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"To Have Lived is Not Enough for Them:"

Performing Irish History in the Twentieth Century

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Drama and Theatre

by

Michael Perin Jaros

Committee in charge:

Professor Marianne McDonald, Chair
Professor Stephen Barker
Professor James Carmody
Professor John Rouse
Professor Donald Wesling

2008

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University of California, San Diego

University of California, Irvine

2008

DEDICATION

To my parents, Joe and Carolyn,
and to my Grandmother, Mary-Jo,
without whose love and support
I could not have made it here.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"To Have Lived is Not Enough for Them:"

Performing Irish History in the Twentieth Century

by

Michael Perin Jaros

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Theatre

University of California, San Diego, 2008

University of California, Irvine, 2008

Professor Marianne McDonald, Chair

This dissertation addresses the need in contemporary Irish theatre scholarship for a more elastic examination of how history has been performed in Irish culture in the twentieth century. Combining methodological and theoretical approaches from the fields of Irish cultural studies, anthropology, performance studies and theatre history, this study offers a unique approach to analyzing how the past has been performed, challenged, and reinterpreted in various forms of performance, including funerals, parades, and traditional theatre.

Beginning with an analysis of the common ways the canonical figures William Butler Yeats and Samuel Beckett thought of history and then envisioned it in performance, the project then widens its scope to consider how abstract narratives of Irish history predicated on failure were solidified in the performing body of the Irish

actor Micheál MacLiammóir, who combined the tragic falls of the Irish Patriot Robert Emmet and Oscar Wilde with his own nostalgic style of performance. From there the work examines several performance events which occurred at moments of historical crisis in Ireland, including the 1898 Wolfe Tone commemorations and President Eamon de Valera's funeral in 1977. I examine how the history these events told was itself challenged and revised in actual theatrical pieces by Lady Augusta Gregory, Denis Johnston, and Thomas Kilroy (authors often sidelined in histories of Irish theatre).

The work thus seeks to show that the Irish theatre existed as one strand in a dense web of interrelated forms of performance. When the theatre itself sought to perform history, the relationships between the various ways culture was imagined through performance become all the more apparent. Each chapter therefore traces how different understandings of historical reality were imagined and contested theatrically.

Introduction

but the brick walls
of this sagging district, against which
it alerts me to knock my head.

With a scruffy nineteenth century
history of half-finished
colonials and upstarts. Still with us. (1)

Thomas Kinsella, "One fond Embrace," 1994

VLADIMIR. To have lived is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON. They have to talk about it.
VLADIMIR. To be dead is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON. It is not sufficient. (58)

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 1955

I began this dissertation with a single, substantial question: how have debates about the past figured so heavily in imagining Irish culture in the twentieth century? Even as Ireland as a county has moved into the twenty-*first* century, with its cosmopolitan, European capital, its per capita income equal to that of Great Britain, and the Good Friday Agreement in place in Northern Ireland, the past's place in the present remains a hotbed of contention. The "memory of the dead," John Kells Ingram's nineteenth-century Irish ballad, was sung at the beginning of the twentieth century to remind those living of the obligation they owed to the nationalist past. "Lest we forget" was a clarion call to remember a largely unwritten history long before it became a favored slogan in the sectarian murals of West Belfast.

1996 was the year that the Good Friday Agreement was signed—possibly signaling the end of a bitter, sectarian conflict which had raged since the partition of the

country in 1922—and also the date that the per-capita income of the Republic equaled that of the former Imperial power. "For the first time in recorded Irish history," Fintan O'Toole notes, "it became possible to understand the Republic of Ireland without reference to Great Britain" (*Ex-Isle* 11). If Great Britain could no longer be regarded as the defining force in the Irish cultural imagination, was the end of history at hand? How now would Irish culture define itself? Or, in a globalized country with a surge of immigrants as opposed to emigrants, could one even speak of "Irish identity" without being labeled as hopelessly backward or unsophisticated?

Positioned at the beginning of the twenty first century, and looking on Irish culture as an American scholar of theatre and performance, it is not my intention to speak to any notion of an exclusive Irish identity based on any one reading of history. My focus here is instead on how Irish history has been performed in a series of presents, from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s, to represent vastly different things. Poet Thomas Kinsella's notion of a "history of half-finished colonials and upstarts," who are "still with us," is a particularly useful concept, as it calls attention to the fragmentary nature of historical experience: "half finished" objects (buildings, monuments, or the bodies of actors) bear witness to a palimpsest of historical narratives (from colonials to revolutionary upstarts) that continue to haunt the present. The sheer volume of theatre in 1990s Ireland that dealt with the immediate or distant past is staggering. Marina Carr's *Portia Coglan* (1996), Sebastian Barry's *The Steward of Christendom* (1995), and Connor McPherson's *The Weir* (1997) were just a few of the plays that featured literal or figurative specters returned to stalk Celtic Tiger Ireland. In 2006, the city center of Dublin saw rioting when a Loyalist parade marched through downtown to commemorate

the victims of Republican violence in Northern Ireland, choosing to march from the Garden of Remembrance in North Dublin and past the General Post Office (GPO) in O'Connell St., both central spaces within the Republican memorial iconography of the capital.[1] This briefest of summaries provides some measure of the importance representations of the past continue to play in Irish performance, even at the present moment of cultural crisis.

In 1999, however, Irish playwright Declan Hughes, one of the more progressive voices in the contemporary Irish theatre, assaulted what he saw as the "mindless worship of the past" in contemporary theatre work. He urged the Irish theatre to reinvent itself for the future. Identity, he claimed, "must be constantly reinvented: like theatre, made new every day" (9). Nostalgia for a vanished time was the "Irish disease." Hughes's claim that addressing the past in performance should be abandoned—that the past represents a miasma within Irish culture—is the idea against which the present study positions itself: what all the varied forms of performance I chart here have in common is a profound concern with the relationship between the past and the present, specifically how certain readings of the past shape subjects in the present. Instead of being mindless, I argue that such performances of history are instead quite mindful of the tenuous relationship between past events and present notions of identity. To rephrase Hughes, the past, like theatre, is constantly being reinvented in the present.

This disparaged idea of nostalgia is a consistent theme in the five chapters that follow. Although traditionally viewed as a conservative force (as Hughes himself sees

[1] The Garden of Remembrance commemorates those who died in the Anglo-Irish war from 1916 to 1922. The GPO is where the Easter Rising began in 1916 when members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood declared an Irish Republic. 2006 was also the ninetieth anniversary of the Rising.

it), recent scholarship points to its potential as a critical term. "Nostalgia, Svetlana Boym notes, "inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals" (xiv). Its force, however, is not always restorative, in the sense of attempting to go backwards to a previously lost golden age. Boym's landmark work, *The Future of Nostalgia,* in fact divides the term into two conceptually related fields:

> Here two kinds of nostalgia are distinguished: the restorative and the reflective. Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia,* the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt. (xvii)

Not all of the performances I analyze here could be defined outright as nostalgic according to either definition, but each in some way addresses ideas associated with Boym's second term, reflective nostalgia. All in some way react to the fragmentary nature of modern life (modernity) by turning to certain visions of the past, even if those writing or performing do not actually believe in the possibility of such a past ever returning, or even believe in the separate existence of a "past" at all. Performance opens up a space of doubt: its emphasis on seeming to be something that it is not and its dependence on popular (audience) reception inevitably results in a complex set of meanings which challenge any singular truth, any singular reading or interpretation. In *Performing History,* Freddie Rokem discusses the complex effects that staging the past theatrically has upon our understandings of history. Performance has an uncanny ability

to reveal "complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities and subjectivities and power structures […]" (8). The performances I document here attempt to come to terms with various contradictions and failures within the perceived Irish historical record. I use the term "perceived" because the various readings of history presented here are quite different from one another, and the history they both perceive and then perform is constantly mediated by the presents within which these figures moved.

My selection of these figures and the cultural moments within which they operated is intentionally eclectic. Many of the versions of Irish theatre history written over the last fifty years have been little more than chronologies, featuring either literary analyses of individual playwrights or brief descriptions of productions and historical contexts, mostly at the National (Abbey) Theatre, the company founded by William Butler Yeats, Edward Martyn and Lady Augusta Gregory in 1901. Many of these works use that date to mark an almost biblical beginning of theatrical performance in Ireland.[2] In a review of recent developments in Irish theatre historiography, Lionel Pilkington notes that a move is now underway to dismantle this patrician chronology of Irish theatre, "Yeats and Gregory's view that that Irish Literary Theatre arose *ab nihilo* […]," and to consider forms of performance outside the dominant, naturalistic forms of representation which the Abbey made its trademark style. He also points to the importance of incorporating forms of performance outside of the actual theatre itself, such as "mumming, pageantry, processions [and] political demonstrations" ("Recent

[2] Recent notable exceptions include Pilkington's *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland,* Morash's *A History of Irish Theatre,* and Greene's *The Politics of Irish Drama,* all referenced here.

Developments" 725) for establishing a broader framework for the analysis of performance in Irish culture. Most recently, Mary Trotter's *Ireland's National Theatres; Political Performance and the Irish National Dramatic Movement* (2003) has gone the furthest to expand the field to include such performances, using the performance theories of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner to inform her analysis of how pageantry, parades and theatrical performances intersected to embody varied and often oppositional ideas of the Irish nation at the turn of the century. Pilkington, however, offers an important criticism of his own work and Trotter's, claiming that both still assume a certain attitude towards history that is teleological and evolutionary, playing down "forms of expression that seem at odds with Ireland's modernization project, or seem to mix the modern and the pre-modern in radical and unfamiliar ways." What is still needed, he maintains, is a "cultural history of Ireland that accounts for Irish theatre's complex relationship to colonialism and modernity" (728-29).

One of this study's primary goals is to suggest how such a cultural history might be written. The vexed relationship between various pasts (including, among others, the colonial legacy of Ireland) and modernity is, as a result, one of its principal subjects. It includes examinations not just of the traditional theatre, but of memorial statuary, urban planning, nationalist parades, and funerals; it investigates how accepted notions of history were revised not only in onstage, theatrical performance, but offstage in the streets, within the frame of the television screen, and even within the bodies of actors. By examining the interrelationship between the traditional theatre and various other forms of performance, I hope to build what Joseph Roach has termed a "genealogy of performance." Conceiving of history as a genealogy challenges linear, teleological

understandings of history; such understandings replace conceptions of a stable past with the idea of a palimpsest of fragmentary narratives, "documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (Foucault 76). The palimpsest returns again and again as a theme in the performances I examine here. Applying such understandings of historical narrative to performance, Roach maintains, genealogies both "document—and suspect — the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations" (25). Such documentation, therefore, never assumes a unified, stable history will result from the analysis. Each chapter here, then, takes its own, unique approach to examining how history was thought in a series of presents.

The first chapter, "Among the Deepening Shades," examines the similarities in Samuel Beckett and William Butler Yeats's readings of Irish history as a narrative dependent for meaning on ideas of loneliness and failure. The work of each dramatist enunciates a longing for either a stable Irish history (Yeats) or personal memories of things Irish (Beckett) that inevitably fails to arrive and make whole a culture or subject. The idea of a failed history has a long tradition within Irish literature and culture, and many of Yeats's and Beckett's theatrical efforts represent a complicated attempt to stage these sentiments. Within their theatrical works, each explores a state of solitude which results from these failures, of being alone amidst the ruins of history or memory. The concept of the ruin becomes a central metaphor for both history and memory in the chapter, specifically as seen in the work of Walter Benjamin, who posits that the ruin stands as an allegory for the fragmentary nature of historical experience. I suggest, ultimately, that the figures Yeats and Beckett place onstage are themselves embodied ruins whose various narratives about failure and aloneness haunt the onstage figures, but

fail to make them into whole, historical subjects. Inasmuch as they can both be described as Irish, their Irishness is located in a profound sense of reflective nostalgia that remains, ultimately, unresolved. In the case of Yeats, this results in a tragic vision of the historical process. For Beckett, the failure of memory results in the destruction of the subject itself.

The Irish actor Micheál MacLíammóir is the enigmatic subject of the second chapter. I chart how he successfully performed a nostalgic version of Irish history both on and offstage for over half a century. Born an Englishman, MacLíammóir invented an Irish identity for himself, including an ancestry and a name; he learned, wrote, and then acted in plays in Irish. Focusing on his two most famous (and most remembered) stage-roles, as the nineteenth-century Irish patriot Robert Emmet and the poet, author and dramatist Oscar Wilde, I examine how MacLíammóir attempted to fuse the memory of the two men together in his performances, and subsequently sought to replace each man in the Irish cultural imagination. In his own performed history, the two men stood as markers of "brilliant failure," which Wilde himself had once told Yeats was the defining feature of the great figures within the Irish cultural tradition. MacLíammóir used the martyr-cult of Irish republican nationalism, with its long tradition of speeches from the dock after failed rebellions (Emmet's 1803 speech ranks among the most famous) as his performance script to accomplish these goals. He applied the messianic republican vision of history—as a tradition of failure, consecrated in blood, which always looked toward some resolution in the future tense, to the "nation once again"—to his own work to rehabilitate Oscar Wilde's reputation in the eyes of both Ireland and the world. Finally, I focus on how MacLíammóir was himself remembered in a 2002 play at the Gate Theatre,

the company he and his partner Hilton Edwards had founded and then ran until their deaths in the 1970s.

Chapter three examines how memorial spaces become contested sites within the public imagination, specifically focusing on how live performances, both on and offstage, challenge the concrete understandings of history that memorial spaces (especially statues) purportedly hold in place. Central to this examination is the 1898 centenary of the 1798 Rising, which culminated in a gigantic memorial procession through the center of Dublin to plant a foundation stone for a statue to Wolfe Tone, leader of the 1798 Rising, in St. Stephen's Green in central Dublin. I argue that popular forms of performance fed Lady Augusta' Gregory's own personal anxieties, as a director of the Abbey Theatre, about controlling the cultural representations of Ireland through performance. Her relatively unexamined 1909 play *The Image,* which features a Western Irish community resolving to build a statue to a man who never existed, expressed these anxieties in the more reassuring cultural space of her own theatre. The play was written in the aftermath of the failure of the Tone commemorations to subsequently produce an actual statue for the site, as well as the riots at the Abbey over J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907. As a result of these events, I maintain that Gregory became somewhat paranoid about how history could be presented in performance; *the Image* depicts the failure of a singular narrative of Irish history to arrive.

The fourth chapter examines the historical identity crisis which emerged immediately after Irish independence in the 1920s, centering on the production and reception of Denis Johnston's 1929 play, *The Old Lady Says 'No!'* I investigate how Johnston's use of expressionist theatrical technique sought to challenge fundamental

conceptions of history at this particular moment of crisis in Irish culture, as Ireland moved from colony to postcolonial state. Through Johnston's own understanding of history, which I term nostalgic modernism, I examine the various ways that the text and its performance staged the city and its various memorial spaces, allowing a multitude of different narratives to speak to various histories of the disenfranchised and dispossessed. In doing so, Johnston hoped that he could create, via avant-garde theatrical technique, a new national theatrical form which could speak to the turbulent state of Ireland in the 1920s. Although he failed to do so in his own time, he became a strong influence on subsequent, experimental playwrights such as Tom Kilroy.

Television has had profound effects on live performance in Ireland, specifically with regard to how events are remembered, and this becomes the focus of the final chapter. It examines how the 1975 funeral of the last surviving leader of the 1916 Rising and one of the most famous, influential Irishmen of the twentieth century, Eamon de Valera, was experienced as both live performance and televised repetition. This "boxed" performance is then compared to Thomas Kilroy's own play *Talbot's Box* (1977), which focuses on the various competing historical narratives coalesce around the figure of the early twentieth-century Catholic mystic Matt Talbot, whom I argue is a conceptual stand-in for de Valera. Kilroy dissents against the dominant representative frame of televised naturalism, using avant-garde theatrical technique to bring the powers behind how events are remembered into sharp relief.

Each chapter suggests that performance offers various possibilities for re-imagining how history is thought. Certainly, these realizations are not necessarily specific to Irish cultural contexts, but I find that they are a welcome addition to the

largely chronological way in which Irish theatre history is often examined, and how the Irish past is in general discussed. The reception of various parts of this dissertation at conferences in both theatrical and Irish studies convinces me that there is a substantial demand for this type of work. This project represents only one of the first steps in such an endeavor. A critical understanding of the ways in which history is fashioned to serve the present (especially through performance) seems all the more important in contemporary Ireland, where the various legacies of the past have met the homogenizing effects of global capitalism and a financially lucrative tourist industry.

Chapter 1

Among the Deepening Shades:

Loneliness and Failure in the Theatrical Works of Yeats and Beckett

When we search our own experience of life and letters how many stand solidly? At the moment I but recall four or five intimate friends…and the half symbolic image of Jonathan Swift…I think of these men born of our Irish solitude, of their curiosity, their rich discourse, their explosive passion, their sense of mystery as they grew old. (qtd. in Smith 92)

Samuel Beckett, Letter to Thomas McGreevy

We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.
(*Selected Poetry* 215)

William Butler Yeats, "The Statues"

It seems fitting to begin such a potentially problematic comparison of two playwrights whose work seems so drastically divergent in both aesthetic and socio-cultural contexts with a claim to identity based on a backward look towards a mysterious, mythical history. *The Backward Look* was the title Frank O'Connor gave to his 1967 survey of Irish literature, and thinking about Irish writing, including writing for the theatre, as an exploration of the past tense certainly has merit. Despite the aesthetic gulf between Samuel Beckett and William Butler Yeats, a gulf represented by their own personal and aesthetic beliefs as well as by some of the more traumatic events of the twentieth century in both Ireland and abroad, both here make some appeal to a deep history tinged with a certain amount of nostalgia. "*Our* Irish solitude," "*We* Irish:" these inclusive terms, which both site what a skeptic of national polity might call the accident

of each man's birth, *do* call upon a culturally specific idea of loneliness (Beckett) or withdrawal (Yeats) in the face of the failures of history. Beckett was certainly skeptical of any notion of an Irish nation or Irish nationality, despite the fact that he held onto his Irish passport throughout his life. His oft-quoted homage to W.B. Yeats's younger brother, his friend the painter Jack Yeats, seemed to verify this skeptical stance and still stands as an admonition against any potential surveyors of the depths of Beckett's Irish identity: "the artist who stakes his being is from nowhere, and he has no kin" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 148). When a scholar once asked him what he thought of Yeats, Beckett—after said scholar clarified that he was not asking about the painter, but about his more famous brother—merely responded that W.B. had gone after "all the wrong things in Irish life" (qtd. in Armstrong 32).

If Ireland was more than an accident of birth for Beckett, what was it to be Irish? Furthermore, what was "our Irish solitude," or "Irish life?" Were the terms deployed casually, or uncritically? How might these ideas compare to Yeats's poetically proclaimed retreat from the "filthy modern tide" of contemporary Irish history? Such potentially essentialist questions certainly skirt the bounds of cultural or critical naiveté, and are at least partially answered—or confounded—by Declan Kiberd's cryptic suggestion that Beckett was the first "truly Irish playwright, because the first utterly free of factitious notions of Irishness" (*Inventing Ireland* 531). If Irishness becomes, as it is in Kiberd's post-colonial framework, a critical way of seeing, then how is that way of seeing related to historical narrative, to our ways of seeing history? These are the questions this chapter proposes to unravel, focusing primarily on how both history (narratives by which collective groups of people make sense of the past beyond the range

of living memory) and memory (details of a past that are personally recalled by individuals) were understood, challenged—and in some cases erased—in performance. Jonathan Swift, the eighteenth-century satirist and Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, who ended his life alone and delusional, becomes for Beckett a historical exemplar of the latter's own aesthetic loneliness, itself enforced by an imaginative topography—"our Irish solitude"—which figures so largely in his own prose and stage works. For Beckett, who left Ireland in his twenties to live for most of the remainder of his life in France, Ireland became a palimpsest of fragmentary memories, all of which are *lonely*: the physical landscape evoked (evacuated, solitary) becomes a leitmotif for an aesthetic profoundly concerned with solitude. A series of fragmented experiences never add up to an integral whole, and never produce a subject with intact memories. If historical failure can be read in the Irish landscape (evacuated, solitary landscapes are often the result of traumatic periods in Irish history, such as the Cromwellian invasion, the Great Famine and wholesale land-evictions), Beckett distills this external failure within an individual subject on an ontological level. History becomes personal memory, which for Beckett is a necessary, yet futile habit: we possess a habit for remembering, yet we most often *fail* to remember, in our efforts to stave off the cancer of time.[1] Without these memories adding up to a recognizable whole, the subject fails, finally, to *be* one.

Irish history, Seamus Deane notes, is predicated on a similar rehearsal of failure by certain players (authors, politicians, intellectuals, rebels): "discontinuity is rehearsed within the confines of a body of work," he maintains, "but the central interpretive

[1] On habit, Beckett specifically writes: "Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities, the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightening conductor of his existence" (*Proust* 8).

strategy is that they all, after a career of action or writing in which they consolidate some aspect of the Irish experience, even to the extent of suddenly making it appear comprehensible, should have a tragic fall" (Deane 165). No one, Deane notes, was more conscious of this than Yeats. His concern with failure (specifically, his self-proclaimed failure to consolidate and enunciate the Irish experience as he saw it) and a resulting retreat into an aesthetic of profound loneliness is itself distilled in this last stanza of "The Statues." This failure becomes heroic and tragic, at once historically situated and profoundly personal. This stanza, in one of Yeats's most famous (and last) poems, begins with the communal invocation of "we Irish," George (Bishop) Berkeley's famous eighteenth-century assertion of Anglo-Irish identity in the face of British imperial interests: "We Irish think otherwise."[2] The Anglo-Irish (also referred to as the Ascendancy), the Protestant class to which both Beckett and Yeats belonged, had ruled Ireland for the English for centuries, but the class was in its final death throes in Yeats' time, its legitimacy challenged by the increasingly assertive and now politically empowered Catholic, bourgeois majority. As a self-identifying member of that vanishing class, Yeats cast a backward look towards the "proper dark" of a nostalgic golden age for Ireland. In the introduction to his play *The Words Upon the Window Pane,* which staged the invasion of a contemporary séance by the Dean's recalcitrant ghost, he called Swift and Berkeley's era the "one Irish century that escaped from darkness and confusion" (*Collected Works* 708). Multiple scholars have noted that a pantheon of 18th century Ascendancy heroes became the lodestone for Yeats' own self-fashioning as their

[2] An excellent discussion of the implications of George Berkeley's philosophies for Irish identity (including Yeats' appropriation of them) can be found in Richard Kearney's chapter entitled "George Berkeley: We Irish Think Otherwise" (Kearney 145-156).

aesthetic and intellectual heir and representative in a fallen, postcolonial Ireland.[3] In a similar aesthetic feint, although much less directly, Lucky's great monologue in *Waiting for Godot* registers a similar loss: by dating the "dead loss per caput since the death of Bishop Berkeley" within an absurd, empirical framework "being to the tune of one inch four ounce per head approximately" (Beckett, *Complete Dramatic Works* 43), Lucky presents us with the word-shit of a history of failures.

It is within performance that Beckett and Yeats most powerfully refine these ideas of failure and loneliness, embodying them in their own actions, stage-characters or—in Beckett's case—fragments of characters, and using Irish topography and history as a palimpsestic backdrop. Freddie Rokem has amply demonstrated how "performing history" has the capacity to both reflect and interrogate "complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities, subjectivities and power structures" (8). If "Irishness" has a common meaning to both authors, it is located within a complicated anxiety between the need—or longing—for both a stable history and memory, the repeated attempts to achieve that stability, and finally the failure inherent in both of these concepts within an Irish cultural context. The stage, a space of seeming, of appearances, and of repetition, becomes an ideal place to explore this complicated theme.

Yeats had attempted to involve himself directly in what he saw as the historical destiny of Ireland on a series of fronts: as poet, as director of the Abbey theatre, and finally as a Senator in the Irish Free State government. Despite winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923 primarily for his poetry, he chose to speak in Sweden of his

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[3] See especially McCormack, as well as Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals* (Salem, NC: Wake Forrest University Press, 1985).

activities at the Abbey theatre. It was clear that he considered his work there as a more direct intervention in the life of the nation that the poetry for which he would primarily be known. His ambitions were enshrined in the founding documents of the Abbey, which he, Edward Martyn and Lady Augusta Gregory had founded as a testing ground for the thoughts and emotions of the developing Irish nation, proving the country to be "not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, but of an ancient idealism" (qtd. in Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* 9). Yeats did want to generate a public forum for such concerns, although what he deemed to be of concern moved in and out of fashion with his primarily Catholic, middle class, and often nationalist audience. *The Countess Cathleen* (1899) showed a Famine-era landlord, one of the most hated figures in the nationalist imagination, offering her soul to the devil in exchange for those of her tenants. Not only was the symbolist dramaturgical style of the piece alien to the Irish audiences which at that point had been weaned on the realistic and melodramatic fare of touring houses such as the Queen's Theatre, but it focused its lens on the Great Famine, year zero for nationalists avidly seeking to blast the British out of Ireland. Furthermore, it staged a heroic, benevolent aristocrat saving Catholic tenants from starvation and eviction, more than most of his audience, involved as they were in the growing nationalist revival, were willing to accept as plausible history. Yeats, however, seemed to welcome the controversy, generating debate around the play in local papers before it even opened, and casting himself—as he would at multiple times in the future—dualistically as the spokesperson for the "Irish genius" of the Abbey theatre and as a member of the ancient race of his eighteenth-century heroes, who were, like the protagonist of the play, heroic martyrs.

Yeats would, however, coauthor with Lady Gregory a corrective, much more popular nationalist piece in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). Set in the context of the 1798 rebellion against the British, a peasant cottage in Western Ireland is visited by an old woman who claims to have been robbed of her "four beautiful green fields" (the four ancient provinces of Ireland), and rouses the eldest son Michael to action. The old woman then miraculously becomes young again, gaining, "the walk of a queen." As the lights fade, her lines from earlier in the play, "they shall be speaking forever, the people shall hear them forever," float back over the stage and the audience (Yeats, *Cathleen* 11). The play was an overwhelming success: Maud Gonne, the militant nationalist and Yeats' life-long, unrequited love, played the role of the old woman. She even arrived at the theatre late on opening night, entered from the rear already in costume, and walked through the audience to mount the stage. One could not have asked for a better reception; the work was immensely popular, and rapidly entered into what Christopher Morash termed the audience's "sense of its own communal memory" (Morash 123). Yeats, however, was more skeptical about the success of the piece, and would come in time to look back upon the initial performance as a failed intervention on his part in both Gonne's personal life and in the political history of Ireland. In the wake of the subsequent revolution and Civil War, he wrote in "The Man and the Echo:"

> Did that play of mine send out
> Certain men the English shot?
> Did words of mine put too great strain
> On that woman's reeling brain?
> Could my spoken words have checked
> That whereby a house lay wrecked[…]? (11-16)
> (*Selected Poetry* 221)

In the private, poetic form, Yeats dwells upon the actual, performative power his words—uttered from a stage—might in fact have had on history. His attempts, ironically, to intervene, to make history *whole*, have instead resulted in the fragmentary wreck, as he sees it, of the postcolonial Irish Free State.

The Irish writer Seán Ó Faoláin, when asked about Yeats the "national" poet, once quipped that "There *was* no Yeats! I watched him invent himself!" (qtd. in Maddox xiii). This theatrically-charged quote (Yeats was watched, Yeats invented himself) reinforces the fact that the poet's offstage performance certainly was informed by onstage theatrical reception, even when the creations onstage were not his own. Inherent in these actions or inventions was the belief that he was failing: he was losing a battle with history and history-making in the face of the filthy modern tide of contemporary Ireland. The modern reality of the Abbey theatre, he wrote to Lady Gregory, was for him both "a discouragement and a defeat" (*Explorations* 252). Yeats had taken the stage mid-performance to actually rebuke the audience of his own theatre on more than one occasion, the most famous of which was his defense of J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907. When he took to the stage for a second time in 1926, during a riot over Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, he rose "like an ancient Roman senator," the actress Ria Mooney claimed, to berate the audience for its folly:

> I thought you had tired of this, which commenced fifteen years ago. But you have disgraced yourselves again. Is this going to be a recurring celebration of Irish genius? Synge first and then O'Casey. […] Dublin has again rocked the cradle of reputation… (qtd. in Morash 168)

His deportment echoed his own poem "The Seven Sages," in its description of "old men massed against the world." The world of the poem became the disgraceful, plebian mob of the theatre, those with their "leveling, rancorous, rational sort of mind" responsible for the fallen, fragmented historical world they now all inhabited (Yeats, *Colleted Poetry* 167-8). Yeats had taken the same patrician stance a year earlier on the floor of the Irish Senate in June 1925, when he stood to contest the Catholic-church-backed ban on divorce then under debate. He spoke of himself as a member of a proud, besieged minority:

> We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created the most of the modern literature of this country. (qtd. in Maddox 238)

One speaker rose to challenge him, asking him if he would think it better to leave the dead alone. "I am passing on," Yeats rebutted. "I would hate to leave the dead alone." Despite his efforts, the divorce ban passed. Artistic censorship in the Free State also became rampant. Yeats' theatrical and political failures thereby ushered in for the poet a process of withdrawal from a public life of historical action (where he felt he had failed) into the private life of the mind and—with it—a persistent dwelling on the past of his "great" forebears and an emphasis on the loneliness of the intellectual in the Irish Free State. Yeats seemed to have no place in a modern Ireland, a place where he could, in his own words, "stand upon O'Connell Bridge in the half-light and notice that discordant architecture, all those electric signs, where modern heterogeneity has taken its physical form […]" (qtd. in McCormack 364). Modern, heterogeneous Ireland had failed to deliver the homogenous history he wanted.

If a young Beckett was one of the people who, like Ó Faoláin, had watched Yeats invent himself, he was quite fond of lampooning the performance. Beckett had never been sold on the collective, unified idea of an Irish nation or on the Gaelic revival that had tried to bring such an imagined community into existence artistically. He euphemistically referred to the enterprise as the "gossoons wonderhorn of Irish revivalism," that were busy "delivering with the altitudinous complacency of the Victorian Gael the ossianic goods" (*Disjecta* 70,76). His words for the Abbey theatre itself were just as vitriolic. The title character of his novel *Murphy* has a "last will and testament" which involves his ashes being flushed down a toilet directly above the Abbey stage, "if possible during the performance of a piece" (*Murphy* 151). When Murphy accidentally explodes later in the novel, his ashes must settle for commingling with the beer-soaked floor of an Irish pub, that derisory icon of Irishness that Murphy—whose hyper-Irish surname marks him as the last stage-Irishman, the performative period in a long list of buffoons one of the characters terms "the ruins of the ruins of the broth of a boy" (121)—textually merges into. Years before he began to write for the theatre, Beckett therefore announced his abandonment of any sort of collective Irish nation which might be realized in performance, without resorting to stale stereotypes to bemuse out-of-towners. This feint certainly echoed his older countryman and sometime mentor James Joyce and his famous dictum that Irish history was a nightmare from which he wanted to wake. Beckett's movement away from Joyce towards *lessness* as an aesthetic tactic (discussed below) would, ironically, take him back towards the ideas of failure and solitude that drove Yeats's personality and later work. It was Yeats' later theatrical work and poetry that Beckett admired, specifically the former's 1930 play about Swift, *The*

Words Upon the Window Pane. Subsequently, when Beckett himself was an old man, he would himself write and direct a ghost-film revolving around Yeats's own poetry, entitled …*but the Clouds.*…(1976), in which a man tries to summon the ghost of a departed love, whose shade appears to mouth Yeats' final stanza of "The Tower."

The anxiety I am attempting to outline, one which both Yeats and Beckett share across their concerns with history and memory, respectively, is embodied in each of these works as a specter, certainly one of the more popular theatrical images of all time. Stage-ghosts embody failure; they are representations of a past that fails to actually return, and make an individual subject or a collective history whole. They still, however, persist in the present. They are figments that purportedly belong to a past tense, to *that time* (pun on Beckett's play title intended), that arrive in any number of forms in the theatre: as disembodied voice, as tape recording, as radio voice, or as stage voice. They return to speak for a memory that is in some way tied to a personal identity, or to a collective history. However, they are always reconstructed in the present tense. As such, they are not really "of" that time which they represent, and cannot themselves effect change in the present. Thus, they fail. Specifically, with regard to this study, they fail to generate a unified, Irish history, and consequently a self that could be tethered to that history. Speaking in terms of the ghost of Hamlet's father, Herbert Blau elucidates: "The Ghost is the stimulus of an enigma arising from the infrastructure of the theater which seems to limit the revelation of its illusory power. […] it is an impossible prospect" (Blau 95). Historically, specters reach us "only through absence, through the intermediary of documents […] from which a presence has been washed away" (De Certeau, *Writing* 3). The impossibility of the ghosts being "real" is also the problem of theatrical

representation itself: this idea essentially drives Yeats's vision of failure (specifically a failed, Irish historical tradition) onstage. For Beckett, theatrical representation becomes a stand-in for the representation of *self*. It is through the lens of such stage-specters that we must study both Yeats' skepticism about history and his retreat into artistic solitude, as well as Beckett's subsequent exploration of this state of solitude and its dubious relationship to memory.

Heaps of Broken Images: Ruins, Loneliness and Failure

> [*The boy puts down pack and stands in the doorway.*]
> BOY. There's nobody here.
> OLD MAN. There's somebody there.
> (Yeats, *Purgatory* 34)

In both authors' work, these specters often "appear" in or around ruins, indicative of a haunted landscape, and—in the case of Irish history—a legacy of various periods of traumatic change. Seamus Deane notes that the "spectacle of the ruin" was a mainstay in the Irish literary tradition, due to its ability "to stimulate [that tradition] to an imaginative intensity that would be the more impressive precisely because it derived from a history that had been lost, displaced, a history that had no narrative but the narrative of nostalgia" (Deane 2). Nostalgia for a lost history, a longing for wholeness, became a central part of the Irish cultural project, enunciating the anxieties of a tradition that had in actuality "never kn[own] coherence" (Kiberd, *Inventing* 537). Unlike the specter, the ruin *physically* embodied the failure of this idea in its fragmentary, decayed nature. "History," Walter Benjamin writes, "stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience." Both the specter and the ruin belie the shifting, fragmentary ground of historical change. In his lengthy study of the Baroque, German mourning-play

(*Trauerspiel*), Benjamin maintains that ruins are the offstage, physical form of an onstage allegory of decay and fragmentation: "in the ruin history has physically merged into the setting […]. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (*Origin* 177-78). Yeats and Beckett actually stage both: the ruins are in many cases the fragmentary remains of a vision of history to which the stage-specters—that never fully appear—bear partial witness.

For Yeats, ruins were directly tied to the traumas Deane describes. Yeats' late play *Purgatory* (1938), which is often conferred with a "Beckettian" aesthetic by commentators, features "*a ruined house and a bare tree in the background*" (33). Yeats had himself witnessed with disgust how his sometimes patron Lady Gregory's estate of Coole, where he had spent a substantial portion of his artistic life, had been razed in 1932, after her death. This actual event, along with the destruction of many of the larger Anglo-Irish estates by the IRA during the Anglo-Irish war (1919-1922), in no small part inspired the play, as did his beliefs in the moral superiority of his own, disappearing class. At its opening, an old man returns with his son and looks with disgust upon the ruin of the house in which he was born, imbuing the scenic backdrop with its own history:

> Great people lived and died in this house;
> Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament […].
> They had loved the trees that he cut down
> To pay what he had lost at cards
> Or spent on horses, drink and women;
> Had loved the house, had loved all
> The intricate passages of the house
> But he killed the house; to kill a house
> Where great men grew up, married, died,
> I here declare a capital offense. (35)

Anne Yeats, the poet's daughter, designed the set for the premiere as merely "a backcloth with a window cut out of it" (Morash 189). With the Old Man's words, however, it becomes the ancestral home that, once familiar and full of light and warmth, has (due to the sins of his own dead father) become dark, rotten, and uncanny. He directs the audience's attention to the ruin with his first line to his son, "study that house." Paraphrasing Hamlet's agony over the gibes, gambols, and songs Yorick's empty skull once held, the Old Man imbues the house with the properties of those human remains: "Where are the jokes and stories of a house," he asks, "Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty" (33)? The house, once a repository of great traditions, has been taken apart for baser uses, as has the old man's genealogy. This is borne out in the story the Old Man then relates to his son, telling how his father, low-born, married his aristocratic mother and lost the estate over time to "horses, drink and women." Finally, he confesses that he in fact murdered his father, and—exiled from his family house and history—became an itinerant peddler. The ruinous old man is physically tied to the fortunes of the ruined house; it is his own genealogical shell. The specters that soon arrive bear this truth out:

> OLD MAN. Listen to the hoof beats! Listen, listen!
> BOY. I cannot hear a sound
> OLD MAN. Beat! Beat!
> This night is the anniversary
> Of my mother's wedding night,
> Or the night wherein I was begotten
> My father is riding from the public-house
> A whiskey bottle under his arm.
> [*A window is lit, showing a young girl*] (36)

The Purgatorial allegory of the play arrives in this continuous, spectral return: again and again, the Old Man maintains, this originary failure plays itself out with the specters

arriving and coupling, both conceiving the old man and giving meaning to the ruined house they seem to partially occupy. Despite his protestations, the entire event spectrally occurs as the living pair look up at the window. Suddenly the boy can see the lit window and the shade of his grandfather pouring whisky, the impossible prospect of a "dead, living murdered man." In a final attempt to save his mother from her purgatorial punishment of begetting her son and ruining the house, the old man, cursed from birth, stabs his own son to death to stave off the curse. The window grows dark and the tree alone stands in white light. "Study that tree," the Old Man says to his son's lifeless corpse and his mother's ghost:

> It stands there like a purified soul,
> All cold, sweet, glistening light.
> Dear mother, the window is dark again,
> But you are in the light because
> I finished all that consequence.
> I killed that lad because had he grown up
> He would have struck a woman's fancy,
> Begot, and passed pollution on. (39)

"Birth was the death of him," begins Samuel Beckett's *A Piece of Monologue* (*Complete Dramatic Works* 425), and in this case the genealogic curse engulfs the old man, his son, and the house itself. Convinced that his blood sacrifice has exorcised his mother's troubled spirit from reliving her sins, and that he has righted the course of history, the Old Man turns to go, only to hear the hoofs returning again. The Old Man, "twice a murderer and all for nothing," resigns himself to his failure to right history. The stage fades on his vain prayer to God to "appease the misery of the living and the remorse of the dead," as the ghosts return once more to engender him (39). Failure is in inherited trait, it seems:

his attempts to interpret the behavior of the specters and diagnose what they both signify and demand have resulted in his own total destruction.

Yeats' retreat from history into a place where its failures can be contemplated in solitude might be described as a starting point for Beckett's aesthetic. From here, however, the younger author and playwright moved further and further away from any stable notion of history or subjectivity. Although there is in Beckett's work a consistent denial of any sort of authentic set of memories which might make a textual or stage subject "real," there is never an end to all the dead voices. The voices of Beckett's texts and stage are themselves specters that float free from certain meaning, shards of memories that merge and part like dust on the air. Beckett proclaimed as much in his great, exhaustive novel *The Unnamable:*

> […] I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words,
> with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing,
> coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they,
> all of them, those that merge, those that part […](386)

If and when these memories are of Irish places (often culled from Beckett's own childhood memories) they never come together as any one body or history; they disperse long before this can happen. Despite this, his "characters" cling to these memories and tenaciously try to make them real, to summon the dead to speak and prove that they "themselves" exist.[4] Before moving into the added frame of complexity the *mise en scène* brings to the Beckettian equation, it would be beneficial to outline how this process is first accomplished in the prose.

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[4] This assumption is best summed up Estragon's line in *Waiting for Godot:* "We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression that we exist" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 64)?

Over the course of three novels, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies,* and finally *The Unnamable,* the narrator becomes more and more exhausted with his creatures, his story, and finally himself. Like Yeats' Old Man, the tale, the scene and the self are all ineluctably tied together. But whereas the dramatic progression of *Purgatory* specifically related to a failed, Anglo-Irish history, the unnamable "I" invokes an ontological, but no less failure-riven genealogy: the specters that haunt him into existence—his ancestors—are the words themselves. Any search for meaning in the past which these ghost-words bear witness to results in nothing more than a long glance into the infinite bone-yard of discourse:

> […] and that I seek, like a caged beast born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, born and then dead, born in a cage and then dead in a cage, in a word like a beast, in one of their words, like such a beast, and that I seek, like such a beast, with nothing of its species left but fear and fury […](387)

Born of a long series of (now dead) caged beasts, the *Unnamable* is himself the ruin of a protagonist that the words cannot make whole.

This terrible sense of alienation from language, from "their words," is explicitly tied to an Irish history of dispossession and disappearance in the earlier novel *Watt*, which—unlike *The Unnamable*—was first written in English, and thus infected with what Beckett proclaimed to be his Irish "style," which he subsequently sought to eschew by writing in French. Here the protagonist, a performative question mark,[5] journeys through an imaginative topography that is distinguishably the Irish Free State towards the South

[5] "Watt" with an Irish accent would also sound like/mean "What?"

Dublin house of his employer, the Anglo-Irish grandee of the big house, Mr. Knott.[6] Mr. Knott (as his name suggests) is not ever fully there: he remains a specter haunting the grounds and inner sanctum of the big house. He is only caught in glimpses, walking in the yard, climbing down a tree, or is heard pacing the floor above Watt's quarters. The house Knott haunts is just as transparent itself. When, at the end of his employment, Watt departs for the train station, it is chimerically noted that "the chimneys of Mr. Knott's house were not visible, in spite of the excellent visibility. On fine days they could be discerned, from the station. But on fine days apparently not" (225). Knott's own name, itself a pun on a negative, cancels out the very existence of his own dwelling.

One of the only textual specters Watt both sees and hears is the appropriately named Arsene (are-seen), the servant (the "*arse-en*d" of the house's hierarchy) whom Watt is replacing in the big house. Arsene launches into a long genealogic history of the spectral Knott and those (like the Unnamable's "caged beasts") who have served Knott before Watt. Speculating on his future now that he is leaving the non-place that is Knott's house, he ruminates:

> Without however pausing in my career (no easy matter), perhaps longing to be turned into a stone pillar or a cromlech in the middle of a field or on the mountain side for succeeding generations to admire, and for cows and sheep and goats to come and scratch themselves against and for men and dogs to make their water against and for learned men to speculate regarding and for disappointed men to inscribe with party slogans and indelicate graffiti and for lovers to scratch their names on, in a heart, with the date, and for now and then a lonely man like myself to sit down

[6] Frederick Smith makes an interesting connection to Jonathan Swift here, noting that Watt is the name of Jonathan Swift's Irish servant mentioned in the "Holyhead Journal of 1727." In such a reading, Dean Swift becomes the spectral Knott (38).

> with his back against and fall asleep, in the sun, if the sun happened to be shining. (49) [7]

Arsene aspires to possess a stone ruin, conferring it with a palimpsestic history akin to that of his own name: a stone monument put up against the failure of memory instead becomes a half-erased, fragmentary stack of overlapping histories and personal memories. Arsene's desired fate shadows all the characters in the novel, especially Watt himself, who in a moment of realization early on faces up to the truth that all of his memories are themselves fictions he has created and revised, which seem "to belong to some story heard long before, an instant in the life of another, ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten" (74). Watt's greatcoat (constantly a dubious placeholder for identity in Beckett's oeuvre), which we hear also belonged to his father, places the tale's protagonist in a long line of "other" Watts, so that his distinguishing physical feature (a large, bulky coat) is an inherited surface or cover. Like the Old Man's ruined house in *Purgatory*, it becomes the genealogic shell, born of caged beasts, that ultimately fails to guarantee Watt's own identity: there is nothing, apparently, underneath the coat. At the train station, Watt buys a ticket to the end of the line, a pun on the silence that shall follow the end of the textual line on the page. During the train's arrival, Watt literally vanishes: his name is stricken from the book as his character dissipates into a "long, wet dream" in the minds of the men who just spoke to him, leaving them instead staring at "nothing in particular," the absence where Watt had previously stood (246).

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[7] "Cromlech" (often called "Dolmen") are the megalithic rock formations left by the Celts and others in prehistoric Ireland. Numerous Dolmen ruins dot the Irish landscape. They have become one of the quintessential symbolic archetypes of Ireland and Gaelic/Celtic culture.

The movement from textual experimentation to onstage, physical embodiment is certainly complicated, due first and foremost to the presence of a living, breathing body and an actual audience. Of Beckett's plays which subsequently use places or memories rooted in an Irish topography, the physical onstage presence itself becomes a ruin, around which these places and memories merge and part in failed attempts by the onstage figure to give itself a set of memories that will guarantee its identity. The ruin onstage bears witness to a history that is as uncertain as his or her actual presence in the stage space. What remains is a meticulous editor trying to make memories whole; he/she is at once, as Beckett put it in his novella *Company*, "deviser of the voice and of the hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company" (18). In the theatrical space, "company" becomes the actual spectators in the seats. The ruin onstage is thus caught in the act, literally, of making it all up for company.

Faced with a pesky corporeality, it is not surprising that Beckett explored the radio medium as a middle ground between textual and theatrical experimentation. The radio play *All That Fall*, written in English, witnesses the return of Beckett's self-consciously repressed style first and foremost in the voices which populate the sound-scape, itself a spectral space of merging and parting entities. The voices' accents are those of Foxrock, County Dublin, a primarily Anglo-Irish suburb and Beckett's childhood home. The protagonist Maddy Rooney's journey to meet her husband at the train station (the action of the piece) is a voyage Beckett is reconstructing from memory, much as Joyce mentally reconstructed the geography of 1904 Dublin from exile for *Ulysses*. However, the threats the limitless void of the sound-scape brings to this "Irish" world are constant. Beckett claimed that the idea for the play had come to him as an

amalgamation of sounds: “in the dead of the other night got a nicely gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something” (qtd. in Worth, “Beckett” 197). These sounds engender Maddy Rooney and her world, sounds that spectrally arrive out of the ether of the radio. This tenuous constitution is something of which Maddy herself seems painfully aware. At the opening, we hear Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” in the background, to which the voice of Maddy remarks, “Poor Woman. All alone in that ruinous old house” (*Complete Dramatic Works* 172). Speaking of a neighbor, the metaphor of the ruined house applies to Maddy’s own existential predicament: she is “herself” alone in the haunted, limitless house of the sound-scape, perpetually in danger of falling through the cracks if the sounds fail to create “her.” This sense of aloneness is ever-present, despite the warm, Irish voices we hear in what masquerades as a naturalistic scene. In passing the character Christy she inquires of him:

> Do you find anything…bizarre about my way of speaking? [*Pause.*] I do not mean the voice. [*Pause*] No, I mean the words. [*Pause. More to Herself.*] I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very…bizarre. (173)

Momentarily, the Irish “voice” realizes that she is no more than the sum of her words, and that her words seem to be failing her, becoming both bizarre and uncanny as they issue forth out of the ether to stave off an awful silence. Later, Mr. Rooney also questions his wife’s strange way of speaking: “Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.” “Well, you know, it will be dead in time,” Maddy responds, “just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said”

(194). Maddy's own alienation from her words is compared here to the loss of the Irish language, a loss for which—ironically—the Anglo-Irish themselves were historically responsible. Maddy and Mr. Rooney's own world, however, is itself rapidly vanishing within the Catholic-dominated Free State, summed up in a line that, on its surface, captures Beckett's own exilic predicament: "It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home, Mr. Tyler, what is it to be at home? A lingering dissolution" (175). The plight of a vanishing class, however, acts as a leitmotif for Maggie's own predicament: both at home and abroad in the sound-scape of the radio, she is herself a "lingering dissolution." The work ends with the intimation that Mr. Rooney may have been responsible for pushing a child out of the train and killing her, echoing the homicidal intentions of Yeats' Old Man to put an end to a cursed history.

The two greatest Irish ruins on Beckett's stage are the corporeal remains we as an audience see in *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *That Time* (1974). There are also similar dramaturgical techniques at work in both plays: each uses an Irish predilection towards nostalgic, historical narration as a dramatic technique which challenges the composition of the stage-subject. Both were first written in English, approximately 20 years apart and both feature "shards" of biographical details from the author's own childhood. *That Time* arguably refines a process already at work in *Krapp's Last Tape*: the stage subject is reduced from saying little himself in the face of a series of recorded memories which he plays back in the latter, to saying nothing at all in the former: Krapp's memories have become historical, insofar as they have been carefully archived in boxes, complete with dates and descriptions of the contents. In *That Time* the scene is much more abstract, with only disembodied voices "*from both sides and above*" of the listener's face testifying to a

series of memories that may be related to the ruin that occupies the stage, an "*old white face [with] long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread"*(*Complete Dramatic Works* 388). What we see in each case are remainders; each is, in Beckett's own words, "history's ancient faeces" (*First Love* 34). Krapp's wardrobe is described as "rusty," his shirt is "grimy," and his boots are "dirty." His voice is "cracked," his walk is "laborious" and his hair is "disordered." Krapp's comic *lazzi* (appropriately accompanied by clownish makeup) and his vacuous sucking of the banana mark him, like *Murphy,* as the ruins of the ruins of the comic stage-Irishman, whose fame is still dependent on "getting known" somewhere "beyond the seas" (*Collected Dramatic Works* 222). All that we know about the Krapp onstage comes from the tapes, which summon up the ghosts of former Krapp's to speak for the stage-ruin. Anthony Kubiak aptly, therefore, notes that "the entire movement of Krapp, so to speak, represents something like the alimentary movement of 'history' as crap itself" (120).

Much less has been written about *That Time*, which is surprising, given that it refines a number of the tropes enunciated in *Krapp's Last Tape* in the direction of Beckettian *lessness*: as he grew older, Beckett's aesthetic focused more and more on reduction: "make it smaller," he maintained, "on the principle that less is more" (qtd. in Knowlson 602). Again, we have a potentially absurd figure, which this time is merely the "listener's face…about ten feet above stage level and off centre" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 388). In a technique resembling *Not I* (he later called *That Time* its "brother"), the *mise en scène* disengages the audience from thinking of the listener as an integral person: the face is ten feet in the air, off center from the central vantage point of a proscenium stage, and is also, paradoxically, in a prone position. Unlike Krapp, *That Time's* Listener

never speaks, but merely breathes, “audible, slow and regular,” and opens and closes his eyes at various points. The spectral voices come in to supply the rest. As with the various, disembodied Krapps, what we are meant to hear are what Beckett calls “moments of one and the same voice:” they each speak to a memory from what we imagine to be moments in the life of the figure onstage. However, there is no proof that the voices of memory and the physical, onstage figure are actually connected. As with the textual protagonist in *Company,* the memories associated with the figure onstage (narrated in the initial performance at the Royal Court Theatre by the well-known Irish actor Patrick Magee) might all be invented “for company,” an audience hearing an Irish voice telling stories about Ireland, but an Ireland whose existence—and connection to the onstage figure—is fundamentally challenged.

Unlike the disembodied face of *That Time*, Krapp seems able to order carefully the memories to which he listens. This ostensibly enables him to have some say as to what is remembered, as well as what the audience might learn about him. Krapp’s archive, however, is fraught with failure. The present Krapp has trouble both remembering the meaning of words (“vidua bird”) and the meaning of his archival labels (“memorable equinox”). Furthermore, the original point of artistic inspiration— one that set Krapp upon his path to the “late evening in the future” where we meet him—is obviously for the present Krapp a sign of failure, something he has *attempted* to forget. What he has in fact forgotten, however, is the meaning of “memorable equinox” in the archive’s directory, so that his own originary failure comes upon him in a spat of involuntary memory. As the tape plays he manically attempts to silence it. Nevertheless, this repressed memory cannot help but surface in the consciousness of the audience:

> What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely – [*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again.*] – great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under in reality is my most [*Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again.*] – unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire [*Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again.*] my face in her breasts and my hands on her. (222)

Having potentially eluded the return of this memory of artistic inspiration, which subsequently failed to produce a successful artist, Krapp is content dwelling in the nostalgic memory of a sexual encounter. When the figure onstage *does* begin to speak, the memories he regurgitates are nostalgic fragments, by which Krapp attempts to place himself in a recognizable past which will allow him to "be again." Alone within a failed corpus, he continues to make up a past for company, out of personal – and theatrical - necessity:

> Lie propped up in the dark and wander. Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red berried. [*Pause.*] Be again on Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. [*Pause.*] And so on. [*Pause.*] Be again, be again. [*Pause.*] All that old misery. [*Pause.*] Once wasn't enough for you. [*Pause.*] Lie down across her. [*Long pause. He suddenly bends over machine, switches off, wrenches off tape, throws it away, puts on another, winds it forward to the passage he wants, switches on, listens staring front.*] (223)

When Krapp records his "last tape," it almost reads as a travelogue of places and things Irish: the scenic Dingle peninsula, the bells at Croghan. These Irish scenes and the romantic encounter on the boat (which is the tape he subsequently puts on and continues listening to) are the "old misery," the frozen space of nostalgia that he prefers to dwell in.

His last recording will not enter the archive, but the dust bin of history: there is no real present for Krapp to record, save the "sour cud and the iron stool." In a Yeatsian feint, he moves towards the "proper dark" of a nostalgic memory that he himself sees as "old misery," yet ultimately refuses to do without. What for Yeats was a heroic failure, a willing removal of oneself from the world of action to a place of solitary contemplation, is embodied here in Krapp's pathetic failure not to be alone, but merely to *be*. The cycle will continue, the tapes will play on, but the present Krapp will fade from existence: the last tape has been recorded, which will now be replaced by the endless looping cycle of a nostalgic history haunted by failure.

That Time deploys a similar set of techniques, but distills the tenuous relationship between stage-subject and spectral memories even further: the Listener remains silent, and the tape player has become three disembodied voices, that each speak in turn as the play moves forward. These specters arrive from positions around the head we see onstage: "The B story has to do with the young man, the C story is the story of the old man and the A story that of the man in middle age," Beckett explained (qtd. in Knowlson 601). Most—if not all—of the stories seems situated in Ireland, an Ireland again constructed from Beckett's own memory in three fundamentally different phases. Besides Beckett's notes, however, nothing literally connects these voices: each tells its own stories which *haunt* the stage-face into meaning. The Listener reacts to certain portions of the story by opening and closing his eyes, and finally by enigmatically smiling—toothlessly—at the play's conclusion.

Each voice's story follows a similar pattern, first attempting to stave off silence with recollection, and then becoming more and more aware that the endeavor is futile.

Voice B's story involves lovers' vows, exchanged over a "long, low stone," akin to Arsene's cromlech, in the sunshine before a wheat field. The story seems to build musically, repeating this series of images, as if repetition will make the images literally appear in the present and link the voice to the face. Voice B, however, owns up to the futility of such an enterprise:

> […] harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you till just one of those things you kept making up to keep the void out just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud [*Silence ten seconds. Breath audible. After 3 seconds eyes open.*] (390)

Just as when Krapp's wrenches off spool five, stage business (the face "acts") at this point changes out memories. B's narrative has reached a point of crisis, where its theatricality (making it all up for company) has become far too apparent. A new story (C's in this case) must oscillate in to keep the "shroud," the void/stage curtain, from ending the voices and the Listener's theatrical, associative existence. B's story later continues, "drifting on [the water] or "caught in the reeds" in a nostalgic memory that almost duplicates the sexual encounter of Krapp in the punt. The spectral background this time appears to be the Grand Canal in Dublin, the same canal off which Krapp (and Beckett's) mother "lay a-dying" (219). B walks "the towpath with the ghosts of the mules the drowned rat or bird or whatever it was floating off into the sunset till you could see it no more nothing stirring only the water and the sun going down till it went down and you vanished all vanished" (393). The city of Dublin becomes an evacuated landscape akin to any other lonely, Beckettian topography, a series of half remembered fragments passing

in and out of the void. As the above quote bears out, this void not only engulfs the Irish scene at the end of the speech, but the teller as well.

These memories of the city are "all the old scenes" that A also alludes to in his story, which is the tale of a middle aged exile returning home, as Beckett himself did reluctantly during his mother's final illness. A in fact begins the play-text for the spectral face onstage:

> […] that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child when was that [*Eyes close*] grey day took the eleven to the end of the line and on from there no trams then gone long ago that time you went back to look […] (388)

Although James Knowlson remarks that A's actions to find the place where he hid as a child are carried out "with an absence of nostalgia," it is certainly a quest to verify a memory that A has clung to, located within an Irish topography that anchors his childhood. This memory stands as a ruin where he used to hide as a boy, "Foley was it Foley's Folly, bit of a tower still standing the rest rubble." Foley's Folley was/is an actual "historical" place, Barrington Tower, in Carrickmines just outside of Dublin. It was one of the many towers built as a "fake" ruin, a romantic vogue of the 19th century. Beckett here refines loneliness and its link with Irish topography while at the same time suggesting that such topography is itself a folly, invented—once again—for company. The tower A moves towards was, at *that time*, a safe place of solitude akin to the tower Yeats had actually retired to at Thoor Ballylee. It becomes the lodestone of A's journey, a fake ruin that provides some form of solace and solution to his own fake identity: it is the dubious link to the embodied ruin that we see opening and closing its eyes before us ten feet in the air. However, such an escape into what Beckett had himself called "our

Irish solitude" is revealed to be impossible. A's search for the ruin brings no solace: he recalls arriving at the railway to take the train out to the Folly to find the station boarded up. He then remembers sitting upon the stone doorstop of the ruined station and "making it all up on the doorstep as you went along making yourself all up again for the millionth time forgetting it all […]" (394). A's story suggests that he may not have traveled anywhere at all and points to the deeper revelation that "he" is not actually *anywhere* at all, one of several, spectral memories which collide and part around the stage-head. We are the witnesses to the three voices' endless cycles of remembering and forgetting these "fake" memories/narratives. A returns to the mail-boat unfulfilled:

> […] back down to the wharf with the nightbag and the old green greatcoat your father left you trailing the ground and the white hair pouring out down from under the hat till that time came on down neither right nor left not a curse for the old scenes the old names not a thought in your head only get back on board and away to hell out of it and never come back […] (395)

Again we have the reference, as in *Watt*, to the genealogic greatcoat: this piece of "proof" that A was engendered covers—quite literally—nothing, and is —in a possible jab at Irish obsessions with the past—green. It is this shroud which covers A on his march into the greater shroud of oblivion. Despite his avowal that he cares "not a curse" for the old places and names, as a subject "he" is ineluctably bound to them.

C's story shares much in common with Beckett's *Stories*: ruins of men walk through topographies of decay in a place that, to misquote Yeats, is the *only* country for old men. C proceeds through a series of public buildings before alighting in the "Portrait

Gallery," which very well could be Ireland's national gallery.[8] It is especially in this last place that C stops to dwell to get out of the rain and sits on another "stone" (Beckett's persistent theme of stones link the voices together: all the voices at one point ground themselves on one) to stare into a painting. The antiquated space seamlessly merges into A's own antiquated state, standing like the Unnamable at the end of a long line of dust:

> […] not knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it was saying what you were saying whose skull you were clapped up in whose moan had you the way you were was that the time or was that another time there alone with the portraits of the dead black with dirt and antiquity and the dates on the frames in case you might get the century wrong […] (391)[9]

The dead, "black with dirt and antiquity" are archived in this gallery as they are in Krapp's tapes. Like the *Unnamable*, C voices the fear that *he* is nothing more than the some of these dead peoples' words, a specter in the shroud of the inherited greatcoat the museum represents. This "framed" history mirrors the audience's own framed, yet leaky perception of the Listener, composed as he is by the competing stories of A, B and C. The Listener remains palimpsestic, a surface upon which various narratives which compete for meaning cover each other. He remains the ruin the spectral stories fail to construct. Irish landscape, history and an Irish "voice" become the performative frames for a failed prescencing: the ghosts cannot collude to form a stage-character.

I would like to turn now to two plays that directly summon specters from history, Yeats' *Words Upon the Window Pane* and Beckett's television play …*but the clouds*...

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[8] Scholars disagree on this point: Eoin O'Brien surmises it is the National Gallery of Ireland, (220) while James Knowlson believes it to be London's National Portrait Gallery (601).

[9] A productive association could be made between the historical images seen in the gallery (the painting C stares into is "some young princess or prince of the blood black with age (389)") and those seen by Stephen Daedalus in the museum-like space of Mr Deasy's home, replete with Stuart coins and other detritus of Ireland's violent, colonized past in the *Nestor* episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (35).

Each addresses the loneliness and failure of the Irish intellectual by using historical, Irish words, specifically disembodied text from the dead author(s) Swift and Yeats, respectively.

Shutting the Door and Turning up the Lamp:

Specters of Swift, Specters of Yeats

> Swift has sailed into his rest
> Savage indignation there
> Cannot lacerate his breast
> Imitate him if you dare,
> World-besotted traveler;
> He served human liberty.
> (qtd. in Yeats, *Collected Works* 708)

"Imitate him if you dare:" Yeats's translation of Swift's own Latin epitaph reveals that such a choice is inherently dangerous. It was the "savage indignation" of the plebian mob, in Yeats' view, which was responsible for the disquiet in the elder satirist's soul. Yeats went so far as to suggest that in the Dean's elder years this fear of history translated into a fear to reproduce. Swift, he maintained, had "so dreaded the historic process that it became in the half-mad mind of Swift a dread of parentage, of giving birth in a fallen world: 'Am I to add another to the healthy rascaldom and knavery of the world'" (*Collected Works* 718)? The quote was also one Beckett admired. For Yeats, imitation of his Irish forebears likewise meant a retreat into solitude, a monastic choice for the world-besotted wanderers of the Irish Free State. Serving human liberty thus involves, ironically, separating oneself from that world and from those people. In his introduction to *The Words Upon the Window Pane*, Yeats narrated his own pilgrim's progress:

> We poets and artists may be called, so small our share in life, "separated spirits," words applied by the old philosophers to the dead. When Swift sank into imbecility and madness his epoch had finished in the British Isles. (qtd. in *Collected Works* 715)

Seeking avatars for his own process of aesthetic separation, Yeats constructed a genealogy of originary failures (historical figures who had failed, thereby beginning the work Yeats saw himself, in his own aesthetic loneliness, as continuing). Dean Swift loomed high in the pantheon. The latter's epoch ended with his own corporeal and mental failure, which was for Yeats the result of that rancorous, rational mind associated with modern mob-politics. Yeats documented his own, earlier involvement with what he called "imaginative nationalism" before moving on to the role he saw for artistic expression in the age of what he euphemistically dubbed "political victory," ergo the contemporary Irish Free State. "Hitherto we have walked the road," Yeats claimed, "but now we have shut the door and turned up the lamp" (*Collected Works* 707). This retreat into the "proper dark" of the statues, into a space of reflection, moves Yeats' elder aesthetic towards the artistic landscape of the "Irish solitude" Beckett himself was to hearken to some years later.

The Words Upon the Window Pane, as noted, concerns the summoning of Swift at a séance in the early years of the Irish Free State. The work was dedicated to "the memory of Lady Gregory, in whose house it was written" (*Collected Works* 464). As with *Purgatory*, Gregory's absence, and Yeats' subsequent disillusionment with the fate of the Anglo-Irish class, also shadows the work. It is not surprising, then, to notice that when Swift himself "appears" in the séance, he is embodied by an old lady named Mrs. Henderson, described as "a poor woman with the soul of an Apostle" (466). The séance

occurs in old Georgian house from the 18th century heyday of the Ascendancy, yet another ruin bespeaking a failed history. John Corbett, a Cambridge student who is writing a dissertation on Swift, inexplicably arrives to attend the séance, not knowing at this point that Swift will be the spirit that is summoned. Explaining his project, Corbett becomes a mouthpiece for Yeats' own fascination with the Dean:

> I hope to prove that in Swift's day men of intellect reached the height of their power – the greatest position they ever attained in society and the State, that everything great in Ireland and in our character, in what remains of our architecture, comes from that day; that we have kept its seal longer than England. (468)

Swift is a nostalgic figure, an image of what might have been had Ireland (and the western world) followed a different path and kept their men of genius at the forefront of political life. All that physically remains of this epoch is house itself, a palimpsest of different peoples' histories. Dr. Trench, an elderly veteran of many séances, explains the house's history to Corbett:

> It was a private house until about fifty years ago…Quite a number of notable people lived here. Grattan was born upstairs; no, not Grattan, Curran perhaps – I forget – but I do know that this house in the early part of the 18th century belonged to friends of Jonathan Swift, or rather of Stella…Somebody cut some lines from a poem of hers upon the window pane – traditions says Stella herself. [*A Knock*] Here they are, but you will barely make them out in the light. (467)

Dr. Trench's failed recollection—Henry Grattan and John Curran were both Eighteenth Century Anglo-Irish patriots—anticipates the failed communications with the specter of Swift himself, and underlines the central anxiety explored in this chapter: history itself cannot appear, cannot be accessed, but only interpreted in fragmentary traces. These

traces are etched into the set itself. Esther Johnson, known to history as "Stella," was Swift's onetime student, intimate companion and, possibly, his lover. Whatever the case, her death in 1728 devastated Swift. Words she wrote about the Dean are written on a windowpane in the set, yet remain partially obscured by the darkness (low stage lighting) that permeates the scene. Meaning is attached to the house through Trench's half-remembered history lesson, akin to the stage-ruin the old man narrates into existence in *Purgatory*, but this time through a litany of actual, half-remembered names. The room contains contemporary furniture and is described as a simple "lodging house room," but the lighting and the words on the window pane threaten its contemporaneity: history seems to hang in the air, eerily anticipated with a knock at the door, yet not quite arriving in this time, not *yet.*

Those who arrive with the knock are people that need to speak to the dead for a variety of personal reasons: one wants to speak to a great evangelist to improve his own preaching, one wants to speak to her husband who drowned at sea, and another is interested in horse-racing. They are suggestive of the Abbey's own bourgeois audience: concerned only with the present, they represent the amnesiac mob Yeats was so fond of berating. The characters awaiting the séance refer to the "interruptions" suffered in previous sessions by a "hostile influence:" as yet unidentified, these ghosts endlessly cycle through "the same drama…just as if they were characters in some horrible kind of play." Dr. Trench goes on to explain the Yeatsian process of "dreaming back" to the audience:

> Some spirits are earth-bound – they think they are still living and go over and over some kind of action of their past lives, just as we

> go over and over some painful thought, except that where they are thought is reality. (470)

The notion of appearing again, tonight, is of course, the central conceit of the theatre itself. Staged, thought becomes reality, inasmuch as those thoughts are embodied as physical actors and stage-spaces. However, what is highlighted in the following scenes is in fact the disparity between the fleeting memories of the dead and the physical reality of the stage. When Swift does in fact arrive, it is in the voice Mrs. Henderson, who dualistically becomes Swift and Vanessa (Esther Vanhomrigh, Swift's other long-time female companion, whom he met during his service in London and who subsequently followed him to Ireland, despite his protestations). Embodied by the medium, the specters repeat a fight between Swift and Vanessa over both his purported love for Stella and his failure to have children himself, as he claims—like the Old Man of *Purgatory*— to have "something in [his] blood that no child must inherit" (474), another genealogic ailment (it was widely rumored Swift may have been illegitimate) which again connotes the decay and impotence of the Anglo-Irish class: "an old man without children is very solitary," the voice of Vanessa warns him, "even his friends, men as old as he, turn away…" Swift, however, vows to leave nothing of himself in the world save his intellect "that came to him from heaven." This intellect, however, can only reach us in fragmentary forms, ventriloquized through an old woman. Swift's voice, claiming to be "afraid of solitude, afraid of outliving [his friends] —and [himself]" takes comfort in the last lines of the poem Stella wrote him, the physical words etched into the window pane:

> Late dying, may you cast a shred
> Of that rich mantle o'er my head;
> To bear with dignity my sorrow

One day alone and then die tomorrow. (477)

The words tell another history to those present at the séance, however: Stella died long before Swift, who did in fact end his life "an old, miserable, childless man," as Vanessa had warned him he might. *This* Swift seems unaware of those events: as with the Listener in *That Time*, each time the specter appears it is as a different life-moment of the same voice. Corbett, Yeats' mouthpiece, wishes above all else to prove his thesis, and Swift's place within the larger frame of Anglo-Irish history. Surmising that Swift's madness (his fear of outliving his own "self") was symptomatic of the madness of civilization itself, he attempts, vainly, to directly question the specter:

> JOHN CORBET. But there is something I must ask you.
> Swift was the chief representative of the intellect of his epoch, that arrogant intellect at last free from superstition. He foresaw its collapse. He foresaw Democracy, he must have dreaded the future. Did he refuse to beget children because of that dread? Was Swift mad? Or was it the intellect itself that was mad?
> MRS. HENDERSON. What are you talking of sir?
> JOHN CORBET. Swift, of course.
> MRS. HENDERSON. Swift, I do not know anybody called Swift. (478)

Swift seems to have vanished from the perception of the medium as swiftly as his words have left her mouth. He has appeared as a trace of the failures that followed, failures that dissipated his spirit (in a Burkean vein, these failures included democracy[10]). Underneath this surface, however, lies the deeper anxiety that even when one closes the door and turns up the lamp to be alone with ones ancient forebears—as Yeats often literally did in

[10] Yeats was also fascinated with Edmund Burke, and espoused the same skepticism towards democracy that the latter did in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). For a treatment of Burke's writings about Ireland and Yeats' appropriation of him, see McCormack's chapter "Edmund Burke and the Imagination of History" (49-93), and Deane's chapter "Phantasmal France, Unreal Ireland" (1-48).

the numerous séances he participated in—there may not in fact be anyone there at all; the ghosts cannot speak directly to the living. As the lights fade on the final scene of the play, Mrs. Henderson is alone on stage, quite involved in the stage-business of making a cup of tea when Swift makes a positively final appearance. *This* Swift is aware of Stella's death, the passing of his friends and the terrible loneliness of the intellect in a fallen world:

> Five great ministers that were my friends are gone, ten great ministers that were my friends are gone. I have not fingers enough to count the great ministers that were my friends and are gone. [*She wakes with a start and speaks in her own voice.*] Where did I put that tea-caddy? Ah! There it is. And there should be a cup and saucer. [*She finds the saucer.*] But where's the cup? [*She moves aimlessly about the stage, and then, letting her saucer fall and break, speaks in Swift's voice.*] Perish the day on which I was born! (479) [11]

The speech builds a heap of words, akin to Clov's first lines in *Endgame:* the detritus of words and death builds with each line, until it is uncountable. Finally, paraphrasing the book of Job, Swift's specter literally smashes the mundane stage routines to give the audience a parting, bitter line; his failure haunts the stage still. Imitating Swift's Irishness meant walking the via dolorosa of loneliness and failure. "Swift haunts me," Yeats wrote, reflecting on walking the streets of modern Dublin, "he is always just around the next corner..." (*Collected Works* 708).

For Beckett, Richard Ellman remarks, "Swift [was] an immediate presence, but not so much a symbol as a kindred spirit, significant not because of his politics but because of his fellow-suffering" (qtd. in Smith 93). This notion of "Irish solitude

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[11] The last line paraphrases Job 3:3: "Let the day perish wherein I was born." I use "fallen" here as a direct reference to Yeats' poem "Fragments," which equates Enlightenment rationalism with the Edenic fall: "Locke swank into a swoon;/The Garden died;/God took the spinning jenny/out of his side" (*Selected Poetry* 149).

(Beckett)," of "shutting the door and turning up the lamp (Yeats)" becomes the thematic frame for Beckett's television play …*but the clouds...* The play cites Yeats's own poem "The Tower," as well as staging a Yeatsian figure, M, who engages in the remembering that comprises the action of the piece. Throughout the piece, "M" tries to summon "W," the shade of a woman, so that she will physically appear in the space M occupies. The film medium allows Beckett to play several performative tricks not possible onstage, which challenge the integrity both of the remembered and the one who remembers as stage-subjects. For instance, M (the man) is doubled so that he appears as two separate presences: the thinking M is first composed by "near shot from behind of man sitting on invisible stool bowed over invisible table. Light grey robe and skullcap. Dark ground. Same shot throughout" and also as his projected, remembered self, "M1," described as "M in set. Hat and greatcoat dark, robe and skullcap light." It is M1 who is perceived by the camera's eye to move throughout the piece. As in *That Time,* the voice of M not attached to any of the visible forms, but is instead merely denoted as "V," M's Voice. The first description of M (shot from behind) certainly resembles Gordon Craig's design work for Yeats' play *The Hour Glass*, which features a man seated in a robe and skullcap deep in thought in a solitary space (Brockett 453). The set, "S," that contains M1 is perceived by the viewer to be within is a circular space, "about 5 m in diameter, surrounded by deep shadow," which has three exits: "west, roads; north, sanctum; east, closet" (*Complete Dramatic Works* 418). The set becomes the Yeatsian place of aesthetic retreat, the sanctuary of the tower at Thor Ballylee. This world is completely engendered by M, however, who remains outside, in fact creating himself and the set as he goes.

M awaits the arrival of W's shade, who arrives first in his mind and finally within the visual space of the sound-stage. To think her he must first think himself, within the space:

1. *Dark. 5 Seconds.*
2. *Fade up to* M. *5 seconds.*
3. V: When I thought of her it was always night. I came in -
4. *Dissolve to* S *empty. 5 Seconds,* M1 *in hat and greatcoat emerges from west shadow, advances 5 steps and stands facing east shadow. 2 seconds.*
5. V: No –
6. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*
7. V: That is not right. When she appeared it was always night. I came in –
8. *Dissolve to S empty. 5 Seconds.* M1 *in hat and greatcoat emerges from west shadow, advances 5 steps and stands facing east shadow. 5 seconds.*
9. V: Right. Came in, having walked the roads since break of day, brought night home, stood listening [5 *seconds*], finally went to the closet –
10. M1 *advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds.*
11. V: Shed my hat and greatcoat, assumed robe and skull, reappeared – (419)

M catches himself in the act of creating his own existence as M1, itself the precondition for both thinking W and for allowing W's scenic appearance. Quickly, he replaces "thought" with "appeared" in an effort to grant W's specter corporeality. This, however, proves to be impossible: M is yet another version of the fragmentary protagonist of *Company*, the deviser of the voice (V) and of its hearer (M1) and of himself (M). W only appears as a fleeting image, outside of the two other spaces the camera reveals, as a "close-up of woman's face reduced as far as possible to eyes and mouth. Same shot throughout" (417).

Yeats' prose arrives in stage-space here, but the words drift through a scenic void. V distinguishes three different versions of W's appearance: she appears and vanishes quickly, she appears and lingers "with those unseeing eyes I so begged when alive to look at me," and finally that she appears and recites the last stanza of "The Tower." The work uses the dramatic form of the séance against itself: the play is a *failed* attempt to summon someone from the past and get their ghost to speak. Like Krapp and Listener, however, what W haunts M *with* is his own fictional self. Conceptually, the work directly relates to Yeats' dictum of Irish intellectuals ceasing the "public life" of walking the roads and shutting the door to be in their "proper" dark. This retreat into "our Irish solitude" becomes merely another tale, another Irish dramatic technique, a series of nostalgic gestures that are ultimately hollow: history's specters cannot be presenced, either on the roads or in the proper dark. This realization remains V/M's ultimate fear. "There was a fourth case," he maintains, continuing his analysis of W's appearances,

> or case nought, as I pleased to call it, by far the commonest, in the proportion say of nine hundred and ninety nine to one, or nine hundred and ninety eight to two, when I begged in vain, deep down into the dead of night, until I wearied, and ceased…busied myself with nothing, that MINE. (421)

"Busying himself with nothing" is the mining - or hollowing out – of the space of the play, of hollowing a space out - paradoxically - in the *greater* void. The "best" option for W's arrival is number three, in which she arrives and "speaks" Yeats' poetry. Although Katherine Worth maintains that the play works towards this "supreme Yeatsian moment" ("Words" 140), this moment of historical transcendence—where the specter shall arrive to make history whole, reuniting M and W—never arrives, just as John Corbett's

emphatic questions to the Dean's ghost are answered by Mrs. Henderson's profession of ignorance, "I do not know anybody called Swift." "W's words are the inherited words of others, Irish others, made up for company, which in this case is the camera. These words are not actually even spoken by W, but by V:

> 54. V: Right.
> 55. *Dissolve to* M. *5 Seconds.*
> 56. *Dissolve to* W. *5 Seconds.*
> 57. V: "…but the clouds of the sky…when the horizon fades…or a sleepy bird's cry…among the deepening shades…"
> 58. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
> 59. *Fade out on* M.
> 60. *Dark. 5 seconds.* (422)

W was never "there" at all. She is imagined by M and voiced by V, and voiced via jumbled group of Irish (Yeatsian) citations.

Beckett essentially summons Yeats to follow up on the ramifications of the conclusions he makes about aesthetic failure. Yeats sought to pattern himself after the failures of his forebears, particularly Swift, in a retreat into a space of solitude and memory. This movement, however, still remained within a recognizable historical scope, specifically the failure of both Yeats and his class, as he perceived it, to make Irish history whole. If artists were, like the dead, separated spirits dwelling among the deepening shades of a fallen world, there was still a place of retreat, where the lamp could be turned up. For Beckett, however, there was nowhere to hide. Failing *better*, as he put it, involved the transition from larger, historical failures into the domain of personal memory. Even if those fragmentary memories retained an Irish scene, "Irishness," in its concern with loneliness and failure, became only a leitmotif for an

exploration of failure on a much more basic level: the failure to arrive at *being*, at a place where memories would add up to an integral self.

Chapter 2

Brilliant Failure: Memorializing MacLíammóir

> To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. (112)
>
> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

When the Irish actor Micheál MacLiammóir died in 1978 he left a bizarre legacy in his wake: those who sought to memorialize him looked back over his lengthy theatrical career and discovered that his two most famous performances were themselves works dedicated to memorializing others. In 1929 he had taken the stage as the 18th century Irish patriot Robert Emmet in Dennis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says No!*, a role that—despite Emmet's youth at the time of his trial and execution for treason in 1803—MacLiammóir would continue to perform well into his sixties, wearing only a little more makeup onstage than he wore in public to conceal his age. In his sixties, he had then composed and toured a one-man Oscar Wilde show, *The Importance of Being Oscar*, across the globe, bringing the actor and the Gate theatre, the company he had co-founded with his lifelong partner Hilton Edwards in 1928, international acclaim and a much-needed injection of financial capital. Memorializing Micheál MacLiammóir was complicated not only by the memorial work he himself had done, but also by the fact that, as people looked through this veil of performance, past the make-up, the Wildean aphorisms and the creative flourishes of autobiography, more and more of the actor's own life was revealed to be a consummate act. MacLiammóir was not actually Irish: he had been born Alfred Wilmore in Kensal Green, London, in 1899. His Cork childhood, which he had colorfully described in his series of autobiographies as the scene of his first

memories, was a total fabrication. He had learned Irish at a school in London, where he had became a well-known child actor. For most of his life, he had also played at being straight, despite his life-long, rather open partnership with Edwards and although there was certainly "talk," as their biographer Christopher Fitz-simon puts it, about his other relationships with men in a country where homosexuality was a criminal offense until 1993. His name, his Cork heritage, his sexual identity, and his fluent Irish all amounted to no more (or no less) than a series of performances of an extremely self-conscious, personal brand of Irishness. As another of his biographers, Micheál O'hAodoha notes, from an early stage Alfred/Micheál "had come to identify Ireland and Irishness with all the positive elements of the imagination and creativity which he yearned to explore" (19). Throughout his life, he found various, potentially oppositional exemplars of Irish identity to both imitate and revise. In an incisive article, Éibhear Walshe traces MacLiammóir's poses from the "Yeatsian mask" of the Celtic revival to the "emblematic figure" of Oscar Wilde, which allowed MacLiammóir to "bring his dissident sexuality more and more to the fore" in his elder years (153). Walshe's goal is to "explore those writings dealing directly with sexual identity" by which MacLiammóir sought to position himself within Irish cultural discourse.

Informed by Walshe's essay, I also hope to show the conceptual similarities between Yeats and Wilde's notions of performing identity and how this shaped MacLiammóir's own vision of himself within an Irish cultural context. However, I will move beyond her literary investigations of the autobiographies to consider how various national narratives were stitched together in MacLiammóir's theatrical performances, specifically the narrative of failure and the resulting, messianic call to action associated

with Republican nationalism (in the form of Robert Emmet and his famous "speech from the dock"), and Oscar Wilde's own career, which was read as a performed failure by W.B. Yeats, and subsequently by MacLiammóir as well. Whereas the last chapter in part focused on Yeats' notions of historical failure and how these were manifested in his life and work, the present study shall explore how MacLiammóir both interpreted and then performed these Irish failures within the recognizable dramatic genre of tragedy. Hayden White has noted that the tragic narrative mode, "that vision of human life informing the poetic genre of tragedy," crafts or emplots historical events to adhere to that form. As a result, "the symbolic content of narrative history, the content of its form, is the tragic vision itself" (181). It is my contention that in whatever persona MacLiammóir adopted on or off the stage, this tragic narrative informed his poses, dramaturgy and acting. Finally, at his own memorial, MacLiammóir's absent body took its place within the narrative, as his own life was emplotted according to this tragic form. It is my contention that MacLiammóir's own continuous posing ultimately highlights the notion that his "Irishness," as I will define this amorphous term here, was itself predicated on a series of acts that sought to perform a tragic history, and—through this performance—to erase the differences between Robert Emmet, Oscar Wilde and himself, uniting them all as "brilliant failures," an expression Wilde had applied to his own Irish forebears.

Oscar Wilde's "tragic" fall (his trial and conviction in 1895 for "gross indecency") would be grafted onto the narrative of failure and redemption associated with Emmet through the stage-presence of a body (MacLiammóir's) that had stood in for *both* men via what Joseph Roach has dubbed surrogation, "the doomed search for originals by continually auditioning stand-ins." MacLiammóir dualistically became the stand-in for

Robert Emmet and Oscar Wilde, and in his own memorialization he was remembered *as if* he were both men *and* himself. [1] Roach notes that in surrogation the "fit can never be exact," and "public enactments of forgetting" within a culture are required to "blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances and ruptures" (3). I shall chart how this process of surrogation occurred, first in public performances associated with Robert Emmet, and then moving into MacLiammóir's theatrical performances, as he stood in for Emmet and then Wilde. Finally, I hope to demonstrate how stand-ins for MacLiammóir himself were sought after his own death.

Republican Failure: Robert Emmet

In September 1803, Robert Emmet was brought before British magistrates for the orchestration of a failed Irish rebellion, one that had come upon the heels of Wolfe Tone's own, larger failed rebellion five years earlier. From its inception, the rebellion seemed doomed to failure: allies in the counties of Wicklow and Ulster failed to come to his aid, a munitions dump where he was hiding his weapons exploded, one of his own men was an informant, and the rebellion's crescendo amounted to little more than a mob brawl in Dublin in which several people, including the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, were murdered. Emmet was charged with treason, as well as collaborating with France, from whom he had sought aid and with whom Great Britain was currently at war. As a potentially tragic figure, Emmet more than fit the bill: he was young and handsome, a dashing member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy who was deeply in love with Sarah

[1] I am using "as if" here in the Stanislavskian sense: the actor behaves according to a given set of circumstances as if he or she was the person he or she was portraying. Acting *well* thus means carrying the audience along with this lie. Even in such a liminal state for the actor, however, the audience is never fully convinced that the actor is that person. But the impression of character, as I discuss here, can remain long after the actor ceases playing as if he or she were that character. See Stanislavski 49-57.

Curran, to whom he had become secretly engaged. Her father was his defense council in the trial. It had all the makings of a tragic romance: the young, failed revolutionary torn between his love of country and lady. Over the next century Emmet became a legend, the subject of numerous songs, poems and melodramas, the most famous of which became a nationalist hymn, penned by Thomas Moore, "She is Far from The Land Where Her Young Hero Sleeps."

At the epicenter of this performance, however, was not the actual rebellion itself, but Emmet's famous speech from the dock, in which he not only explained his actions, but sought to give them much larger significance by inserting them into a rapidly developing historical script that can only be described as messianic. As Seamus Deane has aptly noted in his commentary on Emmet's speech, what was really *said* in the final five minutes of the trial, when the prisoner was allowed to speak, is the subject of much debate, and depends, ultimately, on which archive one draws from. "The differences," he notes, "can be attributed to the objectives of those publishing" (934). The decidedly nationalist version, not surprisingly, is the one that passed into Irish cultural memory. This text, in pamphlet form, appeared four years after the trial, claiming to have been issued "at the request of his friends." This text was certainly punctuated dramatically to emphasize not only the theatricality of this failure, but its messianic possibilities, even featuring Emmet's betrayer, Leonard MacNally, whose credentials included being a "dramatist, barrister and informer," kissing Emmet farewell as he was being led from the courtroom. The conclusion of the speech, according to the "friends" pamphlet, read as follows:

> Let no man write my epitaph, as no man who knows my motives dare he vindicate them, let them and me repose in obscurity and peace, and my tomb remain uninscribed, until other times and other men can do justice to my character – when my Country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written – I have done. (Emmet 938)

Nationalist martyrdom is performatively linked to the central sacrifice of Christian theology: "I have done" replaces the biblical "It is finished." The obligation to redeem this failure—itself consecrated in death—seems implicit: Emmet becomes a specter, until his coming again in the form of others who will carry the work forward. Meaning to his sacrifice cannot be given *until* this moment, this "coming again." Walter Benjamin elaborates on this messianic vision of history: "There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was predicted on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. This claim cannot be settled cheaply" (*Theses* 254). History here is "thought" as a national narrative predicated on failure and repetition, a narrative which ostensibly moves towards a time—always in the future tense—where these traumatic failures can be transcended. At the same time, this failure is nostalgically mourned: the "what-ifs" of history (if Emmet had lived, if the rebellion had succeeded) are entertained in conceiving of the present moment. In such a way, history is thought of as a tragedy of past moments of failed possibility.

This seemingly contradictory idea of a tradition engendered by failure is clarified if one turns to Roach's notion of surrogation, and its role in addressing the trauma of death or disappearance within the social fabric of a community. Inherent in surrogation, and the various rites of mourning which surround and constitute it, is failure:

performance seeks to erase these chasms in the narrative that death creates, to literally make the absent present again. Reinvention of the existing culture is demanded by loss or departure, as survivors feel "obliged to reinvent themselves, taking into account the roles of their predecessors." The specter of Emmet appears in performances that seek to reinterpret or revise "Emmet" to speak to and for the changing present moment(s). "Performance," Roach notes "stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and replace" (3). In re-presenting the speech from the dock, survivors attempt, nostalgically, to "see[k] refuge in a mystical connection with [their] great and ennobling heritage" (Lowenthal 71). So imbued, the mythic idea of Irish martyrdom is reinterpreted and performed to fit present historical circumstances.

Speeches from the dock pepper 19th century Irish history. John O'Leary, whom WB Yeats monumentalized in his poem "September 1913," had invoked Emmet's name in his own speech from the dock in 1865.[2] Arguably, however, the most performatively effective speech took place in 1915, not in a courthouse but in a cemetery, literally over the body of the Fenian revolutionary O'Donovan Rossa.[3] The speech was spoken by Irish revolutionary, poet and playwright Pádraic (Patrick) Pearse. In 1915, a generation of Fenian revolutionaries was dying out, and a series of funerals sought to embody and replace these losses via an active forgetting of the differences between the Fenian struggles of the 19th century and the fractious agendas of the various nationalist groups present at the funeral. To an audience of 10,000 attendees, Pearse repeated Emmet's call

[2] This poem featured the refrain "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone/It's with O'Leary in the grave." (*Selected Poetry* 73).

[3] "Fenian" is a term used from 1850 on to apply to Irish nationalists who advocated the violent overthrow of British rule in post-famine Ireland. The "Fenian Brotherhood," of which O'Donovan Rossa was a member, was actually started by exiled Fenians in the United States. Rossa was in exile there himself and his body was returned to Ireland for this interment.

to action using the same messianic rhetoric, refining the performance by reinforcing the connection between nationalist bloodshed and the Catholic rites of baptism and communion. Pearse felt it his obligation to speak as a young man in place of Rossa's contemporaries "on behalf of a new generation that has been re-baptized in the Fenian faith:"

> I propose to you that, here by the grave of this unrepentant Fenian, we renew our baptismal vows […] we ask of God, each one for himself, such unshakable purpose, such high and gallant courage, such unbreakable strength of soul as belonged to O'Donovan Rossa. Deliberately here we avow ourselves, as he avowed himself in the dock, Irishmen of one allegiance only. (293)

Pearse spoke of one allegiance, invoking the performance space the dock represented, in an attempt to summon Rossa and at the same time move past him towards a new space, one where all the attendees of the funeral could merge together into a single community of resistance to imperialism. This was to be accomplished "in the name of" Rossa: through his death/failure, the narrative could continue via the communal ritual.

> In closer spiritual communion with him now than ever before or perhaps ever again, in a spiritual communion with those of his day, living and dead, who suffered with him in English prisons, in communion of spirit too with our own dear comrades who suffer in English prisons today[…]. Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations.

Pearse's speech concluded by reinforcing the claims of the past on the present with the famous quote: "the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree will never be at peace" (294). Pearse's performance was a resounding success, as he was able to channel the Fenian risings and

those who had died in them into his own project, to blast them, as Benjamin wrote in other circumstances, "from the continuum of history" (*Theses* 261).

The inherent theatricality of this moment did not go unnoticed, and scholar Nicholas Greene maintains this primary concern with performance carried over to the Easter Rising against the British that took place a year later in 1916. "It was an event," he notes "planned with conscious theatricality, and if the initial Dublin audience reaction was derisive, within years it grew to be regarded by Irish nationalists as the great drama which Pearse and the other leaders had planned it to be" (136). Despite a series of mistakes and betrayals that repeated the "tragic" expositions of Emmet's century-old rebellion, Pearse and the Irish republicans decided to go forward with the insurrection anyway. Given the history of failed performances, failing *well* in this rebellion would make it into a great drama, a sublime piece of political theatre. They chose the General Post Office (GPO) in the middle of O'Connell St to stage the rebellion, a space that Roach would term a "vortex of behavior." Such spaces "frequently provide the crux in the semiotext…the grand boulevard, the marketplace, the theater district, the square, the burial ground – where the gravitational pull of the social necessity brings audiences together and produces performers from their midst" (28). O'Connell St was itself a vast mausoleum of statuary which spoke to a multitude of oppositional historical narratives: the Catholic "liberator" Daniel O'Connell stood half a mile from the vast column of Horatio Nelson, an icon of British Nationalism, who had died at the Battle of Trafalgar two years after Robert Emmet.[4] The rebellion was a failure, both literally and

[4] Viscount Admiral Horatio Nelson was killed by snipers in a decisive naval battle with a combined French and Spanish fleet at Trafalgar in 1805. The vastly outnumbered British fleet achieved a victory that effectively stopped Napoleon's ambitions to invade England. Irish nationalism, of course, was not alone in

symbolically marking the GPO and its environs with the signs of a traumatic, failed struggle. Pearse had backed up his own "speech from the dock," in this case the proclamation of an Irish Republic, with sobering martyrdom; he had effectively re-presented Emmet's own death a century earlier. Those leaders of the Rising who surrendered, including Pearse, were swiftly executed by the British authorities for high treason. A cult status grew around them, as the papers over the next days sought to rapidly insert them into the tragic narrative with decidedly Christian overtones: the rebellion, after all, had happened during Easter Week. The sixteen men executed were quickly changed, as Fintan O'Toole wrote in an Irish times article ninety years later, "from dangerous fanatics to Catholic martyrs." Pearse's attempt, after Emmet, to performatively link Christianity to Republicanism were a stark success, as political opinion in Ireland rapidly shifted to support Sinn Fein, the political party that stood for separation from Britain at all costs. Yeats summed it up in his poem "Easter 1916:" "All changed, changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born" (*Selected Poetry* 119).

I invoke Yeats here to raise an important point: such national theatrics shared many things with the legitimate Irish theatre of the time.[5] Only a few blocks from the now pock-marked GPO stood the Abbey theatre, billing itself as the "National theatre society, ltd.," had itself been established by WB Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn as part of a Gaelic literary revival that hearkened back to the ancient idealism of a

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its worship of the martyr to the cause, and a cult of Nelson rapidly grew in England, complete with memorial columns in many cities of the Empire. The Dublin Nelson Column was blown up during the night, reportedly by the IRA, in 1966 on the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising. Newspaper accounts of the rising also note that a failed attempt was made to detonate it during the 1916 rebellion itself. The Dublin General Post Office (GPO) is now forever associated with the Rising, and is commemorated with a statue, "The Death of Cuchulain," the Irish mythological hero.

[5] For an excellent account of these commonalities, see Matthews.

vanished Ireland. When the Rising took place, the Abbey had been running a revival of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. "They shall be speaking for ever, the people shall hear them for ever," the last lines of the play, enshrined the power of failure that Pearse advocated. His own poem, "The Mother," in which a mother keens for her sons who have died for Ireland, included lines taken almost verbatim from the play:

> They shall be spoken of among their people,
> The generations shall remember them,
> and call them blessed […]. (758)

Pearse deftly paraphrases Mary's song of praise in the Bible: "surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (*Revised Standard Version*, Luke 1.48), reinforcing the connection between martyrdom and remembrance. Reflecting on his own childhood, Pearse wrote that "had Mr Yeats' 'Kathleen ni Houlihan' been then written, and had I seen it, I would have taken it not as an allegory, but as a representation of a thing that might happen any day in my house" (qtd. in Greene 70). As a young man who went out to die in 1916, he saw little separation between the sober ritual of republican martyrdom and its theatrical representation; allegory became reality. He became one of Yeats's "certain men the English shot."

Soon after the Rising, Yeats wrote to Gregory that "all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and criticism from politics…I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me – and I am very despondent about the future" (qtd. in Pilkington 79). Yeats certainly perceived that a war with and about history, and representation of it, was at hand, and he

was not optimistic about his chances. He seemed particularly aware of the powers of evoking the specters of the past in such a ghastly performance:

> When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
> What stalked through the Post Office?
> What intellect, what calculation, number, measurement,
> replied […]? (*Selected Poetry* 215)

The first stanza of "The Statues" claims that Pythagoras—who, despite his discovery of the "divine" proportions—could not make statues "live;" they required the embodiment, the participation of the living. The mythological Irish hero Cuchulain could, like Emmet, only be summoned and embodied by the living Pearse.[6]

After the Anglo-Irish war concluded in 1922, radical political performances of the type above ossified into official, state-endorsed ones. The Irish Free State (and later the Irish Republic), David Lloyd notes, could continue to use partition of the country as a justification for this type of performance's continuation: "The formation of modern Ireland occurred through the exercise of constant coercion and violence, that nonetheless never achieved the integration and homogenization of Ireland that would have extinguished nationalist aspirations" (10). A new geographic discontinuity required a new sort of national performance, one that bound nationalist iconography (the pantheon of the fallen), Catholicism (ineluctably bound, as demonstrated, to the former) and agrarianism (the land or soil that is a mainstay of nationalist rhetoric) together to represent an "Ireland" opposed to both the Protestant, industrialized British Empire and Protestant Loyalists in Northern Ireland. Such moves created an increasingly claustrophobic

[6] The first stanza reads: "Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?/His numbers though they moved or seemed to move/In marble or in bronze, lacked character./But boys and girls pale from the imagined love/Of solitary beds, knew what they were,/That passion could bring character enough/And pressed at midnight in some public place/Live lips upon a plummet-measured face."

cultural environment, reinforced by juridical precedent, literary censorship and an inherent suspicion of the sort of performances that had – ironically – assured the place of men like Pearse within the nationalist pantheon. One of the more famous examples of this is found in the well-documented 1926 Abbey riots over Sean O'Casey's play *The Plough and the Stars*, which used expressionistically charged theatre techniques to interrogate the enshrined heroism of the men and women of 1916.

I would like in the remaining pages, however, to move away from this instance of a well-covered conflation of nationalist and theatrical performance to focus on a much less-researched and potentially dynamic intersection of the theatrical and the political spheres. In the Irish case, this involved using the same narrative historical and performance tropes to imagine new histories. Conceiving of the past as something ephemeral and moldable—an image—makes possible the consistent re-invention of the present. Such action, as Susan Bennett has noted in her book-length study of the intersection of nostalgia and performance, can "enable rememberings which don't, by virtue of the categorization, conjure up a repressively conservative and singular history" (7). I would like, therefore, to trace an alternative performance tradition based upon notions of self-invention, which introduced a certain amount of free-play into how meaning making occurred upon the historical and theatrical stages of an independent Ireland. At the same time, however, the performance genealogy I follow here employed the same rhetorical structures of memorialization and surrogation as the above outlined, nationalist forms of historical commemoration.

Re-inventing Alfred Wilmore

Christopher Fitz-simon, who wrote a dual biography of Hilton Edwards and Micheal MacLiammóir, is quick to point out the inauthenticity of MacLiammóir's Irishness, and to link his performance to a rather generalized theatricality associated with acting. "MacLíammóir overdid everything which would flaunt his Irishness," he notes, "actors then, as now, presented themselves to the press and public as they wished to be seen, rather than as what they were" (19). Fitz-simon's dismissal of this trait as something generically "theatrical" misses an important point: Micheál had two prominent Irishmen that served as exemplary examples of this type of performance: WB Yeats and Oscar Wilde, and both had made deep impressions on him early in his career. Such influences seem fitting, as each of these men fully believed in various notions of personal identity as a series of surfaces, performed in everyday life: Yeats self-admittedly had taken many of these ideas from Wilde himself, whom he had met on a number of occasions in London. Wilde had passed through a series of identities throughout his life, refining an aesthetic of the surface, since, as he expressed in the final passage of his theatrical essay, "The Truth of Masks," "it is only in art criticism, and through it, that we can realize Hegel's system of contraries. The truth of metaphysics is the truth of masks" (1078). Wilde went on, however, to refine this aesthetic in his theatre, prose, and day-to-day life much more than in his criticism. His plays and the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are replete with surfaces, deceptions, and dual existences. Wilde lived several lives himself: Irish immigrant, darling of the London theatrical scene, closeted homosexual and devoted husband and father. The interrelationship between art and life was a constant theme. Wilde had noted in "The Decay of Lying" that art

> takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of ideal treatment. The third stage is when life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. (979)

More than one scholar has remarked that Wilde's greatest piece of theatre was his own life: indeed, many have reflected on the almost prophetic quality of the writing such as that above, which seems to potentially refer to the artist's failure and downfall, to Art (in this case, the "art" of the person) being "driven into the wilderness." This of course actually was, in the tragic narrative of events, Wilde's fate, as he was tried in 1895, and sentenced to four years hard labor, from which he never fully recovered. He died in France only several years after his release from prison. The scandal blackened his name in England and abroad, specifically in his home country of Ireland, where his works would as a result not be performed until the 1930s. *De Profundis*, which was in reality a long letter to his lover Alfred Douglas, sought to solidify this contemplation of suffering. What biographer Richard Pine has called Wilde's "narrative of self" crescendos in his "tragic" Christ-like trial, condemnation, and eventual death, complete with a speech from the dock in the Old Bailey on beauty and aesthetics. Indeed, both Pine and Richard Ellman, two of Wilde's most contemporary biographers, have been accused of perpetuating the view of Wilde's life as a "tragedy," and the scandals and trials as a "fate," testament, perhaps, to the convincing nature of Wilde's performance.[7] Wilde was certainly not one to resist the comparison. In "De Profundis" he wrote that there was the most "intimate and immediate connection between the true life of Christ and the true life

[7] Pine volunteers this information (21).

of the artist…his entire life also is the most wonderful of poems. For "pity and terror" there is noting in the entire cycle of Greek Tragedy to touch it" (922-24).

Yeats certainly followed suit. It was with no sense of sarcasm that he referred to his encounters with Wilde in his own *Autobiography* under the subheading "The Tragic Generation" (166). "We Irish," Wilde once told Yeats, "are too poetical to be poets; we are a nation of brilliant failures, but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks" (qtd. in Pine 24). For Wilde, rhetoric and performance must replace poetry in Irish culture; brilliant failure necessitated a consistent series of poses, or performances, since it was inherently "Irish" to be "too poetical." Yeats caught on quickly. He noted with potential admiration that Wilde "had lived with no mockery at all an imaginary life, perpetually performed a play" (qtd. in Pine 152). Yeats went on to do likewise, refining theories of the mask into the self and anti-self, and employing such conceptions not only in his drama and poetry but in his own life, as he lived dualistically as the hermetic, mystical poet in one instance and as a man of the people on the other. It was this Yeats that Sean O'Faolain had watched invent himself.

It is not surprising, then, that the actor MacLíammóir was fascinated by these two men and sought to emulate them in numerous ways from an early age. They became, for him, part of an alternative pantheon of Irish "heroes," one that represented aesthetics, posing and consistent performance. He spoke in flowering prose about finally meeting Yeats himself in 1929, echoing in many ways Beckett's varied descriptions of the spectral protagonist of *Watt.* The actor found him "tall, slow and stately, as grey as time, as vague and vivid as a dream…" (qtd in Fitz-simon 55). His recollections of encountering Wilde (in prose, not in person) are even more remarkable. In *An Oscar of*

No Importance, one of his series of autobiographies—he wrote three to Yeats's one—he spoke of his discovery of Oscar Wilde as a child:

> Before my eyes a magician rose from a sea of clouds black as Acheron, irresistibly smiling: a dim, terrifying figure swathed in scarlet, wielding a wand like some monstrous being in a pantomime, a sorcerer at whose bidding all things were changed. And this horror, this ogre, yet was smiling: he was grand and gay and witty and good natured […]. A shadow, monstrous, laughing, insolent, dark and radiant as Lucifer himself, *turning men into women.* (3)

Micheál's father's derogatory remark that Wilde "turned young men into women," is what inspires this specter to appear: for MacLíammóir, who must have slowly been realizing that he was attracted to men, Wilde becomes an avatar for him, one who was a master of confusion, contradiction, and a potential release from the constrictions of Victorian morality. This "demoniac possession" by Wilde was potentially a source of reinvention for MacLíammóir, taking into account the role of his predecessor. Roach notes of surrogation that the fit cannot be exact, and this was certainly true of MacLíammóir: one was Irish, the other English; one a writer, the other an actor; each was the product of two quite different ages. However, in embodying the spirit of Wilde, MacLíammóir sought not only to become *like* the dead author, but to rehabilitate his memory, to invest it with the nostalgic possibility of what might have been if the failure of Wilde's trial had not occurred, or had been transcended. He worked hard, therefore, to remake Wilde as an Irishman, just as he sought to rehabilitate his image in a land where, in the 1930's Wilde was viewed as scandalous, an oddity of the 1890's. Wilde's specter was summoned up to challenge, in several ways, the nationalist narration of history, to imagine alternative "Wildean" bases for what Irishness might in fact be.

Macliammoir's training as an actor made him the man for such a job. Alfred Willmore, as he was then known, had begun acting in London in 1911 as a child actor in the company of the famous actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree, the founder of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Tree had himself inherited the grandiose, mid-19th century romantic acting tradition of Henry Irving. Tree taught his young performers an acting style which emphasized emotion over realistic characterization: appropriate, strong gestures preceded emotionally under-girded speech (Fitz-simon 26). Such strong choices were certainly due to the larger houses of melodrama, where audience reception was dependent on visually and aurally arresting acting, as opposed to later, Stanislavskian naturalism. Such a style was, in fact, quite similar to the theatrical form attributed to Sarah Bernhardt and her generation of actors, with its emphasis on the musicality and power of the voice, preceded by mimic facial expressions and strong gestural movements (Sauter 129). MacLiammóir in fact saw Bernhardt act in 1912, and we are lucky enough to have his own account of his experience as an audience member. Above all else, the young actor recalls that he was fascinated by her power to bring "indescribable brilliance and seductiveness to every move she made," with a voice that "caressed the mind and tore at the heart." He recalled that she kept the brown lace of her sleeves glued to the back of her hands to avoid distraction (Fitz-simon 29). This supreme focus on the gesture, or the dramatic pose, was an embodied action that MacLiammóir would carry with him throughout his subsequent career, both on and off the stage. For a variety of reasons, such posing would suit his performing body to the roles that he would be most remembered for: that of a melodramatically conceived nineteenth-century Irish patriot, and Oscar Wilde himself.

It was this actor of poses and potential contradictions that took to the stage in Denis Johnston's expressionist drama *The Old Lady Says No!* in 1929. The play began as yet another melodrama about Robert Emmet and his love, Sarah Curran, which were all too common throughout the 19th century, with MacLíammóir playing Emmet. MacLiammóir, young and handsome like Emmet at the time of his execution, had an immediate sensory reaction on the audience, buoyed by both his realistic uniform and his acting technique. Through a repertory of actions that can be traced back to the archaic, melodramatic style of the large nineteenth-century London houses where he first learned to act, MacLiammóir's deportment highlighted Emmet's out-of-step romanticism. The play takes on its expressionistic tone when the actor playing Emmet is knocked over the head by a rifle butt, and—in a feint similar to Pirandello's *Enrico IV*—comes to believe he is actually Emmet. The character, iterating between the actor playing Emmet and Emmet himself, then walks through a dreamscape of 1920s Dublin, which contrasts Emmet's romantic, nationalistic ideals with the actual modern, capitalist state that is 1929 independent Ireland. The landscape that he moves within is replete with financial busybodies, flappers, flower-sellers and "salons" full of learned ladies, ministers of the Free State government and attending artists. Emmet's romanticism is not only opposed by the storm of modernity that buffets him, but by a talking statue of Henry Grattan, the famous 18th century Irish parliamentarian, who debates the legacy of bloodshed that Emmet represents.[8] In such a fashion, Emmet and Irish nationalism's legacies' bearings

[8] Grattan and "Grattan's Parliament" at the end of the 18th century stand for another failed possibility of Irish Independence. Their attempt to seek that parliamentary independence via legislation was overshadowed by the rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798, in which Emmet had also taken part. The Irish Parliament was itself dissolved in the 1800 Act of Union with Great Britain. Grattan, Johnston, and *The Old Lady Says No!* are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

on the present are theatrically challenged. Implicit in the staging, directed by Hilton Edwards, was the understanding that MacLíammóir never quite "became" Robert Emmet in the Stanislavskian sense, but that he should maintain a certain amount of distance from the character. Again, MacLiammóir's declamatory training helped him achieve this. The actor's persona was consistently visible. At the end of the play, MacLíammóir rewrites Emmet's messianic epitaph, reacting it to emphasize its restorative potential as opposed to its messianic call to martyrdom. Although Dublin is a city "so old, so sick with memories," it will in time "walk the streets of Paradise, head high and unashamed." The monologue concludes with a performative: "there now. Let my epitaph be written" (Johnston 122-3).

As Speaker, MacLíammóir, effectively re-buries Emmet by writing his epitaph as a paean to Dublin itself. The traumatic memories of the city are exorcised and Emmet is reburied. Emmet/the Speaker quickly became MacLíammóir's most famous role, one that ghosted him throughout the rest of his theatrical career. Despite the actor's advancing age, he continued to perform the role in numerous revivals of the play. Fitz-simon comments that this was not seen as "odd," precisely because of the aesthetic distance between the character Emmet and the actor MacLíammóir:

> […] for the part is more a figure than a character, and that is how MacLíammóir was able to continue playing it without the usual snide twitter in the dress circle bar about his sagging chin. It was undoubtedly his greatest creation […]. His mellifluous speaking of the final lines – which have been anthologized in collections of verse as well as prose – provide a supreme example of the synthesis of performer with performed. (214)

"The young romantic hero and ill-starred lover never found as fine an interpreter as MacLiammóir," Micheál Ó'hAodha added. "It was one of those rare occasions in the theatre where the part – the mask – had become the person" (76). If the part was more a "figure" than a character, then what might the "mask" of Emmet make of the person who wore it? What effect might the figure, or *specter*, of Emmet have on the living Macliammoir?

Both Joseph Roach and Marvin Carlson have written extensively about the theatrical power of this sort of synthesis.[9] Writing of the 17th century actor Thomas Betterton, who similarly played Hamlet and other canonical roles well into his seventies, Roach maintains that he had not one but two bodies, one real and the other a stand-in for a complicated set of British national symbols, which made it possible for audiences to suspend their disbelief, looking past the "memento mori of pockmarks, strained lungs and fat:"

> This dichotomy provokes a constant alternation of attention from actor to role, from vulnerable body to enduring memory, in which at any moment one or the other ought to be forgotten but cannot be. (82)

Whereas Betterton had stood in for the abstract political concept of the British monarch's two bodies (one corporeal, the other eternal), MacLíammóir stood in for the two bodies of the nationalist narrative (one the individual actor in the nationalist drama, the other a long line of martyrs he/she in turn sought to emulate in his/her own heroic failure). Performing the role of Emmet over and over again, MacLíammóir became a stand-in for the Irish cultural idea that invoking the specter of Emmet had stood in for before, yet the

[9] See Carlson 52-95.

actor never really "disappeared" himself. Despite aging, and even wearing makeup in everyday life to lessen the visible effects of this aging to his public, he became a placeholder for what was quickly becoming (in the rapidly modernizing Free State) an archaic vision of Ireland. Moreover, MacLíammóir's grandiose acting style onstage reinforced his own offstage posing as a nineteenth century figure tragically out of step with the current times: he famously remarked in a quarrel with Johnston over a schism at the Gate theatre that he was "incurably nineteenth century in temper" (Fitz-simon 95). He wore a long flowing cape in public, combined with a significant layer of facial makeup after he passed the age of thirty, and preferred the already defunct Celtic twilight school of theatre and literature championed by W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, leading more than one critic to quip that he had arrived for the Gaelic revival thirty years too late. MacLíammóir had become a nostalgic cultural institution while still living.

The Importance of Being Oscar

MacLíammóir's most commercially successful venture, however, and the one piece that brought him as much fame and cultural cache in his home country as *The Old Lady Says No!* was his one-man Oscar Wilde show, *The Importance of Being Oscar*, which he wrote in 1960. The piece toured across the world, bringing Wilde, MacLíammóir and the Gate to global attention. The title of the piece speaks to its aim, which was dualistically to rehabilitate Oscar Wilde in the eyes of both Ireland and the world, and to solidify the link between Wilde and his home country's history. When the one-man show was announced, many anticipated that MacLiammóir would embody Wilde as an actual character: "Oscar Wilde," Ó'hAodha quipped, recalling a pre-show

comment he had overheard, “isn’t that a role he’s been playing all his life” (164)? Again, Hilton Edwards directed the piece, and again he encouraged MacLíammóir not to actually “become” Wilde:

> Mind you…I don’t like the idea of you trying to *look* like him at all really…Do it as yourself. A dinner jacket. Yourself. A recital, not a play. But don’t bill it as a recital. Fundamentally it will be an entertainment. But we can’t call it that either. (qtd. in MacLíammóir, *An Oscar of No Importance* 56-7)

This in fact became the way it was done: neither recital nor play, it was a pastiche of Wilde’s own works, creatively sorted and narrated by MacLíammóir. In the printed introduction, which was included in the program for the play, Hilton Edwards sought to set this narrative form within a distinctly Irish tradition:

> The *Seanchaí*, the story-teller, is a fast vanishing figure in the tradition of Gaelic and Irish culture. Oscar Wilde, though possibly unaware of it, owed much of his influence both as an artist and as a social lion to the craft of the *Seanchaí.*..as we progressed I became convinced that at no moment should the actor *play*, that is impersonate, Oscar Wilde…he could temporarily become the characters of Wilde’s creation, but he must never attempt to *be* Wilde but must always remain himself. Stepping, as it were, in and out of the picture as occasion demanded he yet must always maintain an attitude aloof and ultimately objective; that of the Teller of the Story, of the *Seanchaí.* (ix-xii)

MacLiammóir did not “become” Wilde: he wore a dinner jacket adorned with a green carnation, one of Wilde’s most recognizable symbols. The notion of “objectivity” here, however is naïve: a *Seanchaí* was never objective, but sought to place events within a recognizable story format, and in this case it was a tragic, yet Irish tale. The direction to be “himself,” to one who conceived, after Wilde, that life itself was a consummate performance —“a long rehearsal,” as the actor once said, “for a play that is never

produced" (qtd. in Ó'hAodha 127)—seems problematic. But it was perhaps this self-aware theatricality, of seeing a man who (like Wilde) believed in constantly posing, pose in so many different roles and forms, that allowed the audience to associate MacLiammóir with Wilde's own notions of identity-as-performance. In other words, MacLiammóir did not need to become Wilde to both rehabilitate and replace him in the eyes of the audience, he merely had to adopt the "pose:" a careful, "musical" series of gestures and controlled movements that anticipated vocal recitations of text again echoed Macliammoir's own, predominantly 19th century training. As "himself," MacLiammóir entered a very simple stage-space, lit from above, and consisting of a vase filled with lilies, a carpet, a chair, and a sedan. Wearing evening dress, he began reading from Wilde's poem "Helas." Macliammoir did employ physical gestures to suit the emotions of the poem, essentially acting *as if* he were Wilde reading it, but he then came downstage "as himself," to address the audience directly and put this quote in context within his narrative. MacLiammóir told the audience *about* Wilde, without completely *becoming* him. He was, dualistically, storyteller and impersonator.

One of the most remarkable things about *The Importance of Being Oscar* is that the actual trial, which is the focus of so many other dramatic treatments of Wilde's life, does not transpire onstage but, as the play notes "may be presumed to have taken place during the interval" (MacLíammóir, *Importance* 37). Alan Sinfield has rightly commented that this reduces the "bite" of the piece, and certainly allows MacLíammóir to politely skirt any potential discussion of Queer identity (149). Eibhear Walshe has also noted that this was indicative of Micheal shying away from expressing his own sexuality on the stage, which he only in fact would do in one of the last theatre pieces he

wrote and acted in, *Prelude on Kasbeck Street* (153). What the piece does do immediately after the interval, however, is link Wilde with the nationalist performance tradition detailed above. MacLíammóir uses his own body as the glue. Launching into a passage of "De Profundis," certainly one of Wilde's more maudlin pieces, MacLíammóir gives his own preface, referring to how Wilde was "silenced" in the dock by the chief justice:

> And yet one cannot help wondering if Oscar Wilde had been allowed to speak at that moment what would have happened? Would he have delivered some speech comparable in eloquence and power to that of the Irish rebel Robert Emmet: a speech that, independently of his own fate, might have revealed the strange and uniquely Anglo-Saxon quality of the law that had sentenced him? It is impossible to say. One thing is certain: we can today no more think of Wilde without the interlude of disgrace and imprisonment that we can think of Emmet without the gallows. (39)

As an actor who had played at being both men, MacLíammóir physically joined the two tragic falls together through surrogation. Edwards wrote in the program note that the work "shows [Wilde] to have been aware from the first of the inevitability of his tragedy, a fate which he appears deliberately to have sought…and leaves no doubt that, at his most triumphant moments he sensed the approach of the shadow that would at last envelop him" (vii). Such an introduction, combined with the physical presence of MacLíammóir onstage, who admitted himself that he could never really "escape" his role as Emmet, made such a link implicit. MacLíammóir, similar to Betterton, become the new object of memory himself. By never fully disappearing into the role, he had managed to both embody and replace each with a new, immediate object of nostalgic memory of failed possibility, at once claiming Wilde for the Irish cultural imagination and inserting himself as well.

Indeed, this stage persona, this aura which somehow linked Emmet to Wilde to Macliammoir, became larger than life, greater than the physical body of MacLiammóir himself. Simon Callow recorded this uncanny transformation from the actor to the stage-persona at a subsequent performance of the work in Belfast in 1968, when the actor was well into his seventies. Callow, still at that point a young actor, led the timid-voiced, trembling, arthritic, and half-blind MacLiammóir up a staircase backstage. He heard him mount the stage, and then, suddenly, "Micheál's voice rock steady as if it had been on for hours…I stepped round to the front and watched the ebullient unrecognizable figure juggle words and emotions, drawing his audience of largely middle-aged, middle-class Belfast burghers and their wives into his charmed circle…" (Ó'hAodha 181). It was, in fact, during a performance of the piece that MacLiammóir suffered the stroke that began his terminal illness. Upon hearing of this incident, the President of Ireland, Cearbhall O Dálaigh, was told that "Ireland's leading actor was probably giving his final performance." The president decided to attend a performance at the Gate, which was itself almost a unique event, testament perhaps to the fact that the Gate had become a cultural institution, as opposed to an avant garde theatre, by the 1970s. Rising to address the audience after the performance, the President proclaimed that they had all witnessed "something wonderful" (Fitz-simon 298). This was indeed MacLíammóir's final performance, and he died soon after, in 1978. Hilton Edwards died soon after that in 1982. The president offered condolences to Edwards at the funeral, which was itself televised by RTE, Ireland's national broadcasting service. Along with the Gate theatre, Edwards and MacLiammóir had become cultural institutions themselves.

Gates of Gold

A final iteration of this performance of failure, martyrdom and rebirth arrived in Frank McGuinness' play *Gates of Gold*, which premiered at the Gate Theatre in 2002. The play revolves around the death of Gabriel, an aging actor who has spent his life with Conrad, a director. The critics immediately realized that the play was actually about MacLíammóir (the "angel" Micheál replaced by Gabriel) and Edwards, and the fate of the Gate theatre itself. Indeed, when interviewed, playwright Frank McGuinness was quite forthcoming that, although primarily a work of fiction, it was about the historical couple, and was his own attempt to revise how the two men were remembered in Irish culture. "They would loathe what has happened to them," McGuinness remarked, referring to their "sanitization" as cultural institutions. "They didn't lead clean lives. That's a fact" (Fay). McGuinness claimed they would have violently resisted being seen as role models, and—somewhat contradictorily—that his play aspired to commemorate their bravery, humor and Queerness in an intolerant Ireland.

McGuinness had first been exposed to MacLiammóir when the actor gave a production of *The Importance of Being Oscar* in the former's hometown of Bruncrana, Co. Donegal, when the younger author was only nineteen years old. Mesmerized by what he saw as an "icon of style and presentation," the Wildean aesthetic of the surface, McGuinness then saw the show again twice in Dublin. It was while watching MacLiammóir's televised funeral, however, that he began to think of writing a play about the couple. Upon watching Edwards read the eulogy, McGuinnesss, who claims at the times was coming to terms with his own homosexuality, remarked that "seeing this man speak about another man with such lasting love and pride had a huge effect. It's not the

kind of thing you saw in the late 1970s" (Fay). [10] Three decades later, McGuinness wrote his play. MacLiammóir, embodied by an actor, would be placed within the tragic narrative the dead man had himself both fostered and transformed. In this final iteration, the narrative would undertake yet another metamorphosis to include modern, liberal politics—especially Queer identity—as well as the position of the Gate Theatre itself in Irish culture. The play was not a critical success; summoning the specter of MacLiammóir proved to be far too culturally complicated an endeavor. Fintan O'Toole, who reviewed the piece for *The Irish Times,* wrote that "by the end of the evening's 95 minutes, you feel the great actor's ghost is still hovering over the stage he inhabited so often, smirking triumphantly at having seen off yet another attempt to upstage him" ("Conjuring"). O'Toole's wryly asserts that MacLíammóir, as full of theatricality as he was, and standing in for so many absent historical figures as he did, cannot be upstaged. Any attempt to invoke him as a memory in another character must confront a formidable genealogy of specters, ranging from Oscar Wilde back to Robert Emmet. Memorializing MacLiammóir meant remembering someone who served as a conduit, a cipher in the ongoing narrative of failure and redemption, a palimpsest upon which so many other histories were written and read. W*hich* MacLiammóir was being embodied? *Which* performance was being remembered?

The legacy that the two protagonists of *Gates of Gold* leave after them is not a tradition of brilliant, personal failure for national ideas, but a theatre that they claim "nobody wants." In the piece, failure is centered on the couple's theatrical ambitions,

[10] McGuinness takes some liberty with the historical record here: Senator David Norris had already begun a large-scale campaign for gay rights in Ireland at the time, and plays with openly gay characters, such as Tom Kilroy's *The Death and Ressurection of Mr. Roche* (1968) had already appeared on Dublin stages before the decade began.

stifled within the restrictive cultural environment of mid-century Ireland. What remains, in spite of the theatre's purported failure, is the unsentimental life of gay couple, a side of their relationship that Edwards and MacLíammóir were forced to conceal from the public throughout most of their lives. Gabriel's own passion (he is ill and bed-ridden throughout the play's action) and death allows the other characters to both understand and accept his failure, and to derive meaning from it. Speaking to Gabriel's sister Kassie, Conrad recalls:

> I was once asked, 'What have you achieved in the theatre?' I replied, 'Nothing.' 'And what will you leave after you?' 'Well, the same, nothing.' The young man I gave those answers to, he was very angry with me, for he was planning to devote his life to this profession and he believed I was trying to destroy him. I wasn't. I was saving him…He would like myself, like yourself, turn into nothing, be not remembered and yet he would work with all his heart to prevent such forgetfulness…if I have to have men around me, let them be warriors, that we may fight to the last for the sake of what we do and do not believe in, since there is no difference. We are men, all of us, and your brother proves it, he goes out, fighting. (59-60)

The Gate theatre is placed here within an Irish mythological tradition: the references to being surrounded by warriors call up in the minds of Irish audiences the mythological hero Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warrior band, the *Fianna*, after which the largest political party in Ireland *Fianna Fail* was named. Gabriel and Conrad are made heroic in their failed attempts to stave off forgetting, to add their own particular fragment to Irish history.

The reviewers did not miss the opportunity to note that a play about a theatre's noble failure was performed in the Gate theatre itself, the company that the two men founded, and a theatre which at the time was in a tough financial spot and had only

recently moved back into the black. By giving itself the cultural cachet the martyrdom of Gabriel – or MacLíammóir – provides, the contemporary Gate could rest on the laurels of its own "brilliant failure," to invoke Wilde and the long legacy of performance I have attempted to outline here, in the quest for cultural legitimacy and financial success, a tactic MacLíammóir, with his archaic acting style and nineteenth century temperament, had helped make lucrative. All the while, in various guises failing brilliantly is uncannily preserved as an Irish performance tactic, across multiple instances of surrogation.

Chapter 3: Where Lady Gregory's *Image* was not:

Memorial Statuary and the Nostalgic Impulse

In Ireland we are not a statue-building people. Few of our immortals live either in stone or bronze. (qtd. in Gibbons, "Wolfe Tone" 154)

The Nation, 1888

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the idea of "Ireland" was consistently rethought, remolded, and recast by various groups responding to the stringencies of historical circumstance. Wiping away the veneer of the present, one finds that the mirror reflects back not the image of a united nation, gliding into the future borne by a secure history of origins, but something more akin to Stephen Daedalus' "cracked looking glass," his "symbol of Irish art" (Joyce 6) reflecting not only the trauma of imperial servitude but also a dissonant cacophony of national narratives: Sinn Fein, *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*, Connolly and Larkin's Socialist Workers' Republic, Ascendancy Unionism, the Home Rule party—the list is long, the historical narratives multiple.

This chapter takes as its subject these images' creation, and their reception by collective audiences, specifically within the context of turn-of-the-century Irish nationalism. Central to such an analysis is an exploration of the tension between what Pierre Nora has termed "places of memory" (*lieux de mémoire)*, the mnemonic sites, persons, or archives around which people create a collectively shared history, and theatrical representation, specifically what happens when such objects appear within the *mise en scène*. In 1909, Lady Augusta Gregory wrote a play entitled *The Image*, now

largely omitted from most theatre histories of the period.[1] Its plot deals with a fictional Western Irish community's decision to build a memorial statue in the center of town to Hugh O'Lorrha, a man who whose very existence begins with rumors after a name is found on a piece of driftwood, and subsequently evolves into a completely fabricated, heroic, historical narrative. Too late, the principal characters realize their complicit credulity: the statue remains un-built, despite the approaching parade to lay the foundation stone. The work stands as an anomaly within her larger *oeuvre*, especially when one considers her substantial body of work on the Irish heroic tradition (she had herself translated many of the old legends from Irish, editions of which are still read today). The work challenges many of the nostalgic ideas that drove the revival, specifically the existence of a vanished, heroic, yet *knowable* Irish past, and stands (like Yeats's own beliefs about his failure to *make* history) as a testament to Lady Gregory's own anxieties about the historical processes at work in pre-revolutionary Ireland.

Lady Gregory's theatrical work is often side-stepped in Irish theatrical histories covering the first decade of the century in favor of a narrative of the meteoric rise—and subsequent, corporeal demise—of J.M. Synge, whose *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) provides the inaugural benchmark of Irish theatrical modernism. Ironically, Gregory's own autobiographical *Our Irish Theatre* tends to corroborate this account, echoing in many ways her fellow director and collaborator W.B. Yeats's own series of

[1] Morash mentions the play in a sentence (162), Pilkington does not mention it at all, nor does Robert Welch, in an actual history of the Abbey itself, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999). Christopher Murray, however, gives the play an entire paragraph, claiming it was a "personal favorite" of Gregory's and that within it the "Irish fidelity to the dream image is both celebrated and mocked" (51-2).

autobiographic descriptions of the events.[2] Indeed, *The Image* was written within a year of the riots which occurred at the Abbey theatre during the first run of the *Playboy*, and premiered the same year as Synge's death in 1909. The two events effectively shadow Gregory's own writing in this period, which is itself a bizarre blend of the careful archiving of the legends of heroic Ireland on the one hand, and a well-constructed criticism of those heroic narratives in stage works such as *The Image* on the other. *Playboy* and its reception certainly influenced Gregory's understanding of the drama, but in ways that have not been adequately researched. In recovering this under-discussed work, I hope to address the strange contradiction between Gregory's championing of a nostalgic, heroic identity in her prose works and her open questioning of such an identity in the theatre. This movement can be explained by a detailed investigation of the tension between the vision of the Irish nation Gregory built in her own work, one influenced by her own position as a member of the Ascendancy, and the fractious, populist politics which often coalesced around various memorial objects (specifically statues), and the popular forms of performance that themselves coalesced around those places of memory. Lady Gregory's patrician ideas of educating the masses in their own mythological traditions were fundamentally threatened by a Catholic, nationalist populism, with its own competing notions of mass education, represented most starkly in the gigantic parade in Dublin which marked the centenary of the 1798 Rebellion. It was this group's failure to agree on a single definition of the Irish nation in these nationalist performances,

[2] Witness, for instance, chapters such as "The Fight over *The Playboy"* (Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*) and "The Death of Synge" (Yeats, *Autobiography*).

as well as Lady Gregory's overall skepticism regarding grass-roots nationalism, that led to her own re-presentation of this failure on the Abbey stage.

The Gaelic Revival and the Revival of Memory

Performance and memorial came together in a number of different ways during the Gaelic Revival of the 1890s and 1900s. Nora importantly notes that places of memory are not restricted to physical memorial sites, but may also include the archive itself, as well as the impulse *to* archive oral culture. Their existence highlights a certain anxiety among memorial artists and archivists: there are *lieux de mémoire*, Nora maintains, precisely because of a fear that "real environments of memory," collective memories passed on orally through indigenous cultural institutions, are vanishing (Nora 7). In the Gaelic Revival, artists cast a nostalgic, backward look towards a lapsed time when folk memory was purportedly everywhere and thus inextricable from history. The recovery of said memories involves converting them into a solid, preservable form so that they were saved for posterity, a process which became a cottage industry during the Revival. The specific instances of this process investigated here were Gregory's own work archiving the oral traditions of Gaelic Ireland and the Wolfe Tone memorial movement in Dublin, planned as one of the many memorial projects for the 1898 centenary of the 1798 rebellion. This encounter with populist performance, combined with Gregory's experiences as an Abbey theatre director, especially the controversy over *Playboy*, engendered within her dramaturgy a more critical stance regarding heroism, national consensus, and the problematic line between history and memory with regard to her writings for and about the stage. In other words, this critical eye was founded upon the dynamics of theatrical representation and its popular reception. This fear of popular

reception—or reception paranoia—resulted from her position as a member of the Ascendancy, as well as her gender: she was a woman operating within the predominantly masculine world of the Revival. This paranoia betrayed a deeper anxiety about the uncertainty of historical meaning. Nora notes that although *lieux* first and foremost seek to hold collective memories in place, to "stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things," they in fact bear witness to a "capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications" (19). Nostalgic sentiments might surround such places at their conception, as Svetlana Boym notes, "as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheaval" (xiv), but their existence in the public sphere, as subjects of reception to a multitude of different audiences, challenges their authors' intentions that they stand as images of consensus and solidity. They become opening to a range of popular interpretations beyond the image-makers' initial conceptions or intentions.

The Image's performance, Gregory's own archival work and the Tone memorial celebrations all transpired within the social drama of the Gaelic Revival, and each shared a key set of cultural concerns. However, within the greater social drama, theatrical performance's capacity for "hypertrophy, an exaggeration of jural and ritual processes" (Turner 12) often highlights the complexities of *lieux de mémoire* and the history for which they "speak." Theatre therefore has the capacity to challenge the audience with a more complex understanding of the notions of representation that places of memory depend upon for meaning. In the context of this study, exaggerating these processes served Gregory's ends as she used the theatre to critique mass-memorial ritual. She employed a performance form she could, as an Abbey director, exert a considerable

amount of control over in order to allay her own fears of more unbridled, popular forms of performance.

Within the social drama of the Revival, nostalgia, heroism, and the Irish peasantry were central themes. Nostalgia was as an organizing force throughout late nineteenth century Ireland, ranging from more conservative actions (the assertion of Irish agrarian self-sufficiency) to the more radical (the violent overthrow of English rule in Ireland). Paul Connerton has noted that looking backward to a *lost* past allows one to view the present as "a time of fall into the ennui of a post-heroic age, or as a permanent state of crisis, the anticipation, whether hoped for, or feared, of a recurrent eruption" (6). Nationalists perceived that the moment of crisis in late colonial Ireland as both a cultural and an economic one: the perceived vanishing of the dense, rich history of Gaelic, Irish Ireland under the imperial Anglophone bureaucracy and the continued subservience of agricultural industry and land ownership to the imperial center. At the turn of the century, Ireland was a staunchly agricultural society, and one of the ideological successes of the Gaelic Revival lay in tying this agrarianism to an embodiment of cultural identity: the image of the Western, Irish-speaking peasant who made his living from the land—as opposed to the revival's leaders, Anglo-Irish and Catholic, bourgeois intellectuals living primarily in the urban centers—became central in the movement's repertory.

The heroic peasant became both a nostalgic tonic for the ennui of a post-heroic modernity and a symbol of what was inherent in the Irish nation above the issues which divided various nationalist groupings during a tense cultural period.[3] Concretely,

[3] This championing of a "folk" somehow integral to the national "soul" was not isolated to Ireland, of course, and was endemic of a larger surge of nationalism throughout late 19th and early 20th century Europe.

evidence of this trend was seen in the sheer volume of statue-building which occurred across Ireland for the 1798 centenary. Judith Hill notes that one of the more profound changes from previous periods (besides the sheer volume of work around that year) involved the presence of an anonymous, universal peasant carrying the symbolic weapon of agrarian insurgency in Ireland, the pike. Such a "myth of a self-directed Catholic peasantry taking on the British government" was open to a range of uses, from more conservative forces that saw it as a symbolic image of a strong, agrarian, national identity, to more militant republicans who saw such works as literal incitement to rebellion (*Sculpture* 122). Edward Martyn, who a year after the centenary would become one of the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre along with Gregory, Yeats, and George Moore, praised one of the most famous statues of the period (the 'Wexford Pikeman,' which still stands in the town of Enniscorthy today), calling it "a symbol of an emancipated Ireland marching onward self-reliant in the strength of character that comes from a distinctive native life" (qtd. in Hill, *Sculpture* 124). Martyn, a constitutionalist, carefully made no statements about armed insurgency, choosing to see the pike-wielding peasant in its more symbolic tones.

This nostalgic mood held true as well with regard to archiving folk memory, despite a similar disparity of political positions among the writers involved. Most, however, held a common working assumption: the Peasant created by the Gaelic revival was the last, diminished link in an heroic narrative that stretched back to *The Táin* and other Irish legends, where the failures and deprivations of myth mixed with those of the historical record (specifically the heroic failure of the 1798 rebellion, in this case) to elicit a messianic history, one that by looking backward could look forward to the eruption of

the "nation once again," in whatever form that might take.[4] Such was the mobilizing force behind such works as Father Patrick Kavanagh's *Popular History of the Insurrection of 1798* (re-issued for the centenary), which above all else strengthened the heroic myth of the pike-carrying peasant, as well as the predominantly conservative unionist Standish James O'Grady's widely-read *History of Ireland* (1880), which purposely conflated myth and historical events to incite change in 1880's Irish affairs (McAteer 95). O'Grady's ambivalent position —Yeats ironically described him as the "first Fenian Unionist on record" (qtd. in Pilkington 14)[5] —shows the pervasiveness of this nostalgic mood in archival history: looking back toward a heroic past obviated the need, in many cases, to address a fractious present among the Gaelic League intelligentsia. As Lionel Pilkington notes in his recent survey of the interrelationship of theatre and politics in twentieth-century Ireland, many Anglo-Irish unionists were also cultural nationalists who walked a tightrope between the more conservative and the more radical forms of remembrance that arose out of the Gaelic Revival. This was a position which Gregory, as a landed member of the aristocracy, shared in many ways herself, despite her disavowal of Unionist politics. Indeed, her sometimes fraught involvement with various manifestations of the revival highlights a certain amount of dissonance or outright contradiction at the heart of various memorializing practices.

In many of the accounts which sought to collect a rapidly diminishing folk culture, ideas of heroism and nostalgia went hand-in-hand: the age of such heroism was—had to be—tragically lost so that it could be in some manner recovered and rebuilt

[4] The title and refrain of Thomas Davis' (1814-1845) song, one of the most famous Irish revolutionary ballads.
[5] A contradiction: a "Fenian" here refers to an Irish nationalist seeking the removal of the British from Ireland by force, a "Unionist" to someone supportive of preserving the link with Great Britain.

in the light of modernity, as the "nation once again." "Monumental" history, as Friedrich Nietzsche dubbed this way of seeing the past, envisions historical progress as a chain which "unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks," a genealogic list of heroes whose deeds and fate inspire the action of future emulators, since "the greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again." Gregory's own cultural work within this folk tradition certainly appears to favor this monumental notion of history, first in her archival work, and later in her literary and theatrical writing about memorial spaces. Important in both instances is a refinement of this heroic, nostalgic mindset, and its interdependence of mythic and historical events. Monumental history and "mythical fiction" were close comrades, Nietzsche asserted, and often crossed narrative streams, since "the same stimuli can be derived from the one world as from the other" (68-70). This blending together served to inspire a revolutionary cultural identity, and Gregory, strongly influenced by the work of historians such as O'Grady, and herself a careful archivist of a rapidly disappearing oral culture, espoused similar sentiments.

For Gregory, such heroism existed not only in the recovery of the mythic legends of distant heroes, but also within the everyday lives of the common people, whose oral history she recorded as a dense blend of mythical figures from both the distant and near past with accounts of people who had actually lived. For her, the peasants of Kiltartan (the village near her estate where she did a substantial amount of her research) lived *within* memory, and that memory carried with it the same "strength of character" Martyn had admired in the monument to the pike-carrying peasant, one which only arrived from that "distinct national life." Such a tradition, she maintained, moved against the grain of

the then dominant, British narratives of Irish history. She assiduously sought to archive and preserve this memory against its disappearance, most specifically in *Poets and Dreamers* (1903) and *The Kiltartan History Book*, published, interestingly, in the same year as *The Image's* premiere, 1909. Both seek to archive for posterity the folk history of Kiltartan and various other parts of Co. Galway. As editor Patricia Lysaght notes of the *History Book*, myth folds over historic chronology in the account, as "narratives of the mythic figures Fionn mac Cumhaill and Meadhbh of Connacht […] take their places alongside traditions of Saint Patrick, the Anglo-Normans, Cromwell, the Stuarts [...] Charles Stewart Parnell and Daniel O'Connell" within the peoples unwritten memory (1445). The accounts are supposedly written in a verbatim format ("I'll tell you now about the trace of Cromwell"), beginning as stories ostensibly told to Gregory, complied on notes, and then reprinted.[6] Gregory's own position as oral archivist, as she saw it, was to add these lesser known names and stories to the larger, more famous ones within what she called the "book of the people," as she came to call the collective memory of Gaelic Ireland.

One of the greatest icons of this synthesis of myth and history in Gregory's archival *oeuvre* was her research on the blind poet Raftery, whose life, as Gregory uncovered it, exerted strong influence on her subsequent work. Indeed, "the book of the people" had purportedly been *his* own phrase for the oral performance tradition he represented. Raftery had traveled throughout western Ireland in the period immediately

[6] Gregory's position of power here is certainly suspect: she was a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy seeking "exotic" authenticity among the disenfranchised, Gaelic Irish. See James F Knapp, "Irish Primitivism and Imperial Discourse: Lady Gregory's Peasantry," *Macropolitics of 19th Century Literature,* Ed. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo (Philadephia: U. of Pennsylvania P., 1991) 286-301. For the cultural implications of such a writing/performance power disparity, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003) 16-33.

preceding the Famine, but in the 1890s he still inhabited the living memory of both Gregory's tenants, and those Kiltartan residents from whom she collected stories at the Gort workhouse. "As I heard of him," she recalled, "his image grew…"(*Seventy Years* 410). Recovering some discernable image of Raftery became Gregory's nostalgic project, by which she could slow the rapid effacement of folk memory, securing her own place in what she called the "roughly hammered links" of the oral tradition. He thus became the first chapter in her anthology of *Poets and Dreamers* (1903), within which she published her research on various ballads, poems, and other unwritten Gaelic practices in Western Ireland. Raftery became for Gregory the most powerful manifestation of the "lost" peasant. Douglas Hyde, another pillar of the Gaelic revival, shared her fascination with this lost poet, as did W.B. Yeats, her partner in both the Irish Literary Theatre and its subsequent, more famous incarnation, the Abbey. Raftery also represented for her the last link in a performance genealogy which stretched back into "the old tradition of the bards, the wandering poets of two thousand years or more" (Gregory, *Poets* 2). He had carried this tradition within his own living person, the last avatar of an oral legacy of historical resistance whom Gregory hoped to emulate herself in her literary work.[7] From her records, Gregory constructed a narrative of a man who was not only a poet, but who himself had some influence over historic events. For example, one of Raftery's songs memorializes a man hung for treason as a member of the nationalist Whiteboys, an agrarian insurgent group, in 1820. The ballad not only preserves his man's heroic death in collective memory, but ends with Raftery himself calling down divine vengeance on those that betrayed the condemned man. Such a mellifluous blend of myth, historical

[7] See "The Felons of Our Land," described below.

events and heroic narrative are for Gregory a tonic for the dry calculation of the British system of education. "Irish history," she maintains,

> having been forbidden in schools, has been, to a great extent, learned from Raftery's poems by the people of Mayo.[…] it is hard to say where history ends in them and religion and politics begin; for history, religion and politics have grown on one stem in Ireland, an eternal trefoil. *(Poets* 10)

Here the education that the blind, illiterate Raftery (an Irish version of Homer) provides is a fluid mixture, a blending of ancient myth and historical deprivations at the hands of the English, from Elizabeth I onward. Raftery's heroism involved remembering, and telling a story about what he remembered in song. His narrative stitched together the familiar and the less familiar names into the roughly hammered links of history. Her own goal was to remember Raftery, and so add her own name to the chain.

For Lady Gregory, uncovering Raftery involved not only transcribing his poetry, songs and stories and then translating them into English for a wider reading public. It also involved physically uncovering what remained of the man himself; Gregory sought out Raftery's unmarked grave in 1899. She "discovered" the site beside a ruined medieval church, "surrounded by tall trees and Victorian high crosses, and overlooked by a substantial thatched cottage" a picture-postcard scene of Irish rural nostalgia. It was here, "miraculously," as Judith Hill notes, "that she met two men who had been at Raftery's funeral, who could show her the grave and add to the myths she had heard about his death" (*Lady Gregory* 139). Certainly, the entire scene speaks to a conscious theatricality in Gregory's recollection of these events, complete with the walk-on extras ready to provide an exciting anecdote to further her investigation. She subsequently commissioned

a local stonemason to craft a headstone for the grave, printed simply with his Irish name, "Raifteirí." This simple memorial marker was then unveiled publicly at a Gaelic league meeting in 1900, attended by monument-praiser Edward Martyn, W.B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde, showing the impetus, once again, of cultural leaders to fix an agrarian, oral culture into various solid forms. That three of those present had founded the Irish literary theatre the year before was certainly no coincidence, and clearly demonstrates a similar impulse behind both their desire to found that theatre and public memorial practice. Already shunning her position as a public figure, perhaps, Gregory leaves her own actions out of her account in *Poets and Dreamers,* remarking only briefly that "there is a stone over Raftery's grave now" (45).

A similar set of concerns can be seen in Gregory's most staunchly nationalistic piece, "The Felons of Our Land," written for *Cornhill Magazine* in 1900. The work reads like a piece of ethnography, seeking to preserve an oral counter-tradition to British histories of Ireland, primarily through an examination of the Irish martyr cult and its preservation in street ballad form throughout most of the 19th century. Although covering a broad gamut of failed rebellions, the primary focus of the article is on the 1798 rebellion and its contemporary cultural resonance in 1900. "Felons" can be read as Gregory's own assessment of the impact of 1798 on Irish culture, the centenary having occurred only two years before. It also provides some clue into her views on various forms of memorial and their respective effectiveness in transmitting cultural memory. Diana Taylor has noted the prevalence of subversive, performance-based counter-traditions in the face of more official, written and archival forms of memory (17), and this is the primary theme of "The Felons of Our Land." The "felons" of the title are the

sung heroes themselves, their famous speeches from the dock in trials for treason, as well as those who memorialize them. Indeed, one of Gregory's fascinations with the lost world of Raftery was the position of respect, honor, and memory the oral poet held within Gaelic culture as an integral part of this memory-machine. In such a fashion, the poet herself could assume a place within monumental history. [8] In Ireland, she maintained, stone monuments to the "felons" had yet to be built, or were only beginning to be built. The oral culture itself was closer to the people, and monument-building primarily supported British, official history, the imperial system which both forbade teaching Irish or learning Irish history in the national schools. Despite the recent construction of the O'Connell monument at the end of Sackville street (which would soon also carry his name), Admiral Nelson's column still dominated the monumental skyline of central Dublin. The *absence* of nationhood demanded an unofficial form of counter-performance. Echoing Taylor's work in many ways, Kenyan novelist and performance scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o has referred to such practices within colonial contexts as "Orature," oral movements within advanced, literate cultures which exist alongside more official forms of memory. Indeed, the exchange is complicated, as each form interacts with and produces the other over time. Despite discussing primarily Wolfe Tone and 1798, Gregory may well have had Raftery in mind: "The Felons of our Land" was published in 1900, at the very time she was busy collecting material for her Raftery project. This might explain her use of a very similar quote with regard to the educative benefits of

[8] Leigh Partington notes that "This idea of the chain, linking generation to generation through memory and song, influenced Gregory's work in other genres […] the contribution to the public memory of tragic heroes was…the roughly hammered links, the mixture of lesser-known names with well-known names described earlier, provided an opportunity to instruct the Irish public; this contribution to the public memory of tragic heroes was high on the list of Gregory's objectives." "Roughly Hammered Links: Lady Gregory, Irish Ballads, and Political Memory," *South Carolina Review* 32:1 (1999) 152.

orature: “Irish history,” Gregory wrote, “having been forbidden in the national schools, has lifted up its voice in the streets, and of the men who guided it, into the memory of each new generation” (“Felons” 624). “Cheap ballad books” are a necessary part of such circulation, however, as they allow such subversive performance to be rapidly multiplied. Both those who seek to perform martyrdom and those who valorize them for doing so in performance earn a place in the book of the people, and thus in the cultural memory of Ireland.

Gregory thus attempted to fit this dense oral performance history into a written form, to monumentalize it in what she considered a particularly Irish way. Thus, when she did conceive of physical memorials, for her they were not the monolithic icons of the Imperium, but the rustic landscapes of her vision of the Irish peasantry, set always to a nostalgic melody. Svetlana Boym notes how the late nineteenth century European imagination carried a certain fascination for ruins, for the incomplete, for the souvenir. “The melancholic sense of loss,” she maintains, “turned into a style, a late 19th century fashion” (16). As noted in chapter one, in an Irish context these ruins conveyed not just a pre-modern sense of a lost, simpler age, but a physical mark of colonial deprivation that must be redressed in the future: an incitement, in other words, to future performances. For Gregory, the imaginative topography of the Irish memorial was thus relatively constant, and her description of the unmarked gravesite at Bodenstown of Wolfe Tone, the leader of the 1798 Rebellion, echoes her description of Raftery’s own burial site: “No tomb has been built there,” she maintains, “for others feel, as [balladeer Thomas] Davis felt, that the time has not yet come, but stones have often been laid on his grave to mark it, and have as often been carried away by pilgrims as relics.” She then quotes Thomas

Davis, one of the most famous ballad writers of the 19th century, who provides Tone with a temporary, moving memorial in ballad form:

> In Bodenstown churchyard there is a green grave,
> And freely around it let winter winds rave.
> Far better they suit him, the ruin and the gloom,
> Till Ireland, a nation, can build him a tomb. ("Felons" 627)

Together, Davis' poem and Gregory's commentary distill the cultural concerns at the heart of this heroic notion of history: as with Raftery, a nostalgic ruin marks his grave, itself highlighted and magnified not by a stone monument, but by a rich oral tradition honoring the felons of the land, the criminals of written law who become heroes in Irish orature. Only in the messianic future tense, when Ireland, in Davis' own words from his most famous ballad, is "a nation once again" can a stone monument be chiseled, and an official history be solidified.

The article was one of the most radical stances she had taken in her career. It certainly ran her into trouble with her more Unionist friends among the Anglo-Irish establishment, and her reactions to its reception demonstrate some of her first anxieties about her performances as a public persona. Gregory was, or at least became at this point, suspicious of presentation, specifically the blending of her public and private personas within the public sphere. These sentiments in turn blended with an outright suspicion of populism and popular forms of performance, despite her careful archival work for "the people." For Gregory, Yeats, and many other cultural warriors of the Irish Renaissance, "the people" were an ambivalent thing – easy to cite in support of the idealized, nostalgic visions of Irishness elucidated above, but also quick to become a "mob" — as Yeats so often termed it — of fractious discord. Controlling the "tune," and

educating the "mob" became favorite refrains of the Abbey directors over the next several decades. Gregory at the time thought the boundaries between her work and popular performance were intact, or at least could be shored up. Soon after the article was released, Gregory wrote that she wished "to keep out of politics and work only for literature," certainly a difficult task, given her very public position within the Gaelic league. For her, "politics" seems to have a certain low-culture etymology, revealed in her attitudes towards certain forms of street performance in "Felons." Discussing a popular street ballad which links together many of the felons of the more famous Irish rebellions, she describes its origin in "a Dublin street singer" who "in spite of the stilted sounds of one who has learned a style from newspapers and pub oratory," still applies "something touching in the conscientious attention to detail where it concerns those whose names might be slipping out of memory…" (625). The street singer, apparently, must be divorced from his common roots to reach the heights of aesthetic appreciation. Gregory's growing anxiety over becoming a "public" figure within the nationalist pantheon is here paired with an off-handed dismissal or suspicion of the "common" origins of various forms of popular performance, forms which might sully her more aesthetically lofty endeavors. Consequently, the mob would have to be educated. In such a fashion, she readily adhered to Yeats' patrician reading of the public as an undisciplined mass, which was itself still a more measured stance of populist paranoia than her fellow-translator and friend Standish O'Grady's mandarin assertion, upon hearing that Gaelic Leaguer George Russell wished to stage a production of the mythic story of Deirdre, that writers should "leave the heroic cycles alone, and not bring them down to the crowd" (qtd. in Kiberd, *Irish Classics* 402).

Although Gregory wrote this article specifically about ballads commemorating 1798, she was herself rather skeptical about the mass and size of the celebrations, perhaps at least partially because of her ambivalent position as an Ascendancy landholder. During the centennial celebrations in Dublin, she stayed away, telling Yeats, who under the influence of Maud Gonne was heavily involved in the centenary, that "if it had worked as intended, we should now be celebrating it" (qtd. in Foster, *W.B. Yeats* 193), that anyone who wanted to commemorate 1798 should "simply plant a tree and get on with their lives," (qtd. in Foster, "1798" 80) and finally referred to it in other circumstances as a "massacre of Protestants." This criticism certainly seems at odds to her valorization of the messianic uses of failure quoted above, where many of the ballads she discusses refer to 1798. Such ambivalence has to do with the differences Gregory envisioned between the two projects, one (for Gregory) an archival, literary exercise, and the next a series of oppositional public performances. Indeed, there was no doubt in Gregory's mind an anxiety over the monster meetings which characterized many of the public demonstrations in 1898.

Within the context of these demonstrations, the heroic peasant with a long memory often took a back seat to memorializing the heroic martyr Theobald Wolfe Tone. The commemorations quickly became a battle for his historic legacy, as almost every single group within the nationalist configuration, from James Connolly's Socialist Worker's party to Maud Gonne's *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*, to the Home Rule Party attempted to claim Tone's legacy as their own, thereby placing themselves as the legitimate successor to the spirit of the failed rebellion. What was conceived as a show of unity, which Tone, had advocated in his union of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter in

a Jacobin-inspired vision of a United Ireland, finally demonstrated the reverse, as R.F. Foster aptly notes, as various groups sought to pre-empt the celebration and gain prominence ("1798" 82). Gonne, for one, refused to march or speak in the Tone memorial procession due to the presence of Home Rulers on the speech platform. Connolly's paper, *Workers' Republic,* issued its first edition at the Tone demonstration to the large crowds massing in the capital for the celebration. In its pages, Connolly fervently sought to link Tone's legacy to modern socialism (Ó'Broin 90). Meanwhile, John Redmond (the leader of Home Rule party) organized his own commemorative group to solidify the links between Tone and his own more conservative constitutional nationalism. Attempting perhaps to cover over these ideological cracks in his own centennial speech, Yeats remarked that "Ireland was appealing to the past to escape from the confusion of the present" (qtd. in Owens 106). There was reason to try to dominate this anniversary: the pinnacle of the 1898 activities in Dublin was a parade that drew upwards of 30,000 spectators onto the parade route, conceived as a counter-performance to Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, which had occurred the year before and drawn large crowds itself[9], as well as what Gary Owens calls a "unique experiment in mass education" (106). The entire event was a conscious performance of nostalgia, a defense mechanism against political infighting by looking back to a time supposedly free of such divisions. It was essentially a new funeral for Tone, which sought to recover his spirit in both senses of the word: to both re-instill or resurrect a supposedly unified front of nationalist resistance to imperialism and at the same time bury that spirit in a solid,

[9] Maud Gonne had directed an actual counter-performance during the Jubilee, including a mock "funeral" for the British Empire (Ó'Broin 84-5).

memorial wherein its meaning could be fixed. Funerals, however, as Joseph Roach has asserted, often reveal instead the dissonance at the heart of such actions of recovery, since this somber form of performance is still a performance, revealing "the tangible existence of social boundaries" (39), and this was certainly the case at the Tone procession.

Nevertheless, above this anxious base, another unwritten narrative was quickly being constructed with the hope that it would achieve, both figuratively and literally, the selfsame monumental solidity. Similar to Gregory's assertion that ballad-singing counteracted the absence of Irish history in the British-run national schools, as well as her and Yeats's subsequent attempts to educate their own audiences via performance, so public rituals, and the dedication of memorial statues provided important history lessons for the disenfranchised. "In the absence of systematic teaching of our country's history in the schools," one memorial enthusiast maintained, "these monuments will be to the child the illustrations of a portion of our national story" (qtd. in Owens 108). These monuments were "illustrated" not only through chiseling or casting heroic figures from the Irish past in stone or bronze, but within the public performances that surrounded their dedication.

Tone's Reburial

The Wolfe Tone memorial procession was to be the second largest public gathering in Dublin in the nineteenth century, following the record-setting crowd that had turned out for the dedication of the O'Connell monument 15 years before (Owens 107). At the heart of the gathering was a rigidly choreographed public event, which helped to crystallize a genealogy of performance that would continue into the next century: the Irish Republican funeral. The foundation stone for the Tone memorial had been created in Belfast, which had been a central city historically in the 1798 rebellion. This stone

became a stand-in, a surrogate for the slain body of Tone himself, which was then carried in honor aboard a ceremonial lorry through West Belfast, the nationalist section of the sharply divided city, and then loaded onto a train to be taken to Dublin. Once there, it was taken to the site of the old Newgate prison where various rebels during the rising had been held, where it lay "in state" for two days. It was then lifted aboard another ceremonial truck, and transported to O'Connell St. behind three bands and costumed members of the Irish national foresters. It was then carried in a massive procession throughout the city, which Owens describes in detail:

> In the parade were scores of dignitaries, nearly eighty bands, costumed figures on horseback, and hundreds of banners bearing patriotic slogans and paintings of '98 heroes and battle scenes. Marchers and spectators alike wore badges of green, white and orange; many sported oak leaves or sprigs of ivy taken from Tone's gravesite in County Kildare.[…] Flags, banners and decorative arches of evergreen lined the route of the procession, and for the first time in years a green flag fluttered from Nelson's pillar. (113)

In such a fashion, various representatives from the fractious parties processed solemnly through the streets, clad even in natural relics from Tone's real grave-site. Traveling a circuitous route, a Via Dolorosa of the sites in Dublin associated with 1798, the massive procession carried the stone to the top of Grafton Street at the gates to St. Stephen's Green, temporarily occupying the historic sites of Unionist Dublin in the process. Owens notes that the St. Stephens' Green monument site was an entirely strategic location: the intersection of Grafton street (the epicenter of Dublin's high street shopping and the route to Trinity College) and the gates to St. Stephens' Green were then at the heart of Unionist Dublin, where a year before during Victoria's jubilee Union Jacks had been ubiquitous.

At the edge of the Green, the previously exiled Fenian John O'Leary presided over Tone's re-burial. A veteran of both the 1848 and 1867 uprisings against the British, his physical presence embodied a legacy of resistance. Owens continues his account of the actual stone-laying:

> He was then handed an ornate trowel, the gift of Tone's granddaughter in America, who, before she sent it to Ireland, had as many of the patriot's direct descendants as possible place their hands upon it. When O'Leary had finished, he slowly tapped the trowel on the stone six times: once for each of Ireland's four provinces, once for the United States and once for France. Then, at a signal from the platform, the band struck up the theme song from the centenary, 'The Memory of the Dead.' (114)[10]

Certainly, the ceremony bears many resemblances to Gregory's own recovery of Raftery: complete with the memorial blessing of a revolutionary ballad of the very kind she had helped to archive, Tone was reburied in a purported show of nationalist solidarity before an audience of tens of thousands. The memorial site left in the wake of this political performance was not so grandiose, however. A huge fund-raising campaign for the statue that would sit atop the foundation stone had been undertaken, to which end Maud Gonne had even traveled to America to ensure support from the Irish Diaspora. The funds for the statue never materialized (only £561 of the £14,000 had been found), testament, perhaps, to the ephemeral alliances behind the event. A plaster bust of Tone which was placed on the site in lieu of an actual statue was "knocked over, decapitated, and the head taken away," purportedly by loyalist students at Trinity College (Ó'Broin 91). After this fiasco, the space became empty until used as the foundation for a memorial arch to the Dublin

[10] "The Memory of the Dead" was a famous 19th Century Fenian ballad, which became a theme of the commemorations. It contained the refrain, "Who Fears to Speak of '98?"

Fusiliers at the conclusion to the Boer war, which occupies the site to this day (Foster, "1798" 82).[11] The empty site functioned, in that sense, as an aporia in the nationalist consciousness, whose lack spoke to a lack of national consensus in the face of British imperialism. Nevertheless, the stone retained a spectral presence in a variety of ways. Numerous nationalist parades at the beginning of the 20th century, including Padraic Pearse's famous performance at the grave of O'Donovan Rossa (described in chapter 2), began at the foundation stone for the absent Tone statue. The empty space is perhaps most famously remembered by James Joyce, who in the "Wandering Rocks" episode of *Ulysses* has a Miss Dunne listlessly gaze across the vista of St. Stephen's Green, briefly resting on the "slab where Wolfe Tone's statue was not (294)." The statue's failure to appear, however, became a powerful fulfillment of Davis' prophesy, one which Gregory herself had echoed: only in the world to come, the nation yet to be, could the statue come into existence.

Literary Theatre and Popular Opposition

W.B. Yeats seemed simultaneously mesmerized and alarmed by the sheer masses of people involved in the commemorations. P.J. Matthews notes that by this point in his career (1898), Yeats had serious misgivings about the power of poetry to affect national consciousness, since, the poet surmised, "the great mass of our people, accustomed to interminable political speeches, read little." However, theatre in his vision had the power

[11] In 1967, the sculptor Edward Delaney won an Arts Council competition to design a statue of Tone to finally sit in St. Stephens' Green, a few hundred feet from the original foundation stone. This statue was in turn destroyed by Loyalist paramilitaries in 1979 (during the Northern Irish Troubles), but the head survived and the statue was rebuilt. This serves of testament to the enduring legacy of the site as a contested space of public memory, as does the monument to the Great Famine, also by Delaney, that sits immediately adjacent to the Tone statue.

to do this, as he saw it, since "in the theatre the mob becomes the people" (qtd. in Matthews 18). Joseph Roach notes that much "more intensely than the solitary experience of readership, the provocative spectacle of the theatrical audience summons the idea of nationhood in the poignancy of its absence (74)." The absence of Tone, the performative power which gathered around the missing man, and by implication the missing *nation*, were powerful forces indeed. However, for both Yeats and Gregory, such political performances were mob-like; free reign was given to what they saw as "low street" sectarianism. Popular performance transpired in a realm far removed from the disciplined practice of archiving oral history or writing poetry. The theatre—a *literary* theatre along continental models—might condition such audiences to behave, under the expectations placed on theatrical audiences, as a "people." The power of the mob could thus be harnessed for the theatre director's own personal vision of nationhood.

Naming the effort, launched that same year, the Irish *Literary* Theatre emphasized that the venture would be an extension of the literary projects of Yeats and Gregory, only now that literature would just happen to be performed. Performance was essentially side-lined, despite the fact that the theatre itself was conceived in many ways as a counter-performance, to remove or exorcize what Lady Gregory dubbed "the Scarecrow of the mind," the Stage Irishman, the comic drinking, fighting buffoon that had amused London audiences for three centuries. These sentiments were expressed in the published manifesto of the Irish Literary Theatre, which would later, in another guise, become the Abbey, Ireland's National Theatre. Gregory herself penned the document, along with W.B. Yeats and Edward Martyn, and she faithfully reprints it in her own *Our Irish Theatre,* along with a retrospective caveat that it "now seems a little pompous:"

> We hope to see certain plays performed in Dublin…which whatever their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome […] we will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (8-9)

This oft-quoted document contains a certain set of assumptions that reflect directly on the composition and reception of *The Image,* as well as reinforcing several notions about performance alluded to above: an idealistic stereotype replaces the older Stage Irishman, and there is an implied consensus of "all Irish people," whom the theatre has the capacity to unite—just as the Tone memorial celebrations had intended to do—"outside all the political questions that divide us." Yeats's sentiments from his 1898 commemorative speech held true here as well. Indeed, the directors sought to capture the potential energy of this anterior, popular form of performance (Irish public oration) which he believed had already trained an audience to listen. This seems starkly ironic when one considers the visual choreography and free flowing, interacting crowds associated with spectacles such as the Tone commemorations, as well as the often violent vociferations and interjections within Irish political speeches themselves, a dense performance history too detailed to recall here. As Mary Trotter has noted, such a move also turned a blind eye to the existing theatre traditions in the capital, especially the melodramatic fare at the Queen's Theatre. Such theatre events contained interactivity which aligned them more closely

with popular demonstrations, as audiences "hissed the villain, cheered the hero, yelled advice to the characters and sang patriotic songs" (123). All these forms implied a much more participatory form of popular performance existed than the Irish Literary Theatre maintained.

Popular reception was also at the heart of the related issue of Gregory's own position as a public persona, briefly described above. It is against Gregory's self-fashioning as the matron of the Gaelic league and the Irish literary theatre that I would now like to contrast the much more radical figure that Maud Gonne cut both on and offstage. Gregory had been continually suspicious of her motivations, not only because of Yeats's infatuation with her, which was at its height at the moment of the 1898 commemorations and the founding of the theatre, but also because of Gonne's conscious, theatrical projection as a public persona. Gonne's radical nationalism, which Gregory found somewhat self-serving, was also a threat to the latter's actual economic position, something demonstrated perhaps most starkly by Gonne's public statement in the year of the commemorations that they should slaughter Irish landlords' cattle to feed poorer tenants. Gonne's hope, as Gregory saw it, was that this would drive the authorities to open fire on the populace, thus drawing attention to the cause. The latter recalled in her journal that in the action "Miss Gonne would, if she suffered by imprisonment also gain by it the notoriety she wants – but the poor people sent to prison would have no such consolations" (qtd. in Hill, *Lady Gregory* 133-34). Gregory thereby cast herself as the benevolent, matronly landlord standing in the path of the radical, self-serving Gonne. Gonne was a consummate public performer, a hurler "of the little streets upon the great," as Yeats put it in the patrician terms of his poem "No Second Troy" (*Selected Poetry* 64).

Gregory herself found such behavior unseemly, a reaction which must be considered alongside her own growing anxieties about the various contradictions between her public and private selves. Mary Trotter has pointed out that among her fellow nationalists Gonne was seen as "extraordinary." Both on and offstage, she played upon popular, male nationalist stereotypes of a beautiful, feminine Ireland such as Hibernia, Dark Rosaleen, and the Shan Van Vocht (who grew young off the blood of heroes) in order to avoid embracing the traditional roles allotted to women within the context of the Gaelic revival, which were predicated on motherly duties and maintaining the household (roles Gregory proudly played as the holder of the estate at Coole for her son Robert and as surrogate mother/patron to WB Yeats and her own Irish tenants). In opposition, women like Gonne became extraordinary in their public performances, "allowing themselves to be characterized by feminine ideals of beauty, performative skill, and accomplishment" (Trotter 79). Gonne played the part to the hilt, walking through the streets wearing long, flowing robes, giving flamboyant speeches (such as Robert Emmet's "Speech from the Dock") and actively participating in public demonstrations (such as the funeral for the British Empire in 1897). In short, she readily composed herself as a nationalist icon. Such behavior, Trotter argues, actually worked against her own agency as a nationalist, however, as she ran the risk of becoming a victim of her own image; in the eyes of many nationalists, Gonne became "too 'theatrical' to be taken seriously" (94).

This complex assertion is perhaps best demonstrated in the meeting of the above ideas, themes, and persons in one of the benchmark productions of the Irish Literary Theatre, the 1902 production of Gregory and Yeats' own *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* which was performed in association with the radical nationalist women's group which Gonne

headed, Inghinidhe na hÉireann. For the opening performance, Gonne entered the theatre true to form, Christopher Morash notes, "ten minutes before the curtain went up, unprofessionally (but impressively) sweeping through the audience in full spectral costume as the Poor Old Woman" (123). Beautiful, yet "made up" old, Gonne fused her own public persona with that of the iconic old woman made young by the blood sacrifice of Gregory's own "felons of the land." The 1798 rising, the genealogy of dead heroes Cathleen mentions, and the ballads she sings all speak to Gregory's authorial role.

The play was lauded by many nationalists. As with "The Felons of the Land," the play represented for both Gregory and Yeats a momentary synchronicity between populist sentiment, memorial practice, and the aesthetics of their theatrical project. Gonne's stunt, however, as well as her public reputation for theatricality, potentially moved against this alignment, as she elicited cries from the stalls of "ah…yes…of course…the stage, that's where she belongs" (qtd. in Trotter 94). Gonne the public persona readily bled into Cathleen, the old woman of Irish mythology made young by the blood of young men, but the actress thus ran the risk of being discredited as too "theatrical" for public tastes. Gregory herself would later perform the role in 1919, in a much more restrained interpretation, maintaining—certainly with dismissive reference to Gonne's excessive theatricality—that all that was really needed was "a hag and a voice."

By 1907, popular reception took a very different turn, as the theatrical excessiveness of the peasants of J.M Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* touched off the most famous riots in Irish theatre history, setting off a crisis of representation which once again dealt with the Western Irish peasant's figuration as a model of national identity. It is not my intention here to reassess or describe what has been voluminously

discussed elsewhere,[12] but instead to detail the effects the riots had on Gregory's own notions of theatrical reception. Synge had, like Gregory, a certain level of exotic fascination with western Ireland and peasant culture, perhaps best detailed in his travelogue *The Aran Islands.* However, *Playboy of the Western World* was accused by nationalists, especially several of the higher echelons of the Gaelic league (including Douglas Hyde, a close friend and collaborator of Gregory's) of reviving the "scarecrow of the mind" the theatre was supposed to dispel, at the expense of the potent symbol of untrammeled Ireland that the western Irish peasant had become. Synge maintained that the play resulted, like Gregory, from oral tales he had heard while living on the islands. However, the deliberate theatricality of the piece, as Christy Mahon built himself into a hero with exaggerated tales of the fictional murder of his father, offered a fundamental critique of the implied relationship between heroism, myth-making, and violence; it humanized the western Irish as sexual, fallible beings whose love of the heroic might be more a hindrance than a virtue. The "mob" (the rioting audience) became an antagonistic, oppositional group to be endured. For the Abbey directors, the riots played into a rapidly developing model which combined skepticism of popular modes of performance with Gregory and Yeats's own performances as the guarantors of the educative potential of modernist aesthetics. The rioters themselves expressed their opposition in a variety of ways reminiscent of the various mass celebrations in the streets, hissing, stomping, and launching into various counter-performances, such as the singing of Irish ballads such as "Hurrah for the men of the West." Again and again, as Neil Blackadder notes, the primarily voiced objection and the source of the controversy was the representation of the

[12] See Morash 130-138, Blackadder 69-108.

western Irish, so important a symbol within the nationalist imagination. “This is not the west,” “This is not Irish life,” became the common calls from various sections of the pit (76).

Such a “west” was, ironically, one of the symbols Gregory herself had worked so hard to distill through her archival and literary work. She admitted in retrospect that she had not been particularly fond of Synge’s play, yet she had defended it as a matter of principle. She conceived of the entire event as a literal battle for artistic integrity against mob rule, maintaining in an interview with the Freeman’s Journal during the riots that “it is the fiddler who chooses the tune. The public are quite willing to stay away, and if they come in they must take what is provided for them” (qtd. in Trotter 125). This selfsame public had been the one ripe for ancient, idealistic education, yet it had now become a mob. Did such autocracy betray her fear of populist nationalism and its many, fractured narratives? Trotter brings attention to Una Chaudhuri’s notion that with the rise of realism and naturalism, spectators became a sort of “hindrance, an inconvenience.” They were in a sense made to “play the role of the ultimate hermeneutic authority while also being reminded simultaneously of the authorizing but invisible presence of the omnipotent puppet master/playwright” (127). Similarly, Neil Blackadder notes that with the modernist rise in serious drama, as plays themselves began to “be associated with shock and sensation,” a more passive mood of audience behavior was developing in juxtaposition, so that a theatre riot was a much more sensational, historically notable event by the turn of the century than it would have been in earlier decades (2). Such allowances apply to the contradictory position of the intended Abbey audience: it was to be instructed in national sentiments, but not to participate by voicing concerns about the

political implications of what was being represented. The authors of the Abbey could thus shield themselves from public reception behind the proscenium, calling the tune for the audience to follow, and falling back on the modernist sanctity of art in the face of negative reception. Popular demonstrations and their accompanying oratory, as well as the early twentieth century theatre in Ireland, however, were far from this: these looser forms of performance remained open to multiple interpretations, as has been shown here. This literary model ran counter not only to the behavior of amateur nationalist theatres and the melodramatic houses, as Trotter has aptly shown, but also to the popular performances such as the Tone memorial celebrations, which demanded a back and forth, participatory relationship between performers and audience. For Gregory, however, such disorder could only lead to mob rule, and a final result as barren as the empty Tone platform in St. Stephen's Green. She wrote in 1913:

> it was a definite fight for freedom from mob censorship. A part of the new national movement had been, and rightly, an attack on the Stage Irishman, the vulgar and unnatural butt given on the English stage […] but the [Gaelic league] societies were impatient. They began to dictate here and there what should and should not be played. (*Our Irish Theatre* 115)

Having opened up a space for anti-colonial representation, the Directors foreclosed it in the interests of aesthetic integrity, with the onus for creation and preservation being on the image-makers themselves, the purported arbiters of cultural authority, and not those people they were supposedly "for." Reception, as Chaudhuri points out, was sealed out of the equation, despite the attempts of the Abbey's founders to capture the kinetic power of populist performance.

Image-Makers and their Discontents

Popular reception and its bearing on the creation of images is the subject of Lady Gregory's play *The Image*, which premiered at the Abbey in 1909. Arriving after the tide of memorial madness around 1898 had receded, and in the wake of the *Playboy* riots, the play represented a marked departure from Gregory's literary efforts. Its production and reception serves as a summation of the many ideas discussed here, specifically the place of the Western Irish within national consciousness, myth and history's interdependence in that oral culture, and finally the workings of the memorial process itself. The play opens with Coppinger, the town stone mason, looking at headstones. He is a man who makes his living primarily from memorializing the dead, and is currently busy working on his own gravestone, which reads "Erected for Thomas Coppinger and posterity." The scene is stark, almost Beckettian in tone: the landscape lurking immediately under the comic surface of the text is barren, littered with words about the dead and departed. Underneath the casual comedy of the first scene, in which Mrs. Coppinger upbraids her husband for being content "knocking out a living among the dead," there is talk of all those who have emigrated. Coppinger's business is one of diminishing returns, as there are now "half the people in the world that there used to be" (132). In her characterization of peasant memory, Gregory remains true to her archival form: throughout the play, the peasants display long memories that seem filled with trauma: Coppinger's mother remembered the French landing at Killala, a reference to 1798. Hosty, a small farmer, speaks of a son "buried in Minnestota," and a daughter looking at "her children's children in Australia." Gregory quickly paints an almost absurd picture of a universe filled with the old and the left behind, left with only their memories in a rapidly diminishing universe.

Coppinger's problem essentially mirrors Gregory's own memorial work: he wishes to be remembered after his own death for building a grand memorial to someone else, hoping that "some great man might come wanting a monument that would put up my name for ever. Some man so great his death would put away laughter in Ireland" (133). Such heroism might provide him some solace in forging the "roughly hammered link," a nostalgic escape from the absurd universe he seems to occupy at the play's opening. Coppinger gets his chance, as two whales that have run ashore and the oil their carcasses might provide suddenly present his township with an excess of money, and the town decides that a statue should be built in the city square with the funds. This happens to coincide with the entrance of Malachi, described as a "mountainy man" in the opening, who arrives telling stories of a board he found, washed ashore with the name "Hugh O'Lorrha" written upon it. Malachi, in his appearance, stories and "mountainy" itinerancy clearly has resonances to the "dreamer" Raftery. Indeed, it is Malachi who seems to stimulate the townsfolk's imaginations. He is aided in his efforts by Peggy Mahon, an old midwife who has her own private project to memorialize her own long-dead husband. She appears to live continuously in the past tense, despite Mrs. Coppinger's admonishments that she should have "taken another comrade in [her] bloom, in place of always lamenting him that is gone"(149). Together the two dreamers begin to invent a heroic narrative for this specter. The narrative reads like the very oral tales Gregory sought to document in "The Felons of Our Land:" O'Lorrha left his mother's home, went out on the "fighting road," and barely escaped the Sassanach [Englishman] who "twisted the rope so" (147). Quickly, the other townsfolk join in the myth-making: they try to determine whether he was a "48" man or a "98" man, referring to the 1848 and

1798 rebellions, and settling on the former, as "few escaped in '98." Soon, the completely fictional O'Lorrha is nominated for the memorial.

What follows is essentially a parodic restaging of the 1898 Tone foundation stone ceremony, which also highlights the plight of the image makers (Coppinger, and with regard to the mythos around O'Lorrha, Malachi and Peggy) in the face of such mass-reception, a "statue-madness" demonstrating a persistent aching on the part of this nostalgic community for something or someone worth remembering, even if what is remembered has no basis in any sort of factual evidence. Word arrives from offstage that a commission of citizens will visit the site, and "lay the foundation stone. Speeches there will be, they bringing a member of Parliament purposely, and a meeting with banners and with bands" (152). This news elicits discussions of the "real-life" heroes O'Connell and Parnell, and the various accolades already given to them. (Both men, in fact, stood in monumental form several blocks from the Abbey's doors, on Sackville (now O'Connell) St.)). Should they build a statue to them as opposed to this unknown? This is voted down because people all have their own opinion of Parnell and O'Connell's various traits, and "it is a hard thing to be asked to make a likeness of a man, and his appearance to be known before." The town itself is aware of the inherent problems with image-making, problems Gregory had encountered again and again in her fraught relationship with performance: everyone who sees the statue will have an opinion and want to weigh in on the "realism" of the representation of the historical figure. There is also intense sectarianism: Mrs. Coppinger wants a Munster Man such as O'Connell, and Hosty, being from Connacht, refuses to back her choice. The stage-space itself contains a stone wall that purportedly separates the two ancient provinces of Munster and Connacht,

physicalizing these divisions within the scene. Out of exhaustion, the little known O'Lorrha becomes the agreed upon candidate. They then proceed to hammer down his place of birth, where he was reared, the length of his years, and the deeds he has done. Dublin artists quickly send in a generically "heroic" model for O'Lorrha, based on the visages of other prominent monuments, with an appropriate "monumental" expression.

The revelation then follows that O'Lorrha is a complete fiction: "only in the poets' stories he is, and nothing but a name upon the wind" (174). A two-day-old child in the province has been named O'Lorrha, but this was only due to the fuss being made of the "famous" man in the village. The name itself is attributed to a fishing vessel from Kerry that had wrecked some days before. However, the character of O'Lorrha himself is from another half-remembered piece of folk memory in the mind of Peggy Mahon, "an old story-tellers yarn" from a man who lived "at the time of the giants." Indeed, Costello admits he half remembered the story himself, but went along with the group since he was fearful of going against the crowd. To add to the confusion of the scene, word arrives that one whale carcass has been washed back out to sea and the other stolen, so the memorial fund, as with the Tone statue, suddenly vanishes. Despite this realization by both the original Dublin audience at the Abbey and the central characters in the piece, both sitting in a city that holds an empty foundation stone, the memorial celebration is still going forward in the background, and at the curtain Coppinger is left standing on stage alone, flabbergasted, as he hears the band close in and shouts of "hi, Hugh O'Lorrha!" ring out.

What is one to make of the play? Its reception was certainly mixed, as many reviewers seemed sternly perplexed as to what Gregory was attempting to do, especially in relation to her previous dramaturgy and literary work, in the play. It is far from a work

of praise of the Western Irish, whose credulity for stories and obsession with a mixed mythic and fictional past is seen as a tragic liability. One reviewer noted that the "purpose was too remote," and belabored the length of the play (Gregory's previously well-received works, including *Spreading the News*, which similarly dealt with the detrimental effects of gossip in a small town, were much shorter), which seemed to consist primarily of talk and little action. What the reviewers did agree on was the superb performance of Maire O'Neill, the recently widowed wife of J.M. Synge, who played the widow Peggy Mahon. One reviewer even went so far as to call it O'Neill's (a veteran Abbey actress) best performance yet. That same year Yeats had noted her "tragic power" as a stage actress in *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, and Joseph Holloway equally noted her excellence in *The Image*, singling out her performance from the others (*Autobiography* 131). The part was apparently played with great gravity and strength, avoiding—as the reviewer seems to suggest—a potential within the script to make her role seem rather ridiculous ("The Abbey Theatre" 9). The central position of the old widow Peggy certainly seems telling, given the fact that Gregory directed the play herself, especially when this is paired with what she as an author had to say about the piece. In anticipation, perhaps, of the piece's reception, she included a note in the program for the play which read "*Secretum meum Mihi,*" Latin for "My secret to myself." Gregory's remonstration echoes the words given to Peggy Mahon at the conclusion of the play, when the game is up: "Any person to own a heart secret, it is best for him hide it in the heart, Let the whole world draw near to question me, but I'll be wise this time…I'll be as wise as the man that didn't tell his dream" (175)! She subsequently explained this choice in a letter to D.P. Moran, who had turned in a negative review of the work, confused, as many other reviewers were, by the

inclusion of the Latin slogan in the program. "My secret to myself," she maintained, had almost been the name of the play, and was for Gregory *The Image's* theme:

> I had given a heart secret into the keeping of each of the persons in the play […]. Thomas Coppinger dreamed of the great monument he would make to some great man, and old Peggy of one made beautiful through long memory and death; and Malachi of who was beyond and above earthly life. And each of these images crumbled at the touch of reality, like a wick that has escaped the flame, and is touched by common air. ("Notes" 98)

She goes on to remind Moran that he also had "been an image-maker" (he had written a piece entitled "The Battle of Two Civilizations" for a Gaelic league anthology Gregory had published a decade before) and maintained that although the "Directors of our Theatre [were] beginning to get some applause […] only they know how far it still is from the idea with which they set out" (98). Image-making (and it seems clear that she meant here both the image of the image maker as well as what they created) inevitably had to face the reception of a potential mob, especially in the public space of the theatre, where multiple opinions and counter-performances had the capacity to wither and distort the image-makers' efforts.

Gregory's play performs the problems of the public's reception of images. In a deliberate send-up of the Wolfe Tone memorial procession and the various nationalist groups' failures to build an actual statue, Gregory weaves a cautionary tale about the liabilities for image-makers in Ireland, who through image making become public figures themselves. Her ironic parody of the western Irish, whose culture she had sought so vehemently to preserve in her other work, reinforces the quote that opens this chapter. The colonial Irish may not be a statue-building people, but their attempts to become a

people that *would* build statues commemorating an agreed-upon history, one until that time only preserved in orature, is an inherently problematic process. The public's participation in the creation of places of memory, despite the vital part they must play in such an equation, is for Gregory the heart of the problem. Images are made, enter the public sphere, and thus are irrevocably changed. Seeking to stall this process ignores the inherent complexity in the public imagination such spaces seem to hold, standing as they do at a complex intersection of myth, memory and historical narrative.

Chapter 4: Denis Johnston and the National Longing for Form: Expressionism, Messianism and Nostalgia

A modern nostalgic can be homesick, and sick of home at once. (50)

Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*

BLIND MAN. This is no city of the living, but of the dark and the dead! (109)

Denis Johnston, *The Old Lady Says 'No!'*

Speaking to a concussed actor who believes he is in fact the 18th century Irish patriot Robert Emmet, a blind man proclaims his native city of Dublin to be haunted by the strained, cacophonous narratives of multiple pasts. All the dead voices ring shrilly in a set of ears trained by sightless eyes. By 1929, Ireland's longed-for independence had arrived as a mixed blessing: although now free of the yoke of imperial Britain, the ensuing Irish Civil War (1922-1924) between hard-liner Republicans who refused to accept the British terms of dominion status to Ireland (similar to Canada and Australia) and an oath of allegiance to the English King in lieu of an all-out Irish Republic, and the Free State forces (who did) had led by the close of the 1920s to a sort of tolerant stalemate in the wake of a bloody, bitter sectarian conflict. Forward progression seemed ever-blinded by partisanship: in 1929 Republicans still refused to take their seats in the *Dail*, the Irish Parliament which now sat the legitimate government of Southern Ireland. *Cumann na nGaedheal*, the oppositional party who supported the Anglo-Irish treaty, thus ran only a partially representative government. The northernmost six counties had voted to remain within the British Empire, bringing the sub-state of Northern Ireland into existence and further fracturing the dreamed-for nation. In the period immediately

following the amnesty which ended the Civil War in 1924, the cultural condition of the Free State was thus one of paranoia and uncertainty as Ireland made the transition from colony to postcolonial nation.

For many artists, politicians, laborers and philosophers, 1920s Ireland was a city replete with the dead, a charnel house of names and ideas, some propped up on high in stone monuments, some freshly buried to the republican tunes of "A Soldier's Song"[1] at Glasnevin cemetery, and many more swiftly passing away into the veritable dust bin of history. At its birth, the nation was haunted by its fractious pasts. Patrick Pearse's 1916 proclamation (shortly before his own death in the Easter Rising) that the revolution was to be carried out in the name of Ireland's dead generations, as well as one of the title of one of the most popular Irish ballads of the nationalist tradition, John Kells Ingram's "The Memory of the Dead," seem evidence enough of this profound weight of the dead on those who walked the streets of the Irish capital. To Johnston and many others of various professions and allegiances, a multitude of Irish histories swirled palpably beneath the now pockmarked streets of Dublin, pushing up through the cracks and crevices to trouble the living stream.

The national longing for form

It was within this cultural context that Denis Johnston wrote and premiered his play *The Old Lady Says 'No!'* in 1929, a work that borrowed heavily from the dramaturgic techniques of continental expressionism. It is my contention that this play was Johnston's attempt to forge a new national dramatic form that enunciated this postcolonial malaise, which he described in his postscript to the play as "what Dublin has

[1] This would become the Irish National Anthem.

been making many of us feel." It was his hope that such a form would replace the naturalistic style dominant at the Abbey theatre, which in Johnston's eyes had become incapable of addressing the historical problems of contemporary Ireland. The Abbey had rejected the play, and Johnston later maintained that the "old lady" of the title was Augusta Gregory herself. He explained his turn towards European, avant-garde influences by noting that, in the wake of the last several decades, Ireland was "spiritually in a poor condition" and thus he did not know "if a homeopathic treatment [was] the best for her complaint (*Old Lady* 125)." For a theatrical audience a little soured to the romantic naturalism of works such as Yeats and Gregory's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Johnston sought a theatrical form which would be capable of enunciating the turbulence of the historical moment. Importantly, he did not see such a departure as an abandonment of historical narratives, but as a type of secular Messianism, in which the audience might witness what Johnston termed the "triumph of the word over the environment," the transcendence of the variously enunciated possibilities of history over the pock-marked, stone ruins of the violent Irish past. At once, this would offer a salvo against the amnesiac forces of capitalist modernity already at work in Irish culture, whose representatives seemed all too happy to bear witness to the end of history if it meant the progress of commerce. Plural spirits could thus speak a multitude of narratives.[2] In such a fashion, *The Old Lady Says 'No!'* and its cultural concerns anticipate Fintan O'Toole's conclusions about the "new" Irish theatre 30 years later:

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[2] My thinking is influenced not only by Walter Benjamin, but also by Jacques Derrida, who in the opening of *Specters of Marx* writes of the importance of "learning to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company…this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, of generations…There is then *some spirit.* Spirits. And *one must* reckon with them. One cannot not have to, one must not not be able to reckon with them, which are more than one: *the more than one/no more one* [*le* plus d'un]" (xviii-xx).

> the doubleness of society, the co-presence of contradictory world-views, made it necessary for the theatre to evolve forms in which the collapse of personality, the instability of character, the failure of the naturalistic laws of cause and effect, were not just *avant garde* experiments but also necessary forms of social realism […] the society simply could not be encompassed within the singular vision of naturalistic theatre. ("Irish Theatre" 53)

Johnston, in 1929, was already addressing ideas O'Toole pointed out as a defining feature of another period of intense cultural change in Ireland. Indeed, various scholars have argued that one of the clarion calls of modernism in Ireland—and other postcolonial societies as well—has been the enunciation of such a multiplicity. Specifically, David Lloyd has spoken of the "anomalous states" that entail Irish reality, helping to represent a "population whose most typical experience may be that of occupying multiple locations, literally and figuratively" (*Anomalous* 3).

This longing for a national form, then, could never arrive in the form of a singular narrative. The longing – the pain, or *algos* of nostalgia – remained, and would be enunciated, but could never arrive at any one *nostos,* or home. Instead, there would always be a contradictory sense of homely isolation in modern nostalgia, as Svetlana Boym's opening quote elucidates, and as Irish noble laureate Seamus Heaney bears out so eloquently in the concluding lines of his poem "The Tollund Man:" "lost, unhappy, and at home" (48). Irish nostalgic modernism, as I will refer to this national form here, involved a perpetual search, a perpetual saying of the multiple places— and attendant historical specters—that represented home. Seamus Deane tracks the development of this nostalgic modernism in Irish literature. Growing out of the romantic period, he notes, the Irish fixation on pastness was itself a culturally self-defining act. Importantly, this

backwards-looking modernity, with its emphasis on rebirth, renaissance or recovery could be juxtaposed against the flattening conditions of "British commercial and technological modernity" (94).[3] What remains to be explored is how this conflict between the traditionalism and nostalgia of Irish cultural identity and globalizing modernity began to be realized theatrically.

"The National Longing for Form" is in fact the title of a well-known essay by postcolonial theorist Timothy Brennan, who charts the interrelationship between literary form and modern nationalism, both in Europe and the Third World. The rise of First World nationalism in the nineteenth century is counterbalanced against the difficult process of national enunciation in various, contemporary Third World environments that are themselves subject to the "ceaseless commercial and informational outpourings" of the contemporary First World, as Deane himself notes of postcolonial Ireland (Brennan 60).[4] Irish cultural critic Declan Kiberd cribs Brennan's title for a chapter of his *Inventing Ireland*, which focuses on how Yeats, Synge and Joyce attempted to invent a new genre of literature in tune with this nostalgic modernism I have been attempting to outline, specifically one in which art "might be seen as man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him." He goes on to note that they all "celebrate a nation's soul…but also claim it has yet to be made" (118). Implicit in such nostalgic modernism is thus a messianic strain of the work-to-come, so that nostalgia in fact compels, as Deane notes, a search for the future, a potentially radical future where the disenfranchisements of cultural modernity might be addressed.

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[3] See also Gibbons's chapter "Coming out of Hibernization" for an analysis of how this dynamic is still at work in contemporary Irish culture (*Transformations* 82-94).

[4] Today it is hard to talk of Celtic Tiger Ireland (even Northern Ireland) as a third world nation, but global capitalism has widened the gap there between the rich and the poor.

Walter Benjamin and nostalgic modernism

Both Lloyd and Brennan draw attention to Walter Benjamin's position as what the latter terms a "nostalgic modernist," very much in line with the ideas elucidated above. It is through Benjamin that we may connect continental expressionism, the concern with the dead in post-civil war Ireland, and the various messianic notions clearly at work in Irish nostalgic modernism, three important cultural strands behind the genesis of Johnston's 1929 play. Speaking of nostalgia's lingering label as an atavistic negative, David Lloyd responds, beginning with Yeats' famous collective invocation in the last stanza of "The Statues:"

> "We Irish" have often enough been accused of indulging an obsession with the past. The accusation is usually made in the name of a modernity defined not so much by the erasure of the past as by the discrimination of those elements of the past which can be incorporated in a progressive narrative from those which must be relegated to the meaningless detritus of history. But, as Benjamin well understood, such historicism entails a drastic reduction of the field of possibilities for the sake of a singular verisimilitude called "progress" and "development." (*Anomalous* 10)

For Lloyd, nostalgia has the potential to offer, if used selectively, potentially radical revisions of dominant historical narratives, specifically the safe narratives that pave the way for homogenous, global capitalism. The "storm" of progress, so memorably described by Benjamin as the force that blows the angel of history backwards into the future, provides a stunning visual example of this nostalgic modernism, and allusions to it have appeared in various theatre pieces in the twentieth century ("Theses" 257-8).[5] The angel itself is aligned towards the past, but is nevertheless buffeted by the mighty force of

[5] Heiner Muller's *Hamletmachine* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, among others.

the onward rush of time. The ruins the angel sees before it defy a positivist understanding of history: they are fragmentary and multiple. But the force of time does not permit him to stay and activate that past; it is ever receding, and the angel is ever striving towards it. This process is akin to the infinite deferral and perpetual search of nostalgic modernism.

The liberation of humanity from the deleterious effects of this storm of progress was certainly one of the goals of German expressionism, particularly in post-WWI Germany. In these plays, sound, light and scenic design impressionistically reveal the inner turmoil of the messianic artist, sacrificed to save humanity. Often, he or she is figuratively or even literally torn apart by the alienating forces of modern, bourgeois society. Walter Sokel, writing of Georg Kaiser's work in this period, notes the stance such work often takes towards historical reality: "History, too, in Kaiser's view is a jumble of accidents, brutalities, and meaningless events, but human intelligence, embodied in the poet as a maker interprets the events and gives them meaning. It is the poet who creates the only history meaningful to man" (110). Dualistically, the poet must abandon his or her self-obsessed narcissism, must "learn to identify himself with others, share their sufferings." Individual, naturalistic character was broken down via avant-garde stage techniques which sought to emphasize the collectivity of the human struggle. Although it was often aligned with radical, political causes, Expressionism as a movement did not espouse a singular political philosophy. Sokel notes that the ethical idealism proposed by many expressionists did not carry over into wholesale Marxism, as goals often remained abstract; they were not saliently political. In his own early writing on Expressionist dramaturgy, Benjamin had noted that the form itself, like the Baroque

German *Trauerspiel,* or mourning-play, was an inevitable result of the fractious socio-cultural period from which it emerged: "That characteristic feeling of dizziness which is induced by the spiritual contradictions of this epoch is a recurrent feature in the improvised attempts to capture its meaning" (*Origin* 54). However, he was skeptical of Expressionism, due to what he himself read as an expression of the singularity of the artist and their will (despite the fate the artist often suffered), as well as what he saw as an ignorance or naïveté to the immediate, political relevance of history. For many of the Expressionists, history remained a dark specter, necessarily exorcised by the artist so that civilization might begin again. For Benjamin, however, it is *only* from and *with* the ruins of history that one *can* begin again, only in the *living with* specters. The older German *Trauerspiel,* which literally placed history-as-ruin within the mise en scene, effectively did this.

As should by now seem clear, Dublin in the 1920s was as contentious and as fractured a society as Weimar Germany. Johnston himself was intimately familiar with German theatrical experimentation: he had traveled extensively there, seen works by both Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser at Peter Godfrey's London Gate Theatre Studio, and directed several expressionist productions himself for the amateur Dublin Drama League. He maintained himself that his play, although certainly influenced by all these factors, was "not an expressionist play and ought never to have been mistaken for one" (*Old Lady* 129). In fact, *The Old Lady's* dramatic stance towards history more closely aligns the work with Benjamin's own understanding of the possible relationship between history and theatre. Richard Allen Cave notes that that work's expressionistic subject was in fact the historic process itself, specifically "the power of the past to shape or condition the

shape of the present" (82). To this I would add the importance Johnston attaches to this past's fluid multiplicity. Such performances of history, Freddie Rokem notes, seek "to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from the past will matter again" (xii). A theatrical project such as Rokem describes is certainly complicated in a land where history seemed so immediate: *too* close, perhaps, to Johnston and his contemporaries in the 1920s. But I argue that for Johnston, as for Benjamin, the attempts even then underway to pave over that history—to make it a tame, singular and safe narrative in the name of a technological, global modernity—were even more insidious. Johnston longed for a theatrical form that could enunciate the nostalgic modernism so prevalent in Irish society, a form that looked backwards to more forward.

'The Last Hour of the Night:' Dublins of the Future and Yesterday

Such attempts to pave over history were often quite literal. The tension between modernity and history within the post-revolutionary period was perhaps strongest within the applied study of space itself, specifically the rapidly developing field of modern, urban planning. This new science sought to evacuate the city of its troublesome history along with its famous slums: just as it realigned population density, so it sought to pave over Dublin's contentious pasts. As this space and its attendant places of memory are of central importance to the text and performance of *The Old Lady Says No!*, it is important to investigate those contemporary forces that proclaimed history's conclusion, before turning to the theatrical event through which Johnston sought to explode such notions.



Fig 1: "The last hour of the Night," etching by Harry Clarke, Patrick Abercrombie et. al., *Dublin of the Future* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1922) 1.

Both Johnston and urban planners used expressionistic artistic themes to conceive of the bearing of the past on the present and future. One would be excused for looking

upon the etching ‘The last hour of the Night’ (1922) by Irish Artist Harry Clarke and thinking more of entering into the macabre world of the undead than of leafing through a British proposal for the urban renewal of Dublin City (Fig. 1). Clarke certainly had personal reasons for feeling the way that he did: prints for his edition of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” had burned in the Easter Rising, and countless other works of his had been lost. By the time of the armistice, he and many of his fellow Dubliners were fed up with the long, bloody conflict and its cultural resonances.

The plan Clarke provided this frontispiece for, ambitiously entitled *The Dublin of the Future,* had won a planning competition hosted by the Dublin Civics Institute at the beginning of the First World War. It was published, however, in 1922—amidst the bitter sectarian conflict—with the hope of its possible adoption by the postcolonial Irish government. Lead author Patrick Abercrombie’s tonic for the ruinous history of Dublin was tame, historically progressive modernism. Broadly conceived, the plan sought to transform the capital, historian Patrick Kinkaid notes, from an “underdeveloped city into a capitalist metropolis.” It took advantage of the wholesale destruction of much of the city center as a result of the fighting to propose a sort of neutral, memorial space, a “monumental urban core” (13). With the trauma of the past tidily swept away, broad Hausmann-inspired boulevards would lead between a newly-built national theatre, the renovated parliament building, and a national cathedral. Behind this cathedral would sit a monumental square, dominated by an Irish round tower topped by Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Around the perimeter were to be arched cenotaphs to famous, unspecified Irishmen. The slums in the north part of the city would be razed, and the

people within them redistributed to housing estates outside the city center. “Dublin today needs a great reawakening,” wrote the planners in a subsequent proposal, “A freedom from political and religious controversy, a subordination of the individual for the general good as well as a disregard of the sanctity of vested interests” (O’Roarke xvii).[6] Nothing, they maintained, was more capable of accomplishing such a goal than the creative reorganization of public space, a parsing of the “weeds in a haphazard garden” into managed infrastructure with a singular vision. The result would be an end to the violent legacies of the past, as “the state of a city indicates the character of its citizens” (xviii). The space people walked within thus had a disciplinary effect on their very constitution.

Clarke’s frontispiece visually demonstrated the profound importance of the project in its expressionistic rendition of the violent past so in need of clearing away. Although his primary specialty was stained glass, Clarke was also well-known for his gothic etchings and illustrations for works by the likes of Edgar Allan Poe and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as well as several theatrical designs for the Dublin drama league, the amateur theatre group with which Johnston himself was also affiliated. On closer inspection of the work, both its theatrical and gothic resonances become clear: in the background stands a strange collage of the more famous landmarks of Georgian Dublin, all of which were seriously damaged in the revolutionary and civil wars. The principal buildings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish ascendancy, the Customs House (1791), the Four Courts (1802) and the General Post Office (1818) burn in the background, while the derelict eighteenth-century housing blocks, at that point the

[6] This report, so the editors note, is the second in a two part work of which *The Dublin of the Future* was the first.

symbol of the slums that would dominate Sean O'Casey's Dublin Trilogy of plays in the immediately following years, occupy the right side of the illustration. The buildings are impossibly, almost comically propped up by pieces of wood to keep them from falling into the street. Below, citizens go about their business as if completely unaware of this ruinous scene that an emaciated specter hovers over, his shrouds merging with the swirling vortex of flames that engulf the monuments to the left. Ruin and poverty are ineluctably tied to rebellion and violence. The theatrical figure bears an uncanny resemblance to the heavily made-up Max Schreck in F.W. Murnau's famous expressionist film *Nosferatu,* made that same year (1922). Henrik Galeen's screenplay for the film was essentially an unauthorized, slightly altered filmic version of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897), itself composed by a Dubliner writing within the North Dublin flats in the twilight hours of that colonial legacy. The character of Dracula himself had been based on the famously gothic actor Henry Irving, whom Stoker vainly hoped would appear in a theatrical version of his novel. Like Schreck's vampire Count Orlok, who arrives via ship to stalk the alleyways of a peaceful, German village, this specter takes up residence among the ruins afflicting the town's heart. Symbols of ruin and decay, both are the core cause of pestilence and disease spreading among an unaware populace. Clarke's specter stares out towards the viewer. History—both the crumbling Anglo-Irish ruins and the flames of the more recent revolution and civil war—is presented, flaming across the page, as nightmare, a spectral inverse of Benjamin's angel: the figure is turned away from the burning past and towards the viewer; he challenges us to remove him. If it is indeed the "last hour of the night," and the small star in the upper right hand corner is the sign of hope, it is implied that this hope is contained in razing and rebuilding the city,

in the replacing of the legacies of colonialism and colonial resistance with managed, efficient infrastructure. Like Orlok or Dracula, with the coming sun the historical specter must vanish; it must be exorcised in the name of modernity.

Opposing such modernity were various forms of nostalgia for both the immediate and distant past, depending of course on the community involved. The most obvious was of the type that Svetlana Boym calls "restorative," which attempts a "transhistorical reconstruction of a lost home" (xvii). The same year that Johnston's play was performed, a missive entitled (perhaps in opposition to Abercrombie's published plan) *The Dublin of Yesterday* (1929) appeared. Its author, P.L Dickinson, testified as to what had already gone wrong in the nascent Free State, specifically what he saw as the systematic destruction of the Anglo-Irish intellectual tradition at the hand of Free State bureaucrats, which he saw, in its "modern movement back towards this Gaelic Hey-Day" as alternatively "pathetic," "comic" and "useless." Despite such vociferations, Dickinson then went right on to wax nostalgic for the glory days of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, carefully avoiding the problems of imperial violence and mismanagement, literally stating that he must "let the question of the slums pass," as the urban blight—Dublin had some of the worst slums in Europe at that point—did not enter into the scheme of his reminisces (2-3). Here, then, was the polar opposite of rampant modernization: dwelling on a vanished, Anglo-Irish past.

Indeed, both *Dublin of the Future* and the *Dublin of Yesterday* are profoundly concerned with past-ness, specifically with the relationship between collective memory and place. Within civic planning which sought to pave over Dublin's multitude of pasts to make way for modernity, or in an Anglo-Irish panegyric to a lost time, or even—as a

book compromisingly called *Dublin Old and New* attempted to do a decade later (1938)—in packaging that safe past for a growingly lucrative tourist culture, recent traumatic events in the Irish capitol remained frightfully close to the surface. The position of the republicans existing outside of the government was clear: there was still the obligation to the memory of the dead; the Irish Republic had yet to be realized, and the Free State and the existence of Northern Ireland were barricades to its realization. History existed as a messianic obligation. Johnston certainly did not seek to forget the violent past for the sake of any sort of capitalistic modernity, but he also did not seek to bemoan its passing as had Dickinson, or join IRA irregulars in violent, anti-governmental action. He sought, instead, to enunciate the problems of this historical moment in a socially responsible way, one that might place his audience between a leveling, global modernism and the sense of nostalgia which, as Deane notes, seemed delicately to hold in place modern notions of Irish identity.

Theatricality and the longing for form versus national culture

For Johnston, avant-garde performance was one of the best ways of enunciating the complex connection between memory and place. In the early years of the Free State, theatre still occupied a formidable place in the public sphere, and in the artistic life of the state, a national theatrical form existed. The Abbey, now the National Theatre of Ireland in more than just name (the new Free State government had endorsed the title and given the theatre a subsidy), had developed a steady, predictable form of realism which audiences now came to expect at that theatre. The other larger Dublin houses, such as the Queens and the Gaiety, operated as both touring houses for predominantly English works as well as popular Irish melodramas. The Abbey style had developed, through extensive

touring of America and the continent, into a recognizably Irish form that could also be easily exported. Naturalistic representation—Abbey realism—had become a seemingly firm piece of bedrock in a turbulent new state, leading Johnston to search for a cure to what he regarded as Ireland's poor condition which was not, as he put it, homeopathic.

Chief among the narratives to be paved over by Abbey realism were, as with urban planning, the specters of immediate history, in this case militant Republicanism and Socialism.[7] Lionel Pilkington asserts that there was in fact a high degree of complicity between Free State bureaucrats and the Abbey theatre to paint oppositional elements outside the government as dramatically excessive; a "regular recourse to a kind of theatricality, as evident in the legacies and continued existence of republican and labor militancy" was used as a tactic used to discredit the opposition (*Theatre* 86). Those who continued to challenge the status quo were simply actors acting in bad faith, off the boards: like Patrick Pearse summoning Cuchulain to his side in the GPO in 1916, they suffered from a deplorable excess of theatricality. One of the most telling examples of this was an early 1930s election poster for *Cumann na nGaedheal*, which carried the name of Sean O'Casey's famous 1922 play *The Shadow of a Gunman*, on its cover. The poster called upon its audience's knowledge of the hit play at the Abbey, about a romantic poet-turned-revolutionary who turns out to be only the "shadow" of a real gunman. "The Shadow of the Gunman: Keep it from your home," runs the full ad, along with the command to "vote for *Cumann na nGaedheal"* in order to exorcise the shadow,

[7] The Socialist force, the Irish Citizen Army, led by James Connolly (executed in 1916 by the British), was folded into the Irish Republican army during the Anglo-Irish war, and a large portion of that force remained within the anti-treaty, Republican faction of the IRA.

which looms threateningly over a peaceful, bucolic cottage (Pilkington, *Theatre* 86).[8] Militants who threatened the peaceful society were merely method actors engaging in actual violence without cause or need. Pilkington, however, argues that what such associative moves in fact demonstrated was the inherently fractious nature of post-independence Ireland, which was without what the government and its allies sought to create, a national culture which restricted acting to the naturalistic stage. National culture, in this definition, moved beyond the early intentions of the Abbey theatre to stage the Irish imagination, as was seen in chapter three, to an actual attempt to constitute, define and delimit it by maintaining the "vitally important distinction between play-acting and real life, between theatrical and non-theatrical action" (*Theatre* 87). The theatrical uses and abuses of history, then, had to be exorcised just as much as Clarke's vampire, or at least defanged onstage so it was no longer a potent threat to the national culture.

Despite a consistently espoused socialism, Sean O'Casey's works often support such a reading in their denunciation of the melodramatic tendencies of Republicanism, from the romantic poet-turned gunman in *The Shadow of a Gunman* to the fragments of speeches by Patrick Pearse in his later play *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), which were rendered in an expressionist vein. O'Casey's own experimentation with the avant-garde art form would quickly run him afoul of the Abbey's aesthetic: his next, more fully expressionist play, *The Silver Tassie*, was rejected for production there in 1928. In *The Plough and the Stars*, O'Casey, like Clarke, used the aesthetic to highlight the vampirism of immediate history. This is most readily apparent in the appearance of the spectral speaker through the window in the 2nd act of the play. Here, various fragments of

[8] The election poster is featured on the cover of Pilkington's book.

Pearse's historic speeches float in from the shadow. "The voice of the man," which flits in and out of the line of sight through an upstage window, haunts the stage-scene (34).[9] Consequently, the men on stage are immediately overcome by this infectious rhetoric, and subsequently break out of the naturalistic dialogue of O'Casey's gritty, urban realism into a sort of possessed speech. Expressionism becomes the language of this possession, a visual and aural way for the audience to realize that all is not well with the characters onstage. "Their faces are flushed and their eyes sparkle," notes O'Casey, and "they speak rapidly, as of unaware of the meaning of what they said." They break into a kind of call-and-response, ritual chant, which is not unlike the ritual imagery of Pearse's own blood-infused rhetoric, which follows immediately after:

> CAPT. BRENNAN. We won't have long to wait now.
> LIEUT. LANGON. Th' time is rotten ripe for revolution.
> CAPT. BRENNAN. You have a mother, Langon.
> LIEUT. LANGON. Ireland's greater than a mother.
> CAPT. BRENNAN. You have a wife, Clitheroe.
> CLITHEROE. Ireland's greater than a wife.
> LIEUT. LANGON. Th' time for Ireland's battle is now – th' place for Ireland's battle is here.
> *The tall, dark figure again is silhouetted against the window. The three men pause and listen.*
> VOICE OF THE MAN. Our foes are strong, but strong as they are they cannot undo the miracles of God, who ripens in the heart of young men the seeds sewn by the young men of a former generation. They think they have pacified Ireland; think they have foreseen everything; think they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools the fools! They have left us our Fenian dead, and, while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland, unfree, will never be at peace. (53)

Pearse's words, taken from his famous speech at the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa described in chapter 2, are some of the most messianic in the Republican tradition, and

[9] True to more traditional expressionist form, the figure is not given a name besides "voice of the man,"

are used here to blend the worlds of the living and the dead, as O'Casey's dramatic shift in language does within the stage-scene itself. The possessed characters will soon follow the Voice of the Man's words into the actual theatre of war.

Johnston, however, is more ambivalent in his use of expressionist technique to interrogate Irish history. The Abbey rejected *The Old Lady* as well, Pilkington maintains, because of its difficult, expressionist-influenced dramaturgy and its "acerbic satire of the new Free State elite." Nevertheless, he still sees the play as another example of "attack[ing] republican nationalism by portraying it as a form of play-acting […]" (*Theatre* 105). Certainly, the work does not spare the romantic nationalism of the Republican tradition, as we see the patriot Robert Emmet revealed as nothing more than an actual stage-actor who has been clubbed over the head and now believes he is in fact Emmet himself. Walking in 1920s Dublin, O'Casey's offstage "Voice of the Man" now becomes "the Speaker," an expressionistic protagonist who finds the modern world grossly out of sync with his idealistic rhetoric. However, the Speaker is not an insidious figure; his plight, as the play progresses, becomes alternatively satiric and tragic. Pilkington reads the specter/speaker of Emmet, embodied by the hyper-romantic actor Micheál MacLiammóir, as indicative of Ireland's "irredentist attraction to romantic nationalism, with Irish political militancy portrayed pejoratively as a form of inappropriate or unacknowledged theatricality." He sees Johnston as falling within the camp of W.B. Yeats, one of the rejecters of his play for production at the Abbey, since "what is portrayed as lost and neglected as a result of the banalities of a liberated Ireland is the Anglo-Irish and Irish Protestant tradition" (*Theatre* 106). The equation seems easy:

what Yeats's filthy modern tide and Irish republicanism are both atavistic; both fall before the expressionist sword.

Pilkington misses an important and jarring ambivalence, however, concerning this figure, an ambivalence characteristic of Johnston's own nostalgic modernism. It is within this ambivalence that one can see the distillation of the themes addressed up to this point in the chapter. The playwright did not advocate a wholesale dismissal of Emmet as the specter of a bloody past. Christine St. Peter has noted that Johnston instead seems to "satirize the glamour of revolutionary politics, with its disastrous effects on the modern spirit, even as he admitted the potency of revolutionary ideas," a move that has perplexed scholars of his work for some time (6). Johnston spoke wistfully of Emmet in a later introduction he wrote for the American premiere of the play in 1933. Reminiscing on Emmet's historic fate, Johnston notes that he was only hanged

> after making one of the finest speeches from the dock in the annals of the criminal courts—and we have had some pretty good ones in Ireland. So we all love Robert Emmet. Yeats and De Valera loved him, each in his own fashion. I do too (51).

In marshalling two such disparate figures, both intellectually and politically, and then adding himself, Johnston strives for a common marker of Irishness that might in some way stand against an amnesiac modernity. Certainly, this is a tempered heroism: the work does not dwell on Emmet as a romantic figure. The play instead functions as an Irish *Trauerspiel:* history, as Benjamin notes of the 16th Century German dramatic form, is presented as a ruin, in actual stage figures, in fragments of dialogue that evoke people, ideas, and places gone or passing away. No authoritative narrative ever arrives, however, to gain predominance.

The Old Lady, Messianism, and Nostalgic Modernism

As noted in chapter two, *The Old Lady* begins with a play within a play, an historic melodrama about Robert Emmet akin to many of the works that peppered the late nineteenth-century Irish repertoire, coalescing around the one-hundred-year anniversary of the 1798 rebellion. Dion Boucicault, one of the most prolific melodrama authors of all time, had himself written one called simply *Robert Emmet* in 1884. These plays also concerned themselves with the relationship between memory and place, but in performance embraced the restorative nostalgic mood: the patriotic spirit of the 1798 rebellion could return in 1898, for instance, if the time lag between the two places could be bridged in performance. One of the most famous examples of such an attempt was J.W. Whitbread's play *Wolfe Tone*, first performed in 1898 at the Queens Royal theatre directly behind Trinity College. Tone had himself been a student there at the time of the 1798 Rising. At the opening of that play, the rear doors of the stage were opened onto a square in Trinity itself, so that a character was chased into the theatre through the scene doors by Trinity "rowdies." Chris Morash notes that such a move "reinforce[d] real class tensions between [Anglo-Irish] Trinity Students and the predominantly working class audience who patronized the Queen's, thereby bonding the audience to the republican United Irishmen" (113). In one dramatic feint, 1798 becomes 1898, and a link is established in performance between the ills of that time and the present.

Johnston enters into dialogue with such performances by instead highlighting the time lag between Emmet's time and his own, using expressionist techniques to bring the disparity into sharp relief. The audience is initially duped into thinking they have

actually come to see a more traditional theatre piece, in this case a classic, Irish melodrama. One audience member to the 1929 premiere claimed that he initially "fortified [himself] with a cocktail to put up with yet another interpretation of Ireland's woes […]" (qtd. in Fitz-simon 59). By 1929 that dramatic formula was growing stale in the shadow of recent events. Lady Gregory, also present, actually enjoyed the first part of the play, apparently missing the irony. However, the melodrama is in reality an assortment of literary fragments from the Irish romantic tradition, primarily taken from nineteenth- century poetry by authors such as Thomas Moore, James Mangan and Samuel Ferguson. The mass of intertextual citations is mouthed by both the actor playing Emmet and the actress playing Sarah Curran, his paramour. These fragments were well-ingrained into the Irish literary tradition at this point, and would have been familiar to the ears of a native Dublin audience. The site of the action was also famous: the playlet is set just outside the village of Rathfarnam in 1803, where Emmet was captured by British soldiers led by Major Charles Henry Sirr.[10] Johnston depended on the audience's sense of recognition, remarking that the work "presupposes at the start a set of recognizable figments in the minds of the audience, figments which from their very nature are bound to be somewhat local (129)." The scene, however, never coalesces into a naturalistic one, and the audience is never fully at home even in this opening playlet. The words and the stage-scene remain fragments of an historic stage-tradition which remains stagy. As Benjamin noted of the *Trauerspiel*, history is staged as a ruin, never coalescing into a naturalistic narrative. Instead, fragments are "piled up ceaselessly" (Benjamin, *Origin*

[10] Major Charles Henry Sirr (1756-1841) was a British soldier who had also been responsible for the arrest of one of the leaders of the 1798 rising, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, five years earlier. He surprised Emmett at a house near Rathfarnam after an informer tipped him off that he was hiding there in an attempt to meet with Sarah Curran.

178): the words the Speaker/Emmet mouths throughout much of the play continue to be the broken images of an assortment of past traditions. Boym, expanding on Benjamin, notes that such a format is "not elegiac but rather dialectical," suggesting first and foremost "the coexistence of many historical layers, the plurality of possibilities" (136).

The sudden *coup de theatre* of the piece is delivered when Emmet is clubbed over the head by one of the Redcoats who arrive with Major Sirr, the melodramatic villain of the playlet. In the first audience, weaned on a diet of Abbey realism, a doctor even came forward to assist. At this point an expressionist dramaturgy takes over, as the actor playing Emmet suddenly merges with his actual character in an hallucinatory dream in which he walks the streets of 1929 Dublin, believing he is in fact Emmet. The play walks a fine line between satire and tragedy: Emmet is given the messianic power to speak again, but no one will listen to him. He is a performed ruin of a romantic age no longer practical to the forces of a modern, capitalist society hurriedly attempting to eject its past.

The change from the naturalist stage-world of the melodrama to the hallucinatory rendering of 1929 Dublin is accomplished primarily by both curtains (which open and close with the coming and going of various figments in the speaker's feverish imagination) and lighting (which lit crowds from the wings and below to underline their

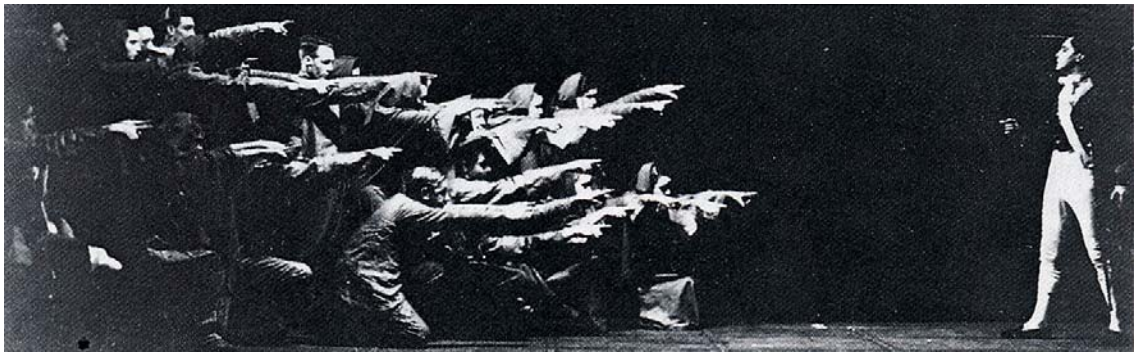


Fig 2: The Speaker (Macliammoir) confronts the expressionist crowd near the end of Act 1, *The Old Lady Says No!* (Courtesy, Dublin Gate Theatre)

spectral, dream like stage-presence) (fig. 2). Both were ingeniously deployed in the tiny Peacock theatre by Hilton Edwards, who served as both lighting designer and director in what was to be the inaugural production of the new Dublin Gate theatre. From this initial moment, chanting, drumming and choral passages underline the dreamlike state of the rest of the work. As the second part of the play begins, "forms" in the house answer on the audience's behalf, thus engendering a second, representational audience that the speaker, now believing he is actually Emmet, can see. These forms, moving in and out of his vision, never coalesce into actual characters, but flit about, listing place names in contemporary Dublin, suggestions of what to do with the downed actor, and even going so far as to list the rules of the theatre. As the speaker rises and begins, as the stage directions put it, to "act" again, he remains stuck in a melodramatic theatrical world starkly contrasted with the expressionist stage-world he encounters. The forms rise in pitch to a shriek, propelling the consciousness of the speaker out into this dream version of modern Dublin. We subsequently follow his movements, in a dramaturgic form similar to Ernst Toller's *Stattionendrama,* in which episodic scenes, or stations, frame the action of a protagonist's progression through the world of the play, just as the various stations in the Catholic Stations of the Cross frame Christ's journey to Calvary. As noted earlier, much expressionist work contained such a messianic strain, and the ritualistic undertone was certainly apropos to the elements of performance implicit in the martyr cult of Irish republicanism, and provides a framework to the apotheosis of the Speaker and the end of the play. This landscape does not so much seek to fuse the stage scene with the world outside, as had plays such as Whitbread's, but to point out the fundamental distinction between these two worlds: the hallucinating actor is himself a

ruin amidst the din of post-colonial modernity. His melodramatic acting, appearance (clad in early 19th century uniform), and rhetoric now meet the sounds of 1929 Dublin, complete with "the throb of petrol engines, the hoot of motor horns, the rattle and pounding of lorries, and, above all, the cry of the newsboys," who many of the forms have now transformed into. No one has time to pay attention due to the merciless stopwatch of modernity:

> SPEAKER. [*now in the midst of the traffic*] Men of Eire, awake and be blest! Do you hear? [*He fiercely accosts a passer by*] Do you hear? Awake!
> PASSER-BY. [*politely disengaging himself*] Sorry. The banks close at half two. (67)

Emmet, standing in the middle of traffic in one of Dublin's busiest intersections, is unable to "wake" him from the drone of modernity. Isolated from society, the Speaker is akin to the classic Expressionism's protagonist, railing against the base materialism of the world. However, the theatricality of the scene complicates the action further: Immediately after his attempt to wake the passers-by, as the Speaker rises toward crescendo in a patriotic speech about his "springing soul meet[ing] the eagle on the hills," a stage hand approaches the actor and asks him if the artistic director has cleared him to have hills in the scene. Flabbergasted, the Speaker first maintains he does not know what he means, but subsequently "breaks" character to show the stage hand his name in the program, along with the description of the setting in Rathfarnam, and demanding to know why he is downtown and not there. The Speaker seems to know that he not Emmet, yet



Fig 3: Henry Grattan's statue in College Green today. Photo by Michael Jaros

has a great deal of trouble breaking character. Thus, the conventions of modern acting are used to throw the time lag into even sharper relief.

Above this scene, at the head of College Green and before the old parliament building, stands the statue of Henry Grattan, the leader of parliamentary reform in 18th century Ireland (fig. 3). The Irish parliament, disbanded after the 1798 rebellion which Emmet's own insurrection echoed, was known in its last, more successful years as "Grattan's parliament." Although it only represented the Protestant minority, the parliament went a long way towards the legislative separation of Ireland from England. The 1798 rebellion, however, brought about that parliament's liquidation, something for

which Grattan never forgave the rebels. Part of a complicated Anglo-Irish legacy, the statue is performed by the actor, Johnston stipulates, who played Major Sirr in the opening playlet. Originally, Grattan had been part of a much larger scheme: Johnston's earlier drafts reveal a vast bevy of talking statues throughout the capital. All the dead voices speaking—as Beckett said—"each one to itself," were perhaps too much cacophony for the *mise en scène*. The conceit, however, of allowing varied places of memory to speak, often against the official history of the Free State, certainly complicates the singular narrative of progress.

Various scholars have interpreted the ensuing debate between the statue of Grattan and Speaker/Emmet as central to the play for a variety of reasons. Lionel Pilkington reads the scene as the nostalgic validation of a lost, Anglo-Irish intellectual tradition in the face of the bloody excesses of Republican militancy (*Theatre* 106). Christine St. Peter interprets the debate as a manifestation of a duality in Johnston himself between his own romantic attachment to Emmet's principles and the intellectual traditions of his own, Anglo-Irish forebears (7). The scene remains pivotal to the play in that it enunciates a complicated set of historical positions in a non-realistic framework. Here we have two dead men, one a specter possessing an actor, the other a stone monument, arguing about the past and its bearing on the present in the middle of a petrol-fume-filled city intersection. Importantly, neither of these historical narratives is given precedence. Also present in the scene is an old flower-woman, also doubled as the actress who plays Emmet's beloved, Sarah Curran, in the first scene. The old woman is herself a ruinous version of Cathleen ni Houlihan, the feminine symbol of Ireland staged by Yeats and Gregory. She embodies the blood-soaked legacy of recent history: the Shan

van Vocht, or "wrinkled old woman" on whom Yeats and Gregory based their own play, could only be made young and beautiful by the sacrificial blood of young men. Johnston's cross casting cements the implicit relationship between sexual love and death in Irish republican mythology through his stage-use of a gendered stereotype, Mother Ireland. These three disparate readings of history are all framed by the "thick, sententious atmosphere," as Grattan calls it, of postcolonial Dublin. The Speaker/Emmet initially agrees with Grattan that the fumes the latter presides over barely keep him from choking. However, he suddenly notices the words come from the actor playing Major Sirr. The Speaker/Emmet is momentarily caught off guard and disengages from his role. The statue of Grattan seems on to this game of theatre:

> GRATTAN. God forgive me, it is hard sometimes, very hard.
> SPEAKER. All the same I will not allow this. It is the voice of Major Sirr. It is not my part.
> GRATTAN. Your part? Ah yes, more play acting. Go on, go on.
> SPEAKER. I am Robert Emmet and I…
> GRATTAN. A young man playing Robert Emmet. Yes, yes, they all come here. (70)

Grattan here alludes to the Queen's Theatre, the location of the first staging of *Wolfe Tone* and countless other nationalist melodramas, and perhaps the theatre from which the Speaker has stumbled out, which at the time stood three blocks from his base in College Green.[11] He also, more darkly, refers to the various insurgents who "played" at being Emmet in the actual conflicts of the 1920s. The Anglo-Irish Trinity College, which Grattan's statue faces, was one of the primary targets of Irish nationalists during the war.

[11] Chris Morash notes that by the late 1920s the Queens was only a shell of its former glory. The nationalist melodramas of the pre-war period were "out of touch with the dour Post-Civil war mood," he notes, so the theatre subsisted on musical revues as well as "a combination of films and stage-acts known as cine-variety" (176). The building was razed in the 1950s, and is now the site of the Irish Government's housing and welfare offices.

"Playing" at being Emmet becomes dead serious, implying a connection between play-acting and the theatricality of republican nationalism which certainly seems to support Pilkington's thesis. To the left of Grattan's statue is his old parliament building, now the head offices of the Bank of Ireland, towards which the Passer-by from the previous scene is rushing. Such is the nature of this complicated *lieu de mémoire*, standing at a nexus of stone memorial and actual performance, within which this scene transpires.

The statue admonishes the Speaker/Emmet for his romantic nationalism, reminding him of one of the only casualties of his rebellion, Lord Kilwarden, the Chief Justice of Ireland, who was pulled from his carriage and stabbed to death in the street. The statue repeats his last words, "Let no man perish, in consequence of my death," highlighting the innocent victims of Emmet's rebellion. Grattan here echoes the skepticism of his countryman and contemporary, Edmund Burke, whose own statue stands symbolically *within* the gates of Trinity facing outwards towards Grattan. Burke himself saw the revolutionary fanaticism of the eighteenth-century French mob as an example of behaving too theatrically. Tracy Davis notes that Burke's anti-theatrical prejudice, clearly imitated by Grattan, was inspired by this danger: "When actor cannot be distinguished from character or dramatic conceit from political espousal, objectivity, critique and individuality are lost" (138). Republicanism, in both contexts, is theatrical in the negative, mimetic sense: such acting is removed from the purported platonic truth of real political belief and action. Grattan bewails the failure of his enterprise:

> GRATTAN. For full fifty years I worked and waited, only to see my country's new-found glory melt away at the bidding of omniscient young messiahs with neither the ability to work nor the courage to wait.
> SPEAKER. I have the courage to go on.

> GRATTAN. Oh, it is an easy thing to draw a sword and raise a barricade. It saves working, it saves waiting. It saves everything but blood. And blood is the cheapest thing the good God has made. (71-2)

However, despite such anti-theatrical vociferations, we can never forget that these lines are spoken by an actor on a pedestal, a figment in the expressionistic hallucinations of the speaker. He is also an actor that doubles as Major Sirr, certainly no patriot of Irish causes. The statue/Sirr's own multiplicity undercuts his condemnation of the Speaker as a "fool, strutting upon the stage" who will surely "crucify [himself] in the blind folly of [his] eternal play acting" (72). The statue of Grattan is just as much a victim of the theatrical conceit as is Emmet. Standing upon a pedestal, posed as an eighteenth-century orator, his own mannerisms and words are tied to his time: they are the anti-theatrical rhetoric of an eighteenth-century parliamentarian, and certainly sound as such compared to the rapid, clipped pastiche of twentieth-century goings-on delivered by the forms of the ensemble. Johnston brings us to a critical distance from both; we are palpably aware of the time lag between the two men and the present. Just as the republican tradition is derided, there can be no return, either, to the heyday of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. They are both nostalgic anti-moderns, one espousing the messianic nationalism of the "nation-once-again," and the other the vestiges of Anglo-Irish civil society and its rich pedigree. Both are performing ruins within the modern landscape. Below Grattan, the macabre Cathleen ni Houlihan bemoans her "four bewtyful gre-in fields," parodying the line from Yeats and Gregory's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Place here becomes what Michel De Certeau calls a "practiced space" (*Practice* 117), deeply lined by the contours of various, contested histories that well up into the modern petrol fumes. Johnston remains concerned with this

relationship between history and place, using expressionist dramatic techniques to challenge conventional, realistic understandings of the interrelationship between the two ideas.

Still, however, the Speaker remains an attractive figure: his simple grandiosity, itself amplified by the romantic acting techniques of the young, dashing MacLiammóir (as described in chapter two) undercuts Grattan's position as a *raisonneur*, a stand-in for the purportedly reasoned position of the audience. Still, following the Speaker to the logical conclusions of his heart-felt nationalism becomes a dubious prospect in the light of immediate history, despite his attempts to sway the audience to his side. The Speaker speaks:

> SPEAKER. [*to the audience*]: He is an old man. He does not understand the way we do. He can only doubt…while we believe…believe with heart and soul and every fibre of our tired bodies. Therefore I am not afraid to go on. (72)

Certainly a 1929 audience, one that had lived through the traumas of the 1920s in their own "tired bodies," might not "understand" the way Emmet wants them to. Grattan proclaims the disillusion of many: with Irish independence a great, postcolonial age did not in fact arrive. At the same time, Grattan's delivery of the line "with unutterable scorn" that Ireland is "free" alludes to the paltry state of freedom that seems to exist in the area around his pedestal. Both figures, in drastically different ways, speak from their pasts of the work still to be done, to a burden of historical consciousness, although each burden is quite different. Both occupy the same stage space; the *mise en scène* proclaims neither to be the legitimate historical narrative. This confrontation ends when it seems that Speaker/Emmet might momentarily break free of the dream, as the curtains close and

he is trapped within them, struggling to escape the staged spectacle. He is, however, unsuccessful.

If the first act complicates conventional understandings of the historical past, then the second act offers a caustic critique of the Free State's bureaucracy 's simplification of history into nostalgia about the war against the British, which allows them to absent from dealing with the present realities of the fractured, postcolonial state and the legacy of the bloody sectarian Civil War. The government's Minister for Arts and Crafts holds a party in his "fantastically respectable" home, complete with the statue of Grattan, the Anglo-Irish Lady Trimmer, one of the actors who played a redcoat arrester of Emmet (now in the green uniform of a Free State general) and O'Cooney and O'Rooney, obvious caricatures of the well-known authors Sean O'Casey and Liam O'Flaherty. In one room, Johnston thereby gathers the competing forces that have helped to establish the modern Free State: the former Anglo-Irish establishment, the bourgeois, Catholic bureaucracy, and the artistic, intellectual establishment are all represented. The Speaker's arrival completes the picture. The environment is one of cronyism and camaraderie: the minister has gathered various supplicant artists who hope to benefit from the "deserving Artists Support Act," referencing the censorship laws of 1923 and 1929, by which the Free State sought to solidify its power over artistic expression. The Speaker enters the house on the minister's request, who claims he "used to know him in the old days," an allusion to the pre-war civility between Free-Staters and Republicans. Recalcitrant nationalism is defanged in the name of cultural legitimacy, and radical readings of the past are replaced with conservative, nostalgic tales.

Stories of the recent and distant troubles become safe stories to be told, full of danger and heroism. All are interested Emmet's stories of his times during the recent "trouble;" no difference is perceived by this stage-audience between the 1920s and the 1800s, as the melodramatic conceits of the Queens theatre are readopted. Lady Trimmer, especially, wants to hear about the "interesting times" he endured in the fighting. The Speaker is persuaded to reenact the initial scene of his playlet before the assembled group without Sarah Curran in the scene. O'Cooney objects to the falseness of the piece, calling it "bloody awful," but simultaneously launches into his own longing for the days of the Anglo-Irish war when he and the minister "hid in the chimbley from the Tans" (102).[12] At once, the Free State General launches into the famous ballad of Emmet and Curran penned by Thomas Moore, "She is Far from the Land." All three speak at once over each other, so that the stage action amounts to a recital of nostalgia for various Irish pasts, both far and near moments of anti-Imperial action. The actual Free State audience in the house is, by default, implicated as spectators of this nostalgic recital. O'Cooney concludes that he would "Not for all the wealth of the world…give up the maddenin' minglin' memories of the past" (105).

This nostalgic recital, however, is disrupted by an old, blind man, one of the tens of thousands of disenfranchised masses who live in abject poverty in the postcolonial capital. Simultaneously, the curtains block out all the figures onstage except the Speaker, who has taken up the last lines of "She is Far from the Land." The blind man informs the speaker of the actual circumstances of his/Emmet's death: the last man to be drawn, hung

[12] "Chimbley" means chimney. The "Black and Tans" were auxiliary troops, primarily World War I veterans from Scotland, which the British army brought to Ireland to shore up its ranks during the Anglo-Irish War. They gained an infamous reputation in Ireland due to their barbarity towards both insurgents and civilians during the conflict.

and quartered by order of an English court, he was executed for high treason in 1803. As the Speaker absorbs the fact that he has been "dead this hundred years and more," a cosmopolitan couple returning to Dublin from London interrupts the scene, remarking on the provincial nature of the place. Ireland remains, to them as visitors, a place replete with nostalgic past-ness, and for a moment they espouse feelings of love for each other. Suddenly, however, music from a nearby dance hall stops, and the spell is broken. "Funny," he remarks, "how the old place can get you for a bit. But after all, one can't get away from the fact that it's all so damned depressing." The "old place," saturated with past-ness, seems to be absorbing Emmet himself, to the point that he at this point becomes unclear of the line of demarcation afforded by the proscenium. He is rapidly losing his ability to "tell what things are real and what are not," certainly a complicated statement coming from a concussed actor, in an expressionist play within a play, playing Robert Emmet. The blind man, however, cuts to the heart of the matter, which is itself the fundamental problem of the institutionalized, "safe" nostalgia of the Free State:

> BLIND MAN. […] For why would they care that the winds is cold and the beds is hard and the sewers do be stinking and steaming under the stone sets of the streets, when they can see a bit of a rag floating in the wild wind, and they dancing their bloody Ceilidhes over the lip of Hell! Oh I have my own way of seeing surely. It takes a dark man to see the will-o'-the-wisps and the ghosts of the dead and the half-dead and them that will never die while they can find lazy, idle hearts ready to keep them warm. […] In every dusty corner lurks the living word of some dead poet, and it waiting for to trap and to snare them. This is no city of the living, but of the dark and the dead! (109)

The blind man speaks to the inherent injustices and the deplorable poverty of postcolonial Ireland that lurk under the veneer of nostalgic sentimentality expressed by the returning

bourgeoisie. Underneath such sentimentality lies an insidious attraction to violence, to playing the hero, as the speaker has himself been doing. His own stage-image is indeed "kept warm" by such hearts as those that drift by. The next scene draws a sharper focus on this legacy of violence, as a young man and an older man, both poor, hold watch over the body of a dying comrade named Joe. The younger is a die-hard republican and the older an accepter of the Free State treaty, and they debate the split legacy of Irish nationalism over a bleeding body. Realizing he is himself a specter, generated by those onstage, the Speaker demands that the younger Republican answer to the Speaker for Emmet's continued existence as an inspirational figure. The young man readily dismisses him as "a bloody play-actor," not a real force in the world of political change. As Joe dies, the Speaker ponders his own lack of agency: "Gone, and I am only a play-actor – unless I dare to contradict the dead! Must I do that" (115)? It is at only at this point that the Speaker, finally accepting that he is an actor in a work of fiction, is able to in fact revise and re-interpret Emmet himself.

This leap of faith into a space where one may "contradict the dead" moves the Speaker away from any single historical tradition. He becomes, at this point, the physical embodiment of the multiplicity of history: throughout the play he has born witness to a multitude of expressionistically rendered viewpoints regarding history and its bearing on the present state of things. As an actor he has become what Freddie Rokem has termed a "hyper-historian:" he confronts the "different possibilities of understanding the past […]. This past as an established body of knowledge, something commonly known […] is constantly being reinterpreted in theatrical or aesthetic means" (103). When a state funeral for Joe ensues, with almost the entire cast of characters present, it becomes

apparent that the speaker has vanished. The blind man then calls up various "shadows" to dance at the wake. They do, appearing behind the scrim and dancing in time to drumming music. Each shadow stops to "strike an attitude," delivering quotes from literary figures (W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw), who in Johnston's own words were "some of Dublin's greatest contributors to the world's knowledge of itself" (130). The speaker then reappears as his own "shadow" to add his voice and to give one last command performance as the nationalist Robert Emmet. Emmet's own speech is an amalgamation of Messianic rhetoric from William Blake, the Old and New Testaments, the commination service of the Anglican Church, and ends with Emmet's own famous speech from the Dock in 1803.

Emmet's nationalist rhetoric joins other voices in a competing expressionist cacophony of Dublin's many voices. This proclamation of a heterogonous history leads to the play's final, secular apotheosis, as the Speaker again appears as "himself" to re-write Emmet's famous epitaph. Announcing that his "ministry is now ended," he slowly returns to his position on the floor, with the doctor above him. His final, poetic speech, to the audience, before the dream dissipates and the curtain falls, is a messianic vision of the many-voiced Dublin:

> SPEAKER. […]Strumpet city in the sunset.
> Suckling the bastard brats of Scots, of Englishry, of Huguenot.
> Brave sons breaking from the womb, wild sons fleeing from their Mother.
> Wilful [sic] city of savage dreamers,
> So old, so sick with memories.
> Old Mother
> Some say that you are damned,
> But you, I know, will walk the streets of Paradise
> Head high, and unashamed.

> [*His eyes close. He speaks very softly*]
> There now. Let my epitaph be written. (125)

The last line, pilfered from Emmet's own dock speech's conclusion, is certainly messianic. It acknowledges the "sickness" of nostalgia present in the capital. Yet, it is the savage dreamers and its heterogenous past of "bastard brats" that must be embraced to move forward into a future open to possibility. Johnston's nostalgic modernism retained a certain reverence for the historical visionary as the bringer of change, yet insured, through theatrical form, that there was never just one visionary speaking. If Johnston's project did involve a great amount of looking back, it was in its form and substance a work obsessed with the future state of his home country.

Johnston's Legacy

Johnston's bid to find a theatrical metaphor capable of conveying the inherent complexity of the Irish historical situation did have its adherents, and certainly does today in contemporary Irish theatre. This did not, however, happen immediately. The intensely insular period of time in postcolonial Ireland —which Johnston's play was aligned against—from the late 1920s to the early 1960s instituted a theatrical time lag of its own, as Abbey realism became so predominant that theatrical sets only needed, as Tom Kilroy derisively put it, a "new coat of paint" every now and then. The Gate theatre, which had become famous with their inaugural production of *The Old Lady* (as described in Chapter 2) became primarily a producer of foreign works, with certain notable exceptions. Johnston left Ireland to work as a BBC war correspondent and went on to a lucrative career in both broadcasting and college teaching. However, his effects on Irish theatrical form have been lasting, if delayed. Hugh Leonard has described him as a father figure to

Irish theatrical experimentation, especially with regard to absenting from naturalism to address the complexities of Irish culture. Like Johnston's theatrical vision of College Green, Thomas Kinsella's contemporary poetry also explores how various places of memory have been understood through various forms of cultural expression. David Kellog calls much of his poetry "a radical geographical critique, a literal decentering" (149). Walking in the city, the narrator in many of his poems contemplates the "multiple interests of international, national, regional, local and individual identity as intersecting and competing claims to territorial determination" (152). Like Johnston, he aligns himself against the flattening powers of modernity, but does not provide an authoritative, singular version of history which will arrive to give definitive meaning to the scene. "St. Katherine's clock," for instance, references a place that has been host to many different historical events, chief of which was Emmet's own execution in 1803. Like Johnston, he reinforces the irreducible distance from the man by focusing on how what we know about him comes down to us from paintings, trial documents, word-of mouth, and biased textual sources. Additionally, Thomas Kilroy, who will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, consistently acknowledges a debt to the elder playwright, both in his non-realistic approaches to drama and in his need to deal with Ireland's varied histories. Enunciating yet another moment of tension in Irish history, Kilroy notes that the writers of his generation seem "alive to the dislocating perspectives of the mid-century," where artists are "constantly reminded that what is being represented has slipped or is rapidly slipping from view" ("Generation" 3).[13] Again, however, a multitude of Irish histories are

[13] "A Generation of Playwrights," *Theatre Stuff: Essays in Contemporary Irish Theatre*, Ed. Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort, 2000) 3.

defended as a form of cultural identity in the face of a leveling, global capitalism in a rapidly changing Ireland.

Chapter 5

Boxed Rituals: Eamon de Valera, Television, and *Talbot's Box*

In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles.* Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation. (7)

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

This chapter shall explore the tension between collective, embodied forms of remembering in both memorial performance and the traditional theatre, and the emergence of television and televisual representation in the postcolonial Irish Republic in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As the pioneering work of Luke Gibbons has shown, television had marked effects on Irish culture during this period of staggering modernization, certainly one of the most profound periods of change in the twentieth century, effects which have only recently begun to be examined by cultural critics. One of the most profound results of the explosion of television on this period, I shall argue, was its startling influence on how events were remembered, and subsequently on how those events were represented artistically. Specifically, this involved the movement of a substantial portion of the populace away from live, participatory forms of collective memory towards a more private, confined form of viewing associated with the new media. The traditional theatre often followed suit, retreating even further into an already established Irish brand of naturalism which the new framing mechanism of the television made all the more "obvious." My point of departure is both to chart how this process of alienation was itself documented by Irish artists, and in turn to detail how more radical

ventures in the theatre reacted to it. The theatrical work I examine in detail here, *Talbot's Box* (1977), was being written the same year as the nationally televised funeral of the last surviving leader of the 1916 Rising, Eamon de Valera, one of the most iconic Irishman of the twentieth century, who was himself both a consummate orchestrator of collective forms of remembering and an object of memory himself. The play premiered two years later to enthusiastic reviews at the Dublin Theatre festival, and remains one of Kilroy's best- known and most revived plays in Ireland. It is my contention that although the work was not necessarily about de Valera directly, its choice of subject (the cult figure Matt Talbot, the "worker's saint" as he was collectively known) was a stand-in for de Valera and the various concepts for which his body had itself stood in. An actor onstage playing Matt Talbot became a figure around whom similar tensions within 1970s Irish culture could be enunciated. Taking its bearings from Joseph Roach's careful analysis of the "three-sided relationship between memory, performance and substitution," the idea of surrogation implies that survivors often attempt to replace the dead, specifically their famous dead, with "satisfactory alternates." Inherent in this process, as noted in chapter two, is a certain amount of failure, as "surrogation rarely, if ever succeeds." What instead becomes all the more apparent in studying the process at work are in fact the various "discontinuities, misalliances and ruptures" within a community's social fabric (2-3). In Irish culture specifically, there remained an anxiety that de Valera himself could not be replaced by any figure within modern Irish culture, that he was in many cases a relic or ruin of a bloody colonial past many seemed anxious to move past. Nevertheless, there remained a sort of nostalgia at work in Irish culture at this passing, one which I hope to chart here over various forms of performance. Chief among these anxieties shall be the

position of the past, of history and memory within the rushing surge of globalization and modernity in Irish culture, a surge best demonstrated by the dominant frame of the television.

Beginning in 1959, when Sean Lemass took over from Eamon de Valera as *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister), the Irish Republic rapidly modernized, opening itself up to foreign investment, joining the European Economic Community, and moving confidently into a global culture. *Radio Telefis Éireann* (RTÉ), Ireland's own television station, began broadcasting in 1961, and represented one of the most fundamental challenges to the nationalist tradition. Luke Gibbons notes that de Valera, now operating as the *Uachtarán* (President) of Ireland (A "head of state" position in the Irish constitution which existed largely outside the maelstrom of parliamentary politics), warned that the boxes rapidly occupying living rooms throughout both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland were in many ways equivalent to the promises and perils of atomic energy: "'It can be used for incalculable good,' he pointed out, 'but it can also do irreparable harm...it can lead to decadence and dissolution" (qtd. in Gibbons, *Transformations* 44).

This decadence and dissolution he spoke about was that of his own vision of Ireland and Irish identity, the parameters of which he had spelled out the 1927 manifesto for the party he founded, *Fianna Fail*: the reunification of Northern Ireland with the south, the restoration of the Irish language, the support of Catholicism and traditional family values, an emphasis on agrarianism, and Irish economic self-sufficiency (Coogan 386).[1] It was a policy that he had, in his extremely influential position in government for

[1] *Fianna Fail*, Irish for "Warriors of Destiny," remains one of the largest political parties in contemporary Ireland, and is, at the time of writing, in power.

over thirty years, attempted to make a reality. Cultural commentators have thus called the Ireland that existed from the late 1920s (when he re-entered government after standing on the losing side of the civil war) until 1959 "de Valera's Ireland." The only surviving signatory of the 1916 proclamation of the Irish republic was remembered in retrospect most often not as a revolutionary hero, but euphemistically as the "lay cardinal:" the stern, Machiavellian school master (his profession before entering politics) who once infamously said that he had but to "examine [his] own heart" to know "straight off what the Irish people wanted" (qtd. in Coogan 296). Playwright Thomas Kilroy recalls his formative years as a time when Ireland "was a self-isolating place, timidly holding itself inwards while the modern century rushed by, headlong and frantic, outside…a cashless society with a minimum of material needs, watched over by that ascetic icon, de Valera" ("Generation" 1). It was a time now remembered by many cultural commentators as one of sexual repression, a national brand of poverty, artistic censorship, and the constitutionally enshrined special relationship between the Catholic Church and the government. Joyce's earlier, 1912 broadside, "Ireland, my first, my only love, where Christ and Caesar go hand in glove" ("Gas" 660) was for Kilroy and other artists who remained in Ireland during this time period, quite literally true. Playwright Tom Macintyre, a contemporary of Kilroy, noted in the afterwards to his play *Good Evening, Mr. Collins* (1995) that whereas Michael Collins, de Valera's opponent who was assassinated during the Irish Civil War (1922), was able to enter legend as one of the great what-ifs of Irish history, de Valera both lived, ruled, and "slowly turned to stone, limestone, blue limestone" (231).



Fig 4: A partially blind de Valera "inspects" a statue of Robert Emmet. Photo courtesy Getty Images.

Reviled, feared, or loved, de Valera became an emblem of his own specific notions of Irish identity, one strongly rooted in the nationalist, anti-colonial tradition. Macintyre's "blue limestone" quip, with its emphasis on monumentality, is striking when one looks at the various forms of memorial performance in which De Valera participated. Tim Pat Coogan's biography paints the enigmatic figure of de Valera as one constantly drawn and redrawn in a series of performances carefully orchestrated for both an Irish and international public. As he orchestrated these parades and funerals, however, he himself began to congeal into an object of memory, a living body that, even while performing, itself began to be seen as a stone figure. A *Dublin Opinion* cartoon from 1948, the year that both the Irish republic was declared and de Valera was temporarily ousted from office, shows the statue of Queen Victoria being removed from the front of

Leinster House, the present seat of the Irish government, as the taciturn, bespectacled De Valera looks on disapprovingly. "Begob, Eamon," the British monarch croons in an ironic, Irish lilt, "there's great changes around here" (qtd. in Gibbons, *Transformations* 170)! de Valera's symbolic replacement of Victoria was implicit when he became President in the early 1960s; he became the figurative head of state which replaced the British monarch under the 1937 constitution, a document which went into official practice in 1949. "Dev," as he was often both affectionately and derisively known, was often brought out in old age to signify a corporeal continuity with the past. This increasing monumentality is again captured in another photograph, this one from the late 1960s, when de Valera himself was almost completely blind, "inspecting" the first statue of Robert Emmet to be publicly displayed in Dublin. The pose is clearly theatrical, staged for posterity, one monument to another (Fig. 4). If Dev, while still living, could become blue limestone, it meant that a living body had become a symbol of a certain archaic vision of Ireland to many theatre artists and cultural commentators. Dev became a ruin, but he remained real and present, a testament to a living past he had actually experienced. His subsequent absence in the body politic, however, would itself generate a profound identity crisis. There was no vouchsafed replacement for him, such as the one for which the doctrine of the two bodies of the English monarch (the queen/king is dead, long live he queen/king!) had allowed.

It was still within de Valera's lifetime, however, that television came to challenge his particular brand of remembrance. It was to have a substantial effect on notions of both authenticity and time, especially how events or people (including, later, de Valera himself) were remembered. For thirty years after the traumas of the revolution and civil

war (fought over the unfinished nature of that revolution), Declan Kiberd notes, Ireland's postcolonial rulers "soothed a frustrated people with endless recollections of the sacred struggle for independence" (*Inventing* 552). This commemoration was most often accomplished through large-scale parades and funerals, especially as many of the men and women who had lived through the war of independence began to die off, and on anniversaries of key events, especially 1916. In fact, 1916 remained central to such commemorations since it predated the sectarian violence of the civil war, violence with which de Valera was of course directly associated. As television's cultural influence began to be felt, the powers-that-be sought to harness the new media to their own memorial performances, often with interesting results. In line with de Valera's "great potential for good," television could bring Irish history and culture to millions, but that history was always mediated by the frame of the screen, dispelling the aura of authenticity associated with live commemorations of an historical past (including the actual use of the body of Dev himself), even as the new medium purportedly threw up real, immediate images.[2]

For the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the 1916 Easter Rising, which coincided with the first several years of television broadcasting, RTÉ decided that one of its first large-scale undertakings would be to film a documentary about the Rising in a "you-are-there" format, entitled *Insurrection.*[3] The script was itself written by Hugh Leonard, a reputable Irish playwright at the time who, ironically, went on to write such

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[2] On the aura and this idea of authenticity, Walter Benjamin writes: "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized when substantive duration ceases to matter" ("Work" 221).

[3] RTÉ's website contains streaming clips from the film, which is housed in its archives.

blasts against Irish nostalgia as *The Patrick Pearse Motel* (1971).[4] Even in 1966, Leonard's script brought a sense of ironic distance to the work. "Insurrection" included interviews with both rebel leaders (Patrick Pearse, rather comically, is "not available for comment"), the British army, and people on the street as the rebellion unfolded. All of this made for a strange framing of the historical events of Easter week. The immediacy viewers even by then habitually associated with television implied that there was in fact no difference between then and now, despite the nuances of Leonard's script: the Rising could be happening outside one's door as one was watching it, as if the viewer were in fact viewing the evening news fifty years distant. The action always returns to a newsroom where an anchor, with a blank television always sitting on his desk, informs us of the day's events and their place within the larger framework of the narrative. The blank television, ever present, becomes the stand-in for the authentic, its representative to assure us that "this is happening now," while at once also being the frame through which we must see the spectacle. In a particularly uncanny, anachronistic moment, a man dressed in a 1960s tweed suit crouches with a microphone on Northumberland road, the scene of intense fighting in 1916, as the camera pans away from him to reveal the corpses of British soldiers in World War I battle dress uniform strewn in the lane. The reporter muses on the strangeness of their fate, which arrived "not in Flanders mud, but on a suburban road in Dublin on a spring day" (*Insurrection*). Despite Leonard's ironic musings on global versus local conflict, the overall impulse behind "Insurrection" was a nostalgic one, a use of modern technology by the nationally subsidized television station

[4] The play is a farce about a couple who run a motel that features kitschy rooms and artifacts from Irish history for credulous tourists seeking an authentic experience, complete with *shillelaghs* (Irish clubs) made in Japan. It was certainly ahead of its time in offering commentary on the theme-parking of Irish culture. *The Patrick Pearse Motel: A Comedy* (London: Samuel French, 1971).

to make 1916 present again, to revive its cultural currency as a collectively shared moment in Irish history. Kiberd writes that "Television – the agent of much of the change [in Irish culture] was being put to a reassuring use on "Insurrection," consoling the public with images of an Ireland that it had all but abolished" ("Elephant" 6). All this made for a strange, last-ditch effort by the powers that be to embrace a technology that showed their idea of Ireland to be outmoded; a policy of constant commemoration, put in place by de Valera and his government, was turning stale to a public's changing taste for a more modern life. The new medium, despite its users' attempts to erase the long history between the two times, succeeded instead in making 1916 more virtual: the Rising was safely, endlessly duplicated into a naturalistic, made-for-TV narrative of the foundation of the Irish state.

These cultural concerns became all the more complex when live commemoration itself began to be filmed and re-broadcast. The long history of monster meetings, funeral processions and commemorative parades within Irish cultural history, in which hundreds of thousands had actively participated in or at least had witnessed in person, now began to be experienced within the television's frame in the privacy of one's own home. Certainly, de Valera had taken advantage of abilities to reach the Irish populace in their homes over the radio from the 1920s onward, but the moving images of the television and its simulation of liveness made it an altogether different animal for the powers that be. Two key events in which de Valera participated personally in the 1960s and 70s demonstrate the complex effects of television on Irish cultural remembrance. Both were funerals. The second would be his own. The first, however, was a long-overdue one. de Valera had a long history of both attending and presiding over many such events himself,

from the famous 1915 funeral of O'Donovan Rossa described in chapter two, to the 1965 re-interment of Sir Roger Casement. Casement, who participated in the 1916 rebellion as well, was caught by British agents on the beach near Tralee in Western Ireland, having been put ashore by a German U-Boat after a botched attempt to deliver German rifles to Irish rebels. He was returned to England, tried for treason to the Crown, and hung. Retrieving his body was a complicated undertaking, as he had been thrown into a common grave with several other bodies fifty years before. What remained—or what was thought to remain—of Casement was returned to Dublin a year before the fiftieth anniversary of the rising, and was buried with full republican pomp, supervised by de Valera, who defied his doctor's orders to attend. Poet Richard Murphy described the scene in the last two stanzas of his poem "Casement's Funeral:"

> From gaol yard to the Liberator's tomb
> Pillared in frost, they carry the freed ash,
> Transmuted relic of a death cell flame
> Which purged for martyrdom the diarist's flesh
>
> On the small screen I watch the packed cortège
> Pass from High Mass. Rebels in silk hats now
> Exploit the grave with an old comrade's speech:
> White hair tossed, a black cape flecked with snow. (1338)

In his short poem, Murphy wrestles with a complicated series of representative frames. The funeral follows the traditional nationalist route from the St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Central Dublin, and up O'Connell St. towards Glasnevin cemetery, the centerpiece of which is the tomb of the "Liberator," Daniel O'Connell, who in the early nineteenth century was responsible for repealing the penal laws against Catholics (one of the results of which was the establishment of the Pro-Cathedral itself, the primary Catholic

Cathedral in Dublin). After said repeal, Glasnevin began as a Catholic cemetery outside Dublin City, and rapidly became *the* cemetery for most famous figures in nineteenth and twentieth century Irish history, Catholic or not. Casement's death is neatly fit within this Republican tradition, despite the controversial diaries he kept for many years documenting his homosexual experiences, which were discovered upon his death and led to an ensuing scandal. The "rebel in silk hat" and black cape is none other that Dev himself, dressed against the cold to officiate as a septuagenarian. Remarkable about the scene of purported exploitation, in which these dubiously authentic remains are ritualistically reabsorbed into Irish earth, is the fact that Murphy is not himself present at the scene, but merely recalls the memory of watching the event, along with tens of thousands of others, on television. A funeral and parade which could not have lasted less than four hours are here telescoped into a brief series of fragmentary scenes, mediated by the new technology. In this case, the television increases the antiseptic distance from the scene, just as the words themselves highlight its theatricality: old rebels are now dressed to the nines for the cameras, as the television frame both stages and enhances the artificiality of the commemorative event overseen by the "old comrade." The commemoration is virtual: Casement, whoever he was, is forever lost; he is himself freed ash on the winds of history.

The most complicated memorial procession of all was de Valera's own funeral in 1975. The event distilled the cultural tensions between tradition and modernity outlined thus far. A memorial for a man, who, as the subtitle to Tim Pat Coogan's voluminous 1996 biography put it "was Ireland," one who had staged and supervised numerous funerals himself, certainly would seem at first glance to be a nostalgic high tide, a time

for a public looking back and taking stock of his legacy. As Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf note in their study of mortuary ritual, such events "throw into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives" (182). The funeral of the leader often ironically represents a symbol of continuity as those cultural values are passed on to be embodied by another, a surrogate. However, de Valera's funeral itself proved to be anti-climactic: as noted above, with the advent of the era of television, this official performance form had in many ways grown stale. People seemed to be unsure what or whom to replace Dev *with*: the British monarchical position he had performatively filled was without any sort of dynastic succession. If the leader's death makes present in its absence the body politic, which could not be seen before lining the streets for the funeral cortege, then the body politic remained a confused assortment of voices and memories in a postcolonial state. In an important addition to Huntington and Metcalf, Joseph Roach notes that funerals, more than many other types of performance, make visible "the tangible existence of social boundaries and, at the same time, the contingency of those boundaries on fictions of identity, their shoddy construction out of inchoate otherness, and, consequently, their anxiety producing instability" (39). Despite official attempts at continuity (the use of the same route to Glasnevin cemetery, the lying in state at the Pro Cathedral, etc) what is most fascinatingly revealed underneath the official parade are the cultural tensions manifested in its observers and participators. As before, this was further complicated by the mediation of the television screen: Dev's funeral was broadcast on RTÉ and seen by millions who could not join the tens of thousands lining the route, or cueing up for the lying in state at Dublin Castle, or

attending the actual funeral at the Pro Cathedral. Other normal programs were canceled and replaced with documentaries on de Valera's life and other broadcast tributes.[5]

In the published reactions to Dev's death, opinion was mixed. *The Irish Times*, the establishment paper that had in many ways fought with the newspaper group De Valera himself had owned, *The Irish Press*, noted in its lead article that "his monument is the Republic of Ireland today, with its weaknesses, its imperfections, its ends to be tied off." At once, however, he also left Ireland with "its national pride realized, its sense of dynamism, its stability and its divisions largely eradicated" ("Towering Figure"). Throughout the coverage of both the death and ensuing funeral procession, however, various shorter articles peppering the pages bore witness to the greatest of loose ends, partition, as violence in Northern Ireland continued unabated: "Army Officer killed in London bomb blast" shared the front page with the bold "Eamon De Valera is Dead." On the day of the funeral, the picture of the funeral cortege passing the GPO, where the Irish proclamation of independence had been read in 1916, was run beside an independent top headline that read "Orange Hall machine-gunned," an alleged IRA reprisal for two Gaelic football fans shot by loyalist paramilitaries while returning to the North from Dublin ("Orange"). Emphasis was also placed on the way the former Taosieach and President's name itself functioned as a monument to a certain idea of Irish identity, namely "de Valera's Ireland." His name abroad was "synonymous with Ireland" and "only the very oldest can remember a period in which the name of De Valera was not a household word to be held in honor, adulated or execrated" ("Towering Figure"). "Dev" seemed to fit perfectly within the maximum limits of living memory, and in the eyes of

[5] "Eamon De Valera is Dead," *The Irish Times*, 30 August 1975: 1.

some had the deleterious ability to live beyond it: John Costello, former Taosiech for rival party Fine Gael, hoped that in death De Valera's legacy was "at an end." He claimed that as a man he had been capable of "creating in others tremendous loyalty and even excessive devotion, and also very practical hatred, undue hatred, which even now existed in their children's children" ("Influence").

The living memory of de Valera was best demonstrated in surveys of people on the street which focused on their reactions to the event. Responses really demonstrated these limits of memory, especially reflecting generational differences between those growing up in the modern, global Ireland and those who had lived through the traumatic events of the early postcolonial state. An old IRA man asked for his reaction claimed that de Valera was nothing short of "the best man Ireland ever knew," and that the nation would never "get anyone like him again." Furthermore, his party Fianna Fail was not the same without him, and had lost track of its original, Republican goals. Another claimed to be a "Michael Collins woman" and had nothing positive to say about his memory. Another, when asked if he was sorry de Valera was dead merely replied "no."

A "haze of history" separating Dev's days of action from the present was the diagnosis the reporter gave to the profound generational differences in recollection. As a result, it seemed that Costello's fear of an enduring legacy of hate in the third generation was not entirely accurate. One young girl remembered that he had "kept us out of the civil war," when he had in fact been one of its primary reasons for occurring. She went on to say that the troubles in the north would not be occurring if Dev were in charge. A fourteen-year-old schoolgirl only remembered he was somehow associated with 1916. A university student had a more verbose, but similar response:

> [de Valera was] a piece of living history, really. I find it hard to believe that he was still alive. I read about his involvement in history back in 1900 and try to envisage him still alive, and it's hard. I'm sad he's dead, because he was like a living monument to the past. But it's a bit like if you told me that Pearse or Parnell was dead. (Murphy, "Cross- section")

A certain amount of anxiety about memory seems implicit here: there is a worry that, without such living monuments, there will be nothing to anchor the past in place, that Costello's fear of hatred or intense loyalty will be replaced instead by something unanticipated: a sort of amnesiac apathy. The quote also discloses a sense of catastrophic distance the man feels between the modern world he occupies and the period when de Valera was directly involved in the foundation of the postcolonial state. Patrick Pearse (executed by the British in 1916) and Charles Stewart Parnell (who, after his fall from power, died in 1891), both signposts within the accepted Irish historical narrative, are here compared to a man who was essentially forgotten, but not yet gone, to paraphrase Joseph Roach's dictum about memory, death, and disappearance.[6] Whereas Pearse and Parnell had both died young and in the spotlight, Dev first solidified into an object of memory, and then his body itself slowly disappeared from the public sphere, as in the twilight years of his life he retreated from both public ceremony and the camera's eye. In death, he —somewhat contradictorily— reappeared in fragmentary form, often as televised or pictorial memory.

Witnessing the performance of this funeral, for a figure that Elizabeth Cullingford has termed "both over-determined and contradictory" (215) was certainly a complex

[6] "The speed at which roles can change hands prompted a recent retiree I know to define the status of professor emeritus as 'forgotten but not gone'" (2).

interplay of memory, nostalgia and forgetting. Secondary artistic reactions to the funeral reflect these contradictions, as well as pointing to the problems of mediated remembering. In each of the cases below, the television's frame seems responsible for increasing the gap between historical events and the present. Neil Jordan's short story "A Love (1976)," which is primarily set on the day of de Valera's funeral, highlights the complex interchange between memory and history taking place within this cultural moment. Cullingford notes that Jordan, who would go on to make de Valera the cinematic villain of his biopic *Michael Collins* (1996), was part of the generation (like Macintyre and Kilroy) who regarded Dev as the lay cardinal, "on oppressive symbol of an Ireland they wanted to escape" (218). This bias certainly frames the narrative. Under the surface, however, lurks the same sense of anxiety about the disappearance of lived memory as well as ambivalence about live, memorial performance. The story begins on the day of De Valera's funeral procession through Dublin, which once again follows the same route as Casement's, with the edition of a formal lying in state at Dublin Castle. The protagonist Neil first recalls the headlines from newspapers such as those quoted above "about love and guns and the man who had died and I wondered how different your memory of him would be from mine" (70). "Your memory" refers to the older woman with whom Neil had an affair with in the past, whom he reencounters in a Dublin café on O'Connell Street on the day of the funeral. Neil's memory of Dev is, like the man interviewed on the street above, culled from a series of historical images: "a big nose," "bulging eyes and spectacles," "the centre of the school textbooks, his angular face and his thirties collar and his fist raised in a gesture of defiance towards something out there, beyond the rim of the photograph, never defined" (71). Neil's memories are all

photographic or televised documentary flashes: denied any aura of authenticity, they are always distant and disembodied (physical pieces of Dev and theatrical poses are re-membered). Coupling with her, however, he moves momentarily closer to other, more immediate memories of the man. "I remember your father's civil war pistol," he recalls, "black and very real, a cowboy gun" (70). Although this real object of memory is itself framed by the Wild West narratives of American television serials, its hard, tactile nature is also reinforced by the immediate and haunting spectacle of the funeral moving slowly by outside. Again and again the sounds of the military parade return: it "was all militarism now," Neil recalls, "like air in a blister, under the skin, it was swelling, the militarism I had just learned of before, in the school textbooks" (71). Here, like the hard metal of the gun, these memories are embodied and linked to the escalating violence at the time in Northern Ireland, itself buoyed by Loyalist and Nationalist parades and military funerals. Despite such a concrete image of the past, Neil still feels "the nostalgia of an emigrant" (he has recently returned from England), but still at a level of remove, as if he "was still away, as if here in the middle of it all I was distant, remembering, apart from it (72)." This alienation is aptly demonstrated by the strange dichotomy between Neil's own memories of the man and the immediacy of the funeral's performance. He is, on a certain level, unable to process its liveness, and thus remains outside the collective memory. Looking on, almost as a tourist, he feels a strange nostalgia for a lost sense of belonging; the notion haunts him that *something* is passing away that is not only the man in the casket. Moving along with the cortege, the music making it too loud for them to talk, the couple stops near Abbey Street just north of the Liffey:

> I bought a newspaper at the corner of Abbey Street and saw a headline about the funeral that was crawling along beside us. We passed a TV sales shop where a crowd of people were staring at a white screen, staring at the death being celebrated behind them. (76)

Like Neil, the potential audience is seduced by the comfort of the framed image of the actual performance, despite the fact that the actual event is transpiring behind them. The double entendre of the closing line of the section (is it the TV-induced death of an era, or of a man?) works on us as Neil reads about the event taking place behind him. A series of representative frames insures that the actual event remains secondary, in some way inaccessible—despite its ear-ringing immediacy—without the aid of mass media's screen-narrative. His lover's memory as a little girl, "standing at meetings, holding my father's hand, waving a tricolor, shouting Up Dev" (77), is one Neil cannot access. Lived experience of live performance dies in the off-white glow of the cathode ray tube.

This cleft between televised history and memory is expressed again in Thomas McCarthy's poetic reflection on the event, "State Funeral." Here, the family watches the funeral together on the television. The sense of monumental awe that the actual event might engender to both participators and live witnesses is liquidated by the television screen, which purports to bring the immediacy of the event into the living room of McCarthy's family. Instead of some sort of sublime awareness, witnessing is accomplished via the "boxed ritual" of the communal meeting in the living-room:

> That August afternoon the family
> Gathered. There was a native deja-vu
> Of Funeral when we settled against the couch
> On our sunburnt knees. We gripped mugs of tea
> Tightly and soaked in the TV spectacle;
> The boxed ritual in our living room [. . .]. (1-6)

Against this artificial scene, “natives” hold their own distanced funeral (“soaking-in” spectators in a living room on sun-burnt knees amid mugs of tea). McCarthy’s father invokes his own personal recollections of “monster meetings, blazing tar barrels/Planted outside Free-State homes.” Reciting “prayers of memory,” as McCarthy dubs them, his father seeks to invest the spectacle at hand with some sense of the tactile, collective immediacy of actual, remembered events. However, the generational and representational cleft is once again too great. All McCarthy remembers of Dev’s Ireland as a boy is “one decade of darkness, a mind stifling boredom” without the comforts of the “here and now/with instant jam, instant heat and cream.” Like Neil’s lover, the father’s memories are not to be passed down with any verve to the son. For the latter, that past remains a foreign country:

> It was a landscape for old men. Today
> They lowered the tallest one, tidied him
> Away while his people watched quietly.
> In the end he had retreated to the first dream,
> Caning truth. I think of his austere grandeur;
> Taut sadness, like old heroes he had imagined. (19-24)

In (mis)citing W.B. Yeats’ first line from “Sailing to Byzantium,” “That is no country for old men,” McCarthy’s last stanza reverses the Yeatsian metaphor of the old looking upon the young. To the poet as young man, the landscape of the funeral only has immediacy in the collective memory of the old, “his people” who are quiet spectators in this last, nostalgic call back towards an imagined, heroic past.

Thomas Kilroy and Theatrical Dissent

In the remaining pages, I would like to chart the theatrical reactions to this cleft between tradition and modernity, the tensions between authenticity and reproduction, which colored the work of playwright Thomas Kilroy, focusing specifically on his play *Talbot's Box* (1977), which premiered two years after the funeral, and was one of the most well-received theatrical productions of his career. There are several reasons why this was so, the most important of which had to do with this vexed relationship between memory and televised reality. Kilroy's work had enunciated a very real anxiety: a culture was losing its grip on being able to address its past through live performance. Or, to put it precisely, live performance was ceasing to occupy a central place in Irish cultural dialogue as a result of the advent of television, which seemed poised to resign live-ness to a form of past-ness, a somewhat archaic high art form, or a funerary landscape of "old men," removed from the consciousness of the larger community. The theatre itself, like much literature at the time, seemed more than amenable to discarding the immediate, postcolonial past in favor of something else. However, the position of performance and its relationship to history—especially unofficial histories outside the dominant nationalist narratives of the state—was a much debated subject. Much of the work in the late 1960s and 1970s that dealt with the past was either a rejection of nationalist history by those who had grown to adulthood in the shadow of the lay cardinal, or, more fruitfully, a radical reinterpretation of history's workings on collective memory, in the light of recent traumatic changes in the cultural landscape of Ireland: rapid urbanization and industrialization, political corruption, the Northern Irish Troubles, and the shifting loyalties of people with regard to the Church were all subjects addressed. One of the

most well-known results of the sea change was the founding of the Field Day Theatre Company. Academic Seamus Deane, poet Seamus Heaney, playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea founded the group in the late 1970s with the above concerns in mind. Although he would later leave the group, Kilroy enjoyed one of his greatest critical successes there with his play *Double Cross* (1984).[7] The group was bent on establishing what Irish philosopher Richard Kearney (also involved with the group) had termed a "fifth province" of Irish identity, an imaginative addendum to Ireland's four historic provinces of Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht. Kearney wrote in 1977, the same year as the premiere of *Talbot's Box*, that:

> The fifth province is to be found, if anywhere, at the swinging door which connects the 'parish' (in [Poet Patrick] Kavanagh's sense) with the 'cosmos.' The answer to the old proverb —'where is the middle of the world'—remains as true as ever: 'here and elsewhere.' We are speaking not of a power of political possession but a power of mind. The fifth province can be imagined and reimagined; but it cannot be occupied. In the fifth province it is always a condition of thinking *otherwise.* (Kearney 100)

Revising the conditions of how people both imagined and remembered collectively was certainly a daunting and ambitious goal, especially due to the influence of the television not only on how the public remembered (as witnessed above), but on theatrical craft itself, an effect it continues to have today. Irish theatre (not an indigenous art form) had at its inception merged with a long storytelling tradition in Irish culture (the *Seanchaí,* or storyteller) so that strong, naturalistic narrative became and remained first and foremost the spine of what was identified in Dublin, London and New York as the prototypically

[7] The play examines the double lives of Brendan Bracken, Churchill's minister of propaganda during World War II, and William Joyce, a Nazi radio propagandist (known over the airwaves as "Lord Haw Haw). Both men went to great lengths to conceal their Irish pasts for drastically different reasons. In the premiere production, Rea played both parts.

"Irish" play: stories, naturalistically told, and imbued with the backward look of nostalgia.

Given its own boxed, naturalistic performance conventions, television made this type of theatre all the more quaint and self-serving, while at the same time conditioning audiences to its *obviousness* as the accepted form of representation, which in turn made it harder for experimental theatre to move "outside the box," both figuratively and literally, and still retain engaged audiences. Kilroy himself remarked that by the 1960s the Abbey had ceased to be a dynamic cultural institution; its sets only needed a new coat of paint to be recycled as cultural icons that had little to actually say about contemporary culture.[8] Considering the position the Abbey theatre had once purportedly held in Irish cultural consciousness, a position from which, in historian Christopher Murray's words, a "habit of mind" was created by which people might "understand who they were" (163), a pervading sense of staleness now began to fill the theatrical space, as it congealed into a cultural institution of a liberal, accommodating state, as opposed to an actual, dynamic forum for addressing the cultural concerns of the day.

Long before Field Day, even, Kilroy was a proponent of establishing a new Irish theatre that was avowedly theatrical, concerned itself with the problems of contemporary Ireland, and was above all else a communal undertaking, in opposition to the privatized and distanced ways of seeing associated with televised naturalism. In his 1959 essay,

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[8] This was still the case two decades later, when Garry Hynes was directing a 1991 revival of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and The Stars* at the Abbey theatre in 1991 and was presented by the production staff with the original set for the 1926 production! Brian Singleton, "The Revival Revised," *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama*, Ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 263.

"Groundwork for an Irish Theatre," he vented many of the concerns of those operating within the sunset years of de Valera's Ireland. "Too often," he maintained,

> the view from our modern Irish windows is cluttered up with distracting monuments to the dead and glorious past of politics and art. If we ever do come to house a creative theatre for a new generation, many of these idols will have to be demolished so that the interesting faces of modern Ireland may crowd at every window of the theatre. (192)

He stressed the communal force of theatre (both in front of and behind the proscenium) as one of its strong suits against other more private forms of entertainment and artistic appreciation. Theatre which creates "something permanent" is capable of absorbing "some of the conflicting, topical, social issues around it and [giving] a public interpretation of current values." The writer as private commentator, hard at work in his or her solitary space, should be disavowed in preference of a writer as an integral part of the theatrical process. Placed on a pedestal, the writer, like the theatre, ran the risk of becoming a cultural institution him or herself. Thus, by participating in workshops, readings, and preliminary staging, the writer would work within a purported microcosm of this public sphere, as opposed to outside of it. This would be true for the theatre as an institution, which should not only provide *for* the community but also be part *of* it: "the serious dramatist should fulfill the role of commentator on current values, practicing espionage for everyman" (195).

For Kilroy, much of the theatrical passivity and the lack of dynamism were tied not just to an uncritical obsession with the past, but to how television worked against ideas of communal understanding associated with performance. The route between the "old idols" and mechanical reproduction was certainly a complicated path to steer.

Murphy, McCarthy and Jordan—all working in the solitary capacity Kilroy criticized—showed in their work a modern world wiping away atavistic forms performance. If that was something to be momentarily nostalgic about, it was all in all a good thing to them, especially as atavism became a choice word for describing the seemingly endless blood feuds at play in the violent North as the 1970s wore on. Kilroy's own twilight of the idols certainly was bent on demolishing cultural institutions to make way for the future. However, unlike those writers mentioned above, this did not mean the end of history, its erasure in the cathode ray tube of modern life, but instead a re-evaluation of history's meaning-making effects in the present. Michael Etherton notes that Kilroy's dramaturgy demonstrates "an uncompromising intellectual commitment to the processes of history: to historiography" (52). Within an ever moving present, the past, as Kearney notes of the fifth province, had to be constantly re-imagined and restaged. Given his choice of ephemeral metaphors (the need for constant re-imagination, the fifth province's continuous present tense) it should not seem surprising that Field Day as a cultural enterprise first manifested itself theatrically, or that Kilroy chose the theatre as his primary means of expression. Thinking *otherwise* meant creating a communal, rigorous theatre that sought to open the past up to alternative possibilities in the present. An historical text of "misalliances and ruptures" is integral to conceiving of the modern, liberal nation, for generating, via performance, what Homi Bhabha has called "counter-narratives of the nation," which "disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (149), be those agragian, nationalist or cosmopolitan, capitalist ones. "If a work can be realized better in any other form," Kilroy told Patrick Mason, the first director of *Talbot's Box*, "then it is not truly

an act of theatre" (Mason). History, as Kilroy saw it, had to be performed to be understood; plays with historical subjects, demand a theatrical treatment, just as official history (as described in great detail above) demanded its own performances to solidify its links with its own mystical heritage. Realizing the inherent theatricality in how we both make and think of history is key to understanding Kilroy's own aesthetic, and that of the type of theatre he advocates.

Kilroy's work, especially *Talbot's Box*, responds in radical ways to the cultural concerns I have raised to this point, specifically the effect of television and naturalism on notions of authenticity, history and memory, the relationship between performance and memory, and the cultural debate between tradition and modernity in Irish culture in the 1970s. "The contemporary audience," Kilroy noted recently, "is conditioned by television, conditioned by factuality, conditioned by so called real images […]" (Dukes 249). This was a problem for a theatre artist who was reacting against such trends:

> […] there's been a huge influence of television on contemporary theatre writing. The form which this takes is that the writing has a quality of factuality, a naturalism, in some cases an in-your-face frontal rendition of a scene. It's a kind of writing which finally I have to say I find rather dull. I'm much more interested in the way in which the material is lifted, elevated, transformed in some fashion. (Roche)

Television had influenced not only styles of writing, but also the material conditions of production, as the medium became an alternate, lucrative venue for Irish playwrights to make their bread and butter. Potentially radical theatre also had to contend with an increasingly liberal, global culture of which this television was a part, one that could easily absorb the challenges of the radical writer into its own cultural landscape. Kilroy

noted that theatre's ability to "offer modes of perception which may radically transform the way in which we see, hear and feel about the world around us is something which liberalism embraces as a principle but converts into Culture, that is to say it protects itself from the full, social implications of artistic subversion" ("Irish Writer" 179). Becoming an "Irish writer" to be emblazoned on t-shirts for sale in Grafton and O'Connell Streets was a dangerous predicament for one bent on working through that society's cultural woes. His solution would be to show this form of cultural appropriation onstage: *Talbot's Box* was both a working through of his own anxieties about being an Irish writer/dramatist in 1970s Ireland and that culture's anxieties about the past and its bearing on the future. Written in the wake of the cultural crisis that de Valera's funeral helped to enunciate, the work premiered a year later at the Dublin Theatre Festival, not —importantly—as a part of a regular season at any of the main theatres. He wrote that he was both "fascinated and appalled" by what often happened when "the intense, concentrated hopes, fears, beliefs of the private person are subjected to the fragmenting, diffusionary effects of public life." *Talbot's Box*, in his own words, charted that process, demonstrating, just as de Valera's funeral bore out, the "failure to achieve a wholeness of community in the Irish experience" ("Irish Writer" 181). If Kilroy did not offer a whole society, he offered a stage upon which that society might communally address its contradictions and trauma, and work through them in a way not possible in the classic, naturalistic Irish theatre or the now dominant representative frame of television. This mode of performance might come closer to Bhabha's notion of "perform[ing] the problem of totalizing the people and performing the national will," performing the *need* to remember, without assuming that those memories would congeal into a single,

authoritative history. This experience might allow a movement beyond de Valera's monumental presence. "Being obliged to forget" thus "becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberated forms of cultural identification" (Bhabha 161).

The play is not about de Valera, but employs a surrogate, another who lived through many of the same key events in the foundation of the Irish state, Matt Talbot, a Catholic mystic who worked as a laborer in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Dublin. Living in Dublin's terrible slums and enduring back-breaking work, he fell into alcoholism until "taking the pledge," as it was then called, of total abstinence from drink in 1884. He then became a devout Catholic, wearing penitential chains throughout most of the rest of his life, and praying incessantly at home and on the street. Not much else was known about Talbot's life story until he was found dead on a Dublin street in 1925. Soon after, however, his fame spread and he became something of a patron saint among the working poor of Dublin, and a central figure in the Irish temperance movement. Although he did not play a key role in the historical events of the period (as de Valera had), he did live through the same foundational moments of the Irish state: one of the greatest labor strikes in Irish history, the Dublin lock-out in 1913; the 1916 rising; the creation of the Irish Free State; and the ensuing civil war. His adult life, Michael Etherton notes, "coincides with an historical period when Ireland changed its governing and commercial elites" (53). The most enduring controversy today remains where Talbot stood with regard to labor in 1913: some recalled he was a strike-breaker, others that he stood with the workers. Similar questions, incidentally, were also leveled at de Valera, who had been a member of the Catholic St. Vincent De Paul society, which had been

used as a strike-breaking weapon in 1913 (Coogan 51). Brendan Behan, writing in the 1950s from a socialist perspective, noted that Talbot had himself been somewhat of a crackpot, and remarked that his sainthood extended primarily to the "upper classes and even a Presbyterian timber contractor said he was a good man," and that he was not adored by the people whom he lived among (243). Whether or not this was in fact that case, in the 1930s an official move for his canonization as the "Blessed" Matt Talbot was begun, and he was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI to be the "Venerable" Matt Talbot in 1975, one step short of sainthood. Various chemical dependency treatment centers in Ireland, England and the United States still bear his name, as does a bridge crossing the Liffey below O'Connell St. Preparing for the play, director Patrick Mason recalled visited the man's tomb, which had become a shrine: "It was moving to see the ordinary women with ten kids, a husband who was drinking and beating them up, praying for help. Matt Talbot gives them hope, and I can't presume to judge that" (Chanteau).

Matt Talbot, then, remains a substantial cult figure in Irish popular culture, also both over-determined and contradictory, and Kilroy's point of entry also is memorial ritual, in this case the varied stories that begin to be told about Talbot on the occasion of his death. The "box" of the title is one of the more complicated metaphors of the play: it represents both the box that he is physically entombed within as well as the framed representation of the stage-space itself, and finally the framing mechanism of the television screen. This last framing mechanism appears to offer the codes through which we read the spectacle at hand: side-commentary almost always accompanies whatever visual images we see, seeking always to place those things (specifically Talbot's body) in some sort of readily identifiable context. In opening the story with Talbot's death, we as

an audience are privy to the meaning-making process various forces within contemporary Irish society use to make sense retrospectively of Talbot's life. Although Talbot speaks, the occasions are rare. When he does, he does not behave as the framing characters desire. Matt Talbot (who he was, what he represented) remains inaccessible. Kilroy remarks in the published introduction that he was from the beginning "possessed by the crude manipulation of an eccentric, inaccessible man by forces which sought a model for the purposes of retaining power over people" (5).

Talbot's "box" occupies the entire stage; the front at opening is closed towards the audience. As the box is opened, he notes that "all actors, costumes and props required in the play are already in the box." It remains "part sanctuary, part prison, part acting space." Talbot's corpse lies on a table. A priest figure, who Kilroy stipulates must be played by an actress, begins to narrate for us the basics of Talbot's life, and what those events should "mean to us," as an actress dressed as a statue of the Virgin Mary complains about holding her pose and keeping the pulpit scene in play. The small scene is a microcosm of the dramatic framework of the play, which studies the meaning-making processes associated with death. The audience watches a play that will never for long let them forget that it is that very thing: the contrived nature of the performance itself highlights the complex process of historical meaning-making going on over the absent figure of Talbot, sitting as he does between various physical and embodied frames of representation.

To enlarge this gap between the figure of Talbot and those attempting to frame him, Kilroy and Mason (the play's initial director) employed a combination of anti-naturalistic theatrical styles influenced by the work of both Brecht and Artaud. In line

with the former, all the characters played by the ensemble (minus Talbot, who is continuously played by the same actor) become attitudes as opposed to fleshed- out characters. For instance, near the opening, one of the morgue attendants breaks into an existentialist rant over the purported meanings of Talbot's life, but is quickly disarmed by the other attendant, who merely changes him into another character by draping a stethoscope around his neck and telling him to just "follow the cues." Quickly, however, the scene transforms into an intense theatrical spectacle, as Talbot himself suddenly rises from the gurney, and prays:

> *With a sudden, startling energy, he rises on the trolley and flings both arms out in the shape of crucifixion. As he does so, blinding beams of light shoot through the walls of the box, pooling about him and leaving the rest of the stage in darkness. The other four figures cringe back, the women screaming. A high-pitched wailing cry rises, scarcely human but representing human beings in great agony. As it reaches its crescendo it is of physical discomfort to the audience. The four figures race about, hands aloft, to block the lights. Each of the beams is gradually cut off and the sound dies down.* (17)

Screams, sounds and lights collide to generate what Artaud himself called a "hieroglyph:" a sudden, fearsome spectacle designed to "reintroduce on stage the slightest intimation of the great, metaphysical fear underlying all ancient theatre" (32). Kilroy uses the technique to jar the audience out of their passive, spectatorial position, if only for a moment. In the wake of this event, the other stage-figures seek merely to contain it, not to explain what has occurred. The hieroglyph is the strange, inexplicable and inaccessible core of Talbot's own private brand of mysticism, which cannot be framed by the stage-figures or known by the audience in any discursive sense.

The returned Talbot, capably played in the premiere by the reputable Dublin character actor John Molloy, rarely talks. When he does, it is to roughly enunciate — in his North Dublin, working-class dialect — his own brand of personal, inaccessible mysticism. He is harangued by the other cast members to make his intense, personal struggle with what he calls "the darkness" signify as a larger cultural metaphor. These other characters consistently act as interlocutors for the audience, attempting to make sense of the strange visual effects and words emanating from the frail old man onstage, a spectacle we cannot fail to notice does not live up to any of their varied conclusions:

> WOMAN. He was a tool of the Church against the workers!
> SECOND MAN. He was a scab! He was a scab!
> FIRST MAN. He was irrelevant!
> PRIEST FIGURE. He was a saint! (35)

These competing figures are, variously, the church (represented by the priest in drag), the modern, capitalist establishment (represented by one man riding another as if he were a horse) and labor (represented by several, roughly-drawn characters associated with the 1913 lockout). As the description of these positions seems to suggest, character is never allowed to accrete on any one actor's body for long, except for ruinous stage-figure of Talbot. Kilroy is exploring the metaphysical mystery of the process of acting itself. The dead Talbot has returned before us, but he is of course not "there:" he exists only within his box, framed for our viewing, and enacted by someone else (John Molloy). The other characters change roles as quickly as time passes from the contemporary world, to the Jervis street hospital where his body lies in 1925, to the street warfare between the police and striking workers in 1913. At one and the same time, the semi-aphasic Talbot remains unable or unwilling to signify what others want him to in the stage-space of the present.

To marshal evidence to their cause, the other figures use various books found among Talbot's possessions, hoping that an amassed body of archival knowledge will give meaning to the kneeling figure. At the request of the first man, the priest figure dumps them on and about the prone figure as Talbot continues to remain motionless center-stage. When this unveiling of the written archive fails to explain anything, the first man, berates the Priest:

> FIRST MAN. What about him? (*Talbot*) It's your job to get something out of him.
> PRIEST FIGURE. My job?
> FIRST MAN. Look! He could read out of his books. And you give pious commentaries. Or maybe something of his experiences of the Great Strike. I was there but I wasn't there. You know what I mean? (32-3)

The first man becomes a historian for official culture, who seems invested in Talbot's story bearing out the righteousness of the status quo in opposition to labor. Nervously, however, he reminds the actors onstage that 1913 "didn't work. Consult your history books. Police exonerated. Disturbances exaggerated. The usual protesters. They're all down in me little book" (31).

Talbot finally breaks his silence in the face of the demands that he discuss his role in the 1913 lockout, but once again his narrative is certainly not one that helps any of the characters on stage prove their particular version of history to be true. Talbot instead describes an apocalyptic vision similar to the final scene of *The Old Lady Says No!* This is itself followed by another intense hieroglyph that threatens the integrity of the entire stage-spectacle:

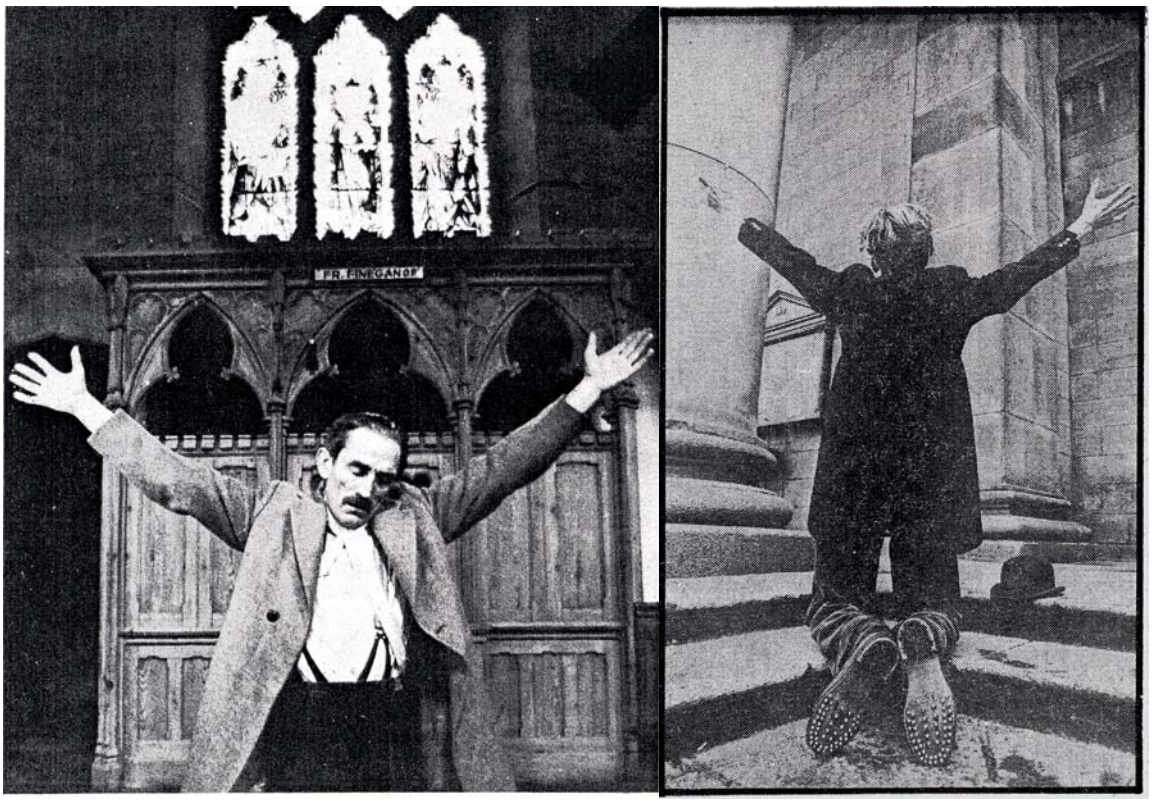
> *TALBOT has risen suddenly to his feet. He stands a moment, swaying.*

> TALBOT: (*Great anguished cry)* Oh, Gawd! I seen Satan in the streets! I seen the city like a woman in the dark waiting his coming. I seen the brood of Lucifer in dark uniforms batin' the innocent —
> *All five stand, listening. A sound, which grows louder and louder, of thousands shuffling, marching feet seems to come from some distance. The four figures fall back to the sides in frozen positions. TALBOT is alone in the centre, pooled in light. The walking feet come nearer and there is pushing, scratching, beating against walls. TALBOT moves and touches the walls and there is momentary absolute silence. Then a great uproar and beating which threatens to envelop the great box. Cries of* Strike! Strike! *Then Roars of* Larkin! Larkin! *And then above these screams of* The Police! The police is chargin'! *Sounds of panic, policed attacks on bodies and heads. TALBOT has thrown himself against the back wall as if holding it with his body. Abrupt silence with TALBOT spreadeagled against the wall, back to audience. Lights on the other four in tired postures facing the audience.* (34-5)

The historical events of the 1913 lockout, led by labor leader Jim Larkin, which ended with a police baton charge down O'Connell St. and multiple deaths, physically impinge on both Talbot and his box, threatening to overpower both his sanctuary and the meaning-making space of the stage. At once, however, the historical event in all its horror and trauma—as well as the masses involved in it—remain a spectral presence that neither we nor Talbot see: they are out of sight, out of the range of representation that is the box. 1913 is evacuated of its performative immediacy by both the box and the interpretive figures; a radical event (the largest strike in Irish history, often forgotten by the powers that be in favor of 1916) is made tame. The first man, still as the status-quo spokesman, notes matter-of-factly that "There's always a Bloody Sunday, a Bloody Friday, somewhere or other. St. Petersburg, Dublin, Derry, Santiago. It happens. It passes. Can you name the names of the dead? No. Only the names of places" (35). Along with events across the world, the two Irish bloody Sundays—1922 in Dublin, when Michael Collins

ordered the IRA to assassinate fourteen members of the British Secret Service; 1972 in Derry, when the British army opened fire on a parade of civil rights protestors, killing fourteen civilians—become evacuated of content. They remain dates and place names only in his "little book."

Place achieves a profound importance to the play for the same reason it did in *Insurrection:* the setting, so to speak, has not changed, and people can walk through the same places mentioned onstage. In a review of the play, John Banville noted that the work would probably not travel well, and was specifically a play for Dublin, "here and now" ("Portraying"). Indeed, the locality of the play seems predicated not only on its consistent reference to local historical events, but to an iterating series of street names



Figs. 5, 6: 1977 promotional images for *Talbot's Box* featuring John Molloy as Matt Talbot. Photos courtesy Abbey Theatre Archive.

and locales not far from the theatre itself. The promotional material for the play used two pictures of Molloy, kneeling with his hands stretched wide (Figs. 5, 6). In the first he faces the camera in front of a background inside a Catholic Church. In the second he faces away from the camera, towards the recognizable contemporary façade of the Dublin Pro-Cathedral. The second photograph, especially, reinforces a belief that the play fundamentally challenges: the audience can of course walk these same streets, may even live near them, but they walk within a drastically different time, as out of joint with the past as the microphone-bearing reporter who crouches in the middle of Northumberland road to examine the bodies of men slain in 1916. Unlike Hugh Leonard, however, Kilroy seems bent on highlighting the profound sense of distance between the audience and the events he places on or near the stage-space, something the theatrical medium allows him to do quite successfully. Although we might follow Talbot to work, we do so through a telescopic series of temporal lenses provided by the disagreeing figures onstage:

> SECOND MAN. This is Dublin.
> TALBOT. Work? I do not know the day or the hour?
> WOMAN. This is 1892.
> SECOND MAN. This is 1913!
> PRIEST FIGURE: This is 1977, surely? (25)

The second man temporarily "wins" the time-argument: working as a prompter, he coaches Talbot into acting his part by giving him a series of visual memories, via places and routes within a historically recognizable city. Many stood immediately outside the Abbey theatre: "Down Gardiner Street, Matt. Cross Beresford Place and out to the North Wall, Matt. Past the stations and Fish Street, Matt, with the early cattle from the markets on their way to the boats. Don't you hear the beasts Matt? Don't you see the day rising

over Ringsend, Matt? Isn't it a great day to be alive, with God in his place over the Custom House" (25)? This nostalgic memory, replete with bygone sights and sounds of North Dublin and the quays on the Liffey, and linked to the vanquished Colonial Administration (The British Royal insignia, "*dieu et mon droit,*" still stands over the Custom House in Dublin) seems to rouse Talbot into at least partially playing out the next scene in 1913. Through the various frames of representation (even the Second Man switches in the space of several lines from a nostalgic colonial to a 1913 striker) we are constantly challenged as soon as we make assumptions about an event occurring in an actual, historical time: actors' bodies, times and scenes seem to swirl around the central stage-ruin of Talbot.

In the second act this place-naming takes on a tone of absurdity, as the First Man follows Talbot's daily pieties from church to church as if narrating a televised sporting event. Talbot is cajoled by this interpretive frame to perform to the point of exhaustion. "The effect," Kilroy notes, "should be of a gradually weakening animal in a cage:"

> FIRST MAN. He's off! He's out! He's up! He's down! He's up again! What a man! He's there! The Jesuits in Gardiner Street. He's in! (*TALBOT kneels).* He's down! First mass of the day! With the rest of us in bed. What a man! Mass over (*TALBOT off again)* Just look at that pace, that stamina! Pell-mell down Sackville Street, as it was then known. Over the bridge! On to the Carmelites in Clarendon Street. (60)

Quickly, however, the actions become more and more absurd as both the announcer and Talbot reach fever pitch:

> (*High rising note)* Jumping over trolley cars, crawling over banks, scrambling over warehouses! Surmounting what is commonly called material reality! Swinging out of steeples and—and—He's there, yes there! He's made it. (*TALBOT prostrate centre stage)*

> There! Prostrated before Adam and Eve's down on the quays. I make it, yes, make it three masses plus numerous ejaculations, meditations, exercises of a religious nature en route, yes, in under one hour and forty three minutes—just inside the record, folks, consult your street maps, put geography against philosophy and work it out! (60)

This exhaustion mirrors the overall exhaustion of the theatrical piece. It remains impossible to tell what Talbot is himself proving in his onstage kinesthetics, marshaled by the other characters in some attempt to show his piety, and resulting instead in the their complaining of the bodily stench of the exhausted Talbot/Molloy. The audience is told to pull out their (contemporary) maps of City Center Dublin to follow this absurd route, as if the fact that the route can still be trod in 1977, minus a few mentioned changes (Sackville Street was renamed O'Connell Street after the revolution) will itself add import to the scene. Seeing that this last-ditch effort at imbuing the scene with historical meaning has failed, the other figures give up and engage in small talk about their appearances and the weather.

Talbot departs with a metatheatrical quip akin to Beckett, "Man today is, 'n tomorrow he is seen no more. An' when he is take out of sight, he is quickly also out of mind. Hafta—hafta go to—[…]." When the box Talbot resides within is closed, the theatrical spectacle ends, and he shall cease to be. Patrons will go about their business, quickly putting the enigmatic figure out of mind. The box itself is physically shut by the actors at the closing, and the secondary characters stand "looking in through cracks in the walls from which bright light comes which illuminates their faces" (63). Talbot's strange powers and what they might mean to history remain closed off and incommunicable.

The play's initial reception, however, challenged many of Kilroy and Mason's presuppositions regarding history and performance, as reviewers and commentators latched first and foremost onto Molloy's moving portrayal of Talbot, the only remotely naturalistic character in the play. If he was a figure at odds with the modern world of the stage, he was the figure most still felt drawn to, despite their awareness that Talbot remained an elusive figure to pin down. The work opened to almost universal praise in Dublin during the fall theatre festival there, despite initial rumors that its incendiary topics might cause rioting, and the play soon moved to the Royal Court in London. The reception itself—specifically the evaluation of Talbot as an historical figure—in many ways seemed to extend the stage-business of the other figures into actual cultural discourse. Father Morgan Costello, who was at the time of the play's opening the lead figure behind having Talbot canonized, as well as a woman writing a biography of Talbot, Mary Purcell, both attended the production to see if it measured up to their own opinions of Talbot. Both went on record to say there were satisfied with the portrayal, despite its radical undertones (O'Rourke).

At the same time, however, the play did serve to generate a significant debate within the community regarding Talbot, the 1913 Lock Out, and the plight of artists within contemporary Irish culture. The *Irish Times* reviewer called the work "kaleidoscopic," which rushed through "patterns of history" to at last allow the audience to realize that they "must find the image of Matt Talbot [themselves]" (Archer). Speaking to the topicality in 1977 of memorial concerns, as well as echoing Kilroy's earlier concerns about the position of the artist within Irish culture, John Banville noted that "what the Church and State did to Matt Talbot, they are still doing, with gusto, to his



Fig.7: Talbot Memorial Bridge, shot from the Custom House Quay. The Ulster Bank complex is in background. Photo by Michael Jaros

modern counterparts, the misfits and the mystics, the saints, and yes, the artists" (Banville). People who knew Talbot personally were still alive in 1977, and appeared at the Abbey premiere to discuss their own memories of the man in the atrium. "Many," an Abbey spokeswoman said, "had never seen the inside of a theatre before" ("Matt"). One of the most remarkable parts of this discussion was its merging with an ongoing debate about what to name a new bridge that spanned the Liffey. One party in the debate, rather comically, suggested it be named simply the "Memorial bridge" without any elaboration. Finally, given the current cultural force Talbot had, the committee settled on the name "Matt Talbot Memorial Bridge" ("Saintly").

When I visited the Matt Talbot memorial bridge in 2007, I found it to be a drab piece of 1970s architecture, certainly lacking in grandeur when placed next to the majestic O'Connell St. Bridge which sits just up river within the heart of Dublin's city center. The bridge itself crosses the Liffey between the Custom House, where Talbot spent hours laboring under the old Colonial administration, and the giant, twenty-first century testament to Celtic Tiger capitalism, the Ulsterbank complex (Fig. 7). Taken in as a scene, it speaks to the vexed relationship between memory and power in both historical and modern Ireland, as does the labor leader Jim Larkin's statue in O'Connell Street (the scene of the 1913 riots), with the Millennium spire—the smooth, steel monument to a wealthy European capital, called "the stiletto in the ghetto" by its detractors—behind him (Fig. 5). In each case, the figure seems framed by a larger, more all-consuming modernism that threatens to unseat any sort of historical remembrance. Certainly, television, memorial performance, avant-garde theatre and even Irish urban planning share a concern with the space of the past and its place in an increasingly modern Ireland, a place where Kilroy fights to restore memory to its position as a collective, performed, act with a definitive place within a rapidly changing Irish culture. The need to remember, even if it is to remember to disagree on what is remembered, to adopt a more critical stance towards history, remain important political acts in the face of an amnesiac cultural impulse where naming a bridge simply "the memorial bridge" seems a good idea.

After the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte placed a large plaster elephant in the Place de la Bastille to commemorate both the spirit of the revolution and his own victories in Africa. After his fall from power, the elephant fell into disrepair (it was



Fig.8: Jim Larkin and the Millennium Spire gesture skyward. Photo by Michael Jaros

intended that the plaster statue would one day be replaced with a bronze copy), and was eventually carted away, having attained the nickname “the elephant of revolutionary forgetfulness.” Declan Kiberd noted cynically in 1991 that the place vacated by the 1966

IRA demolition of Horatio Nelson's monumental column on O'Connell St would be replaced by just such a drab icon to the 1916 rising ("Elephant" 19). His cynicism did not go far enough. What came, with the new millennium, was instead a huge, steel spire that really commemorated nothing in particular, but was rapidly incorporated into the city's own tourist logo (the "I" in the word Dublin was replaced by the spire). Performance and its vexed relationship to memory, death and disappearance are necessary parts of a cultural landscape where such a spire dominates the skyline. Kilroy's play opened up a space where such a dialogue could be undertaken in a rapidly changing Ireland, if only for a moment.

Conclusion: Spires, Ports and Other Mythologies

If Irish history exists as a palimpsest of erased and redrawn narratives, then what tales can be read in the chrome reflections of Dublin's new millennium spire? The spire itself appeared as part of a large-scale millennial project to improve the image of downtown Dublin, and it now dominates the skyline so that it is visible from almost anywhere in the city center. Like Roland Barthes' ubiquitous Eiffel tower, which one has to go to great lengths to avoid seeing in any part of central Paris, the spire focuses attention on a central blank spot. It "attracts meaning," but has no meaning in itself. It is involved, as Barthes says of the France's most famous monument, "in no rite, in no cult, not even in Art. You cannot visit the tower as a museum [...]" (7). Still, thousands flock to this new Dublin monument, standing as it does above the demolished ruins of the monument to Horatio Nelson the IRA blew to pieces in 1966. It becomes the new central image which itself organizes the downtown cityscape, even becoming part of the word "Dublin" (the "l") in tourist literature. Its shining chrome surface quite literally reflects out what is put into it. The spire occupies a space once filled by a monument to the cult of Nelson and the colonial empire, yet the new Dublin focal point seems open to an infinite range of interpretations, and subversive nicknames: "The Stiletto in the Ghetto," "The Spike," "The Stiffy at the Liffey," and "The Erection in the Intersection" are the most common. A phallic monument without history stands amidst an intersection of famous historical monuments which reference various cultural movements and events: The Parnell, Larkin, and O'Connell monuments; the General Post Office; and the Abbey

Theatre all radiate out away from its base. It reflects back these competing historical monuments on themselves; the center of the city becomes a virtual space.

At the conclusion of this dissertation, I would like to return to Declan Hughes' quote about the need to abandon the past to embrace the future. Is this spire the Ireland Hughes welcomes, a monument, paradoxically, to modernity itself? Celtic Tiger modernity does not, really, seek to discard the past; it merely seeks to shape history into an easily digestible narrative for consumption by passers-by, for tourists: it sells an anti-modern modernity. Seamus Deane has noted that for two centuries the "tourism and the marketing of Ireland as an object of consumerism has been implicit in much of its literature and history" (148). Ireland becomes a haven for world-weary wanderers, the "Land of Saints and Scholars" whose rich literary (and dramatic) tradition is somehow both anti modern and modern at once (old ways are now organized by sleek, new signposts). This history is composed for the tourist gaze, and certainly the "theme-parking of Ireland," as this trend has been called recently by scholars (Negra 9), is a substantial field of inquiry that could not be a part of the present work, but to which it is certainly related. Such a history does not speak of or about a fractious, modern state, but instead about a virtual space that seems to exist more and more in a series of spectacles organized by *Bord Failte*, the Irish tourist board.

As I waited to board a plane to take me back to the United States after a two-week research trip to a Dublin I hardly recognized after being away for only several years (partially due to the exorbitant cost of day-to-day living in the city center), this strange new way of seeing became starkly clear to me. *Connections*, Dublin Airport's magazine, featured an advertisement on the inside cover for the Dublin Port Company. It displayed

an impressionistic painting of Samuel Beckett's bust, with a picture of the power station that marks the mouth of the port of Dublin in the background. Emblazoned across the top of the ad was the following caption: "Samuel Beckett left Dublin by ferry for good in 1939 to meet with Joyce. Won nobel prize 1969. To distinguish between myself and Joyce he wrote: 'Mr Joyce tries put everything in, I try to leave everything out.'[…] Art, literature, sea travel; the great life! Just have it" (Port). Beckett and Joyce certainly make strange salesmen for the port of Dublin, and here a seemingly incongruous set of symbols becomes a hip advertisement that somehow implies that coming and going from the port of Dublin is part of the cultural experience of Ireland. Making Beckett or Joyce sell a certain idea of the Irish experience is difficult work, but well within the repertoire of the theme-parking of Irish culture. Such a reading seems to confirm Kilroy's own fears that the modern, liberal state can easily accommodate its former dissidents into its own particular version of Irish history that effectively drives an economy, sells t-shirts, and delivers ferry tickets to people who are not fleeing Ireland out of economic hardship or artistic censorship, but in order to tour destinations across Europe.

The spire and the port are part of a new narrative of Dublin that with relative ease has managed to reconfigure historical space (even as it applies to the idea of exile) into a new history for consumption. It is my hope that by gaining an appreciation of how historical narratives are performed in a vast range of historical circumstances, one might begin to form a critique of the contemporary narratives which are used to both market and sell Ireland as a cultural package. At the heart of this study, then, is a very contemporary concern with reverberations far beyond the borders of Ireland itself. What place local identities, predicated on varied, contending histories may have in a global

network of capital is an international concern. It is a debate, I believe, that can best be enunciated within the varied media defined by the word performance.

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