

Contemporary Irish Theatre

Histories and Theories

Charlotte McIvor
Ian R. Walsh



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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-031-55011-9 ISBN 978-3-031-55012-6 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55012-6>

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To Theo and David, Antonia, William and Isabelle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the support of our colleagues, wider professional networks and family and friends.

At the University of Galway, we extend particular thanks to our immediate colleagues in Drama and Theatre Studies who walked literally alongside us every day as we navigated and conceptualised this project over many years: Miriam Haughton, Marianne Kennedy, Patrick Lonergan, Mike O'Halloran, Mairéad Ní Chroínín, Finian O'Gorman and Aideen Wylde as well as Emma Brinton, Aoife Harrington, Claire McGuinness and Teresa O'Donovan. We have been lucky to have you alongside us as interlocutors in the process and for the influence of your own ongoing work on our ultimate vision in this book. We would like to particularly recognise the current and former PhD students and postdoctoral researchers in Drama and Theatre Studies who worked with us over the years alongside the development of this book: Zsuzsanna Balázs, Jamie Bigley, Jérémie Cyr-Cooke, Ella Daly, Jason King, Shirley-Anne Godfrey, Luke Lamont, Justine Nakase, Chris McCormack, Tricia O'Beirne, Michelle Palmer, Aisling Smith, Maria Tivnan and Heidi Schoenenberger.

We'd also like to thank colleagues in the wider School of English and Creative Arts at University of Galway, particularly Muireann O'Coinneide, Elizabeth Tilley, Marie-Louise Coolahan, Lionel Pilkington, Seán Ryder, Seán Crosson, Conn Holohan, Karen Walsh, Adrian Paterson, Tony Tracy, Frances McCormack, Emily Ridge and Clíodhna Carney. Charlotte would also like to thank colleagues within the Active* Consent Programme team including Pádraig MacNeela, Siobhán O'Higgins, Rebecca Connolly, Kate Tierney, Alex Black, Lorraine Burke, Kate Dawson and Gavin Friel for supporting her to finish this book during a very busy time of development and scaling up for our programme. We also mutually extend sincere thanks to our colleague and secret weapon, archivist Barry Houlihan at the University of Galway's James Hardiman Library whose stewardship of the Abbey, Druid, Gate and other

theatre and performing arts archives on campus as well as his own scholarship have been of key assistance at vital points in tracking down materials and advising on archival puzzles we encountered in our own collections and beyond.

We are also grateful to have availed of the University of Galway's sabbatical programme at key points in the book's completion and to have made use of the University of Galway Triennial Travel Grant fund to present portions of this book in development at key international conferences including the International Federation for Theatre Research, American Society for Theatre Research, International Association for the Study of Irish Literature and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education among others, extending our thanks as well to the colleagues who fed back on our work at those meetings. It would not have been possible for this book to be Open Access without funding from research projects conducted in partnership with Galway Community Circus funded by Creative Europe and Erasmus +. A big thank you to Ulla Hokkanen, Becca Clayton and Lynn Carroll and all the team at Galway Community Circus.

We would also like to extend our sincere thanks and admiration to our colleagues, contemporaries (and friends) in the wider field of (Irish) theatre and performance studies who have sustained and driven us in our commitment to this project, particularly Siobhán O'Gorman, Emilie Pine, Maura Stewart, Emine Fişek, Rustom Bharucha, Ric Knowles, Matt Moore, Joanne Tompkins, Catherine Morris, Cathy Leeney, Ondřej Pilný, Áine Phillips, David Rosenwasser, Melissa Sihra, Brian Singleton, Maria Delgado, Elaine Sisson, Mary Trotter, Ruud van den Beuken and Eamonn Jordan. There are too many of you to name in full, but you are cited in these pages and this book is the result of a decades-long build of collective momentum in our subfield which has made the accomplishment of our vision here possible.

We would also like to thank the theatremakers who engaged with us so generously over the years in terms of interviews, chats, access to materials, tickets and inspiration particularly Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan (Brokentaklers), Louise Lowe (ANU Productions), Mairéad Delaney (Abbey Theatre), Garry Hynes, Fergal Hynes, and Brian Fenton (Druid Theatre), Gavin Quinn, Aedín Cosgrove and Emma Coen (Pan Pan), Niall Henry (Blue Raincoat Theatre), Andrea Montgomery (Terra Nova Productions), Paula McFetridge (Kabosh Productions), Petal Pilley (Blue Teapot Theatre) and Mairéad and Ionia Ní Chroínin (Moonfish Theatre) among others. We particularly want to thank the Abbey Theatre, ANU Productions, Blue Raincoat, Blue Teapot, Dead Centre, Pan Pan, Terra Nova Productions, as well as photographer Ros Kavanagh—the photographic eye of contemporary Irish theatre across multiple institutions and companies—for letting us use your images throughout this book.

And to our non-academic friends and family especially David Cheung and Theo Haghjoo, Maryanne Cochrane-McIvor, Richard McIvor, E.R. McIvor, Venyamína Kallista macIvèrra, Adela Neth, Gail and Ali Haghjoo, Ramin

Haghjoo and Kayo Yamomoto, Roya, Hooman, Darioush and Shireen Karbasion, Antonia O’Kelly, William Walsh, Isabelle Walsh, Esther Walsh, James Walsh, Ronan Walsh and Niamh Walsh. Thank you for trusting us that these stories are important enough for us to tell to take us away from you.

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Introduction

Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories began life as what we thought would be a straightforward academic textbook. We pictured bold headings and terms, tidy boxes, and tight word counts as we hopscotched succinctly from one topic or figure neatly to the next. The length and breadth of the book on contemporary Irish theatre since 1957 in the Republic and Northern Ireland that you now hold instead evidence our ultimate realisation that this work needed to be a renovation of the Irish theatre history survey committed to a wider and more kaleidoscopic way of seeing that would preserve some textbook conventions (like headings or parallel chapter structures) but also challenge the reader to take some agency in their negotiation of the material covered by the book as a whole. The book needed to be kaleidoscopic in the sense that the book could rearrange a reader's vision through placing both familiar and perhaps unfamiliar objects and case studies next to each other to be seen relationally in a new way. It needed to be kaleidoscopic in that it would ask us as readers to shift our perspective frequently between the contributions of individuals and collectives, between the work of well-established companies and those more (or never quite fully) emerging, and between historical and theoretical perspectives. And most importantly, it needed to be kaleidoscopic in that it could make visible a range of achievements from playwrights, actors, directors, scenographers, artistic directors, administrators and other roles in the theatre industry (including crucially treating companies *as* collectives) as they bounced off and resonated with one another over time and in different combinations across the island.

Our kaleidoscopic renovation of the Irish theatre history survey was driven by passion for not only advancing scholarship, but a sincere commitment to pedagogy and the practical problems we had encountered in the classroom over the years teaching contemporary Irish theatre at both undergraduate

and postgraduate levels and even working with PhD students. Again and again, we had difficulty directing students to a contemporary Irish theatre history survey with adequate historical background and modelling of different (but accessible) theoretical perspectives also capable of mapping accurately the Irish theatre landscape that we lived within. For us, this less documented and researched contemporary Irish theatre landscape includes the work of smaller and independent companies, the contributions of directors, dramaturges, scenographers, lighting, costume and sound designers as well as actors that are harder to capture in a published play text that can circulate outside of a production run and internationally. In addition, we searched for attention to the revivals of key Irish plays over time and how these revivals continue to change and shift the meaning of these works and so on. After continually coming up short, we wrote the book that we didn't feel yet existed and that we imagined being used very concretely in classrooms and beyond to drive forward cross-pollination of contemporary Irish theatre scholarship.

Our renovation of the Irish theatre history survey within these pages makes visible contemporary Irish theatre's current range of practice by including discussion of well-known companies, playwrights and other key figures like the director and actors but also centralising the contributions of mid-size and/or small companies and artistic roles like designers, scenographers and artistic directors and/or administrators who we felt were less represented. We also are committed to making visible the policy background and material economies of making contemporary theatre in Ireland today as a key component of this book's arc and arguments which can be traced across the whole. *Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories* ultimately identifies and in some cases introduces multiple new and/or reoriented starting points from which one might negotiate the expanse of the contemporary Irish theatre's practice more comprehensibly for students, emerging and established scholars, by building on the work of our colleagues in this subfield, both scholars and theatre practitioners.

What Is contemporary Irish theatre?

Contemporary Irish theatre in our examination encompasses work made in the Republic and Northern Ireland since 1957 because despite important differences in these region's funding structures and foci of practices formally and thematically during this period, their social, political, cultural and artistic histories are interlinked far beyond the fact of sharing the same island. Following Patrick Lonergan therefore, we "present the term 'Irish theatre' as encompassing work produced on the island in its entirety" (2019, 9). It was our conviction that a book attempting to survey contemporary Irish theatre had to reckon with the challenges and messiness of balancing the telling of each strand's genealogies on their own terms, and as intermeshed with the other from the late 1950s onward. This book therefore requires contemporary Irish theatre history travellers engaged with this book—both new and seasoned veterans—to occupy multiple temporalities and geographies at once within

and across chapters within this book and to continually expand their perspective on what constitutes Irish theatre today, where it might happen and with whom, and whose contributions on artistic teams are worth memorialising and reflecting on at length.

We identify this book as located in Irish theatre *and* performance studies but with a primary focus on theatrical productions, events and practitioners that would be classified primarily as theatre in terms of their use of genre classification and other indicators such as funding streams or site of premiere. However, as *Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Practice* will evidence, the body of practice that we can coherently identify as Irish “theatre” through use of form, funding sources and so on has become increasingly interdisciplinary in execution with increasing intersection with other art forms including performance art, dance, visual art and music among others from the late twentieth century onwards. In addition, companies like Corcadorca, Performance Corporation, Company SJ, ANU Productions and others have consistently produced landmark works which took place outside theatre buildings in site-specific or site-responsive ways (McIvor 2018, 465–486).

Therefore, at this moment, the baseline formal characteristics of contemporary Irish theatre practice remain in flux, a state of ongoing contestation that has in fact been undulating in waves since the mid-twentieth century across mainstream and fringe/independent Irish theatre practices particularly as “international and movements in performance have additionally affected change in Irish theatre, dance and music as cultural globalisation has provoked the common consumption of cultures that have been diffused by the internet, popular culture media, and international travel” (Kelly et al. 2020, 9). Marie Kelly, Siobhán O’Gorman and Áine Phillips crucially also observe that as “cross-disciplinary performance has dissolved traditional boundaries of practice” in the mid-late twentieth and early twenty-first century there has been a simultaneous turn towards artistic expression becoming in their words, more “socially productive” (Kelly et al. 2020, 9) or politically engaged as we explore at length across this book and which has recently been explored in book-length studies by Emer O’Toole (2023) and Ciara L. Murphy (2023). Contemporary Irish theatre’s recent intensified period of politicised enmeshment and engagement develops and, in many cases, actively contests earlier understandings of the entanglement of Irish theatricality, politics, activism and nation(alism) as we document throughout the book. As Murphy puts it, contemporary Irish theatre artists are frequently “artistic makers *and* change makers” [emphasis ours] whose work contributes actively to “cultural, political, and economic ‘switch points’ of social change on the island of Ireland” (Murphy 2023, 4).

However, despite focusing on theatre as our primary genre of reference in this book, we also acknowledge following Fintan Walsh and Sara Brady that “the categories of ‘Irish culture’ and ‘Irishness’ are highly performative, effected through a multitude of social practices, cultural formations, and discursive utterances” (2009, 1). Therefore, we frequently discuss extra-theatrical performative moments as inextricably linked touchstones within

contemporary Irish theatre history particularly when it comes to the intersection of theatre and politics. This has been demonstrated particularly acutely in recent years for example by a lengthy struggle between 2016 and 2018 as to whether street artist Maser's "Repeal the 8th" mural could be displayed outside Dublin's Project Arts Centre, the Republic's foremost experimental theatre venue, after the mural was deemed by the Charities Regulator to constitute "political activity" (Young 2021, 326–332) or the use of ANU Productions' performers frequently as part of official Irish state commemoration ceremonies during the Decade of Centenaries which blur the line between re-enactments of the past and contemporary political performatives (see Chapter 6). This ongoing inextricability between theatre and the (politically) performative which has been a hallmark of modern Irish theatre since its early twentieth-century origins means our historical and theoretical chapters must too continually emphasise how extra-theatrical performance and the performative bleed over constantly from contemporary Irish social and cultural contexts into theatrical contexts. We consider this link when it happens literally as in the above examples, representationally (in terms of plot, content, theme, site and/or use of theatrical form) and/or through collaborative relationships and/or direct tie-ins with local, regional or national agendas, as in for example the funding of theatre and other arts projects through peace and reconciliation schemes in Northern Ireland post-Troubles or the role of theatre and performance in events related to the Republic's Decade of Centenaries' commemorative programme.

Nevertheless, even though we focus on theatre as genre and art form, we deliberately decentralise the Irish play text and playwright as the most important nodal points for understanding the progression and relational nature of contemporary Irish theatre histories. We have observed a still persistent focus on the Irish dramatic theatre text in approaching the study of Irish theatre in higher education classroom contexts internationally. We would hold this imbalance almost directly responsible for a relative paucity of scholarship and by extension teaching engagement with the practices of contemporary Irish theatre companies like Operating Theatre, Pan Pan Theatre, Fabulous Beast/Tèac Daísa, Performance Corporation, Barabbas, Blue Raincoat, ANU Productions, Brokentalkers, Kabosh Productions, Dead Centre and many others whose theatrical work is not primarily reliant on a central dramatic literary text, but rather may interpret "performance text" more widely as involving spoken or recorded text but also sound, movement/dance and scenography as primary languages of theatrical meaning-making. Those contemporary Irish theatre companies named above and many other companies and individual artists who work in and explore non-dramatic theatre text performance modalities have been equally if not more responsible for the evolution of contemporary Irish theatre practice over the period covered by this book. And yet, unless you live in the county, city or indeed country where they make and show work and are of a certain age and level of privilege where you got to witness it live, you may have little to no awareness of their existence

and record of innovation even if you consider yourself well-versed in modern and contemporary Irish dramatic literature and theatre history. *Contemporary Irish Theatre: History and Theories*' principal aim is to radically change and correct this imbalance of emphasis in telling the story of contemporary Irish theatre for Irish and international readers.

Just as decisively, we argue that this dramatic literary textual bias in Irish theatre scholarship has continued to hinder knowledge and understanding of the full spectrum of figures who populate and actually execute the labour necessary to sustain and make meaning from the contemporary Irish theatre landscape. In response, this book attempts to foreground or at least continually point towards the equally important contributions of directors, artistic directors, scenographers, actors, activists and administrators also active as Irish theatre and performance makers. In particular the contribution of directors has been consciously written into this new history as their achievements have been especially neglected. We, of course, do not ignore playwrights or dramatic texts, but we have deliberately placed them within the larger theatre ecology in Ireland. Ultimately this book's aim is to make possible a new kind of entry point to contemporary Irish theatre studies that demands a different kind of attention and questioning from the reader in terms of the figures, performance elements and roles that are necessary to understand and map in order to grasp the totality of contemporary Irish theatre as a field of practice. We feel that our inclusive and kaleidoscopic approach is ultimately more representative of the contemporary Irish theatre landscape as it has been lived on the island by those who make and consume theatre since the late 1950s. As such, we focus as much as we can on the unit of the collective—whether at the level of institution, company, festival or movement. And we emphasise wherever we can not only the new as a measure of innovation within contemporary Irish theatre practice—but also the return, the overlap, the missed connection, the erasure and the possibility of the emergent—whether in the form of analysing revivals of plays as a recurring feature across the “Histories” chapters or exploring production histories of landmark plays over time (see discussion of Frank McGuinness's multiple revivals of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* in Chapter 7) or tracing the longer career arcs of key theatrical figures like Druid's Artistic Director Garry Hynes over decades across chapters.

RENOVATING THE IRISH THEATRE HISTORY SURVEY

However despite our goal of renovating the Irish theatre history survey we are not claiming that this book ultimately can or will be fully comprehensive of contemporary Irish theatre figures, productions and practices (mainstream *or* margin)—in fact, quite the opposite. Rather, we intend to continue to highlight more gaps than we can fill within these pages, and raise more questions than we can answer. We very intentionally point readers of this book towards the work of our colleagues in this field encouraging readers to further deepen

their exploration of this subject after engaging with our study as an entry point or re-orientation.

This book is ultimately intended as an introductory survey of contemporary Irish theatre histories and theories—but an introductory theatre histories and theories survey with a difference in that we have deliberately chosen to not always feature the most well-known plays, figures or production case studies known on the island of Ireland or internationally. Instead, we have taken the opportunity to weave both a history and a counter-history within and across these pages. We intentionally make use of a chronological framework as described later to multiply and fracture knowledge of a knowable contemporary Irish theatre landscape that cannot only be organised comprehensibly under the names of artists whose work has enjoyed the most mobile international traction such as Brian Friel, Martin McDonagh, Marina Carr or even companies like Galway’s Druid Theatre, arguably the most world-renowned regional Irish theatre company apart from the Abbey, the Republic’s national (and Dublin-based) archetypal institution, but nonetheless actually very underrepresented in contemporary Irish theatre scholarship.

Tellingly, it has been 20 years since the publication of Christopher Morash’s comprehensive and methodologically expansive *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601–2000*, which we argue is the last full-length Irish theatre history survey monograph in our field explicitly intended as such (2002). Patrick Lonergan’s 2019 *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950* comes closest to recently reinvigorating the theatre history survey approach but ultimately employs a thematically focused structure rather than engaging with the chronological in any systematic way. In the intervening years, scholars in our field have more commonly chosen thematically, theoretically or genre-focused approaches in key monographs and edited collection on Irish theatre and performance in modern and contemporary contexts or narrowed in on key practitioners/companies such as Field Day (Richtarik 2001), the Gate Theatre (Pilný et al. 2021) *Blue Raincoat* (Trench 2015), Barabbas (Szabo 2012), ANU Productions (Singleton 2016), Marie Jones (McNulty and Maguire 2015), Marina Carr (Trench 2010; Sihra 2018), Martin McDonagh (Lonergan 2012), Enda Walsh (Caulfield and Walsh 2015) and others as the focus of study. These post-2002 monographs and edited collections on Irish theatre and performance have therefore trended instead towards using more targeted criteria based on identity (class, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity/nationality, region, religion, political affiliation), form/genre (dance theatre, devised theatre and performance, experimental theatre, performance/live art, scenography) or theme (globalisation, interculturalism, memory, mythmaking, trauma) as the lenses through which authors have surveyed the entire field of modern and contemporary Irish theatre and performance. Perhaps paradoxically, the more narrowly defined scope of these publications, however, has indispensably proliferated understanding of the volume and nuance of theatre practices taking place on the island of Ireland since the early twentieth century and the social, political and cultural dynamics that continue to shape how these

practices are remembered or alternatively, forgotten within the field of Irish theatre studies.

Indeed, at the time of writing, our book might even seem superfluous following so soon upon the rigorous and wide-ranging recently published edited handbooks on modern and contemporary Irish theatre—Nicholas Grene and Christopher Morash’s *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* (2016) and Eamonn Jordan and Eric Weitz’s *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (2018). These two wide-ranging resources cover more than 120 years of Irish theatre practices pre- and post-independence, with the dozens of contributors at a variety of career stages across the two volumes evidencing the plurality and scope of current scholarship on modern and contemporary Irish theatre with Jordan and Weitz also including essays by theatre practitioners.

And yet, our efforts do differ from that of our colleagues in those publications in that we *are* summarising chronologically in Part I of this book. In addition, we see ourselves as continuing our survey work in Part II with the case studies selected rather than intending only to move forward theoretical discourse in Irish theatre studies. That being said, the aim of Jordan and Weitz’s collection in particular shares most in common with our own, with describing their 866-page handbook as “a multiform sweep of theoretical, historical, practical and personal glimpses of aspects of a landscape roughly characterised as contemporary Irish theatre and performance” (Jordan and Weitz 2018, 3). However, we intentionally chose breadth over depth with *Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories* due to a dearth of more recent full-length publications which take a survey approach to the study and theorisation of contemporary Irish theatre histories as defined by attention to how events unfold linearly and chronologically over time in interrelationship with one another. The broad historical survey as practised within Irish theatre studies, in our opinion, needed an update and a serious expansion of focus and coverage.

But it is nonetheless a risky undertaking to attempt a theatre history survey when we know that true inclusion will never actually be achieved. Again and again, the theatre history survey as a genre has proved incapable in Irish theatre studies and beyond of fully making space for a diversity of theatre approaches and practitioners, particularly those marginalised in terms of their identities including but not limited to women. Indeed in the same twenty years since the publication of Morash’s post-1600 history of Irish theatre, surveys focused on women’s contributions to Irish theatre histories in the form of monographs, edited collections and edited editions of play texts have become a survey genre of their own with notable examples including Susan Cannon Harris’s *Gender and Modern Irish Drama* (2002), Melissa Sihra’s landmark edited collection, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (2007), Cathy Leeney’s *Irish Women Playwrights 1900–1939: Gender & Violence Onstage* (2010), Lisa Fitzpatrick’s edited collection *Performing Feminisms in Contemporary Ireland* (2013), Charlotte Headrick

and Eileen Kearney's edited collection of plays *Irish Women Dramatists: 1908–2001* (2014), Miriam Haughton and Mária Kurdi's edited collection *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* (2015), Fiona Coleman Coffey's *Political Acts: Women in Irish Theatre 1921–2012* (2016), Shonagh Hill's *Women and Embodied Mythmaking in Irish Theatre* (2021) and the two-volume edited collection, *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights 1716–2016* (2021), edited by David Clare, Fiona McDonagh and Justine Nakase. As Melissa Sihra notes in the coda to these two volumes:

The golden thread of women's voices demonstrates that we must not merely slot their plays into a predetermined male "canon", but, rather, tilt the very angles of theatre history itself in order to reveal new spectrums of meaning-making in which women's creative power is foundational. From this recalibration, theatrical expression by women becomes intrinsic, rather than relational, to Irish theatre, past, present, and to come. (2021, 221)

We therefore revive the model of the Irish theatre history survey in this book as our contribution to this ongoing collective Irish feminist theatre studies project of "tilt[ing] the very angles of theatre history itself" (2021, 221) as it is practised in the context of Irish theatre and performance studies in the twenty-first century.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Part I, "Histories," surveys periods of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Irish theatrical activity delineated roughly by decade, with splits determined by key events or shifts in theatre or the wider culture at roughly the ten-year mark. Each "Histories" chapter contains two parts: "Part I: Historical Context" and "Part II: Theatre and Performance Practices." Each "Historical Context" provides an overview of key reference points from social, cultural and economic history of that period to frame that chapter's "Theatre and Performance Practices," and can also be used to cross-reference case studies and/or figures from that historical period elsewhere in the book. Each "Theatre and Performance Practices" section covers "Genres, Methods and Approaches," "Key Practitioners and Companies," "Landmark Plays and Productions," "Seminal Revivals" and a "Spotlight on Institutions and Festivals." We have aimed to capture a representative composite picture of each period as a whole within each individual chapter taking into consideration representational balance within chapters and across the book as a whole on grounds including geography, size of company or institution, availability of a play text (if one exists) or other production materials for further study, and identity categories of theatre artists including but not limited to gender, religion, class, race/ethnicity/nationality and sexuality as appropriate or significant to each period. We have often consciously opted for lesser-known works, figures or companies with the intention of providing newcomers to the field

with different orientation points and challenging those established within the field to refocus their view. This means that frequently there is *not* extensive documentation, recordings or a play text available for work we analyse, but this should not in our opinion diminish the importance of this work as a reference point for understanding the evolution of contemporary Irish theatre. And indeed, it is citation of the barrier of no play text or recording to justify non-inclusion that we feel has constricted accounts of the diversity of contemporary Irish theatre as a living field of practice, particularly as key Irish companies and artists from the late 1980s and 1990s onwards embraced aesthetics and ways of working that are more difficult to translate through the medium of a play text.

Part II, “Theories,” offers five key theoretical lenses—nation, language, body, space and interculturalism—for navigating this wide terrain of contemporary Irish theatre practices with case studies chosen thematically rather than on chronological grounds although we have also been conscious of representational balance particularly in terms of geography and identities. Each chapter is also argument-driven in that it identifies and argues for three key strands of how each theoretical lens has been realised on Irish stages and in collaborative production contexts over time. Due to the call and response nature of theatre history where both historical events and the work of other artists influence theatremakers conceptually and thematically in real time, there is some chronological bunching within chapters (such as looking at the 1985 premieres of Anne Devlin’s *Ourselves Alone* and Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* in our nation chapter) but overall, we move more quickly and consciously back and forth across chronological time in our “Theories” chapters individually and as a group. We also continue to treat historical background as relevant to the arguments in each “Theories” chapter and frequently reference pre-1957 theatrical and historical events.

Indeed, while “Part I: Historical Contexts” is organised chronologically and can be read straight through, it is not only useful in this regard and it is a key contention of this book that Irish (and other) theatre histories should not be understood linearly. Rather, each chapter stands on its own and continually cross-references other chapters across the book as a whole. And while “Part II: Theories” offers only five theoretical key words out of the many discursive strands that have shaped the field of contemporary Irish theatre and performance studies (and Irish Studies more broadly) over the last several decades, we strategically offer our selected terms as orientation points to one another and the wider field, not authoritative pronouncements that should re-endow these already familiar (even hackneyed in some instances) lenses with more authority to continue constricting the future of contemporary Irish theatre and performance studies. Rather, we hope that assessing where the bulk of the discourse on contemporary Irish theatre has landed to date will instead provide a launchpad for emerging scholars to push even further into new areas of study, catalysed by the easier comprehensibility of a bird’s-eye view. That being

said, our last keyword, “interculturalism,” is least established within contemporary Irish theatre studies (McIvor 2016). Therefore, through our curation and presentation of this term, we *are* pushing here for a theoretical refocus regarding how an unprecedentedly demographically diverse island of Ireland in terms of race, ethnicity and nationality of origin might view itself, its population and its theatre practices going forward—as well as through historical lenses as this chapter also engages.

CONCLUSION

We ultimately intend *Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories* to be an introduction for all, but equally a dislocation for many of us in systematically challenging within these pages where our critical emphasis might be needed now and moving forward in both modern and contemporary contexts in the field of Irish theatre studies. You might still be wondering then why we still chose to use a cover image from the Abbey Theatre’s 2017 revival of *Katie Roche*, directed by Caroline Byrne and starring Caoilfhionn Dunne as Roche, which we use as a case study in Chapter 6, for this book. This image of Dunne as Roche looking backward at a gallery of Catholic religious iconography in the midst of Joanna Scotcher’s set and costume design, amidst Paul Keogan’s lighting design, on the main stage of the Abbey, the Republic’s national and still most highly funded theatre might seem surprising despite its beauty given our book’s ultimate remit and mission to diversify and layer how we think about a broader performance ecology of contemporary Irish theatre. Why then stay on the stage of the national theatre, trapped in Catholic iconography, literally looking backward?

We made this choice because although *Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories* demands that we fragment understanding and vary points of attention within contemporary Irish theatre histories, we argue that huge value does remain in looking back to look forward or to the side. This means that individual scholars and artists must be equipped to travel across and negotiate their own experiences with these temporalities of event and influence in order to understand what work is in conversation with who and why. And just as Dunne as Roche repeatedly dug into the literal dirt on the stage floor in Scotcher’s densely semiotically coded expressionistic set during this 2017 revival, as students, scholars *and* theatre practitioners working within “Irish” theatre, we must continue and repeat our own excavations. To dig up from a different spot will yield new discoveries as Byrne’s searing 2017 production of Deevy’s 1936 play did, and we hope our book will also do this in terms of its ripple effects within the field at large. Therefore, we now invite you take up our invitation to dig anew but in a broader landscape. You may commence with a bird’s-eye view of the flux and flow of histories and a range of theatrical practices in “Part I: Historical Contexts” before moving to fragmentation in “Part II: Theories,” or move backward and forward between Part I and Part

II based on areas of interest or spark, or begin with your own figure, production or moment of interest following the currents of the book outwards from there.

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PART I

Histories



Economic Expansion and Moral Conservatism (1957–1966)

PART I: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

1957 has been chosen as a starting point in this study as this year marks a sharp change in vision for Ireland. This year saw the political party Fianna Fáil win a majority in the general election based on a platform that promoted free trade and criticised their own previous attempts at national self-sufficiency through protectionist trade policies. It was also the year of the first Dublin Theatre Festival. This cultural event grew from *An Tóstal*, a previous governmental tourist initiative that sought to attract international travellers to view the best of Irish theatre while also hosting international productions for Irish theatre-goers. These events point to the establishment of an official commitment in Ireland to looking outward rather than inward for economic stability and the commodification of Irish arts and culture as a valuable item of exchange. This is not to say that Ireland in 1957 suddenly wholeheartedly embraced modern industrialisation and liberal market values.

The decision to begin free trade and reject the old ideology of self-sufficiency was forced upon Ireland after protectionist policies had failed to lift the economy leading to mass emigration. Britain, still Ireland's primary trading partner, was also now considering joining the European Economic Community. The new plans for trade famously contained within Ken Whittaker's *Programme for Economic Expansion* (1958) encouraged foreign investment but also included policies "designed to increase livestock output, rather than tillage" (Daly 2016, 23). This was not a plan for industrial revolution in Ireland but one that hoped to show growth and stability in the Irish economy in order to eventually gain membership of the EEC to benefit from the farming subsidies it offered. Thus the often-held notion that Whittaker's plans

sounded “a death knell for a traditional Ireland” (Brown 2004, 231) is overstated. These policy changes were largely done to preserve a pre-industrial agrarian-based economy that still held to the values it had established since independence in 1922 of privileging the family farm and rural life, Gaelic culture and Catholic teaching. Fintan O’Toole writes “The intention was to reanimate the economy in a way that was aimed primarily at ending emigration, in order to allow it to become a more enclosed space – politically, socially and culturally” (2008, 190). Plans for economic expansion were thus never conceived as a means to open up Ireland to foreign influence and practices but were instead imagined as a means to protect and sustain the dominant nationalist conservative values and institutions established since independence in Ireland. The country was beginning to look outward but it did so from within strict social and cultural boundaries of established religious and nationalist ideals.

The goal of a united Ireland was not abandoned either at this time although the strategy for ending partition had changed. It was hoped to bring both North and South together by means of shared economic interest. The bid to follow Britain into the EEC was one strand of this approach and the other was direct talks between the leaders of the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Irish assembly. This culminated in two historical visits to Stormont, the home of the Northern Irish Assembly, in 1965 where Taoiseach Seán Lemass met with Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O’Neill to appeal for greater co-operation between North and South on economic rather than national terms. It was the first meeting between the heads of government since the 1920s and for historian Tom Garvin this marked the end of “a sterile cold war between the two Irish states” (2009, xiv).

Indeed, anti-Catholic sentiment among Protestant unionist workers was something that the Northern Irish state was keen to hide in this period. This position was made most obvious in two controversies over theatre productions by the Belfast-based Ulster Group Theatre. First there was the Group’s production of Gerard McLarnon’s *The Bonfire* in 1958, directed by then internationally renowned director Tyrone Guthrie at the Grand Opera House. The play was to tour to the Edinburgh Festival after its Belfast run and its reception by reviewers showed an anxiety about the portrayal of Northern Ireland in the light of its subsequent presentation to international audiences. The Belfast telegraph worried that a foreigner “will not regard the Orange bigots and the spineless Catholics on stage as crude caricatures” (quoted in Dean 2004, 171). The Lord Mayor of Belfast, W. Cecil McKee, demanded changes be made and the Ulster Group Theatre acceded. The second controversy occurred the following year when the board of the Ulster Group Theatre demanded that rehearsals stop for the production of *Over the Bridge* a new play about the conflict between trade unionism and sectarianism in the Belfast shipyards written by Sam Thompson, who had direct experience of working in the shipyards. The board of the Ulster Group Theatre had been reconstituted, as a condition of receiving funding from the Northern Ireland Council

for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), to include representatives from CEMA and Belfast Corporation. The objection by the board to the play was to what they saw as its “graphic portrayal of anti-Catholic bigotry as an integral part of daily life in contemporary Belfast and the depiction of a vicious Protestant mob” (Dean 2004, 169). The withdrawal of the production, following on from the concessions made previously in relation to *The Bonfire*, was considered to be state censorship by many with three Ulster Group Theatre board members resigning in protest. However, the public controversy led to offers for Thompson to have his play produced at alternative venues, and in 1960, it was given a lavish production at the Empire Theatre in Belfast directed by James Ellis, one of the Ulster Group Theatre board members who had resigned. Lionel Pilkington writes how “this production was one of the most expensive in Northern Ireland’s history and attracted a total of 42,000 spectators with an average of 1,200 spectators per performance” (1995, 77). Ultimately, in the case of the *Over the Bridge* controversy the attempt to censor the brutal reality of sectarianism in the North at this time was defeated and further direct scrutiny by theatremakers of the political situation was to come.

The move towards more free trade and the pursuit of foreign investment in the Republic, marked as beginning in the year 1957, did eventually lead to change but this real economic change did not occur until the mid-1990s (see Chapter 5). Daly notes that “we can argue that Ireland never really became an industrial economy – it moved from an agrarian economy... to become a modern service economy at the end of the twentieth century, with an uncertain hybrid existence in the intervening period” (2016, 7). It is the response to living in this “uncertain hybrid existence” that ushers in a new era of contemporary Irish theatre and performance. The period from 1957 to 1966 marks the first reaction to and tensions caused by this uncertainty of existence. Characters from the plays of this era such as Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia Here I Come* (1964) and Mairéad Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail* (1964) wrestle with the pressures imposed by the confusion of the rhetoric of modern liberalism contrasted by the reality of their society’s commitment to pre-industrial conservatism. Directors such as Mary O’Malley, Tomás Mac Anna and Hilton Edwards reflect the uncertainty of the period in abandoning realistic representation and staging performances on ever-changing stages peopled by characters in fluid motion. Indeed, it is significant that the definite fixed set of the Irish country cottage, an established symbolic metonym for the nation of Ireland on stage, is wholly disregarded or remade on unstable foundations during this period as is evident in the case studies in this chapter (also see Chapter 10).

Arguably, the coming of television to Ireland had as much if not more of a transformative impact on society than the shift in state policies on trade and new cultural initiatives like the Dublin Theatre Festival. The BBC was received from the late 1950s on the east coast and in 1961 the state run television station, Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE) began to broadcast. Revenue for the new station was gathered through a television licence in the same way that the BBC

television funding model had been established but RTE could not run on the money gathered from the licence alone and had to also generate revenue from advertising. Television in Ireland was a major force in promoting a consumer society. Not only did television programmes offer glamorous images of affluence but continual advertisements of clothing, alcohol, electrical goods and cars created new aspirational appetites. With television came a greater emphasis than ever before on the construction of the individual as consumer with their own specific material wants that were free from or often suppressed by a responsibility to the nation and its previous Gaelic values.

Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961) could be read as a dramatisation of this condition of the new aspiring individual who in emigrating to England hopes to free himself of the shibboleths of Ireland's past only to have his dominating father and brothers come to live with him and destroy him through their commitment to an outmoded Irish nationalist cult of violent heroism. The collision between the individual's needs and those of the state is even more pronounced in Ní Ghráda's *An Triail* (1964) as the individual in question here is a woman in 1960s Ireland.

The freedoms promised by the individualism of the increasingly consumerist Ireland of the early 1960s had little impact on women's rights and the policing of sexual morality in Ireland. Since the founding of the new state women's economic and civil freedoms had been curtailed by successive legislation. In 1932 the Public Service Marriage Bar was passed which forced female civil servants and teachers to cease employment after marriage. Then Section 16 of the 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill saw the Minister for Industry and Employment empowered to limit numbers of women working to the benefit of male workers. Finally the 1937 Constitution of Ireland stated controversially that "In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved" and "The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home." These articles along with the previous legislation made women's expulsion from the public sphere effectively a founding principle of the new Republic. Melissa Sihra, in *Women in Irish Drama*, writes of this confining Catholic principle enshrined in the constitution as belonging to a "monotheistic patriarchal meta-narrative" that "valorized the heterosexual family unit and glorified the role of motherhood while intervening in issues pertaining to sexuality and morality" (2007, 2). All forms of contraception and abortions were criminalised.

In 1957 the director and co-founder of the Pike Theatre Alan Simpson would be arrested and tried for supposedly showing a condom on stage in a production of Tennessee William's *The Rose Tattoo*. Although cleared of all charges Simpson was considered a pornographer and the Pike Theatre, which had premiered the work of Brendan Behan and given the first Irish production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, struggled to maintain its reputation and was forced to wind up its activities some two years later.

The contraceptive pill that had been approved since 1960 in the United States and led elsewhere to the sexual revolution was only offered to married couples in very special circumstances from 1967 onwards. Irish society remained unsympathetic to single mothers during this period with many being put in Mother and Baby homes or incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries, where women had to provide free labour in exchange for their meagre living costs. These institutions were controlled by Catholic religious orders but financed by the state. Others were forced to marry the father of the child whether he was a suitable partner or not. Many babies from these homes and laundries were given up for adoption in what Mike Milotte has termed “Ireland’s baby export business” (Milotte 1997) or were sent on to industrial schools again run by religious orders and financed by the state. These schools would later become notorious for the physical and sexual abuse of children under their care. In *An Triail* (1964) Ní Ghráda challenges the patriarchal glorification of motherhood and the constitution’s valorisation of the family unit when she presents the murder trial of a woman who has killed her own illegitimate baby girl. The woman admits her guilt and claims she wished to save her baby from having to grow up in a modern Ireland where women and illegitimate children are treated so cruelly. The great power of the play lies in how the audience is positioned through clever expressionistic devices to be sympathetic to the woman’s point of view and to condemn Irish society rather than the perpetrator of the murderous act.

In 1966 Ireland commemorated the golden jubilee of the 1916 Insurrection, which marked the beginning of the Irish struggle for independence. A series of parades and pageants were staged celebrating and mixing Irish history and legend. The mood was optimistic for Ireland’s future, as the new trade policies of the Lemass government had brought a degree of sustained economic stability and growth for the country not experienced since independence. This year also saw the opening of the eagerly anticipated new Abbey Theatre building that marked a new era for the Irish National Theatre, which had been exiled to produce plays in the run-down Queen’s Theatre since the old building had been burnt down in 1951.

The new Abbey could boast of its state-of-the-art lighting, sound and projection technology, offering theatre artists previously impossible creative opportunities but it also housed the tensions of this period, not only in what it presented on stage but also in the building’s architecture. The design of the theatre is one of modernist ambition with a “consciously internationalist aesthetic” (Morash 2016, 435) that tries to maximise light and space. But this was hampered by the insistence of then Director of the Abbey, Ernest Blythe that the new building be built on the cramped site of the old theatre. The result is that the building in its location shows continuity with the former past glory of the original theatre and looks modern in its large windows and smooth concrete façade. But functionality was lost in the clash of modernity and tradition as the public areas are too small, the stage lacks depth and there is “inadequate rehearsal, dressing room, storage, and office space” (Morash

2016, 436). The 1966 Abbey Theatre thus captures and memorialises the optimism and tensions of the era of its construction between a vision of Ireland that wished to be open to a new internationalism of thought and a conservative view of Ireland that wanted to protect its established national traditions.

These tensions would also come to shape the theatre practice of this time although in this field they would prove to be much more successful, fruitful and functional than in the case of the Abbey Theatre building.

PART II: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Genres, Methods and Approaches

The stagecraft of this period was characterised by a pared back style that emphasised theatricality over realism with direction and design foregrounded in a new internationalism of practice. This radical change in approach came about due to the limitations of the material circumstances, specific theatre policies and government initiatives that theatre practitioners were subject to rather than any agreed upon artistic manifesto.

The Abbey Theatre since 1942 under the directorship of Ernest Blythe had instituted a Gaelic Policy. This insisted that all members of the company were bi-lingual and capable of playing in the Irish language. This was a deeply unpopular policy and was blamed for decreasing standards of production. Further to this, as previously mentioned in 1951 when the theatre had burnt down the Abbey Company was exiled to the shabby Queens Theatre and in order to survive would rely on producing revivals of tried favourites (particularly O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy) and popular comedies. These conditions led to the rise of independent theatre companies made up of actors, directors and designers who were either not proficient in the Irish language and thus could never hope to secure a position with the Abbey Company, or simply wished to be a part of a theatre group dedicated to new and international work. Two of the most successful of these companies the Pike Theatre and Gemini emulated the Gate Theatre model previously established by Hilton Edwards and Mícheál mac Liammóir of an independent commercial cosmopolitan and avant-garde theatre. These companies wished to show Irish audiences the best of international theatre and stagecraft cultivating in them a taste for dramatic experimentation. This was something that the Dublin Theatre Festival would also do through bringing visiting companies from around the world to Dublin. However, the festival had also originated in a government initiative to boost tourism and in its business model it still banked on bringing visitors to Ireland. As a result Irish theatre artists were no longer making work for an exclusive home audience, as had largely been the case in the 1930s and 1940s; now with an annual contribution to the theatre festival they were showing Ireland not only to itself but also to the world. Thus Irish drama of this period is increasingly self-conscious and self-critical. During the previous decades post-independence there was a need to show Ireland to itself as the nation wished

to define its difference as it emerged from a legacy of colonialism. Naturalistic plays of Irish country life thus dominated the stage as they offered a repeated stable mimetic representation in which the people could begin to recognise themselves as different from their British counterparts. The new generation of playwrights that came to the fore in the late 1950s trouble the stability of this realistic representation through theatricalised productions that show awareness of their performativity. Their dramaturgy is thus shaped by the creative possibilities offered by modern lighting, design and direction. Further to this, with the cancellation of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1958 due to the protest of Archbishop Charles McQuaid and Seán O'Casey's subsequent ban on his work being performed in Ireland, theatre practitioners began to look for other canonical figures to showcase Ireland's theatrical and literary past. Interestingly they did not turn to Augusta Gregory or J. M. Synge but instead turned to the long neglected plays of W. B. Yeats and began stage adaptations of James Joyce's literary works. In Yeats and Joyce they found Irish artists that suited the times in their internationalism and modernist experimentation.

It follows that in this period with these new plays that emphasised theatricality and the revival of Yeats's anti-realist plays that the role of the theatre director would increase in prominence. Barry Cassin, Jim Fitzgerald (Gemini), Alan Simpson, Carolyn Swift (*The Pike*) and Mary O'Malley (*Lyric*) would all emerge from the independent theatre scene. These theatre companies performed in small spaces that were adapted into a theatre configuration. They did not have the luxury of flown-in scenery, or large lavish sets. Theirs was a poor theatre where in order to enact a drama they had to marshal actors in complex movement, composition, and tableaux on tiny stages using clever lighting techniques. This was something that Hilton Edwards had been achieving for many years at the Gate and continued to do, inspiring and mentoring many of the younger generation. Tomás Mac Anna would prove the exception to the rule in developing his craft at the Abbey Theatre and benefiting from the implementation of Blythe's Gaelic Policy in learning to direct theatricalised performances in the annual Irish-language Christmas pantomime. He would also develop a keen interest in continental drama in directing Irish translations of European playwrights. This eventually would culminate in celebrated productions of Lorca and Brecht for the Abbey and his eventual tenure as Artistic Director of the new theatre in 1966.

Key Practitioners and Companies

Mary O'Malley

Mary O'Malley began her theatrical career with the New Theatre Group in Dublin but it was her successes at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast, which she founded that made her name as a director. Inspired by Austin Clarke's theatre company dedicated to verse drama she founded the Lyric Theatre at the back of her home on Derryvolgie Avenue, off the Malone Road in Belfast in 1951. The theatre later moved to larger premises on Ridgeway Street in 1968 and

the current state-of-the-art theatre, which sits impressively on the banks of Belfast's River Lagan with a capacity of 390 seats, was opened officially by Brian Friel in 2011. Between 1951 and 1968 O'Malley had directed 140 of the 180 productions staged by the Lyric while also acting as Artistic Director. Her directing practice was informed by the limitations of the initial studio space and her dedication to the verse dramas of W. B. Yeats (Fig. 2.1).

Productions under O'Malley at the Lyric were thus noted for an economy of design, dynamic movement and the actors' delivery of poetic speech. Her commitment to this Yeatsian aesthetic led her to favour more experimental works in her programming. The plays of Lorca and Brecht were given repeated productions as were O'Casey's later, expressionist pieces. New works by Brian Friel and Patrick Galvin were also staged under O'Malley's artistic direction. But it is for the productions of twenty-three Yeats plays that she is remembered. Ulick O'Connor wrote: "Stunning productions of *The Herne's Egg*, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, *The Green Helmet* left you drained of every emotion except wonder. Once an awed member of the audience greeted her: 'Hail Mary full of Yeats'" (O'Connor 2006). The Lyric defiantly remained open throughout many of the worst years of the Northern Irish conflict and O'Malley continued to deliver innovative and challenging productions sometimes without heat or electricity. Bernard Adams goes so far as to write of O'Malley's work at the Lyric as "operating a kind of cultural peace process in



Fig. 2.1 T4/55, *At the Hawk's Well* by W. B. Yeats, 1960, Lyric Theatre Archive, University of Galway Library Archives

Northern Ireland” adding that she “strove mightily to use drama to promote debate and historical understanding in a community that found the simplicities of sectarianism so seductive.” (Adams, 2006) Unfortunately, after the move to Ridgeway Street, due to restrictions imposed by Equity and the need to secure Arts Council funding, O’Malley could no longer run the theatre as a co-operative. Her dream of a permanent company that would specialise in the style of theatre she had developed over the past twenty years could not be sustained. In 1976 she resigned as a trustee of the theatre and the Lyric Company was dissolved. The theatre continued to produce new and canonical work but the particular aesthetic developed under O’Malley’s directorship did not remain. She is remembered now more often for her significant role as a cultural and political figure rather than as an innovator of Irish theatre practice.

Tomás Mac Anna

In his first of three tenures as Artistic Director of the Abbey, Tomás Mac Anna revolutionised the output of the national theatre through his design and staging of European modernists as well as his encouragement of a new generation of playwrights. He first came to the Abbey as a designer but with his fluency in the Irish language he was soon promoted to producer of Gaelic plays. As part of this role Mac Anna had to direct, design and sometimes pen an annual pantomime in the Irish language. The demands of the pantomime meant that he had to learn how to stage scenes with a large cast and become expert at transitions to several locations while also incorporating choreography and song into his productions. Also with a lack of Irish-language plays he had to select and stage Irish-language adaptations of plays, the selection of which would favour continental European dramatists rather than British playwrights. Thus the role of director of Irish-language plays schooled Mac Anna in a type of staging that was in direct contrast to the naturalistic style employed in the production of the Abbey’s, by this time, signature realist dramas of peasant life. With such a background it is not surprising that his later productions would be characterised as Brechtian. He visited the Berliner Ensemble in 1967 and helped design and advised on their production of O’Casey’s *Purple Dust*. But he denied Brecht as an influence. When his production of Máiréad Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail* (1962), which employed placards and had actors double up in roles, was praised for being Brechtian he claimed it was not intentionally so but was “exactly the thing I was doing in the Gaelic plays for years and years” (O’Connor 2006). Nonetheless, he staged and designed an influential production of Brecht’s *The Life of Galileo* for the Abbey at the Queens Theatre in 1966 and in 1974 he would also stage Brecht’s *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* at the Abbey and perhaps more significantly at the Lyric in Belfast where the play’s theme of protectionism had a particular relevance at this time and “its grim humour could be appreciated” (O’Malley 1990, 256). His 1966 production of Lorca’s *Yerma* at the Queens was distinguished in its use of movement and colour which drew from a palette of lemon yellows and deep

reds conveying both the heat of the Spanish location and the fiery temperaments of the characters. In terms of Irish playwrights Mac Anna directed revivals of O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy but more significantly he also gave the later, expressionistic plays such as *Cock A Doodle Dandy*, *A Star Turns Red*, and *Purple Dust* among others their first productions at the Abbey as well as at the Lyric. His greatest success with a new play was Frank McMahon's adaptation of Brendan Behan's biographical *Borstal Boy*. Mac Anna's staging again had all the hallmarks of epic theatre: the performance took place on an unadorned open stage stripped back to the back wall, the changing spaces of the different scenes were mapped out by an elaborate lighting design and the dramaturgy relied on the use of a narrator figure who introduced and linked the scenes. The production went on to Broadway winning the Tony award for best play in 1970. Mac Anna continued to direct and design successfully into the 1980s and should be considered one of the most influential figures in the shaping of contemporary Irish theatre.

Hilton Edwards

Hilton Edwards began his theatrical career acting with the Charles Doran Shakespearean repertory company gaining enough experience to then secure a place with the Old Vic company where he came under the tutelage of the star director of the time: Robert Atkins. Edwards learnt how Shakespeare productions could be made dynamic and immediate for an audience "by dispensing with eye-seducing pictorialism" and "by breaking through the confines of the proscenium arch and bringing directly to them a faster, less illusionistic style of performance" (Skeele 1998, 97).

After leaving the Old Vic he pursued musical performance in joining Ronald Frankau's Cabaret Kittens but by 1927 Edwards was touring with the Anew McMaster Shakespearean repertory company in Ireland when he first met actor, designer and playwright Michael mac Liammóir. In 1928 these two men along with Gearóid Ó Lochlainn and Desirée Bannard Cogley established the Gate Theatre in Dublin announcing their commitment to "...the production of plays of unusual interest, and for the purposes of experimenting in methods of presentation free from the conventionalities of the commercial theatre" (Hobson 1934, 12). Despite the criminality of a homosexual relationship in Ireland during their lifetimes Edwards and mac Liammóir "survived, and even flourished, as Ireland's only visible gay couple" (Walshe 1997, 151) and remained both romantic and theatrical partners until mac Liammóir's death in 1978.

In a period of over 40 years Edwards acted in and/or directed more than 400 productions for the Gate. His innovative directing methods were often driven by necessity when confronted by the material limitations of the theatrical space in which he worked. The theatre in Cavendish Row where the Gate took up permanent residence is a small theatre with little offstage working space and no flies in which to drop large lavish sets. Thus Edwards embraced modern theatrical approaches such as expressionism that moved

away from realist staging while also finding inspiration in older performance styles such as the *commedia dell'arte* (Walsh 2021). Mac Liammóir wrote of him: “It was he who introduced to Dublin methods of production, décor, and lighting, handling of mass effects, experiments in choral speaking, in scenic continuity, in symphonic arrangements of incidental music, of mime and gesture hitherto barely understood” (Luke 1978, 15). His practice as a director marked a shift in how Irish theatre was produced, presented and written. In 1958 he published his seminal book *The Mantle of Harlequin*, which brought together his ideas on and methods of staging based on his extensive experience. Then in 1961 he took a two-year break from theatre and headed up the new Drama Department at Raidió Teilifís Éireann. However, it was his Gate production of Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia here I come* (1964) for the Dublin Theatre Festival that was to bring him worldwide recognition and see him direct on Broadway when the play transferred to New York in 1966. Anthony Roche tells us that Edwards even helped to shape the script as he consulted with Friel throughout the rehearsal process “in order to maximise the play’s effectiveness as a piece of live theatre” (2011, 46). Edwards would continue to influence and shape the trajectory of Irish theatre for another two decades, after the success of *Philadelphia*, before his death in 1982.

The Pike Theatre

Carolyn Swift and her husband Alan Simpson established the Pike Theatre in September 1953. Unlike many of the other *theatre de poche* that had been established in Dublin at this time the young couple’s new theatre had a clear manifesto and was self-consciously experimental and avant-garde. Just as the term “avant-garde” has its roots in the military, Swift and Simpson, the latter a Captain in the Irish army by day, named their theatre after a symbol of militant Irish revolt: the pike was the weapon used by Irish rebels in the 1798 uprising. The primary revolt seems to have been against the Abbey Theatre at the time and its programme of formally conservative and parochial plays. This is clear from the Pike manifesto: “We hope to give theatregoers opportunities to see more of the struggle going on at present in world theatre, to introduce new techniques and new subjects in playwriting” (Swift 105). Audiences at the Pike saw plays by Ugo Betti, Jean-Paul Sartre, Tennessee Williams, Christopher Fry and Diego Fabbri. They also produced cabaret performances entitled *The Follies*, which consisted of short sketches based on the Sweet and Low series of revues in the Ambassador Theatre, which Swift saw when she was “an enthusiastic theatregoer in wartime London” (Swift 1985, 117). Swift’s revues included sketches and songs that parodied and satirised Irish politics and institutions such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Abbey Theatre. Lionel Pilkington writes of the Follies as a “cultural phenomenon that celebrated the arrival of a new, urban, liberal elite and a social space in which audience members could perform with brio this new identity” (2008, 27).

But it was the production of work by two Irish writers that was to bring the Pike most renown, launching Brendan Behan’s career as a playwright with

their premiere production of *The Quare Fellow* in 1953 and introducing a radically new type of drama in touring the first production in Ireland of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1955.

It was the decision to stage Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo* in the first Dublin Theatre Festival in 1957 that was to lead to the theatre's demise. The play contains a stage direction in which a condom is dropped on stage. In the Pike production this was mimed, but so convincing was the acting that many in the audience thought that a condom had indeed been dropped. Condoms were illegal in Ireland at this time and thus to present one on stage could be considered a crime. This incident saw the authorities arrest Simpson on the charge of producing "for gain an indecent and profane performance" (Pilkington 2008, 21). Despite Simpson being acquitted of all charges after a lengthy trial it had entered the popular imagination that Simpson was a pornographer and that the Pike was a shameful institution, to be shunned. A musical written by the sculptor James McKenna about Teddy boys entitled *The Scatterin* (1958) staged by the Pike was to be the last success of a dying theatre. Simpson left for England after his marriage to Swift broke down in the years following the arrest. He returned later to briefly hold the position of Artistic Director of the Abbey in 1968. Swift went on to write her own plays, children's books and work in Irish television as a scriptwriter in the newly established Raidió Teilifís Éireann.

Phyllis Ryan and Gemini Productions

In 1956 Phyllis Ryan began her career as a theatrical producer firstly with her own Orion Company and then in 1958 along with the actor Norman Rodway she set up the long-lasting and influential Gemini Company. She had previously enjoyed a successful acting career beginning at 14 years of age when she appeared in Denis Johnston's *Moon on the Yellow River* (1931) at the Abbey Theatre. She would go on to star in Paul Vincent Carroll's *Shadow and Substance* (1937) when only 16 in 1937. However, in the early 1940s with the national theatre under the management of Ernest Blythe who pushed for all the Abbey players to speak fluent Irish she struggled to be cast as she lacked proficiency in the language. She subsequently left the company and managed to continue her career as a freelance actress working for smaller independent companies and working on radio dramas until then moving into her new role as a full-time producer.

Gemini's first production was not until 1960 and by this time much of the smaller successful "little theatres" that had existed during the 1940s and 1950s such as the New Theatre Group, Studio Theatre, 37 Theatre Club and the Pike Theatre were abandoned or in decline. Gemini took off from where these companies had left off by continuing to produce contemporary international plays alongside new work by lesser or unknown Irish playwrights while also staging topical entertaining revue shows. Many of those who had acted or directed in these smaller companies also began working for Gemini. Chief among these were the directors Barry Cassin and Jim Fitzgerald. Cassin had

been the founder of the 37 Theatre Club with partner Nora Lever, and Jim Fitzgerald had begun his career with the New Theatre Group. Both these directors were known for their ingenious direction of ambitious experimental plays in makeshift venues with little resources. They both contributed greatly to the early successes of Gemini in the 1960s. Cassin was the director of the premiere productions of John B. Keane's *The Field* (1965) and *Big Maggie* (1969). According to Ryan, Cassin helped Keane develop as a writer as he would help him with "constructional difficulties" as he wrote his plays in "one constant stream of words and images, and found it difficult to go back and revise his work" (1996, 156). Jim Fitzgerald's direction of Hugh Leonard's *Stephen D* (1962) as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival met with such success that it subsequently transferred to St. Martins theatre in London's West End. This production brought international acclaim to Gemini and launched Norman Rodway's career as an actor in the UK, which saw his eventual departure from the company. *Stephen D* of course also helped launch Leonard's career as a major playwright and he would go on to write eleven more plays for Gemini. Ryan was unafraid of controversy staging the first English-language version of Mairéad Ni Ghráda's *An Triail* entitled *On Trial* and mounting a revival of Alan Simpson and Carolyn Swift's infamous production of Tennessee Williams *The Rose Tattoo* (see Pike Theatre).

Gemini first staged plays in the Gas Company theatre in Dun Laoghaire but then Ryan found a more permanent home for her theatrical venture in the Eblana Theatre, which was part of Busáras, the central bus station in Dublin, and had originally been built as a small cinema to show newsreels to bored commuters. The company continued to produce plays at the Eblana until 1995 premiering many new works and staging popular satirical revues with Des Keogh, Rosaleen Linehan and Fergus Linehan. Ryan returned to acting in the late 1990s and her final stage performance was fittingly at the Abbey Theatre where it had all began, in a production of *Medea* starring Fiona Shaw and directed by Deborah Warner in 2000.

Landmark Plays and Productions

An Triail by Mairéad Ní Ghráda (1964)

An Triail makes the treatment of unmarried mothers by Irish society its subject, telling the tale of a young woman's murder of her child and her own subsequent suicide that puts this issue centre stage with "an electrifying immediacy (and prescience) that shocked and indeed continues to shock the Irish conscience" (O'Leary 2017, 56). Máire, the young woman, begins and ends the play with the lines: "I killed my child because she was a girl. Every girl grows up to be a woman... But my child is free. She'll never be the easy fool of any man. She is free. She is free. She is free. She is free" (Ní Ghráda 1964, 60). The play is a damning account of how unmarried mothers are treated and how the fathers of these children are never brought to account in the cruelly patriarchal and hypocritical Catholic Ireland of the 1960s. It criticises

the Church and State for its inhuman treatment of these women and their children—putting the women in Mother and Baby homes where their children are put up for adoption while they must work for their keep in industrial laundries. But Máire is also rejected by her family for her sins with her Mother more concerned with respectability and what the neighbour's think than the welfare of her own daughter. The only person to show Máire compassion in the play is the supposedly indecent prostitute Mailí who offers her food and lodging.

The play was written and performed in Irish and produced by the independent An Damer group in a small basement on Stephen's Green, Dublin. It would have been unlikely to be produced by the bigger theatres due to its controversial subject matter. However as the play premiered as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival it found itself surprisingly celebrated not only in the Irish press but also in British newspapers with Peter Lennon praising it in the *Manchester Guardian* and despite the language barrier famous theatre critic Harold Hobson in *The Sunday Times* was effusive in his praise for the play (Hobson 1964). It was later translated into English by Ní Ghráda as *On Trial* and produced by Gemini Theatre in 1965 with many of the original cast and directed again by Tomás Mac Anna.

From its premiere production the play has been described as Brechtian in form, but the play is more accurately a blend of expressionistic dramaturgy and courtroom drama. The Counsel for the Prosecution in the opening scene frames the performance as a trial by directly addressing the audience as the Jury. A succession of witnesses is called to give evidence but all their testimonies dissolve into flashback scenes that show how Máire is mistreated by these nasty and uncaring characters. These persons presented are all representative types rather than fleshed out individuals that contrast Máire as the only character with any growth. We see her transform from naïve innocent country girl to a hardened woman made a pariah for her sin of having a child out of wedlock. In witnessing how harshly Máire is treated the audience sympathise with her and can understand her decision to murder her child. The audience's role also gradually shifts from Jury to the accused as the play begins to point its finger at the audience as constituents of an Irish society that would allow for what happened to Máire to occur. The play positions the audience to be critical of what they see unfold before them but it does not offer a complexity of argument that allows for differing positions as Brecht's theatre did. In its effects it follows more closely expressionism's episodic structure of pitting an individual against a society, which manifests on stage physically as the single actor versus the ensemble. Expressionism traces its origins to Strindberg's station plays that took their form from the Stations of the Cross that charted the last moments of Christ on his journey towards crucifixion. Máire here in these scenes moves towards her judgement and death but she is denied a resurrection. The murdering of her child is also a grotesque parody of the passion of the Christ as she sacrifices her only daughter to save her from the world. The play has been revived throughout the subsequent decades

and made canonical, as it is now a core text for the Irish Leaving Certificate examinations.

Philadelphia here I come! *By Brian Friel (1964)*

For Richard Pine in writing *Philadelphia here I come!* Brian Friel emerges as “the father of contemporary Irish drama” (1999, 190) and for Thomas Kilroy this play and Hugh Leonard’s *Stephen D* “ushered in contemporary Irish drama” (2001, 4). These critics are not alone in citing the play as a landmark work and it remains one of the most well-known Irish dramas of the contemporary period. What was so striking about Friel’s play was how it took the tired naturalistic conventions of Irish drama and refashioned them into an inventive moving contemporary play full of dynamic theatricality.

The play presents us with a familiar social situation and a recognisable trope in Irish literature: a young man reflecting on his past life, community and family the night before he will leave them all behind to emigrate. The action takes place in a country home and the cast is made up of the familiar types of small-town life including the teacher, the priest and the local lads. But the great theatrical innovation of the play is that the young man Gareth O’Donnell is split into two personas: a private and public self, played by two different actors. This device enables Friel to theatricalise the situation, as Private Gar can wittily comment on characters and situations, can observe and challenge Public Gar’s behaviour and also articulate his true feelings. A special intimacy is thus created with the audience intensifying their experience of the events that unfold as different episodes from Gar’s life are staged so that he can make sense of his feelings of love, restlessness and loss on his decision to emigrate. The conventionalised space of the Irish country home is also remade in Friel’s characterisation of the space and the presence of Private Gar. Anthony Roche writes:

If the bedroom operates as the realm of private fantasy while the kitchen is the site of public and familiar discourse, Friel’s decision to cut away all the other areas of the house and present the bedroom and kitchen in stark juxtaposition, adjoining each other from opposites sides of the stage, gives each a balanced significance that a fully realistic staging would not allow. The non-realistic presentation foregrounds the theatrical nature of what goes on in *both* locations. (1994, 81)

With such theatricality also comes a sense of uncertainty as all that is known and gone before becomes suspect. This theme is also picked up in the play in relation to the conflicting memories that Gar and his widower father S. B. O’Donnell have about each other. Both remember differently and are separated rather than connected by memory. Unlike previous representations of the Irish artist forced to go into exile Gar’s decision to leave is his own and for Christopher Murray the play is less “about emigration than it is about the isolated self which subsists on memories” (2014, 19). *Philadelphia* presents a

new dramaturgy of rupture to the Irish stage that destabilised the binary structures of past and present, private and public, imagined and real, capturing the indeterminacy of thought and feeling in a time of suspended social and cultural change.

A Whistle in the Dark by Tom Murphy (1961)

A Whistle in the Dark tells the brutal tragic story of a working-class family of Irish immigrants in Coventry, England, whose struggle to reconcile the promised heroism of Ireland's nationalist rhetoric of the past and the reality of living in a foreign urban consumerist present result in self-loathing and violently destructive action. The play was based on Tom Murphy's personal observations of Irish immigrants in the UK. It won the amateur All-Ireland script competition in 1960 under the title of *The Iron Men*. Adjudicator of the competition Godfrey Quigley passed the script to the famed British Director Joan Littlewood who in 1961 professionally staged it with Patrick Magee at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London, under the new title of *A Whistle in the Dark*.

The play tells of Michael Carney who has settled into a successful career in coventry and married a young Englishwoman Betty. His three wild loutish brothers leave Mayo to move in with him disrupting his respectful status, professional ambition and domestic life with their gang fights, pimping and hard drinking. Things come to head when his father, Dada, and youngest brother, Des, arrive and also take up occupancy in Michael's House. Dada romanticises and encourages the brutish behaviour of his criminal sons and sneers at Michael's successes. Des becomes the focus of conflict between Michael and his father as both wish to mould him in their image. This culminates in the tragic death of Des as he dies at the hand of Michael who accidentally beats him to death in a fighting competition suggested and adjudicated by Dada. Aidan Arrowsmith writes:

In a *Whistle*, Murphy presents the Carneys as the inevitable product of Lemass's post-nationalist, capitalist modernity and the embodiment of its contradictions. Once, perhaps, these Mayo men might have qualified as the lifeblood of "authentic" Western Irishness. Now, however, the Carneys of Co. Mayo are an embarrassment to the "new" Ireland. Murphy clearly shows the intense frustration and the inferiority complexes that emerge amongst these working-class men. (2010, 236)

With its relentless violence in words and deeds the play fits within the category of "angry young men" British dramas of the time such as John Osborne's *Look back in Anger* (1958) and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1959). *The Times* critic Kenneth Tynan wrote of Murphy's play as "arguably the most uninhibited display of brutality that the London theatre has ever witnessed" (Morash 2002, 214). The play is naturalistic and tragic.

These forms are apt as the men are trapped in the reality of their situation unable to change roles or act differently. The characters rage against the containment of the form but their violence inevitably leads to their doom. For Roche the Carney's destruction of the drawing room set is "Tom Murphy's rebellion in his playwriting against the constraints of urban bourgeois drama" and as such he is "declaring war on pieties of conventional theatre" in order to create "a theatre of rough edges which can be put to new uses" (Roche 1994, 139).

Seminal Revivals

Revivals of Yeats

The plays of W. B. Yeats in their experimentation of theatrical form that mix verse, dance, music and often take myths as their subjects run counter to the naturalistic peasant plays that became dominant on the Irish stage from the Irish revival onward. Even at the Abbey, the theatre that Yeats co-founded and had managed, his plays were seldom produced after his death in 1939. However, in the late 1950s and early 60s there was a resurgence of interest in staging Yeats's drama by the newly formed independent theatre groups. These companies saw in the openness of Yeats's plays exciting performance challenges that could be met by ensemble playing, contemporary directing techniques and new approaches to acting and design. Reverence to the poetic verse was no longer a deterrent but an opportunity. The greatest promoter of W. B. Yeats work at this time was Director Mary O'Malley and the Lyric Theatre, she founded in Belfast. As Conor O'Malley writes in his history of the early Lyric:

The unique style of presentation developed by the Lyric was one of its most significant achievements. Many of the ideas which formed the basis of this distinctive style closely resembled those of W. B. Yeats, an emphasis on the unity of presentation with the words as "sovereign". (1988, 46)

The presentation of Yeats plays became a feature of the early years of the Dublin Theatre Festival. Jim Fitzgerald presented an ambitious season of Yeats's Plays at the Globe Theatre in the first festival in 1957 which included: *The Land of Heart's Desire*, *At the Hawk's Well*, *Purgatory*, *The Shadowy Waters*, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, *The Cat and the Moon* and *The Unicorn from the Stars*. For the playwright Thomas Kilroy these productions were influential and revelatory of the potential of Yeats's drama: "I [...] saw how a director with an acute sense of contemporary theatre in all its facets could do something new with Yeats's plays" (Kilroy 2008, 11). O'Malley with Lyric Players would present *The Death of Cuchulainn* and *Oedipus at Colonos* in the 1959 festival and return again to stage *The Hour Glass*, *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *The Player Queen* in 1961. In 1965 the year of Yeats centenary the festival saw Mícheál mac Liammóir of the Gate Theatre stage a one-man show

entitled *Talking about Yeats* and the Abbey Theatre staged *Deirdre* for the festival. Also in 1965 as part of the centenary celebrations the Abbey staged and toured a production of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* with the then world famous Siobhán McKenna in the title role and in the February and again in the April they would stage *The Dreaming of the Bones*, *The Land of Hearts Desire* along with *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, all directed by Tomás Mac Anna. Yeats would unfortunately not enjoy such a revival of his works again until the 1990s when an annual festival of his plays was produced at the Peacock under the direction of the Harvard professor James Flannery. This later revival Anthony Roche tells us played a part in the development of Ireland's most globally successful theatrical export because the "combination of traditional and contemporary Irish music" that composer Bill Whelan developed for a five-year-cycle of Yeats productions at the Peacock in the 1990s "laid the foundation for *Riverdance*" (2015, 198).

Spotlight on Institutions and Festivals

The Dublin Theatre Festival

In 1953 An Tóstal a nationwide festival of cultural and sporting events was devised by An Bórd Fáilte, the Irish Tourist Board, in an effort to attract visitors from abroad and lengthen the tourist season into late September and October. This event continued through the decade but as the years passed "members of the theatre community muttered about the almost negligible financial assistance provided by the Tóstal council in support of their efforts" (Fitz-Simon 2008, 208). On foot of this, Theatre Manager and playwright Brendan Smith, thinking it a better idea for the theatres to have their own separate festival in Dublin, approached the tourist board successfully acquiring a subsidy and the Dublin Theatre Festival was established. Smith was appointed its director and from its first year in 1957 the success and ambition of the festival was secured when Smith managed to get Jean Vilar, the eminent French Director of Théâtre National Populaire and founder of the Avignon Festival to present two of his productions in Dublin. This saw the festival not only showcase the best of Irish theatre but the finest of world theatre of the time. This is a principle it maintains and values to this day. Visiting practitioners of international renown who have participated in the festival over the years include John Gielgud, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, Robert Wilson, Deborah Warner, Steven Berkoff, Anne Bogart, Kenneth Branagh, Romeo Castellucci, Katie Mitchell, Robert Ipage and famous companies like the Moscow Arts Theatre, the Living Theatre, Footsbar, Cheek by Jowl and Complicité.

To have such innovative and accomplished practitioners come to Dublin greatly affected how theatre was conceived of and produced in Ireland. The need to put on a play for the festival had an impact on what the mainstream Irish theatres would do each year leading to the programming of a new original play for the festival or a novel adventurous staging of a canonical work. The

festival offered Irish theatre practitioners the opportunity “to reach new and unusual audiences, to interact with non-Irish performance traditions, to take risks” (Lonergan 2016, 637).

Unsurprisingly then, many of the landmark productions of contemporary Irish theatre debuted at the festival such as Hugh Leonard’s *Stephen D* (1961) or Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia Here I come!* and Mairéad Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail* both in 1964, Tom Murphy’s *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975) or Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star* (1985) or Marina Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) or Anu’s site-responsive productions that make up the Monto Cycle (2010, 2011, 2012, 2014). However, as Patrick Lonergan observes “Theatre festivals do not just host performances they are themselves forms of performance – staged events that communicate a meaningful narrative to an audience” (2016, 637). The particular story that the DTF told of a modern Ireland open to international cultural exchange where artists were free to criticise the status quo was not always well received. In its first two years the festival would prove especially controversial. The inaugural 1957 festival saw Director Alan Simpson arrested on charges of indecency for his production of Tennessee Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo* at the Pike Theatre for the supposed presentation of a condom on stage, which were illegal at the time (see Pike Theatre). This was a major embarrassment to conservative Catholics whose views were dominant at the time as the play was part of the festival and thus considered representative of Irish theatre to an international audience receiving positive notices in the British press. In 1958 the festival itself was more directly affected by the religious fervour of Catholic Ireland when Archbishop Charles McQuaid refused to say a votive Mass to open the festival. He was protesting the announcement that the programme would include an adaptation of Joyce’s *Ulysses* by Alan McClelland, Seán O’Casey’s *The Drums of Father Ned* and some short plays by Samuel Beckett; these were all considered by McQuaid to be blasphemous and anti-Catholic. In support of the Archbishop the Irish Jesuit Provincial gave instructions that the St. Francis Xavier Hall was to withdraw permission to stage the Beckett plays and the Dublin Corporation withdrew their funding for the festival. Hearing of this Beckett was disgusted and banned his plays from being performed in Ireland. O’Casey likewise banned all professional productions of his work. Years later the two playwrights would lift these bans but the effect of not being able to produce these two world famous playwrights in their native country was a large blow that hurt Irish theatres for many years. Smith had to cancel the festival in 1958 due to the controversy but he would return the following year and the festival thrived from then on. Indeed, the success of the Dublin Theatre Festival would go on to inspire other city festivals throughout Ireland such as the Galway International Arts Festival, the Dublin Fringe, Cork Midsummer Festival and the Kilkenny Arts Festival.

CONCLUSION

While this period in Irish history is marked by abrupt change in governance as the Republic of Ireland committed to a plan of economic expansion, societal transformation was not as sudden. As we have outlined here the turnabout in economic thinking was done so in order to continue the nationalist objectives of achieving a united Ireland and preserving an Irish way of life based on agriculture and the Catholic family unit. While in Northern Ireland a perceived softening in attitude towards the Republic was not to come at the cost of upsetting the established unionist power structure. Television may have arrived and begun presenting glamorous visions of consumerist freedoms but few in the country could enjoy these and were either saddened by having to seek them elsewhere like Gar O'Donnell in Brian Friel's *Philadelphia here I come!* (1964) or enraged by the poverty of the country that forced them to emigrate as are the savage Carney family in Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961). Women's bodies and sexuality remained contained and policed by a cruelly patriarchal Catholic morality where young girls would suffer great shame, loss of their children and even incarceration in Magdalene Laundries if they were to have a child outside of marriage, a topic bravely dealt with directly by Mairéad Ni Ghráda in *An Triail* (1964). Theatre production in Ireland in this period saw a rise in status for the role of the director, the designer and producer buoyed by increased exposure and openness to international work through the Dublin Theatre Festival and an appetite for experimental non-naturalistic staging methods. Fascinatingly, this exploration of international performance practices brought about a return to early Irish dramas of the revival by a renewed engagement with W. B. Yeats's theatre. Tensions between the old and the new, an inward gaze and an outward view were played out on Irish stages leading to public controversy as in the case of Sam Thompson's *Over the Bridge*, the Pike's production of *The Rose Tattoo* and the cancellation of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1958. Joan Fitzpatrick Dean writes, "This series of controversies pitted a conservative, isolationist puritanism against a liberal, progressive permissiveness that transcended the interests of nationalism" (2004, 49). The dialectic between change and stasis in Irish history and society evident in this early contemporary period would continue in the subsequent decades often leading to artistic innovation, renewal or revolt.

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Rapid Change, Revision and the “Troubles” (1966–1980)

PART I: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The late 1960s and 1970s in Ireland was a period of accelerated change. Ireland’s acceptance into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, educational reform, the removal of censorship on publications, revisionist histories, increased urbanisation and the outbreak of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland created new social and economic circumstances prompting a break with previous convictions and ideologies of the past. This rapid change was fuelled by an increase in materialistic desires created by mass media. The goal of making Ireland into a competitive open economy spear-headed by Sean Lemass’s Fianna Fáil government in the early sixties now dominated state policy in the Republic.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the pursuit of economic prosperity by means of an open economy and through membership of the ECC was not conceived as a radical break from the past but a new means to achieve the old goals of Irish independence. It was thought that financial prosperity in the Republic would help to end partition by making unionists see the financial benefit of a united Ireland. While membership of the EEC was sought to secure subsidies and grants that would sustain the primacy of agriculture in Irish economic plans. However, despite its aims at continuity with the past the fervent adoption of free market capitalism soon aided the creation of a “new Irish reality” that “was ambiguous, transitional, increasingly urban or suburban, disturbingly at variance with the cultural aspirations of the revolutionaries who had given birth to the state” (Brown 2004, 299).

The revival of the Irish language was one such aspiration at odds with this new reality. This was reflected most obviously in the lack of Irish-language programmes on Irish television. Dependent on advertising revenue the state

broadcaster determined that most of its broadcasting be in English. The requirement for proficiency in the language for entry to the Civil Service was abandoned and the numbers of native Irish speakers continued to decline. Terence Brown tells how the revival of the language on the island was replaced with a new goal: “Bilingualism, not linguistic exchange became the new aspiration” (Brown 2004, 259).

After four decades of independence the dominant nationalist historical narrative was now being openly and frequently questioned as the people began to consider if their circumstances were all that better in the Republic. Historians and public intellectuals like Conor Cruise O’Brien rejected the story of Ireland as one of repeated sacred Fenian rebellions that culminated in the salvation of the Irish people through the sacrifice of the 1916 insurrection and a subsequent heroic war of independence. The motives and actions of revered revolutionaries like Patrick Pearse and the role played by the Catholic Church since independence were scrutinised while those who had sought different futures for Ireland were again remembered. This historiographic revolution referred to as “revisionism” was not confined to public debate but was also incorporated into second-level education, now free to all citizens since 1967. This created a generation that would continue to dismiss old pieties and reassess national values in subsequent decades. A further contributing factor to this was that the school children of the 1970s grew up in an Ireland free of the censorship on literature and intellectual thought experienced by previous generations. The censorship of previous years had been particularly sensitive to anything sexual. Historian Donal O’Drisceoil tells how the “mere suggestion of homosexuality, promiscuity, or prostitution was enough to ban a book” (2017). In 1967 the then Justice Minister Brian Lenihan brought forward a new Censorship of Publications Act. The permanent prohibition on books banned for indecency and obscenity was replaced by a 12-year ban, applied retrospectively. According to O’Drisceoil, “This immediately released over 5,000 titles, and about 400 a year up to 1979” (2017). Irish citizens could now read and study great works of world literature and most of their own modern writers that had been banned until this point.

These gains for freedom of thought did not lead to an immediate destabilising of the power of the Catholic Church as had been once feared. There was a legislative shift towards pluralism of religion with the Irish people voting in a referendum in 1972 to remove article 44 from the constitution that recognised the special position of the Catholic Church. But the majority of the country still showed unwavering devotion to Catholicism with two and half million people turning out to see the Pope when he visited in 1979. It was in the theatre that opposition to the controlling aspects of organised religions, particularly Catholicism, continued to be voiced and enacted. Patrick Lonergan views Irish theatre from 1950 onwards as being “instrumental” (2019, 42) in the liberalisation and secularisation of Irish society. However, he qualifies that “Irish dramatists, actors and theatre-makers have challenged Catholicism not so much as a religion but as an ideology, and not so much as a personal

faith but as an institution that wielded power, often unjustly, within Irish society” (2019, 42). Indeed, plays of the late 1960s and 1970s by Tom Murphy, Brian Friel, Thomas Kilroy and Edna O’Brien all rage against the ideology of religion through their characters but interestingly plays such as Murphy’s *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975), Friel’s *Faith Healer* (1979) and O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place* (1973) all rely on its ritual structures for their dramaturgy. This is most explicit in the title of Kilroy’s breakout play: *The Death and Resurrection of Mr. Roche* (1968). These plays seek the communion and transformative potential offered by Catholic ritual while also rejecting Church dogma and control.

Women’s groups also voiced dissent against the Church by protesting legislation influenced by Catholic thought, in particular the restrictions on contraceptives. In 1971 members of the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement, many of them high-profile journalists, travelled by train from Dublin to Belfast to purchase contraceptives across the border. This public event drew attention to the absurdity of the legislation on contraceptives in the Republic and marked a significant moment for a second wave of Irish feminist activism. Sustained pressure from women’s groups led to a series of legislative reforms in the 1970s including the introduction of an unmarried mother’s allowance and removal of barriers against employing and promoting married women in the Civil Service. Further to the actions of these grassroots movements “EEC directives were paramount in advancing equality (...) reflected in the Employment Equality Act, which came into operation in 1977, prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sex or marital status” (Ferriter 2012, 623).

Less advances were unfortunately made for gay equality in this period despite the establishment of the Irish Gay Rights Movement in 1974. Men were still being prosecuted and sent to prison for “gross indecency” under 1885 legislation. The Irish Censorship Board banned the *English Gay News* in April 1976 (Ferriter 2012, 584) and that same year Dublin Corporation pulled its funding of the Project Arts Centre after it produced two plays by the UK-based Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company.

The social and political upheaval in Northern Ireland that would emerge in the late 1960s and lead to a period of sustained violence for the following three decades originated in efforts to address social injustice and poverty. The once prosperous linen and shipbuilding industries of the region were in decline and the suburbanisation of cities such as Belfast saw the placing of “link roads through inner city areas, destroying supportive networks” (Ferriter 2005, 610). This led to the building of large flat complexes, “an expensive and destructive mistake, which carved up local communities” (Ferriter 2005, 610). The Troubles, as these three decades became known, were thus born from a movement to address poor housing conditions and unemployment. Catholics were disproportionately affected by such scarcity of jobs and housing as unionist controlled local government and employers discriminated against them favouring Protestant workers. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in 1967 to unite both Catholic and Protestant communities, not

to strive for a united Ireland, but to force the government at Stormont and the British government to “face up to the facts of discrimination and honor the rights of Nationalists as citizens of the UK” (Ferriter 2005, 616). A series of civil rights marches took place in the summer of 1968, opposing the discrimination in the allocation of housing and other issues and these passed peacefully with little incident. This was not the case with a march in Derry on 5 October 1968 when large-scale rioting broke out and protesters were savagely confronted by the RUC police force. The violence was captured on television and broadcast across the world. This served to further tensions as the two communities became more entrenched in their positions. Regular rioting from both sides brought the British Army to police the streets of Northern Ireland in 1969 and in 1970 the Criminal Justice Act was enacted allowing mandatory sentences of six months for disorderly behaviour. Unjustified internments of Catholic men taken out of their beds in the middle of the night by British soldiers and RUC officers followed in 1971. All these events saw a shift in Catholic’s sympathies and activities from peaceful civil rights protests against discrimination towards support and participation in a violent provisional IRA terrorist campaign against the British government. But it was the events of Bloody Sunday on the 30th of January 1972 when 13 unarmed civilians were killed by British soldiers at a civil rights march against unlawful internment of Catholic citizens that decidedly radicalised a generation towards violent protest. News of this atrocity in the South led to an emotional outbreak of support and violence as the British Embassy in Dublin was burnt down. Bloody terrorist campaigns by Catholic and Protestant sectarians would continue throughout the decade claiming hundreds of victims on both sides. An attempt in 1974 by British and Irish governments to establish a power-sharing executive was met with a general strike by the Ulster Workers Council which escalated into further violence and killings; direct governance of Northern Ireland from Westminster followed with the cities of Belfast and Derry effectively becoming militarised war zones.

PART II: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Genres, Methods and Approaches

The emphasis on developing international practice to invigorate Irish theatre that started in the late 1950s became further established and institutionalised in this period. This manifested in a “a rather restless search after innovation” (Brown 2004, 305) in dramatic form by prominent playwrights such as Murphy, Friel, Leonard and Kilroy who would draw on the theatrical styles and dramatic structures of Bertolt Brecht, Tennessee Williams and Anton Chekhov in particular. However, this period also followed international practices in terms of its production process with a movement away from the primacy of the playwright as the creator of the piece towards more collaborative productions that valued the contribution of directors and designers. This

in turn led to the development of more community-based and devised theatre practice that would become more fully developed in subsequent decades.

The new spirit of collaboration was spearheaded by Theatre Director Jim Fitzgerald who teamed up with an ambitious recent UCD graduate Colm O Briain in 1966 to organise *Project 67*, “the first attempt at cross-fertilisation of the arts in Ireland” (*Irish Times*, 2003). This consisted of a series of events that ran for three weeks at the Gate Theatre including the production of European avant-garde plays, rallies against censorship, music performances and art exhibitions. These events eventually led to the establishment of the Project Arts Centre in Dublin which quickly became the home of interdisciplinary performance, offering an alternative creative space for art practitioners and new companies to explore novel methods and forms.

The Abbey Theatre with its new state-of-the-art building under a succession of artistic directors (Tomás Mac Anna, Lelia Doolan, Hugh Hunt) broke away from the narrow nationalist and revivalist agenda of Ernest Blythe which had been stultifying for artistic growth. Mac Anna and Doolan had both worked with Bertolt Brecht (Dean 2021, Walsh 2016) while Hunt after having been a director at the Abbey in the 1930s had been director of the Bristol Old Vic, London, and directed productions in Australia and on Broadway (Allen 2009). During Mac Anna’s first tenure as Artistic Director from 1966 to 1969, he purposefully produced dramas by playwrights previously rejected by Blythe such as Tom Murphy and Hugh Leonard. He even convinced Samuel Beckett to have his work staged at the Abbey and Beckett would eventually come to direct at the theatre by the end of the 1970s. Mac Anna also brought in teams of designers to work with him including Christopher Baugh, who was teaching stage design at Manchester University, Bronwen Casson, Wendy Shea and Frank Conway. These designers brought a new professionalism and internationalism to design. Casson, Shea and Conway all received formal training at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, and then went on to complete specialised courses in theatre design in London: Casson and Conway at Sadler’s Wells while Shea attended the stage design course at Regent Street Polytechnic.

Audiences at the Abbey were offered productions of world-renowned plays written by Jean Genet, Günter Grass, Harold Pinter and Albert Camus. These challenging theatrical texts invited ambitious imaginative productions and were mostly staged on the smaller Peacock stage which functioned as a space for creative experimentation. The Abbey also brought its work to new audiences touring productions, particularly in the late 1960s playing at festivals in Florence, London, Edinburgh and Paris. In 1970, the company toured Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and London with a production of Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage* directed by Hugh Hunt. That same year international recognition for the achievement of the company would come with another Behan production when Frank MacMahon’s adaptation of *Borstal Boy* directed by Mac Anna on Broadway was awarded a Tony Award for Best Play (Abbey Theatre 1970).

Commitment to the Irish language was still apparent at the Abbey throughout this period. The annual Gaelic pantomime was abandoned once the company moved back to Abbey Street into its new building in 1966, as it was associated with Ernest Blythe's tenure as director and the days of exile at the Queen's theatre. Irish-language work was not neglected in this period at the national theatre. There were new plays produced including *An Choinnéal* written by Padraig O Giollagáin (1967); Mairead Ní Ghrada's *Breithiúntas* produced in 1968 and subsequently revived in 1969 and 1971; Christór Ó Floinn's *Is é Dúirt Polonius* (1968)—a one-man show acted by Michael Campion; *Mise Raifiteiri an File* (1973) and *Aisling Mhic Artain* (1977), an Oireachtas Award winning dystopian drama by Eoghan O'Tuairisc. A translation by Liam O'Brian of Micháel mac Liammóir's play, *The Mountains Look Different* was staged in 1970 as *Tá Cruth nua ar na Sléibhte*. In 1972, a new initiative was trialled entitled *Scéal Scéalalái*. This involved the telling of stories in Irish by fluent actors with the tale then "acted out with the visual aids of mime and dance and Father Patrick Ahearne's musicians." (Abbey Theatre 1972). The stories were compiled by Eamonn Kelly, Tomás Mac Anna, Edward Golden and Sean O'Briáin. This was deemed a success and the formula was repeated the following year with new stories as *Scéal Scéalalái Eile* and again in 1974 under the title *Seo Scéal Eile*. More satirical pieces in the Irish language included an adaptation of Flann O'Brien's comical novel *An Béal Bocht* in 1975 and *Mise Le Meas*, a bi-lingual tongue-in-cheek look at the Irish Language Revival was collaboratively written by Eoghan O'Tuairisc, Liam O Cleirigh, Fergus Linehan, Eamonn Kelly and Tomás Mac Anna in 1976. The end of the 1970s saw a short-lived return of the annual pantomime with Eoghan O Tuairisc penning *Oisín* in 1978 and *Táinbócó* in 1979.

This was also a time of great activity at An Taibhdhearc, the national Irish-language theatre. From 1973 to 1977 the theatre expanded by operating "a small experimental theatre space, An Taibhsín" (Pilkington 2023, 315), which was located just across the road from the main theatre.

World-class theatre practitioners such as Julian Beck from the Living Theatre as well as Pierre Bylan and Harold Pinter staged work in Ireland as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival during this period. But touring companies such as the Glasgow Citizens Theatre, Tanz Forum Cologne and John McGrath's 7: 84 Company also brought their work to the Abbey as part of an annual International Season that ran from 1971 to 1973. This initiative ran during Lelia Doolan's tenure as Artistic Director of the Abbey, which was significant not only in its emphasis on bringing international work to Ireland but also in its ambition to learn new techniques in movement, voice and design which would also lead to new modes of making theatre. It was Doolan who first brought Patrick Mason to the Abbey as a voice coach and in 1973 "a four month season of activities" (Abbey Theatre 1973) was programmed at the Peacock theatre entitled *Experiment 73* which proposed not only to present "plays old and new, Irish and Foreign," but also "to blunt the lines of demarcation between author-designer-actor-technician so that each can make the

greatest contribution to the whole for the eventual benefit to the audience” (Abbey Theatre 1973). This was radical change for a theatre that had built its reputation on the promotion of writers and their plays. Indeed, it was in the 1970s that many of the directors that would come to international prominence in the 1980s and 1990s such as Patrick Mason, Joe Dowling and Garry Hynes began to emerge. These directors “brought a renewed emphasis on the psychology of character into theatrically complex productions that radically reinterpreted canonical works while also discovering appropriate approaches to new plays manifest with dramaturgical invention” (Walsh 2016, 452). This turn to the psychology of characters could be considered reflective of an increasingly consumer society that was placing greater emphasis on individualism. But it could also be viewed in the context of the violence in Northern Ireland where the conflict was often made abstract from the realities of the suffering caused by entrenched ideological positions and a saturation of media coverage. The creation of empathetic individual characters could be viewed as a corrective response to such abstraction.

Experiment 73 is also notable for its inclusion of works by Helen Cahill and Maureen Duffy in addition to those by Beckett, Joyce, Genet and Anthony Cronin. This is significant as few plays by women were produced at the national theatre during this period. Despite the civil and legal victories for equality in this period plays written by women were still rarely produced at the larger stages of the Abbey and the Gate. Women did, however, rise to greater prominence in theatre management, along with Doolan’s appointment at the Abbey, Garry Hynes co-founded and directed Druid Theatre Company in Galway and Deirdre O’Connell ran the Focus Theatre in Dublin. Doolan’s time at the Abbey was regrettably short as she met with resistance from a conservative board and a lack of financial support for her innovations (Houlihan 2021, 201–202).

Pecuniary issues would continue long after Doolan’s departure from the national theatre. However, Terence Brown observes that “the 1970s were notable {...} as the period when Irish Theatre attracted a greater degree of public support and financial aid than it had ever done before” (Brown 2004, 304). This increase in financial support came from the new legislation and the establishment of new structures within the government. Firstly, the Currency Act (1969) introduced by the Minister for Finance and later Taoiseach Charles Haughey was passed that exempted writers from income tax. This enticed writers such as Tom Murphy and Hugh Leonard who had established themselves abroad to return to Ireland. In 1973 the Arts Act (1951) was expanded to include funding for the Gate Theatre and others. This showed a new support for theatrical output such as that of the Gate that was not explicitly nationalistic in its aims. Then in 1975 the Minister for Finance transferred responsibility for the Abbey Theatre, the Gate Theatre, the Irish Theatre Company, the Irish Ballet Company and the Dublin Theatre Festival to the Arts Council and made it responsible for administering funds “four times greater than before” (Merriman 2016, 393). This transfer of responsibility

for theatre funding to the Arts Council is also significant in its subsequent support of new theatre companies. After only being established the year before Druid Theatre Company would receive council funding in 1976, which was a marked difference from the past where companies other than the Abbey had to struggle independently for decades without any government subsidy. Indeed, Druid would become a new model for independent theatremakers in Ireland. The increases in funding were unfortunately still far less than in other European countries. The Abbey received a subsidy of £518,000 in 1978 which was scarcely enough to cover the wage bill and the Arts Council Report the following year would state how such a low level of funding “seriously endangers the Abbey’s ability to fulfil its proper role as a centre of dramatic excellence” (Brown 2004, 455).

Tracking government financing in this period we can see a de-centralisation of Irish theatre in the support for Druid, with their commitment to base themselves in and premiere all new work in Galway city, but also in the funding of the ITC (Irish Theatre Company) established in 1975 which was a touring company that sought to bring professional productions to every corner of Ireland. Christopher Fitz-Simon notes that the 1970s was “the era of regionalism and Cross-Border Co-operation and both Arts Councils on the island were sensitive to the trend” (1988, 19). The ITC also created a space for young directors like Joe Dowling and later Ben Barnes and designers such as Wendy Shea to develop their craft. Sadly, it had to be disbanded in 1982 as the costs of touring rose and the Arts Council budget tightened further. It ended on a high with a critically acclaimed production of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* directed by Barnes and designed by Wendy Shea. Further commitment to regions outside of Dublin came in 1978 with support of the newly established Galway Arts Festival which would go on to eventually become a major international festival.

While theatrical activity through regional and touring companies increased in rural areas in the 1970s the staging of stories of urban life also began to rise. Brothers Jim and Peter Sheridan lead the charge in writing and directing plays about working-class city life at the Project Arts Centre. Jim Sheridan, appointed Chairman of Project Arts Centre in 1976, wrote dramas that explored the plight of urban caravan dwellers (*Mobile Homes*, 1976), the dreams and desperation of three young women at a Dublin Disco (*Where All Your Dreams Come True*, 1978) and urban renewal in Dublin’s inner city (*Inner City/Outer Space*, 1979). While Peter Sheridan would write of the frustrations of a young man wishing to escape a violent urban society in *No Entry* (1976) and in *Liberty Suit* written with Mannix Flynn he would stage a young man’s struggle to overcome the effects of a system of institutional reformatories. Murray writes how the Sheridan’s “set about creating a politically aware theatre along lines which combined the Irish dramatic tradition with the community-style British theatre made popular by John McGrath and 7:84” (1997, 181). The influence of John Arden’s and Margaretta D’Arcy’s *Non-Stop Connolly Show* at Liberty Hall, Dublin, in 1975 which had

sections directed by Jim Sheridan must have been a significant influence in the formation of this style as this play was staged by a large cast of amateur and professional actors staging scenes over a twenty-four-hour period. The production mixed song, dance, political speeches, music and film to tell the story of patriot and socialist James Connolly. Michael Jaro contends that *The Non-stop Connolly show* “represented a significant step towards later community-based theatre and devised performance” (2015, 34). Peter Sheridan would continue to create challenging theatre work in subsequent decades while Jim Sheridan would leave theatre to become one of Ireland’s premier filmmakers.

Key Practitioners and Companies

Bronwen Casson

In an article from the *Irish Times* in 1976 Bronwen Casson is quoted as saying “The set should not distract: Stage design is a self-effacing art and the designer should be almost imperceptible” (Walsh 1976). The issue with the work of great designers is that in this “self-effacing” art too often their contribution is overlooked. Such is the case with Casson whose influence on Irish theatre in a career lasting over four decades was significant. She came from a famous theatrical family with her father Christopher Casson an actor in the Gate Theatre, Dublin, and her grandmother the British Actress Dame Sybil Thorndike. But she did not favour acting and instead followed her mother Kay O’Connell’s profession of theatre designer. After four years in NCAD she went on to specialist study in theatre design under Margaret Harris at Sadler’s Wells, London. She returned to Dublin and began working at the Abbey Theatre in 1968 becoming Head Designer from 1975 to 1990. In her early years at the Abbey Casson looked to international companies for inspiration travelling to France and Germany in particular. She was affected by the Berliner Ensemble’s production of *Coriolanus* in London in 1966 and she greatly admired the work of Ariane Mnouchkine working with her Théâtre du Soleil Company in the mid-1970s (Walsh 1976).

These influences are discernible in her work through an emphasis on creating a playing space for the actors onstage above simply the presentation of a particular place. For Casson, “stage design is not implanting a monstrous art form onto the stage, which doesn’t relate to the actors. It should be instead a definite space in which the actors can best put across the idea of the play” (Walsh 1976) (Fig. 3.1).

This preference found particular expression in sets that combined abstraction and realism such as her design for a revival of Yeats plays at the Peacock in the 1970s and again in the 1990s but also in adaptations such as *Ulysses in Nighttown* (1971, revived 1974) or new plays such as Tom Murphy’s *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975). In her design for *The Sanctuary Lamp* Casson created an “abstract and atmospheric arrangement of church pillars, pulpit, pew and confessional” (O’Toole 2003, 193) that was “shot through with shafts of darkness” (Morash 2002, 150). This set allowed for the Church



Fig. 3.1 Photograph of the stage setting for *Ulysses in Nighttown*, Peacock Stage, 1974 (Photo Fergus Bourke. Courtesy of the Abbey Theatre Archive)

setting to function as both a place for the outer action of the characters to be played but for that action to also be read in terms of inner psychological states and metaphorical significance. In 1983 she joined playwright Tom MacIntyre, director Patrick Mason and actor Tom Hickey in their adaptation of Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* at the Peacock. Hickey, Mason and MacIntyre had been producing experimental productions together at the Peacock since the late 1970s in "a devised imagistic theatre style" (Walsh 2016, 450). *The Great Hunger* proved to be the most successful of these experiments and was considered innovative in its "foregrounding of scenography as central to the adaptation process" (O'Gorman 2018, 347). Casson worked collaboratively with this team of theatremakers throughout the rehearsal process, something she would repeat with them for *The Bearded Lady* (1984) and in subsequent productions with director Micheal Scott at the Project Arts Centre. Casson has written how working collaboratively in this manner was her favourite way of working but it was also pioneering. Siobhan O'Gorman observes how Casson's collaborations allowed for a new model in Irish theatre where "Designers became partners in theatre-making in that their work not only fed back into textual developments but was responsive to the rehearsal process" (O'Gorman 2018, 346).

Joe Dowling

Joe Dowling’s career in theatre began when he joined the Abbey Company as an actor in 1968. In that first year he was cast in a production of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* directed by Madame Marie Knebel visiting Ireland from the Moscow Art Theatre. “Knebel’s clear and unambiguous reading of the text, combined with her deep understanding of the characters was a revelation and inspiration to Dowling who never forgot this world-class director’s ‘brilliant ensemble approach’” (Dowling 1983, 33). Over the next few years, he continued to act in Abbey productions but was frustrated that the national theatre was losing younger audiences and so “he went to the then Artistic Director Hugh Hunt and pleaded for something to be done. Hunt sent him to Manchester to see some of the theatre-in-education companies that were running effectively there” (Walsh 2016, 452). When he returned, he co-founded and led the first Irish Theatre-in-Education group where actors, technicians and administrators created a series of programmes for schools throughout Ireland. Through improvisation, scene work and discussion, the students worked with the company to make new and innovative theatre pieces. With the Young Abbey and under the mentorship of Tomás Mac Anna he first began to direct for the stage. He further cut his teeth serving as the artistic director of the Peacock and then of the Irish Theatre Company in 1976–78, touring new productions all around Ireland. In 1978 at twenty-nine years old, he became the youngest-ever Artistic Director of the Abbey. During his tenure he directed the premieres of several important Irish plays including Brian Friel’s *Living Quarters* (1975) and *Aristocrats* (1979). He also made a success of *Faith Healer* in 1980 at the Abbey after its disastrous premiere on Broadway. Dowling has admitted that “practically everything I know about directing a play comes from my work with Brian Friel... Listening to the clarity he brought to every line and every character has served me in working with other writers and with classic texts” (IT OCT. 12 2015). Indeed Dowling’s style of direction is one that is driven by textual analysis and an ambition to “fully realize the intentions of the text” (Dowling 1992, 188).

Unfortunately, like Lelia Doolan and other artistic directors before him, Dowling grew increasingly frustrated with the interference of the Abbey Board in the management of the theatre. He resigned his post in 1985 and went on a year later to found the Gaiety School of Acting, which again testifies to his lifelong dedication to training and theatre education. That year, he would also go on to exact revenge on the Abbey by staging O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, a staple of the Abbey repertoire, at the rival Gate Theatre. This production would tour to Broadway and prove a worldwide success and helped Dowling build an international profile which led to him becoming the director of the prestigious Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis from 1995 until 2015. During his time in Minneapolis, he directed over 50 productions and oversaw the building of a new Guthrie Theatre building with a 700-seat proscenium stage and a smaller studio space designed by Jean Nouvel costing 125 million dollars.

Patrick Mason

The impact that Patrick Mason has had on Irish theatre is immense. Spanning a career of over four decades he has directed many of the most significant productions of the contemporary period including dramas by Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Tom Kilroy and Sebastian Barry, and some of the landmark examples covered in this book: Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* (1977), Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) and Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985). He has also shaped the character of Irish theatre through his leadership as Artistic Director of the Abbey in 1994–99, his long-term collaborations with designers Bronwen Casson, Joe Vanek, Monica Frawley, Wendy Shea, Frank Hallinan Flood, and Francis O'Connor and his direction of some key revivals of the work of Anglo-Irish writers including Shaw, Wilde and Sheridan at the Gate Theatre as well as directing Opera, writing radio dramas and adapting work for the stage. Mason's deep knowledge of the history and practice of theatre comes from his training at the Central School of Speech and Drama where he subsequently taught in 1972. That same year saw him arrive in Dublin to take up a position as voice coach in the Abbey while Lelia Doolan was Artistic Director. He then left Ireland to become a lecturer in Performance Studies at Manchester University in 1975 but returned to the Abbey as a resident director in 1978. This began his long association with the Abbey where he developed his craft crediting his collaborations with the playwright Tom Mac Intyre and actor Tom Hickey on a range of productions at the Peacock between 1982 and 1989 as influencing his development. He wrote that it was "the intensity and energy of that contact that really jolted me out of a more literal, realist kind of reading of text into a far more emblematic, symbolic reading of text and action" (Mason 2001, 320). With Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), a play that relies heavily on music and tableaux for its effects, Mason found the perfect piece in which to display the maturation of his style. This was most clear in the scene in which all the sisters temporarily forget themselves in a wild liberating dance. Under Mason's direction the five personalities of the women began to sound and signal individually, only to then harmonise and dissolve into each other becoming ecstatic in a transcendent *coup de theatre*. The production became a theatrical phenomenon with long runs in the West End and Broadway with Mason winning the Tony Award for Best Director in 1992.

For Cathy Leeny "Mason has [...] worked to broaden the context of Irish theatre, its connections across cultures and histories in Europe and internationally, its collaborative sophistication and professionalism" (2008, 106). He has directed many influential productions of world drama in Ireland including notable productions of Luigi Pirandello, Henrik Ibsen and Arthur Miller, and he staged a production of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, at the Abbey in 1992. This was a brave and important moment as homosexuality was still classified as criminal in Ireland at the time and Kushner's play concerns the 1980s AIDS epidemic and includes the staging of a gay sex scene. In more

recent years Mason has won critical acclaim for his direction of Hugo Hamilton’s *The Speckled People* (2011) and *The Mariner* (2014) at the Gate Theatre, Dublin.

Druid and Garry Hynes

As a student in the early 1970s Director Garry Hynes spent her summers working in New York where she managed to see avant-garde productions by the Performance Garage and the work of Joe Chaikin and Meredith Monk. She writes:

I saw theatre that was being made by young people, or people reasonably young and it was being made in small rooms, and it was immediate and it was accessible and it was available and it was tremendously exciting to me. (Hynes 2012, 81)

Inspired by this experience Hynes along with the actor Marie Mullen whom she met in the university and actor Mick Lally formed Druid Theatre Company in Galway. The intent of the company in the early years was to replicate in the west of Ireland what she had seen in New York. The company began staging plays in “small rooms” in Galway city until they eventually secured rental of an old warehouse and converted it into a small theatre there, which has become their permanent home and is now named the Mick Lally Theatre, in honour of the actor and founding member of the company who died in 2010. Gavin Kostick has stated that it was the ‘foundation and success of the Druid theatre in Galway in 1975 that sets the scene and template for the development of the independent sector’ (Kostick 2018, 235).

For their first season they staged a production of J.M Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* in a bid to attract tourists. This opportunistic decision was to have a long-term effect on Hynes practice and the direction Druid would take as a company: “In my own development as a director, the discovery of Synge as a writer was an epiphany, one of the shock things. It completely influenced everything I’ve done since and continues to do so (Chambers et al. 2002, 201).” From Synge, Hynes and Druid developed a “harsh, physical and direct style of performance” (Morash 1994, 257) rooted in social reality that challenged romantic pastoral visions of Ireland. The company would produce fresh interpretations of *The Playboy* in 1977, 1982 and 2004, and in 2005 they staged and toured all of Synge’s plays as a theatrical event entitled DruidSynge. Although Druid have produced renowned productions of canonical Irish writers like Synge, O’Casey, Boucicault and others they are also celebrated for producing new Irish writing. From 1983 to 1986 Tom Murphy was writer-in-association at Druid and wrote *Conversations on a Homecoming* and *Bailegangaire* for the company. The success of these productions helped to solidify Druid’s reputation as an “Alternative National Theatre” or the “Abbey Theatre of the West.” Indeed, from 1991 to 1994 Hynes left the company to take up the position of Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre. When she returned Druid would go on to produce and tour three enormously

commercially successful plays by Martin McDonagh which became known as the Leenane Trilogy. This led Hynes to become the first woman to win the best director Tony Award for her production of McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* in 1998. Druid has also premiered new work by Vincent Woods, Marina Carr, Enda Walsh, Lucy Caldwell and Stuart Carolan. Following on from *DruidSynge* (2005) the company has produced further theatrical events that have toured nationally and internationally such as *DruidMurphy* (2012) where three of Murphy's plays *Conversations on a Homecoming*, *Whistle in the Dark* and *Famine* were produced with an ensemble cast and in 2015 Shakespeare's *Richard II*, *Henry IV (Parts 1 & 2)* and *Henry V* were condensed into one thrilling drama played out over six hours entitled *DruidShakespeare*. In 2021 the company embarked on reviving the neglected work of Lady Augusta Gregory in site-specific works in Galway entitled *DruidGregory*.

Landmark Plays and Productions

The Flats by John Boyd (1971)

John Boyd's *The Flats* was an early dramatic response to the Troubles that follows Seán O'Casey's model in *Juno and the Paycock* of condemning the political conflict through examining its disastrous effects on family and community. Christopher Murray points out the location of the play in "a block of flats in which Protestants and Catholics live together but which is now under attack by Protestants seeking to drive out the Catholics also proved to be "both metaphor and prophecy" (Murray 1997, 189–190) for the situation in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. With the popularity of the play its plot and situation provided a "precedent for a separate genre of 'Troubles plays' which rapidly degenerated into hackneyed representations" (Maguire 2006, 22).

At the centre of the drama is the Donnellan family whose actions when confronted with angry Protestant mobs intent on driving them from their home reveal a range of attitudes to the conflict. Father and son, Joe and Gerard Donnellan resort to a violent defence of their home; the Junoesque Kathleen Donnellan condemns violence on both sides; her daughter Brid Donnellan and Brid's boyfriend Sean Cullen wish to flee and let others resolve the matter. Monica Moore, a young Protestant girl, is a neighbour to the Donnellans who have helped her in looking after her sickly mother. Monica begins a flirtation with Phil, a young British soldier stationed at the flats to protect the occupants from the Loyalist mob. She is shot in the final act trying to get to her mother who is distressed by all the noise of the attack. Her body is brought on stage in the final moments and presented to the audience as the awful tragic result of sectarian violence. The stage directions read:

When Monica's body is brought in the light is beginning to fade; and when Phil kneels beside her darkness has almost fallen; and when Kathleen is saying her prayer only a few wisps of light are left. This wan light finally falls on Monica and on Kathleen, and fades. (Boyd 1981, 85)

These final moments are powerful in eliciting an emotional response from the audience but also point to some of the problems of the play in the choice of the young innocent girl as sacrificial victim and the emphasis on the selfless Mother figure that mourns her passing. Throughout the drama the men come to represent violence and women peace. Maguire writes that such an idealisation of women “both occludes the realities of women’s experiences of the conflict and suggests that they have little part to play in its political resolution. Individual agency is detached from structural change” (2006, 104). This characteristic of the “Troubles play” was something that Northern female playwrights have been keen to address. The appeal of the play is that it humanises the conflict making it easier to comprehend and condemn in its familiar Aristotelian tragic form. However, this too is problematic as Christopher Morash writes in deciding to have all the violence in the play happen offstage “it makes political violence appear mindless and unmotivated because it is unrepresentable” (2002, 246).

Non-Stop Connolly Show by Margaretta D’Arcy and John Arden (1975)

Like the subject of their play James Connolly Margaretta D’Arcy and John Arden were rebels and in the creation of *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* they showed how theatre could be produced in a radically different way. Staged on Easter Weekend fifty-nine years after the 1916 Rising in Liberty Hall the headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* told the story of the life of James Connolly, the insurrectionist and socialist leader of the Irish Citizen’s Army, who was cruelly shot dead after the rebellion by British forces. The performance consisted of a six-part series of plays staged over twelve hours that told of Connolly from his boyhood to his death. The piece was directed by Jim Sheridan, Robert Walker and D’Arcy and Arden and involved a mix of community and professional actors. The length of the show was a deliberate device to tell all of Connolly’s story so that he could be judged and understood for more than his contribution to the 1916 Rising. For Arden, the duration of the performance and its attention to Connolly’s many struggles with politicians and Union leaders over the decades of his life was crucial to the politics of the piece. He wrote,

...the very tediousness and seeming hopelessness of the eternal wrangling was in itself so essential a part of the life-pattern of any Revolutionist, that we could neither omit it nor slide over it too briefly. If we did, we would be in danger of distorting our work into spectacular ‘high theatre’ at the expense of the long-drawn ‘continuous struggle’ which inevitably precedes the actual outbreak of Revolution. (quoted in Cohen 1990, 79)

In its style of production, *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* also ran counter to “high theatre” and any Aristotelian conception of drama. It was closer to the medieval theatre in its form with a spatial configuration that involved several platforms and banners, redolent of the pageant wagons of the mystery plays.

For Michael Jaros it also “had the sweeping scope of a religious passion play, with an ongoing allegorical battle between Socialism and Capitalism” (40). The plays were made non-naturalistic using masks, women playing male roles and use of physical slapstick comedy. Characterisation drew on archetypes—a capitalist villain in the piece called Grabitall comes straight from Victorian melodrama—and actors would step in and out their roles as they sometimes would narrate action in Brechtian fashion. Further to this, events were represented emblematically in the production. Robert Leach writes:

...the First World War was depicted by giant, puppet-like monstrosities including the War Demon, “a tall figure all covered with spikes, flags, bits of armour and weapons”, the ‘Controlling Nations’ personified by “an androgynous creature, very tall and gross, laden down with innumerable furs and rich robes [and] hung about with boxes and bags on chains and jewelled belts” and the ‘Neutral Nations’ like a cartoon figure of Uncle Sam, but with “a great, broad, featureless moon of a head that laughs all the time. (2019, 8)

In its non-naturalistic style of production, its duration and its performance in a non-theatre space *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* anticipated much of what would come in Irish theatre in subsequent decades. However, its radical politics would not be as easily adopted in the following years as Ireland became increasingly conservative and avidly embraced the individualism of global consumer culture.

A Pagan Place by Edna O’Brien (1972, 1977)

Edna O’Brien’s *A Pagan Place*, adapted from her novel of the same name, was a scathing attack on Irish society and its shameful mistreatment of women under the guise of Catholic moral correction and piety. First staged by the Royal Court in 1972 directed by Ronald Eyre and designed by Sean Kenny, it was subsequently produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1977 directed by Patrick Mason (his first time directing on the main stage) and designed by Wendy Shea. Tomás Mac Anna first approached O’Brien about adapting her novel *The Country Girls* for the Irish national theatre but after the stage rights could not be acquired for this it was decided instead to produce *A Pagan Place*.

The play received mixed reviews both in London and in Dublin; those that dismissed it did so because they found the subject matter unpalatable and even implausible. James Downey in his review of the London production for the *Irish Times* found the very idea of a priest raping a young girl “silly” and “ludicrous” (1972). Barry Houlihan writes that “For this play to reach the Abbey stage at all was a subversive act” (Houlihan 2021, 54) and in retrospect the play can be viewed as landmark, not only in its bold subject choice for the time, but also in its adroit dramaturgy that draws on ritual as a means to critique a Christian Ireland devoid of spirituality, compassion or love.

A Pagan Place follows a rites of passage narrative where a young twelve-year-old girl Creena moves from childhood to adulthood over a series of

successive scenes set in 1940s rural Ireland. Creena’s spirited nature with her inclination towards creativity and material pleasure, illustrated in her invention of her own pagan rituals, is continually hampered and threatened by a patriarchal society that wishes to control her behaviour. Her limited options are made clear by the examples of how other women behave and are treated in the community. Her teacher Miss Davitt, an intelligent, educated, and outspoken woman, has a nervous breakdown in front of her students leaping around the classroom and stripping her clothes while teaching a lesson on the history of male conquests of the land of Ireland. Subsequently it is reported that she drowned herself after the incident. Later in the play Creena’s unmarried sister Emma returns from Dublin and her pregnancy is revealed to the whole village by the drunken doctor, much to the shame of her mother and father. Her family threaten to put Emma in a Magdalene Laundry, and she escapes back to Dublin. In these two figures Creena sees that she will have no future in the community and after she is sexually assaulted by the priest, she ends the play leaving to become a nun who will teach in Belgium. It would appear that the community has managed to break Creena but in joining the nuns she is offered a chance of escape and it is made clear that her vocation is one she views as offering her freedom. She tells the recruiting nun that she feels her vocation is “like a summer’s day inside my head” (O’Brien 1973, 61). In the middle of the play the family have a day by the beach where they are happy, connected and free. Thus, for her to see her vocation as a summer’s day is to associate the future with freedom. Creena is also the only character that acts as a Christian in the play by showing compassion to a man who tried to attack her. She offers a hopeful future that blends the pagan and the Christian, but that future is only to be realised away from Ireland, a place that is represented in O’Brien’s play as irredeemable in its containment and cruelty towards women.

Seminal Revivals

Beckett Revival

Samuel Beckett lifted the ban on his plays being performed in Ireland in 1960 but it was not until 1967 that he saw his work produced on the national stage at the Abbey. Although from then on his works would be produced regularly until 1990 and Patrick Lonergan notes, “No other living Irish writer was produced so frequently at the Abbey during that period” (2019, 35). Beckett’s work spoke to the concerns of the late sixties and seventies in several ways. Plays like *Krapp’s Last Tape* in its interrogation of the complexities of remembering address the era’s revision of Irish history and identity as it “challenged any complacent narrativizing of the past” (McMullan 2016, 114). While the conceptual nature of his work invited key creative contributions from directors and designers and unlike previous internationally recognised Irish playwrights such as Yeats, Synge or O’Casey his art did not explicitly make Ireland its

subject matter or its location. As such Beckett as a figure and his work represented the aspirations of the period towards a re-imagining of Irish identity that was modern in its refusal of tradition, international in its displacement and sophisticated in its intellectualism.

The production of *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Abbey in 1970 shared a bill with Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, W.B Yeats's *Purgatory*, Synge's *The Well of the Saints* and Frank O'Connor's *On the Train*. Roche comments that this programming "can be seen as a strategic move by the Abbey to align Beckett with the Irish rather than International drama" (Roche 2016, 13). But this programming in its choice of these most Beckettian Irish plays could instead be considered as re-reading the history of Irish drama through Beckett's work and as such re-situating the Irish dramatic tradition in relation to an international practice of theatrical experimentation. Beckett would himself go on to bring German and American productions to the Abbey staging his own directed productions of the Schiller Theatre's *Warten auf Godot* in 1977 and the San Quentin Theatre Workshop's productions of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* in 1980.

Productions of Beckett's plays were not confined to the Abbey at this time and there are notable productions of his work at smaller venues such as the Focus theatre (see O'Gorman 2016, 67–85), Dublin, and at the Lyric theatre, Belfast (Grant 2016, 51–65). However, it was the revival of *Waiting for Godot* at the Abbey in 1969 that has been regarded as "a watershed in the history of Beckett production in Ireland" (Murray 1984, 114). It is a fascinating case that stages many of the concerns of this era in its complex interplay between the Irish and the International and its crafted revision of the past. The play was produced only months after Beckett had garnered significant prestige and world-renown in being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. It starred Peter O'Toole, the famous stage and screen actor at the top of his powers having been nominated for an Academy Award for his role in *The Lion in Winter* the previous year. O'Toole appearing on stage at the Abbey marked how the theatre under the directorship of Tomás Mac Anna, and subsequently Hugh Hunt, had broken with previous long held values. Such a celebrity-driven production was a rarity at the theatre where up until 1966 under the directorship of Ernest Blythe there had been a policy whereby all performers at the national theatre had to be fluent in the Irish language. Indeed, O'Toole (who had been raised in Leeds) claimed to have been rejected from joining the Abbey Players for this very reason (Murray 1984, 115).

The theatre programme for the show includes an expected write-up on O'Toole (foregrounding his Irish origins and his residence in Connemara) but it also features Norah McGuinness as the designer of the show. McGuinness linked the production to the triumphs of the early Abbey in the 1920s and 1930s as the programme tells of how she designed sets for the plays of Yeats, Lennox Robinson and Denis Johnston (Abbey Theatre, 1969). The production thus announced itself as a break from an insular nationalism, characterised by Blythe's Irish-language policy, in its casting of O'Toole but also connected

itself to the glory days of the early Abbey and the cosmopolitan figures of Yeats and Johnston with McGuinness as designer. The choices in performance would also reflect a mixed representation of the Irish and the international (Fig. 3.2).

The production stressed the music hall and vaudeville aspects of the play. The double act of Vladimir and Estragon in tattered costumes and large shoes evoked Charlie Chaplin’s tramp figure. Further to this, the director of the play, Sean Cotter remarked how “before each performance, [...] O’Toole and McCann listened to old records of Flanagan and Allen in O’Toole’s

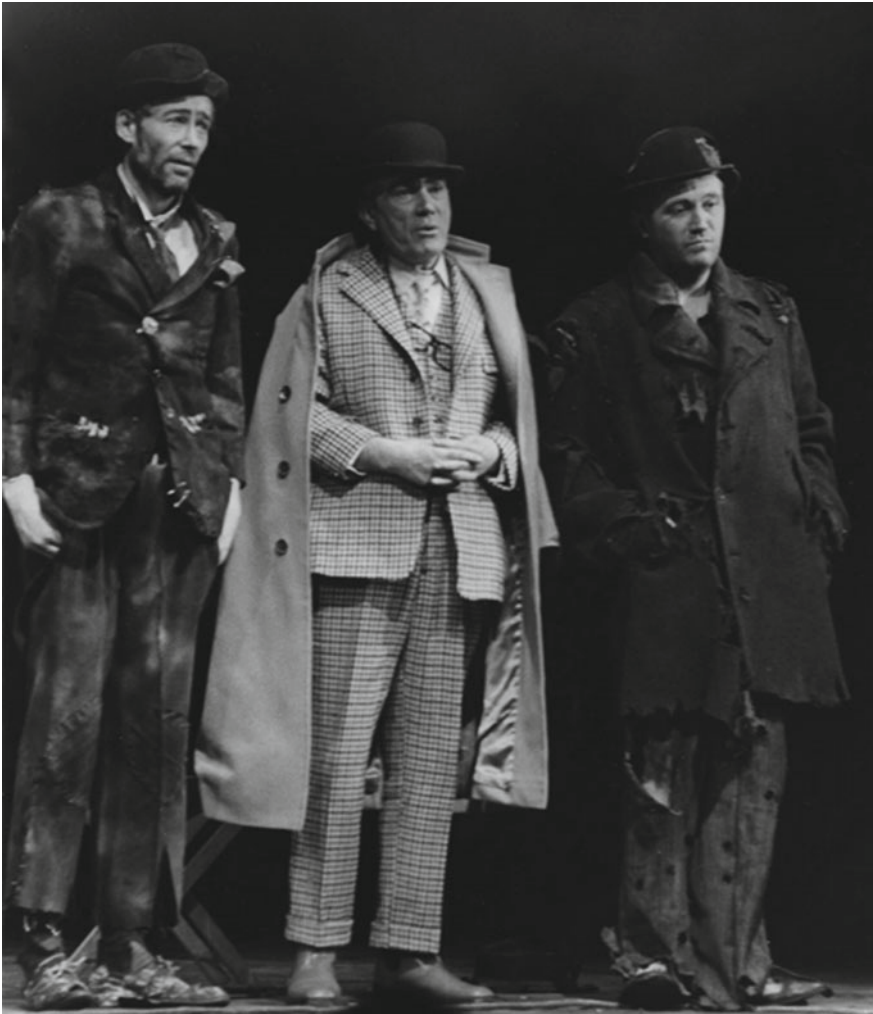


Fig. 3.2 *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, Abbey Stage, 1969 (Photo Fergus Bourke. Courtesy of the Abbey Theatre Archive)

dressing room, in order to get the music hall “feel” and timing right before curtain up” (Murray 1984, 116). However, McMullan comments how the ragged costumes also brought forth “an Irish iconography of stage itinerants” (McMullan 2016, 115). Here, then Beckett’s clowns are redolent of the displaced wanderers of Synge’s and Yeats’s dramas. McGuinness’s set of an “Island of Boulders, topped with a withered tree” (Murray 1984, 116) would also have evoked for many of the audience a Neolithic tomb, or fairy fort as they are often known, a common feature scattered across the Irish landscape. These aspects would have hibernicised the production, as did the accents of the actors, although the trend in Irish productions of Beckett of depicting Pozzo as an Anglo-Irishman was not followed. Instead, Eamonn Kelly played the demonstrative Pozzo in his native Kerry accent and his performance was suggestive of an old school master or parish priest. This saw the production reflecting on more recent history identifying oppression as no longer coming from outside colonial forces but from the internal authoritarians of post-independence Ireland.

Spotlight on Institutions and Festivals

Project Arts Centre

In 2016 in a speech that celebrated 50 years of the Project Arts Centre Orlaith McBride proclaimed: “This is not a home for art as monument. It is not a place of retrospection. It is a laboratory to find the antidote to what afflicts us now. Censorship may be gone off the statute books, but the requirement to challenge consensus, is more pressing than ever” (2016). McBride’s description of the Project Arts Centre as a laboratory space captures what this institution has offered Irish Arts—a place to creatively imagine, develop and show alternative modes of thinking and behaving. She also draws attention to how it has always been more interested in the future than the past with its origins in an initiative from 1966 entitled *Project 67* which looked forward to what was to come, in a year where the Irish state was busy organising events that looked back, commemorating 50 years since the 1916 insurrection, the foundational event for the establishment of an Irish Republic. When he failed to secure the rights for a run of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* Colm O’Briain (later director of the Arts Council) decided to use the three weeks he had booked at the Gate to organise, with the help of Theatre Director Jim Fitzgerald, a series of artistic activities including exhibitions, short plays, music and poetry readings. This became *Project 67*. One of the most memorable events during the three weeks was a meeting to protest the censorship laws where writer Edna O’Brien brought copies of her own banned books and actors including Fionnuala Flanagan and T.P. McKenna read extracts from O’Brien’s work to “a packed gathering, highlighting the absurd situation whereby words that could be freely spoken in public could not be read in private” (McBride 2016).

The Project Arts Centre would have peripatetic beginnings, located first in Lower Abbey Street, then in South King Street until it finally settled in a

former printing works at East Essex Street in 1974 that was converted into a performance space, gallery and cinema. With financial support from the Arts Council this building was bought in 1977 and the arts centre would continue here until 1998. It was temporarily closed for refurbishment but continued as Project @the mint in Henry Place until once again taking residence in its newly designed space in East Essex Street in 2000.

Over the years the centre has proved a nurturing creative space for new companies and artists to develop their work. The 1970s would see future film directors Neil Jordan and Jim Sheridan write and direct at the centre, while U2 and the Boomtown Rats would also perform on the project stage. In the 1980s Rough Magic theatre company would use the project space to stage productions that would establish them as a new force in Irish theatre. Other companies such as Operating Theatre, Loose Canon, Pan Pan, and Fishamble and countless others would all be supported by Project Arts Centre to develop exciting new work in the subsequent decades attracting a much more socially and age diverse audience than the other established theatres.

Galway International Arts Festival

The 1970s was a time of great theatrical activity in the city of Galway. John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy had established the Galway Theatre Workshop “primarily for the purpose of developing the treatment of social questions in theatrical form—street theatre, cartoon plays, agit prop” (Pilkington 2023, 325); Druid Theatre Company had been founded in 1975 and An Taibhdhearc, the national theatre for plays in the Irish language, had expanded to run a smaller experimental space, An Taibhsín, from 1973 to 1977. In this atmosphere a group of artists, university students and community activists came together in 1977 to propose the establishment of a new arts centre and festival for Galway. The following year the first Galway Arts Festival took place offering a fortnight of a variety of artistic endeavours. The festival was funded by local and national businesses and semi-state bodies. With few artistic venues in Galway the Festival became known for its innovative use of urban sites and buildings to house and stage work. One of the most famous examples of this was when “Robert Lepage’s *Dragon’s Trilogy*—one of the key international productions of the latter half of the twentieth century—was performed in a tiny school hall in Galway in 1987” (Loneragan 2019, 94). The lack of theatres and arts centres also led to the festival attracting international large-scale street and outdoor theatre with Cornish-based Footsbarn, Catalonian theatre group Els Comediants and French circus group Archaos regular participants. Lionel Pilkington writes “It was the electrifying effect of Footsbarn and Els Comediants’ extraordinary, larger-than-life processions that inspired Ollie Jennings and Páraic Breathnach to establish Macnas (an Irish word meaning ‘joyful abandon’) in 1986” (2023, 330). Macnas would go on to perform an annual parade in the Galway Arts Festival for many years and became itself a renowned company, touring to festivals around the world. Galway would see the development of more artistic venues in the subsequent decades after the establishment

of the festival including the refurbished 400-seat Town Hall theatre, Druid's Mick Lally Theatre, the Galway Arts Centre and O'Donoghue Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance. These venues have helped the festival to attract some of the biggest names in theatre worldwide and to present a major discussion platform entitled, First Thought Talks, but it has always maintained its commitment to street spectacle and temporary venues. There is still no permanent art gallery in the city and the visual art programme in the festival still adapts old buildings for exhibitions. The festival more recently invested in a large, big top blue tent which hosts large music concerts and circus events. The erection of this tent in mid-July has now come to signal to all in Galway that it is festival time. Thousands of tourists flock to Galway for the festival each year and in 2014 the name of the festival was changed to Galway International Arts Festival to acknowledge its global reach and its role as a major producer of new Irish work, premiering plays by Enda Walsh, Olwen Fouéré, Conall Morrison and many others, to then tour this work to London and New York.

CONCLUSION

The rapid historical and social changes of this era, sped on by membership of the EU, free second-level education and the outbreak of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland troubled the conception of an Irish national identity like no other period since independence. There was debate over and revision of key historical events and figures, while mass youth movements protested for equal rights for women, and gay liberation in the Republic and civil rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland. This inevitably led to fierce conflict and in the case of Northern Ireland a decade of terrible grave violence. The theatrical activity on the island reflected this time of revision and began to expand, reaching new audiences with a new emphasis on regionalism. This led to the Irish Touring Company (ITC) bringing quality productions all over the country and the founding of Druid Theatre Company in Galway, that would become a major production house outside of Dublin. The Project Arts Centre through the energies of the Sheridan brothers, Mannix Flynn and others brought the underrepresented urban working class to the fore. There were political experimentations in form such as Arden and D'Arcy's *The Non-Stop Connolly Show* (1975), controversial dramas that criticised the morality of the Catholic Church such as Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* (1977) and a theatrical reaction to the violence in Northern Ireland in John Boyd's *The Flats* (1971), which began a subgenre of the "Troubles play." Many new young directors and designers would begin working this decade who would become hugely influential in subsequent years. The period ended with a visit from the Pope to Ireland in 1979 with millions from both North and South coming out to see him. This visit effected a mass renewal of faith in Catholicism which would bring a deep conservatism of thought and action in the early years of the following decade.

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Crisis, Uncertainty and Scandal (1980–1994)

PART I: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Economic instability in the 1980s halted the accelerated societal change of the 1960s and 1970s in the Republic of Ireland ushering in a period of renewed Catholic conservatism, political uncertainty, moral hypocrisy and corruption. The growth of Irish business and manufacturing that had begun in the 1960s had slowed by the mid-70s and continued to stall due to the effects of several international oil crises; by the 1980s it had all but come to a stop. The strategy of generating wealth through foreign investment with multinationals establishing factories and offices in Ireland had not paid off, with only a limited number of companies instituted. With modernisation many traditional jobs in areas such as docking and clothing manufacturing were lost to machines. Successive governments had to increase borrowing just to maintain current spending with little or no budget for economic stimulus initiatives. They also had to make severe cuts to spending which included making thousands of public servants redundant. All of this inevitably led to mass unemployment and emigration, with figures returning to those recorded in the 1950s. In 1988–1989 alone, 70,600 people left the country—2% of the entire population. Most of these were young—those aged between fifteen and twenty-four made up 69% of the total (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 2008, 246–247). Many who could not leave suffered an increase in extreme poverty which in turn gave rise to criminality. Muggings, housebreaking and petty larceny became commonplace in cities such as Dublin and Limerick with many afraid to walk the city streets at night. Much of this criminal activity was fuelled by a desperate need for heroin which was flooded into the cities' poorest areas by new organised crime gangs.

Many commentators blamed the financial crisis on a “lack of a satisfactory, workable, self-image after the economic and social change of the 1960s and ’70s had destroyed a serviceable version of the national identity as Gaelic, Catholic and republican” (Brown 2004, 319). This then led to a rise in a new conservatism as a means of maintaining a separate Irish identity. Few in the country had sufficient fluency in Gaelic, and support of republicanism was perceived to run counter to the modern rise of economic globalisation while also being too connected with the violent atrocities of the provisional IRA. So, it was in a renewed commitment to the Catholic Church that a distinctive Irish identity could be most easily reclaimed. In this spirit, Catholic lay groups came together in 1981 to form the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) to outlaw abortion in Ireland. The practice of abortion was already illegal in Ireland by law but fearing how laws could be challenged or overturned by the courts PLAC sought an amendment to the constitution which would only be changed by a referendum of the people. In September 1983 a referendum on the issue was conducted and carried leading to an eighth amendment to the constitution of Ireland which recognised the equal right to life of the mother and the unborn. Earlier that year in April an appeal to the High Court made by plaintiff (and later senator) David Norris to the illegality of two laws made under British rule that made homosexual acts and conduct illegal was rejected by the Supreme Court. Norris would bring his case to the European Court of Human Rights and successfully argue how Ireland was in breach of Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights in its criminalising of homosexuality. The European court judged in favour of his position in 1988 and the Irish laws impugned by the judgement were repealed five years later in 1993. But before that Catholic conservatives would have another victory with the defeat of an amendment to the constitution to remove the prohibition of divorce proposed by the government in 1986.

However, despite such retrograde steps, the economic and social changes of the previous decades could not be fully reversed. The Republic of Ireland was now part of a global liberal market connected by mass media; it provided free state education and was no longer subject to the strict censorship of the early decades of independence. This created appetites for the freedoms of liberal democracies that conflicted with the strict mores of the Catholic Church. This clash of values did not, however, lead to revolutionary action but a stalemate between both positions sustained by a discerning hypocrisy, what Fintan O’Toole has described as “the culture of deliberate unknowing” that involved a mindset of “don’t ask, don’t see and don’t say” (2021, 28). This was particularly apparent in the public moral policing of sexuality, marriage and control of women’s bodies that existed alongside a private world of pregnancy outside of marriage, affairs, clandestine gay sex, imported contraception and travel *en masse* to the UK for abortions.

The violence in the North of Ireland and sectarian divisions further deepened in the 1980s exacerbated by the hunger strikes of republican prisoners at the beginning of the decade. These strikes were the culmination of years of

protests by inmates who demanded recognition as political prisoners and to be given Special Category Status rather than treated as criminal offenders. They first refused to wear prison uniforms, choosing to go naked or wear blankets, this was called the “blanket protest.” Then after attacks by prison guards they refused to leave their cells. This became known as the “Dirty protest” as unable to leave their cells the prisoners could not wash and as guards refused to go in to clean the cells, there was no disposal of the prisoner’s excrement, so they smeared it on the walls in defiance of their conditions. Women prisoners who would later join the protest would also smear menstrual blood on the walls. In October 1980 with their demands still not met it was decided that some prisoners would go on hunger strike together. This strike would last for 53 days until the British government proposed a settlement. However, unhappy with the conditions of the settlement a further strike began in March 1981 with prisoners joining the strike one at a time in staggered intervals. Bobby Sands, who led the action and was the first to refuse food, was elected to the British House of Commons as a Sinn Féin representative while on hunger strike. It was thought that if elected to this position the British government would be forced to concede their position rather than let an elected member of parliament die. However, Margaret Thatcher the British Prime Minister refused to give in and Sands died after 66 days on strike. Thousands lined the streets of Belfast for his funeral which was conducted with IRA military honours. Ten other prisoners would die on hunger strike before the efforts of their families to medically intervene and the British government’s partial concession to demands ended the strikes. In nationalist republican communities the strikers were portrayed as martyrs and as such served to give legitimacy to the IRA’s violent campaign. For historian Diarmuid Ferriter, “the deaths and election victories by hunger strike candidates...can be said to have altered the political environment in which the IRA operated” (2004, 640). It forced the IRA to engage with democratic institutions and participate in political debate via the nationalist political party Sinn Féin. Atrocities would continue throughout the decade from both sides but the IRA bombing at a Remembrance Day memorial in November 1987 where 10 civilians and a police officer were killed and 63 injured was a turning point for many to finally end the violence. Gerry Adams, the Leader of Sinn Féin, would move the IRA towards peace talks by the end of the 1980s which would eventually lead to a ceasefire in 1994. Another significant movement towards peace were the negotiations between the then Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald and Margaret Thatcher that resulted in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 which gave the Irish government a consultative role in the governance of Northern Ireland. It also crucially declared that Britain would no longer oppose a united Ireland if a majority in Northern Ireland were to desire this. With Unionists and Republicans both refusing to be part of the negotiation the agreement did not bring peace in the short term but it signalled publicly for the first time that Britain “was essentially neutral in the Irish quarrel, a change in policy which could be built on over time” (Brown 2004, 333).

As already outlined, the 1980s was a turbulent time politically where the urgency of the economic crisis and the continuing horror of the Northern conflict created instability politically with power shifting continually throughout the decade between the two largest political parties Fianna Fail and Fine Gael as both were forced to make unpopular decisions. Indeed, between 1981 and 1982 the Irish electorate would vote in three general elections where a Fine Gael-Labour coalition would see Fianna Fail gain a majority government after a forced election, followed by Fianna Fail losing power to Fine Gael and Labour after another forced election.

All this uncertainty and doubleness would lead to a sense of unreality in Irish life, a sense of emptiness and deadly performativity. In the summer of 1985 Irish Catholics would flock to parishes in Kerry to pray in the hope of witnessing holy statues move, as they were purported to have miraculously come to life. O'Toole writes,

Nothing was incredible, nothing was neatly contained within the bounds of likelihood. The unbelievable was entirely possible; the real was hard to believe. Events that looked like conspiracies might turn out to be mere accidents, while surface normalities might conceal the most convoluted political machinations. When the state was enveloped in this cloud of unknowing, it was not surprising that society at large was struggling not to lose its reason. It became easier to accept fantastical explanations than to settle for plain facts. (2021, 356)

However, the fantastical show of the 1980s would come to an end with the arrival of the new decade as political and church scandals broke and the Irish people began to no longer wish to maintain the charade. The beginning of this change could be viewed to have been ushered in by the election of Mary Robinson as the first woman to be president of Ireland in 1990. Robinson was a Labour party candidate, who in addition to being a senator and councillor had been an outspoken barrister who had fought for women's rights, opposing the 1983 abortion referendum, and advocating for gay liberation, heading the legal team for David Norris in his case on the decriminalisation of homosexuality at the European Court for Human Rights. The presidential role had largely been ceremonial in Ireland but Robinson used her position to influence thought by speaking out on issues, presenting a liberal contemporary vision of Ireland for the 1990s that was in opposition to the conservatism of the previous decade.

Robinson had been aided in her election victory by a disastrous Fianna Fail campaign which collapsed in scandal as their candidate Brian Linehan was caught in a lie about an incident in the past and a senior Fianna Fail government minister, Pádraig Flynn, in a radio interview, misogynistically attacked Robinson for being a bad mother and wife. This was to be the beginning of the end for Haughey's political dominance as party colleagues plotted to oust him and he lost the leadership in 1992. Over the following years revelations about payments to him from prominent business men and his involvement

in tax evasion schemes would lead to a lengthy tribunal of inquiry into his finances in 1997 with a final report released in 2012, six years after his death.

The moral authority of the Catholic Church which had resurged in the 1980s was to collapse in the 1990s. It began with the resignation of Bishop Eamonn Casey, a highly visible member of the Irish clergy who stepped down after it was revealed by the *Irish Times* in 1992 that he had fathered a child with a woman from Connecticut, Annie Murphy, in the 1970s and had recently given her a large financial settlement using church funds for her son's college fees. Casey fled the country and a year later Murphy published a book which detailed the affair with the Bishop and his hedonistic life of pleasure and privilege. Bishop Casey's hypocrisy and conduct damaged the Church's standing in Ireland but the scandals that would follow in subsequent years, the horrific exposure of its systemic cover-up and protection of paedophile priests who had abused children for decades, was to forever end its formidable influence on Irish society. This saw the end of Catholicism as a core marker of Irish identity just as Ireland entered into a new globalised era of financial prosperity and inward migration.

PART II: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Genres, Methods and Approaches

The 1980s and early 1990s saw a massive rise in theatrical activity across the island. New companies were founded North and South offering more diverse perspectives while the established theatres staged radical revivals of Irish classics alongside challenging new plays by well-known authors. There was a huge increase in touring of productions at home and abroad with many of these achieving significant critical and commercial success. All this activity was due to and in reaction to the circumstance of the time. With more university graduates than in earlier periods but less prospects for employment a generation of artists emerged that had to create their own opportunities. Many companies were thus formed following the earlier model set by Druid such as Rough Magic (Dublin, 1984), Pigsback (Dublin, 1988–1996), Gallowglass (Clonmel, 1990), Island (Limerick, 1988–2008), Meridian (Cork, 1991–2009), Corcadorca (Cork, 1991), Punchbag (Galway, 1989–1997) and Blue Raincoat, (Sligo, 1991). Victor Merriman points out:

Unlike Druid, however, and with the exception of Blue Raincoat, none of these companies developed as a venue-based theatre ensemble, relying instead on seasons presented at established or emerging local venues and on access to touring – a central plank of Arts Council policy toward “regional development” almost since its inception, and which was funded between 1982 and 1990 by direct grant aid to companies. (2016, 395)

Other companies were set up because of inequalities or to confront contemporary issues. Charabanc (Belfast, 1983–1995) was started by a group of

unemployed actresses, who produced their own work, as there were so few roles for women in the plays being produced at the time. They also felt that the roles that were available were limited in their representation, reducing women to types rather than portraying any reality. Glasshouse (Dublin, 1990–1996), a company also run by female theatremakers, later followed the example of Charabanc but they set out to deliberately produce new and neglected writing by women, frustrated that such work was not being staged at the larger theatres. Over the entire decade of the 1980s only one female authored play would be produced on the main Abbey stage: Jean Binnie's *Colours—Jane Barry Esq* (1988).

Passion Machine (Dublin, 1984–2008) furthered the work done by the Sheridan's at the Project in the late 1970s in representing working-class urban identities and issues in being “committed to a wholly indigenous populist theatre that depicted, challenged and celebrated the contemporary Irish experience” (Irish Theatre Playography, n.d.). Field Day Theatre Company (Derry) was also established by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea in 1980 with a view to making theatre more accessible to new audiences by committing to touring its productions around the entire island to small towns often ignored on traditional touring circuits. Touring for Field Day (as it was also for Charabanc) was also a means to artistically address the ongoing sectarian violence as it sought to unite communities through performance and offer varied perspectives through staging historical dramas such as Friel's *Translations* (1980), Thomas Kilroy's *Double Cross* (1986) and Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987) and new adaptations of classics like Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984), a version of *Antigone* by Sophocles and Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1990), after *Philoctetes* by Sophocles.

Nicholas Grene writes how in this period “Many others adopted the same strategy of recreating the past in order to find a means of better understanding the troubled issues of the contemporary period” (1999, 235–236). A prominent example being Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1985) which is discussed in Chapter 7.

The distancing of a historical narrative was not for everyone with other companies such as Rough Magic in their production of Declan Hughes's *Digging for Fire* (1991), Pigsback's staging of Joseph O'Connor's *Red Roses and Petrol* (1995) and *Passion Machine's* many productions of the plays of Paul Mercier and Roddy Doyle, confronting audiences with a dynamic urgent contemporary realism. Playwright Clare Dowling writes:

In the late Eighties and early Nineties, modern urban Dublin finally booted boggy bits of land off the Irish stage, page and screen. Suddenly people were writing about dole queues and housing estates and southside dinner parties. The characters in these new fictional urban communities seemed very immediate and young and empathetic. Humour was rampant, sentiment gleefully absent. The language would strip paint. (Williams et al. 2001, 133)

Contemporary rural Ireland was also given unsentimental realistic treatment in many dramas of this time, most notably Tom Murphy's landmark *Baile-gangaire* (1985) that came from his fruitful collaboration with Druid during this period, famously starring Siobhan McKenna in her final legendary performance as Mammo; and Billy Roche's Wexford Trilogy that included *A Handful of Stars* (1988) *Poor Beast in the Rain* (1989) and *Belfry* (1991). Roche's plays explore the gritty working-class world of men in Wexford town in order to reveal "the dignity of small lives" (Merriman 2022, 133). The plays of the Wexford Trilogy were first produced by the Bush theatre in London before being staged in Ireland. Roche here followed a practice that would become increasingly common in the 1990s and 2000s with Irish playwrights including Marina Carr, Mark O'Rowe, Enda Walsh, Frank McGuinness and Conor McPherson often being commissioned by producing houses in the UK to premiere new work.

This renewed appetite for Irish plays in the UK and worldwide could be said to have originated with the recognition of international touring productions in the 1980s and early 1990s. Chief among these were Field Day's tours of its productions outside of Ireland; Druid's award-winning revival of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* that toured repeatedly throughout the 1980s from Edinburgh to Perth, Australia; and the Gate Theatre's revival of O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* directed by Joe Dowling that earned plaudits on Broadway in 1988. However, the biggest Irish hit worldwide was the Abbey Theatre's production of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*. First staged at the Abbey in 1990 under the direction of Patrick Mason, this production would tour internationally for the next three years winning Best Play at the Tony awards in 1992. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is representative of many of the plays of this era in not only being a history play but also in its emphasis on movement and the body in performance. The most famous aspect of this production is the wild dance by the Mundy sisters that marks a moment of cathartic release for these women from their harsh tense reality. Indeed, in his closing monologue the character of Michael speaks of the memories of his childhood as coming to him in the form of dancing, as the entire cast sway slowly in a tableaux vivant:

Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement – as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary.... (Friel 1999, 108)

Michael's articulation of "words surrendering to movement" could be used to describe the theatrical output of the 1980s and early 1990s as Irish theatre was dominated by a new physicality in its presentation. This was most evident in Tom MacIntyre's stage adaptation of Patrick Kavanagh's poem *The*

Great Hunger in 1983 where he collaborated with designer Bronwen Casson, director Patrick Masson and an ensemble of actors to create a physical theatre that emphasised movement and design for its effects rather than language which was a radical departure at the time for the Abbey Theatre, that had built its reputation on the literary quality of its productions. The revivals of Irish classics in this era were also characterised by physical and visceral effects. Druid in several productions gave Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* a new raw vitality in an unsentimental presentation where impoverished crazed characters caked in dirt, passionately loved and violently raged on a sparse stage. Joe Dowling similarly would give Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* at the Gate Theatre in 1986 a stark treatment that emphasised the poverty of the Dublin tenement dwellers but also stressed the knock-about music hall aspects of the play. Garry Hynes would also radically reimagine O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* in a controversial production at the Abbey in 1991 with the cast of Dublin tenement dwellers appearing with heads shaved on a blood-stained stage. W.B. Yeats's rarely performed plays that are full of dance, music and movement were produced at the Abbey in a dedicated annual festival from 1989 to 1993. Theatre in the Irish language would also see productions that combined dance, masks and mime not so much in the output of the Abbey Theatre or An Taibhdhearc, the National Irish language theatre, but in the exciting work of an unfortunately short-lived company: Na Fánaithe (1987–1993). A production highlight of this company was *Bullai Mhártain* (1989), a co-production of Na Fánaithe and the Dublin-based, Irish-language theatre company, Deilt that would tour to Sligo, Dublin and Cork. The play consisted of a series of poetic episodes based on Seán McCarthy's adaptation of Síle Ní Chéileachair and Donncha Ó Céileachair's 1955 collection of short stories. According to Lionel Pilkington "With its extensive use of dolls and mannequins, and the confident and well-executed theatricality of its performers, *Bullai Mhártain* had an extraordinary effect" (2023, 333).

This turn towards the physical and the body on stage could be said to reflect the historical context of the era which was dominated by the violence in the North and a renewed commitment to the tenets of Catholicism which was then followed by faith-shattering revelations about politicians and priests. All of these contexts manifested in representation of and debate concerning the body. Republican prisoners used the body as a weapon through the blanket and dirty protests followed by the hunger strikes. Irish Catholicism's power was renewed in the 1980s through its victory in controlling the female body in referendums that would prevent abortion and divorce in Ireland. A distrust of words would manifest at the beginning of the following decade with the hypocrisy of priests that preached chastity and charity exposed as decadent philanders or paedophiles, and some politicians revealed as dishonest self-servers that asked people to endure economic hardship while they abused their position to gain wealth.

Key Practitioners and Companies

Field Day Theatre Company

Despite its future success and enormous influence on Irish theatre and the study of Irish literature, Aidan O'Malley, in his book length study of Field Day, points out that "There was no master-plan behind the creation of the company; rather it was an essentially improvised occurrence" (2011, 5). Field Day originated when the actor, Stephen Rea approached playwright, Brian Friel about the possibility of them working together to produce and tour a play in Ireland after hearing of potential Arts Council funding for such a venture. Friel accepted Rea's proposal as he had already been working on a new play and was intrigued with the idea of touring it both north and south of the border to regions outside of the metropolitan centres of Dublin, Belfast and London. Field Day was chosen as a name for the new company as "a rhyming amalgam" (2011, 5) of the co-founders surnames: Friel and Rea.

The play Friel had been working on was *Translations* and it would be the first play staged by Field Day at the Guildhall, Derry in 1980. The play considers the cultural impact of the loss of the Irish language due to the colonial occupation of Ireland by Britain. It does this by telling the story of how a hedge-school teacher, his two sons and small group of locals in Baile Beag, Donegal are affected by the arrival of British troops engaged in the Royal Ordnance Survey of Ireland where they are in the process of translating the local Gaelic place names into English. The play was a response to the political violence in the North that sought to understand the conflict in terms of the legacies of British colonialism in Ireland.

This production not only launched the company but set its agenda in its interrogation of language, identity and postcolonialism. The venue of the Guildhall, Derry for the play's premiere was also significant as it was the building for the local seat of government and had been the site of multiple attacks since the outbreak of the Troubles. The production of *Translations* there in 1980, in front of an audience composed of both prominent loyalists and republicans, aimed to transform the space into a shared site of empathy for the suffering and loss caused by colonialism and a cultural enquiry into the complexities of language and identity. This aim was later identified by Friel as the creation of a "Fifth Province" and became a leading concept that initially energised Field Day. Ireland is divided into four provinces but in the Irish language the word for province is cúige, which translates as fifth since there were once five provinces in ancient Ireland. Stirred by how the language still retains the memory of this lost fifth province Friel wished through the work of Field Day to create "a fifth province 'of the mind'" in which to "devise another way of looking at Ireland, or another possible Ireland." He borrowed this concept from the editors of Crane Bag, a cultural journal of Irish Studies who had first written of this in 1976.

After the success of *Translations* Friel and Rea committed to producing and touring a play together annually. This meant they had to register as a

formal company with a Board of Directors. By 1981 four of their friends would come to serve on the board: Poets, Seamus Heaney and Tom Paulin, academic Seamus Deane and musicologist David Hammond. Along with its co-founders the board consisted of a balanced mix of Protestants and Catholics but did not include any women. Thomas Kilroy would also be invited to join the board in 1986 shortly after his play *Double Cross* was produced. Kilroy would be the only board member from the Republic of Ireland. With such an illustrious gathering of cultural figures soon the board began to involve the company in activities outside of theatre production producing pamphlets, magazine articles, academic monographs, collections of essays, an annual review and a five-volume anthology of Irish literature. As O'Malley puts it "In short, the company has been, and continues to be, a banner under which a wide array of voices have found expression in a variety of forms to generate debates about the histories of Irish cultural identities and their significance on the cusp of the twenty-first century" (2011, 1).

1980–1991 marks the most fruitful period of production for the company. In addition to *Translations* Friel would go on to write *The Communication Cord* (1982), *Making History* (1988) and an adaptation of Chekov's *Three Sisters* for Field Day. His fellow board members Tom Paulin and Seamus Heaney would both write new versions of Greek classics by Sophocles, Paulin adapted *Antigone* in his *The Riot Act* (1984) and Heaney reimagined the *Philoctetes* as *The Cure at Troy* (1990). Derek Mahon's *High Time* (1984), an adaptation of Moliere's *The School for Husbands* was also staged as a double bill with Paulin's play. Field Day produced significant original plays including two by Kilroy, *Double Cross* (1986) and *The Madame MacAdam Travelling Theatre* (1991), Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* (1987) and Terry Eagleton's *Saint Oscar* (1997). All these plays and adaptations are unique theatrically exciting examinations of the complexities of an Irish identity from fascinating historical or imaginatively mythical perspectives, but they are united, according to Murray, in their insistence "that the problem of identity is best understood theatrically, involving audiences in the process of redefinition" (Murray 1997, 222).

With the poor reception of Kilroy's second play for the company, *The Madame MacAdam Travelling Theatre* (1991), Friel's decision to give *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) to the Abbey, which became an international hit, and Rea's film career beginning to take off after a nomination for an Academy Award for *The Crying Game* (1992) the frequency of productions slowed in the 1990s with only two further productions after Kilroy's play, Frank McGuinness's adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* in 1995 and a revival of Parker's *Northern Star* (1984) in 1998. The controversy that arose following the publication of three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, edited by Seamus Deane in 1990 may also have contributed to the winding down of theatrical activity. The anthology had included little writing by women, something that had gone unnoticed by the all-male editorial board. Although Friel and Rea were not directly part of this enterprise, they were still

implicated as board members of the company. Kilroy resigned from the Board in 1992 and Friel followed in 1994. Two further volumes of the anthology that concentrated on Irish women’s writing were published in 2002 to address the imbalance. The company returned in 2012 to produce new plays in Derry by David Ireland and Clare Dwyer Hogg starring and directed by Rea. The production of Hogg’s *Farewell* marked the first play written by a woman to be produced by the company. In 2013 as part of the Londonderry/Derry City of Culture celebrations, Field Day staged the premiere of *A Particle of Dread: Oedipus Variations*, a new play by American playwright, Sam Shepard, which then travelled to New York, in 2014–2015.

Charabanc Theatre Company

Frustrated with a lack of theatre work for women, a group of five Belfast-based actresses, Marie Jones, Brenda Winter, Maureen McCauley, Eleanor Methven and Carol Scanlon (Moore) decided to form their own company in 1983. They named their company Charabanc, after an “open-top, day-trip bus” (Sihra 2016, 550). The company was made up of women from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds “creating a unique model for an integrated, non-sectarian theatre group” (Coleman Coffey 2016, 85). They made work for all communities, deliberately staging their productions in both loyalist and republican areas as well as in neutral venues. Charabanc would also tour shows over the border to the south of Ireland and internationally to the United States and Russia, producing twenty-four shows over twelve years (1985–1995), nineteen of which were new works.

As the five members of the company were all actresses, they created work collaboratively examining working-class women’s lives and experiences that were side-lined or ignored by much of the drama and writing about the North, which took a male perspective in narratives often dominated by “the Troubles.” Charabanc’s process was “to collect ideas, interviews, and research, shaping and reshaping material that engaged with the women’s identities and with the diverse social histories of their mothers and grandmothers” (Sihra 2016, 551). They did not wish to make the immediate violence of the sectarian conflict their subject but instead aimed to tell the hidden stories of Northern Irish women from different communities united by the everyday struggles of the working class. For example, *Lay Up Your Ends* (1983) devised with help from the playwright Martin Lynch, told of the strike of linen mill workers in 1911, while *The Girls in the Big Picture* (1986) follows the impact of cinema on the lives of three women in rural Ulster in the 1960s and *Gold in the Streets* (1985) charts the effects of emigration on women at the beginning, the middle and towards the end of the twentieth century. In presenting these stories Charabanc offered audiences a deeper understanding of the histories of class, gender and ethnicity that had led to the contemporary violence of their own time.

Productions had a minimal aesthetic with sets sometimes consisting of simple platforms or crates and modest costumes that hinted at time periods

while props were used judiciously to denote a variety of characters. This aesthetic was born of financial necessity, but it also served to make the work versatile and mobile, enabling the company to bring their shows to working-class communities. Fiona Coleman Coffey's points out:

For working-class audiences of the North, theatre was considered the purview of an educated elite that could afford to attend performances and who could also travel to the city at night in safety. Charabanc made theatre accessible financially and physically by travelling to community neighbourhoods and performing in safe spaces where families could go without fear of violence. (2016, 88)

Another aspect of the work that came from circumstance but had ideological implications was all the members of the company playing multiple characters in the productions, including those of the male roles. This signalled to audiences that it was a female perspective that was being presented and embodied countering the "long tradition of male-constructed portrayals of women" (Coleman Coffey 2016, 86). It also drew attention to the performativity of identity itself. This could be viewed as a radical political act in a place and time where violent atrocities were being carried out in the name of people's identities as Irish or British, Catholic or Protestant. However, the work did not wish to produce superficial distanced presentations typical of confrontational agitprop theatre but performances that would still move audiences, through sensitive portrayals of characters, often creating "compassion and empathy for those identified as the adversary" (Coleman Coffey 2016, 86).

Although they wound up operations in 1995 the legacy of the company was to be lasting. Coffey states that Charabanc "helped establish an independent theatre sector for the first time in the North, and it secured an international reputation for Northern Ireland as the progenitor of significant and high-quality theatre" (2016, 84). It was also through her work with Charabanc that Marie Jones developed as a playwright, often taking on the role of the writer-in-residence for the collaborative shows and eventually having her own single-authored plays produced by the company. Jones has gone on as a playwright to win international renown with plays such as *A Night in November* (1994), *Women on the Verge of HRT* (1995) and *Stones in His Pockets* (1996).

Rough Magic

On graduating from Trinity College, Dublin, where they had been directing productions for the university drama society, Declan Hughes and Belfast-born Lynn Parker wanted to continue to work in theatre and asked if some other graduates would join them. In 1984 four actors, Stanley Townsend, Helene Montague, Arthur Riordan, Anne Byrne and a producer/general manager, Siobhán Bourke along with Parker and Hughes, would thus come to found a new company: Rough Magic. As "kids of the television and film age" Parker has said that they "didn't want to look back to the rural Ireland that was staged in so many of the Abbey's plays. We wanted to reflect our own culture,

the culture of our generation” (O’Rourke 2018). The company thus deliberately set out to produce work by international writers such as David Mamet, Caryl Churchill and David Hare which were rarely produced at the time in Ireland. They were lucky early on to have support in this enterprise from the Project Arts Centre which allowed them to develop into a flagship company for the centre. With Ireland in a deep recession they also found cheap rehearsal space in abandoned buildings in Dublin. Arthur Riordan remembers, “In our first 12 months we mounted 13 productions. Back then we rehearsed in a decrepit old building on Temple Lane with mostly broken windows and a view of the sky through the roof” (Tipton 2019). The company soon formed a regular ensemble of actors which included Pauline McGlynn, who would later win fame on television for her portrayal of Mrs. Doyle in Channel Four’s *Father Ted*, and Anne Enright, a future Booker Prize winning author. As Rough Magic advanced they began to ambitiously stage classic works by John Webster, Bertolt Brecht and George Farquhar alongside contemporary plays, offering their young actors opportunities to play famous roles that would have been unavailable to them at the more established theatres. Four years into their existence they began to produce new Irish work starting with Donal O’Kelly’s *Bat the Father, Rabbit the Son* (1988). But it was a new Irish drama *Digging for Fire* by one of the co-founders of the company, Declan Hughes that would bring Rough Magic significant recognition not only in Ireland but also in London, where the play was staged at the Bush theatre. This would create a reputation for the company as a producing house for new Irish plays with a more cosmopolitan sensibility that did not shy away from discussions of sex, popular culture, urban life and global as well as local political concerns. Over the next three decades Rough Magic would premiere work by Gina Moxley, Arthur Riordan and Pom Boyd (who were all in the original cast of *Digging for Fire*) as well as Paula Meehan, Christian O’Reilly, Rosemary Jenkinson, Elizabeth Kuti, Hillary Fanin, Sonya Kelly and further works by Hughes and O’Kelly. Two collections of new plays produced by Rough Magic have been published evidencing the considerable impact the company has had on new writing for the stage. For Patrick Lonergan “All of these plays are different from each other in tone, form and content, but they share a determination to break away from any sense of Irish exceptionalism...[They] show that Irishness comes most clearly into focus when placed in an international context...That is what makes them typical Rough Magic plays” (2019, 97). The playwright Stewart Parker was Lynn Parker’s uncle and it is important to also recognise that Rough Magic have staged several productions of his works including a landmark revival of *Pentecost* for the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1995 which then toured Ireland and the UK in 1996. Many of the founders went on to pursue other projects, often returning for single shows or projects. However, Parker has remained as artistic director of the company and acted as the director of the majority of Rough Magic’s shows. It is her dynamism and vision that drives the company. Her directing has garnered Parker many awards and she has worked freelance outside of Ireland at the

Almeida, the Bush, Old Vic in London and the Traverse, Edinburgh. Her style of direction has been characterised by its emphasis on ensemble playing, its “playful theatricality” (Walsh 2016, 458) and “an exceptional sensitivity to music on stage” (Lonergan 2019, 96). A signature production that showcased this style was Rough Magic’s award-winning musical *Improbable Frequency*, written by Bell Helicopter and Arthur Riordan about historical figures in neutral Ireland during World War Two. This production premiered in the 2004 Dublin Theatre Festival and went on to enjoy several revivals and tours in the following years. As an artistic director, in addition to her influential choice of productions and commissions Parker should also be commended for how under her directorship Rough Magic has played a major role in mentoring new talent in Ireland.

In 2001 the company launched Rough Magic Seeds, a structured development programme for emerging theatre practitioners across all theatre disciplines. As part of this initiative, participants worked on Rough Magic productions and developed their practice through mentoring and international research trips as well as work placements in London at the National Theatre, the Royal Court and the Southbank Centre, at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh and the Vígyszínház, Budapest, working with internationally recognised theatre practitioners. This programme has helped develop the careers of many of the most prominent theatremakers in Ireland in recent years including playwrights Stacey Gregg and Lisa McGee, writer of Channel 4’s *Derry Girls*; directors, Tom Creed, Sophie Motley and Ronan Phelan; producers Cian O’Brien, artistic director of the Project Arts Centre and Matt Smyth, producer with ANU; lighting designer, Sara Jane Shiels and sound designer, Alma Kelliher.

Landmark Plays and Productions

Tea in a China Cup *by Christina Reid (1983)*

Women’s voices, actions and stories were absent from the histories, media analysis and dramas of the conflict in Northern Ireland. This was exacerbated in the early 1980s with the hunger strikes of republican prisoners which were depicted in religious and nationalist terms of male sacrifice, with the women prisoners’ strikes and protests given little attention in comparison. When women were represented it was in subordinate roles or as limited stereotypes. As Janet states in another of Christina Reid’s plays *The Belle of the Belfast City*: “there are no women in Ireland. Only mothers, sisters and wives” (Reid 1997, 210). Further to this the lives of working-class Protestants were also often ignored as a dominant narrative took hold that simplified the conflict in the North as that of a wealthy Protestant majority oppressing an impoverished Catholic minority. *Tea in a China Cup* addresses these issues by telling the story of three generations of a poor Protestant family, between 1939 and 1972, from the perspective of two women. Sarah is dying of cancer and is being cared for by her daughter Beth. We join these two in 1972 as they

prepare for the coming of the annual Twelfth of July parade which sees loyalist's known as Orangemen march through the streets of Belfast to celebrate the victory of William of Orange over the Catholic King James II in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. The parade prompts Sarah and Beth to remember previous year's celebrations and functions as a device for them to step back into their past in a series of episodic scenes and remembrances directly addressed to the audience. From some of these scenes of the past we learn that a tradition of service in the British army by the men of Sarah's family is considered a core part of their loyalist identity. However, Sarah decries the personal cost, pain and loss of this tradition towards the end of the play:

Three generations of my family have fought in your army, and for what? That's my father, gassed in the First World War, that's my brother killed in the second, and that's my son, my only son, and he can't even come home on leave any more in case he gets a bullet in the back. (Reid 1997, 55)

History here is depicted as an endless cycle and this is also supported in other scenes by the parallels drawn between Sarah's and Beth's marriages as they both wed self-serving drunkards. Women are made to suffer for the decisions of men in a male-dominated world of war and violence fought over to preserve identity and tradition. But they also perpetuate patriarchal control and sectarianism through their own emphasis on respectability and materialism. Lisa Fitzpatrick writes that:

The metaphor of the fine china cup represents respectability, cleanliness, and hard work; but also not "whining and complainin'" and "putting" a poor mouth on yourself like the Catholics. Reid introduces this symbol of identity alongside the Sash, the Twelfth parades, banners and military service, so inserting women into the otherwise exclusively male set of signifiers. This also facilitates the recognition that this family stands metonymically for an entire community. (2022, 108)

Sarah in her endurance of the hardships of history is made sympathetic but she repeatedly refuses to stand up to her father, husband or grandfather and does not mix with Catholics as she wishes to maintain respectability and order. Beth, spurred on by her friendship with Theresa, a Catholic school friend who is living in London as a single mother, ultimately refuses to passively suffer the patriarchal culture of Northern Ireland, like her mother did for the sake of keeping up appearances. She ends the play selling the house and all its assets that she gained through her marriage, including an incomplete tea-set of Belleek china. We learn that she has kept one of the cups for herself and as a result deliberately devalued the set. In this final act of taking the cup, Beth brings some of the traditions forward with her into an uncertain future but she is also no longer a prisoner of them. Maria M. Delgado writes: "Reid's work doesn't provide happy endings or produce easy answers to the questions it poses. Rather, it seeks to interrogate the conflicting and disparate

ways in which a certain political situation affects those who function within it" (1997, XXII). *Tea in a China Cup* was Reid's first play to be professionally produced but she would go on to write seminal plays throughout the 1980s and 90s that would continue to reflect upon prejudice and patriarchy in Northern Ireland through increasingly theatricalised forms that would innovatively incorporate aspects of popular performance culture such as stand-up, cabaret and clowning.

Double Cross by *Thomas Kilroy (1986)*

In telling the story of Brendan Bracken and William Joyce, two Irishmen who denied their heritage in order to reinvent themselves and take different sides in World War Two, Thomas Kilroy in *Double Cross* draws attention to how identity is as much performed as it is given but also what dedication to such a performance can cost an individual, as these men betray and deceive to gain power.

Bracken was born in Tipperary, the son of a prosperous builder and strong supporter of the Republican Movement who reinvented himself as an English private-school-educated publisher and Tory MP that was appointed Minister for Information in Winston Churchill's war-time government. Joyce was born in New York to an Irish Father and English Mother but grew up in Mayo and Galway. He turned informer for the Royal Irish Constabulary after the IRA burnt down his father's property, then emigrated to England, joining Sir Oswald Mosely's British Union of Fascists and eventually moved to Germany to broadcast Nazi propaganda during the war years, earning the nickname "Lord Haw Haw."

The play shows the control these men exerted publicly in their professional roles and privately with their lovers, their insecurities and failings as well as how their lives intersected and overlapped. It is full of theatricality, duality and mirroring. The style of presentation is Brechtian with actors directly addressing the audience, telling them the fate of the two men at the beginning to place the spectator into a interrogative mode explaining how they will not "vouch for the accuracy of anything that is going to follow" (Kilroy 1994, 26–27) as the play has been instead "put together to make a point" (Kilroy 1994, 27). *Double Cross* is divided into two parts: "The Bracken Play: London", followed by "The Joyce Play: Berlin" and the roles of Bracken and Joyce are played by the same actor with two other actors playing all the other parts. Anthony Roche comments that by denying their Irish past neither of the men gain freedom but instead become "the mirror-image of the oppressor" placing all their "faith in the symbols of the culturally dominant race" (Roche 1994, 146). Kilroy in his introduction to the play writes:

Oppression disables personality. The whole point of oppression is to reduce the person, to remove all potentiality so that control becomes easy. But oppression also profoundly diminishes the oppressor....There is nothing as calcified as the

air of superiority and the ultimate of this is the baleful paralytic stare of the racist. (Kilroy 1994, 12)

The play is thus showing how national identities polarise people into entrenched positions that then reduce their individuality and humanity. Both oppressor and oppressed are doubles of each other. One person's loyalty is another's treason. The title of *Double Cross* thus refers not only to doubling and betrayal but as José Lanteris has pointed out “the ‘cross’ stands for the dark and debilitating ideological burden each man carries” (Lanteris 2022, 127).

As a history play *Double Cross* was looking to the past to understand the present but it was also using the safe distance of an earlier period as a means to address the then volatile contemporary situation of the Troubles in the 1980s, a violent conflict fought in terms of identity politics. The story of Bracken and Joyce highlights the corrosive consequences on the individual of nationalism in Northern Ireland where people often identify as British Protestant or Irish Catholic and are fully committed to perform those roles that reduce them into both oppressors and oppressed. As *Double Cross* was produced by Field Day Theatre Company, premiering in Derry with a legendary performance by actor Stephen Rea it is most often analysed and thought of in terms of its relevance to the North. However, as outlined in the Historical Overview section in this chapter, the performance of an Irish identity rooted in Catholicism, as it was in the 1980s in the Republic, was also a performance of deception, with a hypocritical clergy leading people that were caught between professing a strict adherence to Catholic moral standards in public and contradicting these same standards in private as they yearned for the freedoms of liberal democracy. Indeed, decades after the tour of *Double Cross* Kilroy would go on to more directly address the effects of Irish Catholic sexual hypocrisy in *Christ Deliver Us!* (2010) his adaptation of Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*. In 2018 the Abbey Theatre revived *Double Cross* and its connections between nationalism, imperialism and fascism were felt to have a chilling immediacy and relevance to the contemporary rise of the performative populist politics of Donald Trump's presidency and Brexit.

Digging for Fire by Declan Hughes (1991)

Declan Hughes recalls that when his play *Digging for Fire*, transferred from Dublin to London's Bush Theatre in 1992 a member of the audience commented at the interval “I didn't think they *had* people like that in Ireland” (1998, ix). Despite the majority of people who frequented the theatre, in the 1990s, being middle-class, educated and cosmopolitan these audiences rarely saw themselves represented on stage in Ireland. This class of person was even less visible in Irish work that toured internationally and so it is understandable that a London theatre-goer may have thought such people did not reside in Ireland. However, as this anecdote reveals Hughes's play rectified this, presenting audiences with a story of a group of Dublin university friends

who reunite for one last drunken night that leads to them all parting ways with damning secrets revealed as the party wears on.

Clare, a school teacher and frustrated writer, bored in her marriage to Brendan, an insipid doctor, has had an affair with Danny, her old writing partner from college. Danny is back from living in Manhattan and is found to have lied about successfully publishing a story in the *New Yorker*. Emily, a visual artist, reveals she is HIV positive and tells Breda, a radio producer that her advertising executive boyfriend Steve has been sleeping around. Rory, a solicitor and sometime Opera critic who is gay remembers that he does not like any of them.

Although the play is redolent of Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985) the play is much closer to the cult film, *The Big Chill* (1983) and like the Lawrence Kasadan movie it features a soundtrack of international hits to score emotions, provide commentary and atmosphere including songs by the *Sex Pistols*, *New Order* and *the Pixies*, whose song gives the play its title.

Hughes presents a cynical generation that has come of age in the uncertain and hypocritical 1980s, who in the early 1990s witnessed political and church scandals. They were raised on Enid Blyton and BBC children's television. The previous conception of "Ireland as a folksy little village" is only useful to sell commodities according to Steve, "all it is, is goods and services" (Hughes 1998, 39). While Danny claims there is "no great 'shared vision', no sense of solidarity or common purpose" (Hughes 1998, 36) and they are fools to "pretend there's some unique sense of community, that Ireland's a special little enclave – things are breaking down as fast here as anywhere else" (Hughes 1998, 37). At the same time Steve registers unease with his job in advertising left to think of himself as either Faust or Mephistopheles—he must sell his soul and also be the devil that tricks people. Danny is a liar and for all his speeches on wishing to be free of Ireland's history and obsession with national identity, he admits that he had to come home "It's all I ever thought about while I was away. I brought my village with me" (Hughes 1998, 74). Breda on the other hand tries to argue for the value of the radio show she is producing, as connecting people and creating what Marshall McLuhan famously termed a global village. She says "even if people feel isolated, lost in the suburbs or something, they can tune in and feel a part of what's going on – it's like they're living in a village, and they want to keep up with the gossip" (Hughes 1998, 37).

All the characters yearn for belonging and community despite knowing it is out of their reach. The final scene of the play depicts Clare dancing defiantly to "True Faith" by *New Order* despite her uncertain future as her old life is now disintegrating with her husband gone and her friends lost. In her dance Clare embraces chaos rather than trying to reorder her life. The ending offers no solutions, no call to action, and no regrets. It is an image of individual acceptance, which could be interpreted as a privileged position without responsibility and/or a courageous act of resilience. For Patrick Lonergan, *Digging for Fire* in its representation of the suburban middle-classes and in its

“integration of international culture” marks an “important departure for Irish drama” (Loneragan 2022, 143). It was also a significant critical and commercial success for Rough Magic Theatre Company who would continue to interrogate Hughes’s themes in the future through work by him and a host of new Irish voices that followed.

Eclipsed by Patricia Burke Brogan (1992)

Based on Brogan’s personal experiences as a former novitiate, *Eclipsed* is a play that was pivotal in breaking silences about the abuse of women and children in Magdalene Laundries. As Jessica Farley and Virginia Garnett argue, “*Eclipsed* was one of the very first writings about the Magdalene Laundries, published before the release of the documentary, *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1998) and Peter Mullen’s widely popular film *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002)” and the wave of state inquiries into industrial and reformatory schools, Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes that have taken place in the 2000s and 2010s in the Republic and North (see Chapter 6).

Eclipsed’s premiere production toured to Edinburgh Fringe Festival where it received a Fringe First Award. Since its premiere, it has had more than 100 productions worldwide including Australia, Japan, Italy, Germany, Peru and Brazil and has been translated into multiple languages. The international reach of this play (despite it never having been produced by a major annually-funded Irish theatre company) signals its enduring importance as a key contemporary Irish theatre text and the important role it has played in spreading awareness about the issues highlighted in the play.

The play’s ensemble female cast, focus on multiple stories rather than a central protagonist and critical examination of systems of patriarchy and gender-based oppression structurally embodies feminist theatremaking values. In doing so, *Eclipsed* trains audiences’ focus onto the social relations and structures that maintained the Magdalene Laundries as a part of network of interrelated institutions in Irish society including the then-unquestioned power of the Catholic Church, lack of culpability for the babies’ fathers and the class dimensions of the priesthood’s elite status and the women’s own disenfranchised position.

Eclipsed focuses on the relationships between a group of young women, Brigit, Mandy, Cathy and Nellie-Nora, who are “penitent women” incarcerated within a Magdalene Laundry in 1963. The play also explores their relationship with some of the nuns who run the institution—Mother Victoria and Sister Virginia. Through the character of Sister Virginia, Brogan represents her own experiences as a former novitiate, making visible through this character how individuals did try to challenge the systems they were part of. The play’s framing device is Brigit’s adult daughter returning from the United States to seek her mother. By using the device of Brigit’s daughter, Rosa, returning to the Laundry as an adult in 1992 to frame the play, Brogan reveals that Nellie-Nora has remained within the institution for her whole adult life while also highlighting ongoing questions about the barriers to reunion of

adopted children with their birth mothers, an issue that unfortunately remains timely in Ireland today.

The female body is explicitly theatricalised throughout *Eclipsed* as the “penitent” women repeatedly use playacting with one another as a mode of fantasy and protest within the play. Their fantasies focus primarily around romance and food, with Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra as the recurrent soundtrack voiced by the ensemble. Mandy tells the women: “Close your eyes and pretend! It’ll be true if you pretend!” (Burke Brogan 2014, 183) The women also repeatedly replay interactions with authority figures including the nuns and priests behind their backs, inhabiting and subverting these roles. Their pointed satire exposes and critiques the gendered and classed hierarchies they enact daily through their work and residence in the laundry:

Brigit:	Gawd bless you, my scrubbers! Don’t squint at me, Nellie-Nora! Stand up straight all of you! Knees together! Say, ‘Good afternoon, my lord!’
Nellie-Nora and Mandy:	‘Good afternoon, my Lord!’
Brigit:	Will you forget your bog accents! Say ‘Good awfternoon, my lord!’

(Burke Brogan 2014, 179)

Yet, playacting is not without risk and does not ultimately result in deliverance for the women, individually or collectively. Playing with a found lipstick triggers painful memories of sexual assault by her former employer for Nellie-Nora, and Cathy, the only character who fulfils their shared fantasy of escaping the laundry in one of the baskets, suffocates during her attempt due to untreated asthma—a strategy the women rehearse together onstage before her actual attempt.

Brogan’s *Eclipsed* dramatises the power of playacting as a tool of community building and resistance that can empower individual performing bodies with the temporary power to flip, transform and appropriate the scripts that they have been given to play. Nevertheless these characters’ embeddedness (both the penitent women and the nuns) in the institution of the laundry and the wider society which enabled its persistence limits the power of individual bodies to sustain these transformations beyond the moment of performance. *Eclipsed* ultimately is a powerful call for collective transformation that enables widespread acknowledgement of and restitution for the women and children abused and separated by those who ran these institutions beyond the theatre.

Seminal Revivals

O’Casey Revivals

Since their first productions O’Casey’s *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923); *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), known as the Dublin plays, had become a mainstay in the Abbey repertoire. With repeated revival these once provocative and controversial plays had become safe and familiar with actors often overplaying the comedy and sentiment of the dramas in performance. The Gate, while under the direction of its founders Michael mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards had never staged O’Casey, even his later expressionistic plays which would have suited their theatrical experimentalism. When Michael Colgan took over directorship of the Gate he did not programme O’Casey until 1986 when Joe Dowling approached him with a new staging of *Juno and the Paycock*. Dowling had planned to do a production of the play at the Abbey before he left the theatre after disagreements with the Board of Directors. The production of *Juno* at the Gate was thus landmark in being the first major staging of O’Casey at the theatre but it was also groundbreaking for the manner in which it was staged. Dowling directed it with a gritty realism that was complemented by Frank Halinan Flood’s squalid claustrophobic set and Consolata Boyle’s tattered costumes. Christopher Morash writes of how the Gate production divested O’Casey’s play of “every shred of sentimentality, turning the warm glow of *Juno*’s resigned, proud survival to the gnawing chill of poverty in the bones.” This production style executed with devastatingly convincing performances by a stellar cast that included Donal McCann, Geraldine Plunkett, John Kavanagh and Maureen Potter brought forward O’Casey’s disdain for nationalism which he viewed as dangerously distracting people from the plight of the vulnerable and impoverished in society. It also reinterpreted the character of Joxer in particular which had often been portrayed as a figure of fun. This was most evident in the ending of the play where John Kavanagh as Joxer “steals the Captain’s (Donal McCann) last sixpence as he collapses to the ground unconscious with drink. In this Joxer was revealed as a malevolent parasite rather than a broad figure of fun and the Captain’s desperate fate was sealed” (Walsh 2016, 453). The Gate production of *Juno* was well-received by the newspaper critics and proved popular with audiences leading to its revival twice in Dublin and a tour to Jerusalem, Edinburgh and New York where it earned many plaudits.

The 1991 radical restaging of O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* at the Abbey directed by Garry Hynes and designed by Frank Conway was not received with as much universal favour, indeed, few contemporary revivals of classic Irish plays have caused as much controversy. *The Plough and the Stars* famously caused a riot when first produced at the Abbey in 1926 due to its critique of the 1916 rising. By that time the rising had already become mythologised as the sacred foundational event of the Irish Republic, and audiences’ protests were understandable considering they had just been through a violent struggle for independence and a subsequent brutal civil war in the

years previous. However, in the years since its first production the play had lost its ability to provoke strong reactions, marred by familiarity through repeated, sometimes mawkish, performances. The 1991 revival of *The Plough*, like the Gate production of *Juno* in 1986, emphasised the politics of O'Casey's play, his condemnation of poverty and violence, by stressing the deprivation of the Dublin tenement dwellers and how they suffered for a nationalist ideology. Hynes achieved this through a Brechtian staging of the piece that was much more radical than Dowlings approach to *Juno*. In the 1991 *Plough* designer Frank Conway abandoned the realist tenement set of O'Casey's script and replaced it with a large raked platform with a "huge, white, false proscenium [surrounding] the action. Scrawled on it with black paint the rallying cry of the 1916 Uprising, 'We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland'" (Griffith 1992, 97). The violent consequences of the slogan would be made viscerally apparent to the audience as the white of the stage became stained with trails of blood left by the dragged bodies of the dying rebel soldiers. All of the ensemble had shaved heads leading one of the reviewers to comment that "O'Casey's creations are, apparently, being brought to life by inmates of an undefined institution" (Rushe 1991). This along with the stark set design served as distancing techniques from the naturalism of past productions while also functioning as a Brechtian social *gestus* where the inhumane wretchedness of the people's poverty was palpable. Consistent with the Brechtian approach the characters were represented in extreme terms to emphasise how they were subject to their environment and emblematic of social conditions. Rosie Redmond, the prostitute we meet in Act 2 was played by Lorraine Pilkington who was still a teenager at the time. Her youthful appearance confronted the audience with the desperation of her situation. Fluther Goode, a character often played for laughs, was portrayed by Brendan Gleeson as a raging alcoholic and at the opening of Act III audiences had to endure a heartbreaking agonisingly slow walk across the stage by Ruth O'Brian as the consumptive child Mollser. The lengthy programme for the play which included a wealth of archival materials and short articles was keen to highlight the contemporary relevance of the play by drawing attention to the depressing statistics on unemployment, housing and education in "North Inner City of Dublin 75 years after the Rising" (Abbey Theatre 1991) (Fig. 4.1).

This was Hynes inaugural show as artistic director of the Abbey and it announced her intention to pursue a bold new direction. Desmond Rushe in the *Irish Independent* in a review entitled "A mould breaking debut of courage", gushed about Hynes's achievement: "...she has torn conventions and traditions to shreds; tossed naturalism and realism out the window and come up with the most revolutionary and controversial presentation ever seen of the theatre's most-performed masterpiece" (Rushe 1991). Others were less impressed or kind, particularly playwright Hugh Leonard who in his weekly column in *The Sunday Independent* objected to the stylised approach and heavy-handed message, renaming the production "*The Plough and the Starved*"; admitting he left the show at the interval out of boredom (Leonard

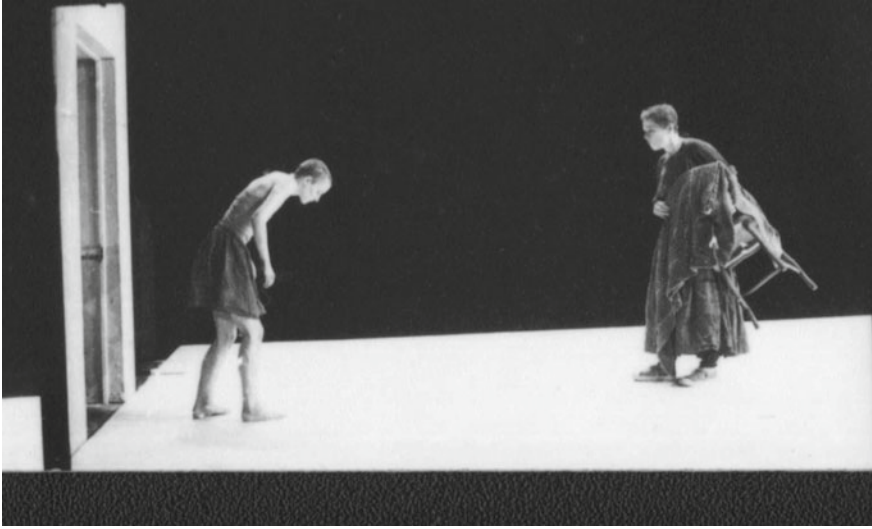


Fig. 4.1 Scene from *The Plough and the Stars*, 1991 (Photo: Fergus Bourke. Courtesy of the Abbey Theatre Archive)

1991). The review in *The Irish Times* was also dismissive of the production. This then led to a series of counter reviews in the *Irish Times*'s Second Opinion and Letters pages. Even the president Mary Robinson was asked to comment on the production in a printed interview. She spoke of enjoying the show and parallels between her and Garry Hynes were made, characterising both as leaders who were challenging received staid notions of Irishness (Woodworth 1991).

The lasting legacy of both of these revived productions of O'Casey was their restoration of the bite and urgency the plays had possessed when first staged, making them once again fresh and relevant for contemporary audiences.

Spotlight on Institutions and Festivals

There Are No Irish Women Playwrights 1 (1992) and 2 (1993)

Glasshouse Productions

Inspired by the work of companies like Charabanc and Trouble and Strife in the UK, Glasshouse Productions was founded in 1990 by four Dublin-based female theatremakers to present and promote the work of women in the theatre. Siân Quill (actor), Clare Dowling (actor and playwright), Katy Hayes (director) and Caroline Williams, (producer) established the company as “a response to the fact that Irish theatre did not reflect their lives as women, due to the lack of plays by female playwrights produced at the time” (O'Beirne 2017, 270). Glasshouse produced ten shows over the six years it would operate, including premieres of *Out of my Head* (1991) by Trudy

Hayes, nominated for a Stewart Parker Theatre Award, *Burns Both Ends* (1992) and *Leapfrogging* (1993) by Clare Dowling, and two new plays by Emma Donoghue, *I Know My Own Heart* (1993) and *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1996), landmark works in their representation of queer female characters on the Irish stage. Further to these dramas Glasshouse also produced two important festival events focused on women's contributions to Irish theatre that would include hosted discussions and archival projects developed to identify new plays and celebrate older dramas written by women. These projects were entitled *There are no Irish Women Playwrights 1* (1992) and *There are no Irish Women Playwrights 2* (1993).

The ironic title for these events came from a story heard by the company wherein the academic Claudia Harris found herself in a Dublin bookshop looking for plays by Irish women. When she couldn't find any on the shelves, she asked a shop assistant for help. He told her the reason that she could not find any scripts was because, "There are no Irish women playwrights." Of course, there have always been Irish women playwrights but as few of their plays have been published or rarely revived this anecdote served to highlight the issue of the scarcity of scripts by women and the risk of a tradition of Irish women writing for the stage disappearing. This story spirited Glasshouse towards their intervention.

There are no Irish Women Playwrights 1 was a staged reading of extracts from plays by contemporary writers including Geraldine Aron, Emma Donoghue, Deirdre Hines, Anne Devlin, Marie Jones and Marina Carr. The event was first staged at the City Arts Centre and then at the Irish Writers Centre in June 1992. *There are no Irish Women Playwrights 2* formed part of the 1993 *Acts and Reacts Festival*, which took place in two venues, Project Arts Centre and The Irish Writers' Centre. The selection of extracts this time was from 1920 to 1970 including writers such as Mairéid Ni Ghráda, Teresa Deevy, Maura Laverty and Edna O'Brien. It ran for nearly two months, concluding with a ten-day run of Emma Donoghue's *I Know My Own Heart*. The events had a mixed critical reception in the newspaper reviews. Treasa Brogan of the *Evening Press* was supportive of the first event and wrote, "Had the title been a debate they'd have proven their point" but a reviewer in the *Sunday Tribune* complained unfairly about the playwrights' choice of themes, "wife-battering, alcoholism, babies and war"; he felt Irish women to be capable of "other sensibilities" (Quoted in Williams et al. 2001, 141). Male playwrights are never lambasted for their choice of appropriate subjects and such criticism revealed an ingrained misogyny in the reception of drama written by women. This bias was also evident in Gerry Colgan's review of the second showcase for the *Irish Times* where he condescendingly described various excerpts as "a kind of jolly-hockeysticks non-romance" and "a wild piece of lusty nonsense" before finally dismissing the event as "pure transient entertainment" (Quoted in Clare et al. 2021, 3). However, Caroline Williams remembers how the event "got and extraordinarily good reaction" (Williams et al. 2001, 141) and Katy Hayes recollects that audiences were "constantly

surprised at the wealth of material” (Williams et al. 2001, 141). Glasshouse Productions’ interventions did not have an immediate public impact in the way that #WakingtheFeminists movement would have more than two decades later, although it serves as an important precedent to this. The legacy of the festivals curated by Glasshouse is best summed up by the editors of the two volumes of *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights* a collection of essays that charts a tradition of Irish women dramatists from 1716 to 2016, published in 2021, when they write:

Glasshouse’s groundbreaking work spoke clearly to Irish women playwrights who might have felt like they were working without a tradition only to suddenly discover that they were actually, to quote Gilbert and Gubar, part of a “secret sisterhood” stretching back many years. (Clare et al. 2021, 4)

It should also be noted that in the period directly after Glasshouse’s *There are No Women Playwrights 1 and 2* the Abbey Theatre under the directorship of Patrick Mason (1994–1999) would see sixteen plays by women produced at the National Theatre, including a seminal revival of Teresa Deevy’s *Katie Roche* and two new plays by Glasshouse founders, Katy Hayes and Clare Dowling.

CONCLUSION

The beginning of this period in the 1980s saw the country take a step backwards with economic instability, mass emigration, moral hypocrisy and hunger strikes but in the early 1990s with the revelation of church scandals, the collapse of the authority of the Catholic Church, decriminalisation of homosexuality and movements towards peace in Northern Ireland it was set to take great leaps forward. A cruel performativity characterised many people’s behaviours in this era where they voted against divorce and abortion and yet thousands would travel to England for terminations. While real life became a performance for many, theatrical activity was booming in this time with lots of new companies such as Charabanc, Rough Magic and Glasshouse Productions formed with young practitioners keen to embrace new collaborative modes of theatremaking, confront topical global issues and make sure women’s voices were heard in an industry that was still dominated by men. Field Day Theatre Company was also founded by more established cultural figures and it would have a lasting impact not only on theatre, through the production of seminal new work by Brian Friel, Thomas Kilroy and Seamus Heaney but on literature and cultural theory about Ireland. Dramatists like Christina Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* (1983); Thomas Kilroy’s *Double Cross* (1986) looked towards the past in order to understand the stasis of the present in terms of the violence in the North while Patricia Burke Brogan would explore the history of systemic abuse in Catholic institutions in *Eclipsed* (1992). This period ends looking towards a more optimistic future for equality

and peace with Ireland's economic fortunes beginning to turn favourably bringing an inward migration to the country that had not been experienced before. But not all the change that was to come was to be welcomed as a new era of conspicuous consumption, and the creation of wealthy elites also further marginalised and excluded disadvantaged communities.

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The Celtic Tiger, Inward-Migration and the Peace Process (1994–2008)

PART I: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Between 1994 and 2008, a great deal of what could be assumed about Irish identity North and South of the border changed legally and culturally. Carmen Kuhling and Kieran Keohane go so far as to argue that during this approximate interval: “Ireland was effectively transformed from a premodern, peasant rural community to a postmodern, high-technology urbanised society” (2007, 1). Claire Bracken observes that a “sense of futurity pervaded, as major transformations in the Irish imaginary brought about a perceived shift from a self-identity constructed as postcolonial country to a globalised nation of a networked world” (2016, 4).

Key events in the Republic included the unprecedented economic boom known as the “Celtic Tiger” and its impact on Irish migration patterns and the 1996 legalisation of divorce as well as the emergence of key revelations regarding Catholic Church abuse scandals. In 1999, then-Taoiseach Bertie Ahern made an Irish State apology to victims of childhood abuse and set up a Commission to Inquire Into Child Abuse which would ultimately produce the Ryan Report in 2009 (see Chapter 6). These seismic shifts followed directly on the 1992 Maastricht Treaty (which prompted increased integration into the European Union including cultural and arts activities) and the 1993 decriminalisation of homosexuality. Events in Northern Ireland during this period were dominated by the negotiation of the Northern Irish Peace Process, which began with the 1994 Provisional Irish Republican Army Ceasefire and ended officially with the 1998 passage of the Good Friday Agreement, passed by an all-island vote. A long-term process of peace and reconciliation accompanied by political and social restructuring of the British state in Northern Ireland was catalysed following these landmark paradigm shifts.

The “Celtic Tiger” (as coined by economist Kevin Gardiner in a 1994 Morgan Stanley report) stretched from approximately 1991–2008 and describes a period of Irish economic growth, low unemployment and drastically improved Debt/GDP ratio which “fell from 92 per cent in 1993 to 38 per cent in 1999” (Kuhling and Keohane 2007, 1). During this period, the Republic also underwent an unprecedented social transformation in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. A question on nationality was only asked for the first time on the 2002 census, and subsequently, there was an 87% increase in non-Irish nationals recorded in the next 2006 census (224,261–419,733) with this increase ultimately standing at 143% over nine years by the 2011 census (544,357) (Central Statistics Office 2012, 7). This demographic diversification was unprecedented in Irish history and this group represents a diverse collective of returning Irish-born emigrants, economic migrants, refugees and those seeking asylum amongst others including international students. However, the Celtic Tiger’s economic promise which had partially driven these new inward-migration flows collapsed entirely in the post-2008 global economic crisis. This resulted in the management of the Republic’s economy being overtaken by the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission, “compounded by a lock-in to an externally managed austerity programme (under the EU’s 2012 fiscal treaty)” (McCann 2013, 109). This economic downturn did not result in the departure of the “new Irish” (Fanning 2009, 146–150) during the period covered by this chapter or after, but rather increased emigration of white middle-class Irish-born individuals, particularly university educated young people (Coakley and Mac Éinrí 2022, 379–403).

Likewise, the Peace Process did not erase sectarian tensions and/or the economic and social disparities between communities in Northern Ireland that exacerbate these tensions despite a mostly sustained cessation of violence. The years of negotiation between the initial ceasefires saw multiple setbacks including the 1996 IRA bombing on London’s Canary Wharf and the 1998 Real IRA car bombing in Omagh which killed 29 people. While an elected Northern Irish assembly took over the devolved government of the North in 1998 following the Good Friday Agreement, this same assembly collapsed in 2002, before being restored by a “historic accommodation” (McDonnell 2008, xiv) between Sinn Féin and DUP in 2007. As Enda Longley observed in 2001:

Much depends on whether the Agreement parties really desire an inter-cultural sharing of Northern Ireland or whether, or now that culture has become more significant, they will build up their own constituency by intensifying the politicisation of culture. (2001, 30)

As Longley predicted, the aftermath and ongoing negotiation of the Peace Process in terms of local everyday engagements as well as official projects and initiatives rendered theatre particularly relevant in Northern Ireland during the

period covered by this chapter and to the present. Northern Irish companies and individual theatre artists have repeatedly made use of theatre's liveness in both professional and community settings to comment on and/or facilitate the Peace Process and its aftermath, frequently through cross-community projects. In addition, like the Republic, Northern Ireland was also negotiating increased inward-migration and resulting racial tensions during this time. In 1997, the Race Relations (NI) Order was passed into law, a move that officially recognised the existence of racial and ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland, as opposed to diversity and/or interculturalism remaining defined exclusively by the two communities identity paradigm, a fallback that remains still difficult to resist even at time of writing. As Peter Geoghegan observed in 2008, "In less than a decade Northern Ireland has gone from a situation in which discrimination on the grounds of 'race' was not illegal to one in which 'Race Relations' policy is given a relatively central location in post-Agreement public policy" (127).

1994–2008 therefore stands out as a period of unfinished or arrested reinvention that in addition to large-scale social shifts saw conflicting redefinitions of contemporary Irish citizenship North and South. The Good Friday Agreement reaffirmed birthright Irish citizenship for individuals born on the island of Ireland, while a 2004 Citizenship Referendum in the Republic removed birthright citizenship by an 80% majority due to anxieties about a post-1996 increase in asylum seekers from the Global South and particularly the African continent (Fanning and Mutwarasibo 2007; Tormey 2007). At the same time, a concerted rebranding of both the Republic and Northern Ireland attempted to position both as cosmopolitan and forward-looking (economically and socially) (Neill 2009, 325–342; Moore 2016, S138–S162). The explosion of theatre companies and forms shifting the landscape of contemporary Irish theatre and performance in both the Republic and Northern Ireland ultimately reflects the instability and possibility of this transformative and paradigm-shifting period.

PART II: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Genres, Methods and Approaches

The 1990s and first two decades of the 2000s saw the persistence of the figure of the Irish playwright as a nationally and globally lauded figure, exemplified by the international success of Marina Carr, Marie Jones, Conor McPherson, Martin McDonagh, Mark O'Rowe and Enda Walsh. All were emerging figures during this period with the exception of Jones whose co-founding of Dubbeljoint in Dublin in 1991 after leaving Charabanc (see Chapter 4) initiated a new stage of recognition in her career with personal acclaim for her as a playwright and international touring of her plays *A Night in November* (1994) which transferred to both London's West End and off-Broadway in New York and *Stones in His Pockets* (1996), which also had a

West End run. These playwrights collectively and consistently tackled themes of Irish identity in flux, particularly in terms of gender, sexuality, class and urban/rural divides. The political engagement of these theatrical representations (despite their thematic focus) has been much debated, especially the work of Carr and McDonagh which Vic Merriman memorably and controversially termed “Tiger Trash.” He comments that: “At a time of unprecedented affluence, Carr and McDonagh elaborate a world of the poorly educated, coarse, and unrefined. The focus is tight, the display of violence inhering in the people themselves, grotesque and unrelenting” (1999, 312).

Major plays of this period were increasingly packaged or viewed as “trilogies” including Paul Mercier’s Dublin Trilogy (*Native City*, *Buddleia* and *Kitchensink*), Carr’s Midlands Trilogy (*The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, and *By the Bog of Cats*) and McDonagh’s Leenane Trilogy (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Skull in Connemara* and *The Lonesome West*). These playwright’s strategy of serial playwriting as a pattern during this time eventually led to simultaneous productions of these plays in repertory such as PassionMachine’s 1998 presentation of all three of Mercier’s Dublin Trilogy at Dublin Theatre Festival and Druid’s still-evolving specialisation in “marathon theatre” (Dean 2013, 181–195) offerings which include not only the presentation in repertory of McDonagh’s self-professed trilogy of plays, but linking across the canon of other playwrights work through *DruidSynge* (2005, J. M. Synge) and later *DruidMurphy* (2012, Tom Murphy) and *DruidShakespeare* (2015, William Shakespeare, see Chapter 6). The embrace of contemporary Irish theatre and Druid in particular of this serialised/package strategy for presenting work was perhaps a move to spectacularise the Irish theatre experience as a competitor with film and television and interestingly anticipates the DVD “box set” phenomenon in the 2000s, a shift that transformed the relationship between time and television viewing practices (Kompere 2006, 338). And indeed, the intertextual influences of film and television on new writing for the theatre would become a much more pronounced influence during this era, especially for O’Rowe and McDonagh (Lonergan 2012).

The “monologue play” (whether as single or intersecting monologues) also emerged as a key Irish form in the 1990s particularly in the work of McPherson and O’Rowe, a trend that would continue through the 2000s and 2010s, with Jones’ international success with *A Night in November* (1994) as a key reference point for the ascent of this genre. As Brian Singleton observes, plays including McPherson’s *Rum and Vodka* (1992), *The Good Thief* (1994) and *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995) and Mark O’Rowe’s *Howie the Rookie* (1999) were “replete with socially subordinated male individuals who are performing their own abjection in a society in which they have lost their place” (2011, 71), a direct comment on the uneven distribution of the Celtic Tiger’s economic and social invigoration of Irish society. Patrick Lonergan observes that “a significant feature of the form in Ireland is that the audience will rarely share the background of the characters onstage” (2009, 181),

a disjuncture that would increasingly become addressed by emerging theatre companies and artists in the 2010s (see Chapter 6).

Study of this period in Irish theatre history has been arguably dominated by focus on these afore-mentioned playwrights, particularly the role of their work in bringing “Irish” theatre to global audiences through touring and international productions of their plays, with some more limited attention paid to Druid Theatre and its ensemble under the artistic direction of Garry Hynes (Lonergan 2009; Jordan 2010; Roche 2009). But this concentrated and playwright-centric focus risks obscuring the proliferation of companies, independent practitioners and performance forms that actually emerged across the island of Ireland between 1994 and 2008. Connecting these strands of inquiry is essential for understanding the evolution of Irish theatre as a form during this period.

The 1990s and early 2000s were characterised by a growth in dance and physical theatre (Blue Raincoat, Fabulous Beast, CoisCéim, Corn Exchange, Barabbas, Irish Modern Dance Theatre, Liz Roche Company), in addition to the use of devising methods and/or the collective creation of work that could retrospectively be classified as postdramatic theatre (Pan Pan Theatre, Operating Theatre) as well as the growth of site-specific and/or site-responsive theatre approaches (Corcadorca, Performance Corporation, Kabosh Productions, Calypso Productions). Within the work of many of these companies, the dramatic text was increasingly decentralised with movement, dance and scenography increasingly taking centre stage in Irish theatre practice. Undeniably this spread of company-based models of collective creation throughout the sector stretched the boundaries of what an Irish “play” could look, sound or move like and challenged attitudes towards playwriting as a solo or stable craft for emerging artists. The lack of critical attention given to these companies with some key exceptions in the work of Christie Fox (2008), Deirdre Mulrooney (2006), Bernadette Sweeney (2008), Carmen Szabo (2012), Aoife McGrath (2013) and Rhona Trench (2015) among others. A funnelled critical focus which has reified the Irish playwright as the dominant figure in this period prior to not only this book but the *Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (Jordan and Weitz 2018, see introduction) has likely been due to the challenges of analysing much of this formally layered work in retrospect without in many cases a play text or at least a published one and/or having to be resident or present in Ireland to witness the work and on an ongoing basis. Yet, the output and vision of these companies from the 1990s to the present has profoundly shifted the meaning and practice of “contemporary” and “Irish” theatre as a landscape of practice.

This proliferation of theatrical activity and formal experimentation was due to a number of factors including the ongoing legacy of the community arts movement (which embraced interdisciplinary methods of theatremaking and devised approaches) (Fitzgerald 2004; McIvor 2015) and increased international collaboration and training by Irish-born artists, a development aided by increased financial resources for European Union partnerships post-Maastricht

Treaty. Writing in 1997, Christopher Murray argued that: “Ireland is rapidly becoming European, its culture cosmopolitan; yet there is a new-found passion for the arts as a means of articulating and celebrating home-based experience” (2000, 246). Arguably, the dominant factor in Ireland’s multiplication of theatrical form was increased arts funding generally from domestic and EU sources as well as specialised schemes like the EU PEACE Programme whose purpose was “to support peace and reconciliation and to promote social and economic progress in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland” (European Parliament 2022). To date, there have been five cycles of the PEACE programme with some theatre companies and artists profiled in this book directly benefiting at key points in the evolution of their practice including but not limited to Kabosh Productions, Theatre of Witness and Terra Nova Productions. In the Republic, increased prosperity in the mid-1990s and 2000s resulted in an exponential expansion of Arts Council funding for independent and established theatre companies. Arts Council funding overall increased from £20 million in 1995 (with £5.62 for theatre specifically) (An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council 1995, 51) to a high of €81.62 million across the arts in 2008 (An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council 2008), although it must be noted that even during this boom time, more than half the theatre budget went consistently to the Abbey. This overall arts budget hit a post-1995 low of €56.7 million in 2015 (An Chomhairle Ealaíon/Arts Council 2015, 45) before climbing again post-Covid-19 as we detail in Chapter 6. Aine Shiels and Joshua Edelman attribute this expansion as well to the 1992 establishment of the Department of Arts which allowed representations of the arts “at cabinet level for the first time” and was followed by a “strategic three-year plan...the first policy document of its kind” (2009, 147). As these plans evolved, Shiels and Edelman argue that they “move towards a position in which the idea of the international also carries with it certain responsibilities which may affect the production of art itself” (2009, 149) within the Republic. The founding of Culture Ireland in 2005 in the Republic which aids “Irish artists and companies” in presenting their work “at strategic international festivals and venues” (Culture Ireland 2023) was a key related development that aided in the sustainable internationalisation of key companies profiled in this chapter including Pan Pan, Blue Raincoat and Druid.

The Republic’s short-lived arts funding expansion during the Celtic Tiger helped catalyse the temporary stability and proliferation of an expanded number of professional Irish theatre companies and artists that had been growing in number and strength since the mid-1970s but never before supported to these levels by the Irish state. This proliferation of funded professional theatre activity during this time collectively pushed at the received limits of Irish theatrical and performance forms, with the diversification of the theatre landscape putting pressure on each company to define their own innovative features clearly to remain competitive. For example, Barrabas (founded in Dublin, 1993 by Raymond Keane, Veronica Coburn and Mikel Murfi) established itself as “the leading Irish theatre company in theatre of

clown” (Barabbas 2023) while Performance Corporation (set up in 2002, Co. Kildare by Jo Mangan and Tom Swift) billed itself in 2017 as “creating theatrical adventures in surprising places” but more recently describes themselves as specialising in “Immersive Theatre, Virtual Reality Creations and Opera...blending fresh, award-winning work blending thrilling visuals, hi-tech innovation, edgy writing and strong physical intuition” (Performance Corporation 2017; Performance Corporation 2023). This pigeonholing was not always welcomed by theatre artists. For example, the pressure on Barabbas however to define their brand and remain consistent led to Coburn’s departure from the company in 2007 as “she decided that the interference of the Arts Council was too intrusive in the process of artistic creation” (Szabo 2012, 13).

This injection of arts funding also regionalised the professional Irish theatre sector in the Republic more than ever before, as represented by the ongoing or newly established work of regional companies including Macnas (Galway), Upstate Theatre Project (Drogheda), Red Kettle Theatre Company (Waterford) and Corcadorca (Cork) during this time. This regional growth was aided by the construction of a network of new arts centres throughout the Republic that could now receive work. This was made possible through a “EU-financed initiative, known as the Cultural Developments Incentive Scheme which was spearheaded by Michael D. Higgins who served as minister for arts between 1993 and 1997” (Keating 2009). Higgins stated that: “I have always believed that cultural citizenship is as vital a need as economic participation, and the idea behind the Cultural Developments Incentive Scheme was to tackle that” (Keating 2009). Over time, however, particularly following the economic downturn, these arts centres have found it difficult to sustain an audience for theatre as well as other art forms as *The Irish Times* detailed in a revealing article by curator and writer Gemma Tipton (2010). As former artistic director of the Source Arts Centre in Thurles, Claudia Woolgar, observed in conversation with Tipton in 2010 that: “an active, vibrant community or cultural scene does not guarantee interest in professional work” (Tipton 2010).

In the North, the theatre’s agenda and funding streams were heavily influenced in this period by the Peace Process and post-conflict processes of truth and reconciliation, as well as pressure to rebrand Northern Ireland for tourism and commerce purposes. As Mark Phelan puts it, “If Troubles drama has been largely defined by the expectations that artists deal with the conflict, perhaps post-conflict theatre in the North can be similarly defined by expectations that it should play some sort of role in the processes of truth and reconciliation” (2016, 384). These intertwined (and frequently conflicting) agendas indeed provide much of the dramatic material as well as setting the material production conditions for Northern Irish theatremakers. Surveying the island of Ireland at large, Christopher Morash observed in 2002 that “there is no such thing as *the* Irish theatre; there are Irish *theatres*, whose forms continue to multiply as they leave behind the fantasy of a single, unifying image, origin or destiny” (271).

Key Practitioners and Companies

Pan Pan Theatre

Pan Pan Theatre was established in 1991 in Dublin and is co-directed by Gavin Quinn and Aedin Cosgrove. They are arguably the most versatile and outward-looking company in Irish theatre history with their works frequently premiering outside Ireland as part of international partnerships and a sustained engagement with intensive touring practices that take them throughout Europe and Asia as well as to the United States and Australia. Below is an image from their international smash hit production, *Oedipus Loves You* by Simon Doyle and Gavin Quinn with original music by Gordon is a Mime, which premiered as a work-in-progress at Dublin Theatre Festival in 2005 before going on to tour nine countries and more than twenty cities in Ireland and internationally (Fig. 5.1).

Since the early 1990s, the company's own artistic output has crossed a dizzying array of theatrical terrains including the production of new plays (*Mr. Staines*, 1999; *Standoffish*, 2000; *For the First Time Ever*, a co-production with German Stage Services, 2003; *Amy the Vampire and Her Sister Martina*, in conjunction with Corcadorca, 2003) and more recently an ongoing collaboration with playwright/performer Dick Walsh (*Newcastlewest*, 2016; *A Dangerman, Some Baffling Monster*, 2014), adaptations of Shakespeare and the Greeks as well as seminal modern plays (*Mac-Beth 7*, 2004; *Oedipus Loves*



Fig. 5.1 The company (from left: Ned Dennehy, Ruth Negga, Derrick Devine, Dylan Tighe and Gina Moxley) in Pan Pan Theatre's *Oedipus Loves You*, 2007 (Photo Marcus Lieberenz)

You, 2005; *The Rehearsal Playing the Dane*, 2010; *Everyone is King Lear In His Own Home*, 2012; *A Doll House*, 2013; *The Seagull and Other Birds*, 2014; *The Good House of Happiness*, 2017), Chinese adaptations of Irish plays (*The Playboy of the Western World*, 2006 [see seminal revivals below]) including their simultaneous premiere of a Chinese version of *The Seagull and Other Birds*, 2014) as well as directing the world premiere in China of Sun Yue's play, *Do Di Zhu (Fight the Landlord)* (2010) (as part of their long-term collaboration with Chinese theatre artists Wang Zhaohui, producer and Sun Yue, writer and performer), devised work (*Peepshow*, 1997; *Deflowerfucked*, 2001), multimedia performance (*City*, 1995; *The Chair Women*, a co-production with Scarlet Theatre and Ludowy Theatre, 2004; *The Crumb Trail*, 2008), plays incorporating original animation (*Cartoon*, 1998), theatrical adaptations of films (*The Idiots*, 2007), large-scale site-specific solo performance/installation (*One: Healing with Theatre*, 2005) and a long-term investigation of Samuel Beckett (*All That Fall*, 2011; *Embers*, 2013; *Quad*, 2013; *Cascando*, 2016; *Endgame*, 2019). Even this long summary is not exhaustive of their body of work but gives some sense of its breadth and ambition.

Co-artistic directors Gavin Quinn and Aedín Cosgrove's enduring collaboration in the roles primarily of director and designer on Pan Pan's productions also provides one of the most substantial case studies currently available (in Ireland and internationally) of the relationship between directing and scenography practices in the life of a single company. Quinn speaks of Pan Pan working initially with "the simple idea of theatre being conceptual, and very much a medium where you could use the kind of visual arts principles of line, form, colour" (Ruiz 2015, 121) an orientation that makes clear the central role of scenography in their work. Under Quinn and Cosgrove's co-direction, Pan Pan embraces a formalistic fluidity (jumping from devised work to adapting a film for the stage e.g.) and centres design and technological elements in the experience of their work for audiences (such as in their more recent stagings of Beckett's plays for radio that centralise performance installation and sound in the audience's experiences of the work). Speaking of the company's original intent in forming, Cosgrove observes: "We wanted to make our own identity, kind of like a band: we wanted our own sound" (Ruiz 2015, 212), a process of reinvention that Pan Pan continuously pursues.

Noelia Ruiz points to Pan Pan's distinctive "performance/acting mode" (2009, 128) as another hallmark aesthetic of their work, a style that has been evolved through working with the same actors over time including Derrick Devine, Ned Dennehy, Gina Moxley and Dylan Tighe among others in addition to a rotating network of other Irish artists and international collaborators. This does mean that their habitual acting collaborators stay confined to these roles over time: Moxley also writes and directs and Pan Pan has produced some of her works *The Crumb Trail* (2009) and *The Patient Gloria* (2019) which she has also acted in. Quinn describes Pan Pan's performance style overall as making actors "want to be onstage" rather than "lying when they are onstage or hiding the fact that they are onstage" (Ruiz 2009, 128). Ben

Brantley referred to Pan Pan's acting style in the *New York Times* as "a largely affectless acting style that recalls the Dogme school of film" (2008) but which also recalls that of New York's own Wooster Group. Their characteristic acting style has persisted through Pan Pan's multiple periods of experimentation, an approach that also leads to direct confrontation with the audience throughout the work in performance.

Finally, Pan Pan under Quinn and Cosgrove's direction have led vanguard international theatre exchanges and mentorship programmes which have had a discernible impact on generations of emerging and now mid-career theatre artists. These included their Dublin International Theatre Symposium (1997–2003) which according to Quinn was intended to be a "stimulating reference point for discussion and action from which to further our theatrical interaction" (University of Galway 2022, "Thinking About Theatre") and featured workshops, talks and performances. Over the life of the initiative, the Dublin Theatre Symposium welcomed companies from Japan, Austria, Poland, Britain and the Netherlands among others ultimately growing in "stature to rival the Dublin Fringe and the Dublin Theatre Festival, while still occupying a wholly unique position in the festival calendar" (University of Galway 2022, "Thinking About Theatre"). This was an initiative very much ahead of its time because as Brian Singleton outlines "such work had yet to be curated in Dublin's theatre festivals, as the theatrical language of some of the companies had yet to find its audience in an Irish context" (2016, 254). Pan Pan wound down this initiative in order to focus back on creating their own work, but then launched an international mentorship scheme in 2012, now in its 11th edition at the time of writing. In this programme, Irish-based artists are paired with international mentors and given a bursary to develop their own work. Finally, they began partnering with Dublin Fringe Festival in 2019 to create the "Pan Pan Platform at Dublin Fringe Festival" which "connects experienced makers and producers with exciting early career artists" (Pan Pan Theatre 2023, "Pan Pan Platform at Dublin Fringe Festival"). Through these ongoing initiatives and their body of work to date, Pan Pan not only led the future of contemporary Irish theatre practices in terms of proliferation and global networking, they continue to lay down the tracks for yet more futures to emerge.

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company

Blue Raincoat Theatre Company was founded in 1991 in Sligo by Malcolm Hamilton, Niall Henry, John Carty and Fionnuala Gallagher. This company operates as a "venue-based professional theatre ensemble" (Blue Raincoat Theatre 2023a) with the founding members taking on distinct artistic roles at different points in their history: Hamilton (writer-in-residence), Henry (artistic director), Carty (performer and director) and Gallagher (performer). Other key long-term collaborators have included Jocelyn Clarke (dramaturge, writer of multiple original adaptations), Kelly Hughes (performer and director), Jamie Varten (set design), Joseph Hunt (resident sound designer),

Fiona McGeown (performer) and Sandra O'Malley (performer) in addition to others which Rhona Trench has extensively catalogued in her history of the company up through 2015 (Trench 2015, 124–128). Similar to Pan Pan, Blue Raincoat's continental European formal influences, their increasing internationalisation over the life of the company through touring and partnerships and also in their case, embeddedness within a regional Irish community are paradigmatic of the period in which they emerged.

Over the course of their history, Blue Raincoat have produced a wide range of European, Irish and classical plays, as well as new plays (including a sustained engagement with those of company co-founder Malcolm Hamilton) and original theatrical adaptations of literary works which include Jocelyn Clarke's adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1999), *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2000) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2006) as well as Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (2007) and *At Swim Two Birds* (2009). Their focus on canonical Irish playwrights over time has been limited to W. B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett and J. M. Synge despite an influential early 1996 production of Tom Murphy's *A Whistle In the Dark* which garnered the company their first Arts Council funding grant (Trench 2015, 25). J. M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, along with Yeats' *Purgatory* and *Cat in the Moon* (first produced in 1994 and 1992 respectively), have nonetheless been particularly important touchstones for the company remaining part of the repertoire since almost Blue Raincoat's origins. This led eventually to the commencement of years-long Yeats Project in 2009, as described later (Fig. 5.2).

Blue Raincoat's trademark aesthetic is a mixed physical theatre approach drawing on a range of continental European influences. As Rhona Trench summarises: "Blue Raincoat's practice is derived from the work of Jacques Copeau, Étienne Decroux (the company's main influence), and Marcel Marceau" (2015, 13). These formal influences structure the company's approach to staging, and the physical acting demands of Blue Raincoat's performance repertoire is a hallmark of their work. As Peter Crawley observed, "the precise gestures and rigorously controlled movements in their work, which is the company's stock-in-trade" is "a study in minute detail" (2009, 18). The centrality of this formal aesthetic framework evolved over time as Trench details that:

The early productions remained more text-based because the notion of mime and movement as central to making meaning was a one-person project-Niall Henry's- which could not be fully realized, because at that time, the company performers had not been trained. (2015, 17)

A more decisive move towards precise physical theatre techniques in their work was enabled by further training by Carty and the sustained contributions of performers including O'Malley, McGeown and Hughes who trained at schools including the Theatre de l'Ange Fou (Decroux style of movement, London),



Fig. 5.2 Fiona McGeown and John Carty in W. B. Yeats' *The Cat and the Moon*, Blue Raincoat Theatre, 2016 (Photograph Peter Martin)

the International School of Corporeal Mime (London) and the *École de Mime Corporel Dramatique* (London). Blue Raincoat's work is also characterised by vivid and often epic scenographic practices and uses of sound design (such as in their almost entirely worldless 2016 *Shackleton*, designed by Jamie Varten with sound by Joe Hunt, both long-term collaborators).

Blue Raincoat has been based in Sligo's Factory Space since 1991, which houses a movement studio, office and a performance space. The Factory is "an artistic hub of Sligo's community, it provides in addition to its own performances, a venue for touring companies, workshops, exhibitions, music, and poetry recitals" (Trench 2015, 10). Trench's authoritative history of the company makes visible how Blue Raincoat's operational structures including local partnerships and employment practices (such as making use of government community employment schemes to integrate local non-professionals into the professional company over time) has been aimed at maximum empowerment of the Sligo arts community to ensure the company's immersion and local sustainability (2015, 32–34). In 2012, they launched a Blue Raincoat Theatre Academy which builds on their company mission to "implement training, teaching and cultural development programmes with relevant state agencies and third-level institutions throughout Ireland" (Blue Raincoat 2023).

In 2000, they formalised a programming strategy, annually "consisting of three theatre productions developed for repertoire" (Trench 2015, 31). The current composition of their repertoire reflects a consolidation of Blue Raincoat's theatrical experimentation since their formation. It includes their

productions of canonical works by W. B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco as well as many of Hamilton's plays (*A Brief Taste of Lightning*, premiered 2002; *The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst*, premiered 2003; *The Last Mile*, premiered 2009) and work by Clarke (*Alice in Wonderland*, premiered 2006; *The First Cosmonaut*, premiered 2013). They have had an extended engagement with the plays of W. B. Yeats beginning in 1992 with their first productions of *Purgatory* and *The Cat and The Moon*. They officially inaugurated their Yeats Project in 2009 which is devoted to "building our selection of dramatic works by W. B. Yeats on an annual basis" (Blue Raincoat 2017), including recent site-specific productions of his plays in County Sligo (2015–2015). Their extended engagement with Ionesco is also definitive of the company's evolution with *The Chairs* (premiered 2005), *Rhinoceros* (premiered 2010) and *The Bald Soprano* (premiered 2005) all remaining in repertoire. Most recently, they have expanded on their development of devised work with a four-part series that began with *Shackleton* (2016) and continued with *The School Days of Thaddeus K* (2018) which explored experiences in a West of Ireland industrial school in the 1970s, *Hunting Darwin* (2021) which returned to the Antarctic to explore another epic ill-fated journey to reach the South Pole, and then finally *The Last Pearl* (2022) which told the "story of M, a pearl diver, in her search to survive in an ever-changing and increasingly challenging world" (Blue Raincoat 2023b, *The Last Pearl*).

Calypso Productions

Calypso Productions was originally established in Dublin in 1993 by Donal O'Kelly and Charlie O'Neill, who identify primarily as playwrights. Bairbre Ní Chaiomh became artistic director in 1998, serving until the company's funding-related demise in 2008. During the company's existence, she worked as an actor, playwright and outreach programme facilitator in addition to this role. Calypso's 1995 mission statement communicated that through theatre, they hoped to:

change the world...Some of us are lucky enough to have inherited life saving rights, life enhancing social opportunities and life affirming creative opportunities. With those rights and privileges comes a responsibility to defend them for ourselves and others. (Qtd. in Merriman 2011, 165)

Calypso's work is an important index of the social and aesthetic shifts brought on by the Celtic Tiger in the Republic. Their work addressed social and economic justice in Irish society head-on, their productions of usually new works centring around issues including global economic inequalities (Donal O'Kelly's *Trickledown Town*, 1994), the arms industry (Donal O'Kelly and Kenneth Glanaan's *The Business of Blood*, 1994), racism against the Traveller community (Charlie O'Neill's *Rosie and Starwars*, 1997), the institutionalisation of unwed mothers and unresolved issues around adoption (Bairbre Ní Chaiomh and Yvonne Quinn's *Stolen Child*, 2002), women in prison (Paula

Meehan's *Cell*, 1999) and mental health (Gavin Kostick's *The Asylum Ball*, 2000). When Ní Chaiomh took on artistic directorship, Calypso shifted more decisively to focus on national and international issues related to race, racism, asylum and refugeeness. They did so through Irish-located works (Roddy Doyle's *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, 2001, and Maeve Ingolsby's *Mixing It On the Mountain*) as well as Irish productions of international plays (Athol Fugard's *Master Harold and the Boys*, 2005, Kay Adshead's *Bones*, 2007, and Robin Soan's *Talking to Terrorists*, 2007). Under Ní Chaiomh's artistic direction, Calypso began the Tower of Babel programme which set out to:

use our imaginative resources as a professional theatre company to devise an integrated cross-cultural arts programme that would develop and showcase the talent and skills of young people from minority ethnic communities living side by side with their Irish counterparts. (McIvor and Ní Chaiomh 2014, 342)

The minority ethnic cohort that took part in Tower of Babel were predominantly separated children and unaccompanied minors who were seeking asylum in Ireland at the time. This circumstance led to the company becoming directly involved in advocating for some of their cases, a situation that Donal O'Kelly would indirectly dramatise in his play *The Cambria* (2005), which was not produced by Calypso Productions, but remains one of O'Kelly's most toured and critically acclaimed works so it is highly relevant to understanding the story and impact of Calypso's Tower of Babel.

Tower of Babel's activities had multiple dimensions. Participants had the opportunity to perform in some of Calypso's productions alongside professional performers including most notably *Mixing It on the Mountain* (which had been commissioned for the group) and which Jason King observes "created space for sympathetic engagement recent immigrants to Ireland by relating their experiences to the nation's most foundational myth and most iconic forms of historical memory" namely the myth of St. Patrick with the character of St. Patrick played by Solomon Ijigade who was then seeking asylum from the Irish state but is now long settled in Ireland and a professional musician, teacher and facilitator (2005, 27). Tower of Babel participants also created their own work including the theatre pieces *The Museum of Me* (in partnership with London's Phakama), *Where is Home*, *Suitcases* and *Re-Imagining the World* as well as "a series of short films based on their dreams and fantasies, which were shown in European Parliament in Brussels in 2008 as part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" (McIvor and Ní Chaiomh 2014, 346). Calypso's explicit focus on a social-justice centred mission and sustained commitment to educational outreach and professionalisation of minority ethnic actors singles them out as a unique company in Ireland during this time. Their post-crash demise left a vacuum in the late 2000s/early 2010s Irish theatre landscape, particularly for emerging minority ethnic artists and the treatment of race and migration-related themes on Irish

stages. As Jason King observed writing in 2016, the shuttering of Calypso Productions among others as a result of the “economic collapse” precipitated an attrition of visibility for “emergent immigrant and minority ethnic arts practitioners” (like Ijigade) who then “largely disappeared from the Irish professional theatre scene” with the consequence being in his opinion “a kind of cultural atrophy in which community and non-professional productions largely fill the void” (73). Chapter 6 will reveal that this tide has begun to turn for theatre artists from minority ethnic and/or migrant backgrounds but even so, this contextual moment as evidenced by the story of Calypso Productions is important to remember and theorise.

Marina Carr

Born in Offaly, Marina Carr is a leading member of an internationally recognised cohort of contemporary Irish playwrights who emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s also including Martin McDonagh, Conor McPherson and Enda Walsh among others. As arguably the only internationally recognisable and/or regularly produced internationally cisgender woman of this group, and the only female playwright produced on the Abbey Theatre’s main stage in the 1990s as well as on other Irish and international leading stages, Carr’s body of work takes on arguably increased significance relative to her male peers. Melissa Sihra argues that Carr along with Lady Gregory have been repeatedly pressed into service as the “token women” of Irish theatre who after being “validated by patriarchal standards” is then “allowed conditional entry to mainstream culture” and then, as a result of her “extraordinary status” “the token woman is permitted to stand-in as a totalizing representative of all women” (2018, 1–2). However, Carr’s work pushes back against this very representational burden of the token female playwright, Carr’s plays are feminist (in that they address centrally the social construction of gendered roles) as well as female-driven. As such, Carr’s plays comment explicitly on the exclusionary landscape of Irish theatre *and* society as well as being exemplary within it deconstructing token or simple understandings of femininity often with simmering rage boiling underneath and not a small amount of magic animating her dramatic landscapes.

Carr is perhaps best known internationally for her Midlands Trilogy: *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats*, which were produced in the mid-late 1990s despite remaining prolific since this time and particularly in the last five years. The Midlands Trilogy plays works are centrally concerned with gender and the politics of sexuality, particularly as it plays out within heteronormative family structures circumscribed by Irish norms of family, community, church and state. They dramatised midlands Irish women, families and communities in crisis with themes of incest, rape, suicide, alcoholism, depression, marriage and motherhood prominently and unrelenting. Carr’s emergence as a playwright during a decade of enormous social upheaval particularly as regards gender, economics and the waning power of the Catholic Church rendered these plays not only timely but transformative of and in

direct dialogue with the cultural landscape into which they emerged. Powerfully, *Portia Coughlan* “was commissioned by the National Maternity Hospital as part of its centenary celebrations and was entirely paid for by 89 high-profile women who each donated 50 pounds” (Sihra 2007, 210).

Carr’s plays began being produced professionally in the late 1980s and gained momentum throughout the 90s: *Low in the Dark* (1989, Crooked Sixpence Theatre Company in association with Project, 1989) *Ullaloo* (1991, Abbey Theatre, Peacock stage), *This Love Thing* (1991, Tinderbox Theatre Company/Pigsback Theatre Company), *The Mai* (1994, Abbey Theatre, Peacock stage), *Portia Coughlan* (1996, Abbey Theatre, Peacock stage) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998, Abbey Theatre, main stage). She had been made a writer-in-residence at the Abbey in 1995, and *By the Bog of Cats* received a West End production at the Wyndham Theatre in 2004 with U.S. film actress Holly Hunter in the lead role of Hester Swayne. By the 2000s, she was a more than well-established mainstay of the Abbey Theatre’s programming and her work was also being premiered internationally: *Meat and Salt* (Abbey Theatre, Peacock stage, 2003), *Woman and Scarecrow* (The Royal Court Theatre, 2006), *The Cordelia Dream* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2008), *Marble* (Abbey Theatre, main stage, 2009), *The Giant Blue Hand* (The Ark, 2009), *Phaedra Backwards* (McCarter Theatre, Princeton, 2011), *16 Possible Glimpses* (Abbey Theatre, Peacock Stage, 2011), *Hecuba* (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2015) and *Anna Karenina* (Abbey Theatre, main stage, 2016). Within this most recent body of work are two plays for young audiences: *Meat and Salt* and *The Giant Blue Hand* and also two musical collaborations (“a new, contemporary translation of *Rigoletto* for Opera Theatre Company which toured Ireland in 2015; and an oratorio, *Mary Gordon*, as part of a commission for Wicklow County Council,” 2016) (Irish Theatre Playography 2023a). Most recently, she has premiered *Girl on an Altar* (Abbey Theatre and Kiln Theatre, 2023), *Audrey, or Sorrow* (Abbey Theatre and Landmark Productions, 2024) and *The Boy* (Abbey Theatre, 2024). Actresses Olwen Fouréré and Derbhle Crotty have appeared across multiple premieres of Carr’s plays in leading and now iconic roles from the early 1990s such as the title role in *Portia Coughlan* (Crotty, 1996) and Hester Swayne in *By the Bog of Cats* (Fouréré, 1998). Fouréré also appeared in the premieres of *Ullaloo* and *The Mai* and most recently *iGirl* (2021) while Crotty appeared in the premieres of *Marble*, *The Mai*, *16 Possible Glimpses* and *Hecuba*. In addition, Druid Theatre’s Garry Hynes directed the premieres of both *Portia Coughlan* and *On Raftery’s Hill*, one in her tenure as Abbey artistic director between 1991 and 1994, the other after she went back to Druid in 2000.

Siobhán O’Gorman characterises Carr’s early work (including *Low in the Dark*, *The Deer’s Surrender*, *This Love Thing*, and *Ullaloo*) as dependent on “non-sequential structures” which “resist closure,” “satirically excavating the interconnections of genders, customs and cultural histories” (2014, 488). By Carr’s own repeated admission, these earliest works were influenced by Samuel Beckett but O’Gorman crucially identifies *Low in the Dark* and *This Love*

Thing as “partially devised, developed through work-shopping and improvisation” (O’Gorman 2014, 489). Carr herself would conclude by writing in a devised and co-created way with others that “writing like that is dicey; I learned that it doesn’t work for me” (Trench 2010, 5). Nevertheless, this earlier lineage of Carr’s playwriting craft places her in a continuum with rather than opposed to shifting trends in Irish theatremaking at the time.

Rhona Trench locates “Carr’s transition into a more “mainstream” theatre in 1994, coinciding with her *Irish Times Award of Best Play*” for *The Mai* (2010, 5). This transition included the adoption of more straightforward dramaturgical structures that Trench summarises as a move towards “recognizable forms of behaviour for her characters, such as causally related plots with observable time frames and identifiable settings” (2010, 5). If her earliest work riffed on Beckett, the epic scale of Greek tragedy would become an increasingly important landscape for Carr. Beginning with *The Mai*, Carr positions the mythic and poetic more centrally in her work and frequently builds her plays around responding to archetypal female characters from contemporary perspectives such as Greek myth’s Medea (*By the Bog of Cats*), Iphigenia (*Ariel*) and Phaedra (*Phaedra Backwards*), as well as Shakespeare’s Cordelia (*Cordelia’s Dream*). Paula Murphy argues that there is a throughline between Carr’s Midlands plays and this formal strand, offering that “the literary influences of the midlands plays, Shakespeare, ancient Greek drama, and ancient Egyptian narrative, mirror the plays’ concern with the lost other” (2006, 391). She also took on the life of Anton Chekhov in *16 Possible Glimpses*, a move that recalled the earlier panoramic perspective of *This Love Thing* which featured “Renaissance artists and some of the characters they depicted” in a “light-hearted analysis of love” (Irish Playography 2017, “*This Love Thing*”). As the mythic and interrogation of canonical writers such as Chekhov, Shakespeare and the Greeks has grown in significance within Carr’s playwriting, a trenchant focus on the sociological and political particularly within a local Irish context has arguably receded. Claire Wallace asserts “[f]rom the perspective of positive, politically aggressive feminism, Carr’s work might be said to have developed in a negative sense veering from a playful, satirical feminism to grim, patriarchal tragedy” (2000, 87). Paula Murphy counters this however arguing that Carr’s “appropriation of classical forms and themes, particularly Greek tragedy, places her in a theatrical tradition that crosses national boundaries,” also “representing” an Irish “cultural anxiety about moving from a relatively insular, economically unsuccessful island nation to a wider global community, politically, culturally and technologically” (2006, 390, 391).

Carr’s work (particularly the Midlands Trilogy) animates many of the key tensions and transformations experienced both in the heat and aftermath of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger era. The increasing internationalisation of her work in form, theme and collaborative partnerships between the early and late 2000s also represents a trajectory taken by other leading Irish playwrights of her generation including Martin McDonagh, Conor McPherson and Enda Walsh most prominently. As argued by Patrick Lonergan, this turn in Carr’s work

among others perhaps suggests that “globalization- rather than the ‘national question’-is now the dominant paradigm in Irish theatre” (2009, 27). To what end, and what this means for Irish feminist theatre practice and criticism particularly, is a matter still evolving especially in the aftermath of 2015’s Waking the Feminist’s movement, which is directed towards national infrastructural transformation of gender equality in the theatre industry. In addition, waves of attention to racial and ethnic equity in the Irish theatre sector for minority ethnic and/or migrant theatremakers re-emerged as priorities as the conversations and structural change initiatives around racial equity catalysed by the initially U.S.-based Black Lives Matter movement became more globalised post-2020 and increasingly impacted priorities and conversations even within the Irish arts sector (McIvor 2016) (see Chapter 6).

Landmark Plays and Productions

Riverdance (Premiered 1994)

Riverdance’s premiere as the interval entertainment for the 1994 Eurovision song contest held in Dublin that year was impeccably timed. In retrospect, the first preview appearance of this ultimately full-length dance spectacular (created by producer Moya Doherty, director John McCollgan and composer Bill Whelan with original soloists Michael Flatley and Jean Butler) epitomised as well as anticipated the spirit, excesses and internationalisation of the Celtic Tiger era in Ireland, premiering the same year that the Morgan Stanley report coined the very term. Hazel Carby observes that the premiere of “*Riverdance*” on Eurovision was the “cultural vision of the economic narrative of the Irish as the success story of the new Europe” (2001, 329). Following the premiere of the interval entertainment excerpt, *Riverdance* was developed as a full-length performance which is still touring worldwide with regular returns to the Republic of Ireland at the time of writing almost thirty years later (*Riverdance* 2023a).

Riverdance’s perhaps most iconic image, its thunderous chorus line, registered from that very first performance as an adjusted influence for Ireland (economically and culturally) on 1990s world stages. As Aoife McGrath puts it, “the chorus line in *Riverdance*, using the technique of competitive step dance, can be read as an example of an aestheticization and advertisement of a late capitalist Irish labour force that is young, dynamic, mobile and always striving to move upwards and forwards ‘in step’” (2013, 8). *Riverdance* also packaged together many of the most recognisable signifiers, sounds and moves of stage Irishness including a liberal use of green and sentimental evocations of home and displacement with many of the piece’s based on “such traditional” Irish “rhythmic forms as the reel, slip jig, and slow air” (Scahill 2009, 72). These tropes however are crucially recycled through the lens of a cosmopolitan, new age (and sexed-up) worldview, staging and soundscape (with *Riverdance*’s soundtrack repeatedly characterised as “world music”) (Scahill 2009, 74). Some scenes are titled according to familiar Irish nationalist and diasporic

tropes, “The Countess Cathleen” or “American Wake,” while others are called by more generic titles like “The Heart’s Cry,” which is described as staging how we “need and sustain each other” and “keep this knowledge in song since the beginning of time,” an inclusive “we” that absorbs all potential audience members, not just those of Irish descent (*Riverdance* 2023b). Through a two-act structure, *Riverdance* ultimately dramatises Irish history and its diaspora in particular as perpetually in motion and shaped by contact with a multicultural cross-section of performers, including African-American tap dancers and a gospel choir, Argentinian flamenco dancers and Russian whirling dervishes. Carby summarises that “the cultural and aesthetic politics of *Riverdance* imagine and present Irishness for global consumption as the story of one successful ethnic group among many, an Irishness to be understood with the frame reference of multiculturalism” (2001, 330).

Riverdance’s spectacular blend between the universalist and the particular, the Irish and the global, has generated one of the most lucrative performance franchises in history. It has, in turn, spurred other franchises such as Michael Flatley’s follow-up solo enterprises including *Lord of the Dance* (1996), *Feet of Flames* (1998), *Celtic Tiger* (2005) and *Lord of the Dance: Dangerous Games* (2014) and stimulated the increased circulation of Irish step dancing practices due to the show’s popularisation of the form (Foley 2001, 34–45). According to the most recent figures available from 2017 on the *Riverdance* site, since the 1995 Dublin premiere, there have been over “11,000 performances” which have been “seen live by over 25 million people in over 467 venues worldwide, throughout 46 countries across 6 continents.” When television audiences are taken into account, it has been seen by more than 3 billion people since its initial debut (*Riverdance* 2017, “The Journey”).

For better or worse, *Riverdance* has to a large extent shaped how Irishness is read and consumed by audiences around the world due to its massive reach. It is a phenomenon that has outlasted the Celtic Tiger. Despite being performed continuously for almost thirty years, *Riverdance* has never been significantly altered in form or content apart from the addition of one scene “Anna Livia” for a group of female dancers in 2015 inspired by “James Joyce’s personification of Dublin’s River Liffey” (*Riverdance* 2023b) and to mark twenty years of *Riverdance* on tour. This means that attending *Riverdance* today allows one to gain live access to an important relic of Irish contemporary performance history that has intentionally not kept pace with the evolving nature of Irishness in the second decade of the twenty-first century. That being said, the original creators did premiere original creators did premiere *Riverdance: Heartbeat of Home* in 2013 (choreographed by David Bolger and John Carey) which is still being performed. This new extension of the franchise draws on “the multicultural fusion of Irish, Latin and Afro-Cuban dance” and uses performers who are “not only at the top of their profession in Irish but also in other dance forms” (*Heartbeat of Home* 2023).

Martin McDonagh, The Leenane Trilogy (The Beauty Queen of Leenane, *The Lonesome West*, *A Skull in Connemara*) (Premiered 1996/1997)

Garry Hynes and Druid Theatre's "discovery" of Martin McDonagh through Druid's blind submission process for new writers and the company's decision to produce all three plays of his Leenane Trilogy simultaneously (in a co-production with the Royal Court Theatre, London) is the material of legend. It also directly followed on Hynes's resignation as artistic director of the Abbey and her subsequent unexpected return to Druid. Druid's international success with McDonagh's work and the impact of this experience on how the company consolidated its "Irish" reputation was a landmark event that again reflected and influenced wider patterns in the global circulation of Irish theatre at this time.

Druid's production of the Leenane Trilogy launched McDonagh's stage and film career and inaugurated a new international phase of prestige for the Galway-based theatre company. This included runs on the West End, Broadway and as part of the Sydney Festival, and Hynes' 1998 Tony Award for best director for *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, the first ever awarded to a female director, in addition to Tony Awards for three of the cast: Marie Mullen (Best Actress), Anna Manahan (Best Supporting Actress), and Tom Murphy (Best Supporting Actor).

Druid had premiered the three new works in Galway: *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) first as a stand-alone piece and then as the Trilogy with *The Lonesome West* (1997), and *A Skull in Connemara* (1997). This continued Druid's long-established pattern of production which firmly routes the origin of their work in the West of Ireland despite their international profile (and touring schedule). As Fintan O'Toole quipped, "If Martin McDonagh had not existed, Garry Hynes would have had to invent him," for the Leenane Trilogy is "uncannily in line with what she and Druid have been about for 21 years...a long demythologization of the West" (1997).

McDonagh's public persona generated perhaps as much press as the critical acclaim for his work, especially an infamous drunken encounter with Sean Connery at the 1996 Evening Standard Awards in London. Born in London to parents from Galway and Sligo, McDonagh has been claimed for both British and Irish theatre with Anthony Roche terming him "one of the first, and certainly most high profile, playwrights of the Irish diaspora in England" (Roche 2009, 236).

The Leenane Trilogy featured Druid co-founders Marie Mullen and Mick Lally, as well as associate artist Maeliosa Stafford who had served as artistic director during Hynes' tenure at the Abbey. They joined a company of actors including Anna Manahan, Aidan McArdle, David Ganly, Dawn Bradfield and Brían F. O'Byrne (with O'Byrne performing in all three works).

The plays of the Leenane Trilogy divided critics and academics, with *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* being consistently regarded as the strongest of the three. McDonagh was lauded by some such as Fintan O'Toole for his

intertextual reworking of twentieth-century Irish drama in form and content (particularly the work of J. M. Synge) with a postmodern twist, but attacked by others for crass nihilistic opportunism that rebranded the “Stage Irish” for ever wider global audiences (Merriman 1999, 305–317).

Tinderbox Theatre, Convictions (2000)

This landmark site-specific theatre work was staged at Belfast’s Crumlin Road Courthouse—“the site of many of Northern Ireland’s paramilitary trials and the home of the secretive Diplock courts” (McKinnie 2003, 583)—only two years after the Good Friday Agreement. At that time, the Crumlin Road Courthouse had been closed since this event as “part of the general restructuring of the British state in Northern Ireland” (McKinnie 2003, 583). Under the artistic direction of Paula McFetridge with design by Houston Marshall, *Convictions* featured seven new dramas by Northern Ireland’s leading playwrights staged throughout the courthouse, including work by Daragh Carville (*Male Toilets*), Damian Gorman (*Judge’s Room*), Marie Jones (*Court No. 2*), Martin Lynch (*Main Hall*), Owen McCafferty (*Court No. 1*), Nicola McCartney (*Jury Room*) and Gary Mitchell (*Holding Room*). As a theatre event, *Convictions* brought together many of Northern Ireland’s leading playwrights and artists as part of one project. In doing so, this event provides a unique snapshot of the wider landscape of Northern Irish theatre at a key moment of political and social transformation. It also made clear Tinderbox Theatre’s evolution since their “low-budget beginning” in 1988 to their clear status at the time of *Convictions* as a “champion” of “much of the new writing through which dramatic output from Northern Ireland has been reshaped” (Maguire 2006, 150). McFetridge later became artistic director of Belfast-based Kabosh Productions, founded in 1994 whose mission involves creating “provocative theatre that transforms our understanding of who and *where* we are, through giving voice to *site*, space and people” (Kabosh Productions 2023, emphasis ours), continuing the legacy of *Convictions* in her own independent company.

The plays focus on evocative vignettes rather than attempting to dramatise a representative history of the courthouse’s landmark cases or events and engage subject positions including defendants, victims, family members, judges and guards.

As Michael McKinnie outlines, each short play:

was self-contained and bore no causal or correlative relationship to any other—there were no recurring characters, no overarching plot, no consistent themes apart from expected and expansive ones like incarceration and justice, and no dominant writing style beyond a fairly broad adherence to the conventions of naturalism. (2003, 589)

Convictions also featured original music by composer Neil Martin and visual art installations by Amanda Montgomery which “attempted to revive” the

“essence or soul (if there was one) of the areas which were once a prominent feature in the lives of those passing through this building over the years” (Montgomery 2000, 13).

Each individual drama had a different director, and audience members did not all experience the work in the same order. They instead moved in rotation in small groups through rooms including the Jury Room, Courts No. 1 and 2, a Judge’s Office, the toilets and the holding cells for prisoners, experiencing Montgomery’s installations and the soundscape of the production during their transitions. As a total experience, *Convictions*:

offered to lead spectators physically and imaginatively through the cultural memory for which the courthouse stood as metonym, and part of its appeal lay in the fact that it allowed the spectator to experience state space in ways previously inadmissible and unimaginable. (McKinnie 2003, 583)

Premiering so soon after the Good Friday Agreement, *Convictions* strongly communicates anxieties about the next phase of identity politics or rebranding for Northern Ireland, as well as the seething legacies of undelivered justice. Daragh Carville’s *Male Toilets* features a character savagely suggesting that bombings will need to continue being staged at appropriate intervals to preserve the Northern Irish brand as “we’re disappearing from the world agenda” but building “Tourist Information Centres, hotels, theme parks, heritage centres” (Carville, in *Convictions* 2000, 35). Other plays including Martin Lynch’s *Main Hall* and Nicola McCartney’s *Jury Room* probe the intersection between class, criminality and incarceration while Owen McCafferty’s *Court No. 1* features a victim still seeking justice in their unsolved murder case. McKinnie faults *Convictions* for sidestepping “the political motivations for, and sectarian consequences of, the events that caused the pain” (2003, 593), but it seems that the inability to capture the enormity of these “motivations” and “consequences” in the theatre let alone Northern Irish society at large is what *Convictions* did ultimately dramatise on a panoramic scale. Karen in Marie Jone’s *Court No. 2* insists “we are planning a heritage centre, it is not our responsibility to tell people what to think” (Jones in 2000, 10). This may be a debatable point, but this character’s assertion does strike at the heart of the representational challenges faced by theatremakers from all sides of the sectarian debates particularly when engaged in a cross-sectarian project.

Seminal Revivals

The Playboy of the Western World Revivals (Druid Theatre, Abbey Theatre, Pan Pan Theatre)

2007 marked the 100-year centenary of the infamous premiere of John Millington Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* which sparked riots and public debate over the role of the national theatre and the limits of representation at

the Abbey Theatre. As would be expected, this anniversary catalysed multiple revivals and adaptations in the years leading up to the event. Taken together, they index the still dynamic role of Synge's play as a vehicle for commentary on and contestation of contemporary Irish society.

Some productions arguably sought to consolidate Synge's reputation for national and international audiences including Druid's 2004 production initially starring Cillian Murphy as Christy Mahon. This production "embarked on a unique tour along the Western seaboard, retracing (in reverse) the journey undertaken by the bold Christy Mahon after 'murdering' his father," touring to locations including the Aran Islands and Geesala, County Mayo "where the play is set" (Druid Theatre 2023a). This production (albeit recast and restaged) served as a building block for Druid's landmark acclaimed *DruidSynge* which was "the first ever staging of John Millington Synge's entire theatrical canon," seven plays in total including *Playboy* but also *The Shadow of the Glen*, *The Well of the Saints*, *The Tinker's Wedding*, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, *Riders to the Sea* and *When the Moon Has Set* (Druid Theatre 2023b). *DruidSynge* premiered in 2005 at the Galway Arts Festival before touring nationally and internationally to the UK, U.S. and Australia. As a company, Druid's reputation is frequently linked centrally to Synge with Patricia Byrne arguing that Druid's "definitive" 1982 production of *Playboy of the Western World* "revived Synge for Irish audiences and established Druid's reputation worldwide" (2008, 135).

Pan Pan Theatre's 2006 *Playboy of the Western World* "emerged out of co-artistic director Gavin Quinn's explicit desire to work in a Chinese context," as "the production concept for a Mandarin Chinese *Playboy* preceded the finding of... Chinese collaborators" (McIvor 2016, 55). Pan Pan eventually collaborated with producer Wang Zhaohui and translator/dramatist Sun Yue to reimagine *Playboy* as "[t]ransposed to a modern setting of a hairdressers and foot massage parlour, otherwise known as a 'Whore Dressers' on the outskirts of Beijing" (Pan Pan 2023). Christy Mahon became Ma Shang, a rural outsider to the cosmopolitan hairdressers in Beijing hailing from "Xinjiang, the remote Muslim region bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is China's own Western World" (Morash and Richards 2013, 140). The particularities of this regional Chinese identity to Pan Pan's adaptation both key to and controversial in the circulation of the work within China itself (McIvor 2016, 57–58), and Christy/Ma only wore the "taquiah (the Muslim cap)" in Dublin where Christopher Morash and Shaun Richards argue that its significance was "unlikely to be fully appreciated" (Morash and Richards 2013, 141). Pan Pan's production of Yue's translation/adaptation of *Playboy* premiered at the Oriental Pioneer Theatre in Beijing with an all-Chinese cast before touring to the Project Arts Centre in Dublin. The company would continue their collaborations with Zhaohui and Sun into the 2010s with a number of other adaptations and staging of original works including Sun Yue's *Do Di Zhu (Fight the Landlord)* (2010) and a simultaneous premiere of a Chinese-language version of *The Seagull and Other Birds* in 2014 at Beijing Fringe

Festival while their English-language version of the same production was opening simultaneously at the Dublin Theatre Festival, both directed by Gavin Quinn (McIvor 2016, 61–64; Tatlow 2014).

The Abbey commissioned Arambe Productions' Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle to write a “new version” of *Playboy of the Western World* for the 2007 centenary that would feature a Nigerian playboy, Christopher Malomo. Adigun had founded Arambe Productions in 2003 as the Republic's first African-Irish theatre company with the aim of “fostering a better understanding of African cultural values through an innovative approach to the interpretation and performance of classic and contemporary African plays” as well as “foster[ing] new work by reinterpreting Irish classics” (Irish Theatre Institute 2023) such as *Playboy* and another celebrated adaptation of Jimmy Murphy's *The Kings of Kilburn High Road* as *The Paddies of Parnell Street*, substituting white Irish immigrants working in London for Nigerian immigrants working in Dublin and reflecting on their lives and relationship to home (Irish Theatre Playography 2023b). In Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy*, Malomo arrives in Dublin from Lagos, believing that he has murdered his father and seeking far-flung cousins, a criminal fugitive confused by many characters in the play for an asylum seeker (and by reviewers of the play itself who often erroneously referred to him as such) (McIvor 2016, 69–72). As Charlotte McIvor and Matthew Spangler observe, this play would come to be regarded as the “most high-profile and indeed controversial Irish theatre production on the themes of inward-migration and interculturalism” (McIvor and Spangler 2014, 2). It premiered to mixed reviews, but was a popular success and was revived in 2008/2009 due to popular demand. By this time, however, legal proceedings had been “initiated by Adigun/Arambe against the Abbey Theatre and Doyle, which alleged breach of contract among other charges despite repeated protestations from both parties that ‘it was written line by line together’” (McIvor 2016, 43). Jason King perceptively argues that:

...this legal controversy off stage was more symptomatic of the cultural condition of Ireland in economic collapse than the content of the play itself, or many works produced during the era of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath. Its main beneficiary was not Bisi Adigun nor Arambe Productions, who at best seem to have won a pyrrhic victory, but rather the legal industry which enjoyed a hidden subsidy from the cultural sector and its ever diminishing proportion of taxpayer funding. (2016, 72)

Playboy of the Western World: A New Version's contested appearance at the eclipse of the Celtic Tiger indeed made manifest the incremental work that would be necessary to revise the Irish theatre canon as a more inclusive site for minority ethnic and migrant individuals in particular, work that still continues today (see Chapter 6). In this moment however, the aspirations of the Celtic

Tiger as economic miracle and the Adigun/Doyle collaboration as transformative of the Irish theatre canon in terms of racial and ethnic diversity were both outpaced by structural and interpersonal realities.

Taken together, these three landmark re-envisionings of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* demonstrate the divergent yet complementary routes along which Irish theatre in the Republic developed during this period. Druid's long-term interrogation of Synge within a West of Ireland context came to a climax with DruidSynge as they ignited local national networks of touring and collaboration before touring the production internationally. Druid and Pan Pan's international partnerships and touring activities demonstrated the continuing legibility of Irish theatre as a mobile brand (with Synge's *Playboy* as a particularly valuable dramatic passport to cross-cultural legibility). But Pan Pan and Adigun and Doyle's adaptations of Synge's dramatic text in relationship to contemporary contexts multiplied Irishness and questioned the outer limits of the "Irish" theatrical canon. Both productions perhaps did so only partially, but they established that that racial and ethnic identity of an "Irish" *Playboy* was nowhere near clear or one-dimensional on the occasion of the play's centenary.

Spotlight on Institutions and Festivals

The 1995 establishment of the Dublin Fringe Festival (DFF) was a pivotal event that continues to shape the development of new directions in Irish theatre and performance (particularly work for performance that operates at the intersection of art forms). Theatre company Bedrock, under the artistic direction of Jimmy Fay, "initiated and administered the first Dublin Fringe Festival" (Irish Theatre Playography 2023c). Fay served as the director for its first two years before passing it on to Ali Curran. Curran would serve until 2000 and was then succeeded by Vallejo Gantner (2001–2005), Wolfgang Hoffman (2006–2007), Roisé Goan (2008–2013), Kris Nelson (2014–2017) and Ruth McGowan (2018–2023) with David Francis Moore taking over from her at time of writing. From its beginnings, the DFF was curated, claiming in 2011 to be the "only fully curated Fringe Festival in Europe" (Shorthall 2011, 14–15), an organisational structure that has resulted in increased infrastructural support for programmed artists despite arguably restricting grassroots access. Former DFF Director Ali Curran (1996–2000) claimed by 2000 that "the Dublin Theatre Festival has altered its programming since the Fringe came into existence" (Meany 2000). Writing in 2014, Miriam Haughton reconstructs the DFF's evolution thus:

Over forty productions were proposed by companies and artists for the inaugural 1995 Festival. From those early years came significant successes, including Conor McPherson's *This Lime Tree Bower* (1995) and Enda Walsh's *Disco Pigs* (1996). Today, approximately 300 to 400 presentations are proposed, with sixty to eighty programmed. (2015, 131)

In 2003, then-director Vallejo Gantner said of DFF: “The focus of the Dublin Theatre Festival is on quality, but the focus of the fringe is on fresh, on new, on next. I want to see work asking questions, engaging with new ideas, with the politics and issues of its own form” (McKeon 2003, 13). Gantner credited the DFF, for example, with developing dance and performance art from the late 1990s onwards (McKeon 2003, 13). Despite the DFF’s origin as an initiative from within the workings of Bedrock, a theatre company (albeit one which described itself as crossing “the boundaries of theatre, performance art, dance, and video”) (Irish Theatre Playography 2023c), this festival embraced multiple genres from the beginning, including comedy, dance, performance art, music, and film, experimenting over the course of its years of programming with balance and focus. Within just a few years of the DFF’s creation, it was also international in scope bringing companies including acclaimed New York director Anne Bogart’s SITI Company and giving the Irish premiere to landmark productions including Mark Ravenhill’s *Shopping and F***ing* (produced by Out of Joint and the Royal Court Theatre, London) in 1997. Many of its former directors including Vallejo Gantner, Wolfgang Hoffman and Kris Nelson came from outside Ireland to lead the festival (Australia, Germany and Canada respectively), periods of stewardship that emphasise the internationalism of DFF’s outlook.

Ultimately, the programming history of DFF is a key archive through which to map and historicise the widening circulation of interdisciplinary performance techniques in contemporary Irish theatremaking. Although theatre became less central as a programmed art form as DFF evolved, DFF’s producing trends diagnose shifting priorities in contemporary Irish theatre such as a post-1990s decline in new playwriting and the rise of devised, postdramatic and/or physical theatre methods which emerged incrementally and with many false starts. The scale and diversity of work presented by the DFF since the late 1990s from both individual artists and short-lived as well as established companies indeed troubles linear genealogies of practice transfer that might otherwise credit individuals or companies with inaugurating new forms in Ireland on their own. DFF’s long-term focus on staging events in non-traditional spaces provides for example a key index of the rise of site-specific and immersive theatre in Ireland since the 1990s. In 2023, DFF describes itself succinctly as “a curated multidisciplinary arts festival and year-round artist support organisation,” focused on “seek[ing] out and present[ing] contemporary provocative and playful new work made by Irish and international artists of vision in an annual celebration all over the city” (Dublin Fringe Festival 2023), with the last part of this statement firmly signalling the importance of the particularities of place to DFF’s ongoing work. As to whether we can still regard it as truly fringe, Peter Crawley observed in 2017 that the “second word” in DFF’s title has long seemed “vestigial” as it “hasn’t operated at the edge of another festival for years” (Crawley 2017, 14). Instead, by 2017, “the Fringe has pushed the alternative firmly

into the mainstream” (Crawley 2017, 14) of Irish theatre and the arts more broadly.

CONCLUSION

If we were to characterise the mirror that theatre and performance held up to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland during this time, that mirror would undeniably be fragmented, indicating a proliferation of aesthetic modes and approaches as well as the singular contributions of theatremakers across many disciplines of theatre craft. As this chapter has demonstrated building on the chapters to date, this mid-1990s-late 2000s explosion of fragmentation and experimentation in theatrical form had been long percolating within the twentieth-century history of Irish theatre and performance but the economic transformation of Ireland during this period as well as our increased and unprecedented inward-migration and progress on the Northern Ireland conflict created conditions that allowed a greater diversity of theatrical work to be not only created but circulated globally in some key instances. That being said, the figure of the Irish playwright as globalised phenomenon and key reference point for Irish theatre as a total art form was also rejuvenated through key successes by individual playwrights like Martin McDonagh, Marina Carr, Enda Walsh and Conor McPherson while Druid Theatre as a company revitalised the legacy of J. M. Synge as an early twentieth-century Irish master with their globally successful phenomenon *DruidSynge*. Therefore, while much changed and gathered momentum due to new funding streams and structures, many things remained the same in terms of accepted norms around ideas of Irish theatre and performance broadly, a push and pull that the next period of work would continue to wrestle with.

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Recession, Commemoration and Covid-19 (2008–2023)

PART I: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The dramatic end of the Celtic Tiger period in 2008 brought recession, bailout of the banks, rapidly rising unemployment/underemployment and austerity to the people of the Republic following “the wholesale collapse of the property industry and the destabilisation of the banking and financial sectors” in the context of wider global economic freefall (Bracken and Harney-Mahajan 2017, 1). Ultimately, “[t]he combination of bailing out banks and choosing not to pursue tax related revenue gathering policy options meant reliance on public expenditure cuts to manage the public deficit”—in other words, austerity measures (Murphy 2014, 134). Net outward-migration overtook net-inward migration by 2009, reversing a defining trend of the Celtic Tiger period as “the number of people leaving Ireland more than tripled between 2008 and 2012” with “Irish citizens” at the “epicentre of most political and public debate surrounding emigration” during this time (Glynn with Kelly and Mac Éinrí 2015, 1, 6). In the North, the continuation of the Peace Process’s lived experience and daily legacy played out against a backdrop of gentrification and aggressive rebranding of this former conflict zone. The theatre as building and institution in the North even had its part to play. On 27 June 2012, the Lyric Theatre, Belfast was the site for a historic handshake between Queen Elizabeth II and Martin McGuinness, Deputy First Minister for the Northern Ireland Assembly and a former commander of the IRA, cementing not only the metaphoric but literal role theatre has to play in the ongoing negotiation of a post-conflict society. McGuinness himself described it in advance as “one of the most symbolic handshakes ever seen” (*Irish Examiner* 2012).

Nevertheless, this period also saw a series of landmark social justice campaigns and referendums including those that resulted in marriage equality

(Republic and North) and expansion of abortion rights (Republic and North) and widespread ongoing protests regarding various austerity and bank bailout measures. Significantly for both the Republic and the North, the UK under Prime Minister David Cameron voted to leave the European Union with a slim 51.9% majority in 2016, beginning the protracted and messy Brexit process.

Across the island of Ireland, the 2008 economic downturn and its extended aftershocks also had grave implications for the arts. In the Republic, the funding model moved away from regularly funding independent companies to making emerging and established companies and artists more dependent on once-off project awards and other limited grants. This was similar in the North as “[f]unding cuts in 2015, in particular, were devastating, threatening the survival of many of Belfast’s most established and well-known independent theatres” (Coleman Coffey 2016, 250). But the fight for social justice nonetheless continued within the theatre with the groundbreaking #WakingTheFeminists movement erupting in November 2015 catalysed by a single social media post by freelance set designer and arts manager Lian Bell in response to drastic underrepresentation of female theatre artists in the Abbey’s 1916 centenary programme, “Waking the Nation.”

This period also brought an intensified period of reckoning regarding the physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse of individuals in a network of Church and/or State-run institutions including reformatory and industrial schools, Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes among others. Key reports produced by the Irish state during this time include the Murphy Report which addressed the handling of abuse complaints against clergy within the Dublin Catholic archdiocese (Department of Justice 2009), the Ryan Report which focused on the abuse of children in Irish institutions for children, primarily industrial and reformatory schools (Ryan 2009) and the McAleese Report which was tasked with “establish[ing] the facts of State involvement with the Magdalene Laundries” (McAleese 2013, 1). Following the efforts of amateur local historian Catherine Corless, whose painstaking research of death certificates exposed the death and burials onsite of hundreds of children onsite at the former Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, the Irish state also initiated and completed a Mother and Baby Homes Commission and Investigation, which was released in January 2021 (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2021). In the North, the Report of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry which focused on “children in residential institutions (other than schools) between 1922 and 1995” was completed in 2017 (Historical Abuse Inquiry 2017).

This same period has seen allegations of sustained sexual misconduct within the creative arts industry against former Universal Artists Belfast agent Mark Butler and former long-time Gate Theatre artistic director, Michael Colgan, who had served 33 years in this role. Butler was convicted in 2009 of assaulting an actress in 2005 and has been the subject of numerous other allegations. In 2017, he received an Order from an Industrial Tribunal barring him from operating an agency for 10 years following “an extensive investigation by

the Department for the Economy’s Employment Agency Inspectorate into complaints received from a number of actresses alleging inappropriate conduct and behaviour on the part of Mr. Butler” (*Derry Journal* 2017). The Gate Theatre commissioned a confidential independent review following the allegations made against Colgan carried out by Gaye Cunningham which engaged 65 individuals overall and found “Mr. Colgan has a case to answer in respect to dignity at work issues, abuse of power and inappropriate behaviours” (Cunningham 2018, 15). The two subsequent artistic directors of the Gate have both been female: Selina Cartmell (2018–2022) and Roísín McBrinn (2022–present). Their quick turnover in fact follows through by actioning one of Cunningham’s report’s main findings that the length of Colgan’s previous 33-year tenure contributed to the setting up of conditions for a hostile workplace.

2012 also marked the beginning of the Decade of Centenaries and state commemoration programmes in the Republic marking events leading up to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. The purpose of this public period of state commemoration was “to ensure that this complex period in our history, including the Struggle for Independence, the Civil War, the Foundation of the State and Partition, is remembered appropriately, proportionately, respectfully and with sensitivity” (Decade of Centenaries, n.d.). Prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, this commemorative period centrally influenced creative agendas across art forms during the period under consideration in this chapter. Arguably, ANU Productions’ site-specific and immersive works about the histories of those marginalised within the Irish state, particularly women and/or economic and other minorities, established themselves as the key theatrical key touchstones of this period for their visceral and political explorations of the intersection of the historical and contemporary and heavy commissioning at state and local level.

And finally, to begin the new decade, Ireland and the world were rocked by the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in an almost total halt of the live theatre and wider creative arts industries. Soon after the onset of the crisis, the Republic’s Arts Council announced that it would “honour all existing commitments for 2020” and “allow grantees to drawn down 90 per cent of their funding to allow them fulfil in turn their own business commitments, especially to artists” (Arts Council, n.d.). They in turn announced a series of Covid-19 specific schemes including “enhancing commissioning, projects and bursary awards” aimed at supporting individual artists and organisations in response to the changing needs of the theatre sector as the crisis evolved (Arts Council, n.d.). However, some of these schemes backfired within the theatre sector and their nuances contained disadvantages for those that took them up as Miriam Haughton observes that those who took up the Arts Council’s “Covid-19 Crisis Response Award” in the Republic were then disallowed from accessing “social welfare payments” or “business support monies, such as financing available from Enterprise Ireland.” In addition, these schemes also including Culture Ireland’s “Ireland Performs,” “privileged those who

perform, signalling an absence of planning for those who work as designers, technicians, carpenters, electricians, front of house staff, cleaners, company accountants and so on” (Haughton 2021, 44). Nevertheless, in 2021, the Republic’s Arts Council announced its highest grant in the history of the state of €131 million, an increase of approximately 60% on the 2020 grant of €80 million, which had only just closed in on the height of the pre-Celtic Tiger crash grant high of €81.62 million, and that grant decreased only €1 million to €130 million in 2022 although these numbers must also be understood in the context of current inflation at the time of writing (see Chapter 5 for further funding history) (Arts Council 2022a). Similarly, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland by February 2021 had “distributed £17.76 million of Covid-19 emergency funding to 168 arts organisations and 1,562 individual artists” as compared with £9.8 million total funding the previous year (Bamford et al. 2021). Funding to annually funded arts organisations in the North then remained at the same level for 2022–2023 with £13,012,490 allocated but the Arts Council of Northern Ireland’s chair Liam Hannaway noted on announcement of these funds that “we are facing a weakened creative sector, working with reduced income and facing higher costs of delivery” (Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2022). Post-Covid-19, it is clear that the Irish theatre and wider arts landscape on the island is currently undergoing a radical renovation with as yet unforeseen possibilities and consequences if these increased crisis funds are clawed back and/or cut over time after the sector adjusts following this incredibly tumultuous period. But despite this structural instability, some of the performance examples later in this chapter demonstrate how theatre artists and organisations are already creating new artistic horizons in direct response to the ongoing constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic at the time of writing.

PART II: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Genres, Methods and Approaches

The end of the 2000s and the 2010s witnessed a continuation of many of the formally experimental theatrical trends that have been identified in previous chapters such as a growth in devising and collaborative theatremaking practices and physical/dance theatre, but these practices continue to undergo subtle shifts. Most significantly, an unprecedented number of companies including THEATREclub, ANU Productions, Brokentalkers, WillFredd, Theatre for Witness (in residence in Derry between 2009 and 2013 as discussed below), and Terra Nova Productions (see Chapter 11 for extended Terra Nova case study) now regularly work with non-theatre/non-professional participants to collaboratively devise new work for theatre. For some, community participants are only engaged in the research and creation phase (THEATREclub) whereas for others their performance onstage is frequently central to the meaning of the work (Theatre of Witness, Brokentalkers).

The work of these companies and others including Junk Ensemble, Dead Centre, Talking Shop Ensemble, THISISPOPBABY, Collapsing Horse and Junk Ensemble active at points during this period have continuously rejected formal boundaries between theatre, dance and other art forms, especially visual arts and music. Cormac O’Brien refers to this present cohort of new/recently established companies as “New Century companies” who still “have the state of the nation and Irishness as central concerns” but use the creation of “ensemble works” to “eschew any over-reliance on a central text” and “make strange the familiar structures of narrative drama that have long been entrenched” often bringing the craft of theatre itself into active conflict and/or fusion with other art forms and artists (O’Brien 2018, 256). Brian Singleton elaborates that:

Many of the practitioners who work in contemporary Irish theatre do not subscribe to terminology that delimits their role in production. Directors, designers and actors in the twenty-first century are embraced within the generic nomenclature of ‘theatre-makers,’ who share tasks and are collaboratively engaged in creating what they often call ‘performance’ that is not necessarily theatrical, dramatic, or even taking place in theatre buildings. (Singleton 2016, 560)

Due to this continuing shift towards collective creation by theatremakers and the ensemble as the “author” of works, the role of new writing in the Irish theatre relative to other modes of theatremaking became a hotly debated topic during this period which did not see the creation of new Irish playwright superstars like Marina Carr, Martin McDonagh or Enda Walsh who can cite similar success and global profiles. However, key companies including but not limited to the Abbey Theatre and Lyric Theatre, Belfast still specialise in producing new writing for the stage. Most notably Fishamble: The New Play Company, produce 50% of the new plays produced on the island of Ireland each year and are profiled later in this chapter.

The increasing influence of performance art, visual art and/or installation practices on contemporary theatre in Ireland has perhaps been most impactful in terms of significant formal shifts and trends during this period. Therefore, rather than this period simply continuing to signal the decline of the Irish “playwright” as the primary figure of reference, ongoing interdisciplinary experiments within contemporary Irish theatre continues to expand what form Irish writing for theatre and performance can take in relationship to genre, content and even ultimate venue of expression for the written words. Crucial for situating this turn, performance artist and scholar Áine Phillips published the first comprehensive history of Irish performance art North and South in 2015, with this seminal collection featuring contributions by artists, scholars and those identifying as both, urgently making visible the deep roots of contemporary Irish performance art practices as theatre scholars and practitioners engage with this new turn within our field (Phillips 2015). Key

examples of performance art's specific influence on contemporary Irish theatre include ANU's ongoing partnership with ground-breaking Irish performance artist Amanda Coogan and Coogan's own live art sign-language adaptation *Talk Real Fine, Just Like a Lady* of Teresa Deevy's play *The King of Spain's Daughter* in collaboration with Dublin Theatre of the Deaf and presented in the Abbey's Peacock Theatre as part of 2017's Dublin Fringe Festival. In terms of visual art's intersections with theatre, ANU's co-artistic Director Owen Boss identifies primarily as a visual artist and socially engaged artist Fiona Whelan also recently undertook an ongoing long-term collaboration with Brokentakler's Gary Keegan and Feidlim Cannon. Their work together began in 2016 and has resulted in theatrical works (*Natural History of Hope*, 2016) but also the ground-breaking project *What Does He Need?* (2018–ongoing) which also involves Rialto Youth Project and explores how men and boys are shaped by and influence the world they live. Keegan, Cannon and Whelan describe this project as “at the intersection of collaborative arts practice, performance, qualitative research and youth work” (“What Does He Need?”, n.d.) This multi-faceted project encompasses experiences like a one-day dialogical workshop aimed at adults and young people, an eight-week programme for children and young people extending that workshop, delayed dance/theatre piece *To Be Frank* (postponed in May 2020), and a text-based “public poster project” which presented “a range of viewpoints on the needs of men and boys in different scenarios and at different stages of life” and was displayed at various locations in Dublin between 2020 and 2022 including the Irish Museum of Modern Art (“What Does He Need?”, n.d.)

Enda Walsh's ongoing collaboration with Galway International Arts Festival's artistic Director Paul Fahy on their *Rooms* series also registers this shift towards interdisciplinary and visual arts-oriented examinations of the limits of contemporary Irish theatrical form. Walsh and Fahy's *Rooms* to date bring to life 8 “poetic short stories” (as the concept was described for a 2017 international exhibition of works to date) which include *Room 303* (2014), *A Girl's Bedroom* (2016), *Kitchen* (2016), *Bathroom* (2017), *Office 33A* (2017), *Waiting Room* (2017), *Changing Room* (2020) and *Bedsit* (2021). Each has been created to be sited within a “5 M × 5 M white cube” resulting in “installations in a site-specific gallery setting” with narration by well-known Irish actors including but not limited to “Niall Buggy, Charlie Murphy, Donal O'Kelly, Paul Reid and Eileen Walsh” (Galway International Arts Festival, n.d.). Tellingly, some of these “poetic short stories” have also been published and/or performed as short monologue plays by Nick Hern books alongside Walsh's other plays including *Arlington* (2016), which also premiered at the Galway International Arts Festival while *Room 303*, the room that started it all began life as a one-man show premiering at London's Bush Theatre in 2011 (Nick Hern Books, n.d.).

In a similar vein, Pan Pan Theatre's explorations of Samuel Beckett's radio plays *All That Fall* (2011) and *Embers* (2013) were also created as installation-style experiences directed by Gavin Quinn with lighting and set design by

Aedín Cosgrove and sound design by Jimmy Eadie and hailed by reviewers internationally with Patrick Lonergan commenting that *All That Fall* achieves “a space that is almost entirely free of sensory distractions, allowing us to listen to the play with a profound concentration” (2011) while Joyce McMillan hailed the production as creating “a marriage of theatre and installation that seems to capture the hard, loving and implacable soul of the work, while giving it a new theatrical life” (2013).

Finally, playwright-poet-performers Felicia Olusanya (FeliSpeaks) and Dagogo Hart’s *Boy Child* premiered at Dublin Fringe Festival in 2018 and reflected an emerging cross-pollination between spoken word, poetry and rap in Ireland today with theatre. FeliSpeaks and Hart are leaders in this area and have founded the WeAreGriot Collective, a poetry performance/production collective along with Samuel Yakura with their work demonstrating that these kinds of approaches will be a key site for the continuing evolution of contemporary Irish theatre and performance. Rose Ugoalah positions this group as “part of a generation of Irish artists who are using their unique perspectives to draw influences from their indigenous cultures and mix that with their current experiences to tell a distinct story,” with Olusanya herself observing that in *Boy Child* there was “heavy Nigerian influence in the work without distracting from the beauty of the poetry” (Ugoalah 2018). Yakura’s own one-man show, *The Perfect Immigrant*, which premiered at the 2023 Dublin Fringe Festival before going on a national tour, also blended semi-autobiographical theatrical storytelling with sections of poetry performance, drawing on his own champion slam poetry experience in both Nigeria and Ireland to cast a critical eye back on Irish culture since emigrating here in 2018 for postgraduate study. *A Perfect Immigrant* reflects on the challenges of family dynamics, masculinity and remaining connected to home from a Nigerian/African-Irish perspective. In reflecting on the meaning of his show within the contemporary Irish theatre landscape and its enthusiastic reception in three sold-out runs in Dublin, Yakura observed that “there is a noticeable lack of representation in the arts and in audience attendance” (Zapryanova 2023) which this performance tackled head-on.

FeliSpeaks went on to have a work in progress in the 2021 Dublin Theatre Festival entitled *Dubh* (which is the Irish-language word for Black and which was defined as “blackness” on the poster), for which they collaborated with Poetry Ireland and individual artists including “music producer Fehdah, singer songwriter Tolü Makay and filmmaker Zithelo Bobby Mthombeni” to stage a work-in-progress “visual poetry album inspired by conversations with people from migrant and minority backgrounds in Ireland” (Dublin Theatre Festival 2020). The work-in-progress showing foregrounded FeliSpeaks as a performer and delved into themes of shame, pleasure, desire, gender and femininity through a highly visual, surreal and physical performance style with movement direction by Andrea Williams who also performed in the work along with Walé Adebusuyi and Tolü Makay on vocals with sound design by Fehdah. Crucially for ongoing engagement with FeliSpeak’s work within contemporary

Irish theatre and performance studies, this theatre-situated performance must be read in dialogue with FeliSpeaks's projects with many of these collaborators across the medium of music videos ("Tough Meat," 2022), short film ("They," 2022, directed by Ellius Grace featuring Jafaris and FeliSpeaks) and even a web series with singer-songwriter Tolü Makay that features the collaborators in "vulnerable and honest discussions about various topics" ranging "from friendship, to trauma and toxicity, to entrepreneurship" ("The Tolu and Feli Show," 2022). FeliSpeak's vanguard cross-medium body of artistic work that engages theatre but moves fluidly in and out of this genre signals a further proliferation of what "theatremaker" can imply for individuals' practice as an umbrella term within contemporary (Irish) theatre today.

The Republic's Arts Council also released its first two policies on cultural diversity and the arts in Ireland during this period (*Cultural Diversity and Arts*, 2010, and *Human Rights, Equality and Diversity Strategy*, 2019) with the Northern Irish Arts Council *Intercultural Arts Strategy* appearing in 2011 (Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2011). These policy/strategy measures and documents recognised the unprecedentedly increased racial and ethnic diversity of the Republic and the North post-1990s, a profound period of demographic shift on the island and also considered the accommodation of other kinds of diverse artists and audiences in state-level arts funding and arts provision. The Arts Council's *Human Rights, Equality and Diversity Strategy* forcefully stated that

...within the arts in Ireland, many inequities still exist and ...there is a substantial number of people who continue to experience barriers to engaging with and participating in the arts because of their socio-economic background, their ethnicity or religion, their sexual orientation or gender identity, their family status, their age, their membership of the Traveller Community, or through lack of accommodation of a disability. (2019a, 2)

These policies' all-island focus on mobilising diverse artists and audiences seeks to expand representation within the work that is being made as well as access to that work-enabling approaches that range from the participatory/community to the professional or somewhere in-between as we have discussed above in the work of many contemporary Irish theatre and performance artists who trouble these distinctions. We examine the nuances of these particular policies in Chapters 9 and 11 where we focus on the body and interculturalism in detail.

Overtly political/politicised theatre too played a key role during this period as it has in all chapters in the historical section of this book and between 2009 and 2022 often directly intersected with political campaigns and initiatives, intentionally and strategically blurring the boundaries between theatre and real life. Intensified attention on the experiences of women and children incarcerated in Irish church and/or state-run institutions was a major focus with key productions of this period including journalist Mary Raftery's

documentary-drama *No Escape* (2010) which distilled the Ryan Report into an ensemble performance on the Abbey's Peacock stage as part of their 2010 Darkest Corner Series (see Chapter 8 for an extended discussion of this paradigm shifting series), ANU Productions' landmark site-specific immersive production *Laundry* mounted in a former Magdalene Laundry (2011), Brokentalkers' *Blue Boy*, a documentary dance theatre work based on the testimony of survivors of reformatory and industrial schools (2011, see "Landmark Plays and Productions" below), Mephisto Productions' 2013 revival of Patricia Burke Brogan's landmark 1992 play *Eclipsed* and the Abbey Theatre's *Home* (2021) which was made in collaboration with survivors of Mother and Baby Homes and featured their testimonies read by actors, commented loudly, often and directly on these histories, frequently produced in collaborations with survivors and/or directly featuring their testimonies.

There was a spate of limited attention as well on the wider European refugee crisis with some reference to ongoing critiques of the Republic's direct provision system for housing those seeking asylum post-2016 through productions including Brokentalkers' *This Beach* (2016), Fionnuala Gyga's *Hostel 16* (2016), Outlandish Theatre Platform's *Megalomaniac* (2016), Martin Sharry's *Playboyz* (2017) and Oonagh Murphy and Maeve Stone's *Mouth of a Shark* (2017), a documentary musical created for THISISPOPBABY's "Where We Live" Festival as part of the Dublin St. Patrick's Festival which juxtaposed accounts of LGBTIQ+ Irish migrants from the 1970s/1980s with contemporary experiences of LGBTQ individuals who have sought asylum in Ireland due to political persecution as a result of their sexual orientation (see McIvor 2023, forthcoming). In Chapter 9, we examine particularly the role of Panti Bliss/Rory O'Neill's body of theatrical and activist work in relationship to the marriage equality referendum and campaign.

And finally, from 2015 onwards, #WakingTheFeminists transformed the Irish theatre and wider creative industries' engagement with issues of gender, privilege, access and theatrical creation in the Republic and the North. This "campaign for equality for women in Irish theatre" (Donohue et al. 2017, 5) emerged following a backlash against the Abbey Theatre's October 2015 announcement of their centenary "Waking the Nation" programme under the artistic direction of Fiach MacConghail which featured "90 per cent male authors and 70 per cent male directors" (Haughton 2018a, 347). As Miriam Haughton recounts, "[a]s questions sprang from artists and the media regarding the gender (im)balance," MacConghail's initial response, a "glib, hurtful, and telling Tweet, 'Them the breaks,' lit a fire" in the sector which translated into collective and sustained action that ultimately created impact far outside the Abbey and even the Irish theatre sector after gaining national and international support (Haughton 2018a, 347). #WakingTheFeminists defined itself as a one-year campaign, focusing during that time on providing benchmark theatre statistics in their 2017 report *Gender Counts: An analysis of gender in Irish theatre 2006–2015* but pushing for ongoing statistical reporting and accountability by boards and arts organisations, a call

they echoed in their 2020 five-year interim report (Murphy et al. 2020). #WakingTheFeminists led to a ripple effect in the wider Irish creative industries with cognate initiatives created by Screen Ireland and spin-off initiatives including, for example, Sounding the Feminists which is “an Irish-based, voluntary-led collective of composers, sound artists, performers, musicologists, critics, promoters, industry professionals, organisations, and individuals, committed to promoting and publicising the creative work of female musicians” (Sounding the Feminists, n.d.). #WakingTheFeminist’s 2020 follow-up report, *5 Years On: Gender in Irish Theatre—An Interim View*, reported that “the percentage of work being written/created by women has increased across all organisations included in the original research, who also submitted figures for the period since... by an average increase of 23%” (Murphy et al. 2020, 3). The Abbey Theatre, whose programming missteps catalysed the furore, reported improvements in “female representation across every category” measured by the #WTF methodology which includes directors, authors, cast, set designers, lighting designers, sound designers and costume designers (Murphy et al. 2020, 3).

Key Practitioners and Companies

ANU Productions

ANU Productions was created in 2009 and is led by “Theatre Maker Louise Lowe” and “Visual Artist Owen Boss” working closely also with Producer Matthew Smyth and Creative Producer Lynette Moran since 2013 and 2014, respectively (ANU Productions, n.d.) Their extended collaboration explicitly aimed at pushing the boundaries of theatre practice is reminiscent of Pan Pan’s Gavin Quinn and Aedín Cosgrove as director and scenographer, but Lowe, Boss, Smyth and Moran go even further in exploding boundaries between artistic disciplines. They describe their work as “an interdisciplinary approach to performance / installation that cross-pollinates visual art, dance and theatre in an intensely collaborative way” (ANU Productions, n.d.). ANU’s work is self-divided into several categories including theatre, gallery installations and museum interpretation/commemoration—a system of classification that emerged in recognition of Lowe and Boss’s key specialisms (theatre vs. gallery) but also due to the extraordinary number of state and local commissions that ANU began to receive after the groundbreaking success of their *Monto Cycle* which included *World’s End Lane* (2010/2011), *Laundry* (2011), *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012) and *Vardo* (2014), sited in Dublin’s north inner city and spanning one hundred years of history in this area. Their typically site-specific and immersive works for small audiences are created in partnership with a rotating (but often recurring) ensemble of multidisciplinary collaborators and performers from within the arts or from community and/or local heritage groups.

ANU are arguably the most critically lauded company of the 2010s in Ireland with influential *Irish Times* commentator and public intellectual Fintan

O’Toole remarking that their Monto Cycle (*World’s End Lane*, *Laundry*, *The Boys of Foley Street*, and *Vardo*) initiated a “new kind of alternative national theatre, exploring the legacy of coercive institutionalisation, sexual exploitation, poverty social collapse, and the heroin epidemic” (2013). ANU’s approach to exploring these legacies is to emphasise histories of regular people as well as better-known iconic historical figures like revolutionary feminist and politician Constance Markievicz.

ANU’s evolving history as a company has been greatly shaped by their creation in the years leading up to and now encompassing Ireland’s Decade of Centenaries, which we introduced at the beginning of this chapter. ANU were invited to participate in several state commemorations including the National State Commemoration of the Lockout (2013) and the Cumann na mBan National Commemoration (2014), in addition to being commissioned by state-funded or run institutions including Dublin City Council, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Irish Heritage Trust, the National Museum of Ireland, the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, and the National Archives of Ireland.

Across this broad range of commission and performance contexts, ANU’s work is unified by the company’s (1) signature aesthetics (immersive, site-specific or responsive one-to-one or small group performances making use of performance art, installation and dance/movement practices), (2) a topical focus on grassroots histories of individuals and communities utilising archival and interview research, (3) ongoing work with a recognisable cohort of performers over time as well as other collaborators behind the scenes and (4) a focus on overlapping or linked historical events related to Ireland’s Decade of Centenaries that push on history’s connection and relevance in the now. Their volume of work from 2015 to immediately pre-pandemic is particularly staggering and also evidences an increasing presentation of their work in non-live performance forms such as art installation (including retrospectives of previously presented work) and short film even pre-pandemic. From 2013 onwards, ANU also began to make work abroad in Manchester focused on diasporic Irish and other local histories: *Angel Meadow* (2013) and *On Corporation Street* (2016). Given the extraordinary impact and significance of ANU’s work on contemporary Irish theatre, we re-engage with them as one of the case studies under “Landmark plays and productions” below.

Irish-Language Theatre in the West of Ireland: Fíbin, Branar, Moonfish Theatre, An Taibhdhearc and Garraí an Ghiorria

This cohort of companies and projects (including An Taibhdhearc, Ireland’s national Irish-language theatre) are treated under the same heading not to homogenise their practices as Irish-language artists working in the West of Ireland but rather to make evident the range of practices and aesthetic approaches that characterises Irish-language theatremaking in Ireland today. The critical mass of these companies in the West of Ireland adjacent to

or located within the Gaeltacht reflects the concentration of Irish-speaking communities in this region but the mission of each company is driven by the desire to transform theatre generally and not Irish-language theatre specifically.

Both Fíbin (founded 2003) and Branar Téatar do Pháistí (founded 2001) create works for young people. Branar's mission as led by artistic Director Marc Mac Lochlainn and Executive Producer Joanne Beirne is exclusively focused on art for young people and strongly driven by the conviction that their theatrical work should “advance children’s right to be creative.” This means that Branar embraces an advocacy side to their work as well with their Branarfesto stating outright their believe that “[w]e believe every that every child should see a play at least once a year” and that they “will do our best to make that happen for children in Ireland” (Branar, n.d.). Fíbin produce “new writing as well as classic plays,” catering often specifically to school-going audiences and re-interpreting canonical classics such as Máiréad Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail* for an abridged restaging (premiered 2016) which brings a “seeming outdated plot into the context of modern society using, puppets, masks, engaging visuals and physical performances to appeal particularly to a younger audience, making it current and more accessible” (Fíbin, n.d.). Branar, under the artistic direction of founder Marc Mac Lochlainn, frequently develops its work through international partnerships including with Dekkoart theatre (Norway), Teatre Refleksion (Denmark), and Starcatchers (Scotland). Their work ranges from original productions in a range of formats such as their 2020 “immersive theatre event, *Sruth na Teanga*, which “imaginatively realises the evolution and life of the Irish language” (Branar 2021) to non-verbal adaptations works of the internationally popular Irish children’s author Oliver Jeffers’s work (*The Way Back Home*, co-production with Teatre Refleksion, premiered 2014, and *How to Catch a Star*, 2018) (Branar 2021). Their work has been presented throughout Ireland, Europe, the USA, China and Japan with *The Way Back Home* even enjoying a limited run on Broadway in New York City in 2017 followed by a return to the Great White Way with their show *Grand Soft Day* in 2023 (*Connacht Tribune* 2017, 2023).

Moonfish Theatre, co-founded by Ionia and Máiréad Ní Chróinín, describe themselves as “a collaborative ensemble that blends language, story-telling, music and dance with puppetry, interactive technology and light” (Moonfish Theatre, n.d.). They create work in both Irish and English for young people and adults—classics, new writing and original devised work—including, for example, adaptations of Joseph O’Connor’s acclaimed novels *Star of the Sea* (premiered in 2015 and has toured internationally) and *Redemption Falls* (premiered 2019 as a co-production between co-production between Moonfish Theatre, The Abbey Theatre and Galway International Arts Festival, in association with the Town Hall Theatre). All three companies produce visually arresting theatre that makes use of puppets, masks, animation, dance, movement and song to work in and across the Irish language in the theatre with some use of English within the productions or as subtitles.

More recently, Garraí an Ghiorria formed as “collective of multidisciplinary artists working in the Irish language on the western seaboard,” containing “artists across many forms of theatre practice” who include but are not limited to Áine Moynihan, Anne McCabe, Beartla Ó Flatharta, Caitríona Ní Chonaola, Colm Heffernan and Marianne Ní Chinnéide (Giorria Theatre, n.d.). They participated in the Abbey’s 5 × 5 residency in 2018 (developing *Téada, Rópaí agus Slabhraí* (*Strings, Ropes and Chains*)) and were also featured as part of the Abbey’s *Dear Ireland III* in December 2020. Garraí an Ghiorria and the other groups as part of this cohort of *Dear Ireland* (see below for more information in section on Graham and McLaren) were singled out as “disenfranchised and marginalised” and asked “What does it feel like to be you, right now, in Ireland?” (Abbey Theatre 2021a). Garraí an Ghiorria responded by creating a piece about the effect of Covid-19 on rural Irish-speaking communities, a focus that exposed the intersection of language, class and geography in this community’s experience of being “disenfranchised and marginalised” in line with the other members of their *Dear Ireland III* cohort who were representing communities or organisations focused on social challenges like domestic violence, homelessness or mental health (Adapt Domestic Abuse Service, Simon Community, Samaritans) or minority statuses including race and/or ethnicity and sexuality (Africa Centre, AkiDwaA, Transgender Equality Network). Yet, despite being Garraí an Ghiorria repeatedly singled out as part of this cohort through the Abbey’s recent theatrical inclusion initiatives (5 × 5 and *Dear Ireland*), use of the Irish language as a first language is not mentioned with the Arts Council’s most recent *Human Rights, Equality and Diversity* strategy (see above for discussion of this policy). At the time of writing, the Arts Council is still working to release a new Irish-language arts strategy, the first bespoke policy of its kind with this area previously being provided across other broader strategy and/or policy documents for the arts and/or Irish language generally (Beartla Ó Flatharta. 2023. Message to author, December 22). This follows the creation of the first Irish-language literature policy, *Supporting Writing in Irish*, launched in December 2022 (Arts Council 2022b). Consultations for the broader Irish-language arts policy from practitioners, audiences or those “interested in the Irish-language arts” closed in December 2019 but the new national strategy was still unreleased at the time of writing (Arts Council 2019b). Ultimately, Garraí an Ghiorria’s work has been key in exposing that theatre made by communities with Irish as their first language and/or in Irish must be examined as interrelated to rather than in parallel with how the Irish theatre and arts community conceptualises of diversity and inclusion in a demographically transformed and now-post-Covid-19 contemporary Irish society. Otherwise, the contributions and rights of Irish-language artists risks being obscured and even disappeared in a twenty-first-century intercultural Irish context instead of their expertise being mined as well as Irish-language arts practice benefitting from the intercultural contributions of a new and unprecedentedly racially and ethnically diverse Irish generation.

Teya Sepinuck and Theatre of Witness

Teya Sepinuck is an American dancer and therapist who spent four years between 2009 and 2013 funded by “the Derry Playhouse, Londonderry City Council, and an EU Peace III Grant (2012–2014) to work with the Derry Playhouse and Holywell Trust in Derry/Londonderry city to produce a cycle of verbatim plays dealing with the legacy of the Troubles conflict” (Pine 2020, 97). She ultimately produced four new works with residents of Northern Ireland who were survivors of and directly implicated in the Troubles or new arrivals-refugees seeking asylum in Northern Ireland. These works included: *We Carried Your Secrets* (2009), *I Once Knew a Girl* (2010), *Release* (2012) and *Sanctuary* (2013). As Lisa Fitzpatrick details:

...the stories include near escapes from bomb attacks, the murder of loved ones, various paramilitary or military activities, and in the final show, the testimony of refugees seeking asylum in Northern Ireland. The multimedia performances, which include film footage, live and recorded music, song, movement sequences and puppets, appeal directly to the audiences’ emotions through the evocation of shared memories, shared grief and hope for the future. (2018, 63)

Sepinuck says of her Theatre of Witness approach which she began developing in 1986 with a project about ageing that “the purpose of this form of theatre is to give voice to people who have been marginalized, forgotten or who are invisible in the larger society, and to invite audiences to bear witness to issues of suffering, redemption and social justice” (2013, 14). While other Northern Irish companies like Tinderbox Theatre, Kabosh Productions, Prime Cut Productions and Big Telly Theatre Company have consistently addressed post-conflict themes in their work during this same period, Sepinuck’s approach of working directly with community members and featuring them in the performance differentiates her work as a coherent approach despite a long history of community arts practice in Northern Ireland working across communities and other landmark projects including *The Wedding Community Play* (1999), created by Marie Jones, Martin Lynch, with the company led by artistic Director Jo Egan. Quite notably, Sepinuck’s Theatre of Witness residency has garnered significant critical attention from Fitzpatrick, Emilie Pine, Miriam Haughton and Mark Phelan among others whereas analysis of the longer history of Northern Irish community arts practice which employed similar practices working with and between the communities at the intersection of community and professional practice since the 1970s has received more limited attention comparatively with the important exception of Bill McDonnell’s *Theatre of the Troubles: Theatre, Resistance and Liberation in Ireland* which is an extended study of the emergence of “popular” (i.e. grassroots and community-based) theatre projects in Republican and Loyalist communities between the 1970s and early 2000s. That being said, Sepinuck’s explicit mission to put victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence onstage together after co-developing the work in the three post-conflict focused shows is

unique within this longer history. And indeed Sepinuck’s status as an outsider perhaps granted her both a different kind of relationship with her collaborators as non-implicated in the conflict personally, as well as the cachet of her Theatre of Witness methodology’s international track record. Individuals who collaborated in the making of these works were employed during the process of developing and then performing in the work despite their lack of previous performance experience. Miriam Haughton observes that Sepinuck’s work is “not motivated by aesthetic or dramatic objects. The goals are the fruits gathered from the process itself, not the performance to be packaged and purchased in the typical neoliberal framework for cultural consumption of entertainment” (2018, 168). Sepinuck’s background as a therapist also informed how the experience is mediated for an audience, as Emilie Pine details, “counsellors are present at all shows, and every show is followed by a postshow forum to ensure maximum support as well as full participation” (2020, 97). But Pine pushes on the work’s truly transformative aspect noting:

Sepinuck’s dramaturgy works to reconcile victims and perpetrators through a common emphasis on pain and empathy; yet the unity created by Theater of Witness shows during the moment of the production and its immediate aftermath as the audience remediates its meaning, is itself vulnerable, not least because of the absence of political unity outside the theatre— as suggested by the repeated breakdown of a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland and the continuation of sectarian violence, both in terms of actual physical violence and the cultural violence of a sectarian school system. (2020, 114)

With this critique, Pine is pushing particularly on Theatre of Witness’s claim that the Northern Irish theatre project actually delivered on its aim of developing “key institutional capacity for a shared society” (2020, 114), a promise that no theatre project would be likely to fulfil on its own. This kind of ambitious overclaiming for the impact of socially engaged and collaboratively created theatre projects is indeed a trend to watch and check in contemporary Irish theatre as these practices continue to multiply across the island as this chapter demonstrates. Nevertheless, Sepinuck’s facilitation of her Theatre of Witness process across these four productions in the late 2000s and 2010s is an important case study in the increasing centrality of community-engaged collaborative work in contemporary Irish theatre and modelled compelling if overambitious aims for the ongoing role theatre and performance might uniquely play in Northern Ireland’s ongoing post-peace process quest for sustainable social cohesion, particularly with a growth in minority ethnic groups including but not limited to refugees, as we will explore in further detail in Chapter 11.

Landmark Plays and Productions

Brokentalkers, The Blue Boy (2011)

Brokentalkers is the name of the “creative partnership of Feidlim Cannon and Gary Keegan” who describe themselves as making “formally ambitious work that defies categorization” and rejects “ideologies of text-based theatre” and is often made in partnership with “people who do not usually work in the theatre but who bring an authenticity to the work that is compelling,” working directly with the participatory arts sector (Brokentalkers, “About,” n.d.). As McIvor observes elsewhere:

Brokentalkers’ mission involves searching for a new performance language that can be constructed only out of the larger broken pieces of a larger Irish social history, which necessitates breaking down the drama as the representative formal genre of the Irish theatre. (2013, 41)

2011’s *The Blue Boy* is exemplary in this regard as it mixes modes of theatrical storytelling evocatively to confront “the experiences of men and women who were incarcerated as children in Catholic residential care institutions” (Brokentalkers, “*The Blue Boy*,” n.d.). Since premiering in 2011 at the Dublin Theatre Festival as a co-production with Dublin Theatre Festival, LÓKAL Theatre Festival Reykjavík, Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival Groningen, Korjaamo Theatre/Stage Festival Helsinki, and Cork Midsummer Festival, Brokentalkers’ *The Blue Boy* has toured internationally.

Produced in the almost immediate aftermath of the release of both the Murphy and Ryan Reports as discussed earlier, *The Blue Boy* weaves together three primary strands of theatrical storytelling. One, there is the personal story of Keegan growing up alongside Artane Industrial School and his grandfather’s work as a local coroner including his regular removal of children’s bodies from the school. Second, *The Blue Boy* draws on recorded interviews with survivors and archival footage from the period, including that of the acclaimed Artane Band (which still plays for Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) national matches as a community band, but was comprised of boys from the school up until 1969). Finally, there are masked dancers dressed as schoolchildren and operating a child puppet while performing against Seán Millar’s haunting score with choreography by Eddie Kay. Millar’s score features “repetitive musical structures, a returning drone, and a haunting chorus of children’s voices” as the “musical landscape captures the sensation of a relentless return of the past and translates this effect into an auditory experience that denies the audience and the dancers any escape” (McIvor 2013, 49). As Roísín O’Gorman concurs:

The juxtaposition of the concentrated and extreme movement vocabulary and haunting sound score, with the on-screen documentary footage highlights the gap between social discourses of the civic pride of the work in the school and the social complicity in the silencing of the abuses endemic in the industrial school system. (2018, 70)

The Blue Boy's performance layers sit intentionally uneasily beside one another, and these layers interact associatively and imagistically rather than narratively throughout the performance. *The Blue Boy* does not attempt to be comprehensive or even *comprehensible* in its treatment of the legacies of trauma and resilience indexed in these reports and the histories of individuals attached to them. Rather, the uneasy relationship of these layers of testimony, story and information to one another in the performance intentionally mirror the unresolved and festering status of these histories in contemporary Irish life.

As a concrete example of this dynamic in performance, Keegan's matter-of-fact storytelling opens the play with an object, an extendable slide ruler he played with as a child. He begins *The Blue Boy* by telling the story of this ruler, and changing it into different animals for the audience—a giraffe, a horse. He soon reveals that this ruler was a tool of his grandfather's trade as an undertaker, one that he specifically used to measure the bodies of children when called to the Artane Industrial School. Keegan's use of this everyday object and account of his family's and geographical proximity to the school including his grandfather's morbid and frequent business with the children there vividly captures the way in which mundane and extreme relationships to these institutions were part of the fabric of normal life for a lot of Irish people without its gravity fully being grasped. By animating his family's own experience through his performative strategy in unfolding their history first as a lighthearted and then as a darker anecdote, Keegan and the production of *Blue Boy* as a whole provoked audiences to consider the often mundane and everyday nature of systemic state violence and to look more deeply into the complicities they may too share with state-controlled abusive histories. As Dominic Campbell hauntingly noted in a programme note commissioned for the *Blue Boy's* premiere: "Haven't we all these stories in Ireland?," an uncomfortable recognition that the production confronts its audience with dramaturgically at every turn in the action. As McIvor previously concluded of *The Blue Boy*, among Brokentalkers' other works, this production ultimately "issues an invitation for (Irish) audiences to be brave together on a collective journey that can offer no guarantees of stable form or genre to guide them" (2013, 55), a theatrical invitation that can ultimately only create uncomfortable theatrical space for witnessing rather than resolving the processing of the collective and individual traumas dealt with in the work.

ANU Productions, Dublin Tenement Experience—Living the Lockout (2013) and THIRTEEN-Constituents (2013)

We expand our focus on ANU in this chapter through a brief discussion of links between two of their projects in 2013 out of recognition readers will have been unlikely to experience their work due to the time-limited nature of their projects and small audience sizes. Significantly their *Dublin Tenement Experience—Living the Lockout*, created in partnership with Dublin City Council, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Irish Heritage Trust is also available for viewing freely online at the time of writing (Irish Congress of Trade Unions

2013). Briefly discussing key performance moments from these two performances in dialogue with one another will give readers better insight into the ongoing call and response between ANU's works over time which is a key feature of how they make and remake meaning across their body of work over time. Both projects were created in observance of the 100th anniversary of the Dublin Lockout, Ireland's largest and most serious industrial dispute centring on tram workers and the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. During a time of debate regarding Irish Home Rule and widespread poverty among working classes, this 1913 conflict and ensuing bloodshed is a flashpoint of Irish labour history. Creating work five years after the contemporary Republic's catastrophic economic downturn and ongoing austerity measures, ANU sought to collapse the relationship between Ireland's past and present and re-animate the issues at the centre of the Dublin Lockout (specifically financial and worker precarity) in the context of the contemporary Irish moment. *Dublin Tenement Experience—Living the Lockout* was presented in July and August 2013 as a site-specific performance free and open to the general public located at 14 Henrietta Street, a building that served as a home for Georgian colonial elites (1700s), the professional upper class (1800s) and finally, as a tenement building (1900s). ANU were given access to the building during a period of refurbishment for use as a museum (which finally opened to the public in 2018). ANU's intention with *Living the Lockout* was "to create an experience that explored what it was really like to live with (and inside) the lockout" (ANU Productions 2013). As such, it focused on the conflict between two brothers on opposite sides of the struggle and the wife of one of the brothers who has a small child. *Living the Lockout* chronicled "the high-octane revolutionary ideals of the young striking brothers at the start of the Lockout, through the bleakest of Christmas times for a young mother and finally" portrayed "the prospect of the strikers giving in and returning to work in January (albeit with the spirit of change in their hearts)" (Lowe 2013). *Living the Lockout* captured both the idealism and promise of the period, as well as the material difficulties that crippled families, represented particularly through performer Laura Murray's portrayal of her struggles as a young mother. The performance powerfully brought history full circle by making use of letters from the performer's own grandmother during the period who had lived in similar circumstances. While *Living the Lockout* offered no answers and ended in a standoff between the brothers—one returning to work, the other staying on strike—ANU further revised moments of this performance to offer even fewer answers when presented in a revised version as *Constituent(s)*, one part of their thirteen-part cycle *THIRTEEN* (which built over thirteen days in September adding one new performance a day) during the 2013 Dublin Fringe Festival.

Constituent(s) immediately and directly reprised the optimistic opening moment of *Living the Lockout* where performer Lloyd Cooney sang "Who Fears to Wear the Red Hand Badge" before enthusing to the gathered

audience about the Jim Larkins' vision as leader of the Irish General Transport and Worker's Union. In this performance reprise, Cooney was actually now performing on a historic tram car from William Martin Murphy's tram company whose working conditions sparked the Lockout on the grounds of Collins Barracks, a former army base, now museum, which housed both British and then Irish forces and is believed to perhaps be the longest serving military base in the world (National Museum of Ireland, n.d.). Cooney's performance is then interrupted by actor Laura Murray, who plays the character of a contemporary woman and mother (after playing the historical mother figure in *Living the Lockout*), and is joined by her partner, played by Thomas Reilly. They are designated as working class through their dress and accent. Reilly and Murray engage in a heated and ultimately violent conversation about the care of their daughter that begins with language then becoming physical, first concrete then abstract, (notably echoing the dance vocabulary of ANU's earlier ground-breaking production *Laundry*), and Reilly's management of their limited finances, particularly his decision to take out a high-interest loan. These characters are portrayed as interrupting Cooney's performance rather than being a planned part of it. Murray directly asked the audience why they were watching a play, and what they think doing so will actually accomplish. *Constituent(s)* ultimately concluded with the couple leaving and Cooney apologised for not being able to fulfil his obligation to perform for the audience. When viewed alongside one another, these performances might seem to actively work against each other conceptually and maybe even undercut ANU's central conviction that performance making is an important method through which to recover and comment on forgotten or marginalised Irish histories in the context of the Irish Decade of Centenaries as they do across the body of their work. However, ANU's embrace of this confrontational stance (why are you watching a play instead of taking action) also opens up a space for the audiences as co-creators of the work to become more conscious within the then often overwhelming context of ongoing centenary events, celebrations and performance and question whether or not this overload actually created true critical space for reflection or action. *Constituent(s)* confronted audiences with the very direct question of what they think they are doing through their participation in these kinds of events and performances and by linking *Constituent(s)* so directly to *Living the Lockout*, they also animated an opportunity for knowing audience members to perhaps become more conscious of the perhaps even conflicted and conflicted meanings that may emerge across and between the range of commemorative activities that they participated in over this period. ANU's staging of a failed commemorative performance through *Constituent(s)* even while remaining centrally implicated then and afterwards in a number of official state and local commemorative events during the Decade of Centenaries uniquely models what it means to be both inside and outside structures of state power as artists. While *Constituent(s)* ultimately casts the audience as perhaps inadequate participants in their own contemporary political struggles even while reflecting consciously on the history of

the lockdown, the performers and ANU as company implicate themselves as well in this failure. Ultimately, through *Constituent(s)*' intentional commentary on *Living the Lockout*, ANU are not just questioning the power of theatre and theatre audiences to intervene in contemporary politics—why are you watching a play—but confronting the value of commemoration itself as a pastime if it cannot inspire direct debate and engagement with the contemporary manifestations of historical legacies such as the Lockout in working class and other communities in Ireland today.

Druid Theatre, DruidShakespeare (2015)

2015's *DruidShakespeare* in a co-production with Lincoln Center Festival NYC marked a new spin for the renowned Galway company on their by then internationally renowned epic cycle approach to productions of Irish theatre classics performed in repertory by the Druid ensemble. Previous landmark cycles included *DruidSynge* (2005, featuring productions of all six of John Millington Synge's plays) *DruidMurphy* (2012, featuring Tom Murphy's *Conversations on a Homecoming*, *A Whistle in the Dark* and *Famine*) and most recently *DruidGregory* in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020, featuring Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, *Hyacinth*, *Halvey*, *The Gaol Gate*, *McDonough's Wife* and *Cathleen ní Houlihan* written with W. B. Yeats). Druid's use of the cycle format provides an ideal showcase for the company's central ethos of the ensemble, formalised in the company's creation of the Druid permanent acting ensemble in 2013, "a core group of some of Ireland's leading actors who work closely with Druid to shape the future direction of the company's work" (Druid Theatre, n.d.). The acting ensemble currently includes Marie Mullen, Derbhle Crotty, Garrett Lombard, Aaron Monaghan, Rory Nolan, Aisling O'Sullivan, and Marty Rea, in addition to designers (including Frances O'Connor, James F. Ingalls) and other production personnel they work with on an ongoing basis, with Garry Hynes and Mullen's inaugural working relationship remaining nonetheless in their words at Druid's "heart" (Druid Theatre, n.d.).

Significantly, *DruidShakespeare* also commemorated the company's 40-year anniversary, a bold statement by Ireland's most enduring independent ensemble-based theatre company as they took on arguably the most universally renowned playwright in the English language in this epic cycle format. Cross-gender casting and showcasing of the Druid ensemble was also central to their concept with Derbhle Crotty as Henry IV, Aisling O'Sullivan as Henry V, John Olohan as Mistress Quickly and Marie Mullen in a variety of roles across the cycle including Northumberland, the Lord Chief Justice and Silence. Emer McHugh argues that this casting strategy overtly "uses gender to engage with the history of Druid's repertoire" (n.d.). And as Patrick Lonergan has observed, the gender-blind casting of Derbhle Crotty as Henry IV and Aisling O'Sullivan as Henry V was particularly symbolically notable in the year that #WakingTheFeminists later erupted, but it also indexed a longer history of cross-gender casting in Irish Shakespeare performance as Fanny Furnival was

the first woman ever recorded as playing Hamlet at Dublin’s Smock Alley theatre in 1741 (Lonergan 2018a) (Fig. 6.1).

The *DruidShakespeare* cycle embraced earthiness and dark shadows literally as in Frances O’Connor’s peaty soil-based playing space and the company’s visceral and frequently gutturally charged performances, with Brantley pronouncing the cycle “a lean, purposeful organism that is built for speed” with this “organism” of the production doubling “as history itself, casting precisely patterned shadows as it moves” (2015). The full cycle ran approximately six hours if viewed in full, and “the production alternated between a presentation over a full day or across two evening performances” (Irish Theatre Playography, n.d.). Emer McHugh perceptively identifies that *DruidShakespeare’s* “set design recalls and ghosts their previous marathon theatrical events” as the “peat moss floor that becomes a key aspect of *DruidShakespeare’s* set design was also crucial to the sets used for *DruidSynge* and *DruidMurphy*” (n.d.). Peter Crawley also perceptively picks up on this throughline in his *Irish Times* review noting that Hynes’ treatment “holds satisfying echoes of Synge in both its earthy aesthetic, fleet progression and more outlandish characterisations” (2015).

DruidShakespeare may first appear in some ways a departure for Druid from working with “Irish” playwrights in this cycle format particularly on the momentous occasion of their 40th anniversary as a company. However, they



Fig. 6.1 Derbhle Crotty as Henry IV and Aisling O’Sullivan as Henry V in *DruidShakespeare* (Photo: Matthew Thompson)

engaged playwright Mark O’Rowe to adapt *Richard II*, *Henry IV: Part 1*, *Henry IV: Part 2*, and *Henry V*, rooting their approach to the Shakespearean cycle firmly within contemporary traditions of Irish playwriting. *DruidShakespeare* also built on their own more distant production history of engagement with Shakespeare (*Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Garry Hynes, 1981/1982) and *As You Like It* (directed by Maelíosa Stafford, 1999), engaging with the Bard it seems roughly every 15–20 years.

DruidShakespeare toured around Ireland after premiering in Galway at the Mick Lally Theatre and to New York City’s Lincoln Center as part of their co-production with the *New York Times*’ Ben Brantley ultimately praising the cycle as possessing a “fierce, revitalizing clarity and momentum to the undertaking” and highlighting the “sum effect” of the cross-gender casting of the kings particularly as “not distorting but illuminating, setting off a steady chorus of ‘Eurekas’ in your head” (2015).

We attended the inaugural run of *DruidShakespeare* in Galway, where audience members began the performance outside of the Mick Lally theatre watching performers such as Aisling O’Sullivan, Marie Mullen and others warm up and prepare in the archaeological remains of the Hall of the Red Earl, a set of thirteenth century ruins and the oldest recovered from medieval Galway, before moving into the playing space of the theatre. Between plays, audience members emerged to a lobby filled with graves of murdered characters that multiplied in number over the course of the six hours and were able to avail of boxed meals from local caterers as well as beverages during a long interval between the two parts of the cycle. Our local experience of *DruidShakespeare*’s inaugural run is relevant to closing out this brief case study as Druid’s attention to these local flourishes and historical sites that made the most of resignifying local landscapes and environments (including the theatre lobby) that long-time audience members and city or local residents would be very familiar with was very deliberate and especially meaningful on the occasion of the company’s 40th birthday. Druid’s ability to scale between the local and the universal, the national and the international and the particular and the epic distinguish them among contemporary Irish theatre companies and their approach to *DruidShakespeare*’s inaugural run in Galway and subsequent national and international tour played upon every bit of that expansive range knowingly and boldly.

Dead Centre, To Be a Machine (Version 1.0) (2020)

Dead Centre’s *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)* premiered during the 2020 Dublin Theatre Festival and was described as a “live audience upload experience,” intended to be consumed online and requiring ticket buyers to upload videos and images of themselves prior to attending the online performance (Dead Centre, “*To Be a Machine*,” n.d.). Dead Centre are a theatre company based between Dublin and London founded in 2012, helmed currently by Bush Moukarzel, Ben Kidd and producer Mags Keohane. They work with “a

close team of collaborators who work with us on an ongoing basis—writers, technicians, inventors, artists, designers and performers” (Dead Centre, “About Us,” n.d.). They tour internationally “including to the USA, Hong Kong, China, Australia, France, Estonia, Holland, Romania, Italy, and throughout the UK” (Dead Centre, “About Us,” n.d.).

Dead Centre described this work as:

An early iteration of a future project, *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)* is an adaptation of the Wellcome prize-winning book by Mark O’Connell: an exploration of Transhumanism, a movement whose aim is to use technology to fundamentally change the human condition, to improve our bodies and minds to the point where we become something other, and better, than the animals we are. (Dead Centre, “*To Be a Machine*,” n.d.)

O’Connell worked on the adaptation with Dead Centre, and he was played by actor Jack Gleeson (well-known for playing Joffrey Baratheon on the HBO adaptation of *Game of Thrones*). Presented at the first Dublin Theatre Festival during the pandemic in 2020, Dead Centre’s adaptation of O’Connell’s work met this unprecedented context head on in the concept and execution of the performance. They announced this performance as “Version 1.0” playing on both the constant updating of digital software and announcing that this is only the first but will not be the only engagement with O’Connell’s book. Indeed, the substance of the book itself or even the general concept of transhumanism seemed ultimately far less important to the performance than its interrogation more generally of theatre, the digital, liveness and the future of all three in the post-Covid-19 era.

The performance began with a tight shot on O’Connell (as played by Gleeson) as he might appear to us on a video call before panning out to reveal that he is in fact in a theatre (in the Space Upstairs, the Project Arts Centre’s 220 seat first-floor performance space in Dublin) with his screen image on a monitor stand beside him. This reveal primes the audience from the opening moments of the performance to experience and parse how different registers of the real or the live can actually still be experienced through and on screens due to the extremely obvious difference between O’Connell performing as a Zoom image in the first sequence and the pan-out to reveal the crisper image of O’Connell on the stage at the Project next to the more granulated image of him on Zoom on the monitor next to the “live” O’Connell. An “audience” too is revealed as “live” in the fold-down seats of the Project’s Space Upstairs (a background familiar to any regular attendees of Irish experimental theatre) on tablets featuring close-ups on faces and upper torsos, the pre-uploaded moving images required by audiences prior to attending the show. Throughout the performance, there are cut-aways to audience member’s pre-recorded expressions, reactions or non-reactions which are deliberately manipulated by the theatremakers/editors to “perform” as reactions at orchestrated moments—for example, a laugh at a joke or to

punctuate an uncomfortable moment in the performance, or the use of audience members' deadpan, blinking, blank expressions used out of context to signal rejection or dissatisfaction with a point made during the performance (Fig. 6.2).

To Be a Machine (Version 1.0) used these devices to simulate the live, but also never attempted to hide how mediated the company's manipulation of the non-live to appear to be an actual live performance actually is—an ultimately compelling game of theatrical cat and mouse that posed more questions than the theatremakers ultimately cared to answer in this iteration.

In fact, *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)* stages concerns that are not unique to this production within Dead Centre's wider body of work and many of its theatrical preoccupations pre-dated Covid-19. Formal experimentation with voice, authenticity and presence, for example, run as a concern across Dead Centre's work pre-Covid-19, as in their 2019 production *Beckett's Room* which featured no actors' bodies onstage but instead used puppeteers and shadows to animate characters' ghostly non-embodied presence in the room as cushions sunk under the weight of invisible bodies, cigarettes emitted smoke as they hovered in mid-air held by invisible hands, and shadows were cast without bodies to project them. Covid-19 forced production conditions that ultimately served this particular work but the broader thematic concerns and theatrical cum digital strategies showcased in *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)* were already key ingredients informing Dead Centre's evolving contribution to contemporary Irish theatre's newest horizons.

To Be a Machine (Version 1.0) reckoned directly with the Covid-19 zeitgeist to raise questions about how we transpose or activate theatre's liveness within digital contexts while also calling attention to how theatre and particularly acting are already technologies of representation that require transposition of mind, body and spirit for audience and performers. This iteration in Dead Centre's longer process of adapting the book productively spent only limited time with source text and instead leaned most into more general reflections on theatre, liveness and how individuals and audiences might be able to gather within the digital realm for an experience that is recognisable *as* theatre in how it feels and unfolds dramaturgically. *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)* also raised the suggestion that if this simulation of the liveness of theatre in digital space can be accomplished more regularly and credibly and we understood better about why it works when it works, we might also be better able to understand how the potential for experiencing theatre's kind of liveness within everyday digital experiences such as chatting, making calls and interacting with apps. Mastering the rules of this kind of transference of knowledge might place theatre at the centre of comprehending the digital world rather than in constant threat of being made obsolete by it—a utopian goal worth further pursuing. *Irish Times* reviewer Donald Clarke did argue that “questions remain about” *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)*'s status as theatre “but recognised that the “piece's creators almost certainly savour that ambiguity”



Fig. 6.2 Performer Jack Gleeson in front of the screens on which audience members' faces and reactions were displayed during the live performances of Dead Centre's *To Be a Machine (Version 1.0)*, 2020 (Photo: Ste Murray)

(2020). Indeed, they do and in fact they so fully embraced the full possibility of the Covid-19 restrictions that set the conditions for the making and experiencing of the performance in October 2020 that it makes it hard to imagine how this work could be improved through experiencing it live in an actual theatre with other live bodies. By leaning so fully into the constraints of their working conditions but refusing to give up questions of theatrical liveness as the central preoccupation of the company's work, Dead Centre not only made the best of a challenging situation but have continued to open up new languages for grasping theatre's relevance and role in a digital and post-Covid-19 world in Ireland and beyond.

SEMINAL REVIVALS

Teresa Deevy's Katie Roche (2017, directed by Caroline Byrne)

Teresa Deevy stands out as perhaps the most acclaimed but under-produced modern Irish female playwright next to Lady Gregory, making the Abbey's production of *Katie Roche* post #WakingTheFeminists both obvious and long overdue as it had last been produced at the Abbey in 1994, and before that 1975. This production ran in August–September 2017, in performance briefly parallel to Amanda Coogan and the Dublin Theatre of the Deaf's live art adaptation of another Deevy play, *The King of Spain's Daughter*, which was presented by the Abbey on the Peacock Stage as part of Dublin Fringe Festival.

Directed by Caroline Byrne with dramaturgy by Morna Regan and starring Caoilfhionn Dunne as Katie, this 2017 revival of Deevy's 1936 expressionist play (with set and costume design by Joanna Scotcher and lighting design by Paul Keogan) situated the action in a dirt landscape within the exploded architecture of a house which physically closes in on the actors over the course of the performance. The artistic team and performers not only consciously rejected but exploded the naturalistic approach taken by previous Abbey productions of the play exploiting objects and set pieces for their full imagistic potential from the mausoleum-like kitchen table that rises from an open grave in the centre of the stage from which Katie also first appears to the absurdist, riotous and deeply revealing use of cups of teas as a social prophylactic device throughout.

These directorial and scenographic choices were meant to create not only imagistic but also *affective* resonance as Byrne recounts: "I like to capture what the play feels like and in this I use ideograms (images that bypass language) when working on the world of the play to ensure the audience has an emotional, sensory and visual experience" (Abbey Theatre 2017). And whereas Deevy's original dramatic text is continuously animated by binaries between inside and outside the home and civilisation versus nature, Byrne's direction and Scotcher's scenography collapsed these binaries in a tense staging that embraced the dynamic tension of doubleness in the play's text and central

actions in ways that restored agency to Katie in some moments (repeatedly giving her control over shaping and reshaping the dirt within and outside the home) but also amplified the oppressiveness of her confinement within home, nation and the female body in 1930s Ireland through moments of stunning iconoclastic spectacle (such as the appearance of an outsized gallery of religious paintings of Jesus and female saints that Katie gazes blankly upon). This production was ultimately unflinching in its portrayal of Katie's inability to find either freedom on her own or fulfilment in either her marriage or capricious flirtations with her neighbour Michael (Kevin Creedon) despite revealing over the course of the play that Katie comes from a noble but impoverished background. Under Byrne's direction, Katie's repeated stagnation and lack of direction or outlet culminated in the production's unequivocal final image of her trapped behind a glass wall despite her final line in this production being "I was looking for something great to do...and now I finally have it" (Quoted in Abbey Theatre 2017, 6). For *Irish Times* reviewer Peter Crawley, the glaring contradiction amplified by this closing image exposed what he perceived to be dramaturgical deficits in the original character, remarking that "[Katie] has no real character to lose" making moments such as this closing one "mostly academic" (2017) in terms of the stakes of her lost potential for contemporary audiences. However, this critique of the play itself seems to miss the point that for Deevy as playwright and this contemporary artistic team who realised the production, the stiltedness and discontinuities in Katie's character are symptomatic not of her individual inadequacies as a would-be heroic figure, but rather systemic failures and blindspots that make her desires and longing incomprehensible not only to audiences but also to herself and to the wider society she is implicated within. And how could she ever approximate the wholeness of a tragic heroic figure, when this archetype was created by definition through Aristotle's *Poetics* as a male and patriarchal standard to be emulated? By embracing the brokenness of Katie's character and the 1930s Ireland she inhabited (as well as the potential paucity of tragic heroic paradigms) and translating the play and characters into such uncanny, rich and deliberately contradictory theatrical images, Byrne, the wider artistic team and the performers delivered a contemporary production of Deevy's best-known play in the era of #WakingTheFeminists that animated what it means to not wait for the perfect female (or even feminist) protagonist or playwright but to lean fully into the potential of what is on the page with an expansive of imagination and keen dramaturgical insight that faces gender head on but does not reduce its meaning down to this theme only. As Byrne observed, "I told Graham [McClaren] and Neil [Murray, then Abbey directors, see below] that I didn't want to stage this as a museum piece, nor did I want it to be an exercise that was purely about the politics of programming work by women. I felt strongly that the piece had to stand on its own without an agenda or narrative around it" (Abbey Theatre 2017, 36). And yet, by taking the play on its own terms, Byrne and the wider artistic team unlocked one of the most searing and unequivocal explorations of gender, history, confinement and its impact on the

imagination in recent times. Byrne et al.'s interpretation of *Katie Roche* epitomised the #WakingTheFeminists era working from within the Abbey theatre archives of earlier productions but also against them to create new horizons for the understanding of the play.

SPOTLIGHT ON INSTITUTIONS AND FESTIVALS

Fishamble: The New Play Company: "Show in a Bag," "Tiny Plays for Ireland," "A Play for Ireland" "Duets" and "Transatlantic Commissions Scheme"

Fishamble was established in 1988 (initially called Pigsback Theatre) and from soon after its inception committed itself exclusively to supporting and producing new plays and the playwrights who create them—an agenda anchored through the enduring collaboration between artistic Director Jim Culleton and literary manager Gavin Kostick. We highlight Fishamble's particular interventions in this period because of four key initiatives—"Show in a Bag," "Tiny Plays for Ireland," "A Play for Ireland" and "Duets"—intended to influence and respond to the contemporary state of writing for the stage in Ireland and which indeed did have transformative effectives. These innovative schemes kept pace with the ways in which playwriting and "the playwright" were being contested within the wider theatre industry by designing schemes for ambitious playwriting to emerge from established and emerging artists and/or those who may not yet identify as such. Fishamble's initiatives also deliberately foreground the institutional factors, challenges, opportunities and barriers that may be experienced by would-be writers and shape the future of playwriting in Ireland, a concern that brought them quickly into line with the #WakingTheFeminists movement. They've continued nuancing their perspective current landscape with broadening definitions of "Irishness" increasingly being referenced in their calls for participation—a move that has recently caused some troubling racist backlash at the time of writing after announcing a workshop. Show in a Bag was launched in 2010 and ran through 2018 as a collaboration between Fishamble, Dublin Fringe Festival and Irish Theatre Institute, garnering an Irish Times Theatre Special Award for the collaboration's impact in 2017. The initiative was described as "an artist development initiative" to "resource theatre makers and actors"—providing a bridge for those previously identifying mainly as performers to write *and* perform in their own work (Fishamble, "Show in a Bag," n.d.). Show in a Bag launched at a time of increasing instability in the definition and practice of being a theatre artist in Ireland as noted above. But this project's genesis also had a link to Ireland's economic precarity at the time with Róise Goan (then director of the Dublin Fringe Festival) identifying performers' particular vulnerability as free agents, therefore Kostick and Fishamble co-created a performer-focused initiative. Show in a Bag served this aim by creating a scenario where the performers can "own the work" (Kostick 2017) to present and tour, with the

scale of the works produced also serving an ongoing need for highly portable theatre content to send throughout the expansive network of regional arts centre throughout Ireland as discussed in Chapter 5. Show in a Bag ultimately produced 31 new plays overall involving “41 artists” and “over 1250 performances” with many notable successes in terms of altering individual career trajectories, for example, launching Sonya Kelly as a playwright. Following the premiere of her one woman show *Wheelchair on My Face* (2011) about her experience growing up with glasses, Kelly went on to write and star in *How to Keep an Alien* (2014) for Rough Magic, and enter into a period of extended collaboration with Druid Theatre who have premiered to date Kelly’s *Furniture* (2018), *Once Upon a Bridge* (2021) and *The Last Return* (2022) works which saw her move away from performing in her own work. In 2012, Fishamble ran “Tiny Plays for Ireland” in partnership with *The Irish Times*, which was a call out to “the Irish public” asking “what can be achieved with three minutes of stage time, what are the issues that need to be addressed and who are the people that should be brought to life in the theatre?” (Fishamble, “Tiny Plays,” n.d.) There were 1700 plays submitted to this first round, with Patrick Lonergan commenting of the premiere of the selected 25 “tiny plays for Ireland” in March that:

[u]nder the direction of Jim Culleton, the theatre space became a kind of citizens’ assembly, in which established playwrights, emerging authors, and people who’d never before had their work staged were all presented together on an equal footing. (2018b)

Featuring only a minority of already established playwrights including Deirdre Kinahan, Michael West, Jody O’Neill and Dermot Bolger, *Tiny Plays for Ireland* powerfully communicated Fishamble’s conviction that “there are people all across this island who have something to say on page and stage” (Lonergan 2018b)—values that they followed through on in a second edition of *Tiny Plays* in 2013 and in the crafting of their 2017 callout for “A Play for Ireland” to celebrate their 30th anniversary in 2018. Their aim with “A Play for Ireland” was “to find one, big ambitious play, that bursts with humanity and tackles a subject about which the playwright feels passionate” (Fishamble, “A Play for Ireland,” n.d.) “A Play for Ireland” was a two-year process that “encouraged the citizens of Ireland, and non-Irish citizens living on the island of Ireland, to write plays, engaging people aged 18+, from all communities, throughout the country” (Fishamble, “A Play for Ireland,” n.d.) and resulted in the supported development of 30 new plays winnowed down from 370 submissions from across the island of Ireland, with five plays workshopped at 6 partner venues located throughout the regional Irish arts centre network including the Pavilion (Dún Laoghaire, Dublin), Draíocht (Blanchardstown, Dublin), The Everyman (Cork), Lime Tree Theatre/Belltable (Limerick), Town Hall Theatre (Galway) and Lyric Theatre (Belfast). Peter Crawley of the *Irish Times* called A Play for Ireland “an unabashed appeal for a new state

of the nation drama, tinged with the frustration that writers were not being encouraged to be ambitious” (2019) hinting that perhaps Fishamble’s aim was not ultimately celebrating the singularity of “one play for Ireland” but catalysing ambition and collaboration across the sector.

The scheme’s open call, multi-centred and partner-led support structures across the island and ultimate award of the “Play for Ireland” title to a co-authored play (*The Alternative* by Michael Patrick and Oisín Kearney) provides a powerful model of how to create the conditions for excellence in Irish playwriting through leading a process based on openness and interdependence as core values of the exploration. That Fishamble’s work continues of course is further testament to that it can never be about finding that one play or playwright but continuing to engage in a renewal of the play development process with space for more voices and more experimentation in playwriting processes. Their 2020 and 2021 scheme, Duets, again ran in collaboration with the Dublin Fringe Festival and Irish Theatre Institute, and was “aimed at professional theatre makers from any discipline working in pairs to tell an undeniable story through the unique combination of their skillsets” (Fishamble, “Duets,” n.d.) with the ambition of achieving a tourable production from the collaboration. Finally, their most recently announced scheme, the 2022 “Transatlantic Commissions Scheme,” mentored by US playwright and Pulitzer Prize winner Dael Orlandersmith, is an “endeavor that aims to address head-on the historical inequalities in representation that have existed in the theatrical canon” (Fishamble 2022) by amplifying the work of Black-Irish artists in partnership with New York City’s Irish Repertory Theatre, a scheme we return to in Chapter 11 on interculturalism.

Fishamble’s constant testing of where the energy and momentum for new Irish playwriting lies recognises the instability of current artistic roles and the precarity faced by artists working in theatre including but not limited to playwrights. These visionary schemes have already left a lasting impact within the contemporary Irish theatre industry and continue to expand access and vision of Irish playwriting as Fishamble and their partners lead in continuing to chip away at the question of “what is an Irish playwright?”

*The Abbey Theatre (Under the Joint Directorship of Neil Murray
and Graham McLaren, 2016–2021)*

Murray and McLaren’s tenure as joint artistic directors came at a time of enormous upheaval in Irish theatre following the eruption of #WakingtheFeminists in 2015 and then artistic Director Fiach Mac Conghail’s off the cuff and callous reaction to the initial uproar via Twitter: “Them’s the breaks” (Haughton 2018a). Murray and McLaren came to the Abbey directly from their previous roles as executive producer and associate director, respectively, of the National Theatre of Scotland (NTS). Murray was on the founding artistic team when they launched their successfully and critically acclaimed decentred

national Scottish theatre model not based around a building in 2006, a “theatre without walls.” McLaren, a director and designer, joined NTS in 2010 after an extensive international career and was “responsible for some of the most successful shows in the NTS repertoire” (McMillan 2015). There was both celebration and anxiety regarding their initial appointment on account of their status as outsiders to Ireland, appointment as co-directors (the first since W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory), and the very different operational model of the NTS which did not draw regularly from canonical works or seek to create work for traditional (i.e. proscenium and black box theatre spaces) as a primary mission. To counter this anxiety, Murray pointed to the comparability of the budget between the two institutions and commented that “The theatre tradition in Ireland is amazing, and there are so many brilliant theatre artists, many of whom we already know through various projects over the years,” vowing particularly to build on his expertise at NTS by “creating more shows that are not made in Dublin, but reflect the whole rich geography of the island” (McMillan 2015). But it was precisely their relationship to Irish theatre artists and the Irish theatre tradition more broadly that would be most controversial during their tenure. In January 2019, more than 400 theatre “actors, directors, designers, technicians, and producers” delivered a letter to Minister of Culture Josepha Madigan “about the effects of a large increase in co-productions and a reduction in self-produced work” (i.e. produced by the Abbey) under their co-direction (Barry 2019). The letter detailed key statistics including:

In 2016 the Abbey directly employed 123 actors in Abbey productions and 90 actors in readings and workshops. Then, in 2017 the Abbey directly employed only 56 actors. No figures are available for readings or workshops that year. Fifty-six. That is a reduction of 54% of actors appearing on stage directly employed by our National Theatre. (Qtd. in Barry 2019)

The letter also exposed the Abbey’s increased move towards co-production as the most highly funded Irish theatre institution as having knock-on effects like payment of lower rates to actors, directors and designers by contracting them to the co-producers who pay lower rates than the Abbey for runs at the Abbey and resulting in “double funding” for the Abbey who were then benefiting from funding won by the independent companies. Based on the initial letter, the “national theatre committed to increasing its percentage of in-house productions and to paying in-house rates to those working on co-productions” (Falvey 2019b) in addition to other measures although these promises were soon challenged as unmet with a second letter again alleging in May 2019 that “the current executive and board do not understand the responsibilities of a National Theatre to theatre ecology, the theatre community and the public” (Falvey 2019a).

As Chapter 11’s discussion of labouring bodies in the contemporary Irish theatre will engage in more detail, the nuance of who is employed within

the theatre sector with what funding and how individuals are compensated or supported to create work has often been sublimated within Irish theatre studies, a silence this book seeks to correct throughout and this controversy over Murray and McLaren's tenure brings usefully into sharp relief. After Murray and McLaren took over at the Abbey, there was indeed a decisive shift towards co-production with Irish and primarily UK-based theatre companies and the re-presentation of work by leading Irish independent theatre companies. This means that many of Ireland's leading and emergent independent theatre companies including ANU Productions, Collapsing Horse, Moonfish Theatre and THEATREclub indeed responsible for many of the formal and dramaturgical shifts we cite here as at the vanguard of key trends in contemporary Irish theatre during this period were presented or co-produced by the Abbey Theatre for the first time or re-appeared after a long absence (Pan Pan Theatre and Corn Exchange). Murray and McLaren also focused on diversity and inclusion as a key facet of the theatre's overall mission under their leaders—initiating, for example, a Free First Previews programme to broaden access and encourage new audience members, creating the 5 × 5 series for “communities” who identify as “marginalised and silenced” to develop work at the Abbey over 5 day periods, presenting the first relaxed performance at the Abbey as co-producers of playwright and producers Jody O'Neill's *What I (Don't) Know About Autism* which featured and was co-created by performers with autism and registering a notable uptick of in producing female creator/writer's new works following #WakingTheFeminists with premieres of new plays by Margaret Perry, Stacey Gregg, Deirdre Kinahan and Lisa-Tierney-Keogh. Given that the Abbey's underrepresentation of female creators/writers and directors in particular is what tipped off #WakingTheFeminists, these statistical changes are highly significant—female creators/writers went from 17% to 35% and female directors increased from 20% to 46% between 2016 and 2021 (Murphy et al. 2020, 3). They also pursued international partnerships as key to enhancing the profile of the Abbey globally—a long-term strategy however that backfired with its stark repercussions on the employment of freelance Irish theatre artists across the sector between 2017 and 2020. Notable co-productions with international partners included the stage adaptation of Emma Donogue's novel *Room* (2017, A Theatre Royal Stratford East and Abbey Theatre co-production in association with National Theatre of Scotland and Covent Garden Productions) and *Come from Away*, the 2018 European premiere of the musical (An Abbey Theatre co-production with Junkyard Dog Productions and Smith & Brant Theatricals)—particularly controversial for being presented in the winter holiday slot which is typically occupied by a large-cast production employing Ireland-based actors.

The controversy remained still largely unresolved with the onset of the pandemic in 2020 with theatres directed to close from 12 March 2020, and the Abbey board announced in July 2020 that it did not plan to renew Murray and McLaren's contracts. Caitríona McLaughlin and Mark

O'Brien were announced as artistic director and executive director, respectively, in February 2021, and their tenures began in summer 2021. Murray and McLaren did continue to produce work digitally throughout the pandemic, initiating the *Dear Ireland: Reflections on a Pandemic* series in 2020 which was "originally conceived as a rapid response to the pandemic, to support artists during the early days of lockdown" (Abbey Theatre, "Dear Ireland," n.d.). It ultimately ran to three editions at the time of writing, featuring well over 100 artists including recently or frequently Abbey produced playwrights and familiar performers as well as emerging artists and extending to inclusion of playwrights from abroad including the United States and China. They also responded to the publication of the 2021 report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes with *Home: Part One*, a "direct response to the report on Mother and Baby Homes, focusing on the testimonies of survivors" presented as a streamed reading featuring actors and other public figures including authors and politicians (Abbey Theatre 2021b) (see Chapter 7 for more detail on this performance). Given their recent departure, Murray and McLaren's legacy is too soon to assess in full but the controversies engendered during their time at the Abbey did bring many of the fault lines in Irish theatre to the surface, particularly regarding the precarity of theatre workers and the differential funding conditions and infrastructure for the large well-funded companies like the Abbey and the smaller independent companies who continue to innovate across the nation.

CONCLUSION

Over the last decade, contemporary Irish theatre has manifested an almost constant state of change in terms of practice, forms and funding structures as well as the impact of national and world events on the sector. Modern Irish history (particularly that of the founding of the Irish state and the ongoing legacy of the Troubles) was continuously brought into living contact with the contemporary through theatre, whether in relationship to the release of state inquiries or the official Decade of Centenaries commemorative programme. Theatremakers, playwrights, directors, actors and scenographers pushed the boundaries of what Irish theatre *is* or *could* be through collaborations across and at the intersection of an ever proliferating number of artistic genres, as digital media advances and then the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, forced new considerations of what it might mean for theatre to conceive of itself as not bound by occurring in physical spaces. Theatrical work was also heavily influenced formally and thematically by the anguishing impact of austerity, recession and precarity on a generation of emerging and established artists as well as by the #WakingTheFeminists movement and related actions undertaken by the Arts Councils in the Republic and North regarding how gender and other structural inequalities such as disability, race/ethnicity, sexuality, class and/or nationality impact who gets to make theatre. As an unprecedentedly diverse generation comes of age in contemporary Ireland in the aftermath of

Covid-19, the future of Irish theatre will be shaped not only by its own history, but by as yet unimagined horizons driven by variables that cannot yet be seen or understood.

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PART II

Theories



Nation

The iconic Shakespearean character MacMorris, an Irish officer in the English Army, intoned of the Irish nation in *Henry V* in 1599: “Of my nation? What ish my nation? Ish a villain, and a bastard, and a knave. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation?” (Shakespeare 1982, 169). When it comes to modern and contemporary Irish theatre and performance practices, the answer to who is talking of the Irish nation is still quite bluntly—almost everyone, and it is for this reason that nation is the focus of our first of this book’s theoretically focused chapters. Arguably the “nation” and its many anti-colonial, postcolonial, Troubles-era, post-conflict and early twenty-first-century permutations remain the defining thematic obsession of contemporary Irish theatre—a fixation echoed structurally in the continuing centrality of the Abbey as Ireland’s national (and most highly funded) theatre in the Republic, the broader ongoing role of the arts as tourist draw and cultural export of the island as a whole, and the recent conclusion of the Republic’s Decade of Centenaries specifically which as we’ve dealt with at length in Chapter 6 comprehensively commemorated key events, figures and controversies in the birth of the independent Irish nation-state. Christopher Murray’s pithy summation of twentieth-century Irish drama as a whole as “mirror up to nation” in the title of his seminal 1997 study therefore remains apt in the early twenty-first century but this chapter will seek to unpack the multilayered and multivalent ways that contemporary Irish theatre and performance are used by theatremakers not only as a mirror for nation but also as a laboratory for experimentation, creation and occasionally destruction of the idea of nation itself.

Before continuing, however, we need to parse how we are using nation, nation-state and nationalism in this chapter as these nuances are essential

to understanding the complexity of contemporary Irish theatre and performance's treatment of these themes. The Republic of Ireland's occupation by England from the sixteenth century to 1922 resulted in a state of extended rupture, crisis and conflict regarding this territory's status *as* a nation. These negotiations over time across the island in Ireland's case and in countless others across the world means that a nation is not *only* a fixed inert point on a map which marks an internationally recognised political territory with defined legal and geographical borders. Instead, we must reckon with how ideas of nation impact on individuals' and collectives' feelings of belonging, stability, and identity in the present, over time and through collectively held real or imagined memories and/or myths. And yet, the nation as a modern bureaucratic innovation is still quite recent with historian Benedict Anderson tracing its emergence and exporting only to the end of the eighteenth century when the nation became a "modular" concept capable of "being transplanted" to a "great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations" (2006, 4), a franchising with a difference that of course has played out in complicated ways on the island of Ireland. Nevertheless, the nation-*state* (once internationally recognised) is also an administrative entity which holds enormous power over people's lives. National authorities wield the legal jurisdiction to grant or withhold political and/or human rights including access to basic rights and services (such as housing, medical care, employment) and/or security (such as legal protection) to individuals or groups living within the borders of a nation-state (or occupied territory). In the twenty-first century, individual access to these kinds of rights, services and security within a nation-state are typically tied to citizenship as an individual legal status that grants one access to these administrative structures and protections. National belonging then is not only about feeling but about gaining vital material access to resources to live and move freely through the world as a whole.

Within the context of the island of Ireland at the time of writing, two nation-states hold jurisdiction over portions of the population living on these shores: the Republic of Ireland in the South and the United Kingdom (UK) in the North (Northern Ireland). As our book demonstrates across its chapters, basic understanding of the island of Ireland's division is integral to grasping how contemporary Irish theatre tackles not only ideas of "the nation" but also reveals nuances of the different permutations of this broad baseline concept as it becomes translated into lived and theatricalised experience. Anderson famously conceptualised the nation as an "imagined community" where "communion" among some stands in for "indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship" (2006, 6–7) which theoretically bind all living within a geographically defined territory. But as Jen Harvie observes, "national identities are neither biologically or territorially given; rather they are creatively produced or staged" (2005, 2)—an ongoing process of negotiation that makes theatre and performance key sites for investigating this dynamic, particularly

in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland where the relationship(s) between (and within) these nation-states remains contested.

For what does it mean for theatre and performance's treatment of nation if a country's history paradigmatically includes being part of another country's empire for hundreds of years, long pre-dating the actually quite modern political and administrative concept of the nation-state as defined above? What if, due to this postcolonial history, the borders of this island country remain contested following the 1921 partition of Northern Ireland, the decades long Troubles, the Belfast Peace Agreement and persistent flashes of sectarian conflict up through the present? And what if some of those living behind either border, the Republic's or Northern Ireland, hold multiple citizenships (as per the Belfast Agreement) or are stateless or formerly stateless (as in the case of an increased number of individuals seeking asylum or who hold refugee status who have arrived in both states since the 2000s)? How do these kinds of contested (and often multiple) national belongings translate into lived experiences and theatrical/performance content? And not only that, what if claims to an Irish national belonging are regularly tied not just to residence, citizenship or rights to citizenship, but distant *feeling* whether as traced through or projected onto a family line back through recent or distant generations or through fainter moments of imagined connection shared in an "Irish" bar abroad or during a St. Patrick's Day parade (or pub crawl in a foreign city)?

All this baggage means that we will be careful to avoid use of "the Irish nation" as a catch-all in this chapter, but instead track carefully *which* nation-state we are referring to any given time and/or how the distinction of the Republic/Northern Irish border is being challenged in the theatrical works we examine. We will also draw attention to how contemporary Irish theatre and performance reveal viscerally how *nationalism* manifests as an affective and imaginary set of practices, feelings and beliefs that almost never respects the administrative limits of the Irish nation-state(s) as (a) more rigid designation(s). In the context of contemporary Irish theatre studies, we ultimately view nationalism as the performative practice of ideas of the Irish nation as an imagined community that may bear some, little or no resemblance to the actual contours of nation-states set up administratively on the island of Ireland.

Ultimately, this chapter contributes three elucidating frameworks for navigating how contemporary Irish theatre continues to dramatise and negotiate these complex and contested dimensions of the Irish nation as an idea and aspiration from the perspective of past, present and future:

- **Theatre and the political work of nation-building:** One of the most unique features of modern and contemporary Irish theatre history is the persistently close relationship between the work of theatre (and theatre practitioners) and the political work (and interrogation) of nation-building from the late nineteenth century onwards. While the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre and its subsequent relaunching as the Abbey, the Republic's national theatre and the world's first English-language

state-subsidised theatre in 1904 (still in operation today) are the most recognizable touchstone in this genealogy, the work and interrogation of Irish nation-building in fact continue to be done across the registers of theatremaking practice from professional to amateur, institutionally located to community-based, in the period covered by this book. This manifests through the direct participation of theatremakers in political struggles/activism and their linking of this action to their theatrical work's form, content or themes, but also through more subtle means, such as how projects are funded and/or conceptualised, for example, in terms of community reconciliation processes (as in the North) or local/state commemorative occasions or how Irish theatre productions are funded to travel abroad (and then marketed) or programmed to serve strategic points in the tourism calendar at home.

- **Woman and/as nation:** As identified in the introduction to this chapter, national belonging—whether administrative or affective—is experienced by individuals and groups, singly and collectively. But national belonging is also *gendered* in terms of the different expectations placed on men, women, transgender, genderqueer and/or non-binary people in terms of expected service and participation to the Irish nation(s) including but not limited to biological reproductive capacity or the ability to participate in military service and/or campaigns. In modern and contemporary Irish theatre history, these expectations are highly gendered along a male/female axis. This section will focus on theatrical figures of Irish women and/as nation, distinguishing between how the valences of “woman” can play out differently on Republic versus Northern Irish stages but we acknowledge that there is far more work to be done in the nuancing of this area in relationship to diverse gender identities and expressions over time that have likely been obscured by modern and contemporary Irish theatre's persistent gender binary as tied up with ideas of and contestation over “the nation.”
- **Interrogating national histories through the Irish history play:** Across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Irish playwrights and theatremakers have continuously created works that consciously and deliberately reflect on national histories, often in very close proximity to the historically significant events then being depicted or reflected on theatrically. While contemporary Irish theatre's repetitive topical and thematic focus on national histories tangibly contributes to the work of nation-building as explored in our first case study in this chapter, we also need to consider the ways in which contemporary Irish theatre practitioners' obsession with national histories/histories of the nation expands our ability to think about the relationship between history and theatricality in the Irish context and beyond. For as Rebecca Schneider offers, “...theatre, like history, is an art of time. Even, we could say, *the art of time*” (2014, 7). The contemporary Irish theatre's particular use of theatricality as an art of time to return again and again to history, and histories of

the nation specifically, creates a powerful feedback loop that is essential to not only understanding Irish theatre as a discrete field of practice, but histories of the Irish nation more generally. We argue that the work of Irish theatre practitioners offers a unique embodied counter archive of the history of the nation state that defies chronology through its manipulation of the theatrical art of time, and in doing so, makes available a syncopated series of counter-narratives of the nation.

These three foundational frameworks are accompanied by brief case studies that model the application of these critical lenses to these key theatre productions:

- **Theatre and the political work of nation-building** (Michael West/Corn Exchange's *Dublin By Lamplight*).
- **Woman and/as nation** (Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*).
- **Interrogating national histories through the Irish history play** (Frank McGuinness' *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*).

The chapter concludes with a consideration of how the Decade of Centenaries' conclusion in 2023 alongside the ongoing waning of the Covid-19 pandemic and its rippling seismic effects across the fabric of international society might provide an opening for new narratives of the Irish nation to emerge in their wake and speculates about the role of contemporary Irish theatre in doing this foundational work.

Indeed, there is a risk in overdetermining *all* Irish plays (and/or performances broadly construed) and theatremakers as invested in exploring the question of the Irish nation in all its plurality, North and South. Some like playwright Declan Hughes have openly challenged assumptions that Irish theatre artists are inevitably reflecting on Irish national identity in its singular or pluralistic forms. In his landmark polemical 2000 essay, "Who The Hell Do We Think We Still Are? Reflections on Irish Theatre and Identity," Hughes wrote that he'd:

like to see Irish theatre embrace the profound change that has occurred: that we are barely a country any more, never have been and never will be that nineteenth century of drama, a nation once again; that our identity is floating, not fixed. (13)

Yet, despite Hughes' passionate pronouncement and the recent international success of Irish(-affiliated) playwrights including Marina Carr, Martin McDonagh, Conor McPherson and Enda Walsh with works not set in Ireland or exploring specifically "Irish" themes (as in Walsh and McPherson's musical adaptations of work by David Bowie, Roald Dahl and Bob Dylan), this close association between Irish theatre and the nation persists. For example, ANU Productions does not articulate an ambition to comment on the Irish

nation as core to how they see themselves but their intimate, site-specific and immersive theatre has been referred to by Fintan O'Toole as “a kind of alternative national theatre, exploring the legacy of coercive institutionalisation, sexual exploitation, poverty, social collapse and the heroin epidemic” (2013). Their work has central to the Decade of Centenaries through a high rate of commission by various state and non-state agencies including Dublin City Council, Dublin Bus, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Irish Heritage Trust, Fáilte Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland to create bespoke commemorative performances on key events in Irish national history in addition to the company's own independent theatre work on this topic. As arguably the most written-about and discussed contemporary Irish Theatre Company of the 2010s (Haughton 2018a; McIvor 2018; Morash and Richards 2013; Singleton 2016; Till 2018 among others), ANU's obsessive retelling of Irish national histories from the minority perspectives of those marginalised within Irish society by class, gender and/or sexuality communicates that reflecting on the nation is still a very dominant concern of contemporary Irish theatre practice (see Chapter 6 for a full discussion of their work and participation in the Decade of Centenaries and Chapter 10 for a discussion of *Boys of Foley Street* from their Monto Cycle).

THEATRE AND THE POLITICAL WORK OF NATION-BUILDING

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century histories of theatre in Ireland North and South reveal a close relationship between this art form and not only commentary *on*, but direct participation by theatremakers *in* political matters of building, maintaining or imagining the Irish nation-state—whether singularly or plurally conceived or claimed. As Nicholas Grene summarises, “As long as there has been a distinct Irish drama it has been so closely bound up with national politics that the one has often been considered more or less a reflection of the other” (1999, 1). However, Christopher Murray counters that Irish theatre may “be a mirror up to nation” but “the mirror does not give back the real; it gives back images of a perceived reality” (1997, 9). To extend Murray's observation of the inevitable gap between intention and execution, this section examines how contemporary Irish theatre practitioners both aspire to *and* contest the ongoing work of Irish nation-building vis-à-vis politics and political participation in their practice, whether through strategies of dramatic representation and/or the setting up of production conditions intended to contribute to or contest these efforts when performed on the island or abroad.

Indeed, the Abbey was not the only twentieth-century Irish theatrical institution to explicitly claim a national mandate as part of its core mission. Parallel projects included the Theatre of Ireland (1906–1912), the Ulster Literary Theatre (1902–1940) and Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, the national Irish-language theatre of Ireland (1928–present). Lionel Pilkington argues that attaining national theatre status as these projects attempted to do, each on very different terms, holds such attracting power because “a national

theatre...serves both as a prominent public site associated with the prestige of national self-representation, and as a means of instituting, or attempting to institute, norms of political agency” (2004, 232). However, Ireland’s competing national theatrical institutions, past and present, enact the island’s postcolonial fracturing as it is still being played out in real-time and theatrical space over matters including but not limited to jurisdiction and language.

For example, when Protestant National Association Members Bulmer Hobson and David Parkhill formed the Ulster Literary Theatre to “spread the ideals of the United Irishmen” (Quoted in Byrne 1997, 37) as a Northern franchise of the Irish Literary Theatre (the precursor to the Abbey), they informed William Butler Yeats expecting to be supported, however, he instead demanded royalties for their performance of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), his landmark play co-authored with Lady Gregory. Through the Dublin secretary for the Irish National Literary Theatre at the time, George Roberts, Yeats wrote to Parkhill also stipulating that “the Belfast actors had no authority to state that they were a branch of the Irish National Literary Theatre” (Quoted in Byrne 1997, 37). This row exposes another key tension characteristic of the relationship between (all-island) contemporary Irish theatre and the concept of nation: anxiety over whether “national” theatre refers to the creation of theatrical work that is unique *to* the people of that nation in that time and place or whether “national” theatre is an endeavour undertaken to agitate for or to shore up the very existence of or continued flourishing of a political nation-state, or indeed to imagine it into being as in the case of the pre-independence Republic or the ongoing political cause of nationalists in Northern Ireland. Initially, Hobson and Parkhill viewed their franchising of the Irish Literary Theatre as an endeavour promoting a shared political cause (the United Irishmen) but when knocked back, they pivoted to focus on the creation of their own plays, unique to their region and experiences. As a contrast, when Brian Friel, Seamus Deane and Stephen Rea founded Field Day in 1980, they did so with the intention of creating a “cultural Fifth Province, complementing Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connaght” with Friel referring to the idea as a “transcendent location” (Regan 1992, 27). Reflecting on their intentions more than 25 years later, Rea contended that Field Day’s work

...was directed at a very broad kind of audience, not just a theatre audience or the theatre ghetto, but into the veins of public opinion. What was unique about it was that it was a theatre of debate or discussion; [we were] looking for a way out when the ceasefire wasn’t even a remote possibility. (Keating 2006)

Yet, Field Day has also been critiqued for, on the one hand, latent Republicanism and, on the other, political naivete with Colm Toibin famously musing that “There were times in the 1980s...when it was hard not to feel that Field Day had become the literary wing of the IRA” (Shovlin 2009). In looking at Field Day’s contributions to postcolonial theory discourse vis-à-vis theatre,

Shaun Richard judges that overall “[t]here is some fairly unsophisticated material and perhaps, some less than well-judged analogies and activities” that “also has to be acknowledged” (2004, 611). Richards concludes that Field Day’s use of postcolonial theory as the “frame in which theatre could be set” was often “applied unreflectingly as a prevailing orthodoxy that often serves to limit rather than advance analysis of both Irish drama and Irish society (2004, 612).”

In contemporary Northern Irish theatre, ongoing contested questions of belonging and identity for Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Loyalist communities whether or not they participated in or endorsed armed conflict during the Troubles remains a central concern as in the recent plays of Stacey Gregg, David Ireland, Owen McCafferty and Abbie Spallen or the seminal 1990s–early 2000s work of Christina Reid, Anne Devlin or Stewart Parker among others. Across all these plays, the personal and communal costs of particularly violent struggles for Irish national freedom are debated and contested as the theatrical stage provides a forum through which to rehearse the tension between individual and collective experiences of “nation” as a lived experience.

Furthermore, national politics are not only a subject *of* Irish drama but have also been played out live within and adjacent to Irish theatre spaces (a cross-over satirised and celebrated by Michael West and Corn Exchange’s 2004 *Dublin By Lamplight*, see below). Theatre practitioners repeatedly contributed and continue to contribute to key political events and movements particularly during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indeed, the first rebel casualty during Easter Rising was Abbey actor and Irish Citizen Army member Seán Connolly (Keena 2013), serving under rebellion leader, barrister, educator, poet and playwright Pádraig Pearse whose plays with overtly militaristic and revolutionary themes including *An Rí*, *Iosagan* and *The Singer* had also been performed at the Abbey. This blurring of lines between performance and politics in the Irish theatre is also captured in the iconic anecdote of feminist nationalist activist and campaigner Maud Gonne arriving for one of her landmark performances of W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and approaching the stage through the audience (presumably coming straight from a nationalist organising meeting or protest). But there are numerous other examples from modern and contemporary Irish theatre history where state of the nation plays and those producing them are not holding up a mirror to real-life politics as much as directly participating in the shaping of them: from the direct involvement of Easter Rising leaders and participants such as Pádraig Pearse, Seán Connolly and Maud Gonne with the Abbey (leading to Yeats’ later crisis of conscience captured in his iconic poem) to Field Day’s role as intellectual and theatrical thought leaders regarding not only the Northern Irish conflict but also postcolonial theory internationally in the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, we can cite Panti/Rory O’Neill’s elevation to a leading national campaigner for the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum after a speech he gave onstage at the Abbey regarding

homophobia went viral (see Chapter 9 for more discussion of Panti/Rory O'Neill's "Noble Call" onstage at the Abbey, plays and broader activism) and the widening use of documentary/verbatim and other theatrical and performance approaches to interrogate state-level traumas including abuse of women and children in Magdalene laundries, Mother and Baby Homes, industrial and reformatory schools and the ongoing peace and reconciliation processes in Northern Ireland (see Chapter 6). As Mark Phelan observes of the role of theatre in conflict transformation in Northern Ireland:

One of the most distinctive, if debilitating, features of the otherwise successful peace process in the North is the fact that there is no state mechanism or apparatus in place to undertake any form of truth recovery, with the resulting vacuum unsatisfactorily filled by a welter of charitable, statutory, and community organizations. This political failure to deal with the past means that artists—particularly theatre artists—have had an enormously important role to play in the ongoing processes of conflict transformation. (2016, 373)

The role of the theatremaker and theatre institutions in amplifying processes of social reckoning and redress has been particularly pronounced in the early twenty-first century with key companies like Brokentalkers and ANU Productions in the Republic collaboratively creating works that deal with histories of abuse and trauma within Irish institutions including industrial and reformatory schools and Magdalene laundries and the Abbey theatre recently creating a theatrical response titled *Home: Part One* to the publication of the 2021 report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes featuring actors and other public figures including authors and politicians reading testimonies from survivors and other materials (see also Chapter 6 for more detail on the Abbey Theatre's programming under then artistic directors Neil Murray and Graham McLaren). *Home: Part I* was made available to watch first on St. Patrick's Day 2021 and for four months afterwards, with the Abbey stating that this "day where we celebrate our identity should also be a day for us to reflect on Ireland's history and on the experiences of its citizens" (Abbey Theatre 2021). The necessity of creating this material for an online audience due to the pandemic also meant that the content was available globally and throughout the Irish diaspora. This extension of access was particularly appropriate in this case as many adult survivors of these institutions might have been sent out of the country to be adopted (with the United States a frequent destination) and as a case in point which demonstrates how participating in acts of belonging to the Irish nation and its histories can transcend presence *in* the actual Irish nation-state at the time of spectatorship.

Finally, across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Irish theatre (defined here as made in the Republic or the North originally) has also functioned as a national cultural export utilised for soft diplomacy as well as supporting the livelihood of the Irish theatre artists bringing their work around the world. From the early twentieth century Abbey theatre tours to Druid Theatre's

international touring circuit forged from 1980 onwards to the 2005 formation of Culture Ireland to explicitly promote the circulation of Irish arts (including theatre abroad) (Culture Ireland 2022), modern and contemporary Irish theatre's ongoing association with the political and *economic* work of nation-building to some extent remains inescapable when work from these companies or under the auspices of state agencies has circulated abroad. Patrick Lonergan's work on the relationship between globalisation and contemporary Irish theatre is particularly instructive here as he identifies and works through at length post-Celtic Tiger shifts in the branding of theatre for national and international audiences, noting that particularly post-1990s that the Abbey (as well as other Irish theatres) "operates within a global theatre network where it must compete against other national and international theatres, its success in doing so determined by the dominance and success of branded versions of Irish identity" (2009, 75). While a full consideration of contemporary Irish theatre's movement around the world through globalised networks in the time period covered by this book is outside the scope of this current chapter, it is nonetheless essential to bear in mind that even when Irish theatre moves outside of our national border(s), its circulation nonetheless contributes to the political work of Irish nation-building in layered and complex ways with affective and economic implications that we must remain attuned to as spectators, artists and/or critics.

Case Study One: Michael West in collaboration with Corn Exchange, *Dublin by Lamplight*

Premiered: 2004, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, produced by The Corn Exchange, directed by Annie Ryan.

Notable Revivals: 2017, Abbey Theatre and The Corn Exchange, directed by Annie Ryan.

Dublin by Lamplight is a purposeful conflation and distortion of two of early twentieth-century Ireland's most powerful founding moments/myths which both took place in 1904: the opening of the Abbey and the action of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, his epic account of Dublin over the course of one day through the eyes of Stephen Bloom and his associates. Equal parts satire and homage, comedy and tragedy, *Dublin by Lamplight* follows the ill-fated premiere of would-be theatre impresario Willy Hayes' *The Wooing of Emer* as an attempt by his amateur drama troupe to lay claim to establishing the first "Irish National Theatre of Ireland" (West 2005, 12) as performance and politics collide directly in their attempt to stage this play. Historical figures like Maud Gonne, Lady Gregory, Annie Horniman, Oscar Wilde, William Butler Yeats and the Fay brothers are cleverly collapsed into single characters or refracted across multiple characters with their most identifiable character traits and/or aspects of their legacy savagely lampooned. The characters address the audience in both first and third person, experiencing the play's action but also commenting on themselves and the play from an outside perspective (Fig. 7.1).



Fig. 7.1 Corn Exchange's 2017 revival of *Dublin by Lamplight* by Michael West in collaboration with the company, directed by Annie Ryan. Featuring (from left) Willie Hayes (Louis Lovett), Martyn Wallace (Paul Reid), Maggie (Catriona Ennis), and Jimmy Finnegan (Colin Campbell) (Photo Ros Kavanagh)

Set over one day during the visit of the King, the leading actress (and the troupe's benefactress), Eva St. John, is detained for political protest en route to the theatre while the leading actor, Frank Hayes (Willy's brother), is plotting a bomb blast outside the theatre to protest the King's visit which he plans to detonate during the play's final rousing nationalist speech. Meanwhile, Maggie, the costume mistress turned leading lady understudy, is forced to take to the stage. She is also trying to tell Frank that she is carrying his child while another suitor Jimmy tries to convince her of his own love for her. The business of putting on a play and agitating for political independence on the occasion of the King's visit become bound up in one another repeatedly, much to the chagrin of many of the characters such as Willy and the actor Martyn Wallace who hold out hope for the non-political and primarily self-enriching glory and economic rewards of a theatrical career and the status that might come with laying claim to *the* national theatre.

Dublin by Lamplight's riotous slapstick driven by personal *and* political intrigue builds up not to a comic climax but a tragic one after the explosion of Frank's bomb kills a young man outside the theatre. This climax viscerally depicts the very real differences between staging a call to armed struggle and dying when one answers this call to participation. When pressed by suspicious police on the political content of *The Wooing of Emer* as connected to the blast, Willy protests "it's just a play" (West 2005, 57)—but this defensive claim is

precisely what West and Corn Exchange encourage audiences to reflect on more deeply at a century's remove. It is of course a claim that William Butler Yeats himself would reflect on at length as in his well-known poem, "The Man and the Echo" (1939) where he asked of his and Lady Gregory's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, "Did that play of mine send out/Certain men the English shot?"

West's irreverent deconstruction of early twentieth-century Irish political and cultural nationalism as interrelated movements comes into sharpest focus through the character of Maggie and her ultimate alienation from cultural or political agency within 1904 Ireland. Her alienated status as a pregnant woman out-of-wedlock promoted from wardrobe mistress to temporary star is far from an incidental plot line. West and Corn Exchange's ensemble instead gives Maggie the final scene in the play as she sails away on a boat to England, meditating on the question of "What future had she, had any of them, in this dark place?" (2005, 73). By ending the play on Maggie's unfinished story, *Dublin by Lamplight* ultimately demands reflection on who got erased or became collateral damage within early twentieth-century Irish cultural and political nationalist movements rather than reassuring audiences with a triumphalist celebration of Ireland's national/ist theatre legacy.

Originally staged in 2004, Peter Crawley describes *Dublin by Lamplight*'s premiere as "staged in parallel with the national theatre's own blighted centenary, by a company on the outside looking in" (2017) with the play revived in 2017 finally on the stage of the national theatre itself. The Corn Exchange, founded by Annie Ryan in 1995, combines "strong physical theatre practice" (particularly Commedia dell'Arte) "with dynamic text" in order to create work ranging from "contemporary site-specific work, adaptations of classics and original theatre made in collaboration with the ensemble and writer Michael West" (2018). They have more recently clarified their focus as a company to be committed also to "strong embodied ensemble practice" and "cutting edge design and technology" (The Corn Exchange 2023). When *Dublin by Lamplight* was revived by the Abbey Theatre in 2017, the Abbey's publicity described the production as "Corn Exchange's much loved alternative version of the founding of a national theatre" (Abbey Theatre, 2017).

Dublin by Lamplight emerged from Corn Exchange's signature ensemble-based working method which at the time Ryan described as "marrying this renegade version of Commedia dell'Arte from Chicago with other performance disciplines" (West 2005, n.p.) The company assembled "a cast, a creative team and a devising period before committing anything to paper other than the premise," working through the principles of "pure' *commedia* (with mask and fixed location) and 'pure' Story Theatre (whatever you could find or invent)" (West 2005, 6). In performance, an ensemble of six performers played over thirty characters in *Dublin by Lamplight* while wearing "fixed painted masks" (inspired by Commedia dell'Arte) but taking on "complete costume changes for each character" (West 2005, 7). Props apart from Frank's leather bag (which contains the bomb) were all mimed by the actors in line

with the company's highly physical performance style and the conventions of Commedia particularly as the performers deftly manoeuvred through the riotous world imagined by West and the ensemble under Ryan's direction. In both the 2004 and 2017 productions, the sparse scenography (Kris Stone) and stark lighting (Matt Frey) amplified the actors' performing bodies at the centre of this work as the virtuosic performances of the ensemble met the demands of the densely layered and intertextually rich dramatic text with expert lightness.

Dublin by Lamplight ultimately engages many of the key tensions inherent in the relationship between theatre and nation in Ireland, especially at the beginning of the twentieth century: Do cultural and political nationalism have anything to do with one another really? Can one theatre troupe alone profess to represent the "nation"? Is a "national theatre" a building or an idea? What is the relationship between women as an ideal within the nationalist struggle and the lived experiences of women in the streets? What does the drama backstage reveal about the meaning of the drama onstage? How does dramatising the contrast between backstage and onstage help us make sense of the larger tensions within nationalism as a discourse of ideas and repertoire of political practices (including the realities of armed struggle)? *Dublin by Lamplight* does not resolve any of the tensions around nation and theatre that it mobilises, but instead asks audiences to consider what stories remain unfinished when we focus too much on nation as the primary value through which to measure theatre's function in society.

WOMAN AND/AS NATION

The previous section detailed the myriad ways in which contemporary (and modern) Irish theatre as a network of institutions and individual artists remains engaged in the political work of nation-building materially and metaphorically up through the present day. However, this section explores the ways in which staging the Irish nation has been heavily gendered along a male-female binary in landmark plays and productions over time. This tendency has had implications for women as *symbolic* figures performing characters and/or personas and female playwrights and theatremakers as *bearers or critics* of national themes and tropes in the works they create.

In fact, staging the modern and contemporary theatrical Irish nation is inconceivable without women as key players onstage, but their centrality often translates into the tokenistic and comes at a cost. As Melissa Sihra details:

Women have held centre stage since the inception of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899 and foundation of the Abbey Theatre in 1904, in iconic roles which variously symbolize 'Woman' as 'Mother' and/or 'Ireland,' embodying the anti-colonial imaginary as *Eire* or *aisling*, which goes back to at least the time of the Penal Laws. (2016, 547)

But as Shonagh Hill trenchantly observes: “The enduring trope of Mother Ireland has defined women’s bodies as the terrain over which power has been contested, while concurrently erasing the reality of their corporeal experiences” (2019, 4) particularly in terms of access to birth control, pregnancy, motherhood and free expression of sexualities (See Chapters 2–6 for historical context). Maria Elena Doyle’s assessment of early twentieth-century Irish drama concluded that:

nationalists preferred to put forward the figure of the woman-nation who could return to Irish men a sense of their own masculinity by standing as a passive ideal in need of their rescue. Writers including W.B. Yeats, Alice Milligan, Edward Martyn, AE and John Millington Synge thus generally opted to depict active male heroes who either protected passive heroines (like the popular Deirdre) or overshadowed more harshly drawn villainesses (like Milligan’s Grania). (1999, 33–34)

Writing in 1999, Doyle assessed that these patterns of representation were still persistent at that time:

Present day Irish drama tends to depict figures who recall the woman-nation as powerless (Sarah in Brian Friel’s *Translations*), self-deluded (Mamie in Jennifer Johnston’s *The Nightingale and not the Lark*), overtly destructive (Marie in Stewart Parker’s *Catchpenny Twist*) or disturbingly unknowable (Greta’s ghost in Anne Devlin’s *After Easter*); in these and many other plays written since the onset of the troubles, the ideal of the woman-nation as conceived by the Revival ultimately hinders the production of an Irish identity taking its place in a modern world. (1999, 46)

Post-1999, contemporary Irish theatre and society have re-examined the binarism of gender identity and its relationship to sexuality as well as race and ethnicity in more complex ways as this book reveals throughout but nonetheless, Doyle’s diagnosis ghosts the representational limits of female embodiment even at the time of writing. To this end, Chapter 9 examines in more detail the relationship between the body, intersectionality and identity (including gender) in contemporary Irish performance, but this section will focus narrowly on how the interplay between “woman” and “nation” has been and continues to be (albeit in ever more complex and critical ways) a major foil for contemporary Irish theatre practices due to the legacy of this entanglement over time, and its different manifestations as a trope in the Republic versus Northern Ireland.

When it comes to interrogating the Irish nation (or aspirations towards its achievement theatrically), Irish women have been simultaneously symbolically overloaded and constrained as characters and professional workers in the industry (as actors, playwrights, directors, designers, etc.). Their work particularly as playwrights has also been systematically marginalised and misunderstood in terms of the productions and dominant critical reception of their

plays which take on national (and other) themes despite watershed moments of agitation, change and impact by individual artists and movements over time as demonstrated repeatedly by leading scholars in this field with the point only amplified again most recently with the two-volume publication of *The Golden Thread: Irish Women Playwrights, 1716–2016*, edited by David Clare, Fiona McDonagh and Justine Nakase which gathers case studies from 400 years of this pattern in action (2021a). For this reason, this section's case study, the 1985 premiere of Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*, focuses to a great extent on the play's critical reception and critics' pronouncements on Devlin's ability to take on the themes that she does and the relative accomplishment of her play-writing craft in order to illustrate this dynamic in action and within historical context.

As a representative moment capturing the persistence of the entanglement of modern and contemporary in imagining "woman" and "nation" together in Irish theatre, Outlandish Theatre (OT) Platform's 2016 production of *Megalomaniac*, which was based on "fifteen qualitative" interviews with an anonymous collaborator of Syrian-Palestinian descent living in Dublin 8 and her family" and "written by Maud Hendricks in collaboration with Bernie O'Reilly (co-artistic directors of OT Platform), the interviewee, and Aoun, addressing "themes of migration, war, displacement, citizenship, racism, social integration, and family" (McIvor 2020, 67). This key moment features the character of Noor, the Syrian-Palestinian woman whose story was adapted for the play as played by Iman Aoun, the artistic director of Palestine's ASHTAR Theatre who collaborated with OT on the project. In this moment, Noor interacts with one of the child assistants who brought onstage props including baby dolls throughout the performance. Notably, this child is dressed as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the titular character from W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's iconic play, a detail that combined with the location of the play's staging and themes becomes highly meaningful. Originally staged in the Rita Kelly Theatre located in Coombe's Women's and Infant's University Hospital as part of a three-year partnership with this institution, *Megalomaniac* was originally envisioned as the first instalment in a Trilogy of plays inspired by the title Mother Ireland, an honorific the play suggests Noor has a full right to as a migrant woman and now Irish citizen. However, although Cathleen Ni Houlihan/Mother Ireland is played here by an seemingly innocent and guileless child, that symbolic figure in fact stalks both the child performer and Noor (Aoun) in layered ways, particularly in a 2016 moment staged in Ireland's largest "provider of women's and infant healthcare" (Health Service Executive 2023) prior to the legalisation of abortion in 2018 in the Republic, and where migrant women's childbearing remains suspect and their layered status as (non-Irish born) women within Irish society remains highly contested (See McIvor 2016, 153–178). Neither female figure here (the eternal Cathleen ni Houlihan as child or Noor, the more recently arrived Irish resident) can claim full autonomy over their body or rights even in the immediate setting of a maternity hospital and even after the character of Noor begins the play sharing

that she has received refugee status and citizenship in Ireland. The revisiting and recycling of the Mother Ireland figure remains highly potent, relevant and perhaps unescapable even for women more recently arrived in Ireland as a symbol of what continues to hold women back from full bodily and other autonomies in the country today.

Contemporary Irish female characters, playwrights, actresses, theatre artists and/or theatremakers might therefore be excused for feeling burdened by the myth of Mother Ireland but it has remained constitutive up through the present due in no small part to this repetitive theatrical fixation being legislatively mirrored in the setup of the Irish nation-state. As Miriam Haughton contends emphatically, “Ireland as a state is birthed from, and has become reliant upon, gender inequality in its machinery of nationhood, of which the national theatre [the Abbey] acts as a significant public tool in shaping and influencing images of Ireland deemed ‘national’” (2018b, 346). For example, one of the most persistently controversial articles in the Republic of Ireland’s Constitution, for example, is Article 41.1 which has still not been replaced at the time of writing and stipulates that by “her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved,” which means that “mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home” (Bunreacht na hÉireann, 40.1) (See also Chapter 2).

The Republic’s immediate constitutionally enshrined linkage between the home, maternity and nation on its formation from the previous Free State in 1937 has drawn (female) playwrights who have experimented with the “state of the nation” play, if only to explode and contest the format to exploring and contesting the domestic and/or motherhood as a site of nation-building and/or regulation. Nadine Holdsworth describes the state of the nation play in an international context as characterised by:

representations of personal events, family structures and social or political organisations as a microcosm of the nation-state to comment directly on the ills befalling society, on key narratives of nation or on the state of the nation as it wrestles with changing circumstances. (2010, 39)

We could indeed group many of the best-known works of modern and contemporary female playwrights into this genre including of course the iconic *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* by Yeats and Gregory but also Teresa Deevy domestically trapped disenchanting heroines in the 1930s, Maura Laverty’s own Dublin Trilogy addressing housing, class and motherhood as a female-perspective led updating of Seán O’Casey’s 1920s post-independence Dublin Trilogy (Leeney and McFeely 2021), the domestic dystopias of Marina Carr’s early 2000s Midlands Trilogy (see Chapter 6), Máiréad Ní Ghrada’s 1960s *An Trial/On Trial* in its indictment of the relationship between the Irish home, Church and state regarding out of wedlock pregnancy (see Chapter 2), Charabanc Theatre Company’s work (written by Marie Jones, Martin Lynch, Sue Ashby) and

that of Christina Reid and Anne Devlin who together explore the relationship between Northern Irishness and femininity in the home in the 1970s–1990s (see Chapter 4), or finally, Nancy Harris, Deirdre Kinahan and Stacey Gregg’s more recent urban realism excavations of Irish and new Irish female identities in the Republic and the North as negotiated in domestic spaces across networks of kinds of relationships that often exceed the strictly familial and/or biological. Lisa Fitzpatrick posits that Anne Devlin, Christina Reid and Marina Carr’s approach to the state of the nation play in particular works through key problems *of* the nation and nationalism to pose a set of “key problems” that simply cannot be disentangled from the gendered perspectives of their characters. Due to the “concentration of the dramatic conflict around female characters” in those playwrights’ works, Fitzpatrick argues that straightforward “readings of the text as metaphorical engagements with the national question” (2005, 321–322) are continually interrupted particularly by Devlin and Reid as Northern Irish playwrights. Fiona Coffey observes that in Northern Ireland, “an emphasis on essentialist forms of identity has required that individuals subvert all other parts of their selfhood (such as gender, class or profession) to the dominant identifying markers of the larger group” (2016, 25). For women in particular, they “have had to subvert their needs as females to those of their ethno-nationalist group in order to avoid marginalization” (2016, 25) in addition to negotiating the religious gendered norms that affect those in the Catholic and Protestant communities in various different ways. Fitzpatrick argues that Devlin and Reid’s work in particular troubles “the conflation of woman and nation in the originary myths of Irish republicanism” by disrupting “narratives of communal identity” and opening up “other potential allegiances, such as those based on class or gender, which trouble sectarian identities” (2005, 321), an approach also shared in common by the production history of Charabanc Theatre Company working in roughly the same era.

It therefore might therefore be said that cisgender female Irish playwrights, in the Republic and Northern Ireland, have largely interpreted and continue to interpret the Irish state of the nation play as a key dramatic genre through which to interrogate the relationship between symbolic and material relationship between women and/as nation in Irish contexts. Whether or not this automatically makes their work feminist in a political sense is a point that Irish theatre and performance scholars continue to debate with Melissa Sihra recently making the distinction between “theatre (and art in general) that is polemically feminist or ‘issue-based,’ where the work serves as a political means to an end” and “theatre that instinctively challenges heteropatriarchy through the nature of its form and content” (2016, 546), while also tracing the way in which earlier generations of female Irish playwrights and theatremakers such as Carr and the women of Charabanc being more hesitant to name their work as such despite touching on a large range of political issues in their work beyond gender whereas she argues that “the younger generation of women in theatre now largely self-identify as feminists” (2016, 557).

This shift towards not only explicit identification but also multi-sited action becomes evident in the work of more contemporary theatremakers like Republic-based Maeve Stone, who has worked across the genres of theatre, film and interdisciplinary art practices, particularly performance art, and overtly describes her work as “responding” directly “to issues of climate breakdown” and “revisiting the canon with a feminist lens” (Stone 2023a). Stone’s body of practice includes extended stints with mainstream companies like the Abbey (resident assistant director in 2012) and established independent companies like Pan Pan Theatre (working their first associate director ever) but increasingly she has moved towards interdisciplinary arts practice with an explicitly activist and/or community-led and embedded orientation. She has addressed the relationship between woman, body and nation head on in *Unwoman Part III*, a collaboration between herself, iconic performer and feminist theatremaker Olwen Fouréré and Australian feminist theatrical company The Rabble performed at the 2018 Dublin Fringe Festival in September, four months after the repeal of the Eighth Amendment which legalised abortion in Ireland (see Chapter 7). *Unwoman Part III* was: “...an invocation of the pregnant body as a plurality of experiences,” an “uncompromised piece of feminist theatre horrified by the history and laws attempting to curb bodily autonomy and reproductive rights” (Stone 2022). In the performance, Fouréré gives “birth to stones,” as “[t]ethered by a thick umbilical rope,” she is “condemned to labour over and over, a perpetual parturition” (Keating 2018), a spectacle supported by set designer Kate Davis’s “space with caul-like tombs” (Keating 2018), Emma Valente’s haunting and atmospheric lights and Stone’s sound design and composition which intensified the overall affect of the piece. Stone’s politically inflected theatre work has addressed the global refugee crisis in *The Mouth of A Shark* (2018), a verbatim song cycle featuring stories of migration to and from Ireland, composed by Maeve Stone, directed by Oonagh Murphy and “created with Michelle o’Rourke, Osaro Azams, Daryl McCormack and Ashley Xiu for ‘Where We Live’ Festival at the Complex in Dublin including a community choir from immigrant and asylum communities” and most recently and prolifically, the climate emergency across multiple projects and artistic works which she classifies under “Activism” on her personal webpage and which has included her serving in roles such as lead artist for the Green Arts Department at Axis Ballymun and artist in residence at the Project Arts Centre, as well as working with “Codema (Dublin’s energy agency)” and Axis as the “embedded Irish artist” on the 2019–2021 Creative Europe project, Cultural Adaptations, led by Creative Carbon Scotland (Stone, 2023a, 2023b “Activism”). Like the work of Charabanc Theatre’s founders, Stone’s work demonstrates how an explicit political orientation towards looking at the relationship between women, gender and nation in Ireland today not only can translate into direct action on a variety of issues but ongoing formal artistic innovation that pushes forward the field of contemporary Irish theatre and performance more broadly.

Case Study Two: Anne Devlin, *Ourselves Alone*

Premiered: 1985, Royal Court Theatre, London in a co-production with Liverpool Playhouse, directed by Simon Curtis.

Anne Devlin's first play *Ourselves Alone* premiered at London's Royal Court Theatre at the height of the Troubles and immediately following several landmark referendums and events on reproductive rights in the Republic. These included the 1983 passage of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland which guaranteed an equal right to life of the unborn child and the mother (Irish Statute Book 1983), County Longford teenager Ann Lovett's 1984 death in childbirth in a Virgin Mary grotto and the Kerry Babies case which was an investigation into the discovery of a murdered infant and subsequent wrongful targeting of another local woman, Joanne Hayes, who had given birth out of wedlock to and buried a stillborn child in the same vicinity. The Irish state recently apologised to Hayes and her family in December 2020 with "deep and sincere regret" for "the hurt and stress" caused to the entire Hayes family," many of whom had been intimidated and charged with aspects of the crime at the time (O'Faolain 2020). These intense contexts would have directly influenced the reception of the play as Devlin's play deals at length with women, sexuality, motherhood and the relationship of these themes to political agency, freedom and contested ideas of nation albeit in the North.

Ourselves Alone was initially developed at the Liverpool Playhouse Theatre and its world premiere for the Royal Court was directed by Simon Curtis with design by Paul Brown (Irish Theatre Playography 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). Despite the play being set in Anderstown, a West Belfast suburb, Devlin was unable to get it produced in Belfast and she speculated at the time that "Belfast theatre management might have thought the play would prove too provocative for their audience" (Nowlan 1986a, 8). Nevertheless, *Ourselves Alone* toured Derry, Enniskillen and Dublin, and also received productions closely following the premiere in Hamburg at the Schaus Spiel Haus in 1986, directed by Peter Palach and the United States at Washington D.C.'s Arena Theatre, directed by Les Waters (Troubles Archive, n.d.). The play's international acclaim also extended to Devlin receiving the 1985 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *Ourselves Alone* which is given annually since 1978 to "women who have written works of outstanding quality for the English-speaking theatre" (The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize 2022). Other awards or nominations for *Ourselves Alone* included the George Devine Award (given by the Royal Court Theatre), an *Irish Post* award and nominations for best new play by the Laurence Olivier Awards (which recognises the best professional theatre in London) and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

In terms of *Ourselves Alone's* immediate categorisation vis-à-vis Irish theatre upon its acclaimed premiere, Andrew Hamilton's pre-coverage of the play in *The Irish Times* opens stating:

The conflict in Northern Ireland is featured day and night now on British television screens and on the radio news bulletins but the greater British public

at whom the coverage is directed are already war weary in their armchairs and kitchens. They are switching off metaphorically. If not literally. Oddly the same thing isn't happening in the British theatre. (1986, 8)

Devlin's unequivocal association with the "British theatre" in the *Irish Times* is telling, Northern Ireland's status as part of the UK and the premiere of the play in Britain notwithstanding. *Ourselves Alone's* international productions and acclaim further complicate how we might think of this play's impact within the unstable category of contemporary "Irish theatre," particularly in terms of how anxieties (or uncertainty) about its initial classification in 1985 also powerfully capture the caginess with which Irish association with the Northern Irish conflict was being dealt with in the Republic of Ireland's press at the time.

Ourselves Alone dramatises the interrelationship between armed conflict in Northern Irish society and violence in the home, following the women of one republican family—sisters Josie (Brid Brennan) and Frieda (Hilary Reynolds) and their brother's partner/common-law wife Donna (Lise-Ann McLaughlin). All performers referenced here appeared in the original production at the Royal Court and for the tour in the Republic of Ireland (Irish Theatre Playography 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). Women's bodily autonomy is under threat throughout from within their own community and kinship network, as well as in the wider context of the Troubles. Frieda comes home noisily telling her sister, Josie, and Donna, "I was nearly gang-raped at the club," to which Josie responds, "Is that all?" (Devlin 1986, 18)—highlighting the pervasiveness of sexual aggression in their daily lives.

Ourselves Alone dramatises the struggle between women's bodies being a central obsession within Irish politics, culture and society and the daily struggle of women to have any meaningful control over their own bodies, personal or political. While women are sexualised constantly as in Frieda's encounter at the club, expression of desire outside of the boundaries of heteronormativity is unacceptable as Josie's inability to talk about her deep and long-term extramarital love affair with Cathal O'Donnell (Adrian Dunbar) epitomises. And while maternity is idealised, it risks being an overdetermining trap which Donna's confinement to the home with a small baby as the partner of an interred man reveals. The extremity of these distorted values is represented by the offstage figure of Josie and Frieda's maiden aunt, Cora, who is cared for by Frieda. She is "blind and deaf and dumb and she has no hands" because the "usual" happened to her—she was storing ammunition for her brother which exploded in her face. Frieda wryly observes: "They stick her out at the front of the parades every so often to show the women of Ireland what their patriotic duty should be" (Devlin 1986, 29). This grotesque parody of a Marian procession in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother Jesus Christ, vividly communicates the distorted symbolic value put on women's total self-sacrifice for their men—an imperative that all three women resist in different ways throughout the play however imperfectly.

As such, the play knowingly plays on the second-wave feminist slogan that the personal is political throughout but keeps feminist politics (as defined by active involvement in political agitation for gender equality) in the background rather than in the foreground. As Cathy Leeney observes of Anne Devlin's later work *After Easter* (1994), Devlin's dramaturgical vision "lets the private flow into the public, making visible in spatial terms a feminist refusal to uphold the categorisation of experience into the political, the personal, the cultural" (2021, 317). Frieda refuses to express cross-border objection to the pending anti-abortion Amendment to the Irish Constitution (see Chapter 4). Meanwhile Josie emphatically insists that "there are no political differences between one person and another that are not political" (Devlin 1986, 23)—a conviction that is not only a matter of personally held belief but reinforced by their family's treatment as active republicans within their immediate community. The women represent a spectrum of political commitment—Josie is a volunteer for the IRA who works as courier, interrogator and active combatant (having planted an unsuccessful bomb), Frieda rejects political commitment and only joins the Worker's Party out of defiance after being hit by her father, and Donna's commitment to republicanism seems sustained only through her child's father's activities and ongoing internment.

In *Ourselves Alone*, sexuality and motherhood operate as continual (but unreliable) barometers that confirm or limit each woman's degree of personal and/or social freedom. After learning that Liam has another woman, Donna immediately takes a younger lover herself, telling Josie, "he's young, he makes me feel innocent" (Devlin 1986, 83). Josie's pregnancy radically alters her plans for political involvement: "I'd like to stop for awhile, look around me, plant a garden, listen for other sounds; the breathing of a child somewhere outside Anderstown" (Devlin 1986, 77). Mel Gussow's *New York Times*' review for the later 1987 Arena Stage production of *Ourselves Alone* observed that "[w]hat keeps the play from being solipsistic or self-pitying is that Ms. Devlin's three women are not viewed heroically. They are self-victimizing, allowing themselves to be trapped in traditional roles, unable or reluctant to assert their own identity" (1987, 61). However, Gussow's individuation of the women as portrayed by Devlin misses the structural argument that she consciously makes through imbricating her protagonists' personal struggles so closely to the gendered constraints of Northern Irish republican nationalism which confines the characters (and by extension the other women in their immediate and wider communities) so absolutely to their homes and within rigid limitations of femininity and motherhood. In doing so, Reid does not concede to her character's lack of heroism, but rather calls into question the conditions under which women can become heroes to themselves or others in the North at that time, and in doing so begins to chip away at the notion of the tragic hero as both gendered and potentially meaningless in these circumstances.

Given the intense political and social contexts noted above and the international success of this play by a Northern Irish female playwright, attention

to its immediate reception is illuminating as it reveals a gendered slant to the criticism and also notably does not put the play in direct dialogue with any of the production's loaded contexts—the Troubles or debates over reproductive freedom—instead it is about assessing the play as a discrete stand-alone artistic work of estimable measurable quality. David Nowlan's review of *Ourselves Alone* when it premiered in the Republic as part of the 1986 Dublin Theatre opens by proclaiming that with *Ourselves Alone*, Devlin "consolidates her reputation as a significant writer, even if she does not establish herself as an accomplished playwright." He goes on condescendingly to claim: "She writes her words well and conveys her ideas with empathy and subtlety. Her text resounds with authenticity. But her plot creaks with implausibility" (1986b, 12). Feminist Irish theatre scholars including but not limited to Cathy Leeney, Melissa Sihra (2018) and Lisa Fitzpatrick (2005) have demonstrated over and over that as a female Irish playwright Devlin has been far from alone in these kinds of backhanded gendered critical commentaries, particularly the repeated focus on her inability to satisfy genre conventions and tendency to verbal excess but as Leeney charges, "If women playwrights are sometimes accused of not knowing what they are doing theatrically, it is often because they are doing something new, familiar, or transgressive of convention. Originality, strangeness, and resistant awkwardnesses are likely to result" (2021, 318). In addition, Nowlan's review visibly chafes against the emphasis on women's lives and women's words, noting first that "the characters of the women are persuasive and engaging, but the men in their lives come across as either bullies or wimps," ultimately grudgingly concluding that "...in contrast to many other plays, the women have all the best lines here" (1986b, 12). The same gendered undertones (or overtones) are evident in Michael Billington's review of the London premiere for *The Guardian*. He does open by conceding the play's significance from a canonical perspective weighted down by gendered tropes of the nation as he observes that in "[m]ost Irish plays tell us it is the women who suffer: this one shows it" as "the first work I have seen to present the Northern Irish tragedy from the women's viewpoint" (1985, 12). However, he goes on to fault the work for excesses claiming that "she takes on more material than she can handle" although "her writing is not without hidden subtleties" (1985, 12). This reception example for Devlin's work in the Republic is important to highlight both in terms of what it brings up about Northern Irish theatre's relationship to Irish theatre and the double-bind of Northern Irish female playwrights who are marginalised through both lenses.

INTERROGATING NATIONAL HISTORIES THROUGH THE IRISH HISTORY PLAY

From the nineteenth century to the present, the island of Ireland's search for national self-definition has not only relied on the stage but the stage as a lens for *historical* contemplation of ideas of the Irish nation in formation through

the evolution and practice of the modern and contemporary Irish history play. This is true both in terms of the craft of playwriting but also production strategies applied to canonical Irish history plays as in Director Garry Hynes' infamous 1991 production of Séan O'Casey's *Plough and the Stars* as her inaugural production as artistic director of the Abbey which "placed strong emphasis on the poverty of its characters" with "visual" images that "worked against the tendency to see O'Casey's characters as 'colourful' expressions of working class life in Dublin" (Lonergan 2009, 65) Patrick Lonergan identifies this series of artistic choices as inciting "unusual levels of media hostility" but also making space in the media and private debates that followed for discussions of the 1926 play's "relevance to contemporary events, including the changing role of women in Irish life, the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland, and fears about the erosion of Irish sovereignty caused by the impending transformation of the European Community into the European Union" (2009, 65) at the time (see Chapter 4 for more background on this period).

Many of modern and contemporary Irish theatre's most famous and paradigm-defining plays could be classified within the genre of the Irish history play from W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* to Séan O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy (*The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Plough and the Stars*) to Brian Friel's *Translations* and *Making History* to Stewart Parker's *Northern Star*, *Pentecost* and *Heavenly Bodies* to Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (profiled below) to ANU Production's extensive body of site-specific work largely concerned with local, minoritarian and grassroots histories of individuals and/or communities that challenge monolithic (and patriarchal) histories of the Irish nation and/or nationalist movements (see Chapter 6). In this section, we define the Irish history play as a theatrical work that uses past events of canonical or counter-canonical significance to reflect explicitly on those events by using theatrical form as a prism to make new meaning for the present. Theatre's liveness lends an immediacy to this particular dramatic genre, particularly as the Republic and North's self-memorialisation of their intertwined histories has so often looked to theatre through grassroots (Field Day Theatre) and top-down state funded initiatives (such as the heavy theatrical programming and commissioning of ANU Productions particularly for the Decade of Centenaries observed between 2016–2023, see Chapter 6). We also identify how performance histories and particularly the history of the actor and/or revivals of landmark Irish history plays are key to understanding the operation of this genre in its constitutive role in establishing and testing the limits of Irish national belonging onstage.

The Irish history play and the Irish state of the nation play (addressed in the previous section in primarily gendered and gynocentric terms) share similarities in terms of their preoccupation with interrogating and defining belonging to and through Irishness in private and public spaces. However, the Irish history play, as arguably a subgenre of the state of the nation play, explicitly focuses on watershed historical events as a lens for theatrical and/or performative action.

The events which form the background to the theatrical experience concern representative groups and figures with the events' impact ranging in scale from the nation or contested territory as a whole (plays which deal with Easter Rising, the War for Independence, Civil War), regions (such as plays about the Troubles which may impact the whole island to greater or lesser degrees depending on the particular event or context being addressed) or distinct subgroups or communities who uniquely experience the historical event in ways that might not extend to the whole nation (such as in McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster* profiled below which focuses on the experience of Ulster Protestants who served in World War I or various adaptations of James Plunkett's radio play *The Risen People* (Irish Theatre Playography [2023b] which depicts working-class tram workers striking in Dublin during the 1913 Lockout). Regardless of whether the historical event in question's scale of impact extends to the whole nation or only to smaller subgroups or communities, however, the Irish history play as a formal genre makes an argument that an audience's focus on the particular experiences of characters amplified through the play and/or performance at that historical watershed moment can result in their own greater understanding of the (Irish) nation as a broader shared collective, their own place in it *and* that historical moment.

In understanding how the Irish history plays operate in relationship to the nation, nationalism and the nation-state, it is important however to acknowledge that modern and contemporary Irish theatre's lineage of the Irish history play pre-dates the early productions of the Irish Literary Theatre and then the Abbey Theatre which most prominently define the genre such as Yeats and Gregory's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Rather, we might more usefully locate the origins of the Irish history play as we are using it here with the work of nineteenth-century melodramatic playwright extraordinaire Irish emigrant playwright Dion Boucicault, popular on English, Irish and North American stages. While his work (and in particular his triptych of Irish plays *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughbruan*) was in earlier periods often minimised only as a side effect of an "improved portrayal of the stage Irishman," Deirdre McFeely has more recently demonstrated that "the complex politics of reception of" Boucicault's "plays, spanning the twenty-year period from the start of the 1860s right through to the early 1880s, cannot be separated from the social and political implications of colonialism at that time" (2012, 2). Boucicault's triptych's emphasis on using historical events as a touchstone of plot (whether the 1798 rebellion in *Arrah-na-Pogue* or the re-telling of the nineteenth-century murder of Ellen Scanlan (née Hanley) in County Clare in *The Colleen Bawn*) and reappropriating them in the service of (nationalist) melodramatic spectacle would not have been unique to him in the time period in which he worked. However, as Boucicault's pivotal role in the lineage of modern and contemporary Irish theatre practice has been more clearly excavated in the past decade due to the work of McFeely and others, we must begin with him if we are to understand most rigorously how the contemporary Irish stage makes use of theatricality not only as a re-treading

of but also a rectification of the past *for* the present through the genre of the Irish history play as a comment on the nation, nationalism and the nation-state. Crucially, beginning our genealogy of the Irish history play as we're using it in this chapter with Boucicault also foregrounds the inter- and transnational influences and political crosscurrents of this particular dramatic genre as practised by contemporary Irish playwrights and/or theatremakers who are an unprecedentedly diverse generation in terms of race, ethnicity and/or other nationalities than Irish.

The Abbey Theatre's 2022 production of African-American playwright Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon*, which is a direct adaptation of Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, makes the theatrical potential of this longer and multi-nodal genealogy of the Irish history play particularly evident in terms of how the specific genre of the Irish history play might be used theatrically to not only reflect on the past but demand active confrontation with the present and the future of the Irish nation, in particular, the relationship between race, ethnicity and national identities in Ireland today. Boucicault's original play *The Octoroon* and Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* admittedly do not focus on historical events per se but rather historical institutions (U.S. slavery), tropes (the "Octoroon") and in the case of Jacobs-Jenkins' adaptation, historical figures (Boucicault himself). However, the Abbey's programming of this play written by an African-American playwright, directed by a Black British director (Anthony Simpson-Pike) and featuring the largest cast of Black and/or African-*Irish* descent ever to appear on the Abbey's stages (either the mainstage or the Peacock) was a deliberate performative confrontation that worked actively to destabilise how we might classify the Irish history play moving forward in light of the Republic of Ireland's drastically diversified population over the last 25–30 years (see Chapters 6 and 12).

Directed by Black British Director Anthony Simpson-Pike, the Abbey's production of *An Octoroon* starred renowned white Irish actor Rory Nolan as Boucicault and other roles (recognisable to many from his extensive production history as a Druid ensemble member including acting in other Boucicault plays with Druid including their 2013 production of *The Colleen Bawn*) (Druid Theatre 2022) and a cast of Black, Black-Irish and/or mixed-race Irish actors including Loré Adewusi, Umi Myers, Jeanne Nicole Ní Ainle and Patrick Martins, many of whom were making their debut on the Abbey stage (Abbey Theatre 2023a). This example is relevant to this section because of the way in which Jacobs-Jenkins as contemporary African-American playwright uses history as his material consciously in *An Octoroon*—not only the history of slavery but also the history of melodrama as a theatrical genre tied up with both slavery and capitalism which Boucicault's original play *The Octoroon* casts in bold relief through its staging of a slave auction as one of the central sensation scenes characteristic of the melodrama genre that the play restages.

When performed on the stage of the Abbey, Ireland's national theatre in 2022, Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* came directly into close proximity with theatrical genealogies of the Abbey's "haunted stage" following Marvin

Carlson (2003) which raised the stakes of what this particular production could activate in Jacob-Jenkins' play relative to previous American and UK productions of the play. *An Octoroon's* symbiotic relationship with Boucicault's original melodrama was uniquely intensified when performed on the Abbey stage due to the contested historical and national status of Boucicault himself as a figure, prior histories of blackness and indeed blackface being performed on the Abbey's stages, and the fact that this play was deliberately chosen by current Abbey artistic Director Caitríona McLaughlin to reflect on and dialogue with Ireland's growing Black and African-Irish community by confronting dead-on (white) Irish involvement with the violent and coercive histories of slavery and empire the play invokes. As Patrick Lonergan notes in a wider review of production histories of Boucicault's *The Octoroon*, we "need too to consider how Irish theatre has contributed to the oppression of others, and to chart the extent to which racist performance practices have informed the composition and reception of Irish plays for several centuries" (forthcoming, n.p.). There is no play more ideal than Boucicault's *The Octoroon* as delivered via Jacob-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* to activate this quest of inquiry.

Despite the continuing popularity of Boucicault in general and *The Octoroon* in particular with community and other professional theatres, Boucicault was exiled from the Abbey's programming until 1967 apart from a single performance by an amateur group in 1905 when the Garrick Amateur Club performed Boucicault's drama *Grimaldi* for one night only, 19 December 1905, as a charitable event in aid of "Miss Swift's Home" (Abbey Theatre 1905). Boucicault's exclusion from the "national" canon of modern and contemporary Irish theatre due to being perceived as problematic in his representation of Irishness introduced a chasm in understanding his influence on the evolution of the modern and contemporary Irish history play as a touchstone dramatic genealogy/genre—a gap that became more urgent when the Republic of Ireland's population diversified drastically post-1990s. This is because Boucicault's particular sidelining obscured the constitutive relationship of his legacy to race, ethnicity and Irish identity as relevant to the practice of the Irish history play today. Cross-racial performance and blackface specifically in the nineteenth-century theatre history is inextricably linked to Irishness via Boucicault's transnational prominence as a figure and the popularity of *The Octoroon* particularly in Ireland and internationally since the nineteenth century.

When Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon* was staged at the Abbey, Ireland's national theatre, in 2022, all these historical resonances were activated, but the performance was also ghosted by previously acclaimed blackface performances on the Abbey stage such as Northern Irish actor and playwright Rutherford Mayne's often-revived title role performance in Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*. Billed as the first white actor to play the role, Mayne originally played the role in an amateur context through the Dublin Drama League before performing it for the Abbey Theatre (1927 and 1931), the Belfast Grand Opera House (1929) and 1942 at the Gaiety Theatre, this time in a

production produced by Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammoir and the Gate Theatre. Mayne's 1967 obituary declared that many had "preferred him to" African-American actor "Paul Robeson in the part" (Irish Times 1967), a pronouncement contemporaneous with the in-progress US Civil Rights movement and indicative of the still high level of tolerance for blackface in the Republic at this time. It is difficult to date the actual accepted end of blackface at the Abbey or in Ireland generally as Lonergan details, but John Brannigan has been able to establish that this practice had ceased at the Abbey by the early 1970s based on a noticeable shift to the importing of Black actors from the UK and the United States in productions with Black characters (2009, 202). It is worth noting that Boucicault's attainment of status as a "national" playwright for the Republic's national theatre in the late 1960s coincides with other shifts in theatrical social consciousness such as the receding of blackface as an accepted practice at the Abbey.

Simpson-Pike's 2022 Abbey production of *An Octoroon* ended with actor Loré Adewusi who played Br'er Rabbit and Captain Ratts settling on the edge of the stage downstage centre and locking eyes in stillness with the audience for several minutes. This stillness (a tactic used at other key moments in the play) deliberately contrasted with the play's energetic explosion of melodrama as a theatrical repertoire and worked against the spectacularisation of the Black body that melodrama as well as the institution of slavery itself are characterised by. However, the additional layer worth noting here is how this ponderously anti-spectacular and interrogative moment called Irish theatre histories and history in general to account—whether contemporary Irish theatre's own spectacularisation of the Black (male) body as asylum seeker repeatedly on the Abbey's stage in more recent times, the Abbey's previous histories of blackface as well as other racist representations, or the way in which *An Octoroon* makes it impossible to separate Boucicault's global celebrity which paved the way for modern and contemporary Irish theatre's global successes even if indirectly from the institution of slavery it dramatises, an association only intensified by the Republic's significantly increased Black population in the last 30 years. In this final extended gaze between Adewusi and the audience, the question of what the Irish national theatre is now, who it is for, and what histories must impact its future modes of expression are all left open, but in being left open, they are left activated hopefully for what is to come next on the Abbey and other stages as the Irish history play must reimagine itself for a new generation or at the very least, restage itself in productive and illuminating ways that refuse a chasm between the past and the present. And yet, a February 2023 controversy following the announcement of the Irish Times Theatre Awards nominations for 2022 underscored how potent moments of performative confrontation do not automatically result in structural change. Two actors from the ensemble of *An Octoroon* were singled out for an acting award nomination—the only two white actors in the ensemble Rory Nolan and Maeve O'Mahony. While the production was nominated for best production overall, Anthony Simpson-Pike and the ensemble (which is a category for award)

were not nominated (Keating 2023). Selected members of *An Octoroon's* team including Director Simpson-Pike, Annie-Lunnette Deakin-Foster (Movement Director), Choy-Ping Clarke-Ng (Assistant Designer), Esosa Ighodharo (Assistant Director), Giles Thomas (Sound Designer and Composer) and Molly O'Cathain (Costume Designer) released a statement in objection to the nominations noting that the production:

demanded a lot of the people of colour making and performing it, asking them to stage moments of great violence and reenact offensive and damaging stereotypes, in order to emphasise the enduring toxicity of those caricatures to the (majority white) audience. (Black and Irish 2023)

They observe that despite this representative burden “a decision was made to only recognise the two white actors for nominations among all the individuals in the cast and creative team” and in response, called for “a more expansive and diverse judging panel, and transparency around their selection process” (Black and Irish 2023). At the time of writing, the judging for the *Irish Times* Theatre Awards for 2023 is paused to work through these issues (Carolan 2023), reflective of hopefully a turn towards wider accountability that extends beyond limited flagship productions that still struggle to be legible within mainstream structures of recognition in the Irish theatre industries like the *Irish Times* Theatre Awards.

Case Study Three: Frank McGuinness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*

Premiered: 1985, Abbey Theatre, Peacock Stage, Dublin, directed by Patrick Mason.

Notable Revivals: Abbey Theatre, Dublin: 1994, directed by Patrick Mason (to mark the Northern Irish ceasefire), 2004 (for the Abbey Centenary), directed by Robin Lefevre and 2016, directed by Jeremy Herrin (as the final play in the Abbey's Centenary “Waking the Nation” Programme).

McGuinness's treatment of the mass carnage of the Battle of the Somme through the eyes of eight Ulster Protestant volunteers from diverse class backgrounds is a landmark of contemporary Irish theatre in the context of both the Republic and Northern Ireland. McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster*, directed by Patrick Mason, premiered in the same year as Devlin's *Ourselves Alone*, and like the above, took on gender, sexuality, the body and the nation as central themes in relation to Northern Irish identities. However, McGuinness's play centres masculinity, queerness and Protestantism in an almost complete inversion of Devlin's work. Interestingly, of the two, McGuinness's has demonstrated the most canonical staying power despite the heavy international support and accolades for Devlin's work upon its initial premiere as explored earlier in the chapter.

Upon its premiere, McGuinness's choice to take on this perspective as a playwright of Catholic background originally from Donegal was considered extraordinary, as was the play's debut on the Abbey's Peacock stage given its

subject matter. After all, as the *Sunday Tribune* observed at the time, this was “a Republican play being staged in the national theatre of the Republic of Ireland” (Abbey Theatre 1985a) at a time of active conflict in Northern Ireland. McGuinness described his motivation thus:

When I examined what happened on that day, I realised that it was the Battle of the Somme and the psychic blow that it delivered to a part of the population of the island which has as effectively shaped our destinies as anything that happened on Easter Sunday...This knowledge could have caused not a political unity but certainly an imaginative unity, an imaginative understanding of why people were behaving the way they did. (Abbey Theatre 1985b)

Directed by Patrick Mason, then artistic director of the Abbey Theatre, this landmark production was also a progression of the developing and still ongoing creative partnership between Mason and McGuinness. Mason has directed the premieres of many of McGuinness’s plays also including *The Factory Girls*, *Dolly West’s Kitchen*, *Gates of Gold*, *The Hanging Gardens* and his adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera*. McGuinness says of their sustained collaboration that he’s “benefited enormously from Patrick’s very exact visual sense; I benefited from his extremely acute ear; and I try to carry those lessons learnt from him into my work and with other directors. I judge every other director I work with by the standards of Patrick” (Roche 2010, 19).

With *Sons of Ulster*, McGuinness powerfully multiplies the “national” myths accommodated on the stage of the Republic of Ireland’s national theatre. He reintegrates not only participation in World War I but queer Protestant Loyalist participation in World War I into the collective memory of the Republic’s national theatre repertoire, an intervention amplified by the Abbey’s repeated re-inclusion of the play at pivotal moments of reflecting on the Irish past in the present over the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. *Observe the Sons of Ulsters* is a densely textual play with layered classical, religious and historical allusions throughout but it is also extremely visceral in the play’s opportunities for physical expression, particularly in terms of the spectrum of intimacies possible between men, from the platonic to the erotic. The play was received on its premiere in Ireland as not only a comment on the legacy of World War I and the Battle of the Somme, but an allegory for the continuing Troubles as well as the broader global threat of nuclear holocaust felt keenly during the Cold War period in which it premiered. Terence Brown observed in 1985 that the play is not only about Ulster Protestantism or World War I but “about the chronic insecurity that has us all marching towards Armageddon, those fears that mean we arm with weapons of self-destruction so that we might not have to fear” (Abbey Theatre 1985c).

Of *Observe the Son’s* status as an Irish history play, Helen Lojek argues that: “the importance of McGuinness’s play lies in its very avoidance of (and sometimes outright challenge to [a] standard notion of what events are worth recording and constitute ‘history.’ This play has no directly presented official side, no officers, no marches, no battles” (1985, 45). The play’s opening lines

by Pyper, the central character and only survivor of the battle, establish this from the outset as he laments: “Again. As always, again. Why does this persist? What more have we to tell each other? I remember nothing today. Absolutely nothing” (McGuinness 1996, 97). Yet, *Observe the Sons*’ obsession with the performance of memory and memory as a performative tool (as in Pyper’s constant lies about and/or embellishment of his own past to the other men as a tool to expose their own insecurities, fears and/or prejudices throughout the play) draws attention to way in which individual and idiosyncratic perspectives on moments of historical importance such as the Battle of the Somme expose the true complexity and contradictions of the event in question, as well as playing out how individuals themselves feel history acting on and through them. McIlwaine and Anderson debate the connection between the sinking of the Titanic and the impact of World War I on Belfast in particular:

Anderson: The bloody *Titanic* went down because it hit an iceberg.

McIlwaine: The pride of Belfast went with it.

Anderson: You’re not going to meet many icebergs on the front, are you? So what are you talking about?

McIlwaine: The war is our punishment.

Anderson: There’s more than Belfast in the war.

McIlwaine: But Belfast will be lost in this war. The whole of Ulster will be lost. We’re not making a sacrifice. Jesus, you’ve seen this war. We are the sacrifice (McGuinness 1996, 156).

Throughout, *Observe the Sons* riffs on the unionist convictions of the assembled men which vary in intensity and scope. While some were politically active in terms of unionism prior to the war including Millen and Moore who describe publicly shaming a young Catholic who painted a tricolour on their lodge, others such as Pyper engage more primarily with the pressures of this identity as related to their family’s background and expectations and for others still, their primary attachment is to religiosity rather than tribalism. Therefore, while the characters are aware of and meditate on their precise intersection with historical events as above, they also constantly question their true connection to these events even as they experience the consequences of their aftermath as above. Although all the men voluntarily enlist albeit for very different reasons, McGuinness’s take on the Irish history play presents these characters as conscripted to unionist history itself without their consent, an entanglement each negotiates and plays out over the course of the play before mostly meeting their deaths confirming McIlwaine’s prescient intuition in Part 3. McGuinness stages membership to a nationalist/communal identity as part of an imagined community as highly individual and negotiated rather than monolithic in addition to memorialising the nuance of Ulster Protestant experiences in World War I.

David Cregan further argues that McGuinness’s dramaturgical renovation of the Irish history play in *Observe the Sons* and other works depends on

queerness for its critical power as “[r]epresentations of homosexuality and gay characters are often the sexual dynamite McGuinness ignites to blow up the organisation of history that dominates and dictates solidified or essentialized Irish identities” (2004, 672). Fintan Walsh concurs observing that McGuinness’s plays stand out overall for “deploying queer characters and aesthetics in order to revise dominant historical narratives and imagine them differently” (2016, 6), an observation which succinctly encapsulates how McGuinness makes use of the Irish history genre in *Observe the Sons*. Across his body of work, McGuinness’s signature queer remix of the Irish history play repeatedly uses intimate relationships between men including but not limited to fully sexual “as a dramaturgical device to puncture pressure points in Irish history and disseminate ideologies that have become congested and stagnant in the politics of both gender and national identities” (Cregan 2004, 672) which favour heteronormative figures and roles such as that of Mother Ireland explored in the previous section. Cregan in fact identifies *Observe the Sons of Ulster* as “the first overt representation of gay physical action on the stage at the National Theatre in Dublin” (2004, 673). Premiering almost a decade prior to the legalisation of homosexuality in Ireland in 1993, the male-male intimacies staged in this production by Mason and McGuinness on the stage of Ireland’s national theatre were highly significant and also cleverly evasive of the archival record when the play was originally published alongside the production. As Cregan exposes, “*They kiss*” does not appear in the stage directions “of the published text,” meaning that “the only real evidence that proves the use of homosexuality as a dramaturgical tool in this play comes from the performance” (2004, 672–673) itself. The play’s repeated production over the years at the Abbey and internationally however has meant that this watershed moment had sticking power and McGuinness’s groundbreaking and taboo-breaking work as a playwright paved the way for the current generation of queer Irish theatremakers on the stage of the national theatre and beyond.

Observe the Sons of Ulster’s extended meditation on the futility of memory and myth as amelioratives for national(ist) trauma as negotiated by powerless individuals has remained dramatically central in contemporary Irish theatre as a lens through which to negotiate twentieth and twenty-first-century Irish commemorative occasions. It has received several key revivals for the Abbey in line with marking key historical events or anniversaries connected to the play or the institution itself including the announcement of the 1994 Provisional IRA ceasefire, the Abbey’s centenary (2004) and recent centenary of the Battle of the Somme itself as well as Easter Rising (2016). Despite the play’s refusal of grand historical narratives or positions as observed by Lojek earlier, the play’s 1994 staging was particularly charged within and of itself doing political work by commentators at the time with Robert F. O’Byrne observing in the *Irish Times* that “[n]ow that peace between the parties has been negotiated, the Government chose to watch drama rather than create it by turning out in force for the opening night of the revival” (Abbey Theatre 1994a). However, there were also remarks in the same batch of coverage that

security was “tight at the Abbey theatre tonight when representatives of the Loyalist community in the Shankhill road, Belfast” (Abbey Theatre 1994b) were attending the 1994 revival. When the play was revived in 2016, it was tellingly done so as a co-production between “the Abbey, London’s Headlong, Glasgow’s Citizens Theatre and Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres,” which reviewer Peter Crawley concluded meant this production had covered “more ground between Ireland, the UK and even a brief detour to the Somme battleground, than the characters in Frank McGuinness’s 1985 play” (Crawley 2016). This broad group of co-producers speaks to increasingly coalitional attempts to share and reflect on contested histories between Ireland and the UK. Ireland’s ambassador to London Daniel Mulhall reflected in 2016 on attending commemorative events for Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme in quick succession and witnessing talks with competing and critical perspectives on both events without controversy. He mused:

I doubt if such inclusive commemoration would have been possible in 1966 or even in 1996. In the past, there would have been some reticence on the Irish side about World War I commemoration and a good deal of sensitivity in Britain about the events of Easter 1916. Happily, we have now reached the point where we can view each other’s historical narratives with curiosity and respect. (Embassy of Ireland, Great Britain)

McGuinness’s remarkable success with *The Sons of Ulster* in the Republic’s national theatre over four consecutive decades suggests that contemporary Irish theatre led the way in making this kind of shared contemplative space possible far in advance of the nation-state apparatuses that programme wider commemorative events for both the Republic and the UK.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that the close association between contemporary Irish theatre and the nation in terms of thematic focus, production aesthetics and/or use of theatre productions or theatremakers as commemorative or diplomatic emissaries has continued to mutate and increase in complexity up through the present rather than fade away as a defining Irish theatrical fixation. Our national(ist) fixation continues however as the meaning of Irish national belonging and/or jurisdiction continues to undergo unprecedented shifts in scope and definition on the grounds of inward-migration, emigration, diasporic belonging and/or race/ethnicity/multiple citizenships.

This book on contemporary Irish theatre comes out just as the Republic of Ireland officially concludes our Decade of Centenaries in 2023 at the end of a commemorative decade that has seen the departure of the UK (and with it, Northern Ireland) and one of the worst ten pandemics or epidemics

recorded in human history as well as against the global backdrop of a desperately mounting climate emergency and intense wide-scale conflicts in Syria, the Ukraine, and Palestine among others with this global instability contributing to an unprecedented refugee crisis in which the UN Refugee Agency estimating approximately 100 million people displaced worldwide at the start of 2022, the most recent figures available at time of writing but likely higher (UNCHR 2023). All these interlinked global events and pressures throw the question of “what ish” the Irish nation into further crisis. Impacts include fresh reengagement with questions over the status of Northern Ireland (as well as limited outbreaks of violence related to this ongoing negotiation), serious questions for the Republic and the North regarding their participation in and ethical duty to global and/or European Union led climate recovery initiatives and how to accommodate populations arriving in or displaced from within and/or outside Europe, as well as the ongoing attempt to rebuild economically and socially across the island following the (so far) most acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The contemporary Irish theatre’s ongoing response to these newest and in most cases dire and even apocalyptic dynamics is of course at nascent stages although some theatrical works such as Brokentalkers’ *This Beach* (2016) have explicitly explored the link between climate emergency, the global refugee crisis and Irish (and world) national belonging (McIvor, 2023). In addition, as detailed in Chapters 6 and 12, the demographic changes to the population in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland since the mid-1990s mean that whiteness and/or Europeaness is no longer synonymous with Irish national belonging for those living in either national jurisdiction on the island. And indeed, as theatre and performance organisations continue to interrogate the cost and environmental impact of touring productions and/or works post-pandemic as the sector revives internationally, there may be changes ahead for contemporary Irish theatre’s currency and movement as national(ist) export. For example, the Republic’s Arts Council is now currently drafting a new Climate Action Policy and Implementation Plan which will likely have implications for the touring of theatre created in Ireland/Irish theatre both nationally and internationally (Arts Council 2023). These dramatic recent events and rapidly shifting global dynamics mean that precision as well as expanse of imagination in the definition of nation, nationalism and nation-state when it comes to analysing contemporary Irish theatre and stagecraft will be more important than ever.

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Language

Irish theatre has often been viewed as synonymous with literary theatre, its drama made distinctive by the use of inventive, performative and often poetic language by characters that are natural storytellers. This perspective has been promoted by critics and playwrights alike and is often an expectation of international audiences. The critic Seamus Deane is indicative of this viewpoint when he proclaims in his preface to *The Selected Plays of Brian Friel*:

Brilliance in the theatre has, for Irish Dramatists, been linguistic. Formally, the Irish theatrical tradition has not been highly experimental. It depends almost exclusively on talk, on language left to itself to run through the whole spectrum of a series of personalities, often adapted by the same individual. (1987, 12)

Deane's statement goes too far, as much past criticism has, in overstating the linguistic over the formal accomplishments of Irish theatre. In so doing he elevates the status of the playwright over all other theatre practitioners, something this book, in the historical chapters, has endeavoured to correct. However, to ignore how language operates and contributes to the development and impact of Irish theatre would also be a mistake.

The attention to language identified by Deane can be rooted in Ireland's colonial history and struggle for independence. Ireland's own native ancient language, Gaeilge often anglicised as Gaelic, was gradually lost to its people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries due to its systematic eradication through the laws that prevented its use and teaching implemented as part of British colonialism; the trauma of the potato famine in the nineteenth century and mass emigration. The movement to restore the Irish language subsequently in the early twentieth century was a key driver of cultural nationalism

and brought with it a revival of Ireland's rich mythical inheritance and celebration of its tradition of storytelling. This revivalism also sought to counter the colonial propaganda and stereotype of the stage Irishman which was not only propagated through grotesque caricature but through language with the Irish portrayed either as inarticulate savages or as deviant manipulative linguists whose words were not to be trusted. It was thus that cultural nationalists Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, George Moore and Edward Martyn would found the Irish Literary Theatre to counter the misrepresentation of Ireland and show that it was not the "home of buffoonery and easy sentiment" (Gregory 1972, 20). The Literary Theatre evolved into the Abbey Theatre that would enjoy world renown for the plays of J. M. Synge, Sean O'Casey and indeed Yeats and Gregory which were not written in Irish but inventively drew on the rhythms, phrasing and myths of Gaelic to create a new form of Hiberno-English. This legacy of the literary theatre still looms large in contemporary Irish theatre through the repeated revivals of the dramas of these playwrights as discussed in the historical chapters of this book and also due to international expectations of Irish theatre that views work through this tradition. It is also worth observing that stage Irish portrayals did not end with the coming of the Irish Literary Theatre but continue to be perpetuated on stage, in Hollywood movies, sit-coms and soap operas. Anxieties concerning language and the failure of words as well as play with language and performativity that mark so much of contemporary theatre's concerns and innovations of form are thus acutely determined on the Irish stage.

It is prudent at this point to first qualify what is meant by language in this chapter and to qualify how language is understood to function in the theatre. Language is a term that can be thought of broadly to include any system of communication used by a particular community. The theatre makes use of, reflects and often stylises the linguistic systems of communication of its community but it also possesses its own particular systems of communication. It has been argued, particularly since the application of semiotic theory to performance, that theatre as an ancient highly codified and conventionalised art form communicates with audiences through many different languages of the stage (movement, composition, gestures, lighting, conventionalised forms, archetypes, etc.) that are beyond the verbal or even the referential. Such languages of the stage have been emphasised in this book through a dedicated chapter on the body, production cases studies, charting changing performance strategies and showing how directors, designers and theatre companies have shaped Irish theatre in the short-profile sections. Therefore for the purposes of this chapter we will be concentrating largely on the linguistic systems of communication used by contemporary Irish playwrights and how they play with language. Marvin Carlson writes that

...playing with language in the theatre is not simply a postcolonial or post-modern strategy (although linguistic play has become of major or even central importance in both postcolonial and postmodern theatre) but an activity found

very widely in theatrical cultures past and present, around the world, and that such ‘playing’ as is the case with much ‘play’ in theatre, has often involved very serious social and artistic concerns. (2006, 6)

The chapter draws on postcolonial and postmodern strategies in relation to Irish theatre while also emphasising how such approaches are rooted in the medium of theatre, a medium that invites its audiences to play with the cultural conceptions as well as political and historical circumstances of contemporary Ireland. These conceptions and circumstances are of course connected to and often shaped by the wider world.

This chapter charts through its three elucidating frameworks and three related case studies how contemporary Irish theatre negotiates the tension between a strong theatrical tradition that is tied to a conception of an independent Irish nation that aimed to speak in its own distinctive voice and a contemporary interdependent world that speaks with many different voices.

- **Hiberno-English: An Untamed Language for the Stage:** The loss and attempted revival of the Irish Language and its creation of Hiberno-English when translated fuels creativity in the Irish theatre and has helped to give it many of its recognisable characteristics. This section firstly explores the theatricality of Hiberno-English in contemporary drama. Secondly, it examines duality in Irish playwriting that manifests in recurring features such as twins, doppelgängers and double meanings. Here, such duality is examined as a result of the status of the Irish language in contemporary culture where it is a ghostly presence that affects the national psyche and is felt in creative expression. Finally it focuses on how the production of Irish-Language dramas could be said to have contributed to the introduction of new staging techniques thus furthering a deeper knowledge and practice of new languages of the stage in Ireland.
- **Storytelling: Language as Community:** With Ireland’s strong folk tradition of oral storytelling and the world renowned achievements of its modern literature in the works of James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Elisabeth Bowen, Lady Gregory, Samuel Beckett, to name a few, it is unsurprising that contemporary Irish drama is often concerned with the nature of storytelling. In much contemporary Irish theatre there are many narratives within a play and these often propel the drama. Stories are themselves actors, within much of Irish drama, with the capacity to change circumstances and characters or to stultify and distract them. In this section the use of language as story and the power of words as an agent of both change and stasis is explored.
- **Adaptation: Language as Heteroglossia:** Since the early twentieth-century Irish theatre has been concerned with the translation and adaptation of plays written in other languages other than English. In adapting these plays into an Irish idiom and context Irish playwrights are able to

go beyond being situated within an English tradition and position themselves in relation to world drama. This section identifies a rise in Irish adaptations of this sort from the 1980s onward and it explores the translation strategy they employ to deliver texts in a language of heteroglossia, or many voices, that reflects Ireland's contemporary location within an international community and its negotiation of foreign cultures.

These three foundational frameworks are accompanied by brief case studies that model the application of these critical lenses to these key theatre productions.

- **Hiberno-English: An Untamed Language for the Stage** (Enda Walsh's *Disco Pigs*)
- **Storytelling: A Language Searching for Community** (Conor McPherson's *The Weir*)
- **Adaptation and Heteroglossia** (Lucy Caldwell's version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*)

HIBERNO-ENGLISH: AN UNTAMED LANGUAGE FOR THE STAGE

Despite one hundred years of Irish independence where a systematic effort to revive the Irish language through state education was put in place, English is the tongue spoken by the majority of the population of the Irish Republic. The language is still spoken in particular areas of the country, known as Gaeltachts, such as Connemara in Galway, but the numbers of Irish citizens that claim fluency in the language is in decline and very few speak it on a regular basis. However, the Irish language remains the official language of the Republic and is still a core part of the primary school curriculum and a compulsory subject for the senior education cycle. This means that all children in Ireland are taught the Irish language from the age of 4 to 18 but very few go on to speak it once they leave school. In Northern Ireland Irish is not offered as a school subject and this is a continual source of debate as many from nationalist backgrounds feel they are being denied something that is core to their Irish identity. This connection to a national language that is either unspoken or unavailable links the contemporary experience of being Irish with that of earlier generations as Irish identity is experienced as continually fragmented or split between two languages and two cultures.

This hybridity is registered in speech for the English spoken throughout Ireland is still very much influenced by the Irish language in its phraseology, pronunciation and many dialects. This was mocked in the figure of the inarticulate stage Irishman, or given a roguish and sentimental treatment in Boucicault's melodramas in the nineteenth century but celebrated by revivalists in the twentieth century. J. M. Synge and Lady Augusta Gregory

recognised the musicality, poetic imagery and theatricality of the Irish vernacular uttered on stage. In his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* Synge wrote how, influenced by time spent in the rural west of Ireland, he wished for a style of speech that was as “fully flavoured as a nut or an apple” (1968b, 54). This style would come to dominate with the success of Synge’s and Gregory’s plays followed later by O’Casey’s dramas where “this colloquial high colour was a key dimension” of their triumph “though with a shift from peasant lyricism to urban demotic” (Grene 2018, 422). This legacy of a theatricalised hybrid form of speech, Irish English or Hiberno-English, is one that contemporary playwrights have continued and furthered on stage for theatrical effect whether it be Enda Walsh drawing on the staccato of Cork dialect in *Disco Pigs* (1996), Marina Carr leaning on the sonorous midland’s drawl in her Midlands Trilogy or Mark O’Rowe delivering punchy monologues in a rhythmic Dublin patois in *Howie the Rookie* (1999). Mic Moroney writes on this:

The chief weapon for Irish dramatists, of course, is the strangely universal appeal and the creative use of the old Hiberno-English dialects, with their beautifully involuted syntactical shapes that emerge partly from the translations of nineteenth-century Gaelic revivalists, and partly from the rich idioms which still survive up and down the country, and indeed island. Sometimes the Irish protrudes like bone through the hungry hide of the unsuspecting *Béarla* [English]. (2001, 253)

Debate at the time of the Irish Literary Revival over the status of Hiberno-English on stage concerned the authenticity of the language spoken and how reflective it was of the reality of experience. This was in reaction to how Irish dialects and phrasing had been used as a means to denigrate the Irish as barbarous, wild and ill-mannered in order to serve the colonial agenda of the British. Indeed to this day the use of dialect on stage or screen without significant engagement with the culture behind it carries according to Angela Pao “the potential for ethnic stereotyping as much as performing in blackface or yellowface perpetuates racial stereotyping” (2004, 355). For contemporary Irish playwrights such as Walsh, O’Rowe, Carr and others the use of Irish dialects and phrasing is not done in any effort towards verisimilitude or in an attempt to be authentic. It is instead chosen to heighten the stylised and theatrical world of the play or to create what Moroney calls an “untamed elasticsation of reality” (2001, 255).

For Gilbert and Tompkins in their *Post-colonial Drama* “Split or fragmented subjectivity reflects the many and often competing elements that define post-colonial identity” (1996, 23). It can be argued that the particular situation of the Irish language as both ever present and ever absent in contemporary Irish culture, through the education system and in its influence on how English is spoken in Ireland, has led to a prolonged awareness and experience of postcolonial hybridity despite the country’s diverse population. Being caught between two languages is not only about being caught

between two cultures but also the feeling of being stuck between modernity and tradition, inclusion and exclusion, power and impotence. The Irish language through the revival movement is still associated with Irish nationalism and its continued minority status serves as a reminder of the history of colonial oppression. The English language is the dominant language of global popular culture, world commerce and western politics. However, there is a sadness at the loss of the language, an understanding that it is of value and in the Republic it is still considered by the state to be of “crucial importance to the identity of the Irish people” (Government of Ireland 2010, 5). All of these tensions concerning the Irish language were most directly addressed and movingly captured in Brian Friel’s *Translations* (1980) which shows the decline of the language through the eradication of Gaelic place names by colonial geographical surveys, the penal laws that denied Irish speakers education and the coming of the potato famine which led to the death and mass emigration of millions of native speakers. The play being written in English heightens the sense of loss, as if it were written in Irish it would not have been understood by most contemporary Irish audiences. Subsequent to Friel’s play, the Field Day project would continue to explore the issue of language in Irish culture in plays, pamphlets and publications throughout the 1980s and 1990s as described in Chapter 4. The continued relevance of Friel’s play was highlighted on the Abbey theatre’s website when promoting its 2022 co-production with the Lyric Belfast of the play stating: “Brian Friel’s modern masterpiece finds a new potency, in a time where Brexit has thrown current Anglo-Irish relations into sharp relief, redrawing old boundaries, and opening up old wounds” (Abbey Theatre 2022).

However, the conflicting experience of language and identity in Ireland can most easily be read in contemporary Irish plays in the recurrent doubling of characters on stage, representing “split subjectivity” through two actors embodying characters that share a single consciousness, as in the case of Friel’s *Philadelphia here I come* (1964), or friends connected by an intense private world as with *Disco Pigs* (1997) or by family ties and resemblance as it is with Portia and her twin Raphael in Carr’s *Portia Coughlan* (1995) or the comparisons of Hester Swane and her mother Josie in *By the Bog of Cats* (1997). These are some prominent examples but it is hard to find an Irish play that does not have some kind of doubling of characters. Such duality can be of course read in many ways (doubling is in itself inherently theatrical) but the postcolonial history of Ireland and its specific failure to revive its native language post-independence has created a situation particular to Ireland that allows us to understand this preoccupation with duality. Indeed, with most of these doubles there is usually a conflict where one or both no longer wish to be double and must choose to either separate or merge, often with tragic consequences. Anxieties about hybrid and dual identity that are perpetuated in the contemporary period through unresolved issues concerning the status of the Irish language in the national consciousness are thus staged and played out.

A feature of contemporary theatre has been to explore the limits of verbal or literary language as a means of expression and a suspicion of any such language in its claim to truth or authenticity. This is also a feature of Irish theatre that is evident in a particular use of storytelling as a device which is examined further in this chapter. However, it also manifests in a theatrical style that moves away from text as the primary maker of meaning in the theatre towards a deeper exploration of the other languages of the stage (movement, lighting, proxemics, scenography, etc.). This is covered in other chapters in this book as already mentioned but it is also worth pointing out that the movement towards what Erika Fischer Lichte sees as the “retheatricalisation of theatre” (1997, 62) in the twentieth century could be read as having been prompted and aided in Ireland through Irish language theatre.

When speaking on the legacy of the revival it has to be noted that there has also been a great deal of theatrical activity and plays written in the Irish language. Some of these plays, companies and institutions, such as An Taibhdhearc, the National Theatre for the Irish Language have already been considered in the history chapters of this book. What I would wish to point out here is how the challenges of staging a play in the Irish language have brought innovation in terms of staging technique. As it could not be assumed that audiences would understand the words spoken on stage, theatre practitioners have had to emphasise visual storytelling through movement, settings, props and theatrical effects to engage the spectators. Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir founded the Gate Theatre in 1928 after they collaborated together on producing mac Liammóir’s *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* (1928) as the inaugural production for An Taibhdhearc. These two men would have a profound influence on stagecraft in Ireland over the next fifty years; Edwards in terms of directing and lighting as already highlighted in earlier chapters; mac Liammóir in terms of costume and set design; with both delivering celebrated acting performances. Also earlier in this book we pointed out how the director and designer Tomás Mac Anna credited his own development of stagecraft to his staging of plays in Irish, which were primarily adaptations of European plays with dramaturgies that allowed for more experimentation than the naturalistic Irish plays in English on at the Abbey. He also credits the demands put upon him to stage an annual Irish language pantomime at the Abbey theatre throughout the 1950s and early 1960s as helping his directing and design practice as he had to contend with the large casts, fantastical locations, quick scene changes and stylised acting of this form of entertainment. The influence of these practitioners on contemporary Irish theatre was immense (O’Gorman et al. 2021) but innovation in terms of staging is still being led by Irish language theatre through the work of companies such as Aisling Ghéar and Moonfish theatre company. Through collaborative devising techniques and experimentation with different technologies Galway-based Moonfish productions have created inventive mediated productions that inventively incorporate surtitles and translation into the scenographic dramaturgy of their shows, as was most evident in their acclaimed bilingual

adaptation of Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* in 2014. Aisling Ghéar based in Belfast, founded in 1997, has also consistently delivered inventive productions in the Irish language including adaptations, new work and revivals with Brian Ó Chonchubair describing their work as “the most sustained innovative, and progressive theatrical experiment in Irish in recent decades” (2016, 266). Of their productions, *Makaronik* (2014) written by Dave Duggan counts as one of the most imaginative. This was a multilingual sci-fi play that was written in English, Irish and a made up language of Empirish. Joan Fitzpatrick Dean and Radvan Markus remark of this play that it circles back to mac Liammóir in that it “uses echoes of the Diarmuid and Gráinne story in a dystopic setting” (2021, 38–39).

Case Study One: Disco Pigs Written by Enda Walsh

Premiered: Triskel Arts Centre, Cork, 1996 by Corcadorca Theatre, directed by Pat Kiernan

Notable Revival: 58th Avignon Festival, Avignon, 2004, German translation, produced by Baracke am Deutschen Theater (Berlin) directed by Thomas Ostermeier

When *Disco Pigs* was produced by Corcadorca theatre company in 1997 they had already secured a reputation for exciting inventive productions by “taking performance out of theatre spaces and into the streets and other sites, the development of new writing, and an openness to international forms and styles of performance” (Fitzpatrick 2010, 315). Enda Walsh was a founding member of the company and held the position of writer-in-residence when the play was developed with a young Cillian Murphy and Eileen Walsh who announced themselves as major talents in the roles of the titular Disco Pigs under the creative direction of Pat Kiernan.

Written in a rhythmic language that mixes the Cork dialect, with baby talk, animal sounds and teenage slang, the play confronts us with two disaffected teenagers, Pig (male) and Runt (female) who narrate and act out their violent adventures around “Pork” city. The two share a birthday, live next door to each other and are united in their rejection by others which has led to the creation of their own private language and shared worldview. Runt explains:

So we grow up a bit at a dime an all dat dime we silen when odders roun. No word or no-ting. An wen ten arrive we squeak a differen way den odders. An da hole a da estate dey talk at us. Look nasty yeah. But me an Pig look stray at dem. An we looka was happening an we make a whirl wher pig and Runt jar king and queen. (Walsh 2008, 15)

The pair tell the audience of their escapades on their seventeenth birthday where they drink cider together, head into cork city, beat up a boy they know on a bus for previously refusing to sell them alcohol, then visit a student disco where they play the “piggy dance.” In this game Runt dances with a boy and

then Pig pretends to be her jealous boyfriend and assaults the boy. After being ejected from the disco, they eat burgers and end the night by driving to the coast to sit by the sea. Here Pig kisses Runt but she does not reciprocate. The next evening they go out again, this time to a pub where they sing karaoke with supporters of the provisional IRA and then on to the Palace Disco. The division between them grows as Pig begins to fantasise about having sex with Runt while Runt imagines what it might like to be romantically involved with another boy. Runt dances with a boy she likes but Pig confuses the situation as the “piggy dance” but this time he is also really jealous and he savagely beats the boy to death. Runt is disgusted by Pig’s murderous actions. She leaves with a final speech in which in her last few words she begins to speak in a more standardised way. It is thus not only through the final violent act but also through language that the dramatic transformation of the piece occurs. Runt’s change in the register of her speech at the end of the play articulates her transformation as she separates herself from Pig and ends their private shared world.

The invented language although redolent of Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* and James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* is entirely Walsh’s own creation with the sounds of an urban Cork dialect informing its pulsating staccato construction. As such, we can identify many common features of Hiberno-English in the private language of Pig and Runt as well as particular words and idiosyncrasies belonging to Cork. There is the use of words that are particular to Cork such as “buddel” (Walsh 2008, 8) for bottle, which is a version of the Irish word, buidéal and “langer” (Walsh 2008, 8), which is a local term for idiot. But beyond the use of certain words it is the pronunciation of Cork English that is captured so accurately by Walsh and used expertly for theatrical impact. The Irish language has no equivalent to the “th” sound commonly found in English words and so this sound is pronounced instead with a “d” or “t” sound transforming words like “the”, “they” and “think” into “da”, “dey” and “tink”. This is prevalent throughout *Disco Pigs* but an exemplary line would be at the play’s climax when Pig is in the Palace Disco and proclaims at the height of his rage and paranoia: “Dey all look an laugh at me! Hear dem?! I can see it, yeah! Dey loads a cash an look a Pig an, who he, dey say!” (Walsh 2008, 28). For Patrick Lonergan this use of the “d” sound aids the rhythm of the piece with “the effect of intensifying the speed of the speech, while emphasizing the manic quality of Pig’s character” (2009, 179). Runt also speaks in a similar manner but in her speech, there is further traits of Hiberno-English to be discerned that sometimes softens her speech betraying her attraction to others and her longing in contrast to Pigs defensiveness, disgust and violence. For example, when she looks at the college students she says, “I look a deez students yeah, I tink a all da learning das goin in ta dem. I tink a da books dey do read all stack tall inside dem oblong heads” (Walsh 2008, 12). The use of a habitual form of the verb “to read” here in “dey do read” is signature of Hiberno-English. T. P. Dolan explains:

Irish has a habitual form of the present tense (“Bíonn”) as well as the substantive form (“tá”). The habitual form is concerned with the nature or “aspect” of the action involved, whether it is instantaneous, continuing or recurring. This gives rise in Hiberno-English to such idioms as “I do be here every day” or (less commonly) “I bes here every day” (“Bím anseo gach lá”). (2004, xxv)

Epenthesis, the insertion of a sound or letter into a word, is common to Irish people speaking English due to rules concerning the use of slender and broad sounds before vowels and certain consonants in the Irish language. This results in some words such as film being pronounced as “filum” and worm becoming “worrum.” This is evident in *Disco Pigs* in the use of “Schmack” (Walsh 2008, 10) for smack, “SHLAP” (Walsh 2008, 22) for slap and “whirl” (Walsh 2008, 15) for world. Again, this particularity of Irish speech offers Walsh a means to create a poetic theatrical language that is rich in onomatopoeia, allusion and defamiliarisation. For Jesse Weaver this “language is at once theatrically muscular and utterly baffling, drawing an audience or a reader relentlessly into a private and suffocating dramatic space that the characters inhabit” (2016, 18–19).

These features of Hiberno-English and the Cork dialect in particular are exploited by Walsh to create what Peter Womack refers to as “world-making discourses” (2011, 113). This is often identified in Shakespeare as “scene-painting” where a character conjures the setting of the scene into existence through the vivid imagery of their speech (deixis) to make up for the lack of actual stage scenery on the Elizabethan stage. However, Womack observes that in Shakespeare these passages often go beyond “evoking something that scenery could not portray” giving audiences a vision of the world “saturated in the observer’s emotions and associations” (2011, 112). The language of *Disco Pigs* works hard for Walsh in not only narrating action, giving a sense of character and place but also managing to reflect the frustration, energy and violence of its two protagonists. This is achieved most directly in the rhythms of the speech but also through the clever pronunciation of words to give them several meanings. For example in Runt’s line “An we looka was happenin and we make a whirl where Pig and Runt jar King and Queen” (Walsh 2008, 15) the cork accent is evident in the pronunciation but also words such as “whirl” in place of “world” manages to capture the frenetic pace of the teenagers environment and “jar king and queen” instead of “are king and queen” points to their difference to, and alienation from others as they jar with the society that they fantasise subjugating as monarchs. Pig’s cynicism and perversity is also to be discerned later in the play in words such as “suckycess” (Walsh 2008, 24) in place of “success” or when he speaks of the national anthem as “da national rant-hymn” (Walsh 2008, 24).

The duality of meaning that is present in such words can be read as indicative of the split subjectivity of the postcolonial subject that has been disinherited from their language. Dualism is key to both the content and form of the play. Walsh’s two-hander tells the story of a pair of teenagers who move

from an intense shared relationship toward a violent separation with tragic consequences. The form of the piece which relies on narration by the two actors also creates a distance for the audience between language and movement that draws attention to the duality of the theatrical event. Womack explains this:

In being given the power to narrate herself, the theatrical figure is split in two – the narrator and the hero of the narrative, the one who describes and the one who acts. The always implicit duality of the actor finds explicit dramatic form, and the outcome is a dialogic form, and the outcome is a dialogic language of the stage. (2011, 118)

This theatricality of storytelling on stage that Womack identifies will be elaborated upon in the next section but it is worth pointing out here that while this is a language play that is not to say that it is without performative potential beyond language. Indeed, Weaver has drawn attention to the fact that the “rhythmic lyricism” of the language demands “a heightened physicalisation” (2016, 18–19). As it did in its first production with Corcadorca, the play invites actors and directors to create complex and interesting dynamic movement and bursts of energy to match the cleverness and vitality of the language. This may explain the phenomenal popularity of this play over the years in non-Anglophone countries, particularly in Germany (see Huber 2012, 84).

STORYTELLING: PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE SEARCHING FOR COMMUNITY

Storytelling is central to Irish culture and performance. Eamonn Jordan observes “In Ireland, people tend to exchange stories more than they involve themselves in discussion or debate. Dialogue often takes the form of narrative. Sometimes people exchange/inhabit the same conversations/narratives again and again, even with the same people” (2004, 358). Further to this common place use of story, Ireland has a tradition of storytelling as performance in the cultural practice of the *seanchaí*, who was “a community’s guardian of tales and lore who would travel from house to house or village to village gathering and telling stories in exchange for food and shelter” (Clarke 1995, 62). The *seanchaí* was both revered and feared by largely illiterate communities as he would impart knowledge and share learning as well as entertain with his stories. Jocelyn Clarke writes how a *seanachaí* needed to be gifted with “a mellifluous voice” as “stories were often rhymed or sung” and that they were “foremost performers, and their performances were always imaginatively inclusive of the audience” (1995, 62).

It is unsurprising then that a distinctive feature of modern Irish theatre that persists into the contemporary is the telling of stories on stage. Anthony Roche goes so far as to say that “Irish drama has its origins as much in the communal

art of the seanchaí, the act of oral storytelling, as in a more formal written script performed on a proscenium stage in an urban centre” (1994, 115). Indeed, in Synge’s *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) Nora decides to leave her husband and go with the tramp that has visited her because of his “fine bit of talk” (1968a, 57) and in *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Christy Mahon becomes a hero in the local community due to his fervent telling of the tale of killing his father only to be rejected by them when his story is found to be untrue. In Gregory’s *Spreading the News* (1904) the invention of a story based on a mishearing of events leads to comic consequences for a small rural community. While in O’Casey’s *Plough and the Stars* (1926) it is the oration of The Speaker that intoxicates the men with nationalistic fervour that then leads to tragic consequences for the community of tenement dwellers. Stories and how they are told have the power in these plays to make or break individuals and communities. Georges Zimmermann in his book *The Irish Storyteller* explains:

Storytelling is essentially a social – a co-operative- activity; to narrate is to act on listeners, and an audience’s sense of sharing an experience and thus belonging together may be as valuable as individual imaginary release. The foundations of the art belong to a common heritage of mankind, but some formal details and performance patterns may be specific to a particular culture. People with a common set of stories (and ways of telling them) form a community; conversely, different repertoires may divide audiences – but stories can cross ethnic barriers. (2001, 9)

In contemporary Irish theatre stories and storytelling remains a key feature as playwrights struggle with modernisation and its effects on community, belonging and identity. For Jordan, the storytelling tradition in Irish theatre “deals with characters that are inhibited and inhabited by story, enabled and dispossessed of their narratives, personal, collective or national” (2010, 35). Understood in this way, stories are performative in Irish theatre in the sense that they are performance-like in how they are told but also in the linguistic sense in that they function as performative utterances, whereby when they are spoken they do things and effect change. Stories are thus not primarily used by a narrator figure to inform, comment or interrupt action on stage as they would function in Epic theatre, although Brechtian narrator-figures are found in many Irish dramas such as Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), Christina Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* (1983) and Vincent Woods *At the Black Pigs Dyke* (1992). But stories are instead in many Irish dramas active agents that assist or hinder characters from becoming part of or re-entering a shared community. Tom Murphy’s *Bailegangaire* (1985) is a famous and influential example. In this play a bed-ridden dementing old Grandmother, Mommo persists in continually telling a tale from her past and dominating the lives of her two grown-up granddaughters, Dolly and Mary, that care for her. The action of the play depends on Mommo finishing the tale for once and in doing so offering

a communal release for all three women from the burden of its endless telling. Nicholas Grene adds that in addition to this release the completion of the tale also resolves tensions between “the archaic old Ireland of Mommo’s *seanchai* style with the realities of Mary and Dolly’s 1980s modernity. Telling the story out to its end is a way of at last making a connection between the two” (2018, 430). Here story is both an obstacle to growth for the characters, when it is being incessantly repeated without end but also the means of recovery in its being told to conclusion. This pattern is also repeated in Enda Walsh’s *The Walworth Farce* (2006) where a father and his two sons are caught in a paralysing ritualistic routine of farcically enacting the story of how they left Ireland and came to live in the London flat where we find them. The story turns out to be a lie made up by the father as a means to control and trap his sons who in continually enacting an invented past are prevented from taking part in the present or imaging a future. The story is finally ended when the sons decide to rebel and an outsider intervenes but Walsh’s characters do not gain deliverance in breaking the cycle only violence, death and a new story in which to be stuck.

Marina Carr’s surreal comedy *Low in the Dark* (1989) which explores the absurdities of fixed gender roles and patriarchal power, features a character called Curtains who appears on stage as a pair of curtains that never open. This character played by a female actress, who refuses to be reified as an object of display for the male gaze in never presenting her gendered body to the audience, spends the play telling fragmented pieces of a story “about a man and a woman roaming between south and north, following a rhythm of meetings and separations” (Kurdi 2010, 229). Here a performative story is an actual actor in the piece as well as a commentator and again the play cannot conclude until Curtains finally tells a complete version of her tale. For Mária Kurdi, “Considering its overarching presence and disruption of the action, Curtains’s “tale” serves a self-reflexive function in that it highlights as well as qualifies the subversive strategies of gender representation in the whole drama” (2010, 230).

Another version of this use of storytelling as a means of constraining or becoming for individuals as they yearn for inclusion in a shared community is to be found in Irish plays that take the form of a series of character monologues. There are many examples of such work by Conor McPherson, Mark O’Rowe, Deirdre Kinahan and Elizabeth Kuti but Brian Friel’s *Faith Healer* (1979) is considered by most critics as paradigmatic in this regard. *Faith Healer* takes the form of four successive intersecting monologues delivered directly to the audience by three characters: Frank Hardy, the Faith Healer, Grace his estranged wife and Teddy his cockney manager. Each share contradictory details of their shared damaged lives together and give their own different perspectives on the events of a particular night when Frank was unable to perform a miracle. Despite their connection the characters never occupy the same space together on stage and only Frank gets a second monologue.

The absence of interaction between the performers highlights the isolation of their characters and the fragmented indeterminate nature of their stories invites the audience to complete the narrative. As such the process the three women undergo in *Bailegangaire* is repeated here with the audience invited more directly to share in the story making process and as a result enjoy a temporary sense of community. Lonergan explains,

In Irish monologues – especially those that feature more than one character – part of the role of the audience is to piece together the strands of information, judging the credibility of the narration, and attempting to understand the gap between the deeds being described onstage and their mode of transmission. Being part of an audience at the performance of a monologue thus becomes a communal enterprise, in which meanings are created in the interplay between performers and audiences. (2009, 185)

These narrated stories delivered as monologues onstage do not contain any obvious dramatic transformation of the characters. The meaning of what has been represented and what has changed is instead determined by the audience. As such these plays have been considered to adhere to Hans Thies Lehmann's concept of postdramatic theatre. (Barnett, 2006) When considered in this light, storytelling in Irish theatre can be viewed as at once situated within a national cultural context and a broader international framework. The act of storytelling becomes in the contemporary a means to achieve a sense of temporary “belonging together” in a globalised world that is connected through commerce and technology but often starved of human contact and shared experiences in the presence of others.

Case Study Two: The Weir Written by Conor McPherson

Premiere: The Royal Court, London, 1997 directed by Ian Rickson

Notable Revival: Donmar Warehouse, London, 2013 directed by Josie Rourke

Conor McPherson had established himself as a playwright by writing monologue plays that made use of storytelling directly to an audience with such plays as *Rum and Vodka* (1994), *This Lime-tree Bower* (1995) and *St. Nicholas* (1997). However, when commissioned by the Royal Court the then artistic Director Steven Daldry stipulated that the new play could not be another monologue. The play that McPherson wrote was *The Weir* which involves characters telling stories as its central action which Scott T. Cummings considers “McPherson’s characteristically cheeky response to the call for him to write characters who talk to each other instead of an audience” (2000, 308).

Set in a pub in “a rural part of Ireland, Northwest Leitrim or Sligo” (McPherson 1998, 3) the play concerns three bachelors, Jack a mechanic, Jim a handyman gambler and Brendan the publican whose usual social ritual of meeting up together for drinks is enlivened by the arrival of their old friend Finbar, a successful businessman, who brings with him Valerie a young Dublin

woman who has just moved into the area. From their banter in the pub we learn about the men's backgrounds and their isolation. They begin to tell ghost stories prompted by Valerie's interest in knowing more about the locale. Valerie then adds her own haunting story of personal loss and terror which shocks the men but unites them all in shared empathy. Emboldened by the intimacy the storytelling has created Jack discloses an intimate account of his own regrets and missed steps that have transformed him into a phantom in his own life.

These narratives begin to destabilise the realistic stage world that has been set up for us through the realistic *mise-en-scène* of the pub and the characters' convincing naturalistic interactions up to this point. Firstly, the stories introduce a sense of the uncanny to the stage which undermines the familiarity and even fixity of the set as the characters all seem to believe in their confrontations with the supernatural despite their protestations to the contrary. Secondly, the stories reveal the vulnerabilities of these men that have begun the play establishing prowess through competitive banter. This creates a safe space for Valerie to share her very personal story of loss which in turn encourages Jack to finally open up at the close of the play. Thirdly, the stories break down any sense of time as the tales become present in the telling and the preternatural forces of which they tell exist beyond any temporal limits. Mythic Ireland is evoked in Jack's story of the ancient fairy road that runs through the Nealon house that Valerie is now occupying; Jim's disturbing tale of a ghostly paedophile that remains predatory even after death conjures the years of horrific abuses perpetrated and covered-up by Church and state in Ireland; and Valerie's account of her daughter contacting her by phone from beyond the grave brings the spectral into the contemporary. Kevin Kerrane offers further analysis of the "structural elegance" of *The Weir* writing, "The play incorporates five stories in all, and the first four offer models of intensification, as each narrative becomes more personal and more unsettling than the one before" (2006, 108).

This intensification of experience and the collapsing of temporal divisions of past and future into the present theatricalises the telling of these narratives transforming them into a live event that is full of immediacy for the audience. Indeed, the stage moves from a place of mimetic representation towards a shared theatrical space through the telling of the stories. This is another example of a contemporary Irish play's use of negative dramaturgy to transform space (see Chapter 9). In his later monologue play *Port Authority* (2001) McPherson writes in the stage directions that "The play is set in the theatre" (2004, 137). *The Weir* could also be considered to move from being set in the public house to public theatre through the performativity of storytelling. Furthering this idea Patrick Maley considers McPherson's plays as creating a theatricalised space of becoming for his characters where "the implied ethos [is] not 'I have a story, therefore I am' but rather 'I have a story, therefore I might be'" (2014, 209–210). He qualifies this by stating how the

characters are “not performing identities constituted in their stories but performatively creating identities through the collaborative process of storytelling to an audience” (2014, 209–210).

The verity of the stories is thus not of consequence and the “truth”, or more properly here the meaning-making, resides in the telling as audiences must form their conception of the characters presented on what the different narratives reveal about them. This sense of the instability of the stories and the unreliability of the narrators is perhaps compounded by the details of Valerie’s tale in particular which contains many overlaps with those that come before hers. Jordan writes how this could be considered in gendered terms: “it is possible to read her narrative as a ruse, as a clever deconstructive attack on the male characters struggles for self-definition and the hold that they have over both the space and the storytelling format itself” (2022, 143). Regardless of its sincerity Valerie’s story is powerful, like the others that preceded it, the story creates intimacy between her and the drinkers in the pub allowing Valerie to move from being an outsider to insider within this gathered community while still maintaining her difference to them. Indeed, all the characters are afforded a chance to become and belong, to be different and accepted through the power of sharing stories. The audience are asked to aid in this process as the storytelling demands that they make the meaning from what is being told and enjoy a temporary sense of belonging with relative strangers who all listen together to the theatrical tales of supernatural “otherness” being told.

ADAPTATION AND PERFORMING HETEROGLOSSIA

Adaptations of plays written in a foreign language have been a key part of Irish theatre for over a hundred years. One of the founding aims of the National Theatre Society was to stage major European classics alongside new work by Irish playwrights. This led to Yeats’s adapting Sophocles’s Oedipus plays and Lady Gregory translating “the comedies of Molière into Kiltartan, her own distinctive Hiberno-English dialect; the miser and the would-be gentleman in her versions talked as if they came from East Galway” (Greene 2010, 101). Later in the 1940s and 50s Tomás Mac Anna was tasked with translating and staging more modern European dramas by Gheon, Jalabert, Benevente and others into Gaelic at the Abbey. He credited the challenging dramaturgies of these texts as key to his development as a director and designer (Walsh 2016). It is also arguable that this translation practice led to a more outward looking approach at the Abbey under Mac Anna’s artistic direction in the 1960s as we outlined in Chapter 2. From the 1980s onward an increasing number of Irish playwrights were found to write adaptations of classical and modern European drama adapting them to an Irish context. The list of playwrights includes Brian Friel, Thomas Kilroy, Tom Murphy, Marina Carr, Enda Walsh, Conor

McPherson, Deirdre Kinahan, Michael West, Mark O’Rowe and Lucy Caldwell. Frank McGuinness has written over twenty adaptations of ancient Greek and modern European classics alone.

This section wishes to consider how plays in languages other than Irish or English have been hibernicised through adaptation to an Irish context as well as how Irish theatre has adapted to the proliferation of different languages now spoken in Ireland.

Marvin Carlson writes:

The tradition of a theatre closely tied to a particular nation and a particular language still may dominate a generally held idea of how theatre operates, but the new theatre that is most oriented toward the contemporary world no longer is restricted to this model, and one of the most important challenges it faces is the presentation of a newly interdependent world that speaks with many different voices. The heteroglossic stage, for centuries an interesting but marginal part of the dramatic tradition, became in the late twentieth century a truly important international phenomenon. (2006, 19)

As other chapters in this book have argued, theatre in Ireland is closely aligned to the concept of nation and as outlined earlier in this chapter the particular way English is spoken in Ireland, a legacy of colonisation, continues to be explored by playwrights for theatrical effect. However, as the population of contemporary Ireland is now made up of diverse people that speak many languages it is important to see how such heteroglossia is reflected in Irish theatre. In the historical chapters we have already charted how Irish theatre in the contemporary period has continued to adopt international modes of production in terms of movement, acting, lighting, and design. Further to this in Chapter 11 we outline frameworks to aid in the analysis of the complexities of intercultural performances in Ireland. Aspects of these chapters are directly relevant to what is presented here and readers are encouraged to connect the chapters but the focus for this section is the speaking of and the translation/adaptation of linguistic systems of communication that are singular to particular nations and cultures as they are written in a dramatic text. As a way to navigate our examination of heteroglossic stages in Ireland we employ Margherita Laera’s distinction between “vertical heteroglossia”: “productions that feature one or more regional/social English dialect/accents” (387), and “horizontal heteroglossia”: “productions that feature two or more national languages” (386). Many Irish plays that feature Irish, English and American characters can be considered to be examples of vertical heteroglossia and many Irish language theatre productions such as those already mentioned in this chapter by Moonfish and Aisling Ghéar are representative of horizontal heteroglossia in their speaking of both English and Irish onstage.

Here, we wish to consider those productions that have been originally written in another language other than Irish or English and have been translated into a modern Irish context. Laera writes “Plays originally written in

a foreign language and performed in English can feature a degree of horizontal or vertical heteroglossia, the intensity of which may depend on the source text itself, the translation strategy, or its mise-en-scène, casting, and acting approaches” (389). All aspects of Laera’s frameworks could be applied to productions in Ireland by companies like Corn Exchange, Pan Pan and others that have adapted work originally written in another language. Indeed, Polish Theatre Ireland, formed in 2008 was a company that was dedicated to producing heteroglossic theatre aiming “to intertwine Polish and Irish theatre traditions” (Lech 2018, 603). In 2011 they used the poetry of the Nobel poet Czesław Miłosz to devise *Chesslaugh Mewash*. Kasia Lech, academic and member of the company, writes of this fascinating production that “Under the direction of Anna Wolf, the company spoke verse in Polish, English, Lithuanian, French, Irish, and Slovak to explore their own precarious and transnational identities in relation to globalization and social networks” (2018, 603). We have chosen here to review some of these productions in Chapter 11 through intercultural frameworks and instead concentrate in this section solely on the translation strategy employed by Irish playwrights in this examination of language in dramatic texts.

As already analysed, a core identifier of Irish drama is the use of Hiberno-English which can be considered to be double-voiced in being written in a unique English dialect that is formed by the residual presence of the Irish language. However, the use of Hiberno-English in the adaptation of modern European classics originally written in Russian, German, Swedish, French or Norwegian arguably allows for a heteroglossia that goes beyond colonial history to situate Ireland in relation to languages and cultures other than that of the former coloniser. These adaptations by Irish playwrights of foreign language drama cannot be accused of a hegemonic domestication of the foreign that obscures the source material, as with some English translations, due to the “also and” duality of Hiberno-English.

The rise of adaptations by Irish dramatists from the 1980s onwards can be traced to two influential productions of Chekhov in 1981: Friel’s adaptation of *Three Sisters* produced by Field Day and Kilroy’s version of *The Seagull* for the Royal Court. Friel’s production furthered the interrogation of language and identity that he had begun in *Translations* (1980) a year earlier. He writes that his motive for adapting Chekhov’s play was to remove the Englishness of the productions which for him stood in the way of the plays connecting with Irish audiences. He writes:

Somehow the rhythms of these versions do not match with the rhythms of our own speech patterns, and I think that they ought to, in some way...this is something about which I feel strongly – in some way we [in Ireland] are constantly overshadowed by the sound of [the] English language, as well as by the printed word. Maybe this does not inhibit us, but it forms us and shapes us in a way that is neither healthy nor valuable for us. (Delaney 2000, 145)

It should be noted here that Friel did not translate *Three Sisters* from the Russian but adapted it from a literal translation, a process he repeated with all his later adaptations. Kilroy would also follow this method of using a literal translation as the source material as would all subsequent Irish playwrights referring to their works as versions or adaptations rather than translations.

Friel's intervention in his *Three Sisters* was with the dialogue, he did not change the setting or time period of the play. This was not the case with Kilroy's *The Seagull*. He relocated the play to a crumbling Anglo-Irish Big House in the West of Ireland and in his version of Chekhov's masterpiece "Konstantin Treplev, the young would-be dramatist, son of the famous actress Arkadina, became a Yeats-like figure trying to stage a fey Celtic Revival drama, mocked by his mother used as she was to traditional nineteenth-century theatre" (Greene 2010, 101). Lonergan views these two approaches as achieving different outcomes in their style of adaptation. He writes "Where Friel had made Chekhov's foreignness more evident Kilroy showed how his Russia had much in common with Ireland" (Lonergan 2019, 102). Both plays are heteroglossic in that they give voice simultaneously to both an Irish and Russian experience in the English language but in Laera's terms Friel's play stresses horizontal heteroglossia in its reference "to culture-specific objects and names" (389) that are Russian, while Kilroy's play emphasises vertical heteroglossia particularly in placing "the translated text within the literary tradition of the target language" (389). Although, here it is placed within a tradition of Anglo-Irish literature rather than an English literary tradition.

Subsequent Irish adaptations could be said to follow the trajectories of these two influential plays by Friel and Kilroy, some stressing a vertical heteroglossia and others a horizontal heteroglossia which both estranges and makes familiar the work of foreign playwrights. As such these plays reflect a contemporary conceptualisation of Ireland as a modern nation with an open economy situated within a global community where it is understood to have many varied voices that make it similar and different to other countries. The complexities of this situation is something that is addressed in the case study below and in Chapter 11.

Case Study Three: Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov in a Version by Lucy Caldwell from a Literal Translation by Helen Rappaport

Premiere: 15 October, 2016 The Lyric Belfast

In her essay "On Writing *Three Sisters*" Lucy Caldwell recalls being at a dinner where a Russian scholar warned her that the "play very rarely works in English. A typical Russian toast, he said, might go along the lines of: 'You are my dearest friend and I want you to know how much I love and esteem you.' This just doesn't translate into English, reserved and ironic and understated as it tends to be" (2017, 85). Caldwell replied to the scholar "it might not work in English-English, but it works in *Belfast-English*: I fucken love you mate, you're sound as a pound" (2017, 85).

Caldwell's *Three Sisters* transposes the economic and social upheaval of late nineteenth century Russia in Chekhov's original drama to nineties Belfast, during the years of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Her play begins in 1993 a year before the IRA ceasefire and ends in 1998 with the withdrawal of British troops after The Good Friday Agreement. The transitional times the sisters are living in that contrasts with the stasis of their lives is thus given an immediacy and relevance in an Irish context. Caldwell felt Chekhov's play chimed "most clearly with what it was like to grow up in 1990s Belfast: the turmoil, the tedium, the restlessness, the resentment, the desperate desire to get away, to be somewhere, anywhere but here, now" (2017, 84). In her version of the play the three sisters Olga, Masha and Irina become Orla, Marianne and Erin whose sense of displacement is not due to differing social class as in the original but one of national identity and religious affiliation in a sectarian city where "You always have to watch what you're saying and who you might be talking to and who might be listening and how you pronounce your constants and what might be betraying you without your even knowing" (Caldwell 2016, 16). The sisters have a mixed identity placing them outside of any British/Irish, Protestant/Catholic division. Marianne explains that they are "not one thing nor the other" as they had an English Catholic Dad and Ulster Protestant Mum, "who gave us Irish-sounding names" (Caldwell 2016, 36). The soldiers who court Erin are British officers, now named Baron and Simon, and their commanding officer Vershinin, retains his name from Chekhov's play but is found here to have been born in New York with Lithuanian heritage. In Caldwell's adaptation the sisters do not long to go to Moscow but the United States, their brother Andy is a gifted linguist rather than an accomplished musician, their Uncle is not an army doctor but a hospital porter with a thick Belfast accent and Orla's husband is no longer a teacher but a disc jockey called D. J. Cool. With all of these identities come different accents and registers giving the piece a vertical heteroglossia and the changes in location, time period and some of the occupations of the characters draws attention to the similarities of the Russian source material to an Irish situation rather than further estranging it.

However, the most significant change made by Caldwell is with the character of Natasha, the lover and later wife of Andy. She is reimagined as Siu Jing, a Cantonese-speaking immigrant from Hong Kong. Caldwell writes of her reasoning for this alteration:

In most versions, as in the original, she [Natasha] is cast as a girl of a lower social class, to whom the sisters are disdainful and snobbish. A hundred years on, the corollary of internal, class-based social upheaval seemed to me to be immigration. I loved the idea that while the sisters endlessly talk about moving across the world and starting their lives again, right under their noses is someone who has done just that, who has arrived in the country barely speaking any English and by the end of the play is fluent. (2017, 86)

In this character's speaking of Cantonese Caldwell's *Three Sisters* is found to emphasise a horizontal heteroglossia where more than one national language is voiced on stage. This heteroglossia goes further than many earlier adaptations by Friel and others where another language is only present predominantly through naming and reference. Here a foreign language is spoken alongside English and thus Caldwell's play is not only situating Ireland within an international community by adapting a Russian play into an Irish context but it is also showing how Ireland itself must adapt to new cultures and include new voices in its story. In writing the character of Siu Jing it should be noted that Caldwell received help from members of the Chinese community in Belfast who met with her and shared their experiences (Caldwell 2016, 7). Lonergan proposes that Caldwell uses the metaphor of the "foreign" in the figure of Sui-Jing to demonstrate the need for openness to new influences, new people and new definitions of what identity might mean in Northern Ireland today (2019, 108) (Fig. 8.1).

Caldwell does not write Siu Jing's integration into her new community as simple and seamless. She is not accepted by the sisters who make casual racial comments about her and they resent her presence in their house and their lives. But Caldwell makes her the heart of the play signposting this in a prologue where Siu Jing speaks directly to the audience telling them that while this is the story of three sisters, "It is also my story. It might not have my name on it, but it is my story too" (Caldwell 2016, 18). In Caldwell's adaptation the sisters are outsiders to the sectarian conflict with their mixed English/Irish and Catholic/Protestant background and Siu Jing is a further cultural outsider as a Chinese national in Northern Ireland. In the final moments of the play,



Fig. 8.1 Shin-Fei Chen as Siu-Jing in *Three Sisters* by Lucy Caldwell, Lyric Theatre, 2016 (Photo Steffan Hill)

the three sisters come to accept their situation and speak of their steadfast resolve to face “a new dawn” (Caldwell 2016, 102), and to “hold out just a little longer” in order to—“know what all the suffering meant” (Caldwell 2016, 102). Their continued stasis comes with the loss of their old dreams of moving to the US but the Belfast they will continue to reside in is changing and has the potential to become more like the US they dream off—an open-minded culturally diverse place. This is cleverly signified in the last moments of the play as the sisters deliver their final lines while Andy is seen to be pushing one of his mixed-race children in a buggy. Siu Jing and her offspring in their “foreignness” are distanced from the sectarian politics of Northern Ireland’s past and “hint at a much-needed plurality in generations to come” (Caldwell 2017, 86).

CONCLUSION

Concentration on the use of language and its literariness has been stressed in the reception and criticism of Irish theatre often to the detriment of the design, direction and acting that have also contributed to its achievements. In this book we have made an effort to reclaim the importance of these elements in the production of Irish theatre and offer frameworks in which they can be analysed in terms of the body, space, nationhood and interculturalism. We have also tried in this chapter to make sure not to tip the balance and forget an analysis of language and how it functions theatrically and thematically in Irish theatre. English as it is spoken in Ireland is influenced by and translated from the Irish language and as this chapter has made evident, this process has led to it being inherently theatrical in its strangeness, intensity and immediacy. This is something that Irish writers have utilised to further the dramatic impact of their plays on audiences. They have also explored the performance tradition of storytelling in Ireland which we have examined here in terms of its power to create communion amongst characters and audiences. Finally, we have investigated how the unique phrases and rhythms of Hiberno-English have been employed by playwrights to adapt works written in other languages in order to register the similarities and differences of other cultures. We argue that this adapting process has created a heteroglossic stage that speaks in many voices enabling the language of Irish theatre to be considered beyond the postcolonial binary of English/Irish but to be also thought of in terms of Russian or Norwegian or French. In the final case study of the chapter we propose that the concept of a heteroglossic stage offers a model of Irish theatre that is multi-voiced and intercultural reflecting the contemporary diversity of cultures and languages in Ireland today.

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Body

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a body is the singular “physical form of a person, animal or plant” but it is also “the *complete* physical form, or *assemblage* of parts of a plant” [emphasis mine] (2023). This chapter explores how bodies work and signify as *individuals* but also as stand-ins for a greater *whole* (both materially and representationally) within the contemporary Irish theatre and by extension, Irish society. As the previous chapter demonstrates, bodies have been repetitively enlisted as performers, artists and audience members to agitate for, reproduce or contest the Irish “nation” as a shared but often divergent project in the contemporary Irish theatre throughout the period covered in this book and preceding it. However, this chapter now shifts focus to the multivalent work bodies performing individually and as collective representations of wider publics within contemporary Irish theatre onstage, behind the scenes and in the audience.

The participation and presence of bodies in theatrical and extra-theatrical events connected to the contemporary Irish theatre as a network of individuals, practices and institutions indexes not only the aesthetic but the political and social status of the body within Irish society at any given time. Understanding the limits of theatrical representation *and* participation by individuals and/or communities as artists in the Irish theatre gives us deeper insight into the rights accorded to individual bodies and/or those grouped according to a shared identity such as gender, sexuality, religion, class, race/ethnicity and/or disability, as well as drawing attention to how theatre and performance as live and embodied art forms can sometimes push productively at the limits of what is legally or socially possible at the scale of the body.

As Simon Shepherd puts it: “[t]heater is a practice in which societies negotiate around what the body is and what it means” (2006, 1). There has been a particularly intense and ongoing regulation of bodily rights and autonomy

over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries across the island of Ireland since the foundation of the Irish state in the Republic in 1922 due to the legacy of British colonialism, the close association between the Catholic Church and the state in the Republic, and as a result of the Troubles and its still-unfolding legacy in the North. Matters such as sexual orientation, access to abortion and birth control, the right to divorce, the rights of minority religious or other communities (particularly in Northern Ireland), as well as the rights of other marginalised communities including people with disabilities and transgender individuals have been extremely public and contentious. These matters also persistently have been played out, contested and most importantly *embodied* on and beyond Irish theatrical stages as the performing body has been called upon again and again as the vehicle for what Jill Dolan terms utopian performatives which in their enactment: “persuade us that beyond this ‘now’ of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we’re scared by the promise of a present that gestures towards a better later” (2015, 7). This chapter proposes the following frameworks for studying the body as a key vehicle towards utopian performatives in contemporary Irish theatre:

- **Acting Bodies:** Acting and the role of the actor working within and across multiple influences and lineages of theatrical practice is key to an understanding the function of the body in contemporary Irish theatre but the role of the Irish actor in terms of craft and individual and collective contribution to theatre and performance histories remains in our opinion seriously underresearched. This is curious considering that as Bernadette Sweeney notes that “[m]any prominent” early-late twentieth-century “Irish theatre companies were founded or co-founded by actors,” including for example, “the Fay brothers at the Abbey; Micheál mac Liammóir at the Gate and An Taibhdhearc; Marie Mullen and Mick Lally at the Druid; Stephen Rea at Field Day so on” (2018, 376). We consider here the major currents that influence and shape perceptions of the Irish actor at home and abroad between the modern and contemporary period, in terms of what constitutes a particularly Irish acting virtuosity, as well as how the shifts in form, aesthetics and collaborative theatre practices since 1957 have altered the boundaries of what can be considered the job or responsibility of the individual actor in a theatrical process. These transformations have necessarily changed and challenged how we think about the expansiveness of the role of the “actor” in contemporary Irish theatre. We also consider the opportunities and the challenges the live acting body can pose to theatre historians in terms of capturing and understanding the contributions of not only individual performers, but the interlinked influence of multiple theatrical movements, ideas and aesthetics on that single performer or even within the context of their work in a single production.
- **Bodies as Tools:** While the previous chapter explored in the first section how theatre as an artistic genre and the artist-activists who work in the

field of theatre can be enlisted at the scale of production or performance to do the political work of nation building, this section focuses more specifically on the strategic use of the body itself as a unique embodied tool which can act in politicised and other ways within contemporary Irish theatre. In this section and throughout this chapter in particular, we pay attention to not only the performances going on inside Irish theatres and how bodies are represented onstage as political tools in dramatic contexts, but how bodies who work in the theatre (i.e. the people) frequently use publicity or other opportunities to make use of bodies as strategic tools which can bridge gaps between overtly political and theatrical contexts to amplify a cause, message or political campaign. We argue that we cannot understand how the body works in contemporary Irish theatre representationally or even in terms of the performing body onstage without tracking how the body in Irish theatre history never stays exclusively confined within dramatic fiction or the theatrical space. We suggest that this is one of the unique and defining aspects of both modern *and* contemporary Irish theatre as a field of practice over time.

- **Intersectional Bodies:** This book has explored at length so far the under-representation (or at least persistent non-canonisation) of women in Irish theatre as playwrights, performers and collaborators as well as the ways in which gendered and sexual norms have frequently constrained the representation of cisgender women onstage or resulted in a sidelining or erasure of their work. However, we consider here the other ways in which bodies perform their own intersectionality within the contemporary Irish theatre and why the Irish theatre is a main site through which to access and understand the operation of intersectionality in diverse lived experiences in Ireland today. Kimberlé Crenshaw's highly influential work on intersectionality over the last 30 plus years has transformed both critical theorists' and popular culture's ability to speak clearly about the differential privileges and/or disadvantages individuals may experience based on the competing axes of their identities, necessitating recognition that "identity politics take place at the site where categories" of identity "intersect" (Crenshaw 1990, 1299). We argue that we simply cannot progress meaningfully now towards the multiplication of utopian performatives in the contemporary Irish theatre unless we meaningfully commit to ongoing and embedded intersectional critical perspectives within this subfield. We take our lead here from contemporary Irish theatre practitioners as we reflect on how they again use theatre and performance's liveness to explicitly confront the multiple othering of bodies on grounds in addition to gender including sexuality, disability, age, race/ethnicity/nationality, minority or oppositional religious identity and/or class. As with Irish feminist theatre concerned with cisgender women's stories specifically, there is a vibrant if not always critically mainstream history

and field of contemporary practice particularly in terms of queer performance over the last 30 years, but also an emergent field of disability arts practices including theatre which this section introduces in part.

These three foundational frameworks are accompanied by brief case studies that model the application of these critical lenses to landmark theatre productions or movements, or as in the case of this chapter, landmark individuals and/or moments:

- **Acting Bodies** (Olwen Fouréré)
- **Bodies as Tools** (Panti Bliss/Rory O’Neill and the “Noble Call”)
- **Intersectional Bodies** (Christian O’Reilly’s *Sanctuary* with Blue Teapot and *No Magic Pill*)

In moving between considerations of the body as it functions individually and collectively through theatrical performance in Ireland and beyond, this chapter encourages study of the body within contemporary Irish theatre as it functions across multiple levels of action and critical intelligibility. We conclude with a final reflection on labouring bodies as terminology which can link across these frameworks of analysis.

ACTING BODIES

A focus on the acting body in contemporary Irish theatre insists on recognition of the actor’s craft and technique as utilised in the service of an individual production’s collective vision but also recognises actors as key co-creators of theatrical meaning regardless of the theatrical work’s form or genre as recent work by Ciara Conway (2016) and Elizabeth Brewer Redwine (2021) on the artistic vision and pivotal contributions of Abbey Theatre actresses including Laura Armstrong, Maud Gonne, Sara Allgood, Eileen Crowe, May Craig, Aideen O’Connor, Frolic Mulhern and Ria Mooney has conclusively demonstrated from a modern Irish theatre historiography perspective. As Aoife McGrath writes from the perspective of dance theatre, “focus on the authority of the word” within Irish theatre and performance histories “routinely confined the body to a function of interpretation rather than creative articulation” (2013, 1) in its own—a prejudice rooted in the persistent reputation of not only modern but contemporary Irish theatre as a playwright’s theatre generally rooted within realism and naturalism as major acting vocabularies.

But what is a contemporary Irish acting aesthetic? What does a contemporary Irish actor do or do differently with their bodies that makes their technique recognisably *Irish*? This key question is inseparable from the trailing impact of the known and celebrated signature styles of internationally acclaimed Irish actors in the twentieth-twenty-first centuries including but

not limited to Sara Allgood, Siobhán McKenna, Stephen Rea, Liam Neeson, Brendan Gleeson, Cillian Murphy and Ruth Negga as well as Paul Mescal more recently among others who achieved worldwide fame after beginning their careers in theatre in the global film and television industries which are dominated by psychologically rooted approaches to storytelling. The route from the theatre to film and television even today for Irish actors who are successful on a global scale perhaps continues to link perception of a signature Irish acting style to text-driven understatement with less of an emphasis on the total body as an expressive instrument. However, this is an Irish acting cliché that does have some historiographical basis in the original acclaimed house style of the Irish National Theatre Society/early Abbey actors under the direction of brothers Frank and W.G. Fay as well as later Samuel Beckett's frequent immobilisation or obscuring of the total body across his dramatic works as a key element of his signature theatricality.

Adrian Frazier describes the signature acting style of the original Irish National Theatre Society (INTS) company under the direction of the Fay brothers and featuring Maud Gonne, Maire Quinn and Dudley Digges among others as “codified” by the values of “fine speech, teamwork, and restraint”—values referred to in short-hand as the “Abbey style” at that time (2016, 237). W.B. Yeats in commenting on this original cohort's signature style in 1908 observed:

In rehearsing our plays, we have tried to give the words great importance, to make speech, whether it be the beautiful and rhythmical delivery of verse or the accurate speaking of a rhythmical dialect, our supreme end...We believe that words are more important than gesture, that voice is the principal power an actor possesses, and that nothing may distract from the actor and what he says. (Quoted in Frazier 2016, 237–238)

Yet, Frazier demonstrates perceptively how the acting style and physical playfulness of famed Abbey actors of the 1920s like Barry Fitzgerald, F. J. McCormick and May Craig, expanded the parameters of the national theatre's house acting style quite quickly even in those early years as those performers engaged in practices like introducing “subtextual or extratextual business of their own invention to the characters written” (2016, 241). Furthermore, Ian R. Walsh argues that a central focus on the body by Irish directors and actors can in fact be traced back through an “alternative Irish tradition that links the experimentations of the early Irish theatre movement with the innovations of contemporary Irish and international drama” (Walsh 2012, 5). He illustrates this in his study of Jack Yeats, Elizabeth Connor, Donagh McDonagh and Maurice Meldon between 1939 and 1953, demonstrating a sustained move “away from mimetic drama towards a stylised theatre in the twentieth century” (2012, 5) that consistently drew on a range of expressive theatrical vocabularies centralising the actor's body during this period. Similarly, Lionel Pilkington has recently drawn attention to the cacophony of “national and

international influences” of Ireland’s Dublin-based Little Theatre Movement of the 1950s which were characterised by “modernist experimentation” and an “anti-authoritarian avant-garde” focus, combining “an eclectic mix of cultural activities and social engagement” united by “defiant and exuberant bohemianism,” and which was constantly pushing the actors/performers who took part in this work to cross styles and forms, with the work of the Dublin Dance Theatre Club as discussed by Pilkington particularly illustrative here. However, this later and more varied work from the Abbey in particular and the smaller-scale experiments of Dublin’s Little Theatre Movement and other experimental theatre work happening at the edges across the island was not internationally disseminated as the Abbey’s famous early international tours which cemented core aspects of the reputation of Irish modern drama for global audiences. This explains in part why the stylistic characterisations of the Abbey’s house acting style have continued to run as an undercurrent beneath expectations of what constitutes an Irish acting aesthetic, nationally *and* internationally, in addition to the ongoing emergence and prowess of Irish television and film stars evidenced most recently by the 2023 Oscar nomination for *An Cailín Ciúin (The Quiet Girl)*, directed by Colm Bairéad, Ireland’s first-ever international feature Oscar nomination.

In addition, Druid Theatre’s current status as arguably the most internationally successful, mobile and acclaimed contemporary Irish theatre company and their signature focus on playwright-driven textually rich work also might contribute to the reinforcing of this dynamic, despite the depth, nuance and variety of the Druid Ensemble member’s and other collaborators’ individual acting performances across Druid’s body of work. As one representative comment indicating the ongoing and habitual international reception of Druid’s style in terms of acting, Charles Isherwood remarked in the *New York Times* following their *DruidMurphy* cycle on tour in 2012 that:

As always with this remarkable company, the acting is of a quality to leave you dumbstruck with admiration: visceral, precise and saturated with raw wit and honest feeling, it represents ensemble work of the highest order. (2012)

The actors’ bodies underlies and drives these effects of the ensemble performance for Isherwood as the literally visceral vehicle through which feeling can even be communicated, but the review as a whole repeatedly focuses on the themes, plots and nuances of *Murphy*’s plays as texts, arguably sublimating the actors’ roles to being in effective delivery of that vision as a group orchestrated by Garry Hynes’ direction.

But in fact, Druid has recently doubled down on its commitment to acting and actors at the centre of the company’s vision and artistic direction, creating the *Druid Ensemble* in 2013, “a core group of some of Ireland’s leading actors who work closely with Druid to shape the future direction of the company’s work,” which at the time of writing includes long-time *Druid* collaborators including Marie Mullen (one of the company founders),

Derbhle Crotty, Garrett Lombard, Aaron Monaghan, Rory Nolan, Aisling O’Sullivan and Marty Rea (2023). Their work involves not only acting in Druid’s productions, but contributing to “research and development of potential projects, and ensuring continuity across future programming” (Druid Theatre, 2023). This shift in creative direction towards the actor-led perhaps directly contributed to their acclaimed 2016 production of *Waiting for Godot* which was described by Peter Crawley in *the Irish Times* as “the freshest, funniest and most affecting production of the play in at least a quarter of a century” (2016). Tellingly, Crawley’s review digs deep into the specificity of the acting craft of Druid Ensemble members Aaron Monaghan (Gogo) and Marty Rea (Didi) as driving the success of the production’s overall effect, linking the actor’s deep study of the text with their physical precision and choices with their body and gesture in the production:

If you haven’t laughed this hard at Beckett in years, or felt as moved, it’s because Rea and Monaghan show every thought process, finding a rooted reason for every line. Just look at the sly long-arc game Rea plays with his hat (2016).

However, even in the case of Druid and their Druid Ensemble which has such a recognisable house acting style in production, the training and further production history of individual actors will always yield more complicated and competing influences, which is true of those working with Druid today, and is true of all actors who have contributed to the ongoing development of modern and contemporary Irish theatre.

Rhona Trench’s recent work on actor training and education in Ireland since 1965 has outlined the diverse influences that individuals, companies and/or training institutions like the Focus Theatre’s Stanislavski Acting Studio (1967–2012), the Gaiety School of Acting (1986–present) and the national network of third-level institutions that teach Drama and Theatre have drawn on in preparing emerging Irish theatre professionals or working with those continuing to hone their professional skills. She argues that recurrent influences include “Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Michael Chekhov, Jacques Lecoq and Étienne Decroux” (Trench 2018, 334). Trench also identifies a trend in theatre companies founded post-1990 linking ongoing performer training and development to the development and maintenance of their company styles, citing the work of Blue Raincoat, Barabbas, Loose Cannon and The Corn Exchange among others to which we would also add the seminal contributions of Pan Pan Theatre. Noelia Ruiz argues that this particular cohort’s collective mass despite differences in form, approach and aesthetic initiated a concerted “turn towards physicality” in Irish theatre at this time, “conceiving the actor’s body and presence as theatricality’s main vehicle” (2018, 297–298). Ruiz also connects this stylistic shift for individuals and companies and an explosion in interest in ongoing training and international exchange to the larger context of the “establishment of the establishment of the European Union as an economic power in the 1980s” which

led to “European and national public funding” providing “new opportunities for the arts” including for example a “rise in international arts festivals” and eventually, the onboarding of programmes like Creative Europe and nationally, Culture Ireland, whose foundation in 2005 has been transformational in the greater circulation of contemporary Irish theatre work like that of Pan Pan Theatre and Brokentalkers (see Chapters 5 and 6). These programmes’ funding for international circulation of more contemporary Irish theatre work will continue to contribute to the complication of more narrow understandings of the expanse and layering capacity required of an Irish acting body today.

Pan Pan’s own signature house acting style across their hugely varied and constantly evolving body of work (see Chapter 5) also exemplifies how much has changed about what now might more credibly constitute an “Irish” acting aesthetic, or at least the skills and knowledges that Irish actors may be asked to call upon in their training/education and professional careers. The nuance of Pan Pan’s house acting style can be best grasped by tracing the performances of frequent collaborating actors over time including Gina Moxley, Andrew Bennett, Judith Roddy and Dylan Tighe among others in landmark Pan Pan productions including *Oedipus Loves You*, *Mac-Beth 7*, *All That Fall*, *Embers*, *Everyone is King Lear in Their Own Home*, and *The Seagull and Other Birds*—all adaptations or strategic revisitings of canonical theatre works but married with Pan Pan’s hallmark visual, conceptual, intermedial and non-linear aesthetic. The Pan Pan house acting style evidenced by these performers can be characterised by the conscious psychological distancing of the individual from the “character,” frequent blurring of the lines between the identity of the individual actor and the character/persona they are portraying, a deadpan and/or matter of fact use of vocal delivery and tone, and ongoing acknowledgement and engagement with the audience (i.e. frequent breaking of the fourth wall). Ultimately, the individual actor and the actor’s body’s function in a Pan Pan production as curated by co-artistic directors Gavin Quinn and Aéidin Cosgrove who occupy the roles of director and scenographer on most of the company’s productions in Pan Pan’s history is as one shifting tool, image and/or locus of meaning who engages in an interplay with all the theatrical elements of Pan Pan’s work from scenography to sound, lighting and costume design. For example in their reimagining of Samuel Beckett’s radio play *All That Fall*, the actors do not perform as part of the live performance experience but rather “perform” as pre-recorded soundscape. Yet, this does mean that actors are expendable and sublimated to Quinn and Cosgrove’s ultimate conceptual vision for any given production. Rather, in addition to the technique and/or training they bring themselves as “actors” into the room, the inextricability of an individual actor’s identity and persona and their direct role in building the performance text in the rehearsal process with Quinn and Cosgrove regardless of the Pan Pan production approach (working from a concept versus a canonical theatre text) arguably multiplies rather than minimises the levels of input and collaborative gravity an individual actor may

contribute to the development of a new Pan Pan work. And this shift is not only significant in understanding Pan Pan's body of work within contemporary Irish theatre. While Pan Pan's signature house acting style underpinned by their collaborative co-creation process of original performance texts might be identifiable as *theirs*, it has also now influenced several generations of actors and more broadly identified theatremakers coming of age in Ireland and echoes of their acting aesthetic can be observed across the work of themselves now influential companies and artists who have emerged in the last 20 years including but not limited to Dead Centre, ANU Productions, Brokentalkers and THEATREclub.

Ultimately, understanding the role and function of the acting body in contemporary Irish theatre often now involves thinking across and through multiple styles, genres and theatrical vocabularies simultaneously and being able to switch between them fluently as a performer, particularly if one aims to work across companies nationally and internationally which most well-established Irish actors do. Rather than Irish acting technique being as limited technically to realism as mainstream representations particularly of Irish theatre actors who've transitioned to film and/or television might sometimes suggest, the contemporary Irish actor (if they are to be successful) should be more accurately understood as an experimental shapeshifter who is capable of holding multiple roles and/or functions within a collaborative process and is as adept often with writing and/or improvisation, the handling of text as well as physicality (and likely trained in one of many specific techniques), and comfortable with the intersection of artistic genres (dance + theatre, visual art + theatre) and/or intermedial modes of performance. We turn now to Olwen Fouréré whose powerhouse presence and career range exemplify how the job description and limits of imagination for the Irish actor have expanded over the period covered by this book.

Case Study One: Olwen Fouréré

Premiere: Her “first professional performance, in a five minute play, occurred in June 1976” (Fouréré 2023).

Olwen Fouréré's individual career trajectory as an actor and multidisciplinary collaborative artist is particularly instructive in mapping the range of contemporary Irish acting practices that can be employed within the arc of a single actor's career in contemporary Irish theatre and the proliferation of influences and movements that now constitute a contemporary Irish theatre acting repertoire and aesthetic. Bernadette Sweeney observes that “[i]n many ways, she” has been “an actor before her time, as interdisciplinary work became the norm only relatively recently in the Irish tradition” (2018, 383). Fouréré's career allows us to trace that lineage of practice backwards in dizzying complexity while gaining access to some of the most memorable

acting performances in contemporary Irish theatre in the last two decades of the twentieth century and first two and a half decades of the twenty-first.

Fouréré describes her drive in her early career in the theatre “to dissolve disciplinary boundaries and articulate a performance-based theatrical language... in resistance to the inherent traditions of a predominantly literary Irish theatre” (2009, 115). As such, Fouréré identifies the performing *body* as her primary conduit of expression as an artist, an embodied focus that she would continue to develop across multiple roles working in theatre and film over now more than four decades. She currently describes herself as “an actor, director, and creative artist whose extensive practice navigates theatre, film, the visual arts, music, dance theatre and literature” (Fouréré 2023). While her work extends to direction, artistic direction (Operating Theatre, 1980–2008), adaptation, translation and writing and many other permutations of collaborative practice in theatre, film and visual arts, we will focus here primarily on her acting work and style for theatre.

Although now one of the most recognisable faces in Irish theatre, film and television particularly for those living on the island with her signature long white hair, razor sharp cheekbones and lucid piercing green eyes, Fouréré did not initially intend to focus her career on theatre and/or acting. As she recently reflected on with Lionel Pilkington:

I think I came to theatre through sculpture and through the visual arts. I used to explain my need to stretch forms in terms of having come through the visual arts and ending up in performance, but I think that there are possibly other explanations as well. Perhaps in my DNA there is a more European sensibility in thinking about form. (Pilkington 2022)

After growing up “on the west coast of Ireland” with “Breton parents,” Fouréré initially struggled with choosing between a career in medicine or the arts after finishing secondary school early at sixteen (Fouréré 2023). After moving away from medicine, Fouréré first thought about pursuing theatre design not acting given her deep interest in visual arts. However, after taking classes at the Focus Theatre referenced above, she got a “job as an actor with the Project Arts Centre in Dublin’s Temple Bar, which was then under the directorship of Jim Sheridan” (Arts Interview: French Fouréré Tale).

The rest is history as Fouréré never looked back but rather then proceeded to continually explode the boundaries of what was possible for an actor to achieve within the Irish theatre industry and beyond as she rejected early on the sidelining of the actor within production processes. She reflected in 2008:

A lot of actors are beaten into submission-they are made to believe that they are there to fit into a process, to do what they’re told- but theatre is primarily a collective art form. An actor should act as a creative force. It is important to me that I take an active part in the creation of a piece of theatre (Arts Interview: French Fouréré Tale).

Only a few years into her professional theatre career, she co-founded the groundbreaking multidisciplinary performance company Operating Theatre in 1980 with composer Roger Doyle, serving as artistic director as well as driving the concept and scripting of many of their landmark works including 1999's *Angel/Babel*. Conceived and scripted by Fouréré, she was “attached to custom-made sensory software” for this performance “that responded to the kinaesthetic impulses of the actor, and reproduced those impulses through computer-generated sound, challenging notions of character, and the dramatic” (Singleton 2016, 562).

Fouréré's extension and expansion of the performing body through experimentation with technology in live theatre performance was groundbreaking in an Irish theatre context, but her own continuous pursuit of the limits of theatrical and collaborative practice through the performing body did not mean that she rejected the canonical or mainstream Irish (literary/text-based) theatre scene as mutually exclusive. She commented recently that her relationship to realistic Stanislavski-based acting technique remains important building on her foundational early training with Focus Theatre:

there was stuff around the Stanislavsky approach that I needed to get rid of. But the tiny bit of training that I did do made me understand that you have to “be” in order to experience and communicate. You can't just pretend to be and pretend to communicate. In terms of “building a character” and other aspects of the Stanislavsky method, it's not that I never felt they were useful. Probably I do use them but I use them very much for my own ends. (Pilkington 2022)

Indeed, Fouréré has premiered many of the landmark plays referenced throughout this book including work by Marina Carr, Enda Walsh, Mark O'Rowe, Tom MacIntyre and Tom Murphy, all of which are largely although not totally based within theatrical realism. She also premiered Samuel Beckett's *Not I* in Ireland with Focus Theatre and would go on to perform Beckett's work extensively and has worked consistently with the Abbey Theatre and the Gate over many cycles of artistic directors, playing across the canonical repertoire of modern Irish drama in the works of John Millington Synge, W. B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde and Séan O'Casey. In addition, she has performed in the work of William Shakespeare across a range of Irish and English companies including the Abbey Theatre, Second Age Theatre, Siren Productions and the Royal National Theatre. She has also been a long-term creative partner of playwright Marina Carr, originating the role of Hester Swayne in 1997's landmark premiere of *By the Bog of Cats* (directed by Patrick Mason, Abbey Theatre) as well as Tilly in 1991's *Ullaloo* (directed by David Byrne, Abbey Theatre, Peacock stage), the Mai in Carr's 1994 *The Mai* (directed by Brian Brady, Abbey Theatre), Woman in Carr's 2007 *Woman and Scarecrow* (directed by Selina Cartmell, Abbey Theatre, Peacock Stage) and going on to perform in Carr's 2021's *iGirl* (directed by Caitríona McLaughlin, Abbey Theatre). Sara Keating's *Irish Times* review of *iGirl* clearly articulates the

now well-established inextricability between Carr's evolving dramatic vision and Fouréré's distinctive virtuosity as a performer, as she bluntly states: "It is Fouréré's performance, of course, that creates the grounded reality of this deeply collaborative, multidimensional piece of theatre...She lets Carr's words pour through her like nectar through a rare and precious chalice, brimful with ancient stories" (2021).

In addition to being the founder and artistic director of Operating Theatre and creating TheEmergencyRoom "(a necessary space)" in 2009 for her own projects as "a virtual holding space for the development of art-based ideas, relationships and performance contexts" (TheEmergencyRoom 2023), she has also worked with some of the most vanguard and influential theatre and dance theatre directors of the last forty years in a sustained way on a project-by-project basis such as with Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre (now Teac Damsa's) Michael Keegan-Dolan (see Chapter 11 for a full case study of his production of *The Bull* starring Fouréré) and Director Selina Cartmell (who recently finished her tenure as the first female artistic director in the Gate Theatre's history) who worked with Fouréré through Operating Theatre as well as Cartmell's own former company Siren Production. Through her connection with these and other theatre artists over time, Fouréré has undeniably become a common denominator across contemporary Irish theatre practice centred on performer-focused formal innovation in theatrical stagecraft and dramaturgy, unsurprisingly also collaborating with Pan Pan Theatre on their celebrated audience participation-focused adaptation of *Hamlet, The Rehearsal- Playing the Dane* (2017). As a performer, Fouréré both melds herself into the theatrical world and dramaturgy of each project she appears in whether it is based in realism or absurdism or postdramatic style while bringing her own distinctive energy, presence and visceral often wraith-like physicality that transforms each work beyond what genre(s) it is associated with as well as often toying with, commenting and subverting on gender as expressed in, with and through the body onstage. As Shonagh Hill puts it, "her distinctive and vigorous physical performance style underscores the way in which limiting myths of femininity are inscribed on, and resisted by, the embodied experiences of women" (2019, 214). Hill argues that Fouréré's body of acting work shifts "the emphasis from the" cisgender female "body as bearer of meaning to *maker* of meaning" [emphasis ours] enabling a rewriting of "the corporeal realm which woman has traditionally been aligned with" through intervention of her corpus of work (2019, 220).

Yet, we would argue that Fouréré's redefinitional power regarding gender and performance extends even further than exploding femininity. While Fouréré identifies as cisgender female and indeed has played and even originated some of the most iconic modern and contemporary Irish theatre heroines from John Millington Synge's Pegeen Mike to Marina Carra's Hester Swane, she has also consistently stretched the limits of gender across her body of acting work performing as female, male and/or androgynous or shifting between or among the three within single works. In *Here Lies* (2005–2007),

Fouréré created a number of performance installations with Selina Cartmell and Paul Keogan as part of Operating Theatre in which she performed as seminal modernist French theatre director and theorist Antonin Artaud in Galway, Paris and Dublin, later adapting this project as a theatrical film with cinematographer Christopher Doyle *Here Lies in Film...* for Dublin Theatre Festival in 2008. She also played Roy Maunsen in the television adaptation of Pat McCabe's play *If These Lips* for RTÉ's television series, *Play Next Door*, in 2014 (Wallace 2014). A landmark performance in which she again toyed with and exploded gender even more totally was her solo monologue adaptation of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, 2013's *riverrun* co-directed by Kellie Hughes and produced by TheEmergencyRoom, in which she performs the voice of the river Anna Livia Plurabelle. Her performance as the river is described by *The Guardian's* Maeve Kennedy as "androgynous and shimmering" (2014) while Fouréré herself says of gender within her *riverrun* performance that:

The river's voice changes constantly, often unidentifiable as male or female, an ever-changing force of onward motion, recycling the past into the present. Towards the end the river's voice becomes clearly that of a woman letting go of the past and sensing the future following behind her. (Kennedy 2014)

Fouréré's shifting and fluid (gender) consciousness in role as the river in this internationally acclaimed adaptation of Joyce's work not only demonstrates once again her singular virtuosity as an individual performer whose unique body and presence is her primary instrument of expression. Rather, Fouréré's performance also once again looks to the past (Joyce) in the present to remind us of the future of not only Irish acting technique and the agentic possibilities of the actor as an individual making their mark within theatre as a collaborative art form. She also makes theatrically manifest what can be gained when gender itself is deconstructed and reimagined using live performance as a portal to other even non-human possibilities of the acting body's range as through her personification of the gender-fluid river in *riverrun*. As Fouréré puts it herself, theatre can and should be about "carving the space for other dimensions of reality to become evident" (RTÉ 2014) and this is precisely what she herself has made possible repeatedly for audiences through her acting body as a tool of expression and communication. Fouréré's body of work as a performer and theatremaker ultimately makes co-present the past, present and future of not only Irish acting technique as understood from a contemporary vantage point, while also making available wider understandings of reality and identity more broadly by as enabled by her boundary-exploding performances within the theatrical event. As such, her work takes us right to the dividing line and grey area between the body as a tool of artistic expression and the body as a tool of consciousness change and/or expansion through politics or other means, as we will now explore at length in the next section.

BODIES AS TOOLS

There is a well-documented and defining fine line between the body as a tool of artistic expression and the body as a tool of political agitation on the island of Ireland in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This lineage arguably begins with the diverse activities of early twentieth-century nationalist artist-activists including Alice Milligan, Maud Gonne, Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh and Pádraig Pearse that explicitly blended artistic expression with political agitation. As Nic Shiubhlaigh recollected:

Many young nationalists appeared as players with amateur companies, and a lot of the political clubs led by Arthur Griffith's Cumman-na-nGaedheal, had dramatic societies attached, either as a means of gathering funds or disseminating propaganda. (1955, 141)

The work of Susan Cannon Harris (2017), Catherine Morris (2012), Lionel Pilkington (2010), Paige Reynolds (2007) and Mary Trotter (2001, 2008) and others on regional, activist and tellingly feminist performance practices (including but not limited to theatre) that were contemporaneous with the founding of the Abbey establish the performing body as a major tool of political agitation. These early twentieth-century practices frequently necessitated subversive uses of the (gendered) body in public space in ways that blurred the boundaries between performance and activism, such as through Inghinidhe na h-Eireann members' distribution of nationalist leaflets on Dublin's O'Connell Street (with some women even leafleting in male-only saloons) (Trotter 2001, 88–89) alongside the staging of their popular tableaux-vivants. We see this dynamic also enacted in poet/playwright/activist (and Inghinidhe na h-Eireann member) Alice Milligan's early twentieth-century work making use of magic lantern and tableaux shows co-created with local communities as a consciousness-raising tool in her work as a travelling lecturer for the Gaelic League. As Catherine Morris details, she:

...began to journey across Ireland with her own portable lantern and a camera that she used to collect pictures for slides...Milligan worked with local communities to re-embodiment the pictures as theatre and devise new scenes for the stage from local folklore, the cultural life of the community and from Irish songs and legends. (2012, 257)

In the work of Milligan specifically and Inghinidhe na h-Eireann more broadly, we can also see the political (and nationalist) roots of community-engaged theatre practices in Ireland which have become increasingly influential in the early twenty-first century within professional mainstream Irish theatre practice.

Both then and now, Milligan and contemporary theatremakers and companies like ANU, Brokentaklers, Teya Sepinuck's Theatre of Witness (see Chapter 6) and others make use of the realness of non-professional performing

bodies as a tool to further their artistic and/or political vision, through creating work using participants' direct experiences that may also have these individuals performing in the work. Others such as Kabosh and Dubbeljoint Productions, THEATREclub, the Abbey Theatre and individual artists including Colin Murphy and Mary Raftery draw on documentary and/or verbatim interview materials but use professional actors. This range of work evidences a proliferation in contemporary Irish theatre of what Carol Martin groups as "theatre of the real," a category that encompasses "documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, reality-based theatre, theatre of fact, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, restored village performances, war and battle re-enactments, and autobiographical theatre" but is unified by all these approaches "claim[ing] a relationship to reality, a relationship that has generated both textual and performance innovations" (2013, 5) and that depends on the live and/or mediated body as a medium of expression and communication onstage.

This proliferation of an Irish theatre of the real over the last fifteen years which recognises "real" bodies and "real" testimony as a powerful theatrical *and* political tool is due in large part to the recent release of multiple state inquiries into systemic institutional and/or gender-based abuses committed in frequent collusion between the Church and State(s) as well as the living legacies still being debated in "post-conflict" Northern Ireland as detailed in Chapter 6. As Tina O'Toole summarises: "...both twentieth-century Irish states perpetrated and/or actively condoned the violent subjugation of human bodies, whether those of women incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries, children abused in industrial schools, or prisoners on hunger strike in Long Kesh or Armagh Women's Prison" (2017, 177). The Irish theatre of the real hones in on explicitly dramatising this "violent subjugation of human bodies" across Republic and/or Northern Irish contexts by returning voice and/or expression to those directly involved in or impacted by these events and systems whether through voicing their testimonies or allowing their experiences to be partially communicated through some other kind of performance approach (such as Brokentalkers and Junk Ensemble's use of dance in *The Blue Boy* for example, see Chapter 6).

Some key categories of the Irish theatre of the real to date include the curated re-staging of sections of landmark reports (as in Mary Raftery's *No Escape* which excerpted the Ryan Report staged at the Abbey in 2010 as part of their "Darkest Corner" series or the Abbey's more recent 2021 response to the report release of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes briefly discussed in Chapter 7), reconstructions of major landmark Irish historical events or controversies (as in Colin Murphy's *Guaranteed!* and *Bail Out!* which deal with the 2008 economic crash and its aftermath or Jimmy Murphy's *Of This Brave Time* which used published testimonies of those involved with Easter Rising), or formally experimental and community-led/co-created works which may combine artistic forms and showcase minoritarian and/or disenfranchised perspectives as in Kabosh and

Dubbeljoint Productions' vast catalogue of work led by Marie Jones, Pam Brighton, Paula McFetridge and others over time which experiments with different aspects of community stories and experiences over the last 20 years in Northern Ireland or more recently, the work of Republic-based work of Grace Dyas with THEATREclub and as a solo artist tackling themes such as the inner-city Dublin histories including that of the ongoing heroin epidemic in 2012's *Heroin* and women's travels to obtain abortions with Emma Fraser in 2017's installation *Not At Home*).

In Irish theatre, performance and activist history therefore, bodies are often called on to use performance as a tool in ways that other mediums of communication or art simply cannot on their own, and this remains a defining feature of contemporary Irish theatre and performance history. Dublin's Project Arts Centre (see Chapter 3) for example was inaugurated by an event in 1967 where performers gathered to read aloud banned literary texts including the work of Edna O'Brien, because as Project co-founder and theatre director/author Peter Sheridan, puts it: "it was within the law to read from such material in a theatre, where censorship did not apply" (2006, 7). Here again, the performing body operates as a tool in the Irish theatre in ways that the printed page could not as a medium of legal communication at the time. Project's origin story which actively enlists the performing body as a tool of breaking through censorship powerfully exposes again how the inventiveness of how Irish performers and theatre artists repeatedly make explicit central use of the body in battles for political rights and liberties across the island of Ireland.

This power of the Irish body as political tool however must also be understood in the context of its use as a deliberate weapon in military and/or paramilitary campaigns as in the Irish Republican Army's late 1970s-early 1980s extended use of body-focused protest strategies to achieve political goals particularly after the removal of special category (i.e. political prisoner) status for paramilitaries. This wave of protests making use of the body included the 1976 "blanket protest" (in which prisoners refused to wear prison uniforms and/or fashioned clothing from prison blankets only), the 1978 "dirty protest" (in which prisoners refused to wash and smeared excrement and/or menstrual blood on prison walls) and two waves of hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981, the latter of which saw Bobby Sands elected to British parliament while in prison on hunger strike, before his death and that of nine others before the hunger strike was eventually concluded on 3rd October. Other men who died in the hunger strike included (in order of death) Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreesh, Patsy O'Hara, Joe McDonnell, Martin Hurston, Kevin Lynch, Kieran Doherty, Thomas McElwee and Michael Devine. Emma Creedon links this spectacularised use of the body as a political tool by IRA paramilitaries to postcolonial histories noting:

Images of an 'anomalous' physicality can be traced back to the Irish famine where the aesthetics of starvation and bodily degeneration contributed to the colonial politicization of the Irish body as inferior. Over a century later, the Irish

Republican hunger strikers in Northern Ireland in the 1980s capitalized on this association between the abject body and recalcitrance, which had been exploited by colonial propaganda to further promote the Irish body as insufficient and insubordinate. (2020, 59)

The political legacy of the hunger strikes for the IRA and Margaret Thatcher's British government which reacted to the events in real time remains debated among historians and political commentators, but its symbolic legacy as an extension of the histories cited by Creedon remains extremely potent (particularly through the continuing circulation of images of Bobby Sands and other strikers as well as repeated adaptations of their stories in multiple mediums including theatre and film) and is vital to understanding the true weight of the body as tool in the contemporary Irish imaginary (Hennessey 2014; Duggan, 2017). As another key link between political and theatrical Irish histories mediated at the level of bodies, former hunger striker Laurence McKeown who was taken off of the 1981 hunger strike by his family before its official conclusion went on to become a prolific playwright frequently collaborating with Kabosh and Dubbeljoint Productions as well as founding the Belfast Film Festival and obtaining a PhD in sociology with a thesis entitled "Unrepentant Fenian Bastards." In addition to McKeown's plays which address the period of the Troubles as well as post-conflict Northern Ireland, he also co-wrote a film *H3* about the 1981 Hunger Strikes with fellow former prisoner Brian Campbell, who also co-wrote McKeown's first two plays with him, *The Laughter of Our Children* (2001) and *A Cold House* (2003). In turning to the theatre (and film) following his internment, McKeown continues to deploy his body and that of others who perform in his work as a tool of ongoing political dialogue. His efforts are now directed more towards gradual and nuanced post-conflict reconciliation vis-à-vis performance as opposed to more immediate political goals as during his participation in the 1981 Hunger Strikes. He shared with the *Irish Times* that while he "believes telling and hearing other stories can be cathartic and reconciling" (as in 2003's *A Cold House* which was based partially on interviews and featured the perspectives of an IRA ex-prisoner and a former RUC officer) nevertheless "he wishes more unionists would meet republicans halfway" (Moriarty 2016). Nevertheless, McKeown continues to test the contemporary Irish theatre as a meeting place for this imagined coming together of competing political perspectives and agendas.

Bodies as a tool of performative communication that deliberately link the theatre industry with direct political action continue to characterise key moments of the early twenty-first century. Members of ANU Productions for example consulted with laundry survivors involved with the group Justice for Magdalenes on the creation of their production *Laundry*, and some ANU company members stood with survivors the day that Enda Kenny made his official state apology. In addition to Panti Bliss/Rory's O'Neill viral Noble Call speech addressing homophobia and public speech delivered as part of the

Abbey Theatre's production of James Plunkett's *The Risen People* covered in our case study below, Hot for Theatre's production of Amy Conroy's *I Heart Alice Heart I* began as a faux documentary theatre play about the love story of two older women but eventually toured in direct support of the Marriage Equality Campaign (Halferty 2022, 175–178). Finally, #WakingtheFeminists campaign subtly linked their work for gender parity in the Irish theatre to the Repeal the Eighth campaign that was ongoing at the time at a key moment. In the autumn 2016 publicity photos and video released for #WakingTheFeminists's autumn announcement of the conclusion of the official public one-year campaign, the women gathered are all wearing black, but a woman positioned prominently at the bottom right corner of the photograph wears a "Repeal" jumper, with others wearing the same iconic jumper able to be seen in the video footage from the day (Keating 2016). This iconic recent photo and all the recent and historical examples covered in this section consistently and powerfully reveal the use of the body as a tool in the Irish theatre capable of connecting onstage action with offstage struggles for political freedoms and rights.

Case Study Two: Panti Bliss/Rory O'Neill's "Noble Call" after the curtain call for the Abbey Theatre's 2013–2014 production of James Plunkett's *The Risen People*, directed by Jimmy Fay and adapted by Jimmy Fay from a version by Jim Sheridan (Abbey Theatre 2013).

Premiered: Bliss's "Noble Call" happened on 1 February 2014, but this production of *The Risen People* had opened on 4 December 2013.

During the 2013–2014 run of their revival of James Plunkett's *The Risen People*, the Abbey Theatre "used the device of the Noble Call, an old Irish tradition whereby after a performance, usually of music, the audience are invited to respond through word, song or poetry" (Burns 2014) as part of their framing of the production, which was being produced for the 100th anniversary of the Dublin Lockout, a 1913–1914 strike which began with Dublin United Tramway company workers in the Irish General Transport and Workers Union but spread wider to more than 20,000 workers across sectors. The Lockout (also discussed in Chapter 6 in relationship to ANU Productions' work) served as a flashpoint not only between workers, union organisers and company owners but with the Catholic Church and various factions within Irish nationalists at the time. The six-month Lockout concluded in January 1914 unfortunately without achieving many of the workers' and union organisers' key demands, but the Irish Transport General and Workers' Union did continue to grow in strength subsequently and it continues to be regarded as a landmark in Irish labour history and was one of the key events commemorated in the Republic's Decade of Centenaries between 2012 and 2023 (Yeates 2001).

This was the Abbey's third production of Plunkett's play dramatising the events of the Lockout. *The Risen People* had begun life as a radio play before being produced as a full stage production by the Abbey in 1958 and 1963 respectively (Abbey Theatre 2013) and the 2013 production involved further adaptation by Jimmy Fay who also directed it and who was working from a version by Jim Sheridan. In all, the Abbey "invited over 60 people from all walks of contemporary Irish life, including poets, musicians, activists, journalists, historians and community workers, to give their responses each evening to the play" (Burns 2014) and Rory O'Neill as Panti Bliss took the stage for the Noble Call more than halfway through the production's run.

Bliss was taking the stage having been embroiled at that point for three weeks in a public controversy following her appearance as both Rory O'Neill and Panti Bliss on RTÉ's *Saturday Night Show*, hosted by Brendan O'Connor. Out of character and sitting for interview as Rory O'Neill, on the *Saturday Night Show*, O'Neill responded to a direction question from host O'Connor about where anti-gay attitudes were still being expressed in newspapers and he named the *Irish Times* columnists Breda O'Brien and John Waters and the right-wing Catholic conservative Iona Institute which "promotes the place of marriage and religion in society" (2023). Connor then responded: "I wouldn't have thought John Waters was homophobic" (Qtd. in O'Toole 2017a, 104) which led to an exchange between them with O'Neill speaking about the nuances of homophobia. This exchange led to O'Brien, Water and several members of the Iona Institute taking legal action against RTÉ and O'Neill. RTÉ would ultimately remove the episode, pay out €85,000 to the complainants and "two weeks after the original broadcast O'Connor issued a live statement distancing RTÉ from the content of the interview and apologizing for O'Neill's behavior" (O'Toole 2017a, 106). After the removal of the episode online, there was a "media blackout among mainstream media in Ireland while support for Panti" grew "online" (Curtin 2014) but it would take the unexpected form of Bliss's Noble Call in the theatre to break through to public awareness across all media.

The Abbey Theatre's intention in programming the Noble Call as part of the *Risen People* production was not only to catalyse public figures but the audience as a whole to engage actively with overlaps between past and present activated by the production and look together towards the future in terms of not only reflective connections but also action. The occasion of the Lockout's commemoration was not straightforwardly joyous but rather consciously quite fraught (as indeed would be most of the occasions celebrated in this decade), and other theatrical responses to this particular landmark such as ANU Productions' *Living the Lockout* and *Thirteen* profiled in Chapter 6 too deliberately emphasised the unfinished business of these early twentieth-century events and the necessity to be active on the rights of workers and other related causes in the present. Bliss's appearance then on 1 February 2014 in the midst of a seemingly irresolvable public standoff where she seemed to have been silenced so decisively at least in mainstream Irish media could not have

been scripted better in terms of a relative underdog literally taking the stage to try to seize on another ambivalent political moment and make meaning for the contemporary out of her own personal reflection.

Bliss was already no stranger to the Abbey due to adaptation of her drag act and autobiography into stand-alone theatre pieces like *In These Shoes?* (2007), *All Dolled Up* (2007), *A Woman in Progress* (2009) and *High Heels in Low Places* (2014). These were created often in collaboration with THISISPOPBABY, “a theatre and events production company that rips up the space between popular culture, counter culture, queer culture and high art” (THISISPOPBABY 2023) and then subsequently mounted by the Abbey for short runs in the Peacock after premiering elsewhere. As Fintan Walsh summarises:

The creation of Rory O’Neill, Panti has been fundamental in mobilising performance as activism, social engagement and cultural critique, and in ushering queer performance from bars, clubs, social gatherings and street interventions to more conventional theatre contexts and spaces. (2015, 21)

Bliss’ Noble Call on 1 February 2014 therefore was not only about one moment of her body morphing into a consciously deployed political tool, but the outcome of decades of activity that had brought her closer and closer to mainstream theatre and the Abbey in particular which led up to this powerful catalytic moment.

When Bliss took the stage that night she was announced as “Ireland’s most fabulous drag queen and famous activist” but she described herself as “an accidental and occasional gay rights activist” (rory oneill 2014) despite decades of active engagement which preceded the RTÉ debacle. This was by no means the beginning of Bliss’s public activism and fight against controversy for that public activism (having been also involved in a lengthy public standoff with *Sunday Times* columnist Brenda Powers in 2009 over Pride in general and the right of queer couples to marry in particular) (See Walsh 2015, 36–40). She also immediately articulated her own class difference to the characters onstage in *The Risen People* describing herself as “painfully middle class” (rory oneill 2014) but soon pivoted to linking the characters’ class-based struggle to that of LGBTIQ+ people’s (and in particular cisgender gay men despite also explicitly describing herself as a gender discombobulationist in the speech) struggle against homophobia and the ways in which that struggle manifested itself.

Her main refrain of “it feels oppressive” or “that feels oppressive” recurred throughout her ten-minute speech parsing “oppression as something I can relate to,” which she paraphrased as feeling “put in your place” (rory oneill 2014). The experiences Bliss detailed were highly affective and embodied—having a milk carton thrown at her by a “bunch of lads” who shout “Fag!” or policing or wanting to police herself or her friends in the way that they “give the gay away” as well as the ongoing alienation of “the kind of people who

make good neighbourly neighbours” having a “reasoned debate about you... and who you are and what rights you do or do not deserve” (rory oneill 2014). Bliss’s repeated rhetorical emphasis on the affective embodied impact of the myriad ways in which she and other LGBTIQ+ individuals are hailed daily in contemporary Ireland that “feel oppressive” and lead to daily repetition of checking herself are highly reminiscent of Frantz Fanon’s landmark account in his 1952 clinical and philosophical study *Black Skin, White Masks* where he speaks of coming to consciousness as being other as a result of being Black when a child hails him on the street as “Look! A Negro” (Fanon 2008, 82). Bliss’s own intersectional analysis of her experience situated within her relative class privilege and aware of being resident in a country with more expansive LGBTIQ+ rights but still having to live with the awareness of what atrocities are being experienced elsewhere builds viscerally on Fanon’s legacy and was received as a clarion call to justice and nuance for the Irish LGBTIQ+ and building Marriage Equality movement at the time.

At the speech’s climax, Bliss concluded that “ a jumped-up queer like me should know that the word ‘homophobia’ is no longer available to gay people which is a spectacular and neat Orwellian trick because it turns out that gay people are not the victims of homophobia, homophobes are” which prompted cheers and applause from the audience before building to the observation that the entire audience and Bliss herself are all homophobes as “to grow up in a society that is overwhelmingly and stifling homophobic and to escape unscathed would be miraculous” (rory oneill 2014). By implicating not only the “others” of the audience and by extension the heterosexist media establishment she was in conflict with, but herself in the social poison of homophobia as living and lived practice, Bliss broke down barriers between the individual and the collective, refused to relinquish her own and by extension the “gay”/ LGBTIQ+ community’s right to the term, and made clear the work of political discernment and action that would be the legacy of her speech that night for herself in the audience.

Bliss’s electric and frequently breathless (such was its visceral urgency) Noble Call immediately went viral and ultimately transformed not only public sentiment regarding the case between herself, RTÉ and the complainants but the entire trajectory of the Marriage Equality campaign in the Republic. As Emer O’Toole narrates, Bliss’s Noble Call was:

... discussed in the Dáil, the Seanad, and the European Parliament—propelling Bliss into a global spotlight. Hundreds of thousands of people around the world listened to the speech; the Irish youth charity LGBT Noise printed “I’m on Team Panti” T-shirts; the story was sympathetically covered by global news outlets, including the BBC, CNN, Reuters, the Washington Post, the Guardian, and the New York Times; social media and online publications were flushed with support. (2017, 106)

Bliss's bodily presence deployed as a tool onstage at the Abbey and through the dissemination of her theatrical oration online in full was able to generate results that rhetoric on social media, on-air on RTÉ, or indeed in legal communications between the parties could not and that had enduring and this performative intervention had extremely consequential ripple effects as following this night, Bliss "became a unifying figurehead for Ireland's marriage-equality...whose efforts were crucial to securing a resounding 62 percent victory for the Yes Equality campaign in Ireland's referendum on same sex marriage" (O'Toole 2017, 104). Bliss again proved that the Irish theatre as institutional space as well as repertoire of performative practices is a highly strategic site that continually breaks down boundaries between the private space of the theatre and the public space of politics through individuals' potent use of the (performing) body as tool of not only artistic expression but political agitation.

INTERSECTIONAL BODIES

By looking at the bodies of performers and/or the characters they represent onstage as well as examining who is actually employed in the Irish theatre industry overall as representative of one or several identity positions (male, female or non-binary, Catholic, Protestant or otherwise, LGBTIQ+ or straight and so on), we continually seek evidence as audience members and scholars for which bodies can access, participate in and/or are represented by not only contemporary Irish theatre, but society more broadly. The theatre's demographics as a litmus test for the limits or possibilities of political inclusion animated our recent #WakingtheFeminists movement and its earlier antecedents such as "There Are No Women Playwrights" (see Chapters 4 and 6) both of which sought to call out and rectify a lack of gender parity in the Irish theatre industry arguing the female-identified bodies needed to be able to access and participate in theatre equally as 50% of the population as professionals as well as see themselves represented as characters/performers onstage. If we cannot see certain kinds of bodies in front of us regularly, there is presumably a problem with opportunities for access, participation and/or representation which likely reflects a broader political lack of rights/supports for that population. But how many levels of identity do we need to be assessing to make that call most comprehensively and helpfully for increasing equity in the contemporary Irish theatre most broadly and how can intersectionality help us as a critical strategy?

#WakingTheFeminist's *Gender Counts* report emphasised the need for a more multiplied intersectional perspective on identity within their own identity-based but ultimately gender-focused campaign. Campaign Director Lian Bell argued that #WakingTheFeminists began with gender as a single focus of analysis because "we picked the battle that we knew best, and thought we had the best chance of winning" (Donohue et al. 2017, 6). But on the place of intersectionality within #WakingtheFeminists and its legacy, she

reflects that “our hope and ambition was always that the organization and psychological changes wrought in the wake of the campaign could also be taken advantage of by those who continue to be sidelined in our culture; because they are poor, transgender, a member of the Traveller community or another minority” (Donohue et al. 2017, 6). Brenda Donohue et al. observe in the 2017 *Gender Counts* report that the representation of “transgender and non-binary individuals, as well as the depiction of race and foreignness on our stages, should be further studied” (Donohue et al. 2017, 61)—a pressure on both the theatre industry and scholarship that has only increased with the coming of age of an unprecedentedly diverse Irish population also influenced by global racial equity movements like #BlackLivesMatter (see Chapter 6). We also take up these strands around race, ethnicity and migration more explicitly in Chapter 11 through the keyword interculturalism.

Committing to an intersectional critical viewpoint within contemporary Irish theatre and performance studies means that we cannot position any single human body that appears onstage and/or works in the theatre and creative industries from the vantage point of only one of their identity positions, or the most dominant one (such as gender or in the case of Northern Ireland, religion/community/political belonging) if we are to truly excavate the nuance of how tracking bodies in contemporary Irish theatre grants us access to an index of the wider freedoms and inequalities in Irish society that the theatre industry attempts to hold a mirror up to. For example, cisgender (but frequently non-gender conforming) middle-class gay male Rory O’Neill’s presentation of himself as his alter ego Panti Bliss onstage at the Abbey on that night in February 2014 and the avowedly intersectional content of Bliss’s speech made a powerful and visceral statement about the ways in which gender (not only biological gender but an individual’s performance of masculinities and femininities and/or gender non-conformity), sexuality, class and national belonging are continually intersecting and interacting in individuals’ and group’s lived experiences and can be directly linked to the experience of greater or fewer freedoms for some as opposed to others, even in their own mind as Bliss’s speech so eloquently narrates. O’Neill/Bliss’s experience with homophobia could not actually be understood fully if viewed from the perspective of only one aspect of his identity (cisgender male and/or non-gender conforming when performing as Bliss, gay, middle-class or white Irish)—rather the co-mingling of these elements had to be not only named but embodied through Bliss/O’Neill’s live presentation of themselves at this event.

There has been some movement towards employing intersectionality as a theoretical framework within Irish theatre and performance studies. McIvor (2016) and Fiona Coffey (2016) both employ it as a central framework in their monographs on migration and interculturalism in contemporary Irish theatre and women in Northern Irish theatre respectively and others such as Brian Singleton (2011) make reference to it in their analyses of theatrical subjects

with multiple identity positions that impact the meaning of their work. As Coffey outlines for a Northern Irish context:

In contrast to the essentialized identity politics of Northern Ireland, which requires individuals to view their experiences through a specific and limiting sectarian lens, intersectionality theory requires individuals to examine how their memberships in overlapping identity categories all contribute in a cumulative way towards oppression and marginalization. (2016, 29)

A shift towards intersectionality as a key critical framework is increasingly vital given the island of Ireland's unprecedented demographic diversification over the last thirty years as discussed at length in Chapters 6 and 10 as well. We acknowledge that we are privileging a theoretical framework that has its origins within U.S. critical theory but would note the long-established relational critical genealogy between Irish (postcolonial) thought and African-American (feminist) and political thought particularly vis-à-vis performance as explored by Kathleen M. Gough in her 2014 *Kinship and Performance in the Black and Green Atlantic: Haptic Allegories*. But as Dawn Miranda Sheratt recently put it, we must work towards "a practicable intersectionalist version of Irish feminism that evaluates subjectivity along multiple axes of oppression as well as intercultural relation" (2017) if we are to keep pace with the lived experiences of the population currently resident in the Republic and Northern Ireland, as well as those whose more complex experiences and backgrounds had been omitted from the historical record until recently.

Intersectionality whether in the context of Irish theatre and performance studies or other fields can be challenging to practise critically as a consistently comprehensive aspiration although this does not mean that we should stop trying. We certainly fail frequently within these pages as we cannot say that we have fully considered every aspect of every artistic collaborator and/or characters' multiple intersecting and even conflicting identities in terms of works' meaning, critical reception and/or roadblocks to success or intelligibility. As Vivien May describes, intersectionality also asks critics to analyse "privilege and oppression as concurrent and relational and attends to within-group differences and inequities, not just between-group power asymmetries" (2015, 4)—a perhaps endlessly multiplying frontier of critical perspectives or angles we could commit to in trying to unpack the relationship between identities, power and theatrical legibility within Irish contemporary theatre. Of course, a comprehensive work though will not always be possible as many subjects and/or case studies in contemporary Irish theatre might actively prevent challenges to this kind of theoretical approach due to lack of information about a creator or character's multiplicity of identity and/or clarity about how it is relevant to their work or its reception.

Nevertheless, intersectionality's more expansive critical lens desperately needs more practice and mainstreaming within contemporary Irish theatre and

performance studies. This section suggests that by thinking about intersectional *bodies* in relation to the triad of access, representation and participation specifically, we might be able to concretise the possibilities of intersectionality as a critical strategy and practise it more deeply and meaningfully moving forward within our field. To do this, we will first turn to recent Arts Council policy in Northern Ireland and the Republic which have become increasingly specific about the relationship between intersectional aspects of identity and access to and participation in the arts and by extension, representation. Following Arts Council terminology in both settings, we use “access” to refer to individuals’ opportunities to view theatre as audience members, “participation” to signify individual practice of theatre and the arts as non-professional, and “representation” to encompass an audit of those working in and/or participating in making theatre as well as characters depicted onstage.

Following the release of the Republic’s 2019 Arts Council policy and strategy, *Equality, Human Rights & Diversity Policy & Strategy*, it is current state policy at the time of writing that the Arts Council “as the agency tasked with the development of the arts in Ireland” must make sure “every person living in Ireland has the right to create, engage with, enjoy and participate in the arts” (Arts Council 2019). A right to engagement and enjoyment means accessing the arts (including theatre) as an audience member and a right to participation and creation means having access to taking part in the arts as a non-professional or professional across a range of artistic roles and/or mediums. Implied but not guaranteed within these rights is the right for minority and/or underrepresented communities to be *represented* (i.e. see themselves onstage) as a by-product of their own participation in the arts or that of someone like them. Similarly, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland currently identifies their research and evaluation programme goals as:

1. Build evidence-based knowledge and understanding of the role and impact of art on people’s lives;
2. Identify patterns of engagement and factors affecting engagement in the arts; and
3. Help create more diverse, equal and confident communities by addressing inequalities as they relate to race, disability and gender (2022).

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland therefore goes even further than the Republic’s Arts Council by claiming the capacity of arts access, participation and by extension representation, to catalyse more diversity, equality and confidence in communities if inequalities related to “race, disability and gender” can be ameliorated to allow access and participation. The Republic’s 2019 policy and strategy’s list of key barriers to participation and access for individuals and groups is even broader than those three grounds however, citing “gender, sexual orientation, civil or family status, religion, age, disability, race

or membership of the Traveller community” (Arts Council 2019, 5), all areas covered under the Republic’s current equality legislation. Nevertheless, both Arts Councils on the island’s core policies currently lead from the perspective that individuals’ experiences of their intersectional identities impact on their access, participation and representation within the arts. Therefore, if attention is not paid by these agencies to ameliorating and/or addressing inequality as experienced across groups and individuals with intersectional identities, the two Arts Councils will not be able to fulfil their core missions as regards the arts in contemporary Irish society. This is enormously significant for how we practise contemporary Irish theatre and performance studies scholarship today and is also a pivot vantage point from which it is incredibly useful to analyse the past as we attempt to do throughout the book.

The mutual priorities of the Arts Councils in the Republic and Northern Ireland for individuals to access, participate and by extension be represented in the Irish arts (and theatre) are therefore a neatly defined scaffolding for us to lay out briefly here what the critical practice of attending to intersectional bodies in contemporary Irish theatre might look like. We however will dwell most at length on participation and representation in this brief section. Attention to equalising access to the arts as audiences in Ireland, the Republic and Northern Ireland, has indeed been a key focus of policy and practice in the period covered by this book, as evidenced by the expansion of regional arts centres in the Republic during the Celtic Tiger period covered in Chapter 5 as well as increasing audience demographic research by the Arts Councils in the Republic and Northern Ireland and through dedicated agencies like Thrive (formerly Audiences NI) (Thrive 2023) or short-term initiatives like Arts Audiences in the Republic which was a partnership between the Arts Council and Temple Bar Cultural Trust in the 2010s (Arts Audiences 2023). However, the story of Arts & Disability Ireland in the Republic is a very interesting case in point about how attention to participation of artists must overlap with consideration to participation by audiences, in this case, who have experiences of disability. Arts & Disability Ireland “grew out of Very Special Arts Ireland” (VSA Ireland), set up in 1985 and allied to the VSA network based in the US with a “main focus” on “artists with disabilities.” They changed their “name to Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI) in order to reflect contemporary thinking about disability inclusion” in 2001 and expanded their remit to include “audiences with disabilities” in 2005. After this expansion of focus, they “graduated from supporting just two Dublin-based drama and dance programmes to developing new partnerships in locations throughout Ireland in a range of artforms” (Arts & Disability Ireland 2023). Our double case study later in this section, Blue Teapot’s landmark 2012 production of Christian O’Reilly’s *Sanctuary*, directed by Petal Pilley, which was also adapted into a film, and then Christian O’Reilly’s 2022 play *No Magic Pill*, further develop our consideration of disability arts in Ireland as a key area for intersectional critical practices in Irish theatre and performance studies to be expanded.

Arts & Disability Ireland's as well as Blue Teapot's work draws centrally from the history and ongoing practice of contemporary community arts/collaborative arts practices on the island of Ireland which over the last 50 years has radically expanded who can participate in the arts in Ireland, ultimately having a pivotal if frequently obscured impact on core professional practices in independent but now mainstream contemporary professional Irish theatre practices which now frequently utilise collaboration with non-professional community-based partners as detailed in the previous section. As McIvor argues elsewhere, "community arts as it operated in tandem with the experimental theatre sector in the 1970s–1990s was and continues to be a site where some of the most cutting edge developments in innovative theatrical strategies are being tested in Ireland" (2015, 53) including but not limited to the use of devising/collaborative creation, working with amateurism as aesthetic, and use of interdisciplinary arts practices. However, what is important to understand here is that as the history of the modern Irish theatre pre-1957 demonstrates, "non-professionals" (i.e. amateurs such as the Fay brothers or Maud Gonne herself in the early days of the Abbey) have always shaped not only the core aesthetic output of Irish theatre but its *political* potential. The main reason that non-professional participants have been able to do this uniquely is not only because of the political causes that they might have personally been involved in (as in the case of Gonne) but specifically because of the multiple and complex intersectional identities that they brought into the work and as a direct influence on the content, form and delivery of the work. McIvor details how the immediate context of community arts' coalescence in the Republic and Northern Ireland from the late 1970s onwards included "sectarian conflict, poverty and drug issues" and responded by projects "serving divided communities, encouraging cross-community work and working in at-risk neighborhoods" (2015, 53). As she summarises:

Artists and groups working in the community saw the arts as a way to give a voice to those marginalized within the broader society. The arts could potentially give individuals or groups the opportunity to tell their story in various artistic mediums but could also provide training in practical work skills, or empower the process of community development through linking practical initiatives to community arts. (2015, 54)

Today's Theatre of the Real (following Carol Martin referenced earlier in the chapter) in contemporary Irish theatre represents a multiplicity of intersectional perspectives according to gender, class, sexuality, disability and race/ethnicity/national origin/background of migration that builds tangibly on the legacy of the Irish community arts movement which from the late 1970s onward. Christopher Morash ultimately credits the Irish community arts movement with challenging "the idea that one theatre might represent the whole island, pushing the wider concept of representation to the breaking point by blurring the lines between artist and audience" (2002, 262). As

Morash succinctly details, “Those who were represented were now the same people who were doing the representing (2002, 262).” Pioneering practitioners at the vanguard of this movement from the 1970s onward that we must continue to revisit as part of an intersectional contemporary Irish theatre critical practice include Peter Sheridan and Mick Egan (City Workshop, Dublin), Fiona Nolan (Balcony Belles, Dublin), Fr. Des Wilson and Michael Hilton (Belfast People’s Theatre, Belfast), Pam Brighton, Marie Jones, Jo Egan and Martin Lynch (variety of projects and companies, Belfast) and others too numerous to name or to fully honour here. Yet, despite this catalytic record of innovation, Brian Singleton identifies that “popular and community theatre are barely afforded a mention in most histories” (2011, 13), omissions linked inextricably to hierarchy and prejudice masked as quality control within scholarship and the theatre industry. As Singleton identifies, “Often the justification for canon formation is determined by the literary quality of the playtext all the while completely ignoring the extent and significance of the cultural and sometimes political intervention an actual performance might have generated in a particular historical moment” (2011, 13). We suggest that given the frequently diverse intersectional identities, of participants/professional artists working with and through community and/or participatory-based methods or who come to theatre first in this way, what is at stake here is not just omissions in canon formation, but equitable access, participation and representation within contemporary Irish theatre.

Indeed, while some leading Irish contemporary theatre companies such as ANU Productions and Brokentaklers who have become leading fully professional and consistently funded companies after working steadily with non-professionals and/or through community/participatory theatre-based methods of creating new work, there remains challenges particularly for migrant and/or minority ethnic artists in particular to break fully through as professional artists if they began their careers working in and through community and/or participatory arts contexts (McIvor 2016, 2020) and for companies working with minority artists that have identified themselves at the intersection of professional/participatory ways of making to keep and/or generate stable funding, including Calypso Productions and Outlandish Theatre Platform in the Republic, and Terra Nova Productions in the North (McIvor 2016, 2019, 2020). This repetitive disadvantage suggests that when projects or companies exploring intersectional aspects of identity specifically tie these endeavours to participatory methods in Irish theatremaking that this can end up becoming a barrier to ongoing or stable professionalisation of individuals and by extension, communities who begin their theatre journey with this work, and ultimately further perpetuate identity-linked inequities in access, representation and participation. However, it is for this very reason that we must pay particular attention to work in Irish theatre taking place at the intersection of professional and participatory theatre methods in terms of not only how it might increase access, participation and representation within

Irish theatre but also how it might continue to diagnose structural inequalities in the profession and by extension Irish society through the particularities of professional routes available within contemporary Irish theatre. We turn now to Galway-based Blue Teapot's ongoing collaboration with playwright Christian O'Reilly and this company's evolution from a purely participation-based/community organisation to having a mixed profile as a professional and participatory arts company. They have navigated the mixed professional/participatory ecology of their company extremely well, yet notably are quite under-engaged within contemporary Irish theatre and performance studies scholarship which may hint yet again at the ways in which theatre work at the intersectional of professional and participatory illuminating complex intersectional identities remains difficult for many to critically engage or acknowledge.

Case Study Three: Blue Teapot Theatre's production of Christian O'Reilly's *Sanctuary*, directed by Petal Pilley and featuring Charlene Kelly, Kieran Coppinger, Robert Doherty, Patrick Becker, Michael Hayes, Emer Macken, Paul Connolly, Frank Butcher and Valerie Egan. Christian O'Reilly's *No Magic Pill* in association with Town Hall Theatre, Galway and Civic Theatre Dublin as part of Dublin Theatre Festival 2022, directed by Raymond Keane, dramaturg and disability consultant Peter Kearns, and featuring Sorcha Curley, Mark Fitzgerald, Peter Kearns, Ferdia MacAonghusa, Julie Sharkey, Paddy Slattery.
Premieres: 2012 and 2022.

We have elected to feature a double case study in this section due to two key landmarks of contemporary Irish theatre, *Sanctuary* and *No Magic Pill*, centring the stories of and starring performers/theatremakers with disabilities premiering exactly a decade apart authored by the same Galway-based non-disabled playwright Christian O'Reilly in collaboration with the companies and/or actors that he worked with on both projects. *Sanctuary* and *No Magic Pill* need to be considered in relationship to one another, not only because O'Reilly is a common denominator between the projects and they are the most acclaimed theatre projects tackling disability in contemporary Irish theatre in the last twenty years, but because the long pathway of each project to funding and acclaim is interdependent on the other and taken together, these production histories make clear the possibilities and barriers of bringing the stories of disabled people/those with disabilities to the Irish stage, especially when performed and/or advised primarily by disabled individuals.

Sanctuary was created and produced in collaboration with Galway's Blue Teapot Theatre, founded in 1996. Blue Teapot "evolved from a community arts project within the Brothers of Charity Services Galway to become an award winning independent theatre company" (2023), professionalising in

2009 (Ojrzynska 2017, 233). Blue Teapot describe themselves today as “theatre change makers” and now describe their mission as “work[ing] to radically transform theatre practices by telling stories through the lens of disability, paving the way for inclusive practices to become the norm.” More specifically, they use theatre to “challenge the narrative about intellectual disability” (Blue Teapot 2023) which is “a disability characterised by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour” that becomes apparent “during the developmental period” (Schalock 2011, 228). In contrast, *No Magic Pill* was a stand-alone professional theatre project which brought together a team of freelance professional artists and whose subject matter was more focused on the disability activism across a diverse community of disabled individuals, though with an emphasis on physical disability in terms of the stories centred by the play. Directed by Raymond Keane (Barabbas co-founder, see Chapter 5) and produced by Mitzi D’Alton and O’Reilly, *No Magic Pill* examines the work of groundbreaking activist Martin Naughton and his co-conspirators in the disability rights movement at a pivotal moment in the ongoing fight for adequate home care provision and other supports that facilitate independence for Irish disabled people.

Sanctuary and *No Magic Pill* both take on the fight of disabled individuals to gain bodily and personal autonomy on their own terms from the Irish state. *Sanctuary* examines desire, consent and sex between intellectually disabled partners as sex was illegal at the time of the play’s premiere under Irish law if the individuals were not married and was catalysed by Blue Teapot actors interested in exploring the topic of relationships within their community who commissioned O’Reilly to come in and write the play with them. This law was repealed in 2017 and instead the law now focuses on “whether a person who has an intellectual disability has the capacity to consent to a sexual relationship, rather than banning such relationships outright by reason of the person’s intellectual disability” (*Irish Examiner* 2017). Both productions featured disabled actors (although there are a few roles in *No Magic Pill* where actors play both characters with and without a disability), and in both productions, the actors shaped the writing of the scripts with O’Reilly as well as the overall staging of the works based on their own experiences. O’Reilly said of *No Magic Pill* in 2022 that he hopes it is a “line in the sand for Irish theatre, showing theatre companies that disabled Irish actors deserve to play disabled characters” (2022, n.p.), but indeed, that line in the sand was really already drawn with *Sanctuary* several years previously. Both plays are also irreverent in their humour and scathing in their criticism of non-disabled Irish peoples’ assumptions and limitations in imagination in fully comprehending the complex lives and desires of disabled people, working as Emma Creedon puts it, actively against the “longstanding literary tradition of identifying characters with disabilities solely by their physical impairment,” or in the case of Blue Teapot’s artists, their intellectual disability (2020, 56). *Sanctuary* and *No Magic Pill* are also both insistent that while the rights and freedoms of their characters’ bodies may be restricted through the structures and laws that

govern their lived experiences day to day, their desires and dreams exceed these given circumstances and are not shaped ultimately only by the structural barriers that they face.

O'Reilly and Peter Kearns, *No Magic Pill's* Disability/Equality Dramaturg who also played Dermot in the production, are very explicit that *No Magic Pill* explicitly employs a dramaturgy rooted in the social model of disability which, in the words of Kearns, necessitates an understanding that:

...*Disability* is the barriers, physical and attitudinal, developed by society that stop or restrict people with impairments. So, disabled people are not labelled by their clinical condition, but are disabled by inaccessible busses, buildings, segregated education and negative media representations. (O'Reilly 2022, n.p.)

Sanctuary's action too explicitly stages the experience of being disabled by circumstance and provision rather than imagination and/or desire as the characters in this play explore their relationships and their sexualities under an unusual set of circumstances where two of the group, Larry and Sophie (played by Kieron Coppinger and Charlene Kelly) convince their carer Tom (Robert Doherty) to book a hotel room for them to have some time alone together and as they reveal to him once the arrangement is made, have sex (Fig. 9.1).



Fig. 9.1 Charlene Kelly as Sophie and Kieron Coppinger as Larry in Blue Teapot Theatre Company's *Sanctuary* by Christian O'Reilly, 2012. Photo: Reg Gordon

As this scenario plays out, Larry and Sophie, the couple at the centre of the action, as well as other pairs and small groups, get opportunities to be alone together to test the boundaries of their knowledge as constrained by the limited circumstances of their living conditions and/or particular relationships with their carers. Larry presses Tom for a condom due to being unable to procure one himself. After successfully bargaining for it with Tom, Larry asks for instructions on how it works. When Tom asks Larry if he's watched porn, his response is "I'm not let" (O'Reilly 2012, 27). This brief but telling exchange points towards the strict enforced limits that have curtailed Larry's ability to explore his sexuality for himself despite understanding exactly what he is barred from learning about and what he wants to experiment with himself. As Katyra Ojrzyńska summarises, *Sanctuary* "offers a critique of the social system which deprives those with learning disabilities of access to sexual experience, and by placing them under constant surveillance, increases their dependence and vulnerability" (2017, 235).

The stage play of *Sanctuary* was subsequently adapted as a 2016 film which was co-funded by the Irish Film Board, Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and RTÉ and won awards at the Dublin Film Festival, Galway Film Fleadh and Long Beach Film Festival (Brady 2017, 11). Tara Brady remarked in the *Irish Times* that:

In cinema, intellectual disability often translates into big, hammy performances (*Radio, I Am Sam*) or misunderstood superpowers (*Rain Man, The Accountant*). With a few exceptions...it remains unusual to see the intellectually disabled on film, so a film starring nine such actors is exceptional. (2017, 11)

Brady locates the power and significance of *Sanctuary* as film internationally in the skill and charisma of the Blue Teapot acting ensemble (Patrick Becker, Frank Butcher, Paul Connolly, Kieran Coppinger, Jennifer Cox, Valerie Egan, Michael Hayes, Charlene Kelly, Emer Macken and Robert Doherty), a powerhouse group of actors that form the heart of Blue Teapot's professional theatre ensemble and whose skill has been honed and developed by many years of intensive work with and through the company. Helmed by Director Petal Pilley since 2006, Blue Teapot operates three key strands which combine to "offer a pathway to a fully realised creative life for people with intellectual disabilities" including the Blue Teapot Theatre Company, "professional, intellectually disabled acting ensemble that trains and performs at the highest level, on the main stages of Ireland's leading arts venues and festivals," the Performing Arts School and their Community Theatre Programme which includes a programme for adults ("Bright Soul") and teenagers ("Sparkle") (2021, 9). O'Reilly and Blue Teapot's *Sanctuary* as play and film therefore did not come into being as a pair of phenomenon in a vacuum but were the outcome of almost twenty years of steady work by Blue Teapot members, Pilley and other Blue Teapot staff at the intersection of community work and

participatory arts practice moving gradually towards professional theatre (and film).

And while *No Magic Pill* was fronted by many recognisable independent professional Irish theatre artists on the creative team also including lighting designer Sarah Jane Shiels, set designer Ger Clancy and composer and sound designer Trevor Knight among others, O'Reilly has been very open about *No Magic Pill's* struggle to receive full Arts Council production funding. This includes being turned down twice after a long development process which had initially begun with O'Reilly's attempt to tell Naughton's story as a film which drew on his own experience working as Naughton's "researcher/personal assistant/communications officer" (O'Reilly 2022, n.p.). This initial attempt resulted in the 2004 film *Inside I'm Dancing* but which O'Reilly felt "doesn't tell the story I set out to tell" (2022, n.p.). Just like *Sanctuary*, *No Magic Pill's* acclaim upon its premiere, winning the *Irish Times* Theatre Award's 2022 Audience Choice Award (Johns 2023), actually conceals a longer and more effortful path to production complicated by the depth of collaboration and resourcing that O'Reilly and the team ultimately needed to realise their vision of a cast with disabled actors in starring roles, a script strong enough to have withstood heavy consultation and dialogue, and a fully accessible set designed which allowed actors who were wheelchair users to zoom on and offstage through a cross-cutting system of ramps with fluid dynamic movement director by Rachel Parry. *No Magic Pill* ultimately told the story not of Martin Naughton's disability or those disabilities of his other comrades in the disability rights movement at the time, but rather *No Magic Pill* was a meditation on desire, joy within community and the cost of stubborn single-mindedness for a cause which may lead individuals to not process some of their own trauma or needs (regardless of whether not they are "special" needs). It was a production which depended on the lived experience of the actors/collaborators who formed most of the cast but was a play about much more than bodies, or specifically their own disabled bodies. *No Magic Pill* also offered no answers regarding love or how to maintain and build momentum in an activist movement without sacrificing the self or others in the process. As reviewer Dove Curpen observed of *No Magic Pill*:

This performance is an unfinished discussion...It is a call to action, an introspective experience calling for an examination of one's dreams and hopes, its obstacles and the true reward of activism. (2022)

No Magic Pill's dramaturg/equality consultant Peter Kearns articulates that the goal is for "disabled people" to "come together" onstage "not as the blind or the deaf or the epileptic, or the bipolars, or the spastic or the arthritic impairment-based groupings, but as disabled people and activists and body-owning corporal-cultural enablers who also have important stories of class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc." (O'Reilly 2022, n.p.). Creating these conditions for access, participation and representation by intersectional

and in this case, disabled, bodies to tell layered stories like these requires investment in time, resources, individuals and relationships. *Sanctuary* and *No Magic Pill* achieved intersectionally deep access, participation and representation as well as critical acclaim upon their eventual premieres but their interlinked journey to full production dramatises the need not only for investment in intersectional critical strategies and access and participation policies but material infrastructural support and longitudinal effort in developing performers who may be disabled as one aspect of their identity as well as non-disabled collaborators like O'Reilly who have the experience and integrity gained from working alongside collaborators with different identities and/or needs than their own.

CONCLUSION

The body is never just individual in the contemporary Irish theatre; individuals are rather always interdependently linked to broader collectives and communities. The body is never just a tool for artistic expression or political agitation—these levels of resonance are always intertwined as this book argues throughout. Thinking at the level of individual and collective bodies within Irish theatre and performance history requires vigilant attention to the interplay of past, present and future as activated by the performing body or bodies in the present as well as attention to what other bodies' labour contributions backstage or in the theatrical conception of the work contribute to what we see on stage, or may be blocking what we don't see, or haven't seen represented very often, or *who* we haven't seen onstage or sitting beside us in the theatre. We therefore have to keep looking not only for the bodies we can see onstage or backstage or in the offices of the Irish theatre companies we examine, but we have to remain on the lookout for invisible bodies, absent bodies, ghostly bodies or imagined bodies such as those articulated by recent Arts Council policies in the Republic and the North which prioritise broader access, participation and representation for and within the arts including but not limited to theatre. We have tried throughout this chapter to push at and expand the lens through which we might consider the body in contemporary Irish theatre, but we still have more work to do, particularly when it comes to fully working through the idea of the labouring body in the contemporary Irish theatre and particularly post-COVID-19.

The Irish theatre sector is composed of many different types of companies, working structures and individual labouring bodies. Since the 1950s, funding models in the Republic and Northern Ireland have undergone multiple periods of change which have had profound effects on the number and composition of professional theatre companies in operation and their models of employment which are dependent year to year on both short- and long-term funding streams. The theatre as an institution (and entertainment industry more generally) is notorious for the precarious models of employment which characterise its work practices internationally. As Shannon Jackson notes, "the pervasive

narrative of performance labor is one of temporary contracts and itinerancy” (2012, 23). As supply of theatremakers of all crafts always exceeds demand, the paucity and instability of arts funding coupled with short contracts (even if one is frequently employed) renders careers across the crafts of direction, writing, performance, design and technical/production management incredibly difficult for individuals to sustain economically, despite the Republic and Northern Ireland’s public healthcare and unemployment benefit structures.

More focus on the labouring body in future scholarship would open up consideration of the interdependence of the many workers who make a theatre production possible in Ireland and beyond—not only playwrights, directors, performers and designers but also stage management and administrative staff. As Christin Essin forcefully argues, “A production history that augments performers’ experiences by recovering” for example “technicians’ backstage labor, therefore, potentially lays bare the *collective* labor necessary to deliver a long-running production night after night” (2015, 199). Sustaining this kind of perspective would immeasurably broaden our understanding of the body’s social, political and cultural function in Irish theatre history not just symbolically or formally, but as a collective of *working* bodies whose access, participation and representation is also shaped and/or limited by aspects of individuals’ multiple intersecting and sometimes conflicting identities. It might train more consistent focus on historiographically neglected areas of Irish theatre practice such as scenography, costume design, sound design and stage management as recent work by Siobhán O’Gorman on Irish designers and scenography (2018) and Eimer Murphy on prop making at the Abbey (2018) has begun to do through materialist theatre historiographical practices. Ultimately, accounting for the full ensemble of bodies that make a theatrical production in the contemporary Irish theatre and beyond possible will demand even more and deeper consideration of the work of *all* artistic stakeholders as contributing and vital bodies.

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Space

Theatre theorist, Kim Solga writes of “the epistemological duality” of space, “its imaginary potential, coupled with its literal and constant material impact on our lives” which “inevitably transforms it into territory, into something to be argued over, fought for, colonized, decolonized, hunted, owned, and lost” (2019, 2). With Ireland’s division into two territories under different governance, its geographic location as an island at the edge of Europe and its colonial history where its people were dispossessed of their land, it is perhaps unsurprising that space, as a mode of meaning-making in performance, is a key feature of Irish theatre.

The importance of the physical landscape to Ireland, a country with a long agricultural history, is registered by the fact that the Irish language has thirty-two different words for field. However, the land has also been considered to be capable of telling its own stories or possessing knowledge and memories: early Irish-language texts wrote of the *dinnsenchas*, the local lore of places and Irish bogs have been found to preserve ancient artefacts along with buried bodies hundreds of years old. Space in Ireland has thus traditionally been valued as a vital resource and also capable of generating meaning.

In more recent times the interpretation of the space of Ireland has been aligned with identity politics and governance. Due to the partition of the island into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland since 1922 many of the people living in six northern counties consider the territory to be British and identify as British while others in the same space identify as Irish. Northern Ireland is a political state whereas the North of Ireland is a geographical area that includes counties in the Republic such as Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan. Henri Lefebvre writes, “space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies” (1976, 31). This conceptualisation of space is

most apparent in a divided Ireland where the understanding of the space is dependent on an ideological point of view.

Beyond its colonial history and relationship with Britain, Ireland is also situated both geographically and ideologically between Europe and the United States. Due to sustained emigration from Ireland to the US from the nineteenth through to the twentieth century there are an enormous amount of American citizens who claim Irish heritage, which has led to deep connections between the two countries. In its struggle for independence from Britain, its abandonment of failed isolationist policies of self-sufficiency since the late 1950s and in its membership of the European Union since 1973 Ireland has also been keen to identify itself as a European nation. Ireland is thus also a space that is shaped and changed by how it navigates its relationship to these two spheres of influence and their conceptualisation of it, one that often considers it as “the old country”, romantically characterising it as an unchanging pastoral ideal and the other that views it as a partner nation in a modern economic community dedicated to a shared model of social democracy. With its open market economy in a globalised world Ireland is not set apart from the rest of the planet but deeply connected and affected by international events. It is thus also subject to the pernicious effects of consumer culture and technology that dissuade against and erode community belonging, individual agency and collective action. In this chapter we consider how space functions in Irish theatre reflecting and critiquing these historical and cultural contexts that have led to isolation, division and exclusion but also how it appeals for alternative futures that are connected, inclusive and open to change.

However, it is not only these contexts but also the material conditions of the physical spaces of performance that have also contributed to the development of Irish theatre. The small stage and auditorium of the first Abbey Theatre building encouraged the production of realistic plays that relied on the intimacy of the venue for their intensity. Due to the success of these productions, a fixed set of a domestic interior, small casts and naturalistic acting style suited to the limitations of the Abbey became conventions of the Irish play. In subsequent years as theatre buildings developed and performance spaces changed to be more adaptable to different styles of presentation (the Abbey Theatre included—see Chapter 2) so too were the conventions of Irish theatre challenged in the work created for these various physical spaces. Since the 1970s Irish theatre has increasingly been made outside of theatre buildings allowing different performance sites to shape new processes of making theatre to interrogate the political efficacy of performance.

Before we embark on our analysis it is important at this point to consider how we understand space to function in the theatre. The examination of space has long been identified as central to the study of theatrical events as they unfold in real locations (auditorium, stage, performance site) in front of audiences but also transform those spaces both physically and imaginatively in enacting a theatrical performance. The theatre explores the duality of space,

how it is “one of the simultaneously most boundless and abstract, *and* most grounded and concrete concepts in the human imaginary” (Solga 2019, 2). Spatial studies of the theatre consider “how space, as an independent but also an *interdependent* function of theatrical composition (along with for example, acting bodies, an audience, and a script, whether pre-conceived or devised) generates aesthetic, social and political value for producers and consumers of the performance event” (Solga 2019, 2). This leads us to ask questions such as: what spaces are depicted on the stage and what significance might these have for the audience? How are certain spaces such as outside/inside, onstage/offstage, real/diegetic (imaginary) navigated by characters and are characters associated with certain spaces? What does the restrictions of the physical environment where the performance is taking place offer in terms of enriching the meaning of the theatrical event or shaping the reception of the performance? These questions and more outline a means by which the aesthetic, social and political value of space in the works examined can be understood and assessed.

This chapter will explore through three elucidating frameworks and three related case studies the particular spatial conventions and dramaturgies that can be identified in Irish theatre and how they contribute to the meaning and performance of Irish plays. We will also consider how the performance site can create meanings specific to Irish social contexts.

- **The Home Place**

In its struggle for independence Ireland sought a stable image of home that would mark its difference and give a sense of belonging and value. The country cottage, repeatedly reproduced on the Irish stage in the early part of the twentieth century came to represent an ideal of home. As this domestic space became a convention of Irish drama a spatial dramaturgy developed whereby characters actions were expressed through a dialectic between an onstage space characterised as a real, mimetic and restrictive while the offstage space was expansive and diegetic. This section charts how this staging of home develops and changes over decades in which Ireland’s political divisions, rising Catholic conservatism and economic modernisation are reflected in changes to this established convention of the stage space. It ends by illustrating how many contemporary plays make use of a negative dramaturgy where the drama begins in a defined fixed place but through various theatricalised devices this place is destabilised to become a fluid performative space that offers the potential for change and reimagining. But the transformation of the space does not come without consequence as characters must either suffer, sacrifice and even experience tragic loss in the process.

- **Liminal Spaces**

This section examines the recurrence of liminal (in-between) spaces in contemporary Irish drama and how these spaces are occupied by wandering/homeless figures that are outsiders to a patriarchal, heteronormative and sectarian Irish society. These plays do not reproduce the

domestic space and no longer rely on spatial division or a dialectic between oppositional spaces. Instead, they tell the stories of those denied a part in and even expunged from the national narrative of Ireland. In the creation of these liminal spaces divisions are collapsed into each other revealing the contingent and performative nature of gender, sexuality and national identities. This allows for a space in which identity and society can be reimagined or performed differently. However, the outsider figure that is associated with the liminal space is often exiled or destroyed by the end of the play signalling for the audience an urgency for Ireland to change and become more inclusive.

- **Sites of Performance/Non-theatre Spaces**

In this final framework theatre practitioners' use of non-theatre spaces or sites of performance are examined as leading to new modes of meaning-making in contemporary Irish theatre. When work is moved outside of the theatre the conventions and divisions that the theatre building allows between audience and performer are collapsed. Irish theatre companies engaged in the creation of site-specific productions have been keen to explore the possibilities of a renegotiation of not only the space of the performance but also theatrical processes of production and reception. Much of this type of performance strives towards creating a new sense of communion between spectators, the site and the performance. In doing this we consider how the increased frequency of site-specific production in Ireland since the late 1990s can be viewed as a reaction to the effects of globalisation that paradoxically both homogenise cultures but also emphasise their superficial differences to suit market demands. Thus, Irish theatre artists are drawn to explore ways of making theatre that is rooted to local spaces to confront audiences with the material realities of communities that live in marginalised spaces or to situate them in a shared communal space with diverse communities. How these processes work to activate spectators both to contribute to the creation of the performance but also towards future political action is explained.

These three foundational frameworks are accompanied by brief case studies that model the application of these critical lenses to these key theatre productions.

- **The Home Place** (Stewart Parker's *Pentecost*).
- **Liminal Spaces** (Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*).
- **Sites of Performance/Non-theatre Spaces** (ANU's *The Boys of Foley Street*).

THE HOME PLACE

While home is a place of belonging, refuge and permanence it can also be a place of containment, conformism and suffocation. For Una Chaudhuri these contrasting aspects of home create conflict for the individual in the collision of “two incommensurable desires: the desire for a stable container of identity and desire to deterritorialize the self” (1995, 8). She considers the realist plays of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century as dramatising the contradictions of the home place and as such following a “geopathic dramaturgy” wherein these conflicting desires manifest as “a disease of space and place” (Solga 2019, 65).

In Ireland the concept of home is over-determined due to its history of British colonial occupation whereby people did not own their own land or homes and lived under the constant threat of eviction. A large part of the Celtic revival project was the establishment of a stable image of home for the new emerging Irish nation. It was the domestic setting of the interior of a country cottage in W. B. Yeats’s and Augusta Gregory’s seminal *Cathleen ní Houlihan* (1902) that would become fixed as a representation of the Irish home. Christopher McCormack examining theatre programmes in the Abbey Theatre Digital Archives counts 176 plays with a domestic setting in the twenty years after the premiere of *Cathleen ní Houlihan* (McCormack 2018, 54). Marion McGarry has described the symbolic value of the Irish cottage as “a type of Eden unsullied by British colonialism to which the Irish might return” (McGarry 2017, 16). The pastoral homestead offered a singular solid construct to represent Ireland that was grounded in authenticity. This was most important in a postcolonial nation, for as Lloyd suggests, “it is the inauthenticity of the colonized culture, its falling short of the concept of human that legitimates the colonial project” (Graham 2001, 132). Therefore, in terms of identity the rural pastoral allowed for an authentic consensual Irish identity that presented Irishness in terms of stability and legitimacy. However, the country cottage never reflected a lived reality for the largely urban audience that frequented the Abbey Theatre and no sooner had it become a fixed ideal than it began to fade in actuality. By the 1960s modern one-storey bungalows had replaced most of the traditional thatched cottages and larger farmhouses in rural Ireland (Daly 2016, 137). The country cottage was no longer rooted to any authentic representation in contemporary Ireland but yet had become fetishised as *the place* of Irish drama. As Yi-Fu Tuan explains: “space becomes place as soon as we get to know it better and endow it with value...when a space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become a place” (1977, 6).

This geopathology of home in an Irish context plays out not only as a crisis of the individual subject but also an interrogation of national identity that manifests as “dialectic between restrictive and expansive spaces” (Morash and Richards 2013, 25). The onstage space is characterised as the restrictive mimetic familiar home interior while the offstage space is the expansive imaginative strange space outside. This dialectic of space followed a particular

dramaturgical pattern established in seminal plays by Yeats, Synge and Gregory whereby the stability of the onstage space is threatened by outside/offstage forces represented by the incursion of a “stranger in the house”. For Nicholas Grene “The dramatic motif of the stranger in the house brings into play axes of inner versus outer, the material against the spiritual, familial, domestic life opposed to a life of individually chosen destiny” (1999, 53). In these early revival plays the stranger lures a member of the household to leave their home and embrace life outside of the safety and comfort of domesticity. To go with the stranger in these plays is a revolutionary act but also destructive. In *Cathleen ní Houlihan* (1902) a groom forsakes his bride, by leaving his home on his wedding night to fight and die for Ireland after being beckoned to do so by an old stranger, Cathleen ní Houlihan, a personification of Ireland. With his sacrifice Cathleen is made young again. In J. M. Synge’s *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903) Nora leaves with the tramp fully aware that in doing so she is leaving the comforts of her domestic situation for a life of hardships and possibly an early death. Self-determination comes only with great sacrifice in these instances and involves departure from home in order to bring renewal and stability. This spatial drama thus maps onto the revolutionary nationalist ideology of Ireland at the time that believed Ireland must embrace loss and sacrifice as a means to gain independence.

In later dramas post-independence the division of restrictive and expansive space as onstage and offstage continues but the stranger is no longer followed offstage. In the dramas after the bloody conflict of the war of Independence and the Civil War the stranger threatens the stability of the now established home/nation and is banished along with any impulse to follow him/her. An extreme and fascinating example of this change in attitude is evident in Frank Carney’s *The Righteous are Bold* (1946), one of the most popular plays of the 1940s where a young woman returns from England possessed by the devil. She brings a stranger within her onstage that must be exorcised. This play performs the xenophobia of the ideology of the new self-sufficient Church-dominated Ireland of the 1930s and 1940s where Irish (female) souls must be saved from the evil of British modernity. In Teresa Deevy’s *Katie Roche* the constraints imposed on Irish women since the founding of the state is staged by giving a new twist to the familiar dialectic of restrictive and expansive space and its accompanying stranger in the house trope. The eponymous Katie, an illegitimate domestic servant who is an imaginative dynamic figure longs for the vitality of the offstage space with its regattas and dances but instead remains confined to the onstage deciding to marry the insipid master of the house in which she serves. A wandering tramp enters the onstage and is revealed to be Katie’s father but he does not ask her to follow him. He instead beats and chastens her. For Deevy her heroine’s options are so limited in the new state due to her illegitimacy and her sex that Katie must resign herself to dwell in the restricted onstage. Unlike Synge’s Nora she is unable to leave with the stranger and reside in the expansive offstage space.

In the contemporary drama from the late 1950s onwards however there is a shift in this neat division of space towards a different paradigm. This model sees the dialectical spatial dramaturgy replaced with a transformation of the space whereby the restrictive onstage space becomes expansive over the course of the play. Here the representational mimetic space is transformed into a diegetic theatrical space. Or in Yi-Fu Tuan's terms the familiar *place* is changed back into an unknowable dangerous *space*. There is no longer a conflict between the onstage place and the offstage space but instead a new process where the hampering place is transformed into an enabling space of possibility. The protagonists of these dramas undergo a journey where they are no longer subject to their environment, victims of the space they inhabit, but are instead made active agents of change, architects of their own future. However the renewal of the space is not without loss and often time comes with destruction and death.

This transformation occurs through a theatricalisation of the space. Anna McMullan's comments on Friel's dramaturgy are especially apt in relation to this idea. She writes: "The dramatic dynamic of his theatre seems to lie in the explosive moments of tension when the script is destabilised, when the masquerade is exposed and the possibility of performing otherwise is glimpsed" (McMullan 2006, 151) Patrice Pavis identifies this in Chekhov as "negative dramaturgy" (2000, 70). He claims such a dramaturgical composition presents as a "neo-classical building" where the "cracks are already visible" (2000, 72). We are presented with what seems a well-made-play structure, "A form based on conflict, opposition, dualism and the contrasting qualities of good and evil" but through the course of the play this "dramaturgy will become negative; it will become destructured, dematerialised, disorientated" (2000, 72) by means of theatrical devices. Pavis' negative dramaturgy can be located in many contemporary Irish dramas from the late 1950s onwards reflecting changing attitudes in Ireland or appeals for change.

As already mentioned this dramaturgy is located in much of Friel's drama. In *Philadelphia Here I Come!* (1964) the device of the two personas of Gar undermines the reality of the domestic space, something that is again achieved by the narrator Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa* when he theatrically frames, interrupts and steps in and off the home of the Mundy sisters. The exaggeratedly violent male household of Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* simply destroy the home place on stage as they rage against their marginalisation in England as immigrants forced to leave a new Irish nation that could not sustain them; while Mommo in her bed in the kitchen in *Bailegangaire* unites her daughters in the finishing of her fantastical tale freeing them temporarily from the material realities of their environment that limit their lives. In the course of Anne Devlin's *Ourselves Alone* the home is revealed to be a site of danger and conflict for the women in Catholic communities in Northern Ireland during the Troubles where the violent effects of sectarianism on the men is taken out on daughters, wives and girlfriends who dream of swimming together in the sea where they are free from the land and the men that war

to dominate it. Christina Reid's *Tea in a China Cup* similarly shows how the women of Loyalist communities suffer the loss of sons, husbands and fathers to a cult of defending the homeland through British military service and sectarianism. Reid shows how such patriarchal structures of division are supported and perpetuated in the reductive roles of sister, mother, daughter that women are confined to play and their keeping of a respectable home place. Beth learns to free herself of these patriarchal roles and the restrictions of the domestic space which is destabilised by the enacting of past memories and direct address to the audience.

These are a few examples that illustrate how common this negative dramaturgy of space is in contemporary drama and how it moves towards breaking down the metonymic house of the nation that with its rigid definitions of identity no longer serves to unite, sustain or offer refuge to its people and must be destroyed, undermined or reimagined so that it can become a space of potential once more a space of reinvention and becoming.

Case Study One: *Pentecost* by Stewart Parker

Premiered: Guildhall, Derry, 1987, produced by Field Day Theatre Company, directed by Patrick Mason.

Home has been a contentious term in the north of Ireland particularly since the partition of the island that led to decades of violence and death. Ownership of the home place is contested by two different traditions held by some of the people that live there: the Protestant Ulster Unionists who believe northern Ireland to be a part of Britain and the Catholic Republicans who wish to be united with the Republic of Ireland.

Stewart Parker's *Pentecost* in its apparent realism first stages the "geopathic dramaturgy" of home in the context of the Northern Irish "Troubles" as a site of conflict. However, as the play develops the rigid unyielding structures of the home place, that cause divisions among those that dwell there, are dismantled by a "negative dramaturgy" where by the end of the drama the stage is transformed into a miraculous open space of theatricality. In this space the characters unite through play and shared human understanding instead of splitting according to fidelity to tradition and religious loyalties creating what Stephen Rea identifies in Parker's drama as "a vision of a harmonious possibility on the other side of violence" (Parker 2000, xii).

First produced by Field Day Theatre Company at the Guildhall in Derry on 23 September 1987 *Pentecost* was directed by Patrick Mason with Stephen Rea playing the role of Lenny. The events of the drama take place in 1974 shortly before, during and soon after the Ulster Workers' Council strike, which was a protest by unionist workers against the establishment of a power-sharing Executive, Northern Ireland's first concerted effort "at a form of democratic self-government" (Roche 1994, 221). The strikers were supported by loyalist paramilitaries who blocked roads and intimidated workers not on strike. This escalated into violence by terrorist groups on both sides of the conflict with thirty-nine civilians killed in shootings and bombings in Belfast, Dublin and Monaghan over the thirteen days of the strike.

The play is set in the downstairs of a Belfast terrace house with the majority of the action staged in the kitchen, which has a large window that “looks out on the back yard” (Parker 2000, 171). Stewart writes in the stage directions that “*Everything is real except the proportions. The rooms are narrow but the walls climb up and disappear into the shadows above the stage*” (Parker 2000, 171). This signals to the audience how the drama will at once follow and challenge the conventions of realism with its inherent conflict between the outside and inside, onstage and offstage, restrictive and expansive spaces.

The drama begins with strangers in the house: Marian and Lenny, an estranged Catholic couple. Lenny has just inherited the terrace house as the long-term tenant, a Protestant widow Lily Mathews, has died. Marian wishes to buy it from Lenny but he will only sell it to her on condition she grants him a divorce. She agrees to the deal and moves in, soon meeting the ghost of the bigoted Lily who is unhappy that a Catholic woman has taken residence in her home.

The entrance of Lily as a ghost transforms the nature of the space. Anthony Roche writes:

Her ghostly manifestation not only challenges Marian’s reality and her grip on it, but undermines the reality the play is representing. Ironically, while Lily appears to urge strict segregation into Protestant and Catholic, her presence on-stage succeeds in crossing boundaries and established lines of demarcation between the living and the dead. (Roche 1991, 224)

The appearance of a ghost onstage admits the uncanny to the familiar home and undermines the solidity of the representation before the audience. As an actor onstage embodies the character of Lily she appears no less real than the other embodied characters on stage. Her carnality ironically draws attention to the constructed nature of the performance event and its status as “make believe”. Parker playfully hints at this when he later has Marian say to Lily: “You think you’re haunting me, don’t you. But you see it’s me haunting you” (Parker 2000, 210). The theatricality of the ghost is inherent for as Alice Rayner points out: “theatre is itself a ghostly place in which the living and the dead come together in a productive encounter” (2006, xii). This is true of the relationship between Lily and Marian who come to understand and care for each other as the play develops, dramatising a process of reconciliation.

Ruth, a Protestant wife to an abusive RUC Officer, joins Marian in the house seeking refuge from her husband. Lenny also comes to stay after his own home is burgled and brings along his old Protestant college friend Peter, a property surveyor, just home from London. Marian agrees to Peter staying provided he survey’s the house as she wishes to transform it into a museum.

Lily again appears to Marian who confronts her about finding a baby’s christening robe. Upset at seeing the little garment Lily confirms for Marian that she had a child but gave it up for adoption. Ruth enters, does not see Lily but does see Marian holding the robe. She tells of having had several miscarriages

and that she can no longer have children. Marian opens up about her child, Christopher that died as a baby of cot death. The two women comfort each other with an embrace overcome by their loss. This final image of the first act is one of unity as two mothers from two different traditions embrace as they mourn their innocent dead.

In the second act, after reading her diary, Marian confronts Lily about her affair with an English lodger that stayed with her during the depression while her husband sought work and how it was his child that she had. The final scene takes place after the strike. The four refugees gather in the kitchen where they begin to share personal stories and then Ruth begins to read from scripture about the Pentecost. Marian speaks to the group of Christopher, confronting her own pain and guilt of losing her child. She then declares how she has resolved to no longer turn the house into a museum, but instead wants it 'to live' (Parker 2000, 244). The house as metaphor for Northern Ireland is underscored here. It is to be no longer a home stuck in the past, a restrictive place clinging onto deadening barren traditions but to be a fertile living space. In the final moments Ruth opens the large kitchen window to let light and air into the house to show this transformation and Lenny plays his trombone with Peter accompanying him on the banjo. This use of music at the close of the play is powerful in performance as it collapses the structured boundaries between the inside-onstage and outside-offstage space signified by sound throughout the play.

In the first act sounds offstage score the actions onstage. After Marian announces she wishes to buy the house "*the soft booming of two distant explosions is heard*" (Parker 2000, 177). Just as Lily Mathews enters for the first time "*A low distant rumble of explosions is heard.*" Ruth's "*hammering*" on the front door interrupts Lily and Marian's argument. Before Lenny arrives with Peter "*the sound of half a dozen drunken youths running up the back entry, shouting and whistling is heard off. A beer bottle sails over the yard wall and smashes harmlessly on the floor of the yard*" (Parker 2000, 196). And as Lily enters the stage for the second time "*In the far, far distance the sound of two lambeq drums head-to-head starts up*" (Parker 2000, 208). The outside space is expansive—the words "*distant*" or "*distance*" are used repeatedly to describe these sounds but it is also a place of violent threat and danger. The inside space by contrast is restrictive and stultifying, unable to accommodate the loud joy of Lenny's trombone.

The second act begins with a radio address by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, condemning the Ulster Workers' Council strikes as an undemocratic act of sectarianism. This is played first through the theatre PA while the stage is dark, but as Ruth enters, with a candle and the lights come up, "*the sound of the broadcast from her radio overlaps with and soon takes over from the theatre PA*" (Parker 2000, 213). This announces that this act will be one with a "negative dramaturgy" whereby the realism of the situation will gradually become undermined not only by the ghost device but also by the use of sound as the border between a restrictive onstage/inside space

and expansive outside/offstage space will be crossed. The final actions of the play make this most clear as Lenny “*goes out to the back yard*” and “*sits down on the window ledge*” as Ruth reads from the bible he plays “*a very slow and soulful version of ‘Just a Closer Walk with Thee’*” (Parker 2000, 245). Noise from outside is thus no longer that of threat and danger but music. Inside Peter on the banjo “*starts to pick out an accompaniment to the tune*” (Parker 2000, 245). Music in this instance unites both the outside and the inside space, drowning out the previous sounds of violence. This enacts the miracle of the Pentecost as Ruth had earlier described it: “they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Parker 2000, 245).

LIMINAL SPACES

Audiences of Irish theatre are frequently presented with stage worlds located in liminal spaces. For Anthropologist Victor Turner, in his seminal conceptualisation, the “limen” or threshold, is defined as an “ambiguous” state “betwixt-and-between” which inhabits a space “neither here nor there” (1995, 95). A liminal space is thus by definition inconstant and boundless in contrast to the stability of the home place. The setting of plays in liminal spaces is a different response by Irish playwrights to Chaudhuri’s problem of place or “geopathology”, what she characterises as a struggle that unfolds as “an incessant dialogue between belonging and exile, home an homelessness” (1995, 15). In the previous section we saw how many contemporary playwrights confront this geopathology by setting their dramas in home places whose fixed boundaries become destabilised by the end of the play through the use of theatrical devices that undermine the mimetic realism of the space. In the close of these plays the characters are found to be in a liminal performative space that exists between “the desire for a stable container of identity and desire to deterritorialize the self” (8). Other playwrights do not follow this negative dramaturgy but instead emphasise liminality throughout their dramas using strategies that include, but are not limited to, the placing of action in outside spaces such as a river bank as Marina Carr does in *Portia Coughlan* (1996), framing events as relived memories such as in Frank McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1985) where a dying gay loyalist, Pyper endlessly remembers his experiences fighting in the First World War; or choosing a theatricalised style of presentation where multiple changing locations are presented on stage through movement, dialogue (or monologue) and minimal use of props, as in Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy’s *Women in Arms* (1984) where the heroic legends of the Ulster Cycle are told from the perspective of the women characters or Pat Kinevan’s *Silent* (2011) which is a dynamic one-man show about a homeless Irishman.

These plays mostly tell of characters that are Irish outsiders, identities that were excluded from the project of nation building. As already outlined in the historical chapters, in Ireland the imagined community of the nation was one that stressed its difference to a British identity, with Catholicism, the Irish language and republicanism becoming some of the key markers of that difference as well as a resistance to the wild, drunken and violent portrayal of the Irish in British literature and culture. Thus Protestant loyalists, queer identities and the travelling community were cast as outsiders. As too were women excluded from power or privilege in a patriarchal society informed by Catholicism and a nationalism that idealised passive domesticated women (see Chapter 7). Economically marginalised urban communities were also made outsiders of the nationalist pastoral ideal and the *petit bourgeois* establishment.

As we have shown in the previous section the domestic home place onstage became metonymic of the nation on stage and so an uncanny liminal space in its fluidity can be read as a challenge to the rigid suffocating fixity of a national identity. Liminal space thus conceived can be considered as a queer space. Jean-Ulrick Désert writes that “Queer space crosses, engages, and transgresses social, spiritual, and aesthetic locations” (1997, 20). Such a queer space can accommodate identities that are outside the imagined community of the nation. These outsiders in these plays reveal paradoxically how they are “at home” in the “in-between” and those surrounding them are reframed as the outsiders. As boundaries are transgressed and binaries collapsed in liminal spaces the strict divisions and definitions that mark gender, sexuality and national identities are revealed to be contingent and performative. In such spaces then identity and society can be reimagined and performed differently.

At this point it is prudent to point out that liminality is a prevalent and contested term in Irish postcolonial studies where critics have questioned the use and validity of the liminal and the idea of hybridity it contains. Richard Kirkland in his “Questioning the Frame: Hybridity, Ireland and the Institution” cautions against negligent representations of the liminal arguing that “an awareness of the hybrid, the heterogeneous and the anomalous should not be a catalyst for celebration but rather should investigate a considered process of rereading to assess just how far the frames of representation themselves need to be re-evaluated” (1999, 118). Claire Bracken conducts such a rereading in her essay, “Each nebulous atom in between: reading liminality—Irish studies, postmodern feminism and the poetry of Catherine Walsh” in which she convincingly argues that postcolonial theorists’ view of liminal space as “an entity of non-differentiation” functions to “reinforce the oppositional categories they seek to negate” and runs the risk of “suffocating difference in a generalized totality” (2005, 98–99). As a solution to this predicament Bracken recommends a rereading of the liminal in light of Rosi Braidotti’s postmodern feminist theory of the nomadic subject. Braidotti argues that in its dual process of both roaming and resting, nomadic wandering has the ability to simultaneously articulate elements of diversity and connection (1994). In much contemporary Irish drama that makes use of liminal spaces in its dramaturgy

there are wandering figures that move between both liminal and domestic spaces bringing specific issues of exclusion to the fore. Todd Barry in his essay “Queer Wanderers, Queer Spaces: Dramatic Devices for Re-imagining Ireland” situates the wandering figure within queer rather than feminist theory. He draws on the work of Désert quoted earlier, writing how the presence of these wanderers in a drama “catalyses a new understanding of the play’s places and the literal dramatic space of the theatre, because he ‘crosses, engages, and transgresses’ a multiplicity of spaces” (Barry 2009, 152). Barry considers two plays by Frank McGuinness, *Carthaginians* (1988) and *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching towards the Somme* (1985), as well as Brian Friel’s *Gentle Island* (1971) and Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage* (1958) in his essay but such characters can be located in many plays such as those already mentioned earlier in this section and in the case study that follows.

In the same essay Barry also asks “If old and unsuccessful national stories are queered, de-centred, and subverted, what stories are put in their place, and what happens to the queer ‘hero’ who brought the old imaginative structure down?” (2009, 160). He answers his question by highlighting in the plays he chose to examine how the hero is sacrificed for the community. The eventual erasure of the queer wanderer recurs throughout these dramas, be it through death, exile or silencing and with this heteronormative, patriarchal and neoliberal structures are restored. On the one hand, the tragic force of the loss of these characters should emotionally impact audiences and cause them to wish for a different national story that includes these outsiders. On the other the tragic release could lead to an exhaustion of emotion and any will towards real reform. Barry in his essay discusses how Behan’s *The Hostage* offers an alternative in its ending through the resurrection of Leslie, the British soldier who has been kidnapped and killed, who he identifies as the queer wanderer of the piece. Leslie rises after his murder at the close of the play to sing a song with the entire cast in defiance of death and of the violent outcomes of sectarianism. For Barry, Leslie’s final song shows how the “inspired doubt in the solidity of boundaries, locations and identities” created by queer space “need not have a destructively deconstructive effect but rather can achieve a kind of cultural unification” (2009, 168). The space in these final moments of Behan’s play is one that is communally shared by the cast and the audience who are powerfully united in the act of performance. This experience of shared space between audience and performers is something that is further explored in the next framework as we examine the work of Irish theatremakers who abandon the theatre building in order to create new modes of performance.

Case Study Two: *By the Bog of Cats* written by Marina Carr

Premiere: Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 1997 directed by Patrick Mason

Notable Revival: San Jose Repertory Theatre, 2001 directed by Timothy Near, starring Holly Hunter.

Marina Carr has stated “I find a particular metaphor or image and start chasing it down [and] that becomes the plot as much as anything” (Fitzpatrick 2008, 57). The Bog of Cats where Carr’s tragic heroine Hester Swane

dwells functions as the primary metaphor and image in *By the Bog of Cats*, signalled in the title, it is central to the meaning of the play. As Lisa Fitzpatrick points out the bog is “a watery landscape, a liminal space that is neither lake nor dry land” (Fitzpatrick 2008, 178) and “in colloquial speech to say someone is from the bogs is similarly to dismiss them as uncivilised and unsophisticated...Yet the bogland is also celebrated in culture and literature as a characteristic geographic feature of the country and a preserver of its ancient and recent, history” (Fitzpatrick 2008, 176). It is thus a landscape symbolic of Ireland, but unstable, changeable, untamed, dangerous and uncouth. As the character of Monica says in the play “ya know this auld bog, always shiftin’ an changin’ and coddin’ the eye” (Carr 1999, 267). The bog can sustain the living when dried as peat and used to fuel fires but it also preserves the dead. In her play Carr also imbues it with the supernatural, as this is where Hester meets the Ghost Fancier at the opening of the play who wishes to take her away to her death. However, he mixes up the dawn with the dusk and he tells her that he will return later to fulfil his duty. For Melissa Sihra the bog in the play is “synonymous with female agency where the ungovernable terrain is a psychic recess of Hester’s character as much as a physical location” (Sihra 2021, 163).

The plot of *By the Bog of Cats* like its setting is also double as it follows but differs from Euripides’s *Medea*. Like the classical heroine, Hester is an outsider to the settled community, as an Irish traveller woman, who is set on a destructive path after she is rejected by her former lover so he can wed a younger daughter of a man that will bring him acceptance and status within the community. The lover here is Carthage McBride in place of Jason and he tries to force Hester off the Bog of Cats. She retaliates by burning down his house and killing his livestock. She ends the play killing herself and her seven-year-old daughter, Josie, she had with Carthage. However, unlike *Medea* Hester does not kill her daughter in revenge but does so as an act of love for she does not wish her to live as she has done without a mother in a cruel patriarchal world. Hester is made sympathetic in her pain at being abandoned by her mother, Big Josie Swane and her longing for her return to where she left her on the Bog of Cats. Lisa Fitzpatrick points out how the heroic myth is parodied by Carr in her adaptation of the classical figures of Euripides’s drama. She writes,

Carthage is a subsistence farmer. Xavier Cassidy, Carr’s counterpart to Creon, is a brutal incestuous small-time landowner, whose power is strictly local. They are piddling heroes. Hester Swane herself is no better than she should be: an uneducated, dispossessed woman; a fratricide; mother of an illegitimate and half-neglected child; alcoholic. (2009, 180)

Carr’s play also adheres to and strays from the Aristotelian structure of the original. It takes place over the course of a day, there is one action driving the piece that is resolved by the end of the play and the heroine’s violent

death promotes catharsis by eliciting fear and pity in the audience enabling a purgation of emotion. It also includes a classical blind seer that takes the form of the Catwoman, although she is again a parodic figure not only in her grotesque mice-eating but also in her counsel that fate can be avoided: “There’s ways round curses. Curses only have the power ya allow them” (Carr 1999, 276) In its movement to the interior of Xavier Cassidy’s house in Act 2 the play breaks with classical convention in having more than one location. Medea is famously saved by Euripides in the final moments by her grandfather the sun god, Helios, who descends in a *deus ex-machina* but in *By the Bog of Cats* Hester instead dances at the close of the play with the Ghost Fancier before a knife is plunged into her chest.

Medea is a foreign witch, a barbarian princess, in Euripides’ drama and Jason’s betrayal of her is not condemned, as she is an outsider without status in the ancient society. Carr chose to make Hester a Traveller as “Travellers are our national outsiders” (Battersby 2000). Hester is also without status in the Irish society depicted on stage and the subject of bigoted verbal attack by Carthage’s Mother. As a Traveller Hester can also be considered a queer wanderer as Todd Barry has conceptualised it and we have explained in the previous section. She crosses a multitude of spaces between the natural and supernatural, in her dealings with the Ghost Fancier and the ghost of her dead brother, as well as between the outside of the bog and the inside of Xavier’s house. Her home on the bog was never meant to be permanent and only made there as she awaited the return of her mother. She not only transgresses spatial boundaries but also the patriarchal restrictions on female behaviour in her outspokenness, her rage, her freedom from domestication and her agency. As a queer wanderer she activates the liminal space to show the shortcomings of the self-serving land-grabbing grotesques that make up the settled community in the play. As she puts it herself: “As for me tinker blood, I’m proud of it, give me an edge over all yees, allows me to see yees for the inbred, underbred bog brained shower yees are” (Carr 1999, 289). Through her lover’s name we can associate Hester with the classical figure of Dido, queen of Carthage. The name Dido means wanderer and she is another mythic figure that destroys herself when abandoned by her heroic lover, Aeneas. Hester is a feminist revision of these classical heroines by Carr as she does not kill herself due to rejection by a male lover but because she is overcome by being abandoned and losing her mother. So while the queer wanderer figure is destroyed at the end of the play this destruction rewrites established narratives. In Act 2 Hester in her protestations to remain on the bog says: “I was born on the Bog of Cats, same as all of yees, though ya’d never think it the way yess shun me” (Carr 1999, 314) and “The truth is you want to eradicate me, make out I never existed” (Carr 1999, 315). Although it can be argued that Hester is sacrificed for the community, with her death marking a return of established order, the abrupt violent force of the horrific murder of young Josie and then Hester’s own death at the end of the play are designed to leave the audience

deeply affected as the lights go down. The audience are left haunted by Hester and Josie in the same way she claims that she will haunt Carthage:

Ya won't forget me now, Carthage, and when all of this is over or half remembered and you think you've almost forgotten me again, take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair or a soft breath be your ear or a rustle behind ya. That'll be me and Josie ghostin' ya. (Carr 1999, 340)

Hester is not easily eradicated from the minds of the audience nor is the impression of the liminal Bog of Cats and its appeal to the inclusion of the outsider.

SITES OF PERFORMANCE/NON-THEATRE SPACES

In the two previous frameworks we have outlined spatial conventions and dramaturgies have been established and challenged in dramas written for the stage. In the discussion there has been an assumption made about the performance space in which these plays are enacted that there is a clear division between the audience space and the playing space. This most commonly takes the form of audiences viewing a performance that takes place on a lit stage in a darkened auditorium. This division may be broken, crossed or played with through various means as in a Brechtian style of production but these devices are only effective so long as the boundaries between audience and performers have been established or assumed. When performances occur in sites outside of the theatre this primary spatial division between audience and performers is no longer certain, along with a host of other conventions as the new site evokes its own spatial divisions, associations and meanings that further, shape, challenge or even contradict the performance enacted there. Kim Solga, drawing on the work of Mike Pearson explains that:

The “site” in site-specific theatre isn't about physical space, then, so much as it is about process. Journeying through such a space- through its histories, investigating its role in shaping relations in a specific place over time – as either an artist or an audience member means being prepared to shift our shared sense of “space” and “place” from fixed and location bound to social, economic, cultural and changeable. (2019, 80)

Charlotte McIvor, who has charted how Irish theatre practitioners and companies have been creating performances in non-theatre spaces since the early twentieth century to the present, reflects Solga's emphasis on process in this type of work, arguing that the move into these spaces “constitutes varying but directed political manoeuvres that call into question the meaning and political efficacy of theatre as a communal act in Irish society, as well as in the inter/transnational networks through which Irish theatre and performance circulate” (2018, 465). While McIvor has shown that contemporary

site-specific work can trace its genealogies to the development of street theatre and community arts as well as pointing out productions of this nature in earlier periods, site-specific production became progressively more common from the mid-1990s onward. Its increased frequency corresponds with Ireland's economic boom. Fintan O'Toole writes that "Over this period, after all, Ireland did not merely become more globalised. It became, according to the A. T. Kearney/*Foreign Policy* Magazine Globalisation Index, the most globalised society in the world in 2002, 2003 and 2004. (Ireland's ranking dropped by 2007, but it is still ranked fifth, well ahead of countries like the United States and Britain)" (O'Toole 2009, x). The "directed political manoeuvres" to move Irish theatre to performance sites outside of traditional theatre spaces can be considered as a reaction to the effects of globalisation which continued in Ireland even after the economic crash in 2008 on to the present. In its exploration of site as process, following Solga and Pearson, this work counters globalisation's paradoxical process of cultural homogenisation (making places look the same throughout the world as global franchises like Starbucks take over public spaces) and differentiation of cultures by superficial reified characteristics (making local places serve market expectations of how different they should be rather than difference based in authenticity, for example the "Irish pub" that is found all over the world). Chris Morash and Shaun Richards make this connection between the rise of site-specific work and globalisation writing:

The flowering of site-specific work in the opening decades of the twenty-first century in Ireland may be an attempt to return to those conditions that made theatre so central to Irish culture in the first instance: the final efforts to tap the last reserves of emplaced memory, in the one location where they cannot be channelled into global systems of production, where place must stay in place. (p. 179)

However, we would argue that the processes of varied site-specific performances go beyond this effort to reclaim emplaced memory as it also calls "into question the meaning and political efficacy of theatre as a communal act". The emphasis on breaking down divisions between performers, spectators and site as well as the process of sharing spaces with often marginalised communities sees this work move towards creating what Miriam Haughton calls "moments of communion". She explains:

This 'communion' occurs as moments of sharp, tense and interior reflection for the individual, without the security of an audience or a theatre building. One is guided into alien places, where the histories of the sites explode with such powerful energy that one no longer seeks to distinguish between performers and community, but the ghosts and the living. (Haughton 2014, 154)

Haughton's conceptualisation derives from her analysis of the confrontational *The Boys of Foley Street*, which is discussed in our case study below.

However, “moments of communion” between the performance and the spectators can be usefully applied in relation to less directly provocative work and achieved via other performance processes such as in Corcadorca’s production of *The Merchant of Venice* in 2005.

Established in Cork in 1991 Corcadorca are considered to have “pioneered the art of theatre performance in unusual venues” (Irish Theatre Playography 2023) as well as developing new writing, most notably producing the early plays of Enda Walsh, a founding member of the company, to great international success (see ‘Disco Pigs’ Chapter 8). Through their sustained 31-year interrogation of different sites in Cork city, until they ceased operations in 2022, Corcadorca would become a “part of the cultural fabric” (Corcadorca 2023) of the city producing landmark performance events that include *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Fitzgerald Park; *Woyzeck* at Haulbowline Naval Base and even during the Covid-19 pandemic they brought “*Contact*, a travelling theatre performance, to greens and estates across the city” (Corcadorca 2023).

The company’s production of *The Merchant of Venice* was presented during Cork’s year as a European Capital of Culture in 2005, as part of a larger Corcadorca-led project entitled “Relocation”, which involved partnership with three other European site-specific theatre companies. In these contexts Pat Kiernan explained that the intention behind this staging of Shakespeare’s play was “to examine the city as it is today, particularly within a European context” (Corcadorca 2023). He elaborates:

How we judge the caskets in Belmont (“All that glistens is not gold”) or Shylock (“Hath a Jew not eyes?”) is a central theme in the play. It seems appropriate to look at ‘The Merchant of Venice’ at a time when in Cork and Ireland we find ourselves suddenly exposed to different resident cultures and colours. How tolerant and welcoming are we? (Corcadorca 2023)

The production featured professional and community actors and musicians, with Polish actors playing the Jewish roles and thus standing in for the increased number of racial and ethnic identities that had settled in Ireland during the economic boom (see Chapter 5). While the production in its casting choices was asking the question “How tolerant are we?”, the site of performance was in the process of creating what such tolerance might constitute. Lisa Fitzpatrick writes, “Although this production foregrounded the persecution of Shylock, it also offered an experience in which various races and nationalities gathered in the same space and engaged with a living performance as a unified community of spectators” (2007, 169). She elaborates:

The scenes were performed in a number of spaces in Cork, the production travelling through the streets and over the bridges of the city to map the streets of Venice, blurring the relationship between the real and performed one, and creating, from the real city, an iconic map of the fictional one. Cork’s history

as a merchant trading port and its watery landscape (the rivers Lee and Black-water wind through its centre) facilitated the relationship between real and the performed, and creating, from the real city, a map of the fictional one. (2007, 171)

Corcadorca's production situates *The Merchant of Venice* in sites around Cork city but also it places it within "a wider network of European identity, merging the work of an English playwright with an explicit focus on Italian, Irish and Polish national identities" (McIvor 2018, 474). The sense of place and space are shifted through the process of the site-specific performance that points towards an ideal intercultural space in which different identities co-exist and work together in performance. This performance then is placed in communion with varied sites in Cork City and spectators who share the spaces with the different communities who live in these spaces but are also from other places. Through these moments of communion created by site-specific theatre the transformation central to theatrical performance is not so much undergone by characters presented before an audience but is instead one experienced by the individual spectator through the process of the performance.

Case Study Three: *The Boys of Foley Street* by ANU Productions

Premiere: 2012, Dublin Theatre Festival

Louise Lowe, co-artistic director of ANU Productions has acknowledged that for her "the most exciting part of theatre is the process." She elaborates, "I'm not interested in audiences sitting back in comfort for two hours", instead, "we need to take advantage of the live nature of theatre, the energies that exist in any space, what that can lead towards, and the visceral effect that that can create" (Keating 2009). In *The Boys of Foley Street* Lowe's and ANU's exploration of space, liveness and visceral effect was most evident where spectators were shocked out of their comfortable roles as passive observers and made into co-creators of a show that interrogates the ethics of spectatorship itself.

Staged as part of the 2012 International Dublin Theatre Festival, *The Boys of Foley Street* was the third instalment of the Monto Cycle, a tetralogy of productions about the history and social issues of a part of north inner-city Dublin, once known as the Monto. This area was notorious as a red-light district during colonial times and has been blighted by poverty and crime throughout the twentieth century up to the present day. The impetus and name for the show came from a series of RTÉ radio documentaries featuring interviews with four boys from Foley Street (part of what was the Monto). They were interviewed first as teenagers in 1975, then again in 1988 and finally tracked down in middle-age in 2008 where they were asked to listen back to and comment on the previous interviews with their younger selves. These documentaries chart over decades how these men's lives are marked by stasis, hardship and neglect, as they are caught in a cycle of poverty and crime due to a lack of opportunities caused by social exclusion. ANU revisits the lives of these men in their production but situates their story within the social

and historical conditions that shaped their lives, predominantly the heroin epidemic in the 1980s but also the legacy of the 1974 Loyalist car bombings that destroyed part of the area. The production brought spectators to the spaces that these men live in, to Foley Street and the local surrounding streets. In doing so it highlighted, as Haughton writes, “The power of the setting in the construction of these identities’ with the audience having ‘to come to them in their home-place’” (2014, 148).

Audiences were composed of only four people, who would be separated into groups of two on arriving at the LAB, a purpose-built arts facility on Foley Street where they were also asked to leave their wallets and phones for the duration of the show to “ensure, safe, uninterrupted passage” (Haughton 2014, 149). Performances ran every thirty minutes throughout the day and night. The show does not follow a narrative structure but unfolds through a spatial dramaturgy where spectators are guided through various inside and outside spaces where different scenes take place. Brian Singleton writes of his experience of the show and how its disjointed structure functioned:

In each scene we caught glimpses of or gestures to what happened, but they were glimpses and gestures, not recreations or reenactments. It was only by piecing together the fragments we encountered did we accumulate a sense, not of a story, but a whole community, and a community through time. (2016, 70)

With this fragmented non-narrative structure ANU were able to offer audiences different experiences of the show as they could send them on alternative routes through the various spaces. In whichever order, audiences experienced, over a period of just under hour, listening on headphones to snippets of the interviews with the boys from the 1975 documentary; witnessing a violent altercation between two men on the street that one of the spectators is asked to video on a phone; viewing a short film showing “four teenage boys in contemporary clothes walking down Foley Street, intercut in short flashes with historical photos of the street and its residents” (Singleton 2016, 60) projected onto a wall while inside a car where a woman on the roof slowly descends covered in debris and describes the effects of a bomb; being in a car chase; seeing a film of a gangrape through a peephole in a bathroom; helping a woman pin her ripped dress realising this woman is the victim of the rape just seen; dancing with the residents of a squalid council flat, including a schoolgirl who drinks vodka and smokes; sitting near a drug dealer measuring out bags of heroine, squirming as the drug dealer gets his ear bitten by his strung-out jealous lover; getting into a car and brought to a CPAD (Concerned Parents Against Drugs) meeting room where photographs of audience members at the drug dealer’s flat are on the wall; having a mother of one of the boys accused of pushing drugs confront them asking who gave up her son’s name to CPAD knowing he will be violently assaulted by the vigilante group or worse; suffering the glare of the bomb victim covered in rubble who throws a large brick on the ground and washes herself (Fig. 10.1).



Fig. 10.1 Caitríona Ennis in ANU Productions' *The Boys of Foley Street*, 2012 (Photo: Pat Redmond)

A key line that is repeated in the performance, is one taken from the documentary spoken by one of the “boys”, Larry:

Its crazy isn't it? You see old films; its like looking at an old film, y'know what I mean? It's crazy and I'm saying Jaysus, y'know, that's, that was us! That was us. (Lowe 2015, 376)

This line contrasts with the experience of ANU's show where the audience cannot distance themselves from what they have seen as something from the past (“Like looking at an old film”). Their production seeks to go beyond identification with characters (“that was us”) towards implication in the action and complicity with characters. Singleton writes based on his own experience “the spectators of ANU's performance had no such distancing medium. We had been implicated and had performed as part of the life of The Monto and there were photographic and video traces of our complicity with criminality” (2016, 65). The past is made present for the audience through the participatory performance, as it is for the community around Foley Street where little has changed in terms of social mobility since the 1980s. The processes employed by ANU in the production such as involving the audience in the action, temporal distortion and experiencing the locality in the movement through different spaces functions to avoid, as Singleton puts it, “scopically observing the community as other, and thus contradicting what otherwise might be considered as ‘dark tourism’ or ‘poverty porn’”. For him, “the

audience participation required in the performance by proxy implicated spectators in and as community though they were not of community” (2016, 71). The process developed for the site-specific performance thus moves towards creating a communion between spectators, performers and the site that makes sure the problems of the community are not viewed from a superficial distance but intimately felt and thus not easily forgotten.

CONCLUSION

The topic of space in Irish theatre is vast and continually developing. We are unable to cover all aspects in one chapter but have tried to outline some of the major areas of focus by artists and academics since 1957 to the present. One area that Irish theatre artists have been exploring, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, that we did not feature in our frameworks but that we would encourage further consideration is how space in theatre is changed by technology. The anonymity provided by the online space was directly addressed by Enda Walsh in *Chatroom* (2007) where a group of teenagers in an online chatroom encourage another adolescent to commit suicide. This was an early exploration of the moral consequences and responsibility that are at stake in the online space where technology distances and filters reality, making it indistinguishable from fantasy and entertainment. The theatre in this instance, as a communal space where people must gather and turn off their phones to be present to the shared experience of the performance, can function as contrary to the isolating and polarising effects of online spaces. This is something that has of course become a much more prevalent and pressing issue in the age of smartphones, social media and virtual reality. However, as became most evident during the pandemic when companies were forced to produce work online, technology also offers new possibilities for storytelling and immersive interaction. The Performance Corporation is an Irish company that has had a sustained engagement with the possibilities of technology and how it changes our perception of sites of performance and audience-performers relations. Since 2008 they have run the SPACE programme, “a professional development residency for artists and creative technologists with a focus on collaboration across form and medium” (The Performance Corporation 2023). With many multinational technology companies such as Google and Facebook operating out of Ireland and Irish economic fortunes being tied to the success of these companies, a consideration of space, technology and Ireland is worthy of further study.

This chapter has emphasised some of the ways in which space functions in Irish theatre, contextualising cultural and political considerations of space in Ireland and showing how these contexts can be read into the dramaturgies of Irish drama and site-specific performances. The three frameworks developed in which to analyse space in Irish theatre also chart a movement in Irish theatre

away from fixed notion of place which might limit identity, agency and exclude communities towards a conceptualisation of space that is boundless in terms of imagination offering opportunities for inclusion, communion and change.

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Interculturalism

In the past 25 years, the island of Ireland has experienced an unprecedented diversification of its population (see Chapter 5). This led the Republic of Ireland to embrace an ambitious and optimistic series of intercultural policies for civil society and the arts sector from the early 2000s onward aimed at integrating minority ethnic and/or migrant populations and in doing so, broadening understanding of “Irishness” as an identity nationally and internationally. The embrace of “interculturalism” over “multiculturalism” followed a turn in European Union thinking at the time and also sought to distance Ireland from the negative stigma attached to “multiculturalism” in UK and French contexts, for example, a comparison often directly cited. The Northern Irish Arts Council in particular has adopted explicitly intercultural arts policies, although the context of interculturalism in the North is still heavily defined by community relations between Catholic/Republicans and Protestant/Loyalist communities in addition to the inclusion and integration of minority ethnic and/or migrant members of Northern Irish society.

Interestingly, long prior to its enthusiastic adoption in Irish and EU social and arts policy, interculturalism served as a central and heavily contested keyword within theatre and performance studies where it connotes as defined by Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins “the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a temporary fusing of techniques, styles and/or cultures” (2000, 7). When this term’s contemporary theoretical discourse coalesced in the late 1970s/1980s in the work of Richard Schechner, Erika Fischer-Lichte and Patrice Pavis among others, intercultural theatre was first synonymous with the high-art productions of Peter Brooks, Ariane Mnouchkine and Robert Wilson. Daphne P. Lei names these kinds of contemporary paradigmatic Western-led intercultural experiments aimed at

fusion with “Eastern” aesthetic techniques and ideas “hegemonic intercultural theatre” (HIT) practices. She defines HIT as a “specific artistic genre and state of mind that combines First World capital and brainpower with Third World raw material and labor, and Western classical texts with Eastern performance” (2011, 571). Patrice Pavis had earlier summarised this extractive dynamic as manifesting in production contexts as the relationship between a “target” and “source” culture with the “target” culture who received the performance typically being Western and the “source” culture most typically non-Western (2001, 4–5).

But Western intercultural performance’s earlier twentieth-century roots took hold in the modernist theatre experiments of William Butler Yeats, Edward Gordon Craig, Antonin Artaud and others, meaning that interculturalism (or its pursuit) had taken root on Irish shores long prior to post-inward migration policy renovations. Indeed, Yeats himself can be credited (or charged with depending on your viewpoint) with catalysing the evolution of Western/global intercultural theatre and practices over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Outside of an Irish context, interculturalism remains one of the most charged theoretical terms in theatre and performance studies due to the evolution of this practice being bound up with the history of colonialism/imperialism and its unequal power dynamics usually enacted along a Western/Eastern or Global North/Global South split. Ireland’s complicated status as a postcolonial nation but nonetheless Western, English-speaking and majority white population makes it a particularly layered and compelling case study within these wider field debates. Furthermore, Ireland’s embrace of the rhetoric of interculturalism following the speedy and unprecedented expansion of our national racial and ethnic demographics necessarily links any discussion of Irish theatrical interculturalism to questions of race and performance as well as cross-racial performance as this chapter will evidence—a dimension more continuously emphasised in recent intercultural performance scholarship more widely. This chapter ultimately connects contemporary Irish theatre and performance to wider field debates by proposing the following three frameworks for studying interculturalism within Irish theatre and performance history:

- **Interculturalism’s Irish Historical Legacies:** Interculturalism may be the value that defines an unprecedentedly demographically diverse Irish future, but it also undergirds and has long operated in tension with post-revival theatrical nationalisms. This becomes particularly clear when we examine the Abbey’s early relationship to theatrical modernism, especially in the work and leadership of William Butler Yeats within that organisation at this time and most particularly through his experimentation in adapting Japanese Noh Drama to a modern Irish context in his cycle of plays for dancers.

- **Interculturalism as Cross-Cultural Collaborative Relationships:** Interculturalism as a lens of analysis demands attention to *both* production processes as well as the networks that enable them nationally and internationally *and* the blending of forms and resulting content/themes of the theatrical productions under examination here. Previously in intercultural theatre and performance scholarship there has been a tendency to focus on the content of single productions (or the oeuvre of individual directors who repeatedly deploy certain types of intercultural spectacles such as Brooks, Mnouchkine and Wilson) as a unit of analysis, and most often with an emphasis on the intercultural semiotics, or sign-systems, being communicated to audiences through directorial choices resulting in hybrid uses of different performance forms (or performers) identified as culturally distinct prior to fusion in this context. We suggest here that we also need to pay careful attention to inter or cross-cultural collaborations in terms of key personnel or collaborative networks over the course of contemporary Irish theatre and performance history as well as any hybrid aesthetic forms utilised within productions.
- **Contemporary Minority-led “New” Interculturalisms:** Ireland’s move towards interculturalism signifying expanded participation of minority communities (most with backgrounds of recent migration) aligns with wider theoretical development within intercultural performance theory where scholars in other international contexts including Ric Knowles (Canada) and Royona Mitra (UK) have called for the reinvention of interculturalism in theatre and performance as led from the grassroots by migrant and/or minority artists. Intercultural theatre and performance in Ireland today therefore ideally connotes collaboration between minority and majority ethnic theatremakers and/or projects led by minority ethnic theatremakers which in overt and/or subtle ways redefine Irishness from more diverse perspectives inflected by race, ethnicity and/or migration status as well as other identarian perspectives including but not limited to gender, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability and/or class.

These frameworks are then paired with the following case studies:

- **Interculturalism’s Irish Historical Legacies** (Conall Morrison’s *The Bacchae of Baghdad (After Euripides)*).
- **Cross-Cultural Collaborative Relationships** (Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre’s *The Bull*).
- **Contemporary Minority-led interculturalisms** (Terra Nova Productions, *Arrivals Project: Arrivals 1, Arrivals 2, Arrivals 3D: Mi Mundo*).

INTERCULTURALISM'S IRISH HISTORICAL LEGACIES

William Butler Yeats's collaborations with Michio Ito and Ninette de Valois on the theatrical realisation of his plays for dancers between 1916 and 1929 marks a clear modern starting point for Irish intercultural performance's historical legacies. As Aoife McGrath contends, "At a time in Irish history when the postcolonial need for racial, sexual and religious 'purity' of identity was creating strict definitions of permissible bodies, Yeats' dance plays were a wonderful site of exciting experimentation and resistance to the status quo" (2013, 51). Yeats's investigation of non-Western aesthetics was shared in common with many of his modernist theatrical contemporaries including Antonin Artaud and Edward Gordon Craig with Artaud drawing on Balinese theatre and Craig primarily inspired by Japanese, Indian and Indonesian traditions (Tian 2007, 168). Other early-mid twentieth-century Irish theatre practitioners including Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammoir would also be heavily influenced by interculturally inflected movements in visual art, literature and dance including Japonisme, Chinoiserie and Symbolism, and seeing the work of the Ballets Russe in particular would have opened up particular stage languages to these pivotal figures who founded the Gate Theatre (Nakase 2021, 189–192; van den Beuken 2021, 11–33).

Indeed, it is Yeats himself who might be credited with first overtly articulating the precise working dynamic of what Lei would eventually define as HIT practices most succinctly, although Yeats like many other committed practitioners of theatrical interculturalism seems to view HIT tendencies as a utopian aspiration rather than colonially inflected process of exploitation. He alleged: "Europe is very old and has seen many arts run through the circle and has learned the fruit of every flower and known what this fruit sends up, and it is now time to copy the East and live deliberately" (Yeats 1961, 228). Despite the complicated politics and aesthetics of Yeats's dance dramas in their initial and subsequent explorations by modern and contemporary Irish theatre artists including Blue Raincoat with their formal borrowings not only from Noh but South Indian Kathakali dance drama, these works did not aim to copy but rather used surface aspects of the formal aesthetics of Noh theatre as well as other cultural influences like Egyptian art to inform the invention and refinement of a new kind of indigenously Irish verse-drama, a liberationist postcolonial attempt at one level although complicated by the East–West binary on which this fusion depended. And indeed, other Irish playwrights including Padraic Colum and Ulick O'Connor would continue to attempt to evolve the Irish noh drama form in the 1960 and 1970s respectively (Sternlicht 1986, xvi–xvii; Bastos 2011, 46–47). Yet although other Irish playwrights would take up the task of adapting Noh aesthetics, Aoife McGrath demonstrates conclusively that when De Valois worked with Yeats between 1926 and 1929, they made a conscious move away from "pseudo-Oriental" aesthetics. McGrath reads this possibly as a change in fashion, but also perhaps

related to the collaborators' and the Abbey's "desire to stress a more unambiguously 'Irish' national identity for the transfer from a comparatively liberal and experimental London, to an increasingly conservative Dublin" (2013, 50). Yet, as we will see shortly, many early productions at the Gate deliberately continued to embrace this pseudo-Oriental style.

Early-mid-century Irish intercultural experiments could also be analysed through the theoretical lenses of orientalism or internationalism, particularly as European modernisms leaned heavily on both as influence and impetus. In a way, theatre and performance studies' theorisation of interculturalism as a materialist theatrical and performance *practice* creates an opportunity to consolidate understanding of orientalism and internationalism within theatrical modernism as interculturalism amounts essentially to these influences merged and operationalised in live collaborative performance contexts.

Orientalism was first coined by postcolonial theorist Edward Said as connoting "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively" (1979, 3). Joseph Lennon in turn defines the early twentieth-century dynamics of *Irish* orientalism as a conviction that "the ancient and absent Celtic culture mirrors the living and present Orient" (2004, xvi). He argues that cultural nationalists (among which Yeats can be counted) "created anti-imperial and cross-colonial narratives from this" alleged "ancient semiotic connection," and furthermore that "Irish Orientalism at one time helped imagine and cross-actualize cross-colonial ties and decolonising narratives around the globe" (xvii). McIvor and Justine Nakase define internationalism in a performance context as "...the aspiration that artists and cultural performance forms and techniques would be able to cross borders to collaborate and influence one another's ongoing practice and development, resulting in an eventual de-hierarchization of power structures between nations and their cultures, realized through the transmission of performance" (2020, 226). "Irish" Orientalism as an animating catalyst of our unique Irish interculturalism is evidenced clearly in Yeats's remark about turning towards the East in order to copy their aesthetic approaches quite overtly. However internationalism actually better captures the dynamics of Yeats's actual collaborative relationships and correspondence with not only Michio Ito, the Japanese Europe-trained modern dancer (not Noh performer) but also Indian playwright and poet Rabindranath Tagore (whose support from Yeats would help complete secure the first English translation of his poetry and Nobel Prize as well as the word premiere of his play *The Post Office (Dak Ghar)* at the Abbey in 1913). The Abbey's commitment to orientalism/internationalism/interculturalism would wane post-independence due to changing programmatic priorities, but the Gate Theatre would step enthusiastically into this space after its formation in 1928. But as Justine Nakase finds in her study of cross-racial performance at the Gate between 1930 and 1954 and specifically the Gate's strand of Chinese theatre translations and adaptations by Lord Longford and others:

Unlike at the Abbey, where these Asian influences were subsumed within an Irish context due to that theatre's particularly nationalist project, the Gate embraced the very Otherness that Chinese theatre represented. Indeed, its recurring engagement with Chinese formal aesthetics in the first five years acted as a shorthand for the very internationalism of the theatre's mission. (2021, 192)

For the early Gate, intercultural (and cross-racial) performance was repeatedly deployed as internationalist enrichment and homage particularly in terms of how production choices played up aesthetic (and racialised) dimensions of otherness. Elaine Sisson's recent examination of the production history of Padraic Colum's *Mogu, the Wanderer* identifies the broad pop cultural influences which shaped both the inspiration for and reception of this production's Eastern themes and setting (2021, 175–192). Siobhán O'Gorman also traces orientalist and internationalist scenographic tropes in the history of Dublin's Pike Theatre, particularly their popular late-night revue *Follies*, which ran throughout the company's existence between 1953 and 1957 (2014, 25–42). These perhaps well-intentioned but ultimately shallow or by contemporary critical standards HIT intercultural experiments where theatre and performance practitioners repeatedly look to a “source” culture for the “target” culture (and audience's) enrichment, nationalist or otherwise, placed Irish modern theatrical innovation in line with their European contemporaries. However, these early productions contexts also established precedents that would ripple through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, as this case study of Conall Morrison's 2005 production of *The Bacchae of Baghdad (After Euripides)* demonstrates.

Case Study One: Conall Morrison's The Bacchae of Baghdad (After Euripides)
Premiered: 2006, Abbey Theatre, directed by Conall Morrison.

Morrison's decision to adapt Euripides' *Bacchae* was by the mid-2000s a familiar tactic within Irish theatre where adaptation of the Greeks (as well as other canonical Western works) had become a signature strategy of consolidating the reputation of established playwrights also including Marina Carr, Tom Murphy and Frank McGuinness with these adaptations frequently produced at the Abbey.

The Bacchae of Baghdad used Greek theatre as a vehicle through which to allegorise international/Irish attitudes towards the then ongoing U.S. led war in Iraq and comment on debates on religious and specifically Islamic fundamentalisms. This production animates Irish historical legacies of interculturalism through its thematic turn to “Otherness” and focus on cultures meeting in performance as a way to push reflection on and renewal of Irish contemporary theatrical culture.

Morrison's early 2000s Irish treatment of Middle Eastern fundamentalisms was inflected with his own experiences of conflict in Northern Ireland which he noted “taught me something about the mechanics of” fundamentalism, which is how he summarises the fervour of the *Bacchae* in contemporary

terms (Abbey Theatre Archive, 8 March 2006a). Morrison also employed a self-consciously multi-racial and ethnic cast of performers including Christopher Simon (Irish-Greek Rwandan descent who played Dionysus), Ruth Negga, Mojisola Adebayo, Merrina Millsapp, Tracy Harper, Donna Nikolaisen, Mary Healy, Jeff Diamond, Angela Irvine, Shereen Martineau, Simon O’Gorman and Robert O’Mahoney (Irish Theatre Playography 2023, *Bacchae of Baghdad*). It was the most diverse cast racially and ethnically to appear on the Abbey stage until the 2022 production of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’ *An Octoroon*, directed by Anthony Simpson Pike (see Chapter 5), although most of *The Bacchae of Baghdad*’s cast was resident in the UK at the time of production. Negga was the only cast member of colour who had appeared or would go on to appear semi-consistently in Abbey (ten productions between 2002 and 2008).

However rather than this ensemble being intended to be a reflection of Ireland’s by-then well-established growing minority ethnic population, both sides of the agonistic debate at the centre of the *Bacchae* (Dionysus and his followers and Pentheus and company) are cast within the production’s framing concept as Other to an Irish audience despite the Irish accents of many of the performers. The production is set in one of Saddam Hussein’s current or former Iraqi castles and pits the American-occupiers against a broadly Middle Eastern (i.e. racially other to white) ensemble.

Multi-racial/ethnic casting is not necessarily an intercultural theatre practice on its own however the casting practice executed by this production’s artistic team does make this conflation while also enforcing an East vs. West binary animated along a black/white fault line generally through the casting of actors of diverse racial and ethnic descent in the roles of Dionysus and his followers as well as the visionary Tiresias while having Irish-born actors adopt American accents. Through this strategy, “Irish” audiences (read white and Ireland-born audiences) are encouraged to look at the Others (“Middle Eastern” vs. “American”) to reflect on themselves as the obvious parallel with the legacy of conflict in the North was continually emphasised in press for the piece. However, this production concept does not only avoid setting up any meaningful conditions for intercultural exchange in the diverse ensemble due to being intended primarily for a white Irish inward looking view but sidesteps Ireland’s own neo-imperial alliances with the United States economically and militarily, not to mention showing no awareness of how minority ethnic communities in Ireland (particularly of African diasporic backgrounds, Middle Eastern descent or the Islamic faith) might receive being depicted as violent barbaric uber-Others within the overall frame of the production (Fig. 11.1).

In terms of how these casting choices translated into the staging of the play itself and particularly music and movement of the *Bacchae* chorus, Andrea McCall uncritically praises the production for its Orientalist flourishes in her review for the *Sunday Tribune*, offering that “[t]he production is a visual



Fig. 11.1 The chorus of *The Bacchae of Baghdad* (Euripides' *The Bacchae* in a new version written and directed by Conall Morrison), Abbey Stage, 2006. (From l-r): Shereen Martineau, Mary Healy, Donna Nikolaisen Ruth Negga, Merina Millsapp and Mojisola Adebayo with Negga as Chorus Leader. Courtesy of the Abbey Theatre Archive

sensual treat, filled with the smell of incense and the sound of hi-tech, Arab-like music and the colours (thanks to Nick McCall's lighting) of Arabia" while the chorus moves "cat-like about the stage, thumping their staff and whooping eerily" (Abbey Theatre, 8 March 2006b). The vagueness of McCall's review description of these elements epitomises the broad intercultural strokes taken by the production team resulting in a confused mess of visual, sonic and staging choices that attempt to approximate a broadly Middle Eastern or "Arabian" (a geographical designation that does not even include Iraq, the actual setting) aesthetic without meaningfully engaging with the cultural backgrounds evoked. Karen Fricker ultimately indicts *The Bacchae of Baghdad* in *The Guardian* as "orientalism and occidentalism writ large: a didactic reduction of the original text and current political situation" meaning that "while it is certainly exciting...and overdue to see multicultural cast on the Abbey stage, there is no productive cultural work being accomplished by this bombast" (2006). Justine Nakase also identifies how the production's operationalisation of minority ethnic female (and male) sexuality as a threatening and dangerous force is particularly tone-deaf considering the then recent outcomes of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum which removed birthright citizenship as a constitutional right, a referendum won by a large majority vote (79.17%)

through a campaign that played heavily on fears regarding the number of those seeking asylum in the Irish state, increasing racial/ethnic diversity and allegations of abuse of this citizenship clause by women of African descent specifically. Nakase elaborates: “While Morrison may have been striving to comment on the unflinching rigidity of a militaristic American outlook, what he ultimately revealed was a corresponding Irish attitude that understood the black female body in terms of a national threat specifically through a morally suspect sexuality” (2019, 83–84). It is also striking that in Abbey theatre press cuttings from the production, lead actor Christopher Simpson is branded as a diva by Donal Lynch of the *Sunday Independent* for getting his back up about being asked about his family’s Rwandan connections, particularly how his parents met. This interviewer seems incredulous that Simpson only wants to talk about the production and its themes and not his racial/ethnic history or personal experiences of racism with the by-line for one article reading “Actor Christopher Simpson is not yet a star but he has already mastered the art of acting like a diva” (Abbey Theatre Archive, 8 March 2006c). Regardless of what interpersonal dynamics may have shaped that interview, it is telling in reinforcing that the reception of *Bacchae of Baghdad* and its diverse cast was as intercultural spectacle to be consumed and mined for resources rather than interrogated for its formal and thematic dramaturgical assumptions. Morrison and the Abbey’s turn to the setting of the Middle East as a source of renewal and lens for contemplation of the Irish present (via Greek theatre as a vehicle) borrows a leaf from Yeats’s early twentieth-century playbook although likely unintentionally. Nevertheless, this production’s blind spots and failings do ultimately bring Ireland’s 2006 intercultural (and xenophobic) anxieties more clearly into focus with quite unflattering results.

INTERCULTURALISM AS INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

As with the previous section, contemporary Irish theatre’s arguably defining reference point for this strand of Irish intercultural performance practice too reverts to Yeats, but perhaps even more importantly, should be understood from the perspective of his original non-Irish collaborator on realising his dance plays theatrically, Michio Ito. Ito was notably a European-trained modern dancer, *not* a Noh performer despite being Japanese although it is alleged that he might have had some cursory training in Kabuki theatre. But as Aoife McGrath finds, although “[r]ecruited for being Japanese by [Ezra] Pound and Yeats, Ito was in fact more interested in exploring the meeting of the orient and the occident in his work” (2013, 44). Ito’s personal artistic aims, McGrath unfolds, however, did not protect him from being “doomed to a perpetual state of ‘Otherness, both in Europe, and later in the US,” despite being “often categorised under the racially ambiguous title of ‘international artist’” as he even suffered imprisonment in a US Japanese internment camp during World War II (Ibid.).

We've established that turning to Eastern and/or culturally "Other" theatrical and performance forms as a "source" for a "target" culture can be problematic, but the dynamics and results of collaboration between individuals and groups who identify as coming from different cultural backgrounds can be more subtle and layered as the deeper account of Yeats and Ito's relationship attests to. In addition, a production that may not "look" intercultural on the surface at the level of performance forms utilised, content or theme can actually be deeply so if we investigate the collaborative relationships that brought the production into being more carefully, even going all the way down to the level of the individual with Ito as a paradigmatic example. Justine Nakase argues powerfully that we must look to the individual in our analysis of Irish intercultural performance practices today, or we might miss urgent and telling collaborations that advance the visibility of and our understanding of minority ethnic artists' contributions to Irish theatre and performance. She calls on critics to practice "scalar interculturalism" and argues that by tracing intercultural performance "*within* and *through* the individual," critics can trace more rigorously how "the body itself can act as [the] space between cultures and this site of negotiation" (2019, 3). Ito puts this in his own words when he contended "[i]n my dancing it is my desire to bring together the East and the West. My dancing is not Japanese. It is not anything- only myself" (Quoted in McGrath 2013, 44). Nakase's intervention indeed responds specifically to what she sees as the repeated erasure of mixed-race and other minority ethnic Irish individuals in Irish theatre and broader performance histories (such as that of sport) who may not "pass" as Irish. As such, she pushes Irish theatre and performance studies to acknowledge that:

(a) the performative articulations of mixed race and minority ethnic identities can be seen and read as intercultural, (b) that this interculturalism is nested within and performed by the individual and (c) that this individual interculturalism can be revealed by analysing moments of performance through a scalar lens. (2019, 3)

In Nakase's study, she is mainly focused on the analysis of those resident within Ireland for all or a significant part of their lives, but we would argue for the purposes of this book that we also need to use her scalar intercultural lens to keep putting pressure on the particular relationship between interculturalism and internationalism in modern and contemporary Irish theatre history, meaning that we also need to look at the terms under which international collaborators may be mainstreamed in Irish performance practices whether or not they are actually resident and what story their participation may actually tell Ireland about themselves at the time of their participation.

A focus on international (i.e. non-resident) collaborators as part of the twentieth-twenty-first century Irish intercultural performance lineage of practice reveals a few major trends that also help us to understand the evolution of this area in contemporary Irish theatre and performance. Firstly, over the

twentieth and into the twenty-first century, there has been a repeated importation of non-white actors to play roles (as seen in the *Bacchae of Baghdad* case study above) in order to produce works for the Abbey, the Gate and elsewhere whose racially/ethnically-based casting and/or other needs are alleged to not be present in Irish-based pools of professional talent up through the present. There has also been a whitewashing (or at least erasure) of mixed-race and/or mixed-ethnicity collaborators who pass/passed as white, omission which influences the historical record on sustained participation by minority ethnic artists in Ireland over time. The second dimension of recurrent Irish participation by internationally-based artists occurs when they are brought in as collaborators on Irish projects due to specialist skills, particularly for dance and dance theatre companies. In these instances, they are *not* recruited on the basis of their race and/or ethnicity but their cultural difference might end up doing layered work in the context of the performance or production. This pattern of participation is particularly recurrent in Irish modern and contemporary dance in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As Aoife McGrath, Barbara O'Connor and other scholars of Irish dance and dance theatre detail, training opportunities for Irish dancers in modern and contemporary techniques particularly have always been international by necessity despite Yeats' attempt to establish an Abbey School of Ballet with Ninette de Valois between 1927 and 1933. De Valois significantly had also spent time dancing with the Ballets Russes, a major intercultural influence on European artists as noted earlier (McGrath 2013, 47–52).

Since the founding of the early modern Irish theatre with the Abbey in 1904, there have however also been minority ethnic and racial characters that appeared on stage semi-regularly in mainstream and often popular theatre productions. Prior to this period, as Patrick Lonergan documents, white actors in blackface and occasionally minority racial and ethnic performers or troupes such as African-American actor Ira Aldridge who settled in Britain and performed frequently there and in Ireland from the 1830s (2023). The use of blackface and cross-racial performance involving white actors playing characters of African, South/East Asian and Middle Eastern descent on the modern and even contemporary Irish stage up through the 1970s at least is to some extent, openly documented although limited images or justification of the approach from the artistic teams exists (Brannigan 2009, 179–221; Nakase 2021). Reviews of these performances and particularly discussion of the actors in the roles however are revealing. For example, one frequently revived production of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* with Northern Irish actor Rutherford Mayne in the title role was lauded as late as the 1970s. 1927 reviews of Mayne's performance of *Emperor Jones* had American audience members quoted as saying that "Mr. Mayne's nigger is equal to the best that its coloured interpreters have given" (*The Irish Times*, 26 July 1927). In 1973, Michael O hAodha, then chairman of directors at the Abbey, again reiterated that Maynes "had been reckoned by many to have been better than Paul Robeson" the acclaimed African-American actor who starred in stage and

film versions “in the part” (Nowlan 1973). The emphasis here suggests focus on white Irish virtuosity in playing an “Other,” the underlying implication being that ethnic Irishness has no ties to black racial identity, foreclosing the possibility of a Black Irish performer taking up this role at the time.

But rather than focusing only on participation by Irish performers of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds as interculturalism, tracing international collaborators’ participation history and their acknowledgement, elision or erasure in Irish theatre and performance history actually goes a long way towards better understanding the influence of international/intercultural aesthetic forms in Ireland in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This strategy also provides insight into how race and ethnicity get refigured in relationship to white Irishness beyond the stark example of Maynes’ performer above during this same period particularly through the creation of the European Union and inward-migration from non-EU countries, particularly African and Middle Eastern nations. Ireland’s post-1970s integration into first the European Economic Area and then the European Union has resulted in an exponential rise of Eastern European migrants who came to Ireland post-2004, with Polish and Lithuanian populations most significantly represented (Central Statistics Office 2016). The growth of our Eastern European Irish community productively challenges and textures the meaning of whiteness in Ireland today, pushing scholars and critics of intercultural theatre not only to conflate difference with racial difference, but to think about a broader spectrum of ethnicities as well as the role of a spectrum of statuses arising from backgrounds of migration ranging from refugeeness to migrants by choice in shaping the artistic and social futures of our “new Irish” population (i.e. those who themselves or their parents emigrated here in the last 25 years).

But perhaps best well-known in an international context is modern Irish theatre’s early twentieth century mission to define a cultural nationalism that was institutionally and *performatively* substantial and substantiable as “Irish” at home and abroad (through the Abbey’s touring practices for example) (Harrington 2016, 593–606; Lonergan 2009). Nevertheless, during this period and beyond, European and other collaborators who brought with them a conscious expertise in non-“Irish” art forms or movements informed by their own cultural histories nonetheless shaped what we may problematically view as a seamless “Irish” performance history, “Irish” connoting being made by those who are white, born and resident in Ireland for most of their lives—criteria that the Anglo-Irish drivers of this modern Irish theatre movement, for example, such as Yeats, Lady Gregory, John Millington Synge and others meet. Indeed returning yet again to Yeats’s foundational 1916 exploration of *At the Hawk’s Well* with Ito, the longer roster of collaborators also involved French “illustrator, musician and mask-maker Edmund Dulac” who “designed the costumes, make-up and masks and also “composed the score for drum, gong, flute and zither or harp” (McGrath 2013, 42). And even while de Valois and Yeats moved away from overt “pseudo-Oriental” overtones to their staging of his dance plays, the collaborators’ list and reception of the work abroad

was decidedly internationalist. For their 1929 restaging of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* as *Fighting the Waves*, Dutch sculptor Hilda Krop and US composer George Antheil were also part of the artistic team, and a New York Times review of the Dublin premiere noted “Yeats, Dutch masks, Russian dancing and American music will constitute a combination without parallel on the Abbey stage” (Quoted in McGrath 2013, 42)—signalling international understanding of Irish theatre’s intercultural aspirations in this instance. More recent scholarship by McGrath (2013), Siobhán O’Gorman (2014), David Clare and Nicola Morris (2021) and others has also more carefully unwound the contributions of international collaborators and their historiographical implications in modern and contemporary contexts. Clare and Morris, for example, go deeper into four key Gate Theatre collaborators’ ethnic and cultural roots, looking at founding directors’ Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammoir’s “part-Irish roots,” actress Coralie Carmichael’s “Moroccan and Scottish ancestry” and “under-regarded actor, costume designer and milliner” Nancy Bekh’s background as the English-born daughter of German immigrants (2021, 75–76). Clare and Morris offer that:

forcing artists from “mixed” backgrounds into one nationality and treating that nationality in an essentialist way will prevent us from adequately understanding the power dynamics and artistic imperatives inscribed within individual and collective performances not just on the Gate Theatre stage but also on stages across the world. (2021, 95)

Clare and Morris single out “power dynamics” and “artistic imperatives” as both being potentially shaped by an individual’s racial/ethnic background and cultural influences. Therefore it is important to acknowledge that these might overlap *or* manifest as distinct from one other in a collaborative process. For example, those from minority racial or ethnic backgrounds might not have their own artistic imperatives linked to aesthetic forms associated with their culture of heritage background (as in the case of Ito) but they may experience differential treatment or higher risk of elision or erasure from historical records due to being outliers in the creative industries for any number of reasons related to the particular intersection of their identities (of which race/ethnicity is only one dimension).

What stands out particularly over the last 20 years for contemporary Irish theatre is that it is Irish dance and dance theatre companies who have presented work with the most racially and ethnically diverse casts most consistently. In addition, these companies often also continued to work with those artists over time rather than as a once-off, cementing dance and dance theatre practices in Ireland today as continuous “sites of interdisciplinary and intercultural physical negotiations” (McGrath 2013, 165). Companies that are exemplary in this regard include Fabulous Beast (profiled below), CoisCéim, John Scott Dance (formerly Irish Modern Dance), Liz Roche Company and

Catherine Young Dance (McGrath 2013, 147–162; McIvor 2016, 133–138; Spangler 2016, 41–58).

Over time as the country has diversified, international collaborations help expose both an ongoing lack of support for the develop of or recognition of professional minority ethnic artists resident *in* Ireland regardless of art form and sometimes produce arguably unintentionally intercultural results (as in the case study of Fabulous Beast’s *The Bull* below as well as other works by the company including *Rian*). These cross-cultural (and usually multi-racial and multi-ethnic) collaborations often produce intercultural results which go some way to semiotically representing Ireland’s population as it is now through the bodies who get to take up space on Irish stages creating and performing “Irish” contemporary dance and dance theatre. As Justine Nakase summarises, “...as an embodied form of expression, dance can create a space in which individual dancers can contribute to and influence understandings of what the Irish body is and how it moves” (2019, 185). As such, consideration of contemporary Irish dance theatre and the international and/or intercultural collaborations that continually push forward this form are essential to understanding interculturalism in Ireland today.

Case Study Two: Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre, The Bull (2005).

Premiered: O’Reilly Theatre, Dublin. Produced by Fabulous Beast (now known as Teac Damsa) in association with Dublin Theatre Festival and BITE:07, Barbican, London. For a full list of production roles in the original, you can view the entry for “Michael Keegan Dolan, *The Bull*” (Irish Theatre Playography 2023b).

Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre was led by director and choreographer Michael Keegan-Dolan but guided by a wholly collaborative and ensemble making process during its existence as a company between 1994 and 2016, before Keegan-Dolan reformed the company as Tëac Daímsa after moving from “the Irish midlands to the West Kerry Gaeltacht on the Southwest coast of Ireland” (Tëac Daímsa 2024).

In an advance interview for *The Bull* in 2005, it was noted by the journalist that “[u]nusually for a director, Keegan-Dolan will not talk about the piece without having as many members of the company as possible to join in the conversation” (McKeon 2005). In this interview, Keegan-Dolan stresses both the internationalism and the versatile artistic virtuosity of the diverse ensemble:

You have an Irish percussionist. A piano-playing, acting composer from Rome. An actor from Norwich. An actress from the west of Ireland. A dancer-actor from Bratislava. A counter-tenor from Naples, an actor from Cork, a dancer from France ... very eclectic. And nobody is good at just one thing, there are no categories. The dancers are singing, the singers are dancing, the actors are dancing, the drummers are dancing (McKeon 2005)

Keegan-Dolan's collaborative relationships with dancer/performers for *The Bull* as well as other works produced before or after for Fabulous Beast were formed on the basis of skill and shared artistic aims, not overtly intercultural aims including any stated mission about diversifying Irish stages in terms of race, ethnicity and/or nationality. However, *The Bull* and other Fabulous Beast productions showcased semiotically and dramaturgically a much more representative Ireland than most other theatre productions at the time or sadly since. And while the performers' race and ethnicity did often end up indexed dramaturgically in ways that reflected the social and political realities of these categories, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, *The Bull* and Keegan-Dolan's wider body of work in no way falls back on simplistic binaries of self/other, East/West, white/non-white as *The Bacchae of Baghdad* did. This is particularly meaningful as *The Bull* very consciously plays on Irish theatrical and literary tropes throughout, referencing the 1907 *Playboy of the Western World* Abbey theatre riots, rural/urban conflict and anxieties over female sexuality and childbearing. *The Bull*'s diverse international ensemble is therefore implicated as co-architects of the contemporary relevance of Irish theatrical and performance histories and tropes, rather than exotic outsiders drafted in to ornament a production dependent on binaries at its core. We see this in the casting of Emmanuel Obeya, the Nigerian-born dancer and choreographer and long-time Fabulous Beast collaborator as Eddie, an Irish patriarch with a French wife, whose curse over their childbearing ability forms a major plot line, as well as the prominence of Eastern European characters (albeit stereotyped) and frequent reference to minority ethnic members of the local community throughout (Fig. 11.2).

The Bull forms the middle work of Keegan-Dolan's Midlands Trilogy which also included *Giselle* (2003) and *James Son of James* (2007). Keegan-Dolan's trilogy-based approach reprises a familiar approach in modern and contemporary theatre employed also by Séan O'Casey, Dermot Bolger, Martin McDonagh and most significantly Marina Carr who also has a Midlands Trilogy with Keegan-Dolan likely commenting directly on Carr's Trilogy with Fouréré in his lead role. Fouréré played and would continue to play leading roles in many of Carr's premiere productions including *Ullaloo* (1991), *The Mai* (1994), *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), *Woman and Scarecrow* (2007) and *iGirl* (2023) (Irish Theatre Playography 2022). *The Bull* attacks and satirises the excesses of Ireland's Celtic Tiger economic boom through an adaptation of an ancient Irish prose epic, *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley*). To do so, Keegan-Dolan goes straight for the jugular of the Celtic Tiger's arguably most globally iconic performance, *Riverdance* (see Chapter 4 for background) by featuring Maeve Fogarty (Olwen Fouréré), the nouveau Celtic Tiger rich anti-heroine embroiled in the conflict with her husband over the central bull in question, as the producer of an Irish dance spectacle called *Celtic Bitch* and going so far as to eventually cast Colin Dunne, Michael Flatley's first replacement and choreographer of parts of the show in *The Bull*, with Dunne replacing actor Conor Lovett following *The Bull*'s Irish premiere



Fig. 11.2 The company in Michael Keegan-Dolan's *The Bull* (2005), with design by Merle Hensel and lighting design by Adam Silverman (Photo Ros Kavanagh)

when the production moved to the Barbican. Aoife McGrath offers that this activation of *Celtic Bitch* in the production “would seem to highlight the dislocation or ‘gap’ between Irish society’s past notions of its cultural identity to be historically ‘pure’ and the ‘false’ image of Celtic Tiger Ireland indexed by commercial cultural productions such as *Riverdance*” (McGrath 2013, 117). We would add that *The Bull*’s centralisation of diverse collaborators onstage and casting choices such as Obeya’s which disrupt associations of Irishness with whiteness exclusively do further important work in troubling gaps in Irish cultural self (or outside) perception.

The Bull was highly controversial following its premiere in the 2005 Dublin Theatre Festival with heated debates on Irish radio and in the *Irish Times* “Letters to the Editor” section due to its explicit language, frequently gruesome violence, male nudity and savage attacks on familiar Irish tropes and figures (Mulrooney 2007, 7–8). Artistically, some audience members or reviewers complained that it was too text-heavy to be dance or alternatively too dance-heavy to be a play. Irish dance scholar Deirdre Mulrooney recognises Keegan-Dolan’s achievement with his ensemble in consolidating almost a century of Irish formal theatrical experimentation at the interface of dance and theatre into a pulsing new genre within this critical anxiety:

An eclectic mixum gatherum production, its new idiom is promiscuous in its embrace of other art forms: from contemporary dance to visual and installation art, kabuki, martial arts, film, music, opera, and – even – Irish dancing.

It's the kind of total theatre we have been slowly slowly inching towards in Irish theatre since playwright Tom MacIntyre's mid-1980s plays at the Peacock Theatre (most notably his adaptation of Patrick Kavanagh's great anti-pastoral poem, *The Great Hunger*). (2007, 8)

As this chapter has demonstrated, those experimental roots go even further back and notably, particularly when it comes to dance/dance theatre, have been consistently associated with intercultural collaborations in modern and contemporary Irish theatre history. While *The Bull* is not without its representational issues (as some of the gendered satire focused on women flirts with misogyny and the representation of disability is questionable at best), it is nonetheless one of the most influential and successful moments where contemporary Irish theatre/dance practitioners practiced and achieved interculturalism rigorously and productively if defined as the blending of performance forms/experiences from different cultures which results in the creation of new performance idioms and experiences. This intercultural achievement depended on collaboration with international partners but Keegan-Dolan's working model on this and other Fabulous Beast productions through the mid-2010s does provide a process-based blueprint and some telling dramaturgical structures and casting approaches that would productively inform ongoing intercultural collaborations between majority and minority ethnic Irish-based artists.

CONTEMPORARY MINORITY-LED “NEW” INTERCULTURALISMS

This final section explores the attempts of the Irish state and contributions of minority ethnic Irish artists to creating and sustaining a “new” Irish interculturalism, in line with the grassroots, minority-led new interculturalisms documented by Ric Knowles and Royona Mitra among others elsewhere (Knowles 2010, 2017; Mitra 2015). In a post-1990s Irish context, McIvor has differentiated between social and aesthetic interculturalism in Irish state and EU policy and theatre and performance studies discourse. Social interculturalism refers to social policy led and linked initiatives that define interculturalism and intercultural dialogue as involving dynamic dialogue and collaboration between minority and majority ethnic individuals that lead to transformation for all while aesthetic interculturalism refers to artistic and in this context, theatrical and/or performance projects that consciously blend culturally diverse forms, themes and/or collaborators (McIvor 2019, 343–372). As a theoretical idea then, “new interculturalism” represents the dynamic outcomes of encounters with explicitly social *and* aesthetic intercultural aims. As defined by Knowles particularly, new interculturalism aspires to “a complex set of negotiations across multiple sites of difference, on stage, between the stage and the audience, and within audiences” in a context where there is national recognition that “cultural and national identities no longer coincide, and in which the performative constitution of such identities is increasingly recognised as

formative” (Knowles 2017, 2). Our previous case study of *The Bull* arguably enacts this kind of “formative” “performative constitution” in action in terms of how we understand the production’s semiotic/cultural legacy, but this was nonetheless a collaboration initiated and led by a white Irish dance theatre company. McIvor has documented the important and seminal contributions of socially engaged white Irish artists including Donal O’Kelly, Bairbre Ní Chaoimh, Charlie O’Neill, Declan O’Gorman and others in advocating for and initiating theatre projects in collaboration with minority ethnic artists and/or representing stories of and/or from this community onstage (McIvor 2014, 37–49). However it is notable that when plays featuring minority ethnic and/or migrant or refugee characters have made it onto the stages of prominent national theatrical institutions, with the exception of Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle’s infamous 2007 adaptation of John Millington Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* for the Abbey, those plays have continued to be helmed by white Irish creatives. Some key examples include Gary Duggan’s *Shibari*, directed by Tom Creed, Abbey Theatre, 2012, which looked “at contemporary Dublin through a multi-ethnic lens” featuring characters from white Irish, Black British, Romanian and Japanese backgrounds (Meaney 2012) and Pan Pan Theatre’s *The Good House of Happiness*, directed by Gavin Quinn in 2017. Pan Pan’s adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *The Good Person of Szechuan* set in China began from the premise that the play was “originally performed in Switzerland with an all German speaking cast playing the Chinese parts. So for this version we wanted to source people from the correct geographical region of the world” (Pan Pan, n.d.). Pan Pan ultimately recruited a cast of performers of Asian descent living, studying and/or working in Ireland (Saruul Altantuya, Zolzaya Enkhtuya, Xier Luo, Zheyu Wei, Ashley Xie) described by the company as: “three Chinese people – A budding actor who works in a Chinese takeaway, a singer who works for a tech firm, a scholar doing a PHD in Trinity on globalisation and theatre, and two Mongolian accountants who compete in pole dancing competitions” (Pan Pan, n.d.). However, Pan Pan’s mission to “source” these performers for their original vision is telling as it potentially implies that these performers are a commodity to be used as well as this need making evident the non-integrated nature of Irish theatre in terms of an identifiable pool of racially and ethnically diverse actors/collaborators.

Since the early 2000s, minority ethnic and/or migrant-led companies including but not limited to Arambe Productions, Camino de Orula Productions, Outlandish Theatre Platform and Polish Theatre Ireland, collaborators/collectives including WeAreGriot’s Felispeaks (Felicia Olusanya) and Dagogo Hart, and individuals including Samuel Yakura, Ursula Rani Sarma, George Seremba and Mirjana Rendulic have presented work consistently as actors, playwrights and playwright/performers. However, racially, ethnically and/or culturally diverse artists more typically have been able to show their own artist-led work independently and particularly in Dublin in venues like the Project Arts Centre (Dublin), the New Theatre (Dublin) and Theatre Upstairs (Dublin, closed since 2019). Until the recent success of Felispeaks,

Dagogo Hart and Samuel Yakura however (see Chapter 5), works produced by minority ethnic artists however frequently has not received Arts Council funding but rather has often been presented through self-financing, profit share models and/or state, local or city funding schemes, sometimes arts-related, but more often related more specifically to intercultural, cultural diversity and/or integration initiatives with Arambe Productions' early work, Polish Theatre Ireland's effort and key offerings of Camino de Orula Productions particularly fitting this mould (McIvor 2016, 85–114; 2020, 63–79). It is also important to note that across this body of work, not all productions have necessarily foregrounded the theme *of* interculturalism, migration and/or racial/ethnic diversity, but this is a burden of representation that minority ethnic artists should not be beholden to and that intercultural Irish theatre criticism must defend explicitly. Samuel Yakura's one-man play *A Perfect Immigrant* which he wrote and performed in for the 2022 Dublin Fringe Festival challenged this burden head on with the production's tag line stating boldly: "What else does a young Black man have to say if it isn't about racism?" (Smock Alley 2022). Yakura's answer is a reflection on masculinity, family and communication intershot with his own poems as he combined semi-autobiographical theatrical monologue storytelling with performance of individual poems not in "character" whose themes both fit and exceeded the narrative he was unfolding as the character Levi in his monologue.

In Northern Ireland, the production conditions for minority ethnic artists and intercultural projects have been similar, as Terra Nova Productions' evolution and struggle to survive has evidenced (see case study below). These highly differential and recurrent production conditions have arguably led to a deprofessionalisation of minority-led intercultural arts practice over time due to relative prestige attached to funding schemes (before even considering the quality of the work itself), a dichotomisation exacerbated by wider-post-2008 Arts Council funding cuts. As Jason King observed in 2016, "the mainstream players" (by which he means the Abbey, the Gate, Druid and other core funded companies) "seem to have survived the financial crisis largely unscathed" while "emergent immigrant and minority ethnic arts practitioners" such as those associated with Arambe "have been devastated by the economic collapse and largely disappeared from the Irish professional theatre scene" (73).

The development of intercultural Irish arts practices post-1990s in the theatre and beyond has indeed been characterised by ongoing tensions between professional vs. community/participatory practices as platforms for minority-led new intercultural work, with representation *of* migrant and/or minority ethnic groups frequently at risk of being regarded interchangeably with representation created *by* these stakeholders as discussed above. This risk is particularly pronounced due to the close relationship between social and aesthetic interculturalism in contemporary Ireland in addition to systemic challenges for minority ethnic artists and/or those from a background of migration to gain access to the professional arts—an issue not unique to Ireland. The

use of arts and culture from community grassroots on up were identified as key sites for developing intercultural understanding and cultural diversity by the Irish government since as early as the 2005 National Action Plan Against Racism, which lists among its key objectives to “Develop the potential of arts/culture policy to promote interaction and understanding of cultural diversity” (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 34). In 2010, the Arts Council of Ireland announced its first dedicated five-year policy strategy and action plan to “support culturally diverse [arts] practice into the future” (4), a project undertaken in collaboration with Create, the national development agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR)—a partnership that evidences strong links between social and aesthetic interculturalism in contemporary Ireland at that time. This Arts Council policy was updated in 2019 as the *Equality, Human Rights and Diversity Policy and Strategy* which announces that:

The Arts Council, in everything it does, strives to respect, support and insure the inclusion of all voices and cultures that make up Ireland today, from all sections of society, from existing and new communities, and from all social backgrounds, ethnicities and traditions (1).

However, there is a good deal of slippage in Irish intercultural arts agendas over time empowering minority ethnic artists and/or those from a background of migration or refugeeness on their own professional terms and the instrumentalised use of encounters (often in a community context) between minority and majority ethnic artists and/or audiences as furthering social interculturalism and integration agendas more broadly. The almost continuous role of Create, Ireland’s national agency for collaborative arts in social and community contexts (formerly CAFE, Creative Activity for Everyone) in driving research and discourse on Irish new interculturalism is instructive here. As CAFE, they conducted the first survey of minority ethnic artists living and working in Ireland in 2002, “*Artists of Distinction: Mapping Survey of Ethnic Minority Arts in Ireland*, to determine their professional/practice needs and support requirements, if any” (Healy 2002, 3) and after re-forming as Create in 2003, this organisation also managed the 2009 *Cultural Diversity and the Arts: Research Report*. Written by Daniel Jewesbury, Jagtar Singh and Sarah Tuck and commissioned in partnership with the Office of the Minister for Integration under the Government’s National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR), this research report concretely informed the Arts Council’s first 2010 policy document in this area. The Arts Council still classifies “cultural diversity” as linked most strongly to “the area of arts participation” (“Cultural Diversity and the Arts,” n.d.) Arts participation refers to “a broad range of practice where individuals or groups collaborate with skilled artists to make or interpret art” although it “is recognised as a value and an opportunity across *all artforms and arts practices*” (“Arts Participation,” n.d.). With

rare exceptions, arts participation projects involving minority ethnic and/or migrant or refugee communities usually position white Irish artists as the “skilled” stakeholders. The Abbey Theatre’s recent 5X5 project which ran between 2018 and 2020 did attempt explicitly to bridge this gap by operating as a “development series for community theatre projects...that enables these communities to engage with their national theatre for the first time” (Abbey Theatre 2020). It offered participant projects €5000 in development monies, and five days of space and technical assistant at the Abbey. Across the three cycles, multiple groups involving minority ethnic and/or migrant participants were involved (Discovery Gospel Choir, Taitiu Theatre Company, SoloSIRENs, Grand Theatre Project & Tina Noonan) as well as those taken onto the scheme encompassing a wider range of intersectional identity positions encompassing gender, sexuality, disability, membership in the Travelling community, minority language status (Irish as first/primary language specifically) and age. This scheme makes the relationship between “community” and identity position in the professional Irish theatre scene explicitly clear with most projects being led according to the arts participation model cited above: “skilled” (usually white Irish) artists leading a community group. This is not to say that this kind of initiative as a developmental step is not important, and the legacy of the 5X5 scheme and its medium and long-term outputs are too early to call. Nevertheless, its central assumptions and rehearsal of familiar power relationships in the context of the Republic of Ireland’s national theatre do need to keep being called attention to and questioned for the barriers they may unwittingly reinforce.

Ric Knowles’s call for attention to broader performance ecologies in understanding and analysing new intercultural theatre networks over time rather than attention only to the demonstrable and influential impact of exceptional plays, companies and/or individuals (as has often been the case within Irish theatre studies) is particularly helpful in the Irish context where the boundaries between professional and community/participatory work have been consistently intentionally blurred for minority ethnic and/or migrant artists meaning that this work might be more difficult to find and archive. Knowles uses “performance ecology” to “talk about the complex ecosystem that is constituted by a city’s shifting network of actors- performers, performances, institutions, audiences, artists, administrators, and audience- organized variously into companies, caucuses, committees and communities” (2017, 5). Even before the devastating impact of Covid-19 on the Irish theatre and creative industries, there had been a widening post-2008 gap between companies like the Abbey, Druid, Pan Pan, Rough Magic and the Gate who have their ongoing core costs funded and independent companies and artists who work project to project or through other more limited funding streams, and this is why well-intentioned schemes like the Abbey Theatre’s 5X5 programme may have more complex ripple effects than first appear to be the case in terms of continuing to reify a professional vs. “community” theatre divide. As Miriam Haughton observes, “Covid-19 brought the economic livelihood of the state and the

arts sector to the cliff edge at the same time, forcing a conversation regarding survival and stability,” a state of double jeopardy even more exacerbated by those artists who struggle to maintain professional status let alone get paid as professional artists (Haughton 2021, 50).

Ultimately generally challenging and uneven industry conditions for new, emerging *and* established theatre artists post-Covid-19 make it even more challenging for minority ethnic and/or migrant artists to break through truly to the professional theatre sphere. However, there is hope in that the #WakingTheFeminist movement’s recent legacy of demanding formal careful and ongoing audit of infrastructural and institutional gender-based inequalities provides a base on which to build in addition to an injection of energy around anti-racism and Equality/Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work in the arts sector following the renewed post-2020 impact of the global #BlackLives-Matter movement after George Floyd’s murder which in turn exacerbated pressure on the Irish arts and theatre industries to re-examine issues of representation. The Arts Council in the Republic released the *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit: Building a Policy for Inclusive Arts Practice* in 2022 as a follow-on to their new 2019 *Human Rights, Equality and Diversity Strategy* but it proved to be opportune timing for organisations like Fishamble Theatre and Baboró the international arts festival for children among others who wanted to engage with this amplified post-2020 awareness of these inequities within the Irish theatre sector. They launched schemes like Fishamble’s 2022 Transatlantic Commissions Programme (in partnership with New York’s Irish Repertory Theatre) and Baboró’s 2022 pilot LEAP programme, both of which target upskilling for and engagement with racially and ethnically diverse artists and/or those from backgrounds of migration, playwrights in the case of Fishamble (Kwaku Fortune, Jade Jordan, Felicia Olusanya, and CN Smith), but multidisciplinary artists for Baboró (Alexandra Crăciun, Fernanda Ferrari, Justyna Cwojdziańska, and Justin Anene). That being said, these promising programmes remain focused on development which is an often limited pathway particularly for minority ethnic artists, and in this context, the longer trajectory of Terra Nova Production and artistic director Andrea Montgomery’s work in Northern Ireland over the last fifteen years is both instructive and inspirational.

Case Study Three: Terra Nova Productions, The Arrivals Project (Arrivals 1 (2014), Arrivals 2 (2015), Arrivals 3D: Mi Mundo (2016, remounted in 2017), Me You Us Them (2018) and the Intercultural Shakespeares (The Belfast Tempest [2016] and A Midsummer Night’s Dream [2019]).

Premiered: Belfast, various venues.

This chapter and the book’s final case study is Terra Nova Productions who undertake an integrated approach to creating a Northern Irish intercultural theatre ecosystem that for over a decade has operated through combining community consultation and engagement with creating new professional work

and championing emerging minority ethnic Northern Irish theatre artists. Founded in 2007 by Andrea Montgomery, Terra Nova Productions defines interculturality as “what happens at the points where the culture rubs together, like tectonic plates, sparks fly and something new is forged” (“Intercultural Practice,” n.d.) Terra Nova’s situation within post-conflict Northern Irish society further textures Terra Nova’s attempts to forge a new interculturalism through their ambitious projects as cultural diversity in the North not only refers to those from a background of migration and/or non-Western European racial or ethnic background, but also to the differences in perspective of those from Catholic/Republican versus Protestant/Loyalists backgrounds. They position themselves explicitly against assimilationist or narrow understandings of both multiculturalism and interculturalism, insisting that the intercultural art they make rejects insisting that “people are integrated into the dominant culture” or that the host culture (in this case, post-Conflict Northern Ireland) “should abandon its identities, values, joys, sorrows or memories” (Terra Nova, “Intercultural Practice,” n.d.)

While Terra Nova’s work with a wide network of Northern Irish and internationally-based colleagues, the company’s vision has been driven primarily by artistic director and founder Andrea Montgomery. She is a Canadian-born migrant to Northern Ireland herself initially moving there to serve as the artistic director of Riverside Theatre. She describes herself as “from the global north” but having grown “up largely in the global south” with diplomat parents, identifying now “as a third culture individual influenced by United Nations policy” (Terra Nova Productions, “Intercultural Practice,” n.d.). From the beginning of Terra Nova’s work, Montgomery and her collaborators sought to make intercultural theatre in Northern Ireland by engaging *with* culturally diverse individuals and community groups to shape the theatre they wanted to make and see. Montgomery describes their work as having three overlapping circles integral to Terra Nova’s vision: community engagement, emerging artists and professional arts. But as she observes, “If you don’t have that third circle, you’re ghettoizing people” (Montgomery, interview with Charlotte McIvor, July 27, 2017). Nevertheless, Terra Nova continually faces this same pigeonholing of their mission and characterisation of their work, with Montgomery being candid that they are most successful in being funded to do process-based community workshops around intercultural dialogue, rather than to actually produce professional theatre—a recurring experience that bears out our claims about the impact of the professional vs. community/participatory bind that has shaped the ability of intercultural Irish arts practices to actually find stable footing as led by minority ethnic and/or migrant artists (Montgomery, interview with Charlotte McIvor, July 27, 2017).

Rather than focus on one Terra Nova production, we have chosen to situate their Arrivals Project and intercultural Shakespeare stream within their mission and a larger all-island Irish intercultural performance ecology in order to offer a tangible case study of the kinds of structural supports and ongoing labour

actually needed to create and sustain performance ecologies of minority and migrant-led new intercultural theatre practices given the island-wide challenges, resourcing issues and policy blindspots identified in the previous section. Both projects encompass multiple productions directly shaped by ongoing community consultation as well as participation by professional and emerging artists. Of all the nascent intercultural and/or minority-led theatre companies started in the Republic or the North post-1990s, Terra Nova has had the most staying power and explicitly ecological approach evident on the island of Ireland in working not only for its own survival but the future of intercultural, minority ethnic and/or migrant-led theatre individuals practice more broadly. Terra Nova's persistence has not come without struggle and frequent frustration at how the company's attempts to build and professionalise a minority ethnic/intercultural theatre community has been counted against the assessments of the overall professional quality of their work leading to funding hurdles which have repeatedly threatened their survival as discussed above.

Their body of work includes *It's Not All Rain and Potatoes* (2007), Macau Young Creative Voices, a three-year international drama project with Macwac Theatre and young people from the SAR on the theme of decolonisation in Macau (2007–2009), the *Ulster Kama Sutra*—a puppet show addressing sexuality based on interviews across Northern Ireland (2011–2013), the El Akl Festival in Minya, Egypt (2017) and the *Arrivals* series (*Arrivals*: 2014, *Arrivals2*: 2015, *Arrivals3-Mi Mundo* 2016–2017, *Me You Us Them*: 2018). The *Arrivals Project* was created “to bring together writers, actors and members of Northern Ireland's new multicultural communities to share experiences and support each other to create a new intercultural canon” (Terra Nova Productions, “*Arrivals Project*,” n.d.) of original theatrical works which ranged from one-acts, to an immersive play followed by a workshop on intercultural dialogue for audience members, to a two-hander explicitly focused on race and racism in Northern Ireland. They have also presented large scale intercultural Shakespeare projects combining professional and community participants including the *Belfast Tempest* (2016) which was “Northern Ireland's largest ever Shakespeare production,” and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2019), “the largest Shakespeare event ever organised in Ards and North Down: a specially created *Midsummer Night's Dream* featuring culturally diverse community participants living in Belfast and beyond” (Terra Nova Productions, “*A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” n.d.)

Montgomery's perception that the Northern Irish stage was closed to any stories that were not “predominantly white, Irish, male, and straight” spurred the Arrivals Project which directly confronted this issue through their commissioning and production of new plays (Terra Nova Productions, “*Arrivals*,” n.d.). The *Arrivals Project's* model was to:

work on storytelling empowerment workshops with our community contacts in Northern Ireland's new immigrant communities, and thereby to discover the

individuals who were willing to work more intensely with us to get their stories on stage. At the same time, we put out a call to writers of any background who wanted to be supported to create intercultural theatre. (Terra Nova Productions, “*Arrivals*,” n.d.)

The playwrights and community participants continued working together in the room in masterclasses, with the injunction to write explicitly for the minority ethnic actors cast in the first two *Arrivals* productions. However, this was not a verbatim or documentary theatre process, rather a testing and workshopping of stories, themes and concerns that filtered into the final works, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. The first two instalments consisted of evenings of short plays written by Northern Irish playwrights including Shannon Yee, Paul McMahon, James Meredith, John Morrison, Deirdre Cartmill and Maggie Cronin, Fionnuala Kennedy and Darragh Carville while Montgomery wrote the final two instalments. *Mi Mundo* featured only one central storyline of a white Northern Irish and Brazilian couple’s struggles to keep their family together and the experience concluded with an intercultural workshop experience for audience members, while *Me You Us Them* is a combination of scenes and monologues explicitly addressing racism with some interweaving stories at its core. Across these plays, the characters represent a spectrum of racial and ethnic identities that are often contested by the individual’s personal affiliations and lived experiences: Black British (of Indian and African descent), Asian British (of Chinese descent), mixed-race Northern Irish (of Chinese and African descent), Protestant Black Ghanaian, Romanian, Hong Kong Chinese, Peruvian, Polish and white Northern Irish characters from Catholic and Loyalist backgrounds who profess varying levels of involvement or investment in sectarian politics. Unlike most of the plays presented on these themes in the Republic since the late 1990s, these plays mostly concern individuals who migrated by choice for education and opportunity rather than through forced displacement and many characters (including those of mixed race/ethnicity) who were born and grew up in Northern Ireland. Rather than eliding issues of forced displacement, refugeeness and Northern Ireland specific issues with seeking asylum and refugee status, the negotiated choice between Terra Nova, the community participants and professional artists to tell these other stories productively expands the canon of minority ethnic, migrant and/or intercultural Irish theatre in a more demographically representative way as those seeking asylum and refugee status account for much smaller percentages of the rise in Third-Country nationals than their stage representation would suggest. The plays range from taking on everyday mundane encounters (such as debates about relative oppression experienced by the Irish versus other minorities among a diverse group in a pub one night in John Meredith’s *Don’t Get Me Wrong*) to more climactic ones (such as *Mi Mundo*’s explicit examination of family reunification and UK immigration policy). Each instalment of the *Arrivals Project* has toured throughout Northern Ireland and featured a majority of professional minority ethnic performers.

Terra Nova's intercultural Shakespeares *The Belfast Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* blurred professional and community/participatory boundaries even more aggressively on the stage itself as each production paired professional actors in the lead roles with interludes by community participants and/or emerging artists who had been worked with over months to shape their contributions. *The Belfast Tempest* engaged "750 people across 18 months, from which a community cast and volunteer team of over 180 Northern Irish residents, originally from 52 different cities across the globe, joined 40 professional artists to create a giant temporary theatre in T13 warehouse in Belfast's Titanic Quarter" for the performance as part of Northern Ireland's celebrations for Shakespeare's 400th birthday (Terra Nova Productions, "*The Belfast Tempest*," n.d.) (Fig. 11.3).

For *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "82 community participants from 6 to 82" ultimately joined the professional performers onstage with many hundreds more having been engaged through a two-year exploratory workshop process preceding the production (Terra Nova Productions, "*A Midsummer Night's Dream*," n.d.). While many of the individuals who participated in the development of each process did not ultimately make it onstage and those who did may not have achieved "professional" standards of performance, these processes Terra Nova undertook are nonetheless essential to changing the



Fig. 11.3 The combined professional and community cast in Terra Nova Productions' *The Belfast Tempest* staged in a warehouse at the Belfast docks, 2016 (Photo Neil Harrison)

performance ecology in Northern Ireland over time, as the possibility of arts participation was introduced through such a concrete series of experiences.

Ultimately, Terra Nova sought not only to diversify participation and casting through these epic events alongside their programmes of audience and community engagement, but they also explicitly set out to contribute to the history of Northern Irish Shakespeare performance overall due to the unprecedented scale of participation they intended and achieved for each work, regardless of the background of those participants. By setting out those kind of ambitious aims, Terra Nova specifically positioned minority ethnic and/or migrant communities at the vanguard of pushing forward the remit and ambition of Shakespearean performance and performance more generally forward in Northern Ireland. This is a powerful statement about the place and contributions these communities can and will make to Northern Irish arts if given the resources to do so. Terra Nova's ongoing and tireless confrontation of the community/professional binary in Northern Irish theatre has generated ground-breaking projects and novel methodologies that deserve to be not only supported but more broadly adapted across the island of Ireland in order to catalyse and nurture the kind of nascent intercultural performance ecologies their work proves it is possible to lay down roots for.

CONCLUSION

Ireland's future is intercultural based on our current population demographics in the Republic and the North. The Republic's continuing membership in the European Union too means that questions of intra-EU interculturalism vis-à-vis member states as well as our mutual obligations to those seeking refugee status will continue to shape "Irish" identity's future parameters. But as this chapter, and indeed, this entire book has revealed, our Irish theatre history too is persistently intercultural, in the connections internationally we sought and imagined, the collaborations we built over time, and the possibilities nascent in our current performance ecology.

This chapter ultimately invites you to pick up the thematic strands that we have introduced here to continue to examine actively Ireland's past, present and future including our theatrical and performance histories. The purpose of this book has been to situate Irish contemporary theatre from the 1950s to the present within historical and theoretical contexts. But as the evolution of our chapters and arguments have shown, history refuses to be linear, and the deeper you dig, the more connections and contradictions emerge particularly when it comes to interculturalism's role in the past, present and future of contemporary Irish theatre.

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Conclusion

Contemporary Irish Theatre: Histories and Theories aimed to renovate and reinvigorate the Irish theatre history survey through combining study of canonical and lesser-known figures and case studies throughout these pages while giving readers multiple points of entry through historical and theoretical routes. We provided historical and social context as well as policy background and information on the material economies of making theatre in Ireland today. We hope that this contemporary Irish theatre history survey has ultimately made visible in a rigorous but comprehensible manner contemporary Irish theatre's complex ecology of processes "and practices" that form "a meshwork and multifaceted field of cultural production" (Nicholson et al. 2018, 6) involving well-known companies and playwrights but also a wider range of mid-size and/or small companies and individuals working across many artistic roles.

As we built this book over many years and tested its logics and structure as a whole through our process of co-writing and co-rewriting, we often struggled with language to describe precisely what underpinned the logic we were following to construct our landscape of contemporary Irish theatre theoretically and methodologically from the perspective of a birds-eye view of the book as a whole. We knew that we were attempting to "do" the Irish theatre history survey differently in order to make visible a wider range of contributions and texture of practices—particularly that of individuals and companies whose work was lesser known or more ephemeral due to its formal nature or lack of availability of extensive post-performance documentation—while balancing attention to landmark canonical figures and moments that were necessary for a basic orientation to contemporary Irish theatre history. We also knew as we reflected on at the end of the introduction that we were building most consciously on the feminist counter-canonical interventions of the last 20 years within Irish theatre studies and beyond which have repeatedly called

into question structures of inclusion, prestige and accessibility to theatrical practice on grounds defined by but not only limited to gender and female gender specifically (Cannon Harris 2002; Clare et al. 2021a, b; Coleman Coffey 2016; Fitzpatrick 2013; Headrick and Kearney 2014; Houghton and Kurdi 2015; Leeney 2010; Sihra 2007). But can a book that expressly does not *only* deal with or centralise female or female-identified figures and/or histories be claimed as a feminist book, particularly in a moment where questions around gender norms and identification continue to be productively in flux in ways that we and contemporary Irish theatre have not yet caught up to fully in this book? Is there a difference between what one is actually doing as an individual scholar (proceeding from a feminist logic and political commitment) and what one can claim within a scholarly publication (this is a feminist book in terms of methodology, key theoretical frameworks and inclusionary scope)?

Doireann Ní Ghríofa's 2020 prose work *A Ghost in the Throat*, which combines memoir with historical excavation and translation of an epic poem by eighteenth-century poet Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill, opens with the lines: "This is a female text" (3). Her proclamation draws attention to the inextricable meaning of this book being written amidst the working conditions of her life as a mother of four young children: "This is a female text borne of guilt and desire, stitched to a soundtrack of cartoon nursery rhymes" (3). This statement also draws attention to the parallels between her search to excavate Ní Chonaill's personal story and work from the eighteenth century and her own challenged circumstances as a twenty-first-century female writer: "This is a female text, written in the twenty-first century. How late it is. How much has changed. How little" (4).

While female and feminist are not always interchangeable as identities and/or affiliations, we will chance joining ourselves to Ní Ghríofa's refrain here, revising it for our purposes as "This is a feminist text." *This* is a feminist text, and in this basic underlying conviction lies both this book's refrain and call to action for the future of contemporary Irish theatre scholarship. This is a feminist text, written as a female and male co-writing team in-between caring and other core work duties over more years than originally planned due to the demands of family and constant institutional pressures and crises. This is a feminist text, whose structure is both linear and anti-linear, fragmented and tightly structured, rejecting the possibilities of neither side of the binary as is characteristic of recent feminist theatre examinations of formal theatrical innovation and re-assessment of prejudice against realism/naturalism for example (Solga 2015). This is a feminist text, which began as most closely aligned to feminist theatre scholarship projects specifically about the recovery of women's histories and contributions in modern and contemporary Irish theatre, but which revealed through its writing the ever more urgent importance of applying the inclusive, destabilising, anti-canonical and politicised principles of feminist theatre scholarship not only to the study of theatre work by female and female-identified persons. As such, we have ultimately attempted through this book's kaleidoscopic structure and broad coverage to continue

the work of our colleagues in even more widely applying a feminist sensibility and set of theories and methodologies to treatment of as much of contemporary Irish theatre's landscape on the island of Ireland as we could fit between these pages, profiling work created by or with thematic consideration of all genders and often with consideration of multiple complex subject positions in addition to gender.

We also know that this book cannot be read exclusively as a feminist text, or as one type of feminist text (although we have drawn most consistently on materialist and intersectional feminism in considering the interplay between the historical, economic and individual identities in the making, consumption of and access to theatrical work over time). But we did feel as a cisgender female and male writing team that it was important politically, pedagogically and methodologically to ultimately transparently claim the subtle refrain of the feminist text that guided our chapter-by-chapter criteria for inclusion and discussion in terms of overall balance of representation across theatre case studies, including not only gender but attention to other categories of identities such as sexuality, race/ethnicity, disability, class and nationality. This speech act we hope keeps the currently raging flame of Irish feminist theatre scholarship growing and expanding in its interpretation and remit. We are not kidding ourselves that we have fully succeeded in our intentions, or that it is possible to use guiding feminist principles to achieve an inclusive new canon that eliminates the future need for separate volumes and deeper studies based on identity *or* aesthetic categories. And we are certainly not suggesting that the ongoing study of contemporary Irish theatre should only be guided solely by the lens of identity as a criteria for inclusion or not of productions and artists as worthy of scholarly study. Otherwise, what would happen to the study of aesthetics or other aspects of craft within theatre and performance as art forms? However, we are calling on our field to keep questioning whose stories are told and how, and who is omitted and why, and to keep tilting our perspective again following Melissa Sihra (2021, 221) to continually readjust our understanding of how contemporary Irish theatre has evolved over time from the scale of individuals to small companies to large companies to big and sustainably funded state institutions while understanding that we are in part if not in full indebted to feminist theoretical methodologies as a catalyst for this line of ongoing questioning.

Echoing Ní Ghríofa again and looking back at our own now finished work—"How late it is. How much has changed. How little" (4)—and how much we know that we have still missed, or still repeated despite our best efforts. We are now counting on you as readers to pick up the pieces and take this project forward to its next iteration. And indeed, of the many better alternative versions of this book that could exist, what would a renovation of the Irish theatre history survey have looked like if we had *always* started with the designers in each chapter (as in the urgent work of Siobhán O'Gorman) (2018) or with the actors? Or if we had actually prioritised the perspective of stage managers or those responsible for the production's finances? Or if we had

only covered theatre produced in cities other than Dublin and Belfast? If we had consciously prioritised work that had “failed” commercially, artistically or collaboratively to see what that had to teach us not only about what contemporary Irish theatre is but what it could have been? The next and better version of the contemporary Irish theatre history survey is now up to you, because in our final assessment, even a renovated survey is not a mapping of a landscape that already or verifiably exists, but an invitation to continuous and ongoing remapping starting out from previous coordinates, such as those now logged within these pages.

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