



# Cultural Convergence

The Dublin Gate Theatre,  
1928–1960

*Edited by*  
Ondřej Pilný · Ruud van den Beuken · Ian R. Walsh



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## Cultural Convergence

“This well-organised volume makes a notable contribution to our understanding of Irish theatre studies and Irish modernist studies more broadly. The essays are written by a diverse range of leading scholars who outline the outstanding cultural importance of the Dublin Gate Theatre, both in terms of its national significance and in terms of its function as a hub of international engagement.”

—Professor James Moran, *University of Nottingham, UK*

“The consistently outstanding contributions to this illuminating and cohesive collection demonstrate that, for Gate Theatre founders Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir and their collaborators, the limits of the imagination lay well beyond Ireland’s borders. Individually and collectively, the contributors to this volume unravel the intricate connections, both personal and artistic, linking the theatre’s directors, designers, and practitioners to Britain, Europe, and beyond; they examine the development and staging of domestic plays written in either English or Irish; and they trace across national boundaries the complex textual and production history of foreign dramas performed in translation. In addition to examining a broad spectrum of intercultural and transnational influences and perspectives, these frequently groundbreaking essays also reveal the extent to which the early Gate Theatre was a cosmopolitan, progressive, and inclusive space that recognized and valued women’s voices and queer forms of expression.”

—Professor José Lanters, *University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, USA*

“*Cultural Convergence* is a book for which we have been waiting, not just in Irish theatre history, but in Irish cultural studies more widely. By drawing on fresh archival sources to show us that Dublin’s Gate Theatre was not simply the Irish home of stage modernism, or a playpen for its founders, this book shows us that the ground for the globalised, multicultural Ireland of the twenty-first century had been prepared much earlier. It is thus not just good theatre history; it is an important intervention in our present.”

—Professor Chris Morash, *Trinity College Dublin, Ireland*

“This exciting collection pushes our understanding of the Gate Theatre and its impact miles ahead of where it has stood for decades. By asking new questions about the cosmopolitanism the Gate espoused, this study exposes the complex interactions among genres, media, languages, political affiliations, and identities both personal and collective that shaped the theatre. These carefully researched

and thoughtfully argued accounts of cultural convergence further enhance the recent array of strong critical work on the Gate, as well as providing an important model for rigorous Irish theatre historiography in the global moment.”

—Professor Paige Reynolds, *College of the Holy Cross, USA*

Ondřej Pilný · Ruud van den Beuken ·  
Ian R. Walsh  
Editors

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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: Cultural Convergence at Dublin's Gate Theatre</b>	<b>1</b>
	Ondřej Pilný, Ruud van den Beuken, and Ian R. Walsh	
<b>2</b>	<b>The Internationalist Dramaturgy of Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir</b>	<b>15</b>
	Joan FitzPatrick Dean and Radvan Markus	
<b>3</b>	<b>Gearóid Ó Lochlainn: The Gate Theatre's Other Irish-Speaking Founder</b>	<b>47</b>
	Pádraig Ó Siadhail	
<b>4</b>	<b>The Transnational Roots of Key Figures from the Early Years of the Gate Theatre, Dublin</b>	<b>75</b>
	David Clare and Nicola Morris	
<b>5</b>	<b>The Other Gates: Anglo-American Influences on and from Dublin</b>	<b>107</b>
	Charlotte Purkis	

6	The Brothers Čapek at the Gate: <i>R.U.R.</i> and <i>The Insect Play</i>	141
	Ondřej Pilný	
7	Kismet: Hollywood, Orientalism and the Design Language of Padraic Colum's <i>Mogu of the Desert</i>	175
	Elaine Sisson	
8	Prussian Discipline and Lesbian Vulnerability: Christa Winsloe's <i>Children in Uniform</i> at the Gate	193
	Yvonne Ivory	
9	'We Belong to the World': Christine Longford's War Plays During Irish Neutrality	217
	Erin Grogan	
	Index	237

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 2.1	Shelah Richards's directorial debut: G.K. Chesterton, <i>Magic</i> , Gate Theatre, 1935. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	20
Fig. 2.2	James Elroy Flecker, <i>Don Juan</i> , Gate Theatre, directed by Hilton Edwards, Gate Theatre, 1933. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	21
Fig. 2.3	Modern dress production of <i>Hamlet</i> , directed by Hilton Edwards, Gaiety Theatre, 1941. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	24
Fig. 2.4	Micheál mac Liammóir in the modern dress production of <i>Julius Caesar A.D. 1957</i> , directed by Hilton Edwards, Gaiety Theatre, 1957. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	27
Fig. 2.5	Micheál mac Liammóir seen with expressionistic masks in <i>Yahoo</i> by Edward Longford, directed by Hilton Edwards, Gate Theatre, 1933. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	34

Fig. 5.1	Pilcher's (?) logo used at the London Gate Studio on programmes, leaflets and letters 1927-1929, shown here on the 'Subscriber's Leaflet' 1927 announcing the new theatre	121
Fig. 5.2	Mac Liammóir's logo created for the Dublin Gate in 1928 (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	122
Fig. 5.3	Membership Prospectus for the Gate Theatre Studio, Hollywood, 1943	125
Fig. 6.1	Karel Čapek, <i>R.U.R.</i> , Act III, National Theatre, Prague, 1921. Set design by Bedřich Feuerstein. Photograph by Karel Váňa (Courtesy of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague)	143
Fig. 6.2	Karel Čapek, <i>R.U.R.</i> , Gate Theatre, Dublin. Promotion flyer for the 1931 revival. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	147
Fig. 6.3	Karel Čapek, <i>R.U.R.</i> , Gate Theatre, Dublin. Prompt book for the 1931 revival. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	148
Fig. 6.4	Bratrí Čapkové, <i>Ze života hmyzu</i> , Butterflies in Act I, National Theatre, Prague, 1922. Set design by Josef Čapek in collaboration with K.H. Hilar. Photograph by Karel Váňa (Courtesy of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague)	154
Fig. 6.5	Bratrí Čapkové, <i>Ze života hmyzu</i> , 'Mravenika' [Ant-City] in Act III, National Theatre, Prague, 1922. Set design by Josef Čapek in collaboration with K.H. Hilar. Photograph by Karel Váňa (Courtesy of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague)	155
Fig. 6.6	The Brothers Čapek, <i>The Insect Play</i> , adapted by Myles na gCopaleen, Gate Theatre, Dublin, 1943. Prompt book. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	159
Fig. 6.7	The Brothers Čapek, <i>The Insect Play</i> , adapted by Myles na gCopaleen, Gate Theatre, Dublin, 1943. Insect drawing by Micheál mac Liammóir in the part of Chief Engineer. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	161

Fig. 7.1	Micheál mac Liammóir, set design for Padraic Colum, <i>Mogu of the Desert</i> , Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	179
Fig. 7.2	Oriental costume on display at the National Children Hospital's Fundraiser, Iveagh Gardens, Dublin. <i>Irish Life</i> , 21 May 1920	182
Fig. 7.3	Micheál mac Liammóir, costume design for female character, <i>Mogu of the Desert</i> , Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	184
Fig. 7.4	Micheál mac Liammóir, costume design for ‘Selim’ (played by Robert Hennessey), <i>Mogu of the Desert</i> , Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	185
Fig. 7.5	Padraic Colum, <i>Mogu of the Desert</i> , Gate Theatre, 1931. Set and costume design by Micheál mac Liammóir. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	186
Fig. 7.6	Micheál mac Liammóir, costume drawing for ‘Food-of-Hearts’, <i>Mogu of the Desert</i> , Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	187
Fig. 8.1	Edwards’s stage directions for the final moments of <i>Children in Uniform</i> : at left is von Bernburg at her desk, about to collapse; the vice-headmistress, ‘K’, exits the study into a hallway full of pupils who line up to ‘follow her slowly out. Edelgard last’ (Winsloe 1933a, 73). See the bottom left image in Fig. 8.4 for a photo of the set. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	204
Fig. 8.2	Edwards’s stage directions for the meeting between von Bernburg and Manuela in Act III, scene 3 of <i>Children in Uniform</i> (Winsloe 1933a, 69). Note the pauses (indicated by the <i>fermata</i> symbol) and stage directions that add hesitancy to von Bernburg’s attitude, and belie the firmness of her words. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)	205

- Fig. 8.3 Coralie Carmichael as von Bernburg comforts Betty Chancellor as Manuela. This image appeared in the *Evening Herald* and *Irish Independent* of 17 April 1934. It was also chosen by Richard Pine and Richard Cave to represent Carmichael in their 1984 slide-show history of the Gate (27; slide 5) (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Líammóir Estate) 206
- Fig. 8.4 The ‘Poster of Photographs’ that served as a foyer placard welcoming audiences to the Gate production of *Children in Uniform*, April 1934. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Líammóir Estate) 207
- Fig. 8.5 An iconic scene from F.W. Murnau’s Weimar expressionist film *Nosferatu* (1922) 208
- Fig. 8.6 Edwards’s stage directions for the end of *Children in Uniform*: the headmistress taps her stick as she repeats her lie to herself (Winsloe 1933a, 72). Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Líammóir Estate) 209



## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: Cultural Convergence at Dublin's Gate Theatre

*Ondřej Pilný, Ruud van den Beuken, and Ian R. Walsh*

In his autobiography *All for Hecuba* (1946, 1961), Micheál mac Liammóir describes the shared excitement that Hilton Edwards, Desirée ‘Toto’ Bannard Cogley, Gearóid Ó Lochlainn and he himself felt during the summer of 1928 as they were setting up the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio (as their new venture was initially called), while he also recounts his surprise at the broader interest that they were generating: ‘Miraculously, there seemed many Dubliners who desired to see plays by Ibsen and Evreinov and O’Neill, and the guineas began to shower upon us.’ (60) Although such auspicious enthusiasm was important to the

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Gate's early success, producing foreign avant-garde theatre would not prove particularly lucrative, and it was not until Lord Edward Longford offered to buy the remaining shares in late 1930 that the company could be kept afloat. By that time, Edwards and mac Liammóir had indeed already produced plays from Norway (Ibsen, Wiers-Jenssen), Sweden (Strindberg), Denmark (Bramsen), Russia (Evreinov, Tolstoy), Germany (Goethe, Kaiser), Czechoslovakia (Čapek), France (Raynal), Spain (Martínez Sierra) and the US (O'Neill, Greensfelder, Rice).

The Gate's outward gaze not only increased the influx of experimental plays from the Continent and America to Ireland, but also inspired Irish dramatists to revolutionize their dramaturgy. Such new creations could hold their own with Abbey productions: for example, four out of the total of eight dramas included by Curtis Canfield in his anthology *Plays of Changing Ireland* (1936) were original works by Denis Johnston, Edward Longford, Christine Longford and Mary Manning produced at the Gate. Canfield described how '[i]n the midst of this stirring of new forces another Ireland is emerging, one which, if early symptoms are correct, is more than content to allow its romantic predecessor to remain with O'Leary in the grave' (xii). The anthology was presented as an attempt at charting the cosmopolitanism of new Dublin playwrights, whom Canfield considered to be 'intent either on dramatizing the diversified life of the modern Europeanized capital, or on revealing, with heartening sincerity, the effect which strange and unfamiliar conditions are having on Irish character' (xii).

The early Gate, then, was instrumental in facilitating cultural convergence, both in Ireland and on its many tours abroad, which included visits to Cairo, Alexandria, Malta, Athens, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade, Salonika, Sofia, and Bucharest in the 1930s alone. After World War II, Edwards – mac Liammóir Productions also toured the US and Canada, performed *Hamlet* at Elsinore Castle in Denmark and returned to Egypt and Malta. Despite these many international links, the collaborations and exchanges that mark the Gate's pivotal role in the Irish theatre scene have only been partially explored. Much of the major writing on the theatre until more recently was of a biographical or commemorative nature. Most prominent amongst these books are Christopher Fitz-Simon's seminal double biography of Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir entitled *The Boys* (1994, 2002) and Richard Pine and Richard Allen Cave's book *The Gate Theatre 1928-1978* (1984) that accompanied the fiftieth

anniversary celebration of the theatre. However, as Irish theatre scholarship has begun to draw on new methodologies and frameworks beyond postcolonial analysis that privileged the work of the playwright, the Gate has come to enjoy more sustained examination. The work of the early Gate is particularly prominent in studies on modernism and modernity on stage in Ireland. Ben Levitas's chapter in *Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism* (2014) is exemplary of such work. It charts a history of modernist theatrical experiments in Ireland from Oscar Wilde to Marina Carr that resisted 'routine mimesis' (111), favouring stylizations that were socially and politically self-reflexive but never fixed in their theatricality. Levitas situates the early expressionist productions of Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice, Karel Čapek and Georg Kaiser at the Gate, renowned for Edwards's innovative direction and mac Liammóir's evocative designs, in this modernist tradition. He then considers Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says 'No'!* (1929) as an example of 'a native expressionist' (120) work, discusses the Gate's regular productions of Wilde in relation to the founders' commitment to theatricality and their relevance to their own homosexuality and also commends the theatre for its championing of Mary Manning's satirical *Youth's the Season-*? (1931).

This pattern is repeated in lengthier essays in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* (2016), where Richard Cave dedicates a great deal of his chapter, 'Modernism and Irish Theatre 1900-1940', to examining the early expressionistic productions of Edwards and mac Liammóir (*The Old Lady Says 'No'!* in particular) in similar terms to Levitas. Paige Reynolds charts the technical achievements in these same early productions in her chapter, 'Direction and Design to 1960', while Éibhear Walshe interrogates the supposedly radical nature of Gate productions of Wilde, from its foundation to the present, finding that the theatricality present in the productions depicted Wilde more as a 'charming dandy' (217) rather than a troubling queer artist. How expressionism offered women a stylistic vocabulary to disrupt patriarchal naturalism is considered in the work of Mary Manning and Maura Laverty at the Gate by Cathy Leeney in her chapter 'Women and Irish Theatre before 1960'. Chris Morash's chapter marks a departure in its spatial analysis of the Gate Theatre building but returns to framing this analysis in relation to how the space created 'a kind of enforced modernity' (432). Performances at the Gate in the post-1960 period are referenced in many chapters on playwrights, actors, directors and designers in the handbook, but those exceed the scope of the current study.

This is true also of the *Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance* (2018), which features many chapters that focus on work at the Gate in the contemporary period, in particular productions of G.B. Shaw, Brian Friel, Samuel Beckett and Frank McGuinness. The international tours of Gate productions from the 1980s onward are the subject of a chapter-long study by Mária Kurdi. Despite this handbook taking the post-World War II era as its starting point, it considers that ‘it is only since the late 1950s and early 1960s that a significant new generation of writers emerged’ (8). As a result, there is little reflection on the early Gate and its influence and disappointingly little on the theatre in the 1950s.

However, 2018 saw the publication of *The Gate Theatre, Dublin: Inspiration and Craft*, the first book-length collection of essays on the Gate. The chapters in this volume encompass a full history of the theatre from its foundation to the contemporary period. It redirects the discussion of the Gate away from modernism towards a sustained interrogation of its complex relationship with nationalism and also stands as a major act of historical recovery, remembering the contributions of the producer ‘Toto’ Cogley, the actor Ria Mooney and the plays of Lord Edward and Lady Christine Longford, as well as offering more detailed analysis of Johnston’s and Manning’s dramas, Edwards’s achievements as a director and mac Liammóir’s as a playwright. Ruud van den Beuken’s recent monograph *Avant-Garde Nationalism at the Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928–1940* (2020) further engages with the company’s attempts to promote new Irish playwrights and to facilitate collective identity formation by engaging with contentious issues in both the nation’s history and in the contemporary Free State, such as the legacy of the Easter Rising, class identities and sectarian tensions.

Despite all these recent publications, there are still numerous lacunae in the existing scholarship. These include, surprisingly, the writings on theatre of its original artistic directors, Micheál mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards, which elucidate the aesthetic and theatrical practice of the Gate against the backdrop of the considerable international experience of both partners. It is particularly in this context that comparisons of the Gate’s work with European theatres with a similar focus and remit are remarkably scarce; likewise, comparative studies are lacking of the productions of international drama (e.g., German, British, American or Czech plays) at the Gate and in their original contexts, as are discussions of design or the Gate’s poetics in an international or intercultural context. Moreover,

the influence of cinema on the work of the Gate (including its repertoire and its promotion) remains unexplored. Finally, there are numerous neglected figures associated with the Gate waiting to receive appropriate critical attention, such as its co-founder Gearóid Ó Lochlainn – an actor and Irish-language playwright whose work helps to further elucidate the involvement of the Gate in the development and promotion of Irish-language theatre, or prominent women playwrights, including Christine Longford, who was also indispensable for the theatre's management. It is by addressing these neglected areas that this volume intends to unravel the complex cultural convergences at the Dublin Gate Theatre in its first three decades of existence, showing the Gate to have been a truly cutting-edge theatre of its time in international terms.

In their consummate professionalism, Edwards and mac Liammóir meticulously documented production details in prompt scripts, set and costume designs, lighting plots, photographs and sketches. Such ephemera was kept and valued as the theatre often relied financially upon the revival of successful productions, but also because Edwards and mac Liammóir persisted together through the decades, eventually passing on a legacy that continued under the directorship of Michael Colgan and on to Selina Cartmell in the present. This longevity of the Gate is a rarity in the history of independent avant-garde theatres, which often die with their founders or whose artistic vision and practices change radically under regular successive changes in management. The archival holdings on the theatre at the Gate Theatre Archive at Northwestern University (Evanston, IL) and in the Gate Theatre Digital Archive at NUI Galway are thus exceptionally rich in the amount of detail that they preserve. The present volume offers a sampling of those riches by way of various images, illustrating the potential for the detailed reconstruction of the work of directors and designers of individual shows in particular. Indeed, contributors to this collection have all drawn on these abundant archival materials in their analysis of the theatre.

No less importantly, focusing on cultural convergences means that the output of the Gate Theatre is examined in terms of the dynamics of exchange, interaction and acculturation that reveal the workings of transnational infrastructures. Our conception of cultural convergence differs from that of George Ritzer's popular definition of this term as a process whereby 'cultures tend to grow similar to one another after being subjected to the same cultural flows' (154). In the Gate's productions, practitioners' backgrounds and writings on theatre, there is a constant

coming together of different cultures; but the focus of this study is on how these meetings of cultures offered variety and novelty as much as similarity. Ritzer's notion of cultural convergence moves towards a fixed endpoint of sameness, whereas the essays in this collection mark processes of cultural convergence as continual interactions that are enlivened by *difference*. However, the volume has been envisioned primarily as a work of theatre history based on archival research; as such, it proceeds from newly acquired sources towards a broader contextualization and theorization of the dynamics at hand, rather than starting with a preconceived theoretical framework and attempting to make the results of archival research fit such a framework. The conception of cultural convergence that emerges from the research conducted in these essays thus allows for our contributors to employ a multitude of differing perspectives on the material and utilize a variety of theoretical concepts including transnationalism, internationalism, interculturalism and cosmopolitanism.

In employing such an approach, this volume is situated within a growing area of scholarship that moves away from the once dominant consideration of Irish theatre in postcolonial terms to an exploration of wider global contexts. In this sense, the essays in this collection build particularly on the work of Patrick Lonergan, Charlotte McIvor, Wei H. Kao and Jason King amongst others. The majority of scholarship in this area has tended to focus on Irish theatre from the 1960s to the contemporary, with some studies also looking at the work of seminal figures of the Irish revival such as Yeats, Synge and Gregory. These studies map onto the historical narrative that characterizes the period after the revival and before the economic expansionist policies of the 1960s as artistically fallow due to the cultural isolation of Ireland created by nationalistic policies of self-sufficiency and the rise of Catholic conservatism. What is unfortunately forgotten in this perspective is that the manifold creative efforts of the early Gate Theatre were energized by its commitment to cosmopolitanism. The present collection addresses this neglect by concentrating on the early history of the Gate Theatre from 1928 to 1960, which is remarkable for running counter to the narrow-minded xenophobic nationalism of the era. The book thus aims to be not only an important project of retrieval, but also an intervention in the study of Irish theatre that challenges prevailing historical periodization, charting a continuous narrative of fruitful artistic engagement with international cultures through the work of the Gate Theatre under the artistic directorate of Micheál mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards.

In establishing this scope, it must be noted that mac Liammóir and Edwards's creative energies became somewhat dissipated after the première of mac Liammóir's famous one-man show *The Importance of Being Oscar* (1960), with which he proceeded to tour the world, and Edwards's acceptance of the post of Head of Drama at RTÉ in 1961. It may be argued that the only productions of major significance that occurred at the Gate from this point until the death of its founding directors (1978 and 1982, respectively) were *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* by Bertolt Brecht (1961), and the celebrated early stagings of Brian Friel in the 1960s; however, these have been amply covered by other scholars, thereby marking 1960 as a natural terminus for this collection.

The next chapter of this book lays out in detail the views of Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir on theatre, and as such provides a general point of reference not only for the discussion of the Gate's productions further in the volume, but also of its artistic policies and the nature of its programming. Both Edwards and mac Liammóir wrote and gave talks about their work at the Gate on the one hand and about theatre's past and present on the other throughout their artistic careers, and their individual views have been reasonably well covered by scholars (for Edwards, see, e.g., Walsh; for mac Liammóir, see, e.g., Ó hAodha). However, their respective commentaries on theatrical styles, design, acting and directing have almost exclusively been discussed separately, as much of what mac Liammóir wrote about theatre was in the Irish language and has been available only to the speakers of the language. Joan FitzPatrick Dean and Radvan Markus's essay presents a pioneering collaborative study in which the writings of the original artistic directors of the Gate are treated in a comparative fashion, teasing out the dynamics of their perspectives, revealing the intersections of Edwards's reflections on continental experimentalism with mac Liammóir's vision on the prospects of Irish-language drama. It is in their reservations about realism, the desire for theatre to be truly theatrical and the wide-ranging internationalism with which they proceeded to develop Irish theatre that the confluence of opinion is most remarkable. Moreover, Dean and Markus's chapter illustrates that the influence of Edwards and mac Liammóir has been as significant in English-language theatre in Ireland as in theatre in the Irish language.

While the passion for, and fluency in, the Irish language on the part of Micheál mac Liammóir is a well-established fact, the figure of another Irish-speaking founder of Dublin's Gate Theatre, Gearóid Ó Lochlainn

(1884-1970), is familiar only to a small circle of Irish-language specialists. Pádraig Ó Siadhail makes a seminal act of reclamation in his chapter for this remarkable actor, playwright and theatre activist, outlining not only Ó Lochlainn's work for and at the Gate, but also his principal role in An Comhar Drámuíochta which the Gate hosted for four seasons in 1930-1934, his work as an actor, director and translator in further prominent Irish-language companies, and his appearance in plays in English in Dublin's other theatres, including the Abbey and the Pike Theatre Club. Moreover, Ó Siadhail highlights the international experience that Ó Lochlainn brought to the Gate, as his acting skills were honed in Denmark in the 1910s, first in silent films and later as a company member of the Alexandrateatret in Copenhagen. The notion of two gay Englishmen, an Irish-language revivalist and representative of Sinn Féin in Denmark, and a radical French socialist – the cabaret manager and actor Desirée Bannard Cogley – as the founding artistic figures of a major theatre project in Free State Ireland, dominated as it already was by the influence of the Catholic Church, might appear beyond the realm of the plausible, certainly from the perspective of earlier theatre historiography and its focus on the hegemonic. This unlikely confluence perhaps explains the disappearance of Ó Lochlainn and Bannard Cogley from the narrative of the Gate Theatre. However, Ó Siadhail's painstaking research on Ó Lochlainn's career, together with other recent pioneering essays, such as Elaine Sisson's work on Madame Bannard Cogley (Sisson 2018), complement Fitz-Simon's biography of Edwards and mac Liammóir in recovering the Dublin of the 1920s and 1930s in its extraordinary cultural variety and plasticity, thus adding to the magnificently evocative and no less surprising picture of the three preceding decades painted several years ago by Roy Foster in *Vivid Faces* (2014).

The next chapter represents another unique collaboration, this time between a theatre scholar and a professional genealogist. David Clare and Nicola Morris have plunged deep into archives in order to examine the mixed background of four prominent figures at the Gate: Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir, the theatre's 'leading lady' Coralie Carmichael, and the actor, costume designer and milliner Nancy Beckh. They bring to light much new information about the family histories, not least about the 'doctored' origins of mac Liammóir on the one hand and the so far largely unexplored background of Edwards on the other. Using a new interculturalist approach, they argue that the transnational roots of these artists – Scottish and Moroccan in the case of Carmichael, and

German and English in the case of Beckh – helped them create sensitive and subtle ‘intercultural performances’ in their work, rather than engaging them in shallow cosmopolitanism or cultural imperialism in Ireland.

Charlotte Purkis returns in her chapter to the origins of the Gate Theatre, Dublin. When the company was being set up, Edwards and mac Liammóir derived its name from Peter Godfrey’s Gate Studio Theatre in London. However, relatively little is known about the extent of their actual contact with the London Gate or the precise nature of inspiration by its work, and no critical consensus exists on the matter. Purkis meticulously examines the surviving evidence and in the process, she emphasizes the important role of another neglected figure, Velona Pilcher (1894-1952). A visual artist and Godfrey’s co-director at London at the time the Dublin Gate was founded, Pilcher was responsible for much of the programming, based on her extensive travels around Europe and in the US, where she went to see productions by a range of avant-garde theatre groups. It was the programming of the London Gate that arguably influenced Edwards and mac Liammóir in their early seasons the most, together with the shared desire to make a ‘theatrical’, as opposed to illusionist, theatre. Purkis goes on to explore two other related ventures, the Gate Theatre Studio founded in Hollywood in the US in 1943, and the Watergate Theatre Club, which opened in London in 1949. While Godfrey ran the former and Pilcher was involved in establishing the latter, the company members were otherwise mostly different from those at the parent theatre. Purkis uses this loose network to demonstrate how avant-gardist theatre operated for several decades of the twentieth century, with individual artists spreading the internationalist outlook and collaborative culture of little theatres across the Western world, representing a prime instance of cultural convergence.

The subsequent five essays focus on a range of mostly neglected productions by the Dublin Gate Theatre that highlight multiple cultural convergences in the theatre’s aesthetic, while also frequently teasing out the theatre’s politics, about which its directors were certainly (and very likely deliberately) less outspoken than about its artistic aims. Ondřej Pilný discusses the Edwards – mac Liammóir stagings of works by the brothers Čapek – *R.U.R.* (1921) by Karel and *Ze života hmyzu* (known to English speakers mostly as *The Insect Play*, from 1922) written in collaboration with his brother, the celebrated avant-garde painter Josef – and compares them with their original productions in Czechoslovakia. He demonstrates

how intuitively sensitive Edwards was as a director to the spirit of the original despite the significant discrepancies between the Czech and English play texts (as both Gate productions were based on flawed London adaptations, while *The Insect Play* was moreover commissioned from the *Irish Times* satirical columnist Myles na gCopaleen as an intentionally ‘Irish’ version). Pilný further argues that while the choice of *R.U.R.* for the Gate’s second season in 1929 was due to Edwards and mac Liammóir’s strong interest in formally innovative international drama and the global success of the play, the decision to stage *The Insect Play* – the work of two internationally known anti-fascists – in the throes of World War II (1943) amounted to taking a clear political stance in neutral Ireland. The respective plays were regarded as powerful allegories that spoke to the moment both in Czechoslovakia and in Ireland. However, the meaning of these allegories was constructed by critics and audiences in significantly different ways which had much to do with the atmosphere in the newly independent, optimistic and prosperous Central European republic on the one hand, and that of the also freshly independent but isolationist and economically still largely underdeveloped Irish state on the other.

Elaine Sisson’s chapter turns the attention to the fascination with the exotic and the oriental in the early decades of the Gate’s existence which, she argues, originated predominantly from popular cinema. Examining the 1931 production of Padraic Colum’s *Mogu of the Desert*, Sisson unravels how the stage and costume design for the play drew upon Hollywood cinematic versions of the West End hit musical *Kismet* by Edward Knoblock. She points out that *Mogu* was actually one of a number of productions by Edwards and mac Liammóir from this period that were preceded by film versions screened in Dublin cinemas, such as Wilde’s *Salomé* (1928), Goethe’s *Faust* (1930) and Ibáñez’s *Blood and Sand* (1933), demonstrating the keen awareness of their commercial potential on the part of the Gate’s directors. Moreover, Sisson shows how the design language of *Mogu* buys into contemporary fashion and middle-class bohemian fantasies of the Orient; as such, the design of the production may be interpreted as ‘quintessentially modern’, featuring a cultural exchange with a range of other forms, high and low: cinema, variety, literature, film magazines and fashion.

The 1934 production of Christa Winsloe’s *Children in Uniform* was also preceded by a successful screen adaptation but on this occasion, the film version – *Mädchen in Uniform* – would not be shown in Ireland because of its ‘difficult theme’ (Mandy 14). Yvonne Ivory demonstrates

once again the intuitive understanding of Hilton Edwards of an original play script to which he had no access: she elucidates how the director of the Gate production not only reinstated details of amorous relationships amongst the female characters that were suppressed both in the film version and in some of the earlier stagings of Winsloe's drama, but also subtly elaborated on the feelings between the central pair of the teacher and her pupil. Ivory's chapter unravels the remarkable feat that it was to stage *Children in Uniform* with its obvious lesbian subject matter in morally conservative Ireland, and more, to make it a success with audiences and critics alike. She points out that although the reviewers discussed the play mostly as a critique of authoritarianism, they clearly recognized the 'sexual dissidence'. It may be argued then that the Edwards—mac Liammóir production of *Children in Uniform* only confirmed that, in Ivory's words, “the Boys” had created a haven in the old Rotunda Assembly Rooms for queer expression’.

In the concluding chapter, Erin Grogan focuses on another unduly neglected figure at the Gate, Christine Longford. Grogan concentrates on three of Longford's history plays that were produced during World War II, *Lord Edward* (1941), *The United Brothers* (1942) and *Patrick Sarsfield* (1943), and demonstrates that despite their ostentatious setting in the past, Longford and the Gate were clearly commenting on the war and Ireland's neutrality by producing these works, defying the censorship in a way similar to the Edwards—mac Liammóir staging of *The Insect Play* discussed by Pilný. Moreover, Grogan argues that Longford's own complicated position as an Englishwoman living in Ireland during the war and being an Irish patriot at the same time made her scrutinize essentialist notions of identity in her war-time history plays, particularly in relation to women. Developing Cathy Leeney's recent work on the playwright and Gate manager (Leeney 2018), Grogan concludes that Longford engaged with the failure of the Irish state to deliver on the promises of gender equality by ‘placing women in central positions within politics, bypassing censorship and utilizing historical stories’ to critique the contemporary state of affairs.

This volume, then, presents a wide range of translations and transpositions, links and collaborations, engagements and contestations that underline the Gate Theatre's importance to facilitating cultural convergence, which are interpreted not as processes of homogenization or embodiments of a specific *telos*, but as the complex and versatile dynamics that enable cosmopolitan identity formation. In this sense, it is precisely

the Gate's ostensible specificity as a Dublin playhouse and its distinctiveness as an Irish theatre company that exemplify the paradoxical nature of cultural individuation, further highlighting what might be termed 'the constitutive multiplicity of Ireland's avant-garde national theatre' (van den Beuken 209).<sup>1</sup>

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## CHAPTER 2

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# The Internationalist Dramaturgy of Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir

*Joan FitzPatrick Dean and Radvan Markus*

Unlike other Irish theatre practitioners, Edwards and mac Liammóir combined their apprenticeships in London's professional theatres with a unique breadth of knowledge of world theatre. They devoted themselves to building audiences, principally to attract people to their Gate Theatre productions but also to inspire amateur actors and playwrights. From the late 1920s, they wrote and spoke about not just their theatre, but *all* theatre in order to inform potential audiences of the alternatives, both thematic and dramaturgic, to the Abbey Theatre. Edwards and mac Liammóir preached what they practised, specifically the possibilities that lay beyond the security of realism.

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The present chapter starts with a detailed assessment of Hilton Edwards's dramatic commentary. The analysis reaches from his early articles on dramaturgy in *Motley* right up to his encounter with the Berliner Ensemble in 1956 that influenced Edwards's most elaborate statement on drama, *The Mantle of Harlequin* (1958). An important part of Edwards's vision was his cosmopolitanism, his refusal to view drama within a restricted national framework. Nationality, on the other hand, was more important for the self-styled Irishman Micheál mac Liammóir. Hence, his writings about theatre often focus specifically on Irish drama. On close inspection, however, we find that his outlook did not differ much from Edwards's. Mac Liammóir's main concern was for Irish drama to absorb elements from abroad, to escape the straitjacket of Abbey realism and to become distinctive in a global context. Interestingly, his dramatic commentary was often related to the Irish language, as exemplified by his important essay 'Drámaíocht Ghaeilge san Am atá le Teacht' [Irish-language Drama in the Future] (1940, repr. 1952). This chapter, then, aims at revealing some of the reasoning that lay behind Edwards's and mac Liammóir's wide-ranging contribution to both Irish and world theatre.

## HILTON EDWARDS: THEATRICALIZING THE IRISH STAGE

Too often Hilton Edwards is depicted as if his greatest achievement was to realize his partner's visionary schemes. Archival sources confirm that Edwards certainly had immense talents for organizing even very large productions by meticulously setting down the lighting plots, production notes and precise blocking, but he was a less prolific writer than his partner, publishing only two monographs, *The Mantle of Harlequin* and a slim volume of poems, *Elephant in Flight* (1967), and occasional, sometimes unsigned, essays. From the time of the publication of *Enter Certain Players* in 1978, described by Peter Luke as a festschrift in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the Gate and published only months after mac Liammóir's death, Edwards has receded while mac Liammóir has come to dominate theatrical lore as well as scholarship. Perhaps because he did not write plays and memoirs, as did his partner, because he was less flamboyant, quotable and flashy, Edwards's theatrical commentary deserves closer attention.

In a 1968 biographical note, Edwards described himself as ‘an Englishman who started his acting career with the Charles Doran Shakespearean Company in England, with which he also toured Ireland in 1921, and continued with five years in the Old Vic company and occasional excursions into Opera’ (1968, 740). Born in 1903, Edwards began his theatrical apprenticeship at seventeen as an assistant stage manager and bit player in Charles Doran’s touring company, whose itineraries brought Shakespeare to Belfast, Dublin and Cork (Luke 84). From 1922 to 1925, Edwards worked at the Old Vic in London. Before joining Anew McMaster’s touring company, he also toured South Africa with Ronald Frankau’s cabaret company. Pine and Cave argue that ‘the main influence on Edwards was his Old Vic Shakespeare director, Robert Atkins. [...] Atkins wanted to restore the original Shakespeare texts to the repertoire and favoured a form of staging as close as possible to the Elizabethan’ (21). Throughout his career, Edwards would advocate for a stage freed from the proscenium frame – not least through the inventive ways he created and manipulated stage spaces<sup>1</sup> – and asserted that the staging must suit (and was subordinate to) the text. Hence, the Gate did not have a single distinctive style, but would range across the theatrical spectrum. Atkins’s influence on Edwards also appears in the choice of two of the early Gate’s wildly ambitious productions, *Peer Gynt* (1928) and Goethe’s *Faust* (1930), both of which had been staged by Atkins at the Old Vic in 1922 and 1923 (Rowell 105).<sup>2</sup> In 1927, Edwards and mac Liammóir met and began their partnership in Anew McMaster’s touring company where they acquired the first-hand skills, some of it surely grunt work, as lighting technician, costume maker, set painter, etc. Through their career, these skills were indispensable in their three Dublin theatres, first the Peacock, then the Gate and the Gaiety, as well as on their many tours.

The range of Edwards’s theatrical experience – in prestigious London companies and in provincial touring companies alike, in comedy and tragedy, in the classics and Shakespeare as well as modern plays – was further broadened by his interest in continental innovations, especially German expressionism both on stage and in film. Not least because they competed for audiences, film and theatre were often juxtaposed in Edwards’s commentaries. Just as the Gate absorbed and processed continental stage influences, most notably Leon Bakst, Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig,<sup>3</sup> it also drew upon the cinematic style that after World

War II became known as film noir, perhaps via James Whale's early films such as *Journey's End* (1930) or *Waterloo Bridge* (1931).

Edwards's commentary on drama reaches back to the late 1920s, when he and mac Liammóir created publicity materials for the Dublin Gate Theatre. They routinely published catalogues of their productions to remind audiences of their established record and versatility. Bulmer Hobson's numbered-edition *The Gate Theatre*, complete with essays by Edwards and mac Liammóir and numerous plates documenting costume and stage design, chronicled Gate productions through 1934. Edwards and mac Liammóir of necessity became spokesmen for the Gate, advocates for state subsidy of their theatre, publicists and promoters. In the late 1920s, Edwards and mac Liammóir launched a crusade to open a professional theatre in Dublin as an alternative to the state-subsidized Abbey – a crusade that was no less ambitious than their early productions. Not only did they stage challenging, controversial and even banned plays such as Wilde's *Salomé* in their first season, they also barnstormed to bring their message and appeal for an international theatre to Ireland. They worked to build support in the wider public by educating and tantalizing wherever they imagined they might reach potential audiences: on the radio, at Rotary Club meetings, among university dramatic societies, with Irish-language enthusiasts, in the amateur theatricals. And, of course, their theatrical ventures were not limited to the Gate Theatre. At the urging of Liam Ó Briain, mac Liammóir became the first producer at An Taibhdhearc in Galway and wrote and starred in its celebrated first performance of *Diarmuid agus Gráinne*. In 1931, Edwards and mac Liammóir returned to An Taibhdhearc with *Gaisge agus Gaisgid-heach*, mac Liammóir's Irish translation of Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. Edwards lent his technical expertise, particularly in lighting, to university drama societies for *Twelfth Night* in 1929 and *Epicene* in 1934. He sang at the concerts of the Gate Theatre orchestra. Both Edwards and mac Liammóir maintained a decades-long affiliation with provincial Irish amateur theatrics serving as adjudicators. They wrote, designed, acted and produced extravagant pageants for the 1929 Dublin Civic Week. In 1932, the Gate sponsored the first of its symposia. In what today would be called outreach to the community, they were as versatile and adaptable as they were ambitious. They were not only the producer and art director of the Gate Theatre as well as its leading actors, but they were also its principal

fund-raisers, its development officers and its audience builders. To fulfil all of these roles they were civic-minded, articulate and conspicuous. As two gay Englishmen openly living together in the Irish Free State, they counterintuitively sought not anonymity, but celebrity. And within five years they achieved it.

In 1929, for instance, Edwards and mac Liammóir lectured in Balbriggan, under the auspices of the County Dublin Libraries Committee. Edwards spoke first to contextualize the Gate and its goals by delivering ‘a comprehensive survey of the development of the drama through the ages’ (C.W.C.), a sweeping outline of theatre from the Greeks through the Renaissance to the bondage of realism in which theatre now languished that would become Edwards’s party piece. Mac Liammóir’s presentation in Balbriggan was expressly Irish in its orientation, detailing the Revival and the emergence of the Abbey, which ‘drew its inspiration from Ireland, was indeed, almost provincial in its nationalism, which had led it to debar all foreign dramatists from its boards and yet it was English in language’ (C.W.C.). As throughout their partnership, Edwards and mac Liammóir complemented one another in their presentation to the Balbriggan Rotarians. Much later in his career, in 1955, Edwards would say that when he founded the Gate he set out to create a theatrical conscience in Dublin (*Ricorso*).

With the founding of *Motley* under the editorship of Mary Manning in 1932, Edwards and mac Liammóir created another platform to advance the Gate, articulate its importance as an alternative to the Abbey Theatre and expand its audience base. *Motley*, which ran from March 1932 through May 1934, sought to garner publicity for the fledgling Gate but it was also educative – directed at a wide audience to cultivate a greater theatre literacy in the Irish public.

Edwards signed some of his essays, such as ‘Why the Dublin Gate Theatre’ and ‘The Theatre and the Plays’ in the first two issues. The November 1932 issue of *Motley* (1.6) contains another unsigned essay that is probably Edwards’s, ‘The Present Position of Irish Drama’, as well as ‘Hilton Edwards Replies to a Critic’ and the note ‘In future, Hilton Edwards will deal with any interesting points raised in the correspondence column of *Motley* in the form of conversations with the Editor.’ (12)

There seems little doubt but that Edwards was the anonymous author of some other important articles in *Motley* as well, especially in 1932 and 1933. The essay entitled ‘Realism’ in the December 1932 (1.7) issue, although unsigned, is most likely Edwards’s. The essay made plain the Gate’s view on realism: ‘we have presented comparatively few realistic plays, and have already avoided realism in production. We consider that realism has been badly overdone, and if the drama has a future that future will not be found to lie in a realistic direction’ (1932, 2). In it we hear Edwards’s voice, that of a twenty-nine-year-old who wrote with experience, authority and conviction: ‘Realism is not essential to drama [...] For the theatre is not life. No realistic trimmings will make it so.’ (2) (see, e.g., Figs. 2.1 and 2.2)

The newspaper advertisement for the November 1932 symposium at the Gate Theatre, ‘Should the Theatre Be International’, provocatively



**Fig. 2.1** Shelah Richards’s directorial debut: G.K. Chesterton, *Magic*, Gate Theatre, 1935. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)



**Fig. 2.2** James Elroy Flecker, *Don Juan*, Gate Theatre, directed by Hilton Edwards, Gate Theatre, 1933. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

combines Edwards's desire to simultaneously engage the Irish public and advance a transnational or anti-nationalistic theatre agenda. The symposium was advertised as 'The First of a Series of Open Discussions on matters of Theatrical Interest at which the public are invited to attend and to speak' ('Gate Theatre'). Indeed, the headline in the *Irish Press* article on the symposium, which attracted several hundred people, makes another of Edwards's intentions explicit: 'Critics Sought in Audience'. He actively and successfully cultivated not only Rotarians, but theatre enthusiasts who were or became playwrights and theatre critics: Dorothy Macardle, who was a theatre critic for the *Irish Press* in the 1930s and as committed to the Gate as she was to the Irish Republic; David Sears, who reviewed for the *Irish Independent*; or the editor of *Motley* and Gate playwright Mary Manning. The larger pattern of Edwards's encouragement of women playwrights, practitioners and actors included Christine Longford, of whom John Cowell writes that Edwards 'recognised hers as a talent neglected, undisciplined, capable of infinitely greater heights' (204); Ria Mooney, whose adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* were staged at the Gate in 1934 and 1944; Shelah Richards, whose

first experience as a director occurred at the Gate when she was thirty-one with G.K. Chesterton's *Magic* in 1935 (Fig. 2.2); Molly McEwen, the Scotswoman who designed for the Gate; and Maura Laverty, who wrote two of the Gate's most successful and often revived plays, *Tolka Row* and *Liffey Lane* (both 1951). These women were often recruited by Edwards to write their own plays, to move from acting to directing, from critic or novelist to playwright. In *The Mantle of Harlequin*, Edwards would return to the need to have theatre critics who could appreciate the aim of opening the Gate:

We wanted a first-hand knowledge of the new methods of presentation discovered by the Continental experimental theatres. We wanted ourselves to discover new forms. We wanted to revive, or at least take advantage of, and learn from the best of discarded old traditions. And, not least, we wanted to put at the disposal of our audiences all the riches of the theatre, past, present and future culled from the theatres of all the world and irrespective of their nationality. A theatre limited only by the limits of the imagination. (1934, 21)

From first to last, Edwards scorned the notion that theatre should be a vehicle for Irish cultural nationalism. His obituary in the *New York Times* quotes what some in Ireland might have seen as heresy in someone who sought (and eventually received) funding from the Irish government: 'I don't care about nationalism. I care about theatre.' (Blau 28) At the November 1932 symposium, Edwards stated that he would 'prefer that Irish drama was incidentally national rather than consciously national' (qtd. in Leeney 127). He is reported as telling the audience at the Gate symposium about internationalism that 'the time had come when realism in the drama might be abandoned' ('Critics Sought in Audience'). Even while it actively sought state subvention, the Gate, Edwards argued, 'is not a national theatre. It is simply a theatre. Its policy is the exploitation of all forms of theatrical expression regardless of nationality' (1958, 3). Thirty-two years later, Edwards was even more insistent on this point. The issue of nationalism and theatre in Ireland was, even in 1964, a point of contention when Ernest Blythe, whom Edwards would soon describe as 'the dictator of Abbey policy' (1968, 738) from 1942 to 1968, defended his policies at the Abbey by insisting that 'the facts of Irish history and the national theatre [...] required the foundation of a specialist theatre to

turn from the English stage and concentrate mainly on Irish drama' (qtd. in 'Abbey Had to Put on "Long Run" Plays'). The Dublin Gate Theatre Archive at Northwestern University holds Edwards's typescript 'Nationalism in Theatre Today', which made its way into a symposium at the Dublin International Theatre Festival in September 1964, with Edwards squaring off against Blythe. Edwards's dogged resistance to subordinating theatre to any nationalism and his long campaign to nurture an informed, even cosmopolitan theatre-going audience followed logically from his unrelenting critique of limiting theatre to a single style, especially realism.

One of Edwards's most extensive written statements appeared in 1934 as his essay 'Production' in Hobson's book about the Gate. Twice in his opening paragraphs, Edwards positions the Gate as 'International'. That internationalism was intrinsic to the Gate's versatility not only in the nationalities of its playwrights but also, and more importantly, in the many non-realistic dramatic styles that were brought to Dublin. In 'Production', he offers an account of the Gate's first seven seasons emphasizing the use of design, music, choreography and scenography suited to the demands of the plays produced. He begins with the spaces, first the Peacock and then the Gate at Parnell Square, the limitations of those spaces and the inventive ways in which those limitations were overcome. By the end of its first season, the Gate 'had presented six programmes each by a different method of production' (28). Anticipating Erika Fischer-Lichte's phrase 'the re-theatricalization of theatre' (72 *et passim*), Edwards describes the Gate's larger objective as 'the task of discovering for ourselves how the "Theatre Theatrical" was to be re-established' (22). As throughout his theatrical commentaries, Edwards is descriptive rather than theoretical, specific rather than obscure, practical rather than abstract. Whereas many might tell this story in terms of dramatic themes, acting and actors, reception or finance, Edwards discusses more mundane, operational issues: the lack of fly space, the wattage of the lighting, the available dimensions.

After World War II, Edwards and his partner floated plans for a new theatre building, subsidized by the state, that in some iterations was to cost £50,000. In the late 1940s they prepared yet another summary of their work over the previous twenty years, perhaps in support of their bid for a new theatre, that concluded with a question from the partners: 'is it worth the country's while to make some endeavour to maintain these two men in the style of work they have produced in the past and are still producing at present or is it as well to allow them to seek, as

so many members of their profession have been forced to seek work in London or New York?' (Edwards and mac Liammóir) At the very time that Edwards and mac Liammóir were appealing for government funding to subsidize a new theatre building in Dublin, mac Liammóir published an imagined dialogue between himself and Edwards, 'Three Shakespeare Productions: A Conversation', in the inaugural issue of *Shakespeare Survey* in 1948. Set on 'a stone terrace in Sicily', the urbane dialogue between the partners discussed the current state of Shakespearean productions with specific reference to the Gate's recent Shakespeare productions (*Anthony and Cleopatra* [1943] *The Merchant of Venice* [1939], and two versions of *Hamlet* [1932 and, in modern dress, 1941; see Fig. 2.3]). Mac Liammóir has Edwards rail against realism and the proscenium. Edwards is heard to say that 'a forgotten secret of Shakespeare's magic' is Elizabethan actors' 'direct contact with the audience' and that the proscenium is 'one of the



Fig. 2.3 Modern dress production of *Hamlet*, directed by Hilton Edwards, Gaiety Theatre, 1941. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

first things that, if I were able to build the theatre I should like, I would abolish' (89). Edwards's last word is his vision of an ideal theatre space that returns to the audience and its relationship to the performer:

It would be a manner further removed from that of the cinema than any used by the stage since the end of the seventeenth century, for its first principle would be that contact of the player with his audience that is the most precious quality of the living theatre, and that survives to-day, ironically enough, only in the music-hall; and whenever an actor had objected to the direct address, the direct appeal, the calling of the public into his confidence and the sharing with them of his secret, which is a vital part of the soliloquy, I feel it in my bones that what prompts his objection is the framed-in isolation of the proscenium and the footlighted stage that sets a barrier between itself and the auditorium, and that renders any attempt on the actor's part to break that barrier down a self-conscious and artificial process. (95)

His analysis is not without self-criticism, as elsewhere he admits that before 1940 the Gate productions 'perhaps over-stress[ed] the plastic and the visual in contrast to the Abbey's austerity' (1968, 741).

Throughout his life, Edwards travelled periodically to London, surely to see theatre, but in the mid-1950s also to 'climb the agents' staircases' to assess 'what possibilities remained for them outside of Ireland' (1957). In 1956, one of these trips to London brought Edwards to the Palace Theatre, where the Berliner Ensemble performed three of Brecht's plays: *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Drums and Trumpets* (Smith 315). At fifty-eight, Edwards was as experienced a theatre practitioner as might be found, yet he describes seeing the Berliner Ensemble's performance of Brecht as revelatory. For him, the Berliner Ensemble and Brecht 'reconcil[e] theatricality with realism, or at least with a form of realism' (1958, 68). From the mid-1950s, productions of Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1953), Anouilh's *The Lark* (1955), the modern dress *Julius Caesar* (1957; Fig. 2.4), *The Informer* (1958), Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1959), *Chimes at Midnight* (1960), Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1961), Sam Thompson's *The Evangelist* (1963), and of course, mac Liammóir's *The Importance of Being Oscar* (1961), *I Must be Talking to my Friends* (1963) and *Talking About Yeats* (1965) abandoned the painted canvas and wooden sets that Edwards had come to loathe. These amount to the majority of the new productions staged by Edwards – mac Liammóir productions over this twelve-year period. After seeing Brecht, Edwards

was far less willing for his company to pursue the pot-boilers, melodramas and crowd-pleasers that dot the Gate's repertory during the 1930s and 40s. Christopher Fitz-Simon writes that

Edwards had been seeking a simplified style of presentation for certain kinds of play which might be described for convenience as "epic", and had made use of his own ideas in this regard most tellingly in *Liffey Lane* and *St. Joan*. [...] [Edwards] sought to adapt [Brecht's theory of alienation] where and when appropriate, as in Sam Thompson's *The Evangelist* in 1959 and *St. Joan of the Stockyards* in 1961. (219)

Similarly, Edwards celebrated Thornton Wilder as one of the greatest living dramatists, in large measure because Wilder could create engaging theatre on what amounted to a bare stage (1958, 40).

Brecht's influence can also be seen in *The Mantle of Harlequin*, which grew out of two radio series by Edwards: 'My First Three Thousand Years in the Theatre' broadcast in August 1956 and then, in Spring 1957, 'Harlequinade', a series of six radio talks advertised as 'Advice to Amateurs'. Harlequinade was also the name given to the Gate's 1941 Christmas extravaganza. Harlequin was not only the figure depicted in the Gate logo but also the persona that Edwards would adopt in *The Mantle of Harlequin*. In May 1957, Patrick Sampson encouraged Edwards to produce a book based on the radio series (Sampson). Over the summer, Edwards did just that and initially entitled the book *Not in the Script*. Edwards may have seen publishing as a small source of badly-needed income. The manuscript was sent first to Longman in London and on 23 October 1957, John Guest, Longman's literary advisor, turned it down (Guest). It was published the next year by Progress House, which operated in Dublin between 1958 and 1968 and specialized in drama, publishing plays by John B. Keane, James Cheasty, M.J. Molloy and G.P. Gallivan as well as mac Liammóir's *All for Hecuba*. Although not lavishly produced, *The Mantle of Harlequin* was, for its day, lavishly pictorial. With a Prologue by mac Liammóir, the book ran to 127 pages and included plates and illustrations. It is hardly a theoretical analysis; in fact, Edwards candidly states, 'I have had little time for theories.' (1958, 8) Instead, he hopes to 'ease a few of the problems that beset my friends in the amateur theatre' (5).



**Fig. 2.4** Micheál mac Liammóir in the modern dress production of *Julius Caesar* A.D. 1957, directed by Hilton Edwards, Gaiety Theatre, 1957. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

*The Mantle of Harlequin* celebrates ‘the exploitation of all forms of theatrical expression regardless of nationality. It embraces, on occasion, that naturalistic play, but concern has always been with the whole gamut of the stage’ (3). Edwards begins by expressing disappointment with the state of theatre in general, measured not least by the loss of so many Irish stage actors to film and television: ‘at this moment, I can only think that, as history has a habit of repeating itself, a glance at what has gone before may hint to us how to re-construct to modern taste conditions under which great plays may again be written, great parts created and great actors made, and the living theatre retain its magic’ (10). With that he moves chronologically through twenty centuries of theatre history: Ancient Greek and Elizabethan theatre were unencumbered by elaborate stage mechanisms and the scenic demands of realism.

'When plays become too dependent upon spectacle or, at any rate, upon pictorial illustration', Edwards writes, 'they tend to be lethal to the stage' (16). Galloping through Greek, Roman, Spanish, Italian, French and English theatre across the ages, Edwards concludes that 'the finest plays of which we have record and the most memorable eras of great theatre and acting were all related to a stage of which the permanent setting was a feature and on which scenery played either a minor or, more often, no part at all' (19). In the nineteenth century, drama was crippled by 'dogma rather than belief [...] instead of a conflict between gods and men, the tragic play became a tussle between villains and virtuous maids' (26). Realism arose as 'a reaction against this noisy deluge of emotional platitudes [in] a movement [...] to banish theatricality from the theatre [...] and to supplant it by what was hoped to be reality' (27). His critique of realism is by now familiar but here further refined: he characterizes realism as a constriction of theatre because it offers no acknowledgement of the audience, no characters of monumental stature, and it imprisons theatre within the proscenium. The 'degree of realism with which the work will be performed [...] will control every detail of the production' (33), he argues. Realism is a 'cul-de-sac' (40) for Edwards; rigid adherence to it creates 'a stick-in-the-mud, playing-safe attitude [that] is artistic infanticide' (41). It 'spread[s] stagnation and death wherever it has established itself' (41). Discussing the twentieth century, Edwards turns to the dramatists in whom he places his hopes for theatre, including Bertolt Brecht, Thornton Wilder, Jean Anouilh and Denis Johnston. Edwards's telling of theatre history is as much concerned with staging and the conditions of performance and theatregoing as with the thematic preoccupations of the age. He argues that 'it is desirable to discover how *un-realistically*, how true to the theatre, a play can be treated and yet carry conviction and serve the author's intentions' (34). Edwards then assesses the role of the director, the actor, and, returning to his quest for insightful reviewers, the critic. Before the final section of *The Mantle of Harlequin*, 'Notebook', Edwards imagines conversations between Harlequin (Edwards's persona) and a curious, but inexperienced enthusiast. In six fanciful conversations, Harlequin first declines to collaborate directly, but then discusses the importance of space (stressing the ways in which the proscenium need not confine the production), of the director's 'pattern [that] will serve as a guide for every subsequent decision' (87), and of the actors' physical and vocal stamina.

In the mid-1960s, Edwards contributed several thousand words on ‘The Irish Theatre’ to a new edition of George Freedley and John A. Reeves’s *A History of the Theatre*. From its first sentence, which describes the Abbey as ‘succumbing to popular taste’ (1968, 735) even in the lifetimes of Yeats and Lady Gregory, to its conclusion that ‘Irish Theatre in 1966 is ill-defined in policy and faces problems which must be solved if it is not to suffer further diminution’ (749), Edwards’s essay offers an atypically immodest account of twentieth-century Irish theatre history *pas comme les autres*. Edwards writes that ‘by now [1968] the pioneer work of the Abbey, the Anew McMaster Company, and the Dublin Gate Theatre Productions had borne such fruit that a mushroom growth of small companies, each with their own varying but considerable merit, had sprung up’ (744). Edwards positions many of these companies as the inheritors of the Gate tradition, noting, for instance, that three of the original directors of Dun Laoghaire’s Globe Theatre Company ‘were ex-members of the Dublin Gate Theatre Productions’ (744). By cataloguing the numerous Irish playwrights who premièred plays with Phyllis Ryan’s Orion Productions and Gemini Productions, he documents what amounts to an indictment of the Abbey’s failure to produce worthy new Irish plays.

Two of the most insightful assessments of Edwards’s influence on Irish drama come from Thomas Kilroy, who in 1992 cited ‘two productions which ushered in contemporary Irish drama, Hugh Leonard’s adaptation of Joyce, *Stephen D* (1962) and Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964)’ (136). The former premièred at the Gate as a Gemini production directed by Jim Fitzgerald; the latter at the Gate as an Edwards – mac Líammóir production directed by Edwards. In 2007, Kilroy was more explicit about Edwards’s centrality, particularly in using Brechtian dramaturgy, in the ‘liberat[ion] of the Irish stage in the second half of the twentieth century from the constrictions of naturalism’ (2007, 605):

The Edwards-Mac Líammóir productions I did see included *St. Joan* (1953) with Siobhan McKenna, Mac Líammóir’s *Henry IV* by Pirandello (1955), *Julius Caesar* in fascist dress (1957), and, perhaps most important from my point of view, Edwards’s two Brecht productions, *Mother Courage* (1959) and *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1961). Edwards had been greatly taken by the Berliner Ensemble on its visit to London in 1956. Lacking that privilege, I, like many another young playwright, derived my sense of Brechtian stage technique at second hand, through the work of directors

like Edwards, [Tomás] MacAnna, and George Devine at the Royal Court in London. (2007, 603)

Kilroy's insightful commentaries notwithstanding, time and scholarship has not been generous to Edwards, certainly not as generous as to mac Liammóir. Rarely are his Oscar nomination for *Return to Glennascaul* (as Best Short Subject in 1953) or many film roles remembered. Despite his Englishness, his life-long refusal to affect any Irish trait, and his thinly-veiled threats to leave Ireland, Edwards was named the first director of drama for Teilifís Éireann in 1961 and very widely praised for the job he did. Richard Pine believed that when compared with mac Liammóir, Edwards 'was the superior actor' (163). It is difficult to overstate his range as a theatre practitioner, perhaps most cogently summed up by mac Liammóir:

It was he who introduced to Dublin methods of production, decor, 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. It is impossible to see the work of any of the younger directors without tracing a great portion of its inspiration to him. (1958, xv)

### MICHEÁL MAC LIAMMÓIR: INTERNATIONALIZING IRISH-LANGUAGE DRAMA

Micheál mac Liammóir's ideas about theatre developed in close alignment with those of his partner, Hilton Edwards. While Edwards's most comprehensive dramatic commentary can be found in *The Mantle of Harlequin*, the Irish-version of the same phrase, *Fallaing Arlaicín*, was used by mac Liammóir as the title of a 1945 essay in Irish which relates the early history of his engagement with the theatre (1952, 11-44). A more exact counterpart to *The Mantle of Harlequin*, however, is mac Liammóir's pamphlet *Theatre in Ireland*, first published in 1950 and subsequently in 1964 in an expanded edition, which is more than double the length. In terms of mutual influence, *The Mantle of Harlequin* and *Theatre in Ireland* seem to be closely intertwined – while the first edition of mac Liammóir's pamphlet preceded Edwards's book and might have inspired it to a certain extent, the second edition was published six years after it and, in direct imitation of *The Mantle of Harlequin*, includes a final

section of short notes on various topics, entitled ‘Reflections’ (1964, 74–83).

Among the many common points between mac Liammóir’s and Edwards’s text we may name the distrust of realism in drama, a keen sense for practical aspects of running a theatre, as well as a qualified admiration for W.B. Yeats and his theatrical experiments. The main difference lies in scope: while *The Mantle of Harlequin* takes a broad view of European theatre from Greek tragedy to Edwards’s present, *Theatre in Ireland* focuses, as the title suggests, on the history of the Irish theatrical scene. This can be attributed to a more general difference between the two partners. In contrast to the outspoken internationalist Hilton Edwards, mac Liammóir’s opinions about the theatre were often formed in relation to his assumed Irish identity. Mac Liammóir, however, was far from being an Irish chauvinist. At least since World War II, he shared Edwards’s distrust of nationalism. In 1951, mac Liammóir frankly admitted that ‘nationality is a miserable and unnecessary thing’ (1952, 290).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he did not propose a complete elimination of nationality. Fearful that stronger nations might dominate and eclipse weaker ones, mac Liammóir sought to cultivate such cultural diversity that would discourage bigotry: ‘none of them [the nations] needs to think that it is better than any other, or worthier, or more spiritual. There is difference among them: that’s all.’ (1952, 290)<sup>5</sup>

Just as in Douglas Hyde’s *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland* (1892), the principal mark of Ireland’s distinctiveness for mac Liammóir was the Irish language. In *Theatre in Ireland*, he argues that if Irish were lost, Ireland would be reduced, in cultural terms, to a mere region within the Anglophone world (1964, 76–77). However, the cultivation of national specifics was meaningful for him only if they facilitated interaction with the rest of the globe. Thus, he could paradoxically sound as a committed cultural nationalist and a cosmopolitan at the same time. In the aforementioned 1929 Balbriggan lecture, he, in the same breath, condemned the Abbey Theatre for refusing to stage any foreign plays and argued that ‘there could be no real Irish drama until playwrights and actors used Irish’ (C.W.C.). This seems contradictory until we realize that for mac Liammóir the use of Irish actually implied a greater openness to new ideas, not the opposite. As he argued concerning Edward Martyn’s relationship to the Irish language, ‘his interest in it had its usual unexpected and not generally recognised effect of awakening a desire in his soul for two things: the expansion of Irish expression beyond the limits

of peasant life, and the linking up of Ireland with European tendencies other than English' (1964, 18). It was clear that for mac Liammóir, the use of the Irish language in drama was a way to become 'incidentally national' rather than consciously staging nationality, as Edwards argued already in 1932 (qtd. in Leeney 127). The use of Irish would enable Irish playwrights to remain Irish without emphasizing other, often superficial or quaint, features of Irishness. For instance, the effort to articulate national identity through English led, according to mac Liammóir, to the creation of the 'Abbey Stage Irishman', a revision of the earlier Boucicault model that the Abbey strove so much to suppress (1964, 48). While these new iterations of the Stage Irishman (in the work of John B. Keane, for example) may 'have done no harm to dramatic development', they may mean that 'the nation itself becomes too satisfied with the charms these characters parade before them' (49).

Mac Liammóir's commitment to Irish spanned the whole of his artistic career. Having acquired it in his late teens, he soon became a writer in the language, publishing numerous essays, travel diaries, plays, short stories, as well as prose poems. As was already mentioned, he also became a crucial figure in Irish-language theatre, serving as the first producer of Galway's *An Taibhdhearc* (1928-1929), a guest producer of Dublin's *An Comhar Drámaíochta* (1930-1934), as well as an adjudicator at theatre competitions (see Ó Siadhail 69-70, 97-103; mac Liammóir 1952, 135-51). It is therefore not surprising that his dramatic commentary, while sharing the international outlook of Hilton Edwards as well as many of his opinions, was often focused specifically on Irish-language theatre.

The mission statement of *An Taibhdhearc*, printed in the programme for the opening night of *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* on 27 August 1928, reveals mac Liammóir's opinions about the independence of drama (and art in general) from nationalism. He argues that it is not enough if people go to the theatre merely out of their interest in the language revival: 'There is no theatre in this world worth calling a theatre that people attend merely because its productions are in this or that language.'<sup>6</sup> He complains that many people come to see Irish-language plays for patriotic reasons only and are not truly interested in the play, the acting, or the production. He expresses the hope that *An Taibhdhearc* would change attitudes of the public and audiences would attend 'because they simply want to go to the theatre and because it is natural in Galway to go to an Irish-language theatre just as it is natural in Seville to go to a Spanish one'.<sup>7</sup> For mac Liammóir, a key purpose of theatre is neither to express

national identity nor to contribute to the revival of a language but ‘to teach the public about beauty and the world through drama’ (1928).<sup>8</sup>

Mac Liammóir’s most explicit statements about drama can be found in the essay ‘Drámaíocht Ghaeilge san Am atá le Teacht’ [Irish-language Drama in the Future]. (1940, repr. 1952) As the date of the first publication reveals, the essay reflects mac Liammóir’s extensive experience with both Irish- and English-language productions, but looks to the future rather than the past. Remarkably, it combines an openness to international influences with a deep commitment to the revival of the Irish language and respect for the Irish indigenous traditions. The search for a synthesis of the ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘revivalist’ strands of his thinking was a consistent feature of mac Liammóir’s work, palpable also in his travel writing, polemic essays, as well as a number of his plays.

‘Drámaíocht Ghaeilge’ is conceived as an evaluation of various modes or styles available to an Irish-language playwright or producer. The first style that mac Liammóir considers is that of realism, the predominant mode of Irish-language productions at the time. Very much in tune with Edwards’s opinions, he criticizes realism in general terms as an outmoded form in the European context, stating that ‘the area that it owns is too narrow and limited even for experienced world languages, French and English’ (1952, 231).<sup>9</sup> In theoretical terms, mac Liammóir reveals realism as a mere technique, as a specific means of creating theatrical illusion, rather than a style that has some intrinsic connection to the outside reality (229). Just like Edwards, mac Liammóir also deliberately draws parallels with film, making an explicit connection between realism and the eye of the camera (229). The obvious conclusion is that realist theatre cannot compete with its ‘old enemy’ (*‘sean-námhaid’*), the cinema, in creating an illusion of verisimilitude (238) (Fig. 2.5).

Nevertheless, mac Liammóir does not limit himself to general considerations, but makes an argument why realism is distinctively impractical in the context of Irish-language drama. The whole essay starts with the following words: ‘Irish is not the usual language of cities in Ireland, but yet drama usually grows and develops in big cities.’ (227)<sup>10</sup> The realist convention implies that the play has to ‘grow out of the real life of the people [...] out of their speech, their customs, manners, opinions and beliefs’ (227).<sup>11</sup> As Irish is the community language only of a few limited areas on the western seaboard, however, adherence to realism in Irish-language drama would necessarily imply that the settings of the plays could never ‘leave Connemara, Kerry or Donegal’ (227).<sup>12</sup> And not only



**Fig. 2.5** Micheál mac Liammóir seen with expressionistic masks in *Yahoo* by Edward Longford, directed by Hilton Edwards, Gate Theatre, 1933. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

that, dramatists would be severely encumbered in terms of topic. With a touch of sarcasm, mac Liammóir expresses his fear of endless repetition of plays that concern themselves ‘with country kitchens, discussions of the price of fish, land disputes, the burst of laughter about the ugly old spinster and the arranged marriage, the lamentation about the lonely aging mother and her brave son fighting for the old country’ (227–28).<sup>13</sup> An Irish-language realist play about the life in an Irish city would not be credible as it would, in a sense, involve translation from English to Irish. In mac Liammóir’s words: ‘Thoughts translated from another language usually contain strange empty music, especially in the mouth of the actor, unless the play deals with life overseas and foreign customs.’ (230)<sup>14</sup> Moreover, mac Liammóir implies that adopting realism by Irish-language playwrights would be a mere imitation of the established ‘Anglo-Irish

school of realist drama' that he traces, with some simplification, from Synge and Lady Gregory to Sean O'Casey and Lennox Robinson (228).

The debate concerning the absence of Irish in the cities and its consequences for Irish-language literature had been already going on since the beginning of the revival. Conservative members of the movement advocated precisely for what mac Liammóir ironized – the limiting of Irish-language prose and drama to Gaeltacht topics (see O'Leary 1994, 401-20). Mac Liammóir, however, belonged to the 'progressive' group that aimed to overcome this impasse. Accordingly, the rest of his essay is devoted to outlining the various ways in which this goal could be achieved. The discussion starts with pondering on the relative advantages and drawbacks of 'romanticism', defined very broadly as setting the play far away or long ago. Mac Liammóir sees much more freedom in this style than in realism and gives a number of international precedents including plays by Goethe, Shelley, Turgenev and Shakespeare. (1952, 231) In the Irish context, he mentions W.B. Yeats, who was a life-long influence on mac Liammóir – Yeats's essay 'Ireland and the Arts' (1901), after all, significantly contributed to mac Liammóir's decision to assume an Irish identity (1952, 28; Ó hAodha 23-24).

A definite advantage of the romantic mode in the Irish-language context is its independence of language – as mac Liammóir describes it, it does not matter how much difference there was between the Italian of the original Romeo and the English of Shakespeare's hero (1952, 232). Romantic plays set in distant countries or in the legendary past could be therefore plausibly staged in Irish. He clearly saw this as a possible path for Irish-language drama as he repeated this particular piece of advice in the second edition of *Theatre in Ireland* (1964, 65). It should also be mentioned that this broad notion of romanticism is an important part of mac Liammóir's own writing: his first play, *Diarmuid agus Gráinne*, is entirely based on an early Irish saga, and he mixed elements from Irish legends with realism and the comedy of manners in his English-language plays *Where Stars Walk* (1940) and *Ill Met by Moonlight* (1946). The 'romantic', Celticist style is also much apparent in his illustrations and stage designs. Nevertheless, in 'Drámaíocht Ghaeilge' he expresses his dissatisfaction with his first play and admits that romanticism in drama is definitely out of fashion in international terms. From a more practical point of view, he also mentions the costliness of the technique in terms of stage design and costumes as an important limiting factor (1952, 232-33).

After romanticism mac Liammóir briefly discusses German expressionism, praising its focus on deep human psychology as well as its ability to express abstract concepts, such as the class struggle and the mechanization of life. He notes that no attempt has yet been made to introduce this technique on the Irish-language stage and urges playwrights and producers to engage with it. Nevertheless, he does not recommend expressionism as an ideal form as international fashions are changeable, and he would also prefer Irish-language dramatists to draw on indigenous as well as foreign models (233-36). Instead, he proposes a wholly new type of theatre, suitable to the Irish situation. This mode, called ‘drama of the imagination’ (*dráma na samhláiochta*) would, in mac Liammóir’s view, take advantage of local cultural resources, namely traditional storytelling and placename lore (237-38). He does not describe it in any great detail, nor mention any existing models apart from unspecified plays by Douglas Hyde and Patrick Pearse (238). Instead, mac Liammóir illustrates his idea by the following example: ‘I would like to see an Irish-language play in which an actor would come out on an empty stage and say to the audience, just as a storyteller would tell the neighbours at the fireside: This is the King’s golden palace, these are the gates of paradise and of hell.’ (237)<sup>15</sup> Notably, this description matches important opinions expressed by Edwards. In *The Mantle of Harlequin*, Edwards praises the simplicity of the stage in Greek and Elizabethan drama (1958, 14, 18) and criticizes the overemphasis on the visual in realist productions (29). He also suggests that theatre should provoke imagination on the part of the audience (30). Despite the lack of concrete details, mac Liammóir’s hopes for the new form were high: ‘This Irish talent of imagination could create drama and a dramatic form in this country that could, maybe, if applied in the right way, influence world drama just as Greek drama influenced Europe a long time ago.’ (237)<sup>16</sup>

However exaggerated this statement might sound, it is significant that mac Liammóir does not see, in the manner of more conservative revivalists, Irish-language literature as a means of protecting or even expressing the putative ‘Gaelic soul’ (O’Leary 1994, 19-38). Rather, he imagines it as something that could be potentially offered to the world. The inspiration for this idea might have come again from W.B. Yeats, who, in his essay ‘The Celtic Element in Literature’, writes about Irish literature as a possible source of enrichment for world culture (Yeats 293-95). The crucial difference between the two, however, is that while Yeats mentions only the literary tradition of the past, mac Liammóir talks about a *future*

dramatic movement. The concept of the drama of the imagination seems to be an answer to a more general question, posed by mac Liammóir in *Theatre in Ireland*: how to find a style that would escape the realistic trap, could compete with the cinema, and at the same time would ‘convey those qualities of clarity, sincerity, passion, humour, and warmth so often lacking in experimental dramatic writing’ (1964, 39). In national terms, he was looking for an expression that ‘apart from its Irishry’ would ‘have the intrinsic values of universal discovery’ (41).

In his considerations, mac Liammóir did not overly concern himself with the most pressing problem of Irish-language theatre of his time (or indeed of any time including the present): the difficulties of attracting a large enough audience. This was, after all, the main reason why An Taibhdhearc never quite fulfilled the bold hopes expressed in its mission statement and had to rely mainly on the enthusiasm of amateur actors and a meagre state subsidy. While many Galwegians certainly knew Irish, it was a second language for most of them and they lacked the high comprehension skills to truly enjoy an Irish-language play. When Walter Macken, one of mac Liammóir’s successors as producer of An Taibhdhearc, reminisced about a 1933 performance where he made his debut as actor, he noted that there were hardly more than twenty spectators and bluntly explained why: ‘The common people were not yet keen on any theatre, not to mind a theatre putting on plays in what to them was a foreign language.’ (Macken 115) But in 1940, mac Liammóir could still envision the scarcity of theatregoers as something that could be turned to advantage. With no established audiences, the playwrights and directors would not have to stoop to popular taste and would be able to educate whatever public there was according to their own wishes. In mac Liammóir’s own words:

Ireland is the only country in Europe today, I would say, with a language that its own people are so ignorant of that one does not need to kneel before them in order to produce a good play in it. The people? And their demands? We don’t have any audience as yet, as the word is understood in other countries. We are slowly building one. Let us start immediately to educate whatever audience there is to get interested in things we place hope in, in things that we believe that are good. (1952, 239-40)<sup>17</sup>

Mac Liammóir was perhaps overly optimistic about the future of Irish-language drama, which, due to the small size of audiences coupled

with the difficulty of recruiting actors with sufficient language skills, has to this day remained a minority genre even within the Irish-language context. This unfavourable situation undoubtedly influenced mac Liammóir himself – apart from *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* and two short, less significant early pieces, he actually never wrote another play in Irish.<sup>18</sup> Traces of the drama of the imagination can be seen, however, in the most successful of his shows, *The Importance of Being Oscar* (1960). In the play, conceived as a monologue, mac Liammóir himself assumes the pose of the storyteller, works with a very limited set of props and depends much on the imagination of the audience. Arguably, a tentative link can be made between *The Importance of Being Oscar*, Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* (1979) and the boom of Irish monologic plays in the 1990s by authors such as Dermot Bolger and Conor McPherson. And indeed, numerous reviewers made a connection between these plays and the Irish tradition of storytelling (Wallace 45), which chimes with mac Liammóir's ideas about the drama of the imagination. Moreover, many of these monologic plays were successful internationally, which can be seen, from a certain angle, as a partial fulfilment of mac Liammóir's hopes.

Questions of audience aside, the ideas contained in the essay did have a definite impact on subsequent Irish-language theatre. Successful Irish-language productions have been rare, but it is remarkable how many of those that did enjoy success deliberately broke away from the rules of realism. This includes the most popular Irish-language play ever, Mairéad Ní Ghráda's *An Triail*, whose 1964 production under Tomás Mac Anna employed elements of the morality play and Brechtian theatre (O'Leary 2017, 64). The non-realist tradition has continued ever since, with major playwrights taking inspiration from European stages, including expressionism as advised by mac Liammóir, but also the theatre of the absurd and other styles (O'Leary 2017, 44, 52, 95, 284 *et passim*). Among the most recent non-realistic productions we may count Biddy Jenkinson's *Mise Subhó agus Maccó* (2001), which combines social commentary on the issue of homelessness with reference to a number of literary works, such as *Buile Suibhne*, Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and Pearse's 'Mise Éire'. Another interesting example is Dave Duggan's sci-fi play *Makaronic* (2014), set in the distant future and combining lines in Irish, English and a number of other languages including an invented one, Empirish. As if in order to make a full circle back to mac Liammóir's first play, *Makaronik* uses echoes of the Diarmuid and Gráinne story in

a dystopic setting.<sup>19</sup> Both plays were produced by the innovative Belfast theatre company Aisling Ghéar.

Turning to explicit dramatic commentaries, one may note that the above-mentioned director Tomás Mac Anna thought very much in the manner outlined by mac Liammóir. He argued that instead of relying on props, ‘imagination [should] rule the acting’.<sup>20</sup> He also deplored the fact ‘that drama in Irish was too influenced by the realistic style of the Abbey’ and suggested that it should rely ‘more on storytelling and verse-making and exaggeration’ (126).<sup>21</sup> Even the wording here is surprisingly similar to mac Liammóir’s ‘Drámaíocht Ghaeilge’, which makes a direct connection between the drama of the imagination and traditional Irish verbal arts. And as Ian R. Walsh has shown, Mac Anna’s rejection of realism did not have impact only on the staging of Irish-language plays, but influenced the whole style of the Abbey Theatre when he became its artistic director in 1966 (2016, 448).

Similarly, one of the most original Irish-language playwrights (not to mention his achievements in poetry and prose), Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, advocated in 1964 the abandonment of the Abbey realistic style. He called it, quite sarcastically, ‘the Dresser Style’ (*an Stíl Dhriosúrach*) and described it in similar terms as mac Liammóir before him:

We all have seen it. The curtain rising. Kitchen. A sigh from the audience, ‘Here we go again!’ A fire, every pot, every hook, and every sod of turf in proper order. Pictures, St. Patrick, my grandfather, the Sacred Heart and my aunt Eileen from Boston, Mass. And the dresser, and all the plates, the little jugs, the mugs, the dishes in order, every cup on its hook without a single cup out of place. (43)<sup>22</sup>

Instead, Ó Tuairisc called for a thorough simplification of the stage. Just as in mac Liammóir’s essay, the key concept for Ó Tuairisc is imagination, which gets all but stifled by the realistic trappings, inherited from the Victorian era:

Drama relies on imagination. The director must awaken the imagination of the audience from the moment the curtain is raised. If that stirring of the imagination is not accomplished, the poor play will remain on the floor of the stage and the miracle of the theatre will not be effected in the hearts and heads of the audience. (42)<sup>23</sup>

One may see from the above that mac Liammóir's ideas about the theatre resonated widely both in the context of Irish- and English-language drama. Perhaps his most remarkable achievement was that he absorbed the internationalist impulse from Hilton Edwards as well as from his own experience and applied it to the specific Irish situation. In this way, he showed that cosmopolitanism and revivalism, at least in the field of theatre, are not mutually exclusive and that their combination, if achieved in an inventive way, may be artistically successful.

## CONCLUSION

Edwards and mac Liammóir aspired to see Irish audiences that embraced international theatre and international audiences that embraced Irish theatre. Their writings on theatre consistently reflect these ambitions, as do their many tours in Ireland and abroad. At the end of their lives, Edwards and mac Liammóir enjoyed their greatest, perhaps only, period of financial security with the international success of mac Liammóir's lucrative one-man show, *The Importance of Being Oscar*. Edwards directed it, as well as several of Brian Friel's early plays: *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *Crystal and Fox* (1968), and *Lovers* (1969).

Mac Liammóir died in 1978; Edwards, four years later. One measure of their legacy is that the internationalist dimension of their commentaries on theatre was realized in Irish productions that pursued 'the limits of the imagination' (Edwards 1934, 21). The year after Edwards's death, Patrick Mason staged the hugely inventive production of Tom MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* (1983) for the Abbey. Two years later, Druid's landmark production of Tom Murphy's *Bailegangaire* was directed by Garry Hynes. Irish theatre in the 1990s was distinguished by productions such as Mason's direction of Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), Hynes's direction of Vincent Woods's *At the Black Pig's Dyke* (1992) and Macnas's adaptation of the *Táin* (1992). Had Edwards and mac Liammóir lived into the 1990s and the twenty-first century, they surely would have been gratified to see Irish theatre represented on international stages by plays as various as those in Friel's oeuvre, Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), or Enda Walsh's *Once* and *Misterman* (both 2011) and by the work of companies as imaginative as Macnas and Druid. Without any doubt, Edwards's and mac Liammóir's wide-ranging influence contributed to this remarkable international success.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

1. In his essay ‘Hilton Edwards as Director’, Ian R. Walsh provides an excellent summary of Edwards’s hallmark directorial interventions: the deft and swift transitions between scenes, the creation of ‘fluid stage space’ and silhouette effects, massed choreography, choral speaking, the ‘Ich performance’ (2018, 40).
2. Both productions of *Faust* used the ‘simplified’ version by Graham and Tristan Rawson. Ian R. Walsh points to the influence of Peter Godfrey at the [London] Gate Theatre by noting a number of plays performed at both theatres. Walsh also writes that ‘Edwards even went so far as to reproduce Godfrey’s staging of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* (1922) in 1929.’ (2018, 31-32)
3. Mac Liammóir wrote in his autobiography: ‘I determine[d] to break with acting [he had been a child actor] and to paint; I would design for the stage perhaps; I would become a Bakst, a Gordon Craig, and Adolphe Appia; I would save Irish theatre from a photographic realism.’ (1947, 2) See Pine and Cave for Craig’s influence on Edwards.
4. ‘gur bocht neamhriachtanach an rud an náisiúntacht’. All translations from Irish in this chapter, unless noted otherwise, are by Radvan Markus.
5. ‘nach gá d’aois cheann orthu cheapadh go bhfuil sé níos fearr ná an ceann eile, ná níos fiúntaí, ná níos spioradálta. Tá difríocht eatarthu: sin an méid’.
6. ‘Níl taibhdhearc sa domhan seo ar b’fhiú taibhdhearc thabhairt uirri a mbíonn daoine ag dul chuici ar an ábhar gur sa teangain seo nó sa teangain úd bhíos a cuid dramaí d’á léiriú’.
7. ‘gur mian leo dhul chuig an taibhdhearc, agus i ngeall ar gur rud nádúrtha an rud é, i nGaillimh, bheith ag dul chuig an taibhdhearc sa nGaedhilge, díreach mar is nádúrtha, i Sebhilla, dhul chuici sa Spáinnis’.
8. ‘eolas ar an áilneacht is ar an saol thabhairt don phobal thríd an dráma’.
9. ‘An dúthaign atá aige tá sí ró-chúng ró-theoranta fiú amháin do theanganacha oilte an domhain mhóir, an Fhraincis nó an Béarla’.
10. ‘Ní hí an Ghaeilge gnáth-theanga na gcathrach mór in Éirinn, agus mar sin féin is sna cathracha móra de ghnáth thig fás agus borradh i saothrú na drámaíochta.’
11. ‘Ní mór don dráma [...] fás as fiorshaol an phobail. Ní mór dhó fás as caint an phobail sin, as nóna an phobail sin, as a gcuid béas is tuairimí is creideamh’.
12. ‘gan dul amach as Conamara go deo, nó as Ciarraí, nó as Tír Chonaill’.
13. ‘leis an gcistinigh faoin tuaith, le comhrá faoi phraghas an éisc, le clampar faoin talamh; an scairt gháire faoin tsean-mhaighdin ghránna agus an cleamhneas, an racht goil faoin máthair aosta uaignigh agus a mac calma ag troid ar son na seán-tíre’.
14. ‘bíonn ceol aisteach folamh ag baint le smaointe haistríodh ó theangan eile de ghnáth, mórmhór i mbéal an aisteora, sé sin mura mbíonn an

dráma ag baint le saol thar lear agus le béasa eachtrannacha'. The quote does not imply that mac Liammóir was against translation as such – he translated his debut play *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* into English and while engaged in An Taibhdhearc, translated two plays into Irish (Bateman). He also promoted translation as a means of enriching Irish-language literature (1917, 1922).

15. ‘Ba mhaith liomsa aon dráma Gaeilge amháin fheiceáil ina mbeadh aisteoir ag teacht amach ar an stáitse folamh agus ag rá leis an lucht éiste, faoi mar a déarfadh seancháí leis na comharsain cois na tine: Seo é pálas órtha an Rí, nó, Seo iad geataí Pharrthais agus Ifrinn’.
16. ‘D’fhéadfadh an cháilfocht seo na samhlaíochta in Éirinn dráma agus foirm dhrámaíochta chumadh sa thír seo a d’fhágfadhbh a rian, b’fhéidir, ar dhrámaíocht an domhain iomláín dá bhfostófaí i gceart í, faoi mar a d’fhág drámaíocht na Gréige a rian ar an Eoraip fadó’.
17. ‘Sí Éire an t-aon thír san Eoraip inniu, déarfainn, a bhfuil teanga aici a bhfuil a muintir féin chomh aineolach uirthi nach gá di dul ar a dhá glúin rompu más mian léi dráma maith léiriú sa teangain sin. An pobal an ea? Agus an Rud Theastaíos ón bPobal? Níl aon phobal againn go fóill, mar tuigtear an focal i dtíortha eile. Táimid go mall ag iarraidh ceann dhéanamh dúinn féin. Féachaimis chuige mar sin go dtosnóimid láithreach ag oliúint a bhfuil againn cheana chun spéis agus suim chur sna rudaí a bhfuil dóchas againn féin astu, sna rudaí a chreidimid bheith go maith’. Similar opinions are expressed also in the essay ‘An Litríocht Nua agus an Pobul’ (1922, 28-29).
18. The plays in question are the unpublished one-act comedy *Lúlú* (1929) and the children’s play *Oidhche Bheatlaine* (1932).
19. The script for the play was later converted into a novel, published in 2018.
20. ‘an tsamhláiocht a bheith mar mháistir ar an stáitsíocht’.
21. ‘go raibh an drámaíocht Ghaeilge rómhór faoi stíl réadúil sin an Abbey’; ‘níos mó ar an scéalaíocht agus an rannaireacht agus ar an áifeis’. Translation from O’Leary 2017, 38.
22. ‘Chonacamar go léir é. An Brat ag éirí. Cistin. Osna ón lucht éisteachta, ‘*Here we go again!*’. Tíne, gach pota, gach crúca agus gach fód móna i gcaoi agus i gceart. Pictiúir, Naomh Pádraig, mo sheanathair, an Croí Rónaofa, agus m’aintín Eibhlín ó Bhoston, Mass. Agus an driosúr, na plátaí, na crúiscíni, na mugáí, na miasa go léir in eagair, gach cupán ar a chrúca, gan bun cupán amach ná barr cupán isteach’. Translation of the passage from ‘Tíne’ onwards is from O’Leary 2017, 123.
23. ‘Braitheann an drámaíocht ar an tsamhláiocht. Ní mór don léiritheoir samhláiocht an lucht éisteachta a mhúscailt ón nóiméad a ardaítear an brat. Mura ndéantar an bíogadh samhláiochta sin, fanfaidh an dráma bocht ar urlár an ardáin agus ní chuirfear míorúilt na hamharclainne i bhfeidhm ar chroí agus ar cheann an lucht éisteachta’. Translation from O’Leary

- 2017, 123. Also the playwright Críostóir Ó Floinn, in the preface to the published play *Cad d'Imigh ar Fheidhlimidh*, explicitly evokes the connection between imagination and traditional storytelling, postulated by mac Liammóir (O'Leary 2017, 267).
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## CHAPTER 3

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# Gearóid Ó Lochlainn: The Gate Theatre's Other Irish-Speaking Founder

*Pádraig Ó Siadhail*

## INTRODUCTION

Micheál mac Liammóir's name springs to mind immediately when one considers the Gate Theatre's association with the Irish language. However, Gearóid Ó Lochlainn, another of the Gate's four founders and a prominent figure in Dublin's theatre community from the 1920s to the 1960s, was also an Irish speaker.<sup>1</sup> In their appreciation of Ó Lochlainn after his death in 1970, Hilton Edwards and mac Liammóir acknowledged him as a founding member who served on the Gate's board until 'other activities forced him to retire', and that 'for many years as an actor [he] served as a cornerstone in its company'. They recalled Ó Lochlainn 'as a good friend, courteous, tolerant, and always with dignity and a gentle sagacity'. But they hinted at unknowns in his life story: 'Like many stage people, his off-stage life was private and inviolate, and we knew little of it beyond the fact that he had a charming Danish wife and a family; that he had once been sent to Denmark on some Government mission and

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that, while he was there, he had acted in the Royal Alexander Theatre in Copenhagen.' (1970)

The appreciation lauded Ó Lochlainn but, as we will see, it contained factual errors. More pertinently, in not citing examples of Ó Lochlainn's input to the Gate project in its early years as a founder and one of the original Board directors, it indirectly strengthened the perception that Ó Lochlainn's role was minor and marginal. That may have been a deliberate ploy on mac Liammóir's and Edwards's part as they did not always acknowledge the contribution of the fourth co-founder, 'Toto' Cogley, nor that of Lord Longford, who saved the theatre from bankruptcy in 1930 and remained a key benefactor (Fitz-Simon 218; Cowell 198). Their portrayal of Ó Lochlainn also dovetails with studies of English-language theatre in Ireland, including books about the Gate, which mention Ó Lochlainn only in passing (Clare et al.; Cowell; Hobson; Luke; Pine).

In reality, as mac Liammóir in particular must have known, Ó Lochlainn had published during his lifetime an array of theatre-related writings, primarily in Irish. In multiple series of autobiographical articles, Ó Lochlainn recounted his formative years as an actor in amateur productions in Irish and English in early twentieth-century Dublin, his move to Denmark in 1907 at Arthur Griffith's behest to promote the Irish separatist cause, his marriage and his experiences in the silent film industry in Denmark. Ó Lochlainn's memoirs touch on how British authorities blocked his travel to Ireland in the post-Easter Rising period, his service in Denmark on behalf of Dáil Éireann during the Irish War of Independence and his eventual return home in 1921. Regrettably, Ó Lochlainn never completed his memoirs covering his time as a company member at the Alexandrateatret in Copenhagen and his contributions to Dublin Irish-language and English-language theatre projects, from An Comhar Drámuíochta (1923-1942) to the Pike Theatre Club and An Damer in the 1950s.

Apart from his memoirs, Ó Lochlainn discussed aspects of post-1922 Irish-language theatre in newspaper articles and letters in Irish and English. He authored a short book, *Ealaín na hAmharclainne* [The Art of the Theatre] (1966), based on another series of published articles, exploring the origins of classical drama and the story of theatre in Ireland, thereby permitting further autobiographical reminiscences. Furthermore, many of Ó Lochlainn's Irish-language stage plays and several of his translations were published. Since 1970, a lengthy biographical entry in *ainm.ie*, An Bunachar Náisiúnta Beathaisnéisí Gaeilge [The National

Irish-language Biographical Database], and critical discussions by Philip O'Leary in English (2004), and by this author in Irish (Ó Siadhail 1993; Ó Siadhail 2007) of *An Comhar Drámuíochta*, have detailed Ó Lochlainn's extensive contribution to Irish-language theatre.

As such, Ó Lochlainn is a well-documented individual in Irish-language theatre studies. Accordingly, this chapter aims to fill lacunae in the story of the Gate Theatre and in Irish theatre studies in English by weaving together the following strands: a biographical sketch of Ó Lochlainn including his time in Denmark; a discussion of his role in *An Comhar*, which the Gate Theatre hosted for four seasons; a summary of what we know about his involvement with the Gate as founder, director and actor; a survey of his plays in Irish including his translations which, in introducing Dublin's Irish-language theatregoers to world drama, complemented the mission of the Gate; his post-Gate career; and an assessment of Ó Lochlainn's theatre career in general terms.

## FORMATIVE YEARS

Gearóid Ó Lochlainn – or Gerald Patrick O'Loughlin – was born in Liverpool on 25 April 1884 to Irish-born parents, Elizabeth and Patrick O'Loughlin (Denmark Census 1911).<sup>2</sup> The family returned to Ireland when Ó Lochlainn was an infant, and he and his Irish-born siblings were raised in Dublin and Tullamore, in King's County (later Offaly). Ó Lochlainn came from an advanced Irish nationalist family. His Wexford-born father was the 'centre' – the leader – of a Dublin-based 'circle', a unit in the secret revolutionary organization, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) (Ó Lochlainn 1968e, 24). The 1901 census return for the family in Tullamore lists Patrick and Gerald as clerks for a wholesale drinks company (Census of Ireland 1901). Unlike other family members, both self-identified as Irish-speaking.

Ó Lochlainn moved from Tullamore to Dublin in 1903 and soon began a three-year stint as a clerk in the head office of *Conradh na Gaeilge* (the Gaelic League). He became acquainted with leading figures in the Irish-language movement, including the League's President, Douglas Hyde, and P.H. Pearse, the editor of its weekly, *An Claidheamh Soluis*. Through *Conradh na Gaeilge*, Ó Lochlainn had access to a network of social and cultural activities. He taught Irish at a League branch in Marino, Dublin. He played hurling with a Gaelic Athletic Association club. His family connections and cultural and sporting activities made him

an ideal recruit for the IRB, which he duly joined (Ó Lochlainn 1968e, 24). But his primary focus after work was theatre.

Theatre in early twentieth-century Dublin was a lively and contested space as Irish nationalists, ranging from physical-force republicans to cultural activists, had competing visions of the role of theatre in Ireland's political evolution and intellectual renewal. As Ó Lochlainn was about to take his first steps on the stage, those visions clashed in 1903 when Dudley Digges and his wife, Máire T. Quinn, parted company with W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and the Irish National Theatre Society in protest against Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen* (Hogan and Kilroy 1976, 48-49). Later that year, in preparation for Cumann na nGaedheal's Samhain Festival and its Robert Emmet Centenary, Digges assembled a troupe to stage Henry Connell Mangan's *Robert Emmet* in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin. Billed both as the National Players' Society (NPS) and the Cumann na nGaedheal Theatre Company, the affiliation persisted as NPS became a branch of Cumann na nGaedheal, the precursor of Sinn Féin in 1905 ('Samhain: A Week').

Seán Connolly, a young actor who captained Ó Lochlainn's hurling team, invited him to audition for a minor Irish-speaking role in *Robert Emmet* (Ó Lochlainn 1962a, 9-10).<sup>3</sup> Illness delayed Ó Lochlainn's stage debut but he soon appeared in the company's première of *Pleusgadh na Bulgóide* [The Bursting of the Bubble], Douglas Hyde's satire on Trinity College Dublin, on 3 November 1903. From then until 1907, Ó Lochlainn remained active in NPS, which survived Digges's and Quinn's departure to the United States. The highpoint for Ó Lochlainn was the staging of his play, *The Rapparee*. NPS presented the one-act tale of romance, murder and revenge set in post-Williamite War Ireland as part of a triple bill in the Queen's Theatre on 18 March 1907 (Hogan and Kilroy 1978, 187-88). Ó Lochlainn later remarked that the play's melodrama matched the Queen's reputation as the natural home for melodramatic fare in Dublin (1962c, 4). Not only was *The Rapparee* his first play, it was his only one in English.

From 1905 to 1907, Ó Lochlainn was a member of the cast specially assembled to stage Irish-language plays at An tOireachtas, Conradh na Gaeilge's annual literary and cultural festival held in Dublin. His life changed dramatically in late summer 1907 when Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin, approached Ó Lochlainn about a position teaching English in a Berlitz Language School in Aarhus in Denmark.

According to Ó Lochlainn, Sinn Féin used Berlitz's demand for English-language teachers as a device to station Sinn Féin representatives abroad to promote the Irish separatist cause. Griffith wanted Ó Lochlainn to replace Michael MacWhite, later a senior figure in the Irish diplomatic service (Ó Lochlainn 1962c, 22).<sup>4</sup> For Ó Lochlainn, this was a chance to see the world beyond Ireland. He enthusiastically accepted the offer.

## DENMARK

Ó Lochlainn arrived in Aarhus in autumn 1907 and spent two years teaching there before partnering with a German to establish a language school in Odense on the island of Funen. Ó Lochlainn's personal circumstances rapidly changed. On 15 January 1910, he married a young local woman, Rita Ingeborg Bøstrup, in Aarhus (Denmark Marriages 1635–1916). Born in Mendoza, Argentina in 1890, Ingeborg Bøstrup was one of Ó Lochlainn's early students in Aarhus. Ingeborg joined her husband in Odense, while Seán Ó Duinn, another Sinn Féin placeman, succeeded Ó Lochlainn in Aarhus. But as Ingeborg was unsettled, Ó Lochlainn persuaded Ó Duinn to transfer to Odense, with Ó Lochlainn returning to the Aarhus school in 1911. The following year, Ó Lochlainn successfully applied to teach English in an academy in Copenhagen. He and his wife settled in the Danish capital in September 1912 (Ó Lochlainn 1968a, 9), though he left the academy to teach English privately about a year later (Ó Lochlainn 1968c, 19).<sup>5</sup>

By 1914, Ó Lochlainn was integrated socially and linguistically in Denmark. He did no acting during his early years there but regularly attended plays and was impressed by the high status and vitality of Danish theatre. There is no evidence that he undertook serious propagandistic work for Sinn Féin. Indeed, Ó Lochlainn recalled that there were times, such as for an extended period in 1912, when he and Ó Duinn received no communication from Sinn Féin (1968b, 19). However, using a pseudonym, 'An Lochlannach' [The Viking], which played on his family name and his location, Ó Lochlainn published articles in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, *An t-Éireannach*, the London Conradh na Gaeilge paper and in *Sinn Féin* (O'Leary 1994, 84 n226). The topics in his *An Claidheamh* series ranged from commentary on current affairs and international tensions to developments in the world of theatre. In one article, he discussed the challenges of instituting theatre in Iceland, arguing that its experience of launching a permanent company of actors in their own

dedicated space in Reykjavik provided a model for the Irish-language community (An Lochlannach 1912).

Free to enjoy the Danish capital's theatres, Ó Lochlainn returned to acting in early 1914. Although a competent Danish-speaker by this time, he sounded, he was told, like a Norwegian (Ó Lochlainn 1943, 7). The silent film industry offered a solution. Ó Lochlainn has left a fine description of his early experiences in silent film in Copenhagen, first with the newly-established Dania Biofilm Kompagni, and then in 1915 with its larger rival, Nordisk Film (Ó Lochlainn 1945a-f).<sup>6</sup> His acting roles were minor but he had steady employment (Ó Lochlainn 1945e, 5). Eventually, at the invitation of Emmanuel Lorentz Larsen, whom he had met filming, Ó Lochlainn joined the company at Copenhagen's Alexandrateatret. His move from film to stage was fortuitous as the World War badly affected Nordisk's activities (Nordisk Film). Though Larsen died in June 1917 (Emmanuel Larsen), Ó Lochlainn spent over three years at the Alexandrateatret (Ó Lochlainn 1943, 1).

Ireland was never far from Ó Lochlainn's thoughts. The British authorities were likely alert to the Irishman in Copenhagen receiving Irish-language and other Irish newspapers. Ó Lochlainn's article in *An Claidheamh* in 1915 about the role of propaganda in war almost certainly attracted the attention of British wartime censors (An Lochlannach 1915). In turn, the Easter Rising in 1916 startled Ó Lochlainn politically and personally. His brother, Patrick O'Loughlin, had fought in the South Dublin Union during Easter Week and was subsequently interned in Frongoch. Ó Lochlainn's old friend and mentor, Séan Connolly, by 1916 both an Abbey Theatre player and Irish Citizen Army activist, had died in the assault on Dublin Castle on Easter Monday. Unsettled, Ó Lochlainn was keen to return home, even trying to secure employment in advance. By that stage, however, he and Ingeborg had their first child, Rita Emer, born in August 1915 and, with prospects uncertain in Ireland, the family remained in Denmark (Denmark Census 1916).

The British refused to issue Ó Lochlainn a travel permit to return to Ireland in 1917 and 1918 on account of pro-Irish independence articles that he had published in the Copenhagen press (Ó Lochlainn 1966, 51). The convening of the secessionist Dáil Éireann in January 1919 added urgency to the push for international recognition of the Irish Republic. 'Consuls to be sent abroad as soon as practicable probably not practicable now but existing men in other countries might be utilised, Gerald O'Loughlin in Denmark may be thoroughly relied upon', declared Arthur

Griffith, then incarcerated in Gloucester Prison (Fanning et al., 4). But despite a recommendation to Dáil Éireann in June 1920 about an official appointment (Fanning et al., 72), Ó Lochlann functioned as its unofficial representative in Denmark for the duration of the Irish War of Independence, while Seán Ó Duinn, still based in Odense, also contributed to the propaganda effort (Art Ó Briain... Ms. 8421/28 and Ms. 8428/9).<sup>7</sup> Ó Lochlann's work attracted negative reaction from the Danish authorities. A Dáil Éireann report in March 1921 noted 'that there is interference on the part of the police' (Fanning et al., 123). Another Dáil departmental report stated that Ó Lochlann 'was recently called before the police authorities and ordered to cease propaganda work for Ireland' (Fanning et al., 185). Writing to his Dáil Éireann contact, Art O'Brien, however, Ó Lochlann stressed on 3 March 1921 that he was continuing his mission (Art Ó Briain... Ms. 8421/28).

Despite those pressures, 1921 was a joyful year for the Ó Lochlann family. Ingeborg gave birth to their second child, Finn Georg, in February (Research Foundation). With the advent of the Truce in Ireland in July, British authorities finally approved Ó Lochlann's passport application and he journeyed home alone that autumn after fourteen years abroad. Clearly, he planned to move back to Ireland permanently and raise his family there. His long relationship with Arthur Griffith, his service on behalf of the Irish cause and his command of Irish resulted in Ó Lochlann's appointment as Griffith's temporary secretary (Fanning et al., xxvii). However, no sooner was Ó Lochlann home than the Treaty signing and ratification set the scene for the Split and the Civil War. Loyalty to Griffith may explain Ó Lochlann's support for the Treaty; in any case, he was not a polemical figure. After Griffith's sudden death in the early months of the Civil War in August 1922, Ó Lochlann acted temporarily on behalf of the Provisional Government as 'roving envoy to Berlin and Brussels' (Fanning et al., xxvii). On his return he remained attached to the Department of External Affairs, though he never became a career civil servant. This provided flexibility for him to re-join Irish theatre activities, but without the safety net of a Civil Service pension. Ingeborg and the children, Emer and Finn, only joined Ó Lochlann in Ireland after the Civil War (Ó Lochlann 1966, 52). We do not know how Ingeborg viewed the family's move to Ireland or about her subsequent life and experiences in Dublin.

## AN COMHAR DRÁMUÍOCHTA

The War of Independence had already disrupted Irish-language theatre and the Civil War compelled Conradh na Gaeilge to cancel An tOireachtas in 1923. But at An tOireachtas's request, Ó Lochlainn assembled remnants of Na hAisteoirí, a Dublin-based troupe established by Piaras Béasláí ten years previously, to stage a week of plays at the Gaiety Theatre in July 1923. The programme included the first of Ó Lochlainn's eight stage plays in Irish, the one-act *Bean an Mhilliúnaí* [The Millionaire's Wife]. He played the role of Ó hArtagáin, a businessman whose sharp practices threaten the livelihood of a small competitor. The latter invades Ó hArtagáin's home, intending to shoot the businessman only for Ó hArtagáin's wife to intercede and for her husband to repent of his heartlessness. The middle-class urban setting was relatively unusual in Irish-language theatre of the time. However, the play was unconvincing in its portrayal of the married couple's relationship and the businessman's *volte face*. The gunman angle was topical but seems less a comment on the role of the gun in 1923 Ireland than a reflection of the influence of cinema.

The Gaiety week attendance was low; financial losses were high but so too were the energy and enthusiasm to push ahead. Ó Lochlainn became one of the founders of An Comhar Drámuíochta, which launched a season of single-performance Irish-language productions in the Abbey Theatre in November 1923. In still-troubled times, the venture represented a promise of hopeful beginnings. The Free State government soon provided a modest subvention, just as it did to the Abbey, but challenges lay ahead. In the poisoned political post-Civil War atmosphere, suspicion lingered that An Comhar was a favoured government project. There was a paucity of quality original plays. An Comhar possessed no dedicated theatre space while each single-performance production was essentially a dress rehearsal.

Ó Lochlainn was the guiding hand, the jack-of-all-trades, in An Comhar's early seasons. He directed the plays and acted in them too. Productions included, for example, two 1798-themed pieces, *An Craipí Óg*, a translation of the ballad 'The Croppy Boy', transformed by Ó Lochlainn into an operatic number in November 1924, and *An Fóghmhar* [The Harvest], Ó Lochlainn's reworking of Tomás Ó Ceallaigh's 1907 play, staged in March 1925. A highlight was the première of Liam O'Flaherty's *Dorchadas* [Darkness] in March 1926, in which Ó Lochlainn

played the part of Brian, one of two brothers entangled in a deadly Aran Island love triangle.

The dearth of strong original Irish-language plays presented an opportunity to showcase world drama. ‘Ní feabhas go comórtas’ [Competition leads to excellence], Ó Lochlainn wrote (O’Leary 2004, 392, 638 n91), stressing the importance of staging translations of worthy works, which included plays by Chekhov, Tolstoy and Molière. An Comhar produced three Ó Lochlainn translations in those early seasons. *An Cheist Chin-neamhnach* [The Fateful Question], staged in May 1924, was the opening act of Arthur Schnitzler’s *Anatol*, a seven-act German-language play set in Vienna about the musings on life and love by Anatol, a playboy. An Comhar’s production, in which Ó Lochlainn played the lead role, let the audience sample Schnitzler’s work in Irish a year before the Dublin Drama League presented *The Wedding Morning*, *Anatol*’s final act (‘An Amharclann’; Katz Clarke and Ferrar 29–30). *Heircileas*, staged in December 1924, was Ó Lochlainn’s rendering of the Danish single-act farce *Verdens Hercules* by Adolph von der Recke and Robert Watt, which, in turn, was an adaptation of Georg Belly’s German play *Monsieur Herkules*.<sup>8</sup> Set in a hotel, the entrance of visitors leads to mistaken identity and entertaining comedy as the athletic circus performer, Heircileas, is confused with a puny teacher. *Deire an Leabhair*, staged in October 1926 and Ó Lochlainn’s first translation from English, was a thriller in which death arrives via a poison-laden book. The original work, *The End of the Book*, was an early play by the multi-genre American writer, Henry Myers, who later fell foul of the McCarthy anti-Communist witch-hunt.

## Ó LOCHLAINN AND THE GATE THEATRE

By 1926, Ó Lochlainn’s commitments to An Comhar, on top of his daytime work, took their toll on him. ‘I personally was obliged to relinquish the work of production [...] from sheer overstrain’, he later wrote (Ó Siadhail 2007, 685). He continued to act with An Comhar but participated in other projects too. As a member of Dublin’s theatre community in the mid-1920s, Ó Lochlainn crossed paths with ‘Toto’ Cogley, the French-born Paris-trained actor, socialist and Irish republican. Despite their contrasting attitudes to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the pair found common cause in their openness to influences beyond Ireland. In February 1926, they collaborated in *Magic*, a G.K. Chesterton comedy, staged by the Dublin Drama League which, though an offshoot of the

Abbey Theatre, anticipated the Gate in staging experimental and international work (Katz Clarke and Ferrar 30). Ó Lochlainn also acted in Seumas McCall's *Bealtaine* and Eimar O'Duffy's *Bricriu's Feast*, plays produced by Cogley in Molesworth Hall that June ('Dublin and District').

Contemporary newspaper accounts place Cogley and Ó Lochlainn at events such as the Thalia Cabaret at Daniel Egan's Salon in December 1926 and, in spring 1927, the Cinderella Dance in Clery's Ballroom, a feature of which 'was the cabaret performance in which Madame Bannard Cogley and Mr. Gearoid O Lochlainn introduced Argentine dances and folk songs' ('The Thalia Cabaret'; "Save the Children" Fund'). They performed at Conradh na Gaeilge's 1927 St. Patrick's Day Concert in Tralee ('Notes on News'; 'Gaelic League Concert'). Ó Lochlainn, who was a fine singer, and Cogley presented 'The Sons of the Sea and Their Shanties' at a fund-raising concert in the Theatre Royal in October 1927 ('Advertisement'). In August 1928, Cogley's radio programme 'Cabaret Pot Pourri' featured Ó Lochlainn ('Dublin Broadcasting'). He also regularly performed at the various iterations of Madame Cogley's Cabaret Club, part of the lively counterculture in Dublin in the first decade of the independent state that, Elaine Sisson argues, prepared the ground for the Gate Theatre (27). Their extended collaboration validates mac Liammóir's description of Ó Lochlainn and Cogley as partners (mac Liammóir 60).

In spring 1928, Ó Lochlainn introduced Hilton Edwards 'to a small group of Dublin people' at 'The Little Theatre' at South William Street where Cogley then hosted her Saturday evening cabarets (W.D.J. 11). Edwards disclosed that he and his fellow actor, mac Liammóir, planned to stage Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* as part of a new theatre project. Ó Lochlainn and Cogley 'were themselves hoping to start a new theatre, and so the wheels began to turn' (W.D.J. 12). It was in mac Liammóir's and Edwards's interest to cooperate with Cogley and Ó Lochlainn, as the former pair were largely unknown in the Dublin theatre community. As Elaine Sisson notes, Cogley facilitated their 'access to a whole network of actors and writers' (14). In particular, Cogley provided her Cabaret Club members' list – around 400 names – to solicit subscriptions for the new venture (Sisson 13, 25). Similarly, Ó Lochlainn offered strong contacts within, and introductions to, the Dublin theatre community, including Irish speakers who knew little about mac Liammóir before his breakthrough with the new Irish-language theatre in Galway, Taibhdhearc na

Gaillimhe, in August 1928. ‘Gearóid was an actor of distinction and experience’, noted mac Liammóir (60). Ó Lochlainn’s experience stemmed primarily from his years in Denmark and his knowledge of theatre there (Ó’Lochlann [*sic*] 1921a and 1921b). His experience in Ireland included success in negotiating An Comhar’s subsidy and his acquaintance with senior figures in the Cumann na nGaedheal government. Intriguingly, mac Liammóir remarked: ‘Gearóid [...] had, we all thought, a more business-like head than the rest of us.’ (60) The basis for that statement is unclear; however, it is worth remembering that Ó Lochlainn and Cogley, both in their early forties in 1928, were significantly older than the twenty-something Edwards and mac Liammóir. Overall, then, it is no surprise that mac Liammóir and Edwards teamed up with Ó Lochlainn and Cogley and that the four were subsequently listed in the circular announcing the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio in September 1928.

In the Gate’s inaugural production of *Peer Gynt* in the Peacock in October 1928, Ó Lochlainn played three roles. He featured regularly during the first season, including in Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* that October and in the English-language première of mac Liammóir’s *Diarmuid and Gráinne* in November. With the second season at the Peacock in spring 1929, Ó Lochlainn appeared in David Sears’s *Juggernaut* in April 1929, in Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* in May, in John Galsworthy’s *The Little Man* in June and in the première of Denis Johnston’s *The Old Lady Says ‘No!’* in July. His acting credits are a matter of record, but it is difficult to document and assess Ó Lochlainn’s other contributions to the Gate project. Mac Liammóir’s later occasional comments suggest that Ó Lochlainn was involved in planning, including scouting a permanent home for the Gate (mac Liammóir 82, 88). Ó Lochlainn’s use of the plural – ‘léiríomar’ [we produced], in reference to plays staged in the early seasons – infer his active participation in the Board’s discussions and decisions (Ó Lochlainn 1966, 34, 35).

Ó Lochlainn was certainly influential in forging a connection between the Gate and An Comhar Drámuíochta in 1930. An Comhar was in crisis by the late 1920s. The company feared that it might lose its government subvention due to low attendance at the Abbey; moreover, the well-publicized launch of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe with the première of mac Liammóir’s *Diarmuid agus Gráinne* accentuated An Comhar’s frustrations at its failure to obtain its own space. Accordingly, it transferred its productions to the more modest Peacock and appointed Piaras Béaslaí as director for the 1929-1930 season. That season’s week-long

offerings contained a new one-act piece by Ó Lochlainn, *Cótáí Móra* [Overcoats], in February 1930. Described as ‘a jovial, rollicking, farcical comedy of student life in Dublin’, *Cótáí Móra*, the text of which appears not to have survived, received uniformly negative reviews, with Frank O’Connor highlighting Ó Lochlainn’s fatal attraction to the gunman figure of contemporary cinema (‘Stage and Platform’; ‘F.O’C.’). Overall, An Comhar’s change of location and producer and its longer production runs barely improved matters. Yet there was a ray of hope. Once the Gate moved to its permanent home in the Rotunda complex at the beginning of its third season in February 1930 and it became evident that mac Liammóir did not intend to continue travelling back and forth to Galway, nor to commit himself to An Taibhdhearc on a permanent basis, an opportunity arose. An Comhar rented the Gate for its productions and mac Liammóir agreed to direct its plays.

In effect, An Comhar Drámuíochta was the Gate Theatre’s unofficial Irish-language wing from autumn 1930 to spring 1934. Mac Liammóir directed over thirty Irish-language productions at the Gate during that period. Ó Lochlainn acted in plays in two languages there. In November 1930 alone, he was in the cast of T.C. Murray’s *A Flutter of Wings* and in *An Geocach Duine Uasal*, a translation of Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. He relished the opportunity to participate in mac Liammóir’s ambitious and artistic Irish-language productions. Likely using his experiences of professional theatre in Copenhagen as a point of comparison and implicitly criticizing the standard of An Comhar productions to date, Ó Lochlainn extolled the quality of the Gate’s Irish-language productions:

Sa tréimhse sin sa Gate bhláthraighe an drámaíocht Ghaeilge thar mar bhláthraighe sí riabh roimis ná ó shin. Bhí gach áis againn ann chun slacht agus maise a chur ar na léirithe, agus bhí stiúrthóir agus aisteoir againn i Mac Liammóir nach raibh a mhacasúil le fáil sa tir ach amháin a pháirtí, Hilton Edwards. (1966, 37)

[In that period at the Gate, Irish-language drama flourished more than it ever flourished before or since. We had access to every technical device to improve and enhance the productions, and, in mac Liammóir, we had a director and actor whose only match in the country was his partner, Hilton Edwards.]

The Gate Theatre saw drama of another kind as its Board of Directors was transformed in 1931. ‘Toto’ Cogley departed for England and, as Denis Johnston records, ‘severed her active connection with the theatre’ (W.D.J. 19). Ó Lochlainn and Lord Glenavy also resigned: Ó Lochlainn acted in the Gate’s English-language production of Dmitri Merejkowski’s *Tzar Paul* that March, but that production’s programme does not list him as a Gate director.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Longford and Johnston became directors. Despite mac Liammóir’s statement about Ó Lochlainn’s business sense, the Gate was in serious financial difficulties by late 1930 through no fault of Ó Lochlainn. An Comhar’s contribution for rent would not stave off bankruptcy. Once Longford rescued the Gate project, his appointment to the board was prudent. Johnston was an obvious addition after his *The Old Lady Says ‘No!’* success. But it remains undetermined why Ó Lochlainn resigned in 1931 and what factors explain the Edwards/mac Liammóir statement that ‘other activities forced him to retire’.

We know little about Ó Lochlainn’s relationship with Edwards but his enthusiasm to continue in mac Liammóir’s An Comhar productions (mac Liammóir 1967, 199) and his positive comments about An Comhar under mac Liammóir, dispel suggestions of personal animosity or professional disagreements. Certainly, Ó Lochlainn and mac Liammóir continued to collaborate closely. Mac Liammóir staged Ó Lochlainn’s translations of two English-language plays: *Greann Hathalaba*, his version of *The Jest of Hathalaba*, Lord Dunsany’s modern folktale about human folly, staged in December 1931, and *An Sár-Ghadáí*, Matthew Boulton’s playlet about a break-and-entry with a twist in its tail, *The Burglar and the Girl*, in May 1933. In addition, mac Liammóir produced Ó Lochlainn’s first full-length play, *Na Gaduithe* [The Thieves] in February 1933 with Ó Lochlainn as Tadhg Ó Tuama, a rural hotelier. The hotel hosts an array of characters, the standard-issue nubile daughters, their prospective suitors, the loyal but much-maligned hotel staff, and – no surprise here – two gun-toting Irish-American bank robbers on the run. The work played successfully for its share of laughs, gasps and romantic sighs, and deservedly earned An Comhar’s Craobh Órdha [Gold Branch] for best original play of the 1932-1933 season.

Ó Lochlainn acted in English-language Gate plays until 1933. That year he appeared in mac Liammóir’s *The Ford of the Hurdles* in April and

in David Sears's *Grania of the Ships* in September. But he was largely absent after that. In fact, he soon seized the opportunity, one he would likely never receive in the Gate's English-language productions in which mac Liammóir and Edwards regularly filled the lead roles, to play the title role in the Abbey's production of *Macbeth* in October 1934 (Abbey Theatre Archive).

As inevitable as mac Liammóir's final retreat from Galway was the termination of An Comhar's arrangement with him and the Gate. An Comhar could not call on a wealthy patron, such as Lord Longford, and by early 1934 the Gate rent and production costs became too expensive (Ó Lochlann 1966, 37). It is unlikely too that mac Liammóir was able or willing to continue his personal commitment indefinitely. The final productions of An Comhar's 1933-1934 season were not in the Gate but back at the Peacock. Mac Liammóir directed those productions, including, in March 1934, *Bean an Iasgaire*, Ó Lochlann's translation of T.H. Stafford's *The Fisherman's Wife*, a one-act tragedy set in a Breton fishing village that in its coastal backdrop, love triangle and sense of impending doom was reminiscent of O'Flaherty's *Dorchadas*. Ó Lochlann also acted in mac Liammóir's last An Comhar production, *Bean an Ghaiscidhígh*, a translation of Martínez Sierra's *La Mujer del Héroe*, in May 1934 ('The Hero's Wife'). No longer a Gate director, no longer part of the Gate company and no longer working with mac Liammóir in Irish-language plays, Ó Lochlann had tentative connections only with the Gate henceforth. In the absence of early theatre minutes, one can question the full extent of his contribution to the Gate project in its infancy: perhaps an accurate assessment is that while he was less of a cornerstone of the acting company for many years than mac Liammóir and Edwards claimed, he provided street credibility and points of introduction in Dublin for two unknowns at their time of need. Ó Lochlann was always gracious in acknowledging mac Liammóir's and Edwards's achievements. One can legitimately ask why they were not equally gracious in ensuring that Ó Lochlann and Cogley were later memorialized as fellow-Gate founders (Fitz-Simon 218).

## Ó LOCHLAINN'S POST-GATE CAREER

In 1935, Ó Lochlann undertook a new professional responsibility. '[O]rdinarily attached to the Department of External Affairs', it was

reported, Ó Lochlainn ‘is now on loan to the Education Department’, where his duties involved promoting Irish-language drama in schools (‘Fostering Drama in Schools’). Frequently described as a drama inspector, Ó Lochlainn was active in Gaeltacht areas, including Donegal (‘Fostering Drama in Schools’). He also regularly ran workshops with Aisteoirí Ghaoth Dobhair and, when possible, acted with that west Donegal company (‘The Gweedore Players’) and helped to raise its profile outside Donegal (‘From Gweedore’). Ultimately, the drive, if not all the funding, came from within that Gaeltacht community, but the opening of Amharclann Ghaoth Dobhair, the Irish-language theatre in Gaoth Dobhair in 1961, owed no small part to Ó Lochlainn’s early support and encouragement.

Back in Dublin, Gate company member Cyril Cusack directed many An Comhar productions in the 1934-1935 and 1935-1936 seasons at the Peacock. An Comhar restructured in 1936, offering performance opportunities for other amateur companies without solving the enduring question of a permanent home. Ó Lochlainn’s commitment to An Comhar continued as a member of its new An Fhoireann Thofa [The Select Cast] and as dramatist. In the late 1930s, he penned three Irish Revolution-themed plays. The one-act *An t-Éirighe Amach* [The Rising], which premiered in March 1937, recalled Seán O’Casey’s Dublin tenement plays in its setting, Dublin’s working-class Liberties. As the fighting rages during Easter Week 1916, Pádraig de Clár, a veteran Fenian in failing health, played by Ó Lochlainn in the first production, rues never having struck a blow for Irish independence, though his son, Liam, is out fighting. Soon the roles are reversed as a shell-shocked Liam shelters at home and his father embraces a glorious death. Ó Lochlainn gave voice to neighbours who queried the insurgents’ capacity to defeat the British militarily, but, unsurprisingly for the times, he neither introduced the perspective of those whose menfolk were fighting for Britain nor questioned the implications of political violence.

Premiered at the Peacock in January 1938, *Na Fearachoin* [The Fierce Warriors] was a three-act War of Independence tale of romance and shifting loyalties, as an Anglo-Irish family reassesses its allegiance to Britain. In the final act, the play morphs into a hostage narrative as a British major, played by Ó Lochlainn, awaits with stiff upper-lip his death in retaliation for the execution of IRA Volunteers. Of course, Frank O’Connor had already treated that theme to great effect in his short story, ‘Guests of the Nation’. So had Mícheál Ó Siadhail in Irish in his play,

*Deire an Chunntais* [The End of the Account], premièred at the Gate in April 1931 under the title *Dia ’Á Réidhreach* [God Save Us].

The unpublished one-act *Lá na Paráide* [Parade Day], first performed in December 1940, was the most nuanced of Ó Lochlainn’s trilogy. Painting ‘a picture of an ex-I.R.A. man who has lost everything in the fight for freedom’, the play’s exploration of the after-effects of war implicitly challenged heroic portrayals of Ireland’s recent past (‘New Plays in Irish’). As in premières of his other stage works, Ó Lochlainn also featured as an actor, playing the second main character, the Melodeon Man.

An Comhar also produced two Ó Lochlainn translations in the late 1930s, including, in December 1938, *Sean-Mhaighread*, his version of *Old Mag*, a one-act Christmas play by Kenneth Sarr, the penname of Kenneth Sheils Reddin. While Ó Lochlainn translated mostly English-language plays in the 1930s, he also provided an ambitious translation of Henrik Ibsen’s *En Folkefiende*, staged under the title *Námhaid don Phobal* [An Enemy to the People] at the Peacock in April 1939, with Ó Lochlainn as Dr Stockmann, which earned favourable critical reviews (‘Ibsen Play in Irish’; Ar Aghaidh).

In October 1941, Ó Lochlainn acted in two Abbey plays to mark An tOireachtas week, including his final serious play as dramatist, the one-act *Ag an Ladhrán* [At the Junction]. He revisited the theme of *Bean an Mhilleáináí*, while shunning a sentimental ending. Literally and metaphorically, ruthless businessman Pilib Mac Eoin, played by Ó Lochlainn, is at a junction. As he waits for a train and encounters his conscience, ‘An Fear Eile’ [The Other Man], Mac Eoin must choose which course he will follow. Inevitably, Ó Lochlainn introduces a gun into the action. As the curtain descends, Mac Eoin’s fate – suicide – is equally inevitable.

By late 1941, the action off-stage was as significant as that on stage. Ernest Blythe’s decision to present Irish-language plays such as *Ag an Ladhrán* reflected not only the Abbey Theatre’s rebranding as a bilingual national theatre, but also strategic positioning as Blythe lobbied the government to entrust productions in Irish (and An Comhar’s subsidy) to the Abbey. An Comhar soldiered on until 1942 but *Tristan is Iseult*, a translation of Joseph Bédier and Louis Artus’s French-language play, staged by Ó Lochlainn and An Fhoireann Thofa on 24 May at the Abbey, brought the final curtain down on An Comhar as an independent company. The single performance of the play was reminiscent of An Comhar’s early productions minus the enthusiasm and optimism of 1923.

In June 1942, An Comhar's membership, some willingly and others reluctantly, voted in favour of the Abbey absorbing the company.

It is not certain that Ó Lochlainn initially opposed An Comhar's termination as an independent entity. Indeed, he benefitted from the new dispensation, acting in Abbey Irish-language productions in 1943 and 1944. But, ironically, just as some external commentators were hostile to the Abbey's Gaelicization and some Abbey actors were fearful about their prospects as Blythe introduced new bilingual company members (Holloway 89; Ryan 85), many An Comhar veterans, overlooked by the Abbey for parts in Irish-language plays, quickly became disillusioned with the Abbey. Ó Lochlainn, who increasingly resented the Abbey's treatment of his Comhar colleagues, joined other An Comhar stalwarts to launch a new company, Compántas Amharclainne na Gaeilge, which gave its inaugural production at the Gate Theatre on 19 March 1944 when it premièred Séamus de Bhilmot's *Prológ don Réim Nua* [A Prologue for the New Age] with Ó Lochlainn in the cast. Initially, Compántas was a direct rival to Irish-language productions at the Abbey; in reality, both were in weak positions. In An tOireachtas week in October 1944, both companies staged separate Irish-language productions in which Ó Lochlainn featured. Thirty-five people attended the Abbey; an audience of fourteen people viewed Compántas's play in the Gaiety ('Oireachtas Drama at the Abbey'; "Black Night"). Compántas changed tack smartly, pioneering successful Irish-language variety shows in Dublin's main commercial theatres. The Abbey soon shifted focus to occasional short plays staged after its main English-language productions, and to its popular annual Irish-language Christmas pantomime. Ó Lochlainn was in demand by both companies: he featured in *Hot-Seadh*, Compántas's first major variety show in May 1945, and in the early Abbey pantomimes, including the inaugural *Muireann agus an Prionnsa* [Muireann and the Prince] in December 1945, written by Micheál Ó hAodha with additional material by Ó Lochlainn (Sandes 2).

Ó Lochlainn continued to move easily across language divides. He was Assistant Director in Aisteoirí Ghaoth Dobhair's visiting productions at the Abbey in September 1946 and appeared in a series of English-language plays at the Gaiety, including *Abdication*, a piece about Edward VIII by the American writer, H.T. Lowe-Porter, staged by Edwards – mac Liammóir Productions in September 1948. Undoubtedly, Ó Lochlainn welcomed the extra income to augment his Department of Education salary. As much as mac Liammóir described Ó Lochlainn

as a professional actor (63, 199), he was semi-professional in reality. Unsurprisingly, he was keen to see improved working conditions and wages for actors. When the Writers, Actors, Artists and Musicians Association of Ireland (W.A.A.M.A.) became Irish Actors' Equity Association in January 1949, Ó Lochlainn sat on the new committee, becoming Equity's vice-president, a position that he held into the 1960s.

In May 1949, Ó Lochlainn played the role of Shylock in his translation of the trial scene from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* at Galway's An Taibhdhearc. Ó Lochlainn subsequently published *Radhairc as Drámaí Shakespeare* (1965), containing his translations from *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. As dramatist, he returned to An Taibhdhearc for the première of his final stage play in April 1950. In *An Balbhán Bréige* [The Pretend Mute], a Dublin-based painter risks losing the patronage of his rich uncle, played by Ó Lochlainn at the Taibhdhearc, unless he succeeds in conning the visiting uncle that he still employs a mute assistant. Concealment, confusion and comedy ensue before the inevitable happy ending. Back in 1950, the play's treatment of a disability garnered cheap laughs. In fact, the piece proved to be quite popular, with two Dublin productions in the early 1950s, including one by Compántas ('Jubilee Plays of Keating Branch'; 'Two Languages').

Ó Lochlainn participated in two new theatrical ventures in the 1950s. He acted in Carolyn Swift's *The Millstone*, the initial production of the Swift/Alan Simpson-founded Pike Theatre Players in Dún Laoghaire Town Hall in September 1951 (Carson; Swift 94). When the company moved to the Pike Theatre Club on Herbert Lane, Ó Lochlainn, by then a director of the Pike, featured in the inaugural production, G.K. Chesterton's *The Surprise*, in September 1953 (Swift 95). Ó Lochlainn also acted in two high-profile Pike productions, as Warder Regan in Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* in November 1954 and as Father de Leo in Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo* in May 1957 (Swift 245). The latter production ran into trouble with Simpson charged, though ultimately not prosecuted, on account of the play's alleged indecent content (Simpson 138-67; Swift 240-58). After Simpson's arrest, the cast assembled to discuss abandoning the run: 'At the meeting, only one member of the cast was understandably against continuing. Gearóid Ó Lochlainn held an unestablished, non-pensionable post in the Department of Education, and would immediately have been dismissed if convicted. Nevertheless, a great believer in trades unionism, he agreed to abide by the majority decision' (Swift 266).<sup>10</sup> The play completed its run. Ó Lochlainn continued

to act with the company but the Pike never recovered financially from legal costs arising from the controversy, and 'by 1961 collapsed as an independent theatrical entity' (Pilkington 298).

The Abbey's move to the Queen's Theatre after the fire in July 1951 extinguished lingering hope that the national theatre would stage full-length plays in Irish. Compántas survived until 1958 but, for financial reasons, scaled back its variety shows and retreated to small venues. By 1954, the Irish-language community began to explore a fresh approach for theatre in Irish. Cumann na Scríbhneoirí, the society of Irish-language writers, assembled a committee which included Ó Lochlainn, mac Liammóir, Siobhán McKenna and Cyril Cusack to examine options (Ó Siadhail 1993, 137). However, independent of them, Gael Linn moved quickly to establish An Club Drámaíochta in the Damer Hall in the basement of the Unitarian Church on St Stephen's Green. An Club Drámaíochta opened in November 1955 and An Damer soon became the centre for Irish-language theatre in Dublin. Ó Lochlainn played no leadership role in the project but acted in several productions there, including the June 1958 première of Brendan Behan's *An Giall* [The Hostage], playing the part of the veteran Monsúr.

Ó Lochlainn's Department of Education appointment likely ended in the late 1950s, at a time when many of his peers had retired. Not surprisingly, his range of activities had diminished by then, although he still appeared in two films, *Lies My Father Told Me* (1960) and *Johnny Nobody* (1961), published a new series of memoirs in 1962, and featured in several English-language Abbey plays during the 1960s. His final stage role was in summer 1966 in the inaugural production at the new Abbey Theatre, as one of the Performers in *Recall the Years*, a backward glance at the Abbey's history. Re-elected as Equity vice-president in 1966, Ó Lochlainn finally stood aside the following year ('Equity's Appeal'; 'Equity Opposes'). He published his theatre book, *Ealaín na hAmharclainne*, in 1966 and yet another series of memoirs in 1968-1969. The series concluded in January 1969 with a note that Ó Lochlainn's account would resume later (Ó Lochlainn 1969, 23). That was not to be. Ó Lochlainn died in St Mary's Hospital, Phoenix Park, on 21 July 1970.

### AN ACTOR IN SEARCH OF AN AUDIENCE

Gearóid Ó Lochlainn's Gate years, 1928-1934, were a small part of his lengthy, distinguished career in Irish theatre. Ó Lochlainn was no mere

‘drama enthusiast’ (Fitz-Simon 52): he was an internationally-experienced man of the theatre and a professional actor in all but name. Nor was he a mere ‘Irish language enthusiast’ (Sisson 12 n5): for the multilingual Ó Lochlainn, Irish was his language of preference. His life story demonstrated an openness to the outside world and a willingness to learn from others abroad, not least from those striving to maintain their own languages and cultures. Unlike his An Comhar colleague, Piaras Béasláí, who refused to acknowledge his Merseyside origins, or Micheál mac Liammóir, whose lifelong professional theatrical role was as *pure laine* Gael, Ó Lochlainn did not conceal his birth in Britain. His wife was Danish. His children were Danish-born. The cosmopolitan Ó Lochlainn was comfortable in his Irishness, while happy to embrace the best of other cultures.

Ó Lochlainn filled multiple roles during his theatrical career, from actor to actors’ union representative. Those as dramatist and actor are most notable. It is no coincidence that his plays from the 1920s onwards were in Irish, as he sought to provide well-constructed dramatic fare for the Irish-language theatre community. Ó Lochlainn grew to become a competent author of popular drama, whose knowledge of stagecraft helped him to set the scene in his plays, to create distinctive characters and to move those characters on and off the stage. Mixing lively dialogue, action and, not infrequently, music and song (which he usually wrote) and, as we have seen, the gun and gunman from cinema, he fashioned stage works that entertained without touching his audience deeply or challenging them intellectually. Ó Lochlainn acknowledged his plays’ modest artistic merit (1951, 22) but, in their time, they served their primary goal of cultivating an audience for theatre in Irish.

Micheál Ó hAodha’s description of Ó Lochlainn as ‘an actor in search of an audience’ (69) captures Ó Lochlainn’s first and most enduring theatrical passion. While mac Liammóir praised Ó Lochlainn’s ability as an actor (60), Cyril Cusack hinted at his limitations.<sup>11</sup> ‘Maireann an t-aisteoir míle beatha’ [The actor lives a thousand lives], declared Ó Lochlainn in a poem (1959, 15). His thousand lives encompassed roles in silent films, on Danish stage, and in English and Irish. His acting experiences in Irish and English differed significantly. In the former, he was frequently the leading man; in the latter, he was usually a supporting player. But his acting in Ireland, in the National Players’ Society’s productions in two languages,

in Irish-language ventures from An Comhar Drámuíochta to An Damer, and in English-language theatre from the Gate to the Pike and the Abbey highlighted not only Ó Lochlainn's personal accomplishments but his vision for Irish theatre in which actors and dramatists would find an audience for high-quality work whether in Irish or English. For Ó Lochlainn, that meant that 'Amharclann Ghaeilge' – an Irish-language theatre – was essential in Dublin (1951, 23). That prospect is more remote today than in the 1920s when he and his colleagues launched An Comhar, or in the 1930s when mac Liammóir directed its productions at the Gate, or even in the early 1940s when the Abbey could claim, with some legitimacy, to be Ireland's national theatre.

## NOTES

1. A signed photo of Gearóid Ó Lochlainn has been digitized by the National Library of Ireland and may be viewed at <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtls000283525>.
2. Although Ó Lochlainn's birth certificate has not been located, Danish marriage and census records confirm his place of birth and his date of birth. Except where other sources are cited, information about Ó Lochlainn's life is drawn from his *ainm.ie* entry.
3. In his memoirs, Ó Lochlainn refers to Connolly as Seán Ó Conghaile.
4. Ó Lochlainn used the Irish version of MacWhite's name, Mícheál Mac Faoite.
5. Muiris Ó Droighneáin claims that Ó Lochlainn studied at 'Ollsgoil Chopenhagen' [the University of Copenhagen] (219). However, Ó Lochlainn makes no mention of such studies in his memoirs.
6. Unfortunately, Ó Lochlainn did not name the silent films in which he appeared.
7. An interesting feature of Ó Lochlainn's and Ó Duinn respective letters to their Dáil Éireann contact, Art O'Brien, is that Ó Lochlainn always wrote in Irish while Ó Duinn corresponded in English.
8. Ó Lochlainn's published translation of *Heircileas* does not provide the names of the Danish play and its authors or details about the play's German provenance.
9. Email correspondence from Ondřej Pilný, Charles University, Prague, to the author, 15 July 2019.
10. In his account of this incident, Alan Simpson – unlike Carolyn Swift – did not name Ó Lochlainn, 'who held an unestablished, non-pensionable post as a Cultural Adviser to a State body, and who was liable to dismissal at a week's notice [...] This actor bravely agreed to abide by the majority

decision, even though he was very worried about the possible reaction of his superiors.' (155)

11. Cyril Cusack commented that Ó Lochlainn was perhaps not the world's best actor but was fully committed to the cause of Irish-language theatre ('[...] b'fhéidir nár bh é an t-aisteoir ab fhéarr ar domhan é, ach bhí sé chomh tugtha sin do chúis na hamharclainne Gaeilge') (Cusack 6).

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## CHAPTER 4

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# The Transnational Roots of Key Figures from the Early Years of the Gate Theatre, Dublin

*David Clare and Nicola Morris*

When considering the avant-garde nature of the early Gate Theatre, critics rightly focus on the queer sexuality and liberal politics of many of the people associated with the theatre at the time. However, it is also important to consider the transnational backgrounds of so many based at the Gate then – especially those individuals whose outsider status and interest in the *outré* could be linked not simply to foreign origins but also to ethnic and cultural hybridity. This chapter will fill in many gaps and correct various misconceptions regarding the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of four key, English-born figures associated with the early Gate: the theatre's co-founders Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir, the Gate's first “leading lady” Coralie Carmichael, and

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the under-regarded actor, costume designer and milliner Nancy Beckh. It will be made clear that the work of these four artists at the Gate cannot be dismissed as examples of people from comfortable English backgrounds condescendingly engaging in cultural imperialism (i.e. treating the ‘exotic’ cultures of people from marginalized countries like Ireland and various states in Africa and Asia as artistic ‘raw material’) or shallow cosmopolitanism (Stewart 330). Rather, the mixed backgrounds of these artists helped them to create what scholars in the emerging field of ‘new interculturalism’ call ‘intercultural performances’.<sup>1</sup>

### NEW INTERCULTURALISM AND INTERCULTURAL PERFORMANCE

Since 1990, when the publication of Micheál Ó hAodha’s biography of the supposedly Cork-born Micheál mac Liammóir revealed that the Gate co-founder was actually born Alfred Willmore in London, there has been a tendency among commentators to build their analysis of the Gate on the idea that it was a theatre ‘created by two Englishmen [...] to diversify and Europeanize Irish theatre’ (Maxwell and Fitzgibbon 413). The lazy equation of the Gate with international drama (in contrast to the Abbey’s focus on Irish plays) existed for decades before Ó hAodha’s biography ever appeared, and critics including Ruud van den Beuken and Feargal Whelan (among others) have demonstrated how reductive such an angle is, since it greatly underestimates the Gate’s contribution to new Irish drama over the course of its entire history (van den Beuken 47; Whelan 147–59; Clare, Lally and Lonergan 3–7). Arguably, highlighting the English backgrounds of ‘the Boys’ in such a prevailing critical context carries the strong implication that mac Liammóir and Edwards were on a neo-colonial “civilizing” mission to Ireland. The fact that they enlisted the help of other English-born theatremakers, including Coralie Carmichael and Nancy Beckh, would only strengthen such an impression. However, the four, key London-born artists associated with the early Gate discussed in this chapter were not from thoroughly and firmly established well-to-do, English backgrounds. As the examination of their ancestry below reveals, mac Liammóir and Edwards were part-Irish, and their families had only risen from poverty relatively recently; Carmichael had Moroccan and Scottish ancestry, and her immediate family’s shaky fortunes sank steadily during her childhood; and Beckh, while raised in Dublin, was the descendant of German immigrants to England who – like all immigrants – had

to work hard to attain prosperity in the new country to which they had moved. Given the ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds of these four artists, their work at the Gate was clearly *not* an example of what Daphne P. Lei has called ‘hegemonic intercultural theatre’, in which theatre practitioners from more privileged nations use their ‘capital and brainpower’ to create transnational or intercultural performances by effectively exploiting cultural ‘raw material’ and even ‘labor’ from more marginalized countries (571).

Scholars from the field of ‘new interculturalism’, such as Charlotte McIvor, Ric Knowles, Royona Mitra and Justine Nakase (among others since the early Noughties), have demonstrated that, while racism and cultural imperialism undoubtedly inform or affect the production and reception of intercultural performances, subtler forms of intercultural exchange often occur when theatre is made by artists who are from hybrid backgrounds (McIvor; Knowles 2010; Knowles 2017; Mitra; Nakase). The above named scholars have been heeding Jen Harvie’s call to find critical models to better understand ‘intercultural encounters’ in which it is ‘difficult to specify a primary, let alone solitary, location of power, or where the “us” and “them”, “self” and “other” exist within the same community and/or within the same person’ (12). To be able to assess such situations, Nakase has developed the idea of ‘scalar interculturalism’, which ‘extends the analysis of intercultural production to include individual performances, even within productions that on collective level are not necessarily intercultural’ (263). In her work, she stresses the need for scholars to come to a nuanced understanding of an artist’s positioning with regard to the various cultures implicated in their background (while also understanding that the individual’s ‘identity position’ can change according to circumstances – either because of how they perceive themselves or are perceived by others in a particular moment of performance) (277). Such a nuanced understanding helps us to assess whether an individual artist from a mixed background is privileging one aspect of his or her identity over another during a specific performance.

In the case of the four figures examined in this chapter, their sure knowledge that their forebears were not *entirely* from Ireland’s former colonizer country, England, means that, when examining their work at the Gate, we cannot simply fall back on what Mitra calls ‘historical us-them hierarchies’, since it is clear that these four artists were ‘simultaneously embodying us, them and phases in-between’ (15). That is to say, it was not simply a matter of English artists “civilizing” the Irish by

teaching them about international theatre or (in the case of the Gate's involvement in Irish-language theatre and Irish mythological plays) plundering Irish culture, to satisfy their jaded cosmopolitan appetites which hungered for "exotic" theatrical raw materials.

As McIvor has noted, the work of scholars involved in 'new interculturalism' has highlighted 'the use of intercultural aesthetic approaches by diasporic, migrant and/or otherwise globalized (usually minority) networks' (5). As will be shown, Edwards and mac Liammóir were aware of their Irish ancestry, and, as members of the Irish diaspora, they would have been conscious of the fact that they were plugging into the culture of (some of) their ancestors. Indeed, mac Liammóir's thorough-going embracing of all things Irish (including learning to speak and write what poet Paul Durcan's father considered the best Irish in Ireland)<sup>2</sup> and Edwards's impressive devotion to the Irish theatre world (and later Irish television) speaks to their deep commitment to the country – a commitment that cannot be written off as the condescending regard of neo-colonialists.

With regard to Coralie Carmichael, it is noteworthy that the role which first brought her to national attention in Ireland was as Anitra, the daughter of a Bedouin chief during the scene in Morocco in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (which was the Gate's inaugural production in 1928).<sup>3</sup> One could, of course, suggest that the Gate's depiction of Morocco in this production and Carmichael's portrayal of Anitra were textbook examples of 'orientalism' in Edward Said's definition of the term (Said *passim*). There is one major problem with this, however: Carmichael herself was part-Moroccan and (after her father's death) temporarily resided in the same house as her Tangier-born grandfather. Her grandfather was not from a nomadic Moroccan background like Anitra (as will be seen below, he was possibly of mixed Jewish and Christian heritage); however, it is inconceivable that Carmichael would have approached her playing of Anitra in a blithe, condescending manner, happy to essentialize an "exotic" people for the benefit of a Western audience. This is not to say that her portrayal would not have been tainted to a degree by attitudes absorbed during her schooling in England, her lifelong residence in the West, or her ignorance of the real Morocco. But her awareness of her own Moroccan roots would have undoubtedly given her greater sympathy for characters such as Anitra than would ordinarily be the case for an English or Irish actor. It is even likely that, thanks to her own background, she would have extended this sympathy to the other "exotic" characters she was repeatedly asked

to play over subsequent decades. This would include many of her most famous roles at the Gate, including the Palestinian-Jewish title character in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (with whom she likely shared Jewish heritage), the title character of mysterious origins in Lord Longford's adaptation of Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, the Arabic maiden Biskra in August Strindberg's *Simoons*, and Gazeleh (Lady of the King's Harem) in Padraig Colum's *Mogu of the Desert*.

Similarly, Carmichael's portrayal of Irish characters would not simply have been informed by her English background. Her performances would also have been informed by her awareness of her Scottish roots, which would have brought an awareness of how the "Celtic" nations within the British scheme have historically been marginalized by England.

Nancy Beckh's case is different to the other three included in this essay. The country complicating her relationship with both England (her birthplace and the nation from which half of her ancestors hailed) and Ireland (the country where she was raised and lived for most of her life) was Germany. That country has had an adversarial relationship with England – especially during Beckh's lifetime, thanks to the two World Wars. And it has had a contradictory relationship with Ireland. On the one hand, many Irish men and women were involved with the Allied cause against Germany during the Great War and also (via enlistment in the British, Canadian, American and Australian armed forces and nursing services) World War II. On the other hand, one could note the attempts at collaboration between the Germans and those involved in the Easter Rising, as well as the fact that Ireland was officially neutral during World War II, which famously led to Taoiseach Éamon de Valera calling on the Third Reich's ambassador to Ireland to express his condolences upon the death of Hitler. So, in this case, the issue is not whether the theatre practitioner in question may have felt greater or lesser sympathy for Irish characters and themes, thanks to Irish or Scottish roots. Instead, we are concerned with the lasting impact that her German forebears had on her. When scholars discuss, for example, African 'cultural survivals' in African-American culture, they demonstrate an awareness of the durability of cultural values, mores, tastes and practices within families over generations (see, e.g., Ekwueme; Ferris and Oliver; Garrett; Hall; King; Turner).<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to undertake archival research to see if there is any evidence of German aesthetics apparent in Beckh's costume and hat designs. We might also question the degree to which her German ancestry might have impacted on her approach to certain roles (though

no evidence has yet been found of her performing any German roles). These speculations, however, are beyond the scope of this essay. Our main concern here is to firmly establish the facts around the mixed backgrounds of these four prominent figures from the early Gate, correcting errors and filling in gaps left by previous biographers, critics, and of course by mac Liammóir himself.

### HILTON EDWARDS

In Gate Theatre studies, it is quite common for the London-born Hilton Edwards to be portrayed as almost *excessively* English. In his autobiographical novel *Enter a Goldfish*, mac Liammóir depicts Anew McMaster as saying that Edwards is ‘so English [...] just a John Bull with the lid off, Britannia’s son’ (1981, 221). Mac Liammóir’s biographer, Micheál Ó hAodha, describes Edwards as ‘an uncompromising Englishman’ (54), and Brian Friel, in a 1964 interview about his breakthrough play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, suggests that there were certain aspects of the relationships between the characters in the play that Edwards, the director of the production, did not understand due to his ‘English’ perspectives on romance and sex (3). (It is noteworthy that Edwards had actually lived in Ireland for over thirty-five years by that stage.) And mac Liammóir himself – Edwards’s professional and romantic partner – is keen in his autobiographical writings to stress Edwards’s no-nonsense Englishness, if only to contrast it with his own elaborate pose as a romantic Irishman.

There is one significant issue with depicting Edwards as unequivocally English, and it is one that has occasionally troubled biographers and critics: his mother’s maiden name was Murphy (see, e.g., Fitz-Simon 33; Ó hAodha 54). Perhaps out of deference to mac Liammóir’s assumed Irishness or because he knew how dismissive Irish-born people can be about members of the diaspora claiming to be Irish, Edwards showed no instinct to assume an Irish identity on the basis of the Murphy connection; as such, biographers and critics have neglected to seek out more details regarding Edwards’s Irish antecedents. Interestingly, genealogical enquiries reveal that Edwards was actually eligible to “play for Ireland”; that is, he was entitled to Irish citizenship through an Irish-born grandfather.

Hilton’s mother, Emily Murphy, was born on 9 May 1861 at 27 Great Marlborough Street in the parish of St. James, Westminster, London, and was the daughter of William Murphy, an Irish-born comb maker, and a

Middlesex-born woman of partial Irish descent called Rosina Emily Swain (Birth Cert for Emily Murphy). Emily was baptized as an Anglican in the parish of St. James, Westminster on 23 October 1861 ('England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975', entry for Emily Murphy), and she was raised in a house comprised of her Irish-born father William, her part-Irish mother Rosina and her eight London-born siblings, but also her Irish-born paternal grandmother, Catherine (1871 Census of England and Wales, 97 Dean Street, Soho). When Emily was four, her mother died shortly after giving birth to a child called Georgina (Death Cert for Rosina Murphy). Thereafter, Emily's Irish grandmother served as a surrogate mother to her. These facts make it quite clear that Hilton Edwards's mother was raised in an Irish household in England.

It should also be noted that the Murphys were not a prosperous family. William Murphy was born circa 1826 in Ireland (exact location unknown) to John and Catherine Murphy, and his first appearance in English records is his 1850 marriage certificate, which reveals that he is of 'full age', and that his father is already deceased (Marriage Cert for William Murphy and Rosina Swain).<sup>5</sup> The 1851 census reveals that William's mother Catherine was living with her son and his new wife (1851 Census of England and Wales, 9 Foley Place, Marylebone). As such, Catherine Murphy either joined William in London after his emigration to England or came with him, perhaps after the death of her husband in Ireland. William worked as a shell-comb maker for many years after emigrating to London, which was not a well-paid job. It is presumably through his job that William came in contact with his wife Rosina Emily Swain, who was from a similar background: her London-born father, John Swain, was also a shell-comb maker and the maiden name of her London-born mother, Sophia, was the Irish surname Reilly (1841 Census of England and Wales, Norton Street, Marylebone; 'England Marriages, 1538-1973', entry for John Swain and Sophia Reilly [*sic*]; 'England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975', entry for Rosina Emily Swain). It has proven impossible to determine if it was Sophia's parents or perhaps people further back in her paternal line who were born in Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

The idea that Hilton Edwards's mother, Emily Murphy, came from a relatively poor background is not just indicated by the humble profession of her father and maternal grandfather. A further sign of the family's lack of prosperity is the fact that (from the time of Emily's parents' wedding onwards), the Murphys resided in parts of Marylebone and Soho which – unlike now – were full of slum dwellings.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Murphy family

cannot be found in the 1861 census, when Rosina would have been heavily pregnant with Emily (the census was compiled in April 1861 and Emily was born, as noted above, on 9 May). Given the social status of the family, it is likely that Rosina may have entered a workhouse or a “poor law” hospital for the birth of her child. Likewise, by 1881, a William Murphy who can be presumed to be Emily’s father was in the Central London Sick Asylum Highgate Infirmary, a “poor law” hospital (1881 Census of England and Wales, Central London Sick Asylum Highgate Infirmary; Central London Sick Asylum District Admission and Discharge Registers).

William was deceased by the time his daughter Emily married Hilton Edwards’s father, Thomas George Edwards, on 18 December 1897 in the Registry Office in the District of Islington (Marriage Cert for Thomas George Edwards and Emily Murphy).<sup>8</sup> Emily, by that point a thirty-four-year-old spinster, rose in the world through her marriage to Edwards, a forty-two-year-old widower and relatively successful man who had risen from tenement dwellings through hard work: in sundry official records dating from 1871 through 1914, his job is variously described as Artist, Designer, Engraver, Printer, Master Publisher and Christmas Card Designer (see 1871 Census of England and Wales, 70 Margaret Street, Marylebone; Baptismal record for Thomas Albert Edwards; 1881 Census of England and Wales, 18 Alfred Place, Finsbury; 1891 Census of England and Wales, 45 Clepstone Street, Marylebone; Marriage Cert for Thomas George Edwards and Emily Murphy; 1901 Census of England and Wales, 45 Clepstone Street, Marylebone).<sup>9</sup> However, it is still clear that Gate co-founder Hilton Edwards was raised in close proximity to Irish poverty, through his mother Emily. And this would almost certainly have haunted him as he made a life in Ireland between June 1927 – a mere ten months after the death of his beloved mother (Death Cert for Emily Edwards) – and his own death in 1983.

### MICHEÁL MAC LIAMMÓIR

Hilton’s life partner and fellow Gate co-founder, Micheál mac Liammóir, was born Alfred Lee Willmore on 25 October 1899 at 150 Purves Road, Willesden, London, the youngest child of Alfred George Willmore (a forage dealer’s buyer) and Mary Elizabeth Lee (Birth Cert for Alfred Lee Willmore). As a teenager, Alfred fell in love with Irish mythology and literature, as well as the Irish language – partially as a result of his

discovery of the work of Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats but also through the influence of his great friend, Máire O'Keeffe, the London-born daughter of a Tipperary father. Together, Alfred and Máire joined London branches of the Gaelic League and Sinn Féin. And, as biographers Ó hAodha, Christopher Fitz-Simon and Tom Madden have shown, between 1917 and 1927, the Londoner Alfred – with crucial input from O'Keeffe but also a Kildare-born friend called Jack Dunne – successfully transformed himself into the Irish-speaking and supposedly Cork-born Micheál mac Liammóir.<sup>10</sup> It was not until after mac Liammóir's death that the truth about his English background and his original name became widely known – thanks, as previously noted, to the publication of the Ó hAodha biography (and the many revelations it contained) in 1990.

As Des Lally, Fitz-Simon, Ó hAodha and others have discussed, there were suspicions during mac Liammóir's lifetime that many of his stories regarding his past – and particularly his Irish past – were not true (see, e.g., Lally 193–207; Fitz-Simon 13, 23; Ó hAodha 4, 189). However, mac Liammóir fooled most Irish people, and it seems that the shock of discovering the surprising truth has led to a situation where commentators are quick to emphasize – indeed, over-emphasize – mac Liammóir's Englishness. Within Gate studies and Irish Studies, one regularly sees critics asserting that mac Liammóir ‘had no Irish connections whatsoever’ (Walshe 151; see also, e.g., Ó hAodha 4; Fitz-Simon 19; Pine 66; Wilson 120; Cairney 119; Horan; Whitington). They also regularly imply that his decision to take on an Irish persona in life was even more transgressive than it might otherwise have been because he was – of all nationalities – English. However, this reductive treatment of mac Liammóir's background has virtually shut down enquiries into curious contentions made by Ó hAodha and others that would complicate the picture of “pure” Englishness. These contentions include Ó hAodha's suggestion that mac Liammóir's mother might have been from an ‘English Jewish background’, as well as what Ó hAodha rightly refers to as the ‘enigmatic and contradictory traces of a Spanish [...] connection’ on the Willmore side of the family tree (4–5). And, finally, there is the fact that Ó hAodha does not dispute mac Liammóir's contention that his mother's full name was actually ‘Mary Elizabeth *Lawler* Lee’ (345, our emphasis).<sup>11</sup> The name Lawler would seem to indicate some Irish blood in mac Liammóir's lineage. Each of these provocative hints regarding mac Liammóir's possibly “mixed” ancestry requires investigation, in order to get a more accurate sense of his national and cultural starting point.

Having investigated the Jewish connection, it has become clear that Ó hAodha's surmise in this regard results from his having confused two different Mary Elizabeth Lees. When looking for a birth certificate for mac Liammóir's mother, Ó hAodha seems to have presumed that she was born in London, and therefore he settled on a document related to the 1867 birth in Islington of a woman called Mary Elizabeth Lee (5, 205). This particular woman was the daughter of a jeweller called Robert Samuel Lee and his wife, Rebecca (maiden name Essex). Ó hAodha is right to suggest that these details would seem to indicate a possible Jewish background (5). The only issue is that this is the wrong Mary Elizabeth Lee.

Mac Liammóir's actual mother, Mary Elizabeth Lee, was born on 5 July 1864 at Farningham in the District of Dartford, Kent, the daughter of Frederick Lee, a journeyman miller, and his wife Elizabeth (Birth Cert for Mary Elizabeth Lee). Mary can be found in the 1871 census, aged seven years, residing in Tower Hamlets with her Reigate, Surrey-born father, Frederick (described as a miller's servant), and her Isleworth, Middlesex-born mother, Elizabeth (1871 Census of England and Wales, Parish of St. George in the East). And when she married Alfred Willmore on 12 January 1888 in Camberwell, Mary identified her father as Frederick Lee, a corn merchant (Marriage Cert for Alfred Willmore and Mary Elizabeth Lee). The entries for Mary in the 1891 and 1901 census returns (i.e. after her marriage) also confirm that she was born in Kent (1891 Census of England and Wales, 14 Clarence Road, Hackney; 1901 Census of England and Wales, 150 Purves Road, Willesden). These facts disprove the theory regarding possible London Jewish ancestry. However, that still leaves questions to be answered about the suggestions that mac Liammóir had Spanish and Irish antecedents.

Mac Liammóir frequently contended that he was part-Spanish. He claimed that his grand aunt was called Luisa Concepción Fuentes and that he and his father visited her in Seville in 1914. It seems likely (or at least plausible) that mac Liammóir and his father visited Spain in 1914, but the veracity of many details included in mac Liammóir's account of the trip in Chapter 4 of his autobiographical novel *Enter a Goldfish* is certainly open to question. Did mac Liammóir's father really leave him in Seville for an extended period, so that he could learn Spanish – something that could potentially be useful to him in a future career now that the child acting roles were drying up? Was it really the threat of the Great War breaking out that brought this Spanish sojourn to an end? And, most importantly,

were the people he stayed with really his relations? Going back through the Willmore family tree to the late eighteenth century, it becomes clear that there are no Spanish people in mac Liammóir's direct line. However, it is still conceivable that one of the women named Louisa on that side of his family may have married a Spaniard and moved to Spain.

Mac Liammóir's grandfather – Edward Willmore, Jr. (born in London in 1834) – had a sister called Louisa, who would seem like a good candidate for the Spanish-based grand aunt (1841 Census of England and Wales, Wellington Buildings, Tower Hamlets; 1851 Census of England and Wales, 4 North Street, Tower Hamlets). However, she married one Henry Forrest in London on 21 January 1861, and died in the English capital only six years later (Marriage Cert for Henry Forrest and Louisa Willmore; City of London and Tower Hamlets cemetery registers). Likewise, that same grandfather had a child called Louisa via his second marriage (1881 Census of England and Wales, 228 Holywell, Shoreditch). It is possible that this woman, who was born in London circa 1873 (1881 Census of England and Wales, 228 Holywell, Shoreditch), married a Spaniard and/or moved to Spain. However, so far, no evidence to this effect has been forthcoming. What is more, this woman was ten years younger than her half-brother, mac Liammóir's father Alfred, which complicates the picture painted of her as an older aunt figure.

Evidence may yet surface of a Spanish connection to the Willmore family, but – in the end – it is most likely that mac Liammóir was exaggerating the tie to Spain, as a way of acknowledging the significant impact that the 1914 trip had on him. The account in *Enter a Goldfish* (however unreliable it may be) indicates that the trip included a degree of sexual awakening. That said, if rumours that Fitz-Simon heard are true, the intense impact may have been related not so much to the fact that he became more aware of his homosexuality on that trip but that he was the victim of sexual harassment or even assault, in form of the unwanted 'sexual advances [...] from] an older person' (39).<sup>12</sup>

While mac Liammóir may have been embellishing or even fabricating his Spanish ancestry out of some attempt to acknowledge or come to terms with events that took place in Spain in 1914, this would not automatically mean that his suggestion of Irish blood through his invocation of the Lawler surname is definitely another fabrication. Indeed, in tracing back the Willmore line in search of Spanish blood, the Lawler/Irish connection has been uncovered. Mac Liammóir's paternal grandfather, Edward Willmore, Jr., has already been mentioned. By the time Edward's

second son – mac Liammóir’s father Alfred – was born, he was a respectable corn dealer, even if he was living in rough and ready Shoreditch in London’s East End (1871 Census of England and Wales, 228 Holywell, Shoreditch). But he had risen from much humbler origins – origins that he seems to have been keen to cover up.

When Edward married Mary Tyler Bond, mac Liammóir’s grandmother, in 1859, he described his father – Edward Willmore, Sr. (born in Middlesex circa 1796) – as a ‘warehouse man’ (Marriage Cert for Edward Willmore and Mary Tyler Bond). In 1871, after this first wife died, he married a woman called Louisa Moss. On this occasion, Edward Jr. described his deceased father as having been a ‘Gentleman’ (Marriage Cert for Edward Willmore and Louisa Moss). In point of fact, census records show that Edward Willmore, Sr. worked primarily as a ‘labourer’ or ‘dock labourer’ in the East End during Edward Jr.’s formative years, only eventually (and temporarily) rising to the position of ‘warehouse man’ in the late 1850s and early 1860s (see 1841 Census of England and Wales, Wellington Buildings, Tower Hamlets; 1851 Census of England and Wales, 4 North Street, Tower Hamlets; Marriage Cert for Edward Willmore and Mary Tyler Bond). Likewise, Edward Jr. himself started his working life as a ‘servant’ whose specific position was ‘Cheese monger’s Shopman’ (1851 Census of England and Wales, 22 Cable Street, Whitechapel); later on, he became a ‘merchant clerk’, then ‘manager to a Corn Merchant’, before eventually becoming a ‘Corn Dealer’ himself by 1871 (Civil Marriage Cert for Edward Willmore and Mary Tyler Bond; 1861 and 1871 Census of England and Wales, 228 Holywell, Shoreditch).<sup>13</sup>

We can imagine that, in attempting to cover up his humble origins, Edward Willmore Jr. did not just suppress the true nature of his father’s working life by referring to him as a ‘Gentleman’ after his death. It is probable that he would have been unlikely to advertise the fact that his mother was a London-born woman from an Irish background called Mary Lawler, who was born and raised in rough parts of London and whose parents may have been born in Ireland (“England Marriages, 1538–1973”, entry for Edward Willmore and Mary Lawler; 1841 Census of England and Wales, Wellington Buildings, Tower Hamlets; 1851 Census of England and Wales, 4 North Street, Tower Hamlets; ‘Christenings 1795’, entry for Mary Lawler).<sup>14</sup> Still, the Lawler name clearly survived in the family’s collective memory, since Mary’s great-grandson Micheál

mac Liammóir used her surname when attempting to give an Irish sheen to his mother's name decades later.

Mac Liammóir's niece, Mary Rose McMaster (the daughter of his sister Marjorie and the great actor-manager Anew McMaster) once admitted that Micheál was 'prone to distorting facts and exaggeration' when discussing his Irish background (quoted in Ó hAodha 6). While many of his assertions, from the Cork birth to the suggestion that his mother knew some Irish (Pine 66), were patently false, it is noteworthy that – as his "renaming" of his mother suggests – he was clearly aware of (and chose to pay tribute to) the Lawler connection in his family tree. And it is now clear that mac Liammóir was not – as so many commentators have suggested – completely without Irish connections.

### CORALIE CARMICHAEL

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Gate Theatre was in an unusual position in that its (informal) company of actors included three women who could play lead roles: Betty Chancellor, Meriel Moore, and Coralie Carmichael. As mac Liammóir put it in his memoir *All for Hecuba*, this rotation of 'leading ladies' made for 'a discreet and pleasing variety' (2008, 110). And yet, of these three women, one always seemed to get more attention than the others: the glamourous Coralie Carmichael. Her unusual, dark looks were often described by critics and commentators as 'exotic', and, in *All for Hecuba*, mac Liammóir ascribed this to her background: 'she had been born in London of origins as mixed and unexpected as those of an American *hors d'oeuvres* – the lands of her ancestors ranged from Scotland to Morocco' (14).

Perhaps out of awareness of mac Liammóir's ability to embellish the truth, scholars have been reluctant to explore Carmichael's alleged Moroccan ancestry. Ó hAodha is typical when he simply describes her as 'born in London, of Scottish extraction' (46-47) – a safe enough surmise given her English accent and Carmichael surname.<sup>15</sup> However, a question remains over whether mac Liammóir was actually lying, in order to intensify Carmichael's perceived exoticism. One might also wonder about the extent of her Scottish ancestry; after all, her Scots Carmichael forebear could be even further back in her family tree than mac Liammóir's Lawler relations.

As it turns out, Carmichael's Scottish and Moroccan roots were both very real and very recent in her lineage. She was born Coralie Esther

Percy Carmichael on 6 November 1902 in Hampstead, London, and her parents were Thomas Percy Carmichael, a divorced actor originally from Glasgow, and Simie Benoliel, the Croydon-born daughter of an Anglican clergyman originally from Morocco called Maxwell Mackluff Benoliel and his North London-born wife, Harriet James (Birth Cert for Simie Harriette Ben Oliel; Marriage Cert for Thomas Percy Carmichael and Simie Harriette Ben-Oliel).

To begin with the Scottish side of the family, Coralie's father, Thomas, was born on 1 May 1862 in Shettleston in Glasgow's East End, and was raised in that same area (Birth Cert for Thomas Carmichael). His father was originally from Dumfries in southwest Scotland and was a grocer and spirit merchant, and his mother was originally from Forfar, a town about fifty miles north of Edinburgh (1871 Census of Scotland, Shettleston, Glasgow). Despite Thomas's father possessing a respectable and fairly prosperous job, the young man defied expectations by taking to the stage and acting under the name Arthur Cecil Percy. An obituary note about him from the 25 February 1905 edition of *The Era* gives us a good sense of his career:

We regret to record the death of Mr. Thomas Percy Carmichael (professionally known as Arthur Cecil Percy), which occurred at Epsom on the 16<sup>th</sup> inst. Mr. Percy was a native of Glasgow, and was well known as a very painstaking actor in heavy and character parts. His most distinct successes were made in *The Hansom Cab, England, Home, and Beauty*, *The Trumpet Call*, *The English Rose*, *The Penalty of Crime*, *Alone in London*, *The French Spy* and *I Defy the World*. His demise at the early age of 43 is deeply regretted by his many friends and acquaintances, especially so by his sorrowing wife. The deceased was interred on Monday at Epsom. ('Theatrical Gossip')

His 'sorrowing wife' was Coralie's mother, Simie. Thomas and Simie had married in Birmingham on 14 September 1901 (Marriage Cert for Thomas Percy Carmichael and Simie Harriette Ben-Oliel), less than a year after Thomas's divorce from his first wife, Mabel Moore, was finalized.<sup>16</sup> Sadly, Thomas died only three and a half years after his second marriage – and only two years and four months after Coralie's birth. However, his acting talent clearly lived on in his daughter.

Then again, Coralie must also have gotten some of her talent from her mother's side of the family (specifically, her Moroccan grandfather and her mother), as we shall see. As previously noted, Simie's father Maxwell

was an Anglican clergyman, and his job, of course, certainly required a degree of “performance”. Maxwell was born in Tangier circa 1833, and he was the son of a physician (1871 Census of England and Wales, St. Paul’s Parsonage, Croydon; Marriage Cert for Maxwell Mackluff Benoliel and Harriet James). It is likely that Maxwell was at least partially of Jewish descent, since Benoliel (spelled in a variety of ways) is frequently a Jewish surname in North Africa, as well as in Gibraltar, Spain, Portugal and Cape Verde (see Serels; Researchers of The Museum of The Jewish People). By contrast, the surname Mackluff (also anglicized in various ways) frequently belongs to Christians across the Arab world.<sup>17</sup> It is possible that Maxwell had mixed Jewish and Christian roots, which could explain his Anglican faith.<sup>18</sup> What we do know for certain is that, at the age of twenty, Maxwell emigrated to England, where he took Holy Orders after settling in the northwest of England – first in Birkenhead and then Kirkby Lonsdale (Naturalization Papers for Maxwell Mocluff Benoliel). In 1861, he became a naturalized British citizen, and, six years later, he married Harriet James, daughter of a ‘Gentleman’, in Croydon (Marriage Cert for Maxwell Mackluff Benoliel and Harriet James).

Coralie’s mother, Simie, was born in Croydon six years later (Birth Cert for Simie Harriette Ben Oiel). Prior to Simie’s birth, Maxwell served in various street missions but also as chaplain to the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland.<sup>19</sup> During Simie’s formative years, Maxwell mainly served as a vicar in parishes in southern England. When she came of age, he took up some rather surprising positions: he seems to have led a mission in West Berkeley, California in 1889-1891 and to have served as rector of a parish in San Bernadino, California in 1891-1893. Upon his return to England, he was – for a time in 1896 – head of the Kilburn Mission to the Jews, further confirmation that he was likely of Jewish descent. It is unclear if Simie accompanied her parents to California, but she was certainly living with them after their return to London (1901 Census of England and Wales, Oxford Road, Willesden). Simie left the family home when she married Thomas Carmichael but returned to live with her parents – together with her daughter, Coralie – after her husband’s death. The last record for Maxwell in *Crockford’s Clerical Directory* appears in the 1907 edition, so we can presume he passed away around that time.

By the time of the 1911 census, Coralie was living in Mortlake, Surrey with her mother, who was now described as an ‘Actress’ (there was no occupation listed for her in the 1901 census), and her grandmother

Harriet, a ‘Widow’ living by ‘Private Means’ (1911 Census of England and Wales, Mortlake, Surrey). With Maxwell dead, the family’s financial situation became increasingly precarious, and in 1914, Coralie – who had previously been educated at two expensive private schools – was sent to the Putney County Secondary School in Wandsworth. Her July 1915 discharge record (in which her mother is described as being in the ‘theatrical profession’) seems to indicate that she had some sort of fee exemption (Admission and Discharge Register for Girls, Putney County Secondary School). In the following years, the family is scarcely found in official records. What is clear is that Coralie ‘went on to the stage at 16’ (*Coralie Carmichael Dead*) and that her grandmother Harriet died in 1919 (Death Cert for Harriet Ben-Oliel). Coralie had amassed lots of varied stage experience in London by the time she joined Anew McMaster’s troupe in 1926, where she later met the co-founders of the Gate and became inveigled in their plans to set up a theatre in Dublin. That venture was greatly helped by Coralie’s strong acting talent and arresting, unusual looks, both of which were inherited from her Moroccan-Scottish-English forebears.

Incidentally, Coralie’s success as an actor and a private vocal coach (she even trained the young Gay Byrne) meant that she could bring her mother, Simie, to Ireland, where the woman died in 1947 (Byrne 77; ‘Ireland, Civil Registration Deaths Index, 1864-1958’, entry for Simie Ben-Oliel). And Coralie herself – who had married fellow Gate/McMaster actor Denis McKenna in 1941 – converted to Catholicism in 1956 and died two years later, at the relatively young age of fifty-six. During her final illness, there was a tribute concert for her held at the Gaiety Theatre, which featured performances by (among others) mac Liammóir, Edwards, Maureen Potter, Jimmy O’Dea, Noel Purcell, and London’s Festival Ballet Company (*Coralie Carmichael Concert*).

### NANCY BECKH

As relatively little scholarship exists on the Gate compared to other major Irish theatre organizations, many important figures who contributed to the theatre’s successes have been overlooked – especially women. One clear example of this is Nancy Beckh, who worked as an actor, costume designer and milliner for several Gate productions between 1932 and 1956. Beckh was completely of German descent on her father’s side of the family. Her paternal grandfather was a Bavarian man called Emil

Beckh who was born in Schwabach on 23 July 1824, the son of a merchant named Sebastian Beckh and his wife Auguste Fischer (Baptismal record for Emil Beckh; Marriage Cert for Emil Beckh and Juliet Emily Benecke).<sup>20</sup> Emil emigrated to England when he was approximately nineteen. An alien arrival certificate reveals that Emil Beckh arrived with one Carl Kreistner (or Freistner) on 22 February 1844, having departed from Belgium and arrived in the port of Dover (Alien Arrival Document for Emil Beckh).

Once in England, Emil followed in his father's footsteps and set up as a merchant in Riches Court in the City of London. Emil became a naturalized British citizen in advance of his marriage at the age of twenty-six to an English-born daughter of German parents called Juliet Emily Benecke (Naturalization Papers for Emil Beckh). Juliet's father Frederick was a 'manufacturing chemist' born in Hamburg circa 1803, and his wife Henrietta (née Souchay) was born in Frankfurt circa 1809; the couple married in Deptford in September 1826, and were naturalized British citizens by the time of Juliet's birth (1851 Census of England and Wales, 84 Denmark Hill, Lambeth; Naturalization Papers for Frederick William Benecke).

Emil and Juliet would go on to have five children (all born in Surrey), and the last of these children was Nancy Beckh's father, Harry Oscar Beckh, born in 1864 (Birth Cert for Harry Oscar Beckh). Harry excelled at Haileybury College (a public school in Hertfordshire), and at Caius College, Cambridge, where he completed a B.A. in Mathematics and an M.A. in Civil Engineering (Venn and Venn 211). Early in Harry's career, he worked as a Civil Engineer for firms in London and Colchester, Essex ('Civil Engineer Membership Forms, 1818–1930'). It was while working in Colchester that he met his wife, Agnes Helen Legh – the daughter of an Anglican clergyman. After marrying in 1899, Harry and Agnes had two children in Colchester: Joan Katherine (born in early 1900) and – the focus of this essay – future theatre practitioner Nancy Helen (born in late 1903) (1911 Census of Ireland, 81 James's Street, Usher's Quay Ward, Dublin).<sup>21</sup> Then, in 1904, shortly after Nancy's birth, Harry was offered a job with Guinness's in Dublin and the family moved to Ireland (1911 Census of Ireland, 81 James's Street, Usher's Quay Ward, Dublin). A third child, Kate Winifred, was born in Dublin in 1908 (Birth Cert for Kate Winifred Beckh).

Nancy was raised in two houses in Dublin: first 81 James's Street near Guinness's Brewery and later 15 Palmerston Road in the suburb of Rathmines (1911 Census of Ireland, 81 James's Street, Usher's Quay Ward, Dublin; 'Irish Wills'). Her interest in performance manifested itself early, as her early appearances in the *Irish Times* indicate. Her first appearance in Ireland's "paper of record" relates to her participation in a 'Swedish Educational Gymnastics' exhibition, held in Dublin's Antient Concert Rooms in 1910, in which she and the other students in Miss Studley's Dublin and Bray gymnastics classes (including Nancy's sister Joan) showed off various gymnastics and dance moves ('Swedish Educational Gymnastics'). Her next appearance was in 1925, in a review of a benefit concert organized by famed Cork actor Charles Doran, which sought funds for 'the Countess of Mayo's Fund for the relief of distress in the West of Ireland'. The concert was held at Alexandra College; Nancy sang in a group with two other singers, and the *Irish Times* reviewer complimented the trio on some 'really excellent vocalism' ('Distress in the West'). She appears again in 1928, when the paper notes that Nancy along with two other singers won First Prize in the 'Ladies' Vocal Trio' category at the Dublin Feis ('The Feis Ceoil'). And, in 1930, she is touted in the *Irish Times* as being one of the featured speakers at a public meeting of the Pembroke Social Service Union, alongside the Bishop of Meath ('Social Service Union').

During the 1920s and early 1930s, Nancy was not simply developing her performance skills as a singer and public speaker: she was also cultivating her love of the visual arts. Elaine Sisson has examined the Headmaster's annual reports and the attendance books from Dublin's famous Metropolitan School of Art and determined that Beckh was a student there during the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> It appears that she entered the school in 1922, and made a mark right away: she is mentioned in the 1922-1923 Annual Report, which states that she won a 'Junior Prize'. The 1924-1925 Annual Report announces that she has been hired as a teacher of drawing at the 'Intermediate School, Celbridge' (also known as the Collegiate School Celbridge, a well-known school for Protestant girls). Sisson surmises that this probably means that Beckh finished her training in the School of Art by the Summer of 1925; that said, she reappears in the 1928-1929 Annual Report, which states that she won a prize for 'drawing from natural forms' and was commended in the 'Modelling and Sculpture' category.

It may seem unusual that Beckh was considered a qualified teacher by the school as of 1924-1925 but was then back winning student prizes in 1928-1929. Sisson believes that the most logical explanation is that she re-attended the School of Art a few years later, possibly as a night student, noting that her Metropolitan School contemporaries Harry Kernoff and Rosamond Jacob both attended by night. Of course, in the late 1920s, Kernoff and Jacob were both involved in Desirée ‘Toto’ Bannard Cogley’s Cabaret, which provided the early Gate with its initial membership list. Other contemporaries of Beckh at the Metropolitan School were also involved with Toto’s Cabaret and/or the early Gate, including Norah McGuinness and Cecil Salkeld. Sisson suggests that the fact that Beckh would have known these people may indicate how she came to the attention of mac Liammóir and Edwards. Nancy began working at the Gate in 1932, and – over the next two and a half decades – she fulfilled various key roles at the theatre (including actor, costume designer and milliner), both under ‘the Boys’ and with Longford Productions.

Although Nancy is little remembered today, she was actually part of the original cast for the debut of several important plays from the Gate’s early history. Examples include Lord Longford’s 1932 stage adaptation of J.S. Le Fanu’s *Carmilla*, Christine Longford’s 1938 stage adaptation of Maria Edgeworth’s *The Absentee* (for which the former art student also designed the cast’s elaborate, period hats), Denis Johnston’s 1939 play *The Golden Cuckoo* (on which she also served as Wardrobe Supervisor), and the Irish première of Bernard Shaw’s *In Good King Charles’s Golden Days*, put on by the Longfords in 1943.

Other memorable roles were her scene-stealing cameos as Lady Catherine de Burgh in Christine Longford’s 1941 stage adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (‘Gate Theatre: “Pride and Prejudice”’; ‘Other Houses’) and as the housekeeper, Tabby, in John Davison’s 1944 play *The Brontës of Haworth Parsonage* (Sweeney 1944b), as well as her star turn in the Longfords’ 1943 production of Elizabeth McFadden’s *Double Door*. As an anonymous *Irish Times* journalist puts it in a review of *Double Door*: ‘This “thriller”, with an American period setting, [...] gives an opportunity to Nancy Beckh to show how good an actress she can be. She has the principal [...] part in the play, and makes a fine performance of it.’ (‘*Double Door*’) A review of the production’s revival at the Gaiety suggests that she ‘dominated the stage’ (‘*Dublin Theatres*’).

In 1944, Nancy left Dublin, but only after passing on her Wardrobe Supervisor duties with Longford Productions to the woman who had

been serving as her assistant, Sheila O'Reilly (Sweeney 1944a). She moved first to Belfast, then subsequently to East Ealing, Clapham, Lambeth, and finally back to Clapham, where she died in 1981 (Sweeney 1944a; 1948 Ealing East Electoral Register; 1951 Clapham Electoral Register; 1964 Lambeth Electoral Register; 1981 England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index). She did continue to act, however. Her most notable acting job during these years was arguably her performance in a 1958 BBC television adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* ('Television Programmes'). However, it is fitting that she also made one more return to the theatre to which she had contributed so much. In the spring of 1956, she was brought back to Dublin by Longford Productions to play Lady Lannion in the company's staging of Mary Hayley Bell's *The Uninvited Guest*.

## CONCLUSION

When discussing the early Gate's involvement in international cultural exchange, it is easy to point to the fact that one of the theatre's original Directors was a French woman (the aforementioned 'Toto' Bannard Cogley, who was also temporarily part of the Gate's informal acting company), or to note that Chinese (Hsiung Shih-I) and African-American (William Marshall) theatremakers contributed to key productions during the theatre's first three and a half decades. However, the early Gate was also involved in quite subtle examples of intercultural performance, thanks to the fact that four key figures from its formative decades were from mixed backgrounds. For too long, there has been too much reluctance to properly understand the national and cultural starting points of Gate figures such as mac Liammóir, Edwards, Carmichael and the almost-forgotten Beckh.

But, of course, the Gate's involvement with intercultural performance has extended well beyond its first few decades. Consider, for example, its celebrated Beckett Festivals of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: these productions, like the theatre's 1928 staging of *Salomé*, involved actors from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds performing in plays originally written in French by a Dublin-born playwright. Or consider its 2018 production of *Hamlet*, in which the title role was played by a Limerick actor of Irish and Ethiopian descent, Ruth Negga, and in which Hamlet's father was played by a black British actor, Steve Hartland.

As noted towards the start of this chapter, in most studies of Irish theatre history, there has been a tendency to underplay the Gate's

contributions to specifically Irish drama and to play up the theatre's cosmopolitanism. While recent scholarship is correcting this imbalance, it is important that critics do not simply add more weight to the "Irish" side of the national/international scale. Rather, theories around intercultural performance must be employed, so that we can understand – in a more nuanced way – the hybrid nature of many of the Gate's greatest productions. Clearly, 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.

## NOTES

1. See, e.g., McIvor; Knowles 2010; Knowles 2017; Mitra; Nakase.
2. Paul Durcan made this comment in conversation with Alan Gilsean at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, on 29 May 2011.
3. It should be noted that Carmichael also played the Green Clad One in that production of *Peer Gynt*.
4. For an overview of 'cultural survivals theory', see Boyes.
5. At the time in the UK, being of 'full age' meant that someone was over twenty-one.
6. This has been especially difficult to verify, since it appears that all of these Reilly family members died before the 1841 census, the first census to include place of birth information.
7. Margaret Makepeace notes that the 'world of poverty and deprivation centred on a poor area of London between Lisson Grove and Edgware Road in the Christ Church district of Marylebone. In an 1843 report, the local registrar described a dense population, with up to seven sleeping in one room. The general condition of the local people was "not very cleanly", their habits "intemperate", and their earnings irregular.' (Makepeace) Lisson Grove is, of course, where Bernard Shaw's fictional Eliza Doolittle was born and raised.
8. Witnesses to the marriage were Hugh and Alice Love. Alice was most likely Emily's sister, Alice Murphy, who married Hugh Love in Islington in 1891 (General Register Office England and Wales Civil Registration Indexes Ref. 1891). It is noteworthy that the maiden name of Hilton's paternal grandmother, Elizabeth, was also Swain. Thus, it appears that Hilton had Swain blood on both sides of his family tree (Marriage Cert for Robert Edwards and Elizabeth Amelia Swain; 'England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538–1975', entry for Thomas Edwards).

9. Fitz-Simon and other biographers have conflated and/or confused Hilton's artistic father, George Thomas Edwards, with a civil servant who served in India called Thomas George Cecil Edwards. However, George Thomas Edwards was residing in London in April 1911 with Emily and their son, Hilton, when the census was compiled, and also appears in an account in the *Hendon & Finchley Times* on 1 May 1914 (p. 6), which repeats the address from the 1911 census. By contrast, Thomas George Cecil Edwards died in India on 4 July 1911, where he was employed as Collector and District Magistrate for the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. This civil servant also seems to have been the son of a barrister, and he married a woman called Violet College in Cheltenham in 1904 – whereas Hilton's father was the son of a coach spring maker and was married to Emily Murphy by 1904. What's more, the 1911 census for George Thomas Edwards recorded his age as fifty-six years, suggesting a year of birth circa 1855. This is at odds with the age of Thomas George Cecil Edwards, who died in Agra aged forty-one years in 1911, suggesting he was born in circa 1870. Finally, at no point does the name Cecil appear on records related to the birth of Hilton or the 1911 census return related to Hilton's family.
10. This transformation is the central concern of Madden's *The Making of an Artist: Creating the Irishman Micheál MacLiammóir*.
11. Peter Costello also includes 'Lawler' in her name (see Costello 345).
12. This may explain why, as Fitz-Simon notes, mac Liammóir wrote to Gate secretary Patricia Turner 'half a century later' that 'Spain, to me, means doom!' (39, emphasis in the original).
13. The 1861 census also seems to suggest that Edward Jr. and his wife Mary ran a lodging house for a time. Edward Jr. was residing at 228 Holywell Street in Shoreditch with Mary (aged twenty-eight) and son Edward (aged one), but the household also included a number of others: three barmaids, a domestic cook, a kitchen maid, an under waiter, a nursemaid and one Cornish widow.
14. It is still to be determined if Mary's parents – named Patrick and Frances Lawler (if we have Mary's correct baptismal record) – were born in Ireland. There is some uncorroborated evidence (perhaps impossible to confirm) that suggests that her father may have been born in Dublin to Christopher Lawler and Anna Cavanagh, and that he later settled in the East End (Baptismal record for Patrick Lawler). The only proof connecting this gentleman to Mary Lawler are two genealogies uploaded to ancestry.com by Mary's descendants. Since very few baptismal records survive for the Roman Catholic population of eighteenth-century Ireland, it is possible that the amateur genealogists who compiled these genealogies decided to trust the only surviving documents related to a Patrick Lawler of roughly the right age who was born in Ireland and who moved

- to London in advance of Mary's year of birth. A significant amount of additional (possibly fruitless) research would have to be undertaken to discover if this man was, in fact, Mary's father. The birthplace of Mary's presumed mother, Frances, is – at present – totally unknown.
15. Curiously, the tribute to her in *The Irish Press* after her death describes her as having been born in London to Spanish parents ('Death of Coralie Carmichael').
  16. According to the divorce petition, it seems that Mabel had 'frequently committed adultery with Gordon Smith at the White Hart Hotel, St. Albans' (Divorce Court File 666, Appellant: Thomas Percy Carmichael).
  17. Prominent examples of Arab Christians bearing the surname include St. Charbel Makhlouf, Fr. George Makhlouf, peace activist Samer Makhlouf, and the writer Georgia Makhlouf. That said, as Georgia Makhlouf herself has observed, the surname also occasionally belongs to 'Muslim and even Jewish' people (see Makhlouf).
  18. There is evidence online that appears to verify Maxwell's Jewish roots and to suggest that Maxwell's brother might also have been a Christian clergyman. Someone has uploaded a family tree online which refers to a person who could be Maxwell's father: a Samuel Ben-Oiel, who was born on 10 June 1791 in Tangier and who was the son of Abraham Ben-Oiel and Paloma Serruya. He married Sahra Eltuaty and his occupation is described as 'Medico del Sultan de Marruecos' (see 'Samuel Ben-Oiel'). No sources are provided for this information, so its accuracy is impossible to verify. And there is a death record in Michigan for a Rev. Abraham Ben-Oiel, who died on 1 June 1900, a seventy-four-year-old married 'Missionary to the Jews' who was born in Tangier, Morocco. Abraham was the son of Samuel Ben-Oiel, who was born in Gibraltar – i.e. not Tangier, as the online family tree suggests (see Death record for Rev. Abraham Ben-Oiel). Abraham is cited as a brother of Maxwell in online published family trees, but, again, the accuracy of these genealogies cannot be completely verified. In these family trees, other siblings of Maxwell (besides Abraham) include Moise, Sol and Paloma. As can be seen, if these family trees are indeed related to Maxwell's family, there is clear evidence of Jewish ancestry, but also some first names and surnames that more frequently belong to Christian or Muslim Arabs (e.g., Sahra Eltuaty, the name of Maxwell's possible mother) and even Spanish Christians (e.g., Paloma Serruya, the name of Maxwell's possible paternal grandmother). That said, Sahra is also a Hebrew variant of the Biblical name Sarah, and Serruya can sometimes be a Jewish surname.
  19. The details regarding Maxwell Benoliel's clerical career included in this section of the essay can be found in the 1907 edition of *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, a copy of which is located in the Lambeth Palace Library.

20. According to a genealogist that was engaged in Germany, ‘Emil’s great-grandfather, son of an administrator near Horb (in Baden-Württemberg), born in 1700, founded a factory for gold and silver wire in Schwabach in 1730, which continued to exist, in family hands, until after 1900. The wire is of a special sort, called Leonische Waren; there is a picture on the German Wikipedia page from the town museum in Schwabach. [...] There are monuments for the family at the local cemetery in Schwabach. And there is a (short) street named after the family.’ (Schleichert)
21. It should be noted that, at the time of writing, the family’s surname is misspelled ‘Beadh’ in the online transcription of their original census form.
22. The information about Beckh’s time in the Metropolitan School of Art included in this paragraph and the following one comes from an email from Sisson (see Works Cited). Sisson notes that the Metropolitan School of Art was under the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) and that DATI reports, including the Metropolitan School of Art’s annual headmaster reports, are held in the National Library of Ireland; however, Sisson clarifies that she consulted the records in the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) and at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD).

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## CHAPTER 5

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# The Other Gates: Anglo-American Influences on and from Dublin

*Charlotte Purkis*

This chapter extends the established historical narrative of the relationship between the London and Dublin Gate Theatres. It elaborates on the impact that the London Gate Studio Theatre's management made on the foundation of the Dublin Gate Studio Theatre in 1928, reviews unpublished documentary evidence which points to the under-researched influence of London Gate co-director Velona Pilcher (1894-1952) and seeks to clarify London Gate director Peter Godfrey's (1899-1970) role in relation to the Dublin theatre. In keeping with the emphasis of this volume on cultural convergence, a brief account follows about the development and activities of two other theatres – one in England and one in the US – which were, like the Dublin Gate, also inspired by the London Gate and connected back to it through the two London co-directors working within new partnerships. The lost stories of these other theatres founded in the 1940s are valuable, since they suggest a shared sense of avant-garde sensibility in English-speaking theatre which is surprisingly cohesive across an otherwise unconnected group. The 'Gate Theatre

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Studio' opened in Hollywood (Los Angeles) in 1943 (supported by Godfrey), while the Watergate Theatre Club opened in London in 1949 (supported by Pilcher); they each closed during the Edwards – mac Liammóir era of the Dublin Gate. Print media picked up on connections to the original London Gate from re-use of the name, circulating these apparent links in magazine articles and newspaper reports.

Although Godfrey had been in the market for transferring and exchanging productions to extend his sphere of operation beyond London in the late twenties and early thirties, no network of the separate establishments discussed in this chapter was ever formally developed. Yet Godfrey was credited in his lifetime, at the time of his death, and in recently published reference texts with the founding of all three Gate Theatres. For example in 1954, *World Biography* Volume 5 listed under his name: 'Founded The Gate Theatre, London, Dublin and Hollywood' (433). Subsequently, Godfrey is recorded as having founded the Dublin Gate in at least one obituary published in the US in March 1970: *Variety* called him 'a native of London' who 'founded The Gate Theatre there and Dublin' ('Obituaries: Peter Godfrey' 79). In Britain, *The Stage and Television Today* obituary does not mention Dublin, but does record that in Hollywood he 'opened another Gate theatre in 1943' ('Obituary: Peter Godfrey' 11). The misconception about his role with the Dublin Gate may well have stemmed from reminiscences related to the publicity surrounding the 1943-1945 Hollywood Gate Theatre venture, the reputation of the Dublin Gate from its American tours, and perhaps also because American drama featured strongly in the Dublin Gate programming, further connecting the two countries. The past association with Dublin may have been highlighted because the Dublin Gate was more renowned around the world than the only distantly-remembered London Gate and the barely-known Hollywood Gate. The error that associated Godfrey with the founding of the Dublin Gate is still being perpetuated. In Terry Rowan's current *Who's Who in Hollywood* it is claimed that Godfrey was 'a stage actor, producer and director in England and Ireland' (137). While it is true that Godfrey had travelled to Ireland as a youth when he performed as a clown and conjuror with Swift's Circus ('Peter Godfrey' 345), he had not even personally produced his adaptation of William Pratt's nineteenth-century melodrama *Ten Nights in a Bar Room, or Ruined by Drink* when it was performed at the Dublin Gate in May 1930. On 26 January 1938, he directed an Irish play on Broadway, *Shadow and Substance* by Paul Vincent Carroll, which had just

come from the Abbey Theatre; arguably, to the media, this would have further consolidated an Irish connection, especially as the play won the New York Drama Critics' Circle award in this production.

Parallels can be drawn between the collaborative work at the various Gate venues and their club cultures, although these other venues and associated companies operated independently from one another. Looking comparatively at the missions of these Gate Theatres raises awareness of how cultural connections and parallel enthusiasms gave rise to similar conceptual formulations across mid-twentieth-century experimental theatre culture.

### THE LONDON GATE

The London Gate began as the 'Gate Salon' in the upstairs of a dilapidated warehouse at 38 Floral Street, Covent Garden on 30 October 1925. This first theatre was founded by Peter Godfrey and his then wife Molly Veness. Both acted in the productions, as the theatre was an ensemble venture. Its ethos was that theatre was 'The Gate to Better Things'. Godfrey was publicly praised in the press for what he was achieving. In September 1927, G.W. Bishop from *The Era* called him an 'artist of the theatre' whose work had 'imagination and vision' and who 'has shown us what can be done with the smallest of stages and the leanest of resources' (5). Godfrey was consistently the chief producer and managing director, but he relied on a number of business/artistic partnerships as the Gate developed and expanded. Godfrey's second partnership was with Anglo-American thespian Velona Pilcher who was willing to invest money and also a range of expertise in journalism, engraving and printing, and arts management.<sup>1</sup> She became his new co-director in March 1927 when Veness retired from active management, and the Salon location closed. Pilcher apparently paid for Godfrey's contribution to the new premises so that they could work together on an equal footing, handing over £800 which represented the whole of her capital (Sprigge 53). This partnership was short-lived and lasted for the 1927-1928 'third' season, although Pilcher's influence continued into the start of 1928-1929. It resulted in rebranding from 'Salon' to a 'Studio', in a new venue at Villiers Street, Charing Cross, and in artistic development of illustrated programmes and a logo.

The Godfrey-Pilcher partnership has been overlooked in the majority of published histories of the London Gate, although published and

unpublished documentation from the time exists which verifies its existence.<sup>2</sup> Their association developed the theatre and its audience considerably due to its new venue, and the introduction of playbills, programmes, and publicity photographs of the productions which were also occasionally picked up by the press contributed to greater attention to the theatre's productions than in its Floral Street days, and greater financial success. In February 1928, Ashley Dukes wrote in the international magazine *Theatre Arts Monthly* in his role as London correspondent concerning the re-opening: 'I believe this experiment is the most hopeful that London has seen since the War, and possibly the most important.' (145) He also commented on the significance of the name: 'The Gate Theatre modestly made it clear that it was a strait and narrow Gate, like the eye of a needle, through which the prosperous and contented men of the theatre would find it exceedingly difficult to pass.' (144) Pilcher herself enthused in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in an article about her work there how the Gate was 'an independent house' addressing 'itself to the present-day intelligence, eager to participate – all energies on edge – in contemporary creative work' (1929, 509).

The Gate was a club theatre throughout its history, which meant that audience members were subscribers (who paid an annual fee in order to be eligible to buy tickets) and the theatre could bypass censorship law and thus the processes of the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, so long as it did not sell tickets to non-members. One of the reasons that the Godfrey-Pilcher partnership came under strain was due to the 1928 court case which claimed that the club status had been violated by these arrangements breaking down and fined the co-directors. Pilcher appears to have been forced out of the Gate when their association started to break down in summer 1928 under the strain of these proceedings. An unpublished biography by Pilcher's partner at the time of her death, Elizabeth Sprigge, 'L'Idiote Illuminée: The Life and Writing of Velona Pilcher', written with access to Pilcher's journals and letters then in her possession, recorded Godfrey's position in his argument with Pilcher, how he had refused to sign the partnership agreement set up by Pilcher and her solicitor in 1927 as he had not agreed with two of her terms: 'Naturally enough', commented Sprigge, 'as it was he who had started the original Gate in Floral Street and made its considerable reputation, he felt that if the partnership ended, the name "Gate Theatre Studio" should become his property. In addition, he wanted the lease of the premises, which had been taken in his name, to remain his property' (54), and how

he had taken it for granted that ‘she would be willing to be bought out’ (63). Although Pilcher had physically left her regular work at the Gate by winter 1928, her influence pervaded the theatre into its fourth season, 1928–1929, because it had been her role to choose the plays, and some of the programme notes continuing to be printed may well have been hers.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1929, Charles N. Spencer became the new partner to Godfrey, who was quick to issue a new subscription leaflet excluding mention of Pilcher and reasserting himself as ‘the foremost producer of the New Theatre in this country’ and stating that ‘it is purely as a result of his [Godfrey’s] technical knowledge and abilities that The Gate Theatre has now an international reputation and remains the only advanced theatre in England’ (1). Recalling the Gate in the 1930s, the distinguished London theatre critic, J.C. Trewin, described the theatre under Godfrey as ‘steadily and challengingly esoteric’ and a ‘rebel’s haven’ (1960, 62). The theatre changed under its subsequent director, Norman Marshall, who despite remaining in partnership with Charles N. Spencer was initially less successful but then re-established the venue as a revue theatre which also produced new plays. Andrew Davies’s account of Marshall’s takeover stated that Godfrey sold the theatre to Marshall for £2500 and that Godfrey was apparently exhausted (90). *The Manchester Guardian* recorded the financial failure of Godfrey’s Gate in August 1933 and stated that it was due to a lack of reserves, declining membership and an unsuccessful arrangement ‘for the periodical exchange of plays and companies’ with the Cambridge Festival Theatre which had been discontinued in January 1933 (‘The Gate Theatre’ 10). But Godfrey moved on very successfully into a range of other employment: as a popular compère and magician at the London Pavilion variety theatre, then into broadcasting as a producer for Anglo-foreign programmes, followed by film acting and directing.

In his valedictory announcement to members, Godfrey had summarized his achievement as ‘giving London a chance of seeing the amazing experiments that were being made in the theatre all over central Europe and in America just after the war’ (Marshall 50). Marshall was responsible for establishing the history of the theatre in a well-circulated account of the British ‘little theatre movement’, *The Other Theatre* (1947). Marshall of course had an interest in consolidating the strong reputation because he had been the last owner of the theatre which has been consistently recognized since in theatre histories as a groundbreaking organization for introducing experimental Western theatre from Europe and the US

to British audiences and for paving the way for many of the plays first produced there to achieve success in wider circulation. Trewin summed up its importance in 1960 by remarking how there, it had been possible to see ‘many of the foreign plays which would not otherwise have reached London’ (235). More recently, Jozefina Komporaly has defined the London Gate as ‘a translation powerhouse’ and ‘one of the most daring institutions of the inter-war British theatre scene’, and undertaken a detailed examination of the Gate’s internationalist ‘vocation’ and ‘mission’ (129). Marshall’s Gate closed in 1941 when it was hit by a bomb during the Blitz.

### FAMILIAR NARRATIVES CONCERNING THE FOUNDATION OF THE DUBLIN GATE REVIEWED

A review of the historicization of the founding narrative of the Dublin Gate needs to go back to the late 1920s and also to extend to the present day. As well as primary documentary resources, such as press reports and subscription literature from the theatre, there are also vital anecdotal reminiscences in published memoirs. Connections between the London and Dublin Gates were outlined in several press reports. In 1929, the *Derry Journal* noted that ‘[t]he Dublin Gate Theatre is similar in aims and objects to the London Gate Theatre and produces what it considers the best modern plays wherever written’ (‘From the Irish Capital’ 3). *Theatre Arts Monthly* linked the theatres in a commentary by Dukes, who was very familiar with the London Gate and observed that the new Dublin theatre’s playhouse was ‘at least three times as large as that of its London namesake’ (1930, 383). In the same magazine in July 1931, St. John Ervine mentioned the situation in Dublin in ‘The Plight of the Little Theatre’: ‘In Dublin, in addition to the Abbey Theatre, which seems to be in a period of fallow, two littler theatres contrive to obtain audiences: the Peacock and the Gate (The latter began in admitted imitation of the Gate Theatre in London, but is now developing a character of its own).’ (545)

In published accounts from the 1930s, less emphasis was placed on London. Bulmer Hobson recorded in his early history *The Gate Theatre Dublin* (1934) that the theatre was founded ‘in association with the Gate Theatre Studio’ (12), but also confirmed that ‘in actual practice its association or connection with the other organisation in England entirely ceased with these initial conversations’ (14). By 1939, the *Irish Times*

reported on a lecture to the Dublin Literary Society given by Mr. Andrew E. Malone, which had surveyed ‘Ten Years of the Gate Theatre: What it Has Done for Drama’. No mention at all was made of any impact or influence from the London Gate. In fact, the view expressed was that ‘[t]he way had been prepared for the coming of the Gate Theatre by the Dublin Drama League and by a number of excellent amateur societies’. The independence of Ireland was rammed home with this remark: ‘When it was contended that Dublin audiences knew nothing of European and American dramatists before the opening of the Gate Theatre, the contention was without ground, as most of the great contemporary dramatists had their work offered in Dublin, often before even London had seen it.’ (‘Ten Years of the Gate Theatre’ 15)

Modernist experimentation in theatre practice has been seen as the key link between the two Gates. But the London Gate’s advocacy for theatrical innovation and reputation for promoting new continental plays was actually only one facet of the impetus for the development of modernist drama in Dublin. Others of significance which occurred earlier were the productions of Yeats’s plays at the Abbey from the 1910s-20s, and the foundation of the Dublin Drama League (1918-1928), to which ‘the experimental roots of both the Peacock and the Gate theatres can be traced’ because of the way ‘the appetite for experimentalism’ was ‘so well fostered’ by that organization (Sisson 2011, 39, 52). The introduction of German expressionist plays to audiences in London and Dublin began in the mid-twenties and was simultaneous in both places. The audience for experimental drama was sparked in Dublin by the 1925 Abbey Theatre production by Arthur Shields of Vera Mandel’s translation of Ernst Toller’s *Masses and Man* (1921).

The influence of the expressionism experienced in London on Denis Johnston is recorded in the interview by Hickey and Smith, ‘Did You Know Yeats?’, in which Johnston spoke about what he and Sean O’Casey had ‘discovered together in the London Gate Theatre’ (‘Johnston’ 62). The experience led to Johnston’s production of Georg Kaiser’s expressionist play *From Morn to Midnight* (1916), which he would have seen in Godfrey’s staging at the London Gate in 1925. Johnston’s *From Morn to Midnight* was presented at the Peacock Theatre in 1927 under the umbrella of the Abbey Theatre by the ‘New Players’ for the Dublin Drama League. Elaine Sisson has discussed the expressionist productions witnessed by Johnston at the London Gate as a radical departure which had opened his eyes to ‘the potential of theatre as an expressive medium’

(2010, 138). Subsequently, Virginie Girel-Pietka has built on this work to consider in detail how production elements taken from the experience of watching Toller's *Masses and Man* (1920) at the Gate Salon in 1926 impressed Johnston and fed into his own work (112–13).

In his memoir *All for Hecuba* (1947), mac Liammóir recalled his partner Hilton Edwards's 'flying visit to London from which he returned full of his talks with Peter Godfrey', whom Edwards had first befriended when he acted alongside Godfrey in the Forum Theatre Guild production by Robert Atkins of *The Dybbuk* at The Royalty Theatre, London (4 April 1927). Mac Liammóir went on to liken Godfrey's achievements in London to adding a new taste to the repertoire of those less exotic English supper dishes which he compared to various more regular theatrical experiences: 'Godfrey was building a reputation for his methods of production and for the choice of his plays, which had a certain quality as of caviare, and filled a real gap in the English theatrical menu.' (58) Edwards's account, in a later interview from the early 1970s, recalled how Godfrey was persuasive about a close relationship between London and Dublin and reported that when he had 'told Peter Godfrey about our project he said: "Why a new theatre? Why not start another Gate and we can exchange plays?"' ('Edwards and Mac Liammoir' 77). Irish writer Sean Dorman's autobiography *Portrait of My Youth* (1992) repeated this claim and elaborated: 'the idea was that they should be of benefit to one another. He [Godfrey] was to act for them as a clearing house for interesting Continental plays, and they in their turn were to send him new material.' (154)

Revisiting the established narrative of the Dublin Gate's origins, including the initial intentions for connection with the London Gate, benefits from historiographical reflection on how the narrative has been repackaged by the recycling of extant information in the public domain across secondary accounts. The various similarities in retellings have led to an accepted familiarity, arguably contributing to a lack of ongoing interrogation. Historiographical reading of the layering of the inherited story within secondary source accounts, which looks into how a history has been written and what the influences on the story have been, can expose how and why retellings are repetitious. But the variety of reformulations within these repetitions can also contribute to rethinking a range of dimensions characterizing the theatre's outlook, recognizing that these are informed by notions of the avant-garde established throughout the retellings of this history.

In later twentieth-century versions and rewritings of the foundation of the Dublin Gate, Godfrey is often seen as a father figure and his London theatre as an inspiration and productive influence. In 1978, Robert Hogan reviewed and commented on the primary documentary sources of the history of the foundation, reproducing the four-page circular distributed to selected Dublin potential theatregoers in the mail on 15 September 1928, which identified the inspiration from London:

It is proposed to open the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio in October, 1928, for the production of modern and progressive plays, unfettered by theatrical convention. The London Gate Theatre has been extraordinarily successful, and the directors of the Dublin Gate Theatre are in a position to avail themselves of this organisation for procuring plays that would not otherwise be within the reach of Dublin Theatrical circles. (13)

A reference made to extra activities also responds to the innovations introduced in the third season of the London Gate: ‘It is hoped to hold from time to time lectures, discussions, and exhibitions of painting for the benefit of members.’ (13) Hogan commented that the ‘list of possible productions [...] proposed, was for Dublin a rather dazzling prospect indeed’ (14).

In other sources, there has not been a conclusive shift away from making any meaningful connection at all, but there has been a growing tendency to play down or omit influence from London. Even in the mid-century the *Irish Times*’ report on Denis Johnston’s talk about the history of the Gate on Raidió Éireann in 1953 claimed that ‘he did not say who thought of “Gate”’ and made no mention of English influence (‘Denis Johnston Reviews’ 5). Explaining that when ‘Edwards and Mac Liammóir founded the Dublin Gate Theatre in 1928 they kept alive this international impulse within the Irish theatre’ (112), Hogan bypassed any mention of an influence from London in his 1967 study of Irish theatre (although he did acknowledge it in his subsequent study of the Gate in 1978 as cited above). Elaine Sisson’s detailed investigation of the emergence of theatrical modernism in Ireland within *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture: Negotiating Modernity, 1922-1992* relegates the London connection to a footnote: ‘The Gate Theatre Dublin (1928), took its name from the Gate, London, an indication that, by association, the Dublin Gate was aiming to be as daring and experimental as its London counterpart.’ (2011, 270)<sup>4</sup> Some current texts ignore

the London connection altogether. This might have been otherwise had the London Gate Theatre continued into post-war times.<sup>5</sup> The histories published this century generally suggest that the relationship between the theatres was not actually that meaningful. Christopher Morash diminished the link, placing the reference in brackets, and saying that the name, the Gate Theatre ‘(originally intended to indicate a vague affiliation with Peter Godfrey’s Gate Theatre in London’s Covent Garden)’ (178). Christopher Murray expressed the connection as: ‘Modelled to some extent on Peter Godfrey’s Gate Studio theatre in London, which O’Casey admired’ (212). Then in 2010, Thomas Connolly re-emphasized Edwards and mac Liammóir’s intention to create ‘a Dublin version of the London Gate Theatre’s avant-garde style’ with its ‘unlicensed and experimental English and European plays’, adding emotion into the retelling by declaring: ‘Impressed by the productions they saw’ at The London Gate Studio Theatre ‘they determined to do the same’ (71-72). The approach taken seems to depend on the context for the author’s focus, so in *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*, Ben Levitas chooses to ignore any role of the London Gate, writing that the Dublin Gate was the Dublin Drama League’s ‘natural successor’ in keeping with his account that highlights national modernist experiments in Ireland (120).

### LINKS BETWEEN THE GATES: PROJECTED PROGRAMMING, EXCHANGE OF PLAYS AND THE CIRCULATION OF KEY THEATRICAL PERSONNEL

Although it came to be the case that the connections between the theatres were not to be as may have first been thought, the initial plans are historically relevant to a discussion of origins and influences. Initially, a London aspect shows in the programming proposed for Dublin’s first season, which maps onto the programme developed by the Godfrey-Pilcher partnership at the Gate.<sup>6</sup> A suggested list of plays projected for Dublin appeared in subscribers’ publicity – a four-page circular from the ‘Dublin Gate Theatre Studio’ by its four directors: ‘Hilton Edwards, Micheál Mac Liammóir, Gearóid Ó Lochlainn and D. Bannard Cogley’. Of that list, these, which had all been produced in the London Gate, did not in fact get produced: *Maya* (London Gate Studio, 22 November 1927), *Nju* (London Gate Salon, 19 July 1926, and Studio, 14 June 1928), *Orphée* (London Gate Studio, 11 April 1928), *All*

*God's Chillun* (London Gate Studio, 20 November 1928) and *Simoom* (London Gate Salon, 11 October 1926). The plan appears to respond to the conversations Edwards had had with Godfrey about contemporary avant-garde theatre, and also to conform to reports made by some historians that Edwards had planned ‘an exchange-of-plays scheme with Godfrey’ (Cowell 8). However, Edwards later claimed: ‘We exchanged only one play’; ‘although our association remained very friendly, there was really no connection between the theatres’ (‘Edwards and Mac Liammoir’ 77). The exchange which did occur was Godfrey’s burlesque adaptation of Pratt’s *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, which opened at the London Gate on 1 January 1930, and which the Dublin Gate staged in a production of their own a few months later in May 1930. It was extremely popular in both venues.<sup>7</sup>

The following were also produced in both places in different productions: *The Theatre of the Soul* (London, 19 October 1927; Dublin, 12 December 1928), *The Hairy Ape* (London, 26 January 1928; Dublin, 28 October 1928) and *Six Stokers Who Own the Bloomin’ Earth* (London, 5 July 1928; Dublin, 2 January 1929). With respect to the second production of the new company at the Peacock, O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Bulmer Hobson’s history recorded the admiration of Edwards for Godfrey’s 1928 London set: a ‘superb conception’ which ‘directly influenced’ and ‘coloured’ their treatment for the Dublin production (25). Ian R. Walsh has pointed to this as an example of influence on Edwards as a director that ‘should not be missed’ because the borrowed approach was successfully used again (31). Perhaps surprisingly, bearing in mind this initial confluence of productions of the same plays, Edwards recalled later that plays ‘suited to [Godfrey] were not really suited to us’ (‘Edwards and Mac Liammoir’ 77). Sean Dorman quoted another recollection by Edwards: that he (Edwards) had not realized in the late twenties ‘that the distance that separated us was much greater than the geographical one. We got pulled apart. He [Godfrey] asked me only to safeguard and keep to ourselves the name of “Gate Theatre”.’ (154) Edwards also retrospectively commented, ‘I rather regret that we called it the Gate’, although he acknowledged that it had seemed a good idea at the time, and also emphasized that they had survived longer than the London Gate, thus outliving potentially interconnected history (‘Edwards and Mac Liammoir’ 77).

There was a further link which tangentially connected the two theatres and their conjoined history: Terence Gray, the director of the Cambridge Festival Theatre (founded in 1925) who was the son of an Irish aristocrat.

In 1931-1932, Gray trialled an experimental notion of theatrical collaboration between locations, aiming to set up a cartel in England, aping that of ‘des Quatres’ in Paris. That was a group of theatres which the Gate in London was inspired by and which influenced its programming (Komporaly 136). Godfrey had got involved successfully with Gray as a producer, and he directed several plays in Cambridge in 1928, around the time that he was enthusing Edwards about a possible collaboration between the Gates: Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* in February, a new American play by Elmer Rice, *The Subway*, on 5 November and Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* on 26 November. Ultimately, Gray’s attempt to try to link the Gate Theatre London to the Festival Theatre Cambridge failed, although the cooperation had been enthusiastically presented as a new departure by Gray in *The Festival Review* and then announced in *Theatre Arts Monthly*. *Drama* magazine reported in 1932 that an arrangement between the theatres had started, and that Peter Godfrey had directed and acted in his own ‘potted version’ of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*, which opened in Cambridge (7 October) and then transferred with the same cast to London (18 October) at the Gate Theatre (‘Plays of the Month’ 29). And *The Stage* also recorded the arrangement having started and that there was now a ‘Cartel company’ who ‘pass from Villiers Street to Cambridge and back again’ (‘The Gate: Peer Gynt’ 12). According to Rowell and Jackson, the association did not last because ‘the needs and organisation of the two proved too disparate for close cooperation’ (64). It is also reported as failing because of the international financial crisis of the early 1930s, a context which Davies records in his discussion of Gray’s plans. According to Davies, Gray had purchased a site in Covent Garden and intended to build a new theatre there, but even with his ‘drive and administrative flair’ he was defeated by the difficult circumstances (88-89).

Gray was also connected to Anmer Hall (A.B. Horne) who had worked with him in Cambridge as a student. In 1934, Hall invited the Gate Theatre Dublin company to perform at the Westminster Theatre, London, and again in 1937. According to the account by Grene and Morash in *Irish Theatre on Tour*, as impresario of this venue Hall manifested ‘the same artistic policy as Edwards and Mac Liammoir, and as Peter Godfrey’s pioneering Gate Theatre in London’, which was ‘the presentation of new and experimental work’ (162). A further associate of Gray was his cousin, the Irish dancer Ninette de Valois, born Edris Stannis, who had as a child attended the same performing arts school

– the Lila Field Academy London – as mac Liammóir, born Alfred Willmore (Sorley Walker 6). The Peacock Theatre in Dublin was influenced by Gray's experimental festival theatre in Cambridge due to W.B. Yeats's interest and familiarity with it (Sisson 2011, 43). Richard Allen Cave has detailed in *Collaborations* (2011a) de Valois's meeting with Yeats at Cambridge and her collaboration with him at the Peacock in the late 1920s supporting the productions of his Noh plays. She also started the Abbey school of ballet there in 1928.

Billed as the first production in the British Isles, Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* produced by the Dublin Gate company was performed at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin on 12 December 1928. De Valois was not involved, but she choreographed the 'dance of the seven veils' for Gray's *Salomé* productions in Cambridge twice, in 1929 and 1931, and did a third choreography to music by Constant Lambert for Godfrey's production starring Margaret Rawlings for the London Gate Studio (27 May 1931), and then performed the same choreography herself at the Camargo Society (Cave 2011b, 151). *Salomé* thus became another play that was produced at both Gates, in a different production in each location as was the case with the other shared repertoire. But in this case, it was the Dublin Gate who produced it first. Joan FitzPatrick Dean has commented that this production of *Salomé* demonstrated the attraction of the Dublin theatre to evading censorship, and this was something else it had in common with the London Gate (129). De Valois worked alongside Marshall who was also within Gray's experimental theatre circle at the same time, and when Gray abandoned theatre life in 1933, relinquishing the Festival Theatre in June, Norman Marshall was able to offer several of those who had worked with him new opportunity at the London Gate as its new owner. In this capacity, it might have been possible for Marshall to invite the Dublin players there, but that did not happen.<sup>8</sup>

### HITHERTO UNRECOGNIZED INFLUENCE

New flavour is added to the story of the Dublin Gate's foundation by reminiscence, recorded within Sprigge's biography, of Pilcher's involvement, raising new questions about her role in connecting the London and Dublin Gates.<sup>9</sup> According to Sprigge, while 'in the little theatre' (the Gate) in London, 'one successful play followed another and its reputation soared [...] it was at this time that Hilton Edwards consulted [Pilcher] about the formation of the Dublin Gate' (63). This was the late summer

of 1928. All that is known about this conversation is that Pilcher ‘was firm in her view that it must be affiliated in its policy to the parent theatre’ (Sprigge 64). There is no further documentary evidence of the connection.

However, visual evidence points to ideas in common that seem to be prompted by Pilcher. Pilcher’s artistic vision for the London Gate Studio appears to have had a greater impact on the Dublin Gate than has yet been considered and is a valuable addition to its early history. Similarity between the logos for the two Gates reveals that Pilcher may have influenced the famous design for Dublin made by mac Liammóir. It is not possible to be completely certain who designed the Gate Theatre Studio London logo because it is unsigned and no archival evidence has been discovered, but it began to be used in the third season and Pilcher was the key influence on the introduction of visual arts to the theatre. It is possible this is by Pilcher because all the other engravings used by the theatre are signed and the logo is drawn in a different style to the majority of the images on the programmes which were made by Blair Stanton-Hughes, a former fellow student of Pilcher’s. Pilcher had studied art and was associated with Leon Underwood’s art school in Girdler’s Road, where she signed up as a member on her return to London from the Continent in 1921. The Underwood group, including Pilcher, had a significant interest in wood-engraving. If it is not made by her, then it is certainly a logo that she endorsed, because she personally supervised the production of all the playbills and notices initially through Robert Gibbings’ Press and then the Gate Press which was located in her own cottage. Sprigge reported that Pilcher was ‘determined to make it [the Gate] a centre of modern art’ (55). It is not hard to imagine that Edwards returned to Dublin with copies of Pilcher’s theatre programmes which carried her logo (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

The conversation Edwards held with Pilcher could have been then as equally influential as the discussions reported back to mac Liammóir with Godfrey. Arguably, Pilcher had a greater influence on the choice of plays of the London Gate’s third and fourth seasons than Godfrey, judging from what is recorded in the British press of the time about her, and what she wrote about her time working at the theatre herself. Bishop stated categorically in *The Era* in his portrait of Godfrey, ‘A Youthful Producer’, that ‘[t]he selection of plays will be under the direction of Velona Pilcher, who during the last two or three years has visited Prague, Paris, Berlin, Moscow and the little theatres of America, studying the

## THE GATE THEATRE STUDIO.



The Gate Theatre Studio is a private Little Theatre and seats for its performances may only be bought by Members, for themselves and their friends.

Members of the Studio are also entitled to use the Theatre as a club room after half-past-four in the afternoons, between which time and the opening of the evening's play tea and sandwiches will be served, and books and writing material will be available.

**Fig. 5.1** Pilcher's (?) logo used at the London Gate Studio on programmes, leaflets and letters 1927-1929, shown here on the 'Subscriber's Leaflet' 1927 announcing the new theatre

work of the younger school of dramatists'. He also took the opportunity to praise her articles in the American *Theatre Arts Monthly* which he declared to have admired (5). And J.T. Grein reinforced her importance to the newly launched Gate Studio, describing her enthusiastically as a 'world pilgrim in quest of plays' with 'a formidable list' the same autumn in *The Illustrated London News* (192).

In her article about her time as selector of plays, 'No Work and All Play' (July 1929), Pilcher wrote about these experiences and set out her priorities for the contemporary stage. It is the 1927-1928 season that most influenced the programming in Dublin. So, it may then not be a coincidence that the Dublin Gate staged *Back to Methuselah* in an epic production in its new Rotunda over three nights on 23-25 October 1930, as this work had featured on her list of priorities. Prior to her 1929 article appearing, Pilcher had been invited onto the BBC radio in November 1928 to broadcast her thoughts in the series engineered by James Agate 'The Aims and Ideals of the Theatre'. She was one of an impressive group



**Fig. 5.2** Mac Liammóir's logo created for the Dublin Gate in 1928 (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

of ‘eminent theatrical people’ that had included Sir Nigel Playfair and William Mollison, but not included Godfrey (‘Radio Drama and Music’ 8). The broadcast was received in Ireland and listed in the *Northern Whig and Belfast Post* newspaper (‘Broadcasting’ 10).<sup>10</sup> According to a report in *Theatre Arts* published a month before the above article, the editor Edith J. Isaacs represented key points from this unpublished talk in which Pilcher had declaimed how the ‘newest and youngest aim in theatre is to be theatrical [...] Our ideal is the theatrical theatre’ (396). There seems to be an echo of her thinking in what Hilton Edwards called ‘the theatre theatrical’ writing in Hobson’s celebratory volume in 1934 (22), as much as he may have been influenced also by Gray’s 1932 article in the *Varsity Weekly*, ‘The Theatre Shall Be Theatrical’. Edwards certainly stated how he was indebted to the vision of Edward Gordon Craig (Pine and Cave

21-22). Like many contemporaries, Pilcher was also fascinated by Craig; she was friends with his sister, Edy Craig, and met him either with Dame Ellen Terry or at her funeral in Smallhythe Kent which had occurred in July 1928, just before Pilcher met with Edwards.<sup>11</sup>

A key reason why Pilcher's influence on the Dublin Gate has lain hidden is because her role in the London Gate was effectively erased by Godfrey in a new Subscriber's Leaflet produced in late 1928 for calendar year membership from January 1929. This was due to the fact that throughout 1929 he was in dispute with her and forced her out of the partnership. However, the theatre continued to feature the logo, believed to be Pilcher's design, although it was much smaller than the one used in previous publicity, and noted only the new management regime: 'Managers Peter Godfrey Limited', 'Managing Directors Peter Godfrey and Charles N. Spencer' and 'Hon. Sec. Charles N. Spencer'.<sup>12</sup> Marshall subsequently claimed that he had not known of Pilcher's work at the Gate, which is why he had not included it in his history *The Other Theatre* (1947). Sprigge reported that in the summer of 1947 he had sent Pilcher a copy of his book which included a section on the London Gate, with 'an apology for it containing no mention of her name. He had not known in time, he explained, of her connection with the Gate Theatre, and had failed to get a last minute addition made to the volume.' (Sprigge 171) It is probable that had Pilcher been remembered by Marshall, had she made contact with him about re-opening the Gate just a few months earlier than she did, in time for him to record her contribution to the establishment of the Gate Theatre Studio in his 1947 book, then her role might have been investigated by historians far earlier and kept her in the story. Although Pilcher is associated with the London Gate in Mander and Mitchison's book *The Lost Theatres of London* (1968) and her name appears in Allardyce Nicoll's encyclopaedic *English Drama, 1900-1930: The Beginnings of the Modern Period, Volume 2* (1973), her presence was unfortunately unacknowledged by Komporaly in her otherwise excellent analysis (140).

### THE LONDON GATE AS A 'PARENT' THEATRE AND ITS ARTISTIC IMPETUS FOR OTHER THEATRES

As it was to Dublin, the London Gate was also a 'parent' theatre to the Hollywood Gate Theatre Studio (Godfrey and others, 1943-1945),

and the London Watergate Theatre Club (Pilcher and others, 1949-1952). Various documentary sources, discussed below, connect these other theatres to the London Gate, and illuminate the inspirational qualities of the London Gate Studio Theatre in its Godfrey-Pilcher partnership phase in particular. For example, the new theatre ventures started by Pilcher and by Godfrey used subscribers' publicity materials to express reformulations of the mission of the old Gate for new theatre-goers in new contexts. The longer-running success and reputation of the Dublin Gate may equally have influenced the foundation of these 'other' Gates, because of the way they could tap into that sense of a collective avant-garde, modern and internationalist spirit associated with the Gate concept. *Theatre Arts Monthly*, the American magazine which was subscribed to and read in England and Ireland as well as known in Europe, and which reported on and from Europe and North America throughout its history, referred to developments in all three theatres and reinforced the association of avant-garde identity with the title 'Gate'.<sup>13</sup>

### *Reorganization in Hollywood: The 'Third Gate'*<sup>14</sup>

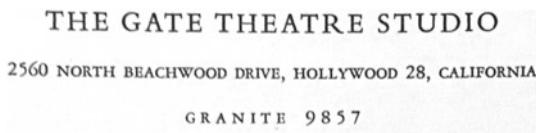
Having sold the London Gate to Marshall in 1934, and after a short period working as compère and magician at the London Pavilion, Godfrey left London for the US in 1937 to act and direct in the American film industry. He thus became one of many European emigrées to move to Hollywood at that time. Godfrey's new venture, directed by two very well-known film actresses – his second wife Renee Godfrey (Haal) and Anita Sharp-Bolster – responded to the central European dimension of transcontinental exile within Hollywood culture. Harold Leonard, critic and film historian, commented on how Godfrey's 'transplanted London Gate Theatre' was 'the one short-lived theatrical project of significance [...] since the dissolution of the W.P.A. Federal Theatre' and was transformative of the rather backward-looking cultural life of Los Angeles as he saw it at that time (39).

The theatre's membership prospectus (1943) announced the theatre as 'reorganized [...] with the same director, Peter Godfrey, and some of the original players from London, united to create again the spirit of free enterprise and experiment, which existed in the Gate Theatres of London and Dublin'. The choice of programme shows Godfrey recalling not only plays he had produced at the London Gate, other London theatres and the Cambridge Festival Theatre, but which had also been performed in

Dublin theatres. For example, Harley Granville-Barker's translation of Jules Romaine's *Doctor Knock* had opened in Dublin at the Abbey on 16 February 1926, produced by Lennox Robinson. Godfrey had also produced it at the Royalty Theatre, London on 27 April 1926 (Fig. 5.3).

The Hollywood-located<sup>15</sup> 'Gate Theatre Studio' was announced in *Variety* on 22 December 1943 as 'a new coast group' whose 'members act without pay'; the article reported that Godfrey had 'operated similar groups in Dublin and London' (52). It was also announced in *Yank*, the American army weekly (because the Godfreys were active in troop entertainment in wartime), which commented that there were links to

Fig. 5.3 Membership  
Prospectus for the Gate  
Theatre Studio,  
Hollywood, 1943



A THEATRE reorganized in Hollywood with the same director, Peter Godfrey, and some of the original players from London, united to create again the spirit of free enterprise and experiment, which existed in the Gate Theatres of London and Dublin. Plays will be chosen from the following:

MAYA by Simon Gantillon

DR. KNOCK by Jules Romaine

THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR by Gogol

KING LEAR by William Shakespeare

VOLPONE, THE FOX by Ben Jonson

THE DREAM DOCTOR by Lenormand

AS YOU DESIRE ME by Pirandello

*And the plays of Eugene O'Neill, Georg Kaiser, Strindberg, Ibsen, Toller, Saroyan, Sean O'Casey, Garcia Lorca, Aristophanes, Jean Cocteau, James Bridie, Jean Jacques Bernard.*

Ireland amongst the group, as well as several members who had acted at the London Gate, including Aubrey Mather, Vincent Price and Alan Napier ('New Stage Group' 19). Other actors had come from England to Hollywood, such as John Abbott, former member of the Old Vic.

Cast lists for the plays produced likely drew on others from the list of 'founder members' recorded on the back of the programme for Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, many of whom were indeed Irish and/or have acted in Ireland.<sup>16</sup> For example, readers of *Theatre Arts* magazine were informed in an article by George Morris (January 1945) that Anita Bolster was 'a former Abbey Theatre player' (58); she was also Irish-born as Alice Bolster.<sup>17</sup> In the programme for Simon Gantillon's *Maya*, which had also been reported on by *Theatre Arts* ('Maya: The Gate Theatre Studio' 298), it is specifically noted that one of the London Gate's former actresses, who also worked in films, Moyna MacGill, was Irish-born. She was playing the lead role – Maya – in this production, although she had not done so when it had been first performed as the opening play of the Gate Studio in London (she had, however, played Eurydice in the 1928 production of *Orphée*).<sup>18</sup> Also Irish-born was Barry MacCollum who played a Sidi. J.M. Kerrigan, Irish character actor and member of the Abbey Players from 1907, until he left to become a film actor in Hollywood, acted the role of Doctor Parpalaid in the production of Romaine's *Doctor Knock* in 1944.<sup>19</sup> Sara Allgood, who had had a prominent career at the Abbey Theatre, is also listed as a founder member; however, it is not known whether she actually acted at the theatre.

In a note – 'The Gate Theatre Is a Year Old' – printed in the programme for *Doctor Knock*, which was the third production of the new Gate, links were drawn to its relationship to other Gates and particularly to the continuing success of the Dublin theatre. Audiences were informed that 'the original Gate was founded in London, by Peter Godfrey' (without mention of Molly Veness), and that he 'produced and directed one hundred and ten of the world's most famous plays, first in Covent Garden and later at the larger Gate in Villiers Street' (without mention of Velona Pilcher or Charles N. Spencer). It is curious that from the 1945 *Theatre Arts* article by Morris it appears that the London Gate is still operational, perhaps because he is writing in the present tense. In fact, it had been put completely out of action and Morris's comment does not compare to the statement in the theatre's programme for *Doctor Knock* (which he may not have seen) that the London Gate had been destroyed in the Blitz in June 1941. As the Hollywood theatre only opened in

1943, it seems most likely that Morris is using the historical present tense, seeking to convey that the spirit of the Gate Theatre London and its association with modernity had continuing significance; he may be choosing to see the London Gate as a contemporary rather than historical phenomenon, implying that Godfrey was actively connected to the London theatre still, as he was adapting his London experiences to ‘the Hollywood problem’. The reference to a ‘genie’ here is to Godfrey in his role as conjuror for the troops during the war, for which he was very well-known:

Roughly speaking, as distances go, it is a good six thousand miles from Charing Cross in London to Beachwood Drive in Hollywood. Yet confirmed theatregoers in both places find themselves greeted by the identical legend: Gate Theatre Studio. This is not the work of a magic genie shuttling back and forth across the Atlantic with the speed of light, but the doing of a dynamic, enthusiastic individual who loves his theatre, Peter Godfrey. (58)

Morris also elaborated on the status of the theatre, information on which appeared in the *Doctor Knock* programme as well: he asserts that ‘[l]ike the London and Dublin namesakes, the Hollywood Gate is non-profit’, meaning ‘non-commercial’, and ‘[n]obody was to be paid to act and no acting fee was required’ (59). However, this was not in fact wholly true of the practices of these other theatres through their life cycles.

The programme note for the American production of *From Morn to Midnight* from March 1944 acknowledged the significance of this important work of the modernist avant-garde across Europe and America by saying ‘it has been played in nearly all languages in all the important capitals of the world’. Morris’s article carried a photograph of Godfrey performing as the cashier by Man Ray, who had arrived in Los Angeles from Paris in 1940, and had also photographed *Maya* for *Theatre Arts* the year before. Peter Godfrey had directed the first British production of the Kaiser play at the original Gate Theatre Salon in 1925, as well as productions at both the Cambridge Festival Theatre and The Gate Theatre Studio London in 1928, and a revival at the same venue which opened on 3 May 1932. The programme also carried a message from another emigré, Thomas Mann, who expressed his happiness that ‘American audiences are being made familiar’ with Kaiser’s works and sent his best wishes to the cast of the new theatre (3). Mann had been honoured by several

American universities and by the National Library of Congress, and was acknowledged as a leader amongst the German exiles. Additionally, he championed the cause of refugees and offered considerable practical assistance. To have Mann's endorsement for a theatre company producing a German classic of pre-war expressionism which included emigré actors was highly significant and revealed the high calibre and serious intent of the endeavour at Brentwood Drive. Mann was well-established in Southern California in the 1940s, visitor to the Feuchtwanger and Viertel Salons in Santa Monica frequented by artistic and theatrical people, where inter-war Weimar German 'discourse resurfaced' and this context likely supported the theatre membership (Fear and Lerner 2). Ultimately, this multicultural American Gate Studio Theatre closed quickly due to sudden expiry of its lease; it had survived for over three years.<sup>20</sup>

### *Continuing the Policy of the Gate Theatre at the Watergate Theatre Club*

Sprigge's biography records how Pilcher tried and failed to re-open the Gate Theatre London after the war. In winter 1946, Pilcher apparently wrote to Marshall 'to ask him the exact position in regard to the Gate' and apparently then had 'discussions with Norman Marshall and other advisers' about whether she could revive the Gate (65). Sprigge noted the result of these conversations from Pilcher's journal: "The Gate is open", [Pilcher] recorded, when Marshall told her that if he did not restart the Gate theatre himself, which was unlikely, she undoubtedly had the next right to the name.' (158) Presumably, Marshall thought this was in his gift, because he had bought Godfrey out in 1934. Sprigge recalled the visit she and Pilcher made to where the old Gate used to stand in quite romantic terms:

We made a pilgrimage to the site then, one early evening under a rosy sky, black-patterned with starlings, and Velona saw a footprint engraved on the pavement, pointing towards the theatre. This she took as a favourable portent, nor was she perturbed by the great pile of rubbish in the open door. We climbed over feet of rubble and explored the shell of the auditorium, the stage and the tiny dressing-rooms, and then Velona rang up her solicitor,<sup>21</sup> told him that everything of the old Gate was there but the roof and instructed him to try to get the premises for her. (158)

It seems most likely that the site was actually in too bad a state, but it is unclear why the idea could not work out. Sprigge did note how in 1948 when they were still looking for a theatre venue, ‘examining all possible premises’, that ‘the old Gate was scheduled to be yet one more café in that street of cafés’ (180). Pilcher had considered how she might make a Gate ‘barn theatre’ at her farmhouse ‘Shotters’ near Lodsworth, emulating the example of the Terry/Craig theatre at Smallhythe Kent, and between May and Autumn 1947 had discussed her vision for such a new Gate with her friends actor Alan Wheatley and producer David Tutaev (169). Nothing came of this attempt to make a new Gate as a barn theatre either as in 1948 the farm was first let and then sold. At the request of Tutaev, Pilcher formed an alliance with him and Sprigge that led, in summer 1948, to the foundation of the ‘Forty-Eight Theatre Company’ based at the Anglo-French Arts Centre in London, which had been founded by Alfred Rozelaar Green in the old St. John’s Wood Art School in 1946 (Sprigge 172, 174). Although Pilcher still wanted to have her own theatre, working with this company was her first attempt ‘to provide a worthy successor to the Gate Theatre’ (Sprigge 177). On 8 June 1948, *The Times* reported the news that this company was a ‘play-producing society’, ‘a non-profit-making limited liability company’ which hopes ‘eventually to have its own company in its own theatre’ (‘New Play-producing Society’ 7). The policy was to produce new British and American work and recent foreign works in new translations. It was an ambitious new set-up for an arts centre with lectures, late night revue, rehearsals, classes, and even ‘experiments’ listed in the news article.

Sprigge asserted that Pilcher had reflected in her journal on a new Gate with an artistic vision as an experimental theatre, which she believed could be ‘the theatre of truth’ (173). Pilcher was a follower of the teaching of Gurdjieff and a member of Maurice Nicol’s group, and her thinking about art was imbued with spirituality. In her *Theatre Arts* essay ‘Testament of Theatre’ (1947), apparently a summary of a planned book, she conceptualized an interdisciplinary imaginative avant-garde. Later, in 1949, an extract from this vision was reproduced on the marketing materials for the Watergate Club: ‘Avant-garde – [...] really means the prophetic sense – the feeling forward into the next step [...] – the going forward – This is it. The opening. The way of Wings – up above the worming theatre way [...] The aim of all these ideas is not to bring the best of all the other arts into the theatre so much as to bring the theatre into line with the best in the other arts.’ (qtd from Sprigge 174-75)

Pilcher and Sprigge were looking for their own theatre at the same time as Forty-Eight Theatre and David Tutaev sought to go their own way. The Watergate premises had been renovated by architects Elizabeth Denby and Jane Drew who had obtained a lease from the London County Council and converted it from a restaurant on the North Embankment of the Thames, naming it after the York Watergate built by Inigo Jones in 1626. This new conversion was located a stone's throw from the old Gate. During the planning phase, there was a series of meetings between the four board members (Drew, Denby, Pilcher and Sprigge) and the group overseeing the foundation and early management of an Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, which still exists as the 'I.C.A'. A collaboration was proposed by the I.C.A. group who intended to promote contemporary theatre as part of their scheme. A rehearsed reading of the Picasso play *Desire Caught by the Tail* at the London Gallery arranged by Roland Penrose in 1947, who was later on the joint committee, probably began the discussion about a relationship, as this was a play that the Watergate went on to stage in 1950. Herbert Read, who was also involved in setting up the I.C.A., had been a supporter of the Forty-Eight Theatre and had chaired the first general meeting at the St. John's Wood Anglo-French Arts Centre. Pilcher was present at some of the joint I.C.A and Watergate Theatre meetings, invited to represent artistic policy for the Watergate group, including a proposed programme which was strongly international. There was open debate about her ideas, but the I.C.A. also invited other theatre representatives. It struggled to get the participation desired from Michel St. Denis and the Group Theatre, and finally Peggy Ashcroft expressed doubts about the Watergate directors' inexperience. On 2 June 1949, the minutes recorded: 'Miss Pilcher said that artistic policy must be agreed between the I.C.A. and the Watergate. The Watergate's aim was to continue the policy of the Gate Theatre, and its directors would want to be satisfied that the I.C.A. was in agreement with this.' (4) The committee attempted to micro-manage the arrangements for the new theatre in terms of appointing staff but conflicts quickly arose concerning the commercial basis that the club needed to operate on, with income from catering or expenses of room hire factored in. Jane Drew (who by 1949 had taken over as the Chairman of the joint I.C.A. and Watergate committee) decided to withdraw from the Watergate theatre project in late August 1949 (Institute of Contemporary Arts – Watergate. Minutes 25 August 1949). Ultimately, the proposed collaboration failed to establish and the Watergate opened independently. The three

remaining women of the Watergate group – Pilcher, Sprigge and Denby – formed a public limited company (Thameside Productions) in order to run the theatre, and finally opened it as a members' club on 19 December 1949.

To Pilcher and Sprigge, the Watergate was the London Gate reborn. A publicity leaflet released 1949 to promote the purchase of season tickets to subscribers promised 'a small avant-garde theatre-club in the heart of London for the practice and enjoyment of the arts', and is not dissimilar from the Gate Studio mission. Although another small stage, it had club rooms and a restaurant which enabled Pilcher to develop the plans for lectures, a newsletter, exhibitions and cuisine, all of which she had moved forward with at the old Gate but could not fully carry out due to the collapse of the partnership with Godfrey. Some connections can be seen between the Watergate's artistic policy and that of the old Gate. For example, a new translation of Kaiser's last play *Medusa's Raft* (1940-1943; first produced 1945) was staged on 26 January 1950, thus extending the association with Kaiser whose work had been so strongly cemented to the history of the London Gate. Cocteau's *The Typewriter* (14 November 1950) was chosen and mirrored the production of his *Orphée* that Pilcher had previously brought to the London Gate.<sup>22</sup> More emphasis was placed on new playwrights than at the old Gate. Pilcher invited the American Paul Green to a Watergate party to discuss new work; his play *The Field God* had been produced at the Etlinger School Theatre under the auspices of The Gate Theatre Studio (30 September 1927). Young British writers Anne Ridler, Ronald Duncan, David Gascoyne and Philippa Burrell were all supported with performances, and there was a strong European dimension to the wider planning of talks, films, and exhibitions.

Writer Nancy Cunard, Pilcher's cousin, who herself hoped for a production of a translation she had made of Ramón del Valle-Inclán's *Ligazon* (1926) (a plan that did not come to fruition),<sup>23</sup> publicized the revival of the Gate ideal by praising the open nature of little theatres 'which are always brave ventures' in an article for *Life and Letters and the London Mercury*. This explored the creative mindset of the group of the Watergate founders (Cunard 239). Cunard introduced Pilcher's past in brackets, saying she was '(already well-known as a founder-director of the Gate Theatre when it opened in Villiers Street)', and emphasized that she was well-connected to contemporary culture due to cultivating the

'friendship of several famous artists' involved in the venture (238–39). The Watergate was an influential and successful club theatre which had a particularly global outlook. It became a site for international communication featuring Eric Bentley on Brecht, Peter Brook and Ram Gopal, and brought the first cabaret group from Germany after the war. Denby retired from the management team 'owing to ill-health' in May 1951 (Sprigge 197). The club carried on for a few years after Pilcher's death in 1952 under new management. In 1953, *The New Statesman and Nation* magazine reported: 'The New Watergate Theatre Club is now, on its stage side, under the direction of Mr. Norman Marshall who, it will be remembered, supplied the serious theatre-goer with many of his pleasures between the wars at the old Gate.' (486) In 1956, the original premises at 29 Buckingham Street were forced to close due to the widening of The Strand. Muriel Large, the manager, reopened the club at the Comedy Theatre held on lease by Anthony Field, where 'New Watergate Productions' quickly attracted many thousands of members and the new version of the theatre became a highly significant player in the abolition of censorship.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of convergence is helpful in pinpointing concurrences in the missions and cultural achievements of this connected network of experimental theatres, specifically with respect to their internationalist outlooks, overlapping associations of management and production personnel, as well as performers. Parallels can be drawn between their similar artistic and collaborative club cultures. Although there was very limited artistic traffic between the London and Dublin Gate Theatres compared to what had initially been envisaged, there are many associations embedded in the historical record shown in the network of connections traced here. Tracking the involvements of a small number of key individuals opens up a range of interrelations through which it is possible to trace influence. The diversity of people involved with the Hollywood Gate who brought associations from Europe into American culture was exceptionally wide for such a small and short-lived venture, and explains how it was possible for Godfrey to succeed with his recreation of the Gate Studio there. The involvement of Sprigge at the Watergate, who had previously been in the audience at the Gate Studio, and then Marshall who had reshaped the Gate and later took over the Watergate, a few years after Pilcher had left

each organization, also evidences intriguing links in the pattern of involvements across theatres. The connected history of Gate Theatres was made up of shared qualities in theatre practice characteristic of the international little theatre movement. The theatres discussed in this chapter are sometimes called ‘fringe’ without clarity of what they were on the fringe of.<sup>24</sup> They are more plausibly viewed rather as examples of ‘pre-fringe’ theatre venues, prefiguring the emergence of the ‘fringe’ before 1947, when that term was first used at the Edinburgh International Festival, although it only became more widespread in the 1960s (Chambers 2011, 332, 334). Such theatres can most productively be termed ‘theatres of art’, following the designation deployed by Katharine Cockin in her biography of Edith Craig: ‘diverse’, ‘independent’ and ‘small-scale’ with an openness in artistic policy which stemmed from an anti-commercial stance, rather than merely ‘other’ (as Marshall would have it) or ‘alternative’ (according to Davies) (Cockin 2).

## NOTES

1. For example, Pilcher had run a recreation hut in an American army hospital just behind the front line in World War I. Further information is available in Purkis 2016a.
2. I have written outlines about this professional partnership elsewhere; see Purkis 2011 and 2016b.
3. For example, the unsigned programme note for Eugene O’Neill’s *All God’s Chillun* (20 November 1928) ends with words very similar to those reported by Isaacs in *Theatre Arts Monthly* (1929) from Pilcher’s BBC broadcast of the same month concerning ideal theatre: ‘The Gate Theatre itself belongs to the little theatre movement. It respects the playwright, who is the first theatrical craftsman, and seeks to offer him his creative hearth. It even respects the critic, who can interpret the theatrical movement if he will.’ (‘A Note on Eugene O’Neill’) Programme notes in the 1927–1928 season were signed ‘V.P’.
4. Sisson had used the term ‘homage’ to describe the relationship between the London Gate and the new Dublin theatre in an earlier version of her 2011 essay and emphasized how the Dublin Gate sought to be as ‘equally daring and experimental’ as London (2010, 139).
5. Colin Chambers in the *Continuum Companion to Twentieth-Century Theatre* has claimed that the name and spirit were taken up by the small theatre with the same name in West London (303). But in fact, the current Gate Theatre London based in Notting Hill is completely independent of the original Gate. This has been confirmed by Lise Bell,

Executive Director, to the author: ‘We don’t have any connection other than by name with the Gate in Dublin or other Gates of the past. I know there’s a Wikipedia article or two that suggests we do, but we were established as our own entity.’ (Email to the author, 29 July 2019.) See also: <https://www.gatetheatre.co.uk/about-us/our-story>.

6. Details are available in Luke 13-14, 93.
7. It is not known whether Godfrey was present in the audience in Dublin.
8. The London Gate is perceived as losing its experimental edge under the directorship of Marshall, after a few years in decline in the final years under Godfrey, although Sprigge is more generous about the period after Pilcher left. See, for example, Banham and Stanton (136).
9. Sprigge inherited all of Pilcher’s papers on her death in 1952; she also had the benefit of conversation from their initial meeting in 1944 until Pilcher’s death because the two were partners. Pilcher’s early death at the age of fifty-eight from cancer, which she had been treated for over a number of years, makes it likely that the two conversed about Pilcher’s earlier life with the expectation that Sprigge, an established biographer, would become the custodian of her story.
10. Pilcher had previously published in this Irish newspaper in 1923, at the time Cochran was producing a Eugene O’Neill cycle of plays in London at the Strand Theatre. Although her article may not have been read by Edwards, it is possible that they discussed her experience at the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village when they met in 1928, and she may have shared the article with him.
11. For further context, see Purkis 2011, which discusses her relationship with this group.
12. The logo ceased to be used on the new notepaper for the Godfrey-Spencer partnership, adding further to the speculation that it was a design made by Pilcher herself. It was routinely used on her letters sent from the theatre to artistic associates and is retained in various archival collections.
13. The first article on the Dublin Gate in the magazine was Macardle’s in 1934.
14. Expression used on p. 3 of the programme for *Doctor Knock*.
15. 2560 North Beachwood Drive, Hollywood 28, California is now the location of the Besant Lodge liberal Catholic Church. The site is less than an hour’s drive from Velona Pilcher’s teenage home at Long Beach.
16. Archival copies of the programmes for the other productions have not yet been traced.
17. At this time, she was also known as Anita Sharp-Bolster – using her surname by birth – and was the elected Dean of the Drama department of the newly-created Hollywood Academy of Arts. For further information, see Nissen (178).

18. Barbara Roisman Cooper recalls her mother working on *Maya* with Edgar Bergen and Peter Godfrey, and that she had been in the audience for the ‘Beachwood Theatre on Beachwood Drive in Hollywood’ (238). This was the theatre used by Godfrey, by its former name after its location.
19. Archival evidence is incomplete.
20. Phyllis Hartnoll erroneously listed it as opening in 1944 in *The Concise Companion to the Theatre* (201).
21. The playwright Harold F. Rubinstein.
22. A translation by Pilcher of Cocteau’s *The Marriage at the Eiffel Tower* was also proposed to the ICA/Watergate joint committee as one of the plays for the Watergate, but this was not produced and the translation is lost, assuming it had been completed.
23. Full context is discussed in Pereiro-Otero.
24. For instance, J.C. and Wendy Trewin state in their book on The Arts Theatre that ‘[d]uring the mid-1920s the word Fringe was unused’ (1).

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## CHAPTER 6

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# The Brothers Čapek at the Gate: *R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play*

*Ondřej Pilný*

The intention of Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir to introduce major works of contemporary world drama to Irish audiences is clearly reflected in the impressive list of productions by the Gate Theatre under their artistic leadership (see Luke 93–104). This chapter examines two important but hitherto largely neglected stagings of famous European dramas, *R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play*, which it attempts to reconstruct insofar as the available documentary evidence allows. In the process, it discusses the complicated textual history of the English versions produced by the Gate and finally compares their reception with that of the first productions in Czechoslovakia, teasing out the points of convergence and elucidating the differences brought about by the respective theatrical and political contexts.

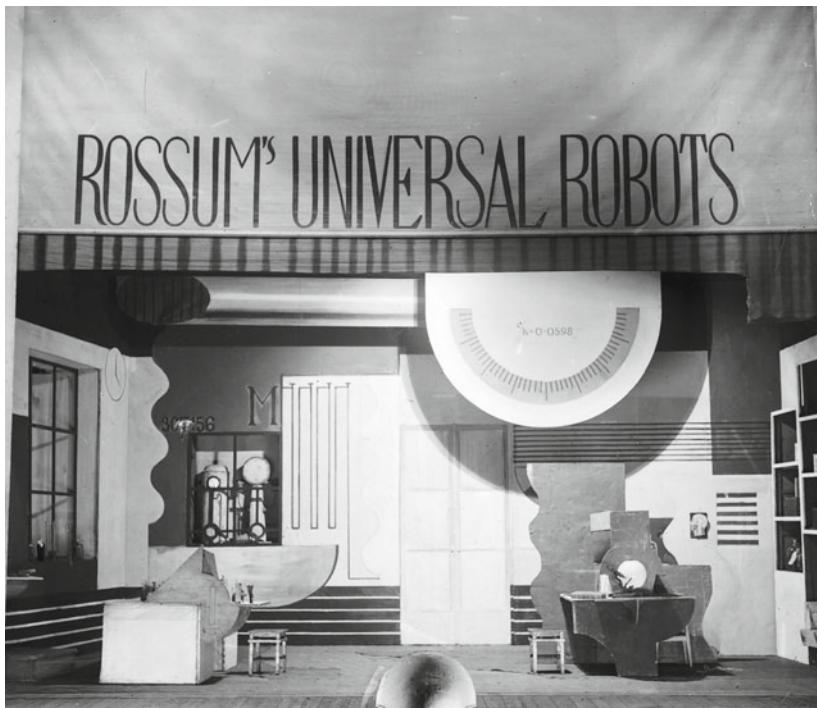
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## R.U.R.

*R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots* by Karel Čapek received its first professional production at the National Theatre in Prague on 25 January 1921. The play pictures the revolt of artificial human beings devised to perform manual labour instead of humans, whose name was derived by the author's brother Josef from the Czech word 'robotá', i.e. 'heavy toil' or 'hard labour'. It was the first major achievement for Čapek, who was soon to become a celebrated fiction writer, playwright, journalist and a vocal public intellectual in Czechoslovakia. His international reputation, somewhat regrettably, has come to rest largely on this early play, particularly as it has been recognized in retrospect as a seminal forebear of science fiction. The enormous success of *R.U.R.* in Prague (Fig. 6.1),<sup>1</sup> where the production played until 1927 for a total of 63 performances, and where spectators initially had to queue for tickets from 6 a.m. or buy them underhand (Černý 105), triggered multiple translations that were produced to acclaim across Europe from Aachen to Belgrade, in New York and in Tokyo over three years alone (Černý 93). The achievement is all the more remarkable given that Czech theatre was not really on the radar internationally at the time; as it happens, the foremost Czech theatre historian František Černý has argued that Čapek's *R.U.R.* in fact represents the first instance of a major Czech author addressing the world, as opposed to the nation, since Comenius (72).

It is hardly surprising that Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir decided to stage *R.U.R.* as early as during the Gate's second season. Both Edwards and mac Liammóir may have seen the first London production directed by Basil Dean at St. Martin's Theatre, which opened on 24 April 1923 and ran for 127 performances (Wearing 224), since, at the time, the former was living in London and the latter had an exhibition of his paintings and drawings there (Fitz-Simon 45, 48). Moreover, as in Czechoslovakia, the play created an extensive debate in the British press as regards its exact meaning and implications. St. Martin's Theatre even hosted a discussion about the work on 21 June 1923 that featured Bernard Shaw and G.K. Chesterton as speakers, to which Čapek sent a response that appeared in *The Saturday Review* (23 July 1923).<sup>2</sup> Čapek – together with his brother, who was a frequent collaborator – quickly became recognized as a prominent experimental playwright whose work was mostly labelled expressionist in Britain (see Vernon 135-37), notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary. Expressionist – and broadly



**Fig. 6.1** Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.*, Act III, National Theatre, Prague, 1921. Set design by Bedřich Feuerstein. Photograph by Karel Váňa (Courtesy of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague)

speaking avant-garde – drama was particularly attractive to Edwards and mac Liammóir in the early years of the Gate and became a principal ingredient of its repertoire, particularly whenever it addressed pressing social and political issues through intense emotion.<sup>3</sup> All in all – and regardless of inevitable flaws that were due to the author’s lack of previous theatrical experience<sup>4</sup> – Čapek’s formally innovative, moving play about humanity in jeopardy was ideal material for the Gate’s artistic directors.

## TEXTUAL HISTORY

Any comparison of the staging and reception of *R.U.R.* by the Prague National Theatre with the production at the Dublin Gate – or indeed any English-language production until the 1990s – must take into account the fact that the respective audiences saw a staging of a considerably different text. The play was translated into English by Paul Selver, a seminal figure in making modern Czech literature available to Anglophone readers in the 1910s-1940s. Selver has frequently been accused of bowdlerizing the originals, but Robert Philmus has demonstrated that, as regards *R.U.R.*, the accusation is mostly unjust, since the non-correspondences with Čapek's original text in the versions of Selver's translation published in the UK and in the US, respectively, are mostly due to it having been adapted for the English stage by Nigel Playfair prior to its appearance in print.<sup>5</sup> Philmus has also pointed out that Čapek – who spoke English reasonably well – retained Selver as his English translator until the end of his life, and thus must have been content with his work (23). On the other hand, the process of adapting and staging the play in London involved such convolutions that Selver ended up writing a satirical novel on the subject (Philmus 27 n30).

Selver's original translation (which appears not to have survived) was most likely made from a typescript of the play used by the Prague National Theatre for its first production (Philmus 19), and the available evidence – sparse as it may be – indicates that apart from changing the headings of the acts (whereby the original Prelude became Act I, and the original Act III was retitled 'Act IV. Epilogue'), the only major departure from the original consisted in Selver's rendition of the maid Nána's lines in standard English, as opposed to a rural dialect peppered with colloquial turns of phrase. Nána was intended by Čapek to represent the voice of down-to-earth common sense and folk wisdom (see Černý 78), which was reflected by the linguistic contrast with all other characters. This contrast was flouted by Selver, whose forte never was the translation of non-standard varieties of Czech, and eventually led to much of Nána's part being cut by the English adaptor, since when rendered in standard English, many of Nána's observations would have come across as either bland or as self-evident. Further cuts in what remained of the part were often introduced by directors, including Hilton Edwards. What may likewise be regarded as a deficiency is Selver's decision not to translate the name of the creator of the robots and founder of the company: 'Rossum'

is homophonous with the Czech word for reason, ‘*rozum*’, and translators into other languages have mostly taken this into account.<sup>6</sup>

The alterations made by Nigel Playfair were of much greater consequence, however, and came to shape the later production at the Gate as well, since Edwards worked from his adaptation as published in Britain. They included renaming two of the company’s managers – Hallemeier turned into Helman and the Consul Busman into Jacob Berman – and the Czech diminutive Nána was changed to Emma. Together with Selver’s rendition of the General Manager’s name, Harry Domin, as Harry Domain, these linguistic shifts toned down the author’s universalist intention, since Čapek deliberately based the names of his characters in a range of languages from Latin and Greek to English, German, French and Spanish (see Černý 76). Helena Glory, instead of being the daughter of the President of the company, became the ‘Daughter of Professor Glory, of Oxbridge University’ (Čapek, J. and K., list of characters), which removed the main reason for the deference of the company’s managers to the young woman in Act I. The part of the robot Damon, who is the chairman of the robots’ Central Committee, was cut, together with any references to the Committee itself. Most of Damon’s lines were given to robot Radius. Radius thus became the sole leader of the robots of the world, and the clear reference in the original to the communist party disappeared.<sup>7</sup> The detailed outlines of the characters’ appearances, as well as the description of the nature of the robots’ movements and delivery, along with the costumes recommended by Čapek, were also deleted.

The considerable textual cuts in the English adaptation included the powerful dissection scene in the final act: the last of the humans, Alquist, is made by the robots to search for the secret of their reproduction, without which they are doomed to follow humanity into extinction. As his effort is proving to be in vain, he is ultimately asked to experiment on Damon. Since the robots are biological in their nature, the scene involves an incision made with a knife in a live body and is accompanied with heart-rending screams. The scene was very likely considered too intense for the audience.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, its disturbing effect was confirmed by the first Prague production: despite being performed behind glass and in silhouette only, the audience was always visibly shocked by the scene, and once a spectator even fainted (Černý 101). The final act in fact suffered the most extensive pruning as a whole, with the first half of Alquist’s opening monologue and the second half of his closing speech disappearing altogether. It may be argued, however, that much like the less drastic cuts

that were made in the dialogues of the closing act, these deletions actually work in favour of the drama, since they by and large remove the more wordy or melodramatic passages.

Finally, flowers have an important symbolic dimension in the original, but this vanished in the English adaptation of the play. At the beginning of Act II, Alquist makes a present of a new species of cyclamen to Helena. In the Czech text, we are told that, as an artificial hybrid, the flower is unable to reproduce. It is analogous to Helena in this respect, as Helena very much wishes to have children but cannot, and to humanity more generally, which has become sterile since it has begun to spurn physical labour. The cyclamen, as well as humanity itself, are repeatedly referred to as ‘hluché květy / hluchý květ’, i.e. ‘barren blossom(s)’, which was a Czech idiomatic expression for that which was devoid of purpose (the expression appears in the original as many as ten times; Čapek, K. 2018, 50, 56, 85). All these passages have disappeared in the English version and with them also the ‘Ibsenesque’ (Philmus 22) symbolism of the flowers. The same applies to virtually all references to human sterility, amounting to several pages of printed text, mostly in Act II; an important similarity between the humans and the robots has thus been removed.<sup>9</sup>

### R.U.R. BY THE GATE

*R.U.R.* was first staged by the Gate at the Peacock Theatre in May 1929. Sadly, no record of the production has been preserved in the Gate Theatre Archive; from the press cuttings pertaining to the 1931 revival, it is possible to ascertain only that the role of Domain was played by Micheál mac Liammóir, Hilton Edwards played Alquist, and Helena Glory and the Robotess Helena were both played by Coralie Carmichael.<sup>10</sup> Apart from that, we know that three of the other roles were acted by Hubert Duncombe ('Suicide'), Joseph Millar ('Degree') and Gearóid Ó Lochlainn.<sup>11</sup> The significant doubling of the two Helenas was Edwards's decision, as no doubling is indicated in the text and was not introduced in the London production of *R.U.R.* either. However, Edwards thus intuitively used the same solution as that adopted in the Prague National Theatre production, where the suggestion to couple the two characters came from an actress in rehearsal (Černý 105). In this way, both productions came to emphasize Čapek's hopeful suggestion that despite its self-induced extermination, humanity will continue to live in the robots.

**Fig. 6.2** Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.*, Gate Theatre, Dublin. Promotion flyer for the 1931 revival.  
Gate Theatre Archive,  
Northwestern University  
(Copyright of the  
Edwards – mac  
Liammóir Estate)



The reception of the Gate's *R.U.R.* must have been favourable enough to solicit a revival in a relatively short time; this is testified also by the inclusion of several rapturous quotes from reviews in a publicity leaflet issued by the Gate for the 1931 revival ('The Dublin Gate Theatre') (Fig. 6.2). The decision to revive the production may have also had to do with the move of the company from the small Peacock to a larger theatre of their own that had a bigger stage and better equipment, which would have allowed for a more impressive presentation of the scenes involving the siege and the ambush of the humans by the robots in particular.

Archival evidence pertaining to the 1931 production allows for reasonable insight in the work of the director in particular. The text that Edwards used was the 1930 Oxford edition of the play. Given that it was a revival of a recent staging, the extent of his preparation is remarkable. The three copies of the play text preserved in the Gate Theatre Archive (all of the same edition) demonstrate that Edwards first made two series of minor cuts and pencilled in a few basic directions concerning the movement of the characters. Of course, he may have transferred some of his notes from the prompt copy of the 1929 production, but this cannot

be established with any certainty, since the original prompt copy has not survived. The third volume, inscribed as Prompt Copy, reproduces the same cuts in the text, adds a few more and includes detailed directions concerning movement, as well as the names of the cast in pencil (see Fig. 6.3 for an example).

Generally, Edwards's cuts help to maintain the rhythm and the tempo of the action, a tendency displayed by Čapek himself when revising the text of the first Czech edition. This may also explain why Act IV – which had already been significantly pruned by Nigel Playfair – remained virtually untouched by Edwards. Importantly, however, Edwards added the following lines to be spoken by the robots Helena and Primus in the middle of Alquist's final monologue in Act IV: 'Look Primus. Flowers. / For your hair, Helena. How beautiful you are.' (Čapek, K. 1930, 102)

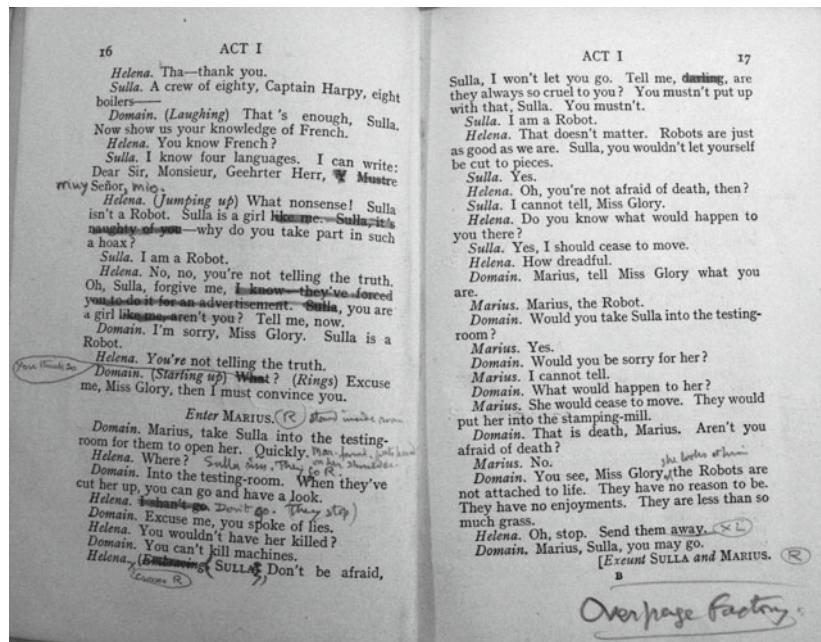


Fig. 6.3 Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.*, Gate Theatre, Dublin. Prompt book for the 1931 revival. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

The addition demonstrates an intuitive awareness of the symbolic role of flowers discussed above, since the director had no way of knowing how elaborate this feature had been in Čapek's original.<sup>12</sup> Apart from that, Edwards also altered a few passages in order to make Selver's English sound less formal. The time of action was specified in the printed programme as 'between A.D. 1950-1960'; neither Čapek's original nor the published English version are prefaced with such a note but the fact that the play is set in a future that is not too distant is indicated in the opening act, where the audience are told that old Rossum started his experiments in 1920 (Čapek, K. 2018, 13) or 1922 (Čapek, J. and K. 5), respectively, i.e. immediately preceding the time of the drama's production in Prague and in London.

The set and costumes were designed by mac Liammóir; no photos or designs seem to have survived but we know that the production used a painted set, as Charles Marford is listed in the programme as the painter. The set design for the opening act featured an 'ingenious medley of posters in many languages, including Irish' (D.M.), and as so often with Edwards's work, the lighting design was impressive and the direction astute: in a reviewer's description, 'as the drama grows in intensity, the style of the staging and lighting as well as the acting, change' and '[t]he close of the second act – the procession pouring in, of victorious Robots, and the extraordinary dramatic lighting of the final scene are masterpieces of theatrical art' ('A World of Robots'). The music used in the performance consisted of 'selections from De Falla, Debussy, Mendelssohn, etc.' performed by The Gate Theatre Trio directed by Bay Jellett (Dublin Gate Theatre – *R.U.R.*). The revival of *R.U.R.* was scheduled to run for two weeks.

## RECEPTION

Edwards's production was praised in all reviews of the opening night's performance, and so was the acting by mac Liammóir, Edwards and Carmichael, and of James Murphy as Radius, whose 'stentorian voice' and 'herculean frame' ('A World of Robots') were highlighted in particular. Admiration was expressed as well for Nancy Beckh, who undertook the role of Emma at 'a few hours' notice' (M.M.) instead of Molly Tapper. In contrast to the production qualities, the assessment of Čapek's play ranged from positive to overwhelmingly negative, and the few observations that were made about its meaning were widely divergent, echoing

the critical discord that followed both the Prague première and the London staging of 1923. In order to perhaps forestall fruitless discussions of whether the play was expressionist or not, which featured prominently in the response to Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says 'No!'* (1929), the theatre advertised the 1931 revival of *R.U.R.* as follows: 'It is neither expressionistic nor impressionistic, but straightforward drama dealing with one of the most urgent problems of modern times.'<sup>13</sup> This precaution turned out to be largely idle, since very few of the reviewers went as far as discussing the play's style or genre. The *Evening Mail* critic, who had described *R.U.R.* as an 'eerie fantasy' ('The Dublin Gate Theatre') in his review of the 1929 Gate production, re-iterated that its 'theme is of such a startling and unfamiliar nature that it cannot but arouse great interest'. He concluded, however, that 'the morbid atmosphere of the whole play and the detailed working out of impossible horrors [...] make it an unpleasant business when seen for the second time' ('A World of Robots'). Similarly, the *Leader* stated that *R.U.R.* was 'an interesting, if rather far-fetched, play' ('The Gate Theatre Reproduced'). The *Irish Times* critic, on the other hand, asserted that in the eight years since its first production (in English), the play had lost its topicality: 'Neither as technician nor as philosopher [...] will the claims of Karel Čapek be admitted by any audience to-day.' In his view, time had revealed that 'The entire attraction of the play lay in its presentation of the embodiment of a mechanised civilisation', which makes it come across as 'little more than crude melodrama', as much as it still may be 'one of the most interesting plays now available' ('Gate Theatre').

These comments seem to be indicative of a lack of immediate relevance of *R.U.R.* to an early 1930s Dublin audience. This is remarkably different from early 1920s Czechoslovakia, a heavily industrialized country with a strong economy that had just gained independence, and was naturally full of optimism and belief in further progress. There, the play was viewed both as a topical warning against the dehumanization of people under the influence of modern technology, and as an image of modernity that had spiralled out of control (see Černý 75, 83). Moreover, a number of commentators interpreted *R.U.R.* in relation to the experience of World War I and its use of technology for the extermination of human beings (Černý 83); Čapek himself – whose ideas were deeply influenced by the cataclysm of the Great War – stated at the time of completing the manuscript that while he was far from condemning science, 'Every technological discovery so far has been part success and part hell.' (qtd

in Černý 82) In Ireland, only a single reviewer spoke of ‘unwanted progress’ in relation to *R.U.R.*, simply arguing that ‘Man, according to Karel Čapek, is transforming himself into a Robot, a mechanical creature, without feeling.’ (M.M.)<sup>14</sup>

*R.U.R.* was also interpreted in Czechoslovakia as a critique of American-style capitalism, an aspect of the play that was emphasized in the National Theatre production by the presentation of the business manager, Consul Busman, whose plump body and costume were reminiscent of a caricatured US tycoon, and of Domain and Helena as a successful American-style entrepreneur and his wife (Černý 102-103). This perspective was iterated in Dublin only by the communist reviewer for the *Workers’ Voice*, who asserted that ‘R.U.R. is a phantasy, a dream, a nightmare, visualising with terrible distinctiveness the Machine Age of Capitalism.’ He went on to argue that since it was the dream of dividends that drove the company managers to create ‘a machine capable of producing more than the human one could do’, Čapek’s work emphatically presents ‘a plea for Communism’ (M.D.). Nevertheless, several Czech commentators held a contrary view, pointing out that it was the collective actions and manifestoes of the Robots, together with the specific hierarchy of their organization, that clearly reflected the global rise of the workers’ movement and the ascent of communism. Their interpretation was further justified by the contemporaneous polemic between Karel Čapek and the young generation of radically left-wing authors such as Karel Teige and Vítězslav Nezval, whom Čapek criticized both for their militancy and for their tendency to treat people as a mass rather than individuals (Černý 79, 83). Shortly after the première of *R.U.R.*, Čapek wrote that the grave social issues of the present day must be resolved ‘by personal engagement, rather than by comfortable doctrines or irresponsible collectivity’ (qtd in Černý 84-85); elaborating on the matter, he argued in his famous 1924 essay titled ‘Why I Am Not a Communist’ that while communists preach about paradise on earth, their vision is based on hatred and is driven by the desire for power, and the plight of the poor is ultimately of secondary importance to them (Čapek, K. 1991).<sup>15</sup> As much as attitudes to communism would have been prevalently negative in Ireland at the time of the Gate production of *R.U.R.*, no commentators saw this strand in the play. This may be explained by the fact that it had been significantly de-emphasized by the English adaptors, who – as noted above – removed the allusions to the workers’ movement and the communist party from the text.

## PROBLEM WITH AUDIENCES

The greatest difficulty by far of the 1931 Gate production was poor attendance. An article published in the *Dublin Opinion* observed that ‘at the revival of “R.U.R.” [...] the customers might have been counted on the feet of a centipede and some of the insect’s toes would not even have been tickled’ (‘Stage and Screen’); the *Irish Independent* spoke ‘about 50 souls huddled together’ on the opening night (M.M.). Some reviewers attributed the low audience numbers to the highbrow reputation of the Gate; for instance, *The Leader* stated that ‘many people seem to be afraid to venture to one of its productions on that account’ (‘The Gate Theatre Reproduced’). Complementing the observation, the *Evening Mail* critic noted that this was a revival of a difficult play produced only two years ago, while ‘it is a work that most people would be content to see once’ (‘A World of Robots’). The frequency with which the Gate programmed revivals of recent productions was regarded as problematic by the commentator in *Dublin Opinion* as well, who in fact dedicated most of the article to outlining the reasons for poor patronage at Gate shows. Among these he listed the lack of publicity given by the Gate to its productions, criticizing the blandness of the showbills in particular, and the fact that two-week runs may be too long for Dublin, despite the undisputed excellence of the Gate, a theatre whose work may occasionally annoy him ‘rather unnecessarily’ but which he ‘would go a long distance out of [his] way to preserve’ (‘Stage and Screen’). Quite apart from these very plausible explanations, it must be remembered that theatre had to face an increased competition from cinema at the time, since it was at the turn of the 1920s that feature films began to use sound. Indeed, as the *Irish Independent* review of *R.U.R.* testifies, poor audiences seem to have become a problem for intellectually challenging theatre in Dublin as a whole, with the drama critic complaining: ‘Where are the Dublin theatre-goers? I am beginning to doubt their existence.’ In a response to the review, a certain J.F. heartily embraced the point, concluding that Dublin ‘with its reputation for critical acumen and appreciation of talent’ was ‘degenerating to the level of a provincial town’ (J.F.). Be that as it may, the available evidence about the 1931 *R.U.R.* at the Gate is conducive to agreeing with the *Irish Press* reviewer who asserted that this was a production ‘of which any city might be proud’, and that it was a shame that so few people opted to see it (D.M.).

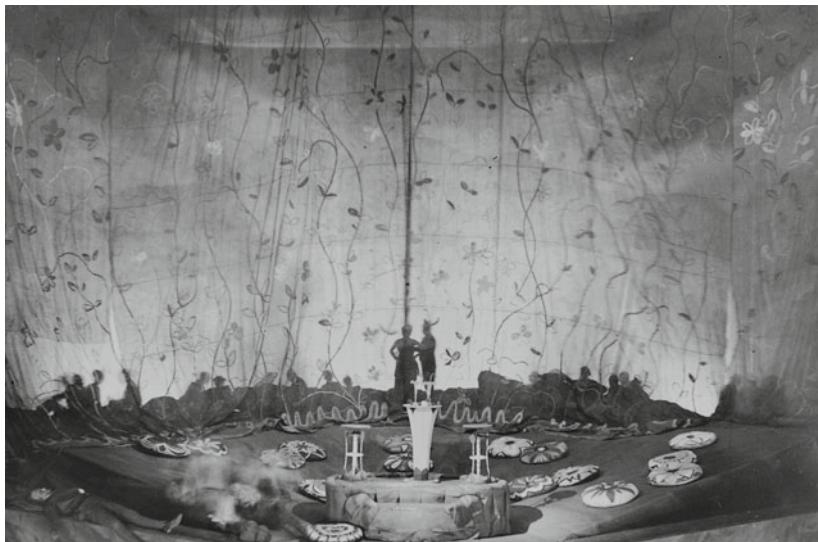
### THE INSECT PLAY

On 24 July 1942, Hilton Edwards wrote to Brian O’Nolan, whose work as the *Irish Times* columnist Myles na gCopaleen he much admired:

For a long time I have wanted to produce Capek’s [sic] ‘Insect Play’ for which I have the rights. I have not produced it because I don’t like the only version available in English. I believe it is not so much a translation as an adaptation for the English theatre. I think it is cumbersome and it aims at an English colloquial quality which it misses; and which even if achieved would render the version ineffective for Ireland. [...] What about an Irish version with a tramp speaking as an Irishman would and with various insects speaking as Irish insects and not as cockneys? [...] I think very nice analogies might be made: the tramp and the Communist; the fraughtfully refined [sic] upper middle class and the common people, etc., etc. [...] Would you consider making a version of this play for me? [...] I think your mind behind this, plus your name, would turn a translation into a really vital and popular Irish success. (*The Collected Letters* 122-23)

The play in question was *Ze života hmyzu* [From the Life of Insects], a dark allegorical comedy co-written by Karel Čapek with his brother Josef, who was a painter, graphic designer and a writer. The brothers actually started working on the play around 1919 (this being their third collaboration in drama), and temporarily shelved the manuscript when Karel opted for a detour to write *R.U.R.* (Černý 107). *Ze života hmyzu* premièred at the National Theatre in Brno on 3 February 1922 in a celebrated production by the young director Bohuš Stejskal. Within a mere two months, productions of the play were presented in the cities of Moravská Ostrava and Košice, and on 8 April 1922, *Ze života hmyzu* opened at the Prague National Theatre in a spectacular production by Karel Hugo Hilar (Černý 144), an electrifying director generally regarded as one of the most important figures in Czech theatre of the first half of the century (Figs. 6.4 and 6.5).

Despite the charge of undue pessimism raised against the authors by a number of Czech critics, and some of the audience members evidently taking offence at the play’s comparison of humans to insects (Černý 108, 170-71), the play was again quickly translated into English by Paul Selver, whose version was adapted in the US by Owen Davis, and in the UK by Nigel Playfair and Clifford Bax. The American adaptation opened under the title *The World We Live In* at Jolson’s 59<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre in New



**Fig. 6.4** Bratří Čapkův, *Ze života hmyzu*, Butterflies in Act I, National Theatre, Prague, 1922. Set design by Josef Čapek in collaboration with K.H. Hilar. Photograph by Karel Váňa (Courtesy of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague)

York on 31 October 1922, that is within three weeks of the US première of *R.U.R.* The production ran for 111 performances (*Internet Broadway Database*), and the play text was published in 1933 by Samuel French. The British version was staged as *And So Ad Infinitum* at Regent's Theatre in London on 5 May 1923, again on the heels of the first production of *R.U.R.*, and stayed on for 42 performances (Wearing 225);<sup>16</sup> the text was published by Oxford University Press the same year.

## TEXTUAL HISTORY

As in the case of *R.U.R.*, the Oxford edition of the ‘Insect Play’ which Brian O’Nolan was working from is fairly distant from the Čapeks’ original. However, since O’Nolan essentially rewrote the play for the Gate Theatre production, the present essay is going to reference only some of the major alterations made by Selver, or Playfair and Bax, respectively, that have influenced the Irish version in a significant way.<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 6.5** Bratrí Čapkové, *Ze života hmyzu*, ‘Mravenika’ [Ant-City] in Act III, National Theatre, Prague, 1922. Set design by Josef Čapek in collaboration with K.H. Hilar. Photograph by Karel Váňa (Courtesy of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague)

Edwards secured the rights to produce *Ze života hmyzu* through the Czechoslovak consulate in Dublin relatively shortly before he commissioned the adaptation (Samek 24, 52–53). While the Gate production was to be the first professional outing of the play in Ireland, it had already been performed at the Father Mathew Hall Feis in Dublin in April 1937 (Swaney 18), for which the rights do not seem to have been solicited from the authors. Moreover, Edwards generously sanctioned an amateur production of the play by the Dublin University Players in June 1942, directed by a twenty-one-year-old Jewish refugee from Czechoslovakia, Hanuš Drechsler (H.S.K.; Quidnunc). The fact that a number of people in Dublin would have seen one or the other of these earlier amateur performances of the ‘Insect Play’ may have influenced the somewhat disappointing run of the Gate staging in 1943.

Brian O’Nolan was asked to work at extremely short notice. Within three weeks of Edwards’s letter, the Gate secretary Isa Hughes communicated to him the suggestion that the adaptation should be ready for the Gate’s October and November season of plays at the Gaiety. This he refused, not so much due to the time constraints but because his play *Faustus Kelly* was to be performed at the Abbey Theatre around the same time;<sup>18</sup> he suggested delivering the script for March next year instead (*Collected Letters* 123-24 n155). The first draft of the adaptation was finished in October 1942, but rather than proceeding to finalize the script, O’Nolan sent it to Edwards and sought his view on the direction the adaptation had taken, particularly as regards what he referred to as ‘naive political commentary in the last act’ (*Collected Letters* 125-26). The director’s response was generally enthusiastic. As O’Nolan included drawings of his ideas of the insects (now lost) in the margins of the typescript, Edwards sketched his own vision of the ants on the back of the letter, wearing gas masks and military helmets in a clear allusion to the world war that was going on at the time. Edwards’s letter also unravels that the Čapeks’ butterflies of the first act were originally replaced with monkeys (‘I do agree about the butterflies and always thought it unfortunate that the play opened with those impossible creatures, but monkeys are not insects – does it matter?’ *Collected Letters* 126). Interestingly enough, O’Nolan’s diary for 1943 reveals that it was his friend and occasional collaborator Niall Montgomery who wrote most of the first act featuring monkeys (Taaffe 247 n27). Remarkably, O’Nolan also consulted the physicist Erwin Schrödinger (Moore 379), who is likely to have known the Čapeks’ play in German translation.

The only regret expressed by Edwards about the first draft of the adaptation was that O’Nolan had removed ‘the sloppy sentimental ending’ of the English version, as the director thought ‘it gave a lyrical note to end on, quite beautiful and good theatre’ (*Collected Letters* 127). However, the ending in question was largely the work of Nigel Playfair and Clifford Bax, rather than the authors of the play. The Čapeks’ original ending, in which the corpse of the Tramp is discovered by a woodcutter and commented on in a matter-of-fact way only, was regarded by most reviewers of the early Czech productions as so bleak that the authors eventually supplied an alternative version in which the Tramp wakes up the next morning, realizing that his mortal agony happened only in a dream (see Čapek, K. and J. 86-92). A similar need for ending on what the Čapeks called a note of ‘compromise’ (Čapek, K. and J. 90) must have

been felt by the English adaptors, who – since the alternative version was not available until the third Czech edition of the play of 1922,<sup>19</sup> and had not been translated into English – added a sentimental closing moment that has School Children file across the stage singing ‘As I went down to Shrewsbury Town’, and a flower is passed on from a little girl to a baby, whose mother then lays it on the body of the Tramp (Čapek, J. and K. 177).

Edwards and O’Nolan finally met – for the first time in person – in January 1943, and Edwards suggested that the first act be rewritten using wasps; this O’Nolan did, and supplied the finished manuscript on 16 January 1943 (*Collected Letters* 127 n165), including a sketch of a wasp on the first page. Nonetheless, due to what Robert Tracy has called ‘Myles’s erratic entomology’ (O’Brien 85 n3), O’Nolan actually turned his wasps into bees in all but name.<sup>20</sup> The appropriate emendations, whereby bees were no longer referred to as wasps, were made in rehearsal, and as much as the typescript that was used as the prompt book does not reflect these, they duly appeared in the published version of the play edited by Tracy.

As I have shown above, the Gate production of *R.U.R.* suppressed some of the author’s universalist intent unwittingly due to the nature of the English adaptation of the text. The case of the Gate ‘Insect Play’ was different, however, in that it was intended as a local adaptation from the onset. O’Nolan shifted the place of action from an unspecified forest to Dublin’s Stephen’s Green. He introduced a number of new minor characters, such as the Keeper of the park, replaced the Chrysalis in Act I with a hen’s Egg, and the Ichneumon Fly and its Larva with a Duck and Duckling. Characters speak with a range of strong accents: the Tramp, together with the dung Beetles, talk like Dubliners from the North-side, bees ‘discuss suicide in Trinity accents’ (Tracy 9-10), the Crickets speak as Corkonians, and one of the ant species is presented as Belfast unionists, as opposed to their ant enemies from the Republic. Moreover, O’Nolan worked in a hefty dose of satirical references to contemporary Ireland.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to such ostentatious regionality, however, a number of passages in O’Nolan’s version are heavily intertextual, using quotations from multiple plays by William Shakespeare or Shakespearean language, while the Čapeks’ original (or, for that matter, the English adaptation) features virtually no intertextual references whatsoever. Despite these major divergences from the play as originally written by the Čapeks, Matthew Sweeney is absolutely correct in asserting that O’Nolan put

colour back into the language of Selver's translation, which was rather bloodless to start with – an issue that was further aggravated by its faulty English adaptation (Sweeney *passim*).

### THE GATE PRODUCTION

The Gate prompt book shows that Edwards's cuts were more extensive than had been the case with *R.U.R.* They mostly affected the more verbose passages, such as some of the Drone's Shakespearean speeches in Act I, and much of the discussion of Ulster unionist politics and militant propaganda by the Chief Engineer, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer and the Politician in Act III. It is indeed the act about the ants that was subjected to most extensive pruning, and also some minor restructuring, as Edwards was clearly working towards the most effective way of staging the war scenes, which shifted the emphasis somewhat from language to non-verbal action (Fig. 6.6). The relatively marginal scene featuring the Egg, the Tramp, the Duck and the Duckling in Act II was restructured along similar lines. An awareness of the audience's sensibilities is perhaps apparent in Edwards's removal of Mrs. (Dung) Beetle's line about 'some beetles' who 'do be selling their bodies to other beetles that does have a big pile like this' (O'Brien 41), and of the comic-sounding prudishness in Mrs. Cricket referring to her pregnancy repeatedly as being 'in a certain condition' (50, 51) in Act II. Last but not least, many of the Tramp's lines were cut across the entire play. This decision is unfortunate in relation to the original, but appears perfectly justified given the text that O'Brien was adapting. The Tramp's role in the Čapeks' original play – regardless of arriving tipsy on the scene in Act I – is to provide a running commentary on the action: he serves as a guide for the audience, his observations are often philosophical in nature and are at times spoken in verse. He is a veteran of the Great War, a shell-shocked lost soul confined to menial jobs (Čapek, K. and J. 11-12), and was intended by the Čapeks to embody both the authors' and the audience's perspective on the world of the insects (Černý 114, 124), serving as an insightful representative of humanity who observes the range of vices that the 'Insect Play' satirizes. In contrast, Playfair and Bax cut most of his part and turned him into a permanently drunken Cockney, a line that O'Nolan largely followed, not having access to the Czech original.

The play required what was an unusually large cast for the Gate: it features twenty-eight parts, a group of children and an unspecified

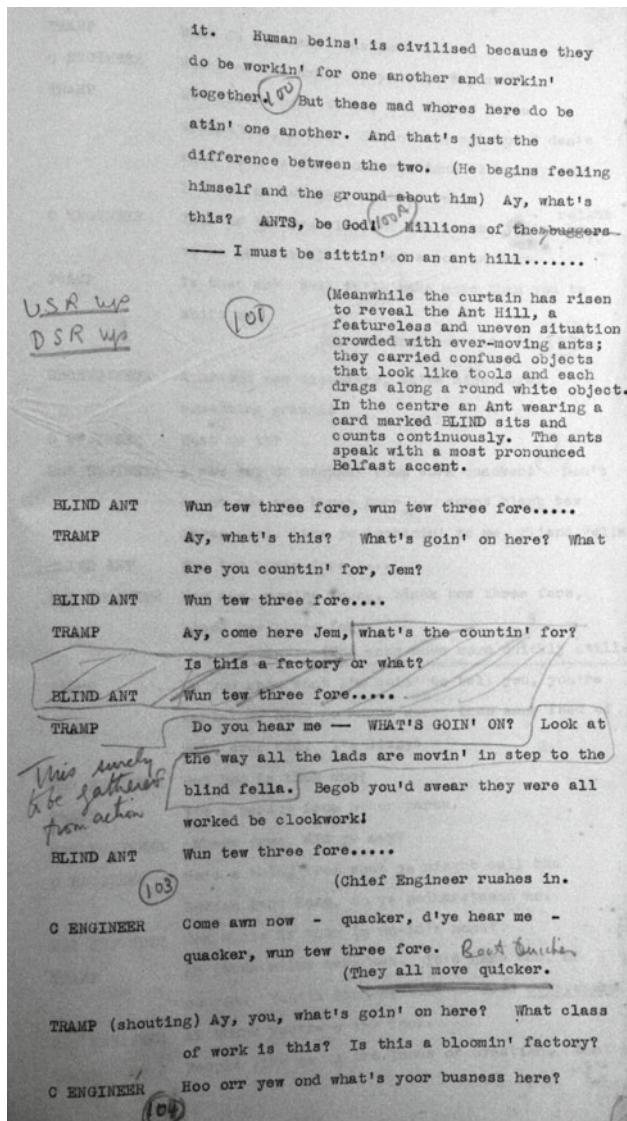


Fig. 6.6 The Brothers Čapek, *The Insect Play*, adapted by Myles na gCopaleen, Gate Theatre, Dublin, 1943. Prompt book. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

number of silent parts to depict the ants. Despite using twenty-one actors and nine children, the company still had to resort to some role doubling. The copies of the text of numerous parts (which are preserved in the Gate Theatre Archive) indicate that the casting was a complicated process. For instance, the parts of Mr. Cricket and the Chief Engineer are signed ‘Micheál MacLiammóir’; both are heavily annotated by mac Liammóir in Irish and in English, and the latter features many doodles, at least one of which may be an idea for an insect costume (Fig. 6.7). This shows that mac Liammóir was clearly involved in rehearsals; however, in the event, neither he nor Hilton Edwards appeared in the play. The role doubling of Mr. Cricket and the Chief Engineer was retained but the parts were played by J. Winter, possibly because most roles were given to younger members of the company or its associates, with only the Gate’s leading actresses Meriel Moore and Betty Chancellor appearing as Mrs. Cricket and the Queen Bee, respectively.

The title under which O’Nolan’s adaptation would play likewise remained an issue until very shortly before the opening night. O’Nolan did not seem to have provided a title for his adaptation, since the folder with his typescript bears the heading ‘Irish Version of Capeks’ INSECT PLAY / By Myles na gCopaleen’, and its first page has a question mark in place of a title. However, advance notices in the press announced the production as ‘Rhapsody in Stephen’s Green’, an adaptation of ‘Carl Capek’s’ or ‘the brothers’ Capek The Insect Play’ by Myles na gCopaleen, and it is only in the programme (and presumably also on the posters) for the production that the title ‘The Insect Play by the Brothers Capek. Translated and Adapted by Myles na gCopaleen’ appeared first.<sup>22</sup>

*The Insect Play* opened at the Gaiety on 22 March 1943 and ran for one week. The lighting design was by the play’s director, Hilton Edwards, set design by Molly MacEwen, and the costumes were designed by Micheál mac Liammóir. Regrettably again, none of the designs or production photographs appear to have survived.<sup>23</sup> Thus we don’t know, for instance, which of the solutions proposed by Edwards as to how the insects might be depicted was eventually adopted; Edwards wrote to O’Nolan: ‘There are two ways of approaching these insects theatrically; one, to make the humans as insect-like as possible by covering up; or, two, to adapt the human figure; i.e. Mr Beetle in a shiny American cloth morning coat with tails to the ground, and bowler hat. I rather fancy the second method, but we can settle all these points later.’ (*Collected Letters* 126) Regardless, the actors were generally lauded on their performance,

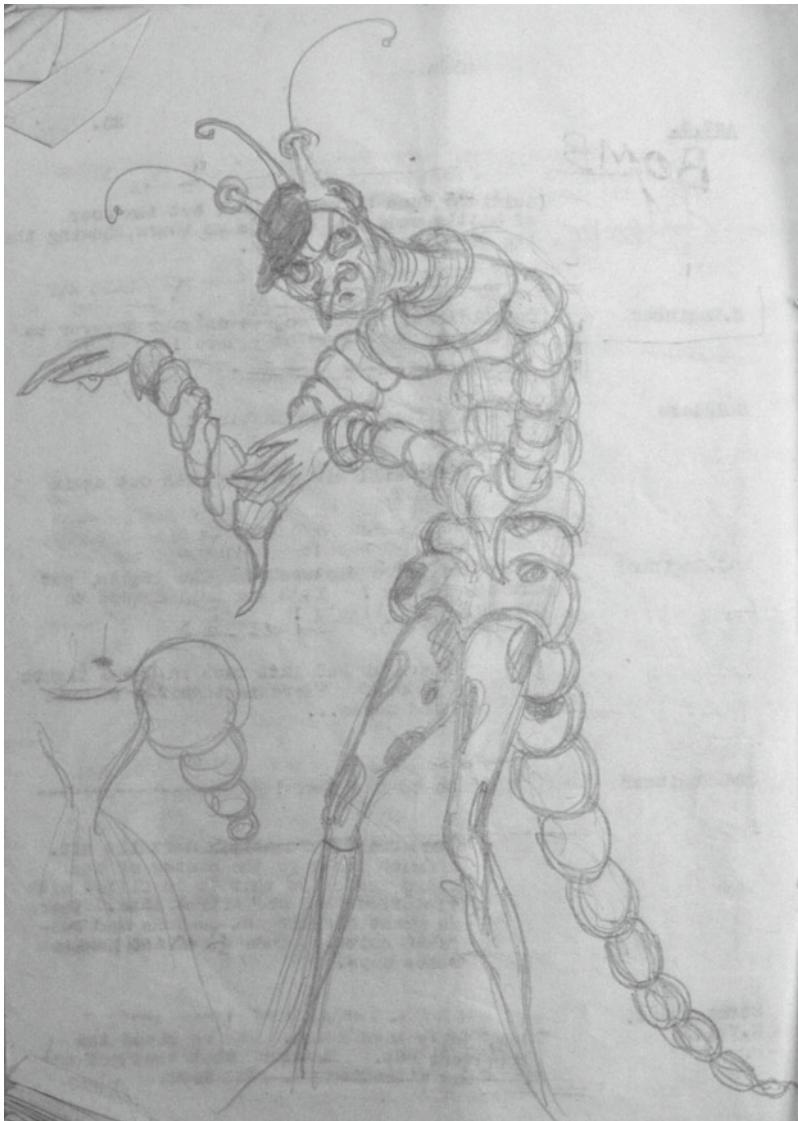


Fig. 6.7 The Brothers Čapek, *The Insect Play*, adapted by Myles na gCopaleen, Gate Theatre, Dublin, 1943. Insect drawing by Micheál mac Liammóir in the part of Chief Engineer. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

with Robert Hennessy singled out for praise in his role of the Tramp. A few of the reviews paid tribute to Edwards's handling of the anthill and the battle scene, and one commentator saluted the design and production qualities, concluding that this was 'a designer's and a producer's play' (D.S.). Otherwise, all reviewers focused overwhelmingly on the content of the work.

Unlike in the 1920s, to produce a play by the Čapeks during World War II was a political act, as Matthew Sweeney asserts (3). Both brothers were well known internationally for their firm anti-Nazi stance in the 1930s, and while Karel died shortly before the outbreak of the war, Josef was arrested by the Gestapo in September 1939 and sent to a concentration camp, where he was ultimately to perish only days before the German capitulation. The strict neutrality in public discourse enforced by censorship during the 'Emergency' likely prevented the staging of Karel's final plays, *Bílá nemoc* (*The White Plague*, 1937) and *Matka* (*Mother*, 1938) in Ireland in English during the war due to their obvious anti-fascist message, as much as *Bílá nemoc* was courageously given at least an Irish-language production at An Taibhdhearc in 1941, translated and adapted by Buadhach Tóibín as *An Sgiúrsa Bhán*, directed by Walter Macken and starring Macken and Siobhán McKenna (*Irish Playography*; Samek 23, 52).<sup>24</sup> Edwards and mac Liammóir were thus taking a clear stance when putting on *The Insect Play* in 1943, and it is with an awareness of the censorship of the press that the reviews of their production must be read.

## RECEPTION

Due to the considerable disparity between the Čapeks' play as staged in Brno and Prague on the one hand, and Myles na gCopaleen's adaptation produced at the Gate on the other, the respective critical response naturally differed in a number of ways. The reviews in Czechoslovakia were overwhelmingly positive, and the authors ultimately received a prestigious national award for the play in 1923. However, commentators mostly struggled to find an appropriate interpretive framework for this unusual 'comedy', being puzzled by its uncommon and seemingly multifarious genre characteristics. *Ze života hmyzu* was thus variously called 'unostentatiously expressionistic', 'grotesque', a work of 'literary cubism', a 'cinematic' or 'philosophical ballet' (Černý 140, 141, 144), and perhaps most poignantly, a 'modern imitation of a medieval morality play' (Černý 167). Unorthodox as the play's technique and structure may

have appeared, even the most conservative of reviewers were enthusiastic about it as theatre. A likely explanation is offered by eminent Čapek scholar Jiří Opelík, who has argued that the basic structure of the play – which essentially consists of a series of one-act plays thrown together and framed by a prologue and an epilogue – was in fact adopted from a most popular form of art nouveau entertainment, the variety play (166–67), which was still widely practised in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. The Irish commentators, on the other hand, were unanimous in the assumption that what they saw was intended as a relatively straightforward, hilarious satire on the state of contemporary Ireland.<sup>25</sup>

Where the Čapeks were chastised by their compatriots for a pessimistic outlook that seemed unsolicited in the enthusiastic atmosphere of the recently inaugurated, prosperous free state, *Myles na gCopaleen* was criticized for excessive mirth, vulgarity and blasphemy in Ireland during the ‘Emergency’. A hostile review in the *Irish Press* objected to the use of what it viewed as gratuitously foul language and ‘cheap jokes about motherhood’. The reviewer asserted that the Čapeks would have been surprised to see their ‘serious satire’ used ‘to burlesque the divisions in this country to make a theatrical holiday’, and concluded that ‘[t]he Čapeks, lovers of their country, would have been amazed to find their translator and adaptor using their work to mock the movement for reviving a national language and to sneer at the people of Ireland, North and South’ (T.W.). Similarly, the tireless chronicler of Dublin theatre, Joseph Holloway, now in his eighties, complained about the overuse of the word ‘bloody’ in the adaptation; he considered *The Insect Play* ‘Stage-Irish’, concluding that the dramatic efforts of *Myles na gCopaleen* ‘are distinctly vulgar and common, and not suitable in the Gaiety, the Abbey, or the Gate’ (qtd in Tracy 12). A much more positive review in the *Times Pictorial* also complained about labour pains being used as the subject of humour and regarded the ‘bloodies’ as tiresome; it concluded nonetheless that ‘It is good for a people to be able to laugh at themselves; this has become a neglected art in many countries, and sometimes we take ourselves a great deal too seriously.’ (Review... *Times Pictorial*)

The most vocal objector against the alleged immorality and crassness of Myles’s adaptation was Gabriel Fallon, however. His scathing review in the Catholic newspaper *The Standard* provided an impulse for just the kind of gleeful battle in the press that Brian O’Nolan had relished since his student days; moreover, the fact that Fallon’s review identified *Myles na gCopaleen* and Flann O’Brien<sup>26</sup> as the same person (*Collected*

*Letters* 134 n183) sent O’Nolan on a rampage. On 2 April 1943, *The Standard* published three texts alongside one another, all under the title ‘Our Theatre Critic Attacked and Defended’: ‘Letter from Myles na gCopaleen’, ‘Letter from Member of Audience’ signed ‘S.M. Dunn’, which had most likely been written by O’Nolan as well,<sup>27</sup> and ‘Our Theatre Critic’s Reply and His Challenge to Myles na gCopaleen’. The following passage from Myles’s response to Fallon is indicative of the timbre of the entire polemic:

we protest very strongly against a dirty tirade, which, under the guise of dramatic criticism, was nothing more or less than a treatise on dung. ‘There will always be a distinction,’ Mr. Fallon says, ‘between the honest dung of the farmyard and the nasty dirt of the chicken run.’ Personally I lack the latrine erudition to comment on this extraordinary statement, and I am not going to speculate on the odd researches that led your contributor to his great discovery. I am content to record my objection that his faecal reveries should be published. (*‘Our Theatre Critic’*)

As to Fallon’s charge of obscenity, Myles noted that ‘There is no reference to sex as such anywhere; it is true that there are male and female characters, but very few people nowadays consider that alone an indelicacy.’ (*‘Our Theatre Critic’*) In closing his letter of protest, Myles raised what he called its ‘main point’: he accused Fallon of having tried, after the performance, to make the Director of the Catholic Boy Scouts, whose members were involved in the performance, to withdraw them from the show. This Fallon emphatically denied doing in his response. ‘S.M. Dunn’ also recorded his shock at the involvement of Catholic Boy Scouts in the performance of this ‘low down jibe at all that we, as Catholics, hold dear’, as he learnt from the programme for the play. The polemic was, in fact, preceded by an anonymous text published in *The Standard* on 27 March, titled ‘Disgusting Performance’, which concluded with a very similar passage about the involvement of Boy Scouts as listed in the programme; the language and style of this delightfully opprobrious article make it very likely to have been written by Brian O’Nolan, too. As a matter of fact, the programme (as preserved in the Gate Theatre Archive) includes no mention of Boy Scouts whatsoever. Instead, it lists the names of nine child actors, seven of whom were female, as acting ‘by permission of Miss Ursula White’. Since it is unlikely that two versions of the programme for a play that ran for a mere seven performances were printed, it seems that

O’Nolan invented the whole business and Fallon swallowed it hook, line and sinker. Incensed both by the play and the ensuing attack, *The Standard* critic announced that he was going to boycott the Edwards – mac Liammóir productions in the current season in protest against *The Insect Play* (‘Our Theatre Critic’).<sup>28</sup>

The review that appeared in the May issue of *The Bell* picked up from O’Nolan’s satirizing of Fallon’s prudishness and asserted that in this regard, ‘Ireland has apparently now reached the seventeenth century. In a few more years we shall have the drama where it was between 1720 and 1900 in Great Britain, i.e., in the soup. Then the Pussyfoots can joyfully say: “Well, there may be nothing in the plate. But isn’t it *clean*?”’ (C.C. 157) On a more serious note – and to return to the issue of the ‘Emergency’ and censorship – the reviewer in *The Bell* described the Irish adaptation of the ‘Insect Play’ as ‘more amusing than the Capeks, less interesting’. The reason he gave for his judgement was that since the ‘idea’ of the original ‘has become painfully obvious now though it was fresh enough when it first came out to express post-last-war disillusion by comparing men to insects’, the play calls for a distinctly ‘modern, or local, re-interpretation’, which Myles decided not to provide. Instead, he chose to ‘tempe[r] Czech gloom with Hibernian irresponsibility’ and has thus ‘lost most of the point’ (155-56). The wording is oblique out of necessity but still quite clear, including the objection raised against the version of the play not being ‘local’, that is, ‘local’ in the right sense of the word: what the reviewer criticized was that instead of adapting the play in reference to the current world war, be it in an international sense or by way of satirizing Ireland’s stance to it, Myles opted largely for mere entertainment.

Likewise, as much as the commentator on the production in the *Irish Tatler and Sketch* did enjoy the humour of Myles na gCopaleen, they observed in a clear reference to World War II that ‘however funny it may have seemed once to suggest that ants and bees managed their affairs at least as well as human beings, after the last four years that jest has lost its point. Certainly between us and the insects the laugh is no longer on our side.’ A letter from a reader, signed ‘L. Kiernan’, protesting against the harsh review that appeared in *The Irish Press* (referred to above) argued that Myles’s adaptation had retained a serious underlying meaning, since it showed

what does happen when the part has convinced itself that it is the whole and in egomaniacal obsession sets itself out to dominate and to destroy all who differ from it. It is in this way that factions are begotten which destroys states and nations. The tendency to breed them is one which has cursed us all through our history and in bringing that truth so forcibly, if amusingly, before us – when the danger from them is perhaps greater than ever – the author [of the adaptation] was doing a national service. (Kiernan)

Finally, even the fine and detailed review in the *Irish Times* (probably by the writer Brinsley MacNamara [Tracy 11], who was a friend of O’Nolan’s) that interpreted Myles’s adaptation as a Swiftian satire on humanity with a local touch included a sentence that evidently referenced the war: ‘There were moments when [the insects] brought us quite close to topics of the day, when we were as near to certain things as some of these things now are to Stephen’s Green.’ (‘Gaiety Theatre’) On the whole then, while it might appear that the domestication of the ‘Insect Play’ by Myles na gCopaleen largely deprived it of its universal appeal and turned it into an easy comedy that merely offended some of the more puritanical reviewers, enough of the Čapeks’ original concept remained to allow for a broader allegorical reading that encouraged at least some of its spectators to muse about the current global cataclysm.

*The Insect Play* fared better with audiences than the revival of *R.U.R.* in 1931 and was given ‘a most enthusiastic reception from a large audience’ on the opening night (‘Gaiety Theatre’). However, given that the cheque that was sent to O’Nolan by the Gate came with apologies for being ‘a very poor reward for all the work’ (*Collected Letters* 127 n165), and that the production was never revived, the high expectations that Hilton Edwards had had of the venture were evidently not fulfilled. The fact that his accomplished production received ample praise was likely small consolation, since superlatives used in connection with the work of the Gate’s original artistic directors had become a staple feature of critical commentaries by the early 1940s.

## CONCLUSION

The story behind the Čapek productions at the Gate considerably differed in that *R.U.R.* was staged relatively shortly after its Czech première and its ensuing global success, resulting in a well-received – albeit perhaps

modest – staging followed by a more lavish but somewhat ill-scheduled revival, while *The Insect Play* was not presented until over two decades from its first appearance. The choice of *R.U.R.* chimed with the artistic preferences of Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir in the early seasons of their theatre and its focus on contemporary international drama; the staging of *The Insect Play*, on the other hand, combined an aesthetic choice with an unequivocal political attitude. Like the original Czech productions, the Gate versions were praised for the originality and efficiency of the director's work, impressive scenography and fine acting. The reception of the Čapeks' work by Irish spectators must, importantly, be viewed in relation to the nature of the play texts that were staged by the Gate, particularly when compared with that by the original audiences in Czechoslovakia: *R.U.R.* was based on a faulty English adaptation of a translation that was merely passable to begin with, while *The Insect Play* was a relatively free 'Irish' adaptation that was made from a similarly deficient English version. The principal point of convergence in the Czech and Irish reviews consists in both plays being regarded as powerful allegories that spoke to the moment – were it newly independent, prosperous Czechoslovakia in the early 1920s or neutral Ireland in 1943, still dominated by the issue of national identity while having a world war on its doorstep. The fact that some commentators on the revived production of *R.U.R.* at the Gate in 1931 came to regard Karel Čapek's warning against dehumanization due to the overuse of technology as too fantastic and/or bleak to be taken seriously may be viewed – together with the low audience numbers – as indicative of the ethos of proudly independent but isolationist Ireland of the day perhaps, where the experience of World War I had faded into the distance (or was actively suppressed) and where the level of industrialization was very moderate yet. The critical response to *The Insect Play*, on the other hand, provides a fascinating glimpse into how the uneasy proximity of World War II was felt at the time of its production, as much as the commentaries may have been dominated by prudish objections and the focus on the larger-than-life figure of the satirical columnist Myles na gCopaleen.<sup>29</sup>

## NOTES

1. The number of performances – which might seem relatively low – must be seen in relation to the nature of programming at continental ensemble theatres (such as the Prague National), where a number of productions

would be running simultaneously at any given time, with new titles playing more frequently at first and eventually once or twice a month only. Moreover, the size of the theatre must be considered as well, as the Prague National seated approximately 1000 spectators at the time.

2. The Czech original of the response is reprinted in Čapek 1968, 299–301.
3. A succinct expression of the seminal role of emotions in the theatre may be found in Edwards's *The Mantle of Harlequin*: '[...] the theatre's function is not to appeal directly to the mind, but to the mind through the emotions. I have never yet met with a play that succeeded in its objective and made an appeal primarily to the intellect. Such a work is usually sterile in the theatre.' (123)
4. Čapek made a whole set of revisions for the second edition of the play, which was used for subsequent Czech productions of the play and became the basis for the more recent English translations of *R.U.R.*
5. A typescript version of the English adaptation was also the source for the American incarnation of *R.U.R.*, produced by the Theatre Guild at Garrick Theatre on 9 October 1922 in what was the English-language première. The Theatre Guild made numerous alterations that differ from the text that appeared from Oxford University Press in 1923 (Philmus 13–20). The Theatre Guild production ran for 184 performances (*Internet Broadway Database*), and the text of their version was published in the US by Doubleday in the same year as the British edition. To make matters even more complicated, Philmus has shown that the text of the adaptation published by Oxford University Press does not quite correspond to the version used at St. Martin's Theatre for their production, as preserved in the papers of the Lord Chamberlain's Office at the British Library (15).
6. For instance, the name became 'Werstand' in German and the drama played as *W.U.R.* in consequence; likewise, in French, the name was rendered as 'Rezon'.
7. Apart from all these changes, Fabry and Hallemeier were cut altogether in the first London production (Philmus 18 and the frontispiece to the Oxford edition of the play).
8. The US producers explicitly cited this as the reason for making a similar cut in their production (see Philmus 18).
9. While it is possible that Selver was unable to find an appropriate translation of the Czech idiom, this hardly explains the extent of the deletions in the published version.
10. Unless noted otherwise, all archival materials referenced in this chapter come from the Gate Theatre Archive lodged at the McCormick Library of Special Collections at Northwestern University.
11. See Pádraig Ó Siadhail's chapter in the present volume, p. 57.
12. Interestingly, the Doubleday edition of *R.U.R.* (but not the Theatre Guild production) added flowers in this scene as well, although in a different

- place: Helena puts a flower in Primus's hair after she has smoothed it and tells him that he looks ridiculous; they both burst out laughing, and wake up Alquist. See Philmus 30 n42.
13. The sentence – most likely written by Hilton Edwards – appeared in advance notices published in three Dublin papers, and partially in a fourth; see “R.U.R.” at the Gate and the item ‘The Gate Theatre’ from the *Evening Mail*, the *Evening Herald* and the *Irish Independent*.
  14. The present comparison is somewhat lacking in balance as regards the material that it is based on. This is due to the status of the respective productions, i.e. a first production of a new play by a promising author of a recently emancipated literature at the National Theatre, on the one hand, and a revival of an experimental foreign play at a relatively small theatre in a culture still preoccupied with the national on the other: the former garnered twenty-four largely extensive reviews, several of which were written by prominent intellectuals such as Otokar Fischer (for a complete list, see Černý 442-43), while reviews for the latter were only a few and mostly rather brief.
  15. This essay became one of the reasons why Čapek’s work was suppressed by the authorities in Czechoslovakia after the communist takeover in 1948.
  16. K.H. Hilar was invited to assist with directing the play by both the New York and the London producers. As he was not given leave of absence by the National Theatre for the New York production, he eventually collaborated on the Regent’s Theatre staging only (Černý 166).
  17. A brief summary of the principal differences between the original and the Oxford version was provided by James Partridge, who concluded that the ‘translation/adaptation is particularly poor and completely misrepresents Čapek’s [sic] play’ (229).
  18. In the event, *Faustus Kelly* did not open until January 1943, two months before the opening of *The Insect Play*.
  19. The third edition includes both endings, together with the suggestion that the director chooses between them according to his/her preference, a format that has been replicated in all subsequent Czech editions (Černý 123-26).
  20. Time constraints may have been a factor here as well, since O’Nolan complained in his diary: ‘They asked me to write a whole new act within the week. I promised I would do it without actually having the time for it.’ (trans. from Irish and qtd in Taaffe 247 n27)
  21. A detailed summary of O’Nolan’s innovations is provided by Robert Tracy in his introduction to the published text (O’Brien 9-11). Most contemporary references are identified in Tracy’s notes to the text and are discussed further in Taaffe 180-81.
  22. Robert Tracy claims in his introduction to the published text that ‘*Rhapsody in Stephen’s Green* was Myles’s working title’ (14 n1) but does

not cite any evidence for this. On the other hand, Ruud van den Beuken has pointed out to me that ‘Symphony in Green’ was an early title for Denis Johnston’s *The Old Lady Says ‘No!’*; should this be more than a tenuous link, it would indicate that the working title would have more likely come from Edwards than O’Nolan.

23. The two production photos listed in the catalogue of the Gate Theatre Archive cannot be located.
24. For further details about the production, see Markus 64-68.
25. There is again a discrepancy as regards both the nature and the quantity of commentaries that are being compared here which is due to the difference in the theatrical contexts: although reviews of *The Insect Play* did appear in eleven periodicals in Ireland, *Ze života hmyzu* was regarded as *the* theatrical event of the season in the two cities where it was produced by their national theatres; as a result, there were ten largely extensive reviews of the Brno production and as many as twenty-seven of Hilar’s production at Prague (cf. Černý 446-48).
26. Flann O’Brien was the pen name under which O’Nolan published all of his English-language novels and a few shorter works in English.
27. Tracy has arrived at the same suspicion; see Tracy 15 n19. Ian Walsh has pointed out to me that if this is the case, O’Nolan may be playing on the word ‘donn’ in Irish, which is homophonous with ‘Dunn’ and means ‘brown’ – an appropriate colour given Fallon’s analogy.
28. About a year later, Edwards and mac Liammóir retaliated by officially barring Fallon from their productions via a letter to the editor of *The Standard* (published together with Fallon’s bad review of *Desire under the Elms*, and a brief retort to the letter, in *The Standard* on 16 February 1944). Ultimately, however, they all made up and Fallon contributed a comprehensive, moving tribute to Edwards and mac Liammóir’s work to Peter Luke’s volume about the Gate Theatre, *Enter Certain Players* (40-46).
29. Work on this chapter was supported by the European Regional Development Fund Project ‘Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World’ (No. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16\_019/0000734). I am grateful to Jiří Opelík for his advice on Čapekiana, my friend Matthew Sweeney for generously sharing a late draft of his forthcoming work on *The Insect Play* with me, and to the staff of the McCormick Library of Special Collections at Northwestern University for allowing me to work with the materials from the Gate Theatre Archive during the hectic time of a major cleaning project, and indeed for going out of their way to accommodate all my queries.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# Kismet: Hollywood, Orientalism and the Design Language of Padraic Colum's *Mogu of the Desert*

*Elaine Sisson*

When the Gate Theatre staged Padraic Colum's *Mogu of the Desert* in 1931, the play had been in circulation since 1908. The Gate's production was its first staging, although it was not a success and closed after two performances. The content and form of the play differs greatly from Colum's earlier works for the Abbey (especially *Thomas Muskerry*, 1910, and *The Land*, 1905) and is described in the *Irish Press* as 'a fantastical comedy [...] on Persian themes' (28 December 1931). This in itself is something of a misnomer, since it is neither fantastical nor comedic. Colum had reworked *Mogu* numerous times since its first publication as part of his ongoing exploration of transcultural narratives. By the time of the Gate production Colum had already published a series of Hawaiian folk tales, in addition to books on Norse, Greek, Irish and Celtic mythology.<sup>1</sup>

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An analysis of *Mogu*'s design and staging – and, in particular, its costume and set design – in relation to its Middle Eastern subject matter reveals how this production was part of a broader engagement with ‘exotic’ or oriental narratives at the Gate that were influenced by popular cinema, in particular the film versions of Edward Knoblock’s play *Kismet*. This chapter looks at the history and subject matter of Colum’s play *Mogu*, as context in which to discuss Mac Liammóir’s fascination with oriental and Middle Eastern culture within film and popular culture. Further, the documentary traces of *Mogu*, left behind in costume designs, set drawings and production photographs, provide an understanding of theatre as a commercial enterprise.

Although written in 1908, by 1912 there was a certain amount of controversy brewing around Colum’s play. Colum maintained the West End hit musical *Kismet*, packing houses in London’s Garrick Theatre, was in fact based on *Mogu The Wanderer or The Desert*. We know this because two letters to the *Irish Times* appeared on the same day, 5 April 1912 (one from Colum, and the other from Tom Kettle), drawing attention to the similarities between *Kismet* and Colum’s play, referred to in the correspondence as ‘The Desert’. Colum was vexed at what he considered to be outright plagiarism. As Kettle says in his letter, ‘Mr. Colum had spoken constantly to me about “The Desert” from 1907; in the spring of 1908 he showed me the first draft, afterwards re-written; and in the winter of 1908 I saw the final version.’ Furthermore, says Kettle, ‘I happen to know that from this date on the MS [manuscript] was going the rounds of various London theatres.’ (Kettle) Colum’s letter was slightly more conciliatory, acknowledging that the plays represented what we would now call *Zeitgeist*, but what he describes as ‘correspondences’ of ‘certain psychic phenomena’. Nevertheless, his letter revealed he had organized a reprinting of his play, asking a committee of ‘disinterested’ ‘gentlemen’ to ascertain whether or not there were any similarities with ‘Kismet’ (Colum). The members of the committee were no lightweights: W.B. Yeats, George Russell, Edward Martyn, Lord Dunsany, Tom Kettle, Professor Donovan and the editors of both the *Irish Times* and *The Freeman’s Journal* were asked to read both plays. Kettle’s letter calls the similarities ‘the strangest coincidence in literature that I have ever encountered’ (Kettle). Ernest Boyd noted that it shared an interest in ‘the romance of that vague Orient’ that characterized the dramatic work of Lord Dunsany (118).

Edward Knoblock had allegedly written *Kismet* in 1911 and it was first performed at the Garrick Theatre in London, running for over two seasons. Knoblock had been commissioned to write the play for the leading theatrical manager, producer and actor Oscar Asche, who may or may not have seen a script of Colum's play when it was doing the rounds of London theatres some years previously.<sup>3</sup> While Knoblock's play was still running in London, another production of *Kismet* opened in New York and Asche also produced a successful run of the play in Australia. The commercial success of *Kismet* makes it easy to understand how galling this was for Colum. Perhaps it was the prospect of Knoblock's show coming to Dublin that precipitated the republishing of *Mogu the Wanderer, or the Desert* in 1912 in order to support Colum's charge of plagiarism. By April 1912, the *Irish Times* was reporting that 'everyone who went to London [...] tried to see "Kismet" at the Garrick. The world and his wife were going to it, and it was eminently the thing'. However, the paper went on, disappointed Irish theatre-goers were now being treated to the West-End production at the Theatre Royal in Dublin. The *Irish Times* reviewer praised the 'Arabian nights entertainment' and 'the glamour of the Orient' featuring 'girl slaves and eunuchs', as well as dancing and magicians ("Kismet" at the Theatre Royal').

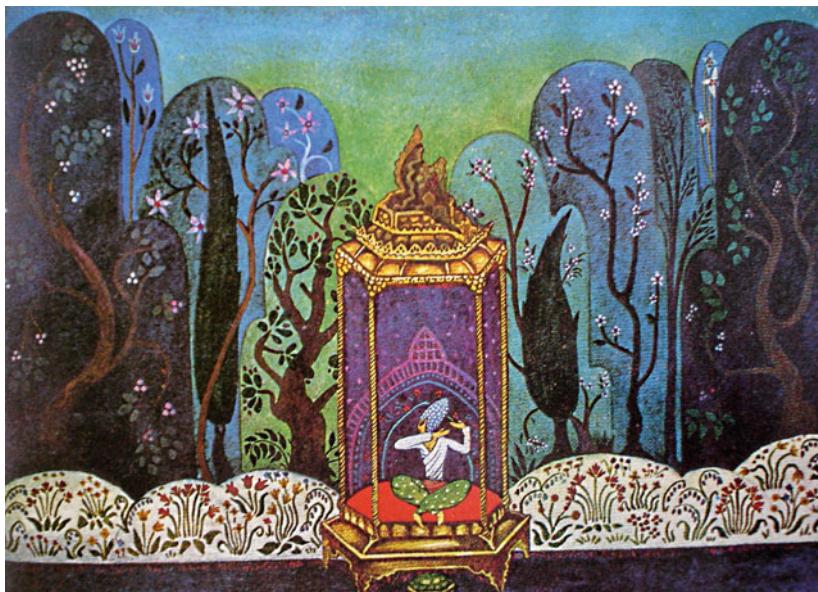
Nevertheless, almost twenty years had passed by the time of the Gate's production of *Mogu* in 1931. On the face of things, it seems a peculiar choice for Edwards and mac Liammóir to make: the play is not very modern, nor does it offer opportunities for avant-garde experiments. After all, this was to be only the third season in the Gate's new home at the Rotunda, and the theatre was slowly building up its reputation for edgy, experimental drama. Mac Liammóir's interest in *Mogu* may be attributed to two things: first, a genuine desire to support Padraic Colum in admiration of his work, and second, the potential to stage a home-grown version of *Kismet* which had enjoyed sustained popular attention in two film versions.

Although *Kismet* was a theatrical success in the 1912-1914 London season, its broader legacy may be traced largely through cinema. *Kismet* was filmed in 1920, 1930, 1944 and 1955 but today's audiences are probably most familiar with the Hollywood musical versions dating from the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>3</sup> It is the 1920 and 1930 film versions of *Kismet* that are of interest here. The silent film version of 1920 starred Otis Skinner and Elinor Fair and was directed by Louis J. Gasnier. It was filmed again as a talkie in 1930, directed by John Francis Dillon for Warner Bros and

again featuring Otis Skinner, this time appearing opposite Loretta Young. The 1930 film is now lost but its pre-Hay's code aesthetic, particularly of the harem scenes, attracted interest.<sup>4</sup> Dublin cinema listings for 1931 show that there was a screening of the 1930 talkie *Kismet* at the Theatre Royal on 21 July 1931, some five months before Mac Liammóir staged *Mogu*. The film was advertised in the *Irish Times* under the tagline as 'a dramatic story of Eastern fatalism. A beggar's rise from rags to riches. Love and Hate. Desire and Revenge' (21 July 1931). An article in the same paper highlighted the upcoming visit to Dublin of the film, noting that it had 'peculiar interest for Dublin because of its theme's similarity to that of a play by one of the most prominent Abbey Theatre authors' (20 July 1931). The publicity for, and success of, the film may better explain why Colum's *Mogu* made it to the Gate stage in time for the Christmas 1931 season.

Mac Liammóir was an admirer of Colum and recalls conversations with the playwright 'about his play and of his hopes that [the Gate] would put it on' (144). In *All for Hecuba*, he concedes that the story of *Mogu*, as relayed by Colum, with its magic Arabian carpets, flowers, jewels and 'impossible adventures' did not translate well to the stage. 'The story was involved', he writes, 'the characters shadowy, the imagery forced and derivative as in so many pseudo-Oriental plays.' (145) Nevertheless, the production design setting, 'a rainbow-coloured path through a maze of deserts and mosques and moonlight gardens' (144) proved hard to resist. Mac Liammóir loved the style of Persian miniatures, exemplified in the work of Mirza Ali, and whose influence can be seen in his design for *Mogu* (see Fig. 7.1).<sup>5</sup> The flamboyance of the set and costume design did not convince the reviewer from the *Irish Press* of the merits of the play, who, rather cuttingly, described its plot as full of 'mysticism, contentions, jealousies and humour' with an 'underlying profundity' that 'best suits the histrionic abilities of the Gate Theatre Company' (28 December 1931).

*Mogu of the Desert* was neither a critical nor a commercial success and, accordingly, has prompted little interest from literary or theatre historians: it is not even listed in PLAYOGRAPHYIreland. It tells the story of the beggar Mogu whose extremely beautiful daughter, Narjis, catches the eye of the Persian King. After their marriage, Mogu's fortunes and status improve; however, his power makes him pompous and he attracts self-serving cronies. Years later, after the King dies, Mogu and his daughter lose their social position and by the end of the play they are penniless and reduced to wandering the desert once again. Hilton played Mogu, 'a



**Fig. 7.1** Micheál mac Liammóir, set design for Padraic Colum, *Mogu of the Desert*, Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

grand bulging lecherous oily performance', with Betty Chancellor as his daughter (mac Liammóir 145). Orson Welles, the new kid in town, played Chrosoes, the King of Persia or the Grand Vizier, 'which involved several pounds of nose putty, a white turban at least two and half feet in diameter, and three-inch fingernails of peacock-blue and silver' (mac Liammóir 145). Design was by mac Liammóir, with incidental music composed by Frederick May.

Mac Liammóir was an admirer of Leon Bakst and of the oriental dances of the Ballet Russes, as is clear from his memoir *All for Hecuba*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Katherine Hennessy has described mac Liammóir's work as a 'mélange of Celtic Twilight inspiration and cutting edge continental theatrical innovation' (66). However, by 1930, the oriental-style influences of the Ballet Russes were well established, even a little old-fashioned, given that its deepest influence was during the pre-war period, and in the 1930s the visual language of Ballet Russes was understood as belonging to a rather

outdated art nouveau expression, rather than to the contemporary cutting edge styles of art deco and streamline moderne. Although the design language of stage and dance is important to mac Liammóir's aesthetic during this period, my argument here is that the visual language of the cinema is equally, if not as, significant. Undoubtedly, *Mogu* was staged partly out of loyalty to Colum, whose work had been 'gradually neglected' by the Abbey despite his early successes there, but by placing *Mogu* within the context of mass culture, a more hard-headed commercialism is discernible, acknowledging the appeal of popular cinema (Boyd 119).

While theatre historians acknowledge the influence of stage design on early cinema (such as fixed cameras, painted backdrops and acting styles), the production values of cinema (lighting effects and the use of shadows, for example) are often overlooked as features of stage design.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the design of *Mogu* is evidently influenced not only by the stage show of *Kismet*, but also by films with 'exotic' themes popular with cinema audiences. There are a few productions by the Gate in the 1920s and 1930s with oriental or 'exotic' themes which had first come to popular attention as films (featuring stars like Theda Bara and Rudolph Valentino) rather than the original plays. For example, the Gate's productions of Wilde's *Salomé* (1928), Goethe's *Faust* (1930) and Ibáñez's *Blood and Sand* (1933) were all preceded by film versions already seen in Dublin cinemas.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of *Salomé*, mac Liammóir had two recent film versions to draw on. J. Gordon Edwards's version, featuring Theda Bara, had been made in 1918 but only appeared on Irish screens after 1920. The more significant version, however, was Alla Nazimova's 1923 *Salomé*, with set and costumes designed by Natacha Rambova. Nazimova's film was seen across Irish cinemas during 1924-1925 in Belfast, Derry, Dublin, Clonmel, Tralee and Omagh. Visually, the impact of both Aubrey Beardsley's 1893-1894 illustrations and, in turn, his influence on Rambova's designs for *Salomé* (1923), is visible in mac Liammóir's designs for the Gate's 1928 staging of the play. Mac Liammóir's costume designs, especially his design for Herod, attest to this influence.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the influence of F.W. Murnau's 1926 film *Faust* is clearly evident in production photographs of the Gate's February 1930 production of *Faust* where the design of the costume and makeup of the central character are closely modelled on that of Murnau's film.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the popularity of the 'sheik' film in the 1920s and 1930s has been linked to the emergence of the 'desert romance' novel genre

during this period. Hsu-Ming Teo observes that the release of the 1921 film, *The Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino, marked a high point in the ‘sheik fever’ generated by popular romance novels which created ‘new connotations of irresistible, ruthless, masterful, and over-sexualised masculinity’ (12).<sup>11</sup> Valentino, the premier matinée idol of the 1920s, appeared in the blockbusters *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926). Representations of the ‘exotic Orient’ included the erotic manifestation of the East: harems of beautiful women and belly-dancers. As Teo remarks, ‘scenes of belly dancers in gauzy, spangled dress’ dominated Hollywood films about the Orient from the early twentieth century (117).

What the context of cinema offers is modernity – the sense of being ‘of the moment’ appearing alongside popular discourses of orientalism (in novels and fashion) which foreground the body. It is important to understand that orientalism is not geographically specific – here it is a conjuring of ‘otherness’ that expands to include Palestine, Spain or Persia. As Teo notes, the *‘locus sensualis’* of the ‘East’, constructed and mythologized in ‘a centuries-long literary engagement between Europe and the Muslim world’, may be vaguely geographically located within ‘the Islamic Middle East and North Africa – from Morocco to present-day Iran’ (6).

Holly Edwards argues that although orientalism influenced the growth of consumer culture through the design and display of ‘exotic’ goods, and more importantly, through its dissemination as popular culture, it offered a narrative of bohemian sexuality to bourgeois audiences (11–57).<sup>12</sup> This fascination can certainly be seen in Ireland, where there was a vogue for young middle-class women to dress as ‘gypsies’, ‘oriental girls’ and bacchantes in fancy dress balls and charity events throughout the 1920s. Photographs taken at the National Children’s Hospital fête in the Iveagh Gardens, Dublin in 1920 for example (see Fig. 7.2) show young women smoking cigarettes in the ‘Chu Chin Chow Gardens’ while dressed in ‘oriental’ and ‘gypsy’ outfits as part of the fundraising activities.<sup>13</sup>

The female volunteers signal their bohemianism by dressing in ‘gypsy’ costumes that are vaguely generalized: headscarves, hooped earrings and patterned loose clothing as well as the ‘oriental’ costume of harem pants, headdresses and loose jewellery. That all of the women featured are smoking indicates the conjunction between orientalist fashion and modernity. The appropriation of ‘exotic’ clothing in the context of costume enabled young women to display a scandalous modernity simultaneously disavowed by the fact that they were in ‘fancy dress’. Donatella Barbieri notes how the visual language of Middle Eastern orientalism within

## Some Happy Snap-Shots at the May Fête



Lord Powerscourt buys "just one more" ticket for a raffle.



Jack Tars trying to guess the weight of a bag of sugar,  
"at a price!"



A Vision of the East at the Fête.



Fig. 7.2 Oriental costume on display at the National Children Hospital's Fundraiser, Iveagh Gardens, Dublin. *Irish Life*, 21 May 1920

popular culture is ‘one of European white bodies, luxuriously dressed in a mixture of invented Eastern costumes of diaphanous veils’ (104). ‘Oriental’ fancy dress allowed white women to perform a sexually liberating identity and, as Susan Nance says, to use ‘the persona of the mischievous Eastern Dancer’ as a ‘vehicle for colloquially feminist, sexually self-aware consumer individuation’ (17).

Orientalist narratives require the display of the body through the eroticization of costume – legitimizing the costumed body as a to-be-looked-at space. Whether on stage, screen or a garden fête, the orientalist, bohemian or ‘other’ spaces being invoked are done so most effectively through location and physical display. Arguably then, the Gate’s oriental settings may be read as expressing playfulness with ‘transgressive’ sexualities. The costumed ‘exotic’ body enables a freedom of sexuality that is permitted ‘elsewhere’. Mac Liammóir’s descriptions of his 1928 production of *Salomé*, for example, draw attention to its visual and sensual appeal: ‘a lovely set in black and silver and viperish green with the entire cast stripped almost naked’ (71). Mac Liammóir’s costume drawings for *Mogu* display male and female bodies both wrapped in diaphanous, luxurious fabrics. The decadent extravagance of costume is a premonition of what we now call ‘camp’ (see Figs. 7.3 and 7.4). Bob Hennessey’s costume combines an electric blue sleeveless undershirt, with a leather harness and green and gold chiffon trousers.

Mac Liammóir’s costume designs for *Mogu* showcase the erotic display of male and female bodies, to be scrutinized in the dark theatre, in much the same way as cinema enables private looking. Costume is distinguishable from ‘dress’ or fashion, in its differences in construction and use as well as its contexts and meanings. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher distinguish between clothing that functions as ‘modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body’ and costume which ‘indicate[s] the ‘out-of-everyday’ social role or activity’ (1995, 7). Eicher has further argued that while dress establishes ‘identity in everyday life’, costume expresses ‘a performance identity’ (2010, 152). As Pravina Shukla has surmised, costume ‘is usually set apart from dress in its rarity, cost, and elaborate materials, trims and embellishments, and in its pronounced silhouette or exaggerated proportions’. Where the object of costume is ‘heightened communication’ and ‘spectacle for public consumption’ she argues, it is the avoidance of the ‘ordinary and its embrace of the “evocative” that is at the heart of the very set of meanings it is striving towards’ (4).



**Fig. 7.3** Micheál mac Liammóir, costume design for female character, *Mogu of the Desert*, Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)



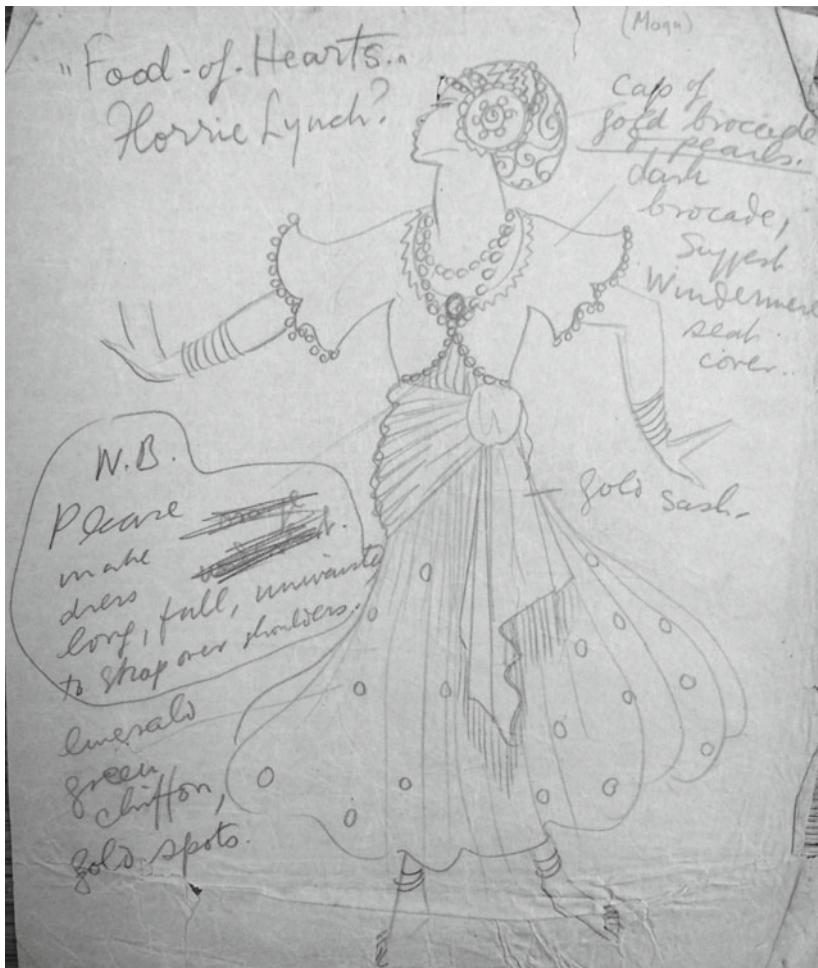
**Fig. 7.4** Micheál mac Liammóir, costume design for 'Selim' (played by Robert Hennessey), *Mogu of the Desert*, Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)



**Fig. 7.5** Padraic Colum, *Mogu of the Desert*, Gate Theatre, 1931. Set and costume design by Micheál mac Liammóir. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

Yet in theatre practice, there remains a gap between what might be called ‘the poetic intention’ of a design and its realization. Here we must acknowledge the difference between a drawing and a photograph, a model box and a finished set, a costume design and what an actor actually wears. The photograph at Fig. 7.3 shows the actual set of *Mogu* in contrast to mac Liammóir’s set drawing at Fig. 7.1. Here artistic ambition is curbed by the constraints of the stage and by scale. Lack of money and financial necessity demands the use of cheaper materials to reproduce the highly ornate vision of the Persian miniature. Nevertheless, the desire for artistic experiment is present, and so, far from diminishing the original designs, the production photographs crystallize the real-world tension between ambition and realization: between theory and practice (Fig. 7.5).

Costume drawings may provide us with knowledge that photographs cannot about the process of theatre-making. Sketches and drawings are



**Fig. 7.6** Micheál mac Liammóir, costume drawing for 'Food-of-Hearts', *Mogu* of the Desert, Gate Theatre, 1931. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

often overlooked as important sources of information in favour of more finished drawings, models or images. For example, mac Liammóir's rough instructional sketch for his dressmaker, Christine Keeley, at Fig. 7.6 tells

us that the actress Florrie Lynch was being considered for the part of the slave girl ‘Food-of-Hearts’ (she was offered, and accepted, the part). In the absence of colour photography, or the costume itself, it also provides a key to the materiality, texture and colour scheme of the costumes. Food-of-Hearts’s costume is of a diaphanous emerald green chiffon with gold spots, a gold sash and a gold-coloured cap made of brocade and pearls. Understanding the fabrics (even if they may have not been of the best quality) and colours enables us to see what the audience saw, how the costume moved on the body, how it might have looked under lights, and even what it sounded like as the actress moved across the stage.

However, a closer look at the costume drawing may prompt us to think not only about the process of the design and making of the physical object: chiffon and brocade; gold and green with details for the dress-maker. The costume drawing reveals the economic system within which theatre works: the dressmaker repurposes the brocade seat covers from an earlier production of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*. Other drawings in the archive give instructions to recycle the curtains from the production of Mary Manning’s *Youth’s the Season* for Cecil Monson’s Persian character.

Shukla categorizes costume creation into four types: those that can be ‘pulled’ (taken from existing stock), rented, bought, or ‘built’ (211). ‘Building’ a costume includes making an original item from a pattern but also adjusting or modifying existing costumes to create something new. The practice of ‘building’ and ‘pulling’ costumes was clearly the system within which the Gate theatre operated and it explains why no costumes have survived from this period. However, while the artefacts themselves no longer exist, mac Liammóir’s costume drawings and designs have become coveted artistic objects and many of them are now in private collections. The absence of the costume as a material artefact in the archives may also explain why, as Aoife Monks has written, ‘costume, in one way or another, is frequently looked through, around or over in theatre scholarship’ (9). As Donatella Barbieri has observed, ‘both costume and fashion act through the body intending to influence behaviour and thoughts and to communicate. In costume this is organised [around] an ordering principle that evaporates at the end of a performance.’ (xxiii) It is this ‘evaporation’, this ‘mutability’, says Barbieri, that may explain ‘why there has been so little written about costume throughout its long history of performance’ (xxii).

Costumes are not just clothes that actors wear: they are part of the signification system of theatre – part of the material trace of performance,

as cultural markers, as economic as well as designed objects. This squares with costume designer Sandy Powell's maxim that making a period feel authentic is more important than making it accurate: that costume is not about replication but about communication (qtd in Nadoolman Landis 118). Costume often reflects contemporary fashion and conventions, and, as seen in *Mogu*, costume works as an intertext: it contains modes of meaning that are not just about ancient Persia but something else – something modern and sexy and fun. Aoife Monks's work asks us to consider context: What is the relationship between the costumes on stage and what the audience is wearing; and how might the audience have understood them in the context of what was taking place in the wider culture? Doing this situates *Mogu* within contemporary fashion, middle-class bohemian fantasies and Hollywood movies.

Perhaps *Mogu*'s greatest achievement was in providing the backdrop for one of the Gate's legendary parties, described in some detail by Mac Liammóir in *All for Hecuba* (147-53). It is in this description that the eroticized world of the Orient and the late-night party scene of Dublin in the early 1930s collide in a gossipy, champagne-fuelled recollection of the evening's antics. Guests included theatre students, college professors, politicians, musicians, writers and actors, and a selection of the city's bright young things. Drinks were served in the auditorium and dancing was on the stage surrounded by the debris of 'miraculous carnations and lilac-coloured banks of rock' that had comprised the *Mogu* set. The stage electrician had rigged up coloured lights that changed frequently, bathing the dancers in 'cool moonlight' followed by 'fire and flame', and the party ended in a 'Bacchic frenzy' with the Polish ambassador singing the national anthem of Poland (151).

The material culture of *Mogu*'s set and costume designs demonstrates how the ephemera of productions may offer added dimensions to our understanding of a play: to think not only about a play's language but its experiential dimension – what audiences saw (colours, lights, spaces), as well as what they heard (the rustle of chiffon, the live music score). It challenges us to think more expansively about how theatre operates in a wider cultural context – where audiences go to the cinema as well as the theatre, and perhaps bring systems of reference from one to the other. A closer analysis of the Gate's production of *Mogu* illustrates how cultural exchange or dialogue may operate between different popular forms: cinema and variety, literature and film magazines, fashion and costume, and this blurring, so evident in the Gate's theatre practices,

is quintessentially modern – the overlap between low and high culture, the emergence of the celebrity, the technologies of modernity and the economic necessities of recycling costumes so that the Gate's theatrical productions contain references folded into each other.

## NOTES

1. Colum's Hawaiian tales in print at the time of the Gate's production of *Mogu of the Desert* were commissioned by the Hawaiian Legend and Folklore Commission and illustrated by Juliette Fraser; they are: *At The Gateways of the Day* (3 vols; New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1924) and *The Bright Islands* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1925).
2. Oscar Asche promoted a number of oriental themed musical productions after *Kismet*, including *Mameena* (1915), *Cairo* (1921) and the smash hit *Chu Chin Chow* which ran from 1916 to 1921 in London, and played in Dublin's Gaiety Theatre in August 1920. See Singleton.
3. The 1920, 1930 and 1944 film versions of *Kismet* are based on the original 1911 play by Edward Knoblock. The 1944 version featured Ronald Colman and Marlene Dietrich and was directed by William Dieterle for MGM. The 1955 hit film was based on the award-winning Broadway musical loosely adapted from Knoblock's play with musical score by Robert Wright and George Forrest. *Kismet* (1955) was directed by Vincente Minnelli, also for MGM, and starred Howard Keel and Ann Blyth in the leading roles.
4. The Hays Code (or the Motion Picture Production Code), in force by 1934, monitored and governed 'moral' standards in American filmmaking.
5. The painter Mirza Ali, or Abd al-Samad, was one of the founders of the Mughal miniature tradition in sixteenth-century Persia.
6. In *All for Hecuba*, mac Liammóir laments his progress on his designs for *Mogu*, saying they 'were nothing but half-hearted echoes from Mirza Ali filtering down through Bakst and Edmund Dulac' (136).
7. I have written elsewhere on the influence of German expressionism on Irish stage design during this period: see Sisson (39-55).
8. Theda Bara appeared as Salomé in 1918, directed by J. Gordon Edwards for the Fox Film Corporation. By 1923 Alla Nazimova's version of *Salomé* overtook Edwards's film in popularity. The 1908 novel *Blood and Sand* by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez was made into a film, also directed by Ibáñez in 1916. A Hollywood version, based on the stage adaptation by Thomas Cushing, was made in 1922, starring Rudolph Valentino and directed by Fred Niblo for Paramount Pictures.

9. The costume design for Herod by Micheál mac Liammóir, 1928, is in the University of Bristol Theatre Collection. Ref. TC/D/C/81.
10. The 1926 film version of Goethe's *Faust* directed by F.W. Murnau does not have any cinema listings in Ireland in the late twenties, but the 'homage' to the design makes it clear that mac Liammóir and Edwards saw the film prior to 1930.
11. The best-selling romance novels of E.M. Hull were adapted for cinema. Hull's 1919 book *The Sheik* was filmed in 1921, and her 1925 novel, *The Sons of Sheik*, was filmed in 1926. Both films starred Rudolph Valentino (Teo 2).
12. Bram Dijkstra's work also explores the fascination with oriental settings and the emergence of the female 'vamp' at the turn of the last century. See Dijkstra.
13. A description of the event can be found in an *Irish Times* article of 14 May 1920 ('The May Fete'). The musical *Chu Chin Chow*, devised and directed by Oscar Asche, ran in London's West End from 1916 to 1921, making it one of the most popular West End shows at the time. The 'Chu Chin Chow' gardens would have been understood by a contemporary audience as a reference to exotic Eastern orientalism.

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## CHAPTER 8

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# Prussian Discipline and Lesbian Vulnerability: Christa Winsloe's *Children in Uniform* at the Gate

*Yvonne Ivory*

On Easter Monday 1934, *Children in Uniform*, the English adaptation of Christa Winsloe's German play *Gestern und heute* [Yesterday and Today], opened at the Gate.<sup>1</sup> It was scheduled to run for a fortnight, but proved popular enough with Dublin audiences that it was extended for a week. Winsloe's play had started life in Leipzig in 1930 as *Ritter Nérestan* [Knight Nérestan]; within a year it had conquered Berlin under the title *Gestern und heute*, and been adapted for the screen as *Mädchen in Uniform* [Girls in Uniform] (1931). Hilton Edwards and Micheál mac Liammóir probably saw *Gestern und heute* in Berlin in 1931, but it was the film's London release that brought Winsloe's work to the attention of the wider Gate community: in the August 1932 issue of *Motley*, W.J.K. Mandy praised *Mädchen in Uniform*'s treatment of 'a difficult theme' with 'extraordinary subtlety, delicacy and psychological insight' (14). When Barbara Burnham's English adaptation of the original play

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was successfully staged at London's Duchess Theatre in 1932-1933, *Children in Uniform* became a serious candidate for the Gate's 1933-1934 season.

What Mandy calls a 'difficult theme' is love between women: a sensitive, motherless, teenage girl (Manuela von Meinhardis) is sent to a strict Prussian boarding school where she falls in love with one of the teachers (Fräulein von Bernburg). Her adoration is ripped out of the comfortable context of the schoolgirl crush – 'pashes' are rife among the girls – when a drunken Manuela, still dressed as a knight for the school play, declares publicly that she and Fräulein von Bernburg love each other, and that she is wearing von Bernburg's chemise as a token of that love. Manuela's passion is labelled sinful, perverse and morbid; ostracized by school administrators and facing a future without von Bernburg, she commits suicide.

Most scholarship on Winsloe's story is limited to the film version, *Mädchen in Uniform*,<sup>2</sup> but this chapter focuses on her play: on Burnham's translation of Winsloe's original *Ritter Nérestan/Gestern und heute*, on the genealogy and execution of the Edwards—mac Liammóir production, and on its reception among Irish critics. The (heavily annotated) prompt copy, lighting plots, foyer placard and photographs of the Gate production all survive and reveal an unflinching staging that used expressionistic lighting and sonic leitmotifs to underscore the authoritarian regime within which the tenderness of the relationship between Manuela and von Bernburg briefly flourishes. These materials reveal that Edwards's staging, through its persistent focus on the vulnerability of Fräulein von Bernburg and its reintroduction of a second lesbian love intrigue that had been expunged from Burnham's adaptation, exposed Dublin audiences to a queerer version of the play than had been seen in London's West End. By examining just how Edwards staged subversion in his production of Winsloe's play, my analysis will corroborate the contention of Meaney, O'Dowd and Whelan that *Children in Uniform* helped establish the Gate as a 'radical, subversive or dissenting space in the conservative 1930s' (213).

### THE GENEALOGY OF *CHILDREN IN UNIFORM*

Christa Winsloe wrote a number of versions of her (semi-autobiographical) story of Manuela in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Iurascu 89-90; Puhlfürst 40-54; Stürzer 96-97). It was originally

produced as *Ritter Nérestan*, a title derived from the role of the knight taken on by Manuela in the play-within-a-play, Voltaire's *Zaïre*. *Ritter Nérestan* opened at the Leipziger Schauspielhaus on 30 November 1930 and met with modest success; but *Gestern und heute*, the slightly revised Berlin version directed by Leontine Sagan, really captured German audiences from the start of April to the end of June, 1931 (Stürzer 107-108). The change in title (from *Knight Nérestan* to *Yesterday and Today*) appears to signal the Berlin production's shift in emphasis from the love story to the theme of Prussian tradition, and the strict discipline needed to maintain its conservative values (embodied by the headmistress) in the chaos of Weimar's social democracy (embodied by Fräulein von Bernburg). Anne Stürzer has documented other differences between the Leipzig and Berlin productions: textually, Sagan appears to have softened von Bernburg by cutting her robust defence of tomboyishness, her announcement to the headmistress that she will resign her position to take care of Manuela, and a scene in which the girls gossip about von Bernburg's alleged assertion that she 'didn't want to be kissed' and 'thought men were disgusting' (103-105).<sup>3</sup> In a bid to attract audiences, theatre manager Victor Barnowsky also added a new scene in which Manuela's fencing master, played by the handsome star Viktor de Kowa, declared his love for her – a subplot that had been dispatched by means of a simple love letter in the Leipzig version. Critics considered this scene a distraction, however, and it was soon cut from the Berlin production (100). These alterations notwithstanding – and *pace* Stürzer – the Berlin production did not in fact downplay the piece's queer content: Herta Thiele, who played Manuela in both productions, went so far as to say that 'the lesbian element was explicitly highlighted' in Berlin, that Sagan went 'all in with the lesbianism', whereas von Bernburg and Manuela had had more of a 'mother/daughter relationship' in Leipzig (Puhlfürst 44-45).

On the strength of the critical and financial success of the Barnowsky production, Sagan and Winsloe worked with Carl Froehlich over the summer of 1931 to create the now-famous film version, *Mädchen in Uniform*, which premiered in November. The plot of the play was altered in some key ways for the cinema: in all of the stage versions, Manuela commits suicide at the end of the piece, but in the film she is saved by her friends; and the cross-dressing role she plays for the big screen is not Voltaire's obscure knight Nérestan but Friedrich Schiller's Don Carlos, a character who was already something of an icon to German

gay audiences (Tobin 159–61). Despite having a scriptwriting credit on the film, Winsloe was forced to accept Froehlich’s decision to have Manuela saved at the end of the film. Frustrated by the erasure of lesbian suffering in Froehlich’s film, Winsloe reworked the same material one final time to produce *Das Mädchen Manuela* (1933), a novel that gives a fuller description of Manuela’s childhood and restores the tragic ending. Barbara Burnham’s English translation, meanwhile, was based neither on the film nor on the novel: the script of Berlin’s *Gestern und heute* served as the basis for her Duchess Theatre production, and *Children in Uniform* retains such original plot features as Manuela’s portrayal of Knight Nérestan and her ultimate suicide.<sup>4</sup> Thus – remarkably, if we consider the international success of *Mädchen in Uniform* – the Gate production of Burnham’s translation hews closer to the Berlin play than it does to Froehlich and Sagan’s better-known film.<sup>5</sup>

### BURNHAM’S ADAPTATION OF *GESTERN UND HEUTE*

Burnham characterizes her translation of *Gestern und heute* as an ‘adaptation’ because she intervenes substantially in the structure and dialogue of the original. Instead of twelve ‘Bilder’ [tableaux], Burnham divides the play into three acts with a total of ten scenes, and she often rearranges the sequence of events within a scene. This results in fewer sets, new dialogue to allow for smoother transitions, and an admirable tightening of the play’s pacing. Some of her reworked dialogue is also welcome – jokes are reframed, for instance, to appeal to a British audience – but many of her interventions serve to tone down aspects of sexual and gender non-conformity in the play and emphasize instead the dangers of Prussian authoritarianism.

In terms of gender expression, von Bernburg in Berlin’s *Gestern und heute* exemplifies female masculinity. She is described in the stage directions as ‘tall, straight, [...] noble, masculine, stern [‘strengh’] and having a ‘steady gaze’ (Winsloe 1930, 25). Berlin production photographs of Margarete Melzer as Fräulein von Bernburg show a woman in the modern dress and with the severe haircut of a Weimar New Woman – worlds apart from the elegant femininity of Dorothea Wieck in *Mädchen in Uniform*.<sup>6</sup> Barbara Burnham’s von Bernburg is also ‘tall’ and ‘straight’ but is now ‘strong’ rather than ‘stern’ and is certainly not ‘masculine’ (Winsloe 1934, 34); and production photos from the Duchess Theatre show a feminine

Joyce Bland in a full-length, simple, elegant dress just like the one worn by von Bernburg in the film (1933a, 26-27). Where the Berlin Manuela, in the early stages of her infatuation, declares to her friend Edelgard that 'if [von Bernburg] were a man, she'd be such an amazing gentleman – don't you think – I'd like awfully to ... get her to like me' (1930, 34; ellipsis in original), Burnham's Manuela makes a more conventionally romantic declaration: 'She's like one of the knights of the Round Table! Oh, Edelgard, I do want her to like me!' (1934, 40) Manuela herself is thought to 'look' boyish by the headmistress in *Gestern und heute*, but when she hears of this from Ilse, Manuela corrects what she sees as a misapprehension: 'I *want to* be a boy, I want to be a man, I hate my curls, I hate my tenderness.' (1930, 58) Burnham's Manuela is less defiant, replying simply 'I'd like to look like a boy.' (1934, 57)

The sexual tension between the teacher and the student is also much more muted in Burnham's adaptation. The school's French mistress is barely described in *Children in Uniform*, but in *Gestern und heute*'s stage directions she is shown to be jealous of von Bernburg's intimacy with the girls, and at the same time 'erotically excited' by it (1930, 35-36). Manuela is depressed when she arrives at the school, and so the French mistress encourages von Bernburg to help the child be more resilient, not by means of discipline, but by 'taking her in your strong arms, protecting and warming her' (37). This exchange is sanitized by Burnham: her Mlle Alaret simply remarks that von Bernburg is 'strong' and that 'the strong should comfort the weak' (1934, 41). When *Gestern und heute*'s Manuela finds out that she'll be in von Bernburg's dormitory, that von Bernburg's bedroom door opens onto the girls' room, and that she kisses each girl goodnight in turn, she is beside herself with anticipation. She tells Edelgard that it will be wonderful to be kissed by someone

like a mother – or no, wait a minute – differently. [...] Oh God – now I can only ever think of Fräulein von Bernburg and now I can't remember how mother kissed me and it must be the same, Edelgard – mustn't it, it *must* really be the same, but really it is different, I never wanted it as much as I do now and I'm actually afraid that something will happen this time. (1930, 45)

Burnham removes the confusion from this almost incoherent outburst and makes the prospect of being kissed all about Manuela's loss of her mother:

it must be just like a mother. I remember quite well how my mother kissed me. [...] Now I shall only be kissed by Fräulein von Bernburg. I won't know anymore how my mother kissed me. I wonder, will it be different? It must be, mustn't it, and yet I never wanted it to be the same as much as I do now, but I don't know how I can wait. (1934, 46)

This sets the tone for the rest of the play and allows London audiences to read the affection between von Bernburg and Manuela as filial. When bedtime arrives, and the ritual is actually performed, then, it is hardly surprising that where, in Berlin, von Bernburg picks up a fainting Manuela and kisses her firmly on the mouth, in London she picks up a fainting Manuela and does not kiss her at all (1930, 50; 1934, 50).

In a key scene establishing the mutual attraction between Manuela and von Bernburg, Winsloe has von Bernburg call Manuela into her private study to discuss the poor state of Manuela's underwear. (The laundress has brought it to von Bernburg's attention; von Bernburg sees it as evidence that the child has no real mother-figure in her life.) Von Bernburg offers Manuela one of her own chemises to replace the worn-out one, and Manuela covers von Bernburg's hands with kisses by way of thanks (1930, 66). She then kneels and puts her arms around the teacher's hips, and confesses that she is jealous when von Bernburg kisses the other children because 'I love you, I love you, like my mother, but more, much more, differently.' (70) After the teacher has calmed Manuela, she confesses that she knows she is not allowed to treat pupils differently, and so Manuela should tell no-one, but 'I think about you an awful, awful lot, little Manuela. I see more than you know. [...] Do you understand? Little one? (She kisses her.)' (70) Burnham desexualizes this scene somewhat by minimizing the characters' physical contact: she places a table between teacher and pupil, and retains the teacher's confession but deletes the kiss that follows it. She does not entirely jettison the erotic potential of the scene, however: Burnham's Manuela may not kiss von Bernburg, but she does kiss her chemise (1934, 70-72).

While there are many other instances of Burnham's obscuring the gender and sexual dissidence of the two main characters, the most significant occurs in the climactic scene that marks Manuela's affection as 'perverse' rather than just another example of *Schwärmerie*: her drunken public speech in praise of von Bernburg. In *Gestern und heute* it is long, with Manuela claiming that the teacher loves her, and kisses no-one else as she kisses her, 'softly, lingeringly, sweetly' (1930, 85). Burnham shortens

the speech and deletes this reference to kisses, making it possible for an audience to imagine that the love is one-sided and perhaps only in Manuela's head (1934, 77). Similarly, in the final scene where von Bernburg and the headmistress clash over the best way to handle Manuela's case, the headmistress begs not to be reminded of the 'abominable' sight of 'the lost child, Manuela, in her silver chain mail, as she roared out her sinfulness, her perversity' (1930, 121). Von Bernburg counters that it was her 'longing' that she was crying out about: 'you call it perversity and I – I call it the great spirit of love, which has a thousand faces' (121). Burnham builds up a dramatically powerful confrontation between the two women, but shortens it, and omits this specific defence of 'perversity' (1934, 103).

In short, Burnham's adaptation disguises the lesbian content that had been so clear in German versions of the play that a reviewer for the Berlin lesbian magazine *Die Freundin* [The Girlfriend] could exclaim:

But that's – that's our destiny, surely. That's our life, surely, that is being played out here; surely this is about the arena of lesbian love. [...] Ladies! This play speaks to us. All of you have to see this play. All of you will feel that what is represented here is the destiny of us all, the fate of all of us.  
(qtd in Puhlfürst 44)

But the finger can hardly be pointed at Burnham for her unwillingness to portray love between women more openly. The level of censorship to which plays in London were subjected in the early 1930s was unknown in a German republic that had not yet fallen to the Nazis. Excerpts from the readers' reports to the British censor on Burnham's initial 'literal translation' (Shellard 113) of *Children in Uniform* show concerns about the nature of Manuela's affection. One reader finds that the 'intention of the original was to criticise the stupid and unimaginative discipline of a Prussian aristocratic girls' school, and that the unhappy passion of one of the girls for a mistress is subsidiary' (113). He does not believe that the play deals with 'real Lesbianism'; it is simply 'unfortunate' that the headmistress 'treats it as a grave perversion' (113). Another reader advises that the play be passed after 'the references to perversity and sin' have been excised (114); and a third agrees, adding that – to be clear that such things do not happen in England – productions must set the play in Germany. Fears that a 'bad production could introduce a different atmosphere' led to a final decision to grant the play a license as long as

some language was changed, there was ‘strict supervision in the production’, and the setting remained ‘strictly GERMAN’ (115). These were not conditions that would apply to the Edwards – mac Liammóir production.

### *CHILDREN IN UNIFORM*’S ROUTE TO THE GATE

It is entirely possible that Edwards and mac Liammóir saw Barnowsky and Sagan’s Berlin production of *Gestern und heute*, as they spent the summer of 1931 in ‘two square, bare, glistening rooms’ overlooking the Kurfürstendamm – then at the heart of Berlin’s gay neighbourhood – enjoying the ‘blue water and brown flesh’ of Wannsee, staying out all night to see ‘dawn breaking over the Brandenbürger [*sic*] Tor’, and soaking up all the drama and nightlife that the city had to offer (mac Liammóir 115, 118–19). ‘Every night we were at the theatre’, mac Liammóir recalls, ‘and I think I learned more about design that summer than ever before’ (119). His list of theatres visited does not specifically include Barnowsky’s Theater in der Stresemannstrasse, where *Gestern und heute* ran nightly for the months of April, May and June; but given both men’s interests, mac Liammóir’s German proficiency, and the positive critical responses the play was garnering, it is more likely than not that they did see it. They were in the queer capital of the world, the Berlin of Magnus Hirschfeld and Christopher Isherwood and of their friend Hubert Duncombe – even when imagining Berlin, mac Liammóir pictured people sitting in cafes discussing ‘die Psychologie des Geschlechtslebens’ [the psychology of the sex life] (113) – so it seems highly unlikely that they would have passed up the opportunity to see the most sexually daring hit of the season when they were in town for so long.

But even if ‘the Boys’ did not see *Gestern und heute*, they would have been aware of its box office potential from their stay in Berlin and would have been reminded of that when its film version was mentioned in the August 1932 issue of *Motley*. Jimmy Mandy’s ‘Letter from London’ describes ‘Leontine Sagan’s *Mädchen in Uniform*’ as one of the few ‘good’ films currently having a ‘successful run’ in London. ‘The film’, writes Mandy,

deals with the emotional complications of life in a Prussian girls’ school. This difficult theme is treated with extraordinary subtlety, delicacy and psychological insight. The particular excellence of the film lies in the

perfect adaptation of technique to narrative. The camera work is always adequate and never obtrusively clever. (14)

Mandy's Dublin audience had no way of confirming this assessment, however, as the film would not be released in Ireland. Still, five months later Owen Sheehy Skeffington, *Motley*'s reviewer in Paris, makes the mistake of presuming his readers must know *Mädchen in Uniform*, as he refers to it in passing while reviewing a different German film (11). Between these two *Motley* reviews, Burnham's *Children in Uniform* had passed the British censor and opened at London's Duchess Theatre on 7 October 1932; it would run to full houses until 27 May 1933 (Wearing 235). Oddly, there is no mention of the London run of the play in *Motley*, but this is because the 'Letter from London' was in practice a very irregular feature. The next – and final – mention of *Children in Uniform* in *Motley* is a simple notice in April 1934 that the play is opening at the Gate and 'runs till the 14th April' (Manning 2). As this was the final issue of *Motley*, there was no follow-up report on the production in that magazine.

### THE SCRIPT OF *CHILDREN IN UNIFORM* AT THE GATE

Edwards had two sources for his production script: a full edition of Burnham's adaptation that had just appeared in the volume *Famous Plays of 1932–33* (Winsloe 1934), and French's Acting Edition, which was slightly shorter and reproduced photographs from the Duchess production (Winsloe 1933a). This latter edition provided Edwards with his prompt copy, and he amended it by hand, adding and revising stage directions, re-inserting a few lines that had been stripped out of *Famous Plays* for French's Acting Edition, and sometimes adding lines or interjections of his own.<sup>7</sup> The prompt copy allows us to trace two major interventions in Edwards's production: despite having no access to the physical script of the Berlin production, he restores a Berlin subplot that has Edelgard fall in love with Manuela, and he adds stage directions that depict Fräulein von Bermburg as a much more vulnerable figure with deeper feelings for Manuela than was evident in the London staging.

Edelgard Comtesse Mengsberg is initially introduced to Manuela as 'the Saint' of the school: 'Whenever we want to make a good impression – we produce Edelgard.' (Winsloe 1933a, 11) Burnham's translation offers few stage directions for Edelgard in this early scene: she enters the set

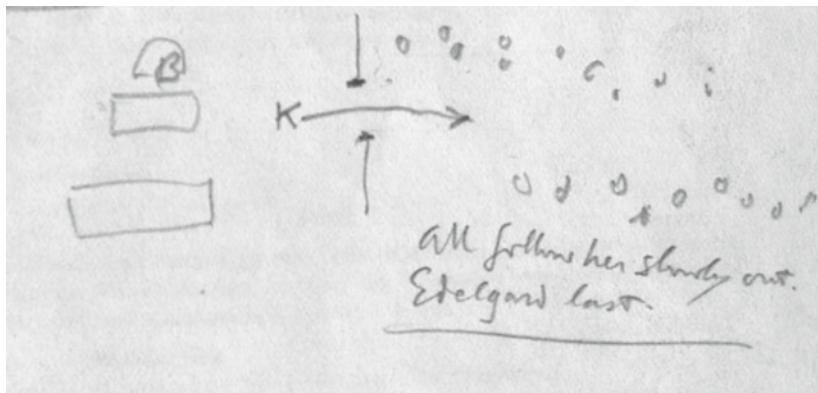
'quietly', 'stands a little apart', then 'comes close to' Manuela and introduces herself 'softly' (11). Edwards's supplemental blocking notes give her more attention than any of the other girls in the scene: he has her walk to the front of the stage, cross over to Manuela, and 'slip' into position beside her to introduce herself. In the stage direction 'MANUELA warms to her at once', Edwards draws an emphatic box around the words 'at once', showing his particular interest from the start in the interactions between these two girls (11). By the end of this first scene, Edelgard has taken Manuela under her wing (13); she soon becomes a confidante who laughs at Manuela's bad jokes (20); and in times of anxiety or sadness, the two encourage each other (28, 33-34, 39). Manuela tells Edelgard of her dream of a life with von Bernburg, a dream which Edelgard does not understand, but does not spurn (35). During the scene where von Bernburg privately gives Manuela her chemise, Edelgard waits patiently for her friend in the hallway outside the teacher's study; this is another scene where Edwards intervenes to add extra colour to Edelgard's feelings for Manuela. In all other versions of the play Manuela simply leaves the study, crossing the hallway to exit stage left, and all dramatic attention is focused on von Bernburg. As the curtain falls on the scene, in *Gestern und heute* the teacher is expressing her own inner turmoil by putting her head in her hands; in Burnham's adaptation she is silently looking after Manuela; but in the Gate production Edwards focuses his audience as much on Edelgard as on von Bernburg. Edwards's teacher 'watches [Manuela] exit [her study]. Looks at her hand' – a hand that Manuela has just kissed twice in Edwards's staging – and pauses for some time. She then starts writing, but suddenly stops, and 'looks front' (1933a, 42), openly exposing her conflicted feelings to the audience. Simultaneously, Manuela runs past Edelgard, drops her old, torn chemise and exits as Edelgard 'rises', calls out 'Manu-', 'looks round, picks up chem.', and follows Manuela (42). The implication is that Edelgard feels as strongly about Manuela as von Bernburg does.

In a later scene, Edwards repeats this move of letting Edelgard's unspoken feelings mirror the spoken ones of von Bernburg. It is the day after Manuela's scandalous speech, and she has been isolated from the others, but the headmistress (played by Ria Mooney) is forced, for the sake of appearances, to let Manuela be part of the welcoming party for a special visitor to the school. As von Bernburg is discreetly telling

the French mistress that she plans to come to Manuela's defence, the pupils start arriving to greet their guest. The children are all milling about, waiting for the guest, but Edwards adds special stage directions for one of them: 'Edelgard R comes down & up .. pacing' (1933a, 59; emphasis in original). Manuela finally joins the assembled crowd 'amidst a tense silence' (61). She stands beside Edelgard, and, in Edwards's staging, 'Edelg. pts hand on M.'s shoulder' (61). All three versions of the play include a follow-on scene in which Edelgard quietly watches over Manuela and defends her to a vice-headmistress who sees Manuela as 'lost', 'morbid' and – in the German original – guilty of something 'very ugly' (1930, 105-107; 1934, 93-94). But in the play's final scene, only Edwards has Edelgard and von Bernburg, the two women who have loved and defended Manuela, share the stage alone one last time: everyone who has crowded onstage in the immediate aftermath of Manuela's suicide files off slowly, following the vice-headmistress. Edwards strikes the line that has von Bernburg rush off stage calling 'Manuela' in Berlin and London and instead has the broken-hearted teacher 'collapse' as the last person exits the stage. That last person, at the Gate, is Edelgard (1933a, 73; Fig. 8.1).

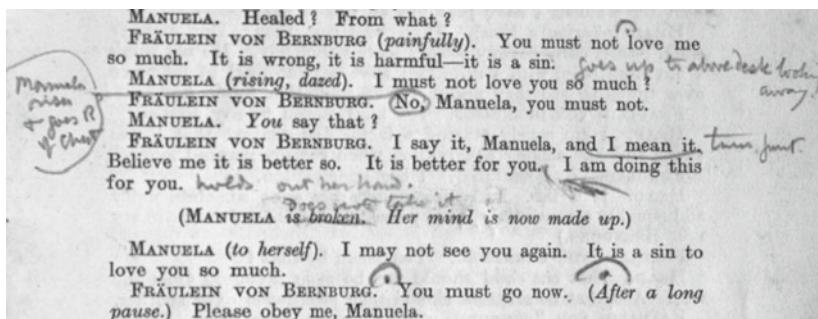
These Edelgard vignettes spring wholly from the imagination of Edwards, but they express a subplot of the Berlin version that was almost completely excised by Burnham. In *Gestern und heute*, Edelgard's love of Manuela becomes clear in the scene following her theatrical triumph: Edelgard 'flies to Manuela' and throws 'both arms around her neck', crying 'You! You were sweet, you were beautiful, you are just so magnificent, I have to–' and she kisses Manuela (1930, 76). Later she also dances with her (82); and once the scandalous speech has been made, a drunken and disgraced Manuela collapses into Edelgard's arms in Berlin (85), while there is no-one to catch her in Burnham's version (1934, 78). Finally, only in the Berlin version do we learn that Manuela's separation from the rest of the girls is causing Edelgard to weep into her pillow all night (1930, 97). If Edwards and mac Liammóir saw the play in Berlin, they would have come away with the impression that this character was in love with Manuela; without access to the German original, they inserted new material into Burnham's sanitized script quite possibly to recover that subplot.

In some of the scenes described above, it is already clear that Edwards also went out of his way to make the figure of von Bernburg more



**Fig. 8.1** Edwards's stage directions for the final moments of *Children in Uniform*: at left is von Bernburg at her desk, about to collapse; the vice-headmistress, 'K', exits the study into a hallway full of pupils who line up to 'follow her slowly out. Edelgard last' (Winsloe 1933a, 73). See the bottom left image in Fig. 8.4 for a photo of the set. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

vulnerable than Burnham had left her. By having von Bernburg unable to write at the end of the chemise scene, or collapse alone on stage as the final curtain falls, rather than run off calling Manuela's name, Edwards draws attention to her passive, private suffering, rather than her active, potential heroism (1933a, 72). Her sighs and especially her silences – usually marked by a *fermata* in the prompt copy – matter to Edwards, who shows her inner struggle by contrasting firm words with ambivalent body language and hesitant speech (see Fig. 8.2). The strength of her feelings for Manuela is indicated as early as Act II, scene 2 by Edwards. When Manuela confesses her constant longing to creep into von Bernburg's room at night, the teacher tries to brush it off with the affectionately dismissive words 'You really are a baby, little Manuela.' (1933a, 41) Burnham's stage directions suggest she should say this '*as lightly as possible*', but in Edwards's staging she 'clutches chest & looks away' as she says it (41). In the wrong hands, such a stage direction risks slipping into melodrama; but Edwards was working with a talented



**Fig. 8.2** Edwards's stage directions for the meeting between von Bernburg and Manuela in Act III, scene 3 of *Children in Uniform* (Winsloe 1933a, 69). Note the pauses (indicated by the *fermata* symbol) and stage directions that add hesitancy to von Bernburg's attitude, and belie the firmness of her words. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

actress in Coralie Carmichael, whose performance as the troubled teacher reaped high praise from Dublin critics. Her ability to silently convey inner suffering is captured in the press photo released for the production: a close-up of her holding a limp Betty Chancellor (as Manuela) appeared in the *Evening Herald* and *Irish Independent* of 17 April 1934 (Fig. 8.3) and was included in the Gate's foyer placard for the run of the play (Fig. 8.4). Edwards's reintroduction of von Bernburg's personal anguish, of her marked confusion about her feelings for Manuela, allows the (willing) spectator to see this relationship as something other than filial.

### THE SIGHT AND SOUND OF CHILDREN IN UNIFORM AT THE GATE

Mac Liammóir's sets and Edwards's lighting and sound design provide an ominous environment within which the story unfolds, and accentuate the defencelessness of most of the girls and the staff in the face of the school's Spartan regime and Prussian authoritarianism. A glance at the foyer poster for the production (Fig. 8.4) suffices to suggest the mood of the piece: in two images we see the oversized shadow of the head-mistress descending the stairs into the reception hall, first to preside over



**Fig. 8.3** Coralie Carmichael as von Bernburg comforts Betty Chancellor as Manuela. This image appeared in the *Evening Herald* and *Irish Independent* of 17 April 1934. It was also chosen by Richard Pine and Richard Cave to represent Carmichael in their 1984 slide-show history of the Gate (27; slide 5) (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

**Fig. 8.4** The ‘Poster of Photographs’ that served as a foyer placard welcoming audiences to the Gate production of *Children in Uniform*, April 1934. Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)



daily prayers (Fig. 8.4, second row from top), then to interrupt a conversation between two teachers (Fig. 8.4, fourth row, left). This silhouette technique, referred to as the ‘stair shadow’ in the *Children in Uniform* lighting plot (Edwards 1), represents the oppressive system of surveillance that dominates life in this school or, indeed, any authoritarian regime. The technique is borrowed from German expressionist film and theatre, and in this case seems to pay homage to F.W. Murnau’s 1922 horror classic, *Nosferatu* (Fig. 8.5). This is one of the films Siegfried Kracauer cites to support his (tendentious) claim that those works of Weimar film and theatre (including *Mädchen in Uniform*) that portrayed weak men and women in the thrall of powerful personalities paved the way for the Nazi dictatorship (Kracauer 226-29). A stronger case could be made,



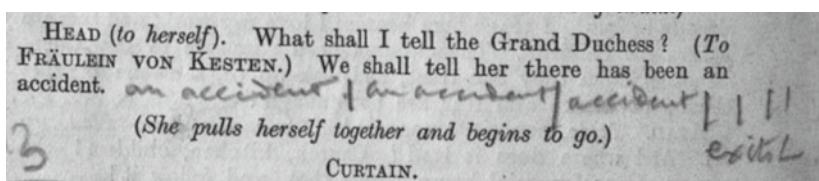
**Fig. 8.5** An iconic scene from F.W. Murnau's Weimar expressionist film *Nosferatu* (1922)

however, that Edwards and mac Liammóir were attempting a critique of Nazi authoritarianism in their play. It was staged over a year into the Nazi seizure of power, and whereas in Berlin in 1931 mac Liammóir could dismiss the Nazi movement as 'a mildly Gaelic League-ish affair on a large scale concerning itself mainly with a revival of Lederhosen, attractive or not according to the wearer' (mac Liammóir 118-19), by 1934 he was beginning to recognize that their 'marching and saluting and shouting' was in fact 'bloodcurdling' (118).

Ian R. Walsh has shown how Edwards used this German expressionist silhouette technique in early Gate productions like *Peer Gynt* and *Hamlet* to capture 'the isolation and alienation of modernity felt by characters in modernist plays' (42). In *Children in Uniform*, however, it is not the alienation of the isolated heroes that this technique captures, but rather the closing off of the potential of (three-dimensional) affective self-determination in the face of looming (two-dimensional) emotional subjugation. *Children in Uniform*'s 'stair shadow' is associated with a sonic leitmotif, too: the 'tap, tap, tap' of the headmistress's walking stick, a prop which can be seen in several of the images. This tapping is noted in the stage directions for all versions of the play, but Edwards choreographs

it quite precisely in the Gate production. When the headmistress arrives to hear the end of Manuela's scandalous speech, for instance, Edwards has everyone 'look at her stick' as the headmistress starts to speak (see Fig. 8.4, top) and take their cues from its tapping: '2 stick. Count 2. All curtsey form into Double file exit up L.' (1933a, 52) At the end of the play, Edwards has the headmistress rhythmically repeat the word 'an accident' several times as she exits, '[pulling] herself together' and reasserting order to the beat of her stick (1933a, 72; Fig. 8.6).

Another ominous presence dominating mac Liammóir's set and tied to a sonic regime is the bell pull in the reception hall, visible in three of the images on the foyer poster (Fig. 8.4). In the (realist) Duchess Theatre production, a small school bell had hung in an arch at the back of the stage (1933a, facing page 5); mac Liammóir's more expressionist production replaced it with a bell pull that looked more like the perch of a caged bird – or even a stylized hangman's noose – and let it hover above these scenes, out of control of the women standing below, rendering them servile (see Fig. 8.4, row 2). This bell sounds out across the school regularly, and along with an electric doorbell, a ringing phone, a grandfather clock (Edwards reinserts a line in which Manuela complains about its tick [1930, 6]), a drumbeat with which Edwards opens and closes almost every scene, and the recurring sound of 'marching' or 'tramping' feet – especially a long marching sequence before the curtain even rises<sup>8</sup> – it renders the regimentation of Prussian boarding school life inescapable. The result is that the tender feelings of von Bernburg, Edelgard and Manuela are even more vulnerable, under constant threat of interruption or exposure within the disciplined scopic and sonic regime of the school.



**Fig. 8.6** Edwards's stage directions for the end of *Children in Uniform*: the headmistress taps her stick as she repeats her lie to herself (Winsloe 1933a, 72). Gate Theatre Archive, Northwestern University (Copyright of the Edwards – mac Liammóir Estate)

## THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE GATE PRODUCTION

The *Irish Times*' 'Irishman's Diary' of 9 April 1934 lavishes praise on Edwards's sound design, in particular 'the eerie effects obtained by [...] the use of the drum motif'. Having its 'note of doom' echoed in 'the sound of the [...] walking stick is a touch of real genius' (Clippings 8). But the oppressive soundscapes of the production do not appeal to all critics: the reviewer for the *Irish Press* complains that 'the marching of the children in heavy military step was more prolonged and emphasised than was necessary' (7). There are also concerns about slow scene changes on opening night, but on the whole the critical reception is positive. The acting (by an all-women cast, many noted) is universally praised: Manuela is 'superbly played by Betty Chancellor', Carmichael 'played the part [of von Bernburg] with unusual tenderness and depth of feeling', and 'Ria Mooney lent an added strength to the grim headmistress' (7) in the *Irish Independent*'s assessment, which typifies the Dublin opinions. Unsurprisingly, the critics build their reviews around the play's critique of authoritarianism, with only some referring to the love story thwarted by that system. According to the *Irish Times*, the 'first fifteen seconds [...] gives the key to the whole play before a word has been spoken. [...] An iron, almost a prison-like discipline is the note of the scene, and it is carried all through the drama'; the play 'is nothing but an indictment of Prussianism in education' (7). The *Evening Herald* of 7 April does not mention the love story at all: this is simply 'the tragic story of the child's [...] reaction to the iron discipline enforced in the Prussian Girls' School' (7); the *Sunday Independent*, similarly, refers only to the play's 'indictment of conditions in a Prussian girls' school' (7). Critics do not see the production as a representation of indoctrination or authoritarianism specifically in Nazi Germany: they imagine, rather, that Winsloe (through von Bernburg) is taking aim at the unyielding Prussian militarism that led to the Great War.<sup>9</sup>

When the source of Manuela's suffering is mentioned, the story of romantic love is erased and Manuela's feelings are pathologized, even by apparently sympathetic reviewers. On 11 April, the critic for the *Irish Independent* notes that 'the play would be more convincing had the girl crushed by the system been a more normal type'. Chancellor is superb in the role, but the 'sensitive, imaginative child' is 'morbid', and her downfall is due to this 'weakness in her character' (7). The *Irish Times*

agrees: Manuela gives her teacher ‘the love which can find no expression elsewhere. That love, warped, as it is, because it can find no normal outlet, does not run a normal course, and the affection almost becomes a perverted affection. Thus, the play is not a study of normal people, but an essay on the neurotic’ (7). Later in 1934, Bulmer Hobson sounds the same note in his retrospective study of the Gate’s first five years when he praises Betty Chancellor’s ‘subtle study of hysteria as Manuela in “Children in Uniform”’ (47). The language of these reviews indicates that the writers recognized the lesbian content of the play, but could not bring themselves to name or defend an affection they considered taboo. Not one of the reviewers takes the easy road of characterising Manuela’s passion as the misplaced need for motherly affection, though: Manuela feels as she does because she is not ‘normal’ – because she is ‘morbid’, i.e. diseased. Film critic Richard Dyer has declared himself astounded by the fact that many viewers of *Mädchen in Uniform* do not see the love story in the film: ‘*Mädchen*’s lesbianism is so obvious that it is hard to believe anyone could downplay it.’ (44) Reviewers of the Gate production of *Children in Uniform* were clearly not that oblivious: they may not have used the word lesbian – and if they had they would not have used it in a positive sense – but they certainly did recognize sexual dissidence in the Edwards – mac Liammóir production.

## CONCLUSION

When it comes to the critical reception of the Gate’s *Children in Uniform*, then, we are not dealing with what Tamsin Wilton and others have characterized as lesbian invisibility, but with the pathologization of lesbian desire in 1930s Dublin. The Gate production did not invite these negative readings: it was sensitive not only to the genuine – if sometimes excessive – feelings of Manuela but also to the older woman’s more tightly controlled feelings of love for the younger woman. This is hardly surprising: ‘the Boys’ had created a haven in the old Rotunda Assembly Rooms for queer expression, living openly as a couple themselves and staging plays that depicted – if only tangentially – love between men (Mary Manning’s *Youth’s the Season*–? or Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*). Ria Mooney, who played the tyrannical headmistress in Winsloe’s play, had also spent several years steeped in the lesbian culture that surrounded Eva Le Gallienne’s Civic Repertory Theatre in New York, where Mooney had worked as an actress, teacher and director before returning to Dublin to

join the Gate in 1933 (McGlone 30-55; Mooney 68-99; O'Dowd 191-222).<sup>10</sup> In the case of *Children in Uniform*, this Gate ensemble produced a play that was sympathetic to the fate of women-loving women. Script emendations, blocking, sets, lights and sound effects all combined to make plain that the restraint and oppression of love was what produced pathological symptoms ('morbidity', 'hysteria', 'neurosis' in the language of the day), not the passion itself. If, in the spirit of Heather Love's *Feeling Backward*, we 'take impossible love as a model for queer historiography' (24), the depiction of vulnerability, passivity and abjection in the character of von Bernburg, the multiple failures of Manuela in the face of social norms, and the tragic denouement itself are features of the play that also help make the story a recognizably lesbian one. What lesbian theatregoers made of the production we cannot say without further evidence (from diaries, letters, or other memoirs that may come to light), but it cannot be far removed from what the contributor to *Die Freundin* saw in *Gestern und heute*, 'That's our life, surely, that is being played out here', for 'it is the fate of us all to be "cast out of human society."'" (qtd in Puhlfürst 44)

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank the librarians and archivists at the Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries; the National Library of Ireland; and the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek in Leipzig for expertise shared and assistance rendered as I researched this chapter. My especial thanks go to Northwestern's Jason Nargis for his generosity with time and advice. Travel to these archives was funded by the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures and the Richard L. Walker Institute of International Studies at the University of South Carolina, for which they also have my grateful thanks.
2. Most recently, the German studies journal *Seminar* dedicated its spring 2019 issue to *Mädchen in Uniform*, giving us a timely and important reconsideration of the film and its legacies; but see also Dyer, Fest, Kracauer and Rich.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German are my own.
4. Alexander and Georg Marton published typewritten copies of the play solely for staging purposes. Their text is that of the Berlin production, *Gestern und heute*, although they include the play's original Leipzig name as a subtitle (see Works Cited). Regardless of when they were typed up, copies of this (scarce) edition all bear the publication date of 1930. It is this actors' edition of the Berlin script that was used by Burnham.
5. Despite not having been shown in Ireland, the film was so well known that most Irish reviewers of the Gate production refer to it. The *Irish Times*,

for instance, notes that ‘as a film in New York it appears to have made the greatest impression’ (Clippings 7); the *Evening Herald* reports that the play ‘has been filmed under the title of “Madchen [sic] in Uniform,” which has not yet been seen in Dublin’ (7); and in the *Evening Mail* we read that it was ‘in the film version of this remarkable modern play by Christa Winsloe that the beautiful German actress, Dorothy Wieck, made her name’ (7).

6. For an image of Melzer as von Bernburg and Gina Falkenberg as Manuela in the Berlin production, see Stürzer 104. A simple search on Getty Images brings up a second photograph of the two in costume.
7. Edwards’s personal copy of *Famous Plays of 1932–33* is at the Gate Archive at Northwestern University; it is not marked up in any way, but must have been the source of his emendations to the prompt copy. A typical example of Edwards’s editing can be seen in that prompt copy in an early scene when the pupils are about to converge on the new girl, eager to meet her. Whispers offstage include the line ‘Like a lost lamb ... as usual!’ in *Famous Plays of 1932–33* (Winsloe 1934, 24) but this is missing from French’s Acting Edition (Winsloe 1933a, 10). Edwards adds it back in by hand, along with his own new interjection, ‘Where is she?’ (10).
8. John Finegan describes a similar moment in Edwards’s staging of Denis Johnson’s *The Old Lady Says ‘No!’* as the ‘most arresting opening to any Irish drama that I know. While the curtain is still down there is heard the approaching tramp of marching feet, and voices chant the “Sean Bhean Bhocht”. The tramping and the singing continue for some minutes before gradually dying away. Then the curtain rises.’ (24)
9. See, for instance, the opening lines of the *Irish Independent* review of 11 April: ‘During the Great War we came to attach a certain meaning to the word Prussianism. In “Children in Uniform” we see it at its worst and its stupid best.’ (Clippings 7)
10. Thanks to Ciara O’Dowd’s groundbreaking work on Mooney, we now have a fuller picture of her place in bohemian circles in 1920s New York. Her network included not only Le Gallienne and her lover Josephine Hutchinson, but also the lesbian icon Alla Nazimova, who acted at the Civic Repertory Theatre and was supportive of Mooney’s career. O’Dowd speculates that in New York Mooney developed an ‘intimate’ relationship with Rita Romelli, ‘a dancer, an actress, teacher and later a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance’ (214). Previous accounts of Mooney’s life have focused mainly on Mooney’s love affairs with unavailable men; O’Dowd complicates this heteronormative narrative, concluding that ‘Romelli and Mooney had a loving and intimate relationship that lasted their whole lives. There is no evidence it developed from friendship to a sexual relationship, or indeed is there anything to suggest that it was only platonic. Their relationship was intimate, loving and vital to Mooney’s happiness’

(215). Mooney would go on to dedicate her memoirs to Romelli. Unfortunately, Mooney does not specifically discuss *Children in Uniform* in those memoirs; she merely notes that ‘the headmistress in *Madchen [sic] in Uniform*’ was one of the characters she played ‘[carrying] my clothes the way I might have done, had I actually lived in that particular period’ (106).

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## CHAPTER 9

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# ‘We Belong to the World’: Christine Longford’s War Plays During Irish Neutrality

*Erin Grogan*

Despite the critical and popular success of Christine Longford’s dramas she is now rarely celebrated as a playwright but more often remembered as simply the wife of Lord Edward Longford and a financial supporter of the Gate Theatre. There are multiple reasons why her eighteen plays and numerous adaptations for the stage have suffered neglect. Chief among these is the bias against the examination of women’s work for the stage but a further reason her dramas are overlooked is that the majority of them were staged in the 1940s, a period often dismissed for producing parochial and uninspiring theatre unworthy of critical attention. It is the intention of this chapter to show that Christine Longford’s plays are deserving of investigation for their complex negotiations of Irish identity within international contexts, criticism of censorship and advocacy for women’s rights.

Christine’s venture into the world of theatre began in 1930 when Edward financially saved the Gate Theatre from bankruptcy (Cowell 10). Edward, upon learning the Gate would otherwise close, bought

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the remaining shares of the theatre and effectively became the majority shareholder (Fitz-Simon 66). From that point forward, the Longfords became increasingly involved in all aspects of the administration and artistic output of the theatre until finally splitting into Longford Productions in 1938 – still housed at the Gate but separate from ‘the Boys’, mac Liammóir and Edwards (Billington *xii*). This split was a result of growing tensions over whether the theatre should participate in a tour of Egypt. Mac Liammóir and Edwards were for the tour, and Edward against (Fitz-Simon 89). Ultimately, the decision was made that ‘the Boys’ would operate under the name Edwards—Mac Liammóir Dublin Gate Theatre Productions Ltd., and the Longfords under Longford Productions, each group occupying the theatre space for half a year at a time (Fitz-Simon 93, 95).

With Longford Productions, Christine wrote and produced numerous scripts and found her footing as a playwright. She continued to work closely with the Gate well past her husband’s death, right up to her own. In fact, after Edward’s death in 1961 Christine helped to dissolve the separation between ‘the Boys’ and Longford Productions and became a Director of the Dublin Gate Theatre Productions and acted as the Gate’s manager for many years (Fitz-Simon 237). While her administrative roles gave Christine prominence, her achievements as a writer are well worth noting, particularly since they have never received due recognition. This chapter will look specifically at three plays Christine Longford wrote in the early 1940s. These plays are a departure from Longford’s earlier work in terms of content and tone. Each drama centres on a historical war or rebellion, but Longford uses these historical moments to indirectly critique the government, specifically the role of women in Ireland, as well as Irish neutrality during World War II. As Cathy Leeney has noted, Longford’s writing critiques ‘the failure of the new state to fulfil the idealism that informed its foundation’ (178). This is especially true of the history plays Longford wrote in the 1940s, which critique both women’s limitations in Ireland and the idea of the country being insular, reflecting on the ways Ireland was and continued to be culturally international.

The 1940s was in many ways the most restrictive decade of the twentieth century for Irish women. The passing of the 1937 constitution enshrined the government’s view that a woman’s place should be within the home, and increasing censorship made it difficult for women to fight back against this oppressive legal framework. This decade was in large part defined by Ireland’s neutrality in World War II, a period from 1939

to 1945 known locally as ‘The Emergency’. The name derived from a constitutional amendment called the Emergency Powers Act that allowed for stricter governmental control. The act itself stated:

The Government may, whenever and so often as they think fit, make by order such provisions as are, in the opinion of the Government, necessary or expedient for securing the public safety or the preservation of the State, or for the maintenance of public order, or for the provision and control of supplies and services essential to the life of the community. (*Emergency Powers* 2.1)

Effectively, this meant that the government had the means to secure control over almost any area of society and social expression they wished. Censorship was not new to Ireland. For example, in 1923 the Censorship of Films Act established an official censor to certify that pictures were ‘fit for exhibition in public’ (*Censorship* 5.1). This act gave the censor the right to withhold any film that was deemed immoral, specifically ‘indecent, obscene or blasphemous’ (*Censorship* 7.2). What changed within the Emergency was that limitations on what could be censored expanded widely, and the basis for restrictions became vaguer. No longer were censors looking only for obscene or blasphemous material. Now any material deemed threatening to ‘public order’, or offensive to ‘friendly foreign states’, could be disallowed (Wood 86). This meant that any material that spoke out against Ireland’s neutrality could be censored.

The language of the Emergency Powers Act did not specifically reference theatre and stage plays as opposed to, for instance, print publications. This lack of explicit proscription provided theatre makers with a unique ability to push the boundaries of political and social critique. Nevertheless, as Ian Wood notes, ‘as in peacetime, [...] theatres could be licensed or have their licences taken from them, and the latter was a threat that theatre managements knew they had to accept as a reality’ (93). Given the vagueness of official proscription, and the overarching censorship that prevailed in areas such as film and journalism, the risk to use the stage as an outlet for critique was palpable, making Longford’s achievements even more notable.

In November 1940, for example, the Gate Theatre was urged to withdraw its production of *Roly Poly* by Lennox Robinson due to the unsympathetic portrayal of a German soldier (Ó Drisceoil 52). While not officially told to remove the play, ‘the producers were approached by the

Department of Justice and “reminded” of the equivocal position of the Gate under the 1745 Act relating to the licensing of theatres’ (Ó Drisceoil 52). Christine Longford navigated these risks during the 1940s with her own plays, using both her work and position to critique the rampant censorship present in Ireland.

One of the few accounts of Longford’s life is found in *No Profit but the Name*, written by John Cowell, an actor who worked closely with the Longford Players. In this account, it is clear that Christine and her husband Edward’s lives were considered very much entwined. Overall, Edward Longford is far more remembered in theatrical history, thanks to his own plays and his financial contributions to the Gate Theatre, but Cowell notes: ‘it is opportune to point out to readers of this book, and particularly to feminist readers, that every time Edward’s name appears, Christine’s, if not specifically mentioned must be understood to be implied’ (Cowell 58). Cowell reiterates the Longfords’ influence on each other and in this way points out that Christine had more authority in theatrical endeavours than it may have appeared. Leeney notes that Longford ‘was in the very positive and fortunate position of having access to a theatre to stage her work’ and was thus perhaps more privileged than other women writers of the period (163).

Christine wrote numerous novels but concentrated solely on play-writing after her fourth novel was published in 1935 (Billington vii). While her first play, *Queens and Emperors* in 1932, was neither a huge flop nor a big success, Longford continued to grow as a writer, subsequently reflecting that ‘I did better later’ (qtd in Cowell 89). As time went on, Longford’s writing became increasingly focused on Ireland, and during the 1930s her plays and novels centred on characters of Anglo-Irish background. However, her focus on Irish ‘Big Houses’ and the comedy of house parties did not satisfy Longford for long. In looking back on her 1937 play *Anything But the Truth* later that same year, Longford said: ‘At the time I thought it was amusing. The jokes hit their mark and I had an excellent cast. Still, what was the point? What was the idea, if any? I imagined I had one, but somehow it failed to emerge.’ (qtd in Cowell 118) In the following decade, she would dedicate herself to addressing her own concern by writing plays that intended to stimulate debate and pack a punch.

From 1941 to 1943, Christine Longford wrote and produced three plays. No longer a writer of social comedies, she instead dramatized stories of heroism and sacrifice in times of crisis. *Lord Edward* (1941), *The United Brothers* (1942) and *Patrick Sarsfield* (1943) were all performed during World War II. Based on historical Irish uprisings and battles, they all take war as their subject. Despite Ireland’s neutrality, the world war did have an impact on the daily lives of Irish people. Clair Wills observes in *That Neutral Island* that ‘as the Irish government was keen to emphasise, neutrality was not peace. While the violence of the conflict may have seemed remote to most people, everyday life in Ireland was shaped by the hardships, constraints, and psychological pressures of surviving in a war-torn world’ (4). Irish people still dealt with increasing censorship, economic hardships and limitations regarding gender roles. These history plays, though not set in the twentieth century, indirectly comment on the experience of Longford and citizens of Ireland living during the 1940s.

The first of her history plays, *Lord Edward*, shows women asserting their positions on politics in a time and place where they are told they have no voice and no vote. Longford uses her women characters in this play as key figures in carrying out political and rebellious action, highlighting the ways in which women continue to be active political participants even when government silences them. It is worth noting that for a period of time after the 1937 constitution was adopted, Irish women did attempt to assert authority and agency politically. As Ian R. Walsh describes, this period ran from the formation of the Women’s Social and Progressive League (WSPL) in November of 1937 until the election of 1943, during which the WSPL ran four candidates, all of whom unfortunately lost (31). Longford’s *Lord Edward* was written and produced during this brief period of mobilization for women. Additionally, this play began to explore the question of what it means to be an Irish woman, and who has a claim to that role, a question Longford continued to consider throughout her history plays.

*Lord Edward* was first produced in Dublin by the Longford Players at the Dublin Gate Theatre on 10 June 1941 (Longford 1941, i). The play was well received and an *Irish Times* reviewer asserted that breathing life into historic Irish figures was a ‘most desirable national service’ which ‘Lady Longford has done [...] remarkably well by giving the Gate Theatre a play that will be greatly liked not there alone, but wherever the story of Lord Edward can stir to life once more the memory of our patriot men’ (“*Lord Edward*” at Gate’). The same reviewer went on to describe the

strong acting in most roles and also stated that this play was a deviation from Longford's normal class comedies. The play was so successful that it was retained for a longer run than originally planned, allowing audiences a full extra week to see the show ('Gate Theatre' 1941).

*Lord Edward* is set amid the 1798 Rising in Ireland. Named after the national figure Lord Edward FitzGerald, who was an Irish aristocrat turned revolutionary, this play looks at his contributions to the Irish cause and his untimely death; but this is not simply a play that depicts an Irish hero in the conventional way. In her script, Longford carefully delineates the supporting characters in Edward's life, making them just as central to the story she is telling. By emphasizing the women in Edward's life as integral to his cause, Longford highlights and critiques the disempowerment of women within her own contemporary Ireland.

At the start of the play, the characters give us some background about the politics of Ireland at the time and the rumblings of war. It is March of 1798, just a few months before the outbreak of rebellion. We are led to believe that Ireland is under more scrutiny than ever, and the parallels to the neutral Ireland in 1941 are blatant. The men in the play are reluctant to admit that Ireland is in trouble, despite consistently referring to the 'state' of things. Longford uses Lady Sarah, Edward's Aunt, to highlight this male reluctance, and in doing so, pokes fun at Ireland's contemporary situation:

*Lady Sarah*: I'm sick of hearing of the state of the country. What *is* it? Is it a state of war?

*Mr. Conolly*: Oh, no, not exactly. God forbid.

*Lord Castlereagh*: Certainly not. Not yet. (13-14)

During the Emergency, censorship prevented both men and women alike from sharing their thoughts and opinions on the war. Ian Wood articulates the breadth of censorship in his book *Britain, Ireland and the Second World War*, in which he outlines that, beginning in 1939 with the Emergency Orders, censorship in Ireland was expanded to newspapers and radio programmes (88-90). This gave the government widespread control of the information to which most of the Irish population would be exposed. Increasingly strict rules made it difficult for people to disseminate information about what was going on in the war. Even sharing the local weather on the radio was censored and seen as a threat to Irish neutrality, since it could be useful to outside forces seeking footholds in nearby water or airspace (Wood 87). Clair Wills recounts how news of the

war in newspapers, while able to be reported, ended up being devoid of opinion and comment, creating oddly blank descriptions of events and at times full omissions of actions that could not be reported without eliciting non-neutral response (274).

Despite this censorship, and rather perhaps because of this censorship, this period led to a marked increase in activism on a number of fronts, including women’s rights. This is seen through the formation of the independent women’s party WSPL referenced above, a culmination of multiple groups all determined to run a party based on women’s issues to contest an election. Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, a major voice for women’s political mobilization, ran a campaign with WSPL in 1943, though ultimately failed (Walsh 31). This period of increased agency for women is reflected in Longford’s characters. The spirit of political participation is seen in Longford’s Lady Sarah who pushes others, especially women, to think critically about the information they are being fed and to create their own opinions and ideas. She insists upon being politically engaged. For example, she urges Lady Louisa to have her own voice:

*Lady Sarah:* It’s clear as daylight. Use your imagination, Louisa. Imagine something quite simple. Imagine that not only the Catholics were emancipated, but that we were emancipated as well.

*Lady Louisa:* But we are. What do you mean?

*Lady Sarah:* Can you vote in an election?

*Lady Louisa:* Of course not.

*Lady Sarah:* Then supposing you could, would you vote for Edward or for Lord Castlereagh? (3)

Lady Sarah is presenting herself as a woman knowledgeable of the political climate, and one who has a stake in its outcomes. She is left to ponder how she would partake if she had the ability and also incites others to reflect upon this injustice. Thus, while Longford’s script addressed issues of war and peace that resonated with Emergency-era audiences, it simultaneously highlighted the absence of women’s rights, both in the past and the present.

Despite Sarah’s overt political statements, it is actually Pamela, Edward’s wife, who plays an integral part in the plotline in which privileged information needs to be passed among rebels. Pamela is pregnant with her third child and she is often excused from conversations throughout the play due to her ‘delicate’ condition. The idea that being

a mother makes women weak is asserted time and again by male characters in this play. When British soldiers arrive at their house and turn it inside out to search for communications about the rebellion, they discount Pamela. They do not see her as a threat, dismissing her as someone without knowledge of politics or war. They leave with nothing. After the soldiers are gone, Pamela reveals that she in fact had the letters that they were searching for the whole time on her. She pulls them out of her dress and says ‘It’s a great pity, the new fashions are not so suitable for conspiracy as the old. It was easier when women had more stuff in their dresses.’ (46) Pamela uses the tools made available to her by her gender (in this case both the dress and the probability that she will be underestimated by men) to swiftly deliver important documents into the hands of another rebel. This act uses the patriarchal constraints imposed on women’s dress as a means to undermine both male political ambitions and British control.

Beyond Pamela’s inspired manipulation of the limitations placed upon her as a woman, this scene again hints at censorship in Longford’s Ireland. Ian Wood notes that during the Emergency, ‘most censorship employment was created by the interception and checking of mail. All letters and packages to and from any destination beyond Éire’s borders were liable to be opened and examined’ (87). Complaints were lodged with the postal service from Irish citizens who found their letters delayed for long periods of time, and when they finally arrived to have been cut up and, in some instances, made unreadable (Ó Drisceoil 70). Longford’s depiction of British soldiers using their ‘right’ to check mail and ransack Edward and Pamela’s home may be viewed as likening the contemporary Irish government to the British government it has only recently replaced.

At the end, Pamela is forced to leave Ireland, despite wanting to stay. Her own connections to Ireland parallel those of Longford’s. Longford was born Christine Trew on 6 September 1900 in Somerset, England. Though born in England, Christine had Irish blood through her father’s side, and she was always fascinated with Ireland (Cowell 12-14). It wasn’t until she married Edward that Longford actually moved to Ireland. Christine’s character of Pamela was born in France, and thus, despite her marrying an Irishman and living in Ireland, is considered ‘other’. After Edward’s arrest, Pamela bribes her way into his cell to tell him the news and ultimately say goodbye:

*Pamela*: Your Government has said I must leave Ireland. (*Cries, they embrace.*) But I will not go.

*Lord Edward*: Is it an official order?

*Pamela*: Oh, yes. The police came. I said I would not go. I said I would stay with you in prison. They said no, I am a Frenchwoman, and I must leave Ireland. (83)

Pamela’s experience of being cast out due to her background is one that Longford faced in an important sense herself, as an English-born woman living in Ireland. While she lived in Ireland for much of her life, and was never forced to leave, living as an English woman in neutral Ireland during a major war must have taken some toll on her sense of identity and belonging. In 1935 the government passed both the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act as well as the Aliens Act which together effectively defined Irish citizenship and classified British citizens as aliens (Jackson 295). While this act likely did not personally affect Longford, the aim of these acts was to imply that to be Irish was distinct and different from being British, even though many people within the country had ties to both Ireland and Britain. These acts show the permeating feelings in Ireland against the previously dominant Anglo-Irish minority. Lionel Pilkington asserts that ‘throughout this period many nationalist intellectuals argue the need for a more representative Irish culture’ (163). There was a push for a cultural focus on the majority population of the nation, Irish Catholics. Within theatre this was seen in the controversies surrounding *The Silver Tassie* at the Abbey Theatre in 1935 in which people protested the drama’s anti-Catholicism and anti-nationalism (172). Pilkington notes that these controversies were about much more than the one play, and instead about a feeling that the Abbey Theatre was dismissing the ‘social and cultural life of the majority’ (172). Longford’s work engages with this struggle by writing Anglo-Irish characters and questioning the continuing validity of those pre-independence labels.

Ireland – and Dublin in particular – was at the same time becoming much more international during the Emergency: indeed, Clair Wills observes how ‘[t]here was more rather than less high-class travel to Ireland, principally by those for whom Dublin would have been off the map before the war. Now they were attracted by good food, entertainment, and the absence of blitz’ (282). Internationals found their artistic homes in Dublin: the White Stag group was comprised of international artists and poets and contributed to what Wills describes as the ‘beacon

of creative freedom' which turned Dublin into a European city during the 1940s (284). This dichotomy between being Irish and being international or European is present in the character of Pamela. Longford highlights the tragedy of Pamela being cast out of her home, and in doing so demonstrates her belief that Ireland should be lauded for its international qualities.

Longford's next history play, *The United Brothers*, produced the following year, continued to foreground women's place in an Ireland in the immediate proximity of war. Longford called into question the expectations of freedom for women within an independent Ireland and forced contemporary audiences to ask themselves whether these freedoms had been achieved. In this play Longford also utilized the symbolic Mother Ireland motif to underscore the double standards for men and women in Ireland.

Staged at the Gate Theatre in April of 1942, *The United Brothers'* plot runs concurrently with that of *Lord Edward*, beginning a year before the 1798 Rising and ending after the rebellion in July of 1798. Like her other history plays, this production also met with success. Maxwell Sweeney, reviewer for the *Irish Times*, said of the play: 'this is the best thing seen at the Gate so far this season' (1942). Its run was also extended by a week, like that of *Lord Edward* ('Gate Theatre' 1942). While named after John and Harry Sheares, who were republican figures, the script's main character is clearly Maria Steele, the eighteen-year-old love interest of John Sheares. The Sheares brothers were revolutionaries who took up leadership in the Rising after Lord Edward's arrest, but unfortunately were eventually also captured themselves. The tragedy of the Sheares brothers' fates is played out through the lens of Maria's eyes and most of the action against the brothers occurs offstage – the main playing area being the home of Maria and her mother. Maria is obsessed with literature, much to her mother's chagrin, and falls in love with John as they write poetry and read histories together. When John asks Maria's mother for her hand in marriage, he is denied on the grounds of his financial standing and his political beliefs as a republican. Maria herself refuses to run away to America with John, believing she must respect her mother's wishes, and also asserting that she is unready to wed.

A commentary on the current state of Ireland comes later in the play, during a dinner party at which the Sheares pontificate upon what Ireland will look like once it is free and how so many wrongs will be made right.

Julia, the Sheares’ sister, and Sally, Harry’s wife, participate actively in the conversation being led by the men:

*Julia*: In the new Ireland, there will be no more drunken country gentlemen, no more riotous students, no more insolent officers.

*Sally*: No more bad manners, and no more unhappy women.

*John*: Women will be respected, and educated like men. They will take their place with men in philosophy and the arts and sciences. (58-59)

John responds to Sally’s comment about unhappy women with talk of education, assuming that the solution to their unhappiness lies in areas in which they face inequality. While it may be debatable whether Irish women during the 1940s had gained ‘respect’, it was clear that women did not have the same presence in philosophy, the arts, the sciences or politics during this period.

In fact, during the mid-twentieth century, regressive legislation was enacted under the guise of respect for women. In 1937, journalist Gertrude Gaffney observed of women’s place within the new constitution that ‘we are to be no longer citizens entitled to enjoy equal rights under a democratic constitution, but laws are to be enacted which will take into consideration our “differences of capacity, physical and moral, and of social function”’ (qtd in Luddy 178). Beyond inequality in education, women were also banned from the workforce. Maria Luddy points out that Irish women were much more concerned with economic inequality because the language of the new constitution could potentially limit women’s abilities and opportunities for work (183). Hearing John discuss the promises of new Ireland, Irish women may have been forced to confront the fact that independent Ireland did not live up to its promises for women.

At the dinner party, Longford also uses the gendered symbolism that so often accompanied Irish nationalism to demonstrate men’s urges to force women into specific ideals and symbols. Maria, the obedient daughter, is literally made into a symbol of Ireland during the dinner party:

*Armstrong*: What is the toast I’ve drunk in the clubs? ‘Mother Erin dressed in green ribbons by a French milliner, if she can’t be dressed without her.’

*Maria*: Were you looking at *me*, sir, when you said ‘Mother Erin’? I *am* wearing green ribbons, but I think the lady is somewhat older than I am.

*Armstrong:* I beg your pardon, madam. My eye was straying. You are certainly much less mature in figure than that lady.

*John:* I don't think so. I think Miss Steele is ideally suited to be the symbol of Ireland. (57)

In many ways, John is right that Maria is suited for this symbolic image. Maria is young, she is intelligent enough, but other characters mark her as unpolitical in their musings. Julia criticizes Maria for being too concerned with fashions to care about politics. She says, 'Maria considers everything from the point of view of upholstery' while Julia and the men, John and Armstrong, discuss what an Irish senate would look like, quickly dismissing Maria's contributions (60). Julia vilifies Maria for being more concerned with priorities such as the home, marriage and children.

Maria is made to leave the dinner party early because her mother is worried about her staying out while the fighting continues. As she leaves, John remarks: 'alas, the symbolic figure of Ireland is carried off by her nursemaid' (62). This comment shows that both Maria and Ireland are seen as needing to be cared for – looked after as children. John sees himself as a caretaker to both, being a suitor for Maria as well as a stalwart supporter of the rebellion. However, by the end of the play, Maria is unable to live up to this ideal. Her very last line, referring to Harry's wife, is: 'No, it's not worst for her. She has been married and has children. I have lost a lover I never had'. (97) Maria is of course grieving someone that she cared about, but she also lingers on the role she lost with John's death. Maria has lost her chance (at least with John and within the scope of this play) to fulfil what so many Irish women are told completes their identity: getting married and becoming a mother.

The last lines of this play highlight the absurd ways in which women are tied to the men in their lives and how their grief brings them to reflect on their own roles. Lady Steele, Maria and Julia all reflect on the women left behind after the Sheares brothers are hanged and discuss who has the most unfortunate lot in life. Successive arguments are made for who has it worst – the boy's mother for having no sons any more, Harry's wife for being a widow, Maria for losing her prospects, or Julia for losing her two brothers and in turn her hope for her country. Each of these women perceives their lives to be drastically changed due to the loss of these two men. Longford uses these lines to show that no role for women could be considered 'settled' with the loss of the men in their lives. Longford repeats the line 'it's worst for her' three times in a row,

as one by one Julia, Lady Steele and then Maria utter the words (96–97). The Sheares brothers are dead but it is the women who are left to pick up the pieces. No one has it ‘worst’, but rather they are all in positions that are unfavourable as women. In this repetition, Longford heightens the impact of these words and demonstrates how these women attempt to find agency as a collective after tragedy. Whether they succeed in this is left unexplored by the end of the play, but the character of Julia does demonstrate potential success in gaining power.

*The United Brothers* ends with a message of hope delivered by Julia. She says: ‘I have lost my two brothers, and I have lost my hope for my country. But not for ever. Their sacrifice will not be in vain. Their light is not out.’ (97) With this line, Julia takes up the torch her brothers left behind. Having just taken part in a conversation about their dismal prospects, this seems an odd place for Julia’s mind to go. However, if the audience recalled Julia’s avid participation in the dinner party conversation of Act II, and her strong advocacy of women’s rights throughout, they may well have interpreted Julia’s hope for her country as being tied directly to the state of these women’s lives. If so, then, the play’s end may have been understood as a prospective memory strategy, which Ruud van den Beukens describes as a dramatic technique by which ‘historical action [...] is explicitly endowed with the quality of something *that should be remembered*’ (200). Longford, in employing this tactic, urged the audience to consider the relevance of a woman leading this nationalist effort, and the state of women’s progress in 1942.

With her next history play, *Patrick Sarsfield*, Longford revisited the idea of Irish identity as complicated by familial background, and how particular backgrounds could be doubly limiting for Irish women. Longford used her female characters to once again assert their right to a voice within politics and also placed the women in positions of power. This play also presented a more critical view of neutrality, emphasizing that imposed restrictions on Irish identity became even more limiting during war.

*Patrick Sarsfield* première at the Gate Theatre in May of 1943 and takes place a century earlier than both *Lord Edward* and *The United Brothers*. This play was also extended to run for a third week after initial success of the production (‘Gate Theatre’ 1943). The setting for this drama is the Williamite War of 1689–1691, which was fought mostly on Irish soil and was the last attempt of King James II, a Catholic, to take back the crown from his Protestant son-in-law, William III (Childs 2–4). The play begins in 1690 and once more, female characters give us

insight into the world of the play and the current state of Ireland and the war. These women are all part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, Elizabeth Rosse and Fanny Dillon, the daughters of the Duchess as well as Honora, Patrick's wife. The women discuss identity and begin to quantify the idea of Irishness:

*Elizabeth:* We were brought up in France.

*Fanny:* And we were very poor, too.

*Elizabeth:* But not unhappy. We loved it, we loved France. We're not so Irish as you are.

*Honora:* You can't be 'more Irish' or 'less Irish.' You must be Irish or not.

*Fanny:* Yes, I'm Irish. Our father was Irish.

*Elizabeth:* And our mother is English.

*Fanny:* But she married two Irishmen, one after another. First our father, and then Uncle Dick. We always called him Uncle Dick. And she loved them both madly, and she's more Irish than the Irish themselves. (5)

This idea of quantifying Irishness was not only personal to Longford, but extremely relevant to Longford's Ireland. Despite being born in England, Longford's connection to Ireland was always strong, and she felt she was an Irish republican long before she married an Irish lord. In her memoirs, she wrote, 'I was determined to be oppressed and not an oppressor' regarding her connection to Ireland (Cowell 19). The characters of Elizabeth and Fanny contemplate their heritage and ask how many parts Irish versus English make them Irish, but Honora stays firm that being Irish is a stable identity, and one either is or is not. Both sides of this argument are problematically absolute, and the play continues to interrogate these ideas.

These questions of identity and belonging within the play are intimately tied to the larger Williamite War. King James urges others to remember what is happening off the shores of Ireland and he stresses that the war is affecting other parts of Europe as well. When the war does not seem to be going in James's favour, he lets everyone know that he needs to go to France and spend time there. General Luttrell, an Irishman, comments 'He's King of England and Ireland and Scotland, God help him. So he must go to France. Is there any logic in that?' (Longford 1943, 26) Luttrell's comments are representative of the characters in the play, whose only loyalty is to Ireland and who take little consideration of the world outside. The conflicting views between the King and his supporters were bound to resonate with audiences in 1940s

Ireland, who knew that a world war was happening, but, due to censorship, experienced this war far differently than others. It is also reminiscent of how some people viewed 1940s Ireland as a time of stagnation for the country, while others viewed it as a time of booming international culture (Wills 8). F.S.L. Lyons said of Ireland in the Emergency that the country was in total isolation and ‘the tensions – and the liberations – of war, the shared experience, the comradeship in suffering, the new thinking about the future, all these things had passed her [Ireland] by’ (557). This complete seclusion of Ireland, however, would have been impossible given the number of Irish people who fought in the war, and the fact that both Allied and Axis power countries were allowed to maintain embassies and presences within the country. Longford stresses this idea that Ireland is part of a larger picture within the play. After Honora tells Berwick there is only Ireland for her, he responds: ‘we belong to the world. To Europe and the world’ (77). Longford thus emphasizes the necessity to recognize Ireland’s international place.

Further complicating the notions of identity within the play, religion is brought up as another identifier. There are rather strict lines made between Catholicism and Protestantism, where Catholics support James and Protestants support William. Despite this seemingly hard line, Longford litters the play with characters who cross those boundaries and blur these hard and fast distinctions. The Duchess, and other unseen relations within the world of the play, have converted to and from Catholicism and Protestantism – based on what was politically or socially more advantageous for them at the time.

The Duchess has a scene in which she speaks with Dr. King, a Protestant minister who is imprisoned. Their interaction seems to be a common occurrence as the two have built up a rapport. Out of all of Longford’s history plays, this is the one scene in which a woman is definitively and openly in a position of power over a man: Dr. King as prisoner and the Duchess as prisoner (or at least representative of her male family members who imprison him). Despite this, the two debate rather equally about the state of the war. The Duchess argues that due to ‘the emergency’ (a phrase she uses twice in the conversation) it is all right that the Protestants are being treated harsher than in the past. When Dr. King asks the Duchess if a Protestant could be expected to take orders from a Catholic, the Duchess responds: ‘ah, that’s the whole trouble, sir. Why not? (*Pause*). Until they learn to do that, we shall have no peace’ (45). This dramatic exchange is one that could highlight the struggle for power

and sovereignty that Ireland fought for and was in the process of re-asserting with its declaration of neutrality. Furthermore, this question of power may also be a reflection of the attitudes of the former Protestant Ascendancy after Ireland became independent, facing a world in which they were no longer the dominant political power.

The Duchess's control over this scene and conversation resonates at two levels. On the one hand, it appears as though the audience are led to be on her side in the debate (meaning the Catholic side) since the main characters and the heroes of the story are on that side, but by the end of the scene the Duchess concedes that she does 'not believe there is any matter of conduct in which a good Protestant should act differently from a good Catholic' and that since she was born as a Protestant she has seen that there is little difference between the two identities (48). Longford uses this time away from the main plot with the Duchess to demonstrate that no identity within Ireland is wholly one thing or another, further emphasizing her view of the country as a cosmopolitan place and suggesting that these delineations no longer have a purpose in Ireland.

Longford's history plays bypassed the critical censorship of Éire laws by using these past wars to indirectly critique the world she was living in. With *Lord Edward*, Longford placed women at the centre of espionage and rebellion, asserting their political prowess and the importance of granting women voices. *The United Brothers* took this a step further by demonstrating the dichotomy between women involved in politics and women made into vapid symbols without opinions to promote certain politics. With this play, Longford reminded audiences of the expectations for women and women's rights that came with the nationalist movements, and questioned whether those expectations have been met. *Patrick Sarsfield* focused on questions surrounding Irish identity and highlighted how seclusion, both within the world of the play and within Ireland, further restricted Irish women.

Longford's history plays demonstrate a dramatic shift in her writing style and reflect the author's sharper focus on the world around her. There is no evidence that these plays were revived, which is surprising given that they were all well received with reviews suggesting the critique of contemporary Ireland that she offered was, to some extent, understood and appreciated by audiences. Further, each play also enjoyed extended runs, and they all centred on major historical figures often lauded in Irish life. Critic Maxwell Sweeney noted in his review of *Patrick Sarsfield*'s only

known run that ‘Lady Longford in this, as in her earlier historical plays, has shown herself to be both a painstaking historian and a painstaking playwright.’ (1943) Almost every review of Longford’s plays applauds her skill as a writer. The neglect of these dramas is all the more striking in the face of the fact that Longford questioned ‘the point’ of her plays written before the 1940s, and saw greater meaning in the work that came after. An *Irish Times* review of *The United Brothers* claimed that ‘we are given many witty and homely touches which bring the Dublin of 1798 almost as near to us as the Dublin of today’. (‘Gate Theatre: The United Brothers’) Longford managed to address key issues regarding gender roles, censorship and Irish identity, contesting the limitations placed on Irish citizens during the Emergency through these history plays.

Evidence of Longford’s success as a playwright raises questions about why she has been left out of the Irish canon. In examining this it is worth noting the composition of the Irish canon and the dearth of celebrated plays written by women in this period (and indeed throughout most of the twentieth century), as well as the lack of scholarship about these plays. Irish women during the 1940s faced repressive legislation and within the arts faced difficulty in getting productions and recognition for their work. In spite of these obstacles, Christine Longford and other women writers who have been left out of the canon wrote plays worthy of analysis and examination. Longford worked cautiously within an oppressive system to find and maintain success while still turning a critical eye on the circumstances around. A further challenge Longford faced in gaining recognition for her work was that her characters were often of Anglo-Irish descent. This period was largely unsympathetic toward the Anglo-Irish as seen with the passing of legislation such as the Aliens Act. Not only was Longford writing unpopular ideas surrounding women’s rights and censorship during a time of extreme repression, but she was also doing it from a perspective that had a rather antagonistic relationship with the Catholic majority Irish government.

Theatrically, Micheál Ó hAodha – for instance – noted that the legislation of the Free State and of the following era in the 1940s ‘created a climate of repression which was not conducive to the free expression of ideas’ and asserted that Irish theatre during this time had become ‘indifferent’, indicating that the work of this period was not particularly noteworthy (134). However, Christine Longford’s history plays contravene this widely shared perspective, as they did in fact engage with the political, social and cultural issues of the period by placing women

in central positions within politics, bypassing censorship and utilizing historical stories to critique the ethos of 1940s Ireland.

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# INDEX

## A

Abbey Theatre, 2, 8, 15, 16, 19, 22, 23, 25, 29, 31, 32, 39, 40, 42, 52, 54, 56, 57, 60, 62, 63, 65, 67, 76, 109, 112, 113, 119, 125, 126, 156, 163, 175, 178, 180, 225

Abbott, John, 126

Æ (George Russell), 176

Agate, James, 121

Aisteoirí Ghaoth Dobhair, 61, 63

Alexandrateatret, Copenhagen, 8, 48, 52

Ali, Mirza, 178, 190

Allgood, Sara, 126

Anouilh, Jean, 25, 28

Appia, Adolphe, 17, 41

Artus, Louis, 62

Asche, Oscar, 177, 190, 191

Ashcroft, Peggy, 130

Atkins, Robert, 17, 114

Austen, Jane, 93

## B

Bakst, Leon, 17, 41, 179, 190

ballet, 119, 162

Ballet Russes, 179

Bannard Cogley, Desirée ‘Toto’, 1, 4, 8, 48, 55–57, 59, 60, 93, 94, 116

Bara, Theda, 180, 190

Barbieri, Donatella, 181, 188

Barnowsky, Victor, 195, 200

Bax, Clifford, 153, 154, 156, 158

BBC, 94, 121, 133

Beardsley, Aubrey, 180

Béaslaí, Piaras, 54, 57, 66

Beckett, Samuel, 4, 94

Beckh, Nancy, 8, 9, 76, 79, 90–94, 149

Bédier, Joseph, 62

Behan, Brendan, 64, 65

Bell, Lise, 133

Bell, Mary Hayley, 94

*Bell, The*, 165

Belly, Georg, 55

Bentley, Eric, 132

Bishop, G.W., 109, 120

Bland, Joyce, 197

Blyth, Ann, 190

- Blythe, Ernest, 23, 62, 63  
 Bolger, Dermot, 38  
 Bøstrup, Rita Ingeborg, 51  
 Boucicault, Dion, 32  
 Boulton, Matthew, 59  
 Boyd, Ernest, 176, 180  
 Brecht, Bertolt, 7, 25, 26, 28, 29, 38, 132  
 Brontë, Charlotte, 21, 94  
 Brontë, Emily, 21  
 Brook, Peter, 132  
 Burnham, Barbara, 193, 194, 196–199, 201–204, 212  
 Burrell, Philippa, 131
- C**  
 Cabaret, 8, 17, 56, 93, 132  
 Camargo Society, 119  
 Cambridge Festival Theatre, 111, 117–119, 124, 127  
 Canfield, Curtis, 2  
 Čapek, Karel and Josef, 2, 3, 9, 57, 141–151, 153–163, 165–169  
 Carmichael, Coralie, 8, 75, 76, 78, 79, 87–90, 94, 95, 97, 146, 149, 205, 206, 210  
 Carr, Marina, 3, 40  
 Carroll, Paul Vincent, 108  
 Cartmell, Selina, 5  
 Cave, Richard Allen, 2, 3, 17, 41, 119, 122, 206  
 censorship, 11, 52, 110, 119, 132, 162, 165, 199, 201, 217–234  
 Černý, František, 142, 144–146, 150, 151, 153, 158, 162, 169, 170  
 Chambers, Colin, 133  
 Chancellor, Betty, 87, 160, 179, 205, 206, 210, 211  
 Cheasty, James, 26  
 Chekhov, Anton Pavlovich, 55  
 Chesterton, G.K., 20, 22, 55, 64, 142  
 Civic Repertory Theatre, 211, 213  
*Claidheamh Soluis*, An, 49, 51, 52  
 Club Drámaíochta, An, 65  
 Cockin, Katharine, 133  
 Cocteau, Jean, 131, 135  
 Colgan, Michael, 5  
 Colman, Ronald, 190  
 Colum, Padraic, 10, 79, 175–180, 186, 190  
 Comedy Theatre, 132  
 Comhar Drámaíochta, An, 8, 32, 48, 49, 54, 55, 57–63, 66, 67  
 Compántas Amharclainne na Gaeilge, 63–65  
 Connolly, Seán, 50, 52, 67  
 Connolly, Thomas, 116  
 Cowell, John, 21, 48, 117, 217, 220, 224, 230  
 Craig, Edith, 123, 129, 133  
 Craig, Edward Gordon, 17, 41, 122, 123  
 Cumann na nGaedheal Theatre Company, 50  
 Cunard, Nancy, 131  
 Cusack, Cyril, 61, 65, 66, 68
- D**  
 Damer, An, 48, 65, 67  
 Dania Biofilm Kompagni, 52  
 Davies, Andrew, 111, 118, 133  
 Davison, John, 93  
 Dean, Basil, 142  
 Dean, Joan FitzPatrick, 7, 15, 119  
 de Bhilmot, Séamus, 63  
 del Valle-Inclán, Ramón, 131  
 Denby, Elizabeth, 130–132  
 de Valera, Éamon, 79  
 de Valois, Ninette, 118, 119  
 Devine, George, 30  
 Dieterle, William, 190  
 Dietrich, Marlene, 190  
 Digges, Dudley, 50  
 Dillon, John Francis, 177  
 Doran, Charles, 17, 92  
 Dorman, Sean, 114, 117

- Drechsler, Hanuš, 155  
 Drew, Jane, 130  
 Druid Theatre, 40  
 Dublin Drama League, 55, 113, 116  
 Dublin University Players, 155  
 Duchess Theatre, 194, 196, 201, 209  
 Duggan, Dave, 38  
 Dukes, Ashley, 110, 112  
 Dulac, Edmund, 190  
 Duncan, Ronald, 131  
 Duncombe, Hubert, 146, 200  
 Dunn, S.M., 164, 170  
 Dunsany, Lord (Edward Plunkett), 59, 176  
 Durcan, Paul, 78, 95  
 Dyer, Richard, 211, 212
- E**  
 Edgeworth, Maria, 93  
 Edwards, Hilton, 1–11, 15–34, 36, 40, 41, 47, 48, 56–60, 63, 70, 75, 76, 78, 80–82, 90, 93–96, 108, 114–120, 122, 123, 134, 149, 153, 155–162, 165–170, 177, 191, 193, 194, 200–205, 207–211, 213, 218  
 Edwards, Holly, 181  
 Edwards, J. Gordon, 180, 190  
 Eicher, Joanne B., 183  
 Ervine, St. John, 112  
 Etlinger School Theatre, 131  
 Evreinov, Nikolai Nikolayevich, 1, 2  
 expressionism, 3, 17, 34, 36, 38, 113, 128, 142, 150, 162, 190, 194, 207–209
- F**  
 Fair, Elinor, 177  
 Falkenberg, Gina, 213  
 Fallon, Gabriel, 163–165, 170  
 Field, Anthony, 132  
 Finegan, John, 213  
 Fischer-Lichte, Erika, 23
- Fitzgerald, Jim, 29  
 Fitz-Simon, Christopher, 2, 8, 26, 48, 60, 66, 80, 83, 85, 96, 142, 218  
 Forrest, George, 190  
 Forty-Eight Theatre Company, 129, 130  
 Forum Theatre Guild, 114  
 Foster, R.F. (Roy), 8  
 Friel, Brian, 4, 7, 29, 38, 40, 80  
 fringe theatre, 133, 135  
 Froehlich, Carl, 195, 196
- G**  
 Gaelic League, The (Conradh na Gaeilge), 49–51, 54, 56, 83  
 Gael Linn, 65  
 Gaffney, Gertrude, 227  
 Gaiety Theatre, 17, 54, 63, 90, 93, 156, 160, 163, 166, 190  
 Gallivan, G.P., 26  
 Galsworthy, John, 57  
 Gantillon, Simon, 126  
 Garrick Theatre, 168, 176, 177  
 Gascoyne, David, 131  
 Gasnier, Louis J., 177  
 Gate (Studio) Theatre, London, 9, 41, 107–121, 123, 124, 126–128, 131–134  
 Gate Theatre Studio, Hollywood, 9, 107, 108, 123–128, 132, 134, 135  
 Gemini Productions, 29  
 Girel-Pietka, Virginie, 114  
 Globe Theatre Company, Dun Laoghaire, 29  
 Godfrey, Peter, 9, 41, 107–111, 113–120, 122–128, 131, 132, 134, 135  
 Godfrey, Renee, 124  
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 2, 10, 17, 35, 41, 180, 191  
 Gopal, Ram, 132  
 Granville-Barker, Harley, 125  
 Gray, Terence, 117–119, 122

- Greek drama/theatre, 19, 27, 28, 31, 36  
 Green, Alfred Rozelaar, 129  
 Green, Paul, 131  
 Gregory, Augusta Lady, 29, 35  
 Grein, J.T., 121  
 Grene, Nicholas, 118  
 Griffith, Arthur, 48, 50, 51, 53  
 Group Theatre, 130  
 Guest, John, 26  
 Gurdjiev, Georgiy Ivanovich, 129
- H**  
 Hall, Anmer (A.B. Horne), 118  
 Hartland, Steve, 94  
 Hennessey, Katherine, 179  
 Hennessey, Robert (Bob), 183, 185  
 Hilar, Karel Hugo, 153–155, 169, 170  
 Hirschfeld, Magnus, 200  
 Hitler, Adolf, 79  
 Hobson, Bulmer, 18, 23, 48, 112, 117, 122, 211  
 Hogan, Robert, 50, 115  
 Holloway, Joseph, 63, 163  
 Hollywood, 9, 10, 108, 123–127, 132, 134, 135, 175, 177, 181, 189, 190  
 Hughes, Isa, 156  
 Hull, E.M., 191  
 Hutchinson, Josephine, 213  
 Hyde, Douglas, 31, 36, 49, 50  
 Hynes, Garry, 40
- I**  
 Ibáñez, Vicente Blasco, 10, 180, 190  
 Ibsen, Henrik, 1, 2, 56, 62, 78, 95, 118, 146, 208  
 Institute of Contemporary Arts (I.C.A.), 130  
 Isherwood, Christopher, 200
- J**  
 Jackson, Anthony, 118  
 Jacob, Rosamond, 93  
 Jellett, Bay, 149  
 Jenkinson, Biddy, 38  
 Johnston, Denis, 2, 3, 28, 57, 59, 93, 113–115, 150, 170, 213  
 Jolson's 59th Street Theatre, 153  
 Jones, Inigo, 130  
 Joyce, James, 29
- K**  
 Kaiser, Georg, 2, 3, 113, 118, 126, 127, 131  
 Kao, Wei H., 6  
 Keane, John B., 26, 32  
 Keeley, Christine, 187  
 Keel, Howard, 190  
 Kernoff, Harry, 93  
 Kerrigan, J.M., 126  
 Kettle, Tom, 176  
 Kiernan, L., 165, 166  
 Kilroy, Thomas, 29, 30  
 King, Jason, 6  
 Knoblock, Edward, 10, 176, 177, 190  
 Knowles, Ric, 77, 95  
 Komporaly, Jozefina, 112, 118, 123  
 Kracauer, Siegfried, 207, 212  
 Kurdi, Mária, 4
- L**  
 Lally, Des, 76, 83  
 Lambert, Constant, 119  
 Large, Muriel, 132  
 Laverty, Maura, 3, 22  
 Leeney, Cathy, 3, 11, 22, 32, 218, 220  
 Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan, 79, 93  
 Le Gallienne, Eva, 211, 213  
 Lei, Daphne P., 77  
 Leipziger Schauspielhaus, 195  
 Leonard, Harold, 124  
 Leonard, Hugh, 29

- Levitas, Ben, 3, 116  
 Lila Field Academy, 119  
 London Pavilion (variety theatre), 111, 124  
 Lonergan, Patrick, 6, 76  
 Longford, Christine Lady, 2, 4, 5, 11, 21, 93, 217–234  
 Longford, Edward Lord, 2, 4, 34, 48, 59, 60, 79, 93, 217, 218, 220, 224  
 Longford Productions, 93, 94, 218  
 Love, Heather, 212  
 Lowe-Porter, H.T., 63  
 Luddy, Maria, 227  
 Luke, Peter, 16, 17, 48, 134, 141, 170  
 Lynch, Florrie, 188  
 Lyons, F.S.L., 231
- M**  
 Mac Anna (MacAnna), Tomás, 30, 38, 39  
 Macardle, Dorothy, 21, 134  
 MacGill, Moyna, 126  
 MacIntyre, Tom, 40  
 Macken, Walter, 37, 162  
 mac Liammóir, Micheál, 1–11, 15–20, 24–27, 29–43, 47, 48, 56–60, 63, 65–67, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82–87, 90, 93, 94, 96, 108, 114–120, 122, 141–143, 146, 149, 160–162, 165, 167, 170, 176–180, 183–191, 193, 194, 200, 203, 205, 208, 209, 211, 218  
 MacNamara, Brinsley, 166  
 Macnas, 40  
 MacCollum, Barry, 126  
 MacWhite, Michael, 51, 67  
 Madden, Tom, 83, 96  
 Makepeace, Margaret, 95  
 Malone, Andrew E., 113  
 Mandel, Vera, 113  
 Mandy, W.J.K. (Jimmy), 10, 193, 194, 200, 201  
 Mangan, Henry Connell, 50  
 Manning, Mary, 2–4, 19, 21, 188, 201, 211  
 Mann, Thomas, 127, 128  
 Marford, Charles, 149  
 Marshall, Norman, 111, 112, 119, 123, 124, 128, 132–134  
 Marshall, William, 94  
 Martyn, Edward, 31, 176  
 Mason, Patrick, 40  
 Mather, Aubrey, 126  
 May, Frederick, 179  
 McCall, Seumas, 56  
 McEwen (MacEwen), Molly, 22, 160  
 McFadden, Elizabeth, 93  
 McGuinness, Frank, 4  
 McGuinness, Norah, 93  
 McIvor, Charlotte, 6, 77, 78, 95  
 McKenna, Siobhán, 29, 65, 162  
 McMaster, Anew, 17, 29, 80, 87, 90  
 McMaster, Mary Rose, 87  
 McPherson, Conor, 38  
 Melzer, Margarete, 196, 213  
 Merejkowski, Dmitri, 59  
 Metropolitan School of Art, Dublin, 92, 93, 98  
 Millar, Joseph, 146  
 Minnelli, Vincente, 190  
 Mitra, Royona, 77, 95  
 Molesworth Hall, 50, 56  
 Molière, 55, 58  
 Mollison, William, 122  
 Molloy, M.J., 26  
 Monks, Aoife, 188, 189  
 Monson, Cecil, 188  
 Montgomery, Niall, 156  
 Mooney, Ria, 4, 21, 202, 210–214  
 Moore, Meriel, 87, 160  
 Morash, Christopher, 3, 116, 118  
 Morris, George, 126, 127  
 Motley, 16, 20, 21, 193, 200, 201  
 Murnau, F.W., 180, 191, 207, 208

- Murphy, James, 149  
 Murphy, Tom, 40  
 Murray, Christopher, 116  
 Murray, T.C., 58  
 Myers, Henry, 55
- N**  
 na gCopaleen, Myles/Flann O'Brien (Brian O'Nolan), 10, 153, 154, 156–167, 169, 170  
 Na hAisteoirí, 54  
 Nakase, Justine, 77, 95  
 Nance, Susan, 183  
 Napier, Alan, 126  
 National Players' Society (NPS), 50, 66  
 National Theatre, Brno, 153, 170  
 National Theatre, Prague, 142–144, 146, 151, 153–155, 167–170  
 Nazimova, Alla, 180, 190, 213  
 Negga, Ruth, 94  
 New Watergate Productions, 132  
 Nezval, Vítězslav, 151  
 Niblo, Fred, 190  
 Nicol, Maurice, 129  
 Ní Ghráda, Mairéad, 38  
 Nordisk Film, 52
- O**  
 Ó Briain, Liam, 18  
 O'Casey, Sean, 35, 61, 113, 116, 225  
 Ó Ceallaigh, Tomás, 54  
 O'Connor, Frank, 58, 61  
 O'Dea, Jimmy, 90  
 O'Dowd, Ciara, 212, 213  
 Ó Drisceoil, Donal, 219, 220, 224  
 Ó Duinn, Seán, 51, 53, 67  
 O'Flaherty, Liam, 54, 60  
 Ó Floinn, Críostóir, 43  
 Ó hAodha, Micheál, 7, 35, 63, 66, 76, 80, 83, 84, 87, 233  
 O'Keeffe, Máire, 83  
 Old Vic Theatre, 17, 126
- O'Leary, Philip, 2, 35, 36, 38, 42, 43, 49, 51, 55  
 Ó Lochlainn, Gearóid, 1, 5, 7, 8, 47–68, 116, 146  
 O'Neill, Eugene, 1–3, 41, 57, 117, 118, 133, 134  
 Opelík, Jiří, 163, 170  
 O'Reilly, Sheila, 94  
 Orion Productions, 29  
 Ó Siadhail, Pádraig, 8, 32, 47, 49, 55, 65, 168  
 Ó Siochfhradha, Mícheál, 61  
 Ó Tuairisc, Eoghan, 39
- P**  
 Partridge, James, 169  
 Peacock Theatre, 17, 23, 57, 60–62, 112, 113, 117, 119, 146, 147  
 Pearse, Patrick, 36, 38, 49  
 Penrose, Roland, 130  
 Philmus, Robert, 144, 146, 168, 169  
 Picasso, Pablo, 130  
 Pike Theatre, 8, 48, 64, 65, 67  
 Pilcher, Velona, 9, 107–111, 116, 119–124, 126, 128–135  
 Pilkington, Lionel, 65, 225  
 Pine, Richard, 2, 17, 30, 41, 48, 83, 87, 122, 206  
 Pirandello, Luigi, 29  
 Playfair, Nigel, 122, 144, 145, 148, 153, 154, 156, 158  
 Potter, Maureen, 90  
 Pratt, William, 108, 117  
 Price, Vincent, 126  
 Provincetown Playhouse, 134  
 Purcell, Noel, 90
- Q**  
 Queen's Theatre, Dublin, 50, 65  
 Quinn, Máire T., 50
- R**  
 Raidió Éireann, 115

- Rambova, Natacha, 180  
 Rawlings, Margaret, 119  
 Ray, Man, 127  
 Read, Herbert, 130  
 realism, 7, 15, 16, 19, 20, 23–25, 27,  
     28, 31, 33–39, 41, 209  
 Recke, Adolph von der, 55  
 Regent's Theatre, 154, 169  
 Reynolds, Paige, 3  
 Rice, Elmer, 2, 3, 118  
 Richards, Shelah, 21  
 Ridler, Anne, 131  
 Ritzer, George, 5, 6  
 Roach-Higgins, Mary Ellen, 183  
 Robinson, Lennox, 35, 125, 219  
 Roisman Cooper, Barbara, 135  
 Romaine, Jules, 125, 126  
 Romelli, Rita, 213, 214  
 Rowell, George, 17, 118  
 Royalty Theatre, 114, 125  
 RTÉ, 7, 30  
 Rubinstein, Harold F., 135
- S**  
 Sagan, Leontine, 195, 196, 200  
 Said, Edward, 78  
 Salkeld, Cecil, 93  
 Sampson, Patrick, 26  
 Sarr, Kenneth, 62  
 Schiller, Friedrich, 195  
 Schnitzler, Arthur, 55  
 Schrödinger, Erwin, 156  
 Sears, David, 21, 57, 60  
 Selver, Paul, 144, 145, 149, 153, 154,  
     158, 168  
 Shakespeare, William, 2, 17, 24, 25,  
     27, 29, 35, 60, 64, 94, 157, 158,  
     208  
 Sharp-Bolster, Anita, 124, 134  
 Shaw, G.B., 4, 18, 25, 29, 93, 95,  
     121, 125  
 Sheehy Skeffington, Hannah, 223  
 Sheehy Skeffington, Owen, 201  
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 35  
 Shields, Arthur, 113  
 Shih-I, Hsiung, 94  
 Shukla, Pravina, 183, 188  
 Sierra, Martínez, 2, 60  
 Simpson, Alan, 64, 67  
 Sisson, Elaine, 8, 10, 56, 66, 92, 93,  
     98, 113, 115, 119, 133, 175,  
     190  
 Skinner, Otis, 177, 178  
 Spencer, Charles N., 111, 123, 126,  
     134  
 Sprigge, Elizabeth, 109, 110, 119,  
     120, 123, 128–132, 134  
 Stafford, T.H., 60  
 Stanton-Hughes, Blair, 120  
 St. Denis, Michel, 130  
 Stejskal, Bohuš, 153  
 St. John's Wood Anglo-French Arts  
     Centre, 129, 130  
 St. Martin's Theatre, 142, 168  
 Strindberg, August, 2, 79  
 Stürzer, Anne, 194, 195, 213  
 Sweeney, Maxwell, 93, 94, 226, 232  
 Sweney, Matthew, 155, 157, 158,  
     162, 170  
 Swift, Carolyn, 64, 67  
 Synge, John Millington, 6, 35, 38, 50
- T**  
 Taibhdhearc, An, 18, 32, 37, 42,  
     56–58, 64, 162  
 Tapper, Molly, 149  
 Teige, Karel, 151  
 Teo, Hsu-Ming, 181, 191  
 Terry, Dame Ellen, 123, 129  
 Thameside Productions, 131  
 Theater in der Stresemannstrasse, 200  
 Theatre Guild, 168  
 Theatre Royal, Dublin, 56, 177, 178  
 Thiele, Herta, 195  
 Thompson, Sam, 25, 26  
 Toller, Ernst, 113, 114  
 Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich, 2, 55

- Tracy, Robert, 157, 163, 166, 169, 170  
 Trewin, J.C., 111, 112, 135  
 Trewin, Wendy, 135  
 Turgenev, Ivan Sergeyevich, 35  
 Turner, Patricia, 96  
 Tutaev, David, 129, 130
- U**  
 Underwood, Leon, 120
- V**  
 Valentino, Rudolph, 180, 181, 190, 191  
 van den Beuken, Ruud, 1, 4, 12, 76, 170, 229  
 Veness, Molly, 109, 126  
 Voltaire, 195
- W**  
 Walshe, Éibhear, 3, 83  
 Walsh, Enda, 40  
 Walsh, Ian R., 1, 7, 39, 41, 117, 170, 208, 221, 223  
 Watergate Theatre Club, 9, 108, 124, 128–132, 135
- Watt, Robert, 55  
 Welles, Orson, 179  
 Westminster Theatre, 118  
 Whale, James, 18  
 Wheatley, Alan, 129  
 Whelan, Feargal, 76  
 Wieck, Dorothea, 196, 213  
 Wilde, Oscar, 3, 7, 10, 18, 79, 83, 119, 180, 183, 188, 190, 211  
 Wilder, Thornton, 26, 28  
 Williams, Tennessee, 64  
 Wills, Clair, 221, 222, 225, 231  
 Wilton, Tamsin, 211  
 Winsloe, Christa, 10, 11, 193–196, 198, 201, 204, 205, 209–211, 213  
 Winter, J., 160  
 Women's Social and Progressive League (WSPL), 221, 223  
 Wood, Ian, 219, 222, 224  
 Woods, Vincent, 40  
 W.P.A. Federal Theatre, 124  
 Wright, Robert, 190
- Y**  
 Yeats, W.B., 6, 29, 31, 35, 36, 50, 83, 113, 119, 176  
 Young, Loretta, 178