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FLASHES OF MODERNITY: STAGE DESIGN AT THE ABBEY THEATRE,  
1902-1966

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted to the O'Donoghue Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance at  
National University of Ireland Galway

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## ABSTRACT

Responding to Guy Julier's call for a "knowing practice" of design studies, this doctoral thesis reveals Ireland's negotiation with modernity through stage design. I use historian T.J. Clark's definition of modernity as "contingency," which "turn[s] from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future".

Over the course of 60 years that saw the transformation of a pre-industrialised colony to a modernised republic, stage designs offered various possibilities of imagining Irish life. In the same period, the Abbey Theatre's company shuttled itself from small community halls to the early 19th-century Mechanics' Theatre, before moving to the commercial Queen's Theatre, and finally arriving at the modern building that currently houses it. This thesis shines new light on that journey.

By investigating the design references outside theatre, we can see how Abbey Theatre productions underlined new ways of envisioning life in Ireland. Revivalist design, through incorporation of Arts and Crafts design and realism, roused social issues in the last years of colonial occupation. Expressionist design put shape on the fragmented landscape after the Civil War. Resistance to the cultural isolationism of de Valera's policies was located in striking cosmopolitan design in the 1930s and 1940s. Frustration with the status quo in the post-World War II period was articulated through costuming inspired by counter-culture in the 1950s and 1960s.

Furthermore, significant designers and playwrights in Irish theatre will be uncovered by scholarship for the first time here. These include Tanya Moiseiwitsch, Alicia Sweetman, Maeve O'Callaghan, Samuel John Waddell, Anne Daly, Tom Coffey and Peter Hutchinson.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Flashes From the Past**

Sometime in the late 1990s T.J. Clark, a professor of modern art at University of California, Berkeley, sat down to write his latest book. His 1985 study *The Painting of Modern Life* had roused lively debate in the letters section of the *New York Review of Books* for suggesting French impressionism was the house style of the haute bourgeoisie. Clarke had arrived at a new idea. For him, experiments in modern art were linked to senses of a future espoused by socialism, a project he views as having ended with the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Without socialism as an inspiration, those artistic experiments may have run their course. In *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, published in 1999, he wrote: “Modernism is our antiquity” (3).

To 21st century eyes, many objects of modernist design may be unreadable. For instance, the Central Bank building (1978) on Dublin’s Dame St, with its concrete bunker-like appearance, is daringly brutalist in character but remains widely unloved. It hardly inspired more buildings in the same style. Clark says that the future these modernist forms prophesised gradually failed to match the future that arrived. According to him: “Modernism is unintelligible now because it had truck with a modernity not yet fully in place” (3). Similarly, my reading of stage designs for Abbey Theatre productions from the early 20th century - especially those informed by modern crafts, art, architecture and fashion - has involved dealing with strange and unfamiliar artefacts. Those design experiments at the Abbey were rare and never became a house style. They came to me only in flashes. Glimpsed within these designs, I argue, are projections of modernity, what Clark defines as "contingency". According to him, contingency “turn[s] from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future” (7). In this project, I will show how stage designs at the Abbey Theatre offered alternative possibilities of how to view productions at the theatre and, consequently, Irish society itself.

Although the Abbey Theatre has received several written histories and sustained scholarship, its stage displays are almost routinely ignored. The lack of a dedicated study has left complexities of its engagement with modernity unmapped. In four chapters, this project looks at a period beginning in 1902, when the Abbey Theatre's company the Irish National Theatre Society was formed, and ending in 1959, around when Conor McCarthy dates the modernisation of the Republic of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> That measure of time spans the transformation of a pre-industrialised colony to a modernised republic. I argue that throughout this period of immense turbulence, stage design at the Abbey Theatre projected modernities glimpsing alternative ways of living in a freighted country.

Chapter 1, covering 1902-1923, will show that against a backdrop of labour difficulties and political revolution, the influence of the Irish Arts and Crafts movement on stage design made for a redoubtable expression of Irish self-invention. This movement had a similar spirit to the English Arts and Crafts movement which the *Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* describes as a look to “the Middle Ages and rural traditions to promote the moral and aesthetic virtues of craft work over industrial production” (31). For the Irish movement, the “Middle Ages” resembled a pre-colonised society full of heroic achievement. It's no coincidence that the scrupulous form of realism became the house style, as fully atomised visions of poverty could highlight Ireland's desperate need for modernisation. Chapter 2, looking at the years between 1924-1934, focuses on a period of economic recession and political uncertainty, in which the adoption of modernist painted forms into stage design reimaged life in the new Irish Free State. Chapter 3, covering 1935-1949, views how international architecture inspired stage designs at a time when the country was oppressively inward under protectionist and isolationist policies. Lastly, between the years 1950-1966, we'll see the influence of white-collar clothing and *prêt-à-porter* fashion in the theatre's costuming at a time when Ireland was on the verge of embracing modernisation by incentivising foreign investment. Throughout this new

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<sup>1</sup> For Conor McCarthy's expert analysis on modernisation in Ireland, see his book: *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland, 1969-1992*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.

written history of the Abbey Theatre, design will be seen as projecting new futures to the economically and culturally stultifying Ireland of the early 20th century.

While this project owes much of its theoretical lens to the emergent field of scenography in theatre studies, I have chosen the term “design,” not “scenography,” as my focus. I do this in the spirit of what design scholar Guy Julier calls the “knowing practice” of design action and reception, that is: “a systematic approach to understanding the dynamics and effects of material and immaterial relationships that are articulated by and through the multiple artefacts of design culture” (73). Julier believes that design culture, often assumed to be the business of visual culture and its “detached or alienated observer overwhelmed by images” (76), deserves a new systematic approach. I believe stage design requires the same. Scenography is elastic in the terms defining it. Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth define it simply as the “orchestration of the performance environment”, and its production “sit[ting] uneasily within the existing functions of writer, director, choreographer, designer and performer” (4-5). That pulls focus from the designer, the role of the person who, according to Jane Collins and Andrew Nesbit, “conceives and realizes the material processes of production through, but not exclusively, set, costume, lighting and sound” (2).<sup>2</sup> Scenography, as a term, rarely implies contextual influences outside theatre that inform a stage design, or the geographical context leading to its creation. Scenography isn’t associated with brand stewardship or the quality of a design’s immersion of an audience into a specific ambience. That requires a more detailed approach that “traces a cartography that exposes and analyses the linkages of artefacts that constitute information flows and the spaces between them” (Julier 76).

This introduction chapter will review existing literatures relating to Irish modernism, modernity and modernisation, in order to situate this study into the current field of enquiry. It will also review gaps in written histories about Irish theatre that fail to acknowledge stage design as a vital element in production. This chapter also lays out the project’s methodology, including my navigation of theatre archives and use of design theory. It concludes with an overview of the project and detailed description of its four key chapters.

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding productions where designers are not credited, this project presumes the director to be responsible for those material processes.

## 1. Literature Review: Modernity and Irish Theatre Design

It was the French critic Charles Baudelaire who coined the term *modernité* in his 1859 essay “The Painter of Modern Life”. Observing a new way of life unfolding in a dense urban environment, Baudelaire noted the impact of industrial technology on society and art. He uses modernity as a concept to refer to a particular relationship with time, and the artist’s responsibility to “distil the eternal from the transitory” (Baudelaire 1995 13). The term refers to historical and cultural phenomena, from modern warfare to fashion, as well as the individual and existential experience of the conditions they produce. Baudelaire puts this in epic terms in his 1846 essay “On the Heroism of Modern Life”:

Before trying to distinguish the epic side of modern life, and before bringing examples to prove that our age is no less fertile in sublime themes than past ages, we may assert that since all centuries and all peoples have had their own form of beauty, so inevitably we have ours. That is the order of things. [...] But to return to our principle and essential problem, which is to discover whether we possess a specific beauty, intrinsic to our new emotions.<sup>3</sup>

Modernity now widely refers to the historical period that saw the evolution of capitalism and industrialisation. It also featured the “contingency” for new futures, to repeat T.J. Clark’s definition from the previous section.

Chief forces for change in society make up what’s been termed modernisation theory. According to Conor McCarthy, modernisation theory “suggests that the chief forces for change and development in society are industrial technology, entrepreneurial skills and capital investment” (14-15). He points out the theory’s flaws, especially the great faith and presumption put into the beneficial effects of technology, and urges us to see modernisation instead as a dialectical process that produces various economic,

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<sup>3</sup> See Baudelaire, “On the Heroism of Modern Life”, *Salon of 1846*. mariabuszek.com.

political, social and cultural effects. In that spirit, he adheres to Marshal Berman, who argued that modernity isn't necessarily a positive narrative of progress:

Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air' (15).

Berman makes clear that modernity doesn't simply promise adventure and transformation. It's also an overwhelming, confusing and liberating condition of life under capitalism.

A focus on how Irish society was shaped by this mode of experience didn't come into view until the 1990s - intriguingly, after Clark's dated endpoint of modernism as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Luke Gibbons, in his introduction to the essays comprising *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996), argued that Irish society did not have to wait for the 20th century to undergo the shock of modernity. Disintegration and fragmentation were already part of its history as a result of lethal racial agitations and its own nineteenth century version of a holocaust in the form of the famine. Gibbons calls for a reversal of the standard view of the modernist movement, represented by the figures of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, as turning its back on the torpor of tradition in Ireland in order to embrace the exhilaration of the metropolitan *avant-garde*. According to Gibbons: "If anything, these writers' vital contacts with mainland European culture proved productive precisely because they were carrying with them the nightmare of Irish history". (6)

Gibbons proposes a rethinking of tradition in a country with a fractured and colonial past. Because tradition is associated with order, stability and the inherited wisdom of the ages, a sluggish evolution of a society over a long duration, it becomes the antithesis of the modern, against which both 'progress' and 'enlightenment' must define themselves. Tradition as manifested in the guise of the Celtic Revival, Gibbons

explains, concerned itself with denizens of the Celtic Twilight rather than with citizens of the real world, or, rather, imperial subjects attempting to become citizens. According to Gibbons: “The radical politicization of culture during the Literary Revival may be seen as a repudiation of this idea, an attempt to bring cultural identity down to earth from its more ethereal flights through the Celtic cosmos”. (9)

Recently, Paige Reynolds has lent a fascinating blurring of revivalism and modernism as seemingly opposed forces. In her book *Modernism, Drama, and the Audiences for Irish Spectacle* (2007), she revisits the classic Revival narrative set out by Richard Kirkland - from the 1890 fall of Parnell to the end of the Anglo-Irish War and publication of *Ulysses* in 1922 - and the work of artists rebuking stereotypes imposed by English colonisers depicting the Irish as violent, uncivilised and buffoonish “stage Irish”. Revivalist artists, we know, promoted indigenous legend and folklore. They sought to provide Irish citizens a native foundation from which to build a coherent and positive national identity, one based on the timeless world of the spirit, the triumphs of ancient Irish heroes, and an idealised rural peasantry. Revivalism allowed its proponents to represent the Irish as having shared access to an authenticity that marked them as different from and superior to the English, whom they regarded as contaminated by modernity. According to Reynolds: “by identifying with antiquity, the revivalists located Ireland outside of a present day associated with industrial capitalism and imperialism” (3).

Reynolds compares the seemingly rival ideas of revivalism (working to resurrect the past) and modernism (to make it new):

Revivalism celebrates a linear trajectory in which the past and its conventions might provide an uninterrupted flow of inspiration for the modern public, while modernism purports to require a complete break from the past or at the very least an innovative refashioning of that past from its fragments (4).

It's clear that revivalism lionizes the rural peasantry and the national community, while modernism prefers metropolitanism and the atomized urban *flaneur*. One serves as an adjunct of nationalism and privileges native art, while the other represents itself as staunchly international in scope and supports an intercontinental artistic

community. Revivalism encourages the return to an ancient language, and modernism aggressively works to develop a new idiom. But Reynolds argues that this tension between the aesthetics and ideals of Irish revivalism and international modernism has received little sustained critical attention.

The Revival's celebration of the 'tradition' of Ireland's mythic past as the antithesis of the 'modernity' of an English industrial present has long influenced how literary and cultural critics understand the place of modernity in Ireland. But Reynolds references T.S. Eliot, who in 1923 claimed that the "mythical method" begun by Yeats and further developed by James Joyce in *Ulysses* was to be praised for "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (177-178). Eliot was suggesting the revivalist method as a corrective to modern life. It's already been proven that the most influential proponents of the Irish Literary Revival were in direct contact with the architects of the modernist doctrine and their work. But this aesthetic confluence of Yeats and Joyce suggests that revivalism and modernism may have had conceptual and practical overlap, and thus are compatible.

If we are to think of the Revival as a modernist project, there are striking differences in its engagement with audiences in comparison to international modernism. Reynolds reminds that modernists intended to emphasise individual engagement with the text over social participation in a production. Therefore Irish revivalism, unlike the kind of international modernism that defined itself through scepticism towards audiences, espoused great confidence in its publics. Dramatists, poets and novelists imagined initially that they could create accord among the publics who consumed their work, and thereby foster a cultural unanimity that would contribute to political consensus. According to Reynolds: "The revivalists, intoxicated by a thick brew of idealism, naiveté, and arrogance, believed their cultural products would transform audience members into a homogenous and harmonious body of ideal national subjects" (11).

However, her analysis of responses to *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and the Irish premiere of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1913) shows an Irishness increasingly revealed as unable to resolve differences among the diverse individuals who composed theatre audiences. Artists gradually acknowledged that their fantasy of a cohesive Irish audience was false and that Ireland was in fact composed of individuals

who forged competing publics. Nothing exemplifies this better than Yeats's seeking an audience of "all Irish people" in 1897 (Gregory 9), a message which changed to an appeal for "vigorous and simple men whose attention is not given to art but to a shop, or teaching in a National School, or dispensing medicine" in 1906 (Yeats 265). As Reynolds says: "The Irish public was fractured by gender, by educational background, by class, by aesthetic taste, and by individual occupation" (12). But as artists began to assert that the Irish public was composed of individuals, these equivocations, according to her, "suggest that modernism's emphasis on critical subjectivity, the individual, and fragmentation had permeated revivalist thinking" (13).

The tensions tested by *The Playboy of the Western World* over representations of the west of Ireland might also be viewed as a modernist revision of that landscape as a source of heroism, mystery and romance, going back at least to antiquity. Gibbons, in his essay "Synge, Country and Western", singles out how Ireland and the United States are outstanding examples of countries in modern times where the myth of the west has been elevated to the level of a national ideal. Both concern themselves centrally with sites of cultural survival, and the sole remaining enclaves of traditional values in a world corrupted by progress and industrialization. According to Gibbons, in the west of Ireland "the rigours of a puritan ideology were no less pronounced, and indeed were inscribed on the very agrarian ideal from which the nation-building class drew imaginative sustenance" (28). Gibbons uses Canon Sheehan's moral vision of the west of Ireland as an example:

Across that bight of sea sleep the three islands that link us with the past, and whose traditions, were we otherwise, would shame us. [...] They symbolise ... comfort without wealth, perfect physical health without passion, love without desire ... clean bodies, keen minds, pure hearts - what better world can the philosopher construct, or poet dream of? (Sheehan 46-49).

Gibbons likens this to art critic Erwin Panofsky's idea of "hard primitivism", a form of romantic ethic that played a crucial part in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. "Soft primitivism" on the other hand, imbued with aristocratic values of leisure and self-indulgence, evoked a world of recklessness and sexual abandon (Panofsky 297-302). Synge's vision of "soft primitivism" - the representation of the

west of Ireland as a site of drunkenness, sexuality, violence and mob rule - could be considered a modernist impulse.

Other critics have argued that Irish people experienced modernity at later points. By the end of the Civil War in 1923, the country had been in a heightened state of crisis for over ten years. The labour disputes, characterised by the disastrous social consequences of the 1913 Dublin Lockout, set the tone of a tumultuous decade. By the early 1920s, Irish society had experienced a heightened campaign for Home Rule (1912-1914), a rising in Dublin (1916), a World War (1914-1918), a War of Independence (1919-1921), the establishment of the Irish Free State and partitioning of the island into two political entities (1922), and a Civil War (1922-1923). Nicholas Allen begins his enlightening book *Modernism, Ireland and Civil War* (2009) with a striking image from the beginning of the Civil War. Republican leader Ernie O'Malley, barricaded inside the Four Courts, looks over his adored copies of renaissance Italian art. Then a mine explosion occurs inside the public records office:

With its shattered walls and fragmented archive, the Four Courts is symbolic of a deep erasure in the history of those dissident decades, the 1920s and 1930s. Now forgotten cultures flared and disappeared, little magazines, cabaret clubs, riots and theatres erupting in a fluctuating public sphere. A smouldering city found formed in art and literature. The fires of the Four Courts, the dishevelled military campaign to follow, the confused politics, the assassinations, are all failures too bitter for speech. A silence has ensued, broken intermittently (2).

With this explosion, the works of a thousand years disappear.

Allen traces that alienation onto literature and art, using O'Malley as only one figure to rethink the cultural geography of a transformed place. Retaliating against the notion of the 1920s and 1930s as a cultural wasteland, Allen links the work of James Joyce, W.B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett with controversies of the Free State, locating an experimental literature in the formation of a post-imperial state. He writes: "Like a later Beckett landscape, this Ireland of 1922 and after was strange and familiar all at once" (4). Allen demonstrates this in the "shrapnel presence" of the Civil War in

Joyce's novel *Finnegan's Wake*, using the writer's personal notes for the work as evidence. He traces the involvement of women as central figures in anti-imperial public protest and cabaret nights to the *Plough and the Stars* riots. Allen reads Yeats's occult book *A Vision* as an account of independence, using commentary from the author's library copies of Oswald Spengler. He identifies critiques of new state institutions - the university, the insane asylum, the hospital - in Samuel Beckett's prose *More Pricks than Kicks* and *Murphy*. He also looks at Jack Yeats's sketchbooks as miniature landscapes of Ireland's possible republic.

Against the background of civil unrest and fading dreams, the concrete expression of political and cultural change was made tangible by the design of state projects, as documented in Elaine Sisson and Linda King's collection of essays *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture* (2011). This collection investigates specific examples of how Irish design, material and visual culture negotiated the parallel discourses of nationality and modernity from 1922 to the unprecedented economic transformation of the early 1990s. It reveals the mythmaking process involved in constructing and materialising the identity of a new state and the assimilation of international influences involved. It also exposes that, from the 1950s onwards, expressions of modernity were focused as discourses of leisure, consumption and urbanisation became more widely embraced.

Historian Terence Brown pinpoints later experiences of modernity during The Emergency of 1939-1945, suspecting it as the beginning of a watershed in Irish life. From that point onward, Ireland would undergo a widespread rejection of the conditions of rural life that once predominated society. Up to the late 1930s, emigration reflected in its paradoxical way a commitment to rural life, or at the very least to the protection of the inherited plot. According to Brown:

With increasing frequency, come reports on surveys, on literary and dramatic portraits, which agree in their discovery of an almost universally demoralized rural scene, where emigration has begun to represent an outright rejection of rural life (171).

Ireland's negotiation of modernity is evidently complex. Jürgen Habermas described modernity as an incomplete project because each era has its own definition of

‘modern’. According to Habermas, modernity had run the course of the Enlightenment - to enrich the “life world” through reason - when postmodern malaise in the second half of 20th century had shattered that optimism: “More or less in the entire Western world a climate has developed that furthers capitalist modernization as well as trends critical of cultural modernism” (13).

If modernity refers to an experience of life under capitalism, and modernisation relates to cultural forces shaping society such as technology, then modernism is the term used to describe the cultural and artistic movements that ran concurrent to those social changes. In theatre, it’s been linked to artistic innovation. Dennis Kennedy, in his book *The Spectator and the Spectacle* (2009), explains that the association of modernism with innovation is the result of fetishized modernist histories that conflate manifesto with practice. Such innovations weren’t created by modernism but because “novelty achieved new value in the industrial age” (39). Kennedy parallels the rise of the director with that of European capitalism, the fall of an actor-manager repertory system to demands for longer runs. Kennedy suggests “we might see the director not as a creation of modernism but rather as a logical result of modernity” (28). He says that modernist histories underplay how crucial the director was to the commercial theatre, and the accusations of invidious industrial practice made against them in the process. Directors are seen here as inheritors of 20th century industry.

In the *Oxford Handbook to Modern Irish Theatre* (2016), Richard Cave’s chapter “Modernism and Irish Theatre 1900-1940” finds that definitions of ‘modernity’ and ‘modernism’ have become “elastic to the point of being opaque and nebulous” (121). He agrees on recurring patterns, including a crisis of confidence in forms of authority that consequently leads to a stylistic preoccupation with techniques of dislocation; a focus on interiority and forms of consciousness; and the cultivation of international perspectives. With these criteria, Cave identifies Wilde and Shaw as “precursors of modernism” (Cave 2016 124), and finds such criteria being fully realised in Yeats’s *Four Plays for Dancers*. The chapter also offers an informed comparison of plays by Sean O’Casey and Denis Johnston against models of German expressionist theatre. *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* defines expressionism as “in-turned art, drawing on the visible world but also going behind it to display the essence of experience in abstracted formulations” (227). Cave finds that “in eschewing realism

and naturalism, the modernist drama demanded new technical skills of actors, designers, and directors” (134). The introduction of architectural elements was one of those invented skills. He even speculates that German director Leopold Jessner’s use of rostra in stepped formations for productions of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (1920) and *Othello* (1921) may have influenced Abbey designer Dorothy Travers Smith’s designs for *King Lear* in 1928. But Cave ignores Norah McGuinness, another designer at the theatre whose design for *From Morn to Midnight* (1927) by Georg Kaiser was explicitly German expressionist in style. Nor does Cave touch on designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s modern use of rostra in her designs.

In 2004, Irish stage designer Joe Vanek wrote an essay accompanying an exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art celebrating the Abbey Theatre’s history of stage design. It’s telling that he, a designer, took the lead on writing an account of the theatre’s designers. Much of what we know about 20th century stage design internationally has come from books by designers themselves, artists like Craig Appia and Jo Mielziner. Vanek’s essay mentions internationally reputed designers who were previously known to collaborate with W.B. Yeats, such as Edward Gordon Craig, Charles Ricketts and Edmund Dulac. But he also includes lesser-known designers whose work for the Abbey hasn’t been examined. Such a role-call includes figures from the first half of the 20th century, like Dorothy Travers-Smith, Norah McGuinness, Tanya Moiseiwitsch, Anne Butler Yeats, Alicia Sweetman and Tomás Mac Anna.<sup>4</sup> Up until quite recently, you’d be hard pressed to locate them in any written histories about Irish theatre.

The only designer mentioned in Christopher Murray’s *Twentieth-century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to Nation* (1997) is Tomás Mac Anna, specifically his sets for the Abbey Theatre’s productions of *The Quare Fellow* by Brendan Behan. The first, seen in 1957, was framed within Mac Anna’s imposing but restrictive granite prison set. Murray finds that the director-designer’s paired back presentation for the 1984 revival

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<sup>4</sup> Others, from the second half of the 20th century, represent a professionally trained school of designers but their work doesn’t feature in the period covered by this project. For reference, these later designers mentioned in Vanek’s essay are Brian Collins, Alan Barlow, Christopher Baugh, Bronwen Casson, Wendy Shea, Frank Conway, Francis O’Connor, Paul McCauley, Monica Frawley, Robert Ballagh and Joan O’Cleary.

was more successful. The only designer to get a mention in D.E.S. Maxwell's *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980* (1985) was Tanya Moiseiwitsch, for having "enlivened the Abbey's mournful succession of cottage kitchens" in the 1930s (136). Christopher Fitz-Simon's *The Irish Theatre* (1983) contains no design analysis and is more useful as an illustrated history rather than an interrogative one. In *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness* (1994), Antony Roche only refers to Anne Butler Yeats and her backcloth for W.B. Yeats's *Purgatory* in 1938. Lionel Pilkington, who gives a historical account of theatre in the context of Irish nationalism in *Theatre and the State* (2004), neglects all the aforementioned designers.

That's not to say that histories haven't included Irish stage design and technology in their scope. Chris Morash provides a fascinating development of design in *A History of Irish Theatre 1901-2000* (2002). From candlelit dramas staged in Dublin Castle in 1602, this book charts the introduction of gas in 1823 that enabled controlled dimming of house and stage lights. Of particular interest, Morash identifies Dion Boucicault's production of *The Colleen Bawn* in the 1860s, with its vast landscape details of the lakes of Killarney and the Gap of Dunloe, as a "genre of virtual tourism" (Morash 2002 89). He considers the effect of opening the back wall of the Queen's Theatre in 1898 for J.W. Whitbread's *Wolfe Tone* in 1898. Such a detailed history provides interesting starting points for writing about the Abbey Theatre's stage design. An account of the premiere of J.M. Synge's *In the Shadow of a Glen* in 1903, for instance, observes the use of side lamps in lieu of conventional footlights.

Scholarship has acknowledged the 'poorness' of the Abbey's early design. In his essay "On the Sitting of Doors and Windows" (2004), Richard Cave reads these poor designs as a deliberate refutation of the materialist and cluttered stages of English commercial theatre. Instead, a world beyond 'the door', he argued, was to suggest a superior Irish dimension of being. Cave uses Robert Gregory and Sturge Moore's design scheme of the 1903 staging of W.B. Yeats's *The Hour Glass* as an example of the early Abbey model. That curtained-box set, strikingly different from the artificial-looking painted backdrops of the time, allowed maximum use of the playing space. It was devoid of wooden flats that could restrict the space with their angled metal or

wooden supports. This curtained set, Cave suggests, was mostly used for dramas rooted in narratives from Irish mythology.

According to Cave, visual austerity was linked to imaginative richness, specifically in how the stage object of a door takes on symbolical resonance in a play like *The Hour Glass* as a meeting point of onstage and offstage worlds. The exiting of characters through doors at the end of dramas like Yeats's *Deirdre* and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, co-written by Augusta Gregory, suggest a critique of materialist values and entrance to alternative values. He charts the use of the door in Yeats's drama, endowed with liminal and symbolic value, to Synge's drama where characters try to invest it with similar properties but a door remains within the same entrance/exit mechanism found in farce. Cave then considers O'Casey use of the door as indebted to Synge, and how he was ultimately without the means to represent larger social forces on stage. He suggests that the Abbey's rejection of O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* in 1928 may have been informed by the theatre's limited devices to present that play's expressionist vision.

Cave's extensive criticism of W.B. Yeats has generated a lot of valuable analysis on the stage design surrounding the playwright's work. His enlightening coverage of the *Four Plays for Dancers* in his book *Collaborations: Ninette de Valois and William Butler Yeats* (2011) built on oral histories collected by Deirdre Mulrooney in her *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland* (2006). Cave's analysis of the choreography, music, mask and costuming in those productions makes mention of Norah McGuinness, whose costumes were, according to Vanek, "imbued with a formal elegance and restrained use of colour".<sup>5</sup> Cave gives important evidence of McGuinness's Japanese-inspired costumes for Yeats's *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, seen at the Abbey Theatre in a Dublin Drama League production in 1926. He also suspects Norah's costuming for that production to have been used in Yeats's *The Dreaming of the Bones* in 1931.

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<sup>5</sup> See Vanek, "Scene Change: One Hundred Years of Theatre Design at the Abbey". [imma.ie](http://imma.ie).

It's disappointing that McGuinness's dynamic work at the Abbey was ignored by Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray in their book *Yeats and the Noh: A Comparative Study* (1990). Thankfully, Karen E. Brown dedicates a chapter to McGuinness in *The Yeats Circle, Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880-1939* (2011). Brown points out the paradox of Yeats, an artist resistant to developments in literary modernism in the 1920s, wishing to work with McGuinness, who, according to Brown, was "best remembered as one of several women artists who painted in a late Cubist idiom". She shows that McGuinness's influences range from stained glass by Irish artist Harry Clarke to the impressionist paintings of Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh and Georges Braque. Brown observes the critics' puzzled reception to Norah's modernist-sounding designs for the Abbey productions of Yeats's *Deirdre* and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and suggests them to be too modern for their time.

Yeats was something of lightning rod for design innovation, though there's no mention in the Abbey Theatre's minute books of its board commissioning these artists, suggesting that the playwright may have paid for them himself. With Yeats's death in 1939, experimentation in design continued as Ian R. Walsh's book *Experimental Irish Theatre: After W.B. Yeats* (2012) shows. Walsh proves how a how visual-led dramaturgy was part of the experimental theatre that ran counter to the dominant naturalistic peasant play in the 1940s. He uses postdramatic theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann to analyse Anne Butler Yeats's scenery for Jack Yeats's 1939 play *Harlequin's Positions*. Walsh argues that the playwrights' extensive notes on colour design and excessive stage props suggest the registration of visuals on a purely informational level, a density that resembled Yeats's use of heavy paint and impasto in his later paintings. The study also mentions the rarely discussed designer Vere Dudgeon, though his stage design for Maurice Meldon's *House Under Green Shadows* (1951) at the Abbey Theatre suggests the expressionistic play was played in a naturalistic style.

References to stage design in Irish theatre have traditionally been made within playwright-centred analysis. Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth speculate the most design-inventive playwright was Samuel Beckett, in whose work the operation of spatial elements is "deliberately mobilized" (88). In their essay, "Samuel Beckett

and Irish Scenography” (2015), Trish McTighe and Anna McMullen consider the playwright’s connection to theatre networks in the 1920s and 1930s, specifically the modernist approaches of the Dublin Drama League - the Abbey Theatre’s subscribers’ club - and the Gate Theatre. This revelatory essay relays Beckett’s fondness for Dorothy Travers-Smith and Norah McGuinness’s stage designs, and considers how productions from this period may have influenced the shape of his first play *Eleutheria*. Beckett’s influence on Irish stage design, however, didn’t occur until the late 1960s according to Joe Vanek. It doesn’t feature within the period analysed by this project.

This study is informed by recent scholarship on ‘space’ in Irish theatre. Morash called it “one of the great under-researched areas in Irish theatre studies” (Morash 2012 12). His recouping of theories about space began in the essay “Making Space: Towards a Spatial Theory of Irish Theatre” (2012) but since evolved into the book *Mapping Irish Theatre* (2013) co-written with Shaun Richards. While this study points to the physical space of the stage, he reminds that it can extend to the auditorium, the series of spaces produced by the architecture, light, the movement of people around the building, and even beyond into the physical space of the city. It also calls for attention to the ‘fictional space’ of Boucicault’s *Kerry*, Synge’s *Wicklow*, Brian Friel’s *Ballybeg* and Marina Carr’s *Offaly*. These fictional spaces representing real places may, he argues, come from real locations that are already inhabited with signification and may only need a transfer to the stage for that signification to function. With Richards, Morash introduces spatial theories by Henri LeFebvre, Anne Ubersfeld and Yi-Fu Tuan to interrogate Irish theatre history, from the Gaelic Revival to the contemporary site-specific productions of ANU. They uncover valuable evidence of stage design of early Abbey Theatre productions, such as Frank Fay and W.G. Fay’s Andre Antoiné-inspired approach of using real-world objects. The book also draws attention to Tanya Moisewitsch’s frequent use of the height of the Abbey proscenium and abstraction of patterns in realist settings. Perhaps most significantly, the authors speculate if the physical dimensions of the theatre, in their limitations, ultimately shaped the Abbey’s repertoire.

Now, the Abbey Theatre’s stage design is receiving more scholarly attention than ever. The recent arrival of the immense *Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*

(2016) heralded two chapters on the subject. One by Ian R. Walsh, “Directors and Designers Since 1960,” reveals the increased importance of the designer in a globalised era. Paige Reynold’s “Design and Direction to 1960” shows that the Abbey went beyond Irish shores for inspiration, giving a sharp analysis of Edward Gordon Craig’s screen technology as an example. She looks at expressionist design at the Gate Theatre before moving on to a concise description of Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s tenure at the Abbey: ‘... she created, at a breakneck pace, the costumes and settings for over fifty productions’ (Reynolds 2016 212). However, Reynolds doesn’t mention Dorothy Travers-Smith or Norah McGuinness, whose designs also engaged with expressionism. Nevertheless it is encouraging to see scholars engage with Irish stage design. Siobhán O’Gorman’s work tends to look more at the second half of the 20th century but her control of the term ‘scenography’ suggests an openness to contextual references outside theatre, using it as a term that not only describes theatre but all its implications for visual culture.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, this project proves that an emphasis on stage design can lead to alternative readings of the Abbey Theatre. This study isn’t largely preoccupied with canonical figures such as W.B. Yeats, J.M Synge and Sean O’Casey, for instance. Instead, space is created to consider plays by other writers, some of whom aren’t Irish. Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* and William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, both directed by Denis Johnston in the late 1920s, are seen in Chapter 2 as remarkably resonant to the instability of the Irish Free State years. Furthermore, though this project seeks to acknowledge the work of neglected women designers such as Dorothy Travers-Smith, Norah McGuinness, Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Alicia Sweetman, it has also led to the examination of contributions by neglected women playwrights. Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins’s *Broken Faith* (1913) and Dorothy Macardle’s *Ann Kavanagh* (1922) feature as case studies in Chapter 1, while Maeve O’Callaghan’s *Wind from the West* (1936) is analysed in Chapter 3, and Anne Daly’s *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959) in Chapter 4. Through its combinations of forgotten histories relating to design, productions by non-Irish playwrights, and work by women, this study intends on being a serious intervention in Irish theatre historiography.

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<sup>6</sup> See O’Gorman, “Scenographic Interactions: 1950s’ Ireland and Dublin’s Pike Theatre”. *Irish Theatre International* 3 (1), 2014.

## 2. Methodology: Archives and Design Culture

Here, I will discuss the project's methodology. This has been predominantly qualitative in approach, developing case studies to analyse stage design in productions at the Abbey Theatre. This has enabled me to delineate trends in thought, as outlined in my literature review in the previous section. This qualitative approach has led to some degree of quantitative research. The settings for Abbey Theatre productions between 1902-1966 will be counted and presented here for the first time, and ordered into categories to show the popularity and unpopularity of certain types of space and geographies. These categories of space include domestic (eg. cottage kitchen, farmhouse parlour, living room), workplace (office, gardaí station, doctor's surgery), punitive (prison) and leisure (hotel bar, deck of a cruise). It should be noted that many plays have multiple settings, and that they may be included in more than one category.

This data has been sourced from the Abbey Theatre digital archive located at the Moore Institute in the National University of Ireland, Galway. The background of the archive is described on the university's dedicated webpage as "the largest ever theatre archive digitisation project worldwide and the digital archive contains almost a million pages in addition to substantial audio and video content".<sup>7</sup> This study will be one of the first large scale projects to make use of this repository. It is the result of navigating a multiplicity of document forms including visual material such as photography, programmes and design drawings. Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson have described some of the demands on such a scattered process:

The visual composition of materials, whether a playbill, a script marked up by the director or deputy stage manager, a sketch or a photograph of a rehearsal, an actor, a building and so on, require an interpretive strategy. This interpretation might borrow from other disciplines; Roland Barthes' and John

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<sup>7</sup> See NUI Galway's webpage for more information:  
<https://library.nuigalway.ie/collections/archives/depositedcollections/featuredcollections/abbeytheatredigitalarchive/>

Berger's theories of reading images for example, might inform reading a visual document (20).

It became clear that this project required a broad conceptual approach.

Both Barthes and Berger wrote about the mysterious and unknowable element of the image. The idea of images being "obtuse", to use Barthes's term, dissuades us from a traditional semiotic analysis that otherwise might have interpreted design elements like set and costuming as examples of Saussure's "sign". That system is dependent on translating the visual into the linguistic but Barthes cautioned that the meaning of "obtuse" images can lie beyond articulated language (61). Berger affirmed that while we explain the world surrounding us with words, we establish our place in it by "seeing", though the relation between what we see and what we know can never be settled. On the subject of historical paintings, he writes:

When we 'see' a landscape, we situate ourselves in it. If we 'saw' the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history' (11).

History for Berger constituted a relation between a present and its past. The latter can never be lived in, but from "seeing" it we could draw conclusions to act in the former. That is a principle by which I've conducted this project, that is to reimagine portrayals of the Abbey Theatre in the early 20th century in order to stimulate new discourse around the theatre and its stage design.

It must be noted that all of the case studies in this project have been determined based on evidence of stage designs that best resemble expressions of modernity. This is to be clarified so as not to presume that certain productions have been included, or even excluded, within a highly subjective reading of design. Another study may include different designs to argue alternative meanings but the designs included here have been chosen to best reveal the Abbey Theatre's negotiation of modernity. Many of the artefacts used in this project have been made available through the Abbey Theatre digital archive. It's easy to presume that resource to be *the* authoritative chronicler of the theatre's history. Foucault, describing the power of the archive, wrote: "[it's] a system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" (145-146).

Jacques Derrida, tracing the etymology of the word in his article “Archive Fever” (1995), found translations of the Greek *arkhe* that included “a public building,” “the first place,” and “the government” (10). Derrida’s term “archive fever” relates to an obsession with archival research that has resulted in classification of documents under a “privileged *topology* [sic.]” (10).

I found some truth in this. For example, the Abbey Theatre digital archive didn’t contain Norah McGuinness’s radically expressionist set design for Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*, produced in 1927, which features in this project as a case study in Chapter 2. That was not to presume that the design didn’t exist; I found a reproduction of it in Elaine Sisson’s article “Experimentalism and the Irish Stage: Theatre and German Expressionism in the 1920s”. I found the manuscript copy of Maeve O’Callaghan’s comedy *Wind from the West*, produced in 1936 and discussed in Chapter 3, in the National Library of Ireland. Though the Abbey Theatre’s digital archive had a prompt script of Anne Daly’s comedy *Leave it to the Doctor*, seen in 1959, it was the published version in the National Library of Ireland that contained a foreword by reputed novelist Kate O’Brien, which allowed me to situate Daly in networks of Irish feminism in Chapter 4. Norah McGuinness’s designs for W.B. Yeats’s *Deirdre* in 1926 don’t feature as a case study here but the costume design I found in the V&A Museum’s collections informed my reading of the designer’s work. Similarly, traces of Dorothy Travers-Smith’s designs found in the Lennox Robinson papers in the Benjamin Iveagh Library at Farmleigh House also furthered my understanding of that artist’s designs. In fact, without the wealth of visual images from design, painting, architecture and fashion histories that I came across in my research, the design traces in the Abbey Theatre digital archive and their potential meanings would have remained isolated and dormant.

No matter what picture forms of the Abbey Theatre’s past through analysis of these artefacts, it’s important to note it can never equate to a recreation of the original theatrical event. “No historian will ever have immediate access to the events to which the research refers, no matter what his/her underlying concept of theatre and history might be,” wrote Erika Fischer-Lichte in her book *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (1997 344). Transparency is important in historical contextualisation. Tracy A. Davis articulated this well in her 2004 article “The

Context Problem”. She provides a helpful strategy for “filling in the gaps” left by history: “In order to “flesh out” an event, bring it “to life,” or show its vitality, other evidentiary morsels are brought in narrative proximity and they “bleed” together in order to create an impression of completeness” (205). I have found this technique useful: to address gaps in Irish theatre history, I’ve brought in material from design, crafts, modern art, architecture and fashion histories. Davis offers the image of the historian as an art restorer, whose job is to restore an illusion of multidimensionality to a damaged painting. This technique called *rondeur*, through its use of colour, shading and foreshortening, is similar to the theatre historian’s optical trick of “filling in gaps” in history. For the sake of transparency, I also acknowledge that this project uses newspaper reviews and diary entries for information about productions, and I am aware that these types of sources can be sometimes unreliable.

I acknowledge this project at part of the 21st century trend of scholarship about stage design and scenography that’s not produced by a working designer. In the 20th century, Denis Bablet may have been the only exception, with his *Revolutions in Stage Design of the XXth Century* published in 1977) only in French. Christopher Baugh - who, it should be noted, worked as a designer - suspects in his valuable study *Theatre, Performance and Technology* (2005) that the late arrival of academic intrigue to stage design may be explained by the distrust of ‘spectacle’ in theatre. “Theatre histories have frequently presented the actor as being continually challenged and possibly threatened by technology and its associated spectacle,” he writes (8). This isn’t a recent trend. Spectacle, insofar as it is considered a demonstrative image mostly concerned with craft, has been distrusted as far back as Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where as *opsis* it was considered the least germane to the art of poetry and placed last in his formulation of tragedy. But Baugh reminds us that spectacle is also a complex interaction of image, sound and movement, one that has always “unnerved their audience providing a frisson of the uncanny, the *unheimlich* – the ‘other-worldly’, and unsettling sensations of the mysterious and the unexplained” (1).

Baugh’s book is an immense history, and has assisted me greatly in contextualising the Abbey Theatre’s stage design. His analysis of electric lighting, introduced in the 1880s, reveals how theatre displays were widely reshaped. 17th century technology such as wooden grooves set upon the stage with sliding shutters immediately became

dated. Under increased illumination, painted two-dimensional scenery, when viewed against the three-dimensional actor, made for an artificial-looking effect. Baugh argues that the arrival of electric lighting coincided with a “millennial frenzy of artistic rejections and manifestos for change” at small theatres across Europe - the Abbey Theatre, the Théâtre Libre and Moscow Art Theatre - searching for a psychological truth beyond mimetic representation (28). This will be seen clearly in Robert Gregory’s Arts and Crafts-inspired stage design for W.B. Yeats’s *Deirdre* (1906) examined in Chapter 1. An eschewing of mimetic representation will also be revealed in the modernist art-inspired stage designs analysed in Chapter 2 - Norah McGuinness’s design for Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* (1927), and Dorothy Travers-Smith’s designs for Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1927) and Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (1928). It’s safe to say the Abbey Theatre never abandoned mimetic representation for long but I will identify, throughout this project, the gradual removal of a stage design dominant in the 19th century, one that “converted the visual experience of the world into a codified collection of scenic apparatus – the backcloth, the wings, the borders and the ground-rows” (Baugh 31).

As this project progressed, it felt necessary to merge theatre studies with the rich field of design studies. I owe much to the existing work led by Linda King and Elaine Sisson, as embodied in their vital edited collection *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture* (2011). In a 2014 article “Visual Shrapnel: Rethinking Irish Studies through Design and Popular Visual Culture” (2014), King and Sisson argue that design studies can inform current readings of Irish culture. A visual methodology that lets the “image speak,” they suggest, makes use of “visual shrapnel”: “shards used to reconstitute buildings (theatres, cinemas, office buildings), objects (flyers, advertisements posters, newspapers, costumes, letters, machines) and experiences (audiences, manufacturers, consumers, designers)” (King and Sisson 2014 78). Therefore, archival images we find, such as a costume design or a photograph of a set, are embedded into an obscured cultural history of Ireland. Reconstituting these stage designs can lead to further fields of investigation, as King and Sisson explain: “Bringing together modernity’s shards of visual shrapnel forces us to acknowledge the extent and complexity of external influences on Irish society more general” (King and Sisson 2014 78).

Delayed scholarly concentration on the image is reflected in the relatively new field of design studies. It wasn't until the early 1980s that an understanding of design history as something apart from art history emerged. The founding of the journal *Design Issues* in 1984 by Victor Margolian, a Professor at the University of Illinois, contributed to the popularisation of the discipline known as design studies: a field of enquiry to "include consideration of History/Theory/Criticism within a multi-disciplinary approach" (Clarke and Brody 2). W. J. Y. Mitchell introduced the "pictorial turn" in his 1996 essay "What do Pictures Really Want?" to denote the increasing attention to the image and visual technologies in contemporary culture, cultivating a system of interrogation termed 'visual culture'. In this "pictorial turn", visual and written texts are equal in significance, where historically the image was considered an illustrative aid to written language. However, Guy Julier observes that visual culture inherited the legacy of art history insofar as it primarily focuses on the relationship between the viewer and the viewed. To better comprehend the social meanings of design, he encouraged the term 'design culture', referring to "the interrelationships of the domains of designers, production and consumption with the design object, image, or space" (72).

In his article "From Visual Culture to Design Culture" (2006), Julier wrote that design culture "expresses an attitude, a value, and a desire to improve things" (70). Stage design shares these concerns. In a 1976 interview with the *Irish Times*, stage designer Bronwen Casson put the craft into clear terms: "Stage design is not implanting a monstrous art form on to the stage, which doesn't relate to the actors. It should, instead, be a definite space in which the actors can best put across the idea of the play" (Walsh 8). That efficiency is the mark of 'good' stage design but how should we write about it? Julier says that design writing can encompass a broad range of areas related to production and consumption. Writing about the process of making a design may involve the immediate contextual references implicit in its development, but also the totality of carrying out the design, from conceiving and negotiating artefacts with clients to studio organisation and output of design to its realisation. We may think of design as a "context-informed practice", taking into account how geographical context influences practice and limits availability of technologies (70). There is also the organisational idea of design culture, that it conveys a company's innovation and possibly its cultural capital. Finally, Julier considers the "pervasive but

differentiated value” expressed by design culture, that is the “quality of immersion in a specific (designerly) ambience” (71). All these facets of design culture have shaped this project’s analysis of stage design at the Abbey Theatre.

I must acknowledge that alternative methodologies might have uncovered more results. My attention to realist designs, for instance - Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins’s *Broken Faith* (1913) and Dorothy Macardle’s *Ann Kavanagh* (1922), analysed in Chapter 1, and Anne Daly’s *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959), Tom Coffey’s *Stranger, Beware* (1959) and Peter Hutchinson’s *No Man is an Island* studied in Chapter 4 - might have uncovered little compared to the wealth of innovations suggested by Tomás Mac Anna’s designs in the 1960s. However, I felt it important not to extend the proposed period of time too far past the 1950s, a decade which Conor McCarthy pinpointed as the modernisation of the Republic of Ireland. I also acknowledge that the Abbey Theatre is not a substitute for all Irish theatre, and welcome the development of other stage design histories. In fact, the vibrant staging methods associated with the Gate Theatre also suggest a rich engagement with design. While this project focuses on material aspects of stage design such as set and costuming, I should also note the marginalisation of immaterial details. Lighting design is rarely considered, and sound design is absent completely. I’ve lacked the required sensibilities to reconstitute those designs from archival drawings and cues.

### **3. Project Overview: Abbey Theatre, 1902-1959**

Before concluding this introduction chapter, I will provide a detailed overview of the project’s four chapters. It will see a vast transformation of the Abbey Theatre, from a national theatre led by artists from the Anglo Irish ascendancy-class - especially Augusta Gregory, W.B. Yeats and Lennox Robinson - to explicitly Irish nationalist administrations from the 1940s onwards - led by directors F.R. Higgins and Ernest Blythe - that shared something of the isolationist, and possibly xenophobic, policies of de Valera’s government. The theatre’s financial fortunes will shift from the generous patronage of the English producer Annie Horniman to a precarious existence in the 1910s and 1920s, before receiving an annual subsidy from the government in 1925, effectively making the Abbey Theatre part of the state’s apparatus. It will also see the Abbey company beginning as a group renting venues before buying premises

on Abbey St, and then the disastrous fire in 1951 that sent the company into the Queen's Theatre.

Chapter 1, covering the years 1902-1923, begins with uncovering links between the Irish Arts and Crafts movement and the Abbey Theatre's stage design. Art historian Nicola Gordon Bowe defined this decorative movement by its "striv[e] for individual, 'modern' visual expression based on glorious past achievements, set against an urban backdrop of decay, unemployment and disease" (Bowe and Cumming 77). It reified the artistic and heroic credentials of the distant Irish past in order to contest British caricatures of recalcitrant Ireland. Its influence will be made clear in Robert Gregory's set design for W.B. Yeats's *Deirdre* (1906). I argue that within this design and its signalling of native culture and self-invention, seen during the British colonial occupation of Ireland, was modernity's vision of a future where Ireland is politically and culturally independent. However, realism became the dominant form to atomise Irish life, usually within the structure of the rural cottage. Architecture historian Marion McGarry has described symbolic value of this structure as "a type of Eden unsullied by British colonialism to which the Irish might return" (McGarry 16). I argue that realist design of cottages for Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins's *Broken Faith* (1913) and Dorothy Mccardle's *Ann Kavanagh* (1922) stressed a desperate need for modernisation, and so projected modernity's future of Irish society that is politically peaceful and extends protections to women and workers.

In Chapter 2, looking at 1924-1934, the explicit influence of expressionism will be revealed on the Abbey Theatre's stage design. Norah McGuinness borrows the stepped visual forms seen in German expressionist films *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu* for her design of Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* in 1927. That same year, Dorothy Travers-Smith focused the screen technology of Edward Gordon Craig to shadowy effect in her forest set for Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*. I argue that by using these exaggerated details, McGuinness and Travers-Smith's designs both accentuated modernity's anxieties and confusion that had become everyday experience during the years of the politically unstable Free State government. I also explore Travers-Smith's palatial set for Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 1928, which combined the ritzy abstraction of Art Deco architecture with the

dynamism of Italian futurist art. That design, I argue, evoked the nation's divisions after the Civil War.

In Chapter 3, covering 1935-1949, I show that the Abbey Theatre emerged at the end of the 1940s as recognisably cosmopolitan. Though conservative programming in this period didn't embrace plays with modernist form, I have detected modernity in its more discrete presence. Increased attention to three-dimensional staging saw the simulation of architectural forms that occasionally came from further afield such as English Arts and Crafts, French Art Deco and Italian styles. For instance, Tanya Moiseiwitsch's set for James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan*, produced in 1936, was West Asian in style. I argue that within this orientalist spectacle was modernity's projection of Ireland, still in didactic relationship to Britain, asserted its political credentials by embodying a colonial attitude. Art Deco is clearly present in Moiseiwitsch's drawing room set for Maeve O'Callaghan's *Wind from the West* (1936). That style's association with modernity, I argue, frames O'Callaghan's play as a call for gender equality. Lastly, Alicia Sweetman's hotel set for a revival of Samuel John Waddell's *Peter* in 1944 will be proven as simulating architecture from the Venetian Lido sandbank. I argue that this cosmopolitan design envisioned Irish people inhabiting international space, and in doing so rejected the isolationism of de Valera's Ireland in the 1940s.

Finally Chapter 4, covering 1950-1966, focuses solely on costuming and how it illuminates Ireland's shifting cultural tensions in the late 1950s. New methods of costuming in Abbey Theatre productions in this period reveal new types of bodies on stage. In Anne Daly's comedy *Leave it to the Doctor*, female bodies are costumed in dress that reflects the changing cultural value of work done by, to use Caitríona Clear's helpful term, the "woman of the house". I argue that this costuming projects modernity's vision for a female-centred Ireland, as it rejects the traditional male gaze and its perception of women as passive. In Tom Coffey's murder mystery play *Stranger, Beware*, we see young bodies dressed in non-native materials, drawing instead on the *prêt-à-porter* garments popularised by British fashion designer Mary Quant and as seen in Hollywood movies. Within this denial of traditional bodies, I argue, is a kind of modernity that extends rebellion to younger generations in Ireland, dissolving through emigration in the 1950s. In Peter Hutchinson's military drama *No*

*Man is an Island*, men's bodies are costumed in dress that shows the "soldiery man," to use George L. Mosse's term, which challenged the hegemony of masculinity represented by corporate breadwinners.

The breadth of this PhD thesis will show that a "knowing practice" of design studies can reveal Ireland's negotiation with modernity through stage designs. By investigating the contextual references outside theatre, we can see how Abbey Theatre productions underlined new ways of envisioning life in Ireland. Revivalist design roused social issues in the last years of colonial occupation, while expressionist design put shape on the fragmented landscape after the Civil War. There was a resistance to the cultural isolationism of de Valera's policies in cosmopolitan design, and counter-culture design revealed a frustration with the status quo. All of these practices, I argue, are imbued with the "contingency" that characterises T.J. Clark's definition of modernity.

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## CHAPTER 1

## THROUGH IRISH EYES, 1902-1923

**Introduction**

In September 1899, theatre critic Frank Fay attended a play at the Queens Theatre in Dublin. *The Irishman*, a melodrama by the theatre's manager J.W. Whitbread, was set against the period's contentions around land proprietorship. Fay dubiously watched its "sensation scene",<sup>8</sup> wherein bailiffs arrive outside the cottage of a tenant unable to pay their rent, and wield a battering ram to knock down the door. "A crude piece of unconvincing conventionalism," he wrote in the *United Irishman*, adding that the play "does not convey the maddening and heartrending scenes which used to be enacted on these occasions" (27-28). This scene, effectively showing a rural cottage being demolished, is an apt starting point for understanding the Abbey Theatre's reverence for cottage displays. Before leaving the *United Irishman* to join in that project, Fay campaigned tirelessly for an Irish national theatre, one that "would see life through Irish eyes" (56).

This chapter considers how life *was* seen, by examining the Abbey Theatre company's stage design between 1902-1923. It will reveal that Fay's ideal gaze - "through Irish eyes" - was bound up in a desire for Irish modernity, as expressed

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Diamond describes the melodrama's "sensation scene" as a concentrated scene that 'stands in strong relief to the rest of the action'. Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation: or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-century Britain*. London: Anthem, 2004; 218.

through experiments in revivalism. According to Paige Reynolds, modernism and revivalism are traditionally read as antithetical:

Revivalism celebrates a linear trajectory in which the past and its conventions might provide an uninterrupted flow of inspiration for the modern public, while modernism purports to require a complete break from the past or at the very least an innovative refashioning of that past from its fragments (4).

The distinctions between Irish revivalism and international modernism are often read in a nationalist context - revivalism will celebrate the mythic past and omit the modernity symbolised by industrial England. Rural peasants are prioritised instead of urban *flâneurs*. Revivalism encourages the return to an ancient language, and modernism aggressively works to develop a new idiom.

In *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle* (2007), Reynolds channels T.S. Eliot, who in 1923 claimed that the “mythical method” begun by W.B. Yeats and further developed by James Joyce in *Ulysses* was to be praised for “manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity”. For Reynolds, Eliot suggested the revivalist method as a “corrective to modern life” (177-178), which sounds like the “contingency” of T.J. Clark’s definition of modernity. This aesthetic confluence of Yeats and Joyce suggests that revivalism and modernism may have had conceptual and practical overlap. In that spirit, this chapter will consider revivalism as a modernist project.

This chapter reveals the existence of a “contingency” involving the “high cultural credentials of this distant past [to assert] sources for national identity that implicitly contested long held British assumptions of recalcitrant, if not irrationally uncivilised, Ireland” (Kreilkamp 13), seen specifically in W.B. Yeats’s *Deirdre* (1906) and its signalling of Irish self-expression. The use of Arts and Crafts forms in the Abbey Theatre’s displays has yet to receive critical attention. This decorative arts movement, according to Nicola Gordon Bowe, was defined by its “striv[e] for individual, ‘modern’ visual expression based on glorious past achievements, set against an urban backdrop of decay, unemployment and disease” (Bowe and Cumming 77). Inevitably, the cottage, viewed as part of the monastic culture of pre-conquest Ireland, was

imbued with nationalist ideology and seen as “a type of Eden unsullied by British colonialism to which the Irish might return” (McGarry 16). By drawing on the re-evaluated realist writings of French critic Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson (known as Champfleury), this chapter shines new light on cottage displays as underlying concerns with labour frustrations and maternalist feminism (*Broken Faith* (1913) by Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins), and militaristic violence (*Ann Kavanagh* (1922) by Dorothy Macardle), while also emphasising the need to resolve them.

This chapter will show how set design can reveal uncharted aspects of the theatre in this period. In Lionel Pilkington’s writing about the Abbey’s “irenic engagement with nationalism” (62), he doesn’t include the premiere of *Deirdre*, or its intensely Arts and Crafts-inspired displays. Nor does stage design factor into Nicola Gordon Bowe’s survey of the Arts and Crafts movement in Ireland. The newly forged Abbey Theatre had to create new displays to fit the “ancient idealism” that its founding playwrights envisioned (Gregory 20). In Yeats’s myth drama *Deirdre*, stage displays designed by Robert Gregory show the mark of Arts and Crafts artists’ turn to “a distant pre-conquest past in their search for themes and images expressing their country’s claims for the future” (Kreilkamp 9). In Suzanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummin’s drama *Broken Faith*, we see a realist production that closely simulates the interiors of Irish cottages as outlined by Marion McGarry in her architecture history *The Irish Cottage: Culture, History, Design* (2017), and through its realism rouses prescient questions about labour reform. McGarry’s view that the cottage can represent “the impoverished history of the country” (1) will also be proven, by looking at the realist design of Dorothy Macardle’s wartime drama *Ann Kavanagh*.

The methodology will use Guy Julier’s concept of “design culture” as a means of contextualising stage design within a wider framework. Julier uses this term to refer to “the interrelationships of the domains of designers, production and consumption with the design object, image or space” (Julier 72). This chapter uses design artefacts from the period 1901-1923 as evidence.

In his history of the Abbey Theatre, Pilkington points out that the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre - Yeats and Gregory’s previous project - coincides with legislation depowering the landlord class in Ireland. This puts the Irish Literary

Theatre manifesto in context: “Irish native culture (in landlord eyes more notorious indeed for its ‘passion for oratory’ rather than any simplicity and imagination) is now felicitously reconceptualised (‘trained to listen’) as an audience” (16-17). No scholars have yet to analyse the visual displays for representing that “native culture”. Pilkington also rightfully evokes Marjorie Howe’s idea of “Ascendancy nationalism”, that is an “enlisting [of] the Irish peasantry ... in a shared national project while continuing to dominate them politically and economically” (Howe 45) but no analysis has yet to consider how cottage displays worked to serve the working class and the dangers they face in terms of poverty, gender inequality and militant violence.

### **1. Cultural Revival and Revolution**

For an explanation of how Ireland’s revolutionary period came into being, Roy Foster provides a nuanced account of the years between 1891 and 1916. He identifies the tendency to read it as a vacuum in Irish politics, the “long gestation” that W.B. Yeats described (Yeats 1955 554) or Augusta Gregory’s “unloosing of forces” (191) after the death of Irish Paramilitary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell. Foster acknowledges that party politics campaigning for self-government, or Home Rule, were frustratingly stifled after inroads made by Parnell at Westminster, which included successfully campaigning for land reform and getting the first Home Rule bill on the agenda. The “failure, on many levels, of political inspiration and direction” (Foster 434) was apparent by the defeat of the second Home Rule bill in 1893.

But Foster owes the radicalisation of Irish politics to Britain’s involvement in two wars. The Boer War (1899-1902) focused moderate opinion into an anti-imperial outcry, and was the catalyst for the creation of the women’s nationalist organisation *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* and the expansion of the Gaelic League promoting the Irish-language from 107 branches to nearly 400 around the country (456). It was the First World War (1914-18), however, that changed the political landscape irrevocably: “it put Home Rule [introduced in 1912 but delayed until after the war] on ice; it altered the conditions of military crisis in Ireland at a stroke; and it created the rationale for an Irish Republican Brotherhood rebellion” (471). Also unresolved was the question of where Ulster, a province with major unionist support, would fit within Home Rule. The delay of any answers allowed fears to fester and a private army of Ulster

Volunteers to establish itself. This was met with a rival force of Irish Volunteers in the south that mounted a rising in Dublin in 1916. 450 people were killed and most of the city centre was shelled to ruins. But, as Foster points out: “the British authorities behaved more and more in the manner that IRB propaganda desired” (485). The execution of the leaders of the rising inspired a reconstruction of extremist volunteers into the Irish Republican Army.

By 1919, the Irish revolution was firmly established. Republican party Sinn Féin had replaced the Irish Paramilitary Party, and Independence had replaced the compromise of Home Rule. The War of Independence (1919-1921) saw IRA tactics such as guerrilla warfare and shooting down policemen, which in turn provoked ruthless reprisals from police reinforcements, nicknamed Black and Tans. A turning point came with the Government of Ireland Act, passing into law at the end of 1920, establishing separate parliaments in Belfast and Dublin. A treaty for nationalist Ireland could be envisioned, with unionist Ireland separately catered for. But as Foster observes, the result of the treaty - a twenty-six county dominion - was not very different from what had been coming into view. It was the ensuing Civil War that created “a caesura across Irish history, separating parties, interests and even families, and creat[ed] the rationale for political division that endured” (511). The Irish Free State government was established but the split in the IRA sent both sides warring across the country, until the anti-treaty side dumped their arms in May 1923. The government had responded with draconian measures, including the carrying out of 77 executions. But as Foster points out, the government’s dominion status was enough to be legitimate: “public opinion did not repudiate such policies; the Free State government was strongly supported, even at its most coercive, because it was ‘Irish’” (513).

The cultural revival provided a language for revolutionaries that they couldn’t find at licensed Dublin theatres such as the Queen’s Theatre, Theatre Royal and Gaiety Theatre. In their written histories, Pilkington and Chris Morash both point to the Irish Literary Theatre’s premiere of Yeats’s play *The Countess Cathleen* in 1899 as a starting point of a native theatre but a photograph of a performance of *tableaux* from *The Countess Cathleen* shows actors in Early Modern dress devoid of Irish character.

<sup>9</sup> But Catherine Morris's wealth of research shows that Alice Milligan's *tableaux vivants* production for Inghinidhe na hÉireann in April 1901 had Arts and Crafts costuming: spiral and zoomorphic embellishments, dressed with penannular brooches.<sup>10</sup> Visually, the native theatre started with Inghinidhe na hÉireann's production.

After seeing the company's productions of Milligan's *The Deliverance of Red Hugh* and *The Harp That Once Was* in August 1901, Yeats claimed "I came away with my head on fire. I wanted to hear my own unfinished *Baile's Strand*, to hear Greek tragedy spoken with a Dublin accent" (Yeats 1936 72). The following April, he and Gregory contributed their explicitly nationalist play *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* to the company. Adrian Frazer has pointed out that after accusations of blasphemy garnered by *The Countess Cathleen*, Yeats won faith, first by providing "nationalist credentials" with *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* and then proving "religious ones" with his next drama, *The Hour Glass*, in 1903 (59).<sup>11</sup> This anarchic activity might be read as a series of publicity stunts, ones that would make Yeats out to be the most significant founder of an Irish national theatre, at the exclusion of others. As Mary Trotter observed of his curtain call speech after *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, Yeats neglected to mention the Inghinidhe na hÉireann players, instead remarking on the "formation of an Irish National Dramatic company which in his opinion had already shown itself well fitted to carry on the work of the Irish Literary Theatre".<sup>12</sup>

*Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, with its cottage interior, could be envisioned by W.G. Fay, a scenic artist experienced in landscape composition, harmony in painting, and distemper. However in the same billing was *Deirdre* by George Russell (also known as A.E.), a play that Fay felt was outside his capabilities: "... it was far out of my line.

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<sup>9</sup> See Nicola Gordon Bowe and Elizabeth Cumming 164.

<sup>10</sup> Reproductions of Alice Milligan's costume designs were published in Catherine Morris, *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012; centrefold.

<sup>11</sup> In between these two dramas was the comedy *A Pot of Broth*, co-written with Augusta Gregory, premiered at the Ancient Concert Rooms on Oct 30, 1902.

<sup>12</sup> "Two Irish Plays: by Mr. W.B. Yeats and A.E.: The Performance Last Night," *Freeman's Journal*, 3 April 1902: 7.

I saw A.E. and left the design for the scenes and costumes entirely in his hands,” he wrote in his memoir (119). A scheme flexible enough for Russell’s play, with its scenes in a fort, on a bank by a loch and inside a regal house, in other words the mythic imagery of Arts and Crafts design, seems to have been intimidating for Fay. As the company went on to be reformed as the Irish National Theatre Society, the question of designing Arts and Crafts-style sets remained an issue. Augusta’s son Robert, a 22-year-old flunking Oxford student who recently expressed desire to study painting at the Slade School of Art, was commissioned to design *The Hour Glass*.

Born in 1881 Robert was heir to the Gregory family, which included his father William Henry Gregory, a Westminster MP, and great-grandfather William Gregory, the Undersecretary for Ireland. In *Lady Gregory: The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance* Mary Lou Kohfeld traces Augusta Gregory’s disappointment with her son’s inability to forge a career in politics like his predecessors. Consequently, his engagement with stage design, and eventually post-impressionist painting, may have been a more assuring and fulfilling time in the life of Robert Gregory. Richard Cave provides a detailed account of that work in his book chapter “Robert Gregory: Artist and Stage Designer”, along with Yeats’s generous memorial after his death: “When Robert Gregory fell on the hilly soil of Italy, Ireland may have lost an Irish, and more colourful, Gordon Craig” (Cave 1987 400).

After a detailed design drawing for *The Hour Glass* supplemented by the English craftsman Thomas Sturge Moore, Gregory’s scholarly study set was realised with olive green hessian backings and costuming in shades of purple and brown. Yeats outlined his thoughts on set design in post-show lecture: “It should be thought out not as one thinks out a landscape, but as it were the background of a portrait”.<sup>13</sup> Gregory continued as regular designer for plays with ancient settings, designing an impressionistic-sounding wood for Augusta Gregory’s Brian Boru tragedy *Kincora* (1905) and an intensely Arts and Crafts-style cabin for Yeats’s *Deirdre* (1905). He also made a harp for Yeats’s *The Shadowy Waters* (1906), stonewalled village streets for Augusta’s *The Image* (1909), and shimmering costumes for J.M. Synge’s *Deirdre*

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Hugh Hunt’s *The Abbey: Ireland’s National Theatre 1904-1978*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1979; 43.

of the Sorrows (1910). His final commissions involved making a backcloth for Douglas Hyde's *A Nativity Play* (1911), in a translation by Augusta Gregory, painted in a soft pastoral tone similar to oil paintings he exhibited in Chelsea in 1914, and costuming for Augusta Gregory's *The Deliverer* (1911).<sup>14</sup>

If Yeats believed single notes of colour worked best for ancient Irish plays,<sup>15</sup> he may have twitched when Annie Horniman, the English producer who became the company's patron after seeing *The Hour Glass*, started sewing beads and tracing patterns onto garments. Her patronage was serendipitous in timing, as the Inghinidhe na hÉireann players had recently withdrawn their props after the decision to stage Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen*.<sup>16</sup> Horniman's costuming for the first production of Yeats's *The King's Threshold*, following a poet's hunger strike after his dismissal from court, has received negative criticism from Yeats scholars. Richard Cave called it amateur in the worst senses of the word (Cave 2004 93). However, Horniman's costuming for court women and knights in *The King's Threshold* in geometric bands and medieval silhouettes may owe more to the principles of Carl Emil Doepler's

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<sup>14</sup> Images of Robert Gregory's oil paintings were reproduced in Colin Smythe's *Robert Gregory 1881-1918: a Centenary Tribute*, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1981. Richard Cave shows Yeats's enthusiasm for Robert, who provided new lighting designs for his plays *On Baile's Strand* and *The Shadowy Waters* in 1906. But by 1908, after weeks of poor communication, Robert's delayed designs for a revival of Synge's *The Well of the Saints* were rejected in favour of designs by the English artist Charles Ricketts. Cave suggests that when Yeats's commissioned the screen technology by English designer Edward Gordon Craig in 1911, it was a means to replace Robert. (See: Cave, "Robert Gregory: Artist and Stage Designer). 1911 turned out to be Robert's final year working for the Abbey Theatre. He turned his attention to developing his post-impressionist style of painting, and held a well-received exhibition in 1912. In 1915, following a serious argument with his wife Margaret Parry, Robert joined the Connaught Rangers, an Irish regiment of the British Army, and soon transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. In January 1918 he was killed, according to the British National Archives, by being "shot down in error". In 2018 Geoffrey O'Byrne White, director of the Irish Aviation Authority and a grandnephew of Robert's, found it more likely that his plane crashed after a bad reaction to Spanish Flu inoculation made him faint. (See: Ray Burke, "Challenge to official account of Gregory death in WWI", rte.ie).

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Hunt, 43.

<sup>16</sup> See Senia Pašeta. *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 61.

savage dress for Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle* than the soft blues and greens of reimagined Celtic dress as emerging out of the new Dun Emer studio - whose directors included Elizabeth Yeats and Lily Yeats, W.B.'s sisters.<sup>17</sup> Horniman's Germanic figures may have looked out of place in the Irish design culture of the time. That effect could have been deliberate; as purse-holder, she felt that the Abbey company shouldn't peddle in nationalist politics.<sup>18</sup> As costumer, she was well-placed to prevent it from happening.

While political tensions in live performance are not always predictable, Horniman clearly saw nothing dangerous in furnishing the new national theatre - the lease of which she purchased on Abbey Street in 1904 - with Arts and Crafts design. The façade had five windows from the stained glass studio Túr Gloine (Tower of Glass), embroideries on interior walls from Dun Emer, large copper-framed mirrors from metalworks at Youghal (one still hangs in the foyer today) and, most significant, the woodcut by Elinor Monsell that gave the theatre its lasting emblem: Queen Maeve, holding a wolfhound in leash.<sup>19</sup> When doors first opened on Dec 27 1904, the programme credited Horniman for costuming Yeats's *On Baile's Strand*. She had already left Dublin by then, after Yeats insulted her costuming in front of the

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<sup>17</sup> Annie Horniman's biographer, Sheila Goode, observes that Horniman saw the *Ring Cycle* in London, with "scenery from the original Bayreuth production". Sheila Goode, *Annie Horniman - a Pioneer in the Theatre*, London: Methuen, 1990; 22.

<sup>18</sup> Adrian Frazier's account of this period uncovers that Horniman became patron of the Abbey company on the understanding that the company wouldn't stage plays that were explicitly political. See Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1990; 76.

<sup>19</sup> Sheila Goode gives a detailed description of Horniman's "buying Irish" policy. 66-67.

company.<sup>20</sup> She committed to covering 50% of all stage design expenses before she went.<sup>21</sup>

The Abbey Theatre's first technical crew was established under W.G. Fay. Seaghan Barlow built timber sets and dyed hessian curtains as master carpenter and scenic artist. He also designed a small number of sets before retiring in 1949. Udolphus Wright was the theatre's electrician and was tasked from early on to experiment with arc-lamps and gobos.<sup>22</sup> He occasionally designed lighting for productions until he left in 1951. The most obvious inspiration for Fay was Paris's Théâtre Libre, which sought a theatrical equivalent to literary naturalism. Edward Braun has referred to the "behavioural naturalism" (29) and "documentary exactitude" (32) of its *quart d'heure* (slice of life) productions. Fay's sourcing of Aran petticoats and a spinning wheel for J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* - diligently observed by Chris Morash and Shaun Richards (39) - may be compared to the Théâtre Libre's gathering of costumes and objects from Paris's Russian community for its production of *The Power of Darkness* (Braun 29). Other scenographic methods didn't transfer, especially the "particular innovation" (Braun 28) of rejecting footlights. According to Christopher Baugh: "The introduction of electric lighting from the 1880s exposed the inherent artificiality of the carpentered and painted stage forms" (25). Indeed, a photograph of W.G. Fay's shebeen set for *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, painted in dark walls with a hillside backing peeping through the window and door, put before footlamps looks superficial and flat.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Holloway documented this exchange after a rehearsal, when Yeats said the kings' robes made them look like "extinguishers" and "Father Christmas". Joseph Holloway, *Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (eds.); 49.

<sup>21</sup> "Abbey Theatre Minute Book 1904-1905," 29 Oct 1904. [digital.library.nuigalway.ie](http://digital.library.nuigalway.ie).

<sup>22</sup> Seaghan Barlow and Udolphus Wright's technical theatre reminiscences are included in Lennox Robinson's *Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History, 1899-1951*, New York: Kennikat Press, 1951; 69-77.

<sup>23</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Playboy of the Western World*, 05 Jun 1907 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0197\_SM\_0001, p3.

In his memoir, *Fays of the Abbey Theatre* (1935), W.G. Fay explains he resigned from the theatre in 1908 after nothing was done to “insist on written contracts of service clearly defining the conditions of employment” (229). Frank Fay left with him.<sup>24</sup> Stage displays remained artificial and two-dimensional, as evidenced by Seaghan Barlow’s painted backings for Bernard Shaw’s *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* and Augusta Gregory’s *The Image*, both premiered in 1909.<sup>25</sup> Lennox Robinson became director of plays in 1910. Soon into the role, he missed Annie Horniman’s telegram instructing the theatre to close on the occasion of King Edward VII’s death, and as a result she withdrew her subsidy - including fifty per cent of spending on design. The board’s minute-books don’t reveal any new solution for covering design costs. They don’t mention the specifics of how art nouveau artist Charles Ricketts was commissioned to design costuming for J.M. Synge’s *The Well of the Saints* in 1908, Yeats’s *The King’s Threshold* in 1914 and *On Baile’s Strand* in 1919 - though if his costume design for Cuchulainn is anything to go by, those garbs were vibrant and exotic.<sup>26</sup> Nor is there information on the 1911 purchase of English director Edward Gordon Craig’s screen technology - moveable stage machinery “not intended to produce an illusion [but] nevertheless assist the imagination of the spectator by suggestion” (McKinney and Butterworth 20). In 1911, the screens were implemented for a revival of *The Hour Glass* and Augusta Gregory’s new play set outside a palace by the River Nile, *The Deliverer*, but they didn’t become part of the theatre’s regular displays.

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<sup>24</sup> Hugh Hunt wrote that the Fays’ departure marked a new style of acting, one wherein “comedy was played more broadly, acting generally was treated with greater naturalism; simplicity gave way to technique” (83).

<sup>25</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Press Cuttings re: Scrapbook containing press cuttings regarding the Abbey Theatre during the period 1909-1910*. NLI REF 25, 493. 1909-1910. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, ADM\_00003647, p23.; Abbey Theatre. *The Image*, 21 Jun 1911 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 5378\_MPG\_01, p9.

<sup>26</sup> Joe Vaněk documents Charles Ricketts’s designs for the Abbey in his essay ‘Scene Change’, imma.ie. Some of Rickett’s designs for *On Baile’s Strand* and *The King’s Threshold* are reproduced in Liam Miller’s *The Noble Drama of W.B. Yeats*, Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1977.

Even if the Abbey Theatre had become less financially secure after the loss of Horniman's subsidy, its scenery seems to have improved under Lennox Robinson's management. Design drawings and property lists show a more detailed engagement with interiors that - to quote Christopher Baugh - may have "blend[ed] two-dimensional painted surface alongside three-dimensional 'carpentered' scenery to inject [...] a greater degree of theatrical honesty" (5). A kitchen range was borrowed for St. John Greer Ervine's drama about forbidden love, *Mixed Marriage* (1911),<sup>27</sup> and a safe was put into the grocer's office in R.J. Ray's *The Gombeen Man* (1913).<sup>28</sup> The parlour of T.C. Murray's *Sovereign Love* was furnished with pictures, ornaments and a carpet.<sup>29</sup> Lord Dunsany's fantasy play *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior* (1911) got a religious idol.<sup>30</sup> Lighting also became detailed, with amber rays shining through a house window, possibly to give a nostalgic glow, in Mrs. Bart Kennedy's drama about Daniel O'Connell, *My Lord* (1913).<sup>31</sup> The most significant development was the rejection of painted representations of wooden beams and stones, and instead the use of actual materials, such as plaster for kitchen walls in Seamus O'Brien's comedy, *Duty* (1913).<sup>32</sup> Green wallpaper was also purchased for

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<sup>27</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Mixed Marriage*, 30 Mar 1911 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4360\_MPG\_01, p6.

<sup>28</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Gombeen Man*, 30 Jun 1913 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1557\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>29</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Sovereign Love*, 11 Sep 1913 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1575\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>30</sup> Abbey Theatre. *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior*, 26 Jan 1911 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4341\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>31</sup> Abbey Theatre. *My Lord*, 16 Oct 1913 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1587\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>32</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Duty*, 05 Jan 1914 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 5956\_SM\_0001, p1.

the domestic interiors of Victor O'Donovan Power's romantic play, *David Mahony* (1914).<sup>33</sup>

The loss of Horniman's subsidy left the theatre dependent on revenue from touring. In February 1914 the company left for its third tour of the U.S., under Lennox Robinson's management. On Abbey Street the theatre's business manager, Andrew Patrick Wilson, became the new manager responsible for directing plays, and elaborated upon the scenic methods established by Robinson.<sup>34</sup> Plastered and wallpapered sets came in vibrant-sounding palettes of red (an interior in Walter Riddall's *The Prodigal*)<sup>35</sup> and blue (the farmhouse kitchen of William Patrick Ryan's *The Jug of Sorrow*).<sup>36</sup> Wilson's own plays received great detail, such as the yellow-plastered shop of *The Cobbler*<sup>37</sup> and new displays created especially for *The Slough* - the first play produced by the Abbey Theatre with a Dublin tenement as its setting.<sup>38</sup> F. Jay's *The Cobweb* had stylised lighting, a mix of amber and blue, possibly - like *My Lord* - to sell a nostalgic visit to a previous Irish rebellion.<sup>39</sup> Rostra are referenced - for the first time in Abbey Theatre set designs - in the drawing for Con O'Leary's

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<sup>33</sup> Abbey Theatre. *David Mahony*, 29 Jan 1914 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4176\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>34</sup> Hugh Hunt described Wilson's season as "desultory" (102).

<sup>35</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Prodigal*, 15 Feb 1923 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1912\_SM\_0001, p2.

<sup>36</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Jug of Sorrow*, 20 Oct 1914 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4228\_SM\_0001, p2.

<sup>37</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Cobbler*, 13 Apr 1914 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4189\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>38</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Slough*, 14 Apr 1915 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1238\_SM\_0001, p2.

<sup>39</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Cobweb*, 26 Nov 1918 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1057\_SM\_0001, p1.

halfway-house drama, *The Crossing*, which used a rostrum to build the foot of a staircase.<sup>40</sup> The same device was used in *The Prodigal*.<sup>41</sup> Also radical for the theatre's displays were curved and slanted panoramic backings. These had strictly run straight and parallel to the front of the stage before. Imaginably, these lent fresh dimensionality to the streets and mountains of Lennox Robinson's *The Dreamers* (1915), another play recalling a past rebellion.<sup>42</sup>

The cost of these displays was £100 according to a board meeting in April 1915.<sup>43</sup> The same revenue report found that the theatre inherited a £1,210.13.4 deficit over the past year, though around fifty per cent of it came from the theatre's U.S. tour. Wilson submitted his resignation in July - according to a letter from Yeats to his solicitor, Wilson was caught poaching players for his own theatre company.<sup>44</sup> In October, St. John Greer Ervine, a Northern Irish playwright known to oppose Home Rule, was offered and accepted the manager role.<sup>45</sup> Very few new plays were produced under his purview, and there's little design evidence other than satirical paintings for Bernard Duffy's play based on the Ancient Order of Hibernians, *Fraternity* (1916), which are revealed in the set design and property list for the production.<sup>46</sup> J. Augustus

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<sup>40</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Crossing*, 23 Sep 1914 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4220\_SM\_0001, p2.

<sup>41</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Prodigal*, 30 Sep 1914 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 4223\_SM\_0001, p2.

<sup>42</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Dreamers*, 10 Feb 1915 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1216\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>43</sup> "Abbey Theatre Minute Book 1912-1939", 9 Apr 1915. digital.library.nuigalway.ie.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Hunt, 110.

<sup>45</sup> Hunt reminds us that, aside from the personal antagonisms that arose between Ervine and the players, the manager inherited a serious financial situation, with the disastrous performances of the box office, at home and on tour "abolish[ing] the profit-sharing arrangement by which the players were able to augment their meagre Dublin salaries" (112).

<sup>46</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Fraternity*, 16 May 1917 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0961\_SM\_0001, p3.

Keogh, an experienced actor-manager, replaced Ervine in 1916 and premiered six of Bernard Shaw's plays at the theatre. Seaghan Barlow was tasked with presenting the sprawling rural Irish scenes of *John Bull's Other Island*, and the continental hotels and villas of *Widowers' Houses*, *Man and Superman* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*. Set designs and property lists reveal a good attention to detail, such as including a balustrade for *The Doctor's Dilemma*,<sup>47</sup> a sofa for Shaw's *The Inca of Perusalem*,<sup>48</sup> and a sideboard for Lennox Robinson's *The Whiteheaded Boy*,<sup>49</sup> all which show a deeper engagement with leisure and parlour settings. Perhaps this is why Yeats complained that Keogh was becoming too commercially minded, and, upon realising the manager sought a more advantageous contract, seized the opportunity to accept his resignation (Hunt 112). In 1917, Fred O'Donovan, an actor with the theatre since 1908, became manager and worked to meet many of the same demands as his predecessors. Set designs and property lists reveal a mountain backing for Augusta Gregory's *Hanrahan's Oath*,<sup>50</sup> and plush interiors for Maurice Dalton's *Sable and Gold*<sup>51</sup> and Lennox Robinson's *The Lost Leader*.<sup>52</sup> His production of *Blight*, Oliver St John Gogarty's response to the Dublin slums, slyly contrasted a Dublin tenement

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<sup>47</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Doctor's Dilemma*, 26 Mar 1917 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0947\_SM\_0001, p27.

<sup>48</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Inca of Perusalem*, 12 Mar 1917 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0943\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>49</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Whiteheaded Boy*, 13 Dec 1916 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1190\_SM\_0001, p34.

<sup>50</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Hanrahan's Oath*, 29 Jan 1918 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0998\_SM\_0001, p3.

<sup>51</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Sable and Gold*, 16 Sep 1918 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1037\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>52</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Lost Leader*, 19 Feb 1918 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1003\_SM\_0001, p6.

scene dominated by three beds with a boardroom scene adorned with three oil paintings.<sup>53</sup>

In February 1919, O'Donovan resigned as manager, having complained about Yeats's "interference" in rehearsals, and of "not getting more pay" (Hunt 113). The reinstatement of Lennox Robinson as manager in 1919 saw continued efforts to present ambitious scenes. Bernard Shaw remained an inspiration for exotic displays: *Androcles and the Lion* (1919) had scenes in Ancient Rome, *The Devil's Disciple* (1920) recalled the American Revolution, and *The Man of Destiny* (1922) found Napoleon travelling in Italy. The Dublin tenements were revisited in M.M. Brennan's comedy *A Leprecaun in the Tenement* (1922), and, more famously, in Sean O'Casey's tragicomedy set during the War of Independence, *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923). A rare production of a play by a non-Irish writer, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1923), may suggest more international interests from the theatre's board.<sup>54</sup> What's for certain by the 1920s is that the Abbey Theatre's displays had become significantly different than those of its first productions. The Arts and Crafts-style once used to set plays in ancient Ireland may have been of use again, for Augusta Gregory's new fantasy plays - *The Dragon* (1919), *The Golden Apple* (1920) and *Aristotle's Bellows* (1921) - but it wasn't employed. That movement was on the verge of disappearing.

Arts and Crafts principles, first manifested in England, were inspired by critic John Ruskin's arguments for a medieval craftsman-alternative to factory mass production. The movement is best remembered for architect Augustus Pugin's Gothic revivalist buildings and artist William Morris's folk-inspired interiors. This model appealed to Irish designers too, specifically a medieval craftsman-approach that could recall pre-conquest and monastic culture. These references to an artistically distinguished past, Vera Kreilkamp says, asserted "sources for national identity that implicitly contested long held British assumptions of recalcitrant, if not irrationally uncivilised, Ireland" (13). An Irish movement had its beginnings in Lady Aberdeen's establishment of the Irish Industries Association in 1886 to showcase cottage

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<sup>53</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Blight*, 11 Dec 1917 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 0989\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>54</sup> Irina Rupp Malone summarises that this was a "tame version of the play" and that the "Ibsenite Irish plays (including Robinson's own) were more provocative" (129).

industries, and the Earl of Mayo's founding of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland in 1894 to exhibit local artists. The new Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction reformed the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art in 1900. Lily Yeats and Elizabeth Yeats joined Evelyn Gleeson in forming the Dun Emer Guild craft studio in 1902, and Sarah Purser established the co-operative stained glass workshop An Túr Gloine in 1903.

Evelyn Gleeson, a carpet and tapestry designer living in England, was loaned money by the botanist Augustine Henry to set up a craft centre in Dublin. Henry also reached out to Elizabeth Yeats, a painter and book designer, and Lily Yeats, an embroiderer who worked with William Morris's daughter, May Morris, to join her. By the end of 1902, the Dun Emer Guild employed seven weavers, three embroiderers, two printers and a dozen paid trainees (Bowe and Cumming 123). The guild's first rug, almost more Navajo in inspiration than Celtic, subtly evoked the greens and blues of the Irish landscape on a white background. Nicola Gordon Bowe describes it as a small version of an idiom favoured by the Guild in its early years (Bowe and Cumming 140). She also takes stock of the guild's impressive output:

Dun Emer was thus able to offer tapestry panels woven to fit screens and overmantels, chairs, stools and sofas, embroidered portieres, cushions and sofa backs, heraldically embroidered carriage rugs, needlework pictures, ecclesiastical vestments, banners, altarcloths, hand-painted fans and sashes, as well as hand-tufted rugs and carpets, hand-printed books, bookplates, calendars and cards, printed ephemera, bookbindings and enamels - in the latest fashionable Arts and Crafts designs and hand-made using native skills (Bowe and Cumming 125).

Internal friction between Gleeson and the Yeats sisters eventually split the guild into a co-op, before a complete break occurred in 1908. Lily Yeats and Elizabeth Yeats set up Cuala Industries as a new studio for embroidery and printing press. Gleeson continued to lead Dun Emer, with Katherine MacCormack employed as principal designer in 1917. Gleeson died in 1944 but MacCormack designed cards and embroideries under the Dun Emer name until the 1960s.

Gordon Bowe has observed that few Irish architects engaged with Arts and Crafts principles (Bowe and Cumming 77). On the surface, Sir John O’Connell’s furnishing of the Honan chapel in Cork (1915-17) may appear conservative in comparison to other Celtic Revivalist churches but Tomás Ó Carragáin argues it’s closer to the Hiberno-Romanesque style than most. The bicameral plan and placing of the main doorway on the west wall recalls megalithic sites associated with founding saints, such as churches at Roscrea and Kilmalkedar. Its most unusual feature is its round tower, then a nationalist symbol, but made small and restrained from dominating the building (91). Of this austere new method, Ó Carragáin evokes Susal Alcock’s writing on groups’ social memory and space, describing the Honan Chapel as “a coherent image of their past and a design for their future” (17).

Irish Arts and Crafts seems to have reached most attention in the medium of stained glass. Harry Clarke attended the Metropolitan School of Art before winning a national competition for his earliest work, *The Consecration of St. Mel, Bishop of Longford, by St Patrick* (1910). His book illustrations for Edgar Allen Poe’s *Tales of Mystery of Imagination* included one plate, *The Colloquy of Monos and Una* (1923), showing otherworldly beings floating over the recognisable Dublin Mountains. Gordon Bowe described it as “the most evocatively visual expression of the melancholic spirit of the Celtic Twilight” (Bowe and Cumming 105). Kelly Sullivan argues that Clarke, along with the Austrian symbolist artist Gustav Klimt and his protégé Egon Schiele, represents “a transition between the last decadent and impressionistic movements of Victorian art and the burgeoning radicalism of modernist style” (128). For Sullivan, the grotesque element in Clarke’s work establishes a transition towards modernism. Gordon Bowe also locates Irish artist Whilhelmina Geddes at the front of the movement, her work distinguished by a wealth of iconographic allusions and narrative details. Her linocut *The Saint*, conceived for the catalogue cover of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland’s exhibition in 1921, is a “powerfully expressionist design” depicting an ancient saint deep in thought while contemporary “artworkers” stand dramatically behind him (Bowe 123). Both Clarke and Geddes proved the Arts and Crafts movement’s potential for forging links with modernist art.

## **2. Abbey Theatre Scenography: Domesticity is Dominant**

In his *United Irishman* review of Inghinidhe na hÉireann's *tableau vivants* production, Frank Fay announced "the introduction for the first time in the metropolis of a cottage ceildh scene representing the actual everyday life".<sup>55</sup> The cottage displays by the company that founded the Abbey Theatre - whether under the moniker of Inghinidhe na hÉireann or the Irish National Theatre Society - must have been refreshingly new for Dublin theatre-goers. Fay identified Inghinidhe's production as set in "the Irish speaking districts," probably referring to Gaeltacht areas outside Dublin. But by the time the Abbey was on the cusp of its third decade, Dublin had become the most popularly cited place represented on its stage. Audiences' programmes state that between 1902 and 1923, seventeen productions had settings in Dublin,<sup>56</sup> and while these begin modestly with W.F. Casey's two plays in 1908, *The Man Who Missed the Tide* and *The Suburban Groove*, Dublin became steadily popular from 1914 onwards, with the likes of *The Slough* (1914) by Andrew Patrick Wilson, *The Wooing of Julia Elizabeth* (1920) by James Stephens and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) by Sean O'Casey. This increased attention on the capital city occurs in the period following the 1913 Lockout.

Connaught was cited in programmes for sixteen productions.<sup>57</sup> This province almost exclusively belonged to plays by Augusta Gregory, W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge, and

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<sup>55</sup> *United Irishman*, 13 Apr 1901, cited in Catherine Morris's *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival*, Dublin: Four Courts press, 2012; 254.

<sup>56</sup> *The Man who Missed the Tide* (1908) and *The Suburban Groove* (1908) by W.F. Casey, *An Imaginary Conversation* (1909) by Norreys Connel, *The Challenge* (1909) by Winifred M. Letts, *The Dean of St. Patrick's* (1913) by G. Sidney Paternoster, *The Critics* (1913) by St John Greer Ervine, *The Lord Mayor* (1914) by Edward McNulty, *The Cobweb* (1914) by F. Jay, *The Slough* (1914) by A.P. Wilson, *The Dreamers* (1915) by Lennox Robinson, *Blight* (1917) by Oliver St. John Gogarty, *Candle and Crib* (1920) by K.F. Purdon, *A Royal Alliance* (1920) by Fergus O'Nolan, *The Wooing of Julia Elizabeth* (1920) by James Stephens, *The Revolutionist* (1921) by Terence MacSwiney, *A Leprechaun in the Tenement* (1922) by M.M. Brennan, and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) by Sean O'Casey.

<sup>57</sup> *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) by W.B. Yeats & Augusta Gregory, *The King's Threshold* (1903) by W.B. Yeats, *Riders to the Sea* (1903) by J.M. Synge, *Kincora* (1905) by Augusta Gregory, *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906) by Augusta Gregory, *The Gaol Gate* (1906) by Augusta Gregory, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by J.M. Synge, *The Jackdaw* (1907) by Augusta Gregory, *The Unicorn and the Stars* (1907) by W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory, *The Workhouse Ward* (1908) by Augusta Gregory, *The Heather Field* (1909) by Edward Martyn, *The Full Moon* (1910) and

though there were other contributions - *The Bribe* (1913) by Seamus O'Kelly and *The Parnellite* (1917) by Seamus Kelly - the region steadily declined in popularity from 1908 onwards. Fourteen productions had settings in Ulster<sup>58</sup> - five of them written by St. John Greer Ervine - and most of them were produced after 1914. Munster was the setting for nine productions,<sup>59</sup> beginning with George Fitzmaurice's *The Country Dressmaker* (1907) and *The Piedish* (1908), and this province also gained popularity from 1914 onwards with John Bernard Mac Carthy's *Kinship* (1914) and *The Supplanter* (1914). Six productions had settings in Leinster counties excluding Dublin,<sup>60</sup> while three were vaguely placed in the midlands.<sup>61</sup> The increased rate of plays set outside Connaught is seen to be in direct proportion to the decreased rate of plays set in Connaught. It should be noted that according to programmes, a majority of the sprawling 196 productions in this period weren't explicitly set in any province.

What was clear from the beginning was that domestic space would dominate the Abbey Theatre's displays. According to programmes, fifty-seven productions were set

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*Coats* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *The Bribe* (1913) by Seamus O'Kelly, *The Parnellite* (1917) by Seamus Kelly, and *The Dragon* (1919) by Augusta Gregory.

<sup>58</sup> *The Man who Missed the Tide* (1908) by W.F. Casey, *The Golden Helmet* (1908) by W.B. Yeats, *Mixed Marriage* (1911) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Magnanimous Lover* (1912) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Mine Land* (1913) by Joseph Connelly, *The Orangeman* (1914) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Cobbler* (1914) by A.P. Wilson, *The Dark Hour* (1914) by Robert Christie, *The Bargain* (1915) by William Crone, *John Ferguson* (1915) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Partition* (1916) by D.C. Maher, *The Island of Saints and how to get out of it* (1920) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Yellow Bittern* (1920) by Donal Corkerry, and *Insurance Money* (1921) by George Shiels.

<sup>59</sup> *The Country Dressmaker* (1907) and *The Piedish* (1908) by George Fitzmaurice, *Maurice Harte* (1912) by T.C. Murray, *Kinship* (1914) and *The Supplanter* (1914) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *John Bull's Other Island* (1916) by Bernard Shaw, *The Lost Leader* (1918) by Lennox Robinson, *The Grabber* (1918) by Edward F. Barrett, and *The Labour Leader* (1919) by Daniel Corkerry.

<sup>60</sup> *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) by J.M. Synge, *The Eyes of the Blind* (1907) by Winifred M. Letts, *Falsely True* (1911) by Johanna Redmond, *Partition* (1916) by D.C. Maher, *Ann Kavanagh* (1922) by Dorothy Macardle, and *The Glorious Uncertainty* (1923) by Brinsley MacNamara.

<sup>61</sup> *The Land* (1905) by Padraic Colum, *The Rebellion in Ballycullen* (1919) by Brinsley MacNamara, and *The Drifters* (1920) by Frank J. Hugh O'Donnell.

in a “house”,<sup>62</sup> and two set in a “home”.<sup>63</sup> One play was set in a “flat”,<sup>64</sup> and two were in an “apartment”,<sup>65</sup> though neither term appears in programmes dated before 1920. The domineering type of structure was the “cottage”, mentioned seventeen times,<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Deirdre* (1902) by George Russell, *Kincora* (1905) by Augusta Gregory, *The Building Fund* (1905) by William Boyle, *The Land* (1905) by Padraic Colum, *Deirdre* (1906) by W.B. Yeats, *Interior* (1907) by Maurice Maeterlink, *The Poorhouse* (1907) by Augusta Gregory and Douglas Hyde, *The Man Who Missed the Tide* (1908) and *The Suburban Groove* (1908) by W.F. Casey, *The Workhouse Ward* (1908) by Augusta Gregory, *The Clancy Name* (1908) by Lennox Robinson, *The Miser* (1909) by Augusta Gregory, *Stephen Grey* (1909) by Stephen Laurence Kelleher, *The Cross Roads* (1909) by Lennox Robinson, *The White Feather* (1909) by R.J. Ray, *The Challenge* (1909) by Winifred M. Letts, *The Heather Field* (1909) by Edward Martyn, *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910) by J.M. Synge, *Thomas Muskerry* (1910) by Padraic Colum, *The Casting-out of Martin Whelan* (1910) by R.J. Ray, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1911) by W.B. Yeats, *Mixed Marriage* (1911) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Maurice Harte* (1912) by T.C. Murray, *Damer's Gold* (1912) by Augusta Gregory, *The Post Office* (1913) by Rabindranath Tagore, *David Mahony* (1914) by Victor O D Power, *The Supplanter* (1914) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *The Crossing* (1914) by Con O'Leary, *The Jug of Sorrow* (1914) by William Patrick Ryan, *The Dreamers* (1915) by Lennox Robinson, *Shanwala* (1915) by Augusta Gregory, *John Ferguson* (1915) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Plough-lifters* (1916) by John Guinan, *John Bull's Other Island* (1916) and *Widowers' Houses* (1916) by Bernard Shaw, *Partition* (1916) by D.C. Maher, *The Strong Hand* (1917) by R.J. Ray, *The Parnellite* (1917) by Seamus Kelly, *The Bacac* (1917) by John Barnewall, *The Spoiling of Wilson* (1917) by R.J. Purcell, *Blight* (1917) by Oliver St. John Gogarty, *Aliens* (1918) by Rosemary MacKenna, *The Grabber* (1918) by Edward F. Barrett, *Atonement* (1918) by Dorothy Macardle, *The Dragon* (1919) by Augusta Gregory, *The Fiddler's House* (1919) by Padraic Colum, *The Golden Apple* (1920) by Augusta Gregory, *The Devil's Disciple* (1920) by Bernard Shaw, *The Land for the People* (1920) by Brinsley MacNamara, *Candle and Crib* (1920) by K.F Purdon, *The Drifters* (1920) by Frank J Hugh O'Donnell, *The Good Natured Man* (1920) by Oliver Goldsmith, *Bedmates* (1921) by George Shiels, *The Revolutionist* (1921) by Terence MacSwiney, *Ann Kavanagh* (1922) by Dorothy Macardle, *Aftermath* (1922) by T.C. Murray, *Paul Twynning* (1922) by George Shiels, and *Apartments* (1923) by Fand O'Grady.

<sup>63</sup> *The Shuiler's Child* (1910) by Seamus O'Kelly and *The Orangeman* (1914) by St. John Greer Ervine.

<sup>64</sup> *A Doll's House* (1923) by Henrik Ibsen.

<sup>65</sup> *The Serf* (1920) by T.C. Murray and *The Good Natured Man* (1920) by Oliver Goldsmith.

<sup>66</sup> *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (1902) and *A Pot of Broth* (1902) by W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory, *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) by J.M. Synge, *The Eyes of the Blind* (1907) by Winifred M. Letts, *The Cross Roads* (1909) by Lennox Robinson, *The Travelling Man* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *Harvest* (1910) by Lennox

with “farmhouse” appearing fourteen times.<sup>67</sup> The “tenement” was seen in five plays between 1914 and 1923.<sup>68</sup> Seventeen plays were set either in a “parlour,” “drawing room” or “dining room”,<sup>69</sup> while fourteen were in a “living room” or “sitting room”.<sup>70</sup> An astonishing forty-seven plays were set in a kitchen.<sup>71</sup>

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Robinson, *Birthright* (1910) by T.C. Murray, *Falsely True* (1911) by Johanna Redmond, *Macdaragh's Wife* (1912) by Augusta Gregory, *The Magnanimous Lover* (1912) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Kinship* (1914) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *Fox and Geese* (1917) by Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins, *Spring* (1918) by T.C. Murray, *When Love Came Over the Hills* (1918) by William Fearon and Roy Nesbitt, *The Island of Saints and how to get out of it* (1920) by St. John Greer Ervine, and *Aftermath* (1922) by T.C. Murray.

<sup>67</sup> *The Building Fund* (1905) by William Boyle, *The Land* (1905) by Padraic Colum, *The Clancy Name* (1908) by Lennox Robinson, *Stephen Grey* (1909) by Daniel Laurence Kelleher, *The Cross Roads* (1909) by Lennox Robinson, *The Supplanter* (1914) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *The Dark Hour* (1914) by Robert Christie, *John Ferguson* (1915) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Parnellite* (1917) by Seamus Kelly, *The Bacac* (1917) by John Barnewall, *Aliens* (1918) by Rose MacKenna, *Meadowsweet* (1919) by Seumas O'Kelly, *The Deamen in the House* (1920) by F. Barrington, and *Aftermath* (1922) by T.C. Murray.

<sup>68</sup> *The Slough* (1914) by A.P. Wilson, *Blight* (1917) by Oliver St. John Gogarty, *Candle and Crib* (1920) by K.F. Purdon, *A Leprechaun in the Tenement* (1922) by M.M. Brennan, and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) by Sean O'Casey.

<sup>69</sup> *The Eloquent Dempsy* (1906) by William Boyle, *The Man who Missed the Tide* (1908) and *The Suburban Groove* (1908) by W.F. Casey, *Mirandolina* (1910) and *Coats* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *Thomas Muskerry* (1910) by Padraic Colum, *The Love Charm* (1911) and *Family Failing* (1912) by William Boyle, *Sovereign Love* (1913) by T.C. Murray, *David Mahony* (1914) by Victor O D Power, *The Bargain* (1915) by William Crone, *John Bull's Other Island* (1916) and *Widowers' Houses* (1916) by Bernard Shaw, *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1916) by Lennox Robinson, *Crusaders* (1917) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *The Drifters* (1920) by Frank J. Hugh O'Donnell, and *The Land for the People* (1920) by Brinsley MacNamara.

<sup>70</sup> *The Clancy Name* (1908) by Lennox Robinson, *The Casting-out of Martin Whelan* (1910) by R.J. Ray, *Mixed Marriage* (1911) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Patriots* (1912) by Lennox Robinson, *Maurice Harte* (1912) by T.C. Murray, *The Bribe* (1913) by Seamus O'Kelly, *The Prodigal* (1914) by Walter Riddall, *Nic* (1916) by William Boyle, *Partition* (1916) by D.C. Maher, *The Spoiling of Wilson* (1917) by R.J. Purcell, *Atonement* (1918) by Dorothy Macardle, *The Serf* (1920) by T.C. Murray, and *Aftermath* (1922) by T.C. Murray.

<sup>71</sup> *A Pot of Broth* (1902) by W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory, *Twenty Five* (1903) by Augusta Gregory, *The Building Fund* (1905) by William Boyle, *The White Cockade* (1905) by Augusta Gregory, *The Mineral Workers* (1906) by William Boyle, *The Country Dressmaker* (1907) by George Fitzmaurice, *Stephen Grey* (1909) by Daniel

Types of public space included the “public houses” of Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Seamus O’Brien’s *Duty* (1913), and George Shiels’s *Paul Twyning* (1922). There was also the “hotel bars” of W.F. Casey’s *The Man Who Missed the Tide* (1908) and Brinsley MacNamara’s *The Glorious Uncertainty* (1923). Types of workspaces varied, from a post office in Gregory’s *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906), to an office at a mine in William Boyle’s *The Mineral Workers* (1906), and a workhouse manager’s office in Padraic Colum’s *Thomas Muskerry* (1910). There were coachbuilders’ workshops in *The Unicorn and the Stars* (1907) by Yeats and Gregory, and the latter’s *Shanwalla* (1915). A businessman’s office was the setting of *The Gombeen Man* (1913) by R.J. Ray, no less than the Lord Mayor of Dublin’s office was a scene for Edward McNulty’s *The Lord Mayor* (1914), and Bernard Shaw’s *John Bull’s Other Island* (1916) had a scene in a civil engineers’ office. Shop interiors were seen in six plays, including Ray’s *The White Feather* (1909) and *The Strong Hand* (1917).<sup>72</sup>

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Laurence Kelleher, *The Cross Roads* (1909) by Lennox Robinson, *The White Feather* (1909) by R.J. Ray, *The Travelling Man* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *The Casting-out of Martin Whelan* (1910) by R.J. Ray, *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1911) by W.B. Yeats, *Mixed Marriage* (1911) and *The Magnanimous Lover* (1912) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Damer’s Gold* (1912) by Augusta Gregory, *The Cuckoo’s Nest* (1913) by John Guinan, *Broken Faith* (1913) by Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins, *The Magic Glasses* (1913) by George Fitzmaurice, *Duty* (1913) by Seumas O’Brien, *Victor Mahony* (1914) by Victor O D Power, *The Orangeman* (1914) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Kinship* (1914) and *The Supplanter* (1914) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *The Dark Hour* (1914) by Robert Christie, *The Crossing* (1914) by Con O’Leary, *The Prodigal* (1914) by Walter Riddall, *The Jug of Sorrow* (1914) by William Patrick Ryan, *The Slough* (1914) by A.P. Wilson, *The Bargain* (1915) by William Crone, *The Coiner* (1916) by Bernard Duffy, *The Plough-lifters* (1916) by John Guinan, *Tommy Tom Tom* (1917) by Martin J. Mac Hugh, *Fox and Geese* (1917) by Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins, *The Inca of Perusalem* (1917) by Bernard Shaw, *The Strong Hand* (1917) by R.J. Ray, *The Parnellite* (1917) by Seamus Kelly, *The Bacac* (1917) by John Barnewall, *Aliens* (1918) by Rose MacKenna, *The Grabber* (1918) by Edward F. Barrett, *The Saint* (1919) by Desmond Fitzgerald, *The Island of Saints and how to get out of it* (1920) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Candle and Crib* (1920) by K.F. Purdon, *The Deamen in the House* (1920) by F. Barrington, *Insurance Money* (1921) and *Paul Twyning* (1922) by George Shiels, *Twixt the Glitinans and the Carmodys* (1923) by George Fitzmaurice, and *Apartments* (1923) by Fand O’Grady.

<sup>72</sup> *The Jackdaw* (1907) by Augusta Gregory, *The White Feather* (1909) by R.J. Ray, *The Cobbler* (1914) by A.P. Wilson, *The Counter Charm* (1916) by Bernard Duffy, *The Strong Hand* (1917) by R.J. Ray, and *Brady* (1919) by Mrs. Theodore Maynard.

The prison was seen as a site of punishment, whether close-up in the cell of *The White Feather* (1909) or from outside the jail walls of Gregory's *The Gaol Gate* (1906). The impoverishing conditions of the workhouse was also a focus for Gregory, showing it first in *The Poorhouse* (1907), co-written with Douglas Hyde, and then in *The Workhouse Ward* (1908). Colum's *Thomas Muskerry* (1910) also explored the workings of a workhouse. But this space, like the prison, stopped receiving attention around 1910 onwards. Intriguingly, an "almshouse" - a secular type of poorhouse on the European continent that didn't demand labour in exchange for accommodation - was seen in *Hannele*, an ecclesiastical "dream play" by Gerhardt Hauptmann, produced by the Abbey in 1913.

On a separate spectrum, leisure places were seen in the "hotel" settings for seven plays, including Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* (1916) and *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1917).<sup>73</sup> Gregory's *The White Cockade* (1905) and *Mirandolina* (1910) were two of six plays set in the past that saw characters pass through "inns".<sup>74</sup> "Restaurants" were seen in August Strindberg's *There are Crimes and Crimes* (1913) and *The Stronger* (1913).

Clearly, Shaw and Gregory did a lot to push the theatre's displays.<sup>75</sup> As a result, this period saw more international displays at the Abbey than any other period in this

<sup>73</sup> *The Man Who Missed the Tide* (1908) by W.F. Casey, *Coats* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *Widowers' Houses* (1916) by Bernard Shaw, *Crusaders* (1917) by John Bernard Mac Carthy, *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1917) by Bernard Shaw, *The Lost Leader* (1918) by Lennox Robinson, and *The Glorious Uncertainty* (1923) by Brinsley MacNamara.

<sup>74</sup> *The White Cockade* (1905) and *Mirandolina* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *The Dreamers* (1915) by Lennox Robinson, *A Night at an Inn* (1919) by Lord Dunsany, *The Good Natured Man* (1920) by Oliver Goldsmith, and *The Man of Destiny* (1922) by Bernard Shaw.

<sup>75</sup> Not that these settings always received an execution that matched their ambition; a photograph shows the costuming of the fantasy characters in Gregory's *The Dragon* (1919) as eclectic and lacking cohesion. There's more evidence of Lennox Robinson's productions of Shaw's plays in the 1920s than there is of J. Augustus Keogh's, though a calm backcloth and a ground row of balusters seems to have sold the hotel terrace of *The Doctor's Dilemma* quite well.

project. When settings went further afield, it was mostly to France. Naples was the background for two of Gregory's adaptations in 1908: *Teja* by Hermann Sudermann, and *The Rogueries of Scapin* by Molière. Paris was the setting for both Gregory's adaptation of Molière's *The Miser* (1909), and Lennox Robinson's production of *There are Crimes and Crimes* (1913) by Strindberg. Rome was found in Noreys Connel's *Time* (1909) and Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* (1919), while Napoleon travelled through Italy in the latter writer's *The Man of Destiny* (1922). There was London in *The Dean of St Patrick's* (1913) by G. Sidney Paternoster, and in both Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (1916) and *Widowers' Houses* (1916). Galicia was the setting for *The Home-coming* (1913) by Gertrude Robins, and another Spanish region was seen in Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1917). *The Deliverer* (1911) by Gregory found a palace at the mouth of the River Nile, and a vague scene in the Middle East seems to have been the setting for Lord Dunsany's *The Tents of the Arabs* (1920). Shaw's *Widowers' Houses* brought Germany, *Arms and the Man* (1916) Bulgaria, and the American West came to audiences in *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909).

Domestic space dominated at the Abbey but there were some imaginative trips, whether outside Ireland or just outside the "cottage". Imaginably, signs of superficiality were harder to suspend in exterior scenes dependent on broadly painted backdrops and footlights. The theatre's most prolific playwrights made the most demands on these scenes: Yeats's palace steps in *The King's Threshold* (1903) and deck of an ancient ship in *The Shadowy Waters* (1904), and Synge's country crossroads in *The Well of the Saints* (1905) and tent exteriors in *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910). But Gregory arguably put the most demands on design, with landscape settings stretching from the town outskirts of *Spreading the News* (1904) to wild scenes at the Burren in *The Dragon* (1919).

Interestingly, productions set in nobles' houses, throne rooms and tents seemed to lose popularity around the same time that the Irish west stopped being the theatre's main preoccupation. There were seven of these until Lord Dunsany's *King Agrimenes and the Unknown Warrior* in 1911, and none again until Gregory returned to similar

scenes in her “wonder plays”.<sup>76</sup> This project will show that the “cottage” will outlive Gregory’s imaginative landscapes and the intercontinental scenes of Bernard Shaw’s plays. The ambition of such scenes deserves notoriety, however, even if that ambition wasn’t always matched. In a programme note for G. Sidney Paternoster’s *The Dean of St. Patrick* (1913), a play that jumps locations and years, a director acknowledges: “Owing to the size of the stage, the Scene of the Third Act must be taken as a mere indication of St. Patrick’s Cathedral”.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.1 *Deirdre* (1906) by W.B. Yeats

The “contingency” of modernity, one expressing Irish self-expression during a period of colonial occupation, is implicit in the stage design for *Deirdre*, W.B. Yeats’s ninth play to be produced in Dublin. His first, *The Countess Cathleen* (1899), was deemed uninspiring by Frank Fay in the *United Irishman*, stating: “[it] does not send men away filled with the desire for deeds”.<sup>78</sup> Instead, that was to be the reputation of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), the explicitly nationalist drama co-written by Augusta Gregory. But agitprop wasn’t to be Yeats’s sole goal; Adrian Frazier suspects that Yeats, at this moment in time, was invested in “literary drama laid in Irish scenes” (Frazier 45). The *Irish Times* critic applauded the originality of the farce co-written with Gregory, *The Pot of Broth* (1902),<sup>79</sup> and said *The Hour Glass*’s (1903) “wholesome tone will enlist general approval” but “its one act limits may be taken as

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<sup>76</sup> *Deirdre* (1902) by George Russell, *On Baile’s Strand* (1904) by W.B. Yeats, *Kincora* (1905) by Augusta Gregory, *Deirdre* (1906) by W.B. Yeats, *The Canavans* (1906) and *Mirandolina* (1910) by Augusta Gregory, *King Agrimenes and the Unknown Warrior* (1911) by Lord Dunsany, *The Dragon* (1919) and *The Golden Apple* (1920) by Augusta Gregory.

<sup>77</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Dean of St. Patrick’s*, 23 Jan 1913 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 1470\_MPG\_01, p6.

<sup>78</sup> *United Irishman* 114, vol. 5. 4 May 1901.

<sup>79</sup> "SAMHAIN "WEEK: MR. YEATS AS A FARCK-WRITER", *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Nov 1, 1902; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 9

a gauge to the author's ambition".<sup>80</sup> The Abbey Theatre's production of his most recent play, *On Baile's Strand* (1904), was praised for its acting but the plot was received as muddled: "There is a considerable amount of random talking in the earlier stages, and the audience experience some difficulty in striking out the central motive".<sup>81</sup> A critic took a sterner stance on *Deirdre*, saying its poetic embellishments "do not compensate for the absence of those dramatic elements which at once make a swift, strong, successful appeal to the sympathetic feelings of the audience".<sup>82</sup>

*Deirdre* premiered on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1906 at the Abbey Theatre, with set and costume design by Robert Gregory and music by Arthur Darley. It ran for seven performances, which was commercially better than other productions that year such as Augusta Gregory's *Hyacinth Halvey* and *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (four performances), and equal to William Boyle's *The Eloquent Dempsy*, but low compared against Gregory's *The Gaol Gate* and *The Canavans*, Boyle's *The Mineral Workers* and Yeats's new version of *The Shadowy Waters* - which all ran to eight performances. An adaptation of a legend set in pre-Christian Ireland, *Deirdre* finds three women musicians in a forestal guesthouse owned by the local king, Conchubar. They explain that the king had once sequestered Deirdre, a woman of immense beauty, until she was of age to marry him. But Deirdre escaped with the warrior Naisi. Now, Conchubar's aid Fergus is facilitating a meeting to negotiate peace between them. However, one of the musicians has seen that Conchubar plots to put Deirdre under a love spell. Appraised of this, Deirdre and Naisi try to escape the guesthouse but they're soon trapped by Conchubar, who executes Naisi. Deirdre kills herself with heartbreak. Fergus, who believed that Conchubar genuinely had the best of intentions, is horrified.

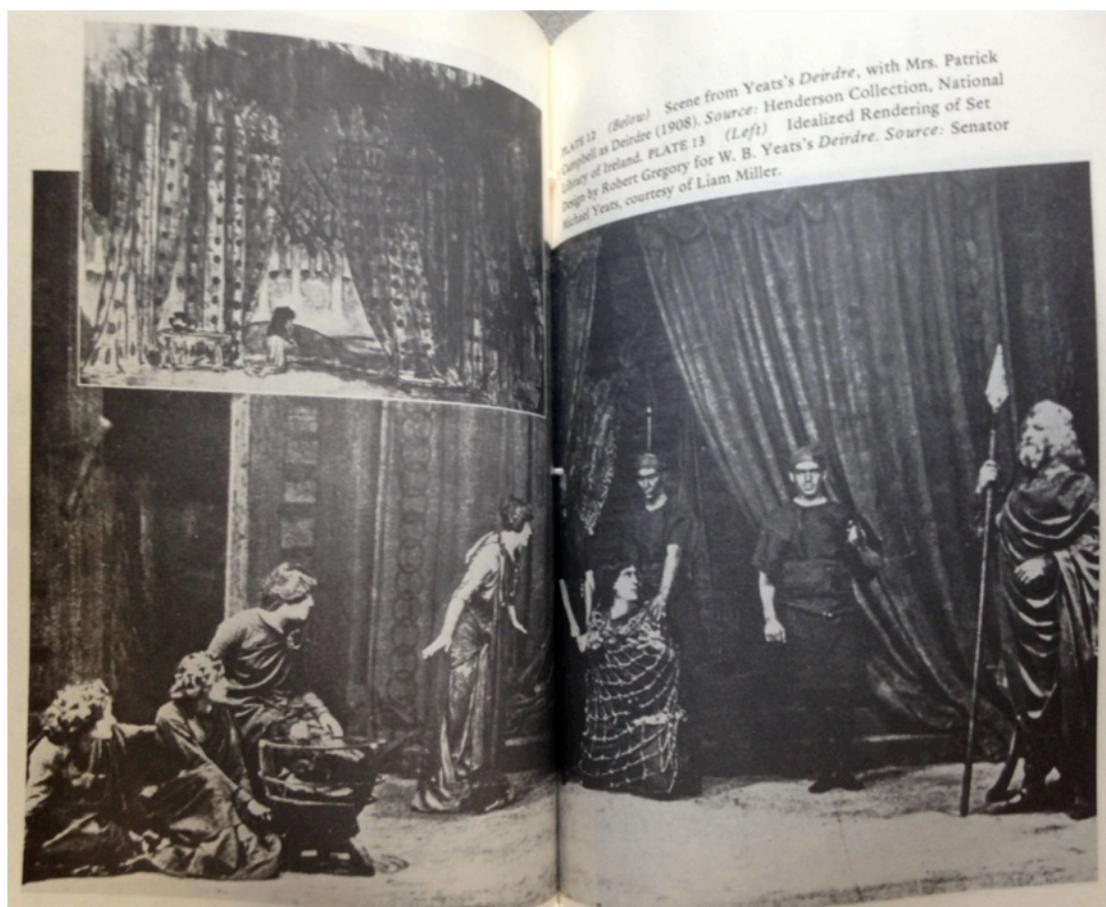
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<sup>80</sup> IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE: TWO NEW PLAYS *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Mar 16, 1903; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 7

<sup>81</sup> IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE: OPENING PERFORMANCES *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Dec 28, 1904; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 5

<sup>82</sup> THE ABBEY THEATRE: MR. YEARS'S NEW PLAY, "DEIRDRE." *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Nov 26, 1906; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 7

### 3.2 Staging the Heroic Period



**Robert Gregory's set for *Deirdre* (1906) - before curtain. Source: James W. Flannery, *W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre*, centrefold.**

Robert Gregory's design for *Deirdre* firmly placed the play within the "heroic period," a source of inspiration for Irish self-expression in the present. Standish O'Grady's book *History of Ireland: Heroic Period* (1878) was one of the most influential books during the Celtic Revival. On the writing of Irish history, O'Grady encouraged artifice over empirical research, advocating for "a reduction to its artistic elements of the whole of that heroic history taken together" (x). Many artists worked within this school of thought: that a reconstruction of Irish history should transform the past into stirring narratives of heroes and battles. This method suited nationalist concerns, Paige Reynolds observes: "by identifying with antiquity, the revivalists located Ireland outside of a present day associated with industrial capitalism and imperialism" (3). In theatre, a new codified form presented itself, one that rejected

“stage Irish” characters and took revivalist ideals as its conventions. The timeless world of spirit, triumphs of heroes and virtuous peasants could be adopted to transform audiences in the present. Reynolds calls it “an uninterrupted flow of inspiration for the modern public” (4).

Not only did Yeats’s play evoke O’Grady’s “heroic period” for a modern audience, it seems to have suspected repeating patterns of history. On her return to Ireland, Deirdre may well be stepping into the same house where she was once incarcerated - “a house upon a hillside, in this wood,” recalls a musician (Yeats 1926 192). The most prominent reminder of a tragic past is the story of the king Lugaidh Redstripe and his wife, who “had a seamew’s body half the year” (Yeats 1926 201), remembered here by the presence of an old chessboard. Both, we learn, played chess one night while waiting for assassins to slaughter them. Naisi suspects it as an omen: “I never heard a death so out of reach / Of common hearts, a high and comely end” (Yeats 1926 214).

Yeats’s play is suspicious of myths. A point of contention is Deirdre’s history. A musician speculates whether she’s ‘human, or of those begot / By an invisible king of the air in the storm’ (Yeats 1926 192). Events as they are remembered lend significant weight. Fergus tries to prevent Deirdre from leaving their meeting by claiming it would bring great conflict and death to the kingdom: “I have poured / Water upon the fire, but if you fly / King Conchubar may think that he is mocked / And the house blaze again” (Yeats 1926 209). By the end, it’s Conchubar’s treachery that stands to reverberate most, as Fergus expresses his sorrow: “What’s this but empty cage and tangled wire, / Now the bird’s gone?” (Yeats 1926 230).

### **3.3 Stage Design as Revivalist**



**Robert Gregory's set for *Deirdre* (1906) - behind curtain. Source: James W. Flannery, *W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre*, centrefold.**

It isn't easy to identify specific characteristics of Arts and Crafts displays, in Ireland or elsewhere in Europe, especially if you agree with Vera Kreilkamp's description of the movement as "a set of ideologies rather than a single aesthetic style" (9). Karen E. Brown puts Arts and Crafts into rich comparison with the Irish language movement and that movement's recording of regional dialects:

These activities can be compared with the means by which the visual arts and the Irish Arts and Crafts movement sought artistic motifs from Early Christian art, such as the spiral, the pelta and the triscala, to weave and embroider into their wares' (32).

Other motifs from monastic art like interlace and zoomorphic images were also retrieved. Robert Gregory's guesthouse set for *Deirdre* was ornately backed by a dotted curtain bordered with circular interlace embellishment. A geometric square wall panel ran vertically along one side of it. Gregory's costuming put figures into medieval robes, with the three musicians dressed with penannular brooches.

Identifiable Arts and Crafts elements in Gregory's design effectively grounded Yeats's play in the "heroic period". The displays intensified with the drama: as Deirdre pleads Conchubar to spare Naisi's life, she doesn't notice him being gagged by a soldier and taken away to a room behind the dotted curtain. When an executioner comes out with a bloody sword, Deirdre, like the audience, realises Naisi's been killed. Recalling Sophocles's *Antigone*, Yeats's tragedy turns to the question of burial rites, as Deirdre speaks of what's customary: "We lay the dead out, folding up the hands, / Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet" (Yeats 1926 226). Conchubar initially denies Deirdre this request, and by hiding Naisi's body behind the curtain, the production denies the same to its audience. She eventually grants access, and in the play's climactic moment, the curtain pulls back to show Deirdre lying over Naisi's body, dead. The musicians keen as the audience take in this hidden room, dressed with intense Arts and Crafts embellishments. Variations on the spiral form drip incandescently on dark wall panels, with wispy clouds painted above. A mural likely depicts the slain Lugaidh Redstripe, confirming that history has indeed repeated itself.

Yeats's play could easily have been Hellenic, an immense tragedy that plays like a curse on a woman's beauty. Instead, it's more self-conscious as a play about myth. Catherine Morris stresses the transformative potential of seeing the past re-performed by ordinary humans playing legendary characters:

Belief in the past was connected to belief in the future and both intersected during the Revival: so the local school teacher was also Brian Boru; the farm worker could transform into a Fenian warrior; the school child could be Queen Maeve (222).

Though Yeats's play sees a tragic cycle repeat by its end, it also emphasises the importance of forging a self-made future. Sitting at the chessboard, awaiting Conchubar's soldiers, Deirdre reflects on her tragic predecessor, the seamew woman, and decides: "I cannot go on playing like that woman / That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins" (216). She adapts a more resistant stance in time for Conchubar's arrival. This defiance seems as important an aspect of Yeats's play as its nihilism, and that sentiment, backed by Gregory's intense Arts and Craft displays, must have been a

stirring sight. In that respect, the stage design has expressed the possibility for self-invention as a form of contingency during Ireland's colonial occupation.

### 3.4 In Performance: De-etherealising Reality

At the Abbey Theatre and on tour, *Deirdre* was produced 39 times between 1906-1911, when it fell out of annual repertoire. It wasn't revived again until 1926, when it received new designs by Norah McGuinness. It wasn't Yeats's most popular play; *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, co-written by Augusta Gregory, was produced almost annually from 1904-1938. But *Deirdre* lasted longer than other plays premiered in 1906; *The Shadowy Waters* was rarely seen after 1906, and Gregory's *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* faded after 1910. Others lasted longer in regular repertoire. *The Canavans* lasted until 1914, *The Eloquent Dempsy* until 1915, *The Gaol Gate* until 1918, and *Hyacinth Halvey* until 1920. The fact that *The Mineral Workers* was most enduring, lasting until 1921, may suggest that audiences preferred plays that touched on material realities rather than immaterial. Boyle's play sees a struggle for mineral resources between farmers and aristocratic industrialists.

Yeats's next play, *The Unicorn and the Stars*, co-written by Augusta Gregory, premiered in 1907, and could be said to be his least popular play, running for eight performances before disappearing for good in 1913. 1908 saw the Cuchulainn farce, *The Golden Helmet*, though the *Irish Times* critic thought "it does not bring out his best work".<sup>83</sup> It was put into verse and produced as *The Green Helmet* in 1910. The Irish premiere of Yeats's first play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, in 1911 was deemed an improvement by one critic who hoped it "will henceforth be very frequently performed".<sup>84</sup> It was the 1911 revival of *The Hour Glass*, designed by Edward Gordon Craig, that awarded the playwright artistic accolades. The *Irish Times* critic wrote that the screen technology made for an improvement on the Abbey's displays,

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<sup>83</sup> THREE NEW PLAYS AT THE ABBEY THEATRE *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Mar 20, 1908; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 8

<sup>84</sup> ABBEY THEATRE: MR. YEATS'S "LAND OF HEART'S DESIRE." *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Feb 17, 1911; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 5

securing “the most impressive effects in the appearances of the Angel, and in the groupings on the stage, which, with the new costumes designed by Mr. Craig, were always picturesque”.<sup>85</sup> It also brought Yeats’s prodigious output of plays since *The Countess Cathleen* (1899) to a halt. With the exception of revivals of *The King’s Threshold* (1914) and *On Baile’s Strand* (1919), both costumed by Charles Ricketts, nothing new was presented by Yeats until *The Player Queen* in 1919.

#### **4.1 *Broken Faith* (1913) by Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins**

The stage design for *Broken Faith* was implicit in expressing a “contingency,” specifically rectifying the lack of people’s protections under labour law. This was Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins’s first play presented at the Abbey Theatre. Their writing partnership also wielded *Fox and Geese* (1917). Notably, they are of the low number of women playwrights produced by the Abbey Theatre in this period, following only Augusta Gregory, Winifred M. Letts, Johanna Redmond and Gertrude Robins in the nine years since the theatre opened in 1904. Day had previously founded the Munster Women’s Franchise League and became one of Cork’s first women poor-law guardians, experiences she documented in a veiled memoir, *The Amazing Philanthropists: Being Extracts from the Letters of Lester Martin, P.L.G* (1916). As a solo playwright, she also wrote *Out of a Deep Shadow* (1912) and *Toilers* (1913). Cummins - who was 14 years her younger - was then at the start of her writing career.<sup>86</sup> She shared suffragette principles with Day, which they expressed together in their plays.

Day and Cummins’s *Broken Faith* premiered on April 24<sup>th</sup> 1913, in a production directed by Lennox Robinson. It ran for four performances, the same as every other premiere that year, with the exception of Seamus O’Brien’s *Duty* at three

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<sup>85</sup> ABBEY THEATRE: NEW SCENERY SYSTEM LADY GREGORY’S LATEST PLAY *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Jan 13, 1911; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 8

<sup>86</sup> Velma O’Donoghue Greene identifies 24 plays in the Geraldine Cummins Collection in the Cork Archive Institute, 12 of which Cummins claims sole ownership of. Melissa Sihra (ed.), *Women Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke and New York, 2007; 42.

performances, and one performance of *The Post Office* by Bengali playwright Rabindranath Tagore, programmed as a fundraiser for St. Enda's School. *Broken Faith* didn't receive much attention; the *Irish Times* critic only mustered that it was "admirably presented".<sup>87</sup> The drama finds a woman struggling to survive while indebted to the landowner and businessman, Reilly. Bridget is hopeful her husband Michael will get paid for his ploughing and "road contract" to tide over them and their three sons. Michael, however, has a reputation for being an irresponsible farmer, and when word spreads that an agricultural co-op is assembling to oppose Reilly, he shows no interest in collective gain; his obsession with defeating his landlord is only to satisfy his ego. When Bridget accuses Michael of endangering their livelihood, he lashes out by setting Reilly's farm on fire and killing him. Bridget volunteers to plead guilty for the crime, if it means that Michael will continue working to give their children a future. When she discovers that he'll put his own needs first, she rejects him before a sergeant comes to perform an arrest.

#### 4.2 Staging the Labour Question

The stage design for *Broken Faith* grounded the play's action in the precarious and extremely impoverished conditions of the proletariat by the late nineteenth century, the issue Roy Foster calls the "labour question," and accentuated the need to resolve it. This concerned the high proportion of "general labourers" that reflected an immense dependence on "casual work" (436). Labour organisation was finally provided in 1912 by James Larkin and his dynamic mobilisation of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union to re-organise dockworkers and agricultural labourers. The wealthy industrialist William Martin Murphy provoked the union by refusing to employ its members in his tramways company, spurring a large scale lock-out. Foster emphasises the momentum of these labour disputes:

... for a considerable time it appeared that the critical confrontation in early twentieth-century Ireland would take place not between the British

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<sup>87</sup> ABBEY THEATRE *The Irish Times* (1874-1920); Oct 29, 1913; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 9.

government and Irish nationalists, but between Irish capital and Irish labour (442).

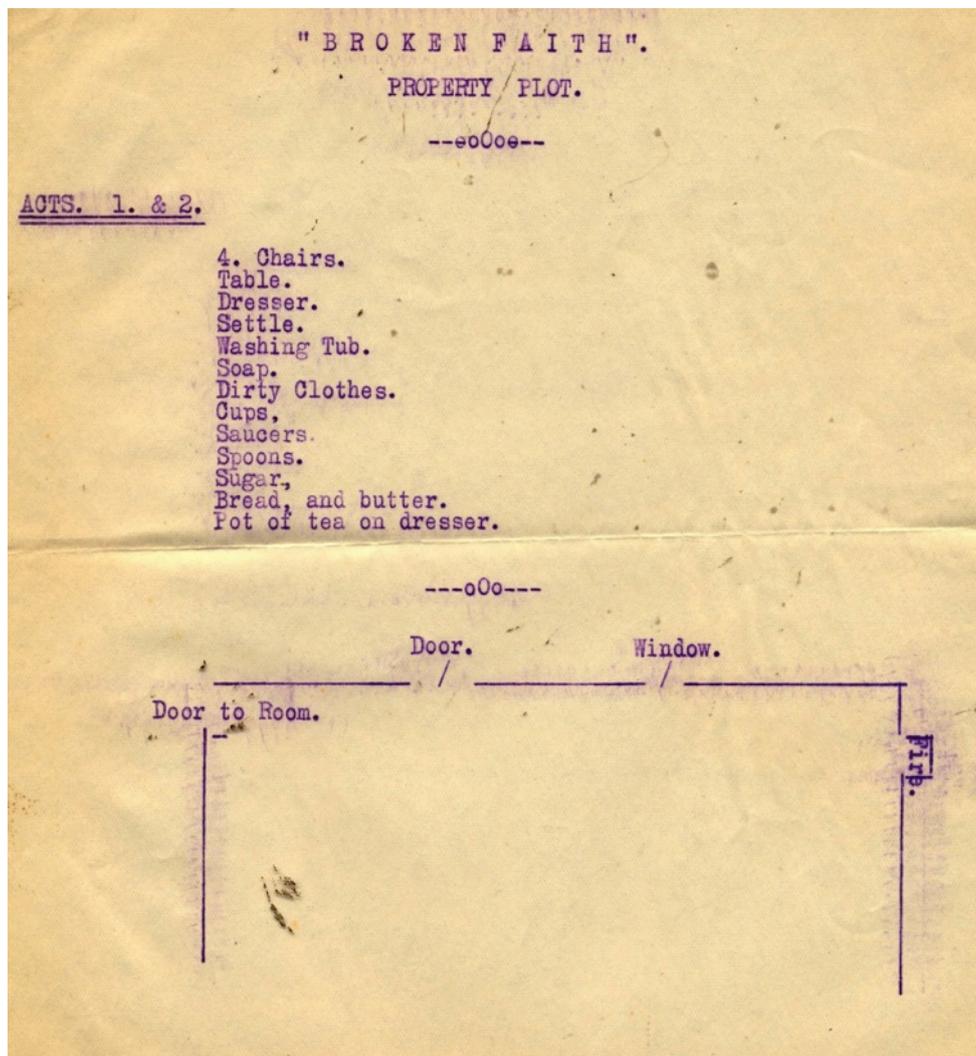
This never materialised. The absorption of the labour movement into a broad anti-establishment - but domineeringly nationalist - front subsumed the issue. Impoverished conditions after Independence confirmed this, as Foster says: “nationalism not only absorbed pre-war social radicalism, but apparently negated it” (446).

Premiered during the mobilisation of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, *Broken Faith* must have been seen against these real life developments. The Abbey even revived it in October 1913, when the Dublin Lock-out was in effect. Day and Cummins put the dissolution of a town’s businesses and land, bought out by the businessman Reilly, in fable-like terms. Mrs. Gara, Michael’s mother, observes: “There’s a quare change coming over this village. I mind the time when there wasn’t a shop in it wouldn’t give you a bite nor a sup for the asking” (2). She later declares “Them gombeen men is the curse of the country” (5) but Dan Hourihan, a financially responsible farmer with affections for Bridget, speaks positively of the agricultural co-op as much-needed reorganisation of agricultural labourers: “There’s better times coming at last” (5). Unfortunately, a visit by the co-op’s secretary, the town councillor Tim Coll, confirms him as a superficial politician rather than productive one, failing to galvanise the co-op against Reilly’s corruption: “Sure he had them bribed. Is it cutting his own throat he’d be?” (11).

These frustrations around labour reform must have been resonant for 1913 audiences. Day and Cummins make it clear that those at risk are women and children. The play begins with Bridget announcing that she couldn’t get a loan to buy flour: “Reilly says he’ll give us no more credit” (1). Behind on rent payments to Reilly, she agonises over her family’s shelter and well-being, clinging to Michael’s “road contract” for survival: “If it wasn’t for the contract we’d be starving on the roadside in a week” (4). She’s horrified to learn he’s quit the contract because he claims it doesn’t pay enough. When he refuses to finish a ploughing job for another farmer on grounds of being exhausted, Bridget accuses him of going back on his word: “... you promised me ... You said you’d make money for the children” (12). She challenges him, saying she

held her tongue as the farm fell to ruin, as “one by one the fields melted away and the cows were sold and never another bought in their place” (13). It’s extraordinary that Bridget’s matriarchal protection drives her to plead guilty for Michael’s murdering Reilly, but the terms of her offer depend on keeping their sons out of the workhouse. When Michael claims “There’s worse places than the workhouse’ (1), she knows for sure he won’t put their safety first, and withdraws her offer to save him from prison.

#### 4.3 Stage Design as Realist



Property list for *Broken Faith* (1913). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.

As previously stated in section 2, design artefacts suggest that the Abbey Theatre’s displays were reorganised under Lennox Robinson’s management, blending two-

dimensional painted forms with three-dimensional carpentered forms for “a greater degree of theatrical honesty” (Baugh 5). This suggests evidence of a potent engagement with realism. Jules François Felix Fleury-Husson, or Champfleury, editor of the French periodical *La Réalisme*, wrote in those pages that an author must suspend ornate language and “hold himself in absolute simplicity, and only recounts what he has seen” (81). Sara Pappas has elaborated on Champfleury’s definition of realism, its claims for faithfulness and transparency, as well as critics’ obsession with its imitative purpose. She argues that realism, as outlined by Champfleury, can define modernity by “representing the contemporaneous, depicting the ugly and displeasing, awkwardness, scandal, and fragmentation” (61). Champfleury articulates the form’s preoccupation with class struggle in his criticism of Gustave Courbet’s novels:

M. Courbet is a factious one for having represented, in good faith, bourgeois, peasants, and women of a village of natural size. We do not wish to admit that a stone-breaker is worth a prince; is granted so many cloth meters to the common people (Champfleury, cited in Abélès 70).

If there is a preoccupation with realism’s exactitude to reality, then we ignore the form’s obsession with reversing the social order. As Champfleury put it: “... the reproduction of nature by man will never be a reproduction or an imitation, it will always be an interpretation” (92).

Realism is a slippery term insofar as it denotes a form of theatre. I refer to it as described by J.L. Styan: a “conscious rebellion against the characteristically romantic form of drama” of the nineteenth century (2). Styan observes plays in the realist form to have a “show of interest in the social background of the characters,” and written in dialogue that avoids “poetic flights and excessive sentiment” (4-5). Realism desires “to reproduce on the stage a piece of life faithfully,” and may “explore the human psyche in the manner of an Ibsen or an O’Neill, to the point where it must concede the unreal devices of expressionism or symbolism” (164). In discussing realist stage design, I also imply Chris Morash and Shaun Richards’s examination of realist theatre as exercising a “logic of omniscience,” a promise of total visibility, and thus total knowledge (22). Within this “theatre of total visibility,” action onstage is seen

synedochically, or representative, of a wider culture. This is how this project views the cottage displays of the Abbey Theatre.<sup>88</sup>

Realist elements are identifiable in the set design for *Broken Faith*, which is recorded in the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive. A drawing in “absolute simplicity” identifies a small cottage interior with two doors, a window and a “fire”. It matches architecture historian Marion McGarry’s identification of the fire, or “hearth”, as “both physically and socially situated in the centre of the house,” whereas the focal point in other European cultures was the kitchen table (33). McGarry identifies two other tenets of early-twentieth century cottage interiors: the dresser and the settle, both of which are included in the production’s property list. The dresser was often the largest object in the Abbey Theatre’s displays, and there’s evidence of one going all the way back to 1903, in Augusta Gregory’s *Twenty Five* - it may very well have belonged to Inghinidhe na hÉireann. According to McGarry: “The dresser in the Irish cottage was a point of pride for the Irish housewife. Although [it] was primarily a decorative piece, it did not escape being given other functions” (49). Also of importance was the settle, which McGarry explains:

A settle, in its most basic form, is a long wooden bench with side arms and a high back. It differs from a church pew or a monks’ bench in that it is for domestic use. The inclusion of a high back in its design kept the sitters’ backs away from damp walls and retained some heat from the fire (46).

Tradition had it that the settle was built on-site when the house was newly built, for it to be as old as the home itself. McGarry describes it as a “hierarchal piece of furniture by virtue of its age and importance and, like the dresser, seemingly immovable” (47). Though settles in Abbey Theatre displays go back before *Broken Faith* - there’s one on the property list for William Boyle’s *The Building Fund* (1905) - they are rarely identified in property lists in this period. *Broken Faith* was one of the few productions that unified McGarry’s tenets of cottage interiors - the hearth, dresser and settle - in its displays, so we may consider it painstakingly realist in presentation.

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<sup>88</sup> Irina Rupp Malone described the “Cork realists” - a nickname given to Abbey playwrights whose plays were considered Ibsenite in influence - as showing Ireland “was not home to ‘ancient idealism’ but to provincial corruption” (63).

The fidelity to these real-life details, I argue, charged Robinson's production to be a stirring portrayal of the underside of life. Here, gestures such as Bridget's lifting of a kettle, scrubbing dishes and throwing turf, even Michael's pushing away of his scant dinner, may be viewed against signs of real poverty. In comparison to Revivalist plays like *Deirdre*, these individuals onstage belong to real life and not the Celtic Twilight. Raymond Williams has stressed the need to "de-etherealise" culture, emphasising the need for "a material force in its own right in negotiating the structures of experience" (352-353). Day and Cummins's play is cultural materialist in that respect.

This stage design was implicit in emphasising the need for people's protection under labour law, and so acts as a form of "contingency". But such design, I argue, also underlined the legitimation of women's authority in the spirit of maternalist feminism. Caitríona Clear states that within this wave of feminism, "women's interests were defined as those which reflected women's domestic concerns in the wider society". It insisted on good standards in "consumer affairs, conditions in National Schools, quality control in foodstuffs, working-class housing, public health, local government, nutrition and diet and adoption" (62). The cottage Bridget lives in belongs to Michael's mother, who constantly makes excuses for her son. Bridget, however, challenges Michael's irresponsibility and does so from the settle, the "hierarchal piece of furniture" (McGarry 47). I argue that this subtle gesture is symbolical of a new matriarchal model for the house, one that advocates for maternalist feminist values of affordable living and childcare. The design, by emphasising the women's dependence on men in precarious living situation, is also underlining the need for such dependence to change, and so acts as a form of contingency.

#### **4.4 In Performance: Signs of Maternalist Feminism**

After ten performances across 1913, *Broken Faith* wasn't seen at the Abbey Theatre again. Day and Cummins's last play at the theatre, *Fox and Geese* in 1917, seems to have been their most commercially successful, running for sixteen performances. That farcical comedy, in which a number of women pursue a wealthy farmer for marriage and fortune, had pagan elements such as love potions and ghostly visitations. It wasn't reviewed by the national newspapers.

In the context of international maternalist feminism, roused in the late nineteenth century by writers such as Hannah More, Frances Trollope and Elizabeth Gaskell, *Broken Faith* was quite contemporary. In her analysis of Day and Cummins's unproduced play *Fidelity* (1914), Velma O'Donoghue Greene speculates that a counter-normative representation of gender "affords an opportunity to consider and evaluate the specific perspectives, and reflections, of women involved on the fringes of the suffrage and avant-garde movements in early twentieth century" (52). This extends to *Broken Faith* as well, and it's very possible that recognition for women's domestic labour and monetary needs hadn't been articulated at the Abbey Theatre before. They don't seem to have been regular sentiments in the theatre's work, and possibly weren't expressed regularly or explicitly in the period much between *Fox and Geese* (1917), Fand O'Grady's *Apartments* (1921) and Margaret O'Leary's *The Woman* (1929) either.<sup>89</sup> *Fox and Geese* marked the end of a writing partnership. Day took on a more directly responsive role as a nurse on the French front in World War I, and working for the London fire service in World War II. Cummins wrote about the Irish working class in her 1919 novel, *The Land They Loved*, but her interests soon turned to mediumship and she wrote an immense body of work on spirituality. She also wrote a solo play, *Till Yesterday Comes*, produced at London's Chanticleer Theatre in 1938.

### 5.1 *Ann Kavanagh* (1922) by Dorothy Macardle

Another form of "contingency," one condemning militaristic violence, was implicit in the stage design for *Ann Kavanagh*. This was Dorothy Macardle's second play produced at the Abbey Theatre. 1918 saw *Atonement*, a play about a family coming to terms with the death of their father. One son, a returned emigrant, suspects the death was the result of militaristic violence. No critics seem to have attended. It was directed by Lennox Robinson and ran for only six performances. By then, Macardle

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<sup>89</sup> In her analysis of Margaret O'Leary's *The Woman* (1929), Lisa Fitzpatrick observes that theatre in this period saw the "tragic heroine [...] in ascendance over the free, adventurous character who might seek her own destiny". Melissa Sihra (ed.), *Women in Irish Theatre: A Century of Representation and Authorship*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke and New York, 2007; 84.

was a member of Cumann na mBan and a teacher at Alexandra College in Dublin. She had worked with the English actor-manager Sir Frank Benson between 1916 and 1917, and had her first play, *Asthara*, produced at Dublin's Little Theatre in 1918.<sup>90</sup>

*Ann Kavanagh* premiered on April 6 1922. It ran for four performances, the same as Bernard Shaw's *Man of Destiny*, also premiered in 1922, but it was a short run compared to T.C. Murray's *Aftermath*, M.M. Brennan's *A Leprecaun in the Tenement* and George Shiels's *Paul Twyning*, which all stretched to six performances. The *Irish Times* critic called *Ann Kavanagh* a "powerful little sketch of the '98 rebellion", and observed that the "mixed marriage problem added to [its] interest".<sup>91</sup> Macardle's play, set during the 1798 United Irishman Rebellion, finds Ann, the Protestant wife of Catholic Republican insurgent Miles, tidying her living room while her exhausted husband sleeps upstairs. His brother Stephen arrives to announce Miles's promotion to commander. Ann fears her husband's new position will put his life at risk but Stephen takes her lack of enthusiasm as signs of a concealed allegiance to British authorities because of her Protestant background. After Stephen and Miles leave to hunt a local informer to the British forces, Ann discovers the same fugitive has sneaked into her house. Out of compassion, she nurses him back to health. She tries to hide him when the insurgents return but he's discovered and executed. Miles defends Ann's actions and her life is spared. Stephen is furious that his brother's reputation as an Irish hero is destroyed. The drama ends with Miles assuring Ann he understands her actions.

## 5.2 Staging the War of Independence

The stage design for *Ann Kavanagh*, though set during a previous rebellion, subtly condemned the War of Independence. Roy Foster calls the war the "logical result of the politics of exaltation" (494), specifically the rise in support for Sinn Fein's call for

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<sup>90</sup> Cathy Leeney deduces that this was an ambitious play written in verse, and "seems to betray a symbolically laden Maeterlinckian influence in its abstracted theme". Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playrights, 1900-1939: Gender & Violence On Stage*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010; 117.

<sup>91</sup> ABBEY THEATRE The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Apr 18, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 2.

Independence and withdrawal of Irish politics from Westminster. By 1919, extremist Irish Volunteers, or the Irish Republican Army, were shooting down members of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Reprisals by police reinforcements, the Black and Tans, were brutal. Civilians were pulled into the violence - Foster observes the “shooting of farmers’ sons who refused to dig trenches” (498). The height of the conflict is considered November 21<sup>st</sup> 1920, when the I.R.A. killed eleven unarmed British officers, to which the Black and Tans responded by firing into a football crowd, causing twelve deaths. The activation of the Government of Ireland Act at the end of 1920 established separate home rule parliaments in Belfast and Dublin. With unionist Ulster catered for, the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 could be visualised to establish an Irish Free State with independence in domestic affairs and full fiscal autonomy. However, a split between Irish nationalists and republicans was inevitable, and the Treaty was ratified only by a tiny majority in January 1922.

Premiering three months later, *Ann Kavanagh* must have been seen in light of the War of Independence and the emerging signs of the Civil War. Though its setting is a past military campaign for self-rule, the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion, its critique of violence can be taken as a warning against history repeating itself. In other words, Macardle’s depiction of the 1798 Rebellion was an indirect way of staging the War of Independence for 1922 audiences. Director Lennox Robinson may have agreed when he revived the production for six performances in September, after the Civil War had firmly begun. Like Sean O’Casey with *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), Macardle suspects the romancing of militaristic republicanism, as Stephen reprimands Ann for trying to excuse Miles from work: “Any other woman’d be proud. There’s a name gathering on Miles Kavanagh will be remembered with the best” (6). Through Stephen, Macardle gives shape to prejudices founded on religion and gender. When Ann doesn’t share his enthusiasm for Miles’s promotion, he accuses her: “your people were against our people always” (7). He reminds her of the expectations of her gender: “Tis not for ‘Miles’s wife to be hindering him and holding him from his place” (6).

Macardle’s portrayal of civilian deaths must have been resonant for audiences after the War of Independence. When the Republican insurgents reveal that they’ve killed a

local man who's been an informer to the British army, Ann identifies him as her sister's fiancé:

ANN. Alice, Alice, my darling they have killed your man!  
*(She wrenches herself free from MILES's arm and  
 hides her face.)*

MILES. Ann!

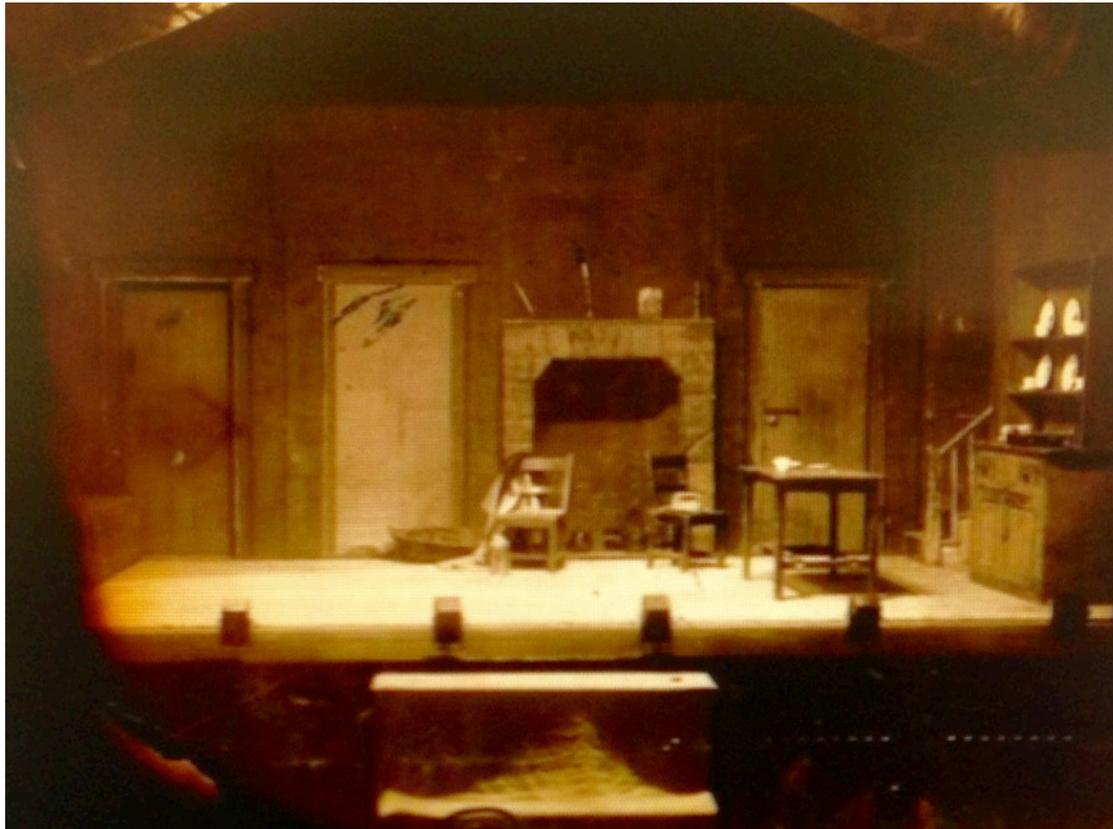
ANN. A prisoner! Alone! Helpless! You could have kept him living,  
 and you killed him in cold blood (9).

Maccardle gauges the responses to this outcry as if it were an agonising decision at the centre of a morality play. Stephen, clearly heartless, reprimands her: "You'll want to learn, Ann, you'll disgrace us all! A soldier's wife to weep for a spy!" (9). Miles, however, is loyal to his wife: "Ann will never disgrace us. She's as brave as any's in the world" (9). Later, the arrival of the fugitive is delivered as a moment of immense desperation. He is agonising about being captured: "They're after me! They're coming ... God!" (12). Ann is immediately compassionate, bolting the house door, carrying him over to the fire, and even bathing his face. When the insurgents discover him, Miles's loyalty to Ann is tested; he's ordered to execute the fugitive but Ann pleads for mercy:

ANN. Miles, listen to me ... listen. Think! Think! ... Some young boy is in it, with a mother wanting him - with a young wife, maybe, like myself! ... You won't let them kill him Miles? Promise me! ... You won't let them kill! (16-17).

Miles does what Ann asks of him, despite it demoting him from commander. She fills with guilt but Miles assures him at the end: "Ann --- I - I understand" (26). Here, compassion is seen as more significant than violence.

### 5.3 Stage Design as Impoverished History



***Ann Kavanagh* (1922). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.**

Cathy Leeney offers a fascinating analysis of Macardle’s play, saying it sits “on the cusp between melodrama and realism” (111). The stark cottage set for its premiere production suggests a leaning towards the latter. With a hearth as its focal centre, and settle and dresser on opposing walls, the tenets of cottage interiors as outlined by McGarry was in full play. The rigour of these details suggests a potent engagement with realism, what Champfleury called “so many cloth meters to the common people” (Champfleury, cited in Abélès 70). The bare scene suggests an impoverished dwelling, its dark walls being an architectural reference to the eighteenth century, when whitewash walls weren’t yet common. McGarry observes:

... it was the nineteenth century’s social and religious emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene that increased its use by women in the later nineteenth century. It was considered part of a woman’s work to frequently whitewash the home (30).

The eighteenth century cottage in *Ann Kavanagh* simulates darker, wattle-and-daub-style plastering.

The darkness of the walls also lends a solemn atmosphere. McGarry evokes Martin Heidegger's writings on place, saying: "the thatched cottage, at this time, became increasingly associated with the idea of an unspoiled Ireland, a type of Eden unsullied by British colonialism to which the Irish might return" (16). Yet, she also suspects the power of the cottage in disrepair: "the cottage increasingly came to represent the impoverished history of the country and many of these little dwellings were abandoned by the end of the twentieth century" (1). The stark cottage interior of *Ann Kavanagh* may have been charged to mine anguished aspects of Irish history. The realist attention to candlelight - in a time before electricity - and material concerns such as Ann's drying of Miles's drenched coat at the fire, suggests a shadowy and punishing glimpse of the 1798 Rebellion.

This sounds like it goes against nationalist depictions of the cottage, which McGarry says represent "Irish Otherness, a type of distinct, 'real' Irishness" (7). Maccardle's play is especially subversive when you compare it to *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (1902), set in the same year. W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory's play showed the arrival of a poor old woman, an allegory of Ireland, seeking men to help fight invaders. The opposite happens in Maccardle's play, where Ann tries to prevent Miles from going out to fight: "I tell you the man's destroyed; 'tis a week and more since he got a night in bed" (6). The poor old woman in *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* enlists a young man into leaving his home and fighting for Ireland, but in *Ann Kavanagh* that violence threatens to spill into domestic life. Ann is distraught as the insurgents search her home, and when they decide to execute the fugitive, she protests: "Stephen, what is it? They're not going to kill a man -- to shoot a man, here?" (15). The romanticised idea of a man leaving home to fight for Ireland is met here with the reality of men being killed in people's houses. Ann is an anti-Cathleen and anti-war figure. When Miles leaves on the insurgents' hunt for the fugitive, she prays alone: "God pity all women have lovers in a war!" (10). The stage design is implicit in expressing this form of contingency, one that calls for peace and not war.

#### **5.4 In Performance: Signs of Anti-Militaristic Drama**

*Ann Kavanagh* initially ran for four performances, and returned a week later for an additional three. Lennox Robinson revived it a few months later during the Civil War for another six performances. After the war, it was seen at the Abbey quite intermittently between 1924 and 1931, which suggests it may have taken on additional resonance after the war. Another play by Macardle, *The Old Man*, premiered in 1925 and looked at generational differences across the nationalist insurrectionary movement. The *Irish Times* described it as a “well constructed play”.<sup>92</sup> It ran for five performances and wasn’t seen again. *Ann Kavanagh* was Macardle’s most enduring play at the Abbey Theatre. Leeney sums up her work for that theatre as “question[ing] the price of political ideology, to problematize violence, and to high-light the potential role of woman in creating a future from the theatrical present moment” (106).

Leeney has identified 11 plays written by Macardle, many of which share a stance against Republican militarism. In fact, both *Atonement* (1918) and *Ann Kavanagh* (1922) precede Sean O’Casey’s *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). The Gate Theatre, which produced Denis Johnston’s anti-Republican drama *The Old Lady Says No!* in 1929, was drawn to Macardle’s *The Dark Waters*, a drama about a family prophecy, and staged it in 1932. A critic described it as “eerie” and “gripping” but also lamented the pacing.<sup>93</sup> It seems *Ann Kavanagh* was only Macardle’s first excursion in such shadowy scenes; her 1941 ghost story, *The Uninvited*, was produced as a Hollywood movie in 1944. Both it and another supernatural novel, *The Unforeseen* (1945), have recently been republished by Tramp Press. For a long time, Macardle has been best remembered for writing *The Irish Republic* (1937), a popular account of the War of Independence and the Civil War from an anti-treaty perspective.

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<sup>92</sup> "THE OLD MAN.": NEW PLAY AT THE ABBEY THEATRE *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Feb 25, 1925; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 5

<sup>93</sup> "DARK WATERS.": GATE THEATRE'S NEW PRODUCTION *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Sep 14, 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 6

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show that stage design reveals a form of contingency concerned with Ireland's modernisation in the final years of British colonialism. Arts and Crafts-displays can become stirring expressions of nationalism and resilience. Robert Gregory's intense Arts and Crafts-style stage design for *Deirdre* (1906) evoked the Irish "heroic period," and for modern audiences threw ideas of resistance against predetermined tragedy into sharp relief. Such design was implicit in signalling Ireland's self-expression and capability to govern its own fate. I've also shown the potent power of realism in cottage displays. The exactitude to real detail in the set for *Broken Faith* made for a form of contingency that atomised the "labour question" and showed the social oppression of women, and the need to resolve them. The stark treatment of the cottage in *Ann Kavanagh* drew on the building's national resonance to evoke an impoverished history of war and death, as a form of contingency condemning recent violence during the War of Independence. Anchoring portrayals of poverty, gender inequality and militaristic violence, these stage displays reflect social anxieties in the Irish revolutionary period.

New design inspiration would be needed in the late 1920s, and not just because methods for the near-permanent inflow of farmhouse kitchens would inevitably appear dated. The new Irish Free State would be ushered in with an expectation of modern and efficient technologies, the pressure of which would find its way into the Irish national theatre's displays as well. Moreover, the establishment of the Dublin Drama League in 1919 to produce international works on the Abbey's off-nights would lead to a serious commitment to contemporary theatre, paving the way for the new Peacock Theatre. The Abbey would have to take itself at its word, as the unavoidable expressionist avant-garde - either explicit in Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* (1927), or implicit in Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) and Lennox Robinson's *Ever the Twain* (1929) - would require anti-realist designs.

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## CHAPTER 2

## TROUBLED HISTORIES AND EXPRESSIONIST DESIGN, 1924-1934

**Introduction**

In 1922 two men from New York went on tour of theatres in France, Sweden, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria. Kenneth Macgowan, a theatre critic with *Theatre Arts Magazine*, was already observing Austrian director Max Reinhardt in Germany. He invited designer Robert Edmond Jones, a founder of the experimental Provincetown Players, to join him in Europe and sketch the stage designs of significant productions. “They give the actual visual quality of the best productions on the Continental stage,” wrote Macgowan (ix), when he compiled their documentation into a published volume. Editions of *Continental Stagecraft* (1922), featuring Jones’s drawings of radical expressionist presentations by German directors Leopold Jessner and Jürgen Fehling, found their way to theatre artists in different cities, including Dublin.<sup>94</sup>

This chapter explores the fragmentation of Irish life in the first decade of the Irish Free State as reflected in expressionist stage designs at the Abbey Theatre between 1924-1934. It argues that within productions at the theatre, there were projected modernities concerning state formation and modernisation. As explained in my Introduction chapter, I use T.J. Clark’s definition of modernity as meaning “contingency,” or signalling a social order that has “turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future - of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information” (7)

According to Nicholas Allen, the crisis of Irish independence, represented by a Free State in constant controversy, was formative of new experimental art:

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<sup>94</sup> *Continental Stagecraft* was read in Dublin. The provenance of the National Library of Ireland’s copy is Sean O’Casey’s library.

The conditional, unfinished spaces of the modernist novel or the abstract painting were an unfinished civil war that maintained the dissident energies of the revolutionary period into the new dispensation” (3).

The transition from the Free State founded in 1922 to the Republic declared in 1937 was far from seamless. Communities were fraught, divided and embittered after the Civil War. Several constitutional transformations lent confusion and political instability. Appropriately, the period saw radical developments across art forms, determined to resist their interpreters.

In *Modernism, Ireland and Civil War* (2009) Allen traces the cultural alienation of the post-Civil War period by making connections between experimental art and the workings of a state founded in violent controversy. He argues that while “Ireland occupied an anomalous state between empire and independence, its politics and culture [were] both attempting to find representative forms that could incorporate and refigure their troubled histories” (8). In that spirit, this project considers how the application of expressionist stage design at the Abbey Theatre acknowledged the shrapnel presence of the Civil War in Irish life, while simultaneously projecting modernities that rejected a violent past and resembled a new present.

This chapter reveals the influence of expressionist theatre on Abbey Theatre productions, a form that J.L. Styan defines by a “rigorous anti-realism” and “a dramatization of the subconscious, a kind of scripted dream, with the consequent loss of character motivation and rational plot development of the well-made play” (1-2). These effects will be seen in my first case study: a 1927 production of *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O’Neill. The effects of expressionist design at the Abbey Theatre during this period has received scant attention. One rich exception is Elaine Sisson’s valuable essay “Experimentalism and the Irish Stage: Theatre and German Expressionism in the 1920s” and its excellent assessment of the stage design for the 1927 production of Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*, which features as the second case study in this chapter. Sisson contextualises that design within Russian constructivist graphic design and architecture, while this chapter seeks a new perspective - viewing the design through the cinematography of the 1920 German expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern*

*Irish Theatre*, Richard Cave contributes an illuminating chapter on the influence of German and American modernism in this period. He focuses its effects on playwrights Sean O’Casey and Denis Johnston, however, and not productions during this period by non-Irish writers, such as the 1928 production of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, the third case study in this chapter.

Here, examination of set design will reveal uncharted aspects of the Abbey Theatre’s history. Lionel Pilkington says that the Abbey, campaigning for a subsidy, “offered unambiguous support to the new Irish state,” and that “in its immediate post-independence repertoire [included] plays that were directly concerned with satirising republican anti-Treaty militancy” (90). That was one way for productions at the Abbey to critique forces of instability in Irish life. This chapter argues that the production of plays with expressionist design was another approach.

According to David Kuhns, the subject of German expressionist playwrights was “the cultural bankruptcy of contemporary German society” (10). Expressionist theatre may have articulated a “cultural bankruptcy” in Ireland too. Director Lennox Robinson’s production of *The Emperor Jones*, darkly designed by Dorothy Travers-Smith to show the embedded trauma of African American slavery, was seen in Ireland at a time when the country was reeling from culminations of its colonial past - the republican violence threatening to destabilise the country’s future. *From Morn to Midnight*, directed by Denis Johnston and designed by Norah McGuinness, offered a timely critique of a social conservatism during the stultifying years of the Free State. Johnston’s production of *King Lear*, with modern designs by Travers-Smith, depicted an unstable kingdom, like *The Emperor Jones* before it, and considered questions about governance. That none of these plays are set in Ireland is unimportant; Kuhns says expressionism “sought to represent not the psyche of an individual pursuing his particular fate but rather the internal “spiritual” condition of humankind as a whole” (86).

## **1. The Irish Free State and Modernism**

For an explanation of how the exhilarating cultural energies of the revolutionary period dissipated in the conservative state founded by the Cumann na nGaedheal

government in 1923, Terence Brown provides a comprehensive account. He identifies “a prudent acquiescence” associated with the inherited realities of the Irish social order and a conservative government with a tight grip on the public purse (4). The stagnant economic conditions of the country were an obvious factor. With no native industries sizeable enough to base an industrial revolution, the beautification of the cities and the education of the workers lacked infrastructure. Restricted government spending meant that many social problems went unresolved, including the depressingly overcrowded Dublin tenements.

But Brown suspects the answer also lies in the composition of Irish society. It was predominantly rural, with the census in 1926 returning 61 per cent of the population living outside towns and villages. He identifies a “profound continuity” with the social patterns and attitudes of the latter half of the nineteenth century, specifically the economic concerns of farmers following the Famine. With many disinclined to contemplate social change, the preservation of the family plot continued to be at the centre of Irish life, even to extreme extents. High rates of emigration, Brown suspects, were “much less a reflection of demoralisation in the countryside than a measure of continuity in Irish life” (12).

Catholicism became a remarkable mark of national distinctiveness, with the 1926 census returning 92.6 per cent of the population as Catholic (Brown 20). There was no grander demonstration of Irish Catholicism than the Eucharistic Congress of 1932, where over one million people attended mass in Phoenix Park. But Brown observes that throughout the 1920s, the church held an

authoritative position in Irish society to preach a sexual morality of severe restrictedness, confirming the mores and attitudes of a nation of farmers and shopkeepers, denouncing all developments in society that might have threatened a rigid conformism in a strictly enforced sexual code (29).

Such religious conservatism, combined with economic stagnation and an essentially rural society, paved the way for forms of cultural conservatism. This was reflected most obviously in the Censorship of Films Act of 1923, the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929, and the motion of 1925 making divorce legislation

impossible. This suggests an extreme repressiveness, one that, according to Brown, “severely stunted the cultural and social development of a country which a protracted colonial mismanagement had left a desperate need of revival in both spheres” (30).

In this time of state austerity, it was surprising that the Abbey Theatre’s directorate - Augusta Gregory, Lennox Robinson and W.B. Yeats - were eventually successful in acquiring an annual subsidy for the theatre in 1925. According to Lionel Pilkington, the government suspected an ideological role for the Abbey to play in the new state: “At a time when the legitimacy of the Cumann na nGaedheal government lay under constant threat from anti-Treaty republicans, the [Abbey] was an important institutional supporter” (90). He observes that while the theatre’s programming maintained a “scrupulous, but nationalist-orientated partiality” during the War of Independence, its repertoire post-Independence altered to explicitly “satiriz[e] republican anti-Treaty militancy” (90).

This was most obvious in Sean O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy: *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). All set during the recent revolutionary period, and populated by occupants of the Dublin tenements, these plays provided the Abbey Theatre with daring and dark portrayals of political insurgency. In fact, *The Plough and the Stars* incited a riot when its representation of the 1916 revolutionaries was thrown into question. Mostly elsewhere in the repertoire, critiques of nationalist ideology weren’t as brazen. But Pilkington observes that several plays, like T.C. Murray’s psychological drama *Autumn Fire* (1924) and Brinsley Macnamara’s comedy *Look at the Heffernans!* (1926) were still preoccupied with “the relevance of traditional social structures to the exigencies of Irish modernisation” (104).

One interesting development was the evolution of the Dublin Drama League. With its debut production in 1919, it stated its aim to “promote a vision of ... national life other than that of cottage and tenement” (Ferrar and Clarke 10). The Dublin Drama League was founded by Lennox Robinson and W.B. Yeats, with the idea that it could present work on the Abbey stage on the theatre’s off-nights, and cast actors from the theatre’s company. Producing contemporary plays like Ernst Toller’s *Masses and Man* in 1925, and August Strindberg’s *The Stronger* in 1921 and *The Spook Sonata* in

1925, it's no wonder Elaine Sisson suggests that the co-occupation of the Dublin Drama League and the formally conservative Abbey Theatre can be seen as a metaphor for tensions within the Free State: "The Abbey continued to promote homespun rural dramas that reflected ideologies of the traditional and authentic while [...] the League at the Abbey hosted an appetite for edgy, avant-garde representations of modern life" (41). The latter was signified by two darkly humoured pen-and-ink programme covers by Harry Clarke, one of Ireland's leading modernist artists, and a faithful friend of Lennox Robinson.

In my Introduction chapter I referenced Guy Julier's idea of design culture as attitudinal, and concerned with the internal ethos of a company and its interactions with its public. In terms of brand stewardship, design can "signify the "cultural capital" of a company - its faculty to qualify, critique, and thus deliver distinction and differentiation" (71). The migration of modernist design from Dublin Drama League productions to Abbey Theatre productions in the mid-1920s may have been to reenergise the Abbey's brand. In 1926 W.B. Yeats asked Norah McGuinness, an illustrator and painter, to design set and costuming for the first revival of his play *Deirdre* in 15 years. According to the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* McGuinness was born in Derry in 1901. She took life-drawing classes - despite parental opposition - before being awarded a scholarship to the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. In 1924 she won a medal for drawing at the Tailteann competition, and underwent further study at the Chelsea School of Art. In London she had significant encounters with the paintings of Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh and Georges Braque. In 1925 she received a commission arranged by her past teacher, the stained glass artist Harry Clarke, to illustrate Laurence Sterne's novel *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*. It's likely these illustrations are what brought McGuinness to the attention of British publisher Frederick Macmillan, who asked W.B. Yeats to suggest a book for her to work on, a correspondence that would eventually lead to her illustrating Yeats's *The Stories of Red Hanrahan and the Secret Rose* (Karen E. Brown 65). The results of McGuinness's design for *Deirdre* seems to have been daringly abstract, for one critic bemoaned that "the planning of the

backcloth would not convey to even the mind steeped in symbolism the idea of a forest in a grey-blue light".<sup>95</sup>

Yeats clearly liked the effect, and McGuinness soon designed gold masks and costuming for the Drama League's production of his play *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. Theatre diarist Joseph Holloway heard that she designed the backcloth for a baroque production of *Sancho's Master*, Augusta Gregory's adaption of *Don Quixote*.<sup>96</sup> McGuinness designed Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, the production opening the Abbey's new experimental stage, the Peacock. When her abstract design drew attention again, it was for her garden scene in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which reportedly "left the impression of forlorn and irrelevant figures battling feebly against a sea of paint".<sup>97</sup> It's tempting to suspect the influence of the French impressionist and post-impressionist paintings McGuinness saw in London as an inspiration for these designs (Kennedy 53-54).

By 1927, it was clear that the Abbey Theatre could include Drama League productions in its repertoire. The latter's 1924 production of Gregorio Martinez Sierra's *The Kingdom of God* and 1926 production of Eugene O'Neill's *In the Zone* were presented again as Abbey Theatre productions, and for longer runs. The League's productions of O'Neill's expressionist drama *The Emperor Jones* and Susan Glaspell's feminist drama *Trifles* followed in January 1927, with its production of *Caesar and Cleopatra* by Bernard Shaw in October. Before long, the Abbey seemed to be embracing the international outlook of the Drama League, producing, of its own volition, Gregorio Martinez Sierra's *The Two Shepherds* and Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* in 1927, and Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Bjorkman* and Shakespeare's *King Lear* in 1928.

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<sup>95</sup> REVIVAL OF "DEIRDRE" AT THE ABBEY The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Mar 9, 1926; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Holloway observed that *Sancho's Master* was "elaborately dressed with a new tapestried scene painted by Norah McGuinness for Act 3. [Actor Raymond] Fardy told me the mounting, etc., of the play had cost a fortune" (22).

<sup>97</sup> J.W.G., 'An Abbey Revival. The Importance of Being Earnest', November 1926 (clipping, National Library of Ireland McGuinness Archive).

But any engagement with modernist artists seemed uncertain. Over this time, McGuinness left the theatre - there's no mention in the board's minute-books of her being paid.<sup>98</sup> But Dorothy Travers-Smith, a portrait painter, had arrived and contributed vivid backcloths for revivals of Gregory's *Spreading the News* and Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*. Travers-Smith, according to the *Royal Irish Academy's Dictionary of Irish Biography*, was born in Dublin in 1901. Following her parents' divorce she moved to London with her mother, the celebrated psychic and medium Hester Swaine. Travers-Smith studied at the Chelsea School of Art around the same time as her life-long friend Norah McGuinness. It was possibly through her mother's *milieu* that Travers-Smith became friends with Lennox Robinson, who performed a séance with Swaine in 1915 to summon the spirit of the late gallerist Hugh Lane. In 1926 Travers-Smith and Robinson began to plan her return to Dublin to design productions for the Abbey Theatre. Where McGuinness may have focused the costuming and backcloth as if it were a post-impressionist painting, Travers-Smith seems to be more knowledgeable of stage technology. With Robinson, who she'd marry in 1931, she planned to restore radical use of the Abbey's set of screens designed by Edward Gordon Craig, mostly deployed at this point as partitions in farces such as Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1923. Travers-Smith's ancient Egypt-style costuming for *Caesar and Cleopatra* may have been cut to shorter lengths than costumes typically seen at the theatre. Despite this industrious output, she seems to have been paid only once in 1927 - £3-3-0 for her haunted farmhouse set for John Guinan's play *Black Oliver*.<sup>99</sup>

It soon became clear that the Abbey's engagement with expressionist theatre would only go so far. 1928 saw rejections of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* and Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says No!*. Meanwhile, the newly formed Gate Theatre

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<sup>98</sup> On Mainie Jellett's advice, McGuinness went to study with cubist artist André Lhote. She soon had prodigious career as a painter, exhibiting with the Twenties Group in London and the Dublin Society of Painters in the 1930s, and co-founding and being involved in the operations of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in the 1940s. In 1950, along with Nano Reid, she represented Ireland for the first time at the Venice Biennale.

<sup>99</sup> "Abbey Theatre Minute Book 1925-1931". [digital.library.nuigalway.ie](http://digital.library.nuigalway.ie).

company rented the Peacock Theatre that year to present an immediately modern season including Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, before opening their own theatre in 1930. With the Gate the home of European modernist theatre in Dublin,<sup>100</sup> the Abbey's repertoire began to fall back into a familiarity of producing Irish plays in a realist form. Only Lennox Robinson seemed the exception, with expressionist elements to his plays *Ever the Twain* (1929) and *Church Street* (1934). Briefly, it seemed that Travers-Smith, in her part-time work at the theatre, would do little more than refresh old designs, such as the cottage kitchen of Kathleen O'Brennan's *Full Measure*, the village streets of Gregory's *Hyacinth Halvey*, and the Celtic costuming of J.M. Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*.

But a curious orientalism that crept into the Abbey's programming would soon require her imagination, explicitly in Yeats's dance play *The Fighting of the Waves* (1929) and Lord Dunsany's Eastern drama *The Gods of the Mountain* (1929). Travers-Smith also found the opportunity to create cosmopolitan designs for Robinson's *Ever the Twain* (1929) and his adaptation of Brinsley Sheridan's *The Critic* (1931), and Francis Stewart's *Men Crowd Me Round* (1933). In February 1934 the theatre's board finally offered her a set wage: "£5 for each scene designed and £2 for each Costume".<sup>101</sup> However, it was to be her final year working at the Abbey, designing Yeats's *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *The Resurrection*. Travers-Smith's last design, and collaboration with her husband at the theatre, was a production of Eugene O'Neill's expressionist play *Days Without End* in 1934, possibly an effort to recapture the success of *The Emperor Jones* in 1927.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> In his doctoral thesis on how the Gate Theatre contributed to Irish identity formation, Rudd van den Beuken explains that the theatre became "renowned chiefly for producing Continental modernist plays in a uniquely avant-garde setting". Ruud van den Beuken. "Moulding the Irish Dramatist of the Future: Memory, Modernity, and (Inter)nationalist Identities at the Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928-1940 [published doctoral thesis]. 16.

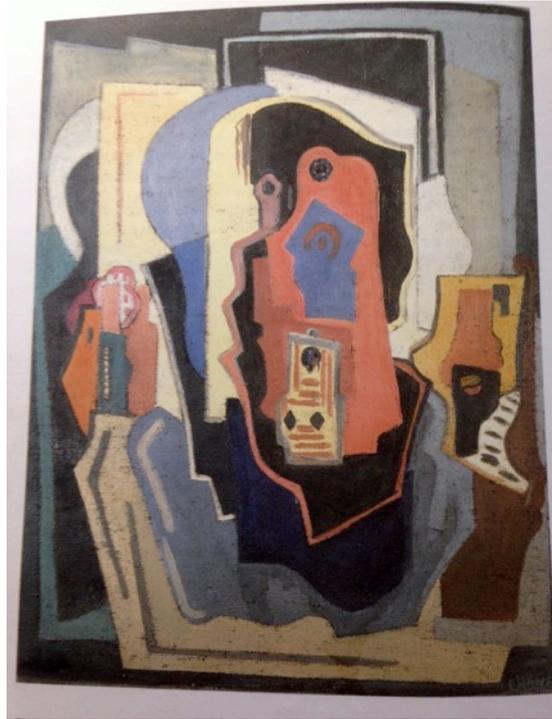
<sup>101</sup> <https://digital.library.nuigalway.ie/islandora/object/nuigalway%3A24f03ae7-f355-43b4-8691-ed1f91e9f274>

<sup>102</sup> Dorothy Travers-Smith exhibited paintings as "Dolly Robinson." She joined the Dublin Society of Painters in 1938 and exhibited paintings that year. She was also a member of the Picture Hire Club and exhibited with them in the 1940s.



***Decoration* (1923) by Mainie Jellett. Source: nationalgallery.ie. Web. 20 Jun 2018.**

Considering that McGuinness and Travers-Smith would later become members of the Society of Dublin Painters, we must suspect they were interacting with modernist ideas in the 1920s. Art historian S.B. Kennedy says the Society was “synonymous with the best of avant-garde painting in Ireland” (20). Founded in 1920 by artist Paul Henry, it curated young painters’ work in its gallery at No. 7 St Stephen’s Green. The more conservative members determined its character and development but by the mid 1920s a small cohort of artists produced work reflecting more recent developments in Europe. Though cubism was no longer prevalent in European terms, having ceded to surrealism, it still found an outlet in Ireland. *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* credits the French critic Louis Vauxcelles with coining the term cubism in describing the landscape paintings Georges Braque in 1908. In its early period the style is marked by “tilting planes, lines, areas of suave brushwork [...] as distinct elements, implying a building up of the image that is Constructive rather than imitative” (175). New cubist paintings by Irish painters were indicative of the later period of the movement: “Synthetic Cubism,” in which “areas of different colour were juxtaposed one with another so as to create abstract compositions, often with an emphasis on qualities such as light or rhythm and movement” (Kennedy 34).

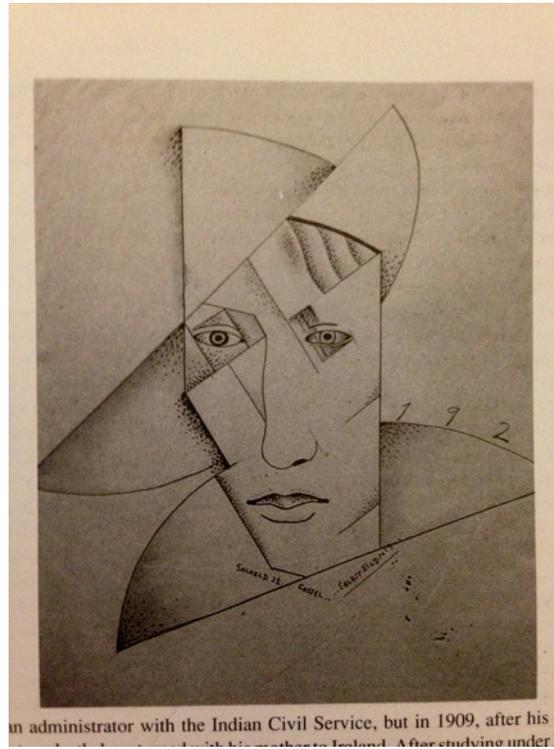


***Composition* by Evie Hone. Source: S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950*, 236.**

The pioneers of Irish cubism were painters Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone, who in 1920 both moved to Paris to study under Cubist painter André Lhote. In 1921, seeking a more spiritual art than that taught by Lhote, which was based on the study of natural forms, they went to work with French artist Albert Gleizes. Kennedy says Gleizes “underwent a religious conversion and subsequently endeavoured to interpret the laws of art in terms of Catholic truth and religious experience of Middle Ages” (36). After working with him for two years, Jellett exhibited two paintings at the Society of Dublin Painters’ exhibition in 1923. These attracted derision from the *Irish Times* in a headline: “Two Freak Pictures”. But Fintan O’Toole observes that the response, while emblematically conservative, was misplaced: “*Decoration* is in fact a religious painting [...] it draws on traditional images of the Madonna and Child” (24).

Later recounting her work with Gleizes, Jellett explains that they sought art “based on the eternal laws of harmony, balance and ordered movement (rhythm) [...] We sought the inner principle and not the outer appearance” (18). That “inner principle” seemed the inspiration for Evie Hone too. *Composition* was among her exhibited paintings in at the Dublin Painters’ gallery in 1931. This shows Gleizes’ techniques of

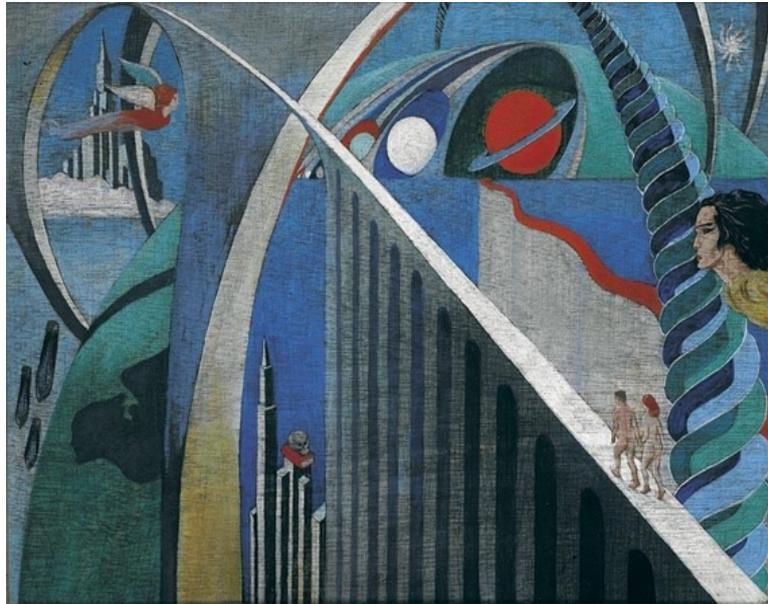
“translation” and “rotation,” the “dividing and sub-dividing [of] the picture plane into juxtaposed shapes which echo the overall shape and proportions of the canvas” (Kennedy 38). Unlike Jellett, Hone preferred to keep the subject of her painting a mystery.



***Self-portrait* by Cecil Salkeld: Source: S.B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism 1880-1950*, 41.**

As well as cubism, another major continental influence to arrive in Ireland in the 1920s was the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* - or New Objectivity. It's described by *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* as a turn “away from Expressionism to a calmer and optimistic concern with visible reality” (494). According to Kennedy, this “represented a cold, descriptive linear style [...] the full impact of spontaneous excitement and, with a penetrating exactitude, it pinched the shape of objects to illustrate the relevant experience with over-sharp forms” (40). The movement arrived in Ireland in the form of artist Cecil Salkeld, who trained in the German city Kassel under Bauhaus-inspired theatre designer Ewald Dulberg. Salkeld's paintings were characterised by stylised forms, flattening of the picture plane, and diagonal thrust of composition. This can be seen in his *Self-portrait*, a pencil drawing, probably

exhibited at the Dublin Painters' gallery in 1924. Kennedy suspects the influence of Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer and his "studies of figures in motion" in it (42).



***Extension in Time and Space* by Harry Kernoff: Source: whytes.ie Web. 20 Jun 2018.**

The Dublin Painters' gallery was also where futurist art was seen. *The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* defines futurism as an Italian movement proposing "the modern urban experience as the only subject for modern art". It identifies futurist paintings by a "vehemence against the past, together with fragmented and uncouth character [that] gave 'futuristic' its sense of headlong foolishness" (256). Harry Kernoff had an energetic flirtation with avant-garde ideas before turning to realism - he designed sets for the Dublin Drama League's production of Ernst Toller's expressionist play *Hoppla* in 1929, for instance. In 1932 he exhibited his modern paintings, including *Extension in Time and Space*. According to Kennedy, this depicts "some sort of metaphysical world, possibly symbolising Hope and Reality, though which man must pass but over which he has little control" (45). The warping viaduct stretching across menacing skyscrapers and alien planets is undoubtedly futurist. It also recalls Fritz Lang's 1927 futuristic film, *Metropolis*. Considering such radical work presented by the Society of Dublin Painters, it's not difficult to imagine artists at the Abbey Theatre being influenced by modernist aesthetics.

## 2. Abbey Theatre Scenography: Staging Inside Ireland and Outside

In Chapter One I showed that after the 1913 Lockout, Dublin became the most popularly cited space represented on the Abbey Theatre's stage. That continued to be the case between 1924 and 1934, not-counting revivals of plays. Audiences' programmes state that ten new productions had settings in urban Dublin.<sup>103</sup> These were consistently seen throughout the period, from Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* in 1924 to Norman Webb's *Sheridan's Mills* in 1932. This doesn't strengthen a perception of Abbey's role as a "national theatre" representing the entire nation. In fact, the 1926 census returned 61% of the population living outside cities and towns.

Eight productions had settings in Munster,<sup>104</sup> and these were also consistently seen across the period, from Lennox Robinson's *The Big House* in 1926 to W.R. Fearon's *Parnell of Avondale* in 1934. Connaught, originally the dominant province represented in Abbey Theatre productions, was cited only three times in plays in the 1930s.<sup>105</sup> This could suggest that no new plays produced in the 1920s were set in Connaught. Ulster was also cited only three times.<sup>106</sup> Two productions had settings in

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<sup>103</sup> *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) by Sean O'Casey, *Never the Time and the Place* (1924) by Lennox Robinson, *The Old Man* (1925) by Dorothy Macardle, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Sean O'Casey, *The Drapier Letters* (1927) by Arthur Power, *Before Midnight* (1928) by Gerald Brosnan, *The Words Upon the Window Pane* (1930) by W.B. Yeats, *Peter* (1930) by Samuel John Waddell, *The Critic* (1931) by Lennox Robinson, and *Sheridan's Mills* (1932) by Norman Webb.

<sup>104</sup> *The Big House* (1926) by Lennox Robinson, *Parted* (1927) by Michael C. Madden, *Full Measure* (1928) by Kathleen O'Brennan, *The Woman* (1929) by Margaret O'Leary, *The Reapers* (1930) by Teresa Deevy, *1920* (1933) by Frank X O'Leary, *Men Crowd Me Round* (1933) by Francis Stuart, and *Parnell of Avondale* (1934) by W.R. Fearon.

<sup>105</sup> *Let the Credit Go* (1930) by Bryan Cooper, *Church Street* (1934) by Lennox Robinson, and *Bridgehead* (1934) by Samuel John Waddell. This number may in fact be greater. It's hard not to imagine the use of the Kiltartan-dialect in Augusta Gregory's *The Would Be Gentleman* (1926) and *Dave* (1927) would place those plays in Connaught. Similarly, Denis Johnston's *The Moon in the Yellow River* (1932) was obviously referring to the Ardnacrusha power plant.

<sup>106</sup> *The Retrievers* (1934) by George Shiels, *Peter* (1930) by Samuel John Waddell, and *Let the Credit Go* (1930) by Bryan Cooper.

Leinster counties excluding Dublin,<sup>107</sup> and two were vaguely placed in the midlands.<sup>108</sup> One play, *Mr. Murphy's Island* (1926) by Elizabeth Harte, was set “on an island off the Irish coast”.<sup>109</sup> Many productions from the sizeable 80 counted weren't explicitly set in any province.

The dominance of domestic space in Abbey Theatre productions, demonstrated in Chapter One, clearly continued throughout this period. According to programmes, twenty-seven productions were set in a “house”,<sup>110</sup> and three in a “home”.<sup>111</sup> The domineering type of specifically named structure was the “farmhouse”, seen seven times,<sup>112</sup> while the “cottage,” which was found dominant in Chapter One, is cited only

<sup>107</sup> *Look at the Heffernans!* (1926) by Brinsley MacNamara, and *Things That Are Caesar's* (1932) by Paul Vincent Carroll.

<sup>108</sup> *The Master* (1928) and *Margaret Gillan* (1933) by Brinsley MacNamara.

<sup>109</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Mr. Murphy's Island*, 16 Aug 1926 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3081\_MPG\_01, p3.

<sup>110</sup> *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) by Sean O'Casey, *The Retrievers* (1924) by George Shiels, *The Old Man* (1925) by Dorothy Macardle, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Sean O'Casey, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1926) by Oscar Wilde, *The Would Be Gentleman* (1926) by Augusta Gregory, *The Big House* (1926) by Lennox Robinson, *Mr. Murphy's Island* (1926) by Elizabeth Harte, *Dave* (1927) by Augusta Gregory, *Trifles* (1927) by Susan Glaspell, *From Morn to Midnight* (1927) by Georg Kaiser, *The Pipe in the Fields* (1927) by T.C. Murray, *Parted* (1927) by Michael C. Madden, *Black Oliver* (1927) by John Guinan, *Cartney and Kevney* (1927) by George Shiels, *King Lear* (1928) by William Shakespeare, *John Gabriel Bjorkman* (1928) by Henrik Ibsen, *The Master* (1928) by Brinsley MacNamara, *The Words Upon the Window Pane* (1930) by W.B. Yeats, *The Reapers* (1930) by Teresa Deevy, *The Admirable Bashville, or Constancy Unrewarded* (1931) by Bernard Shaw, *The Moon in the Yellow River* (1931) by Denis Johnston, *Sheridan's Mills* (1932) by Norman Webb, *Michaelmas Eve* (1932) by T.C. Murray, *Margaret Gillan* (1933) by Brinsley MacNamara, *The Resurrection* (1934) by W.B. Yeats, and *Parnell of Avondale* (1934) by W.R. Fearon.

<sup>111</sup> *The Kingdom of God* (1924) by Gregorio Martinez Sierra, *The Blind Wolf* (1928) by T.C. Murray, and *Ever the Twain* (1929) by Lennox Robinson.

<sup>112</sup> *Autumn Fire* (1924) and *The Pipe in the Fields* (1927) by T.C. Murray, *Trifles* (1927) by Susan Glaspell, *Black Oliver* (1927) by John Guinan, *King Lear* (1928) by William Shakespeare, *The Mating Shan M'Ghie* (1932) by T.H. Stafford, and *Michaelmas Eve* (1932) by T.C. Murray.

twice.<sup>113</sup> Nearly as popular were residences that occupied only part of a building - four plays were set in a “flat”,<sup>114</sup> and two in an “apartment”.<sup>115</sup> The “lodging house” was seen in two plays.<sup>116</sup> Two plays were set in a “tenement,”<sup>117</sup> and one in a “slum”,<sup>118</sup> though these stop occurring after 1927 - which is surprising considering the popularity of Sean O’Casey’s plays. “Lodge” appeared once.<sup>119</sup> “Maternity home” and “orphanage” also appeared once.<sup>120</sup>

Thirteen plays were set in a luxury-sounding “drawing room” or private “dining room,”<sup>121</sup> notably in plays by Lennox Robinson. This is greater than the number of plays set in a “kitchen,” which was dominant in Chapter One, but seen in this period just nine times.<sup>122</sup> The “parlour” and “sitting room,” which sound less formal than the

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<sup>113</sup> *Autumn Fire* (1924) by T.C. Murray, and *Wrack* (1932) by Peadar O’Donnell.

<sup>114</sup> *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Sean O’Casey, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1926) by Oscar Wilde, *All’s Over Then?* (1932) by Lennox Robinson, and *Men Crowd Me Round* (1933) by Francis Stuart.

<sup>115</sup> *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) by Sean O’Casey and *Days Without End* (1934) by Eugene O’Neill.

<sup>116</sup> *The Words Upon the Window Pane* (1930) by W.B. Yeats, and *Peter* (1930) by Samuel John Waddell.

<sup>117</sup> *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Sean O’Casey.

<sup>118</sup> *The Drapier Letters* (1927) by Arthur Power.

<sup>119</sup> *The Admirable Bashville, or Constancy Unrewarded* (1931) by Bernard Shaw.

<sup>120</sup> Both in Gregorio Martinez Sierra’s *The Kingdom of God* (1924).

<sup>121</sup> *Fanny’s First Play* (1925) by Bernard Shaw, *Professor Tim* (1925) by George Shiels, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1926) by Oscar Wilde, *Mr. Murphy’s Island* (1926) by Elizabeth Harte, *The Big House* (1926), and *The Far Off Hills* (1928) by Lennox Robinson, *John Gabriel Bjorkman* (1928) by Henrik Ibsen, *Dark Isle* (1929) by Gerald Brosnan, *The Reapers* (1930) by Teresa Deevy, *Let the Credit Go* (1930) by Bryan Cooper, *The Critic* (1931) by Lennox Robinson, *Men Crowd Me Round* (1933) by Francis Stuart, and *Church Street* (1934) by Lennox Robinson.

<sup>122</sup> *Autumn Fire* (1924) by T.C. Murray, *The Retrievers* (1924) and *Professor Tim* (1925) by George Shiels, *Trifles* (1927) by Susan Glaspell, *Full Measure* (1928) by Kathleen O’Brennan, *The Woman* (1929) by Margaret O’Leary, *Mountain Dew*

“drawing room” and “dining room”, were cited twenty times.<sup>123</sup> The “living room,” which suggests a more casual space, was described seven times.<sup>124</sup>

Types of public space include the “public house” and “bar” of O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926, Gerald Brosnan’s *Dark Isle* in 1929, and Paul Vincent Carroll’s *Things That Are Caesar’s* in 1932. Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* in 1927 had scenes in a “cabaret,” at a “velodrome” and in a “Salvation Army Hall”. There was an “Agricultural Hall” in Bernard Shaw’s *The Admirable Bashville, or Constancy Unrewarded*, produced in 1931, and a “Metropolitan Hall” in Lord Dunsany’s *The Gods of the Mountain*, seen in 1929. Eugene O’Neill’s *Days Without End* had a scene inside a church in 1934.

Workplaces were varied but nothing new compared to those found in Chapter One. There were banks in Bryan Cooper’s *Let the Credit Go* in 1930, Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*, and Lennox Robinson’s *Church Street* in 1934, the former of which also had a scene in a Garda barracks. Frank X O’Leary’s *1920*, produced in 1933, had a scene in a post office. Shop interiors were seen in Brinsley MacNamara’s *Look at the Heffernans!* in 1926, Kathleen O’Brennan’s *Full Measure* in 1928, and Carroll’s

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(1929) and *The New Gossoon* (1930) by George Shiels, and *Wrack* (1932) by Peadar O’Donnell,

<sup>123</sup> *Never the Time and Place* (1924) and *The White Blackbird* (1925) by Lennox Robinson, *The Old Man* (1925) by Dorothy Macardle, *Look at the Heffernans!* (1926) by Brinsley MacNamara, *From Morn to Midnight* (1927) by Georg Kaiser, *Sancho’s Master* (1927) by Augusta Gregory, *Full Measure* (1928) by Kathleen O’Brennan, *Dark Isle* (1929) by Gerald Brosnan, *Mountain Dew* (1929) by George Shiels, *The Reapers* (1930) by Teresa Deevy, *Peter* (1930) by Samuel John Waddell, *A Disciple* (1931) by Teresa Deevy, *Things That Are Caesar’s* (1932) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *All’s Over Then?* (1932) by Lennox Robinson, *Sheridan’s Mills* (1932) by Norman Webb, *You Never Can Tell* (1933) by Bernard Shaw, *Drama at Inish* (1933) by Lennox Robinson, *1920* (1933) by Frank X O’Leary, *Men Crowd Me Round* (1933) by Francis Stuart, *Margaret Gillan* (1933) by Brinsley MacNamara, and *Bridgehead* (1934) by Samuel John Waddell.

<sup>124</sup> *Autumn Fire* (1924) by T.C. Murray, *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) by Sean O’Casey, *The Pipe in the Fields* (1927) by T.C. Murray, *The Moon in the Yellow River* (1931) by Denis Johnston, *The Mating of Shan M’Ghie* (1932) by T.H. Stafford, *Michealmas Eve* (1932) by T.C. Murray, and *Days Without End* (1934) by Eugene O’Neill.

*Things That Are Caesar's* in 1932. There was a non-descript office in O'Neill's *Days Without End*.

On a separate spectrum, leisure spaces were seen in the hotels of Samuel John Waddell's *Peter* in 1930, and *Bridgehead* in 1934, Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* and Robinson's *Drama at Inish* in 1933, Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, and Francis Stuart's *Men Crowd Me Round* in 1933. The latter also had a scene in a restaurant (in London), as did Robinson's 1929 play *Ever the Twain* (in New York), which also featured a "smoking room on a small trans-Atlantic liner".<sup>125</sup> In 1931, Robinson's version of Brinsley Sheridan's *The Critic* had a scene set at the Abbey Theatre itself.

The Abbey's displays were also consistently international in this period. When settings went further afield, they were mostly to England. London was the background to Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* in 1925, and *The Admirable Bashville, or Constancy Unrewarded* in 1931, as well as Francis Stuart's *Men Crowd Me Round* in 1933. Shaw chose Devon for *You Never Can Tell*, W.R. Fearon used Brighton for *Parnell of Avondale*, Oscar Wilde was inspired by Woolton for *The Importance of Being Earnest*, produced in 1926, and Shakespeare showed Dover in *King Lear*, seen in 1928. New York provided backgrounds to Robinson's *Ever the Twain* and O'Neill's *Days Without End*, while the 1927 production of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* was imaginably played in its original North American setting. O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* in 1927 was a rare visit to the West Indies.

W.B. Yeats evoked ancient Greece in his adaptations of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* in 1926 and *Oedipus at Colonus* in 1927. Biblical Israel was revisited both in his 1934 play *The Resurrection* and Augusta Gregory's *The Story Brought by Brigit*, premiered in 1924. Gregory's 1927 adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote, Sancho's Master*, was set in Spain, as probably was director Michael J. Dolan's production of Gregorio Martinez Sierra's *The Kingdom of God* in 1924, translated by Helen Granville Barker and Harley Granville Barker. Syria and Egypt were seen in Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* in 1927, while Lord Dunsany lent fictionally Eastern surroundings in his 1929 play, *The Gods of the Mountain*. Hungary was found in T.C.

<sup>125</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Ever the Twain*, 08 Oct 1929 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3293\_MPG\_01, p4.

Murray's *The Blind Wolf* in 1928, and the original Norway of Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, produced in 1928, and Germany of Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* were imaginably kept in production.

Chapter One showed that new plays set in nobles' houses, such as castles and palaces, were initially quite popular at the Abbey Theatre but they declined after 1911. There is a sudden return to these spaces between 1924 and 1928, featuring in six productions.<sup>126</sup> Signs of superficiality, I speculated in Chapter One, were harder to suspend in exterior scenes. These came with difficult demands in this period, such as depicting a lighthouse in Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, the exterior of a tenement in O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926, and the road to Calvary in Gregory's *The Story Brought by Brigit*. There was also the garden for Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the forest scenes in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*.

### 3.1 *The Emperor Jones* (1927) by Eugene O'Neill

For Nicholas Allen, abstract art during the years of Irish Free State represented "an unfinished civil war that maintained the dissident energies of the revolutionary period into the new dispensation" (3). "Dissident energies," particularly that of an ethnicity's traumatic dislocation, is implicit in the stage design for director Lennox Robinson's 1927 production of *The Emperor Jones*, Eugene O'Neill's expressionist tragedy from 1920. This was Robinson's second production of O'Neill's work. For the Dublin Drama League in 1922, he staged *Diff'rent*, a tragedy about a failed marriage. The *Irish Times* critic wrote: "The dramatic note [O'Neill] strikes in "Diff'rent" is something very different from what we are accustomed to on the Abbey stage".<sup>127</sup> More formative perhaps was Robinson's rare performance as an actor - under the pseudonym Paul Ruttledge (Ferrar and Clarke 29) - in the League's 1925 production of *The Spook Sonata*, or August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata*. David Kuhns says

<sup>126</sup> *The Story Brought by Brigit* (1924) by Augusta Gregory, *Oedipus the King* (1926) by W.B. Yeats, *The Emperor Jones* (1927) by Eugene O'Neill, *Sancho's Master* (1927) by Augusta Gregory, *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1927) by Bernard Shaw, and *King Lear* (1928) by William Shakespeare.

<sup>127</sup> THE ABBEY THEATRE: TWO AMERICAN PLAYS *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Mar 20, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 4.

Strindberg's play clearly influenced early expressionist plays: "the resulting "half-reality" of plays like *The Ghost Sonata* [...] reveals a dialectic between an inner "deep" perspective and an outwardly realistic "wide" perspective" (97).

After a brief run by the Dublin Drama League, Robinson's production of *The Emperor Jones* opened at the Abbey Theatre on January 24th 1927, with set design by Dorothy Travers-Smith. Its initial run was for seven performances, the same as a majority of the Abbey's productions that year. Comparatively, Michael C. Madden's *Parted* and George Shiels's *Cartney and Kevney* ran for six performances, and Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* ran for only two nights. "So intense was the dramatic quality," noted the *Irish Times* critic on *The Emperor Jones*, that some audience members "could not stand the strain" and left at the end of the third scene.<sup>128</sup> Notably, the New York premiere of O'Neill's play cast black actor Charles Sidney Gilpin to play the African-American character Brutus Jones, but the Abbey's production cast white actor Samuel John Waddell.

O'Neill's play is set on an island in the West Indies. It finds Smithers, a Cockney trader, arriving in the palace chamber of Emperor Jones, abandoned by its staff. Jones, it turns out, is a picture of self-invention - an escaped U.S. convict who convinced the natives he's their ruler, and believes only a silver bullet can kill him. Now fearing a revolution by the natives, he escapes through the forest, but his surroundings warp around him to show horrors from the past - Jeff, a man he murdered in a dice game, for instance. But these apparitions steadily suggest more systemic and racial traumas - the sight of a chain gang of black men controlled by a white guard, and, particularly, an uneasy scene showing the auction of slaves to planters. The silver bullet Jones keeps for himself, he fires at the crocodile god, a terrifying creature summoned by a witch doctor. But before Jones can escape the forest, Smithers assists the natives in tracking him, and they kill him with silver bullets.

### 3.2 Staging the Shock of Modernity

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<sup>128</sup> "EMPEROR JONES.": PRODUCTION BY DUBLIN DRAMA LEAGUE The *Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Jan 17, 1927; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The *Irish Times* and The *Weekly Irish Times* pg. 4



*The Emperor Jones* (1927). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.

The stage design for *The Emperor Jones* exteriorises the psychological interiority of the play, particularly the embedded trauma of slavery in the United States. While that history should not be conflated with Ireland’s colonial past, it’s not hard to suspect that an Irish audience, particularly in the fragmented years of the Irish Free State, might have registered its historical anxieties as colonial subjects. Brendan Bradshaw once described the “catastrophic dimension” of Irish history: “Seared as the record is by traumatic dislocations, by lethal racial antagonisms, and, indeed, by its own nineteenth-century version of a holocaust” (338). As a consequence, Luke Gibbons suspects, Ireland did not have to await the 20th century to undergo “the shock of modernity.” Gibbons writes: “disintegration and fragmentation were already part of its history so that, in crucial but not always welcome sense, Irish culture experienced modernity before its time” (6).

Four years after an embittering Civil War, Irish audiences may have seen something of their fragmentary postcolonial experience in *The Emperor Jones*. Indeed, it was a popular production - it was revived six months later, in July 1927. The realism in O’Neill’s play cedes to expressionism once it enters the forest - explained, in plot terms, by the witch doctor’s torturing spell. Jones, we see, is forced to re-tread the historical sufferings associated with his race. Upon encountering the chain gang, the

white guard motions Jones to join the convicts, and he “gets to his feet in a hypnotised stupor,” succumbing to their mechanical movement (40). Later, when he’s forced to stand on the auction block, the scene sounds full of fear:

[JONES] sees the [white PLANTERS] on all sides, looks wildly for some opening to escape, sees none, screams and leaps madly to the top of the stump to get as far away from them as possible. He stands there, cowering, paralysed with horror (44).

This all suggests a freighted portrayal of a racial history.

Such a stark look at oppression may have resonated with Dublin audiences in 1927. It’s clear that Jones himself has abused his power as emperor. He’s taxed the natives and put their money into a foreign bank. “Blimey! You’ve squeezed ‘em dry,” observes Smithers, to which Jones responds: “No dey ain’t all dry yet. I’s still heah, ain’t I?” (14). But it seems O’Neill is ultimately sympathetic to Jones, a man whose persecution onto others is probably internalised - historically dealt by white planters. When he’s dead in the end, Smithers is the play’s most conspicuous figure, remarking: “Where’s yer ‘igh an’ mighty airs now, yer bloomin’ Majesty?” (54).

### 3.3 Stage Design as Expressionist

Expressionist theatre’s demands on stage design has often been concerned with assisting the actor to embody the play’s tragedy. According to Kuhns:

the emphatic visual gestures in scene design and lighting - together with the bold strokes and accents of characterisation and dialogue, costuming, and make-up - stimulated, indeed forced, the actor to “feel” the performance space and be shaped by its textures and rhythms (92).

The emphatic visuals in *The Emperor Jones* were achieved through use of Edward Gordon Craig’s screens, acquired by the Abbey in 1911. According to Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth: “Spaces created by the *Screens* were infinitely variable and additional use of light manipulated the flexible features of the schemes”

(20). Robinson used the ivory-coloured screens to create the palace chamber in scene one, against which the “eye-smiting scarlet” (O’Neill 7) of Jones’s throne and his “light-blue uniform coat” (10) must have made for a stylised scene.

Leaving the palace for the forest, the production transformed through Dorothy Travers-Smith’s set design. The screens are refigured and black curtains drape from above. These could be repositioned to morph and suggest surroundings in the play, such as the “small triangular clearing” (O’Neill 34) in scene three, or the “wide dirt road” (37) in scene four. Under the controlled lighting suggested by Travers-Smith’s designs in the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive - painted in detailed watercolours - these sculpted woodland scenes often look claustrophobic in intensity, with bright orange, blue and purple lights penetrating a dark stage.

From this, we might suspect that Travers-Smith was using Kenneth Macgowan and Robert Edmond Jones’s *Continental Stagecraft* as a reference. There, they observed that all productions in Berlin were hung in black curtains. Macgowan speculated this was an “attempt to get a background of emptiness”. The only colours to break the black was the “red of blood” and “blue that strikes across the black a symbol of a sinister cruelty” (53). But more specifically, Travers-Smith may have seen photographs of the premiere production of *The Emperor Jones* by the Provincetown Players. Designed by Cleon Throckmorton, that production was backed by a sky dome. It gradually came into view, with the forest trees being stripped away as the play progressed. Travers-Smith, like Throckmorton before her, let this kind of bright backing (using the screens as opposed to a sky dome) to be fully exposed at the height of the play’s action, when Jones encounters the witch doctor, lending a blinding intensity that silhouetted figures onstage.

The use of these emphatic visuals, I argue, charged Robinson’s production as an expressionist piece of theatre that roused anxieties. According to Kuhns, expressionism “sought to represent not the psyche of an individual pursuing his particular fate but rather the internal “spiritual” condition of humankind as a whole” (86). Though O’Neill offers a specific context of suffering, I argue that within this production Irish audiences may have recognised a modernity that shook their own

sense of history. In writing the auction scene, O'Neill's directions instruct how the planters, no less than the audience, should judge Jones as a potential slave:

*Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb, as they can see. Very strong still, in spite of his being middle-aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable. Will and gentleman start the bidding?* (44).

The design, evoking an internal spiritual pain, may also underline the traumatic dislocations that have seared Irish history.

### **3.4 In Performance: Signs of Traumatic Dislocation**

*The Emperor Jones* ran for a total of 14 performances across 1927. It was seen at the Abbey again in 1931, for a further seven performances. That revival may have been a direct contestation against the new Gate Theatre, opened in 1930, which quickly became the home of the *avant garde*. Around this time, O'Neill's *In the Zone*, a drama about the crew of a tramp steamer in World War I, first staged at the Abbey in 1926, was revived in a 1930 production by Robinson. The *Irish Times* deemed it a "finely acted" study of "war-strain".<sup>129</sup> However, this was likely less radical than the Gate Theatre's presentations of the expressionist *The Hairy Ape* (1928) and tragic *Anna Christie* (1929) in the Peacock Theatre. Both Robinson and Travers-Smith would stage one more O'Neill play, *Days Without End*, in 1934. Considered the playwright's final experiment in expressionism, this play demanded use of masks. The *Manchester Guardian's* review of the Abbey production found it was "excellently produced by Lennox Robinson" and Travers-Smith's design for the final scene - "that of the Cross and the stained-glass windows" - "is particularly

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<sup>129</sup> THE ABBEY THEATRE: A TRIPLE BILL *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Mar 12, 1930; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times*

effective”.<sup>130</sup> After that, there wouldn't be an Abbey production of a Eugene O'Neill play until *Long Days Journey Into Night* in 1959.

It's hard to identify other modernist forms of “traumatic dislocations” on the Abbey stage. If we agree with Tahrir Hamdi that W.B. Yeats's *On Baile's Strand* (1904) shows a “radical act of self-sacrifice in order to break the English master/Irish slave relationship upon which empire is based,” (2) then the playwright's revisiting and abstraction of the same plot in dance play *Fighting the Waves* (1929) may have reflected the freighted legacy of the revolutionary period. The eventual production of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* in 1936, with its intensely expressionist second act, also offered a stark portrayal of history. But expressionism, the major modernist movement in European theatre at the time, soon lost traction. Though plays such as Lennox Robinson's *Church Street* (1932) and Teresa Deevy's *Katie Roche* (1936) would be written with expressionist elements in mind, they don't seem to have received an explicitly expressionist production. As a result, expressionist design practically disappeared from the Abbey's repertoire in the 1930s.

#### **4.1 *From Morn to Midnight* (1927) by Georg Kaiser**

Expressionist design for *From Morn to Midnight* was implicit in expressing the “dissident energies of the revolutionary period,” specifically towards the alienating experience of official institutions and patriarchal family. This was director Denis Johnston's first production at the Abbey Theatre. A practising solicitor, Johnston also had a studious interest in international theatre. He joined the Dublin Drama League in 1925 and acted in Jacinto Benavente's *The School for Princesses*. While residing in London in 1926, he saw director Peter Godfrey's expressionist productions of Ernst Toller's *Masses and the Man* and Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight* at the Gate Studio (Cave 128). The former was also staged by the Dublin Drama League in 1925, and perhaps, for Dublin audiences, the closest in form to Kaiser's play. The *Irish Times*

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<sup>130</sup> ABBEY THEATRE, DUBLIN: O'Neill's 'Day Without End' A E M The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959); Apr 19, 1934; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer pg. 5.

critic commended it for offering “a fragment of the social revolution of the Twentieth Century”.<sup>131</sup>

Johnston’s production of *From Morn to Midnight*, with set design by Norah McGuinness, opened on November 13th 1927, and was the first production to run in the Abbey’s new experimental theatre: the Peacock Theatre. It ran for only two performances, which was comparatively low, considering most productions that year ran for seven performances. One critic described it as “a strange play,” but praised Johnston’s efforts. He also insinuated that the direction was harmonious with the design: “one of the reasons for [the production] going so well is that the eye is not distracted - some might even say pained - by the flamboyant eccentricity of the background, as designed”.<sup>132</sup>

Kaiser’s tragedy, first seen in 1917, follows a cashier who works in a clearly corrupt bank. He’s mesmerised when a woman in rich furs enters, and, believing her to be tempting him, commits embezzlement for her. He brings 60,000 marks to her hotel room, and is shocked to realise she has no desire for him. He retreats into a snow-covered field where a tree transforms into a skeleton and reminds him of death. The cashier decides to live his life anew. He leaves his house before dinner, sending his family into a shock that kills his mother. He’s adored at a bike race for the cash prizes he offers the winners, but leaves angrily when someone more important, the royal highness, enters. He’s also humiliated trying to dance with women in a cabaret club. Finally, he’s led to a Salvation Hall by a woman, the Salvation Lass, and confesses his embezzlement to the sinners. But she reports him to the police, and before he can be arrested, the cashier falls entangled into electric wires and dies.

#### **4.2 Staging Crises of Labour, Patriarchy and Religion**

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<sup>131</sup> DUBLIN DRAMA LEAGUE: INTERESTING PRODUCTIONS The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Jan 5, 1925; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 3

<sup>132</sup> "THE PEACOOK.": OPENING OA A NEW DUBLIN THEATRE The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Nov 14, 1927; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 4



**Fig 6. Set design by Norah McGuinness for *From Morn to Midnight* (1927).  
Source: Elaine Sisson, “Experimentalism and the Irish Stage: Theatre and German Expressionism in the 1920s,” 40.**

The stage design for *From Morn to Midnight* exteriorises the psychological interiority of the play, particularly its portrayal of alienation from labour, patriarchy and religion. Through expressionist effects, this tragedy set in Germany could show the “spiritual condition of humankind as a whole” (Kuhns 86), and so audiences in the Irish Free State may have recognised their own fragmented experience. The once inciting labour movement, established by James Larkin in 1912 to reorganise workers, had long since been absorbed into a broad anti-establishment. As Roy Foster argues: “nationalism not only absorbed pre-war social radicalism, but apparently negated it” (446). Another aspect of Irish life in the 1920s and 1930s was its defining familism. Brown theorises that “In the years following the Famine Irish rural life was characterised [...] by a calculating sensitivity to the economic meaning of marriage” (11). This assigned strict gender roles: the husband as dominant and the wife responsible for domestic economy of the house. These assigned roles were reinforced by an ultramontane church, grounded in a rigid piety. Canon Sheehan judged Irish Catholics by their “self-sacrifice, the devotion to duty, the fidelity to their flocks” (Heuser 126).

Staged in this environment, *From Morn to Midnight* must have been resonant. Alone in the snow-covered field, the cashier considers the godlike quality of his manager not only as an employer paying him but as someone he's stolen money from and, ironically, set him free.

CASHIER. You are my sole creditor. How so? I owe you my life! Good God - I exaggerate? You have electrified me - set me free. One step toward you and I enter a land of miracles (53)

Kaiser also directs our sympathy to the waiter in the cabaret scene. The cashier leaves money to pay for champagne and caviar, but it's later stolen by evening-dressed "gentlemen" who enter the room. The waiter stresses that he has a family needing the money, but the men lock him in the room, leaving him to contemplate suicide: "I'm going - into the river!" (126).

Satire of traditional family life couldn't have been common in 1920s Ireland, but Kaiser's play offered a scathing scene. With the cashier returned to his family home, the dutiful operations of the family are clear - daughters playing piano and sewing, a grandmother asleep, a wife working in the kitchen. But he doesn't find this fulfilling and decides to leave.

WIFE. Then where are you going?

CASHIER. That's the question, Wife. I've climbed down from wind-swept trees to find an answer. I came here first. Warm and cosy, this nest; I won't deny its good points; but it doesn't stand the final test (70).

The cashier's rejection of this patriarchal family is played as so shocking, his own mother collapses and dies. The religious code that sustains this familism is also under attack in Kaiser's play. Wryly, the cabaret scene where the cashier chases lustily after masked women, is initially set up to be a dinner for his daughter's confirmation. More explicitly, the final scene in the salvation hall shows the cashier's slow journey to the penitent form - a vacant bench for sinners to confess before a crowd. But this search

for absolution is eventually corrupted by material greed, as the Salvation Lass leads in a policeman to arrest the cashier, in return for a cash reward.

### 4.3 Stage Design as Schrei Expressionist

In his study of expressionist theatre, David Kuhns says that actors strove to portray themselves as ecstatically possessed, culminating in a scream of “*Schrei*”. In visual terms, this undoubtedly looked to the warping anxiety of Edvard Munch’s 1895 lithograph *The Scream* for inspiration. But Kuhns also observes the “emphatic accents in certain works of Gauguin and Van Gogh” (101). The resulting style was seen onscreen in Robert Wiene’s 1920 horror film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Frank Witford vividly described this cinematography in 1979:

The brickwork, flagstones, windows, even the shadows cast by the buildings, actors and furniture have been painted onto the sets with more concern for their vitality as forms as such than for any approximation to reality. It is as though the actors are walking around in an enormous Expressionist painting (26).

If up until now expressionist painting was viewed a part of expressionist performance, *Dr. Caligari* inverted that perception.

By looking at Norah McGuinness’s set design for *From Morn to Midnight*, one could make a good case that Wiene’s cinematography for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was an influence on the designer.<sup>133</sup> A design shows the interior of a bank, its walls and doorways accented, painted in a palette of grey and white. Conspicuously, the teller’s

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<sup>133</sup> *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* seems to have a limited release in Ireland in the 1920s, shown only on occasion by the Irish Film Society (See IRISHMAN'S DIARY: Painting in the Street : Lord Longford's Players : ... The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Aug 27, 1938; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 6). It is more likely that McGuinness saw the film while she lived in London between 1924-1926. An English distributor acquired the rights in 1923. (See: THE WEEK ON THE FILM: THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959); Nov 3, 1923; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer pg. 9).

window is red, drawing attention to the play's capitalist critique. McGuinness's set seems to have been flexible. The plush doorways and curtain could accommodate scenes in the hotel and cabaret. The ascending lines of white on the walls probably evoked the snow-piled field.

This emphatic design, I argue, framed the production as expressionist, and capable of rousing anxieties in an audience. Kaiser's portrayal of alienation from capitalism, patriarchal familism and the church must have been resonant for audiences in Dublin in 1927. His cashier broadly embodies many of these distresses. In the end, Kaiser distinguishes between the pain of the body and the soul, as the cashier meets the skeleton from the snow-covered field again: "From first to last you sit there, naked bone. From morn to midnight, I rage in a circle" (153).

#### **4.4 In Performance: Signs of Critique**

*From Morn to Midnight* ran for only two performances. None of Georg Kaiser's other plays were seen at the Abbey Theatre. Perhaps this reflects a lack of appetite for Kaiser's critiques of capitalist and religious society - there certainly wasn't anything seen at the Abbey Theatre before that was as explicit. But plays on those themes would come later. Teresa Deevy's *The King of Spain's Daughter* (1935) and *Katie Roche* (1936), with hints of expressionism, critiqued familism in Irish life. Paul Vincent Carroll showed how the church drifted from its founding beliefs in *Shadow and Substance* (1937). Kaiser's play wasn't produced at the Abbey again but determined critical plays did follow.

#### **5.1 *King Lear* (1928) by William Shakespeare**

Expressionist design for *King Lear* was implicit in expressing the "dissident energies of the revolutionary period," particularly the trauma of the Civil War. This was director Denis Johnston's (under the pseudonym E.W. Tocher) second production for the Abbey Theatre, after *From Morn to Midnight* in 1927. In May 1928, he directed *The Fountain*, Eugene O'Neill's play about a conquistador's search for the fountain of youth, for the Dublin Drama League. Its weighty mythic quality and free-form

episodic structure suggest the influence of expressionism. The *Irish Times* critic praised the production, and observed “acting of rare quality”.<sup>134</sup>

Johnston’s production of *King Lear*, with costuming and set design by Dorothy Travers-Smith, opened at the Abbey Theatre on November 26th 1928. Its initial run was for seven performances, the same as a majority of productions that year. Comparatively, a production of Henrik Ibsen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* ran for five performances, and Brinsley MacNamara’s *The Master* for six - though the latter was revived soon after. The *Irish Times* critic described *King Lear* as “satisfying in every sense”.<sup>135</sup> The *Evening Herald* critic praised F.J. McCormick’s performance as Lear, saying he “show[ed] the house the weird and rugged figure of Lear,” and “displayed much ability in entering into the passionate and other moods of the king”.<sup>136</sup>

In Shakespeare’s tragedy, Lear is first seen dividing his kingdom among his three daughters, based on how well they can flatter him. That’s no problem for the Machiavellian Goneril and Regan, but Cordelia, too honest to praise, is banished. Similarly, Edgar, son of Lear’s loyal earl Gloucester, vanishes when his brother Edmund convinces him he’s in danger. With Goneril and Regan stripping away Lear’s army, he becomes mad, reflected in a thunderous storm. His allies, including Cordelia and Edgar, make an attempt to arrest Goneril, Regan and Edmund for treason but it comes at a price - Cordelia is executed. Lear dies of heartbreak.

## 5.2 Staging the Civil War

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<sup>134</sup> " THE FOUNTAIN.": DUBLIN DRAMA LEAGUE *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); May 7, 1928; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 11

<sup>135</sup> "KING LEAR.": ABBERY THEATRE STAGES SHAKESPEARE *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Nov 27, 1928; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 4

<sup>136</sup> *Evening Herald* 1891-current, Tuesday, October 28, 1930, apg. 5



**Dorothy Travers-Smith's set design for *King Lear* (1928). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUIG.**

The stage design for *King Lear* exteriorises the psychological interiority of the play, particularly embittered feelings over governance and split territories. Through expressionist effects, this tragedy set in England could show the “spiritual condition of humankind as a whole” (Kuhns 86), and so audiences in the Irish Free State may have recognised their own fragmented experience after the Civil War. Roy Foster says “the civil war created a caesura across Irish history, separating parties, interests and even families, and creat[ed] the rationale for political division that endured” (511). By 1922, the Irish Free State government was established but the split in the IRA sent both sides warring across the country, until the anti-treaty side dumped their arms in May 1923. The Free State government had responded with draconian measures, including the carrying out of 77 executions (Foster 513). But as Foster points out, the government’s dominion status was enough to be legitimate: “public opinion did not repudiate such policies; the Free State government was strongly supported, even at its most coercive, because it was ‘Irish’” (513).

In the period following the Civil War, *King Lear* may have been resonant for Irish audiences. Lear is uneasy about division of the territories. “We shall express our

darker purpose,” he says, requesting a map of the kingdom (62). It’s clear that this division of the land, coinciding with his daughters’ marriages, is an effort to protect the stability of the country for years to come.

LEAR.            We have this hour a constant will to publish  
                          Our daughters’ several dowers, that future strife  
                          May be prevented now (62).

While the kingdom officially divides into thirds - one ruled by Lear, another by Goneril and her husband Albany, and a last territory by Regan and Cornwall - there is also the emotional separation, or partitioning, of Lear and Cordelia, with the former banishing the latter.

LEAR.            Here I disclaim all my paternal care,  
                          Propinquity and property of blood,  
                          And as a stranger to my heart and me  
                          Hold thee from this for ever (65).

It is Lear’s loyal earl Kent who is most shocked by the king’s pageant-like contest of flattery, but he’s also probably the most resolved to repair the damage done by Lear’s arrogance. When dispatched to France, he speaks in double meanings, announcing he’s going to a new country, but is actually going to reform England: “Thus Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu [...] He’ll shape his old course in a country new” (67).

The cracks in Lear’s plan widen as the play develops, and political instability begins to set in. He commands his servant - a disguised Kent - to withhold intelligence from Gonerill. Both Kent and Gloucester are captured as political prisoners. But Shakespeare suspects others are most vulnerable, as Lear, in his madness, becomes sympathetic to the country’s citizens: “Some people won’t have shelter from the storm” (123).

### **5.3 Stage Design as Emblematically Expressionist**

David Kuhns characterises the late style of expressionist theatre by its “emblematic” mode. In these performances, production elements were unified to clarify a controlling idea: “Ideally, every movement or utterance was to reinforce - that is, be emblematic of - this idea” (174). This was the effect achieved by German director Leopold Jessner, for whom political conflict was spiritual conflict, and so effective representation could occur only in symbolic terms. Kuhns says that in Jessner’s productions, isolated figures were seen against geometric settings that were “monumental,” that is: “a kind of abstractionism the dimensions of which are massive in terms of the setting” (196).

Jessner’s productions seem to have influenced Dorothy Travers-Smith’s set for *King Lear*. Richard Cave has speculated that Jessner’s production of *Othello*, documented in Macgowan and Jones’s *Continental Stagecraft* book, was a reference. Macgowan identified:

two platforms, one on top of the other, each reached by two of three steps, the lower a long ellipse almost as large as the stage, the upper one smaller and proportionately broader; upon the upper platform Jessner places certain indications of settings (131).

Travers-Smith’s designs, painted in vibrant watercolours, include similar steps as their focal centre. With performers masked by the curtains, we can argue that this design achieved the same effect as Jessner’s production, that is “to have an actor walk straight up out of the back of the stage, and appear in a dominating position in the middle of the action” (Macgowan and Jones 132).

This design, I argue, is expressionist through its “monumental” quality. The storm scene, for instance, is represented by massive and geometric lightning bolt that surely dwarfed the figure of Lear. The slyly accented detail in an art deco-style window in Lear’s throne room also suggests expressionist design. It shows three traditional emblems - a bronze lion, flags in blue and white, yellow and black - streaking out in different directions, much like the dividing of Lear's kingdom. By framing the production as expressionist, this design may have roused Irish audiences’ anxieties around division of territories, particularly partition and the Civil War that followed. In

that respect, some of the Earl of Albany's last lines might well describe Ireland in the 1920s.

ALBANY.     The weight of this sad time we must obey;  
                   Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

#### **5.4 In Performance: Signs of Partition**

*King Lear* ran for seven performances in 1928. It returned for a further seven performances in 1930, possibly as a response to the newly opened Gate Theatre and its expressionist methods of presentation. In fact, productions of Shakespeare's plays in the 1930s - *Macbeth* (1934) and *Coriolanus* (1936) - seem to have been partly deliberate attempts to compete with the Gate's non-Irish repertoire. After that, Shakespeare's plays disappeared from the Abbey's repertoire for four decades.

I have sought to show here that Denis Johnston's production of *King Lear* can be read as an allegory of the partitioning of Ireland in 1921. That no play produced at Abbey showed events around the Anglo-Irish Treaty may speak something about the sensitivity of that subject in Irish society. The closest may have been A.P. Fanning's 1934 play *Vigil* about republican prisoners. That sought to show how people on both sides - pro-treaty and anti-treaty - were not divided by animosity but by principle.

#### **6. Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to show how stage design reveals modernities in Ireland in the years following the Civil War. I use T.J. Clark's definition of modernity as meaning "contingency," or signalling a social order that has "turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future - of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information" (7). Expressionist displays can rouse historical anxieties. Dorothy Travers-Smith's dark design for *The Emperor Jones* (1927) showed the "shock of modernity," and Irish audiences may have glimpsed the traumatic dislocations that punctuate their own national history. I've also shown how the expressionist cinematography in *The*

*Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) may have influenced Norah McGuinness's set design for *From Morn to Midnight* (1927). The accented and distorted detail in McGuinness's design may well have enabled Irish audiences to recognise the alienating experience of Irish capitalism, familism and the Catholic church. Travers-Smith's emblematic design for *King Lear* (1928) showed traces of Leopold Jessner's productions, and though its "monumental detail" could have accentuated the cracks in Lear's kingdom, in an Ireland that was embittered by partition and the Civil War.

Expressionism, the major modernist movement in theatre, clearly arrived at the Abbey Theatre in the 1920s. Therefore, the controversial rejection of Sean O'Casey's play *The Silver Tassie*, which may have been thought to be too difficult for the theatre's resources, was more likely personally motivated by the Abbey directoriate. Expressionist design would soon become unpopular in the 1930s. In an Ireland officially declaring itself a republic in 1937, the re-atomising aspects of realism might be more important. That's not to disregard international influences completely. We'll see that the Abbey's first resident designer, Tanya Moiseiwitsch, ushered in architectural influences from wide afield, and assisted the theatre in its important need to become cosmopolitan.

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## CHAPTER THREE

INTERNATIONALISING IRELAND AND COSMOPOLITAN DESIGN, 1935-  
1949**Introduction**

In January 1935 the Abbey Theatre went dark for two months. Two English artists - the director Blandon Peake and designer James Bould - had delivered an energetic programme for the theatre between October and December 1934, but this didn't perform well at the box office. Their contracts weren't extended, and the theatre was closed. Interestingly, Peake and Bould's presentation of non-Irish plays such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Molière's *School for Scandal* suggests some inspiration from the Gate Theatre, whose recent repertoire included *Hamlet* and Bernard Shaw's *Dark Lady of the Sonnets*. On January 24th, when the Abbey board met to discuss the stultifying state of its theatre, W.B. Yeats read aloud a memorandum acknowledging the Gate as a threat:

Drama enticing to the intellect and delighting the eye is now found upon another stage; and while resource-ful and experimental, that stage deflects main attention from the National Theatre.<sup>137</sup>

In a few short years the Gate Theatre's stylish design had made it a serious commercial competitor, forcing the Abbey to consider its own brand stewardship. A few months later, Tanya Moiseiwitsch, the Abbey's first resident designer, began working at the theatre and revolutionised its displays.

This chapter explores unchartered orientalism and cosmopolitanism in Ireland as reflected in stage designs at the Abbey Theatre between 1935 and 1949. It argues that

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<sup>137</sup> "Abbey Theatre Minute Book 1932-1936". 24 Jan 1935. [digital.library.nuigalway.ie](http://digital.library.nuigalway.ie).

within productions at the theatre were projected modernities concerning Ireland's internationalism. As explained in my Introduction chapter, I use T.J. Clark's definition of modernity as meaning "contingency," or signalling from a social order than has "turned from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future - of goods, pleasures, freedoms, forms of control over nature, or infinities of information" (7). The domineering element of Taoiseach Eamon de Valera's governance in the 1930s and 1940s was the pursuit of self-sufficiency. According to historian Clair Wills: "Native industries were to be encouraged by protectionist economic policies" (27). These policies obviously align with a political isolationism. I argue that in this period, stage design reacted to this isolationism by projecting modernities glimpsing an Irish society that was international and cosmopolitan. While these cosmopolitan designs didn't become the Abbey Theatre house style by any means, I argue that individually they ruptured the narrow conservatism of the period.

Robert J. Holton defines cosmopolitanism at its simplest: the idea that citizenship can and ought to be founded on a world-wide community (4). The term is often used in relation to global inequality. However, Ulf Hannerz contends that the dual character of the term, relating to politics on one hand, must also refer to consumerism and the satisfaction of desires through consumption of other cultural products or ways of life (20). In that respect, Mica Nava's study into cosmopolitan consumerism in early twentieth century London, using the department store Selfridge's as an important site transforming consumers through cultural differences, is a fascinating comparison for the Abbey Theatre. Nava defines cosmopolitanism as a "structure of feeling", as an empathetic and inclusive set of transnational identifications (3).

Any normalising of international identifications in the 1930s and 1940s must be seen as subversive, considering that Taoiseach Eamon de Valera's vision of Ireland was for a genuinely independent, self-sufficient rural republic. According to historian Terence Brown, political policy preferred "an Ireland of frugal, God-fearing country folk to any absorption of the country into industrial Europe" (133). Given that context, this project considers the revolutionary possibilities of international design at the Abbey Theatre, which could deflect historically prescribed ideas of Irish primitivism on one hand, and modernise Irish cultural life on the other. A majority of productions in this

period were not so explicitly cosmopolitan in style, meaning that the productions chosen as case studies in this chapter must have been striking for Abbey audiences.

This chapter identifies an intense engagement with orientalism in its first case study - the Abbey Theatre's 1936 production of *Hassan* by James Elroy Flecker. This significant production has yet to receive scholarly attention. I have included it in this project because its distinctive design stands out for its orientalism, making it unlike all other designs for Abbey Theatre productions that I've encountered. Where that stage design crudely depicted life in West Asia as under developed, something more constructive may be gleaned from the Art Deco design for *Wind From the West* (1936) by Maeve O'Callaghan, the chapter's second case study, which sees Irish people living in an English town. Later, some plays set in Ireland show a complete geographical dislocation, such as the 1943 revival of Samuel John Waddell's *Peter*, the final case study here, which was dressed in an explicitly Mediterranean style.

Such examination of set design will reveal uncharted aspects of the Abbey Theatre's history. The design, shown here to subvert isolationism, compliments Lionel Pilkington's observation of the theatre resuming a "more combative role in relation to nationalist majority views" in the 1930s, as suggested by productions like Paul Vincent Carroll's *Shadow and Substance* and Seán O'Faolain's *She Had to Do Something* (131). The content of those plays directly tackled the social conservatism reified by clericalism and censorship. This chapter argues that the production of plays with international design was another approach to subverting such traditionalism.

According to Joseph Lennon, Irish orientalism in the early twentieth century had a "both/and" approach, as Irish artists belonged "to both the imperial metropole and the colonised periphery" (xxiii). But from that position, Irish orientalism didn't always support cultural decolonisation in West Asian colonies, as director Hugh Hunt's production of *Hassan* demonstrates with its mystical Eastern design by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, which I argue is an example of what Homi. K. Bhaba calls postcolonial "mimicry". Hunt and Moiseiwitsch also brought design from far afield in their presentation of *Wind From the West*, which offered audiences an explicitly feminist critique one year before the 1937 Constitution limited women as homemakers. Though director Frank Dermody's 1944 revival of *Peter* by Samuel John Waddell

was less thematically charged, its Mediterranean design by Alicia Sweetman is difficult to place in Ulster - its setting. Such cosmopolitanism is “treasonous,” I argue, using Rebecca L. Walkowitz’s use of the term as meaning “the refusal to tell a consistent story about politics, about oneself, or about the past” (31). Sweetman’s design is political because it refuses to set Waddell’s play in de Valera’s Ireland.

### **1. The Republic of Ireland and Cosmopolitanism**

Conservatism in Irish life truly deepened in the 1930s. De Valera’s Fianna Fáil government set forward a programme of self-sufficiency concerned with the creation and success of native industries. The government abolished free trade and erected high tariffs, prompting a trade war with England. Farmers suffering from the disastrous drop in cattle exports were encouraged to turn to tillage. The state increased its involvement in the manufacturing industry, in the building of houses and provision of services. As a result, industrial output rose by 40 per cent between 1931 and 1936 (Cullen 178-180).

Terence Brown argues that de Valera’s policies expressed “a conviction that the life of an Irish small farmer represented a purity and decency of life that could set Ireland apart from the more commercial societies that surround her” (133). It’s unsurprising, then, that this climate of economic nationalism nurtured an attitude of xenophobic suspicion that accompanied anything hinting at cosmopolitanism. This took form in the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act, which according to Clair Wills was “designed to protect Irish readers from the immoral literature produced across the channel” (25). Some 1,200 books and some 140 periodicals were banned between 1930 and 1939 (Brown 137).

Catholic thinking dominated public life. This was made clear by the large-scale celebration that had marked the 1932 Eucharistic Congress, decorated with 12 miles of bunting and drawing one million people. Judging its success, historian Diarmaid Ferriter said it “[made] difficult to avoid the conclusion that this was indeed a Catholic state for a Catholic people” (408). Catholicism was also influential on legislation, leading to the banning of sale and importation of contraceptives in 1935. It was inevitable that the 1937 Irish Constitution would be conceived with Catholic

social thinking in mind. “The Family” was recognised as the fundamental unit group of society and divorce was banned. The Constitution recognised the special position of the Catholic Church as guardian of the people’s faith, and included a clause preventing the state from interfering with the Church’s control of education in denominational schools.

All these efforts were to seal Ireland’s self-sufficiency but de Valera’s model of economic nationalism ultimately experienced unremarkable growth. The home market was too small to allow new Irish industries to expand, and export business was difficult as small companies found it hard to compete in international markets where costs were high. Ultimately, native industry couldn’t compensate for losses in exports. Elaine Sisson and Linda King have argued that this economic model stunted developments in Irish design.

The restrictive nature of de Valera’s policies of protectionism resulted in an internal market with little or no competition, and consequently Irish companies did not initially have to develop distinctive packaging or sophisticated advertising campaigns to showcase their goods. (33)

Competition drives design, as evidenced by W.B. Yeats’s concerns about the Gate Theatre and productions “delighting the eye”.

New technologies that would allow Irish people to gain a sense of life elsewhere grew popular in this period. The middle class motorcar became more common than it had been in the 1920s, with over 10,000 private motor vehicles registered between 1931 and 1937 (Brown 141). Radio also gained popularity. Broadcasts in the 1920s had been of low power and heard only in small parts of the country, but a high-powered station in Athlone opened in 1933, and 100,000 radio licences had been issued by 1937. Also, the popularity of Hollywood films was widespread throughout towns, cities and the countryside.

Ongoing historical research has uncovered Ireland’s hidden negotiation with modernity in the 1930s. In her architectural history of Dublin, Ellen Rowley reminds us that while early twentieth century buildings revived older architectural styles

through stone cladding and architectural ornament, they were actually structured out of modern techniques such as steel frames and poured concrete foundations (25). If the building of the Electricity Supply Board's works at Ardnacrusha (1924-1929) sent out a signal for what would be termed the "International Style", architect Vincent Kelly answered with his white plaster walls and flat roof design of a transformer station at Dublin's Fleet Street, built between 1925-1930 (36).



**Foyer of the Alliance and Dublin Consumers' Gas Showrooms, now the Trinity College School of Nursing. Source: [nursing-midwifery.tcd.ie](http://nursing-midwifery.tcd.ie).**

That design was acceptable for an industrial building. Some commercial properties answered the call for the 'International Style' by satisfying modernist and traditional impulses within the stylish form of Art Deco, what Rowley defines as "an interesting mix of ornate symmetry (Classicism) with Modernist materials and demeanour" (38). This was principally seen in the work of the architectural firm Robinson + Keefe in the early 1930s, who designed the Alliance and Dublin Consumers' Gas Showrooms (1928-1933) on D'Olier Street, and Noblet's Corner confectioners (1932) on Grafton Street. Furthermore, the passing of housing legislation in 1931 and 1932 saw the government confront the Dublin slums head-on for the first time. English architect Herbert Simms was appointed as Housing Architect to local authority Dublin Corporation, in which capacity he focused on the creation of city-centre flat schemes designed in the style of Dutch Expressionism (Rowley 43).



**Noblett's Corner. Source: comeheretome.com.**

If much of Ireland remained resistant to modernising influences, it certainly had to awaken itself to international events by the end of 1939. Dáil Éireann declared The Emergency, Ireland's neutral state during World War II. According to Brown, the war brought an experience of cultural isolationism to Ireland that was hardly different than that experienced under de Valera's protectionist policies (163). However, the depredations of the war were obvious, with the rationing of bread, tea and sugar, and short supplies of fuel that made private motoring impossible. The economy as a whole entered a decline. Yet, Ireland's remove from the conflict seemed to have given Dublin an air of bohemian excess and a hint of cosmopolitanism. The journalist Patrick Campbell recalled that "Dublin almost seemed to have a special duty, in a world gone grey and regimented, to preserve the gaieties and pleasures that we felt had vanished from everywhere else" (Campbell 151). Peter Kavanagh, the brother of the poet Patrick Kavanagh, even sensed that Dublin in the war years exuded "a certain international atmosphere" in contrast with the preceding decade (Kavanagh 57).

It wasn't only the war that had spurred Irish life towards modernisation. Browne identifies the period 1939-1945 as the beginning of a watershed in Irish life (198). The values of the rural civilization as enshrined in the Constitution of 1937 underwent

widespread rejection. Up to the late 1930s, emigration was seen as a means of preserving the family plot. But from the 1940s onwards emigration comes to represent a rejection of rural life, and demoralized rural scenes became increasingly circulated in representations such as Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* in 1942. By 1948, it became widely accepted that emigration had reached crisis point, and a commission was appointed to prepare a report on the matter. It revealed that rural people found conditions in the countryside quite unacceptable. Four out of five farm dwellings were without special facilities such as flush lavatory or chemical closet. The commission also noted that through cinema and radio, and experiences either personal or of relatives, rural people had been made aware of the contrast between their standard of life and that in other countries.

Since independence, Catholic magazines planted distrust of modernity in the guise of cinema, print and radio. In their view, Michael Flanagan observes, a "determined attack was being made through these new media forms to lower moral standards and to undermine the Christian life of Irish people" (121). As it turns out, a report undertaken in 1948 proves that modern communications had indeed interfered with the social values that dominated rural Ireland since the nineteenth century. The 1940s saw a greater number of people, particularly young women, leaving rural Ireland than in earlier decades, leaving the countryside and small towns for an urban world glimpsed in film and magazine. In the next two decades emigration, principally to Britain, would account for a major decline in rural population.

Old forces seemed on the brink by November 1942 with censorship debates in the Seanad allowing substantial criticisms of censorship to be voiced in public. A campaign against censorship began to be waged in the pages of the *Irish Times* and Seán Ó'Faoláin's literature magazine *The Bell*. In 1943, Norah McGuinness found it possible to found the Irish Exhibition of Living Art with artists such as Mainie Jellet, Evie Hone and Louis le Brocquy. Energetically guided by McGuinness, the event became "the arbiter of artists with an interest in international developments and new ideas" (Crookshank 64). These exhibitions brought to the attention of an Irish public the fact that there were Irish painters whose work reflected the artistic concerns of the Continent. It was no longer possible to pretend that Irish art and Modernism were entirely antithetical.

The Abbey Theatre had shown a renewed interest in European plays during the short season produced by Blandon Peake and James Bould in 1934. Bould abandoned the front curtain and removed the footlights for *Macbeth*, a production that also received a built forestage (Hunt 148). These innovations aside, the season was a financial failure and the new creative team's contracts were terminated in January 1935.<sup>138</sup> The immediate concern for the board seemed to be reducing the increased power that Lennox Robinson - the manager responsible for directing plays - held since the death of Augusta Gregory in 1932. Robinson's struggle with alcoholism was beginning to affect the theatre's productions. According to Hugh Hunt, Robinson's management style had allowed discipline to slack. Productions were so badly rehearsed that "on first nights the voice of the prompter was too often heard," punctuality at rehearsals was "spasmodic" and involved little more than a "run-through for lines and moves" (Hunt 147).

During the board meeting in January 1935, it was proposed that an "advisory committee" be established to make recommendations to the board, recommendations that could only be rejected by the unanimous vote of the full board. This was to redistribute Robinson's power among the board, which soon had three new directors: the poet Fred R. Higgins, the playwright Brinsley MacNamara and former Minister for Finance Ernest Blythe. If these structural changes were made to re-energise the Abbey, a new direction was signalled in August 1935, with the belated production of Sean O'Casey's expressionist tragicomedy *The Silver Tassie* during the busy time of Dublin Horse Week.<sup>139</sup> Lionel Pilkington observes that the production coincided with the opening of the theatre's newly modernised vestibule and the abolition of its 'no smoking' rule, suggesting a bold new policy (127). *The Silver Tassie* was not without

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<sup>138</sup> Bould's designs for the Abbey Theatre were highlighted in a number of reviews. *The New York Times* described his designs for Molière's *School for Scandal* as "a bold break with even Abbey traditions, which both audience and critics applauded. ... Dublin drama lovers now anticipate some good nights at the Abbey under the young British directors". *The Irish Times* lamented their termination from the theatre, saying they had "begun to bring an atmosphere of life into it which was sadly needed".

<sup>139</sup> As established in Chapter Two, *The Silver Tassie* was controversially rejected by the Abbey Theatre back in 1928.

its protests; MacNamara publicly resigned over the production, hinting at the anti-Catholic stance of the theatre in the press (129). He was replaced by the novelist Frank O'Connor.

By gravitating to the expressionistic form of *The Silver Tassie*, and to the non-Irish programme produced by Peake and Bould in 1934, it was clear that the Abbey Theatre board desired to emulate the success of the European repertoire at the Gate Theatre. Again, the board sought to hire a manager responsible for producing plays from outside the company. Yeats engaged the English director Hugh Hunt. In the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Hunt is recorded as being born in England in 1911. As a student he became president of the Oxford University Dramatic Society, and was subsequently employed at the Maddermarket Theatre of Norwich, where he was also responsible for productions at the London Westminster Theatre. It was likely through the latter that he met the designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch. It was also at the Westminster Theatre where *The Faithful* was produced - a play by John Masefield, the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom who recommended Hunt to Yeats for the Abbey manager job.

One of Hunt's terms was the employ of a resident designer, specifically insisted on Tanya Moiseiwitsch. The Jewish Women's Archive states that Moiseiwitsch was born in London in 1914 to award-winning musicians from Ukraine and Australia. She studied art at the Central School in London, which was steeped in the principles of the English Arts and Crafts movement, before working as an apprentice scene painter at the Old Vic. Her professional debut was designing John Masefield's *The Faithful* at the Westminster Theatre in 1934. The Abbey's 1935-1936 season continued the strategy of the 1934 season but it soon became apparent that audiences could not be won over by challenging the Gate Theatre's policy of producing non-Irish plays. Instead, a regeneration of the Abbey Theatre became the focus, one that according to Hunt: "lay in a vigorous and creative approach to the work upon which its national and international reputation has been founded" (153). The theatre was to improve its relationships with its playwrights and treat them with courtesy and encouragement. The School of Acting was reorganised under Ria Mooney's direction, and from its pupils arose the Abbey Experimental Theatre in the Peacock in 1937.

With the return to Irish interior scenes as part of Hunt's regeneration of the theatre, Moiseiwitsch simulated Irish vernacular architecture - architecture reflecting local materials and traditions - in sophisticated construction of scenes. But her designs of repertoire plays tested traditionalists. George Yeats described her costumes for W.B.'s *Deirdre* in 1936 as "HELL" (Yeats 436), and Moiseiwitsch and Hunt were soon debarred from staging plays by Yeats and J.M. Synge. In fact, the commissioning of Anne Butler Yeats, a new design assistant, to design productions of her father's plays *On Baile's Strand* and *Purgatory* in 1938, as well as Augusta Gregory's *The Story Brought by Brigit* in 1939, may have been seen as a move to appease traditionalists on the board. According to the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* Anne Butler Yeats was born in 1919. At the age of four she started lessons in brush drawing from her aunt Elizabeth Yeats. She attended boarding school in Switzerland at the age of nine, before transferring to a boarding school in Dublin two years later. She took art classes at the Royal Hibernian Academy for three years before starting work at the Abbey Theatre. Whether or not Anne Butler Yeats was satisfied working on the repertoire plays, she was insistent on delaying a training trip to Paris in order to finish assisting Moiseiwitsch on building the set for the topical new play *The Invincibles* by Frank O'Connor and Hunt (Yeats 497).

Hunt credits Moiseiwitsch's tact for helping to maintain order during the board debates that followed their controversial presentations of *Deirdre* and Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1936 (153-154). Left feeling deflated, he resigned from management in September 1936 but continued working as a director of new plays, of which there now were many. In fact, Pilkington observes that in the late 1930s the Abbey Theatre resumed a combative role as many new plays questioned nationalist majority views (131). Decisions around producing plays were resumed by the board, who battled well until Yeats's death in 1939. Hunt resigned in November 1938 to direct Paul Vincent Carroll's *The White Steed* in New York, previously rejected by the Abbey. Moiseiwitsch left in January 1939 to work at London's Q-Theatre, replaced as chief designer by her assistant Anne Butler Yeats.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Moiseiwitsch was active as a stage designer in Ireland, the UK and North America from 1934-1985. She's most celebrated as architect of a unique thrust stage at the

Before Yeats's death, he acknowledged F.R. Higgins as his heir. Higgins's appointment as managing director in 1939 inflamed tensions between O'Connor and the rest of the board, resulting in O'Connor's resignation in 1940. He was replaced by the playwright and broadcaster Roibeárd Ó Faracháin, whose presence allowed the administration to embrace the production of Irish language plays as part of its policy, staged by a new resident director Frank Dermody. Work had begun on this in 1938, when Ernest Blythe convinced the board to approve a revival of Douglas Hyde's *Casadh an tSúgáin* as well as the establishment of a public competition for plays written in Irish. Under this administration, Anne Butler Yeats was promoted as chief designer in charge of the many domestic scenes following the runaway success of George Shiels's *The Rugged Path* in 1940, setting a 12-week-run record for the theatre. Higgins died from illness in January 1941, and Yeats left the Abbey two months later after a salary decrease.<sup>141</sup>

After Higgins's death, the board appointed Blythe as new acting manager in 1941. Efforts to establish Irish language drama as part of the Abbey repertoire intensified in 1942, with the introduction of a policy to hire only junior players who could perform in Irish, and the tremendously ambitious staging of Blythe's *Cach*, an adaptation of the English morality play *Everyman*. Attracting a sizeable enough audience for Irish-language theatre proved difficult but Blythe remained determined. In 1942, he persuaded the Gaelic theatre organisation An Comhar Dramaíochta to sublet its productions of plays to the Abbey, and in return the theatre received the organisation's annual grant (Hunt 167). In 1945, the administration struck success

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Stratford Festival Theatre in Ontario in 1953, and subsequent thrust stages at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield.

<sup>141</sup> On her trip to Paris in 1937-1938, Anne Butler Yeats had been student to Gaston Baty, a director influenced by Austrian director Max Reinhardt's dexterous use of stage machinery (Whitton 111-112). She was also introduced to George Pitoëff, a director influenced by Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold's kinaesthetic spectacle (Yeats 497). Imaginably, the Abbey Theatre provided little opportunity to apply such references. Her later experimental designs for Austin Clarke's Lyric Theatre and her seeking out of modernist painter Mainie Jellet suggests that her artistic satisfaction laid in more adventurous scenes than those at the Abbey. She held exhibitions throughout her life as a painter.

with the unprecedented popularity of an Irish-language pantomime *Muireann agus an Prionnsa*, which established an annual pantomime as part of the theatre's repertoire.

Suddenly, pinning down a resident designer became difficult. Michael Walsh was a new actor with the company when offered the role. His set for Roger McHugh's historical legal drama *Trial at Green Street Courthouse* (1941) showed a stark use of the height of the stage but little competency for built scenery. His association with the theatre lasted only a year.<sup>142</sup> Comparatively, Michael Clarke had been an actor at the theatre for thirteen years before taking the role in 1941. His set design for Roibeard O Farachain's *Assembly at Druim Ceat* (1943), an adaptation of a 6th century tale about authorities' attempts to banish local poets, reveals a moveable piece of stage machinery to accommodate the play's many locations, from the seashore of Lough Foyle to Druim Ceat. Clarke left in 1943, and a year later he contributed to a vote of no confidence in Abbey managing director Ernest Blythe.

Clarke was succeeded by Alicia Sweetman, Not much is known about Sweetman. The Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of Irish Biography* describes her father, the politician John Sweetman, as displaying "clericalist Catholicism" and "social conservatism" in his views. His wife and children lived in Meath, where he was a major landlord, before moving to Dublin. It is possible that it was the Sweetman family's association with political nationalism that attracted the Abbey board to Alicia Sweetman. She arrived at the role with a strong knowledge of stage technologies. Archival photographs reveal that she resurrected Edward Gordon Craig's screens for a revival of W.B. Yeats's *The Player Queen* in 1944. Sweetman's international references are to be suspected in her relationship with Russian designer Vladimir Poluin, scene painter for the Ballets Russes, who visited Sweetman and her husband, the Gate Theatre actor John Biggerstaff, in May 1946.<sup>143</sup> However, the Abbey's

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<sup>142</sup> Michael Walsh along with actor Shelah Richards, who also left the Abbey Theatre at this time, founded Richards-Walsh Productions in 1942, and presented plays by Sean O'Casey, Paul Vincent Carroll and Frank Carney at Dublin's Olympia Theatre that weren't produced at the Abbey Theatre. Anne Butler Yeats also worked as design assistant.

<sup>143</sup> See AN IRISHMAN'S DIARY *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); May 15, 1946; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 5.

efforts to emulate the Gate Theatre's standards in design grew explicit in 1946, when Sweetman was replaced by Carl Bonn, an English designer who previously raised design values at the Gate Theatre and the Gaiety Theatre. This, again, was a short appointment.<sup>144</sup> He was succeeded at the Abbey Theatre by designer Vere Dudgeon.

There's no doubt that the Abbey Theatre had to work within constraints during The Emergency, when fuel and electricity were in short supply. In fact, with international tours by companies from abroad brought to a halt, the theatre received unprecedented full houses (Hunt 162). The growth of Dublin theatre audiences in the 1940s and 1950s is indicative of the urbanisation and emergence of a consumer culture following World War II. But it's clear that the leadership did little to encourage playwrights to experiment with new forms. That is not to say that it lost its teeth; Pilkington identifies that the English language repertoire in the 1940s addressed social and economic issues, underlining the urgent need for Ireland's modernisation (137).

After Dermody left in 1947 to take a position in Gabriel Pascal's Irish film company, Blythe wisely appointed Ria Mooney and Tomás Mac Anna as resident directors of plays. As for the Irish language strand of the theatre's policy, Hunt has described it as a project based on linguistic rather than artistic grounds (168). A public protest by two intellectuals, Roger McHugh and Valentine Iremonger, at a performance of *The Plough and the Stars* in November 1947 called attention to the theatre's depressing standards and faded glory. That faded glory may be indicative of a wider disenchantment of older values. Terence Brown sums up the intellectual movement's cultural criticism of the period in saying: "Ireland's cultural grandeur, whatever the truth of former times, was now merely a myth that gave comfort to an insecure, uprooted middle class which had cashed in on the revolution and had instinctively resisted change since" (189). Nothing quite reflects this like the pantomime treatment of mythological figures that were treated with solemnity during the Celtic Revival. The "Heroic Age" of Irish legend was once used to provide an uninterrupted flow of inspiration for the modern public in its fight for independence. For the Abbey

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<sup>144</sup> Carl Bonn left Ireland in 1950 to become set designer at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre. Later in the 1950s, he would open an acclaimed theatrical costume workshop in London's Covent Garden with his partner Colin Mackenzie.

Theatre's Irish-language pantomimes, that "Heroic Age" provided a familiar stock of heroes and villains to run amok a modern global landscape, proving Ireland's cosmopolitanism.

## 2. Abbey Theatre Scenography: Further Glances at the North

In Chapter One I established that Connaught was initially the most popular setting cited in Abbey Theatre programmes, from 1902-1912. But from 1913-1924, Dublin became the most popular area represented. That dominance of Dublin continued between 1924 and 1934, as seen in Chapter Two. Dublin remained the most popular between 1934 and 1949, with 18 productions set there.<sup>145</sup> These were consistently seen until Sigerson Clifford's *The Great Pacificator* in 1947. Dublin isn't cited in programmes between 1948 and 1949.

Most surprising is the rise in popularity of plays set in Ulster, which only amounted to three productions between 1924 and 1934. Ulster was seen 16 times between 1935 and 1949, particularly from 1940 onwards.<sup>146</sup> This occurred under F.R. Higgins and Ernest Blythe's administrations as opposed to during Hugh Hunt's time as manager

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<sup>145</sup> *The Silver Tassie* (1935) by Sean O'Casey, *Summer's Day* (1935) by Maura Molloy, *Blind Man's Bluff* (1936) by Ernst Toller and Denis Johnston, *The Grand House in the City* (1936) by Brinsley MacNamara, *Coggerers* (1937) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *The Invincibles* (1937) by Frank O'Connor and Hugh Hunt, *The Man in the Cloak* (1937) by Louis D'Alton, *Caesar's Image* (1939) by E.F. Carney, *Peeping Tom* (1940) by Frank Carney, *Trial at Green Street Courthouse* (1941) by Roger McHugh, *Remembered For Ever* (1941) by Bernard McGinn, *The O'Cuddy* (1943) by Anthony P. Wharton, *Railway House* (1944) by Ralph Kennedy, *Rossa* (1945) by Roger McHugh, *Muireann Agus an Prionnsa* (1945) by Mícheál Ó hAoidha and Liam Ó Briain, *Fernando Agus an Dragan* (1946), *Oiche Mhaith Agat, A Mhic Ui Domhnaill* (1947) by Liam Ó Briain and Riobard O Braonain, and *The Great Pacificator* (1947) by Sigerson Clifford.

<sup>146</sup> *Boyd's Shop* (1936) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Pilgrims* (1938) by Mary Rynne, *The Heritage* (1939) by J.K. Montgomery, *Birth of a Giant* (1940) by Nora MacAdam, *Three to Go* (1940) by Olga Fieldon, *William John Mawhinney* (1940) by St. John Ervine, *Black Fast* (1941) by Austin Clarke, *Friends and Relations* (1941) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Remembered For Ever* (1941) by Bernard McGinn, *Assembly at Druim Ceat* (1943) by Riobard O Farachain, *The End House* (1944) by Joseph Tomelty, *The Old Broom* (1946) by George Shiels, *The Drums are Out* (1948) by John Coulter, *Light Falling* (1948) by Teresa Deevy, *All Soul's Night* (1949) by Joseph Tomelty, and *The Hard Man* (1949) by Michael J. Murphy.

responsible for directing plays. Similarly, the 13 productions set in the Leinster counties excluding Dublin rose in popularity from 1940 onwards.<sup>147</sup> Only two were produced between 1935 and 1939: Maura Molloy's *Summer's Day* in 1935 and Paul Vincent Carroll's *Kindred* in 1939.

13 productions had settings in Munster, and six of these were seen between 1935 and 1939, suggesting it was most popular during Hugh Hunt's time as manager responsible for directing plays.<sup>148</sup> Connaught remained comparatively low, represented nine times onstage, but seven productions were seen between 1943-1949.<sup>149</sup> This renewed interest in the province occurred under Blythe's administration as managing director, though it's also to be credited to playwright M.J. Molloy, who wrote three of the plays. Two productions had vague midland or "provincial" settings: Sean O'Faolain's *She Had to Do Something* in 1937, and Louis D'Alton's *Lover's Meeting* in 1941. All these productions have been counted from analysis of settings described in Abbey Theatre programmes. It's important to remember that many of the 151 productions counted in this period did not indicate specific locations in their programmes.

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<sup>147</sup> *Summer's Day* (1935) by Maura Molloy, *Kindred* (1939) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *Mount Prospect* (1940) by Elizabeth O'Connor, *Strange Guest* (1940) by Francis Stuart, *Today and Yesterday* (1940) by W.D. Heppenstall, *The Lady in the Twilight* (1941) by Mervyn Wall, *The Three Thimbles* (1941) by Brinsley MacNamara, *The Wise Have Not Spoken* (1944) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *Borumha Laighean* (1944) by Sean O'Conchubhair, *Marks and Mabel* (1945) by Brinsley MacNamara, *Fernando Agus an Dragan* (1946), *Diarmuid agus Grainne* (1947) by Michael Mac Liammóir, and *Ask For Me Tomorrow* (1949) by Ralph Kennedy.

<sup>148</sup> *Katie Roche* (1936) by Teresa Deevy, *Who Will Remember?* (1937) by Maura Molloy, *Moses's Rock* and *Time's Pocket* (1938) by Frank O'Connor and Hugh Hunt, *Illumination* (1939) by T.C. Murray, *Tomorrow Never Comes* (1939) by Louis D'Alton, *Forget Me Not* (1941) by Lennox Robinson, *An Apple a Day* (1942) by Elizabeth O'Connor, *An Bhean Chrodha* (1943) by Piaras Beaslai, *Stiana* (1944) by Peadar O'hAnnrachain, *Rossa* (1945) by Roger McHugh, *The Great Pacificator* (1947) by Sigerson Clifford, and *The Briery Gap* (1948) by T.C. Murray.

<sup>149</sup> *The Great Adventure* (1938) by Charles I Foley, *Baintighearna an Ghorta - Our Lady of the Famine* (1938) by Seamus de Bhilmot, *Old Road* (1943) by M.J. Molloy, *Mungo's Mansions* (1946) by Walter Augustine Macken, *The Righteous Are Bold* (1946) by Frank Carney, *Cara An Phobail* (1946) by M.O. Droighranin after Augusta Gregory, *The Visiting House* (1946) and *The King of Friday's Men* (1948) by M.J. Molloy, and *The Bugle in the Blood* (1949) by Bryan Mac Mahon.

The dominance of domestic space in Abbey Theatre productions, demonstrated in Chapters One and Two, continued throughout this period. According to programmes, an immense 60 productions were set in a “house”,<sup>150</sup> and six in a “home”.<sup>151</sup> In terms

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<sup>150</sup> *Summer's Day* (1935) by Maura Molloy, *The Wild Goose* (1936) by Teresa Deevy, *Blind Man's Buff* (1936) by Ernst Toller and Denis Johnston, *Wind From the West* (1936) by Maeve O'Callaghan, *Hassan* (1936) by James Elroy Flecker, *The Grand House in the City* (1936) by Brinsley MacNamara, *Shadow and Substance* (1937) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *The Invincibles* (1937) by Frank O'Connor and Hugh Hunt, *Killycreggis in Twilight* (1937) by Lennox Robinson, *The Man in the Cloak* (1937) by Louis D'Alton, *The Patriot* (1937) by Maeve O'Callaghan, *She Had to Do Something* (1937) by Sean O'Faolain, *Purgatory* (1938) by W.B. Yeats, *Moses's Rock and Time's Pocket* (1938) by Frank O'Connor and Hugh Hunt, *Neal Maquade* (1938) by George Shiels, *Harlequin's Positions* (1939) by Jack B. Yeats, *Give Him a House* (1939) by George Shiels, *The Spanish Soldier* (1940) by Louis D'Alton, *Birth of a Giant* (1940) by Nora MacAdam, *Three to Go* (1940) by Olga Fieldon, *Peeping Tom* (1940) by Frank Carney, *The Rugged Path* (1940) by George Shiels, *Lover's Meeting* and *The Money Doesn't Matter* (1941) by Louis D'Alton, *The Lady in the Twilight* (1941) by Mervyn Wall, *Friends and Relations* (1941) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Fire Burns Late* (1941) by P.J. Fitzgibbon, *The Three Thimbles* (1941) by Brinsley MacNamara, *The Summit* (1941) by George Shiels, *An Apple a Day* (1942) by Elizabeth O'Connor, *Faustus Kelly* (1943) by Flann O'Brien, *An Bhean Chrodha (The Brave Woman)* (1943) by Piaras Beaslai, *Ar an mBothar Mor (On the Main Road)* (1943) by Liam O'Briain after Jean Jacques Bernard, *Assembly at Druim Ceat* (1943) by Roibeard O'Farachain, *An Coimisinear (The Commissioner)* (1943) by Tomas O'Suilleabhain, *Old Road* (1943) by M.J. Molloy, *An Traona Sa Mhóinfhéar* (1943) by Seamus de Faoite and Fachta O'hAnnrachain, *The Wise Have Not Spoken* (1944) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *The Coloured Balloon* (1944) by Margaret O'Leary, *Laistiar De'n Éadan* (1944) by Eibhlínn Ni Shuilleabhain, *The End House* (1944) by Joseph Tomelty, *Sodar I nDiaidh na nUasal* (1944) by Ernest Blythe after Moliere, *The New Regime* (1944) by George Shiels, *Giolla An tSoluis (Servant of the Light)* (1945) by Mairead Ni Ghrada, *An tUbhall Oir - The Golden Apple* (1945) by Liam O'Briain after Augusta Gregory, *Rossa* (1945) by Roger McHugh, *Marks and Mabel* (1945) by Brinsley MacNamara, *Nuair A Bhionn Fear Marbh (When a Man is Dead)* (1945) by Liam O Briain after Rene Fauchois, *Muireann Agus an Prionnsa* (1945) by Mícheál Ó hAoidha and Liam Ó Briain after Augusta Gregory, *Mungo's Mansions* (1946) by Walter Augustine Macken, *The Righteous are Bold* (1946) by Frank Carney, *The Visiting House* (1946) by M.J. Molloy, *The Old Broom* (1946) by George Shiels, *The Dark Road* (1947) by Elizabeth O'Connor, *The Great Pacificator* (1947) by Sigerson Clifford, *Cursai Cleamhnais (A Marriage Proposal)* (1947) by Muiris O'Cathain after Anton Chekhov, *The Drums are Out* (1948) by John Coulter, *Blood Wedding* (1949) by Federico Garcia Lorca, *The Bugle in the Blood* (1949) by Bryan MacMahon, and *Ask For Me Tomorrow* (1949) by Ralph Kennedy.

<sup>151</sup> *The Silver Tassie* (1935) by Sean O'Casey, *Candida* (1935) by Bernard Shaw, *Illumination* (1939) by T.C. Murray, *The Heritage* (1939) by J.K. Montgomery, *Swans and Geese* (1941) by Elizabeth O'Connor, and *Muireann Agus an Prionnsa* (1945) by Mícheál Ó hAoidha and Liam Ó Briain after Augusta Gregory.

of specific types of structures, the “farmhouse” was seen to be dominant in Chapter Two, but the “cottage,” dominant in Chapter One, is most popular again during this period, cited seven times.<sup>152</sup> The “farmhouse” was slightly less popular, seen six times.<sup>153</sup> Four plays were set in an “apartment” or a “flat”.<sup>154</sup> “Tenement” appeared twice.<sup>155</sup> Three plays were set in a “lodging house”,<sup>156</sup> one in a tower,<sup>157</sup> and one in a mansion.<sup>158</sup> Seven were in a “tavern,” “cabin,” or “shanty”,<sup>159</sup> and four in a “hut” or “barn”.<sup>160</sup>

In Chapter Two it was revealed that the luxury-sounding “drawing room” or private “dining room” was the most dominant scene. Between 1935-1949, however, the

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<sup>152</sup> *Katie Roche* and *The Wild Goose* (1936) by Teresa Deevy, *Time's Pocket* (1938) by Frank O'Connor and Hugh Hunt, *The Lady in the Twilight* (1941) by Mervyn Wall, *The Caretakers* (1948) by George Shiels, *The King of Friday's Men* (1948) by M.J. Molloy, and *All Soul's Night* (1949) by Joseph Tomelty.

<sup>153</sup> *The Wild Goose* (1936) by Teresa Deevy, *Give Him a House* (1939) by George Shiels, *Lover's Meeting* (1941) by Louis D'Alton, *Old Road* (1943) by M.J. Molloy, *The Wise Have Not Spoken* (1944) by Paul Vincent Carroll, and *The Righteous Are Bold* (1946) by Frank Carney.

<sup>154</sup> *The Great Adventure* (1938) by Charles I Foley, *Caesar's Image* (1939) by E.F. Carney, *Poor Man's Miracle* (1943) by Marian Hermar and F.B. Czarnomski, and *Rossa* (1945) by Roger McHugh.

<sup>155</sup> *Caesar's Image* (1939) by E.F. Carney, and *Remembered For Ever* (1941) by Bernard McGinn.

<sup>156</sup> *The Old Broom* (1946) by George Shiels, *Oiche Mhaith Agat, A Mhic Ui Domhnaill* (1947) by Liam O'Briain after Riobard O'Braonain, and *The Bugle in the Blood* (1949) by Bryan Mac Mahon.

<sup>157</sup> *Nicolas Flamel* (1948) by Seumas O'Sullivan.

<sup>158</sup> *Friends and Relations* (1941) by St. John Greer Ervine.

<sup>159</sup> *Kindred* (1939) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *Donnchadh Ruadh* (1939) by Seamus O'hAodha, *The Rugged Path* (1940) and *The Summit* (1941) by George Shiels, *Gloine an Impire (The Emperor's Glass)* (1942) by Traolach O'Raihbhearthaigh, *Tenants at Will* (1945) by George Shiels, and *The Great Pacificator* (1947) by Sigerson Clifford.

<sup>160</sup> *Fohnam, The Sculptor* (1939) by Daniel Corkery, *An Bhean Chrodha (The Brave Woman)* (1943) by Piaras Beaslai, *Diarmuid agus Grainne* (1947) by Micheal Mac Liammoir, and *The Barn Dance* (1948) by Arthur Power.

“kitchen” returned to dominance, seen in 19 plays, mostly from 1940 onwards under F.R. Higgins and Ernest Blyth’s management.<sup>161</sup> 18 plays were set in a luxury-sounding “drawing room” or “dining room,” recurring in plays by Brinsley MacNamara, Lennox Robinson and Elizabeth Connor.<sup>162</sup> The “parlour” and “sitting room,” which sound less formal than the “drawing room” and “dining room,” were cited 13 times.<sup>163</sup> The “living room,” which suggests a more casual space, has been less popular in previous chapters but here was described 12 times.<sup>164</sup> Two plays were

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<sup>161</sup> *Time’s Pocket* (1938) by Frank O’Connor and Hugh Hunt, *Give Him a House* (1939) by George Shiels, *Tomorrow Never Comes* (1939) by Louis D’Alton, *Birth of a Giant* (1940) by Nora MacAdam, *Lover’s Meeting* (1941) by Louis D’Alton, *The Whipping Hand* (1942) by Brigid G. Mac Carthy, *The Cursing Fields* (1942), *The Fort Field* (1942) by George Shiels, *Gloine an Impire* (1942) by Traolach O’Raithbhearthaigh, *Old Road* (1943) by M.J. Molloy, *An Traona Sa Mhóinfeár* (1943) by Seamus de Faoite, *Ordóg An Bháis* (1943) by Micheal O’hAodha, *The Wise Have Not Spoken* (1944) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *Laistiar De’n Éadan* (1944) by Eibhlin Ni Shuilleabhain, *Stiana* (1944) by Peadar O’hAnnrachan, *The End House* (1945) by Joseph Tomelty, *The Righteous Are Bold* (1946) by Frank Carney, *The Bugle in the Blood* (1949) by Bryan Mac Mahon, and *All Souls’ Night* (1949) by Joseph Tomelty.

<sup>162</sup> *Wind From the West* (1936) by Maeve O’Callaghan, *The Grand House in the City* (1936) by Brinsley MacNamara, *Shadow and Substance* (1937) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *Who Will Remember?* (1937) by Maura Molloy, *She Had to Do Something* (1937) by Sean O’Faolain, *Moses’s Rock* (1938) by Frank O’Connor and Hugh Hunt, *Bird’s Nest* (1938) by Lennox Robinson, *The Dear Queen* (1938) by Andrew Ganly, *Mount Prospect* (1940) by Elizabeth Connor, *Three to Go* (1940) by Olga Fieldon, *Today and Yesterday* (1940) by W.D. Heppenstall, *Peeping Tom* (1940) by Frank Carney, *Swans and Geese* (1941) by Elizabeth Connor, *Forget Me Not* (1941) by Lennox Robinson, *The Lady in the Twilight* (1941) by Mervyn Wall, *The Three Thimbles* (1941) by Brinsley MacNamara, and *Nuair a Bhionn Fear Marbh* (1945) by Liam O Briain.

<sup>163</sup> *Neal Maquade* (1938) and *Give Him a House* (1939) by George Shiels, *Kindred* (1939) by Paul Vincent Carroll, *William John Mawhinney* (1940) by St. John Greer Ervine, *Thy Dear Father* (1943) by Gerard Healy, *The Coloured Balloon* (1944) by Margaret O’Leary, *Railway House* (1944) by Ralph Kennedy, *An T-Udar I nGleic (The Struggling Author)* (1945) by Labhras Mac Bradaigh, *The Dark Road* (1947) by Elizabeth Connor, *Oiche Mhaith Agat, A Mhic Ui Domhnaill* (1947) by Liam O’Briain after Riobard O Braonain, *The Caretakers* (1948) by George Shiels, *The Lucky Finger* (1948) by Lennox Robinson, and *Ask For Me Tomorrow* (1949) by Ralph Kennedy.

<sup>164</sup> *Boyd’s Shop* (1936) by St. John Greer Ervine, *The Patriot* (1937) by Maeve O’Callaghan, *The Great Adventure* (1938) by Charles I Foley, *Illumination* (1939) by T.C. Murray, *Caesar’s Image* (1939) by E.F. Carney, *The Heritage* (1939) by J.K. Montgomery, *The Fire Burns Late* (1941) by P.J. Fitzgibbon, *An Apple a Day* (1942)

set in an “attic”,<sup>165</sup> and four were in a “morning room” or “breakfast room”.<sup>166</sup> Four were set in a private “study” or “laboratory”.<sup>167</sup>

Types of public space include the “public house” and “bar” in Frank O’Connor and Hugh Hunt’s *The Invincibles* in 1937, Frank Carney’s *They Went by the Bus*, Louis D’Alton’s *Tomorrow Never Comes* in 1939, Roger McHugh’s *Trial at Green Street Courthouse* in 1941, and J.B. Yeats’s *La Noo Noo* in 1942. A new public space was the courtroom, which appeared in Denis Johnston and Ernst Toller’s *Blind Man’s Buff* in 1936, Roger McHugh’s *Trial at Green Street Courthouse* in 1941 and *Rossa* in 1945, Marian Hemer and F.B. Czarnomski’s *Poor Man’s Miracle* in 1943, and August Strindberg’s *The Link* in 1945. Hospital rooms were seen in Sean O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie* and George Shiels’s *The Passing Day*, both in 1935.

Churches and shrines were seen in Mary Rynne’s *Pilgrims* and Seamus de Bhilmot’s *Baintighearna an Ghorta - Our Lady of the Famine*, both in 1938. There was a college campus in Jose Marie Penam and Hugh de Blacam’s *A Saint in a Hurry* in 1935, and libraries in Denis Johnston and Ernst Toller’s *Blind Man’s Buff* in 1936, Paul Vincent Carroll’s *Coggerers* in 1937, and Sigerson Clifford’s *The Great Pacificator* in 1944. Public halls were seen in Tomas O’Suilleabhain’s *An Coimisinear (The Commissioner)* in 1943, and Lennox Robinson’s *The Lucky Finger* in 1948. Compartments of a train were the setting of Frank O’Connor and Hugh Hunt’s *In the Train* in 1937. The premises of a football club appeared in Sean O’Casey’s *The Silver Tassie*, and there was a gymnasium in Mary Rynne’s *Pilgrims*.

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by Elizabeth Connor, *Faustus Kelly* (1943) by Flann O’Brien, *They Got What They Wanted* (1947) by Louis D’Alton, *The Drums Are Out* (1948) by John Coulter, and *The King of Friday’s Men* (1948) by M.J. Molloy.

<sup>165</sup> *A Deuce O’ Jacks* (1935) by F.R. Higgins, and *The Man in the Cloak* (1937) by Louis D’Alton.

<sup>166</sup> *Strange Guest* (1940) by Francis Stuart, *The Money Doesn’t Matter* (1941) by Louis D’Alton, *Friends and Relations* (1941) by St. John Greer Ervine, and *Caitriona Parr* (1947) by Liam O’Laoghaire after Maurice Baring.

<sup>167</sup> *The Silver Jubilee* (1936) by Cormac O’Daly, *Lost Light* (1943) by Roibeard O’Farachain, *Poor Man’s Miracle* (1943) by Marian Hemer and F.B. Czarnomski, and *Nicolas Flamel* (1948) by Seumas O’Sullivan.

Types of workplaces were similar to those found in previous chapters but there seems to be an increased amount of them. Shops were seen in Bernard Shaw's *Village Wooing* in 1935, St. John Greer Ervine's *Boyd's Shop* in 1936 and *William John Mawhinney* in 1940, James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* in 1936, Paul Vincent Carroll's *Kindred* in 1939, Brinsley Mac Namara's *The Three Thimbles* in 1941 and *Marks and Mabel* in 1945, and George Shiels's *The Fort Field* in 1942. Law offices were in Denis Johnston and Ernst Toller's *Blind Man's Buff*, Anthony P. Wharton's *The O'Cuddy* in 1943, Marian Hemar and F.B. Czarnomski's *Poor Man's Miracle* in 1943, and George Shiels's *The Caretakers* in 1948. There was an office in a potato store in Shiels's *Quin's Secret* in 1937, and a rent office in his *Tenants at Will* in 1945. A bank office was glimpsed in Ralph Kennedy's *Ask For Me Tomorrow* in 1949. Non-descript offices were in Shiels's *The Passing Day* in 1936 and Lennox Robinson's *Forget Me Not* in 1941. A "council chamber" was seen in Flann O'Brien's *Faustus Kelly* in 1943, and a "workroom" was in Shiels's *The Jailbird* in 1936.

On a separate spectrum, leisure spaces were seen in the hotels of Mary Rynne's *Pilgrims* in 1938, Frank Carney's *They Went by the Bus* in 1939, Bernard McGinn's *Remembered For Ever* in 1941, Roger McHugh's *Rossa* in 1945, and Sigerson Clifford's *The Great Pacificator* in 1947. Bernard Shaw's *Village Wooing* in 1935 featured the deck of a cruise. Punitive spaces include the prison cells of James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* in 1936, Frank O'Connor and Hugh Hunt's *The Invincibles* in 1937, Marian Hemar and F.B. Czarnomski's *Poor Man's Miracle* in 1943, and Roger McHugh's *Rossa* in 1945. There was a "workhouse" in George Shiels's *Neal Maquade* in 1938.

Some of the Abbey Theatre's displays were international in this period. When settings went further afield, they were mostly to France, which provided backgrounds for Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* in 1935, Jose Marie Penam and Hugh de Blacam's *A Saint in a Hurry* in 1935, Traolach O'Raihbhearthaigh's *Gloine an Impire (The Emperor's Glass)* in 1942, Liam O'Briain and Jean Jacques Bernard's *Ar An mBothar Mor* in 1943, Ernest Blythe and Moliere's *Sodar I nDiaidh na an tUasal* in 1944, Liam O Briain and Henri Gheon's *Arís* and Seumas O'Sullivan's *Nicolas Flamel* in 1948. England was seen in Bernard Shaw's *Candida* in 1935, Maeve O'Callaghan's

*Wind From the West* in 1936 and *The Patriot* in 1937, Roger McHugh's *Rossa* in 1945, and Liam O'Laoghaire and Maurice Baring's *Caitriona Parr* in 1947.

New York was in Roger McHugh's *Rossa* in 1945, and the pantomime *Fernando agus an Dragan* in 1946. Spain was a background to *Fernando agus an Dragan*, and Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, staged in 1949. Russia was in Anton Chekhov and Muiris O'Cathain's *Cursai Cleamhnais (A Marriage Proposal)* in 1947 and Chekhov's *An Bear* in 1949. Italy provided settings to Mary Rynne's *Pilgrims* in 1938, and Jose Marie Penam and Hugh de Blacam's *A Saint in a Hurry* in 1935. The latter also featured China and Portugal. Turkey was in Andre Obey's *Noah* in 1935, and Iraq in James Elroy Flecker's *Hassan* in 1936. *Fernando agus an Dragan* had a scene in Jamaica.

Nobles' castles, palaces and halls were popular settings during the Celtic Revival, as established in Chapter One. These had a renewed popularity during the period, seen in 12 productions.<sup>168</sup> This renewed focus is particularly focused in the 1940s, in Austin Clarke and Roibeard O'Farachain's plays about medieval Ireland, as well as plays written in the Irish language. In previous chapters I speculated that exterior scenes made greater demands on the theatre's resources. Ambitious scenes in this period include the World War I battlefield of Sean O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* in 1935, and the mountain roads of Andre Obey's *Noah* in 1935, Mary Rynne's *Pilgrims* in 1938, and Elizabeth Connor's *The Dark Road* in 1947. Seaside scenes were in J.B. Yeats's *In Sand* in 1949, and there was a jetty in Daniel Corkery's *Fohnam, the Sculptor* in 1939.

### 3.1 *Hassan* by James Elroy Flecker, adapted by Basil Dean

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<sup>168</sup> *A Saint in a Hurry* (1935) by Jose Marie Penam and Hugh de Blacam, *Who Will Remember?* (1937) by Maura Molloy, Daniel Corkery's *Fohnam, the Sculptor* (1939) by Daniel Corkery, *Black Fast* (1941) by Austin Clarke, *The O'Cuddy* (1943) by Anthony P. Wharton, *Assembly at Druim Ceat* (1943) by Roibeard O'Farachain, *Borumha Laighean* (1944) by Sean O'Conchubhair, *An tUbhail Oir - The Golden Apple* (1944) by Liam O'Briain after Augusta Gregory, *Muireann Agus an Prionnsa* (1945) by Mícheál Ó hAoidha and Liam Ó Briain after Augusta Gregory, *Fernando agus an Dragan* (1946), and *Diarmuid agus Grainne* (1947) by Micheal Mac Liammóir (1947).

For Edward Said, the primary function of orientalism is to fortify identity by setting up an “other” which operates as the west’s “contrast image, idea, personality, [and] experience” (1-2). That “contrast image” is implicit in the stage design for director Hugh Hunt’s 1936 production of *Hassan*, Basil Dean’s adaptation of James Elroy Flecker’s play from 1923. Flecker was a British writer known for his portrayals of Western Asia, likely coloured by his time working in the consular service in the Eastern Mediterranean. This was the third production of a play by Flecker seen in Dublin. The Dublin Drama League produced his version of *Don Juan* in 1927, at which the *Irish Times* critic noted the effective lighting techniques of director Lennox Robinson and observed that “the audience were grateful for a production of great beauty”.<sup>169</sup> The Gate Theatre then produced *Don Juan* in 1933, which was viewed as a muddled production in one review arguing “it’s working-out is by no means clear”.<sup>170</sup> In his biography of Gate Theatre managers Edward Longford and Christine Longford, John Cowell states that the Gate was forced to cancel plans for a production of *Hassan*, intended as the theatre’s “most sumptuous super-production,” in 1934 due to financial reasons (99).

Hunt’s production of *Hassan* opened at the Abbey Theatre on June 1st 1936, with set design by Tanya Moiseiwitsch. It ran for six performances, the same as many productions that year. Maeve O’Callaghan’s comedy *Wind From the West* and George Shiels’s *The Jailbird* managed to run for 12 performances, suggesting a more commercial success than other productions. Most impressive was Denis Johnston and Ernst Toller’s *Blind Man’s Buff* which ran for 25 performances, making it one of the most popular productions at the theatre in this period. *The Irish Press* critic noted Hunt and Moiseiwitsch’s work on *Hassan*, saying: “The producer did his work with great tact, and the colourful costumes and settings showed taste and imagination”.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> "DON JUAN.": STRANGE PLAY BY THE DRAMA LEAGUE *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Mar 21, 1927; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 6

<sup>170</sup> "DON JUAN" AT THE GATE THEATRE: FLECKER DESERTS ROMANTICISM FOR REALISM *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Jan 18, 1933; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 8

<sup>171</sup> *Irish Press* 1931-1995, Tuesday, June 02, 1936; 3.

The *Irish Times* described it as a “courageous experiment,” finding incoherence in the acting and limitations to the physical space of the Abbey stage.<sup>172</sup>

Flecker’s play is set in Baghdad. It finds Hassan, a confectioner, brewing a potion to propel a customer, Yasmin, to fall in love with him. While trying to seduce her, he accidentally foils an assassination attempt on the Caliph by Rafi, the King of Beggars. Hassan becomes the Caliph’s aid, and discovers the comforts of royal life in a palace. But he’s soon horrified by the Caliph’s intentions to execute Rafi and his wife Pervaneh. Failing to save them, Hassan witnesses their killings up close. The play ends with him leaving Baghdad to go on a pilgrimage.

### 3.2 Staging Irish Decolonisation

The stage design for *Hassan* evoked a darkly mystical representation of life in Baghdad. The Irish national theatre’s portrayals of Iraqi life as barbaric, sensuous and under-developed in the 1930s may reflect anxieties around Irish decolonisation in the early years of Independence. Homi K. Bhaba uses the term “mimicry” to denote “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other” (86). By imitating the culture of its colonisers, a decolonised society may “[cohere] the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensify surveillance”. The stage design for *Hassan*, I argue, reflects an Irish mimicry of British colonial accusations of primitivism. Representations of Irish people as uncivilised go back to at least 1587, when Thomas Hughes’s play *The Misfortunes of Arthur* portrayed them as morally disruptive. Fintan Cullen observes that the “wild Irish” are seen in Hughes’s play as “symbols of disorder in the realm, where they rebel against the English yet also ravage their own population” (8). There’s an embedded visual history since the 16th century comparing Irishness and Englishness. Andrew Hadfield and Wily Male have argued that “one of the most important ways in which Ireland was read in this period was as a series of negative images of Englishness ... The development of “Englishness” depended on the negation of “Irishness” (7).

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<sup>172</sup> THE ABBEY THEATRE: A COURAGEOUS EXPERIMENT *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Jun 2, 1936; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 8.

Audiences in 1936 were likely aware of these representations, and saw a new nationality portrayed in these terms in *Hassan*. According to Paige Reynolds, stereotypes of Irish people by their English colonisers “depict[ed] them as violent, uncultured “wise Irish” or drunken, buffoonish “stage Irish” (3). Flecker uses similar characteristics to depict Iraqi people. It’s soon established that Hassan is guileless, cowardly running away from Yasmin when she arrives at his shop. He eventually emerges “*pale and staggering*”.<sup>173</sup> Hassan entrusts his friend Selim to deliver his love potion. When Hassan waits by Yasmin’s balcony to see if the potion worked, he finds her kissing Selim. She cruelly pours water down onto Hassan and he falls asleep, dejected, by a fountain. There, he’s accidentally brought to the party where he coincidentally saves the Caliph. Flecker makes clear that Hassan, lacking in sophistication, does none of his heroic deeds intentionally.

Such buffoonish portrayals of Iraqi people may reflect anxieties around the formation of the Irish state during the 1930s. Through Irish mimicry, portrayals of primitivism were deflected onto another nationality and Irish people could be seen as demonstrating power to do the “seeing,” as opposed to being the “seen”. In other words, the development of Irishness depended on the negation of Iraqiness. Flecker and Dean draw some of the characters as crude. When Selim gloats to Hassan about seducing Yasmin, for instance, his “*face [is] in YASMIN’s bosom*”. Later, when Hassan is living comfortably in the palace, Yasmin tries to seduce him by stripping off her cloak and undressing to being “*naked, in the Persian style*”. In contrast to Pervaneh, who refuses to lift her veil when threatened by the Caliph because “only the eagle dare look upon the sun”, Yasmin is seen to be immodest and morally disruptive. Underlining this is her fate - she’s taken away by the executioner Masru, the most barbaric and uncivilised character in the play, who enters “*naked, with his scimitar*” before slaughtering Pervaneh and Rafi.

### 3.3 Stage Design as Orientalist

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<sup>173</sup> For all references to Flecker’s play, see: James Elroy Flecker. *Hassan: The Story of Hassan of Bagdad and How He Came to Make the Golden Journey to Samarkand*. projectgutenberg.org. Web. 22 Jun 2018.



***Hassan* (1936) by James Elroy Flecker and Basil Dean. Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive.**

The exotic décor of orientalist design struck a chord, particularly with French artists, from the 1910s onwards. According to Martin Battersby, the elegant and ethereal Japanese art that inspired the Art Nouveau movement was replaced by “the more barbaric attractions of a legendary Persia or Arabia, of roses, or minarets against a purple sky, pearl-decked, veiled odalisques” (177). In fact, the visual repertoire of orientalism may have absorbed the linear and abstract qualities of Art Nouveau, which found inspiration in “the never-ending marvels of natural objects” (Battersby 145). Orientalist art, for that reason, can often feature the “swirling lines and arabesques of hair and the smoke of incense” (Battersby 177).

Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s set for *Hassan* achieves orientalist effect by drawing on this visual repertoire. Her design combines an economy of space with explicit embellishments, as it moves the action from Hassan’s shop to a Baghdad street, Rafi’s house, and into the gardens, marble halls and dungeons of the Caliph’s palace. It’s questionable if the design successfully met the play’s technical demands, which include a basket from on high lifting characters out of a scene, sheets of iron falling from the ceiling to create a cage, and a fountain switching from running water to blood. But there is no doubting that Moiseiwitsch’s design pushed the Abbey’s

resources towards new displays. An immense teaser curtain creating the effect of three arches provided a high and pronounced curve across the stage never seen at the theatre before.

Further linear emphasis, indicative of orientalist design, was used to dress the scene for Rafi's house. Flecker and Dean describe the "*great room*" as decorated in "*rich, rather vulgar Oriental taste*," though Moiseiwitsch preferred elegant swirling abstract detail for the doors of a cage. The inclusion of geometric elements such as the checkered floor and the silhouetted steps suggests some influence by U.S. film designer William Cameron Menzies, who combined stylish symmetry and Art Nouveau effects to portray Baghdad in Raoul Walsh's 1924 film *The Thief of Baghdad*.

The use of all these design details, I argue, charged Hunt's production to be a showy piece of Irish orientalism that ultimately portrayed life in Iraq as exotic but uncivilised. Through its mimicry and deflecting historically prescribed depictions of Irish primitivism onto another nationality, this design projects a modernity wherein the new Irish state is cosmopolitan enough to develop its self-image by negating an Other supposedly underdeveloped state. Such a society, like Flecker and Dean's play, isn't likely to demonstrate great understanding of life in Iraq. It'll sooner transmute real events into a romanticised but vague search for enlightenment, as epitomised in the end when Hassan leaves on a pilgrimage. "For lust of knowing what should not be known, we take the Golden Road to Samarkand," says a fellow traveller.

### **3.4 In Performance: Signs of Orientalism**

After six performances, *Hassan* wasn't seen at the Abbey Theatre again. None of Flecker's other work was produced by the theatre either. Perhaps this reflects a lack of appetite for explicitly orientalist plays. Joseph Lennon has argued that Irish orientalism was well placed for Celtic Revivalists to critique European colonialism: "Writing from within a position of European imperial privilege, Irish Orientalism provides agency for Irish cultural decolonization and, at times, enables cultural decolonization in Asian and West colonies" (xxvi). A cross-colony identification between Celtic and oriental is clear in plays by W.B. Yeats seen at the Abbey

throughout the 1920s and 1930s, where “the Orient, particularly Japan, came to stand for an unadulterated traditional culture from which modern Ireland could learn” (282).

Yeats’s Eastern-inspired plays, like *Fighting the Waves* (1929), *The Cat and the Moon* (1931) and *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1934), never became popular. But from the 1930s onwards, the explicitly Orientalist plays of Lord Dunsany, such as *King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior* (1911), *The Tents of the Arabs* (1920), and *The Gods of the Mountain* (1929), also ceased being seen at the Abbey. Such obvious orientalism wouldn’t become a sustained part of the theatre’s repertoire.

#### 4.1 *Wind From the West* (1936) by Maeve O’Callaghan

Exploring the relationship of cosmopolitanism to questions of otherness, Mica Nava defined cosmopolitanism as “a structure of *feeling*: as an emphatic and inclusive set of identifications” (3). Those international “identifications” are evident in director Hugh Hunt’s production of *Wind From the West* by Maeve O’Callaghan in 1936. This was O’Callaghan’s first play presented at the Abbey Theatre. Very little seems to be known about her. She also wrote as a novelist - her work *Hungarian Rhapsody* was published in 1935 under the pseudonym Sheila Fitzgerald.<sup>174</sup> The American magazine *Kirkus Reviews* noted the “glamor” of the novel’s Hungarian setting.<sup>175</sup>

Hunt’s production of *Wind From the West* opened at the Abbey Theatre on November 30th 1936, with set design by Tanya Moiseiwitsch. It ran for 12 performances, which suggests it to be one of the theatre’s most commercially successful productions that year, when most productions ran for six performances. George Shiels’s *The Jailbird* also ran for 12 performances, and Denis Johnston and Ernst Toller’s *Blind Man’s Buff* ran for a striking 25 performances. The *Irish Times* critic commended O’Callaghan’s “eye for the farcical situation and an ability to develop it in a manner which reminds one more of Mr. Ben Travers than of the “Abbey School” of farce-writers”. But the

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<sup>174</sup> OBITUARY: MISS MAEVE O'CALLAGHAN *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Jul 23, 1940; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 7

<sup>175</sup> [kirkusreviews.com](http://kirkusreviews.com). Web. Jun 22 2018.

same reviewer wrote that it “cannot be reckoned as a good play,” claiming audiences must “wonder what “Wind from the West” is about”.<sup>176</sup> When the same newspaper reported on the play’s extended run a week later, it observed that “the play has been extremely well received,” concluding that it has a “welcome freshness of treatment of comedy that holds out promise of better work from the new authoress”.<sup>177</sup>

O’Callaghan’s comedy is set in the drawing room of Josie and Stephen, an Irish family living in a town in northern England. Stephen, a doctor, is frustrated that his wife isn’t spending more time minding their children and mending his clothes. Instead, Josie is preoccupied with refurbishing the house for a visit by Mrs. Hock-Smith, a local “pillar of the community” who could bring good business to Stephen’s surgery. Stephen becomes resentful of Josie’s friend Kate, who encourages her to go to dances and theatres, and Josie’s sick brother David, who Stephen has agreed to pay passage to Africa. Stephen eventually tries to guilt Josie about not minding their children, but she argues that he should dedicate more time himself. The play ends with Josie and Stephen farcically rushing for tables and chairs, and setting the scene, just in time for Mrs. Hock-Smith’s arrival.

#### 4.2 Staging Irish Feminism

The stage design in *Wind From the West* simulated modern interior design to frame the play’s explicitly feminist critique. According to Caitriona Beaumont, definitions of women’s citizenship in this period were shaped by Catholic teaching. For instance, Mary Immaculate College in Limerick launched a “Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade” to urge “[y]oung women to refrain from smoking and from talking or laughing loudly in public.” It further instructed that “[i]modest dances, cinema shows and plays were to be avoided at all cost”. Rules for “suitable dress” were laid down by

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<sup>176</sup> THE ABBEY THEATRE: A NEW PLAYWRIGHT O’Callaghan, Maeve The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Dec 1, 1936; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 13

<sup>177</sup> ABBEY THEATRE The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Dec 8, 1936; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 6

the college's annual journal, with specific instructions for sleeve lengths and dresses "suggestive in style" (Beaumont 567).

These definitions of women's citizenship must have been resonant for audiences in 1936, and even acute after contraceptives were banned in 1935 as part of seemingly ongoing restrictions on women's lives. It was significant, then, that *Wind From the West* presented explicit arguments against women's forced domesticity. O'Callaghan aligns Stephen with de Valera's policies, not only in his expectations for Josie to mind their children and mend his clothes, but also in his thoughts on Ireland's future. When a conversation turns to their native country, he shares his views on Ireland's needed modernisation: "They want to get on with the job of making the country prosperous, my dear sir. Grow more crops, create more markets, work harder!" (20). This sounds like an endorsement of de Valera's self-sufficiency policy, where tillage took precedence over international cattle trade. If so, Stephen prefers the isolationist Catholic model of Irish living rather than the cosmopolitan model of Josie's based on international culture and identity politics.

O'Callaghan draws Josie's mother, Mrs. Kelleher, as an embodiment of the Irish woman defined by her motherhood. When Stephen is out golfing, Josie proposes that she, Mrs. Kelleher and Kate go see a film, *The Guardsman*.<sup>178</sup> Mrs. Kelleher feels disallowed, and even claims "I've never had a thrill in my life" (15). She paints a bleak picture of mothering life in Ireland.

MRS. KELLEHER. I've had no time for thrills. I had a husband and eight children.

KATE. But surely those were thrills in themselves.

MRS. KELLEHER. Not in Ireland. You'd not supposed to get any pleasure out of having children there. It's your duty (15).

But Kate, an intelligent single woman who claims "Heavens, I couldn't live without books" (41), is the play's voice when it comes to calling out men's shirked off

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<sup>178</sup> *The Guardsman*, a 1931 American film, was adapted from the play *Testör* by Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár. O'Callaghan seems to have been fascinated with Hungarian culture, as judged by her 1935 novel *Hungarian Rhapsody*.

responsibilities in marriage. On discussing Stephen, she observes: “He likes to combine the comforts and pleasures of married life with the freedom of a bachelor” (40). Later, when Josie returns home at midnight after a show, she’s shocked to learn that her daughter has broken her ankle sliding down the bannister. Stephen tries to make her feel guilty for not being with her children.

STEPHEN. I’m sick to death of your damned irresponsibility, running out and leaving five children unprotected, they could be burnt in their beds for all you care; you’re not fit to be a mother, or a wife!

JOSIE. [...] It’s like a man to put all the blame on his wife. Where were you this afternoon? Playing golf! (50-51).

Josie explicitly argues that Stephen must share in caring the children, as opposed to the responsibility being placed solely on her. Shortly afterwards, when Stephen’s friend Tom tries to assure her that her daughter’s injury wasn’t her fault, she says she doesn’t need to be told that.

JOSIE. I’m blaming him! I’ve had enough of this ‘the wife’s place is in the home’ business. I’m entitled to a little pleasure the same as the rest of you, and I’m going to have it (54).

Josie’s insistence that her time won’t be solely spent in the domestic sphere is nothing short of emphatic, and she clearly rejects the Catholic teachings that defined women’s citizenship in this period.

#### **4.3 Stage Design as Cosmopolitan**



***Wind From the West* (1936) by Maeve O'Callaghan. Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive.**

According to Rebecca L. Walkowitz, modernist fiction produced a new approach, or “Cosmopolitan Style,” that critiqued the progress of knowledge, and in some cases, the resistance of some forms of progress. She observes that a “new distrust of civilizing processes [...] develop[s] forms of critical cosmopolitanism that reflect both a desire for and an ambivalence about collective social projects” (4). In her analysis of novels by Salman Rushdie, she uses the term “mix-up” to denote how ordinary social and semantic mistakes create opportunities for effective agency (131). Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s set design for *Wind From the West* achieved a cosmopolitan effect through its “mix-up”. Here, a couple living in England, who are coming to terms with gender roles prescribed in Ireland, are seen living in an unusually emblazoned French Art Deco house. The design can be perceived as a semantic mistake because it creates a deliberately unusual frame for Irish people in this period.

Art Deco, or *Arts Décoratifs*, was made famous by the Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in 1925. This style was influenced by contemporary art. It incorporated the dreamlike stepped forms of expressionism, the clashing colours of fauvism and geometric shapes of cubism. According to architecture historians Powers and von Sternberg, Art Deco provided an immediate outlet for architects eager to challenge existing beliefs after World War I, and was

available as “an entrance into Modernism” (15-16). Another historian, Ellen Rowley, described it as “an interesting mix of ornate symmetry (Classicism) with Modernist materials and demeanour” (38). While first developed in Paris in 1925, and emerging in Britain and the U.S. throughout the 1920s, Art Deco didn’t shape the Dublin landscape until the early 1930s, in buildings such as the Alliance and Dublin Consumers’ Gas Showrooms (1928-1933) on D’Olier Street, and Noblet’s Corner confectioners (1932) on Grafton Street.

The brushwork decorating the walls of Josie and Stephen’s drawing room clearly simulate geometric Art Deco tiles. This goes beyond O’Callaghan’s simple description of a “*gay, comfortable drawing room*” (1). Moiseiwitsch’s design emphasises the play’s association of Josie’s cry for gender equality with culture and design. Josie and Katie smoke cigarettes, discuss fashion and frequent theatres, which means they clearly reject the rules for women’s behaviour as outlined by the likes of Mary Immaculate College’s Modest Dress and Department Crusade. Stephen, on the other hand, is seen as distrustful of international design. When Josie’s new “*surrealistic*” carpet arrives as part of her refurbishment, Stephen insists that the carpet layer take it up.

- CARPET LAYER. It’s a good bit a’carpet, sir, best Axminster”.
- STEPHEN. I don’t care if its straight from Egypt. Take it up.
- CARPET LAYER. Don’t you like the design?
- STEPHEN. No, I don’t like (*imitates* CARPET LAYER’s *northern drawl*) ‘design’.
- CARPET LAYER. Aye, I think the design’s champion (32).

In fact, Stephen and Josie’s clash over the international character of the carpet is suggested as a metaphor for their marriage. The carpet layer later observes: “Wey it’s not fer me to interfere between man an wfe. It’s a very solemn thing is marriage - but it’s a bit thin wen carpet can’t go down!” (70).

The play doesn’t lose sight of the purpose of Josie’s refurbishment - to impress and persuade Mrs. Hock-Smith as a potential high-profile patient for Stephen’s surgery. That makes Josie’s spending seem less conspicuous, and even position her as a stake

holder in her husband's business. In one of the play's curious moments, she considers the gypsies working at a local fair, and stops to contemplate a new business venture for herself.

JOSIE. [The children] are always clamouring to ride on roundabouts. I like the things myself. (*dreamily*) You know those gypsies must make a fortune on the roundabouts, thirty or forty peacocks at a penny at a time - it would be very interesting to know just how many peacocks - (*pauses; then suddenly*) - have you had any lunch, Mother? (9)

In this moment, Josie shows a calculating mind for profit before being yanked back to reality. Though Josie and Stephen don't obviously resolve their differences over her role, they do come together in the final scene to finish refurbishing the drawing room, making for a farcical movement of rolling out carpet, repositioning chairs and tables, before politely opening the door to Mrs. Hock-Smith. Through these antics, Stephen and Josie are seen as united, and possibly co-partners, in acting to improve their family's business. She must have been an unusually outspoken and rebellious character to be seen on the Abbey stage at this time. As Kate remarks: "you're as refreshing as a west wind, Josie" (43).

#### 4.4 In Performance: Signs of Feminist Theatre

After 12 performances, *Wind From the West* wasn't seen at the Abbey Theatre again. This is surprising considering the play's popularity, though its absence may speak more about the artistically, and possibly socially conservative administrations that followed in the 1940s. O'Callaghan wrote another play for the theatre, *The Patriot*, which ran for 9 performances during the busy Horse Show Week in 1937. The *Irish Times* critic insisted that *The Patriot* did "not differ materially from her first play in any respect," and "received a flatteringly enthusiastic reception from a large audience".<sup>179</sup> While *The Patriot* did focus on the lives of an Irish doctor's family in

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<sup>179</sup> ANOTHER DOCTOR'S DILEMMA: ABBEY THEATRE'S NEW COMEDY The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Aug 6, 1937; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 8

northern England, the *Irish Times* review is questionable, as it did dwell on different subject matter than that of *Wind from the West* - the alienating feeling of an Irish family living abroad, and what happens when they move back to Ireland. Shockingly, in July 1940, the *Irish Press* reported that Maeve O'Callaghan had died, aged only 30. Lennox Robinson described her as a "brilliant young woman" who had "written very interesting plays, and was about to do better work".<sup>180</sup>

Upon re-evaluation, O'Callaghan may still be remembered as an emergent playwright, but her death may have been a greater loss to Irish theatre than realised. Though no critic noted the explicitly feminist critique in *Wind From the West*, it was one of a handful of plays that emphatically outlined depressing realities for Irish women in the 1930s. Only Teresa Deevy seems to have also expressed these concerns. In plays like *The King of Spain's Daughter* and *Katie Roche*, Deevy used touches of expressionism to give shape to women's lack of freedoms, an approach that was very different from O'Callaghan's use of farce in *Wind From the West*.

### 5.1 *Peter* by Samuel John Waddell

The inclusive international identifications of cosmopolitan design are evident in the stage design for the Abbey Theatre's 1943 production of *Peter*. The play written by Samuel John Waddell, under the penname Rutherford Mayne, was first seen at the theatre in a 1930, and ran for a strong 14 performances. The *Irish Times* critic commended the "simple interplay and interpretation of character," and that "the introduction of a cabaret scene made an innovation on the Abbey stage that is very welcome".<sup>181</sup> Director Frank Dermody's revival in 1941, with stage design by Michael Walsh, ran for an immense 24 performances. The *Irish Press* critic wrote that

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<sup>180</sup> Irish Press 1931-1995, Monday, Jul 22, 1940; 7

<sup>181</sup> "PETER.": NEW COMEDY AT THE ABBEY THEATRE The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Jan 29, 1930; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 6

the production “was smooth, and settings by Michael Walsh had just the right touch”.<sup>182</sup>

The 1943 production of *Peter*, directed by Dermody and designed by Alicia Sweetman opened on November 8th. It ran for 12 performances, which seems to have qualified for a good run at the theatre this year. Only M.J. Molloy’s *Old Road* and a revival of the George Shiels’s indefatigable comedy *The Rugged Path* performed better, at 18 performances, as well as Gerard Healy’s *Thy Dear Father*, which ran for an impressive 24 performances. Aside from the Irish language plays - which were often programmed for only two performances - and once-off performances of plays by Roibeard O’Farachain, the shortest run was six performances, by Anthony P. Wharton’s *The O’Cuddy* and Marian Hemar’s *Poor Man’s Miracle*. The *Irish Press* critic found Dermody’s production of *Peter* to be “sound,” and that “Alicia Sweetman’s setting was striking, but perhaps too striking for an Ulster hotel (even a big one)”.<sup>183</sup>

Waddell’s play begins with Peter, an engineering student, returning to his Dublin lodgings late at night. The next morning he gets a letter from his uncle disclosing that his allowance has been cut off. By chance, Partridge, a middle-aged man who met Peter once before, and is proprietor of the new modern Hotel Excelsior in the fictional Ulster town Portahoy, has tracked down where he lives. Peter accepts Partridge’s job offer of working as cabaret entertainer and service boy at the Excelsior for the summer. Partridge also confides that he’d like Peter’s help in courting a woman booked to visit the hotel. A few days later at the Excelsior, Partridge suspects that Peter isn’t committed to his cabaret performances, and seems more fascinated with the construction of a new harbour in Portahoy. He’s also regularly playing golf with Mr. McCleery, chairman of the company building the harbour, and has become fond of his daughter, Joan. This woman, we learn, is who Partridge intends to woo. Partridge tries to sink Peter’s chances with Joan, putting him in an embarrassing ballet, and revealing to her that Peter failed his exams. Joan remains insistent that she

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<sup>182</sup> Irish Press 1931-1995, Tuesday, July 22, 1941; 3

<sup>183</sup> Irish Press 1931-1995, Tuesday, November 09, 1943; 3

loves Peter. The play ends with Peter waking up in his Dublin lodgings, realising that the events were all a dream. He learns that he actually passed his exams, and is offered a job to work on a new reservoir.

## 5.2 Staging Irish Epochalism

The stage design in *Peter* used markedly international identifications, particularly Italian architecture, to depict a scene set locally in Ireland. This reveals uncharted cosmopolitanism concerning Irish state formation in the 1940s. This cosmopolitan normalising of international identifications may well be indicative of what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called “epochalism” (234-235). In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz identifies a tension within newly independent countries between the desire to address issues of nationality and culture, what he calls “essentialism”, and questions about the direction of history, and the material and economic realities of the new state, which he refers to as “epochalism” (234-235). If so, this stage design reveals an epochalism seeking to portray Irish drama, and possibly society, in an explicitly international context.

This design must have seemed subversive for audiences in 1943. In her history of Ireland during World War II, Clair Wills observes that the state’s call for political neutrality, which emphasised a defence of Irish independence as opposed to resistance against a specific international enemy, espoused a xenophobic suspicion. Framing neutrality as the protection of the country from the war, the journal of the defence forces used the tagline “Ireland versus the foreigner” (92). There were signs that national protectionism could slip into anti-Semitism. In 1942 Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin founded the clearly fascist *Aiséirí* party with the belief that the country be governed with “actualised Christianity” (Wills 366). Members included Ernest Blythe, and the emblem resembled a Celtic swastika. Most intently anti-Semitic was the People’s National Party, a descendent of the right-wing Blueshirts of the 1930s, established by George Griffin. At the party’s founding meeting, Griffin sought to degrade the government: “Practically all the Fianna Fáil TDs are in the clutches of the Jews!” (Wills 368). But Wills also observes that while war waged elsewhere in Europe, stories of luxury in Dublin were “tinged with a fairytale sense of unreality, as if

Ireland were a fantasy refuge from the harsh outside world” (6). Stage design at the Abbey Theatre clearly contributed to this cosmopolitanism.

Furthermore, Waddell’s play yearns for cosmopolitanism in performance. When Partridge first appears at Peter’s lodging, he insists on speaking French, as if to prove his worldliness. He says: “Excuse me. *Pardonnez-moi*. [...] D’ye not remember the night of the football *conversazione*?” (19). Later at the Excelsior, we meet Miss Van de Meizer, a Californian tourist staying at the Excelsior who flirts with Peter with whacky dialogue like “Gee, I say kid, you suits me just cruel” (53). Miss Van de Meizer, who’s markedly cosmopolitan with her “Paris footwear,” also helps an audience to realise that the Excelsior has attracted visitors from overseas. She explains her trip: “There’s a party, 25 of us from Chico City, doing Europe, and they always send me on in front for enquiry” (55).

### 5.3 Stage Design as Cosmopolitan



***Peter* by Samuel John Waddell in 1943. Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive.**

In *Cosmopolitan Style*, Rebecca L. Walkowitz discusses the idea of “treason” in Kazuo Ishiguro’s fiction. She observes that refusal in the novel to tell a consistent story about politics, oneself, or the past, constitutes a more reliable narrative. She finds Ishiguro’s novels “treasonous” in that “they use unreliable narratives to generate in their readers self-reflective and contingent kinds of loyalty” (109-110). An imperfect unanimity is seen as informing anti-nativist ideas of community. Alicia

Sweetman's set design for *Peter* achieved cosmopolitan effect through its use of "treason," in that it conspicuously bears no resonance of real Irish architecture. This explains the *Irish Press* critic's description of the set as "too striking". By being unreliable, Sweetman's design could propel viewers to think of how Irish scenes, onstage and off, could be internationalised. Furthermore, it depicted Irish citizens populating international space.

When first describing Portahoy, Partridge calls it "[k]ind of an Ulster Lido, like if you could imagine the thing" (20-21). This is a reference to the Lido di Venezia sandbar in Venice, where a real Hotel Excelsior was built in 1908 in distinctive Moorish architecture. The Venice Excelsior was internationally reported about in the press, even more so after 1932 when it annually attracted Hollywood stars for the Venice Film Festival. Sweetman's hotel interior doesn't bear the horseshoe arches or other characteristics of the hotel's Moorish style. However, the set's light stucco-like walls, floor-to-ceiling windows and neoclassical columns can be said to bear resemblance to scenes in the Venice Excelsior. Sweetman's familiarity with Italian architecture can be evidenced by time spent in Italy in 1934.<sup>184</sup>

Sweetman's design fulfilled and heightened the play's descriptions of international culture. That may have underlined the conspicuous cosmopolitanism embodied by Partridge, who presents a worldly version of himself by speaking French and building an international hotel. But this cosmopolitanism is linked to his wealth. In fact, while reprimanding Peter for giving Joan a tour, he reveals that the Excelsior itself is part of his method for wooing Joan.

PARTRIDGE. You leave me, young man, to show her the views of the place.  
D'ye understand? Them views is mine. I've paid for them (50).

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<sup>184</sup> In letters to their parents, Alicia and her sister Honoria discuss their time in Rome, where they stayed in the Palazzo style Hotel Savoia. They had private audience with the Pope and visited the Vatican Gallery, St. Peter's Basilica, the Piazza di Spagna, and the Mussolini Forum sports complex - a pre-eminent example of Italian fascist architecture. From there, they went to Florence and visited Il Duomo. See "Sweetman Family Papers: Four Letters from Honoria and Two Letters from Alicia," National Library of Ireland.

While trying to impress Joan, Partridge dismisses Peter by referring to his adolescence, insisting that “[a]ll he’s got is his youth”. Partridge preaches that money is what’s important, and “if money can make you happy, all that Sam Partridge has, ever will have, ever can hope to have, all that is yours” (67). But earlier in the play Peter’s youth is seen as significant, as he voices generational frustration by calling disconnected college examiners “old” and claiming “they use us ... fetch and carry me this, bring and carry me that” (15). Peter, who arrives dancing in jazz steps, clearly embodies a kind of cosmopolitanism, but it’s one connected to new modernisation and industry, as evidenced by his studies in engineering and fascination with the construction of the harbour in Portahoy. The play doesn’t seem to want audiences to lose sight of that, as Waddell’s stage instructions for the Excelsior lounge describe the window view showing “*a new harbour in course of construction*” (26), a detail that Sweetman faithfully outlined in her design (26).

#### **5.4 In Performance: Signs of Irish Internationalism**

Dermody’s production of *Peter* returned again in 1944, when it ran for six performances. The play was revived once more at the Abbey Theatre in 1955, in a production directed by Tomás Mac Anna and designed by Michael O’Herlihy, which ran for 12 performances. The *Irish Independent* critic found that the “old Abbey favourite has lost none of its appeal,” and that O’Herlihy’s design “give[s] an abundance of colour and atmosphere”.<sup>185</sup> None of Waddell’s other plays were produced at the theatre after this.

The evolution of cosmopolitan characters and design at the Abbey Theatre requires a detailed account. Roger McHugh’s historical drama *Rossa*, staged in 1945 with designs by Sweetman, saw Irish characters stay in a New York hotel. Irish characters travelled to a Genoa hotel in Sigerson Clifford’s *The Great Pacificator*, staged in 1947. But cosmopolitan journeys such as these became almost exclusive to Irish language plays, judged by the international scenes of *Fernando Agus an Dragan* (1947) and *Bean an Mhi-Ghra - La Malquerida* (1949), Paidgrain Ni Neill’s translation of Jacinto Benevente’s *The Unloved Woman*. Throughout the 1950s and

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<sup>185</sup> Irish Independent 1905-current, Tuesday, October 11, 1955; 8

early 1960s, Irish characters were effectively grounded at the Abbey Theatre. The only exception may have been *An Fear Og Umhal Malda* (1961), Eoin Ó Súilleabháin's translation of Betty Barr and Gould Stevens's *The Good and Obedient Young Man*, with scenes in Japan. Clearly, the theatre didn't encourage cosmopolitanism in its repertoire in this period.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to show how stage design reveals modernities in Ireland between 1935 and 1949. Cosmopolitan designs can reflect concerns around the formation of the new Irish state. Tanya Moiseiwitsch's design for *Hassan* in 1936, a play set in Baghdad, alternately shows Irish decolonisation, and deflects definitions of primitivism prescribed to Irish people onto another nationality. Other designs were more inclusive. I've shown how Moiseiwitsch's unexpected Art Deco interior for *Wind From the West* in 1936 was a "mix-up" strategy to accentuate the play's rejection of women's citizenship defined by Catholic teaching. Alicia Sweetman's Italian neoclassical design for *Peter* in 1943 used "treason" as an approach to creating an unreliable but strikingly international setting for a play obsessed with international culture. During the isolationist years of de Valera's Ireland, this cosmopolitanism showed that Ireland and the wider world were not antithetical.

This was to be only a brief engagement with cosmopolitanism at the Abbey, as during the 1950s, under the continued administration of Ernest Blythe, Irish scenes became rigidly local. Only two non-Irish plays in the English language were produced by theatre in the 1950s, bookending the decade - Federico Garcia Lorca's *House of Bernarda Alba* in 1950, and Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* in 1959. But counter-cultural influences would find their way, whether it be in the maternalist feminist campaign of the Irish Housewives Association, or youth culture in post-war Britain. This was significantly felt in the Abbey's costuming, which forms the focus of the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

## EMBODYING NEW FORMATIONS AND COSTUMING, 1950-1966

**Introduction**

This chapter will show how traces of costume design can illuminate Ireland's shifting cultural tensions in the late 1950s. It will focus on a period when the Abbey Theatre operated at the Queen's Theatre, following a fire that destroyed the original premises in 1951. It will reveal that productions were influenced by fashion from Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States that are associated with considerable shifts in generation- and gender-based relations after the Second World War. Irish modernity, I have argued in previous chapters, often takes on an international character. Some of the Abbey's costuming became even more explicitly international, in the period around T.K. Whitaker's 1958 Plan for Economic Expansion and the opening of Ireland to foreign investment.

Paige Reynolds has argued that modernist artists "hoped to revise, or even destroy, what they perceived as the stultifying moral and intellectual inheritance of their predecessors through aggressive thematic and formal experimentation" (3). Costuming in three productions at the Abbey Theatre in particular - *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959), *Stranger, Beware* (1959), and *No Man is an Island* (1959) - suggests an aggressive break from the past, using changes in contemporary fashion as a springboard. These productions have been chosen because they best represent a break from previous costuming methods at the theatre in this decade. Furthermore, this chapter will put costuming at the Abbey Theatre into context with innovative developments in 1950s Irish fashion for the first time.

This chapter will show how costuming can reveal previously uncharted types of bodies on the Abbey stage. Bernadette Sweeney's study of the body in Irish theatre takes a postcolonial approach, arguing that the foregrounding of language in

postcolonial studies has repressed the body. According to Sweeney: “The body is nonetheless responding to and existing within a culturally specific set of parameters which are subject to change” (15). That change will inevitably be influenced by the temporal nature of fashion, and the changing ways in which the body is shaped through dress. Aoife Monks has considered the complex work that theatrical costuming does in producing the body of the actor in relation to the wider fashion system. Therefore, by looking at costuming, we can expand the examination of bodies performed in Irish theatre.

New methods of costuming in Abbey Theatre productions in the late 1950s reveal new types of bodies on stage. In Anne Daly’s comedy, *Leave it to the Doctor*, female bodies are costumed in dress that reflects the changing cultural value of work done by, to use Caitríona Clear’s helpful term, the “woman of the house”, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Not much is known about Daly other than she wrote two plays for the Abbey Theatre: *Window on the Square* (1951) and *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959). I argue that the strategy of costuming in the production of *Leave it to the Doctor* is feminist as it rejects the traditional male gaze that, according to film scholar Laura Mulvey, views women as “simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (837). In Tom Coffey’s murder mystery play, *Stranger, Beware*, we see young bodies dressed in non-native materials, drawing instead on the *prêt-à-porter* (ready to wear) garments popularised by British fashion designer Mary Quant and as seen in Hollywood movies. In Peter Hutchinson’s military drama *No Man is an Island*, costuming curates a spectacle of masculinity found in 1950s Hollywood films, distorting hegemonic ideas of masculinity represented as suburban and corporate. The denial of traditional bodies in all three productions opens the way for new representations that I argue are modernist in formation.

The methodology will continue to use Guy Julier’s concept of “design culture” as a means of contextualising stage design within a wider framework. Julier uses this term to refer to “the interrelationships of the domains of designers, production and consumption with the design object, image or space” (72). This chapter takes

advantage of design artefacts from the 1950s in the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, a decade for which there is regular detailed evidence of costuming in performance.

Written histories about the Abbey Theatre at the Queen's have frequently made reference to a coalesced style of character acting. Robert Welch described it as "a tendency towards playing for laughs no matter what the play" (quot. McGlone 157). Robert Hogan and James P. McGlone also describe in details this "style", however none of their portraiture makes reference to how the actors were dressed. This is a vital missing element in our understanding of how the theatre navigated cultural change at the time. According to Lionel Pilkington, this change manifested at the Abbey in the form of a "concern with a depolitization of Irish republican militancy," and "a compelling need for an adjustment of nationalist ideology to the exigencies of foreign capital" (150). Chris Morash observes that the Abbey of the 1950s was truly syphoned of the nationalist energies upon which it was founded: "Values suddenly drained of their context were beginning to form the basis for a new type of dramatic conflict, even for tragedy" (215). This new tragedy feels the pressure of the revolutionary period's complex legacies, and the increasing threat to the country's security and financial stability posed by the I.R.A. By focusing on costuming, we can see how this new reality materialised on stage.

### **1. Urbanisation and Censorship**

By 1951 41.44 per cent of the Irish population lived in towns. Historian Diarmaid Ferriter described this urbanisation as "a pronounced feature of the post-war era", but observed that "for all the changes that the new urbanisation brought, there were remarkable consistencies concerning not just class, but the role of women and religious observance" (500-501). An ideological continuity with the rural past in modern urban areas ensured that Catholic belief and practice still dominated daily life. Perhaps this continuity was reassuring in a decade that began shrouded in uncertainty. Following a period of twenty-five years in which there had been only one change of government, the period between 1948 and 1957 saw four changes in government. This accumulated into a wide-spread rejection of the quest for cultural self-sufficiency. As Ferriter put it: "at home economic malaise was eating away at Irish confidence like a cancer" (463).

What filled that void was a bold pursuit of foreign investment, spurred by economist T.K. Whitaker's plan for economic development and exercised by Seán Lemass, who succeeded Eamon de Valera as Taoiseach in 1959. Economic growth was to become the new national imperative, in place of the language and the protection of native values and traditions. Historian Terence Brown has described the years between 1958 and 1963 as "almost legendary years in Irish self-understanding" (230), as the rapid transition of a society from being dedicated to economic nationalism to willing to participate fully in the post-war European economy led to two decades of economic regeneration.

Despite this outward focus, Irish theatre came under significant fire and censorship in the 1950s. In 1955 Gaiety Theatre manager Cyril Cusack staged the premiere of Sean O'Casey's play *The Bishop's Bonfire* - subtitled as "a sermon in the comic manner" - which attracted hundreds into the street outside the theatre to protest against its anti-clerical content. But another worthy agitator to O'Casey was found in Tennessee Williams. Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift had founded the Pike Theatre in 1953 to offer a more continental repertoire, and had major successes in producing the world premiere of Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* in 1954 and the Irish premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1956. But when they produced Williams's *The Rose Tattoo* - a drama about a withdrawn widow over-sheltering her daughter - as part of the first An Tóstal festival (later Dublin Theatre Festival) in 1957, the Pike was raided by police. Simpson, its director, was charged for profane performance. The following year, a transfer of Williams's play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* from Liverpool to Dublin was cancelled (Brown 223). Also in 1958 archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, refused to perform opening mass at An Tóstal festival on grounds of opposing its programme, which included Sean O'Casey's new play *The Drums of Father Ned* and Alan McClelland's adaptation of *Ulysses: Bloomsday*. Organisers cancelled the festival.

The Abbey Theatre also suffered a serious setback when its premises caught fire in 1951, leading director Ernest Blythe to negotiate a lease at the Queen's Theatre that would last sixteen years. Hugh Hunt has exposed how the size and economics of the Queen's Theatre (with approximately 50% more seats than the old Abbey) changed

the character and policy of the Abbey company: “Now with a larger capacity house the audience was used up more quickly. This virtually entailed an end to the repertory system” (178). Revivals were no longer economically viable and so long runs of popular plays were aimed to cover expenses. There were exceptions of course, such as O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy. But following the blowout of the 1957 An Tóstal festival, which planned to go ahead with *The Drums of Father Ned* if amendments were made to the script, O’Casey pulled production rights of all his plays in the Republic of Ireland. This hit the Abbey hard towards the end of the decade.

According to Lionel Pilkington, plays produced by the Abbey in 1950s, specifically those by Louis D’Alton, Seamus Byrne, Walter Macken and Bryan MacMahon, feature an inevitable conflict between personal choice and the rulings of Irish Catholicism: He writes “In [Byrne’s] *Design for a Headstone* and [D’Alton’s] *This Other Eden*, there is an impression that Ireland’s existential development is hindered not only by sanctimonious nationalism, but by the overbearing influence of Catholic social dogma” (150-152). Chris Morash describes John McCann’s successful plays *Twenty Years A-Wooing* (1954) and *Give Me a Bed of Roses* (1957) as farcical comedy where the hero isn’t linked by an abstract principle but is the one who ends up with the money. Morash astutely links plays such as McCann’s (who was a Fianna Fáil TD) with the theatre’s new role in disarming the “fighting spirit” it once dangerously roused: “the director of [the] Abbey, Ernest Blythe, saw them as important weapons in the National Theatre’s mission to defuse the unexploded mines of Ireland’s recent history” (216).

At the forefront of the changeover to the Queen’s Theatre was Ria Mooney, who had been working industriously as director of plays since 1948 (the Irish language strand of plays was directed by Tomás Mac Anna). Before Blythe signed the lease at the Queen’s, the Abbey had a temporary home at the Rupert Guinness Hall, and a timely hit in Louis D’Alton’s *The Devil a Saint Would Be*, a drama about an old woman beset by supernatural visitors. However, according to a theatre programme, “technical difficulties” delayed the production’s transfer to the Queen’s Theatre.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Abbey Theatre, *The Silver Tassie*, 24 Sep 1951 [programme]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway.

Astonishingly, to fill the gap, Mooney decided to revive Sean O’Casey’s notoriously difficult WWI tragicomedy *The Silver Tassie*. While the director was familiar with the play, having staged it at the Gaiety Theatre in 1947, resident designer Vere Dudgeon had to design new settings because scenery for the Abbey’s previous production in 1935 - designed by Maurice Mac Gonigal - was destroyed in the fire. The *Irish Times* praised the design, particularly the expressionistic battlefield in Act II, but criticised the lack of attention to sightlines as the set wasn’t fully visible from the back centre of the dress circle. The reviewer also argued that the Abbey should have taken the opportunity to assimilate more to the surroundings. The Queen’s was previously home to comics, singers and musicians, and “a good old Abbey farce might have suited better”.<sup>187</sup>

In his book about Mooney, James P. McGlone credits actor Walter Macken, who “exchanged his actor’s cap for a playwright’s shade and effectively bailed out Ria’s distressed troupe of weary performers” (127). Set in a Galway backstreet, Macken’s *Home is the Hero* (1952) sees the return of a man jailed for manslaughter and its effects on his family. It broke new records and ran for 97 performances despite being ignored by Dublin press. Louis D’Alton’s *This Other Eden* improved on that. This comedy about a town’s efforts to rescue the reputation of their local IRA commandment ran for 133 performances in the summer of 1953. These efforts may not earn the avant-garde credentials of *The Silver Tassie* but they do nod to a new theme in the theatre’s repertoire: the complex legacies of Ireland’s revolutionary period.

Hunt focused on the negatives of the Queen’s Theatre when he said “the stage lighting was many years out of date” and “it possessed no workshop or wardrobe store” (177). McGlone claims it had “the added production advantage of a fly gallery” (120), a mechanism which mightn’t have been installed in the old Abbey Theatre building. He also records Mooney’s wishes that Blythe spend more money on production design for new plays, but investment only seemed to pour into Mac Anna’s Irish-language productions (104). After the Abbey fire, however, McGlone

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<sup>187</sup> “The Silver Tassie at the Queen’s”, *Irish Times* Sep 25, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and the Weekly Irish Times, 6.

says: “Now that all the stock scenery had been destroyed, she would get the new designs she had always wanted for the repertoire of standard plays” (115).

Yet, throughout the 1950s Leslie Scott’s lighting, Eileen Tobin’s costuming, music compositions by Gerard Victory, Eamonn O’Gallchobhair and John Reidy, and Sean Mooney’s choreography are almost exclusively credited to Irish-language productions. Some of these design elements are crucial to any production regardless of language, though it’s hard to find evidence if Leslie Scott and Eileen Tobin worked with Mooney on her productions; unfortunately there’s very little known about either artist. In 1955, when the time came to present the Abbey’s first revival of *The Plough and the Stars* since the 1951 fire, on invitation to the Théâtre des Nations Festival in Paris no less, Vere Dudgeon had left his post.<sup>188</sup> Mooney convinced Blythe to hire Michael O’Herlihy, who designed productions for the Edwards-MacLiammoir’s Gate Theatre - Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Maura Laverty’s *A Tree in the Crescent* in 1952 - as well as Cyril Cusack Productions’ *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1954 and *The Bishop’s Bonfire* in 1955. Blythe agreed to make the hire only after Rooney reminded him that the Abbey was representing Ireland in the most art-conscious country in the world (Glone 161). It’s clear that Blythe thought little of the contribution of design. According to Hunt, he regarded designers as a “necessary evil” and “had no sympathy for their fanciful ideas” (177).

But O’Herlihy was to make clear that theatre design is serious work. When he brought libel action against the *Irish Times* in 1956 after they wrongly credited design for *The Plough and the Stars* to Dudgeon in their review, it seems to have made a sterner impact than when Norah McGuinness complained in the letters section of the same paper in 1943 when her costuming for a ballet production of *The Wolf and Peter* was used without her knowledge.<sup>189</sup> O’Herlihy’s drawings suggest a more robust designer

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<sup>188</sup> After leaving the Abbey Theatre, Vere Dudgeon moved to Christchurch and exhibited with New Zealand’s *avant-garde* painters, The Group, in their 1964 exhibition. Source: [christchurchgallery.org](http://christchurchgallery.org) (The Group Show catalogue 1964). Web. Jun 21 2018.

<sup>189</sup> O’Herily’s libel action against the *Irish Times* was dismissed because he failed to give notice of trial within six weeks. For details, see: *Irish Independent* 1905-current, Tuesday, May 08, 1956; 11.

than Dudgeon, who, while skilled in dressing fashionable interiors under wide arches, had done little to push the displays that Tanya Moiseiwitsch installed in the 1930s. Comparatively, O’Herlihy’s set design for Francis McManus’s *Judgement on James O’Neill* in 1955 placed rostra at elevating height so as to create impressively multiple stage levels. There is more use of architectural language in his drawings, such as the judging of “false perspective” (the manipulation of visual perception through scaled objects) in his design for M.J. Molloy’s *The Will and the Way* (1955),<sup>190</sup> and use of technological structures such as a “balustrade” (railings supported by short pillars to form a parapet) for the pantomime *Sonia Agus an Bodach* (1954).<sup>191</sup> He left the Abbey in 1956 to follow his actor brother Dan (also once an Abbey employee) to Hollywood.<sup>192</sup>

And so Tomás Mac Anna, who arrived at the Abbey ten years earlier to assist Alicia Sweetman on building sets, was made resident designer.<sup>193</sup> According to the Royal Irish Academy’s *Dictionary of Irish Biography* Mac Anna was born in Louth in 1925. He was educated at an Irish-language school which laid the basis for his lifelong bilingualism. He was a keen amateur painter whose interests eventually gravitated to stage design. After the Abbey Theatre fire in 1951 his love of spectacle was well suited to the larger Queen’s auditorium and the popular drama required to meet its

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<sup>190</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Will and the Way*, 05 Sep 1955 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3571\_SM\_0001, p9.

<sup>191</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Sonia Agus An Bodach*, 21 Dec 1954 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3544\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>192</sup> According to the British Film Institute index, Michael O’Herlihy worked as technical advisor on *Darby O’Gill and the Little People* (1959), but mostly left design to direct movies until 1984.

<sup>193</sup> In a recollection, Tomás Mac Anna describes arriving at the Abbey Theatre in 1944 asking Lennox Robinson for a job as a scenic designer. Robinson pointed out that he could “hardly sack the resident designer, Alicia Sweetman” but Mac Anna could “come in from time to time to paint the scenery”. On his first day, he arrived at the “paint frame” and found Sweetman had left early “after a heated argument about the artistic merits of a backcloth for *John Bull’s Other Island*. Tomás Mac Anna, “Ernest Blythe and the Abbey, *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections*, E.H. Mikhail (ed.), London: Macmillan Press, 1988; 167-168.

expensive costs. His appointment to resident designer seems to have come at the expense of George Bannister, a designer who was mostly assigned Mac Anna's Irish-language productions between 1955-1956, and whose drawings point to a more specific knowledge of stage-building: his set design for Mairead Ni Ghrada's *Ull Glas Oiche Shamhna* (1955) includes "tormentors" (a hanging behind the proscenium to block wings).<sup>194</sup> Mac Anna's drawings in the 1960s would also reference this stage device. Mac Anna once described Mooney's stagings as all in the "same naturalistic style" while he staged Irish translations of "Gheon, Jalabert, Benevente, Molière and Chekhov in styles ranging all the way from late Guthrie to music-hall" (Mac Anna 170). However, Ciara O'Dowd has revealed that Mooney had long ago engaged with European playwrights while performing and directing at Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Theatre in New York.<sup>195</sup> Both Mooney and Mac Anna had the experience behind them to be quite a creative team.

In 1956 Mooney tried again to claim the avant-garde success that she attempted with *The Silver Tassie*, this time with modernist playwright Denis Johnston, whose *The Old Lady Says No!* (1929) made explicit use of expressionistic methods. The premiere of *Strange Occurrence on Ireland's Eye*, Johnston's reworking of his 1936 legal drama *Blind Man's Buff*, had a modest run and was critically welcomed, with experimental black and white settings by Tomás Mac Anna. If Mooney and Mac Anna were subtly moving in to claim artistic integrity from Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift at the Pike Theatre, they were more than obvious when they mounted Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow*, still fresh in public memory two years after the Pike production. They also quickly moved to give the Irish premiere of Johnston's *The Scythe and the Sunset* (1958), a parody of *The Plough and the Stars* that offers an alternative view to O'Casey's pacifism. Mac Anna's set design suggests epic displays,

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<sup>194</sup> Abbey Theatre. *Ull Glas Oiche Shamhna*, 05 Nov 1955 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3578\_SM\_0001, p4.

<sup>195</sup> Ciara O'Dowd. "The On and Off-stage Roles of Abbey Theatre Actresses of the 1930s" [doctoral thesis].

such as a “ground row of GPO replaced in Act III for blackened shell of building” and a “masking piece to represent Nelson Pillar”.<sup>196</sup>

Moving in on *The Scythe and the Sunset* only two months after its premiere at the Poet’s Theatre in Massachusetts might have also been a swift and shrewd response to O’Casey’s ban on production rights of his plays. Another play set in Dublin tenements and which practically aped *The Plough and the Stars*, James Plunkett’s *The Risen People*, was also staged in 1958. Towards the end of the decade, a production of Eugene O’Neill’s immense play *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* in 1959 signalled an openness to outside influence. Abbey productions of O’Neill’s plays in the past, principally those directed by Lennox Robinson and designed by Dorothy Travers-Smith, had passed the theatre off as explicitly modernist.<sup>197</sup> While O’Neill’s drama about an Irish-American family is written more tamely in the realist mode, it does mark the theatre’s first English-language production of a major international voice since the Abbey Experimental Theatre’s staging of *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Federico García Lorca in 1950. The production directed by former director of plays Frank Dermody (freeing Mooney to play one of her final roles as the family’s matriarch) was designed by Mac Anna, who realised the setting of the Connecticut home with high-reaching classicist-style architecture, the most impressively built display since Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s wide-arch settings in the 1930s.

The 1950s also saw signs that a new Ireland less concerned with national identity and less antagonistic to outside influence was in the making. According to Elaine Sisson and Linda King, expressions of Irish modernity became more outwardly focused from the 1950s onwards. Discourses of leisure, consumption and urbanisation, as manifested in the U.S. and elsewhere in Europe, were embraced in anticipation of Ireland’s application to the European Economic Community (EEC). Sisson and King observe a move from “the ideological concerns of establishing a new, fragile state

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<sup>196</sup> Abbey Theatre. *The Scythe and the Sunset*, 19 May 1958 [stage management files]. Abbey Theatre Digital Archive at National University of Ireland, Galway, 3673\_SM\_0001, p1.

<sup>197</sup> *The Emperor Jones* in 1927 and *Days Without End* in 1934 have been discussed in Chapter Two.

identity towards the consolidation of Irish cultural life as experienced through popular culture, leisure, consumption and urban space” (King and Sisson 34).

International influences on Irish modernity are indeed explicit in this decade. Guus Melai, a designer with the Dutch airline KLM, was given Aer Lingus’s publicity account and in 1955 produced a poster that, searchingly, blended European modernism with contemporary American illustration. King reproduces the poster in her book chapter “(De)constructing the Tourist Gaze: Dutch Influences and Aer Lingus Tourism Posters”, and argues that Melai’s work in Ireland was indicative of Dutch graphic design after World War II, which “began to distance itself from overt references to early modernist practice with all its connotations of rigidity, control and totalitarianism” (King 185). Irish architect Robin Walker, who trained with Swiss modernist Le Corbusier, co-designed Bus Áras (1953) with Michael Scott and boldly dressed Ireland’s new transport hub in the “International Style”.<sup>198</sup>

Also at the start of the decade - May, 1950 to be precise - designer Irene Gilbert produced a fashion show at Jammet’s restaurant in Dublin. Gilbert, exhibiting English and French stock from her clothes shop on South Frederick Street, decided at the last minute to include a dozen suits and dresses of her own construction which went on to be lauded by observers and press. Fashion historian Robert O’Byrne locates this performance as the starting point of modern Irish fashion, and a distinctive new character in Irish clothing. Until that date, the people of the country really possessed little or no distinctive style of dress [...] As a rule, the inhabitants of Ireland dressed no differently from their nearest neighbours across the Irish sea,” he argues (12-13). Fashion historian Elizabeth Crum reminds us that nothing happens in a vacuum: “The features that would lead to the strength of Irish fashion were in place - the fabrics, the textiles, the embellishment skills were all there but it took a group of home-based designers to kick-start the industry” (quot. O’Byrne 19).

Among those Irish-based couturiers working in the 1950s were Gilbert, Sybil Connolly, Neilli Mulcahy, Clodagh O’Kennedy (often known as “Clodagh”) and Ib

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<sup>198</sup> The ‘International Style’, christened by an exhibition in New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1932, was the label given to an architectural style of industrial buildings on mainland Europe, characterised by white plaster walls and flat roofs.

Jorgensen. McCrum argues that their distinctive designs “owes much of its distinctive quality to a remarkable fidelity to the forms and fabrics of earlier periods” (1). They gave recognisably Irish character to three natural fibres: wool, linen and silk. Wool woven into tweed was especially popular in the 1950s as a durable and weather-proof fabric. Gilbert, whose clothes “demonstrated an abundance of technical skill” for O’Byrne (23), regularly used tweed to make suits, coats and ensembles.



***Stormclouds* by Irene Gilbert. Source: Robert O’Byrne, *After a Fashion*, 24.**

Virginia Pope of the *New York Times* observed in a Gilbert collection that the “delectable tonalities were all hand-woven” and “showed a skilled hand that recalled the technique of the great [French designer] Vionnet in the use of biased [or diagonal] cuts” (quot. O’Byrne 25). For eveningwear she used Carrickmacross lace to spectacular effect, as seen in her dress *Stormclouds*. Gilbert gained high-profile clients such as Anne Parsons, or Countess Anne of Rosse, and Grace Kelly, Princess of Monaco. In 1960 she moved her operations to prime real estate on St. Stephen’s Green, and soon after developed a *prêt-à-porter* range.

According to O’Byrne, *Stormclouds* helped to confirm Gilbert as “an intense romantic’ (O’Byrne 25). The same could be said to characterise Sybil Connolly’s clothes. At the age of seventeen Connolly trained at London’s Bradley & Co dressmakers who specialised in debutante’s gowns. In 1940 she returned to Dublin and was hired by Irish fashion entrepreneur Jack Clarke to be manager at his Grafton Street store Richard Alan. Her dressmaking abilities were widely unknown until 1952 when Clarke lost his couturier, the French-Canadian designer Gaston Mallet, and invited Connolly to fill the post. She shrewdly adapted traditional Irish vernacular dress for the couture market, such as the red flannel petticoats seen in Connemara at the start of the century, recreated by her as billowing quilted evening skirts. “Sophisticated redeployment of old forms was to be her forte,” wrote O’Byrne (28).



***Victoria* by Sybil Connolly. Source: Robert O’Byrne, *After a Fashion*, 30.**

It is Connolly’s publicising savvy that sealed her success, particularly with the American market. A photograph showing the model Ann Gunning in a full-length red Kinsale cape and white crochet evening dress made the cover of *Life* magazine in August 1953 under the heading “Irish invade Fashion World”. The “romantic” character of her clothing lies in an aesthetic relationship to classical Dublin, as seen in

a 1954 collection based on 19<sup>th</sup> century plasterwork which used Dublin streets as backgrounds for photo shoots. Also, a dress such as *Victoria* will combine traditional Irish embellishing such as crochet with modern character - in this case the plunging necklines of 1950s women's fashion - to make a heightened expression of individuality. Her most memorable creations are those made of hand-pleated handkerchief linen.

Given the publicity surrounding these *couturiers*, it's important that costuming at the Abbey Theatre be put into context with these innovative developments in fashion. Another entrepreneur was Neilli Mulcahy who produced her first solo fashion show in January 1955 in her family home in Rathmines. The *Irish Press* picked up on the overtly Irish character: "Green was the predominating colour of the collection and tweed the important material. [...] Clever cutting made rather heavyweight tweeds hang well in boxy jackets" (quot. O'Byrne 39). Later, an ensemble presciently named *Aer Lingus* - a green tweed slim skirt combined with a low-fastening double-breasted jacket - earned her a contract to design a new uniform for the national airliner. McCrum has said that Mulcahy's strength lied in her use of heavy tweed, even in evening wear, in strongly-shaped evening coats and matching dresses: "She had a great love of Irish tweed and wasn't afraid to use it in weights others might have shied away from" (Quot. O'Byrne 39). Later, in 1962, she founded the Irish Haute Couture Group with Gilbert, Jorgensen and Clodagh.

Mulcahy was a graduate of the Grafton Academy of Dress Design in Dublin. Set up in 1939 by Pauline Clotworthy, the Academy started making an impact on the Irish fashion industry in the 1950s. Another graduate, Danish-born Ib Jorgensen, worked for years with Irish designer Nicholas O'Dwyer before opening his own business in 1956. Jorgensen, who once described himself as a "classical designer", made bold statements such as his famous evening dress in heavy silk crepe printed with a kinetic-style print, hanging from one shoulder in the Grecian style (O'Byrne 51). Another designer making bold statements in the 1950s was Clodagh, still in her late teens. She tested the market to see if a younger generation would buy clothes of unquestionable Irish origin, using crochet and tweed in new forms. "What distinguished Clodagh from other Irish designers was her interest in producing work with an overt sensuality," writes O'Byrne. "The quality has never been a strong

feature of the country's fashion and is therefore all the more striking when it appears" (46). An ensemble consisting of a long check tweed coat trimmed with fur at the collar and cuffs with a pair of matching knee-high boots testifies to this. The work of these innovative fashion designers show that by the late 1950s, dress was shaping bodies in new ways, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality.



**Ensemble by Clodagh. Source: Robert O'Byrne, *After a Fashion*, 46.**

## **2. Abbey Theatre Scenography: Still a Rural Idyll?**

Stage design at the Abbey Theatre in the 1950s is strikingly different from that displayed in the previous 14 years comprising the last chapter of this thesis. There, I revealed that the representation of some Irish scenes between 1936-1949 took on international character. Designer Vere Dudgeon (1948-1954) continued an embellished interior in the French Art Deco style, but by 1950 it had vanished. This could be attributed to the lapse of Art Deco as a fashionable style, which had already been resoundingly rejected in the U.S. and parts of Europe during the years of World War II. However, the new wave of sets designed rigorously to replicate Irish

vernacular architecture also suggests a re-atomisation of realism. This offers fascinating parallels with the “kitchen sink” genre in British theatre sparked by John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956). We can argue that this is a shift towards democratising representations of society after the Second World War. As Michelene Wandor observes:

At one level it is a very clear class statement about the nature of the world represented on stage - no longer the drawing-room, with invisible servants working at an invisible sink. The more ‘ordinary’ (i.e. non-gentry) people who are the subjects of these plays shift the class bias of post-war subject matter. At another level, it is the relationship between sink, psyche and gender which is also important (41).

If the 1950s saw a major shift in population from the rural to the urban in Irish life, the settings of the Abbey Theatre plays did little to adjust to or acknowledge that shift. The decade continued the prevailing types of space and locations from the previous decade. Louis D’Alton’s *The Devil a Saint Would Be* in 1951, *This Other Eden* in 1953 and *Cafflin’ Johnny* in 1958 all retained a connection to small-town life in southern Ireland. M.J. Molloy also routinely presented depictions of life in the west of Ireland across different periods: the 1950s in 1953’s *The Wood of the Whispering* and 1955’s *The Will and the Way*, the time of the Famine in *The Paddy Pedlar* in 1953 and the Civil War period in 1958’s *A Right Rose Tree*. Contemporary life in the west was also evoked in the settings of Walter Macken’s *Home is the Hero* in 1952, *Twilight of a Warrior* in 1955 and *Look in the Looking-Glass* in 1958. Tomás Mac Anna offered a picture of Donegal, specifically “the wild country spreading from the Gap of Barnesmore to the Border”, in his standalone English-language play *Winter Wedding* in 1956. Aside from Hugh Leonard’s *The Big Birthday* in 1956 and *A Leap in the Dark* in 1957, there doesn’t seem to have been many new plays set in Dublin, the country’s biggest urban centre, at all.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> John McCann’s plays all retain an ambiguity of place in their settings but it’s not hard to imagine that the former Lord Mayor of Dublin didn’t set his plays in his hometown.

Domestic settings continued to dominate the Abbey's repertoire, ensuring society's importance of "the family" in Irish life. According to programmes for the fifty new English-language plays that ran during the 1950s, fourteen were set in a "house", albeit one in a Spanish village,<sup>200</sup> and six set in a "home".<sup>201</sup> One play was set in a "flat",<sup>202</sup> and two in an "apartment".<sup>203</sup> Yet, signs of rural depopulation could be suggested by the scarcity of settings that were previously popular. The "cottage" is only explicitly prescribed once, to a play set in the 1840s.<sup>204</sup> Irish society's move away from agriculture may be reflected in the lowly two plays with "farmhouse" settings, one of which is set in the 1920s.<sup>205</sup> Six new plays were set in domestic kitchens,<sup>206</sup> while "parlour" and "drawing-room" were decreasing in popularity, with

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<sup>200</sup> *The House of Bernarda Alba* is set in the Andalusia region of Spain. Other plays set in a 'house' are: *Mountain Flood* (1950) by Jack P. Cunningham, *The Goldfish in the Sun* (1950) by Donal Giltman, *House Under Green Shadows* (1951) by Maurice Meldon, *Window on the Square* (1951) by Anne Daly, *Home is the Hero* (1952) by Walter Macken, *John Courtney* (1954) by John Malone, *Is the Priest at Home* (1954) by Joseph Tomelty, *Twilight of a Warrior* (1955) by Walter Macken, *The Big Birthday* (1956) by Hugh Leonard, *Look in the Looking-Glass* (1958) by Walter Macken, *A Change of Mind* (1958) by John O'Donovan, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1959) by Eugene O'Neill and *No Man is an Island* (1959) by Peter Hutchinson, which is set in a house that is a soldier's billet.

<sup>201</sup> *The Devil a Saint Would Be* (1951) by Louis D'Alton, *Innocent Bystander* (1951) by Seamus Byrne, *Twenty Years A-Wooing* (1954) by John McCann, *The Flying Wheel* (1957) by Donal Glitinan, *Give Me a Bed of Roses* (1957) by John McCann, and *The Country Boy* (1959) by John Murphy.

<sup>202</sup> *A Leap in the Dark* (1957) by Hugh Leonard.

<sup>203</sup> *The Risen People* (1958) by James Plunkett and *In Dublin's Fair City* (1959) by Criostoir O'Floinn.

<sup>204</sup> *The Paddy Pedlar* (1953) by M.J. Molloy.

<sup>205</sup> *A Right Rose Tree* (1958) by M.J. Molloy is set between 1921-23. The other play set in a farmhouse was *The Last Move* (1955) by Pauline Maguire.

<sup>206</sup> *The Devil a Saint Would Be* (1951) by Louis D'Alton, *The Paddy Pedlar* (1953) by M.J. Molloy, *The Last Move* (1955) by Pauline Maguire, *Waiting Night* (1957) by P.S. Laughlin, *A Right Rose Tree* (1958) by M.J. Molloy, and *The Country Boy* (1959) by John Murphy.

being assigned only one play each.<sup>207</sup> The most popular type of domestic interior in the 1950s was the “living-room” or “sitting-room”, which appears as a setting in thirteen programmes.<sup>208</sup> In all, thirty-four of the fifty new English-language plays produced by the Abbey Theatre during the 1950s had domestic settings.<sup>209</sup>

Types of public space included those that had long been in the theatre’s design idiom. “Public houses” were the settings for Louis D’Alton’s *The Devil and Saint Would Be*, and *Winter Wedding* by Tomás Mac Anna, and a “shebeen” from 1900 appeared in Jack P. Cunningham’s *Mountain Flood* in 1950. Workspaces included “offices” in a Dublin newspaper in John O’Donnivan’s *The Half-Millionaire* in 1954; a printing works in John McCann’s *Early and Often* in 1956; the superintendent’s headquarters in Dublin Castle in Denis Johnston’s *Strange Occurrence on Ireland’s Eye* in 1956; an engineer’s business in J.D. Stewart’s *Danger, Men Working* in 1959; a doctor’s surgery in Anne Daly’s *Leave it to the Doctor* in 1959; and, grandly, the Department of An Taoiseach in John O’Donovan’s *The Less We Are Together* in 1957. In the past,

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<sup>207</sup> Louis D’Alton’s *Cafflin’ Johnny* (1958) was set in a parlour behind a shop in a small town. *Window on the Square* (1951) by Anne Daly was set in a drawing-room of house in Dromeen, Co. Claire over the period 1900-1917.

<sup>208</sup> *Innocent Bystander* (1951) by Seamus Byrne, *John Courtney* (1954) by John Malone, *Twenty Years A-Wooing* (1954) by John McCann, *Knocknavain* (1954) by J.M. Doody, *Blood is Thicker than Water* (1955) by John McCann, *A Leap in the Dark* (1957) by Hugh Leonard, *Give Me a Bed of Roses* (1957) by John McCann, *The Flying Wheel* (1957) by Donal Giltan, *The Wanton Tide* by Niall Carroll (1957), *I Know Where I’m Going* (1959) by John McCann, *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1959) by Eugene O’Neill, *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959) by Anne Daly, and *In Dublin’s Fair City* (1959) by Criostoir O’Floinn.

<sup>209</sup> *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1950), *Mountain Flood* (1950), *House Under Green Shadows* (1951), *Window on the Square* (1951), *Innocent Bystander* (1951), *The Devil a Saint Would Be* (1951), *Home is the Hero* (1952), *The Paddy Pedlar* (1953), *John Courtney* (1954), *Is the Priest at Home* (1954), *Twenty Years A-Wooing* (1954), *Knocknavain* (1954), *Twilight of a Warrior* (1955), *The Last Move* (1955), *Blood is Thicker than Water* (1955) by John McCann, *The Big Birthday* (1956), *The Flying Wheel* (1957), *Give Me a Bed of Roses* (1957), *A Leap in the Dark* (1957), *Waiting Night* (1957), *The Flying Wheel* (1957) by Donal Giltan, *The Wanton Tide* by Niall Carroll (1957), *Look in the Looking-Glass* (1958), *A Change of Mind* (1958), *The Risen People* (1958), *A Right Rose Tree* (1958), *Cafflin’ Johnny* (1958), *I Know Where I’m Going* (1959) by John McCann, *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* (1959), *No Man is an Island* (1959), *The Country Boy* (1959), *In Dublin’s Fair City* (1959) and *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959).

the thrilling “courtroom” setting was very much part of the publicity for Denis Johnston’s *Blind Man’s Buff* in 1936 and Roger McHugh’s *Trial at Green Street Courthouse* in 1941. In the 1950s, it only appears in Johnston’s reworking of that first play into *Strange Occurrence on Ireland’s Eye*.

The “prison” had been a site of punishment before, in Roger McHugh’s *Rossa* (1945) in fact, which looked at the life of Fenian leader Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa. But prison scenes in the 1950s were to hit home some serious truths, first in 1950’s *Design for a Headstone*, Seamus Byrne’s play resonant with prison hunger strikes, and then Brendan Behan’s anti-capital punishment piece: *The Quare Fellow* in 1956. Another part of the framework of the legal system was the Garda’s barracks, which was seen in Niall Sheridan’s *Seven Men and a Dog* in 1958 and Tom Coffey’s *Stranger, Beware* in 1959.

On a separate spectrum, leisure spaces such as “hotels” were the settings of Louis D’Alton’s *This Other Eden* in 1953 and 1954’s *A Riverside Charade* by Bryan Walter (Lord Moyne) Guinness, the latter of which also had a scene at a “dog pool” and in the gardens of a castle. M.J. Molloy offered less genteel “leisure” space with *The Will and the Way*, which took audiences to a committee room in the backstage area of a rural dance hall. Denis Johnston caustically chose a café on O’Connell Street from which to view Easter 1916 in 1958’s *The Scythe and the Sunset*.

Exterior scenes were rare and imaginably more challenging to construct for plays in the realist mode. Though materials from the natural world were imported with good effect into Vere Dudgeon’s set for *The Wood in the Whispering*, of which there is photographic evidence in the Abbey Theatre Digital Archive. In M.J. Molloy’s Chekhovian play, set at the gates to a crumbling estate in the woods, the trees are as withered as the lives of those who hide out in them: a rural, mostly older community, drained of its youth (through emigration) and its energy. Dudgeon’s set is eerily elegiac, with the gate backed by a void of darkness, its grid partly overcome with stranglers. Francis McManus also gave the theatre an exterior setting with his play *Judgement on James O’Neill*, which takes place in a graveyard. The other notable play set outside was Thomas Coffey’s murder mystery *Stranger, Beware*, the first act of which plays out on a village street with facades of a public house and a Garda

barracks in view. This was hardly ground-breaking for the Abbey; Coffey's setting recalls Augusta Gregory's comedy *Hyacinth Halvey*, the action of which takes place on a village street outside a post office.

While the settings of Abbey Theatre plays in the 1950s were unlikely to signify in a major way the growing transition from rural to urban in Irish society, the costuming is more telling. J. Humphreys noted in his study *New Dubliners: Urbanization and the Irish Family* (1966) that by 1946 there were signs of a "new Dublin", with a decline of the class of general labourers and a growth of skilled workers - especially white-collar - that made up a modern, industrialised community. In 1946 Humphreys records that Dublin enabled 21.1 per cent of its population to engage in work in the worlds of commerce and finance, 12 per cent in administration and defence, 8.9 per cent in the professions, and 13.7 per cent in personal services. In total, 32.2 per cent were occupied by non-agricultural production.

The Abbey Theatre's wardrobe supervisor, most likely Eileen Tobin at the start of the decade until Michael O'Herlihy's appointment in 1955, and finally Tomás Mac Anna in 1956, was more attuned to this "new Dublin" than the repertoire it was producing. New white-collar formalwear, principally men's grey flannel suits, ties and hats, were used to dress actors despite the fact that they were playing villagers from small town rural Ireland: from Wexford in 1953's *This Other Eden*; Antrim in a revival of George Shiels's 1948 comedy *The Caretakers* in 1954; and the fictional Ulster town Portahoy in Samuel John Waddell's *Peter* when revived in 1955, though its year of origin, 1930, predates the arrival of the "new Dubliners".

Women's costuming also found new forms. The woollen "brat" - a large voluminous cloak-wrap mantle - seemed to be finally retired for good, overstaying its welcome in the Abbey wardrobe ever since it was first used to dress peasants in productions from the Celtic Revival period. The paisley-pattern dress of the inter-war years socialite had since created a neater silhouette after the "brat" had all but completely covered up women's bodies from view. But there were signs of change again, with something new offered in hairstyle: the poodle cut, which teases the hair into tight curls, was popular in this decade and often displayed by women actors of the Abbey company. In 1958 the actor Joan O'Hara appeared in Walter Macken's *Look in the Looking-*

*Glass* with a shoulder-length pageboy cut (wearing the hair sleek, with a wave at the front and the ends turned under) reminiscent of how Grace Kelly wore it in *High Society* (1956).

### 3. Costuming: From Conspicuous Consumption to Situated Bodily Practice

In her path-finding book *The Actor in Costume* (2010), Aoife Monks distinguishes between the terms “costume” and “costuming”. She finds that “costume” histories that focus on the garment, such as James Laver’s *Costume in the Theatre* (1964), “have a tendency to treat actors as living paper dolls, rather than fully interrogating the theatrical implications of the *uses* and *reception* of costume” (8). “Costuming”, the act of dressing-up, is a richer approach for Monks: “By thinking about costuming we can imagine theatre as a contradictory place of illusion where audiences can look at real clothes. We can think about the dress of the audience and the actor, and consider the actor’s role in the fashion system” (3).

It’s no coincidence perhaps that costume theories are as scant as sociological literatures on the cultural meaning of clothes. Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson argue that “Dress is a crucial aspect of embodiment, shaping the self physically and psychologically”.<sup>210</sup> In their introduction to the seminal collection of essays, *Body Dressing* (2001), they trace how costume history emerged as a subset of art history, and was only subject to philosophical or sociological thinking from a moralistic point of view. Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), which rejected fashion as “conspicuous consumption”, was still being quoted as an authority on dress in the 1960s and 1970s. Veblen’s views were replicated by Jean Baudrillard in his work, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981). Sociologist Georg Simmel, in his essay “Fashion” (1971), summed up the uses of fashion as little more than to distinguish the upper class from the lower. This perceived “wastefulness” of clothes from philosophical and sociological literatures seems to have also permeated theatre studies, which finds itself lacking in methodologies for examining theatre costuming.

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<sup>210</sup> Back cover to *Body Dressing* (2001).

Roland Barthes in his analysis of fashion journalism, *The Fashion System* (1985), noted how the heterogeneity of everyday dress practice is far more complex than the fashion discourse laid out in magazines. Entwistle and Wilson, however, point out that Barthes's linguistic and structuralist explanation only reduces fashion to an abstract value system and neglects the place and significance of the body. According to them, it is through the process of embellishing or covering the body that the body is shaped by culture and rendered meaningful. Therefore, through shifting styles, fashion is constantly reinventing the body, whether by finding new ways of concealing body parts or revealing them. These new forms of making the body visible are also loaded with identity politics:

Dress and fashion mark out particular kinds of bodies, drawing distinctions in terms of class and status, gender, age, sub-cultural affiliations that would otherwise not be so visible or significant. In this way, fashion can tell us a lot about the body in culture. (Entwistle and Wilson 4)

Entwistle draws on structuralism and phenomenology in her theory of “dress” as “*a situated bodily practice* which is embedded within the social world and fundamental to micro social order” (Entwistle 34). She draws on the structuralism of Mary Douglas, who in *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1973) argued that the individual body shaped by society makes for another body: “The social body [that] constrains the way the physical body is perceived” (Douglas 93). For phenomenology, Entwistle looks to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Primacy of Perception* (1975) which argues that that we perceive the world through the body and its place in the world, an embodied nature of subjectivity. If that is “crucial to the experience of expression of self,” writes Entwistle, “what could be more visible an aspect of the body than dress?” (Entwistle 46). Dress, then, is the visible form of our intentions, the insignia by which we are read and come to read others. As Entwistle puts it: “Dress works to “glue” identities in a world where they are uncertain” (Entwistle 47).

Monk's history of costuming complements Entwistle's theory of dress as “situated bodily practice”. In her overview of nineteenth century English costuming, for example, she identifies that theatrical costuming was instrumental to the fashion system. By dressing actors in the clothes of the rich, they suggested fashionable dress

for the theatre-going audience, and were “feeding the public appetite for variety and novelty, generalising and exemplifying the uses of dress and exacerbating the widening rift between ideas of the self and clothes” (55). But in the modernist scenographies that dominated the twentieth century, the “beauty” of dress was suspended and costuming was located more in the revelation of eternal truths and political transformation of the spectators. According to Monks: “Costume now framed actors as labourers or peasants who meditated the meanings of contemporary culture, the new world order, and new technologies for their audience” (73).

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, costuming is also a way of looking at the body on stage. Bernadette Sweeney has shown how representations of the body can be read as responses to a specific set of cultural conditions. In 1950s Ireland, that body existed in a climate resonant with censorship and constraint due to the power of the Church, de Valera and the Dance Hall Acts. A conflation of religious and political idealism appropriated the female form, in particular, for a patriarchal postcolonial agenda.

#### **4.1 *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959) by Anne Daly**

*Leave it to the Doctor* is the second, and last, recorded play written by Anne Daly. From Crosshaven, Co. Cork, the writer’s first work, *Window on the Square*, was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1951, the first new play presented during its residency at Queen’s Theatre. Ernest Blythe told the Sunday Independent that this drama, a critique of middle-class parochialism and parental tyranny, was “written with a feminine approach and resembles somewhat Teresa Deevy’s successful *Katie Roche*”.<sup>211</sup> Set in rural Cork in 1900, *Window on the Square* looks at events leading up to a marriage between a Dublin architect and a woman under the thumb of her interfering mother. The action jumps to 1922 to show the married couple dispirited, and the matriarch’s family name in disrepair. This explains the *Irish Times* reviewer’s description of it as “a sort of *Cherry Orchard*”. It ran for only six performances and was lambasted by that reviewer as “the sort of play that Lennox Robinson might have

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<sup>211</sup> “New Play by County Cork Dramatist”, *Sunday Independent* Oct 14 1951, 2.

written in the middle twenties. [...] In the hands of Miss Daly, unfortunately, the play degenerates into nothing more or less than a melodramatic slush”.<sup>212</sup>

In her foreword to the published script of *Leave it to the Doctor*, novelist Kate O’Brien protests that review, claiming *Window on the Square* “was killed by the critics, and, may I add, by the lethargy of Dublin theatregoers”. She goes on to write: “[Anne’s] distinction of method lies, I think, in a kind of level delicacy of approach to all characters; this and a very marked and feminine irony”.<sup>213</sup> *Leave it to the Doctor* had comparable success. It premiered as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival on September 14<sup>th</sup> 1959. The production directed by Ria Mooney (who also directed *Window on the Square*) and designed by Tomás Mac Anna initially ran for twelve performances and came back for another nine. The *Irish Times* reviewer described it as “in startling contrast” to *Window on the Square*, and observed it to be “a quiet skilful resumé of all the matchmaking kitchen comedies which have passed over the Abbey’s well-worn boards”.<sup>214</sup> The review also singled out Maire Kean (or Maire Ni Cathain), a member of the acting company from 1949-1988, for her role as the harsh love interest Molly Davern (Kean also played the prominent role of the tyrannical mother in *Window on the Square*).

*Leave it to the Doctor* is a match-making comedy following a town doctor, Mick Brazil, whose fiancé insists that he disclose their relationship to her difficult and over involved uncle and guardian, Corney. Mick’s strategy is to diagnose him with a phony illness, put him on bed rest, and encourage a local schoolteacher, Molly Davern, to be his companion, thereby distracting him from his niece. The plan is made to the detriment of Corney’s housekeeper, Maggie Lillis, who secretly harbours feelings for him.

#### 4.2 Staging the “Woman of the House”

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<sup>212</sup> “Window on the Square”, *Irish Times* Oct 23 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times, 3.

<sup>213</sup> Quoted from foreword of *Leave it to the Doctor* (1961).

<sup>214</sup> “Leave it to the Doctor”, *Irish Times* Sep 15 1959; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times, 5.

While a matchmaking comedy mightn't be the most obviously feminist form of theatre, there is a subtle subversion of the classical patriarchal model in Daly's play. Caitríona Clear uses the term "woman of the house" to describe female domestic workers, saying that "housewife" and "homemaker" refer to married women only:

A woman of the house is any woman who is seen to be in charge of certain functions within a house, those to do with the organisation and performance of its everyday nurturing and recreational functions. 'Woman of the house' also has the advantage of being a direct translation of the Irish *bean a'tighe*; *teach* (of which *tighe* is the genitive case) translates as house, building, shop, region, kingdom, family and line of descent (Clear 2000 12).

Women who performed household work constituted the largest block of adult women in the first 40 years of Independence. This was partly ensured by discriminatory legislation, with the combined efforts of the 1932 Marriage Ban and 1936 Conditions of Employment Act excluding women from white-collar work. But Clear points out that mass emigration in the 1940s was one method through which women were forsaking recommendations to be domestic servants: "[emigration] drew attention not only to the men left behind who were thus bereft of potential wives [...] but also to the middle class women deprived of cheap domestic labour and forced to their housework unaided" (Clear 2000 2)

Daly's play dramatises the necessity of the "woman of the house" in Irish life, and finds humour in men's fears of losing such labourers (and, though its unsaid, having to do the work themselves). When we first see Mick, it's clear he's been resisting the urges of his patient fiancé, Nancy, to confront Corney. What forces him to finally take action is the leave of his housekeeper, Nora, who announces she's taking leave to visit her daughter in America. For Mick, dealing with Corney and proceeding into marriage with Nancy only becomes urgent when he's in need of her to become his housekeeper. He jokes to her:

MICK: I'm keen on getting an efficient and qualified person. [...] She must have a diploma in cookery (Daly 6).

Another motivation for Mick is financial necessity. Nancy, we learn, has an inheritance that Corney is in control of and won't give without consent. She insists that Mick's salary isn't enough; they will need the sum controlled by her uncle to accommodate their married lifestyle:

NANCY: Don't you see that we'd want it if we got married. Think of the furniture alone! (7)

Nancy's emphasis that they live in a "decent house" that is "properly equipped" reflects feminism in mid-century Ireland, which Clear has equated as being identical to the maternalist feminism of early-century Europe. The passing of Fianna Fáil's 1943 bill to give mother's child allowances for the first child (it was defeated and another bill introduced payments for the third and subsequent child) would, according to Clear, be perceived as "[rewarding] directly with money work that was coming to be recognised as both arduous and valuable - the care of a family" (Clear 2000 47). The Irish Housewives' Association, founded in 1942, began advocating for women to fine-tune their consumer practice and shrewd thinking. As Andrée Sheehy Skeffington urged readers of the first issue of their annual publication, *The Irish Housewife*:

Defend your rights as consumers; never pay more than the fixed price for any commodity; insist on getting the best your money can buy; have nothing to do with the black market; be particular as to the quality and cleanliness of all goods (49-50).

Clear identifies that, by the 1950s, consumer advice was prominent in women's pages of newspapers and magazines. Where books produced in the 1920s and 1930s laid emphasis on survival, basic health and making-do-and-mending, publications in the 1950s, according to Clear: "emphasised sternly the woman's duty both to relax and to make the home pleasant and the meals varied" (Clear 2000 53). Some level of physical and material comfort in the daily round, rather than power or responsibility, seems to have been what the women who set up house in the 1940s and 1950s, craved, though they saw personal financial power as a necessary prerequisite of this comfort (Clear 2000 201).

One way in which Daly emphasises Molly Davern as a bad match for Corney is in her abuse of the play's handyman, Cleary, and her rejection of his good deal on a second-hand bath that once belonged to Mrs Preston-Manchester (an offstage local, grand enough to live in a castle). This can be read as a rejection of the Irish feminism that preaches the importance of shrewd economic practice and good hygiene. Tellingly, when Corney and Maggie Lillis become a match at the comedy's conclusion, the latter asks Cleary not to let go of Mrs Preston-Manchester's bath. Daly suggests that Maggie makes for a better companion than Molly because her nature is aligned with feminist values.

#### 4.3 Costuming as Feminist



**Ray McAnally as Mick and Kathleen Barrington as Nora in *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.**

According to Sweeney, readings of the Irish body in performance require acknowledgements of the culturally specific repression of the body. The female body, in particular, was inscribed with values such as self-denial and chastity demonstrated

by the Virgin Mary. As Tamar Mayer writes in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism Sexing the Nation* (2000):

Women are encouraged to represent and manifest the ideal of Mary in their own “essence” - in their behaviour, their motherhood and their relationships with others. In other words it is through their mimetic performance of Mary’s model that individual Irish women came to embody femininity and, by extension, the Irish nation” (17).

Aside from this Catholic inscription, the female body in Ireland was also complexly placed within a country that was previously feminised by its coloniser. Sweeney cites David Lloyd when drawing attention to Irish Nationalist writings that describe Gaelic culture as lost, primitive and feminine. After Independence, the focus was to dismantle this image:

In the Irish Republic masculine subjectivity assumed the privileges of the white Western male and, although a rural ideal was being posited, it was the middle classes, property owners and educated professionals who could now set about countering the savage feminised representations as constructed by the coloniser (Sweeney 17).

Seeing as a majority of women worked as “women of the house” in the years after Independence, the question became how to dress for the role while deterring the feminised colonial past. For warmth and durability, an *Irish Press* article in 1931 suggested “a skirt in a woollen material and a sleeveless knitted pullover”.<sup>215</sup> A slightly more embellished uniform was recommended in a 1943 *Irish Independent* article entitled “Pretty but Practical”, which made a case for an “overall frock| that is easily slipped into, yet made up in some gay cotton fabric, is smart and becoming, and at the same time, essentially practical”.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> “The Housewife’s Outfit”, *Irish Press* 19 Oct 1931.

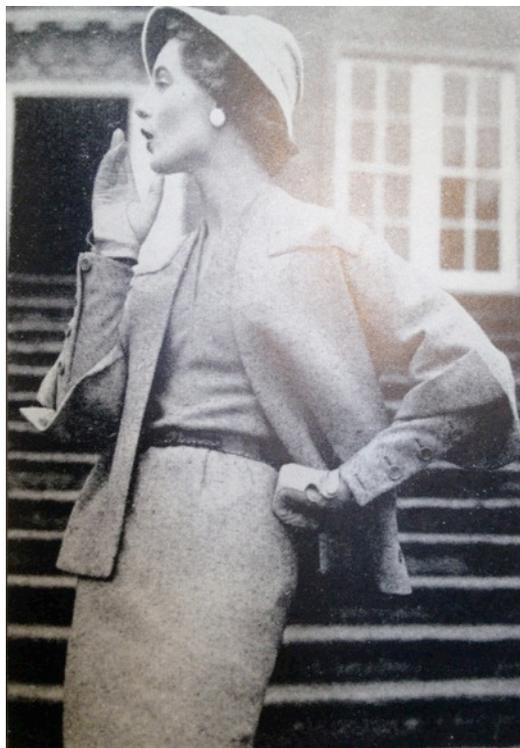
<sup>216</sup> “Pretty but Practical”, *Irish Independent* 18 Oct 1943.



**Ray McAnally as Mick and Aideen O'Kelly as Nancy in *Leave it to the Doctor* (1959). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.**

However, the costuming of Ria Mooney's production for *Leave it the Doctor* reveals one "woman of the house" character, Nora, dressed not in a flexible frock. Instead, she is wearing a buttoned jacket made of tweed, a fabric now synonymous with men's suits. A white collared shirt is worn underneath, suggesting the professionalization of the "the woman of the house" and her work. A watch on her left wrist indicates that she is alert to time-keeping. The costuming in Mooney's production respectably adorns a woman of the house whose work, Daly emphasises, is multifarious. Nora's duties, we see, goes beyond cooking and cleaning Mick's house. She admits patients into the surgery. At one point she goes to mix distemper for Cleary, the handyman. When she announces she's leaving, Mick despairs "Who'll cook my dinner and flatter my rich patients and keep out the creditors", suggesting that she's also his accountant (Daly 4).

Daly's emphasis on women's work isn't limited to Nora. Maggie, we realise, displays the skills of a nurse while looking after Corney. Molly, we learn, has two jobs: working as a schoolteacher and a farmer. In fact, the only woman whose labour seems solely domestic is Nancy, who, at one point, leaves to help Maggie in a presumably domestic task ("If I had known you were coming I would have stayed in, but I promised Mrs. Lillis - ") (23), and at another point announces: "I'll run out and do a spot of gardening" (30). Perhaps this is why Mooney elected to dress Nancy in evening wear, in a patterned dress more resonant with a socialite rather than with the labour-aspects of a woman of the house.



**A tweed women's suit designed by Irene Gilbert. Source: Elizabeth McCrum, *Fabric & Form*, 19.**

Perhaps Nancy, identified as the love interest of the protagonist, has to be distanced from those realities of work to fulfil her role. Film scholar Laura Mulvey has argued that onscreen women have been "simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (837). According to Jill Dolan, the same representations persist in theatre, and "tend to objectify women performers and female spectators as passive, invisible, unspoken subjects" (289). Where the

costuming of Nancy fits into such an analysis, the costuming of Nora ruptures it. If subjectivity in Irish theatre has primarily been written from the male perspective, and that involved dressing female bodies to be passive, then the deployment of white-collar wear for women in this production of Daly's play must have shifted the traditional gaze.

In fact, such costuming points to the serious surge of women entering non-domestic work in the next decade. As Caitriona Clear points out in her book *Women's Voices in Ireland* (2016): "There were over 31,000 more female white-collar, industrial professional and commercial workers in 1961 than there had been in 1946" (Clear 2016 8). While such a cultural change didn't shift roles for female actors in the Abbey company (they still, for the most part, were narrowed to roles defined by relationships with male characters), the 1959 production of *Leave it to the Doctor* seems to have briefly changed the status quo. The production's costuming grounds some women of the house in realities of work that are separate from traditionally passive realities such as romance. The inspiration for this may very well have come from Ireland's own growing fashion industry. A day suit from Irene Gilbert's 1954 winter collection is obviously more tailored than the garment used to dress Nora but its adoption of tweed into women's day wear is noteworthy. Similarly, director Ria Mooney's production redeploys white-collar dress from a predominantly male milieu, thus legitimising the woman of the house's work as active, not passive.

#### **4.4 In Performance: Signs of a Feminist Revolution**

That Kate O'Brien, a novelist whose 1930s novels dealt with female agency and sexuality, wrote the foreword to the published script of *Leave it to the Doctor* gives us a sense of what kind of social circles Anne Daly frequented. As I have argued, this 1959 play can be seen to reflect the maternalist feminism of mid-century Ireland, that type of feminism championed by the Irish Housewives Association. This wave of feminism supports the legitimisation of work by women of the house. From a present perspective, this may seem like an acceptance of gender roles that allows inequality to persist. And while Ireland's second wave feminism would arrive in 1970, with the formation of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement whose activism is linked to

improvements in legal status for women, the maternalist feminism roused in Daly's play remains an instrumental step to reform.

Despite the critical and commercial improvement on *Window on the Square*, the Abbey Theatre did not produce any further plays by Daly. Her record as a writer after *Leave it to the Doctor* has yet to be recovered. It's not known what relationship she had with Ernest Blythe, or whether to suspect that Daly, like playwright Teresa Deevy may have been, was a victim of the culture wars of the time. A playwright of her gender was certainly a rarity at the time; the only other female playwright whose work in English was produced by the Abbey in the 1950s was Pauline Maguire and her once-off comedy *The Last Move* (1955). In the Irish language-programming, a piece by Marjorie Watson was translated by Tomás Mac Anna into *Ar Bhuile a hOcht* (1958) while Máiréad Ní Ghráda had best success with *La Bui Bealtaine* (1953), *Ull Glas Oiche Shamhna* (1955) and *Sugan Sneachta* (1959). Later, Ní Ghráda's *An Trial* (1964), a drama about a pregnant woman and her subsequent single motherhood, would share some serious truth about women's realities in Ireland.

### 5.1 *Stranger, Beware* (1959) by Tom Coffey

*Stranger, Beware* is the debut stage play by Tom Coffey (1925-2014). From Ennis, Co. Clare, his first drama, *Luíochán*, was broadcasted on Radio Éireann in 1955. Coffey worked as principal at Dingle Technical School, Co. Kerry, which may explain the focus on young people's frustrations in *Stranger, Beware* and a later play produced by Gemini Productions in association with Dublin Theatre Festival, *Gone Tomorrow* (1965). Coffey's debut play premiered on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1959, in a production directed by Ray McAnally (a first for the actor who had been part of the Abbey company since 1948) with set designed by Tomás Mac Anna. It ran for 11 performances, which doesn't suggest a commercial success. The *Irish Times* review described it as "an unpretentious thriller set in a Kerry village".<sup>217</sup>

Resembling the hardboiled fiction that came to prominence in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century through writers like Raymond Chandler, Coffey's *Stranger, Beware* takes the

<sup>217</sup> "Kerry Setting for New Abbey Thriller", *Irish Times* Aug 18 1959; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times, 5.

“whodunit” model as its plot structure. In a remote Kerry village, an abusive Civil War veteran, Ned, is found murdered. The locals turn their heads to a suspicious hiker from Dublin who arrived in town the same night. The local sergeant and his young peer, Jim (who is obsessed with detective novels), work to identify the murderer before the town turns to mob rule and executes the hiker.

## 5.2 Staging the Next Generation

The play opens with the arrival of a young couple on a village street, at 10pm on an August night. The *dramatis personae* inside an unpublished script tells us Paudeen is “Village ‘tough’, about eighteen, noisy, cheeky, not very brave”, while Nellie is “Another tough, about 19, also noisy, cheeky, leads Paudeen into mischief”.<sup>218</sup> These “toughs”, as Coffey calls them, seem to engage in anti-social behaviour. After deflating the postman’s bicycle tyres, they attack Ned when he’s leaving the local pub. It’s possible that this is Coffey’s method of setting up Paudeen and Nellie as early suspects in the man’s murder; by the end, we discover the crime was committed by a local schoolteacher trying to protect Ned’s daughter.

There is a sure generational disdain wrapped up in Nellie and Paudeen’s assault on Ned. When they are chased away by the sergeant, Paudeen howls back:

PAUDEEN: Wooo! Ned the Tan Killer WOOO! [...] The only thing you can kill is a bottle o’ stout (Coffey 5).

Demonstrating more than a lack of respect for their elders, this line suggests a deeper resentment for the circumstances that the younger generation have inherited. In such flashes of anger, Nellie and Paudeen seem to be railing against Irish revolutionary history. Whatever their feelings of alienation, they’re probably linked to the lack of opportunities made explicit by the sergeant when he introduces the town to the hiker.

SERGEANT: It is situated thirty miles from the south west of Killarney, an’ ten miles from the tar road. [...] Its principal industries are fishin’ for the

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<sup>218</sup> *Dramatis Personae*, *Stranger, Beware* (1959).

leavin's of the foreign trawlers and producin' children for the export market (12).

But Coffey's young characters are also noteworthy for defying the usual appropriation of bodies to the postcolonial agenda. According to Bernadette Sweeney: "National identity relied on notions of chastity and self-denial, especially in women" (20). However, Coffey makes it explicit from the beginning that Nellie retains a certain ambiguity. In terms of her relationship with Paudeen, Coffey describes her as his girlfriend though it seems that she isn't completely monogamous:

PAUDEEN: What about you and Stevie Mike?

NELLIE: What d'ya mean, what about me and Stevie Mike?

PAUDEEN: Wasn't I there when he borrowed the keys of Patsheen's car before he took you onta the dance the other night [...] There's a grand comfortable back seat in Patsheen's car, isn't there? (3).

There is more than a hint in Coffey's play that these young characters are having pre-marital sex. When Paudeen cat-whistles Maureen, a young woman working in the local school, he crudely remarks: "I wouldn't mind a good houl't of that wan then" (3). Clearly, Coffey's play puts bodies onstage that don't comply with Catholic morality defined by chastity and self-denial.

### 5.3 Costuming as Counter Culture



**Derry Power as Paudeen, Edward Golden dressed as Sergeant, and Maire Ni Dhomhnaill dressed as Nellie in *Stranger, Beware* (1959). Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.**

It's possible to suspect that Coffey was less sure of how to present Nellie and Paudeen on stage than other characters. The detail of other figures' dress is very explicit. The question of the sergeant's professionalism, for example, is teased by a description of his appearance: "*collarless, tunic off*" (12). In comparison, the officer Jim, a more enthusiastic worker, is "*immaculately uniformed*" (19). A local woman, Mrs. O'Brien, considered pretentious by others, is dressed impractically with "*high heels, nylons, short fur jacket, despite warm weather, fashionable hat*" (11). Her pugnacious rival, Sheila, has "*flashy earrings and necklace, showy blouse and skirt, in clashing colours, too much lipstick and rouge, badly applied*" (10). It's surprising that the younger characters don't receive such detailed descriptions of dress.

Nellie, I argue, best resembles the subject of Hilary Radner's essay: "Embodying the Single Girl in the 1960s". Radner argues against the traditionally feminist stance that consumer culture oppresses women by holding them to impossible standards. In her analysis of 1960s fashion photography, she identifies the Single Girl as embodied by

the likes of model Jean Shrimpton. According to Radner: “both in appearance, waif-like and adolescent, and in goals, to be glamorous and adored by men (in the plural) while economically independent, the Single Girl defines femininity outside a traditional patriarchal construction” (184). Nellie mightn’t subscribe fully to this model, especially if we are to infer that she one of those young people being primed for the “export market”. But the clear adoration she commands of men, combined with the suggestive glamour of her costuming provokes certain comparisons.

Radner identifies the 1957 comedy film *Funny Face* as a transitional moment in the move from *haute couture* to *prêt-à-porter*. From that picture, she argues, the gown designed by Hubert de Givenchy for Audrey Hepburn is less remembered and iconic than another ensemble she wears of black turtleneck and capri pants. “For practical and aesthetic reasons,” writes Radner, “the formal attire of the socialite [...] no longer was constructed as the locus of ‘correctness’ and ‘authority’” (Radner 189). Radner asserts that the new ideal was “young and single, but not necessarily economically or socially privileged, seemingly as accessible to the typist as to the duchess” (Radner 186).

Radner cites Martin Harrison in charting changes in women’s fashion magazines, arguing that the displacement of the fashion model from studio to outdoor *mise-en-scène* marked a construction of a female identity that’s active rather than passive (Radner 187). It’s worth pointing out that Coffey’s play is one of few plays produced by the Abbey Theatre in the 1950s with an exterior setting. In fact, the first image in Coffey’s play is of Nellie, alone, emerging almost ominously from the shadows of the urban scene as another local arrives:

*NELLIE is standing near the private door of the pub and is almost completely hidden. MICHAEL comes on [...]. He is lighting his pipe. NELLIE looks left too and giggles. MICHAEL is embarrassed. PAUDEEN comes on. MICHAEL exits (3).*



**Shift dresses with geometric print, designed by Mary Quant. Source: [stylebyportobello.com](http://stylebyportobello.com).**

Links between Nellie and the Single Girl type are further evident in the costuming of Ray McNally's production. Nellie is dressed in a sleeveless shift dress with geometric print, and a beret sitting on top of her head. This *prêt-à-porter* look resembles ensembles by Welsh designer Mary Quant, who effectively coined the "minishirt", and who Radner references as pioneering the Single Girl "look". Quant's shift dresses have also been linked to the Mod, or modernist, subculture that Melissa M. Casburn describes as "struggling to escape the oppressiveness, family morals and strict discipline in schools and on the streets" in the wake of World War II.<sup>219</sup> The costuming of Nellie in Mod fashion, therefore, suggests she belongs to a counter culture that, instead of reacting against alienation felt after World War II, is furious with the legacies of the Irish Civil War.

Paudeen is dressed as belonging to the same *milieu*. He is costumed in a striped t-shirt. It's possible to draw a line to the iconic Breton stripe, a motif from nautical

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<sup>219</sup> Melissa M. Casburn, "A Concise History of the British Mod Movement", [gbacg.org](http://gbacg.org).

uniforms, long since incorporated into couture by Coco Chanel in 1917. Itai Doron in his essay “Tinker, soldier, sailor, thief” draws reference to the male sexual outlaw as embodied by the sailor archetype. Doron’s study discusses representations of that archetype specifically in gay art but it’s still helpful in understanding “the male-dominated shady underworlds they supposedly inhabit” as a site of “representation and desire for a sexually dominant man”.<sup>220</sup> Paudeen’s place within that site as a sexually explicit character prone to engaging in assault and other antisocial behaviour is further accentuated by dressing him in a striped garment. The Breton stripe found a contemporaneous male model in James Dean, who wore it in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). In his essay “1955 - Movies and Growing Up ... Absurd”, Jon Lewis weaves cinema criticism with psychology, and analyses that *Rebel Without a Cause* “placed the blame for teen deviance and dysfunction on an adult generation lost in the fast-changing postwar American culture” (Lewis 151). Though Coffey doesn’t shift such blame onto his older characters in *Stranger, Beware*, the costuming implies that young people’s alienation and its source are present.

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<sup>220</sup> Abstract of “Tinker, Soldier, Sailor, Thief: The Visual Representations and Appropriations of the Male Sexual Outlaw as a Gay Fantasy Figure in the Arts and in Fashion Imagery”, *Critical Studies in Men’s Fashion* Vol. 3 (2) 2016.



**James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). Source: esquire.com.**

#### **5.4 In Performance - Signs of a Rebellious Generation**

Despite *Stranger, Beware* faring less well than Anne Daly's *Leave it to the Doctor*, the Abbey Theatre continued to invest in Coffey's work. In 1960 came *Anyone Could Rob a Bank*, a music-hall style farce following three men trying to solve who stole their plan for a bank heist. *Stranger, Beware* may have been hung up on the Troubles of the 1920s but *The Long Sorrow* (1961), which bands together a militant republican and a RUC officer in a struggle for survival, offered a look at violence in Northern Ireland that would escalate in the next decade. *Them* (1963) followed a young man taunted by the locals for being a bit "queer in the head". *The Call* (1966), a thriller set during the London Blitz, was his last play produced by the Abbey Theatre.

I mentioned before that Coffey's play *Gone Tomorrow* (1965), presented by Gemini Productions in association with Dublin Theatre Festival, also featured youths rebelling against an absurd world. Around the same time, Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) dramatized the agonising lack of opportunities for young people in Ireland. The younger members of the Carney family in Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in*

*the Dark* (1961) are caught up in spirals of violence connected to the absurdity of Irish identity. And of course, Tom Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr. Roche* (1968) sees the repressed sexualities of men made manifest in out-of-control behaviour. While Coffey's *Stranger, Beware* is less remembered than all those works, it still shines an important light on why a generation of Irish people may have felt alienated as they negotiated Ireland's post-Independence period.

### **6.1 *No Man is an Island* (1959) by Peter Hutchinson**

*No Man is an Island* was the second - and last recorded - play by Peter Hutchinson. His first drama *Outpost*, presented at the Amateur Drama Festival in Athlone in 1958, depicted life in the Irish army. It was likely informed by Hutchinson's own experience as an adjutant of an Irish army construction corps in Tramore during World War II.<sup>221</sup> *No Man is an Island* premiered at the Abbey Theatre on November 9 1959, in a production directed by Ria Mooney and designed by Tomás Mac Anna. It ran for nine performances, which doesn't suggest a commercial success. The production seems to have been ignored by critics.

*No Man is an Island* is a drama set in an army barracks in an Irish city. Regan, a new recruit, has arrived at his billet struggling with an unknown disorder. His roommate Lowther - a protective, athletic and philandering private - believes he's homesick. But Regan's behaviour grows strange; he's unable to bless himself, and imagines seeing a serpent. Meanwhile, Masters - the harsh captain of the barracks, and who's wife is worryingly sick - is visited by a local young woman who says she's pregnant with Lowther's baby. Lowther insists that the baby couldn't be his. Later, a medical officer observes that Regan might be manic depressive. Masters ignores the seriousness of the speculation, just before Regan starts firing shots from a tower. Masters climbs towards the platform to disarm him, but is caught at gunpoint. Regan intends to kill Masters, believing that the captain's tyranny comes from joining the army too late to fight the Blueshirts, and that he's also threatening to take Regan's companion Lowther away. But Lowther intervenes and saves Masters, before urging him to see how his unhappiness is the source of his wife's sickness. Grateful for the perspective,

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<sup>221</sup> Munster Express 1860-current, Friday, August 21, 1959; 6

Masters dedicates himself to being more sensitive to this wife's anxiety, and helping her recover.

## 6.2 Staging the "Soldiery Man"

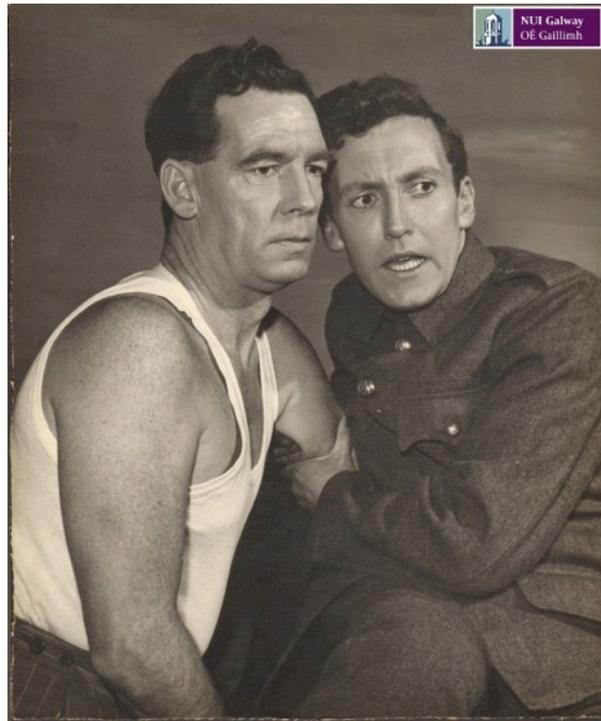
In his book *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, historian George L. Mosse charts the evolution of masculinity. He observes a change from the knightly chivalry of the medieval period to the "soldiery man" of the early 20th century. With the rise of conscription, physical toughness became as important as moral strength, celebrating "the entire male body as an example of virility, strength and courage expressed through the proper posture and appearance" (23). Focus shifted away from behaviour and courtesy. What replaced it was "a totality in which not merely dress and bearing but the male body itself" (23).

In Hutchinson's play, that "soldiery man" is embodied by Lowther. He's first seen entering from the wash house "*in slacks and scarlet waist-belt and gym-slip, with towel over shoulder,*" asking for "a dab o' brylcreem" (4). Immediately, his athletic and rebellious appearance is seen in contrast to the by-the-book corporeal, O'Neill, who's fussing over Regan's failure to unpack his kit and make his bed. Demonstrating his physical ability, Lowther "*gently propels*" Regan away and teaches him how to make the bed. When Regan shares his feelings of powerlessness, Lowther shows off his virility by trying to encourage Regan to find freedom in sex and overconsumption, saying "you can court your pick outside these gates; you can get drunk, blind, reelin', squitterin' drunk" (9).

As a "soldiery man," Lowther is also seen displaying moral strength. Seeing Regan distressed, he encourages him to consult the barracks' medical officer. When Regan uncontrollably cries out for his mother, Lowther bursts through the door, bathes his face with a towel, and cradles him to sleep, saying: "Alright ... alright ... You're alright now, boy. ... Just go to sleep for yourself" (29). Near the end, Lowther saves Masters from Regan, even though the captain hasn't been shy about voicing his resentment of Lowther and threatening to reassign him to "the dirtiest job" he can find with a "temporary latrine" (17.2). Lowther jumps Regan just as he raises his rifle at Masters, presses a wad into his mouth and overpowers him until he's unconscious.

When asked why Lowther did it, he explains that he didn't want Regan to “get into deeper trouble” (9.3). This demonstrates strong moral attributes in Lowther, principally concern and companionship.

### 6.3 Costuming as a Spectacle of Masculinity



**Bill Foley (Lowther) and Vincent Dowling (Regan) in *No Man is an Island* (1959).**

**Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.**

For film scholar Steven Cohan, a particular type of men in the U.S. during 1950s, and distributed in Europe in pictures like *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1956), captured a hegemonic concept of masculinity. He finds these are “namely, the white, heterosexual, corporate, WASP, suburban breadwinner” (xi). But an erotic value to male stardom in the 1950s, evident in the fan worship of William Holden and Marlon Brando, signified a way to disturb that normative concept of masculinity. The spectacle of those men’s bodies, as revealed through careful costuming, could disturb the orthodoxy of a “real man.” The sight of Holden’s “ripping muscles” in the 1955 film *Picnic*, for instance, could “signify phallic superiority in comparison to the other more diminutive male bodies on screen” (Cohan 173).

Hutchinson clearly had specific ideas about Lowther's appearance. Showing up in a gymslip, with a towel over his shoulder, is one way of playing up his rebelliousness, particularly when he fails to change into uniform in time for Masters's inspection of the billet. But such dress also reveals his superior athletic body. In Ria Mooney's production, Lowther was costumed in a sleeveless and low-neck vest, revealing actor Bill Foley's arms and upper-chest. His physique is put into contrast with other male bodies, including Regan, who was played by a boyish Vincent Dowling. If the hegemonic masculinity identified by Cohan was embodied by college-graduated White Anglo-Saxon Protestant males (WASP), then it may be sooner glimpsed in Regan, who packs a book of poems by John Donne. Furthermore, a notebook of Masters's own poetry is discovered and read aloud by his daughter Terry, evoking "glittering waves" that "weave fantasises on silver sand" (7.2). The play seems to be ceding Masters's masculine authority to Lowther.

If Lowther's body disrupted a hegemonic concept of masculinity and effaced that college-educated and breadwinning version of male identity, then what took its place? For Lowther, a military career wasn't something he particularly desired. As he explains to Terry: "I knocked around a bit, couldn't get a job, didn't want to emigrate and so I found myself in this outfit" (4.2). Much like the young people in *Stranger, Beware*, Lowther's rebelliousness is seen as a product of alienation spurred on by fears of unemployment. In fact, when he recounts his career so far, Lowther doesn't dwell on work-details of his various reassignments, but rather hints at sexual activity proving his virility.

LOWTHER. Two years in the College, prancing up and down Pearse barracks. Two years of watching your step with the rosy-cheeks in Newbridge and Kildare. Having to learn their pedigree before you tumble 'em, for fear they're sergeants' daughters. [...] You daren't be seen at a hop because although the liveliest women are there, the price of admission is too low and heaven knows what you may pick up. (11)

Through Lowther's body, Hutchinson's play effaces normative ideas of breadwinning masculinity and shifts focus onto a masculinity frustrated with the status quo. The costuming in Mooney's production curated a spectacle of masculinity where Lowther, through his embodiment of the "soldierly man," could put new masculinities centre stage.



**William Holden and Kim Novak in *Picnic* (1955). Source: alarmy.com**

#### **6.4 In Performance: Signs of New Masculinities**

The Abbey Theatre didn't produce any further plays by Hutchinson. There may be more of his record as a playwright to be recovered. Hutchinson's play is a rare evocation of the "soldierly man" represented in Hollywood films in the 1950s, whose athletic body distorts conventional portrayals of hegemonic masculinity. Aside from Lowther, whose clearly moral compassion separates him from the raging men of Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* and Thomas Kilroy's *The Death and Resurrection of Mr. Roche*, it's difficult to track similar characters in the Irish canon. Brian Singleton's book *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* provides a detailed study of masculinities in Irish theatre from the mid 1990s onwards. But a

history that goes back earlier, locating other examples of the “soldiery man” frustrated with post-WW II society, has yet to be written.

## 7. Conclusion

As I stated in this chapter’s introduction, none of the analyses of actors’ bodies and acting in 1950s Abbey productions have addressed what was worn onstage. Traces of costuming can reveal diverse types of bodies on the Abbey stage and even, as demonstrated in my case studies, the nuances of cultural change. Costuming in Ria Mooney’s production of *Leave it to the Doctor* matches with the values of maternalist feminism as roused by the Irish Housewives Association, and puts into context such activism as part of Ireland’s feminist histories. Ray McAnally’s production of *Stranger, Beware*, I’ve argued, used costuming to position young people and their alienation as part of an international counter culture. Costuming in Mooney’s production of *No Man is an Island* curated the kind of spectacle of masculinity found in Hollywood films, distorting a hegemonic idea of masculinity as college-educated and breadwinning. Bodies in all three productions suggest new formations in Irish culture.

In the 1960s, Ernest Blythe’s mission to use the Abbey Theatre as a proponent of the language movement began to show signs of fatigue. Ireland’s wider cultural shift towards the rest of the world might explain some unexpected additions to the theatre’s programming. There were productions of Federico Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba* in 1963 and *Yerma* in 1966. German playwright Reinhart Raffalt’s *The Successor* received a production in 1963. And, perhaps most notably, Tomás Mac Anna’s staging of *Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht as part of the 1965 Dublin Theatre Festival. According to Hunt, it was “regarded by many as a breakthrough in lighting, production and acting” (184).

In 1963, Ria Mooney retired from the Abbey company after being an on-and-off member since 1924. Directing duties were resumed by Frank Dermody and Tomás Mac Anna, the latter now effectively a director-designer. Mac Anna, whose own designs began to be described as Brechtian (though he would later insist that

Meyerhold's scenography was his dominant influence<sup>222</sup>) was successful in pushing Abbey management to invest in design. A dedicated department began to form. Anne McCabe took up the role of wardrobe supervisor in 1961, her more risqué garments pushing costuming towards new silhouettes. Brian Collins arrived in 1964, a designer whose abstract and gauzey sets suggest inspiration from Broadway designer Jo Mielziner. Lighting designer Leslie Scott continued working at the theatre, and even consulted with architect Michael Scott on plans for the new Abbey Theatre building.

Concerns about Blythe's management of the theatre grew in intensity in 1959. During Dáil debates about the allocation of £250,000 for building the new Abbey Theatre building, there was anger from some politicians that the Abbey doesn't tour rural areas, and suggestions that some significant playwrights had their plays rejected. This may have inspired his need to outline his position in a new book about the theatre, published in 1962. In a section about the Abbey's influence on public affairs, he wrote:

One of the most perplexing of our national problems today, in a world which is, as it were, shrinking geographically and coalescing politically, is to devise and implement a policy which will preserve permanently Ireland's historic identity.<sup>223</sup>

Here, Blythe discreetly laments Irish society's compulsion towards the wider world, and pleads the need to preserve a unique Irish history. The passage confirms suspicions of the managing director's distrust of internationalism in playwriting, modes of performance and design: an attitude that has clearly dominated his programming. Blythe also used the book to defend against the accusations of rejecting

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<sup>222</sup> In an interview with Karen Carleton, Mac Anna said: "My interest is in Meyerhold, a Russian director, who put his actors up on scaffolding ... I managed to follow his ideas when I did *Ulysses in Nighttown* in the Peacock and I put all the actors up on scaffolding. A few times in the new theatre, I hung the actors from the flies". Lilian Chambers, Ger Fitzgibbon and Eamonn Jordan (eds.). *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001; 282.

<sup>223</sup> Blythe outlines his thoughts on Irish society in *The Abbey Theatre* (Dublin: The National Theatre Society Ltd., 1962).

worthwhile plays. By 1953, his preferred argument against his critics was to dismiss them as playwrights who were embittered by the rejection of their work.<sup>224</sup> But by 1961 there was proof that significant plays had been rejected, when *Irish Times* columnist Séamus Kelly chaired a lively panel with Brendan Behan and John B. Keane acknowledging the theatre's turning away of *The Quare Fellow* and *Sive*. In his book, Blythe stuck by his programming decisions - "One was a broad and simple farce; the other was a melodrama" - and insisted that the only misstep in the theatre's history was W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory's rejection of Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says No!* in 1929.<sup>225</sup>

The first mumbling of Blythe's retirement seems to have been in August 1963, when playwright John O'Donovan defended the much-criticised managing director in a garrulous letter to the *Irish Times*. He says the nation should reward Blythe for financially guiding the theatre by "inviting him to retire".<sup>226</sup> This spurred Kelly to use his *Irishman's Diary* column to draw attention to questionable aspects of Blythe's management - he had procured most shares of the theatre's limited company, and changed its articles of association to remove board members by "special resolution" and refuse shareholders the right to inspect financial accounts. Kelly even suggested replacements for Blythe, saying Micheál Mac Liammoir would be welcomed with "loud and prolonged cheers,"<sup>227</sup> and that "[Denis] Johnston has all that it needs".<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> 5,000 writers had plays rejected *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Apr 18, 1953; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 5.

<sup>225</sup> See Blythe's *The Abbey Theatre*.

<sup>226</sup> LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: THE NATIONAL THEATRE O'Donovan, John *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Aug 27, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 7

<sup>227</sup> AN IRISHMAN'S DIARY *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Sep 3, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 8

<sup>228</sup> AN IRISHMAN'S DIARY QUIDNUNC *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File); Jan 8, 1966; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* pg. 9

Instead, it was the appointment of Walter Macken in a new role - artistic adviser - that heralded enough promise for the *Irish Times* to publish the announcement on its front page. Macken had a significant track record; aside from being an acclaimed actor, playwright and novelist, he had been manager of the Taibhdhearc theatre in Galway. According to a spokesperson for the theatre, Macken's duties will involve the "redirection of policy in the selection of plays," the "production of contemporary works by continental and other authors," and "exploring touring policies at home and abroad." When asked why the position was adviser and not director, the spokesperson explained "it will be necessary for Mr. Macken to work in close cooperation with Mr. Blythe until the latter's retirement, so that he will be in a position, all going well, to take over complete control when that happens".<sup>229</sup> The past two chapters of this thesis have shown how developments in design at the Abbey Theatre were tied to the managing style of Ernest Blythe. This project has also shown that through cosmopolitan sets and counter-culture costuming, design could resist the isolationism and conventionalism that defined Blythe's programming. By 1965, there were signs that Blythe may soon be departing.

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<sup>229</sup> DIRECTOR TALKS OF ABBEY'S FUTURE: Macken's appointment The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Dec 14, 1965; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 8

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## CONCLUSION

On July 18th 1966, the day the new Abbey Theatre building opened, the *Irish Times* published a sketch by stage designer Liam Miller. It recreates the woodcut of Queen Maeve with wolfhound in leash, created by Elinor Monsell as the theatre's emblem in 1904. Queen Maeve looks towards a building with expansive walls stretching to a glazed upper level, backed by a low sun on the horizon. Entitled "Homecoming," the scene is something of meeting point between the heroic Arts and Crafts design that furnished the Abbey in its infancy, and the new trend of bare and imposing architecture seen in Dublin. This thesis has shown that in its first decades, the national theatre engaged with ideas of modernism through stage design. In terms of visual communications, the Abbey Theatre, by moving into this building, now seemed to be adopting modernism as its brand.

The theatre's lead architect, Michael Scott, was a known harbinger of contemporary style. His firm's design for the transport hub Busáras, opened in 1953, was predominantly glazed, with imaginative concrete technology extending a wavy canopy over a passenger concourse. Architecture historian Ellen Rowley says it signalled a forceful statement in a post-Emergency Ireland. In 2015, she wrote in the *Irish Times*: "Here was modernist infrastructure coming into the centre of the capital, at the service of Ireland's bus-travelling masses".<sup>230</sup> While principally a bus station, Busáras had other facilities, including a rooftop restaurant with Italian mosaic pillars and Danish-bronzed windows. In 1966, it was only a short walk away from the new Abbey Theatre. The two sites bookended a route through the city centre stimulated by modernist design, leisure and cultural activity.

With consultation from French architect Pierre Sonrel, designer of the Comédie de Strasbourg, the new Abbey Theatre building was complex in form. Its main auditorium had a seating capacity of 628, with reflectors in the kinked ceiling ideal for acoustic projection. The adjustable opening of the proscenium arch could alter the

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<sup>230</sup> See: Ellen Rowley, "Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks: Busáras by Michael Scott". [Irishtimes.com](http://irishtimes.com). Web Jun 25 2018.

height of the stage, depending on the needs of production. The new Peacock auditorium was placed underground, below the theatre's foyer and lounge, and had a capacity of 156. That backstage requirements - dressing rooms, wardrobe, green rooms and offices - also fit on a site 40 x 35 yards in extent led one architecture critic to describe the new theatre as "a miracle of compression".<sup>231</sup>

The week of the building's opening was challenging. On July 14th *Irish Times* columnist Séamus Kelly captured a chaotic press conference held by managing director Ernest Blythe under the headline "New Abbey's Blythe Spirit". Blythe, beleaguered by press, denied accusation of rejecting Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* - the breakout production of the 1964 Dublin Theatre Festival - and let slip that he turned down a tour of the Abbey company to Russia. When asked about the theatre's artistic policy, he intended to produce "translations of Continental plays and classics over a hundred years old. No West End successes".<sup>232</sup> But a commitment to international plays barely manifested, with Eugene O'Neill's *Before Breakfast* seen in 1968, following a new production of *Long Days Journey Into Night* directed by Frank Dermody and designed by Alan Barlow. Ironically, a non-Irish play produced at the end of Blythe's managing directorship in 1968 was one of his administration's most acclaimed. Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, directed for the Abbey by the Moscow Art Theatre's Maria Knebel, ran for a stunning five weeks. The *Irish Times* critic called it "a faithful and beautiful period reproduction of the play".<sup>233</sup>

In 1969 Alan Simpson - a director at the centre of anti-Catholic accusations that closed down the contemporary Pike Theatre in 1957 - was appointed as artistic director of the Abbey Theatre, ushering in new productions of Brendan Behan's *The*

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<sup>231</sup> A MIRACLE OF COMPRESSION Our Architectural Correspondent The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Jul 18, 1966; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. I

<sup>232</sup> New Abbey's Blythe spirit Kelly, Seamus The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Jul 14, 1966; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 11

<sup>233</sup> Dublin Theatre Festival first nights: chekhov's classic as in Russia Kelly, Seamus The Irish Times (1921-Current File); Oct 9, 1968; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times pg. 10

*Quare Fellow* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the latter with designs by Norah McGuinness.<sup>234</sup> Plays by emergent playwrights included Tom Murphy's *A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant* and Thomas Kilroy's *The O'Neill*. The centrepiece of the energetic programme was Eugene McCabe's new play *Swift*, directed by Tyrone Guthrie - pioneer of the Stratford Festival of Canada and founder of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis - with expressionist design by Tanya Moiseiwitsch.<sup>235</sup> It's difficult to know what behind-the-scenes events led to the astonishing execution of Simpson's contract at the end of 1969, though it's worth remembering that Blythe, while retired from managing director in 1967, continued serving as director on the board as majority shareholder until 1972.

What is encouraging is that during the late 1960s, the Abbey Theatre began to show signs of a modern repertoire stylistically concerned with dislocation and fragmentation of the kind promised by the bold exterior of its building. A commitment to Samuel Beckett's work began with Edward Golden's productions of *Play* and *Come and Go*. Tomás Mac Anna staged Sean O'Casey's expressionistic drama *Red Roses for Me*, and delivered a production of Tom Murphy's Brechtian play *Famine*. Most striking was Mary Manning's adaptation of *The Saint and Mary Kate*, Frank O'Connor's novel about an abstinent man's desire for a woman. Designer Patrick Murray crafted a set unlike any for the Abbey company before - a constructivist design that ingeniously exchanges the frame of a house for jutting wooden beams depicting a stark roadside, a conceit for the protagonist's own freighted journey.

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<sup>234</sup> Norah McGuinness's designs for the Abbey Theatre were discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>235</sup> Tanya Moiseiwitsch's designs for the Abbey Theatre were discussed in Chapter 3.



*The Saint and Mary Kate* (1968) written by Frank O'Connor, adapted by Mary Manning. Source: Abbey Theatre Digital Archive, NUI Galway.

## 1. Project Overview

Throughout this thesis I argue that projections of modernity were implicit in stage designs at the Abbey Theatre. I use historian T.J. Clark's definition of modernity as "contingency," which "turn[s] from the worship of ancestors and past authorities to the pursuit of a projected future" (7). Over the course of 60 years that saw the transformation of a pre-industrialised colony to a modernised republic, stage designs could offer various possibilities of imagining Irish life. In the same period, the Abbey Theatre company shuttled itself from small community halls to the early 19th-century Mechanics' Theatre, before moving to the commercial Queen's Theatre, and finally arriving at the modern building that currently houses it.<sup>236</sup> This thesis has sought to shine new light on that journey.

<sup>236</sup> As of May 2017, the Abbey Theatre still intends to upsize to 950 seats in a multimillion redevelopment. See: Jack Power, "Abbey Theatre Reveals Ambitious Expansion Plan". *Irishtimes.com*. Web. 25 Jun 2018.

In my Introduction chapter I outlined the sustained attention and scholarship surrounding the Abbey Theatre. These nearly always excluded rigorous analysis of the theatre's stage displays. Inspired by scholar Guy Julier's call for a "knowing practice" of design action and reception, this project has explored the contextual influences outside theatre - crafts, fine art, architecture and fashion - that may have informed stage designs. It has speculated on the design's immersion of an audience into a specific ambience, based on archival materials available. That all has led to a new map of the Abbey Theatre's history, one that, to use Julier's words: "traces a cartography that exposes and analyses the linkages of artefacts that constitute information flows and the spaces between them" (76).

If design could project modernities and reimagine Irish life, it clearly shared the sense of cultural self-expression practiced by the Arts and Crafts movement, which I illuminate in Chapter 1. The influence of this design movement, defined by historian Nicola Gordon Bove by its "striv[e] for individual, 'modern' visual expression based on glorious past achievements, set against an urban backdrop of decay, unemployment and disease," was obvious in the Abbey's 1906 production of *Deirdre* by W.B. Yeats (Bowe and Cumming 77). Robert Gregory's set and costuming I argue, used motifs from Arts and Crafts design to set the action in a Celtic Ireland not unlike that of Standish O'Grady's "heroic period". The heroic design for Yeats's play, which sees Deirdre stand up against her pre-ordained fate, likely resonated with the cultural independence and self-expression of the last years of the colonial period.

In Chapter 1 I also chart how realism soon became the dominant form of representation at the theatre. Champfleury's definition of realism involves a preoccupation with class struggle - the "so many cloth meters to the common people" (Champfleury, cited in Abélès 70). The faithful recreation of real-life interiors in *Broken Faith* (1913), written by Susanne R. Day and Geraldine Cummins, could ground the action in the precarious conditions of families dependent on casual work, a crisis sometimes referred to as labour question. Director Lennox Robinson's production reflects the interiors of the time, as documented by historian Marion McGarry. Such painstaking set design drew a line under the play's compulsion - the need for protecting women and children from poverty.

Furthermore, if realism can depict the underside of life, it's well-placed to show the anguish of military violence. McGarry argues that the cottage "came to represent the impoverished history of the country" (1). Lennox Robinson's production of Dorothy Macardle's 1922 drama *Ann Kavanagh* received a rigorous cottage set, making it a potent realist production. I argue that Macardle's portrayal of impoverished history - specifically the violence of the 1798 United Irishman Rebellion - functioned as means for the Abbey Theatre to critique the recent Civil War. The production's realist design lent to the drama's anti-war message.

Design, whether Arts and Crafts or realist, reflected social anxieties during the Irish revolutionary period. But after the combined upheaval of the War of Independence and the Civil War, new ways of seeing were required in the Free State of the 1920s and 1930s, as I have illuminated in Chapter 2. Expressionist theatre, with its exteriorising of psychological interiority, made a timely arrival, just as there was a need to refigure the country's troubled histories. Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, I argue, portrayed the catastrophic dimension to a colonised population's history, what Luke Gibbons called "the shock of modernity" (6). O'Neill's play puts shape on the traumatic dislocation of African-Americans through slave trade, but if expressionism - as David Kuhn puts it - sought to represent the "spiritual condition of humankind as a whole" (86), then through Dorothy Travers-Smith's fragmented stage design, maybe Irish audiences also glimpsed Ireland's tortured colonial narrative.

Such was the breadth of Georg Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, in a production by director Denis Johnston, it could attune to many social issues during the Free State. I have discussed these in Chapter 2, where I argue that Johnston's production was Shrei expressionist, or inhabited by a warping anxiety. To give the audience an entry point, designer Norah McGuinness drew on the accented cinematography of Robert Feine's popular horror film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. In this design could be found the fragmentary experience of life in the 1920s, when plans for labour reform had dissolved, familism was oppressive, and religious conservatism was dominant. *From Morn to Midnight* wasn't the first play seen in Ireland to address those concerns, but it did strikingly hold them to account.

If the emblematic expressionism of directors like Leopold Jessner could transform political conflict into powerful symbols, then Dorothy Travers-Smith seems to seize the opportunity to depict a nation's divisions with her design for William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Historian Roy Foster says the Irish Civil War created "a caesura across Irish history" (511). For an Irish audience, I argue, unease about separated territories and families was resonant. Through symbolic design, the production offered the Abbey Theatre something timely, albeit indirect. The seared divisions of Shakespeare's tragedy, made strange in the design, may have come to reflect the fragmentary experience of life in post-war Ireland.

Expressionist design was useful in the years after the revolutionary period, but the re-atomising effects of realism seemed a priority as the new Republic emerged in the late 1930s and defined itself throughout the 1940s. In Chapter 3, I argue that international design harnessed a tension under the cultural isolationism of Taoiseach Éamon de Valera. James Elroy Flecker's drama *Hassan*, for instance, was subversive insofar as it deflected old depictions of primitivism from Irish culture to Iraqi culture. In its stylish geometry, Tanya Moiseiwitsch's set was likely inspired by William Cameron Menzies's cinematography in *The Thief of Baghdad*, but her design was certainly orientalist. The Abbey's production of *Hassan* may have discreetly shown Ireland's decolonisation, but at the expense of crudely representing another colonised population.

More inclusive was Moiseiwitsch's design for Maeve O'Callaghan's comedy *Wind From the West*. In Chapter 3, I argue that the emblazoned French Art Deco-style set was a striking and unexpected frame for seeing Irish individuals onstage. Rebecca L. Walkowitz writes about how deliberate "mix-ups" in cosmopolitan literature can signal a distrust in cultural hegemonies. Similarly, Moiseiwitsch's design helped materialise O'Callaghan's association of contemporary culture with feminism. The result was a powerful and explicit call for gender equality.

Furthermore, Chapter 3 uncovered how cosmopolitan design could express a yearning for an internationalised Ireland. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz used the term 'epochalism' to refer to desired material realities in newly independent countries. Alicia Sweetman's set for *Peter*, a comedy by Samuel John Waddell, rejected the

architecture of its Ulster setting, preferring Italian design instead. Rebecca L. Walkowitz described such inconsistencies as “treasonous” and argued that they make for more reliable narratives. In this case, Sweetman’s design may have propelled audiences to think about how Irish life could be internationalised.

Even though Irish realism re-established itself as dominant in Abbey stage designs during the 1950s, there were still signs of hegemonic orders waning. Costuming was a discreet means to critique society, as I show in Chapter 4. Through discriminatory legislation, the woman of the house - Caitríona Clear’s term for female domestic workers - made up the largest block of adult women, and campaigned for their labour to be recognised by the state. Director Ria Mooney’s production of *Leave it to the Doctor*, a comedy by Anne Daly, costumed the woman of the house in a grey flannel suit, a symbol of corporate masculinity, as opposed to the traditional dressing of women as passive.

By the 1950s, it was clear that de Valera’s policies of economic self-sufficiency were failing. Costuming was well-placed to put deprived sections of the population onstage. In Chapter 4 I show how Tom Coffey’s play *Stranger, Beware* views a small town dissolved through youth emigration and unemployment. Young people, or “toughs,” resent the circumstances they’ve inherited. Director Ray McAnally’s production dressed them using the counter-culture fashion trends of post-war U.K. and U.S: the Mod look created by Mary Quant, and the dress of alienated characters like Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Representations of masculinity were also changing. Historian George L. Mosse argues that the knightly chivalry of the medieval period was firmly replaced by the ‘soldierly man’ of the early twentieth century, for whom physical toughness was as important as moral strength. Peter Hutchinson’s *No Man is an Island*, discussed in Chapter 4, offered an opportunity to disrupt conventional portrayals of hegemonic masculinity embodied by the ‘man in the flannel suit’. The costuming in the director Ria Mooney’s production turned masculinity into a spectacle, effacing normative ideas of the ideal man as a corporate breadwinner, and instead made room for men alienated by the status quo.

## 2. Future Research

The breadth of this PhD thesis has shown that a “knowing practice” of design studies can reveal Ireland’s negotiation with modernity through stage designs. By investigating the contextual references outside theatre, we can see how Abbey Theatre productions underlined new ways of envisioning life in Ireland. Revivalist design roused social issues in the last years of colonial occupation, while expressionist design put shape on the fragmented landscape after the Civil War. There was a resistance to the cultural isolationism of de Valera’s policies in cosmopolitan design, and counter-culture design revealed a frustration with the status quo. All of these practices, I argue, are imbued with the “contingency” that T.J. Clark defines modernity by.

It is important to note that there are discernible flaws in this research. It contributes to a wider historiography gravitating towards the Abbey Theatre, at the risk of obscuring the rest of the Irish theatre landscape. While the “national theatre” status of the Abbey is particularly symbolic, analysis of other theatres and performances will yield new results. The Gate Theatre, in particular, was often more cosmopolitan than the Abbey, and its contribution to national identity formation has begun to be uncovered by Ruud van den Bueken in his PhD thesis.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, valuable analysis of artefacts from early designs at the Gate have been supplied by Elaine Sisson,<sup>238</sup> Richard Cave,<sup>239</sup> and Paige Reynolds.<sup>240</sup> Designs at the Pike Theatre, which was at the absolute centre of

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<sup>237</sup> Ruud van den Beuken. “Moulding the Irish Dramatist of the Future: Memory, Modernity, and (Inter)nationalist Identities at the Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928-1940 [published doctoral thesis]

<sup>238</sup> Elaine Sisson, “Experimentalism and the Irish Stage: Theatre and German Expressionism in the 1920s”, *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture*. Linda King and Elaine Sisson (eds.). Cork: Cork University Press, 2011.

<sup>239</sup> Richard Cave, “Modernism and Irish Theatre 1900-1940”, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

<sup>240</sup> Paige Reynolds, “Design and Direction to 1960”, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

contemporary theatre in the 1950s, have received their first major analysis by Siobhán O’Gorman.<sup>241</sup> Ian R. Walsh has linked the innovation of contemporary theatre with the work of Austin Clarke’s Lyric Theatre and productions at the 37 Theatre Club.<sup>242</sup> Forthcoming publications on Irish stage design include O’Gorman’s monograph *Theatre, Performance and Design: Scenographies in a Modernising Ireland*, which will examine how issues of identity and modernisation are reflected in scenographic practices. O’Gorman’s article “A Designer’s Theatre” will also feature in *The Palgrave Handbook to Contemporary Irish Theatre*.

The theoretical framework of this thesis owes much to Linda King and Elaine Sisson, whose introduction of design studies into the field of Irish studies has yielded revelatory results.<sup>243</sup> Sisson, in particular, used “visual shrapnel” to reconstitute the ambience of early performances at the Gate Theatre and the Dublin Drama League.<sup>244</sup> This thesis has attempted that method in a new context, one of greater scope: reconstituting the Abbey Theatre’s designs from 1902-1966. This has expanded analysis of Irish theatre history to include contextual references outside theatre. In a first significant study, productions at the theatre have been considered alongside developments in crafts, fine art, architecture and fashion. This synthesis of theatre and design culture makes for a rich approach to Irish theatre history.

In reconstituting the overlooked work of designers and plays, the hope is that this thesis may stimulate further investigation into the work of some individuals. Through Norah McGuinness, for instance, new perspectives may be brought to Longford Productions’ production of *Bride for a Unicorn* by Denis Johnston in 1935, for which McGuinness supplied designs. In the 1940s Alicia Sweetman also designed

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<sup>241</sup> Siobhán O’Gorman, “Scenographic Interactions: 1950s Ireland and the Pike Theatre”, *Irish Theatre International* 3 (1) 2014.

<sup>242</sup> Ian Walsh, *Experimental Irish Theatre: After W.B. Yeats*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

<sup>243</sup> Linda King and Elaine Sisson, “Visual Shrapnel: Rethinking Irish Studies Through Design and Popular Visual Culture”, *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 38 (1) 2014.

<sup>244</sup> Elaine Sisson, “Experimentalism and the Irish Stage: Theatre and German Expressionism in the 1920s”, *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture*. Linda King and Elaine Sisson (eds). Cork: Cork University Press, 2011.

productions directed by Shelah Richards at the Gaiety, including Pulitzer prize-winning play *Hell Bent for Heaven* by Hatcher Hughes, and the adaptation of Kate O'Brien's novel *The Last of the Summer*. Anne Yeats worked as design assistant for Richards' production of Paul Vincent Carroll's *The Strings are False*, and designed the Lyric Theatre's productions of Austin Clarke's *The Second Kiss* and George Fitzmaurice's *The Dandy Dolls*. Furthermore, most of the plays analysed in this thesis are by writers who have yet to receive scholarly attention, and the analysis in this thesis may lead others to explore the works of Maeve O'Callaghan, Anne Daly, Tom Coffey and Peter Hutchinson.

It's significant that this thesis is the product of the recently available Abbey Theatre Digital Archive in NUI Galway, and has demonstrated how such a resource can transform our understanding of Irish theatre. The archive has provided immediate access to artefacts such as set designs and photographs, which I put at the centre of my methodology. The result is a design-led approach to theatre history, one which shifts primary focus from the play script to show new perspectives on the Abbey Theatre's role in reflecting Ireland's engagement with modernity.

One result of this approach has been the inclusion of women artists neglected by scholarship. Much design work in the Abbey's first decade was undertaken by women, and the results were occasionally ambitious in terms of form. The expressionist displays by Norah McGuinness and Dorothy Travers-Smith reveal an atmosphere for experimentation in the 1920s. Tanya Moiseiwitsch and Alicia Sweetman demonstrated a striking manipulation of architectural forms in the 1930s and 1940s. Director Ria Mooney's awareness of contemporary fashion and its role in gender identity creation is seen in her productions in the 1950s. Plays by Susanne R. Day, Geraldine Cummins, Dorothy Macardle, Maeve O'Callaghan and Anne Daly have been looked at in detail. Considering the enlightening efforts of the #WakingTheFeminist movement, Irish theatre historiography must seek to include women from the past.

In its inclusion of women artists, this project seeks dialogue with other scholarship. Much like the essays in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, edited by Melissa Sihra, it explores the legacy of women in Irish

theatre. This project has elaborated upon the investigation of how women in Irish theatre remodel theatrical form, as analysed by Cathy Leeney in *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939*. It re-examines canonical approaches to early twentieth century Irish theatre by using a female-led approach, looking to Catherine Morris's *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival* for inspiration. Furthermore, it provides context on a lineage of women's theatre as radical, as recently investigated in Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi's collection of essays, *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland*.

Furthermore, this project speaks to the internationalism of Irish theatre in this period. The importance of Eugene O'Neill's plays to the Abbey Theatre is also made clear. After the fresh-feeling *Diff'rent*, produced by the Dublin Drama League in 1922, and the Abbey's production of *In the Zone* in 1926, *The Emperor Jones* in 1927 offered the theatre riveting contemporary displays. The production was the best work by the director-designer team of Lennox Robinson and Dorothy-Travers Smith, and likely inspired their final collaboration: a production of O'Neill's expressionist play *Days Without End* in 1934. Later, in 1959, O'Neill's drama *Long Days Journey Into Night* would mark the end of a decade where no English-language plays by non-Irish playwrights were produced by the national theatre.

Also deserved of further thought is the significant contribution of Lennox Robinson as producer and playwright to artistic innovation at the Abbey Theatre. Through his performance in *The Spook Sonata* - the Dublin Drama League's 1925 production of August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* - and direction of *The Emperor Jones* and *Days Without End*, Robinson linked the national theatre to wider developments in expressionist theatre. Expressionism would also influence his plays: *Ever the Twain* (1929) and *Church Street* (1934). A dedicated study on Robinson is clearly overdue.

My framework may yet expand in the future, to create a second project reconstituting the Abbey Theatre's designs from 1966 onwards. Ian R. Walsh has already done important work in uncovering the increased importance of the designer in the globalised era, shining light on significant Irish stage designers such as Bronwen

Casson, Frank Conway and Wendy Shea.<sup>245</sup> Such a design-led method will continue to chart a history of the Abbey Theatre contrary to the popular literary-led approach, and help uncover the negotiations between Irish modernity and Irish society. In that respect, this project is immensely valuable as it provides a model for how to write a design-led history of Irish theatre, and, in the process, rethink our understanding of Irish theatre itself.

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<sup>245</sup> Ian R. Walsh, "Directors and Designers Since 1960", *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. Nicholas Greene and Chris Morash (eds.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

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