

# “PRIME THE PUMP”

The Lived Experience of Post-War Arts Policy in the  
Irish Amateur Drama Movement 1949 to 1969

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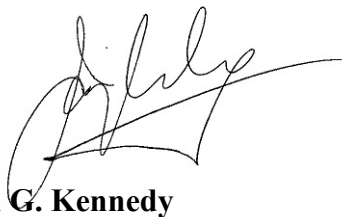
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## **Declaration**

I, Ian Gerard Kennedy, declare that this thesis, which I now present for examination for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) award is my work.

Mindful of academic integrity, I have acknowledged and cited the work of others in the text of this thesis.

This thesis was not previously awarded a degree at the University of Galway or any other Higher Education Institution in Ireland or overseas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian G. Kennedy', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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## Abstract

The interface between Arts Council policy and the lived experience of amateur drama, which this dissertation examines, provides cultural historians with an access point to understand post-war Irish society. After decades of neglect, the Irish Government initiated a series of fundamental cultural responses to post-war Ireland's socio-economic crisis. These initiatives included the *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (1949), the passing of the first Arts Act (1951), establishing An Chomhairle Ealaíon / the Arts Council of Ireland (1952) and initiating the national An Tóstal Festival (1953). This research argues that Arts Council's support for amateur drama and other cultural festivals was essential to the state's response to this deteriorating economic situation.

Following Raymond Williams's approach to cultural development, this research uses the Arts Council archive to analyse the development of amateur drama festivals. In addition, physical and digital archives exploring the North Cork, Western, Clare and All-Ireland Drama Festivals tell the story of this movement. The predominant focus of recent work concerning Irish theatre history is the professional rather than the amateur experience. However, in recent years, scholars in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Ireland have begun to understand amateur drama as a means of exploring the process of change in society.

Rather than see amateur drama as a springboard for the professional, this research shows it was where people in post-war rural Ireland experienced the creativity and storytelling of the theatre. In addition, plays performed at amateur drama festivals became opportunities to highlight issues of national importance, such as emigration, poverty, and the institutionalisation of vulnerable women and children. Finally, it concludes that with Arts Council support, amateur drama festivals became a voluntary grassroots movement influencing audience attitudes towards Irish modernisation.

**Keywords:** Cultural Policy, Arts Council of Ireland, Amateur Drama, Festivals, Playwrights, Audience, Modernisation

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<b>AIDF:</b>	All-Ireland Drama Festival
<b>ACGB:</b>	Arts Council of Great Britain
<b>CDF:</b>	Clare Drama Festival (Scarriff)
<b>CEMA:</b>	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
<b>CST:</b>	Catholic Social Teaching
<b>INA:</b>	Irish Newspaper Archive
<b>IRA:</b>	Irish Republican Army
<b>ITC:</b>	Irish Theatre Council
<b>NCDF:</b>	North Cork Drama Festival
<b>TD:</b>	Teachta Dála (elected member of Dáil Éireann)
<b>UN:</b>	United Nations
<b>UNO:</b>	United Nations Organisation
<b>USA:</b>	United States of America
<b>WDF:</b>	Western Drama Festival
<b>YISS:</b>	Yeats International Summer School

## Introduction

An Chomhairle Ealaíon, the Arts Council of Ireland (after this, the Arts Council) played a critical role in Irish cultural development for seventy years. Besides visual art, the archive shows a clear commitment by the Arts Council to drama and literature during the post-war years. Though the term post-war refers to the years between 1945 to 1991, the period considered here examines the Arts Council's engagement with the amateur drama movement between 1952 and 1969.<sup>1</sup> Like the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), the Arts Council stabilised amateur drama festivals by supplying guarantees against loss. In this thesis, I argue that the Arts Council's support for amateur drama festivals was part of the government's response to this decade of socio-economic decline. I analyse the interface between Arts Council policy and its application to the lived experience of the amateur drama movement during the 1950s and 1960s. As well as Arts Council policy, this research examines the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, Catholic social teaching (CST) and professional theatre engagement with voluntary amateur drama festivals as they became a grassroots movement. This introductory chapter outlines the contribution of this research to Irish cultural history, incorporating a literature review, the research objectives, questions, method, and chapter outline.

The 1949 *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (fig.1) maintained that State engagement with culture regressed in the first two decades after Irish independence.<sup>2</sup> Former director of the National Gallery of Ireland, the report's author Professor Thomas Bodkin, previously contributed to the "Committee of Inquiry into the National Museum" report in the late 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Moving to Britain in the 1930s, he became Director of "the Barber Institute of Fine Arts [at] the University of Birmingham."<sup>4</sup> Commissioned by John A. Costello's Inter-Party Government in 1949, Bodkin's report

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<sup>1</sup> D. E. Moggridge, 'Keynes, the Arts, and the State', *History of Political Economy* 37, no. 3 (2005): 548, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-37-3-535>.

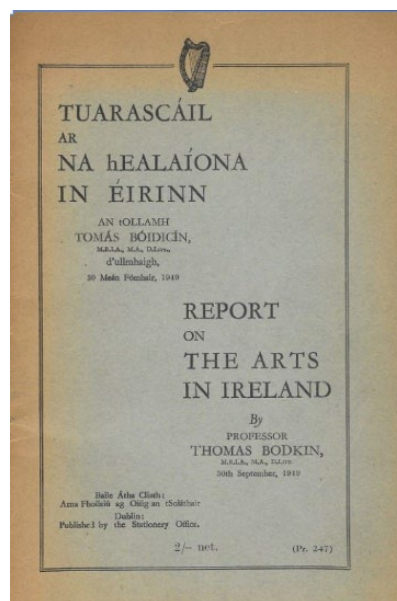
<sup>2</sup> Thomas Bodkin, 'Report on the Arts in Ireland', Print (Dublin: Stationery Office, 30 September 1949), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Craig, 'The Bodkin Report', *The Bell* 17, no. 6 (1951): 18; Anne Kelly, 'Thomas Bodkin, Arts Policy, and Exile', *New Hibernia Review* 6, no. 2 (2002): 138.

<sup>4</sup> Bodkin, 'Report on the Arts', 5; Kelly, 'Thomas Bodkin, Arts Policy, and Exile', 138.

assessed “the constitution and working of institutions concerned with the Arts.”<sup>5</sup>

Popularly known as the Bodkin report, it envisaged a major government department overseeing Ireland’s arts and cultural development.<sup>6</sup> He envisioned a department with broad responsibilities, including providing “a limited amount of patronage of living artists,” an issue revisited by the first Arts Council.<sup>7</sup> He also proposed the establishment of an organisation “exercising powers similar to those vested in the Arts Council in England.”<sup>8</sup> The report also emphasised the economic benefits of cultural development, consistent with Ireland’s participation in the American-initiated European Recovery Programme (ERP, also known as the Marshall Plan).<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 1:** Cover of the *Report on the Arts in Ireland*, 1949

Considering the experience of CEMA and the ACGB, Bodkin recognised the challenges presented by establishing such a department. He proposed the enactment of relevant legislation (Arts Act, 1951) and the establishment

of another...less formal body, which might be entitled...the Arts Council of Ireland, which should be empowered to plan and execute schemes for the promotion and application of the arts in all or any of the various other directions covered or indicated by this report.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Committee on Finance, Vote 3 Department of the Taoiseach’, Pub. L. No. 10, 117 (1949), <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1949-07-20/54/>.

<sup>6</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 65; Craig, ‘The Bodkin Report’, 17–25.

<sup>7</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 65.

<sup>8</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 5; 40–45; Bernadette Whelan, ‘The New World and the Old: American Marshall Planners in Ireland, 1947–57’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 12 (2001): 187.

<sup>10</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 66.

Though forty years passed before establishing the Ministry of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in 1993, the Arts Act (1951) instituted a “less formal body,” the Arts Council.<sup>11</sup> Chapter One notes that P. J. Little made several unsuccessful attempts throughout the 1940s to involve the Irish Government in developing the arts.<sup>12</sup> Some months before the publication of Bodkin’s report, the inclusion of the right to culture in the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights gave arts policy development an international imperative.<sup>13</sup> Cultural development became an inevitable part of government policy for a nation seeking its place on the world stage.

### Originality and Contribution

From 2012 to 2017, I managed the Yeats International Summer School (YISS) organisation and events in Sligo. As I became involved in cultural tourism, I researched the school’s history for a master’s thesis, which Professor Pilkington supervised.<sup>14</sup> When I undertook that research, I believed that the modernisation of Irish society began with the advance of television. Probing further, I discovered that little research about Irish literary festivals in the post-war era was available. It intrigued me that many festivals emerged during a decade of national crisis in the 1950s. As I developed my doctoral proposal, I gradually focused on the Arts Council’s influence on cultural development in post-war Ireland.

It is over thirty years since the first publication of Brian P. Kennedy’s book, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*.<sup>15</sup> Over the past decade, three Irish publications considered the Arts Council’s work in Ireland. The first, *Into the Light*, commemorated the Arts Council’s sixtieth anniversary in 2012.<sup>16</sup> That book briefly introduced the Arts Council’s history, concentrating

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<sup>11</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Arts Act, 1951’, Pub. L. No. 9 of 1951 (1951), <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1951/act/9/enacted/en/print.html>; Alexandra Dilys-Slaby, ‘Interview with Michael D. Higgins, Minister of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht between 1993 and 1997’, *Revue LISA/LISA e-Journal. Littératures, Histoire Des Idées, Images, Sociétés Du Monde Anglophone – Literature, History of Ideas, Images and Societies of the English-Speaking World II*, no. 4 (1 July 2004): 211, <https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.2947>.

<sup>12</sup> Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland* (1990; repr., Dublin: The Arts Council/An Comhairle Ealaíon, 1998), 47–48, <https://www.arts council.ie/uploadedFiles/DreamsandResponsibilities.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948’ (1948), art. 27, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

<sup>14</sup> Ian G. Kennedy, ‘A Lived and Living History’, *Sligo Field Club Journal* 2 (2016): 137–46.

<sup>15</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*.

<sup>16</sup> Karen Downey, ed., *Into the Light: The Arts Council 60 Years of Supporting the Arts*. (Dublin: The Arts Council /An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 2012), 9–12.

primarily on the visual arts and did not consider post-war literary culture. Kevin Rafter's *Taoisigh and the Arts* examine the cultural attitudes of those who held the office of Taoiseach. He contends that establishing the Arts Council was "one of the most significant State interventions to assist the arts since independence in 1922."<sup>17</sup>

Finally, Pat Cooke's recent book, *The Politics and Polemics of Culture in Ireland, 1800-2010*, examines cultural policy development across two centuries. He maintains that culture has provided a resilient anchor point for the nation at various crisis points in Ireland's post-independence history.<sup>18</sup> While Cooke is critical of the "minimal" political impact of the Arts Council during the post-war years, my research shows the socio-cultural impact of its work which exceeded official limitations.<sup>19</sup> With Arts Council support, amateur drama festivals, among other cultural initiatives, provided resilience during the crisis years of the 1950s. The Irish language revival was the principal cultural policy pursued in the decades after independence serving as a bulwark against modernisation.<sup>20</sup> Despite this, I argue that this resistance to change did not stem the tide of modernisation which proceeded incrementally throughout these years.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Bodkin, Little and other Arts Council members shaped cultural development along broadly Catholic lines.<sup>22</sup> The appointments of Monsignor Pádraig de Brún and Father Donal O'Sullivan S.J. as members and directors of the Arts Council strengthened this influence.<sup>23</sup>

Up to the passing of the Arts Act (1951), culture was an implicit rather than an explicit part of a government policy that straddled the politics of language revivalism and progressive development.<sup>24</sup> In establishing the Arts Council, a contradiction emerged between the official Irish language revival policy and the adoption of British cultural development structures.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding, recent research agrees that the

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<sup>17</sup> Kevin Rafter, *Taoisigh and the Arts* (Dublin: Martello Publishing, 2022), 6, Kindle.

<sup>18</sup> Pat Cooke, *The Politics and Polemics of Culture in Ireland, 1800-2010* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis, 2021), 24, Kindle.

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 31–33.

<sup>21</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 37–38.

<sup>23</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 38; Lawrence William White, 'De Brún, Pádraig (Browne, Patrick)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James Quinn (Royal Irish Academy, 2009), <https://www.dib.ie/biography/de-brun-padraig-browne-patrick-a2457>. Incidentally Monsignor de Brún was a brother of Dominican Michael Cardinal Browne, brother-in-law of Seán McEntee, uncle of Máire Mhac an tSaoi and was taught by Éamon de Valera. He served as director of the Arts Council from 1959 to 60. Father O'Sullivan served as director of the Arts Council from 1960 to 1973.

<sup>24</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 311–15.

<sup>25</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 42–43.

Arts Council's establishment was a major step in cultural policy development.<sup>26</sup> Eamon de Valera, Bodkin, Costello, and Little viewed its establishment as an opportunity to promote culture's consumption rather than production. In addition, the Arts Council utilised amateur and voluntary organisations to develop culture.<sup>27</sup> While Cooke and Rafter's important research has not allowed for a detailed exploration of the post-war voluntary response of people involved in the amateur drama movement, that is something which this dissertation addresses.

Much work undertaken in theatre history over the past twenty years by critics including Lionel Pilkington, Chris Morash, Nicholas Grene, Patrick Lonergan, Christopher Murray and Barry Houlihan has concentrated on professional than amateur theatre.<sup>28</sup> As recognised at the 1962 All-Ireland Drama Festival (AIDF), the amateur movement attracted little attention because it was viewed as a stepping stone to professional theatre (see chapter five).<sup>29</sup> However, many Irish theatre histories acknowledge how amateur drama supported community life.<sup>30</sup>

One of the remarkable aspects of post-war cultural development was the increasing number of drama groups active throughout the country. As explored below, these drama groups travelled the country, competing in amateur festivals every spring. Present in almost every town, village and parish, these groups formed a voluntary

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<sup>26</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 314; Rafter, *Taoisigh and the Arts*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 318.

<sup>28</sup> Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis., 2001), Kindle; Chris Morash, 'Making Space: Towards a Spatial Theory of Irish Theatre', in *Irish Drama Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Nicholas Grene and Patrick Lonergan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 6–20; Trish McTighe and David Tucker, eds., *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2020), Kindle; Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel, The Politics of Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511486029>; Patrick Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre since 1950* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019), Kindle; Anthony Roche, *Brian Friel: Theatre and Politics* (Basingstoke and London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama Mirror up to a Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> 'Close of Tenth Drama Festival', *Westmeath Independent*, 19 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive; Claire Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre Industry, Art and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 103, Kindle; Helen Nicholson, Nadine Holdsworth, and Jane Milling, *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre*, 1st ed. 2018 (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), loc. 230, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50810-2>; Finian O'Gorman, 'Critical Perspectives: John B. Keane, Sive (1959) and the Art of the Amateur', in *Irish Drama and Theatre since 1950*, ed. Patrick Lonergan (London: Methuen Drama, 2019), 205, Kindle.

<sup>30</sup> Finian O'Gorman, "'A Quiet Cultural Revolution": The Amateur Theatre Movement in Ireland, 1952-1980' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway., 2019), 5, ARAN: NUI Galway Theses (PhD Theses), <http://hdl.handle.net.nuigalway.idm.oclc.org/10379/15857>.

movement. Though this study does not allow for an examination of other cultural organisations, including Tuairim, Muintir na Tíre, the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA) and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, these movements influenced changing Irish social attitudes.<sup>31</sup> Little research exists on the Arts Council's engagement with the post-war amateur drama movement, a gap that this dissertation engages.

Recent scholarship in the United Kingdom, United States and Ireland has highlighted the amateur drama movement's importance to cultural history.<sup>32</sup> In his doctoral research, Finian O'Gorman concentrates on the relationship between the All-Ireland Drama Festival and the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals. The value of the amateur movement came from the fact that in rural Ireland, it was the only source of theatrical exposure people experienced.<sup>33</sup> For O'Gorman, the interface between the amateur and paid theatre empowers a dialogue that brings aspects of professional practice to the peripheries.<sup>34</sup> In this dialogue, professional theatre practice is found in the centre (cities) and brought to rural towns and villages on the periphery of this drama experience. As chapter five explores, if amateur theatre is the means through which post-war rural communities experienced drama, then the professional was peripheral, as the Abbey Players discovered during its 1967 tour.

The original approach taken by my research contests a gap in the literature concerning the interface between Arts Council policy and the response of the voluntary amateur drama movement. It has the following objectives. First, to examine the development of the Arts Council as a governmental response to the socio-economic climate of 1950s Ireland. Second, to analyse how Arts Council policy impacted the development of community-based amateur drama festivals in the 1950s. Third, evaluate how these communities utilised amateur drama to address issues in Irish society. Finally, critically determine how audiences, adjudicators, playwrights, and

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<sup>31</sup> Tomás Finn, *Tuairim, Intellectual Debate and Policy Formulation: Rethinking Ireland, 1954-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Méabh Ní Fhuartháin and David M. Doyle, eds., *Ordinary Irish Life: Music, Sport and Culture* (Sallins, Co. Kildare, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*; Nicholson, Holdsworth, and Milling, *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre*; Joe MacCarrick, 'Clerical Influence in Amateur Drama' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2017), NUI Galway Theses (Taught Masters); O'Gorman, 'A Quiet Cultural Revolution'; Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*.

<sup>33</sup> O'Gorman, 'A Quiet Cultural Revolution', 6.

<sup>34</sup> O'Gorman, 'A Quiet Cultural Revolution', 172-73.

drama companies engaged with the performance of selected plays that dealt with these issues.

Culture is a consequence of civic life and a constitutive part of society.<sup>35</sup> In his book, *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams identifies “three levels of culture” present within any study of cultural history.<sup>36</sup> Though some scholars criticise Williams’s approach as somewhat “conservative,” it provides a valuable prism to view post-war Irish culture.<sup>37</sup> The first is the lived culture of a specific time and nation. Second is what he calls the “culture of a period,” which is concerned with “recorded culture.”<sup>38</sup> The third category is the relationship between lived and recorded culture. Williams calls this “the selective tradition,” the interpretation of culture by successive generations.<sup>39</sup> It begins when those engaged in cultural production select and preserve certain artistic expressions and archival evidence embodying that time’s overall lived experiences for future generations.<sup>40</sup> For example, the archival preservation of minutes, letters, playbills and syllabi in the Arts Council and festival archives from the time is part of the process of selective tradition. This documentary evidence concerns the network of relationships that emerged from the lived experience of arts council engagement with the respective drama festivals. In addition, it includes drama companies, adjudicators, playwrights, and the audience. Selective tradition engages all three elements of culture simultaneously in a dynamic process that shapes our understanding and interpretation of meaning within society.<sup>41</sup> These three elements inform the analysis and interpretation of the creative life found in the “texts and practices” of the Arts Council archives and amateur drama festivals.<sup>42</sup>

New understandings of society and what it is to be human emerge from lived experience.<sup>43</sup> Williams maintains that while each generation freshly reinterprets culture from its own lived experience, a “residual” element is passed on from generation to

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<sup>35</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*. (1961; repr., Cardigan: Parthian Books, 2011), 65, Kindle; David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2, Kindle.

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 72.

<sup>42</sup> John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2013), loc. 264, Kindle.

<sup>43</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, loc. 196.

generation.<sup>44</sup> From this lived experience, engaging with the generation of meaning becomes possible, and a new society emerges. As this study shows, through innovation and development, culture builds on what preceded it but, in its reinterpretation, becomes something new.<sup>45</sup> Each generation's reinterpretation of the selective tradition engages culture in the concrete experience of human life.<sup>46</sup>

Cultural history is not the production of general history but an analysis of relations between social and artistic activities.<sup>47</sup> For Williams, the focal point of this analysis is how “the particular activities and their interrelations were affected”?<sup>48</sup> As seen in the relationship between the Arts Council and the amateur drama movement, the type of change undertaken contains “elements of persistence, adjustment, unconscious assimilation, active resistance, [and] alternative effort” both in the activities and the organisations.<sup>49</sup> My research contributes to Irish cultural history by considering the relationship between the Arts Council and the amateur drama movement as a series of responses to the socio-cultural crisis of post-war Irish society. I frame these responses as three main movements that permeate the chapters below.

### International Influences

This research argues that various external and internal activities influenced the development of Arts Council policy and its application to the voluntary amateur drama movement. These include Ireland's participation in the ERP. Popularly known as the Marshall Plan, this programme rebuilt European democracy and infrastructure from 1947 until the early 1950s. Such rebuilding utilised culture to articulate values that opposed the advance of communism in its totalitarian form.<sup>50</sup> The resulting post-war reshaping of Europe into Western and Communist spheres of influence led to the rise

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<sup>44</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 68; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 122, Scribd.

<sup>45</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 70; György Markus, ‘The Paradoxical Unity of Culture: The Arts and the Sciences’, *Thesis Eleven* 75, no. 1 (November 2003): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513603751002>.

<sup>46</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, ed. Seamus Deane, *Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays 2* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 10; Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 64; Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review* (1979; repr., London: Verso Books, 2015), 352–53, Kindle.

<sup>47</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 67.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 66; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121.

<sup>49</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 66.

<sup>50</sup> Tara Byrne, ‘Cultural Policy and the Creative City: Legitimation Discourses, Culture and the State’ (Doctoral Thesis, Dublin Technological University, 2013), 16, Arrow, <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/appadoc/54>.

of Cold War tensions that lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.<sup>51</sup> Throughout Irish newspaper reports of the 1950s and 1960s, details of amateur drama festival successes shared space with stories of Cold War tensions, which added to the fear that accompanied these years. For Hannah Arendt, the post-Stalinist rediscovery of culture was an ideological part of the Soviet Union's engagement with the world.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the ERP encouraged modernisation by promoting the Irish tourist industry. This promotion led to the establishment of An Tóstal, which took its inspiration from the Festival of Britain and gave momentum to the amateur drama movement.<sup>53</sup>

The establishment of CEMA and the ACGB in 1940 and 1946 influenced the development of post-war cultural policy. Responding to the start of the second world war, CEMA established the idea of the arts as a salve for a time of national crisis.<sup>54</sup> The work undertaken by CEMA under the direction of economist John Maynard Keynes proved so effective that it continued as the ACGB at the end of the war.<sup>55</sup> For Tara Byrne, establishing the ACGB “was the first explicit European cultural policy as a legitimate arm of official government...[that]...had a lasting effect on the development of international governance.”<sup>56</sup>

Anna Rosser Upchurch maintains that people like Keynes used “their intellectual training to find solutions for social problems.”<sup>57</sup> During the post-war years, Keynes's economic and social legacy influenced the development of the international political economy. His vision, which radically reduced the need for work to a minimum while leisure shaped people's lives, failed to materialise within society as the decades progressed. Culture and the arts were not necessarily the elite's preserve but were to become an integral part of daily life. His cultural policy vision saw the establishment of an arts infrastructure in every British town as a critical part of

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Harvey, *Global Disorder: How to Avoid a Fourth World War* (London: Robinson, 2003), xvii–xix.

<sup>52</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; repr., London: Penguin Books, 2017), xlv.

<sup>53</sup> Joan Fitzpatrick Dean, *All Dressed Up: Modern Irish Historical Pageantry*, Irish Studies (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 187, [https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuig/detail.action?docID=4649093#goto\\_toc](https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nuig/detail.action?docID=4649093#goto_toc).

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), 26.

<sup>55</sup> Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 35–36.

<sup>56</sup> Byrne, ‘Cultural Policy and the Creative City’, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Anna Rosser Upchurch, *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement Philanthropy and Policy*, New Directions in Cultural Policy Research (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 5.

developing the nation's civilization.<sup>58</sup> This view influenced early Arts Council policy concerning building and renovating halls for cultural and dramatic activities in Ireland.

Some viewed Ireland's apparent "reluctance" to embrace modernisation as a refusal to take its place among nations.<sup>59</sup> The claim that Ireland was not acting maturely in resisting global influences served to avoid "ideological underpinnings of modernisation."<sup>60</sup> Irish Catholicism was enmeshed in a narrow nationalism focused on eliminating transgressive behaviour concerning sexual morality.<sup>61</sup> This narrow social focus led to a nation politically and morally disengaged from the horrors of the destruction of European civilization.<sup>62</sup> The decision to remain neutral in the second world war was seen as a rejection of the European model of civilization and led to a cooling of diplomatic relations, particularly with the United States over partition.<sup>63</sup>

The concept of civilization, combined with American hegemony, underpinned the application of the ERP with CST in rebuilding the post-war world.<sup>64</sup> By establishing the UN, the Council of Europe and the European Coal and Steel Community, among others, the community of nations strove to create a new form of civilization that would not tolerate the horrors inflicted over the previous half-century of war.<sup>65</sup> This aim was the context of Little's vision of post-war cultural progress. His emphasis on the development of culture and its relationship to citizenship, which he developed through memos, speeches and letters explored in chapter one, sought to overcome the perception that Ireland rejected European civilization. Since the Enlightenment, the theatre has become synonymous with the experience of a civilised way of life.<sup>66</sup> As discussed in later chapters, Little and members of the Irish hierarchy saw its identification with civilization as an essential aspect of the amateur drama movement. The post-war embrace of European civilization was also one of Seán Ó Faoláin's priorities when contextualising the debates around Ireland's relationship

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<sup>58</sup> Moggridge, 'Keynes, the Arts and the State', 549–50.

<sup>59</sup> Aidan O'Malley, 'Irish Writers and Europe', in *Irish Literature in Transition, 1940–1980*, ed. Eve Patten, 1st ed. (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 67, [https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108616348%23CN-bp-3/type/book\\_part](https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108616348%23CN-bp-3/type/book_part).

<sup>60</sup> O'Malley, 'Irish Writers and Europe', 67–68.

<sup>61</sup> O'Malley, 'Irish Writers and Europe', 71–72.

<sup>62</sup> O'Malley, 'Irish Writers and Europe', 72.

<sup>63</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland Revolution and State Building*. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 198–99; O'Malley, 'Irish Writers and Europe', 71.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe after the Second World War* (London: Profile Books, 2020), 68, 147, Kindle.

<sup>65</sup> Betts, *Ruin and Renewal*, 16, 145, 161.

<sup>66</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theatre: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: OUP Oxford, 2014), 46.

with the Anglo-Irish and its literature.<sup>67</sup> The work of Samuel Beckett, considered in chapter five, is key to understanding the post-war transition.<sup>68</sup> This shift saw Ireland move from a narrow focus on itself to embracing the advantages of acceptance within a changing global civilization.<sup>69</sup>

In considering the international Arts Council network, Upchurch's book *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement Philanthropy and Policy* did not treat the Irish Arts Council as an independent entity.<sup>70</sup> Instead, she included it in developing the Arts Council in the British Isles. Following the establishment of the Irish Arts Council, the Canadian Government acting on the 1952 Massey Report, created an Arts Council in 1957.<sup>71</sup> Though Ireland was the second nation to establish an Arts Council, Upchurch contends that the Canadian council was the first "outside the British Isles" to adopt this method of policy development.<sup>72</sup> During the 1960s, "Northern Ireland, New Zealand, the United States of America and Australia" established various forms of Arts Council.<sup>73</sup>

In the post-war years, two broad influences shaped Irish society; a Christian democratic state that sought to consolidate its position and the theological imperative of the Roman Catholic Church to engage society with CST.<sup>74</sup> Together with professional theatre, these two influences sought to shape the direction and reception of individual drama festivals and the amateur drama movement. Church and State formed a symbiotic relationship rooted in a fragile interdependence throughout the twentieth century.<sup>75</sup> This interdependence provided Church support for the government in the post-Treaty years.<sup>76</sup> In turn, the government guaranteed social

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<sup>67</sup> O'Malley, 'Irish Writers and Europe', 74.

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Allen, 'Becoming a Republic: Irish Writing in Transition', in *Irish Literature in Transition, 1940–1980*, ed. Eve Patten, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 94, [https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108616348%23CN-bp-4/type/book\\_part](https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781108616348%23CN-bp-4/type/book_part).

<sup>69</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalisation of Democracy* (Profile Books, 2014), 700, Kindle; Allen, 'Becoming a Republic', 94.

<sup>70</sup> Upchurch, *Origins of the Arts Council Movement*, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Vincent Massey et al., 'Report [of the] Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951.' (Ottawa: [The Commission], 1951), Lib.467 Fol.16, Library and Archives Canada, <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/massey/h5-400-e.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Upchurch, *Origins of the Arts Council Movement*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Upchurch, *Origins of the Arts Council Movement*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Leonard Francis Taylor, *Catholic Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2020), loc. 987.

<sup>75</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Catholic "Ethos" Was about Faith and Practice - and Land, Property, Control and Power', *Irish Times*, 25 June 2021, Online edition, sec. Opinion, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/catholic-ethos-was-about-faith-and-practice-and-land-property-control-and-power-1.4602535>.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Laffan, *Judging W.T. Cosgrave* (Royal Irish Academy, 2014), 118.

stability that benefitted the Church.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, some members of W.T. Cosgrave's cabinet, influenced by "Neo-Thomism" and CST, sought to address perceived gaps in a secular approach to the ordering of society.<sup>78</sup> No more than during the post-war years, the fear of outside influences on Irish society determined the engagement of the Church and state on matters of social and public policy.<sup>79</sup>

Though not without caution and qualification, this enmeshment of church and state produced a quasi-religious nationalist ideology that considerably blunted the central Gospel message throughout the twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> During the post-war years, the Catholic hierarchy framed their engagement with public issues by applying CST and the impact of the Cold War.<sup>81</sup> Promulgated as a response to the nineteenth-century modernisation of industry and science, CST found its first expression in Pope Leo XIII's encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). *Rerum Novarum* argued that the State exists not for itself but for the "common good" of all its citizens.<sup>82</sup> In rejecting the political application of socialism, the encyclical envisaged the State providing social and material benefits for its people, including the right to health, housing, and clothing, easing hardship, and increasing "well-being."<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, there was no discrimination in experiencing these benefits as "the interests of all, whether high or low, are equal."<sup>84</sup> In placing the common good at the centre of its teaching, *Quadragesimo Anno* sought to "unite" a society in chaos through "organised action" and "moral reform."<sup>85</sup> This unity focused on achieving social justice in the economic and social life of the nation.<sup>86</sup> The UN enactment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 enshrined these

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<sup>77</sup> John M. Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921-1936: Treaty Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1999), 285.

<sup>78</sup> Regan, *The Irish Counter Revolution, 1921-1936*, 281.

<sup>79</sup> Regan, *The Irish Counter Revolution, 1921-1936*, 282–86.

<sup>80</sup> Regan, *The Irish Counter Revolution, 1921-1936*, 285; Laffan, *Judging W.T. Cosgrave*, 260.

<sup>81</sup> Pope Leo XIII, 'Rerum Novarum', Papal Encyclical, 15 May 1891, [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html); Pope Pius XI, 'Quadragesimo Anno', Papal Encyclical, 15 May 1931, [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19310515\\_quadragesimo-anno.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html); John Henry Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland: 1923-1970* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), 62.

<sup>82</sup> Pope Leo XIII, 'Rerum Novarum', 15 May 1891, no. 32.

<sup>83</sup> Pope Leo XIII, 'Rerum Novarum', 15 May 1891, no. 34.

<sup>84</sup> Pope Leo XIII, 'Rerum Novarum', 15 May 1891, nos. 33–34.

<sup>85</sup> Pope Pius XI, 'Quadragesimo Anno', 15 May 1931, no. 84; Paul Hanley Furfey, 'Personalistic Social Action in the "Rerum Novarum" and "Quadragesimo Anno"', *The American Catholic Sociological Review* 2, no. 4 (1941): 205.

<sup>86</sup> Pope Pius XI, 'Quadragesimo Anno', 15 May 1931, nos. 95; 110.

rights, including culture, into international law.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, CST emerged and developed through the Church's engagement with public and political life.<sup>88</sup> Known as the Catholic Church's best-kept secret, the central principles of CST, subsidiarity, the common good, solidarity and socialization, explored in the following chapters, provide valuable access points to the Church's engagement with amateur theatre.

For Williams, culture is a network of "interests and activities" that combine to produce "a way of life."<sup>89</sup> This concept of a way of life evokes a sense of transformation that is consistently present in the government's understanding of culture. First, in theological terms, it is about aligning with religious values and critically thinking about the type of life and society one wishes to live. Second, it conveys a sense of depth about engaging in the regular activities one individually and socially experiences. Finally, it invites one to consider a cultural system as a dynamic hermeneutic present in the layers of society.

If culture is a combination of specific things that contribute to a whole, then one must conceive other aspects of a way of life in society. Religion, politics, social life, work life and the worldview found in family life all contribute to culture. Other aspects of Irish life include Ireland's post-colonial struggle and emergence as a democracy. Bill Kissane maintains that Ireland achieved the consolidation of post-independence democratic politics by the outbreak of war in 1939.<sup>90</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s, while many European nations succumbed to fascism and communism, the Irish Government maintained a stable democracy.<sup>91</sup> It continued establishing political, cultural, and economic power structures that enhanced the "rational organisation of social and political life."<sup>92</sup>

For Brian Girvin, because of the influences of continuity, for example, CST on the shape of social and cultural policy, post-war Ireland did not experience

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<sup>87</sup> United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, art. 27.

<sup>88</sup> Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2022), 30.

<sup>89</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> Bill Kissane, *Explaining Irish Democracy* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002), 227.

<sup>91</sup> Brian Girvin, 'Stability, Crisis and Change in Post-War Ireland 1945-1973', in *The Cambridge History of Ireland.*, ed. Thomas Bartlett, vol. IV (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 381–406.

<sup>92</sup> Amy Allen, 'Discourse, Power, and Subjectivation: The Foucault-Habermas Debate Reconsidered', *Philosophical Forum* 40, no. 1 (2009): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9191.2008.00314.x>.

transformation.<sup>93</sup> This continuity of tradition benefitted post-war Ireland through the maintenance of political and social stability. Associated State building accompanied this democratic stability, of which the Arts Council was a part.<sup>94</sup> However, the process of continuity and change evokes both a sense of opportunity and terror. For György Márkus, modernisation destroyed past communities and prioritised individual freedom “into the highest value alone capable of conferring meaning upon life.”<sup>95</sup> A consequence of this was the emerging independence of “social interaction”, the destruction of “personal integrity”, and the emergence of people who cannot resist the attention of “impersonal social influences.”<sup>96</sup> Culture exists in such an environment, allowing society “to encounter what is unique and irreplaceable.”<sup>97</sup>

Keynes, influenced by his family’s recusant Catholicism, sought to utilise culture to modernise society.<sup>98</sup> He envisioned a world where work existed to support people’s way of life rather than for employment alone.<sup>99</sup> In this context, culture and the arts were a means of attaining a quality of life that challenges and transforms society.<sup>100</sup> Culture is dynamic and ever-changing, with an underlying residual element that permeates and makes it a unique part of society.<sup>101</sup> It can transform society through the art form’s impact on daily living.<sup>102</sup> This social transformation goes to the heart of CST. As outlined in chapters one and three, the post-war embrace of CST influenced the Arts Council’s understanding of citizenship and culture. Culture underpins the development of citizenship, which empowers the fullest expression of being human.<sup>103</sup> As the amateur drama movement was a voluntary grassroots response to cultural and social policy, chapter three argues that bishops, priests, and religious inevitably became involved in its development. They engaged the movement through patronage, playwriting, production, and event management. Girvin contends that although it embraced globalisation’s benefits, Irish society remained suspicious of social

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<sup>93</sup> Brian Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger: Change without Modernisation in Ireland 1959-1989’, *Economic and Social Review* 41, no. 3 (2010): 354–62.

<sup>94</sup> Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 19.

<sup>96</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Gerard Kilroy, ‘Keynes: A Catholic Family and Its Legacy’, [Online], *The Tablet*, 12 December 2019, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/17173/keynes-a-catholic-family-and-its-legacy>.

<sup>99</sup> Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 540.

<sup>100</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 65; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122; Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 65.

<sup>102</sup> Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, 12.

<sup>103</sup> Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 66.

change.<sup>104</sup>

This argument emphasises a tension that emerges between continuity and change. How were continuity and stability maintained while post-war cultural development sowed the seeds of socio-political change? Letting go of “all that is of value in society” is part of cultural change.<sup>105</sup> Continuity of tradition provides a framework of meaning and challenges Irish society to modernise without losing “all the important images which were so central to [its] ideology.”<sup>106</sup> For example, some bishops and priests sought to influence the movement’s direction when opening or closing festivals. The themes of their speeches, supported by politicians and others involved in the movement, often resisted modernisation in Irish society.

Markus maintains that the complementarity of cultural disciplines stabilises society as it engages the chaotic nature of modernisation.<sup>107</sup> The claim that “high culture” is elitist and cannot address the chaotic impact of modernisation on most citizens questions this argument.<sup>108</sup> In challenging this view, Markus distinguishes between the audience who consume the arts and the “reach and social resonance” of culture.<sup>109</sup> This distinction is part of the change when one generation hands the recorded culture of a period to the next.<sup>110</sup> While Girvin’s argument does not account for the lived experience of amateur drama, the following chapters will examine how this process occurred through performing plays produced at these festivals.<sup>111</sup>

### **The Government and Arts Council Response**

Byrne claims that from 1951 to 2015, the government developed an implicit rather than explicit cultural policy.<sup>112</sup> In contrast, my research argues that the socio-economic challenges of the 1950s prompted the government to make several cultural responses. These included the *Report on the Arts in Ireland*, the *Arts Act 1951*, and the establishment of the Arts Council. In addition, because Ireland participated in the ERP,

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<sup>104</sup> Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 352.

<sup>105</sup> Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>106</sup> Celia Keenaghan, ‘The State and Cultural Policy in Ireland: The Case of the Irish Audiovisual Sector’ (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Dublin City University, 1991), 9, DORAS.

<sup>107</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 20.

<sup>108</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 20.

<sup>109</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 20–21.

<sup>110</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 72.

<sup>111</sup> Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 352–62.

<sup>112</sup> Byrne, ‘Cultural Policy and the Creative City’, 101.

the government established An Tóstal.<sup>113</sup> These celebrations provided a reason for emigrants to return home by celebrating Irish culture's local, national, and international space.<sup>114</sup> In this respect, and despite economic stagnation, the 1950s exhibited flourishing arts initiatives and festivals throughout the country.<sup>115</sup> An examination of the Arts Council archive shows that this initiative catalysed the establishment of many amateur drama festivals in the early 1950s. As already noted, the emergence of the Arts Council contributed to the development of social institutions that provide cultural stability within the State.

Despite an initial post-war boom, the perception of the 1950s is of a bleak decade with little optimism about the future.<sup>116</sup> Continuous emigration and a challenging economic climate contributed to a sense of “cultural and social despair” that undermined the protectionist policies of the Irish State.<sup>117</sup> The crisis of the post-war years challenged the ideals of “economic nationalism and the quest for cultural self-sufficiency.”<sup>118</sup> De Valera outlined this idealism in 1943;

We of this time, if we have the will and active enthusiasm, have the opportunity to inspire and move our generation in like manner. We can do so by keeping this thought of a noble future for our country constantly before our eyes, ever seeking in action to bring that future into being, and ever remembering that it is for our nation as a whole that future must be sought.<sup>119</sup>

De Valera's speech highlighted that in 1943 numerous people did not achieve the minimum living standards.<sup>120</sup> As previously mentioned, increased living standards were central to Keynes's vision, underscoring the development of the ACGB.<sup>121</sup> However, Minister for Industry and Commerce, Seán Lemass TD and T.K. Whitaker, secretary of the Department of Finance, soon recognised that economic growth drove

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<sup>113</sup> Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 224, Kindle.

<sup>114</sup> Morash, 'Making Space', 6–20.

<sup>115</sup> Finn, *Tuairim*, 21–28.

<sup>116</sup> Finn, *Tuairim*, 22.

<sup>117</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, 213; Jonathan Haughton, 'Chapter One: Historical Background', in *The Economy of Ireland: National and Sectoral Policy Issues*, ed. John O'Hagan and Carol Newman (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2014), locs. 722–760, Kindle.

<sup>118</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, 209.

<sup>119</sup> Eamon deValera, 'On Language and the Irish Nation', in *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera: 1917 – 73*, ed. Maurice Moynihan (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1980), 466, <https://spinnet.humanities.uva.nl/images/2014-04/devalera1943.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 136–37.

<sup>121</sup> Anna Rosser Upchurch, 'Keynes's Legacy: An Intellectual's Influence Reflected in Arts Policy', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 17, no. 1 (2011): 70–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630903456851>.

social change.<sup>122</sup> Timothy McCarthy, who takes a different view from Girvin, claims several institutional events culminated in a “critical moment” that created “profound social change.”<sup>123</sup> As the decade progressed, government economic policy shifted from the protectionism of the de Valera years to the openness of Lemass and Whitaker’s *Programme for Economic Expansion*, a programme of economic reform most associated with the 1960s.<sup>124</sup>

While most authors concentrate on the 1960s as a time of change, they agree that traces of a shift are present in the decade before the *Programme for Economic Expansion*.<sup>125</sup> Clair Wills claims the 1950s was “a transformative phase in modern Irish history,” which led to the opening of Irish society to economic expansion in the 1960s.<sup>126</sup> According to Conor McCarthy, the modernisation process of the late 1950s succeeded a “post-Independent isolationism, wartime neutrality and the ambivalences of the political and economic relationship with Britain.”<sup>127</sup> Tom Garvin, Brian Girvin, Patrick Honohan and Timothy McCarthy contend that the economic challenges of the 1950s catalysed the change that occurred in the 1960s.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, Joe Lee, Brian Fallon Enda Delaney and Terence Brown call for a fuller exploration of the cultural influence on the modernisation of post-war Ireland, which this research addresses.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Anne Chambers, *T.K. Whitaker: Portrait of a Patriot* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2014), 150, Kindle.

<sup>123</sup> Timothy J. McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland 1958 - 93: The Role of Ideas in Punctuating Institutional Path Dependency at Critical Junctures’ (Doctoral Thesis, University College Cork, 2011), 94, CORA, <http://hdl.handle.net/10468/1070>.

<sup>124</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Programme for Economic Expansion’ (Dublin: Stationery Office, 12 November 1958), Oireachtas Library Digital Collections, <http://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWData/Library3/Library2/DL006590.pdf>.

<sup>125</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Programme for Economic Expansion’; J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985 Politics and Society* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland so Poor for so Long?* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004); Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’; Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*; McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland’; Girvin, ‘Stability, Crisis and Change’.

<sup>126</sup> Clair Wills, *The Best Are Leaving: Emigration and Post-War Irish Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14, Kindle.

<sup>127</sup> McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 12.

<sup>128</sup> Garvin, *Preventing the Future*; Patrick Honohan, *Preventing the Future: Why Was Ireland So Poor for So Long?*, *The Economic and Social Review*, vol. 35 (Gill & Macmillan, 2004), <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=9095774&Fmt=7&clientId=11502&RQT=309&VName=PQD>; Brian Girvin, ‘Did Ireland Benefit from the Marshall Plan?: Choice, Strategy and the National Interest in a Comparative Context’, in *Ireland, Europe and the Marshall Plan*, ed. Till Geiger and Michael Kennedy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 182–220; Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’; Tom Garvin, *News from a New Republic: Ireland in the 1950s* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2010); McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland’.

<sup>129</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*; Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998); Enda Delaney, ‘The Vanishing Irish? The Exodus from Ireland in the 1950s’, in *Ireland in the 1950s: The Lost Decade*, ed. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea, and Carmel Quinlan

Another feature of the post-war years was an explosion of publications and arts initiatives.<sup>130</sup> Numerous authors, including Beckett, Patrick Kavanagh, Michael McLaverty, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Máirtín O’Direáin, Liam O’Flaherty, Ó Faoláin, and Francis Stuart, emerged at this time.<sup>131</sup> An explosion of literary and religious journals, including *The Bell*, *The Furrow* and *Doctrine and Life*, accompanied this profusion of writing. The rise of mass media and new journals signified an emergence from the oppression of intellectual engagement that marked the decades of censorship in Ireland.<sup>132</sup> In addition, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, radio, a profusion of British newspapers and cinema broadened the Irish public’s appreciation of global perspectives.<sup>133</sup> Despite the challenges of sustaining literary magazines, the growing range of titles available showed a changing landscape. This research has extensively used journals, including *The Bell*, *Studies*, *The Furrow*, national and international newspapers, and archival documents, including letters, memos, speeches, and relevant publications.

For Tony Judt, this was a generation of young writers, intellectuals and philosophers whose anticipation of post-war global change gave way to a worldview “once more polarized into irreconcilable political camps.”<sup>134</sup> The new reality introduced concepts and an environment for “radical political and social change” as nations and peoples strove to rebuild society.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, social change occurred slowly as a protectionist Ireland experienced the influences of a post-war globalised world.

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(Douglas Village, Cork: Mercier, 2004), 80–86; Enda Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics in Post-War Ireland’, in *Turning Points in Twentieth-Century Irish History*, ed. Thomas E. Hachey (Dublin; Portland (Or.): Irish Academic Press, 2011), 103–18; Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*.

<sup>130</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 206–7; R. F. Foster, ““Changed Utterly”? Transformation and Continuity in Late Twentieth-Century Ireland”, *Historical Research* 80, no. 209 (August 2007): 419, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2007.00411.x>.

<sup>131</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, *A Soul for Sale: Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1947); Patrick Kavanagh, *Tarry Flynn* (London: Pilot Press, 1948); Seán Ó Faoláin, *The Irish* (London: Penguin, 1947); Francis Stuart, *The Pillar of Cloud* (London, 1948); Máirtín Ó Cadhain, *Cre na Cille*. (Baile Átha Cliath: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1949); Máirtín Ó Direáin, *Rogha Dánta* (Baile Átha Cliath: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1949); Michael McLaverty, *The Game Cock, and Other Stories*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949); Liam O’Flaherty, *Two Lovely Beasts, and Other Stories*. (New York: Devin-Adair, 1950).

<sup>132</sup> Garvin, *News from a New Republic*, 9.

<sup>133</sup> Kieran Woodman, *Media Control in Ireland: 1923-1983* (Galway: Galway University Press, 1985), 104.

<sup>134</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2010), 198.

<sup>135</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 198.

Arguably, history is a series of networks that conveys the operation of power within society.<sup>136</sup> Archival work for this research examines the role of the Arts Council and its influence on emerging cultural networks in the development of arts policy during this time. In exercising this influence, the Arts Council applied indirect state influence on cultural production. An analysis of drama festivals indicates the emergence of a minimum of twenty-six cultural networks in operation throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Two years after the foundation of the AIDF, Brendan O'Brien wrote a memo that noted the emergence of a regional, national and international amateur drama network that festival participants were building.<sup>137</sup> For example, the addition of an International Children's Art competition and the stay of a "party of Bretons" with local people during the festival led to a town twinning between the Athlone "Arts Council" and the "Breton Town of Angiers."<sup>138</sup> Networks emerging from cultural encounters like these constitute a way of life and shape a nation. This research demonstrates that these networks synergized with international influences, including CST, ERP, and the cold war, shaping mid-century Ireland.<sup>139</sup> However, as explored in later chapters, within these networks, a continuity of tradition exists that conveys the core lived experience of culture even as it undergoes an intergenerational transformation.<sup>140</sup>

As society modernises, the process encompasses all constitutive parts that make it work, including culture, politics, the economy, industry, social cohesion, religion, and community.<sup>141</sup> Williams maintains that "patterns of culture" reveal the underlying lived experience of the arts.<sup>142</sup> These patterns or cultural networks are present in the Arts Council's engagement with the amateur drama movement. By the mid-1950s, a collaborative approach to arts development between the Arts Council, An Tóstal, the Cultural Relations Committee, Bord Fáilte Éireann and Forás Éireann

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<sup>136</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower: Networks and Power, from the Freemasons to Facebook* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 46–48.

<sup>137</sup> Brendan O'Brien, 'What An Tóstal Has Done for One Town' (Memorandum, 25 March 1954), 2000/1952/11, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>138</sup> O'Brien, 'What An Tóstal Has Done for One Town'.

<sup>139</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 67; Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower*, 46–48.

<sup>140</sup> Brian Girvin, 'Before the Celtic Tiger: Change without Modernisation in Ireland 1959-1989', *Economic and Social Review* 41, no. 3 (2010): 351.

<sup>141</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 67; Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 160–61.

<sup>142</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 67–68.

emerged.<sup>143</sup> The following chapters show that Arts Council policy emerged through its engagement with festivals and support networks. Each organisation worked with one another in responding to issues that emerged from various cultural sources. These policy responses challenged local community festivals to engage with governance and accountability issues within their operating structure.

### **The People Engage: Amateur Drama Festivals**

While the immediate post-war period was a time of social fragmentation, it provided opportunities for a shift in thinking and intellectual culture. According to Wills, popular dramatists undertook this critique in a form ingrained in a romantic notion of “peasant and small-town Ireland.”<sup>144</sup> Even though the recorded culture or selective tradition includes material found in the Arts Council and other archives consulted, it also includes the several hundred performances of plays produced at these representative festivals between 1953 and 1968. As the Athlone, Charleville, Tubbercurry, and Scarriff experiences show, with Arts Council support, the amateur drama movement articulated a cultural response to the Irish social crisis of the 1950s and 1960s. This cultural response engaged playwrights, adjudicators, clergy, politicians, drama companies and audiences in considering a series of social issues presented on stage. I also argue that the Arts Council’s support of the amateur drama movement influenced a change in social attitudes within Irish society. Plays like John B. Keane’s *Sive*, Tom Murphy’s *On the Outside* and Máiréad Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail* (translated into English as *On Trial*) challenged resistance to change from more traditional aspects of Irish life. The amateur production of these plays spoke directly to the lived experience of audiences who gathered night after night at venues like St. Brigid’s Hall, Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, Charleville Hall, Co. Cork, Astor Cinema, Scarriff, Co. Clare, Sportex and Dean Crowe Halls, Athlone, Co. Westmeath throughout the 1950s and 1960s. As Fanning and Garvin contend, “literature articulated things that could not be spoken of in official Ireland or dealt with in the so-

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<sup>143</sup>An Bord Fáilte (or Bord Fáilte) was set up under the Tourist Traffic Act, 1952 to develop the tourism market. In 1955, the Tourist Traffic Act merged Fógra Fáilte with An Bord Fáilte into a single entity known as Bord Fáilte Éireann. It was previously known as the Irish Tourist Board and the usage of this name alternates in the archive. For ease of reading, this thesis will use Bord Fáilte; Government of Ireland, ‘Tourist Traffic Act, 1952’, Pub. L. No. 15 of 1952 (1952), <http://acts.oireachtas.ie/en.act.1952.0015.1.html>; Government of Ireland, ‘Tourist Traffic Act, 1955’, Pub. L. No. 5 of 1955 (1955), <http://www.acts.ie/en.act.1955.0005.4.html>.

<sup>144</sup> Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, 17.

called non-fictional media.”<sup>145</sup>

Social change does not begin at one historical point and ends at the next. It proceeds along a modernisation continuum, reinterpreting tradition within society and providing meaning and value for each generation.<sup>146</sup> Culture acts on society before, during and after social change. It supplies meaning for the experience of those that live within society, empowering individuals and communities to interpret and make sense of the fragmentation of human life. Gibbons’ argument that culture is “grounded in the material conditions of society” means that it is concerned with concrete living as much as the ethereal.<sup>147</sup> This concrete lived experience of culture is an essential quality that creates a dynamic society.<sup>148</sup> It is the lived experience of social networks during a particular historical period.<sup>149</sup> These cultural networks are vital when determining the quality of this lived experience. According to György Markus, as culture becomes part of recorded history, it remains a lived manifestation of society which continues to be accessible to both the audience and the artist who builds on earlier work.<sup>150</sup> In this, one sees the continuance of “tradition” within culture as art remains “living and effective” while expanding its relevance.<sup>151</sup>

For Markus, “the value of what is produced,” distinct from the means of production, gives culture significance.<sup>152</sup> He maintains that culture is “radically autonomous” because it does not belong to an individual or organisation. In experiencing culture, audiences engage an active “self-abandoning openness to its unique meaning.”<sup>153</sup> As individuals engage with what they like and interpret for their own lives, culture is “imaginatively re-experienced.”<sup>154</sup> As the amateur movement shows, the organisers and the audience’s experience of drama festivals made them culturally important.<sup>155</sup>

A review of relevant literature supports Enda Delaney’s argument that politics

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<sup>145</sup> Bryan Fanning and Tom Garvin, *The Books That Define Ireland* (Dublin: Merrion, 2014), 186.

<sup>146</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 73.

<sup>147</sup> Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, 8–9.

<sup>148</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69; Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 65.

<sup>149</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69.

<sup>150</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 12–13.

<sup>151</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 13.

<sup>152</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 12.

<sup>154</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 12.

<sup>155</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 10.

rather than lived experience informs historical understanding of events.<sup>156</sup> However, as seen in amateur drama festivals, engagement with “lived experience” empowers the questioning of political and other ideologies.<sup>157</sup> As Gibbons maintains, the “lived experience of popular memory” is found in the recorded culture of historical writing and the literary fiction of the time.<sup>158</sup> Literature, drama, art, music, fashion and architecture, to name but a few, constitute a lived record of a particular place and time. For example, as explored in chapters two and three, the Arts Council supported building and renovating community halls while insisting on staging work by Irish playwrights. Using these venues to promote drama, music and cultural festivals is a concrete example of this lived record, which connects a “deep community” that explores the understanding of meaning transmitted through the generations.<sup>159</sup>

As previously mentioned, An Tóstal influenced the establishment of many amateur drama festivals throughout rural Ireland. The Arts Council archive indicates that between 1952 and 1968, approximately seventy-four cultural festivals and amateur drama groups received support.<sup>160</sup> The emergence of these festivals throughout the country at a time of economic strife showed the need to creatively express the nature of what it was to be a society.<sup>161</sup> Just as CEMA boosted morale during Britain’s wartime crisis, the emergence of arts festivals played a similar role in 1950s Ireland. Unfortunately, several festivals which coincided with An Tóstal were locally based with a short lifespan (see chapter five). Nevertheless, some festivals that emerged, including those under discussion, continue to prove the vitally important role of culture in twenty-first-century Irish society.

### Method

Archival work is painstaking and time-consuming.<sup>162</sup> It pieces together “fragments” of experiences that became part of the recorded culture creating a story of a particular

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<sup>156</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 118.

<sup>157</sup> Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), locs. 593–612, Kindle.

<sup>158</sup> Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, 15.

<sup>159</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69.

<sup>160</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘File Register 1951-1975’ (Ledger, Dublin, 2017), Arts Council Archive.

<sup>161</sup> Fanning and Garvin, *Books That Define Ireland*, 186.

<sup>162</sup> Christopher Innes, Katherine Carlstrom, and Scott Fraser, *Twentieth-Century British and American Theatre: A Critical Guide to Archives*. (Milton: Routledge, 2019), loc. 59, Kindle.

time, place or movement.<sup>163</sup> Seventy years after the establishment of the Arts Council, its time witnesses are not necessarily the people who operated its functions in the period under discussion but the documentary evidence left behind.<sup>164</sup> The documentary assessment inevitably leads to “‘social’ analysis, whether in a lived culture, a past period or the selective tradition which is a social organisation.”<sup>165</sup> The cultural process occurs when each element is analysed considering the networks it engages.

Interpreting Williams, John Storey defines culture as “the texts and practices whose principal function is to signify, to produce or to be the occasion for the production of meaning.”<sup>166</sup> This definition has proved helpful to the archival work undertaken during this research. Following Williams and Storey, the Arts Council archive, coupled with the recorded experiences of the amateur drama movement, provides the text and practices analysed in this study. In this context, this study focuses on these research questions: How did Arts Council policy shape the delivery and experience of amateur drama in Irish society? How did amateur drama festivals influence the modernisation of post-war Irish society?

The critical question is not how the development of culture changed society but how the organisations involved in cultural production participated with all the other actors in bringing about this change. As Williams argues, in analysing the influence of culture on post-war Irish society, one must consider the inter-relationships of these constitutive parts.<sup>167</sup> These constitutive elements include the Arts Council, the festivals it supported, and how social, political, economic, and cultural tensions progress within them.

The primary archival work occurred at the Arts Council offices in Merrion Square, Dublin, between 2017 and 2019. Other archives included the O’Malley Archive at the University of Galway, Drama League of Ireland Library, the National Archives, Sligo County Library, Aidan Heavey Library, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, and Libraries Ireland. The sourcing of original play scripts and dramaturgical approaches used by the drama groups at festivals was a particular challenge for this study. The library of the Drama League of Ireland, started by the Western Drama Festival in the

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<sup>163</sup> Barry Houlihan, ‘Introduction: The Potential of the Archive’, in *Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive: Theory, Practice, Performance*, ed. Barry Houlihan, Reimagining Ireland, Volume 87 (Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2019), loc. 399, Kindle.

<sup>164</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 70.

<sup>165</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 74.

<sup>166</sup> Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, loc. 266.

<sup>167</sup> McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 19.

1950s, and Libraries Ireland proved a reliable source for various plays.<sup>168</sup> However, as Barry Houlihan maintains, the emergence of digital archives has changed research methods.<sup>169</sup> When the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-21 halted further exploration of the physical archives, the availability of digital archives meant adjusting and continuing the research process was possible. This research extensively used online archives, including the Irish Statute Book, Oireachtas Library Digital Collections, the National Archives, the Irish Newspaper Archive, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Scribd, Playography Ireland, Drama Online and Concord Theatricals.

Between 2017 and 2019, I visited the Arts Council Archive documenting minutes, letters, memoranda, invoices, and accounts. When venturing into the archive, the number of applications from parish priests and religious orders seeking support for the building and renovating halls was notable. Another archive feature included a wide range of applications from groups seeking help with concerts, music scholarships, exhibitions, and renovation of halls in every part of the country, including Northern Ireland (see chapter four). However, when examining the archive file register, I realised that the Arts Council supported many festivals throughout the post-war years.

At this stage, the number of documents photographed, and festivals supported was larger than the scope of the research. As with my earlier work on the YISS, I expected to find details concerning the daily events of the Arts Council's engagement with Irish society in minute books and letters. Instead, I found records of decisions and actions that demanded much more investigation. To narrow the scope, I searched the Irish Newspaper Archive (INA) and ProQuest Historical Newspaper archives for articles that put flesh on the bones of the story emerging from the Arts Council archive. For example, opening the North Cork Drama Festival (NCDF) in Charleville in 1954, playwright Bryan MacMahon commented that country districts needed the type of leadership exemplified by the NCDF in Cork.<sup>170</sup> Seán O'Beirne, president of the Amateur Drama Council of Ireland (ADCI), echoed MacMahon when he remarked in 1955 that "some of the greatest movements came from the people...and this movement

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<sup>168</sup> 'Amateur Drama Library Has 2000 Manuscripts', *Irish Independent*, 20 April 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive; 'Amateur Drama Council Manuscript Competition', *Westmeath Independent*, 23 June 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>169</sup> Houlihan, 'Introduction: The Potential of the Archive', loc. 399.

<sup>170</sup> 'Fourteen Drama Groups Participating: Opening of North Cork Festival', *Cork Examiner*, 2 April 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

to revive drama in rural Ireland was one of them.”<sup>171</sup> He criticised the government for ignoring amateur drama “both as a means of preventing migration and emigration.”<sup>172</sup>

In 1956 MacMahon revisited his remarks on leadership when he commented that

in rural Ireland, with its many ills, there were three outstanding places which had done something to use their own resources; they were Charleville, Tubbercurry and Scariff. If everybody in rural Ireland did as much, the country would have fewer ills.<sup>173</sup>

MacMahon’s comments that these festivals responded to the crisis unfolding within Irish society in the 1950s were intriguing. Drama societies in each of these rural towns, which along with the All-Ireland Drama Festival (AIDF), are the focus of this research, responded to the challenges facing post-war Irish society by creating cultural festivals.

I checked the file register to discover that the Arts Council supported festivals in these three towns. Therefore, I decided to focus on drama festivals that originated in the post-war years and still exist almost seventy to eighty years later. I concentrate on the All-Ireland Drama Festival (AIDF) in Athlone, Co. Westmeath, the Western Drama Festival (WDF) in Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, the Clare Drama Festival (CDF) in Scarriff, Co. Clare and the North Cork Drama Festival (NCDF) in Charleville, Co. Cork.<sup>174</sup> These festivals fulfilled three criteria, which framed their inclusion and narrowed the study. First, they received Arts Council support through the 1950s. Second, they responded to issues facing Irish society in the 1950s and 1960s. Third, they were still operating when beginning this study in 2016.

I contacted the organisers of the respective festivals to determine if any archival material was available. While little was available, I accessed play listings and programmes from the All-Ireland, Clare, Western and North Cork Drama Festivals. Consequently, chapters two, three, four and five analyse sixteen plays. These, together with recent festival histories by Gus Smith, Gearoid O’Brien, Kieran Sheedy, and the

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Drama Council President Opens Cork Festival’, *Irish Press*, 11 April 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’, *Cork Examiner*, 11 April 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>173</sup> ‘Drama Festival: West Limerick Group’s Success’, *Limerick Leader*, 21 April 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>174</sup> In 2023, these festivals marked some significant milestones for voluntary organisations as the Western Drama Festival (established in 1943) celebrated its eightieth year. The North Cork and All-Ireland Drama Festivals (established in 1953) reached the seventieth anniversary of their foundation while the Clare Drama Festival (established in 1947) marked its seventy-fourth year.

organising committee of the WDF, were invaluable resources in developing this story.<sup>175</sup>

### Chapter Outline

Five chapters explore the story of the development of Arts Council policy, its engagement with CST, and the lived experience of the amateur drama movement. Chapter One explores the establishment of the Arts Council and its overall policy direction using speeches and memos written and delivered by Little during his tenure as Arts Council director. Influenced by CST and the rebuilding of Western civilization, this chapter explores how responsibility for the development of culture decentralised to local communities, who became accountable for the direction of amateur drama and other arts festivals.

Chapters two to five examine the festivals' response to the culture/civilization-building vision of the Arts Council. Overall, these chapters explore how amateur theatre occupied a local, national, and global space in response to this vision.<sup>176</sup> This response prepared audiences for the modernisation of Irish society throughout the decade. These chapters examine an aspect of cultural policy, exploring how the drama festival under consideration is interpreted and applied through the staging of plays. The sixteen plays discussed across chapters two to five emerged from a catalogue of plays compiled for this research (see appendices). I composed this catalogue by analysing archival festival programmes and articles from the *Irish Times*, *New York Times*, *Guardian*, and Irish Newspaper Archive. Some plays were unavailable, out of print or lost. The availability of scripts or dramaturgical information about the festival performances determined the selection of plays analysed in this dissertation.

Chapter two examines how Arts Council policy concerning the contribution of festivals to the local community led to the work of aspiring playwrights like Keane and Murphy, raising issues of social concern on the amateur stage. Chapter three examines the engagement of some Roman Catholic bishops and priests with the amateur drama movement by focusing on plays produced by clerics like Father P.V. O'Brien and Father Joseph Cassidy (later Archbishop of Tuam) between 1953 and

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<sup>175</sup> Gus Smith, *Festival Glory in Athlone* (Dublin, Ireland: Aherlow Publishers, 1977), 217–20; Gearóid O'Brien, ed., *All-Ireland Drama Festival Athlone 1953-2002: 50 Glorious Years of Drama* (Athlone: All-Ireland Festival Committee, 2002), 106–27; Kieran Sheedy, *Clare Drama Festival, Scarriff 1947-1996* (Scarriff, Co. Clare: Clare Drama Festival Committee, 1996), 188–90; Western Drama Festival Committee, *The Actors Are Come Hither: A History of the Western Drama Festival, Tubbercurry, 1944-1993* (Sligo: Western Drama Festival, 1993), 85–119.

<sup>176</sup> Morash, 'Making Space', 6–20.

1968. Using the examples of Charleville and Dean Crowe halls, this chapter also considers how the Arts Council challenged the governance of church buildings used as festival venues. Chapter four examines the plays produced at the AIDF by drama groups like the Newpoint Players and Orangefield Dramatic Society. It examines how the national issue of partition influenced Little's vision and argues that the ADCI responded by attempting to build cross-border cultural solidarity. Finally, chapter five examines the relationship of the amateur movement to the Abbey Theatre through its engagement with world theatre, as exemplified by the work of Jean Anouilh, Tennessee Williams, Eugène Ionesco, and Beckett.

## Chapter One: “Prime the Pump” into Action

### Introduction

Like many European nations, post-war Irish Governments supported values rooted in a Christian democrat tradition of “Catholic movements of the political centre.”<sup>1</sup> This movement unsuccessfully sought to influence the direction and shape of European politics in the inter-war years but became directly relevant after the second world war. In the war’s aftermath, European Christian Democratic governments took responsibility for the “well-being of [their] citizens.”<sup>2</sup> Such commitments gave birth to the British welfare state and National Health Service.<sup>3</sup> As the government accepted aspects of the welfare state philosophy, it became open to the possibility of funding the arts.<sup>4</sup> From within its Christian democratic ideals, the government culturally responded to post-war modernisation by establishing the Arts Council.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of political vision and direction, Christian democracy thrived because of its “social and moral reforms” programme, which was at the heart of CST during displacement and familial rupture.<sup>6</sup> The adoption of Christian democracy throughout Europe was consistent with a “vote” that was “heavily conservative, especially on social issues and in regions of high Catholic practice.”<sup>7</sup> Though Girvin claims that this embrace of Catholic values indicated a continuity of tradition within Irish society, it was consistent with international efforts to rebuild a fragile European civilization.<sup>8</sup> Christian democratic parties advocating a vision of post-war European reconciliation became the choice of people, especially women, who wished to avoid the right-wing imbalance that led to the ravages of war at the end of the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, this chapter argues that establishing the Arts Council and An Tóstal was consistent with this broader rebuilding of post-war European civilization.

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<sup>1</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 80.

<sup>2</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 76–77.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Renwick, *Bread for All: The Origins of the Welfare State* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 4, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Act, 1951.

<sup>6</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 80–81.

<sup>7</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 81; Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 351; Betts, *Ruin and Renewal*, 317.

<sup>9</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 80.

## Chapter One: “Prime the Pump” into Action

Seven months after President Seán T. O’Kelly signed the first Arts Act into law, the full Arts Council met for the first time on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1952.<sup>10</sup> The Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, and opposition leader John A. Costello attended. During the meeting, which considered procedural matters, they remarked on cultural development’s economic and social advantages. De Valera acknowledged that the Arts Act could not have passed without the “initiative” of Costello, his immediate predecessor.<sup>11</sup> Affirming the council’s work, he voiced concern about the influence of materialism, emphasising that intellectual development enabled Ireland to take its place among the cultural nations of the world.<sup>12</sup> Agreeing with de Valera’s comments, Costello remarked, “there could be no nationality or prosperity without art.”<sup>13</sup> Consistent with the ERP’s encouragement of trade and tourism during his time in government, Costello, like Bodkin before him, connected future economic prosperity to the development of culture and the arts.<sup>14</sup>

Responding to de Valera and Costello, Arts Council Director Little lamented the slow progression of cultural development. He attributed this to the “conflict” that marked the beginning of the State.<sup>15</sup> He commented on the substantial international investment of countries with more advanced tourist economies. Like Bodkin, de Valera and Costello, Little saw the economic benefits of cultural tourism that could use “our own talents, treasures, and energy, giving employment to our own people and adding to the largest single export asset in the country.”<sup>16</sup> While speculating about potential barriers, Little remarked on the “encouraging signs” of cultural development emerging “in the cities, towns and villages.”<sup>17</sup> He maintained that the Arts Council’s role was to “instigate and inspire cultural activities - so to speak, to prime the pump into healthy

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<sup>10</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Act, 1951; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of the Arts Council of Ireland 25th January 1952’ (Minutes, Dublin, 25 January 1952), ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Move to Advance Nation in Cultural Sphere’, *Irish Independent*, 26 January 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>12</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Precis of a Speech by An Taoiseach, Mr Eamon de Valera TD at the First Meeting of An Chomhairle Ealaíon’ (Minutes, Dublin, 25 January 1952), CE: 33, ARN: 2609/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>13</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Precis of a Speech of Mr John A. Costello TD at the First Meeting of An Chomhairle Ealaíon’ (Minutes, Dublin, 25 January 1952), CE: 33, ARN: 2609/1952/1, Arts Council Archive; ‘Move to Advance Nation’.

<sup>14</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 44; Whelan, ‘The New World and the Old’, 187.

<sup>15</sup> P. J. Little, ‘Speech: Reply of Deputy P.J. Little, Director, An Comhairle Ealaíon to An Taoiseach’ (Speech, 25 January 1952), 2, CE:33 ARN: 2609/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Move to Advance Nation’.

<sup>17</sup> Little, ‘Reply to An Taoiseach’, 2.

action.”<sup>18</sup>

Little’s use of the language of community activism implied the potential of middle-class culture to embrace a way of life that could catalyse a socio-cultural movement within the State. Little’s cultural activism, this chapter argues, was an example of the principle of subsidiarity, which encouraged a voluntary approach to arts development that resulted in the emergence of an amateur drama movement. Kennedy and Cooke are critical of Little for his lack of assertiveness regarding the political independence of the Arts Council from the government.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, I argue that the amateur movement emerged as a response to his vision of cultural development. I explore this vision by analysing memos and speeches that outline the Arts Council’s encouragement of voluntary cultural development.

### **At Arms-length**

As noted, on St Patrick’s Day 1943, de Valera nostalgically reflected on an idyllic experience of rural life, the privations of which (depicted in Walter Macken’s plays and explored in chapters two and four) drove people to seek the attractions of a better life overseas.<sup>20</sup> If ongoing emigration rejected de Valera’s concerns about Irish life, it also showed a desire for a modernised Irish society that provided for all its citizens.<sup>21</sup> For Little, the economic and material benefits of the nation’s modernisation needed to be matched by the broader education and tourism returns of cultural development.<sup>22</sup> In a speech to the Royal Institute of Architects in 1952, he maintained that it was necessary as a nation to overcome the neglect of culture.<sup>23</sup> From his perspective, such neglect resulted in a preoccupation with “material issues” with detrimental consequences for “the things of the spirit.”<sup>24</sup>

The neglect of culture and the tension between material prosperity and cultural development was a recurrent theme for Bodkin, Costello and Little. In the *Report on the Arts in Ireland*, Bodkin echoed Winston Churchill when he described the neglect

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<sup>18</sup> Little, ‘Reply to An Taoiseach’, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*; Pat Cooke, ‘The Artist and the State in Ireland: Artist Autonomy and the Arm’s Length Principle in a Time of Crisis’, *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 37, no. 1 (2011): 98–119; Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 379–409.

<sup>20</sup> deValera, ‘On Language and the Irish Nation’, 466; Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, 172; O’Gorman, ‘Critical Perspectives’, 214.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, 204–6.

<sup>22</sup> P. J. Little, ‘Returning Thanks to the Royal Institute of Architects on Behalf of the Guests.’ (Speech, 3 December 1952), 3, CE: 68, ARN: 33215/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>23</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 3.

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of culture as an “iron curtain” that fell on Irish artistic development.<sup>25</sup> Driving home the point, Bodkin, like Little some years later, used nationalist rhetoric and heroes like Thomas Davis to encourage the government to support the development of art and culture.<sup>26</sup>

Though lamenting the shortcomings of Irish institutions, Bodkin, like Keynes, emphasised the socio-economic benefits of cultural education.<sup>27</sup> He argued that developing an informed audience was central to promoting and developing culture in Ireland.<sup>28</sup> However, while accentuating the spiritual development of the nation, for Costello and de Valera, the economic benefit of the arts to industrial development and employment was of prime importance.<sup>29</sup> Such benefits included industrial design, the income generated by artists, built heritage, and increased employment along the “western seaboard and in districts in our country where our people are living upon a bare subsistence level.”<sup>30</sup>

In outlining the council’s priorities during the debate on the Arts Bill in 1951, Costello stressed that

concentration should be directed to the development of appreciation of the fine arts in the popular sense of the term and, in the applied arts, the application of art to industry. Music and the drama may come later...when there is greater public interest in matters connected with pictorial art and architecture and the application of art to industry.<sup>31</sup>

Bodkin contrasted the value of arts development with the enmeshment of nationalism and religion, arguing that culture transcended both in its impact on the lived experience of post-war Irish society.<sup>32</sup> Arguably, when politicians accentuated the language of spirituality over material development, which economically benefited the state, they meant the aspiration of many citizens to find a better way of life than that which de Valera presented in 1943.<sup>33</sup> For many, this dream resulted in a choice to emigrate rather than engage with de Valera’s protectionist vision. Nevertheless, as the Arts Council

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<sup>25</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 7; Winston Churchill, ‘The Sinews of Peace: A Speech to Westminster College, Fulton Missouri, 5th March 1946’, in *The Sinews of Peace*, e-pub (1948; repr., New York: Rosetta Books, 2014), 132, Scribd.

<sup>26</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 44; Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 545–46.

<sup>28</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 64.

<sup>29</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage.’, Pub. L. No. 9, 125 (1951), <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1951-04-24/30/>.

<sup>30</sup> Government of Ireland, Committee on Finance, Vote 3 Department of the Taoiseach.

<sup>31</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage.

<sup>32</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 7–8.

<sup>33</sup> deValera, ‘On Language and the Irish Nation’.

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archive indicates, Little’s memos and speeches consistently argue that Irish people could equally value the importance of cultural development alongside material prosperity. For Keynes, the chief purpose of an Arts Council lay in providing “courage, confidence and opportunity” for this type of cultural development.<sup>34</sup>

Like all Fine Gael led governments throughout the twentieth century, the Inter-party Government lost the 1951 general election, and Fianna Fáil resumed power.<sup>35</sup> Costello wrote to de Valera promoting Bodkin as chair of the Arts Council without success.<sup>36</sup> Finally, de Valera appointed Little director of the Arts Council (1952-56).<sup>37</sup> Criticising the appointment, the Fine Gael TD and future party leader James Dillon described it as a consolation for not being included in the cabinet.<sup>38</sup> De Valera conceded that Little’s absence from the cabinet made him available for the appointment but argued that the former minister’s previous advocacy for establishing an arts body made him an ideal choice as director.<sup>39</sup> Little engaged in a fact-finding mission to London and Paris to prepare for his appointment. He met with those involved in the cultural life of both nations, including officials of the ACGB.<sup>40</sup>

After he visited Paris and London, Little submitted a memorandum on *The Arts in Ireland* to the government in October 1951.<sup>41</sup> He proposed the creation of a “committee of Ministers [which included the Ministers for Education, Seán Moylan and Posts and Telegraph’s Erskine Childers]...to help establish the necessary control.”<sup>42</sup> Such an arrangement balanced “certain principles of public interest and policy” while relieving the Department of the Taoiseach of the burden of cultural policy administration.<sup>43</sup> As in Britain, it was expected that the Arts Council would come under the management of the Minister for Education.<sup>44</sup> However, according to

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<sup>34</sup> Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 551–52.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Collins and Ciara Meehan, *Saving the State: Fine Gael from Collins to Varadkar* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2020), 66–67.

<sup>36</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 53.

<sup>37</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Committee on Finance, Vóta 73 An Chomhairle Ealaion’, Pub. L. No. 9, 129 (1952), <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1952-03-05/56/?highlight%5B0%5D=arts&highlight%5B1%5D=arts&highlight%5B2%5D=art&highlight%5B3%5D=arts&highlight%5B4%5D=arts>.

<sup>39</sup> Government of Ireland, Committee on Finance, Vóta 73 An Chomhairle Ealaion.

<sup>40</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 65; Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> P. J. Little, ‘Memorandum for the Taoiseach: The Arts in Ireland’ (Memorandum, Dublin, 22 October 1951), CE: 1, ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>42</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 1.

<sup>44</sup> This was also the expectation of R. A. Butler in the mid 1940’s when establishing the Arts Council of Great Britain.

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Little, independent advice affirmed the provision outlined in the Arts Act (1951) that the ultimate cultural authority was the Taoiseach, with responsibilities devolved to the director and members of the Arts Council.<sup>45</sup> To attain the aims of the *Report on the Arts in Ireland*, Little, Moylan, and Childers argued that such an organisation be independent of politics and political parties.<sup>46</sup>

In arguing for this independence, Little recognised the disparity and dysfunction that could arise from the different approaches within the various cultural institutions. Accordingly, he recommended that the Arts Council work independently of government “departmental interference, delay and friction.”<sup>47</sup> In an example of such tensions, Moylan wrote to Little, lamenting the unwillingness of his department to encourage drama education which, in his view, was vital for the nation.<sup>48</sup> This view recognised that “education is the process by which a particular culture transmits itself across the generations.”<sup>49</sup>

Though emphasising the arms-length nature of the independence of the Arts Council, the memo also stressed that the new body could be a “buffer between the Taoiseach and the public - a body to which in answering awkward questions in parliament, the Taoiseach can refer the matter for consideration and decision.”<sup>50</sup> As mentioned above, in the mid-1940s Little unsuccessfully proposed establishing an Arts Council.<sup>51</sup> However, the proposed use of the new Arts Council as a political shield for the government may have been a persuasive tactic. Ruth Blandina-Quinn claims that there was no political advantage to Irish politicians lobbying the Arts Council for issues of “peripheral concern and where... decisions are not constituency based.”<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless as the archive demonstrates, this did not prevent politicians like Costello as Taoiseach or Denis O’Sullivan, the Government Chief Whip successfully lobbying

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<sup>45</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’; Seán Moylan to P.J. Little, Letter, 13 November 1951, CE: 1, ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive; P. J. Little to Seán Moylan, 14 November 1951, CE: 1, ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive; Erskine Childers to P. J. Little, Letter, 27 November 1951, CE:1, ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>47</sup> P. J. Little, ‘Memo on Suggested Cultural Institute’ (Memorandum, Dublin, 1951), 4, CE:1, ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>48</sup> Seán Moylan to P. J. Little, Letter, 17 November 1951, 1, CE:1 ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, Needs and Opportunities for Study (Williamsburg, Virginia: University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1960), 28, Scribd.

<sup>50</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 47–48.

<sup>52</sup> Ruth Blandina Quinn, ‘Distance or Intimacy? The Arm’s Length Principle, the British Government and the Arts Council of Great Britain’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 4, no. 1 (1997): 132, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286639709358066>.

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the Arts Council on behalf of Kavanagh, and as examined in chapter three, the NCDF.<sup>53</sup>

It was suggested that the Arts Council include people from a broad cultural background, with specialists developing discipline-focused panels. Little suggested a political compromise that included Taoiseach’s nominees, “prominent persons [and] supporters of opposition parties, with the required qualifications who could neutralise political hostility.”<sup>54</sup> Reflecting on the relationship between Church and State, Childers (an Anglican) recommended that “it might also be wise to appoint a priest” to the board of the Arts Council.<sup>55</sup> Little and Childers sent a list of potential members of the Arts Council to de Valera, who ignored it and appointed his own choices.<sup>56</sup> The first Arts Council included the American philanthropist Chester Beatty, the president of University College Galway, Monsignor Pádraig de Brún, R. J. Hayes, John Maher, Director of the National Gallery, Thomas McGreevy, and Lawrence Parsons, the Earl of Rosse.<sup>57</sup>



An Chomhairle Ealaíon

First meeting

Back row: L to R Mr John Maher; Professor Séamus Ó Duilearga Dr Richard J Hayes; Senator Edward A McGuire; Professor Dónal Ó Corcora; Muiris Ó Muimhneacháin, Secretary, Dept of the Taoiseach; Dr William O'Sullivan, Secretary, An Chomhairle Ealaíon.  
Front row: L to R Mr. Thomas McGreevy; Monsignor Pádraig de Brún; Eamon de Valera, T.D./ Taoiseach; Mr Patrick J Little, T. D., Director; Mr John A Costello, S C, T D; The Earl of Rosse; Miss Muriel Gahan *Insert*: Dr Alfred Chester Beatty By courtesy, *Irish Times*

**Figure 2:** The Members of An Chomhairle Ealaíon / the Arts Council of Ireland with An Taoiseach Éamon de Valera TD, Patrick Little TD, and leader of the opposition, John A Costello TD, 10th January 1952 (photo: First Report and Accounts, 4th December 1951 to 31st March 1953)

<sup>53</sup> Denis O’Sullivan TD to William O’Sullivan, Letter, 28 February 1955, CE: 286, ARN: 2000/1954/3 CE: 286, Arts Council Archive; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of the Arts Council of Ireland / An Chomhairle Ealaíon CE: 432 Mr Patrick Kavanagh’ (Minute, Dublin, 14 June 1955), 139, CE: 432, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>54</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’.

<sup>55</sup> Childers to Little, 27 November 1951, 1; Lawrence William White and Paucic J. Dempsey, ‘Childers, Erskine Hamilton’, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 1 February 2011, <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.001648.v2>.

<sup>56</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 67.

<sup>57</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of the Arts Council of Ireland Concerning Procedures’ (Minutes, Dublin, 10 January 1952), 1, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

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No more than the government appointees, the co-opted members were experts in their respective areas of interest. These included Senator E.A. McGuire, Muriel Gahan of the Irish Countrywoman’s Association, Professor Seamus Delargy, Director of the Irish Folklore Commission, and Daniel Corkery (fig. 2). Including Beatty, an American philanthropist, showed the importance of international investment in Irish culture. The addition of Corkery, an Irish literary activist, and de Brún, a Catholic priest, showed the political balance needed in shaping the council.

Theoretically, the arms-length principle aimed to provide artistic freedom in cultural production and, taking on the role of the public intellectual, critical engagement with Irish society.<sup>58</sup> Arguably, in the network of relationships between the government as a funder, the Arts Council, and the communities it served, cultural development became an example of “the power of the State itself.”<sup>59</sup> The Department of the Taoiseach exercised this power through a tight budgetary control that belied the independence and authority of the Arts Council.<sup>60</sup> From the Department of Finance’s perspective, any cultural expenditure which did not yield an economic return was a waste of resources.<sup>61</sup> By controlling the Arts Council’s finances, the government attempted to shape the delivery of cultural production within society.<sup>62</sup> Where the government provides arts funding, potentially, “all cultural and intellectual activity in society takes place on ground demarcated by the State.”<sup>63</sup> For example, the placing by the Arts Council of a condition that drama companies perform plays by Irish playwrights (see chapter two). A danger of this approach is that creating culture becomes a socially conditioned product that, as with the Abbey Theatre, “legitimises grand national or State projects” (see chapter five).<sup>64</sup>

The Department of Finance’s reluctance to fund cultural development projects was consistent with long practice. From the 1930s to the 1950s, officials refused to consider new economic thinking that could have helped it deal imaginatively with the emerging socio-economic crisis.<sup>65</sup> A legacy of British civil service attitudes, an “old

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<sup>58</sup> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), 10; Cooke, ‘Artist and the State’, 107.

<sup>59</sup> Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 10; Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 146.

<sup>60</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 10; McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 41.

<sup>63</sup> McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 38.

<sup>64</sup> McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 562.

boy” network of recruitment and decision-making influenced this resistance.<sup>66</sup> However, the resistance mindset was not only restricted to an inherited civil service.

In 1951 despite the “pressing matters of economic, financial and social policy,” Costello encouraged the Dáil to take responsibility for cultural development.<sup>67</sup> Despite this, the initial grant awarded to the Arts Council in 1952 was £1,100, increasing to £20,000 in 1955, where it remained for the rest of the decade.<sup>68</sup> Compared to “Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Portugal,” the financial provision of the Fine Arts Bill (1951) was “of insignificant dimensions.”<sup>69</sup> This meagre allocation is shocking when contrasted with the £25,000 offered by Lord MacMillan as a budget for CEMA in 1940.<sup>70</sup> As the *First Annual Report of An Chomhairle Ealaíon* conceded in 1953, without total funding, the council used “propaganda and organisation,” including religious and nationalist language, to develop the arts.<sup>71</sup>

### A Cultural Movement

As mentioned earlier, the development of culture was not always a priority for the Irish Government.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, establishing a short-lived “Ministry for Fine Arts” in 1921 indicated the political value of soft power that the development of culture could bring.<sup>73</sup> As successive Free-State governments, led by Cumann na nGaedhael, engaged in post-independence State building, they recognised the benefit of using Irish art and culture to market the newly built Ardnacrusha Power plant in the 1920s.<sup>74</sup> For Costello, almost three decades later, language and literature were of secondary importance to the economic value of the visual arts on industrial design, which in his view, was a priority for the new Arts Council. His emphasis on the economic benefits of culture

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<sup>66</sup> McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland’, 41–42.

<sup>67</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage., sec. 1287.

<sup>68</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘An Comhairle Ealaíon First Report and Accounts 1951-1953’, pdf (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1953), 8, Arts Council Archive, [https://author.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/An\\_Chomhairle\\_Ealaon\\_1951-53.pdf](https://author.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/An_Chomhairle_Ealaon_1951-53.pdf); An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘An Comhairle Ealaíon Third Annual Report 1st April 1954 to 31st March 1955’, pdf (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1955), 21, Arts Council Archive, [https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/an\\_chomhairle\\_ealaion\\_1954-55.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/an_chomhairle_ealaion_1954-55.pdf); An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘An Comhairle Ealaíon Eighth Annual Report and Accounts from 1st April, 1959 to 31st March, 1960’, pdf (Dublin, Stationery Office, 1960), 34, Arts Council Archive, [https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/An\\_Chomhairle\\_Ealaion\\_1959-60.pdf](https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/An_Chomhairle_Ealaion_1959-60.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage., sec. 1289.

<sup>70</sup> Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘First Report’, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Rafter, *Taoisigh and the Arts*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Bodkin, ‘Report on the Arts’, 65; Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 149.

<sup>74</sup> Sorcha O’Brien, *Powering the Nation: Images of the Shannon Scheme and Electricity in Ireland* (Newbridge, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2017), 132.

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was in continuity with that of the Cumann na nGaedhael Governments. Thirty years after its foundation, the passing of the Arts Act (1951) and the establishment of the Arts Council showed that the State recognised the importance of culture in shaping the nation.

Little’s memos and speeches, influenced by nationalist imagery and CST principles, specifically subsidiarity and socialization, utilised the propaganda approach recommended in the first Arts Council report. The principle of subsidiarity discouraged direct “state intervention.”<sup>75</sup> However, subsequent social teaching developments supported a “planned interventionist action” socialization approach when the number of groups involved was too many to respond coherently.<sup>76</sup> Arguably, one finds elements of the principles of subsidiarity and socialization in the practice of the early Arts Council. In a spirit of subsidiarity, Little advocated establishing a broad policy incorporating all cultural and intellectual endeavours devolved to the regions. For him, “the Arts Council will have succeeded in its task when it induces a large section of the Irish public to enjoy music and drama... with that ability, power of observation and judgement which they apply to their own problems and amusements.”<sup>77</sup> When cultural appreciation became a regular part of people’s daily lives, the Arts Council’s work would be complete. This measure of success operated from a philosophy that reduced the need for the existence of an Arts Council as cultural development and consumption became self-sufficient and self-supporting. It envisaged cultural communities taking ownership of their artistic direction. Such empowerment goes beyond the mere cosmetic and involves a profound social transformation, which is challenging to quantify.<sup>78</sup> Keynes’s belief in a work-free future where the quality of life, rather than economic issues, shaped civilised society underpinned this approach.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, State support of the arts empowered people to develop a good quality of life which it hoped led to greater cultural appreciation and consumption.<sup>80</sup> As cultural production and consumption stabilised, the need for ongoing State support would recede. From this perspective, rather than a means of

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<sup>75</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Third Edition (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 1001.

<sup>76</sup> McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1001.

<sup>77</sup> P. J. Little, ‘Memorandum: On Discovering Ireland’ (Memorandum, Dublin, ND), 1, ARN: 33215/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>78</sup> Desmond Murphy, *A Return to Spirit: After the Mythic Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 96–98.

<sup>79</sup> Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 540.

<sup>80</sup> Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 545–46.

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cultivating sustainable production, the Arts Council was a short-lived solution to the problem of cultural consumption. This approach envisioned a time when, with its purpose fulfilled, it would no longer be needed.

At the first meeting of the Arts Council in January 1952 and in subsequent speeches and memos, Little outlined his vision. He consistently invoked “the spirit of Thomas Davis,” a nineteenth-century Irish cultural nationalist icon, to advance his argument that cultural development was an “authentic [interpretation] of nationalism.”<sup>81</sup> Such an approach engaged a “serious purpose of strengthening the morale of the nation with as much decentralisation as possible.”<sup>82</sup> Despite nationalist rhetoric like Little’s, which sought solace in fallen heroes, post-war Ireland sought comfort in material and social prosperity, a shift that emphasised welfare and modernisation that broadly reflected the views of those who emigrated.<sup>83</sup> For many, an Irish Government that economically encouraged the emigration of thousands throughout the decade rather than “cherish[ing] all the children of the nation equally” could not provide this prosperity.<sup>84</sup>

During the first meeting of the Arts Council, both post-war Taoisigh subtly recognised that the experience of wartime migration to Britain gave Irish citizens a taste of a better way of life.<sup>85</sup> Fianna Fáil, in government since 1932, adopted a protectionist economic policy designed to support the indigenous industry that continued into the 1950s.<sup>86</sup> As a result, emigration became an escape from the rigours of Irish society.<sup>87</sup> As the 1950s progressed, 400,000 people left Ireland, and the fear was that the Irish nation would become extinct.<sup>88</sup> During the decade, the constant flow of people out of the country was symptomatic of a “restlessness of spirit” that showed a cultural disruption in Irish society.

Moreover, this massive emigration provided “a ‘safety valve’ against social unrest,” as many of those who may have punished the government at elections could

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<sup>81</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 3.

<sup>83</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 113.

<sup>84</sup> Alan O’Day and John Stevenson, eds., ‘Proclamation of the Irish Republic, Issued 24 April 1916’, in *Irish Historical Documents since 1800* (Dublin, Ireland: Gill & Macmillan, 1992), 161; Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 114.

<sup>85</sup> Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, 40–41.

<sup>86</sup> David McCullagh, *De Valera: Rule 1932-1975*, vol. II (Dublin: Gill Books, 2018), 152.

<sup>87</sup> R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London: Penguin History, 1989), 349–50.

<sup>88</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 222.

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not do so.<sup>89</sup> Through continued emigration, Irish people engaged in the most dramatic form of social critique, rejecting the idyllic image of rural Ireland that de Valera presented in 1943. Emigration demonstrated that people were already moving beyond the government’s limitations to resolve the challenges of social and economic life. The various means of modern communication, including the telephone, cinema, radio, and the introduction of television, became the focus of blame for this social crisis. Though O’Gorman claims that the amateur movement did not challenge the socio-political system, the following chapters outline how it provided for those who stayed a means of articulating the desire for change in Irish society.<sup>90</sup>

In what initially appears to be a contradiction, though Little invoked the memory of Davis, he pragmatically adopted the practice of the ACGB.<sup>91</sup> Just as the Irish Government adopted British governmental structures thirty years before, in 1952, the Irish Arts Council adopted the ACGB approach, establishing three panels for music, drama, and “Irish literature and drama.”<sup>92</sup> The drama panel provided “technical advice” on aspects of the halls programme.<sup>93</sup> As discussed in chapter three, this advice aided the development of stage facilities for many drama festivals throughout the decade.

Assisted by funding from Foras Éireann and the Carnegie Institute, this programme facilitated the organisation of various cultural activities that included amateur drama festivals throughout the country.<sup>94</sup> A private charity established through a bequest by Bernard Shaw’s widow, Charlotte, Forás Éireann, then and now, funded voluntary organisations involved in cultural development.<sup>95</sup> Together with the

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<sup>89</sup> Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, 188; Gary Murphy, *In Search of the Promised Land: The Politics of Post-War Ireland* (Cork [Ireland]: Mercier Press, 2009), 23.

<sup>90</sup> O’Gorman, ‘A Quiet Cultural Revolution’, 178.

<sup>91</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 2.

<sup>92</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum: An Chomhairle Ealaíon (The Arts Council) Summary of Activities up to 31st March 1952’ (Memorandum, Dublin, 31 March 1952), 1, ARN: 2609/1951/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>93</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum: An Chomhairle Ealaíon (The Arts Council) Summary of Activities up to 31st March 1952’, 1.

<sup>94</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum: An Chomhairle Ealaíon (The Arts Council) Summary of Activities up to 31st March 1952’, 1; J. Wilkie to H.M. FitzPatrick, Letter, 25 January 1954, CE: 275, ARN: 9009/1954/1, Arts Council Archive; H.M. Fitzpatrick to William O’Sullivan, CE: 275 ARN: 2000/1952/6, 10 February 1954, Arts Council Archive; William O’Sullivan to Secretary, Foras Éireann, Letter, 3 March 1954, CE: 275 ARN: 9009/1954/1, Arts Council Archive; ‘Carnegie Trust Gives £20,000 for New Hall’, *Irish Times*, 9 March 1957, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; ‘Carnegie Drama Policy “Has Barely Left the Launching Pad”’, *Irish Times*, 16 June 1961, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>95</sup> Kevin M. Collins, ‘Foras Éireann Aid for Rural Ireland’, *Irish Times*, 4 December 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

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Arts Council, it repeatedly lobbied the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust to fund courses for amateur drama groups.<sup>96</sup> Like Foras Éireann, the estate of Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish-American business tycoon, established the Carnegie Trust in the early twentieth century and supported a range of international philanthropic projects.<sup>97</sup> By the decade’s end, the Arts Council moved from underwriting festivals to raising production standards through drama education.<sup>98</sup> However, between 1951 and 1964, the Arts Council spent a fifth of its overall budget “on drama, as compared with 18.3% on painting, and 21.7% on music.”<sup>99</sup> This allocation of drama funding which appears equal to painting and music demonstrates the national significance of amateur and professional drama.

### **An Tóstal**

The 1951 Arts Act prioritised raising the standards of “Irish goods and services” to increase the competitiveness of international tourism.<sup>100</sup> Faced with an emerging emigration and economic crisis, in 1952, the government announced a national festival called An Tóstal.<sup>101</sup> Influenced by the ERP’s encouragement of cultural tourism and the success of the 1951 Festival of Britain, An Tóstal was another cultural indicator of modernisation.<sup>102</sup> As the first Arts Council report recommended, it utilised the propaganda value of Irish traditional pageantry themes to grow a voluntary cultural movement focused on the international tourism market.<sup>103</sup>

Following the announcement of An Tóstal, the Arts Council found itself involved in a multi-agency approach to planning the national festival. It proposed the development of a national theatre, concert hall and other Dublin-focused cultural infrastructure developments.<sup>104</sup> Other engagements included the possibility of a Tóstal film to be produced by Hilton Edwards, for which Cecil French-Salkeld sought help. This lobbying culminated with the film screening of “a ghost story by Sheridan la Fanu

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<sup>96</sup> Wilkie to FitzPatrick, 25 January 1954; Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 23, 35, 183.

<sup>97</sup> Pirie Madsen, ‘Andrew Carnegie: Making Philanthropy Fashionable’, *CE Think Tank Newswire*, 11 August 2019, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://www.proquest.com/docview/2446073989/citation/946DF9BC7DC747ADPQ/1>.

<sup>98</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Eighth Annual Report’, 16.

<sup>99</sup> Mervyn Wall to Christopher Fitzsimon, Letter, 1 September 1966, CE: 574, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>100</sup> Cooke, ‘Artist and the State’, 101.

<sup>101</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained: An Interview with the Organiser’, *Irish Times*, 29 October 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>102</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’; Dean, *All Dressed Up*, 188.

<sup>103</sup> Dean, *All Dressed Up*, 189ff.

<sup>104</sup> Dean, *All Dressed Up*, 190.

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for members of the cabinet, which took place at the film censors office [before Little attended] the 1952 Bern Inter-Parliamentary Conference.”<sup>105</sup>

In early May 1952, the Arts Council opened lines of communication with the Bord Fáilte concerning the festival’s planning.<sup>106</sup> Internationally, An Tóstal focused on the Irish-American market with efforts to ensure that travel agencies could provide for it on their programmes.<sup>107</sup> The Tóstal organisation targeted “2,500 American travel agents... emphasising the importance of the festival as an early season tourist target and urged agents to feature it in their European ‘package’ tours.”<sup>108</sup> Taking a networking approach, it established a national Tóstal council in Washington, canvassed US travel agencies, the “American Society of Travel Agents,” eighty Irish-American societies, and trans-Atlantic air and sea travel companies.<sup>109</sup> Established in 1952 to market Ireland as a tourist destination, Fógra Fáilte also took a networking approach that sought the engagement of “Aer Lingus, British Airways, Coras Iompair Éireann and the British and Irish Steam Company.”<sup>110</sup> The airline companies saw An Tóstal as a “good business” opportunity for them and the development of tourism in Ireland.<sup>111</sup> Expecting to grow the business to 50,000 passengers over “five or six years,” the organisers expected tourists to spend up to £189,000 during the 1953 festival.<sup>112</sup>

Later that month, John P. O’Brien, from Ballymote in Co. Sligo, read an article in the *Irish Independent* concerning An Tóstal.<sup>113</sup> In that article, Little encouraged national participation in the festival and, in a spirit of subsidiarity, emphasised that “it was not healthy to expect the government to do everything.”<sup>114</sup> Three days later, O’Brien wrote seeking information about An Tóstal, informing the Arts Council of the

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<sup>105</sup> Cecil Ffrench-Salkeld, ‘Cultural Features’ (Memorandum, 27 June 1952), CE: 73, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive; Cecil Ffrench-Salkeld to P. J. Little, Letter, 20 August 1952, CE: 73, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive; ‘Republic’s Attitude to Federation’, *Irish Times*, 1 September 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>106</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning An Tóstal’ (Minutes, 9 May 1952), 17, CE: 73, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>107</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Publicity for An Tóstal’, *Tuam Herald*, 27 September 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>109</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>110</sup> Government of Ireland, Tourist Traffic Act, 1952, sec. 33; ‘Publicity for An Tóstal’. In 1955, the Tourist Traffic Act merged Fógra Fáilte with An Bord Fáilte into a single entity known as Bord Fáilte Éireann.

<sup>111</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>112</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>113</sup> ‘All Nation Must Plan Now for An Tóstal: Mr Little’, *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>114</sup> ‘All Nation Must Plan Now’.

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necessity for building a hall in Ballymote.<sup>115</sup> Dr William O’Sullivan, Secretary of the Arts Council, replied to O’Brien, outlining the general intention to host a festival of “national, cultural, sporting and other events.”<sup>116</sup> These events, O’Sullivan conceded, were to be based primarily in Dublin while encouraging “local events for other centres.”<sup>117</sup>

Consistent with Little’s vision of a voluntary cultural movement, the national festival emphasised the growth of local initiatives rather than a top-down approach of a centralised committee ordering what could occur.<sup>118</sup> The national organiser of the festival, Major General Hugo MacNeill, emphasised the voluntary nature of the organising committees nationwide, which was backed up by some Bord Fáilte staff.<sup>119</sup> The Tóstal organisation encouraged and supported the local committees who took voluntary responsibility for developing and promoting tourism in the locality.<sup>120</sup> While increasing tourism “by up to 50%,” MacNeill stressed that the engagement of volunteers brought a cost-neutral approach to the festival.<sup>121</sup> The voluntary effort established “22 local Tóstal councils...in Athlone, Ardara, Birr, Clonmel, Cork, Castlebar, Drogheda, Dublin, Galway, Killarney, Kilkenny, Limerick, Letterkenny, Longford, Nenagh, Portumna, Sligo, Tramore, Tullamore, Tralee, Waterford and Wexford” that expanded nationwide.<sup>122</sup>

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Mapped onto the Tóstal network, the Arts Council set up local advisory committees in “Cork, Waterford, Wexford, Limerick, Galway, Killarney, Tralee, Athlone, Sligo and Dublin.”<sup>123</sup> This voluntary approach to culture exemplified the principle of subsidiarity, an essential CST tenet. Rather than relying on the State to deliver solutions, this principle sought to empower individuals and groups to take

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<sup>115</sup> John P. O’Brien to William O’Sullivan, Letter, 30 May 1952, CE: 73, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>116</sup> William O’Sullivan to John P. O’Brien, Letter, 7 June 1952, CE: 73.1, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>117</sup> O’Sullivan to O’Brien, 7 June 1952.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Local Committee’s to Be Formed in North Tipperary’, *Nenagh Guardian*, 2 August 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>119</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>120</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>121</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>122</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’.

<sup>123</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 69.

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responsibility for issues within their remit.<sup>124</sup> Key to this voluntary movement was an ongoing investment in “adult education,” which Keynes, Bodkin and Little advocated.<sup>125</sup> For Little, the proof of such investment was the development of small “informed” cultural groups across the country that embraced the promotion of the arts.<sup>126</sup> This artistic “enthusiasm” was, he claimed, an inherent part of the heritage and DNA of the Irish people that became lost along the way to independence.<sup>127</sup>

In words echoed during the early twenty-first-century educational debates concerning promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) curricula over the humanities, Little maintained that the “quality” of the cultural experience was paramount.<sup>128</sup> Such cultural experience demanded careful discernment and hard work. Two decades later, Paulo Freire’s work on liberation pedagogy echoed Little’s claim that such work emancipated culturally liberated and literate people from the “slave mind.”<sup>129</sup>

The development of the cultural panels and committees was an example of the empowerment of local cultural groups, which Little’s embrace of subsidiarity expected. Though committee and panel members engaged in their work with great enthusiasm, they could not maintain the boundaries of their roles, and inevitably, tensions arose.<sup>130</sup> In an example of such tension, Seán Hendricks, from the Cork advisory committee, wrote to O’Sullivan protesting the duplication of work undertaken for the festival by it and the local An Tóstal council.<sup>131</sup> The local advisory group in Cork devoted several meetings to preparations for the festival and then discovered that it was the responsibility of Bord Fáilte. For Hendricks, this waste of work involved the potential duplication of time and effort by the local advisory group and the Tóstal council, which answered and received funding from Bord Fáilte.<sup>132</sup> In

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<sup>124</sup> Pope Pius XI, ‘Quadragesimo Anno’, 15 May 1931; Joseph A Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Collegeville (Minnesota): Liturgical Press, 1991), 986; McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1000–1007.

<sup>125</sup> Little, ‘On Discovering Ireland’, 1.

<sup>126</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Little, ‘On Discovering Ireland’, 2–3.

<sup>128</sup> P.J. Little, ‘Speech: Mr. P.J. Little, Director, Arts Council Unveiling “The Battle of the Books” Mural by Bernard McDonagh ANCA’ (Speech, Sligo County Library, 5 March 1955), 3, CE: 68/1, ARN: 33215/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>129</sup> Little, ‘“Battle of the Books” Speech’, 3; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, New Revised 20th Anniversary Edition (1970; repr., New York: Continuum, 1999), 25–51.

<sup>130</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 69.

<sup>131</sup> Seán Hendrick to William O’Sullivan, Letter, 18 June 1952, CE: 73, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>132</sup> Hendrick to O’Sullivan, 18 June 1952.

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his reply, O’Sullivan remarked that French-Salkeld and his team would coordinate all the activities to “avoid overlapping.”<sup>133</sup> He stressed that the local groups determined the work of organising the festival and affirmed that the Arts Council took funding applications “on [their] merits,” as was a good practice.<sup>134</sup> In a spirit of subsidiarity, the voluntary approach to cultural production intended to encourage local groups and people to “rely mainly on themselves” in “[priming] the pump into action.”<sup>135</sup> The Arts Council’s support of amateur drama festivals was one way of encouraging this voluntary approach. Despite this, following the Comptroller and Auditor General’s review in 1953, this practice ended as the Arts Act (1951) did not provide for independent committees and panels.<sup>136</sup> However, an amendment to the Arts Act could have averted the demise of the panels and committees.<sup>137</sup> Their loss was an opportunity missed to engage local audiences and artists.

### Amateur Drama Festivals

Despite losing the panels and committees, the Arts Council engaged with local communities of artists, playwrights, and actors by sponsoring the amateur drama movement. In addition, the theatre provided tourism development opportunities, making it a strategic aspect of An Tóstal marketing.<sup>138</sup> Many amateur groups, like the St. Colman’s Players in Charleville when founding the NCDF, turned to the Arts Council for support.<sup>139</sup> During the 1930s, efforts to anchor and focus the various amateur drama groups and festivals that emerged since the nineteenth century proved unsuccessful.<sup>140</sup> Though Joan Fitzpatrick Dean does not consider the amateur movement in her discussion of An Tóstal, the festival provided another successful opportunity to anchor and focus the amateur drama scene and develop it into a voluntary movement (see chapter two).<sup>141</sup>

Dean contends that Tóstal events were not arts festivals.<sup>142</sup> Throughout the

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<sup>133</sup> William O’Sullivan to Seán Hendrick, Letter, 20 June 1952, CE: 73, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>134</sup> O’Sullivan to Hendrick, 20 June 1952.

<sup>135</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 3–4; Little, ‘Reply to An Taoiseach’, 2.

<sup>136</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 381.

<sup>137</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Act, 1951, sec. 3.4a.

<sup>138</sup> Dean, *All Dressed Up*, 189.

<sup>139</sup> T. J. O’Riordan to William O’Sullivan, Letter, 25 February 1954, CE 286, ARN: 2000/1954/3, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>140</sup> Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 193.

<sup>141</sup> Dean, *All Dressed Up*, 187–222.

<sup>142</sup> Dean, *All Dressed Up*, 222; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘File Register’.

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1950s and 1960s, the Arts Council supported approximately seventy-four cultural festivals. Though this research is concerned only with amateur drama, the range and spread of these festivals show a nation emerging from cultural isolation.<sup>143</sup> Many middle-class communities responded to constant emigration, austerity, and social control by developing An Tóstal drama, pageants, and traditional music festivals. While Dublin was the festival’s focal point, amateur drama festivals occurred in “Dublin, Bray, Athlone, Tubbercurry, Galway, Wexford, Bundoran, Charleville, Cobh, Laois, Waterford, Gorey, Ballyshannon, Sligo, Dungloe, Ballinrobe, Clonmel and Cork,” amongst others.<sup>144</sup> The emergence of Arts Council-supported amateur drama festivals was an excellent example of Little’s vision of subsidiarity and voluntary cultural development.

So important did the Amateur Drama Festivals become to tourism that in May 1955, Aer Lingus wrote to the Arts Council acknowledging receipt of the list of amateur drama groups it provided to the sales department.<sup>145</sup> As discussed above, the ongoing success of these festivals encouraged cultural tourism, a vital element of the government’s gradual openness to global influence. The receipt by the WDF of two telegrams from Owen B. Hunt, former minister of the State of Philadelphia and Michael Kavanagh of the Mayomen’s Association of Philadelphia showed the international success of the movement. The telegrams proclaimed, “Irish exiles in America are proud of your cultural achievement.”<sup>146</sup> Together with the ongoing sponsorship of the F. J. McCormack, Countess Markievicz and Thomas Derrig medals, these messages indicated the continuing links between the festival and its emigrant community.<sup>147</sup> Such reports, replicated in regional newspapers, showed a society that though suffering from emigration, endeavoured to keep in touch with those who pursued their livelihoods overseas.<sup>148</sup>

Festivals, like those in Athlone, Charleville, Scarriff and Tubbercurry, provided a cultural focus for many communities ravaged by emigration. Those opening, closing, and adjudicating the NCDF argued that promoting drama education

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<sup>143</sup> Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, 224.

<sup>144</sup> ‘An Tóstal Explained’; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘File Register’.

<sup>145</sup> J.T. Murphy to William O’Sullivan, Letter, *SD*, 25 May 1955, ARN: 2000/1952/11, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’, *Sligo Champion*, 1 March 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Resounding Success’, *Western People*, 8 February 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Charleville Notes: Irish Dancers in US’, *Kerryman*, 28 April 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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could “stem the tide of emigration.”<sup>149</sup> Echoing Little’s memo protesting departmental interference, O’Beirne, president of the ADCI, challenged the government to recognise that ideas emanating from the movement were equally valid to those “from behind a civil service desk.”<sup>150</sup>

### Public Service

For Little, local government support was crucial to the development of culture.<sup>151</sup> However, not all public officials supported cultural festivals like An Tóstal. In July 1952, at a meeting of Sligo Corporation, Alderman J. Fallon voiced some discontent with the purpose of a planned public meeting to consider An Tóstal.<sup>152</sup> He speculated that “if this was going to mean a further appeal to the public of Sligo, he was afraid people would not stand for it.”<sup>153</sup> The meeting affirmed that the festival benefitted local businesses, that there was “no compulsion and the decision would rest entirely with the people of Sligo whether or not they would participate.”<sup>154</sup> It was proposed that An Tóstal be “self-supporting” and organised in Sligo by a “central organising committee.”<sup>155</sup> The meeting was at pains to emphasize that the festival should not “interfere in any way with the present Feiseanna and West of Ireland Golf Championship arranged for Easter Week.”<sup>156</sup>

At a meeting of Meath County Council, local Dáil deputy Captain P. Giles TD claimed the festival was “twenty years before its time.”<sup>157</sup> According to Giles, it was a contradiction during an emigration crisis to invite tourists to “a sinking Ireland, the language of which was dying”.<sup>158</sup> In addition, some councillors complained about holding the festival “at Easter given that people in the USA and elsewhere would not be taking their vacations so early in the year.”<sup>159</sup> Other councillors cynically commented that An Tóstal encouraged people to “demonstrate that there was a good

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<sup>149</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’; ‘Drama Festivals “Antidote to Low Grade Amusements”’, *Cork Examiner*, 30 March 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Adjudicators Tribute to Rural Clergy - North Cork Drama Festival’, *Cork Examiner*, 3 April 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’.

<sup>151</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 5.

<sup>152</sup> ‘Sligo and An Tóstal’, *Sligo Champion*, 5 July 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Sligo and An Tóstal’.

<sup>154</sup> ‘Sligo and An Tóstal’.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Sligo and An Tóstal’.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Sligo and An Tóstal’.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Deputy Seants Party Politics’, *Meath Chronicle*, 6 December 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Deputy Seants Party Politics’.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Deputy Seants Party Politics’; ‘Things That Matter’, *Limerick Leader*, 18 October 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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spirit of Christianity in the country” by tidying cemeteries.<sup>160</sup>

The Town Commission in Granard, Co. Longford, also voiced concerns about the national festival’s benefits to the local economy. Echoing concerns expressed at Meath County Council, some of those present commented that the principal beneficiaries of the festival were “the big hoteliers in Killarney and Dublin.”<sup>161</sup> In response to these concerns, the presiding officer arguing that “the country needs dollars and [the commissioners] should do their part to encourage the tourists to visit Ireland” encouraged the globalisation that the festival signified.<sup>162</sup>

The discontent expressed at these meetings demonstrated resistance to an attempt to open the country to global influences. As the following chapters explore, this resistance indicated a perceived vulnerability in embracing emerging globalisation. Liam O’Flaherty’s short story *The Fanatic*, which appeared in the American *Esquire* Magazine in 1953, presents the reader with an example of this vulnerability.<sup>163</sup> In the story, the publican laments his sister’s decision to forego her life in rural Ireland for the adventure of faraway shores; “there’s nothing in that terrible country but dirt and sinful filth. Anybody is in danger of losing his immortal soul that sets foot in it.”<sup>164</sup> Left alone, the barman attempts to make sense of a society that, thirty years after independence, exemplifies a confused and vulnerable social identity for him;

‘Your sister went away?’ I said.

‘She did, my pulse,’ said he. ‘Kate went away to America. She was two years gone away last Feast of St Brigid. God help us! That was the defenceless blow, and don’t be talking. It was a death-blow!’<sup>165</sup>

Ongoing emigration, which showed that people could achieve prosperity only by embracing global opportunities, compounded this vulnerability. The social confusion in this story emanates from traditional patriotic iconography used to present a particular brand of cultural identity. Popular films like John Ford’s 1952 production *The Quiet Man* (see chapter three), the Tóstal festival and the publication of this short story in the American *Esquire* Magazine presented a particular vision of Ireland to

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<sup>160</sup> ‘Deputy Scents Party Politics’.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Will An Tóstal Pay Dividends?’, *Longford Leader*, 6 December 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>162</sup> ‘Will An Tóstal Pay Dividends?’

<sup>163</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, ‘The Fanatic’, *Esquire Classic | The Complete Archive*, 1 December 1953, <https://classic.esquire.com/article/1953/12/1/the-fanatic>.

<sup>164</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, ‘The Fanatic’, in *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories*, ed. William Trevor (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 304.

<sup>165</sup> Liam O’Flaherty, ‘The Fanatic’, 306.

international audiences.<sup>166</sup>

While there was resistance to the festival’s organisation in Sligo, Tipperary North expressed a willingness to re-organise pre-existing events, such as the Thurles Feis, to accommodate An Tóstal events. As in Granard, J.P. Flynn, the Tipperary-North County Manager, affirmed the embrace of the global economy that cultural tourism inferred. He maintained that “if they were going to produce only things that were national, they would [renee] the culture of the world, and no country would do that.”<sup>167</sup> Some attending the Council meeting reasoned that “exiles returning could be made aware that the Ireland they were visiting...was a more national Ireland than the Ireland they left.”<sup>168</sup>

The embrace of modernisation brought considerable change, including “urbanisation, an emphasis on individual self-fulfilment and a consequent decline in social solidarity.”<sup>169</sup> Wills’ comment that “things [would not] change for my uncles and those like them” is a reminder that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, emigration did not always lead to prosperity.<sup>170</sup> Ireland’s close location to Britain meant that despite protectionism, the process of globalisation “was never far away from the minds of the post-war generation.”<sup>171</sup> Though these themes drew public debate, the distribution of an estimated “400,000 British Sunday newspapers” and the impact of radio, cinema and television on traditional Irish life drew the most concern from politicians, clergy and those responsible for organising these festivals.<sup>172</sup> Some years later, the *Report of the Commission on Emigration* (1956) cited a lack of cultural infrastructure and social opportunity, which contributed to the continued emigration that frustrated these councillors.<sup>173</sup> Such emigration, as the later *Limerick Rural Survey* (1958-1964) examined, heralded the decline of a rural way of life.<sup>174</sup> The report’s

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<sup>166</sup> Seán Crosson, ‘The Quiet Man and Beyond: An Introduction’, in *The Quiet Man and Beyond: Reflections on a Classic Film, John Ford and Ireland*, ed. Seán Crosson and Rod Stoneman (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2009), 1, <https://aran.library.nuigalway.ie/handle/10379/6008>.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Local Committee’s’.

<sup>168</sup> ‘Local Committee’s’.

<sup>169</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 115.

<sup>170</sup> Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, xiii.

<sup>171</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 108.

<sup>172</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 108–10.

<sup>173</sup> Angela Bourke et al., eds., ‘Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women’s Writings and Traditions*, vol. V (Cork University Press, 2002), 583–84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1fkgbfc.18>; Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*, 172–73.

<sup>174</sup> Jeremiah Newman, ed., *The Limerick Rural Survey: 1958-1964* (Tipperary: Muintir na Tire Rural Publications, 1964), 248.

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author, Professor Jeremiah Newman of St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, argued that this social change challenged rural Ireland to avoid “the certainty of virtual extinction” by “[organising] themselves into a viable system.”<sup>175</sup> Arguably, the amateur drama movement was one such system. For Keynes, Arts Councils existed to build communities, and this policy was given concrete expression through the physicality of a meeting and performance space.<sup>176</sup> Through the development of the hall programme and its support for amateur drama festivals, the Arts Council indirectly engaged with resolving some of these issues.

### Patronage

Some councillors who resisted the Tóstal festival were concerned with its impact on the local economy. Recognising that cultural development did not yield “box office returns,” Little emphasised the importance of fostering artistic patronage, which he lamented, businesses had yet to discover.<sup>177</sup> Though making progress, Little noted that Irish cultural development lagged behind the international scene.<sup>178</sup> During a Seanad debate in 1950, Senator W. B. Stanford claimed that artists and writers made a noteworthy economic contribution to the State’s finances by selling works equal in value to farming or industry.<sup>179</sup> Like Stanford, Little encouraged the “captains of industry... merchant, farmer or worker” to realise culture’s economic and social value.<sup>180</sup> In an early application of the CST principle of socialization, Little argued that only the Irish Government could be an authentic patron of the arts.<sup>181</sup> The memo recognised the limits of cultural funding. It encouraged “the more monied classes” to become patrons of the Arts with amendments to the tax system to enable such benevolence.<sup>182</sup> The inability of the cultural market to grow within a modern economy causes a system of “neo-patronage.”<sup>183</sup> Local and national governments, individuals,

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<sup>175</sup> Jeremiah Newman, ‘Social Provision and Rural Centrality’, in *The Limerick Rural Survey: 1958-1964*, ed. Jeremiah Newman (Tipperary: Muintir na Tire Rural Publications, 1964), 279. The author of the report, the Reverend Jeremiah Newman was bishop of Limerick from 1974 to 1995.

<sup>176</sup> Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 550–51; Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 146.

<sup>177</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”, 2.

<sup>179</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Local Government (Repeal of Enactments) Bill, 1949: Appropriation Bill, 1950 (Certified Money Bill) Second Stage (Resumed) and Subsequent Stages.’, Pub. L. No. 9, 38 (1950), <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/seanad/1950-07-20/7/>.

<sup>180</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”, 2–3.

<sup>181</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 64.

<sup>182</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 3–4.

<sup>183</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 17.

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and the corporate sector supported cultural development through this system.<sup>184</sup> As Keynes argued, State support for the arts was necessary to ensure that the experience of culture remains open to all citizens.<sup>185</sup>

As illustrated above, patronage provided a place at the decision-making table in forming the first Arts Council. Sir Chester Beatty’s appointment as a council member recognised the importance of the American cultural market. Though a British citizen and knight of the realm, the post-war embrace of the welfare state were not to his taste.<sup>186</sup> Well disposed towards Ireland, like many Americans of Irish descent, he was sympathetic to resolving political issues concerning partition.<sup>187</sup> In April 1952, two meetings occurred with Beatty in Nice, France, from where he participated in the work of the Arts Council. These meetings focused on developing a patronage scheme for wealthy Americans who may wish to take advantage of tax relief to invest in Irish culture.<sup>188</sup> He intended to establish an “oriental studies” museum in Ireland, which opened in 1953.<sup>189</sup> For Beatty, through “Irish-American [investment]...Ireland could be made one of the best centres of culture in the world.”<sup>190</sup> Unfortunately, despite his generosity in donating artworks to the National Gallery of Ireland, there were too few members of the “monied classes” in Ireland to make such a venture possible.<sup>191</sup> Despite this, the replacement of Arts Council support of the AIDF by the corporate sponsorship of Esso Petroleum Company (Ireland) Limited in 1961 demonstrated the potential of the fledgling neo-patronage model.<sup>192</sup>

Little challenged local government to fund local arts initiatives, and the “noisy minority” he claimed pursued “popularity” in opposing such development.<sup>193</sup> For example, he unveiled Bernard McDonagh’s mural commemorating St Columba’s

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<sup>184</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 17.

<sup>185</sup> Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 18; Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 545–46.

<sup>186</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum Concerning Chester Beatty’ (Memorandum, Nice, France, 15 April 1952), 2, CE: 44, ARN: 12/1951/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>187</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum Concerning Chester Beatty’, 2.

<sup>188</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum Concerning Chester Beatty’, 2.

<sup>189</sup> Wesley McCann, ‘Review: Alfred Chester Beatty: The Honorary Citizen’, *The Linen Hall Review* 5, no. 1 (1988): 25.

<sup>190</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum Concerning Chester Beatty’, 1–2.

<sup>191</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Memorandum Concerning Chester Beatty’, 2; Brian P. Kennedy, ‘Sir Alfred Chester Beatty and the NGI’, *Irish Arts Review* 4, no. 1 (1987): 41–54. The American Irish Foundation, founded in 1963, became the American Ireland Fund following its merger with the Ireland Fund in 1987.

<sup>192</sup> ‘Oil Company to Sponsor Festival’, *Irish Press*, 13 February 1961, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>193</sup> Little, ‘“Battle of the Books” Speech’, 2; ‘Battle of the Books Mural Unveiled in County Library’, *Sligo Champion*, 12 March 1955, 3, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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“Battle of the Books” at Sligo County Library in March 1955.<sup>194</sup> On that occasion, the Cathaoirleach of Sligo County Council, Fred Shaw, complimented the Arts Council for prioritising “education and culture” amidst the volume of demands made on local government.<sup>195</sup> The Mayor of Sligo, Alderman Bergin, complimented the “vision and enterprise” shown by Sligo County Council and the Arts Council in their collaboration on the mural which engaged a promising local artist.<sup>196</sup> The *Irish Independent* columnist Tatler and playwright Lennox Robinson recommended other towns copy such practice.<sup>197</sup>

Though encouraging the local and national government to take responsibility for the development of culture, the economic limitations of the mid-1950s restricted the ability of the Arts Council to function correctly. Writing to the *Irish Times* in December 1956, Ó Faoláin, who succeeded Little as director, reflected that it would cost “anything up to £1,000,000 per annum; and we have only £20,000.”<sup>198</sup> In a letter to Bodkin two years later, he unleashed his frustration that the lack of funding affected the future sustainability of the council.<sup>199</sup> The 1956-57 estimate “amounting to £31,500” was far more than that which founded the council in 1951 and illustrated the scale of work undertaken in its first years.<sup>200</sup>

In considering post-war Irish society, some critics concentrate on economic performance as an indicator of modernisation.<sup>201</sup> According to Girvan, Ireland’s combination of protectionism and nationalism is why the economy did not prosper when Europe was thriving.<sup>202</sup> Anne Chambers claims that throughout the 1950s, regular changes in government slowed the adoption of new economic policies.<sup>203</sup> However, Brian O’Boyle and Kieran Allen contend that the gradual transition from protectionism to foreign direct investment was part of a strategy to integrate Irish

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<sup>194</sup> ‘Battle of the Books Mural Unveiled in County Library’.

<sup>195</sup> ‘Sligo County Library Ceremony’, *Western People*, 19 March 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>196</sup> ‘Sligo County Library Ceremony’. Sligo artist Bernard McDonagh also painted a mural in the Irish College in Rome and at Sligo Town Hall. Locals can view the mural each time books are checked in or out of Sligo County Library.

<sup>197</sup> Tatler, ‘Leader Page Parade: Setting a Lead’, *Irish Independent*, 7 March 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Sligo County Library Ceremony’.

<sup>198</sup> Seán Ó Faoláin, ‘Letters to the Editor: The Arts Council’, *Irish Times*, 29 December 1956, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>199</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 83.

<sup>200</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of the Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning the 1956-7 Estimate’ (Minutes, 27 October 1955), 154, CE: 19, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>201</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 562–643; Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 172–98; Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 349–65.

<sup>202</sup> Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 351.

<sup>203</sup> Chambers, *T.K. Whitaker*, 122.

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society into a global economy.<sup>204</sup> The gradual globalisation of the post-war world meant an end to protectionism. Their claim that this process began during the first Inter-Party Government period challenges Girvin’s view that modernisation did not significantly change post-war Irish society.<sup>205</sup>

### Supporting Artists

During an event at Sligo County Library in 1955, Little echoed J.P. Flynn’s 1952 remarks to Tipperary North County Council when he emphasised the “national enterprise” aspect of local cultural promotion.<sup>206</sup> In handwritten notes on the margin of the speech, he noted the “educational value” of the enterprise, which “[gave] people respect and a sense of citizenship.”<sup>207</sup> By encouraging such citizenship, the Arts Council urged those involved with cultural production to create opportunities for critical audience engagement with all aspects of society.<sup>208</sup> This policy of cultural empowerment devolved the creation of “a new community spirit with a common purpose of culture, enhancing our Irish life expressing Irish temperament, and holding the interest and even enthusiasm of visitors” to local cultural organisations.<sup>209</sup> As outlined above, such organisations included amateur drama groups and emerging festivals. These groups were building a new Ireland, free of the caricature of the “slave mind” that diminished the standing of the Irish national psyche and made emigration a necessity for its citizens.<sup>210</sup>

Little maintained that the Arts Council’s work promoted the artist’s independence while developing a national cultural movement.<sup>211</sup> The Arts Council’s role in protecting the artist’s autonomy from State interference was also a policy of the ACGB.<sup>212</sup> From Little’s perspective, cultural appreciation needed to focus on the positive “exploitation of our young artists, architects, dramatists and musicians.”<sup>213</sup> Two years earlier, during the Dáil debate on the 1951 Arts Bill, Costello remarked that the State’s function was to support the artist who could then “depend upon their own

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<sup>204</sup> Brian O’Boyle and Kieran Allen, *Tax Haven Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 36–41.

<sup>205</sup> Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 362.

<sup>206</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”, 3.

<sup>207</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”, 1.

<sup>208</sup> P. J. Little, ‘Opening of the 1952 Clare Drama Festival’ (Memorandum, Scarriff, Co. Clare, 23 March 1952), CE: 68/1, ARN: 33215/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>209</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”, 2.

<sup>210</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”, 2.

<sup>211</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’, 1.

<sup>212</sup> Moggridge, ‘Keynes, the Arts and the State’, 537.

<sup>213</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 1.

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initiative” to become independent.<sup>214</sup> Ó Faoláin also held this view during his term as Director of the Arts Council.<sup>215</sup> For Costello, the benefit of such independence and education was “spiritual betterment” and “the development of craftsmanship or design in industry which will bring material benefit to our industrial activity in this country.”<sup>216</sup> Fr. J. J. Ryan echoed this policy position at the 1951 Clare Drama Festival when he commented that;

the development of a more active and critical spirit is most desirable...I am deeply impressed by the spirit of unselfishness shown by all associated with the movement, and if we have more of it in the country, it would be a great help towards the eradication of the idea of waiting on the Government to do everything.<sup>217</sup>

Such was the plight of artists that, in 1953 and 1955, the Arts Council wrote to both Taoisigh, de Valera and Costello, advocating that “Civil List Pensions for the purpose of enabling compassionate grants to be made to distinguished Irish artists and writers in cases of necessity should be established.”<sup>218</sup> Notably, neither the *Report on the Arts in Ireland* nor the First Arts Act (1951) sought to consult the artists involved with cultural production.<sup>219</sup> The prevailing “trickle down” approach, to which Bodkin, Keynes and Ó Faoláin subscribed, took the view that the promotion and consumption of culture lead to the increased prosperity of the artist.<sup>220</sup> Ó Faoláin, the only artist to become director, opposed direct State support of artists.<sup>221</sup> Applying the CST principles of subsidiarity and socialization, he argued that the State should only subsidise artists when it was impossible for them to survive commercially or through patronage.<sup>222</sup> Consequently, there was no need to make explicit provisions for pension rights or financial support for the artist in their own right. Such a view exemplified another example of the influence of the principle of subsidiarity on policy development.

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<sup>214</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage.

<sup>215</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 394.

<sup>216</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage.

<sup>217</sup> Sheedy, *Clare Drama Festival*, 25.

<sup>218</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of the Arts Council of Ireland Concerning Civil List Pensions’ (Minutes, 26 July 1955), 143, CE: 218, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>219</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 340.

<sup>220</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 333–38.

<sup>221</sup> Cooke, ‘Artist and the State’, 106; Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 394.

<sup>222</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 80.

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The enactment of Charles Haughey’s Finance Act (1969) introduced a tax exemption scheme for artists, supporting those involved in the creative industries.<sup>223</sup> Though beyond his remit, Haughey considered restructuring the Arts Council as part of his budget planning in 1968.<sup>224</sup> However, he reconsidered and increased the council’s funding to £60,000 that year.<sup>225</sup> Five years later, the passing of the 1973 Arts Act restructured the organisation, work and direction of the Arts Council.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, while the 1969 Finance Act addressed artist concerns about income tax, it was another twenty-five years before the government acted upon this resolution by establishing Aosdána.<sup>227</sup>

Several artists, politicians and journalists, including Ó Faoláin, welcomed the Finance Act (1969) changes.<sup>228</sup> Evaluating Haughey’s legacy almost three decades later, the critic Fintan O’Toole claimed that the 1969 Finance Act detrimentally affected the impact of the arms-length principle.<sup>229</sup> He maintained that during Haughey’s period in government, those who benefitted failed to challenge the prevailing vision of Irish society.<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, Haughey’s biographer, Gary Murphy, claims that the act’s purpose was to create “a climate in which art would flourish” rather than the financial support of artists directly.<sup>231</sup>

By 1972, internationally recognised writers comprised almost three-quarters of those who applied for the exemption.<sup>232</sup> Ironically, because of the Finance Act (1969), Ireland opened its doors to world-famous authors. Since enacting the Censorship Act (1929), many native writers and playwrights sought creative refuge overseas.<sup>233</sup> The role of the Irish writer was to tell the truth to power and, if necessary,

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<sup>223</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Finance Act, 1969’, Pub. L. No. 12 of 1969, § 2 (1969), sec. 2, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1969/act/21/enacted/en/print.html?printonload=true>.

<sup>224</sup> Gary Murphy, *Haughey* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2021), 205.

<sup>225</sup> Murphy, *Haughey*, 205.

<sup>226</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Arts Act, 1973’, Pub. L. No. 33 of 1973 (1973), <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1973/act/33/enacted/en/print.html?printonload=true>.

<sup>227</sup> Elgy Gillespie, ‘£4,000-a-Year Plan for Writers, Artists’, *Irish Times*, 6 March 1981, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>228</sup> Murphy, *Haughey*, 220–22.

<sup>229</sup> Fintan O’Toole, ‘How Charlie Came to Be Painted as a Man of the Arts’, *Irish Times*, 10 February 2007, Online edition, sec. News.

<sup>230</sup> O’Toole, ‘How Charlie Came to Be Painted as a Man of the Arts’.

<sup>231</sup> Murphy, *Haughey*, 306.

<sup>232</sup> Murphy, *Haughey*, 305.

<sup>233</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Censorship of Publications Act, 1929’, Pub. L. No. 21 of 1929 (1929), <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1929/act/21/enacted/en/html>; Cooke, ‘Artist and the State’, 103.

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like Beckett and John McGahern, suffer the pain of exile and social ostracization.<sup>234</sup> Challenging the status quo and questioning social policy was an essential aspect of cultural development that was discouraged everywhere but on the stage, as performances at post-war amateur drama festivals discussed in the following chapters demonstrate.<sup>235</sup> The Aosdána Cnuas grant for artists and writers was the subject of controversial review in 2017, while during the 2020-21 Covid pandemic, the relationship between artists, writers and the State came into sharp focus.<sup>236</sup> Consequently, the Irish Government decided at the end of 2021 to introduce a “basic income pilot” for artists.<sup>237</sup> Almost seventy years after the Arts Council proposed the State support of artists, these controversies illustrated that, apart from certain exemptions, the artist and writer’s role is not adequately understood or valued in Irish society.

### Conclusion

Though the movement toward an open economy gradually evolved through the 1950s, this chapter argues that cultural and economic development showed an openness to modernisation and embracing a global outlook. As outlined above, at the first formal meeting of the Arts Council, de Valera, Costello, and Little emphasised the importance of culture to Ireland’s place in the world. Little’s visits to London and Paris, coupled with the American philanthropist Beatty’s membership of the Arts Council (though he often communicated with the Arts Council from Naples), were strategic decisions that emphasised Ireland’s international cultural credentials.

Politics primarily influence history writing rather than “non-economic factors” such as culture.<sup>238</sup> As discussed above, politically, the government was reluctant to subsidise the development of cultural production. However, rooted in the economic benefits of cultural tourism, An Tóstal and the Arts Council supported arts and amateur

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<sup>234</sup> Alison Flood, ‘Julian Gough Slams Fellow Irish Novelists as “Priestly Caste” Cut Off from the Culture’, *Guardian*, 11 February 2010, Online edition, sec. Fiction, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/feb/11/julian-gough-irish-novelists-priestly-caste>.

<sup>235</sup> Peter Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands, 1922-39* (Dublin; Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 116–18.

<sup>236</sup> Michael O’Loughlin, ‘Why We Should Stand up for Aosdana This Bloomsday’, *Irish Times*, 16 June 2017, Online edition, sec. Opinion, 14.

<sup>237</sup> Deirdre Falvey, “‘Once in a Generation’: Basic Income Pilot for Artists to Start in Early 2022”, *Irish Times*, 16 December 2021, Online edition, sec. Culture, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/once-in-a-generation-basic-income-pilot-for-artists-to-start-in-early-2022-1.4756353>.

<sup>238</sup> McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 24.

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drama festivals.<sup>239</sup> As outlined above, for a long time, some of those in government resisted the influences of economic modernisation.<sup>240</sup> For example, de Valera placed the “restoration of the Irish language” as the number one priority of his party over emigration and the stabilisation of the economy.<sup>241</sup> Other than Lemass and Whitaker, the conservative approach of Irish Government officials and ministers reinforced this mindset.<sup>242</sup>

By combining the language of culture with its Christian democratic ideals, the government sought, through An Tóstal and the Arts Council, to influence the attitudes of its citizens. Emigration, a constant factor of Irish life since the famine a century before, continued with devastating effects as the young emigrated to find work in Britain and beyond. By the end of the decade, government policy shifted from the intense protectionism of the de Valera years to the openness of the *Programme for Economic Expansion*.<sup>243</sup> The programme, implemented in phases during the 1960s, opened Irish society to the broader world. Like the amateur drama movement, other initiatives such as An Tuairim and Muintir na Tíre were grassroots attempts to address fundamental issues facing Irish Society.

In evaluating the process of Irish modernisation, it is “lived experience” that is key.<sup>244</sup> The emergence of Amateur Drama Festivals, among many other arts festivals throughout the country at a time of economic strife, showed the creative need to explore the lived experience of society.<sup>245</sup> The plays performed at various festivals, which the following chapters examine, may have attuned to the needs and particular worldview of the local audience.<sup>246</sup> This process was “an expression of ambivalence about the costs of modernity to an Irish society.”<sup>247</sup> While many of these festivals which coincided with An Tóstal were local events with a short life span, those that emerged in this period show the vital role that the lived experience of culture plays in society. The Dublin Theatre Festival (DTF), the All-Ireland, North Cork, Western and Clare Drama Festivals, and the YISS emerged during the 1950s. Organisations like the Yeats Society, Joyce Society and DTF built upon the positive work undertaken by An

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<sup>239</sup> Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 73.

<sup>240</sup> McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland’, 43–44.

<sup>241</sup> Chambers, *T.K. Whitaker*, loc. 1924.

<sup>242</sup> McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland’, 44.

<sup>243</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘Programme for Economic Expansion’.

<sup>244</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 104.

<sup>245</sup> Fanning and Garvin, *Books That Define Ireland*, 186.

<sup>246</sup> Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, 17.

<sup>247</sup> Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, 187.

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Tuairim and An Tóstal and embraced Lemass’s vision for a better Irish Society. Patrick McNabb argued in the *Limerick Rural Survey* that the “various community organizations [such as those mentioned above], which have grown up during the past two decades,” drove social change in post-war Ireland.<sup>248</sup>

These festivals gave local communities the means to celebrate all that was good about the region and the nation while providing a reason for emigrants to return home. In this respect, despite economic stagnation, the 1950s showed arts initiatives and festivals flourishing throughout the country. The perception that modernisation began in 1960 belies the reality that people lived in a changing culture long before it became historically associated with the nineteen sixties.

As the following chapters explore, by funding amateur drama festivals during economic, political, and social challenges, the Arts Council financially encouraged the creation of cultural communities within Irish society. Consequently, it reduced its work to that of a funding organisation, a role it still inhabits.<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, the government engaged in modernisation because its people embraced such change.<sup>250</sup> The following chapters argue that establishing an amateur drama movement was a critical voluntary response to a cultural vision underpinning the modernisation of Irish society into the twenty-first century. This response highlights how those who engaged in developing amateur drama festivals in the post-war period contributed to Irish society’s modernisation.

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<sup>248</sup> Patrick McNabb, ‘Social Structure’, in *The Limerick Rural Survey: 1958-1964*, ed. Jeremiah Newman (Tipperary: Muintir na Tire Rural Publications, 1964), 245.

<sup>249</sup> Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 387.

<sup>250</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 118.

## Chapter Two: A “Living Irish Theatre”

### Introduction:

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, amateur drama festivals in rural Ireland expanded nationwide. Especially during the Lenten season, local rural country towns and villages transformed into centres of dramatic performance. Drama festivals took place in towns and villages ravaged by the consequences of economic policies that stole a future from so many. The post-war generation born during the interwar years faced not a prosperous nation where they could thrive but the reality that the only way to achieve a secure future lay overseas.<sup>1</sup>

<b>200,394 EMIGRATED</b>					
AREA	Change in Population Increase (+) Decrease (-)	Natural Increase (Births less Deaths)	Total net Emigration	Total net emigration per annum per 1,000 average population. ‡ = net immigration	
				1951-56	1946-51
<b>LEINSTER</b>					
Carlow .. .. .	- 84	78,499	78,583	11.8	2.1
Dublin* .. .. .	- 308	1,910	2,218	13.0	9.3
Dublin* .. .. .	+ 10,468	46,825	36,357	10.4	+ 5.5
Kildare .. .. .	- 510	4,552	5,062	15.3	8.8
Kilkenny .. .. .	- 992	2,544	3,536	10.9†	13.1†
Laoighis .. .. .	- 1,488	1,896	3,284	13.8	12.2
Longford .. .. .	- 1,669	1,234	2,903	17.2	16.8
Louth .. .. .	+ 493	3,955	3,462	10.0	3.3
Meath .. .. .	+ 352	3,108	2,756	8.3	8.6
Offaly .. .. .	- 627	2,620	3,247	12.4	13.3
Westmeath .. .. .	- 335	3,287	3,622	13.3	11.9
Wesford .. .. .	- 2,796	3,545	6,321	14.3	12.3
Wicklow .. .. .	- 2,772	3,043	5,815	19.0	2.1
<b>MUNSTER</b>					
Clare .. .. .	- 22,345	35,182	57,497	13.0	11.7
Clare .. .. .	- 4,222	2,210	6,432	16.2	15.9
Cork* .. .. .	- 4,597	12,455	17,052	10.1	7.9
Kerry .. .. .	- 4,821	4,114	8,935	14.4	17.7
Limerick* .. .. .	- 3,469	7,617	11,086	15.9	12.7
Tipperary N.R. .. .. .	- 1,320	2,682	4,002	14.2	12.6
Tipperary S.R. .. .. .	- 2,762	3,270	6,032	16.1	13.5
Waterford* .. .. .	- 1,154	2,804	3,958	10.6†	9.6†
<b>CONNACHT</b>					
Galway .. .. .	- 25,887	14,401	40,288	17.6	15.1
Galway .. .. .	- 4,763	7,370	12,133	15.4	15.3
Leltrim .. .. .	- 4,181	361	4,542	23.2	18.7
Mayo .. .. .	- 8,831	4,340	13,171	19.2	15.3
Roscommon .. .. .	- 4,427	940	5,367	16.3	15.9
Sligo .. .. .	- 3,685	1,390	5,075	17.3	10.8
<b>ULSTER (part of)</b>					
Cavan .. .. .	- 17,455	6,571	24,026	19.7	14.6
Cavan .. .. .	- 4,654	1,186	5,840	18.2	15.8
Donegal .. .. .	- 9,469	3,354	12,823	20.2	14.6
Monaghan .. .. .	- 3,332	2,031	5,363	20.0	13.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-65,771</b>	<b>134,623</b>	<b>200,394</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>8.2</b>

\* Including the County Borough

† Figures not comparable on account of extension of Waterford County Borough into Kilkenny County since 1951.

Figure 3: Emigration figures 1951-1956 (*Irish Press*, 2nd June 1956)

Figure three shows that the 1956 census indicated a population decline across all provinces, with more men than women leaving the country, “[reversing]... a trend of the previous five years.”<sup>2</sup> This decline continued through the decade, with the average number of people leaving increasing from 40,000 per year (1951-1956) to

<sup>1</sup> Fintan O’Toole, *We Don’t Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Modern Ireland* (London: Head of Zeus, 2021), 18, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup> Irish Press Reporter, ‘Population Is Down Again’, *Irish Press*, 2 June 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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50,000 per year (1956-1961).<sup>3</sup> As a result, by 1961, many of those born in the 1930s emigrated.<sup>4</sup> The stolen future, which these figures indicate, became the subject of plays performed at these festivals. During the festival season, farmers became actors, homemakers produced plays, and audiences flocked night after night in their thousands to see productions like these written by aspiring and established playwrights.

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, the Irish Government instituted various cultural initiatives during the late 1940s and early 1950s. These included the *Report on the Arts in Ireland*, the Arts Act (1951), setting up the Arts Council in 1952, and a national cultural festival (An Tóstal) in 1953. As discussed in the previous chapter, these initiatives showed an emerging global influence and gradual modernisation as the government responded to the nation’s socioeconomic crisis. Chapter One also argued that rooted in a spirit of subsidiarity, the Arts Council’s framework sought to empower people to take responsibility for cultural development in their towns and villages.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, five plays selected using the year of first production, performed between 1945 and 1968, are analysed and reflect the changing nature of Irish society by contemporary playwrights. These are Macken’s *Mungo’s Mansion*, Joseph Tomelty’s *All Souls Night*, Keane’s *Sive*, William J. Hammond’s *Edge of a Shadow*, Murphy and Noel O’Donoghue’s *On the Outside*.<sup>6</sup> Finally, this chapter argues that amateur drama festivals responded to evolving arts policy by providing those who did not emigrate with a means of safely questioning Irish identity in the face of emerging globalisation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ‘The Census’, *Irish Press*, 18 August 1961, sec. Editorial, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>4</sup> O’Toole, *We Don’t Know Ourselves*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 3–4; Thomas C. Behr, *Social Justice and Subsidiarity: Luigi Taparelli and the Origins of Modern Catholic Social Thought* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 101.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion: A Play of Galway Life in Three Acts* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1946); Joseph Tomelty, *All Souls Night: A Play* (Belfast: H.R. Carter Publications Ltd., 1955); Cork Examiner, ‘Second Win of Co. Cork Playwright’, *Cork Examiner*, 26 June 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive; John B. Keane, *Sive: A Play in Three Acts* (Dublin: Progress House, 1959); Tom. Murphy, *On the Outside*, 1989, <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/playtext-detail?docid=do-9781408189245&tocid=do-9781408189245-div-00000026>.

<sup>7</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes: Drama Panel Meeting Concerning the Athlone Amateur Drama Festival’ (Minutes, 23 January 1953), CE: 148, ARN: 2000/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

### Contributing to the Local Community

In November 1951, the recently formed Irish Theatre Council (ITC) lobbied the Taoiseach Eamon de Valera for a seat on the planned Arts Council.<sup>8</sup> De Valera delegated this issue to Little, and in due course, the newly formed council considered the ITC’s “Memorandum on the Irish Legitimate Theatre.”<sup>9</sup> In assessing the state of the professional theatre, the ITC claimed that “the development of the drama in this country...will be of great benefit to national prestige, culture and education.”<sup>10</sup> Once formed, the Arts Council began to “prime the pump” into action through short-lived local and national committees and panels.<sup>11</sup> Luminaries of the Irish professional theatre, including Ria Mooney; Lord Longford; Dermot Doolan; J.J. Fanning; Lennox Robinson; Liam Ó Briain; Denis O’Dea; Hilton Edwards and Gabriel Fallon, were members of the drama panel, which Little chaired.<sup>12</sup> Mooney, the Abbey Theatre’s Artistic Director, was the panel’s sole woman. A year later, in 1953, the Arts Council wrote to Brendan O’Brien, secretary of the emerging AIDF, recommending that adjudication of plays include an evaluation of the contribution of drama groups to the local communities in which they existed.<sup>13</sup> These communities included the towns that hosted the festivals and the drama groups that performed at these venues. The gestation of this policy was in formation for almost two years with several converging influences.

Matt Devine of the WDF proposed the establishment of a national drama festival in 1951, drawing support from adjudicators Mooney and Shelah Richards.<sup>14</sup> Following Devine’s suggestion, in May 1952, the adjudicator Shelah Richards wrote to Little proposing that the Arts Council consider supporting the foundation of an “All-Ireland or National Final Festival.”<sup>15</sup> Citing the “cultural and educational value” of the movement, Richards proposed that the existing festivals create a “co-ordinating

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<sup>8</sup> S. MacÚ, ‘Note: Concerning a Meeting between An Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera and Irish Theatre Council’ (Memorandum, 1 December 1951), CE: 25, Arts Council Archive. The Irish Theatre Council was formed in 1951.

<sup>9</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’ (Dublin, 13 August 1951), CE: 25, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>10</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Little, ‘Reply to An Taoiseach’, 4.

<sup>12</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes: Drama Panel Meeting One’ (22 February 1952), 1, CE: 63, ARN: 2000/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>13</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes: Drama Panel Meeting Concerning the Athlone Amateur Drama Festival’.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Festival Glory*, 57; Western Drama Festival Committee, *The Actors Are Come Hither*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Shelah Richards to P. J. Little, 16 May 1952, CE: 89, ARN: 2013/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

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Council.”<sup>16</sup> She also called on adjudicators to play their part by agreeing to a “policy [regarding] the festivals...they attend.”<sup>17</sup> Shortly afterwards, Mooney also wrote to Little, suggesting that the enthusiasm of the amateur drama movement be “harness[ed]...for a deeper and wider purpose.”<sup>18</sup> This purpose, she recommended, was the development of “the Amateur Movement” into a broader advocate for the arts.<sup>19</sup> Sharing a similar view Commandant Ferdinand E. Lee of the Custume Barracks, Athlone, claimed that the development of culture at a local level was a fundamental aspect of the “future strength of our country.”<sup>20</sup> Lee became a member of the organising committee of the AIDF after withdrawing his candidacy for the “post of permanent secretary to An Chomhairle.”<sup>21</sup>

Later that year, the national coordinator of An Tóstal, Ffrench-Salkeld, wrote to the Arts Council seeking assistance with the first AIDF, which occurred in Athlone in 1953.<sup>22</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the national festival was one indicator of the modernisation process during this decade and led to the formation of the AIDF and NCDF.<sup>23</sup> In his letter, Ffrench-Salkeld maintained that this festival would “assist the implementation of a National Cultural Project of the first importance.”<sup>24</sup> A theme that Little referred to several times during his stewardship of the Arts Council between 1952 and 1956.

The drama panel, which considered the proposals deferred a decision on Richards’s recommendation until Mooney and Fanning presented a memorandum on the amateur movement.<sup>25</sup> That memo stressed the “cultural usefulness of each Society to its own community.”<sup>26</sup> For Fanning, a proposed audit of drama groups motivated

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<sup>16</sup> Richards to Little, 16 May 1952.

<sup>17</sup> Richards to Little, 16 May 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Ria Mooney to P.J. Little, Letter, 3 June 1952, CE: 89, ARN: 2013/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>19</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

<sup>20</sup> Commandant Ferdinand E. Lee to P.J. Little, Handwritten Letter, 25 March 1952, 1, CE: 58.3, ARN: 33190/1952/4, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>21</sup> Commandant Ferdinand E. Lee to P.J. Little, Handwritten Letter (Athlone, 27 June 1952), CE: 58.3, ARN: 33190/1952/4, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>22</sup> Cecil Ffrench-Salkeld to William O’Sullivan, Letter, 14 November 1952, CE: 73.1, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Plans for North Cork Drama Festival’, *Cork Examiner*, 26 February 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Plans for Drama Festival’, *Irish Times*, 29 October 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>24</sup> Ffrench-Salkeld to O’Sullivan, 14 November 1952.

<sup>25</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Drama Panel Meeting Four’ (Minutes, 22 May 1952), CE: 63, ARN: 2000/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>26</sup> J.J. Fanning, ‘Notes on the Amateur Dramatic Movement in Ireland and on a Possible Scheme by Which Its Cultural Value to the Country Might Be Increased’ (Memorandum, 3 July 1952), 3, ARN: 2013/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

by Arts Council awards empowered each group to avail of resources they could not otherwise access.<sup>27</sup> The memo recognised that the administration of such a scheme could create a cultural network that included the Arts Council and organisations “created by the amateur societies themselves.”<sup>28</sup> By developing a policy “which...place[ed] the greatest emphasis on the cultural usefulness of each Amateur Dramatic Society to its own community,” the panel sought to shape the creative space occupied by the movement.<sup>29</sup> This policy emphasised that “the excellence of a play in competition should not be the only feature in judging an amateur dramatic company.”<sup>30</sup> The panel feared that competitive success could cause the overproduction of a single play. To counter this trend, the panel recommended that drama groups serve “the community by having a small repertory for one season.”<sup>31</sup> The play’s meaning transcended the festival presentation, transforming the social space in which the audience lived and influencing the shape of society.<sup>32</sup> As these memos and letters illustrate, Richards, Mooney, Fanning and Ffrench-Salkeld were arts community insiders who could see these festivals’ creative potential for the nation’s common good. Though a cultural outsider, Lee utilised military connections to seek an audience with and influence Little, who was growing into the directorship of the newly formed council.<sup>33</sup>

These documents show the emergence of a network of cultural organisations, incorporating the Arts Council, the professional theatre, An Tóstal, the army and other State bodies through the post-war years. This network, realising the power of the amateur drama movement as a vehicle for cultural development, sought to anchor and utilise this voluntary organisation for what Little termed the “authentic [interpretation] of nationalism.”<sup>34</sup> As discussed in chapter one, this interpretation saw culture as a

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<sup>27</sup> Fanning, ‘Notes on the Amateur Dramatic Movement’, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Fanning, ‘Notes on the Amateur Dramatic Movement’, 4.

<sup>29</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Athlone Amateur Drama Festival Panel Meeting’ (Minutes, 23 January 1953), CE: 148, ARN: 2000/1952/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>30</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Athlone Amateur Drama Festival’.

<sup>31</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Athlone Amateur Drama Festival’.

<sup>32</sup> Chris Morash, “‘Something’s Missing’: Theatre and the Republic of Ireland Act”, in *Writing in the Irish Republic: Literature, Culture, Politics 1949-1999*, ed. Ray Ryan (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 64–81; Chris Morash and Shaun Richards, *Mapping Irish Theatre: Theories of Space and Place* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Lee to Little, 25 March 1952; Lee to Little, 27 June 1952; P. J. Little, ‘Interview with Commandant Ferdinand E. Lee’ (Memorandum, Athlone, 18 October 1952), CE: 58.3, ARN: 33190/1952/4, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>34</sup> Little, ‘The Arts in Ireland’.

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“national enterprise” that helped to develop Irish citizenship.<sup>35</sup> Another indicator of the rebuilding of European civilization, citizenship was a means of ordering and restoring a world devastated by two global conflicts. Such citizenship, Little claimed, could be developed through the encouragement of “well-informed” cultural groups.<sup>36</sup> These included the AIDF, WDF, NCDF and CDF and the seven hundred associated drama groups nationwide.<sup>37</sup> Consistent with the vision outlined by Keynes and Bodkin, Mooney proposed that the cultural education of groups like amateur drama companies could occur through attendance at lectures in art, music and history.<sup>38</sup> She proposed that these lectures could contextualise the play, playwright and social setting for all those involved with the production.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, indirectly shaping the cultural space occupied by those who attended and participated in the festivals.

At these festivals, conversations about the American wake and cattle price shared space with the finer points of the Listowel Players’ performances of *Sive* (see appendix one). Though at a remove of almost three-quarters of a century, the sense of excitement, anticipation and passion for drama and theatre is palpable in archival documents, newspaper reports and local histories of these events. As Mooney expected, locals prepared for festivals by making costumes and constructing sets using props borrowed from churches, schools, kitchens, and bedrooms.<sup>40</sup> As they applied their make-up and costumes, the local doctor, grocer, bank clerk, carpenter and farmer took on another persona as nightly they trod the boards in search of the Golden Vale or Esso Trophies.

Since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the development of civilization and religion became associated with the colonial expansion of the nineteenth century and the end of totalitarianism within the post-Stalinist Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> After independence, the Irish Government utilised culture to legitimise and consolidate State

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<sup>35</sup> Little, “‘Battle of the Books’ Speech”.

<sup>36</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Mervyn Wall, ‘Handwritten Note Concerning Arts Council Policy’ (Handwritten Note, 31 July 1960), CE: 574, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>38</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952; Andrew Pinnock, ‘Public Value or Intrinsic Value? The Arts-Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes’, *Public Money and Management* 26, no. 3 (2006): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9302.2006.00519.x>.

<sup>39</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

<sup>40</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

<sup>41</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, xlv; Thomas. Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Abacus, 1992), 297–99; Tom Holland, *Dominion How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2019), 430.

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institutions.<sup>42</sup> The relative stability of Irish democracy since independence, especially in the face of European fascism, was symptomatic of a well-developed civil society.<sup>43</sup> As discussed in chapter one, in the 1920s, the nascent Irish State utilised Celtic imagery and ideology to present the Shannon scheme as something modern that encapsulated the tradition of Irish life.<sup>44</sup> The demands of Ireland’s participation in the ERP presumed modernisation.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the challenge of this participation was how to modernise without losing essentialised aspects of rural identity. De Valera’s 1943 St Patrick’s Day speech and the theatrical approach taken by the Abbey Theatre idealised this rural identity.<sup>46</sup> This dichotomy remained at the heart of cultural performance throughout the post-war years. This confluence of culture with modernisation indicated Little’s hope that Ireland was taking its place among civilised nations.<sup>47</sup> The process of post-war Irish civilization involved establishing and consolidating State institutions, of which the Arts Council and An Tóstal were a part. Ten years after de Valera’s speech, the establishment of these institutions showed a gradual embrace of global influences as Irish society journeyed along the continuum of modernisation.

### A “Living Irish Theatre”

The effect of this civilization process was shown in a *Limerick Leader* report that the NCDF made “a useful contribution to Ireland’s cultural revival.”<sup>48</sup> However, according to *The Kerryman*, the actual achievement of the festival was that it

proved to thousands of people in North Cork and Limerick that the living Irish theatre...is a native Irish culture of which our people are becoming keenly conscious to the degree that was not thought possible a decade ago.<sup>49</sup>

This idea of a living Irish theatre illustrated the type of citizenship emerging from within the amateur drama movement. In addition, the increasing number of local drama groups showed that ordinary people looked to the theatre and culture as they

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<sup>42</sup> Keenaghan, ‘State and Cultural Policy’, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Kissane, *Explaining Irish Democracy*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> O’Brien, *Powering the Nation*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Bernadette Whelan, *Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947-57* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 197; Whelan, ‘The New World and the Old’, 187.

<sup>46</sup> de Valera, ‘On Language and the Irish Nation’, 466.

<sup>47</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 4; Byrne, ‘Cultural Policy and the Creative City’, 255–56.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Rural Drama Festival Opens in Charleville’, *Limerick Leader*, 18 April 1953, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Fifteen Groups from Three Counties Contend for Honors at Charleville’, *Kerryman*, 17 April 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

coped with economic recession and emigration (see appendix one).<sup>50</sup> In this sense, the living Irish theatre was a community response to Little’s vision and the experience of post-war Ireland.

At the 1954 NCDF, Bryan MacMahon recommended the development of competition for emerging writers “because somewhere in the country, there might be a budding playwright who could do honour to their festival.”<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the NCDF announced a script “competition for three-act plays with a guarantee of production to the winner.”<sup>52</sup> The guarantee that the “winning script [would be] produced and presented within six months of the festival” provided an original dimension to this competition.<sup>53</sup> In 1956, the Abbey producer Tomás Mac Anna praised the NCDF for developing the playwriting initiative.<sup>54</sup> Though a decade later, he disputed the value of amateur playwrighting (see chapter five), for Mac Anna, the increase of applicants from seven in 1955 to twenty in 1956 was “not only progress but achievement.”<sup>55</sup> By developing a manuscript competition, the festival organisers provided a creative space for aspiring playwrights like Murphy and Keane (with whom Mac Anna clashed throughout the sixties) to explore their craft. The manuscript competition, the *Irish Independent* remarked, was “an idea with big and interesting possibilities.”<sup>56</sup>

As previously noted, besides a manuscript competition, the festival organisations established a library of manuscript plays in Tubbercurry, the home of the WDF and provided training courses for amateur drama groups.<sup>57</sup> For the theatre critic Niall Carroll, the autumn drama course brought the amateur and professional dramatists together in a conducive learning environment that would “improve rural drama no end.”<sup>58</sup> In 1955, under the direction of Abbey Theatre producer Mac Anna, a training course occurred in Charleville. Mac Anna awarded the first prize in the 1955

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Rural Drama Festival Opens in Charleville’.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Fifteen Groups from Three Counties’.

<sup>52</sup> Tatler, ‘Leader Page Parade: Aid for Unknowns’, *Irish Independent*, 30 March 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>53</sup> Tatler, ‘Leader Page Parade: Amateur Playwrights’, *Irish Independent*, 11 February 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Abbey Producer Praises Popular Event’, *Cork Examiner*, 2 April 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Abbey Producer Praises Popular Event’.

<sup>56</sup> Tatler, ‘Aid for Unknowns’.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Amateur Drama Library Has 2000 Manuscripts’; ‘Amateur Drama Council Manuscript Competition’.

<sup>58</sup> Niall Carroll, ‘Niall Carroll Writes on Theatre: Amateurs’, *Irish Press*, 17 October 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

manuscript competition to Fermoy native “Bill Hammond for a one-act piece entitled *Sing a Wild Song*” which he produced as part of that year’s autumn course.<sup>59</sup> Participants from Listowel, Abbeyfeale, Killeedy, and Kilmallock presented and performed “3 one-act plays” during the course.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the course, which occurred “over five weekends,” included a lecture on stage design.<sup>61</sup> An example of good network collaboration Foras Éireann subsidised these training courses and developed the halls scheme with the Carnegie Institute and the Arts Council (see chapter three). As Mooney proposed, the emergence of manuscript competitions and autumn drama courses attempted to educate drama groups and aspiring playwrights.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the decade, the Arts Council insisted that groups seeking assistance comply with the condition that “plays by Irish dramatists should form a larger part of the company’s productions than heretofore.”<sup>63</sup> Arguably, this condition was an early example of Arts Council leverage used to shape the creative space that amateur drama occupied. The new manuscript competition indirectly contributed to the community by addressing an emerging Arts Council concern about the “neglect of plays by Irish dramatists.”<sup>64</sup> The movement’s embrace of the manuscript competition was precisely the type of cultural empowerment that Little encouraged. It also benefited from fostering the emergence of grassroots playwrights, which addressed Arts Council concerns. The *Irish Independent*’s Tatler column reported that this was the first competition of its type and expressed a confident hope that other festivals would “take a leaf from their book.”<sup>65</sup> As the decade progressed, this innovative competition spread to other festivals, raising the profile of emerging and local playwrights, thus showing the collaborative approach of the amateur movement.

Writing in the *Kerryman*, theatre critic Patrick Lynch remarked that by including a script competition for new plays and an autumn drama course, the festival

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<sup>59</sup> Carroll, ‘Niall Carroll Writes on Theatre’.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Course for Amateur Drama Groups’, *Limerick Leader*, 5 October 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Course for Amateur Drama Groups’.

<sup>62</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

<sup>63</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning Dublin Gate Theatre Productions Ltd.’ (Minutes, 10 September 1954), CE: 179, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>64</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning Irish Dramatists’ (Minutes, 9 December 1952), CE: 143, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning Amateur Drama’ (Minutes, 24 March 1953), CE: 89, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning Studio Theatre Club’ (Minutes, Dublin, 22 September 1953), CE: 209, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>65</sup> Tatler, ‘Aid for Unknowns’.

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encouraged and developed every aspect of drama.<sup>66</sup> The effect of the courses for regional drama “reflected in the high standard attained at the festival” proved the merit of Mooney’s proposal.<sup>67</sup> In the 1952 memo, Fanning prioritised raising standards as one area of attention for the drama panel.<sup>68</sup> The ADCI addressed this issue by focusing on the dearth of “suitable producers” and concentrating on the presentation rather than the type of play.<sup>69</sup>

While regional courses were successful, the secretary of the ADCI, Brendan O’Brien, like Mooney, proposed that “the best plan would be to have experienced producers visit the group three times before, during, and after production. These could then be of real help to the groups.”<sup>70</sup> For adjudicator James Stack, the high production standards of the NCDF showed that, for the drama groups, their craft was “art, not just a pleasant way of passing the time...[which]...demanded serious application and study.”<sup>71</sup> The producer, he suggested, was like “a teacher” interested “in the development of his actors.”<sup>72</sup> Taking a hermeneutical approach, he recommended that drama companies consider the play in terms “of the whole and not of the part.”<sup>73</sup> Echoing Mooney, he encouraged actors to research widely “and encourage an appreciation of the other fine arts.”<sup>74</sup> Stack’s encouragement of such a broad view of amateur drama echoed Mooney’s proposal to Little in 1952. It addressed a tension emerging within the amateur drama movement; drama companies catered for the adjudicator rather than the audience. However, Ní Ghráda’s play, *An Triail* in 1966, also challenged the audience to appreciate how these plays affected daily life.<sup>75</sup>

### A Changing Ireland

In terms designed to endear themselves to the amateur movement, Fallon and William Bridges-Adams, the adjudicators of the 1954 AIDF, remarked on the potential for the success of specific performances in London’s West End.<sup>76</sup> In comments that predicted

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<sup>66</sup> Patrick Lynch, ‘Charleville...Ready to Stage Fourth North Cork Drama Festival’, *Kerryman*, 31 March 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>67</sup> Lynch, ‘Charleville...Ready to Stage’.

<sup>68</sup> Fanning, ‘Notes on the Amateur Dramatic Movement’.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Growth in Amateur Dramatic Groups’, *Cork Examiner*, 7 April 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Growth in Amateur Dramatic Groups’.

<sup>71</sup> ‘High Standard at North Cork Drama Festival’, *Cork Examiner*, 18 April 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>72</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>73</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>74</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>75</sup> O’Gorman, ‘Critical Perspectives’, 216.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Tullamore Again on Top’, *Westmeath Independent*, 15 May 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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the tensions of the 1960s (see chapter five), Fallon speculated that “the future of the theatre may well lie in the hands of the amateur.”<sup>77</sup> At the same time, he encouraged drama groups to choose plays from the history of Irish theatre and the Abbey in particular, which “was founded to bring to the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland.”<sup>78</sup> Consistent with Little’s use of nationalist rhetoric (see chapter one), Devine, the president of the ADCI, echoed this encouragement of plays with patriotic themes.<sup>79</sup> If, as Fallon argued, the Abbey Theatre exemplified a nationalist vision of a civilised Ireland, the success of the festival initiatives embedded a “living Irish theatre” in the vibrancy of the amateur drama movement.<sup>80</sup> As chapter five discusses, the Abbey’s portrayal of the soul of a changing Ireland lay at the heart of the debate concerning the direction of the professional stage over the next decade and a half. Nonetheless, what did this changing Ireland look like from the amateur stage?

Christopher Murray maintains that opportunities for the intellectual critique of social issues did not exist during this period.<sup>81</sup> Though Murray considers the work of some playwrights discussed here, his argument focuses on professional rather than amateur theatre. As this chapter outlines, the amateur drama movement provided a space for actors, producers, and new playwrights to interpret issues facing a changing society. Such meaningful theatrical engagement creates a particular experience that produces a creative space that can be local, national, and global.<sup>82</sup> The festivals empowered locals like Keane and Murphy to write and see their plays first performed at local festivals, continuing to national and international success. Thus, for amateur actors, playwrights, and audiences alike, drama and performance became a means of exploring and visualising another Ireland, a modern independent nation where people could achieve improved social well-being and standard of living. As Mooney and Richards foresaw, an ongoing cultural education emerging through the festivals could make these values a reality for its people.<sup>83</sup>

As noted in the Introduction, when MacMahon commented on the industrious embrace of amateur drama at the 1956 NCDF, he reflected on the socio-economic

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<sup>77</sup> ‘Tullamore Again on Top’.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Tullamore Again on Top’.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Tullamore Again on Top’.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Tullamore Again on Top’; ‘Fifteen Groups from Three Counties’.

<sup>81</sup> Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, 164.

<sup>82</sup> Morash, ‘Making Space’, 6–21.

<sup>83</sup> Richards to Little, 16 May 1952; Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

crisis which faced the nation.<sup>84</sup> The localities mentioned by MacMahon, Charleville, Tubbercurry and Scarriff responded through the festivalization of drama to the challenge of emigration faced by post-war Irish society. Many issues from this time, including the institutionalisation of women, domestic abuse, and poverty featured in plays staged at amateur drama festivals throughout the 1950s and 1960s, reverberate in twenty-first-century Irish society. The prevalence of these issues on the festival stage shows an awareness of the failure of the State to fulfil its founding principles outlined in the 1916 proclamation.<sup>85</sup> As adjudicator Stack recognised, in the presentation of such plays, the amateur drama movement made “an important contribution to a more liberal culture,” creating a space to address social justice issues.<sup>86</sup>

Society achieves social justice when individuals receive what they are “due” because of respect for their essential humanity.<sup>87</sup> Principles, including the common good subsidiarity and solidarity, central to understanding CST and the rebuilding of post-war European and Irish society, underpin this respect.<sup>88</sup> Perspectives offered by these plays portrayed social justice violations on the festival stage, including domestic violence, poverty, public sanitation, responsibility for the care of minors, and the underlying greed present within society.<sup>89</sup>

### Social Critique

Reflecting, in 1954, on Kenneth Tynan’s evaluation of the “ailing British Theatre in 1948,” drama critic JKA made the parallel between it and a similar predicament for Irish theatre six years later.<sup>90</sup> Applying Tynan’s four qualities for the British theatre to the Irish stage, JKA outlined how “energy, industry, technique and abandon” were essential elements for the development of theatre.<sup>91</sup> Emphasising the importance of technique, JKA examined how its development was necessary for both the amateur and professional stage, stressing how “the greatest actors have all... the qualities of

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<sup>84</sup> ‘West Limerick Group’s Success’.

<sup>85</sup> *The Easter Proclamation of the Irish Republic* (1916; repr., Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1975).

<sup>86</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>87</sup> Behr, *Social Justice and Subsidiarity*, 86.

<sup>88</sup> Pope Leo XIII, ‘Rerum Novarum’, 15 May 1891; Pope Pius XI, ‘Quadragesimo Anno’, 15 May 1931.

<sup>89</sup> Gus Smith and Des Hickey, *John B: The Real Keane* (Cork: Mercier, 1992), 9.

<sup>90</sup> JKA, ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Dramatic Commentary’, *Westmeath Independent*, 1 May 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>91</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

the true amateur.”<sup>92</sup> The real amateur continually develops stagecraft while engaging with the play’s production. If ongoing development does not occur, the amateur is “either a lost member of the audience or a poseur with relations in the house.”<sup>93</sup> Taking a hermeneutical approach to evaluate the plays, JKA emphasised how the individual elements of “physical balance, speed and timing, effect and the light and shade of the play’s mood” contribute to “a tightly integrated whole which is the finished interpretation of the dramatist’s ‘score.’”<sup>94</sup> Throughout the 1950s, the state of Irish professional theatre was a regular commentary feature at amateur drama festivals, which chapter five will explore.

For JKA, all four elements of Tynan’s evaluation were present in Clones Dramatic Society’s production of Macken’s *Mungo’s Mansion*, which won the three-act open category at the 1954 AIDF.<sup>95</sup> That year, the group successfully produced the play at the Ballyshannon, Bundoran, Tubbercurry, Navan, Meath and Cavan Drama Festivals.<sup>96</sup> At the Meath festival, V.J. Wheatley portraying Mowleogs, Mungo’s nemesis, was awarded the perpetual challenge cup for best producer and a certificate of merit.<sup>97</sup> In addition, his sister Eileen Wheatley won the best female performance award for her portrayal of “Winnie the wild ducks” at the Cavan, Meath and All-Ireland drama festivals.<sup>98</sup> Adjudicating the play at the Ballyshannon Drama Festival, James Struan Robertson praised the suitability of the play for the group, which “sprung into full life after a somewhat uncertain opening.”<sup>99</sup> Awarding the best individual actor prize to Wheatley for his portrayal of Mowleogs, he mentioned the consistency in the play’s “action” and recommended improvements in using light and shade in the production.<sup>100</sup> According to JKA, the production’s success lay in the company’s ability to transform the author’s lack of balance within the play into something that “they

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<sup>92</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>93</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>94</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>95</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’; ‘Drama Festival Awards’, *Irish Independent*, 10 May 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive. *Mungo’s Mansion* appeared five times at the AIDF between 1953 and 1958. Macken’s other plays *Home is the Hero* (chapter four), *Vacant Possession* and *Twilight of a Warrior* appeared five times at the AIDF between 1953 and 1961 (see appendix one).

<sup>96</sup> ‘Drama Festival’, *Irish Press*, 24 March 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Town and Country Gossip: Clones’, *Monaghan Argus*, 1 May 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>97</sup> ‘The Highest Standards of Criticism’, *Meath Chronicle*, 27 March 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Highest Standards of Criticism’; ‘Cavan’s Ninth Drama Festival’, *Anglo-Celt*, 3 April 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Clones Actor Takes Individual Award’, *Donegal News*, 10 April 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Clones Actor Takes Individual Award’.

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almost made the audience lose sight of.”<sup>101</sup>

Macken was an accomplished Irish language playwright, and *Mungo’s Mansion* was his first play in English. Featuring Siobhán McKenna, a colleague of Macken’s at Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, in the role of Nellie, the play was first performed at the Abbey Theatre in 1946 and again in 1948.<sup>102</sup> Macmillan published it in 1946, and Macken redrafted it multiple times before the Abbey accepted it for performance.<sup>103</sup> In June 1947, Terence Smith’s review of Mungo’s Mansion cited Macken’s experience writing plays in Irish as a testament to his familiarity with the genre. For Smith, within the context of working-class unemployment, the play relied “too much on its social importance to generate any real dramatic excitement.”<sup>104</sup> Though a comedy, what Smith calls “painful melodrama” brings the central character to his senses.<sup>105</sup> This combination of forms for Smith was a flaw within a play whose themes demand “a sense of responsibility to one’s subject.”<sup>106</sup> He recommended Gerard Healy’s *The Black Stranger* as an excellent example of such a play and invited Macken to “produce work more challenging and more true.”<sup>107</sup> Despite the reaction of critics like Smith, the audience positively reacted to the play’s “hilarious comedy and stark tragedy which left two Capitals clamouring for more.”<sup>108</sup>

Though Smith recommended that Macken provide a challenging and accurate picture of Irish life, the play addressed housing, sanitation, and severe childhood illness issues. The central plot of *Mungo’s Mansion* is the reluctance of Mungo King to move out of the slum existence that he has known since childhood. The fictional tenement house of the play, in Buttermilk Lane, was based on a house opposite the Taibhdhearc Theatre, where Macken worked until he moved to the Abbey Theatre in 1948.<sup>109</sup> Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, slum conditions were an ongoing problem in Irish towns and cities and the subject of commentary and concern.

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<sup>101</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>102</sup> James E. Reid, ‘Walter Macken (1915-1967) Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager’ (Doctoral Thesis, St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin City University, 2010), 94, DORAS (Humanities: Drama), <https://doras.dcu.ie/22602/1/John%20E%20Reid.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 263.

<sup>104</sup> Terence Smith, ‘Book Review: Mungo’s Mansion. A Play of Galway Life by Walter Macken’, *Irish Writing*, no. 2 (June 1947): 95.

<sup>105</sup> Smith, ‘Review: Mungo’s Mansion’, 95.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, ‘Review: Mungo’s Mansion’, 95.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, ‘Review: Mungo’s Mansion’, 95.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Cork Opera House’, *Cork Examiner*, 12 June 1947, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Moloney, ‘Macken’s Deep Sense of Galway’, *Irish Times*, 28 April 2001, sec. Books, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

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According to the *Cork Examiner*, the play depicted life in “almost any place where there are slums, [which] leaves a very broad choice of towns and cities in this country.”<sup>110</sup>

While the action of the play centres on Mungo, the regular background appearances of the doctor who visits his son Tomeen portray the subplot of the impact of tenement living on public health. Throughout the 1940s, tuberculosis was rampant throughout Ireland, and the Inter-Party Government, guided by Dr Noel Browne, addressed the issue.<sup>111</sup> The portrayal of Tomeen, a child ill with diphtheria in a Galway tenement in *Mungo’s Mansion*, illustrated well the contagion present in such housing conditions without running water or waste facilities. The challenges faced by tenants in such unsanitary conditions showed the tensions that arise when living in such close quarters with a large family. Restricted living conditions resulted in overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions, in which children suffered the most. As the Irish nation gained independence, these conditions became “normal and inevitable.”<sup>112</sup>

Mungo’s reaction to his son Mairteen’s attempt to wash after a day’s work in the foundry highlights the lack of hygiene facilities. The later melee and the ensuing dialogue among the principals on stage draw the audience to the background context of a childhood illness that continually serves as a reminder of the fragility of life set against the aggressive distractions that take up most of the play. His attitude towards his wife’s concern for her younger son dismisses the seriousness of the consequences of slum living, “I think that woman is goin’ off her nog. She’s watchin’ that child like a bunch a geranums.”<sup>113</sup> He denies the nature of the child’s illness and vehemently refuses to consider his daughter Nellie’s proposal that the family leave the tenement and move to newly built council houses. Throughout the 1950s, county councils built new houses like those referred to in the play.<sup>114</sup>

A self-centred Mungo deflects Nellie’s description of tenement confinement, its impact on the health of her brother Tomeen, and the social consequences of such conditions;

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<sup>110</sup> ‘Opera House Amusing Characters “Mungo’s Mansion”’, *Cork Examiner*, 17 June 1947, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Substantial Reduction in Deaths from Tuberculosis’, *Irish Times*, 30 August 1951, Proquest Historical Newspapers; Noel C. Browne, *Against the Tide* (Dublin, Ireland: Gill Books, 2012), loc. 1838 of 4541, Kindle.

<sup>112</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (London: Profile Books, 2010), loc. 3881 of 18719, Kindle.

<sup>113</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 203.

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Well, it suits me, d’ye hear? It suits me down to the ground. I prefer it to anywhere’s else you can mention. I’d prefer teh be livin’ here than law-dee-clawing it out in the Crescent with the Doctors. And it’s near me work, isn’t it?<sup>115</sup>

Mairteen agrees with Nellie that the family needs to move out of the tenement into something more comfortable and welcoming. As with Frank and Joe in *On the Outside*, Nellie and Mairteen’s desire to improve their family’s living conditions is the ambition of young people to live beyond their parent’s expectations. Mungo, focusing on the motives of his children, tries to deflect from his limited view. When this fails and his daughter challenges him, he resorts to what he knows best, aggression;

NELLIE:       (*gathering up the dishes preparatory - to bringing them downstairs*). It’s no use changin’ the conversation, Father. You’ll just have teh knuckle down to it.

MUNGO:       (*roaring*). I’ll knuckle down teh nothin”, d’ye hear, an’ all the divils in hell wouldn’t drag me outa Buttermilk Lane! (*Raising the crutch which is still in his hand*) And I’m tellin’ ye for the last time.<sup>116</sup>

As the conversation progresses, the audience witnesses Nellie taking the basin Mairteen has just used for washing and throwing its contents out the window with the warning, “hey, look out below!”<sup>117</sup> This action presents the audience with the unsanitary conditions of the tenement, disposing of wastewater into the street, where those passing below experience the consequences. She then loads the same basin, just used by Mairteen to wash the daily grime of the factory, with the “delf” that Mungo and his family use to eat.<sup>118</sup>

Throughout the play, a potential win at the races distracts Mungo from recognising his household crisis. As explored above, severe childhood disease was one of these issues. The end of the first act introduces Jack and Mary Manders, Mungo’s lodgers, in portraying domestic violence. Macken’s later play *Home is the Hero* also explores this theme of domestic violence (see next chapter). Mungo’s lodger, Jack Manders, gives the illusion of respectability, an appearance that is far from reality. In blaming his lack of employment for his ill health, he manipulates the unemployed Mungo to empathise with him and overlook the shocking emotional and physical abuse of his wife, which is unfolding. Though agreeing with her husband verbally,

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<sup>115</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 7.

<sup>116</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 8–9.

<sup>117</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 10.

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Mary’s body language tells a different story. She utters a discreet but audible “NO” when Jack encourages her to go upstairs. Then, repeatedly insisting that they return to their lodgings, she reluctantly agrees.<sup>119</sup> Macken’s depiction of misogynistic coercive control drives home the point that for many women, the appearance of respectability hides the reality of unacceptable toxic masculinity.

Following Mary Manders’s murder, Mungo reflects on how, with greater awareness, he could have saved her when she first appeared frightened;

Look, Doctor, I feel bad about this. Oney, a while ago she was down here with us tellin’ us he was goin’ to kill’ er, that he had a funny look on his face, an’ we tellin’ her it was nothin’ and thinkin’ she was off her nut, an I sayin’ that he was oney a pussy-cat oo a man that wouldn’t hurt a fly. We could have saved’er, Doctor!<sup>120</sup>

The admission that he did not believe her pleas underpins a feature of women’s experience of domestic violence both then and now. This veneer of respectability surrounding women’s experiences of institutional abuse and coercive control was not fully revealed until the end of the twentieth century. Manders’s later appearance allows Mungo to persuade Jack to take responsibility for his wife’s murder;

MANDERS. Lookit, Mister King, do you know what, I killed her!  
MUNGO The Lord save us. I Are yeh jokin’, Jack?  
MANDERS (*with venom*). She deserved it too. I tell yeh! That wan! I used teh get terrible pains in me head, Mister King, like I told yeh, didn’t I sometime maybe? Like a hammerin’ inside in me head, and I’d feel maybe like somethin’ was tryin’ to get out through me eyes (*he puts his free hand up to his forehead*), and she never cared, and whin I’d go to her, Mister King, and say, “Love, Love, I have a terrible pain in me head,” she’d back away from me like and she’d be frightened and say, “Jack Jack” she’d say “don’t look at me like that” as if I’d hurt her, Mister King, as if I’d even touch a hair oo her head.<sup>121</sup>

By portraying Jack blaming his wife for provoking him to murder, Macken portrays toxic masculinity in society. The portrayals of Mungo and Jack depict an awareness by the playwright of a bullying co-dependency that continued to reverberate through Irish society. A similar lack of respect is also evident in Keane’s *Sive*, which, explored below, examines the consequences of arranged marriage and unmarried motherhood. Nevertheless, as this chapter argues, the mid-century theatrical portrayal of these issues shows amateur drama’s vitally important contribution to local communities.

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<sup>119</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 31.

<sup>120</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 83.

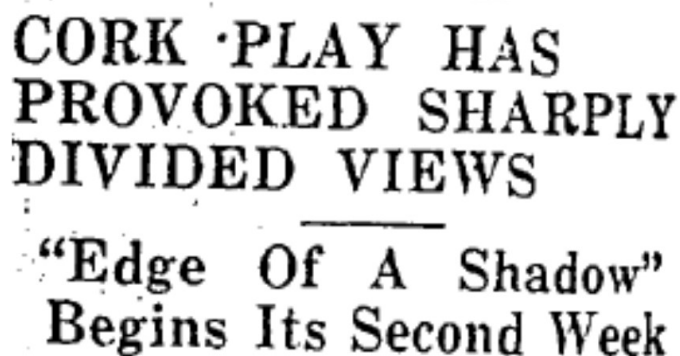
<sup>121</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*, 85–86.

Performances of plays by Macken, Keane, Murphy, Tomelty, and Ní Ghráda demonstrate how the theatre challenged audiences to confront the treatment of vulnerable women within Irish Society.

### **Power, Trust, and Misogyny**

Though Smith challenged Macken’s depiction of Irish life, what is striking about his plays is how relevant the issues are over seventy years later. As an act of social justice, the playwright’s work, no more than the actor or audience, brings issues society needs to confront to light. Moreover, the manuscript competition that the amateur movement launched in 1955 allowed aspiring playwrights to explore such issues. Though few details of the manuscript competition are available, the two plays examined here illustrate that aspiring playwrights were unafraid to address issues challenging Irish society.

Writing under the pseudonym Nujay, Hammond’s play *Edge of a Shadow* won first prize in the three-act manuscript competition in 1956.<sup>122</sup> Set in Cork, the play was “highly commended” as one of four manuscript plays forwarded to the AIDF and came second at the 1956 festival.<sup>123</sup> However, it took four years to produce the play, which the Southern Theatre Group performed at Father Mathew Hall, Cork.<sup>124</sup> Described as “a piece of theatre history,” the dental mechanic’s play was loved or hated by both critics and audiences (fig. 4).<sup>125</sup>



CORK ·PLAY HAS  
PROVOKED SHARPLY  
DIVIDED VIEWS

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“Edge Of A Shadow”  
Begins Its Second Week

**Figure 4:** Headline concerning the play *Edge of a Shadow* (*Evening Echo*, 28th November 1960)

Focusing on an emigrant returning to his native Cork as a Teddy Boy, the *Evening Echo*’s remark that it “was a work that cannot be ignored” illustrated the

<sup>122</sup> Cork Examiner, ‘Second Win of Co. Cork Playwright’.

<sup>123</sup> Cork Examiner, ‘Second Win of Co. Cork Playwright’.

<sup>124</sup> Stephen, ‘Mainly About People: Teddy Boy’, *Cork Examiner*, 25 November 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>125</sup> Catherine, ‘Edge of a Shadow’, *Cork Examiner*, 3 December 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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relevance of the issues presented for Irish society.<sup>126</sup> Teddy Boys were typically young men alienated from the opportunities presented by post-war British society. Imported into Ireland by returning emigrants, they wore a distinctive uniform which was a mix of Edwardian upper class and American gangster style.<sup>127</sup> Typically associated with rebelliousness and “anti-social behaviour,” their presence was another indicator of the modernisation continuum in Irish society.<sup>128</sup> The lead role of the Teddy Boy challenged actor Michael McAuliffe as “beneath their tough veneer, these young men were just children.”<sup>129</sup> Trained by Stack, McAuliffe based his interpretation of the role on the people he met daily.<sup>130</sup>

The play’s opening in 1960 marked the “250<sup>th</sup> performance” for actor Kay Healy who participated in every performance since the group’s foundation in 1958.<sup>131</sup> Ann Neeson, who proved herself at the Cork and Killarney amateur drama festivals, stepped into the role of Rosie at twenty-four hours’ notice when the actress cast for the role became ill with appendicitis.<sup>132</sup> Plucked from the audience of the Cork Film Society, the young actress, who declined opportunities to appear at the “West End,” spent the night rehearsing her role, which she effortlessly executed on the opening night to great acclaim.<sup>133</sup> Like Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (see chapter five), Hammond’s play contained colloquialisms that provided comic relief to the portrayal of tragedy while enhancing its appeal for Cork City natives.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, according to the *Evening Echo*, while the play provided good entertainment, it did not probe “a social problem of the present time” far enough.<sup>135</sup>

If Hammond’s play addressed the Teddy Boy sub-culture, then Murphy’s play *On the Outside*, which he wrote with Noel O’Donoghue, brought misogyny into

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<sup>126</sup> ‘Co. Cork Author’s Play to Be Presented by Co. Limerick Group’, *Cork Examiner*, 8 November 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>127</sup> Eleanor O’Leary, ‘Teenagers, Everyday Life and Popular Culture in 1950s Ireland’ (Doctoral Thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2013), 100–101.

<sup>128</sup> O’Leary, ‘Teenagers’, 100–103.

<sup>129</sup> Stephen, ‘Mainly About People: Teddy Boy’.

<sup>130</sup> Stephen, ‘Mainly About People: Teddy Boy’.

<sup>131</sup> Stephen, ‘Mainly About People: 250th Performance’, *Cork Examiner*, 2 December 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>132</sup> ‘World Premiere of New Play’, *Evening Echo*, 22 November 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive; Patrick Lagan, ‘Giving Life to the Past: On Stage’, *Irish Press*, 1 December 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>133</sup> ‘World Premiere’; Lagan, ‘Giving Life to the Past: On Stage’.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Cork Play Has Provoked Sharply Divided Views’, *Evening Echo*, 28 November 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>135</sup> ‘World Premiere’.

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focus.<sup>136</sup> Winner of the AIDF manuscript competition in 1960, the setting of Murphy’s play outside a dance hall moved away from the kitchen dramas associated with the Abbey Theatre tradition.<sup>137</sup> Influenced by Fr P.V. O’Brien, who produced many successful plays at amateur festivals, Murphy ventured into playwriting because of his experience with the Tuam Theatre Guild.<sup>138</sup> Like Beckett (see chapter five), his broad experience living in Ireland and overseas influenced his writing.<sup>139</sup> Like Keane and Brian Friel, Murphy also emigrated, travelling in 1962 to London, where he immersed himself in the theatre world.<sup>140</sup>

Written in the same year as *Sive*’s festival debut, *On the Outside* portrays a cultural insularity explored through the failed attempts of the central characters, Joe and Frank, to access the objects of their affection at a dance.<sup>141</sup> Though supervised rural dances were part of annual festivals, they provided opportunities for young unsupervised men and women to meet socially to explore aspects of globalised culture (fig.5).<sup>142</sup>



**Figure 5:** Photo of an audience gathered for a dance at the Silver Slipper Ballroom, Strandhill, Co. Sligo circa 1960 (photo courtesy of Robert Burnside, Sligo)

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<sup>136</sup> Nicholas Grene, *The Theatre of Tom Murphy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), loc. 292, Kindle.

<sup>137</sup> Mary Burke, ‘Tuam Babies and Kerry Babies: Clandestine Pregnancies and Child Burial Sites in Tom Murphy’s Drama and Mary Leland’s *The Killeen*’, *Irish University Review* 49, no. 2 (Autumn / Winter 2019): 245.

<sup>138</sup> Grene, *Theatre of Tom Murphy*, loc. 274.

<sup>139</sup> Fogarty Anne and Tom Murphy, ‘Tom Murphy in Conversation with Anne Fogarty’, in *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*, ed. Lilian Chambers (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001), 357.

<sup>140</sup> Anne and Murphy, ‘Theatre Talk’, 358.

<sup>141</sup> Murphy, *On the Outside*.

<sup>142</sup> O’Leary, ‘Teenagers’, 130–33; Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, ‘Parish Halls, Dance Halls, and Marquees: Developing and Regulating Social-Dance Spaces, 1900–60’, *Éire-Ireland* 54, no. 1–2 (2019): 232, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2019.0009>.

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In the play, Frank’s reference to the Marveltones (an American pop group of the 50s) and Mickey’s boasting about car ownership (a common feature of American youth culture) subtly hint at the global influences emerging within Irish society.<sup>143</sup> Nicholas Grene claims that the play depicts a form of misogyny and masculinity influenced by the Catholic Church’s negative attitude towards sexuality.<sup>144</sup> The dialogue between the two friends and Mickey, their rival, expresses misogyny and masculine bravado;

**JOE:** Much women inside?  
**MICKEY:** Loaded, stacked, powerful talent, deadly. Best I’ve seen for a long while.  
**FRANK** (*dryly*) I bet you’ve squared already, Mick?  
**MICKEY** I’ve my eye on a few, but I don’t know which I’ll bother with yet. There’s a Jane in there that’s nursing in England home on holidays. What a woman! Full of your arms, you know. (*He winks.*)  
**JOE** There’s nothing like the ones that spend a while in England. Them are the ones to get.<sup>145</sup>

Mickey’s wink and Joe’s remark about pursuing women who returned home after emigration brings into sharp focus the use of power in socially exploiting the vulnerability of young women. The undertone of returned émigrés sexual liberation reinforces this vulnerability. It also intersects with the atmosphere of resistance to global influences that were prevalent at the time.<sup>146</sup>

The inability of Joe and Frank to afford the “six bob” to access the dance illustrates the straitened circumstances which contextualise their social frustrations.<sup>147</sup> The depictions of frustrated masculinity and implied female vulnerability illustrate a yearning for modernisation that underpins intergenerational tensions. Those with power strive to maintain that which holds society together, while the younger generation, represented by Hammond’s Teddy Boy and Murphy’s Joe and Frank, seek prosperity, “I’m not sticking around here much longer. England. I’m bailing out of that lousy job. Lousy few bob a week. Twenty-two years old, and where does it get me?”<sup>148</sup> Symptomatic of the social power structure and resistance to modernisation, this denial of agency drives their disappointed aspiration for a new way of living.

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<sup>143</sup> Murphy, *On the Outside*, sec. 172;178; The Marveltones, Conn, and Hertz, *My Heart Is Yours- The Marveltones* (Regent, 1952), 194-A, Internet Archive, [http://archive.org/details/78\\_my-heart-is-yours\\_the-marveltones-conn-hertz\\_gbia0100289a](http://archive.org/details/78_my-heart-is-yours_the-marveltones-conn-hertz_gbia0100289a).

<sup>144</sup> Grene, *Theatre of Tom Murphy*, loc. 772.

<sup>145</sup> Murphy, *On the Outside*, secs 176–177.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Bishop Hits at Moral Corrupters’, *Irish Press*, 21 April 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>147</sup> Murphy, *On the Outside*, sec. 173.

<sup>148</sup> Murphy, *On the Outside*, sec. 190.

Does Grene’s argument that Catholic teaching influenced attitudes portrayed in this play relieve broader society of responsibility for the mistreatment of women? As the events of recent years show, gender equality and respect are as much an issue in twenty-first-century society, where the church has a diminished social influence, as it was for the sixth and seventh of the twentieth. When one examines women’s experience in the decades since the play’s publication, the ongoing relevance of the issues portrayed illustrates that in a modernising society, the work of social justice is an ongoing concern.<sup>149</sup> As these plays demonstrate, a critical engagement with the values underpinning Western power structures may illuminate how social justice issues concerning gender equality and toxic masculinity continue to permeate society. While *On the Outside* dealt with teenage angst, Murphy’s second play, *On the Inside*, written in 1974, explores the consequences for women of unmarried motherhood.<sup>150</sup> Because of failing to observe social expectations, many women and children were incarcerated, experiencing harsh treatment in industrial schools, Magdalene laundries, and mother and baby homes.<sup>151</sup> Written between 1959 and 1974, both of Murphy’s plays confronted audiences with the mistreatment of vulnerable women within Irish society.

Despite claims at the beginning of the twenty-first century that society was unaware of these abuses, plays like Tomelty’s *All Souls Night*, Keane’s *Sive*, Murphy’s *On the Outside* and Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail* addressed these issues.<sup>152</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, successive Irish Governments delegated and abrogated responsibility for caring for vulnerable women and children to religious orders, some

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<sup>149</sup> Pauline Conroy, ‘Maternity Confined: The Struggle for Fertility Control’, in *Motherhood in Ireland, Creation and Context*, ed. Patricia Kennedy (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2004), 146–65, <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/9080>; Caitriona Clear, *Women’s Voices in Ireland: Women’s Magazines in the 1950s and 60s* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), Kindle; Virginia Nicholson, *How Was It for You? Women, Sex, Love and Power in the 1960s* (Penguin Books, 2019), Kindle; Lisa Taddeo, *Three Women* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), Kindle; Mia Döring, *Any Girl: A Memoir of Sexual Exploitation and Recovery* (Dublin: Hachette Books Ireland, 2022), Kindle.

<sup>150</sup> Burke, ‘Tuam Babies and Kerry Babies’, 247–48.

<sup>151</sup> Serena Clark, ‘Forgive Us Our Trespasses: Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland’, *Visual Communication* 20, no. 1 (1 February 2021): 124–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357219894044>.

<sup>152</sup> Tomelty, *All Souls Night: A Play*; Keane, *Sive*; Máiréad Ní Ghráda, *An Triail*. (1964; repr., Baile Átha Cliath: Oifig an tSoláthair, 1978); Máiréad Ní Ghráda, *On Trial* (Dublin: James Duffy & Co., 1966); ‘Impugning the Mother and Baby Commission Does Not Serve Victims’, *Irish Times*, 2 February 2021, Online edition, sec. Opinion, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/impugning-the-mother-and-baby-commission-does-not-serve-victims-1.4473277>; Roderick Condon, ‘Narrativized Discursive Legitimation: Comment on the Mother and Baby Homes Report’, *Irish Journal of Sociology* 30, no. 2 (1 August 2022): 196–200, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07916035211026833>.

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of whose members violated the human rights and dignity of those in their care.<sup>153</sup> As the various tribunals of inquiry revealed, child abuse was an “endemic” part of the coercive system during the twentieth century.<sup>154</sup> The misuse of power depicted in these plays attempted to maintain a particular type of social order by curtailing the process of modernisation which the acceptance of this vulnerability implied. Tomelty’s depiction of Kathrine in *All Souls Night* shows the impact of this misuse of power;

JOHN: Is there not an ounce of tenderness within you? Tell me now and be truthful. Why is it you never laugh nor have easy thoughts?

KATHRINE: I’m only as God made me. I’ve never had much to make me laugh. I never laughed as a child, so I couldn’t as a woman.

JOHN: Why, woman?

KATHRINE: The taste of bitterness always in my mouth, since I was knee high in the Home with the nuns. To be cursed with the want of parents, and to be told to be grateful to God for being found in the sheltered hollow of a beech tree. I thought when I married... but the tree planted crooked will never grow straight... I thought I would change that the hardness would leave me.

JOHN: It didn’t?

KATHRINE: We’ve been together a long while, and you should know.

JOHN: But surely, woman, in your mind, you must see things. You see what’s wrong and how you can set it right.

KATHRINE: When I was ten and hired to the farmers, they told me I was found in the tree...Don’t talk to me anymore about it. Don’t, don’t. I can’t help as I am, I tell you. I can’t help it.<sup>155</sup>

Produced by both the Drumcollogher Gaelic Players, Limerick and the Eclipse Drama Group, Belfast, the play competed at the 1956 AIDF.<sup>156</sup> The Drumcollogher Players production won the premier award at the CDF in Scarriff, while Eclipse Drama Group won the Newry Drama Festival.<sup>157</sup> In reviewing the play, the critic AK claimed that the Eclipse Drama Group’s Ulster accents meant a more robust delivery than the

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<sup>153</sup> Sean (Mr Justice) Ryan, ‘Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, Vol. 1’, Report (Stationery Office, 20 May 2009), Lenus: The Irish Health Repository, <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/87278>; Francis D. Murphy, Helen Buckley, and Laraine Joyce, ‘The Ferns Report’, Report (Stationery Office, October 2005), Lenus: The Irish Health Repository, <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/560434>.

<sup>154</sup> Michael G. Cronin, *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>155</sup> Tomelty, *All Souls Night: A Play*, 62.

<sup>156</sup> ‘The Amateur Stage: A Saturday Spotlight’, *Irish Independent*, 28 April 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Premier Award for Belfast: Newry Drama Festival’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 February 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Co Limerick Group’s Success’, *Evening Echo*, 14 March 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

Drumcollogher group, who adapted and set the play in Dingle.<sup>158</sup>

The Eclipse Drama Group’s use of the curtain to convey Kathrine’s despair when she encounters her deceased son Stephen and his ghostly presence shows the creative use of familiar stage furniture for dramatic effect.<sup>159</sup> Despite this, the reviewer did not welcome producer Mat Creighton’s efforts to depict a “naturalistic ghost” and called for a traditional approach of “hollow voice and the sunken eye” to such portrayals.<sup>160</sup> Though disagreeing with AK about the strength of the Drumcollogher Players’ presentation, the *Offaly Independent*’s review agreed that the portrayal of the ghosts fell short of expectations. Teasing through existential discomfort, the reviewer outlined their belief that life after death is less concerned with grudges and material success than the Drumcollogher performance allowed.<sup>161</sup> As chapter four discusses, Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town* explores similar themes. Praising the portrayals of the austere and firm Kathrine, the ghostly Stephen and the gentle John, AK emphasised the delivery of lines and remarked, “They are the kind of amateurs we need to see to give us confidence in the amateur movement.”<sup>162</sup> Reflecting on previous experience of the play, the *Offaly Independent* reviewer acknowledged that the Drumcollogher Players’ performance changed their perspective and understanding of the play.<sup>163</sup> In admitting this change, the reviewer shared Mac Anna’s experience of adjudicating amateur drama festivals, which never failed to bring a new perspective or interpretation to a play.<sup>164</sup>

Written a decade before it influenced Keane’s *Sive*, the portrayal of Kathrine, her sons, and her husband manifests the suppression of agency and power in these plays.<sup>165</sup> This theme, explored in the ongoing dialogue between father and son, focuses on buying a boat (a metaphor for striving for a better life), procuring finance, and the adult children’s deaths. Both sons (in life and death) and their father focus anger on their mother, Kathrine, who, because of an abusive childhood, continues to experience

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<sup>158</sup> ‘Dramatic Commentary: All Souls Night’, *Westmeath Independent*, 5 May 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Dramatic Commentary: All Souls Night’.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Dramatic Commentary: All Souls Night’.

<sup>161</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Dramatic Commentary’, *Offaly Independent*, 28 April 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>162</sup> ‘Dramatic Commentary: All Souls Night’.

<sup>163</sup> ‘Dramatic Commentary’.

<sup>164</sup> Tomás Mac Anna and Karen Carleton, ‘Tomás Mac Anna in Conversation with Karen Carleton’, in *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*, ed. Lilian Chambers (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001), 287.

<sup>165</sup> Smith and Hickey, *John B: The Real Keane*, 9.

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the removal of agency and choice. The distance and dysfunctionality of the familial relationships depicted in this play explore the ongoing impact of the lifelong hardship of institutional and familial abuse experienced by many during these decades. Such portrayals were staged in the decade following Dr Noël Browne’s resignation from the government because of the political controversy surrounding day-to-day health care for mothers and children.<sup>166</sup> In this aspect of the play, one can see that the acceptance by society of the institutionalisation of women and children in the post-war years normalised the exercise of coercive power with devastating effects on those incarcerated.<sup>167</sup> Such normalisation encouraged “compliance and [made] resistance difficult.”<sup>168</sup> These coercive practices violated the essential aspects of social justice to which both Church and State subscribed, resulting in a suppression of agency that reverberates through Irish society into the twenty-first century.

Inspired by *All Souls Night*, returned émigré Keane’s first play, *Sive* marked a turning point in the life of amateur drama in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>169</sup> Initially written as a blend of melodrama and realism, Keane’s play focuses on procuring the young Sive into an arranged marriage with the elderly Seán Dota.<sup>170</sup> The marriage arranged against her will is an aberration of social equality and the removal of agency in her life. The play, which swept the boards at amateur drama festivals in 1959, challenged audiences with the tragic consequences of avoiding scandal and social responsibility.<sup>171</sup> In challenging the convention of arranged marriage, this play recognised the truth of ordinary life present on the stage. The play’s characters evoke horror, rage, sympathy and terror in portraying consent, responsibility, freedom, feminism, power, and class issues.

In her *Irish Times* review of the play, the playwright Aileen Coughlan conveyed the excitement surrounding this play throughout 1959; “the house was packed, and there was a great babble of sound that dropped to a murmur as the lights

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<sup>166</sup> ‘Dr. Browne Replaced by Mr. Costello: Minister’s Scheme Killed by Hierarchy Ruling’, *Irish Times*, 12 April 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>167</sup> Sherrie Carroll, Suhanthi Motha, and Jeremy Price, ‘Accessing Imagined Communities and Reinscribing Regimes of Truth’, *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 5, no. 3 (17 September 2008): 166.

<sup>168</sup> Carroll, Motha, and Price, ‘Accessing Imagined Communities’, 166.

<sup>169</sup> Smith and Hickey, *John B: The Real Keane*, 42–47.

<sup>170</sup> O’Gorman, ‘Critical Perspectives’, 211.

<sup>171</sup> Aileen Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival: A Summing-Up’, *Irish Times*, 2 May 1959, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

went out, and utter stillness fell at the first quiver of the curtain.”<sup>172</sup> Unfortunately, the Abbey rejected the play because it was “too melodramatic with a language too obscure.”<sup>173</sup> In declining the play, Radio Éireann recommended that Keane give the play to an amateur group.<sup>174</sup> Consequently, the Listowel Drama Group production, directed by Bill Kearney, won the Esso Trophy at the AIDF in 1959.<sup>175</sup>

In the play, Sive is an illegitimate orphan whose parents died in tragic circumstances. Her uncle Mike Glavin, his wife Mena and her grandmother cared for Sive throughout her childhood. Though still at school, she is legally old enough to marry.<sup>176</sup> A matchmaker, Thomasheen Seán Rua, arranges her marriage with Seán Dota, a man of elderly years. The transactional arrangement of the marriage between Sive and Dota explores the greed of her guardians, from which they and the matchmaker financially benefit. Sive’s aunt, Mena, colludes with Seán Rua in making the arranged marriage with the prospect of payment of “two hundred sovereigns”, which she will receive following the successful exchange of vows.<sup>177</sup> The marriage is a transactional arrangement by Sive’s aunt, Mena, and her Uncle Mike, who reluctantly agrees to the marriage. By arranging the marriage, Sive’s guardians rationalise that they are rescuing her from the shame that surrounded her illegitimate birth and guaranteeing her a materially secure, if unhappy, life;

Now listen to me! (*Her voice is insistent*). The child was born in want of wedlock. That much is well known from one end of the parish to the other. What is before her when she can put no name to her father? What better can she do when the chance of comfort is calling to her? Will you take stock of yourself, man? There is a fine farm waiting for her with servants to tend her so that her hands will be soft and clean when the women of the parish will be up to their eyes in cow dung and puddle. What better can she do? Who will take her with the slur and the doubt hanging over her?<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’, 2 May 1959.

<sup>173</sup> John Daly, ‘The Big Fellows Can Look After Themselves. The Small Man Will Tell You the Truth’-The Genius of John B Keane as Sive Turns 60’, *Irish Independent*, 27 April 2019, Online edition, sec. Entertainment: Theatre & Arts.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *Festival Glory*, 13.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Festival Results’, *Irish Press*, 27 April 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive; Smith, *Festival Glory*, 13-14.

<sup>176</sup> In the 1950s the legal age for marriage was 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy. Though a change to the legal age for marriage was proposed to be increased to 16 in 1964 it would be 1972 before the required legislation passed into law. Erskine Childers, ‘Marriages Bill, 1972: Second Stage.’, Seanad Éireann (12th Seanad) (Houses of the Oireachtas, 23 November 1972), <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/seanad/1972-11-23/4/>; Mary E Daly, *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State and Society, 1957-1973* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 161–63.

<sup>177</sup> Keane, *Sive*, 20.

<sup>178</sup> Keane, *Sive*, 27.

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In contrast, her engagement with education and wish to marry her secret boyfriend explore Sive’s desire and aspiration for a better life. At the time of the first production, secondary education was available only to those who could afford it or attend on scholarship.<sup>179</sup> Though it was several more years before the introduction of free secondary school, Keane’s portrayal of Sive’s desire for education highlighted an important issue relevant to the ongoing modernisation of Irish society.<sup>180</sup> In the play, the decisions made by adults invoke the power imbalance by placing their needs above the child, curtailing her desire for a better life;

There is the gift of two hundred pounds for us if there is a marriage. Think of the start it would give us. Think of the start it would give us. How many times would you bend your back to make it? Long enough, we were scraping: you said it yourself. Consider it, will you? It is what we always wanted. Sive will be well off, and we will have no more of your mother and her taunting.<sup>181</sup>

Aged unions, whereby a bachelor postponed marriage to secure and farm the land, was widespread since the famine.<sup>182</sup> Older men in rural Ireland favoured young brides because they could work hard and produce children.<sup>183</sup> The contrast between the depiction of this arranged marriage and the emerging trend toward weddings between life partners illustrated a “transition” of understanding human relationships in a post-war world.<sup>184</sup> Though the Second Vatican Council considered the importance of marriage as a partnership, the subsequent papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, promulgated in 1968, provoked a crisis within church life that continues in the twenty-first century’s culture wars.<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, as the play depicted, such arranged marriages proved detrimental to the women’s physical and mental health.<sup>186</sup> The outcome of such an unhappy future for Sive’s character is despair and tragic death;

LIAM: (*Tearfully*). I saw her running across the bog with only the little frock against the cold of the night. She ran like the wind, and she letting cries out of her that would rend your heart. (*His voice is filled with*

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<sup>179</sup> John Coolahan, *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning: A History of Irish Education, 1800-2016* (Dublin, Ireland: Institute of Public Administration, 2017), 136.

<sup>180</sup> Coolahan, *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning*, 136.

<sup>181</sup> Keane, *Sive*, 28.

<sup>182</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile, 2009), loc. 492, Kindle.

<sup>183</sup> Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, loc. 4088.

<sup>184</sup> Cronin, *Impure Thoughts*, 117.

<sup>185</sup> Pope Paul VI, ‘Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*’, Papal Encyclical, 25 July 1968, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html); Bernhard Häring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, vol. 2 *The Truth Will Set You Free, Moral Theology for Priests and Laity*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 536.

<sup>186</sup> Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, loc. 4346.

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*sorrow*.) I called after her, but she would not stop. She took her own life. It was a while before I found her with her little feet rising over the water. (*Shakes his head*). The poor tormented child.<sup>187</sup>

Sive’s tragic death and the withdrawal from the presence of the corpse of those responsible for her welfare illustrate a dynamic at work within society. Keane’s implied message is that the modernisation continuum involves a cultural transition that allows a new understanding of Irish society that can address post-war reality. Mena’s comment, “tis all love and romancing these days with little thought for comfort or security,” demonstrates the challenge of moving from a society concerned with self-preservation to embracing individual growth and freedom.<sup>188</sup> Sive’s death serves as a warning that Ireland’s place in the world is in the balance and that resistance to the process of modernisation will lead to the collapse of a promised civilised future.

Hugh G. Smith, in the *New York Times*, compared the excitement surrounding *Sive* to that which greeted Seán O’Casey’s work in the 1920s.<sup>189</sup> Despite winning seven cups at previous festivals, the Listowel Drama Group’s production of *Sive* came second by two points to the Tuam Theatre Guild’s performance of *Thunder Rock* at the 1959 NCDF.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, the *Cork Examiner* reported that the play was “acclaimed as one of the most outstanding contributions to Irish Drama for some time.”<sup>191</sup> Exemplifying its impact, over 200 people turned away as the hall reached capacity on the evening of its performance at the NCDF.<sup>192</sup>

Criticism of Keane’s writing focused on the melodramatic elements of the play while overlooking the hybrid approach to realism and the inherent social criticism present in the play.<sup>193</sup> In his critique of the play at the NCDF, Mac Anna remarked how the production “achieved something that was unique in the Irish theatre... [the]...union of the three minds...the producer, author and players.”<sup>194</sup> This fusion of creative expression Mac Anna attributed to the work of the drama festivals over the previous decade. He commented that his experience of the play “left [him] a bit

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<sup>187</sup> Keane, *Sive*, 109.

<sup>188</sup> Keane, *Sive*, 20; Cronin, *Impure Thoughts*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> Hugh G. Smith, ‘Big Hit Called “Sive”’, *New York Times*, 6 September 1959, Online edition, TimesMachine.

<sup>190</sup> ‘Noted Play Is Bound for Cork’, *Evening Herald*, 10 April 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>191</sup> ‘Great Reception for Co. Kerry Man’s Play’, *Cork Examiner*, 6 April 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>192</sup> ‘Great Reception’.

<sup>193</sup> O’Gorman, ‘Critical Perspectives’, 214.

<sup>194</sup> ‘High Praise for Listowel Author at Cork Festival’, *Kerryman*, 11 April 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive.

shaken...It is the sort of thing that we professionals try to get on the stage but never achieve. It is a bit much for an adjudicator.”<sup>195</sup> In critiquing the play, Mac Anna commented that he “heard words of praise all-round” and remarked, “Mr Keane is opening new ground for the theatre in Ireland. I beg of him to continue in that way, and I wish him the best of luck.”<sup>196</sup> Mac Anna acknowledged other festivals that nominated the play to compete at the All-Ireland in Athlone and remarked, “God help the adjudicator in Athlone. He will have a terrible job.”<sup>197</sup>

Smith expressed shock at the play’s rejection “by the directors of the Abbey Theatre but acclaimed by the people as a work of the moment.”<sup>198</sup> Though he complimented Keane during his adjudication in 1959, Mac Anna later admitted that he was one of the readers who rejected the play on behalf of the Abbey.<sup>199</sup> Despite this setback, at the Kerry drama festival, the adjudicator Jim Fitzgerald praised the “three-dimensional” nature of the play’s language, which was “in the direct tradition of many Abbey dramatists of the last twenty years.”<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, tensions between Mac Anna and Keane, which were symptomatic of the broader debate between amateur and professional theatre, continued (see chapter five). In 1963 while adjudicating another of his plays, *The Man from Clare*, at the Wexford Drama Festival, Mac Anna commented that “I wish that Mr Keane would not write three plays every year but one every three years and so give himself a chance to write a masterpiece which I feel he will someday.”<sup>201</sup>

Following its success at the AIDF, the play was staged at the Abbey and produced across Ireland. The BBC considered a television adaptation, while Hollywood contemplated a film based on the play, and the autumn of 1959 saw it produced on Broadway.<sup>202</sup> The Abbey’s decision to stage the play after its success on the amateur drama circuit indicated the movement’s influence on the quality of theatrical production.<sup>203</sup> *Sive*’s success marked an “endpoint...for amateur theatre in Ireland,” which, following international trends, transitioned from melodrama to

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<sup>195</sup> ‘High Praise for Listowel Author’.

<sup>196</sup> ‘Great Reception’.

<sup>197</sup> ‘High Praise for Listowel Author’.

<sup>198</sup> Smith, ‘Big Hit Called “Sive”’.

<sup>199</sup> Smith, *Festival Glory*, 23.

<sup>200</sup> Smith, *Festival Glory*, 28.

<sup>201</sup> Backstage, ‘On the Boards’, *Northern Standard*, 8 March 1963, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>202</sup> Smith, ‘Big Hit Called “Sive”’; Louis Calta, “‘Sive,’ Dublin Hit to Be Done Here’, *New York Times*, 8 September 1959, TimesMachine.

<sup>203</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 14.

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realism.<sup>204</sup> The Abbey’s subsequent decision to stage the play acknowledged this shift. For Smith, *Sive*’s success provided “a good prelude to the ambitious second International Theatre Festival.”<sup>205</sup> However, as discussed in the next chapter, that festival was abandoned because of “controversies over the inclusion of O’Casey’s play, *The Drums of Father Ned* and Alan McClelland’s dramatization of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.”<sup>206</sup>

### Conclusion

Throughout the 1950s, most Irish newspapers reported on aspects of the success and failures of various groups competing at amateur drama festivals alongside the crisis of the Cold War. As the 1950s progressed through a national crisis, volunteers from Athlone, Charleville, Scarriff and Tubbercurry developed cultural networks that primed “the pump into action” in ways Little could not envisage at that first meeting of the Arts Council in 1952.<sup>207</sup> This embrace of amateur theatre provided a creative way of exploring Irish society’s shadow side. It fostered values such as subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good, which were the cornerstone of CST and post-war Irish and European political life.

The young adults striving in *All Souls Night*, *Sive* and *On the Outside* for an independent life with agency and authority over their choices mirror the experiences portrayed in Macken’s plays *Mungo’s Mansion* and *Home is the Hero*.<sup>208</sup> In addition, issues of power and trust, explored in *All Souls Night*, *Edge of a Shadow*, *Sive* and *On the Outside*, portray the challenges of the intergenerational evolution of culture. Remarks by Bryan MacMahon, amongst others’ opening festivals, also indicate this tension. Such resistance is also present in the controversy surrounding the Abbey Theatre’s rejection of *Sive*. Throughout the 1960s, the consequences of that decision permeated the relationship between amateur and professional theatre. As the controversy between Keane and Mac Anna showed, though they yielded considerable influence, adjudicators’ insights were not the last word on a play. The popularity of Keane’s plays, which sixty-three years after *Sive* first graced the stage, are still in production on the amateur and professional stage, proves that Mac Anna’s criticisms

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<sup>204</sup> O’Gorman, ‘Critical Perspectives’, 216.

<sup>205</sup> Smith, ‘Big Hit Called “Sive”’.

<sup>206</sup> Smith, ‘Big Hit Called “Sive”’.

<sup>207</sup> Little, ‘Reply to An Taoiseach’.

<sup>208</sup> Macken, *Mungo’s Mansion*; Walter Macken, *Home Is the Hero: A Play* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1953); Tomelty, *All Souls Night: A Play*; Keane, *Sive*; Murphy, *On the Outside*.

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were without foundation. The performance, interpretation by the adjudicator and encouragement of audience debate on plays provided opportunities for critical engagement with social issues. This critical engagement went beyond what Pope Pius XII termed “thinking that culture was measured by the number of facts learned by heart.”<sup>209</sup> The development of a critical audience proved that Dr Fisher’s assertion that “knowledge was too much for other people” did not ring true when applied to amateur drama.<sup>210</sup> It also showed that audiences became liberated once they critically engaged with drama. Mooney’s proposal that the amateur drama movement be “harness[ed]... for a deeper and wider purpose”; the cultural education of the nation took root.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> ‘Pontiff Talks to Children’, *Cork Examiner*, 25 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>210</sup> Reuters, ‘People Know Too Much’, *Cork Examiner*, 25 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>211</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

## Chapter Three: A “Work of Considerable Importance”

### Introduction:

In the early twentieth century in Ireland, Catholic clergy were active in nationalist politics.<sup>1</sup> However, by the middle of the century, the people’s cultural life drew their energies.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Catholic clergy contributed significantly to the development of amateur drama. Bishops and priests engaged with amateur drama festivals as patrons, presidents, chairs, producers, or playwrights.<sup>3</sup> As chapter one argued, the post-war Irish delegation or decentralisation of cultural development was consistent with the CST principle of subsidiarity, which underpinned the post-war reconstruction of European civilization.<sup>4</sup>

The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* forbade clerical attendance at, or participation in, the theatre.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, the clergy secured influence on amateur theatre through their participation in organising committees, management of halls, production of plays and leadership of the Arts Council. Recent scholarship undertaken by Joe MacCarrick and Finian O’Gorman calls for further exploration of the church’s involvement with amateur drama in the post-war years.<sup>6</sup> This chapter adds to MacCarrick and O’Gorman’s work by exploring the relationship between the Catholic Church and the amateur movement. Plays written or produced by clerics, including Fathers Joseph Cassidy (future Archbishop of Tuam), Patrick Higgins, T.P. Vesey, P. V. O’Brien, and P. Dowling, are examined. These plays include Frank Carney’s *The Righteous are Bold*, Patrick Hamilton’s *Gaslight*, Joseph Cassidy’s *In Wild Earth*, Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* and Ní Ghráda’s *An Triail*. They present themes that challenge audiences to reflect on and question the ideas underpinning society. It argues that by engaging with amateur drama and cultural development, the church tried to influence the direction of a movement for liberal reform.

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<sup>1</sup> Kieran Waldron, ‘Church Was Not Hostile to the Drive for Independence’, *Irish Times*, 22 June 2021, Online edition, sec. Rite and Reason.

<sup>2</sup> MacCarrick, ‘Clerical Influence in Amateur Drama’.

<sup>3</sup> Catholic bishops were involved in the amateur movement, opening, and closing festivals as well as acting as patron for many festivals including the All-Ireland, Western, Clare and North Cork Drama Festivals. Priests who wrote and produced plays at these festivals included the future Archbishop of Tuam, Joseph Cassidy and Bishop of Derry, Edward Daly.

<sup>4</sup> Betts, *Ruin and Renewal*, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Edward N. Peters, ed., *The 1917 or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 140.

<sup>6</sup> MacCarrick, ‘Clerical Influence in Amateur Drama’; O’Gorman, ‘A Quiet Cultural Revolution’.

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Tom Inglis and Louise Fuller’s analysis of Irish society places the modernisation process firmly in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> As previously noted, Girvin contends that profound structural change did not occur during the post-war years.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, as discussed in the previous chapter, a coordinated amateur drama movement emerged as a voluntary grassroots response to converging local, national, and global influences. These influences, including the ERP, the Arts Council and An Tóstal, formed a network that empowered local people and groups to undertake cultural development. This empowerment of a voluntary organisation network led to a nationwide mass movement as almost seven hundred groups and supporters attended drama festivals.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the view held by some, including Fallon and Ó Faoláin, that clerics confine their activity to the sacristy, theological reflection, like that contained in CST, interprets the relationship between culture and religion.<sup>10</sup> While conceptualising culture as an experience of music, writing, art and theatre, it also encapsulates “the set of meanings and values that informs a way of life.”<sup>11</sup> Applying theology to public life is a dynamic, ongoing process that engages culture in its development, dissemination and nature. The Catholic Church teaches that God is present in all human life.<sup>12</sup> As the Church is concerned with people’s welfare, wherever people gather, it is present. Therefore, CST mandated dioceses to reach into the social life of local communities and promote the common good.<sup>13</sup>

This principle is a “moral quality—that is, the authentically human and humanising aspects of social life.”<sup>14</sup> In encouraging the amateur movement, the Church recognised the power of drama festivals to contribute to the betterment of society. By engaging with an organised amateur drama movement, clergy involved

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<sup>7</sup> Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998), 249–59; Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004), 67–81.

<sup>8</sup> Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 362.

<sup>9</sup> Wall, ‘Handwritten Note Concerning Arts Council Policy’.

<sup>10</sup> Seán Ó Faoláin, ‘The Dáil and the Bishops’, *The Bell* XVII, no. 3 (1951): 5–13; Seán Ó Faoláin, ‘The Bishop of Galway and “The Bell”’, *The Bell* XVII, no. 6 (1951): 15–17; Gabriel Fallon, ‘Further Letter from Gabriel Fallon’, *Irish Independent*, 9 May 1963, Irish Newspaper Archive; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*. (London: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> McBrien, *Catholicism*, 10–11.

<sup>13</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, ‘Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church’ (The Holy See, 2004), nos. 164–170, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html#Responsibility%20of%20everyone%20for%20the%20common%20good](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#Responsibility%20of%20everyone%20for%20the%20common%20good).

<sup>14</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, ‘Social Doctrine’, no. 62.

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themselves in the intergenerational evolution of culture. It also highlighted how the work of God is present in the resultant transformation or modernisation of society.<sup>15</sup> Engagement with public life provided opportunities for the Church to respond to the modernisation process. For Karl Rahner, an expert at the Second Vatican Council, modernisation is an “act of this very Christianity arising from its understanding of God” infused in human experience.<sup>16</sup> The “organised action” of the amateur drama movement was part of the transformative (modernisation) work of God present in society’s secular social and cultural life.<sup>17</sup>

#### **An Ecclesiastical Appreciation of Culture**

In 1953, Bishop Vincent Hanly, in whose diocese of Elphin the festival was based, opened the first AIDF in Athlone.<sup>18</sup> For Bishop Hanly, An Tóstal was a declaration of confidence in the potential of Irish culture to engage tourists with “a people who had a tradition for learning, culture, religion and efficiency.”<sup>19</sup> Highlighting the festival’s foundation, he welcomed the opportunities for cultural development that An Tóstal provided.<sup>20</sup> For Hanly, the festival expressed the long-standing cultural appreciation that the Irish cultivated, which became “submerged but... never extinguished” during the nation’s colonial struggle.<sup>21</sup>

This struggle became the church’s post-Catholic emancipation opportunity.<sup>22</sup> The rise of print media in nineteenth-century Ireland led to the consolidation of orthodox Catholicism.<sup>23</sup> The prevalence of emigration bolstered this consolidation as a solution to the rampant poverty in post-famine Ireland. A new class of “Catholic

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<sup>15</sup> McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1005.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Rahner, *Christian Humanism*, E-book, vol. 9, Theological Investigations (Limerick: Centre for Culture Technology and Values, 2004), 201, [https://www.theway.org.uk/comersus/store/comersus\\_viewItem.asp?idProduct=4118](https://www.theway.org.uk/comersus/store/comersus_viewItem.asp?idProduct=4118).

<sup>17</sup> Hanley Furfey, ‘Personalistic Social Action’, 205.

<sup>18</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Opened in Athlone by Bishop of Elphin’, *Anglo-Celt*, 18 April 1953, Irish Newspaper Archive. The *Anglo-Celt* noted the presence of Dean John Crowe, the parish priest of Athlone and Vicar-General of the diocese of Elphin among the civic and religious leaders attending. Between 1956 and 1959 Canon McCarthy, Dean Crowe’s successor, was instrumental in ensuring the transition of the festival to St Peter’s Hall (renamed the Dean Crowe Hall) in 1959 where the AIDF has been based since.

<sup>19</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Opened in Athlone by Bishop of Elphin’.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Drama Festival First of Its Kind in Ireland’, *Westmeath Independent*, 18 April 1953, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>21</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Opened in Athlone by Bishop of Elphin’.

<sup>22</sup> Colin Barr and Daithí Ó Corráin, ‘Catholic Ireland 1740-2016’, in *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland*, ed. Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E. Daly (Cambridge UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 71–75.

<sup>23</sup> Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland: 1750 - 1850* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2010), 136.

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tenant farmers,” as well as providing a source of the clergy, promoted a “discipline involving the sacrifice of short-term goals for long-term planning” that underpinned “the modernisation of Irish society.”<sup>24</sup> This discipline strengthened the Church’s influence on the development of Irish society and provided emerging politicians with a framework that allowed them to legitimise their power within the State.<sup>25</sup>

With the encouragement of the British government, the Irish Catholic Church provided schools and hospitals in towns and villages where the State could not offer these services. Church and State cooperation in education was part of a strategy employed by the British government to suppress revolutionary tendencies within the state following the French Revolution of the late Eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Church provision of public services was well established when Ireland achieved independence.<sup>27</sup> The practicalities of such an arrangement strengthened its role within Irish society, influencing generations for over two centuries. The debate about the Church’s provision of public services began in the 1950s and continued throughout the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> It encompassed all aspects of life and became a point of controversy for the amateur movement when Fallon resigned as lifetime patron of the ADCI in 1963 because of the involvement of clergy in amateur drama.<sup>29</sup>

Though dressed in clothes of spirituality and culture, An Tóstal was a commercial venture. Nevertheless, for the *Irish Independent*, it presented “an opportunity to project widely our spiritual life and cultural place in the world.”<sup>30</sup> In words echoed by Bishop Browne at the end of the decade, Canon Hayes, the founder of Muintir na Tíre at the 1950 CDF, spoke about the tension between spirituality and culture. Addressing the promise of modernisation, Hayes commented that “when a nation throws all its resources into economic betterment, it is only the first sign of a decadent people.”<sup>31</sup> As discussed in chapter one, spirituality and culture, rather than

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<sup>24</sup> Keenaghan, ‘State and Cultural Policy’, 16–17.

<sup>25</sup> Girvin, ‘Before the Celtic Tiger’, 349–65.

<sup>26</sup> McCarthy, ‘The Transformation of Ireland’, 44–45.

<sup>27</sup> Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, 132–35.

<sup>28</sup> ‘When Bishops Opposed an Education Bill’, *Irish Times*, 23 April 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “‘Cherished Relationship Misrepresented’ - Archbishop McQuaid”, *Evening Echo*, 4 October 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘The Bishop Has His Say’, *Irish Independent*, 27 May 1970, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Patron of Drama Group Resigns’, *Irish Independent*, 3 May 1963, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Festival Plan Takes Shape’, *Irish Independent*, 5 April 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>31</sup> Sheedy, *Clare Drama Festival*, 23.

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decadence, permeated de Valera and Costello’s remarks to the Arts Council in January 1952.<sup>32</sup> They were also the themes that permeated de Valera’s St. Patrick’s Day speech almost a decade before.<sup>33</sup>

Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich argues that liberal democracy and “religions of the spirit” contain a fragility that makes them interdependent and deeply engaged with one another in pursuing meaning.<sup>34</sup> This interdependence accentuates their fragilities, leading them towards a fragmented living experience that mirrors and replicates religion and society’s challenges.<sup>35</sup> Some aspects of social life acquire dimensions of spirituality and religion that are ideological rather than religious. Consequently, the nation becomes defined by its “growing power structure” and its pursuit of “a principle of ultimate significance.”<sup>36</sup> When both elements align, nationalism emerges as a quasi-religious ideology within society. Thus, Catholicism and nationalism became enmeshed and entwined in Irish cultural, political, and social life.

### Networking

In post-war Irish society, such enmeshment saw the organisation of festival committees with a clerical hierarchy of patrons, presidents, and vice presidents. This festival structure showed the importance of bringing the Church, State and business together in cultural networks developing festivals throughout the 1950s. Effusive in its praise for the organisers of the WDF, the *Irish Press* was at pains to point out how the organising committee drew its inspiration from its patron, president, and vice-presidents, Bishop Fergus of Achonry, Monsignor Blaine parish priest of Tubbercurry, Dr Flannery, M.J. Devine and District Justice Rochford.<sup>37</sup>

In a manner replicated in other festivals, the parish priest of Holy Cross Parish, Charleville, Very Rev. John Canon Burke PP and curate, Rev. T.W. Lenihan CC, acted as the president and chairperson of the festival committee.<sup>38</sup> Such appointments ensured their influence and control over the festival situated in the parochial hall, a

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<sup>32</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Precis of a Speech by An Taoiseach, Mr Eamon de Valera T.D.’; An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Precis of a Speech of Mr John A. Costello T.D.’

<sup>33</sup> De Valera, ‘On Language and the Irish Nation’, 466.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 66.

<sup>36</sup> Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival’, *Irish Press*, 20 February 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>38</sup> O’Riordan to O’Sullivan, 25 February 1954.

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former church. However, not everyone welcomed such appointments. For example, when asked to become the patron of the CDF, the parish priest of Scarriff, Fr T.J. Sammon, replied, “in other words, you want to get rid of me. You don’t want to give me any power.”<sup>39</sup> Notably, in Scarriff, the local cinema rather than the parochial hall became the permanent venue for the CDF after 1948.<sup>40</sup> Including the priests, the membership of the Charleville committee comprised eight men and four women, including two bank officials, three company directors, a CIE clerk, a carpenter, a retired baker, a homemaker, a shopkeeper, and a shop assistant.<sup>41</sup> Though there was no sign of any denominational preference, the NCDF funding applications signalled the importance of social hierarchy by emphasising the professions of each member.

The priority given to social hierarchy was explored in plays performed at festivals, including Murphy’s, *On the Outside* in 1963, Miller’s *The Crucible* in 1965 and Ní Ghráda’s *On Trial* in 1966. The social position of each person within the committee gave the Arts Council the impression that festival organisers possessed experience and expertise (as is the case in applying for funding to government organisations today). As well as raising the standards of facilities at the festival, funding applications stressed cultivating a network between the local parish and the business community. This emphasis demonstrated to the Arts Council that the NCDF, among others, was building a regional and national cultural network based on a firmly middle-class model.

Like many voluntary arts organisations then and now, these applications detailed some benefits of the community network, which empowered local ownership of the festival. They also recognised that without Arts Council support, the continuation of informal arrangements, such as procuring equipment, provided a poor experience for participating drama groups.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, “extensive alterations to the hall stage to make it on a par, if not better, than other venues sponsoring a drama festival” became possible through funds raised by groups like the St Colman Players.<sup>43</sup> The festival organiser Ted O’Riordan managed the hall on behalf of Canon Burke.<sup>44</sup> Despite this, in 1955, as outlined below, the management of this facility became a

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<sup>39</sup> Sheedy, *Clare Drama Festival*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Sheedy, *Clare Drama Festival*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> O’Riordan to O’Sullivan, 25 February 1954.

<sup>42</sup> O’Riordan to O’Sullivan, 25 February 1954.

<sup>43</sup> O’Riordan to O’Sullivan, 25 February 1954.

<sup>44</sup> T. J. O’Riordan to William O’Sullivan, Letter, 3 February 1955, CE: 286, ARN: 2000/1954/3, Arts Council Archive.

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sticking point for the Arts Council.

The exchange of letters between O’Riordan and the Arts Council about the NCDF funding applications tells us several things that proved to be important as the decade progressed. First, Ffrench-Salkeld’s correspondence with the Arts Council maintained that the development of rural drama needed a creative outlet through which drama groups could network and learn from professional mentors in the field.<sup>45</sup> The choice of adjudicators, the establishment of amateur drama festivals, and an autumn school for drama companies fulfilled this need.<sup>46</sup> Second, in the interest of good governance, the Arts Council expected that a committee independent of the owners managed the halls used by festivals, providing open access to all citizens in the spirit of CST.<sup>47</sup> Third, despite pledges by the government that the Arts Council operated at arm’s length, the NCDF successfully engaged a cultural and political network that was not averse to lobbying on behalf of favoured groups. O’Riordan sought the help of local TD and government Chief Whip O’Sullivan, who successfully lobbied the council on behalf of the festival.

While the Arts Council queried the governance and management of Charleville Hall, O’Riordan wrote to Forás Éireann enquiring about the possibility of applying for “grants from the Carnegie Trust for Stage improvements and stage lighting.”<sup>48</sup> The resulting public-private partnership saw the ongoing development of a cultural network and the influence of international organisations in society. Forás Éireann utilised government (Arts Council) and international (Carnegie Trust) cooperation in pursuing cultural development. An examination of the Arts Council archive shows that both Forás Éireann and the Arts Council availed of funding opportunities presented by the emerging relationship with the Carnegie Trust throughout the decade. O’Riordan’s resourcefulness in accessing a political and cultural network to secure funding for the festival and Charleville Hall proved worthwhile.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cecil Ffrench-Salkeld to P.J. Little, Letter, 14 November 1952, CE: 73.1, ARN: 9021/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>46</sup> T. J. O’Riordan to William O’Sullivan, 23 February 1954, CE: 286 ARN: 2000/1954/3, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>47</sup> William O’Sullivan to T.J. O’Riordan, Letter, 28 February 1955, CE: 401, ARN: 33390/1955/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>48</sup> T. J. O’Riordan to Foras Éireann, 7 January 1955, CE: 286, ARN: 2000/1954/3, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>49</sup> William O’Sullivan to Ted O’Riordan, Letter, 11 March 1955, CE: 401, ARN: 33390/1955/1, Arts Council Archive; William O’Sullivan to Ted O’Riordan, Letter, 11 March 1955, CE: 286, ARN: 2000/1954/3, Arts Council Archive.

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Fourth, while the NCDF’s cultural and political network successfully lobbied for a favourable outcome, the Arts Council insisted on providing a guarantee of public access by the hall authorities as a condition of its assistance. It stressed that, given the permanent nature of the stage renovation, should a dispute arise with the hall management, the festival “would have no rights whatsoever towards its removal...if you were not permitted to use the hall.”<sup>50</sup> Though not considered by O’Riordan or the festival committee, O’Sullivan’s subtle hint that in “time, such things may happen” was a recognition of the changing nature of the clerical management of public buildings.<sup>51</sup> A change of parish priest to one not well disposed towards amateur drama might end the informal arrangement concerning the festival’s use of the hall. Considering Archbishop McQuaid’s detrimental influence later in the decade, the Arts Council’s warning appears prescient.

As the diocesan bishop answered directly to the Holy See for the administration of property, it is significant that the parish promptly provided the guarantee.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the provision of “full right of access” for the public within this signed guarantee asserted the equality of rights envisaged by *Quadragesimo Anno*.<sup>53</sup> Though managed daily by the parish priest, Fr. Burke and O’Riordan, the diocese maintained a vested interest in the administration of property (which the hall was part of) for its people’s common good and needs. This subtle warning, coupled with the query “if the committee of management of the hall is fully representative of the community, and if its rules provide that it is open at all times for the services of the community,” challenged the management practices of the church ownership of public buildings to live up to CST.<sup>54</sup>

In another example, the Sportex Hall, where the AIDF took place, was part of the Gentex factory complex, which the Irish Government established in 1936 under the direction of Patrick Lenihan.<sup>55</sup> Lenihan, the ADCI chair and an AIDF organiser,

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<sup>50</sup> William O’Sullivan to T.J. O’Riordan, Letter, 13 January 1955, CE: 286, ARN: 2000/1954/3, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>51</sup> O’Sullivan to O’Riordan, 13 January 1955.

<sup>52</sup> Peters, *1917 Code of Canon Law*, 1530–33.

<sup>53</sup> Very Rev John Canon Burke and T.J. O’Riordan, ‘Guarantee of Access to Charleville Hall’ (Memorandum, 5 April 1955), CE: 401, ARN: 33390/1955/1, Arts Council Archive; Pope Pius XI, ‘Quadragesimo Anno’, 15 May 1931.

<sup>54</sup> O’Sullivan to O’Riordan, 13 January 1955.

<sup>55</sup> Gearóid O’Brien, ‘Gentex - The Factory That Shaped the Life of Athlone Episode One’, Podcast (Mixcloud), accessed 13 July 2021, <https://athlonecommunityradio.ie/gentex/>.

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represented Fianna Fáil for Longford-Westmeath in Dáil Éireann from 1965 to 1970.<sup>56</sup> Between 1956 and 1959, the parish priest of Athlone, Canon John McCarthy, continuously engaged with the Arts Council about renovating St Peter’s Hall (renamed Dean Crowe Hall in 1959), which became the permanent home of the All-Ireland Drama Festival.

In a handwritten note to the Arts Council in June 1958, McCarthy, parish priest of Athlone and vicar general of the diocese of Elphin, clarified that a committee “representative of the parish” was in place to manage the day-to-day affairs of the hall.<sup>57</sup> Unlike Fr Burke in Charleville, Canon McCarthy specified that the hall was “available, at all reasonable times, for the services of the parish community.”<sup>58</sup> He also specified that the possibility of refusal of access remained for events which may not be “in the interests of the community, public order, and morality.”<sup>59</sup> The guarantee of public access was a significant concession by the parish and diocesan authorities. It confirmed the added value of the renovations and the importance of these festivals to the local community and parish. It also proved that the council, in its pursuit of good governance, was unafraid to challenge the established management practices of a Church that wielded a significant influence on society.

As mentioned earlier, throughout the 1920s, the Irish Government used culture and cultural nationalism to legitimise itself.<sup>60</sup> Catholicism became a bastion of Irish identity as people sought “stability in a time of rapid social change.”<sup>61</sup> As the proliferation of religious news in national, regional, and local newspapers shows, the Church sought to promote catholicity over secularism as part of popular culture.<sup>62</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the medium of television and the relaxation of literary censorship affected social change.<sup>63</sup> The new medium led to the “greatest change in Irish social history since the post-Famine devotional revolution and the attendant

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Patrick J. Lenihan’, *Tithe an Oireachtais* (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2021), <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/member/Patrick-J-Lenihan.D.1965-04-21/>; Brian Murphy, Mary O’Rourke, and Noel Whelan, *Brian Lenihan: In Calm and Crisis* (Sallins, Co. Kildare: Merrion Press, 2014). Lenihan was the father and grandfather of Fianna Fail government ministers, the late Brian Lenihan TD, Mary O’Rourke TD and Minister for Finance, the late Brian Lenihan, TD

<sup>57</sup> Very Rev. John Canon McCarthy to Mervyn Wall, Letter, 25 June 1958, CE: 673, ARN: 33390/1956/2, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>58</sup> McCarthy to Wall, 25 June 1958.

<sup>59</sup> McCarthy to Wall, 25 June 1958.

<sup>60</sup> Keenaghan, ‘State and Cultural Policy’, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Keenaghan, ‘State and Cultural Policy’, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Keenaghan, ‘State and Cultural Policy’, 12–14.

<sup>63</sup> Foster, “‘Changed Utterly’”, 419–41.

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changes in family structure.”<sup>64</sup>

For Tillich, the fragmentary nature of the relationship between secular society and religion begins with introducing new technologies, such as cinema and television, leading to indifference towards questions of meaning.<sup>65</sup> This indifference is a transitory phase in the development of meaning, as one form of understanding gives way before another emerges. Williams presented a similar argument when outlining how generational change affects the understanding and experience of culture while retaining a continuity of tradition.<sup>66</sup> In the transitory phase, secular culture embraces various aspects of religious life, such as social justice “and hope in a progressive transformation of society in a positive direction.”<sup>67</sup> One can see the ideological challenge of this transitory phase in the resistance to new media and global influences throughout the 1950s.

The hierarchy framed their engagement with national social issues through Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin.<sup>68</sup> When they spoke about sordid plays, it was from the perspective of moral reform, as outlined in *Quadragesimo Anno*.<sup>69</sup> Such was the archbishop’s influence that fears of his response to the staging of Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo* prompted the pre-emptive arrest of the Pike Theatre’s director, Alan Simpson, during the 1957 DTF.<sup>70</sup> A year later, the Archbishop refused to permit the customary festival Mass after the proposed staging of O’Casey’s *The Drums of Father Ned* and Alan McClelland’s dramatization of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which led to the cancellation of the DTF.<sup>71</sup> The nature of the archbishop’s misjudged intervention influenced decisions about play choice and production not only in Dublin.<sup>72</sup> For example, the Yeats Society decided not to stage J.M. Synge’s *The Tinkers Wedding* by the Pike Theatre Players at the 1963 YISS in Sligo because of concerns about repercussions from the

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<sup>64</sup> Foster, ““Changed Utterly””, 425.

<sup>65</sup> Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, 13.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Whyte, *Church and State*, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Pope Pius XI, ‘Quadragesimo Anno’, 15 May 1931, no. 84; Hanley Furfey, ‘Personalistic Social Action’, 205.

<sup>70</sup> Lionel Pilkington, ‘Theatre, Sexuality and the State: Tennessee Williams’s *The Rose Tattoo* at the Dublin Theatre Festival, 1957’, in *Interactions Dublin Theatre Festival 1957-2007*, ed. Patrick Lonergan and Nicholas Grene, New edition (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020), 25.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Kilroy, ‘A Playwrights Festival’, in *Interactions Dublin Theatre Festival 1957-2007*, ed. Nicholas Grene, Patrick Lonergan, and Lilian Chambers, New edition (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 13; Clara Cullen and Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, eds., *His Grace Is Displeased: Selected Correspondence of John Charles McQuaid* (Dublin: Merrion Press, 2013), 232–51.

<sup>72</sup> John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Dublin, Ireland: O’Brien Press, 1999), 328–30.

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performance.<sup>73</sup> Notwithstanding, Archbishop McQuaid’s actions in Dublin were not the entire story of the engagement of the hierarchical Church with civil society.<sup>74</sup> As Ó Faoláin indicated in *The Bell*, “there [existed] a more normal relationship between priest and people” than that presented by the Archbishop of Dublin.<sup>75</sup>

Unlike Fallon, for many producers, playwrights and columnists, including Mac Anna, Murphy and the *Irish Independent*’s Prompter, clergy support for drama festivals demonstrated the positive relationship between priest and people.<sup>76</sup> For playwright, Tom Coffey, priests, because of their “background and standing in the local community,” played an influential role in the amateur drama movement.<sup>77</sup> Opening the CDF in 1967, Coffey regretted that clergy could not attend or view professional theatre.<sup>78</sup> As mentioned earlier, the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* forbade priests and religious from attending drama productions that may provoke “scandal.”<sup>79</sup> Like many aspects of Church law, the context of this canon was the avoidance of scandal that plays like J.M. Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World* or O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* provoked in 1907 and 1926, respectively.<sup>80</sup> Contemporary twenty-first-century understandings of avoiding scandal may sometimes dismiss this motivating factor as uncivil. The canon was similar to the requirement of professions, such as teaching and nursing, that members do not engage in publicly disreputable behaviour.<sup>81</sup> Putting on a performance for clergy or inviting them to the dress rehearsal frequently avoided violating this edict.

#### Culture and Education

Culture was an inherent part of the nation’s life for Bishop Hanly. In his view, the artist’s creativity, in all its forms, needed to be harnessed within the “proper environment and [given] encouragement which would allow it to flow and develop.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Shelagh Kirby, ‘Minutes of the Yeats Society, Sligo’ (Minutes, Sligo, 26 April 1963), Yeats Society Archive.

<sup>74</sup> Whyte, *Church and State*, 349–61.

<sup>75</sup> Ó Faoláin, ‘The Bishop of Galway’, 15–17.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Adjudicators Tribute’; ‘Clergy Play Vital Part in Drama Movement’, *Cork Examiner*, 6 March 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive; Grene, *Theatre of Tom Murphy*, 279.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Clergy Play Vital Part’.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Clergy Play Vital Part’.

<sup>79</sup> Peters, *1917 Code of Canon Law*, 140.

<sup>80</sup> Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre & Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 33, Kindle.

<sup>81</sup> Teaching Council of Ireland, ‘Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers’ (The Teaching Council of Ireland, 2016); Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, ‘Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Nurses and Registered Midwives’ (Dublin: Bord Altrains agus Cnáimhseachais na hEireann, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Drama Festival’.

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For Costello, “the shoddy meretricious products of the modern entertainment industry which in films and periodicals achieve such success in corrupting aesthetic taste and warping artistic perception” challenged cultural development.<sup>83</sup> He reasoned that rather than increasing censorship, the solution to this challenge lay in “raising the standard of taste of the people,” empowering their capacity for critical thinking.<sup>84</sup> Dr Roger McHugh posed another solution to Costello’s dilemma. In a lecture on “The Roots of Irish Drama,” he described the foundation of the AIDF as a “genuine cultural contribution.”<sup>85</sup> In words that O’Beirne echoed in 1955, he called on the Department of Education to engage in “intelligent planning” to develop drama within the Irish education system.<sup>86</sup> McHugh argued that such planning led to cultural projects, like the AIDF, which promoted “a healthy national drama and an Irish film industry.”<sup>87</sup>

Echoing McHugh, Bishop Hanly remarked on the educational benefits of drama for both actors and audiences. These included “self-expression,” “appreciation and emulation,” which allowed the exploration of “the noblest and highest traits of our religious and national character.”<sup>88</sup> This creative expression was rooted in “a culture, history and tradition that were nurtured and matured under the guidance of Christian ideals.”<sup>89</sup> Echoing Bishop Hanly and Dr McHugh at the 1954 WDF, Monsignor Blaine VG, acting on behalf of the Bishop of Achonry, Dr Fergus, remarked on the cultural and educational benefits of drama festivals to the local community. Blaine remarked that such festivals “had a very good influence on the community both in cultural and educational spheres. For that reason, they deserved all the support and encouragement that could be given them.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage.

<sup>84</sup> Government of Ireland, Arts Bill, 1951 Second Stage.

<sup>85</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Opened in Athlone by Bishop of Elphin’. Dr McHugh was director of the first Yeats International Summer School which took place in 1960.

<sup>86</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Opened in Athlone by Bishop of Elphin’.

<sup>87</sup> ‘All-Ireland Drama Festival Opened in Athlone by Bishop of Elphin’. The year before, the film director John Ford released *The Quiet Man* with John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara in the leading roles. Bishop Hanly may have had the stage Irish stereotype of Irish village life in mind when he commented on the long tradition of Irish cultural life at the opening of the first festival. Filmed in Co. Galway and Co. Mayo, *The Quiet Man*, despite its stage Irish stereotype, has remained a popular film through the decades generating tourism for the localities in which it was recorded.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Drama Festival’.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Drama Festival’.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Opened at Tubbercurry’, *Ballina Herald*, 13 March 1954, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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As mentioned in chapter one, the Department of Education resisted the inclusion of drama in the curriculum.<sup>91</sup> The failure of the Irish Government to engage with the benefits of drama was the subject of remarks made by O’Beirne, president of the ADCI, at the opening of the third NCDF in 1955.<sup>92</sup> For him, the government’s lack of engagement with drama was “a matter of great regret...both educationally and socially.”<sup>93</sup> Utilising a recurring theme at festivals, he claimed that drama could serve as “a means of preventing migration and emigration.”<sup>94</sup> He called on the government to encourage and foster “drama in the schools by offering scholarships and special awards at these festivals.”<sup>95</sup> Despite the government’s lack of engagement, many primary and secondary schools participated in the school competitions provided by festivals.<sup>96</sup> As the previous chapter discussed, with the aid of the ADCI, many festivals, including the NCDF and WDF, provided production courses for amateur drama groups throughout the 1950s. As an example of subsidiarity, local communities filled a gap that the government was reluctant to engage.

### Drama Reflecting Society

At the opening of the 1953 Cavan Drama Festival, Bishop Austin Quinn of Kilmore spoke about the mental health benefits of drama. For Quinn, drama empowered personal and self-development, leading “young people” to engage in civic life.<sup>97</sup> Quinn proposed two options for young adults present; a sedentary life of “pleasure” or active engagement, whereby they took responsibility for developing their own life and creativity.<sup>98</sup> Three years later, Bishop Fergus of Achonry echoed Quinn’s remarks when he recommended drama as it provided young people with focus, meaning and value at a time of advancing emigration.<sup>99</sup> This recommendation ensured that cultural tradition remained strong throughout the generations as young adults engaged in handing culture from one generation to the next.<sup>100</sup> The longevity of these festivals proved the strength of cultural development undertaken by these organisations.

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<sup>91</sup> Moylan to Little, 17 November 1951, 1.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Drama “Being Ignored” by Government’.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Festival’, *Irish Press*, 23 March 1953, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Festival’.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Opens at Tubbercurry the Bishop’s Tributes’, *Ballina Herald*, 25 February 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69.

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The *Sligo Champion* noted the international profile of the plays and playwrights and mentioned a mix of established and new plays featured at that year’s festival. The plays produced included work by the playwrights Agatha Christie, Lennox Robinson, Frank Carney, William Shakespeare, Brian Bairead, Patrick Hamilton, Lady Gregory, W. B. Yeats, Sigerson Clifford and Louis D’Alton.<sup>101</sup>

Plays written by women appeared at festivals, though not as often as by men. An analysis of festival programmes shows that women wrote or produced twenty-three per cent of the 431 plays staged at the AIDF between 1953 and 1969. Female producers staged two-thirds of these plays, while female playwrights wrote one-third. Thirteen plays written by Gregory were performed at the festival between 1953 and 1961, while three of Teresa Deevy’s plays, *The Wild Goose*, *The King of Spain’s Daughter* and *In Search of Valour*, were performed between 1956 and 1965. Coughlan, who staged several plays at the festival for the Athlone Little Theatre company, wrote and produced one of her plays, *The Return Room*, in 1965.<sup>102</sup> Pauline McGonigle wrote two plays produced by Joan Cassidy of the Kilkeel Women’s Institute, Co. Down, in 1965 and 1966.<sup>103</sup> She also featured as a cast member in one of her plays, *The Thoughts of Emma Rossiter*, in 1966. Joyce Dennys wrote *Women at Peace*, produced by Cassidy for the same drama company in 1962.<sup>104</sup> Maura Laverty’s *Tolka Row* featured in 1953 and 1963, while The Moat Theatre Group and Wexford Parish Drama Group produced Ní Ghráda’s ground-breaking play *On Trial* in 1966 in 1969, respectively.

Emphasising the “widespread interest” in the plays scheduled for performance Bishop Fergus described the 1958 WDF as a “work of considerable importance” (fig. 6).<sup>105</sup> He also affirmed the work of the festival in promoting culture and “good drama.”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the festival’s educational benefits resulted in the critical engagement of the people of the locality with performances and drama.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> ‘The Money Doesn’t Matter’, *Sligo Champion*, 1 March 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>102</sup> ‘More Successes for Little Theatre Group’, *Westmeath Independent*, 10 April 1965, 2.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Plays for Drama Finals’, *Evening Herald*, 14 April 1966, 22.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Tomelty Play Well Produced,’ *Evening Herald*, April 14, 1962, 2, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>106</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Opens at Tubbercurry’, *Western People*, 1 March 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Opens’.

## Week of Drama at Tubbercurry



**Figure 6:** Bishop Fergus of Achonry with the organising committee of the Western Drama Festival in 1958 (*Sligo Champion*, 1st March 1958)

Revisiting remarks from 1956, Fergus reflected upon the importance of drama, which he described as a “most popular” and “most satisfactory form of human art.”<sup>108</sup> For him, drama revealed “life as in a mirror,” portraying all aspects of living, tragic and amusing, on stage.<sup>109</sup>

### **Nobility and Darkness**

Like Hammond’s play *The Edge of a Shadow* (see chapter two), Carney’s play *The Righteous are Bold* deals with the consequences of emigration and the subsequent attitude changes. In the play, the experience of emigration changes the character Nora’s worldview and treats her independence as a case of demonic possession in need of an exorcism.<sup>110</sup> Influenced by Catholic values, the play reinforced a patriarchal understanding of the place of women within society.<sup>111</sup> Its use of exorcism to purge independent thinking promoted a frequent message about resisting exposure to modernising influences heard at festivals.<sup>112</sup> The adjudicator, Harry Brogan, complemented the Ballymote Dramatic Society for their “excellent interpretation of the play,” which local curate the Reverend Patrick Higgins produced.<sup>113</sup> After evaluating the production, Brogan remarked: “that a town the size of Ballymote should

<sup>108</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’; John Devitt, *Shifting Scenes: Irish Theatregoing, 1955-1985*, ed. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>110</sup> Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*, 149; Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 43.

<sup>111</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 45.

<sup>112</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 44.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

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be able to produce a play which would give greater scope to each actor and actress.”<sup>114</sup>

For Fergus, there were no limits to portrayals of human life, with even the “sordid and unlovely” becoming “lawful material for the drama.”<sup>115</sup> He urged moderation in performance and called on drama companies to consider a balance between nobility and darkness in choosing plays. He expressed concern that some plays emphasised what is now considered the shadow side of human living, which in his view, was disproportionate, damaged the craft and “cannot be considered good art.”<sup>116</sup> The playwright’s “work deals with only a small section of life, [and] he must deal with it in proportion and with due reference to its content.”<sup>117</sup> Seven years later, at the opening of the Tipperary Open Drama Festival, the Archbishop of Cashel, Thomas Morris, made a similar point when he encouraged the amateur drama movement to “[produce] maturity and a critical approach to the mass media.”<sup>118</sup>

*The Righteous Are Bold* was not the first play that Higgins brought successfully to the stage. Through his influence, the Charlestown Dramatic Club emerged out of the wartime foundation of the Little Theatre. Charlestown native, journalist and author John Healy noted the resourcefulness of this theatre in staging plays.<sup>119</sup> For example, on one occasion writing “a complete act when the third act of an out-of-print three-act play was lost.”<sup>120</sup> The club’s formation changed the direction of drama in Charlestown throughout the 1950s, as it competed at the Western, Bundoran, Mayo, and All-Ireland Drama Festivals.<sup>121</sup>

Alongside Father Higgins, various priests, including the future Bishop of Derry Edward Daly, who produced at these festivals, chose contemporary plays that reflected societal issues. For example, Fr D. Rea, Rev. P. Dowling, and Rev. T. P. Vesey produced Hamilton’s *Gaslight* at the WDF, CDF and AIDF between 1957 and 1964 (see appendix two). Vesey, who replaced Higgins as curate in Charlestown, produced Hamilton’s play for the club at the WDF in 1958. Still, expectations of the club’s success with Hamilton’s *Gaslight* were low as the play required “a near professional

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>117</sup> ‘The Bishop’s Tributes’.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Fundamental Skills in Mass Media’, *Cork Examiner*, 16 March 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>119</sup> John Healy, ‘Mayo Drama Group’s Success Story’, *Irish Press*, 18 April 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>120</sup> Healy, ‘Mayo Drama Group’s Success Story’.

<sup>121</sup> Healy, ‘Mayo Drama Group’s Success Story’.

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cast and ‘the last word’ in pace and production.”<sup>122</sup>

For Healy, Vesey’s production of *Gaslight* was “the success story of the 1958 Amateur Drama season.”<sup>123</sup> Under his direction, Charlestown Dramatic Club won the F. J. McCormack Gold Medal for the best characterisation and premier prize at the Western and Mayo Drama Festivals that year.<sup>124</sup> Healy attributed the play’s success to the club’s disappointment at Mac Anna’s blistering critique of their staging of T.C. Murray’s *Maurice Harte* at the 1955 AIDF. The success of the 1958 production was proof that they “listened to Mac Anna [as he] explained the mistakes, praised the acting and made suggestions.”<sup>125</sup>

Set in the nineteenth-century London home of a middle-aged couple, Jack and Bella Manningham maintain the appearance of middle-class life while surrounded by the signs of social decay.<sup>126</sup> The play, which gave its name to a particular form of domestic violence involving emotional and psychological abuse, focuses on the consequent fracturing of relationships that result. As demonstrated throughout the play, Jack continuously denigrates his wife in front of their staff, adding to her increasing lack of self-worth; “I don’t mean anything. It’s you who read meanings into everything, Bella dear. I wish you weren’t such a perfect little silly.”<sup>127</sup>

Promising an evening at the theatre, he deliberately misplaces a picture, watch and brooch to shame his wife and control her liberty and sense of self, “You know, Bella, that must be a very superb sensation. To take a part and lose yourself entirely in the character of someone else. I flatter myself; I could have made an actor.”<sup>128</sup> The Charlestown performance presented Jack Manningham as a “preening...ludicrous character.”<sup>129</sup> These unsavoury qualities were stressed by the actor’s “sardonic courtliness” and “air of authority which is rare enough on the amateur stage.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Healy, ‘Mayo Drama Group’s Success Story’.

<sup>123</sup> Healy, ‘Mayo Drama Group’s Success Story’.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Tubbercurry Drama Festival’, *Ballina Herald*, 15 March 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>125</sup> Healy, ‘Mayo Drama Group’s Success Story’.

<sup>126</sup> Patrick Hamilton, *Gaslight* (1939; repr., Abacus, 2018), 6, Kindle.

<sup>127</sup> Hamilton, *Gaslight*, 10–11.

<sup>128</sup> Hamilton, *Gaslight*, 14–15.

<sup>129</sup> AK, ‘Drama Festival Commentary: Gaslight’, *Westmeath Independent*, 19 April 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>130</sup> AK, ‘Drama Festival Commentary: Gaslight’.

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Bridget Duffy’s “credible” portrayal of Bella Manningham conveyed the terror of the gaslighting experience;<sup>131</sup>

I don’t know what to say. It all sounds so incredible... It’s when I’m alone at night. I get the idea that—somebody’s walking about up there... (*Pointing up*). Up there...At night, when my husband’s out...I hear noises, from my bedroom, but I’m too afraid to go up...<sup>132</sup>

Indeed so convincing was Duffy’s portrayal that the *Westmeath Independent*’s reviewer, AK, “wanted to shake her when she told that black-hearted villain about the detective.”<sup>133</sup> Though critical of Bill Doran’s attempt at a Scottish accent which distracted from his portrayal of the detective, AK “found very little fault with [the production].”<sup>134</sup> Despite this, he remarked that while *Gaslight* “may not have been the most suitable play in the world for him to choose... I...feel grateful to him for breaking through the kitchen wall.”<sup>135</sup> AK’s comment about the suitability of the play showed a perception that, as discussed above, clergy and religious avoided plays that dealt with themes like domestic abuse. However, clerics were not averse to writing and producing plays that reflected the reality of pastoral life they encountered in daily ministry. Father Joseph Cassidy’s play, *In Wild Earth*, and Father P.V. O’Brien’s choice of *The Crucible* shows the existence of “zones of permission,” or an unwritten licence about the performance of plays with salacious or controversial themes.<sup>136</sup> In offering gratitude for Vesey’s decision to produce *Gaslight*, the reviewer recognised the value and impact of such plays’ on Irish society.

During his adjudication of the NCDF that year, Stack emphasised this value when he claimed that “drama...broadens our sympathy, enriches our imagination, enables us to understand human nature a little better and helps us to become wiser and more balanced men and women.”<sup>137</sup> The following year, Canon T. F. Murphy echoed Stack’s view of drama when opening the 1959 NCDF on behalf of Bishop John Ahern of Cloyne. Addressing a capacity audience, Murphy lauded the amateur drama as “a movement in the real sense of the word.”<sup>138</sup> He stated that rural groups “come to the

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<sup>131</sup> AK, ‘Drama Festival Commentary: Gaslight’.

<sup>132</sup> Hamilton, *Gaslight*, 29.

<sup>133</sup> AK, ‘Drama Festival Commentary: Gaslight’.

<sup>134</sup> AK, ‘Drama Festival Commentary: Gaslight’.

<sup>135</sup> AK, ‘Drama Festival Commentary: Gaslight’.

<sup>136</sup> Victor Merriman to Ian Kennedy, ‘Doctoral Viva Conversation at the University of Galway’, Personal Communication, 17 February 2023.

<sup>137</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Antidote to Low Grade Amusements’.

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drama festival to teach us, who live in towns, the true way of the stage.”<sup>139</sup> As Higgins and Vesey showed, the producer, Stack suggested, was “a teacher” interested “in the development of his actors.”<sup>140</sup> Echoing Mooney’s approach (see the previous chapter), Stack recommended that drama companies consider the play in terms “of the whole and not of the part” and that actors research widely “and encourage an appreciation of the other fine arts.”<sup>141</sup> For Stack, such work “[enabled] amateur companies to compete with the professional theatre.”<sup>142</sup>

#### Questioning

Bishop Fergus encouraged producers to choose plays that encouraged a holistic approach to daily life, but his appeal was disregarded. Exemplifying the existence of zones of permission, ninety-one plays produced by clergy appeared at the NCDF, WDF, CDF and AIDF between 1952 and 1970; priests and religious produced two-thirds of these plays following Fergus’s remarks (see appendix two). Clerical producers included Fr. P.V. O’Brien (Tuam Theatre Guild), Fr. D. Rea (Parteen Players), Rev. F. Moriarity (Compantas Ide, Limerick), Rev. T. P. Vesey (Charlestown Dramatic Club) and Fr. Christy Langan (Athenry Players) among others. Playwrights whose work featured in these productions included staples of Irish theatre, W.B. Yeats, Gregory, J. M. Synge, G.B. Shaw, Murray, Robinson, Paul Vincent Carroll, and M.J. Molloy. In addition, plays by Hamilton, Wilder, Keane, Murphy, Friel, Miller, Ionesco, Williams, Anouilh, Beckett, and Hugh Leonard broadened amateur theatre development.

Church engagement with public life concerns questions of meaning that face individuals and society. For example, following the controversial resignation of Dr Noël Browne as Minister for Health over the 1951 Mother and Child scheme, many social issues were portrayed on stage at drama festivals.<sup>143</sup> These included domestic violence, poverty, avoidance of scandal and preventable disease. The Archbishop of Dublin and the medical consultants provoked Dr Browne’s resignation over the scheme.<sup>144</sup> Despite this exercise of episcopal and medical power, the subsequent

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<sup>139</sup> ‘Antidote to Low Grade Amusements’.

<sup>140</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>141</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>142</sup> ‘High Standard’.

<sup>143</sup> ‘Dr. Browne Replaced’.

<sup>144</sup> Michael Clifford, ‘Politicians Have No Excuse Not to Do the Right Thing’, *Irish Examiner*, 16 January 2021, Online edition, sec. Views, ProQuest.

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publication of correspondence between Browne and the hierarchy in the Irish Times indicated an emergent questioning of the relationship between religion and civil society.<sup>145</sup> A Church engaged in public life interprets world events in the spirit of the Calvinist theologian Karl Barth’s method: “take your Bible and take your newspaper and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”<sup>146</sup> Such an approach does not point to the church but the presence of God amidst the secular world.<sup>147</sup>

As stated above, rather than choosing plays which suited the bishop’s agenda, some clergy produced a range of work that, as Stack recommended, provided an insight into human nature by portraying issues of power that mirrored the reality of daily life. Portraying such concrete issues in plays like *Gaslight* presented audiences with aspects of coercive control and marriage breakdown. Miller’s *The Crucible* challenged the consequences of an ideological religion present within society, while Ní Ghráda’s play *On Trial* addressed the perception of the fallen woman and society’s responsibility for mistreating unmarried mothers and their children.<sup>148</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, these were themes explored by Keane’s *Sive* at the CDF, NCDF and AIDF in 1959. For producers and playwrights not to present such issues on stage, as Fergus urged, would have resulted in a disservice to an audience that yearned for portrayals of the challenges of daily life.

The 1962 AIDF included what Abbey actor and adjudicator Ray McAnally called “world first productions in the amateur theatre [which] after the meteoric rise of *Sive*, [many thought] were only a flash in the pan.”<sup>149</sup> These premieres included TD O’Donnell’s *Shinny’s Men* and Cassidy-O’Donnell’s, *In Wild Earth*.<sup>150</sup> A play written by the future Bishop of Clonfert and Archbishop of Tuam, Joseph Cassidy and his teaching colleague, Jim O’Donnell, *In Wild Earth* was acclaimed at festivals that year. A gifted orator and master of the English language, Cassidy taught history, and

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<sup>145</sup> ‘Minister Releases Correspondence’, *Irish Times*, 12 April 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; ‘Minister Explains Why He Had to Rescind Scheme’, *Irish Times*, 12 April 1951, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Barth in Retirement’, *Time Magazine*, 31 May 1963, The TIME Vault, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,896838,00.html>.

<sup>147</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), xiv.

<sup>148</sup> Arthur Miller, ‘The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts’, in *Arthur Miller Plays 1* (1952; repr., London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 223–330. Kindle.; Ní Ghráda, *On Trial*; Ní Ghráda, *An Trial*.; Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 55.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’, *Irish Times*, 14 May 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

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O'Donnell taught “classics and French” at St Joseph’s College, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.<sup>151</sup> A contemporary tragicomedy set in “a small East coast hotel-cum-shop,” the play dealt with many challenges facing “the present generation of Irishmen and women.”<sup>152</sup>

Adjudicating the Limerick Drama Festival that year, the actor and director Anew McMaster congratulated the amateur playwrights for their “human play [which in] breaking new ground...[showed] a very outstanding grasp of the individual problems that beset every member of the family.”<sup>153</sup> Unlike McMaster, McAnally commented that *In Wild Earth* “broke very little new ground,” a view not shared by others.<sup>154</sup> Instead, McAnally encouraged the amateur movement to facilitate the work of aspiring playwrights like Cassidy and O'Donnell. Like Keane in 1959, this facilitation provided amateur playwrights with “the experience of seeing their own work on the stage rather than having their plays lying with rejection slips in a bottom drawer.”<sup>155</sup>

Following its appearance at the AIDF, the *Westmeath Independent* described *In Wild Earth* as a “strong play with plenty of meat in it.” which included relationship breakdown, parental neurosis, child manslaughter and disability.<sup>156</sup> The cast, which included the set designer, Eileen Quinn and Jim O'Donnell, who co-authored the play, held the audience and adjudicators’ “interest from start to finish” with their powerful performance.<sup>157</sup> In particular, the actor Dermot Connolly’s portrayal of disability utilised voice and body to portray his character Mark, “a man seething with rebellion against the fate that he refused to call God.”<sup>158</sup> For the *Westmeath Independent*, Connolly’s stage presence was so effective that “psychologically and physically, this was a remarkable performance.”<sup>159</sup> Written for Relays Productions, Ballinasloe and produced by Father Kevin Ryle, it won a gold medal for production at the Roscommon

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<sup>151</sup> ‘In Wild Earth’, *Dundalk Democrat*, 14 April 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive; Colbert Kearney, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 5 March 2013, Online edition, sec. Opinion.

<sup>152</sup> ‘In Wild Earth Is Popular’, *Monaghan Argus*, 28 April 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Drama Commentary: In Wild Earth’, *Westmeath Independent*, 19 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Relays Play in Galway’, *Connacht Tribune*, 17 February 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Drama Festivals: Co-Authors of New Play Congratulated’, *Irish Independent*, 6 March 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>154</sup> Herald Staff Reporter, ‘Adjudicator Enjoyed New Play at Athlone’, *Evening Herald*, 9 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Drama Commentary: In Wild Earth’.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Actor Praises Navan Author’, *Drogheda Independent*, 10 March 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Drama Commentary: In Wild Earth’.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Drama Commentary: In Wild Earth’.

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Drama Festival.<sup>160</sup> The adjudicator at that festival, Mícheál Ó hAodha, praised it as a “very tasteful and well-dressed production [that] flowed along at a steady pace.”<sup>161</sup> Indeed, Brendan Cauldwell, the adjudicator of the CDF, “wondered why some of these new plays were not being accepted for professional production.”<sup>162</sup>

Rather than resist the issues these plays portrayed as sordid or a means of religious persecution, festivals provided opportunities for the Church to creatively engage in public life. Rather than considering modernisation as persecution, it is possible to take the long view and see it as a means of social re-engagement with the process of civilization. Instead of confining themselves to the sacristy, priests and religious involved with amateur drama exemplified the effects of the “democratization of the discourse about God.”<sup>163</sup>

Nevertheless, the bishops did not see it this way. Daily reporting on Cold War tensions shaped episcopal suspicion of the expansion of State influence into the daily life of its citizens.<sup>164</sup> This suspicion was rooted in a fear that once the government expanded its influence and power into all aspects of daily life, totalitarianism and dictatorship soon followed. Likewise, the bishops’ fear of what the twenty-first-century culture wars call “big government” influenced their engagement with public policy issues.<sup>165</sup> As well as the controversial Mother and Child Scheme, some issues included the Health Act of 1947, the Yugoslavian football match, and the licencing hours’ expansion throughout the decade.<sup>166</sup> As Ó Faoláin and Fallon forecast, the exercise of overreach and failure of leadership bequeathed a twenty-first-century anti-clerical legacy for a Church that the post-war bishops were endeavouring to protect.<sup>167</sup>

The amateur drama festivals emerging in rural Ireland during the 1950s provided a forum for people from all over the country to meet. The festivals provided social interest, the ability to transcend the limitations of daily life, and a means of engaging, through drama, with issues like emigration and urbanisation, which were prevalent within Irish society. At the 1959 NCDF, the parish priest of Buttevant,

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<sup>160</sup> ‘Relays Play in Galway’.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Producer Did a Real Job’, *Irish Independent*, 10 March 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>162</sup> ‘Worthy of Professional Production’, *Evening Herald*, 30 April 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>163</sup> Eneida Jacobsen, ‘Models of Public Theology’, trans. Thia Cooper, *International Journal of Public Theology* 6, no. 1 (2012): 11.

<sup>164</sup> Whyte, *Church and State*, 166; 317.

<sup>165</sup> Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*, 106.

<sup>166</sup> Whyte, *Church and State*, 223; 317–30.

<sup>167</sup> Ó Faoláin, ‘The Dáil and the Bishops’, 5–13; Gabriel Fallon, ‘Gabriel Fallon Replies’, *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1963, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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Canon Murphy, criticised the view that people emigrated because of a “lack of entertainment” in the country.<sup>168</sup> Despite Murphy’s claims, amateur actors were not immune to emigration. For example, at the 1958 WDF, the amateur actor David Abbott saved the Bernadette Players’ production of Christie’s, *And Then There Were None* from cancellation.<sup>169</sup> Abbott, a teacher in the Church of Ireland’s Sligo Grammar School, reorganised his travel arrangements for a job interview with the British Colonial Service in London to perform at the festival. The interview scheduled for the following morning resulted in a post-performance cross-country dash to catch a flight to London.

Demonstrating that an urban-rural divide became part of post-war living, Murphy was critical of “cities and towns” that did not “[measure] up to their opportunities in matters dramatic.”<sup>170</sup> He speculated that a lack of discipline and performance post-mortem affected the town’s productions. In distinguishing between urban and rural drama, Murphy alluded to the crisis facing professional theatre while affirming the positive aspects of rural life. Meanwhile, the imagery used by the *Irish Press* about the WDF that year accentuated this divide.<sup>171</sup> The newspaper painted a picture of an idyllic country town where, contrary to urban society, nothing much seemed to happen. It belied the determination and drive of the people of this rural town. They endeavoured to excel in drama and cultivate an integrated approach to civic life, setting up the Tubbercurry Show and providing much-needed employment through the BASTA lock-making factory founded in 1955.<sup>172</sup>

#### **Enmeshment**

While Bishop Hanly (see above) was reflecting on the benefits of drama, *The Crucible* opened on Broadway.<sup>173</sup> Miller’s fourth Broadway production addressed the dysfunctionality of society because of the enmeshment of religion with civil politics.<sup>174</sup> Though not well received by New York theatregoers and critics, according to Miller,

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<sup>168</sup> ‘Antidote to Low Grade Amusements’.

<sup>169</sup> ‘Bishop’s Advice to Drama Group’, *Irish Independent*, 24 February 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Antidote to Low Grade Amusements’.

<sup>171</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival’, 20 February 1958.

<sup>172</sup> Western Drama Festival Committee, *The Actors Are Come Hither*, 48.

<sup>173</sup> J.P. Shanley, ‘New Miller Play Opening Tonight’, *New York Times*, 22 January 1953, TimesMachine.

<sup>174</sup> Shanley, ‘New Miller Play Opening Tonight’.

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it “became by far [his] most frequently produced play, both abroad and at home.”<sup>175</sup> This thirty-fifth play produced by Father P.V. O’Brien for the Tuam Theatre Guild swept the boards at the 1965 Roscommon, Ballinrobe, Glenamaddy, Ballyshannon, Western and All-Ireland Drama Festivals (fig. 7).<sup>176</sup>

Such was the dedication of the guild actors to the play’s production that they travelled to London to see “Sir Laurence Olivier’s production” and met Colin Blakely, the lead actor.<sup>177</sup> As with Abbott in 1958, the group’s travel ability displayed the amateur actors’ middle-class profile and commitment to drama.



Mr. John Donovan, Director of Esso, presents the major trophy, The Esso Cup, to Rev. Fr. P. V. O’Brien, producer of the Tuam Theatre Guild, who won this over-all prize—the three-act section of the All-Ireland Drama Festival, with the production of “The Crucible.” Rev. Fr. O’Brien himself won the production award while Mr. Joe Dillon, of the same Group, won the award for the best actor in the role of John Proctor.

**Figure 7:** Fr. P.V. O’Brien receiving the Esso Trophy from John O’Donovan (*Westmeath Independent*, 15th May 1965)

Describing the play as “Miller’s masterpiece,” the *Evening Herald*’s theatre critic highlighted the similarities between it and Shaw’s *Saint Joan*, suggesting that the “Abbey might now give Dublin theatregoers an opportunity of seeing this fine company in action” (fig. 8).<sup>178</sup> Well received by audiences and critics, the guild’s production appeared at the Gaiety Theatre that September and was broadcast on Radio Éireann in December.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), loc. 6430, Kindle.

<sup>176</sup> F McC, ‘Amateur Theatre: Tuam Has Beaten the Cupid Crux’, *Evening Herald*, 8 April 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Drama Festivals: Tuam Best in Miller Production’, *Irish Independent*, 13 April 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>177</sup> McC, ‘Amateur Theatre’.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Tuam Players Triumph in Dublin’, *Evening Herald*, 18 September 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Tuam Players Triumph’.

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In its review, the *Tuam Herald* played down the social implications of the play and claimed that Miller was “not so much intent on writing a political document as upon writing a good dramatic play.”<sup>180</sup> However, in a documentary filmed by his daughter Rebecca, in the late 1990s, Miller confirmed that his experience of the McCarthy investigation inspired the play.<sup>181</sup> Set during the seventeenth-century Salem Witch trials, the play is understood as Miller’s response to the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities in the 1950s.<sup>182</sup> Even in the choice of plays, the spectre of the Cold War loomed over the amateur stage.



**Figure 8:** Fr. P.V. O’Brien with the cast of Tuam Theatre Guild’s *The Crucible* at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin (*Connacht Tribune*, 25th September 1965)

One of two productions appearing at the AIDF that year, O’Brien’s human emphasis contrasted with Betty Ann Norton’s “simplified” approach, which concentrated on portraying evil in the play.<sup>183</sup> Despite the absence of the stage manager, who “collapsed” on the day of the competition, the 57 Theatre Group’s production drew plaudits from the adjudicator Graham Suter.<sup>184</sup> Though describing Norton’s production as “imaginative and exciting,” he criticised the acting style, which “produced a slight ponderousness” that affected the delivery of the “last two

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<sup>180</sup> ‘Tuam Theatre Guild’s Play on Radio’, *Tuam Herald*, 18 December 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>181</sup> *Arthur Miller: Writer*, Telefilm, Factual (NOW, 2018), <https://www.nowtv.com/ic/online/arthur-miller-writer-2018/A5EK3JXxfMhrEWmyubbpj>.

<sup>182</sup> Henry Popkin, ‘Arthur Miller’s “The Crucible”’, *College English* 26, no. 2 (November 1964): 139–46.

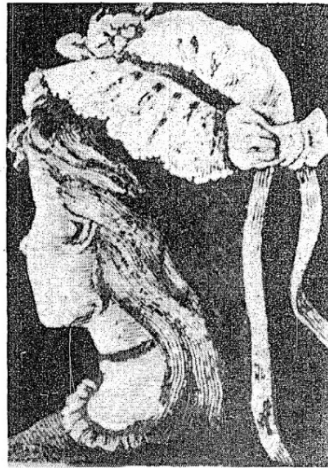
<sup>183</sup> Special Correspondent, ‘Athlone Award Goes Again to Tuam’, *Irish Times*, 12 May 1965, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; ‘Handicapped Group Win Compliments’, *Evening Herald*, 1 May 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>184</sup> ‘Handicapped Group’.

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scenes.”<sup>185</sup> Despite this, as the *Irish Times* pointed out, O’Brien’s use of “lighting, shadowy and evocative, and...colour in the costumes” conveyed the familiarity and humanity of the characters as “people we might all have known,” thus deepening the impact of the play on the audience.<sup>186</sup> Unfortunately, this difference in approach led to an unresolved discussion between adjudicators and reviewers that was “argued long and loudly far into the dawn.”<sup>187</sup>

One characteristic of O’Brien’s productions was his use of innovative techniques to convey the message of the plays. Endeavouring for authenticity, he wrote to the “Salem Museum, Massachusetts,” seeking help with costume and set design.<sup>188</sup> In return, the museum sent him a copy of a portrait (fig. 9) of “a young girl [who] also incorporates the head of a witch” that he used for costume design.<sup>189</sup>



**Figure 9:** The Salem Portrait inspired the design of *The Crucible* costumes for the Tuam Theatre Guild (*Irish Independent*, 22nd September 1965)

At the Roscommon Drama Festival, the adjudicator, Raidió Teilifís Éireann’s (RTÉ) Dan Treston, commented that the sets were as good as anything in the West End or Broadway.<sup>190</sup> The “efficiency with which” O’Brien’s production changed the sets broke new ground for the “amateur theatre.”<sup>191</sup> Impressed by the Guild’s performance, he remarked, “if the standard of the amateur theatre was that, then he pitied those who [relied] on the professional theatre.”<sup>192</sup> As chapter five explores, the

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<sup>185</sup> ‘Handicapped Group’.

<sup>186</sup> Special Correspondent, ‘Athlone Award’.

<sup>187</sup> Special Correspondent, ‘Athlone Award’.

<sup>188</sup> Tatler, ‘Tatler’s Parade: Find the Witch’, *Irish Independent*, 22 September 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>189</sup> Tatler, ‘Tatler’s Parade: Find the Witch’.

<sup>190</sup> ‘Tuam’s Theatre Guild Triumphs’, *Connacht Tribune*, 20 March 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>191</sup> ‘Tuam’s Theatre Guild Triumphs’; Special Correspondent, ‘Athlone Award’.

<sup>192</sup> ‘Tuam’s Theatre Guild Triumphs’.

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debate about the amateur and professional stage standards, to which Treston’s comments alluded, came to a head at the 1968 Abbey Theatre playwrights workshop.

Seven years earlier, Bishop Fergus asserted that drama critically mirrored society.<sup>193</sup> As O’Brien’s approach to *The Crucible* showed, this reflection engaged the playwright, producer, actors, and audience in critical thinking about the social situation in which they found themselves. For this reason, Fergus believed the plays selected for performance must advance the audience’s appreciation of the impact of literature and drama on society.<sup>194</sup> According to Miller, *The Crucible*’s popularity usually indicated “a warning of tyranny or a reminder of tyranny just past.”<sup>195</sup>

Though the experience of institutional abuse indicates otherwise, it may go too far to describe post-war Irish society as tyrannical. The amateur drama was, and is, a means of expressing a voice that society may not otherwise hear. Father O’Brien’s successful production of a social drama and political play like *The Crucible* in Irish country towns threw indirect light on Church-State relationships when clerical influence was impregnable. Though not a matter of episcopal obedience, Fr. O’Brien, in another example of zones of permission, chose this social drama as the Tuam Theatre Guild’s festival production in 1965.

*The Crucible* illustrates the application of Foucault’s “regime of truth” theory.<sup>196</sup> This theory explores how something becomes true when enough people believe it is so, even when, objectively, it is not. In this way, society explains away social ills and issues in a convenient belief that reconciles a contradiction with how it sees itself.<sup>197</sup> In Miller’s play, the accusation of witchcraft, like the demonic possession in Carney’s play, illustrates Foucault’s point.<sup>198</sup> It is an example of how the enmeshment of ideology and religion becomes rooted in a belief that an unexplained or unacceptable phenomenon, conjuring spirits or independence of thought (Carney’s play), is of demonic origin. As these plays depict, an accusation that discredits a reputation is easy to make and difficult to refute. *The Crucible* portrays both individual and social beliefs, which in the avoidance of scandal, invoke shame to control society.

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<sup>193</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>194</sup> ‘The Bishop’s Tributes’.

<sup>195</sup> Miller, *Timebends: A Life*, loc. 6430.

<sup>196</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, vol. 3, Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (New York: The New Press, 2000), 131.

<sup>197</sup> Foucault, *Power*, 3:131.

<sup>198</sup> Miller, ‘The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts’, 235.

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The avoidance of scandal was a regular feature of decisions made by bishops, clergy and religious throughout the post-war years. Such decisions, as explored in Ní Ghráda’s play, *An Triail*, became a regime of truth with a severe human cost.<sup>199</sup> The avoidance of scandal was a motivating factor behind the operation of industrial schools, Magdalen laundries, mother and baby homes, and failure to subject offending clergy to the rigours of civil law. First produced by Séamus Páircéir at the Damer during the 1964 Dublin Theatre Festival, the play was translated into English and performed during Easter in Rome in 1965.<sup>200</sup>

In 1966, Moate Theatre Club, Naas brought *On Trial*, the English translation of Ní Ghráda’s play, which some critics felt lost some meaning, to the amateur stage for the first time.<sup>201</sup> Appearing at the AIDF in 1966 and 1969, adjudicators and audiences widely acclaimed the play. Though the play contained “some sound moments of theatre,” Alan Nicol, the AIDF adjudicator, criticised the club’s portrayal of “comedy [which] was played too broadly.”<sup>202</sup> While the producer was innovative, the lighting directors, including the Rev. P. Dowling, were “defeated by so many lighting cues.”<sup>203</sup> In addition, the mixed adjudication highlighted cast shortcomings, including vocal technique (too quiet) and stage presence. Despite these shortcomings, the adjudicator praised Helen Finnegan, Noel Slattery, and Kathleen Higgins for their conviction of character and effective delivery.<sup>204</sup>

Three years later, the 1969 production of the play by Wexford Parish Drama Group successfully surmounted similar challenges. Winner of the premier award at the Wexford Drama Festival, where Harry Ringwood received the producer’s prize for the play.<sup>205</sup> Adjudicating the 1969 AIDF, the English actor Adrian Rendle praised the group’s engagement of the audience at the beginning of the play but was “puzzled by the courtroom action onto other parts of the stage.”<sup>206</sup> Despite this, the effectiveness

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<sup>199</sup> Ní Ghráda, *An Triail*.; Ní Ghráda, *On Trial*. Amateur drama groups used the English translation of Ní Ghráda’s play.

<sup>200</sup> ‘Siobhán McKenna to Star’, *Cork Examiner*, 24 July 1964, sec. London Letter, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘An Triail to Be Staged in English’, *Evening Herald*, 6 October 1964, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>201</sup> Prompter, ‘One of First’, *Irish Independent*, 28 January 1966, sec. Amateur Drama, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Praise for Wexford Group’, *Irish Newspaper Archive*, 22 April 1969, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Very Sound Moments of Theatre’, *Irish Press*, 27 April 1966, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>203</sup> ‘Very Sound Moments of Theatre’.

<sup>204</sup> ‘Very Sound Moments of Theatre’.

<sup>205</sup> ‘Major Award at Wexford Goes to a Local Group’, *Irish Independent*, 4 March 1969, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>206</sup> ‘Praise for Wexford Group’.

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of production and quality of acting made this a convincing performance for the adjudicator.

Set during an inquest into the death of an unmarried mother and her child, Ní Ghráda’s play, like Keane’s *Sive* and Murphy’s *On the Outside*, challenged audiences to “bring the clearest thinking to bear” on issues of social responsibility and the mistreatment of women.<sup>207</sup> The play uses memory to alternate between Maire’s encounters with Kevin, a married teacher and a series of witness testimonies in a courtroom. These snapshots of life, like Keane’s *Sive*, Murphy’s *On the Outside* (chapter two), Leonard’s *The Poker Session* (chapter four) and Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* (chapter five), challenge audiences to consider how, individually and collectively, society exercises responsibility for those who are vulnerable.



**Figure 10:** Mairéad Ní Ghráda (*Evening Echo*, 12th February 1966)

By portraying a liaison between Maura, an aspiring postulant, and Kevin, a married teacher, Ní Ghráda (fig. 10) exposed the ideology of respectability that uses shame to maintain the power structures of society. In the dock, the prosecution invites Maura to admit guilt and condemn herself. Her address to the audience challenges those watching and listening to reflect on how she alone stands condemned. The man who betrayed her trust remains anonymous and maintains his respectability;

They think they will find out everything. They will question everyone, and they think they know me and what I did. But there are things that no one will ever know—things that are hidden in my heart forever. His name that was never spoken. The night it all began. The dance in the schoolhouse.<sup>208</sup>

Social responsibility is also a theme explored in *The Crucible*. That play utilised the

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<sup>207</sup> Ní Ghráda, *On Trial*, 6; ‘Cork Actress Gives Fine Performance in “On Trial”’, *Evening Echo*, 8 February 1966, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>208</sup> Ní Ghráda, *On Trial*, 7.

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invocation of “God’s law” to reinforce an authoritarian judgement whose conclusions may be flawed in adhering to the rigidity rather than the spirit of the law.<sup>209</sup> Like the Irish bishops of the mid-twentieth century, Parris and the other religious officials support a power system which clouds their critical judgement and supports social injustice. As in *Sive*, Ní Ghráda’s portrayal of how Maura’s family avoids responsibility is shocking. In Keane’s play, those responsible for Sive’s care slowly disappear after her tragic death. Like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, when challenged in *On Trial*, Maura’s mother and brothers metaphorically evade responsibility by repeating the same formula; “don’t blame me for what happened.”<sup>210</sup> Unlike the witnesses in *On Trial*, *The Crucible*’s character Proctor rejects the simplicity of ideological condemnation. He stands before society as one who, though sinful, is justified before God.<sup>211</sup> In spite of this, the actions and refusal of the witnesses in *On Trial* to entertain alternative evidence, like the Irish hierarchy when faced with the child abuse scandal, is anything but the Christianity they claim to profess.

The play provoked audience responses, some of which appeared in the *Irish Times*. Éilís Ní Eachthighern gave it “a shrug” and wrote that it was a “naïve melodrama.”<sup>212</sup> Rejecting Ní Eachthighern’s view, Mary Unger detailed the horrific experience of “a real live Máire.”<sup>213</sup> In what the child abuse inquiries of the early twenty-first century revealed as a familiar story, this girl from an underprivileged background spent her childhood in an “industrial school.”<sup>214</sup> After leaving school, she worked in domestic service but was forced into homelessness after being “raped” by her employer.<sup>215</sup> In middle age, she found herself “in a Dublin hospital having been beaten up by three ‘respectable’ citizens who found her inadequate to their needs...She had become used to ‘horror piled upon horror.’”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Miller, ‘The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts’, 318.

<sup>210</sup> Ní Ghráda, *On Trial*, 10.

<sup>211</sup> Rom 4:5; 5:11

<sup>212</sup> Eilís Ní Eachthighern, ‘An Triail’, *Irish Times*, 29 April 1965, sec. Letters to the Editor, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>213</sup> Mary Unger, ‘An Triail’, *Irish Times*, 3 May 1965, sec. Letters to the Editor, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>214</sup> Unger, ‘An Triail’.

<sup>215</sup> Unger, ‘An Triail’.

<sup>216</sup> Unger, ‘An Triail’.

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Ní Eachthighern’s reply acknowledged that the play’s subject was well known and avoided confronting the reality that Unger detailed. Continuing to dismiss the social implications of the play, she commented that;

misfortune like this, presented undiluted in theatrical form, is unlikely to make a good play unless there is an element of conflict or of development of personality, and these are lacking in *An Triail*. The sight of suffering without purpose or respite is more likely to depress an audience than to awaken any feelings of pity and terror.<sup>217</sup>

For G. H. Murphy, however, the play marked a significant moment because “people have become sufficiently interested as to compel them to debate the matter. This alone proves that Miss Ní Ghráda’s play is worth a visit.”<sup>218</sup>

Though theatre director Alan Simpson felt the portrayal of Irish life was harsher than reality, its depiction of suffering challenged audiences with the tragic consequences of the avoidance of scandal and misuse of power within Irish society.<sup>219</sup> Ní Eachthighern and Simpson’s evaluation of the play’s content was symptomatic of the perception that such cruelty could not be present, to the degree that Unger outlined, and Ní Ghráda portrayed, in respectable society. In contrast, the “stunned silence” of the audience after the play’s performance at the Cork Opera House in 1966 indicated a “moment of truth” when theatre presented a flicker of insight into the shadow side of Irish society.<sup>220</sup> As the *Evening Echo* remarked in 1966,

the girl in this play...is not the one who is on trial here. It is you and I who are the defendants...I think it is because each of us must bear some guilt that we are moved so profoundly by the accusation.<sup>221</sup>

These plays show that the message of moral control, manifested in a “religion of fear,” lost sight of the fundamental respect for human dignity found in CST and formally promulgated during the Second Vatican Council in 1965.<sup>222</sup> As alluded to by

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<sup>217</sup> Eilis Ní Eachthighern, ‘An Triail’, *Irish Times*, 11 May 1965, sec. Letters to the Editor, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>218</sup> G.H. Murphy, ‘An Triail’, *Irish Times*, 7 May 1965, sec. Letters to the Editor, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>219</sup> ‘On Trial Has Set a Standard’, *Evening Echo*, 19 February 1966, sec. Theatre Survey, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Small Audiences Threaten Future of Two Events’, *Irish Independent*, 11 March 1969.

<sup>220</sup> ‘On Trial: Revolutionary Production’, *Evening Echo*, 12 February 1966, sec. Theatre Survey, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>221</sup> ‘A Smooth Production from Everyman’, *Evening Echo*, 29 January 1966, sec. Theatre Survey, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>222</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 40th anniversary edition (1974; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 40, Scribd; Pope John XXIII, ‘Mater et Magistra’, Papal Encyclical, 15 May 1961, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html); Pope John XXIII, ‘Pacem in Terris’, Papal Encyclical, 11 April

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Unger, Ní Ghráda’s play, along with *Sive* and *On the Outside*, explicitly portrayed the incarceration of young unmarried mothers as a failed policy that demanded a political and moral response.<sup>223</sup> The question posed at the end of the play, “but you, you who know all the facts, you who know the whole story, what is your verdict? Who, in your opinion, is guilty?” continues to challenge twenty-first-century Irish society.<sup>224</sup>

### Conclusion

Episcopal and clerical commitment to these festivals confirmed that the hierarchy realised the influence of the amateur drama movement on the lives of the audience, actors, and producers. As these plays demonstrate, this impact empowered citizens to consider other viewpoints on the issues facing Irish society. By asserting that the “cultural interests of his diocese were safe,” Bishop Ahern framed the work of the festival in the narrow terms of a diocesan organisation.<sup>225</sup> Though theoretically independent of the diocese, the fact that clergy held office in many festivals perpetuated the sense that they were another means of pastoral outreach when they straddled both the diocese and civil society. Numerous festivals depended on the parish clergy’s goodwill for the halls’ availability and use. Despite this, they showed a social movement’s civil and secular power to influence how people thought, acted, and decided. Festival committees became implicit diocesan organisations by appointing the bishop as patron, parish priest as president and using church property for their activities.

Notwithstanding, this does not mean that bishops and priests involved in the movement pursued the promotion of power, though it became a by-product of their engagement. Many priests were genuinely interested in the cultural development of

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1963, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html); Pope Paul VI, ‘Gaudium Et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’, The Holy See, 7 December 1965, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>223</sup> Judge Yvonne Murphy, Ita Mangan, and Hugh O’Neill, ‘Commission of Investigation - Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin’, Report (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, November 2009), Lenus: The Irish Health Repository, <https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/89453>; Judge Yvonne Murphy, Professor Mary E. Daly, and Dr William Duncan, ‘Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes’ (Dublin: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 30 October 2020), <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d4b3d-final-report-of-the-commission-of-investigation-into-mother-and-baby-homes/>.

<sup>224</sup> Ní Ghráda, *On Trial*, 61.

<sup>225</sup> ‘Drama Movement Praised Cork Festival Opened’, *Irish Independent*, 30 March 1959, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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their local communities.<sup>226</sup> Because of the post-Catholic emancipation church building, parishes possessed an infrastructure dedicated to the growth of the local community, both in faith and citizenship. Members of the clergy were genuinely interested in culture and well-disposed towards promoting and developing drama in rural Ireland. As Fr Barry remarked at the 1959 NCDF, the “amateur drama movement was founded for the unknown group, to help to create it and to help to sustain it.”<sup>227</sup> This focus on the “unknown group” was consistent with the emergence and understanding of CST in Ireland after 1933.<sup>228</sup> As Coffey recognised, the affirmation of the significant influence of the bishop and parish priest provided festivals with authenticity. Despite Little and Mervyn Wall’s visits, the Arts Council could not provide such authenticity from its distant base in St Stephen’s Green or Merrion Square. Though the assistance of the Arts Council was important and valuable, the authority and recognition afforded the bishop and parish priest provided them with a political capital that could promote or discourage local engagement with the festivals.

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<sup>226</sup> MacCarrick, ‘Clerical Influence in Amateur Drama’.

<sup>227</sup> ‘Drama Movement Praised’.

<sup>228</sup> ‘Drama Movement Praised’.

## Chapter Four: “Courage and Initiative”

### Introduction:

Four years after enacting the Republic of Ireland Act (1948), the newly established ADCI resolved to include “the nominees of the Enniskillen, Ballymoney and Newry festival committees, and any other Northern Ireland festival committees” in the first AIDF.<sup>1</sup> The Director of An Tóstal, Ffrench-Salkeld, emphasized: “that the festival committees from the Six Counties would be welcomed...as it was desirable that they should compete and take part in the movement.”<sup>2</sup> Taking up Ffrench-Salkeld’s invitation, drama groups, producers, and festivals from Northern Ireland consistently participated in the AIDF in the post-war years.<sup>3</sup> As discussed in chapter one, by invoking the “ideals of Thomas Davis,” Little was concerned with using culture to build a “free civilised nation.”<sup>4</sup> In a speech to the Royal Institute of Architects, he asserted that small “informed” arts groups across the country pursued the development of culture “with no thought of sectarian or political hostilities.”<sup>5</sup> Such groups included the organisers of drama festivals and amateur theatre groups that sought to build cross-border cultural solidarity, a fundamental aspect of the principle of subsidiarity, as developed in *Quadragesimo Anno*.<sup>6</sup> This encyclical developed the concept of solidarity as the action of a voluntary movement that sought to protect people’s fundamental rights by “facilitating their agency” and ability to engage with all aspects of social life within society.<sup>7</sup>

In 1951 the Minister for External Affairs Seán MacBride, who established the Cultural Relations Committee, encouraged the development of cross-border cultural cooperation.<sup>8</sup> The willingness of the ADCI to engage in this cross-border work showed the movement’s ability to address issues of national importance by creating a cultural space. It also espoused the spirit of cooperation that Captain Terence O’Neill, prime minister of Northern Ireland and Taoiseach Seán Lemass, worked to develop

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Ireland, ‘The Republic of Ireland Act, 1948’, Pub. L. No. 22 (1948), <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1948/act/22/enacted/en/html>; ‘Plans for Drama Festival’.

<sup>2</sup> ‘All Ireland Drama Council Formed’, *Donegal Democrat*, 31 October 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive. Cecil Ffrench-Salkeld was the father-in-law of the playwright Brendan Behan.

<sup>3</sup> Seamus Mallon and Andy Pollak, *Seamus Mallon: A Shared Home Place* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2019), 40–43, Scribd.

<sup>4</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Little, ‘Returning Thanks’, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Pius XI, ‘Quadragesimo Anno’, 15 May 1931.

<sup>7</sup> Behr, *Social Justice and Subsidiarity*, 101–2.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Make Cultural Union with North - MacBride’, *Irish Independent*, 30 March 1951, Irish Newspaper Archive.

throughout the 1960s. This chapter argues that by including Northern Irish drama festivals and groups, the amateur movement signalled a willingness to build cross-border cultural solidarity through the development of amateur theatre.<sup>9</sup> This chapter examines four plays by Macken, Wilder, Leonard and Friel from this perspective. Each play presents individualism rather than community or religion as the fundamental expression of meaning within a modernised society.

### Cultural Solidarity

Indicating the benefits of cultural solidarity, in 1962, Canon McCarthy, the parish priest of St. Peter and Paul’s Parish, Athlone, declared that the AIDF was a festival that “knew no border.”<sup>10</sup> He also welcomed the adjudicators who acclaimed the “amateur theatre as a great proving ground for the professional theatre.”<sup>11</sup> Five years later, James H. Cathcart, Director of the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals, echoed McCarthy’s sentiments.<sup>12</sup> Using such rhetoric at festivals throughout the 1950s and 1960s showed amateur drama’s contribution to building cross-border solidarity.

McCarthy’s use of patriotic rhetoric to promote the work of the AIDF was consistent with Little’s promotion of cultural development. There were subtler ways of utilising the amateur movement to cultivate a nationalist agenda. For example, during the 1950s, Owen B. Hunt, “former Minister of State of Pennsylvania” and a leader of the Anti-Partition League (APL), sponsored the F.J. McCormack medal at the WDF.<sup>13</sup> He also persuaded the Sligo Men’s Association of New York and the Mayo Men’s Association in Philadelphia to sponsor Countess Markievicz and Thomas Derrig medals.<sup>14</sup> Hunt’s commitment confirmed the festival’s popularity throughout Ireland and the United States.<sup>15</sup> However, it also indicated the influence of amateur drama on Irish society and its associated importance to the APL. Like the Irish hierarchy, which sponsored many festival venues, the APL’s commissioning of medals at the WDF was a way it could engage and influence a national movement.

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<sup>9</sup> Gearóid O’Brien, ‘The Case of Two Telegrams’, in *All-Ireland Drama Festival Athlone 1953-2002: 50 Glorious Years of Drama*, ed. Gearóid O’Brien (Athlone: All-Ireland Festival Committee, 2002), 61–62.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Close of Tenth Drama Festival’.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Close of Tenth Drama Festival’.

<sup>12</sup> ‘18 Groups Seek Honours in Athlone Final’, *Irish Independent*, 8 April 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Opened’; ‘The Late Mr Owen B Hunt Cloonacool’, *Sligo Champion*, 16 June 1978, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Resounding Success’.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Opened’.

## Chapter Four: “Courage and Initiative”

An examination of programmes for the AIDF shows that drama groups from Northern Ireland produced plays by Irish playwrights, including Yeats and Shaw. Many groups included work first produced between 1922 and 1930 by George Shiels, O’Casey, Robinson, and M. J. MacKeown, (see appendix three). As the sixties progressed, performances became more contemporary and open to global influences, with plays by Williams, Jean-Paul Sartre, Miller, and others emerging onto the amateur dramatic stage (see appendix four).

Though Northern Ireland reluctantly and belatedly benefited from introducing the welfare state, nationalists experienced discrimination concerning health, education, housing and employment.<sup>16</sup> These real bread-and-butter daily survival issues permeated over forty plays performed by seventeen groups at the AIDF and other drama festivals throughout the 1950s and 1960s. These groups included the Jerretspass Dramatic Group, Newpoint Players, Newry, and Orangefield Dramatic Society, East Belfast. This chapter considers four plays; Macken’s *Home is the Hero*, Wilder’s *Our Town*, Leonard’s *The Poker Session* and Friel’s *The Enemy Within*, which these groups produced. They represent a cross-section of plays performed by groups from Northern Ireland that explore aspects of resistance, continuity, social expectations and modernisation. Through local groups like these, active engagement with drama spread beyond the professional theatres into rural Ireland, North and South.

### **A Dangerous Play**

In the *Westmeath Independent* in April 1953, theatre critic JKA affirmed the significance of the amateur drama festivals. He congratulated the organising committee, who fulfilled “a great need” within the drama movement by establishing “a valuable annual event.”<sup>17</sup> The critic reviewed two plays performed by groups from Northern Ireland. The Newry Abbey Players’ production of *Juno and the Paycock* “achieved a rare reconciliation of the tragic and comic elements in a difficult play.”<sup>18</sup> In addition, the critic described the production of J. M. Barrie’s play, *Seven Women*, by The Neophytes of Portadown as “a pleasant piece of nonsense that was efficiently

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<sup>16</sup> McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, 12; Donnacha Ó Beacháin, *From Partition to Brexit: The Irish Government and Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 135, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> JKA, ‘Dramatic Commentary’, *Westmeath Independent*, 18 April 1953.

<sup>18</sup> JKA, ‘Dramatic Commentary’.

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handled by the cast.”<sup>19</sup>

A year later, he described the AIDF as “essential to Irish theatre.”<sup>20</sup> Contrasting the Athlone festival with “the health of the professional stage”, JKA proclaimed “that there is not only a lively interest in the theatre throughout the country but a standard of achievement in amateur circles second to none.”<sup>21</sup> However, though Michael Monks described Macken’s *Home is the Hero* as “one of the biggest Irish successes in the provinces,” for JKA, it was “a dangerous play for an amateur company.”<sup>22</sup> The critic’s main issue concerned its reliance on the character of Willie to draw the play together, challenging the actors to make up for its poor writing.<sup>23</sup> Not everyone agreed.

One company that ignored JKA’s warning was the Jerretspass Dramatic Society, County Armagh. It “competed regularly at the Newry, Portadown, Lisburn, Bangor, Dundalk and Warrenpoint Drama Festivals,” winning nominations twice to the AIDF in Athlone.<sup>24</sup> Despite JKA’s warning, their production of *Home is the Hero* won the supporting actor Irish digest award for Patrick Byrne at the 1956 AIDF. Robinson presented him and the winners from St Columb’s PPU Players, Derry, Aclare Dramatic Society and Bernadette Players, Sligo, with the awards at the Abbey Theatre.<sup>25</sup> Awarded for the “four outstanding performance[s]” at the 1956 AIDF that showed potential for the professional stage, the winners spent “a week in Dublin [engaging in] a round of the theatres and auditions in the Abbey and the Gate Theatres.”<sup>26</sup> This award, among many other accolades won by the Jerretspass production of Macken’s play, proved that JKA’s warning was ill-founded.

Paddo, the central character of Macken’s play, is released from Limerick prison upon completion of a sentence for the manslaughter of his neighbour. The play focuses on the expectations and reactions of his family upon his return from prison. Prison conditions were an issue of concern throughout the 1940s, with *The Bell* giving

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<sup>19</sup> JKA, ‘Dramatic Commentary’.

<sup>20</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>21</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Monks, ‘Galway Gaelic Theatre’s Jubilee: Athlone Starts Amateur Drama Council’, *Irish Times*, 10 July 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>23</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’.

<sup>24</sup> Mick Waddell, “‘All the World’s a Stage...’ A Life in Amateur Dramatics, 1940-1980”, *Before I Forget...: Journal of the Poyntzpass and District Local History Society*, no. 9 (April 2003): 43.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Scrolls of Honour for Actors’, *Irish Press*, 17 May 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Acting Awards Presented’, *Sligo Champion*, 26 May 1956, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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it particular attention.<sup>27</sup> Following the murders of Vice-Admiral Somerville and John Egan in 1936, Fianna Fáil, which succeeded Cumann na nGaedhael in government, punished Irish Republican Army (IRA) volunteers.<sup>28</sup> As a result, many were interned, executed or died on hunger strike.<sup>29</sup> In the preface to *I Did Penal Servitude*, Ó Faoláin (editor of *The Bell* and Director of the Arts Council, 1956-59) called for a progressive and humanitarian approach to rehabilitating prisoners.<sup>30</sup>

In May 1946, while protesting the conditions of his incarceration IRA hunger striker Seán McCaughey died at Portlaoise prison.<sup>31</sup> His death advanced a desire for political change. This political movement gave birth to a new political party, Clann na Poblachta, which, together with Fine Gael and others, formed the first inter-party coalition government in 1948.<sup>32</sup> In its party manifesto, Clann na Poblachta advocated resistance to global influences and proposed the creation of a council (the Arts Council) to promote cultural development and the establishment of free education.<sup>33</sup> The publicity surrounding McCaughey’s inquest, which criticized the treatment of prisoners, highlighted the shocking conditions in which they existed and provoked protests on the streets of Dublin.<sup>34</sup>

Typical of plays of the time, *Home is the Hero* is set in the living room of a Galway residential street. The play’s presentation of poverty, social dysfunction, domestic violence, and modernisation challenges are frank and forthright for the time. The directions of the play’s opening scene critique a common lack of sanitary conditions in social housing.<sup>35</sup> In the play, the council house, perhaps one of the houses that the King family from Macken’s play *Mungo’s Mansion* lived in, was built without indoor sanitation,

because Councils who build houses for the poorer classes think a toilet in the yard is better than none at all...you have to go out there too to get water from

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<sup>27</sup> Seán McMahon, *Great Irish Writing: The Best from the Bell* (Dublin: O’Brien Press, 1997), 108–15.

<sup>28</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), 480–81.

<sup>29</sup> Ó Beacháin, *From Partition to Brexit: The Irish Government and Northern Ireland*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Seán Ó Faoláin, ‘Preface’, in *I Did Penal Servitude*, by D83222 (Metropolitan Publishing Co. Ltd., 1945), v–xi.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Sean McCaughey Dead in Portlaoighise Prison’, *Cork Examiner*, 1946; Seán MacBride, *That Day’s Struggle: A Memoir, 1904-1951*, ed. Caitriona Lawlor (Dublin: Currach Press, 2005), 132–34.

<sup>32</sup> David McCullagh, *A Makeshift Majority: The First Inter-Party Government, 1948-51* (Ireland: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 180.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Hunger Striker Dies in Maryborough Prison’, *Irish Times*, 18 May 1946; MacBride, *That Day’s Struggle*, 136.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Charleville Notes: Sewerage Scheme’, *Kerryman*, 11 February 1950, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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the tap. It would have cost a few shillings extra to have brought a few yards of pipe into the kitchen. The ratepayers could not afford that.<sup>36</sup> The detail of the rest of the kitchen is typical for the time. A fireplace doubles as a cooker, china dogs, the red light in front of the Sacred Heart picture, and the need for water and sanitation outside the house. It is a familiar setting, even for those who grew up in Ireland during the 1970s. Though part of the directions of the play, the commentary about sanitation and the availability of indoor water critiques the local government housing policy. Such critiques demonstrated that if the local government could not supply the basics of human living, how could it engage in modernisation?

Six years after McCaughey’s death, Macken’s play takes the exclusionary experience of prison and its effects on family life as one of its themes. This exclusion manifests in Josie’s social rejection because of her father’s incarceration;

A lot he cared about us, or he wouldn’t have ended up the way he did. ‘And where’s your father, little girl?’ ‘He’s doin’ five years’ hard labour down in Limerick, sir, but please give me the job all the same. I’m not like me father.’<sup>37</sup>

The social ostracization Josie experienced, along with her mother’s penury and alcohol dependence, show the catastrophic repercussions of Paddo’s actions. It is not only the offender that is othered by broader society, but families also suffer. It is telling that the parenting role that his wife, Daylia, missed was not the care that a father might show his daughter but the violent discipline of “the strap” that was so much part and parcel of life for children in post-war Irish society.<sup>38</sup> This lamentation gives way to a self-obsessed description of Daylia’s expectation that everything should be as Paddo left it five years before, “[t]he things I had to do. He won’t know all that. He’ll expect everything to be just the same.”<sup>39</sup> This is a futile expectation, as prison has fractured his personality and changed the fundamental hierarchy of relationships in the family home. Daylia has struggled, their children are adults, so the family home he returns to can never be the same. Because of Paddo’s aggression, his incarceration heightens the family’s dysfunction. The efforts of some members of his family to depict life as it was before incarceration, coupled with Paddo’s realisation of the change that has occurred, drive home the point that this hero is a stranger in his own home;

This is different. Something is gone wrong here. I saw me coming in the back door and my own family around the fire, and I would just sit down, and things

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<sup>36</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 8.

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would be like they were before. We could take up where we left off?<sup>40</sup>

Reflecting on his experience with Jerretspass Dramatic Society in 1956, Mick Waddell recalled that the adjudicator at the Bangor Festival suggested that Paddo’s “soft side” was not represented in their portrayal.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, the group changed their interpretation of the character. At the next festival, Robinson, the adjudicator, took a different view, criticising the changed performance, which did not portray Paddo as “a real hard man.”<sup>42</sup> As many of the “500 theatrical societies sprinkled through the country” found, the adjudicator’s preference for a particular playwright or type of performance sometimes meant the difference between victory and defeat.<sup>43</sup> Festival success meant that it became necessary to tailor performances to the tastes of the adjudicator.

In the play, Willie’s proposed marriage to Lily amplifies Paddo’s social exclusion. That the daughter of the slain consents to marry the murderer’s son shows an act of integrity and forgiveness of merit. She is reluctant to be imprisoned by the sins of the past. Resolving to make his engagement with Lily work, Willie acknowledges that “my father will never have to look at his daughter-in-law;” he will sacrifice his relationship with his parents.<sup>44</sup> Given the right circumstances, they can transcend the power dynamic of violence and hate that has scarred their lives. In contrast, Paddo’s reaction of anger and incredulity shows that though free, he remains a prisoner of past actions and attitudes. Lily, focused and relentless in her rejection of Paddo’s aggression, reminds him that “all I can see is that you hurt us once very much and that you seem to want to keep on hurting us.”<sup>45</sup>

Willie’s freedom and the changes he sees in his family enrage Paddo. Regretful and penitent, he may be, but amid change, the shadow reveals his true self. Lily’s freedom and strength contrast with the frailty of Paddo’s daughter, Josie. Confronted with her engagement to Manchester, a man like her father, reveals Paddo’s true personality. Unlike Willie and Lily, Josie cannot enforce her place within the new hierarchical reality of the household, and she succumbs to Paddo’s violence;

JOSIE.            Let me alone. Let me alone! *She struggles in his grasp. The coat*

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<sup>40</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Waddell, ““All the World’s a Stage””, 43–44.

<sup>42</sup> Waddell, ““All the World’s a Stage””, 44.

<sup>43</sup> Quidnunc, ‘An Irishman’s Diary: Tiger Smile’, *An Irishman’s Diary*, 1 June 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>44</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 65.

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*slips from one shoulder, and his strong hand tears the frock at her neck. Then he raises the strap high and brings it down on her.*

PADDO. I'll bring ye back. I'll tear the five years of evil out of ye. *Josie tries to dodge the blows. His grasping hand tears the frock further until one shoulder is disclosed. She screams loud and clear. He raises the strap again, forcing her to her knees.*<sup>46</sup>

Macken included a stage direction to save the audience from the scene's brutality: “if you do not wish to see further, you may drop the curtain.”<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, deprived of the visual, the auditory experience of this direction potentially emphasises the domestic violence incident in the audience's imagination and the invocation of a neighbourhood scandal. As with Mary Manders's murder in *Mungo's Mansion*, closing the curtain invests the audience with the underlying themes of integrity and estrangement, depicted through the characters' response to the power dynamic of social and domestic violence. The severity of the beating contrasts with Willie's and Lily's respectful union. This unlikely couple transcends the complexities of their lives, intertwined by violence, to achieve something beyond the circumstances that brought them together. Conventional perceptions of their respective backgrounds ordinarily meant that they remained apart. Macken's storyline challenges audiences with an example of extraordinary forgiveness and love that draws these fictional characters to overcome the social distance that Paddo's exercise of power through violence imposes on them. In this sense, they metaphorically represent letting go of a violent past in favour of building a brighter future which the embrace of solidarity by a new generation offered.

Mooney first produced this play at the Abbey Theatre in July 1952.<sup>48</sup> As noted in chapter two, she was the sole female member of the Arts Council Drama Panel and proposed the establishment of a “central authority” to “guide the amateur movement into a broader advocate for...the arts.”<sup>49</sup> The Abbey Theatre production attracted an audience of 92,000 people running to widespread acclaim until October 1952.<sup>50</sup> Much criticism of the play concerned the negative portrayal of Irish life, which depicted the dysfunctional and destructive effects of alcoholism, poverty and domestic violence in

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<sup>46</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Macken, *Home Is the Hero*, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 125–26.

<sup>49</sup> Mooney to Little, 3 June 1952.

<sup>50</sup> J. J. Finnegan, ‘Miscellany’, *Evening Herald*, 29 November 1952, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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the west of Ireland.<sup>51</sup> Like its Abbey run, the 1953 Radio Eireann broadcast of *Home is the Hero* evoked a considerable reaction. As with *An Triail* over a decade later, some listeners were riveted, while others found it objectionable on several grounds, including vulgarity and its depiction of Irish life.<sup>52</sup>

One of those who found the play objectionable, Marie Le Goc, claimed that “sordid” plays, like Macken’s, confirmed prejudicial views of the Irish as “drunkards.”<sup>53</sup> However, she betrayed her class bias by declaring that “educated people do not want to view plays about slum living.”<sup>54</sup> She cited several unverifiable critics and audience responses as evidence for her view.<sup>55</sup> The value of Macken’s plays lay in highlighting the conditions of working-class people in the post-war years.<sup>56</sup> Notwithstanding opposition from the Department of Finance, influential civil servants like Patrick Lynch and Alexis Fitzgerald persuaded the inter-party government to adopt *Keynesian economics*.<sup>57</sup> As the 1950s progressed, the Irish Government and county councils implemented a £120 million capital-building programme focused on housing and hospitals.<sup>58</sup>

Such was its appeal that between 1954 and 1956, Macken’s play was staged in Paris, Liverpool, the United States, Sweden, Germany, Norway, and Australia.<sup>59</sup> Unlike Leonard’s play, *The Poker Session*, a decade later, which provided for a neutral staging, Macken’s play did not transpose easily into an American setting. The Broadway production tried to adapt the play by setting it in an American middle-class family, which resulted in poor audience receipts because of accent and other cultural issues.<sup>60</sup> The play embraced new media with a televised broadcast in 1956 and a film adaptation which screened to favourable reviews in 1959 but received a mixed American welcome in 1961.<sup>61</sup>

Le Goc contrasted the play with performances from her native Brittany,

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<sup>51</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 129–33.

<sup>52</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 136–38.

<sup>53</sup> Marie Le Goc, ‘Radio Eireann Shocked Me’, *Irish Independent*, 8 October 1953, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>54</sup> Le Goc, ‘Radio Eireann Shocked Me’.

<sup>55</sup> Le Goc, ‘Radio Eireann Shocked Me’.

<sup>56</sup> Heinz Kosok, ‘Plays and Playwrights from Ireland in International Perspective’, in *Playwright, Actor and Theatre Manager*, ed. James E. Reid (Dublin: St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, 1995), 342–43.

<sup>57</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 202.

<sup>58</sup> Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland*, 203.

<sup>59</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 175.

<sup>60</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 148.

<sup>61</sup> Reid, ‘Walter Macken’, 163–64.

promoting clean living rather than the “sordid” view presented in *Home Is the Hero*.<sup>62</sup> Her remarks echoed Bishop Hanly’s hope that An Tóstal and the AIDF presented Irish people as cultured.<sup>63</sup> In 1958 Bishop Fergus of Achonry echoed Le Goc’s concern about portraying a sordid Irish life when he confirmed that the shadow side of life presented extensive material for dramatic production.<sup>64</sup> He encouraged drama groups and producers to rectify this by taking a balanced approach to their craft.<sup>65</sup> At the opening of the All-Ireland Rural Finals in Loughrea in 1962, the organising committee chair, Fr. O’Callaghan, claimed that there was no evidence that the sordid portrayals of Irish life in these plays existed.<sup>66</sup>

Like Wilder’s *Our Town*, many social issues permeating Macken’s plays speak into the contemporary experience.<sup>67</sup> Herein lay the danger JKA described in his critique of *Home is the Hero*. In presenting these issues, Macken challenged those who wished to remain engaged with an idealised vision of Ireland that no longer existed. Rather than dramatic critique, fear of social change provoked such a poor review of, and strong audience reaction to, these plays.

### Shades of Meaning

As the 1960s began, cinema, radio and television challenged the appeal of the amateur and professional stage. Speaking at the opening of the 1962 Cavan Drama Festival, the Bishop of Kilmore, Dr Quinn, addressed some challenges. Echoing a consistent theme of the previous decade, he lamented that “the most interesting people are the abnormal and the degenerate, and the only worthwhile story is one of tragedy and despair.”<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding these criticisms, Seamus Mallon’s “bloodless” production of the Newpoint Players’ performance of Wilder’s *Our Town* at the Cavan, Newry and AIDF told a “gentle story” about life and living.<sup>69</sup>

Newry produced two amateur drama groups in the 1940s, the Abbey and the

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<sup>62</sup> Le Goc, ‘Radio Eireann Shocked Me’.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Bishop Opens Drama Festival’.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Week of Drama at Tubbercurry’.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Priest Calls for More Good Plays’, *Irish Press*, 3 April 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>67</sup> Kathryn S. Roberts, ‘Our Town, the MacDowell Colony, and the Art of Civic Mediation’, *American Literary History* 31, no. 3 (2019): 395, <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajz025>.

<sup>68</sup> “‘Legitimate Stage at Its Best Has No Rival’ Bishop of Kilmore’, *Anglo-Celt*, 31 March 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>69</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’, *Westmeath Independent*, 19 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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Colmcille Players, who emerged following a split.<sup>70</sup> The Newpoint Players were drawn from Newry and Warrenpoint.<sup>71</sup> This play which won the producer’s cup at the Newry Drama Festival was nominated to the AIDF after winning the premier award at the South Leinster and Cavan Drama Festivals in 1962.<sup>72</sup> Like many of his later political colleagues, Mallon actively participated in the amateur drama movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>73</sup> For those involved in the politics of Church and State, time spent developing the skills of amateur stagecraft proved to be a valuable asset in negotiating the complexities of modern Ireland.

In his evaluation of the 1962 AIDF, the adjudicator Ray McAnally distinguished between the “standard of presentation, lighting, costuming, make-up and production by the top groups” and “other [productions which] left a great deal to be desired.”<sup>74</sup> McAnally’s top groups included the Sligo Drama Circle, Kilkeel Women’s Institute, Newpoint, Lifford and Brosna Players (see appendix three). For the adjudicators, the Newry, Lifford and Sligo productions “set a standard...as high as one could ever desire to see in the amateur theatre.”<sup>75</sup> Winning the Esso trophy by one point at ninety-seven marks, McAnally commented on how Mallon, through his use of “all-important lighting effects...surmounted immense problems” and “showed sensitivity, delicacy, strength and a real understanding of the play.”<sup>76</sup> Similar to the minimal settings for *Waiting for Godot* or *The Chairs* (see chapter five), Mallon utilised a simple set of “black drapes, a few chairs and lighting” to produce an “atmospheric effect” that captivated the audience.<sup>77</sup>

In a new approach to staging, Wilder immersed the audience in the play’s dramaturgy by positioning some of the action among the stalls.<sup>78</sup> In addition, the continual narrative presence of the stage manager utilised the Greek theatre technique whereby the audience, who became part of the play itself, knew in advance who the

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<sup>70</sup> Waddell, “‘All the World’s a Stage’”, 40.

<sup>71</sup> Marie O’Reilly, ‘Monday Mirror: She Came First in Our Town’, *Irish Independent*, 21 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Awards at Newry’, *Irish Press*, 2 April 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive; Mallon and Pollak, *Seamus Mallon*, 40–43. Following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement Mallon served as Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.

<sup>73</sup> Mallon and Pollak, *Seamus Mallon*, 40–43.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Athlone Drama Festival: Top Award Won by Newry Actors’, *Irish Independent*, 14 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>77</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’; Mallon and Pollak, *Seamus Mallon*, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Roberts, ‘Our Town’, 395.

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central characters were and what was to happen to them.<sup>79</sup> The stage manager’s narration relieved the characters of the burden of interpretation built into the play.<sup>80</sup>

The adjudicator praised Newpoint’s “Liam O’Callaghan, Thelma Marley, and Ann Brady [who gave] wonderful performances.”<sup>81</sup> A member of the Lyric Players, O’Callaghan’s “easy, casual, humorous and sad” performance of the stage manager was so effective that, as Wilder intended, the *Westmeath Independent*’s AK “lost all sense of watching a play - I, too, lived in Grover’s corner.”<sup>82</sup> Contrasting this play with their previous 1958 production of Shaw’s *Arms and the Man*, the *Westmeath Independent* critic described the 1962 performance as “bewitched.”<sup>83</sup> While initially sceptical that the play would command the audience’s attention, the critic remarked that the production “held itself, breath and all.”<sup>84</sup>

Wilder’s play shares a central theme of the changing nature of a society’s cultural understanding of itself with his other work, *The Cabala* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*.<sup>85</sup> The playwright’s thorough familiarity with the work of James Joyce, among others, influenced these works.<sup>86</sup> The impact of Wilder’s experimental work was such that “Brecht, Ionesco and Duerrenmatt...acknowledged” his influence in their work.<sup>87</sup> Though *Our Town* has an overall religious feel in its presentation of life and death, it presents a humanist rather than a Christian perspective.<sup>88</sup> Though Bishop Quinn and Father O’Callaghan may have delighted in the staging of Wilder’s play, the emphasis is not necessarily on existential questions of religious experience (though they are present) but on living mindfully, aware of the joy of infinite moments of daily life.

This emphasis is evident in the play’s second act, where Emily, played by Thelma Marley, challenges her neighbour, George, about his distance from her.<sup>89</sup> Their

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<sup>79</sup> Graham. Ley, *Short Introduction to the Ancient Greek Theater* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 54, Scribd.

<sup>80</sup> Roberts, ‘Our Town’, 395.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Top Award Won by Newry Actors’.

<sup>82</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’; ‘Lyric Players Theatre Plan for Programme on the Theatre in “The Arts in Ulster” Recording.’ (16 January 1966), 138, T4:906-909, O’Malley Archive, University of Galway.

<sup>83</sup> Bernard. Shaw, *Arms and the Man: An Anti-Romantic Comedy in Three Acts* (London; New York; Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956); AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’.

<sup>84</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’.

<sup>85</sup> Sidney Feshbach, ‘Deeply Indebted: On Thornton Wilder’s Interest in James Joyce’, *James Joyce Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Summer) (1994): 510.

<sup>86</sup> Feshbach, ‘Deeply Indebted’, 510.

<sup>87</sup> Robert W. Corrigan, ‘Thornton Wilder and the Tragic Sense of Life’, *Educational Theatre Journal* 13, no. 3 (1961): 167–73.

<sup>88</sup> Corrigan, ‘Tragic Sense of Life’, 168.

<sup>89</sup> O’Reilly, ‘Monday Mirror’. Marley had been acting since she was a child attending primary school in Killeel, Co. Down.

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dialogue depicts the awkwardness of puberty and the estrangement of the teenage years.<sup>90</sup> She expects George to reach an unrealistic masculine ideal. Unlike Nellie and Josie in Macken’s plays, her idealised vision of masculinity does not include parental imperfections.<sup>91</sup> As George, Willie (*Home is the Hero*), and Mairteen (*Mungo’s Mansion*) portray, perfection is beyond humanity’s reach.

Nonetheless, Emily’s idea of fatherhood counterbalances the flawed maleness of Macken’s Paddo. It demands respect within relationships beyond the false masculinity that George embraced. He is more focused on impressing his friends than maintaining the genuine relationships he has consistently engaged. However, as these plays illustrate, changing relationships present challenges.



**Figure 11:** Presentation to Thelma Marley, Newpoint Players (*Westmeath Independent*, 19th May 1962)

Mallon’s “courage and initiative in attempting interesting and vital work” determined the final placings.<sup>92</sup> McAnally praised Thelma Marley in his adjudication for her “wonderfully sensitive performance in an extremely difficult part.”<sup>93</sup> As well as winning the Esso Trophy, the Newport Players also won the best actress (Thelma Marley, fig. 11), Moore Trophy for best stage manager (Seán Markham) and the production award at the festival.<sup>94</sup> In deciding the winners, “which were separated by single marks, “the adjudicators took “into consideration the subtlest shades of meaning

<sup>90</sup> Thornton Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, Modern Classics (1938; repr., London and New York: Harper Perennial, 2020), 95, Scribd.

<sup>91</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 96.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

<sup>93</sup> O’Reilly, ‘Monday Mirror’.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

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and the tiniest nuances of interpretation.”<sup>95</sup> These shades of meaning and interpretation permeated the second and third acts of the Newpoint Players production. The play’s third act draws the audience into questions about life and death. Like many women, Emily dies in childbirth, and the act addresses her experience of eternity. In entering purgatory, she meets many of the characters who pre-deceased her. However, as Emily settles into her new reality, she acclaims her discomfort at being “new here.”<sup>96</sup>

In the play, a series of contrasts explores Emily and George’s life experiences at the beginning and end of adulthood. The exciting emergence into adulthood through marriage contrasts with the apprehension of leaving a familiar and secure existence. This contrast is also present in the finality of dying. So too, death, the ultimate social leveller, demands a letting go of all that is familiar as one emerges into an as yet, much deliberated but unknown future. As explored throughout this dissertation, this tension between continuity and progression exemplifies the tension that applies as culture passes through the generations in an ongoing modernisation continuum that resistance cannot overcome. In Wilder’s storyline, though resistance to change is a necessary part of the engagement, acceptance of one’s reality, supported by the broader community, brings peace.

Obsessed with doing, Emily’s exploration of her past life helps her understand that the state of *being* [my italics] provides life. This state, embracing pure existence, contrasts the mindless obsession with the busyness (business) of earlier scenes, with which many of those now dead were preoccupied. In the play, *being* is a state in which the motionless dead, seated, like Ionesco’s invisible audience on lonely chairs, have no choice but to exist. One of the challenging aspects of dying is reconciling things left undone or unsaid with the importance of letting go;

Mother Gibbs, George and I have made that farm into just the best place you ever saw. We thought of you all the time. We wanted to show you the new barn and a great long cement drinking fountain for the stock. We bought that out of the money you left.<sup>97</sup>

Emily’s rushed declaration of her success to her deceased mother-in-law is part of letting go of an obsession with the trappings of modern life and success. Trappings that the stage manager explored before the act opened. In rushing to tell her deceased

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

<sup>96</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 127.

<sup>97</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 127.

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mother-in-law of her mortal success, she resists this ultimate change within life; “how can I ever forget that life? It’s all I know. It’s all I had.”<sup>98</sup> This legacy is beyond Mrs Gibb’s interest; “when you’ve been here longer, you’ll see that our life here is to forget all that and think only of what’s ahead.”<sup>99</sup> To “forget all that, and think only of what’s ahead” is a humanist encapsulation of a time-dominated existence rather than the Christian understanding of living in the eternal present.<sup>100</sup> In the play, Emily’s desire to go back to the living, to transcend death, recognises human resistance to this ultimate change within life. The need to live is humanity’s innate desire. The presentation of the dead living in partial existence, commenting on the living, indicates that “life is changed, not ended.”<sup>101</sup>

Though initially “uncertain” about Marley’s portrayal, AK’s remarks demonstrated the power of this performance; “For me, the moment which twisted my heart came right at the end, when Emily returned to her place among the dead, folded her hands in her empty lap, and became still.”<sup>102</sup> In visiting her past, she has come to a new understanding of the present. Like Scrooge in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, her regret that she did not live a conscious life changes her.<sup>103</sup> It also challenges the audience to review their past, “that’s what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings...of those about you.”<sup>104</sup> Amid this contemplation of the regular cycle of life and death, Wilder situates his understanding of tragedy.<sup>105</sup>

By embracing the suffering and separation of ordinary encounters, one comes face to face with real humanity. The play’s adaptability to suit various interpretations demonstrates its timelessness and ability to speak to a new generation of actors, producers, and audiences.<sup>106</sup> Thus, resistance to change, which Wilder explores through the wedding and purgatory scenes, illustrates the challenge of modernisation facing post-war society. In death, Emily’s simple act of sitting, folding her arms and

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<sup>98</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 132.

<sup>99</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 132.

<sup>100</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 132; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: SCM Press, 1996), xi, Scribd.

<sup>101</sup> Most Rev. John McAreevey DD, ed., ‘Preface I for the Dead’, in *Roman Missal* (Newry: CBC Distributors, Newry, 2012), 65.

<sup>102</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Heinemann, 1915), 116.

<sup>104</sup> Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, 144.

<sup>105</sup> Corrigan, ‘Tragic Sense of Life’, 170.

<sup>106</sup> Roberts, ‘Our Town’, 396.

becoming still is a metaphor that illustrates a shift of understanding once the vision of modernising society becomes apparent. As explored in these scenes, modernisation raises issues about a society that needs exploration. Resistance is a step towards achieving resolution.

Commenting on the “technically perfect” performance of the Newpoint Players, AK briefly reflected on the success of the “tenth festival.”<sup>107</sup> The critic reflecting on earlier “sincerely and movingly acted” performances of Laverty’s *Tolka Row* and Anouilh’s *Antigone* contrasted the financial success of the festival (the busyness) with that of the artistic importance of the performances (being).<sup>108</sup> Articulating the learning from *Our Town*, he warned readers, “how much technical gloss can the amateur take without becoming mechanical, or worse - a mere mimic of the professional? If the heart goes out of the amateur movement, the shell won’t be worth preserving.”<sup>109</sup>

Unlike AK, for theatre critic David Nowlan, the 1962 AIDF was when “we first made real contact with the amateur drama movement.”<sup>110</sup> Commenting on the “brilliant theatricality of Newry’s *Our Town*,” Nowlan remarked that this production, along with those of the new play, *In Wild Earth*, Sligo Drama Circle’s *My Three Angels*, Lifford Players’ production of Gerald Healy’s *The Black Stranger*, and Martin Dempsey’s production of *The Playboy of the Western World*, inscribed “indelible memories of real theatre.”<sup>111</sup> Moreover, these performances indicated that “this movement [became] as much a part of the Irish theatre as the Gate or Abbey Theatres themselves.”<sup>112</sup> Stack also shared Nowlan’s sentiments, commenting that “the growth of [amateur] drama in its more vital and organised form had been truly astonishing.”<sup>113</sup> As a result, amateur drama groups spread throughout the country, replacing “politics [with] social...activity in drama.”<sup>114</sup>

### No Border in Amateur Drama

According to Enda Delaney, despite nationalist rhetoric that sought solace in the

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<sup>107</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’.

<sup>108</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’.

<sup>109</sup> AK, ‘Drama Commentary: Our Town’.

<sup>110</sup> David Nowlan, ‘Verdict on the Athlone Festival’, *Irish Times*, 21 May 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>111</sup> Nowlan, ‘Verdict on the Athlone Festival’.

<sup>112</sup> Nowlan, ‘Verdict on the Athlone Festival’.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Close of Tenth Drama Festival’.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Close of Tenth Drama Festival’.

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“cherished fallen heroes of the Irish Pantheon,” the post-war nation, North and South, sought comfort in material and social prosperity.<sup>115</sup> Led by Lemass and Whitaker through the *Programme for Economic Expansion*, this search “measured the achievement of independence in concrete rather than abstract terms.”<sup>116</sup> Likewise, in Northern Ireland, the prime minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O’Neill, sought to follow the approach of the “welfare state,” which transformed post-war Britain, and the *Programme for Economic Expansion*, which improved the standard of living in the Republic.<sup>117</sup> The meetings between Lemass and O’Neill in 1965 demonstrated the importance attached by the respective governments to cross-border modernisation.<sup>118</sup>

Two years later, the 1967 AIDF illustrated the depth of cultural solidarity emerging in the amateur drama movement.<sup>119</sup> Commenting on the success of the movement during his opening speech,

James H. Cathcart, Director of the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals [AUDF], said that by a coincidence, the Northern Amateur Council was also holding its 15<sup>th</sup> festival, and he thought it would be a good idea if the winners in North and South should perform their entries for three days each in Dublin and Belfast. He said it was significant that Southern groups were competing in the North and Northern groups in the South, which meant that there was no border in amateur drama.<sup>120</sup>

The *Irish Independent’s* theatre critic, Prompter, welcomed Cathcart’s proposal that “the winners of the Athlone and Ulster finals sharing a week in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin and the Opera House, Belfast, in alternate years.”<sup>121</sup> Reminding readers he advocated for such an arrangement for many years, Prompter maintained that this incentivised drama groups to compete in festivals.<sup>122</sup> As the Abbey Players developed close ties with the amateur movement through their regional tour, the first in “24 years,” Prompter encouraged all concerned to reopen negotiations about this possibility.<sup>123</sup> During this provincial tour, the Abbey Players’ visit to Carrickmore was

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<sup>115</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 113–14.

<sup>116</sup> Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 113.

<sup>117</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 415–16; Lionel Pilkington, ‘Theatre and Cultural Politics in Northern Ireland: The Over the Bridge Controversy, 1959’, *Eire-Ireland* 30, no. 4 (1995): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.1995.0058>.

<sup>118</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Border: The Legacy of a Century of Anglo-Irish Politics*. (London: Profile Books, 2019), 75–76, Kindle.

<sup>119</sup> ‘18 Groups Seek Honours’.

<sup>120</sup> ‘18 Groups Seek Honours’.

<sup>121</sup> Prompter, ‘Send Title Winners to Dublin, Belfast’, *Irish Independent*, 14 April 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>122</sup> Prompter, ‘Send Title Winners’.

<sup>123</sup> Prompter, ‘Send Title Winners’.

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a significant moment for the Mid-Ulster Drama Festival. In its short life of four years, it “attracted leading groups from all over the North.”<sup>124</sup> In an example of how peripheral professional drama became to rural Ireland, the visitors were

surprised that so much interest and knowledge of drama could exist so remote from the larger centres of population and remarked that they had found this, too, in other places where they had taken the present play. They had, indeed, been playing to packed houses at every stop of the tour so far.<sup>125</sup>

Their surprise illustrated the impact of the amateur drama movement across all provinces of rural Ireland. For Austin Stewart, “a joint secretary of the Ulster Drama Festivals,” the amateur rather than the professional ensured that the theatre-going public could experience “worthwhile plays.”<sup>126</sup> Donal Kelly in the *Irish Press* echoed this view when he emphasised the “importance of the amateur movement to the whole picture of the theatre in Ireland.”<sup>127</sup> This importance, he claimed, grew in strength as the amateur movement became “more selective in their choice of plays.”<sup>128</sup> Kelly noted that the discerning play selection led to the “Irish premiere” of “*La Muralla* or *The Wall* by Joaquin Calvo Sotelo” and observed that Leonard’s play *The Poker Session* was one of two plays that were “not ... seen by under 16s” that year.<sup>129</sup>

### Spellbound

Eight of the twenty dramatic society applicants appeared at the 1967 Mid-Ulster Drama Festival “in the Patrician Hall, Carrickmore.”<sup>130</sup> Like Mary O’Malley of the Lyric Theatre, the play’s execution and delivery were the focal points of this festival.<sup>131</sup> Although Cathcart saw drama groups’ increased participation in festivals north and south as a positive direction, Sligo Drama Circle’s *Playboy of the Western World* was the only play from the Republic to appear at the Ulster Drama Festival that year.<sup>132</sup> In addition, the Sligo Drama Circle and Newpoint Players appeared for the first time at the festival with their productions of *The Playboy of the Western World*

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<sup>124</sup> ‘Great Honour for Carrickmore in Visit of Abbey Theatre Company’, *Strabane Chronicle*, 27 May 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Great Honour for Carrickmore’.

<sup>126</sup> Terry Smith, ‘On Stage, Please, for Week of Drama’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 13 May 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>127</sup> Donal Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’, *Irish Press*, 25 February 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>128</sup> Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’.

<sup>129</sup> Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’.

<sup>130</sup> ‘The Play’s the Thing at Carrickmore Festival’, *Ulster Herald*, 25 February 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>131</sup> Sam. McCready, *Baptism by Fire: My Life with Mary O’Malley and the Lyric Players* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2007), 55.

<sup>132</sup> ‘18 Groups Seek Honours’; Smith, ‘On Stage, Please, for Week of Drama’.

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and *The Poker Session*, respectively, winning numerous awards.<sup>133</sup>

The Newpoint Players’ production of Leonard’s, *The Poker Session*, was the second new play to feature at the fifteenth Ulster Drama Festival in 1967.<sup>134</sup> Since its inception, the festival, which included “Bernard Myles and...Tyrone Guthrie” among its adjudicators, took place at the Opera House, Belfast.<sup>135</sup> Reviewing two of Leonard’s plays in 1963, Patrick O’Connor commented that it held the audience “spellbound as we watch what should be a pleasant social evening turn into a macabre nightmare.”<sup>136</sup> Notwithstanding, where *Dublin One* was disappointing, *The Poker Session* he remarked: “harks back to those vintage pieces of ‘good’ theatre, *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *Night Must Fall*.”<sup>137</sup> For O’Connor, the strength of Leonard’s play lay in his “technical virtuosity,” which was “an object lesson to some of our dramatists whose slapdash ventures into drama suggest that they think technique is some kind of dirty word.”<sup>138</sup> Responding to the quality of the play’s production, he remarked, “what a pleasure to see a really all-around professional job of work in the Dublin Theatre!”<sup>139</sup>

According to *Belfast Newsletter*’s Terry Smith, Leonard’s play was “one of the best to have come from an Irish playwright.”<sup>140</sup> Described by the *Anglo-Celt* as a “truly superb performance,” the players won “the Open Cup, the Producers’ Cup and the gold medals for best actor and actress [at the Cavan Drama] Festival - a unique but utterly deserved clean sweep.”<sup>141</sup> The players’ success continued at the Newry Drama Festival, where the local group won the “premier award - the James Connolly Memorial Cup.”<sup>142</sup> Though Cathcart claimed that there was no border in amateur drama, naming the Newry premier award after an executed leader of the 1916 Rising responded to previous Unionist efforts to control the impact of professional theatre on Northern Irish society.<sup>143</sup> It showed that much work was needed to make the amateur theatre a neutral cultural space.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> ‘The Play’s the Thing’.

<sup>134</sup> Smith, ‘On Stage, Please, for Week of Drama’.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, ‘On Stage, Please, for Week of Drama’.

<sup>136</sup> Patrick O’Connor, ‘Chronicle: Theatre’, *Furrow* 14, no. 12 (1963): 760.

<sup>137</sup> O’Connor, ‘Chronicle: Theatre’, 760. *Arsenic and Old Lace* featured at the 1957 and 1962 AIDF while *Night Must Fall* appeared in 1956 and 1958.

<sup>138</sup> O’Connor, ‘Chronicle: Theatre’, 760.

<sup>139</sup> O’Connor, ‘Chronicle: Theatre’, 760.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, ‘On Stage, Please, for Week of Drama’.

<sup>141</sup> ‘Newry Players Were Magnificent’, *Anglo-Celt*, 17 March 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

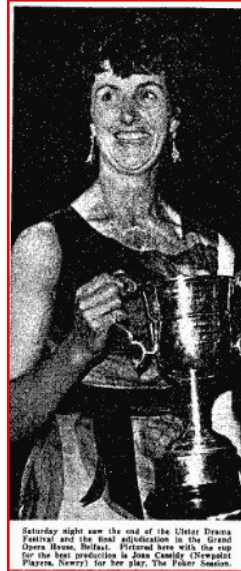
<sup>142</sup> ‘Newpoint Players, Triumph’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 13 March 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>143</sup> Donal Nevin, *James Connolly: ‘A Full Life’* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 2005), 668.

<sup>144</sup> Pilkington, ‘Theatre and Cultural Politics’, 77.

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The players also won the “best actor and actress [awards for] Liam O’Callaghan and Thelma Spallen - and certificates of merit went to the other four members of the cast.”<sup>145</sup> In addition, Cassidy, who produced the play, won “the Newsletter Cup for the best producer” (fig. 12).<sup>146</sup>



**Figure 12:** Joan Cassidy, producer of the Newpoint Players, winners of the James Connolly Cup at the Ulster Drama Festival in 1967 (*Belfast Newsletter*, 22nd May 1967)

After its success at the Newry Drama Festival, the Newpoint Players’ production moved to the AIDF. Evoking the audience’s anxious wait for the revelation of the ultimate winner, Coughlan in the *Irish Times* remarked, “[b]ut tradition demands that the last shall be announced first, and we are all like over tuned fiddles by the time Mr O’Brien works back to the trophy.”<sup>147</sup> Intensifying the tension of the wait were three favourites, *All Souls Night* (Lifford Players), *The Poker Session* (Newpoint Players) and *All My Sons* (Guinness Players), all of whom enjoyed varying degrees of success at the festival.<sup>148</sup> The audience at the 1967 AIDF greeted the Guinness Players’ win of the Esso Trophy with “a roar...the sheer gust of it splitting the smoky air into a thousand spirals.”<sup>149</sup> For Coughlan, the Newpoint Players’ performance of *The Poker Session* brought “a whiff of the Maigret world - the world in the mind of the reader, not the viewer. It is good, thumping, old-fashioned theatre, but has too many

<sup>145</sup> ‘Newpoint Players Triumph’.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Two Cups for Sligo Players’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 22 May 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive. Cassidy also produced two plays at the 1962 and 1965 AIDF for the Kilkeel Women’s Institute.

<sup>147</sup> Aileen Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’, *Irish Times*, 22 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>148</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

<sup>149</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

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music hall jokes thrown in for good measure.”<sup>150</sup>

Both Donal Kelly and *Belfast Newsletter* noted that Leonard’s play *The Poker Session* was one of two plays designated as “adults only” at the 1967 Newry Drama Festival.<sup>151</sup> This designation was because themes including mental illness, social exclusion, relational change, abortion, and death permeate the play. As with *Home is the Hero* and *An Triail*, social exclusion is also present in *The Poker Session*. Incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital since his sister’s death, the play centres on Billy’s first encounter with his family since his discharge. Like Paddo in *Home is the Hero*, Billy in *The Poker Session* is also “a stranger inhabiting an alien world of his own.”<sup>152</sup> His search for vindication serves as the plot for the drama, which occurs in the conservatory of the house that he shares with his mother. This setting, alongside the ongoing queries concerning the location of Billy’s brother-in-law Des, reinforces a middle-class sensibility. Their conversation illustrates that his family is uncomfortable around him;

I’m past looking for good signs or believing in them when they’re there. I don’t go in for false hopes anymore, Irene: I’ve had too much misfortune in my life. First, I lost Ruth—gone like that, like a puff of wind, at twenty-eight years of age. And then her brother had to be taken away to that place.<sup>153</sup>

The family’s interaction with Billy and his hospital companion Teddy explores this estrangement. In acclaiming the “skill” of the actors, Coughlan remarked how the lead actors “Liam O’Callaghan as Teddy” and “Owen Mooney as Billy” utilised inverted stereotypes of mental health distress to “build up tension, and Fran (Thelma Spallen) knock it down with a gust of laughter.”<sup>154</sup> As with Macken and Keane’s plays, comedy communicated aspects of underlying social issues;

KEVIN. You’ll go now when you’re told to.  
TEDDY. Get ruptured. (*FRAN laughs immoderately*).  
KEVIN. What are you laughing at?  
FRAN. You ruptured.  
KEVIN (*to BILLY*). Don’t think I don’t know who’s put him up to this, who brought him in here so as he could spew out his filth. I was invited to this house to play penny poker. Instead, I’ve been reviled and slandered and held to ransom over your miserable cigarette stall.

<sup>150</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

<sup>151</sup> ““Adults Only” Festival Plays’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 24 February 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive; Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’.

<sup>152</sup> John Wild, ‘Introduction’, in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, by Emmanuel Levinas (Duquesne University Press, 1969), 13, Scribd.

<sup>153</sup> Hugh Leonard, *The Poker Session: A Play* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1964), 15.

<sup>154</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

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BILLY. Shop.  
KEVIN. It’s a stall.  
BILLY. It’s a little shop. (*Primly*). I sell tobacco and sweets, which to my mind is at least as sensible as flying people to Lourdes by night tourist and bringing them home by fiery chariot. (*He gives a sudden demented shriek of laughter and thumps FRAN on the shoulder*).<sup>155</sup>

Billy confronts the power dynamic underpinning his family’s attitudes and discomfort by frankly recognising to their faces the reality of his incarceration and their abandonment of him in the hospital. Though the family presents as a middle-class success story, the circumstances of Ruth’s death because of a back street abortion leave an underlying tension;

MRS. BEAVIS. Billy, for my sake, let her rest quietly.  
BILLY. She’s bones by now. Where does resting come into it?  
MRS. BEAVIS. I don’t know what happened to you in that place. God’s truth, I don’t. Did we not go through enough with her? What more do you want? Are you set on shaming us before Irene? Is that it?<sup>156</sup>

Though revealing the truth about Ruth’s death at the end of the play, the debate surrounding the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act in the United Kingdom may have deepened the impact of this aspect of the plot on audiences North and South.<sup>157</sup> In the subsequent interrogation of these attitudes, Billy attempts to engage his family with the chaos of his interior life. Rather than “pay attention,” this interrogation further deepens the estranged relationships in the family;<sup>158</sup>

BILLY. It seemed that Ruth was expecting a child.  
KEVIN. You rotten little Judas.  
TEDDY. Judas?  
KEVIN. Don’t you start.  
TEDDY. Man, if he’s Judas, so you tell me: who does that make you? (*Kevin maddened, turns on him. Teddy skips back nimbly, ready to break the neck of the whisky bottle against the table edge. Billy approaches Kevin*). And your afflicted mother: who does it make Mommy?<sup>159</sup>

This encounter antagonises the extended family, culminating in a customary row and Mrs Beavis’s eventual acknowledgement of the hidden truth behind Billy’s incarceration, “I’ll never forgive you for what you did this evening. Never, Billy, never

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<sup>155</sup> Leonard, *The Poker Session*, 53.

<sup>156</sup> Leonard, *The Poker Session*, 56.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Doctor Admits He Coached Women Seeking Abortion’, *Irish Times*, 2 February 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>158</sup> Wild, ‘Totality and Infinity’, 15.

<sup>159</sup> Leonard, *The Poker Session*, 58.

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as long as I live.”<sup>160</sup> This deep-seated estrangement is an endemic part of family life, emerging from the perceived shame surrounding their parent’s mixed marriage. In the 1950s, the impact of the *Ne Temere* decree on the Tilson case and the Fethard-on-Sea boycott were examples of this type of social estrangement.<sup>161</sup> The denial of shame, like that depicted in *An Trial*, is manifested by Billy’s family, who, by sending him to the hospital, removes his capacity for agency. At the end of the play, the revelation that he has murdered his brother-in-law, the missing character whose absence dominates the play, shockingly confronts audiences with the importance of caring for more vulnerable members of society.

Introducing television challenged the amateur drama movement, but in 1967 the audience responded enthusiastically to the efforts of the amateur actors and producers who graced the festival stage.<sup>162</sup> Despite the attractions of cinema and television, which Coughlan subtly referred to in her column, the festival’s large crowds resulted in a “beseeching queue...[which] besieged Joan Walsh in the booking caravan.”<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, the audience rewarded her patience with “stamping applause on the final night.”<sup>164</sup> Such were the crowds that Coughlan “sometimes looked round, remembering nostalgically the empty seats of other days.”<sup>165</sup>

### Existential Questions

Existential questions permeated many of the plays produced at the 1968 Ulster Drama Festival. For the festival adjudicator, Ray McAnally, this was “typical of what was happening in the theatre” as “people are beginning to expect... the answers to questions they used to put to philosophy and religion.”<sup>166</sup> Friel’s play, *The Enemy Within*, produced by Sam McCready of the Lyric Players for the Orangefield Dramatic Society, exemplifies such questioning.<sup>167</sup> In the *Irish Times*, Ray Rosenfield noted rising anticipation surrounding this production at that year’s festival. This anticipation

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<sup>160</sup> Leonard, *The Poker Session*, 63.

<sup>161</sup> The Holy See, ‘Text of the Ne Temere Decree’ (Toronto, 1909), Internet Archive, [https://archive.org/stream/cihm\\_73751/cihm\\_73751\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/cihm_73751/cihm_73751_djvu.txt); ‘Letters to the Editor: The Fethard-on-Sea Boycott’, *Irish Times*, 5 June 1957, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid*, 245; 321–25.

<sup>162</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

<sup>163</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

<sup>164</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

<sup>165</sup> Coughlan, ‘The Athlone Festival’.

<sup>166</sup> Ray Rosenfield, ‘Festival Frolic on Grave Matters’, *Irish Times*, 18 May 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>167</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 95.

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was down to two factors. First, the adjudicator, Ray McAnally, played the title role in the Abbey Theatre’s production at its opening in 1962.<sup>168</sup> Second, “the very inclusion of this play, and more particularly of the company presenting it - the Orangefield Dramatic Society - in the festival is unusual.”<sup>169</sup>

The unusual part of this production was that the dramatic society was an extra-curricular part of the Orangefield State Secondary School in East Belfast. This protestant school included creative writing, drama, school meals, “Irish literature and history,” relationship and career counselling as part of its broad approach to inclusive education in 1968.<sup>170</sup> This broad, integrated curriculum sought to develop critical thinking among the pupils of this school so that “when they meet with sectarian bitterness, to think things out for themselves.”<sup>171</sup> As part of this comprehensive approach to the educational experience, its pupils met with “Belfast poets like Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley.”<sup>172</sup> They also attended the Abbey Theatre’s production of Brendan Behan’s, *The Hostage* in Belfast.<sup>173</sup> This broad background contextualised Sam McCready’s production of Friel’s play in 1968.

McCready produced the play and was an actor with the Lyric Theatre and a close associate of Mary and Pearse O’Malley, who founded the Lyric Players in 1951. From a Unionist background, McCready became “exposed to the great dramatic literature which [he] encountered at the Lyric.”<sup>174</sup> In addition, through his involvement in amateur theatrics, he became “aware of [his] Irish heritage” due to long conversations at the O’Malley’s home at Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast, where the Lyric Theatre, then an amateur drama group, began.<sup>175</sup> The establishment of a “poet’s theatre” at the Lyric saw what began as an amateur theatrical organisation in the early 1950s emerge into the professional sphere.<sup>176</sup>

Because of O’Malley’s views, the consistent resistance to the redevelopment of the Lyric Theatre in Belfast exemplified Unionist attempts to control the influence

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<sup>168</sup> ‘Dublin Theatres: Friel’s Great Play of Ulster’s Hero Saint’, *Irish Times*, 7 August 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>169</sup> Ray Rosenfield, ‘Ulster Drama Festival Opening’, *Irish Times*, 13 May 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>170</sup> Eileen O’Brien, ‘Tolerance Starts at School’, *Irish Times*, 28 October 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>171</sup> O’Brien, ‘Tolerance Starts at School’.

<sup>172</sup> O’Brien, ‘Tolerance Starts at School’.

<sup>173</sup> O’Brien, ‘Tolerance Starts at School’.

<sup>174</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 152.

<sup>175</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 152.

<sup>176</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 139.

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of both amateur and professional theatre.<sup>177</sup> Indeed, such were the tensions surrounding the development of the Lyric that in 1960 the Arts Council of Ireland noted that O’Malley “refuses all financial assistance from CEMA or Northern Ireland funds.”<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, by 1965, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, which received less grant aid than the “Welsh Arts Council and...some of the English Regional Arts Associations,” supported aspects of the theatre.<sup>179</sup> Despite resistance to the theatre’s relocation to Ridgeway Street in Belfast, only the Lyric survived the conflict that engulfed Northern Ireland from 1969.<sup>180</sup>

As part of his work with the Orangefield school, McCready regularly rehearsed plays at the “Whinlands, the school’s outpost in the Mourne,” and “in 1966...spent much time discussing 1916 and the position of the six counties.”<sup>181</sup> Then, to prepare for the play’s performance, McCready brought the cast to Whinlands, where they spent several days experiencing the hardship of the monks’ way of life as depicted in the play.<sup>182</sup> Ray Rosenfield noted in the *Irish Times* that under McCready’s direction, the society came “just one point behind the overall winners” of the AIDF in Athlone and “won major awards at several drama festivals.”<sup>183</sup>

Adjudicating the Ulster Drama Festival, McAnally, who starred in the play’s first production at the Abbey Theatre in 1962, praised the young actor, “Ashley Rodway, who... played his role of Columba.”<sup>184</sup> He remarked that Rodway portrayed the character with “weight, experience, depth of character and the ability to stand still and say something quite simply,” qualities not expected of teenage actors.<sup>185</sup> Complementing the players’ performance, McAnally remarked that given their young age, “I wouldn’t have given them this play, I would have thought it beyond them, and I’d have been wrong. I think they’ve done a marvellous job.”<sup>186</sup> So “captivated” was

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<sup>177</sup> Pearse O’Malley to Lady Vick, Letter, 1965, T4:906-909, O’Malley Archive, University of Galway; McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 60, 98, 119.

<sup>178</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Agenda No 7 Concerning the Yeats International Summer School’ (Agenda, Dublin, 14 June 1960), CE: 813, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>179</sup> S.E. Capper to Lyric Theatre Trustees, Letter, 25 May 1965, T4:906-909, O’Malley Archive, University of Galway; Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 232; McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 129, 134.

<sup>180</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 98.

<sup>181</sup> O’Brien, ‘Tolerance Starts at School’.

<sup>182</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 95.

<sup>183</sup> Ray Rosenfield, ‘Belfast Finals of Drama Festival Open’, *Irish Times*, 14 May 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>184</sup> ‘Dublin Theatres’; ‘Friel Play for Abbey’, *Irish Times*, 3 August 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Ray Rosenfield, ‘A Familiar Play for the Adjudicator’, *Irish Times*, 17 May 1968, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>185</sup> Rosenfield, ‘A Familiar Play’.

<sup>186</sup> Rosenfield, ‘A Familiar Play’.

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the audience at Orangefield’s production at the Ulster Drama Festival that “one could have heard a plastic paperclip drop at any time, all the way through.”<sup>187</sup>

Though critical of McCready’s “use of radio techniques to fill in background incidents,” McAnally commented that the decision to “[dispense] with a set...lost an opportunity to provide moments of cosiness in the conduct of the play.”<sup>188</sup> McCready, like McAnally, also performed in an earlier Lyric production of this play in 1963.<sup>189</sup> In addition, Ronald Mason, who directed that production, “added an interlude to the original play showing Caornan’s death,” which McCready included at the 1968 amateur drama festivals.<sup>190</sup>

Winning “the Sportex Trophy at the AIDF for the best three-act play,” the Orangefield production of *The Enemy Within* drew praise from the adjudicator Arthur Hodgson.<sup>191</sup> He described it as “a beautifully designed and lavish production in every way.”<sup>192</sup> While disagreeing with McAnally concerning the play’s staging, he agreed that “the producer managed to yield some form of magic which welded this young team into something more experienced and more real than it should have been.”<sup>193</sup>

Friel’s play, set in the sixth century, tells the story of Columba’s ongoing engagement with the travails of his native Ulster. Following an alleged copyright dispute culminating in the “Battle of the Books” at Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo, the saint fled in exile to Iona (fig. 13).<sup>194</sup> The play explores the human and religious tensions of the monastic life, metaphorically representing the ongoing daily struggles of integrity and commitment people face.<sup>195</sup> In 1962, the *Irish Times* noted how Friel “[broke] away completely from his predecessors in saint-worshipping Irish drama in this play.”<sup>196</sup> While physically strong, Columba is divided emotionally and spiritually between his vocational call as Abbot of Iona and the ties that repeatedly draw him

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<sup>187</sup> J.M., ‘Theatre: Boys Do a Man’s Job at the Festival’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 17 May 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>188</sup> Rosenfield, ‘A Familiar Play’.

<sup>189</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 111.

<sup>190</sup> McCready, *Baptism by Fire*, 111.

<sup>191</sup> ‘Top Award for Dublin Group’, *Irish Press*, 6 May 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>192</sup> ‘Top Award for Dublin Group’.

<sup>193</sup> ‘Top Award for Dublin Group’.

<sup>194</sup> Adomnán of Iona, *Life of St. Columba*, trans. Richard Sharpe (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England; New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 12–14.

<sup>195</sup> Brian Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, in *Collected Plays: Volume One* (Dublin: Gallery Books; Faber and Faber, 2016), 9–84. As mentioned earlier, in 1955, P. J. Little unveiled a mural painted by Bernard McDonagh, depicting this battle at Sligo County Library where it can be viewed today.

<sup>196</sup> ‘Dublin Theatres’.

back to Ulster.<sup>197</sup> Though struggling with his faith, Friel understood that “sanctity [consisted]... of a man having tremendous integrity and the courage to back it up,” a choice that also lay at the heart of Friel’s play, *Philadelphia Here I Come*.<sup>198</sup>



**Figure 13:** Bernard McDonagh’s *The Battle of the Books* mural (Photo courtesy of the McDonagh Family and Sligo County Library)

In his adjudication, McAnally asserted that “the message [of the play was] that each day we begin again the battle for self-knowledge, for self-conquest.”<sup>199</sup> This interpretation went to the heart of Friel’s understanding of holiness as a commitment to authenticity in human relationships. Friel’s *Columba* shows this integrity by acknowledging the futility of war and the choice to leave behind the “corrupting influence” of family and nation in the search for authenticity.<sup>200</sup> The play’s third act illustrates this tension in a debate between Columba, his brother Eoghan, and nephew Aedh. Under the pretence of reconciling an estranged marriage, Eoghan and Aedh prevail upon Columba to enter another Ulster war on their behalf. Although tempted by the prospect, Columba, torn between his rediscovered commitment to the “rule” of Iona and the attraction of war, declares, “that day is over for me—finished.”<sup>201</sup> His nephew uses emotional blackmail to persuade Columba of their cause;

Is it a bad thing that we are asking of you—that you save two souls for the Church of God, that you unite under the banner of Christ, the cousins that have fought against one another for generations?<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition*, Rev. ed, New Gill History of Ireland 1 (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 61.

<sup>198</sup> Peter Lennon, ‘Playwright of the Western World’, *Guardian*, 8 October 1964, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>199</sup> J.M., ‘Boy’s Do a Man’s Job’.

<sup>200</sup> Lennon, ‘Playwright of the Western World’.

<sup>201</sup> Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, 76.

<sup>202</sup> Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, 77.

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The confused ramblings of a fellow monk’s search for the deceased Caornan provide Columba with the clarity of vision needed to choose stability over the distraction of power; “He says we’ll make a great room for the Abbot where he can work and pray with no one to interfere with him.”<sup>203</sup> Caornan, one of the older monks of Iona, appeared briefly in the first act. During one of Columba’s Ulster adventures, his death drew the abbot back to the reality of the monastic commitment, “I say to you: subject yourself to the wise discipline of the monastery and to it alone...Only the Rule—but the Rule to the letter.”<sup>204</sup> At this point in the power struggle, grief for his friend decides the matter. Columba’s decision not to respond to his family’s demand for war leads to their condemnation and permanent estrangement. In this moment of estrangement, he realises the cost of his divided life;

Get out of my monastery! Get out of my island! Get out of my life! Go back to those damned mountains and seductive hills that have robbed me of my Christ!... You stole my manhood, my best years! What more do you demand of me, damned Ireland?<sup>205</sup>

Interviewed by Peter Lennon in 1964, Friel described himself as a “practising Catholic” and “a Nationalist...[who felt] very emotionally about this country” and, as a result, “get myself involved in stupid controversies about the border.”<sup>206</sup> From this perspective, Columba’s struggle between the call to defend his family’s interests in Ulster and the search for integrity explores Friel’s engagement with the national question. Though exiled, the saint’s engagement with the travails of Ulster metaphorically represents the ongoing tensions between “the cousins that have fought against one another for generations.”<sup>207</sup>

### Conclusion

Twenty-one years after the first AIDF, the British and Irish Governments recognised the significance of the cross-border cultural solidarity undertaken by the amateur movement in 1974. That year, Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson lauded the commitment of the AIDF and the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals to cross-border amateur drama cooperation.<sup>208</sup> The acclamation by McCarthy and Cathcart that the amateur movement did not observe a cultural border

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<sup>203</sup> Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, 79.

<sup>204</sup> Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, 55.

<sup>205</sup> Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, 82.

<sup>206</sup> Lennon, ‘Playwright of the Western World’.

<sup>207</sup> Friel, ‘The Enemy Within’, 77.

<sup>208</sup> O’Brien, *All-Ireland Drama Festival, Athlone*, 62.

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acknowledged the possibilities such work offered.

The themes explored in these plays presented an alternative path of integrity for Irish society. In *Home is the Hero*, during the encounter with Willie and Paddo, Lily personifies integrity and courage in the face of violent weakness. She exercises this strength by making a life-changing decision for herself, freeing Willie from the socio-cultural expectations of his family life. In these encounters, she exercises responsibility and freedom, challenging the audience to realise that there is an alternative to the consequences of power exercised through social estrangement and violence. This is a different generation that wishes to go beyond the grievances of the past (civil war) towards a future (modern Ireland) that hopes it will be bright for them. In this aspiration and engagement, one sees a potential resolution and forgiveness of the hurt of the past.

Like Emily, clarity comes during the purgatorial realisation of authentic living in *Our Town*. Eventually, her yearning for life in death brings peace. For Friel’s Columba, clarity comes when faced with the challenge of reconciling divided families “under the banner of Christ,” he realises that continuous engagement with power through conflict brings death. This clarity brings stability and freedom. The social circumstances of *The Poker Session* explore the consequences of the lack of integrity within family and society. Faced with crisis, the family resorts to social estrangement and, in typical fashion, deepens the shame associated with Ruth’s death and Billy’s hospitalisation. The façade of middle-class family life is exposed, and as a result, the fragility of social relationships becomes apparent. The production of *The Enemy Within* at drama festivals both North and South by a protestant school demonstrated that the efforts of the cross-border cultural solidarity forged by the amateur drama movement since 1952 were beginning. Despite this, with the outbreak of the Troubles, the work of the amateur drama movement became much more challenging.

## Chapter Five: A Platform for Discontent

### Introduction

As part of his preparations for establishing the Arts Council in 1951, Little argued for “the encouragement of all the cultural activities that belong properly as attributes of a free civilized nation.”<sup>1</sup> Influenced by the principle of subsidiarity, Little’s vision sought to develop a voluntary approach to creating culture in urban and rural Ireland.<sup>2</sup> As previous chapters showed, festival audiences were regularly encouraged to “steer away from the sordid paganism of outside influences.”<sup>3</sup> Such influences included the increasing circulation of British newspapers, but radio, cinema and the emergence of television were also of concern.<sup>4</sup> As the first decade of the amateur movement gave way to the second, the adoption of economic reforms, the introduction of television and President John F. Kennedy’s visit in 1963 showed Ireland embracing a globalised world.<sup>5</sup> Earlier chapters argued that the amateur drama movement responded to this embrace of global influence by facilitating a questioning of social attitudes.

Opening the 1958 NCDF, Brendan O’Brien, secretary of the ADCI, remarked that the drama groups who enjoyed continual audience support strengthened the amateur movement.<sup>6</sup> While the experience which bound the festival participants together was multifaceted, the common thread was encounter. Using this term here refers to the complexity of interdependent relationships or networks that brings the play into dialogue with the life of the festival participants.<sup>7</sup> The interdependence found in the “story” of the amateur movement is an example of the CST principle of socialization found in the papal encyclical *Mater et Magistra*.<sup>8</sup> Applying this theme to analysing plays by Anouilh, Williams, Ionesco, and Beckett will critique controversies

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<sup>1</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Behr, *Social Justice and Subsidiarity*, 102.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Warning by Bishop on Sordid Plays’, *Irish Press*, 24 February 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive; ‘Growth in Amateur Dramatic Groups’; ‘Priest Calls for More Good Plays’.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Antidote to Low Grade Amusements’.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1965), 581–82.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was elected the 35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States in November 1960. Of Irish descent he was the first Roman Catholic to be elected to the American presidency (the current president, Joseph R. Biden Jnr is the second). Kennedy’s visit to Ireland in June 1963, during which he visited his ancestral home in County Wexford, showed the potential of Ireland’s soft power which it has wielded effectively on the world stage over the past sixty years. Five months after his visit to Ireland, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1963.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Growth in Amateur Dramatic Groups’.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Grainger, *Theatre and Encounter: The Psychology of the Dramatic Relationship* (Bloomington, Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2014), loc. 143, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Pope John XXIII, ‘Mater et Magistra’, 15 May 1961; Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion*, 231.

involving amateur and professional theatre throughout the 1960s. This chapter argues that these controversies showed the amateur movement's versatility, resilience, and diversity in a changing Irish society.

Given Beckett's antipathy towards Irish theatre in the late 1950s, three of his plays, *Krapp's Last Tape* (1962), *Waiting for Godot* (1968) and *Come and Go* (1968), appeared in Irish amateur drama festivals during the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> However, Pilkington, Lonergan, Graham Saunders, Trish McTighe and David Tucker studied Beckett's work, but they did not include his plays' appearances at Irish amateur drama festivals.<sup>10</sup> This chapter, which concentrates on Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*, addresses that gap.

### Encounter

The interdependence between the producer, drama group, and script invites actors to encounter and interpret the playwright's intention on the blank canvas of the stage. The means of delivery, props, set, lighting, music, and ambience lend themselves to this interpretation of the playwright's work. Though the dramatist intended a particular direction or meaning, the play's performance and its impact on the audience bring meaning and direction to the work. As the audience brings their daily experience to the performance, the play's meaning is engaged and re-interpreted.

The ongoing diversity of conversations which permeate Eugène Ionesco's play, *The Chairs*, illustrates this variety of interpretations.<sup>11</sup> This play was given its Irish premiere by the Journeyman Theatre, Limerick, at amateur drama festivals in Charleville and Athlone in 1965.<sup>12</sup> It portrays an ongoing dialogue between an elderly couple hosting a public meeting at home. Though appearing confused and demented, conversations with invisible visitors representing civil society interrupt them. The encounter with the invisible visitors portrays, re-interprets and represents their shared and individual stories in a new way.

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Roche, 'Beckett at the Abbey 1967-1990: Broadening the Canon', in *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*, ed. Trish McTighe and David Tucker (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016), loc. 497, Kindle.

<sup>10</sup> Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*; Graham Saunders, 'Reclaiming Sam for Ireland: The Beckett on Film Project', in *Irish Theatre in England*, ed. Richard Cave and Ben Levitas (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007), 79–96; Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*; McTighe and Tucker, *Staging Beckett in Ireland and Northern Ireland*.

<sup>11</sup> Eugène Ionesco, *Four Plays*, trans. Donald M. Allen. (New York: Grove Press, 1958), Scribd.

<sup>12</sup> R.O.D., 'Theatre Survey: Festival Time Comes to Cork', *Evening Echo*, 13 March 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

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In the same way, an audience's encounter with a play has myriad interpretations, which in the retelling brings a new dimension to the theatre experience. As found in Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, Amanda Winfield's youthful reminiscences symbolise the intergenerational transition of the essential cultural and personal identity aspects.<sup>13</sup> Just as a parent recalls the stories of formative years, Amanda's recollection presents her children, Tom and Laura, with a contextual framework for the identity issues with which they are coming to terms;

TOM:           What did you talk about?

AMANDA:      Things of importance going on in the world! Never anything coarse or common or vulgar. My callers were gentlemen—all! Among my callers were some of the most prominent young planters of the Mississippi Delta—planters and sons of planters!<sup>14</sup>

Tom and Laura's engagement with their mother shows two forms of power dynamics in their engagement with this cultural identity work. For Laura, trapped within the perceived limitations of her disability, the glass figures symbolise her choice to "[live] in a world of her own—a world of little glass ornaments."<sup>15</sup> Her choice to remain within the confines of what is familiar and safe (though it is not) symbolises the resistance to new forms of cultural expression that were emerging within society in an Irish context. Tom seeks refuge in a mixture of old and new forms of cultural expression, writing poems and "going to the movies."<sup>16</sup> His embrace of poetry and cinema shows the inter-generational production of a culture built on that which preceded it.<sup>17</sup>

Notwithstanding, the re-interpretation and re-telling of a play's story are not clear-cut and linear but messy and full of contradiction. Like the characters portrayed in Williams and Ionesco's plays, the story of the amateur drama movement was a series of messy encounters on and off the stage. Though uncomfortable, these contradictory and challenging encounters indicated the movement's consolidation and settlement. In this series of messy encounters, those engaged in cultural production became "part of the change," which shaped the understanding of civilised society.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, ed. Robert Bray (1945; repr., Penguin Modern Classics, 2009), Kindle.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 72.

### Role Reversal

As discussed in chapter two, in 1952, the Arts Council became concerned about the increasing number of international plays featured in professional and amateur theatre productions.<sup>19</sup> By 1954, producing “a larger proportion of plays by Irish dramatists” became a condition of funding for professionals and amateurs.<sup>20</sup> Supported by the Arts Council, the thriving amateur drama movement brought excitement to the theatre not experienced by professionals since the beginning of the century.<sup>21</sup> It also brought stability to the incomes of playwrights like Shiels, Murray and Macken, providing them with space to write while allowing new authors like Keane and Murphy to emerge.<sup>22</sup> Pushing the boundaries of theatrical experience, drama companies introduced a new type of Irish play that went beyond the naturalism of the Abbey experience.<sup>23</sup> As a result, these companies experienced constructive criticism from adjudicators and audiences.<sup>24</sup>

Shortly after he was appointed Director of the Arts Council, Ó Faoláin, at the opening of the 1957 CDF, criticised as “boring sameness” the choice of plays performed at the Abbey Theatre.<sup>25</sup> This criticism was consistent with his belief that the Abbey took a “Victorian” approach to playwriting and drama.<sup>26</sup> At the festival, he challenged the management of the national theatre to follow the policy of the amateur drama movement in performing plays from the “world theatre.”<sup>27</sup>

Ó Faoláin’s comments at the CDF contradicted the established policy of the Arts Council he directed. An established writer with the authority of his position as director of the Arts Council, his encouragement of international plays showed the dynamic nature of policy development. Policy changes respond to the evolution of the circumstances and the people who create them. For example, while attending the 1960 AIDF, Wall noticed a perceived snub at the absence of any reference to the Arts

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<sup>19</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minute: Irish Dramatists’.

<sup>20</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, ‘Minutes of An Chomhairle Ealaíon Concerning Irish Dramatists’ (Minutes, 6 April 1954), CE: 91, ARN: 32323/1952/1, Arts Council Archive.

<sup>21</sup> Valentin Iremonger, ‘Dramatic Criticism’, *The Bell* 18, no. 3 (June 1952): 184–88; Devitt, *Shifting Scenes*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Mary. Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre*, Cultural History of Literature 4 (Polity Press, 2008), 176–77, Kindle; O’Gorman, ‘A Quiet Cultural Revolution’, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre*, 176.

<sup>24</sup> Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre*, 176.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Clare Drama Festival: “Boring Sameness in Abbey Plays”’, *Irish Press*, 25 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>26</sup> Seán Ó Faoláin, ‘The New Criticism’, *The Bell* 18, no. 3 (1952): 133.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Abbey Theatre Plays Criticised’, *Cork Examiner*, 25 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

Council's "guarantee...of £450 against loss in the festival programme."<sup>28</sup> A crucial part of any sponsorship arrangement is the acknowledgement of funders in all matters of publicity, including programmes. In his reported remarks, he noted this omission and emphasized that the Arts Council "spent £7,287 in assisting amateur drama and of this, £3,154 went directly to the Amateur Drama Council."<sup>29</sup> Remarking on the stability of the movement, he suggested it find alternative means of support, warning that "it is unlikely that the Council will be able to continue giving the same financial assistance to amateur drama as they have done heretofore."<sup>30</sup> Within a few weeks, he drafted proposals recommending that the Arts Council cease assisting the amateur drama movement, among others, as it was "strong and sufficiently widespread to run itself."<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the Arts Council changed its funding practice and began supporting the provision of "courses for producers" of amateur drama groups.<sup>32</sup> The program omission proved to be an expensive oversight.

Ó Faoláin's remarks were consistent with ongoing concern about the poor standards present in professional theatre. Ever since Valentin Iremonger and McHugh's 1947 protest at the Abbey, critics voiced dissatisfaction with the philosophy and direction of the professional theatre.<sup>33</sup> Critics raised similar concerns about British and American drama during the previous two decades.<sup>34</sup> While professional theatre was "in the doldrums" for many years, Ó Faoláin's call indicated the amateur movement's influence.<sup>35</sup>

An examination of AIDF programmes demonstrates the international influence on the movement from its inception in 1953 (fig.14). What is especially noticeable is that of the international plays nominated to the AIDF between 1953 and 1969, almost 60% were by European, American, Asian, and Australian playwrights, with the remaining 40% of British origin (excluding Northern Ireland). These included staples of the stage by Anton Chekov, Henri Gheon, Henrik Ibsen, Christie, and Shakespeare. In addition, plays by Harold Pinter, Eugene O'Neill, Miller, Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt

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<sup>28</sup> 'Limerick Group Win at Athlone', *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>29</sup> 'Limerick Group Win at Athlone'.

<sup>30</sup> 'Limerick Group Win at Athlone'.

<sup>31</sup> Wall, 'Handwritten Note Concerning Arts Council Policy'.

<sup>32</sup> An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 'Eighth Annual Report', 16.

<sup>33</sup> 'Dublin Letter: Abbey Protest', *Cork Examiner*, 10 November 1947, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>34</sup> JKA, 'Drama Festival Commentary'; Donald Margulies, 'Foreward', in *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, by Thornton Wilder, Modern Classics (New York and London: Harper Perennial, 2020), 11, Scribd.

<sup>35</sup> 'Growth in Amateur Dramatic Groups'.

Brecht and Christa Winslow showed a vibrant, flexible, and diverse amateur drama movement.<sup>36</sup>

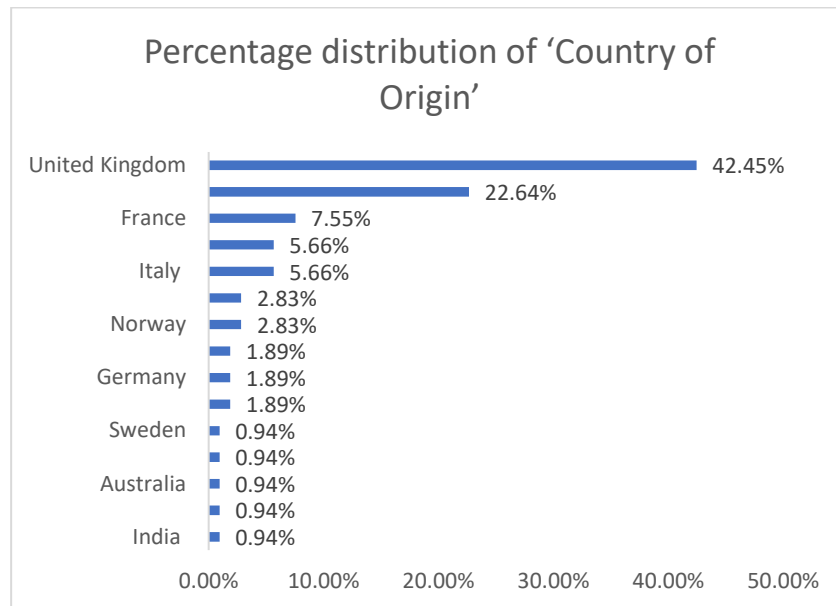


Figure 14: Percentage distribution of plays by country of origin

As discussed in chapter two, in 1951, the ITC lamented that “many areas [of rural Ireland] have been denied the privilege of seeing properly presented artistic drama.”<sup>37</sup> By 1960, over seven hundred amateur drama groups and festivals redressed the nationwide balance between rural and urban theatrical experiences.<sup>38</sup> No longer was Dublin the only place where “legitimate theatre” could exist.<sup>39</sup> The success of plays by Keane, Miller, and Williams on the amateur drama stage showed a movement moving beyond the staid interpretation of Ireland presented by the Abbey Theatre.<sup>40</sup> Though regularly criticised, the instruction, by the director of the Arts Council no less, to follow the example of the amateur was a reversal of roles for the Abbey Theatre, which carried the dominant theatrical culture since the beginning of the century.<sup>41</sup> No longer was the professional the guide to its residual offshoot, the amateur.<sup>42</sup> Instead, as in the United Kingdom, the amateur drama movement emerged as a respected and recognised partner within the Irish theatre world.<sup>43</sup> This reversal of roles led to further

<sup>36</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 109.

<sup>37</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Wall, ‘Handwritten Note Concerning Arts Council Policy’.

<sup>39</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre*, 189.

<sup>41</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> Nowlan, ‘Verdict on the Athlone Festival’; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 124; Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre*, 110.

tensions in the decade ahead.

As exemplified in Yeats's work, among others, international trends in British, European, American, Asian and Eastern drama influenced Irish theatre.<sup>44</sup> In 1960, the adjudicator at the Dungannon Annual Gaelic Drama Festival, Pádraig Ó Siochrú of An Taibhearc, Galway, emphasised the importance of this international influence by encouraging drama groups to “translate plays from European languages.”<sup>45</sup> In 1957, the adjudicator of the WDF, Godfrey Quigley, noted that he sought plays that were “out of the ordinary” and challenged those present at festivals to seek new Irish plays that “[broke] away from the traditional theatre.”<sup>46</sup> For Palestinian-born Quigley, whose father came from Sligo, several plays at the 1957 WDF met this criterion.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, he challenged those present to produce Irish plays that brought a freshness to the stage and warned that “if we once become involved in another country's theatre, it is as bad as losing our independence.”<sup>48</sup> Trained at the Abbey acting school, Quigley established his professional credentials with Anew McMaster and the Abbey, Gate and Longford theatre companies.<sup>49</sup> Then, in the middle of the 1950s, he founded the Globe Theatre, which like the Gate and Pike theatres, staged plays by international and emerging Irish playwrights.<sup>50</sup>

Given his professional background and determination to develop an original, non-traditional Irish theatre, his reported remarks at the 1957 WDF appeared contradictory.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, his view was out of kilter with others, including the chair of Féile Luimní, Mrs K. O'Callaghan. Like Ó Faoláin, she viewed including “the best dramas of other countries” as a benefit to those participating in and attending the festival.<sup>52</sup> International plays, like Anouilh's *Antigone*, did not detract from the cultivation of Irish culture. Instead, it enhanced the development of a drama that “could compare favourably with the outstanding plays of other countries.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>44</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 109.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Value of Local Groups Stressed’, *Irish Independent*, 7 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Awards’, *Sligo Champion*, 23 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Premier Award Goes to Tullamore’, *Western People*, 23 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive; Lawrence William White, ‘Quigley, Godfrey’, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2022, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/quigley-godfrey-a7541#main-content>.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Resounding Success’.

<sup>49</sup> White, ‘Godfrey Quigley’.

<sup>50</sup> White, ‘Godfrey Quigley’.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival’, *Ballina Herald*, 16 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Awards At Close of Féile Luimní Drama Festival’, *Limerick Leader*, 1 April 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Awards at Close of Féile Luimní’.

performing Beckett's plays at amateur festivals throughout the 1960s illustrated the benefit of such an approach to Irish drama.<sup>54</sup>

When the amateur drama movement began in 1953, Beckett emerged as a playwright of note on the international stage. A native of Dublin and an associate of the novelist James Joyce, he emigrated as a young man to Paris.<sup>55</sup> He deliberately wrote in French, which gave him creative freedom.<sup>56</sup> By the end of the decade, his work contributed with Ionesco, Pinter, Genet and Adamov to creating a new direction known as the "Theatre of the Absurd."<sup>57</sup> Based in Paris and writing in French, the designation of Beckett's work as Irish was somewhat controversial.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the impact of Beckett's work in creating a new direction for the theatre showed a transition between national and international perspectives.<sup>59</sup> Something that both O'Callaghan and Ó Faoláin believed could be possible for Irish drama.

The American playwright Miller claimed that the presentation of a play reflected the politics of the society in which it is produced.<sup>60</sup> Faced with the prospect of national economic and global nuclear devastation, the choice of plays at festivals introduced questions explored in previous chapters about the shape and direction of Irish society.<sup>61</sup> While the amateur drama festivals were local events, the widespread engagement of drama groups from across the country made them a national space for theatrical groups to explore issues relevant to Irish society. By staging international plays at amateur festivals, producers shaped their presentations for a local audience and made them a part of the Irish national theatrical experience.<sup>62</sup>

Through its pursuit of local, national and global space, the amateur drama movement empowered the thousands who attended festivals to explore issues and ideas that shaped Irish society.<sup>63</sup> For Ó Faoláin, audience participation was essential

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Seaver, 'Richard Seaver on Translating Beckett', in *Beckett Remembering Remembering Beckett*, ed. James and Elizabeth Knowlson (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 106–7.

<sup>55</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), loc. 7821, Kindle.

<sup>56</sup> Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, loc. 7821.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962), 22–64.

<sup>58</sup> Saunders, 'Reclaiming Sam for Ireland', 93.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, 'Becoming a Republic', 94.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, *Timebends: A Life*, loc. 6430.

<sup>61</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Lonergan, *Irish Drama and Theatre Since 1950*, 109; Morash, 'Making Space', 6–20.

<sup>63</sup> Morash, 'Making Space', 6–20; Cooke, *Politics and Polemics*, 265. Pat Cooke estimates the numbers who attended amateur drama festivals in the 1950s at 250,000. In the mid-1950s newspaper reports for the NCDF, WDF, AIDF and CDF estimated that between 4,000 and 6,000 patrons attended the festivals. If these figures were maintained at the lower end of the scale between

to good theatre as a play failed unless it provoked a response.<sup>64</sup> The variety of plays performed at amateur drama festivals, coupled with the encouragement by the adjudicator of audience criticism and discussion, in his opinion, produced an audience that was “more responsive than an audience in the city.”<sup>65</sup> This critique sparked debate among the audience, who discussed “the plays after they went home.”<sup>66</sup> As mentioned earlier, this was a far cry from the criticisms of the ITC in their 1951 memo to the Arts Council.<sup>67</sup>

Like Ó Faoláin, Quigley was impressed by the engagement of audiences he encountered at the WDF.<sup>68</sup> Encountering local group performances gave him hope for the future of a “living theatre” whose roots lay in groups from “small country districts.”<sup>69</sup> Such drama groups included Ashton Productions from Cork, who, weeks after their founding, first appeared at Féile Luimní with Anouilh’s *Antigone* in 1957.<sup>70</sup> Based on Sophocles’ play, it appeared at the AIDF in 1953, 1957 and 1964 and at the WDF in 1964.<sup>71</sup> Rachel Burrows’ production of the play at Féile Luimní won the *Irish Independent* Cup and nomination to the AIDF, a significant achievement by the newly formed fledgling group.<sup>72</sup> The adjudicator gave Burrows a “special place of honour” for production and acting in the festival awards.<sup>73</sup> Ashton’s success continued throughout the festival season, culminating in a double bill nomination to the AIDF, where it won awards for *Antigone* and Yeats’s *The Dreaming of the Bones*, the first drama group to achieve such a distinction.<sup>74</sup>

Not unlike Macken’s *Home is the Hero* in 1956, critics considered *Antigone* a challenging play for an amateur group, especially one formed a few weeks earlier.<sup>75</sup> In Ashton’s production, David Tierney’s chorus ticked all the *Westmeath Independent*

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1953 and 1968 this would place audience attendances at approximately 240,000 for these four festivals.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Abbey Theatre Plays Criticised’.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Abbey Theatre Plays Criticised’.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Drama Festivals: Praise for Standard at Scariff’, *Irish Independent*, 25 March 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>67</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Awards’.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival Awards’.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Awards at Close of Féile Luimní’.

<sup>71</sup> Sophocles, *The Theban Plays: Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus and Antigone.*, trans. Sir George Young, Dover Thrift Edition (1906; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 2006), 115–68, Kindle.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Awards at Close of Féile Luimní’; ‘Cork Drama Group Won Chief Limerick Award’, *Irish Independent*, 1 April 1957.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Remarkably High Quality of Plays’, *Cork Examiner*, 27 February 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Ashton Productions’ Successes’, *Evening Echo*, 20 May 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>75</sup> JKA, ‘Drama Festival Commentary’; ‘Remarkably High Quality of Plays’.

critic's boxes, especially in how he "took possession of the stage."<sup>76</sup> Though diverging from the traditional use of this technique, Anouilh's chorus is like Wilder's and Williams's narrator, though infrequently appearing, to direct the audience's direction and interpretation of what is happening on stage.<sup>77</sup> According to the critic, the portrayal of King Creon "allowed the character to develop almost it seemed of itself."<sup>78</sup> However, while hoping to see more roles from Ashton's Joan Sheehan, the critic was unhappy with her portrayal of Antigone. The issues with this portrayal included costuming and her appealing nature, which contributed to her lack of "tragic stature."<sup>79</sup> In criticising Ismene, the critic noted her vocal projection and costume length (the dress was too short for their liking), while Albert Cole's Haemon needed a better uniform.<sup>80</sup> Despite these shortcomings, the Ashton Players' performance was "breathtaking in its intensity."<sup>81</sup> For the *Westmeath Independent*, their production of *Antigone* "[showed] us tragedy through the actions of characters...trapped within the limits of their individuality."<sup>82</sup>

Similar to Wilder's *Our Town* and Miller's *The Crucible*, Anouilh's *Antigone* addresses life, death, and the use of power within society. The French playwright Anouilh wrote this play in response to the Nazi occupation of France in 1944.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, the positive reception of the play by the Nazi occupiers led to a controversial debate about the playwright's motivation.<sup>84</sup> Two years after the first production at the Théâtre de l'Atelier, Paris, Rosamund E. Deutsch contended that Anouilh's Creon possessed a legitimate claim to authority, unlike the Nazi occupiers of wartime France.<sup>85</sup>

While acknowledging the parallel between the compromised character of Ismene and the Nazi collaborators, Deutsch failed to explore the moral waste of a rule reinforced through terror.<sup>86</sup> David J. DeLaura claimed that Lewis Galentiere's

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<sup>76</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: Antigone', *Westmeath Independent*, 18 May 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Spingler, 'Anouilh's Little Antigone: Tragedy, Theatricalism, and the Romantic Self', *Comparative Drama* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1974): 229.

<sup>78</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: Antigone'.

<sup>79</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: Antigone'.

<sup>80</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: Antigone'.

<sup>81</sup> 'Remarkably High Quality of Plays'.

<sup>82</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: Antigone'.

<sup>83</sup> Jean Anouilh, *Antigone*, ed. Ted Freeman, trans. Barbara Bray (1946; repr., London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2009), xlvi.

<sup>84</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, xlvi–xlix.

<sup>85</sup> Rosamund E. Deutsch, 'Anouilh's Antigone', *The Classical Journal* 42, no. 1 (1946): 14.

<sup>86</sup> Deutsch, 'Anouilh's Antigone', 14.

translation of the play, which opened in London in 1949, gave the play a “patriotic and moral context” not present in the original.<sup>87</sup> Finally, Michael Spingler claimed that the doubt sown in the encounter between Antigone and Creon is where the play’s tragedy lies.<sup>88</sup> Like the clarity produced by Emily’s purgatorial experience in Wilder’s *Our Town*, the critical thinking of Anouilh’s young Antigone indicates the power plays present within various facets of society.

Within the amateur movement, consistent criticism of the professional theatre at the end of the 1950s gave rise to a spat between Fallon, Anew McMaster, Noel McMahon, and Mac Anna that illustrated the type of power-play outlined in *Antigone*. Shortly after being appointed director of the Abbey Theatre, the drama critic, Fallon, became embroiled with producer and actor McMaster over criticisms made at the Roscommon Drama Festival. Adjudicating that festival, McMaster criticised the standards of acting and the Abbey Theatre’s use of the government grant it received since 1925.<sup>89</sup> For McMaster, this grant reduced the ability of the Abbey to foster diversity and enthusiasm in the sector. He called on the government to reduce the grant and reinvest the money into the Arts Council to develop “amateur and professional” theatre.<sup>90</sup>

Stung by the criticism, Fallon wrote to the *Irish Independent*. Refuting McMaster’s concerns, he threatened to resign as “patron” of the amateur movement if such criticisms continued at festivals.<sup>91</sup> As the patron, Fallon served a symbolic role, giving authenticity to the movement. For Noel McMahon, adjudicating the Ballinrobe festival, this threat of resignation was an attempt to censor adjudicators and the amateur drama movement.<sup>92</sup> Acknowledging that “the Abbey Theatre...has given us realism for half-a-century,” he maintained that the amateur movement led to “a new resurgence in the Irish theatre, which is springing, as the Abbey did itself, from the

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<sup>87</sup> ‘New Theatre: Antigone by Jean Anouilh’, *The Times*, 11 February 1949, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; David J DeLaura, ‘Anouilh’s Other “Antigone”’, *The French Review* 35, no. 1 (October 1961): 36–37.

<sup>88</sup> Spingler, ‘Anouilh’s Little Antigone’, 231; Anouilh, *Antigone*, 30–48. As discussed in chapter three, it was Patrick Hamilton’s play *Gaslight* which gave its name to the common term for this form of power dynamic.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Abbey Standards Criticised by Adjudicator’, *Irish Independent*, 29 February 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive; Pilkington, *Theatre and the State*, 89.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Abbey Standards Criticised’.

<sup>91</sup> Gabriel Fallon, ‘Letters to the Editor: Anew McMaster and The Abbey’, *Irish Independent*, 1 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Adjudicator Refers to Abbey Controversy’, *Irish Independent*, 18 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

ranks of the amateurs.”<sup>93</sup> Moreover, he maintained the “national importance” of the amateur movement derived from its emergence into “an experimental laboratory for new forms of theatre.”<sup>94</sup>

Despite the work of the Pike and Gate theatres in 1955, Fallon asserted that “the Irish theatre is the Abbey.”<sup>95</sup> His threat to resign as the patron “unless the amateur movement was run on the right lines” was consistent with this view.<sup>96</sup> However, like Anouilh’s *King Creon*, his threat betrayed an underlying need to control and censor the movement’s evolution.<sup>97</sup> The argument continued in an exchange of letters to the newspapers. McMaster emphasized that the grant gave the Abbey Theatre security, which meant that “they are now in a better position than ever to...do plays of ambition.”<sup>98</sup> He emphasized that “although ‘peasant quality’ plays are excellent of their kind, one would not in Paris expect to see the Théâtre-Français concentrating on nothing but plays about Normandy country folk or slum dwellers on the Seine.”<sup>99</sup> Though addressing issues surrounding funding and acting diversity, the public nature of this exchange and the undertones of superiority in Fallon’s letters give the impression that McMaster’s criticism hit the mark.

Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* evokes some attitudes present in this dispute. For example, when Pozzo encounters Vladimir and Estragon, he demands deference, “I am Pozzo! (*Silence*). Pozzo (*Silence*). Does that name mean nothing to you? (*Silence*). I say does that name mean nothing to you?”<sup>100</sup> This expectation of deference is like Fallon’s disdain for McMaster, who criticised an “institution...that...paid him the tribute of asking him to deputise for one of its greatest actors.”<sup>101</sup> Mac Anna’s additional attack compounded the tensions between the Abbey and the amateur movement, which remained constant for the rest of the decade.

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Adjudicator Refers to Abbey Controversy’.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Adjudicator Refers to Abbey Controversy’; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123–24.

<sup>95</sup> Gabriel Fallon, ‘The Future of the Irish Theatre’, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 44, no. 173 (Spring 1955): 92–100.

<sup>96</sup> ‘All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival Brilliant Opening Night Scene in Athlone’, *Westmeath Independent*, 7 May 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Senator Condemns Anti-Irish Plays’, *Tuam Herald*, 26 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>98</sup> Anew McMaster, ‘Letters to the Editor: The Abbey Theatre’, *Irish Independent*, 10 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>99</sup> McMaster, ‘The Abbey Theatre’.

<sup>100</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 15, Scribd.

<sup>101</sup> Gabriel Fallon, ‘Letters to the Editor: The Abbey Theatre’, *Irish Independent*, 7 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

At the Ashbourne Rural Drama Festival, Mac Anna hit out at what he called “amateur adjudicators.”<sup>102</sup> Describing the criticism of the Abbey as “silly and misinformed,” he informed those present that “surely we can be spared fatuous and ridiculous comments on what, after all, is really beyond their comprehension.”<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, Mac Anna and Fallon’s reaction to McMaster’s comments demonstrated that the allegations about Abbey standards held some truth. If there were not, why, weeks later, did this Abbey stalwart describe an established actor and critic as “amateur” and out of his depth?<sup>104</sup>

Some weeks later, at the opening of the AIDF, Fallon commented that “if by any chance the Abbey Theatre should go out of existence, it would be only a matter of a few years until the amateur movement would fade away, so close were the links between it and the Abbey.”<sup>105</sup> Fallon’s claim that the movement’s interdependence on the professional implied it would die if the Abbey failed was not unlike Antigone’s Gethsemane encounter with Jonas, her guard.<sup>106</sup> Detained following her trial before Creon, the King of Thebes, she realises that her execution will be a slow, painful death;

ANTIGONE: How will they do it?

JONAS: I believe they were going to wall you up so as not to stain the city with your blood.

ANTIGONE: Wall me up? Alive? <sup>107</sup> Death comes not from an executioner’s sword but from behind a wall in a cave, “all on my own!”<sup>108</sup>

Social exclusion, the scapegoating punishment of the ancient world, was especially heinous. In this act, society saved itself by placing the community’s sins on the shoulders of the excluded.<sup>109</sup> In facing the punishment of exclusion, Antigone realises she will be rendered socially invisible, a fate which, as her suicide demonstrates, is worse than death.<sup>110</sup> This social invisibility was something Ó Faoláin (and others) were determined to resist.

Social exclusion is a theme which permeates Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*,

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Amateur Drama Festivals: Abbey Designer Answers Attack by Adjudicator’, *Irish Independent*, 28 March 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Abbey Designer Answers Attack’.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Abbey Designer Answers Attack’.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Brilliant Opening Night’.

<sup>106</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 53–57.

<sup>107</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 55.

<sup>109</sup> Charles K. Bellinger, *Othring: The Original Sin of Humanity* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020), loc. 142, Kindle.

<sup>110</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 58.

which premiered at the Pike Theatre in 1955.<sup>111</sup> Like Hamilton's *Gaslight*, the play gave its name to a commonly used refrain for patient frustration within a decade after its premiere.<sup>112</sup> Pozzo and Lucky's relationship explore the effects of the threat of social exclusion. Like Anouilh's *Ismene*, Lucky appears to compromise his humanity to receive favour. However, unlike *Ismene*, who appears to live a life of imprisoned privilege, Lucky becomes a servant for Pozzo, who mistreats him. Vladimir realises the injustice of Lucky's treatment and protests. Pozzo logically explains that Lucky has emptied himself of all humanity: "he wants to impress me so that I'll keep him."<sup>113</sup> The alternative, as with *Antigone*, is social exclusion.

This theme of social exclusion continues in the second act, where Pozzo, now blind, depends on Lucky for guidance. In the first act, Vladimir and Estragon continually seek Pozzo's approval. Now that he is infirm, they barely acknowledge his cries for help. In both acts, it is Vladimir's instruction to the boy that captures the importance of the vigil;

Tell him... (*he hesitates*) ...tell him you saw me and that ... (*he hesitates*) ... that you saw me. (*Pause. Vladimir advances, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.*) You're sure you saw me; you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!<sup>114</sup>

The conversation with the boy conveys the fear of social exclusion. Vladimir and Estragon must wait until Godot, the authority, recognises them. Fallon's threat to resign attempted to put the amateur movement back in its box by stifling criticism of the professional theatre by McMaster and others who disagreed with Abbey Theatre policy. In this encounter between professionals of the stage, Fallon's implied threat was an unobvious effort to restore the reversal of roles with the amateur movement Ó Faoláin indicated in 1957.

Nevertheless, it also illustrated the importance of agency and freedom in the amateur and professional theatre's ability to choose its direction. Comparable to Wilders' *Our Town* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Anouilh's *Antigone* considers issues of agency and choice. Like the character *Antigone*, McMaster and McMahon's

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<sup>111</sup> 'Dublin Premiere of "Waiting for Godot"', *Irish Independent*, 29 October 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>112</sup> Aknefton, 'Idle Youth Waiting for Godot?', *Irish Times*, 19 November 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; 'Editorial: Waiting for Godot', *Irish Times*, 11 February 1965, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Lionel Fleming, 'Conference Impasse Over Rhodesia', *Irish Times*, 14 September 1966, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>113</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 37.

<sup>114</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 113.

questioning of standards at the Abbey Theatre highlighted that an alternative critical voice existed in the amateur movement. As Coughlan emphasized, the amateur movement made it possible to stage plays that “no commercial theatre could afford to stage.”<sup>115</sup> Another was the opportunity the amateur dramatic groups provided to perform new plays rejected by the professional theatre that would never otherwise see the stage.<sup>116</sup> As Canon McCarthy, the parish priest of Athlone, claimed in 1965, the amateur movement “served communities which could never be reached by the professional theatre.”<sup>117</sup>

Pozzo’s conversation with Vladimir and Estragon serves to explore questions of identity. His query, “Here on my land?” asserts his authority over the space.<sup>118</sup> His recognition of Vladimir and Estragon’s humanity acknowledges a bond of commonality within the encounter; “You are human beings nonetheless... Of the same species as myself.”<sup>119</sup> Though reminding them of their inequality (professional vs amateur), Pozzo recognises their interdependence when preferring their companionship to the solitariness of completing the journey alone, “Yes, gentlemen, I cannot go for long without the society of my likes (*he puts on his glasses and looks at the two likes*) even when the likeness is an imperfect one.”<sup>120</sup> Pozzo’s choice to continue the journey with Vladimir and Estragon demonstrates the interdependent nature of individual, organisational and state relationships explored in CST.<sup>121</sup> The involvement of Abbey actors forming the movement and adjudicating festivals was an example of the interdependency to which Fallon’s threat alluded and the incorporation of the movement into the professional theatre practice.<sup>122</sup>

The war of words involving Fallon, the Abbey Players and adjudicators at amateur drama festivals made public some underlying tensions between the amateur movement and professional theatre. In 1962, the *Irish Independent* columnist Tatler

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<sup>115</sup> Aileen N. Coughlan, ‘Excitement of New Plays Missing at Festival’, *Irish Times*, 17 May 1961, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Athlone Festival: Main Award Goes to Newry Group’.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Official Opening of Drama Festival’, *Westmeath Independent*, 8 May 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>118</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 15.

<sup>120</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Pope John XXIII, ‘Mater et Magistra’, 15 May 1961; Pope John XXIII, ‘Pacem in Terris’, 11 April 1963.

<sup>122</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123.

alluded to the ongoing tensions behind the scenes.<sup>123</sup> The columnist noted that the AIDF adjudicator Ray McAnally spent his time split between the golf course and “defending with passion and polish the Abbey he loves” while the AIDF secretary “Brendan O’Brien quietly and diplomatically [smoothed] out all difficulties.”<sup>124</sup> A year later, these tensions culminated in Fallon’s resignation as patron of the ADCI over the role of clergy in the movement.<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, not unlike Anouilh’s Ismene, who urges Antigone to silence, Fallon’s letters, coupled with Mac Anna’s ill-tempered remarks, were a series of negative choices that attempted to stem criticism by discrediting McMaster.<sup>126</sup>

### A Platform for Discontent

Fallon’s response to criticism echoed an earlier debate about the relationship between established and new writers.<sup>127</sup> As part of that debate, Iremonger claimed that there was a nostalgic effort by the established writers to shape and control a new writing movement.<sup>128</sup> In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir’s remark, “we were respectable in those days. Now it’s too late,” is like Amanda’s “gentlemen” callers in *The Glass Menagerie*, a yearning for a bygone age.<sup>129</sup> These recollections engage memory and illustrate Iremonger’s critique of established writers. Such writers, he maintained, rather than encourage the development of new approaches to writing, were concerned with recapturing the glory days of the national theatre.<sup>130</sup> Responding to Iremonger, Ó Faoláin suggested that new writing emerged not from “genius” but from the experience of “life and living.”<sup>131</sup> As Iremonger emphasized, new writing could bring freshness to the genre if managed correctly.<sup>132</sup>

Opening the AIDF in 1965, F.H. Boland, former president of the United Nations Organisation (UNO), remarked that amateur drama played “a role of special importance...in the cultural life of the nation.”<sup>133</sup> As mentioned before, in 1951, the

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<sup>123</sup> ‘Tatler’s Parade: Home Audience Unlikely to See Play’, *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1962, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Home Audience’.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Patron of Drama Group Resigns’.

<sup>126</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 11–14.

<sup>127</sup> Anthony Cronin, ‘The Young Writer’, *The Bell* 17, no. 6 (September 1951): 7–12.

<sup>128</sup> John Montague et al., ‘The Young Writer’, *The Bell* 17, no. 7 (October 1951): 15; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122.

<sup>129</sup> Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 8; Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 26–28.

<sup>130</sup> Montague et al., ‘The Young Writer’, 15.

<sup>131</sup> Ó Faoláin, ‘The New Criticism’, 142.

<sup>132</sup> Montague et al., ‘The Young Writer’, 15.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Official Opening of Drama Festival’.

ITC, somewhat self-defeating, observed that Dublin was the only place where the “legitimate theatre” could exist.<sup>134</sup> For Boland, a centralised approach to the theatre “was not a healthy state of affairs for any country,” as the staid condition of professional theatre during the 1950s indicated.<sup>135</sup> Like Little, he argued that the encouragement of local cultural organisations provided a solution to this staidness, potentially bringing vibrancy and life to the theatre experience.<sup>136</sup> However, Boland, whose sister-in-law Coughlan was the theatre critic and Athlone playwright, warned that only through the encouragement of “public interest and...creative energies” would new writing emerge.<sup>137</sup> As Coughlan, McAnally, McCarthy and Boland recognised, the amateur movement, which complimented the professional theatre in various ways, was not on the periphery of theatrical experience in rural Ireland. Despite this, three years later, the quality of such writing led to another controversy involving Mac Anna and the amateur movement.

Recognising the value of local festivals, the adjudicator of the 1964 WDF, Mooney, who proposed the establishment of the ADCI as discussed in chapter two, encouraged the “National Theatre of Ireland” to engage audiences in rural Ireland.<sup>138</sup> The Abbey tour of the provinces, their first national tour in almost a quarter of a century, occurred three years later in 1967.<sup>139</sup> As noted earlier, the ITC painted a bleak picture of the lack of opportunities for the development of rural theatre in 1951.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, in the intervening years, the spread of the amateur drama movement incorporating numerous festivals and almost seven hundred drama groups redressed the balance between the rural and urban theatrical experiences.<sup>141</sup> As already noted, during their visit to the home of the Mid-Ulster Drama Festival in Carrickmore, Co. Tyrone, the Abbey Players were surprised at the level of engagement with drama in rural Ireland.<sup>142</sup> Contrary to expectations, the professional rather than the amateur was at the periphery of theatrical experience in rural Ireland. In his remarks on that occasion, the Managing Director of the Abbey, Ernest Blythe, “hoped [that] they

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<sup>134</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’, 2.

<sup>135</sup> ‘Official Opening of Drama Festival’.

<sup>136</sup> Little, ‘Suggested Cultural Institute’, 4.

<sup>137</sup> ‘Official Opening of Drama Festival’.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Drama Festival Vice-Chairman Refers to “Hour of Need”’, *Sligo Champion*, 29 February 1964, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>139</sup> ‘Great Honour for Carrickmore’.

<sup>140</sup> Irish Theatre Council, ‘Memorandum: The Irish Legitimate Theatre’, 1.

<sup>141</sup> Wall, ‘Handwritten Note Concerning Arts Council Policy’.

<sup>142</sup> ‘Great Honour for Carrickmore’.

would be able to inspire additional interest in drama, and that they would be able to give a service to the whole country.”<sup>143</sup>

Despite Blythe’s aspiration to provide a national service a year later, Mac Anna made controversial remarks about the standards of amateur playwriting during an Abbey Theatre workshop.<sup>144</sup> Thirteen years before, in 1955, Fallon claimed that audience reaction determined the quality of professional theatre production.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, the audience, he implied, bore responsibility for the poor state of the Irish theatre. Just as Fallon blamed audiences in 1955, Mac Anna asserted that the amateur movement’s provision of a space for the “local playwright...set back the theatre in this country by 30, 40 or 50 years.”<sup>146</sup> Fallon, who supported Mac Anna’s view, estimated that 90% of these plays “were from people who had no vocation to be playwrights.”<sup>147</sup> In turn, Leonard, whose plays appeared at amateur festivals, the West End and Broadway, remarked that the parochial nature of Irish playwriting was detrimental to its international standing.<sup>148</sup> Though he saw Mac Anna’s remarks as a return to “the old fight between the amateur and the professional”, playwright Eugene McCabe agreed it was essential to maintain high professional standards.<sup>149</sup>

Whatever his motivation, Mac Anna’s remarks caused the “discontent” that, he claimed, was part of the theatre’s role.<sup>150</sup> Despite the protests of its members, the Amateur Drama League decided not to authenticate the remarks with a reply, while others took up the cause.<sup>151</sup> The *Irish Press* expressed astonishment at the “massive charges” Mac Anna placed at the door of the amateur drama movement.<sup>152</sup> Echoing Coughlan, it outlined how the work of the amateur movement brought plays of national and international standing to the provinces when the “Dublin professional theatre subsidised or unsubsidised” refused to do so.<sup>153</sup> While acknowledging that standards were not always high in these productions, the editorial emphasized that

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<sup>143</sup> ‘Great Honour for Carrickmore’.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Abbey Playwrights Workshop’, *Connacht Tribune*, 16 August 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>145</sup> Fallon, ‘The Future of the Irish Theatre’, 99.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Spotlighting the Playwrights Job’, *Irish Times*, 27 August 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Workshop Told of Abbey Rejects’, *Irish Times*, 31 August 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Spotlighting the Playwrights Job’.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Storm Over Attack on Amateurs’, *Irish Press*, 28 August 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Spotlighting the Playwrights Job’.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Criticism of Comments on Amateur Drama’, *Evening Herald*, 13 September 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>152</sup> ‘Editorial: Amateurs?’, *Irish Press*, 28 August 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Editorial: Amateurs?’

“neither have they been so impressive among the professionals.”<sup>154</sup>

Other playwrights, including Tomelty, Patrick Mulloy, and John McCann, disputed Mac Anna’s remarks, citing the amateur movement’s importance in making theatre accessible to rural audiences.<sup>155</sup> However, they also emphasised the value of amateur theatre, through which so many became professional actors and playwrights.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, Mac Anna made this progression himself.<sup>157</sup> Commenting on the controversy, Mac Anna’s nemesis, Keane, welcomed his willingness to “concede defeat to the amateurs.”<sup>158</sup> Keane, who publicly disputed *Sive*’s success with Mac Anna in 1963, asserted that the “low standard in the Abbey” reflected well on the amateur movement.<sup>159</sup>

In letters to the *Irish Press* and *Irish Times*, playgoers Kate O’Callaghan and Dermot McNamara stressed that the value of the amateur movement lay in providing opportunities for rural audiences to encounter plays they would not ordinarily get to see.<sup>160</sup> As previously mentioned, during their tour of the provinces, the Abbey Players discovered a depth of theatrical engagement in rural audiences that surprised them. O’Callaghan remarked that some actors progressed to professional status because of their experience in the amateur movement. She also emphasized that the amateur movement presented a range of plays that was “a long way advanced” from that produced by the Abbey and encouraged Mac Anna to “transcend” his grievance with the success of Keane’s *Sive*.<sup>161</sup> Surveying the previous two decades of theatrical work, McNamara maintained that the Abbey “consistently played safe and rejected anything of an experimental or controversial nature.”<sup>162</sup> Listing a range of plays by playwrights, including Lorca, Beckett and Friel, that appeared at amateur festivals that year, he argued that the Abbey, rather than the amateur failed to encourage “new Irish playwrights.”<sup>163</sup> In making such arguments, the playwrights, media and letter writers affirmed the peripheral status of professional theatre in rural Ireland.

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<sup>154</sup> ‘Editorial: Amateurs?’

<sup>155</sup> ‘Storm Over Attack on Amateurs’.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Storm Over Attack on Amateurs’.

<sup>157</sup> Onlooker, ‘Week In-Week Out’, *The Nationalist*, 3 February 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>158</sup> ‘Storm Over Attack on Amateurs’.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Storm Over Attack on Amateurs’.

<sup>160</sup> Kate O’Callaghan, ‘Letters to the Editor: Mac Anna and the Amateurs’, *Irish Press*, 30 August 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive; Dermot McNamara, ‘Letters to the Editor: Amateur Theatre’, *Irish Times*, 31 August 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>161</sup> Onlooker, ‘Week In-Week Out’.

<sup>162</sup> McNamara, ‘Amateur Theatre’.

<sup>163</sup> McNamara, ‘Amateur Theatre’.

## Chapter Five: A Platform for Discontent

As discussed above, a cycle of engagement involving the playwright, producer, drama group, theatre and the audience determines the interpretation of the meaning of a play. While the audience's reception and appreciation of plays make them culturally significant, this does not excuse those who engage in theatre production from responsibility for the quality of their work.<sup>164</sup> Culture has autonomy when understood as significant, not only for those who directly value it but also for society.<sup>165</sup> Mac Anna's remarks echoed the conflicts, explored by John Kelly at the YISS the previous week, that engulfed the Abbey Theatre in the early part of the century.<sup>166</sup> While decades later, the faces changed, the issues about the direction of Irish theatre and the nation remained.

### A New Era

In the early 1950s, the openness of some in government, for example, the Minister for Education Seán Moylan, to new media was tepid.<sup>167</sup> This coolness was consistent with a general resistance, which, as mentioned earlier, was a regular feature at drama festivals throughout the decade. Nevertheless, successive changes in government coupled with the availability of British television channels broadcast from Northern Ireland brought about a policy change as the decade progressed.<sup>168</sup> New Year's Eve, 1961, gave birth to the age of television in Ireland.<sup>169</sup> The advance of this new medium heralded a decade of change for the movement. The drama was no longer something just performed on a stage. For those who could afford it, in this new form, it was available in the living rooms of many of those who attended amateur festivals. Inevitably, television impacted the amateur movement. Notwithstanding, the movement made its presence felt as amateur actors, for example, Gay Byrne and Maurice O'Doherty, became presenters of magazine and news programmes at the national broadcaster (see appendix four).<sup>170</sup>

Many of those involved in amateur drama contemplated the implications of this new broadcasting medium for festivals throughout the country. At the 1960 AIDF,

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<sup>164</sup> Markus, 'Paradoxical Unity of Culture', 10.

<sup>165</sup> Markus, 'Paradoxical Unity of Culture', 10.

<sup>166</sup> 'Conflicts in Irish Theatre Movement', *Irish Times*, 22 August 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>167</sup> Moylan to Little, 17 November 1951.

<sup>168</sup> John Horgan and Roddy Flynn, *Irish Media: A Critical History* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 91.

<sup>169</sup> Horgan and Flynn, *Irish Media*, 97.

<sup>170</sup> *The Gaybo Revolution: How Gay Byrne Challenged Irish Society* (Dublin: Orpen Press, 2015), 8.

O'Beirne, the chair of the ADCI, challenged the resistance to new cultural developments and welcomed the proposed introduction of television as a “service [that] would compare favourably with other Irish institutions such as the press and radio.”<sup>171</sup> O'Beirne's challenge marked a change of emphasis and direction for the movement from the “sordid paganism” warnings that were the standard fare of previous years.<sup>172</sup>

Adjudicating the 1961 WDF, Quigley, who in 1957 declared that he savoured new developments in theatre, enthusiastically welcomed the advance of the new broadcasting service.<sup>173</sup> Having availed of an outside radio broadcast in 1958, the WDF was not unused to using mass media to promote the festival.<sup>174</sup> The presence of “Joyce Wilson, play-scout for Associated-Rediffusion and Paramount Films” at the festival emphasised the opportunities Quigley foresaw for the movement in the television age.<sup>175</sup> For Wilson, emerging Irish playwriting was “very interesting to us [as] they are making the grade in a big way in England.”<sup>176</sup> As discussed in chapter two, the amateur movement was instrumental in the success of emerging Irish playwrights like Keane and Murphy.<sup>177</sup> Their international success and Wilson's search for new plays at a festival in a remote west of Ireland town illustrated the amateur movement's versatility as it contemplated the challenges and opportunities provided by the new media.

In 1964, the organisers of the WDF noticed a fall in attendance which the vice-chair of the festival, E.P. Gallagher, hoped did not indicate the death of the theatre in Tubbercurry.<sup>178</sup> He noted that it was not necessary during the festival's lifetime for the organisers to “avail of the grant given by the Arts Council” as local support ensured the event's stability.<sup>179</sup> The *Irish Times* claimed that maintaining high standards attracted festival audiences who, despite “the comforts of fireside drama...will still venture out in the rain to see a ‘real play’”<sup>180</sup> Despite this, as the decade progressed,

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Amateur Drama Knows No Border’, *Irish Independent*, 29 April 1960, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Growth in Amateur Dramatic Groups’.

<sup>173</sup> ‘Western Drama Festival’, 16 March 1957; ‘Arrival of TV Means New Phase in Amateur Theatre’, *Western People*, 25 February 1961, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Awards at Tubbercurry Drama Festival’, *Sligo Champion*, 8 March 1958, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Arrival of TV’.

<sup>176</sup> ‘Arrival of TV’; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123.

<sup>177</sup> Smith, ‘Big Hit Called “Sive”’; Burke, ‘Tuam Babies and Kerry Babies’, 245.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Hour of Need’.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Hour of Need’.

<sup>180</sup> Special Correspondent, ‘Athlone Award’.

many smaller festivals closed their doors as audience attendance waned.

In February 1967, the *Irish Independent* columnist, Prompter reported that the “Ballinrobe, Glenamaddy, Ashbourne and Sixmilebridge” amateur drama festivals were not proceeding that year.<sup>181</sup> The Ballinrobe festival closed because it could not find a venue, while the Sixmilebridge and Ashbourne festivals struggled for some time.<sup>182</sup> In addition, Bundoran was “cancelled because of a lack of entries” and its closeness to the Ballyshannon festival, while entries to New Inn also fell.<sup>183</sup> These closures drew concern from playgoers as “in the smaller centres of population, and rural areas, the amateur dramatic societies, offer people the only available chance of attending live theatre.”<sup>184</sup>

Though on the surface, these cancellations indicated a crisis within the movement, the *Irish Independent*'s Prompter reported that other festivals were “springing up to fill the gaps.”<sup>185</sup> An indicator of growth, Prompter welcomed the creative destruction that such a shift in festivals brought. Throughout the 1960s, the “overlapping of festivals” such as Sixmilebridge and Scarriff made recruiting adjudicators particularly challenging.<sup>186</sup> Notwithstanding the challenges, twenty-three festivals sent entries to the AIDF that year, where the adjudicator, Dick Williams, commented that “the standard of the three-act plays...was higher than that of amateur standards in England.”<sup>187</sup> Williams's comments proved the *Irish Times*' view about standards to be correct.

After the launch of the new television service RTÉ, Bishop Quinn of Kilmore addressed other challenges facing live theatre in the 1960s.<sup>188</sup> He lamented the emergence of “experiments that give results that are not always happy.”<sup>189</sup> In what is arguably a criticism of what became known as the Theatre of the Absurd, he remarked that;

a plot is no longer important - in fact, often, none is discernible. We get rather an analysis of characters, searching and cruel for the most part and showing

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<sup>181</sup> Prompter, ‘Amateur Drama: Five Festivals Fall by the Wayside’, *Irish Independent*, 10 February 1967, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>182</sup> Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’.

<sup>183</sup> Prompter, ‘Five Festivals’; Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’.

<sup>184</sup> Kelly, ‘Theatre: Festival Time’.

<sup>185</sup> Prompter, ‘Five Festivals’.

<sup>186</sup> Prompter, ‘Five Festivals’.

<sup>187</sup> ‘Fine Acting Wins Praise in Athlone’, *Irish Times*, 18 April 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>188</sup> ‘Legitimate Stage at Its Best’.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Legitimate Stage at Its Best’.

them as incapable of meeting the crisis engineered for them. In as far as there is a story, it is usually one of failure and despair.<sup>190</sup>

Though not the totality of human experience, failure and despair have provided playwriting themes since Sophocles wrote *Theban Plays*.<sup>191</sup> Despite this, Quinn's warning was consistent with the theme of resistance to new cultural initiatives that O'Beirne admonished in 1960. Moreover, his incomprehension echoed some mystified London critics who found *Waiting for Godot* "formless and boring" while audiences walked out in protest at a theatre in Blackpool.<sup>192</sup> Nevertheless, the play's performance in San Quentin penitentiary in California in 1957 resonated with the prisoners in a way that eluded regular playgoers in Dublin and London.<sup>193</sup>

As Ó Faoláin wished, Beckett's lived experience inspired this play.<sup>194</sup> The 1968 amateur production of the play by the Guinness Players at the Co. Tipperary Open Drama Festival occurred twenty-two months before its first appearance at the Abbey in December 1969.<sup>195</sup> Like the Ashton Players in 1957, the Guinness Players' performance of Beckett's play at the AIDF was part of a double bill for the group who also appeared in Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*.<sup>196</sup> Like the multiplicity of voices in Ionesco's *The Chairs*, critics in Dublin, no less than London, were also of two minds about Beckett's work. Amidst calls for cutting "cruder words or phrases," Carolyn Swift of the Pike Theatre and John Manning, an audience member, appreciated that the Irish premiere of Beckett's play in 1955 did not experience similar censorship as that executed by the Lord Chamberlain in London.<sup>197</sup> One reason for this different approach to theatre censorship was the influence of an engaged audience on the performance.<sup>198</sup> Unfortunately, the Pike Theatre itself fell foul of the politics of

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<sup>190</sup> 'Legitimate Stage at Its Best'; Martin Esslin, 'The Theatre of the Absurd', *The Tulane Drama Review* 4, no. 4 (May 1960): 8–13, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315115627-2>.

<sup>191</sup> Sophocles, *The Theban Plays*; David Timson, *The History of Theatre*, Audiobook (Naxos Audiobooks, 2000), Scribd.

<sup>192</sup> J.J. Finegan, 'Playing Through a Heat Wave: "Brows" in a Row', *Evening Herald*, 20 August 1955, Irish Newspaper Archive; 'Blackpool Audience Leaves "Godot"', *Irish Times*, 6 June 1956, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, loc. 2251.

<sup>193</sup> Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 1962, 13–14.

<sup>194</sup> Ó Faoláin, 'The New Criticism', 142; Ronan McDonald, *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15, Kindle; Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, loc. 107.

<sup>195</sup> 'Jubilant Scenes in Athlone', *Westmeath Independent*, 11 May 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive; Roche, 'Beckett at the Abbey 1967-1990: Broadening the Canon', loc. 432.

<sup>196</sup> 'Curtain Calls', *Evening Herald*, 2 March 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>197</sup> Carolyn Swift and John Manning, 'Letters to the Editor: Waiting for Godot', *Irish Times*, 10 November 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>198</sup> Martin, *Censorship in the Two Irelands*, 116–18.

ensorship toward the end of the decade.<sup>199</sup>

In the *Irish Times*, Kavanagh welcomed Beckett's "honest" introduction of the fragility of the human condition into Irish writing.<sup>200</sup> For Kavanagh, this brought authenticity and excitement to Irish drama that the prospect of television could not provide.<sup>201</sup> Martin Esslin included Beckett's work with Ionesco and others in what he labelled *The Theatre of the Absurd*, indicating a new approach to Irish and international playwrighting.<sup>202</sup> Though recent scholarship disputes Esslin's label, it recognises how the genre gave audiences an access point for understanding these plays.<sup>203</sup>

At the Tipperary festival, the playwright and screenwriter Wesley Burrowes regretted the poor attendance at the play.<sup>204</sup> Nevertheless, Burrowes praised the presentation of the play and the "brilliant" use of its "fragmentary" dialogue.<sup>205</sup> Recognising that many people found the play confusing, Burrowes claimed it presented a message of hope rather than despair.<sup>206</sup> Nevertheless, for adjudicator Ronnie Masterson, the play provoked a sense of despair as it presented a "sad and very tragic vacuum" for those affected by a loss of faith in a "supreme being."<sup>207</sup> Though the production won the Davis Cup at the South Leinster Drama Festival, the chair Michael Wafer, objected to the presentation of such plays at amateur events.<sup>208</sup> The audience's entertainment was essential for Wafer, and plays like *Waiting for Godot* did not provide such a service.<sup>209</sup>

Beckett was not the only playwright whose work provoked confused reactions among playgoers and critics alike. A decade after the debut of *Waiting for Godot*, the amateur drama circuit staged the Irish premiere of Ionesco's *The Chairs*.<sup>210</sup> Reviewing the Journeyman Theatre's production of the play at the 1965 NCDF, the *Evening Echo*

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<sup>199</sup> Morash, *History of Irish Theatre*, 219.

<sup>200</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, 'Some Reflections on "Waiting for Godot"', *Irish Times*, 28 January 1956, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>201</sup> Kavanagh, 'Some Reflections'.

<sup>202</sup> Esslin, *Theatre of the Absurd*, 1962, 22.

<sup>203</sup> Michael Y. Bennett, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), loc. 380, Kindle.

<sup>204</sup> 'Superb Playing in Godot', *Evening Herald*, 16 March 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>205</sup> 'Superb Playing in Godot'.

<sup>206</sup> 'Superb Playing in Godot'.

<sup>207</sup> "'Godot' a Tragic Vacuum', *Evening Herald*, 6 April 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>208</sup> 'Drama Groups Too "Way-Out"', *Irish Press*, 10 April 1968, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>209</sup> 'Drama Groups Too "Way-Out"'.

<sup>210</sup> R.O.D., 'Theatre Survey'.

expressed shock at the inability of the adjudicator Nora Lever to respond to a question about the play from a member of the audience.<sup>211</sup> Stuttering her way through an explanation, Lever, who with Barry Cassin founded the experimental '57 Theatre Club, reached for the nearest version of "Pears Encyclopaedia" to make a response.<sup>212</sup> For the reviewer, this was nothing short of atrocious for a "recognised authority on theatre."<sup>213</sup>

### Symbolism

The familiarity of the murder mystery or kitchen dramas of the Abbey Theatre provided audiences with comfortable entertainment. However, the challenge of these plays lies in using various symbols to convey meaning. In 1961, at the Meath and All-Ireland Drama Festivals, the Dublin Arts Group, under the direction of producer Martin Dempsey, placed a particular emphasis on symbolism in their production of Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. An offshoot of the Bernadette Players, Rathmines, the group formed specifically to participate in festivals.<sup>214</sup> Like Beckett, Williams wrote some full-length draft plays that did not see the light of day.<sup>215</sup> First produced in Chicago in December 1944, the play's post-war European performances made a "deep impression" on the German public.<sup>216</sup> Indeed, many German critics claimed that Strindberg influenced Williams's use of symbolism.<sup>217</sup> Built around a small cast of four people, *The Glass Menagerie* utilised a cinematic approach to the play's staging.<sup>218</sup> Through the projection of slides, the play innovated with a "representation of reality" distinctly different from the traditional kitchen dramas of the Abbey Theatre.<sup>219</sup>

Adjudicating the Meath festival, Abbey Theatre producer Mac Anna praised

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<sup>211</sup> R.O.D., 'Battle for the Ballet', *Evening Echo*, 3 April 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>212</sup> R.O.D., 'Battle for the Ballet'; Emmet Oliver, 'Death of Nora Lever', *Irish Times*, 30 December 1996, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>213</sup> R.O.D., 'Battle for the Ballet'.

<sup>214</sup> 'Tribute to Dublin Group's Enterprise', *Irish Independent*, 18 April 1961, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>215</sup> John Gassner, 'Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration', *The English Journal* 37, no. 8 (October 1948): 387; James and Elizabeth Knowlson, ed., *Beckett Remembering, Remembering Beckett* (London: Arcade Publishing, 2006), 98.

<sup>216</sup> Horst Frenz, 'American Playwrights and the German Psyche', *The South-Central Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (Feb 1961): 7; Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 6.

<sup>217</sup> Frenz, 'American Playwrights', 8.

<sup>218</sup> Robert Bray, 'Introduction', in *The Glass Menagerie*, ed. Tennessee Williams and Robert Bray (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2009), 8, Kindle.

<sup>219</sup> Bray, 'Introduction', 8.

## Chapter Five: A Platform for Discontent

Martin Dempsey for his innovative presentation of the play.<sup>220</sup> Though critical of the “interpretation” of the play, he particularly noted Dempsey’s use of imagination, “lighting and music”, especially when “giving his audience the unexpected.”<sup>221</sup> As explored in chapters two and four, the staging of other plays, like Mallon’s presentation of *Our Town* or Keane’s *Sive*, also used these techniques in ways different to the realism of professional theatre. Using music and light in *The Glass Menagerie* developed the use of symbolism to evoke meaning in the play.<sup>222</sup> For example, the lighting of the absent father’s portrait underpinned the influence of a character encountered in the lament of his estranged family throughout the play.

Having won the “premier trophy and production and acting awards at the Meath Festival,” the Dublin Arts Group’s production of *The Glass Menagerie* made its second festival appearance at the AIDF.<sup>223</sup> The festival’s adjudicators, Suter and Frank Dermody, brought their expertise to bear on the Dublin group’s performance. Suter’s presence, who came to the AIDF from adjudicating the Canadian and Ugandan Drama Festivals, indicated the international profile that the amateur movement attracted.<sup>224</sup> Describing the play’s lighting as “ambitious,” Suter, who took a different view from Mac Anna, commented that seeing the actors on stage was challenging.<sup>225</sup> Agreeing with his colleague, the second adjudicator, Dermody of the Abbey Theatre, commented, “the emotions and pathos in the play had not been portrayed.”<sup>226</sup> The *Westmeath Independent*’s critic, AK, agreed with the adjudicators and commented that “the producer ... worked too hard” on the presentation and lighting of the play.<sup>227</sup> The long pauses and opening “blackout” almost lost the audience, who “shifted in our seats, coughed and...broke it up with cigarette lighters and matches.”<sup>228</sup> The resultant “lack of spontaneity blunted the acting...which on the technical level was excellent and should have been more moving than, in fact, it was.”<sup>229</sup> Despite these shortcomings, the AIDF adjudicators were fulsome in praising Bernard Frawley and

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<sup>220</sup> ‘Tributes to Producer and Cast’, *Evening Herald*, 22 March 1961, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>221</sup> ‘Tributes to Producer and Cast’.

<sup>222</sup> Gassner, ‘Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration’, 387.

<sup>223</sup> ‘Imaginative Production of Williams Play’, *Evening Herald*, 17 April 1961, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>224</sup> ‘Drama Festival’, *Westmeath Independent*, 13 April 1957, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>225</sup> ‘Tribute to Dublin Group’s Enterprise’.

<sup>226</sup> ‘Tribute to Dublin Group’s Enterprise’.

<sup>227</sup> AK, ‘Dramatic Commentary: The Glass Menagerie’, *Westmeath Independent*, 22 April 1961, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>228</sup> AK, ‘Dramatic Commentary: The Glass Menagerie’.

<sup>229</sup> AK, ‘Dramatic Commentary: The Glass Menagerie’.

Christine McDonnell's performances of Tom and Laura, which they described as "first-class" and "sensitive."<sup>230</sup> For AK, the redeeming character of the play was Christine McDonnell's depiction of Laura, which convincingly conveyed the fear and limitations of the perception of disability.<sup>231</sup> Notwithstanding, the adjudicators noted that though Maureen Foley's performance of "Amanda was technically very fine, she lacked heart."<sup>232</sup> For AK, Amanda's costuming and youth as a "businesswoman" did not reflect the highly anxious older woman living her lost adulthood vicariously through the helicopter parenting of her adult children.<sup>233</sup>

The symbolism of absent presence, which influences the play's underlying message, is a particular feature of Williams's plastic theatre.<sup>234</sup> The utilisation of a deceased or absent character is also a feature of Anouilh's *Antigone*, Ionesco's *The Chairs*, and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, among others. In *Antigone*, King Creon attempts to control Thebes by choosing to make an example of his deceased rival, Polynices, whose corpse lay unburied in the street, "to make these clods I govern understand what's what, the city has to stink of Polynices' corpse for a month."<sup>235</sup> In *The Chairs*, invisible encounters explore the couple's perception of themselves, each other as individuals and their shared life.

Like *The Glass Menagerie* and Ní Ghráda's *An Triail*, snippets of the couple's memories interspersed among conversations with the invisible guests bring the audience into contact with collective and individual identity. Likewise, the absent presence provides these plays with an existential reference that points toward a deeper meaning for each audience member. As the Old Woman comments in *The Chairs*;

We had one son...of course, he's still alive...he's gone away...it's a common Story...or, rather, unusual...he abandoned his parents...he had a heart of gold...that was a long time ago...We loved him so much...he slammed the door...My husband and I tried to hold him back with all our might...he was seven years old, the age of reason, I called after him: "My sonny child, my son, my child"...He didn't even look back...<sup>236</sup>

Though the son does not look back in *The Chairs* as he leaves his family, *The Glass Menagerie* explores how the past shapes personal identity. Though trying to escape

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<sup>230</sup> 'Tribute to Dublin Group's Enterprise'.

<sup>231</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: The Glass Menagerie'.

<sup>232</sup> 'Tribute to Dublin Group's Enterprise'.

<sup>233</sup> AK, 'Dramatic Commentary: The Glass Menagerie'.

<sup>234</sup> Gassner, 'Tennessee Williams: Dramatist of Frustration', 387.

<sup>235</sup> Anouilh, *Antigone*, 38.

<sup>236</sup> Ionesco, *Four Plays*, 134.

the influence of family, Tom discovers it remains an integral part of who he is;

Not long after that, I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe box. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time and followed, from then on, in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion what was lost in space... would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise. Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass. Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once, my sister touches my shoulder. I turn around and look into her eyes. Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!<sup>237</sup>

The use of memory in each play illustrates how, as Fallon recognised in 1955, the ongoing production of culture is a dynamic evolution of past and present practice.<sup>238</sup>

Like *The Glass Menagerie*, the Journeyman Theatre's production of Ionesco's play demanded "shade, mood and atmosphere."<sup>239</sup> Though some parts of the play's pace needed attention, Suter, the adjudicator, acknowledged that the producer presented the play with "ingenuity and sensitivity."<sup>240</sup> Describing it as an "enthraling" and "courageous" performance, the *Westmeath Independent* used the metaphor of a "noisy cafe" to convey the challenges of encountering this play.<sup>241</sup> Both Ionesco's *The Chairs* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* use silence, confused conversation and chatter as symbols in their plays. Using sound, coupled with the starkness of an almost empty set, confronted audiences with a cacophony of noise that acts as a metaphor for the demands of society. The play challenges each person to deep listening as they encounter implied questions about the liminality of human existence.<sup>242</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, Friel claimed that playwriting was a means of provoking self-reflection by the audience.<sup>243</sup> Using such symbolism, then as now, empowered audiences to think critically as individuals about the variety of voices and influences that shape how society is understood. The mixed reaction to plays by Ionesco and Beckett, which demanded critical thinking about society, pushed

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<sup>237</sup> Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, 122.

<sup>238</sup> Fallon, 'The Future of the Irish Theatre', 93.

<sup>239</sup> 'Drama Festivals: Acting in Pirandello Play Is Praised', *Irish Independent*, 4 May 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>240</sup> 'Acting in Pirandello Play'.

<sup>241</sup> 'Acting in Pirandello Play'.

<sup>242</sup> 'All-Ireland Drama Festival Commentary', *Westmeath Independent*, 8 May 1965, Irish Newspaper Archive.

<sup>243</sup> Lennon, 'Playwright of the Western World'.

audiences out of their comfort zone. For the *Irish Times*, which described the Journeyman's production of Ionesco's *The Chairs* as a "tour de force", this was not an issue as festival audiences were receptive to various genres on the stage.<sup>244</sup> As the audience reactions demonstrated, cultural production must be original in its creativity and part of an ongoing valued tradition that it "both stabilises and destabilises."<sup>245</sup>

### Conclusion

As this chapter explored, the 1960s was a decade of consolidation and settlement for the major festivals, which remained in operation until the 2020 Covid pandemic suspended all social activity. Profound encounter brings many positive and negative issues to the surface, which was true of the amateur drama movement no less than any other institution. Like the bickering between Vladimir and Estragon, the tensions and challenges narrated above may seem disruptive on the surface. In addition, this tension is present when the couple fawns over the imagined monarch who bequeaths them a visit in Ionesco's *The Chairs*. It is also present in the actions of Antigone, who buries her brother in defiance of the king and in *The Glass Menagerie*, where Tom continually implores his mother to give him respect. However, these tensions were symptomatic of the amateur movement's effect on Irish society.

Like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, the issue with post-war professional theatre practice was that, caught in Williams's "dominant, residual, and emergent" dynamic, it waited for a creative moment to catalyse its development.<sup>246</sup> Despite lamenting the naturalistic approach of Irish theatre, Fallon and Mac Anna resisted the "emergent" creativity that the amateur movement offered for professional theatre.<sup>247</sup> Nevertheless, like Vladimir and Estragon, despite the criticisms, they both valued the contribution of the amateur movement, which brought the freshness that both Iremonger and Ó Faoláin called for Irish theatre development.<sup>248</sup> As well as this, the controversies and challenges show a movement that demonstrated versatility, adaptability and resilience. Furthermore, as these plays illustrate the importance of recognising individual agency and respect, the tensions between amateur and professional theatre showed the value of drama to the social structure of Irish society.

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<sup>244</sup> Special Correspondent, 'Athlone Award'.

<sup>245</sup> Markus, 'Paradoxical Unity of Culture', 10.

<sup>246</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–27.

<sup>247</sup> Fallon, 'The Future of the Irish Theatre', 94–95; Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 123.

<sup>248</sup> Fallon, 'The Future of the Irish Theatre', 97.

## Conclusion

### Introduction

This dissertation argues that the post-war development of Irish society is part of a continuum of modernisation that was an essential part of the ideology of the independent Irish State. This research examined how the Arts Council shaped the amateur drama movement's engagement with Irish society by focusing on the interface between Arts Council policy and the lived experience of the amateur drama movement. Its significance lies in exploring the lived experience of arts policy development in the voluntary response of the amateur drama movement to Ireland's mid-century national crisis.

Like many other post-war government initiatives, the Arts Council of Ireland emerged as part of a broader stabilisation of the political system. This research considered the application of specific Arts Council policies to the lived experience of the amateur drama movement. What is significant about these amateur drama festivals is that they were part of a voluntary movement of interested people who gave their time to cultural activity. The Arts Council's guarantees against loss provided stability for this voluntary movement. In addition, it sought to shape the movement by placing conditions concerning the staging of work by Irish playwrights on groups availing of its support. As Upchurch claims, arts policy development is often the end of a relatively "informal" process rooted in key people's social interaction as they engage in the daily business of meetings and public service.<sup>1</sup>

An example of this was Wall's recommendations concerning the stability of the movement following the omission of an acknowledgement of Arts Council funding at the All-Ireland Drama Festival in 1960. Specifically, this research explored how towns and villages responded to Little's vision of cultural development by forming amateur drama festivals, which became a social movement. Analysis of Little's memos and speeches was a crucial part of unlocking the argument of this dissertation. His vision, influenced by an understanding of Irish nationalism and the CST principles of subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good, shaped cultural policy formation during this period. In addition, Little was consistent with Ireland's participation in the ERP (sometimes known as the Marshall Plan), a crucial part of America's initial post-

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<sup>1</sup> Upchurch, *Origins of the Arts Council Movement*, 20.

war foreign policy, which sought to rebuild Western civilization.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Lived Experience of Cultural Policy**

Chris Morash contends that the theatre experience creates a particular type of physical (the stage and theatre itself), social, virtual, fictional, conceptual, local, and global spaces.<sup>3</sup> An analysis of plays performed at festivals demonstrates that the amateur drama movement created a local, national, and global cultural space that explored issues of social importance to Irish society. Exploring these issues provided the “lived experience” context that Williams, Delaney, and Markus maintain is fundamental to understanding the application of cultural policy.<sup>4</sup> This lived experience gives “a particular and characteristic colour” to society’s intergenerational understanding of culture.<sup>5</sup>

Though government budgetary controls partially curtailed the Arts Council, the response of the amateur movement took Little’s vision of devolved cultural development and gave it life. Underpinned initially by Arts Council guarantees and the Halls programme, the North Cork, Western, Clare and All-Ireland Drama Festivals, amongst others considered in this research, became rooted in the social and cultural fabric of the communities in which they existed. This rootedness allowed them to experiment and stage plays, like Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Ionesco’s *The Chairs*, that permitted rural audiences to experience drama in all its forms despite limited transport availability. The amateur drama festivals were primarily voluntary local events with associated socio-economic benefits for the towns and villages where they occurred. For example, the Western Drama Festival founders inspired industrial development in Tubbercurry. Their enterprise encouraged local ironmongers to establish BASTA, a lock-making factory in Tubbercurry in the mid-1950s, supplying the international construction industry for over sixty years.<sup>6</sup>

However, the widespread engagement of drama groups from across the country (including Northern Ireland) made these local festivals a national space for theatrical groups to explore issues relevant to Irish society then and now. Some plays examined, for example, *Mungo’s Mansion*, *Home is the Hero*, *Sive* and *On the Outside*, explore

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<sup>2</sup> Betts, *Ruin and Renewal*, 239.

<sup>3</sup> Morash, ‘Making Space’, 6–20.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 67; Delaney, ‘Modernity, the Past and Politics’, 104; Markus, ‘Paradoxical Unity of Culture’, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 67.

<sup>6</sup> Western Drama Festival Committee, *The Actors Are Come Hither*, 48.

the challenges of agency and the desire of the young to forge a prosperous society. This desire of the young for a flourishing society contrast with the regrets of an older generation lamenting the ideals of the independent State. That generation represents a culture formed through poverty and suffering. The younger generation's impatience with what has preceded them stands for a gradual transition to a liberalised Irish society. This tension is also present in the dominant, residual, and emergent dynamic that permeated professional and amateur theatre throughout this period.<sup>7</sup> The tension portrayed in these plays demonstrates Williams's process of intergenerational cultural development.<sup>8</sup>

In undertaking this research, I was fascinated by the prevalence of religious language used to promote culture and the engagement of church personnel with amateur drama. Consequently, this research explored the influence of Catholic Social Teaching on Arts Council policy development and its application to the amateur movement. Though various narratives of this time focus on the influence of Archbishop McQuaid, this dissertation offers an alternate view of the engagement of the Irish hierarchy with amateur drama. The involvement of clergy and politicians in the running of the festivals indicated the movement's growing influence on the shape of Irish society. Through its involvement with the management of halls, production and writing of plays, the church sought, individually and collectively, to shape the social space occupied by the amateur movement.

Nonetheless, as chapter three outlined, the Arts Council leveraging its financial power in the transparent management of church halls in Charleville and Athlone to ensure the common good of the local community showed that relations with the Church were changing. Such change begins through small and apparently insignificant engagements. For example, in the box office success of plays like *Gaslight*, *The Crucible*, and *On Trial*, the producers, actors and audiences who are the "people of God" made their voices heard in post-war Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

This dissertation argued that through its engagement with world theatre, the amateur drama movement indirectly introduced the concept of globalisation to a nation

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–24.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 69–71.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Paul VI, 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium', The Holy See, 21 November 1964, no. 9, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html#](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html#).

by exploring the possibilities an international influence could bring. This indicates that the amateur movement contributed to a shift of attitudes and understanding of society that accompanied the move towards a globalised economy. After almost three decades, this change of approach eventually led to the abandonment of protectionist policies and the implementation of the *Programme for Economic Expansion*. Just as Little envisaged, the staging of contemporary and international plays at the amateur drama festivals showed Ireland taking its place among the world's nations.<sup>10</sup>

The success of plays by Irish and international playwrights at rural festivals illustrated the changing nature of social engagement with issues presented on stage. International talent scouts did not come to the festivals for any other reason than to see raw new playwriting during its incubation. At MacMahon's suggestion, the amateur movement allowed aspiring playwrights to see their work performed on stage. As chapter two demonstrated, this facilitation of amateur writing empowered new playwrights to write for a new Irish generation that was taking its place. Without the flexibility of expression the manuscript competition provided, Irish theatre would have been deprived of the creativity of playwrights like Murphy, who first ventured into theatre through the amateur movement. At the same time, other playwrights like Macken, Keane, Ní Ghráda and Leonard reached a wider audience than that provided for by professional theatre. Significantly, many of these plays came to the international stage simultaneously or shortly after their production on the amateur circuit.

Mary Burke claims that Murphy's play *On the Outside* acknowledged the mistreatment of vulnerable citizens within Irish society.<sup>11</sup> However, the plays discussed in this thesis demonstrate that Murphy was not alone in bringing the public face-to-face with critical social issues. These issues included the Teddy Boy sub-culture, domestic violence, unmarried motherhood, institutional abuse, backstreet abortion and the treatment of mental illness. The evaluation of these plays in chapters two and three explores an understanding of what society knew about these issues. Themes concerning the institutionalisation of women in the selection of plays analysed in these chapters show an awareness of these issues in post-war Irish society.

Though the presence of women was hailed by the festival organisation for their contribution to hospitality, as noted above, Shelah Richards, Ria Mooney and Aileen

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<sup>10</sup> Little, 'On Discovering Ireland'.

<sup>11</sup> Burke, 'Tuam Babies and Kerry Babies', 249.

Coughlan played an instrumental role in raising the profile of amateur drama at the Arts Council table and in the media. While professional female playwrights like Lady Gregory and Teresa Deevy regularly featured at festivals, drama groups like the Kilkeel Women's Institute brought the work of amateur playwrights like Pauline McGonigle to the All-Ireland stage. The role of women in amateur drama is an area that needs fuller examination.

This research considered the dramaturgical influence of adjudicators and those who opened festivals. Future research could consider how adjudicators, critics and actors directly aided amateur theatre groups in shaping their craft. Through adjudication and critique, adjudicators could make or break an aspiring playwright or amateur drama group. As the case of Keane's *Sive* demonstrated, the adjudicator's perspective has repercussions for many years. Consequently, further research could consider the adjudicator's choice, professional background, creative understanding and attitudes towards amateur drama.

Another aspect of this research that needs further exploration is the emergence of informal cultural networks among formal bodies that funded and supported the amateur drama movement through public-private partnerships. Examples include the Arts Council, Bord Fáilte, Foras Éireann and the Carnegie Institute. Amateur drama festivals also formed networks with adjudicators, drama groups, playwrights and emigrant organisations, including the Sligo Men's Association of New York and the Mayo Men's Association in Philadelphia.

Established five years after the ACGB, An Chomhairle Ealaíon is the second of what became an international Arts Council movement. Though Anna Rosser Upchurch has traced the international development of the Arts Council movement, she briefly mentions the foundation of An Chomhairle Ealaíon. Consequently, future research could address this gap in her work by situating the Irish Arts Council within an international Arts Council network that emerged from former British colonies. Rather than see the Irish Arts Council as another institution copied from the British experience, it could examine how An Chomhairle Ealaíon, the second international arts council, contributed to developing that global network. Allied to this could be an exploration of the similarities between policy support for amateur or community drama in Ireland, Britain, Canada, and the United States. The formation of these networks and partnerships demonstrates a collaborative approach to developing

cultural policy during these decades that warrants further investigation.

The Irish newspaper Archive and ProQuest Historical Newspaper databases were regular sources that helped to round out the story of the amateur movement's development. Regular columns by AK, JKA, Coughlan and Prompter, to name a few, were invaluable in evaluating plays and festivals. Though these columns and others like them were a regular feature of the print media throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the coverage of festivals waned as television became embedded in Irish society. The use of local and national media and its adaptation to the age of television needs further research and development.

When lived memory becomes part of what Williams calls "recorded culture," archives become crucial to explorations of cultural history.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, as time diminished the availability of living memory, little archival material was available in the individual drama festivals. Unfortunately, letters, photographs and memoranda held by those involved in drama festivals become unavailable as their owners enter eternity. Consequently, long-established voluntary cultural festivals could be encouraged to deposit their personally held archives with local branches of Libraries Ireland for preservation. Such a scheme could make these invaluable resources available to new generations of local and national cultural history researchers. Allied with that, an oral history project recording the lived experience of local cultural activists like the late Ted O'Riordan and Brendan O'Brien, who were fundamental to establishing their respective festivals, may be worthwhile.

### Conclusion

Raymond Williams argues that one must analyse "a sufficiently long period to get a real sense of historical change and fluctuation."<sup>13</sup> This research is a fascinating exploration of a significant period of Irish twentieth-century history. Though this dissertation examined a small part of the post-war period, the attitudinal shift during the twenty years under discussion laid the foundation for social changes enacted through the divorce, same-sex marriage, and abortion legislation between 1996 and 2018. Growing up in a home where discussions about the interface between politics and daily life regularly took place meant that this exploration of archives became an intriguing way of understanding the modernisation of Irish society. As previously

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<sup>12</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 73.

## **Conclusion**

mentioned, this process is part of a modernisation continuum, which, like culture, is creatively shaped by each generation.

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## Appendices

### Appendix One: Contemporary Irish Plays Performed at Festivals between 1953 and 1968

Play	Playwright	First Produced	Clare Drama Festival Year	Western Drama Festival Year	North Cork Drama Festival Year	All-Ireland Drama Festival Year
<i>Leave it to the Doctor</i>	Anne Daly	1959	1962	---	---	---
<i>The Enemy Within</i>	Brian Friel	1962	---	---	---	1968
<i>Philadelphia, Here I Come</i>	Brian Friel	1964	1970	---	---	---
<i>The Bugle in the Blood</i>	Bryan MacMahon	1949	1953/ 1958	1958/1961/1970	---	---
<i>The Honey Spike</i>	Bryan MacMahon	1961	---	1964	1963	---
<i>Tankardstown</i>	Christine Longford	1948	---	---	---	1957
<i>God's Gentry</i>	Donagh McDonagh	1951	---	1959	---	---
<i>Step in the Hollow</i>	Donagh McDonagh	1957	1968	---	---	1967
<i>The Righteous are bold</i>	Frank Carney	1946	1954 / 1961	1952/1958	1961/ 1968	1959
<i>Madigan's Lock</i>	Hugh Leonard	1958	1962	---	---	---
<i>The Poker Session</i>	Hugh Leonard	1963	1970	---	---	---
<i>Mick and Mick</i>	Hugh Leonard	1966		---	---	1970
<i>Sive</i>	John B Keane	1959	1959 / 1966 / 1970	1960	1959	1959

Play	Playwright	First Produced	Clare Drama Festival Year	Western Drama Festival Year	North Cork Drama Festival Year	All-Ireland Drama Festival Year
<i>The Highest House in the Mountain</i>	John B Keane	1960	1969	---	---	---
<i>Sharon's Grave</i>	John B Keane	1960	1966/ 1967	---	1960	---
<i>Many Young Men of Twenty</i>	John B Keane	1961	1962 / 1969	1962	---	---
<i>The Year of the Hiker</i>	John B Keane	1963	1964 / 1967 / 1970	1965/ 1968	---	---
<i>The Field</i>	John B Keane	1965	1967 / 1970	1967 / 1968 / 1969	1967	1966
<i>Big Maggie</i>	John B Keane	1969	1970	---	---	---
<i>All the King's Men / Horses</i>	John McDonnell	1961	1962 / 1965	---	---	---
<i>The Country Boy</i>	John Murphy	1959	1961 / 1965	1960 / 1961 / 1968	1960 / 1965	1960 / 1961
<i>All Souls Night</i>	Joseph Tomelty	1949	1956 / 1969	1962	---	1956 / 1967
<i>This other Eden</i>	Louis D'Alton	1953	1968	---	---	---
<i>The Visiting House</i>	M. J. Molloy	1946	---	---	1960, 1962	---
<i>The Wood of the Whispering</i>	M. J. Molloy	1953	---	1959	1958	
<i>On Trial (Published in Irish as An Triail)</i>	Máiread Ní Ghráda	1964	1972	---	---	1966 / 1969
<i>The Heart's a Wonder (Adapted from "The Playboy of the Western World" by J.M.Synge)</i>	Máirín Charlton and Nuala O' Farrell	1958	---	---	1960	---

<b>Play</b>	<b>Playwright</b>	<b>First Produced</b>	<b>Clare Drama Festival Year</b>	<b>Western Drama Festival Year</b>	<b>North Cork Drama Festival Year</b>	<b>All-Ireland Drama Festival Year</b>
<i>Tolka Row</i>	Maura Laverty	1951	1963	1959	---	1953
<i>Ill Met by Moonlight</i>	Micheál Mac Liammóir	1946	1961	1955	1955	---
<i>Anyone Could Rob a Bank</i>	Tom Coffey	1960	---	1961	1963	---
<i>Them</i>	Tom Coffey	1963	1968 / 1970	---	1964	---
<i>The Call</i>	Tom Coffey	1966	1968	---	1968	---
<i>Mungo's Mansion</i>	Walter Macken	1946	---	1951/1952/1954 / 1956 / 1964	1956 / 1957 /	1954
<i>Home is the Hero</i>	Walter Macken	1952	1954/ 1962 / 1966	1968/1969	---	---

**Appendix Two: Plays produced or written by Clergy that competed at Festivals.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Play</b>	<b>Playwright</b>	<b>Drama Group</b>	<b>Producer</b>	<b>Sponsoring Festival</b>	<b>Adjudicator</b>
1955	<i>Kevin Barry</i>	G. Westby	Marist Drama Club, Sligo	Brother Francis	---	---
1957	<i>Dark Brown</i>	Philip Johnston	Ballymote Dramatic Society	Rev. P. Higgins	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Godfrey Quigley
1957	<i>All Soul's Night</i>	Joseph Tomelty	St Mary's Drama Group, Drogheda	Rev. James Bird	Meath Drama Festival	P.J. Looney
1957	<i>The Lady is not for burning</i>	Christopher Fry	Tuam Dramatic Society	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	South Mayo Drama Festival (Ballinrobe)	Mícheál Ó hAodha
1957	<i>The Proposal</i>	Anton Chekov	Tuam Dramatic Society	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	South Mayo Drama Festival (Ballinrobe)	Mícheál Ó hAodha
1957	<i>Gaslight</i>	Patrick Hamilton	Parteen Players	Very Rev. Fr. Rea	Clare Drama Festival (Scarriff)	Gerald Healy
1958	<i>A Phoenix Too Frequent</i>	Christopher Fry	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Western Drama Festival	Harry Brogan
1958	<i>Gaslight</i>	Patrick Hamilton	Charlestown Dramatic Club	Rev. T.P. Vesey	Western Drama Festival	Harry Brogan
1958	<i>The Cardinal</i> <i>(From the original in German)</i>	Harald Bratt	The Runners, Tullamore	Noel MacMahon Lighting and Sound: Rev. Fr Murchin and Peadar Kiely	Louth Drama Festival	Milo O'Shea
1958	<i>The Rale McCoy</i>	M. J. J. MacKeown	Caroreigh, Taghmon, Wexford Dramatic Class	Rev. James Murphy	South Leinster Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna

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<b>Year</b>	<b>Play</b>	<b>Playwright</b>	<b>Drama Group</b>	<b>Producer</b>	<b>Sponsoring Festival</b>	<b>Adjudicator</b>
1959	<i>Hamlet</i>	William Shakespeare	Dublin Shakespeare Society	Rev. Richard O'Donoghue	Cavan Drama Festival	Gabriel Fallon
1959	<i>Master Dudley</i>	Philip Johnston	Ballymote Dramatic Society	Rev. Patrick Higgins	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1959	<i>The Black Stranger</i>	Gerald Healy	Caroreigh Dramatic Class	Rev. James Murphy	South Leinster Drama Festival	Jim Fitzgerald
1959	<i>They Also Serve</i>	Brian Bairead	Newtownshandrum Pioneer Drama Group	Rev. Fr. Ryan	North Cork Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1959	<i>Thunder Rock</i>	Robert Ardrey	Tuam Little Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Mayo Drama Festival	Liam Foley
1959	<i>Wildfire</i>	Rev. F. Moriarty	Compantas Ide, Limerick	Rev. F. Moriarty	North Cork Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1959	<i>Give Me a Bed of Roses</i>	John McCann	St Patrick's Players, Castledearg, Co. Tyrone	Rev. E. K. Daly (Bishop of Derry, 1974-1993)	Cavan Drama Festival	P.J. O'Connor
1959	<i>X=0</i>	John Drinkwater	Tuam Little Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Mayo Drama Festival	Liam Foley
1959	<i>Thy Dear Father</i>	Gerard Healy	Westport Dramatic Society	Rev. R. Horan	Mayo Drama Festival	Liam Foley
1960	<i>Drama at Inish</i>	Lennox Robinson	Ballymote Dramatic Society	Rev. P. A. Higgins	Mayo Drama Festival	Gabriel Fallon
1960	<i>The Heart's A Wonder</i>	---	Compantas Ide, Limerick	Fr. Moriarty	Clare Drama Festival	Godfrey Quigley
1960	<i>The King of Friday's Men</i>	M.J. Molloy	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Micheál Mac Liammóir

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Year	Play	Playwright	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
1960	<i>Michael</i>	---	Marist Brothers School, Sligo	Brother Hilary	Bundoran Drama Festival	Seamus Breathnach
1961	<i>Rebecca</i>	Daphne de Maurier	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev. T. O'Reilly	Kildare Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1961	<i>Dial M for Murder</i>	Frederick Knott	St Patrick's Players, Castleberg	Rev. E. K. Daly (Bishop of Derry, 1974-1993)	Bundoran Drama Festival	Barry Cassin
1961	<i>Ill Met by Moonlight</i>	Micheál Mac Liammóir	Relays Productions, Ballinasloe	Rev. Kevin Ryle	Clare Drama Festival	Jim Fitzgerald
1961	<i>Winter Wedding</i>	Tomás Mac Anna	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Ray McAnally
1962	<i>In Wild Earth</i>	J O'Donnell / Rev. J. Cassidy (Bishop of Clonfert: 1982-1987. Archbishop of Tuam: 1987-1994)	Relays Productions, Ballinasloe	Rev. Kevin Ryle	Roscommon Drama Festival	Micheál Ó hAodha
1963	<i>The Rainmaker</i>	N. Richard Nash	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Mayo Drama Festival	Stanley Hilderbrandt
1963	<i>Shadow and Substance</i>	Paul Vincent Carroll	Templemore Players	Rev. P. J. O'Grady	North Cork Drama Festival	James Stack
1963	<i>The Miracle Worker</i>	William Gibson	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev. T. O'Reilly C.C.	Kildare Drama Festival	Nora Lever
1963	<i>Lie to the Nettles</i>	Ian Collins	Compantas Ide, Limerick	Fr Moriarty	Kerry Drama Festival	Louis Lentin
1963	<i>The Survivors</i>	Colman O'Shannon	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev T. O'Reilly C.C.	Kildare Drama Festival	Nora Lever
1964	<i>Antigone</i>	Jean Anouilh	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	North-Western Regional Drama Finals, Bundoran	Ronnie Masterson

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<b>Year</b>	<b>Play</b>	<b>Playwright</b>	<b>Drama Group</b>	<b>Producer</b>	<b>Sponsoring Festival</b>	<b>Adjudicator</b>
1965	<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	North-Western Region	---
1966	<i>The Country Boy</i>	John Murphy	D & I Dramatic Society, Galway	Rev. Fr K. Ward S.J.	North-Western Region	---
1966	<i>The Proposal</i>	Anton Chekov	Monaseed Drama Group, Co. Wexford	Rev. Michael O'Regan	Eastern Regional Final, Navan	---
1966	<i>A Man for All Seasons</i>	Robert Bolt	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	North-Western Region	---
1967	<i>Purgatory</i>	W.B. Yeats	Aghamore Theatre Group	Rev. J. McHugh	---	---
1967	<i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	Anton Chekov	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P. V. O'Brien	---	---
1967	<i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>	J.M. Synge	Monaseed Drama Group	Rev. Michael J. O'Regan	---	---
1968	<i>Johnny Belinda</i>	Elmer Harriss	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev. P. Gaynor	---	---
1968	<i>The King of Friday's Men</i>	M.J. Molloy	Monaseed Drama Group, Wexford	Rev. Michael O'Regan	---	---
1968	<i>Dinny and the Witches</i>	W. Gibson	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	---	---
1969	<i>Our Town</i>	Thornton Wilder	Claremorris Players	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	---	---
1969	<i>Berkeley Square</i>	John L. Balderston	Sundrive Players, Dublin	Una Parker / Fr Seán Cassidy (Director of the Sundrive players)	---	---

### Appendix Three: Plays produced by Drama Groups from Northern Ireland

Year	Play	Playwright	Drama Group	Producer
1953	<i>Juno and the Paycock</i>	Seán O'Casey	Newry Abbey Players	---
1953	<i>Seven Women</i>	J.M. Barrie	Neophytes, Portadown	---
1953	<i>Rope</i>	Patrick Hamilton	C.A.P.P.U. Players, Armagh	---
1953	<i>Juno and the Paycock</i>	Seán O'Casey	Newry Abbey Players	---
1954	<i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	John Webster	Newpoint Players, Newry	---
1955	<i>Young Wives Tales</i>	Ronald Jeans	Newry Stage Society	Jean Baxter
1955	<i>The Rugged Path</i>	George Shiels	Jerretspass Dramatic Society	P.J. Byrne
1955	<i>Today and Yesterday</i>	W.D Hampenstall	Mount Lourdes PPU DG, Enniskillen	---
1956	<i>The Patsy</i>		St Columb's PPU Dramatic Society, Derry	Jack Gallagher
1956	<i>Home is the Hero</i>	Walter Macken	The Jerretspass Dramatic Society	Patrick Byrne
1956	<i>All Souls Night</i>	Joseph Tomelty	Eclipse Drama Group, Belfast	Mat Creighton
1956	<i>Land of Heart's Desire</i>	W.B. Yeats	Newry Abbey Players	---
1957	<i>The Passing Day</i>	George Shiels	St Columb's College Union, Derry	Jack Gallagher
1958	<i>Arms and the Man</i>	Bernard Shaw	Newpoint Players, Newry	Mary Andress
1958	<i>All My Sons</i>	Arthur Miller	St Columbs College Union Dramatic Society, Derry	Jack Gallagher

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1959	<i>Charley's Aunt</i>	Brandon Thomas	St Columb's College Union Drama Society, Derry	Diarmuid McDermott
1959	<i>Give Me a Bed of Roses</i>	John McCann	St Patrick's Players, Castleberg, Co. Tyrone	Rev. E.K. Daly C.C.
1959	<i>Give Me a Bed of Roses</i>	John McCann	St Patrick's Parochial Players, Castledara	---
1960	<i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>	T.S. Eliot	Queens University, Belfast, Dramatic Society	Stage Director: Philip Levine
1960	<i>You Never Can Tell</i>	Bernard Shaw	Newpoint Players	Mary Andress
1960	<i>Montserrat</i>	Lillian Helliman	St Columb's PPU Dramatic Society	---
1961	<i>The Flies</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre	Queen's University, Belfast, Dramatic Society	Jim Caffrey
1961	<i>Night was our Friend</i>	Michael Pertwee	Newpoint Players, Newry	Patrick Carey, assisted by Seamus Mallon
1961	<i>Dial M for Murder</i>	Frederick Knott	St Patrick's Players, Castleberg	Rev. E. Daly C.C.
1962	<i>Our Town</i>	Thornton Wilder	Newpoint Players, Newry	Seamus Mallon
1963	<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	Oscar Wilde	St Columb's PPU Dramatic Society, Derry	Jack Gallagher
1963	<i>Othello</i>	William Shakespeare	Belfast Drama Circle	Roy Alcorn
1963	<i>The Far-Off Hills</i>	Lennox Robinson	Castleberg Players	---
1966	<i>The Thoughts of Emma Rossiter</i>	Pauline McGonigle	Kilkeel Women's Institute, Co. Down	Joan Cassidy
1967	<i>The Poker Session</i>	Hugh Leonard	Newpoint Players, Newry	Joan Cassidy
1967	<i>All Souls Night</i>	Joseph Tomelty		---
1968	<i>The Enemy Within</i>	Brian Friel	Orangefield Dramatic Society, Belfast	Sam McCready

#### Appendix Four: International Plays

Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
1953	<i>Seven Women</i>	J.M. Barrie	---	United Kingdom	Neophytes, Portadown	---	---	---
1953	<i>Antigone</i>	Jean Anouilh	1946	France	Poetry Circle, Limerick	---	---	---
1953	<i>Rope</i>	Patrick Hamilton	---	United Kingdom	C.A.P.P.U. Players, Armagh	---	---	---
1953	<i>Journey's End</i>	R.C. Sherriff	1928	United Kingdom	The Phoenix Players, Tubbercurry	---	---	---
1953	<i>Ophelia</i>	T.B. Morris	---	United Kingdom	The Poetry Circle, Limerick	---	---	---
1954	<i>Two Dozen Red Roses</i>	Aldo de Benedetti	---	Italy	Nomad Players, Cavan	Tom Hickey	---	---
1954	<i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	John Webster	1612-13	United Kingdom	Newpoint Players, Newry	---	---	---
1954	<i>Uncle Harry</i>	Thomas Job	1942	United States of America	St Philomena's Drama Group, Drogheda	---	---	---
1955	<i>Smilin' Through</i>	Allan Langdon Martin	1919	United States of America	Ahascragh Players	---	---	---
1955	<i>X=0,</i>	John Drinkwater	---	United Kingdom	Mourne Grange Dramatic Soc	Patrick Carey	---	---
1955	<i>See How They Run</i>	Philip King	1944	United Kingdom	Wexford Theatre Group	Nicholas Browne	---	---
1955	<i>Young Wives Tales</i>	Ronald Jeans	1949	United Kingdom	Newry Stage Society	Jean Baxter	---	---
1955	<i>The Monkey's</i>	W.W. Jacob	1907	United	Marian	S. Browne	---	---

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
	<i>Paw</i>			Kingdom	Players, Dundalk			
1956	<i>Bonaventure</i>	Charlotte Hastings	1949	United Kingdom	The Marian Players	Frank O'Hara	Féile Luimní,	---
1956	<i>The Late Christopher Bean</i>	Emlyn Williams	1933	United Kingdom	Irish Circle Players, London	Pat Mulloy	Meath Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>Night Must Fall</i>	Emlyn Williams	1935	United Kingdom	The Bernadette Players, Sligo	Gerard Westby	Cavan Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>The Patsy</i>	Georges Feydeau, adapted by Greg Leaming	1896	United States of America / France	St Columb's PPU Dramatic Society, Derry	Jack Gallagher	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>My Hills, My Home</i>	Glyn Griffiths	1954	United Kingdom	'51 Productions Literary and Dramatic Society	Caitlin Ní Chonchubhair	Meath Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>Christmas in the Marketplace</i>	Henri Gheon	---	France	The Runners, Tullamore	Noel MacMahon	Western Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>Tactics</i>	Thomas King-Moylan	---	United States of America	Mountcharles ICA Guild Players	Jacob McKay	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	William Shakespeare	---	United Kingdom	St John Bosco Drama Group, Rostrevor	Mona Garland	Louth Drama Festival	---
1956	<i>The Trial Scene from The Merchant of Venice</i>	William Shakespeare	---	United Kingdom	Wexford Theatre Group	---	South Leinster Drama Festival	---
1957	<i>The Proposal</i>	Anton Chekov	1890	Russia	Tuam	Rev. P.V.	South Mayo	Mícheál

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
					Dramatic Society	O'Brien	Drama Festival (Ballinrobe)	Ó hAodha
1957	<i>The Lady is not for Burning</i>	Christopher Fry	1948	United Kingdom	Tuam Dramatic Society	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	South Mayo Drama Festival (Ballinrobe)	Micheál Ó hAodha
1957	<i>Man on Trial</i>	Diego Fabbri	1955	Italy	The Runners, Tullamore	Noel Mac Mahon	Western Drama Festival	Godfrey Quigley
1957	<i>Antigone</i>	Jean Anouilh Translated by Lewis Galientiere	1946	France	Ashton Productions, Cork	Rachel Burrows	Féile Luimní	Traolach Ó hAonghusa
1957	<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>	Joseph Kesselring	1939	United States of America	Killarney Players	Michael O'Sullivan	Kerry Drama Festival (Killarney)	Lennox Robinson
1957	<i>Gaslight</i>	Patrick Hamilton	1939	United Kingdom	Parteen Players	Very Rev. Fr. Rea	Clare Drama Festival (Scarriff)	Gerald Healy
1957	<i>The Family Reunion</i>	T.S. Eliot	---	United Kingdom	Limerick Poetry Circle	Seamus Ó Maolagáin	Clare Drama Festival	Gerald Healy
1957	<i>The Monkey's Paw</i>	W.W. Jacobs (dramatised by Louis N. Parker)	1907	United Kingdom	The Brosna Players	T.C. Ó h-Íceadha	Kerry Drama Festival (Killarney)	Lennox Robinson
1958	<i>All My Sons</i>	Arthur Miller	1947	United States of America	St Columb's College Union Dramatic Society, Derry	Jack Gallagher	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Barry Cassin
1958	<i>A Phoenix Too Frequent</i>	Christopher Fry	1946	United Kingdom	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Western Drama Festival	Harry Brogan
1958	<i>Cajun: A Comedy of the Mississippi</i>	Elliott O'Donnell		United Kingdom	Eye Productions, Dublin	Seán Ó Meadhra	Meath Drama Festival	James Boyce

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1958	<i>Night Must Fall</i>	Emlyn Williams	1935	United Kingdom	Birr Drama Group	Noel MacMahon	North Cork Drama Festival	James Stack
1958	<i>The Cradle Song</i>	Gregorio and Maria Martinez Sierra	1911	Spain	H & L Players	Lorraine Jones	Cork Drama Festival	Harold Goldblatt
1958	<i>The Cardinal (From the original in German)</i>	Harald Bratt	---	Germany	The Runners, Tullamore	Noel MacMahon (Lighting and Sound: Rev. Fr Murchin and Peadar Kiely)	Louth Drama Festival	Milo O'Shea
1958	<i>Gaslight</i>	Patrick Hamilton	1939	United Kingdom	Charlestown Dramatic Club	Rev. T.P. Vesey C.C.	Western Drama Festival	Harry Brogan
1959	<i>The Bear</i>	Anton Chekov	1888	Russia	Limerick Dramatic Society	Denis Ryan	Clare Drama Festival	Micheál Ó hAodha
1959	<i>The Proposal</i>	Anton Chekov	1890	Russia	Studio Theatre Group, Limerick	---	Féile Luimnighe	H.L. Morrow
1959	<i>Charley's Aunt</i>	Brandon Thomas	1892	United Kingdom	St Columb's College Union Drama Society, Derry	Diarmuid McDermott	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1959	<i>Holy Night</i>	Gregorio Martinez Sierra (English version by Philip Hereford)	---	Spain	St James Gate Drama Group	James J. Henry	South Leinster Drama Festival	Jim Fitzgerald
1959	<i>X=0</i>	John Drinkwater	---	United Kingdom	Tuam Little Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	Mayo Drama Festival	Liam Foley
1959	<i>Thunder Rock</i>	Robert Ardrey	1939	United States of	Tuam Little	Rev. P.V.	Mayo	Liam Foley

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
				America	Theatre Guild	O'Brien	Drama Festival	
1959	<i>The Queen and the Rebels</i>	Ugo Betti	---	Italy	Presentation Theatre Guild, Cork	Daniel Donovan	Cork Drama Festival	W. Bridges-Adams
1959	<i>Hamlet</i>	William Shakespeare	1599-1601	United Kingdom	Dublin Shakespeare Society	Rev. Richard O'Donoghue	Cavan Drama Festival	Gabriel Fallon
1960	<i>Witness for the Prosecution</i>	Agatha Christie	1953	United Kingdom	Athlone Little Theatre Group	Aileen Coughlan	Mayo Drama Festival	Gabriel Fallon
1960	<i>The Heiress</i>	Augustus Goetz	1947	United States of America	Old Christians Theatre, Cork	Lorraine Jones	Cork Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1960	<i>The First Born</i>	Christopher Fry	1948	United Kingdom	Ashton Production	Rachel Burrows	Cork Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1960	<i>To live in Peace</i>	Giovacchino Forzano	---	Italy	Breffni Players, Carrick-on-Shannon	Paddy Dillon	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Micheál Mac Liammóir
1960	<i>The Devil's Bridge</i>	Henri Gheon	---	France	The Runners, Tullamore	Joseph Kenny	South Leinster Drama Festival	Pearse Hutchinson
1960	<i>School for Wives</i>	Moliere	1662	France	Limerick Studio Group	Phil O'Doherty	North Cork Drama Festival	Godfrey Quigley
1960	<i>Murder in the Cathedral</i>	T.S. Eliot	1935	United Kingdom	Queens University, Belfast, Dramatic Society	Stage Director: Philip Levine	Newry Drama Festival	Graham Suter
1961	<i>To Live in Peace</i>	Adapted by Victor Retti from the Italian of Giovacchino Forzano	---	Italy	Sligo Drama Circle	Joe Flood	Bundoran Drama Festival	Barry Cassin

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
1961	<i>Miss Julia</i>	August Strindberg	1888	Sweden	Limerick Studio Group	Maurice O'Doherty	North Cork Drama Festival	Micheál Ó hAodha
1961	<i>Rebecca</i>	Daphne de Maurier	1940	United Kingdom	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev. T. O'Reilly C.C.	Kildare Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1961	<i>Dial M for Murder</i>	Frederick Knott	1952	United Kingdom	St Patrick's Players, Castledearg	Rev. E. Daly C.C.	Bundoran Drama Festival	Barry Cassin
1961	<i>Brand</i>	Henrik Ibsen	---	Norway	Galway University Players	Frank J. Bailey	Mayo Drama Festival	Micheál Ó hAodha
1961	<i>The Flies</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre	1943	France	Queen's University, Belfast, Dramatic Society	Jim Caffrey	Newry Drama Festival	Findlay McDonald
1961	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	Tennessee Williams	1945	United States of America	Dublin Arts Theatre Group	Martin Dempsey	Meath Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1961	<i>The Browning Version</i>	Terence Rattigan	1948	United Kingdom	Old Christians Theatre, Cork	---	Cork Drama Festival	Gerard Healy
1961	<i>Hello, Out There</i>	William Saroyan	1941	United States of America	The Singers, Limerick	Kitty Bredin	Féile Luimní	Hilton Edwards
1962	<i>Ghosts</i>	Henrik Ibsen	---	Norway	The Singers, Limerick	Eileen Fitzmaurice	Clare Drama Festival	Brendan Caldwell
1962	<i>Arsenic and Old Lace</i>	Joseph Kesserling	1939	United States of America	Celtic Players, New Ross	Gerald Donovan and Seamus Furlong	South Leinster Drama Festival	Gerda Redlich
1962	<i>The Post Office</i>	Rabindranath Tagore	---	India	Ashton Productions, Cork	Rachel Burrows	Cork Drama Festival	Stanley Illsley
1962	<i>My Three Angels</i>	Sam and Bella Spewack	1953	United States of America	Sligo Drama Circle	Lionel Gallagher	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Norman Rodway

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
1962	<i>Our Town</i>	Thornton Wilder	1938	United States of America	Newpoint Players, Newry	Seamus Mallon	Cavan Drama Festival	Norah Lever
1962	<i>The Queen and the Rebels</i>	Ugo Betti	---	Italy	Guinness Players, Dublin	---	Féile Luimní	Anew McMaster
1962	<i>Paddy, the Next Best Thing</i>	W. Gayer Mackey & Robert Ord	1920-	United Kingdom	St Aidan's Dramatic Guild, Enniscorthy	Harry Ringwood	Wexford Drama Festival	Tomás Mac Anna
1962	<i>The Late Edwina Black</i>	William Dinner & William Moran	---	United Kingdom	Ashton Productions, Cork	Harry J. Brogan	Cork Drama Festival	Stanley Illsley
1963	<i>The Seagull</i>	Anton Tchekov	1895	Russia	The Strand Players, Dublin	Ann O'Driscoll	Fr. Matthew Drama Festival, Dublin	Barry Cassin
1963	<i>The Devil's Bridge</i>	Henri Gheon	---	France	St Patrick's Dramatic Society, Ballyhaunis	Joe Greene	Ballyshannon Drama Festival	Vincent Dowling
1963	<i>The Miracle Worker</i>	William Gibson	1957	United States of America	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev. T. O'Reilly C.C.	Kildare Drama Festival	Nora Lever
1963	<i>Othello</i>	William Shakespeare	1603	United Kingdom	Belfast Drama Circle	Roy Alcorn	Newry Drama Festival	Nora Lever
1964	<i>And then there were none</i>	Agatha Christie	---	United Kingdom	The Phoenix Players, Kildare	Joe O'Connor	Eastern Regional Drama Finals, Navan	Des Perry
1964	<i>The Rough and Ready Lot</i>	Alun Owen	---	United Kingdom	Athlone Little Theatre Group	Aileen Coughlan	Southern Regional Drama Finals, Charleville	Graham Suter
1964	<i>The Shop at Sly Corner</i>	Edward Percy	1945	United Kingdom	The Rathangan Players	Paddy Tynan	All Ireland Rural Drama	Barry Cassin

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
							Festival, Loughrea	
1964	<i>Heda Gabler</i>	Henrik Ibsen	---	Norway	Guinness Players, Dublin	Paddy Ryan	Eastern Regional Drama Finals, Navan	Des Perry
1964	<i>The Rose and Crown</i>	J.B. Priestley	---	United Kingdom	Sundrive Players, Dublin	Michael Finnegan	Southern Regional Drama Finals, Charleville	Graham Suter
1964	<i>Ring Round the Moon</i>	Jean Anouilh	---	France	The Strand Players, Dublin	Ann O'Driscoll	Eastern Regional Drama Finals, Navan	Des Perry
1964	<i>Antigone</i>	Jean Anouilh	1946	France	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	North Western Regional Drama Finals, Bundoran	Ronnie Masterson
1965	<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller	1953	United States of America	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	North-Western Region	
1965	<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller	1953	United States of America	"57" Theatre Group Dublin	Betty Ann Norton	Southern Regional Final, Killarney	Lisle Jones
1965	<i>Montserrat</i>	Emmanuel Robies adapted from French by Lilliam Hellman	1949	France / United States of America	Guinness Players, Dublin	Paddy Ryan	Eastern Regional Final, Navan	Gerda Redlich
1965	<i>The Chairs</i>	Eugène Ionesco	1952	France / United States of America	Journeyman Theatre, Limerick	Biddy McGrath	Southern Regional Final, Killarney	Lisle Jones
1965	<i>The Aspern Papers</i>	Henry James	1959	United Kingdom	Ashton Productions,	Harry J. Bogan	Southern Regional Final,	Lisle Jones

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Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
					Cork		Killarney	
1966	<i>The One Day of the Year</i>	Alan Seymour	---	Australia	Limerick Studio Group	Kate O'Callaghan	Southern Regional Final, Killarney	---
1966	<i>The Proposal</i>	Anton Chekov	1890	Russia	Monaseed Drama Group, Co. Wexford	Rev. Michael O'Regan	Eastern Regional Final, Navan	---
1966	<i>A Man for All Seasons</i>	Robert Bolt	---	United Kingdom	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	North-Western Region	---
1966	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	William Shakespeare	---	United Kingdom	Guinness Players, Dublin	Paddy Ryan	Eastern Regional Final, Navan	---
1967	<i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	Anton Chekov	---	Russia	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P. V. O'Brien	---	---
1967	<i>Roots</i>	Arnold Wesker	1959	United Kingdom	Castlerea Drama Group	Michael O'Flynn	---	---
1967	<i>All My Sons</i>	Arthur Miller	1947	United States of America	The Guinness Players, Dublin	Paddy Ryan	---	---
1967	<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller	1953	United States of America	The Listowel Players	Nora Relihan and Dan Hannon	---	---
1967	<i>The Late Christopher Bean</i> (An adaptation of Rene Fauchos's comedy <i>Prenez Garde a la Peinture!</i> )	Emlyn Williams	1933	United Kingdom	Ashton Productions, Cork	Harry J. Brogan	---	---
1967	<i>Long Day's Journey into</i>	Eugene O'Neill	1956	United States of America	Abbey Theatre Tour	---	---	---

## Appendices

Year	Play	Playwright	First Produced	Country	Drama Group	Producer	Sponsoring Festival	Adjudicator
	<i>Night</i>							
1967	<i>The Room</i>	Harold Pinter	1957	United Kingdom	The Strand Players, Dublin	Peter O'Driscoll	---	---
1968	<i>Johnny Belinda</i>	Elmer Harris	1940	United States of America	Allen Little Theatre Group	Rev. P. Gaynor		
1968	<i>Ah, Wilderness</i>	Eugene O'Neill	1933	United States of America	Arklow Parish Drama Group	Tom and Carmel Honan	---	---
1968	<i>Come and go</i>	Samuel Beckett	1966	France / Ireland	The Plain Players, Moyvane, Kerry	T.C. Ó hÍceadha	---	---
1968	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>	Samuel Beckett	1953	France / Ireland	The Guinness Players, Dublin	Paddy Ryan		
1968	<i>Happy Journey</i>	Thornton Wilder		United States of America	The Plain Players, Moyvane, Kerry	T.C. Ó hÍceadha	---	---
1968	<i>Dinny and the Witches</i>	W. Gibson	1948 (revised 1961)	United States of America	Tuam Theatre Guild	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	---	---
1969	<i>Children in Uniform</i>	Christa Winslow adapted by Barbara Burnham	---	Germany	Sacred Heart College, Cork	Eileen Nolan and Chris Whittnal	---	---
1969	<i>Caucasian Chalk Circle</i>	Bertolt Brecht	1944	Germany	Strand Players, Dublin	Anne O'Driscoll	---	---
1969	<i>The Glass Menagerie</i>	Tennessee Williams	1945	United States of America	Sligo Drama Circle	Liam McKinney	---	---
1969	<i>Our Town</i>	Thornton Wilder	1938	United States of America	Claremorris Players	Rev. P.V. O'Brien	---	---