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**Outside the Canon:
Theatre, Social Change, and Archival Memory
1951 – 1977**



The Scatterin' by James McKenna, Abbey Theatre, Dublin. 1974. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, JHL.

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Declaration

I, the candidate, Barry Houlihan, certify that this thesis is solely my own work and has not been previously awarded a degree in this University, or elsewhere.

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Without the help, support and guidance of many people this thesis would not have been completed. I am indebted to my supervisor, Professor Lionel Pilkington, for standing by me and this project over the past four years. Lionel has helped shape both me and my work in immeasurable ways. His generosity, knowledge and passion was a constant inspiration and I am grateful to have had such a mentor and teacher. As an undergraduate I read a book called *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland*. Then, it completely changed my outlook on my future course of studies in theatre history and archives, and ultimately my career. That fate should have it I would one day count Lionel as my Phd supervisor was my great luck.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, John Houlihan.

*“Isn't there the light of seven heavens in your heart alone, the way you'll be an angel's lamp
to me from this out”*

J.M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*

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Background and Introduction

On the 29th of April, 1970, a protest against the lack of vision for new forms of Irish drama was taking place outside the Peacock theatre space at the Abbey Theatre. A small group had gathered to picket a new production of Lenox Robinson's 1928 play, *The Far Off Hills*. A light comedy about the relationships of the Clancy family, Robinson's play was a staple of the Abbey's repertoire for decades, having had over thirty-six revivals up to 1970. Its reappearance, in April 1970, on the stage specially designated for the exploration of new forms of experimental Irish drama, provoked a demonstration from the members of an amateur theatre group, the Demona Players.¹ The group carried banners with slogans "Abbey Directors Over the Hill"; "The Abbey – The Cultural Wasteland" and "Experimental Theatre? Yes, 1930s style."²

The production, directed by Frank Dermody, was reported to be of a slow pace, traditional in its production and acting style, failing to meet the remit of the Peacock space as a hub for experimentation and new dramatic forms.³ David Nowlan, theatre critic of the *Irish Times*, noted that Dermody's direction of the play was 'curiously static', with the sets 'strangely ugly and irrelevant.' Yet, despite the public misgivings about this non-experimental play being presented on the studio space, Nowlan concludes his review by stating that 'a night of Brecht' would be surpassed every time by the likes of the performances in *The Far Off Hills* of Terry Donnelly and Bernadette McKenna.⁴ A spokesperson for the protesters commented that "the Peacock should be producing plays that had some relation to Irish life now."⁵

The complexity presented in both these polarising opinions regarding the condition of contemporary Irish theatre offers an opportunity for questioning. These questions include:

¹ No information can be traced as to the origins or membership of the Demona Players amateur theatre group.

² 'Protest outside Dublin Theatre', *Cork Examiner*, 30 April 1970, 20.

³ Frank Dermody joined the Abbey Theatre in 1939, replacing Louis D'Alton, who had recently stepped down from the Board of Directors. Dermody directed, designed and acted in many plays at the Abbey Theatre over his association of close to forty years. Dermody directed three further plays at the Peacock Theatre, the space reserved for experimental work, following his production of *The Far Off Hills* in 1970, including *Grogan and the Ferret* by George Shiels (1970), *In The Shadow of the Gunman* by Sean O'Casey (1973), and *Coats* by Lady Augusta Gregory (1973), plays which premièred at the Abbey Theatre in 1933, 1923, and 1910, respectively. This lack of new and truly experimental work was symptomatic of the disquiet of groups such as the Demona Players towards the Abbey and the Peacock for failing in their remit towards developing new and experimental drama.

⁴ 'Performance outweighs protest', *Irish Times*, 1 May 1970, 10.

⁵ 'Theatre picketed for failure to experiment', *Irish Times*, 30 April 1970, 10.

how did new Irish drama seek to reflect the changing society and life in 'modern Ireland'? What form did these plays take? How did new venues and a new generation of playwrights, producers and actors afford new outlets for an expression of an alternative dramatic representation of Ireland? And how have and can lesser remembered plays, and their dramatic composition, now be re-evaluated so as to enhance critical understanding of socially reflective theatre for the post-war period in Ireland?

In May 1976, Brian Friel wrote a letter to Thomas Kilroy expressing his concerns for contemporary Irish theatre and its agenda. Friel's conflicts centred on what a new drama for modern Ireland would look like and respond to. Friel was aware of the need for a theatre to be responsive to contemporary Irish society and he recognised its influence by international theatre and culture, in particular that of the United States. Friel wrote:

I think we are all conscious of being in it at the beginning of something; and what that something is & what it derives from and what themes are accessible to it and what themes are outside it & what technique can best convey those items – these are all [questions] for exploration . . . In this respect we are closer to the American playwright - and as confused . . . You see, what I think we're all attempting in our scattered plays is to exorcise ourselves of our intimately private obsessions & fears in a medium that is best suited to the exploration of public [expressions].⁶

This thesis offers a focused study of playwrights and plays which are outsiders to the canon but which acted to shape this major period of Irish drama and have a profound influence on Irish theatre-going audiences. In the words of Christopher Murray, 'the closely-knit nexus of the artist and the audience' shows that 'collectively these writers addressed issues central to the developments shaping the new Ireland and that individually they felt themselves to have a role as artists in a changing society.'⁷ Murray cites the importance when reconsidering the social and political developments of the 1960s not to forget the comments of one of the most prominent figures at the heart of decision making at the time – T.K. Whitaker. Whitaker writing in 1986, referred to the opportunity for widening social

⁶ P103/536 (3-4) Letter from Brian Friel to Thomas Kilroy, 5 May [1976], Thomas Kilroy Archive, NUI Galway. The 'we' that Friel here mentions includes Thomas Kilroy, Tom Murphy, Tom MacIntyre and Brian Friel.

⁷ Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to the Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 164.

inclusion, developing economic strategy and political status in an international context as 'paradise lost'. Historian Mary E. Daly, offers a similar re-evaluation in her book of the nineteen-sixties in Ireland as a failed political and economic project. The contemporary memory of the period, Daly argues, has been obfuscated by nostalgia.⁸

In his chapter "Versions of Pastoral", from his book on the politics of Irish drama, Nicholas Grene recognises that beginning in 1964, the plays that emerged thereafter did so from a time and place of rapid modernisation for Irish society. Grene also rightly states that:

whether the playwrights gave their plays urban or suburban settings (as Kilroy and Leonard did), or as in the case of others, preferred traditional subjects in Irish rural and small-town life, there was a new acerbity of social analysis, different angles and some marked changes in dramatic style and technique.⁹

Grene suggests this timeline of 1964 as being the progenitor of modern Irish drama, and of a drama that was reflective of modern Ireland. I also suggest this this needs re-assessment and on more terms than just chronology. It must also be challenged on grounds of gender, class, casting, and race. Grene asserts an acerbity of social analysis and marked changes in dramatic style and technique' as qualitative markers for a 'new Irish drama. I would contend that these marked changes are evident as early as 1951, more than a full decade earlier than the 1964 Dublin International Theatre Festival presented new works by Brian Friel, Eugene McCabe and others.

The historiography of Irish theatre in modern times can greatly benefit from a deeper and engaged relationship with the archive and records of the time. If we move beyond a textual history to a wider critical study of plays, playwrights, actors, and also audiences, cognisant also of the time in which the plays were produced and consumed, a more complete and transparent history is attainable. This trajectory follows recent scholarship such as *Experimental Irish Drama after W.B. Yeats* by Ian R. Walsh who identifies similar gaps in Irish

⁸ Mary E. Daly, *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State, and Society, 1957 - 1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 365.

⁹ Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault from Friel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1999), 194.

theatre historiography, the reason for which, Walsh concludes, lies in the almost exclusive concentration on the theatrical output of the Abbey Theatre in most theatre histories.¹⁰

As, in 1961, Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* broke new ground at Joan Littlewood's Theatre Royal at Stratford East (later moving to a three-month run in London's West End) for portraying the violent masculinity of the emigrant Irish working-class in England, more uncomfortable social truths would be played out closer to home. At many venues away from the national theatre, the Abbey, or other major venues such as the Gate, a new generation of writers and producers were taking on the concerns of the nation in terms of women's rights, equality, violence, emigration, healthcare, governance and the future trajectory of the country through its modernisation. This movement took place largely in parallel to, as Grene notes, "the post-1956, naturalistic movement in British theatre: angry young men and women exposing the social underbelly which genteel drawing-room drama had ignored – the Osbornes, Weskers and Shelagh Delaneys."¹¹

In Dublin, the pocket theatre movement was led by the likes of Madame Daisy Bannard Cogley, Barry Cassin, Nora Lever, Carolyn Swift, Alan Simpson, Phyllis Ryan and others taking the initiatives and "learn as they went".¹² They worked within a close network of intersecting youthful ambition – belief in a new drama that existed outside of traditional forms and settings: a new modern Irish drama. Such was the existence of belief and spirit within this network of influence that actor, director and founding member of the 37 Club, Barry Cassin, wrote to Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift at the Pike Theatre in 1954, offering them usage of the 37 Club's set flats, following its closure. Cassin subsequently wrote that his next venture would entail hard graft within the then current Irish economic context of the mid-1950s:

We have had the news that we have to move our stuff out of the Peacock where it was stored since we closed. Nora and I decided that Carol and you might like a present of our flats. They may be a bit small even for the Pike, but I'm sure you can

¹⁰ Ian R. Walsh, *Experimental Theatre after W.B. Yeats* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 13.

¹¹ Grene, 1999, 195.

¹² For more analysis of the significance of the Théâtre de Poche movement in Dublin in the 1950s see Lionel Pilkington, "The Little Theatres of the 1950s", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 286 – 303.

utilise them in many ways. . . . [in the future I will be] starting right from the bottom .

. .¹³

John Ryan, Dublin-based artist, stage designer and founding editor of literary periodical, *Envoy* (the first to publish works by both Brendan Behan and J.P. Donleavy), had through his teens worked a stage-hand and ‘extra’ around Dublin theatres in the early 1940s. Ryan counters the assumption of the 1950s being accountable for its lack of theatre artistry and originality only by virtue of the Abbey Theatre being out of commission owing to a fire at its premises in 1951 and a relocation to the unsuitable Queen’s Theatre on Pearse Street. As Ryan notes: “these were contemplative times [in the post-war years] in which people read more books, listened to more concerts, patronized more theatres . . . above all, the theatre flourished.”¹⁴

This fringe network continued to grow into the 1960s and developed a particular relationship between audiences and the new theatres that dotted the Dublin city-scape and its hinterland. When the Abbey Theatre reopened in 1966, director Roland Jaquarello described the main stage as unwelcoming with bad acoustics and with a stage which was remote and inaccessible. This alienated audiences from full immersion on the theatricality of modern drama. “You got the sense the theatre was only half developed. This is in contrast to the community between actors and audiences regularly seen at the Pike, Gas Works, Olympia and others at this time.”¹⁵ Such was the momentum of this movement and network that an article headline in the magazine, *The Overseas Family*, concluded “Irish Actors at War with Abbey”:

Ireland’s theatre has gone underground in in what may be the most extensive pocket theatre movement in Europe. Throughout Dublin and its suburbs, cellars and lofts are giving way to props, grease paint . . . with gates and doorways sprouting such names as Pike, 37 and Studio . . . There never were any great days of Irish theatre,

¹³ Letters from Barry Cassin to Alan Simpson, 12 July 1954 and 9 August 1954, respectively. 10813/394/58, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.

¹⁴ John Ryan, *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1975), 34.

¹⁵ Roland Jaquarello, *Memoirs of Development: My Time in Irish Theatre and Broadcasting* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2016), 28.

Madame Bernard Cogley insisted recently, adding that only the early Abbey was near great.¹⁶

Towards a Modern Dramatic Expression of Ireland

Theatre academic Christopher Murray explores the work of Sean O'Casey in connection to its depiction of the urban space, particularly Dublin City, in terms of the relationship between the individual and society, and as a site of injustice to the poor¹⁷. The dramatization of such locations by O'Casey is a central and important motif, symbolising a microcosm of Irish society, whose class disparity and growing theocracy through the years of de Valera's premiership beginning in 1932 and which lasted, nearly unbroken, through to the onset of the 1960s.¹⁸ Located largely in Torquay for much of his later life, O'Casey exiled himself from Ireland and banned his works being professionally produced in Ireland.¹⁹ Murray reminds us that as O'Casey watched on in a blend of anger and amusement as the Free State turned into de Valera's theocratic nation, he wrote a series of one-act plays including *Hall of Healing* (1952) and *Bedtime Story* (1952) that satirized the new Dublin that emerged from this counter-revolution against the social malaise of the state.²⁰

Actor Cyril Cusack was among those who in the early 1950s recognised this hunger for a new form of Irish drama, one that moved away from tradition of peasant kitchen settings or tired drawing room comedies of Victorian sensibility. Cusack signalled that Irish drama could be modern, experimental and reflective of contemporary times. As an art form, theatre was again to reclaim its social and political relevance and urgency, while not being lessened in artistic merit by topical or challenging contexts. Cusack approached Sean O'Casey, as a possible source for just such a new work:

¹⁶ *The Overseas Family*, 27 April 1958, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin, 10813/388.

¹⁷ Christopher Murray, "O'Casey and the City", *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, Grene, Nicholas, Morash, Chris, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 183 – 1984.

¹⁸ The timeframes of office of Taoiseach held by Eamon de Valera include 1932 to 1948, 1951 to 1954, and 1957 to 1959.

¹⁹ This was following the censorious intervention of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid in refusing to permit his works and those of Samuel Beckett and a new adaptation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* from being performed in Dublin. For more on this incident and for discussion of the reception of O'Casey's plays in the 1950s see James Moran's *The Theatre of Sean O'Casey* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), p. 132-134 and also *Interactions: Dublin Theatre Festival 1957 – 2007*, Nicholas Grene and Patrick Lonergan, eds., with Lilian Chambers (Carysfort Press, Dublin, 2008).

²⁰ Murray, 2016, 195.

I am in search of the new play, modern and of Irish inspiration, in a desire to break new ground creatively and productively. Theatre here is very much in the experimental stage again – I suppose it always is and should be – and I think there is a real desire to find a more modern expression.²¹

A week later, writing again to O’Casey, Cusack explains that his fifteen-year-association with the Abbey Theatre “has left me with a violent antipathy towards the present management which my jaundiced eye sees as being anti-theatre.”²² Within less than a decade, in O’Casey’s view, little has changed. Writing to a Thomas Buggy in Cork, who was offering to establish a ‘Sean O’Casey Society’ (an offer O’Casey declined) O’Casey stated he was sorry to hear that no young Irish playwright was producing work that approaches greatness. “If this happened in Ireland”, O’Casey wrote, “we know that instead of being opened, the door would be locked, bolted and barred against his entry.”²³

This ‘modern expression’ that Cusack seeks, was found in a new generation of theatre artists active in Ireland in the post-Emergency period. Emboldened to create innovative new work as independent theatre makers, a network of new playwrights, producers, directors, designers and actors emerged from the fringes of Irish theatre in Dublin on the margins of the major and national theatre venues. This was also a recognisable trait in British post-war drama. “The lure of professionalism was extremely strong in the forties and fifties . . . Autonomy was crucial to the changes in theatre practice.”²⁴ Modernity in expression needed to be enabled and facilitated by change. In a cumbersome organisation like the Irish National Theatre Society change came ‘dropping slow’. Director Roland Jaquarello described how reforming and rejuvenating new figures who came into the Abbey were met often with resistance and frustration:

Lelia Doolan was the first female artistic director the Abbey Theatre. She had come from RTÉ where she had been a successful producer/director . . . The company was

²¹ Letter from Cyril Cusack, Dalkey, to Sean O’Casey, 28 April 1954, Sean O’Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 38,060/1.

²² Letter from Cyril Cusack, Dalkey, to Sean O’Casey, 5 May 1954, Sean O’Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 38,060/1.

²³ Letter from Sean O’Casey to Thomas Buggy, 6 April 1963, Sean O’Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS37, 933.

²⁴ Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All that: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London: Routledge, 1999), 83.

stuck in its ways and needed a kick into modernity. Most importantly, [Doolin] had a vision for what was necessary. . . It was a brave decision to bring in voice and movement coaches and to try and loosen up the Peacock as a genuinely experimental space rather than a mini-Abbey. Unfortunately, most of the experienced actors rejected her ideas and did their best to voice their discontent.²⁵

The 'kick into modernity' as espoused by Doolan had been building momentum and achievement small but important gains on the fringes of Irish and Dublin professional theatre for some time.²⁶ The extent of impacts initiated by a number of new theatre-makers who emerged in Dublin from the onset of the 1950s can now be traced through detailed archival analyses. This period was critical and witnessed the growth of a movement whereby Irish professional drama was developed and radicalised to its largest extent since the foundation of the Irish National Theatre Society in 1904.

This thesis will address key case studies, events, and people, as well as a critical analysis of the reception of these works through their archival documentation. This archival analysis enables a deeper understanding of contemporary Irish drama and its hitherto unexplored archival memory.

New Theatre, Technologies and Media – Performing a New Ireland

The national broadcaster, Radió Telefís Éireann (R.T.É.), began transmission on 31 December 1961. This afforded competition, as well as opportunity, for new roles and creative outlets for many people working in Irish theatre. Chris Morash posits that initially RTÉ was heavily dependent on the established tradition of Irish theatre production as a trustworthy brand from which to build on and broadcast through the new medium of television.²⁷ Figures like Carolyn Swift, Denis Johnston, Lelia Doolan, Siobhán McKenna, among numerous others, all had roles and interactions overlapping between theatre and

²⁵ Roland Jaquarello, *Memories of Development: My Time in Irish Theatre and Broadcasting* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2016), 30.

²⁶ Select examples of these new practitioners and venues include Carolyn Swift and Alan Simpson, who founded the Pike Theatre; Phyllis Ryan who founded the Globe Theatre Company and Orion production with collaborators such as Norman Rodway, Godfrey Quigley, Anna Manahan and others; venues like the Gas Works Theatre in Dún Laoghaire, The Eblana at Busáras, the 37 Club, the Focus Theatre, the Lantern Theatre, The Project Arts Centre, among others.

²⁷ Chris Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 176.

the fledgling venture of Irish television. In January 1957, immediately preceding the *cause célèbre* that *The Rose Tattoo* case²⁸ caused at Dublin's Pike Theatre, Simpson wrote to Louis Elliman enquiring to be part of Elliman's new television company. Simpson stated that he felt "our work [at the Pike Theatre] to date has particularly fitted us for T.V. . . . it would solve the problem of how to make theatrical enterprise pay in Dublin."²⁹

Elliman responded with details of ambitious plans for the Dublin Film Management Ltd. The drive that came with such new ventures matched, at least in energy, the ambition of the likes of Simpson, Swift, Phyllis Ryan and others, where economics in reality proved very different. Even before *The Rose Tattoo* contributed to the eventual demise of the Pike theatre venture, Simpson revealed the challenging economic environment of Dublin in the 1950s for theatre makers. Larger theatres like the Abbey, relocated to the larger and impractical Queen's Theatre was economically unviable for new work of experimental form. It led to an unsustainable reliance on 'safe' revivals and light comedies from the Abbey repertoire, keeping audiences entertained but unchallenged in terms of contemporary theatre practice and social reflection. As critic Robert Hogan recounted that since the end of the Second World War, Irish television content and consumption was following patterns from American media. Television was attracting a growing share of audiences from theatre and cinema with more and more Irish actors turning to television work out of economic necessity. Hogan also outlines the effect the parallel siphoning of theatrical talent away from the stage was having in Ireland:

Many of the best playwrights, such as Hugh Leonard, James Douglas, John O' Donovan and Thomas Murphy, spend a good deal of creative time working directly for television . . . the unavoidable conclusion is that the Dublin stage is tottering to its grave.³⁰

²⁸ The European première of Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo* took place during the Dublin International Theatre Festival of 1957, at the Pike Theatre, directed by Alan Simpson.

²⁹ Letter 398/144, 16 January 1957, Letter from Alan Simpson to Louis Elliman. Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin. Further letters between Simpson and Elliman discuss 'Dublin Film Management Ltd., whose letter-head lists its directors as being Louis Elliman, Emmet D'Alton, and Ernest Blythe. Its registered offices were located at 11 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.

³⁰ Robert Hogan, *'Since O'Casey' and Other Essays on Irish Drama* (Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe Press, 1983), 119.

Hogan summarised his views on the emergence of a new Irish drama since he began observing Irish drama in 1960s, a time he said when Ireland was “on the verge of a violent acceleration into modern times.”³¹ The period and its plays and new generation of practitioners could, he argued, be remembered with “a determination to assimilate experimental techniques without alienating the viewers. Such theatre does not produce manifestos, but it could, if sufficient plays were produced, burst into a startling muscularity.”³² This ‘startling outburst’ of theatre that Hogan describes, at a time of critical juncture for the political, social and economic development of Ireland and its people, reflected startling change, events, innovation, artistic and intellectual rejuvenation. This thesis sets out to identify, examine and reflect upon these changes in society which also served to create a new and alternative national drama for Ireland.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Robert Hogan, “The Year in Review: 1967 – Theatre”, *Irish University Review*, Vol. 5, No.2, 1968. 109.

Methodologies and Literature Review

This thesis is produced through an archival research methodology, drawn upon by historiographical analysis of the available evidence and previous studies of the period on which I focus, from the early 1950s through to the end of the 1970s. Memory becomes a central construct within this study as the works I foreground are those which are primarily outside of the considered canon of contemporary Irish drama. They are not widely remembered and as such have suffered an absence from wider debate and scholarship.

This, I contend, is at the heart of this study: a recalibration of our collective memory of modern Irish drama. I present findings and evidence to account for these neglected plays that have been displaced from theatrical repertoires and performances histories and within wider cultural remembrance. The plays largely deal with controversial and provocative social issues, directed at unsettling audiences and official governances who deliberately or subconsciously uphold the conservative orthodoxies. This act of archival reclamation is necessary for many reasons.

Firstly, the works outlined within this study I have already mentioned as being positioned largely outside the canon of Irish drama. Secondly, they offer a counter-narrative to the argument that a contemporary Irish drama, one that was subject to international influence, did not largely exist in Ireland prior to 1964 and the production of Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* I also provide evidence that there was a diverse body of work created and produced by Irish dramatists and practitioners as early as 1951 that addressed contemporary concerns and was reactive to stylistic development. Thirdly, the network of artists that cross-pollinated ideas, influenced the form such new work in acting, voice, design and text, and created a co-operative movement that often worked in unison and in order to achieve a common and modern drama.

Finally, the recovery of such works from the hitherto unstudied body of Irish theatre archives also show the breadth of social and political issues which were undertaken. Issues such as mental illness, legal adoption, domestic abuse, class inequality, sexism and female inequality, racism, contraception, sexuality and other such issues were bring broadly addressed within Irish contemporary drama. The point must also be made that as these

works were often produced in smaller fringe venues, they received comparatively smaller audiences to those at the major national and commercial venues and so inevitably had a smaller collective memory pool.

Without a body of records and a holistic performance archive, the evidence from which to build a counter-argument to existing historiographies can be scant. National press and Dublin-based press were also largely unsympathetic to works by women authors, for example. Plays such as by Edna O'Brien and Mary Manning, as addressed within this study, received uniformly harsh reviews which frequently took the form of personal and sexist attacks of character and morality rather than objective commentary on the artistic merit of their respective plays. Such reviews are often the only evidence on record for plays with one-off or minor production histories within traditional repositories. They can act as continual barriers to any later study or encounter of the play by new generations, continuing and perpetuating the exclusion of these works from wider study and appreciation.

To support my argument, I turn to work by memory studies and sociology scholar Andreas Huyssen, who argues in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, that the past "is not simply given in memory, 'but it must be articulated to become memory.'"³³ The articulation that Huyssen calls for, comes in the form of archival reconstruction. The past must be given a chance to be remembered.

Further study around the political and social intersection of the period with Irish drama and theatre is necessary. The availability of large volumes of archival records from key writers, producers, actors, critics and theatre venues and companies of the period now offer greater access to evidence surrounding pivotal moments of decision-making, achievement, failure, questioning and emergence of an alternative history of contemporary Irish drama. As Murray reminds us, "Irish writers after 1958 did not sing the new Republic"³⁴ and this new archival evidence reminds how complicated and challenging the period of 'post-Whitaker's'³⁵ Ireland was in actuality, but importantly how this intersection of the

³³ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995), 3.

³⁴ Christopher Murray, 1997, 164.

³⁵ T.K. Whitaker was a senior civil servant in the Department of Finance and later Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, 1969 to 1976 and a Senator from 1977 to 1982. His work on economic modernisation within Government policy in post-war Ireland, resulting in his white-paper, "The Programme for Economic

new Irish Republic, social and critical thought and theatrical intervention was happening as early as 1951.

Archival Methodology – Reclaiming the Record, Reinterpreting Historiography

The depth of this project was greatly enhanced by the access to a proliferation of newly accessible archive collections released within the last half-decade and to other collections which are privately-held. These collections relate to the post-1950 period I am examining and represent a cross-section of key theatre venues, individuals and theatre companies in Ireland and from which I could create a new evaluation of this critical period. Advances in digital preservation and restoration also enabled this project to examine digitally restored performance records. These include sound files and scores for various plays, recorded productions as well as stage management files, annotated prompt-scripts, production images, correspondence, marketing files and ephemera, and other key files which form the corpus of primary source material examined. The combined studies of these resources offer a reconstruction of the mechanics of performance and production as well as its reception.

Anthony Roche's book, *The Politics of Brian Friel*, was one of the first to utilise the Friel papers at the National Library of Ireland. *The Theatre of Tom Murphy: Playwright Adventurer* by Nicholas Grene also made detailed use of records within the Tom Murphy archive at Trinity College Dublin as well as the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive and the Druid Theatre Company archive at NUI Galway. *The Oxford handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* also made prominent use of newly released archive collections across its in-depth analysis. These selected examples show the extent to which disciplined excavation and analyses of such archive material can reshape our collective memory and understanding of the past through a broader and multi-faceted research process.

Similarly, Jim Davis, Katie Normington and Gilli Bush-Bailey with Jacky Bratton present a study and methodological examples of how approaches to theatre history can seek to overcome some of the difficulties encountered in pursuit of the theatrical past.³⁶ They draw

Expansion", adopted by Government in 1958, is largely heralded as the beginning of new globalist economic expansion of Ireland.

³⁶ Jim Davis, Katie Normington and Gilli Bush-Bailey with Jacky Bratton, in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, eds., Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2011), 89.

on the distinction between 'the past', being an irrevocable and intransient temporal state and that of 'history', the documented narrative through which we try to interpret and discern the past. Bruce McConachie foregrounded such turns in theatre historiography in the mid-1980s. Davis et al present a dual focus of such studies of theatre history which draw on two central components: firstly, epistemological (recognising the interplay between modern and contemporary knowledge systems and the contested event within its own past setting) and secondly, hermeneutical, an approach of analysis based upon the interpretation of the forms of analyses themselves.³⁷ These two strategies of approach to history allow for reconsideration of past events (such as the theatre production) being a product of and a challenge against a contemporary event/time and how our current knowledge of that past allows us to consider the past across a temporal divide.

The second point relates to our understanding of previous modes of historical evaluation at particular moments, being cognisant of development of various modes of historical investigation between the past and present time. These forms of addressing performance histories allow for a contesting of constructed and assumed normative narratives: those which were constructed from and in particular historiographic styles, which were typically solely text-based and non-reflective to sociological influences on contemporary production and reception.

Diana Taylor questions the apparent 'fixity' of the repertoire and the binaries of residual memory and ephemeral memory of performance and warns against the prescribed reliance of scholars and historian upon what objects or artefacts are preserved and stable within the archive, rather than within the collected repertoire that form 'embodied memory': "performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing - in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-producible knowledge . . ."³⁸ Maggie B. Gale furthers this point in her acknowledgement that:

The archive – as concept, as resource, as location, as site of power relations, as signifier of the historical and cultural division and ownership of information and

³⁷ Davis et al, 2011, 91.

³⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

knowledge - has centred in recent years on for whom it is created and how it is used . . . a vital cultural tool as a means of accessing versions of the past.³⁹

Clare Cochrane and Jo Robinson remind us of the ethical responsibility inherent with any project of theatre historiography and performance scholarship.⁴⁰ They examine the position of 'ethical spectatorship' that the historian and scholar occupies. The power dynamics of history-shapers (archivists) and history-makers (historians) necessitate practice whereby any examination of the past deconstructs the order of privilege which created and supported the historic context and experience of the past.

There is a significant contribution to be made by the professional archivist community towards the formation of a wider, inclusive, and socially reflective archive and historiography of Irish drama; one that looks beyond the canon. Collection and acquisition strategies of institutions should reflect to the fullest extent the society in which the contemporary (and historical) dramatic works were created. The manuscripts and printed/published works of women playwrights, directors and artists, of artists of immigrant backgrounds, works from outside the Anglophone tradition, works by artists of disability, theatre which reflects working-class communities, as examples, can all contribute to this diversity of Irish theatre history, countering notions of tradition, nation and identity. Archives and institutions can function as formal barriers to a wider public and exclusionary within a perception of academic elitism dominated by male-centred histories. Recent scholarship by historians such as Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam and Lucy Noakes, has indicated that methodological and theoretical approaches to broader social and cultural histories can transform current insights and reframe historical narratives to recognise and include a broader range of sources and evidences.⁴¹

The paucity of in-depth examination in theatre history of working-class voices, women in contemporary performance, middle-class existence and wider socio-historiographic frameworks as a means of understanding dramatic and theatrical influence, lies at the heart

³⁹ Maggie B. Gale, 'The Imperative of the Archive: Creative Archive Research', in *Research methods in Theatre and Performance*, Kershaw and Nicholson, eds., (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2011), 17.

⁴⁰ Clare Cochrane and Jo Robinson, eds., *Theatre History and Historiography: Ethics, Evidence and Truth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

⁴¹ Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam and Lucy Noakes, *New Directions in Social and Cultural History*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). 12-13.

of this study. As Cochrane and Robinson state, the primacy of the task is to “explore the ways in which theatre historians apply ethical thinking to the truthful representation, recovery or revising of the different ways and means by which theatre-makers in the past have enacted scenarios related to human experience . . .”⁴² as I seek to move towards an ethical and broader history of Irish drama.

The diversity of theatre history and inclusion of a plurality of voices, representative of lived experience within broad society was not always accounted for within theatre history. Director Roland Jaquarello points out that:

In the history of Irish theatre, Amalgamated Artists (A.A.) are blithely ignored. Along with the Pike Theatre, Gemini and the Globe Theatre earlier. They produced modern plays that were gateways to a more liberal Ireland and provided public discussion about important and previously taboo subjects. It was, for instance, A.A. that produced *Boys in the Band*, the first openly gay play performed in Ireland and new Irish work like *Savages* by James Douglas. As there was no landmark Irish play, they don't fit into a more obvious narrative . . . They opened the doors to new talent and challenging subject matter with intelligent popular theatre.⁴³

Within this study, the core corpus of dramatic works and archival collections which underpin this methodology are of artists, venues, and audiences that are on the periphery of many other histories of contemporary Irish drama. Venues such as the Pike Theatre, an important theatre of international avant-garde work, is perhaps known to many through the intervention of Church and State authorities to censor the European première of Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo* in 1957. The founding role of Carolyn Swift and her play *The Millstone* in 1951 is an example of necessary archival reclamation in order to underpin new understandings of modern Irish drama. There are other histories which need to be foregrounded and brought to wider attention and which are included within the scope of this study. The Project Arts Centre,⁴⁴ for instance, is not widely included here. Founded in

⁴² Cochrane and Robinson, eds., 2016, 4.

⁴³ Jaquarello, 2016, 22.

⁴⁴ The Project Arts Centre was initially created as a temporary and singular artistic event. This was in the form of a three-week festival at the Gate Theatre, Parnell Square, Dublin, on Tuesday November 29, 1966. The event included plays, readings, concerts of jazz and classical music, teach-ins on censorship and theatre and experiments in children's theatre and art exhibitions. The programme was produced under the name 'Project

1966, the Project has played an important role on the development of fringe and experimental Irish and international drama. Likewise the Focus Theatre,⁴⁵ founded by Deirdre O’Connell, dedicated itself to the development of the Stanislavsky method of acting and drama. The archives of both the Project Arts Centre and the Focus Theatre are available at the National Library of Ireland. The archive of Phyllis Ryan, a figure widely featured in this study, is deposited with the Abbey Theatre Archive, Dublin, but which is, however, as yet unavailable to researchers and the public.

It is also important to note the role publishing played also for the survival, circulation, and access to the public, theatre companies and libraries, for such fringe and lesser produced dramatic works. plays. Very few which feature in this study were published by major publishers even within Ireland or with international publishers with large distribution. Publishing affected the internationalisation of Irish theatre and the access by readers, researchers, amateur groups, and emerging practitioners, the opportunity to engage with texts by those playwrights not perceived or framed within ‘canonical’ recognition. Recent research by theatre scholar Patricia O’Beirne has also indicated the absence of accessible and remembered work by Irish women theatre practitioners in the case of Glass House Theatre Company, during the 1980s and more recent cases as cited by the #WakingTheFeminists movement.⁴⁶ Fintan O’Toole makes the point that Brian Friel’s plays have been published by Faber and Faber since 1965, but it was not until 1988 that Tom Murphy was published by an established publishing house outside Ireland and not until the 1990s that [Murphy] was given the canonical treatment of publication in Methuen’s

67’, and was received by attendees and critics as an immediate success. The first of the works was *The Tiger* by Murray Schisgal, followed by Harold Pinter’s *The Lover* and was completed by James Saunders’ *Double Double*. The founding members of Project and who were involved in the productions on this opening night were Gillian Hanna, Colm O’Briain, Robert Carlisle, Dinah Stabb, and Ian Milton. Although the initial impetus was to produce a single play, this soon evolved into a season of experimental music, visual arts, seminars, children’s theatre, and a debate on censorship with guest, Edna O’Brien. Project’s first exhibition showed the work of four artists: John Behan, Charlie Cullen, Michael Kane and John Kelly.

⁴⁵ The Focus Theatre opened on 29 September 1967 with the production of *Play with a Tiger* by Doris Lessing. This 72-seater theatre was a dream realised for the late Deirdre O’Connell who had founded the Stanislavski Studio of Dublin four years earlier in May 1963. For the next forty years, the Focus Theatre and Stanislavski Studio produced over two hundred and fifty plays by internationally famous playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett, Jean Paul Sartre, and Henrik Ibsen, and trained many famous actors and directors, becoming an important part of late twentieth century Irish theatre.

⁴⁶ Patricia O’Beirne, “A Gendered Absence: Feminist Theatre, Glasshouse Productions and the #WTF Movement”, in Etienne, Anne, Dubost, Thierry, eds. *Perspectives on Contemporary Irish Theatre Populating the Stage*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017). 284.

World Dramatists series.⁴⁷ Works by playwrights like Mary Manning, Edna O'Brien, Maura Laverty, Heno Magee, and Carolyn Swift have never been anthologised, whereas other significant plays by John Murphy and J.P. Donleavy have rarely been reprinted beyond their initial print run, making them obscure to readers and practitioners.

Theories of Social Remembering – Meaning, Everyday Life and Political Resonances

In a wide-ranging study, Ric Knowles demonstrates the breadth of possible new understanding of performance and its context and how this can be achieved through an expanded semiotic methodology that encompasses social and cultural factors to a fuller meaning of how theatre is produced.⁴⁸ Part of Knowles' methodology looks to the production of meaning. This presents a focus to a greater objective level and seeks to understand creative production and public reception, reinforced by socio-political conditions. This process is enabled by the documented components of performance being contextualised through extra-performative records, the social context. This enables a 'meaning of production' to be extrapolated from the performance as well as 'the production of meaning'.

Similarly, Alan Read argues that the co- and inter-dependency existent between both theatre and everyday life, and the extents of re-creation of one through the other, is also an ethical question of social remembrance and engagement.⁴⁹ Knowles' study creates awareness of the production of meaning and the limits of phenomenological experience of social experience through theatrical production. The ethical questions, as posited by Read, are important, such as "can theatre have value divorced from everyday life?" 'Everyday life' is defined by Read as being "the meeting ground for all activities associated with being human – work, play, friendship, and the need to communicate, which includes the expression of the theatre . . . theatre, enables us to know the everyday in order to better live everyday life."⁵⁰ In order to experience the past, it must be located, remembered, and interrogated. Davis Dean, Yana Meerson and Kathryn Price argue that as/for historians and

⁴⁷ Grene, 1999, 197.

⁴⁸ Ric Knowles, *How Theatre Means* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

⁴⁹ Alan Read, *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁵⁰ Read, 1993, 1.

practitioners in performance arts, scholarly practice is being transformed by exposure and assimilation of complimentary methodological practices. In this way, historical investigation is both representative and performative. Memory is thus constructed and re-lived. Dean et al foreground how “memory acts as a shared crucible of discovery and a distorting lens through which history and theatre engage with the past.”⁵¹

Diana Taylor further questions the often problematic means of transmission and recording of this ‘crucible of memory’ through documentation (physical) and repertoire (performative). She posits the question: “is performance that which disappears, or that which persists, transmitted through a non-archival system of transfer that I came to call the repertoire?”⁵² To apply these questions to an Irish context, there is both neglected memory in terms of the physical record (the archive) and the performative record (the repertoire) of the plays I investigate.

This interplay demands a political and sociological intervention at the meeting points of experience as it is lived and as it is performed. Knowles reminds us of this complex ethical confluence – representations and recognitions can be misleading.⁵³ Read also poses the question of “how can one recognise, retrieve and review the unwritten theatre?”⁵⁴ Read’s premise looks to a new ‘regard of theatre’, that encompasses an awareness of the positioning of subject, citizen and event:

Seeing, watching and looking at theatre do not begin to explain what happens between an audience and a performer. Regarding theatre is both the vision of theatre and the care the body takes in the presence of theatre to understand and value what is happening . . . theatre remains bound by its context precisely through the unique relationship images create between audience, performer and everyday-life.⁵⁵

⁵¹ David Dean, Yana Meerson, and Kathryn Prince, *History, Memory, Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), 1.

⁵² Diana Taylor, xvii.

⁵³ Knowles, 2014, 2-5.

⁵⁴ Read, 1993, 9.

⁵⁵ Read, 1993, 9.

The documentation of audience and its reception of work is being addressed by scholars through varying interdisciplinary methodologies. Memory, recalled, remembered or reconstructed, can embody multiple forms of experience. Memory is residual evidence and subject to conditions of experience, event, role and function of the subject who is 'performing' or recalling memory. Memory and its recollection can be emphatic, redeeming, cathartic, or indeed also traumatic. Performance scholar Miriam Haughton investigates traumatic memory in contemporary Irish performance. Haughton states that the embodied moment of live performance disappears the moment it manifests, while the memory of the moment lives on, in flux from the performance environment to the wider public sphere and is subject to the socio-economic and cultural conditions which interact there."⁵⁶ The non-remembering or non-documentation of particular works of Irish drama – works which offered a counterpoint of opinion and context to national histories, skew the record of our communal memory. This schism in performance documentation – that of remembered versus unremembered – can be redressed through archival memory, a process of reanimation of both the Irish theatrical repertoire and the forms of theatre that were historically performed.

Vicki Angelaki defines 'affect in performance' as being "built on intersubjectivity, empowering the spectator through dramaturgy that imagines them as an active agent. 'Effect', on the contrary, is a term that imagines the spectator as a receiver, or worse yet, a recipient with limited and predetermined active agency, whether emotional, physical or intellectual."⁵⁷ Angelaki describes the subversive act of play-going and theatre making within the social and political spectrum that imagines the spectator as an individual in the elemental part of the community of spectators and citizens – the powerful connectivity of co-experience rather than 'just' observing. Angelaki's previous work on this importance of social reflexive theatre is reflected in her 2012 book,⁵⁸ which argues that theatrical works are not confined by easily ascribed categories of genre or even form. Their political action, Angelaki argues, does not lessen their artistic or aesthetic merit, but rather the shared and blended agencies of aesthetics and message heightens the power of dramatic expression,

⁵⁶ Miriam Haughton, *Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 3.

⁵⁷ Vicky Angelaki, *Social and Political Theatre in 21st Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 3.

⁵⁸ Vicky Angelaki, *The Plays of Martin Crimp: Making Theatre Strange* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

creating, as Angelaki suggests, “a new form of theatre responsive to the complexities of our time.”⁵⁹ This in turn allows for an extension beyond social realism and into experimental methodologies from artists and theatre-makers determined to locate a redefined form of expression for contemporary concerns.

Sociologist, Barbara A. Misztal, develops studies and theories that expand on the rapid growth of sociological interest, scholarship and practice from the post 1980s-era.⁶⁰ Memory, Misztal argues, is the essential condition of our cognition and reflexive judgement. It is closely connected with emotions because emotions are in part about the past and because memory evokes emotions . . . and is the central medium through which identities are constituted.⁶¹ By drawing on changes in heritage and memory, commemorations, and re-evaluations of national pasts in a European context, the realm of social change through various facets of memory is questioned. In her study, Misztal builds a collective memory through various facets of memory and documentation and acknowledges the varied social frameworks in the process of remembering. This also requires an ethical remembering. As theatre scholar Katherine Newey states, “making visible women’s lives, work and relationships to power is an ethical imperative for feminist history.”⁶²

Remembering Irish Theatre - Political and Historiographical Problems

Theatre academic Baz Kershaw presents frameworks around the questions of performance efficacy in his monograph *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*. Kershaw’s treatise builds upon the ability of theatre and performance to effect the experience, thinking, and actions of theatre audiences (as a collective). This is achieved through the post-performance culture and legacy of the production through “the immediate and ephemeral *effects* of performance – laughter, tears, applause and other active audience responses.”⁶³ Kershaw clarifies this point by an explanation of the granular detail that this process can entail:

⁵⁹ Angelaki, 2012, 4.

⁶⁰ Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003).

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 1.

⁶² Katherine Newey, “Feminist Historiography and Ethics”, in *Theatre History and Historiography: Ethics, Evidence and Truth* eds., Clare Cochrane and Jo Robinson (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 88.

⁶³ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1.

. . . the possibility that the immediate and local effects of particular performances might – individually and collectively – contribute to changes [within communities and society] . . . that the micro-level of individual shows and the macro level of the socio-political order might somehow productively interact. By efficacy I mean the potential that theatre may have to make the immediate effects of performance influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities.

Throughout this study I build upon this process of exploration, as presented by Kershaw, and place it within the context of the modernisation of Irish society, from the period of the early 1950s through to the end of the 1970s. This study is an act of archival reclamation for many of the works, their authors, producers, actors but also of the memory of their original production and reception.

Their ‘potential’ for greater impact and awareness among scholars and audiences today have been hampered by a number of reasons. Kershaw’s treatise on ‘potential’ as a further means to gauge the value of historic theatrical productions, particularly those with a radical or subversive critique upon social and political policy. By provocation to produce new theatre in response to the many shifts seen and experienced in post-Emergency Ireland, in terms of population, employment, entertainment, leisure and religion, in the successive decades, Irish theatre found itself within a movement of new questioning and experimentation. Irish theatre historiography, however, has not recorded to a meaningful enough extent, the value and impacts of this movement or responded to deeper study of the impacts of the form and medium of the dramatic intervention in performance and reception offered by these plays.

Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt address debates within theatre and performance studies regarding borders of its remit, its methodologies and subject matter and its scholars’ perspectives – the struggle over power relations embedded in texts, methodologies, and the academy itself.⁶⁴ The issues at stake here, as argued for by Case and Reinelt include representation (what is represented and who is authorised to represent it), the canon (the deconstruction of it, or the inclusion of previously suppressed voices and cultures), and

⁶⁴ Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, *The Performance of Power* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991).

boundaries (the dissolving of disciplinary distinctions, the separation of high and low cultures), and the blurring of methodological distinctions among theory, history and criticism.”⁶⁵

Bruce A. McConachie posits a ‘new historicist’ approach to theatre scholarship and historiography as a mechanism to “examine closely the power relations implicit in historically generated concepts of deference regarding race, gender , ethnicity, and class . . . [in order to] deconstruct conventions which structure such narratives and urge considerations of new contexts within which to understand the cultural experiences of the past.”⁶⁶ The plays presented within this thesis have rarely received later revivals beyond their initial production.

There are many reasons I would suggest for this lack of more comprehensive production history. The plays speak primarily to the time, moment and place in which they are products of, critiquing a change within the image of a Republic that Ireland was presenting to the world, one which claimed to be economically vibrant, intellectually dynamic, and culturally stimulating. However, the economic success of the 1960s, buoyed by the global boom led by market and capitalist-driven model of mass materialism, masked the social inequalities still evident at home. As evidenced by examples such as Taoiseach Sean Lemass, who was depicted on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1963; the State visit to Ireland of United States president, John F. Kennedy, also in 1963; the accession by Ireland to the European Economic Community in 1973; and the Papal visit of John Paul II in 1979, Ireland was confidently emerging onto the international diplomatic stage. These events can also be categorised as a performance – a presentation of ‘Nation’ within specific frameworks through which an identity/character was formulated and actioned.

At home, inequality in terms of pay and employment stability for women in the workplace was stark; emigration of young men and women slowed but continued; the breaking away from a traditional way of life habitually linked to the land contributed to physical heritage being demolished to create way for big business. Housing, and

⁶⁵ Case and Reinelt, 1.

⁶⁶ Bruce A. McConachie, “New Historicism and American Theatre History: Towards and Interdisciplinary Paradigm for Scholarship”, in *The Performance of Power*, eds., Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 267.

infrastructure was failing to meet the growing population's needs and functions. Roman Catholic theology forbade access to family planning advice and contraception was prohibited. Homosexual acts were also illegal.

In Northern Ireland, one of the bloodiest sectarian conflicts in Europe for decades was breaking out across the province. Yet, the story of the new and modernising Republic should have matched the image presented on *Time* magazine in 1963. It featured a smiling and proud Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, but who was depicted standing in front of a leprechaun who was pulling back shamrock-embroidered curtains to reveal a space-age industrial factory – the very vision of a successful, confident and post-colonial nation. In reality, the evidence proved different.

While Irish popular media and culture willingly absorbed 'American Dream' ideology of the 'self-made man' (seldom were 'self-made women' mentioned in this category) the undercurrent of dissent was producing and staging an alternative representation of modern Ireland. The period saw a proliferation of groups and individuals who sought to document through theatre an alternative Irish drama, which in Kershaw's criteria "combines entertainment with . . . debate, discussion, socio-political proposals and recommendations. They represent a theatre of social engagement, a theatre primarily committed to bringing about change . . ." ⁶⁷

While Kershaw studies the effects of such works in local communities, the subject matter, message and medium of the plays in this thesis are concerned with national questions and subject matter: identity, modernity, sexuality, reproductive rights, and discrimination on race, religion or gender. The form of these plays were often largely experimental and influential in terms of perception and reception. It is my contention that the plays I gather here within this study acted as a significant challenge to the political elite and the social status quo as well as a signifier of change within contemporary Irish performance.

Timeframes – Scope and Boundaries

The timeframe of this dissertation loosely book-ends the period of Ireland's modernisation. This relates to the span of years which followed the post-war period,

⁶⁷ Kershaw, 5.

beginning in the early 1950s. The earliest work examined in detail as a core case-study within this thesis, was staged in 1951. The latest work was staged in 1977. A study spanning three decades presents complexities on many fronts. In terms of theatre and performance (in Ireland) it traverses various major events. For example, the Abbey Theatre suffered a catastrophic fire in 1951, before transferring to the Queen's Theatre and later re-opening on its original site in 1966. The period witnessed the growth of an independent and new generation of Irish theatre makers, a study of whom forms the crux of this study. Censorship of published texts and periodicals was active in Ireland, but not 'officially' for the theatre productions. New venues like the Pike Theatre Club, the Eblana, the Project Arts Centre, the Focus Theatre, and companies such Orion/Gemini/Globe productions, rallied the new wave of Irish drama that was influenced by international trends.

By the mid-twentieth century, postmodernism was radically altering public perceptions of the society in which new practitioners and theatre-makers were communally part of and with a collective environment and place. Identity was driven by a self-reflexive connection to time and being. For many new works and in particular by new modes of production, direction and design in performance, the new wave of Irish drama was forged along such innovative constructs. Its aim was to question social responsibility and to present an authentic introspection of modern Ireland. The purely narrative style, traditionally associated with the Irish peasant realist tradition was radically altered. Some plays within this study contain a realist element, in terms of time, place, setting or character but to which were added complexity through combining non-realist elements, such as temporal ambiguity, geographic dislocation, exaggerated violence, spectacle, farce and fantasy.

Further changes are evidenced through scenographic influence and in visual and aural design. The sensory experience of these plays, many performed in venues with capacity of less than one hundred seats, encouraged an audience to be immersed in the experience of the production and to share in the communal making of the theatrical performance. The labour of acting was enhanced by the labour of the audience. This reimagining by and of the audience was critical to the provocative and controversial subject matter of the time. The medium of the message of such plays which depicted an often hyper-imagined modern Ireland, or an 'Ireland-in-transition' enabled a deliberate questioning of what a new Irish

drama could push in terms of form and audience engagement, intimacy, style and the collaborative process.

A New Irish Theatre History – International Contexts and Contemporary Ireland

In his posthumously published book of interviews and comments, the British-born and American-based historian Tony Judt, outlined a history of intellectual thought for the twentieth century:

Contextualising is part of the explanation, and therefore separating oneself off from the subject matter is what distinguishes history from alternative, equally legitimate ways of explaining human behaviour: anthropology, political science or whatever it may be.⁶⁸

Judt's argument is centred on the debate of historian/commentator and moralist - how do and did people (intellectuals) and people of influence and with access to various channels of communication choose to engage or disengage with societies' issues of their times. Judt's insistence rests upon his "demand that we [as citizens in society] discuss uncomfortable matters urgently openly and without constraint at a time of self-censorship and conformity."⁶⁹ Judt also posits that through examining the writings of Czech President, philosopher and sociologist, Tomas Masaryk, "you have an intellectual defending the little truths against what seems to be the demands of the big national story."⁷⁰ The 'little truths' that emerged in new Irish plays and on new theatre stages of post-Emergency Ireland, revealed critical contemporary voices, many previously unheard.

These new works also often represented those who were marginalised within conservative Irish culture and society - the little but hidden truths within 'the big national (his)story'. The shared understanding of the works of Tomas Masaryk point out in 1970s European thinking a key facet in public consciousness. This also coincided with an increased European and

⁶⁸ Tony Judt, with Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012), 285.

⁶⁹ Judt, 286-287.

⁷⁰ Judt, 287.

American influence in writing, directing and design within Irish theatre. This again would happen as Ireland was emerging into the European community and as Judt would outline:

The most important recent shift [in the post-war years] was the creation of a European identity among the policy makers and educated elite of a large number of countries which had until very recently thought of themselves as functioning chiefly or only in national conversations.⁷¹

Joe Cleary's survey of cultural change in modern Ireland⁷² is shaped by contemporary cultural and historical considerations upon the construct of Irish culture through shifting socio-economic foundations. Cleary presents a critique of three dominant ideological and academic concerns as seen from post-1970s Ireland: postcolonial studies, feminist studies and revisionism. All three offer competing and at times adversarial accounts of the past, each competing against entrenched views that are being reconsidered upon post-modern and post-structuralist thinking, freeing a historiography of Irish culture and society from the national narrative developed primarily upon male-constructed and militarily-dominated versions of state history.⁷³

The argument made in this thesis, for a wider and archival-based historical examination of Irish drama, is necessary, as Cleary outlines, owing to an existing narrow historiography that is complicit to a 'canonical' narrative, resulting in "standardised languages of argument and analysis, repeated reworkings via a rather narrow band of methodologies, of relatively small sets of key authors and topics, and reciprocated tolerances for certain modes of licensed ignorance's."⁷⁴ Critical and theoretical investigations should seek to broaden intellectual perspectives and offer diverse intersections into literary and dramatic heritage.

It was necessary to consider the complexities of what entailed modernisation versus that of a traditional society. Cleary defines this debate about modernisation theory as being dominant, in an Irish context, from the 1970s. "Based on a cruel dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, modernisation theories sought to explore the institutional arrangements, cultural values and other social variables that might allow

⁷¹ Judt, 300.

⁷² Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2007).

⁷³ Cleary, 2007, 3.

⁷⁴ Cleary, 2007, 4.

traditional societies to become modern as quickly and effectively as possible.”⁷⁵ How Irish theatre defined itself as ‘modern’, is a cultural reaction to a transition from tradition into modernity – a republic renewing its vision and place in a global standing and as a post-colonial setting. This project, by examining governance of society, from national to individual and from macro to micro, in terms of lived experience, delineates the performed narrative of a society performing outward, but which now was being received inward by its own citizens, in a range of alternative performance spaces, themes and venues. Such tradition/modernity dichotomy was ingrained in debates in post-war Ireland and later, towards a new secularising society. Cleary acknowledges that the new naturalism of the period, in both fiction and drama “measured the distance between official state ideology of Irish Ireland and its tawdry reality. The naturalist writers probed, with intimate knowledge of the local terrain . . . the social and sexual traumas that official Irish culture would not acknowledge . . .”⁷⁶

As Cleary further uncovers, once the economic modernisation drive of the 1960s gained traction, an extensive academic and journalistic literature emerged in Ireland that sought to identify those cultural factors that were impeding the development of a modern industrial enterprise culture . . . hence the emergent cultural dominant of the late twentieth century moment in Ireland might be described not so much as post-modernism, as a kind of neo- or post-naturalism.”⁷⁷ Naturalism had evolved to retain the essential elements of recognisable contemporary society, locations, people and events but had transcended formal elements of pure naturalism, to encompass a new naturalism that was porous to experimental expression.⁷⁸

Lionel Pilkington in his survey study, *Theatre and Ireland*, argues that Ireland and Irish theatre was recognisable by its pervasive need to be so recognised as Irish. “Irish drama”, Pilkington shows, “presents sequences of action that are instantly familiar. An Irish play may be shocking, startling, and thematically subversive, but the action that it presents

⁷⁵ Cleary, 2007, 17.

⁷⁶ Cleary, 2007, 97.

⁷⁷ Cleary, 2007, 98.

⁷⁸ Cleary traces this ‘mutated’ naturalism as neo-naturalism and places it within wider literary and cultural contexts, such as Irish poetry and fiction with writers such as Eugene McCabe, John McGahern, William Trevor, Edna O’Brien and Marina Carr.

on stage is most likely to be a version of behaviours that we know to be true.”⁷⁹ For an Irish play to depict behaviours that are received as being true, implies a sense of authenticity – a verifiable account of Irish life.

In his book of collected essays and articles, entitled *Navigations*, Richard Kearney describes the development of a modern Irish drama based on a typified form of authentic verbal and linguistic structures. The form of language and dialogue form the basis of communicative influence between the play and the audience.

The indigenous movement of verbal theatre boasts an august lineage extending from Goldsmith, Shaw, Synge, Yeats and O'Casey and to such contemporary dramatists as Murphy, Kilroy, Leonard and Friel. All these authors share a common concern with the place of language; they have created plays where words tend to predetermine character, action and plot.⁸⁰

However, the ‘august lineage’ for Irish writing that Kearney outlines is an entirely male lineage. He omits any mention of Lady Augusta Gregory, Teresa Deevy, Edna O’Brien, Mary Manning, or Marina Carr, Kearney’s argument concerns the expression and language of Irish literary identity. Language, as part-medium of the message of Irish drama, especially during the period of this study, was embedded in the language and expression of one's self. The representation of one's identity, class, position and place in a changing Ireland was evident in many new plays of the period but which were subsequently excluded from our national historiography. The social standing, gender, class, and race those making theatre in the post-Emergency era became inherent to the placement of such works in Irish consciousness. The voice of women playwrights or playwrights who gave voice to communities of working-class backgrounds were systematically silenced within a structure complicit in its own canon-making.

In Brian Friel's play, *Volunteers*, (1975), for example, which depicted a group of political prisoners working on an archaeological dig in an Irish city, Keeney and Knox are trying to determine how skeletal remains which they unearthed may have met their bodily demise:

⁷⁹ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre & Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 53.

⁸⁰ Richard Kearney, *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays 1976-2006* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2006), 264.

KEENEY: Maybe he was a victim of language?⁸¹

Kearney explores the above points as an assessment of the place, role and agency of language as mode of communication in a post-modernist context – an apolitical and artistically focused spectrum that subverts cultural nationalism for a 'doctrinaire aesthetic of privacy, insulation, isolation and exile'.⁸² This 'transitional paradigm' is paradoxically and oxymoronically, both apolitical *and* political. By focusing on the insular voices and internal language, gesture and action of individuals and the domestic action (and re-action) as version and embodiment of public policy and activity as represented on the Irish stage, there is evident a clear vision and understanding of Irish society, state and population in modernising Ireland.

As a movement known as 'the second renaissance of Irish Theatre' asserted by Christopher Murray⁸³ expanded in the early 1960s, the seeds were planted for a more self-reflective style of play that focused the view of the audience inward into the private lives of Ireland's citizens and within a society that was, little over two decades moved from being a new independent Irish republic to being a member of the European Economic Community by 1973. While modern Irish theatre may have been 'born' in the cottage kitchen or rural sheebeen at the outset of the twentieth century, by the 1960s, Irish theatre inhabited a sprawling coterie of locations and landscapes, through as Kearney describes, the 'taut tension between revivalism and modernism'.⁸⁴ This would be clarified by adding "some narratives gravitate towards tradition in the past: an attitude that might be described, paradoxically, as 'revivalist modernism'; others were in opposite direction, resisting the pull of tradition and its attendant idioms of national renewal. This attitude may be described as 'radicalist modernism'.⁸⁵

The title of Christopher Murray's book, *Mirror Up to the Nation*, has entered the lexicon of scholarship as being a phrase synonymous with the place of theatre in understanding twentieth century Irish drama. For this question and period of research, there is renewed vigour in exploring *who* exactly is reflected in that national reflection? This

⁸¹ Brian Friel, *Volunteers*, (Meath: Gallery Press, 2002), 28.

⁸² Kearney, 2006, xv.

⁸³ Murray, 1997, 162.

⁸⁴ Kearney, xv.

⁸⁵ Kearney, 2006, xvi.

examination is taken in tandem with national reflection where various concentric Irelands are potentially coming to the fore: as a republic, a modern multinational economic force, as a partitioned country, as a member of the European Economic community and as a country divisive among its citizens in terms of language, religion, class, economy and politics. The exploration of these various and often simultaneous Irelands, through its new drama of the period, addresses the complex question of tradition versus modern Irish drama.

Irish and British Theatre in the 1950s – Influences, Resonances and Archival Legacies

Dan Rebellato argues that British theatre in the 1940s and 1950s, far from being solely a perceived stale unit of staid Victorian middle-class drawing-room comedy, was in fact a robust, provocative and interesting setting of artistic response. The theatrical revolution that is widely accepted was motivated by different concerns from those conventionally proposed. The manner of its unfolding involved far-reaching transformations of modes of theatrical production and reception.”⁸⁶ Rebellato questions Osborne’s 1956 play, *Look Back in Anger*, which premièred at the Royal Court Theatre, London, and its reputation as being the play that set off an ‘explosion’ in modern British drama. Rebellato presents a study of how such plays, in their political and social context, matter in order to question dominant histories and continually expand our historiographic understanding of major literary and dramatic movements. A range of critics in Britain at the time struggled to find a singular cause to what Osborne’s play was addressing or was actually *about*. Like *Waiting for Godot* at Dublin’s Pike Theatre in 1955 (or *En Attendant Godot* at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris in 1954) the new movement of theatre was not so focused on *what* was happening in the play in terms of plot, but rather *why* it was happening and why it mattered in that moment.

Theatre, for many, had to say something and speak against something. These variables were dependent on responding “very sharply to the political and social experiences of their audiences.”⁸⁷ Rebellato backdrops his study of Osborne with the rise of the British Left, also in 1956, but also to the intellectual revitalisation of political movements and to attempts to

⁸⁶ Rebellato, 1999, 8.

⁸⁷ Rebellato, 1999, 18.

humanise society through cultural means.⁸⁸ Rebellato also places an importance on historiographic re-evaluation of the theatrical history of the play and its impact on modern British theatre. Rebellato cites Michel Foucault's treatise that "what we have to do with banal facts is to discover – or try to discover – what specific and perhaps original problem is connected with them."⁸⁹ This point relates to the desire for an authentic drama of the lived experience of Irish identity – intimate encounters within the dramatic space of modernity in performance, a mimesis of the every-day. This dramatic form challenged the representation and witnessing of an authenticity in representation of contemporary Irish society.

So much so was *Look Back in Anger* the model for Donleavy's *The Ginger Man* (whose Irish première was at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, in November 1959) that it could have had equally an impactful presence in Irish theatre. Osborne's play fitted the rising British trend of a 'star actor' position, who became a focal point for the audience's and press' attention. The actor was of a billing on par with the playwright. Richard Harris, in playing the character of Sebastian Dangerfield, fitted this mould perfectly, cutting a salacious and attractive figure, for which he gained notoriety in the British theatre and film scene. Rebellato suggests this audience-actor connectivity intensified the audience's ordinary awareness of the performer's own status: "the star wielded their own set of signs, their 'persona', which could be read *alongside* the performance they gave."⁹⁰

Harris, however, was seldom seen on the Irish stage at this time. He was more commonly known for film roles or stage roles in England. This was important also for an added sense of authenticity for the character and impact upon the form and message of the play. As Rebellato explains, "[a] new actor was someone who lent their body to the text, became guarantor of its authenticity, and through it transformed him or herself into its symptoms; consequently they became more authentic people . . ."⁹¹ This authenticity, expressed through bodily representation, was also evident through the intimate productions of the Pike theatre and its many revues which were largely structured and ordered by Carolyn Swift through the late 1950s. The revues, or follies as they were billed as, included sketches with exotic characters whose personal narratives, presented the first expression of a

⁸⁸ Rebellato, 1999, 28-33.

⁸⁹ Rebellato, 1999, 74.

⁹⁰ Rebellato, 1999, 71.

⁹¹ Rebellato, 1999, 81.

modern contemporary state which was being influenced by immigration and greater international cultural influence.

This was theatrically achieved by many of the little theatres which dotted Dublin city and suburbs, performed through blended Irish and Indo-Caribbean musical and theatrical forms. However, an authentic version of modern Ireland was in conflict with the actualities of 'national Irish drama', which developed on lines of exclusively male authors and with little engagement with issues concerning gender, sexual equality and politics, access to housing or employment, intercultural expression, and other critical social issues. New Irish and imported international drama that did challenge such questions were produced primarily at smaller and independent fringe venues. Given that these theatres and companies often had a comparatively shorter life-span, fewer resources and a lack of a permanent home, the remit of existing history has tended to focus on traditionally larger venues, such as the Abbey Theatre. Secondly, as these venues and companies operated under minimal financial and professional security and with much smaller audiences and media coverage, important socially reactive and artistically challenging works of the period often received little subsequent production revivals and in depth studies, obfuscating the historiography of Irish theatre production and practice.

A New National Theatre Movement - Culture and Gender on the Modern Irish Stage

By 1970, the ambition of a new generation of independent theatre-makers was such that aspiring plans for a large-scale theatre festival in Limerick would evolve into a second national theatre for Ireland. This idea was spearheaded by producer and director, Phyllis Ryan in January 1970.⁹² Ryan secured over £15,000, then a huge sum of money, from various sources in Limerick to develop the project. Ryan, from initial talks with Jack Bourke, former mayor of Limerick and owner of the City Theatre, and also Thomas Flanagan,

⁹² Phyllis Ryan (27 July 1920 – 6 June 2011) Actor, producer, director. Ryan is best remembered for having founded Orion Productions (1956) and later Gemini Productions (1959). In the 1970s, Ryan was appointed Artistic Director of the Irish Theatre Company with whom she produced many works. Ryan first starred on the Abbey Theatre stage in W.B. Yeats' play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, in 1936, with later notable roles including Blanaid in Denis Johnston's *The Moon in the Yellow River* and the role of Annie Keegan in Teresa Deevy's 1939 play, *The King of Spain's Daughter*. As well as producing many new Irish plays during her career, from the 1960s to the 1990s, including many international works at venues like the Eblana Theatre, Dublin, Ryan maintained close working relationships with writers such as John B. Keane and Hugh Leonard. Ryan was also a Board member of the Abbey Theatre and was founding patron of the Irish Theatre Institute, Dublin.

Manager of Shannonside, hoped to turn a six-week professional season into a permanent national theatre. Five plays, which included John B. Keane's *The Field*, Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, Hugh Leonard's *The Poker Session*, John McDonnell's *All the King's Horses* and Mairead Ní Ghráda's *An Triail* were chosen as representative to investigate the new audience before "introducing newer and more sophisticated plays."⁹³ Ryan was a progressive thinker in terms of working for a sustainable model of theatre production. While initially working as an actress at the Abbey Theatre, Ryan founded her own company (Orion Productions) to create sustainable work for herself and a regular company of actors and producers. With the demise of the Globe Theatre Company in the early 1960s, Ryan was acutely aware of the financial pressures of work within the independent theatre scene. By 1970, Ryan described the rationale for a second Irish national theatre as essential for theatre and for employment within the theatre in Ireland. She claimed that "things are desperate in the theatre in Ireland just now. Here is a golden opportunity."⁹⁴

Such was the success of Gemini's ten-week run in Limerick's City Theatre⁹⁵ that the Mayor of the city held a civic reception in Gemini's honour.⁹⁶ Ryan's success, as an actor at the Abbey Theatre from the 1940s, to one of Irish drama's most successful producers throughout successive decades and in particular the decade of the 1970s, makes her and other less studied women theatre-makers, central to the argument of this thesis.

Playwright and activist, Margaretta D'Arcy,⁹⁷ recounted the experience she had over a life spent combining both theatre and social activism, that the few occasions in which she collaborated with other female artists and theatre-makers:

I began my working life as an actress in a small alternative theatre in Dublin in the 1950s . . . run in partnership by Nora Lever and Barry Cassin. Nora was the driving

⁹³ "Limerick Plans Second National Theatre", *Irish Times*, 30 January 1970, 5.

⁹⁴ "Limerick Plans Second National Theatre", *Irish Times*, 30 January 1970, 5.

⁹⁵ Limerick's City Theatre opened on 18 January 1953. Variety star Frank O'Donovan was the theatre's first manager. Lorcan Bourke was founding General Manager of the City Theatre. Bourke converted the theatre from its previous existence as the former Ritz Cinema on Sexton Street in the city and had capacity for six hundred seats. The theatre operated until it and its contents were sold at auction in April 1976.

⁹⁶ "Mayor praises Gemini group", *Irish Times*, 12 August 1970, 5.

⁹⁷ Margaretta D'Arcy was born in London on 14 June 1934. She is an actress, playwright and activist. In 1947 D'Arcy married British playwright, John Arden. Both through D'Arcy's own work and in collaboration with Arden, D'Arcy became a well-known fixture in London and British theatre in the 1950s. The couple moved to Galway and founded the Galway Actors Workshop in 1976. D'Arcy is a member of Aosdána and remains active in numerous activist campaigns in Ireland.

spirit. That was the last time I had the experience of working in a theatre run by a woman. In fact at that time [early 1950s] Dublin's theatres were mainly run by women. Ria Mooney was in charge of the Abbey; another small theatre was controlled by Madame Cogley and her sons.⁹⁸

D'Arcy further added in 1981, that at the first ever 'Women's Festival' in Limerick, she discussed that power structures controlled by men in Irish society were also being firmly entrenched in Arts and Culture. Indicating the 1970s as a paradoxical example, D'Arcy recognised the deeper structures of the Arts, and of Irish culture more broadly, which were controlled by central administration that was dominated by men. D'Arcy reiterates the fact that "it would seem that as the State subsidises, and therefore takes over culture, more and more, so men become entrenched in its power structure. The recent advent of the 'women's theatre movement' has opened doors for women, primarily in England . . . but it is still only peripheral."⁹⁹ Lelia Doolan¹⁰⁰ was the first female Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre, appointed in 1971. Committed to new and innovative methods in actor training and rehearsal, experimenting in voice and movement, Doolan was influenced by the new media of television and of experimentation in production. Yet, Doolan would leave her position by 1972 over ongoing disagreements with the Abbey Board and also cast members regarding the new methods she was embracing.

Scholar of feminist histories, Elspeth Probyn, investigates the act of reading of work by women and its public and private function. Does this happen at home? At school? At work? At the library? It is important then also to question: where did the act of viewing plays about women and written by women take place? Was it at the National theatre? Was it small fringe venues? Was it at private theatre clubs? Were they staged as festival productions? How were they reviewed? (national or local press, or not at all?) Probyn reminds us that "the movement of women to a speaking role – the production of a speaking position –

⁹⁸ Arden, D'Arcy, *Awkward Corners: Essays, Papers, Fragments Selected With Commentaries, by the Authors* (London: Methuen Drama, 1988), 121.

⁹⁹ Arden, D'Arcy, 1988, 146-147.

¹⁰⁰ Lelia Doolan was born in Cork in 1934. She studied French and German at University College Dublin before completing a PhD in Anthropology at Queen's University, Belfast. Doolan was joined RTE in 1961 and became central in production and direction. Doolan was appointed Chair of the Irish Film Board in 1993 and was also a founder of the Galway Film Fleadh.

cannot be understood as the invention of personal voice . . . in this way, the production of a speaking position is always tied to the practices and politics bound up with daily life.”¹⁰¹

The production of female voices and the representation of female experience, examined through case studies of works by Carolyn Swift, Mary Manning and Edna O’Brien, among others, document the subversion of a system and of roles effected within society and which are drawn upon gendered binaries and are reflected within the production of drama: men characters affect/create/present action whereas women characters are treated as lesser elements which act to uphold and support the former, legitimising patriarchal constructs through the normalisation of institutionalised norms of gendered behaviour. Furthermore, and as Probyn has argued, the image of the female character can be bent from its location in a discursive system, it can be contested . . . [it can] disrupt and produce disabling arguments against the system in which the image discursively operates.¹⁰²

Beyond characterisation, an understanding of the history and record of theatre written, performed produced by women in Ireland, requires further revision. Theatre scholar Melissa Sihra has produced a re-evaluation of the Irish theatre canon and repertoire which through its inclusion, selection and re-performance is inherently male in construction. Sihra reconsiders the artistic and intellectual contributions by women in Irish theatre, such as Lady Augusta Gregory, Dorothy McArdle, Teresa Deevy, Anne Devlin, Marina Carr, and others, across the twentieth century. This work is a foundation point from which to begin further investigations into theatre production in Ireland from the mid-century and to examine the impacts, achievements and barriers experienced by women practitioners, such as Carolyn Sift, Edna O’Brien, Mary Manning, and Mairead Ní Ghráda.

Geraldine Cousin writes on the ‘dramatic place and time’ of female characters as presented on contemporary stages and is concerned with the quest of female characters for clear and distinct voices with which to tell their stories.¹⁰³ Cousin’s posits the vocal rejection of prescribed social roles as women on stage speak out from the ideological spaces in which they have been positioned. Cousin in particular makes a case-study of the appropriation of

¹⁰¹ Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 87.

¹⁰² Probyn, 1994, 91.

¹⁰³ Geraldine Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time: Contemporary Female Characters on Stage* (London: Routledge, 1996).

the fairy-story and the female vision/body/voice. Edna O'Brien, for example, reconfigures this traditionally 'female' of literary forms and transforms the assumptions of female spaces being nurturing and domestic to being the wild and unpredictable 'pagan place' of O'Brien's play itself.

Elsbeth Probyn's study on the self and gendered societal frameworks sees the female self as a concept as "material evidence of our fluctuating being", a concept upon which Probyn elaborates as discursive argument that addresses tensions of race, class and sexuality. "The self represents the process of being gendered and the project of putting that process into discourse."¹⁰⁴ Probyn argues that the self in contemporary cultural studies has been 'neutered and veiled masculine' and, as I argue in this study, Probyn's assertion can also be used to address contemporary Irish drama. We look to major and other plays of the period to see this point in action. The trope of the absent mother in plays like Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961) and John Boyd's *The Flats* (1971). Academic Lisa Fitzpatrick reflects on the role of the mother as it is depicted in *Philadelphia!* The O'Donnell family consists of "a family of father and son, with the housekeeper Madge as a foster-mother and locus of care and affection for both men."¹⁰⁵ There is a formulaic presentation of women as presented in many Irish plays of this period – either absent through death or present only within the home within subservient roles. These binaries of presence are challenged by many of the plays in this study such as Carolyn Swift's *The Millstone* (1951) and Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* (1977). These works create a contemporary challenge the dramatization of the female individual and self on the Irish stage. As Probyn asserts, "the self is an ensemble of techniques and practices enacted on an everyday basis and that it entails the necessary problematization of these practices. The self is not simply put forward, but rather it is reworked in its enunciation."¹⁰⁶ Probyn's point addresses a motif of the period whereby the direct social and loved experience of the domestic interior becomes a place of challenge rather than stasis.

¹⁰⁴ Probyn, 1994, 1-2.

¹⁰⁵ Lisa Fitzpatrick, "The Powerful Role of the Mother in Irish Culture". 27 August 2018. <https://www.rte.ie/eile/brainstorm/2018/0823/986996-the-powerful-role-of-the-mother-in-irish-culture/> Accessed 27 August 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Probyn, 1994, 2.

Kim Solga provides a history of feminism and feminist scholarship in her survey book, *Theatre & Feminism*. Citing earlier established works on feminist theory and scholarship within performance studies, such as Sue-Ellen Case's, *Feminism and Theatre*¹⁰⁷ and Jill Dolan's book *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*,¹⁰⁸ Solga identifies the frameworks which reoriented audience perception and reception of women characters as well as of performances and writing by women. To elucidate this and by drawing on work by theorist Peggy Phelan,¹⁰⁹ Solga examines how the 'active vanishing' and 'unmarked' presence of women in performance is made visible through new performance techniques, Brechtian philosophy and active role of audiences who "refuse to take the stage image and its promises of pleasurable identification on faith".¹¹⁰

By approaching the neglected plays of this study through such frameworks as espoused by scholars Melissa Sihra, Kim Solga, and Peggy Phelan, a deeper understanding of past performance styles (and also of audience habits through reception) is discernible. This is made clear by Solga's examination of Diamond's treatise on a necessary radical dramaturgy, such as proposed through Brechtian forms, disrupts a 'classical mimesis' and encourages audience members to reject a conservative and homogeneous disengagement from the performance they are witnessing, a status that does "not adopt an overly simplistic form of seeing, one that leaves us ill-equipped to recognise or examine the contradictions working within a play's plot or within its characters."¹¹¹ By retrospectively returning to these neglected plays, we can begin to forge new understandings of major movements and events which contributed to the formation of contemporary Irish drama.

Domestic and External Spaces - Staging the Home Place in the Public Sphere

Nicholas Grene posits that "staged domestic spaces as images of the national life have had a remarkably prolonged life in Irish theatre for a century after Synge."¹¹² Grene

¹⁰⁷ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1988).

¹⁰⁸ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

¹⁰⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹¹⁰ Kim Solga, *Theatre and Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p. 27.

¹¹¹ Solga, 2016, 26.

¹¹² Nicholas Grene, *At Home on the Stage: Domestic Spaces in Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

lists works in which the home-place and the physicality of the domestic space have taken on an iconic character or presence of their own, from O'Casey's Dublin tenements, to Behan's ironic republican safe-house within a brothel to Friel's familiar Ballybeg.¹¹³ However, the elements of 'home', those tangible to senses of touch, smell and sound are reconstituted by playwrights such as Edna O'Brien, Hugh Leonard, Mary Manning, and J.P. Donleavy, whose homesteads are animated through contemporary European design influence and internationally reflective dramaturgies. These modern presentations of traditional sites are relatable to audiences through familiarity. However, through more radical interpretations and interactions with geo-temporal elements of contemporary place, allow for a deeper and more consequential form of dramatic experience and witnessing.

Greene addresses a sense of a 'continuous ambiguity' in terms of the spatial barriers between interior/exterior, on/off stage and performer and audience. Chris Morash and Shaun Richards also offer theoretical accounts for change in presenting place, character and spatial/temporal constructs, in drawing on work by Anne Ubersfeld and Henri Lefebvre.¹¹⁴ However, it is important to record Greene's assertion that 'a number of plays in the mid-twentieth century found ways of rendering that 'continuous ambiguity'. Greene asserts a growing influence of earlier European and American expressionism was a mode for the heightened psychological experience of domestic realism coupled with social experientialism.¹¹⁵ This facet will underpin many case-studies within this thesis where identifiable changes to the staging of contemporary space and society in Ireland are made clear.

Greene's study of naturalism and the domestic world on stage covers an international survey of naturalistic drama, beginning with the late nineteenth century and the rise of Henrik Ibsen and Emile Zola. Quoting Zola's essay, "Naturalism in the Theatre" (1881) we are reminded that "there is more poetry in the little apartment of the bourgeois than in all the empty, worm eaten places of history. In the end, we will see that everything meets in the real."¹¹⁶ Greene adds that the new drama of naturalism was to be contemporary but it was

¹¹³ Nicholas Greene, 2014, 7.

¹¹⁴ Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹¹⁵ Greene, 2014, 8.

¹¹⁶ Greene, 2014, 1.

also to be stayed in the ordinary living space of the bourgeois.¹¹⁷ The form of ‘experimental naturalism’, a contradiction in terms, and which emerged from the 1950s onwards, as well as a more overt experimental Irish drama, also shared common goals: to document and react to a rapidly changing Ireland that was at odds with itself and the globalising identity it was seeking to project. As Grene further asserts, “the familiar space of ordinary middle-class life, the ‘little apartment of the bourgeois’ is to be valued with the dignity and meaning accorded in the past only to tragedy . . . the naturalistic home on the stage, as conceived by Zola and realised by Ibsen, figures both the outer world that surround it and the interiority of the private lives it houses. Insofar as the stage is made continuous with the auditorium, it implies a mirroring identity between the experience of the characters represented and that of the contemporary audience that watches them.”¹¹⁸

Power dynamics within the home authorise and support binaries of control in favour of male characters who are either physically stronger, economically more secure, or less pervious to societal stigma and threats of emotional blackmail through imposition of guilt and or shame. The gender dynamics of plays of this period, many of them either produced or written by women, offer insights into the functioning of the society they reflect. How are women characters staged? Are they central roles? Do they interact meaningfully with other women characters? Are they present merely to support male character’s formation on stage and within dramatic convention? – or as Grene asks – how do male playwrights imagine the dramatized domestic space in which women do - or do not – occupy a central position?¹¹⁹ Melissa Sihra addresses the canonical and social contexts of women both represented on stage in Irish drama and also of women playwrights (not) represented in the canon, through the presence of such work in an alternative tradition and obscured viewpoint of these works in history. This archive of achievement in theatre production and practice by women practitioners is separated from the centrality of Irish theatre memory and history, which is otherwise populated with female figures drawn across specific gender-narratives and defined roles. As Sihra outlines:

¹¹⁷ Grene, 2014, 1-2.

¹¹⁸ Grene, 2014, 2.

¹¹⁹ Grene, 2014, 13.

The social and cultural position of the woman has historically been one of historic centrality and subjective disavowal as both colonial ideology and nationalist movements promoted feminized concepts of the nation, while subordinating women in everyday life.¹²⁰

The story of Ireland's modern architectural change begins in the post-war period. As Irish life moved away from 'the land' and from a traditionally agrarian-dominated isolationist stance economically and politically, so too did the Irish homestead. As cultural historian Terence Brown details:

It was noted how Ireland was changing from a primarily rural, agricultural society to an industrial, urban society . . . By 1979 over a third of the population in the state resided in the greater Dublin area. In the intercensal period 1971-79, the counties of Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, where new dormitory suburbs had been built to serve the city recorded population growth of between 34.9 per cent, 26.6 per cent and 26.4 per cent respectively.¹²¹

The microcosm for an Irish way of life via the kitchen of the country-cottage would be redefined spatially and functionally.. John Murphy's *The Country Boy* (1959) redrew the scope and form of the traditional kitchen. The cottage setting was drawn as an insular space, both intellectually and spatially, which confined its inhabitants to life within traditional hegemonic paradigms, constructed along lines of gender and class. Murphy's country kitchen is radically modernised within the play and a site of inter-generational conflict. The setting (and the play) acted as a site of transition, a bridge between tradition and modernity. J.P. Donleavy's decrepit Dublin flat, the home of Sebastian Dangerfield in *The Ginger Man*, (1959) symbolised the need for urban renewal to rid Ireland of a failed and crumbling society built on patriarchal supremacy and which foregrounds the widening gyre of Church-State dominance in the life of Irish citizens. The geography of Hugh Leonard's plays produced from this period of the late 1950s through to the end of the 1970s, are vital to consider in context of the failure of the modernisation project in terms of adequate

¹²⁰ Melissa Sihra, ed., "Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation" (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 1.

¹²¹ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 245.

housing, infrastructural and spatial planning and the basic needs of a rapidly increasing urban population.

Central to this thesis of theatre and social change is the concept of ‘the modern’ and the impact of modern cultural tropes. Architectural and cultural historian Erika Hanna states that “since the eighteenth century, the city has been understood to be the key site of emergence of modernity . . .”¹²² The modernisation of city-scapes as well as city lifestyles, incorporated an influx of those who had left a traditional rural way of Irish life, swapping an agrarian conservatism for an urban escapism. The promise of anonymity was reflected in the desire of youth to escape both the spaces of conformity but also the environment of containment and stasis. *The Scatterin’* by James McKenna and produced by Carolyn Swift and Alan Simpson (1960) epitomised the incongruence of a new youth culture in 1950s Dublin with the failed promise of the modernisation of the Republic that was, as Hanna argues, a ‘failed promise’ owing to the wilful destruction of Irish built and physical heritage, such as the Georgian squares of Dublin or Hume Street, coupled with the social decline of suburban areas through unsuccessful housing projects and urban regeneration.¹²³

The primacy of space within which lived experience is presented is examined by theorist and critic Anne Ubersfeld. Writing in her multi-volume *Reading the Theatre*, (1976) Ubersfeld states that the concern of theatre that produces meaning through characters played by human beings necessitates a second critical characteristic:

The existence of a space within which these living beings are found. The activity of these humans takes place within a certain locus and creates among them (and between them and the spectators) a three-dimensional relationship . . . Theatrical space is the image and the counterproof of real space.¹²⁴

In the context of this study, Ubersfeld reminds us that “the mimetic possibilities of the semiological nature, (open, closed, etc.) in other words, the space in bourgeoisie drama or naturalistic theatre is not only an imitation of a concrete sociological location, but also a

¹²² Erika Hanna, *Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957-1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹²³ Hanna, 2013, 3-5.

¹²⁴ Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, translated by Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 94.

topographical transposition of important characteristics of social space inhabited by a particular social class.”¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Ubersfeld, 1999, 104.

Chapter 1 - The Family, Domestic Spaces, and ‘Mother Ireland’

In 1951, visual artist Louis Le Brocqy completed a painting entitled *A Family*. The painting was rejected as a gift from the artist to the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin but was selected in 1952 to represent Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 1952. Le Brocqy’s exhibition featured a number of works on the theme of family and secured for Ireland and the artist the recognition of the Acquisito Internationale award. The painting, *A Family*, depicts a stark and bare bedroom scene of limited colour palette, dominated by contrasting shades of white, black and greys. The intrusion of a dangling light bulb, exposed within an angular fitting, foregrounds the lighting of hitherto dark and hidden domestic scenes.



Figure 1 *A Family* by artist Louis Le Brocqy, 1951. The painting is currently housed in the National Gallery of Ireland.

The painting transposed a new viewpoint of the domestic space and onto the lived experience of society, where complicit silence and acceptance prolonged patriarchal dominance and engendered roles. Le Brocqy’s domestic scene is deformed and draws on European-style reclining nudes and as Catherine Marshall adds, is a living scene devoid of life.¹²⁶ The family depicted is incongruous to the domestic setting familiar to the Irish stage. The simple and ritualistic white sheet draped over the central nude body implies a ‘Sive’ like

¹²⁶ “Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks – 1951: *A Family* by Louis Le Brocqy” <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/modern-ireland-in-100-artworks-1951-a-family-by-louis-le-brocqy-1.2287211> Accessed 14 July 2018.

figure – a young female that is lost, spiritually and fatally. The absence of a ceiling on the domestic interior alludes to an open external expanse, that is unattainable to many constricted within prescribed familial roles.

As Le Brocquy’s painting illustrates, the public vision of domesticity as a stable supportive entity to the mission of the State’s modernisation was a performative construct. The depiction of the family within the domestic space, as well as its function and form, received renewed interest from Irish playwrights in post-Emergency Ireland. As the structure and place of the traditional Irish home-place was undergoing redefinition, its alignment to a particular version of Irishness and Irish identity provided opportunity for new plays to address the shift in parallel changes in social constructs. Factors such as increasing internal migration from rural to urban environments and the movement from a traditional peasant-class to an emerging confident middle-class shifted dramatic representation of domestic space and its connection to external on and off-stage roles of characters and environments.

A central facet to this new body of work was the depiction of public roles of women characters and the impacts of external official (state) and unofficial (societal) influences. I will also investigate how these dual barriers were applied to the experience of Irish women playwrights at this time in the process of having their work staged professionally in Ireland (or not, as the case more often was) and also to the public reception of their work. The plays and playwrights discussed in this chapter expose the extent that the Irish domestic space and environment became a key flashpoint of social conflict and a contested space for feminist expression and liberation.

In *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks*, Catherine Marshall and Eibhear Walshe present the point that “it has become clear that women’s creativity has become central within cultural production in the last fifty years, but before that there had been a persistent, if intermittent female presence in contrast to widespread awareness of men’s writing and creating during the same period.”¹²⁷

Cathy Leeney, writing in her study, “Women and Irish Theatre Before 1960”, identifies key playwrights prior to 1960 who confronted restrictive and conservative ideology within Irish

¹²⁷ Fintan O’Toole, *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2016), xii.

society and who explored within their dramatic works a domestic space and public world beyond the narrow and pre-defined roles. Leeney adds that “from the 1930s to the 1950s their plays [Teresa Deevy, Maura Laverty and Máiread Ní Ghráda] raised difficult questions around family failure, violent control of sexual energies, state interference in personal lives, sexual hypocrisy and the double standard.”¹²⁸ These writers confronted audiences with a radical form of experimental and expressionistic dramaturgy that was deemed necessary to in order to subvert social norms but also literary and dramatic traditions. Their collected body of work presented an alternative national drama that subverted constitutionally prescribed domestic roles for Irish women. They also reinforced how theatre could perform against the state. This task was taken up in subsequent years by the likes of Carolyn Swift, Mary Manning, Mairead Ní Ghráda, and Edna O’Brien.

The challenging of prevailing attitudes, especially ingrained patriarchal and conservative Catholic outlooks, were provoked, ridiculed, and rejected by a number of new Irish plays and by an emerging generation of playwrights, directors and designers from the 1950s through the 1970s, and as outlined through the course of this study. During this period, figures such as Carolyn Swift, Mairead Ní Ghráda, Phyllis Ryan, Edna O’Brien and Mary Manning were central to staging a modern Ireland, a staging that did not align to prescribed religious and political ideologies of conservatism and control. This was part of a new outpouring of theatrical response in alignment with the liberalisation of attitudes towards sexuality and gender. This chapter addresses specific new works written and/or produced by these individuals and presents new considerations on the impact and achievement that their work had on the advancement of Irish theatre and performance.

The plays examined in this chapter show that innovation in terms of dramatic expression, style and form, was not restricted to a particular group of new playwrights who were exclusively male and who had privilege to an existent route of access to major Irish stages. Expressionism in terms of character, plot and scenography, recognised in works examined by Leeney, above, is also recognisable in the new plays presented in this chapter, including

¹²⁸ Cathy Leeney, “Women and Irish Theatre Before 1960”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, eds. Chris Morash and Nicholas Grene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 281.

The Millstone (1951)¹²⁹ by Carolyn Swift, *On Trial* by Mairead Ní Ghráda (1964, 1973),¹³⁰ *The Saint and Mary Kate* (1968)¹³¹ adapted by Mary Manning from the novel by Frank O’Connor and *A Pagan Place* by Edna O’Brien (1977)¹³² adapted by the author from her novel of the same name, will form the central areas of examination.

The plays that form part of this study uniformly deal with the dramatization of a liberalising national attitude towards sexuality but which presented the encompassing attitude of shame, victimisation and disgrace placed against women in Ireland on matters such as pregnancy outside of marriage and the subsequent enforced adoption of children. These plays, I suggest, depict a changing Ireland where liberalising attitudes towards the body, in particularly the female body, sexuality and independence were signalling a shift in dramatic form and theme, as well for the dramatic representation of female-inhabited theatrical spaces.

Katherine Newey writes that feminist scholarship has traditionally addressed female bodies as the site of contestation and activist campaigns. Newey draws on a re-evaluated feminist presentation of historiography, where materialist and deconstructive approaches to history can offer a new meeting point for critical understandings. Feminist critical scholar, Joan Scott, posited that “the evidence of experience, whether conceived through a metaphor of visibility or in any other way that takes meaning as transparent, reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems.”¹³³ This methodological approach is relevant to understanding the documented experience and expression of performance through its material archival memory. By approaching a new feminist historiography and performance history and analysis of female-authored plays, the visibility of experience in society, coupled

¹²⁹ *The Millstone* premièred at the Town Hall Theatre, Dun Laoghaire in September 1951, produced by the Pike Theatre Company, produced by Alan Simpson.

¹³⁰ *An Trial* premièred at An Damer Theatre in Dublin in 1964. It was translated into English and presented by the Globe Theatre Company as part of a summer residency and was directed by Barry Cassin.

¹³¹ *The Saint and Mary Kate* first opened at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 18 March 1968, directed by Frank Dermody.

¹³² *A Pagan Place* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London on 2 November 1972, directed by Ronald Eyre. The Irish première of the play took place at the Abbey Theatre on 17 November 1977, directed by Patrick Mason.

¹³³ Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience”, *Critical Inquiry*, 17.4, 1991, 778, quoted in Katherine Newey, “Feminist Historiography and Ethics”, in Cochrane and Robinson, *Theatre History and Historiography: Ethics, Evidence and Truth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 90.

with theatrical expression within a repositioned performance space, affords important interventions in the study of Irish theatre.

Similarly, the spaces of conflict, need redressing within this debate. Hörschelmann and Van Hoven specify that “analysing the connections between space, place, and identity remains a significant task, if we seek to transform unequal relations of gender and sexuality as they are materialised and lived spatially.”¹³⁴ There is a common thread of changing place and space within the plays presented within this chapter – a kinetic development of onward movement, forward into the unknown, moving outward from domestic stability and confinement. While pressing for a more open society for women in terms of choice, expression and identity, resurgent challenges in society, both socially and politically but also artistically, against these new plays and playwrights, remained.

Gender and Performing Roles in Ireland – Finding Voice

Writing in his 1995 introduction to *The Stifled Voice*, a special issue of *Irish University Review* dedicated to women playwrights, Christopher Murray explains the deliberate placing of the Irish female voice to the periphery of power and access to decision making in programming and recognition for artistic contribution. Writing of Maura Laverty at the Gate Theatre, Murray states:

Laverty[’s], two plays, *Liffey Lane* and *Tolka Row* virtually saved the financial lives of MacLiammóir and Edwards in the nineteen-fifties. It is clear from [Christopher] Fitz-Simon’s account that Maura Laverty was exploited by this gallant pair of performers: she was always the last to be compensated for plays which paid their bills and usually had to press and beg for royalties due.¹³⁵

Murray adds that this fact is a reason for the reluctance of women to join the male-dominated workplace of Irish theatre at this time. The correspondence between Maura Laverty and Hilton, reveals the extent to which Laverty was left at the bottom of the list of creditors despite it being her work which was servicing Gate debts at the time. Hilton

¹³⁴ Kaithrin Hörschelmann and Bettina Van Hoven, eds., *Spaces of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.

¹³⁵ Christopher Murray, “The Stifled Voice”, *Irish University Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Silver Jubilee Issue: “Teresa Deevy and Irish Women Playwrights” (Spring - Summer, 1995), 3.

Edwards recorded the use of monies owed to Lavery that were instead used to service personal bad debts and capital investments on behalf of the Gate.¹³⁶

As a workplace, the fare of women actors at the Abbey Theatre was also unduly precarious in contrast to their male counterparts. A series of letters between Glynnis Casson, a young aspiring actor, and Ernest Blythe, then Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre, show Casson's desire to become an Abbey actor following her audition there in 1959. While praising her audition, Blythe remarks that a large amount of female Abbey company members are unlikely to leave and break with theatre work to embark on television and film work, unlike their male counterparts who, especially in film work in Hollywood during the 1930s which saw brothers Arthur Shields and Barry FitzGerald and others become Hollywood regulars. The place of female actors at the Abbey and in theatre in Ireland in general at this time of the late 1950s is further exacerbated by Blythe who in writing to Tom Hyde, another Abbey Theatre auditionee, regarding feedback on his audition, states that the Abbey is desperately in need of a sixteen year-old actress as, "with one or two exceptions, our actresses are all married and some of them who could do juvenile parts until recently are no longer able to do so."¹³⁷

With Blythe refusing to expand the range of women actors at the Abbey Theatre, especially through developing young actors, the range of female parts that could be played remained narrow. What remained was a static body of Abbey plays from its repertoire in which actors such as May Craig and Eileen Crowe, long-standing members of the company, could be relied upon to play familiar parts of women on stage. This also would have had a knock on effect for playwrights, aware of the lack of young women actors at the Abbey and in Irish theatre generally, thus removing parts from new works which would challenge or expand the playing style and range of actors.

¹³⁶ Letter from Hilton Edwards to Maura Lavery, 21 May 1954. Gate Theatre. *Correspondence re: Correspondence between Maura Lavery, the author of 'Tolka Row,' and Hilton Edwards regarding royalties for the play.* 1954-1954. Gate Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, GADM_00002124, p6.

¹³⁷ Letters between Blythe and Cassin, Abbey Theatre General Correspondence, Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway. For more on this see Adrian Frazier, *Hollywood Irish: John Ford, Abbey Actor and the Irish Revival in Hollywood* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2012).

For women actors who applied and auditioned at the Abbey Theatre in these years, many were advised to remain within local and amateur ranks or for others, it was acceptance 'on probation' for the Abbey by starring in pantomimes rather than in leading 'straight' dramas. Fidelma Murphy, a hopeful applicant from Cork was one who also auditioned for the Abbey in 1959. Blythe wrote to Murphy to say that both he and Ria Mooney agreed that Murphy had talent but chose only to offer her a part in a pantomime, a role which could offer little evidence of her ability to play more traditional acting roles.¹³⁸

This overly-long probationary period, as well as the ‘trial’ in a pantomime is not clearly defined or obviously accounted for as being the requisite for new male actors to the Abbey. With new starring lead roles for women actors not being written by playwrights coupled with complex and lengthy audition and probation periods, the corresponding outcome was a dearth of opportunities for skilled and confident women actors in leading roles.

Murray identifies a change in the dramatic representation of women by the 1970s. In 1971, two plays, *The Morning after Optimism* by Tom Murphy and *The Patrick Pearse Motel* by Hugh Leonard offer contrasting representation of female sexuality and freedom. "Women were being represented in more courageous terms. In general, however, the empowerment of women in Irish drama was from a male point of view. The main focus remained on the hero. [Which was invariably a man]"¹³⁹ In the Murphy play, the 'virgin-whore dichotomy [of Anastasia and Rosie] the only one the play allows, Rosie's freedom is compromised . . . Most drama of the period falls into this category. A woman is given a voice of sexual independence only at the price of her status."¹⁴⁰

Jack White's play *The Last Eleven*, which was awarded the *Irish Life* drama award in 1968, depicts a dwindling Protestant rural community in mid-lands Ireland that is being encircled by a growing Catholic middle-class population. Deborah, the daughter of the Protestant

¹³⁸ Letter from Ernest Blythe to Fidelma Murphy, 5 November 1959, General Abbey Correspondence, Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway. "It is very difficult on the basis of an audition to decide whether a particular aspirant has not only talent but enough talent to enable her to achieve success which would make acting a satisfactory career. We think it would be a good thing if . . . we gave you a part in our forthcoming pantomime . . . we could then decide whether we thought you seemed to be promising enough to be given a six-month or a years' trial in the theatre."

¹³⁹ Murray, 1997, 173.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Canon, is separated from her husband. The reason for the separation was Deborah’s extramarital sexual relationships and infidelity. She is shamed and stigmatised within the play. Forced to return home to the keep of her father, Deborah is presented as an economic liability with no independent means of living for or by herself. This play is also an important example on the subject of Protestant-Catholic relations in 1960s Ireland. Murray refers to it as the only play on the subject at the time as "in the 1960s, every effort was made to suggest that it was Catholic business as usual."¹⁴¹ The play is equally important for its efforts in highlighting the continued repression by Irish society of the recognition of female sexual independence.

In terms of theatrical production and experimentation, Leila Doolan recognised that the Abbey had to modernise in the development and progression of new and experimental work, from both in Ireland and outside. She was appointed Artistic Director of the Abbey in 1971. Director Roland Jaquarello stated that:

[Doolan] wanted to bring in a new energy to expand the repertoire, build up the skill base, develop the existing company and reach out to a wider audience. She employed new outside talents like Patrick Mason as a voice coach and designers Alan Barlow, formally of the Old Vic.¹⁴²

Young and innovative directors like Jim Sheridan, John Lynch of R.T.É. and Jaquarello himself would comprise the core artistic and intellectual grouping. Doolan's plans to revitalise the Abbey's acting pool and modernise its creative team was met with some distrust by a cohort of Abbey Players Council members who wielded considerable clout. "There was a reluctance to attend voice and movement classes, to adapt to different rehearsal methods and to see the Peacock as a genuinely experimental space."¹⁴³

The plays I will address in this chapter question the overarching paternalistic influence of the Irish State and the Roman Catholic Church, and critiqued their influence on the Irish family. The plays also (and their authors) rebuked the constitutional position of women as being solely ‘within the home’. A new play and new voice in Carolyn Swift emerged in 1951

¹⁴¹ Murray, 1997, 175.

¹⁴² Jaquarello, 39.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

that would have formative impacts of the course of modern Irish theatre in the years that followed.

Common also to the plays presented here is the representation of a definite place and time – contemporary Ireland. The plays each offer an urgent reflection upon modern Irish society. The characters and dramaturgy of the plays are interconnected to the physical spaces and worlds they inhabit. Through examination of diverse theories of space and place in terms of cultural phenomena, Chris Morash and Shaun Richards chart the function of place of Irish theatre performance. In mapping Irish theatre, Morash and Richards identify the processes whereby performance sites and action physically and metaphorically move out of the traditional kitchen cottage and in doing so acknowledged and inhabited on and offstage worlds that were of the Irish nation and identity more broadly. While the kitchen cottage acted as a verified idealised notion of peasant Ireland and Gaelic culture, the modern and urban home was a contested space in terms of gender roles and performativity. The radicalised spaces depicted in the plays studied in this chapter, which range from rural towns and villages, to urban flats, to courtrooms, are spaces where private and public interests intersect and which aimed to show the failure of national instruments such as law and constitution to protect all in society. These domestic locations are significant as the stories and experiences they reflect are not commonly remembered within national theatre historiography. These plays counter the idea of a democratic republic and of a nation/(al) identity. As Morash and Richards write:

The idea of a national theatre constitutes in Lefebvre’s terms, a conceived space, and the infrastructure of theatre sites constitutes its perceived space . . . however there is always a disjunction between the perceived space of performance and the conceived space of the nation.¹⁴⁴

In radicalising the Irish domestic spaces the private home shifted in form and location and became a subversive space, critical of what ‘nation’ now amounted to in the eyes of more modern, sophisticated, global and urban Irish society, or as Morash and Richards posit, “the

¹⁴⁴Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 73-74.

collapse of subject-object relations in the spaces [on stage] and a “radical reconceptualization of the stage space, the shattering of a world of certainty.”¹⁴⁵

Economic Landscape and New Theatrical Spaces

In Swift’s *The Millstone*,¹⁴⁶ the returning birth-mother of the young girl, Bridget, seeks to reclaim her daughter for reasons of economic gain, as free labour in a new guest-house to cater for growing tourism in Dublin. The hopeful youth and ambition of Bridget is quashed by this reduction into human capital for monetary gain.

MISS WHITE: (*lights cigarette*) I’m after buying a guest house and I want you to come and help me mind it. Between us we should make a fine business out of it – maybe after a while buy the house next to it – there’s quite a bit to be made out of tourists these times.¹⁴⁷

Carolyn Swift later also stated her own belief in this instance, regarding the necessary recalibration of the production space, in physical as well as expressionistic terms:

If you want to stage experimental plays that are not set in a farm kitchen or Lady Thingummy’s drawing Room, you’ve two alternatives – build your own theatre or present *Waiting for Godot*.¹⁴⁸

Further to this, Stan Marquiss writes in his introduction to the 1970 Proscenium Press-published edition of the script of *The Saint and Mary-Kate* that: “[Manning] has eliminated the superfluous and concentrated on the usable strengths of the novel, especially the relationship between Mary-Kate and the Saint, and their mutual relationship with their common Irish environment.”¹⁴⁹ The ‘common Irish environment’, suggests a shared lived experience, and it is these plays which present just how unequal that ‘commonality’ was experienced within modern Ireland, for women.

¹⁴⁵ Morash and Richards, 2013, 14 – 18.

¹⁴⁶ First produced by the Pike Theatre Company in 1951 at the Town Hall Theatre in Dun Laoighaire. The play remains unpublished. A typescript was accessed by the author through the family estate of Carolyn Swift.

¹⁴⁷ Carolyn Swift, *The Millstone*, unpublished script, A.III, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Transcript of a radio talk by Carolyn Swift, c. 1956, - “Waiting for Godot or Build Your Own Theatre”, 10813/385, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.

¹⁴⁹ Mary Manning, *The Saint and Mary Kate* (Dublin: Proscenium Press, 1970), 8.

Marquiss also notes O’Connor’s similar skill in “creating a tapestry textured with the lives of his characters in their physical surroundings”¹⁵⁰ O’Brien’s self-adapted play, *A Pagan Place*, from her novel published in 1970, is situated in the rural Clare countryside of which O’Brien herself grew up in. The landscapes of the plays reflected the lived experience of the author. It also projected a vision of contemporary Ireland for audiences to engage with that otherwise was not readily accessible or visible. The predominantly rural, wild and overtly conservative Catholic ideologies of the locations of the plays by O’Brien, Ní Ghráda and Manning, for instance, reveal a dramatic representation of the failing modernisation of the Irish Republic. In doing so, these were plays of resistance and offered an alternative version of Ireland.

Theatre and feminist critic Cathy Leeney makes the point that Mary Manning foregrounded the absurdities of Irishness as a manufactured identity, citing “the failure of independent Ireland to disrupt conservative notions of women as marriage fodder, or to challenge the social controls of class and gender categories inherited from the English occupier.”¹⁵¹ To address Leeney’s point, I argue that these plays do disrupt this very issue – challenging social controls of class, gender and the matrimonial duties expected and pre-prescribed for women in Irish society.

Women, Ireland and Disrupting the Social Order

Mairead Ní Ghráda’s courtroom drama, *On Trial*, places the audience within the court gallery, voyeurs and witnesses while all those accused as accountable deny any wrong-doing to the forced suicide of Maura Cassidy, a young woman, publicly tried for charges of infanticide, an act in which she was driven to commit owing to the unrelenting psychological trauma inflicted upon Maura by her family and wider society, shamed owing to the manifestation of her previous sexual acts through the form of her child.

On Trial was first performed in Irish as *An Triail*, at the Damer Hall, Dublin, on 22 September 1964. The English language translation by the author was first staged at the Eblana Theatre, Dublin on 19th March 1965, with direction and setting by Tomás MacAnna. The format of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 7.

¹⁵¹ Melissa Sihra, ed., *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 26.

the play, by calling on witness testimony from friends and family of Maura (who all deny any culpability) pre-empts Brian Friel’s 1973 play, *The Freedom of the City*, which presented a courtroom setting for its depiction of the latterly-whitewashed investigation into the deaths of fourteen civil rights marchers in Derry in January 1972, which became known as ‘Bloody Sunday’. The Widgery Report into the events of ‘Bloody Sunday’ attract Friel’s attention through the play, which was also directed by Tomás MacAnna (at the Abbey Theatre) to the dichotomy of on and offstage roles of audiences and witnesses.

In Ní Ghráda’s treatment, the plight of Maura is linked to staging communal culpability. In the published English language text of the play, a drawing of the stage plan reveals a high rostrum upstage centre which offered an imposing view over the audience as well as over the stage, characters and ‘witnesses’. Maura, upon entering the court room addresses the audience directly at the front of the stage:

Maura: They think they will find out everything. They will question everyone and they think they know me and what I did. But there are things that no one will ever know – things that are hidden in my heart forever. His name that was never spoken. The night it all began. The dance in the schoolhouse. The music. The sweetness of the May night. The shiver of delight in my blood. The song I sang. The song . . .”¹⁵²

The ensuing dance scene foregrounds the intimacy and relationship between Maura and her would-be lover, the closeness of bodies and rhythm of music, which is recalled through memory but which is sharply broken by being jarred back to the present and to the courtroom, where evidence and testimony is laid out against Maura, describing her as wild, provocative and “unearthly”.¹⁵³

Maura, from an off-stage ethereal world speaks to the auditorium before the action of the play begins. Her disembodied voice coming from an unknown but otherworldly place, a device used in effective means in plays such as *Footfalls*¹⁵⁴ by Samuel Beckett, which presented a conversation between a daughter and the voice of her (perhaps dead) mother. The female voice, absent from the view of the audience and symbolic of the lack of

¹⁵² Mairead Ní Ghráda, *On Trial* (Dublin: James Duffy and Co, 1966), 7.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁵⁴ *Footfalls* was written between March and November 1975 and first staged at the Royal Court Theatre, London on 20th May 1976.

psychological or physical healthcare provisions afforded to women in this era, offers tragic defiance of the conditions which pre-empted such actions:

Maura’s Voice (*Offstage*): I killed my child because she was a girl. Every girl grows up to be a woman. But my child is free. She’ll not be the easy fool of any man. She is free. She is free. She is free.¹⁵⁵

The device of ‘memory as evidence’ recounted through voice from the offstage is discussed by Morash and Richards in their treatment of Beckett’s plays of this period, such as *Happy Days* (1961), *Not I* (1972), and *That Time* (1974). Memory may present places that seem invested with significance, their record in memory is fragile and their status as place is constantly being eroded . . . this rupture of the self in time [as in Maura’s recounting of her own role but non-divulgence of name of her lover or his acts] refined the formal division of the body of the performer in the present and from the recorded voice speaking from the past in the present.¹⁵⁶ Ní Ghráda contested the dramaturgy of presence through giving voice to the absent Maura, symbolic of the many women physically and emotionally silenced by their incarceration in Magdalene Laundry institutions. Public and communal voyeurism is criticised through the presentation of the female body as evidence of sin within a courtroom setting.

On Trial was produced in Limerick in August 1970 during Gemini Theatre’s fifth festival of theatre in the city.¹⁵⁷ The play was described in the *Irish Times* as being “one of the most powerful social documents ever seen on the Irish stage” by critic David Nowlan. Nowlan adds that by switching the sex of the protagonist to a woman, Maura, Ní Ghráda subverts two thousand years of Christian doctrine and the story within the book of Genesis of Cain and Abel and the debate around being ‘my brother’s keeper’. In the Book of Genesis, Cain murders Abel in a dispute over sacrifice rejected by God - the first-born man kills and causes the first death. In Ní Ghráda’s work, the story shifts to Maura’s death where all her family are implicated, but declare dumbfound innocence. While a murder was not actively performed, Maura’s suicide is a result of shared social stigma and shame – the courtroom

¹⁵⁵ Ni Ghráda, 1966, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Morash and Richards, 2013, 88-89.

¹⁵⁷ Also produced in Limerick during Gemini’s summer Limerick residency were John B. Keane’s *Big Maggie* and *All the King’s Horses* by John McDonnell.

interrogations echo with the hollow remarks which ask ‘are we our sister’s keeper?’ *On Trial* is described as “compelling theatre . . . a screamingly articulate cry for female emancipation – and it is well served by Barry Cassin’s direction and by the playing of the company.”¹⁵⁸

By 1979, an amateur production of *On Trial* by the Beaver’s Repertory Theatre in Dublin, donated their services and the proceeds of the opening to the support groups in Ireland for unmarried mothers, *Cherish*¹⁵⁹ and *Ally*. It was noted as being a sign of “the changing times” of Ireland.¹⁶⁰

Historian Sarah Anne Buckley examines the history of the State’s engagement with the family through child welfare and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Ireland, in her book *The Cruelty Man*. Buckley examines the gender inequality experienced between men and women in the eyes of the state – from welfare provision to the courts. Buckley concludes that “the difference between deserving and undeserving mothers [of state support] can be identified in the period [c. 1920-1950]. While the [NSPCC] dealt with many unmarried mothers, support to retain their children was not offered in most instances, and for widows, an illegitimate child would cancel the little support the state was offering.”¹⁶¹

This point would preoccupy dramatic works throughout the timeframe of post-Emergency Ireland, from the 1950s through to the 1970s. While Ní Ghráda developed a powerful political and social statement by using the setting of a legal courtroom, the supposed site and resort of equality under the law, other works by Carolyn Swift and Edna O’Brien traversed this official setting to highlight social issues from within the home itself – dramatizing the decline of the ‘national space’ in Irish theatre, the domestic kitchen and family home.

Carolyn Swift – throwing off ‘The Millstone’

¹⁵⁸ “Power of “The Trial” as Social Document”, *Irish Times*, 12 August 1970, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Evelyn Forde and Annette Hunter-Evans were co-founders in the 1970s of ‘Cherish’. Mary Robinson served as its first president with Bishop Eamon Casey as its patron. In the 1960s, ‘Ally’ was founded by a Dominican priest, the late Fr. Fergal O’Connor.

¹⁶⁰ “‘On Trial’ still true”, *Irish Times*, 21 September 1979, 10.

¹⁶¹ Sarah-Anne Buckley, *The Cruelty Man: Child Welfare, the NSPCC and the State in Ireland 1889 – 1956* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 197.

Carolyn Swift was born in London in 1923 as Caroline Samuel. Describing home-life as “privileged, middle class with maids and nannys . . . my mother had tried hard to make me look like the pure young English rose I could never be.”¹⁶² Swift’s relationship with her parents, especially with her mother, contributed to Swift’s independent streak and ideological freedom that would later permeate her own work for the stage. Like Edna O’Brien describing countries as either ‘mothers or fathers’, Swift sought to break with the rule and expectation of her family and faith. In marrying Alan Simpson, Swift was, to the mind of her parents, marrying ‘a goy’ - marrying outside the family Jewish faith. Simpson’s own father was a Church of Ireland rector and so Swift married into her husband’s church in October 1947. She would say later that, “a symbol of all I wanted to escape from was the wedding dress itself . . . Marriage had not freed me from my parents, rather it simply lured Alan into the same trap. It seems unbelievable now that we appear to have been so powerless to organise our own lives.”¹⁶³

Then based in London, Swift and Simpson, worked in various capacities in the London theatre circuit. At the Unity Theatre, a left-wing amateur theatre society (regarded as being professional in standards) based in Goldington Street, the couple learned to run a small but sustainable theatre that was also challenging contemporary artistic and social issues. The experience would stand to both in their endeavours of establishing the Pike Theatre some years later. By the late 1940s, with the couple living back in Dublin, the network of emerging and ambitious young artists and writers embraced Swift and Simpson.

The onset of the 1950s was formative in terms of Irish theatre developing new and predominantly young voices within a burgeoning independent theatre scene. However, the period also had its divisive confrontations with censorship and authority. As Lionel Pilkington concludes, furores of the period such as the well-documented production by Cyril Cusack of Sean O’Casey’s *The Bishop’s Bonfire* at Dublin’s Gaiety Theatre in 1955, was testament to the conservative ethos the Irish state. O’Casey’s play, widely condemned for its ‘crude vulgarity’, proved less to be symptomatic of the increasing modernisation of Irish theatre and its audiences:

¹⁶² Carolyn Swift, *Stage by Stage* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1985), 15.

¹⁶³ Swift, 1985, 62-63.

Audiences flocked to O’Casey’s play not because it was regarded as nationally representative, but because it proclaimed a new and dissenting resistance to the traditional paternalistic role of the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁴

Like many of the women who were centrally influential in Irish theatre during the period of theatrical reinvention from the 1950s onwards, Carolyn Swift has not received true regard to which she is deserving in terms of artistic vision, creative energy and professional ability. Her husband, director and producer, Alan Simpson, perhaps partly by reasons beyond both their control. Simpson’s central role in *The Rose Tattoo* case at the Pike Theatre, which saw him brought before the Irish High Court on charges of indecency and profanity¹⁶⁵ (the charges were later thrown out) garnered prominent notoriety in Irish theatre history. However, when the husband and wife pair co-founded the Pike Theatre Club, Simpson wrongly claimed it a sole affair in an interview with Des Hickey and Gus Smith.¹⁶⁶ Published works which discuss the Pike Theatre all agree on 1953 as the year of the foundation of the theatre when it took up the cramped space on Herbert Lane, Dublin. The origins of the Pike Theatre, however, I have found, can be traced to 1951, two years before the foundation of the Pike Theatre Club on Herbert Lane and to a new play written by Carolyn Swift and which was produced under the banner of the Pike Theatre.

Lionel Pilkington outlines the importance of the Pike Theatre to Irish theatre and wider culture:

The Pike was a *Théâtre de Poche* that modelled itself not so much on the consensual ideology of nationalism but on the more adversarial stance of a modernising elite. To this extent, the Pike belonged to the ‘new wave’ of theatrical experimentation that was taking place in London and Paris . . . in terms of organisation, aesthetic philosophy and style of presentation, the Pike pitted itself deliberately in opposition to the [National Theatre Society].¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2001), 151.

¹⁶⁵ For more on this case, see *Spiked! Church-State Intrigue and the Rose Tattoo*, Gerard Whelan with Carolyn Swift, (Dublin: New Island Books, 2002); *Theatre and State in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*, Lionel Pilkington (London: Routledge, 2001); and Ian R. Walsh, *Experimental Irish Theatre After W.B. Yeats*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

¹⁶⁶ Des Hickey and Gus Smith, 210.

¹⁶⁷ Pilkington, 2001, 152.

Carolyn Swift was central to this achievement. Not just producer of important new Irish and European plays at the Pike, she was also a skilled editor and play-reader, acting as a *de-facto* literary manager, general manager and marketing agent. Her efforts, for instance, to defend the Pike production of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* saw her write to the editors of all daily Irish and Sunday Irish press as well as Irish radio, concerning a warning issued prior to opening of *Godot*. Swift clarifies it was not for sensationalism but as per the authors wishes: there would be no cuts and audiences may find certain words of phrases "not normally used in public or in the presence of ladies."¹⁶⁸

Denis Johnston proposed a production of Mary Manning’s adaptation of *Finnegan’s Wake* (entitled *The Voice of Shem*) at the Pike Theatre to be directed by Carolyn Swift. Johnston wrote that he was “rehearsing at the moment an extremely good stage version of *Finnegan’s Wake* dramatized by Mary Manning . . . It has only one set, and is quite simple to do with the right cast. In view of the raging success that you made with [*Waiting For*] *Godot*, it seems to me to right [sic] up your street.”¹⁶⁹

Johnston’s letter foregrounds the contribution that Swift has on the production of the Pike’s English-language production of *Waiting for Godot*. Further evidence of the importance of Swift to new Irish theatre of this period comes through many sources. Swift’s husband, Alan Simpson, wrote to Louis Elliman, Manager of the Theatre Royal, Hawkins Street, Dublin, in 1959, about holding a production of Dominic Behan’s new play, *Posterity be Damned*. Elliman declined the play but Simpson refutes the decision as he is confident “by the time Carol has finished “fixing it”, it will have considerable impact.”¹⁷⁰ Swift acted as assistant producer of the play when it opened at the Gaiety in September 1959. The play garnered

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Carolyn Swift, 5 November 1955. 10813/384/121, Pike Theatre papers, Trinity College Dublin.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from Denis Johnston, 10 Jewett Street, South Hadley, Mass. USA, to Carolyn Swift, Pike Theatre, Dublin. 9 February 1957, 10813/395/478 Pike Theatre papers, Trinity College Dublin. Swift replied on 15 February 1957, (letter 482) to say she is very keen to have the play and hopes rights should not be an issue (unlike many other productions stalled under rights issues) but business is going very well at the Pike, with three weeks booked out despite petrol rationing in Dublin.

¹⁷⁰ 10813/398/389 Letter from Alan Simpson to Louis Elliman, Odeon (Ireland) Ltd. Theatre Royal, Hawkins St. 29 April 1959. “I gather from Brendan that you do not wish to present “Posterity be Damned” in the Gaiety for the Festival. I think you are mistaken, because I am confident that by the time Carol has finished “Fixing it”, it will have considerable impact.” Simpson continues to say that he will have to press on and find another venue. The play was eventually produced at the Gaiety Theatre, beginning 28 September 1959, to great critical acclaim. It was produced outside of the Dublin Theatre Festival as a venue could not be found during the Festival.

major critical acclaim if not also controversy owing to charges of blasphemy over use of ‘the Holy Name’.

Ernest Blythe discussed his rejection of *Posterity be Damned* with Alan Simpson, and also recognised Swift’s ability to turn the play into something successful, “as she did with *The Quare Fellow*”.¹⁷¹ Simpson remonstrates that “Carol [Carolyn] has done quite a lot of work on it in the way she did to *The Quare Fellow*. Blythe remains resolute in refusing it as [the Abbey’s] opinion is that Mr. Behan’s play, which is less good than, say, Hugh Leonard’s unsuccessful I.R.A. play *A Leap in the Dark*, would fail at the Queen’s. It is a rather ordinary I.R.A. type of play with a number of faults . . .”¹⁷²

The significance of the Pike Theatre to Ireland, namely in staging English language premières of innovative and important works of drama, the deployment of experimental dramaturgies and staging techniques in lighting and staging, but also what it stated in terms of ambition and aesthetic possibility. The ‘Pike aesthetic’, if such a thing can be quantified, could be seen in its ambition: to build and establish a theatre that could push boundaries in terms of repertoire, staging and an avant-garde ideology that did not subscribe to prevailing hegemony of nationalism.

However, the ‘Pike aesthetic’ also meant more than just the 60-seat space it occupied. Its energy, dynamism and ambition was at its core. Its co-founder Alan Simpson was central to the theatre’s success as director of many key plays and because of his dedication to a professional avant-garde theatre but equally and if not more important, was its other co-founder, Carolyn Swift.

Carolyn Swift and Establishing the Pike Aesthetic

The initial Pike Theatre production, *The Millstone*, was written by Carolyn Swift and opened on the 3rd of September 1951. Staged at the Town Hall in Dún Laoghaire, the play, which was produced by Alan Simpson, presented a brave and startling treatise on the status

¹⁷¹ 10813/398/411 Letter from Alan Simpson to Ernest Blythe, 6 June 1959. Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.

¹⁷² Letters between Alan Simpson and Ernest Blythe, 6 June 1959, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.

of legal adoption in Ireland, criticising the implicit hitherto lack of regulation or transparency regarding the forced adoption of infants from predominantly unmarried mothers.

Biographer of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, Joseph Cooney notes that following the ‘Maynooth meeting’ (a gathering of senior clerical officials in 1949), McQuaid averted the risk and possibility that Catholic adoption agencies would be inspected by local authorities. Cooney notes how “the closed nature of Irish society enabled McQuaid to exploit a cloak and dagger atmosphere in which he could influence the legislators. An example of McQuaid’s political *modus operandi* was his vetting of proposed adoption legislation, the groundwork for which had been prepared by an Episcopal committee under his chairmanship.

The Archbishop later concluded and recorded in a letter to the Minister for Justice, Geared Boland on 3rd January 1952, that if adoption was “restricted within certain limits and protected by certain safeguards . . . it could be permitted within Catholic teaching.”¹⁷³ Each clause of the Adoption Bill presented by Minister Boland was personally vetted by Archbishop McQuaid and foregrounded especially the remit of preservation of the Catholic faith for the child. This softening of official position by the Archbishop was in response to a position that was becoming increasingly difficult to explicate the Church from – the sale of ‘illegitimate’ children from Irish orphanages to families in the United States. Prior to the Legal Adoption Act, these children, the likes that Swift witnessed every day in Dún Laoghaire, had no legal standing or protection.

Falling outside of the desired familial model as ascribed within the constitution, these children were deemed to have no ‘value’ or place within conservative Ireland. Cooney notes that as many as three hundred children were sold from Ireland annually, mainly to the United States.¹⁷⁴ McQuaid did challenge this transaction but only temporarily and only so far as to draft guidelines that would protect the religion of the child being maintained as Roman Catholic. The fact that this practice was monitored and agreed by the State, as Cooney notes, shows just how deeply a cause this was for Swift to present on stage in 1951

¹⁷³ John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Syracuse: Syracuse, University Press, 2000), 297.

¹⁷⁴ Cooney, 2000, 246.

and in the timeframe where these guidelines and official debate would have been under the watchful eye of Church and State.

The Millstone was billed on its play programme as ‘a topical play’ indicating Swift’s intent in creating and staging such a piece to respond directly to the contemporary and ongoing discussions around a proposed Legal Adoption Bill for Ireland. The Bill was passed in the following year of 1952. The play programme also carried a full page advertisement for the Irish Housewives’ Association, advertising the organisation’s aims, which counted “to safeguard the health of the community, particularly of children; to prevent to any unjustified increase in prices [of household goods];”¹⁷⁵ and other directives to protect the livelihood of the women and wife within the family context. The placing of such a large advertisement by the Irish Housewives’ Association was a public act of intent for its aims and to showcase the supports it offered to women in such a patriarchal society. By stating also “We want members, help us to help you. Join the Irish Housewives Association”¹⁷⁶ also indicates it predicted a large portion of the play audience would be Irish women who could relate to the subject matter of the play and seek supports within the association.

¹⁷⁵ Programme, *The Millstone* by Carolyn Swift. 1951. Programme from within the author’s own collection.

¹⁷⁶ Programme, *The Millstone*, Pike Theatre Company, 1951. Copy in author’s own collection.

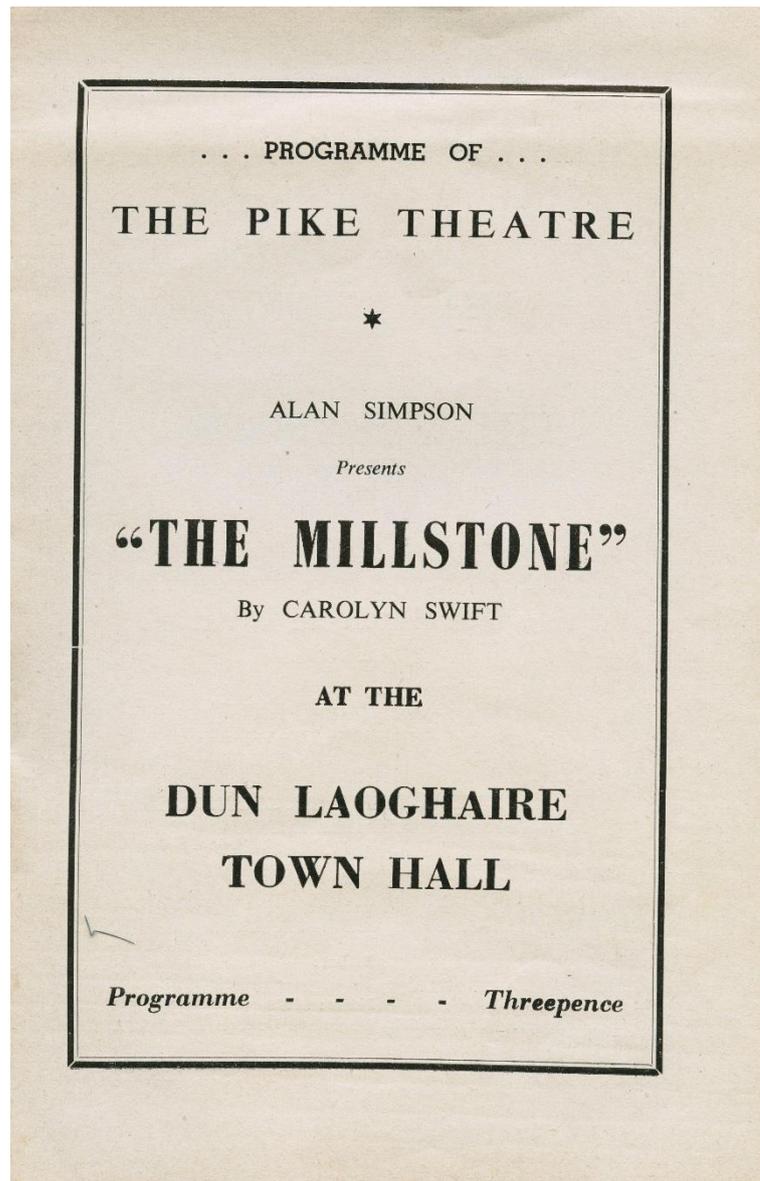


Figure 2 Programme cover of *The Millstone* by Carolyn Swift, 1951

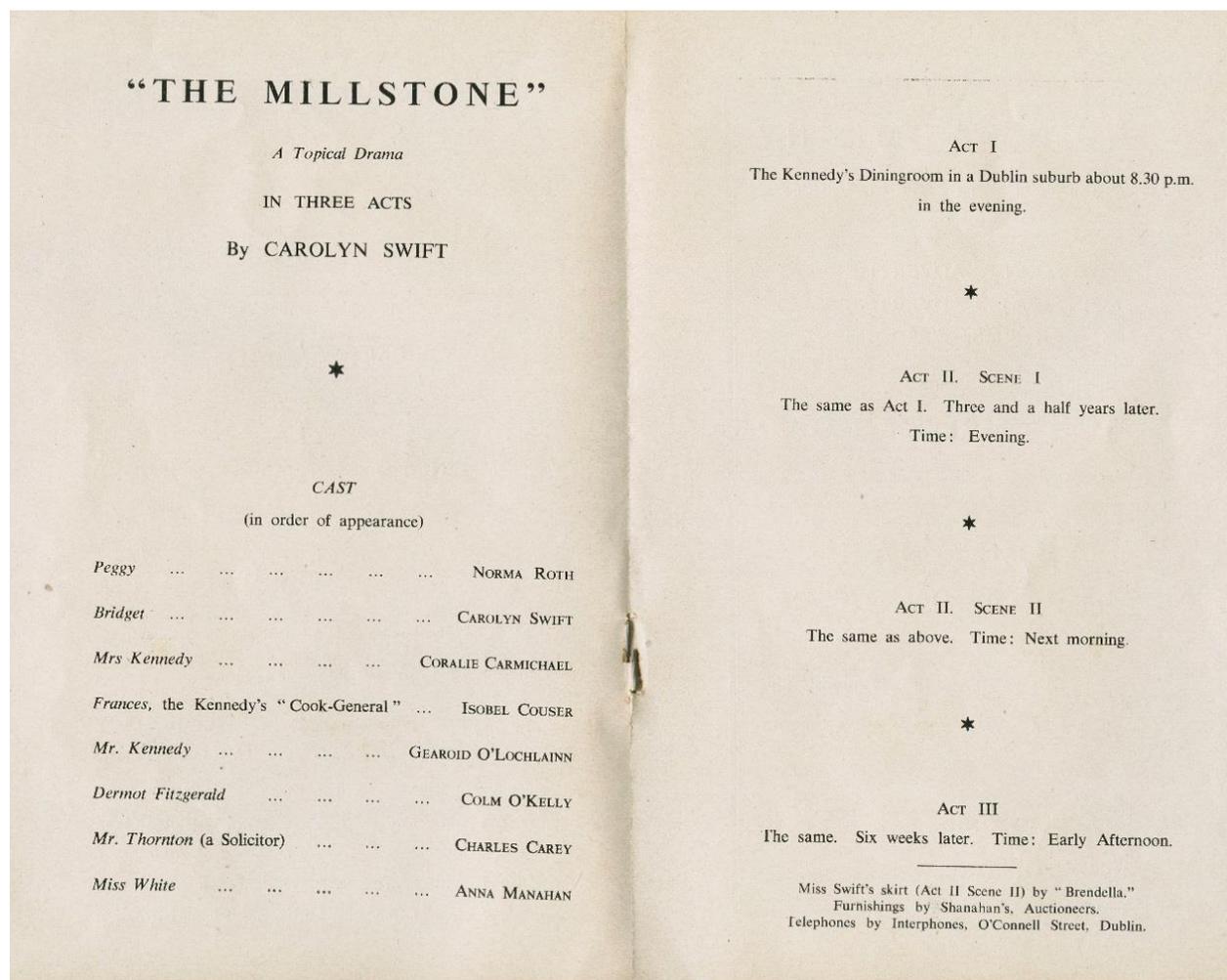


Figure 3 Cast Listing for *The Millstone* by Carolyn Swift, 1951

The play featured the author in the role of the teenage girl, Bridget. A talented cast included Coralie Carmichael as Mrs. Kennedy, the adoptive mother; Anna Manahan as the biological mother, Miss White, and other later Pike actors, Colm O’Kelly and Gearóid Ó Lochlann. The play is set in the Kennedy’s dining-room in a Dublin suburb with the action of later acts also taking place in the same location but three and a half years later.

With Simpson earning a regular wage from the Irish Defence Forces and Swift contributing to Radió Éireann and the *Irish Times*, the couple bought a home on York Road in Dún Laoghaire in 1950. The house was across the street from the Bird’s Nest Orphanage. One of three orphanages in the town, the 'Birds Nest' was founded in 1859 by a Mrs. Smyley and took in orphaned children between five and twelve years of age. The girls were

'prepared chiefly for domestic service' and the boys afterwards went to one of the Dublin 'homes'.¹⁷⁷

The close proximity to such an institution prompted Swift to write *The Millstone*, which focused on the adoption of children in Ireland and the lack of regulation regarding the reclamation of children. The care of children in the State was not far removed from comment or criticism from wider theatrical figures only a few years later. Cyril Cusack made an offer to Sean O'Casey in February 1960, to have a bed installed in every children's hospital in Dublin, named in honour of O'Casey, as a legacy to the playwright.¹⁷⁸ O'Casey rejected the offer as he felt he could not consent for a child in a hospital bed that bore his name, for the idea that any child should owe having a hospital bed to Sean O'Casey was wrong. "A bed should be there for a need, not as a gift. Thousands of Irish children need beds at home as well as in hospital. Ireland has a long time-lag to make up in the care of her children."¹⁷⁹

The Millstone is set in the drawing room of the Kennedy household in present day Ireland. The parents live with their two daughters, Bridget (played by Swift), Peggy, Frances, the family maid, Mr. Thornton, a solicitor and Miss White, Bridget's biological mother. Three and a half years pass between the first and second acts and a number of weeks between the second and third acts. The play reaches a climax on the arrival of Bridget's birth-mother, seeking to reclaim her daughter in order to secure cheap labour for a new guesthouse she intends to run for the growing tourist market of Dublin.

Swift's would later return to this theme in her work in producing the rock musical, *The Scatterin'* by James McKenna in 1960. The play is set in North Dublin working class communities in which disenfranchised youths are seeking to identify with modernising Ireland. In the second act, Jemmo reveals his personal story and comments on 'illegitimate' children but also on parents and the State who fail in their duty to those in their care:

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.dun-laoghaire.com/genealogy/orphans.html> Accessed 5 August 2017.

¹⁷⁸ In previous correspondence between Sean O'Casey and Cyril Cusack, O'Casey asked after the well-being of Cyril Cusack's own children, who were sick with scarlet fever, an illness which O'Casey said afflicted all his siblings and his own mother.

¹⁷⁹ Letters between Sean O'Casey and Cyril Cusack, 18-20 February 1963, MS38, 060 / 3, Sean O'Casey papers, NLI, Dublin.

These children become the property of the State – the Free State . . . A bloody labour camp, that’s what this country is. We’ve been manufacturing world labour for a hundred years solid. Every goddam factory here is foreign, employin’ cheap Irish labour. They put ‘made in the Republic of Ireland’ on the stuff an’ we’re away, we have an Irish industry. Do they think we’re gobaloons or something? Kathleen Ní Houlihan (Ireland) Ltd.¹⁸⁰

In Swift’s *The Millstone*, despite being lovingly reared by the Kennedys, Bridget chooses to return with her manipulative biological mother in order not to be publicly outed, shamed and stigmatised by contesting the adoption in the courts and being ‘outed’ as adopted in the local media and community gossip.

MISS WHITE: How else only by coming away with me now so I don’t have to adopt legal proceedings to get you back. . . You had better remember that when you see your name in all the papers and know that everyone is talking about you and the way all your fine friends will be learning how you lied to them about who you really are and what you really are, you little bastard!¹⁸¹

Social historian Maria Luddy comments on the stigma placed on public knowledge of adoption, for both the single or unmarried mothers and the adoptees themselves:

Unmarried motherhood was as problematic in Ireland as it was in most other European countries. Reflecting badly on the ‘moral character’ of the woman, unmarried motherhood carried a stigma that was almost impossible to shake. An unmarried mother’s child was more likely than a legitimate child to die in infancy. The mother, once her status was known, found it difficult, if not impossible, to find respectable employment and was often shunned by her family.¹⁸²

Swift describes the conservative and religiously driven outlook towards adoption in Ireland:

In those days there was no legal adoption in Ireland and several cases had been reported in the papers of children being reclaimed, after fifteen years or more, by

¹⁸⁰ James McKenna, *The Scatterin’*, Prompt Script, Simpson Papers, JHL, NUI Galway, 19-20.

¹⁸¹ Carolyn Swift, *The Millstone*, AllI, (1951, unpublished, copy in possession of the author), 18.

¹⁸² Maria Luddy, “Gender and Irish History”, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, edited by Alvin Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 201.

their natural mother from stricken foster parents who had come to regard them as their own. Now a campaign had begun to grow about legal adoption, which was bitterly opposed by the sort of people who always oppose social reform in Ireland. .

”¹⁸³

The Millstone was described as ‘topical’ in the playbill, reflective of the extensive drafting of a legal reform bill in the Dáil at the time. The government rejected such a bill in December 1950, which prompted a cross-party private members’ bill to address the issue in a revised bill the following year.¹⁸⁴ The social realism of the play was explained by Swift: “my play had a plot roughly based on the sort of situations revealed in these cases [within the Irish media] but with characters derived from much nearer home.”¹⁸⁵ Swift’s comment foregrounds the autobiographical elements within the play, expressed through the characters of the controlling mother and reflective of Swift’s own childhood self-identification and her Jewish upbringing. *The Millstone* can be seen as reflecting Swift’s own inner conflicts of identity.

It was planned to hold a one-off performance of the play at the Abbey Lecture Hall in Dublin city centre but Swift was denied a license to stage the production owing to fire-safety concerns. An alternative venue was needed. The Town Hall in Dún Laoghaire was available and booked but which Swift described as being ‘technically - a disaster, with difficulty in attracting people to a non-theatre venue, awful acoustics and noise of movement from free-standing chairs.’¹⁸⁶ Despite the technical and physical limitations of the building, the play received good critical attention. Comments in the *Irish Times* noted that:

It is a pity that a Dublin stage has not been found for the Pike Theatre’s production of *The Millstone*, for this play poignantly underlining the unfortunate position with regard to child adoption in this country, is well written and acted and deserves a wider audience than it has found so far in the Town Hall in Dún Laoghaire . . . The play is a personal triumph for Carolyn Swift.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Swift, 1985, 92-93.

¹⁸⁴ “Another Legal Adoption Bill?” *Irish Times*, 4 December 1950, 1.

¹⁸⁵ Swift, 1985, 92.

¹⁸⁶ Swift, 1985, 94.

¹⁸⁷ “Child Adoption Theme of Pike’s Theatre’s Play”, *Irish Times*, 5 September 1951, 3.

The contrasting opinion with which the play is treated by other press critics is symptomatic of the institutional dismissal of female artists at this time. The play topic itself is belittled for being of interest to women playgoers only and of no artistic or intellectual value within national discourse. The review in the *Irish Press* reads:

The newly formed Pike Theatre will not earn a great deal of prestige with the performance of Carolyn’s Swift’s “The Millstone” at the Town Hall, Dún Laoghaire, this week, but if the female population of the borough is sufficiently large and is sufficiently augmented by visitors, they should make a tidy bit of money . . . she has written a super tear-jerking tale for women.¹⁸⁸

This misogynistic article fails in its premise to act as theatre criticism and focuses in a personal attack on Swift for writing as a woman on a matter of national importance but which concerned chiefly women and children. As Anna McMullan writes, “Irish women come under pressure from Catholic and Protestant ideologies to retain the domestic role as their primary function.”¹⁸⁹ As Swift sought to counter these prescribed patriarchal orthodoxies, established media outlets sought to dismiss such work as anti-national and of no place within the Irish dramatic narrative. To do so was to forcibly remove the artistic contribution of the likes of Swift from the mainstream artistic fabric of the nation. Swift was presented not as an independent artist but as a dependent but faithful spouse and mother. This maintained the ideal feminine vision of a ‘Kathleen Ní Houlihan’ type figure, a frail and isolated figure, in need of support from and within a constrained national space.

In further media coverage of the play, images of Swift in school-girl attire were referenced in a clear sexualised manner, foregrounding her feminine and elegant appearance while also presenting her as ‘wife of Army captain and producer, Alan Simpson.’¹⁹⁰ An unnamed press cutting ran a headline of “A Mother Becomes a Schoolgirl on Stage” with an image of Swift, with her infant daughter sitting on her knee. This is adjacent to another image of Swift in character and in costume as the young girl at the centre of the adoption storyline of the play. This is a cynical ploy in order to obfuscate the national issues that the play sought to

¹⁸⁸ *Irish Press*, 5 September 1951.

¹⁸⁹ Anna McMullan, “Irish Women Playwrights since 1958”, in *British and Irish Women Dramatists since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, Trevor R. Griffith and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, eds. (Open University Press, 1993), 111.

¹⁹⁰ 10813/387, Press Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

challenge, and instead, reduce the urgency by creating confusions between Swift-in-character as yet another mistreated young woman, and Swift as an independent playwright/actor/producer.

The undercurrent of the sexualisation of a young teenage girl was not uncommon for the time of the play’s writing. It would have propagated the position of young women as readily sexual, attainable and also forcibly guilty within society for any follow-on effects of sexual encounters, many of which, the young women had no willing part or role to play in, as Mairead Ni Ghráda’s play attested to. The character of Maura Cassidy, quite literally, was ‘on trial’ for her perceived crimes through her sexual attainability. Historian Carole Holohan reminds us that the preconceptions of behaviour and attitudes towards adolescent men and women were inherently different in 1950s Ireland. “Notions of masculine adolescence implied vandalism, violence and above all, gangs. Rather than behavioural deviants, girls were viewed as possible sexual deviants.”¹⁹¹

Another article had a headline of “Soldier-Husband will produce wife’s play”, reducing Swift to the role of ‘wife and mother’ only. The article included no comment from Swift, only making reference that “she [Swift] has not avoided controversial issues [previously]” but offers no elaboration as to what the issues were. Half the article is devoted instead to Alan Simpson, the “theatrical producer” who went back into the army for the war years to support his family and is now devoting his leave to direct his wife’s play. The only other direct reference to Swift is the line “Carol will appear in her play in a gym tunic.”¹⁹² *Time Pictorial* failed to mention Swift by name entirely, again focusing on the “brilliant young engineer”, Alan Simpson, who is producing his wife’s show.

The Sunday Press, an organ of the Fianna Fáil government and also of strongly Catholic ethos, dismissed the play as “a propaganda piece in support of the current agitation for legal adoption. As such it can be sure of finding its audiences sympathetically disposed in advance. As such it must be counted moderately successful.”¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Carole Holohan, “Catholic Youth Clubs in the Sixties”, in *Adolescence in Modern Irish History*, Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan, eds. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 182.

¹⁹² 10813/387, Press Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

¹⁹³ 10813/387, Press Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

As a play, it just won't do . . . unoriginal . . . repetitive to the point of annoyance . . . with wedges of undiluted propaganda put into the mouths of the characters who have hitherto been speaking natural dialogue . . . The greatest mistake Miss Swift made was in writing for herself, as the adopted child . . . a high-tension part that was lamentably beyond the prowess of the actress . . . the vicarious embarrassment I suffered will allow me to pick my words more carefully, from this general Holocaust . . . ”¹⁹⁴

The *Evening Mail* did buck the trend and explore Swift's research and artistic practices:

This is her first effort as a playwright and before setting to work she visited a Dublin orphanage and spent many hours searching through the case histories of the children in the home. In this way she aimed at finding the right atmosphere and authentic details for her work, which she has entitled the *Millstone*. She has described her aim in writing the play as an effort to present the more human aspects of the problem of legal adoption, rather than its legal complexities. Some idea of the versatility of this artist may be gauged from the fact that she will appear in the play as a 12-years-old child who is adopted. She needs only a gym tunic, coupled with her own youthful appearance to bring about this transition.¹⁹⁵

Swift also found similar struggles within the Irish dramatic scene. Pressures such as lack of available space, affordable rents and a paucity of well-equipped venues ensured the smaller fringe groups suffered disproportionately to the quality and originality of work they were producing. Swift wrote an article on Irish theatre published in *Home Planning* magazine in April 1954, “The problem”, she wrote “was the strangle-hold of the professional companies and theatres meaning cut-throat competition amongst the smaller professional companies in booking little theatres and halls.” The Pike Theatre Company disbanded after *The Millstone* largely over this problem and reformed later to build their own theatre in 1953 as the Pike Theatre Club.¹⁹⁶ Swift recounts the psychological effect this inability to secure an

¹⁹⁴ *The Sunday Press*, 9 September 1951, 10813/387, Pike Theatre Papers, Press Scrap Book, Trinity College Dublin.

¹⁹⁵ “Big Theatrical venture for Dun Laoghaire.” *The Evening Mail*, 27 August 1951. 10813/387, Pike Theatre Papers, Press Scrap Book, Trinity College Dublin.

¹⁹⁶ 10813/387, Pike Theatre Papers, Press Scrap Book, Trinity College Dublin.

economic foothold in Dublin as an emerging and professional theatre club was dispiriting for her personally but which provided the catalyst for a permanent home for the Pike:

We'd presented a play with a professional cast in a hall outside Dublin . . . but we couldn't get theatre bookings and the company had to be disbanded. That's when we joked about building our own theatre. (Estimates of building a 300-seat theatre was c. £70,000)¹⁹⁷

Writing to Micheal O'hAodha, (radio broadcaster in RTÉ and later Chair of the Abbey Theatre Board) on 26 July 1951, Swift mentioned she was revising the script of *The Millstone* in order to keep it current and topical: “. . . since its production I have revised it, partly because – with the coming Legal Adoption Bill [1952], parts of it have become out of date, and partly to improve it in light of what I had learned seeing it in production.”¹⁹⁸ In doing Swift expressed her willingness to work with various forms of dramatic production, including radio, as she felt the play would benefit from a radio adaptation, as it flagged quite a bit in the third act on stage, whereas on radio it would benefit from “plenty opportunity for effective use of music and other effects.”¹⁹⁹

As a result of this territorial battle for experimental theatre spaces, an article reported shortly later in 1958 that: “Ireland’s theatre has gone underground in in what may be the most extensive pocket theatre movement in Europe. Throughout Dublin and its suburbs, cellars and lofts are giving way to props, grease paints...with gates and doorways sprouting such names as Pike, 37 and Studio. . . .”²⁰⁰

Eight years later, Swift would not be deterred and turned to translating a play by Italian playwright, Diago Fabbri, *Inquisition*,²⁰¹ for the Pike Theatre in 1959. *Inquisition* has four characters. A young priest who feels he has mistaken his vocation, a young husband

¹⁹⁷ Transcript of a radio talk by Carolyn Swift, c. 1956, - “*Waiting for Godot* or Build Your Own Theatre”, 10813/385, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.

¹⁹⁸ Letter from Carolyn Swift to Micheal O’hAodha, 26 July 1951, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin, 10813/398/12.

¹⁹⁹ Letter from Carolyn Swift to Micheal O’hAodha, 26 July 1951, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin, 10813/398/12.

²⁰⁰ “Irish Actors at War with Abbey” in *the Overseas Family*, 27 April 1958. 10813/388, Pike Theatre Papers, Press Scrap Book, Trinity College Dublin.

²⁰¹ *Inquisizione* in Italian, Diago Fabbri’s play was first published in *Teatro* magazine in Italy and first published in book form by *Garzanti* in 1952.

who feels he had and still has a vocation to the priesthood and his wife who, knowing this, has blackmailed him into marriage by attempting suicide. The priest and the wife blame God for their unhappiness; the husband is brought to believe that Heaven has duped him too since a revelatory dream had led him to accept his marriage as the Will of God. The three are joined by an old Prior, in charge of a miraculous shrine which is a place of pilgrimage, where the trio go to find a solution to 'the awful problem of human loneliness'.²⁰²

Scholar of Italian literature in translation, Robin Healey, notes in his book *Twentieth-Century Italian Literature in English Translation* that *Inquisition* was first translated into English as a published text by Adele M. Fiske in 1963.²⁰³ Healey's bibliographic compendium fails to mention Swift's adaptation which was staged at the Pike in 1959. Film historian and critic Peter Malone notes that as Fabbri also wrote many films, his artistic inspiration was primarily Pirandello, but the spiritual inspiration of Fabbri was closer to Charles Péguy, the French-born poet and essayist (1873 – 1914) whose deeply Catholic writing was influenced by Péguy's early socialism and also his later proto-fascist writings which emphasises the collectivist and communal, an 'authentic Christian society'.²⁰⁴

Swift was influenced by modernist European theatre, particularly Italian drama, through works like *Inquisition* and also *Crime on Goat Island* by Ugo Betti, produced at the Pike Theatre in 1958. The opportunity to present this type of work was dependent on an experimental sensibility in terms of acting style, gesture, and discipline. Betti's play was delayed for five years before Swift and Simpson were able to produce it at the Pike, having first seen it in Paris in 1953. Simpson commented that the availability of the right cast was a primary reason for the delay.²⁰⁵ Swift and Simpson demanded high professional standards from their casts. Their vision was to manage a theatre on par with any major European avant-garde venue. When box-office returns dipped slightly in 1954, Simpson was quick to remind cast members that their energies were to be placed on acting alone, not ad-libbing

²⁰² Diego Fabbri, *Inquisition* Adapted by Carolyn Swift. First performed at the Pike Theatre, Dublin, September 1959. <http://www.irishplayography.com/play.aspx?playid=32314> Accessed 9 November 2017.

²⁰³ Robin Healey, *Twentieth-Century Italian Literature in English Translation: An Annotated Bibliography 1929-1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 474.

²⁰⁴ Peter Malone, *Screen Jesus: Portrayals of Christ in Television and Film* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 2012), 82.

²⁰⁵ "An Irishman's Diary", *Irish Times*, 29 September 1958, 6.

or playing for cheap laughs. Lines, movement, choreography and all facets of production were to be delivered with complete accuracy from Swift’s and Simpson’s directions.²⁰⁶

Swift’s interest in form as well as theme and style for dramatic production meant that as well as interest in producing more works by Eugène Ionescu following the successive of the production of *Rhinoceros*, Swift discussed with fellow producer Phyllis Ryan (of Gemini/Orion/Globe theatre companies) in 1960 the idea of producing a stage version of Samuel Beckett’s radio drama, *All that Fall*.²⁰⁷ After the success of the English language première of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, Swift turned to experiment with a play written for radio and one which Beckett expressed its form was entirely dependent on images “coming out of the dark.”²⁰⁸ It was a statement by Swift as to her desire to continually push boundaries of Irish dramatic repertoire and to her artistic vision for Irish drama. An alternative vision for modern Irish drama, one that was influenced by and in-line with international cosmopolitan thinking and form had been championed by other women dramatists for many years at this time of Swift’s intervention. Mary Manning²⁰⁹ is one such figure whose career had formative influence upon Irish culture and criticism as well as on dramatic writing and production. A figure of prominence in film, theatre and wider social and cultural criticism for publications such as *Motley* at the Gate Theatre in the early 1930s and later for the periodical, *Hibernia*, Mary Manning produced important dramatic works in the 1960s but was left frustrated by artistic conservatism in terms of direction and

²⁰⁶ A memo from Alan Simpson to all Pike Theatre cast members, 22 September 1954, noted a downturn in box-office revenues at the Pike. Simpson called on all cast members for support to rectify this deficit on the following points: 1) Prompt start times 2) prompt and ready entrances 3) Script – “The script writer writes into the script, the artist performs it. Do not try and do two jobs. Because an ad lib may get a laugh does not necessarily mean that it improves the number as a whole. Carol and I are the people to judge the value of any new idea.” 4) Dancing – Sloppy and inaccurate work shows an amateur approach which should be avoided at all costs.” 10813/394, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Carolyn Swift to Phyllis Ryan 22 June 1960. The letter discusses Swift hoping to deliver a script of Samuel Beckett’s *All That Fall* to Ryan, but was delayed in doing so, but will also pass a script of *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco to Ryan, following success of recent Ionesco works at the Pike. Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin. 10813/534.

²⁰⁸ Lois Oppenheim, ed., *Directing Beckett* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 191.

²⁰⁹ Mary Manning (Howe) (1905-1999) was born in Dublin in 1905 and attended the Abbey Theatre drama school under the instruction of Sarah Allgood. Manning acted in the Abbey and the Gate in the early 1930s. Her first play, “Youth’s the Season-?”, was produced at the Gate Theatre in March 1930. Manning emigrated to Boston in 1934 and married Harvard lawyer Mark DeWolf Howe. There she directed drama at Radcliffe College, then later became a founding director of the Poet’s Theatre, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Mary Manning worked as drama critic for *Hibernia* magazine for several years and was a regular reviewer of books for the *Irish Times*.

production at the Abbey Theatre by 1968. Her work of this period would address growing social concerns of the willingness of a state and society to accept female sexual liberation.

***The Saint and Mary-Kate* – Mary Manning and Staging the National Domestic Vision**

Playwrights such as Manning, Swift, O’Brien, and others succeeded in unsettling the foundation of Irish theatre tradition while countering the constructed ‘National’ image as women as symbolic of Mother. Enrica Cerquoni observes that Irish female characters have also been traditionally appropriated by male authors to embody the nation, land, desires and responsibilities of their male characters, but rarely have there been authentic, complex, autonomous women.²¹⁰ *The Saint and Mary-Kate* opened at the Abbey Theatre on Monday 18th March 1968. Timed to coincide with the national holiday of St. Patrick’s weekend, Manning’s adaptation provided a counter-narrative to traditional Catholic Irish consciousness and memory of the Irish martyrdom symbolised in male heroic figures which typify Catholic Irish identity. Remembrance of such fallen Roman Catholic and Irish nationalist figures such as St. Patrick, Cúchulainn and latterly Padraig Pearse, indicate the power of symbols to patriarchal constructions of the concept of nation. Manning’s adaptation is a rebuttal of such versions of Irishness through a criticism of a modern Ireland, which through its constitution pledges to protect the citizens, but which ultimately failed in its inscribing of rights for women.

The preamble to the 1937 Constitution of Ireland reads: “In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred.”²¹¹ Article Two of Bunreacht na h-Éireann makes special reference and consideration for all those born within the country: “It is the entitlement and birth-right of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation.”²¹² Article 41 relates directly to the structure and role of the

²¹⁰ Enrica Cerquoni, “Women in Rooms: Landscapes of the Missing in Anne Devlin’s *Ourselves Alone*.”, Melissa Sihra. ed, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 160.

²¹¹ Bunreacht na hÉireann/The Constitution of Ireland, 20.

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_h%C3%89ireann_October_2015_Edition.pdf Accessed 15 October 2017.

²¹² Bunreacht na hÉireann/ The Constitution of Ireland, 22

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_h%C3%89ireann_October_2015_Edition.pdf, Accessed 15 October 2017.

family in Irish society. It reads: “The state recognises the family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law.” However, it became obvious that was not the case.

Manning first began the drafting of her adaptation of O’Connor’s novel in the summer of 1934,²¹³ as then Taoiseach Eamon de Valera was in the process of drafting the Irish constitution, before its ratification in 1937. After her move to Boston in 1934, , Manning paused her adaption of O’Connor’s novel until five years later in 1937, when upon a visit to Dublin she saw a production of O’Connor’s play *The Invincibles*²¹⁴ at the Abbey Theatre. Revitalised in her interest in O’Connor’s book, she sought permission from the writer, to which he responded that Ria Mooney was also working on an adaptation and this would have to receive priority.²¹⁵

With the project side-lined yet again, Manning’s other theatre work which included *Voices of Shem* (1955), an adaptation of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, dominated the intervening years. In 1963, Cathal O’Malley, son of revolutionary Ernie O’Malley, directed Manning’s *The Saint and Mary-Kate* at the Loeb Drama Centre, Harvard University, where it was warmly received by the academic community and critics.²¹⁶ Manning describes the novel as “a beautiful poem. As a novel it is confused and badly constructed but it has a peculiar magic of its own. The characters are intensely alive . . . and though it happened forty years ago, *The Saint and Mary Kate* is with that old problem, the conflict of interest between God, sex and Mum in Holy Ireland”²¹⁷

²¹³ In 1932-1933, Denis Johnston worked with Mary Manning in making a film adaptation of a short story by Frank O’Connor, *Guests of The Nation*, “which was made on 16mm black and white film [in 1933] and shot in the Dublin mountains, using Gate and Abbey actors as well as amateurs.” Bernard Adams, *Denis Johnston: A Life* (Dublin, Lilliput Press, 2002), 132.

²¹⁴ *The Invincibles* was written by Hugh Hunt and Frank O’Connor and based on the events surrounding the assassinations of the Chief Secretary Lord Cavendish and the Permanent Under Secretary Mr. Thomas Burke in Phoenix Park in 1882 by two members of the extremist organisation the Irish National Invincibles.

²¹⁵ Abbey Theatre. *The Saint and Mary Kate*, 18 Mar 1968 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3996_MPG_01, p5.

²¹⁶ Abbey Theatre. *The Saint and Mary Kate*, 18 Mar 1968 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3996_MPG_01, p5.

²¹⁷ Abbey Theatre. *The Saint and Mary Kate*, 18 Mar 1968 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3996_MPG_01, p5.

From her early work at the Gate Theatre, such as *Youth's The Season* in 1932 and her subsequent growing profile in Ireland's theatrical scene as a critic and editor, she identified herself as a visionary for a changing Irish dramatic form. In 1934, Manning delivered a lecture to the University College Dublin Elizabethan Society in which she said the folk tradition of Irish drama was being replaced with a new dramatic form, one that was national and international, collective yet intensely individual.²¹⁸ Manning continued to identify as part of the new wave of young dramatists that were distinct from the previous generation of the ‘Abbey firstlings’, Manning's cohort were reacting to a new and modern Ireland, urging them to avoid the failure of the National Theatre, restricted to a building in Dublin, and instead, ‘be national’, and physically have a theatrical presence that was experimental but also connected to all of the country through touring.²¹⁹

Following Manning's years in America and in running the Poet's Theatre at Cambridge, she continued to experiment with dramatic works. Her play *Ah Well, It Won't be Long Now* opened at the Olympia Theatre in March 1971. Similar to the theme of many of Hugh Leonard's works, the play was a light comedy which satirised the cultural decay of modern Ireland in return for the ‘dirty dollar’. In the play, a crumbling Georgian mansion, the seat of Castlerochfort and the ascendancy family for generations. In order to keep the house financed, the family are forced to sell their family papers and archives to the highest American bidder.

Ah Well, It won't be Long Now was directed at the Dublin Theatre Festival by Roland Jaquarello who recounted that:

It featured two Americans looking for valuable cultural documents, found under the commode of an aging professor, played by Milo O'Shea. O'Shea was based in the United States at this time and the play was seen as his homecoming, a full house every night, becoming 'an event', surpassing the drama itself.²²⁰

Jaquarello remembers Manning as being "warm, opinionated and well-connected. The only problem was that she was the acerbic critic for *Hibernia*, the now defunct Dublin magazine. .

²¹⁸ “The Function of the Theatre”, Mary Manning, *Irish Times*, 25 October 1934, p. 4.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Jaquarello, 22.

. Mary had trashed a lot of people in the publication. I think she saw herself as a combination of the acerbic Dorothy Parker no the powerful NYT critic Clive Barnes. . . After the opening night of her play "venom poured forth like blood from a bad wound."²²¹

The first edition of Frank O’Connor’s novel, *The Saint and Mary Kate*, printed in 1932, was dedicated by O’Connor to his mother, and was a tribute of sorts to his own impoverished childhood in Cork city. The review of the book in the *Irish Times* fails to make any reference to the plight of Mary-Kate, whose pregnancy forces her away from her Cork-slum home in order to take to the road.

Manning’s adaptation for the stage, and similar to the others within this chapter offered a new feminist historiography of modern Irish theatre and for a parallel examination of Irish society. Manning’s play, and the others studied here, present a vehicle for striking scenography and a modernising of the presentation of the Irish family and of the family home, so enshrined in the 1937 Irish constitution. Directed by Frank Dermody and designed by Cork-born Pat Murray, the play staged the slum setting of “The Doll’s House”, the named area of the Cork city slum, as a transparent structure, a model of a doll’s house itself.

By examining the digitised photographs of the set, taken in 19678 and now within the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, we can gauge the scenography of the home in Manning’s adaptation. The house took the shape and form of a grand two-storey Georgian manor but constructed only of a wire frame for the exterior walls, windows, doors and pillars, otherwise all was transparent within the house. The bare interior consists of minimalist setting of traditional household accessories – furniture was sparse, plain and wooden, with little decoration. Thick wool blankets, wooden chests used as seats and miss-matched crockery further display the separation from lived experience of 1920s Cork city slums. The setting was a contemporary reflection on economic inequality in the Irish Republic still present more half a century later than the play’s original setting. This design acted as a powerful statement in visualising Manning’s intent to destabilise the restrictive national and constitutional narrative of a women’s place as ‘protected’ within the home. It also reflected upon the pre-defined role of women to act as a home-maker. Melissa Sihra notes that

²²¹ Jaquarello, 22-24.

the recurring interior of the home on the Irish stage has come to signify an enduring association and conflation of family and nation. While ideals of family were promoted in the cultural life, ‘home’ in Irish drama has remained a precarious space, denoting a lack of security and prone to invasion and penetration.²²²



Figure 4: Set of The Saint and Mary Kate by Mary Manning, Abbey Theatre, 1968. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, JHL.

This point confirms the challenge to national perceptions of authenticity of prescribed domestic gender roles made by Manning in her adaptation. By audiences being able to see through the strata of constitutional and political framing of the female body in the home, family and society, the story of Mary-Kate who departs the family home in shame upon a personal pilgrimage but which ultimately ends in tragedy, is made visceral and contemporary.

²²² Sihra, 2007, 2-3.

Nicholas Grene cites the writings and theories of Henri Lefèbvre around the inevitable failures of the separation from the anonymising widening urban populace and landscape from the interior bourgeoisie family domestic interior, as propagated in the nineteenth century by John Betjamin. Lefèbvre writes:

visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise . . . to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity. The space of a room, bedroom, house or garden may be cut off in a sense from social space by barriers and walls, by all the signs of private property, yet still remain fundamentally part of that space.²²³

This ‘ambiguous continuity’ is an aspect which made Murray’s scenography and Manning’s vision for the play as a means of contemporary dramatic social expression resonate with audiences. The house was large, imposing and powerful – a symbol of the increasingly materialistic global consensus towards a society which had state-supported agreement towards acquisition and attainment of material wealth and status through, including many other facets, property. Within the home, the continuous silence as well as ambiguity manifested itself in terms of restrictions and containment on the ability of women to access professional careers and economic independence outside its walls.

The removal of the physical wall in Murray’s designs, which should sit between the audience and the actors, blurs the on and off-stage worlds, from the private to public and interior to exterior. Sihra further supports this importance of a visible domestic space on the Irish stage:

Potent threshold spaces such as windows and doorways emphasis issues of containment and transformation in performance, reinforcing the place of the body within history and culture. The [liminality] of the window powerfully frames the emptiness that it outlines on stage.²²⁴

The ‘Doll’s House’ name for the location of the house and slum within the play creates a further idea of a fragile femininity. It also echoes the play of the same name by Ibsen and

²²³ Henri Lefèbvre, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 87.

²²⁴ Sihra, 2007, 2-3.

the naturalistic style which was so influential in the early Abbey and Irish dramatic tradition of the early twentieth century. To further this point, Manning’s adaptation of a novel by a prominent male Irish writer, a former Board member of the Abbey Theatre in Frank O’Connor and also in previous adaptation of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, which became *The Voice of Shem*, provided a provocative statement of intent. A female writer/director can take plays from canonical male writers and skilfully and successfully re-present that work as an autonomous and authentic piece of art, also acting to challenge the historiographic nature of the male-dominated canon. As Sihra adds:

In what has become to be regarded as a dramatic tradition of almost exclusively male playwrights, it is crucial to consider the ways in which canon-formation enables an implicit set of cultural norms and standards to materialise which perpetuate hegemonic structures and which are based upon historically contingent values.²²⁵

The painted backdrop featuring the spire of St. Anne’s church, Shandon, places the play specifically in Cork but also nationalises the message of the play, bringing out from its Dublin base of the National Theatre. The spire acts as a physical marker, a signifier of place, common to all parishes of Ireland. It is also carries another meaning, signifying the place of the Catholic Church as overseeing all of society and family life.

Designer Pat Murray was described as one of the most talented and imaginative designers, either for musicals or plays [in Ireland],²²⁶ and in 1968 was notably the first Irish designer asked to work at the Wexford Festival where he designed and painted the sets for *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Also in the same year he designed Shaw’s *John Bull’s Other Island* at the Abbey Theatre. He was noted to be in constant demand in his native Cork, where we largely worked at the Cork Opera House. A European infused artistic aesthetic was part of his dramatic vision for the stage. Murray noted that “each year I go to the continent to study new trends in the field of opera and theatre designing. There is no school in Ireland for this so the best things for a young designer to do is travel.”²²⁷ The influence of the European visual arts and scenography is further seen at this time with the appointment of

²²⁵ Sihra, 2007, 10.

²²⁶ “Designer in Demand”, *Sunday Independent*, 4 February 1962, 2.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

the artist Gerard Dillon as a graphic designer at the Abbey Theatre along with a grouping of artists that Dillon was part on, known as ‘A.D.C.’

Despite the innovative designs and impactful nature of Manning’s adaptation, a reason for the play not being noted as a success for the Abbey Theatre, is recounted in a letter between Manning to producer Ria Mooney on 19th March [1968], the day after the play’s premiere. The fault, in Manning’s view, was the lack of high quality artistic direction, production and staging on behalf of the Abbey theatre itself:

I could write a book about the Abbey venture. It is a disgrace. The lighting and sound men don’t know what they’re doing. Nobody seems to supervise – the stage-manager would seem to be non-existent. Rhona [Woodcock – Stage Director] appears to do everything. There is no discipline backstage. I’m really hindered by it. Pat Murray is intelligent and flexible. The set was not lighted at all adequately and with no imagination. Poor old Dermody directing at a snail’s pace and with a firm eye for irrelevant detail.²²⁸

It speaks to Manning’s artistic vision and desire for high-quality expressionistic as well as avant-garde production styles that she places such emphasis on direction to bring the text, image and artistry of the play to the audience. In a letter from Manning to playwright Thomas Kilroy in 1975, Manning commented on Kilroy’s new experimental play *Tea and Sex and Shakespeare*²²⁹ which depicted the psychological complexities of a writer and his muses. Manning wrote: “It is a play I would take a risk on but it needs a high-powered actor as O’Brien and a director who understands it. I don’t think there is anyone in Dublin capable of directing this play.”²³⁰

Despite the best efforts of Manning, Murray and Woodcock, the presentation of *The Saint and Mary-Kate*, foiled by ‘direction at a snail’s pace’ from Dermody, failed to adequately or successfully present the urgency of the play’s message and theme. David Nowlan, reviewing the play in the *Irish Times* noted ‘a pleasingly full Abbey Theatre’ for the opening night also noted the slow pace of production while praising the atmosphere between Frank Grimes

²²⁸ Ria Mooney papers, MS49,603/30 Letter from Mary Manning to Ria Mooney, 19 March [1968] NLI, Dublin..

²²⁹ *Tea, Sex and Shakespeare* was first produced on the Abbey Theatre stage on 6 October 1976, directed by Max Stafford Clark.

²³⁰ Letter from Mary Manning to Thomas Kilroy. P103/450. Thomas Kilroy Archive, JHL.

and Bernadette McKenna in the lead roles of Phil Dinan and Mary-Kate.²³¹ The play is continually discussed in terms of its ‘entertainment’ value for audiences rather than ‘serious’ artistic or dramatic merit, with a headline telling readers it is a ‘play based on O’Connor’s novel’, rather than a new adaptation by a women playwright. The experience would not be Manning’s last for the professional Irish stage but would foreground a similar experience by Edna O’Brien in the coming decade.

Edna O’Brien and Staging a ‘Pagan Ireland’

By the early 1970s, Edna O’Brien was already one of the most recognisable names in Irish literature. It was following a move to London in 1960 that O’Brien began to write seriously. “I have never been outside Ireland . . . I found everything do different, so alien . . . you must remember that I had no literary education, but a fervid literary one.”²³²

Edna O’Brien, in writing in her collection of essays, *Mother Ireland*, under a heading of “The Land Itself”, described that “countries are either mothers or fathers and engender the emotional bristle secretly reserved for either sire . . . Ireland has always been godridden.”²³³ Taking O’Brien’s statement as a means of understanding the depiction of social issues that had formative influence on the ongoing emergence of modern Ireland, a period in which saw continuous Fianna Fáil presence in power in Ireland, with two brief periods of exception²³⁴, Ireland can only be categorised as a ‘male country’. The complex intertwined relationship and co-dominance of Irish society by Catholic Church and successive governments, was a battle for control of the family. Within the domestic space, plays of this period cast new light on the staging of social and political matters, such as legal adoption, stigmatisation of women and the depiction of declining faith in rural Ireland.

²³¹ “Play Based on O’Connor Novel”, *Irish Times*, 19 March 1968, 8.

²³² “Edna O’Brien – the Art of Fiction”, *The Paris Review*, Issue 92, Summer 1984.

<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2978/edna-obrien-the-art-of-fiction-no-82-edna-obrien> Accessed 10 October 2017.

²³³ Edna O’Brien, *Mother Ireland* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), 11.

²³⁴ In 1954, John A. Costello led a Fianna Gael-Labour-Clann na Tamhlan coalition until 1957. From 1973 – 1977 Liam Cosgrave led a Fianna Gael-Labour coalition government.

Rebecca Pelan comments that the trivialisation of literary work by women has resulted in the virtual dismissal of women writers from the literary and cultural canon, bar the placement within gender-specific networks and discussions:

There is perhaps no greater example of this trivialization than the critical response to the work of Edna O’Brien, a writer who has been seriously undervalued as a result of the literary establishment’s perception of her as a sexually-transgressive maverick and as a writer so lacking in imagination that she has been compelled to tell the same story over and over again.²³⁵

I would further suggest that O’Brien’s contribution to Irish drama, especially during the decade of the 1970s, has also been sorely unremembered within the scope of theatre scholarship and history. The adaptation of her own novel, *A Pagan Place* (1977), for the Abbey Theatre offers an examination of this point in relation to the development of modern Irish theatre and also a critical commentary at the intersection of Irish nationalism, politics and women’s sexuality within the Irish Republic of the time.

The play is a subversive commentary on a state that continually victimised and stigmatised women for their sexuality and simply their gender. O’Brien’s play attracted criticism from the established press when it opened at the Abbey Theatre in 1977. Even succeeding in staging the play was in itself a subversive act – O’Brien broke established rigid gender roles which had seen a distinct absence of women from the main stage of the Abbey Theatre for a number of decades. O’Brien resonates this point by saying that “In terms of overall perception, I think in high echelons women are still regarded as being a bit lower down the table. The male voice is perceived differently, and regarded higher by both men and sometimes by women.”²³⁶

The experience of women in Ireland at this time, therefore, was seriously underrepresented in a national cultural space such as the national theatre. Pelan further adds that O’Brien is “acutely aware of the ways in which the politics of the nation has impacted upon the lives of

²³⁵ *The Role of Irish Women in the Writings of Edna O’Brien*, Helen Thompson, ed. (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), iii.

²³⁶ “Irish literary giant coming to Babel”, *The Buffalo News*, 22 March 2017.

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/03/22/irish-literary-giant-coming-babel/> Accessed 14 September 2017.

Irish women and who offers, in response, a constant critique of both the Church and state as dominant players in the development (and retardation) of Irish womanhood.”²³⁷

Scholar Helen Thompson, an editor of works focusing on O’Brien’s writing²³⁸ presents the place of Irish women in the work of O’Brien within a delicate plane where control is inextricably torn from Irish women and withheld by reinforcing patriarchal structures and gender-specific roles within society: “. . . O’Brien has little sympathy for male characters and focuses instead on the hardships of rural women, how they are made to become icons of purity as well as representatives of and substitutes for the Irish land . . .”²³⁹ The Irish obsession with land ownership and development, so indelibly satirised by the plays of Hugh Leonard, as discussed earlier in this study, further demonstrate how plays of the period such as *A Pagan Place* by O’Brien are important theatrical works as well as social and political statements reflecting contemporary Ireland.

By 1967, O’Brien was seen to have shifted ground as a writer. No longer could she be comfortably classified or predicted in terms of literary style or content. At the same time, she was seen to have introduced an explicit political content at the expense of her former easy style. By 1970, the shift in style and tone was increasingly obvious. *A Pagan Place* was a novel extremely experimental in style: narrated by an unnamed nun who traces her life from village to convent through a second-person narrative technique. The central character, Creena, speaks to her younger self, recounting the journey of her life, from childhood to convent. The events were primarily driven by the actions of men who were all of redoubtable positions of trust and power within family and society and who emerged without being answerable to any higher power. The young girl, along with her older sister Emma, was at the mercy of a ferociously unforgiving system that underpinned home, Church and state. Reviews of the novel, as recounted by Pelan, polarised opinion, with the experimental nature of the work exposing O’Brien to further personal as well as professional attack:

²³⁷ Rebecca Pelan, in *The Role of Irish Women in the Writings of Edna O’Brien: Mothering the Continuation of the Irish Nation*, Helen Thompson (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), iii.

²³⁸ Helen Thompson, *The Role of Irish Women in the Writings of Edna O’Brien: Mothering the Continuation of the Irish Nation* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

²³⁹ Thompson, ed., 2010, 5.

The novels polarised critical opinion. Reviews of *A Pagan Place* ranged from suggesting that it should not be taken seriously since it was "merely an emigrant Irish novelist taking a swipe at Holy Ireland" to those who felt it was her "finest book".²⁴⁰

Yet the experimental narrative technique of *A Pagan Place* can be read either as second-person singular in which the adult narrator addresses herself as a child or, more significantly, as second-person plural in which the "you" of the narrative reaches out to encompass the adult narrator, the child, the reader and Irish women generally.

This stage-Irish persona of O’Brien being cultivated for a primarily Irish-American audience as posited by Pelan is a softening of the sharper edges to O’Brien’s outlook and work of the time, a distraction from the social commentary of her adapted novel. Maureen O’Connor notes that in an *Irish Times* book review from 1970, Nuala O’Faolain speaks of just such ‘a softening’ in O’Brien’s novel *A Pagan Place* which demonstrates, in the reviewer’s words, the novelist’s ‘devious cool’.²⁴¹ O’Connor presents O’Brien as an ‘Irish dandy’ figure – cutting an identity of a wandering, bohemian and complex artist, driven by a sense of control of style and identity. O’Connor writes that O’Brien:

engage[s] in a theatrical, aggressively fictional self-fashioning that problematises foundational ideas about identity, class, gender, social role and position, even ‘race’, in their commodification of identity. They playfully encourage and abet critical and popular confusion between their gleefully marketed, self-consciously manipulated personae and their fictional productions.²⁴²

This is therefore also at the heart of the non-recognition by the Irish theatre establishment of O’Brien’s works – she, like others included in this study such as Hugh Leonard and Carolyn Swift, is deemed an outsider, writing of Irish issues from a safe haven exterior to Ireland. She is also not the voice of, nor the exponent of, a style that is immediately common to the vernacular of Irish (Abbey) realist theatre. Her experimentalism reflects the European aesthetic of her own personal reading and theatrical experiences. Similar in vein to Carolyn Swift, Sean Kenny, Mary Manning and Pat Murray, who all were heavily influenced

²⁴⁰ Rebecca Pelan, "Edna O'Brien's 'Stage-Irish' Persona: An 'Act' of Resistance", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Jul., 1993), 71.

²⁴¹ Maureen O'Connor, "Edna O'Brien, Irish Dandy", *Irish Studies Review*, 13:4, 2005, 470.

²⁴² O'Connor, 2005, 474.

stylistically but also ideologically by international contemporary thought and artistic resonance in society and the potential for amelioration of thought through high art.

O’Connor also notes in this article that the most widely cited influence on O’Brien is James Joyce. The greatest innovator of modernist literature was undoubtedly a major influence on O’Brien the novelist. However, when it came to theatrical influence I would suggest that Sean O’Casey was the *agent provocateur* for O’Brien’s theatrical work in the 1970s and in particular on the adaptation of her 1970s novel, *A Pagan Place* in 1977. The play would fit neatly in the groove of new theatrical works that would challenge both form and technical aspects of traditional Irish peasant drama. *A Pagan Place* brings O’Caseyan social commentary to the rural heartland of the western Irish Catholic and conservative home-place.

O’Connor maintains that class is crucial not only in approaching O’Brien’s subject matter and treatment of it but also in appreciating her audience, which has remained constant through her many experimentations with form and her use of controversial material, such as lesbianism, incest, abortion, and terrorism.²⁴³ This is again a form of subversion of critical taste by O’Brien. Pelan contends that her ‘stage-Irishness’ and popularity extolled a loathing for her work among traditional critics. O’Connor moulds this varying visual presentation and appropriation of O’Brien through identifying her as a ‘Dandy’ in the form of an artist such as Oscar Wilde, himself a writer who was ostracised for a blending of the artistic and the personal in terms of subverting sexuality, masculinity and form of the artist in the public sphere.

O’Brien discusses the development of the play with Jack Foster in *Fortnight* magazine. "The country towns of England have a kind of dismalness and the people . . . their imaginations went to sleep a long time ago. You feel that these people in Ireland, whatever else, their imaginations are so active".²⁴⁴ It is guilt, however, which O’Brien emphasises as the central trope of the Irish people which fuels the Catholic dogma and social coercion of acts of

²⁴³ O’Connor, 2005, 474.

²⁴⁴ Geoffrey Bell, "Without Bitterness - An Interview with Edna O'Brien", *Fortnight*, No. 47 (October 5, 1972), 20 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25544280.pdf> Accessed 12 September 2017.

vigilance against women. "Every man women and child in a place like Ireland feels guilt, like a bed of roses it blooms."²⁴⁵

O'Connor and Collette recognise the problematic non-recognition of O'Brien as an 'Irish writer', demonstrating, as they put it, the transgressive power of the writer's canny performance of identity and her manipulation of personae. O'Brien's deliberate, stylised, highly theatrical staging of the Irish family unit have traditionally drawn the most critical response. This is as they not only make porous the boundaries between author and text but also reveal the constructed nature of national and sexual identities, family politics as well as the unacknowledged interdependence of these constructs.²⁴⁶ The authors further tease out the deeply ingrained theatricality of O'Brien's prose but also the performance of post-colonial Ireland through its stock and stereotyped characters – the wild runaways, the auburn haired and porcelain skinned young girls, the sexually voracious but unfulfilled fallen women. O'Brien's flamboyant public self, O'Connor and Collette state, "places her in a tradition of insurgent, discomposing Irish writers in revolt against the masculinist dominant culture . . ." ²⁴⁷

Plays such as *A Pagan Place* further subvert the Irish literary tradition by staging challenges to engrained Irish State institutions, such as the Catholic Church, the family and the nation itself. These pillars are offered constitutional presence, visibility and protection. The personal stories and experiences of Irish women, both constitutionally and within the canon of Irish theatre, were conversely hidden and unheard. To debunk the myth of Irish nation by foregrounding the falseness and failing of the constitution, from the stage of the National Theatre, was a brave act of political and artistic rebellion.

A Pagan Place received its world première at the Royal Court Theatre, London on the second of November, 1972, directed by Ronald Eyre²⁴⁸ and designed and lit by Sean Kenny.²⁴⁹ Sean Kenny, also at this time, had won recognition for his provocative stage design

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Eyre had successes in recent years prior to the O'Brien production with a Tony Award nomination as Best Director for his 1975 production of *London Assurance*, originally the first major success written by Dion Boucicault in 1841.

²⁴⁹ Tipperary-born and U.K.-based designer, Sean Kenny, died suddenly at age forty-three in 1973, just before his last work on *The King of Friday's Men* was to go into production at the Abbey Theatre. His designs had

work in London, where he had also been Artistic Director of the Mermaid Theatre.²⁵⁰ Stage designer and publisher, John Ryan (who produced *The Scatterin’* by James McKenna with Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift) called Sean Kenny “the most original stage designer of our times” and gave Ryan his first introduction to stage design.²⁵¹ The text of *A Pagan Place* was published in 1977 by Faber and Faber, a sign of the play’s recognition at the time, especially in the U.K. Playwright John Wilson Haire wrote in a letter to critic and scholar D.E.S. Maxwell in November 1972, after seeing *A Pagan Place* at the Royal Court that the theme of the play was “an excellent one – rural life in county Clare in the 1940s . . . the brutality of life in a narrow community did peep through at moments. The London audience did get the impression that this was southern Ireland today.”²⁵² Haire’s point is revealing as to the attitudes towards the play and to O’Brien from the perspective of English audiences, as distinct from Irish audiences. Audiences at the Royal Court in London recognised O’Brien’s cautionary tale about ‘modern Ireland’ and its failures to protect or recognise the rights of women in society.

The play won strong favourable reviews from London critics, much less so than in Dublin where critics and much public reaction was to denigrate the play by a previously censored writer who was both a *cause celebre* and a national disgrace. O’Brien’s first novel, *The Country Girls* was famously banned in Ireland upon publication in 1960 for depicting themes of female sexual liberation and independence. Close to twenty years later, O’Brien’s second play on the stage of Ireland’s national Theatre in 1977, would re-open those previously held views towards O’Brien – a writer of sensation and scandal.

James Downey, journalist and political columnist who was based in London and contributing to the *Irish Times* at this time, reviewed the Royal Court production for the *Irish Times*:

There can be few parallels for the artistic atrocity being perpetrated by Miss O’Brien, Mr. Ronald Eyre and others at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square in London . . .

already been completed. His many sets in London included those for *Oliver*, *The Hostage*, *Uncle Vanya* (with Laurence Olivier) and *Hamlet* (with Peter O’Toole).

²⁵⁰ The London production of *A Pagan Place* also was one of the first major stage roles for future Academy Award-winner, Brenda Fricker, who played the role of ‘Emma’ in the play.

²⁵¹ John Ryan, 35.

²⁵² MS 36, 252/8, Letter from John Wilson Haire to D.E.S. Maxwell, 17 November 1972. D.E.S. Maxwell Papers, NLI, Dublin.

a nauseous rehash is presented of the usual topics: the child’s mechanistic innocence, the father’s decayed gentility, the sister’s predictable tragedy, the doctor’s seediness, the priest’s lust, set in the context of rural brutality, squalor and ignorance. It is all the more repulsive for its tiny illuminations of insight and artistic sensitivity that from time to time break through its monstrous boredom and vulgarity. It does not appear to be possible for Miss O’Brien to be absolutely a bad writer, though she has certainly tried hard on this occasion.²⁵³

James Downey’s extraordinary ‘review’ offers little by way of any comparable commentary for the reception and responsible criticism of new theatre productions within Irish print or other media outlets. He continues to berate O’Brien’s depiction of the rape of Creena by the young priest in the play as being “implausible . . . silly and a ludicrous denouement.”²⁵⁴ This dismissal of predatory sexual violence against young women was symptomatic of the wider social blindness against such acts and of the physical, psychological and emotional effects endured by women afterwards. The only praise offered by Downey was that Sean Kenny was likely the world’s foremost theatre designer of the time but that the play was “the most atrocious thing on view at present at the Royal Court, consisting as it does of a kind of surrealistic gallows backed by a design reminiscent of the cinema in its greatest days.”²⁵⁵

Patrick Mason joined the Abbey in 1972 as a voice and movement coach and while there worked as an assistant to Michael Cacoyannis, who directed *Oedipus the King*. Mason also contributed to teaching at the Abbey School of Acting. He had been central to new experimental work at the Abbey in the mid-1970s where, for example, he directed a mime play, *Jack Be Nimble*, (August 1976) by Tom MacIntyre and also the premiere of Thomas Kilroy’s *Talbot’s Box* (October 1977). Both of these plays were produced on the Peacock Stage while O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place* (November 1977) was Mason’s first production on the larger Abbey stage.²⁵⁶ The press release from the Abbey Theatre describes the play about a young girls growing up in rural Ireland, her growing sexual awareness and curiosity, and the fears, superstitions and guilt that pass from one generation to the next.” It also describes

²⁵³ “Edna O’Brien Play”, *Irish Times*, 6 November 1972, 10.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Abbey Theatre. *A Pagan Place*, 17 Nov 1977 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 2702_MPG_01, p12.

the mother figure in the play who strives to preserve respectability in the wake of the ‘flashy’ daughter Emma “who becomes pregnant”.²⁵⁷ The stigma placed on young women like Emma was central to campaigns in Ireland through the decade of the 1970s and which were being driven by second wave feminism.

A Pagan Place was designed at the Abbey by Wendy Shea. The play poster features a despondent female face at centre foreground, eyes looking away from the viewer. From her head, her hair radiates upwards, the strands taking the form of land and sea crashing into each other. Shea’s poster is matched by its imagery of rural Ireland at a conflict with modernity as within the programme a series of black and white images by photographer Fergus Bourke are included. The images depict a rural, agricultural way of life, at odds with the modernity of its time. Figures of an old man in tweeds, walking overgrown fields with cattle straying around him; rusting ploughs filling gaps in crumbling stone walls; and an image of a young girl, roughly the same age as the character of Creena, running through the fields, looking over her shoulder. The images and accompanying programme note by O’Brien are lifted from O’Brien’s book, *Mother Ireland*.

²⁵⁷ Abbey Theatre. *Correspondence: Publicity / Public Affairs re: Correspondence and publicity documents regarding the production of "A Pagan Place"*. 1977-1977. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00001181, p34.

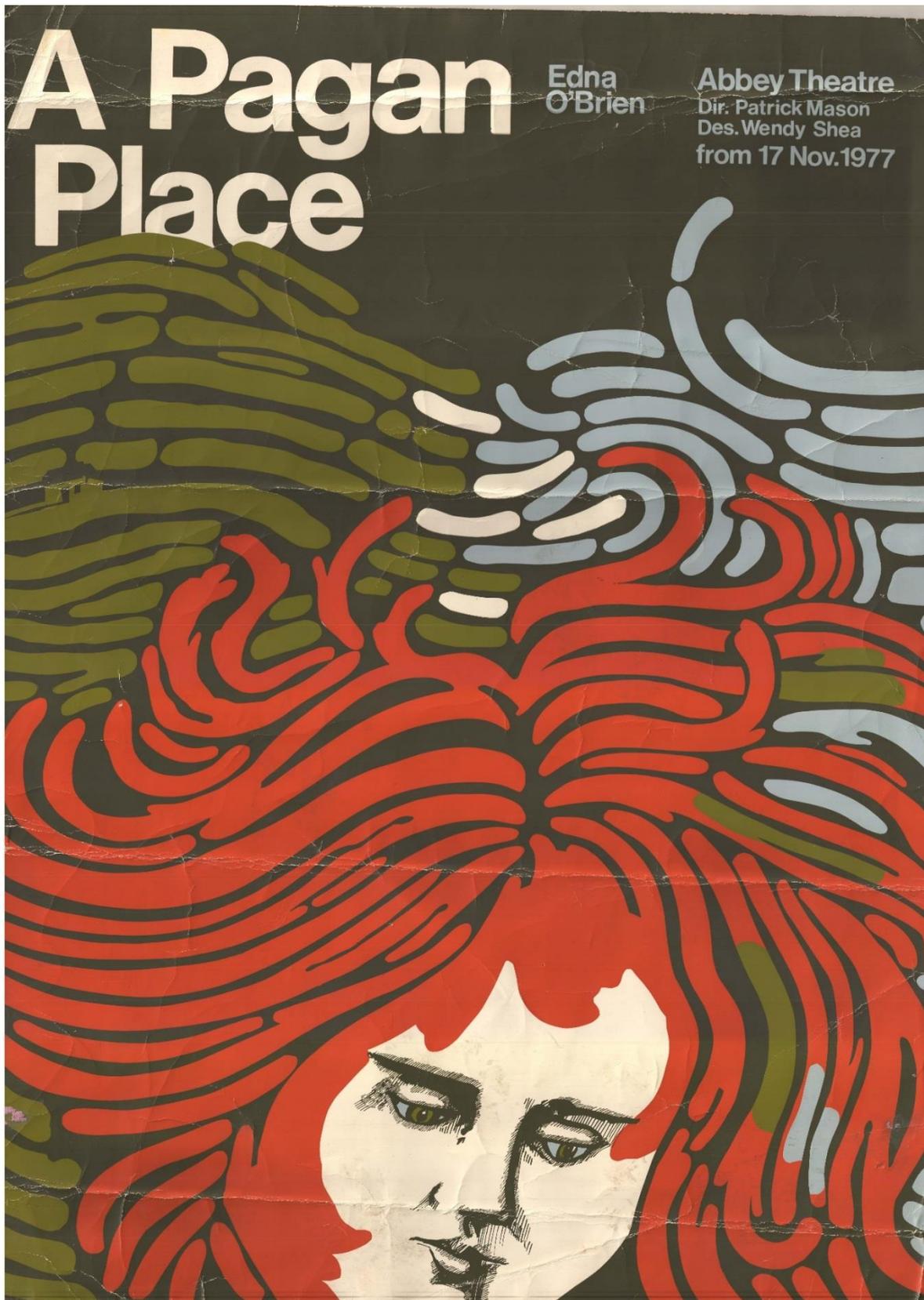


Figure 5: Poster for *A Pagan Place* designed by Wendy Shea. 1977. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, JHL.

A series of letters between Tomas Mac Anna, Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre and Edna O'Brien, in [1974-1975] reveal that Mac Anna had made approaches over previous

years to O’Brien for the rights to adapt and stage her ‘beautiful book’ for the stage, feeling the story had excellent material for the stage.²⁵⁸ In subsequent exchange of letters, O’Brien agrees to the Abbey producing *The Country Girls* providing she herself can adapt it. Mac Anna agrees but while rights issues were being investigated, Mac Anna wrote to O’Brien once more and having read the adaptation of *A Pagan Place* asks to produce it, calling it ideal for the autumn programme and possible choice to open the Limerick Theatre Festival.²⁵⁹ O’Brien granted the wish on the proviso that she could attend rehearsal, and that Veronica Quilligan be retained in the role of Creena from the Royal Court production. On her letter, O’Brien adds a manuscript addendum, warning Mac Anna to “Brace Yourself! It ~~would~~ might be a most alarming thing.”²⁶⁰

Mac Anna approached British director, Barry Davies, (future husband of Irish actress Brenda Fricker) to direct the play. The terms were seemingly not suitable for Davies and Mac Anna writes a second time within a month to say that the production had been shelved but the option to direct O’Brien’s other new play, *The Gathering*, was possible and that Davies would act as a “stimulation to all [at the Abbey], staff and players alike.”²⁶¹

Reception of *A Pagan Place* – The ‘Playwright on the Stairs’ and the ‘Psychological Choke’

The adaptation was shaped by O’Brien in consultation with Patrick Mason, who visited the author at her London home. O’Brien was looking forward to the Irish premiere of the play but still cautious owing to the reception of her previous play, *The Gathering*, and the personal attacks and condemnation that ensued then. “. . . the theatre seemed to be

²⁵⁸ Abbey Theatre. *Programming / Planning re:Correspondence between the Abbey Theatre and Edna O’ Brien, 10 Carlyle Square, London, regarding the adaptation of her novel, ‘The Country Girls’. Correspondence also relates to the production of ‘A Pagan Place, 1974-1975. 1974-1978.* Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00000135, p1.

²⁵⁹ Abbey Theatre. *Programming / Planning re:Correspondence between the Abbey Theatre and Edna O’ Brien, 10 Carlyle Square, London, regarding the adaptation of her novel, ‘The Country Girls’. Correspondence also relates to the production of ‘A Pagan Place, 1974-1975. 1974-1978.* Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00000135, p5.

²⁶⁰ Abbey Theatre. *Programming / Planning re:Correspondence between the Abbey Theatre and Edna O’ Brien, 10 Carlyle Square, London, regarding the adaptation of her novel, ‘The Country Girls’. Correspondence also relates to the production of ‘A Pagan Place, 1974-1975. 1974-1978.* Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00000135, p6.

²⁶¹ Abbey Theatre. *Programming / Planning re:Correspondence between the Abbey Theatre and Edna O’ Brien, 10 Carlyle Square, London, regarding the adaptation of her novel, ‘The Country Girls’. Correspondence also relates to the production of ‘A Pagan Place, 1974-1975. 1974-1978.* Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00000135, p11.

packed with old enemies and rivals and the air to be thick with condemnation of one sort or another. . . the bad notices that followed confirmed the ill will.”²⁶² Actress Martina Stanley who played the role of Creena in the play would speak out at the treatment O’Brien so often received: “I think she is a courageous woman, a woman of great strength to go ahead and write the way she does considering the onslaught she has always been subjected to in Ireland”²⁶³. Stanley spoke of her own personal experience at a boarding school in Galway during the 1970s. She witnessed a number of young women, similar to Creena, who were stigmatised by their sexual curiosity.²⁶⁴

The impact of both the novel and the play was in O’Brien creating a psychologically intense world that was reminiscent of the struggle of O’Brien, but also that her great inspiration, James Joyce, in order to escape conservative Ireland, and the confining spaces of the convent, the rural village and the family itself, “that was my victory”, O’Brien recounts in her book *Mother Ireland*. She adds that the theatrical influence as much as literary came from Chekhov and in finding his works “found the truest voice that [I] would ever know.”²⁶⁵

O’Brien’s work of the 1970s, in fiction as well as drama, centred largely on exorcising the control that Ireland itself was having on the construct of society in terms of the family and also particular place and role for women. This was, O’Brien argues, largely a challenge against fear of change but also fear of an unknown possible alternative modern Ireland. This fear was inherited and shaped the successive generations until a break was possible to establish and a challenge could be mounted:

The real quarrel with Ireland began to burgeon within me then; I thought of how it had warped me and those around me and their parents before them, all stooped by a variety of fears – fear of church, fear of gombeenism, fear of phantoms, fear of ridicule, fear of hunger, fear of annihilation and fear of their own deeply ingrained

²⁶² “Edna’s play for Abbey production”, *Evening Press*, 6 November 1977, Abbey Theatre. *A Pagan Place*, 17 Nov 1977 [press cuttings]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 2702_PC_0001, p2.

²⁶³ “Edna’s play for Abbey production”, *Evening Press*, 6 November 1977, Abbey Theatre. *A Pagan Place*, 17 Nov 1977 [press cuttings]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 2702_PC_0001, p2.

²⁶⁴ “An Irishman’s Diary”, *Irish Times*, 10 November 1977, Abbey Theatre. *A Pagan Place*, 17 November 1977 [press cuttings]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 2702_PC_0001, p4.

²⁶⁵ O’Brien, 1979, 79.

aggression that can only strike a blow at each other, not having the innate authority to strike at those who are higher . . . we dread the psychological choke.²⁶⁶

The play opens with a foreboding sense of place, somewhere ritualistically pagan, unholy and sinister. The stage directions read “*The stage is in complete darkness. As the lights come up we see men silhouetted along the back and in the centre Creena kneeling and intoning. She has a circle of stones around her.*”²⁶⁷ Creena, aged twelve, is in a religious pose, praying and incanting a hybrid form of English, Latin and Gaelic, transcending Ireland’s colonial history and religious past. She recites a mixed verse which opens and ends with the line “Riddle-me-raddle-me-ro”. This line is directly lifted from the “Nestor” chapter of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* where the character of Stephen Dedalus is teaching a class on Milton’s pastoral elegy, *Lycidas*. The rest of the lines included in *Ulysses* but excluded by O’Brien include:

My father gave me seed to sow

The seed was black and the ground was white

This allusion to coloured seeds and white ground present a vision of rural Ireland that is failing to nurture or nourish its people, it is becoming arid and infertile. Its location is that of a fiction village, Coose, a town and townland in the West of Ireland that is likely in the environs of O’Brien’s west county Clare childhood home. The opening line of John McGahern’s *Memoir* also presents this image of unsustaining landscape by saying: “The land in Leitrim is poor.”²⁶⁸ The sexual connotations implied by O’Brien, as present as they are in Joyce’s novel, referring to failed artistic ambition through masturbation and loss of ‘seed’²⁶⁹, are more sinister here as the lines are interspersed with words from Irish like ‘Pookha’, meaning ‘ghost’.

Creena’s childish innocence is threatened as a male vagabond, known as ‘The Nigger’ creeps from the darkness behind the young girl and menacingly calls to her: “Come here till I do

²⁶⁶ O’Brien, 1979, 87.

²⁶⁷ Edna O’Brien, *A Pagan Place: A Play* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 9.

²⁶⁸ John McGahern, *Memoir*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 1.

²⁶⁹ For more detailed examination of this scene and its exploration of rhyme, sexual potency and of father-son relationships see *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce: Early Poetry through Ulysses* by Zack R. Bowen, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1974).

pooly in you”, while undoing the rope belt of his trousers.²⁷⁰ Creena flees screaming in response to the repeated advances of The Nigger, threatening to do ‘nice pooly in you’. The sense of recalled childhood fear against abusive figures present a trauma of memory. Patrick Duggan, Miriam Haughton, Emile Pine and others, have recently offered detailed consideration of traumatic memory on the contemporary Irish stage. The figure of the Nigger is similar to that of threatening character in the childhood of Samuel Beckett, who recalled “a man called Balfe, a little, ragged, wizened, crippled man. He used to look at me. He terrified me. I can still remember how he frightened me.”²⁷¹

The onset of rape as an opening scene unsettles the pastoral setting, with the silhouetted men at the rear of the stage present as unidentifiable witnesses, while audiences also aware they are complicit witnesses to the sexual assault of a female child. The ‘pagan’ and Godless nature of modern Ireland is incited by O’Brien and given form through Sean Kenny’s dark and imposing dark-lands.

The patriarchal nature of Ireland and the context for increasing feminist campaigns for equality among the sexes is developed by O’Brien through Creena’s parents, Josie and Con, where Con, the dominant presence is self-declared King of a ruined landscape. “Con: I’m Boss around here. Josie: You are, monarch of all you survey. The nettles and the briars.”²⁷² The physical decline of the land and so also rural Ireland in place of a more modern secular and industrialised country marked by symbolic religious gestures and physical expression through the body and actions of Creena. At the family evening meal, Creena takes to reciting verse from William Wordsworth’s poem, “Daffodils” before being told to “shut up and cut out the theatrics.”²⁷³ In response to this, O’Brien’s directions note that Creena breaks a piece of bread, sprinkles sugar on it and places it on her tongue as if it were alter bread . . . and eats the bread as if it were Holy Communion, closes her eyes and touches her breast soulfully and there is the noise of a Sanctus bell, which is the noise she has summoned up for herself.”²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ O’Brien, 1973, 9.

²⁷¹ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996),41.

²⁷² O’Brien, 1973, 11.

²⁷³ O’Brien, 1973, 13.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 13.

Con’s response to the actions of his daughter is to threaten her with the fate of the so-called ‘fallen women’ within Ireland over successive decades, “She ought to be locked up”.²⁷⁵ The off-stage and unnamed place of imprisonment is undoubtedly implied to be a Magdalene Laundry. It also is reminiscent to the threat implied to Katie Roche, the eponymous character in Teresa Deevy’s 1933 play, also produced at the Abbey Theatre in which Katie’s own father, the wandering healer, Reuben, declares that his own daughter is in need of ‘humiliation’.²⁷⁶ Katie is also under repeated threat to be ‘sent away’ by her husband should her behaviour be perceived to be of a less than appropriate for the class and status Stanislaus as a prominent architect. O’Brien, implies through the male father figure of Con, that physical intimidation and even rape was an ever present risk in many rural homes.

Josie: Not now, Con, not now.

Con: What are you talking about, not now! When the urge takes one, fire away, the gun is your own.²⁷⁷

Other female characters such as Creena’s teacher, Miss Davitt, aged forty-five, in ‘a wild condition . . . thin, streelish and her voice is implosive and theatrical . . . her skirt hitched up . . .’, engages the class in the prescribed history curriculum of nationalist education – that primarily of the English conflict with Ireland at the turn of the seventeenth century through the Nine Years War and of the later successive rebellions and figures such as Brian Boru and Robert Emmett. The focus on Elizabeth I is significant as the monarch was herself declared ‘illegitimate’ under Papal ruling in 1570. The wider Tudor conquest of Ireland, which was taught widely in Irish schools presents the primarily military history of the decline of Gaelic Ireland. The succession of failed rebellions and Anglicisation of the people, language, culture of rural Ireland comes ahead in the contemporary ‘pagan place’ of O’Brien’s modern Ireland – a country again finding its identity. The positioning of a figure such as Queen Elizabeth and

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁷⁶ *Katie Roche* written by Teresa Deevy was first produced at the Abbey Theatre by Hugh Hunt in 1933. Waterford-born Deevy was one of the most successful playwrights at the Abbey Theatre during the 1930s but her relationship with the Abbey broke down as her contract, as recorded in the minutes of the Board of the Abbey Theatre, was recommended to be let lapse. The minutes from the meeting held 28 April 1939 record: “The Board decided against the production of “Holiday House” and agreed that the contract with Miss Deevy should be allowed to lapse.” Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway. <https://digital.library.nuigalway.ie/islandora/object/nuigalway%3Aa25629b6-65ab-4d2d-8b31-74695205cad3> Accessed 11 October 2017.

²⁷⁷ O’Brien, 1973, 14.

her ‘illegitimacy’ also foregrounds the primarily male history and place of women as sexualised objects under male dominance. In a surreal act, the teacher Miss Davitt, begins to seductively strip in the classroom until she is interrupted by the arrival of the priest, Father Declan, to the classroom.

We soon learn from private conversations between Creena and her friend, Della, a consumptive girl aged eighteen, that Miss Davitt is being taken to ‘the looney bin’ by Father Declan. The girls gossip about relationships, local men who send love letters and wary of those men who touch the girls inappropriately. All sexual boundaries seem non-existent. The girls too experiment with their own sexuality by kissing each other. Throughout the play female figures are judged and placed on a pedestal for male castigation. In a bar scene, Con, the Nigger and others discuss that Hitler may have been the Anti-Christ but also comment on ‘Eva Braun – the strap’. Miss Davitt’s fate also becomes bar-stool gossip where it is revealed she commits suicide.

Caimin: Lads! Guess what happened an hour ago, Miss Davitt, gone, a goner . . . did herself in.

Con: Too much brain. Too highly strung. She always argued with me, about politics. Hopeless woman, hopelessly misinformed . . . She dabbled too much in politics.²⁷⁸

Her death was caused by her filling her pockets with stones and running into the lake. The men in the bar simultaneously recite an incantation: “Stones, rocks, boulders”²⁷⁹ – rooting the essence of the play in an uncultivated, unkempt, unforgiving landscape. Sean Kenny’s design at the opening scene of the play stages this to dramatic effect, with the upstage wall lined with silhouetted men in front of whom Creena sits in a stone circle – the meeting and ritual place of pre-Christian times – a new pagan Ireland where women are still the sacrifice. The constitution of Ireland reinstates this further by stating “the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ O’Brien, 1973, 23.

²⁷⁹ O’Brien, 1973, 23-24.

²⁸⁰ Constitution of Ireland/ The Constitution of Ireland.

<https://www.constitution.ie/AttachmentDownload.ashx?mid=ee219062-2178-e211-a5a0-005056a32ee4>
Accessed 11 October 2017.

The further stigmatisation of the death implicates the Church and State through the public acceptance of shame on women deemed deranged through displays of liberal thought, ambition, economic independence or sexual desire. “Caimin: The contention is that it was wilful death. The stones, you see. She put them there, deliberate.”²⁸¹ Creena, who is listening intently to the conversation from outside the door of the bar assumes the mannerisms and accent of Miss Davitt and recites verbatim the lecture on his Irish history that Miss Davitt gave the class previously. In assuming the form of the dead teacher, O’Brien ascribes Creena the same fate of Miss Davitt and of Irish women more generally, stifled by a patriarchal society that legally enshrines the place of women to the domestic sphere and servitude.

Creena hitches her skirt up further in a defiant act of display of the female form and body. This is less in act of sexual titillation and more of bodily provocation, by displaying of the female form on stage. O’Brien is reneging on the outcry against her personally as a ‘scandalous female writer’ whose novels were publicly burned by a Catholic priest and further banned on grounds of indecency. Women like Creena, Miss Davitt and O’Brien herself were seen as a threat to the orthodox order of Irish society. In retaliation for this display, Creena is struck by her father and dragged home publicly with the father’s belt wrapped around her neck.

The closing scene of the first act sees Josie, Creena’s mother, being examined by the doctor. The movement and dialogue is highly charged, a lustful atmosphere between both doctor and patient. Both clearly have strong feelings for each other. Josie laments the loveless marriage she is stuck in, waking each morning to a vista of hills and adventure but a reality of feeding chickens and household chores within the home. Despite the advances of the doctor, Josie remains with Con as she “believe[s] in rightness”.²⁸² In the passing of her hand-muff to Creena at the closing of the scene, Josie advises “It doesn’t do to keep turning back. It doesn’t do.” This false-life that Josie endures is a statement from O’Brien against the enduring restraints on marriage, divorce, contraception as well as free choice and will that was beyond the reach of many women still by the 1970s.

²⁸¹ O’Brien, 1973, 24.

²⁸² O’Brien, 1973, 36.

The return of Emma, Creena’s older, “Flashy” sister, from Dublin, aged nineteen, is a turning point in the play. The attention turns to her relationship and visit to the doctor. There, innocent flirting take a sinister turn. Emma admits as a younger girl to watching the doctor and his wife when they first moved to the village as he was a dashing, handsome figure. Flattered, he makes sexual advances towards Emma. Once it becomes clear that Emma is seeking medical advice for symptoms of pregnancy, the doctor’s tone and actions change, becoming cold and aggressive, demanding Emma to ‘get to the point’ when asking about her menstrual cycle and ordering her to strip from the waist down for an internal examination. When Emma asks if it will hurt, she is told:

Doctor: “that depends on how loose you are . . . Lie back! I haven’t much patience left at this time of night”

(Emma lets out a scream as he has started to examine her)

Doctor: Shut up

*(Emma is sobbing and moaning. After some time he removes his hand. She is still sobbing)*²⁸³

Emma’s pregnancy is crudely and mockingly confirmed. The doctor quotes lines from the Gospel of Luke, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour,”²⁸⁴ an excerpt from the prayer of Mary. He further shames Emma in saying it is clear there has been “no maidenhead for some time”. Emma sees abortion as the only answer and proposes horrific solutions induced from her state of shock, foregrounding her own suicide: “Ergot, slippery elm? A packing needle, anything. You can even do it now, I’ll

²⁸³ O’Brien, 1973, 44.

²⁸⁴ Luke1:46-55: The verse in full is known as “Song of Mary”, presenting Mary as a dutiful and humble servant of Christ: My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded
the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth
all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things;
and holy *is* his name.

bear it, I don’t need an anaesthetic, I’ll suffer it . . . I’ll go to the seaside then, and jump off the cliff, the cliffs of Moher”.

The play climaxes in the closing scenes where Emma’s pregnancy and her sexual encounters are exposed to her parents by her mother, Josie, finding within Emma’s diary the lists of all the men she has slept with. Josie repeats the threats to Emma: “By God you’ll scrub and you’ll do your stint in the Magdalene Laundry . . . you’re not fit to pray.”²⁸⁵

The dramatization of domestic roles within the play are structured around pre-determined female subjectivity. Emma and Creena are on the cusp of breaking tradition. Della, the consumptive friend of Creena, succumbs to her illness, highlighting the fragility of young life but also the inadequacy of medical attention afforded to working class rural life. Instead, Emma revolts against her mother and the tradition of female subjugation in Irish domestic life: (To Josie) Emma: (Putting her hands in a gesture of prayer) Queen of Angels, Queen of Patriarchs, Queen of all Saints, Queen of Egypt . . . so sour now, so dried up. You were neither wife nor mother.”²⁸⁶

O’Brien’s final challenge to the State, the Roman Catholic Church and to the family unit which is complicit in maintaining such traditions is presenting Creena, not as one who rejects, but who succumbs to the eventuality of joining the Sisters of Charity. Audiences willing Creena to escape the outcome and move towards a secular life in a secular Ireland would have been taken aback by the outcome. In a parting rebuke to the family and rural Irish village life of traditional Ireland, Josie comments at the sight of the departing Creena, “We’re not her people anymore”.²⁸⁷

Conclusion

Cathy Leeney identifies that “women’s contribution to Irish theatre continues often to be considered as a separate topic . . . as the discipline of theatre and performance studies develops in Ireland away from drama and towards theatre as collaborative practice . . . the key roles played by women require acknowledgment”.²⁸⁸ Citing work by Mary Trotter and

²⁸⁵ O’Brien, 1973, 51.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ O’Brien, 1973, 64.

²⁸⁸ Cathy Leeney, “Women and Irish Theatre before 1960”, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Drama*, Chris Morash and Nicholas Grene, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 271.

Paige Reynolds, both scholars of theatre and of women’s theatre historiography, the reshaping of the historical record to accept a pluralised space for recognition of work by women in theatre is necessary and overdue. Deevey’s anti-heroes, for instance, named by Leeney, such as Katie Roche, Elle Irwin and Annie Kinsella, are not victims or presented as hapless figures. “They are determined to grab hold of life, proud, infuriating, wilful, and twisted into incoherence by the weight of disregard for their personhood, and by their extreme isolation in a society where they search in vain for an image of heroism or greatness within their reach.”²⁸⁹

Leeney reminds us that women’s cultural participation was marginalised until they took matters into their own hands in the 1960s and 1970s. While true, it is necessary to record the level of work by those other early figures (before 1960), important figures like Nora Lever, Phyllis Ryan, Mary Manning and Carolyn Swift, and later Edna O’Brien, who from the early 1950s, become more than ‘supports’ to their male counterparts, but were individually crucial contributors to the artistic modernisation of Irish drama. These figures were idealists, intelligent, driven, and visionary for their craft and for themselves to stake a higher claim of recognition within their society. By forging new opportunities and by acting to reconstitute the place and staging of Irish drama, moving from an internalised kitchen space to a transparent lived society, the experience of these women theatre-makers is rightfully acknowledged.

²⁸⁹ Leeney, 2016, 282.

Chapter 2

Cultural Exchange and Internationalising Irish Drama – Country Boys, Scatterin's and Follies

As Ireland came into the post-war period of the 1950s, it did so within an era of emerging economic and social modernity, experienced within a globalising western culture.. Culturally, things developed with far more trepidation. John Murphy's play, *The Country Boy* (1959) would stand out as a metaphor for the structural, organisational and psychological malaise in which the Abbey Theatre found itself in from the mid-1950s. Murphy's play questioned contemporary Irish identity, economic stagnation, material desire and ideological longing. Peter Daubeny, Director of 'the World Theatre Season', recorded in 1964 that the Abbey Theatre company, in "crossing the Liffey to the Queens, had suffered a deterioration in spirit."²⁹⁰ This condition was not fully rectified even by 1966 with the opening of the new Abbey Theatre, designed by architect, Michael Scott. Director Roland Jaquarello, who described the main stage of the new Abbey Theatre when it reopened in 1966, as "unwelcoming with bad acoustics and with a stage which was remote and inaccessible. You got the sense the theatre was only half developed. This is in contrast to the community between actors and audiences regularly seen at the Pike, Gas Works, Olympia and others at this time."²⁹¹

This chapter examines the depiction of change in Ireland during the 1950s within Irish theatre. I argue that during this period, new theatre ventures, such as the Pike Theatre sought to rejuvenate the image of Irish drama and its depiction of its broadening cultural and intercultural influences. Similarly, by examining plays at the National Theatre, the Abbey, such as *The Country Boy* by John Murphy, I can identify a dependence on American popular culture as the primary medium through which national consciousness and identity was expressed at a time concurrent to how modern Ireland was being developed and showcased on alternative stages, such as the Pike Theatre and the Gate Theatre. This is evident in the annual summer programming as specific intervals by, for example, the Abbey

²⁹⁰ Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 188.

²⁹¹ Jaquarello, 2016, 24.

Theatre. *The Country Boy* was primarily marketed at the American tourist market. Chris Morash in his study of the history of the media in Ireland where he identifies a laboured dependency on American cultural imports into the entertainment sphere of Irish society within their own homes and through broadening access to television set.²⁹² In terms of theatrical production, and in the context of works by Brian Friel, Maria Szasz provides an insightful account of the complex and at times contradictory relationship between the Irish drama and the American stage and audiences.²⁹³

Works such as *The Country Boy* by John Murphy, (1959) *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* by Brian Friel (1964), and the plays and various follies produced at the Pike Theatre, in particular *The Solid Gold Cadillac* by Howard Teichmann and George S. Kaufman (1954),²⁹⁴ and *Follies in the Sun* by Carolyn Swift (1959), epitomised the ambition and international influences of a new generation of artists.

Nevertheless, it is important to also recognise the alignment and interdependency between economic and capitalist developments and by the arts and independent theatre sector within Ireland which occurred in the post-war period. The complexities of the time are reflected in the ridicule of a growing middle-class materialism and rise of mass popular culture within new dramatic work. Contradictions are, however, also identifiable. A newly globalising and mediatised culture and society were drawn to excitement and energy of independent theatre and producers. Perhaps naively, there were cases where such new theatres, producers and dramatic work were participatory and part of the widening relationship between corporatism and cultural tourism. The economic benefits this extolled for ruling political classes did not go unnoticed by those in power or by those in corporate marketing. This created an uneasy relationship which warrants a deeper contextual understanding, which I provide through this chapter.

Locating a New Irish Drama

Irish national drama, in its 'official' form as staged at the Abbey Theatre, was struggling to engage with the emerging and 'worldlier' younger generation of post-war

²⁹² Chris Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 176.

²⁹³ Maria Szasz, *Brian Friel and America*, (Dublin: Glasnevin Press, 2013). 244-250.

²⁹⁴ *The Solid Gold Cadillac* opened at the Belasco Theatre, 5th November 1954 and was produced by Max Gordon. It ran for 526 performances on Broadway. <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-solid-gold-cadillac-2385> Accessed 12 January 2018.

Ireland. Director at the Abbey Theatre, Hugh Hunt, who did initiate some reformist tendencies in direction and management, noted this particular phenomenon at the Abbey Theatre following the fire at the theatre in 1951:

The dusty old home of melodrama was indeed wreaking its revenge on the high idealists who had set out to destroy its popular fare. Not only had the Abbey grown estranged from its oldest and best friends, but more grievously it had failed to win the respect of a younger generation who had deserted to other theatres".²⁹⁵

By the late 1960s, the turn towards the newly awarded Nobel laureate in Samuel Beckett was not surprising, as Anthony Roche identifies accounts that record the production of Beckett's *Come and Go*, staged at the Peacock Theatre in 1968, attracted "keen and significantly, VERY YOUNG audiences."²⁹⁶ A developing desire to create a new life and existence, separate from what had preceded the emerging generations of Irish society was evident. This movement was typified by new Leftist ideals that centred on the personal and the private rather than the personal and shared concern of a collectivist society. Judt would call this rise of the self from the collective "an overwhelmingly youthful constituency", a movement that:

rejected the inherited collectivism of its predecessor . . . a younger cohort saw things very differently. . . What united the 60's generation was not the interest of all, but the need and rights of each. Individualism – the assertion of each person's claim to maximised private freedom and the unrestrained liberty to express autonomous desires and have them respected and institutionalised by society at large – became the Left-wing watchword of the hour.²⁹⁷

This growing individualism, recognised by Judt, led to a wave of new plays which sought to connect this emerging Ireland to wider international concerns. John Murphy's play, *The Country Boy*, (1959), highlighted conflicting generations of Irish people struggling within the domestic space to reconcile a modernity that extolled a life outside of and away from traditional rural, agricultural norms. This divide occurred along generational binaries– a new

²⁹⁵ Hunt, 184-185.

²⁹⁶ Roche, 2017, 8.

²⁹⁷ Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 87-88.

generation at odds with parents who grew-up through the Revolutionary period and who witnessed the partition of the island and the establishment of an Irish Free State in the South and the separation by a border from the six-counties that comprise Northern Ireland. The succeeding generation, who reached young adulthood by the 1960s, were the post-second-world-war generation. These came to adulthood in the fall-out of collapse of autonomous empire-building by nations from within Europe and beyond the continent. They were also the first emerging generation to live in an autonomous Irish Republic, following the declaration of the Republic of Ireland Act in 1948.

Addressing Youth Culture in Post-Emergency Ireland

In addressing the rise of youth culture in Ireland, and in defining cultural tropes of Irish adolescence, historian Mary E. Daly,²⁹⁸ draws relevant and linked conclusions about how the emergence of the modern Irish state was influenced by and dependent on a young and emerging generation of artists, writers and producers. Social historians Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan trace the growth of the psychological and ontological make-up of the adolescent in contemporary society and from the mid-twentieth century: "The task of revealing a national or transnational history of adolescence is highly complex; deeply embedded in local concepts of class, ethnicity, gender and 'demographic and economic' development across centuries."²⁹⁹ Cox and Riordan also identify the gradual 'elongation of adolescence' within Irish contexts. Social factors displaced the 'premodern, preindustrial and agrarian mechanisms and roles that supported the progression of youths from dependents within family households to heads of and spouses in, new units.³⁰⁰

By the 1960s, economic and industrial policy was moving towards free-trade and the attraction of foreign industry and investment into Ireland. In a post-de Valera/economic protectionist era, Ireland was expanding its borders, metaphorically at least, to increase its international presence, role and influence, both as a receiver and reciprocate of a homogenising western culture. Judt outlined the verbalising of this change by youth within this movement as being typified by phrases such as 'Doing your own thing', letting it all hang

²⁹⁸ Mary E. Daly, "The Emergence of an Irish Adolescence: 1920s – 1970s", in *Adolescence in Modern Irish History*, eds., Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

²⁹⁹ Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan, eds., *Adolescence in Modern Irish History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 2.

³⁰⁰ Cox, Riordan, 2015, 3.

out', 'make love, not war'; which were all private and self-orientated objectives which lead, unsurprisingly, to a similar expression of new thinking within Irish drama.³⁰¹ This included the establishment and expansion of a Dublin International Theatre Festival in 1957. This was itself an extension of 'An Tóstal', an annual tourism-driven project, usually staged within the Easter break by Bórd Fáilte and which included large scale parades and pageants which often had casts of hundreds and which depicted myths and legends from Gaelic culture, such as the Táin Bó Cuailnge and the story of St. Patrick.³⁰²

This cultural shift among Ireland's young generation was extrapolated and found a home on the Irish stage as early as the 1950s. The attitude of Irish youth at this time, as depicted on the Irish stage, summed up the feeling of a new wave of Irish playwrights, which in terms of society, emigration and politics, was weary of having a traditional nationalist and authoritarian position imbibed upon them by and through orthodoxies of Church and State.

By the late 1950s, communication and travel by various means was beginning to move freer than in previous years since the end of the Second World War. Increased availability of air travel through the growth of Aer Lingus, the Irish national airline, founded in 1936, established transatlantic routes from Shannon since April 1958, affording those with means the opportunity to consider long-haul international tourism out of Ireland. It also gave opportunity for Irish emigrants to come home to Ireland, which again maintained a focus on American markets and trade with Ireland. Irish drama was being recognised by Irish industry and business as a vehicle of expressing Irish identity abroad. On 17 May 1955, at a reception held by the Alcade (Mayor) of Barcelona, Spain, at the Ayuntamiento (Town Hall), to mark the opening of a new route operated by Aer Lingus between Dublin and Barcelona, Abbey actor turned-Hollywood star, Barry Fitzgerald was one of the guests of honour. Fitzgerald was a recognisable star of theatre and film at this time and an expression of the successful cultural emigrants who moved from the Abbey stage to the Hollywood film set. Also on the plane for the inaugural flight was Dr. Michael Rynne, Irish Ambassador to Spain, William Norton, Tánaiste and Irish Minister for Industry and Commerce, various heads of

³⁰¹ Judt, 2011, 87-88.

³⁰² For more on the pageantry and performance of An Tóstal festivals, see Joan Fitzpatrick Dean, *All Dressed Up: Modern Irish Historical Pageantry* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014) and also notes and correspondence from Professor G.A. Hayes McCoy archive (A35) JHL, NUI Galway.

Aer Lingus and "two Irish girls going to Spain as a prize won in a wine competition back in Dublin".³⁰³



Figure 6 Actor Barry Fitzgerald (fourth from left, front) pictured at the opening of Aer Lingus direct flight between Dublin and Barcelona. 1946. Also pictured is Michael Rynne, Department of External Affairs. (sixth from right, middle) P133/4/10/10A, Rynne Papers, JHL, NUI Galway.

The Tánaiste, Minister Norton, thanked the Spanish people in his speech for the succour and refuge given to the Irish people and patriots in past struggles. By 1965, that process seems to have developed further. A British Pathé newsreel video, entitled "The West Coast of Ireland" was broadcast in that year. With opening shots of sunny blue skies over round towers and early Christian monuments, the footage moves to a busy and industrialising Cork city and port. A new tanker ship is being launched down a slipway with a team of enthusiastic young male ship labourers, all in their late teens and early twenties, cheer joyously as the 'Star Spangled Banner' waves in the background.³⁰⁴

³⁰³ "Aer Lingus Runs First Service to Spain", *Irish Times*, 19 May 1955, Accessed Online 03 July 2015. 3.

³⁰⁴ "The West Coast of Ireland", British Pathé newsreel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWY8ucN1BVk> Accessed 16 Jun 2016.

The westward drift of Irish population towards America was slowing. American tourism into Ireland increased and also those Irish migrants who established a new life in the United States were able to return back more frequently. Such figures would soon form part of a new national dramatic consciousness, from the major institutional stages to new pocket theatres. Drama, economics and industry of a modern internationalism would soon be closely aligned at new venues such as the Pike Theatre, in particular, and which saw the infusion of international performance styles and motifs, such as Indo-Caribbean music, dance and costume, reflect the changing demographic make-up of Irish society.

***The Country Boy* and Staging Modernising Ireland**

In 1959, John Murphy, a playwright from Charlestown, Co. Mayo, had his debut (and only) production at the Abbey Theatre with *The Country Boy*. Murphy emigrated to America in the 1950s and this experience had a direct effect on the playwright, with the plot of *The Country Boy* loosely following Murphy's own personal journey from Mayo to the United States and back. *The Country Boy* was first performed at the Group Theatre in Belfast in April 1959 and was produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in May of that year. In the preface to the Progress House-published text of the play, Ernest Blythe described *The Country Boy* as "one of the most notable plays to come by the Abbey Theatre for a considerable time . . ."³⁰⁵ The play was first performed at the Abbey Theatre for a fortnight in May 1959 and was produced again a month later in June following the end of the Players Holiday period. A Dublin drama critic of the time said it was bad judgement on part of the Abbey directors to select for the visitor's season a play with which the Americans were likely to be displeased. Blythe, in his preface, would move quickly to defend the decision of the Abbey Board to stage the play and revive it for the summer period by evidence in a letter left at the theatre from seven Americans, who did not want to leave without expressing their admiration for the 'remarkable play' they had seen the night before. One aspect that delighted the American audience members was the play's unusual but faithful delineation of the aspect of Irish-American life. Further praise would come from Blythe, in adding that Murphy, in his first play, "has shown such psychological insight, such imagination and such a

³⁰⁵ John Murphy, *The Country Boy* (Dublin: Progress House Press, 1960), Preface.

power to create character that we must look forward to his next effort with eager anticipation."³⁰⁶

For the producers, the play was certainly directed towards the summer tourist market and, specifically, with the American patron in mind. Within the programme for the 18th May 1959 performance of the play are numerous examples of advertisements aimed specifically at the tourist market, including 'Historic Families', a heraldic artistry company who can design your family crest, of interest to the Irish-American audience passing through Dublin. The advertisement would state that such an item would make "a handsome and suitable gift to your friends abroad."³⁰⁷

The advertisement for Brown Thomas department store within the show programme claimed it was 'the loveliest shop in Ireland', and that 'almost every visitor shops at Brown Thomas, Dublin' set a similar tone. The advertisement artwork depicted the brands on sale at the store and picked out the Irish Linen Company, Waterford Crystal and Dior Boutique, all high-end Irish and international luxury products, aimed primarily at a tourist market. What confirms this direct marketing at international visitors is the presence of an 'information stand' depicted within the store layout in the advertisement image, in order to facilitate those visitors who are not regular customers.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Abbey Theatre. *The Country Boy*, 18 May 1959 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3707_MPG_07 p2.

³⁰⁷ Abbey Theatre. *The Country Boy*, 18 May 1959 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3707_MPG_07 p2.

³⁰⁸ Abbey Theatre. *The Country Boy*, 18 May 1959 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3707_MPG_07, p11.

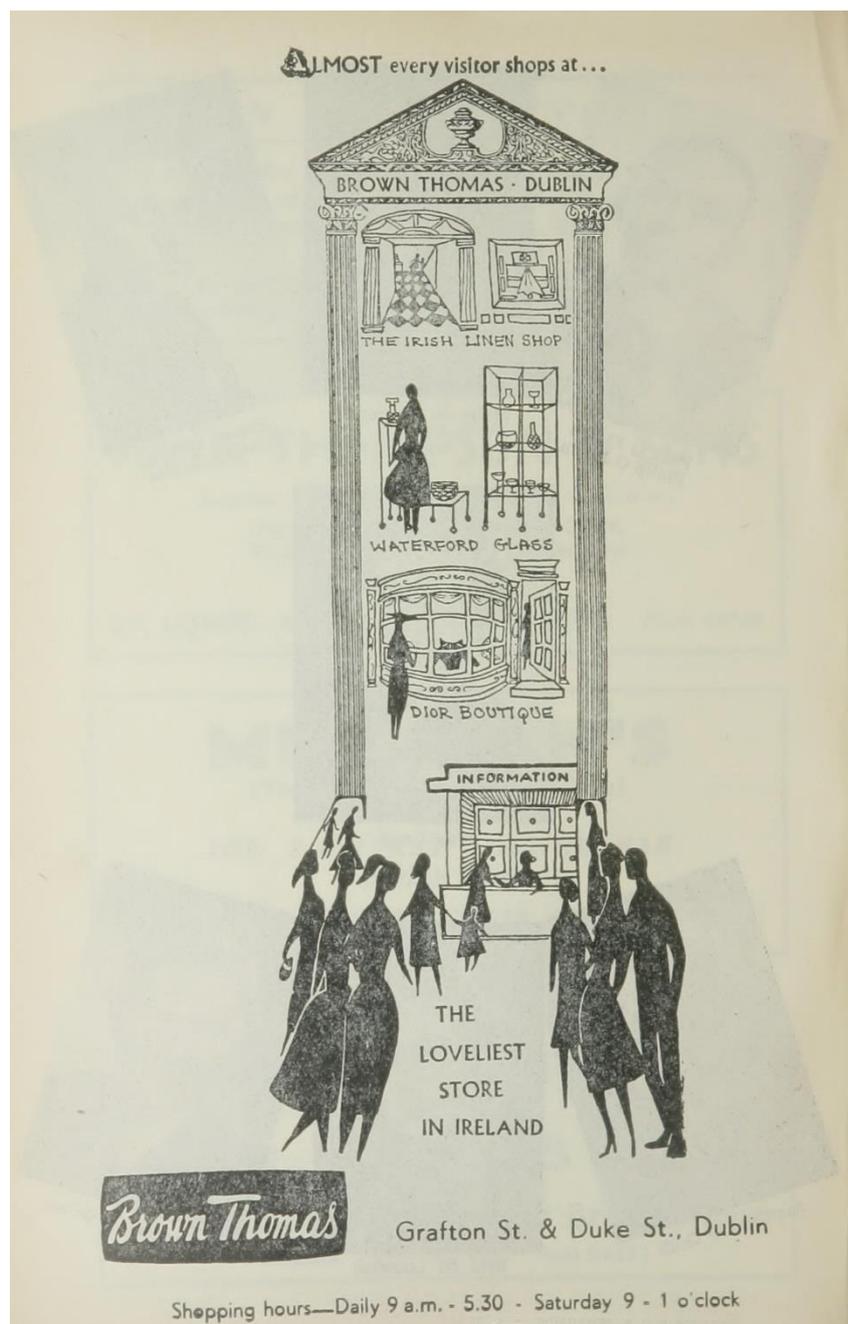


Figure 7 Advertisement for Brown Thomas department store. *The Country Boy* programme, Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

Irish fashion and design had become a global recognised brand. On 10th August, 1953 *Life* magazine ran a front cover headline, “Irish Invade Fashion World” and an image of Irish model Ann Gunning-Beckinsale, wearing a cape and crochet evening gown designed by Irish designer Sybil Connolly. Connolly launched an independent fashion label consisting of high-end luxury clothing, often advertised with posed models who personified mythological and theatrical figures, such as Kathleen Ní Houlihan.³⁰⁹ These traditional Irish images were

³⁰⁹ Linda King, “*Life* Cover – Sybil Connolly”, *Modern Ireland in One Hundred Artworks*, Fintan O’Toole, ed. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2016), 119.

defined along female mythical figures and tourist driven motifs of Ireland and as advertised by the National Theatre and major international publications such as *Life* magazine.

Similarly, in March 1959, Penelope Gilliatt, Features Editor with *Vogue* Magazine, wrote to the Managing Director of the Abbey Theatre, Ernest Blythe. *Vogue* was planning an extensive feature on Ireland, with a strong focus on the Arts and the Abbey Theatre. "It will be written very much for people who will actually be coming to Ireland on holiday sometime in the summer."³¹⁰ This characterisation of the Irish nation through costume and fashion would be radically confronted and would be rebuked by the work of Carolyn Swift and the Pike theatre.

An advertisement for 'Joe Cahill Car Rentals' is further example of just how tourist-orientated the marketing of the Abbey Theatre was in this period. The silhouetted couples and families in the advertisement for Brown Thomas would mirror the perceived image within Ireland of an apparent American 'Hollywood glamour' and material wealth and reflects the cultural influence American consumerism was asserting on Irish society. This allusion to the American motor industry and materialist culture is picked up and further critiqued at the Pike Theatre in the play *The Solid Gold Cadillac*. The 'American Dream' and material wealth is sharply depicted by John Murphy, Brian Friel (*The Mundy Scheme*) and others in their respective works at this time. The cultural historian, Clair Wills, adds that:

The emigrant Irish were encouraged to spend their money on nostalgic returns to the unspoilt landscapes which had failed to offer them a livelihood, returning to Britain at the end of the summer with a lump of Connemara marble in their pockets and the imprint of the Blarney Stone upon their lips.³¹¹

The Abbey Theatre production of *The Country Boy* was produced by Ria Mooney and opened on 11th May 1959. The role of Mooney as a director at the Abbey Theatre and having influence over the style and tone of productions must also be taken into account for

³¹⁰ Abbey Theatre. Correspondence re:General correspondence with the Abbey Theatre. 1959-1959. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00005864, p.12.

³¹¹ Clair Wills, *The Best Are Leaving* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 9.

the projection of a modern Ireland on the national stage.³¹² Set in rural county Mayo on Ireland's western seaboard, the stage directions of the opening act of *The Country Boy* point out that action takes place "in the kitchen of a farmhouse of the type that has now almost completely replaced the thatched cottage."³¹³ This is an indication that the play, as part of the Abbey's programmed summer season, is, as Anthony Roche describes, past the 'PQ' (Peasant Quality) of its tradition.³¹⁴ Upward mobility at this time was evidenced by Murphy in this move from peasant and traditional ideal of rural Ireland to a mechanised, electrified and comfortable way of living. These opening stage directions also detail the following evidence for the transition of the domestic cottage setting on the Irish stage:

*Some modern conveniences are evident such as an electric light hanging in the centre and a radio on a small shelf. . . The window is in curtained and there is a 'new' look about the room as if it has been freshly painted and thoroughly cleaned.*³¹⁵

This visual impression of domestic renewal is also a reflection on the central theme of the play, the returned Irish immigrant from America. The character of Eddie, the son of rural Mayo, has become 'Americanised' through moving towards American norms of social acceptance, suggesting a break away from the land and ties of traditional rural and peasant Irish life. The opening scene of the play which features Curly Maher, Eddie's younger brother, a young man in his early twenties, bursting through the kitchen in a rage, and symptomatic of the 'angry young men' and youth movement culture that would emerge over the next decade, and as exemplified in the plays of John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and others part of post-war British drama. Tom Maher, Curly's father, explains "no one in the whole country can tell him what to do."³¹⁶ Murphy outlines a polarisation between youth and middle-age in the play that typifies the dichotomy between modern Ireland and the previous austere years of war time ('Emergency') Ireland and beyond: "Everything has to be done the opposite way to your way."³¹⁷ The disgruntlement of many young men in rural

³¹² *The Enemy Within* by Brian Friel depicts the solitary life of Saint Columba in the sixth century upon the isolated island of Iona. Ria Mooney was also the first person to direct a Brian Friel play at the Abbey Theatre with *The Enemy Within*, 1960.

³¹³ Murphy, 1960, 1.

³¹⁴ Anthony Roche, *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899-1939*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 86.

³¹⁵ Murphy, 1960, 1.

³¹⁶ Murphy, 1960, 2.

³¹⁷ Murphy, 1960, 2.

Ireland towards forced inheritance of the family farm, as personified in Curly, was receiving official attention in Ireland directly in the years Murphy was beginning to write his play.

The *Irish Times* ran a multi-part series of articles in 1953, focusing on emigration from county Kerry. The article explored education as a means to cauterise the flow of young male emigrants from rural farming families. The local V.E.C.'s went so far as to create a Junior Farmers Club, where children of farmers could partake in skills workshops and training to enamour them with the profession it is hoped they will inherit.³¹⁸ This scheme spoke directly to the likes of Curly Maher. The migration westward to America by the sons of the family in the play is symptomatic of a social and psychological implicitness of necessary emigration. Irish society as represented in Irish theatre and new writing on the late 1950s and early 1960s implied this 'wanderlust' for exploration but also as a necessary mental escape and means of survival that threatened to smother many of those who remained.

This westward emigration extends out of the West of Ireland with Murphy's play set in Mayo and as Brian Friel set his early plays in the recurring and fictional Ballybeg village in Donegal. The economically and demographically burgeoning East of Ireland does not offer its inhabitants an immediate trans-Atlantic exit-route. Instead, in much of the new Irish plays during the 1960s and 1970s, emigration out of Ireland is almost exclusively out of the West of Ireland. It is also a distinctly 'male' emigration. Conversely, demographic change within Ireland and through internal migration is largely centred in the opposite directional point, from west, south and north towards the east and to urban Dublin.

The influence of John Murphy's play upon the later breakthrough play of Brian Friel cannot be underestimated and I would argue that the structure and message of Murphy's successful play allowed Friel to further adapt and develop his own radical staging of the internal vs. external minds of his protagonist, Gar O'Donnell. In a letter to the academic Christopher Murray, Brian Friel states that he could not understand the success of *The Country Boy* but he admits to Murray that he nevertheless absorbed some useful hints and took those in a new direction.³¹⁹ While Friel does not say why he does not understand the

³¹⁸ "Can the Teachers Combat Emigration?" *Irish Times*, 11 April 1953, 4.

³¹⁹ Christopher Murray, *The Theatre of Brian Friel: Tradition and Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 25.

success of Murphy's play, I suggest a possible reason lies in the ending of Murphy's play, which ends on a comedic punchline and leaves little by way of a cathartic climax, instead delivering a mild resolution to the plot. This was symptomatic of a perceived outdated Irish drama, befitting of its symbolically dilapidated temporary home at the Queen's Theatre on Dublin's north side. A more complex and experimental form of Irish drama, to reflect the complexity of the times and also of contemporary international artistic expression and influence, was seen as lacking in Murphy's play. In 'taking of hints in new directions', Friel takes Murphy's initial presentation of a young man, conflicted by both family and country who is struggling to find a rooted place within both facets of place – the home and society, and places him within an experimental dramatic context

Murray further asserts that *Philadelphia* is less about emigration than about the isolated self which subsists on memories. This 'self-segregating and isolating self' is a visibly growing dynamic in the so-called 'second revival' of Irish drama of the 1960s and resonates in the works of Friel, Hugh Leonard and others of the period. I agree with Murray in saying that *Philadelphia* comes from deep within Friel himself and relates directly to Friel's personal journeys as a writer finding his form and voice, as a man having left vocational training in Maynooth seminary after one year – similar to Gar having left University after one year also. It further alludes to issues of personal disconnect from a Nationalism that was rising in Northern Ireland. Friel was born in Tyrone, educated in Derry, had summers in Donegal and had the majority of his plays premiere in Dublin.³²⁰ Such was the impact of Murphy's play, co-director of the Pike Theatre, Alan Simpson, discussed the then current state of the Abbey Theatre (and Irish theatre in general) and also laments the de-intellectualisation of the Irish public through the growing mass consumption of new forms of culture and entertainment:

Some of the best plays in the country have come out of the Abbey in the last fifteen years; some of the Molloy plays, *The Country Boy*, some of the Louis d'Alton plays . . . Ireland is very properly out of tune with European and American theatre, and

³²⁰ No Friel play after *The Doubtful Paradise* (1960) until *Translations* (1980) premièred in Northern Ireland – all other plays premièred at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

particularly with English theatre. Why should we be in tune? But there just isn't the population in Ireland to enable one to live from any art form.³²¹

Simpson was raising a point that had existed for many years. Irish plays and playwrights were hitherto not expressing the new connectedness of global economies and societies. This was not a new phenomenon, as W.B Yeats, in 1933, raised concerns about connecting plays with an Irish sensibility to audiences in America. Yeats wrote to Arthur Shields, tour manager of the Abbey tour of 1933 and requested, at a day's notice, to drop his own play, *The Words Upon the Window Pane*, out of the American tour, citing his concern that it requires a greater knowledge of Johnathon Swift, the play's main theme, than one is likely to find in audiences in America. "He, (Swift) is known merely as the author of Gulliver [in America]."³²²

This point, as well as marking a note of insecurity by Yeats regarding his own work and its ability to connect with international and non-Irish audiences, highlighted a lack of new Irish plays that could travel and have a presence of its own in America and among American and Irish-American audiences. *The Country Boy* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* confronted this matter. Only Friel's play, however, would have its own eventual American production and Broadway success. I would argue that *Philadelphia* was designed to resonate with Irish audiences in America, a play distinctly for export, while *the Country Boy* was designed to appeal to the returning emigrant and Irish-American tourist market in Dublin.

The setting of *The Country Boy*, "the kitchen of a farmhouse of the type that has now almost completely replaced the thatched cottage. . .", is a dichotomous world, with is shaped by past Irish and theatrical tradition but now which has been altered by modernising thoughts on design and form: "Some modern conveniences are evident such as the electric light hanging in the centre and a radio on a small shelf . . ."; the "non-curtained window" offers a clear vista to the external world, what may lay beyond the cottage walls and parish boundaries, overseas. However, we can see discrepancy between the text and the physical world of the new cottage as staged at the Abbey within Murphy's play. The set was designed by Tomás MacAnna and photographs of the 1959 production reveal that floral-

³²¹ Interview with Alan Simpson, *Irish Times*, 22 September 1962, 10.

³²² T13/A/90, Arthur Shields Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway.

print curtains were added to the interior cottage window, enhancing the sense of adornment and upgrading of the house alluded to by Murphy. Murphy's vision, furthered in reality by MacAnna's design additions, is of a place under renewal and expectation. This is process of expedition, of uncertain newness and change, steeped in fluidity, as Shaun Richards explains,³²³ is present through Murphy's opening stage directions: "There is a 'new' look about the room as if it has been freshly painted and thoroughly cleaned. It is not in complete order . . ." ³²⁴



Figure 8 Set of *The Country Boy* by John Murphy, Abbey Theatre, 1959. The toolbox under the wooden bench and new luggage in the centre of kitchen floor are signs of the traditional kitchen cottage under renewal and receiving international influence.³²⁵

³²³ Shaun Richards, "Brian Friel: Seizing the Moment of Flux", *Irish University Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Autumn - Winter, 2000) 254-271.

³²⁴ Murphy, 1960, 1.

³²⁵ Abbey Theatre. *The Country Boy*, 11 May 1959 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3706_SM_0001, p3.



Figure 9 Wide-angle shot of the set of *The Country Boy* by John Murphy, Abbey Theatre, 1959.³²⁶

Murphy, writing this play originally for production in Belfast, would recognise in Irish audiences in the South, a restlessness that was bound in a generation of Irish men and women who expected more than a life on 'getting by' off the land. Curly Maher, '*a young man of twenty-five and well built*', represents this inherent rejection of inherited expectations and rushes onto the stage with his face contorted in anger and frustration. Curly is the youngest son of the Maher family and has remained at home on the family farm to work alongside his father in the absence of his older brother, a recent emigrant to the United States. The first action of the play sees Tom Maher, the head of the household, trailing his son and seeking to calm him and restrain him:

TOM: (angrily) Curly! . . . Curly! Come back here. Curly!

In response to his wife, Mary, as to the matter, Tom responds:

TOM: "What's wrong? . . . No one, no one in the whole country can tell him what to do. Once a thing gets into his head, the devil himself wouldn't drive it out."³²⁷

³²⁶ Abbey Theatre. *The Country Boy*, 11 May 1959 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3706_SM_0001, p1.

³²⁷ Murphy, 1960, 2.

Murphy, through the accessible means of a rural/cottage set play, with a motif of emigration in 1950s Ireland, is laying forth a depiction of modern masculinity. This generation, representative of Curly Maher and Gar O'Donnell, are entering manhood and adulthood when expectations and opportunities for rural based young men are available elsewhere and in alternate ways such as non-agrarian, university educated and urban based. Clair Wills would explore this point and in reference to *The Country Boy* and in the wider context of 1950s Irish theatre and emigration:

The truth is that almost no picture of rural Ireland in this period is without its hopeful intending migrant, returned emigrant, letters from emigrants, or stories of disastrous ends in London or Birmingham. And emigration features centrally in the popular fiction of the period . . . it lies in the heart of the social problem plays of the 1950s which were popular both on the Abbey stage and amongst the many touring and amateur companies who played to the small towns - plays by Keane and Molloy but also lesser known works such as John Murphy's *The Country Boy* . . . In these dramas of rural life, emigration is rarely limited to a colourful character or seamy story; instead the plots turn on attempts to prevent young people leaving home, or to keep them at home once they are back in Ireland for their holidays.³²⁸

The impetus to remain for the likes of Gar and Curly is not economic progression or social mobility but rather security by means of inheritance of the family home place and land but also to act as security for the previous generation in their ageing and advancing years. Curly's older brother, Eddie, an emigrant of some fifteen years to America, is returning home to the Maher home. His arrival is noticed by his parents as a risk to Curly in so far as Eddie may lure Curly out of Ireland and to a radically different way of working, living and earning. Tom is indifferent to his son's economic and professional choices: "a fat lot of good he'll be. Sittin' in a soft job drawing big money for the past fifteen years. Wouldn't remember which end of a heifer the calf was comin' from."³²⁹

The depiction of the returned immigrant, as outlined by Murphy in the play, is an archetype for the 'successful' Irish émigré, who makes their home, family and career far from Ireland.

³²⁸ Wills, 2015, 17.

³²⁹ Murphy, 1960, 4.

How Irish society and indeed Irish theatre presented these diasporic figures is often through derision and mocking tones, as in the case of Eddie in *The Country Boy*, who has not maintained a familiarity with his former pace and toil of life on the family farm. "The Returned Yanks", an article by journalist Maurice Gorham, published in *The Irish Times* in 1960, notes that: "sometimes it (the returned yank) was somebody who had come back well-heeled and settled down to a life more prosperous than he could have had if he had stayed, but even then he looked just like anyone else."³³⁰ Gorham would also note the economic need for some to return to Ireland, "like the yank in *The Country Boy*, with the empty wardrobe trunk, but on the whole they see their future in America and have no ambition to settle back into our rather depressing scene."³³¹

The stage management files for *The Country Boy*, recently made available through the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, reveal a deliberate choreographing of the stage, setting, design and props used in the play. The Abbey Theatre Digital Archive holds numerous drafts and successive copies of stage plans for *The Country Boy*. These documents, in various manuscript hands, are not individually dated and so point to an interchangeable and fluid restaging of the play through subsequent productions at the Abbey Theatre, from its premiere in 1959 to future productions through the mid-1960s. Many features remain constant throughout each iteration of the design plans, such as in Act 1, scene 1, the tool box placed on a bench, highlights a 'work in progress' relating to the physical upgrading and modernisation of the farmhouse kitchen. The place of the setting is similar to so many previous Irish plays which have internalised the action to the heart of the domestic space of the Irish home, the kitchen, which again can be understood to be a 'feminised' space by virtue of traditional restrictions on the place and status of women in Irish society.

This is, not least, as seen officially recorded in the Constitution of the Irish Republic which stipulates in Articles 41.2.1 and 41.2.1, the State recognition "that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. 41.2.2: The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the

³³⁰ *Irish Times*, 9 October 1960, 8.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

home."³³² The marriage bar on women employed in the Civil Service or in teaching positions and which enforced their immediate retirement was also in effect in Ireland until 1973. In the rural Mayo community of 1959 as depicted in *The Country Boy*, the domestic space of the kitchen is very much feminised where male characters, such as Curly and Tom enter at all times from the back door, leading inwards to the house and kitchen interior (feminine) from the exterior farm (masculine). Tom has already lost Eddie as his farm labour and now about to lose Curly, it is the survival of the masculine space of rural Ireland, the farm, which is at risk of being lost to emigration.

The production that immediately followed *The Country Boy* at the Abbey Theatre was John B. Kane's *Sive*, opening on 25 May 1959, performed by the Listowel Drama Group. The cottage setting of *Sive* follows the traditional perceived depicting of the struggling rural farmer. The play, among other social commentaries upon rural Ireland of the time puts forward the role played by women in the physical farm work and contribution to running of the family outside of the domestic kitchen space. The opening stage directions for *Sive* point to a poorly furnished cottage, in contrast to the electrified and modernising scene of *The Country Boy*; a prosperous modern farm and homestead: "*The kitchen is poorly furnished with an open hearth on its left wall . . . a twenty gallon creamery tank stands between a table together with a half-filled sack of meal and half a sack of flour.*"³³³

Both these plays received their first production within months of each other in 1959. Taking account of *Sive*'s setting note as being in 'the recent past' there is little to separate these plays as regards time or location – both West of Ireland, both late 1950s, but it is Murphy's *The Country Boy* that presents the modern kitchen with modern conveniences. The scenographic evidence to highlight that the payment for these physical upgrades has come from American money rather than the local farm is seen in the stage management files of the Abbey production through the 'American-style table' in the kitchen but also the 'American raincoats' on hooks of the kitchen doors and tins of 'Prince Albert Cigars', the

³³² <https://www.constitution.ie/AttachmentDownload.ashx?mid=ee219062-2178-e211-a5a0-005056a32ee4>
Accessed 19 February 2016.

³³³ Abbey Theatre. *Sive*, 09 Jun 1986 [prompt script]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0717_PS_0001, p5.

leading American tobacco brand, on the dresser.³³⁴ Mary and Tom also speak of Eddie sending home money from America:

TOM: That's the way. They'll send you a cheque now and again and you have to spend the most of it getting' ready for them when they come home.

MARY: Well 'Twas Eddie's own money that built this for us and whatever you say it's better than the thatch."³³⁵

This internal familial dispute, based upon falling structures and connectivity to tradition in the face of modernity, foregrounds the psychological and ontological need to break away from the family by the succeeding generation. Theatre scholar Brian Singleton comments on this father-son relationship depiction in a post-colonial context:

The political realities of hegemonic masculinity for the most part have been eschewed by contemporary Irish theatre in favour of performance of patriarchy configured in father-son relationships . . .³³⁶

Singleton further contends that Friel's play was very much a marker for a new generation of Irish theatre in the 1960s. It highlighted the failure of Ireland's post-colonial patriarchal structures to offer Ireland's youth any realistic aspirations of personal and professional fulfilment in a modern economy and society. Successive generational inheritance of family-run farms or businesses were not sustainable to those seeking broadening experiences. However, John Murphy's *The Country Boy* was the first play of the period to address these factors. The play was a primary influence on the development of Friel's later play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Its staging can now be re-examined through archival stage management files which reveal its full extent as a neglected play of importance to Irish theatre historiography.

³³⁴ Abbey Theatre. *The Country Boy*, 11 May 1959 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3706_SM_0001, p31.

³³⁵ Murphy, 1960, 5.

³³⁶ Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 55.

The Country Boy can be understood to be a key influence on how the play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* came to be understood and received by Irish audiences. Brian Friel states in a 1964 interview with Peter Lennon that as with Saint Columba in *The Enemy Within*, in order to build integrity, the break from home and from their father figures was essential. "Gareth was leaving home not only in a local sense but in a spiritual sense too . . . You have to get away from a corrupting influence."³³⁷ In the 2008 'O'Donnell lecture', Professor Mary E. Daly recounts how the 1935 Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, passed by then Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, ensured inheritance of citizenship was granted to those children of emigrants born in Ireland or those with father or paternal grandfather of Irish birth only. This ensured a male-line of citizenship. The 1956 Amendment Act extended citizenship by descent to the female line, and made it easier to claim citizenship . . . But throughout the 1950s fewer than one hundred people a year with overseas addresses claimed citizenship.³³⁸

In 1959, The Abbey Theatre was invited to participate in a 'Festival of Europe' hosted in Italy with support of the Italian Ministry for Tourism and Amusements that was "to deal with various aspects of art and culture". In a letter from the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, to the Manager of the Abbey, 24 November 1959, all European Countries were invited to participate in the Festival which was devoted to prose theatre, held in Rome between February and March 1960. A further stipulation was that each production could not have previously been produced outside of respective national borders, ensuring the Festival would have a succession of European premières.³³⁹ A letter of response, issued on the day following receipt of the letter of invitation, immediately ruled out any such participation by the Abbey Theatre: "The time of year would be rather unsuitable for us . . . we could hardly hope to avoid incurring heavy losses."³⁴⁰

³³⁷ Christopher Murray, ed, *Brian Friel, Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964 – 1999* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 2.

³³⁸ Mary E. Daly, O'Donnell Lecture, *The Irish State and the Diaspora*, National University of Ireland, Dublin, 17 November 2008. 11.

³³⁹ Correspondence between the Manager, Abbey Theatre and the Department of External Affairs, in 'General Abbey Correspondence, 1959, p. 127. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 128.

Such a swift response ruled out any in-depth debate or communication to Board Members of the Abbey concerning the decision to opt of the Festival of Europe. The primary reason given was an 'unsuitable time of year'. This period in question traversed St. Patrick's Day and also the run-up to the Easter period, which fell in late-March in 1959. Within this timeframe, the Abbey produced *I Know Where I'm Going* by John McCann and produced the Irish première of *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Eugene O'Neill and *The Country Boy* immediately following this, from mid to late March. In this action, The Abbey eschewed a European outlet in place of staging work aimed at an American/Irish-American consciousness and audience as well as depicting elements concerned with the Irish-American diaspora. The staging of new work by Eugene O'Neill and of the emigrant play, *The Country Boy*, were economically advantageous to the Abbey Theatre rather than speculate on the costs of a tour to a non-English speaking country and with no overt diasporic or cultural links that could compare with Irish-American relations. The timeframe for the proposed festival would also be less than optimum as regards tourist traffic into Ireland during the peak Easter season. The Tóstal festival and other cultural-tourism initiatives directed at enticing American holiday-makers to Ireland were a commercial boon the Abbey Theatre chose not to dismiss in place of establishing new artistic connections in non-Anglophone regions.

With the world première of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* at the Gaiety Theatre, directed by Hilton Edwards, came the presentation to the world of not just a major new Irish play and playwright, but the concept of the meaning and consequence of emigration from Ireland for a new generation. The crisis for Gar is that he fell into a psychological and ontological chasm, out of which he did not relate to his position or place within the various societal strata, from the family, to home, to village, to community, to class, religion, masculinity, or country. By his own searching and questioning, Gar, be it in his Private or Public self, is a nowhere man. He is among a disaffected youth and it is recognised but not understood by his father or by Madge who says to S.B. of Gar and his generation:

Madge: I don't know. They're a new race - a new world³⁴¹

³⁴¹ Brian Friel, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 94.

The youth and youthfulness of Gar is an important characteristic that is prominently considered by Friel. Within the first manuscript draft of the play, housed within the Brian Friel Archive at the National Library of Ireland, are notes where Gareth O'Donnell is listed as being 'Aged 29, Tomorrow he'll be 30.'³⁴² Gar's age is significant as it symbolically places him in a position of middle ground – he is not an overtly innocent and naive seventeen year old, nor is he an experienced or married man of middle-age. The development of Gar and the structure of the play, dependent on time, memory and the passing of Gar's youth and his place within (or outside of) the newly globalising Irish society that was taking shape before his eyes, is further documented within the first batch of notes on the play by Friel:

Gareth O'Donnell (Public). Aged 29. Grammar School, UCD for two years, one of Medicine, one of Arts. In his father's shop for the last eight years. Going to Philadelphia tomorrow. Was a footballer. Was going out with Kate who got married eight months ago. People think he is quiet reserved modest. Thinks of himself as a 'late child' and conjectures about the circumstances of his conception.'³⁴³

Judt describes this effect of youth and counter-culture seen in American and European societies of the 1960s as being the key factor separating the outlooks of parent-child generations. Judt would support the theory on youth revolt being based out of exasperation rather than larger ideological and high-political idealism:

The rhetorical expression of youthful revolt was, of course, confined to a tiny minority. Even in the U.S. in those days, most young people did not attend University and college protests did not necessarily represent youth at large. But the broader symptoms of generational dissidence – music, clothing, language – were unusually widespread thanks to television, transistor radios and the internationalisation of popular culture. By the late 1960s, the culture gap separating young people from their parents was perhaps greater than at any point since the early 19th century.³⁴⁴

³⁴² MS37, 047/1, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁴³ MS37,047/1 , Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁴⁴ Judt, 2011, 85.

Gar's self-definition was being out-of-sync in a place and time within which he struggled to see his role. From his unfulfilled University career, Gar straddled the medical and human sciences but found his fit in neither. His economic and business acumen was held within the confines of not just his father's shop but of the village of Ballybeg itself. An interesting insight into the place of Friel as he was writing these notes and drafts of *Philadelphia* is a note writ large by Friel in a scrawling manuscript, declaring: "Everybody Wants Something. Tries to State it. CAN'T."³⁴⁵ This theme of Beckettian-like ennui that is lamented by Friel within the timeframe of his writing of the play is also an indicator towards the alternate ending that was intended for the play. Instead of ending on the internal questioning of Public Gar by Private, with:

PRIVATE: God, Boy, Why do you have to leave? Why? Why?

PUBLIC: I don't know. I – I – I don't know.³⁴⁶

Friel instead has extended this final scene beyond this exchange and features an additional scene: an epilogue. The scene is described by Friel as:

Epilogue: On board the plane, outside the window, he sees them all, all the people from his town, his alter-ego. Keep up endless stream of meaningful talk while Gar just sobs and sobs and sobs.³⁴⁷

In discussing his treatment of the ending of the play, Friel recounts during its run at the Gaiety that:

The ending was a bigger problem and you and I, almost alone against all comers, believed that Madge's epilogue should be done as scripted. I now have gone over to the opposition. We switched this scene two pages forward and ended the play with "Why do you have to go, boy? Why? Why?" "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know" and it worked very well. My objection to that is the play would end on a

³⁴⁵ MS37,047/1 , Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁴⁶ Friel, 2000, 96.

³⁴⁷ MS 37, 048/1 Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin. Friel is persuaded to remove this additional scene by Tyrone Guthrie and advises the author that: "I think the epilogue is a mistake. It adds nothing and would look, I believe, a little pretentious in performance. The last scene could, if you removed the epilogue, easily be given a bit more of a 'dying fall'". This is a multi-page letter in which Guthrie gives detailed feedback to Friel on many aspects of the play, regarding structure, language, characters and the split personality of Gar. In a later typescript copy of the same letter, Friel adds in a manuscript note that "I carried out all his suggestions".

negative note, but this is not what comes across. What comes across is a young man's confusion and bafflement and his necessity to respond to an age-old life (to leave home) that he doesn't understand . . .³⁴⁸

This ending that includes the epilogue would show the transition that Friel was still undergoing, from a writer of literature and short stories to one perfecting the craft of drama and theatrical form. The epilogue is a primarily a device of literary fiction, more than an element of dramatic form. This style and form of epilogue also highlights the volition and dynamics of Gar's departure.

Friel updates and modernises the mode of emigration that is hitherto common in Irish dramatic and literary depictions of emigration from Ireland. Gar is written, in the epilogue at least, as travelling by airplane to America. During Parliamentary Questions in the Dáil, 4 July 1961, the Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, is asked by Deputy Richard Corish, T.D. to supply figures on modes of transport for Irish emigrants from the Republic of Ireland to countries other than Great Britain in the years 1958, 1959 and 1960. The figures presented were:

Mode of travel	1958	1959	1960
Air	4,836	4,609	4,720
Sea	2,742	2,200	1,932
Not stated	<u>358</u>	<u>309</u>	<u>342</u>
TOTAL	7,936	7,118	6,994 ³⁴⁹

The official report shows that for the years immediately preceding Friel's writing of *Philadelphia*, aviation travel consistently was double the volume of ship-based emigration from Ireland to countries outside of the United Kingdom, and continued to increase annually. This opening of the transatlantic sky route offered an, as yet, uncommented upon and unromanticised conception of emigration upon the modern Irish stage. The route taken

³⁴⁸ MS 37,048 /1, Letter from Brian Friel to Oscar Lewenstein, 21 October 1964, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁴⁹ Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 191, No. 1, Tuesday, 4 July 1961.

by Gar, to Philadelphia via airplane, rather than through familiar emigration ports such as Ellis Island at New York, and which carried clear emotional and ontological resonances for Irish-American audiences allowed Friel to depict a modern emigrant. The direct societal influence of emigration as depicted by Friel would therefore indicate the play, by its structure of depiction of an Americanising Irish society, is actually at odds with patterns of emigration from Ireland. The play, as I have argued, is less about showing or depicting the Irish emigrant leaving Irish soil but an examination of psychological assimilation of Irish-Americanism in a youth culture that is already evident in America.

The first production of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* at the Abbey Theatre on 30th October 1972, featured further tropes of the new modern Irish emigrant on stage. The play was directed by Tomás Mac Anna with sound designed by Jim Colgan. The newly digitised sound files reveal that the introduction to the play is scored by the sound of a train running at speed along its tracks with the familiar sound of a platform conductor blowing a whistle and directing train traffic. Overlaid onto this is the sound of an airplane jet engine, which progressively gets louder and supplants the audio of the train departure.³⁵⁰

³⁵⁰ Abbey Theatre. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, 30 October 1972 [audio]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 11009_A_001.

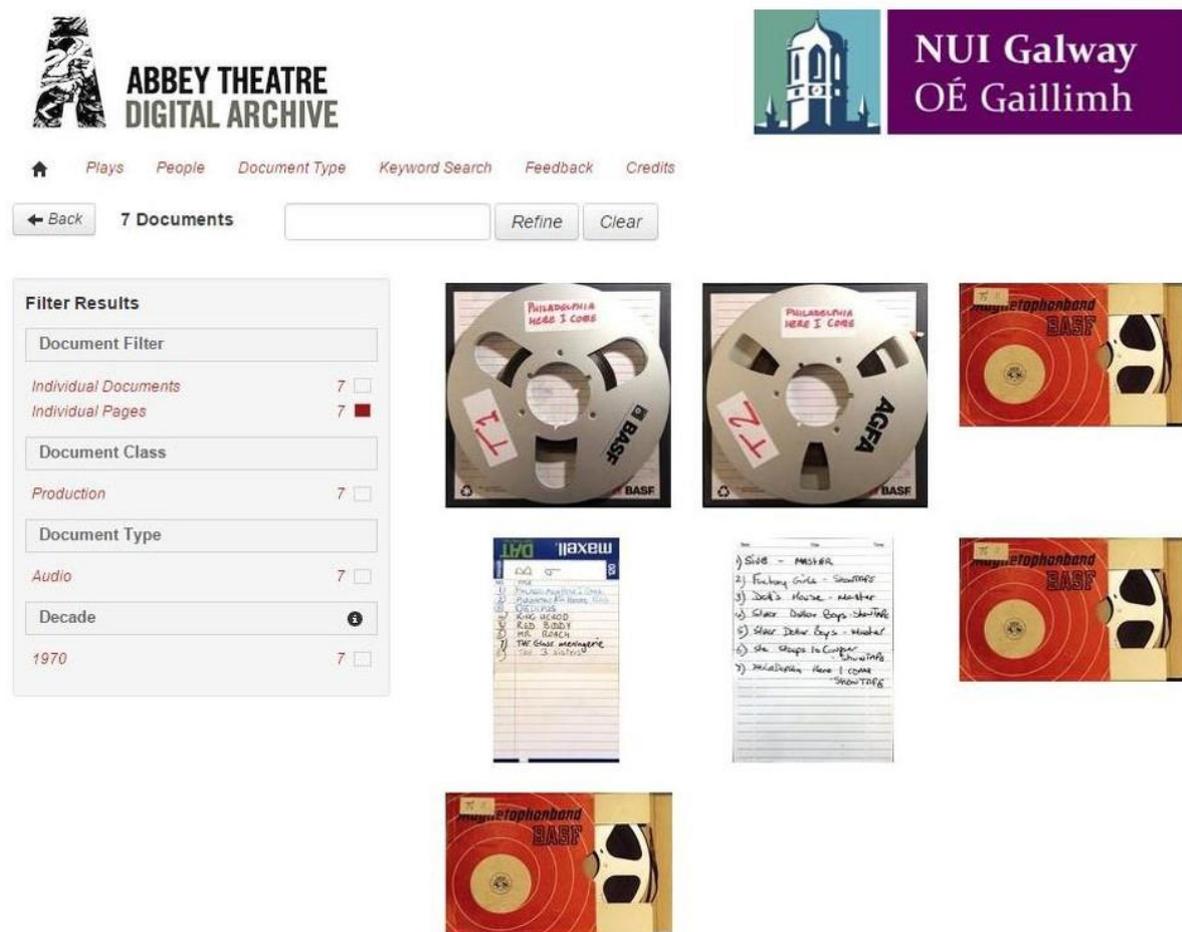


Figure 10 Screenshot of range of audio media from the 1972 Abbey Theatre production of Philadelphia, Here I Come! . Taken from Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.

The programme cover for this production features a close-up image of a tattered and worn suitcase with a luggage-tag visible – it states 'Aer Lingus – Irish', with 'Philadelphia' scrawled across it as a point of destination. A length of rope tied around the case, keeping it closed, offers the only visual remnant of past destitute emigrants from Ireland. The case is a relic of a previous generation and outdated means of travel. This confirms a move of the setting of *Philadelphia* fully into a modern and contemporary context. Left behind are the elements of histrionic Irish emigration, typified by the harrowing image of the emaciated Clare-woman, Brigid O'Donnell, and her young children, as they were depicted during the Famine by English media and used to visually represent the human toll of famine devastation. This was a production of the play for a new generation and one which has the choice to emigrate, which, as Judt outlined, was the decision of the self, not of the collective.



Figure 11 Programme cover from Abbey Theatre production of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Directed by Tómas Mac Anna, 1972.³⁵¹

Friel, as a young and yet emerging playwright still honing his craft, outlined two objectives to achieve from the play that are central to my argument of this play, and of wider new writing within this period of Irish drama, that would constitute a shift and increased deliberate focus on the audience and on sensory and emotional perception and

³⁵¹ Abbey Theatre. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, 30 Oct 1972 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4575_MPG_01, p1.

engagement with society. On the reverse of a manilla envelope entitled "First notes on Philadelphia", Friel writes:

- 1) There must be reactions of hearty (from the heart and belly) laughter
- 2) There must be sadness – people must cry from grief³⁵²

This point exemplifies what Emilie FitzGibbon advocated for as a change in direction in Irish theatre. The means through which to engage with society is through contemporary, immediate and direct emotional experience. By citing dramatic techniques espoused by French surrealist playwright and director, Antonin Artaud, FitzGibbon echoes Artaud's cry for "No More Masterpieces"³⁵³, which called for a sensory experience of performance and a reversion away from a passive audience, separated by tradition of class, behaviour and spatial/architectural ascribing of position within the theatre by virtue of ticket price and therefore also societal expectation. Fitzgibbon outlines further that:

The new politics of theatre insist on a major redefinition both of space and of the theatrical reality presented in that space . . . Irish playwrights live under the shadow of a gunman forced by his constant presence to consider politics as those of a civil war state. World politics are kept at bay by the shadow and it tends to keep political drama in Ireland in the country's major venues at the level of historical analysis while it ignores other aspects of the socio-political debate.³⁵⁴

With the indifference of Gar's Father, S.B. O'Donnell, to Gar's leaving, Friel succeeds in creating Gar to be little more than an unviable commercial liability, to be of no asset to his father's modest economic concerns. In Friel's notes on this play we learn of Gar that:

The going away, the escape has been his ambition ever since he left Grammar school. His whole life has been geared to it and now that the time has come there are the beginnings of doubts. He, Gar, is trying to wrench himself away from the

³⁵² MS 37,048/1 Brian Friel Papers, National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

³⁵³ This essay was published by Antonin Artaud in his collection (in a later English translation) *The Theatre and its Double: Essays*, first published in French in 1936, translated by John Calder (London, Calder Press, 1970).

³⁵⁴ Emilie FitzGibbon, "Theatre with its Sleeves Rolled Up", in *Irish Writers and Politics*, ed. Okifumi Komesu, (Gerrard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1990), 306-310.

alter-ego who cautions wisdom, restraint, the hesitation and as the play goes on, the alter-ego's advice weakens and Gar has finally to talk himself into going . . . Never once does the father say "You're going tomorrow" and the Private Gar wants him to say it!"³⁵⁵

Such familial conflict is evident through the dramatization of succeeding generations' rejection of traditional village life or to be valued as labour within the home. The dilemma for Gar remains with the risk that he knows that should he stay, his community and family can kill him, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually but in also recognising that the psychological after-effects of emigration can equally carry such repercussions:

Gar is going because he has to go and the boy and man fight in him! He will marry there. He will have privacy and dignity. He'll meet people who's [sic] heard of Mendelsohn. Chinese women. Dirty books. No Religion. No Canon. No cloying, sentimental, destroying family ties that he so desires to cut and who's cutting he knows will kill him.³⁵⁶

A further consequence of Gar's decision lies towards his future identity. The inward/outward conflict between Public and Private reflect the condition being experienced in Ireland in this time, which Anthony Roche calls 'the exile's detachment'.³⁵⁷ The key emotion portrayed by Gar in the play is, as he says himself, Loneliness.³⁵⁸ Gar's detachment is felt as much towards his Irishness as much as it is from his family, friends or neighbours. His is already, on the eve of his departure, a 'nowhere man', and displaying symptoms of a hybrid self-identity he is failing to process. The hybrid self-identity express by Gar is a product of his youth, access to third-level education, desire for personal development and aspiration for self-amelioration through attainment of intellectual, social and artistic independence in a pluralising American society. The trope of hybrid identities of varying kinds would also dominate wider plays of the period, especially at the Pike Theatre, where

³⁵⁵ MS 37,048/1, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Anthony Roche, "Brian Friel and Tom Murphy: Form of Exile" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, ed. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 324.

³⁵⁸ Brian Friel, *Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 88.

drawing on influences of the Gate Theatre,³⁵⁹ in particular, the focus on European and American avant-garde theatre and embracing of the international and cosmopolitan sensibilities in terms of stated goals and programmes. There would be a form of hybrid identity for Irish drama itself whereby an alternative and influential tradition of dramatic production and presentation would emerge and provide a cultural expression for modernising Ireland.

Hybrid Identities and Modern Society on Stage

In discussing emigration patterns from the Great Famine of nineteenth century Ireland, through to the stemming of the outward tide in the 1960s, Emile Pine outlines the often experienced feeling of shame of those emigrants who return in Ireland. The act of returning is 'acted out' as an admission of failure and highlights how the concept of 'home' is fluid in Irish theatre:

The experience of homecoming is thus not as harmonious or simple as the returning emigrants might wish and this is fore-shadowed in the idea of nostalgia itself, which so often drives the return home . . . The nostalgia impulse that drives the returning emigrant to seek tradition and correctedness will thus also always entail the trauma of recognising that home as you know it – or have half-remembered it – is not, in fact, the place to which you actually return.³⁶⁰

Pine addresses the early plays of Friel and Tom Murphy and the "psychotic disturbance caused by emigration and return, as emigration comes to symbolise for both playwrights a condition of emotional, cultural, as well as physical, exile."³⁶¹ To take this point, I argue that it infers that the returning migrant distorts the memory, trauma and personal and societal experience of their departure. When they leave they are 'Irish', but when they return they are 'Irish-American'. However, those who return from England, Africa or elsewhere do not carry these adjectives of social and national assimilation. The terms 'British-Irish', 'English-Irish' 'African-Irish' or other such terms do not commonly enter social criticism. The term

³⁵⁹ Both co-founders of the Pike Theatre, Carolyn Swift and Alan Simpson met while working in various roles at the Gate Theatre in the 1940s.

³⁶⁰ Emilie Pine, "The Homeward Journey: The Returning Emigrant in Recent Irish Theatre", *Irish University Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Autumn-Winter, 2008), 310.

³⁶¹ Pine, 2008, 312.

'West-Brit' does enter the discourse as a derogatory term, used by Friel himself in a 1972 interview where in criticising the mass-influence of American popular culture on the Irish psyche he said: We are no longer even West Britons", we are East Americans.³⁶² 'Irish-Americanism', by contrast and as a culturally constructed identity, is staged and portrayed as a metamorphosis, or at least a blending of nationality and identity from Ireland and the United States. This non-recognition of acquired nationality, in the form of language, religion, culture and customs, is foreign and 'other'.

The 'Americanisation' of Irish popular culture and society, industry was undeniable at this time of the early 1960s. With specific reference to Friel, Helen Lojek writes in reference to vulgar and ostentatious displays of material wealth:

Although Brian Friel is too good a playwright to create mere stereotypes, there are indicators he expects audiences on both sides of the Atlantic to recognise a common cluster of Irish-American characteristics.³⁶³

Further outlined by Kenny is evidence of the internalised questioning by Gar of his departure from Ireland, based on the direct experience of migrants from Ireland in this period to the United States and their struggle to be 'countryless', to be somewhere in the metaphorical 'mid-Atlantic' sphere of intercultural isolation.

The development of an ethnic identity among the American Irish involved a twofold and simultaneous struggle over power: within emerging ethnic communities and between those communities and the host society. At stake in the former struggle was the meaning of an emerging ethnic identity.³⁶⁴

The Abbey Theatre was invited to participate in the Boston Arts Festival in June 1959. Claiming to be the largest free arts festival in the United States, The Boston Festival attracted audiences of over twenty thousand people annually. In a further nod to the Hollywood connection of Irish actors, the Boston Festival enquired specifically if Barry

³⁶² Murray, ed. (1999), 49.

³⁶³ Helen Lojek, "Stage-Irish-Americans in the Plays of Brian Friel", *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Dec 1991. 78.

³⁶⁴ Kenny, 2003, 147.

FitzGerald was available to travel with the Abbey Theatre company.³⁶⁵ What mattered most for the Boston Festival was ensuring that the Oscar-winning Barry FitzGerald, a recognisable face to followers of both American stage and screen, could participate and lend further credence to an exportable and authentic Irish brand of drama. This would add to the argument of Helen Lojek for the identification of 'the stage-Irish-American', Lojek writes:

The Stage-Irish-American . . . still likes to take a drop, but the blarney has disintegrated into a crass braggadocio which dwells unbearably on America's golden opportunities and the (often exaggerated) financial success which Irish-Americans have won there . . . they demonstrate a weepy sentimentality about 'the ol' sod', which they like to visit in triumph every few years . . . and of course, they like to return to Ireland to die, or at least be buried.

Phyllis Ryan and Gemini Productions were intended to be the original producers of *Philadelphia!* in Ireland. However, correspondence between Friel and Ryan show that this agreement ended on bad terms.³⁶⁶ Oscar Lewenstein, Friel's literary agent, relayed to Friel that the breakdown in relations that saw the transfer of the Dublin première production from Phyllis Ryan to Hilton Edwards had a "traumatic effect" on Ryan.³⁶⁷ The fact that Ryan was chosen to be the first producer of the Friel's play is testament to Ryan's recognition as a producer and director. Ryan's work with the Globe Theatre Company and later with Orion Productions was typified by a modern vision in terms of how Irish theatre could embrace European and international elements in terms of staging while also reflect contemporary social reflection.

Following this break, Lowenstein suggested that Hilton Edwards and the Gate Theatre produce Friel's play.³⁶⁸ Being an established director of an institution such as the Gate Theatre, which Edwards co-directed with his partner, Micheal MacLiammóir, gave the added credentials necessary for Friel's play to succeed in securing a major American or

³⁶⁵ Abbey Theatre. Correspondence re:General correspondence with the Abbey Theatre. 1959-1959. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM_00005864, p9.

³⁶⁶ It is unclear from the letters what the exact reasons were regarding the breakdown in agreement made for Phyllis Ryan to produce *Philadelphia!* It can, however, be argued that Hilton Edwards, as a more prominent director and with more established contacts both through the Gate Theatre and elsewhere, such as in America, could have given Friel the international outlet and billing for the play he had hoped for.

³⁶⁷ MS 37,048/1 Letter from Oscar Lewenstein to Brian Friel, 1 June 1964, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁶⁸ MS 37,048/1 Letter from Oscar Lewenstein to Brian Friel, 8 June 1964, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

London production. Friel's insistence on maintaining his relation with a literary agent based outside of Ireland and in maintaining a focus on securing an international, especially American-based production, further evidences the argument that the play was designed for export and to be an instrument for internationalising Irish drama in line with contemporary social, economic and political developments of the 1960s.

Friel's fear was that if the play was to be produced in Dublin it would not receive fair consideration from international scouts and critics. Lowenstein convinces Friel that the Dublin Theatre Festival should be the première occasion for *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, as such a billing was imperative for securing a major American production:

I do appreciate your worries about what you called the 'catty, competitive, hysterical atmosphere' and about the possibility of critics leaving before the second week [of the festival]. On the other hand, think of the number of Dublin Theatre Festival plays in the last couple of years that have been tried out there and subsequently mounted in the West End. *Stephen D*, *The Roses are Real* . . . *Philadelphia* is a much better play than either of them or even *The Roses are Real* and I have every confidence that once it has a stage it will proceed in a direct line from Dublin to London.³⁶⁹

In an attempt for staging an authentic Irish-American 'dramatic product', Friel insisted that if and when the play did have an American staging it should have a complete Irish cast because:

it could serve the play better than a mixed Irish-U.S. company could but more because a complete Irish company would have a special foreign appeal in the same way that an all-English company or an all-French or an all-Russian company has in a foreign capital and an enduring belief that there is an authenticity that the non-native actor can't supply."³⁷⁰

The race to get an international production for *Philadelphia* was an all-consuming effort for nearly two years between 1963 and 1965.³⁷¹ By this time the question of staging Ireland

³⁶⁹ MS 37, 048/1 Letter from Suzanne Finley to Brian Friel, 16 June 1964, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁷⁰ MS 37,048/1 Letter from Brian Friel to Oscar Lowenstein, 21 Oct 1964, Brian Friel Papers, NLI, Dublin.

³⁷¹ These efforts were led by the literary agents who were representing Brian Friel, namely Spencer Curtis Brown and Oscar Lowenstein.

'authentically' and what constituted how Irishness was acted and performed had addressed much of the work being presented at Dublin's Pike Theatre. The production of Irishness was becoming more hybrid (influenced by international cultural styles of performance, direction, design and movement – as evidenced on the growing pocket-theatres of Dublin during the 1950s) and intercultural in its construct and expression. Blending forms of music, performance styles and cultural histories, the Pike Theatre, a leading exponent of this theatrical movement from its first inception in 1951, presented an alternative dramatic vision of modern Ireland.

Other Stages –Intercultural Influence and Production at the Pike Theatre

The Pike Theatre Club was established with the procurement of a dedicated premises, located at 18A Herbert Lane, off Dublin's Baggot Street, in 1953. Founded by husband and wife pair, Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift, the theatre offered an alternative to traditional Irish theatre by presenting a provocative and varied repertoire of European and American avant-garde theatre.

The theatre had capacity for approximately sixty seats but frequently had many more standing and fitting where possible. In 1957, the *Sunday Times* critic Harold Hobson described the cramped and atmospheric experience of the Pike Theatre, where audiences were:

jammed together tight as bricks in a wall, sweating, sticking our elbows into our neighbours', digging our knees into the people in the row in front, sore from the knees of the people in the row behind . . .³⁷²

As part of their remit, the Pike produced a number of late-night revues that consisted of a large number of fast-paced sketches, known as 'follies', which were a social barometer for the time, poking fun while also offering criticism and satire on Irish culture and politics.

³⁷² Colin Murphy, "The pornographer who invented Wanderley Wagon", *Magill*, 15 June 2007. <https://magill.ie/archive/pornographer-who-invented-wanderley-wagon> Accessed 16 July 2018.

Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh consider Irish culture and its history through the methodological framework presented by performance studies. They question how Irish culture was 'performed' and also how it was assimilated into a cultural export from Ireland. Irish culture has always, of course, assimilated and received imported cultures also. Brady and Walsh conceptualise how intercultural exchanges through song, theatre, dance, body, gender and race were part of a performative expression of Irish identity and culture within international contexts. Brady and Walsh draw on a range of approaches to historical sources, such as anthropology, sociology, ethnography, gender, sexuality and critical race theory in their examination of the constructs of Irish national performances and cultural constructs through consideration of place, time, geopolitics, landscape and of course various performative forms.³⁷³

Bernadette Sweeney notes that "Ireland's performative culture is rich in folk rituals that give the country an arts heritage based not only in text, but also in gesture and embodied, participatory traditions. Through a tradition of contemporary folk infused drama which incorporated song, music, body and tradition, "Irish ritual and performance traditions complement and complicate the literary in Irish theatre".³⁷⁴ The value of a documentation of such forms of non-literary performance and of embodied interculturalism (the rhythms, movement, speech, accent, colour, costume, and skin of characters as represented and performed through actors on stage) of Irish theatre in the post-war era, is central to constructing a more nuanced and diverse national performance history. Sweeney adds, "the staging of such rituals and traditions may be seen to educate audiences, to foster an understanding of national expressive practices and to communicate on a range of levels by drawing on distinctly physical idioms. The performance of ritual and tradition as a theatrical construct ensures a vibrancy of form as such expression takes full advantage of the mutual presences of audience and performers."³⁷⁵

The growing realisation of Irish culture as a 'legitimate' commodity for export was recognised by the Irish tourism board, Bórd Fáilte, and the Irish Industrial Association (I.I.A.).

³⁷³ Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh, eds. *Cross Roads: Performance studies and Irish Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 4-8.

³⁷⁴ Bernadette Sweeney, "Performing Tradition", in Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh, eds. *Cross Roads: Performance studies and Irish Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 21.

³⁷⁵ Sweeney, 2009, 31.

I.I.A Ireland was formed in 1949 as part of the Department of Industry and Commerce. It was initially briefed to stimulate, support and develop export-led business and enterprise in Ireland. This covered both indigenous and foreign investment and start-up enterprises. This was against a backdrop of economic protectionism and restrictions on imports. The introduction of the first Programme for Economic Expansion was part of a series of moves in the 1950s to achieve economic modernisation and break with isolationist and protectionist strategies. Devised by T.K. Whitaker, the programme removed such economic protectionism, encouraged Foreign Direct Investment (F.D.I.) and promoted exports.³⁷⁶ At this time that the I.I.A. was courting foreign investment for Irish capital development, the Pike, primarily through Carolyn Swift, was devising and staging follies which included sketches that sought to respond and examine this commodification and commercialisation of the Irish national 'brand' and political materialism. Ireland, its land, people and culture were being offered in return as a form of collateral for largescale multinational development.

In August 1958, the Pike staged *Irish Coffee*, which starred Othmar Remy Arthur in a musical performance that was a fusion of Irish and West Indian cultures and tradition. In the production, Arthur sang a number of Trinidadian calypsos and folk songs, which were interspersed with Irish traditional music and song. *Irish Coffee* was described as:

An all-musical show putting forth the best in Irish and West Indian singing and dancing. The instrument selected to represent Irish music was the uilleann pipes and to the play the uilleann pipes in the show was [Wexford musician] Tommy Reck, known as the best player to use the traditional reed . . .³⁷⁷

Irish Coffee was written by Carolyn Swift as an intercultural showcase for modern Irish cultural and theatrical influence. It can also be understood to be a post-colonial statement by the mutual embracement of parallel folk and native music and oral story-telling traditions of both Ireland and Trinidad. The event allowed for alternative performance practices such as musical improvisation by each participating musician:

³⁷⁶ <https://www.idaireland.com/about-ida/history> Accessed 29 October 2017.

³⁷⁷ "Irish Coffee, starring Othmar Arthur sings calypsos", Evening Mail, 1 August 1958. 10813/388 Scrapbook of Press Cuttings, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin. It starred Noel Lynch, Harry O'Reilly, Seamus Dunne, May Ollis (who sang ballads by Donagh McDonagh), and John Dowdall on accordion.

Irish Coffee consists of . . . ballads of Ireland, the U.S., Brazil, Peru, Mexico and the West Indies. The show is unique in that the singers introduce their own songs in unscripted fashion . . . the only script is by Carolyn Swift who deals in three choruses with everything from Ronnie Delaney to Sputnik.³⁷⁸

It was noted in the *Evening Herald* that “at the play interval you can buy a coffee for nine-pence but added “naturally without charge at all – a present of a drop of Irish in the coffee.”³⁷⁹ The presentation of the internationalising Irish society was evidenced through the blending of musical cultures, both Irish and Caribbean, and through the symbol of Irish-International assimilation – ‘Irish Coffee’ – a commodity not grown in Ireland, and imported from various overseas countries, is laced with native Irish whiskey to form a new and hybrid cultural product which, like the Irish-American transatlantic exchange, as examined in plays by John Murphy and Brian Friel, was now a new Irish cultural export. It was noted how the ‘Irish’ element was supplied by singers, dancers and liars (comedians) with the ‘coffee’ part supplied by a cast of Indian dancers and West Indian singers , including ‘Calypso King’ Othmar Remy Arthur.

This cultural distinction can, however, be read as problematic through the division drawn between Irish and West-Indian performers along racial lines. A distinction was drawn between white Irish citizens and people of colour from emigrant backgrounds. The use of ‘coffee’ represented the non-Irish performers by both making reference both to skin colour and also native industry that was becoming increasingly exploited by western consumer culture and tastes for coffee. To further demonstrate that Ireland was now an international capital city on par with others on a global stage, as early as 1958, “the coloured singer³⁸⁰ [Arthur] who writes his own Calypsos as well as singing in opera, to make the mixture complete, has a go at an Irish reel while the whole company join him in *The Sly Mongoose*.”³⁸¹ The fusion of recognisably Irish and Caribbean performance, music, dance, and song, through the medium of a famous Jamaican calypso, sees the Pike functioning as a

³⁷⁸ *Irish Press*, 11 August 1958, 10813/388, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

³⁷⁹ *Evening Herald*, 2 August 1958, 10813/388, Scrapbook of Press Cuttings, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

³⁸⁰ The description of Othmar Remy Arthur by elements of the Irish media, such as the *Evening Mail*, as a “coloured singer” reveals the racist undertones still present within Irish society of this period.

³⁸¹ *Evening Mail*, 2 August 1958, 10813/388 Scrapbook of Press Cuttings, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

multi-national theatre and one which was performing an experimental interpretive examination of contemporary Irish and international society.

Remy Arthur was described by the *Irish Independent* as giving the revue "a slightly international flavour with some excellent renderings of negro spirituals and West Indian calypsos to his own accompaniment on guitar" (And also joined in with Reck and Dowdall in a number of Irish airs.)³⁸² The *Evening Press* led with a headline of "Turf Fire and Good Craic" – *Irish Coffee* is a cleverly devised miscellany of ballad singing, dancing and music making with a bit of gas thrown in . . . grand entertainment and strongly recommended for visitors."³⁸³ The further internationalisation of Irish culture and its equivalence to Irish theatre production, through the Pike Theatre and through the work of both Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift, was noted by the critic of British-based *The Stage* newspaper who reported the production under the headline of 'Gaelic Coffee', and who focused in on the parallel event of the Dublin Horse Show. This major international sporting event held annually, presents the Pike, and theatre itself, as alternative 'national pass-time' and does so in the form of international entertainment, for a visiting audience to Ireland, as much (if not more so) than for a Dublin or Irish audience:

Breaking Away from their usual custom of presenting intimate revues during Dublin Horse Show Week, the Dublin Pike on Monday present "Gaelic Coffee", an international entertainment which opens with songs and dances from various nations and concludes with a sing song with all the artists on the stage.³⁸⁴

The *Irish Coffee* event was also broadcast on short-circuit television to Dublin's Mansion House, seat of the Lord-Mayor. An image of Alan Simpson with Remy Arthur was published in the *Evening Mail*, standing next to the new and then state-of-the-art professional film-camera equipment used for the broadcast. Simpson and Swift were keen to become involved in new media of the time, such as television and film, through the growth of new

³⁸²*Irish Independent*, 5 August 1958, 10813/388, Scrapbook of Press Cuttings, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

³⁸³ 10813/388 Scrapbook of Press Cuttings, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin. *Evening Press*, 6 August 1958.

³⁸⁴ *The Stage*, "Gaelic Coffee" 31 July 1958, 10813/388, Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

independent film companies.³⁸⁵ The *Irish Press* made reference to how central Carolyn Swift was to this cultural exchange enterprise as deviser, script-writer and director of the concert-drama: "*Irish Coffee* consists of ballads of Ireland, the U.S., Brazil, Peru, Mexico and the West Indies. The show is unique in that the singers introduce their own songs in unscripted fashion . . . the only script is by Carolyn Swift who deals in three choruses with everything from Ronnie Delaney to Sputnik."³⁸⁶

Similarly, a year later, Carolyn Swift devised another revue, *Follies in the Sun* that would reconnect on this intercultural motif, with particular reference to Irish-Caribbean performance style, music and dance. *Follies in the Sun*, written by Swift, was staged at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, in December 1959. The cast included four West Indian entertainers, with eight from "home" (Ireland), "perhaps in an attempt to weld these opposites together . . ." Cast member, Jeffrey Bideu, was a ritual and folk drummer as well as being an expert at all other branches of percussion . . . he has made a special study of the West Indian folk rhythms and dancing and often spends weeks in the remote west Indian islands collecting folk music of his people in much the same way as Seamus Ennis and Sean Mac Reamonn and others have done for Irish folk music.³⁸⁷

The West Indian dance arrangements for *Follies in the Sun* were arranged by Edric Connor and Boscoe Holder, both regarded as pioneering Trinidadian-born artists – composer and visual artist/choreographer respectively. Amanda Bidnell investigated British and imperial identity, decolonization, and colonial migration through the B.B.C. careers of Trinidadians, Edric and Pearl Connor.³⁸⁸ Connor began his career at the B.B.C. in the early 1950s, near the high water-mark of that institution's enthusiasm for colonial artists, and the cultural connection between Great Britain and her Empire that they represented. It was a perfect fit: not only did Connor possess natural singing and dramatic abilities, but he was a trove of information about West Indian culture and history.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ In Chapter 4 of this thesis, I note that Alan Simpson wrote to theatre manager Louis Elliman seeking to apply on behalf of himself and Swift for any openings in Elliman's new film company, 1962.

³⁸⁶ *Irish Press*, 11 August 1958, 10813/388, Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

³⁸⁷ *Irish Independent*, 16 December 1958, 10813/388, Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

³⁸⁸ Amanda Bidnell, *West Indian Interventions at the Heart of the Cultural Establishment: Edric Connor, Pearl Connor, and the BBC*, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2013, 58–83. doi:10.1093/tcbh/hwr06

³⁸⁹ Bidnell, 68.

Follies in the Sun became a formal and politicised event when attended by officials such as Minister for Education, Jack Lynch and the Irish Ambassador to France, W.P. Fay. New and modern Irish cultural performance, away from traditional middle-class bases, such as the Abbey Theatre, was becoming fashionable for those in positions of power and influence to attend in personal as well as professional capacities. At the Gate Theatre, a spirit of jovial entertainment was recorded, with “a packed house . . . with the more musical element tapping their toes to the Calypso rhythms of the West Indian musician . . . Everyone thronged towards the foyer at the interval.”³⁹⁰

Through her writing of the book and lyrics for *Follies in the Sun*, Swift examined and offered a new dramatic representation of contemporary Ireland, through an inter/multi-cultural exchange of music, song, dance and drama. By weaving in subtle but important satirical comment on Irish industry, cultural reception and racial perception, modern Ireland was depicted as a receptive space for inward cultural assimilation as well as export of traditional Irish cultural norms and stereotypes.

Follies in the Sun was described as “an Irish-West Indian Revue”, which starred West Indians Ena Babb and Jeffrey Biddeau. . . [which] was written by Swift, whose flair for original productions finds an outlet in ‘rope’ in the show. All the settings will be made from sisal, the raw material of rope. “This is a new idea and we’re anxious to see how it will go.”³⁹¹

“Pike Revue Aids Export Trade” ran the headline of the *Irish Times* in January 1959 and explained the significance of product placement within the theatre productions associated with the Pike and how audience reception was linked with perception - that the Pike was fashionable to be associated with, bringing in international musicians and dancers from ‘exotic’ locations but still producing an ‘Irish product’.

Last summer when the Pike Theatre Company presented in its back lane theatre a musical entertainment called *Irish Coffee*, photographs of the star, Othmer Remy Arthur enjoying the drink which gave the show its name were used by Córas

³⁹⁰ *Irish Independent*, 16 December 1958, 10813/388, Scrap Book, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

³⁹¹ “Brr! It’s So Cold Two artists from Trinidad”, *Sunday Independent*, 14 December 1958. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

Tráchtála Teo, to promote its sales of Irish Whiskey back in his native West Indies. Now, once again, photographs of a Pike show are being used to boost exports to the Caribbean. This time it is the products of Irish Ropes Ltd. From which are made the colourful West Indian Settings for the present revue at the Gate Theatre . . . the raw sisal used in the show to make everything from jungle settings to a gat market scene.³⁹²

As happened a year earlier in 1958 and with the Pike production of *Irish Coffee*, another special event took place at the Mansion House in Dublin to tie-in with *Follies in the Sun*. Dubbed a 'Calypso Céilií', the Mansion House event included the Caribbean stars of the review perform the Irish folk dance, the Walls of Limerick, with Irish music group, Gael Linn. Star of the revue, Chloe Du Pont stated she was curious to see "just how alike Irish music and dance have a lot in common with our own" [West Indian]. Despite a sprained knee, dancer Ena Babb resisted Doctor's orders and danced at the ceilií with Gael Linn (who previously produced *An Giall* by Behan in Irish at An Damer Hall), saying "I just could not resist the Irish music".³⁹³

Despite the manifesto³⁹⁴ of the Pike Theatre being dedicated towards avant-garde drama concerned with European and American forms that spoke to contemporary society and of high artistic merit (and having record of considerable achievement in this regard), the Pike, nevertheless, was centrally placed under the auspices of many state agencies who were propagating the new Irish cultural brand for commercial and political gain. The Pike fitted the mark brilliantly. It was adventurous, risky, irreverent, youthful and brash. It was artistically challenging and provoked strong responses from official sources. It fulfilled, however, many of the goals of a new outward facing cultural economic policy.

³⁹² "Pike Revue Aids Export Trade", *Irish Times*, 14 January 1959. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

³⁹³ *Irish Times*, 27 January 1959. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

³⁹⁴ The Pike Theatre artistic manifesto, published in the programme of the production of G.K. Chesterton's *The Surprise*, stated that "our policy is to present plays of all countries on all subjects, written from whatever viewpoint, provided they be of interest and be dramatically satisfying. As our theatre is a small, intimate one, we intend to avail of the opportunities afforded to stage productions which, for various reasons, would not be seen on either the larger or smaller commercial stages, and we hope to give theatregoers opportunities to see more of the struggle going on at present in the world of theatre to introduce new techniques and new subjects in play writing. On the lighter side, we intend presenting late-night, intimate revue during Christmas and other holidays." Swift, 1973. 105.

In 1958, a group of fifteen travel agents from the Manchester area who were in Ireland in Ireland to familiarise themselves with the country's attractions for pike and other course fishing attended the Pike Theatre's *Follies in the Sun* at the Gate Theatre as guests of Ryan's Car Hire Ltd. The group were later entertained at a cocktail party hosted by Murray's Car Rentals, another Dublin based company. The arrangements for the group in attending the Pike Theatre were made by John McSweeney of the Promotions Department, Bórd Fáilte.³⁹⁵ Loosely playing on Ireland's reputation for fishing tourism, the Pike theatre was appropriated for commercialisation and tourism promotion by Bórd Fáilte's increasing awareness and skill at promoting Irish culture to paying customers abroad. For Ireland's cultural reputation, the Pike, in the absence of a fully functional Abbey Theatre, offered a modern alternative with a European *Théâtre de Poche* aesthetic with energetic management in Simpson and Swift who were both interested in developing their venture into a statement of artistic achievement and ambition.

Between 1958 and 1959, The Pike, particularly through the work of Carolyn Swift in devising such revue works, acted as an alternative theatre for the expression of contemporary urban society and presented Dublin as a cosmopolitan city. It was also concurrently seen by those in position of power and political influence to represent new Irish economic and cultural confidence. The Pike Theatre itself, as argued by Lionel Pilkington, was advocating to be an alternative to the limiting formality the title of 'national' can place upon a theatre. The Pike was responding to national economic policy, political and corporate relationships as well as international travel and cultural exchange.

Within twelve months of the publishing of the white paper on economic reform, drafted by T.K. Whitaker, the Pike was performing its own role as an international theatre within Dublin. In performing this role at symbolic venues such as Dublin's Mansion House, home of Dublin's Lord Mayor and centre of city administration and Dublin's Gate Theatre, a cosmopolitan theatre steeped in expressionistic vision of Ireland within Europe and the world, The Pike was providing itself as a willing participant in the modernisation of Ireland. The Pike did so also as part of a cultural exchange through which Irish audiences were

³⁹⁵ "Will See Pike Follies", 26 January 1959, *Evening Mail* and *Evening Press*, 26 January 1959. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

experiencing unique theatrical productions which blended traditional Irish music and dance with Indo-Caribbean performance, language and music, as well as a hybrid mix of both performed cultures. Also, the revues, under Swift's direction employed use of clowning, mime, comedy and cabaret to create an altogether alternative form of modern Irish drama.

The reaction to the casting and format of the productions detailed the public reception of the foreign and exotic but also local appeal and recognition among audience members to a hybrid Hiberno-Caribbean culture. Cleo Du Pont, an established West Indian cabaret star is billed as "the bronze Sabrina;"³⁹⁶ *A Sunday Independent* review, of *Follies in the Sun* records it as a "fast moving and full-blooded . . . Othmar Remy Arthur with calypsos and guitar and Milo O'Shea give the revue most of its vitality . . . O'Shea a master of silent communication . . . Jeffrey Biddeau is a talented artist and his demonstration of the limbo well worth the applause it receives."³⁹⁷ The *Irish Press* cited Laurie Morton's political sketch, "A Child's Plea"; while the *Irish Independent* called the production a "Rich menu in new follies" with polarising description of cultures with foreign 'exotic' elements in comparison to more 'native' representation by Irish artists - "West Indian calypso artistes, Othmar Remy Arthur and Cleo Du Pont and dancers Jeffrey Biddeau and Ena Babb provide exotic effects while native entertainers, Anna Manahan, Noel Lynch, Charlie Roberts, Laurie Morton and superb clown Milo O'Shea, add Hibernian sparkle. Paddy Long and Nora Gray add to the fun."³⁹⁸

By virtue of the level of product placement for Irish whiskey, the Irish coffee product itself, and the staging and scenography that used so much of Irish rope, (which was a growing

³⁹⁶ *Empire News*, 21 December 1958. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

³⁹⁷ *The Sunday Independent*, 28 December 1958. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

³⁹⁸ *Irish Independent*, 27 December 1958. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin. Further examples of comments upon racial concerns in Dublin society at this time was seen in an early draft, c. mid-1960s, of *The Death and Resurrection of Mr. Roche* by Thomas Kilroy (produced in 1968, Olympia Theatre) In a draft entitled *Where are My Neighbours*, Kilroy writes:

Kelly: "I still think you should have let in those African boys. Add a bit of colour to the furniture.

Missus: Their ways are not our ways.

Kelly: Amen!

Missus:What would the girls upstairs say if they had black foreigners on their doorstep?

Kelly: (Mocking gesture) Save them! Isn't it your Christian confraternity duty? Let not the innocence of Irish womanhood be stained by contamination. Keep it colourless at all costs." (P103/57 Thomas Kilroy Archive, JHL, NUI Galway).

business employing hundreds of staff in its Kildare based plant), the Pike was mentioned in a headline in the *Irish Times* as: "Pike Revue Aids Export trade."³⁹⁹ While the Pike's intent was to subvert and unsettle expectations surrounding Irish theatre and what constituted Irish culture by its assimilation of European and American avant-gardism, it crossed over into participating in the capitalist market economics of free-trade which was strongly favoured at this time by the incumbent Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, and by his civil service staff in the Department of Finance, particularly, T.K. Whitaker.

Further Follies and Cultural Exchanges – *Say it With Follies*, 1956 - 1957

In post-Emergency, Ireland there is noticeable shift towards corporal expression and representation which challenges dramatic norms. On stages such as the Pike, post-colonial elements of formal and received expression and communication of identity were challenged through a range of multi-faceted performance styles and in particular the physically presence of actor and embodied character of colonial/post-colonial identity. As dance scholar Helen Thomas describes it, such work foregrounds the body "as a mode of communication, [and] rejects the common-sense idea that language is the central message system or that it is the only channel of meaning."⁴⁰⁰ Thomas also posits that "the ramifications of perceptions of women's bodies for social relations loomed large in second-wave feminist debates on the unequal position of women in western cultures."

Thomas examines the historical and corporal memory of racial and colonial histories through the performance of body in dance: "our bodily histories are not only entwined with our individual biographies and social locations . . . our bodies' history have much longer history and these histories are not necessarily are of our own making."⁴⁰¹ Thomas' consideration of historical cultural manifestations within bodily and chorographical representation are significant in terms of examining and understanding the personal and trans-national identities being portrayed and performed at the Pike Theatre in the 1950s. As examples of these performances, as outlined above, were of themselves racist and neo-

³⁹⁹ *Irish Times*, 14 January 1959. 10813/388 Scrapbook, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Library, Dublin.

⁴⁰⁰ Helen Thomas, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 26.

⁴⁰¹ Thomas, 2003, 150.

colonial in their representation, the representation of non-Irish bodies and immigrants on Irish stages has a complex history which must be further interrogated.

The Ireland of the mid-1950s portrayed at the Pike Theatre by Carolyn Swift and Alan Simpson was one of complex societal flux, blending European and American dramaturgical influences with innovative performance styles. It also reflected an Irish society that was changing in terms of its demographic composition and internationalisation afforded by cultural influences of imported popular culture growing intercultural tourism and exchange. The complexities of intercultural discourse in Ireland are analysed by Charlotte Mclvor, who identifies the often 'Utopic' notions surrounding intercultural studies as a direct means within the Western academy to open up the possibility of disintegrating an old, and constituting a new theatre, by joining up of a multiplicity of performance traditions. In this paradigm, ethnic-minority communities can transform the meaning of Irish culture without displacing their own native culture.⁴⁰² Nevertheless, Mclvor also identifies the complex realities where criticism of colonial histories and the placement and/or depiction of 'foreign' or 'other' within (Irish) performance has propagated or supported institutional/national colonial mind-sets through performative constructs.

How we read, remember, and consider Irish theatre within national or international contexts is a necessary and continuing conversation that must take cognisance of widening and more diverse histories. Moreover, how we construct our national histories must take into account the international and globalising constructs of the contemporary context. Lonergan adds that in contemporary Ireland, nationality is more commonly defined by identifying oneself as part of an "Irish nation," "which is related to but separate from the physical territory."⁴⁰³ The place and meaning of the positioning of the female sexualisation body, in particular, aligned with intercultural performance frameworks of race, song, folklore and colonial history also dominated the work of Carolyn Swift's later follies at the Pike Theatre.

⁴⁰² Charlotte Mclvor, *Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland: Towards a New Interculturalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 8.

⁴⁰³ Patrick Lonergan, *Theatre and Globalisation: Irish Theatre in the Celtic Drama Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 21.

Say it With Follies opened on New Year's Eve, 1956. It announced a new arrival to the Pike of the actor, Laurie Morton. Described as a "siren" by the *Irish Press* in its Christmas Eve Special Showpage,⁴⁰⁴ "Morton's alluring glance was matched only by chief dancer, seventeen-year old half-Indian Clare Dean, whose *pièce-de-resistance* [was] her Cuban dance spot."⁴⁰⁵ Entitled "Rum and Cola", this number was devised by Alan Simpson with Clare Dean's choreography. The stage was hung with fishing nets and Eoin O'Brien, brother of Conor, drama critic of the *Evening Press*, "sat on an upturned basket clutching a rum bottle, dressed as a fisherman in a big straw hat, ears and costume, making use of props left over from *The Little Hut*." The revue sketch was fired by sexual innuendo, a ploy to shock and scandalise the "ladies in the audience", as at the end of the sketch backstage would be Laurie shouting, "Oh Alan, Simpson, You're no good", before Carolyn Swift would reply back from the auditorium to "keep it down."⁴⁰⁶ The reputation of the Follies had been growing where just weeks previously the *Evening Mail* announced the revue would introduce the first mink bikini to the Irish stage. Other scenes would send up the growing tourist towns and seaside resorts of Ireland, experiencing the monetary benefits of globalising travel and tourism, in a comparison with the French luxury resort of wealth, culture and grandeur in Cannes:

Can't I see Monarchs at play all round Galway Bay, Nor I'm sure in Tramore;
Not a single Marquis will have balls in Kilkee, now I swear in Kenmare;
Film stars don't even dream of a café in Sneem, - on my oath - or in Howth;
And you can't lose your all at Casinos in Youghal,
But you can in Cannes."⁴⁰⁷

The press reviews were uniform in celebrating the success of *Say it With Follies*, matching Dublin with London of the 1940s, a golden period of the style and revue at the Ambassador Theatre. The Pike, with its topical, comic works and witty satire, was single-handedly making Ireland an international cultural space. The cast would inevitably fragment as a result of this

⁴⁰⁴ Carolyn Swift, *Stage by Stage* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1985), 227.

⁴⁰⁵ Swift, 1985, 22.

⁴⁰⁶ Swift, 1985, 227-228.

⁴⁰⁷ Swift, 1985, 229.

success, and most to big projects outside of Ireland – Milo O'Shea to a St. Patrick's Day show in Vancouver, with some added radio and television work in Canada. Dermot Kelly would fill O'Shea's role before himself playing Fluther in O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* at the Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow.

On the 6th January 1957, the *Sunday Press* declared it felt like “snatching back the title *Woman of the Year* from Princess Grace and bestowing it on Carolyn Swift, who wrote the book and lyrics of the fastest, slickest, wittiest and smoothed show of its kind . . . she has taught us how to laugh at ourselves, and through her eyes, we see politics, the ‘bona fides’, Italian films, Spanish dancing and gate crashers as we certainly never saw them before.”⁴⁰⁸

Say it With Follies allowed for a direct and multi-faceted political satire on the development of modern Ireland. It addressed film culture with a sketch of a gangster and his moll who ran a racket on women's underwear; a sketch set in a primary school where the pupils were serving government ministers, such as William Norton, Gerry Sweetman, John Costello, James Dillon and Noel Browne. In a statement about the non-representation of women in politics, gender-blind casting was used on this sketch with Laurie Morton playing James Dillon. The ‘students’ in the class were asked to spell ‘greyhound’, to which James Dillon, Minister for Agriculture, replied in full political retort to the pros and cons of the Greyhound Industrial Bill, meaning the country was in fact ‘going to the dogs.’ International politics and the import for Ireland's postcolonial context was also of interest to Swift's work. A sketch entitled “Rise and Fall” was written specifically for actor David Kelly and depicted a foppish Trinity graduate with little ‘real-world experience’ and how he would fare given that the British Empire was slowly losing its place of position in power and privilege on the world stage:

What's Happening in the Empire?

It's in a desperate Way:

Once, work was sure in Singapore

⁴⁰⁸ Swift, 1985, 230.

But isn't so today.⁴⁰⁹

The sketch was regularly updated and during the run of *Say it With Follies* it made reference to the then resignation of British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, who stepped owing to the non-involvement of U.S. military support for the Anglo-French policy in the Suez campaign of 1956, which heavily eroded British influence in the Middle-East thereafter. The Pike, through Swift in particular, acted as an active barometer for the appetite of Dublin audiences for international political satire and irreverent late-night entertainment. *Say It With Follies* would run for over one hundred performances in Dublin and tour to London and Cambridge in Autumn 1957.

The internationalisation of Irish culture that it ridiculed was made so successful by astute casting of a popular and versatile group of young and multi-talented actors who all shared a sense of comic acting ability as well as more traditional dramatic training to which audiences could relate. By playing on individual cast member's personal strengths and traits, such as David Kelly's dandyism and Anglo-Irish accent for the role of the Trinity graduate in *Rise and Fall* and such as the comic-timing and of Milo O'Shea and Lelia Doolan, the Pike aesthetic, in terms of acting, became influenced by the body and speech patterns of its main actors. Carolyn Swift was aware of the management of such company traits and commented: "I always tried to tailor my material to the particular talents of the cast . . ." ⁴¹⁰ Nevertheless, the use of the sexualisation of women actors in the cast and the recurrent placement of the female body as sexualised object in itself rather than as a criticism of sexualised treatment of women is evidenced in many sketches, such as the "Flamenco Finale" of *Say it with Follies*.

In "Flamenco Finale", the costumes were designed by Eileen Long and Deirdre McSharry and were a mixture of Irish and Spanish [themes], with white blouses or shirts that tied at the waist leaving a bare midriff above red petticoats for girls and dark trousers for the men, who all had Spanish hats. . . " ⁴¹¹ The setting for this musical finale was "a traditional pub scene in which Irish folk dance and song was presented with all the panache, head-tossing, fore and

⁴⁰⁹ Swift, 1985, 233.

⁴¹⁰ Swift, 1985, 235.

⁴¹¹ Swift, 1985, 237.

sensuality associated with flamenco with the cries of "Arís" and "Go Maith" replaced with "Olé."⁴¹²

The achievement of the follies and under the vision of Carolyn Swift⁴¹³ was extremely important for modern Irish culture and theatre. It provided a form of theatrical innovation and production that otherwise was not developed in Ireland. Pocket theatres at the time were vibrant in Dublin as has recently been discussed by Lionel Pilkington.⁴¹⁴

The '37 Club'⁴¹⁵, for example, founded by Barry Cassin and Nora Lever had a stage measuring twelve feet by eight. The auditorium consisted of four tiered rows of wooden benches. A full-house was forty dedicated souls.⁴¹⁶

Nora and I were consciously avant-garde. Our aim was to stage what we considered worthwhile plays not seen in the commercial theatres. I remember *Leonarda* by Björnstjerne Björnson, *The Rainmaker* by N. Richard Nash, *A Man with a Load of Mischief* by Clemence Dane, and *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood and Ronald Gow, a play that dealt with trapped lives in industrial England. A number of interesting one-acts included *Portrait of a Madonna* by Tennessee Williams, in which Nora gave a performance of poignant sensitivity . . . we were fortunate in our set designers. With meticulous realism, Anne Yeats painted, one over the other, four layers of peeling wallpaper for *Portrait of a Madonna*. The result was remarkably atmospheric . . . Our most imaginative designer was Tomás Mac Anna, his assistant Paddy Mooney at his side."⁴¹⁷

However, the political commentary, the topical and quick-change format of the productions themselves provided an intimate spectacle that was invigorating, stimulating, provocative, sexually charged as well as highly entertaining. It was the contemporary model of

⁴¹² Swift, 1985, 237.

⁴¹³ While Swift was the driving force behind the Follies as a concept, there were contributions from various other people and cast members at the Pike, including Alan Simpson. Swift says in her memoir: "I believe the variety achieved by having so many contributors was what made this revue our most successful and that ideally no revue should be written by one person, no matter how talented." (Swift, 1985, p. 231)

⁴¹⁴ Lionel Pilkington, "The Little Theatres of the 1950s", eds. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 286 – 306.

⁴¹⁵ The 37 Club was located at 37 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin and had seating capacity for forty patrons.

⁴¹⁶ Barry Cassin, *I Never Had a Proper Job* (Dublin: Liberties Press, 2012), 108.

⁴¹⁷ Cassin, 109.

internationally influenced modern Irish culture: versatile, well-produced, streamlined, yet distinctly Irish.

The Pike became a selling-point for international visitors in Dublin who read the frequently positive reviews and intrigued by the unique late-night performances of the follies, and also for the business delegates visiting Ireland who were brought to shows by politicians and investors (who were themselves being 'sent-up' on stage). On display was a youthful, energetic, innovative and cultured Irish society – a performative display of modernisation that belied much lived reality of rural and urban unemployment, poor housing, youth disillusionment and emigration. The Pike venture was considered as a valuable asset by tourism chiefs and politicians who wished to present Dublin as a cultured European capital city that was on par with any major continental city. Theatres such as the Pike showed that Ireland mattered as a destination for both industry, commerce and international tourism, as well as for avant-garde and contemporary art. Intercultural familiarity, with traditional cottages and pubs with turf fires that were also home to Spanish Flamenco dancing and music, signalled a shift in cultural awareness and modernisation among many circles of influence in Dublin, such as politicians and business leaders.

This new dramaturgy brought a non-traditional visualisation of Ireland into Irish drama. Gone were bare-footed and petticoat-clad peasant women as versions of 'Aisling' or idealised Gaelic Ireland. Likewise the male hero was not a figure of revolutionary bravery or filled with 'fine words', the youth of modern Ireland were portrayed as curious, worldly and cosmopolitan, wearing their new-found confidence in an external display of independence. Costume, and the body it encapsulated, were tied to a finding a form that was less identifiably 'Irish' but more connected to a diasporic and intercultural social reality. As Helen Thomas examines, the communicative ability of corporeal expression of self and identity, enabled a community of actors, under direction of Swift and Simpson, which worked to subvert Catholic teachings and sensibilities around conservative presentation of the body. At the Pike, the body in performance was sensual, exotic, communicative, and subversive to conservative sensibilities but yet still presented contradictory forms, such as the sexualisation and objectification of the female body and also of the considered 'exotic and foreign' immigrant body, seen within the follies under racial and gendered constructs.

The body as performed in post-Emergency Ireland is further foregrounded throughout *The Scatterin'*, written by James McKenna and produced by Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift at the Abbey Lecture Hall during the Dublin Theatre Festival of 1960. *The Scatterin'* is set in working-class inner-city areas of Dublin city in contemporary 1950s Ireland. The play addressed youth disaffection with modern Irish society and the lack of access to economic opportunity by those of lower and working class communities. *The Scatterin'* is a fusion of music and dance performance, in terms of both contemporary form and style, such as rock 'n' roll and jazz, but also classical styles such as ballet and mime performance. James McKenna, through his characters uses costume to express identity and self-identification, to groups such as 'Teddy Boys' or 'Rockers'. At one point, John and Jemmo put on the juke-box in what the stage directions describe as "*a wild, brief interlude of music and dancing is ushered in with a record of Fats Domino singing "Be My Guest"*".⁴¹⁸ The boys jive from their positions into a line at stage right, facing the girls, who at a certain spot of the music turn and dance to centre, facing the boys, who dance to meet them. At other times in the play, the music becomes synchronised and onomatopoeic with the dialogue and action. "Eight heavy chords to represent on-stage arrival of policemen – dialogue becoming synced with rhythm."⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Abbey Theatre. *The Scatterin'*, 04 Dec 1973 [script]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 11122_S_0001, p17. NOTE: In the script retained within the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, the song choice by Fats Domino is *Rosaline* not *Be My Guest*.

⁴¹⁹ James McKenna, *The Scatterin'*, 1960, Prompt Script. p. 12. Simpson Papers, JHL, NUI Galway.



Figure 12 Scene from *The Scatterin'* revival production at the Abbey Theatre, 4 December 1974. Directed by Alan Simpson.⁴²⁰

Many of the male characters display a brash and confident masculinity, often aggressively sexual towards the female characters, wolf-whistling, calling and 'aggressive grabbing' of the women on stage to get their attention. Sue, in response, reacts to the misogynistic actions which undermines contemporary masculinity of Jemmo and others as being aligned with a failed self-identity, dependent on historical ideals of gendered social roles:

SUE: The big men are all dead. All we are left with now are the maggots who sit around nursing a complex about the things they haven't done, nor won't do. The wild colonial boys who never do anything till they leave the country and then only prove that the stage-Irishman really does exist.⁴²¹

Sue observes what Gar and Curly also experienced and represented in Friel and Murphy's plays respectively, and also what Hugh Leonard satirised in *A Walk on the Water*, also in

⁴²⁰ Abbey Theatre. *The Scatterin'*, 04 Dec 1973 [photographs]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4591_PH_0001, p2.

⁴²¹ James McKenna, *The Scatterin'*, 1960, Prompt Script. p. 9. Simpson Papers, JHL, NUI Galway.

1960, as part of the same Dublin Theatre Festival. As seen in *The Scatterin'*, the ontological disconnect between youth culture, Irish society and international contexts was examined in new and radical dramaturgical and stylistic means. The spaces of these places range from the traditional Irish cottage/shops (in transition) to lesser dramatised spaces, including the Howth pier and the working class streets of inner-city north-side Dublin. The characters presented are in conflict with older generations and are themselves the core interest of their authors – this was a new Irish drama focusing on the youth of tomorrow, rather than the 'wild colonial boys' of Irish revolutionary and colonial history.

The Pike was not without self-awareness in such concerns. It played and presented itself as cosmopolitan, exuding confidence in its success and aware of its strengths and limitations. The latter were largely resources and finances. Both Simpson and Swift were clearly ambitious, for themselves and for the Pike. They saw themselves as part of a vanguard of new Irish artists, comfortable in a sixty-seat pocket theatre but who could also easily move in circles of government ministers, ambassadors and business executives. The Pike traded on its risqué and provocative image. As financial constraints limited word-counts in advertisements (Alan Simpson recounted changing the title of Behan's play title from *The Twisting of Another Rope* to *The Quare Fellow* as it would cost less to advertise in the Dublin press who charged by the letter)⁴²² Simpson and Swift were savvy marketers and saw that the most effective advertising was through word of mouth. The press who reproduced titillating images of female actors and took pleasure in quoting the more suggestive of lines from the revues broadcast a sense of subversive irreverence.

Ironically, the small and cramped venue on Herbert Lane helped the Pike achieve notoriety as to the communal feeling of excitement and revelry from managing to gain access. In contrast to the Abbey company performing at the Queen's Theatre, an overly large, ill-equipped and poorly resourced music-hall, the experience was not being 'on the inside' and attending an Abbey production at the Queens, but rather, to paraphrase the title of Tom Murphy's play, it was important not to be 'on the outside' at the Pike. To be part of modernising culture in Dublin and Ireland was to be at the Pike and see first-hand the

⁴²² Alan Simpson, *Beckett and Behan and a Theatre in Dublin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 41.

intimacy and emotionally-charged and intellectually challenging theatre was forming an avant-garde artistic counter-culture that was aimed at renewing Ireland from within.⁴²³

Conclusion

In protected industries, as historian Phillip Ollerenshaw reminds us, Irish enterprises in post-war Ireland were typically small with low labour productivity and they were also characterised by limited success in export competitiveness. Apart from food, drink and tobacco – already established before the 1930s as Ireland's major manufactured exports – the remainder of the manufacturing sector exported only six per cent of output in 1951.⁴²⁴ The significance of this performance increases when it is recalled that the need to import domestically unavailable capital goods, industrial components, and raw materials led to severe balance-of-payments problems, deflationary budgets, recession, and increased emigration. As seen within the Pike productions and other plays such as *The Solid Gold Cadillac*, and Folly productions including *Irish Coffee* and *Follies in the Sun*, the export agenda and economic repositioning of a post-protectionist and export-led manufacturing economy, in the years immediately preceding and succeeding T.K. Whitaker's 1958 whitepaper, reconciles the Pike Theatre as a contemporary critic for the modernisation of Ireland and its economic as well as its political conservatism.

⁴²³ In describing the repertoire of plays performed at the Pike, Alan Simpson said: "I find it difficult to put these plays [works by Sartre, Fabbri, Ionescu et al] into any sort of category, except to call them plays of emotion, dealing with the relationship between men and women." (Simpson, 1962, 14-15).

⁴²⁴ Phillip Ollerenshaw, "Business and Industry", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History*, ed. Alvin Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 162-163.

Chapter 3

Radical Dramaturgies, Censorship, and Dramatic Expression: *The Ginger Man* and What They Did in Dublin.

In March 1943, Ireland, like much of Europe, was still under the wartime conditions, specific to Ireland known as 'The Emergency'. In the midst of exercising the policy of isolationist neutrality espoused by Taoiseach Eamon de Valera, fears were growing in certain circles of Dublin about permission for a secular orchestral performance to go ahead. The performance was under threat as it fell during Holy Week that year. The Gaiety Theatre was scheduled to host a recital of Sir Edward Elgar's classical orchestral rendition of Cardinal John Henry Newman's poem, *The Dream of Gerontius*. The concert was on the brink of being cancelled before, at the eleventh hour, the Archbishop intervened and granted permission for the performance, but not without expressing his displeasure at such a scheduling clash.⁴²⁵ This intervention by the Roman Catholic Church acted as a prelude for the heightened sense of tension and interference that would threaten the artistic and intellectual growth of post-war Ireland in the succeeding decade.

This chapter explores and reassesses the close and oppressive impact and influence of censorship upon Irish theatre from the late post-Emergency period of the 1950s through to the early 1960s. It will address complexities in what constituted 'Irish drama' versus British drama, and the discrepancy this dichotomy often presented in terms of 'official' reception, intervention and sanction. It will also explore radical dramaturgies and character/acting style and form, in providing accountability for the sanctioning of particular plays over others.

This period is notable for many reasons. It is of key importance to understanding the development of the post-Emergency Irish State. During this time, cultural conservatism was in operation within parameters of State-sanctioned censorship but also socially condoned conservatism within Irish society. This was primarily in the form of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and also through State 'official' censorship in the

⁴²⁵ "Oratorio for Holy Week", *Irish Times*, 8 March 1943, 1.

form of the Censorship of Publications Board. Despite the fact that no official or legislated censorship was in operation upon theatre in Ireland at this time, as opposed to that which operated in the United Kingdom, where all plays were submitted for approval prior to production to the Office of the Lord Chamberlain, the 1950s earned itself the reputation as an artistically and intellectually repressive period, frustrating for Irish writers and also Irish dramatic producers and playwrights. This period was also fuelled by a growing influence of modernising and internationalising culture through the arrival in Ireland of programmed television, a proliferation of new theatre activity, the import of European and American theatre and popular culture.

I argue that the closure of plays such as *The Ginger Man* by Irish-American playwright J.P. Donleavy in 1959, at the behest of a systematic Roman Catholic Church-driven censorship of theatre, contrary to any such remit officially being in operation in the State, was a watershed moment in Irish theatre. *The Ginger Man* was designed to be deliberately provocative to the Irish state and its dominant conservative ideology and set out to function as an Irish *Look Back in Anger*, the play by John Osborne that had premièred in London 1956. These plays set out to propagate a dramatic reassessment of society, class and identity and which criticised the Irish and English states and structures of anti-intellectualism through criticism of middle-class materialism.

My research methodology is to examine the hitherto unexamined archival material in relation to the production and reception of *The Ginger Man* as well as the censorship of the play itself, and that of other works in Ireland at this period. I secured access to the privately held papers of J.P. Donleavy, held at the Donleavy estate in Co. Westmeath. These papers, allied with selected papers from the Dublin Diocesan Archives, Dublin, and the Alan Simpson papers, NUI Galway, offer fresh appraisals of the official record of censorship in Ireland in the 1950s. With access to these papers for the first time, the intersection of new Irish and British theatre of post-Emergency Ireland, and their shared modernising agendas, can be studied in tandem through an approach of archival and social memory.

The papers of J.P. Donleavy have not previously been accessible to scholars and are privately held and maintained by the Donleavy Estate. The papers comprise vast amounts of manuscripts drafts of Donleavy's prose and fiction, including the novel *The Ginger Man* and

many later works; correspondence with his literary agents and publishers; drafts of dramatic works such as *Fairy Tale of New York* and *Helen*; box-office records from theatre productions, including American and English productions of the adaptation of *The Ginger Man*. However, no manuscripts survive of the adaptation of the play *The Ginger Man* itself. In totality, the papers are a detailed and complex resource from which to observe the impact of Donleavy's dramatic work of the period.

James Patrick (J.P.) Donleavy (known as 'Mike' to friends) was born on 23 April 1926 (d. 11 September 2017) in Brooklyn, New York, one of the three children of an Irish immigrant family. When he was seven, the family moved to Woodlawn in the Bronx. His parents were comfortably off and he spent his teenage years "in a curious fairyland of privilege". Athletic and a keen boxer in his youth, Donleavy served in the United States Navy during the Second World War. Following the war, Donleavy moved to Dublin to study law in Trinity College, Dublin, with comfortable financial support from his parents and also the G.I. Bill which provided aid to American veteran students studying abroad. Donleavy's most celebrated novel, *The Ginger Man*, first published by the Olympia Press in 1955, became one of the most controversial events in modern Irish theatre when its adaptation was sensationally pulled from the stage of the Gaiety Theatre in 1959.

The censoring of the play *The Ginger Man* in 1959 had a profound effect on contemporary Irish drama. The play, which was cancelled after three performances, was typical of contemporary international movements which sought to provoke the establishment as well as contemporary dramatic repertoire. It did so by offering a critique upon modern globalising consumerism and rising bourgeoisie mentality. Such plays contributed to challenging post-colonial attitudes and an intellectually liberal modernity that again furthered the subversive agenda of a non-nationalist Irish drama. This cumulative contribution to a 'new-national theatre movement' from the early 1950s through to the mid-1960s sought to reassess Ireland's Anglo-Irish relationships as well as its own cultural and theatrical identity.

Links to theatre movements in Great Britain

The themes of plays I address in this chapter reflect the extent in which such social-realist drama was reflective of international practice. By the early 1960s, British playwright

Joe Orton had been drafting a number of works in fiction and drama largely in collaboration with his partner, Kenneth Halliwell. Orton's plays, such as *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964) and *Loot* (1965) followed the trajectory of shocking but also comedic satire that John Osborne, Brendan Behan and J.P. Donleavy had achieved in the previous decade. Biographer of Orton, John Lahr, said of Orton, that "like all great satirists, Joe Orton was a realist. He was prepared to speak the unspeakable; and this gave his plays their joy and danger . . . his laughter was etched in the despair, isolation and violence of modern life and offered instead of stasis the more apt metaphor of frantic activity."⁴²⁶ This 'frantic activity' became an element of dramatic form common to Donleavy and also Hugh Leonard and Carolyn Swift in particular through presentation of satire and comedy through farce and revues. With specific relevance for the potential impact of theatre and live performance, in place of, for instance, published novels, Orton made clear his manifesto:

To be destructive, words must be irrefutable. Print was less effective than the spoken word because the blast was greater; eyes could ignore, slide past dangerous verbs and nouns. But if you could lock the enemy into a room somewhere and fire the sentence at them you could get a sort of seismic disturbance.⁴²⁷

*Entertaining Mr. Sloane*⁴²⁸ became the first play by British playwright Joe Orton to be professionally staged in Ireland at the Olympia Theatre February 1967. It was directed by Godfrey Quigley who compared Joe Orton to Brendan Behan in terms of impact on contemporary theatre in both the U.K. and Ireland by each writer.⁴²⁹ The play was reviewed and described as "an English black comedy"⁴³⁰ by the *Evening Herald*. The branding of the play as 'English' early in the public reviews created a sense of awareness among readers and indeed audiences that this was an atypical piece of theatre, not the norm for Irish audiences.

Key to this play was the casting of Irish actors who were conscious of their kinetic, emotional and psychological connection between character and audience. For the dark,

⁴²⁶ Joe Orton, *Orton: The Complete Plays*, Introduced by John Lahr, (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), 7.

⁴²⁷ Orton, 1997, 8-9.

⁴²⁸ *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* was first produced in London at the New Arts Theatre on 6 May 1964 and transferred to the West End's Wyndham's Theatre on 29 June 1964.

⁴²⁹ "An Irishman's Diary", *Irish Times*, 11 February 1967, 9.

⁴³⁰ *Evening Herald*, 14 February 1967, 8.

surrealist form of the play to succeed it had to involve the audience and not alienate them. It required skill and precision in terms of comedic expression of both language and body to convey a sense of chaos, amorality and danger but with an underlying element of tangible realism to contemporary experience. Anna Manahan was described as having “mastered the massive dottiness of Kate” while Jim Norton “projected the violence of Sloane” to all those within the vast Olympia theatre.⁴³¹ Within a month of this production opening in Dublin, the management of the Olympia Theatre had already applied for the rights to produce Orton’s other play, *Loot*.

Casting of such demanding roles was crucial. Anna Manahan was a mainstay of the alternative and smaller venues around Dublin from the 1950s onwards. In an interview with Manahan on the occasion of starring in Orton’s *Mr. Sloane* in Dublin in 1967, she was described as being “one of our [Ireland’s] very best actresses for a number of years.”⁴³² Yet, Manahan’s only appearance at the Abbey Theatre, for instance, was a minor ensemble role in a production of *The House of Bernardo Alba* in 1950. Manahan would not have a main starring role at the Abbey until playing ‘Biddy Madigan’ in a revival of Dion Boucicault’s *The Shaughraun*, produced in July 1990.⁴³³ The roles of smaller fringe and independent theatres, such as the Pike and the Eblana⁴³⁴ theatres and companies such as the Globe/Orion productions show how they nurtured and developed prominent acting skills and repertoires that were excluded from the national narrative and wider historiographical considerations.

Manahan’s long-time collaboration with producer Phyllis Ryan was testament to her career trajectory through roles which exemplified powerful stage presence with strong female characters. Manahan exclaimed that *Mr. Sloane* was much more than its billing as an English ‘modern shock comedy’: “it is also a sort of social satire. Its extraordinarily funny but it also has a lot to say about life as it is lived today.”⁴³⁵ The play depicts a young loner, Mr. Sloane, who takes lodgings in the home of a middle-aged but sexually engaging landlady, Kath. Her

⁴³¹ *Evening Herald*, 14 February 1967, 8.

⁴³² “Woman of Many Parts in the Theatre” – Interview with Anna Manahan. *Irish Press*, 17 February 1967. 12.

⁴³³ Abbey Theatre. *The Shaughraun*, 05 Jul 1990 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0545_MPG_01, p18.

⁴³⁴ The Eblana Theatre was located in the basement of Busáras station in Dublin City. It was used primarily as a theatre space by the Globe Theatre Company and Gemini Productions, which was led by Phyllis Ryan between 1958 and 1995. It seated approximately 225 guests.

⁴³⁵ “Woman of Many Parts”, *Irish Press*, 17 February 1967, 12.

elderly father and brother conclude the four-hander. It becomes known that a previous child born to Kath was given up for adoption at the insistence of her brother. Sloane indicates that he is also an orphan.

As the play continues, tensions about past histories and identity as well as authority and control within the home develop and climax in the brutal on-stage murder by Sloane of Kath's father. The Irish première of the play at the Olympia Theatre, directed by Godfrey Quigley, was advertised with the warning in the Dublin press as being for 'Adults Only' and was met with protests by members of the audience. It attracted contempt from some audience member, with one woman who left the theatre with her family calling *Mr. Sloane* "the most indecent play [she had] ever seen . . . We are not narrow-minded, but this play is immoral and indecent. A man changes his underwear on the stage."⁴³⁶ The play, however, attracted little official comment from the Roman Catholic Church and no evidence of it being vetted is present in the Archbishop's files.

The influence of contemporary performance and that of the spaces of such dramatic presentation, made Orton's plays, like that of Osborne and Donleavy, fitting experimental works for Irish audiences. As theatregoers may be more used to seeing the upper-class lifestyles as staged by Coward or Shaw, the importance and change seen in this new wave of plays is largely a question of geography. The kips and lodging houses of *The Hostage*, *The Ginger Man*, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* and others, created a wild domestic space, working-class worlds, through which the equally wild desires of the mind and soul were running unperturbed without control or sanction. Authority was not functioning. Social order was crumbling. As the by-line for the *Irish [Cork] Examiner* review of *Loot* read: "Authority is corrupt and corrupting, is stupid, is all powerful and is completely invulnerable."⁴³⁷

Loot received its Irish premiere at the Eblana Theatre in February 1970. Produced by the Amalgamated Artists and directed by Roland Jaquarello, it was described as a 'tour-de-force of surrealism . . . hilarious and disturbing, it exploits our notions of death, expediency and authority . . . to subvert our traditional assumptions of authoritative control.'⁴³⁸ The comedic but disturbing flippancy with which morals are dispensed with in the play, through

⁴³⁶ 'Woman's Protest at Comedy', *Evening Herald*, 15 February 1967, 9.

⁴³⁷ *Irish Examiner*, 18 February 1970, 12.

⁴³⁸ *Irish Press*, 18 February 1970, 3.

the desecration of a dead body in order to secure financial gain and usurp legal intervention, created a form for expressing a bleak concern for an equally bleak modern society. The influences of Joyce, Beckett, Osborne, Behan, Wesker and Pinter created a space for moral questioning of self as well as of wider society by audiences. The physical world was at odds with the present 'lived' dramatic experience. "The set", as described by *Irish Press* critic, John Boland, "[was] a functional piece of naturalism" within which sat surrealist farce that came 'disconcertingly close to 'ordinary behaviour'.⁴³⁹

Orton and Osborne succeeded with this trajectory in Britain. In Ireland, Swift, Simpson, Donleavy and others did likewise. They championed a style that sought to revolutionise and radicalise the theatre experience. It was designed to move past a pure naturalism and reinvent it rather than eradicate it. The 'frantic activity' was a reaction in response to an absent energy, a vacuum that was to be filled through dramatic reinvention and exploration of the lived contemporary experience. Orton's desire was to move past the limits of naturalism on terms of language, expression and embodiment of everyday life. Naturalism, he decries, is believable, "but there's nothing incredible about it". He cites the long tradition of Anglo-Irish wit, satire and social commentary: through Sheridan, Congrieve, Swift and Wilde, where Orton himself was once dubbed "the Wilde of the welfare state gentility".⁴⁴⁰

The 'Ortonesque' scenes of grotesque and obscure violence wrapped in flowing dialogue were akin to earlier plays derived from the likes of Donleavy's dramatic writing in the mid-1950s. In *Loot*, the play opens with the line of order and instruction: "Wake up, stop dreaming . . ."⁴⁴¹

The intention to not just jolt audiences to attention but rather to intensify the intimacy of collective witnessing. Orton was said to have had an effect on British audiences similar to that of Behan upon Irish audiences – revealing the weaknesses in societal structures through an innovative and revelatory format of drama, and one which outraged, titillated and delighted audiences. Plays such as *The Hostage* presented the farcical setting of a kidnapped I.R.A. man detained within a brothel in a music-hall-like world of unreality. Hugh Leonard reviewed author John Lahr's biography of Joe Orton and contended that the

⁴³⁹ *Irish Press*, 18 February 1970, 3.

⁴⁴⁰ Orton, 1997, 9.

⁴⁴¹ Orton, 1997, 195.

shocking element of Orton's work was not the amoral and degrading actions depicted, but rather the tacit imploring of support and normality of the acts themselves, or as Lahr commented, "like all great satirists, Orton was a realist."⁴⁴²

Theatre in Ireland, though without official censorship still endured authorial pressure – reverberations from the pressures and challenges of modern dramatic expression. Playwrights and producers in Ireland, did, however, push back. They challenged the extent to which dramatic license could be taken and the limit to which artistic expression could be freely maintained.

Theatre, Ireland and the 1950s – New Beginnings

Writing of the growth of Irish drama from the mid-1960s, Anthony Roche declares that "drama has once more regained its urgency, as it did in the approach to Irish independence as the site in which old models can be broken up and reshaped, re-imagined through the medium of play."⁴⁴³ Roche also rightly surmises that the often quoted date of 28 October 1964 as the beginning of contemporary Irish drama, (the opening night of Brian Friel's play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*), is a belated. Roche notes that the energy that fired the emergence of major figures such as Thomas Kilroy, Brian Friel, Tom Murphy and Samuel Beckett, among others, did not originate from encouragement at or from Ireland's national theatre. Most (if not all) of the early successes of these writers happened away from the Abbey Theatre, or indeed, as evidence shows, not always even on this island. At the crux of this new drama was a change in form and theme. "Contemporary Irish drama", Roche contends, "does not so much rely on a plot as on a central situation, whose implications are explored and unfolded in a process which is likelier to be repetitious than straight-forward."⁴⁴⁴

Furthermore, I would suggest that the break from traditional mimetic realism of previous Abbey (and therefore accepted 'Irish') plays was strongly representative in the new plays and imported productions seen in Dublin from the early 1950s. It is the 'situation', the current 'here and now' of Irish society that gave these plays such immediacy but which also

⁴⁴² 'Stranger than fiction', *Irish Times*, 30 September 1978, 13.

⁴⁴³ Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness*, (Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 1994), 5-6.

⁴⁴⁴ Roche, 6.

attracted censorship from those within the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy concerned with the edifying effect new Irish plays were having in an Ireland that was on a slow march towards an increasing secular outlook. Declan Kiberd identifies the encroaching decade of the 1960s as the period when a new phase of secularisation took hold, as holidays abroad and television programmes at home aroused longings for material comforts and sexual fulfilment.⁴⁴⁵

As (unofficial) censorship began to take greater effect on Irish theatre as well as on literature and magazines, a distinct diatribe developed between Archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid and Irish theatre audiences. Theatre was at the centre of An Tóstal festivals, the Dublin International Theatre Festival, the amateur drama network and the sprouting of numerous new pocket theatres and theatre groups in Dublin during the 1950s and so ensured powerful reasons for McQuaid to be conscious of the effect theatre could and would have on expanding liberal opinion. Plays like *The Bishop's Bonfire* by Sean O'Casey at the Olympia Theatre in 1955, which was roundly attacked in conservative press such as *The Standard* and the *Irish Press* for its moral ineptitude, were typical of such mutual confrontation between Church opinion and audience desire. The play still attracted record audiences with over two thousand people crowding outside the theatre seeking admission on one occasion.⁴⁴⁶ Pilkington summarises this episode by concluding that the incident was not quite the stringent blow for artistic freedom but rather:

a sign of the increasing popular force of Ireland's modernisation process. Audiences flocked to O'Casey's play not because it was regarded as nationally representative but because it proclaimed a new and dissenting resistance to the traditional, paternalistic role of Irish Catholicism.⁴⁴⁷

Pocket theatres and independent theatre groups provided an alternative answer and outlet for theatrical energy and innovative transient and radical dramatic styles and would provoke as well as confront existing (un)official censorship.

⁴⁴⁵ Declan Kiberd, *After Ireland: Writing the Nation from Beckett to the Present* (London: Head of Zeus, 2017), 92.

⁴⁴⁶ Pilkington, 151.

⁴⁴⁷ Pilkington, 151.

Monitoring of Irish Theatre – The Catholic Church and Unofficial Censorship

The impact of pocket theatres and new companies to can be examined in documentation of the time. A report sent to Archbishop McQuaid by Fr. Joseph Cooney revealed the extent of coverage 'indecent plays' in Dublin were receiving from the Archbishop. The report appeals for a censorship of theatre to be rigorously enforced:

We have a censorship of films, and of literature, more needed today than when first enacted. It is the greatest legislation of our time. And the fact that, almost every country in the world has a form of censorship is proof of the wisdom of ours. . . A theatre censorship is non-existent. Here, is where some thinking has got to be done. Men and women who can think – wanted!

In Dublin there are plays (?) being staged in professional and amateur theatres (some called “clubs”) that are immoral indecent and profane:

- (a) “Rose Tattoo” by Tennessee Williams
- (b) “Time and Again” by The []
- (c) “Streetcar Names Desire” by Tennessee Williams
- (d) “The Respectable Prostitute” by Jean Sartre
- (e) “Tea and Sympathy” by Robert Anderson (An American production)⁴⁴⁸

The report also warns of the risk an unregulated theatre in Ireland can have on the moral standards of a people: "A bad play destroys the fibre of a nation."⁴⁴⁹ Evidence shows that Cooney requested a report on John Osborne’s play *Look Back in Anger*, such was the impact it had in Irish Roman Catholic Churches:

We did have it seen when it was in London . . . It seems to deal with people with no moral standards at all, and of course there are such people but they reduce life to the level of a pig-stye. *Look Back in Anger* was described by the *Herald* critic as “the worst in thirty years” People who saw it said it was most disgusting. Some walked

⁴⁴⁸ Dublin Diocesan Archive, DDA XXV/64/4.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

out of the theatre. A young man with whom I know gave me details of it. They are unprintable. The author of this play is only 26 years of age.⁴⁵⁰

The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church deemed Osborne's play representative of a people beyond normal human morals and outside of spiritual recovery. They were also of course not Irish, and viewed as 'a very British problem' in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy. Director Roland Jaquarello later recounted that the Joe Orton's play, *Loot*, was not widely remembered, largely owing to it being seen as 'un-Irish', in its origins, theme and form. A farce caper with comic violence and of middle-class accent. Jaquarello added that:

When Donal [McCann] died, nobody in the Irish press mentioned this performance. Maybe because the production had a short run, or it didn't fit into the scheme of things, not being an Irish play. This was a pity as it was one of Donal's best - a brilliantly inventive, comic interpretation by an Irish actor in a modern English classic . . . For those fortunate to have seen it, it was truly memorable.⁴⁵¹

The set of *Loot*, designed by Peter Avery "created a deceptively eerie atmosphere, ordinary on one level, with its suburban trappings, but with hints of the macabre with its ostentatious crucifix and tomb-like wardrobe."⁴⁵² John Lahr reminds us of the combination of sex, hashish and sun (during a period Orton and Halliwell spent in Tangiers) fulfilled the Dionysian intention that lies behind Orton's comedies. They celebrate instinct and gratification, and Orton aspired to corrupt his audience with pleasure.⁴⁵³ This type of play, when produced in Ireland in the late 1950s, in the form of *The Ginger Man*, yet a few years in advance of Orton's notorious excesses, received censorious reaction from authorial figures and also from audiences.

As thousands of books by Irish and international writers passed through the hands of those on the Irish Censorship Board, Irish theatre was a curiosity among the Arts that did not receive 'official' state scrutiny in Ireland. During the 1950s, and particularly through organs such as the Dublin International Theatre Festival, a trend was initiated for banned

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Jaquarello, 2014, 15.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ John Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), 15.

novels and also novels that were expressing a desire for intellectual modernity and personal freedom found their expression through adaptation on the Irish stage.

Over the following two decades, an unprecedented number of novels were adapted for the stage. This included the work of many writers that attracted the ire of the Catholic Church, such as James Joyce, John McGahern, Edna O'Brien, Frank O'Connor and J.P. Donleavy. This was in itself an act of artistic subversion and a flouting, in a perfectly legitimate means, of the pervasive and erratic censorship of literature in Ireland.

A movement against censorship orchestrated by Irish writers arose in 1966 and announce itself from the stage of Dublin's Gate Theatre. A public conference was held to a "packed house" and the Censorship Reform Committee was established from among prominent Irish writers, directors, playwrights and journalists. The group included Jim FitzGerald, founding director of the Dublin Theatre Festival, Hugh Leonard, Edna O'Brien, Micheal MacLiammóir, James Plunkett and Bruce Arnold. Leonard spoke of the writer and the censor being natural enemies – "one dealt in truth, the other in morality, or rather in protecting the conventions of a surface morality."⁴⁵⁴ The full extent of the intersection of theatre, Church and State censorship can be traced through an excavation of the historical and archival record of this period and for the preceding decade and a half.

As early as 1949, Swift and Simpson were engaged in discussions surrounding the securing of rights for various plays that were largely already banned in the United Kingdom but which would also challenge audiences (and authorities) in Ireland. In February 1949, Alan Simpson sought permission for a play, *We Dig for the Stars*, by T.B. Morris, that was already banned in the U.K., for a summer production at the Gaiety Theatre.⁴⁵⁵ The play was based on the life of British poet and painter Gabriel Dante Rossetti, and the relationships he had with women and muses in his life. Carolyn Swift adds that both her and Simpson are

⁴⁵⁴ "Reform Society Queries Powers of Censors" *Irish Independent*, 5 December 1966, 8.

⁴⁵⁵ 10813/395 (2) Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin. Letter from T.B. Morris, Tetbury, [Glos], 8 February 1949, in response to Alan Simpson's letter of interest in *We Dig for the Stars* for a summer production at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. The play was first produced at the Experimental Theatre Club, Manchester in March [1949] but as a private non-professional production. The play was officially banned in the U.K. by descendants of the Rossetti family. It was originally planned for an Easter production run at the Pike Theatre but was postponed, possibly due to casting issues. For the May production, Fergus Cogley, of the Studio Theatre Club, was drafted in to play the lead role in *We Dig for the Stars*. *Irish Times*, 7 April 1955, 6 and 14 May 1955, 11.

keen to produce the play but are aware of the likely controversy and sanction it would generate in Dublin: “. . . we are worried about one point: although there is no play censorship in this country, feeling is very strong here about anything that can be construed as offensive to Roman Catholic Belief . . . we would be quite prepared to put up with criticism from ignorant people who delight in finding plays offensive.”⁴⁵⁶ The play was produced at the Pike in May 1955, starring Carolyn Swift, Pat Nolan, Fergus Cogley and Cathleen Delaney.

Fallon’s reply to Swift supports the staging the play on merit but feels it is not right for Dublin owing to "Fanny's obvious position as Rossetti's mistress [which] would cause very unfavourable comment here – we are very old-fashioned in these respects!”⁴⁵⁷ Fallon recommended a second script, *Reflected Glory*, as another option. This play, by George Kelly, was set in 1930s and focuses in the character of Muriel Flood, a flamboyant young actress and the theme of female urban social isolation. *Reflected Glory* would still "shock the prudish" and “not what they are interested in” advises Fallon, as he adds that "People in this country are inclined not to show interest in plays with an English setting unless they are about some famous person (such as Rossetti) or can be billed as "London's longest run!"

In discussing with Morris and the stalling of plans to repeal the Censorship Bill in the U.K. adds her thoughts on how censorship and wider socio-cultural intellectual morose was fatally stalling the production of stimulating, modern and challenging theatre: "I am sorry for your sake that the Bill to abolish censorship has faded out, but although I disapprove of censorship, I can’t help but feeling that the commercial managers may be right in thinking it the lesser of several evils – our experience in this country, where there is no censorship of plays, rather bear this theory out.”⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ 10813/395 (8) Reply letter from Carolyn Swift, 23 February 1949. Simpson and Swift also pass the script of *We Dig For the Stars* to Gabriel Fallon, their friend and drama critic at the Catholic newspaper, *The Standard*, for comment.

⁴⁵⁷ 10812/395 (11) Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin. 23 March 1949. The script of *We Dig for the Stars* is also sent to Cyril Cusack for comment, who would star as Rossetti and also co-produce the play if it went ahead. Cusack’s unavailability is likely why the play was postponed and Cogley drafted in to play Rossetti.

⁴⁵⁸ 10813/395 (14) Letter from Carolyn Swift to T.B. Morris, 25 January 1950, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

The response from Morris to Swift bears out the dual experience of anti-intellectualism and the arts as experienced through censorship and religious conservatism in both Ireland and the U.K.:

Probably managers are right in wishing to retain censorship of plays. It would certainly make their lives even more nightmarish than usual if they never knew when they might be descended upon by Watch committees, Purity Leagues, Lord's Day Observance Society narks and other kill-joys.⁴⁵⁹

Morris' warning at the outset of the 1950s would prove prophetic. By the end of the decade, one of the most conflicting and frustrating periods for Irish theatre production since the development of professional theatre in modern Ireland. The 'watch committees' of various persuasions of Catholic Church conservatism would intervene in the direct closure of many crucial artistic and theatrical events.

The Birth of *The Ginger Man* and Ireland's *Look Back in Anger*

After J.P. Donleavy departed Trinity College Dublin, where he studied law, he returned to New York with his wife and young family. After some subsequent years of living an artistic Bohemian lifestyle, Donleavy grew restless to return to the Ireland he had recently left with his wife and children. "As this year passed", Donleavy wrote in his autobiographical volume, *J.P. Donleavy's Ireland*, "having returned to the United States, with the manuscript of *The Ginger Man* growing thicker, one became increasingly homesick for the land that gave this book birth."⁴⁶⁰

Donleavy's friend, the playwright and former Irish Republican prisoner, Brendan Behan, first suggested to Donleavy that a Paris-based publisher, Olympia Press,⁴⁶¹ would be worth pursuing as potential publishers of the novel, *The Ginger Man*. The book was eventually published in 1955 in the 'Traveller's Compendium' series, an imprint of The

⁴⁵⁹ 10813/395 (15) Letter from T.B. Morris to Carolyn Swift, 30 January 1950, Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College Dublin.

⁴⁶⁰ J.P. Donleavy, *J.P. Donleavy's Ireland: In All Her sins and Some of her Graces* (London: Viking, 1986), 185.

⁴⁶¹ The Olympia Press was rebranded extension of the Obelisk Press that Maurice Girodias inherited from his father Jack Kahane. Kahane's Obelisk Press published many works including a manuscript limited edition of *Pomes Peny Each*, a book of poems of by James Joyce which carried hand-drawn illustrations by Joyce's daughter, Lucia Joyce.

Olympia Press, based in Paris, managed by Maurice Girodias. Olympia Press published works in English by avant-garde writers such as William S. Burroughs, Samuel Beckett's French trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable* and works by Henry Miller and Vladimir Nabokov. The Traveller's Compendium, however, was an imprint of Olympia which specialised in the publication of semi-pornographic works of fiction. The birth of the novel in publication would soon be followed by an equally, if not more controversial birth of a stage play, an adaptation of the novel by Donleavy himself.

In 1956 Donleavy would begin experimenting with writing for dramatic and theatrical production. A public call issued from the B.B.C.'s 'Excellence in Radio Drama' prompted the writer to begin work in earnest on a piece of drama. Donleavy dramatized the opening scenes of a new play, then entitled *Helen*, a play set in New York. Though not completed to a full-length piece for some years, it would also be the beginning for Donleavy's 1973 novel, *Fairy Tale of New York*. The short play, *Helen*, was shortlisted by the B.B.C. for broadcast. Donleavy recounts how this experience was a defining moment in his theatrical development. He described how he "soon was to find [him]self amid actors and listening carefully as [his] words ethereally floated out over loud-speakers to an English public still listening to the radio."⁴⁶²

Donleavy would recount how "Armstrong, it transpired, was also a man of the theatre and having seen John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on the London stage, and knowing that *Helen* was to be broadcast on the B.B.C., thought that I should dramatize *the Ginger Man*. On July 4th 1956 I commenced to undertake to write the first draft of the play based on the novel *The Ginger Man*."⁴⁶³

Correspondence between Armstrong and Donleavy would continue and focus on aspects such as the design for the dust-jacket of the Neville Spearman edition. Donleavy warned about an early draft of design that: "any suggestion of sex on the cover is fatal."⁴⁶⁴ This debate concerning how *the Ginger Man* was branded would translate across to its theatre adaptation. The play poster for the Dublin production at the Gaiety Theatre in 1959, featured actor Richard Harris prominently in its design. In positioning Harris in this way and

⁴⁶² Ibid, 468.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 470-47.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, 471.

as the focus of the embodiment of what the book and especially the character Sebastian Dangerfield represented, would be a further stick with which to beat the play. Harris was fast-earning a reputation as a noted actor and sex-symbol in London and his playboy standing would add to the play's attraction to a curious Dublin audience, drawn to this new play which was coming direct from a London première.

In November 1956, as drafting of the play continued, Donleavy was resident in Fulham, London, with his family, experiencing first-hand the direct fall-out and reaction to Osborne's play. *Look Back in Anger* premiered in Ireland at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin in April 1957. The reviewer in *The Irish Times* describes the play as one of those pieces that makes objectivity impossible if only because the author makes detachment also impossible.⁴⁶⁵ Jimmy Porter, the central character is described as a 'lonely, frustrated and embittered young man' maintains a mercilessly sustained attack course on the sensibilities of the critic. "At war with himself and everything else he feels any sign of security or tranquillity around him as a wound."⁴⁶⁶

Osborne's play, after all, was sought after for an Irish première by Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift at the Pike Theatre, Dublin. Simpson wrote to Osborne in December 1956 seeking Irish rights for the play, as a theatrical vehicle to further the Pike's progression as an experimental and risk-taking venture in the Arts, describing themselves as being "generally regarded as the most progressive theatre in Dublin", while adding that *Look Back in Anger* "would very much suit our theatre" at the Pike.⁴⁶⁷ A production of the play at the Pike, in an Irish context, with its claustrophobic environment would have made for a natural if not also powerful setting. Director Alan Simpson was wary of taking on *The Ginger Man* in the wake of *The Rose Tattoo* affair. J.P. Donleavy offered the script to the Pike, adding in his letter to Simpson that "I would hate to have you end up in court again but I have the script of *The Ginger Man* . . . Production here is being toyed with at the moment but I'd love for it to have a Dublin première." Simpson replies that he is "agog to see the script of *The Ginger Man*", adding that he was definitely interested but couldn't risk jail for it.⁴⁶⁸ The hopeful Pike

⁴⁶⁵ "Look Back in Anger", *Irish Times*, 23 April 1957, 9.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

⁴⁶⁷ Letter from Alan Simpson to John Osborne, 10 December 1956, 10813 /436.

⁴⁶⁸ Letters between J.P. Donleavy and Alan Simpson, Pike Theatre papers, Trinity College Dublin, November 1958, 10813/106 and 111.

production, however, did not happen. Donleavy attested to Simpson's predicament, stating that in Ireland then, "nothing could be done", alluding to the impact the Catholic Church held over artistic and theatrical production. Osborne's play, and the movement it was part of in Britain, inevitably still had much impact and links back to Ireland. Marion Harewood, Chair of the "Look Back in Anger' Film Premiere Committee', based at the Royal Court Theatre in London, wrote to Sean O'Casey on 21 January 1959, inviting O'Casey to be on the organising committee for the film screening that was planned to mark the Royal Court's third birthday in May 1959.⁴⁶⁹

As a key signifier of the non-recording of *The Ginger Man* within Irish theatre history, the play is excluded from a chronology of Irish plays produced in England since 1920, compiled by Peter James Harris and included in the book *Irish Theatre in England*, edited by Richard Cave and Ben Levitas. Cave and Levitas provide a description of the importance of analysis of Irish plays performed in London as a means of understanding the exchange of cultural, social and political considerations between Ireland and England:

A theatre in Ireland and a theatre in England are still not merely expression of national cultures but sites of specific and shared cultural practice: the place of theatrical performance itself. This then becomes a case of 'Irish meta-theatre in England', in which location amplifies that aspect of Irish theatre which reflects upon constantly conditioned performance of Irish identity itself.⁴⁷⁰

It is therefore a necessary factor to consider the plays such as *The Ginger Man* and *The Hostage*, which both had première productions in London before arriving to perform in front of audiences in Dublin, as a means of antagonising the forces of censorship in Ireland who saw these plays as imported and problematic and unsuitable for consumption in Catholic Ireland. Letters within McQuaid's archive relate to this point in reference to both *The Hostage* and *The Ginger Man*, which are both judged to be subversive to Catholic

⁴⁶⁹ Letters between Sean O'Casey and George Devine / The Royal Court, MS, 38, 063 Sean O'Casey papers, National Library of Ireland. Ahead of the Royal Court's third birthday celebrations on the second of April 1959, Harewood notes that John Osborne and Tony Richardson have offered the premiere screening of the film version of *Look Back in anger* to the Royal Court as recognition and gratitude from Osborne. Harewood invited Sean O'Casey to be on the committee. This screening was to take place between April 30th and May 9th, just before it being shown at Cannes Film Festival.

⁴⁷⁰ Ben Levitas and Richard Cave, eds, *Irish Theatre in England* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007), 9.

sensibilities in Ireland and antagonistic to the Irish nationalist outlook. Fr. Gerard Nolan, S.J., wrote to Archbishop McQuaid in October 1960 to forewarn him of the impending transfer from London of Behan's *The Hostage* to the Olympia Theatre:

The play is entirely unsuitable for the Dublin public and that, from every standpoint that matters. It is an utterly amoral piece, in part obscene, in context degenerate, and at times blasphemous and so totally devoid of any artistic value, as to be worthless. . . I pointed out [to Mr. McCabe and Me. Illsley] that in once scene there occurs an exact repetition of the incident that made *The Ginger Man*, of recent ill-fame, the occasion of major trouble for the management then involved. I have told them that even with cuts, the play can only soil their theatre and their own reputation for discretion and prudence in programming, and will probably result in considerable worries for the, at the civic level.⁴⁷¹

The publicity surrounding both these plays in London ensured it was a struggle to separate the renegade talent of both writers, Behan and Donleavy, from each other. Behan was the first person to read the manuscript of *The Ginger Man* after breaking into Donleavy's Wicklow cottage.⁴⁷² Behan, who was writing *Borstal Boy* at the time, also decided to amend the manuscript, much to Donleavy's chagrin. Despite this, Donleavy has since said that he did incorporate one or two of Behan's suggestions. Behan also makes a cameo appearance in the novel as the wild Barney Berry.⁴⁷³ It was Harold Hobson, theatre critic at *The Sunday Times*, who warmly paired the play with Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* as the "two modern plays in London through which blows the winds of genius"⁴⁷⁴. This fanfare description was used to publicise *The Ginger Man* in Dublin, alluding to the fact that if it was liked in London, it may have been naively thought it would be loved in Dublin.

In the *Irish Times*, on 2nd November 1959, further debate is reported about the indecency and vulgarity of Donleavy's play. At the Wexford Festival Forum a wide-ranging

⁴⁷¹ Letter from Nolan to McQuaid, Dublin Diocesan Archive, XXV/70/1 (69). 16 October 1960.

⁴⁷² "The Ginger Man at Sixty", *The Irish Times*, 17 July 2005, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/jp-donleavy-s-the-ginger-man-at-60-1.2287489> Accessed 14 August 2018.

⁴⁷³ "JP Donleavy's The Ginger Man at 60", *The Irish Times*, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/jp-donleavy-s-the-ginger-man-at-60-1.2287489> Accessed 17 July 2015.

⁴⁷⁴ Harold Hobson review from the *Sunday Times*, quoted on play handbill, *The GINGERMAN*, J.P. Donleavy Papers, Donleavy Estate.

discussion on aspects of contemporary Irish culture and theatre was staged. A panel included Dr. C.S. Andrews, Chairman, C.I.E (Coras Iompar Éireann), Sir Stewart Wilson, Director of the Birmingham School of Music; Msrs Brian George and John Snagge, (B.B.C. commentators) and playwright Padraic Colum. Among the topics for discussion were the viability of the revival of the Irish language; the influence of Behan's presence in the theatre upon his plays and also censorship of the theatre. While opinion offered both positive and negative answers, it was uniformly agreed that official censorship of the theatre in Ireland was not a desirable thing to aspire to.

Andrews noted that though not in favour of censorship, some discretion was necessary on the part of theatre owners but not to the extent that actions would encourage the public to hold sway in opposition to particular plays or playwrights. "Twice in Dublin recently he [Andrews] had seen public opinion outraged and it was deplorable that such plays should be staged."⁴⁷⁵ When asked if he was referring to *Sive* or *The Ginger Man*, Andrews replied that he had not seen *Sive* but that *The Ginger Man* went far beyond the bounds of decency. It is one of the worst things I have ever seen on the stage. There is not much difference between it and the strip-tease in the Windmill in London."⁴⁷⁶

In response to these recent discussions and calls for censorship of the Irish stage, Taoiseach Seán Lemass commented that any such theatre censorship or expanding legislation for censorship to works outside of film and literature would be unconstitutional. "We regard these regulations as being in exactly as the same category as other regulations which prevent the sale of putrid meat or contaminated milk. We have here no political censorship and no censorship of ideas and our constitution prevents the Oireachtas from passing laws for the establishment of any such censorship."⁴⁷⁷

Though the Taoiseach Seán Lemass was stating that there was no official law that provided for State censorship in the theatre, the Taoiseach provided a clearly-worded dictum as to how public opinion might address the recent trend of controversial stage productions. "As regards plays, we seem to have at the present time a rash of playwrights

⁴⁷⁵ "Festival Forum at Wexford", *Irish Times*, 2 November 1959, 6.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ "No Censorship on 'Ideas' or Politics", *Irish Times*, 12 November 1959, 1.

who try to attract notoriety by a liberal use of blasphemy and other offensive materials".⁴⁷⁸

The article would continue to push for an audience-centred and public-based form of censorship, one which would have the consensus of the theatre-going public.

The best censorship to apply to plays of that kind was a strong reaction from public opinion. If the public did not go to these plays, then these playwrights would soon disappear from the billboards and make way for those who could produce a much better and less offensive type of production.⁴⁷⁹

This form of 'public-driven censorship' is what C.S. Andrews forewarned ten days earlier at the Wexford Festival debate. Public opinion that was being fuelled by such comments as made by Lemass – that the State could not intervene in policing theatre's ethical and moral standards, but the public could. Lemass cited the Abbey Theatre as a model producer with a recent history of staging works that were both commercially successful but also without being 'offensive to decency in any way'. Lemass delivered a veiled warning to those who would risk flouting public decency: as any legislation which provided for censorship of plays would be 'impractical' to enforce, "there was ample power to institute proceedings against the proprietors of any theatre who produced indecent plays and that power had, in fact, been exercised in recent years."⁴⁸⁰

With this point, the Taoiseach emitted a warning to every theatre manager in the country. As the Censorship of Publications Act did not extend to theatre performance, plays and playwrights could not be publicly censored in Ireland. Yet, Lemass was insinuating, just two years after *The Rose Tattoo* affair at the Pike Theatre and the Dublin International Theatre Festival, which saw the play closed and its director Alan Simpson charged with indecency, that works of theatre considered indecent would not be tolerated. It can be argued that this statement had the effect to ward off would-be damage international reputation at a time when political impetus was focused on promoting Ireland's reputation abroad as a mature and modernising nation, rather than one bogged down in arguments with a conservative Catholic Church. With the case of the censorship of *The Ginger Man* that was

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

unfolding at this time, Ireland's theatre was again falling foul of an unofficial censorship that was at risk of stagnating the growth of a new wave of Irish drama.

***The Ginger Man* and Staging Domestic Conflict**

Donleavy's adaptation of his own novel saw that the play underwent substantial changes from its original form. All action of the play is confined to the interior and domestic lives and world of the characters, Sebastian Dangerfield, Marion Dangerfield, Kenneth O'Keefe and Lily Frost. This was in line with trends in contemporary British drama by John Osborne and Joe Orton, which saw cramped and claustrophobic interior and domestic settings mirror and enhance the tension as it unfolded on stage and was received by audiences.

The play begins in the rented and dilapidated flat of the Dangerfields, situated at no. 1, Mohammed Road, Dublin. The opening stage directions describe in detail the interior of the flat, located in a south suburb of Dublin city. It is a chaotic mess. Implements and signs of navigation and exploration are scattered about the stage. Dangerfield "*sits on a stuffy armchair. He watches three chairs in front of him on which are signs: twelve o'clock, three o'clock, and six o'clock. A large celestial telescope stands lonely at the window. On an orange box sits an old gramophone. On the wall are three pictures of ships in distress.*"⁴⁸¹ The world outside is in perpetual motion. "A trolley car roars past the window and screeches to a halt up the street. Shadows pass the window."⁴⁸²

The 1950s saw a series of plays that radicalised the naturalistic domestic drama as a form of 'theatre of revolt,'" a style of play that Nicholas Grene contends inaugurated the style of 'kitchen-sink realism.'⁴⁸³ Such domestic sites were contested locations of conflict – physically, emotionally and psychologically. New styles of production which intended a radical and provocative performance style and experience offered new possibilities. This entailed a more prominent engagement with performance aesthetics such as body, movement, sound and lighting, in order to create and curate an atmosphere which was receptive to and critical to a deeper psychological and emotional engagement by audiences.

⁴⁸¹ *The Ginger Man*, J.P. Donleavy, in "J.P. Donleavy, *The Plays*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), 59.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Grene, 2014, 9.

For Irish theatre production, we can identify such influence on style and performance from contemporary British theatre, among other sources internationally, and as I have outlined above in relation to work by Joe Orton and John Osborne. For example, Samuel Beckett's *Fin de Partie (Endgame)*⁴⁸⁴ opened in London in 1957 and presented a dysfunctional family in a dystopian home-place, where containment of actors' physicality as well as character's worlds were dramatized through the staging of immobility. This was implied by the presence of bodily restrictions within trashcans, rocking chairs, or physical ailments such as blindness. This form of setting, was influential on Donleavy who was growing increasingly interested in emerging dramaturgies of the time. Grene supports the importance of such settings and form in the development of Irish drama at the time:

The iconic home on the stage remained a powerful part of theatricality vocabulary of this sort of theatre. *Endgame* (1957), with its enclosed room in which Hamm sits with his aged parents in bins while the pseudo-son/servant Clov waits in the kitchen to be called, is a parody of the traditional residence of the nuclear family.⁴⁸⁵

The stasis of Dangerfield's interior world is at odds with the increasingly growing fast pace of both urban and suburban Dublin life. When the exterior threatens to enter and intervene in the interior and private world, Dangerfield panics and seeks to hide, unsure how to reconcile the private with the public. These melodramatic elements, heightened through farce, furthers the move in form away from traditional realist dramatic tropes of peasant drama. This blending of the private-public worlds and the consequence of time in changing Ireland is also seen in the opening scene of Sean O'Casey's 1926 play, *The Plough and the Stars*. The opening directions of O'Casey play show similarities to the context and depiction of social conditions in Dublin:

SCENE: *The home of the CLITHEROES. It consists of the front and back drawing-rooms in a fine old Georgian house, struggling for its life against the assaults of time, and the more savage assaults of the tenants . . . The room directly in front of the*

⁴⁸⁴ Beckett's play was originally written in French (entitled *Fin de Partie*). Beckett himself translated it into English. The play was first performed in a French-language production at the Royal Court Theatre in London, opening on 3rd April 1957.

⁴⁸⁵ Grene, 2014, 10.

*audience is furnished in a way that suggests an attempt towards a finer expression of domestic life.*⁴⁸⁶

The O'Casey influence is revealing as the opening scene of *The Plough and the Stars* depicts Fluther actively repairing a lock on the door of the tenement flat, symbolic of 'keeping out' impending revolution as much as 'keeping in' the occupants and protecting them from harm. A knock on the door of Dangerfield's apartment rises him in panic from his armchair. He hides and waits and eventually questions the identity of the would-be intruder. In response to, "it's me" (at the door) Dangerfield responds by asking, "Who's me?"⁴⁸⁷ to the outsider, in a rhetorical self-questioning of Dangerfield's Irish-American identity as much as to the identity of the visitor.

Kenneth O'Keefe is a fellow American G.I. Bill veteran who came to Ireland to seek employment, education, social amelioration as well as sexual liberation. Failing on all these fronts, O'Keefe and Dangerfield begin their relationship in the same vein as Jimmy Porter and Cliff Lewis in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. A duo of lost and disillusioned young men who expect more than what society and opportunity has afforded them. Instead they live week-to-week on the allowance afforded them under the G.I. Bill:

O'Keefe: . . . These guys at Trinity think all American's are loaded with dough and I'm starving. You get your check yet?⁴⁸⁸

The opening scene sets forth the tone and deliberately shocking and subversive message of the play by presenting a deliberate attack on Irish Catholic Church and State, the shallow advancement of the Irish middle-classes and the exploitation and inequality of Ireland, both domestically and publicly, towards women.

Dangerfield is a crass, drunken, violent, manipulative self-promoter while O'Keefe is a weak, uncommitted and unconfident loner that is dazzled by the bravado and performative life of extravagance portrayed by Dangerfield, as he constantly seeks the impossible – a comfortable middle-class existence and sexual gratification to match his desires.

⁴⁸⁶ Abbey Theatre. *The Plough and the Stars*, 07 May 1991 [script]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 11029_S_0001, p1.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, 60.

From the outset the play confronts audience sensibilities on the constructs of femininity and male aesthetic expectations of women within defined (patriarchal) gender roles. Both Dangerfield and O'Keefe direct crude and vulgar language towards women, with O'Keefe calling all Irish women "tubs of lard."⁴⁸⁹ Dangerfield also criticises the Trinity College-educated professional classes as he adopts the public profile of the professional classes and associated networks of privilege in order to claim public credit: DANGERFIELD: "Kenneth, how do I look in Trinity rowing pink . . . always best to provide a flippant subtlety when using class power."⁴⁹⁰ Donleavy ascribes role, gender and clothing to suit one's class and place in social strata, "Women", brags Dangerfield, "know their proper place, wear cheerful chains at the stove."⁴⁹¹ This is symbolic of Alison Porter in *Look Back in Anger*, who is constantly positioned behind an ironing board within Osborne's play, depicting her gendered and social position as subservient to a patriarchal society. Commentary on Irish women and the sacrament of marriage ends the first scene with a tirade from Dangerfield directed towards his wife Marion. When Dangerfield failed to collect their daughter owing to his drinking, he screams at Marion to "shut up." In a cry out against such domestic verbal abuse Marion despairs: "O stop it, O stop it. I don't intend to go on living like this."⁴⁹²

The opening scene of *The Ginger Man* contemplates the place of Dangerfield and O'Keefe in a new contemporary Ireland. Racial tensions are evident as prejudiced and ignorance towards non-Catholics reference the emigrant experience of both Dangerfield and O'Keefe but of Donleavy himself as an Irish-American transient figure. Young boys run past the window of the flat and shout in "Jews! Jews!" O'Keefe responds with similar hate in his voice with, "That's what I like about the country. So open about its hatreds. "Irish! Irish!"⁴⁹³ Passing time is tracked by manual acts by Dangerfield, such as the moving of chairs with the 'Six o'clock' sign to coincide with hearing the Angelus bell strike outside. O'Keefe despairs at the life they have within such a life where time is marked by the call of the Catholic evening bell to prayer. "This sad room. Dark gloom. We live like beasts."⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, 61.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, 62.

⁴⁹² Ibid, 62-63

⁴⁹³ Ibid, 64.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, 66.

In condensing a vast and sprawling novel into a concise dramatic work, Donleavy creates the play into a dark and troubling social commentary. The violence that simmers in *Dangerfield* is directed at the crying infant: *Dangerfield*: 'I'll kill that kid. God dammit, I'll kill it, if it doesn't shut up.'⁴⁹⁵ With equally shocking and predatory threat, O'Keefe boasted of his attempted rape of his 'retarded' cousin while on a family visit to a secluded part of Connemara. The scene ends with *Dangerfield* alone on stage, 'a sinner' appealing to God for strength, to put his shoulder to the wheel and push like the rest.

The second scene is also situated in *Dangerfield*'s flat on Mohammed Road, one week later. It opens with *Dangerfield* softly singing a lament for the dead – a recourse to the solace and peace of death, a world away from the chaos of modern society and living:

Sleep thy last sleep

Free from care and sorrow

Rest where none weep

And we too, shall follow⁴⁹⁶

The Ginger Man attacks the myth that Ireland was a uniformly economically vibrant country at this time. O'Keefe bears out the frustration of many of those who did not see or were not part of economic progression: "I'm hounded through streets, beaten to the wall, scratching up pennies and for the first time in months I've got a few beans to have a bath and a haircut and get out, you come and push me to the wall again . . . nothing new. Same damn pattern. Despair, frustration, misery."⁴⁹⁷

The character of O'Keefe sets out case after case of what ails the society of modern Ireland. The piety and fortitude of traditional Catholic values are far from being deeply challenged in the wake of a growing secular Irish movement. He describes visiting his father's relatives in rural Ireland and while there was forced to go to mass. "There I was on hard cold stone, mumbling 'Hail Marys', thinking of the good atheist parties I was missing in Dublin."⁴⁹⁸ He

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, 66.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, 69.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, 73 – 75.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid. 75.

follows this by putting forward his desires to move into a secure and middle-class life, as vacuous as it may be but one which fulfils a variation of the Holy Trinity of the Catholic faith, upon which he has turned his back. What O'Keefe aspires to, and what Donleavy aspires to challenge through this play, is the comfortable and shallow middle-class life. The new Holy Trinity, where O'Keefe is concerned, is chiefly, money, food and sex. The contradiction within the play is not inviting the audience to sympathise with Dangerfield or O'Keefe, but rather to view the complexities and failings of modernity that prolonged gender and economic disparity.

Marion, an American citizen, bemoans the foulness of the flat and blames Ireland as the corrupting influences upon Dangerfield himself: "MARION: You weren't like this before we came to Ireland. This vulgar, filthy country."⁴⁹⁹ As an American and therefore as an outsider, Marion voices her disgust not just at Ireland but speaks out from a position of oppression from which Irish women were still fighting to emerge from. This 'foul' Irishness is an inheritance from previous generations and which acts as an inheritance for her own baby daughter. "MARION: And to have my child raised among a lot of savage Irish and be branded with a brogue for the rest of her life."⁵⁰⁰

In satirising the greed, power, patriarchy and piety of the middle-classes, Donleavy is critiquing the majority theatre-going audience of Dublin, which was solidly middle-class in background and outlook. In an example of influence upon Donleavy by the French dramatist, Alfred Jarry, Donleavy disrupts the domestic quarrel with an outburst of profanity to mirror the shallow and materialistic development of an unequal society. Jarry wrote in his short essay, *Theatre Questions*, that his dramaturgical intent was to present to the audience and the public at large the exaggerated vices they themselves possessed. In doing his Jarry (and later Donleavy) used profanity, violence, and dialogue, to showcase the base and uncivilised characteristics of modern society and to provoke a self-recognition through disgust of these traits within audience members. As Jarry stated:

I intended that when the curtain went up the scene should confront the public like the exaggerating mirror in the stories of Madame Leprince de Beamont, in which the

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, 77.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, 78.

depraved saw themselves with dragon's bodies, or bull's horns, or whatever corresponded to their particular vice. It is not surprising that the public should have been aghast at the sight of its ignoble other self.⁵⁰¹

Dangerfield crashes a chair to the floor to the shout of "Shit". Marion visibly suffers at the act of threat and at the profane word, begging for Dangerfield to "stop using that ugly word to me". Dangerfield responds by screaming "Shit" once more. In a final outburst Marion threatens: "I'll leave this house. Use that language with your working-class friend but I shan't stand for it . . . you've ruined me socially."⁵⁰²

In a reflection of the status of women in Ireland at this time of the late 1950s, Donleavy's play highlights male suppression of female equality and choice. Like John Osborne's play, where the character of Alison Porter suffers emotionally and mentally at the intense verbal degradation of Jimmy Porter. In the opening stage directions to Osborne's play, Alison is described as "*Standing, left, below the food cupboard. She is leaning over an ironing board. Beside her is a pile of clothes. Hers is the most uneasy personality to catch in the polyphony of these three people.*"⁵⁰³

Dangerfield's counterpoint in *Look Back in Anger*, Jimmy Porter, mirrors Dangerfield's contempt for women. Jimmy is tormented by the aural presence of women's gendered identity - the sound of their existence: "Slamming their doors, stamping their high-heels, banging their irons and saucepans – the eternal flaming racket of the female."⁵⁰⁴ These women 'act out' their 'interiority', a method by which both Osborne and Donleavy support the patriarchal world in reality of the time. Jimmy continues to attack the living means of women to the point of forcibly trying to remove a group of female neighbours from his building:

JIMMY: The most simple, everyday actions were a sort of assault course on your sensibilities. I used to plead with them. I even got to screaming the most ingenious

⁵⁰¹ Alfred Jarry, *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*, edited and translated by Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson-Taylor (London: Methuen and Co., 1965). 83.

⁵⁰² *Ibid*, 83-84.

⁵⁰³ John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger and Other Plays* (London, Faber and Faber, 1993), 6.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

obscenities I could think of, up the stairs at them. But nothing, nothing, would move them.⁵⁰⁵

The Ginger Man presented such dramatic forms and questions of women's roles within society to Irish audiences. The prior rejection of Noel Browne's 'Mother and Child Scheme' in 1951, branded as being "anti-family", was in reality, a decision that was evidently anti-woman. Marion, Dangerfield's wife, vocalises these institutional rejections of sex equality. "I want to be free instead of hiding behind these walls."⁵⁰⁶

The scene continues to devolve further into grotesque threats of domestic violence. DANGERFIELD: "I'll kill you here and now unless I'm given some peace. I want peace. You know what I want [shouting] peace, God damn it."⁵⁰⁷ This outburst towards Marion was the key moment of the play which forced some of those in attendance at the short-lived run of the production, to leave their seats and to leave the theatre altogether, in disgust. It also prompted others in the audience to shout at the actors that things 'had gone quite far enough'.⁵⁰⁸ Donleavy engaged the audience members into unwilling but present witnesses and spectators to a male-specific form of violent abuse, husband upon wife, and which was confined to the family home and which perpetuated the cycle of accepted violence against women within their own homes: Marion speaks out: MARION: "My babe has rickets. Because you've drunk every penny we've got. You slapped and punched me when I was pregnant. Threw me out of bed and pushed me down the stairs."

Numerous cases of cruelty perpetrated by husbands upon their wives are listed in the courts proceedings within the *Irish Times* in the years immediately preceding the production of *The Ginger Man*. No such cases are won by the suffering women, furthering Marion's cry to be free of a life of 'hiding behind the walls'. The depiction of these underlying factors, as Mary Robinson calls them in her 1973 Seanad speech, such as the social and legal acceptance of violence in the home against women, is why *The Ginger Man* is such a powerful statement against the fabric of the new and emerging globalising Ireland. If, in the words of the Roman Catholic Church, Noel Browne's Mother and Child Scheme was "anti-family", then

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 21.

⁵⁰⁶ Donleavy, 1974, 84.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, 85.

⁵⁰⁸ "Good Acting in Distasteful Play", *Irish Press*, 27 October 1959, 4.

Donleavy's play, and particularly Dangerfield's treatment of Marion, made this play 'anti-the-Irish-family'.

The misogyny towards women implicit from Dangerfield and symptomatic of inequalities in Irish society at the time, is summed up in a response by Dangerfield to Marion, when she admits to exposing to her father the failures and actions of her husband. Dangerfield reacts in contorted anger, physically and verbally chastising Marion for her supposed indiscretion against her husband. Smashing a glass bulb and threatening her, Dangerfield demeans her morally and shames her within a society that demands and expects female perfection: "You're a scheming slut."⁵⁰⁹ He orders Marion out of the family home, threatens strangulation and blames her for his own failings: "You've made me like this."⁵¹⁰

The Ginger Man, therefore, is a savage critique upon 'de Valera's Ireland', upon the unequal society supported by the 1937 Constitution of the Republic of Ireland, which stressed that the official place of a woman was seen to be within the confinement of the home place and in servitude to their male counterpoints and to the family.⁵¹¹ It is this confinement, set up by the State and supported by the patriarchal family structure that Marion explicitly cites for her unhappiness.

In one final direct attack on the twin pillars of Irish society, Church and State, Donleavy presents Dangerfield with a parting salvo that alone would have been certain to attract not just the criticism of the Church, but also the certain censure and closure of his play. In doing so, he critiqued the sacrificial and mysterious foundation of Christian faith. Dangerfield mimics and performs the act of the crucifixion. The stage directions read "[Raising arms slowly, turns, stretches his back in a cross against the wall]. DANGERFIELD: Put in the nails."⁵¹² It is a striking image for Donleavy to portray on stage for a violent psychopath as Dangerfield to claim to mimic and portray Christ and in doing so seek salvation through resurrection.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, 86.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, 87.

⁵¹¹ Article 41.2 of the Constitution prioritises a woman's domestic role over work. It reads: "The State recognises that that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved . . . The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home."

⁵¹² Donleavy, 1974, 90.

The second act of the play moves its location to the growing and comfortable south Dublin suburb of Glenageary, with the stage directions describing the scene as '*The dining/living room of a suburban villa*.'⁵¹³ Marion has by now left the apartment on Muhammed Road and is seeking her own independence. This scene presents some of the complex views of the play that dictate a necessary political and socio-religious analysis of the characters and their environment. Dangerfield is continually at odds with the 'Landlord class' he encounters both on Muhammed Road and in Glenageary. In referring to Marion's new suburban landladies, he comments that they are ". . . Protestants. I can see that. Four honest eyes. Get those from living on investments. Can see they're faithful to their king."⁵¹⁴ The post-colonial context experienced in Ireland at this time, recorded a decline in Protestant landlord class and a rise in middle-class ownership.

This scene is dominated by the arrival of this Catholic boarder, Miss Frost. She is typical of young, educated and aspirational but ultimately socially confined young Irish people of her generation. Like the character of Peg Finnerty in John B' Keane's *Many Young Men of Twenty* and Alison Porter of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, there is a physical obstacle standing in the way of female social progression, such as the pub bar or the domestic ironing board. In Miss Frost's case, the menial duties she attends to a seed shop stifle her ambition. "This may be an agricultural country . . . but they look upon the soil for nothing else but the money it will get them. . . I'm tired of working for other people. I'd like to be in business for myself. But it's so hard to get started."⁵¹⁵

In this act, the influence of Beckett upon Donleavy becomes further evident through seeking to understand the moral and ethical deterioration of society. In wishing to criticize the economic malaise of Ireland, Dangerfield, wearing a bowler hat, a symbol carried over from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, (and also of the moneyed upper classes), contemplates suicide due to the pressures of economic pressure: "DANGERFIELD: Could you even lend me a scarf? I'm afraid the one I'm wearing is most unsatisfactory. Disconcertingly feels like a rope."⁵¹⁶

⁵¹³ Ibid, 93.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, 93.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, 97, 107.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid, 109.

Further admonishing of the undue level of influence in the personal lives of Irish people by the Catholic Church, Miss Frost reveals the stigma attached to her by Church, family and society by having a previous affair with a married man. Here, she partakes in an on-stage love-tryst with Dangerfield. In the aftermath she suffers a severe attack of conscience, calling it a 'mortal sin'. An exchange between Donleavy and Miss Frost is an unsettling and sexist 'confession' by Miss Frost as to her previous actions, whereas here and before, the male partner in the extra-marital sexual transgression is not to be held accountable:

MISS FROST: They'll send the priest to my house.

DANGERFIELD: Miss Frost, has this happened before?

MISS FROST: Yes . . . they sent me to a convent in Dublin to do a penance.⁵¹⁷

In the final scene of the play Miss Frost resolutely condemns Ireland as no 'country for women' which offered 'nothing to a girl like [her]'. O'Keefe, with Donleavy critique Irish nationalism as weak and shallow, as O'Casey achieved with such previous success, mocks the attempts of the armed IRA: DANGERFIELD: "Everybody gets long faces, rolls up the tricolour, puts away the bombs and we all go into the first pub and get drunk. The police man with us and all. Do you know, I think the North should take over the South."⁵¹⁸

Theatre scholar Joan FitzPatrick Dean identifies that Irish theatre of this time enjoyed a status of international celebrity particularly among those in the United States.⁵¹⁹ The period of the late 1950s created a catastrophic breakdown in artistic freedom due the long reach of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The Abbey would be forbidden by Sean O'Casey to produce his plays and Samuel Beckett ruled likewise in response to the treatment O'Casey and others such as Alan Simpson at the Pike Theatre received. Even in the nearest 'international' realm of the United Kingdom, there was a disparity in the reception of Irish plays concerning Irish matters than was otherwise experienced in Ireland. Writing in *The London Letter* column in the *Irish Times*, the journalist dismayed at the ignorance of Irish

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, 121.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, p. 131.

⁵¹⁹ Joan F. Dean, *Riot and Great Anger: Stage Censorship in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 148.

authorities and also audiences in relation to condemning plays with controversial or challenging social questions, despite often indifference to their literary or theatrical quality:

I find myself increasingly in the position of describing plays which for non-theatrical reasons, evidently are not likely to be seen in Ireland - plays by Brendan Behan, Sean O'Casey and J.P. Donleavy.⁵²⁰

Just ahead of the *The Ginger Man's* London première at the Fortune Theatre, the theatre management decided to request a special police squad to be on duty at the theatre on the opening night, not against 'English' audiences and their reaction, but specifically in predicting a hostile reaction from Irish people living in London, a play, the article describes as containing "controversial matter about Ireland and the Irish."⁵²¹ The play, therefore, was not only presenting a characterisation of the selfish and ultimately shallow rising middle classes of Ireland but also criticising the physical as well as ethical and moral decay of Dublin and Ireland. Despite Ireland modernising in a globalising industrial and economic network, achieving 'global celebrity' as Dean mentions, the aspirations of personal grandeur and a life of middle-class entitlement, as desired by Dangerfield and O'Keefe in the play, sums up the anti-Nationalism of the new generation.

The urban sprawl of Dublin as described by Donleavy in the play, with couples living in dilapidated tenement-like flats, as also described by Thomas Kilroy in his 1968 play, *The Death and Resurrection of Mr. Roche*, reveal the physical neglect and deterioration of the inner-city Dublin and of its great Georgian streets, squares and houses. This changing Dublin also was apparent for cast member and Edinburgh native, Rosalie Westwater, (Who played Miss Frost) who expressed her surprise at Grafton Street not being recognisable to her pre-imagined ideal of wide thoroughfares, cobblestones, trams and quaintness, as told to her by her mother and grandmother who regularly visited Dublin prior to the war years of 1914.⁵²²

The play then was of added insult to Dublin audiences who were witnessing the beginning of the reversal of previous political and economic conservatism and isolationism and who

⁵²⁰ "London Letter", *Irish Times*, 2 November 1959, 4.

⁵²¹ "Guards for new play about the Irish", *Irish Times*, 15 September 1959, 6.

⁵²² "An Irishwoman's Diary", *Irish Times*, 2 November 1959, 9.

had begun to feel the tangible effects of prosperity and especially the cultural influence of American and European tourism.

Dean outlines that key influences were growing in the late 1950s through politicians, journalists, and civil servants who were asserting pressure on the Board and Director of the Abbey Theatre. The establishment of an 'International Theatre Festival' in 1957, for example, set out to reinstate Ireland and indeed Dublin as a global capital of literary and dramatic imputes. However, with growing state influence upon Irish theatre, Dean concludes that what evolved at this time was a serious and concerted effort to impose a rigorous and consistent censorship of theatre production in Ireland that ultimately sought to stifle the artistic space where social criticism and intellectual discourse and reflection could take place.⁵²³ Deane clearly states that the case of *The Ginger Man* was an act of arrogance and intrusion into the social and artistic fabric of Irish society, not to mention an act of censorship that resulted in serious consequences for the financial stability of the Globe theatre company as well as reputational, financial and personal consequences for the team behind the play. As Dean contends:

The stage adaptation of J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man* is the most blatant instance of Irish stage censorship in the fifties. Like the 1955 novel, the stage version of *The Ginger Man* was calculated to *épater* not just *la bourgeoisie* but *le monde* as well.⁵²⁴

Archival Memory and Evidence – Recovering *The Ginger Man*: Censorship and Reception

The series of letters held with the personal papers of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid at the Dublin Diocesan Archive, many of which previously unexplored, would support this consideration upon the impact of the play. The letters also reveal the 'hand-in-glove' relationship with manager of the Gaiety Theatre, Louis Elliman and the Archbishop through their warm and cordial personal letters.

⁵²³ Deane, 2004, 148 – 149.

⁵²⁴ Ibid, 165.



Figure 13 Programme from the Irish première of *The Ginger Man*, Gaiety Theatre, 1959. Image courtesy of the Donleavy Estate

By its third performance *The Ginger Man* had made the front page of the *Irish Times*. With the headline "Gaiety Play Withdrawn."⁵²⁵ However, the report does not document scenes of outraged reaction from the audience that would warrant closure of the play as reported in the headline. "The theatre was half-full last night and the audience repeatedly applauded portions of the play. A few people left at the end of the second act and did not return".⁵²⁶ The review of the play from the *Irish Times*, some two days earlier noted "the mingled love and loathing of Dublin, expressed in words that glitter and cut like a welding torch is not a pastiche of Joyce, but a recreation . . . Mr. Donleavy almost achieves his

⁵²⁵ "Gaiety Play Withdrawn", *Irish Times*, 29 October 1959, 1.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

ambition of turning Dangerfield into a latter-day Hamlet. Last night's production brought only a few shouts from the audience . . . Philip Wiseman's production is brilliant . . ."527

The play which summoned the direct intervention and censorship of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin received only minor and limited fracas in a production described as "brilliant" and where the cast were uniformly cited for wonderful and animated performances. Norman Fruchter, writing in the *New Left Review* says of Donleavy, that from *The Ginger Man* to *Fairy Tale of New York* (produced at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, in 1971), "[Donleavy] has traced a wily, subterranean trail from joy to ambivalence, from sensual to sensuous pleasure to partial withdrawal, from anarchy to compromise."⁵²⁸

Dangerfield refuses to compromise his desires and passions to spite any consequences: "The joy of woman's flesh, the joy of love-making; the joy of liquor; the joy of friendship with the very few people who have not betrayed him."⁵²⁹

Fruchter continues to identify how the Roman Catholic Church and in particular Archbishop McQuaid sought to remove this play from the view of Dublin audiences: "He [Dangerfield] permits to no concessions to any morality . . . so he is free. What limits him is no inner structure of will or doctrine, no fear of inhibition, but only the boundary-defining prohibitions of the outside world."⁵³⁰ Donleavy would say of Dangerfield that "most people misunderstand him. You have this problem, say with actors who might be playing Dangerfield on stage. They forget that he wants to take his place in society. He is not interested in the down-trodden or the worker but rather in his private income."⁵³¹

On 29th of October, a letter is sent to Archbishop McQuaid from the 'front of house' at the Diocesan headquarters. Healy writes to query if the speculation made in the previous late edition of the *Daily Mail*, which cites an apparent quote from Elliman stating that McQuaid was the reason the play had been taken off the previous night was in fact accurate. A letter the same day also noted an enquiry from the *Daily Mail* seeking to speak

⁵²⁷ "The Ginger Man at the Gaiety Theatre, the *Irish Times*, 27 October 1959, 4.

⁵²⁸ "Where is the Ginger Man?" Norman Fruchter, *The New Left Review*, March – April 1961. <https://newleftreview.org/l/8/norman-fruchter-where-is-the-ginger-man> Accessed 14 October 2016.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ "Only for the moment am I saying nothing": An interview with J.P. Donleavy, Thomas E. Kennedy. *The Literary Review*. Vol. 40, No. 4, 1997. 660.

with a 'Monsignor Nolan', who apparently introduced himself as such a person when speaking with Elliman at the Gaiety Theatre and with two of the cast on the previous evening. An annotation by McQuaid in response to this query writes "they must mean Fr. Nolan, S.J., Chaplain to the Catholic Stage Guild."⁵³²

A further letter arrived to the Archbishop on the 29th Oct, 5.30pm, from a James Ardle Mac Mahon, likely a lay administrator at the Archbishop's House. The letter stated Fr. Gerard Nolan S.J. requested a meeting with McQuaid to update him on the nearly five hours of meetings he has recently had with Elliman concerning *The Ginger Man*. The level of direct influence the Church was implementing upon the management of the Gaiety Theatre, a commercial theatre, was unprecedented but also not unusual where/when Elliman was personally involved. Actor and director Barry Cassin recounts in his memoir, that Elliman's reputation and persona as a figure of power and position preceded him:

Over the theatre (The Gaiety) ruled T.R. Royal, a cover-name for the impresario Louis Elliman, also owner manager of the Gaiety, known universally as 'Mister Louis'.

Underlings like myself did not actually bow in his presence, but we thought about it. At the dress rehearsal he sat out front to vet the show. Comedy sketches, especially, attracted his attention. At the slightest hint of a double-meaning joke, his voice was raised – 'Cut'.⁵³³

On the day after the play was cancelled at the Gaiety, Richard Harris wrote directly to the Archbishop on letterhead from Jury's Hotel, College Green, Dublin. Harris wrote in an openly apologetic manner, seeking the forgiveness of the Archbishop for any offence to "our religion"⁵³⁴ in performing in the play. Harris also outlines that he accepted responsibility for his part in supporting the play performed in an unexpurgated form and in not agreeing to the cuts as suggested by a representative of McQuaid, likely to be Fr. Gerard Nolan, S.J. Harris admitted that "[he] approached the part as a Catholic. Harris added that he "found from the sentiments and theme of the play, that though it was without the façade of purity, it was honest and most artistic in its taste."⁵³⁵ Harris requested a private meeting with McQuaid to

⁵³² Letter to Archbishop McQuaid, 29 October 1959, Dublin Diocesan Archive, XXV/69/2.

⁵³³ Cassin, 2012. 50.

⁵³⁴ Letter from Richard Harris to Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, 30 October 1959. DDA XXV/69/5.

⁵³⁵ Letter from Richard Harris to Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, 30 October 1959. DDA XXV/69/5.

discuss these points, especially as he planned to perform the play in New York in the near future. McQuaid, however, replied via his secretary, and stated that if Harris had "any moral problem concerning your post in the play to which you refer, His Grace feels sure that you can find the direction you may need with your usual spiritual advisor."⁵³⁶ This action was an obvious attempt by McQuaid to avoid any public association with the scenario while it was yet ongoing. Being acutely aware of such controversy involving Irish theatre in recent years, including *The Drums of Father Ned* /*The Rose Tattoo* debacles.⁵³⁷

McQuaid's papers reveal this was a calculated action on his part. While not commenting publicly, the Archbishop was actively receiving communications and making judgements upon the affair. On 30th October, Fr. Gerard Nolan forwarded McQuaid a detailed report on "the events leading up to the booking and subsequent closing down of the play [*The Ginger Man*] . . ." The report states that the Globe Theatre Company management had an unspecified booking with the Gaiety Theatre from 26 October to 7 November 1959, subject to the approval of the Gaiety management. The suggestion was then made to Elliman to book *The Ginger Man*. Elliman subsequently dispatched William Ryan and Godfrey Quigley to London to vet the play. Quigley, his wife, actress Genevieve Lyon, would complement two of the English actors in the Dublin cast and rehearse for ten days in London prior to returning to Dublin.

Owing to this close cooperation between the English and Irish cast members, only a walk-through of some parts was deemed necessary in Dublin. Following the opening night, Elliman immediately demanded Donleavy and Wiseman make cuts to the text. Following the second night's performance, Elliman issued an ultimatum that the cuts must be made to the passages "objectionable and offensive to taste and opinion here".⁵³⁸ No list of the cuts is made in the report to McQuaid at this point, however.

⁵³⁶ Letter from Gerard Nolan S.J. to Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, 30 October 1959. DDA XXV/69/6.

⁵³⁷ The planned production of O'Casey's *The Drums of Father Ned* and an adaptation of Joyce's *Ulysses* at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1958, were dropped owing to the Archbishop withdrawing from a ceremonial mass to be performed and which led to the eventual postponement of the Festival. In the previous year, 1957, one of the most infamous of all acts of Church-led censorship upon Irish theatre, the case of *The Rose Tattoo* at the Pike Theatre, directed by Alan Simpson, led to the personal breakdown of the Pike Theatre and major reputational damage to Dublin and Ireland as a centre of world drama.

⁵³⁸ Report on *The Ginger Man*, Dublin Diocesan Archive. XXV/69/1, 1.

Fr. Nolan cited reasons to deflect the claims and attention of 'the English papers' who claim the origins of the call to ban this play stemmed from pressure from the Irish [Catholic] hierarchy. Firstly, the management of the Gaiety are bound by their patent not to present plays which "be in no way offensive to audiences."⁵³⁹ Wiseman had hoped and looked for a banning of the play owing to reputational damage already done, banning would afford a higher publicity record. Crucially, there is evidence given in this interview that Wiseman and Donleavy were considering the cuts suggested.

The reaction to *The Ginger Man* in the Irish print media was uniformly bleak in its condemnation of the play. Its blasphemous and shocking sequence of attacks upon the moral decency of Dublin life and people coupled with the expression of mock-crucifixion by Dangerfield, (and so portraying himself as a modern-day Christ figure), reversed the traditional Roman Catholic Church image of women passively at the side of Jesus through his crucifixion, embodied by Mary Magdalene. In Donleavy's play, the radical image presented showed distressed and confined women such as Marion given the opportunity not only to leave their abusive spouses but also to metaphorically 'forcibly' drive the nails into the Church which was perpetuating the continued role of servitude and silence of women and in tandem with the State which was constitutionally holding Irish women as second-class citizens. A review in [The Irish Independent] wrote:

[The Ginger Man] is one of the most nauseating plays ever to appear on a Dublin stage and it is a matter of some concern that its presentation should ever have been considered. It is an insult to religion and an outrage to normal feelings of decency.⁵⁴⁰

Elliman now was at risk of having his bluff called. He reverted to his previous ultimatum of 'cuts or closure' and took the decision at that moment to close the play or risk legal proceedings for breach of contract. He called the playwright and director and informed them on their supposed breach. The decision was given at 4.30pm in the presence of Fr. O'Neill and adhered to fifteen minutes before curtain. The play was over before it had fully begun.

⁵³⁹ Report on *The Ginger Man* prepared by Gerard Nolan S.J. October 1959. DDA XXV/69/11 (49).

⁵⁴⁰ [Irish Independent] Dublin Diocesan Archive, XXV/69/19.

In the *Sunday Express* coverage, the reporter linked Harris personally with the character of Sebastian Dangerfield, referring to Harris as the "red-haired actor" who would play *The Ginger Man*. The *Sunday Express* report explicitly places the cause of the withdrawal of the play at the hands of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland. Harris expands on his personal Catholicism stating he took on the role of Dangerfield as a Catholic and will likely take the Archbishop's advice in talking with a 'spiritual advisor' but only to seek clarity as to what may be deemed offensive in the play. Donleavy, who left Ireland for England the following day after the closure of the play spoke of the disappointment of the episode but also struck at McQuaid's and the Church's policy of enforcing censorship upon works of deemed moral indecency, saying: "If the Archbishop had seen the play it might have been different."⁵⁴¹

The play and indeed the character of Dangerfield became so synonymous with Richard Harris that the actor admitted to feeling Dangerfield had become a physical part of his personality and added to his personal problems. "The play is a classic and my part is wonderful . . . In fact I have put so much into playing Dangerfield, the *Ginger Man*, I think I have become the character . . . I blame this play for the break-up of my marriage."⁵⁴² The personal toll was also evident on the playwright as Donleavy admitted to be "shattered and shocked" but not surprised that Ireland's conservative Church outlook on artistic criticism would ferment closure of the play on grounds of blasphemy: "There is a terrible amount of confusion between the cast, myself and the management . . . I thought there might be trouble with the play in Dublin but I did not think it would lead to this."⁵⁴³

In December 1959, one month after the initial closure of 'the Dublin play', Elliman wrote to McQuaid, thanking him for his recent personal letter. In thanking the Archbishop for his support in the case, Elliman writes:

In the business of play production it is possible to exercise full control where the subject originates at home. Imported matter is much more difficult and in the recent

⁵⁴¹ "Archbishop will not see *Ginger Man* actor", *Sunday Express*, 1 November 1959. Dublin Diocesan Archive, XXV/69/173 C.

⁵⁴² "I AM the *Ginger Man* says Harris", *Daily Mail*, 30 November 1959, Dublin Diocesan Archive, XXV/69/16.

⁵⁴³ "*Ginger Man* off after three nights", *Daily Mail*, [29 November 1959] Dublin Diocesan Archive, xxv/69/15.

unacceptable play, though viewed on my behalf, did not measure up to the standard set for our theatre. The letter signs off with "kindest personal regards."⁵⁴⁴

As Donleavy exiled himself from Ireland following the treatment of the play, an act of collusion and censorship by the Catholic Church and the Gaiety Theatre management, Harris too left Ireland to be admitted to a Cornish nursing home on medical advice. "I have got to rid my system of *The Ginger Man*", Harris explained. "The aftermath of this is terrible."⁵⁴⁵ At the root of this case is the realisation that Donleavy and others such as Swift, Simpson, O'Brien, and others of this time, were seeking to challenge a society and its orthodoxies, as well as traditional theatrical form.

Conclusion

The significance to Irish theatre of the case of *The Ginger Man* is brought out by director Alan Simpson. Simpson directed a revival of the play at the Eblana Theatre, Dublin, in 1971 with actor Eamon Morrissey in the role of Dangerfield. In his unpublished essay, "Some Thoughts on the Ginger Man", Simpson foregrounds the social realism of the play and again draws attention to the links with the work of Brendan Behan:

Many people regards the novel *The Ginger Man* as a fantasy. This is not the case. It is as realistic a "slice of Life" as *Borstal Boy*. It is an extremely accurate portrayal of a group of people living on the south side of Dublin, circa 1949.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ Letter from Louis Elliman to Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. 1 December 1958, Dublin Diocesan Archive. XXV/69/16.

⁵⁴⁵ "Ginger Man actor for nursing home", *Irish Times*, 9 November 1959, Dublin Diocesan Archive, XXV/69/21.

⁵⁴⁶ "Some Thoughts on *The Ginger Man*", [1971], Alan Simpson Papers, James Hardiman Library NUI Galway. 1.

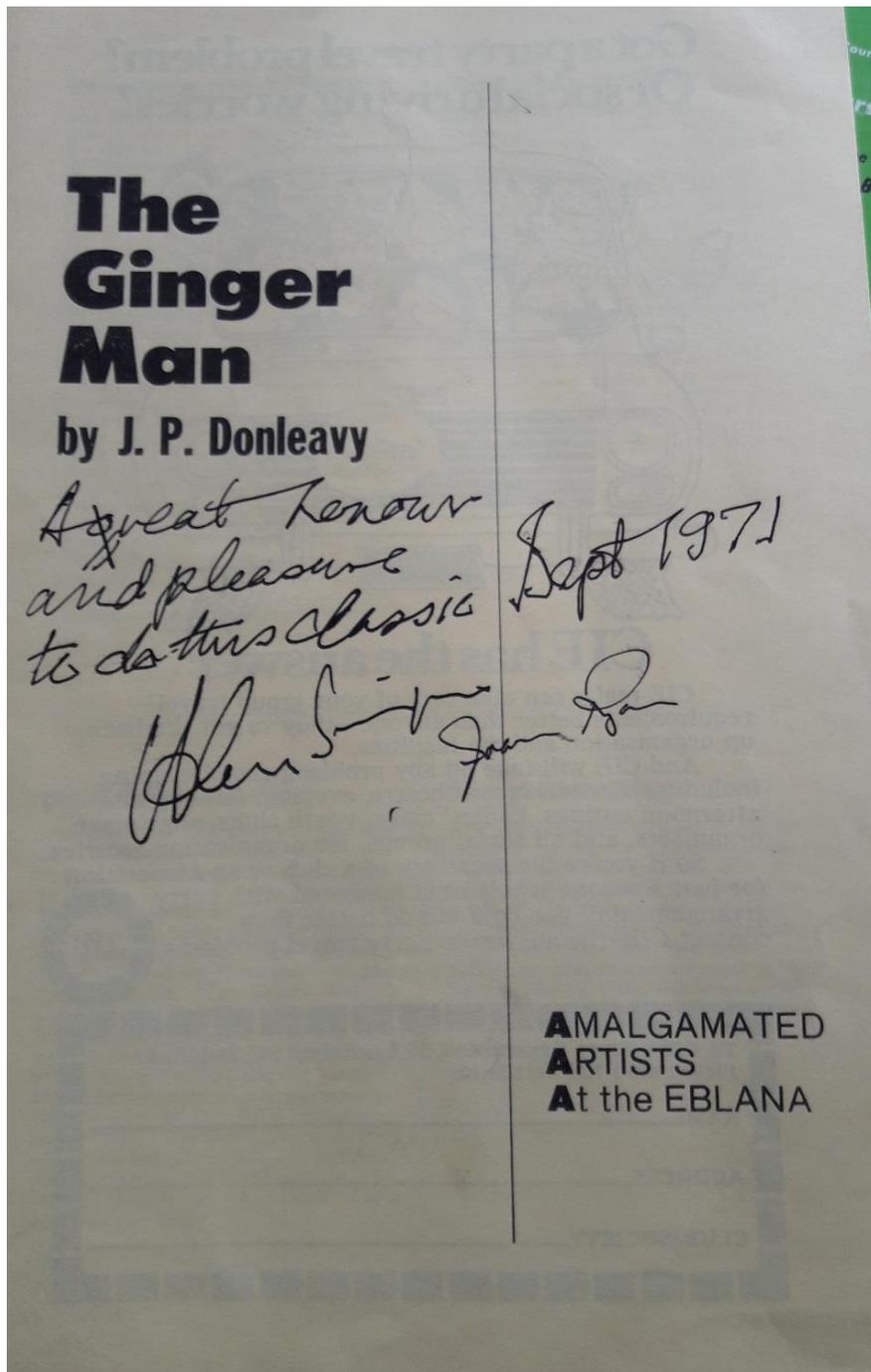


Figure 14 Programme from 1971 production of *The Ginger Man* by Amalgamated Artists, Eblana Theatre. Directed by Alan Simpson. Autograph reads "A great honour and pleasure to do this classic. Sept 1971. Alan Simpson (Director) John Ryan (Designer). Courtesy of Donleavy Estate.

Simpson also reveals his pity at not being able to direct the first production of the play when submitted to the Pike Theatre in 1957. Ian R. Walsh describes the programming of the Pike Theatre as having "a clear manifesto and were self-consciously experimental and avant-garde."⁵⁴⁷ Simpson concludes that the full extent of censorship directed upon *The Ginger*

⁵⁴⁷ Ian R. Walsh, *Experimental Irish Theatre After Yeats* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 164.

Man was due to its ingrained anti-Catholicism. Similar to the later plays of Sean O'Casey which attracted the criticism censorship of the Roman Catholic Church, plays such as *The Drums of Father Ned* and *The Bishop's Bonfire*. Simpson surmised that the treatment of O'Casey was received due to the 'unconscious influence of his father [O'Casey's] than his own atheist-Marxism. Behan's plays on the other hand are more warmly remembered than the plays of Donleavy or of O'Casey's later works as his "fair minded swipes at the lunatic fringes of both Orange and Green are clearly stated and with good humour."⁵⁴⁸

Simpson's insights as a director clarify the lack of a more comprehensive production history for the play. Donleavy's hyper-realism was difficult to relate to outside of a socio-religious Irish context. In comparison, Behan's plays were 'the easiest for both native and foreign actors and directors to interpret.'⁵⁴⁹ *The Ginger Man* was a radical and necessarily provocative anti-nationalist and anti-authoritarian statement. In Simpson's words "[It] may be a period piece [in 1971] but it seems to be current affairs to younger Dublin."⁵⁵⁰ The play marked a watershed moment in Irish theatre that proved to be a clear statement of defiance against Irish traditional and inherited orthodoxies and it opened a door for more progressive works of the 'new wave' of Irish drama and dramatists that would emerge in this period.

⁵⁴⁸ Simpson, [1971], 3.

⁵⁴⁹ Simpson, [1971], 3

⁵⁵⁰ Simpson, [1971], 4.

Chapter 4 – Staging the Landscape of Ireland’s Middle-Class

Speaking in Chicago in October 1963, at a dinner in his honour, Taoiseach Sean Lemass addressed business, political and civic leaders about the changed landscape, both physically and ontologically, of modern Ireland:

At home, Ireland has changed and is at present changing faster than ever before and the change is far reaching. The Ireland of the mists on the bog is gone forever. The bogs have been drained and the mists have been replaced by power-plants which produce electricity from the peat. The shamrock is the symbol of Irish International Airlines which operates highly efficient jet services across the Atlantic. And the land of the jaunting car is today manufacturing automobiles. The spirit of the rising generation of Ireland - a generation full of self-assurance and confidence and the will to succeed – is exerting a new and powerful impact on our psychological climate and on the pattern and pace of our economic growth.⁵⁵¹

Lemass’ depiction of Ireland as a nation already transitioned into industrial and economic prominence, was in itself a performance of modernity. This development was reflected in two major supporting facets: the modernisation of the Irish landscape and the emergence of a prosperous and educated middle-class, in support of the national project. The chapter will investigate, through examining the performance records, correspondence, unpublished essays and speeches of playwright Hugh Leonard, how the physical and economic development of Ireland was satirised and critiqued through innovative dramaturgy and the questioning of time and place on stage.

For the playwright, screen-writer and columnist Hugh Leonard the question, "Why don't you write a play that says something to *us*?" put to him by a Dublin journalist, reminded him that he yet lived and worked in a provincial society. Leonard would strongly deny the charges that his plays did not address the urgent and radical social issues of his time. "The title character in *Da* is a product of class and religion . . . In *A Life*, young Desmond Drumm may be likened to a sapling that has become a gnarled and stunted tree because of the arid soil - his native village, *The Patrick Pearse Motel* was, until *Kill* was

⁵⁵¹ "Taoiseach addresses Chicago leaders", *Irish Times*, 15 October, 1963, 5.

written, my most overtly social play, deploying fact to reveal the abyss between revolutionary ideals and the later reality of a huckster's shop republic."⁵⁵² Yet, Leonard's plays are widely considered as lying outside of in depth examination from canonical studies and historiography.

Within Leonard's plays, there is a convergence of both past and present Ireland – the passing traditional Ireland is challenged by an emerging affluent and middle-class society, more attuned to personal gratification in a consumer-culture driven society than with connectivity to or cognisance of past Irish heritage and tradition. Fintan O'Toole reminds us of the perceptive and socially reflective dramaturgy of Hugh Leonard that foregrounded the ambivalence to memory of new generations in the wake of monetary affluence: "No one captured the comedy and melancholy of 'new money' better than Hugh Leonard."⁵⁵³ By revisiting the documentary evidence of the theatrical construction, the innovative use of place and dramatic locations, and the fracturing of time as a dramatic device, it is possible to position Leonard as an overlooked playwright within the development of contemporary Irish drama.

Leonard and the Irish Canon – The Outsider and an Uneasy Relationship

Within contemporary Irish theatre Hugh Leonard occupies the curious space of such an 'outsider'. He is continually mentioned in the same breath as major Irish theatrical canonical figures; Brian Friel, Thomas Murphy, and Thomas Kilroy, and others. Leonard's reach and connection to Irish audiences and to theatre audiences internationally, through vehicles like the Dublin Theatre Festival and also through Tony-Award success in America, ensures Leonard is among the 'most-viewed' of all Irish playwrights of the last half-century. However, no monograph is dedicated to the critical and analytical study of his literary career. The paucity of dedicated scholarship on Leonard's plays is to the detriment of a fuller and wider understanding of the intersection of Irish contemporary drama and

⁵⁵² Hugh Leonard, *Kill*, Introduction, (Galway: Campus Publishing, 1995), 3.

⁵⁵³ Fintan O'Toole, "Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks: 1973 – Da, by Hugh Leonard", *Irish Times*, 19 December 2015. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/modern-ireland-in-100-artworks-1973-da-by-hugh-leonard-1.2471045> Accessed 12 January 2018.

society⁵⁵⁴. Christopher Murray, writing in 1997, considered the omission of Leonard from inclusion in the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* was a 'significant error'.⁵⁵⁵

Leonard's career, which included some twenty-five professionally produced original plays (including six one-acts) and a further ten full-length adaptations, (of some of Ireland's most prominent literary works, such as those by James Joyce and John McGahern), two volumes of autobiography, two novels, a host of work for Irish and British television, not to mention a weekly column, entitled *The Curmudgeon*, in one of Ireland's widest circulating broadsheets, *The Sunday Independent*, for over two decades, should present a legacy of wide study and production revivals. The opposite is the case however. As is noted in his obituary in the *Irish Times*, Leonard was: "A popular playwright and busy adapter, whose work filled theatres rather than volumes of criticism, he paid for this popularity."⁵⁵⁶

Chris Morash dedicates perhaps the largest coverage of Leonard's work in his book, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000*. Morash identifies three major plays by Leonard from the 1970s, *Da* (1973), *Time Was* (1976), and *A Life* (1979), that:

emerge not only as hugely entertaining pieces of theatre . . . but also as important social commentaries on a society that, in spite of a slowing of the economic growth of the 1960s, was continuing to become more dominated by the values of an urban middle-class . . . Leonard charts a culture that is tearing away from its past, alternately seduced and fearful of the pleasures of nostalgia.⁵⁵⁷

Playwright Thomas Kilroy explores the many and often divergent questions surrounding the expression of 'the self and society' in Irish writing. Kilroy admits he is acutely aware of an

⁵⁵⁴ Dedicated chapters on Leonard include "Leonard's Progress: Hugh Leonard at the Dublin Theatre Festival" by Emilie Pine and published in the book *Interactions: Dublin Theatre Festival 1957-2007*. Grene, Nicholas and Lonergan Patrick, with Chambers, Lillian, eds., (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008); Lisa Coen, "Urban and Rural Theatre Cultures: M.J. Molloy, John. B. Keane and Hugh Leonard", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*, Nicholas Grene, Nicholas, and Chris Morash, eds., (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016). Christopher Murray dedicated detailed attention to Leonard in his chapter "A Generation of Playwrights" published in *Mirror up to the Nation: Twentieth Century Irish Drama*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, 1997).

⁵⁵⁵ Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to the Nation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 162.

⁵⁵⁶ 'Playwright with full mastery of his craft', *Irish Times*, 14 February 2009. <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/playwright-with-full-mastery-of-his-craft-1.700514> Accessed 16 December 2016.

⁵⁵⁷ Chris, Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 249.

inherited Anglo-centric literary tradition that places certain expectations upon the writer in society.⁵⁵⁸ Leonard disregards this inherited tradition through not seeking to indulge literary high-art. Leonard is unapologetically 'popular' in his dramatic composition and themes. Kilroy further qualifies this point and forges a place for the style of drama championed by Leonard by contending a 'literary snobbery' was and is active against such works which do not squarely fit the mould of the 'Anglic' tradition. "The idea of High Art and Low Art is deeply rooted within this tradition, a symptom of social presumptions which this country, like each one anglicized through colonization, has inherited."⁵⁵⁹ Christopher Murray also considered the political and social position of Leonard's work within the context of the Irish canon. He places Leonard at the other end of the spectrum, away from the working class and 'new' urban Dubliners, to holding a mirror up to Dublin's new bourgeoisie.

In Leonard's plays, from his earliest professional works such as *A Leap in the Dark* (1957) *A Walk on the Water* (1960) through to his Tony-award highs of the 1970s with *Da*, a duality of presence occurs. There is a current 'present' but also a noticeable absent past. Fintan O'Toole elucidates this point by stating that:

Hugh Leonard doesn't write tragedies. Tragedies are about the problems of striving, but the middle class has already fulfilled its aspirations. It has got to where it wanted to be. Instead, those who have made it have a gnawing fear of returning to the past, of slipping down the ladder, back to where they came from. Their particular neurosis is schizophrenia; they are at once products of their own pasts and terrified of it.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Thomas Kilroy, "The Irish Writer: Self and Society, 1950-1980", in *Literature and the Changing Ireland*, ed. Peter Connolly (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980), 179.

⁵⁵⁹ Kilroy, 1980, 178.

⁵⁶⁰ Julia Furay and Redmond O'Hanlon, *Critical Moments: Fintan O'Toole on Modern Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003), 297.

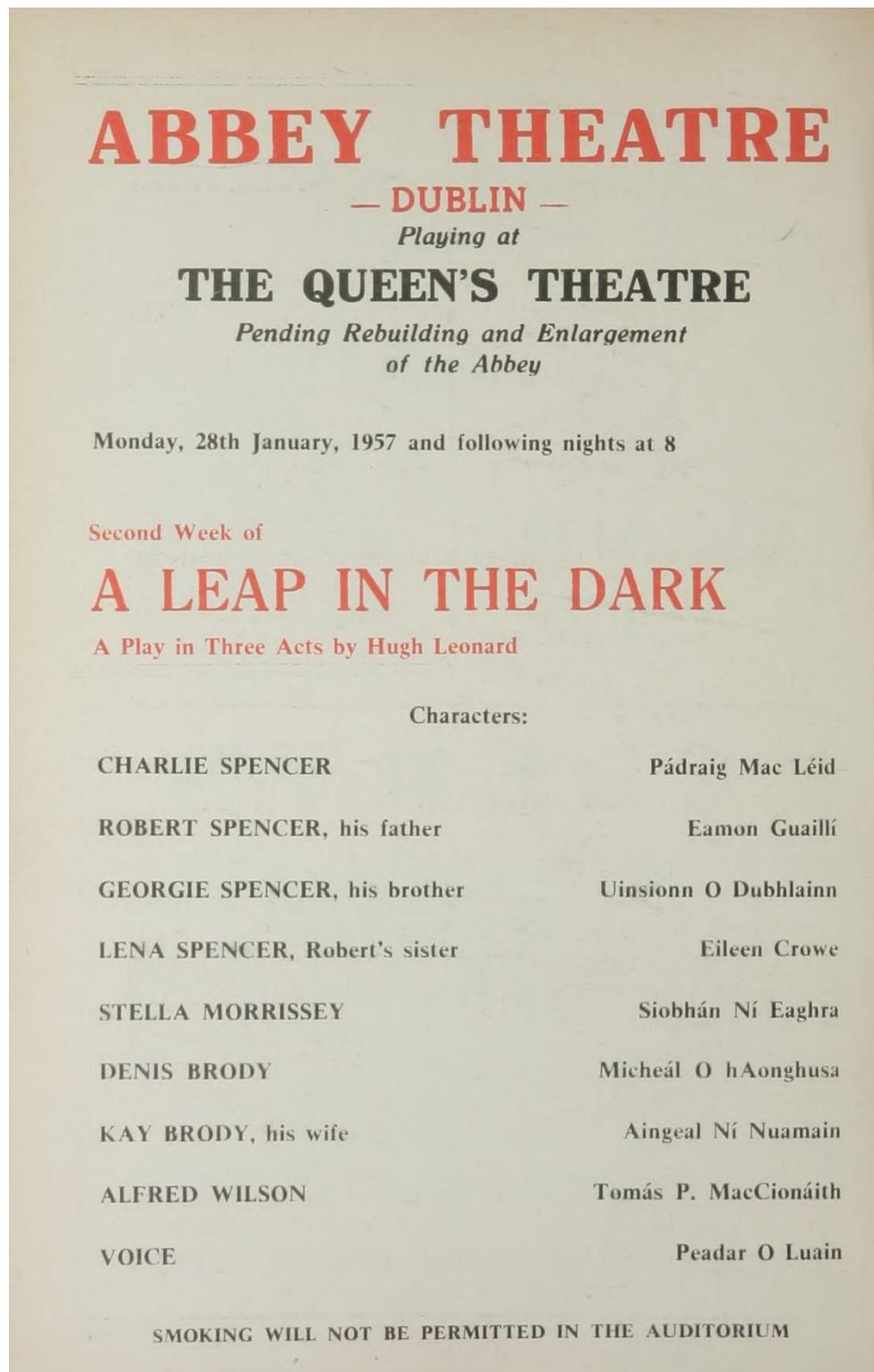


Figure 15: Programme from first production of *A Leap in the Dark* by Hugh Leonard, abbey Theatre, 1957. JHL.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶¹ Abbey Theatre. *A Leap in the Dark*, 21 Jan 1957 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3621_MPG_02, p6.



Figure 16: T.P. McKenna and Pádraig Mac Léid in *A Leap in the Dark* by Hugh Leonard. Abbey Theatre, JHL.⁵⁶²

The complexity of these scenarios, in terms of production, audience reception and in directorial demands and staging are masked by a veil of comedy, which Leonard wraps around his dialogue and characters. Some works may struggle to be perceived as delving into the inner psyche, fears, tragedy and identity of a nation or of citizens when one is laughing and enveloped by humour. O'Casey and Synge constructed a 'national drama' and did so with farcical and comedic ability in places and through certain characters (Fluther Good in *The Plough and the Stars*; the slew of female admirers of *The Playboy*, Christy Mahon, for example) but also deconstructed class anxiety, colonial discourse, nationality and identity with deep tragedy and conflict.

⁵⁶² Abbey Theatre. *A Leap in the Dark*, 21 Jan 1957 [photographs]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3621_PH_0001, p1.

Eric Weitz comments on the impact laughter and humour can have to understand the audience as much as the play or playwright's intentions:

Every comic moment in the theatre draws upon a deep, dense root system of experience, which the spectator brings to the theatre event . . . In fact, the comic handling [within a play] stands to tell us as much about our default cultural codes and prejudices in a single audience reaction as any anthropological study in a thousand hours of fieldwork.⁵⁶³

Morash further suggests that Leonard did not so much present the broad edifices of Irish nationality for ridicule – such as Church and State, but rather did so through narrow cracks that provoked an unsettling space. Instead, Leonard probed the fissures that later playwrights exposed with great aplomb. In the case of the Catholic Church, this came in the form of "a trilogy by different hands" – Tom Murphy's *The Sanctuary Lamp*, (1976), Thomas Kilroy's *Talbot's Box* (1977) and Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979). While these plays broke traditions and structures of form and staging, Leonard's works of the period also offer commentary on social condition of Ireland, notable the clash of tradition and modernity, memory and presence and also physical heritage in a radically changing Irish landscape. As Brian Friel also accounted for in his political farce, *The Mundy Scheme*, (1969) the Irish landscape and the physical country itself was under a deep malaise.

O'Toole described the arrival of upward social mobility in 1960s Ireland as the change from "the clash of the ash to the flash of the cash, the he middle classes had arrived and Hugh Leonard was the man to articulate its fears and securities."⁵⁶⁴ What began with rejection from the Abbey Theatre for Jack Keyes Byrne in 1955 began anew for 'Hugh Leonard' in 1956. *The Big Birthday*, a retitled play by a renamed playwright, presented 'the outsider' with an open door at the Abbey Theatre. Soon, the nation and its predominantly growing affluent class would feel the sting of Leonard's pen.

⁵⁶³ Eric Weitz, *The Power of Laughter: Comedy and Contemporary Irish Theatre*. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004), 2.

⁵⁶⁴ *Critical Moments: Fintan O'Toole on Modern Irish Theatre*, Furay, Julia, and O'Hanlon, Redmond, eds. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003) 297.

Becoming 'Hugh Leonard'

Leonard's own personal experience of being an outsider became the norm in his life long before he became 'Hugh Leonard'. Leonard was born as John Byrne in Dublin in 1926, to Annie Byrne. He was given up for adoption after just three days. This contributed to a recognisable trait in Leonard's plays, where characters are often in motion – journeying outwards from home places seeking their place and identity to the present or journeying homeward, seeking to reconcile the past. Having been rejected by his biological parents, Leonard would later comment that he was “attempting to find a place where I might 'belong'.”⁵⁶⁵

Leonard grew up in a modest house on Kalafat Lane in Dalkey, south county Dublin. His adoptive father, Nick Keyes, worked as a gardener for a local wealthy Anglo-Irish family. When the family, depleted through age and death, sold the estate it was soon purchased by a wealthy Catholic family. The effect and impact this would have on the young Leonard would come to the fore in later plays such as *Da* (1973) and *Kill* (1982) but also drew his attention to the recalibration in class and family structures in the towns and areas around him as a microcosm for change in Ireland itself.

In choosing the Presentation Brothers Primary School over the other local Christian Brothers School, the young Leonard witnessed how identity and class ascribed to him owing only from his name and address could be simply bought as easily as a piece of land in a newly gentrified area. This theme would dominate Leonard's 1974 play, *Summer*,⁵⁶⁶ which was set on Killiney Hill. The idyllic coastal landscape is being engulfed by prospective developers. Three middle-age couples meet for a picnic and struggle to reconcile their hopes and aspirations to how reality and happiness do not always intersect. The split-time device (common to Leonard's plays of this period) displaces memory and shifts expectation for the couples' children as they witness how the shallowness of their parents' generation result in 'cause and effect' repercussions for their future. So too for the young Leonard who endured

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid, 37.

⁵⁶⁶ *Summer* was premiered in America by the Hudson Theatre Guild at the Olney Theatre, Maryland. The play received an Irish premiere at the Olympia Theatre, 7 October 1974, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival.

a schooling where he felt of how 'place' ascribed him an identity he tried to untangle himself from:

I gave my address as the not so lowly and quite imaginary Anastasia Terrace. It fooled nobody. . . I knew that to be what they [his classmates] called illegitimate was an occasion of deep shame. There had been a sin of some kind, and because of it you were not the same as the children who had parents.⁵⁶⁷

The playwright Denis Johnston became a formative influence on the dramatic style and writing of the young Leonard. Leonard would fantasise about choosing a father-figure to look up to. He outlined that "one reason that I picked on Denis Johnston was that he was the only dramatist writing the kind of play that, when young, I wanted to write. I thought *The Moon in the Yellow River* was a masterpiece".⁵⁶⁸ Leonard would add that when looking deeply into the surface of the play, as if it were a mirror, he would see the face of Johnston but also his own reflection, shocked into seeing the "lethal mixture of romance and idealism that make up the Irish ethos."⁵⁶⁹ Leonard mines the foremost agenda of a Johnston play and also infused his own writing with that agenda and style – being a representation of Ireland, "a place where it is the inevitable alone that never happens."⁵⁷⁰

This staging of an 'unknown Ireland', one where the predictable doesn't happen and the natural order remains un-progressed, is a primary reason why Leonard is not widely produced within recent years. The Irish society of his plays is largely set within family group settings who are often disenfranchised from each other as much as they are disparate from an Irish state that praises the conformed but stymies the lone outsider. The 'groupthink' of middle-class Ireland – focusing on social advancement through wealth and materiality, in place of intellectualism or non-conformity with the national agenda, ensured that Leonard's plays would have been seen as little more than light and humorous melodrama, rather than sharp social satire.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid. 55.

⁵⁶⁸ Hugh Leonard, Foreword, in *Orders and Desecrations: The Life of the Playwright Denis Johnston*, Rory Johnston, ed. (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1992), vii.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

Leonard's deep respect for Johnston, as a brave figure of contempt for establishment, mirror's Leonard's own artistic vision. Leonard surmised that Irish theatre audiences (and as a microcosm of middle-class Ireland itself) are unconnected to the plays of Johnston and therefore his own work also as:

he [Johnston] is the wrong shape and size for pigeon-holing . . . the English think of him as Irish, whereas the Irish have never known what to make of him, and at times they beget the suspicion that a member of the literary Quality is deriving amusement from what Myles na gCopaleen termed the Common People of Ireland.⁵⁷¹

With this concept of non-belonging,⁵⁷² Leonard would, in his writing, as Johnston did before him, question the Ireland he saw around him and hold the controlling class of a modern Republic up to task for failing in their social contract to protect and cherish 'all children of the national equally'. Leonard would describe his childhood as being "with poor Catholic parents and within an 'up the rebels!' environment, [in which he] had come increasingly to feel like a cuckoo in a Sinn Féin nest."⁵⁷³

The politics of Leonard and his own personal opinions on Ireland's socio-political make-up are central to a rounded understanding of the dramaturgy and mechanics of a Leonard play. Leonard was staunchly anti-Republican and a vocal critic of armed measures in pursuit of a united Ireland. Leonard was interested in and influenced by European and cosmopolitan outlook and ideals. He was chiefly concerning with depicting the universality of the human condition and how the experience of those within a microcosm of Ireland's new middle-classes were representative of concerns of identity, nation and class, internationally. As Leonard framed this thought: "Literature is, or should be, a celebration of one's membership of the human family . . . In Ireland however, it seems that the function of the artist is not to demonstrate that we are a part of human kind, but that we are apart from it."⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷¹ Ibid, viii.

⁵⁷² Leonard would further say that Denis Johnston belonged neither to the tradition of the Gate Theatre nor the Abbey theatre.

⁵⁷³ Ibid, viii.

⁵⁷⁴ MS 41/960 (2), "The Unimportance of Being Irish", Hugh Leonard Papers, NLI, Dublin, 10.

This outlook places Leonard very much within the intellectual and artistic experimentalism pervasive within the mid-twentieth century resurgence in new Irish drama. Grene mentions both Hugh Leonard and Bernard Farrell as two contemporary Irish exponents of this style but who instead place the focus of Irish naturalism within the social margins. Grene also adds that "Irish drama has had to be seen to be Irish to be recognised as such, as this has skewed the tradition towards the representational, if not the naturalistic."⁵⁷⁵ Grene argues that the tendency has been for Irish playwrights to create plays identifiably 'Irish' (peasant plays of West of Ireland, cottage kitchen-based, tenement plays of working classes). This identification comes by virtue of the traditional vision of Ireland often in a colonial setting, (e.g. in works by Synge, Lady Gregory, Friel, or O'Casey) or in their representation of what is considered 'Irish' subject matter or in an 'Irish' location.

Leonard instead experiments with this 'Irishness' as being something not entirely 'Irish' by virtue of its setting or its dialect (south county Dublin) but rather by its 'otherness'. Irishness, in Leonard's works, exists in numerous forms and contexts. These include an 'other' Irishness, outside of traditional Republican and Catholic tropes which were synonymous with post-independence Ireland. Leonard would expand on this point in saying

[Perhaps] it may be that we still suffer from the fruits of independence, when a peasant clergy and a race of gunmen-turned-statesmen apotheosized Irish dancing (in black woollen stockings, need one say), simple folk tunes on fiddle and tin whistle, and stories mumbled over a turf fire punctuated with spittle, as the pinnacle of native art.⁵⁷⁶

Leonard would describe his admiration for the plays of Denis Johnston in terms of "[them] giving] off neither the stench of tenements nor the headier smell of farmyard manure, but also because he had the same contempt for Anglophobic nationalism that I had'.⁵⁷⁷

For Leonard, the hitherto unrepresented world of the middle-classes, the primary constituent of the modern Irish theatre audience, would prove fertile ground in which to plant the seeds of a new national theatre experiment: to make subversive theatre about

⁵⁷⁵ Grene, 1999, 265.

⁵⁷⁶ MS 41,960 (2), "The Unimportance of Being Irish", Hugh Leonard Papers, NLI, Dublin, 11.

⁵⁷⁷ Leonard, 1989, 186.

those who now were in control of large tracts of Irish society, high office and political influence and who were also the primary consumers of theatre in Ireland at the time:

we have a country with one foot in a shebeen and the other in a lounge bar, purple with plush and purring with Muzak. A race which has been brought up to respect failure as the surest sign of integrity now finds itself in a world that knows no yardstick but success.⁵⁷⁸

Leonard's New Ireland and Losing the Land

From the outset Leonard had a contentious relationship with the Abbey Theatre. With his first play, *The Italian Road*, being flatly rejected in [1956], the young playwright soon realised his style of work might be incompatible with the Abbey Theatre of Ernest Blythe, whose tastes Leonard described as being "less concerned with the fate of [the play's] characters than with the perennial theme of what was wrong with the country".⁵⁷⁹

Thomas Kilroy placed Leonard's adaptation of works by Joyce, *Stephen D*, (1962), as a play that chiefly ushered in the new era of contemporary Irish drama.⁵⁸⁰ Kilroy further places the play by virtue of its form and sensibility, being "striking, modern, alive to the dislocating perspectives of the mid-century and the fluidity of expression possible on stage with modern lighting, design and direction."⁵⁸¹ Leonard's rejection of labels, that of being an 'Abbey' or 'Irish playwright', by moving to England, has been cited by Christopher Murray as being the catalyst for works like *Stephen D* (1962).⁵⁸²

In keeping with global and national uncertainties of the decade, especially in Leonard's plays from the mid-1960s through the 1970s, Leonard both locates and dislocates his audiences. Primarily, the settings of his plays are specific locations in Ireland and more precisely within south county Dublin, often being the affluent areas of Dalkey, Killiney, or Foxrock. Within these locations, the world of the characters shifts out of sync with realist existence.

⁵⁷⁸ Hugh Leonard, "The Unimportance of Being Irish", unpublished essay. MS 41/960 (2). Hugh Leonard Papers, NLI.

⁵⁷⁹ Leonard, 1989, 183.

⁵⁸⁰ Thomas Kilroy, "A Generation of Playwrights", *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed., Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press 2000), 2.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.* 2.

⁵⁸² Murray, 1997, 167.

The Padraig Pearse Motel (1971) begins in an expansive front room of a Foxrock house, complete with eighteenth century English kitchen - all electric – before moving to a motel in the Dublin Mountains with eighty-four rooms, each named after heroes in Ireland's national struggle. *Madigan's Lock* (1958) presents a setting based at the end of a lost canal and an equally lost pub, which will reward those who discover it with 'free pints 'til God calls time and gently leads them upstairs to His own lounge bar above'. *Time Was* (1976), the only of these plays to premiere at the Abbey Theatre is a comedic fantasy in which the overbearing weight of nostalgia for a simpler past time ruptures the continuity of the present. This allows the past to be reanimated and populate current Irish society. The comedy dissolves to reveal a further strident criticism of 1970's Ireland nouveau-riche class.

A position in London offered Leonard an oblique understanding of the place of the playwright.⁵⁸³ It also allowed Leonard to live without the pressure of being 'an Irish playwright' or an 'Abbey playwright' in Dublin. On this point Leonard considered himself lucky to be able to write on Irish material but without the hindrance of audience preconceptions.⁵⁸⁴ Leonard's own self-imposed exile, unlike that of Beckett, Joyce or O'Casey before him, was not purely of an ideological stance. He was not strictly seeking to 'outfly those nets of language, nationality of religion', to paraphrase Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.⁵⁸⁵

The Arrival of Hugh Leonard

Emilie Pine situates Leonard's work within a complex position – one which does not, on the surface, contest or challenge national orthodoxies or governmental or Church doctrine but rather the personal and individual experience of those who reside within reach of the outgoing ripples of affect. Pine identifies that plays by contemporaries such as Brian Friel and Tom Murphy accrue greater critical acclaim and productions, Leonard's plays grow

⁵⁸³ Leonard took up a role with Granada Television as a script editor in Manchester in 1961, before moving to London to work as a free-lance writer in 1963.

⁵⁸⁴ Hugh Leonard Obituary, *The Guardian*, 13 February

2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/feb/13/hugh-leonard-obituary> Accessed 23 January 2017.

⁵⁸⁵ James Joyce, *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Modern Library, 1928). 238.

ever increasingly marginal.⁵⁸⁶ Leonard wrote of personal, domestic everyday of middle-class urban society, but which also addressed contemporary national questions of identity and modernisation while adapting impressionistic and complex, often fragmentary, plot constructions.

Leonard is one of the most innovative playwrights of the post-Emergency era in terms of dramatic form, setting and methods. His first production at the Abbey Theatre, *The Big Birthday*⁵⁸⁷ in 1956 would, according to a preview article in the *Irish Times*, be a 'history-making production'.⁵⁸⁸ A source from the Abbey Theatre confirmed it was the first time that "the Abbey Company will have a play right from the heart of the amateur dramatic movement."⁵⁸⁹

The play, was positively received by audiences but not so by critics, describing it as lacking the assured structure of comedy more accustomed to Lennox Robinson and Louis D'Alton. The experience did, however, enable Leonard to realise his skill as a character-writer, crafting instantly relatable figures for audiences and characters.

The change from rural peasant plays to urban Dublin comedies of the middle-classes would also alter traditional place and setting of the Irish play. No longer was the wild and unkempt west of Ireland kitchen to provide an allegorical representation for the country as a whole. Modern Irish life as was now being recorded within the expanding and affluent Dublin suburbs was to prove to be the new location for Irish drama, on the fringes of an internationalising capital city.

***A Walk on the Water* – Escaping Society and the City**

Leonard's third play, *A Walk on the Water*, (1960) was also to be his breakthrough. It was important for a number of reasons. It was staged at the Gas Works Theatre in Dún Laoghaire, which was been the home for many important and experimental productions by companies on the fringes of Irish theatre, such as Orion Productions, The Globe Company

⁵⁸⁶ Emile Pine, *Leonard's Progress: Hugh Leonard at the Dublin Theatre Festival*, Interactions: Dublin Theatre Festival 1957 – 2007 (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007), 48.

⁵⁸⁷ The play was first written in 1948 and produced by an amateur company in November 1950.

⁵⁸⁸ "First performance of new play at the Abbey Theatre", *Irish Times*, 21 January 1956, 3

⁵⁸⁹ "First performance of new play at the Abbey Theatre", *Irish Times*, 21 January 1956, 3.

and other such work by Godfrey Quigley, Phyllis Ryan, Norman Rodway and others.⁵⁹⁰ This theatre as a venue released Leonard from the pressing weight of producing what may be considered an 'Abbey play', or which was placed within a traditional realist peasant Ireland setting. Leonard instead places this play on an unspecified 'old Pier' in Dublin sometime in post-Emergency Ireland.

OWEN: We used to come here because we were bored by the war, by the safety of being out of it. We'd listen to the band on the far pier, watch the mail boat go out . . . It only lasted one summer

ALMA: It's a long time to stay anti-social.⁵⁹¹

Barney and Tom are waiting for a figure known as "the Citizen" Kane, who is the central figure and focus of the other character's presence, attention and discussion.

BARNEY: They're late again

TOM: Why not. It's all part of being anti-social. I explained it to you.

BARNEY: I'm the ignorant one, remember? And what for do we have to come all the way out here? It's freezing.

TOM: The Citizen says it's a symbol. It's the furthest we can get. From Society.⁵⁹²

The Citizen has orchestrated this group into a loose alliance of individuals, generally figures who seem ostracised from society, from any formed successful relationships or even from their own sense of identity and place. The pier is a physical representation of this questioning of Irish society. The pier is also symbolic as a point of departure for traditional Irish emigrants, with emotional and psychological connotations regarding departing Ireland and Irishness. It also offers a place of refuge in Dublin from the sprawling and expanding city and suburbs. The group, by their 'anti-social' ideology is to be separate from the growing middle-class economic status that was growing and being ably supported by the dominant political establishment of Lemass' pro-industry and pro-capitalist outlook. The sea offers a

⁵⁹⁰ The play was also produced at the Eblana Theatre, Dublin City, 19 September 1960, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. "A Walk on the Water at the Eblana", *Irish Times*, 20 September 1960, 5.

⁵⁹¹ MS 41, 954 / 1 Script of *A Walk on the Water*, Hugh Leonard Papers, NLI, Dublin, 1-2.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*

stability, a stasis and ever-presence in face of the rapidly changing and disappearing Irish culture. Leonard, in this play, presented a rebuke to the homogenising of Irish society and the amorphous western capitalist system.

Present on stage is Tom, described as "a potential painter and a potential homosexual; Barney, a pug, a simple, decent muscleman and a bit of a waster; J.J., a rigid Gaelic nationalist; Dick, a private soldier with a messed up marriage; and Nina, a loose-living, enigmatic girl . . ." ⁵⁹³

The Citizen, whose real name is Jimmy Porter (in a nod to John Osborne's influential play, *Look Back in Anger*), returns and meets the others after the passage of eight years.

Fractured time and the recurrence of the past within the present is a device often employed by Leonard. The breaking of the present through the invasion of the past into the contemporary world, in plays such as in *Time Was* (1976) *Da* (1971) and *Summer* (1974), furthers Leonard's main theatrical premise: to reveal the failures of present society through embrace of economic capitalism to the detriment of the public and also personal sense of Irish identity. This non-recognition of self and society is represented through the dramatic form of place and in particular the changing Irish urban and suburban landscapes.

The *Irish Times* reviewer concludes that *A Walk on the Water* draws obvious comparisons with James McKenna's play about the experience of 'Teddy Boys' in Dublin city in *The Scatterin'*, (1960) but Leonard's misguided and ultimately aimless individuals have more to say about contemporary Irish experience, do so more subtly and with inevitably less sympathy for its characters. It was said the play called for "interwoven contemporary action, flashbacks and chorus commentaries, and [was] very cleverly handled by the joint directors, Godfrey Quigley and Jim FitzGerald." ⁵⁹⁴

In the first act, Owen and Alma, a couple in their mid-thirties, are bickering following being at the funeral of Owen's father. We learn that Owen has arranged this get-together with his friends for around the time of the funeral. Despite the loss of his father, he is also consumed

⁵⁹³ 'A Walk on the Water, at the Eblana', *Irish Times*, 20 September 1960, 5.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

by an uncomfortable but uncertain memory, that he has caused upset in the past to his friends:

OWEN: Told you – I ruined them . . . I must have. I sent Barney that note because I wanted to find out . . . what happened. Afterwards . . . I didn't wait, you see. It's like going back to see if you've left the tap running or the light on. You don't want to.⁵⁹⁵

The lighting plan for the play utilised by Leonard in the stage directions emphasize a direct focus on the dichotomy of presence and place, between the present and the past. This has the effect of internalising and externalising the moment of memory recollection, i.e. the above exchange of memory from Owen to Alma is scripted with stage directions that show "[Owen] crosses into the other area. The light begins to fade on Alma", thus bringing the past foregrounded into the present and directly to the audience. Given the small scale of the Eblana stage, this would have accounted for an intimate atmosphere and experience.

Summer - Place, Heritage and Landscape

The decline and loss of Ireland's natural heritage as well as traditional values is also a foregrounded presence in Leonard's work. The writer Aidan Higgins, writing from London in a letter to Thomas Kilroy in October 1974 described his recognition of the downfall of Irish heritage and destruction of the landscape in the name of modernisation:

[I] rarely pass over to Ireland but when last there I was struck by the curious ugliness of progress, Irish style, single domestic dwellings planted like sores here and there, stand on Killiney Hill and marvel at suburbia (here designated "slurb") marching into Co. Wicklow . . .⁵⁹⁶

Terence Brown supports Higgins' point through his observation that ostentatious consumption in a society enjoying a rapid rise in its standards of living marked the late 1960s and 1970s in Ireland. Motor cars, houses and foreign holidays became major

⁵⁹⁵ MS41, 954 (1), Script, *A Walk on the Water*, Hugh Leonard Papers, NLI, Dublin. 1-13.

⁵⁹⁶ P103/433, letter from Aidan Higgins to Thomas Kilroy, 10 October 1974, Thomas Kilroy Archive, JHL, NUI Galway.

preoccupations, if not passions. In 1978, for example, as the *Irish Independent* reported, half of all new houses in Dublin were detached houses, built for the upper end of the market.⁵⁹⁷

Geo-cultural scholars, Ken Taylor, Archer St. Clair and Nora J. Mitchell, speaks of global indigenous cultures and their connection to local landscapes: “Where people and nature are regarded as inseparable in the philosophical sense of landscape being incomplete without people.”⁵⁹⁸ As Taylor et al, argue, progress is celebrated or lamented by the actions of those who live within a sustainable society.⁵⁹⁹

This line of argument can be traced through Leonard’s plays. There is a new dramatic representation – the sense of loss of people and habitation. In *The Country Boy*, Curly’s possible departure from the family home and the country at a crucial juncture – such as when the parental generation reaches age of physical infirmity and also economic unviability, represents a threat to the national economic modernisation and development project of the country. This idiom is also explored by Brian Friel through Gar in *Philadelphia!*, as the filial duty of Gar is represented through his succession within the village shop and home-place of rural Ballybeg.

There is a complex and taut relationship between land, streets, people and the environment in plays such as *The Patrick Pearse Motel*, *Summer* and *Da*. Monica Luengo identifies a marked change and ever-increasing impact on landscape and heritage in modern societies, highlighting relevant international policy and commentaries such as the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage* issued by UNESCO.

Irish policy and government also were aware of major housing concerns in Ireland within this period. The Fianna Fáil minister for Local Government of the early 1960s, Neil Blaney, authorised the construction of the Ballymun tower blocks in order to counteract the growing population demand and urban sprawl of Dublin City.

⁵⁹⁷ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922–2001* (London: Harper Collins, 2010), 248.

⁵⁹⁸ Ken Taylor, Archer St. Clair and Nora J. Mitchell, eds., *Conserving Cultural Landscapes: Challenges and New Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2015), x-xi

⁵⁹⁹ Ken Taylor, Archer St. Clair and Nora J. Mitchell, eds., *Conserving Cultural Landscapes: Challenges and New Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2015), xi.

Leonard's plays offer a blurring of traditional dramatic boundaries of time and place.

Traditional Irish realist dramatic convention stipulates a specific temporal and chronological stability to the on-stage action – a set of characters in recognisable locations in a recognisable time involved in recognisable acts. The psychological effect on behalf of Irish audiences to such locations and times creates a non-recognition of contemporary Ireland through their own lack of physical connection to the land, new suburban localities and heritage. As Luengo surmises, during the decade of the 1970s, a shift occurred in relationships between territorial identities and the conservation of local heritage and natural resources. In line with wider globalisation practices, the sense of one's place was dramatically impacted as emerging generations sought to reconcile their identity and role in historical and spatial memories of place. "The shifts are probably accentuated by new communication technologies that have erased our traditional concepts of time and space and as a result, unfamiliar relationships are being established."⁶⁰⁰

Julian Smith appeals to the necessity for an entirely new cultural landscape theory and practice that recognises the move from an object-centred focus to one which recognises the wider ecology of the settled and unsettled landscape, one "that considers the relationship among objects as much as their individual distinctiveness. And more importantly, it is an ecology that is both natural and cultural, involving humans as integral parts of these relationships."⁶⁰¹ In terms of Irish drama generally, this shift too is needed in order to look beyond the surface level of place and into the stratified multi-layered ecology of Leonard's Dublin sites. The pre-Celtic stone cross that is present at the opening of *Summer* is one such example of the move from isolated object to interconnected ecology. The tangible item that is wilfully neglected is highlighted by the as yet off-stage suburban development beneath Killiney Hill.

Smith places an ecological framework to the consideration and treatment of historical places and on the objects 'in relationship to each other and to the people who shape them and use them . . . the treatment of historic places within an ecological perspective does not necessarily tend towards physical conservation, restoration or reconstruction. Instead, various forms of revitalization – economic, social, cultural and political as well as physical –

⁶⁰⁰ Taylor et al, xii.

⁶⁰¹ Taylor et al, 182.

become more common.⁶⁰² Smith argues this is apt because 'historic places are understood as layered', where tangible and intangible connectivity sustain the integrity of specific places. "Architecture and landscape become interwoven with cultural practice."⁶⁰³ Smith also argues for the recognition of the importance of experience when assessing place:

The rituals of cultural practice define the shape and meaning of the urban environment as much as the physical forms within which they occur. Ritual and artefact define each other, and their cultural meaning emerges at the point of intersection. Cultural landscapes are places informed by cultural imagination, understood and valued through experience.⁶⁰⁴

This cultural landscape theory can be applied to the staging of the Dublin backdrop of Leonard's plays. The world in which Leonard develops on stage are never passive vessels in which his characters live and happen to be located in, but instead are active shapers of the environment and lives of the people we encounter. The canal waters in *Madigan's Lock*, for example, offer a medium of escape to a fantasy pub paradise. The home of Charlie and his father in *Da*, allows for a physical containment of memory and ghosts within the family home itself. The lived experiences of these sites are evidence of a definitive and vital break from the peasant cottage of realist Irish drama and a move into modern, site-shifting and fluid worlds which are themselves under development within the play.

The Irish society of the 1970s, of which Leonard was both a product of and a commentator on, included an emerging disparity of class and economic position in terms of housing and the ascribed social position one's address placed them in the eyes of others. Irish theatre-going would not be exempt from the effects of this expanding housing boom. Programmes of plays produced at the Abbey Theatre, for example, would carry advertisements from banks advertising increasingly competitive mortgage rates. 'Abbey Builders' would trade on the national theatre's name and status in attracting business from an audience seen as being comfortably middle-class, earning steady wages, married and having families and consciously 'upwardly-mobile' in accruing social status.

⁶⁰² Julian Smith, in Taylor et al, 185.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

In the Irish-language premiere of Tom Murphy's *Famine*, translated by actor Mick Lally and staged at the Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe in 1975, a glaring error of judgement was published in the programme. On a double-page spread, the left-hand page features a triptych of images depicting three stages of the effect of the Famine in mid-nineteenth century Ireland – starvation, emigration and desertion of Irish towns and villages. Adjacent to this lays a full-page advertisement for Fahy Builders, offering premiere building services and best rates with an image a two-story detached home, garden and white picket fence – the very image of white American middle-class suburbia that was influencing such similar development in Ireland.⁶⁰⁵

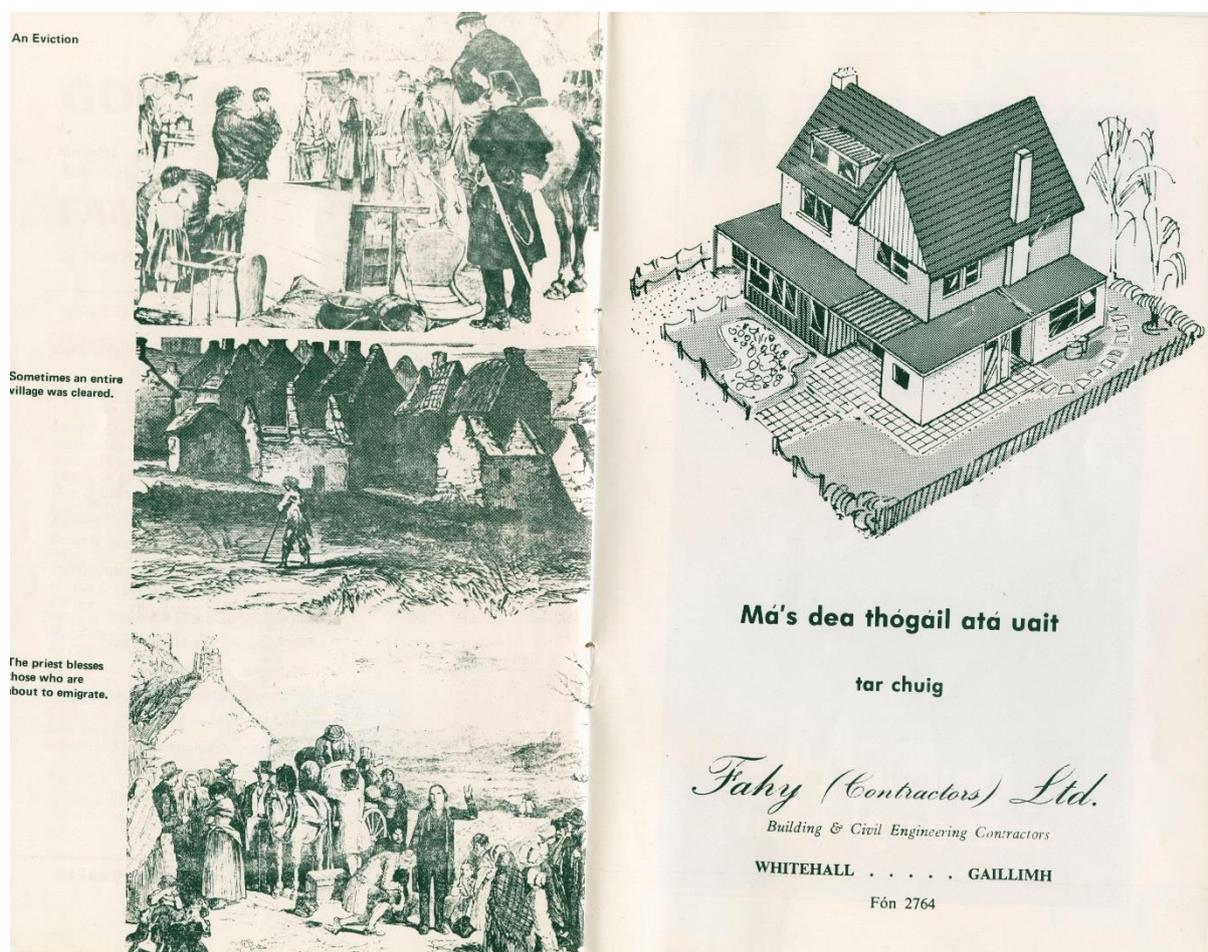


Figure 17: Programme excerpt from An Taibhdhearc production of *Famine* T1/D/285 Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe Archive, JHL.

⁶⁰⁵ T1/4/285 programme, *Gorta*, translated by Mick Lally, from *Famine* by Tom Murphy, Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe Archive, JHL, NUI Galway.

In 1974, plans to redevelop the Liberties area of Dublin city was covered in a report for *Seven Days* on RTÉ television. The message from the residents was clear – the essence of the Liberties was community, often built on familiarity through generations of successive families living side by side. Stringent opposition was put forward against proposed relocation of residents to new developments and estates in Dublin's suburban hinterland. The report informs viewers that "the houses of the Liberties and the older parts of Dublin have been gradually disappearing. Despite the drain of life that has already taken place in the heart of the city, [residents] are determined to stay put."⁶⁰⁶

Future broadcaster and journalist Marion Finucane was also interviewed for an RTÉ news report in 1970. Then an architecture student, she was interviewed about her opinion on the occupation of Hume Street and protest related to the decline of Ireland's built heritage. Finucane responded by saying she felt it was part of her responsibility as a student funded by the tax-payer but also as a Dubliner.⁶⁰⁷ Such civic responsibility and engaged consideration for Irish tradition and heritage is an absent trait in the characters across Leonard's repertoire. Maxwell further points out that the urban plays of Thomas Kilroy, Hugh Leonard, James Douglas and others, are constant reminders of what is past and lost – among others things – an Anglo-Irish architectural heritage:

The lives of middle-class city dwellers and suburbanites have increasingly become a subject. The slums of Dublin and its inner-city flats are the fallen world of Thomas Kilroy's plays. Its essence is a legacy, whatever the cruelties of its making of 'tall house, tall windows, tall doors with steps to every door' and the indignities brought upon it by its sad, lost inheritors.⁶⁰⁸

The increased export of Irish culture ensured wider international engagement. No longer was Irish theatre the preserve of wild and Western Hiberno-English, where glossaries were routinely published in theatre programmes, but rather the common experiences of such a shared culture ensured the plays were instantly consumable in places such as America, where the Olney Theatre in Maryland produced many world premières of Leonard's work.

⁶⁰⁶ "Demolition and Development of The Liberties", RTÉ 'Seven Days', 8 February 1974, <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0715/630841-liberties-festival/> Accessed 19 February 2017.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Wednesday Report', RTÉ, 14 January 1970. <http://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0114/497696-hume-street-occupation-1970/> Accessed 19 February 2017.

⁶⁰⁸ Maxwell, 1984, 172.

Leonard's plays could be seen as theatrical examples of the 'bottled and packaged' Irish heritage now advertised for sale world-wide. Hugh Leonard's 'Irelands' create a marketable Irish landscape in plays that railed against the audiences who swarmed to see these works, and who were depicted as shallow and materialistic and also the root cause of the destruction of traditional Irish heritage. Key to understanding this is Leonard's 1974 play, *Summer*.

Critic David Nowlan reviewed the Irish premiere of *Summer* at the Olympia Theatre in October 1974. "Very few serious playwrights", Nowlan observed, "have attempted to look seriously into the middle-class soul of Irish suburbia . . . In *Summer*, which opened to a rapturous reception in the Olympia last night, Hugh Leonard peers into the limbo of south Co. Dublin, and despite an obvious warmth in the writing, finds a rattle of skeletons in the concrete cupboard."⁶⁰⁹ Nowlan's one criticism of the play is that beneath the comic and witty dialogue and obvious dramatic merit of the play, it lacks a fulsome social criticism on the wilful destruction of Irish natural heritage. The play remains, however, "the closest thing to Tchekov that Irish drama knows – a compassionate exposition of small, real people, kicking around in their ruts with little enough, god knows, to talk or dream about All this is tricked out and bedecked with a succession of gags and epigrams such as only Hugh Leonard can provide and it is played with superb skill by everyone concerned."⁶¹⁰

The play is set and opens upon Killiney Hill, on the coast of the south Dublin suburb of Dalkey where Hugh Leonard grew up. Act 1 is staged in summer of 1968 with the second and final act bringing the groups of couples back to Killiney Hill six years later in late summer of 1974. Leonard describes the setting in his opening stage directions. "*An age worn Celtic cross juts up at an angle near the summit. There is a suggestion of trees, and there is a wooden picnic table with flanking benches. The debris of the picnic has yet to be cleared up.*"⁶¹¹ The image is striking with the harsh grey worn stone cross reminiscent of an early Christian and historic Ireland, rich in Gaelic Irish custom and traditions. The function of the crosses were as marking points, indicating many significant roles but notable the location of borders or meeting places. These public edifices are visible and tangible links to Ireland's

⁶⁰⁹ "Play by Hugh Leonard at Olympia", *Irish Times*, 08 October 1974, 10.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Hugh Leonard, 1992, 235.

traditional and topographical past that is being forgotten in the increasingly homogenous Irish society.

The stone relics are also at odds with the setting of the picnic for the three sets of couples. The crosses delineated a sacred space, a place of quiet solitude and spiritual reflection. In setting the picnic table with its growing discarded waste strewn on the ground, the visitors have decided to turn their back on religion and embrace commercialism and monetary concerns as primary goals in their respective lives. Tom Murphy would take a similar approach with his play *The Sanctuary Lamp* at the Abbey Theatre in 1975. Murphy's play set out an occupation of the interior church space, by a down-and-out and other seemingly disjointed individuals. The figures are loomed over by immense stone columns, "to dwarf the human form", and rage against God, society and the place of religion, economy and class in Irish life.

Like Leonard, Murphy cites the middle-classes, 'glutinous pigs', as one of the harbingers of the collapse of contemporary Ireland, where monetary greed and personal aspiration has made redundant the concept of a fair and equal society. As Francisco recounts to Harry about the loss of his roving compatriot owing to their Bohemian lifestyle: "FRANCISCO: But, of course, that had to end. My best friend deserted me. Got married, middle-class values, the lot, a little woman."⁶¹² As Leonard presents an opening scene of a now obsolete holy Christian relic, it is positioned, worn and slanted, surrounded by the detritus of the disposable consumerist society, religion is slowly dying out. As Francisco says to Harry in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, "FRANCISCO: You are flogging a dead horse there, Har."⁶¹³

Act 1 of *Summer* opens in the past, "one day", an indiscernible moment when Stormy recounts how he got that nickname from a Christian Brother in his school. 'Stormy' comes to represent a strong masculine presence in his own mind but also symbolises the tempestuous relationship he shares with his wife, Jan. The other married couples, Jess and Myra and Richard and Trina, are representative of the married middle-class which Leonard paints with a generally negative brush in his plays – couples who have unsteady marriages, copious sexual affairs, and are often of strong Republican politics. There is a sensuality and

⁶¹² Tom Murphy, "The Sanctuary Lamp", *Tom Murphy Plays: 3*. (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 138.

⁶¹³ Murphy, 1994, 156.

oppressiveness represented by the weather both in the past and in the present. The thick haze of the opening scene masks the view of the coastline but also of the new homes that Stormy, an independent developer, is building. He adds that he 'is in the trade' and that "there's a fair few quid in the country now."⁶¹⁴

The second act begins after the passage of six years. In the intervening period industry and 'progress' has won out over heritage and concerns of preserving Ireland's past. The stage directions read:

*The Celtic cross is gone; in its place is a notice board. The trees – if any were visible previously – have been chopped down. There is a suggestion that the area is being cleared for 'development'. . . the sunlight has a harshness which suggests a chill in the air.*⁶¹⁵

The scene begins with an act of non-recognition. As obsolete as the past is, Leonard presents his characters as not fully recognising the present. It is unsettling and ultimately unfamiliar.

STORMY: This is not the place.

LOU: There used to be a Celtic cross . . . (*reading*) St. Eanna's Cross, which stood on this spot, has been removed to the National Museum of Ireland.⁶¹⁶

The value of land is now purely on monetary terms. As Leonard castigated the resurgent nationalism and republicanism that fuelled the border campaign of the IRA in the late 1950s in his play, *A Leap in the Dark*, Leonard presents this as the new occupation of Irish soil and land – the colonisation of the landscape for capitalist exploitive gains. Brian Friel mirrors this point in his political satire, *The Mundy Scheme*, first performed at the Olympia Theatre in June 1969. In a set-up of the perceived prevailing political culture within 1960s Ireland, the Taoiseach on Friel's play, F.X. Ryan receives the offer a scheme to save Ireland from bankruptcy. American speculator, Mr. Mundy, sees valuable urban land going to waste all over the world through use as graveyards. Mundy's plan involves an offer of \$100 per acre

⁶¹⁴ Leonard, 1992, 238.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid, 271.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

of 'worthless' rural Irish land, namely in the west of Ireland, for use as a mass graveyard, seen as the most suitable of resting places for the dead of Western society who have long lost all appreciation for ecological or heritage issues.

Stormy is able to recognise the developed lands beneath Killiney Hill as being the work of 'Bellavista Homes'. "STORMY: How did those buggers get permission? . . . to build homes. Down there used to be country." ⁶¹⁷ The disregard for national history and public heritage is dismissed by Jan, saying, "JAN: Who cares . . . No one does." ⁶¹⁸

The group reminisce and gossip about friends and neighbours and events of the last few years. Stormy discusses his business developments and the callous and uncaring stance of the developer:

STORMY: These days, if you're cute, you go in for quantity. I have a new estate underway at Pine Valley. Eight units to the acre. Richard: Bit on the small side: No, no, compact . . . it's the modern concept: Space elimination. ⁶¹⁹

Richard and Jan rekindle discussion of their unfulfilled affair, just as simultaneously Lou and Michael also raise their potential but equally unfulfilled love affair from six years ago. Lou reveals she is now separated from Pearse, that marriage was in his view, in haste, and she is now pregnant with his child. Michael concludes the reason for Lou and Pearse breaking up was as Pearse was himself from a broken home: MICHAEL: That's the cause of it. Broken home. My god, its textbook, he hadn't a hope." ⁶²⁰

The dialogue slips interchangeably between couples and between generations, young and old. Time and place are intermingled and simultaneously disfigured. The apparent happiness of each couple slowly unravels as the fabric of their Ireland and their respective communities becomes undone.

RICHARD: It takes so many years and you do so much harm before you own up to it that in your whole life there is you and there are strangers and there is no one else. There's a clock in the room, and you invite people in for drinks, and hope the chat

⁶¹⁷ Ibid, 272.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid, 272.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid, 282.

⁶²⁰ Ibid, 293.

and the laughing will drown out the noise of it. Well, it doesn't, and after a while you realise that they're listening to it, too. You wish they'd do home.⁶²¹

Richard and Jan are caught by Myra discussing their six-year affair. Richard had been seeking an end but Jan, in an empowering sexuality, determined to maintain things. Their sexuality is likened to animals, unchristian, and the material for village gossip. The play ends with a final confrontation between the two generations, Michael and Lou are talking when Stormy interrupts and accuses the youth of being unable to find their own culture and so must adopt that of their parents. Michael and Lou show signs of a renewed music culture in Dublin, fans of jazz and defending it as not archaic, there is links to the rock and roll growth and punk movement of urban Dublin which is being influenced by the London music scene. Teddy Boys were mainly jazz aficionados and here Leonard links to the earlier play of Durbin urban and youth culture; the rock musical *The Scatterin'*. By the end of the 1970s, this is an allusion to further cultural shifts, that of Teddy Boys giving way to the punk movement inspired by the Sex Pistols, among others.

“Unreal City” – *Da* and Encountering Memory

Erika Hanna defines the city as a site where a multiplicity of identities and agendas were visualised, debated, and given a concrete reality.⁶²² While Hanna's in depth-study focuses on the visible and tangible change to the urban landscape in modern Dublin, Leonard's plays offer a glimpse into the unreality of the time – the dramatized non-recognition of this change by characters that are consumed with their own personal monetary and social amelioration. With this as their main agenda, the functionality of the physical spaces the characters inhabit is sacrificed for the optics of a modern and affluent middle-class lifestyle, which has all but forgotten any sense of a common and shared existence.

This point is intensified by Leonard in *The Patrick Pearse Motel* (1971) where the play is set in the living room of Dermot and Grainne which is described as 'an abject lesson is gracious living',⁶²³ where even the most simple coffee table is marble and an under-stairs space is

⁶²¹ Ibid, 295.

⁶²² Erika Hanna, *Modern Dublin: Urban Change and the Irish Past, 1957 – 1973* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013), 2.

⁶²³ Leonard, 1992, 89.

converted into a bar, a space so cramped and unsuitable that "no one who is more than five-foot-two inches in height can stand erect in it."⁶²⁴ The inhabited sites of the new Irish urban way of living simply do not work.

The first Irish production of *Da* was held at the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, on October 8th, 1973, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. It had its world première at the Olney Theatre, Maryland, U.S.A. in August 1973. In *Da*, the premise of the play contends that Charlie returns to his home in Dublin for the funeral of his father, but the ghost of Da is still present and he and Charlie confront their shared pasts and memory. The setting has resonance for the unfolding of the play. The childhood home, a place which in reality for Leonard was a space dominated by his mother's rules but influenced by his father's actions, has now moved beyond being in the mould of the traditional Irish rural family. Instead, for Charlie, his life has fissured from time and allows him a place to openly confront the memory and spirit of his deceased father. Ireland and its realities of suburban sophistication is ideologically distanced from Charlie who is nostalgic for the past and the security of childhood.

The audience witness the memory and the legacy of Charlie, Da and their familial past existence as it is represented by documents and ephemeral remnants which now reside in a drawer in the kitchen. Leonard's opening stage directions place Charlie in his overcoat standing at the kitchen table sorting family papers, letters and photographs. Leonard writes that:

*There are many playing areas. The main one is the kitchen. This is the kitchen living-room plus hallway of a corporation house. An exit to the rear of the scullery. A hint of stairs running up from the hall. There are two areas at either side of the kitchen and a series of connecting steps and ramps which climb up and over, behind the kitchen.*⁶²⁵

The internal domestic space is consistent with traditional Irish realist drama – a familiar and recognisable kitchen space. However, as the set moves down to the forestage, it immediately breaks with tradition. The presence of a ramp offers an undulating break

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Hugh Leonard, *Da* (London: Methuen Publishing Ltd., 2002), 3.

between interior and exterior and also between present and the past. The majority of remembered scenes take place at this forestage that is a purgatorial-like space of between past memory and present reality. It is situated again at a sea-front, where there is a park bench and a hilltop; all places and items that are present in earlier Leonard plays, such as the disappearing park benches in *Madigan's Lock*, the sea-front pier in *A Walk on the Water* and the hill of Killiney in *Summer*.

Da is concerned with the past still existing within the present – archival memory of past made cognisant and recognisable to the characters in the present by archival documents such as letters and personal ephemera. These facets of the past, signifiers of an ethereal alternative present, are identified by Charlie as unwelcome intrusions in the present:

CHARLIE: "Old faces. They've turned up like bills you thought you'd never have to pay."⁶²⁶

This allegorical questioning of the past to seek a deeper connection to the present is brought out by Leonard's work and seeks to answer the contention: - are we fully present as a collective society or merely existing as individuals?

Da first appears and reanimates his relationship with Charlie from an off-stage space, entering from the scullery at the rear of the stage. However, as seen in Leonard's earlier play, *A Walk on the Water*, Leonard creates another space within the stage outside of the confines of present realism. It is described as "*a neutral space . . . defined by lighting. This can be a number of locales.*"⁶²⁷ This point defines much of Leonard's work which oscillates between past and present; between the obsession with memory and commemoration which paradoxically makes it impossible to forget. As Charlie reminds us, CHARLIE: "[I]t's not then, anymore, it's now,"⁶²⁸ This line can also be taken for a cry for the condition Irish theatre in general and its reliance on an out-dated historic canon; a need for a radical and urgent reflection upon the contemporary Irish social condition. The play spoke to audiences directly and reflected upon their own time and place.

Hanna's book surveys the physical and architectural urban change in Dublin in the years post-1957 and until 1973, the year Ireland officially becomes a member of the E.E.C. Hanna's account and definition of the effect of urban change on Ireland's social and cultural

⁶²⁶ Leonard, 2002, 4.

⁶²⁷ Leonard, 2002, 3.

⁶²⁸ Leonard, 2002, 73.

thinking offers a relevant context to Leonard's plays of this period. As Hanna observes, by the end of the 1960s a desired standard of living and a modern and rejuvenated living environment had failed to materialise. The failed promise of modernisation has also been discussed by historian Mary E. Daly, who with Hanna, argues that this failure resulted in a shift in public opinion regarding the possibility of the emergence of a modern city. The new infrastructure, public spaces for recreation, dynamic living spaces and modern amenities were not supported or enabled by progressive public and government planning at local and national level. Instead, as Hanna identifies, the development of a modern urban city became an unrealised future.⁶²⁹ Leonard reflected on this failure in spatial planning by dramatizing it as an unrealised present.

Hanna suggests that the attempt to preserve the city and urban heritage of Dublin was akin to confirming it as authentically Irish in the same mould and worthy of equal preservation and protection as Gaelic traditions which were often nostalgically linked to the west of Ireland. Protests against suburbanisation and slum clearance by residents of the city were taken up by journalists, writers, and artists, who did much to promote a new interest in preservation of communities, trades and customs of the city . . . indeed it placed the customs of the city alongside the Gaelic traditions of the west of Ireland as another 'authentic' Irish culture that was disappearing and worthy of preservation.⁶³⁰

Leonard was adamant that the persistent greed of developers, fuelled by political corruption at local and national level which favoured sub-size housing construction to maximise monetary return per holding of land was symptomatic of the failure of Irish independence itself. It was a re-colonisation of the Irish country and its land and resources.

I would suggest that this play allowed for the growth of the perception of Leonard's plays being 'un-Irish', or at least the perception of being plays written by an outsider and which were merely 'passing through' Dublin via the Festival, ahead of going to America or coming from America. *Da* had over seven hundred performances on Broadway . . . and the

⁶²⁹ Erika Hanna, 2-3.

⁶³⁰ Erika Hanna, 142.

plays' popularity suggests that audiences in both Ireland and America shared a deeply ambivalent relationship with the past."⁶³¹

With *Da*, Leonard creates an alternative Irish play by subverting its focus on the family memory. The contested ground of Charlie's memory and the relationship with his father decide where and when these transient memories and mobile locations are set. Leonard's opening stage directions are clear in idea and deliberately abstract in form:

*There are several playing areas. The main one is the kitchen. This is the kitchen-living room plus small hall-way of a corporation house . . . there are two areas on either side of the kitchen and a series of connecting steps and ramps which climb up and over, behind the kitchen. . . One of the two areas is the sea-front . . . it includes a park-bench. Behind the sea-front, on the rising platforms, is the hill-top. On the other side of the stage is a neutral area, defined by lighting . . . the kitchen however, is the womb of the play.*⁶³²

A review of a later 1983 production of the play at the Abbey Theatre describes how the set (designed by Wendy Shea) unsettled the temporal present by invoking the co-presence of the past and it served the play through "detail of the distant past locked in the present . . . outside the dingy kitchen, Dalkey Hill loomed in the back garden, a pine forest was in the neighbour's garden. The majesty of nature was juxtaposed with the domesticity, memory against reality."⁶³³

Oliver is an old friend of Charlie's, with allusions to a past time of a Catholic, Fianna Fáil-voting, *Irish Press*-reading traditional outlook; a throwback to the economic, political and social conservatism of de Valera's Ireland of the 1930s and 1940s.

Ray Comiskey outlines how that few plays have so palpable a sense of place - physical and social, as *Da*. The Dalkey of the play was, and to a large extent, still is, a mixed community, with 'the quality' – which historically meant the Protestants – are to be found on the heights with the contrasting community – working-class Catholics – located within the town itself. The house in which we see Charlie and the ghost of both his father and of his own younger

⁶³¹ Fintan O'Toole, ed., *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2016).

⁶³² Leonard, 1992, 167.

⁶³³ *Da* Review, *Irish Press*, 24 June 1983.

self, is a composite of the author's own life experience. The stigma of his father's working life in servitude to the aristocratic Jacob family, is shameful to the younger generation who see entrepreneurial and monetary opportunity within Ireland of this era for the first time, as Charlie shames his father at the pension he received from his employers of over fifty years.⁶³⁴

The clash of generations, memory, and of nation all collide within the world of Charlie and his father. As Drumm warns Da, "I'm advising you to live in your own world, not with one foot in his."⁶³⁵ The essence of *Da* revealed an Ireland at odds with its own succession into modernity.

Conclusion

Leonard counted inaction and apathy within Irish society among the chief problems of the Republic and of Irish theatre itself. Driven by an increasing consumerist mentality that had created Irish cultural industries out of figures such as Yeats and Joyce, Irish identity had become unrecognisable behind the price-tag of what that 'Irishness' is now worth on the world market. Leonard would write in an essay "The Unimportance of Being Irish" that:

We always knew what was wrong with Irish Theatre – and Irish fiction and Irish poetry – but we had forgotten, and now it comes back to us. What is wrong is that we attend seminars and talk about it, instead of staying home to do it.⁶³⁶

Christopher Murray highlights the importance of a renewed appreciation and deeper understanding of the plays of Hugh Leonard. Murray cites Leonard as being an often lone voice writing and dramatizing the social malaise of Ireland in terms of material aspiration and political and social corruption:

Leonard was among the first playwrights to expose the potential for corruption in the new access to affluence. While maintaining good humour, he showed that the

⁶³⁴ Leonard, 1992, 219

⁶³⁵ Leonard, 2002, 32

⁶³⁶ MS 41/960 (2), "The Unimportance of Being Irish", Hugh Leonard Papers, NLI, Dublin.

new Ireland, energised by greed but inhabited by inexperience, was sexually, socially and politically in free-fall.⁶³⁷

Factors such as an annual billing in the Dublin Theatre Festival, sound financial backing through the increasingly well-paid (and reliable) work of writing for television, lucrative tax breaks as well as access to national print column in a widely circulating national broadsheet, Leonard spread his undoubted literary gifts thinly. Maxwell surmises similarly; "[Leonard] has an informed fascination with farce . . . [but] He invites the suspicion that he constructs his plays – with great skill – around good lines. The good lines are memorably funny; their occasion and their deliverers are more likely to fade from recollection."⁶³⁸

Like many of his characters in his plays or the self-projection of himself as Charlie in *Da*, Leonard was battling against an ingrained mentality of a prescriptive Abbey Board. Tom Murphy, contemporary of Leonard and Board member of the Abbey theatre submitted a three-year artistic policy for the Abbey in 1978. One point Murphy raised concerned a lack of engagement by the Abbey with Ireland's Nobel-prize winning playwrights: W.B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett. Murphy mentions this as he fears 'an element to pander' is creeping in', perhaps due to increasing awareness of box-office returns. Murphy questions the following:

Is it felt that the lesser writers are the ones that get the audiences in? and to keep them coming in? Is it felt that laughter in the house is the highest proof of theatre's existence? . . . If we are inclined in this direction then the attitude reflected in our programme is more reminiscent of – at best – a provincial repertory company than that of a national theatre.⁶³⁹

This point by Murphy can be considered as being a rather thinly veiled broadside against the style of work propagated by Leonard.⁶⁴⁰ With such barbed opposition to comedy and populism, to find a place at the table of the national theatre was always an uphill struggle. This is despite the Board of the Abbey at this very time also considering a new policy of

⁶³⁷ Murray, 1997, 183.

⁶³⁸ Maxwell, 1984, 175-176.

⁶³⁹ P103/546, Three Year Artistic Policy submitted to Abbey Theatre, Thomas Kilroy papers, JHL, NUI Galway.

⁶⁴⁰ Leonard had three plays staged at the Abbey Theatre in the previous four years – *Time Was* (1976, 1977), *Stephen D* (1978) and *A Life* (1979).

soliciting new plays that were considered on a ‘theatrical basis rather than an academic or literary one’.⁶⁴¹

In discussing *Madigan's Lock*, many years after its première, Leonard stated that “what audiences found beguiling all those years ago was the possibility of Magic: the wild, one in a million hope, to be clutched at, as it were floating wreckage, as there exists a Golden Fleece, a Grail, a Shangri-la; anything to save us from drowning in the ordinary.”⁶⁴² It is important to consider this point in a wider understanding of Leonard’s drama. As unashamedly populist as he was in his writing, Leonard always gravitated towards lifting audiences from drowning in the mire of ordinariness. His plays spoke directly to the Ireland which produced them and gave a vantage point into a changing Ireland and crucially also into the private lives of Irish citizens in a historically important period. Leonard produced an alternative dramatic view of Ireland. He utilized experimental and non-traditional devices to immerse audiences within dichotomous times and locations, both of the present and the past. Leonard’s plays staged an unfamiliar present, one which foregrounded contemporary social issues, documented the middle-classes of his locality and staged a dramatic dialogue with modern Ireland.

⁶⁴¹ P103/546, Minutes of Abbey Theatre Literary Department; 1978; Thomas Kilroy papers, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway.

⁶⁴² Leonard, 1987, 6.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

The post-Emergency modernisation of Irish society witnessed a corresponding theatrical modernisation. This took greatest effect upon the dynamics of dramatic form, social realism, thematic content, entrepreneurial energy and audience engagement and reception. By identifying these important developmental facets, the proponents and the key dramatic productions that account for such changes, this thesis offers a recalibration of Irish theatre production and historiography within the increasingly internationalised globalised society of post-Emergency Ireland. In furthering this point, I have expanded the examination of the historiography of modern Irish drama to include radical and innovative dramatic productions and practitioners supported with documentary sources and newly available archival evidence. As Christopher Collins and Mary P. Caulfield remind us: "If the past is a foreign country, then it has been colonised."⁶⁴³ Collins' and Caulfield's study lay in "lost histories and faded memories of Irish theatre and performance . . . [that] pluralize the historical narrative into a new broader, progressive and inclusive historical consciousness."⁶⁴⁴ I have applied similar methodologies in examining the archival records of a hitherto lesser explored but important period for the development of modern Irish drama. This is necessary in order to take cognisance of an alternative modern Irish dramatic repertoire. The body of work I address presents myriad voices, classes, locations, and personalities, diversely distributed within Irish society.

Patrick Lonergan surmises that the narrow ideological and historiographic prism through which much of Irish national drama (and identity) is formulated and constructed has regressed our understanding of Irish drama within multicultural and globalised constructs. "Globalisation has brought multiculturalism to Ireland, but the globalisation of Irish theatre has, regrettably, meant that the most successful Irish plays are those that present Irishness in narrow and indeed restricted ways."⁶⁴⁵ The energy of this movement was, as I have outlined, explicitly felt within the margins of the main Irish theatres, those fringe venues outside of long-standing state funding, regular established audiences or with

⁶⁴³ Chris Collins and Mary P. Caulfield, eds., *Ireland, Memory and Performing the Historical Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 1.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid

⁶⁴⁵ Lonergan, 2009, 196.

traditions of particular production types or themes. By drawing on hitherto unutilised documentary evidence from a cross-section of archival collections, it is possible to trace the networks, influences and formative events of a radical contemporary and socially reflective Irish drama. These records, plays and people reveal a dramatised narrative of daily lived experience by those largely and commonly excluded from national historical and theatrical discourse, namely, working-classes, women, children, im(em)igrants and those who were producers of the 'little truths' that were pivotal to the functioning of a social democracy.

By the 1970s, Tony Judt identified the micro-analysis of experiences of the co-called 'little truths' in place of the bigger national picture of big government and colonial and empirical concerns of nineteenth and twentieth century nations. By the end of the 1970s, the flowering of European intellectual, liberal thought that extrapolated the micro from the macro debates of history, created a dialogue not just with the past but with the present.⁶⁴⁶ At the heart of this European movement were public commentators, such as playwrights. Those I have outlined in this study placed Ireland at the vanguard of such European socio-critical thought through dramaturgical and theatrical examination.

From the beginning of the 1950s and in the succeeding two decades, a recognisable movement of new playwrights and practitioners emerged. They formed a nucleus of artists concerned with the authenticity of expression and experience of contemporary Irish society. However, the historiography of Irish theatre has tended to focus primarily on trajectories supported by a 'traditional' canon that was aided and supported by those within a position of privilege. Those outside of such considerations were excluded from our performative national histories.

The precarious position of such artists, who were in the majority working independently in Ireland and without certainty of security of being allied or contracted to a major venue or within a permanent company, showed the spirit of risk evident in that generation. As foregrounded through this study, I have traced a network of connected artists and themes that supports the argument that a critical body of work, now re-accounted for and recovered from detailed archival and forensic research, was central to the development of a

⁶⁴⁶ Judt, 287.

new understanding of contemporary Irish drama that was internationally influenced, stylistically important, dramaturgically radical and socially reflective.

In a radio interview, Carolyn Swift provided a personal reflection on what was needed to rectify the malaise of Irish theatre and foreground her theatrical beliefs which were grounded in the European avant-garde and laments the 'stage in a hall' type local theatre with little wing space, no effective adjustable lighting or curtains that can be flown. "Well, what are you to do? I suggest you build your own theatre . . ."⁶⁴⁷ This artistic spirit and self-reliance summed up the spirit of a new generation of Irish theatre-makers in the post-Emergency years.

The long-term impact on Irish drama by those included in this study have yet to be fully accounted for within broader scholarship. As a director and producer, for example, Phyllis Ryan was an ambitious and progressive artist, who worked with meagre resources for extended periods in developing a talented group of collaborators. As her long-time friend Barry Cassin recounts: "Too few are now aware of Phyllis Ryan's success, or the range of theatre brought to Dublin by Gemini Productions, a remarkable achievement in a business littered with the bankrupt corpses of independent managers."⁶⁴⁸

In January 1968, Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre, Tomás Mac Anna addressed the Clonmel branch of the intellectual society, Tuairim, in Co. Tipperary. He delivered an address entitled "Drama in Ireland" and focused on the need to revive Ireland's theatre through new and invigorative writing. New plays that Mac Anna spoke of were not lacking by their presence. He spoke of new playscripts arriving at the Abbey in every post-delivery. "Everyone in Ireland was writing plays" he reported. The problem lay in what was being written: writers were being "imitative and not writing out of their own experiences about what was going on around them." Mac Anna's advice to those writers was "Don't imitate, write about what you see, people you see, and forget all about the form because everybody else has forgotten about it." "The Abbey", Mac Anna added, was "the window through which the Irish people see themselves as they are, as they could be and as they once were.

⁶⁴⁷ 10813/385, Transcript of a radio talk by Carolyn Swift - "Waiting for Godot or Build Your Own Theatre", n.d., Pike Theatre Papers, Trinity College, Dublin.

⁶⁴⁸ Cassin, 2013, 183.

The world in turn looked through that window and saw Ireland and from time to time the window reflected for the people of Ireland, the world outside.”⁶⁴⁹

The economic development of Lemass’ Ireland was challenged by those sceptical of its potential for prosperity for society as a whole, or rather for those ‘captains of industry’ engaged in big business. As historian J.J. Lee has argued, the rejuvenation of Ireland’s economic status was hollow and built on foundationless and underdeveloped native structures. Irish culture, especially through its theatre, was imminently successful, popular, often controversial and a recognisable brand abroad. It represented quality and assurance of artistic quality that was yet enjoyable and accessible to international audiences, especially Irish-American diaspora.⁶⁵⁰ While Ireland’s modernisation was, as Lee argues, an often hollow façade, the development of a modern drama inculcated a sense of excitement, possibility and experimentation.

The plays of this period that constitute this study, which have been obscured from contemporary and common memory, account to a formative record of the development of modern Irish drama in the post-Emergency period. The writers, directors, producers and designers challenged what they experienced and witnessed as societal and cultural inequalities. The works stand as a testament to a staging of a new Ireland, giving voice to a generation who witnessed Ireland transition from a tradition-dominant neutral island into an integrated and progressive ‘thinker’ in terms of culture and identity. Most of all, the plays and their records constitute an archive of modern Ireland itself, evidence of little truths and a social history of the modern Irish stage.

⁶⁴⁹ “School for Playwrights at Abbey”, *Irish Times*, 30 January 1968.

⁶⁵⁰ J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 163.

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