

Anatomy of Influence:

The Decisive Effect of Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism on James Reaney's Donnelly's Trilogy, as Directed by Keith Turnbull

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- "The act of writing requires a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike."

-Ralph Ellison

Abstract

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By **Teri Loretto-Valentik**

Best known for his Donnelly's Trilogy, Canadian playwright James Reaney completed his PHD under Northrop Frye. Frye's thought and worldview are at the centre of these plays and although Reaney based his writing on a local legend from his childhood, it is undeniably grounded in Frye's work, *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye's influence on Reaney becomes clear when Reaney's trilogy is examined through the lens of Frye's *Anatomy*. The plays manifest Frye's structures concretely in space and time using props, setting, music, the spoken word and movement. An examination of the rehearsal hall methods of director Keith Turnbull reveals that Frye's influence also extended to the actors' preparation and the collective creation process that was critical to the resulting performances.

Reviews and critiques, interviews with participants and an analysis of the trilogy in the context of *Anatomy of Criticism* give a greater understanding of the mechanics of the work and the resulting performances.

In this study, elements of the plays are presented and discussed within the context of or with reference to Frye's literary theory, making clear how the understanding of one contributes to the comprehension of the other. The relationship between a literary theory and live performance is here a powerful tool to understanding these theatrical works. This research establishes that it was also significant for the creation of one of Canada's most pivotal dramatic works.

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Thank you to James Reaney “Jamie’s” works are bricks in a great house that is being built. It will be a place for the vast talent of Canadian writers and practitioners to live and it would never have had such strong foundations without his efforts. Thank you to Ray Fazakas who, with the huge scope of his research into the Donnellys, has done the country a great service by preserving this legendary story for future generations.

Northrop Frye is a force to be reckoned with and I thank all the people who keep his works alive. They realize, as I did over the course of this research, that his contribution to criticism and literature is entirely relevant.

And finally: a *grand merci* to Keith Turnbull for his hospitality, intellect, and humour. Without his insight and stories, this paper would be a rather dry look at the business of theatrical analysis. Keith, you brought energy and reality to my process by talking about yours. You also reminded me that it is people who make theatre such an attractive obsession.

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Teri Loretto-Valentik Ottawa, March 21st 2012

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Introduction

In November 1973, James Reaney's *Sticks and Stones* premiered at Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, Ontario. The play was the first instalment in a trilogy based on the true story of one of Canada's most notorious families, the Donnellys. *Sticks and Stones* was followed in quick succession by the second and third chapters: *The St. Nicolas Hotel* in 1974, and *Handcuffs* in 1975. All three plays, directed by Keith Turnbull, were immediately successful with critics and audiences, and the trilogy has since been acknowledged as a "milestone" in Canadian dramatic literature (Rolfe D1). *The St. Nicholas Hotel* won the Chalmers Award for Best Canadian Play in 1975, and *Sticks and Stones* was included in the 2005 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Plays*' list of the 1,000 most significant plays of all time.¹ This inclusion gives truth to Urjo Kareda's statement in his review of the premiere of *Sticks and Stones*: "I can't help feeling that it was a landmark evening" (Kareda, "A play about the Donnellys" D4). The plays recreate the story of the political, social, and religious reasons for the family's fatal persecution in perhaps "the most famous unsolved mystery of Canadian law" (Noonan 3) "within the overall mythic context of the eternal battle between the powers of spiritual light and dark" (Dictionary of Literary Biography).

It has been said of James Reaney that his way of putting plays together is "both sophisticated, devilishly complicated, and yet so simple that a child could grasp it" (Kareda, "New James Reaney play" D6). This observation is certainly true of *The Donnellys* and the plays are the result of a complex and sophisticated combination of outside influence and personal process. Although Reaney continued to write for the theatre after the success of this series of plays, the trilogy is considered the crowning achievement of his theatrical writings. Key to

1. The plays are selected on the basis of historical context in specific countries and are included based upon recognition of their significance to region, time period and theatre in general.

Reaney's plays was an underlying structure combining myth and archetype. The characters and the imagery conjured by the props, settings and text are informed by a larger, more epic vision than was familiar for the telling of a regional legend in small town Canada and the plays were presented in a manner that was nearly overwhelming due to these multiple facets. This structure came from what might be seen as an unlikely source: a book of theory of literary criticism, Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, published in 1957. When the theory outlined in *Anatomy of Criticism* was united with an experimental rehearsal process that used it as a foundation for exploration, the results were an unquestionably fresh approach to theatre. Reaney's personal background, a story of mythic proportions, Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, and Turnbull's unique combination of these elements in rehearsal led to the development of a multi-textured theatrical experience that was "not just beautiful but also dangerously exciting" (Kareda, "Donnelly's Trilogy Comes" D6). In the chapters that follow, the influence of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* on James Reaney will be investigated within the context of Turnbull's productions of Reaney's Donnelly's plays. First, however, a brief summary of the lives and roles of the three components of this creative triumvirate—Reaney, Turnbull, and Frye—is useful to the ensuing discussion.

James Reaney

James Reaney (September 1, 1926–June 11, 2008) was one of Canada’s foremost poets and playwrights who experimented with collective creation, performance poetry, and physical theatre. Growing up in Southern Ontario near the location of the historical Donnellys’ feud, Reaney’s early imagination had been fed by the legend of this family. “I knew the Donnellys from my stepfather’s childhood stories. There’s so much folklore in Southern Ontario. In winters people sit around their fires or their Calvinators² and make up things about the Donnellys” (Kareda, “These two men” F3). The trilogy was born out of the kernel of this idea that had been with Reaney since his youth. He had even written of the tale in an earlier poem, *Winter’s Tales*, in 1949:

The farmer told them stories

That his father had told him

Of the massacre at Lucan

Where the neighbours killed all the McKilligans dead

Except one little boy who crawled under a bed. (Noonan, quoting Reaney, *The Donnellys* 277)

He had also begun to work on a theatrical version of this story years before *Sticks and Stones* made it to the stage. In his essay “Ten Years at Play,” written in 1969 for *Canadian*

2. Calvinator is the name of a company that manufactured household appliances like electric stoves and heaters. Reaney’s use of the brand name for a generic item is not unlike the more common substitution of Band-Aid for all sticking plasters or Kleenex for any facial tissue.

Literature, Reaney speaks of the beginnings of the trilogy in the context of his work while on sabbatical in that year: “I’ve been working on *Donnelly*, or the *Biddulph Tragedy*, an attempt to apply what techniques I’ve collected in the past with all its longhand archival detail” (Reaney, *Ten Years* 61). It took four years and countless workshops after this early effort to develop the work and to shape it into its existing form. In his own published account of the touring of the three plays in 1976–77, Reaney says of the long percolation period:

About ten years ago, I started working on a script about the Donnelly Tragedy ... I first heard the story of it when I was eight years old and since it happened not twenty miles from where I was born, the effect of the story was unforgettable: terror and fascination. (Reaney, *14 Barrels* Introduction).

It is not surprising either that a trilogy resulted: Reaney once said there are “a hundred plays in the Donnellys story” (Noonan, *The Donnellys* 8), and the published three plays are an expansion of the single original version that Reaney played with earlier in his career. Of the first part of the trilogy Reaney says

When you immerse yourself in this play, you may find that your experience matches my own when I immersed myself in documents which had lain for years and years in the attics of two local courthouses: after a while I couldn’t stop thinking about them” (Reaney, “Program Note”).

The appeal of both the legend and Reaney’s finely crafted telling of it, however, is only part of the formula for the success Reaney found with this trilogy. Combined with the experiences of his formative academic and theatrical years, the local legend of his youth became a springboard for a new type of theatre. The plays propelled Reaney to the forefront of

contemporary Canadian theatre practitioners, and his unique approach to developing his plays through workshop methods, devised with director Keith Turnbull, produced a markedly fresh style of working and performance.

Reaney and Turnbull were experimenting with music, form, dialogue, and myth and creating their own ways of expressing them theatrically. The 1970s marked an enormous change in Canadian theatre, marked by new works from developing Canadian playwrights, and Reaney was to be at the vanguard of this movement. The Stratford Festival in Ontario in 1967, although still mainly a stronghold of colonialist taste, had staged Reaney's memory play, *Colours in the Dark*. This was, however, an anomaly as the majority of regional theatres in Canada before this time remained largely conservative. The average season for these theatres was "made up of a recent American or British success, a classic or two and the occasional Canadian work" (Banham 163) and *Colours* was the exception, not the norm. It was vital to the success of these new writers in a burgeoning theatre scene to seek out alternative theatres. Tarragon Theatre, founded by Bill Glasco in 1971, quickly became the "most established of the alternatives" (Banham 164), and it was here that Reaney's plays found a launching pad. His works have since proved themselves in a broader context too. Though he is closely associated with the regional writers of his south-western Ontario home, his writings have achieved international fame and have a universality to them that transcends the "Southwesto," an idiom coined to identify his peer group near London, Ontario.³ Although he rarely strayed from his physical roots in south-western Ontario, the plays of *The Donnellys* series are but three of the many of his plays that have

3. A group of writers including Alice Munro, Robertson Davies, Timothy Findley, Jane Urquhart, and Barbara Gowdy, for example. The term derives from "south-western Ontario". Reaney claims that James Curnoe coined it first (Bowering, *Reaney's Region*).

enjoyed success across Canada and internationally. In 1996 his *Wacousta!*⁴ was the central play at the International Conference of Canadian Studies in Trivandrum, India, and was performed there by Indian students. His treatment of another Canadian legend was “transformed into the lineaments of Indian myth” (Howells and Kröller 6). Reaney and the students created a piece that transcended cultural boundaries and combined two diverse societies in performance. The nature of Reaney’s writing allows for this type of performance to happen. His works in general and *The Donnellys* plays in particular, combine myth and history, “translating them through the imaginative lenses of Gothic melodrama, fairytale and mythic archetypes” (Howells 6). His masterfully textured sound-scapes, dramatic visual activity and overall inventiveness in staging, flesh out universal stories. In collusion with the actors and director, Reaney created on stage “complex, carefully patterned movements ‘more like a film or a symphony’” (Miller, quoting Reaney, *Wacousta!* 111). His innovative *Donnellys* trilogy required an approach to writing, rehearsing and staging that could only have developed under particular circumstances.

4. *Wacousta!* is based on the novel of the same name by John Richardson, written in 1832. The novel has inspired several stage versions. Reaney’s was originally published in 1979.

Keith Turnbull

The majority of Reaney's early plays were directed by his collaborator and friend Keith Turnbull (1944–), and their relationship was central to the highly innovative and imaginative nature of *The Donnellys*. Turnbull and Reaney's original workshop process was largely responsible for the development of the performance text, the memorable characters and the novel approach to creating setting and movement. The collective work of the actors and designers merged with music and key symbols to create an exciting, if somewhat "exhausting" evening of theatre.⁵ Under Turnbull's direction, the actors, armed with songs and chants, visually and aurally created the locations, and simple but numerous props replaced elaborate sets and stage dressing. Audiences were witness to powerful imagery that created the narrative in an innovative and then-unusual way. Andrey Tarasiuk, who directed the National Arts Centre 2005 revival of *Sticks and Stones*, says this of Reaney's production:

As for the theatre, when it was first presented, *Sticks & Stones* was a landmark in terms of dramas on Canadian stages. Reaney's non-linear, poetic approach to telling his story was fresh and challenging to the theatre community in the mid-1970s. His fresh approach expanded the range of theatrical styles available to playwrights and directors because it broke from what we used to call the "Canadian kitchen sink" method (straightforward, conventional, narrative story-telling) and introduced, instead, ensemble acting, non-linear story-telling and rich visual imagery. (Tarasiuk 11)

5. As one reviewer states, "it is an exhausting play to see, in exactly the way all good theatre should be exhausting" (Campeau C3)

The significance of Turnbull's role in the creation of *The Donnellys* plays cannot be underestimated: Keith Turnbull's contribution as collaborator and director was considered "surely revolutionary, creating a performing style as extraordinary and original as the text to be performed" (Kareda, "Donnellys Trilogy comes" D6). Reaney himself said of Turnbull's contribution to his first produced play, *The Sun and The Moon*, that "Keith was [an] enormous help. I didn't know how to direct. I didn't know how to tell people to cross the stage. We worked under horrendous epic conditions" (Kareda, "These two men" F3). That early beginning led to many collaborative efforts of which *The Donnellys* is considered a highlight. Most importantly, Turnbull developed workshop exercises and a means of exploring key elements of the script that were to become pivotal to the transmission of the underlying themes and imagery of the trilogy. Turnbull was asked by Jean McKay in an interview in 1981 about how much of what happened visually could be accounted to Reaney and how much to himself. His simple response, "it's really hard to separate" (152) is modest, but telling.

Northrop Frye

The distinctive performance and the story that formed the basis of the plays were only a part of the equation for the success of the innovative trilogy that developed out of Reaney and Turnbull's partnership. Underlying all the sound and fury was an influence from what might seem an unlikely source: the literary theories of Reaney's mentor and friend, Northrop Frye. The close working relationship between Reaney and Turnbull unavoidably brought Frye into the rehearsal hall, but the director admits that the Frye would have inevitably had an effect on his work regardless of Reaney's bond with his professor. While Frye is no longer at the forefront of contemporary scholarship, his influence from the mid-twentieth century into the 1970s, when Reaney and Turnbull were initially studying and working, is indisputable. Keith Turnbull, for his part, openly acknowledges the effect Frye had on shaping the artistic community in which he and Reaney existed:

... people would ask me, "Why Frye?" I would say: I'm from small town Ontario, not noted as a cultural leader in the arts and on top of it all my university education was all in sciences and I ended up doing a degree in political philosophy. I kind of thought, well, I have a choice. I could just go to Robart's Library ... and start reading everything, (...) but I'm not going to get to read it in my lifetime, so I'll take Frye: because he has such a deep reading of so much literature ... and he's been digesting the Western library since he was seven in Moncton. He just brings so much. He gives us windows on to such a vast world, and I think that's what Jamie took from Frye too. (Turnbull)

In *The Donnellys* trilogy, Reaney created a “drama of the highest order,” a play that, while coming to life fully only on stage, “can also be studied as literature on the many levels of symbolism, metaphor, and irony” (Noonan *The Donnellys* 288). The many-layered depths of the work can be attributed to Reaney’s assimilation of Frye’s theories and the transmission of the theory to audiences through concrete means in a theatrical context. Reaney’s work is by no means strictly derivative of Frye, but rather was enriched by his academic and personal relationship with Frye. For Reaney, Frye’s criticism is “the ultimate collection of patterns to use (...) laid alongside life to help us see more clearly what people do. Life, or the present, is a distorted mirror image of literature or tradition. The former can’t be truly clarified without the organising powers of the latter” (Dragland, “Reaney’s Relevance” 7). Frye and Reaney would remain friends until Frye’s passing in 1991.

Frye, Reaney, and Turnbull: A Creative Triumvirate

Reaney and Turnbull read Frye. They studied his work and, in Reaney's case, studied under him. It is no surprise then that the theories that Frye proposed in *Anatomy of Criticism* were fundamental to the development of this historic Canadian trilogy and that Frye's thought was decisive in the development of the text, the characters, settings, and songs of *The Donnelly's* plays. The archetypal literary modes defined by Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* were critical to both the structure and content of James Reaney's cycle of plays and Frye's overarching conceptual frameworks are instantiated in Reaney's *The Donnelly's* as theatrical devices. Indeed, the plays were partially developed out of rehearsal exercises that explored the fundamental premises of Frye's *Anatomy*. Reaney and Turnbull combined a theoretical and practical approach based on Frye's theory to help create the fictional world of *The Donnelly's*. Frye's influence on Reaney generally, and the influence of *Anatomy* specifically, led Turnbull and Reaney to develop unique means of theatrical discovery and development. Frye's *Anatomy* provided the skeleton upon which to build this body of work and Keith Turnbull sculpted that body both through rehearsal techniques and by working closely with Reaney on the text. In Reaney and Turnbull's rehearsal hall, Frye's theories became truly concrete and were used as a tool for developing the performance text and characters. This meshing of ideas becomes most obviously concrete in one simple method of character development and exploration that routinely Turnbull used for the development workshops for all three plays. Turnbull drew a large circle on the floor, with four cardinal points, each indicating one of Frye's modes: Romantic, Ironic, Comic, and Tragic. Turnbull then placed five intermediate points between each mode. While working with early drafts of the text, Turnbull had the actors walk between or across the points to explore where the strengths and limitations of each character lay. "We would ... build up these reverberations

around each of the forms: and then we'd take a specific character and walk the character through [the circle]" (Turnbull). This circle (see fig. 1) was to become essential in exploring and developing each play and the trilogy as a whole. In addition to character, the method was used, according to Turnbull, to explore many other elements that make up the plays, such as the songs, poetry, and chants that comprise much of the eventual performance script. Although the three plays can be viewed exclusively from each other, the development of certain thematic elements in the pieces and the growth and change of characters can only be appreciated in full when one has viewed all three. For example, the initial setting of the plays contains only a stark tree in an arid environment, with the actors creating and adding farmland and forest as the story develops, and the world of the Donnellys becomes "much more velvety and lacy and lush by Part Three" (Turnbull). This follows Frye's notions that the vegetable world supplies us of course with the "annual cycle of seasons" (Frye *Anatomy* 160). This is but one parallel to Frye's work that can be seen in Reaney's trilogy. Productions of these plays thus functioned as concrete manifestations in time and space of Frye's aesthetic theories. This does not mean that Turnbull's direction of Reaney's trilogy is simply Frye's theory dramatised: rather, the plays can be seen as an embodiment of the ideas laid out in *Anatomy*. The imagery in the plays can be further clarified and understood through a reading of Frye. Keith Turnbull, when asked whether one would immediately be able to say "this is Frye" when presented with *The Donnellys* replied with the following:

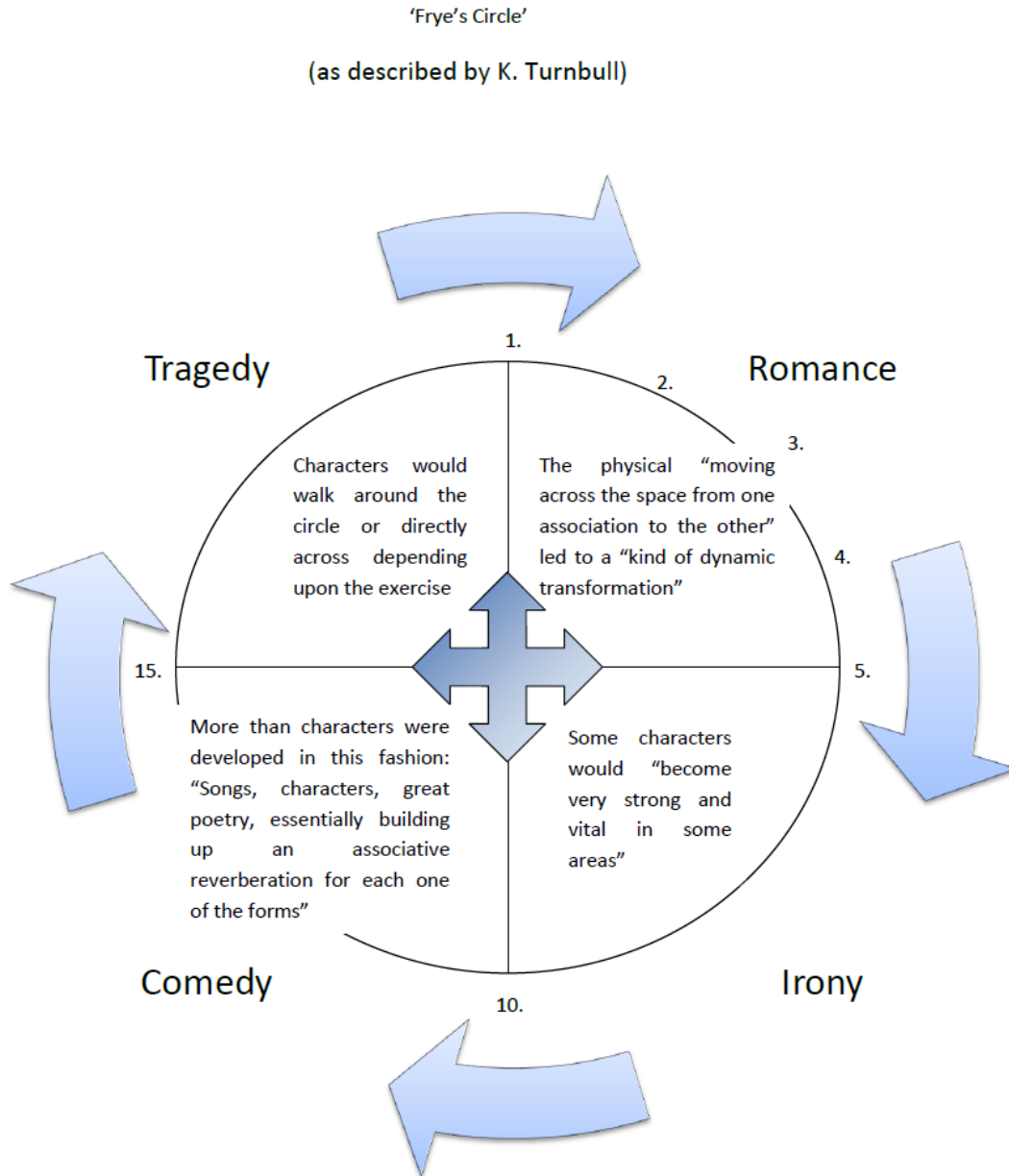
No— but yes— it's not that they would recognise Frye, but when they see water and flame, you are getting very strong associative properties. Even the little bit of incense that is in Part Three, just, you know unlocked untold depths in anyone who happened to be Catholic.. And so— burning a doll's house, uh uh! These

images have a visceral connection, but I wouldn't say that we were trying to demonstrate Frye exactly, but he was such a wonderful source. (Turnbull)

Turnbull used Frye's Circle "as an exercise in analytical thinking," (Turnbull) but it was not so much an intellectual exercise in Turnbull's opinion as a way to give the team the ability to get to a real physical experience. By using Frye's *Anatomy* as groundwork, the theory was then transformed into a practical creative tool for performers. The plays never lose track of the original story that was so exciting and accessible. The combination of critical theory with a hands-on approach to theatrical practice clearly resulted in a dramatic work of "controversial originality and demanding complexity" (Kareda, "Donnellys Trilogy comes" D6).

Fig. 1. Frye's Circle, by T. Loretto-Valentik 2011. Based on personal interview with K. Turnbull 2010.

Figure 1.1



Content and Organization

At the time these plays were being developed, Frye was the leading theoretical and scholarly influence on Canadian literature. Thus, Chapter One of this study will provide evidence of the relationships upon which the theory of Frye's influence will be based. This chapter will focus on establishing the nature of Frye's influence on Reaney in general and on the development of the plays in particular. In order to establish the personal and professional influence of Frye on Reaney and Turnbull, this chapter will also look in greater detail at the connections between the three men, targeting Frye's scholarly and intellectual influence on Reaney and the working relationship between Reaney and Turnbull. Turnbull's methods unavoidably played a part in the final construction of the plays and must be factored into the equation. Similarities in the backgrounds of Reaney and Frye account for common scholarly and cultural perspectives and, by looking at Reaney's formative years, it is possible to draw parallels between Reaney and Frye's lives. Differences of culture and period also account for interesting divergences and combinations of Frye's modes and archetypes within Reaney's plays. Thus Chapter One will explore where the commonalities diverge and where they intersect.

Chapter Two examines in detail the story that inspired Reaney's work from the original legend to Reaney's retelling. Since the story unfolded in the late 1800s, it has continued to capture the popular imagination. The true story of the Donnellys has all the elements found in any good fictional tale of murder and revenge and the now larger-than-life historical characters easily lend themselves to a likening to Frye's archetypal heroes. It is also no surprise that Reaney "used events surrounding the Donnellys as a basis for a [play].... There is a sense as we read or see [the plays] that Reaney [had] finally hit on a subject that [could] give full scope to his regional, national and artistic bent" (Noonan *The Donnellys* 276).

Contemporary reviews of the performance, conversation with the director about the characters, and descriptions of them from the published text will build an in-depth picture of the elements of the productions. A summary of each play will aid in showing how characters develop in the context both of the plays and within Frye's proposed archetypes. The historical basis of the plays gave the audiences a starting point that aided in the assimilation of the poetic vision of the trilogy. "The awareness that 'these people lived', in a place we can identify, makes us open to Reaney's vision of the characters he brings to life from the bare bones of history" (Noonan *The Donnellys* 278). The nature of the story of the Donnellys makes it an ideal medium for the articulation of these theories. "Seen in the light of his background and earlier plays, the Donnelly story appears ready-made for the Reaney world" (Noonan *The Donnellys* 276).

Chapter Three considers the literary theory. The fundamentals of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* will be discussed with a particular focus on "Tragic and Comic Fictional Modes" from the First Essay, "Literal and Descriptive Phases," "Formal Phases," and "Mythical Phases" from the Second Essay, and "Theory of Archetypal Meaning," "The Mythos of Autumn: Tragedy," and "The Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire" from the Third Essay. Settings in *The Donnellys* correspond to these larger, universal structures as posited by Frye. Identification and discussion of these structures in Reaney's plays will serve to support the argument in favour of Frye's influence as the chapter examines how Frye's overarching conceptual frameworks are clearly instantiated in Reaney's *The Donnellys* as actual theatrical devices. The play script is then augmented by a guide map of sorts, making connections to the theory. The performance and the workshop and rehearsal process allowed for the fusing of theory with practice in Reaney's plays. The productions of *The Donnellys* plays thus serve to make a theory truly tangible and concrete. This chapter will decode the theoretical foundations upon which Reaney and Turnbull built the

trilogy, and will show how, while the legend of the Donnellys is unquestionably an enthralling one and the talent of both Reaney and Turnbull is undeniable, it is the influence of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* that makes *The Donnellys* trilogy an exceptional landmark in the canon of Canadian dramatic literature.

Chapter Four will examine Turnbull's rehearsal techniques and Reaney's writing process. The focus of this chapter is how the performance physically created images that reflected Frye's theory. Also considered are the internal logic of the director, the physical action of creating settings, props, and characters, and how symbols put forth by Frye appear in a live production. The non-verbal language of props, settings, sound, and action will also be investigated in the context of Frye's proposed archetypes. The issue of concurrent transmission⁶ and simultaneous execution⁷ will also be examined by showing what these theories look like on stage and how they translate to an audience. Due to the ephemeral nature of theatrical performances, the audience would have to assimilate ideas in one evening that took the company months to explore. The performance text, or the "multi-channel process of communication that makes up a performative act" (Schechner 247) will be looked at in more detail. How the images and symbols functioned on stage must be examined in the context of the reception of the plays. Assessment of this will be supported by reviews of the original performances. Furthermore, an understanding of the importance of the theory will be highlighted by a brief look at a more contemporary performance

6. Concurrent transmission refers to the notion that many tasks, symbols, and processes can be viewed at once to create what appears to be a single idea in presentation. The audience would be assimilating more than one single idea at a time. The action might combine with dialogue, music, chants, and visuals that, although the result of a large spectrum of influence, appear to the receiver as the impression of a single idea. In reality, like the example of light consisting of many colours, the perception is that one is viewing a single colour.

⁷ Simultaneous execution refers to the seemingly spontaneous production and reflection of Frye's ideas by Reaney and Turnbull, rather than by conscious reference to a particular facet of his theories.

of *Sticks and Stones* that did not benefit so fully from Frye's theory and chose to do away with many of the visual and auditory models.

Based on the preceding chapters, the Conclusion will make clear what is here termed the "anatomy of influence" with respect to the creative and theoretical contributions of Frye, Reaney, and Turnbull. Reaney was writing with a vision of Frye's archetypal world in mind; Turnbull was creating concrete exercises to explore and use the theory. He used Frye's Circle to explore the characters and interpret the landscape of the plays. This influenced the way actors understood the fictional world of the play, the way their characters behaved and reacted, and what the numerous props and set pieces meant. Frye is, as a result, deeply ingrained in the work. The Donnellys legend was thus steeped in the ideas circulating between a director, a writer, and actors in rehearsal. This in turn set up conditions for an audience to assimilate a huge landscape of theory in a very concrete manner.

Thus, the Conclusion will show that the theory, the writing, and the rehearsal/development process are so interrelated that one cannot look at *The Donnellys* without considering the influence of the theory upon the other elements.

Chapter One: Personal Connections and Anatomy of Influence

When the student is ready the master will appear.

*-Buddhist proverb*⁸

*I wouldn't be so interested in plays if I hadn't got interested in criticism. Particularly in Frye and Aristotle, and so on*⁹

-James Reaney

The line from Frye's theory to Reaney's work is clear. Frye was dominant on the literary scene at the time of Reaney's post secondary education. A *Toronto Star* column following Frye's death in January 1991 went so far as to call him "possibly the most widely studied and quoted thinker Canada has ever produced" (Marchand D1). Reaney first came in contact with Frye as an undergraduate student in the 1940s, and if one were to judge from Frye's general place in literary criticism at the time, it seems probable that Reaney was influenced by Frye's ideas in any case. Studying at Frye's home institution, under the professor himself, would have cemented the discipleship. Despite initial resistance to joining the confederacy of Frye followers at that time, Reaney eventually became one of Frye's most dedicated students. Frye's influence on Reaney's poetry and other literary works has been noted by scholars prior to the creation of *The Donnellys*. Ross Woodman, in his 1971 comprehensive guide to the work of James Reaney for a Canadian writers series, states that the effect of Frye's work upon Reaney cannot "be overestimated." (14). After a short hiatus from study to pursue a teaching career, Reaney returned to the University of

8. Quoted from Keith Dowman, *The Flight of the Garuda: the Dzogchen Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*, (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1994).

⁹ Reaney in interview with Jean McKay 146

Toronto to complete his doctorate in 1958¹⁰ under Frye's supervision (J.S. Reaney, *Profiles* 1). During his doctoral work Reaney "completed his assimilation from Frye of ideas that he had begun to absorb in the latter part of his undergraduate career" (Stingle 2). That Frye should become such an influence on Reaney is hardly surprising given the nature of their supervisor–student relationship, an association strengthened by the fact that the two men shared a similar religious upbringing and came from comparable social and economic backgrounds.

Herman Northrop Frye (1912–1991) is perhaps Canada's best-known literary theorist, and has been called one of the "greatest critics to have written in English" (Hart 1). Among his numerous accolades were the Order of Canada in 1972 and his election to The Royal Society of Canada in 1951.¹¹ He is considered one of Canada's most influential academic figures and is hailed as a distinguished scholar both at home and internationally. Frye's theories are expounded in over thirty-five books and collected essays and he continued his academic and critical writings until his death at the age of 79 in 1991.¹² "The prestige of Frye's thinking . . . reinforced a significant mythic trend in Canadian poetry in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the work of

10. The dissertation was entitled "The Influence of Spenser on Yeats." Reaney received a doctorate in English Literature in 1958.

11. Frye was awarded the Royal Society's Lorne Pierce Medal (1958) and the Pierre Chauveau Medal (1970). He won the Canada Council Molson Prize in 1971 and the Royal Bank Award in 1978. In 1987 he received the Governor General's Literary Award and the Toronto Arts Lifetime Achievement Award. He was an Honorary Fellow or Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (1969), Merton College, Oxford (1974), the British Academy (1975), the American Philosophical Society (1976), and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1981) (Northrop Frye Centre).

12. Frye also edited fifteen books, composed essays and chapters that appear in over sixty books, and wrote over one hundred articles and reviews in academic journals. From 1950 to 1960 he wrote the annual critical and bibliographical survey of Canadian poetry for *Letters in Canada*, University of Toronto Quarterly (Northrop Frye Centre).

such former students as Jay Macpherson, James Reaney and Margaret Atwood.” (Ayre). Frye speaks of this type of “mythic” poetry in his “Preface to an Uncollected Anthology” in 1956:

Every good lyrical poet has a certain structure of imagery as typical of him as his handwriting, held together by certain recurring metaphors, and sooner or later he will produce one or more poems that seem to be at the centre of that structure. These poems are in a formal sense his mythical poems, and they are for the critic the imaginative keys to his work. (Frye, *The Bush Garden* 179).

Critic Harold Bloom is one of many influential thinkers who acknowledge their debt to Frye. In his introduction to the re-release of *Anatomy of Criticism* in 2000, Bloom states that

I fell in love with Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry*, his study of William Blake, when it was published in 1947, my freshman year at Cornell. I purchased the book and read it to pieces, until it was a part of me. A decade later, when *Anatomy of Criticism* was published, I became one of its first reviewers. . . . I probably absorbed it in ways I can no longer apprehend. (Bloom vii)

Unlike Bloom, however, who was not directly a student of Frye, Margaret Atwood and James Reaney were, and Frye critiqued and reviewed the work of both. In the case of Atwood, Frye often showed his support for her art and in 1986 he declared her “a national resource.” (St. Andrews 47) Of her recognition of Frye’s impact upon her art, Atwood credits Frye not with “influence,” but with “Influence,” that is, in the vernacular, influence with a capital “I” (St. Andrews 47). Jonathon Hart, in his analysis of Frye’s major works, warns the contemporary theorist to be cautious in dismissing Frye as no longer influential upon our thinking; he asserts that to do so would constitute being “blinded by fashion. . . . The world has changed and will

always change. To embrace change does not mean we have to forget our cultural past” (*The Theoretical Imagination* 2).

Frye’s status on the world stage also won him the offer of a chair at Oxford University, England, but he chose to remain in Canada at the University of Toronto. He was a staunch supporter of Canada’s burgeoning literary identity and his international reputation gave him a certain legitimacy that consequently allowed him to champion Canadian literature at a time when to do so was considered provincial. “It was Northrop Frye, indubitably, who proclaimed the merit and grandeur and existence of a vital Canadian literature” (St. Andrews 47). Frye argued that irrespective of the formal quality of the writing, it was imperative to study Canadian literary works in order to “understand the Canadian imagination and its reaction to the Canadian environment” (*Conclusion, A Literary History of Canada* xiv).

Reaney too was an advocate of Canadian literature. Neither he nor his works apologize for their Canadian content. He wrote passionately about life around him in south-western Ontario with topics ranging from the deep past (*Wacousta!*) to the more recent legends of the Donnellys to celebrations of his contemporary life in London, Ontario. He also contributed much towards the recognition of a Canadian cultural identity independent of British and American influence, a point illustrated by Turnbull’s comment in relation to the touring version of *The Donnelly* plays in 1975: “What Reaney has done to a lot of people in the company is to open their eyes to how people can speak well and yet still be Canadian without British accents” (Kareda, “The Donnellys travel” F20). Actress Patricia Ludwick, who played Mrs. Donnelly in the original *Sticks and Stones*, called the play an “extremely Canadian experience” (Kareda, “Actress projects” F3). Ludwick’s remark would seem to encapsulate Reaney and Turnbull’s novel approach to the development of this new piece of theatre, which was based in a uniquely

Canadian legend and far removed from the familiar methods of more conventional theatres whose works were mostly imports.

Frye is recognized for his argument “that literature and criticism are each autonomous, by which he means that they are disciplines like any other” (Hart 1) and for equating them with science, music, mathematics, and other such structural systems. He, like his own acknowledged influence William Blake, believed that truth resides in the imagination. Arguably, Reaney’s imagination became the vehicle for Frye’s “truths.”

Taking his cue from Aristotle, in *Anatomy* Frye formulated an inductive conceptual framework. Looking to the Greeks and Aristotle as a starting point, Frye’s theories of mode, symbol, myth, and genre articulated in *Anatomy of Criticism* are classically inspired and aim to “follow the natural order and begin with the primary facts” (*Anatomy* 15). The primary facts, in this case, are the classical works of literature themselves, particularly the Bible and the myths of classical Greece. The resulting theories are acknowledged to have been highly influential on generations of writers worldwide in the decades before deconstructionist criticism and the postmodern turn.¹³ Long before the post-structuralist boom in the 70s and 80s, Frye was said to have had, according to American literary critic and theorist Murray Krieger, “an absolute hold on a generation of developing critics, greater and more exclusive than any one theorist in recent critical history” (Marchand D1). “As Frye points out in *The Critical Path*, all ‘isms’ come out or go back into myths, or STORIES¹⁴ SO why not present the concrete version of your favourite

13. Contemporary evidence points towards a continued influence despite detractors like Terry Eagleton and Frank Kermode. In his essay “‘Pity the Northrop Frye Scholar’? *Anatomy of Criticism* Fifty Years After”, Robert Denham makes a strong argument that Frye’s influence is quite undiminished in many arenas (Denham, 15-34).

¹⁴ Reaney and original author’s capitals

‘ism’...Maybe if we get used to seeing our society as based on a story, we’ll wake up and realize that we can get a better story” (Reaney, “A letter from Reaney” 4) is how the playwright expressed how the reading of Frye encouraged “the wrapping of meaning in concrete formal envelopes” (Dragland, “Reaney’s Relevance” 8).

In *Anatomy*, Frye uses parallels, stemming from classical stories, as examples to help elucidate his theory: Oedipus is an example of his “tragic hero” and Frye refers to the Greek gods and myths, *Arabian Nights*, and the Bible to support his arguments (33). Reaney’s work too has been likened to the writings of Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Brecht (Noonan *The Donnelly’s* 7), so it is not surprising that the young poet and dramatist gravitated towards theories that expressed the universal archetypes that were already partially established in his own literary imagination. When Reaney found Frye, he found a teacher who not only held similar belief structures, but also one who would also give him the means to articulate his take on them in a bold and dramatic style.

Frye always noted the importance of teaching and maintaining a certain closeness to his students. He was well acquainted with “all his students, ‘my kids’ as he called them in his diaries,” and of his own work Frye said that “I keep reformulating the same central questions, trying to put them into a form to which some reader or student will respond: ‘yes, now I get it’” (Frye, *Divisions* 141). It is unlikely that a professor who responds to his students in this manner would not develop a relationship with his graduate students. Reaney himself admits closeness to Frye as a person and esteem for his professor as an intellectual. P. A. Abraham, in his short biography of Reaney, published three years before the playwright’s death, makes note of two separate occasions that plainly illustrate Reaney’s relationship to his thesis supervisor and professor. “Stan Dragland, in a personal letter (29 Sept. 2002) wrote to me that he once had

heard James Reaney say that he'd sold his soul to Northrop Frye" (Abraham 95). Abraham goes on to say that Reaney had once confided in him (in a 1996 interview) about his indebtedness to Frye and called him "a guru, a swami who could tell me how to put myself together" (96). Similarly, Frye often praised Reaney's work in formal criticism. This example from Frye's review of Reaney's *A Suit of Nettles* demonstrates the respect Frye had for Reaney's work:

I will only say that I have never read a book of Canadian poetry with so little "dissociation of sensibility" in it, where there was less separating of emotion and intellect, of the directly visualized and the erudite.... He has succeeded, as I think no poet has so succeeded before, in bringing southern Ontario, surely one of the most inarticulate communities in human culture, into brilliant imaginative focus. (Frye in Stingle, *CWTW* 205)

Although he is labelling Reaney's home community as an inarticulate one, Frye's admiration for the work itself is undeniable. In *The Donnelly's*, Reaney gives a larger voice to that community and one can only imagine that Frye approved yet again. Frye attended *The Donnelly's* plays at Tarragon Theatre in support of his former student, and after the inaugural run of *The St. Nicholas Hotel*, went so far as to go back stage to speak with the cast and with Reaney (Turnbull).¹⁵

It is important to note that Reaney drew upon Frye in his trilogy but that Reaney's plays are not derivative. Rather, the plays have a separate voice; albeit one that echoes the tones of the

15. "I think we were doing *St. Nicolas Hotel* ... and Frye came back stage and Patsy had no clothes on but her underwear!... And she went "Oh! Hi, Mr. Frye! ... And he's this little Methodist Minister! Really shy and ... we chatted of course ...I think he and Jamie had more developed conversations about the work [later]" (Turnbull).

master. Reaney was comfortable with admitting the influence of Frye on his thinking, as can be seen from his comments to Abraham on his indebtedness, and it could only be someone secure in his own autonomy of thought who could so clearly acknowledge this type of influence. In a review of one of Reaney's books of poetry, Margaret Atwood declares that she has "long entertained a private vision of Frye reading through Reaney while muttering 'What have I wrought?' or 'This is not what I meant at all'" (Atwood 114). This fanciful scenario may have an element of truth, as Reaney's pre-Frye years are scattered with readings in myth and a familiarity with archetypal literature. He was fascinated by myth-based poetry like Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* and was impressed by *Evangeline* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Abraham 71–73). That said, it must also be noted that Reaney had a fondness at this time for more popular pulp fiction like *Tarzan*. Turnbull acknowledges this penchant in Reaney when he notes that even as an adult "...there were other writers too.... Haggard, the 19th century thumper novelist, *King Solomon's Mines* ... and *She*.... I mean Jamie loved that stuff" (Turnbull).¹⁶

Notwithstanding this, it is ultimately Frye who gave Reaney the structure that allowed him to articulate his thoughts and to focus his writing in a manner that would lead to poetry and plays of such epic proportion. Reaney has described his devotion to the structures and levels of poetry as having been inspired and guided "by the patterns that Blake and Frye taught him to see in the literature he read" (Stingle 33).

Northrop Frye, although primarily a theorist, critic, and professor, was also a religious man. He became a Methodist minister, ordained in 1936 in the United Church of Canada (formed in 1925 when Methodists united with Congregationalists and a large percentage of Canadian Presbyterians). He "decided early not to seek a congregation. However, throughout his life he

16. Turnbull laughingly went on to call this "myth porn" (Turnbull).

was constantly called to preach on special occasions and sometimes to marry and bury, and he took these responsibilities seriously” (Warkentin, *Notes* 495-496). Reaney, although raised with a certain religious discipline, rebelled against the notion of organized religion and considered himself more of a sceptic. It is obvious though, that “despite his resentment of the missionary-oriented Congregationalist group at Stratford, Reaney owes to their teaching an early knowledge of the Bible denied to those of his age group who came from more liberal Protestant churches” (Stingle 3). Like Frye then, Reaney had a solid working knowledge of the Bible and soon after he began to read “started copying out the Bible” (Abraham 58). Both men studied and spoke Latin and Greek and studied in the “old rigours honours system of [The University of] Toronto”. When the system was abolished both Frye and Reaney deeply regretted its passing.¹⁷ As a teacher, Reaney also shared Frye’s belief that “students must be steeped in their literary tradition, in mythology, in a total order of words” (Stingle 4).

While Frye was teaching at University of Toronto, the young James Reaney was making a name for himself as the “bad boy of Canadian poetry” (Turnbull). The poet Earle Birney met him in the late 1940s at a party and was enough taken by the experience that he noted:

17. Frye’s response was as follows: “At the University of Toronto there used to be a distinction between a three-year General Course and a four-year Honour Course, but this has been swept away in a great wave of exuberant hysteria. The theories of these two courses were complementary. The theory of the General Course assumed a certain coordinating of disciplines, so that the student could see a broad area of knowledge from different points of view. The principle of the Honour Course was that every area of knowledge is the centre of all knowledge. Both these theories may have required too much sophistication from both students and teachers, but I would hope that after the dust settles and the university becomes restructured, it will become restructured along the older patterns” (Frye, “Definition of a University” 419).

He was still a varsity sophomore, but a very unusual one. I've never forgotten the impression he made on me that evening — a small packet of firecrackers set alight, he went sizzling and leaping mischievously from one guest to another, an excited child popping adult questions, bounding into the kitchen and back to the hall, and continually exploding with ideas, images and emotions. I thought him a marvellously inventive Ariel, and still do. (Martin, S13)

James Crerar Reaney was indeed known for possessing cheek at times in his lengthy career, but the “bad boy” title belied his fairly formal and religious upbringing. He was born in South Easthope in 1926 to parents of Scottish and Irish heritage. This small community, now really a part of Stratford, Ontario was, according to *Belden's Atlas of Perth County* (1879), settled mainly by Germans in the early 1800s. Reaney's British ancestors came in a slightly smaller wave but during the same historical period. “On the Huron Road between Shakespeare and Stratford are several English speaking families, mostly Scotch,” and “on the boundary line of Downie are Matheson, Hislop, Lupton, Dunsmore, O'Donnell, Flanigan and Jackson,” names that speak to Irish and Scottish ancestry (“South Easthope” 20). Reaney's family heritage can be traced to the early wave of settlers in about 1830. This cultural legacy is significant to Reaney's work. In the trilogy, lists of names just like this are chanted like roll call setting up the Catholic/Protestant divide or ‘Roman Road’ that plays a central part in the action.

Reaney's father, James Nesbitt Reaney, suffered from bouts of depression and found working the family farm difficult. After an attempt to find work more to his liking and some medical difficulties, he left the family, eventually ending up in a London, Ontario, hospital under long term care. Here, a young Reaney visited him (J.S. Reaney, *Profiles* 1). After the elder Reaney's passing, Reaney's mother married again, this time to William Tugwell Cooke, who had

been working as the hired man on the Reaney farm. He was a Roman Catholic convert when he became Reaney's stepfather and he encouraged biblical readings. The study of the Bible was to become one of Reaney's early literary pursuits. Despite the initially difficult relationship with his stepfather, Reaney and Tugwell Cooke did reconcile later in life, but as a young man Reaney and he often had disagreements. As Reaney began to become cognisant of the fact that he did not wish to take over the family farm, he also realized that in order to escape that life he would have to excel at school. This encouraged him to become a voracious reader and he soon branched out to read many diverse texts besides the Bible. There was a Carnegie Library in Stratford, near Reaney's home, where he spent a good deal of time in his formative years:

The library was where young Reaney on a daily basis read John O London's Weekly, Punch, Times Literary Supplement.... In fact he read almost all the books in the library ... *The Australian Duke*, a six volume monstrosity called *My Life*, Franz Pentzoldt's novel on Thomas Chatterton-*The Marvellous Boy* and the plays of Sheridan.... He also read the *Collected Plays of Shakespeare* with great enthusiasm. (Abraham 69)

Like his famous mentor, it would seem that Reaney too began digesting the canon of Western literature from a young age. Perhaps it was this similarity in upbringing, despite some religious differences, that shaped their early ideas of literature and later allowed for a common ground upon which these two men drew together.

Even with the parallels in their lives and leanings, however, the assimilation of Reaney into Frye's fold was not an easy one. Reaney's classmate Richard Stingle writes that "he remained for some time actively hostile to what we told him of Frye" (33). According to Stingle,

Reaney was put off by Frye's obvious embracing of the Bible "a book which represented a repressive force in Reaney's background" (Stingle, *All the Old Levels* 2). Frye believed that "Western literature has been more influenced by the Bible than by any other book" (Frye *Anatomy* 14) and had a close working relationship with it. Frye also realized however that the majority of scholars know "little more about that influence than the fact that it exists" (14). This was to be untrue in the case of Reaney. Despite his professed distaste for religion, he was an informed reader of the Bible due to his upbringing. He eventually came to realize the importance of this type of familiarity, especially as an English major (Stingle 33). It was a "conversion" however,

carefully gauged to his own requirements. Reaney at University College cherished his freedom from the narrow evangelical world that earlier surrounded him too much to submit without protest to what at the time he considered the Frye cult at Victoria College (Woodman 15).

Despite a rocky start to their relationship, it is later clear that Reaney changed his view of Frye and his insistence upon the classics and the Bible in his teaching is proof of this reconsideration of this initial hostility. "Frye's literary theories would surely have offered Reaney his discredited childhood religion in a different more sophisticated, acceptable form; the Bible might not be literally true, but under the aegis of Frye it could be seen as metaphorically, psychically true" (Atwood 115). In reference to this approach in his teaching, one of Reaney's former students, Joan Kent, recalled that "overflowing with sensitivity and clarity, [Reaney's] lectures revealed the subtle and infinite nuances of the literature of the western world. Not apparently religious, he listed the Bible as the greatest book ever written" (Kent in Stingle 9).

So though initially it might have seemed that Frye and Reaney themselves were contrasting in personality and outlook, one outgoing and described as a “firecracker,” the other retiring and shy, this would be inaccurate. More alike than not, by the two men shared personal traits that were as fundamental to the relationship as their academic leanings. This can be seen in their choice of leisurely pursuits. Both men had musical training and were frequently seen playing piano at gatherings at the college. Both put great emphasis on their love of teaching and acknowledged their love of the profession. Frye notes that “I think all of my books have been teaching books rather than scholarly books” (Warkentin xxi–xxiv) and Reaney admits in his interview with friend Jean McKay that “I’m really a teacher. That is the most important thing, and the scholarship involved with that. A lot of things I do have developed out of that. They literally have” (146). It seems that, like the son who rebelled against the dictates of his father, who then finds himself using the same words years later, Reaney eventually assimilated and adopted Frye’s theories. This conversion is perhaps best made clear by looking at Reaney’s own words. When Reaney finally acquiesced after much resistance to attending one of Frye’s lectures for a “Literary Symbolism in the Bible” course, he found something he did not expect. He wrote of this experience in 1980.

Since my previous experience of sermons had not been happy, I went along with some reluctance but this “sermon” was different. As a work of literature, he calmly discussed Ecclesiasticus [sic], a book not even in my Bible; God wants us each to be a candle of witness. Suddenly the whole congregation changed into lighted candles. (Reaney, “Identifier” 27).

Frye’s theories fit well with what the young Reaney had already assimilated at home. Reaney found that his world-view and ideas about literature were in reality quite similar to

Frye's and allowed for a return to his childhood when, according to him, "metaphor was reality" (Reaney, "Editorial" 3). What emerges in Reaney's work is a unique manifestation of his mentor's theories in the theatre by their combination with his own ideas and new theatrical practices. For Reaney, Frye's criticism became an academic tool kit of sorts to help reconcile his early readings with his later, more scholarly pursuits.

While a student at the University of Western Ontario, Reaney met Keith Turnbull, who was to become his principal creative partner for the majority of his plays. Turnbull, also a south westerner, was born in 1944 in Lindsay, Ontario. He began as a producer, designer, and director in London, Ontario, near both Reaney's home and the home of the historical Donnelly family. In 1965 Turnbull co-directed the premiere of Reaney's *The Sun and the Moon* for London's Campus Players. Their friendship would last for four decades until Reaney's death and led to thirty years of shared professional theatre work. While in London and working with Reaney, Turnbull founded NDWT Company, a theatre company that focused on producing new Canadian works. Inexplicably named, the acronym NDWT does not actually stand for anything.¹⁸ In *Fourteen Barrels From Sea to Sea*, Reaney states:

I think it was on some letterhead just arrived ... that I first saw what the company name was going to be: The NDWT Company. Immediately, everyone I met started asking what do these letters stand for? Well, Keith or Jerry or Tom or Ricky would reply, "That's just the whole point. They don't stand for anything. We don't know just what style we're into yet, so we thought we'd just jumble some letters together". (13)

18. The theatre company acronym is occasionally expressed as the "Ne'er-Do-Well Thespians" (Turnbull). See also Appendix No. 3 for further detail

Indeed, the company would break new ground when it came to theatrical style and process, so it is not surprising even the key players had difficulty pigeon-holing the company. Turnbull was pivotal in this development and responsible for much of the means of bringing to life Reaney's vision: "Keith Turnbull had absolute understanding of the text" (Reaney, *14 Barrels* Introduction). The personal respect between Reaney and Turnbull, coupled with Frye's theory, laid foundations for an innovative and epic theatrical event. In 1973 Turnbull led the play development workshops in Halifax for *Sticks and Stones*, which would eventually lead to the premiere at the Tarragon Theatre in 1973. The following two years brought the workshops for the plays *The St. Nicholas Hotel* and *Handcuffs*, which premiered again at Tarragon, and the subsequent Canadian tours of these shows. Turnbull worked on inaugural productions of four more Reaney plays from 1976 to 1981.

Turnbull continues to be considered one of Canada's leading directors.¹⁹ It has been said of his more recent work in opera that "although billed as the stage director, Keith Turnbull is, in reality, a third creator ... so effective and brilliant is his staging. Endlessly inventive, rich in metaphor and topical illusion, the opera truly came alive through his amazing blend of tradition and theatrical innovation." (DeLong 16). This style of working, where the director is an integral part of the creation process, began with and is reflective of Turnbull's early work with Reaney.

19. With *The Donnellys* trilogy, Turnbull has directed over ninety plays for theatres across Canada and internationally and has directed and developed operas for Coups de Théâtre, Nexmap, Norbotten Music Theatre, Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, Music Theatre Wales, Pete's Chamber Opera, Tapestry New Opera Works, Welsh National Opera and Vancouver Opera. Turnbull also founded a First Nations theatre company from which emerged many of Canada's most noted Native performers. He was the founding co-artistic director of the Toronto Theatre Festival, the president of the Toronto Theatre Alliance, and a board member of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association. He has taught at the University of Manitoba, the National Theatre School, the University of Calgary, and the Banff Centre for the Arts.

The “vast world” of Reaney’s *Donnellys* bears Turnbull’s indelible mark as well. It has been said that “Reaney’s vision comes fully alive only on the stage” (Noonan 7), and that much of the credit for the unforgettable theatrical experiences that were the original shows is owed to Keith Turnbull. While the plays were in final development, Reaney would travel from London to Toronto where Turnbull and the cast would hammer out details and explore presentational elements of each new version of the play. The process was long but significant to the end result.

...when we were in the process of rehearsing, he would come up on a Friday, I would show him what we’d worked on [that] week, with a little bit of trepidation on my part. And then I’d say, take a look at that, of course with huge holes in them now, go the bar, where we would chew over everything... there’s a lot of props that you had to figure out too and “can this character do a fast change to that character?” ... sometimes he rewrote there, but most of the work was done at Victoria College overnight (Turnbull).

Reaney’s process of writing, though not exactly conventional, worked well with the collective and exploratory nature of Turnbull’s rehearsal process. The pieces were made using a series of methods developed around Frye’s theory and in conjunction with Reaney’s created universe. Our usual way of imagining theatre is to think of a playwright somewhat detached from the actors and director’s processes. Traditionally, a finished script is chosen by the director who, along with designers or producers, creates a world close to that envisioned by the author in his written description. In the case of *The Donnellys*, however, the rehearsal process and continuing development of the script was often as important as Reaney’s initial writings:

Reaney himself acknowledged that the scope of the story would be difficult to contain: he had originally intended to write just one the play on the subject, but found it “too large for one evening ... too great a tragedy ... full of levels and generations of people” (Reaney, “Program Note” 2). Keith Turnbull remembers the unwieldy length of the plays when work was begun on the performance versions. “We started those workshops and with somewhere between 5 and 6 hours worth of material.... And from the workshop often we did cut significantly, Jamie cut significantly in ... all three of them, and did significant rewrites” (Turnbull). Turnbull worked with Frye’s Circle to clarify performance choices and keep the actors on track in a vast landscape. With Turnbull’s editing, Reaney’s piece changed from a lengthy and somewhat ponderous piece of theatre to the significantly shorter, tighter, and innovative performance at Tarragon in 1973. This evolution occurred because of the respectful working and personal relationship enjoyed by Reaney and Turnbull, coupled with a common appreciation of Frye’s structures. Despite Reaney’s obvious connection to Frye, Turnbull was in reality as much a pupil of the theorist himself. In an interview with Jean McKay in the early eighties, Frye was still an acknowledged presence on Turnbull and his work.

KT: Actually, one of the things that we discussed when we were starting the company was not defining our mandate as Canadian, but defining our mandate as plays of language.

JM: That's the impression your work gives, certainly, in terms of the way it looks on the stage. Images recur visually, the same way they would in a book.

KT: There's the Northrop Frye haunting there in the background (laugh) -- must I confess [sic] (McKay 152).

Turnbull was as aware of Frye as Reaney and it is this awareness that allowed for such an intimate understanding of the multiple levels present in Reaney's writing. The director took some of the foundations of Frye's theory more to heart than the writer; as Turnbull laughingly expressed it, "I always wished he [Reaney] had taken a little bit more of the structuralism and formalism from Frye! But I was a bit fed up by then! 'Oh no! Not another five hours!'" (Turnbull).

Chapter Two

The Donnellys Story and Reaney's Retelling of It

*Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.*²⁰

The legend of the Donnellys of Biddulph, thanks in part to Reaney's trilogy, has become a mainstay of Canadian mythology, but the story known to the general public is an amalgamation of material from various sources, both factual and fictional. James Reaney, growing up in close proximity to the location of the famous feud, had to be aware that certain facts were murky and that the story had been distorted over the years. His plays developed the known history into dramatic legend. Reaney hoped his plays might help encourage the creation of fiction and drama based on Canadian history, something he felt to be important to the development of a national culture. "I've been fighting for a national repertory theatre for years. I've got the plays—all from the past—they should be doing. Why go for Nightmare on Elm Street when we've got our own nightmares?" (Reaney, *Ontario Gothic* C8). He had obviously developed sympathy for his local ghosts and, although not naive enough to assume that historic Donnellys were innocent of any wrong doing, he at least attempted to present a more charitable and human version of the characters in the story. It was known that the Donnelly family, to a marked degree, bore quarrelsome characteristics, but their behaviour was not uncommon in the times and sources played up the troublesome nature of the family. The *Toronto Globe* published an article following the tragedy. This excerpt serves to demonstrate the melodramatic and subjective view held by many at the time and elevated by the media.

20. Traditional English children's taunt. Alternate verse ends "*names* will never hurt me."

“ The murders are looked upon by many as the natural result of the Donnellys' lawless career,' was what a man was overheard to say to-day in conversation with a friend, who seemed to agree with the remark. "I'll tell you what it is," the speaker continued, "Hundreds of the people are glad in their own minds that the family has been reduced by five members." Such an admission as this is horrible to contemplate, even although the murdered persons were the most desperate and wicked in the wide world. (*The Biddulph Tragedy - Callousness of the Community over the Great Crime*, February 10, 1880)

This portrayal of the Donnellys was to dominate for the next century and part of Reaney's stated reason for writing his plays was to expose the fact that this melodramatic version accepted by the general public had little basis in fact. Canadian writer Thomas P. Kelley had published *The Black Donnellys*, his version of the Donnelly's story, in 1954. This book and the impressively named sequel, *The Vengeance of the Black Donnellys; Canada's Most Feared Family Strikes Back From the Grave*, published in 1962 were, to Reaney, offensive and sensationalist. Keith Turnbull also agreed that the family was done a great disservice by some historians, and when asked about Reaney's reaction to Kelley's book and whether he was offended by it or not, Turnbull replied “that horrible one? Oh quite a bit! Trash...” (Turnbull)²¹. Reaney also dedicated one of the published versions of the trilogy as follows:

21. The sensationalist bent of the book that offended James Reaney can be seen from this excerpt from the cover notes: “The barbaric Donnelly feud, by far the most notorious and violent in the annals of North America, was an almost endless series of depredations exemplifying human depravity at its worst... an engrossing saga of one family's reign of terror” (Kelley, back cover)

In memory of Alfred Scott Garrett (1905–1964), the first historian of Biddulph Township to realize that both the Vigilantes who murdered them and Thomas Kelley who murdered them again in his book *The Black Donnellys*, a name they were never called during their lifetimes, had totally misportrayed Mr. and Mrs. James Donnelly. (Reaney, Filewood. *The Donnellys: Sticks and Stones, The Nicholas Hotel, Handcuffs Dedication*).

Reaney goes so far as to cast a recognizable Kelley in the role of shyster showman in his plays and has scenes that highlight the complete lack of consideration the historical Donnellys are given by this character, thus making clear to the audience his aversion to Kelley's fantastical reinterpretation of the legend. (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 61). In his stage directions for the first scene in the series involving the Showman, Reaney describes him as a "loud, slick Canadian Irishman with torches & a series of lurid canvas pictures which are attached to a map hanger." The entrance of the Showman is noted as follows: "From the back of the auditorium comes a travelling medicine show, the Shamrock Concert Company, which puts on a viciously based melodrama called the Black Donnellys, also the title of the book everyone reads about the Donnellys" (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 46).

Again, although the plays do attempt to look at the sometimes violent human qualities of all of the characters, Reaney's treatment fashions a much more sympathetic Donnelly family than the popular accounts do. The following will provide a brief outline of the known history of the real Donnellys and the story that so inspired Reaney. Whenever possible, attention will be given to details that are important to Reaney's plays or that differ from that dramatic work.

The historic Donnellys immigrated to Canada from Ireland in the mid-1880s. Dates are uncertain but it appears they arrived between 1842 and 1845. James and Johannah Donnelly first

settled in London, Ontario, where their first son, William, was born. Born with a deformed foot, he was nicknamed, “Clubfoot Will.” He becomes a central figure in Reaney’s plays and the violin he cherishes and plays supplies much of the music and atmosphere in the works.

The Donnellys failed to find stable work in London and, when looking for a new town in which to make some inroads into financial security, they wound up in Biddulph. Of course, they were unable to afford to purchase land and they became squatters on an uninhabited land parcel.²² After settling in Biddulph, five more children—John, Patrick, Michael, Robert, and Thomas—were born over the next several years. Their daughter, Jennie, born in 1856, was the last child and only female to be born to the family. The first play deals mostly with Jennie and William and the parents, the other boys appearing more often “in the form of their shirts hanging from Mrs. Donnelly’s laundry line” (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 11). The Donnellys cleared the land, and despite the tendency of many of the settlers in the area to squabble over land rights, they managed to live there in relative peace until 1855 at which time the absentee landlord sold fifty acres of the 100 total acres of the Donnelly homestead to Michael Maher. Although not historically confirmed, Reaney’s play has them offering to buy the land before the sale to the Mahers, and the landlord refusing them based on local prejudice, a decision that obviously upset the Donnellys. Either way, the historic Donnellys had worked the land for years and were now unable to access half of the property that they had industriously prepared for crops. The land in question was situated on Lot #18 on the sixth concession of the Roman Line, a road named for the Roman Catholics that settled the area. This road is one of the central images in Reaney’s

22. This was quite common practice at the time and numerous illegal squatters eventually bought their land from the owners, helping to create the Irish and Scottish communities that are so prevalent in the region.

plays. Created by the actors with their bodies and props, the road represents not just the divide between Donnelly and his adversaries, but a more universal symbol of segregation and separation between religions. It is on this road in the first act of *Sticks and Stones*, that the Englishman Brimmicombe is killed with little fanfare in the district, setting up the violent nature of the community in general. This scene serves to further increase the divide between Catholics and Protestants of the population at the time. Despite being Catholic, the Donnellys had refused to join the Irish group called “the Whitefeet”. This group was a gang-like gathering of numerous families of that religion back in Ireland who were now in Canada. Thus, the Donnellys were already looked upon as undesirable by the townsfolk who supported the Whitefeet. Reaney has given the divide between the Donnellys and those opposed to them a strong basis in tradition and in the contemporary Irish history of the 1880s.²³

Donnelly and his kin refused to give up the land, but a Patrick Farrell (Farl in the trilogy), legally rented the land from the new owner. The Donnellys continued to fight for the rights to work the entire 100 acres but Farrell was immovable. This resulted in a trade-off decided by the courts whereby James could keep the northern fifty acres of his land, but would have to give up

23. Mostly called ‘Whiteboys’ historically, the ‘Whitefeet’ of Reaney’s plays were a group characterised by the violent tactics they used to get their message out and to exert their influence in communities. They were named for the white robes they often wore on raids to disguise their identities. Originally organised to protect the rights of farmers and peasants in the 18th century, they eventually grew into a more political and violent organisation. By the time the Donnellys had reached Canada, “Whiteboyism” had become a general term for rural violence connected to several Irish secret societies. Due to this generalization, the historical record for the Whiteboys as a specific organisation is unclear and Reaney’s Whitefeet is only one of the many names used for various regional elements of the group. A significant group during the 1830s, the Whitefeet were from Queen's County (now County Laois), and large numbers of this gang were transported to Australia and Canada. The “Molly McGuires” in the United States was a similar group. (Compiled and adapted from various sources; see Downes and Fazakas in Works Cited.)

the southern half. In Reaney's plays, Farl's sister is the catalyst for much of the hatred that springs up between Donnelly and Farl, and the eventual death of Farl at Donnelly's hand sets in motion, both in real life and within the plays, the events that lead to the massacre of the Donnelly family. Interestingly the sister, simply called the Fat Lady in *Sticks and Stones*, evolves from a figure of hate and aggression in that first play to a comical figure in the third instalment of the trilogy. Keith Turnbull explains this in the context of Frye's Circle. The peripheral historical characters were based on limited information, and were thus somewhat one dimensional. These sketches were expanded by Reaney and passed through Turnbull's filter to emerge as fleshed out archetypes that changed and developed as they moved through Frye's Circle. When Turnbull speaks of trying to create these universal images he states:

It also meant that, this is what we tried to do with the casting too ... when we were doing the workshops and all that stuff for the Donnellys, I would intentionally make sure that, say, whoever played John Donnelly or Mrs. Donnelly also at some point played a villain. So that you got closer to the Blake, you know there's— that there is— the demonic and the divine combined. So that's a lot of the casting decisions we always tried to make, we tried to make sure that— (*The interviewer offers, 'That there was a balance in there that combined both elements?' to which Turnbull responds.*) ... Yeah, like the 'Fat Lady' who is such an awful person— but by the time we get to part three, she's one of the heroines, the comic heroines. So that influenced the casting and the editing.

(Turnbull)

The plays show all the characters and events in the light of such oppositions and contain the fundamentals of Frye's proposed hero types that will be investigated in depth in Chapter Three.

Donnelly continued to farm his now smaller parcel of land and of course harboured resentment towards Farrell and his family. On 25 June 1857 the neighbourhood men had gathered for a William Maloney's logging bee.²⁴ Donnelly and Farrell, both apparently having had a few drinks, got into a fight, and although the details are not noted anywhere,²⁵ Donnelly apparently fearing for his life, picked up a tool, hit Farrell, and killed him. James Donnelly was now a murderer in the eyes of the law but when the law came to collect him, he had disappeared. Frye's idea of what pathos is becomes clear in this situation. Frye states in his "Theory of Modes" that "the root idea of pathos is the exclusion of an individual on our own level from a social group to which he is trying to belong" (39). Donnelly had no desire to join the Whitefeet, but he certainly desired to become just another farmer in the district and to make a life for himself and his family. This can be verified by his joining in the community efforts to clear the woods for another family. He tried to fit in but any move towards acceptance was seemingly thwarted by circumstance. His efforts to lend a hand led to his becoming an exile from the very community he was trying to help.

What happens next is the stuff upon which legends thrive. James Senior, dressed in his wife's clothes, apparently continued to work his land, sporting this cheeky disguise for the next eleven months. Neighbours reported having seen Mrs. Donnelly working hard, often with another "woman" by her side, and were impressed by the results she got from the land. The situation recalls some of the greatest heroes of a romantic and epic adventure who escape

24. Bees were neighbourhood gatherings where able members of a community gathered to help each other either by quilting, building barns, fences or by logging properties in order to do quickly what would take the individual family years to complete.

25. Various modern sources speculate as to the details based on hearsay, but no contemporary historic accounts were officially published. All the "witnesses" seem to have missed the actual event.

authorities through similar disguises. Robin Hood, the Count of Monte Cristo and the Greek myths and Shakespearean plays of Reaney's youth are filled with this type of daring behaviour. The event recalls the myth of Achilles, who was dressed in women's clothing by his mother Thetis to hide him from Odysseus who wanted him to join the Trojan War. Of course, eventually the legendary characters are forced to reveal their true identity and accept their fate. The arrival of a second winter and advice from friends compelled the real life Donnelly to turn himself in. As Turnbull has indicated, some of Reaney's other reading tastes were perhaps not so scholarly. The true-life and somewhat delightful deception perpetrated by the rough patriarch of the Donnellys legend must have held a certain appeal for a young Reaney whose exploration of the canon of Western literature included *King Solomon's Mines* and *Tarzan*. To an older Reaney writing the trilogy after his immersion in Frye's theory, the parallels to the myths central to Frye's work must have been compelling. He was finding that the books that appealed to him in his youth, the coveted legend of a local celebrity and the foundations of his mentor's works could be combined to create ways to tell a story in grand theatrical style. And the story was certainly one of high theatrics and drama.

The trial that followed Donnelly's surrender was held in Goderich and although James had obtained one of the best criminal lawyers in the province to defend him, the verdict was guilty and the sentence was death by hanging. The sentence was to be carried out on 17 September 1858. Historically and in the plays, Johannah walks to Goderich, the seat of the county, to plead clemency for her husband. This is a scene of great importance in the plays and the Roman Road, emerging out of the ladders, is populated by the voices of the other actors calling out road markers and sites as she passes. Both in real life and in the plays, a petition of

supporters was given in James' defence and Johannah was successful in getting the sentence reduced to seven years in prison.

In the meantime, the boys were picked on and fought back in return. Some of the Donnelly boys set up a stage coach company. The line of stages, which ran between London, Lucan, and Exeter and was operated by William and his brothers, Michael, John, and Thomas, did well enough to upset a local Irishman who had bought a rival company. This set the stage for the rivalry between Donnelly Stagecoach and Flanagan & Crawly Stage, a rivalry which intensified to an all-out feud between the two companies. What followed was a reign of violence: stage coaches were either smashed or burned, horses were savagely beaten or killed, and stables burned to the ground. Eventually the Donnellys' company folded due to the violence, and the damage to their reputation was beyond repair. The Donnellys now would be forever linked with violence and were blamed for any wrong doing in the county, despite a lack of evidence and notwithstanding the fact they could not have been in the area at the time of many of the incidents. As the newspapers of the day point out, although the family was charged for numerous crimes, apparently few convictions were ever actually secured. Reaney used this feud to launch much of the action around and against the Donnellys in his plays. *The St. Nicholas Hotel* is primarily concerned with this aspect of the history.

As anti-Donnelly sentiment grew in some parts of the community, other elements remained friendly and sided with the family. Eventually Will married a local girl and the Donnellys' daughter Jennie married happily as well. Despite these positive events, the factions against the Donnellys were to triumph. Many locals in opposition to the Donnellys got whipped up into a frenzy and, drunk, set out on the night of 4 February 1880 intending to either beat the Donnellys or compel confessions from them. According to the witness testimony of Johnny

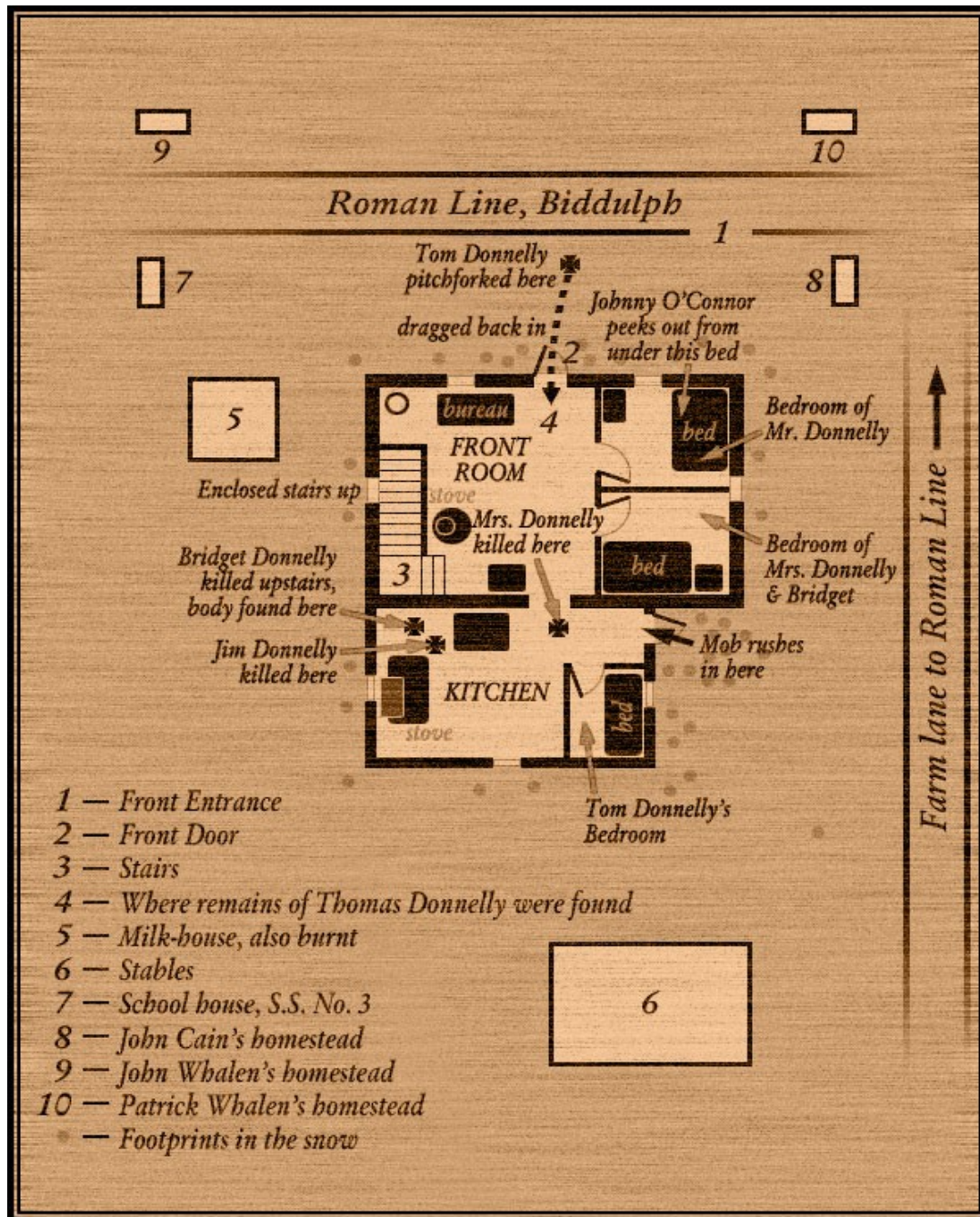
O'Connor, a young farmhand staying with the Donnellys. "The old man," with whom he was sharing a bed, meaning James Donnelly, awakened him between midnight and 2 a.m. James Carroll, constable for the town, was apparently there to arrest James and Tom Donnelly. Tom was supposedly placed in handcuffs at this time and thus was less able to defend himself.

(*Handcuffs* is, significantly, the name of the final instalment in Reaney's trilogy and speaks to a certain helplessness in the face of adversity.) Tom was goading Carroll, questioning the warrant as well as his intelligence, when a mob entered and proceeded to batter Tom and James Donnelly with farm implements. Some of the mob, who did not bring any weapons, used objects picked up on their way to or found at the scene. These included sticks and stones. These items inspired the title of the first play and remain important props and images throughout the trilogy. Reaney's use of these objects as symbols will be investigated further in Chapter Three.

Johnny, who was now hiding beneath the bed, was spared because the mob was unaware of his presence. He witnessed Bridgett, James' niece who had only recently arrived from Ireland, escape to a bedroom upstairs. Tom Donnelly attempted to flee out of the front door but was caught and beaten with the sticks and a shovel. Despite the attempts of some of the assailants to blacken their faces with soot to avoid recognition, the young witness apparently looked out of his hiding spot at one point and was able to identify some men in the crowd as people he knew from the community, Thomas Ryder and John Purtell, as well as the constable Carroll. The crowd then turned its attention to Bridgett, but Johnny did not hear or see any portions of this assault. After her murder, the mob lit the house, including the bed young Johnny was hiding under, on fire. Once the mob had fled, Johnny attempted to smother the blaze but was unable to do so. As he was fleeing, he passed the body of Johannah as well as the still-breathing Tom, and escaped to the house of a neighbour of the Donnellys. (Fazakas. *The Donnellys Album*, 63). The bodies were

burned along with the house so it was impossible for the coroner of the time to determine the cause of death beyond that of fire. The constable who gathered up the remains of the Donnellys reported large amounts of blood on the ground in front of the house, which corroborated the young boy's evidence. The bodies were not recovered until the middle of the following day and apparently looters who wanted mementoes of the night's events had by this time stolen the skulls from the bodies (the mob had apparently also decapitated the small dog that belonged to the family), so the physical evidence of the beatings was never recovered. William Donnelly, however, had survived and was listed as the witness on the death certificates for all five, dated 1 and 2 April 1880, with the cause of death listed as "supposed to be murdered" (Archives of Ontario - Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Registrations of Deaths, 1869-1934.). Will escaped the fate of his parents only because he had moved out of the homestead by that time and refused admittance to the remnants of the gang that later that same evening tried to attack him and his family subsequent to the events at his parents' farm.

Fig. 2. Donnelly homestead floor plan with locations of victims. This diagram is based on a drawing that appeared in the *London Advertiser* in 1880 and a sketch by Ray Fazakas. Mapmaker: Roland Longpré (“Heaven & Hell”).



There were two trials in London, Ontario. The first one in October 1880 ended in a hung jury. The second trial occurred in January 1881. During preparations, the prosecution displayed evidence of involvement in the massacre by the Biddulph Peace Society, including the parish priest, John Connelly. Two brothers, Jim and Bill Feeheley, Whiteboys who were known to have been involved in the crime, confessed to their participation. Perhaps they were testifying because of guilt or remorse, but they later recanted and left the district. It is believed the brothers were paid to leave the region, but the prosecution successfully had them extradited back to Biddulph to stand trial. Second thoughts about the entire prosecution surfaced with the introduction of Father Connolly as a suspect. Much of community was strongly religious and it was felt that including a public spiritual leader in this trial could re-open the violence surrounding the court case. In the face of these challenges and with the prevailing anti-Donnelly sentiment of the region, all charges were eventually dropped and the killers never brought to justice.²⁶

James Reaney had access to the original court documents and newspaper articles of the time. Combining elements of the numerous fictional accounts, fantastical retelling, contemporary ghost stories, and a certain artistic license to agree with or criticise all sources, he set about creating his own version of the Donnellys in his trilogy. Elements of the original story are certainly there but Reaney confesses that he had no intention of simply retelling the story on stage: “The complete story of the Donnelly tragedy is too large for one evening.” (Reaney, *The Donnellys* Foreword 11).

26. This summary compiled from various sources and accounts of the events. Interested readers are directed particularly to the Ray Fazakas books listed in Works Cited and to the original court documents included on the website <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/donnellys/home/indexen.html>

Reaney has combined the documentary evidence with Frye's notion of archetype, symbol, and myth and focused it through the lens of his imagination. Respect for imagination and a belief in the universal nature of the stories of humanity were common to both men. In his 'The Keys to Dreamland', one of his CBC Massey Lectures, Frye states that the

world of literature is a world where there is no reality except that of the human imagination. We see a great deal in it that reminds of us vividly of the life we know. But in that very vividness there's something unreal. (Frye, 57).

Reaney took an historical story and a legend forged out of the collective community consciousness and coupled it with the notion of universal symbol and myth articulated by Frye. The result was the creation of a vividly real, "unreal" world, indeed, wherein the Donnellys were much more than a "portrait of a social environment" (Turnbull).

The historical chronology must be differentiated from Reaney's stage version of events. The makings of this legend spanned years, decades even, if one considers that the basic feud at the heart of the story was a carryover from feuds begun in Ireland in the late 1700s. The vigilante murders in Lucan took place in one evening, but only after years of continued animosity between factions. Reaney's plays in performance run approximately 9 hours in total. Reaney has shifted facts, cut and added characters, and included scenes for which we have no historical evidence. In keeping with theatrical tradition, Reaney has telescoped and compressed the action to suit his needs. Reaney also has a tendency to jump between the past and 'present', introducing contemporary commentary on the action or having the Donnellys appear as ghosts to people visiting the graves many years after the events of their death. This non-linear approach serves

Reaney well, allowing for easy and fast movement between scenes and within time. The basic timeline of the three plays, however, can be summarized as follows:²⁷

Sticks and Stones covers the initial years of the Donnellys in Biddulph. Major events include the clearing of the land for agricultural use, the birth of Will and his taking up of the violin, James Donnelly's murder of Farl and the subsequent "escape" from persecution, Mrs Donnelly's plea to the authorities, and the final decision to stay in Biddulph.

The St. Nicholas Hotel picks up where *Sticks and Stones* left off and the main focus of the story is on the running of a stagecoach company by some of the Donnellys boys and the resulting feud with another local stage business. Bob is convicted of assault and sent to prison. The play concludes with the murder of Mike Donnelly in the St. Nicholas Hotel.

Handcuffs begins with Bob's return from prison and continues with a series of further accusations against the Donnellys by local factions and individuals. The gathering of the vigilante gang and their march to the farmhouse followed by the murder that leaves five Donnellys dead takes up surprisingly little time in the trilogy. Reaney is more concerned with an exploration of character and symbol, and the events of the evening are told through re-enactments of the trials and by bringing the audience forward into the 1970s. In the third act, we find ourselves at the Donnelly gravesite with a group of thrill seekers who are excited by the thought of the grisly death. The opening stage directions read

We open in the graveyard of St. Patrick's, Biddulph in the early 1970's. On the anniversary of the murder it is the custom for crowds of people in cars to come

27. For an historic timeline, including where plays begin and end, see James Noonan's "Chronology of Important Dates" from *The Donnellys* (1983) 289-295 copied in the Appendix 4.5

up, park and wait for a possible ghostly appearance at the Donnelly grave.

(Reaney, *Handcuffs* 252)

The play concludes with the audience being presented with a series of angry ghosts onstage who tell their story and speak of their sorrow. This ending fits Frye's notion of tragedy as it results in an "ambiguous mood that is hard to define" (*Anatomy* 207).

Historically and in the plays there is little real justice for the Donnellys, but Reaney's plays manage to convey the tale in such a way that it leaves the audience with little doubt that the Donnellys are victims of an inevitable tragic process. When Reaney work-shopped the very rough beginnings of the plays in Stratford, before Turnbull was involved, he states that they resulted in the actors saying "they didn't know why the Donnellys had been killed" (*14 Barrels* Introduction). The use of Frye's Circle and the resulting "reverberations" noted by Turnbull must have had some effect as that question never arose after that time. The 'ambiguous mood' stems rather from the question "why did they *have* to die?".

Chapter Three

Frye's Theoretical Framework and the Concept of the Donnelly's Plays

Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* is composed of theories explored in several essays written by Frye for assorted publications between 1949 and 1955. The book, after brief prefatory statements, begins with a "Polemical Introduction" in which Frye sets up his arguments and defends the need for literary criticism. In this section he tries to show the value of truly educated criticism as opposed to personal and subjective taste. He repeatedly points out the subjectivity of a critic's background and sets out to create a precise framework or structure in which one might objectively criticize, situate and understand literature. He cautions that one must proceed "deductively" and be "rigorously selective" in one's examples and illustrations (29) and claims to have proceeded in this manner himself. Frye's sincerity is obvious, but even he acknowledges the flaws in his own proposals despite his attempts to develop an approach to criticism based in an objective and scientific method.

"Theory of Modes," the first essay in *Anatomy of Criticism*, begins by referring to *The Poetics* and reminding us that Aristotle speaks of differences in the elevations of characters that dictate the differences in types of fiction. Some heroes or individuals are either better, worse, or on the same level as we are, according to Aristotle. Frye explains that, although Aristotle's words, *spoudaios* and *phaulos*, are taken to mean "good" and "bad" by most, they actually have the more figurative sense of 'weighty' and 'light'. Frye clarified that by his way of thinking, that rather than status, this refers to things that the hero actually does or fails to do. From here he moves further away from Aristotle's differentiations, which appear to be based on morals, to conclude that "Fictions, therefore may be classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of

action, which may be greater than ours, less or roughly the same” (*Anatomy* 33). He suggests that there are five levels of individual to be considered:

- A hero that is superior in kind both to other men and to the environment of other men. This produces a divine being and therefore a story of a god or a myth. Frye considers this level to be outside normal literary categories.
- A typical hero of romance who is in degree superior to other men and the environment. This person moves in a world where ordinary laws are slightly suspended and we would identify this type with legend and folk tale.
- One who is superior in degree to other men but not to his environment and who is a leader, subject to social criticism and to the order of nature. Frye names this the high mimetic mode.
- If one is superior neither to other men nor to the environment, the hero, by Frye’s reasoning, is of the low mimetic mode.
- The final category is one who is inferior in power or intelligence to us and belongs to the ironic mode. We experience a feeling of frustration or absurdity. This hero’s situation is judged by normal values and thus we get the sense of looking down on a scene of bondage in this instance. (Frye, *Anatomy* 34–38)

James Reaney makes particular use of three of these types: the high mimetic, the low mimetic, and the ironic hero. While some of the characters and situations in *The Donnelly’s*

reflect traits Frye considers as belonging solely to one category, Reaney has taken liberties with Frye's models and overlapped and combined categories in some cases. The categories are reflected in various members of the Donnelly family at different times in the chronicles, and Reaney has, through an occasional synthesis of the three, created characters that are more rounded and have the ability to change over the course of the trilogy. This also helps to reflect the different perspectives from which the story is told. In Frye's examples the characters exist in single narratives and the events are chronicled from only one point of view. In Reaney's plays, characters are often viewed and commented on from several perspectives.

The attributes Frye gives to the high mimetic hero match closely those of the patriarch and matriarch of the Donnellys' tale. The high mimetic hero has "authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject to social criticism and to the order of nature" (*Anatomy* 34) This type would fit most closely the type of hero seen in Greek tragedy, such as Oedipus or Agamemnon, and Frye acknowledges that "this is the hero of the high mimetic mode, of most epic and tragedy, and is primarily the kind of hero that Aristotle had in mind" (34). Jim Donnelly, despite not being of noble birth, acts and reacts in a manner befitting this type of hero. His journey is clearly that of the high mimetic hero; his path is a tragic journey of great perils. Like Oedipus, he has unwittingly brought these perils upon himself through his actions and they are perpetrated by outside forces beyond his control. For example, in the recurring scenes with the Whitefeet, the secret society of Irish Catholics in the Donnellys' homeland of Ireland, Jim Donnelly acts with great passion and authority of belief. Mrs. Donnelly refers to "Blackfeet," the name they call the Donnellys to signify something worse than "scab, or leper or nigger or heretic," (*Sticks and Stones* 16) but with true innocent dignity states "I'd rather be called Blackfoot than do what they did to the Sheas", a family the Whitefeet had harassed,

intimidated and ultimately killed back in Ireland (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 17). The Donnellys, therefore, take a decidedly noble stance against the oppressor and for the underdog. The Whitefeet in Canada were also concerned with the intimidation of people in their community and the stirring up anti-Protestant feelings. We learn from several scenes that if one did not side with these self-proclaimed keepers of justice there were repercussions. Foreshadowing the mob that will eventually burn the Donnellys' home and kill members of the family, Act One of *Sticks and Stones* depicts them ganging up on Jim Donnelly and using threats to try to induce him to join the group and to spurn the friendship of any others who refuse to conform. To their chagrin, and in keeping with a tragic hero of the high mimetic mode about whom our "feelings are mixed" (*Anatomy* 38), Jim Donnelly affably refuses to swear allegiance to this band of bullies but can't resist baiting them at the same time. Mrs. Donnelly recounts the scene in Ireland to her son Will in Act One:

MRS DONNELLY. He opened the door and came out.

OTHERS. Oh, Jim Donnelly. Jim, the Whitefeet hear that you let one of your mares stand to Johnson's stallion last Monday coming home from the fair.

MRS DONNELLY. To which your father replied (he comes towards us and them with affability)

MR DONNELLY. It was love at first sight. Shure Johnson's stallion was mounting my mare before I could stop him. Would you have me break up a pair of true lovers? Would you? And I had my back turned for the merest minute getting the other mare's tail out of a thornbush [sic].

OTHERS. Did you know, Jim Donnelly that no Whitefoot is to have any dealings with the Protestant and the heretic Johnson? (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 18)

The Others continue to demand that Jim Donnelly kneel and swear to their faction and obey their rules. He refuses repeatedly, saying “But you see I won’t kneel. And I won’t, I will not swear that” (19). Despite continued threats of retribution and physical punishment, he continues to refuse in passionate terms and such is his authority that when a faction of the group approach him in his new homeland, he again turns them away and remains true to his values. He cannot see that these early actions will make the group hostile. His noble actions lead to his downfall. For example, just as Frye acknowledges that in the tragedy *Othello* we must pity Desdemona, fear Iago, and have mixed feelings for Othello, in *The Donnellys* so must we also pity the victims of the Whitefeet, fear the Whitefeet themselves, and reserve mixed feelings for the Donnellys who are as often the aggressors as they are the victims. “The stature of both Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly is enhanced in the next sequence when he kneels for the first time. Significantly, the person he kneels to is his wife, his only equal in the drama” (Noonan *The Donnellys* 279). The sequence leading up to this moment is also indicative of how Donnelly is meant to enhance his heroic aura. This scene plays out immediately after Donnelly has killed Farl:

MR DONNELLY. We had been grappling for over an hour and the sun was very hot and there was no lack of whiskey or anything we wanted so long as we kept on fighting. *illustrates* He was on my shoulders with words in my ears and blows—I rolled over and got in a few, then we rolled over again. *laughter*
I picked this up and half stood with it in both my hands, he still on my back.

With the handspike he makes a furious upward motion from between his knees to just behind his head. The burden drops off him, he stands straighter and still, than takes off his shirt. Bright sunlight. The circle of men dissolves with

CHORUS. You're dead Farl. Donnelly you've murdered the man.

*Slowly they and Farl form the Roman Line. Mrs Donnelly, in apron stands at upstage end of it. [sic] Donnelly plods up to her, kneels at her feet after catching up some dirt in his hand. As she speaks all the players kneel. (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 51)*

This is but one example of the Donnelly family as representations of Frye's tragic hero. This outlook is reinforced by recurring imagery in the play and also by the actions the characters take within the pieces. Like Greek tragic heroes, the Donnellys, despite acting in a manner designed to avoid certain destinies, become enmeshed and trapped and are unable to escape their fates. Reaney makes good use of this and other aspects of Frye's notions of what makes up a tragic hero with admirable results, creating in *The Donnellys*, "a new mythology for Canadians of a proud, heroic family, violent in a violent place and era of our country" (Noonan *The Donnellys* Afterword 278). After Donnelly kneels to his wife and the Others have all knelt in deference to the moment, he clutches up a piece of soil and concludes with a very heroic pronouncement: "Mrs Donnelly, this is what is left of our farm and I've killed a man for it" (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 51).

The low mimetic hero, "superior neither to other men nor to his environment," is according to Frye one of us: "we respond to a sense of his common humanity" (*Anatomy* 34). Frye ascribes this type of hero to most comedy and realistic fiction. *The Donnellys* trilogy is not

purely realistic fiction as such, but it is the retelling of a story based in truth, taking liberties when necessary to create a more theatrical story. The relationships are real and the characters realistic even though they might now have a certain legendary status. Significantly, Turnbull's staging had the actors come through the audience and address the audience as members of the crowd in certain scenes. This served to reinforce a sense of the viewer's responsibility or complicity. When faced with the enemies of the Donnellys it would have been natural for the audience to feel that they were their enemies too.

The Donnellys, although most certainly not pure comedy, does contain comic elements. Like classical Greek comedy, it contains political satire and the mockery of certain elements of society. This is particularly notable in some of the early scenes in the play. For example, the Priest himself says "The Bible is a great help in getting rid of people" and the rate of crime and conviction rate in the county is slyly mocked:

CORONER. In the year 1847 eight men were accidentally killed, two men were murdered by falling trees.

MR DONNELLY. Yes, it got so you didn't have to use a knife or a club, why a tree would do it for you... (*Sticks and Stones* 38)

These breezy and rather sarcastic remarks are common in all three plays, adding some humour to what could have easily become a moralizing piece of theatre.

There is also a certain humour in the scenes in which Reaney has Thomas P. Kelley, the author of the sensationalised versions of the legend, appear as the carnivalesque snake oil salesman. In this scene a family of alternate Donnellys is introduced. They are named False John, False Mrs. Donnelly, etc. They are a foil to the real Donnelly characters in the scene, giving

them the opportunity to address falsehoods in their story and to comment on how their story has been distorted by Kelley and legend. There is a striking contrast between the showman and the Donnelly family, which “forces the living to obey the dead.” James Noonan states in his introduction to the collected trilogy that a

further indication of Reaney’s art is the way he is able to make these scenes deriding Kelley into some of the funniest in the play and to use them both to dispel some of the misconceptions passed on by Kelley and to create sympathy for the “real Donnellys.” (6)

The stage directions by Reaney call for the travelling medicine show to enter through the audience, and the “loud, slick” Irish Showman has his “actors” perform a short bit from his show to try and entice the audience in the play to come and see the performance, admission to which is free if one buys the magical medicinal products that he is flogging from his wagon (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 46). Unlike the real Donnellys characters, the False Donnellys are rather dim. The scene featuring them is reminiscent of a vaudevillian performance. Reaney’s stage directions reinforce the comic elements, which reminds the viewer of the ridiculous nature of many of the stories surrounding the historical Donnellys:

SHOWMAN. Ladies and gents just one small scene from tonight’s attraction The Black Donnellys. A little scene with John Donnelly! His father! His mother! *The*

False Donnellys actors should be the Grand Guignol²⁸ persons of folklore-wild cats on hot stoves. (47)

The comic elements highlight for viewers that Frye's low mimetic hero is present.

As for the ironic mode of hero, it is easy to see how Reaney's 'heroes' fit into Frye's ironic mode of the tragic.

The ironic mode of tragedy is born from the low mimetic: it takes life exactly as it finds it.... Tragic irony then becomes simply the study of tragic isolation. Its hero does not necessarily have any tragic hamartia or pathetic obsession: he is only someone who becomes isolated from society. (*Anatomy* 41)

Further, Frye states that

Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness, of the victim's having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than anyone else would be. If there is a reason for choosing him for catastrophe, it is an inadequate reason, and raises more objections than it answers. (41)

Reaney's sympathetic perspective on the family gives this definition much validity. Though Jim Donnelly most often acts in a manner appropriate to a high or low mimetic hero, these actions lead to his eventual isolation from his community and his character takes on the social standing and status of the ironic hero.

28. The Grand Guignol was a theatre dedicated to naturalistic horror shows. The name means "The Theatre of the Big Puppet". In the back pages of definitions in the reprint of *The Donnellys* in 2008, Alan Filewood describes this stage direction as meaning 'sensational and exaggerated' (434)

The hero, by Frye's reasoning, is of the low mimetic mode if "one is superior neither to other men nor his environment" (34). *The Donnellys* demonstrate aspects of this mode as well, and to return to Reaney's synergistic use of the three modes²⁹, it is this fusion of modes that serves Reaney well in making the characters seem more three-dimensional. To use Frye's theory further to support the casting of the Donnellys as tragic heroes, we can look at the human world and his proposed archetypes. In the tragic vision, Frye states that the human world is "tyranny or anarchy, or an individual or isolated man, the leader with his back to his followers, the giant of romance, and the deserted or betrayed hero" (*Anatomy* 82). The stage directions accompanying the first appearance of Mr. Donnelly are a reflection of this image. Reaney has him entering and standing silently far upstage with his back to the audience while Mrs. Donnelly and Will speak of the troubles that plagued him back in Tipperary. The Others, representing the mob, begin to goad him but provoke no reaction. The Others undergo a constant metamorphosis from commentator to aggressor in the scene, eventually becoming the men who have come to get Donnelly to swear allegiance to the Whitefeet. He has remained silent throughout their chanting, taunting, and calling. He is still with his back to the audience, but now the audience "begins to focus on Donnelly's back." When he finally turns he is described as "a small square chunk of will." (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 16–18).

In the trilogy, Donnelly is betrayed first by his landlord, who after promising to sell Donnelly the land he has been working for two decades, sells half of it out from under him to his neighbour and enemy. He is isolated from his community, and he is betrayed again by this

²⁹ Meaning that the relationship between the three modes as used by Reaney are not static, As stated above, the characters change, transforming from mode to another in practice depending upon the perspective of the scene. Only by 'freezing 'the play's action at a certain point can one see them as only one kind of character.

community, which ultimately murders him, his wife, and members of his family. He is also betrayed on another level by Kelley's sensationalised accounts of his life. The crippled child William is mocked, taunted, and also isolated from his peers for his physical deformities and a familial relationship beyond his control. Indicators of further isolation occur throughout the plays with the refusal of Jim Donnelly to join the Whitefeet and their subsequent ostracizing of his family. Some of the Donnelly children are mocked and hated for nothing more than their family ties; the niece who is murdered had only been in Canada for a few weeks. The entire Donnellys' tragedy resonates with the sense that they were misunderstood and were victims of what Frye terms a "sick society": "In tragedies of a sick society the central figure is often a victim and the victim's nature is too big for his fortune. What is squeezed out of the tragic action is not excessive ambition but excessive vitality though it is only because of the perverted social context that it is excessive" (Frye, *Fools of Time* 44). Mrs. Donnelly steps between her male neighbours and Donegan, who has offended the ringleader by asking remuneration for his oak tree. Instead, the men shove him into a barrel filled with spiky thorn brush and proceed to torture him. Despite the fact Mrs. Donnelly has seen this kind of torture in Ireland at the hands of the Whitefeet and knows the consequences may involve a rebound attack on her, she intervenes at the behest of Sarah Farl, wife of the man that her husband killed. We know this brave act will, ironically, only serve to compound the hatred that will eventually lead to her downfall because she has thwarted these men, but we cannot help but admire the spirit it takes to overcome the risk to her own personal safety in order to attempt this good deed. Throughout the scene she maintains a sense of innocent dignity. It is quite clear then that Reaney's Donnelly family has the "authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours but that what [they] do is subject to social criticism" (*Anatomy* 34). This fulfills a major criterion of the high mimetic hero.

Interestingly, we see that Reaney has combined three of Frye's modes to create the unique and rounded mode of tragic hero suitable to his type of theatre.

Several key speeches in the final act of *Sticks and Stones* typify their heroism, as in when Mr. Donnelly says to Cassleigh "Donnellys don't kneel" and when Mrs. Donnelly tells her daughter in the last line, "Jennie, your father and I will never leave Biddulph." (Noonan 279)

Other elements in *The Donnellys* remind us that Reaney is creating a heroic tragedy. We are united with Johannah Donnelly through pity and terror. All forces are seemingly aligned against her family; the prejudices from the old country, the Church, the competitors to the Donnelly stage-coach line, the covetous neighbours and even the environment, when winter drives Jim to turn himself in. Her bravery and stalwart support of her children and husband against these forces put her at odds with the petty and grasping people of Biddulph. Mrs Donnelly, as we are reminded by her behaviour, embodies all of the noble attributes one would expect would bring respect in a community. She is loyal, hard-working and strong. She makes an epic journey to save her husband's life that typifies her will in the trilogy. She has the ability to see beyond the pettiness of the narrow neighbours, and as she admonished Cassleigh's mob, "there's fields of grain to gather and you'd rather be thorns to each other" She is above the others in intelligence and vitality "but as a tragic figure, she also saw and experienced the inward moments of dread and the vital outward connections of the self with the surrounding milieu" (Parker 11). And ultimately, like Oedipus, she fails despite her noble efforts and suffers the downfall that is the earmark of all tragedy. The audience knows that the Donnelly family will never triumph against their enemies and so will lose all they have fought for and yet we cannot help but be moved by their actions. "To be a Donnelly, in short, is to have an integrity lacking in

almost every character that opposes them throughout the trilogy, from the corrupt magistrates (...) in Part One to the churchmen who organize that vigilantes in Part Three, *Handcuffs*, and the jury that finds mob leader Jim Carroll not guilty of their murder. (...) The Donnellys *must* die; their pride and stubbornness cannot be endured. They are tragic” (Wasserman 207).

The abundance of symbols Reaney has placed throughout his trilogy speaks to a great familiarity with Frye’s “Theory of Symbols” and “Theory of Archetypes” and to the literature common in both men’s upbringing, the same classic works that form the foundations of Frye’s theory. These symbols are both visual and spoken. For example, the Showman is flogging “Banyan Tree of Life pills”; this contrasts with the “tree of death” that shows up in the real Donnellys’ life, the spot where the notice of James Donnelly’s fugitive status is posted. Frye described the “tree of life” as existing in the comic vision of myth and the tree of death in the tragic:

In the comic vision the vegetable world is a garden, grove, or park, or a tree of life, or a rose or lotus. The archetype of Arcadian images, such as that of Marvell’s green world or Shakespeare’s forest comedies. In the tragic vision it is a sinister forest like the one in *Comus* or at the opening of *Inferno*, or a heath or wilderness or a tree of death” (Frye, *Anatomy*, 134).

Frye himself admits that it is “of course, only the general comic or tragic context that determines the interpretation of any symbol” (*Anatomy*, 135), and this is obvious in this theatrical context. The plays move between comic and tragic treatment of the legend: the forest that is threateningly dark and oppressive to Mrs. Donnelly as she treks to London to plead for her

husband's life becomes welcoming later in the trilogy. Reaney describes the stage at the top of Part One as turning into

the deep green of primeval forest; someone imitates the whistle of a deep forest bird-the peewee, and then a boy limps across the stage to sit down on the pile of stones ... His mother, a tall woman, enters the forest looking for her son.
(Reaney, *Sticks and Stones*, 14).

Reaney uses the tree or forest as a recurring image in all three plays. Donnelly uses a harrow "made out of a tree branch, to which stones have been tied" in the scene that describes the takeover of half of the Donnelly land (*Sticks and Stones* 42). We must assume that Reaney, knowing Frye as well as he did, chose to do this deliberately, as the "repetition of certain common images of physical nature like the sea or the forest in a large number of poems, cannot in itself be called ... coincidence" (Frye, *Anatomy* 99). Reaney and Turnbull were creating a world so filled with archetype and symbol that it became immediately recognizable on some level to all audience members regardless of their background or education. In a sense, they were proving Frye's theory by giving it concrete form, and the reviews and audience reaction indicate that it worked. As stated by Frye, "because of the larger communicative context of education, it is possible for a story about the sea to be archetypal, to make a profound imaginative impact, on a reader who has never been out of Saskatchewan" (*Anatomy* 99). The artistic team involved with the original productions of the Donnellys were, consciously or subconsciously, making use of these conventions. This allowed the audience to gain an understanding of the live images that actually came from other parts of their literary experience.

One of the most obvious symbolic associations neatly encompasses not only Frye's theory but also historical objects from the Donnellys' massacre. The vigilante gang that attacked

the Donnellys was not an incredibly organised group, but rather a group roused to action by a few core members. Several of the recruits had neglected even to bring weapons with them. This may have had something to do with the fact they had been drinking quite heavily before the trek to the Donnelly homestead began, but in all likelihood it had as much to do with the reality that most of the group did not anticipate the degree of escalation of violence that evening. Some of the attackers had simple tools like pitchforks and pieces of wood that were picked up at the scene. Ray Fazakas in his comprehensive work, *The Donnelly Album*, describes the collection of men and weapons in the chapter, “Clubs.”

At about one hour past midnight after several quarts of *usquebaugh*, the water of life, had been gulped down, the gang of men set off to cover the half-mile distance to the Donnelly farmhouse. Two or three of the men carried guns, Tom Ryder had a pitchfork, Purtell an axe, and Pat Quigley and Jim Toohey each had a shovel. Most of them simply carried a club or a short wooden stake of ordinary cordwood. (Fazakas, *The Donnelly Album* 245)

These are the “sticks” of the title of Reaney’s first piece and they stand for the enemies of the Donnellys. When the chorus divides in *Sticks and Stones*, we see the deeper significance of such ordinary items. The “stones” become the Donnellys and the “sticks” become their foes. We think immediately of the child’s rhyme “Sticks and stones may break my bones.” In the hands of the mob, these simple items are twisted into instruments of death. According to Frye, we may also associate the stones of the title with the tragic vision of the “mineral world,” which is seen in terms of “desert, rocks and ruins, or of sinister geometrical images like the cross” (Frye. *The Educated Imagination: The Archetypes of Literature*, 134) In *Handcuffs*, at the tail end of the final play, these stones become a pivotal image. The chorus sings “Four stones where once there

was a house/home” (Reaney, *Handcuffs* 272), and the sequence that follows exhibits the fluid and powerful nature of a simple prop when seen in the light of Frye’s notions of symbol. The actors who had walked each item through Frye’s Circle in the rehearsal hall were now able to reveal for the audience the deeper meanings that were invested in the items:

PAT. *placing stone* Bob Donnelly, blacksmith from St. Catherine’s,
 once heard James Feeny say there was only one thing he ever done that
 he was sorry for. I asked him what that was. He said he sold Tom
 Donnelly the best friend he ever had. *He begins to beat the handcuffs
 apart ...*

CHORUS. Robert Donnelly

BOB. *placing stone* Bob Donnelly, drayman from Glencoe. They told me it
 was the remains of my father. I knelt down and picked up his heart
Kisses it then slowly puts it down

...

CHORUS. Where once there was a house/home, four stones.

(Reaney, *Handcuffs* 272)

In the hands of actors, the stones become tangible symbols representing an object (the house/home), release (breaking the handcuffs that bind) and sorrow (James Donnelly’s heart in his son’s hand). The stones are a persistent image. Certain of the recurring movement and musical sequences are accompanied by what Reaney termed “stone-clicking rhythms” during which he hoped the company would look like “an old

document which suddenly bristles with stones that hurt as they come zinging through the air” (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 29).

Equally as great a symbol is the use of the harvest in these plays. The parallel between the Donnellys and the growth/cutting of crops manifests in the action and songs of the trilogy. One particularly striking moment that makes use of the image of the harvest and cyclical growth comes at the tail end of the entire trilogy in *Handcuffs*.

The pall bearers, all actors, return to the stage miming the growth of a wheatfield.

March! the snow has gone

The green field John & Tom sowed

Still there green

April! growing again growing again

May! taller and longer with longer

Days until

June and July

July! until ready for harvest

August

Shivering and rippling

cloud shadows summer wind

cloud shadows

*A golden light sweeps the stage. We should feel that around the Donnellys
farmyard lies a big field of wheat ready for harvest.*

CHORUS. To the yard of the house which once stood by this wheatfield came
the Donnellys who were left... (Reaney, *Handcuffs* 272)

In his “Tentative Conclusion” to the *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye writes that there is a
“curious tendency in human life to imitate some aspects of ‘lower’ forms of existence, like the
rituals which imitate the subtle synchronizations with the rhythms of the turning of the year that
vegetable life makes” (343). The association of the Donnellys with the harvest and as grain
represents some of the most powerful imagery in the trilogy. James Noonan also notes that it is
the source of some of the most beautiful poetry as well. “The Barley Corn Ballad” that recurs in
the plays is an example of this, but as Noonan points out there are many other examples. Like
grain, the Donnellys are ‘planted in rows of people they can’t get away from’” (*The Donnellys*,
Concluding Essay 283) and Donnelly says of his enemies that they

Harvested me and my sons like sheaves and stood
Us to die upon our ground
Where nothing now will ever grow.

(Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 41)

In “Tragic Fictional Modes” and in “The Mythos of Autumn,” Frye argues that the
harvest should be most closely associated with tragedy. Clearly this image is one that resonates
within the context of *The Donnellys*. Noonan points out that the identification of the family with
the grain “is complete when the father rejoices; ‘Mrs. Donnelly, I was thinking what fair seed we
have sown and I have come back at last to harvest’” (Noonan 284). This imagery is revisited on

several occasions in the trilogy. Mrs. Donnelly uses it when standing up to the neighbours in the barrel torture scene in *Sticks and Stones*: “There’s fields of grain to garner with bread for you all bad you’d rather be thorns to each other. There’s tables of food for you to eat and you won’t come and sit down at them” (Reaney, *Stick and Stones* 77).

There is a wonderful scene early in the plays between Mr. Donnellys and his sons John and Will that combines the stones, grain, and harvest imagery. Half of the farm has been ceded to the neighbour, historically Michael Maher, but represented by Mr. Fat in the plays. The scene uses the blended imagery to give the audience a picture of the emotions underlying the event:

MR DONNELLY. No boys. No. Not over there. This is the new line. *He points to the centre of the stage.* Put the stones there. *The line of chairs presses in his family to centre where they put down stones; chairs retreat.* Mr Donnelly reaches over it to pluck crop planted on the other side. They’ve got half my farm. *From now on, a line of stones cuts the Donnelly farm and the playing area in half.*

JOHN. What happens to the wheat we sowed over there, pa?

MR DONNELLY. That wheat is lost. And my scythe never touched it....

It was harvested by a piece of paper. I’ve known men burn their crop rather than have a stranger harvest it....(*Sticks and Stones* 43)

This rich metaphor would have been a natural image for a rural man like Reaney to choose and it illustrates Frye’s theory quite nicely.

The Donnellys plays contain the appropriate paradoxical combination of what Frye maintains in his “Theory of Myths” is necessary to tragedy, “a fearful sense of rightness (the

hero must fall) and a pitying sense of wrongness (it is too bad that he falls)” (*Anatomy* 214). This is likely exactly how Reaney’s audience would feel. As an audience, we know that the plays will end in the death of several of the major characters for whom we have come to feel empathy. The eponymous characters are cursed, but one cannot help but hope, however naively, that somehow the ending will allow for their survival. In the same way that the ancient Greek audiences knew exactly when and how Oedipus would fall: we are without a doubt aware of the Donnellys’ inevitable demise. Quests like that of the Donnellys are made more tragic by their implicit content. Like audiences of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* who would have known that “he dies almost immediately and for sixty years unbroken disaster followed for England” (Frye, *Anatomy* 221), we know that the Donnellys are to be killed and that the crime will go unpunished. The Donnellys are sacrificed by the mob for the perceived greater good of the many, and those of us watching the story unfold must accept that. Anyone accustomed to think ‘archetypally’ of literature, as Frye urges us to do, will recognise in this tragedy this “mimesis of sacrifice” (*Anatomy* 214). Eucharistic symbolism and ritual would have been familiar to both Reaney and Frye and the Donnellys legend lends itself quite naturally to this type of imagery. It is difficult to imagine that Reaney was suggesting viewers or readers believe that the elder James Donnelly was a deity, but his treatment of the patriarch in the plays certainly brings to mind an apotheosis. Reaney shines the light of martyrdom on the Donnellys and uses visual and verbal biblical references to describe their appearances. Reaney, as we have seen, gained a new appreciation for the Bible under Frye’s tutelage and so it is not surprising that it features in a multitude of scenes in this series. The institutional church would also have played a huge role historically in the Donnellys’ community, and it is introduced as a source of religious symbolism early in the plays. Certain scenes are spoken like catechism:

MRS DONNELLY. Good day to you Mr Darcy. *She comes to her husband with the notice from the tree.*

MR DONNELLY. read it for me, Mrs Donnelly.

OTHERS. Squatters and Trespassers. Notice is hereby given.

Squatters and Trespassers. Notice is hereby given.

MRS DONNELLY. Oh, did you know this now, Mr Donnelly. There are now again many people going about in the country in search of Improved Lands, occupied by Squatters with the intention of

OTHERS. Purchasing over their heads (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 24)

More examples occur throughout all three plays, one of the most memorable being after Jennie comments on the Donnelly's failure, yet again, to gain entry into the broader community:

we were up for confirmation in a church called the Roman line. No, it was a bigger church than that for it involved Protestants too. We were going to be tested for confirmation in a church called-Biddulph. ... Our confirmation came up and although we had known our catechism well, we failed. (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 84).

Throughout the act, verbal repetitions modelled on the catechism occur, reaching a satisfying conclusion when "Why was I a Donnelly?" is proudly answered with "that once, long before you were born, you chose to be a Donnelly and laughed at what it would mean" (Reaney, *Sticks* 92-

93) Additionally, a priest in Act One of *Sticks* enters and asks “Who are punished in purgatory?” to which the unison reply is:

MR & MRS DONNELLY. Those are punished for a time in purgatory who die in a state of grace but are guilty of venial sin or have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to their sins

PRIEST. Who are punished in Hell?

MR DONNELLY. Not I. No, not James Donnelly. I’m not in Hell though my friends in Biddulph thought to send me there but after thirty-five years in Biddulph who would find Hell any bigger a fire than the fire I died in. I’m not in Hell for I’m in a play *ladders begin to register on us, poking up behind* (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 24)

It is clear that Reaney was making excellent use of his Biblical sources. Turnbull used the chants effectively to build a sense of rhythm and movement necessary to creating a ritual-like atmosphere around these scenes. The choral work was not always appreciated, however:

“One of the chief drawbacks of *Sticks and Stones* is Reaney’s use of a chorus, since a chorus can be effective in giving information in a dramatic way. This chorus, however, never shifted the level of their chanting. It became so tiresome after a while that one tended not to listen to them” (Bradley *The Donnellys*).

Other reviewers were less critical and of the same performance in the same theatre, The Ottawa Journal critic Frank Daley says of the actors that “their strong voices,

their clarity and their eagerness all commend themselves to the audience” (in Reaney, *14 Barrels* 114).

The use of fire as a symbol recurs throughout the plays, preparing us for the expected end of the Donnellys. Jennie Donnelly’s christening in Act Two of *Sticks and Stones* becomes a metaphor “for the final consummation of the Donnellys by fire and a preparation for their marriage with their heavenly spouse” (Noonan 280), as in the words of the ritual:

Receive this burning light and see thou guard the grace of thy baptism without blame: keep the commandments of God, so that when the Lord shall come to call thee to the nuptials, thou mayest met [sic] Him with all the saints in the heavenly courts, there to live for ever and ever. (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 70)

This section aids in demonstrating that Frye’s theory, though undeclared to the audience, was implicit in the plays and that the relationship between Frye’s ideas and Turnbull and Reaney is demonstrably strong. Reaney created a story and characters identifiable as a “displaced myth of the tragic ironic mode” (Frye, *Anatomy* 52), and the three resulting tense and ‘mythic tragedies’ prompted the Globe and Mail to write that they are “a theatrical tapestry woven by a master craftsman” (Filewood, *The Donnellys*. Back Cover). Reaney’s Donnelly plays have achieved such a level of historical relevance to such an extent that one might go so far as to liken them to Canada’s own Greek tragedies. Indeed, in Reaney’s trilogy, the chorus behaves as a classic Greek chorus, commenting on the action, providing exposition, and acting as a single character with whom Donnelly can interact. For example,

CHORUS. Donnelly squatted on John Farl’s land

Just laughed when ordered to pay

Then with an iron bar struck Farl dead

At a loggin'

MR DONNELLY. Show me the scene where I kill Farl; the living must obey the dead ... (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones*, 48)

As the plays progress, the chorus proceeds to narrate the scenes and comment on them, sometimes as witnesses and sometimes as onlookers or even participants in the action. According to Frye, "in comedy a society forms around the hero: in tragedy the chorus, no matter how faithful, usually represents the society from which the hero is gradually isolated" (*Anatomy* 218). In Reaney's plays, the Donnellys, despite their efforts to create a home and the hard work of running a business, are unable to find simple friendship in their community and discover themselves increasingly isolated. The chorus physically reinforces this portrait by creating concrete images onstage. The chorus might take the form of two lines between which the Donnellys walk, "a series of long and short ladders held up by the cast" (Reaney, *Sticks and Stones* 63) that constantly force the Donnellys to climb and manoeuvre around them. At other times the chorus might form a circle around James Donnelly while pointing at him, silently accusing him of crimes, real or imagined. Though Reaney did not adhere to the ideals of classicism per se, the influence of classical theatrical archetypes, especially as laid out by Frye, is evident. As the Greek tragic writers also traditionally used the chorus as an agent for their personal opinions, Reaney sets up scenes that act as vehicles for his personal thoughts and beliefs about the treatment of the Donnellys both by historians

and in fiction. Frye acknowledged and used the Greek myths as examples of his proposed hero archetypes. Reaney uses these archetypes as models for his characters.

It is the very universality of Frye's models that allow a regional Canadian myth to be assimilated so easily and so well. "The primal subject is scapegoating [sic] existing in almost all cultures, and Reaney has not missed the universality. He has transmuted the local into the universal and the documentary into classical tragedy." (Jayakamur 173). In *Anatomy*, it is through primordial images that universal archetypes are experienced and undeniably, Reaney's (...) projects start with the ground under his feet, and move from the local through the regional and national to the universal (Dragland 233).

Chapter Four: Turnbull's Rehearsal Techniques and Reaney's Writing Process

When Frye's ideas were examined, used, and manipulated by Reaney and Turnbull, they evolved, becoming a working model with which to create a play and upon which to base character choices, the selection of visual and aural symbols, and indeed the entire performance text³⁰ of the work. Without the advantage of an understanding of the way in which Reaney and Turnbull developed the plays through their workshop process using Frye's theory, the plays become quite difficult to recreate. It has been said of Reaney's plays that they are "not easily recreated in the mind's ear and eye from directions in the text" (Miller 111) because so much of the original performance came from the workshop process and an exploration of Frye's models that is not documented in the actual published script. Closer study of Turnbull's rehearsal procedure, the performance text of the trilogy, and the relationship between these three men reveals how literary premise can influence practical process.

A complex process of creation, Reaney's plays were tirelessly rewritten and greatly revised before performance. Revisions occurred for several reasons not the least of which was the extreme length of the original versions of the plays. Over the course of three years, followed by extensive touring, NDWT Company and Reaney developed and reworked the trilogy. Turnbull describes the creative process, which included numerous rewrites based on the work done with cast and crew in Reaney's absence. He also tells of the effect the rehearsal-revision approach had on the final piece:

³⁰ Performance text refers to the entire body of work being performed. This includes, but is not limited to, stage directions, props references, choreography and music, as well as the written and spoken word.

From the workshops often we did cut significantly, Jamie cut significantly in two, no, all three of them, and did significant rewrites. he would ... go to his little cubicle in Victoria College and he'd work until dawn. We'd meet at ten o'clock or ten thirty, go through the rewrites and changes as much as I could, (...) and then we would rehearse it, cut it and throw it together as best we could and let him see it Saturday evening rehearsal and then he's go back to London on Sunday... When we did the previews, we actually four previews, and you could never get away with this these days, we'd do the first preview and then we'd do an audience discussion and Jamie and I'd meet and he'd go away, and then we go to the bar of course and then he go away into his cubicle again and he's come up with was often, well like, radically restructured..(Turnbull)

A novel and collective way of working, where the workshop process was as important to the development of the work as the playwright's vision, cannot be ignored when discussing the plays. Turnbull, in his 1981 interview with Jean McKay at Tarragon recalls the process:

In something like *The Donnellys*, for instance, a lot of the initial ideas, of the lines, of things spinning, really came directly from Jamie. Whereas a lot of the execution of them or the refinement of them or the expansion of them would come from me, and some would come from the cast too (153).

This way of working was somewhat unusual and Turnbull is quick to point out the differences in working this way in that interview. McKay has just asked about the difference between *Passe Muraille*, 25th St. and NDWT:

KT: (...) The 25th St. is quite different from Passe Muraille. We tend to work less as a collective. And when we work as a collective we work very specifically as a collective. I've done a number of shows that are collective creations. But even so, the writing process is much more important to us.

JM: That's partly because Jamie's a poet?

KT: Yes, but others, too. We also work with Larry Zacharko. He's a young writer, and very much a writer. I guess it's that we believe in language (154).

Turnbull goes on in that interview to acknowledge the huge contributions made by imagery and sound. Non-verbal elements became as important as the verbal elements of the drama. The sound-scape created onstage by the chorus came to represent a substantial part of the necessary background canvas of the works. Turnbull maintains that the group intentionally shaped and structured all the elements of the play right down to the subliminal level.

We set audiences up for the fall constantly. We had to work on *The Donnellys* to see if we could make the tiniest, tiniest, tiniest sound, I think it was in Part II at the Shivarree. There's a whole series of night sounds that are all displaced. We were just focusing the audience's ears down, down, down, and then I think we finally did the sound of wet on the end of the tongue [does it] -- that. So their ears were absolutely focused down. (...)No, it's all very intentional and the structures of stage action are very very intentional. Sometimes you just have to get the right image for yourself. I went in and did a very angular blocking for Part II. And I realized, after two weeks of rehearsal, "My god, I've been doing this ALL WRONG." The play is based on straight lines meeting spinning. And I had based

everything on the geometrical patterns, like Part I, on the lines without the spin. Well, the rhythm of the language didn't work properly. The lines are punctuated in a different way and unless you're aware, unless the stage action is moving properly, the actors don't breathe it properly, they don't speak it properly, it doesn't mean what it's written to mean. Things like that are very very conscious. I would love to be able to simply throw it on the stage and have it all just work, you know. But no, it's all worked with much debate and care. (Turnbull in McKay 153-154)

One of Reaney and Turnbull's persistent staging choices also serves to reinforce the sense of tragedy and Frye's elements of tragic heroism. Actors are often directed to form opposing lines, facing each other or in rows. The constant use of this image reinforces the sense of two forces aligned against each other, a constant confrontation. The Donnellys are forced to choose which side of the line they will stand on. These lines divide the Donnellys universe into sides and we choose with them; good versus evil, noble versus petty, victims and victimizers, the mob against the individual and the guilty versus the innocent. Turnbull acknowledges that working with the group, hands on, allowed for a multi-faceted approach to exploration that subsequently led to discoveries and additions that might not otherwise have manifested. The actors moved and Turnbull could stand back and observe and carefully select images that served the overall pattern of the plays.

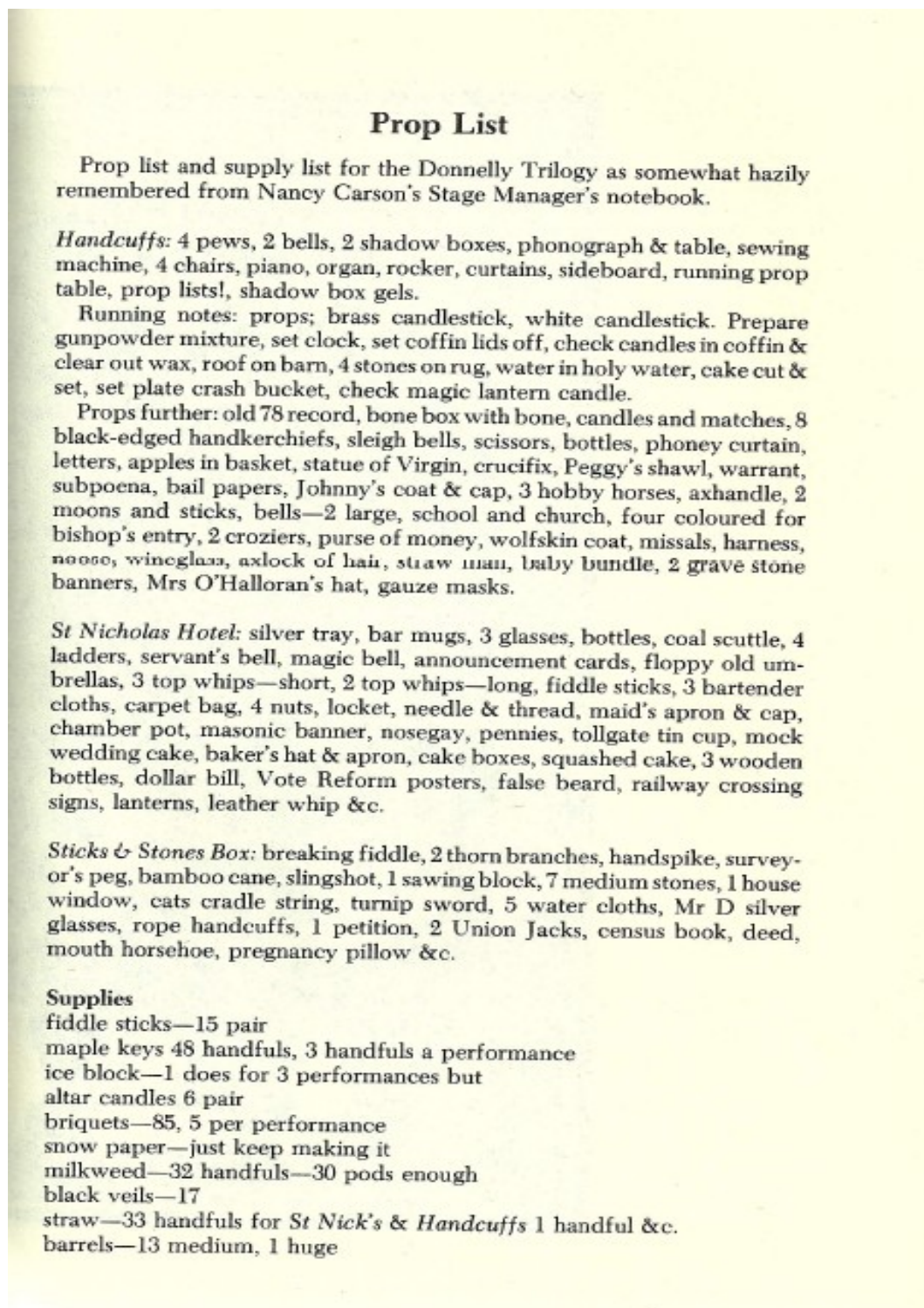
The actors brought much to the table that might otherwise have been neglected. Actors sometimes experimented with or even created their own props. Reaney called for wooden spinning tops in *The St. Nicholas Hotel* to symbolize the vitality of the Donnellys and to show that they "are caught up in a momentum over which they have little control. They can't help

being what they are” (Wasserman 207). The image is crucial at the end of that play.

Unfortunately, the company did not have any period wooden tops. Reaney tells of one of the actors dealing with this problem: “I’ve observed professional actors respond very poorly to [so many props]...Others though-Don MacQuarrie eventually whittled a top for the *St. Nicolas Hotel* workshops, in his spare time. They had to have these tops from somewhere. Either had to make them or...” (Reaney in McKay 143). Props in fact, became as significant as characters in some scenes. The props list, for example, for the touring production of the trilogy (which had fewer properties than the original fixed shows) contained “more props—farm chairs, barrels, ladders, candles, posters, knives, clothesline, wagonwheels [sic], sticks and stones—than a full blown Shakespearean extravaganza” (Slack in Reaney, *14 Barrels* 165- see fig. 3 below for an incomplete list drawn from the stage manager’s notebook to get a sense of the massive number of properties required for the shows). Each object had a specific meaning and had been worked out in rehearsal by the actors and Reaney and Turnbull to convey a particular meaning in the Donnelly universe.

Fig. 3. Props list compiled from Nancy Carson's stage management notebook, 1975.

Source: Reaney, *14 Barrels*. 7).



The songs, chants, props, words, and actions of the Donnellys' universe became so imbued with meaning from Frye's theory that without knowledge or awareness to that theory, some of the implications of what was being seen and the rationale behind certain staging choices became lost. The experience that the work within Frye's Circle gave the director and the actors and the resulting transmission of what that meaning was, was to become problematic for many who were external to the rehearsal process or unfamiliar with Frye's theory. Could an audience manage to grasp all of the different levels of meaning unfolding simultaneously underneath all of that action? Even in the early and heady period of the shows exciting infancy, some reviewers found the massive Donnellys' universe difficult to comprehend: "Plainly there is just about all a reasonably vigilant and intelligent theatregoer can keep track of. Perhaps more than is reasonable" stated one critic. (Slack in *14 Barrels* 165) Another remarked that

"the NDWT production ... whirled the audience around to the point of mental dizziness ... We were swirled from incident to incident so fast it was impossible to comprehend everything onstage" (Claus in Reaney, *14 Barrels* 150).

Louis Dudek, in his less than flattering "A Problem of Meaning" in *Canadian Literature* in 1974 says of Reaney's theatrical writing in general that his " plays are a strange and wonderful experience-though often an irritation..." (28)

The difficulty some had in assimilating all of the theory that suffused Reaney and Turnbull's piece may be well summed up by this review:

The facts come to us theatrically gift-wrapped; scores of small pieces must be fitted together in much the same manner as a jigsaw puzzle. If a bit here and there

seems not to match up immediately, these must be put aside temporarily. In the end everything does go together. Now this is not the kind of game the ordinary, garden-variety theatre-goer is either willing, or has the patience to play, and for this reason the *Donnellys* has limited appeal.

(Galloway “The Donnelly’s Death” F5)

An example of this overwhelming effect upon audiences can be seen in the 2005 revival of *Sticks and Stones* by The Stratford Festival. The taut and “exhausting” evening of theatre that changed the face of Canadian dramatic art in 1973 was, in its 2005 incarnation, given only two out of five stars by both the *Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* (Coulbourn). The show was criticised as being “cluttered with choral speaking” and director Tarasiak accused of losing track of the story’s humanity (Coulbourn).

There are so many images and actions happening concurrently in Reaney’s *Donnellys* plays that his works might be termed kaleidoscopic. Things move in and out “from regional to universal, from private to public, from personal protestant to group liturgical and in all kinds of other ways” (McKay 144). Examples from the stage directions for *The St. Nicholas Hotel*, demonstrate the specific detail that Reaney included in his plays and make obvious how easy it would have been for an audience member to miss aspects of the performance that would have aided in deeper understanding of the images and symbolism.

He takes a block of ice and puts it in a pail; all through the evening we watch it slowly melt till it is used by the scrub women at the end of the play to wipe Mike Donnelly’s blood off the floor (106)

and

The two stage drivers confront each other among a pile of coach fragments and accident victims slowly reassembling themselves; but the scene is darkening , a bell rings, Mike Donnelly's face grows red from some fire he is looking at running out into a blazing stable door as the tollgate between Birr & Elginfield is set up with the money pouring out for counting of the days take (140)

There are various bits of information being delivered to the audience in a number of different ways at the same time. It would have been easy to miss any one of the symbolic items. The difficulty the 2005 production had in reaching audiences may also have had something to do with the shortened process and rehearsal times more familiar to contemporary companies, which operate with leaner budgets and more compressed production schedules than can accommodate the expansive workshop style exploration that Turnbull and Reaney undertook³¹. The sheer number of props being used, images, songs and action happening concurrently to symbols being presented would have required an in depth understanding of the meaning behind them and recognition of their place in the vast Donnellys universe. In 2005 the nature and importance of the relationship between Reaney and Frye seems to have been missed.. The theory, in this case, was absent. This meant that the exercises and directorial vision needed to understand and recreate the complex canvas of Reaney's plays was also not present. Without a real understanding of Frye's structures and without a staging inspired by this knowledge, the artistic

³¹ Mary Jane Miller states of Reaney's work *Wacousta!* that "as a script which others can bring to life *Wacousta!* is problematic, although, if the bare bones of the play were fleshed out with the inventiveness, devotion and hours of extra rehearsals demanded by the script, it would be an entertaining evening." It would seem the some of the problems associated with restaging The Donnellys trilogy is common to much of Reaney's complex plays (111).

team cannot present a complete and nuanced performance. The end result is that the performances do not transmit information to the audience in the same way as the original presentations did. An average audience member in 2005 would not have had the benefit of having Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and "read it to pieces" (Bloom vii) and 'Frye's Circle' did not enter into the 2005 rehearsal hall making the process for a complete understanding even more difficult.

The Stratford production went so far as to remove the ladders from the show, an action which resulted in the loss of the symbolic weight of the items. Turnbull, in the McKay interview responds to a question about the ladders:

JM: I was thinking about the ladders that are in *Sticks and Stones* that keep reappearing again in the other plays. Are you conscious about that sort of thing?

KT: Oh yes, oh golly, yes. [We are] doing it on purpose. I'm very aware. Sometimes I'll go back to Jamie and say "I don't understand this image here, because of we put it here we've got to develop it somewhere else, or we've got to prepare our imaginations for it". If he agrees, then we look to putting the image in somewhere else" (154)

An analysis of the ladders as symbols in the Frye/Reaney universe would have led to a greater understanding of the necessity of retaining the basic machinery that was proposed by Frye and fashioned into physical theatrical devices by Reaney and Turnbull. To a biblical scholar like Frye and someone with the religious upbringing of Reaney, the concept of the ladder would have had several meanings that would have influenced its use as a symbol in *The Donnelly's*. The most obvious would perhaps have been the parallel to Jacob's ladder. In the Christian tradition,

Jacob's ladder, as described in the Book of Genesis, was a ladder witnessed by the biblical patriarch upon which angels ascended to and descended from heaven. It came also to be associated with the path of the human soul's return to God at life's end. In *Midrash*, or Judaic commentaries on the Old Testament, Jacob's ladder is often a metaphor for the exile of the Jews before the coming of the Messiah. The exile of the Donnellys and the migration of Irish escaping the Whitefeet in Ireland would have factored into Reaney's thinking when creating this metaphor.

Jacob's ladders are recreated as well in the plays by the actors in the form of string games, also known as "cat's cradles." The ladder image is one of the most central in the play. Reaney, in the stage directions of *Sticks and Stones*, states that the lines and ladders formed by the cast are "one of the most important images of the story, a man caught between the lines of his neighbours, caught in a ladder" (28). Keith Turnbull confirmed the sentiment expressed by Reaney about this metaphor: "from a staging point or a cinemagraphic point of view, they [the ladders] are the central metaphor" (Turnbull). Nonetheless the ladders were removed from the more contemporary production.

Frye somewhat presciently addressed this failing in *Anatomy* when he stated that the majority of contemporary readers, unlike Reaney and Frye, suffered from a "deficiency in contemporary education." This, according to Frye, leaves the said readers somewhat "clueless" when faced with certain archetypes and symbols. Frye complains of the disappearance of a "common cultural ground which makes a modern poet's allusions to the Bible or to Classical mythology fall with less weight than they should" (*Anatomy* 99). Unintentionally, the more contemporary design model sabotaged the meaning of the staging specified by Reaney.

Canadian theatres continue to stage period pieces from our colonialist past and many theatres in the country are unwilling to give as much weight and time to the practice of a home grown drama. The Canadian play might benefit from the rigorous research and exploration normally given to the staging of the works of Shaw, Shakespeare, and the like. It would seem then that a willingness to explore and recognize the relationship between James Reaney and the works of Northrop Frye is necessary for the development of our own theatrical past and to reproducing our founding pieces in a manner that accurately reflects their performance style. The absence of this serious approach to Reaney's work has led to the difficulty in present-day performances of his plays. Of course, the link between Reaney's work and Frye's theory must be acknowledged as obscure and challenging to some present-day actors and directors. Even Turnbull has confessed to not completely enjoying the workshop process of the plays without before having undertaken additional associative work:

My favourite is still Part Two and I didn't altogether like Part Three when we were working on it.... But when I did the Part Two again in Banff just before we were supposed to go out and do Part Three, ... I did all the background ... work, and I ended up with a much deeper respect for it. (Turnbull)

Frye himself was pragmatic about the transfer of the theoretical to the practical, stating that *Anatomy* was "to be regarded rather as an interconnected group of suggestions which it is hoped will be of some practical use to critics and students of literature. Whatever is of no practical use to anybody is expendable" (*Anatomy* 3). Clearly though, Reaney and Turnbull did find it to be of great practical use.

Conclusion

While remaking ourselves we should not throw out all history.

Hart, *The Theoretical Imagination*

The evidence of the influence of Frye upon both Reaney and Turnbull is powerful. In Reaney's case the student-mentor connection and the subsequent friendship with Frye and a shared way of thinking led to a relationship built on mutual respect. The comparable social and economic background of Reaney and Frye coupled with Frye's general influence at a time when Reaney and Turnbull were developing academically and as artists inevitably made him a principle point of reference for both men. The associative metaphors and physical symbols in Reaney's plays are undeniably Frye-ian structures. That Turnbull further concretized Frye's theory by creating his Frye's Circle rehearsal technique leaves no doubt that the theorist was present in key aspects of the process of creation of the trilogy. One has only to look at the Donnelly's trilogy in the context of Frye's structures to recognise how profound an influence *Anatomy* had upon these two theatrical practitioners. Frye's worldview in general and his *Anatomy of Criticism* in particular permeated the writing, the artistic discussion, the rehearsal process, the resulting staging and performance and provided the basis for the thought behind every moment in the evolution of the plays.

Keith Turnbull sums up what he feels Frye really gave to Reaney and how it helped develop *The Donnelly's* trilogy:

I think the epic nature, because once you've started to see all creation, all literature, all art as totality, then you— it opens up your creative muscles and your creative ear and eye, so that transition from one world to another in the very

Shakespearean sense of constant change on stage, it takes preponderance ... Frye looks at creation as this massive vista, it is all connected, even the worm in the middle of the rose as the serpent in the garden, you knew you could mix these metaphors. (Turnbull)

The vista of *The Donnellys* was, and remains, massive. The plays, individually and as a whole, reflect a world suspended out of time and space that moves freely between the historic 1800s, Reaney's contemporary world, and a mythic atemporal plane. The people of these different times and places collide over the course of the plays. Symbols and metaphors abound in a universe somehow new and ancient at the same time. This is the essence of what Frye was trying to communicate through the theory argued in *Anatomy of Criticism*. He felt that there was a common thread in the stories of humanity that was recognisable on some level to all of us.

Reaney's movement through time and space and his non-linear approach to storytelling may seem to belie his famous teacher's reputation as structuralist and formalist. In reality, Reaney's non-linear technique simply reinforces that the themes he addresses are universal and unaffected by time. Characters move freely between the past and the present, with little regard for their surroundings. Practically this meant that an actor might find himself playing two opposing characters in back-to-back scenes, an event that Turnbull admits caused some nervousness at the beginning of the process of creation. Despite developing strong emotional associations with each character after the work with Frye's Circle, Turnbull also challenged the actors by cross casting them in contrasting character types:

I would intentionally make sure that whoever played John Donnelly or Mrs. Donnelly also at some point played a villain. So that you got closer to the Blake,

you know there's— that there is— there is the demonic and the divine combined.

(Turnbull)

One reviewer describes this method resulting in a “Brecht-like” distancing effect that “defied our forming sympathies with one actor or another by suddenly recasting him or her in the role of a character completely opposed to his former one—Donnellys becoming anti-Donnellys, etc.” (Dyck D4). In setting up two Donnellys in opposition, one known as ‘false’ and the other, just as false but reflecting another aspect of the story, Reaney and Turnbull were giving credibility to Frye’s belief that “in the greatest works of literature, we get both the up and down views, often at the same time as different aspects of one event” (Frye *The Educated Imagination* 58). James Noonan, in his Concluding Essay to the collected trilogy, states that

We see the uniqueness of the Donnellys in the contrast between them and the Fat Woman and her husband, who “have a certain on the ground quality which materializes everything, while with the Donnellys there is just the opposite feeling.” (279).

Such contrasts and opposites are an important feature of the plays. They aid in emphasising the fate of the Donnellys who are caught between the opposing forces of familial pride and independence (“Donnellys don’t kneel!”) and the local prejudice and violent opposition of the forces aligned against them.

Frye’s Fourth Essay in *Anatomy*, “Theory of Genres,” expresses a close connection between literature and music. “The world of social action and event, the world of time and process, has a particularly close association with the ear. The ear listens and the ear translates what it hears into practical conduct” (243). Reaney also mines this connection in the form and

content of *The Donnellys*. All three plays in the trilogy rely upon songs and chants to carry much of the thematic association and historical content.³²

In "Theory of Genres," Frye also writes that the "world of individual thought and idea has a correspondingly close association with the eye, and nearly all our expressions for thought from the Greek *theoria*³³ down, are connected with visual metaphors" (243). Reaney's approach to creating *The Donnellys* encompasses these ideas as all three plays are filled not only with song and rhythm but also with visual metaphor and symbol. The non-verbal language of action, setting, and props tied to the spoken and sung portions created an archetypal framework built from Frye's universal models. Reaney mounted the Donnellys legend upon this framework, clearly demonstrating his concrete use of Frye's theories to transmit visual and aural meanings to an audience. Although Turnbull has admitted that an audience might not immediately recognize the performance as articulating Frye's theory, the influence is nonetheless evident in all aspects of Reaney's trilogy. Given the difficulties faced by the 2005 revival, the practical exploration of this influence by the artists producing the plays seems essential for the meaningful reception of the performances. Turnbull acknowledged that much of the visual impact of the plays began with and resided in the recognizable symbols and images articulated in Frye's *Anatomy*. These images have a visceral connection. The stage directions for one scene for example, (omitting dialogue), read as follows:

³² By no means is *The Donnellys* the only outlet for Reaney's musical leanings either. He had written libretti for several operas with composers John Beckwith and Harry Somers, and as early as 1960, had completed a performance piece entitled *One Man Masque*, which incorporated music and rhythm. In *Performance Poems* published in 1990, Reaney states that "one way of making your poems performant [sic] is to have brilliant composers set them to music" (34). Fittingly, the year after Frye's death at a conference on Frye held at Victoria College, Reaney and Beckwith presented "In the Middle of Ordinary Noise" a musical portrait of Frye. (Warkentin 495).

33. The Greek term for contemplation.

A model of the Donnelly's curtilage (house, outbuildings and barn) is brought in and set down.... Have the model set fire to and burning now by two Vigilante "ladies" with torches.... Four neighbours turn their back on a blazing house.
(Reaney *Handcuffs* 260)

The world of fire, in Frye's 'Theory of Myths', is a "world of malignant demons like the will'-o'-the-wisps, or spirits broken from hell, and it appears in this world in the form of the *auto da fe*³⁴...or such burning cities as Sodom. It is in contrast to the purgatorial or cleansing fire" (*Anatomy* 150).

To return to Turnbull's statement:"when they see water and flame you are getting very strong associative properties, or even the little bit of incense that is in part three, just, you know unlocked untold depths in anyone who happened to be Catholic. And so ...burning a doll's house, uh huh!" (Turnbull), it becomes obvious that most the objects in the play were chosen, not just for practical or historical reasons, but for their symbolic nature. According to Frye, archetypes are communicable symbols and we should expect to find at the centre of archetypes, a group of universal symbols. "I do not mean" he states, "that there is any archetypal code book which has been memorized by all human societies without exception. I mean that some symbols are images for things common to all men, and therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited" (*Anatomy* 118). Such is the case of the burning house. The fear of fire, of losing all that one has worked for in this manner is universal. This is what Turnbull is referring to and how influential *Anatomy* was on these symbolic choices in the trilogy cannot be underestimated.

³⁴ 'Act of Faith'-commonly associated with burning at the stake for heresy during the Inquisition.

Of the Donnelly family, Turnbull says “The heroic nature of the family in terms outlined by Frye is obvious and is impressed upon us. For example, “when Mr. Donnelly returns from prison to meet his boys after seven years and we see ‘the shadows of the seven Donnellys grow huge and by themselves towering over the theatre’” (Noonan 280). On the page, it seems at times as if Reaney has tailored every image and word to fit Frye’s theory. We can draw direct lines connecting the theory to the practice, the conjecture to the concrete. On the stage, Reaney and Turnbull created a piece of theatre that could only have occurred through the synthesis of very particular things at a particular time and chief among these was the influence of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism*.

Alvin Lee, in his biography of Reaney notes this influence from the early days of the relationship and clearly notes this relationship is exceptional “Although there are still many readers (...) who firmly believe that the influence of literary criticism theoretical or practical, can only be inimical to a poet’s development, such does not appear to have been the case with Reaney’s learning from Frye. Those acquainted with Frye’s writings will recognize that his is the kind of criticism which can in a profound way be a shaping and liberating experience for artists” (Lee 122) This, it is clear, is exactly what Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* did for Reaney.

It would be simplistic to claim that Reaney, Turnbull, and Frye were exclusively responsible for the development of the three plays and that *Anatomy of Criticism* was the only influence. The work of the actors, designers, and crew contributed enormously to the end result of this complex theatrical process. It must be acknowledged, however, that Frye’s theory laid the foundation upon which Reaney and Turnbull assembled the entire theatrical construct. The lengthy development process allowed for exploration of the ideas of *Anatomy* in a concrete theatrical manner. The interplay between the ideas articulated in *Anatomy* and in *The Donnellys*

remains profound. The complete dramatic process—from writer to director to designers to artists— came under the influence of that creative interplay. Keith Turnbull sums up the overall creative and collaborative experience:

I do think that in a way the whole company was somewhat fearless and had a voracious appetite for dramatic experience. And if the dramatic experience took you somewhere you hadn't been before? Scary, but we thought "let's go for it!"
(Turnbull)

Appendix 1:**Character List (alphabetical) *Sticks and******Stones***

Black Man

Boy (also appears as voice of boy)

Brimmacombe

Cassleigh

Chorus (Variously divided into groups:
Others, Men, Women, Barrel Rollers, Sticks,
Stones, voices of Men and Women, All,
Voices, Kids, Women, Men, and Populous
etc.)

Coroner

Darcy, Mr.

False John, False Jim etc. (all of the
Donnellys in caricature)

Farl

Fat Woman

Gallagher

Gaoler

Ghost of Mrs. Donnelly

Girl (also appears as voice of girl)

Grace

Grog Boss

James Donnelly Sr.

Jennie Donnelly

John Donnelly

Keefe

Lady Head

Maggie

Man

Mr. Fat

Marksey

Mrs. Donnelly

Mrs. Farl

Mulowney

Negro woman

Pat

Priest

Sarah Farl

Showman

Sir Edmund

Son

Stub

Surveyor

Tom

Will

<i>The St. Nicholas Hotel</i>	James Donnelly Sr.	The `Coaches` (voices supplied by whoever is physicalizing the coach)
Apprentice	Lady	
Aunt Theresa	Lewis	Tollman/Tollgater
Bailiff	MacDonald	Tom Donnelly
Baker	Maggie	Tom Ryan
Bartender	Maggie`s Father	Traveller (x2)
Berryhill	Maids (x2)	Will Donnelly
Bill Donovan	Mary Donovan	Voices (numerous)
Boy	McCrimmon	
Bridget Donnelly	McKellar	
Brooks	Mike Donnelly	
Carrol	Miss Maguire	
Cessman	Morrison	
Child	Mr. Maguire	
Chorus	Mrs. Donnelly	
Constables	Mrs. Ryan	
Corcoran	Ned Brooks	
Donaldson	Ned Ryan	
Farl	Nellie	
Farmers (X3)	Norah	
Fat Lady	Nun	
Fiddler	Priest	
Finnegan	Schoolmaster	
Frank	Sid	
George Stub	Stagedriver (x2), Ancient Stagedriver	
Girl (x3)		
Greenwood	Squire	

Handcuffs

Ann

Ax Woman

Bill

Bishop

Bob Donnelly

Bridget Donnelly

Carroll

Cassleigh

Chief

Child, Grandchild

Chorus

Clerk

Constable

Coroner

Crimmon

Doctor

Father Girard

Girls (x3)

Jennie Currie (née Donnelly)

Jerome

John Donnelly

Johnny (who hid under bed while murders
took place)

Judge

Jurors

Kate

Keefe

Kitty

Lawyers

Lindsay

Mahoney

Maria

Marksey

Mater and Pater (Donnelly's parents)

Mr. and Mrs O'Halleran

Mr. and Mrs. Glass

Mr. James (Jim) Donnelly

Mrs. Donnelly

Neighbours

Norah

Paperboy

Pat

Peggy

Priest

Station Agent

Stompers and Clappers

Theresa

Tom Donnelly

Tom Ryan

Traveler

Whalen

Will Donnelly

Appendix 2: Interview with Keith Turnbull in Montreal, 4PM 8 January 2010.

Transcribed by T. Loretto, 13–16 January 2010.

Teri makes a brief comment about some criticism regarding her topic (Frye) as it is such a structured formalist approach in a post modern crazy world...

Keith: He was very unfashionable at a time, certainly when I started using him to teach my actors, it was very, very, it was in the 80's, and everyone was like "Oh my God! Northrop Frye" and, but you do have to read his work because it's pre-feminist theory, none of that is included but...

Teri: What I really wanted to speak to you about is your experience with Frye and Reaney. I'm looking at how James Reaney might have been influenced by and/or used Frye, as well as the performance. Any sort of connection between Northrop Frye –was there that connection?

Keith: Oh yes, very much. I will try to be as exact as I can-some this is really ancient history! Yeah, Yeah I mean uh-I was trying to remember today and Susie was there at that time too but she doesn't remember any of the work we did on Frye. I can't remember when it was, my guess is after The Donnellys. The NDWT (NOTE: *inexplicably named. This is not short for anything-Teri*) was in residence in London and one of the things of our residence was that we did work with a number of classes um, and so we did uh- what I call the Frye Circle. And, and, my memory of the most influential, and this is where I am not sure I am accurate, Frye's essays is the Third Essay. Theory of myths and the (generic? *Word?*)...because it is absolutely dramatic. Some of the others are wonderful from the point of view of other things but...(*Teri: I am focussing on that section quite a bit*) so we did, and I have since gone on and done a fair amount of work with what I call, another process of Frye's Circle, but it all started with that class, which I think we did, like I don't know, know three times a week or something for a number of weeks, and uh, what it was, we just, essentially put on this floor, this huge circle which started with "romance one" at one point, two, three, four, five, you know, into irony, down into comedy and up to tragedy and back into romance.

Teri: Fantastic-and you could pretty much explore any character within this?

Keith: Songs, characters, great poetry, uh, essentially building up an associative reverberation for each one of the forms. And then, and again I can't remember, I'm sure we did it then but since then I've used it a lot separate from Jamie, but I'm pretty sure that we started it there, where we would take a character, so we would build up these reverberations around each of the forms: and then we'd take a specific character and walk the character through, so when you walk a character from (he gestures in a circular fashion)

Teri: through the romance, irony, comedy points?

Keith: Yeah, and some characters of course, would become very strong and vital in some areas and other areas they would not be. And we would also take things, once we figured out, then we would take characters and walk them directly across the circle from one to the other, so you would...and play with things, at the time Olivier, well not that many years before, had done the *Titus Andronicus* that he was famous for and when they cut off his hands, um, he did one of those things where he moved it into, vocally he went into a huge scream and then transformed it into cosmic laughter-with his hands gone...which was a kind of a devastating moment of the theatre—something that you can't really get to with pure psychology-the fashion, you know the fashion of the 20th century American theatre, but when you took the character and moved them from the tragic moment right across to the either comedy or comedy into black irony, then physically, that moving, that physical moving across the space from one association to the other, you could get that kind of dynamic transformation. It also meant that, this is what we tried to do with the casting too, ah, we, when we were doing the workshops and all that stuff for the Donnellys, I would intentionally make sure that say, whoever played John Donnelly or Mrs. Donnelly also at some point played a villain. So that you got closer to the Blake, you now there's ...that there is...the demonic and the divine are combined. So that's a lot of the casting decisions we always tried to make, tried to make sure that...

Teri: That there was a balance in there that combined both elements?

Keith: yeah, that like the 'Fat Lady' who is such an awful person...but by the time we get to part three, she's one of the heroines, the comic heroines. So that influenced the casting and the editing because you see when one of the things that I got more and more critical with Jamie, is that hmmm, one of the things that I don't think he was as strong as I would have liked with drawing from Frye was the whole structuralist question. So and after going through the process of the Donnellys, because the major change for him was *Listen to the Wind*- that was where he did the whole artistic transformation from a kind of Shavian dramaturgy to epic, more Peking Opera, epic, men's death-all that kind of epic dramaturgy. And then, I think the next thing after that was-was pretty much the Donnellys. We started those workshops and with somewhere between 5 and 6 hours worth of material.

Teri: and they are such substantial plays anyways...

Keith: Yeah, they are about three hours now, but they were

Teri: "Shave" ian takes on a whole new meaning... (both laugh)

Keith: And uh, from the workshop often we did cut significantly, Jamie cut significantly in two, no all three of them, and did significant rewrites. But when we were in the process of rehearsing, he would come up on a Friday, I would show him what we'd worked on this week, with a little bit of trepidation on my part. And then I'd say, take a look at that, of course with huge holes in them now, go the bar, where we would chew over everything and then he would go, I think he was staying at Victoria College at the time, go to his little cubicle in Victoria College and he'd

work until dawn-we'd meet at ten o'clock or ten thirty, go through the rewrites and changes as much as I could, -because when you read them- *laughter*-there's a lot of props that you had to figure out too and "can this character do a fast change to that character?"- you there's a lot of-so we did that and then we would rehearse it, cut it and throw it together as best we could and let him see it Saturday evening rehearsal and then he's go back to London on Sunday...

Teri: And rewrite?

No pretty well he well-sometimes he rewrote there but most of the work was done at Victoria College overnight. Um, progressively in the Donnellys he gets, there's a vast increase in sophistication. My favourite is still Part Two and I didn't like part three when we were working on it. (*Whispers*-*"if I ever hear another word about the Donnellys again"*-*gestures and laughs*) But I did the Part Two again in Banff just before and we were supposed to go out and do Part Three and of course I did all the background and design work and ended up with a much deeper respect for that than when I was doing it. Anyways...

Teri: I have only physically seen only the first one at the NAC so...

Keith: Andrey Tarasiuk called me up before the NAC version and asked me if I thought the ladders were important. And I went "well-from a staging point or cinema-graphic point of view, (*laughter*) well, they are the central metaphor..." The road is the ladder, the buildings- and he wanted to cut the ladders... (*more laughter*)...

Anyways, I wished, because then after the Donnellys, it all started again, and I thought "why are we starting with a nine-hour *Wacosta* again?" Well, I just, as much as his poetry and his capacity at efficient characterisation were most extraordinary, it did improve vastly from, you know, *Listen to the Wind* through to the end of *The Donnellys*, but the actual structuring of the material did not. He really needed... which was a very healthy thing too because it kept him connected to the audience, When we did the previews, we actually four previews, and you could never get away with this these days-um, we'd do the first preview and then we'd do an audience discussion and Jamie and I'd meet and he'd go away, and then we go to the bar of course (*laughs*) and then he go away into his cubicle again and he's come up with was often, well like, radically restructured. So like every fucking props list had to be redone, every lighting cue, and we were, you know, there were no computers in those days-it actually had to be done, everything had to be done manually. After the second preview the same thing would happen, usually not as radical, but still significant, and after the third preview, we did changes right after the preview, so we didn't have a lot of time so they couldn't be major. I mean they could be major, but they couldn't be massive. They couldn't be large in number and major. And then we just kind of went "Oh, give the actors one chance to do the same thing twice in a row!" (*laughs*). But Jamie really did very, very directly respond to the audience and he interpreted it very well too. He wasn't stupid about it.

Teri: To redirect a bit, do you think that Jamie made references to Frye on purpose. Was he a believer of what he read in Anatomy of Criticism?

Keith: Oh yes. Absolutely.

Teri and did he see that resonate with the audience?

Keith: Yes! Yes...and it goes, I mean I just, not just, last year, finished a new opera in Sweden, which was all based on the works of William Blake and it was great to get back to Blake again to realize-well, massive parallels to Reaney's work. And Reaney worked on Spencer-all that, but I think his affinity to-you see after he got his doctorate he *really* become a poet. His wife Colleen was really the poet, and he was the bad boy short story writer. And so I think his, I mean of course he was writing poetry before, but I think that it was that his poetry became central to his life's work while he was studying with Frye. So it's hard to separate Frye from Reaney.

Teri: So all of that influenced- would obviously have translated into his other works-you probably can't separate the poet from the playwright

Yeah, yeah and the fact that, what I think that one of his major artistic transformations, from a theatre point of view, happened when he was with Frye. So to bring Frye's ideas and Jamie's ideas, well, there was certainly a difference; there is certainly a difference, but...

Teri: that is why I am looking at influence. Reaney took these ideas and ran...made them visual and aural...

and *that* really is *Listen to the Wind* and some of those earlier puppet plays and children's plays, *Names and Nicknames*, because, and that's what people don't realize, the five plays, *Killdeer and Other Plays*, I'm not sure I'm exactly right on this but at least marginally, people don't realize, that those plays were published before any of them were produced! So they become literary, because at the time there was no Canadian theatre...so ah...well, no one was doing Canadian plays, but they were reading them. And also it connected into that kind of weird thing that-well for 50 years or so-the Canadians and the Russians were the ones who read all this poetry! Books and books of poetry! And (*laughs*),

Teri: True, kids don't realize that these days...and I didn't realize that they were published before performance. So that's a really strong literary connection...

Keith: We used to call- we, well the big influence on *Listen to the Wind* was Peking Opera, when he started to see Japanese theatre-one of the things that we did around Frye's Circle too, is we were developing the physical techniques and metaphors for what we called "Canuki" Theatre. So, and we were very strongly influenced by Kabuki and Kabuki -san, and Noh theatre...

Teri: Which is also strongly rooted in myth and symbol.

Keith: And transformation. Huge transformation. So that was, we put our rough and unruly ‘Canuckedness’ together with Kabuki and superimposed them all over Frye’s circle. (laughs).

Teri: Did Jamie ever say to you or mention to you that he felt people could recognise the “Frygian” elements-even if they weren’t familiar with Frye?

Keith: Very much. When I do the Frye’s circle, I won’t let anyone read this (*indicates Anatomy on his table*). They can read it after they’ve done it. ‘Because if they read it first, particularly actors and too many directors are fearful of analysis and once you’ve done the Frye circle and you’ve done your own romance play, third form and you’ve done this and you’ve done that, you read this and you go “yeah, yeah, oh yeah...” Like when we were doing all of these things the people were doing them were, particularly myself and Patsy Ludwick, -we never made a big thing of Frye or *Anatomy of Criticism*.

Teri: was it just in the accepted canon of reading?

Yup, was to get the real physical experiential, and I’ve used the Frye circle for directors-I’ve used it as an exercise analytical thinking and transform it into a creative tool for performers, not an intellectual exercise.

Teri: Frye is presenting us with a structure and the actors/directors are taking it and making it concrete...and probably changing it in a way? Evolved into something-so many theories get lost because they are never practiced!

Keith: And you couldn’t really get at, like if you were looking at what I was mentioning earlier, that Titus Andronicus transition? You can’t really get to it from just reading about it, you really need to experience each one of those universes.

Teri: That’s what I found when I started reading these plays again-Jamie’s use of the tree. Is that Frye’s ‘tree of death’ maybe?

Keith: Yup (laughs)

Teri: and winter autumn, the journey’s the forest? Off topic, how much did that book about the Donnellys piss Jamie off?

Keith: Oh that horrible one? Oh a bit! Trash...

Teri: It seems to me that part of his (Jamie’s) purpose was to humanise the Donnellys or take it away from this type of look, understanding why things were done...

Keith: Much more a portrait of a social environment

Teri: I heard about this legend when I was a kid...Friends who had a band called the Black Donnelly’s had to change the name when they toured-good band too!

Keith: yeah, there is a misunderstanding in –well mostly the French culture- about the use of the word Black “I meant *Black* as in Black Irish sense” (laughs)

Teri: Where there any feelings you had that the plays would have been very different if you hadn't looked at Frye?

Keith: Oh yes.

Teri: What might I recognise if I went to see, as an audience member, any Frygian elements? Or would I recognise? I don't know if this is the right question to ask!

Keith: Well I think because, I think the epic nature, because once you've started to see all creation, all literature, all art as totality, then you... it opens up your creative muscles and your creative ear and eye, so that transition from one world to another in the very Shakespearean sense of constant change on stage, it takes preponderance rather than the more ummm...his early plays-*The Killdeer and Other Plays*, were often criticised at the time because of their kind of rambunctious energy and that they didn't have a really consistent tone to them, but I thought the criticism was absolutely wrong. That's it's exactly the opposite, in that they should have been praising the inconsistencies of tone and get into much less of a Shavian parlour drama and release much more of a metaphoric imagination rather than this combination of psychology, early Freudian psychology the kind of “unities of time, space” and all that...but, and I think because of Frye, because Frye looks at creation as this massive vista, it is all connected, even the worm in the middle of the rose the serpent in the garden, you know you could mix these metaphors.

Teri: I recently looked at the broken narrative in a paper, I think Jamie was ahead of his time. The movement through time and space, the non-linear narrative... they say it (Frye) is so structuralist-formalist, but in reality his theories, well, how they manifest, in the work of Reaney is almost a precursor to non-linear or post dramatic work. Because now we have a great basis to move from in which to begin to play with 'reality' and time...

Keith: yes...and I always wish he had taken a little bit more of the structuralism and formalism from Frye! (laughs): But I was get a bit fed up by then! “Oh no! Not another five hours!” (laughs)

Teri: and then you got into opera! (both laugh) Is there anything you can think of that you came up with an image or theatrical device that you actually thought “this is Frye? People will recognise this as Frye if they know his work?” Something that was directly based in Frye?

Keith: No...but yes...it's not that they would recognise Frye but when they see water and flame you getting very strong associative properties, or even the little bit of incense that is in part three, just, you know unlocked untold depths in anyone who happened to be Catholic. And so

...burning a doll's house, uh huh! These images have a visceral connection, but I wouldn't say that we were trying to demonstrate Frye, but he was such a wonderful source.

Teri: The rocks, how stark the city is, the dryness, the sticks, the trees in the beginning of the trilogy are dark and arid...

Keith: but it gets much more velvety and lacy and lush by part three and...

Teri: It evolves and changes so much. The team behind this evolution...must have...did you guys ever opening discuss Frye, opening banter around the bar...

Keith: Yes, well Jamie! Have you read, Eco's *The Name of the Rose*? He knew who had done it about a third of the way through (*laughs.*) So our knowledge of Frye? Nothing compared to his. I mean we also had Blake and Yeats, the Brontes and on and on.

Teri: A real love for literature

Keith: I mean, it's like Frye, I love Frye's humour. It takes some time before you can...

Teri: Took me awhile, but yes...

Keith: It was because it people would ask me, "Why Frye?" I would say: I'm from small town Ontario, not noted as a cultural leader in the arts and on top of it all my university education was all in sciences and I ended up doing a degree in political philosophy. I kind of thought, well I have a choice! I could just go Robart's library, whatever the big library is, and I start reading everything, and but I'm not going to get to read it in my lifetime, so I'll take Frye: because he is such a deep reading of so much literature.

Teri: Without being obtuse, he's pretty clear, there's clarity...

Keith: Yes, and he's been digesting the western library since he was seven in Moncton. He just brings so much. He gives us windows on to such a vast world, and I think that's what Jamie took from Frye too. But it's not I mean there were other writers too. Do you know Haggard? The 19th century thumper novelist? *King Solomon's Mines*? And what was the other one? (*calls to Susie, his sister in the other room, she replies "She!"*) That's right, "She". I mean Jamie loved that stuff-this sort of myth porn. (*all laugh*)

Teri: I don't know if I have anything to ask, but if you had anything to throw out there?

Keith: Susie? Were you aware of Frye?

(Susie Turnbull: Yes, remember, I think we were doing *St. Nicolas Hotel*? And Frye came back stage and Patsy had no clothes on but her underwear? And she went "Oh! Hi, Mr. Frye!")

Keith: (*laughing*) Of course! All we had were mixed dressing rooms, and everyone in ...

Teri: Their skivvies?

Keith: And less! And he's this little Methodist Minister! Really shy and... *(laughs)*

Teri: So Frye actually came to see the plays? Did he say anything? Any comments?

Keith: No, not really. I mean we chatted of course but, you know, you don't come back after a show and say...well you know. But I think he and Jamie had more developed conversations about the work.

Teri: Any other thoughts?

Keith: Hmm, I have, I think read, most or all of the plays, I think, I directed pretty much every Reaney play for awhile, *The Donnellys*, *Canadian Brothers* and *Muldoon*, I do think that in a way the whole company, was somewhat fearless and had a voracious appetite for dramatic experience. And if the dramatic experience took you somewhere you hadn't been before? Scary, but "let's go for it!"

Appendix 3: Formation of NDWT Company

The following history of NDWT written by Reaney is kept in the University of Guelph archives. It is reprinted here from www.lib.uoguelph.ca/resources/archival_&_special_collections/collection_update/11/13jr/print.html. 5 November 2011.

NDWT--Its Birth and Death--What did it Mean?

by James Reaney

Introduction: In 1982, the following obituary appeared in the entertainment pages of the Globe.

NDWT CLOSES DOWN

"The NDWT Company is suspending operations for a year, Keith Turnbull, NDWT's artistic director has taken this step because the company's deficit is now \$53,000 and he sees little chance that it will be paid off quickly.

For the past six years, NDWT has presented 19 Canadian plays and it was responsible for the establishment of the 500-seat Bathurst St. Theatre. Through its tours north of the 50th parallel it inspired the establishment of the Northern Delights Company of Sioux Lookout, a native theatre with which NDWF still has close ties. NDWT was also responsible for a playwright development program from which came the CBC-TV series, Home Fires.

Where NDWT has had trouble is in establishing a clear cut identity. Its versatility, one minute a James Reaney play, the next a musical workshop like Orders From Bergdorf, has given audiences a confused image.

NDWT board chairman Robert Johnson emphasizes that NDWT is coming back for the 1983-84 season; the year off will be dedicated to raising the money to pay off the deficit and re-establish the company on a sound financial basis."

Curtain Rises

What follows is long overdue, a fuller version of the story behind a remarkable and lively theatre company which flourished, and also struggled, from January 1975 to January 1982. What it tried to do

was produce and often tour, both nationally and provincially, original plays from its headquarters at Bathurst Street Theatre, Toronto. A great many of these plays were dedicated to the concept of "the story of our people", were epic and folkloric in style, with large casts. A spin-off company, The Northern Delights Company, toured native settlements in Northern Ontario from a headquarters in Sioux Lookout with shows of special relevance to these communities acted out with a significant native presence in their casts. To put the whole story in a nutshell, there was enthusiastic and generous support for these aims from audiences all over Ontario, particularly those outside the Golden Crescent, but generally speaking, the same fervour never developed in the immediate area of Bathurst Street Theatre, particularly with the press whose theatre outlook was dominated at this time by Miss Gina Mallett, a Britisher with firm ideas about the absolute non-necessity of any local theatre that tried to tell the story of our people. This was vanity and boosterism so far as she was concerned, and these views extended to her evaluation of the Irish National Theatre movement led by William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge et al., when, in response to a question of mine at a seminar for journalism students at Western University, she replied that the Irish theatrical movement had produced little of lasting value! In the teeth of such bleak winds, NDWT's courage in surviving as long as it did looks positively Homeric. However, like many other Canadian theatre organizations brought to life by our desire to be a culturally mature nation, as well as to receive some help from a Canada Council suddenly interested in the theatrical expression of this goal, there were enemies enough within without worrying about the limp coverage by the press or the reviewers with killer-contracts. One such enemy was the name--NDWT.

The name, according to Rick Gorrie (Johnny O'Connor in Handcuffs), as he drove me around Saskatoon last winter in his truck, came about in a Halifax tavern, one evening in 1972. Those present with quarts of beer in front of them were Keith Turnbull, Patricia Ludwick, Jerry Franken, Suzanne Turnbull, Gorrie himself, and Elizabeth Bedwell. Some said: "What will we call it?" and here was the fateful moment, for, thinking to satirize such pompous acronyms as MTC or TNM, someone off the top of their head, rhymed off a meaningless acronym--NDWT! and condemned members of the group for all time to spend hours of explaining this over the phone to potential patrons and funding sources. "Do you mean your title doesn't mean anything?" would reply a Mother Superior of a convent or the head of a paint company. At length, in self-defence, group members delivered such fantasies as "No Debts with Turnbull" or "Ne'er-do-well Thespians", but does such a brave and ambitious organization need such an early embryological problem? One other aim mentioned at the tavern gathering was "to put on original plays". Both this aim, and the desire to found a company run by the actors themselves are highly praiseworthy. If only, though, there had been a drama critic around who could have given all this just a bit more of a back-up theory and also have market-tested the name.

The Play's the Thing

At this time, the group of actors gathered around Keith Turnbull were working on Listen to the Wind for Neptune Theatre. If you read my Fourteen barrels from sea to sea (Erin, Ontario, Porcupine's Quill), you will find out just how that leads to my working with Turnbull and his group on the prototype workshops for the Donnelly trilogy produced by Tarragon Theatre and Bill Glassco. There was an ideal division of labour here. The shaping of a complex trilogy was guided by author and director in an unofficial unit separate from the nurturing theatre organization whose skilled and sympathetic staff raised the money, pushed the publicity, and generally prepared the cradle for the child produced by the Halifax Workshops. When NDWT started its existence, it never seemed to realize (see Fourteen barrels) that the first year of touring the Donnelly trilogy nationally, an epic struggle in itself, was, in effect, floating on the production expertise already lavished on it by Tarragon. The crunch would come when NDWT moved out into the double world of not only writing and developing the plays, but also handling the tough challenges of funding and publicizing them. The tension between the two worlds of creativity and finance was the largest reason for the eventual collapse of the company.

One ominous note was struck just as the tour closed so triumphantly with a nine hour long continuous performance of the whole trilogy at Bathurst Street Theatre--to which the press did not bother to come. A nine hour Nicholas Nickleby from abroad is different! But a homegrown epic all in one day? At the time, I thought this rather boded ill for relationships with entertainment editors and future original productions.

The first of these-- I wanna die in ruby red tap shoes --was a satirical revue attacking the whole range of contemporary theatre in Toronto and Stratford. Based on Pilgrim's progress (as well as the Lindsay Anderson film O you lucky man!), it showed a young playwright taking his script to the Slough of Despond (unnamed Toronto theatre) or to the Valley of the Shadow of Death (unnamed children's theatre--many gasps of recognition here) and so on, until, at last, after blowing up the Stratford Festival Theatre (just as those triangular white killed young soldiers knobble out in Robin Phillips Antony and Cleopatra), he falls into the creative arms of Bill Glassco at Tarragon. Gina Mallett gave Ruby red a favourable review!

After this September 1976 opening, the November show was a folkloric extravaganza about a farmhouse in the swamps near Lake St. Clair haunted by a poltergeist in the 1830's. C.H. Gervais and myself had spent the summer putting this together. I was a bit surprised at how after the years spent in establishing

the flexible, undesignated style of The Donnellys, NDWT did not consult the authors about design, but Sue Lepage's set and costumes were striking, and there were stunning effects and some haunting work with animal and bird puppets. The show toured well.

The next year was extremely busy for me as unofficial dramaturge in preparing a dramatization of the first Canadian novel--a Gothic romance about the Pontiac Conspiracy at Fort Detroit in 1763, and in conducting a battle to finish a script for a generous and important commission from the University of Toronto to write a play about the student strike in 1894 in which the young Mackenzie King had early shown his familiar trick of having it both ways at once. The dismissal premiered in the fall of 1977, and, to my mind, was the show where the NDWT's pursuit of elegant design and production matched the script without getting in the way of its fluidity. Of course, the company did not have to raise the money for the show at the same time.

1978 started with a disappointing Tom Thomson play called Breakthrough. The script was minimal, ironic, purposely banal, not at all like Thomson, and audiences stayed away. After intensive workshops at Western, the Gothic romance mentioned above, Wacousta, went into rehearsal. It was very exciting to watch three native actors work, and to hear Thomson Highway teaching members of the cast speeches in Cree, the closest we could get to Pontiac's Ottawa tongue. In this year, NDWT held its first of three street festivals, part of a year long effort to build up a community of interest in the immediate city neighbourhood. A projected play being researched called The house on Euclid Street was also part of this scheme, and although the government cut in grants prevented production, nevertheless this company-researched script about a nearby neighbourhood became a CBC television series scripted by Jim Purdy known as Homefires. Touring shows came to Bathurst, one of the most original at this time being Adele Wiseman's Old woman at play, starring not only her mother but 300 or so of the latter's dolls.

Northern Delights in 1979 was a company collective created in Northern Ontario with native actors, a spin-off of the Wacousta tour in that area. This year also brought Gervais' The fighting parson, the first original Windsor play, developed with an NDWT director, portraying a United Church Minister during prohibition who shot up saloons and their keepers. 1979, as well, brought Orders From Bergdorf, the show, a workshop, in which NDWT by itself came closest to what it could do when its aesthetic fitted the script involved. This story involved a designer who created hat hats out of feathers, but, fairytale motif, couldn't quite get two thousand of them done in time for the big order from New York. Potentially, as an elegant and original musical, I thought it had a future. Radio Free Cree, scripted by Paulette Jiles, was touring the northern Indian communities out of Sioux Lookout about the same time.

Finale

Now we come to the last two years, and one feature of this period is that the pressures of just existing at Bathurst Street Theatre are too much. No amount of energy and organizational skill can cope with an institution where, of necessity, charity cases continually thread through theatre space on their way to the church office. Unknowns sleep and drink in all the secret nooks and crannies an old Methodist church can muster. Relationships with the church's minister and dwindling congregation are fragile. So, after the production of Layne Coleman's The Queen's cowboy, the company moved its headquarters to a small house on Adelaide St. West with productions of Trebol Dark (Stephen Fraygood) and Swipe (Gordon Pengilly) performed at Toronto Free Theatre. The final straw, however, came partly from outside--from the decision to underwrite Caravan Players' Horse Play, a touring show from British Columbia produced with wagons drawn from performance date to performance date by mighty Percherons. An outdoor show, rain meant expensive and unpredictable cancellations, but still the horses had to be fed their hay, and the kind of hay they ate had to be just right. Hay was expensive give-up time. The struggle to keep one's eye on finances while trying to find new scripts and hammer out, too late, why you were doing this, finally became one-sided. And so, the obituary appeared in the Globe.

But I choose not to remember this part of NDWT's short life. The parts really worthy of scrutiny are the joyous feeling one always received from a group of actors who loved poetry and responded to it with wit and often genius. As time goes by, the liaisons worked out with native actors and audiences may easily prove the start of a tradition. And it is the first six months of NDWT's existence--the Donnelly tour--that keep recurring to me. For example, I remember the 1985 visit with St. Nicholas Hotel to Mount Allison in Sackville, New Brunswick. The night before, we visited the dining hall and sang songs from the show to the students, who all ate together while a chef cut slices of beef for them from what looked like a half a steer roasting in the centre of all the tables. "When we heard you singing, we thought you must be Capers" said one of the Mount Allison girls after we'd finished the sing song and sat down with them.

Yes, that was the original idea of NDWT--to be a portable Cape Breton of fiddle tunes, poetry, and imagination and words that could be carried about the land with its own stories.

Appendix 4

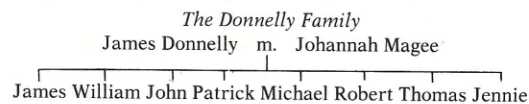
Historical Donnelly Family Members

- James Donnelly - patriarch (1816–1880) *
- Johannah Donnelly - (née Magee) his wife, and mother of all the children (1823–1880) *
- James Donnelly Jr. - son, (1842–1877)
- William Donnelly - son, born with a clubfoot (1845–1897)
- John Donnelly - son, the first child born in Canada (1847–1880) *
- Patrick Donnelly - son (1849–1929)
- Michael Donnelly - son (1850–1879)
- Robert Donnelly - son (1853–1911)
- Thomas Donnelly - youngest son (1854–1880) *
- Jenny (Jane) Donnelly - the last child, and the only daughter (1857–1917)
- Bridget Donnelly - Patriarch James' niece from Ireland (1858–1880) *

**asterisk indicates died in attacks of February 1880*

Chronology of Important Dates

(Note: This is an historical-literary chronology of events particular relevance to *The Donnellys*. I have compiled it mainly from Orlo Miller's book *The Donnellys Must Die* (Toronto:Macmillan, 1962), Reaney's own research, and the trilogy itself. A small number of changes in historical fact, including names of some people associated with the Donnellys, have been made in the plays for purposes of the drama.—J. Noonan)



1761 — the Whiteboys movement and name originates in Tipperary
 1766 — feud between the Whitefeet and Blackfeet Irish in Tipperary begins—it is conveniently dated from March 15, the day on which Father Nicholas Sheehy, parish priest of Clogheen, Tipperary, is hanged, drawn and quartered for complicity in the murder of an informer against the Whiteboys—this day became known as 'Sheehy's Day' to the Tipperary Irish in both Ireland and Canada, especially in Biddulph township where many of them settled

The Donnellys

- 1816 – March 7 – James Donnelly, Senior, born in Tipperary
- 1823 – September 22 – Johannah (al. Judith or Julia) Magee born in Tipperary
- 1830 – refugee Negro slaves from the United States establish the settlement of Wilberforce in Biddulph township, near the site of Lucan, Ont. – shortly afterwards Irish settlers arrive in Biddulph – some of them petition the government not to allow more Negroes to settle there – many Negroes move away
- 1834 – survey of Biddulph township
- 1841 – James Donnelly marries Johannah Magee
- 1842 – James Donnelly, Junior, born
- 1844 – the Donnellys sail from Ireland to Canada
- 1845 – January – William Donnelly born
- 1847 – spring – Donnelly family settles on a piece of vacant land of about 100 acres on lot 18, concession 6, on the Roman line in the township of Biddulph near the village of Lucan, Ontario, formerly named Marysville
- September 16 – John Donnelly born
 - George Stub burns Negroes' barns
- 1848 – census of Canada West is taken, in which the Donnellys are included
- Patrick Donnelly born
- 1850 – November – Michael Donnelly born
- 1853 – Robert Donnelly born
- 1854 – August 30 – Thomas Donnelly born
- 1855 – fall – Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ryan (al. 'Fats') and Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Farrell move to the Roman line
- 1856 – Mr. and Mrs. Ryan buy the south half of the Donnelly farm
- 1857 – James Donnelly is awarded 50 acres of the land on which he squatted
- Feb. 6 – Richard Brimmacombe, an English Protestant cattle drover from a neighbouring township, is killed near the Roman line – Patrick Marksey is named a suspect and Tom Cassleigh an accomplice – the murderer is never brought to justice
 - June 25 – Mulowney's logging bee at which Donnelly strikes Farrel with a handspike; Farrell dies three days later – Donnelly goes into hiding
 - December – Canadian elections – in the local riding Holmes (the Liberal and Protestant candidate) defeats Cayley (the Conservative and Roman Catholic candidate) – Donnellys and Keefes invariably vote Liberal
 - Christmas Eve – in a post-election incident Andrew Keefe's

Chronology

tavern is attacked by Protestants—George Stub, recently appointed Justice of the Peace, knocks down Keefe's signpost during the attack—no convictions are made

END OF ACT ONE OF STICKS AND STONES

- 1858—Reprisal by Roman Catholics on Keefe by burning his stables—10 horses are burned to death—no convictions
 - Donnelly gives himself up and is convicted of the murder of Patrick Farrell—Sept. 17 is set as the day on which he is to be executed
 - July 7—Mrs. Donnelly presents a petition for clemency to Governor-General Edmund Head at Goderich, Ont.
 - July 28—Donnelly's sentence is commuted to seven years' imprisonment—he is sent immediately to Kingston Penitentiary
 - Jennie (al.Jane) Donnelly born, the last of the Donnelly children and the only girl
- 1860—the Ryans move away, but Mrs. Donnelly can't afford to buy the half of the farm which the Ryans owned
- 1861—Will accused of stealing 6 fleeces of wool—the case is heard before Magistrate Stub—Mrs. Donnelly accused of receiving the fleece as stolen goods
- 1862—the indictments against Will and Mrs. Donnelly are withdrawn
 - raising bee at Gallagher's at which Mrs. Donnelly prevents Cassleigh and others from torturing Donegan, brother of Patrick Farrell's widow Sarah, now Mrs. Flannery
 - Donegan is found in bed by Father Crinnon, the parish priest, the flesh burnt off his bones—Father Crinnon later becomes Bishop of Hamilton
- 1863—Tom Donnelly and Jim Feeney swear fidelity in blood
- 1865—July 27—Donnelly released from prison
 - Sept. 12—body of Patrick Marksey, the suspect in Brimmacombe's death, is found decapitated and mutilated

END OF ACT TWO OF STICKS AND STONES

- 1866—Quinns' barn is burnt out—they leave the township—Cassleigh buys their property
 - the other half of the Donnelly property is for sale, but is bought by Mrs. Ryan with the help of her family
- 1867—July 1—Canada becomes a Dominion
 - fall—persons unknown burn Donnellys' barn while they are at

Chronology

- Mike works for the Canada South Railway, is married to Nellie Heins, and rents a house in Lucan
- Pat runs a blacksmith shop in Thorold, Ont.
- John and Tom live at home
- members of the Donnelly family buy property near Bad Axe, Michigan, perhaps with a view to moving there
- 1878 – April 1 – Bob convicted of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm and sentenced to two years in Kingston Penitentiary – ‘two down and seven to go’
- Sept. 17 – Federal general election – in Biddulph Tim Coughlin (Conservative and Roman Catholic candidate) is elected over Colin Scatcherd (Liberal and Protestant) as Sir John A. Macdonald and the Conservatives win the election
- 1879 – February – Father John Connolly, who has been working in a parish in Quebec, is appointed parish priest of St. Patrick’s, Biddulph, by Bishop John Walsh of the diocese of London
- June – Provincial election – in the North Middlesex riding John Waters (Liberal) defeats J. McDougall (Conservative) – Father Connolly gets parishoners to sign pledge to aid him ‘in the discovery and putting down of crime’
- Bridget Donnelly, aged 21, niece of Mr. Donnelly, arrives from Tipperary, Ireland, and comes to live with the Donnellys
- Sept. 20 – James Carroll appointed county constable at the urging of the Vigilance Committee
- late summer – members of the Committee search and upset the Donnelly home looking for William Donovan’s lost cow – they then go to Will’s and are driven away as he plays the fiddle – a number are charged with trespass, destruction of property, and assault, but all charges are thrown out
- Dec. 9 – Mike Donnelly stabbed to death in a bar-room in Slaughter’s Hotel in Waterford, Ont., by William Lewis, who is punished with suspicious lightness for the murder – ‘three down and six to go’ – Mike leaves a wife and two children living in St. Thomas, Ont.
- Martin McLoughlin, a member of the Committee is appointed magistrate

END OF THE ST. NICHOLAS HOTEL: THE DONNELLYS, PART II

- 1880 – Jan. 10 – Bob returns home from Kingston Penitentiary, then leaves for St. Thomas and Glencoe

The Donnellys

–Jan. 15–Pat Ryder’s barns and stables are burned down—warrants issued for the arrest of Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly—Mrs. Donnelly is visiting Jennie, now Mrs. Currie, who lives in St. Thomas, when James Carroll arrests her—after four adjournments, Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly are to appear before Magistrate Tom Cassleigh on Feb. 4 in Granton, Ont.

The Fateful Week:

- Sunday, February 1
- Father Connolly preaches against depredation in the parish
- the Donnellys have not attended his church since John was refused Confession the previous April
- Monday, February 2
- the feast of Candlemas—candles are blessed on this day
- Tuesday, February 3
- feast of St. Blaise, on which parishoners have their throats blessed with candles
- Mr. Donnelly writes a letter to the *St. Mary Argus* declaring innocence in the Ryder fire, mails it, buys some things in the village and picks up 11 year old Johnny O’Connor to take care of the farm next day when he and Johannah will be in Granton
 - John goes to Will’s to get the cutter for their journey and decides to stay there the night
- Will attends a dance in the evening
- about 10 pm Jim Feeheley visits the Donnellys, then leaves his coat there while he goes to the Ryders’—the door is left unlatched for him to return for it—and for the Vigilance Committee to enter the house
- Wednesday, February 4
- five Donnellys are murdered
- shortly after midnight a mob of about forty members of the Vigilance Committee led by James Carroll enter the Donnelly home, kill and mutilate James and Johannah as well as Tom and Bridget Donnelly, and then burn them and their home—Johnny O’Connor hides under a bed during the massacre
- 1:30am—Johnny O’Connor, the sole witness of the murders, arrives at the home of Pat Whalen across the road
- 2:15am—the mob arrives at Will’s home, shoots and kills his brother, John, thinking it is Will—they start for Jim Keefe’s home but disperse before arriving there—‘six down and three to go’—the other three (Will, Pat and Bob) all die natural deaths
- Thursday, February 5, 7:00 pm

Chronology

- inquest opens at the town hall of Lucan
- Friday, February 6
- funeral is held in St. Patrick's Church for the five murdered Donnellys—Pat, Bob and Jennie return for the funeral—two coffins are needed: one for John and one for the remains of the other four—Father Connolly says the Funeral Mass and preaches the sermon
- Wed., Feb 11—Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent
- March 13—preliminary hearing ends at London—six men are committed for trial: James Carroll, John Kennedy, Martin McLoughlin, James and Thomas Ryder, and John Purtell
- April 12—trial of the six opens at London—then it is postponed to the fall assizes
- Late Sept.—fall assizes open in the Middlesex County Court-house in London—all six prisoners plead not guilty—the defence is granted a severance of trials
- Oct. 4—trial of James Carroll, the first of the prisoners to be tried, opens—W.R. Meredith is the defence lawyer; Aemilius Irving is the Crown lawyer; Mr. Justice Armour hears the case before a jury
- Oct. 9—the divided jury is unable to decide on the guilt of the accused—a new trial is required
- 1881—late Jan.—second trial of James Carroll begins, this time before two judges: Matthew Cameron and Featherston Osler
- Jan. 29—ninth day of the trial—jury returns their verdict: 'not guilty of murder'
- the same day, after eleven jurors are sworn in for the trial of Thomas Ryder and John Purtell, Irving requests that their and the other three cases be tried at the next assizes—all the prisoners are granted bail. No further trial of them or of anyone else is ever held for the murder of the five Donnellys killed on Feb. 4, 1880.
- summer—Will, Pat and Bob leave Lucan—Pat returns to Thorold; Bob goes to Glencoe; Will settles in Appin, Ont., and runs the St. Nicholas Hotel
- 1897—March 7—Will dies at home in Appin
- Bob returns to Lucan and runs the Western Hotel
- Father Connolly dies at Ingersoll, Ont.
- 1860—June 14—Bob dies in Lucan
- 1914—May 18—Pat dies in Thorold
- 1917—Jennie dies in Glencoe and is buried in Wardsville, Ont.; she was the last surviving member of the Donnelly family
- 1937—Feb. 25—Will's wife Nora dies in London, Ont., aged 85

JAMES NOONAN

Appendix 5

From actual court transcriptions regarding James Donnelly and the Farrell (Farl in the plays) murder: spelling is as per original transcript

Information of Witnesses and Inquisition

Queen vs. James Donnelly: Murder of Patrick Farrell, 1857-58

United Counties of Huron and Bruce

To Wit

Informations taken of Witnesses severally and acknowledged on behalf of our Sovereign the Queen, touching the death of Patrick Farrell, at the dwelling house of Robert McLean, Known as the Exchange Hotel in the Township of Biddulph in the county of Huron on Sunday the 28th day of June, in the twentieth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria, Before John Hyndman Esquire One of the Coroners of the said County, on an inquisition then and there taken on view of the body of Patrick Farrell, then and there lying dead, as follows, to wit:

Patrick Ryan of the township of Biddulph in the said County, Yeoman, being sworn saith, I was at a logging Bee at William Maloney's, on Thursday the 25th day of June in this Township, a quarrel took place between one James Donally and Patrick Farrell who was drunk and accused Donally for shooting him once before. I did not hear him say so at this present time, was about 20 or 25 rods when I first saw the fight. from there did not see them fighting with sticks they fought for about 20 minutes or half an hour as near as I could say. Michael Carroll was with me where I was working at that time. Shortly afterwards some one hollered out that Patrick Farrell was dead, the cry was between them that James Donally had killed him (Farrell). When I came up to the place there were 3 teams in the field and about 17 or 18 men, the only men I knew by name were Cornelius Lanagan and Martin Mackie , do not believe he (Farrell) was killed by a blow from a man's fist, a man's fist would not give him the cut he had which pointed a little over the forehead thinks it was done by some weapon there were some handspikes lying about where they were logging they all said He (Farrell) was struck with a handspike the breath was in him that was all, did not go near him at all until they went up to the House then I looked at the cut. Lives on this side of that place about a mile have lived there 8 years going on 9 cannot remember the names of those that were standing there, J. Donally was standing within a rod of where Farrell was lying. Donally did not assist in taking the body from the place did not see any blood about Donally might have enough for all I know, I heard them say when we were coming round a log pile, that Patrick Farrell was killed by a blow from a handspike used by James Donally, Michael Carroll was a little behind me perhaps about a rod and a half when I heard this said we all went home after the body was taken up to Maloneys house when I left. That is all that were going my way I am not a teetotaller generally take a little. Thoman McLaughlin was Grog bass

that day. I think it might be between two and three o'clock that day when the fight took place. John Towhy was there also I cannot call all the names to mind at present.

Cornelius Lanagan of the said Township and County aforesaid sworn. I was present at the logging bee on Thursday the 25th June saw two men fighting James Donally and Patrick Farrell the deceased.[...] I did not see it done. I heard it. [...]I saw no one quarrelling with Farrell but Donally. [...]I can't suspect any body else but Donnally of striking the blow. I did not see Donally look at the deceased nor did not see him go away. I saw him in the forenoon of last Friday at his own door. I have heard that he is gone away. I have also heard that he is still in the neighbourhood but don't believe it. Heard said that it was Donally that struck the blow.

Cornelius Maloney , of the said Township, being sworn says as follows. [...]I heard some talk of an old grudge between them but saw no symptoms of it. I did not see any one try to prevent Donally from striking him

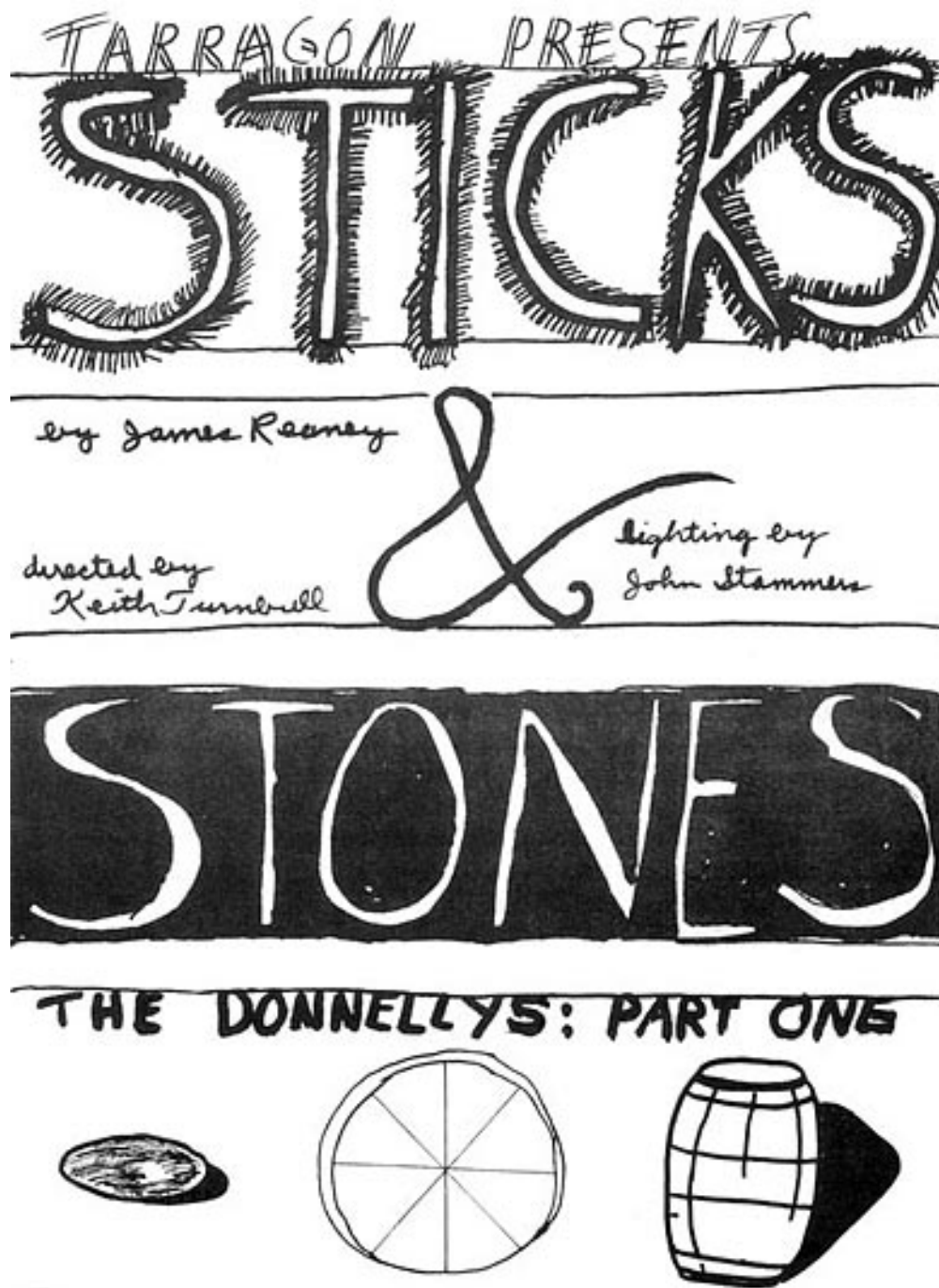
Mrs. Farrell Widow of deceased of the Township of Biddulph and County aforesaid Sworn, saith, [...] Mr. Orange's little boy was sent by Con Maloney to tell me to come over to the Concession he wanted to see me I asked what was the matter if Patrick Farrell was hurt or killed, I asked him who done it and he said Oh// who done it before, from that expression I knew it was Donnelly he meant.

An Inquisition taken for our Sovereign Lady the Queen, at the Township of Biddulph, in the County of Huron, on the first day of July in the twentieth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lady Victoria, before John Hyndman Esquire,

The Jury, Consisting of Robert Achison Shell, Foreman; Samuel Bradley, James Nugent, Robert Porte , Thomas Hamil, James Robinson, Barber Regan, William Porte , Robert McLean, Patrick McIlhargdy, James Ryder, Michael Dougherty, Bartholomew Lavin, Samuel Flanery and James Hogan, good and lawful men of the said Township duly chosen [illegible] being then and there duly sworn and charged to inquire for our Sovereign Lady the Queen, when, where, how and after what manner the said Patrick Farrell came to his death, do upon their oath say that James Donally of the Township of Biddulph in the County aforesaid not having the fear of God before his eye, but moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, on Thursday the 25th day of June last 1857, with force and arms in and upon the said Patrick Farrell [...]did make an assault, and that the said James Donally with a certain wooden handspike of the value of one penny, which they said James Donally then and there had and held in both his hands, him the said Patrick Farrell then and there feloniously, wilfully and of his motive aforethought, did strike and beat, then and there giving into him the said Patrick Farrell in and upon the left side of the head of him the said Patrick Farrell with the said wooden hands aforesaid, one mortal fracture of the length of three or four inches, of which said mortal fracture, he the said Patrick Farrell instantly died. [...]

James Donally after the doing and committing of the said felony and murder aforesaid withdrew and fled for the same.[...]

(Source: J.J. Talman Regional Collection, University of Western Ontario Archives, Donnelly Family Papers, B4877, File 3, John Hyndman, Information of Witnesses and Inquisition, Queen vs. James Donnelly, Murder of Patrick Farrell, June 28, 1857.)



House program cover for *Sticks and Stones*, part one of *The Donnelly Trilogy* by James Reaney, 1973. (From Tarragon Theatre Archives)

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