's lives before their scene together. It is important for the play not to become an isolated set of events – every actor should know the whole back story of their lives and what happens in between the scenes so that the play and the characters become real people and events. The cast then carry out several improvisations to add background and colour to the relationship between Michael and Elizabeth. The first one is the day

before Elizabeth arrives at the safe house and so far only men have been staying in Michael's apartment. Costello comes round to have a chat with the boys and to establish boundaries – he doesn't want any funny business. The second one is Elizabeth's arrival, and there are some awkward moments the minute she turns her back. Finally, we see an evening meal two weeks after she has arrived – she has cooked a Peking Duck for them and involved the boys in the shopping – and she and Michael are beginning to get close. The remainder of the day is spent working on the rest of 1.1 and then Max gives the actors their call for tomorrow.

## **Rehearsal Diary for 11<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

### **By Chantelle Staynings, Deputy Producer at Out of Joint**

An ex-marine who served in Northern Ireland in the British Army came in to talk to the cast about his experiences. Because he'd signed the Official Secrets Act, he has to be careful about the information he gave away and we can only identify him with his initial (P). P did three tours in Northern Ireland (including a spell in Enniskillen, which had been the site of the 1987 Remembrance Day bombing) from 1990 to 1998. He started off in uniform but then took part in covert operations, which mainly involved watching houses with suspected IRA members or following suspects to gather intelligence. He chose not to go undercover because he couldn't master the Irish accent and knew it would be too dangerous for him to try and blend in.

His experiences were particularly useful for Stephanie Street (who plays Karelma) because she was interested to know the practicalities of planting microphones and cameras in houses, and the ways in which the British Army and MI6 tried to win 'hearts and minds' and gain informers within IRA cells. There were times when it took a month to drill through concrete floors and walls in order to plant bugs. P told of how raids to arrest suspects would usually take place at around 4.30am, when people were probably asleep and least likely to resist arrest. One remarkable fact to emerge was the respect with which he regarded the IRA's command structure and discipline.

P described how, as in the play, the intelligence services would sometimes not prevent bombs that they knew about in order to protect their source of intelligence. They would generally only bust a cell if they thought that their 'informer' was playing both sides by giving them only partial information or deliberately misleading them. Youssef Kerkour (Tom Billy) wanted to know how members of an IRA cell might act if they suspected they had an informer. P emphasized how dangerous the situation could be, with both sides sometimes snatching suspects on the street and even torturing them to try and extract information. The IRA considered itself an army and many members would be drilled in counter-surveillance techniques such as trying to find possible exits whenever they entered a room, or ensuring routines were varied to make being followed much harder.

The session ended with some improvisations in which the actors played either members of a British unit raiding a house in the early hours or IRA suspects who were under arrest. It was surprisingly

quick and disorienting for the suspects, who were asleep in bed one minute and pinned to floor (without knowing what they were suspected of) the next.

## **The Big Fella: Oxford Playhouse and Newbury Corn Exchange**

10:15am Thursday 26th August 2010

By Giles Woodforde

‘Good. There was more of a pattern in the conversation that time,’ says director Max Stafford-Clark in his calm, gentle voice. In rehearsal is a scene from *The Big Fella*, a new play by Richard Bean which is being produced by Max’s own Out of Joint theatre company.

The conversation itself has, however, been anything but calm or gentle. It takes place at gunpoint, and is riddled with expletives — not altogether surprisingly, for the play is about Irish Americans, and their relationship to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. When the rehearsal adjourned for lunch, I asked Richard what had made him choose that subject.

‘I was in New York, I suppose six months after 9/11, and I went down to Ground Zero. I was very moved by the way that the whole of New York was in trauma at that time, and I felt that I really wanted to write about terrorism.’

‘I’d written one or two things about Islamist terrorism, but I thought it might be more productive to come at it from a different angle: in particular the way that we all support political violence when it’s in a just cause. The parameters of the argument are whether you consider something to be a just cause, or not.’

‘Most people would consider French resistance against the Nazis to be a just cause, for instance, but in one analysis it could be called terrorism.’

‘So I wanted to write in a broader way than just focusing on Islamic terrorism, and the obvious group walking about New York City six months after 9/11 were the 400,000 Irish Americans who live there.’

"I thought to myself, 'this is horrendous, what has happened here in New York, but you guys have been supporting Irish terrorism for 30 years'.

"And, of course, one thing 9/11 really did was to end financial support for the IRA overnight."

Few, if any, directors have a longer or more distinguished record in nurturing new playwrights, and putting their work on the stage than Max Stafford-Clark.

I asked him what still excites him as he opens a new script.

"The great strength of English drama at the moment is the breadth of subjects that it takes on. I think theatre has learnt more from journalism in the last 15 years than from any other art form I'm aware of.

"Last night, for example, I went to the National and saw a play about climate change. The subsidised theatre in this country has given us a means to examine our own society, and to ask pertinent questions."

Pertinent questions have been asked in many of Max Stafford-Clark's productions, not least in *The Permanent Way* by David Hare, a searing indictment of mismanagement on Britain's railways which culminated in a series of crashes, among them Ladbroke Grove, with its strong local resonances: after a performance at the Playhouse, I saw a girl sobbing uncontrollably in the foyer.

Can you intrude too deeply into an audience's emotions, I asked Max?

"We normally expect laughter, that's the most vocal response audiences are able to give. But I have occasionally stumbled across tears: that response is as valid and satisfactory as any other, because you're dealing with emotion in rehearsal.

"For example, in the scene you just saw, Costello, played by Finbar Lynch, is obviously very upset because his daughter has died as the result of a heroin overdose.

"So as a director, I'm engaging the actor's emotion in that.

"Indeed, at an earlier rehearsal, we talked of Finbar's own son: tucking him up as a child, meeting him at the airport when he'd not seen him for three months, and how moving all that was.

“So you’re engaging the actor’s own emotions in the script, and engaging the audience’s emotions as well doesn’t seem to me to be invalid at all. It’s very much what you’re trying to do.”

Back in the rehearsal studio, Max is examining the characters’ motivation at each point in the story.

It is, Richard Bean pointed out, part of a long creative process.

“I originally wrote this play in Slovenia, typing away on a laptop and speaking Irish to myself. I was sitting in a room going, ‘I shat the horse’ — you type a line then see what it sounds like.

“In some ways I pay less attention to each character’s motivation to start with, then you come into rehearsals and you’re constantly analysing. Max’s process is very clinical on that.”

## The writer Richard Bean's article in The Times, September 2010

My first time in New York. It's only a few months after 9/11 and the city is wired, coked, running on something toxic. Flags everywhere. If for some reason you forget you're in America every time you open your eyes a flag mnemonic locates you back in the land of the free. It is like seeing the world through a filter of stars and stripes.

The playwright, Gary Owen, hails down a Yellow Cab. Gary is coping with New York a little better than me. He can order coffee without getting abuse. I can't, I mumble and shake, and genuinely don't know what I want. We're both staying at The Hotel Chelsea, famous for its rock and roll murders; its drink yourself to death writers; its artistic suicides. I've seen Gary's room, it could be in Wiltshire, and has a sofa. My room, second left, through the wired glass door with the extant bullet hole - why would you fix it? - is not in Wiltshire. I get paranoid. Is it the room where Sid Vicious murdered his girlfriend Nancy Spungen? I ask at the desk, they claim they don't know. Like, yeah, they don't know. It must be *the* room. My neighbours are long term residents with dogs. They're a gay couple going through a crisis, and it's not as simple as irreconcilable similarity. One of them is having an affair and comes home in the early hours to be met by his boyfriend and the dogs who are hiding behind the door ready to attack him. The dogs are in on the plan, and as soon as the guilty one's key finds the key hole, all hell breaks loose. Sexual histories are screamed, the dogs take sides, ice hockey trophies get thrown down the metal fire escape.

I lie awake, next door, sweating, still impossibly jet lagged, waiting for the ghost of Sid Vicious to come out of the bathroom with a knife and put me out of misery. The Yellow Cab is being driven by an African hoping to become an African American. Gary asks for 23rd and 8th Avenue, and we're off, like a bat out of hell. I look at Gary and for the first time in New York his face betrays a little fear. My Health and Safety Officer face started betraying fear on the Heathrow Express. Our driver is a headcase, he's nuts, he's on drugs, he's suicidal, he must live in The Hotel Chelsea. For the very first time in six days of constant Yellow Cab use, we both put on our seatbelts. What killed Lady Diana Spencer? Her decision not to wear a seatbelt. Clunk click. The bright yellow lump of metal tears off down the Grand Theft Auto race track which is New York's five lane one way system. There's nothing we can do, the guy is not stopping at red lights, he's weaving in and out of lanes, he hasn't passed his a driving test, he's had a tab of acid. If he would only stop we could

jump out, but when you have a hell hound on your trail you don't stop at the crossroads. Coming up to a red light he sees the lines of conformist muggins waiting for green, he spots an empty lane, and guns the great yellow shark into the gap and wipes out a pedestrian, breaking her hip and both her legs.

Now he stops, and slumps. He doesn't get out, just slumps. We get out. Suddenly, there's an enormous number of people about, helping. I never see the woman. "Is she alive?" I say. "She's ok. She'll live." Knowing that we will have to give witness statements Gary and I hang around on the street ten yards behind the Yellow Cab with its still slumped prisoner. He turns his engine and lights off. Whatever race he was in he has finally accepted that he can't win it.

First to arrive are the NYPD, the cops, about six cars, they close all five lanes. They don't arrest the driver as such, just chat to him. A deep growling klaxon sounds a warning, a celebration, the arrival of FDNY, the fire department. For me, that klaxon sound, based as it must be on Moby Dick's war cry, *is* New York. The fire truck arrives, it's flying the stars and stripes, the guys hang off the sides, in their now iconic hi-viz workwear. Mainly white guys, Irish Americans and Italian Americans, one African American. Everyone's in a movie. A cop comes over. He's friendly, asks us what we're doing in New York, if we're having a good time. We look at him, wondering like Brits do, if he's being ironic. He goes to talk to the driver, chatting to him through the window. He comes back to us - "the guy says you haven't paid the fare."

I grunt a laugh. Where I come from, Hull, that would be a rather bad taste joke offered up to lighten the mood of a tense situation. But this is New York and the cop is deadly serious.

"Why didn't you pay the fare?"

"We're not paying. We were in his cab two minutes, he didn't get us home, *and* he ran someone over."

"Come on guys, it's only a few dollars."

We pay the exact fair to the cop, I forget how much, maybe three dollars. The cop takes the money, walks over to the driver, hands it over, has another little chat. The cop comes back to us.

"Ok.....the guy wants a tip."

I know, reading this you don't believe it, you think I've made that bit up to spice up the story, let me tell you, I didn't believe it.

"I'm not giving him a tip."

"Aw, come on guys. New York runs on tips."

This much I knew to be true. Two days earlier I'd been chased down the street, well he was running, by a Japanese waiter demanding a 20% tip. I'd been ungracious enough to only give a 10% tip. I paid the waiter, what else could I do, he didn't speak English, and I only do improcomedy Japanese. Another cop comes over.

"What's the problem?"

The FDNY boys are getting interested. These two British playwrights are not playing the game, they don't want to give the guy a tip. We didn't like being the centre of attention, and I apologise to all lovers of reason everywhere, but I admit that we paid the driver a tip on top of the fare. I don't know how much, I would guess it was a dollar. We walked the rest of the way back to The Hotel Chelsea.

Nearly thirty years earlier Brendan Hughes of the Provisional IRA had come to New York looking for guns. As an Irishman he'd probably be more at home than me. New York is Irish, or more accurately the public interface is Irish - that is the Port Authority, NYPD, and FDNY. (Today FDNY faces a racial discrimination legal challenge to its recruitment practices that seem to be keeping the organisation if not Irish, then at least Catholic ie: Irish and Italian.) Brendan Hughes was a Provisional from Belfast and catapulted into the international world of terrorism by Bloody Sunday and its aftermath. The old IRA, or the "stickies" as they were known to the newly formed Provisionals had proved themselves incapable of defending the Catholic communities in the North from attack. The Provos had taken the initiative of asking the Irish diaspora for money, and guns.

There are two sources of guns in America - the Mafia, and the shops. And Brendan was not short of money. In 1972, the year after Bloody Sunday, Irish Americans had raised \$600,000 dollars - and that's only the official figure. Much of this was through NORaid, the Irish North American Aid Committee. Throughout its existence Noraid has claimed to be a peaceful membership organisation raising money to support Nationalist victims of the troubles. It has always denied that it's main function was to pass the hat in order to buy guns and bullets. Gerry Adams, who was then Officer Commanding the Belfast Brigade, knew that was all tosh, and sent

Brendan Hughes to New York to meet the Noraid guys and get them to start sourcing the Armalite rifle. The NORAID people that Brendan Hughes met were still uncomfortable with the Belfast Provisionals, and offered Hughes old fashioned Garrands and M1 carbines, and told him they were under orders from Dublin not to give him what he wanted - Armalites. Hughes walked out of the NORAID meetings and set up his own group in New York and bought Armalites across the counter with forged ID and smuggled them into Britain, through Southampton, on the QEII.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre are a truth, and will be remembered as a dramatic date in American history. Irish American support for the terrorists of the IRA over the thirty year period of The Troubles is also a truth, and a much less dramatic part of America's moral history. Sitting in diners, eating New York breakfasts, preparing myself mentally for a visit to Ground Zero, I am aware of the irony, and, because I am a playwright, a play starts to form.