



shared**experience**

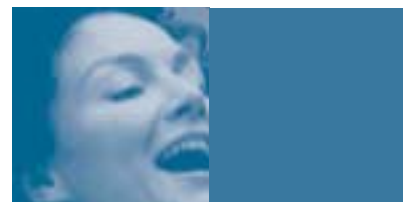
THE CLEARING

by Helen Edmundson

Education Pack

CONTENTS

- 2 Introducing The Pack
- 3 Shared Experience
- 4 Shared Experience on Expressionism
- 5 On Directing The Clearing
- 6 Helen Edmundson
- 7 The Curse Of Cromwell
- 8 Conquered Ireland in the 1650s
- 9 The Cromwellian Settlement
- 10 A People is Stronger than a Lord
- 11 A Little Piece of Eden
- 12 Traditional Gardening
- 13 Female Transport
- 15 The Patterns of History
- 16 The Design
- 17 What Do I Want?
- 18 The Psychology of Sturman
- 20 In Conversation with Joe Millson and Aislin McGuckin
- 22 In Rehearsals (looking at first few scenes, then Mon 11th Feb transcript, then the scene)
- 26 An interview with Peter Salem (Composing)
- 27 Leah Hausman (Movement)
- 28 Writing a review
- 29 Youth Education Training and Access



Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine) & Mairead McKinley (Killaine)



Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine) & Pip Donaghy (Solomon)


THE PACK

This pack is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing a performance of **The Clearing**. I've included background material, such as the history of the time and the political policies and also information specifically on our production; which includes interviews with the creative team.

Although this cannot be an exhaustive account of the whole production, I hope that it introduces some of the ideas and approaches central to Shared Experience and this production. Scattered through the pack are questions and exercises that I hope will be useful to provoke discussion and practical work of your own.

Gillian King.

Education Associate, Shared Experience



**'GAN GAIRE FA
GHNIOMHRADH LEINBH'
'THERE IS NO LAUGHTER
IN CHILDREN'S DOINGS,
MUSIC IS PROHIBITED,
THE IRISH LANGUAGE IS
IN CHAINS.'**

'At the heart of our work is the **POWER** and **EXCITEMENT** of the performer's physical presence and the unique collaboration between actor and audience - a **SHARED EXPERIENCE**. We are committed to creating a theatre that goes beyond our everyday lives, giving form to the hidden world of emotion and imagination. We see the rehearsal process as a genuinely open forum for asking questions and taking risks that redefine the possibilities of performance.'

Nancy Meckler -Joint Artistic Director



Patrick Moy, Polly Teale, Pip Donaghy, Mairead McKinley & Joseph Millson

SHARED EXPERIENCE ON EXPRESSIONISM

In our everyday lives we hide much of what we think and feel, for fear we would be considered foolish or even mad. I believe we have a longing to see expressed in the theatre that which we conceal in life; to share our 'madness' and understand that we are not alone.

Central to Shared Experience's approach is the desire to go beyond naturalism and to see into the character's private worlds. There will be moments on stage when we literally enact whatever a character is secretly feeling or imagining. In more realistic scenes the social façade is a thin layer beneath which bubbles a river of barely suppressed emotion. During rehearsals we encourage actors to allow this 'bubbling emotional energy' to explode and take over. In a scene where someone is secretly feeling very angry, we allow the inner to erupt onto the surface when they may viciously attack the other person; if the other character is feeling afraid they might crawl under the table. Having allowed the inner to erupt, the actor must return to the scene and struggle to conceal it. Although we may see two people drinking tea, we sense that underneath the social ritual it is as if murder is taking place.

This emphasis on subjective experience runs through all areas of the production. For example, the setting of the play will be more expressive of what a place **feels** like than what it realistically **looks** like. In Jane Eyre everything on stage was grey or black to express the loneliness of Jane's inner world. In War and Peace the set was a hall of mirrors to suggest the vanity and narcissism of the aristocracy in Tolstoy's Russia. In The House of Bernarda Alba the house feels like a prison. We decided to make the door colossally large and encrusted it with locks and bolts. It is this emphasis on the 'inner' or the subjective experience which characterises expressionism and it is at the heart of Shared Experience's approach.

Polly Teale



Ameida Brown (Susaneth) & Pip Donaghy (Solomon)

ON DIRECTING THE CLEARING BY POLLY TEALE

The Clearing is an extraordinary achievement. It captures both a great sweep of history and the intricate break down of a marriage between an Irish woman and an English man. We are made to feel the effect of history through the lives of the characters.

Edmundson explores with great subtlety the way in which racial hatred springs from fear. We see how beneath Sturman's formidable façade hides a frightened man who had imbued the Irish with supernatural powers. This fear of *'the other'* lies at the heart of the play: the desire to crush or destroy what we cannot understand (and perhaps secretly covet). It is not surprising that Sturman is so threatened by Madeleine. She represents everything he could never allow himself to be. She is passionate, sexual and unafraid of life. Robert is of course hugely drawn to Madeleine *because* she is so different to everything he knows.

'Hers was not the dutiful love I had come to anticipate. It was given freely.'

And yet when he realises the cost of his devotion he becomes increasingly controlling, fearing that Madeleine's passionate nature will bring about their downfall. We realise that Robert has built himself a tiny British kingdom in the heart of the Irish forest.

'It's different for you. You love this country but I do not. I love this little piece of it that's mine. That's all. This little piece with its garden and its fences and its big stone gates.'

Traditionally, in Ireland, there was no such thing as absolute private ownership of land. Land was owned collectively by clans who distributed it according to the needs of the community. Robert's walled garden becomes a symbol of everything that England has brought to Ireland.

A wall has become the focal point of the set, dissecting the stage from left to right. But growing through the wall is a tree that buckles the bricks and threatens to destroy the imposed boundary.

Why choose **The Clearing**, a traditional, text-based play for Shared Experience? A company committed to work that goes beyond naturalism? **The Clearing** is written in a highly charged poetic language and yet there is a wonderful sparseness and economy to the writing. Every scene bristles with sub-text. It has something of the quality of a nightmare where ordinary things gain extraordinary significance. The forest, the garden, even the child's toy, which Madeleine uses to frighten Sturman, have great significance and power within the story. It is this charged atmosphere which makes the play right for the company. And, finally, the sense that we see not only the world as it is, but in Madeleine's words we have a glimpse of the world as it could be.

'I hope that one day the people who come after me will have their lives for themselves without this pulling back and pulling back. That they will have their lives to fly like falcons, off their hands and back again as they will. It is a dream and I will not give up.'



Patrick Moy (Pierce) & Mairead McKinley (Killaine)

HELEN EDMUNDSON

I have seen performances of **The Clearing** in several countries around the world now, and wherever it goes, people find ways of relating it to their own experience. This might be that it reflects historic religious and ethnic-based conflicts within their nation, or it might be that it seems personally relevant to the experiences of a mixed-race couple, or a same-sex couple or a Jew married to a Gentile, whose families have always refused to accept them.

In the prosperous, democratic West, where we worship at the shrine of the Individual, it is easy to believe that we are free to love whom we choose. But looking around, it seems to me that there are very few of us who choose to love beyond what we know. Even in multi-ethnic Britain, in the throes of the Global Economy, where our chances of meeting and mixing with people from very different backgrounds are greatly increased, the majority of us continue to gravitate towards *'our own kind'*. At the very simplest of levels, it seems we cannot underestimate the reassurance of a shared culture: similar food we were raised on, the same books we read at school, shared memories of television programmes; to have these sorts of things in common can give partners a kind of shorthand with which to connect. But at a deeper level, this sticking with what we know, has to come from our innate fear, even rejection of, the *'other'*. This may be a conscious thing, a desire to keep a blood-line pure (this applies to the British upper-class as much as it does to Brahmins or Jews) or it may be that age-old, animal instinct, that what we don't know or understand means danger.

In **The Clearing**, Robert and Madeleine have dared to step beyond that instinct. For Robert it is more a matter of chance - he was swept off his feet by a gorgeous Irish woman, and all his ruling-class confidence and youthful sense of adventure allow him to go with it. But for Madeleine it is much more connected to an ideology of life. She has seen the damage done to her family, to the Irish people, by the perpetuation of mistrust and hatred, and she is determined that the cycle can be broken. Consequently, when their relationship is put under strain, she has something to fall back on which he does not have.

Within days of September 11th, British mosques were receiving hate-messages, Muslim taxi-drivers were having their windows smashed, Muslim women were being abused and assaulted in the street. For some, toleration of multi-ethnic Britain is a veneer which is very easily stripped. And what would happen if this conflict, or one akin to it, was to come even closer to home? What levels of violence and hatred might not be unleashed?

I wrote **The Clearing** at the time of the civil war in former Yugoslavia, amidst the expressions of horror and disbelief at fellow Europeans displaying such barbarism. Which one of us can be absolutely certain that, under similar circumstances, we would not be susceptible to propaganda, that we would not fall prey to the lust for revenge or absolute supremacy? At the end of the play, Madeleine talks about her dream of a world where people *"have their lives for themselves, without this pulling back and pulling back"*. For many, it remains a dream.

But perhaps there is hope. Perhaps the numbers marching on recent peace-rallies show that more and more people are able to see the bigger picture. Perhaps what seems to be happening in Northern Ireland really is happening and will last.

Perhaps, when it comes to loving beyond what we know, it is just early days and by the end of the century, we will all be confident enough to consider ourselves citizens of the world.

Perhaps.

Helen Edmundson. November 2001.

THE CURSE OF CROMWELL

On 15 August 1649, Oliver Cromwell landed near Dublin with an army of 3,000 battle-hardened 'Ironsides'. The civil war in England had ended, and King Charles I had been executed seven months earlier. In Ireland, however, the Roman Catholics had been in revolt since 1641 and held much of the island. They had generally taken the King's side, though some had seen in England's turmoil a chance to restore Irish independence. Cromwell entered Dublin as *"lord lieutenant and general for the parliament of England"*. A fanatical Protestant, he intended to offer no quarter to Catholic rebels who had massacred English and Scottish settlers. In Ireland, he could use confiscated land to pay off debts to his troops and to the so-called *"Adventurers"* who had financed the parliamentary cause.

From Dublin, Cromwell marched north to Drogheda which was defended by an English Catholic and royalist. When his surrender demand was ignored, Cromwell stormed the city and ordered the death of every man in the garrison, describing this as *"a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches"*. Having secured the route to Ulster, Cromwell turned on the south eastern port of Wexford, this time slaughtering townspeople and garrison alike. Neighbouring towns quickly submitted.

Cromwell's campaign ended with an assault on Clonmel where, after stout resistance, the defenders withdrew by night. In May 1650 he returned to England, leaving his son-in-law, Henry Ireton, in command. Within two years Catholic resistance was at an end. Many Irish soldiers were allowed to seek their fortunes in Europe. Catholic land-owners were largely dispossessed, but some were given the option of settling on less fertile land in Connaught. Cromwell himself had been in Ireland a mere nine months, but his brutality left an indelible impression on the native Irish. *"The curse of Cromwell on you"* became an Irish oath.

From *A Little History of Ireland* by Martin Wallace.



Pip Donaghy (Solomon) & Joseph Millson (Robert)

CONQUERED IRELAND IN THE 1650S

By the summer of 1652 Ireland had been reduced to the position of conquered colony and the government of England made preparations for the settlement of the countryside. Parliament decreed that the landowners who were guilty of involvement in the Irish rebellion would lose all their land. Those who were innocent of any involvement in the rebellion would be allowed to retain a proportion of the land that they owned. Ireland was divided into two - one part consisted of Connaught and Clare where all those who were innocent would be transplanted.

Solomon in *The Clearing* had not been involved in the rebellion of 1641 but he had, in 1645, declared and fought for the Commonwealth against Cromwell. Initially he is given the order to transplant to Connaught where he will be given land to the value of one third of his home and farm.

The remaining land was to be confiscated and granted to the government's creditors - the soldiers who were owed pay and those who had loaned the government money or supplies.

The Cromwellian settlement completely changed the make-up of the Irish land-owning aristocracy. The ownership of land, the main source of wealth and power in Ireland, was transferred from Catholic to Protestant.

An anonymous pamphlet was published in January 1655 and sent to every member of Parliament. It was an attack on the whole policy of transplantation. It argued that transplantation (to Connaught) would lead to an almost continuous guerrilla warfare with the Irish and increase the number of Tories (Irish resistance fighters) roaming the countryside.

Pierce is persuaded into action by the death of his father and brother and because of the Transplant laws. He tells Maddy;

'You may not see me again after today. I'm going to the Tories. I can't stay in the open any longer. I'll be dancing the hanged man's turn if I don't get out now'



Q

- How do you think Solomon and Susaneh came to their decision to appeal?
- What would have happened if they had refused to register for Plantation?
- Why did Cromwell choose Connaught?

THE CROMWELLIAN SETTLEMENT

Ireland's sufferings in the 1650s were far from over. Ireland, in the language of Scripture, lay void as a wilderness. Five-sixths of her people had perished. Women and children were found daily perishing in ditches, starved. The bodies of many wandering orphans, whose fathers had been killed or exiled, and whose mothers had died of famine, were preyed upon by wolves. In the years 1652 and 1653 the plague, following the desolating wars, had swept away whole counties, so that one might *"travel twenty or thirty miles and not see a living creature"*. In September 1653, parliament issued the order for the great transplanting. Under penalty of death, no Irish man, woman or child was to be found east of the River Shannon, after the 1st May 1654.

**'THE KING IS LOOSE AND
ABSOLVED FROM ALL RULES
OF GOVERNMENT. IN AN
EXTREME NECESSITY YOU
MAY DO ALL THAT YOUR
POWER ADMITS. PARLIAMENT
REFUSING, YOU ARE
ACQUITTED TOWARDS GOD
AND MAN. YOU HAVE AN
ARMY IN IRELAND YOU MAY
EMPLOY HERE TO REDUCE
THIS KINGDOM. ONE SUMMER
WELL EMPLOYED WILL DO IT.'**

(The Earl of Stafford to King Charles 1 1640)

Mairead McKinley (Killaine) & Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine)



A PEOPLE IS STRONGER THAN A LORD

OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND

Prior to the colonisation of Ireland, no one person owned land. Land was the common property of all the clan, and each clansman was allotted land. He could not dispose of it without the consent of his clan, even the disposal of cattle or other goods needed such approval.

The chieftains were elected by the clansmen. They had to be capable of carrying out the job involved, and acquainted with the problems a chief would encounter. However it was very difficult for a chieftain to become negligent or despotic as his power was limited and hemmed in by the clan.

The philosophy was expressed in the old saying '*Is treise tuath no tighearna*' - *a people is stronger than a lord*.

ROBERT:

"I'll tell you what Connaught is. To me. Connaught is unthinkable. This is my land, my house and I will not give it up to go to some Godforsaken corner of this Godforsaken island. It was all my Father left me. All I've got. Everything in England went to my brothers; if I went back there I'd have nothing. And I will not go to Connaught. I will not live there. It's different for you, you love this country but I do not. I love this little piece of it that's mine. That's all. This little place with its garden and its fences and its big stone gates. We will not go to Sturman and we will not make a noise about this."

DEBATE

Split into two groups:

A argues that all land belongs to the people and should be governed by the people

B argues that land should be able to be bought and fought for, land becomes a reward for hard work, achievements and financial success



Amelda Brown (Susaneh)

A LITTLE PIECE OF EDEN

From the start of the civil war in 1642, garden owners and designers began to reconsider the objectives of garden design. They came to see their estates less as backgrounds to social events and more as places of secure retreat from the dangers of political and religious strife. In doing so they looked back to an older tradition deriving from Christian mythology which celebrated the garden as a place in which use could be combined with beauty, profit with pleasure and work with contemplation.

The first element of the gardening ideal to take root in England came from the biblical account of the fall. The book of Genesis recounts the story as follows:

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight; and good for food; and the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it'

Genesis Ch 2 v 8,9,15

But Adam and Eve disobeyed Gods' command and ate of the tree of knowledge, Good and Evil.

The biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and their banishment from it, makes the point that man was charged with horticultural duties both before and after his fall from grace. Before his expulsion from paradise he was required to help maintain the beauty of the Garden of Eden. After their expulsion, they had to sweat and toil on Earth to eke out their own living. It therefore appeared to some Christian thinkers that gardening was not only one of the purest and most divine activities open to man, it was a way of recreating the paradise which man had once shared with God.

Robert builds a wall around his Eden and tends to the garden and by doing so he keeps the wilderness the 'after the fall', the 'Irishness' away.

However Sturman who is without a family and a closed off estate in Ireland, believes that he is faced with a whole country that needs pruning and even hacking back. The whole of Ireland is a wilderness to him and he believes that Robert should first rid the land of evil before cultivating a garden.

Robert: *"My estate. It is beginning to prosper and I have planted a garden"*

Sturman: *'You should work at making this a safe and Godly land before you start with planting trees and shrubs'*

Richard Attlee (Sturman) & Joseph Millson (Robert)

TRADITIONAL GARDENING

Stylistically, gardens of the early decades of the 17th century were influenced by the Renaissance principle that they should be both physically and decoratively harmonious with the house, to present a satisfying combined picture. Even the grandest gardens covering impressive areas were almost always still enclosed by walls, giving no contact with the surrounding landscape other than that provided by the occasional view point.

The desire for order, for a puritanical and patriarchal system following the decadent, royalist reign of Charles 1 was manifested in the clipped, heavily pruned and ordered gardens of the mid seventeenth century.

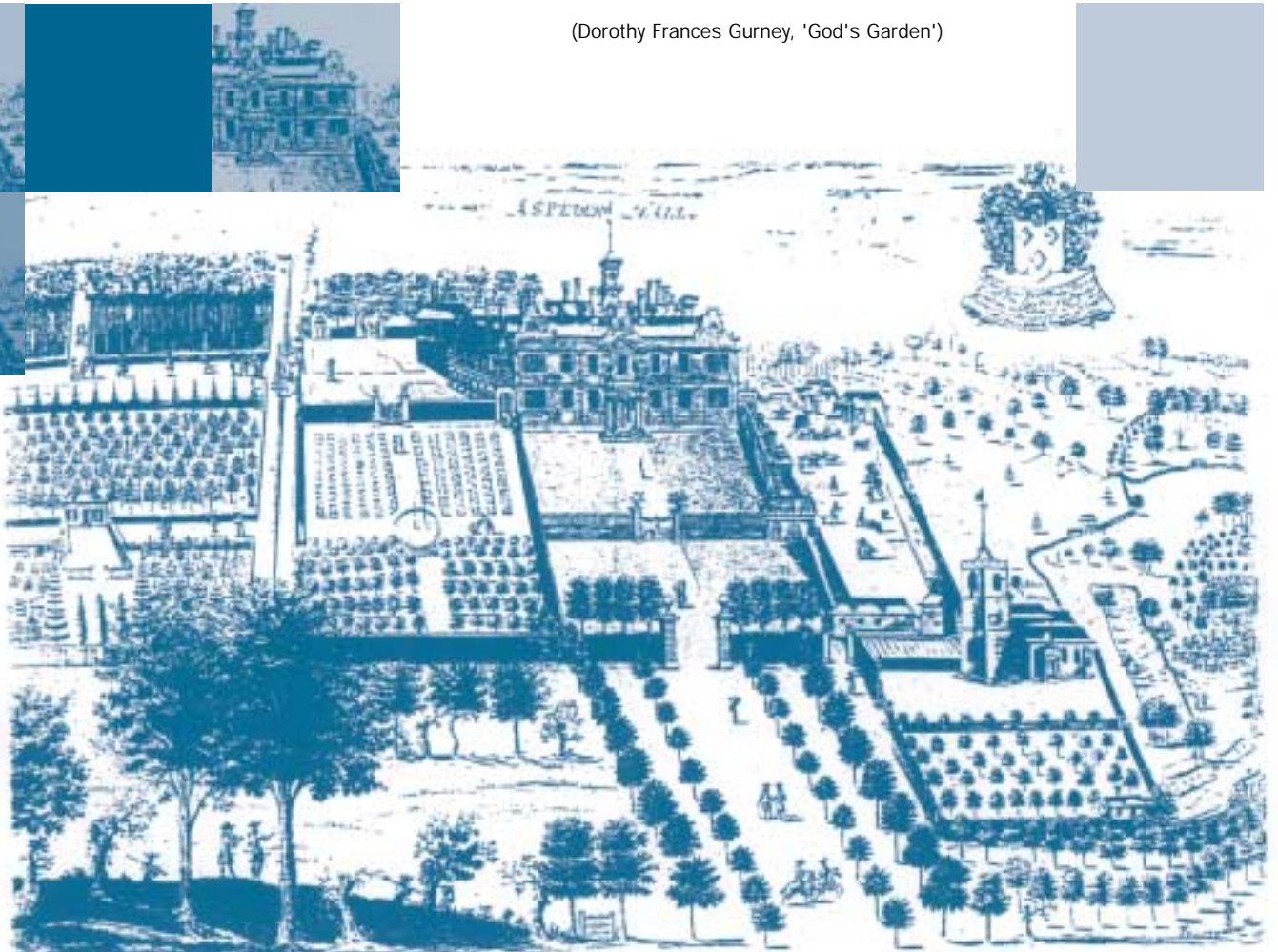
Q

The gardens of the 17th Century reflected the social and moral issues of the day, is that still true today?

In gardening and interior decoration?

ONE IS NEARER GOD'S HEART
IN A GARDEN THAN ANYWHERE
ELSE ON EARTH.

(Dorothy Frances Gurney, 'God's Garden')



FEMALE TRANSPORT!

Many disbanded soldiers following Cromwell victory in the Civil War were encouraged to find employment in Ireland. Failing that, many were sent to the New World to find 'employment abroad'. The soldiers would work as planters, however no women wanted to join them voluntarily. A policy to ensure future population had to be devised and implemented quickly.

Lord Broghill, a leading member of Cromwell's' administration, suggested that a supply of women and young girls could be seized from the Irish and transported to the colonies. This would solve the 'problem' that no women voluntarily wanted to travel by sea for several months to an uncivilised, hot, and very 'foreign' country, in order to marry the planters.

Henry Cromwell, on behalf of his father, agreed with the plan, justifying it thus;

'Concerning the young women, although we must use force in taking them up, yet it be so much for their own good and likely to be of so great advantage to the public it is not in the least doubted that you may have such a number of them as you shall think fit to make use upon this account.'

In the beginning of Act three, Killaine has disobeyed Robert and is on foot in the village. She becomes one of the first Irish women to be rounded up by force to take to the colonies. As the stage directions to Act Three, Scene One illustrates:

In the village. Christmas 1653.

Music. It has a Christmas strain but underneath it is foreboding.

KILLAINE is running. She is terrified, breathing heavily like a trapped animal. There is nowhere for her to go. She runs against a wall. A soldier enters, wielding a chain. A helmet covers the whole of his face. He advances slowly towards KILLAINE, who runs, almost throws herself into another wall. As he gets nearer she freezes, no longer able to move. When he reaches her he pauses and then raises his arm high and strikes her across the head. She falls to the ground. He takes hold of her and drags her off.

In the colonies the 'Transportees' found themselves treated more harshly than the African slaves (of whom there were few). Slaves were bought for good money and were 'for life' and were therefore treated as a prized possession. Prisoners (engages) were contracted for 5-7 years and were then released and given a small strip of land on which to make their living. They were treated very cruelly and Thomas Carlyle in 1655 wrote;

'A terrible Protector this...he dislikes shedding blood but is very apt to Barbados an unruly man...he has sent and sends us by the hundreds to Barbados so that we have made an active verb of it "Barbados you"'



Mairiad McKinley (Killaine) & Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine)

Q

Imagine what life would be like on a transporting ship.
What qualities would you need to survive?
Do you think Killaine will survive?

EXERCISE

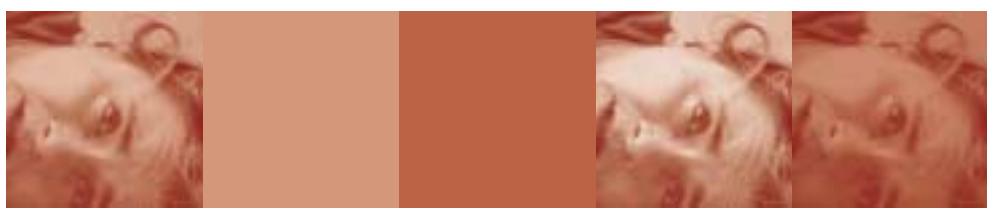
THE ISLAND GAME. The whole group walk around the room, the teacher/leader places newspaper sheets on the floor to make 'islands' (using three or four sheets for each island. When the leader claps, everyone must find a space on one of the islands. Look around your group on your island. They are your people, your pack. Then begin walking again, as in musical chairs the leader reduces the newspaper sheets each time, so each time islands get smaller.

How do you keep your pack together?

Physically?

Eventually do you have to sacrifice people?

How do you decide who goes?



THE PATTERNS OF HISTORY

The **Clearing** thematically explores the power struggles over land, the conflicts between religions and the effect these have on the people in Ireland caught in the middle. The play is set in the early 1650's.

Eight months ago the article below appeared in **The Guardian** Newspaper:

THATCHER SUGGESTED 'CROMWELL SOLUTION' FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

A year after Brighton bombing, PM saw mass shift of Catholics from Ulster to Irish Republic as a way to end the Troubles.

Special report: Northern Ireland

Nicholas Watt, political correspondent, Saturday June 16, 2001 The Guardian

Margaret Thatcher horrified her advisers when she recommended that the government should revive the memory of Oliver Cromwell - dubbed the butcher of Ireland - and encourage tens of thousands of Catholics to leave Ulster for the south.

A year after she was nearly killed in the IRA's 1984 Brighton bomb, the then Prime Minister expressed dismay at Catholic opposition to British rule when they could follow the example of ancestors who were evicted from Ulster at the barrel of a Cromwellian gun in the 17th century.

Lady Thatcher's extraordinary solution to the 'Troubles' has been disclosed by her advisers at the time of the negotiations on the 1985 Anglo-Irish agreement.

Sir David Goodall, then a diplomat who was one of the most senior British officials negotiating with the Irish government, told a BBC four-part documentary, **Endgame in Ireland**, that Lady Thatcher made the "outrageous" proposal during a late night conversation at Chequers.

"She said, 'If the northern [Catholic] population want to be in the south, well why don't they move over there? After all, there was a big movement of population in Ireland, wasn't there?'

Nobody could think what it was. So finally I said, 'Are you talking about Cromwell, Prime Minister?' She said, 'That's right, Cromwell.'"

Her interest in him is likely to turn her into an even greater hate figure among nationalists, who have never forgiven her for mishandling the 1981 Republican hunger strikes. Catholics were slaughtered in their tens of thousands in the 1640s and 1650s by Cromwell's forces. Virtually all Catholic landowners were hounded out of Ulster.

Q

In your opinion, are we anywhere closer to Peace in Ireland than we were at the time of the play?

Polly Teale (Director) & Mairead McKinley (Killaine)

IRELAND IS A
COUNTRY IN
WHICH THE
PROBABLE NEVER
HAPPENS AND
THE IMPOSSIBLE
ALWAYS DOES.

THE DESIGN

THE WILDERNESS VERSUS CIVILISATION.

On the second day of rehearsals, Angela Davies (the designer) and Polly Teale (the director) showed the model box of the set and talked about their concept of the design.

Angela had the idea of a wall with a tree breaking through it to illustrate the two worlds imposing on each other.

The wall is man made, rigid and cuts across nature. While seemingly strong and impenetrable, the tree is pushing through the wall threatening its' stability. While the tree's roots are slowly but surely pushing up through the flag stones.

Robert: 'I'm going to the top of the woods to help with the felling'

Madeleine: 'Will you send a man back with some more green? I want the hall to smell of trees.'

Throughout the play nature finds a way past the walls.

The space was designed so that it could portray outside in the garden, the area beyond the garden walls and interior spaces. The door in the wall can reveal the world beyond the world in the scene.

The colours are monochrome with a feeling of encroaching darkness, reminiscent of Dutch paintings of the period. This means that the light and any colours used then have a greater impact. The Irish are likely to be dressed in animal natural colours; the red of a fox or the green and brown of bracken and turf and so on. The English are dressed in darker colours or black.



Q

If you had to design a studio production of *The Clearing* (seating is moveable) what choices would you make? Why?

Polly Teale (Director)



WHAT DO I WANT?

Each character in the production has a 'want', something that drives them through their lives and the play. This is called the Super Objective. Also there is an 'obstacle' that stops them from achieving their objective.

In the first week of rehearsals, Polly, the director and the actors discussed what each characters' objective and obstacle might be. These are never carved in stone, as through the rehearsals ideas grow and change.

The actors said, that while waiting in the wings just before going on stage for a scene, it is very useful to have a transitive verb in their mind that keeps their objective fresh. For example: 'To grip', 'to control', 'to excite' etc.

MADELEINE:

Super Objective: I want to devour life joyously
 I want to enjoy everything life has to offer
Obstacle: My need to belong with my people. My fear of rejection.
Useful Words: Fecund, intricate, seduce, envelop, sensuous, animal, alive

KILLAINE:

Super Objective: I want to release myself from Maddy
Obstacle: My love for Maddy
Useful Words: Vulnerable, loving, wild, animal, intuitive, secretive, dependent and independent

PIERCE:

Super Objective: I want to free the people of Ireland in order to avenge my father and brothers
Obstacle: My heart, especially in relation to Madeleine
Useful Words: To protect, to bind, to avenge, to scour, to drive

ROBERT:

Super Objective: To thrive
Obstacle: His need to be (and to be seen to be) an English gentleman
Useful Words: Enjoy, relish, build, proud, determined, honourable, passionate

SOLOMON WINTER

Super Objective: To nurture
Obstacle: Fear
Useful Words: Incite

SUSANEH WINTER

Super Objective: She needs to protect her own
Obstacle: Her fear
Useful Words: Skin, taut, tight like rusted armour

SIR CHARLES STURMAN

Super Objective: To dominate (control)
Obstacle: His fear
Useful Words: Threaten, terrorise, to unnerve, passion, divine strength, faith, fear, conversion, undermine, hurt, destroy

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STURMAN

(An interview with the actor Richard Attlee...at the beginning of Week 3)

HAS STURMAN EVER BEEN IN LOVE?

I think he has in the past, when he was a different person and had warmth running through his veins, but he was never a great success with women like he believes Robert to have been.

'There was a lady in a lace dress. She sang. I turned the pages of the music'

At that time, he was still alive, now it's almost as if he has been frozen by his experiences, perhaps the girl in the lace dress rejected him, perhaps that helped to shape his attitude towards women.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU THINK MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO HIS CURRENT PSYCHOLOGY?

He is terrified of anything he cannot control, this probably goes back a long way, perhaps to childhood. His extreme faith is a way of legitimising that need for control. The Irish represent a huge threat because of their freedom of spirit, so he demonises them.

'There are many of Cromwell's men who swear they have found tails on Irish corpses'.

This religious fervour and his desire to avenge his Father's death by the Catholics made him go to Ireland. He wants to attribute blame and then punishment for what has happened to his family;

'I used to see darkness when I closed my eyes. Now I see the flash of a pistol being raised and aimed at me. Strange to think your hand may have held it. It may have been your chest I lunged at first when I drew my sword at Kilkenny. It may have been you who killed my Father. Is that not so?'

DO YOU WANT TO ENJOY HER LOVE OR DOMINATE IT?

(John Drinkwater,
British author 1882-1937)



Richard Attlee (Sturman)

HOW DOES HE REACT TO MADELEINE?

I think he's drawn to her. Her attraction is dark and very potent, she is wild and free and everything he hates about women and Ireland and also everything he fears. He is repelled and attracted at the same time. Her beauty and power make him feel inadequate. He talks about his nightmares and it's possible that Madeleine appears in those dreams as a powerful sexual woman and as a witch.

Throughout the play he refers to women as '*Papist sluts*', his references of Protestant women who have been murdered are graphic and brutal, and he even describes Ireland as a '*toothless whore*'. Female sexuality is seen as something repellent, something repulsive. By demonising women, he avoids his own feelings of fear and inadequacy.

HOW HAS SHARED EXPERIENCES' WAY OF WORKING HELPED YOU TO EXPLORE YOUR CHARACTER?

Allowing the inner emotions of Sturman to explode out and then covering them up is fascinating for a character that is so repressed. Discovering his 'wants' and his 'obstacles' and exploring the sub-text has been very powerful. If I had to choose a physical image of Sturman, he would be like a huge smooth granite slab of rock which would explode and shatter and then contract back to what it was before!

EXERCISE

In rehearsals, each actor created a back story/biography to help him/her flesh out their character, if you were playing Sturman, what would be included in your backstory?

Pick one of the other characters and create your version of what happened to them prior to the start of the play. Can you justify your choices with what your character says or does in the play?

Richard Attlee (Sturman)



IN CONVERSATION WITH JOE MILLSON (ROBERT) AND AISLÍN MCGUCKIN? (MADELEINE)

(At the start of the second week of rehearsals.)

BEFORE REHEARSALS BEGIN, DO YOU DO MUCH RESEARCH?

Joe: A lot of actors think that knowledge is power, but I agree with David Mamet who says that 'It's a bit like teaching the pilot of an aeroplane to flap his arms in the cock-pit'. I do do research but for me it's not the most important part of rehearsals.

Aislin: It depends on each job and each play. For this project we've been learning and discovering as a group, so our research has been a shared process. Peter Beresford-Ellis who wrote **To Hell or Connaught** and on whose book Helen based a lot of the play, came in and gave a lecture. It was fascinating in its explanation of the complexity of the history, the 'shades of grey'. Being Irish, one does have an inherent bias, a belief that is instilled within us. It was a revelation to discover the atrocities the Irish perpetrated upon English Settlers. There were victims on both sides - sometimes it is too easy to see only ones' own take on history.

Joe: Peter illuminated the human element of history and how similar events are happening today, all over the world. In Palestine, the events and war in former Yugoslavia...

HAVE YOU DECIDED HOW YOUR CHARACTERS MET?

Aislin & Joe: Madeleine's' Father and Mother both died, leaving her in the care of her Uncle, Dermot O'Hart. Robert arrived in Ireland three years before the start of the play and his farm borders Dermott O'Harts. He would have hosted parties and attended dinners and it is likely that he met Maddy at a neighbour's social function. It wouldn't have been an issue for Maddy that Robert was English because her Father was a progressive man and counted many English men among his friends. Robert was probably swept off his feet by Maddy, but she too would have found him exotic. There must have been a very strong physical attraction between them as well. Madeleine wanted a life of joy and thought that Robert could provide that.

WHAT ARE ROBERT'S FEELINGS TOWARDS PIERCE AND KILLAINE?

Joe: At the beginning of the play he accepts them as part of Madeleine's world and he doesn't feel threatened by them, almost as if Killaine is Madeleine's pet. When he gets poisoned with ideas/thoughts from others (namely Sturman) he starts to see them as others see them. He starts to feel fear, fear of what they represent and the danger they present; they could stop him from holding on to what is his.

WHAT DOES MADELEINE FEEL FOR SOLOMON AND SUSANEH?

Aislin: Robert and Madeleine are both orphans and we discussed today in rehearsals how Solomon and Susaneh may represent parental figures. Solomon is definitely a Father figure for Maddy. When Madeleine gives birth, they are the first to visit, like Grandparents.

Susaneh is very bristly with Madeleine. Maddy has been surrounded by men all her life, (having lost her Mother in childbirth). She feels that Susaneh is squashing her, or boxing her in. To remain full of joy and exuberance Maddy has to wriggle away from Susaneh. She often uses her strong relationship with Solomon to aggravate Susaneh.

Killaine: *'She'll grow towards you in her time. But you go ahead of her and she can't follow.'*

Madeleine: *'Is that what it is? I don't know, Killaine. I want to behave like the devil's own daughter when she's by me.'*

The irony towards the end of the play is that it is Susaneh who saves Madeleine and Ralph from separation or worse, as she is fundamentally a good person.



WHAT IS MADELEINE'S' OBJECTIVE WHEN SHE GOES TO STURMAN?

Joe: Does she feel she can convince Sturman because, as an Englishman, he must be like Robert - a man of honour?

Aislin: She certainly uses her knowledge of 'etiquette', when confronting Sturman's Englishness', she plays the English lady and only at the end of the interview does she resort to playing the Irish witch. She tunes in to what he's afraid of and uses it. She uses her feminine powers, not the flirtatious, seductive powers she uses with Robert but her animal, instinctive sexual power. She becomes the lioness, fighting for Killaine.
As Pierce says; *'Her mother died bringing her into the world and it's the two lives she has in her'*.

WHY DOES ROBERT DENOUNCE MADELEINE AT THE TRIAL?

Joe: At this point in rehearsals I'm not entirely sure. He feels betrayed by her, she went to Sturman even after he told her not to go and towards the end of the play he gives her a last chance to get back their physical closeness and she pushes him away. It's childlike, but he feels hurt, he's so determined to thrive as a human being that if he can't thrive with her, it's better to thrive and be without her.

As an actor you often understand the through journey of the character when you begin to run the play as a whole, when you witness the preceding and following scenes.

IS IT VERY DIFFERENT WORKING WITH SHARED EXPERIENCE THEATRE COMPANY THAN OTHER COMPANIES?

Joe: Yes its much more freeing, we try first and talk later and it's very inventive.

Aislin: The physical reputation of Shared Experiences work intimidated me initially, however using exercises such as expressing the 'hidden emotion' during a scene or exploring character responses using only gesture has been illuminating. The work has been very releasing and useful in helping me in the development of my character.

Joseph Millson (Robert) & Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine)



LOOKING AT THE FIRST FEW SCENES IN REHEARSAL

(ideas/thoughts and some staging ideas from early on in rehearsals)

ACT ONE SCENE ONE:

Pierce finds it difficult to be touched, when Killaine talks about Maddy's child as; 'A little child. With arms and feet and fingers', she touches Pierce and he has to pull away. He feels betrayed by Maddy and Killaine. He is angry when he's touched and he builds his anger to protect himself. He builds a wall to make himself feel stronger.

'You frighten me', says Killaine to Pierce and he intends to, he wants Killaine and Maddy to open their eyes and to see what he has seen first hand; the killing, the deaths and the misery the English are inflicting on the Irish.

His whole body is clenched, because his heart is clenched.

ACT ONE SCENE TWO (BEFORE MADELEINE'S ENTRANCE)

At the beginning of the scene, Solomon and Susaneh are very separate, almost at the opposite ends of the room, because they have been arguing.

Susaneh wants: To force Solomon to speak out.

Solomon wants: To silence.

The actors began the scene after doing 'the chair game' (see end of this section) and so Robert enters into a room full of tension.

Susaneh could almost be Solomon's 'underneath', his inner emotions. She is full of anxiety and anger at the news that they will be expected to leave their home. She is visibly expressing what Solomon is feeling, but in the scene Solomon is effective at covering it up. Susaneh constantly tries to make him reveal his inner feelings and thoughts. To help this Polly asked Pip (the actor playing Solomon) to try the opening of the scene but this time not to try to hide his emotions, but instead to let them out.

Robert is brimming over with excitement, and Solomon's joy for him makes Solomon feel like a Father figure to Robert. When Robert tells Susaneh that he was present at the birth, Susaneh finds this incomprehensible, beyond anything she could have imagined. When Robert says: '*I shall look at women differently from now on. I take my hat off to you Madam, and all your sex*', Susaneh is shocked as Robert makes her feel he is looking at her naked!

EXERCISE

THE CHAIRS GAME

Two chairs are placed in the empty space and two actors each sit on a chair. Each actor is given a 'want', for example:

- To Punish
- To want forgiveness
- To enthuse
- To freeze
- To protect
- To blame

Using only the chairs and their position relating to the other person and in the room, each actor must try to change the emotional state of the other. No words or sound needed!

One person 'speaks' by moving their chair in relation to the other person and the space, then the second actor 'answers' by moving his/her chair.

They pursue their 'want' in opposition to their partner. Their objective is to win their case and to change/dissuade the other actor of theirs.

IN REHEARSALS

MONDAY 11TH FEBRUARY -THE BEGINNING OF WEEK 3. ACT 4 SCENE 8

Often in rehearsals, especially the first few times a scene is looked at, the director and actors talk through what has just happened, the history before the scene begins, how characters feel about each other etc. I've recorded some of the questions the Shared Experience team discussed and some of what they worked on in their rehearsal time (about an hour and a half on this scene for this day).

EXERCISE

The scene is included for you to make your own decisions/choices about how you might approach the scene.

Act Four Scene Eight

A Tory camp on the edge of the Wicklow Hills. It is dark. There is the occasional sound of movement and whispered words. MADELEINE and PIERCE are side by side, staring into the night.

MADELEINE: I took a room by the harbour. I could see the ship from the window. I passed the days on the quay, watching the deck. There wasn't a glimpse of her to be had. And then, one fresh morning, it sailed. I thought the sea would freeze, or split apart as it did for the Israelites. But the ship sailed on...

PIERCE: *(with barely controlled anger)* You should have come to me. Why did you listen to her?

MADELEINE: She was right. They would have had you in chains. I would have lost the both of you.

PIERCE: That's not yourself you're thinking of, is it?

MADELEINE: Perhaps it is.

PIERCE: You led her a merry dance, Maddy.

MADELEINE: I never meant to. You know that.

Pause

Someone said they use the servants worse than any slave. A slave's for life and worth a little care, but a servant, who'll be gone in five years, seven...

PIERCE: They'll never tame Killaine. She'll be very small and let alone by day, then send herself to the moon at night and step amongst the stars.

MADELEINE: She's stronger than she seems.

PIERCE: She is that.

MADELEINE: Do you think she is alive?

PIERCE: Do you?

MADELEINE: Yes.

PIERCE: Then so she is.

Pause

MADELEINE: I wish I was looking from very far away. I used to have that, Pierce. Remember? It used to drive you to distraction.

PIERCE: You'll get it back.

Pause

Are you cold?

I'm sleeping tonight. We can lie close together with the little lad between us. It's terrible rough, Maddy.

MADELEINE: For an English lady?

PIERCE: That's not what I meant.

MADELEINE: Isn't it?

PIERCE: I always wanted the best for you. I still do.

MADELEINE: Pierce...

PIERCE: It's alright. You don't have to say it. I'm not one for making the same mistake twice.

I'm just glad to have you in my gaze.

MADELEINE: Thank you.

PIERCE: But leave me my hope, will you?

She smiles. He almost smiles.

We'll be moving on before dawn. Are you ready for travelling?

EXERCISE CONTINUED

MADELEINE: Yes.

PIERCE: (*seeing how depressed she is*) You'll reach the other side of it, Maddy.

MADELEINE: I am so afraid.

PIERCE: I won't be leaving you now.

MADELEINE: It's not that. It's not that. I don't know how to say it.

PIERCE: Are you telling me you're lost for words?

MADELEINE: Everything I knew is gone. Everything I held to. Can I have been so wrong?

PIERCE: I'll give you something to know then: know we must drive those people from our land. It's all you need. It's a pure thought. The strongest kind.

Look at everyone about you. Such different people we have been, such different lives but that is all we know and so we are the same now: back at the beginning. Back with the pack.

And so will you be, Maddy. You can't change your blood, or your eyes, or your heart. So will you be soon.

IN REHEARSALS

KEY:

D= Director

P= Pierce

M= Madeleine

D: Where did Maddy go after leaving home?

M: Pierce would be the first person I would go to and I probably would have ridden with Ralph to his sisters' home to find out how to find Pierce. What a journey she must have had! Riding through woods (to escape detection) fast, with Ralph strapped to her!

They then discussed Madeline's experience of finding Killaine on the boat and how she waited perhaps a week or two at the port until the ship sailed. When she returns to Robert she feels broken, heart-broken and the six months that follow must have been unbearable because she had no one to share and 'let out' her grief with.

The actors then read through the scene. At the end, Polly, the director asked them what their wants were in this scene.

M: To confess, to purge herself of the guilt of Killaine's death, to shed, to inform, to explain.

D: She is trying to make sense of the horror of what has happened and of a world that can let this happen. She is grappling, struggling internally.

M: Yes, she feels slow in comparison to what she was before; before she was 'out there', very vibrant, very physical and now her surety has been shattered.

P: He wants to bind her to him, (to him and the cause).

D: How long has Maddy been there with Pierce?

M: Not very long, perhaps two days? Pierce would have been on watch or away, so this would be her first chance to be with him.

D: What is it like for Pierce knowing that Robert has betrayed Maddy?

P: He's totally happy that Robert betrayed her and that she's here with him.

D: After listening to what has happened to Killaine, how do you feel, Pierce?

P: It's the fear of the unknown isn't it, the long journey, the rapes...

D: Is it good or bad that she is alive still?

M: I wish she was dead.

D: Looking at the speech you (Pierce) makes about Killaine's spirit, are you trying to comfort Maddy and give her strength?

P: You must gather the darkness and try to make a light from it, else you will be broken.

D: What are you trying to do to Maddy with your last speech? Bully her? Strengthen her?

The actors run through the scene.

D: What does Maddy mean by 'I wish I was looking from very far away.'

M: She wants to be detached from her pain, to rise above it, fly up high away from it. She longs to be free again of this great pain and anguish.

D: Try another run through, this time you can both see Killaine, but Pierce you have to try to get Maddy to look at you.

The actors work through this idea, and discuss how they felt.

D: This time try not to be too numb with pain, allow the emotions out so that we can discover more about Madeleine.

This time the actors run through the scene, but using a Shared Experience technique to discover the emotions below the surface. The director claps her hands to switch the scene from being text to no text but emotional, instinctive sounds and non naturalistic movement. She claps to switch the actors back to the text and they must hide these feelings again.

D: Does she feel she is going mad?

M: Yes, it's as if nothing can ease the pain.

The director, after running the scene a few more times, asks the actors to have a discussion with each other about how they survive in the camp, what they eat, what triggers this scene? And any other questions they feel they need to explore.

Q

In rehearsals, Aislin stated that as Madeleine, she wishes Killaine were dead. Why do you think she wishes for such a thing?



Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine)



AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER SALEM - THE COMPOSER

HOW DID/DO YOU ARRIVE AT CREATING THE SOUND/MUSIC FOR THE PLAY?

There are many references to breath and the wind in the play. The breath is being squeezed out of Ireland, Robert says 'we have to keep breathing' despite the increasing dangers, Sturman says 'the air is trying to kill me' and there is a sense that wind and breath as elemental forces connect with the Irish people.

The wind is always blowing outside - and outside is where Pierce, Killaine and Maddy always meet - a dynamic contrast to the controlled formality of Robert's house and Sturman's office. So at this stage the two musical/sound ideas I am looking at are sounds and melody emerging from the sound of the wind which would be connected to Pierce, Killaine and Maddy's past and rigid percussive sounds for the formal and oppressive English regime.

WERE THERE ANY SPECIFIC CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME?

No - only the usual ones

HOW DOES THE NOTION OF PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONISM INFLUENCE YOUR WORK ON SOUND?

It means that I use sound effects in a non-naturalistic way and frequently combine them with more musical elements so that the line between music and sound is not very obvious. I often combine them to try to create a heightened sense of a character's emotional state (for example) so that the sound is helping to express what's going on in someone's head rather than just creating a naturalistic environment.

DO YOU DO ANY HISTORICAL RESEARCH?

Sometimes I do historical research and sometimes I don't. In this case I'm trying to avoid too many Irish clichés - it's the elements that I mentioned above which interest me more than setting a period and a place.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORKING WITH SHARED EXPERIENCE AND OTHER THEATRE COMPANIES?

The difference between Shared Experience and other theatre companies is the physical content, coming away from the text to express something purely physically or counterpointing sections of text with physical work. This is always particularly interesting from the point of view of sound as these are heightened non-naturalistic moments which can use sound very effectively.

Aislin McGuckin (Madeleine)



LEAH HAUSMAN - MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

WHAT WERE YOUR STARTING POINTS FOR WORKING ON THIS PRODUCTION?

The text has to be my starting point. Then I work through what physical qualities the world of the play may require. In *The Clearing* there is an obvious Irish, English divide. These two worlds require different physical languages.

WERE THERE ANY SPECIFIC CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME?

The challenge for me will be to keep the physical life vivid in a play that focuses on the text so strongly.

EXERCISE

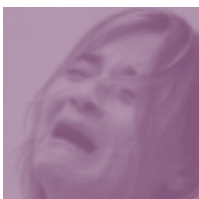
The play talks a lot about belonging 'To The Pack'. In a group, walk around a room. Can you as a group stop and start together, without an obvious leader?

Q

If you had to create a successful pack with 7 people in it, what qualities would you hope for in the individuals?



Leah Hausman Movement Director





THE CLEARING

by Helen Edmundson

Patrick Moy (Pierce) & Mairead McKinley (Killaine)

WRITING A REVIEW

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A REVIEW

Say what you saw
Say what you think
Reflect on your responses
Write freely from the heart

Don't worry about given theories
Create your own theories

Describe the tiniest moment that remains vivid to you
Question that moment
Find out what it says to you
Say why it spoke to you

CONSIDER

The light, the sound, the movement, the colours and textures of the play
The words, the music, the rhythms of the text
The set, the costumes, the style of the production

THE OBJECTS:

Ralph's' favourite toy
Map
Gold locket
The tree
The lace
The cloth from Killaines' skirt

The themes
The characters
The story
The ending...

(and try to say everything you want in just 300 words!)

SEND YOUR REVIEW TO:

Shared Experience
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London W1F 7SJ

OR E-MAIL:

youththeatre@setheatre.co.uk
and we'll put the most interesting ones on our website.



YOUTH, EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ACCESS

The company's Youth Theatre, based at the Soho Laundry and supported by Westminster City Council, is a hotbed of creativity. Young Performers come to stretch their physical and imaginative muscle in courses led by artists from within the company. It runs a wide variety of workshops and projects designed to put members in touch with the physical style of the main company's work.

Contact Kate Saxon, Education and Youth Director, at Shared Experience on 020 7434 9248 or katesaxon@setheatre.co.uk

Shared Experience would like to thank the following for their imaginative and enlightened support:

