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UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

THE CURRENT STATE OF SOUTH-WEST RURAL REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE.

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the
degree of

RESEARCH MASTERS

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Abstract

Ryan Wilce

The Current State Of South-West Rural Representation In Contemporary Theatre.

The following thesis will present the current state of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre and explore who has the right to tell rural communities stories. Using rural proofing as a base framework will present a new framework for theatre makers to inform and influence their creative representations of South-West rural life. To understand the current state of representation and create the framework to improve this, I will be using formalist, actantial and script analysis of select plays, practitioners and theatre companies representing rural life in their work. Equally, my work as a theatre maker will be analysed as I present ways in which artists could improve South-West rural representation.

Keywords: Rural, representation, South-West, Stereotypes, Co-creation, reputation, community, rural proofing, text analysis. (37)

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The following thesis features several contemporary theatre productions that represent a South-West rural life. From those productions I have taken adjectives and imagery they use to present a rural Devon and Cornwall and create the following monologue titled ‘So, where’s it to then?’. This monologue is highlighting the rural life that is being represented in contemporary theatre. This is also an example of the ‘revisionist’ methodology that I have

applied to many of the texts I have been analysing as I attempt to create work that changes the way South-West rural life is represented in contemporary theatre.

So, where's it to then?

Ere Whose Fukin debt is that? I think I know.

Its owner as ad a fuckin nuff

Living in this grave yard of dreams. Full of booties like a vivid nightmare,

I watch him laugh. Cry. In this vile realm of alf made, alf mutated...or just plain dead.

He gives his Fukin debt a shake, He gives his fukin debt to the country bumpkins.

And laughs until his belly aches. Full of the regional cuisine...cold,stale,grissly ginsters.

The only other sound's the break,

Of distant waves and alright birds...their awake.

The Fukin debt his faults. And his dads fault. And his mums mothers second cousins aunites fault.

He lives in sludge, primordial sludge Beadux beys and Mutley mafia deep,

No promises to keep,

Cows with foot and mouth. And no sleep

It's a bubble...with a thick layer of shit.

He rises from his rusty bed, Not

a farmer like his dad.

He never took to silage

And if you dun't take to green fodder round ere you may as well be dead

Promises of tractors, debt and war on Slapton sands

Doubt he's ready for the day ahead.

Introduction

As a Working – Class Theatre Maker raised in Devon and Cornwall, I began this research journey to explore why I felt uncomfortable seeing my home counties presented on stages.

Why was I uncomfortable seeing my hometowns being given limelight. George Orwell states 'If you look for the working classes in fiction, and especially English fiction, all you find is a hole ... When they do find their way between the corners of a book, it is nearly always as objects of pity or as comic relief.' (Orwell in Jones, 2012: 109) I was experiencing lots of

theatre performances that were presenting my home counties, either whole performances or single characters, but what many of them had in common is that they were comic relief characters, or narratives that relied on stereotypes. This then made me shift my focus from the problems around Working-Class representation to focusing on how South-West rural life was being portrayed in contemporary theatre. The Dictionary definition for rural is ‘ Rural places are far away from large towns or cities’ (18) The productions and play-texts I have analysed as examples of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre are all plays that are set in rural Devon or Cornwall (1). I will also reference other texts that have been produced outside of these perimeters as examples of positive rural representations, to further highlight the state of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre. These include but are not limited to Caryl Churchill and John McGrath. I have also spent time understanding the history of rural theatre to help understand what about rural representation has changed. All of the above will be used as reference points to compare positive rural representations to the representations I have concluded as negative (2).

As I analysed the work I was experiencing, I began to realise it was not the attention to the counties but the way they were being presented. Therefore, I wanted to analyse the productions I had experienced representing Devon and Cornwall and understand why these representations were happening, their traits, similarities, and the effect they may have on audience members. As a Theatre Maker, who is making work in Devon and Cornwall with communities, it was important to me to embody this research in my creative process and practice. Therefore, elements of this project include reflections on my own work, and myself putting my research into practice. Additionally, I will explore the principles of co-created and applied theatre practice that I have developed as a possible concept for devising theatre that doesn’t provide harmful representation of a community (24).

Background to research

Theatre and its relationship to rural communities is an area of performance that has been explored by a variety of different practitioners, including Jo Robinson and her text 'Theatre and the Rural' (2016) however, there isn't a focus on Devon and Cornwall, but rather rurality in larger areas, such as Scotland and Wales. Robinson is a Professor at Newcastle University, and her work focuses on the history of regional theatre and performance. Robinsons research has provided me with a large understanding of the state of more general rural representation in contemporary theatre, as well as the history that has got us to this point. I have been able to understand the variety of rural and regional theatre practice and use it as a lens to focus on South-West rural representation. Throughout out my research I am yet to uncover practitioners with a particular focus on the depiction of South-West life, which will lead to my research-having an impact on the field of rural representation.

I want to begin by discussing what I mean by rural and rural engagement within the theatre industry. According to the Oxford Dictionary rural is 'connected with or like the countryside.' (Oxford University Press, 2010:399).' This may create an image in one's head about what rural will look like. A memory from a holiday, a postcard or something from the TV. Francois Matarasso, a community artist and researcher for the National Rural Touring Forum, developed 'Only Connect' (2004). This is a report written for the UK's National Rural Touring forum in 2004. Matarasso argues what rural means and that it is so varied:

It can mean the smoking pyres of health cattle...or the vegetable factories staffed by illegal workers under the gang master's thumb. It can mean wind farms and barn conversions,

foxhunting and holiday cottages, isolated pensioners, or old-fashion village schools. Pick your own. (Matarasso, 2004: 22)

This here suggesting that exact characteristics of rural are varied and subjective and there is not one correct answer. As an individual growing up in and around rural communities this is my experience. Which led me to question why the contemporary plays, included in my research, that are set in rural Devon and Cornwall all offer similar tone, characters, settings, and viewpoint.

Rural life has been an interest of theatre audiences, which we can date back to Medieval plays. Robinson addresses this and describes how:

In the context of British theatre this reaches back to the origins of British drama in the medieval mystery plays of the Corpus Christi cycles, where before the performance of the Annunciation to the shepherds, the actors playing those characters reminded their spectators of the practicalities of working life in the countryside. (Robinson, 2016: 4)

One element of this enactment that stood out to me was how the performers let the audience into daily struggles of rural life, and the realities of rural living. This is not an element of rural theatre that has transferred through time, as many of the productions that explore rural life included in this research, do so as either a comical format, a mythical place, or an area for undereducated labourers. The one exception is Bea Roberts 'And Then Come The Night Jars' (2015). Roberts looks at the heart-breaking Foot and Mouth epidemic that damaged farming communities throughout the UK. Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion reiterate the problematic ways in which rural communities are portrayed, saying:

We must be aware of a broader cultural tendency to see the rural...as a romanticised space, a magical and uncanny space. If we continually cast the rural in this way without countering it with a more pragmatic reading-then we also romanticise rural policies and strategic solution that emerge from rural areas. (Hamilton and Scullion, 2004: 20)

As I explore further on in my research, 'Applied Theatre' underpins a large area of my suggestions for creating an improved state of South-West rural representation. In Helen Nicholson's 'Applied Drama' (2005) she states:

'One common argument is that communities of location are often romanticised, harking back to an imagined era in which homogeneity, aunty and shred values formed the basis of social interaction. A related position, developed particularly by feminists, is that localism has had the effect of keeping people in their place of entrapping the poor and confining women to a sphere of the domestic' (Nicholson, 2005: 86)

This analyse of a community forms part of Nicholson's argument as to why applied theatre is required in communities. But it reinforces the point here that the romanticising of communities is problematic and has consequences. (27) Hamilton and Scullion touch on the dangers of presenting rural communities in a mythical framework, as it starts to affect how we view rural communities off the stage. (3) Rural representation has also featured in classic texts, including the works of William Shakespeare. In the Shakespeare comedy, *As You Like It* (1598-1600), those who have committed some wrongdoing to the 'urban' kingdom were banished to the forest of Arden. Arden was a mythical place and a place for punishment.

Anne Barton (2017) reminds us how in Macbeth, Birnam Wood brings the Scottish King his doom. Both these classical texts are presenting rural areas as negative. But more importantly mythical subjects. (4)

Having explored that ‘rural’ can take many forms, I want to understand why the texts included in this study have similar negative versions. I also want to explore how the theatre industry has attempted to bring rural life to modern audiences and explore a more modern rural narrative through my work as a Theatre Maker. (5) Echoing Jo Robinson, I too ‘want to suggest that theatre and performance offer a space and a stage through which different visions of the rural can be explored, countered and critiqued’ (Robinson, 2016: 4). Therefore, I should be able to have access to a range of rural representations that do not all offer the similar narratives (i.e., take place on a farm) or resolve in death, loss of income and alcohol abuse. I will explore contemporary interpretations of the rural to see how other rural communities have been portrayed exploring the similarities to the portrayal of Devon and Cornwall and the reasons behind that. If other rural communities receive a more positive depiction, this will highlight the problematic nature of the representation of rural Devon and Cornwall as ‘the reality of lived rural is frequently overlaid with external representations and perceptions, which can shape the potential of rural lives’ (Robinson, 2016: 4). By stating ‘...shape the potential of rural lives’ (Robinson, 2016: 4) Robinson is highlighting how the representation of rural communities in Devon and Cornwall can affect how audiences view the community. As well as alter their expectations of themselves. Although, through my methodologies I am not able to accurately measure how an audience perceive a rural community, but in my final chapter ‘Rural Proofing’ I offer a solution for this when looking at how we can measure impact of rural stories on rural communities. (6)

First, I needed to understand rural theatre as a genre and productions on commercial platforms that present a rural community of any kind. In the following section, and further on in my work, I refer to the ‘scale’ of a production. According to the Arts Council England ‘Analyses of Theatre in England’ (2016) a large-scale venue is a ‘venue with capacity over 800’ (Naylor, Lewis & Branzanti. 2016:32). Middle-scale theatre is ‘400-800 seats’ (Naylor, Lewis & Branzanti,2016:32). A small scale theatre is anything less than what is defined as ‘Middle-scale’. (7)

Due to its scale and fame, a key production to the understanding of the depiction of rural communities in contemporary theatre is Jez Butterworth’s production *Jerusalem* (2009). Perhaps one of the most crucial due to its high-profile production in the West End and Broadway, winning Olivier and Tony awards, being viewed by over 300,00 people. Yet, from the outset, it is important to point out that this story about rural life was never performed in collaboration with a rural community raising questions around authenticity. One review of *Jerusalem* explores how Butterworth’s play offers two versions of the rural: ‘the country we recognise, scruffed right up against the dreamy, idealised place of popular imagination-that scepter’d,green, and pleasant and, stewed with an island that is squat and gristly and fierce’ (Robinson, 2016: 2). That is, despite offering multiple versions of rural life, it is based in a ‘scruffed’ up rural location, once again highlighting just one, narrow, fraction of rural life. (8)

Other iconic representations of the rural include *The Farm* by Nell Leyshon (2002). Leyshon’s work explores the farms of Somerset and provides insight into the intrinsic financial situation that faces modern rural communities. What differs from Butterworth’s *Jerusalem* is the multiple layers explored and not just presenting one version of rural life.

Unlike Butterworth's production, when writing this play Leyshon 'drew on her experiences of growing up in a rural farming community'. (Robinson, 2016:49) Furthermore, Leyshon's production toured the South-West with the Somerset based company Strode Theatre thus allowing the communities to engage with the work in their own spaces. Clearly, not all shows about rural communities should stay in rural places, as it is important that these narratives are told across the UK, but arguably it is more important for them to be created with or by those who have experienced the subject matter or find a moment in the process for these communities to have agency over their narratives.

Another production that is crucial to me understand 'rural theatre' and 'rural representation' is *Fen* by Caryl Churchill (1983). This is a piece set in the Rural community of 'The Fens'.

Although not a piece set in Devon or Cornwall Churchill's provides me with examples of good practice to support my review of contemporary rural representations. (9).

As Dunning argues:

[Fen is a] semi documentary play for which the Joint Stock Theatre Group is known, and the actors were investigating the lives of the men, women and children who work on the farms in the Fens. The actors lived with them, worked beside them, and listened to their memories and dreams. They learned about lives that were hard and narrow, circumscribed by community and religious tradition, tight-fisted landowners, and avaricious land-buying conglomerates. (Dunning, 1983: 1)

Therefore, this approach to creating work, that is representing a rural community, is one that gave agency to the rural communities whose narratives the play was exploring. It amplified their voices and would allow for a less harmful representation. (10) With their focus on the

actual lives of those who live and work in the rural environment, and the attempt to tell their stories from the perspective of those inhabitants, both productions seem to play an important part in what Anna Harpin has more recently identified as a new ruralism and the 'resurgence of the local' in her 2011 article 'Land of Hope and Glory: Jez Butterworth's Tragic Landscapes'. Harpin argues that this renewed focus on the rural and local 'marks a countermove to the non -spaces and its devastating environmental consequences' (Harpin, 2011: 66) Here Harpin is referring to a new focus within British theatre within the last decade, on places and people from rural or regional places who were once anonymous. She also refers to companies such as Liverpool Everyman, Northern Stage and Paines Plough who have a 'burgeoning interest in localism' (Harpin, 2011:65) once again referring to the surge or trend in which local or rural stories started to become prioritised.

Another production that is vital to my understanding of a positive and constructive representation of a rural community, thus giving me a solid foundation to compare with South-West representations, is 'FARM' (2013), produced by Irish theatre company 'WillFredd'. 'FARM' is an immersive, promenade piece of theatre that explores rural daily routine and struggles, focusing on all rural communities from young farmers, beekeepers to allotment owners. Christopher Collins work 'Performing the Rural in Contemporary Irish Theatre' (2019) has been fundamental in allowing me to understand how rural representation has been analysed in other communities. It has also provided me with examples of positive representation, such as 'FARM', so I can start to understand what needs to change to improve the current state of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre. 'FARM' was a site-specific piece that offered audiences a chance to embody and understand more about working rural life. Their slogan for the production was '[t]here is a farmer inside everyone...come and get your hands dirty'. (WillFredd.com, 2013) Collins explains how

‘FARM demythologized the rural by demonstrating the effects of labour production and commodification’ (Collins, 2019:11) Collins is referring to how rural life is often mythologised (it becomes something of fantasy, a place where magic happens) whereas ‘FARM’ highlighted some of these harsh realities and allowed urban audiences to experience them first hand. Furthermore, it also showed how constantly thinking of rural as a place of past, old-fashioned, or rare is problematic for the economy and wellbeing of its inhabitants. Therefore, ‘FARM’ presented a rural that was to be taken seriously and not as a comic or magical gimmick. I am yet to come across a piece of performance that provides similar representation of Devon and Cornwall. In a short interview for the ‘BIG HOUSE’ festival the directors of WillFredd, Sophie Motley and Sarah Jane Shiels, state that this work was made alongside farmer groups in Dublin. Furthermore, ‘FARM’ explores ‘...how rural nostalgia is a consumable cultural gimmick, a by-product of the commodification of rural space.’ (Collins, 2019:13) Touching on the cultural appropriation of rural life, and how elements of this rural life, if used by non-rural communities for financial benefit, as gimmick to a production, or to increase interest in a production is problematic. Overall, WillFredd’s production of ‘FARM’ is said to have ‘...offered urban audiences a temporary rural retreat... [as w]hen urban becomes too much, the simpler life of the country is escaped to because it has affective power’ (Collins, 2019. 14) Not only does this touch on the immersive nature of the production and how the site-specific form of the piece allowed the audiences to really escape their normal urban life’s momentarily and understand what it means to live in a rural community, but it also provides a representation of rural life that is beyond the holiday escapism that is often portrayed. The phrase ‘temporary rural retreat’ is interesting, as this implies that rural life can be used or exploited for urban people’s gain, and as tool providing urban audiences with a sense of escapism, creating a false sense of constant peace and ‘holiday’. Nevertheless, ‘FARM’ allowed urban audiences to really understand what it

means to live in a rural community, by visiting the actual place and experiencing some of its realities, redressing the power into the rural narrative, rather than having audiences sit and laugh at a heightened version rural (as demonstrated in the South-West rural representations featured in my research). Having urban audiences go and experience rural life and understand the daily routines and what it means to live there is important because in other productions of the rural audiences are presented with a sense of rural life as being out of reach or not a place that 'real' people can live. For example, the mythical elements of 'Horse Piss For Blood' by Carl Grose (2012), create a sense of Cornwall as a fairy-tale village. Additionally, Henry Darke's *Booby's Bay* (2018) also set in Cornwall, provides a narrative of young adults either being trapped in the county or returning to find that most people they had grown up with are still there. It also has a brief focus on the tourism into Cornwall. Robinson captures this and explains how in '...performances from the early modern period onwards, the rural often stands for a particular kind of 'otherness', to be visited and returned from, perhaps transformed' (Robinson, 2016.6) Thus highlighting that these rural narratives do not appear to present a rural where characters can live comfortably and prosper and welcome new comers, but rather feel trapped, long to escape and deter any outsider from entering the community. Therefore, WillFredds 'FARM' is another example of rural representation that has been done to positively impact the community's representation. 'FARM' by WillFredd, 'The Farm' by Leyshon, and 'The Fens' by Churchill are all productions that have created a rural representation that looks past the stereotypes to tell rural struggles and champion rural life, but so far these are all rural narratives that sit outside of Devon and Cornwall, highlight the problematic nature of the representation of rural Devon and Cornwall in contemporary theatre.

Space

Rural representation in contemporary theatre is portrayed in various spaces. Space referring to the types of space that are represented to an audience and also the physical space in which the audience experience these rural representations. In Henri Lefebvre's work *The Production of Space* (1974) he provides a triadic model which outlines the different types of space, what they mean and how they can be perceived. These can then be linked to performance and in particular those performances engaging with the rural, and the types of rural space that are presented to audience. The first is 'Perceived Space'. The perceived space is '...linked to either production or consumption' (Halfacree, 2007: 127). For rural this category of space refers to their agricultural links and involvement in food production, harvest festivals and other village celebrations. This is what urban audiences may perceive rural life to consist of and revolve around. If artists create spaces that glorify or stereotype these perceived spaces, we can start to create a rural representation that ignores the difficulties or rural life.

Following this is what Lefebvre describes as the 'Conceived space' which are more '...formal representations of the rural...which refer to the ways in which the rural is framed within capitalist processes of production and exchange' (Halfacree, 2007: 127) So therefore, a space that is exploring rural communities, business and commercial involvements. More representation of the conceived spaces, around business and commercial involvement can counter some of the previous stereotypes in contemporary theatre that rural life is uneducated or fantasised as a place. The final category of space described by Lefebvre is the 'Lived Space' which highlights the '[e]veryday lives of the rural' (Halfacree, 2007: 127). The lived space considers the daily lives of the rural communities and can differ according to different people. This is a useful model to help identify which kind of rural space is being presented. If

more plays represent ‘conceived spaces’ and it can help audiences understand more about how rural communities contribute to the economy.

The space in which these rural narratives are told can affect how rural communities can engage with the work. It is important to mention the progressive work of National Theatre Wales (NTW) and National Theatre Scotland (NTS) in their engagement with rural communities. Matarasso explains that by engaging with the rural communities in a largescale rural touring scheme these venues are actually national, being accessible to the whole nation, rather than just saying they are a ‘national’ theatre. In Robinson’s work *Theatre and the Rural* (2016) she explains how, at the time, NTS and NTW where without a permanent building and therefore ‘[a]s a result, both theatres have made a virtue of creating theatre and meeting audience across the diverse landscape and buildings of their respective home countries’ (Robinson, 2016:73). Therefore, without buildings they were physical more accessible and open to creating work that was available outside of a major city. NTS’s mission statement is to ‘make theatre wherever we can connect with an audience’ (Robinson, 2016: 74) and consequently they create work in all areas from pubs, football grounds, to factories and forests. This ability to reach rural communities Is an element that is perhaps missing from the mainstream London venues that continue to tell these narratives. How can they truly give a fair representation of a rural community from a large-scale venue in London, with little rural engagement. Therefore, part of this research will explore how space and place impacts the representation. Inspired by the organisations and artists above I will be leaning on some of the contextual principles of applied theatre as a solution to the current state of South West rural representation. Nicholson states in ‘Applied Drama’ (2005) that applied theatre is ‘...specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies

(Nicholson,2005:3). Therefore, using Applied Theatre concepts when making work about rural communities could improve the representation and thus benefit the community.

Nicholson also suggests that there is a difference between ‘Applied Theatre’ and ‘Applied Drama’ (Nicholson,2005:4) and whilst I am not trying to offer an new definition of applied theatre in this research I will be leaning on it’s core principles to suggest improved ways of creating theatre that is about rural communities.(28)

Another strand of contemporary theatre that I want to address is the work of site-specific artists Mike Pearson and Phil Smith. Pearson’s production *BubblingTom* (2000) is a sitespecific exploration of rural villages in Wales, and Smith’s work *The Crabwalks* (2004) is walking performance looking at rural Devon. I mention these pieces as they represent rural life and by taking your audiences to the actual rural space, this maybe the only fair way to represent these communities in contemporary theatre. Additionally, Robinson describes the site-specific work and the work of likes of Mcgrath, Churchill and Leyshon as ‘a key route for enabling the voices and the stories of different rural locals to be heard’ (Robinson, 2016: 59) due to their process of working in the rural.

Taking influence from the works of NTS, NTW and WillFredd, I will also be exploring process in this project and how the process effects the representation of the rural community. Alongside the ‘National Theatres’ of Wales and Scotland, I will also be looking to the South-West rural representation presented by England’s National Theatre. In particular their piece ‘My Country: A Work In Progress’ (2017) and try to understand if the state of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre is impacted by how our National Theatre as represented the same rural community.

Overall, I believe there is sufficient background to my rural research to highlight positive and negative representations of rural life (11) . I have identified the need to review how to make theatre in a way that doesn't negatively impact rural communities. As well as a gap within research on theatre and rural to focus on Devon and Cornwall representation. I believe I have a strong and varied understanding of contemporary productions that represent current rural life and what those representations say about the rural community. (12) I understand that there are multiple practitioners and research that underpins rural representation but are limited when it comes to Devon and Cornwall, allowing me room to offer research to the field.

Methodologies

Throughout this project I am consistently reflecting on my own creative practice, as an artist currently working in the industry, creating work about my experience growing up in Devon and Cornwall, it was important to ensure my research was in line with my practice. So, throughout my project I am analysing text and then reflecting on the techniques and findings and applying them to my own work or new pieces of work. I was inspired by the work of Bertolt Brecht and his approach to rewriting classic texts. Brecht took several Shakespeare classics, including 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Coriolanus' and rewrote the text to analyse the representation of Class in these pieces. With Romeo and Juliet, Brecht rewrote scenes to 'help the actors about to rehearse Shakespeare's play clarify their attitudes to the central characters...' (White, 2001: Unpaginated) his intention for doing this was '...he wished us to stand back from characters so that they can be judged in behaviour terms according to moral and political issues, undistracted by personalities or psychological concerns.' (White, 2001:

Unpaginated) In the same way that I am rewriting scenes or creating new scenes in response to my findings of South West rural representation. With *Romeo and Juliet* in particular ‘...It provides a genuine question about the play: to what extent are these young loves just privileged aristocrats, who, by playing out their love fantasies are unknowingly ruining other people’s chances for happiness...’ (White, 2001: Unpaginated) and with my work I hope address about the meaning of these rural representations and the effects it has on reputation of these communities. Similarly, to my research, Brecht rewrote ‘*Coriolanus*’ as he wanted to put the emphasis on the Class struggle rather than the celebration of bourgeois hero *Coriolanus*. He was also aware that the ‘Plebeians’ in the text are comical characters in the original and wanted to rewrite this narrative, just how the constant use of South-West rural life a comic relief is what led to this project. Inspired by Brecht’s work I started to develop this methodology for my entire project. This methodology is pinned on the idea of critiquing the work and then creatively reworking ideas or elements of the text to demonstrate how they may be more aligned with the representation that I am seeking. More specifically this is a composite methodology that, in my research, starts with a text or socio-political analyse of a text. Then using a creative methodology, in this case creative writing, to revise the work. The creative work is an artifact of evidence that a better representation is achievable. This methodology is one that could then be used on my creative work to look at how it is representing South-West rural life in theatre. However, for my research project, my work stops at this methodology and the creative outputs, as my position is subjective and represents me, so I can’t continue to analyse my own work. It could be said that this methodology is a ‘correctivist’ or ‘revisionist’ approach to presenting ideas that better portray a rural life. This research and creative methodology is a process that is my contribution to knowledge.

Additionally, I will be looking at ‘Applied Theatre’ principles throughout this research as applied drama ‘...provides a powerful opportunity to ask questions about whose stories have been customarily told, whose have been accepted as truth, and to redress the balance by telling alternative stories from different perspectives.’ (Nicholson, 2006:63) providing me with the foundations to challenge current representations and offer new ways to create SouthWest rural representations. (29)

Another methodology I have used to analyse productions throughout my project is that of language analysis. The two that I have chosen to work with are the Actantial Model and the ‘Formalist Text Analysis’. The Actantial model is a tool used to analyse a narrative in a fictional or non-fictional story. I chose to use this in an approach to remove as much bias from my analyse as possible, and use this as formula to further understand what the key elements of these plays do to the representation of South West rural representation. The Formalist Text Analysis is a tool that form as a whole, not just the dialogue and characters, allowing me to understand how the art as a whole is representing South-West rural life.

Finally, I spent time in the Theatre Royal Plymouth archive. I used this time to explore productions that had been produced that represented a South-West rural life. I have also required programmes and additional information from the archive about cast and creative teams on the projects I have included in this research project.

Authenticity and self

Throughout my research I often use the word ‘authenticity’ as I try to explain that representations of rural community that play up to stereotypes are not ‘authentic’ and can be problematic representations. The definition of ‘authenticity’ is ‘the quality or state of being authentic; reliability; genuineness (Harcourt:2010:2023) There the representations I am searching for portray a reliable or genuine representation of rural community. (20) The use of authenticity is contested in theatre, as how can performers always be authentic. But I am going to explore how authenticity can potentially be possible. I will do this by exploring the history of authenticity in theatre. As well as trying to understand how ‘authenticity’ can be applied to rural theatre.

Academic and Theatre Practitioner Daniel Schulze, explores authenticity in his work ‘Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance: Make it Real.’ (2017) This explicitly aligns to my research as I try to understand if you can create an authentic representation of South-West Rural life. Schulze opens by laying the foundations that highlight how authenticity can be achieved in theatre and has been done since the ages of classical Greek drama’s, he explains:

‘A striking example is the story of the famous actor Polos, who in the late fourth century BC played the title role of Sophocles’ Electra and the ashes of his own recently deceased son to disperse among the audience and allegedly ‘filled the place not with the appearance or imitation of sorrow, but with genuine grief and unfeigned lamentation’ (Gellius in Zarrilli et al. 2009:66 in Schulze,2017:4)

Here, the reality of bereavement and performance intermingle to produce extraordinary effect on the audience. It is certain that the reality of the performance, be it stylized or realist, has

always moved audiences and has been perceived as authentic. Although this is an extreme example of authenticity, it highlights the longevity and power of creating ‘authentic theatre’. This also highlights how the intrinsic detail adds to the authentic of the work. If this detail was used in the production of rural narratives, audiences would not have to succumb to stereotypes to attempt to demonstrate rural life. Furthermore, when exploring the history of authenticity in theatre Schulze draws attention to the notion that authenticity can be subjective. He states, ‘It is evident that every period and culture will have their own notions of what is to be held as authentic or true, but whatever these notions may be, within their own rationale they are powerful.’ (Schulze, 2017:5) Therefore, when seeking authenticity in the work on stage, what may be deemed authentic to one audience member or community will be different to another. Therefore, perhaps my attempt to challenge or recreate authentic rural life in theatre will be subjective to the audience’s perspective. Could this also be an answer to why London or non-rural creatives, create unauthentic work with stereotypes, perhaps in their lived experience this is authentic. Schulze does also state that this longing for authentic representation is not something I am alone in, but a part of life that has been marked by social media, as he states, ‘authenticity has become a vital preoccupation for many, because it carries the promise of some tangible outside and essentialist reality’ (Schulze, 2017:6). Schulze continues ‘...it is enough to note that the perceived superficiality and fakeness of contemporary culture leads to an increased wish for genuine experience, or some sort of reality that is perceived as not fake – in a word: authentic’ (Schulze, 2017:8). Which encapsulate my need to seek for authenticity in rural representation on contemporary stages. In the upcoming chapters, I will draw on approaches to create rural representations with rural communities at the heart of the process, it is perhaps that the process of creating theatre with people who have lived experience of the topic is the only way to achieve authenticity. (21)

Throughout my research project there has been a constant internal battle between my use of the word 'I' that features regularly in my writing. As an emerging academic using the word 'I' it felt like it was jeopardising the authenticity of my research. In 'I-Dropping and Androgyny: The Authorial I in Scholarly Writing' (1993) James C. Raymond states that 'the suppression of the authorial I in academic writing, is, ultimately, a rhetorical ploy... [designed to create] the appearance of objectivity' (Raymond, 1993: 482) Essentially an attempt to persuade academics to stop using the 'I' for no clear reason, other than for writing to appear to not be persuaded by personal feeling. Furthermore, Gesa Kirsch in 'The Politics of I-Dropping' explains that there is potential danger in removing the 'I' from academic writing. She states that '...omitting the authorial I is a rhetorical strategy that can be (and has been) used to turn opinions into truth, to silence women and other marginalized groups, and to trivialize their concerns.... [T]he uses of an authorial I (or lack thereof) have social, moral, and political consequences for which authors bear responsibility (Kirsch, 1994: 382) .Suggesting that there is a lot of power in the I and by not using it there is the danger of turning opinion in to fact, and I am aware that much of my research has been driven by my opinion and feelings on work, but this may not be the same as other academics with other lived experience.

In relation to the research that I am presenting, this focus on the personal material is a catalyst for me to draw on other research that is focusing on the subject at hand, of problematic representations. Each personal experience is supported by a scholarly source, if there is not a source available that focuses on the representation of south-west rural life, I can draw on research surrounding rural theatre, stereotypes, or representation of the workingclass life. The unique perimeters of my research project would potentially lose their impact without my reference to my lived experience, but I hope to use them in a way that is not

‘narcissistic’. Thompson Writing Program issue the same guidance for when the use of ‘I’ is powerful within academic writing. The first ‘Do my personal views on this subject significantly influence my approach to it?’ (Duke Writing Studio, no date: 3) Within my research my personal views drive the research forward and it was my lived experience and sense of discomfort that that began this research project.

Throughout this project I have also had to be aware of my own unconscious bias. To ensure my research is not based purely on opinion I have been using text analyse to critique texts to further understand how they represent South-West rural life.

Chapter 1

Introduction

To begin my understanding of the current state of representation of South-West Rural life in contemporary theatre this chapter will analyse the character and setting of two productions the presented a version of Cornwall. This chapter will be exploring two plays by Cornish playwright Carl Grose. These plays are both productions that I watched when stage between 2012 and 2018 so will also be exploring the visual images they created, the use of dialect and accent choice by the performers and the physical casting of these performers. I also have both copies of the play text for these productions, one a published copy, the other a rare copy gifted by a member of the creative team. I also have access to the original programme handed to the audience for one of the pieces also. I will be using the actantial model of analysis to annotate these texts and will attempt to draw on a further understanding of what these plays are offering audiences about the region.

The two productions are ‘The Kneebone Cadillac’ (2018) and ‘Horse Piss for Blood’ (2012).

‘The Kneebone Cadillac’ explores a young girl and her siblings’ battles to bring glory to their family name. Jed Kneebone passes away and leaves his diary and car, a Cadillac, to his daughter, Maddie. This leads Maddie to hunt for the truth about her family, and the secrets around who her Dad really was, if he was even her Dad at all. The story also includes Maddie’s brothers Slick and Dwight and their endeavours to clear their financial troubles.

These troubles from the family debt left by their late Dad, as well as Dwight’s drug problems.

Despite this piece putting South-west life on a mainstream platform, it also brought up problematic moments for me as a South-west artist. The first was the accent. The strong

South-west accent was not used to aid the characters narrative but purely for the comic effect. Following this, the remaining story involved a majority male cast drunk, involved with drugs or drink. This projecting an idea of how working-class South-west males live. British Theatre Guide described this play as having ‘paternity enigmas, eccentric aunts, mystery-clad death

of mum, gold mines, missing drugs, stolen copper cable, treasure maps and comedy capers as fact, fiction and boastful claims come home to roost' (Bussell, 2018: Online). All of which are stereotypical, and fantasy led traits used to represent Cornwall. The text itself is written to mimic a heightened South-West dialect with most words missing crucial letters or with poor grammar in each sentence. The creative team behind the work have roots to the South-west as they have lived in the areas they are writing about. I shall be exploring whether this gives them the right to create this kind of work despite the negative representation it presents.

The second piece is 'Horse Piss for Blood' which is set in a dated and mystical Cornish village. 'Horse Piss for Blood' is set in Nancekuke, rural Cornwall. A dramatised version of a real place in Cornwall. Nancekuke is being terrorised by 'The Owl Man'. Virgil, the protagonist, returns home from St Lawrence's mental hospital, with his doctor, Dr Levine. He returns to find his mum, Gertrude, married to his old school bully Dusty. It transpires that Gertrude and Dusty were behind the terrorising 'Owl Man' as a ploy to improve their doubleglazing business. The narrative is interweaved with flash backs to 1976, where a chemical weapons test goes wrong, and leads to the scientists dumping the chemicals. These are then uncovered by Gertrude and used as part of her 'Owl Man' plot. By spraying the town with the chemicals, she can convince people they need good double glazing to protect themselves.

The narrative surrounding the chemical weapons is based on true events that involved Nancekuke between 1950-1976.

In the early part of this play Grose describes this South-West area as dilapidated, tatty, small, and grotty. All words that could potentially leave an audience with a negative opinion on the area before the production has even started. The setting is shortly followed up by a character

saying ‘ enter this vile realm ‘alf made,mutated , or just plain dead’, (Grose, 2012. 15) creating the idea of the South being a place people come to die. Referring back to Henri Lefebvre’s work *The Production of Space* (1974) ‘Horse Piss For Blood’ is a piece that sits in the ‘Lived Space’ as it is a piece of work that attempts to represent the daily life of these Cornish residents, but it different from other residents. This is perhaps more problematic as it as implies there is some truth in the stereotypes presented. ‘The Kneebone Cadillac’ is a slightly more complex space being presented across the ‘Perceived Space’, as we get to see a community come together for drag races. We experience a ‘Conceived Space’ as we see financial struggles effect a community. The we also see the ‘Lived Space’ as we experience the daily lives of this community, that is slightly different for each member. Despite being a narrative held together by stereotypes it does provide a well-rounded view of these different aspects of rural life, compared to ‘Horse Piss For Blood’.

Both of Grose’s work will be analysed using the actantial model, ‘[a] device that can theoretically be used to analyse any real or thematized action, but particularly those depicted in literary texts or images.’ (Hebert, 2007: Unpaginated) Thus, meaning I am able to deeper understand the action behind Grose’s writing and draw on any correlations between his two depictions of Cornwall, and attempt to draw a conclusion on how these depictions affect the representation of the South-West. By applying this model to the analyse of a play text I hope to remove personnel opinion from the reading of the production and analyse what is on the play text as written by Grose himself. The Actantial model was developed by A.J Greimas. When using the actantial model there is an ability to categorise moments and characters of the play into six components or in this case ‘actants’. These components fit in to three larger components called ‘axes’. The three axes are the Axis of Desire, Axis of Power and Axis of Transmission, these are all axes of description.

When analysing any action, the axes of desire, focus primarily on what the protagonist or leading characters 'intentions' are. Within in the axes of desire you have two actants 'subject' and 'object'. In this model a subject has an object, something to achieve or receive. The relationship between the subject and the object is called a junction, this 'can be further classified as a conjunction (for example, the Prince wants the Princess) or a disjunction (for example, a murderer succeeds in getting rid of his victim's body)' (Hebert, 2007:

Unpaginated)

The axis of power can primarily be applied to characters who support or provide obstacles for the protagonist, these actants are known as 'helper' and 'opponent'. The helper supports the subject to achieve its object and the opponent does the opposite. The final axes 'transmission' focuses on the characters or themes that set the protagonist on its journey or benefit/suffer from their actions, those actants are 'sender' and 'receiver'. By categorising moments of the action into these components it is possible to get a clear understanding of intention of characters and how these characters are being viewed by audiences, thus allowing me to compare between texts to see what current state of South-West rural representation is. Furthermore, using the actantial model it is possible to analyse environment, individual moments of dialogue, props, physical action and broader themes. Therefore, I can get a wider understanding of the action in a production and even read how non-speaking or present characters such as wider society are represented and what this is outwardly reflecting about Devon and Cornwall.

My following analysis of 'Horse Piss for Blood' and 'The KneeBone Cadillac' will take the same structure of Professor Louis Heberts' paper 'The Actantial Model' (2007) which explores how the Actantial Model can be applied.

Characters

The first part of my analyse was solely on Grose's characters. In 'Horse Piss For Blood' those taking on the 'Subject' actants are Dr Levine, a therapist from Bodmin, whose object is Virgil, a young man he has been treating for his violent outburst across the last 10 years. The subject is directed toward an object. The relationship between the subject and object is called a junction. With Virgil also taking a subject role with his opponent actant being is his paranoia, that he is battling, he is longing to discover what really happened to his father and attempt to lead a normal life. His Mother, Gertrude, her object is greed. She is also the subject of a plot to make money through a double-glazing scheme. Her other object is the cyst growing on her, that is supposedly Virgil's sister, Nancy. She believes Nancy, a cyst on her face, is really alive and her favourite of her two children. Another object of Gertrude's is Dusty, her new husband who she is manipulating to carry out her will. This also makes Dusty a helper as he is assisting in the desired junction between the subject Gertrude and the object money and greed. All done with his double-glazing business and his façade as the Owl Man. Gertrude sitting in more than one actantial classes is called an Actantial Syncretism. All these characters, across all axes are offering audience stereotypes or fuelling negative representations of South-West rural life. These characters don't provide rural joy but only present greed, mental health struggles and obsessions with the mythical creatures.

KneeBone Cadillac has a seemingly obvious subject in Maddie, whose main objective is to get her father's Cadillac restored and race it. Maddie is also her own helper for the majority of the play, with minimal support from Hooper. There are also moments when she considers who her real father actually was and goes on a journey to discover if Hooper is her biological

father. Her major opponent is the financial mess her father left behind when he died, the bad reputation on her family name and the lack of support from her remaining family. Amongst Maddies family there is also a subject, Dwight, whose main object is to find his missing drugs. His helper is Ennis. There main opponent is the Mancunian drug lords who are after the money they are owed by Dwight. The drug lords also act as the sender for Dwight's journey in this narrative. KneeBone Cadillac's characters are adding dysfunctional family, drug addiction and financial problems to the representation of South-West rural life. Another negative representation to sit alongside 'Horse Piss For Blood'

Environment and Circumstances

As well as exploring characters, I will be using the actants to look at environment and circumstance in Horse Piss for Blood. We can begin by looking at the setting. Grose states that 'Nancekuke is a village on the North Cornish coast (rocky,wind-swept,sheer). Mawnan Woods is on the South (wooded, eerie, estuarine)' (Grose,2012; 1) This environment is a helper to the antagonists in this narrative as it not only supports the dark stories and secrets being told but it physically helps them with their Owl Man character and double glazing business as well as disposal of bodies and chemicals. The community itself also takes on several actants within the narrative as the community is an object of Gertrude and her plans, also a receiver of Dusty and his mischief. But in the end the community members that do come together create an opponent for Gertrude.

KneeBone Cadillac has non-character actants in the form of circumstances. As within the actantial model Hebert states 'An actant does not always correspond to a character in the traditional sense of the term. From a simple ontological perspective (which defines what

kinds of beings, broadly speaking, make up reality) (Hebert, 2007: Unpaginated). For example, it can be inanimate objects, elements, or society etc.

The Kneebone family find themselves in a circumstance that was left to them by their family. Maddy states 'It's all our problem, Dwight. We need to put our heads together and figure out just what the fuck we're gonna do about it' (Grose, 2018: 11). The subject here is the family, and their object is to get themselves out of the unfortunate circumstances they find themselves in. They do not have any help but large opponents in the form of debt, drug lords and a bad reputation. Grose sets this narrative in 'A scrap yard half a mile outside United Downs, a post-industrial wasteland in the mid-Cornwall rust-belt' (Grose, 2018: 1). This post-industrial wasteland is referring to an area that does not rely on heavy industry, denoting the lack of opportunities and way out for the young family. There for the setting here is taking on the actant of opponent as its restricting them all from meeting their objects of a better life.

Across both texts there is clear correlations that offer negative stereotypes on the rural life in Cornwall. The first being dysfunctional family life. This is apparent with both Virgil and Gertrude in 'Horse Piss For Blood', where there is hatred, lies and murder attempts. Similar traits are present in the representation of Cornish families in 'KneeBone Cadillac'. The family encounter drug schemes, debt and lack responsibility or parent figures. Both Virgil and Maddy, both subjects, are the youngest members of their family and they have the most drive and desire to lead a normal life. Another similarity across both texts comes from the opponent actants. Both representations include deceit, greed and schemes to make money. 'Horse Piss for Blood' encounters elaborate ploys to boost Dusty's double-glazing business, using the Owl Man to scare people into getting double glazing. In KneeBone Cadillac this

then comes in the form of drug deals with the Mancunian drug lords and drag racing in order to clear family debt. Additionally, both pieces of text highlight education as an opponent. The obvious in Horse Piss Blood is the bullying that was allowed to take place toward Virgil which triggered his mental health difficulties and consequently his violent outbreaks. But also, the lack of education around chemical weapons and pollution led to the dumping of the 'VX' which resulted in the pollution of the area, contaminating locals and subsequently the creation of the Owl Man. KneeBone Cadillac has no actual mention of education or educational institutes, suggesting the characters have not had any formal education. But there is lack of education around finances as the worry of clearing large debt is a large axis of desire for the KneeBone family. However, they do not have the education to manage this efficiently or the resources to ask for professional help. There is also a lack of education around drug and alcohol abuse and consequently the effects this has on families, wellbeing, and the complications around the financial elements of drug production and intent to sell. When considering how to improve the current state of South West rural representation it would include improving the constant reaffirming of stereotypes. It could be suggested that using applied theatre principles in the creative process would overcome this. Nicholson highlights that 'Practices in applied drama are frequently designed to erode divisions and hierarchies...' (Nicholson, 2005:75) these principles have the potential to effect the communities that are being represented in the theatre piece. (30) Overall, using the actantial analysis I have been able to highlight correlations of both representations of rural Cornwall and draw attention to the negative stereotypes that are being presented to contemporary theatre audiences.

Practice

The use of the actantial analysis could also be a valuable tool when creating work. As I continuously develop my practice my research is affecting my creative process. Below is an extract of work developed using the analysis model. I have taken each of the actants and ensured they are present in the writing. But in contrast to the work, I have been analysing, I have focused on using the model to attempt to realistically present a working-class, rural, South-West family life, that does not focus on deceit, intoxication and lack of education:

2011, Sian sits on the stairs, listening to a heated argument between her parents. She is dressed for a party, she holds her clutch bag and a water bottle. The audience can hear muffled arguments including words such as 'debt' 'insurance', 'repossessed' and accusations of overspending. Dad exits slamming the door behind him. Sian enters the bedroom.

Sian: Mum. Can I go to Jordan's party now?

Mum: (She snaps) Fucking hell! There are bigger problems in the world than running you around to your fucking parties.

Sian: (Shocked at Mums response) Christ. Ok. Fuck this I'll walk then...If I get attacked then you'll feel great. (Knowing full well what she is doing)

Mum: Don't say that you stupid girl. Of course, I'm going to take you

(Beat)

I just need a second.

Sian: (Sitting down next to Mum) What's happened now?

Mum: Just money. Nothing for you to worry about.

Sian: Mum I can work more hours...I'll start paying rent if it helps.

(There is an awkward silence in the room)

Mum: You might have too...we can't even afford to buy Scarlett a coat for school. She's still wearing your old one.

(Beat)

Are you able to work more hours? Will you still be able to get all your school stuff done?

Sian: Mums it's fine. This is more important than mock exams. How much do you need?

Mum: I can go into the overdraft for the food shop...that's not a problem...but could I borrow £30 for the coat?

Sian: Yeah I'll transfer it now.

Sian exits the room. She texts the group chat. She can't come to the party. She lies and says she's been sick. The barrage of texts begins.

The aim of the scene was to highlight small working-class family challenges, but at the same time not relying on negative stereotypes around alcohol abuse, deceit, and lack of education, as highlighted in previous texts. The subject is Sian whose new object is to buy a new coat for her younger sister. Her helper in this quest is her judgement of perspective and understanding of sacrifice of her own income and social life in order to support her family. The sender is her Mum in a physical sense, but also her own initiative, values and understanding of her family situation. The focus of this short piece of writing was not to fill it with stereotyped South-West dialect as is present throughout Grose's work. Although the dialect plays a key part in setting location, it does create a sense of lack of education from his characters and that is not a fair representation of all of Cornwall.

Furthermore, using a similar approach to Brecht's revisionist technique on well-known Shakespeare plays, I have taken two-character narratives of 'Horse Piss For Blood' and creatively explored how the narratives could have been used, to aid the narrative but also serve an improved South-West rural representation.

Inspired by Brecht, who in *Romeo and Juliet*, focuses on the Nurse, I have tried to rewrite narratives for supporting roles within the piece. I have focused on Virgil's therapist, Dr Levine and Dusty.

Throughout Grose's piece there is an underlying theme of Virgil's mental health, however this theme doesn't come to fruition or linked to reality and is certainly overshadowed by the mystery and comedy stereotypes. There is an opportunity missed here to tell the story but also highlight the mental health crisis in rural Cornwall. The following extract is a revision of Dr Levine's narrative to focus on mental health in young people in the region.

He comes in. Sits in my office. Chatting about this, this owl man.

Look I know I shouldn't talk about it outside of my office. I understand there is a strict patient confidentiality code. I need to just say, just to stand up for the boy, is there any surprise he is the way he is.

He has this going on and then there is this problem and don't get me started on that issue. But he's not alone. I read this week there is more then 700 people on a waiting list for support in Cornwall. 700 more Virgil's. 700 more nasty journeys.

It's a miracle the poor boy is still us with. One in five you know. One in five dies of suicide every five daysin Cornwall...one in every five dies in this county. In one county. From one illness. This is higher than the average in most counties across the nation. I sit and find myself thinking, why are we higher than others. What are we doing. We haven't got a lot...that won't help.

I guess we are isolated. Left behind. My wife's mate at the clinic in Truro said 40% of Cornish had been known to a specialist service before death. And what are we doing?

People look at us and they think beach, sun, bars, but its not all that.

We need help. We are drifting away in our own floating crisis. Stuck in our own personal lockdown.

Additionally, there is opportunity to take Dusty, Virgil's new stepdad, who is the same age as him, and explore how he is being exploited and manipulated throughout the piece to aid Gertrude's scheme. There was opportunity to explore abuse within relationships, whilst still carrying out the narrative.

I think somethings not right...

I am pretty sure...i think i'm sure....that we aren't doing things the right way.

I am out here all day doing the walking, driving and knocking, and she gets the cash. And if I don't do it she....

Come to think of it I haven't seen a penny.

I know there is more for me out there, but she won't let me get another job.

I don't even want to do the you know what but she said if I don't....she will....

I am a man so I guess I just need to

Or maybe she'll...

By revising the narratives, I am able to start to provide examples on how creatives can represent South-West rural life that entertains but doesn't need to rely on stereotypes and can voice genuine concerns.

Accent

A common thread across both plays has been the dialect used by Grose in the scripts and the accent used by the performers on their staged version to enhance comic relief. 'Horse Piss For Blood' had an 'Accent Coach' on the production, Mary Howland. Howland is an experienced accent coach, however according to her credits she from the 'midlands' which question her intention when directing the accents chosen, and how much she had relied on stereotypes in the direction. The use of regional accents in theatre productions is a contested topic. In an article titled 'Vernacular spectacular: why theatre speaks louder with regional accents' (2010), Theatre maker and writer Dr Daniel Bye states that:

To those of you accustomed to hearing variants of your own voice every day in the media, it's difficult to express how this feel. Let's try. Imagine there were no British film or television industry. Imagine all the cultural output on our screens was American. Imagine British actors had to master only American accents at drama school, and all moved to New York or Los Angeles to work. Then imagine, out of nowhere, State of Play. Pretty thrilling, no?... Suddenly hearing your own voice on stage or screen, then, is a radically empowering experience (Bye, 2010; Unpaginated)

Here Bye draws attention to the lack of diverse British accents on stage and the power of having your regional accent represented on large platforms. In the productions I am

exploring South-West rural accents are being represented. However, they are being used to solidify stereotypes and social hierarchies and not in the positive manner that Bye hopes for. Bye continues, in the same article, describing the importance of regional representation by explaining:

Each part of the country has a unique social history and folk tradition. Every one of these is worthy of celebration. Yet what we choose to represent and what we choose to ignore makes an implicit statement about where our culture places value.

(Bye,2010; Unpaginated)

Devon and Cornwall could be celebrated in these productions for their influential discoveries and academic figures, picturesque surroundings, deep historical roots. I recognise the importance of raising issues, but can contemporary theatre tell stories about the South-West that have elements of celebration of the culture, and not just focusing on the stereotypes, that I have already addressed. If contemporary theatre is continuing to hold the South-West in this light, this could have a lasting effect on its reputation across the UK. Kelly Nestruck for the Globe Theatre asks ‘[i]f I can accept colour-blind casting and cross-gender casting, why can't I deal with accent-blind or cross-accent casting?’ (Nestruck,2008:1). Here Nestruck is suggesting that if we can overlook the physical appearance of a performer when they are being a character and telling a story then why can we not do the same with the accent of the actor. But when telling a regional or rural story an accent is crucial to that narrative and a strong pillar of identity for the locals and having performers using a fake accent is a form of appropriation. For example, a similar issue was raised by Welsh Actor, Rhys Ifans and other actors working in the industry in 2019. It is reported that they:

[C]alled on the National Theatre of Wales to prioritise native talent instead of bringing in English actors. The question has become particularly pertinent since the launch last month of the television show *Pitching In* on BBC One Wales. Set on the island of Anglesey, the programme was criticised widely among viewers for the predominance of southern Welsh actors who “butchered” the local accent. (Thorpe, 2019: 1)

The artists state that this stance is not due to parochialism, but rather a product of the marginalisation of the nation towards this region and that this show offered a chance to give voice to people who could portray their heritage and culture in a closer way. They go on to state ‘...it is as if NTW [National Theatre Wales] does not wish to promote our view of the outside world, but instead the outside world’s view of us’ (Parry, 2018: Online). This is similar to South-West producing houses programming *Kneebone Cadillac* and ‘*Horse Piss For Blood*’ but not casting local performers to play this narrative. They are not telling this story to tell the world what they think of rural Cornwall but give their perception on what life there is like without having lived it. According to ‘*Horse Piss For Blood*’ documentation the production used ‘Jenkins McShane Casting’ to cast the show, who label themselves a ‘London Based’. Therefore, further removing decisions on this rural representation from a rural community, or those who have lived experience of this community. However, as Grose is a Cornish artist, one could state that his lived experience is enough lived experience in the process, without having to also cast Cornish performers. The Australian performance maker Mish Grigor describes a moment when she was questioned about actors playing roles with ethnic characteristics different from their own her response was ‘contemporary performancemakers fumed and thumped their Gorman-clad chest [whereas] playwrights retorted “Of course you can, as soon as I write a story it isn’t mine anymore”’ (Grigor, 2018:

1). However regardless of the writer the term cultural appropriation is widely defined as ‘taking from a culture that’s not one’s own [which includes] cultural expressions’ (Parry, 2018: 11). Having the cast of *Kneebone Cadillac*, widely originating from other regions, use colloquialisms and rural slang is problematic regardless of Grose’s roots to the region. These colloquialisms and slang are cultural expressions. This is a form of appropriation and begins to set a precedence that stereotyping is acceptable. Furthermore, Grose makes this work reflecting these certain stereotypes at a time when regional theatre is struggling in comparison to London based theatres. In consequence, Cornish actors have less work than those working around the capital. However, if Grose reinforced stereotypes about London Middle class life it would appear less problematic. This is because that comedy would be ‘punching up’. Michael K.

Cundall Jr, in his book ‘The Humour Hack’ states ‘...humour coming from someone lower in the organizational hierarchy and targeting someone or something higher up, is generally more acceptable’ (Cundall Jr, 2022:10). Therefore, with the London middle class life being ‘higher up’ stereotyping that life is more acceptable than stereotyping South-West working-class life.

At the 2020 ‘What’s On Stage’ awards, the use of various accents on stage was a key topic of conversation. Especially from Chris Sonnex, Artistic Director of ‘Cardboard Citizens’. On collecting his award, Sonnex in 2020 argued that ‘[accents tell us] so many things about socio-economic back-grounds and the North/South divide, which is a real thing and is why we’re in [the current political situation], because we weren’t listening to those accents and it’s important’ (Sonnex, 2020: Online).

Although Sonnex is not directly referring to improper use of accents nor their appropriation, he is drawing attention to accent or dialect work in the theatre industry and the direct effect this has on audiences and the wider communities that are not being represented. His reference to the 'North/South' divide and the effect of this is in reference to the divides within London and how not representing and platforming all voices has led to several outcries around exclusion and barriers to support and provide opportunities both in theatre and more general areas in life. But taking this as an example of how representation (and more particularly the recognition of other people's stories) can affect how people treat the owners of those narratives, it is thus possible to argue that the use of rural accents and narratives need to be produced sensitively and with a clear understanding of how that accent is viewed and the implications this may have on that community's reputation. Hannah Roza Fisher, Head of Production at the Bunker Theatre further explains that 'A neutral accent doesn't exist, there are people from all walks of life and all areas of the country, and they all have story to tell and none of them are normal, everyone is valid and everyone should be heard' (Fisher, 2020: Online). Whilst I agree that all regions have a story to tell, my exploration is around who has the right to tell that story. Once again, does that representation, in the comedy terms, 'punch up' or 'punch down' on that area of the country. In 'Cases on Applied and Therapeutic Humour' (2021) Cundall and Kelly explore humour and its uses on specific 'groups' or 'communities' and say the following:

Punching up, is the act of using humour to make fun of groups that are in positions of power with respect to the joke teller...A member of an ethnic majority making fun of an oppressed ethnic minority is punching down...Punching down (or up) is an act of laughing at a group that neither the joke teller nor the audience – at least not usually- are a part of. (Cundall & Kelly, 2021:59)

I feel this notion of ‘Punching Up’ and ‘Punching Down’ is relevant to the representation of rural communities in contemporary theatre. Much of the work by Grose can be considered ‘Punching Down’ as it is laughing at a small, sometimes deprived, community. However, as Grose has been born into that community, it can be argued that he has the right to do so. But as the audience is not from that community, which as a writer you would be aware, you are still punching down for the benefit of an audience that would predominantly be ‘above’ the working-class rural communities. Despite my research critiquing many of the writers and directors using the South-West accent to ‘punch down’ there is credit due to ensuring this accent has a presence on the stage and consequently a place in the industry, as Sonnex refers to. Gimbel refers to this notion in ‘Isn’t That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humour and Comedy’ (2017). Gimbel states:

...sometimes “punching down” is good for those who are “punched”. Having your icon acknowledged can enter your group into the discourse and this can be crucial to having the injustices that burdened your group addresses. (Gimbel. 2017:130)

Here Gimbel is referring to the idea that, despite the work ‘punching down’ at a group, this is in fact giving them the ‘attention’ or ‘awareness’ to address issues within that community. Therefore, through Grose’s productions we could start to use this to address rural South-West issue around poverty, alcoholism, and recourses. Overall, both texts presented in this chapter highlight how the current state of rural representation of South-West life in contemporary theatre is one that relies on stereotypes. Stereotypes in the accent choices as well as in the detail of the setting, such as the run down and unclean villages.

Furthermore, these rural representations have chosen to lean into the mysterious and outdated, presenting a rural that out of touch with education systems and drug and alcohol support, but through the use of mythical creatures and comedy, it creates a perception that these issues aren't affecting real people. Finally, these productions have highlighted the need to surround a narrative about a particular community with artists from such community and include community members in the choices made in representing their community.

CHAPTER 2

The following chapter will use a basic formalist text analysis to examine *'The Winterling'* by Jez Butterworth (2006) and *'Then Came The Night Jars'* by Bea Roberts (2015). Unlike my previous chapter these analyses will focus on the work as a whole, and more than just dialogue and characters, more than words and stereotypes, but the production as a whole.

I will use this analysis to assess the current state of representation of the rural United Kingdom, in particular Devon and Cornwall, on contemporary theatrical stages. There is a perception that these counties are completely rural communities, however, many living in these areas grow up in what could be perceived as Urban communities. A factor that makes people believe the South-West of England is a solely rural community is to do with portrayal it is given in literature and storytelling, many of the stories told are ones of past and myth and that when portraying the rural 'there is a tendency to persistently return to a green nostalgic and idealized perspective as a "green world" (Robinson, 2016:3).

The following play *'And Then Come The Night Jars'* by Bea Roberts is another production about the South-West set on a farm. Roberts a South-West born artist but based in Bristol, creates this production which focuses on the foot and mouth disease which destroyed livestock and farms across Devon. This production highlights the heritage of Devon and the importance of farming to the county and the people that live in those rural areas. However, it focuses on two white males whose family lives are falling apart and they are suffering with problems and drinking and being stuck in a dated and old-fashioned mind set. On the outset this piece is perhaps not showing Devon in its best light. I will be comparing it to the work of Jez Butterworth, and in particular his piece *'The Winterling'*. This piece containing constant repetition of how much Devon is disgusting compared to London. An opinion offered on what the South-West life is like from a middle-class Oxbridge author. Butterworth makes a

very clear comparison of the South-West to London in which he talks of London being shiny and a place for businessmen, but the South-west is just 'Primordial Sludge' (Butterworth, 2006:16). The only character we do meet who originates from the South-west is Draycott. A badger obsessed misogynist who makes his way through life living off free scraps from the butchers, living in a shack with stray animals. I will be using formalist text analysis to take a closer look at the work and analyse how this maybe portraying rural life in Devon. 'And Then Come The Night Jars' is a piece that presents a 'Perceived Space' according to Lefebvre, as we experience the rural agricultural links and connections to food production. Whereas 'The Winterling' is solely a 'Lived Space' as the audience experience four different characters perspective of daily life.

Formalist text analysis, also known as 'New Criticism', is an approach to analysing literature, beginning in the 1920's, that focuses not on the subjective elements or authors intention but what is actually on the pages.

'This approach examines a text as a self-contained object; it does not, therefore, concern itself with biographical information about the author, historical events outside of the story, or literary allusions, mythological patterns, or psychoanalytical traits.' (Writing A Formalist Literary Analysis, Bellevue College: Unpaginated)

Therefore, I cannot take bias in my opinion on this text or assume what the playwright meant or imposed by their words. 'Formalist Criticism and Reader Response Theory' (2002) states that:

‘Formalism disregards altogether authorial intention and cultural influence, proclaiming that the art object alone is all that is needed to work critically towards a single, correct meaning.’ (Davis & Womack, 2002:20)

Therefore, I can attempt to draw a conclusion that is not tarnished by opinion on the writer or assumption. In ‘Literary Theory: A short introduction’ (2011) when discussing New Criticism they apply this to looking at Sonnets and states ‘Instead of asking ‘what does the author say here?’ we should ask something like ‘what happens to the sonnet here?’ So moving away from intention to verbal devices’. (Culler, 2011: 136) When offering a formalist analysis, I need to look at the following:

Characters. Setting. Tone. Point of View, Symbols and themes.

By doing so I can see exactly what has been written, without any subjective input and start to form an idea of how Butterworth and Roberts have chosen to represent the rural in their work.

Setting

I will begin by looking at how both playwrights describe the setting of their plays. Roberts opens Act 1 with

‘A farm in the heart of the South Devon countryside. A Barn; the only point of light and activity in the stillness and quiet of a crisp spring night. We can hear the rustle of straw from a restless cow and, outside, snatches of birdsong.’ (Roberts, 2015:5)

And Butterworth set his piece in the following:

‘Darkness....Dartmoor. The heart of the frozen forest, on clenched, sideways land. Sheep. Far off, a dog barking,’ (Butterworth, 2006: 11)

Both pieces of text have set clear visuals of the sights and sounds of rural Devon. Without trying to interoperate or semiotically analyse what the playwright is attempting to portray I can draw on two very clear similarities. The first is light. Both settings offer a dark and dingy Devon, with very little sources of light. However, Robert’s use of ‘heart’ and ‘rustle’ creates a sensation of love and tranquillity. In response to this, I have taken inspiration from the formalist analysis and the use of light in the above extracts to develop a piece of creative writing that demonstrates a version of Devon that could be presented in a positive manner:

Hey Siri, why does it always rain in Devon

It doesn't look like it's going to rain in the next 10 days in Devon...Canada

My Devon

My Devon has

My Devon has a pallet

My Devon has an eclectic pallet

My Devon has an eclectic pallet of colours

My Devon has an eclectic pallet of light colours

*My Devon has an eclectic pallet of light colours that is forgotten about, that is overshadowed
by the overshadow, the dark grey matter that is written about in folk law and history.*

The dark grey matter that hides the beast of Dartmoor

The dark grey matter that slowed Holmes

The dark grey matter that doesn't stop tourists.

One, two, three,

One, two, three crabs back into the sea.

Into the sea that is a mirror, reflecting the boats on to the smooth sky.

A sky the colour of cartoon water.

A sky hosting thin clouds that act as a speed bump for the rays of sun

The rays of sun highlighting the pink house, like a stabile boss...pastel range

The pink house that sits opposite me

Opposite me taking in the glory, the range, the bright, the post card ready.

Me taking in my Devon

Hey Siri why does it always rain in Devon

The altitude increases the rainfall.

Here I begin to take my research and start to apply it to my creative practice as a South-West based Director creating stories about rural life. Creating these short monologues form part of my 'correctivist' methodology to rewriting the state of South-West rural representation.

Sound

The second similarity in the two description is the use of sounds. The only sounds that the audience are offered of Devon in these two pieces are those of nature and animals. This creating a rural life that is removed from society, desolate. Or perhaps so tranquil that it creates the impression that 21st century problems do not affect these communities. Taking inspiration of sound representing a community, I created a monologue of a time in rural Devon when the sounds I could hear were far more than animals.

Alarm.

Finally, here
Crashing, thudding downstairs
Slamming cupboards and out
Thrashing the door behind me
Gone
Along lanes Rattling
down hills
It's here. Race day.
That echo of the exhaust
Booms through the fields
Devon's largest track
Completely full
This.
It feels like everyone's here.
Dads rowdy pub mates
Even the vicar.
They're off
Throttle
25 bikes come hurtling down
Sending red soil flying
These smells and sounds
These are my DEVON.

This was an example of a piece of creative writing that has the ability to highlight a vibrant and loud rural setting that would potentially create a more uplifting representation of a rural

community on stage. Much more inviting, contemporary, and lively than the rural currently represented in modern theatre.

Characters

Following the setting 'Formalist Criticism' also takes a focus on the characters, how they are directly described and what their point of view is.

'And Then Come the Night Jars' has two characters that are the sole focus. We follow them over a number of years. Roberts describes her two characters in the preface.

'MICHAEL VALLANCE, sixty-two – to seventy-four, Devonshire accent.'

'JEFF CRAWFORD, forty-one to fifty-three, Home Counties accent' (Roberts, 2015:4)

Butterworth gives much less detail on his characters:

'WEST, forties

DRAYCOTT, forties

WALLY, forties

PATSY, twenty-five

LUE, twentyish' (Butterworth, 2006:10)

Taking this self-contained information in to account, it is clear to see that both pieces are only offering a view of what rural life is like for adults. This has the potential to be a very closeminded view of rural life. Growing up in a rural community, I feel that these narratives would create a more exciting, interesting, and truthful narrative, that would be accessible and inspiring for younger audiences. I have written a creative output that explores growing up in a rural community and the sense of freedom, fun but having to make a decision on whether to stay or leave when reaching adulthood.

*Those young nights,
Inspiring to discover new heights.
Constantly excited and living fast,
High hopes invading my mind in day.
Carefree decisions in the night,
Everyone I met and the world around had my up most trust?
Feeling carefree, adventurous and warm.
Constantly calm, living everyday like those summer holidays in August,
How could I hate? No one was in my way.
Hopeful and free.
Finding new love every day.*

*Despite responsibilities
This Devon and those feelings are still in my heart,
Remembering the highlights whilst we're apart.*

This piece is an exploration of a young person's life, having grown up in Devon. Far from the older rural communities being represented in 'The Winterling' and 'Then Came the night jars' but also far removed from the mysterious and troubled young people in 'Horse Piss For Blood' or 'The Kneebone Cadillac'. This has demonstrated that it is possible to explore the life of young people in rural communities without the need to rely on stereotypes. This short monologue is part of my approach to understanding how we can improve South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre.

The point of view of the characters is also analysed in Formalist Analyse. In early parts of 'And Then Come the Night Jars' Jeff and Michael have the following conversation:

MICHAEL. Here's a question-why are you here?

JEFF. You're a miserable sod, you know that?

MICHAEL. Yes.

Come on.

JEFF. What?

MICHAEL. You got a proper tasty bit waiting for you back home in a nice warm bed and yet you been sat here, best of two hours, boring the arse off me. (Roberts, 2015, 1.1: 26-28)

Without taking in to account the writer's intention, political stance or background, from this text the characters are not warm to each other and Michael clearly objectifies women with his phrase '...proper tasty bit'. In a similar manner, in 'The Winterling' Draycott, a Devonian, address one of the only female character in the following manner:

'DRAYCOTT. ...Where are you going, you filthy twizzler? Come back, you tart. Come back. We ain't finished.' (Butterworth, 2006: 60)

Another example of an abrupt, misogynistic character that is representing life in Devon. Scary Little Girls are a theatre company based in Cornwall and they are looking to challenge these representations by creating work inspired by Cornish folk stories whilst looking to amplify female voices in theatre, but also highlight the current representation of South-West rural life is male-dominant (34). The characters use of constant expletives also offers a negative portrayal of Devon across both plays. Furthermore, the sustenance structure itself, short and incomplete, represents Devonian characters with minimal intellect or a lack of ability to communicate coherently.

Both pieces of text offer a somewhat enclosed and segregated version of the rural, with both pieces of text never leaving their desolate and dreary setting and leaning on stereotype's through the plays. Jo Robinson states that 'the reality of lived rural is frequently overlaid with external representations and perceptions, which can shape the potential of rural lives' (Robinson, 2016:4) highlighting here how the fantasised or the heightened and stereotyped versions like in these two plays becomes the version that urban audiences perceive real rural life to be. This then having a potential effect on reputation and expectation of the individuals living that rural life. Reinforced by Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion, academics

focusing on rural arts, who state that ‘The implications of our repeated failure to fully engage with the rural in all its guises are problematic...’ (Hamilton and Scullion in Robinson, 2016: 4) this is referring to the notion of only focusing on one element of the rural and not looking at the bigger picture creating problems for how we treat and view rural life, and the implications this has on their relationship with theatre. In reference to the two texts that I am exploring in this chapter, this could be said for the focus on stereotypical setting, focus on angry elderly men and surrounding of dark and negative tone. By not fully engaging with the wider concepts associated with rural life there is a problematic expectation of the people living these lives. This is challenged in WillFredd’s production of *The Farm*, using their immersive attempt to stage this production, Collins states that ‘WillFredd brought the economic and cultural politics of the rural in order to introduce urban spectators to alternative representations of rural specifically to challenge their expectations of reception’ (Collins, 2019: 343). Looking back at my previous exploration of texts such as ‘KneeBone Cadillac’ and ‘Horse Piss Blood’ this is not the case for their South-West representation. Furthermore, Robinson states ‘...more often the theatre written for and performed in the theatres of our cities has tended to use rural to carry that freight of ‘peace, innocence and simple virtues’ (Robinson, 2016:3). This is something that both the texts in this chapter don’t do.

Butterworths narrative that is set in ‘A deserted, half-derelict farmhouse’ (Butterworth, 2006:11) does touch on poverty in rural settings. But ‘And Then Come The Nightjars’ looks at the devastating decisions that were faced during the foot and mouth pandemic. In this following extract, you can see how this became more than the farmers problem and was taken into more powerful hands.

‘MICHAEL. You’re not even gonna try. And you swore to me, Jeffrey, you swore.

JEFF. I haven't got a choice

MICHAEL. Bollocks have you!

JEFF. The government have decided' (Roberts, 2015, 1,2:134-137)

In a similar way to *The Farm* by Will Fredd, Roberts was highlighting serious and life changing issues within agriculture, offering Urban audiences a different representation of rural then they are used to. This further highlighted in the final lines of Act One when Michael screams 'They are my girls. That's all I got.' This takes away from the funny, comic stereotypes, that humours Urban audiences, and you see this is more than a job or an upbringing to these people in rural life. One of the problematic results of not utilising all rural guises leads to 'Othering' rural life's and community. Othering is the idea of something being segregated or look at as 'different'. This is a reoccurring problem with rural narratives and Jo Robinson states '...I argue that in performances from the early modern period onwards, the rural often stands for a particular kind of 'otherness', to be visited and returned from, perhaps transformed' (Robinson, 2016:7) Here highlighting that the idea of rural has always been some kind of other and that it wasn't a place for characters or real life people to have an actual life and was a place that required some form of help or transformation. This is present in the texts explored in this chapter. This is evident in 'The Winterling' in act one when Butterworth gives a clear attempt at othering the rural life from an urban perspective, the character Patsy states ' I like London, Wally, I like to out the door and not sink up to my tits in primordial sludge. I don't like sheep. I don't like Dartmoor. I don't like the country. It's covered in shit.' (Butterworth, 2006:16) This is an example of '...reflecting the complicated

power relationships between the rural and the urban' (Robinson, 2016:7) thus potentially creating an opinion for Urban audiences that this too is how they should feel about rural life. Othering of communities also takes place depending on who's perspective the play is written from or the politics surrounding how or where it is produced. Looking at these texts from outside the formalist analysis it's interesting to take in account the geographic origins of the author and the buildings these were first performed in. Robinson continues with '...rural on stage is most often seen from the perspective of the city, where theatre and its associated buildings have historically and conventionally been situated.' (Robinson, 2016:7) Here she is referring to the perspective that the play is written from, alluding to the fact that rural stories, from the perspective of rural life aren't often viewed or accepted in urban theatres and this will continue if we continue to produce rural stories that are from the perspective of the city looking in. This is prevalent in 'The Winterling' as it focuses on London citizens going into Devon and their opinion and problems, they bring with them. This is not necessary the case with 'And Then Come The Nightjars' as it gives a rural perspective on why foot and mouth was more than just a deadly virus but crushed families and livelihoods. But both Butterworth and Roberts piece do apply to Collins description that '...cottage-kitchen realism that only serves to foreground the fantasy of the rural from the perspective of the urban voyeur.' (Collins, 2019:342)

Its poignant that both these plays have come from authors who are renowned playwrights from large cities but also, with both plays premiering in central London. This, to me, is problematic, as not only is it bringing negative rural portrayal to urban audiences, but it hasn't attempted to engage with a rural community when telling their narratives. Simmons in Robinsons 'Theatre and Rural' states 'Poverty in a time of affluence is being unable to write and have others write about you' (Simmons in Robinson, 2016:16) This leads to consider

how different these productions might have been had they been with a rural community who were affected by these incidents or have lived through similar circumstances. Sanders in 'Theatre and Rural' states

'I turn to look at performances that happen within the rural place, arguing that the creating of performance in and for rural sites comes closest to enabling theatre that remaps and reimagines the rural in a productive and challenging ways, suggesting a rethinking of the relationship between theatre and the constitution parts of the nation.'

(Sanders in Robinson, 2016: 53)

This echoing the importance in creating work for the area that it is written about, and the positive impact this could have on the rural communities and their relationship with urban audiences and theatres. Collins again, looks at Willfredd's production of FARM as a positive rural representation because it '...demythologized fantasies of the rural, the spectators gaze is still regularly positioned from the vantage point of the urban.' (Collins, 2019: 341) Therefore, it didn't glorify rural life as fun filled animal, green fields experience but looked at the challenging aspects. Robinson suggests that 'there is a tendency to persistently return to a green nostalgic and idealized perspective as a "green world" (Robinson, 2016:3). There are moments in both of these texts that do this, for example the setting in both texts is simply surrounding by fields and organic living, however due to the negative, distributive and violent nature of both texts we do not see the "green world" that refers to a world of peace and tranquillity.

Another similarity across both productions is the way both are set with a heavy focus on the past and nostalgia with not a lot of looking to the future or presenting modern rural life, with

similar settings and portrayals of rural citizens. In Collins exploration of representations of rural Ireland, he states that the piece FARM ‘...revealed the false perceptions of othering the rural as a homogenous abstract space.’ (Collins, 2019, 346) In the way they highlighted what life is really like. By using the word ‘Homogenous’ Collins is commenting on how currently all representations are the same, they present consistent similarities and same type of characters. Looking at how both productions have chosen to set their pieces in nostalgic or ‘dated’ time frames. For example, in ‘The Winterling’ the majority of the action takes place in the Farmhouse which is ‘...desolate and derelict. Many floorboards are broken. Someone has had a bonfire in the middle of the room. Rats dart about.’ This description offers an old run-down view of rural living space. In a similar way Roberts 2015 piece, is solely focused on the catastrophes of 2001 and the aftermath, again showing a rural setting that stuck in the past. Collins discusses this in reference to Irish rural representations and comments how these constant representations of a nostalgic rural effect how it is viewed. He says ‘...rural only becomes nostalgic due to the way it is represented.’ (Collins, 2019: 343) Collins believes that these representations have tainted rural narratives as he further comments ‘If the rural is not represented in that way, then it loses the affective power of nostalgia and, all of a sudden, the rural utopia is revealed to be a simulacrum.’ (Collins, 2019:350) This eluding to the idea that without the nostalgic elements of rurality being highlighted in their depictions then people will view it as boring or false interpretation of rural life, suggesting that nostalgia is crucial to rural representation, despite the reputation this may have on a rural community.

Another key trait that features across both texts are the negative portrayal of the male characters. From alcohol abuse, attitude toward women or hypermasculine representation of the weapon owning, aggressive males. In Collins work on FARM he states that they explored male suicide rates in rural areas, and Michael Woods adds that ‘...high level of depression

and suicide among farmers have been linked to the self-doubt of farmers who feel that they are unable to match the expectations of the masculinist model of farming...' (Woods in Collins, 2019:349) This pressure will not be supported by the constant hypermasculine representations of male's in widespread fictional narratives. Collins continues and discuss that by selling these narratives '...demands that labourers become alienated and commodified in relation to the use value of their gender. When such gendered expectations are not realized, the effect can be ruinous.' (Collins, 2019, 349) This is looking at the pressures rural stereotypes have on the individuals living this life, by the continuation to present these gendered stereotypes the theatre industry appears to be encouraging the alienation and value these rural communities have on themselves. This pressure is highlighted in 'Then Came the nightjars' when the fear of losing his stock leads the protagonist to make decisions that are detrimental to his wellbeing and others around him. In response to this thought, I was inspired to create a piece of creative writing that looked a refusing to align to the stereotypical rural masculine ideal.

Yes

Sort of

Not really no

Well I have one

I don't personally have one

My grandad has a gun so I have seen one so I know how to shoot it

Well

Sort of

Kind of know

I haven't personally shot one

My dad has shot one and he showed me how to do it.

Loads

Sort of

I've seen one

I haven't personally driven one

My mate Will at schools has that farm near South Molton and his brother had a quad bike I watched him jump bails.

Loads

Not loads

Only seen it

I haven't actually done it yet

My aunties boyfriend used to work at that PJ Hayman slaughterhouse. Yeah the one that was one the news. He told me how they do it. So, I haven't done it but I could do it.

Why would I know how to drive that?

I don't even know what a John Deere S 690 is.

Well I didn't know Combine Harvesters had names.

No, he never showed me. I wasn't interested.

In all honesty, I've never cared.

I used to ride the Shetlands

Go Trago with Nan

Make Jam with mum.

I've seen it

The hours

Struggle

Pain

I want no part of it.

I want to be able to explain how I'm feeling

*Don't want to miss out on family occasions I
want to support and have support.*

Well, I've not seen anyone I know do it....but I think I've got it.

Overall, through formalist analyse of the productions, it is clear that not only do characters and dialogue create a negative representation of South-West rural life. But so does the sounds, images and general tone depict by the playwright. These two productions have further added to understanding the state of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre, again, not with much positivity. Firstly, we have another two pieces that present a unappealing place to live and grow up. We are faced with a poor representation of a female narrative, and high representation of problematic male characters. These pieces of theatre also focus on an older population of the South-west and narratives that are stuck in or reflect heavily on the past. Therefore, creating a perception, the South-west is an outdated place to live, with little opportunities for a young population to thrive.

CHAPTER 3

Place and Process.

‘... from treating rural audiences as passive objects to working with them as subjects with their own stories to tell – provides an international exampleas a key issue for rural theatre and performance’ (Robinson, 2016:61)

This quote from Jo Robinson encompasses a large shift in the creative process when making work surrounding rural theatre that can impact representation of rural life. Having analysed representation of rural theatre that has taken place in contemporary theatre venues, this chapter is trying to understand how rural representation is presented differently in Urban and Rural theatres. Throughout this chapter I will be focusing on the importance of including the communities whose stories you are telling, regardless of the performance space, and the impact this co-creation process has on the performance.

2018: As I leave Theatre Royal Plymouth, having watched ‘Kneebone Cadillac’ by Carl Grose I reflect on how this performance of a rural community meets the regular traits I have come to know, another rural narrative with stereotypical and comic accents, alcohol abuse and obscene amounts of swearing. I begin to think audiences who may have never engaged with a rural community, may think this is what rural life it is really like in a rural community.

According to Paula Coccozza’s article (2012) he states that ‘for many, the most instinctive way to access the best of the countryside is as consumers; as if what we are really buying into is a sort of processed pastoral’ (Coccozza, 2012: Unpaginated). Referring to the idea that for

many, experiencing rural life first-hand is not an option and that they are in fact doing so as consumers of some form of product within their urban lifestyle. Therefore, what they are presented as rural life, will potentially be what they assume it to be like, this is similar to urban audiences whose experience of rural is that of a staged version in an urban theatre, meaning this has the potential to affect their presumptions of rural life outside of the theatre. I then start to think about how these stories would be received if they were taking place in a rural community and if any of these performers from this company had grown up in a rural community, and if a rural community had been involved in the representation in any form, and how this may affect the representation.

This has since, led me to consider how representation of rural communities may change depending on the following factors:

Where it is being performed? Is the performance venue or audience effecting the representation?

How much was the rural community considered? Was there any involvement from a rural community in the development of this representation? Would this make an impact?

Therefore, I have divided this chapter to answer those questions. The first being place. How has the place of the performance effected the rural representation?

Place

If I was to carry out a practice as research experiment, here is the moment. I would perform a text representing a rural community to Urban audiences and a Rural audience and analyse

how this impacted the process, characterisation, and audience reaction. However, I will be drawing on examples from practitioners and academics who have an understanding of performances that have been performed in both settings. This idea of a relationship between the performance and the place it is being performed was first brought to my attention by Jo Robinson. In her book *Theatre & The Rural*. She draws our attention to Julie Sanders' *Making the land known: Henry IV Parts 1 and 2 and the literature of perambulations* (2018) . Here Sanders highlights how Sir Edward Dering made vast changes to the work when the piece was taken out of the city of London and into the countryside. It also brings up an interesting idea of letting the rural steer the work. Dering argues that:

A provincial performance to an insider audience with a rather different set of regional knowledges and understandings to a London Banksite theatre might not require the suggestion of the rural road networks and cultural and spatial geographies of the provinces [...] but was instead being connected up to the high politics of the capital, otherwise transported to them only through news and gossip. (Dering in Robinson, 2016: 52)

This alluding to the idea that even a classical piece, such as *Henry IV*, was being altered to suit audiences from different communities, especially Rural vs the Urban communities. As well as the idea of considering your audience when making the work, to ensure the piece meets that audience needs. Therefore, if the work I have been analysing in previous chapters was staged in Rural venues we may see a representation that does not feel the need to heighten stereotypes or oversimplify rural life, as it will be for an audience with more understanding in those issues. Furthermore, Matarasso in his analyse on rural theatre '*A Wider Horizons*' (2015) discusses how the Jacobean creatives were constantly considering

rural audiences and ensuring that the work ‘rendered equal’ for its London audiences as well as its rural tours. He states:

The plays were made in London but sought to please people everywhere. Their stories, language and references had to speak to Norfolk farmers as well as Southwark merchants, and the means used—the stagecraft—had to work as well in a church nave as in the Globe. (Matarasso,2015.17)

Matarasso highlighting here that the work taken to rural communities is not diluted but still made accessible, not relying on stereotypes. Also drawing us to the idea that the divide in quality or access to theatre between Rural and Urban communities is a recent one. This consideration of rural communities and aim to culturally provide equally to ‘a church nave’ (Matarasso,2015.17) and ‘the Globe’ (Matarasso,2015.17) may impact these representations, if there was any expectation for rural audiences to engage with the work. Perhaps this lack of consideration for rural audiences is the reason for the problematic stereotypes in contemporary rural representations.

As well as understanding how rural representations are affected by performances in rural communities, I have also analysed how are rural representation is affected by an Urban influence on the performance. Rural Theatre is not always perceived by critics and mainstream artists to be ‘real’ or ‘proper’ theatre. In fact only 4.6 per cent of funds from the 2018-2022 National Portfolio Organisation were awarded to arts programmes, venues or artists in rural settlement. This lack of funding may lead one to assume lack of quality. But perhaps this rural vs urban argument in which setting produces the best quality theatre can

linked back to Renaissance London and a system that has been in place for centuries. Jen Harvie explains that in Renaissance London

‘...any theatres beyond those at court or the very few licensed to operate within the city’s boundaries were only semi-legitimate. They occupied what Carlson calls ‘boundary locations – inescapably tied to the city, but never truly part of it’ (Harvie, 2009. 70)

In a similar way regional theatre is viewed as ‘less’ than theatre produced in Central London and rural theatre is viewed as less than that produced in regional cities and London. Perhaps there is a correlation between the disregard that is held for rural theatre or work produced in rural communities and the disregard for the quality of rural representation in urban theatres. For example, The National Theatre of England, has a very urban centric vision, and their portrayal of rural or South-West life in the work ‘My Country: A Work In Progress’ (2017) is problematic, as explored below. If they had a more rural engagement or rural outreach programme, this might not have been the case, as they would have been able to understand rural life and portrayed the authenticity of a South-West rural life.

When exploring the relationship between theatre and rural communities, it is important to look at theatre venues as buildings. What do they do to support rural communities, and what do they do to provide representation for rural life? Focusing on nationwide organisations that go to rural communities. Who are those venues? And how does their work effect how we see rural life? I am particularly interested in the spaces that say they are available for the nation, and if they serve the whole nation in both their activities and representation in their productions.

When exploring what the National Theatre of England offers its rural communities and its rural representation, I was drawn to the project *My Country: A Work In Progress*. This is a collaboration between Rufus Norris and Carol Ann Duffy. A piece that was Norris' response to the Brexit divide, a piece, he said in an interview on The National Theatres Website, was to include and visit the whole of the UK. But its involvement with the South-West was as far as Gloucester. Norris then goes on to explain how this piece was part of their efforts to step up their relationship with Europe, seemingly looking away from communities much closer to them. Both Norris, and producer Padraig Cusack explain how a conscious decision was made not to involve London voices and the promotional trailer suggests the aim of the piece is to 'share the voices of our regions, in their works, as they speak them' (2017). Feeling like a breakthrough piece serving the regions of the UK but looking at the tour dates still only physically serving urban cities. Dan Rabellato also stated he found the work 'very metropolitan' (Lewis, 2020: Unpaginated). To close this 2020 Lewis interview, Norris, when asked how he would spend funding if it was miraculously doubled, said 'On National Reach' (Lewis, 2020: Unpaginated).

Although not directly about a rural community *My Country: A Work in Progress* presents a version of a South-West community, which makes more poignant the fact that it was not performed more extensively in the South-West. This production is a reference point for how South-West life is being presented in urban theatres to largely urban audiences. I would like to first draw attention to the fact that this text is a series of performers representing certain areas of the UK. In the text each area of the UK is asked to state which areas they are representing, with 'South -West' stating 'Salisbury and Gloucester Cathedral', despite Devon and Cornwall having a rural population of 1.7 million people, so from the outset this piece by England's National Theatre has chosen to exclude the South-West rural representation from a

piece which is supposedly representing the whole UK. In the opening scenes we meet 'SouthWest' and their only contribution to the scene is a range of music references, alongside a series of short sentences including 'How do', or 'innit' thus presenting a character with limited vocabulary and knowledge, which is a trait I previously highlighted in the 'Winterling'. In a conversation which sees the other regions state their most honoured sports man, the South-West only input is about 'Eddie the Eagle', a well-known ski jumper born in the South-West, who despite successes, was well known for his comical failures and somewhat turbulent career. Despite the South-West have many successful sports men and women, the character representing South-West main function is to offer the comic relief of the work, a similar trait to previously discussed representations. When Plymouth does get referenced earlier on in the play, we hear from Jane who describes her short time living in Plymouth has very happy, peaceful and with no stress. This offers a romanticised lense for the South-West, offering up a problematic and potentially fictional representation.(13). This romanticised South-West life is then reiterated later, where there is a scene dedicated to the hardships experienced in the different regions. However, the only region not to feature is the South-West, once again suggesting that hardship does not exist in a South-West rural life. In previous areas of my research I have explored the South-West representation being presented as a comic relief, this is no different in *My Country : A Work In Progress*. When Duffy and Norris present a section on immigration, the other regions offer serious insights to how immigration is impacting their region, with South-West character bringing the comic relief and a sense of disconnect stating

'I'm not sure if that's true but like, because it's the news, you might believe it, but like, some things on the new you can't believe because, like the weather, its says it might rain, but it doesn't.' (Duffy: 2017)

By the character representing the South-West making a comment like the above, it is creating a sense of lack of awareness or not being able to be part of a serious conversation. Once again a South-West rural representation that is removed from the modern way of thinking. Which is then followed in the final sections where the play explores the regions hopes for a post-Brexit Britain, with South-West prominent concern being the legalising of Marijuana and prostitution. Overall, this representation from the UK's largest urban theatre of a largely rural community is one that draws on stereotypes, comic relief and a relaxed and romanticised way of life, which like Kneebone Cadillac, is potentially damaging if you have no other understanding of South- West rural life.

However, looking back out of the urban and into the rural again, there are two national venues that are leading 'national reach'. The first, National Theatre Scotland (NTS), which Robinson gives the following reason as to why rural touring is so important to them:

[A]s the national theatre company in Scotland, it accepts it has an explicit duty to produce and tour work all over the country; secondly, it acknowledges that people living in rural communities are just as entitled to high quality theatre as their compatriots in Edinburgh or Glasgow. (Robinson,2016:75)

This seems like the most obvious reason. A theatre that has deemed itself 'National' needs to serve the whole nation, not just the Southbank of a large city or other neighbouring Urban settings. In a similar way to some of the largest National Portfolio Organisations, in the South-West, who live in the edge lands of rural communities not engaging with their

neighbours in those communities. Furthermore '[i]n taking theatre to the rural as well as the urban, and in making theatre in the rural as well as the urban, the National Theatre of Scotland is better placed to tell the stories of all of Scotland, stories that are dependent on lived experience of place, and which grow from the everyday lives of the rural as well the more usual urban contexts of theatre making.' (Robinson, 2016: 75)

If this was a model that was echoed by England's National Theatre and other NPO theatres, we may begin to see a richer programming, or even better an influx of artists from rural communities. Perhaps the UK theatres' urban centric model is a reflection of their urban focused National Theatre. Unlike NTS, or even National Theatre Wales, which I will explore further later on in this chapter, whose rural facing approach has impacted their rural representation on their stages. Although we can not currently look to The National Theatre, England for positive South-West rural representations there is something to be said for 'Wildworks Theatre' based in Cornwall. Wildworks say '...we draw inspiration from Cornwall's extraordinary natural and post-industrial landscape. We continue to build on Cornwall's long history of working outdoors, turning Cornwall's lack of infrastructure into a positive, by working in the landscape rather than traditional theatre venues' (Wildworks, (2023, May) Wildworks About Us). This is an organisation who place a rural community at the heart of their work, not only in providing them access to the arts but also representing them in their productions. (33)

My next question is around how much representation can alter depending on whether the rural community was considered in the development of the play. Therefore, involved in the creation of the rural representation in the play. For example, I want to understand if the production is co-created with those living in rural communities, is the representation that is

created more authentic and less likely to damage the reputation of the community. This has led me to consider process within my research. Jo Robinson states:

I turn to look at performances that happen within the rural place, arguing that the creation of performance in and for rural sites comes closest to enabling theatre that remaps and reimagines the rural in productive and challenging ways, suggesting a rethinking of the relationship between theatre and the constituent parts of the nation. (Robinson, 2016: 53)

The work that is being made in rural communities with rural communities has the potential to not only change how rural life is represented on stage but also how the rest of the industry is making work about rural communities. Therefore, Robinson is also questioning the process of making theatre, and how this differs between rural and urban communities and by being aware of how the process differs we can start to view the rural and rural communities in a new way. This will hopefully alter this divide between rural and theatre. If we begin to rethink the relationship between theatre and the rural, we might see a difference in rural representation on our contemporary stages.

Ian Watson's 'Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret' (1993) explores the value of process over product, and the outcomes of two communities coming together over a process. They describe 'barter', an exchange of goods or services, and how: '[I]n any barter, the 'micro-culture' of one group (or individual) meets the "micro-culture" of the other. This meeting is realised through the exchange of performances, that is cultural products, but these products are not as important as the process of the exchange itself'. (Watson, 1993:25)

In 'Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the intercultural debate' (2002) , Maria Shevtsova looks further into a 'barter' and including the rural community in a process. She states that the barter:

‘...is a form of ethnography: it is an attempt to present, represent and ‘record’ physically through the immediacy of performance actions – dance, song, ditty, gesture, mime. – what is vital or presumed vital, to the cultural cohesiveness of a community’ (Shevtosva in Watson, 2002: 114)

Therefore, if contemporary artists took this anthropological approach to creating performance it can allow for a more cohesive bond and can lead to a more accurate representation of a community. If a contemporary artist was to approach creating work with a rural community using an ethnographic lens this may take the shape of sharing dinner in the community space, being involved with community activity or involving the community with the artistic vision and approach. In November 2022 and February 2023 I2, created two community productions in Devon, with a specific community of community members , who have lived in the same area for 50+ years. The first piece was titled ‘Quizzy Rascals’, an immersive pub quiz that took place in ‘The Drum’ Theatre at Theatre Royal Plymouth. The second piece was titled ‘Ernesettlers’. It was an interactive committee meeting. There were a number of concrete steps used in both pieces to create a piece that is authentic and delivers a representation of the community that they are pleased with. The first step was embedding ourselves in their routine. Attending lunches, pub quizzes, tours of their community spaces and having cultural exchanges. These barterers are similar to the process that Caryl Churchill and her team took when creating ‘Fen’ (1982) , as previously mentioned in the introduction, ‘...The actors lived with them, worked beside them, and listened to their memories and dreams.’ (Dunning, 1983:

1) . The second step was to build a play structure around that community. Something they recognised i.e a pub quiz or a committee meeting. This meant the dialogue and rules of the play were familiar and comfortable territory for the performers, but also their audience. The third step was a mid-point sharing with other community members to ensure the wider community were happy with the art that was representing them, and they had an opportunity to change it. The fourth step was ensuring that an impartial community member was present at all stages of the process to represent the community and ensure they were being heard. Finally the community from both groups had the ability to say no to anything within the piece at all times.

The above routine to co-creating work is a product of 'The Hand Of Power' (THOP). THOP is an model that was utilised by theatre company 'Warts and All' and has been developed by myself and other creatives at Theatre Royal Plymouth. It is called the 'Hand' because it guides you to think of five steps when co-creating theatre:

- 1) Logistics.
- 2) Artists Voices
- 3) Decision Making
- 4) Parameters
- 5) Agency

These steps allow all involved in the creative process to decide and agree upon an outline for working collaboratively. An artist would use THOP as a framework to discuss with community groups how they would like the process to work. This helps you manage the expectations of everyone involved, ensure all parties understand how the process will move along, how decisions are made and who will have the final say. With the community group involved an artist should take each headline and agree the percentage of 'power' for each

element and who holds that power/responsibility. Using THOP has the potential to create rural representations that the community can feel proud of. (22) Due to Theatre Royal Plymouth's commission of these pieces they have highlighted their commitment to authentically telling local communities stories. Most recently Theatre Royal Plymouth have announced their 'Village Hall Tour' of 'Barn Dance' further showing commitment to rural communities (32). Through the co-creation of artists working with rural communities to make rural representation for urban theatre venues, both groups benefit, be that through development or agency for the rural communities, and also a story and representation with the depth and brevity presented by the theatre company. When analysing 'Considering Co-Creation' (2021) produced by 'Arts Council England' it felt that the co-creation might be the answer to changing the current state of South-West rural representation because it encourages 'Shared authorship of a creative work or project, where each party plays an equal role (but not necessarily the same role). Each party has creative agency throughout the development and production of the creative work or project.' (Arts Council England, 2021: p18) Meaning that the artists don't have free creative reign on how they represent a community. (23)

When exploring theatre happening in rural spaces and the positive effects of including the community in the creative process, John McGrath's 'The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil' (1973) provides strong examples of how involving rural spaces in the process can positively impact rural representation and relationships with rural audiences. McGrath's work is much more than verbatim or some form of method performance. McGrath's work is a direct reference point for Robinson's theory on the connection between the rural places being performed to the places of performance. Robinson states that McGrath's

‘...mention of specific people and places was done not to create a convincing ‘mapped reality of place’ for an urban audience watching a distant rural...rather the invocation of names and settlements explicitly worked to connect the places being performed to the places of performance.’ (Robinson, 2016:55)

This is highlighting how the work being done here to involve the rural community was much more than verbatim and more than using the community to create theatre. But by connecting with the places that are being performed, the people whose stories you are telling, we hopefully look to bring about a different type of rural representation to that which is already present in the industry. A type of process that is much more akin to making work with people who have lived experience of an subject, therefore getting that genuine and reliable representation (26). A more authentic representation, that offers agency to the rural community. Robinson states that ‘The Cheviot made use of specific connections between, site, story and performance style to link past to present in place’ (Robinson, 2016: 55)

As I begin to unpack the narratives from the productions I am exploring, I do not feel any of those plays I have reviewed so far do that. For example, Carl Grose’s ‘Horse Piss for Blood’, mentioned in my previous chapter, removes all sense of time, normality and traditional values from the rural community it is representing and doesn’t highlight (14) the real problems and struggles that happen in rural communities. When ‘The Cheviot, The Stag, and the Black, Black Oil’ brought rural communities to stage and represented them in a production ‘it did so on terms that prevented the rural representations being other or alien to its audience, emphasising a shared space both temporally and geography’ (Robinson, 2016: 56) unlike the way the other productions I reference present an otherness or problematic rural.

Rural representation also has the potential of being presented as part of a fad, part of a new ruralism era. Paula Coccozza defines ‘New Ruralism’ as ‘...the urban search for a closer connection with the rural world...’ (Coccozza, 2012:2023) . New Ruralism is also connected to the preservation and enhancement of rural communities. But in the context of my research, I am referring to the commercialisation of rural life for Urban people. (19) Furthermore, in mainstream urban venues there is a danger of playing on ‘nostalgia’ or over-romanticising the rural. This is evident in stock characters of many classical rural representations For example, Shakespeare’s rural areas are where magic and mystery happens, offering unrealistic version of the rural. This begins to distort the view of what rural life is like. Therefore, driving a wedge between urban reality and rural reality, giving space for the urban to view life as one without struggle or concern. Therefore, by playing in rural spaces with rural communities in the process one can attempt to stay closer to the ‘truth’ or a more ‘authentic’ rural representation. One arts organisation that created a piece that found the balance between nostalgia and fantasy was Golden Tree Productions and their performance ‘The Engine Man’ (2016 & 2018). This performance was a celebration about the history of miners in Cornwall. It took the form of a large mechanical puppet supported by a chorus of storytellers and singers. It toured throughout Cornwall but not theatres and arts spaces but instead in mining landscapes and villages/town centres. It did not rely on stereotypes and was able to tell a story of Cornish history without surrounding the county with mystical and fantastical illusion. (36)

Robinson highlights how the ‘National Theatre Wales has been careful not to place rural work only in the romanticised rural of our conventional imagination but also in the metaphorical abattoirs and the actual pit villages.’(Robinson, 2016: 77) A strong example of this is their piece ‘We’re Still Here’ (2017). A piece co- produced with ‘Common Wealth Theatre’, who

co-collaborated with steel workers to ensure the authenticity of this piece. This co-creation avoids any romanticising of rural life, a place of just serenity and escape from reality, ultimately ‘rural proofing’ the work. Bringing rural struggles to the forefront, rather than depicting rural life as people camping, on holiday homes and cider drinking. By continuing to present this false or stereotyped rural life in our urban theatre venues, as Paul Cloke has suggested, theatre makers ‘...precede and direct the recognition of rural space, presenting us with some kind of virtual rurality.’ (Cloke, 2006: 2022) One that is false, one that creates fake and idyllic visions (15) of what rural life is, having the potential to dilute rural struggles or even recognise them at all.

As established above, offering agency to the rural voice and allowing the place and people to lead the process may create a theatrical representation that allows rural communities to recognise themselves in the story. In my final chapter I will look at how rural communities can be embedded more into a process. (16) This idea of ownership and control is something that is also present in the Rural Touring Scheme Model, as it includes rural communities in each part of the piece. Robinson explores this notion and states:

Through its model of shared ownership and place, rural touring shows can work not just to give communities a voice but also to contribute to the very building of those communities, suggesting a different relationship between theatre, representation, and audience in rural settings. (Robinson, 2016, 72)

Therefore, the Rural Touring Scheme is a possible first step in the process of allowing rural audiences to gain control over an area of the industry, as well as asserting creative control in how they are represented in specific pieces. This provides an interesting concept into how

programming may look if we let rural communities be involved with programming, it would also potentially affect the representation of South-West rural life. Furthermore, Matarasso highlights how rural touring theatre audiences are also more logistically involved. In 'Wider Horizons' he reminds us:

The village hall hosts professional musicians, amateur actors, dance classes and art exhibitions until, when it's over, everything is put away for tomorrow's playgroup or lunch club. The audience are active participants in making it all happen. (Matarasso, 2015:36)

Whereas an audience in urban theatres, when experiencing theatre presenting the rural are more passive. I do not think theatre taking place in the rural is the main problem in regard to rural representation as it is clear that through the schemes in place there is agency and control of their representation and involvement in the industry. Perhaps the difficulties in negatively representing rural communities are solely down to urban involvement with rural theatre. The key to having positive relationships between rural communities and the theatre industries appears to be around the process of 'involvement of audience'. With the involvement of rural audience, theatre makers are giving them control of the space, something they will not get with West End plays exploring rural productions, or London centric communities touring Urban venues telling rural narrative. Matarasso expands on this idea of rural audience involvement and how this model is one that should be viewed at by all makers telling stories on behalf of a community. He states, '...from treating rural audiences as passive objects to working with them as subjects with their own stories to tell – provides and international exampleas a key issue for rural theatre and performance.' (Matarasso, 2016:54) This idea of treating rural audiences as a subject provides a simple foundation to ensure a theatrical representation with depth which will not disadvantage the community in any way. Lynn Gardner arrived at a similar conclusion in the National Rural Touring Conference. Her paper

‘What we can learn from the wandering stars of rural theatre’ (2015) is supporting the notion of audience led programming that is present in rural touring theatre and arguing that this practice could greatly impact urban settings and the work programmed in this space. She explains that ‘perhaps it is when local people get the chance to influence and have power over what they see and participate in that balance is restored and trust is built between artists and audiences, professionals and volunteers, supply and demand.’ (Gardner, 2016:

Unpaginated) Perhaps with a heightened sense of trust between artist and audience we might be able to begin witnessing more provoking representations of a rural community. The key words in the statement above are ‘Power’ and ‘Balance’. The representation I am seeking is not constantly the same, and only authentic, but a balance of representation that offers a varied insight into South-West rural life, is needed. To connect back to the applied theatre principles Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston in ‘The Applied Theatre Reader’ state:

‘Applied theatre usually works in the contexts where the work created and performed has a specific resonance with its participants and its audience and often, to different degrees, involves them in it.’ (Prentki and Preston, 2009: 9) Therefore, if artists want to create work about a community that is authentic, fair representation and trusted by that community then the principles of applied theatre could be introduced into their process. (31)

To conclude, place and space of performance, in particular performing rural life, is something that has been taken into consideration since Jacobean times, but something that is not as prominent now. In fact, rural theatre within the hierarchy of theatre, appears to be at the lower end. Moving forward I want to look at how this perception of rural theatre has affected the representations. Furthermore, place, community and artists working closely in the process massively impacts the rural representation, this is clear from our urban theatres who have

create problematic representations. In 'An Restless Art' (2019) by Francois Matarasso he discusses making work with and about communities and states:

'Nothing about us without us', was used by the disability rights movement precisely to challenge the paternalism that prevented them from making decisions about their own lives and services. How can actual inequalities of power between people involved in an participatory art project be reconciled with a commitment to over-coming them? One answer is in recognition that participatory art can be an empowering process' (Matarasso, 2019: 111)

Although I am not comparing disabled rights to rural representation at all, I think Matarasso highlights an interesting point about process and how decisions and ideas shouldn't be made without involving that community. Additionally, Matarasso is here highlighting how the participatory or applied arts process can support this. (38)

Equally our Urban centric National Theatre could make an impact on rural representations if it was to focus of rural engagement as our Wales and Scotland National theatre does. Overall, engaging with a rural community in the process effectively improves the product, but also has the potential to have an impactful process on rural community members lives.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter will look at how the representation of rural life is part of a 'trend' in utilising elements of rural life for either aesthetic, monetary or status gain. I will explore the negatives

effect this has on rural representation. I will also be looking at how playwrights have benefited from 'rural life' being part of a trend. I will then look at how artists can benefit from the government 'rural proofing' policy and how it might be used as a framework to create meaningful theatre where the representation doesn't affect the reputation.

Theatrical rural representation has the potential of being presented as part of a fad, part of a 'New Ruralism' era. I am interested in New Ruralism and its place within the theatre industry and my research. In Rural sociology:

'New Ruralism is a framework for creating a bridge between Sustainable Agriculture and New Urbanism. Sustainable agriculture can help bring cities down to earth, to a deeper commitment to the ecology and economy of the surrounding countryside on which they depend' (Kraus, 2013:1)

New Ruralism is a framework that is present in cities and in playgrounds, in an attempt to bring the 'beauty' of rural life to Urban communities. New Ruralism is a framework that can be linked to how playwrights, producers, and theatre companies present rural life, rural characters or give audiences a rural experience as a marketing stunt, unique selling point to attract audiences or fulfil a preconceived perception of what rural life is like. Paula Coccozza says 'This ruralisation of play is happening all over Britain, from Kinross to Bristol. In parallel a rural children's literature is flourishing' (Coccozza, 2012, Unpaginated). Here demonstrating how this trend of utilising rural life is present in other areas of the arts industry as well as Theatre. In relation to theatre 'trend journalists' have dubbed '*This recent theatrical return to the countryside's*' (Harpin, 2019:65) and the fashionable energy around it as New Ruralism. So, I am interest to explore the difference in rural representation in the

work that uses rural narrative to fit a trend and those that are genuinely interested in exploring those communities' struggles. Just as 'New Ruralism' is a procedure used by the agriculture industry to make grey and intimidating buildings more approachable, I am posing the idea that this trend is being used in theatre to make it look like they are engaging and supporting rural communities, in such a way that it is a surface level commitment without doing the work. This is evident in the work of Jez Butterworths *'The Winterling'* originally produced by the Royal Court, where he has profited of telling a story based in a rural community with no evidence of engaging with the same community. However, this is not the case of the work of former Kneehigh, Grose's former company, whose commitment was to rural Cornwall and actively engaged with the communities in which they are basing their productions in. However, in the urban theatres attempt at New Ruralism in the theatre industry, it comes across as a fad. This is due to their perceived interest in rural life, without committing to rural engagement past creating a show, like 'Jerusalem'. The commitment is short lived. Like Poverty Chic or Poor Chic. This is 'an array of fads and fashions in popular culture that make recreation or stylish 'fun' of poverty or of traditional symbols of working class and underclass statuses' (Halnon, 2002: 501) Referring back to 'Jerusalem', Robinson mentions a review that states 'the country we recognise, scruffed right up against the dreamy, idealised place of popular imagination-that scepter'd, green, and pleasant and, stewed with an island that is squat and gristly and fierce' (Robinson, 2016: 2). Presenting this 'scruffed' up yet idolised narrative, we are looking at a version of 'Poverty Chic'. Poverty Chic is the idea of transforming working-class life into middle-class entertainment. Poverty Chic can be viewed as objectifying character and '...reducing a complex and multi-faceted human being to a single part or function.' (Halnon, 2002. 504) in the same way Butterworth, and other playwrights in this project, reduce a complex community to comedy and entertain, in exchange for applause, awards and financial gain.

Work that has been made to present rural life on stage without doing the work to engage with the communities is a form of ‘rural chic’, a fad utilising the struggles and already disadvantage reputations of the rural community. By performing ‘poor’ or endorsing poor or poverty chic this ‘controls the possibility of becoming one by dehumanizing it, by reducing it to a commodity’ (Halnon, 1952:508). This is the idea that the struggles of the poor become removed from reality, so we forget that they happen. Similarly, if we continue to present comedic or fantasied depictions of rurality, we start to dissociate the real struggles that happen. The other danger of rural chic becoming a fad is the potential for society to push rural communities further away from urban communities and start to create a larger ‘us and them’ between two communities, thus creating the polarisation of rural life.

Just as it is important to look at the venue’s engagement with rural communities, it is also worth exploring the playwrights and creatives who are presenting ‘The Rural’ on stage in Urban theatres. What do they understand about these communities? Who has the right to tell stories about a community they are not part of?

When asked what his understanding of what a rural sense of England and rural history is, Jez Butterworth (The Winterling and Jerusalem), who grew up in St Albans, states in an online digital interview, his experience of rural life was ‘*getting drunk around roman ruins and losing his virginity in an ice cream van by a roman wall..*’, and a few folk albums his parents had and openly says ‘*I really didn’t do my homework for this at all.*’ On her dissection of ‘Jerusalem’ Anna Harpin suggests that this interest in presenting rural life on stage is but a fad, or trend. She likens it to new ruralism.

‘It is accompanied by a distinct but related development in British theatre: the resurgence of the local. Whether witnessed in regional theatre programming such as at the Liverpool Everyman and the Northern Stage, or in Paines Plough’s initiative Come to Where I am from, in which local writers across the country were commissioned to write short monologues about their homes, a burgeoning interest in localism, cultural identity and heritage is palpable.’ (Harpin, 2011:65)

The use of Harpin’s word ‘Palpable’ and ‘Burgeoning’ explain just how quick and intensely wide spread this interest in rural life has become in the theatre industry and in the Oxford Dictionary a ‘Fad’ is defined as ‘...*an intense and widely shared enthusiasm for something, especially one that is short-lived; a craze.*’ (Stevenson, 2010:626)

It can be argued that any attention is positive attention, and that at least there has been exposure to rural life. But Dia Mohan states that ‘while rural subjects have access to some cultural spaces, they do not necessarily have control over these spaces or representation in them’ (Mohan in Robinson, 2016:60) As can be seen in the previous arguments there is clearly theatre and arts made available to rural communities in some capacity, either via rural touring programmes or outreach projects but what we can see from my anthology of texts presented is that the representation that is offered has not been dictated by rural communities, and there representation hasn’t been in their control. Therefore, although there is touch points to cultural there is no agency over that culture and how the communities are represented.

Highlighting that this surge of interest in rural life is a moment in time before the next trend. It is possible that the Urban theatres producing this interest in rural life is also a fad and not a genuine interest in presenting agency and voice to those communities. Ralph Pite, University of Bristol, when exploring New Ruralism, explains how ‘people find the countryside damaged when they travel to it, and want to bring back in their own spaces what has

disappeared out there' (Pite in Coccozza, 2012: Unpaginated) This idea that those Urban theatre makers are potentially witnessing a community or community struggles and not rectify those, or try to repair any damages but focus on how it benefits their own spaces, rather than patching up the damage in the rural spaces.

But with 'fads' or 'trends' the epicentre of those get left behind when a new 'craze' is the focus, but what happens to those communities who were getting to see their life on stage.

This has the potential to lead to even more dehumanising or fantasy opinions on rural communities. As a theatre maker I am now interested in how we as artists can work towards avoiding tokenism and poor representation of rural communities. To do so I want to explore how the theatre industry might implement 'Rural Proofing'. According to Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 'Rural proofing is a commitment by government to review and examine all public policy to ensure it does not disadvantage rural areas' (Shortall, 2008:1) Rural Proofing is also used in the education sector to explore how policies affect rural education and resources in rural schools. I want to look at how a similar model can be in place for a creative process. Reflecting on the play texts and the artists that I have explored in this project I would hope to use rural proofing to ensure the characters are not just about comedy, the setting is purely focused on the negatives and that the process of writing about such a community includes them, all in all creating work that doesn't disadvantage or tarnish a rural reputation. I want to explore how Arts Organisations and governing bodies can put a process in place that ensure work being produced by artists about rural communities can continue without damaging reputation or offending rural communities, therefore rural proofing the works. This understanding of how an audience feel or a community is impacted by a representation is a limitation of my current methodologies so

implementing rural proofing into the practice of creating a rural representation In theatre would also help develop this research further. (17)

Inspired by the steps outlined by the department of Rural Affairs on how the government rural proofing procedure takes place I explored how this may work in a rehearsal room. I will be looking at the policy in conjunction with two professional pieces of theatre that I have created. As a theatre maker with lived experiences of both rural and urban communities I am aware of the work I can do to ensure this co-creation and wider variety of rural representation is present in the work I am producing.

The first, is a production titled ‘Drekly’ written by Sam Parker. Set in a rural Devon and Cornwall, in 2025. This was performed at the Theatre Royal Plymouth in 2019. In an interview to promote the project I explained the work as having ‘South West at the heart of it’ and how the work was ‘a gritty story line...with much more than laughing at the character with the ‘Janner’ accent.

The second production, also written by Sam Parker, is ‘The Beast Without’. This piece was a commission as part of a scheme by the National Youth Theatre broaden their reach and engage with regional and rural communities. The work was then postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This production followed the journey of four young adults from different upbringings and their journeys to living in Dartmoor, and how the rural folk tale about the beast on the moor effects their life’s.

As I go through the steps of rural proofing, I will refer to the two productions I was involved in and look at how I can apply this process to my rehearsal room.

The first step in rural proofing is to ‘assess the direct or indirect impacts of the policy on rural areas.’ (Author Unknown, 2017:1) In this case, what are the impacts of the performance created on the rural communities. In this step the Rural Proofing guidelines state the need to see if the policy/project is ‘likely to have an impact of rural areas. You should review available evidence and, where necessary, consult rural stakeholders.’ (Author Unknown, 2017:1). This step could be used to assess the representation and what it reads to audiences and the larger take away of the piece. What are the implications of this representations on audience’s perception of rural communities? When applying this to ‘Drekly’ my immediate thought is the choices of characters we created. One character, Gazza, was a young man caught up in violence, theft, and binge drinking. The second, Lineker, is a successful man who credits his success to leaving his South-West rural life behind. What this represents is that if you leave rural areas, you have a greater chance of success but if you stay behind your life will derail. Although there is truth in the fact that there are more opportunities in urban areas, we could have created a piece of work that celebrated the success of those entrepreneurs or rural workers in South-West rural areas, which is a narrative that is undercelebrated and hasn’t appeared in the texts that I have included in this project. Similarly, in ‘Beast Without’ we follow the journey of ‘Abi’, ‘Andrew’ and ‘Killian’. Abi is a woman of colour living in Dartmoor, the narrative touches on the hostility and treatment she suffers because of this. Andrew is a prison guard who has grown up in Dartmoor and suppressed his sexuality because he is worried about how community is would react. The final character is Killian, an escapee from Dartmoor Prison. It was an important play to explore these themes and how rural areas can hold prejudice. But I am interested to explore how we may have looked at these crucial narratives, but in a way that celebrated people of colour and the LGBTQI+ community in a way that wasn’t focused on the negatives but looked at how

these communities can thrive and succeed in rural communities. In this first phase of 'Rural Proofing' the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs insists on rural consultation, something that is easily transferable when creating theatrical work that represents a community, simply working with members of that community in the creative process is very achievable. This is something similar to 'barbers' that are discussed in the previous chapter. 'Drekly' was a piece of theatre that was set in the future, so getting consultation on a Devon and Cornwall, who have experienced their own civil war and Cornwall is fighting to be cut off from Devon wasn't something I thought to be possible. However, I didn't ask question or engage with the community, a community I was part of, to ask how the themes of this project would affect them and this could have played an integral part to the choices I made. This wasn't the co-creation I have been longing for other companies and artists to do. We also had the potential to explore rural education and explore successes and positive opportunities in rural communities.

The second phase of rural proofing is to understand what the scale is of these impacts created in step one. This step should focus on 'the change that occurs as a result of the policy intervention.' (Author Unknown, 2017:9) A step that feels quite big for one theatre maker to be asking but this step also states '...understand if the impact in rural areas is different to urban areas' (Author Unknown, 2017:9) This step could be an opportunity to analyse if the work is deliberately othering rural communities to its urban audiences, and what the impact of this is. If the work touring to Urban venues, is all white men drinking cider or focused on magic and mystery, what image of rural life does this present to Urban audiences. With 'Drekly' we only performed at the Theatre Royal Plymouth, a large urban theatre. Where we created a comedy out of the alcoholism, crime and poor education in rural Cornwall. Therefore, all our impact was a negative impact on a rural representation, thus failing to

‘rural proof’ the work. However, if the work at looked at how success is possible in a rural area, and asked questions about how the urban dwellers buying second homes in rural Cornwall has had disastrous impacts on locals, we would have also impacted Urban representation to an extent, therefore meeting the criteria of this step in rural proofing. Further consideration comes from asking what actions can we take to tailor a production to work best in rural areas. An idea that can be quite easily transferable, perhaps, as a maker an internal question to ask myself at the start of a process, but the translation heavily looking at participation and involvement of rural communities to tell these stories. If I recognise a struggle within in a community, that needs awareness, what else can I do then just make a play about it. How can artists who are working in this area assess the research beforehand to understanding the co-creation models that have worked and the impact of those and put them in place.

The final step is to ask what effect your piece has had on rural areas and how can it be further adapted. More specifically it states that ‘Where you find rural issues to be significant, this should be considered as part of the monitoring and evaluation phase’ (Author Unknown, 2017:9) and states that the work should be reviewed regularly to ensure rural proofing. This final element leaves space for regular check ins and a reflection on my project, to ensure that each phase of the project is rural proofing. It also states that this question should be asked at the evaluation phase of each project to ensure rural proofing is in place moving forward. Although this feels very regimented, I am interested to explore this further in practice but as an artist interested in telling real stories and ensuring the representation of rural life has depth and brevity, this feels like a strong move forward, and anyway to prevent othering or disadvantaging a community feels positive.

Overall, when looking at the work I created I could have lent into the writing's themes of deprivation, isolation, longingness to be heard, battles young people in rural communities have with access to culture and barriers around travel and education. However, in a desire to make sure this piece clearly present an obvious version of rural, and South-West, I ended up providing moments of stereotypes and little engagement with the real, current, struggles of rural communities, probably out of fear of recognising I'd created something I had previously been criticising. Similarly, with 'Beast Without' I made decisions to set this work in the 80's. Immediately I have already fallen into the pattern of rural communities only being presented through a nostalgic lensed. I am yet to analyse a production that presents a post 2010 and positive representation of South-West rural life. But within both productions I failed to assess the direct or indirect impacts of the work I was creating on rural communities and didn't consult or research any of these themes within the rural community to understand how the work would affect a community or how it may affect their representation.

Moving forward, if I was to include rural proofing into my rehearsal process, as I feel a model like rural proofing would improve the current state of South-West rural representation in contemporary theatre. To achieve this, I would attempt the following structure:

Firstly, I would meet with members of a rural community to discuss the themes and how they feel this will be perceived. I would then look to implement regular check in phased throughout the process to ensure all other elements of the productions are aiding to a fair and equitable representation. Then I would be engaging with those from an urban upbringing to assess how the narrative is being represented to an outside community. Then staying open to change and keeping up the communication to ensure the work creates the representation of a rural community that doesn't damage the reputation of the community. Rural Proofing

doesn't always have to be a 'positive' representation or a 'good' one, it just has to be rooted in truth and fact and ensure it is not creating a 'mystical' or 'unjust' representation. Rural proofing is a tool that aligns with the co-creation model 'The Hand of Power', discussed earlier on in the paper, and the steps in rural proofing could be used in an additional or alongside those steps to ensure the rural community is at the heart of the work being created about them. (25)

To conclude, the representation of South-West rural life, although plenty of it, is part of a trend that has seen society become interested in rural life, without necessarily supporting it. These trends mean that the representations we are watching on stage are more about escapism and presenting either an idolised or more fashionable version of rurality which in turn creates a perception that the difficulties and struggles of rural life are not real. It also raises questions on who has the right to tell these stories, especially if they are presenting negative representations of a community, if you have not experienced these negatives experiences yourself. I do not think that all representations of South-West rural life have to positive, as that would also be a damaging representation, there is just a responsibility for artists representing a community that the representations we do put on contemporary stages is authentic and not damaging. Therefore, by putting a structure like 'Rural Proofing' in place, we can ensure that the audiences leave understanding that South-West Rural life is more than sheds, alcohol and low aspirations.

Conclusion

What my research has highlighted is that there is a clear, predominantly negative, state to rural South- West representation. But also, a clear route and guide to how contemporary theatre makers can approach their work without damaging the South-West rural reputation further and improve the state of the representation. Throughout this project I have been able to establish a series of good practice examples for creating a rural representation that is not damaging to the community, that artists can learn from. These include 'The Farm' by Nell Leyshon, 'FARM' created by WILLFREDD and 'Fen' by Caryl Churchill. Although Leyshon's work is twenty years old it has been an impactful source to reference back to as an example of authentic and non-stereotypical representation, this also applies to the work of John McGrath. (35).

Leyshon's piece sits within this category, firstly, because it was drawn from her lived experience. Secondly, the piece had a multi-layered narrative that was more than stereotypes and didn't just rely on comedy timing. It was able to explore a serious topic through the rural lens, without fantasy and mystery. These were similar traits that I had hoped to demonstrate through my re-writing of certain rural narratives. Leyshon's work also toured rural communities meaning the communities being represented had engaged with the work. According to my rural proofing for theatre approach this is a clear step in ensuring the reputation of a rural community is not damaged. Secondly, 'FARM', by WillFredd. This was first and foremost an immersive piece of theatre giving audiences a practical representation of rural theatre, which could be considered the most accurate representation. But beyond that it was about ensuring that the rural representation was not a fantasy or mythical representation but rather explored the day to day of rural life, and how it is much more than drinking in the fields and folk stories. It also takes strides in presenting a rural that doesn't focus on the nostalgia and creating a rural representation that is in the present and focusing

on the future of farming and rural life. With the inclusion of Young Farmers, we also see a rural representation that doesn't feel stuck in the past. So, perhaps the way to improve the current state of South-West rural representation is by creating immersive productions that fully involve and audience in this way of life. Finally, Churchills 'Fen' presents the need for cocreation and sharing spaces when creating representation of a community. With Churchills company living with the rural community members, they were able to create a piece of theatre that was 'semi-documentary' meaning that a representation was created that was close to an authentic representation. By focusing on the shared experience and a semi documentary approach they were able to create a piece that was beyond stereotypes and take pressing rural issues such as landowners and conglomerates and make them the focus of the narrative.

The similarity across all pieces, demonstrate good practice, is they focus on the rural perspective and not the urban perspective. All pieces include genuine rural involvement. This then meant audiences are presented with a non-problematic rural representation. This inclusion of rural communities in the process is not something that is a new approach but something that dates back to the Jacobian period. Which leaves me wondering why, in contemporary theatre, is it not a more frequent approach for creating theatre with South-West rural representation. Having rural communities involved in the process of making the theatre that represents them can ensure 'balance is restored, and trust is built' (Gardner, 2016: Unpaginated). This is referring to how the involvement of communities in rural touring schemes can provide lessons on how working with the community can benefit the theatre industry. The rural touring scheme has started providing a voice to rural communities, therefore giving them ownership over an area of the industry, so there is perhaps a correlation between the more power we provide to the rural communities and the improvement of their

representation on stage, as there is a potential link between how we value art in rural communities and how we choose to present rural communities.

Another finding is that perhaps the current state of South- West rural contemporary theatre is due to the perceived lack of support or interest from the countries National Theatre. National Theatre Wales create co-created work with rural communities. National Theatre Scotland have an aim to make theatre wherever they can connect with an audience. Whereas The National Theatre of England appear to be serving the Urban communities, with their most recent engagement with a real South-West community not stretching as far as rural Devon and Cornwall. Perhaps if the leading theatre of the country changed how they engaged with rural communities, then perhaps the directors and writers creating work to represent South-West rural life might change how they engage with the rural communities.

A common thread across the negative representation I have presented in my research has been how the texts have ‘othered’ South-West rural life. The ‘othering’ comes in many forms. It can be when productions present a rural as a holiday destination, that can be picked up and dropped when urban communities need them. It can also come from when the representation suggests the community needs fixing or saving. It is also present when the narrative fixates on celebrating the urban life but putting down rural life. Similarly, by presenting rural stereotypes artists will fuel the othering as it starts to create false representations of South-West rural life, that can be perceived to be true. Preventing ‘othering’ of the rural community is an approach that can also be linked back to including rural communities in the process. Similarly, to ‘The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil’ who worked with rural communities to represent them on their terms and this process

‘prevented the rural representations being other or alien to its audience’(Robinson, 2016: 56).

Adding to the current state of South-West rural representation is the regularity of narratives that are firmly rooted in the past. Either looking at folklore, historic rural events or having narratives that focus on characters from an older generation. Furthermore, many of the representations are removed from modern and accepted behaviour in the twenty-first century. It can also be argued that the current state of South- West rural representation is one that is part of a trend. This is a trend that is present across multiple industries in an attempt to bring rural life to those in urban settings. However, with a trend it means there is no real commitment to the presentation and those really living that life that is being presented. This is similar to previous trends such as poverty chic. Perhaps suggesting that the current state of South-West rural life is part of cycle that is occasionally in favour for artists, but not a consistent concern.

The current state of South-West rural reputation is also damaged by the artists and creatives that are telling the stories. Firstly, there are productions representing South-West rural life, but those stories are being shaped by directors who don’t have experience of rural life. This includes using Casting Directors from London to decide who tells these rural narratives. I do not believe that it should be rural casting directors only. But I do think there is an opportunity for co-creation here or working with casting directors with rural lived experience. A large part of this argument is around authentic voice, and who has the right to tell a story. However, referring back to Schulze, authenticity is subjective, and everyone will have their own opinion on whether something is authentic and a fair representation. Urban centric artists creating rural representations is also not helped by the tension that Urban theatre is ‘better’ than rural/regional theatre.

Through my use of creative work and reimagining of narratives I have tried to demonstrate that there is a possibility to tell the South-West rural narrative, that the writers have set out to explore, but do so with a narrative that aids the community and doesn't damage their reputation through a problematic representation. Furthermore, as a South-West creative, whose work looks to highlight South-West life, I can ensure that my work is not aiding to the negative current state of South-West rural representation. This can be achieved by exploring a new method of ensuring we can change the state of general rural representation. This could be achieved with the 'rural proofing' framework I have explored. Through the rural proofing framework I am proposing some steps that artists who are looking to use South- West rural narratives can use in the rehearsal room to ensure it doesn't damage the reputation. The first point is to spend more time assessing the potential damage that the representation may have on the community. The second step is to understand further the impact of the representation and what the representation may do to the community reputation. This can be achieved by spending more time with community to understand the scale of these impacts. The following step would be to understand if we need to go through with these impacts or can we tell our narrative in a different way. All of these can be implemented with more contact and involvement of the rural community in the process. There will also be a shift in representation of all rural communities if the process is viewed with an ethnographic lens and it is more about the study and presentation of people, rather than characters, comedy, folklore and history. Overall, with a deeper understanding of how representation and stereotypes can affect a rural community; learning from previous artists who have created rural representation within other regions and challenging and adapting the process on how to create a South-West rural representation, the current state of South-West rural representation can be improved.

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