

## **Field Day Revisited (I): An Interview with Seamus Deane<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Intended to address the colonial crisis in Northern Ireland, the Field Day Theatre Company was one of the most influential, albeit controversial, cultural forces in Ireland in the 1980's. The central idea for the company was a touring theatre group pivoting around Brian Friel; publications, for which Seamus Deane was responsible, were also included in its agenda. As such it was greeted by advocates as a major decolonizing project harking back to the Irish Revivals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its detractors, however, saw it as a reactionary entity intent on reactivating the same tired old "Irish Question." Other than these harsh critiques, Field Day had to deal with internal divisions, which led to Friel's resignation in 1994 and the termination of theatre productions in 1998. Meanwhile, Seamus Deane persevered with the publication enterprise under the company imprint, and planned to revive Field Day in Dublin. The general consensus, however, is that Field Day no longer exists. In view of this discrepancy, I interviewed Seamus Deane and Declan Kiberd to track the company's present operation and attempt to negotiate among the diverse interpretations of Field Day. In Part One of this transcription, Seamus Deane provides an insider's view of the aspirations, operation, and dilemma of Field Day, past and present. By contrast, Declan Kiberd in Part Two reconfigures Field Day as both a regional and an international movement which anticipated the peace process beginning in the mid-1990's, and also the general *ethos* of self-confidence in Ireland today.

### **Keywords**

Field Day, Northern Ireland, Decolonizing Project, Seamus Deane

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The Field Day Theatre company was one of the most influential, albeit controversial, cultural forces in Ireland in the 1980's. It was a product of the crisis in Northern Ireland in the second half of the twentieth-century, which culminated in the death of ten human-rights fighters in a hunger strike in the Maze prison in 1980. In the same year, Derry saw the premier of Brian Friel's *Translations*, which was also Field Day's opening production, even though the company was not officially established until one year later. Aspiring to create outside the four provinces of Ireland a "fifth province,"<sup>2</sup> a space in the mind which finds expression in poetry (Hederman, "Poetry" 111; Quilligan 193) and to which "artistic and cultural loyalty can be offered" (Friel 106), Friel and Stephen Rea—who played the leading role in *Translations*—decided to found Field Day in Derry in order to find a solution to the Northern crisis.<sup>3</sup> A fund from the Belfast Arts Council, which solicited applications<sup>4</sup> came in handy for this purpose. To organize a board of directors, required for application for this fund, Friel and Rea engaged their friends Tom Paulin, David Hammond and Seamus Heaney. Through Heaney, Seamus Deane became involved.

The central idea for the company was a touring theatre group, but publications were also included in its agenda. Five series of Field Day pamphlets were thus launched in 1983-1988 by Seamus Deane,<sup>5</sup> followed by three sizeable volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 1991, which were expanded to include women's writing in 2003. Not incidentally, Field Day's core enterprise evokes memories of the Abbey Theatre<sup>6</sup> under the direction of W. B. Yeats. Its publication sector, in turn, recalls the revivalists' ambition to establish a national literature. Field Day was thus hailed by advocates as a major decolonizing project harking back to the Irish Revivals<sup>7</sup> of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But precisely because Deane identified the Northern crisis as a "colonial crisis" ("Introduction" 6), a perspective largely adopted by the founding members, the

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<sup>2</sup> A term borrowed from Richard Kearney, a student of Seamus Deane and co-editor (with Mark Patrick Hederman) of *The Crane Bag* (1977-1985), a journal sympathetic to Field Day.

<sup>3</sup> Please see *Ireland's Field Day*, vii.

<sup>4</sup> Please see Carole Zucker's interview with Stephen Rea, 110.

<sup>5</sup> There are three pamphlets in each series. For a complete list of these fifteen titles along with a summary of each title, see Tim Gauthier.

<sup>6</sup> Founded in central Dublin as the Irish Literary Theatre by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1899 and given its present name in 1904, the Abbey Theatre had been considered the national theatre of Ireland until it was burned down in 1951. The present Abbey reopened in 1966.

<sup>7</sup> Cultural nationalist movements launched in the mid-nineteenth century by Young Ireland, and resumed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Yeats, Douglas Hyde, and company. These movements also went by other names, including Celtic Revivals, Irish Renaissance, and Celtic Twilight.

group came under ruthless attack from opponents. Revisionists<sup>8</sup> and unionists<sup>9</sup> saw it as a reactionary entity intent on reactivating the tired old Irish question; some of them even denounced the group as “the literary wing of the IRA” (Kilroy, “Friendship” 87).

Although the founding members of Field Day were adamant in defending its agenda, they were not totally invulnerable to these sectarian attacks, and sometimes tended to lapse into despondency. Friel, for instance, was greatly troubled by the harsh critiques of *Translations*, to such an extent that he wrote a farce entitled *The Communication Cord* in 1982 to dilute the political content of the previous play. Field Day was not alone in suffering from the inimical climate of that period. *The Crane Bag*, a journal which lent the idea of “the fifth province” to Field Day,<sup>10</sup> had to cease publication in 1985 because its detractors denigrated its plan to limit the degree of hostile opposition by stereotyping it (Hederman, “Postscript” 171-72).

In addition to the criticism of its opponents, Field Day had also to deal with internal divisions, which sometimes led to administrative blunders. For instance, in 1983 it decided to turn down a play commissioned by Friel himself without giving the playwright an explicit explanation.<sup>11</sup> At first glance this difference of opinion may seem compatible with Field Day’s founding ideal, if not even healthy for any democratically-run group. With hindsight, however, it might have eroded Field Day. In 1990, Friel gave his play *Dancing at Lughnasa* to the Abbey Theater rather than to Field Day despite a strong objection from Rea, who had then been virtually absent from the company for two years in order to concentrate on his film career. In 1994 Friel resigned from the company altogether, informing the reporters: “I sent Field Day my resignation notice a few days ago and I have nothing more to say” (qtd. in Moriarty 236). Several speculations had been made about Friel’s decision to leave a group he had established. David Hammond’s insider’s view is that Friel was motivated by his artistic dispute with Rea and his desire to begin a new artistic journey (Moriarty 237). A less innocent possibility could be observed in the resignation of Thomas Kilroy, a good friend of Friel who wrote *Double Cross* for the company in lieu of a pamphlet two years before he joined Field Day in 1988 (Kilroy, “Author’s Note”); Kilroy left the group in 1992 because he wanted to push

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<sup>8</sup> Originally referring to historians who adopted a historical methodology, introduced to Ireland in the 1920’s, which privileged objectivity in interpreting historical events, revisionists came to mean advocates of a “value-free,” or anti-nationalist, view of Irish history in post-independence Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> Proponents of the union of England and Ireland.

<sup>10</sup> See note 2.

<sup>11</sup> This play is David Rudkin’s *The Saxon Shore*. Please see Marilyn J. Richtarik, 191-203.

Field Day “towards more overt political gestures,” only to find that it consisted of “disparate, even conflicting elements” and thus had “no single ideology” (Kilroy, “Friendship” 87). Kilroy’s statement generally coincides with outsiders’ views. In *Acting Between the Lines*, so far the only monograph on Field Day, Marilyn J. Richtarik attributes the company’s disintegration to the split between “art and criticism” within the Field Day enterprise and between individuals and the group, a division complicated by sectarianism (239). This speculation anticipates Christopher Murray’s observation that Friel must have felt marginalized since none of the Field Day publications dealt with drama, leading to his ultimate judgment on Field Day by way of giving his play to the Abbey Theater (85-86).

Whatever caused Friel’s resignation from Field Day, he remains active as a playwright. He has adapted three plays by Chekhov since operating on his own—*Uncle Vanya* (1998), *The Yalta Game* (2001), *The Bear* (2002)—and written one play, *The Home Place* (2004), which was a box-office success in Dublin and London. On February 22, 2006 he joined Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney in being elected a *Saoi* by *Aosdána*, the highest honor conferred by the President of Ireland for people who have achieved distinction in the arts. Meanwhile, Field Day ceased its theatre enterprise in 1998, producing only two plays in the four years after Friel left.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, its publication sector flourished under the direction of Seamus Deane, who took great pains to secure funds and support from the University of Notre Dame and Cork University Press; Deane was able to carry on the company’s name by publishing a Field Day “Critical Condition Essays” series and the *Field Day Review*. He also planned to revitalize Field Day by finding a new office in Dublin and recruiting new board members, as he told Richtarik in June 2000 (Richtarik x).

Deane’s heroic effort to resuscitate Field Day seems to be a one-man show, however, since most of the founding members of the company have either left or became dormant. What is more, some of these members were reserved about Deane’s determination to reestablish the company. Hammond acknowledges that “the corporate energy that fuelled Field Day for ten or twelve years no longer exists.” Even Rea, the only active member other than Deane, “lapsed into the past tense” when referring to Field Day (Richtarik xii). These reservations are in accord with the general consensus on Field Day’s defunctness, despite Deane’s disavowal. Richtarik, for one, predicted the company’s disintegration as early as 1995 even though she was then writing about it as it had been in the period of its prime. This

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<sup>12</sup> These two plays are Frank McGuinness’s *Uncle Vanya* (1995) and a reproduction of Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star* (1998).

view was shared by Richard Kirkland, who saw Field Day's failure as the general failure of the Irish intellectual community to "extend the critical vocabulary" sufficiently to recognize Field Day's own particular terminology (146).

Sixteen years have elapsed since Friel dissociated himself from Field Day, in the course of which possible solutions to the Northern crisis have been explored as part of the peace process. As politicians are gradually taking over the issues raised by intellectuals, is there still a need for Field Day? If so, what is its legitimacy or, as Richtarik dubiously asks: "[I]n what sense can what is called Field Day now be the same as what went by the name of Field Day in the early 1980s?" (xii). To follow up her query and try to negotiate among the diverse current views and interpretations of Field Day, I interviewed Seamus Deane in his office at the Newman House in Dublin on May 25, 2005.<sup>13</sup>

YU-CHEN LIN: *What in the idea of a Field Day Theatre Company appealed to you so strongly that you decided to join it in 1981?*

SEAMUS DEANE: It was because of my friendship for Brian Friel. Friel and Rea knew me through Heaney, and the four of us went to the Gresham Hotel<sup>14</sup> in downtown Dublin for our first meeting. Friel explained to us the idea of Field Day Theatre Company, saying he would like to include us to develop a publishing venture. He also said we should do something to engage with the political mess and crisis in the North, and that we should make a point of addressing a general audience in what we were doing. So it seems to me that Field Day provided an opportunity to write in a milieu more politically charged than was available to me as a university teacher; the university, University College Dublin, was anti-intellectual in a peculiarly partisan way, deeply hostile to the threat to the *status quo* in the North, no matter how violent and corrupt that régime was, because the challenge was regarded as republican<sup>15</sup> in its source and ambition and because it would ignite changes all over the island which would be disturbing. It was, for me,

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<sup>13</sup> On May 26, I visited Declan Kiberd, Professor of English at University College Dublin, who wrote a Field Day pamphlet entitled *Anglo-Irish Attitudes* in 1984. Deane's postcolonial perspective forms an interesting contrast to Kiberd's "multi-culturalist" view, as both men looked back on Field Day and Ireland in the 1980's. The interview with Professor Kiberd will be included in Part II of this transcription.

<sup>14</sup> A classic hotel in O'Connell Street in downtown Dublin, also the setting for the final scene in James Joyce's short story "The Dead."

<sup>15</sup> Roughly the antithesis of "unionist," "republican" is an attitude in favor of a unified Ireland, including the North.

exhilarating to be for once a member of a group rather than an employee in a system. We didn't mean to deal with political questions exclusively, very far from it, but there was certainly a general agreement on what should be challenged and on possible change—that was enough to go on with. Any disagreement was discovered on the way when we were working together. Those who attacked Field Day consolidated us, in their fervid alarmist imaginations, into a much more tightly-bound group than we were. They said we were the upholders of the old regime while pretending to be liberal, and accused us of mis-describing the Northern situation as a colonial situation. Their argument was that colonialism has many different faces, and therefore to say that Northern Ireland fits one of these is wrong; not the wrong kind of colonialism, of course, but ANY version of colonialism. But we never said that “one size fits all”; we knew more about colonial theory than that; but we also knew that Northern Ireland was one of the many varieties of colonialism and one of the foulest because it was so deeply entrenched within the United Kingdom system itself that it could pretend to be part of a liberal democracy rather than the one-party sectarian statelet that it truly was. We were the first group to say it was necessary to look at Northern Ireland as a colonial society, certainly a unique one, and therefore different from other colonies of the Ukanian State.<sup>16</sup> If people thought we were being anti-unionist, that's fine; we were anti-unionist. Unionism is one of the versions of colonialism. We believed we needed to show this and help to destroy it.

*Edna Longley<sup>17</sup> was very caustic about Field Day pamphlets;<sup>18</sup> she suggested that both Declan Kiberd and you were “off fighting old wars against the English and*

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<sup>16</sup> “Ukania” is Tom Nairn's coinage for the archaic state form founded in 1688, and renovated with the emergence of the British ruling class in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the imperial project for colonial rule. Mark Bahnisch, “*Enchanted Glass*,” *Club Troppo*, 13 Feb. 2005: 7 pars., 26 Jan. 2007 <<http://www.clubtroppo.com.au/2005/02/13/enchanted-glass>>. It is derived from “Kakania,” (which in turn comes from “k.u.k.”—*kaiserlich und königlich*—German for “imperial and royal”) in *The Man Without Qualities* (1930) by the Austrian novelist Robert Musil (1880-1942), where it is a nickname for the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy. “K.u.k.,” *Wikipedia*, 30 Dec. 2006: 7 pars., 26 Jan. 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K.u.k.>>. Nairn uses “Ukania” to indicate the irrational nature (“Ukanian Alzheimer's”) of the British constitutional monarchy. Tom Nairn, 135. Please also see “Tom Nairn,” *Wikipedia*, Oct. 2006: 7 pars., 26 Jan. 2007 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_Nairn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Nairn)>.

<sup>17</sup> Edna Longley (1940- ), formerly Professor of English, Queen's University Belfast, was one of the fiercest critics of Field Day in the 1980's. She is currently on staff at the Seamus Heaney Center for Poetry at the School of English at the same institute.

<sup>18</sup> Longley's targets were Seamus Deane's *Civilians and Barbarians* (No. 3 of the Field Day pamphlets) and Declan Kiberd's *Anglo-Irish Attitudes* (No. 6).

*Anglo-Irish, ignoring the real problem” (qtd. in Richtarik 189). In your introduction to Colonialism, Nationalism, and Literature, you seemed to be repudiating her critique by referring to the problem in Ireland in the 1980’s as a “colonial crisis” (“Introduction” 6), a crisis The Field Day Anthology was intended to address by establishing a “meta-narrative” to reveal and confirm the existence of a continuous tradition of Irish writing (“General Introduction” xix). Still, the problem of audience remains, especially given the “time lag” inherent in the decolonizing project of Field Day publications, a project which might be more pertinent to Celtic Revivals or the post-independence era. What, then, was the targeted readership of the Field Day publications?*

Their main critique was we were recycling cultural nationalism, which was very effective in the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. I don’t entirely agree with them, but on the other hand, I don’t entirely disagree. First, it’s not the same thing when you repeat it. If you said, “I am a cultural nationalist” in the 1920’s, it is very different when you say it in the 1990’s.

*But you seemed to be critiquing Yeats and company in your early writing.<sup>19</sup>*

I do not conflate “we” with “I,” and by so saying I am not incriminating the others. Certainly Stephen Rea and I, and to a large extent Brian Friel, were not reactivating cultural nationalism; it was not the Abbey Theatre reborn. Ours was a different sort of venture. We saw what Yeats and company had done was admirable and astonishing, but cultural nationalism has too many reactionary elements, for me as well as for us. Cultural nationalism has a far too exclusively ethnic base. It generally tends to be very conservative in social matters; it invents the idea of tradition and keeps things the same, and it constantly sees itself as distinct from Irish Republicanism. For me it is legitimate to refuse to accept the Ukanian State as it is presently configured. If the state uses violence to enforce a system of injustice, I see no option really. Cultural nationalism tends to enlist a shadowy view of the historical, as is obvious in Yeats’ poetry, where a presiding vocabulary is one of mystification. The immediate past and the very distant past—prehistorical, mythological—can be manipulated for that purpose. But we were saying, “No, don’t look at the distant past. Instead, look to yesterday, today, or the past twenty years in Northern Ireland. Look at the record of the modern state in Ireland when it

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, *Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea*.

entered modernity—be it 1690,<sup>20</sup> the union in 1800,<sup>21</sup> or after the Famine.<sup>22</sup>” Whatever the date over the doorway to modernity was, that’s a period of great artists for us—Joyce much more than Yeats because he lit up the darker effects of modernism on the psyche of people as well as analyzing it as the condition in which he lived, and thereby changed it because he recognized both the similarities and the differences between modernism in Ireland and in Britain or France or anywhere else in Europe. He was the one who realized that in order to write about these circumstances he needed to alter the conventions which had successfully represented them in other countries. And then he did it in such a way that his experimental modes of representation themselves became conventions. Joyce opened the possibility to the postmodern, something that is more miscellaneous and diverse than that sort of pseudo-aristocratic version of tradition that was recycled by Yeats and cultural nationalism, a version we were not repeating but resisting. But the attacks on us were saying, “Well, what you are doing is displacing Celts and Gaels with Catholic novels; that is an old form based on sectarianism.” Because of the poisonous nature of the political structures here, there is no way of avoiding sectarian divisions; every political question becomes a sectarian question. This isn’t because people have a fatal weakness for sectarianism; it is because of their historical circumstances that made these two things so intimate and inescapable.

*Allow me to go back to the Field Day Anthology: its size is so prohibitive that its most likely function will apparently be an archival one.<sup>23</sup> Would you assign this anthology to your class, for instance?*

No. It’s too big as you said, and inaccessible because of its limited number—2,000 sets.

*This is a shame because there was tremendous effort devoted to it.<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> The year William III went to Ireland to defeat James II at the Boyne, and Limerick was besieged.

<sup>21</sup> The year the annexation of Ireland to England was officially endorsed by the Act of Union.

<sup>22</sup> Caused by a potato blight in 1845, this famine lasted two years and reduced the Irish population by three million—two million managed to emigrate, and another million perished. Please see Kerby A. Miller, 291.

<sup>23</sup> Each volume of this three-volume anthology (expanded to five volumes in 2003) exceeds 1,500 pages. See also George J. Watson, 405.

<sup>24</sup> This anthology was the product of a collaborative effort involving at least seventy editors, who were responsible for selecting, editing, and annotating the articles to be included, and writing an introduction to the section(s) they were assigned.



Yes there was. Partly because of the feminist attack,<sup>25</sup> the original idea was not mobilized. I don't want to subscribe to a national-cultural notion of Ireland, but at the same time it is a reality that there is such a thing as a national literature. There is a mode of writing, a kind of experience that belonged to a place that has been defined in a particular way over some centuries. We had Gaelic literature which corresponds to, defines, and to some extent articulates and represents that kind of experience. The literature in the English language we had from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century is a very specific kind of literature, a colonial literature. Since then till World War II we were living in a postcolonial condition which we are still in. And the literature of this period has appeared to be English, though sometimes it is Irish. So that region is postcolonial, and therefore is recognizably different from classical literature in the English language. But in a sense we never actually defined sufficiently the literature in English, Irish, Norman French, Latin; we never really defined the versions of modern literature that made specific response to the representation of the condition of this island. Many writers were linked up with the English or British tradition—Swift<sup>26</sup> would be an example, so too would Yeats and Joyce, although more anomalously—and they were and are. But they also are of the Irish tradition.

*You seem to see the anthology as a unified, homogenous project. But was it the way you operated?*

I wouldn't say it was homogeneous, no. But the anthology tried to show that there was something that was coherent, to be recognizable as a particular mode of representation that had to do with Ireland.

*Yes, but you seemed to have your idea of what the anthology was to be, whereas the contributors responsible for the section assigned them might have a different notion of what the anthology was to become,<sup>27</sup> not to mention that the editors of the fourth and fifth volumes of women's writing saw themselves as canonizing Irish literature ("Preface" xxxii), something that you did not want to do (Deane, "Introduction" 15).*

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<sup>25</sup> In fact the critique of Field Day's exclusion of women's writing from the anthology came from almost all quarters, not exclusively from feminists. See, for instance, Edna Longley and Colm Toibin, 119-24. For a sample of feminist critiques, see Roisin Higgins, 400.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), an Anglo-Irish satirist famous for numerous works, including *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and *A Modest Proposal* (1729).

<sup>27</sup> For instance, see Watson, 402.

I didn't want to do it, but at the same time I was doing it. The idea of making an anthology, as *The Cabinet of Irish Literature*<sup>28</sup> that preceded it, is *ipso facto* doing it. *The Cabinet* wasn't doing well because of bad marketing. Ours actually gave more canonical force because more people noticed it, and because of its timing—it was right at the critical juncture in the North. It began to be recognized that some political resettlement was going to be necessary as between the North and the Republic and as between both and Britain. There was a full re-assessment on the way, and it would take even longer than violence was going to. But people had regarded these three political units as solid entities that could be taken for granted. But in that generation, everything began to change, to melt. The landscape begins to alter, and the political scene also alters, and must be shown to alter. And one way of altering the present is to change the form of the past. There is a sustained danger in this. I am not a historicist, and I don't believe in the possibility of going back to the past, and presenting it to somebody as alive, and say, "This is how it was then." When you live in the past, you represent the present; it's a present view of the past. And that's why it's so important to recapture the past, so that it can be mobilized for the sake of doing something: what the past often does, or is used to do, is to endorse the order that we live in the present. The present is changing, so the past changes with it. It's like two pistons in an engine, one comes after the other, and it's only when both move that anything else moves, and the whole system is driven. Of course it is necessary to be driven forward. But at least the energy is generated and created. The anthology was published in November 1991, two years before the first ceasefire.<sup>29</sup> So it seems to me that the timing was right. But there were practical questions that people rarely take into consideration. I would have recommended the anthology to my classes if I could have it in paperback. But no publisher could produce it in paperback because the permissions we paid were astonishingly high—on Beckett, for Joyce, Yeats—and we spent thousands and thousands of pounds of permission for an once-off use, so any reprint would cost more. Norton in North America, for instance, wanted to publish it in paperback. On the first round they said they would get the permissions. On the second round, they said, "We don't want to publish all of it; it's too big. We only wanted to publish selections." These would have been selections from the already canonical authors, and would have been almost entirely literary. That's precisely what I wanted to get

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<sup>28</sup> This refers to Charles A. Read and Katharine Tynan Hinkson's co-edition of *The Cabinet of Irish Literature*, published in 1879-80.

<sup>29</sup> The 1994 IRA ceasefire, whose purpose was to secure a British commitment to withdraw from Northern Ireland in order to facilitate negotiations with the unionists.

away from. So I refused to do that. And Faber and Faber wanted to do something like that as well. So they refused it because of the high cost it would have been. There is a matter of having to prevent the publisher from publishing only the best-known authors, thereby confirming the star system that I was in some way trying to get away from. And there were other things I still had to deal with: the feminists who accused me of publishing a patriarchal anthology by missing women's writing. All of these had made it impossible, really. But the fundamental reason was financing. We couldn't do it; in *Field Day* we were sick to death of raising money for the theatre, for every publication. The anthology cost a lot of money, and took a lot of fund-raising. Also, I didn't want to spend any more time. If it was to take to reconfigure the anthology the time it had taken to create it, it was too much. It's good to keep it as it was, and to have volumes four and five paperbacked by Cork University Press.

*But weren't there also financial concerns for volumes four and five?*

Permissions for these two volumes were not nearly so costly, in most cases. It is ironic that the women published there weren't so well known; therefore, they cost less in permissions to reproduce. But authors like Joyce, Yeats, or Shaw—all internationally known authors—cost a fortune to reprint.

*I thought they should be cheaper in permissions because they were dead.*

No, they changed the copyright law here. The copyright used to be valid for fifty years after death, and then was extended to seventy-five years in 1990. So we were still paying full price. Had Beckett been alive, we might have been able to persuade him to give it to us for less. But his London publisher was exploiting us for as much as possible. It was after a long negotiation that the Beckett selections we had went down from 25,000 to 9,000 British pounds, but only on agreement that if we printed it again, he would be paid the first sum. The finance for that set was crazy; it was never a sensible commercial venture, as was the case for volumes four and five. And yet at the same time I am still in many ways glad that I did it, and *Field Day* continued contributing to finance four and five: we paid all the printing and some of the permissions to Cork University Press.

*You were not involved in the editing process.*

No, not in the volumes for women's writing. But there wasn't really any comparison because they were doing it in a democratic, committee way, whereas I had done it in a much more authoritarian way, asking the editor to do this and that, and sometimes saying, "We don't want that"; "We can't use that"; or "This isn't sufficiently annotated." Most editors had a lot of freedom to create what they wanted, but the repeated problem was to get someone to give you the finished one on an agreed date. Clair Wills,<sup>30</sup> in volume five, for instance, had done her share three years before others completed theirs, and there must have been sixty editors involved in volumes four and five. It was so nightmarish that you had to be prepared to be published two years out of date.

*And you were teaching and writing papers—that's incredible. I was always wondering how you got the energy for all the things you have done for Field Day. It's amazing.*

There was something great about the Field Day group: it was energizing; we gave each other energy. And I had nothing to do with the theatre. Everybody else except Hammond wrote a play, and the production and direction of the plays was exclusively the achievement of Brian Friel and Stephen Rea.

*But you were called directors of the company. Didn't the directors have anything to do with the production of the play at all?*

We would meet on regular occasions to give suggestions if we had new plays. There were a number of plays we considered doing but didn't do. So there were discussions about the play, and once we said, "This is the play," then the direction and production of the play fell to Friel and Rea. And then we would on occasion publish the play. Everything about the publication—the design of the cover, how it would be financed—would be put to general discussion at these meetings. And again there were many things that we thought we would do but didn't, which I am trying to do—a new series of Field Day imprints, and a new journal<sup>31</sup> which just was launched in Dublin on 20 May, on 13 May in Derry, and a month before that in Notre Dame.

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<sup>30</sup> Editor of "Contemporary Writing, 1960-2001" in Volume 5 of the *Field Day Anthology*.

<sup>31</sup> *Field Day Review*.

*I have been doing research on Field Day in the British Library, and couldn't find anything as recent as this.*

Yes, I know. There is a series of books called "Critical Conditions" which Field Day did in cooperation with Cork University Press. And the British Library would catalogue it under Cork University Press, rather than under Field Day. As for this journal, we got some money from America and some from Ireland. And what we are going to do is an annual Irish studies review. We are also going to do some book publishing—four or six books in the next couple of years—which continues the "Critical Conditions" series, but in different names so that it doesn't get confused with the first series.

*Are you the only person responsible for this new project?*

No. One colleague named Breandán Mac Suibhne is working with me. And across the hall we have the Field Day archive being catalogued by one of my sons, and then it's to be given to the National Library in Dublin.

*So that is the office for Field Day in Dublin.*

This is actually rented from the University College of Dublin by the University of Notre Dame, and they had given us money to do publishing under the Field Day imprint, with that of Keough Institute of Irish Studies of Notre Dame—it's a joint venture between them but Field Day is senior there.

*What is the role of Cork University Press in the current Field Day publication enterprise?*

We are not going to be connected with it after this Critical Conditions series ends this year, 2005.

*But until then, is it involved in the editorial process?*

No. I would ask someone to provide something; sometimes people would send it something for the series. And the system was Cork would send them back to me to see if I wanted them in the series. If I rejected it, they might take it anyway, but not

publish it in the series. And if I accepted it, I would have to write a reader's report to recommend it.

*So the manuscript was submitted to Cork University Press before it came to you.*

Yes. And then they would send the manuscripts to their readers—at least two readers—before they published it. So they could stop the book that I recommended. But they couldn't start a book when I refused it.

*Did you invite manuscripts by any chance?*

Only informally. I would tell people about it, saying if you have something send it to Cork, and then send it on to me. But I was general editor of the series, so there were difficulties with Cork University Press. Sometimes they wanted to come up with something and I didn't want them to, or they changed the contract in a way that I didn't want them to do. Generally, though, it was very successful, but then Cork itself ran into funding difficulties. And the managing director of Cork University Press, who used to work with me, was fired along with other staff, and now it's a much smaller operation, and only publishes two or three books a year. It's possible that it won't survive on its own. It has entirely depended upon the University subvention, which is too small given what it might cost—paper, print, and of course the selling system including the booksellers and warehousing—everything now takes such a huge cost. And the bookstores give so much of the space to the latest best-sellers, or what they call airport books, rather than more serious books, so it's very difficult to get books like these to enter the bookstore. It's a very hard climate for academic publishing, and Cork has suffered. So we are looking, given the opportunity, to do this, even if it's a small-scale operation. I expect we would survive for three years, and work out a better market set-up, but in the meantime we would do a dozen, twenty books. We just have to make do.

*What you called "make-do" is something very heroic to me. But how did you persevere all the way when most of the founding directors of Field Day have given up the cause? I don't know why they quit, but it seems to me you were the most preserving of the Field Day group.*

Stephen Rea also gave a lot for Field Day. He not only played the main role in most of the plays, but he also sometimes directed them. He was also involved in the

production and the design. He gave the best ten years of his life as an actor to Field Day, and as a consequence, lost many big parts he had been offered.<sup>32</sup> He has made the greatest commitment and sacrifice of any of us. My sacrifice, if any, was in no way comparable to his. I took university jobs, and got people to help along. Still, it's better than simply publishing books that are solely within the academic environment. Publishing had initially nothing to do with Field Day, but the Field Day project made it possible to connect to intellectual life or general, daily life.

*But you also got most of the criticism on account of Field Day publications, didn't you? Wasn't it very scary, somehow?*

Not scary, but enraging sometimes. But then on the other hand, when you see them as misrepresentations, they must be so delivered. Yes, it can be distressing, but by now my skin is thicker.

*Considering what the editor of The Crane Bag said in the last issue of the journal (Hederman, "Postscript" 171-72), I was wondering what kind of climate it was that caused such frustrations, and what happened to Seamus Deane, who did not seem intimidated in any way. What happened at that time?*

There was a certain misunderstanding. *The Crane Bag* was in the charge of Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman; I was guest-editor for only one issue. I worked with them, but not in the way I was involved with Field Day, and thus put relatively small effort into it. In my memory of this, initially the title *Crane Bag* was coined by Richard Kearney; *The Crane Bag* vision and the Field Day vision are different. *The Crane Bag* was just a journal, a very courageous enterprise. For me it didn't have the concerted energy that Field Day had, but for Kearney it was certainly his idea that enacted it, and he took most of the headaches associated with it. It seemed to me to be more disconnected from the actual world than was Field Day.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Please see Zucker, 112-13.

<sup>33</sup> Despite Deane's disavowal, there was a close bonding between these two groups. *The Crane Bag* was intended to "clarify problems that have haunted every Irish person in the last two decades." As the founding purpose of this journal coincided with Field Day's, the journal was closely associated with the group. Seamus Deane was on the board of the journal, guest-edited a special issue, and wrote regularly for it. Richard Kearney, in turn, wrote a pamphlet entitled *Myth and Motherland* for Field Day. Most importantly, it gave Field Day the idea of the "fifth province." Please see Mark Patrick Hederman, "'The Crane Bag' and the North of Ireland," 731.

The Crane Bag *conducted a field trip to the Soviet Union—a trip you also took part in*<sup>34</sup>*—and interviewed the leader of the IRA,*<sup>35</sup>*and so on. Weren't these things very realistic, in some way?*

To me these are something chic; to interview the leader of the IRA does not necessarily mean one is involved, or one is more realistic.

*But Hederman did not seem to realize this. He said that the reason he called for a stop was that The Crane Bag was under unfair criticism and stereotyping, and that the Irish people did not want to “close the gap” of divided opinions that The Crane Bag intended to (Hederman, “Postscript” 171-72).*

Yes, and these critiques were very powerful politically but not intellectually or morally. It's in the interest of the hired establishment hacks not to have the atrocious record of the established systems exposed either in the past or in the present. The assault on *The Crane Bag* was deliberately fermented for political reasons; this journal was attacked because in some ways we talked about republicanism and unionism and criticized American foreign policy—all these things were interconnected in the present propaganda war. It is surprising that Richard didn't seem to realize the assault would be so vicious and given to deliberate distortion, but it always is. If you go into the public realm at all in print, especially in a journal, you are going to be attacked, especially in this small country where the press and the journalists is in the hands of a very few.

*I wonder why they didn't realize that this might be the consequence.*

He was very young; he didn't really know.

*But you were also young when you committed yourself to Field Day.*

Yes, but not as young as Kearney and Hederman.

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<sup>34</sup> As delegates of *The Crane Bag*, Seamus Deane and Seamus Heaney visited the Soviet Union in 1983 for a special issue entitled “Socialism and Culture.”

<sup>35</sup> Mark Patrick Hederman interviewed Seamus Twomey (1919-1989), twice chief of staff of the IRA (1973; 1974-77), in Belfast in November 1977, one month before Twomey was arrested in Dublin.



*Still, it's surprising that Richard Kearney went to The Irish Review,<sup>36</sup> which seemed to be hostile to Field Day—at least when Edna Longley was on the editorial board—after the termination of The Crane Bag, but quit again several years later.*

Yes. Edna Longley silently became the editor of that journal, which moved from Belfast to Cork. It also put many revisionists on the editorial board. Kearney was confused at that time, probably because of his reaction to the attack he had suffered. *The Irish Review* had a very small, incestuous circulation—the readers always agreed with each other. I agreed to give part of my essay to the last issue of the journal operated by the old board at one of my rare ecumenical moments.<sup>37</sup>

*Are you considering including theatre performances for the new Field Day?*

No. First of all, there is the problem of money—you need a lot of it, and we don't have it. Then there is the problem of energy and personnel. The only person who can do it is Stephen Rea, but he is not readily available because he is in London and travels a lot. Still, the greatest problem is money. It's also difficult to produce a play—which takes three or four months—in small town halls with terrible living conditions and very basic technical support for theatre. It is almost impossible, but it was done sometimes. Stephen directed and took one of the main parts in *Northern Star*<sup>38</sup>—a play about the 1798 rebellion—in 1998 in Belfast, which was described then as “A Tinderbox-Field Day Theatre Company production,” and which won an award at the Belfast festival in 1999. That was the last Field Day play, and that was the only way it could be done. But now we have to get a technical director, a producer if we ever do theatre again.

*Do you know about Brian Friel's new play The Home Place, which is being performed in London now?*

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<sup>36</sup> Launched in 1986 by Queen's University Belfast and subsequently taken over by the Association of Irish Studies and Cork University Press, *The Irish Review* published annually in 1986-87, and henceforth bi-annually. Edna Longley was on the editorial board when the journal started.

<sup>37</sup> Seamus Deane, “Freedom Betrayed: Acton, Burke and Ireland.” Deane also wrote a poem entitled “Vanishings” for this journal in 1988.

<sup>38</sup> A play written by Stewart Parker (1941-1988) in 1984, and reproduced by Field Day at the Tinderbox Theatre in 1998.

Yes, it was performed in Dublin two months ago. But Brian Friel is no longer a Field Day director. He resigned from Field Day; Kilroy resigned; Paul<sup>39</sup> resigned; Hammond resigned. That leaves Stephen Rea, Seamus Heaney, and myself, but Heaney is dormant.

*Do you still keep in contact with Brian Friel?*

Ah yes, though he split up with Stephen Rea when he gave his play *Dancing at Lughnasa* to the commercial theatre rather than to Field Day. There was a certain friendship within Field Day; the big break was between Stephen and Brian and Stephen took great offense. Most of our friendships survived. Stephen and I are great pals. I am still friends with Brian, Heaney, and Paul. Hammond was a great friend of Heaney. Paul and I have been friends since Field Day, and remain so. They were surprised that I continued with publishing. Stephen is very pleased that it should continue. The “Critical Conditions” series is as valid as it was in the 1980’s, because the conditions are fundamentally the same, and in fact can recur.

*Do you have new members on your board?*

No. We kept talking about it, but no. Things get complicated that way.

*But don’t you need a board to apply for grants? Wasn’t that the reason Field Day came to be?*

Yes. Because the current grant came from the University of Notre Dame.

*But you are going to carry on the name of Field Day, is that right?*

Yes, absolutely. The university has been using the Field Day imprint for these books, though in smaller operation. We are continuing the Field Day imprint in such a way that we don’t have to beg for money. The new journal we published costs 35 Euros per copy. If we break even between the journal and the books—that’s the most we can do—we can keep it under control without losing too much money. But we can’t make money on this. So two people are competing with big companies, in the hope that the Field Day name will carry through to libraries, academic entities, and the wider general public. And that journal is aimed wider

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<sup>39</sup> Tom Paulin.

partly because we have decided to combine official imprints; each has its own sellers, tracks, and audience. As this journal includes topics on Joyce, the IRA, the politics of Northern Ireland, and an interview with Behan,<sup>40</sup> our new journal not only targets university people but also a fairly wide public; it is a handsome production and our hope is that it will be widely read.\*

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<sup>40</sup> Brendan Behan (1923-64) was an Irish playwright, whose prison service for his activities in the IRA formed the background of his most important plays, including *The Hostage* (1959).

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