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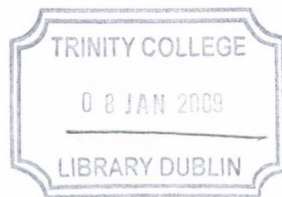
Constructions of History and Memory in the Abbey

2004 Centenary

Holly Maples

A thesis submitted to the School of Drama at the University of Dublin,
Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

2008



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Declaration

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*For my patient parents
Jean and Gary Maples*

Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to position the events of the 2004 centenary of the Irish National Theatre Society, known as *abbeyonehundred*, within the context of Irish institutional and cultural history. Interdisciplinary in scope, this thesis investigates the conflicting aims and policies of the public, the press, the government and its cultural institutions in regards to not only stage representations of national identity, but also concerns over public funding and the arts that affect the contemporary artistic community in Ireland today. Rather than study the Abbey apart from other cultural institutions, I engage with the discourse of institutional amnesia common among companies in periods of crisis. Though focusing primarily on the Irish National Theatre Society, I draw comparisons between events at the Abbey in 2004 with controversies from other institutions such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National Concert Hall in Ireland, as well as the Royal Opera House and Royal National Theatre in the United Kingdom, to provide a broader view of issues systemic to large, cultural arts organizations. As my thesis argues, the mythmaking surrounding the Irish National Theatre Society as a unique and separate force amongst Irish institutions is reinforced by the Abbey's commemorative practice and has been used as a validation of the company's survival amongst frequent financial and artistic crises. However, the government's relationship to arts funding and the Irish emphasis on culture for national significance remain equally noteworthy and intertwined with the challenges facing the Abbey in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

My research scrutinizes the Abbey's events of 2004 through the methodological lens of cultural studies and semiotics. Each chapter explores different social

manifestations of the controversy from organizational issues such as finance and public policy, to more symbolic issues of the representation of Irishness on the national stage and the shaping of collective memory through commemoration. The chapters in the thesis include an examination of commemoration in the Irish context, the politics of the representation of cultural memory for the Abbey Theatre, debates over the theatre's architecture, its touring practice and financial policies, which all were fodder for criticism and public attack during the 2004 season. By contextualizing the events which developed during *abbeyonehundred* through an examination of these different areas, I maintain that the controversies which the Abbey became embedded in during its centenary reveal artistic and managerial shortcomings of a particular moment in the Abbey's history, but also raise deep-seated structural and ideological concerns experienced by many Irish cultural institutions throughout the history of the Irish Republic. By examining contemporary arts policies and practice in the Irish Republic, the country's economic, moral and cultural life in the early twenty-first century, as well as contemporary anxiety over issues of identity politics and public representations of "Irishness", the events of *abbeyonehundred* gain form and, indeed, understanding often overlooked in the documentation of the Abbey Theatre's history.

Note on Sources

Due to the challenge of working with a contemporary subject of such sensitivity, I have been greatly reliant on personal interviews, archival sources from auxiliary institutions such as government materials provided through the Freedom of Information Act from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery and National Library, as well as heavily relying on media sources for my research. The controversial nature of *abbeyonehundred* has caused the Abbey Theatre to withhold any meeting notes, box office receipts, or other planning materials on *abbeyonehundred* from public researchers. Nevertheless, due to the generosity of Jocelyn Clarke, Helen O'Donoghue, Ben Barnes and Sharon Murphy, I have been able to look at some private archival documents from several of the centenary, and its auxiliary exhibition, organizers who have greatly influenced my research. Moreover, due to the ephemeral nature of performance, the media remains an important body of evidence for my research, as the extreme amount of media coverage, both in Ireland and abroad, during the centenary deeply affected those working from within the company and the Abbey Board during the centenary –especially by September of 2004 when news of the financial troubles of the Abbey were in the press on a daily basis – and the later government response to the restructuring of the Irish National Theatre in 2005.

The media sources also offer valuable evidence on how the Abbey Theatre's history, legacy, and centenary was constructed and “spun” by the press for the public's consumption. According to many of my interviewees, the press not only escalated a large amount of the controversy for the company, but they also created a climate of both paranoia and rumor around the Abbey Theatre when the company itself began to shut its doors of information to the public in the autumn of 2004. However, due to the large volume of media coverage on the Abbey during 2004-5, I have only included in my bibliography those that I cite in the thesis. I have excluded media commentary that are repetitive or those that do not raise any new issues on the centenary, the company's controversy, or the Abbey's programming.

In my research, I have been especially influenced by the private interviews I conducted with many of the key players behind *abbeyonehundred*. However, interviews, though extremely compelling to the researcher, are not to be taken in the same light as

documentary evidence. Interviews offer neither conclusive nor objective evidence on events; they are offered by individuals whose own memories and reflections from historic events – especially one as contentious as *abbeyonehundred* – are both fragmented and biased. Therefore, the interviews in this study are used to draw light on the entire sequence of events and personal sentiment felt by some of the key players of the centenary. The interviews are also used to offer alternative evidence and reflections to those given in both the local and international media as well as those uncovered in the official investigations carried out by the Joint and Select Committee on Arts, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Moreover, due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, the potentially libelous content uncovered, and the tight community working within the professional theatre in Ireland, much of the information gleaned from these interviews will not be directly quoted and the interviewee will remain confidential to protect my sources; I will also not include the transcription of these interviews in the appendices for the same reason.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed herein are those of the author and should not be construed as those of the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, the University of Dublin, or any of its employees or agents. Moreover, views expressed in interviews by former members of the Abbey Theatre staff reflect the personal opinions of individuals recounting highly difficult events, and therefore do not necessarily reflect the views of the author of this thesis, and, where factual in nature, should not necessarily be presumed accurate.

"The past is myself, my own history, the seed of my present thoughts, the mould of my present disposition"

-Robert Louis Stevenson

"Because here the outer reaches of memory are the limits of history. Earlier there was nothing, earlier does not exist. History is what is remembered."

-Ryszard Kapuściński

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INTRODUCTION

The end of the nineteenth and beginning decades of the twentieth century witnessed radical changes to Irish society. The emergence of a cultural renaissance in the late nineteenth century, known as the Celtic Revival, saw the foundation of numerous community led societies such as the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletics Association, while the early twentieth century witnessed major events of political and social upheaval such as the First World War, the Easter Rising, the foundation of the Republic and the subsequent Irish Civil War. The richness and diversity of fin-de-siècle Dublin assisted in shaping the country's notion of Irishness for the century to come. One hundred years on, the Irish Republic has experienced equally radical changes to its economic, political and civic life affecting communal understandings of Irish identity and the nation itself. Alongside these transformations, a number of commemorative events have occurred honoring seminal events in Irish cultural and national history. Numerous cultural, political, institutional and individual anniversaries have been celebrated making the last twenty years central to public performances of past and future representations of Irishness.

The centenary of the Irish National Theatre Society in 2004—known as *abbeyonehundred*—was no small part of the wave of commemoration which hit the Republic in recent years. With their boast of reaching out to “over one million people in 2004”, the company began their centenary with an ambitious plan of lavish theatrical events at home and abroad, an education and writer's initiative, and fundraising ventures

“to celebrate the first one hundred years and to look forward to the next.”¹ The celebration of the Abbey’s hundredth anniversary, which began so optimistically, however, ended with a financial deficit of two million euros for the centenary year alone.² The financial crisis led to an overhaul of almost the entire production staff including the Artistic and Financial Directors and the disbandment of the Abbey Board. In December of 2005, the private company begun in 1904, National Theatre Society Limited, was disbanded and a new company was formed with closer ties to the Irish government, the Abbey Theatre-Amharclann Náisiúnta na hÉireann.³ The financial crisis, however, was only one element of controversy during the centenary year. The company was criticized for the lack of new writing or representation of women in its conservative programming, and for its emphasis on international rather than national touring. The remit of the Abbey Theatre as a house for the performance of Irish identity and new Irish writing was also brought into question. While debates unfolded in 2004 over the artistic and financial crisis, many commentators called into question the very nature, or *need*, for a national theatre in twenty-first century Ireland.

For some, the controversy that arose during *abbeyonehundred* was a microcosm of the Abbey’s controversial hundred-year history. The conflict over the company’s relationship with its audience, the Abbey’s faulty theatre building, the centenary’s conservative repertoire, and unstable finances were all fitting tributes to the “mythmaking” that has been created and fostered by the company and its critics over the past century. As Diarmuid O’Brien irreverently notes in the *New Hibernia Review*:

¹ “*Abbeyonehundred Programme*,” Abbey Theatre (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 2004), 7.

² The overall debt of the company was €5 Million.

³ For further insight into the government investigation and proceedings of the Abbey financial crisis see Appendix F: Committee of Public Accounts, Vol. 95, Thursday, 24 November 2005.

Whatever about being Ireland's vanguard for the theatrical arts, the Abbey has rarely failed to provide controversy and high melodrama off the stage—and what better way to recognize one hundred years of unmerciful rows than with a gloriously unmerciful row? This is the Abbey after all, and while we did not quite get the riots and baton charges that Synge and O' Casey laid on in the early days, we did get a reprise of the Abbey's history that went beyond packaged nostalgia and lavishly bound centenary brochures.⁴

O'Brien, like many commentators on the Abbey, likened the current events back to events of the company's founding years culminating in the *Playboy* and *Plough* riots. However, the multifaceted factors behind the events of *abbeyonehundred* more fittingly reflect recent financial and institutional difficulties of the company from the 1980s and 1990s. Struggles for funding in the Arts have occurred since the foundation of the Republic in institutions such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Concert Hall, and more recently, the Wexford Opera,⁵ while concerns over the evolution of Irish identity during the recent period of economic and social change remains a heated and contested topic within all areas of Irish social life.

The administrative and financial difficulties found within national cultural institutions raise fundamental concerns over the function and management of Arts organizations in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The position of the Irish National Theatre Society as a National Cultural Institution remains a contested one amongst scholars of the Abbey. Until the structural changes of 2005, the Abbey Theatre was still a

⁴ Diarmuid O'Brien, "The Fight of the Centenary: Irish Theatre in 2004," *New Hibernia Review*, 9, no. 3 (2005): 137-143.

⁵ In July of 2007 at the Wexford Festival Opera, a crisis enveloped between the Festival's Chief Executive, Michael Hunt, and the Festival's Board of Directors. After the move for Hunt's resignation by the Festival Trust, the Chief Executive took the Festival to court causing a greater rift between the Board Members and the Festival's Chief Executive. According to an *Irish Times* article on the subject, controversies between the board members and artistic directors of the Wexford Opera, National Chamber Choir, National Youth Orchestra and the Abbey Theatre in recent years have provoked questions "about why so many major arts organisations have gone through or are going through such crises. The Arts Council has obvious concerns in this area, and last year published in print and electronic form 'A practical guide for board members of arts organisations' " (Michael Dervan, "The Rumbles in the Arts Jungle," *Irish Times* 2007).

private shareholding company held by guarantee. However, I would argue that the precarious position the Abbey had with its governmental funding body, unique amongst Irish National Cultural Institutions, does not detract from its relationship with the government or the public as a national cultural institution.⁶ In 1998, Patrick Mason, Artistic Director for the Abbey Theatre from 1994-2000, further affirmed that

Through [an] accident of history the Society is the only National Cultural Institution funded by the Arts Council rather than directly through the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. But this does not alter its status in any way, or take away from the responsibilities explicit in that status.⁷

Moreover, other Irish cultural institutions also hold unique relationships with the government of their kind. The National Concert Hall and the Irish Museum of Modern Art are “semi-state institutions” as they have their own Board of Directors, while the Chester Beatty Library, established by the will of Chester Beatty, is technically a charitable institution.⁸ In recent years, cultural institutions have been under public scrutiny due to systemic structural and management controversies. The widespread manifestation of financial, architectural and cultural issues from within Irish national

⁶ The Irish National Theatre was the first institution of its kind to receive a state subsidy by the Irish Government in 1926 and received funding straight from the government until the transformation of the Arts Council in 1974. (See: Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities*) In 1996, the Abbey Theatre was recognized by Minister Higgins as an Irish National Cultural Institutions. In the National Cultural Institutions Act of 1997, the Artistic Director of the Abbey was granted a seat on the Council of National Cultural Institutions and the Abbey Theatre joined with other national organisations such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Library, the National Gallery, the National Archives, the National Concert Hall Company, the Chester Beatty Library, the Arts Council, the Heritage Council and the National Museum of Ireland. Moreover, other national cultural institutions also have precarious relationships between themselves and the government. In an Irish Times article on the peculiar nature of members of the NCI, Arminta Wallace argues that, “To begin with, the presence of ‘national’ in the name of an organisation is an unreliable indicator of the organisation’s official status. As is its absence. The National Concert Hall and the National Archives of Ireland sit at very different ends of a sliding scale of state involvement and control. The NCH is a semi-state organisation with its own board of directors; the archives’ responsibility for official papers marries it intimately, for better or for worse, to the relevant government departments.” (Arminta Wallace, “Standing on Shaky Ground,” *Irish Times*, 23 February 2004.)

⁷ Patrick Mason, “Art and Culture: A Statement of Policy for the National Theatre Society Limited 1998 to 2000,” (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 1998).

⁸ Wallace, “Standing on Shaky Ground.”

cultural institutions illustrates that “controversy and high melodrama off the stage”⁹ are not restricted to the Irish National Theatre Society. An examination of the history of the Abbey Theatre within social, political and artistic struggles of the Arts in Ireland, I contend, demystifies the company from one famous as a harbinger of controversy, to a theatre that manifests the wider cultural and political systems existing within many Irish cultural institutions in contemporary Ireland.

The purpose of this thesis is to position the events of the 2004 centenary of the Irish National Theatre Society, known as *abbeyonehundred*, within the context of Irish institutional and cultural history. Interdisciplinary in scope, this thesis investigates the conflicting aims and policies of the public, the press, the government and its cultural institutions in regards to not only stage representations of national identity, but also concerns over public funding and the arts that affect the contemporary artistic community in Ireland today. Rather than study the Abbey apart from other cultural institutions, I engage with the discourse of institutional amnesia common among companies in periods of crisis. Though focusing primarily on the Irish National Theatre Society, I draw comparisons between events at the Abbey in 2004 with controversies from other institutions such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National Concert Hall in Ireland, as well as the Royal Opera House and Royal National Theatre in the United Kingdom, to provide a broader view of issues systemic to large, cultural arts organizations. As my thesis argues, the mythmaking surrounding the Irish National Theatre Society as a unique and separate force amongst Irish institutions is reinforced by the Abbey’s commemorative practice and has been used as a validation of the company’s survival amongst frequent financial and artistic crises. However, the government’s

⁹ Ibid.

relationship to arts funding and the Irish emphasis on culture for national significance remain equally noteworthy and intertwined with the challenges facing the Abbey in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

My research scrutinizes the Abbey's events of 2004 through the methodological lens of cultural studies and semiotics. Each chapter explores different social manifestations of the controversy from organizational issues such as finance and public policy, to more symbolic issues of the representation of Irishness on the national stage and the shaping of collective memory through commemoration. The chapters in the thesis include an examination of commemoration in the Irish context, the politics of the representation of cultural memory for the Abbey Theatre, debates over the theatre's architecture, its touring practice and financial policies, which all were fodder for criticism and public attack during the 2004 season. By contextualizing the events which developed during *abbeyonehundred* through an examination of these different areas, I maintain that the controversies which the Abbey became embedded in during its centenary reveal artistic and managerial shortcomings of a particular moment in the Abbey's history, but also raise deep-seated structural and ideological concerns experienced by many Irish cultural institutions throughout the history of the Irish Republic. By examining contemporary arts policies and practice in the Irish Republic, the country's economic, moral and cultural life in the early twenty-first century, as well as contemporary anxiety over issues of identity politics and public representations of "Irishness", the events of *abbeyonehundred* gain form and, indeed, understanding often overlooked in the documentation of the Abbey Theatre's history.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY: The Fickleness of History

Individual memories remain embedded in our consciousness. They are inherently personal and self evident. For those who went through traumatic events in history, the memories of them do not disappear with time, but may evolve, fade or re-emerge, depending on the individual. However, while the memory of the *individual* is born through experience, *collective* memory is carefully sculpted. It becomes absorbed into the human consciousness through strategic events, performances or written records; it is what a community “remembers” as history. It is selective and constructed. The performance of collective memory presents the past to the present; it emerges and re-emerges with every new generation. Nevertheless, there are many events that, for reasons beyond our understanding, do not enter the national – or global – consciousness. In the Irish context, events such as the Famine, or the Easter Rising of 1916, enter collective memory and aid in the way Irish society defines itself through past tragedies, while other events become lost, forgotten, or pushed outside of history. The Irish participation in the Battle of the Somme is one of many such events only now being reintroduced into the national consciousness of the Irish Republic.¹⁰ This erasure of some – and fixation on other – events continues to surround the force of collective memory within society. In Ireland of the twenty-first century, the terrain of collective memory remains fraught with tensions of a society re-negotiating its own identity in the midst of radical change.

The history of the Abbey Theatre has been caught up in a narrative of struggle, discord and identity politics cultivated by the company’s founders, William Butler Yeats

¹⁰ The Irish contribution to the Battle of the Somme was consciously erased from the commemorative practice soon after the formation of the Irish Republic in 1922. It was only in the 2007 commemorative events that occurred in Europe that the Irish government once again consented to honor its contribution to the battle. See Chapter One for a more detailed investigation of the commemorative history of the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising.

and Lady Augusta Gregory. The early years are a virtual melodrama of fighting against impossible odds and valiant displays of artistic, financial and national struggle. For scholars this early period has provided continuous fodder for scrutiny over tension between the company and the public's disparate aims for the presentation and *purpose* of a national theatre in Ireland. Much of the narrative of controversy surrounding these formative years centre on events such as the public discord over John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907 and the later riots occurring at the premiere of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. Yeats created a journal, the *Arrow* to address some of the hostile criticism launched against the company in the early years.¹¹ The extensive documentation from this period has both fostered the company's reputation and hindered its later attempts to break with the past. In this way, the past has become both a defining and confining force behind the company's actions throughout its history making it impossible for the company to escape its past. For the Abbey Theatre: "the Past is Myself."

The past of the Abbey Theatre however, like most chronicles of history, is constructed, selected, and created. Events such as the *Playboy* and *Plough* riots are not only central to the collective memory surrounding the Irish National Theatre Society, they eclipse other events of the theatre company's hundred years' history. The recent events of the centenary celebration are already being lost within the current Abbey Company's strategic separation of itself from *abbeyonehundred* following a tradition well known to the Abbey of erasing more recent controversies through a sweeping denial of their impact upon the future. Though the company and the public hold adherently to memories of the struggles of the early Abbey Theatre (from the commencement of the

¹¹ See: W. B. Yeats, *The Arrow* (Irish National Theatre Society: Dublin: 1906-1939).

Irish Literary Society in 1899 to the death of William Butler Yeats in 1939), the Artistic and Theatre Directors of the Abbey Theatre have consistently attempted to ignore the struggles of their more recent predecessors in order to erase fiscal and artistic embarrassment. Such practice is not uncommon in theatre companies like the Abbey; nevertheless, an examination of the Abbey's tradition of erasure throughout the twentieth century comes to the heart of the events occurring in *abbeyonehundred* and its aftermath.

Societal Change and the Celtic Tiger Economy

Some of the issues that developed over *abbeyonehundred* are inherent in the conservatism of the Abbey Theatre under the directorship of Ben Barnes, whereas others draw light upon greater concerns of contemporary Ireland and the changing perceptions of gender, economic, moral and religious value systems, multiculturalism, nationalism and Irishness as witnessed in the past 15 years of Irish society. The Abbey Centenary, like so many other commemorative events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, remained deeply entrenched within the political and cultural growing pains of Celtic Tiger Ireland. While the economic boom of the past two decades has radically transformed Irish society, many of the national institutions developed in the early years of the Republic have failed to transform their own infrastructure as radically. This failure has created a conflict within the institutions themselves, as well as in relation to the public sphere.

Within the last few decades, Ireland has seen significant changes in its landscape and people due to the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger.¹² The Celtic Tiger was

¹² During the boom of the 1990s, the Irish economy transformed from being ranked 22nd per capita among the world's industrial nations in 1993, to 8th in 1999. (Patrick Honhan & Brendan Walsh, "Catching Up with the Irish Hare," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 1:2002.)

first used by the American stock brokerage firm, Morgan Stanley in 1994 to describe the rapid economic growth in the Irish Republic. The “Celtic Tiger” era had a downturn of the Irish economy in 2001 due to a recession in the United States market which impacted the foreign business working in Ireland, creating a short period viewed as the “end of the Celtic Tiger” by some public commentators, however, for the purpose of this thesis, the Celtic Tiger will be used to refer from the period from 1992 to the present. Despite the fact that the economic growth from the period of 2001-2007 has not been as radical a shift as that which occurred in the 1990s, the Irish economy has continued to strengthen since the brief dip in the Irish economy during early 2001.¹³ Moreover, many political, economic, media and scholarly sources continue to use the term “Celtic Tiger” to describe the current economic and social climate. The radical changes to social life within the Irish Republic since the original economic boom of the 1990s also continue to effect Irish society into the twenty-first century.¹⁴

Ireland joined the European Union and gained considerable subsidies to increase Irish productive power. Unfortunately, during the 1970s the country lacked the production force to attract global businesses to increase industry on the island. After a

¹³ According to the Department of Finance Monthly Report of January, 2007, the GDP growth for 2001 was 6.0%, down from the GDP growth rate of 9.9% in 2000, and the GNP saw a decrease from 10.1% in 2000 to 3.8% by 2001 indicating a downturn in the economy for 2001. (website: <http://www.briancowen.com/viewpda.asp?DocID=2914&StartDate=1+January+2007>) However, in 2005, the GNP was up to 4.9%. And according to the CSO Quarterly National Accounts Data for 2007, though not experiencing as high a growth rate as in 2000, the GNP increased by 6.4% and the GDP by 7.5% in that year. Both remain well above the European Union average for 2006 and 2007 indicating the strength of the Irish economy since 2004 (cited in Department of Finance Monthly Reports, September 2007, website: <http://www.briancowen.com/documents/publications/meb2007/September07.pdf>).

¹⁴ Due to a global mortgage crisis effecting the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe in 2008, the ESRI has recently announced a perception that the economic advances of the “Celtic Tiger” will end in 2008. In December, 2007, the publication of the Quarterly Economic Commentary by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), announced that the growth rate of 2008 was expected to be the lowest since 1992. (Paul Tansey and Martin Wall, “Growth rate in 2008 to be lowest in 16 years – ESRI,” *Irish Times*, 20 December, 2007). url: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2007/1220/1197997070745.html> (website accessed: 20 June, 2008).

concerted effort on the part of the Irish government and local industries, the country experienced an industrial boom. The domestic, industrial and agricultural expansion was aided by a government policy of low corporate taxation¹⁵ to encourage foreign businesses to come to Irish shores.¹⁶ Since 1987, Ireland encouraged an economic and international policy of increasing globalized economic structures. According to a recent study by the Irish IDA, Ireland's economic growth rate in the past few years has consistently been one of the highest in Europe, with a 4.6% GDP in 2006.¹⁷ Ireland was greatly dependent upon businesses from the U.S.A. for its growth throughout the 1990s.

Since the 1980s, there have been a number of dramatic changes in Irish social life. The resurgence of the economic boom and the establishment of the European Union brought increasing numbers of immigrants, migrant workers and refugees to Irish shores as well as the steady decrease of Irish emigration to the United Kingdom and America. The 1990s to 2000s witnessed a transformation in the Irish social structure, family life and gender relations.¹⁸ These changes to the social fabric of Irish life have given rise to a

¹⁵ The Irish corporate taxation policy of 12.5% was lower than any other taxation scheme across Europe, adding a major incentive for foreign companies, especially IT start-up companies, to base their businesses in Ireland. (Patrick Honohan & Brendan Walsh, "Catching Up with the Irish Hare," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 1:2002). Also see: Brian Nolan, Philip J. O'Connell & Christopher T. Whelan, eds., *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*. (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration: 2000)

¹⁶ Since the 1990s, several large American corporations have established their European headquarters in Ireland including such IT companies as Dell and Google, offering a growth in the IT and other industries in the Republic. The U.S. IT Corporations were seeking to invest in Europe prior to unification and were attracted to Ireland by the government's liberal company taxation politics. (Sean O Riain & Philip J. O'Connell, "The Role of the State in Growth and Welfare," in Brian Nolan, Philip J. O'Connell & Christopher T. Whelan, eds., *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration: 2000, 310-339: 320). Also see: Cormac Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road: the Irish Economy Since the 1920s*, Manchester University Press: Manchester: 1997. For another valuable study on the development of the Irish economy and its transition into the economic boom period, see: Adrian Redmond, *That was Then, This is Now: Change in Ireland, 1949-1999*, (Stationary Office, Dublin: 2000),

¹⁷ See ESRI, "Quarterly Economic Commentary," (Brussels: 2005). "Ireland Vital Statistics 2006," ed. Wall Street Journal (Dublin: IDA Ireland, 2006).

¹⁸ Brian Nolan, Philip J. O'Connell & Christopher T. Whelan, eds., *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*. (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration: 2000).

number of debates over social inclusion, multiculturalism, globalisation and gender politics in Ireland. Though they have often appeared as positive, there have also been negative effects, such outbreaks of racial prejudice and the continuation of gender imbalance in the home and workplace.¹⁹ Moreover, despite the rapid period of change amongst Irish society, institutional change has been slow to transform, causing greater tension between the Irish institutions and their public since the early 1990s.

The boom in the Irish economy has created radical changes to Ireland's social structure. Peadar Kirby states that, "It is widely claimed that, in contrast to the past, Ireland has recently become a pluralist society, with more egalitarian values, a more international outlook, a fuller and more complex sense of its own history, and a booming economy which has led to a modern prosperous society."²⁰ As Kirby contends, the radical

¹⁹ Despite the politics of inclusion promoted by the Fianna Fáil Government and Irish liberals, the integration of recent immigrants, along with the relationship between the Irish settled and traveller communities, has fostered uneasy relations between these diverse social groups. The increasing numbers of asylum seekers and migrant workers into Ireland during the early 2000s caused a change of sentiment towards immigration in the Republic. According to the *Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform*, "The scale of legal immigration into Ireland in recent years is evidenced in the increase in the number of legally resident non-EEA nationals (from 29,000 in 1999 to 93,500 in 2002)," the study made in 2003, recognized the difficulties caused by such a dramatic increase in immigration over a three year period, as it went on to state, "Ireland has become a modern and thriving economy, and we are now experiencing the forces of migration in a new way, challenging long-held certainties and assumptions." (*Strategy Statements: 2003-2005: 60-65*) In January, 2003, a Supreme Court ruling removed the right to permanent residence for non-national parents of Irish-born children and, in 2004, the Irish government proposed a "citizenship referendum" removing the rites of citizenship for children born in the Irish Republic of non-nationals. (Martin Ruhs, "Ireland: A Crash Course in Immigration Policy," *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS)*, Oxford University: 2004). 2006 witnessed growing tensions between the Republic and its immigrant communities; immigration was closed to the Chinese community, and included the entrance of Chinese students to the country, while the countries soon to be joined to the European Union – Romania and Bulgaria – had their employment rights restricted in Ireland. Meanwhile, the Irish Traveller population continue to face discrimination in Irish society. A study in the late 1990s by Robert Walsh established that Irish Travellers found their "distinct ethnic status was not recognised or respected [by the settled Irish community] and that this also caused tension." (David Walsh, "Policing Pluralism," in *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland*, ed. Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O'Connell (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), 168). In general, despite Mary McAleese's plea for tolerance and inclusion, current relations between the diverse communities in Ireland remain strained and will take a longer period of transition to become fully integrated than optimistically noted by the Irish government.

²⁰ Peadar Kirby, "Contesting Pedigrees of the Celtic Tiger," in *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, ed. Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin Peadar Kirby (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 24.

transformation in the Republic includes a reshaping of the relationship between Ireland's and Britain's economic and trade policies. With the furthering of the peace process in Northern Ireland, this new rapport between Ireland and its island neighbour includes new trade relationships as well as cross-border projects with Northern Ireland. These developments are significant and reflect the long-term policy of the Irish Republic to distance itself from the violence occurring in Northern Ireland from the 1970s to the late 1980s. Another change that has radically affected — and some would say threatened — Irish national identity has been the shift from mass emigration to immigration in the Republic. The increase in the size of the Irish job market and the easing of immigration policies within the European Union have caused the emergence of a multi-ethnic community throughout Ireland, and particularly in Dublin. The new immigrants have caused multiple shifts in the way the Irish perceive their own identity and the nation itself. For a country that has never had a significant intake of immigrants in the past, an increase in their numbers has made it all the more difficult to integrate them within the community.²¹ Women have also had a changing role in the new Irish economy; there have been major shifts in gender relations, and these have caused shifts in the hegemonic structure.²² Recent studies have proved that more women are advancing in the work place and obtaining higher degrees than their male counterparts in the twenty-first century. The rise of women in society has caused some to believe that masculine identity is under threat in the contemporary Irish social order.

²¹ Brian Nolan, Philip J. O'Connell & Christopher T. Whelan, eds., *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality*. (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration: 2000).

²² For insight into the changes in the Irish family structure during the twentieth century see: Finola Kennedy's *Cottage to Creche: Family Change in Ireland* (Institute of Public Administration, Dublin: 2001). Kennedy describes how the changing economic factors of the 1970s, 80s and 90s caused a social revolution from within the Irish family and especially in terms of gender relations.

The recent shifts in power structures of the Irish landscape have also influenced the Irish perception of their past. As will be discussed in detail within this thesis, the Irish commemorative tradition has increased in recent years as a re-affirmation of Irish identity and national pride. However, revisionist history has also been on the rise since the 1990s, offering the space for a re-evaluation of Irish history and nationalism. Contemporary academic and mainstream debates over colonial and postcolonial Ireland, a re-evaluation of Ireland's neutrality in relation to international policies, public revelations of abuse cases involving the Catholic Church in the twentieth century, and a re-investigation of Irish social life in juxtaposition with the Irish governmental and religious institutions have influenced how the Irish perceive their past as well as their future in contemporary Ireland.²³

Collective Memory and the Nation: A Methodology of Being

Central to my methodology is the construction of nationalism, history and memory in the performance of commemoration. Like the nation, collective memory is formed through its orientation to its common past. Culture and cultural signifiers such as the theatre aid in the formation of the nation, while all of these factors are tied to the construction of history and memory by the community. The rise of cultural nationalism and the construction of collective identity in Ireland in the late nineteenth century greatly influenced the Irish National Theatre Society's founders, and the way the Abbey Theatre

²³ Geraldine Moore, "Colonialism and the Celtic Tiger: Legacies of History and the Quest for Vision," in *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, ed. Luke Gibbons, Michael Cronin and Peadar Kirby (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 111-12. For a study of the changes in perceptions of the Catholic Church in Ireland see: T. Inglis, *The Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, (University College Dublin Press, Dublin: 1999), also see Dermot Keough's seminal study of the changes in Irish Society including the radical transformations of Irish social, economic and moral life since the 1990s, *Twentieth-century Ireland: Nation and State*. Revised ed. (London: Gill and Macmillan, 2005).

was analysed by itself, by scholars and by its public in Ireland over the past century. Commemoration practice illustrates how the past is used by the present to document contemporary concerns and anxieties about where the nation is heading, as well as what is significant or, in fact, “unique” in the representation of the national character. During the past decade, the easy exchange of people across Europe caused by the European Union labor policies has created anxiety amongst many European nations over the preservation of their national character.

Ernest Renan’s linkage of national identity and the construction of collective memory and history remains central to this thesis. In his seminal essay, “What is a Nation,” first delivered as a lecture in 1882, Renan bases his argument for a symbolic understanding of national identity by declaring that: “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.”²⁴ Renan stresses the importance of the fusion of the past and the present in the formation of the nation. The historical memories of a common heritage help to foster national sentiment and national identity among a community. For Renan,

The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.²⁵

Renan’s use of the nation as a “cult of the ancestors,” is fundamental for a study of how national identity is dependent on collective memory for its understanding. Rituals, such as the commemoration of the Easter Rising, then, gain shape and force beyond their memorial to the past. The future is shaped by such collective imaginings of past heroes, forging new strength in understandings of Irishness.

²⁴ Ernest Renan, “What Is a Nation?” in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 52-54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 53.

Whereas Renan presents the almost mystical, emotional association that nationalism presses upon its community, Ernest Gellner stresses that nationalist dogma influences the way the state is perceived by its public. His book, *Nations and Nationalism*, defines the State as linked to the nation, but not contingent upon it for the State's existence. According to Gellner, it is a misconception of nationalist theory that the State owes its existence to the nation. As Gellner posits, it is a part of the mythmaking of nationalism that the State's dependency on national thought and nationalist dogma is essential for the formation of the State: "nationalism holds that they were destined for each other; that either without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy."²⁶ Gellner subverts the assumption that national identity is essential for the configuration of social and cultural formation. He stresses the need to interrogate common assumptions of the formation of culture and national identity hitherto conceived in nationalist theory. As Gellner illustrates, the commemorative practice of contemporary Ireland establishes the "predestined" trajectory of Irish independence. As I argue in Chapter One, the Fianna Fáil government's construction of its history through commemorative performance aimed to illustrate Celtic Tiger Irish society's abundance as the direct result of past struggles and events of colonial Irish history. Indeed, Mary McAleese claimed – quite without irony – that the resistance to colonial rule and the revolutionary activity of the Easter Rising martyrs and others were made so that later generations could enjoy the economic boom of the late 1990s. In this context, the Abbey Theatre's own mythmaking can be seen as a part of the greater tradition of Gellnerian nationalist practice.

While Gellner asserts the fabrication of nationalist history, John Breuilly, in his book *Nationalism and the State*, defines the "nationalist argument" in terms of its

²⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 6-7.

political connotations. His definition echoes arguments made by the Abbey Theatre company and other Irish cultural and academic debates found at the beginning of the twentieth century. Breuilley asserts that the “nationalist argument” is built on three fundamental claims: a nation exists with a unique and “peculiar” character, its interests and values take priority over all others, and the nation must be independent (normally requiring the attainment of absolute political sovereignty, separate from any other national community).²⁷ Though Breuilley’s study remains fundamentally a study of “political movements which seek to gain or exercise state power and justify their objectives in terms of nationalist doctrine,”²⁸ his work offers much insight into cultural manifestations of nationalism as well as politically-driven aims. National culture remains interwoven with political practice, and aids in building the imaginings of a “unique” national character worthy of its own political independence.

Benedict Anderson’s seminal work, *Imagined Communities* has become one of the most influential scholarly works on nationalism and national identity since its publication in the mid-1980s. According to Anderson, the nation is an “imagined community,” formed by its members through communal imaginings on their collective understanding of their own identity as members of a national body. Anderson draws upon Gellner, but distinguishes his definition of the imagined identity-building practice as not a negative or “false” invention as Gellner stressed, but rather a creative device that exists in all communities. As Anderson states, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are

²⁷ John Breuilley, *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

imagined.”²⁹ In this way, the construction of national identity is not to be seen as a “fabrication”, but rather a powerful force of collective *imagining*, neither *false* nor *true*, which is an aspect of universal human behavior.³⁰ Anderson emphasizes the national imaginings as a “community” due to the fact that the “nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”³¹ Moreover, it is the community building device that gives the nation its concreteness. It is through a sense of fraternity that national images take form and spread.

Where Anderson stresses how the community is imagined and formed through the influence of print culture, Richard Handler illustrates the “boundedness” of nationalism. In his work, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Handler examines the interconnection between politics, culture and nationalism in contemporary Quebec. For Handler, “Nationalism is an ideology about individuated being. It is an ideology concerned with boundedness, continuity, and homogeneity encompassing diversity.”³² Individuals are “bounded” by space and time, by physical borders and by communal allegiance. Handler posits that despite diversity of ethnicity, religion and other identity-forming devices within a nation, no matter how much individuals differ, they “share essential attributes that constitute their national identity; sameness overrides difference.”³³ Unlike Anderson, Handler emphasizes the individual actor’s agency in developing communal national identity. Through an individual’s creativity, “which is the imposition of one’s choices on the physical and social world,” the citizen establishes a

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, eds. E. George Marcus and James Clifford, *New Directions in Anthropological Writing: History, Poetics, Cultural Criticism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 6-8.

³³ *Ibid.*

bond between the self and the “products resulting from creative activity.”³⁴ These products produce national allegiance and culture. Through Handler’s notion of how individuals shape a society, the Abbey Theatre’s individual creations reflecting national identity aid in the production of the nation for themselves and their public.

COMMEMORATION: Remembrance and Forgetting

Commemoration and centennial celebrations aid in the construction of the past to reinstate and re-inscribe cultural identity and memory upon the collective body of the nation. By looking at how different groups have used commemoration during their own periods of transition, I contend that commemoration is a symptom of – and an argument for – a society’s evolution and manufacturing of collective memory throughout history. Societies employ public rituals to reinstate their own sense of communal self worth; public performances are designed to bind a group by the display of loyalty, identity, struggle and achievement.³⁵ The commemoration of the Abbey Theatre in 2004 is both a construction of the theatre company itself for the Irish nation and Irish theatrical circles, while also continuing a tradition among Irish commemorative practice of allying national

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Though the idea of a nation-state has been contested in recent years of globalization, I believe that communal imaginings of national identity remain a strong part of social understandings of culture and identity. Though the factors behind national identity become increasingly complex, they remain iconic within national communities. The national theorist, Miroslav Hroch provides a good definition of the complicated factors behind what constitutes a nation or a national community in his essay, "From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe," in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (New York and London: Verso, 1996). For Hroch, the nation is defined as a significant “social group” brought together through a combination of multiple factors which influence its understanding of itself as a national body. These factors include many “kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness. Many of these ties could be mutually substitutable - some playing a particularly important role in one nation-building process, and no more than a subsidiary part in others. But among them, three stand out as irreplaceable: (1) a 'memory' of some common past, treated as a 'destiny' of the group - or at least of its core constituents; (2) a density of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a higher degree of social communication within the group than beyond it; (3) a conception of the equality of all members of the group organised as a civil society”(79).

identity with the early years of the twentieth century. The hold over the present by the past, this thesis argues, is not merely an act of remembrance and nostalgia, but a reinforcement of traditional understandings of Irishness in the midst of societal change.

In his study of Atlantic-rim performance rituals, *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach describes how a community performs the past in elaborate funeral processions in order to establish greater nobility within itself. In this way, the past may be resurrected through performance rituals such as funeral rites, parades, or historical theatrical events, to create an imagined history for its audience. The commemoration of the dead (people or past events) aids to insert that past upon the present, to appropriate a past within the community. As Roach illustrates, the past is “surrogated”³⁶ into a symbolic effigy which aids in the appropriation of history for its present aims or needs. Roach describes how the funeral procession of Thomas Betterton, a successful actor of the day, became a modern version of “ancestor worship,” a contemporary ritual of commemoration to transform an individual into a national body. As Roach illustrates:

In this reinvention of ritual, performers become the caretakers of memory through any kind of public action, including the decorous refinement of protocols of grief. A fiction like “Betterton” defines a cultural trend in which the body of an actor serves as a medium—an *effigy*, as I have defined the word—in the secular rituals through which a modernizing society communicates with its past.³⁷

The commemorations of historical figures and events are in themselves as symbolic as public funeral rites in the act of appropriation: they are symbolic performances of effigies of national identity and collective gratification.

³⁶ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, (Columbia University Press, New York: 1996), 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-8.

Though this thesis is one of remembrance, it is also one of what Roach refers to as “violent forgetting.”³⁸ The Abbey Theatre, both pre and post-2004, follows a widespread system within cultural institutions of white-washing past financial and managerial difficulties with the introduction of new management structures. The self-willed erasure of past controversies for future endeavors creates a selectively constructed history seen within many arts organization of what Jocelyn Clarke describes as a “cult of amnesia.”³⁹ Despite the series of investigations made by the Irish government in 2005 over the *abbeyonehundred* financial mismanagement, the current Abbey Theatre under the directorship of Fiach MacConghail has consciously separated itself from the events of 2004 in an attempt to remove the current Abbey from past controversies. Though this attempt is necessary in what Enid Reid Whyte of the Arts Council describes as a period of “healing” for the company after the extremely detrimental events of the centenary,⁴⁰ I argue that the refusal to scrutinize and remember past acts of mismanagement create an opening for the fundamental management problems which created the events of 2004 to resurface in the future. Furthermore, this “cult of amnesia” is neither new nor unique to the Irish National Theatre Society, but is a practice seen in many Irish Cultural Institutions throughout the past century. Moreover, this thesis argues that the policy of erasing the past, especially past controversies within cultural institutions, is one systemic of cultural and political practice found within the Irish Republic. The Abbey’s current denial of its recent past is a manifestation of its ongoing legacy as a cultural institution.

³⁸ Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, 2.

³⁹ Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author, Dublin: June 2007. Helen O’Donoghue of the Irish Museum of Fine Arts, referred to this phenomenon which she perceived in her own organization as “institutional amnesia” which she found as a “very Irish” trend. (Helen O’Donoghue, in discussion with the Author, Dublin: June 2007).

⁴⁰ Enid Reid Whyte (Arts Council), in discussion with the author, April 2007.

Though Fiach MacConghail is making worthy attempts to address some of the issues raised during *abbeyonehundred*, the lack of continuous scrutiny over the centenary's events beyond those occurring in 2004 and 2005 has silenced many deep-seated managerial and programming concerns in light of more cosmetic issues seen by the public since the events took place.

Helen O'Donoghue, curator at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, contests that this phenomenon is especially true "in the Irish government and cultural institutions," and her personal attempts to make organizational change, "being that IMMA is a relatively young institution... [meets] resistance through serious institutional amnesia."⁴¹ However, such erasures allow for the continuation of fundamental organizational inadequacies for the future. The struggles for growth, adaptation and transformation amongst cultural institutions remains caught within tensions of institutional and cultural traditions from within their own historic legacy. Also, for national cultural institutions, such as the Irish National Theatre Society and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, any struggles within the company and its financial status when revealed to the public become especially difficult to navigate. These events transform from private institutional concerns to public political events.

Memory and Erasure: A Century of Writing Abbey Theatre Histories

The institutional amnesia practiced at the Abbey Theatre is paradoxically combined with the practice of manufacturing collective cultural memory within the company. Academic and media sources equally stress the controversies witnessed upon the Abbey Theatre's famous founding members, William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, George

⁴¹ Helen O'Donoghue, in discussion with the Author, Dublin: June 2007.

Martyn and early playwrights such as John Millington Synge. The Abbey's relationship with its founders is often criticized as a company retaining a "backward glance," where it remains "fossilized" and transfixed upon its past to the expense of contemporary Irish theatre practice. Criticism has also been laid upon the company's use of past events and past triumphs to justify their current status as an important and powerful cultural force. Even more selective is the subject of research available on the Abbey Theatre from the academic community. The majority of academic monographs on the Abbey Theatre concentrate on the first thirty years of the Abbey Theatre's history, or provide macro-histories of the company over the entire period of its tenure.⁴² Ben Levitas justifies this continued scholarly scrutiny on the early period of Irish cultural life by arguing that "If literary, cultural, and political nationalism were continually evolving and interacting, the conditions of their development must be followed with equal diligence, demanding the

⁴² Since the 1980s a number of significant scholarly monographs have re-assessed previous conceptions about the early years of the Abbey Theatre. With the development of New Historicism by Stephen Greenblatt in the 1980s and 1990s, and the formation of the Field Day Anthology and other works of that series by Seamus Deane and his colleagues, important developments were made in the area of Abbey Theatre scholarship. Most notable amongst the work on the Abbey from the 1980s to the present are Adrian Frazier's, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the struggles for the Abbey Theatre*, (University of California Press, Berkeley: 1990), Lionel Pilkington's excellent study on the Abbey's political history: *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland*, (Routledge, London: 2001), Mary Trotter's study, *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*, (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse: 2001), which puts the foundation of the Irish National Theatre Society in context with other cultural organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For another study of the Abbey's Theatre's position within the Celtic Revival, see P.J. Mathews illuminating Field Day Monograph, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, The Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement* (Cork University Press, Cork: 2003). Ben Levitas' monograph on the early years of the Abbey and the significance of Parnellism, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890-1916* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 2002), also provides insight into the politics behind the work of the Irish Literary Society. For extensive works over the past century of Irish Theatre and the Abbey see Nicholas Grene's *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1999), Robert Welch's *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 1999), *Players and painted stage: aspects of the twentieth century theatre in Ireland*, edited by Christopher Fitz-Simon, (New Island Press, Dublin: 2004) and Christopher Morash's far reaching *A History of Irish Theatre: 1601-2000* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2002).

integration, and widening of existing scholarship.”⁴³ This concentration on the culturally and theatrically rich period between 1899 and 1930, though important in and of itself, draws only partial light upon the current concerns of the Irish National Theatre Society in the twenty-first century.⁴⁴ I would argue that to fully understand the controversy of *abbeyonehundred*, we must scrutinize the history, not only of the often self-glamorized struggle for a theatre by Yeats, Lady Gregory and other founding members of their company, but, also of the struggle and founding of the National Concert Hall and other Irish Cultural Institutions, the creation and trajectory of the Arts Council of Ireland, as well as the managerial, policy and funding issues of the Abbey Theatre from the 1990s to the present. Though it would be inadvisable, if not impossible, to write upon the Abbey Theatre without making some reference to the founding company and the first fifty years of the Company’s tenure, I will concentrate mainly on the second fifty years of the company’s history and especially the years from the 1990s to the present, and also broaden my scope to look at the way in which many of the concerns found by the Abbey Theatre in 2004 were also witnessed in other cultural institutions within the Republic throughout the century.

The danger of the Abbey Theatre’s historic legacy is to view its policies and struggles apart from those witnessed by other cultural institutions within Ireland. As

⁴³ Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890-1916* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 2002): 5.

⁴⁴ Though the bulk of work on the Abbey Theatre concentrates on the early years of its history, there have been recent anthologies focusing on the current climate of Irish Theatre and Irish Culture. Publications from academic conferences, such as *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, edited by Stephen Watt, Eileen Morgan, and Shakir Mustafa (Indiana University Press: Bloomington: 2000), and the recent publication from the International Association of Irish Literatures (IASIL), *Echoes Down the Corridor: Irish Theatre –Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Patrick Lonergan and Riana O’Dwyer (Carysfort Press, Dublin: 2007), are notable studies on current concerns among the Irish Theatre Community. The *Irish Theatrical Diaspora Series* conducted by Nicholas Grene and Christopher Morash is also examining current Irish Theatrical migrations as well as assisting in doctoral research on the history of the Dublin Theatre Festival, Druid Theatre Company, and the Abbey Theatre’s international touring since 1975.

Mary Trotter maintained in her book, *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*, the founding of the Abbey Theatre at the turn of the twentieth century was only a small part of a greater movement towards a national theatre and Irish cultural nationalism as witnessed by groups such as the Gaelic League and The Daughters of Eireann. To put the theatre company into a larger artistic and historic context, “does not serve to defame the Irish Literary Theatre or the Abbey Theatre and their directors,” Trotter contends “Rather, it complicates the myopic viewpoint that these companies emerged out of nothing but the minds of their directors—a notion generated to a large extent by the self-representation of the personalities involved.”⁴⁵ Trotter’s book criticises the legacy of research by writers such as Peter Kavanagh, whose early influential history, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre*, not only glorifies the company’s mythic beginnings, but also remains highly selective in his view of both the founding members and the company’s history. Though Kavanagh presents an interesting analysis of the Abbey Theatre from its origins to the 1940s, he portrays William Butler Yeats as the sole founder of the Irish National Theatre Society, overlooking Lady Gregory’s and Frank and Willy Fay’s active contributions to the fledgling company. He also believes that the establishment of a government subsidy for the company prompted the decline of the Abbey’s dynamism in the theatre. This view devalues a significant amount of the company’s history and essentially places the Abbey’s heyday between 1904 and 1926. Despite his highly selective view of the Abbey Theatre’s glory days, Kavanagh, and other scholars’, belief that the Abbey Theatre’s early days were not only the most worthy artistically but also legendary, has deeply

⁴⁵ Mary Trotter. *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*, (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse: 2001): xv.

influenced the company's history, especially amongst populist and press accounts of the company.⁴⁶

Trotter contests the self-created mythmaking surrounding Yeats and Lady Gregory's development of the company, as well as the isolationist representation of the Abbey Theatre as the creator of a nationalist movement which dominated Abbey scholarship through the 1970s, limits the understanding of the widespread Irish cultural movement occurring at the time. The marketing of the Abbey's importance as the sole creators of a national theatre within Ireland is also strongly criticized by John P. Harrington in an essay originally given for an academic conference at Indiana University for the centenary of the 1899 premiere of the Irish Literary Theatre, entitled, *Nationalism and a National Theatre: 100 Years of Irish Drama*. Harrington's essay, "The Founding Years and the Irish National Theatre That Was Not," argued that the Irish National Dramatic Society was both "reactionary and insular," and Yeats and Lady Gregory's "effort... was little more than to claim a niche in Dublin's lively performance activity."⁴⁷ Without being as censorious as Harrington, I believe that an examination of the events, structure and controversies of the Abbey Theatre cannot occur without also examining the greater theatrical and cultural community existing around it.

Moreover, this thesis examines the late twentieth and early twenty-first century politics behind the theatre company's management and its relationship to the Arts Council and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Influenced by Adrian Frazier's *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre*, which

⁴⁶ See Peter Kavanagh, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre, from its origins in 1899 to the present*. (Devlin-Adair Press, New York: 1950).

⁴⁷ John P. Harrington, "The Founding Years and the Irish National Theatre that was Not." In *A Century of Irish Drama: Widening the Stage*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis: 2000): 3-16: 8.

documents the politics behind the managerial structure and finance of the Abbey Theatre's founding years, my research emphasizes the politics behind the Abbey's artistic policies due to struggles with the company's funding bodies. Frazier's cultural materialist study emphasizes the political nature of financial subsidy in the arts, and stresses the networks of economics and class conflict which surrounded the Abbey Theatre's early years of its history. Part of the wave of "New Historicism" begun by scholars like Stephen Greenblatt, *Behind the Scenes* attempted to "restore the traditional text to its historic moment"⁴⁸ and places the Abbey Theatre within the social and political context of the turn of the twentieth century. Frazier's early work on Yeats and Lady Gregory's struggles with their private patron Annie Horniman is significant as a vivid example of how the artistic and organizational aims of the Abbey Theatre management are sometimes at odds with their funding body.

While Frazier gives an excellent example of the politics of private financial assistance and its consequences on class and social politics for the company, Lionel Pilkington's *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* documents the importance of the relationship between the State and the Irish National Theatre after the formation of the Republic. Pilkington emphasizes the importance of Irish unionist tradition on the national theatre movement and the fusion of Irish Protestant culture with Catholic Republican politics in terms of the Irish Republic's financial and political support of the Abbey Theatre. Through an examination of William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory's cultural legacy, Pilkington notes their work as "a distinctive cultural response to Ireland's envisaged political future, a response that has its roots in *fin de*

⁴⁸ Adrian Woods Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre, The New Historicism*; 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), xix.

siècle southern Irish unionism.”⁴⁹ By placing the Abbey’s experiences from the formative years through to the 1970s in the frame of cultural and political practice, Pilkington illustrates the often precarious relationship between the Irish government and the Irish National Theatre, and addresses how “Irish theatre history offers a fascinating understanding of the country’s complex political and cultural life.”⁵⁰ Though the Abbey Theatre—and Irish politics—has gone beyond its Unionist past, the Abbey Theatre of the twenty-first century remains caught within the tensions of Ireland’s “political and cultural life.”

DESCRIPTIONS AND DETERMINANTS: abbeyonehundred

This thesis does not investigate the plays of the centenary, but, rather, the cultural systems which surrounded the Abbey Theatre and its theatrical, cultural and financial crisis enveloping *abbeyonehundred* in what Habermas calls “the public sphere.”⁵¹ A national cultural institution is more than just an institution of culture, but rather a site of national and cultural memory and identity as witnessed by its public. This public, however, remains distinct from the *theatre audience*, because, as witnessed in 2004, the Abbey Theatre has a “public” both within and without the theatre walls. Both of these

⁴⁹ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 5.

⁵¹ According to Jürgen Habermas, the arenas of social discourse are defined as the “public sphere.” Habermas’ definition of the public sphere was first introduced in 1962 in his seminal work, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Habermas’ study combined media culture with legal, political and the cultural industry to illustrate how society is shaped and influenced by events around it. His definition of the “public sphere” is useful to my approach to the Abbey centenary and the influence of art and society because, rather than the performance event which assumes that the “public” is together at a theatrical event, the influences of the Abbey Theatre go beyond the play-going public. For his more recent study of the Public Sphere, see: J. Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA: 1991. As Nancy Fraser notes, “designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction”(519).

publics display proprietary concerns over the company's activities, forcing the Abbey Theatre to respond to their theatre and non-theatre going publics throughout their tenure as Ireland's National Theatre.

As I will discuss in Chapters Three and Four, the Abbey Theatre's founders depended on the written commentary to aid in their mythmaking. Outside of the company's theatrical productions, the written testimony on the Abbey significantly influence public perceptions of the company's through scholarly and biographical scrutiny of its social movements, legacies and managerial practice. However, though the print material remains vital to my study of the Abbey Theatre, the oral debates and discussions of the theatre company also fostered the Abbey Theatre's reputation as a national tool throughout its hundred-year history. Therefore, throughout this thesis, I illustrate the importance of oral testimony, private interviews, and public rumour in the connection of the Irish National Theatre Society's role as a national cultural institution. All of the public witnessing, both verbal and text based, remained significant in illustrating how the concerns over the Abbey Theatre in 2004 reflected the public's greater concerns about contemporary Irish society.

The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis separates each chapter by a different area of controversy and context surrounding *abbeyonehundred*. The first chapter introduces the *climate of commemoration* surrounding Ireland at the millennium. By placing the contextual basis on which this thesis depends within an examination of how public commemorative events reflect society, and affect social memory, I will position the Abbey Theatre's 2004 centenary within a greater context of Irish commemoration, of which the Abbey's theatrical history is only a small part. The chapter addresses other

examples of current commemorative practice in Ireland, such as the historic commemorations of the 90th Anniversary of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme, and the Centennial and Bi-Centennial of the 1798 Rebellion. Chapter One examines how, in the Irish context, the need for commemoration is witnessed in events like the Abbey Centenary to display Irish cultural history to a ever-changing society. As the Irish historian Ian McBride notes: “What is so striking about the Irish case is not simply the tendency for present conflicts to express themselves through the personalities of the past, but the way in which commemorative rituals have become historical forces in their own right.”⁵² The politically-charged atmosphere surrounding commemorative events like the Easter Rising or the Battle of the Somme give witness to the power of these memorials outside of the historical events they honor. For Ireland a commemorative act is often caught up with representations of Irish identity and nationalism. By viewing *abbeyonehundred* in this context, it can be inferred that the 2004 celebrations would be viewed by the State and its people as a national act for Ireland and Irishness as well as for the company.

The following chapters turn to more direct areas of contention which developed over the course of the 2004 Abbey Centenary, and attempt to examine these concerns within the greater context of the Abbey’s history and in Irish cultural practice. By establishing the following controversial debates as indicators of social and political signifiers, I wish to illustrate how the areas examined in these chapters, as D. George Boyce describes, “[throw] light on the mentalities and preoccupations of [the] age.”⁵³

⁵² Ian McBride, "Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (2004), 2.

⁵³ D. George Boyce, "'No Lack of Ghosts': Memory, Commemoration, and the State in Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 254.

Chapter Two presents an analysis of the Abbey Theatre's struggle for a new building within the context of the Irish obsession with landscape and monuments as reflections of Irish nationalism and Irish cultural identity. The Abbey Theatre building continues to influence the character of the theatre company itself. The stress on the building's necessity to serve what John O'Donoghue, the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, described as a "geographical footprint" to the nation hindered the company from achieving a new building for the launch of their centenary.⁵⁴ Through an examination of the political, social and historical context of the company's relationship with its building, I will establish the ways in which the battle for a building influenced how the Abbey Theatre is perceived by its public and itself.

Chapter Three turns to an analysis of the theatrical representations of Irishness on the Abbey's stage and in its audience. When the Irish National Theatre announced its programme for the 2004 season, the company was greatly criticized for the lack of ethnic and social diversity in its programme and its under-representation of women in the season. This chapter maps the company's legacy of representing Irishness on its stage throughout the past hundred years, as well as its dependence on its audience to reflect the Irish nation. The debate which ensued developed over questions of what responsibility the national theatre has towards its public in terms of the representation of the nation in its repertoire. By looking at the relationship between the company and its audience, the gender imbalance that has been criticized in regards to the Irish theatrical community, and the failure to recognize diverse communities within the representation of Irishness and Irish cultural identity in twenty-first century Ireland, the Abbey's theatrical

⁵⁴ John O'Donoghue, quoted in Fintan O'Toole, "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People," *Irish Times*, 14 January 2004.

representations of Irishness remain as contested a site as the Abbey found at the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter Four concentrates on tensions between the local and the global in the Abbey's international and national touring practice. It examines the Irish tradition of looking to the international community, namely the Irish diaspora, for validation of Irish identity and the underlying tension between national and international cultural practice. In 2004, the Abbey Theatre found itself caught between its national and international touring policies. The economic strain caused by the company's 2004 international tours brought these debates to the surface. This chapter aims to establish a greater context for the concerns raised over the Abbey's dependence on its international audience for the company's reputation and financial assistance.

The central controversy of 2004 was a financial and managerial crisis at the Abbey. Chapter Five positions the financial management of the company within social and cultural economics. By addressing the political minefield of the arts and arts policy in contemporary Ireland, I will present the events of the Abbey's financial shambles within the greater legacy of Irish cultural funding. Moreover, the Irish National Theatre's struggles for survival emphasized the falling significance of the arts in the country. This fact raised moral and social concerns among the public over the future of Ireland's cultural legacy in Celtic Tiger Ireland.

In all, this examination of the Irish National Theatre Society's architecture, touring practice, theatrical representation of Irish identity, and financial and managerial systems during the 2004 season addresses greater concerns of contemporary Irish society. With the re-formation of the cultural and architectural landscape, its emphasis on the

international and national community, its uneasy transition into a pluralist society, its funding policies for the arts and other social and educational institutions, and the radical changes of the past two decades, contemporary Ireland suffers from underlying tension due to extensive social and political change. The Irish National Theatre Society's concerns which came to a forefront during the 2004 Centenary reflect the recent shifts in the collective imaginings of Ireland's economy, community and identity.

CHAPTER ONE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS: The Production of Commemoration

Whenever the Irish past is invoked, we must therefore ask ourselves not only by which groups, and to what end, but also against whom?

-Ian McBride, *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*

During the Dublin Fringe Festival of 2004, the Corn Exchange Theatre Company premiered *Dublin by Lamplight* at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin. Written by Michael West in collaboration with the Corn Exchange Company, the play was directed by Annie Ryan whose use of experimental theatre practice established her reputation as an important innovative director in Dublin theatrical circles. Presented in the midst of *abbeyonehundred's* season entitled, "The Abbey and Ireland," *Dublin by Lamplight* became a kind of counter-commemoration of the hundred-year anniversary celebrations taking place at the Abbey Theatre in 2004. According to a review in the *London Times*, "West's celebration of the Abbey's centennial, involving as it does the botched debut of an 'Irish National Theatre of Ireland', is decidedly mischievous."¹ Paralleling much of contemporary and past controversies associated with the Abbey Theatre, the play centres around two potential theatre makers in 1904 Dublin who aim to launch an "Irish National Theatre for Ireland." Due to political uprisings, personality disputes and financial disasters, the launching of their theatre company dies at the end of its premiere.

West's work offers a revisionist history of both the Abbey Theatre's founding and Dublin at the turn of the twentieth century. The devised production combines fact

¹ "Dublin by Lamplight," *Times* (London), 15 August 2005.

and fiction, and the characters are composites of such famous Irish theatrical figures as Yeats and Willy Faye, Annie Horniman and Maud Gonne. The Corn Exchange uses a mixture of theatrical genres, combining storytelling with *Commedia dell'arte*, to present a vaudevillian, stylized look at Dublin's theatrical past. It also encompasses the company's research into the economic and social conditions of Dublin at the turn of the century, facts not often included in renditions of the Abbey Theatre's early years. As Michael West declares:

It is hard to comprehend the poverty of what was once the empire's second city. Dublin's population in 1904 comprised some 300,000 people. A third of the city's families lived in one-room tenements – but even this does not convey the dreadful reality. ... There is a much-repeated statistic that Dublin's death rate at this time was comparable to that of Calcutta...and the city stank ... The River Liffey was effectively a giant cesspool for the collection of sewage...²

Through their experimental style the Corn Exchange provides a revisionist look at the Irish National Theatre Society's founding while, at the same time, offering social commentary on contemporary Irish culture. Like the Abbey Theatre's 2004 commemoration, the present is very much in the past in *Dublin by Lamplight*. The production's emphasis on the filth and poverty of turn of the twentieth century Dublin is seen in direct contrast to the relative affluence of contemporary Ireland. While Michael West and the Corn Exchange Company aim to satire themes of national identity which the Abbey Theatre has incorporated into its mythmaking, it also tacitly addresses contemporary Irish society's obsession with early twentieth century nationalist history.

By presenting an irreverent commemoration of the origins of the Abbey Theatre, the Corn Exchange challenges traditional assumptions of the National Theatre's status in the present as well as the past. *Dublin by Lamplight*'s run occurred in the midst of

² Michael West in collaboration with The Corn Exchange, *Dublin by Lamplight* (London: Methuen Publishing Limited, 2005), 5-6.

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the financial and artistic crisis occurring during the company's centenary and presented "a sharp commentary on the current vexed situation of the Abbey Theatre,"³ thus reflecting the present Abbey in its fictional lampooning of its past. The production parodied a number of the issues raised during the Abbey's notorious 2004 season. Through its comic raillery of 1904 and 2004 Abbey controversies, *Dublin by Lamplight* pointedly subverts the Abbey's justifications for its continued significance in contemporary Ireland. The criticisms raised by the Corn Exchange address the Irish National Theatre Society's unsuccessful struggle for a new building, its conservative programming, continuous revivals from its early theatrical repertoire, disputes between the management and the board, and widespread financial distress. The concerns raised by the Corn Exchange production were echoed off the stage throughout 2004 in public commentary over the events of *abbeyonehundred*.

The Corn Exchange's revisionist depiction of early to mid-twentieth century Ireland was a part of a widespread phenomenon amongst the Irish theatre community in recent years. Productions such as *Trad*, which premiered at the Galway Arts Festival, *Improbable Frequency* by Rough Magic Theatre Company, *The Bull* at the Dublin Theatre Festival, and the Kilmainham Gaol production of Donal Kelly's *Operation Easter*, re-examine moments in the Irish past to respond to current explorations of Irish identity politics. These theatrical productions co-existed with large scale commemorative events in the country. The Abbey Theatre's centenary falls in the midst of a period abundant with commemorative practice in Ireland. The magnitude of these commemorative events, like the revisionist explorations found in theatrical circles, indicates, in part, the country's re-exploration of the past due to changing notions of Irishness in contemporary Ireland.

³ Susan McKay, RTE News, "Dublin by Lamplight Review," in *The View* (2004).

Commemoration offers imaginings of a shared past for a community, often revealing more about the present society than the past it celebrates.⁴ In the Irish Republic, commemorative practice transforms history for contemporary national and communal agendas. By focusing on the act of commemoration itself and the current Irish commemorative history, this chapter positions the centenary of the Irish National Theatre Society within the wider context of Irish commemorative history. Through the fostering of collective nostalgia, the present and the past can be placed in opposition with one another to highlight, or alleviate, anxieties over radical transformations of the community and the nation. A commemorative event offers revealing details about the cultural moment which surrounds it. Therefore, the commemoration of the past underlines contemporary political and cultural pressures and policies. This is especially the case within an institution like the Irish National Theatre Society, whose approach to its own history is highly scrutinized by the public and the media. Commemorative events can be read as an analysis of contemporary social and political aims and mentalities. My research examines how commemorative rites are performative *acts* of both collective cultural identity and the construction of pastness for a changing society. A centennial is not only the celebration of past events and past cultures, but a deliberate construction of the past for present and future communities, cultures, politics and policies. Centennials and commemorations buy and sell the past in ways that incorporate it into a commodity of identity, culture and, indeed, the nation.

⁴ Benedict Anderson's seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, posits that a nation is formed through the collective imaginings of a community. Whereas, Peter Glazer's recent study of American Spanish Civil War commemoration from the 1930s to the present, (*Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005) demonstrate the use of the past and nostalgia for the past to offer tacit critiques of the present that counter hegemonic communal imaginings from within the nation itself.

COMMEMORATION FOR A NEW ERA

Many cultures offer commemorations of past individuals and events. However, at times, societies develop particular climates for commemoration, moments in history when the need to celebrate the past forms a significant part of the national practice. The climate of commemoration may be due to shifting values in a society, or moments of radical change, events which create the need to re-affirm a culture's past or future due to the fear of losing that history altogether. Due to the globalization of its economy, the current wave of immigration and the recent increase of wealth into the country, the Republic of Ireland has been witness to multiple transformations of its community and landscape, and its very identity. These transformations have caused a significant re-evaluation of the Irish nation and, indeed, what it means to be "Irish" in all areas of the country's social, political and economic spheres. During this transitional period, centennial and commemorative celebrations have occurred in every aspect of Irish life. These celebrations have encapsulated political events like that of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme, the bicentennial of the 1798 Rebellion, the births and deaths of historical figures, like the Beckett Centenary,⁵ and, even those of fictional occurrences as with *Bloomsday*, a centennial celebration in honour of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.⁶

⁵ According to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue, the Beckett Centenary was programmed to "build on" the successful Bloomsday Centenary from 2004 "for cultural and tourism reasons." The Minister emphasized the need to find new attractions to draw tourists to Irish shores amongst the increasingly competitive tourist market. Minister O'Donoghue created a Beckett Centenary Council to assist in the planning and financing of the commemoration of the Nobel Laureate. O'Donoghue's statement to the *Dáil* asserting the Beckett Centenary's remit "to ensure the delivery of a quality cultural experience that could be enjoyed domestically and marketed abroad by the tourism agencies," offers a valuable example of the use of commemoration in millennial Irish culture and heritage industries to foster the sale of "brand Ireland" to those at home and abroad. (Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, *Message to Dáil*, Vol. 19, 10 May, 2006)

⁶The 2004 Bloomsday Centenary occurred throughout the weekend of June 12-13, 2004 and consisted of performances, lectures and other events in honour of James Joyce and his modernist epic, *Ulysses*. Bloomsday events occur annually in Dublin and throughout the world. The centenary included Bloom's breakfast of kidneys across O'Connell Street in Dublin, boasting of attendance levels of

As the wave of commemorations hit the nation, we must pause to ask, who are these celebrations for? What is the purpose of commemorations and whom does it benefit? In essence, what is being commemorated: macro or micro history, or a nostalgic longing for less complex struggles and a retreat back to a time with more consistent understandings of “Ireland” and “Irishness”? In the following examination of the recent Irish commemorative events of the 90th Anniversary of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme, the 1898 centennial of the Rebellion of 1798, and the Abbey Theatre’s commemorative history, I argue that no matter how diverse commemorative events may be, they all reveal the anxieties of their own contemporary identities and the desire, through commemorative rites, to manipulate the past into a palatable form for present imaginings of a community’s historical legacy. Commemorative events aim to establish an understanding – or affirmation – of a community’s own identity.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ireland was a period of active cultural and political productivity and major change in the country; a time of admirable achievements to commemorate in any era. However, the study and commemoration of these achievements can not be looked at outside of their current cultural context. It is not the past that changes, but contemporary culture’s relationship to it. In P.J. Matthews’s work on the Celtic Revival, published in 2003, he contests that “At a time when the homogenizing pressures of globalization on local cultures have registered as a major concern with cultural criticism, the achievements, as well as the failures, of the Irish revival may have much to teach us about the

10,000 people, which, according to the *Irish Times*, “the huge presence of the breakfasting public will be street theatre in itself.” (*Irish Times*, June 2004, cited on <http://www.ireland.com/events/bloomsday/>) For preparation towards Bloomsday Centenary see also: “Oh Won’t We Have a Merry Time, *Irish Times*, Saturday, January 25, 2003.

cultural dynamics of Ireland in the twenty-first century.”⁷ As Matthews argues, a new and vigorous understanding of the past may help Ireland, or any culture, to throw light upon current changes, or current cultural transformations. If Ireland at the turn of the millennium is witnessing vast transformations of its landscapes and communities, it can be no more radical a transformation than that seen at the turn of the previous century. In this way, the celebration of a centenary event remains a powerful victory of past achievement and of established change for a society looking for answers to its current evolution by acknowledging those in its history.

The act of commemoration can be read as an analysis of contemporary social and political aims and mentalities. By focusing on the act of commemoration itself and the Irish Republic’s commemorative history, I argue that like the commemorative parades in the Republic of the Easter Rising, the Battle of the Somme and the upsurge of cultural societies surrounding the Centenary of 1798, the commemoration history of the Irish National Theatre Society presents not only the company’s own mythmaking, but performs representations of current economic, political and social power over Ireland as well as the Abbey’s past.

COMMEMORATION AND NATIONAL MEMORY: Politics of A Chosen Past

Memory is what binds a community together; it is through mnemonic triggers that a group of individuals find a common heritage, a common past. For a community whose identity is under threat, it is “the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories,”⁸ according to Ernest Renan, which helps to form or create a nation. In this way, popular memory is an essential part of the formation of the nation.

⁷ P. J. Matthews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003): 148.

⁸ Ernest Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Elev & Ronald Grigor Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 52-54.

Commemorative events –such as centennials, monuments, parades, or festivals – all play active roles in that formation through the building of collective memory. According to Ian McBride, “Memories are constantly being described, narrated, illustrated and commemorated in order to inscribe them upon the public memory. These evocations of popular memory are not simply important, but, rather, necessary for the formation of a society.”⁹ Moreover, the commemorations of public memory are platforms for a community to enact that memory and, by doing so, make the public subscribe to the official (or on the other hand, counter-) memory being created. Thus the community can perform not only their position within collective history, but also their place within a society. A commemoration is a complicit *act* of a people towards its community.

However, a commemoration, like any organized event, is constructed. The commemoration is deliberately planned to fulfil a certain agenda for its orchestrators. According to Pierre Nora, such events replace the loss of ritual in society; they are the *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) which “mark the rituals of a society without ritual,”¹⁰ creating simulacra of a forgotten past which manipulate the plastic form of history into palatable forms for the current society:

Lieux de memoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organise celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally.¹¹

Commemorative celebrations offer a space for such sites of memory to be offered to a public not only lacking such sites of nostalgia, but longing for them. These ‘ritualized’ performances offer an authenticating ritual for the construction of

⁹ Ian McBride, ‘Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland’, in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 1-42.

¹⁰ Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire’, *Representations* No. 26, Special Issue: ‘Memory and Counter-Memory’, (1989): 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

collective memory. The *lieux de memoire* allows historical events to become mythicized, transformed from a moment of history into a site of collective ontological belonging.

The performance aspect of a commemoration, like a parade or rally, is developed not only by the event organizers but by its audience as well. The audience participates within the event (i.e. through singing and dancing, applause, cheering or other activities) playing an active role in the performative aspect of commemoration. Thus the people can demonstrate their solidarity within the national structure through their very presence and participation in the event.¹² Anthropologist Kelly Askew describes this duologue which occurs between a people and its country in civic celebrations and commemorative displays. In her study of public events and traditional music in Tanzania, Askew writes of how, upon arrival in Tanga, the president of Tanzania reinforced his “political and social superiority” while “the youths and musicians had performed their loyalty to the state” through the presentation of a festive display of allegiance and power by the witnesses and participators of the event.¹³ Through the “festive display” all participants and witnesses tacitly present their loyalty (or dissent) to the state by the very nature of the commemoration. Askew’s study of Tanzania is strangely apposite to commemoration in the Irish context. The Irish Republic constructs parades or commemorative events to display the nation to the populace; however, the populace also perform their own place within the nation through civic performances. Commemorative performance practices fuse the public sense of “nation-hood” to the State itself. Even by their very

¹² In his account of the celebrations surrounding the American Revolution, Waldstreicher spoke of these performative events as deliberate for the construction of a new nation: "Celebrations were no afterthoughts to independence, nor were they mere symbolizations of accumulated oedipal anxieties. They were anticipated, deliberate, necessary responses to the Declaration of Independence." David Waldstreicher, 'Rites of Rebellion, Rites of Assent: Celebrations, Print Culture, and the Origins of American Nationalism', *The Journal of American History*, 82, no. 1 (1995): 47.

¹³ Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002): 4-5.

presence, the audience, willing or not, presents a national body for the national event. Through verbal and physical acts at a commemorative event, the audience becomes integrated into the celebration and performs its own role, or multiple roles, within it. Thus the public's response to the Abbey's centenary events in the public debates, letters to the editor and chat forums were not passive, but active responses to the company's role as a national institution. The Abbey "audiences"—both theatre-going and non-theatre going—used the public sphere to vocalize their ownership of the Irish National Theatre Society as a national cultural institution. The physical body of the audience becomes transformed into a national formation of identity, a symbol of the nation within these commemorations by its mass form. In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton describes how memory becomes embodied in these performances through the performative acts of community: "In habitual memory, the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body."¹⁴ The recurring rituals of commemorative performance do not merely re-instate accepted memory in the audience's mind, but rather inscribe the memory upon the bodies of the audience. Commemorative performance, through audience applause and consensual participation, creates the embodiment of living memory. Through these commemorative acts, the audience is transformed from passive watcher into active participant in the development of national imaginings.

BEGINNINGS: The Legacy of Commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion and the Irish National Theatre Society

During the turn of the last century, a wave of commemorative events influenced social and cultural movements that aided in the rise of Irish nationalism. One of the most important of these events was the 1898 centenary of the 1798 Fenian uprising. The

¹⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 24.

uprising itself gained strength through the years due to its iconic status in the history of resistance to English rule in Ireland. The historian Kevin Whelan argues that two significant events occur in the importance of the 1798 uprising: the rebellion itself and what was written about it afterwards.¹⁵ The sheer breadth of folk material, literature and performance practice surrounding the 1798 Rebellion is witness to the event's importance for Irish cultural memory. The songs, poems, speeches and performances documenting the uprising display its consistent presence within the public imagination, giving it ample significance as an object for commemoration. Peter Glazer, whose work on yet another unsuccessful rebellion — the communist resistance to fascism during the Spanish Civil War — illustrates the significance of commemoration for the transformation of history over time. It is the performance of these writings around the myth of the event that make it important in the greater tapestry of history. For Glazer: “The cultural elements in these commemorative ceremonies — representational vehicles for history and memory — the group singing of songs made popular during the conflict has been perhaps the most consistent and cherished component.”¹⁶ The folk songs and ballads of the 1798 Rebellion performed at the 1898 centennial celebration are yet another example of how the collective singing of commemorative *acts* helps to inscribe living memory on to the centennial celebration audience.

Commemorations can draw attention to present discontent through the filter of past empowerment. The 1898 centennial of the Fenian Rebellion helped to act as a catalyst against present feelings of disempowerment through the lost possibilities of the past. Yvonne Whelan posits that the 1898 centenary was a fitting commemoration

¹⁵ See Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of an Irish Identity 1760-1830* (Cork: Cork Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Peter Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 34.

for the Irish nationalists as counterpoint to the elaborate celebrations of 1897 in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The centenary of 1898 became not just a separate commemorative act in itself, but a *counter-act* to Loyalist celebration, a commemoration of resistance. For Whelan:

In terms of the number killed, foreign involvement, geographical extent and number of participants, the 1798 rebellion was an unparalleled revolutionary event. Its commemoration was marked throughout the country with the erection of monuments dedicated to those who had been killed. The centenary provided an opportunity for nationalists to commemorate what they saw as Ireland's loyalty not to Britain but to Irish heroes and to the struggle against British rule.¹⁷

The centennial organizers emphasized myths surrounding the 1798 Rebellion and spread folk symbols and rituals of nationalist resistance through monuments, theatrical representations of the events, and the introductions of heroic songs and poems representing "'98," that diluted the historical details of the actual Fenian uprising.¹⁸

Commemorative performances of songs like *The Sean-Bhean Bhocht*, *Wolfe Tone* and '98 moulded the past to suit their own specific political agenda. The swell of folk tradition, which developed because of the 1798 Centenary, helped to instigate a number of national clubs and organizations in 1898. The Irish theatrical movement of the 1890s used events like the 1798 Rebellion to examine themes of insurgency and political strife in Ireland. However, Ireland's newfound interest in Gaelic traditions and Irish folk culture became channelled into the use of culture as symbols of active resistance to British hegemonic control. As Gary Owens reasons,

(Irish) redemptive memory had roots in the rituals of the Fenian funeral procession and in the patriotic educational enterprise of the 1898 centenary. The spread of nationalist symbols and rituals during that year, the erection of monuments, and the

¹⁷ Yvonne Whelan, *Reinventing Modern Dublin: Streetscape, Iconography and the Politics of Identity* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003), 75.

¹⁸ Ian McBride, "Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland," in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (2004), 35.

circulation of print media all make it difficult to disentangle folk memory from official commemoration.¹⁹

If we acknowledge commemorative practice's influence upon cultural trends in society, then the popularity of the "official" commemorative events surrounding 1898 could have gone beyond its memorial of an event in Irish history to become absorbed within the greater communal imaginings of turn of the twentieth century Ireland. As Lionel Pilkington described, plays like J.W. Whitbread's *Lord Edward, or '98*, and *Wolfe Tone* presented insurgency "exclusively in terms of individual volition."²⁰ Moreover, some argue that the 1898 Centennial eventually led to the Easter Rising of 1916. Consequently, the "Spirit of '98" was evoked to fill a community's emotional need in late nineteenth-century Ireland.

The Celtic Revival, which flourished in the wake of 1798 centennial nostalgia, was significant in that it created the foundation of many national institutions which would survive independence. As P.J. Mathews notes in his *Field Day* monograph *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement*:

By 1908 the major cultural, political and educational institutions of the 'post-British-Irish state' – the Gaelic League, the Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, and the National University of Ireland – had all been established, largely due to the efforts of the revivalists and with little help from mainstream politicians. With the development of these national institutions and the emergence of a new wave of nationalist newspapers, an infrastructure was put in place which allowed the 'imagining' of the Irish nation.²¹

As Mathews argues, the rise in Irish cultural nationalist movements was due to the failure of the Home Rule Bills of 1886 and 1894,²² and Parnell's fall from grace

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 18.

²¹ P.J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement*, ed. Seamus Deane, 12 vols., vol. 12, *Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays and Monographs* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003), 10.

²² There were four Home Rule Bills proposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Originally proposed to reverse parts of the Act of Union 1800 and allow Ireland to reinstate its own

among the Irish people.²³ With the loss of hope in political, parliamentary channels, the move towards cultural channels for Irish independence and nationalist struggles became the natural progression from Parnell's legacy of the late nineteenth century. The formation of the Gaelic League, the Irish Literary Society and the Gaelic Athletics Association became, therefore, politically-charged cultural agents. Thus, the legacy of Wolfe Tone can be seen in direct correlation with later cultural nationalist and political nationalist movements. Because of the popularity of the 1898 Centenary, turn-of-the-century Ireland joined the greater European and American rising interest in traditional and folk culture which spread like wildfire across continents.

The 1798 Rebellion held much force for its political and cultural connotations. The folksongs and poems commemorating the Rebellion became a part of the cultural tapestry that was unique to Ireland which, during the Celtic Revival, was the essential foundation of the fostering of Irish culture as separate from that of their British occupiers. The figure of Wolfe Tone especially carried weight as a uniquely "Irish" rebellious figure, an inspiring political leader, and cultural legend. For the Revivalists, moreover, Wolfe Tone's legacy was not only political but cultural in scope and form. William Rooney, editor of the *United Irishman*, argued that the 1898 commemoration was a political act and any Irish cultural institution that did not participate in the

independent Parliament; only two of them were passed by the British Parliament – one of which was never implemented. The Bills proposed were: First Irish Home Rule Bill of 1886, defeated in the British House of Commons and never introduced to the House of Lords; The Second Irish Home Rule Bill of 1894, passed by the House of Commons and defeated by the House of Lords; The 1914 Third Irish Home Rule Act, passed by both Houses of Parliament, but never introduced because of World War One; and then the final Fourth Irish Home Rule Act implemented in 1920 – known as the Government of Ireland Act 1920.

²³ Charles Stuart Parnell was a Member of Parliament and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (formerly the Home Rule League). A powerful advocate of Irish Home Rule, Parnell was a strong leader for late nineteenth century Irish politics. Unfortunately, after Parnell married the divorcée Katherine O'Shea in June 1891 –and the Catholic Church publicly condemned his conduct – he was deposed as leader of the IPP. Parnell wrecked his health attempting to regain political support and died on 6 October 1891.

commemoration was committing an act of political betrayal.²⁴ According to P.J. Mathews,

One of the greatest innovations of Rooney's thinking was his realization of the extent to which culture and politics are inextricably bound up. He saw that, in a colonial context like Ireland's, culture had long been a site of colonial advance and that it had an important role to play in anti-colonial resistance.²⁵

The cultural legacy of the Celtic Revival, therefore, was constructed in order to raise the belief among both the colonized and the colonizers, that Ireland had a "unique" culture and therefore deserved its own governing body. Figures like Wolfe Tone were used as emblems of the heroic leader who is distinctly "Irish." Thus Irish cultural institutions had to construct surrogate mythic figures from the past to legitimize their distinction as an ancient and heroic, and, importantly, as *un-English*, people.

The founding of so many Irish institutions after the 1898 centenary illustrate how Irish folk culture, and Irish culture in general, has for over a century, if not more, been intertwined with a desire to foster collective identity and to construct a national consciousness based on a celebration of their *unique* collective experience. The creation of a national theatre desired by Yeats and Lady Gregory as well as other theatre organizers across Ireland was a part of this wave of interest in traditional Irish culture. While Lionel Pilkington contends that:

The notion of a national drama itself sought to replace what were regarded as pre-modern cultural forms (such as wakes, mumming and other 'folk' practices) with theatre, a cultural practice fully consistent with the idea of the state as a community of individual subjects or citizens.²⁶

Pilkington's argument that the creation or desire for a "national drama" was the denial of "pre-modern ... folk practices" disregards the national dramatic movement's position within the greater resurgence of "traditional arts" and Irish folk practice

²⁴William Rooney, 'Development of the National Ideal', 2-3, cited in Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement*, 101.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*, 18.

gathering momentum across the country after the centenary of 1898. Furthermore, the Gaelic League, as Mary Trotter advocates, combined the movement of the creation of theatre and folk practices as a collective nationalist effort at the turn-of-the-century.

The Gaelic League performed the politics of Irishness by holding festivals and contests throughout the country that included singing Irish songs, dancing Irish dances, reciting nationalist poems and speeches, and even performing dramas in Irish; and they made such activity central to their agenda.²⁷

The Gaelic League is merely one example of cultural institutions founded during this period, and the establishment of national clubs and institutions for the justification of national communal practice occurred in many areas of public life after 1898. Thus it has been the intention and purpose of Ireland's cultural institutions to foster these constructions of identity from their very founding.

The Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Society developed as a result of the re-introduction of Irish folklore following the tumultuous political events of the 1890s and the 1898 Centennial. Parnell's fall from grace in the early 1890s caused many who had hoped for Home Rule to be disillusioned by politics and turn their nationalist, political fervour into Irish culture rather than Irish politics. In his memoirs, W.B. Yeats states that,

The modern literature in Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891 ... Dr. Hyde founded the Gaelic League, which was for many years to substitute for political argument a Gaelic grammar, and for political meetings village gatherings, where songs were sung and stories told in the Gaelic language. Meanwhile I had become a movement in English.²⁸

Yeats went on to describe how the idea of a national theatre came from the "great mass of our people" experienced in political speeches, and so the need for dramatic Irish culture became apparent. Culture became absorbed into politics and vice versa,

²⁷ Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 4-5.

²⁸ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (559-60), cited in *Mathews, Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League and the Co-Operative Movement*:6.

while the Irish culture and Irish history became interwoven to embody national cultural identity.

EASTER RISING AND BATTLE OF THE SOMME: A History of Surrogation

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the expression of culture through commemoration became equally as important as it had for the turn of the twentieth century. Like the 1898 commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion, the 2006 commemorations of the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme aptly denote changes in the representation of the Irish Nation to contemporary society. On the 16th of April 2006, the government of the Irish Republic held a military parade in Dublin City in celebration of the 90th Anniversary of the Easter Rising. In June of 2006 another event occurred that further transformed the context of commemoration, and acted to align the past with the present political moment: the 90th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. Throughout the twentieth century these two events have symbolized opposing ideologies in Irish commemorative practice. Diverse communities in both Northern and Southern Ireland have used key historical events to express current political and cultural ideologies. The 2006 celebrations of both events in the Republic give witness to the radical economic and cultural transformations of contemporary Ireland and can be viewed together as commemorations of that State's future rather than its past. However, as this chapter argues, the power of collective nostalgia in the Irish context also offers the community slippage from present concerns to past triumphs.

The 2006 Easter parade began at Dublin Castle and concluded at the Garden of Remembrance. This was the first official commemoration since the summer of 1969, when the parade was suspended because of its perceived connections with the

Provisional Irish Republican Army, and in response to the outbreak of violence during celebrations of the Rising in the North.²⁹ While the 1966 commemoration had been an optimistic pageant – much like the 2006 parade – intervening remembrances of the Rising became charged with political controversy. The re-instatement of the parade in 2006 was a celebratory affair which reflects both the continuing peace process in Northern Ireland and the current prosperity found in the Republic of the ‘Celtic Tiger’.

While the re-emergence of the Easter Rising parade in 2006 is an expression of the significant political and economic changes on the island as a whole, the 2006 celebration of the Battle of the Somme emphasizes the Republic’s increasing interests in Continental Europe and the rise of the European Union. For the first time, the Irish Republic joined in to honor the Irish dead in an international commemorative event that included representatives from both sides of the war, commemorating an event that had been excised from Irish history and transformed into a purely British, or, more specifically, a Northern Irish Unionist event. Therefore, this was more than just a celebration of Ireland’s European present and future; the Irish Republic’s presence in the European Memorial Day celebrations of the Somme re-wrote the country’s own commemorative past.

Echoing Kevin Whelan’s sentiment about the 1798 Rebellion, Fintan O’Toole suggested that when we speak of the Rising we are speaking of two things: the myth, and the event.³⁰ I would argue, however, that all commemorations have three main components: the myth, the selective event that is being portrayed, and most importantly, the contemporary community who are enacting that commemoration. The 2006 celebrations of the Rising exploited nostalgia for the past to highlight the

²⁹For a study of the history of commemoration of the Easter Rising in Ireland see: Mairin Ni Dhonnchadha and Theo Dorgan, eds., *Revising the Rising* (Derry: Field Day, 1991).

³⁰“Easter Rising Supplement,” *Irish Times*, March 2006.

current prosperity and peace of Celtic Tiger Ireland, while the commemoration of the Battle of the Somme emphasized the Republic's inclusion in the European Union against the backdrop of the sacrifices and atrocities of World War One. However, by reclaiming the Republic's commemorative celebrations of the Easter Rising, as well as the part of Irish soldiers in the Battle of the Somme, the Republic of Ireland assisted in the transformation of commemoration events for their own aims. The Irish reclamations of the Easter Rising and Battle of the Somme remembrance celebrations are symbolic constructions of the country's "Road ahead" as well as the one behind.

On 1 July 1916, the battle began which had been thought to be the turning point in the First World War, but turned into an engagement which would drag on for months and become one of the biggest disasters of European military history. During the first morning alone over 20,000 British, Scottish, Welsh and Irish soldiers were killed by German firepower with 35,000 wounded and 8,000 German dead; by the end of the Battle of the Somme over a million soldiers from both sides in total were killed or wounded. However, it was not merely the enormity of casualties which gave the Battle of the Somme its notorious reputation, but the fact that the battle, which lasted from July to November, gained only six miles of land for the allied forces. Over the course of five months, the battle line generally remained static with the soldiers burrowing deeper into the trenches. In fact, during World War I, twice as many soldiers died from infection and disease caused by conditions in the trenches themselves than from wounds received in any battle.³¹ In the numerous memoirs, songs, poems or performances of the time, the Somme only has to be mentioned to evoke mass slaughter, military debacle, and tragedy for both sides of the war. In

³¹ For detailed research on the history of the Battle of the Somme see: Peter Liddle, *The Battle of the Somme: A Reappraisal* (L.Cooper: London, 1992), and Stewart Ross, *The Battle of the Somme* (Raintree Press, Chicago, 2004). For contemporary accounts of the battle, see: John Buchan & George H. Casamajor, *The Battle of the Somme: The First Phase* (T. Nelson & Sons, New York: 1916).

England, memory of all that went wrong with trench warfare is caught up in the sites of specific battles such as the Somme, Gallipoli, Verdun, Dunkirk, and other such locations of human tragedy. The landscape of battle became a symbolic location of tragic loss for a generation: poignant battlefields of memory and sites of commemoration for years to come.

As the literature of the war has testified – works by the poets Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, David Jones, Isaac Rosenberg and Robert Graves, novels like Erich Maria Remarque's *All's Quiet on the Western Front*, or the memoirs by writers such as the VAD nurse, Vera Brittain – the cultural memory of World War One in post-war England, France and Germany is one of tragedy. The image of young soldiers destroyed in their thousands in careless campaigns waged by elderly generals is evocative of the more general victimization of the population by the ruling class. Such representations established the conflict as an enduring symbol of the blatant madness of war. Unlike the ideologically “necessary” World War Two, the construction of collective memory for post-war culture transformed the First World War battles into an icon of the unnecessary, and a signifier of the destructive carnage of Empire upon its people for both sides of the conflict.

Despite the common view of the Great War as a site of botched battles and ineffective nineteenth-century military strategy with the destructive power of twentieth-century technology, in Ireland the Somme transformed from a site of tragic remembrance into a symbol of British solidarity for the Ulster Unionist Protestant community. This image has continued throughout the years and transformed the battles of 1914-1918 into appropriated sites for loyalty to the Unionist cause on Irish shores. The marching season in Northern Ireland coincides with the Somme Remembrance Day and has often been seen by both Catholic and Protestant Irish alike

as a commemoration owned by the Protestant side in this sectarian conflict. Like the Battle of the Somme, the Easter Rising has itself been appropriated into a narrative of previous and future struggles for independence and heroic Republican national histories. Joseph Roach describes this appropriation of the past as a process of surrogation:

...culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process that can be best described by the word surrogation. In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates.³²

According to Roach, culture is in a constant process of *surrogation* of memories, events and individuals. The Irish use of surrogates to reflect the networks of culture and identity power structures offers a highly charged playing ground for this definition of surrogation. The symbolic battles over memorial and historical terrain between the Irish Republic, and Northern Irish Orange Order, and Republican parades, gives witness to how the battle of the Somme, the Easter Rising, and other Irish commemorative sites, are surrogated by the Irish and Northern Irish communities.

The Unionist appropriation of the battle of the Somme is just as active a surrogation of collective memory as the Irish Republic's erasure of it. In regards to Joseph Roach's definition of *surrogation*, the Unionist appropriation of the battle of the Somme is in itself an act of violent forgetting. Fintan O'Toole elaborates upon this ironic surrogation of history:

In some ways, the Somme posed as many challenges to Unionist as it did to nationalist orthodoxy. In order to remember the battle as a glorious sacrifice (contrasted to the stab-in-the-back of treacherous Catholics in the Easter Rising), it was necessary to forget its essential obscenity. In order to use the

³² Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 2.

memory of the Somme to bolster obedience to authority, it was necessary to forget that the courage and self-sacrifice of the troops was betrayed by the folly of their leaders. In order to use the Somme as a marker of Protestant character, it was necessary to forget, not merely the presence of Catholic nationalist divisions, but also the fact that the Ulster Division had fought in what was seen as a typically “Irish” way. It lost so many men because those men ran with reckless zeal into the German lines, and were then forced to beat a bloody retreat.³³

No matter how the Ulster Unionists strategically misinterpreted the battle their appropriation of the Somme became an act of surrogation, a claiming of sectarian ownership over a uniform commemoration of suffering which affected both communities.

The Unionist surrogation of the Somme began with the commencement of battle being delayed by a day. Due to an act of fate, the battle, which was supposed to have begun at the end of June, started on the same day as the Battle of the Boyne. As early as 1917, only a year later, the commemoration of the Belfast Twelfth focused on the Somme’s coincidence with traditional Ulster victories. Dominic Bryan describes this fusion of the Somme with the Ulster Unionist cause in his book *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control*:

On 1 July 1916 it was the 36th (Ulster) Division that spearheaded the attack at the Battle of the Somme. Within two days 5,500 men were killed or wounded (Bardon 1992: 455), and back in Belfast press reports of the glorious push were soon joined by the lists of the casualties. Orangeism had a blood sacrifice and renewed military and political legitimacy ... Colonel Wallace spoke of the new ‘glorious first of July’ since it coincidentally took place on the same date as the Battle of the Boyne using the old calendar. He recounted that men had ‘sashes over their shoulders’ and drove the enemy before them ‘on the banks of the Somme, as their fathers had done 226 years before on the banks of the Boyne’.³⁴

From a devastating battle of diverse Allied military companies to a concentrated act of triumphant Protestant might, the surrogation of the Somme was so successfully realized that the Irish Catholic contribution to the entire war was erased, by both

³³ Fintan O’Toole, ‘Why We Remember’, *Irish Times*, 4 July 2006.

³⁴ Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000): 55-56.

Unionist and Republican communities. While the nationalist World War One soldiers were forgotten, the Ulster soldiers' battles turned victims into victors, and transformed the war in a desire to create Protestant heroes for the struggle against Irish independence. Whereas the English recorded mass casualties in the "War to End All Wars," the Irish Unionists commemorated the triumph of Ulster courage and their noble sacrifice for the Motherland. The Somme commemorations in Northern Ireland have been so separated from the historic events that, Fran Brearton argues, "The stereotype of the martial Irishman - valiant, aggressive, heroic, with a daredevil spirit - is seemingly remote from the stereotype of the Ulster Unionist - entrenched, defensive, immovable."³⁵ However, Brearton goes on to describe the "inadequacies of those stereotypes" revealed by the actual events of the Battle of the Somme, where on the first of July the Ulster troops charged valiantly ahead of their comrades during the battle and were tragically caught in between the two lines, so that many of their numbers were gunned down by Allied rather than Axis forces.³⁶

While the Unionists expanded their part in the battle, the Irish nationalist historical narrative erased the Battle of the Somme, as Declan Kiberd states:

For decades after independence, the 150,000 Irish who fought in the Great War (for the rights of small nations and for Home Rule after the cessation of hostilities, as many of them believed) had been officially extirpated from the record. No government representative attended their annual commemoration ceremonies in Christ Church: and none publicly sported a poppy.³⁷

By the 1990s, however, the Irish Republic began to re-examine the part played by Irish soldiers in the battles of the Somme and other campaigns of the Great War. With the development of the European Union and increasing globalization, the search began for collective historic experiences which drew Ireland and the Irish people into

³⁵ Fran Brearton, cited in Fintan O'Toole, 'Why We Remember', *Irish Times*, 4 July 2006.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage Press, 1996): 239.

the fold of the greater European community. The continuation of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, moreover, drew greater connections between the Republic and the North between government, industrial and cultural bodies. The forgotten history of World War One perhaps began to seem as problematic as its memory had earlier done during the formation of the Republic. The Irish contribution of the Battle of the Somme now offered a possible representation of Ireland's contribution to this collective European tragedy. While Ireland remained neutral during the Second World War and could not take part in the wide-scale international D-Day commemorations of 1994, the Battle of the Somme was a perfect place to insert itself into the embrace of the European Union. During the media attention surrounding the 2006 celebrations, Fintan O'Toole illustrates the danger of this oversight in the *Irish Times*:

Because it had such a huge impact on human self-understanding, the Somme ought to have been a part of Irish official memory, even if not a single Irish soldier had taken part. That in fact Irish involvement in the Somme was at least as prominent in proportional terms as that of any of the other combatant nations ought to have assured it a prominent place in our sense of our collective past. Yet, for at least 70 years, the memory of the Somme gave way to other battles of remembrance, as competing versions of Irish history dug their own trenches.³⁸

The Irish erasure of its contribution to the First World War may have been a response to a combination of the Republic's discomfort with its own imperialist past, and the Ulster Unionists' appropriation of the massacre as part of its narrative of loyalty to the Crown. However, no matter what occurred during the past ninety years, as O'Toole and others argued in 2006, the new climate of Irish commemorative history and its contribution to the European community has returned the focus to the Somme and the Irish contribution to a wide scale European tragedy.

³⁸ Fintan O'Toole, 'Why We Remember', *Irish Times*, 4 July 2006.

THE CLIMATE OF COMMEMORATION

The elaborate Easter Rising parade in 1966 appeared a celebration of the economic expansion seen by the Irish Republic in the mid-sixties. The celebration was framed by the press to honour not only the 1916 martyrs, but also the significant changes to Ireland during the radical decade of the 1960s. However, the increasing tension in Northern Ireland caused the Rev. Ian Paisley and the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee to have a train of parade participants from the South to be barred from entering Northern Ireland.³⁹ By the spring of 1967, the rising violence in the North transformed the 1916 events into a symbol of Northern Irish Republican protest. On the 29th of March, 1970 an Easter parade in Derry culminated in violence with several parade participants injured.⁴⁰ Commemorations of the Easter Rising became so connected to “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland that during the subdued memorial marking its 75th anniversary, Taoiseach, Charles J. Haughey was asked by members of the press why he was holding the ceremony at all.⁴¹ Haughey’s commemoration was a small, hushed affair, consisting of speeches from a few veterans and the placement of flowers around the General Post Office in Dublin, a focal point of resistance during the Rising. However, public hostility to the event, as a result of the ongoing violence of the IRA, was such that even these minor commemoration activities appeared a dangerous threat to the Irish Republic and the island as a whole. Due to such a politically-charged history, the reinstatement of the march in 2006 and the surrounding activities in honour of the Easter Rising was cause for celebration by the Republic, according to the Fianna Fáil government, as a powerful statement of the

³⁹ Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000): 80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 87.

⁴¹ Declan Kiberd, ‘The Elephant of Revolutionary Forgetfulness’, in *Revising the Rising*, ed. Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha & Theo Dorgan (Derry: Field Day Press, 1991).

successful peace process in the North. Bertie Ahern, the Irish Taoiseach, demonstrated his faith in the development of peace in Northern Ireland by declaring that the commemoration would be an opportunity for “Remembrance, reconciliation and renewal.”⁴² However, as Mary McAleese, the Irish president asserted, in the Republic of the Celtic Tiger, the 1916 Rising was an event that goes beyond the conflict in Northern Ireland, or the birth of the Republic: “We rightly look back on our past with pride at the men and women who lived in very different times from ours, and who made sacrifices of their lives so that we would enjoy these good times.”⁴³ In essence, McAleese declared that the parade of the Easter Rising was a demonstration of today’s prosperity as well as yesterday’s sacrifice. Although these statements were criticized in the Irish press as attempts by the Fianna Fáil party to use the commemorations to boost their support in upcoming elections for Dublin in 2006, the commemorations of the 1916 Rising became in the 90th Anniversary a celebration of the future’s predestined victory over its past.

With such extreme changes in the population and topography, there are many areas within the abundance of Celtic Tiger Ireland that are not emphasized by the Fianna Fáil government. The disparity between rich and poor, the abuse of drug and alcohol consumption and the rising racism in Ireland show a different side to the newly prosperous country so lauded by Mary McAleese during the Easter Rising commemoration ceremony. The conflicting view of Celtic Tiger Ireland is one of prosperity and poverty, globalization and increasing racial and cultural tensions developing among its populace. In his criticism of much of the confident rhetoric around its current prosperous and seemingly changing ideologies of the Irish landscape, Luke Gibbons challenges this ironic contradiction in the country:

⁴² *BBC News*, 16 April 2006, cited on <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4913392.stm>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The dramatic shift from being a country impaired by chronic unemployment and emigration until the 1980s to being a host-culture for immigration in the 1990s is accordingly welcomed as a sign of growing multiculturalism in which Ireland can at last take leave of its troubled past. However, as we have seen, the suffering bound up with historical injustice and sustained cultural loss does not lend itself to overnight cures, and it may well be the process of disavowal, the surface optimism of a culture in self-denial, which poses the greatest problem to a genuine engagement with cultural difference.⁴⁴

Gibbons posits that the Irish culture should confront its history before it can truly engage in a critical interrogation of its current culture beyond the surface of economic and social prosperity. However, Gibbons's assertions that the Irish are not willing to engage in a study of their past and only look to the future ignores the continuous examinations of the past found in contemporary Irish cinema, literature, theatre and commemorative practice. Moreover, Gibbons belief that it is through the examination of the Irish colonial past that an understanding of multiculturalism and modernity will occur in contemporary Irish society denies the possibility that the past can also offer a place for escape from the present; a nostalgic journey into a history with events that can both justify existing displays of identity, and help to inculcate that identity into an intractable, adherent force. In essence, the construction of collective memory aids in the formation of a barricade against change.

In the current community of an evolving Ireland, where the understanding of "Irishness" is in flux, commemorative celebrations become a way to venerate not only the past, but also to re-affirm traditional understandings of Irishness. Commemorations are more necessary when a community is in transition and its identity is under threat. Ernest Renan describes how the past and representations of the past help to bind a community together through the remembrance of collective

⁴⁴ Luke Gibbons, 'The Global Cure? History, Therapy and the Celtic Tiger', in *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, eds. Michael Cronin, Peadar Kirby & Luke Gibbons (London: Pluto Press, 2002): 105.

sacrifice. The nation is formed and reformed through contemporary representations of the past.

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarized, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life.⁴⁵

As seen with Fianna Fáil's manipulation of the Easter Rising for its own governmental propaganda, commemoration events and centennials are powerful because, according to Linda Hutcheon, the intangibility of the past makes it an ideal platform on which to raise present issues. The nebulous construction of collective national memory creates an emotional tie to an imagined past that holds a powerful grip over a community. Hutcheon describes this as manufacturing a feeling of nostalgia through contemporary commemorative events. "It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility," Hutcheon suggests, "that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia's power."⁴⁶ The malleability of the past to reconstitute itself into the image of present belief systems makes it the ideal source for current tensions to play themselves out. While twenty-first century Ireland encompasses multivalent communities of diverse cultures, races and religions, commemorations and centennial events of the past century help to create a comforting nostalgia for the public by celebrating the Ireland of the early twentieth century with its supposedly homogenous identity and traditional struggles between the colonized and the colonizer. With England as the colonial "other," turn-of-the-century Ireland is perceived by many in the present to have had a common enemy and a firm commitment to shaping its own

⁴⁵ Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?', in *Becoming National: A Reader*, eds. Geoff Eley & Ronald Grigor Suny (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 52-54.

⁴⁶ Linda Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern', in University of Toronto English Library (19 January 1998) [UTEL Criticism and Theory Resources] (Toronto, Canada, 1998 [cited on 3 March 2000]); available from www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html. Cited in Peter Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005): 37.

sense of “Irishness,” an identity that is now perceived as under threat in a more visibly global Ireland.

During the 90th Anniversary celebration, the Republic of Ireland’s decision to join in the European commemoration of the Battle of the Somme remains a part of its contemporary emphasis on inclusion in the European Union. By reclaiming their own part of this particular battle, and of World War One as a whole, the Republic of Ireland assisted in the transformation of a commemoration event for its own aims. The need to memorialize this tragic event now, ninety years after it happened, is significant in that it goes beyond an individual level (with most, if not all, of the soldiers who witnessed this battle being dead, and therefore unable to be honoured or affected by the commemoration) to a communal, or inter-communal event. As the first Irish minister to participate in a Somme Commemoration, Mary Hanafin the Minister of Education, clarifies: “It’s not so much that we are interested in history for the sake of remembering, but in history for what we can learn from it, and how we can move forward from it.”⁴⁷ The Irish participation in the memorial event became symbolic of the contemporary political climate in both Northern and Southern Ireland. “For the Irish people to commemorate that is hugely significant,” Hanafin explained, “It shows the improved relations between North and South, and between England and Ireland.”⁴⁸ In the commemoration of an event from the “long past,” the tragedies of World War One had lost their grip on the European community; the Irish reclamation of the Battle of the Somme is a symbolic construction of the country’s place within the European community of the early twenty-first rather than twentieth century.

The 90th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme was emphasized as an “act of healing” between the former Allies and Axis powers, (Germany was delighted to

⁴⁷ *Irish Times*, 3 July 2006.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

participate in the commemorative activities alongside Britain and France), between the Irish and British, and Northern and Southern Ireland. Nevertheless, despite the noble rhetoric surrounding the ceremonies, some old conflicts arose. Ian Paisley denied that the commemoration had anything to do with finding similarities between Ulstermen and the IRA, while Britain offended Ireland with Prince Charles's oversight in forgetting to acknowledge Ireland as one of the countries that experienced overwhelming losses during the war.⁴⁹

The commemoration in Ireland of the Battle of the Somme absorbed the event within the greater legacy of Irish commemorations. The Irish contribution to the First World War was swiftly transformed from a British commemorative activity to a distinctly Irish one. Bertie Ahern was quick to liken the Irish acts of heroism in the Somme to that of the Easter Rising, and thus transform Irish fighting for Imperialist "King and Country" into an act of Irish national heroism and sacrifice. As the Taoiseach declared, "More than 5,000 men of the 36th Ulster Division fell in the first two days in July 1916. They fought alongside 200,000 Irish men from every county of Ireland. Their bravery was no less than that shown by the insurgents of Easter Week."⁵⁰ By making clear connections between the two battles of 1916, Ahern, among other members of the Fianna Fáil government and the Irish media, attempted to justify their shift in Irish commemorative history and transform the public's understanding of the significance of the Battle of the Somme as an *Irish* conflict on par with that of the Easter Rising. While on the first of July 2006, the Irish government became a part of the European Somme commemoration activities in France, in Ireland they continued memorial activities and honoured the event. Bertie

⁴⁹ Charles mentioned Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India but did not mention Ireland at all. Later his press secretary assured the *Irish Times* that Prince Charles did not deliberately leave out Ireland, but the oversight rankled none-the-less. See *Irish Times*, 4 July 2006.

⁵⁰ *Irish Times*, 29 June 2006.

Ahern emphasized that the Irish commemoration of the Battle of the Somme and the reinstatement of the Easter Rising parade were both acts of re-appropriation:

[The Easter Rising Commemoration] Televised live, the ceremony had been abandoned with the outbreak of the modern Troubles in the North. However, the ruling Fianna Fail party, which Mr Ahern leads, judged that it was a propitious moment to “reclaim” a part of the state’s history, which had been “colonised” by Sinn Fein, the Provisional IRA’s political wing. Last week Mr Ahern unveiled a postage stamp commemorating the Battle of the Somme, in a very public acknowledgement of Ireland’s British military history.⁵¹

Both of these commemorative events were, as Bertie Ahern argued, the re-appropriation of colonized history (one by the IRA and the other, fittingly, by the Ulster Unionists). The act of resurrecting history became, for the Fianna Fáil government, yet another triumph of Ireland’s future over its past. Moreover, the triumph was not only over a terrible battle in history, but over the *rights* of commemoration itself. The Irish Republic’s appropriation of what has long been considered a Unionist memorial is also an act of defiance against the Northern Irish conflict’s binary of historical events and commemoration practice.

As the Centennial of 1798 offered a symbolic space for 1898 Ireland to enact contemporary concerns over Irish cultural identity, the recent commemorations of the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising reflect contemporary societal change in the Irish Republic’s perspective upon its past. The “Spirit of 1798” was a part of a widespread phenomenon to foster national empowerment through the fusion of cultural and political movements in Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, while the Battle of the Somme commemoration gives witness to Ireland’s activities within the greater European community, the 2006 anniversary of the Easter Rising represents the triumphant prosperity of the new economy over past struggles and economic deprivation. These events influence the way the Irish

⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 29 June 2006.

community perceive its future and its past, and instigate, perhaps, other social movements of revisionist history and memorial healing within the community itself.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST: Commemoration and the Abbey Theatre

Some might claim that the Abbey Theatre has been a theatre of commemoration even before it began. The founding members of the company were painstakingly aware of the importance for their work to be memorialized in order to spread the company's reputation at home and abroad. Through their public and private letters, speeches and declarations to the press, Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats represented the Abbey Theatre premieres as moments where history was being created. Moreover, they allied the history of the Abbey with the history of Ireland through their emphasis on the company's theatrical depictions of the "authentic" Irish character which they claimed had never appearing before on the Irish stage.⁵² Along with the representation of the nation on the stage, in their rhetoric, the Abbey founders also underscored the audience's national totality in order to illustrate the Irish National Theatre's public as a microcosm of the nation itself. The Abbey Theatre Company's accounts of the audience for the Abbey's performances in 1904-1910 stress how "All of Ireland" attended the opening night performances. For the company, the audience's approval and attendance were needed to create a drama of

⁵² For Yeats in 1906, this issue was bound up in a search for *authentic* representations of Ireland through plays depicting rural life and traditional legends as some how more reflective of collective identity than depictions of life in urban centres like Dublin: "Every national dramatic movement or theatre in countries like Bohemia and Hungary, as in Elizabethan England, has arisen out of a study of the common people, who preserve national characteristics more than any other class, and out of an imaginative recreation of national history or legend." [William Butler Yeats, "The Season's Work," *The Arrow* 1, no. 1 (1906).]

“national importance.”⁵³ Commemoration of the early premieres of Abbey productions provided the space for the company to illustrate their intermingling of national identity with theatrical representation throughout their history and became essential to the Abbey Theatre’s justification of its own significance to the public.

On 27 December 1904, the Irish National Theatre Society opened in their new theatre on Abbey Street. The evening included two one-act plays in the premiere, *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, ostensibly by William Butler Yeats,⁵⁴ and *Spreading the News*, by Lady Augusta Gregory. Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, an actress in the company, described the evening as “the most fashionable theatrical event of the year.”⁵⁵ The audience appeared to receive both plays favourably. As Lady Gregory, who could not be present, was informed in a telegram, “We never had such an audience or such enthusiasm. The pit clapped when I came in. Our success could not have been greater.”⁵⁶ The enthusiasm of the “fashionable” Dublin community was seen to establish the company’s legitimacy and political significance. The premiere in 1904 was similarly described as that of the Irish Literary Society, which was seen to have “All of Ireland” in the audience, framing the performance as a groundbreaking event in the annals of Irish theatrical, and national, history.

In 1938, the Abbey Theatre held a festival honoring its past and defending its future. The program of events which occurred from the 6th to the 20th of August included evening performances of famous plays from the early repertoire such as *Kathleen ni Houlihan* by William Butler Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory and

⁵³ For accounts of the company’s relationship with its audience see: Gerard Fay, *The Abbey Theatre, Cradle of Genius* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1958). Also, Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre; a Chapter of Autobiography* (New York, London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913).

⁵⁴ *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, originally credited by Yeats, was in fact co-written by Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory. The play’s content and nationalist agenda were uncharacteristic for William Butler Yeats, and scholars now consider the play mainly as a work by Lady Gregory.

⁵⁵ Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh as told to Edward Kenny*, Cited in E. H. Mikhail, *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Press, 1988), 46.

⁵⁶ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre; a Chapter of Autobiography*, 36.

Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, while contemporary performances of *The Moon in the Yellow River* by Denis Johnston, *Church Street* by Lennox Robinson, among others, were also presented. The Festival appeared to cater to tourists as well as local visitors with excursions to the Boyne Valley and Glendalough included in the activities. Lectures also took place examining playwrights and theatrical movements developed throughout the company's thirty-four year history by guest speakers such as Brinsley MacNamara, Ernest Blythe, T.C. Murray and other company members. While commemorative events often describe the past in a favorable light, Lennox Robinson, who wrote the forward in the Festival Programme, focused on the struggles and hardships of the company throughout its history and aligned the company's struggles to that of the newly established Irish Republic itself. Robinson emphasized how in the current conditions the company would "never ... become a wealthy theatre."⁵⁷ Robinson declared that the seating capacity was too small and that even if the house was completely full, the company performed at a loss. He also described the hard amount of effort the company put in with little monetary rewards; they performed for forty-six weeks out of the year, showing a new production each week, which, Robinson pointed out, meant "constant, untiring rehearsals." The struggle of the Abbey staff did not end there, however, Robinson emphasized that due to their small budget, many of the company worked second jobs, coming straight from their other profession to the theatre, often just in time to appear on stage.⁵⁸

The portrait of the Abbey Company's hardships, however, is not described in such detail to foster sympathy from their public. In the 1938 Festival programme, Lennox Robinson portrays the Irish National Theatre Society as a company who struggle in spite of their poor facilities and conditions. Robinson frames his depiction

⁵⁷ *Abbey Theatre Festival Programme 6 August-20 August, 1938*, (Dublin: Irish National Theatre Society, 1938), 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

of the company in these terms to emphasize the worthiness of the Abbey Theatre as a company of struggle.⁵⁹ He aids in the mythification of the Abbey as a company of crisis, hardship and perseverance. Rather than belittle the company by portraying it thus, Robinson argues that this is why the company is justified in being Ireland's National Theatre. For Robinson, the difference between the "ordinary commercial theatre" practitioners, who he implies work in much better conditions than those found at the Abbey, and the Irish National Theatre Society is in this ability to be successful against all odds. Robinson argues that this ability,

...would not be possible if our Theatre were an ordinary theatre, but we are something more. We have behind us a tradition of years of willing, unpaid service on the part of Directors and players and playwrights, a memory of lean years of war when players' salaries hardly kept them in boots, a knowledge that the work of our theatre has played no small part in the creation of our State. We are, in fact, small as we are, in every sense of the word, an Irish National Theatre, something which can be seen in Dublin and nowhere else in the world.⁶⁰

In many ways, Robinson used the Festival to commemorate the company's place in Ireland's history for the public. At the end of his introduction to the festival, he rather grandiosely ties his thesis together of the struggles of Abbey and the Nation.

Our short history can teach nothing to any country, our recipe could only have been cooked over the Irish fire. There has been behind it the determination of a few people, that determination which was expressed thirty years ago in a statement signed by Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn and Mr. Yeats, but the Theatre has been shaped by the genius of its playwrights and its players. Its future is unknown: it is hidden in the brains of the dramatists yet to come.⁶¹

⁵⁹ In the introduction to the *abbeyonehundred* volume, the *Book of Days*, Ben Barnes echoed this sentiment of the Abbey which fused the theatre's history as one of opposition and struggle and "the nation." For Barnes, "The Abbey Theatre was born in controversy and controversy has been its bedfellow throughout its turbulent first century. However, in spite of riots, fire, financial ups and downs, the waxing and waning of its public and critical popularity the Abbey survives as a powerful voice of the evolving nation. It has, to quote the famous words of Joyce "forged in the smithy" of its soul "the uncreated conscience" of the race. This Book of Days salutes the triumphs and imperfections of the way and the resilience of the wayfarers." Ben Barnes, 'The Birthday Party,' *Book of Days: An Abbey Century in Pictures*, (Dublin: Abbey Theatre, 2003).

⁶⁰ *Abbey Theatre Festival Programme 6 August-20 August, 1938*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

For Robinson, the Abbey Theatre becomes portrayed as a personification of Irishness; Irish identity and history, he argues is one of struggle against impossible opposition, indeed the very act of empowerment through hardship.

Lennox Robinson's framing of the Abbey Theatre in this fashion said much about the anxiety of the times. The statements made in the Festival programme strategically attempted to reach a particular audience, that of the Irish government. The company had recently proposed a new facility to be found for them in the Rotunda Rooms,⁶² and they used this opportunity to justify their worthiness to an unsympathetic Taoiseach, Eamonn de Valera. In *Dreams and Responsibilities*, the former Director of the National Gallery, Brian P. Kennedy argued that,

De Valera believed in an Irish culture comprised of native sports, music, dancing, story-telling, folklore and literature. He would take time to assist cultural endeavour if it was in spirit with his religious and nationalist beliefs. In the task of nation-building, de Valera saw it as essential to promote activities which were rooted in the traditions of the majority of the Irish people.⁶³

With de Valera's nationalist agenda, the need to emphasize the Abbey's ties to the nation and nationalistic enterprise became strategic, as Lennox Robinson was well aware.

While the 1938 Festival emphasized the hardships of the company, by 1966 it was important to highlight the future potential of the Abbey rather than its past decline.⁶⁴ 1966 saw the opening the company's new building by the architects Michael Scott and Company and they celebrated the launch of their long hoped for new building with a commemorative festival. This commemoration was geared to advertize the Abbey as an exciting performance space for the future. They spoke of the recent past, which was seen as the artistic decline of the theatre company as a

⁶² For more information about the 1938 building proposal, see Chapter Two.

⁶³ Brian P. Kennedy. *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. (Dublin:1991):48-49.

⁶⁴ For a more detailed study of the 1966 launch of the Abbey's current building, see Chapter Two.

“Babylonian Captivity” due to their loss of their Theatre Building in 1951. They depicted the company as going through a period of hardship and struggle from which they fought and gained victory in spite of the odds. The new building was also a sign of the new innovations of the 1960s. The mid-1960s were seen as a period of expansion and optimism in Ireland (as in so many other places) and the company aimed to launch itself into modernity with new artistic practice.

In 1979, there was a celebration of the Irish National Theatre Society’s 75th Anniversary. The celebration continued from the actual date of the anniversary, December 27th, 1979 through 1980 which marked the centenary of Sean O’Casey.⁶⁵ Due to the centenary of O’Casey’s birth, the 75th Anniversary had a strong O’Casey theme with productions by the Abbey’s Artistic Director, Joe Dowling, of O’Casey’s plays, *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Shadow of the Gunman*. National Gallery of Ireland held an exhibition of paintings, drawings and sketches of early Abbey members, and a Festival of Films also occurred, featuring Ardmore Studio productions of Abbey plays, and other films featuring former Abbey Theatre performers. The event also saw the launch of a new book on the Abbey Theatre by a former Artistic Director of the company, Hugh Hunt.⁶⁶

Existing simultaneously to the 75th Anniversary, was a large scale exhibition of Irish Art, Industry and Culture to London entitled, *A Sense of Ireland*. Strategically placed to boost tourism and business and foster understanding with Northern Ireland and the Republic. In association with the Irish Tourist Board, the *A Sense of Ireland* exhibition was presented in London to show British audiences the triumphs of Irish Industry and Culture. As claimed in *The Sense of Ireland* programme, “The purposes of the festival are to present the best of the Irish arts, North and South, in a major

⁶⁵ Sean O’Casey was born in Dublin on 30 March, 1880.

⁶⁶ Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland’s National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

international context; to demonstrate in England the depth and strength of Ireland's heritage and contemporary culture; to make an important contribution to improving understanding and relations between the people of these islands."⁶⁷ Taking place at the height of "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland, the Exhibition aimed to separate the Irish Republic from Northern Ireland through its placement as the "New Europeans," while also fostering sympathy for the Northern Irish community. Modernity, innovation and vanguard creativity was the aim of the event.⁶⁸

The Irish National Theatre took part in *A Sense of Ireland* through performances of a new play by Hugh Leonard, *A Life*, as well as the Abbey's participation in a joint exhibition with the National Gallery of Ireland, "The Abbey Theatre: 1904/1979" which presented artistic depictions of members of the Abbey Company from 1904 to 1979. Taking place at the museum in Dublin and a gallery in London, the exhibition focused primarily on the past. The official program of the anniversary, *75th Birthday Greetings to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin 1904-1979* included anecdotal stories from the early years, a "scrapbook" of lore including the story of the Abbey "gong" and sketches and pictures from the company's history. Due to the sensitivity of the political climate and the continued violence in Northern Ireland, the exhibition attempted to focus on celebratory, but non-political links between the Abbey Theatre, nationalism and the company's part in the struggle for Irish independence. By keeping the focus on the past, and the emphasis on past struggles in relation to the new Republic's history (as opposed to current strife in

⁶⁷ "Without the Walls—Documentation" for *A Sense of Ireland*, ICA, catalogue compiled by Dorothy Walker and designed by Catherine Drea (1979: Callan Design Consultants, Loughbrack, Co. Kilkenny)

⁶⁸ Events for the *Sense of Ireland* exhibition included: Abbey Theatre Events, Aspects of Ireland, Book Fair, Insights into Contemporary Ireland, Ballet Co. and Chieftains, Design Seminar, Irish Film Retrospective, Irish Palladian Houses, Jack Yeats, New Irish Plays, Patrick Scott, Roy Johnston, Rock and Trad Music, Portraits of Literary Figures, Representation of Irish on Film, RTE SO, Vikings in Ireland, Three Points of View, and Writers Reading. (National Gallery Archives 1980 Exhibitions Abbey Theatre/Sense of Ireland, MS P708.15 DUB/ABB)

Northern Ireland), the company and the Irish National Gallery attempted to put a positive and optimistic tone on the exhibition. The exhibition aimed to show the “human side” of the Abbey and link it to significant events of the Republic’s history. The introduction to the National Gallery exhibition on Abbey figures stressed the closeness between the Abbey Theatre with the “political and social life of the country” in its early years. This closeness, it would seem, meant to the organizers of the *Sense of Ireland* exhibition that the theatre in Ireland “is more closely related to the ordinary man than in most other places.”⁶⁹ Through the portraits, The National Gallery organizers hoped to celebrate the unique “Irish” character for their British audiences, illustrating through visual images the aims of *A Sense of Ireland’s* events. At least for Terence Mullaly of the *Daily Telegraph*, this aim was realized.

Something which none of the other events in the Festival of Irish Arts achieved is conjured by the exhibition devoted to the Abbey Theatre now at the Fine Arts Society 148 New Bond Street. It conveys the very spirit of Ireland. This exhibition, organised by the National Gallery of Ireland, where it was first shown, touches upon human characteristics at the heart of being Irish. From the portrait of George Moore, wise with years, by J.B. Yeats, to Brendan Behan, bloated and near early death, by Harry Kernoff, these portraits suggest the poetic insights and the pain of being Irish. ... This exhibition commemorates the 75th anniversary of the Abbey Theatre. What it proves is not only the theatre, but also the visual arts, have been enriched by that archetypal Irish institution.⁷⁰

By continuing to forge the Abbey’s practice with Irish character and Irish history, the *Sense of Ireland* exhibition and the 75th Anniversary aimed to keep the Abbey Theatre placed as the penultimate theatrical institution to represent the Irish nation.

⁶⁹ Terence Mullaly, "Art: The Abbey Theatre," *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1980.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

COMMEMORATING THE FUTURE

Commemoration acts to bind communities together through the imagined past. These imaginings are created, not solely through print culture as previously noted in Benedict Anderson's work,⁷¹ but also through social rituals. Collective memory is important because it is what reinforces our understanding of ourselves and our community. Individual memory may not be reinforced as it is both unpredictable and constantly shifting. It is through collective imaginings that our world takes on solid, concrete form; as Ian McBride notes, the past becomes "stabilised"⁷² through this collective process.

Commemoration and the Abbey are fused together as a space for the memorialization of the company's position in history. In 1904, Yeats and Lady Gregory's depictions of the founding were strategically created to boost their reputation as a "national" artistic endeavour, while 1938 stressed the company's value to the nation for a government with budgetary concerns and a Taoiseach unsympathetic to the arts, the 1966 celebration focused upon where the company was heading, while the 1979 Anniversary renegotiated the Abbey Theatre's position to the past in a world concerned with new interpretations of what it means to be "nationalistic" and in support of the national character. For *abbeyonehundred*, the circumstances of the Abbey's commemorative history are revisited in its relationship with the past, the nation, and the public. These events influence the way the Irish community perceives its future and its past, and instigates, perhaps, other social movements of revisionist history and memorial healing within the community itself.

⁷¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁷² "When we recall the past, then, we do so as members of our groups -a family, a local community, a workforce, a political movement, a church or a trade union." Ian McBride, 'Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland', in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 6.

The recent commemorations of the Battle of the Somme, the Easter Rising and the Abbey Theatre reflect contemporary societal change in the Irish Republic's attitude to its past, while the centennial of the 1798 Rebellion aided in the construction of Irishness for many Irish grassroots organizations in their struggle for independence. The 2006 Battle of the Somme commemoration acts as a celebration of the Peace Treaty in Northern Ireland, as well as the Republic's participation within the greater European community. The recent anniversary of the Easter Rising represents the triumphant prosperity of the new economy over past struggles and economic deprivation.

Throughout centennials and commemorative events, the past is evoked and celebrated as a performance, showing the ways in which history reflects contemporary culture and how those in the community can align themselves to that history. As we have seen in the construction of commemorative practice in parades, governmental memorials, and theatrical events, the past is not merely invoked, but transformed and constructed for current political and social practice. The transformation of the events they celebrate throughout commemorative history illustrates the buoyancy of memory. The events and framing of the Abbey's celebratory history are indicators of the tastes and politics of the time. The past can be transformed, forgotten, resurrected and idealized in ways that are more a reflection of our present than *its* past life. Thus the manipulation of memory will always be both a lively and dangerous element in any commemoration activity. As Pierre Nora reveals:

Memory is life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution, subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying dormant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened.⁷³

⁷³ Pierre Nora, "General Introductions: Between Memory and History," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past/under the Direction of Pierre Nora*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

The past is both excavatable and negotiable; the past is made up of dangerous ground.

CHAPTER TWO

A SPACE FOR THE NATION:

The Architecture of Memory in the Irish National Theatre

I look forward to a new national theatre building that makes a bold and visionary statement about modern Ireland and one that will be a cultural institution that will act as a magnet to draw all of our citizens, and those visiting, towards enjoying the inspiring drama and creativity our country has to offer.

-Seamus Brennan, T.D., Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2007

In the Irish context, architecture and landscape often surface in political debates over identity politics. The landscape of the Celtic Tiger is teeming with building sites; cranes, builders, and new urban structures fill the topography of Ireland in the twenty-first century, offering visual reminders of the changing economic, social and national terrain. According to the architect Martha Schwartz, the constructed environmental space of a community, in part, defines how that community perceives itself within society:

The visual quality of our environment defines us as individuals and citizens of a certain place. It becomes internalized and part of our self-image. It defines who we are individually and collectively and ultimately becomes what we are remembered by as a culture.¹

By this rationale a national monument or institution leaves its imprint on how the public perceive themselves. A national monument in turn, reflects and affects the public perception of the nation.

For the Irish National Theatre Society, issues of the company and the community have played themselves out through the Abbey Theatre building. In an interview with the former Assistant Literary Manager, Orla Flanagan, she argued that

¹ Martha Schwartz Quoted in: Claire Corey, "Groundswell: Constructing Contemporary Landscape," (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, 2005).

the struggles that developed over *abbeyonehundred* had many of their seeds planted in the unsuccessful outcome to obtain a new building by the centenary year. “[If] you talk to anyone on the street about where the Abbey is, they probably haven’t been to the Abbey, they probably don’t go to the theatre at all, but for some reason it got into people’s consciousness, the fight over the building.”² Like criticism over the *abbeyonehundred* repertoire, the Abbey’s struggle to obtain a new building, and the physical impression of the building itself, entered the public sphere and became central to what appeared as faulty in the national institution. For Flanagan, the amount of press coverage about the Abbey building, and the heated debates surrounding it, highlight the symbolic importance that the building itself held for the public. The failed attempt to obtain a new building by the centennial year became a focal point to articulate criticisms against the continued importance of the Abbey Theatre as a viable national cultural institution.

From the late 1990s to 2004, the theatre building provided a site of controversy between the company, the government and the Irish community. The stage and administrative offices of the building had long proved inadequate for the company and there had been talk of replacing the faulty building with a new site by the Abbey’s centenary year. After Ben Barnes’ establishment as Artistic Director in 2000, negotiations for a new building developed between the company and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. Flanagan contests that the arising tension between the government and the theatre company over the building foreshadows the later outbreak of commentary over the Abbey centenary. The failure to obtain a new Abbey building, Flanagan argues “was the beginning of the breakdown between the Arts

² Orla Flanagan (former Assistant Literary Manager, Abbey Theatre 2004), in discussion with the author, 21 May 2007.

Council and the politicians and the Abbey.”³ Ben Barnes’ unsuccessful struggle with the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Irish government created precedence for further miscommunication between the governing bodies and the Abbey Theatre through 2004.

During 2004, the commentary surrounding *abbeyonehundred* became entrenched in the politics of the Abbey’s struggle for a new architectural space. Both the location of the building and the question of design were discussed by the press, the public and the company itself in newspaper articles, interviews and internet chat forums. Considering the number of other, more pressing, difficulties presented during the centenary year, the emphasis placed on the company’s theatrical location appears misplaced. Despite the obvious disappointment of the company’s failure to commemorate its history with the grand opening of a new building in 2004, the public and the company’s concentration on their need for a new national theatre throughout the *abbeyonehundred* season illustrates the centrality of the national institution’s architecture to the company’s identity. In 2004, the theatrical space became symbolic of the Abbey’s status as a national icon and essential for the hopes for the resurrection of the theatre’s failing reputation.

Like many of the issues raised during the *abbeyonehundred* controversy, the struggle for the building offers questions beyond those of architectural planning and the need for government funding to larger debates over the function of the arts in Ireland. The politics of public space reflect hierarchical value systems existing in society. The Abbey Theatre’s struggle for a new building in recent years became embedded in cultural networks of past and future political and national systems. To uncover why the new building had not materialized by 2004, the architecture’s

³ Ibid.

political and economic significance for Irish society need to be addressed. This chapter examines the legacy of Irish monumental history, especially for the Arts, and attempts to frame the history of the Abbey Theatre's multiple buildings within that context. The following illustrates the social politics of space and architecture, national and public spatial systems in the theatre and the Abbey Theatre company's personal response to its architectural frame. While plans for a new building were resurrected in 2005, similar debates and queries about the importance of the physical space for the company as well as concerns for the city's future prosperity remain. The company's struggles over its building became interlinked with its own theatrical and managerial struggles and highlight the importance of the physical environment for a company and a culture.

THE ABBEY THEATRE BUILDING: A "Checked History"

In autumn 2004, as rumours of the Irish National Theatre company's indiscretions and misdemeanours began to surface in the Dublin community, talk of the struggle over the company's physical space returned to the Irish press. The building's "checked history"⁴ was described by Fintan O'Toole in the *Irish Times*, while the *Irish Independent* ran remarks about the possibility of a new building in its future. According to O'Toole,

If the saga of the Abbey's attempts to get a new building were a play, the theatre would reject it. It has gone on too long. It has too many implausible twists. It repeats scenes over and over, continually ending up back where it began.⁵

Like the company itself, the Abbey Theatre building has been fraught with controversy throughout its history. From the beginning, the building has been considered unsound, dangerous, difficult to work in, and an unworthy house of

⁴ Fintan O'Toole, "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People," *Irish Times*, 14 January 2004.

⁵ Fintan O'Toole, "Editorial," *Irish Times*, 13 January 2004.

national culture. The original building had no scene shop, a very small backstage area, and limited office space. The building that replaced it in 1966, designed by Michael Scott, has too wide a stage for modern productions, limited public space, is considered a safety hazard, and is “peculiarly forbidding for a landmark civic building that needs to invite the public in.”⁶ The building has not only been criticized as a physical embarrassment and source of the company’s troubles, but its reconstruction has also been delayed and hindered in 1904, 1938, 1966, 1995 and the present through architectural difficulties and tensions between members of the board, the theatre makers, the government, and the company’s funding bodies.

Before addressing the Abbey Theatre’s demands for a new building and its relationship to the centenary, it is essential to map out the Abbey theatre building or, more accurately, buildings’ pasts. Ironically, the aims, problems and queries over the old Abbey Theatre building are strangely apposite to those of the newer theatre and the attempts at others.⁷ The first building of the newly-christened Irish National Theatre Society transformed the space of the disused Mechanics Institute into a theatre, as they hoped, for a new century. They rebuilt and redesigned the old Victorian variety hall to incorporate the more modern theatre needed for the Abbey company. The building was refurbished by Joseph Holloway to incorporate a pleasing façade, lobby and an intimate theatre space.⁸ However, the building had no scene

⁶Ibid.

⁷ Attempts to create a new Abbey Theatre occurred in 1938, and in 1995, there was a plan to refurbish the current Abbey Theatre building.

⁸ In the 75th Anniversary programme they detailed the purchases and arrangements laid out by the Architect, Holloway for the renovated theatre. “[Holloway] was engaged by Miss Anne Horniman as architect of the original Abbey Theatre. His original estimate of cost was a mere £1,300 and the total outlay did not exceed £1,700. This included: The Carpets –supplied by Millar & Beatty, The Scenery –supplied and painted by The Irish Decorating Company under the supervision of Scenic Artist Frederick Byer, Complete Electrical Installations –erected by TJ Sheehan, Dame Street, Electrical Engineer and Contractor to H.M. War Department, The Painting –executed by Marks Brs., 13 South Anne Street, The Upholstering and Seating –by James Hill of 10, 11, 12 Bachelor’s Walk, The Fireproof Curtain and External Porches –by J & C McLoughlin, Art Metal Workers and Constructional Engineers, 47 to 54 Great Brunswick Street, Dublin, Stained Glass Windows –supplied by An Tur

dock or workshop and the actors had to exit the theatre and cross an alley to pass between backstage left and right and to enter the greenroom.⁹ In the London, *A Sense of Ireland* writer's exhibition in 1980, Andrew Carpenter and Peter Fallon reminisced about the peculiar facilities of the old building,

More serious was the problem presented by an occasional visitor who, on entering by the doorway from the lane, would find himself unable to get to the greenroom without crossing the stage, and might indeed do so while the curtain was up.¹⁰

The peculiar set up of the back door not only made unexpected additions to the cast, it also, as Fallon and Carpenter went on to declare, forced the actors to use the back alley way to go between stage right and stage left.¹¹

Later, the building was renovated to include a brightly lit lobby and "modern chromium canopy" which replaced the original design's dark, sombre oak-lined public space.¹² In 1924, they constructed the Peacock Theatre in a small building adjoining the Abbey Theatre. The new Peacock housed 102 audience members and was designed to be used for experimental work as well as performances by the new Abbey School of Acting. By 1938, a proposal was made to the government for a construction a new national theatre building housing the Abbey, the Gate and An Cohmar Drámaoícha theatre companies. This ambitious project would significantly centralize the established theatrical companies in Dublin. At first, this project was accepted in February of 1940 by Sean T. O'Kelly, the Minister of Finance, but construction was postponed until after the state of "Emergency" came to an end.¹³

Gloine, 24 Upper Pembroke Street, Dublin -Proprietor Miss Purser H.R.H.A. Manager, A.E. Child. (Abbey Theatre, "'75th Birthday Greeting to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin 1904-1979', 75th Anniversary Abbey Theatre Programme," in *Abbey Theatre* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland Archive, 1979).)

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Andrew Carpenter and Peter Fallon, *The Writers : A Sense of Ireland : New Works by 44 Irish Writers* (New York: G. Braziller, 1980), 142.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Donagh MacDonagh, *Drama* London, no. 12 (1949): 4-7.

¹³ Brian P. Kennedy. *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. (Dublin:1991):48-49.

Unfortunately, in 1943, the Minister for Finance no longer felt that the £170,000 needed for the new National Theatre was available for what was considered a “luxury” by the de Valera government. As O’Kelly pointedly declared to the Cabinet Committee on Economic Planning:

In view of the vast amounts which will be required for purposes such as housing (in both town and country), family allowances and other social services – not to mention arterial drainage, the scientific development of agriculture – it seems likely that an artistic luxury such as a national theatre will have to take a low place in financial priorities.¹⁴

Due to the Department of Finance’s unsympathetic position on the funding of a national theatre or other houses of culture in the late 1940s, the calamity which struck the Abbey Theatre company in the early 1950s could not have come at a more difficult time. In 1951, a fire destroyed the entire back-stage premises of the Abbey Theatre and the company was forced to abandon it for the Queen’s Theatre while they awaited the construction of a new building.¹⁵ The Queen’s Theatre was draughty and too large for any intimate performance style, but in 1966, after many delays, the company were finally reinstated in their own theatre.

Nevertheless, the long-awaited building was never adequately equipped for the demands of a large theatre company and persists in being a source of dissatisfaction and contention for the theatre company. Continuing the tradition of long-standing delays for a new building, the Abbey has been attempting to replace the current structure for over ten years. This replacement is a necessity not only in terms of artistic merit but, more importantly, from the position of safety for both the performers and their public. As Fintan O’Toole illustrated in the *Irish Times*,

As long ago as 1995, a study by McCullough Mulvin Architects concluded that ‘the building is rapidly and inevitably becoming a genuine health and safety

¹⁴ Sean T. O’Kelly, Minister of Finance recommendation to Cabinet Committee on Economic Planning (Houses of Oireachtas, Dublin:1943) –Quoted in Kennedy: 49.

¹⁵ For a detailed description of the fire and struggles for a building, see: Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978* [I.E. 1979].

hazard.' In spite of some running repairs, an Office of Public Works report of 2002 concluded that the building was still 'operating at the limits of safety.'¹⁶ It has often been suggested that if the Board of Health were to make a thorough inspection of the structure, the theatre would be shut down as a dangerous risk to the health and well-being of its occupants.¹⁷

In 1995, the Abbey Board began to look into possibilities of rebuilding on the site, of renovating the existing theatre, or of moving the theatre to a new location. They came to the decision that it was easier to rebuild and the Architects McCullough Mulvin and Company were hired to do so. The new designs were modest, but the theatre would have more backstage resources at its disposal, an archive, a library, as well as a more inviting lobby and theatre space.¹⁸ In March of 2000, the Abbey Theatre was given funding by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Arts, Síle de Valera, and it was expected that the company would be able to open the centenary celebrations in 2004 with a new building. However, the Abbey Board changed their minds within the next few months after the project was accepted by the government, and decided in February 2001 to accept an offer of a greenfield site at the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA), thus moving the theatre across the river to the Docklands. Unfortunately, this change in plans was not viewed favorably by the Department of Arts and the Dublin City Council who were deeply concerned about what the move of the National Theatre would do to their plans for the revitalization of the north side.

For the Dublin City Council and the Department of Arts, the need to keep the Irish National Theatre Society on the north side continues a tradition of attempting to bring business and culture to the area around O'Connell Street. The longstanding

¹⁶O'Toole, "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ McCullough Mulvin and Company, "Draft of Abbey Theatre," in *McCullough Mulvin and Company Collection MS122* (Dublin: Architectural Archive of Ireland, 1995).

rivalry between the north and south side is deeply entrenched in Dublin city politics. Unfortunately, the Abbey Board ignored the political issues involved in abandoning the theatre's placement on the north side for the south side docklands site, and had to face the consequences of opposing the wills of their major funding body. In a meeting of the external monitoring committee in 2001, Joe Costello stated that:

This monitoring committee views with dismay the decision by the board of the Abbey theatre to relocate. It is strongly of the view that the decision is damaging to the work of the committee in ensuring that the O'Connell Street area is revitalised and is restored as the central hub of the capital city and invites the Abbey board to a special meeting to discuss the future of the national theatre.¹⁹

The Seanad went on to describe an alternative, that the Abbey Theatre being located potentially on O'Connell Street close to the Gate Theatre, the Savoy Cinema and the newly-developed shopping centres, as a favorable way of turning the area of North O'Connell Street into the "Broadway of Ireland."²⁰

The Abbey Theatre's location, therefore, moves into political rather than financial territory. Many commentaries blamed the opposition of the government on the theatre's attempt to go outside of the political constituency of Bertie Ahern, who, in part, controlled the Irish National Theatre's governmental funding body. Ahern felt that his voting constituents would oppose the move of the Abbey Theatre outside of their area and aid in the economic decline of the community. In an interview with reporter Ben Quinn of the *Irish Independent*, Fine Gael arts spokesperson, Deirdre Clune criticized the Taoiseach's opposition to the Abbey's move and argued that,

...The Abbey's future was too important to be decided on the basis of constituency boundaries. 'Mr Ahern should be prepared to examine the board's proposals with an open mind and put the interests of the country before his own.'²¹

¹⁹The Seanad, *Meeting Notes*, 22 February 2001.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ben Quinn, "Ahern Urged to Reconsider Plan for Abbey Move," *Irish Independent*, 9 February 2001.

Despite the criticism pointed at Ahern, the Taoiseach held firm to his refusal for the Abbey Theatre to move its site to the Dublin south side. In justification for his actions beyond voting rights, Ahern described the need for cultural institutions to aid in the revitalization of the north side's economic and social structures. Like the Dublin Spire, a new Irish National Theatre building was seen as a means of sparking a wave of regeneration and renewal in the north side economic structures.

The theatre's role as a national institution deeply affects the strategic importance of the company's physical site. The Abbey Theatre, according to Ahern and other members of the Irish government, should evoke national symbolic and political power. The Seanad went further to describe the need for the Abbey Board to consider their responsibility as a national cultural institution to the city itself in regards of where they house their new theatre. As Senator Costello clarified this responsibility:

The role of a cultural institution is not just a cultural matter. It depends very much on accessibility. There is not much sense in having a wonderful cultural institution if it is an ivory tower at a distance removed. Neither of the dockland proposals before the board, one on the south side and one on the north side, merits as much consideration as either a rebuilding or reconstruction and expansion of the current building or a move to an adjacent location. It is not a question of whether it is north side or south side but of what will be best in the future. How we see the development of our national theatre as a central cultural resource is important.²²

The Abbey Theatre in and of itself is not enough of a cultural attraction to merit the revitalization of an entire area; but, rather, needs to be strategically located close to other areas of cultural legitimacy for its continued success as a cultural institution.

The Abbey's denial of the political and symbolic importance of their architectural legacy caused the government to refuse the company's chosen physical site. Unfortunately, when the Board was able to convince the Irish government of the necessity for a new location, the south side docklands site had been purchased and the

²²Seanad, *Meeting Notes*.

company lost their chance of launching the centenary with a new theatre building. As Fintan O'Toole declared "Whatever the merits of the docklands idea, it essentially threw away in a matter of days a momentum that had taken five years to establish."²³ Over the next four years, the Carlton Cinema, Garden of Remembrance and almost every vacant building in Dublin was suggested as a potential location of the theatre and the company's physical structure remained inadequate throughout the centenary.²⁴

As *abbeyonehundred* geared up to begin, there was as yet no sign of any new building on the horizon. Members of the press stated their regret that the commemorative celebrations could not have coincided with a new building for the company, as previously planned. According to an editorial in the *Irish Times*:

The Abbey is still mired in uncertainty over its accommodation. There is all-round agreement that the current building, its home since the 1960s, is unsuitable. The opening of a new theatre in 2004 would have been the ideal birthday present. The possible opportunity to provide that gift was lost in a debacle for which the Government and the Abbey itself have to share the blame.²⁵

The newspaper went on to declare their hope that before the end of the centenary year, a site would be chosen and the foundations begun for a new building, either on the current site, or on a new one. As the *Irish Times* editorial illustrated, a need for a new building was imperative because the Abbey could not continue to create "interesting theatre" unless the company had a suitable home to develop that theatre.²⁶

As Orla Flanagan suggested, the controversy of *abbeyonehundred* appeared linked to the problematic issues concerning the new theatre building. Ben Barnes argued that the poor quality of backstage and office space in the current building hampers how the theatre company is run, "and that mitigates the way you can do the

²³ O'Toole, "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People."

²⁴ For more stories of the current debate over the fate of the Abbey theatre building see: "A State of Chassis," *Economist*, 6 January 2005.

²⁵ "Editorial," *Irish Times*, 23 November 2003.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

work.”²⁷ For a theatre which the Irish State intends as a “signature building”, the Abbey has not been able to live up to its symbolic cultural and nationalist purpose at any point in its history.

The debate over location of the Abbey Theatre remained fraught with difficulties and there were equal advocates for the decision to relocate or remain onsite. Some feel that the company needed to relocate in order to build a truly modern theatre building capable of internationally renowned work, while others, such as Ben Levitas, argue that the Abbey’s location on Abbey Street is so caught up with the history and, indeed, legend of the company, that to remove the building from its location would damage the company’s prestige and identity.²⁸ There were a few critics who argued that the increasing dysfunction of the national theatre building would be a good opportunity to turn the theatre into a national theatre without a central location, like that recently developed in Scotland.²⁹ Though this plan could help the decentralization of the theatre in Ireland, in defense of a central location for a national cultural institution, the NCH chairman, Dr. Dermot Egan, defended to the Select Committee of Arts, Sport, Tourism and Gaeltacht Affairs, the need for a state of the art, Dublin-based National Concert Hall, by arguing that

While it is important to have regional centres, as members know from their constituencies, a strong national facility is imperative as a driving force for Ireland internationally and the country nationally and to spur on regional centres. We know from experience when people come from various parts of the country to perform — choirs, orchestras and so forth — they are highly motivated by the experience. It is a wonderfully motivating cultural experience

²⁷ Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author, June 2007.

²⁸ Ben Levitas, Private Conversation with Author, National Theatres Conference, (Trinity College Dublin, May 2005).

²⁹ The National Theatre of Scotland funds productions at different theatres across Scotland, allowing for as diverse a geographic area for national theatre productions as possible. (Belinda McKeon, "Abbey 100 Part 2: Critical Views: How Well Is the Abbey Fulfilling Its Role as the National Theatre?" *Irish Times*, 14 January 2004.)

for them and we would love to be able to provide that opportunity more often but because of the facilities available, we cannot meet demand.³⁰

Dr. Egan went on to portray the need for an important geographical “footprint” for a national cultural institution. This is created due to the building’s location as well as its historical significance.³¹ The former Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O’Donoghue, described the site of Abbey Theatre building in terms of this “geographic footprint” which, he declared would help form a cultural centre as is often found in the “great” cities of Europe and America.³² For defenders of the Abbey Street location, and its opposition, the national “footprint” of the building was considered an important factor in wherever the new building would be placed. Ironically, the original obscure location on Abbey Street, taken out of financial necessity, became a location of symbolic cultural importance which the Abbey found difficult to break.

BUILDING STRIFE: Irish Cultural Institutions and their Buildings

The Abbey Theatre is not unique in its struggle with the government over architectural space. The National Concert Hall, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and even in their time, the National Gallery and the Hugh Lane Gallery fought long and hard battles to obtain, refurbish and move their houses of culture. In the United Kingdom, struggles happened over buildings for the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Ballet and the Royal Opera House, amongst other institutions, indicating that the politics behind buildings for the arts are not solely an Irish phenomenon.

³⁰ Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "National Concert Hall: Presentation.," (Dublin: Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005).

³¹ Ibid.

³² O'Toole, "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People."

Despite the worthiness of all of these institutions' histories, the following will concentrate on the struggles for funding, property issues and delays in construction that occurred at the National Concert Hall and the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Parallels between the construction and perception of the Royal National Theatre and the Abbey will be addressed later in this chapter, while, though the National Gallery, like the National Concert Hall, struggled for years to establish itself at its current site, and the construction of a new Royal Opera House and Royal Ballet at Covent Garden ended with a management crisis due to delays in completion and budgetary quandaries,³³ the former institutions' struggles to obtain their current or future buildings are the most apposite to those of the Irish National Theatre Society.

The National Concert Hall

If the Abbey Theatre's architectural history has been a history of struggle for funding and faulty facilities, it shares that history with the National Concert Hall. Moreover, the establishment of a National Concert Hall in Dublin took decades for its visionaries who fought against a prejudice amongst the early governments of the Irish Republic. Many Irish statesmen thought that Classical Music, and indeed other art forms including the theatre, was an elitist, aristocratic art form with deep roots amongst the Anglo-Irish community, and therefore unworthy of Catholic Ireland.³⁴ Brian Kennedy theorizes that much of the opposition to fund a National Concert Hall and other artistic institutions in the newly established Republic came from Eamonn de Valera's prejudice against what was perceived as high culture:

³³ For a more detailed study of the Royal Opera House controversy involving the management team, board of directors and the British Government, see Chapter Five. Issues between the Irish Museum of Modern Art Board and their Director, Declan McGonagle will also be developed in Chapter Five.

³⁴ The early leaders of the Irish Republic were interested in fostering "native arts" such as traditional Irish music, Irish dancing and the Irish language. For them, spending state funds on a National Concert Hall appeared to be a misuse of funds. See: Brian P. Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. Edited by Arts Council, ed. Arts Council (Dublin: Criterion Press, 1991).

It is obvious that de Valera would have included the fine arts among ‘the luxuries of a certain kind’ which had been part of life in the mansion of Anglo-Ireland. The fine arts had been the preserve of the landed gentry for centuries. Orchestral concerts, dance galas and opera were the fashionable recreations of the wealthy ruling class. Fine paintings were seen only on the walls of rooms in the ‘big houses’. Therefore it was believed that the fine arts were not part of native Irish tradition. De Valera knew that it was politically viable to support what were perceived to be native arts forms, political dynamite to fund ‘non-national’ art. The government had to proceed cautiously. It would be some time before the Irish people would regard the fine arts as legitimate recipients of government funds.³⁵

In 1936 there was an attempt to create a Symphony Orchestra and a National Concert Hall in an expansive project to turn the Rotunda Rooms into a space for Theatre, Music and Irish Dancing. The proposal was to move the Abbey Theatre to this location and create a central space for a National Theatre, National Concert Hall and general arts centre in Dublin. Unfortunately, though initially approved of in 1938, this proposal was discouraged by the government who thought that it was too great an expenditure for something that would appeal to a small proportion of the public.³⁶ As stated earlier in this chapter, the attempt to obtain the Rotunda for the Abbey Theatre and the National Concert Hall was stymied from opposition from the government, and by 1940 the Department of Finance rejected the project out right. In 1942, Paddy Little, the new Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, submitted a new proposal of a National Concert Hall at the site the Capitol Theatre in Dublin, but this project was delayed due to the War throughout Europe and what was known as the “State of Emergency” in Ireland. Though a neutral country, the years of World War Two were still a period of relative deprivation in the Republic, and the Minister of Finance, Sean

³⁵ Ibid.,30.

³⁶ Ibid.,42.

McEntree, did not see the need to spend public funds upon national institutions for the Arts, especially with de Valera's opposition to the project.³⁷

From the late 1940s through the 1960s proposal after proposal was made to establish a National Concert Hall.³⁸ Some failed due to a change in Government in the midst of a project proposal, while difficulties in finding a workable site also prolonged the process. Ironically, similar difficulties as witnessed by Ben Barnes in 2000 occurred with the establishment of a National Concert Hall. Buildings were approved and money allocated by the government for the establishment of a National Concert Hall in 1946 and 1955, but due to political, financial and architectural reasons, these projects were never realized.³⁹ In the 1960s, a proposal was made for a John F. Kennedy Memorial Hall. This hall would have two auditoria and be a centre for classical music.⁴⁰ This proposal was eventually reduced to a single auditorium and, finally, on 9 May 1974, the Government declared that the Great Hall of the University College Dublin, at Earlsfort Terrace, would become the concert hall. The reconstruction of the building, however, was delayed and the company finally opened its doors in September of 1981.

Despite all of the struggles for the construction of the National Concert Hall, once the building was re-constructed, it proved faulty for the purpose it was built.

³⁷ Pat O'Kelly Patricia Butler, *The National Concert Hall at Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin: A History* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press Ltd., 2000), 103.

³⁸ In 1946 the Rotunda was reconsidered for the site of the Concert Hall, but when the Fianna Fail party were 'ousted from office' in 1948, the new Inter-Party Government cancelled the project. By 1952 there was talk of a Concert and Assembly Hall, whereas by 1955 the plan went back to the site of the Capitol Theatre, and yet, by 1969 there was still no concert hall on the horizon. After a struggle of over 6 decades, the Concert Hall was finally under construction at Earlsfort Terrace in 1980, scheduled to open in April of 1981, and yet later postponed until the official State opening was held on 9 September 1981. (O'Kelly, 107-128).

³⁹ See: Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. Edited by Arts Council.

⁴⁰ Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "National Concert Hall: Presentation.," no. 42, 24 November (2005).

According to Pat O’Kelly in a review in the Evening Press, at the test concert the NCH presented before their official opening of 8 July 1981,

One thing is plain. The hall did (and will) show every imperfection, however, minute. The musicians will already have reached this conclusion. The slightest deviation in intonation is highlighted to a fine degree. Coarseness, if there be any, will be more evident and woolly, fluffy playing will be recognizable for what it is. Another thing is certain – *An Ceoldáras Náisiúnta* is a challenge to our musicians and audiences...⁴¹

Additions were added to the building to create a more acoustically acceptable space for sound, and yet the current National Concert Hall has remained inadequate to the present.

In recent years, the management team of the National Concert Hall has proposed to the government plans to replace the existing NCH building with one more fit for an international music venue. The NCH have been advocating for a new building since 2000, and as of 2002, along with a similar condemnation of the Abbey Theatre’s conditions and recommendation for reconstruction, the Office of Public Works declared it was a priority for the national tourist strategy to redevelop the National Concert Hall. John O’Donoghue, the Minister of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism acknowledged the “restrictions” of the current concert hall, due to “limitations in respect of the performance area and the seating arrangements. The building dates back to 1865.”⁴² Though the NCH members wished to adapt the current site, the Minister believed that “its future development and the adaptation of the concert hall on the current site is problematic.”⁴³ The project, however, was postponed.

The current National Concert Hall is relatively small in comparison to similar concert halls of its stature throughout the world. The auditorium holds a maximum of

⁴¹ Patricia Butler, *The National Concert Hall at Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin: A History*, 132.

⁴² John O’Donoghue, "Estimates for Public Service," (Dublin: Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2002).

⁴³ Ibid.

1200 people, but, like conditions at the Abbey Theatre, this is often reduced due to staging requirements of events which require the removal of rows of seats. The NCH director, Ms. Judith Woodworth argues, loses 40% in ticket sales due to turning away potential patrons due to lack of space.⁴⁴ In 2004, the University Campus Dublin announced its intention in moving the rest of their academic departments at Earlsfort Terrace to their campus at Belfield. They were willing to sell the property to the National Concert Hall for €45 Million.⁴⁵ The removal of UCD from other buildings at Earlsfort Terrace made the possibility of reconstructing on site more realistic for the NCH. The National Concert Hall was itself hoping that plans for redevelopment would be underway by its own 25th Anniversary in 2006,⁴⁶ but, though in April of 2006, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism approved the plan and in September of that year contracts were made for the NCH to purchase the remaining property at Earlsfort Terrace, the actual renovation is not scheduled to begin until 2010 at the earliest. As of the submission of this thesis, however, reconstruction has not begun on the development of a new National Concert Hall.

Irish Museum of Modern Art

⁴⁴ Dr. Egan declared to the Select Committee, that the National Concert Hall "...is much smaller than the other venues, even though some of the other cities are smaller than Dublin and provincial, rather than capital, cities. Despite this, we provide a very decent experience for those who come to the National Concert Hall. However, we cannot hide the fact that we are lagging behind in the development of a concert hall with 1,800 or more seats comparable to those in most other European cities." Select Committee on Arts, "National Concert Hall: Presentation."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The NCH management team proposed to reconstruct the site at Earlsfort Terrace and not to remove the concert hall to another location. As the NCH chairman outlined their plan for the new concert hall, "Our vision for the redevelopment, once UCD has moved, is a larger auditorium with 1,800 to 2,000 seats, the refurbishment of the existing hall which would contain 900 seats and a smaller hall with 400 seats to offer flexibility. Such a model can be seen in other cities. The smaller hall would be available for intimate events such as jazz and chamber music concerts. Our analysis indicates that it would be financially viable. Based on our past experience, I am confident that we could make this a success." (Select Committee on Arts, "National Concert Hall: Presentation." 2005)

For John Hutchinson of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, to understand the debate surrounding the Irish Museum of Modern Art, one has to understand the history of the Hugh Lane Gallery. As Hutchinson contests,

The story of Lane's Gallery is of more than mere anecdotal interest. It prompts us to remember just how long the idea of an Irish Modern Art Gallery has been mooted and discussed. (The Lane pictures, then modern, are now, to all intents and purposes, 'Old Masters'.) It reminds us, too, that the controversy surrounding the siting of the Irish Modern Art Gallery has had a much more dramatic precedent. And, no less importantly, Lane's individualistic entrepreneurship, together with his assumptions about the nature of a national gallery, provide vivid contrast to the ideas and strategies on which IMMA will be based.

Sir Hugh Lane, the nephew of Lady Augusta Gregory, was an important art dealer and director of the National Gallery of Ireland. In 1904, he declared the need for a Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin. Lane advocated that "there is not in Ireland one single accessible collection or masterpiece of modern or contemporary art... a gallery of Irish and modern art in Dublin would create a standard of taste, and a feeling of the relative importance of painters."⁴⁷ In 1908, Sir Lane offered 39 modern art paintings from his collection to the Dublin authorities provided they establish a modern art gallery to house the work; however by 1914 the Dublin city authorities had yet to establish a gallery and Lane withdrew his gift of the paintings.⁴⁸ Sir Hugh Lane died in 1916 with the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and though he had provided a codicil in his Will restoring the collection of paintings to Dublin, this codicil proved legally invalid. Through years of Lady Gregory, Dublin city authorities, and the later government of the Irish Republic's attempt to obtain the collection from Britain, and due to the determination of Thomas Bodkin, (an important advocate for the funding of the Arts

⁴⁷ Lane, Hugh. *Exhibition of a Selection of Works by Irish Painters*, Catalogue for Guildhall, (London: 1904). Quoted in *Inheritance and Transformation: The Irish Museum of Modern Art*, (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1991).

⁴⁸ Kennedy, *Dreams and Responsibilities: The State and the Arts in Independent Ireland*. Edited by Arts Council, 11.

in Ireland and the establishment of an Arts Council), in 1959 the two countries came to an agreement where the collection was shared between the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery of Ireland.⁴⁹ In 1924, the Friends of the National Collections proposed to the government the establishment of a Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in honor of Sir Hugh Lane, and though approved by the President Cosgrove, the building was not opened to the public until the 19 June, 1933 under the leadership of Eamonn de Valera.⁵⁰

As with the National Concert Hall, proposals for an Irish Museum of Modern Art occurred over several years. The Taoiseach, Charles Haughey aided in the endeavor to construct an Irish Museum of Modern Art in the late 1980s. Sites were eventually proposed and though a committee of gallery managers rejected the idea, the Dublin city council decided on the site of the Kilmainham Hospital for the new museum. Hutchinson states that the reasoning behind this impractical suggestion by the authorities was the need of the government to find something to do with the architecturally significant building. As Hutchinson argues,

The Royal Hospital was then regarded – not for the first time in its post-colonial history – as something of a white elephant, for a great deal of money had been spent on the restoration (about £22 Million, most of it provided by a European fund), and although it was called a ‘National Centre for Culture’, the place was under-developed and under-utilised.⁵¹

In May 1991, after a struggle to adapt their space to the necessities of a working art gallery, the Irish Museum of Modern Art opened its doors to the public. Extensively criticized by the press, IMMA faced both structural and financial difficulties with their newly established museum. The adaptation of the building for its new function as an art gallery proved expensive, and the Museum did not receive adequate funding

⁴⁹ Ibid.,116.

⁵⁰ The gallery included a room to remain empty until the return of the Hugh Lane collection. Ibid.,38.

⁵¹ John Hutchinson, “From the Edge to the Centre,” (7-11), *Inheritance and Transformation: The Irish Museum of Modern Art*,7

to expand its collection to the level required at the caliber of an international art museum.⁵² Many of the installation pieces were too large for the seventeenth century building's rooms or access points.⁵³ IMMA gradually built up its collection from 1991 to the present with the help of private benefactors, but it took them more than ten years to adapt their site to a working art museum.

No matter how a building is obtained, the building itself reflects the character of that which it houses. "A museum, viewed in a particular light, is a monumental manifestation of the urge to collect and an index of power, authority, and wealth. Its status is established by what it contains, and also, to a lesser degree, by its architecture."⁵⁴ John Hutchinson posits that the public have a particular perception of what to expect at a museum and the architecture of that museum. The outward structure influences that perception, influencing the gaze of the viewer and their respect of the institution itself. Through its focus on live artists, its dependence on visiting collections rather than fostering the establishment of a significant permanent collection, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art's opposition between its traditional exterior and innovative interior, IMMA attempts to resist the traditional role of the

⁵² The purchasing budget for the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1991 was £90,000. An extremely small amount to build a new collection out of. Due to budgetary concerns, the museum curators decided to focus on purchasing work by living artists, rather than attempting to purchase the more expensive artwork of earlier established modern artists, though they did pursue the donation of such works from private donors and in 1992, they obtained a gift of over 200 works by international artists from the Gordon Lambert Trust. *Celebrating a Decade: Irish Museum of Modern Art*, (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 32-35.

⁵³ As Hutchinson argued, "But it remained difficult to see how a retirement home for old soldiers, built in 1684, could be turned into a contemporary art museum without making radical alterations to its architecture. Preservationists, especially, felt that it was absurd to restore a fine seventeenth century building to something approaching its old grandeur, and then proceed to dismantle its interior. From one point of view, they were right. The Royal Hospital isn't an ideal building for the exhibition of modernist art. Inspired by Les Invalides in Paris and a sister institution to the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, the RHK's façade was conceived in a grand classical manner, while its interior was akin to a barracks: most of the rooms, excluding the chapel and main hall, were designed as bedrooms for retired and disabled soldiers. Besides, part of the main front was once the official residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, and it once served as a temporary Vice-Regal residence. In short, the Royal Hospital has none of the adaptable 'neutrality' of a purpose-built contemporary gallery – or even the industrial functionalism of Stack B."(8) *Inheritance and Transformation: The Irish Museum of Modern Art*.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Museum. Celebrating their tenth anniversary, Maurice Foley, Chairman of the Board from 1997-2000 attempted to turn IMMA's struggle into a success by declaring the museum a "work in progress" and arguing that "the tension between the building and its contents adds a unique dimension to the visitor's experience."⁵⁵ However, in 1991, Hutchinson was deeply concerned that the untraditional museum "runs counter to deep presuppositions about the nature of a national museum."⁵⁶

THE BUILDING IS MYSELF: The Abbey Theatre Company and their Building

At the beginning of his book on the forgotten history of the Haitian Revolution, the only successful slave revolt in history, *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot navigates around the ruins of *Sans Souci*, the castle of the simultaneously legendary and forgotten Emperor of Haiti, the former slave, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. As he wanders around the ruins of the formerly grandiose monument, Trouillot muses on the transformative nature of the histories of monuments, buildings, and architectural remains. The past, according to Trouillot, only exists because there is a present, for Trouillot, "The past has no content. The past—or more accurately, pastness—is a position."⁵⁷ Societies incorporate their understanding of pastness in relation to how they interpret their world. Like past narratives, our perception of buildings' significance shifts with current constructions of society and history.

Hutchinson's concern over the public's perception of IMMA as an ideal "national cultural institution" is caught up in social understandings of pastness. For the public, Hutchinson argues, a national cultural institution is supposed to look a

⁵⁵ *Celebrating a Decade: Irish Museum of Modern Art*, 9

⁵⁶ *Inheritance and Transformation: The Irish Museum of Modern Art*.

⁵⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 15.

certain way and offer a particular function. The perception that IMMA's architecture would make upon the public worried Hutchinson; his concern over the Irish Museum of Modern Art was mirrored in the debate over the Abbey Theatre building. Additionally, the Abbey Theatre company often went beyond their concern over public's appreciation of the company through their perception of the theatre building, to describe their company's artistic "health" in terms of the theatre building itself. The Abbey's relation to its building throughout history remains a remarkable example of Trouillot's concept of *pastness*. In the narration of the company's mythmaking, notable Abbey personalities became fused with the building's walls.

The 1959 documentary, *Cradle of Genius*, gives witness to the legend-building devices the company used to create the narrative of mythmaking which surrounding the company and its walls. In the documentary, new and old members of the Irish National Theatre Society returned to the site of the old Abbey Theatre building, destroyed by fire in 1951, to describe the history of the company. Within the burned shell of the theatre, the narrator and writer Frank O'Connor begins the film with his belief of how the fire occurred; O'Connor tells the audience that the ghost of Yeats burned down the theatre. Yeats, "the old fire-raiser" showed his disapproval of the new company's casting of an actor that he did not "approve of" in his work, *The Player Queen*. This beginning sets the tone for the documentary, which continuously uses the location of the burned Abbey site to connect it with the famous characters of the Abbey's "Golden Age". This not only helped with the mythmaking process of the company but also legitimized their position as icons of culture, despite the decline which occurred in the quality of the theatre company's productions in the 1950s. The Abbey actress, Ethna Donne, described the current position of the company in relation to the past in an unflattering light, and stated that they had a responsibility to their

founders to create interesting and innovative work rather than lose their identity in the artistically banal performances which she saw the Abbey creating:

In recent years, the Abbey has been making...just light entertainment, and too malaise and cosy and highly respectable domestic comedies...No theatre lives on tradition only. And even the vitality of an entire generation of writers and actors should always strive continually to find a new urgency which expresses their time. It was that very kind of inspiration that gave [glory] to the Abbey that I could remember, with pride and respect today.⁵⁸

In the film, other members of the company intermingle their loss of a building with this state of artistic decline. Through this type of testimony, the company's present, like Yeats' fire, is constructed to be viewed unfavorably in relation to the mythicized quality of the Abbey's early history. *Cradle of Genius* is not unique in its dependence on the Abbey's past to manifest its legendary status. Indeed, such testimonies argue that the company cannot, and should not, forget its history.

Even before the fire, the company felt the presence of their founders imprinted on the theatre's walls. The Abbey's green room where the actors spent their time back stage, was likened to "a parlour from Lady Gregory's country home," and had as a centre piece a portrait of her watching over their enterprises "rather as a mother of a large family."⁵⁹ Later in *Cradle of Genius*, the Abbey actress Siobhan McKenna describes the Abbey Theatre itself as a virtual haunted house:

And to me, the ghosts of the Abbey, Yeats, and Lady Gregory, and Synge walked in this very theatre. So much so that it was very easy for young actors to absolutely believe the rumour that we heard that Mr. Lennox Robinson one night rather late was walking across the empty stage and he looked out at the empty auditorium and there was our very dear, dead Lady Gregory, but still alive and sitting quite peacefully in the audience.⁶⁰

The actors of the Abbey, like the theatre itself, do not just carry on the traditions of the founders, they find themselves surrounded by them –haunted by their predecessors.

⁵⁸Frank O'Connor, "Cradle of Genius," (Ireland: 1961).

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

The original and current Abbey Theatre has the past inscribed upon its halls. From the lobby to the seats, the present and the past form a combined existence for the audiences and performers that enter it. The Abbey Theatre building is itself a haunted space; the people and events of the past have left their signature upon the theatre building throughout its history until the architecture itself has become a reflection of the personalities of its inhabitants. The Abbey's characteristics and failings are intertwined with their building until the one cannot be distinct from the other. Throughout the past century, the building's location, structural failings, and future designs have all been linked to the company's legendary and controversial history. The oft recited statement that the "Abbey is not just a building but an idea in one man's mind," may be true in its way, but, the old and new Abbey theatre buildings have become inseparable from the ideology of Yeats and Lady Gregory's theatre. Thus, the Abbey building in all its manifestations has come to life with the characteristics of the company it houses; it not only inhabits the Abbey's collective memory, but embodies it.

The Abbey Theatre has also been stymied by the notoriety of the theatre, as well as the incessant documentation of the company by its founders. The sheer breadth of anecdotal material on the company has fostered imagined impressions of the company and its building for members of the public before they visit the site. Through the construction of the Abbey's exterior, its lobby and the stage, as well as the sheer breadth of written work about the company, the *mythification* of the Abbey Theatre has been so effective that the *real* often becomes mingled with the *imagined*. The Abbey Theatre building has often suffered because of the position of the theatre company within the popular imagination. The dispossessing structure does not reflect the illustrious past of the company or the importance of the National Theatre in Irish

culture. The current and past theatre building has often been criticized for its unattractive façade. In response to the previous theatre building, Donagh MacDonagh acknowledged in 1949 that “Visitors to Dublin, particularly those who are connected with the theatre, generally make a pious pilgrimage to the Abbey Theatre, and then sometimes wonder why.”⁶¹ The actual Abbey Theatre does not live up to its mythicized form. The popularity of the company and the written material on it have made the Abbey more an imagined than real space, while the building’s inadequacies create the opposite impression than intended upon the public. Thus the theatre company has to fight against the affect which the building’s unprepossessing demeanor holds for the public, and struggles against, not only the real failings of the building but also the many imagined sites that exist in the visitors’ minds who attempt a “pious pilgrimage” to the site.

Though it was only by chance that the company obtained the space on Abbey Street, they soon turned chance into destiny and began to construct their own history of the land they now occupied. The space chosen for the newly created Irish National Theatre Society in 1904 was an appropriation of three different histories: the new home of the company was built on a site of one of the oldest theatres in Dublin,⁶² it also housed the city morgue and a part of it had recently been a music hall. In the program of the Abbey’s 75th Anniversary, they went into a lengthy description of the decline in fortune of the former building:

The hall was re-named The Princess’s Theatre and later, as The People’s Music Hall, it was run by a Dublin comedian, Pat Langan. It gradually fell to the status

⁶¹ MacDonagh: 4-7.

⁶²The new Princess Theatre of Varieties, in the Mechanics’ Institute, Lower Abbey Street, was built on the site of the Theatre Royal, Abbey Street, though opinions differ according to its origin. In Peter Kavanagh’s book, *The Irish Theatre, Being a History of the Drama in Ireland from the Earliest Period up to the Present Day*, he refers to the Theatre Royal as a building that opened in 1874 under the management of J.S. Lofthouse (391), while the “75th Birthday Greeting to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin” programme of the from 1979-80, the theatre is referred to as the “Theatre Royal Opera House” built in 1820 and destroyed by fire a few years later. (24-25). Despite these varying opinions about the date of the theatre building, there is evidence of a early 19th Century theatre on the site of Abbey Street.

of a penny-gaff or, at one time, a boxing arena. In 1901, it was re-opened under the name The National Theatre by Mr. J.B. Carrickford and Madam Louise Grafton who were the forbears of several generations of actors in the fit-ups. At this period Carrickford engaged mostly English stock actors but as the theatre had not a patent he confined his choice of plays to one-actors. But the rival theatre, the Queens, objected to this procedure and under the threat of fines of as high as £300 per night, the Carrickford management changed over to vaudeville and music-hall. However, the Dublin Corporation insisted on elaborate safety precautions and forced the *soi-disant* National Theatre to close doors.⁶³

The company's placement on an old city morgue was also described in the 75th Anniversary program, which emphasized how this former occupation of the building made the fledgling theatre the brunt of mortuary humour as the new company was aligned with its previous occupants. A popular joke at the time was that the Irish National Theatre Society's performances were as corpse-like above as those found below ground. During one of the original survey's of the theatre, an irate house manager, Sean Glenville, forced the surveyors off the premises, shouting, "May you and your Morgue have luck."⁶⁴ This created a precedent in decades to come for the comparison of future struggles, debacles, or controversies with the original building on the morgue. The presence of those anonymous cadavers perpetuated the almost myth-like history of struggle that helped signify the Abbey's rhetorical accounts of its own position as 'unique;' a theatre unlike any other. The very imperfections of the building have been transformed into a focus of empowerment for the company. Its halls have been used to trigger nostalgia for past debates and triumphs and, as with much of the controversial history of the company, the space has been used as both a scapegoat for the Abbey's imperfections and also a justification for the company's position as a national icon which has survived despite its faulty house. Thus the fate

⁶³ Abbey Theatre, "'75th Birthday Greeting to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin 1904-1979', 75th Anniversary Abbey Theatre Programme,"25.

⁶⁴Peter Kavanagh, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre, from Its Origins in 1899 to the Present* (New York,: Devin-Adair, 1950), 46.

of the physical space becomes allied with the fate of the company. As Benedict Anderson explains “It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.”⁶⁵

In the early years, the Abbey cultivated a “homelike” quality for both their public and performers. Through the company’s construction of a “home” in spite of its failings and struggles, the Abbey used the building’s inadequacies to its advantage in the ensuing years. The Abbey’s less than ideal physical structure, and the many obstacles that have hindered the building of a new theatre, have become another source of the company’s mythmaking material. The cramped quarters of the old and new building, and the lack of space all add to the company’s appeal as a theatre that exists in spite of continuous struggle. The very discomfiture of the locale speaks of the polemical life the Abbey Theatre has had due to funding difficulties, as well as disagreements with the structures of power and with the public itself. Indeed, the dystopic location, building, and theatre space was, and continues to be, a source of empowerment.⁶⁶

During the centennial year, Christopher Fitz-Simon launched a pictorial history of the first one hundred years of the Abbey Theatre. Fitz-Simon, who was a well known playwright at the Abbey through the 1950s and 60s, as well as an Artistic and Literary Manager for the company, gave his visual homage to a company that had been a major part of his life. During the launch, Fitz-Simon went on to describe how connected he felt, not only to the company, but to the building itself. As contemporary audiences lose touch with Fitz-Simon’s work, and that of other writers from his period, the building remains in touch, the building remembers its past and the playwright’s part in it. As Fitz-Simon declared,

⁶⁵Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 11.

⁶⁶Maire Ni Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years*, quoted in E. H. Mikhail, *The Abbey Theatre : Interviews and Recollections* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Press, 1988), 44.

All my life, I've absorbed the Abbey; I find it's my home. Even though I'm ancient and nobody working here would recognise me I always feel I'm walking in the door of my home.⁶⁷

Fitz-Simon's personal connection with the building echoes that of many of the company throughout the era and, indeed, the organizers of *abbeyonehundred*. The building becomes a "home" for both the company and the nation.

The theatre building became so connected with the character of the company that, despite its many structural inadequacies, when the Abbey Theatre burned down in 1951 they blamed the company's decline on the loss of their building. Due to unseen difficulties the company spent fifteen years at the Queen's Theatre on Pearse Street. Though the foundation stone of the new Abbey Theatre was laid on 3 September 1963, the company was not able to rejoice in the final opening of the new building until 1966, when they celebrated with a year of events to mark the occasion. The company's reinstatement in their own building was associated with a new cultural renaissance for the theatre where the recently dubious quality of their productions at the Queen's Theatre would be forgotten. As the President of Ireland, de Valera, stated "The Theatre will now be free to expand and to achieve still greater fame, guided by the cultural aims of its founders and the national ideals from which it was born."⁶⁸ The company's reputation and ability became tied to the theatre's architecture, and "a new Abbey for a new age"⁶⁹ became the rallying cry.

A new theatre offered the company a clean slate for creating a new kind of theatre, one which would transcend the difficulties of the past. The directors began to associate the fresh paint and modern appearance of the building with a fresh look for their company. Tomás MacAnna, one of the Abbey's former Artistic Directors,

⁶⁷"The Abbey in Pictures," *Irish Times*, 8 November 2003.

⁶⁸O'Farachain, "Abbey Commemorative Programme: The Abbey Theatre 1904-1966," 2.

⁶⁹O'Casey, Sean. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 13.

described this association of the building's character with that of the overall theatre company,

There is a novelty about a new theatre, new paint, new walls. A theatre where the dust isn't accumulating on your script when you leave it down for two minutes. I feel the main thing about moving into a new theatre is this: that you have an opportunity of breaking with a certain tradition of writing.⁷⁰

The new space shook up older traditions; thus there was a feeling that the architecture itself created revolutionary change for the company.

The Abbey's optimism over the new space created by Michael Scott reflected the greater sentiment of the country around innovations in the 1960s. Michael Scott's architectural firm appeared to be the epitome of modernity for Irish culture which had been starved of outside influence through the 1940s and 1950s. According to Hugh Campbell, "The new national mood found its perfect reflection in the architecture of Scott, Tallon and Walker."⁷¹ Scott and his firm introduced modern architecture to the country and created several highly significant buildings for what was hoped to be a "New Ireland" including the new Bus Eireann building. Modernism and the architectural movement associated with it, was considered at the time to launch Ireland from a colonial backwater into the international arena. Thus Scott's architecture was a symbol of change, modernity, internationalism and prosperity. Campbell contextualizes this view by linking innovations in commerce with innovations in architecture,

Whereas previously Ireland had sought to protect its identity by insulating itself from the world, it was now opening itself to the world marketplace. Part of the process was to embrace an architecture which spoke of internationalism, progress and serious-mindedness...⁷²

⁷⁰Thomas MacAnna, *Irish Times*, July 18 1966, 8.

⁷¹Hugh Campbell, "Modern Architecture and National Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁷²Ibid.

As Ireland put faith in its future into new urban development and the changing face of architecture, so the Abbey put its own company's prosperity and artistic development into the construction of its own theatrical space. While the new space embodied the optimistic way forward for the company, the previous loss of their home became the centre point of all of their recent failings.

During the festivities, commencing with the restoration of the Abbey Company to their own theatre, the Company Director argued that the Abbey's "Babylonian captivity" was the cause for all of the difficulties the company found itself in during its "exile". As O'Farachain illustrates:

By the waters of Babylon they sat down and wept, because they had remembered Sion.' It was written of the Israelites in their Babylonian Captivity and we of the Abbey Theatre have had fifteen years of Babylonian Captivity, driven by fire from our own ground, our own playhouse into grievous troubles, artistic, financial and of other kinds which only we who knew them agonisingly understand how great they were. No ingratitude here: we were deeply grateful to those who gave us houseroom and shelter, but we were not at home, and our aims, our styles, our methods and our practices were bruised and coarsened — and patience was the virtue that principally we had to have.⁷³

O'Farachain associates the theatre building with the concept of "home" —the sacred space of the National theatre company akin to a kind of Zion, a holy land for the Irish theatre. As he argues, the plans for the new building include a kind of utopic dream of shelter against opposition, a magical place that will defy the recent financial and artistic struggles the theatre has found itself in.

The company's association of their physical building with the health of the company draws many connections between the theatre building as a living entity, and as a force which affects the life and spirit of the company itself. The need for a theatrical home and the allegiance associated with that home help foster a tenacious association between the company and its physical location. The home remains a

⁷³O'Farachain, "Abbey Commemorative Programme: The Abbey Theatre 1904-1966," 6.

deeply symbolic space. In Gaston Bachelard's book, *The Poetics of Space*, he discusses the many manifestations of "home" as both a tangible place and a place of dreams. The home acts as a shelter from outside forces and as a space of the mind, one which inhabits an imagined, as well as actual, existence. As we encounter the manifestations of that space it affects our behaviour and our understanding of both ourselves and our environment.⁷⁴ Foucault acknowledged Bachelard's theory in his work, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," as he states, "The space in which we live, from which we are drawn out of ourselves, just where the erosion of our lives, our time, our history takes place, this space that wears us down and consumes us, is in itself heterogeneous."⁷⁵ We are deeply affected by our environment and how we encounter each other depends upon this space. To describe a place as "home" is to acknowledge its relationship to ourselves, to create a mutual sense of belonging. The *space of home* is a sanctuary, a refuge from outside sources, but also, according to Foucault, if that space is in some ways less than ideal, the crooked nature of the house will create a life that is warped or changed by its environment. Thus, for the Abbey Theatre, the fate of the company is transformed and marred by its faulty surroundings.

The importance of *home*, the longing for sanctuary, for a place of refuge against theatrical philistines and state interference, is found in many a national theatre company across Europe. With the founding of the Royal National Theatre in Britain and the construction of the bank side National Theatre buildings, Bernard Levin of the London *Times* wrote in 1976, "Britain now has the finest national theatre in the world...now, at last, we have not only a national theatre company, but a home worthy of it..."⁷⁶ The British National Theatre was designed by the Modernist architect,

⁷⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York, : Orion Press, 1964).

⁷⁵ Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Quoted in Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 351.

⁷⁶ Bernard Levin, *Times*, July 13 1976.

Denys Lasdun, who was chosen in part because he had never designed a theatre before, and was perceived to bring a fresh eye to the construction of a more innovative theatre building. During his interview with the new National Theatre Directors, Lasdun described his plans for the design in nebulous terms as “the essence of designing a theatre must be a spiritual one.”⁷⁷ Sir Laurence Olivier recollected that Lasdun’s association of a theatre’s architectural designs with spiritual rather than practical methods was the deciding force in his architectural firm obtaining the contract for the new building.⁷⁸ Lasdun would create three different theatres based on three historic theatre traditions: Classic Greek, European Proscenium Arch, and English Tudor Inn-Yards. The lobby, or many lobbies, of the National Theatre would intersect the audiences of the three theatres and create a cultural community outside of the theatrical event with restaurants, musical entertainment, bars and bookstores. That, with the adjoining outdoor promenade experience of the London Bank Side, would help position the National Theatre, and subsequent National Film, Music, and Dance buildings as an overall “home” for national culture and entertainment. The creation of a cultural institution which was a community building is at the heart of the plans for the new Abbey building. Ben Barnes described the plans for a new theatre as one which would be able to create an artistic and national community who would use the Abbey Theatre lobby as a home away from home.⁷⁹ He desired to create a building that would be a source of comfort and ease where patrons would drop by the theatre, even when they were not going to a performance, and sit in the café, presumably to discuss future artistic and community-building plans. Barnes’s plan for the Abbey

⁷⁷ John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre* (London: Cape, 1978).

⁷⁸ As Olivier described in retrospect, the RNT committee “fell for” Lasdun’s plans through their naïve notions of both architecture and theatre buildings. (Elsom and Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre*).

⁷⁹ Ben Barnes, *Irish Times*, 16 January 2004.

would help foster a new “Irish cultural renaissance” for its public and form a nation within its walls.⁸⁰

The whimsical rhetoric about the new theatre building of 1966 parallels the discourse surrounding the controversies of the Abbey during its centenary. As noted in the *Irish Times*,

It is to be hoped that the centenary year will not end without a rebuilding plan that offers more tangible assurance: a new design and date of completion. Only then can our National Theatre go forward with new vibrancy, continuing to provoke, astonish, interrogate - and entertain.⁸¹

The discourse of Ben Barnes, amongst others, about the role of the new building transforms the theatre into a symbolic place for the rebirth of the Irish National Theatre Society, and creates, along with the architectural structure, a new vibrant company, one which parallels the aims of the architectural structure and reflects upon the Abbey’s fate in the twenty-first century in an almost miraculous resurrection of its former glory.

The company’s dependence on its building as a symbolic and material “home”, combined with the need for the theatre as a national monument, both transfer the Abbey’s architecture from a physical to a symbolic space. Throughout the company’s history, from its building above former theatrical institutions and the city morgue, to the company’s “exile” at Queen’s Theatre and the return to “Zion”, provides instances of the company’s deeply personal relationship with its building. Through this type of rhetoric, the company’s signification of its environment may affect its inability to achieve the national “home” that it desires. The Abbey’s physical needs are almost outweighed by its metaphoric aims, creating a conflict of the actual versus the symbolic.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Irish Times*, 12 January 2004

Monuments of the Nation: Architecture and Public Perception

John Hutchinson's concern over the perception of the external shell and inner walls of the Irish Museum of Modern Art is apt; the fear of the public's impression of the artwork being influenced by the architecture that houses it, acknowledges how influenced by their physical environment social animals are. A member of the public navigates around a cultural space, such as a museum, gallery, theatre or library and takes in the location of culture as well as its material. Daniel Soutif argues that the museum is on display as much as its artwork,

As long as it shows things, the museum must show itself showing... From the work outward, the museum forms a multi-dimensional syntagm that begins at the frame of the painting or the base of the sculpture and continues with the wall and all its labels and decorations, the floor, the room, and so on up to and including the entire building.⁸²

For the Irish National Theatre, the impression of the building was of great concern to its managers who knew that a national theatre is aided by its occupation of a national monument.

In 1995 and the present, the company and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism emphasized the need for architectural designs of the new Abbey Theatre to evoke ideas of a "national space" for the public; the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism desired a building which will live up to the public's impression of a national cultural institution. As early as April of 2004, O'Donoghue told the *Irish Times* that there was a need for new sites which reflect the radical changes that have occurred in Ireland within the past 15 years. As he explained,

⁸² Daniel Soutif, "Pictures of an Exhibition", *Artforum*, Marcy 1991, 86-7. Quoted in *Inheritance and Transformation: The Irish Museum of Modern Art*.

It is clear that, despite our living in one of the most imaginative and creative generations of Irish people, there is no architectural public expression of that creativity or imagination and this project presents the opportunity to do precisely that.⁸³

The creation of a new national theatre building, preferably in the city centre, will be a monument to the new generation; an architectural project inscribing upon the urban landscape reflections of the new society of Ireland's future. The Abbey's architectural construction attempted to aid the company's nationalist agenda. The designs for the original Abbey building, as well as the praise extolled on its completion, are notable because, in many ways, they are arguments that were used in both the design and praise for the more recent structure built in 1966 and in the current plans for a new building. The architectural plans in the past and for the future are all designed to create a structure which constructs a "democratic" community within its walls and to present an outward display of the theatre company's importance while, at the same time, representing Ireland as a cultured and noble nation both through its past heritage and future innovations. The strategic position and successful design of the Irish National Theatre thus goes beyond a national concern to become of international importance, and the theatre emblematic of the nation itself.

Nevertheless, the ambition to create a national, democratic, and communal space may hinder the construction of a viable working theatre. The need for a space to be both a presentation of the national character for the nation and useful to theatre practitioners does not always provide an easy marriage for architectural planning. Moreover, as Marvin Carlson aptly points out, architects themselves frequently do not have a working knowledge of the requirements necessary for a theatre company and therefore, though creating beautiful structural endeavors, occasionally fall short when it comes to acoustics, back stage space, entry points, lighting rigs and other such

⁸³ *Irish Times*, 4 April 2004.

needs of a state of the art theatre company.⁸⁴ As witnessed in the opening of the National Concert Hall, which had to be hastily re-constructed due to the designers failure to take into consideration the difference in acoustics between an empty auditorium and a full one,⁸⁵ and, in my own experience, the design of The Mill Theatre at Dundrum in Dublin, which, while creating a beautiful lobby space, made it very awkward for its artists to unload their sets for productions due to the scene dock restricting access in the loading dock of vehicles larger than the size of the average car.

Criticism over the current Abbey's architecture includes its lack of office space on site—the main office space for the company is in a building a few doors away from the theatre itself—and lack of appropriate scene dock space. Though recently renovated, in 2004, the audience formation and seats were also seen to be deteriorating, while the theatre itself had been considered a difficult space to stage due to its wide and narrow formation.⁸⁶ The ineffectual nature of the Abbey Theatre building is exacerbated by the dispossessing exterior and public space which presents a highly visible display of the building's inadequacy as a house of national culture. Many commentators reflect the sentiment that the current theatre building, like its predecessor, does not present a powerful enough image of the great company's significance to the present and the past. In order to regain the public's trust in the National Theatre, the critics argue, the company needs a new, greater house of memory which will trigger an appreciation of the National Theatre among its people.

⁸⁴ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁸⁵ Patricia Butler, *The National Concert Hall at Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin: A History*.

⁸⁶ The National Concert Hall has similar structural encumbrances. In 2001, Sile de Valera revealed that "The National Concert Hall does not have the further backstage facilities and second auditorium it requires and it is difficult to envisage how those facilities could be accommodated on the existing site." (Statement made at the Houses of Oireachtas, quoted on Architecture chat forum, Archiseek, "architecture planning forum" website: <http://www.archiseek.com/content/showthread.php?t=526> accessed: May 26 2008)

Ben Barnes and other members of the Abbey have argued that the company needs a building that bridges the past to the present, and leads the company towards an optimistic future while honoring the past. Barnes argued that the Abbey's loss of ticket sales in 2004 was due not to the theatre's artistic value, but to the failings of the company's accommodation. As he stated in defense of the theatre's work to the *Irish Times*:

The problem, [Barnes] counters, is not one of age or class profile but one that has much to do with a lack of comfort and accessibility. 'I think there is a genuine attrition going on in a theatre like this, that the older the building gets, and the more problems there are with it, the less attractive it is for people to come into it. And it's another reason why, in the short to medium term, it isn't acceptable for this theatre to be in this building any more.'⁸⁷

Through arguments such as these, the need for a new building goes beyond functional concerns about the current structure to more symbolic needs of a cultural monument. Through the creation of an architectural structure that reflects current Irish society in more material ways, the new theatre can present an external image of national values. In this way, through the architecture of the national theatre, the state is able to show its cultural heart – a heart from which the power and wealth of the Irish State can pour out its generosity and spirit.

A New Building for a New Age

After the outcome of the investigation over the Abbey's financial catastrophe in the summer of 2005, and the ensuing restructuring of the company, the plan for the construction of a new building resurfaced. The *Irish Times* voiced the common feeling that it was necessary to create a new theatre that would be worthy of a legitimate and "modern" artistic practice. However, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism found it difficult to come to any quick solution to the problem of finding a

⁸⁷Barnes.

site for the new building. On the 25 May, 2005, in his estimates for public service, the Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue acknowledged the need for a new Abbey building while cautioning about possible difficulties and delays.

The National Theatre — the Abbey — and the National Concert Hall are key elements of our national cultural infrastructure and it is an unfortunate fact that neither can hope to come anywhere near to realising its potential unless essential redevelopment is undertaken. As I have reported regularly to the Dáil on progress with our efforts to find a new location for the Abbey Theatre, Deputies will be aware of the difficulties we have encountered in securing a suitable site at a number of locations. Notwithstanding recent disappointments, I am determined to bring the Abbey redevelopment project to a successful conclusion. I am encouraged that discussions currently taking place between the Office of Public Works and the Dublin Docklands Development Authority are showing promise. However, recent hard experience counsels against building up excessive expectations at this stage in the proceedings.⁸⁸

Both the Irish Arts Minister and the Abbey management staff stressed that the design for the most recent “new” Abbey Theatre should reflect the company’s function as a cultural icon for national legitimacy. The Abbey and the government finally agreed on George’s Dock in the north side docklands, owned by the same Dublin Dockland Development Authority as the previous site rejected by the Bertie Ahern.

The Abbey Theatre Building has been caught throughout its history in a liminal zone between the past and the future, praise and censure, idea and reality. It has been a source of ridicule and pride and continues to have a tenacious hold on the company. As the Abbey Theatre recovers from its financial deficit and managerial crisis of the 2004 centenary, the theatre building will be re-formed and restructured. The move from Abbey Street to the Dublin Docklands Authority site will be developed with the financial backing of €25 million and rising, from the Irish Government over a three-year period. By crossing the river from the original south-side docklands site to that on the north side, the Abbey Theatre’s reconstruction in the Dublin docklands

⁸⁸ Select Committee of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Vote 33 -Arts, Sport and Tourism (Revised)," (Dublin: Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005).

continues the original argument for the theatre's contribution to the urban renewal of the area. With the confidence of the Government and their monetary aid, the company will benefit from a well-equipped modern facility. However, the rhetoric around the new building and its allegiance with the reformation of the entire company echoes that which marked the construction of the Michael Scott building in 1966. Besides urban renewal, the new building is emphasized in the regeneration of the Abbey Theatre after the deterioration of its reputation during the centenary. As the former Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue, states, "The appointment of a new artistic director, the adoption of a new corporate structure and the retirement of its debt have cleared the way for a new artistic flowering of the theatre," enhanced by the building of a new theatre. In this way, the company, the management and the board are all regenerated along with the theatre's architectural frame to create a "new theatre for a new age."⁸⁹

While a confirmation of plans for a new building were rejoiced by the Abbey Theatre staff, pressing concerns called for more immediate renovations to their performance space. In March, 2007, the Abbey Theatre refurbished their audience seating formation. They removed the previous seats and replaced them with "a new stepped 'floor' which integrated the main body of the auditorium with the former balcony."⁹⁰ This new seating arrangement holds approximately 492 seats, in comparison to the previous 630 seat capacity, and two designated wheelchair spaces. It also includes improved acoustics and entrances directly to the bar as well as the lobby. According to the Select Committee of Arts, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "The new configuration will enhance the theatre-going experience

⁸⁹ "Abbey Theatre Will Move to a €20m Site in City's Docklands," *Irish Independent*, 9 December 2005.

⁹⁰ Abbey Theatre, "A Dramatic Change," in *Abbey Theatre Refurbishments Questionnaire* (Dublin: 2007).

for the Abbey's customers."⁹¹ The renovations were created to attract audiences to the theatre, as well as emphasize positive changes for the future of the company.

However, not everyone finds these refurbishments to the Abbey Theatre as a reflection of positive change. The Abbey's former Literary Manager, Jocelyn Clarke views the new seating arrangement provided by the Abbey Theatre in 2007 with great mistrust. He criticized the decision, largely funded by Abbey Theatre box office revenue and Company resources, as a mistake. Clarke declared that they perhaps "did too good a job" on the refurbishment, changing the visible side of the theatre building's failings, so that the public image is one of improvement while many of the extreme structural problems of the building remain.⁹² The inadequate offices, rehearsal space and costume and set production areas remain, but as they are not visible to the public, these pressing concerns for the company could be ignored by the general public. Clarke's sentiment was echoed in other press commentary, and the increased delay in the international architecture competition has caused mistrust in their belief that the new building project will begin construction in the near future.

The Select Committee of Arts, Sport, Tourism, Gaeltacht Affairs and the Islands appears to have anticipated responses such as those found by Clarke, in their 2007 defense of the €750,000 refurbishments:

Those who were of the view that this was a complete waste of money were mistaken. That does not mean we are not committed to the development of a new national theatre on a PPP basis. We have said we are. While we are moving ahead with the project, it is likely that the new facility will not be available for several years. Meanwhile, the investment being made at the Abbey out of the theatre's own resources, will mean patrons will have some comfort as they enjoy the activities on stage.⁹³

⁹¹ Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Vote 35 -Arts, Sport and Tourism (Revised)," (Dublin: Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007).

⁹² Jocelyn Clarke (former Literary Manager, Abbey Theatre 2004), in discussion with the author, Dublin, Ireland, 12 June 2007.

⁹³ Select Committee, "Vote 35 -Arts, Sport and Tourism (Revised)."

Despite such statements, the architectural competition for a new Abbey Theatre has been delayed over the course of several years. In 2006, an international competition was announced to reflect Ireland's newly globalized community and the competition should, according to the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue, "attract designs that will ensure Ireland will have a National Theatre to rival any theatre in the world."⁹⁴ The competition was later scheduled for November of 2007, but was then delayed by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism until July 2007. After another postponement, the results of the competition were scheduled for the 17th of September, 2007, however this again was delayed. As the plans for a new building continue, John O'Donoghue mentioned that further delays may be expected due to the vast scope of the project. By 2007, there was a new Minister for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism appointed, Seamus Brennan, and a new announcement of an international competition was to take place in October of that year.⁹⁵ Brennan, like O'Donoghue before him, confidently declared that the new Irish National Theatre Building "will give Dublin an iconic and dynamic structure reflecting the city's growing reputation as a global capital of culture and creativity."⁹⁶ Unfortunately, due

⁹⁴ Press Release, *O' Donoghue Announces International Design Competition for the Abbey Theatre at Georges Dock in Dublin* (Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2006 [cited November 6 2006]). Accessed online: <http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/publications/release.asp?ID=1612>

⁹⁵ The committee for the new Abbey Theatre's Architectural Competition includes the actress Fiona Shaw, the set designer, Bob Crowley, the architects Sir Michael Hopkins from the UK, Mels Crowel from the Netherlands, Des McMahon from Ireland, Edward Jones from the UK, the Assistant Secretary General of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Niall O Donnchu, the Director of Architecture with the Dublin Docklands Development Authority, John Mc Laughlin, the Dublin City Architect, Jim Barrett, and the Director of the Abbey Theatre, Fiach MacConghail. ("International Competition to design new Abbey Theatre" *Archiseek*, Ireland, News, Dublin: 15 October, 2007 Archiseek website: <http://ireland.archiseek.com/news/2007/000296.html> , website accessed: 10 November, 2007).

⁹⁶ "The new Abbey Theatre will be over 24,000 square metres and will have three theatres, several rehearsal spaces, public and social spaces including shops, bars, restaurants, cafes, facilities for performers and staff, gallery and exhibition facilities and a cinema/lecture facility. The three different auditoria will provide diverse opportunities for artists and writers. Currently the Abbey can provide an average of 632 seats (across two auditoria) on any one night. The new building will provide audiences with more choices and a greater opportunity to see more diverse work with plans for some 1,000 seats across three auditoria. It is envisaged that each of the theatres will have their own foyer, auditorium, stage, dressing rooms, crew/staff rooms and technical control rooms. It is expected that the design competition will be completed by the middle of 2008." Press Release, *International Competition to Design New Abbey Theatre* (Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, 2007).

to illness, in May 2008, Seamus Brennan retired from his position as the new Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, causing a postponement to the already delayed international competition for the construction of a new Abbey Theatre. As of the submission of this thesis, the new Minister for Art, Sport and Tourism, Martin Cullen, T.D. has yet to announce a date for the upcoming competition. As with the plans for a renovated National Concert Hall, the construction of a new Abbey Theatre on the Dublin Docklands will be acquired over several years.

The mistrust of the Government's plans for the Arts is shared by many among the Artist community and reflects a deep rooted mistrust between the Government and the theatrical and artistic community in Ireland. The mistrust between organizations such as the Abbey and the Irish Government over architectural plans and refurbishment has a historic precedent. However, the need for a new building has to factor in the company's access to funding. Jocelyn Clarke stated that the current cost-saving practice found at the Abbey Theatre under the directorship of Fiach MacConghail may actually jeopardize the company's plans for expansion. In an attempt to bring the Abbey out of its financial difficulties, MacConghail declared that the Peacock Theatre would only run during a small portion of the year, while, at the same time, he also lowered the production rate at the Abbey's mainstage space. This policy has been successful for a company struggling to recover after near financial ruin, but it may, according to Clarke, contradict justifications for a new building.⁹⁷ The fear for Clarke, and others, is that the company will eventually have its new building, but not be provided with adequate public or private funds for the production costs of three venues. Clarke's anxiety over the Irish Government's response to the Abbey's artistic policies highlights the fear amongst members of the theatrical

⁹⁷ Jocelyn Clarke (former Literary Manager, Abbey Theatre 2004), in discussion with the author, Dublin, Ireland, 12 June 2007.

community over the vulnerable state of arts funding in contemporary Irish society. Often, the funding of new arts buildings become a part of political policy as a significant statement of governmental approval of the arts among the community. However, these “cultural footprints” are often created without a firm understanding of the managerial and structural needs to sustain the programming of arts activities in such buildings. In 2007, “The arts and culture also took their place among many other facets of Irish society in the national development plan. The culture programme of the plan intends to invest €1.13 billion in culture.”⁹⁸ However, according to Ms. Olive Braiden of the Arts Council, the Government needs a firm understanding of the costs involved in sustaining new venues. As she argued to the Joint Committee of Arts, Sport and Tourism in 2007: “At the time the plan was being published, the Arts Council made a statement and I said it was very important for the development of arts and culture that annual budgetary resources over the course of the plan are sufficient to ensure that programming is possible for venues throughout the country. There is little point in having new buildings and refurbishing venues unless they are used regularly. For every €1 million spent on venues, the Arts Council would have to contribute €200,000, consisting of €100,000 for the venue and €100,000 for programming. We try to make this clear to the Minister on all occasions.”⁹⁹ The creation of new building for the Abbey Theatre, though necessary due to its physical inadequacies at the current site, need to address issues of sustainability due to funding needs. The plans for a new building are ambitious with a proposal for three theatre spaces, increased rehearsal space and storage location. However, as the company continues to struggle financially due to lack of funding and issues of fiscal

⁹⁸ Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Arts Issues: Discussion with Arts Council," (Dublin: Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

responsibility, the new building may create more financial difficulties without the adequate funding to make a larger venue financially viable.

The Abbey Theatre seems destined to continue past actions and past mistakes. Rather than reflect on the needs of the company or the nation to dispel the egregious errors of the Abbey Centenary, the company and the public prefer to sweep the past away in their construction of a new future for the company and indeed, the institution of a national theatre for Ireland of the new millennium. As David McKittrick of the *Irish Independent* confidently states, “The air of constant uncertainty should be dispelled, they say: there is just too much dramatic tension. Reforms will be introduced as the new Abbey is built; if all goes well, a simultaneous fresh start can be made both physically and financially.”¹⁰⁰ And so, as O’Toole predicted, in the end, we are back where we began and the reconstruction of the theatre building holds all the possibilities of a new “fresh start” for the Irish National Theatre’s artistic and financial renewal. The new site, on George’s Dock, has encouraged the revitalization of the formerly depressed, north side docklands area. The contingencies of the new building hauntingly evoke past debates and aims of the Abbey Theatre buildings’ past lives, illustrating the continuation of the community, company and government’s belief in the importance of the theatre’s architecture to resurrect the company. As the issues of architecture continue to be interwoven with the company’s character and livelihood, the future will continue to be built with the house that holds it together.

¹⁰⁰ David McKittrick, "Dublin's Most Famous Theatre: From Drama to Crisis," *Irish Independent*, 27 July, 2005.

CHAPTER THREE

REPRESENTING THE NATION:

The Politics of Programming in *abbeyonehundred*

I do have a dream for the national theatre as a wild space, mythic. A linear, non linear, not tamed by the domestic and the familiar, beyond the comfort zone of what some of us know or think should be known, which is unpredictable, enigmatic, prophetic, passionate and actually I think always exciting.

-Ailbhe Smyth, Abbey Debates, 15 May, 2004.

In 2004, the Abbey hosted a series of public debates addressing issues of the theatre's approach to dramatic repertoire, national memory and theatrical representations of Irishness. Designed by Jocelyn Clarke and Orla Flanagan in the Literary Department, the aim of the debates were to create a public forum to explore how "the work of the Abbey, first as an independent Art Theatre then as state subvented national institution, has provoked debate and controversy – sometimes accidentally, sometimes deliberately - on issues of national, political and cultural identity."¹ According to Orla Flanagan, the debates provided an opportunity to "get a sense of what the public were looking for from the National Theatre" in the twenty-first century.² During the lively discussion arising over the May 15th debate, *Memory and Repertoire*, the public and guest speakers spoke of the extensive, and often conflicting, obligations the Irish National Theatre had towards its public due to its national status. These included the need of the company to produce new writing while remaining faithful to the traditional Irish repertoire, to offer classic and contemporary work from the European

¹ Karin McCully, Jocelyn Clarke, Orla Flanagan & Mairead Delaney, "The Abbey Debates: A Series of Provocations," (Dublin: Jocelyn Clarke's Private Collection, 2003).

² Orla Flanagan, in discussion with the Author, (May, 2007), Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author (June, 2007).

and International Repertoire, to continue pushing the boundaries of the art form while honoring traditions, and to tour both internationally and nationally.³ Reminiscing, Flanagan declared her amazement over the public response due to their “high expectations” of what a National Theatre should produce. For the Abbey Theatre, such expectations prove “daunting” because the company “are expected to tick so many boxes [which is] a huge challenge to whoever’s programming the spaces.”⁴ The broad range of obligations seen as essential ingredients of the Abbey Theatre repertoire offers insight into the many challenges facing the company in the past and for the future.

The *Memory and Repertoire* debate drew important connections between the Abbey programming and Irish cultural memory. While commemoration uses the past to perform the concerns of the present, cultural institutions foster public memory through their programming policies. In the debate, the psychologist Ciaran Benson described the repertoire as a “metaphor of externalised memory,” and, as such, questioned why certain parts of the repertoire are forgotten or re-instated over time.⁵ The Abbey programming is often at the mercy of the continuous changing of the guard in terms of the Managing or Artistic Directors, who Benson refers to as the “artistic gate keepers” of the company. These powerful individuals make programming decisions based on artistic preference, nepotism and the natural desire to distinguish themselves from the legacy of their predecessors.⁶ As Glenda Timelo

³ "Abbey Debates: Memory and Repertoire," *Abbey Theatre*, 15 May 2004.

⁴ Orla Flanagan, In discussion with the Author, (May, 2007).

⁵ "Abbey Debates: Memory and Repertoire."

⁶ In an interview with Ben Barnes, any description of Patrick Mason was described as “my predecessor,” as if by describing him in such a way could erase his legacy as Artistic Director for the Abbey before Barnes’ tenure. Jocelyn Clarke also noted this phenomenon in both Barnes’ and Fiach MacConghail’s approach to past Artistic Directors. As Jocelyn Clarke argued, “I remember when I first came in, Ben Barnes was talking about ‘the previous artistic director’ or ‘his predecessor,’ and he meant “Patrick Mason” –and so there is a kind of memory erasure, and now Fiach is doing it. Why is that, what is that?” (Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author).

aptly described during the Abbey Debates, the repertoire is created and constructed by its current orchestrators:

If you think of a photograph as an object, as an entity in itself, there's always the photographer, the person who's chosen what to include, what to exclude, what to make the foreground, what to make the background. I think theatre is a similar thing. The way that we remember things has a lot to do with the politics and the values of the society that chooses to remember and choose to exclude.⁷

In this way, cultural memory of the Abbey Theatre does not follow a linear progression; it remains volatile due to individual personalities, artistic fashions, and the needs of funding bodies. Despite this lack of coherency, the Irish National Theatre's repertoire becomes a harbinger for the selective memory of cultural displays of Irishness, and as such, "is solidified and crystallised into history"⁸ for the company and its community.

The subject of this chapter is the politics behind the programming of *abbeyonehundred*. The dramatic repertoire of the Irish National Theatre is territory fraught with implicit and explicit expectations over the representation of the nation. While commemoration constructs the past for the current social and political climate, the Irish National Theatre's important position as a national cultural institution augmented concerns amongst commentators over the importance of *abbeyonehundred* to reflect in its repertoire the changing terrain of Irish social life while remaining faithful to its past. By positioning the centenary's plays, public debates and outreach events within the context of the Abbey's perceived responsibility to its public, I aim to establish how the critical reception of the *abbeyonehundred* programme in 2004 was not only an indication of the Abbey's unique relationship with the public in regards to its repertoire, but also a symptom of the common desire for the theatre to

⁷ Glenda Timelo, "Abbey Debates: Memory and Repertoire."

⁸ Ailbhe Smyth: *Ibid.*

express and reflect the changing notions of Irish identity and culture in the twenty-first century.

THE NATIONAL REPERTOIRE: Archives of Memory

Reflections of the past are filtered through contemporary practice. As the former Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Declan McGonagle argues, “We see through contemporary eyes. So I’m not sure that reviving historical material can be about the past. It’s another way of reading the present.”⁹ For a national repertoire, as that fostered by the Abbey Theatre, public perceptions of contemporary society reflect upon how that community (or communities) wish to see the nation’s past represented through performance practice. National Cultural Institutions are pressured by the public’s conflicting perceptions over their role as harbingers of national culture; some members of the public feel it is the institution’s role to “preserve” the past, while others believe its role is to represent contemporary society. This is especially the case for the Abbey Theatre whose public has a sense of ownership over the company’s repertoire. The investment in the Abbey repertoire by the public is adeptly illustrated in a comment from a member of the audience, Liam O’Reilly, during one of the centenary season public debates. O’Reilly believes that the Abbey Theatre “for many people defines our identity not only in theatrical terms but it defines our characteristics, our personality as a people, as an Irish people.”¹⁰ Criticisms over the *abbeyonehundred* program continued a longstanding practice of the feeling of ownership of the Irish community for what is presented upon the Abbey stage. Public regard for the company was enabled by the founders’ representation of the Abbey theatre as “our national theatre,” a space for the representation of the entire nation.

⁹ Declan McGonagle, *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Liam O’Reilly, (*Memory and Repertoire*).

The feeling of ownership over the National Theatre's repertoire amongst members of the Irish public played a large part during the *abbeyonehundred* controversy. Nonetheless, this relationship has been fostered and enabled by the theatre company since its founding.¹¹ Widely documented by Abbey scholars, the feeling of possessiveness over company policies began with Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats' attempt to build the company's importance as a National Theatre through their rhetoric which described their aim to create a theatre by and for the Irish Nation. The audience's familial relationship to the Abbey played a significant part in the success of the fledgling company. The Abbey performances were presented to establish representations of the Irish national character on the stage. The company's promotion of Irishness in performance was seen to be "ennobling" for their audience. As Mr. Walkley established in a supplement to the *Irish Times* in 1904, "It is part of the national movement. It is designed to express the spirit of the race, the 'virtue' of it in the medium of acted drama."¹² Thus the company viewed theatrical representations of Irishness as nation building through the relationship with — and reflection upon — its audience. Members of the company also highlighted their solidarity with their audience, drawing comfort from the bond developed between performer and public. As Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh states, "Standing on the Abbey stage, the feeling, absent in so many other theatres, of being one with the audience was always present."¹³ Therefore, despite the tension that arose between the audience and company over their contested representations of Irish identity, the

¹¹ See: Lady Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (New York, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913).

¹² Quoted in John Millington Synge, *The Dramatic Movement in Ireland*, Cited in Mikhail, *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections*, 56.

¹³ Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, *The Splendid Years: Recollections of Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh as told to Edward Kenny*, Cited in *Ibid.*, 45.

Abbey Theatre relied greatly, financially and rhetorically, upon their audience for the establishment of a national dramatic movement.

The many publics of the Abbey Theatre have often compared the company's current practice to that of their past. For the Irish National Theatre Society, the pressure of representing both the past and the present dramatic repertoire has caused tension between understandings of the company's present artistic practice and that of its dramatic past. The Abbey Theatre has throughout its history, been stymied by the past –both its own and representations of Irish history. In written commentary, current company practice has for decades been compared unfavourably to that found in the early years of the company. As Fintan O'Toole illustrates, "Almost from the beginning, the Abbey has been seen as an institution in decline, usually by people who didn't much like its glorious past when it was the irritating present."¹⁴ By 1912, newspapers, such as *The Irish Review*, were looking with regret to the past productions of the Abbey Theatre and complaining that the new writers such as St. John Ervine, T.C. Murray and Lennox Robinson were tainting the Abbey name and not living up to the genius of John Millington Synge. As mentioned in *The Irish Review*, "The later Abbey dramatists have steeped the peasant play in all the horrors and paraphernalia of ancient melodrama."¹⁵ By 1916, the theatre was already criticized for being deeply entrenched in the past. The theatre was lauded for its "great traditions" but was censured for, as *The New Ireland* magazine described, "[being] occupied in looking back at them instead of looking forward to them. Its object is to conserve, not to create."¹⁶ Along these lines, the condemnation of the 2004 Centenary Celebrations program mirrored those describing the productions of the past century in more ways than intended.

¹⁴ Fintan O'Toole, *Irish Times*, 12 January, 2004.

¹⁵ *The Irish Review*, 1912.

¹⁶ *The New Ireland*, 1916.

The company continued during the years after independence to produce productions which varied between nostalgia of the past and new works. During the 1930s through to the 1950s, the new production were viewed by many critics as heavy handed moral stories and the repertoire fluctuated between vapid domestic comedies and productions set on memorializing the 1916 Rebellion. Though there has been some interest in performances of this period in recent scholarship by Paul Murphy and Christopher Murray amongst others,¹⁷ public perception of the “middle period” of the Abbey Theatre placed the repertoire of the 1940s and 1950s positions it firmly as the performance of nostalgia by the company. Fintan O’Toole provides a valuable demonstration of the common perception of this time period in his 2004 article on the history of the Abbey Theatre, as he contests that,

The dead hand of state control, state sponsorship and state politicking governed the Abbey when the theatre should have been influential and free in shaping the intellectual spirit of the country. Instead poor bloody Ireland got an endless recycling of the same plays: *Gunman of the Western World*, *The Shadow of a Paycock*, *She Stoops to Juno*, *The Importance of Being Juno*, *The Importance of Being Ernest* Blythe –the same woebegone repertoire, repeated and repeated down the ages.¹⁸

The repertoire of The Abbey according to this article from the Irish Times appears, paradoxically, not as a continuation of tradition, but rather, as an albatross on the neck of the present –stymieing creativity and hindering future work.

During the 1950s, the Gaelic/English productions were also intended to access all areas of Irish civic life, and help establish a uniquely Irish drama. As discussed in

¹⁷ For a re-examination of work from Abbey Theatre dramatists of this period see Paul Murphy ‘The Myth of Benightedness After the Irish Renaissance: the drama of George Shiels’ in *Moving Worlds*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Winter, 2003), Vic Merriman, ‘Staging Contemporary Ireland: heartsickness and hopes deferred’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Irish Drama*, (Ed) Shaun Richards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Christopher Murray, ‘Where Are They Now? : Plays of Significance in the 1940s and 1950s.’ in *Players and Painted Stage, Aspects of Twentieth Century Irish Theatre in Ireland* edited by Christopher Fitz-Simon, (Dublin: New Island, 2004). For a study of Irish society in this period see Augustine Martin, ‘Literature and Society 1938-1951’ in *Ireland in the War Years and After 1939-51*, (Eds.) Nowlan, Kevin B., and Desmond Williams, T., (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1969) and Brian Fallon, *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960*, (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1998).

¹⁸ “An Irishman’s Diary,” *Irish Times*, 14 September, 2004.

Chapter Two, the new building of 1966 was intended to create a democratic theatrical experience where all seats were equal and the new space would eliminate the “feeling of disconnection between the audience and players caused by the traditional proscenium arch.”¹⁹ A democratic theatre space and the emphasis on the relationship between the Abbey Company and its audience, created the construction of a unified nation of artists and audience members. Bruce McConachie contests that audiences help shape theatre company’s identities as much as artistic directors do.

Audiences shape performances over time, encouraging or discouraging elements of dramatic style, certain character types, and various acting conventions [...] In effect, groups of spectators and theatre performers produce each other from the inside out as artists-to-be-experienced and audiences-to-be-entertained in a given historical period. The result is what may be termed a theatrical formation, the mutual elaboration over time of historically specific audience groups and theatre practitioners participating in certain shared patterns of dramatic and theatrical action.²⁰

The connection between the audience and the performance stressed the ownership that the Irish audience had over the company’s performance practice, highlighting the audience’s personal relationship with the representation of the national community on the Abbey stage. This relationship maintained a fundamental contract between the Abbey and its audience, a contract that was invariably mentioned as betrayed or unfulfilled in any dissent or debate between the company and the community. The longstanding tradition of the Abbey’s representation of its audience on the national stage is described by Fintan O’Toole as, “That sense that we are defining the nation as you and us, that the stage and the audience is brought together in some form.”²¹ The fusion between the Abbey and its audience is both a gift and a curse for the company; the Abbey’s relationship to its community has remained an issue for debate and

¹⁹ Roibeard O’Farachain, “Abbey Commemorative Programme: The Abbey Theatre 1904-1966,” (Dublin: 1966), 6.

²⁰ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*, 1st ed., *Studies in Theatre History and Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), xi-xii.

²¹ Dublin Fringe Festival’s Spiegeltent Irish Theatre Magazine’s Critic’s Forum, 9 October 2004, “On the Edge,” *Irish Theatre Magazine* 4, no. 21 (2004): 17.

contestation as well as pride in the company's rhetoric throughout the Abbey's history.

During the celebrations surrounding the 1966 commemoration of the company's new building, a series of debates occurred in the *Irish Times* on the fate of the company in the future. They spoke of the decline of the company, the nature of a "national" theatre and what ways could improve the current Abbey Theatre. As the Abbey director, Barry Cassin illustrates, "A national theatre should be a reflection of current ideas and attitudes of the nation. I think that must be the first function of a national theatre. To help do this writers must be stimulated ... to elaborate our own ideas, to learn more, we must see what's going on outside, as well as inside."²² The directors saw the danger of being set in their ways, of being too insular and trapped by tradition and the past. As Tomas MacAnna in the same debates remarked, the company need to look to the future, to be "a place of youth and excitement;" the future flourishes with the nation's youth.²³

The connection to past work in the Abbey, however, remains selective and, for some critics, the practice of erasing significant work of the company occurs as much as does the reverence for work by figures such as Sean O'Casey and John Millington Synge. According to Gerry Stembridge, since 1980, there have only been six revivals of Abbey plays from the period of 1935 to 1960.²⁴ Stembridge strongly believed that the past needs to be explored "inventively" in terms of the Abbey's continuing repertoire in order to re-imagine and re-envision the theatrical history of the company. For Stembridge, moments such as those of the Abbey Debates and the series of stage readings which occurred during *abbeyonehundred* only go so far towards the practice of collective memory. Producing the plays, Stembridge argues, is the most important

²² Cassin, Barry, *Irish Times*, 20 July 1966.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Abbey Debates: Memory and Repertoire."

forum to continue the past in the present. Deeply critical of the narrow terrain of the Abbey's theatrical past in the centenary season, Stembridge censured the company by stating that:

To make no effort to produce work from a twenty five year period of the Abbey's history, especially this year in the context of the centenary celebration, is I think terribly wrong.²⁵

Stembridge was not denying the argument that some of the work from this period was not of high artistic merit, however, he argued that by approaching the production of plays from all periods of the Abbey's history with "intelligence and imagination" allows for a dynamic re-examination of the past that not only assures it remains in the public imagination, but also re-vitalizes the work of the Abbey Theatre's history to transform with contemporary theatrical practice. He cautions against an over-sanctimonious relationship to plays of the past which creates a "museumification" of the national theatre repertoire, which also might force the loss of the company's past repertoire.

THE POLITICS OF PROGRAMMING: Representation and the abbeyonehundred season

Public expectations of the representation of the nation are not universal, but multivocal, creating multiple meanings for different individuals within a community. The Abbey's 2004 Season faced the task of addressing not only Irish culture and traditions from 1904 and throughout the past century, but also those of current and future Irish society. *The Abbey and Europe* season, though initially chosen to offer a celebration of Ireland's increasing allegiance to the European Union, was seen as traditional and not fully engaging with the contemporary European community, while the *Abbey and Ireland* season appeared highly selective, and did not provide an

²⁵ Ibid.

extensive example of work from the company's history to represent different notions of Irishness on the stage. The following scrutinizes some of the debate behind company's choices for the season in full, while providing a detailed exploration of the most controversial production of the season, *The Shaughraun* in juxtaposition with what was seen by many commentators as the most successful choice for the *Abbey and Ireland* season, Frank McGuinness' *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. A study of these contrasting productions attempts to highlight more fully diverse factors involved in the politics behind representation and the nation on the Abbey Stage.

abbeyonehundred

During the *Irish Times*/ESB Irish Theatre Awards for 2003, Patsy McGarry of the *Irish Times* noted: "Mr Smyth extended congratulations and best wishes to the Abbey on its centenary and, as a newspaperman, thanked it 'for all the good copy and news stories along the way. And I expect there will be more.'"²⁶ Smyth, commenting at the very beginning of the *abbeyonehundred* programme, did not realize how resonant his remarks were to become. During the first phase of *abbeyonehundred*, *The Abbey and Europe* the press remained unusually subdued and congratulatory, keeping their criticism of the centennial programme to a minimum, while enthusiastically informing the public of the productions which were being presented from abroad and the new adaptations of European classical works by Irish authors. Between January and May of 2004, it would seem that the centenary had an auspicious beginning, with only a few murmurs of the disaster to come at the start of the "Irish" phase of the programme.

²⁶Patsy McGarry, *Irish Times*, 17 February, 2004.

The *abbeyonehundred* program listed five categories planned for the upcoming season: European plays, new works by Irish writers, a summer of Irish classics, an autumn of works from the Abbey Repertoire, and three plays on International Tour.²⁷ The programme also included a series of play readings,²⁸ and acknowledged Ireland's part in the greater community of the European Union by announcing productions highlighting "European works" by famous European directors and non-Irish works such as Greek Tragedy and a new adaptation of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. The European section also celebrated the new additions to the European Union from the former Eastern Bloc countries with a Polish production of the Norwegian play, *Festen* (The Celebration) by Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukow; the Hungarian play, *Ossztánc* (Dance in Time), by Pál Békés, and a Slovenian version of William Shakespeare's, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, adapted by Andrej Rozman Roza. The new Irish works were by well-known dramatists such as Tom Murphy, Seamus Heaney and the writer Colm Tóibín. The Abbey also wanted to represent the Irish canon in its centennial celebrations, as Christine Madden described in the *Irish Times*, "To honour its socio-political history, the Abbey is presenting a series of plays closely associated with its image and development as Ireland's national theatre."²⁹ Productions such as *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, and *The Gigli Concert* as well as tours of *Playboy of the Western World* were produced, and at the Peacock, productions of works by John Millington Synge and William Butler Yeats were included in the repertoire.

In addition to the playbill for the season, the Abbey's Outreach/Education department developed an ambitious supplemental program during the centenary to

²⁷ See Appendix A for a description of the *abbeyonehundred* season programme. Also see Appendix B for a description of the company's 2004 touring season programme.

²⁸ For a listing of the Abbey's 2004 Play Reading Series and accounts of other Abbey Outreach events scheduled in 2004, see Appendix C.

²⁹ Christine Madden, "How the Abbey Is Celebrating Its Centenary," *Irish Times*, 16 January, 2004.

help promote new audiences; the program included a series of lectures, workshops, screenings, and events which were highly popular. The series of debates and lunchtime lectures, as well as the dramatic readings, encouraged audience participation and served as a forum for debate and discourse around the company's history. As Victor Merriman notes, "The work of the literary and outreach departments on this occasion therefore also enabled us to engage with how people talk about Irish theatre – the ways of reading that we bring to Irish theatre, and how it is the theatre is framed for the public."³⁰ The popularity of the outreach events also negated the popular criticism that the company had lost touch with its community. The high numbers of attendance at all of the outreach activities demonstrated the support the Abbey continued to have among its public. As Fintan O'Toole marvelled, "the other thing that came out of this for me is that there is a huge interest in the part of the Irish public in this institution and its living history. Almost all of those readings were full, with really interested, enthusiastic, intelligent audiences."³¹ The enthusiasm behind these events demonstrated the company's mercurial relationship with its public. The outreach team were able to access the historical legacy of an informed and determined public and their intimate attachment to their national theatre, a relationship that the rest of the *abbeyonehundred* programme was criticized for not accessing.

Alongside of the events occurring at the Abbey Theatre itself, many other members of the National Cultural Institutions also held exhibitions in honor of *abbeyonehundred*. These exhibitions included small, one panel displays like the exhibition held at the Chester Beatty Library, which were "small gestures towards

³⁰ Irish Theatre Magazine's Critic's Forum, "On the Edge," 34.

³¹ Ibid.

other members of NCI³² according to the Library's curator, Jenny Suing, and large, ambitious exhibitions like the Irish Museum of Modern Art's, *Scene Change*, exhibition portraying set designs from throughout the company's history.³³ Other sites included the RTE's documentary, "100 Years at the Abbey," an exhibit at the National Library and National Museum of Art, and a small photographic exhibit from the Photography Archives.

In the months leading up to 2004, the press and the company had looked forward with optimistic enthusiasm to the upcoming season. As the *Irish Times* noted in November of 2003, "The Abbey Theatre is justified in the jubilant mood with which it has just embarked on a year-long celebration of its centenary."³⁴ However, after the season's programming was released to the public, many commentators felt that the productions chosen from the canon of Irish work appeared highly selective, leaving sizeable gaps in the Abbey's long and rich history as well as in works from the contemporary Irish theatre. Though the series of play readings conducted in the Autumn of 2004 included one selection from each decade of the Abbey's history, the main productions performed during *abbeyonehundred* included two continental European classics, three productions by Eastern European companies,³⁵ while the performances from the Irish canon included one play from the nineteenth century, three from 1904 -1930 and the remainder dating from 1967 to the present.³⁶ After the public announcement of the 2004 season, many commentators began to question the selection process of the Centenary programme. The three productions to tour

³² Suing, Jenny. In Discussion with Author, June 2007.

³³ The *Scene Change* exhibition which, though successful to the public, remained fraught with over-ambition and organizational tension as widespread as that found within the centenary itself. (Helen O'Donoghue, in discussion with the Author, 2007).

³⁴ Rosita Boland, "The Abbey Announces Its Programme to Mark Next Year's Centenary," *Irish Times*, 20 November 2003.

³⁵ These productions were presented in short four day runs as a part of the *Abbey and Europe* section of *abbeyonehundred* in collaboration with the Dublin Theatre Festival.

³⁶ *abbeyonehundred Brochure*, (Abbey Theatre: 2004).

nationally and internationally during the centenary were revivals of earlier productions directed by Ben Barnes, while the productions of *The Shaughraun* and *I Do Not Like Thee Doctor Fell* were criticized for being chosen as vehicles for prominent Abbey Board Members, John McColgan and Bernard Farrell. Jocelyn Clarke described this as a concern from within the company as well as amongst the public over the programming:

It did seem like the program was about one man's vision of what the theatre was, rather than actually the Theatre's vision of what the Theatre could be. And when I say the Theatre's vision, I actually mean that there was a discussion going on from the various departments and also with consultants from outside, and that actually wasn't set in place ... And so this notion of vanity projects, whether it be Ben Barnes touring three productions or McColgan's *The Shaughraun*, this was a public perception and it was also an internal perception.³⁷

Concerns over the selection process by the general public and from within the company itself, were made because of the strong belief in the importance of representation of the nation by the Abbey Theatre which appeared to many as overly selective and conservative in the centenary's repertoire.

The Shaughraun

The most widely varying response to a production during 2004 occurred over the production of Boucicault's, *The Shaughraun*. Despite the radical changes to Irish society in the past century, the shadow of the faux Irish Peasant continues to be portrayed or subverted on the Irish stage as a focal point of the traditional theatrical representations of Irish identity. Recent productions in the Republic and the UK have highlighted and subverted the genre of the peasant play so popular amongst the early Abbey Theatre playwrights.³⁸ The Abbey's battle with their presentation of Irishness

³⁷ Jocelyn Clarke, In discussion with the Author.

³⁸ The work of Martin McDonagh in the United Kingdom often concentrates on subverting notions of the West of Ireland in his plays, while recent productions by the Corn Exchange Theatre Company, the

continued in the centenary with the production of Boucicault's melodrama, *The Shaughraun*. The play, though popular among Dublin audiences, was ill-received by the theatre critics because of what was considered a "Disney-fication" of the stage Irishman. Though the mainstage play was complemented with a production in the Peacock Theatre of Stewart Parker's *Heavenly Bodies*, examining the life and work of the controversial playwright, many were sceptical of the reasoning behind the decision to produce *The Shaughraun*, directed by Abbey Board and Centenary Committee member, John McColgan.³⁹

Dion Boucicault was a popular writer of melodrama during the 1860s and 70s; his work was performed across North America, Australia, England and Ireland throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ Though the Abbey founders balked at Boucicault's work, recent scholars have found complex political and social commentary in his melodramas.⁴¹ According to Hugh Hunt, "Both Shaw and O'Casey acknowledged their debt to Boucicault, and Synge's Christy Mahon owes not a little to that glorious liar, Conn, the Shaughraun."⁴² The centenary production of *The Shaughraun* was not the first performed at the Abbey Theatre, for

Galway Arts Festival's 2004 play, *Trad*, and the 2005 production of *The Bull*, by the Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre company, provide a revisionist homage to traditions in early twentieth century Irish theatre alongside the representation of contemporary Irish society. The prevalence in Irish theatre practice of a fusion of past traditions with modernity illustrates conflicting notions of national identity in contemporary Irish society.

³⁹ In Patrick Lonergan's summary of the *abbeyonehundred* events, he states that the decision by Ben Barnes to include the *Shaughraun* was suspect among the press. "In part, this scepticism was because McColgan had never before directed a professional piece of theatre, though he had been responsible for *Riverdance*. Commentators noted that he was chair of the Abbey's fundraising committee, and that he himself had donated large amounts of money to the theatre (believed to be in the region of €500,000)"(3).

⁴⁰ Dion Boucicault (1820-1890), Irish dramatist who wrote and adapted approximately 130 plays and melodramas, including *London Assurance* (1841) and, most notably, *The Octoroon* (1860). His work included farce, pantomimes, and operettas, but after 1852 melodrama was his favourite genre.

⁴¹ In Nicholas Grene's seminal work, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*, he places *The Shaughraun* within its own historic context contesting that the play's representation of the Fenian uprising of 1798 "challenge[d] contemporary thinking" on Ireland(7). Grene describes Boucicault's attempt to raise understanding for the Irish colonial struggle and understanding between the British colonial power and its subject. For an in-depth look at the politics of Boucicaultian melodrama in American, see Joyce Flynn, "Sites and Sights: The Iconology of the Subterranean in Late Nineteenth-Century Irish-American Drama," *MELUS* 18, no. 1 (1993).

⁴² Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]*,201.

in 1968 there was an extremely successful production of the comedy. In more recent years, Conall Morrison directed a critically acclaimed production of Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* which toured to the United Kingdom in 1999. The 1968 production of *The Shaughraun* was also taken on tour to London, and was seen to represent the changes in Irish culture from the "inward looking" 1950s, to a period of cultural and economic expansion. As Irving Wardle emphasized:

I am told that many Dubliners oppose the transfer of *The Shaughraun* to London for fear that it would project the wrong image of the country. Let me assure them that no Dublin show I have ever seen has done more to put over the idea of a dynamic new Ireland than this, which at once rescues a fine dramatist from oblivion and restores the Abbey to its old status as one of the jewels of the English-speaking world.⁴³

The production, starring Cyril Cusack, departed from the hyper-realistic style so prevalent in the Abbey Theatre during the 1950s and 60s, and presented a re-evaluation of its theatrical traditions.

With his stock characters, stories of rebellion and political agitation in the genre of melodrama "[Boucicault] practically invented the theatrical vocabulary which still haunts the imagination of the world when it thinks of Ireland."⁴⁴ The play takes place in County Sligo during a Fenian Rebellion in the nineteenth century. The poacher Conn, the trickster of the piece, finds himself caught up in the political and social struggles of his neighbours. He aids the Fenian Robert Ffolliot, a local hero, to escape from the British gaol, and helps Robert's sister, Claire, and his fiancé, Arte O'Neill, to get free from the clutches of the evil landlord, Corry Kinchela. It also includes a romantic, well-meaning British Officer, Captain Molineux, so that we find all allegiances covered in the production. The play compresses and simplifies Irish colonial history through the genre of melodrama. The *abbeyonehundred* production of

⁴³ Irving Wardle, *The London Times*, 20 May 1968. Cited in Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]*, 201-02.

⁴⁴ Harvey O'Brien, *CultureVulture.net*, June 3 2004.

The Shaughraun has a funeral scene with elaborate keening, singing and dancing. The keening presents the supposedly “authentic” cultural Ireland as an exoticized “other.” The keening promotes a popular stereotype of “Irishness” that presents the wailing women of Ireland in an event which begins as mythic and ends with figures of ridicule and drunkenness.

The decision to produce *The Shaughraun* during the centenary year was due to several factors. As acknowledged to be the decision behind producing Bernard Farrell’s play, *I Do Not Like Thee Doctor Fell*, personal allegiances were a deciding factor behind the contribution by John McColgan. McColgan was on the Centenary Committee and devoting a lot of time, energy and money to the Abbey centenary, so there was a feeling of personal pressure towards his inclusion in the season.⁴⁵ Ben Barnes also felt strongly about the inclusion of a work by Boucicault in the season, along with the production of *Heavenly Bodies* in the Peacock, to acknowledge “the importance of Melodrama and the importance of Boucicault in the development of the work of O’Casey and Synge, and in some ways making a point that Boucicault was the father of all of that.”⁴⁶ Despite the company’s political reasons for McColgan’s directorial debut, Barnes felt that in many ways, a comparison could be made between the life of Boucicault and that of John McColgan. Barnes thought the “showman” like quality of both entertainers was an apt comparison between the nineteenth century and the present. However, many public commentators found the link between the production of *The Shaughraun* and McColgan’s *Riverdance* symbolized the “branding” of Irish culture by the Abbey Theatre: the exportation of stereotypical

⁴⁵ Ben Barnes, In Discussion with Author, June 2007.

⁴⁶ Originally, Conal Morrison was slated to direct *The Shaughraun*, but due to scheduling difficulties he was unable to commit to the production and McColgan was hired in his place. (Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author, June 2007).

performances of Irish identity exemplified, for many, *The Shaughraun's* position as a cultural export, a performance for the tourist gaze.

The Shaughraun was the most popular production by far of the 2004 centenary season. Initially a part of the summer season at the Abbey, the play was brought back in November for a second run through the Christmas season. Many commentators thought that stereotypical representations of "Staged Irishry" in the production was the antithesis of the National Theatre's remit and seemed an incongruous tribute during what was a commemorative season for the Abbey Theatre's history. The journalist, Helen Meany critiques this production and the unsettling popularity of it by Dublin audiences:

Yeats himself had dismissed Boucicault's vast — and damningly pre-Abbey — repertoire as having "no relation with literature," and now the Abbey was devoting a significant slice of its centenary to it. Of course, to more tolerant souls *The Shaughraun* is accepted as an expertly crafted, and even knowingly subversive, comic melodrama, but this glossy, *Riverdance*-inflected (lots of dancing) and unashamedly "Oirish" production missed the point, and moreover, the opportunity, entirely.⁴⁷

The play follows along these lines as a light-hearted comedy that embraces the stereotype but, as Helen Meany criticizes, offers us no irony, no alternative to the characters as they are. *The Shaughraun* presented problematic representations of Irish identity and Irish history.

The critics' charge of undue influence within the Abbey Centenary's committee over the programming of the company was seen by Ben Barnes to effect the reception of the production in the press. Barnes argued that the attempt to offer audiences revisionists notions of Irish identity in the production of *Heavenly Bodies* and its commentary upon Boucicault and *The Shaughraun* was never fully explored due to the media's concentration of the internal politics behind the programming choices, as

⁴⁷Helen Meany, *Irish Times*, 4 June 2004.

well as McColgan's highly public persona as the force behind *Riverdance*. However, Ben Barnes acknowledged during a private interview in 2007 that the popular showmanship of McColgan's public persona worked against the Abbey Theatre as *The Shaughraun* progressed.

I don't think it was a sophisticated take on an understanding of what Melodrama is and then subverting that in some way which might have been a way to go with it. [...] It was the *Riverdance* of the nation. And there were references in the production to that. And I never thought we were going to get anything different than that; I knew what I was buying into. I suppose what I didn't quite appreciate the level of, [...] the tenacity around the selling of the production and the linking of it with the re-opening of *Riverdance* in Dublin and [its] tenth anniversary [...] there was this rather embarrassing photograph of [McColgan] pointing to full houses at the Abbey and full houses at the Gaiety.⁴⁸

Barnes felt that McColgan publicly appropriated the success of *The Shaughraun* as a personal achievement. The large audience attendance of the Dublin production of *The Shaughraun* was contrasted with what was seen as a largely under-attended centenary year. In fact, however, the grossly over-budget production augmented the financial difficulties effecting the company.⁴⁹ The decision to remove sections of the audience seats for the set of *The Shaughraun* as well as the show's high production costs, caused the play to lose money and take a large proportion of the company's resources during the year.

Regardless of the financial benefits or hindrances of the 2004 production of *The Shaughraun*, the divide between the popularity amongst Dublin audiences of the production and the criticism from commentators of its reactionary depiction of Irish identity illustrates the conflict over representations of Irishness on the stage. For

⁴⁸ Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author, June 2007.

⁴⁹ Though the Abbey Theatre has not allowed access to box office receipts or financial statements from 2004, this statement has been confirmed in private interviews I conducted with Ben Barnes, Orla Flanagan, Sharon Murphy and Jocelyn Clarke in 2007. Barnes' stated that the director and production managers behind *The Shaughraun* attempted to create a "West End production style" within in the smaller Abbey Theatre's inadequate back stage and scene shop facilities. This lack of facility forced the production staff to dismantle and re-assemble the built set pieces at the Abbey to get them on the stage, further increasing the already over-budget production costs. (Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author).

some, the production of *The Shaughraun* was highly entertaining and successful, while for others, it represented all that was wrong in commercial representation of national identity on the stage. These criticisms have often been directed at contemporary public displays of Irishness for the tourist audience, of which *Riverdance* is one of the most noteworthy. However, amongst populist audiences in Ireland and around the world, *Riverdance* remains highly successful. Helen Meany articulates her discomfort over the success of *The Shaughraun* amongst the local community.

This creation of a pastiche of what is already pastiche becomes more problematic when it comes to interpreting the play, directing performances and generating audience reaction. If in 2004 we're identifying with those 19th-century audiences lapping up Boucicault's stage Irishry, what exactly are we laughing at?⁵⁰

What was more unsettling for commentators such as Helen Meany was not that *The Shaughraun* was produced by the Abbey Theatre during the centenary year, but that the production was more accepted by Irish audiences than by those abroad. The feeling that the Irish community should have more sophisticated tastes in terms of the representation of Irishness in the early twenty-first century than that found in the nineteenth century was seen as disturbing by some members of the Irish public.

For many critics, the “low brow” production value of *The Shaughraun*, despite the production's popularity amongst Dublin audiences, was an unfitting tribute to the Abbey's centenary due to the display of what many felt to be the antithesis of the Abbey founders' aim for the company. Orla Flanagan charged that the technical complexities of the production outweighed its artistic benefits, “that is not the sort of show that the National Theatre should be developing. It was driven commercially and I don't think it succeeded in that way, and it [caused so many] problems, [took up] so

⁵⁰O'Brien.

much stage time and so much money, and it wasn't an artistic endeavor."⁵¹ Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn founded their theatre in order to present an alternative representation of Irish identity from that found in Boucicault. In the melodramas of Boucicault, the portrayal of Irish identity, though not as derogatory as that found in the English drama, was considered by the Abbey founders as unrealistic. As O'Donovan describes the Abbey Company's frustrations with Boucicault:

(We) felt that the romantic Irish dramas of Dion Boucicault were not a truthful reflection of Irish life and character. They reflected the sentimental Irishman as the English and those who wrote for English consumption liked to imagine him.⁵²

According to the newly established Irish Literary Society, Boucicaulian melodramatic imaginings extended the divide between the Irish public's understanding of their own identity and the representations of it that they found presented by a theatrical tradition created for export. The local popularity of the 2004 production offers a testament to the surviving power amongst audiences of iconic performances of traditional representations of Irishness in popular culture. The extreme contrast between those in favour of productions such as *The Shaughraun* and their critics, offer fitting examples of the tension found within notions of how national identity should be represented on the Irish stage for its conflicting publics.

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme

The second phase of *abbeyonehundred*, known as *Abbey Phase Two* began with a production of Frank McGuinness' 1985 play, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. The play examines men from diverse areas across Ulster who come together to fight in the 1916 battle on the Somme River in France. As a Catholic

⁵¹ Orla Flanagan, In discussion with the Author, May 2007.

⁵² Seamus Deane, "The Production of Cultural Space in Irish Writing," *Boundary 2* 21, no. 3 (1994): 130.

from Donegal, McGuinness wrote *Observe the Sons* in part as an attempt to understand opposing viewpoints, which during its premiere, according to Robert Welch, “took everyone by surprise, and marked a profound shift in Irish theatrical thought, practice, and intent.”⁵³ As an iconic production from the Abbey’s recent past, *Observe the Sons* proved a strong addition to the Centenary programme.

Frank McGuinness’ *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* is an attempt to present an understanding of the Battle of the Somme to Southern Irish audiences. Similarly to Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star*, McGuinness’ play challenges popular notions of Protestant Irish identity. However, in spite of the inclusion of a half-Catholic soldier, Crawford, in the Ulster troupe dramatized in this play, his Catholic identity is portrayed as being at odds with the ideals the Ulstermen are trying to uphold through the battle. Though this play, written in 1985, does not focus on the Catholic Irish element of the famous World War One battle and, therefore, continues the reification of the Battle of the Somme as one in which predominantly Irish Ulster Unionists participated, he does re-incorporate other traditions of World War One victimization and battle struggles within the representation. As Lionel Pilkington notes, “Beneath the jingoistic rhetoric of the First World War and the bombast of Orangeism, McGuinness’s play suggests, there lie personal bonds of sympathy and communal solidarity which outsiders, and especially southern Irish outsiders, must respect and take note of.”⁵⁴ McGuinness’ play was a response to a number of works about the Northern Irish conflict, performed at the Abbey and other theatres in the Republic, where the Ulster unionist voice was silenced, or entirely absent.

In the 1980s and throughout the revival of McGuinness’ play at the Abbey, a theatrical representation of the Battle of the Somme was a testament of the Unionist

⁵³ Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form & Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209.

⁵⁴ Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*, 221-22.

counterpoint to Nationalist depictions of Easter Rising sacrifice. As Pilkington clarifies:

A major emphasis of *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* is its articulation of a deliberate counter to nationalist ideology: in place of the 1916 Rising, McGuinness offers a seminal moment in Northern Irish Protestant identity, the Battle of the Somme, and in place of the painful history of Northern Ireland's Catholic minority, McGuinness places the cultural isolation of Ulster Protestants.⁵⁵

With the defeat at the Battle of the Somme and the devastating effect of the Great War's trench warfare, McGuinness sympathetically portrays Unionist victimization and sacrifice often ignored in the wake of Irish Republican nationalist tragedies.

Premiered at a difficult time in Northern Ireland's history, and a time when the Republic was trying to address its relation to the North's violent politics, *Observe the Sons* gave the National Theatre a place to present alternative perspectives of the nation and national identity. The play was presented as part of the increasing interest in the Northern Ireland conflict that had greatly influenced the Irish National Theatre's practice from the late 1960s to the 1980s. As Robert Welch describes the legacy of the Abbey's drama in this period:

It is now clear, in retrospect and from hindsight, that the Abbey, the Irish National Theatre, was, from its re-establishment in 1966 in the new building, occupied with a number of key concerns. One had to do with the kind of theatre that would adequately reflect and respond to life in an Ireland undergoing far-reaching social change; this concern had formal as well as thematic ramifications and influenced the evolution of imaginative approaches to staging, design, and lighting. ...Another preoccupation focused upon political and cultural matters, in particular the seemingly intractable nature of the renewed conflict in Northern Ireland and its southern reverberations and manifestations.⁵⁶

The focus on Northern Irish politics and impending violence allowed the Republic to address their own identity in relation to the North, as well as separate from it. Through public and highly visible attempts, like *Observe the Sons*, to understand

⁵⁵ Ibid., 222.

⁵⁶ Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form & Pressure*, 209.

Protestant Unionist identity, the Irish Republic could begin to separate itself from the devastating division experienced by their neighbor and work towards peace and reconciliation.

The production which was revived in the mid-1990s, during an important part of the peace process, appeared to be a fitting reminder of current negotiations in the North and reflected the optimism of the Fianna Fáil government of 1994. During the 2004 season, Frank McGuinness' play *Observe the Sons*, was included as a part of their centennial repertoire to address issues of Irish representation in the Abbey Theatre. Recent cross-border initiatives in trade and culture between Northern Ireland and the Republic made the inclusion of the play particularly important in 2004. The production has been resurrected at the Abbey Theatre in times when the negotiations between Northern Ireland and the Republic were especially critical. As Brian Singleton observed during the *Irish Magazine* Critic's Forum in 2004,

The Whole Season was opened with the production of *Observe the Son of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, by Frank McGuinness. The play premiered at the Peacock in 1985 and was revived very notably in 1994 on the main stage of the Abbey. This was a very significant moment in the peace process and, at its opening night, there were many unionist politicians from the north in the audience. A student of mine said to me afterwards: now I know what a national theatre is for.⁵⁷

Observe the Sons presented alternative viewpoints and identities from Irish history, allowing the Irish National Theatre to continue its tradition as a symbolic platform for the greater debates of identity and reconciliation occurring throughout the island.

As a commemorative work, this play presented a problematic view of Ireland's assumptions of identity as inclusive on the Nationalist stage. The play examines men from across the six counties of Ulster, who, though often at odds with one another, learn to reconcile their differences through the fraternity of battle. By presenting the

⁵⁷ Irish Theatre Magazine's Critic's Forum, "On the Edge," 16.

Ulster Unionists as a divided community, rather than a unified front, McGuinness portrays a more three-dimensional presentation of Protestant Unionist identity. Moreover, the group of men fighting for King, country and the Red Hand of Ulster are dismayed by their own dread of the upcoming battle:

McIlwaine: But Belfast will be lost in this war. The whole of Ulster will be lost. We're not making a sacrifice. Jesus, you've seen this war. We are the sacrifice. What's keeping us over there? We're all going mad. ...You're listening to no more of what I have to say because you've already said it yourself. You already know what's happening to yourself, but you won't admit it will you? You can't admit it, and I can.⁵⁸

By showing the characters' discovery of their own weakness, especially through McGuinness' portrayal of the bellicose "Belfast Boys" like McIlwaine, allows for a sympathetic portrait of vulnerability within Ulster masculine identity. The complexity of *Observe the Sons* refuses to essentialize the Battle of the Somme, or the Ulster Unionist contribution to the famous battle.

McGuinness' play interrogates audiences' assumptions about Irish identity and Southern Irish mainstream viewpoints. For the National Theatre to produce a play like this, it asks the audience to challenge themselves and how they view their own concept of Ireland both on and off the stage. As Fintan O'Toole states, "It both represents the Abbey as being a national theatre – in the sense that this is what a national theatre *does*, it has that resonance in terms of contemporary politics – and at the same time of course, it's a play about the limits of the Abbey's idea of a national theatre."⁵⁹ The 2004 production offered a successful presentation for many of appropriate subject matter for the Irish national theatre which, since its premiere in the 1980s, challenged audiences understandings of what it means to be Irish, as well as a re-imagining of Irish history.

⁵⁸ Frank McGuinness, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986).

⁵⁹ Irish Theatre Magazine's Critic's Forum, "On the Edge," 17.

THE NATIONAL SELF: Politics of Representation in abbeyonehundred

Notions of what a national theatre should produce to reflect the nation came to the forefront of criticism to the *abbeyonehundred* season. Although the first phase of the centenary was created to reflect “modern Ireland,” and in the *abbeyonehundred* brochure, Ben Barnes declared that the programme was designed to make the Abbey the voice for Ireland’s “fractured and fractional, multicultural nation,”⁶⁰ the centenary offered very little opportunity for Irish speakers, alternative identities or sexualities to be expressed, and there were no stage representations of Ireland’s diversity in terms of new immigrants or an ethnically-diverse community. At the beginning of the 2004 debate, *Language and Identity*, Ben Barnes declared that “as artists and audience and finally as citizens, we must also think about questions of language and politics, the politics of identity, race and gender when we begin to ask questions about our Irishness in the words we speak, in the works we make and in the world we live.”⁶¹ Despite Barnes’ statement that the company was dedicated to performing the “politics of identity” on the Abbey stage, the programming behind *abbeyonehundred* offered little assurance of the inclusion of gender and racial debates in the representation of Irishness in its repertoire. Many commentators felt that the centenary season should reflect contemporary social concerns effecting Irish society. They thought that a centenary season for the National Theatre should represent where Irish society is going at the turn of the new century, as well as honoring the company and the country’s past. In the Abbey Debates, Helen Meany articulated the “need” amongst Abbey audiences to see a reflection of contemporary culture on the stage,

There’s an expectation among audiences that the theatre will reflect what’s happening in the wider society. There’s a sense that the theatre has a

⁶⁰“Abbey100 Part 4: The Road Ahead,” *Irish Times*, 16 January 2004.

⁶¹ Abbey Debates: *Irish Language and Identity*, Abbey Theatre, Dublin: 20 March, 2004.

responsibility to the changing world of politics, of sexual politics, of power relations and so on which is quite particular I think, and that's why we want new plays. We want plays here in the National Theatre that reflect what's going on out in the street.⁶²

With the announcement of the upcoming season at the end of 2003, many members of the press described the season as "conservative," presenting a "backward glance" in its repertoire selection, while criticism was also felt within the company itself.⁶³ The lack of new writing or writing in the Irish language, dearth of works by female writers or directors⁶⁴ and failure to include representations of the "New Ireland" throughout the centenary appeared to leave unaddressed many of the concerns of twenty-first century Ireland.

Since the 1980s, there have been a number of dramatic changes in Irish social life. The resurgence of the economic boom and the development of the European Union trade agreements and work reciprocity between EU countries have broadened women's role in Irish society, and brought increasing numbers of immigrants, migrant workers and refugees to Irish shores. These changes in the social fabric of Irish life have given rise to a number of debates over social inclusion, multiculturalism, globalisation and gender politics in Ireland. Though they have often appeared as positive, there have also been negative effects, such racism and a continuation of

⁶² "Abbey Debates: Memory and Repertoire."

⁶³ Of the interviews I conducted with *abbeyonehundred* staff, there was a prevailing feeling among Abbey staff members of discontent over the programming decisions for the centenary. Many felt that the Artistic Director, Ben Barnes, had hastily, and for some, arbitrarily, made decisions for the 2004 repertoire not in dialogue with other members of staff. This caused a considerable lack of confidence and decline of morale amongst the Abbey staff when the season's programming came under attack by the media and the company attempted to justify a programme that many of the staff felt lacked coherency. In an interview with Ben Barnes, the former Artistic Director acknowledged that some of the programming decisions were based on obligations that he felt the company had towards certain individuals such as Bernard Farrall, John McCollgan and Seamus Heaney, though he denied having a lack of coherency in his programme choices. (Jocelyn Clarke, Orla Flanagan, Andrea Ainsworth, Sharon Murphy, Bryan Jackson, Ben Barnes: interviews with Author, 2007).

⁶⁴ *abbeyonehundred* included only two works featuring female artists during the season, both of which were produced in the smaller, Peacock Theatre. Marina Carr's, *Portia Coughlin*, performed in Repertory from 24 September to 27 November, while a children's play, *The Wolf of Winter*, by Paula Meehan and directed by Andrea Ainsworth, performed in schools and the Peacock from 10 December to 17 January.

gender imbalance throughout the past two decades. By 2004, the Dublin theatre community have begun to address some of these radical changes to Irish society, and this caused a greater amount of public scrutiny over the choices for the Abbey's centenary season, which many felt offered a reactionary representation of the salient issues in contemporary Irish identity politics.

Ben Barnes stressed that the programme is dedicated to "re-imagining the Abbey in the minds and hearts of the public,"⁶⁵ but became defensive when the programme was criticized for its lack of diversity. Although the new face of the Abbey emphasized in the programme included a mass attempt to address new communities in Dublin, Barnes and other members of the Abbey team failed to integrate their apparent agenda into the centenary performances represented on the stage. The company's failure to attract vital new communities from the "New Ireland" of diverse nationalities, origins, and cultures called into question how the Abbey continues to reflect its audience and community and, thereby, its nation.⁶⁶ In all, the period of transition from the 1980s to the 2000s in Irish society has brought about changes to the shape and face of the Irish community. However, the route to social inclusion and gender equality among the Irish republic remains problematic, while further steps towards tolerance and equality among Irish social practice and within Irish institutions and organizations, like the Irish National Theatre Society, are necessary for the progression towards interculturalism and equality.

⁶⁵Ben Barnes, "Introduction to *Abbeyonehundred*," (Dublin: 2003).

⁶⁶Despite the increased number of immigrants in the Irish Republic since 2000, Ben Barnes stated in an interview that in 2004 there was not such a focus on multicultural audiences at the Abbey. The section of the centenary programme entitled *Abbey and Europe* was solely concerned with artistic connections between Irish Theatre and those from within the European Union and not with local non-Irish performers or audiences. (Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author, Wexford, 7 June 2007).

Representation and Gender

After the announcement of *abbeyonehundred*, there was criticism over the under representation of women in the season. Critics of the Abbey's programme often complained about how the brochure and marketing strategy used female and multicultural perspectives as mere tokens to ameliorate their traditionalist image. Though the centenary's marketing campaign focused a great deal of attention on Lady Gregory's life and work, and the *abbeyonehundred* brochure featured Marina Carr "placed with a halo of male writers around her,"⁶⁷ as a focal point for its section on contemporary playwrights of the year, their representations on the stage did little to realize the company's boast of "artistic and social inclusiveness"⁶⁸ advertized in the brochure. Gerry Smith argued that the season presented "A miserable representation [of women], given that the Abbey is celebrating 100 years of existence."⁶⁹ Despite the inclusion of productions by her contemporaries, William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge, there was no fully realized production of Lady Gregory's work, while Marina Carr's play, *Portia Coughlan*, had a short run on the Peacock stage during the Dublin Theatre Festival.⁷⁰ The season also included a play for children on the Peacock Stage, *The Wolf in Winter*, by the poet Paula Meehan.⁷¹

⁶⁷Deirdre Mulrooney, "Sin Bin: Play Boys ± but Few Play Women," *Sunday Business Post*, 18 January 2004.

⁶⁸Barnes, "Introduction to Abbeyonehundred," 5

⁶⁹Gerry Smith, "Abbey Gets in Gear for Centenary," *Irish Times*, 22 November 2004.

⁷⁰As Deirdre Mulrooney describes the imbalance of production time Carr's play has in relation to that of her male contemporaries: "Don't blink or you'll miss it, because Carr's play doesn't even get a complete run for itself - unlike plays by Stuart Carolan, Peter Sheridan, Colm Tóibín, Eugene O'Brien or Paul Mercier, which take place in the same Peacock space. Rather, *Portia Coughlan* constitutes one fifth of the Abbey in Ireland, and is consigned to share its run with a Lennox Robinson play and playlets by Yeats, Synge and George Fitzmaurice." Deirdre Mulrooney, "Sin bin: Play boys ± but few play women," *Sunday Business Post*, 18 January 2004.

⁷¹The production value of *Portia Coughlan* was also criticized as undervaluing the worth of the complex and controversial nature of Marina Carr's work. As Susan Conley noted in the *Irish Theatre Magazine Forum* in October of 2004, "Because given this was the only female playwright who was produced in the entire centenary year, it's particularly disappointing that Carr didn't get a better outing." (Irish Theatre Magazine's Critic's Forum, "On the Edge," 28.)

The paucity of work by female artists in the centenary was seen as a blatant disregard of the expansion of the role of women in Irish society. It also illustrated a feeling amongst many that division between the sexes was still unequal in the Irish theatre. During the Abbey Debates, Ailbhe Smyth acknowledged her anger over her feeling of lack of personal identification with the “national memory” presented at the Abbey Theatre, due to the company’s continued under representation of works by female playwrights. She felt that “a whole generation of people” have been marginalized by this lack of a reflection of the female perspective on the Abbey stage. Smyth argues that women, and other marginalized groups, are not just “forgotten,” but “deliberately unremembered” by the Abbey Theatre and other cultural institutions.⁷² For her, the tokenistic presentation of Marina Carr’s work at the Abbey illustrated a massive refusal to acknowledge the importance of the representation of women in a national cultural institution.

Throughout the past century, Ireland has been notorious among European countries for its gender inequality. Though women had a higher educational level on average, they were very slow to enter the workforce until well into the 1970s. The importance of the Catholic Church among Irish governmental policy greatly hindered women’s sexual and economic rights in society. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that women’s rights began to be actively addressed in Ireland. However, since 1990, Irish women have increased their numbers in the work force, with over 63% of married women with full time jobs. Moreover, the number of children per family has substantially decreased in recent years, which has added to changes in the dynamic of family life. In addition, the number of single mothers has increased dramatically, altering traditional models of the family structure yet further. Peadar

⁷² Ailbhe Smyth, "Abbey Debates: Memory and Repertoire."

Kirby describes the importance of women's entrance into the work force and the decreasing numbers of children in families as a radical shift in Irish social values:

The growth in the numbers of women, and particularly married women working led to a clash with Catholic morality. The timing and spacing of children could no longer be left to the gift of God and the very idea of a large family, which fitted with a more rural society as a hedge against old age, soon became an anathema to many.⁷³

Irish women also constitute slightly over two-thirds of the work force in the professional service area, though they mainly are in predominantly female professions such as nursing or teaching. Despite these innovations in gender relations in the work force and family life, women are still the predominant child-care givers in domestic households, and are generally paid less despite being better educated than their male counterparts.⁷⁴ As Pat O'Connor states, "From what little we know, it appears that even young unmarried women need to be more educated than their male counterparts to 'compensate' for their gender."⁷⁵ In this way, despite the recent dramatic changes in women's role in society, there is still a long way to go before equality between the genders is established.

Nevertheless, recent decades have begun to address the gender imbalance in Irish social life, and attempted to integrate alternative identities into those of mainstream Irish culture. Through public court trials of events which occurred over the past 50 years of the Republic's history, the rights of women and homosexuals began to be openly discussed in the media. According to Siobhan Kilfeather:

In the 1980s and 1990s public debates over issues to do with privacy, reproductive rights and alternative sexualities were centred on a series of scandals in which print and broadcast media personalized the issues through sensationalized exemplary cases.⁷⁶

⁷³ Peadar Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 162.

⁷⁴ Pat O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), 246-47.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁷⁶ Siobhan Kilfeather, "Irish Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111.

Abortion, child molestation and sexual conduct issues began to come out in the open, whereas previously they had been silenced or ignored by the Irish government, church and educational institutions.

The election of Mary Robinson in 1990 as the first female Irish President, was seen as an optimistic sign of a new Irish future moving away from its former conservatism. Trained as a barrister, Robinson had worked for twenty years in the Senate towards inclusive policies for women's rights and more liberal practices towards homosexuality.⁷⁷ As Kilfeather illustrates:

[Mary Robinson's] presidency coincided with a period of economic prosperity and for a while she was regarded as herself a symbol of a new Ireland, more confident and generally more liberal than before. She decided not to run for a second term of office and in 1997 became United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights.⁷⁸

Though as President, Robinson had more symbolic importance to the nation than legislative, her presence, and that of the current President, Mary McAleese, symbolically allowed for the enlargement of women's roles and the increasing visibility of other marginalized groups in Irish society.

Through the representation of women on and off the stage in *abbeyonehundred*, and by denying their active presence as directors, playwrights and dynamic theatrical figures, the Abbey Theatre's oversight was a definite step backwards in the fight for equality among the genders in the arts and the greater Irish community. Though Ben Barnes argued that this was due to space constraints and scheduling difficulties, it is very hard to believe that he could find no other works by women or about female characters for the centenary season. The under representation of women in the season augmented concerns about the representation of the nation in the National Theatre.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 112.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 113.

One member of the public stated in an *Irish Times* "Letter to the Editor" that she felt the Abbey had no right to call itself a "national" theatre with such a longstanding legacy of under-represented women on their stage:

How an institution whose productions, year after year, continue to favour the male consciousness, that has predominantly nurtured the aspiring male playwright, that allocates its considerable State subsidy to such an unfair project, can be called the "National Theatre" is beyond my understanding.⁷⁹

Due to concerns that the centenary season should properly reflect the national character and the Abbey's century of programming, concerns over the season falling short on many levels drew public scrutiny over the needs of the nation to be reflected in Abbey productions.

In many areas of contemporary Irish society, as O'Connor describes, "women's voices and their concerns are beginning to be heard."⁸⁰ However, without the acknowledgment within Irish cultural and governmental institutions, "the perceived legitimacy of those voices, especially insofar as they articulate women's needs and perspectives, is still problematic."⁸¹ As O'Connor establishes, though many men, as individuals, have accepted the new role of women in their work and home lives, the denial of women's assimilation into "the social and cultural construction of heterosexuality" in Irish cultural life, and the lack of major female voices among "the main institutional structures such as the institutional church, the state or even the economic system,"⁸² have caused women to remain subordinate to their male counterparts in contemporary Ireland. Through the continued practice of denying women an equal position in Irish institutions, like the Irish National Theatre, these institutions continue to justify gender imbalance in Ireland.

⁷⁹ Marie Bashford Sinnott, "Gender Issues at the Abbey," *Irish Times*, 12 January 2004.

⁸⁰ O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Irish Society*, 245.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 254.

Representation and Diversity

Since Mary Robinson's presidency in the 1990s, and her succession by Mary McAleese, a rising interest developed for the inclusion of alternative communities in Irish culture. A look at the position of minorities, including that of Irish travellers who have continued to be marginalized by the majority culture in Ireland, came to the fore in Irish political and social debates. President McAleese declared in 2000 that:

The more people who are on the margins the weaker is the centre [...] we all have a stake in building a future which respects and celebrates diversity – a generous, sharing Ireland that encompasses many traditions and cultures and creates a space for all its people.⁸³

Despite the politics of inclusion promoted by the Fianna Fáil Government and Irish liberals, however, the integration of recent immigrants, along with the relationship between the Irish settled and traveller communities, has fostered uneasy relations between these diverse social groups. In 2006, immigration was closed to the Chinese community, and included the entrance of Chinese students to the country, while the countries soon to be joined to the European Union – Romania and Bulgaria – have been denied the right to work in Ireland.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the Irish Traveller population continue to face discrimination in Irish society. A study in the late 1990s by Robert Walsh established that Irish Travellers found their “distinct ethnic status was not recognised or respected [by the settled Irish community] and that this also caused

⁸³ President Mary McAleese, 24 February, 2000; quoted in Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O'Connell, ed., *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), 1.

⁸⁴ According to the Department of Enterprise, Employment, “Since 1 January 2007 nationals of Romania and Bulgaria are EU nationals but are still required to have a permit to work in Ireland. Applications for employment permits for them will be given preference over those for non-EEA nationals. Romanian and Bulgarian nationals who have been resident in the State on a valid employment permit for a continuous period of 12 months or longer prior to 31 December 2006 will not need employment permits.” (information available on Work Abroad website: <http://www.irishabroad.com/Irish-World/Expats/Moving-to-Ireland/Working/workpermits/>) Website accessed: 10 June, 2007.

tension.”⁸⁵ In general, despite Mary McAleese’s plea for tolerance and inclusion, current relations between the diverse communities in Ireland remain strained and will take a longer period of transition to become fully integrated than optimistically noted by the Irish government.

Irish policy towards immigration has until recently been fairly liberal, thus increasing the number of immigrants to the country during the 1990s. Due to industrial incentives by the Irish government, “Ireland’s total workforce doubled from 1.1 million in 1990 to 2 million in 2005.”⁸⁶ The increase of jobs and wealth into the country caused a building boom across Ireland which greatly increased the manual labour force. According to the Preliminary Report of the 2006 Census, the population had increased by 8.1% since the last census in 2002, the highest population increase on record. The boom in the Irish Economy had also increased the number of immigrants into the country. Between 2002-2006, the net immigration figure for the period was 186,000, doubling the figure for the period from 1996-2002, while the estimated total immigrants living and working in Ireland in 2006 is calculated as 400,000, or a tenth of the total population. In 2005 alone, 70,000 new immigrants have arrived in Ireland, the largest number on record to arrive in a single year.⁸⁷

The need for a “space” for all the people in Ireland remains problematic, however, with the increase of wage-earning immigrants who compete with their native Irish counterparts for jobs and benefits. The new Irish economy also must come to terms with a new multicultural society. Michael O’Connell describes Ireland’s transition from a predominantly mono-society to a plural one: “Part of the new Ireland is an increasing recognition of, and an increasing number of, minority groups within

⁸⁵ David Walsh, "Policing Pluralism," in *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland*, ed. Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O’Connell (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), 168.

⁸⁶ Ruth Gerber, "Discovering the Real Ireland," *Lincoln Journal Star*, August 21 2005.

⁸⁷ Central Statistics Office, "Census Preliminary Report," (Dublin: Government of Ireland, 2006), 9.

Ireland. Cultivating pluralism is about finding ways to enhance social inclusion, for all members of our society.”⁸⁸ Interculturalism as a concept has been a source of public debate since the late 1990s with the arrival of a large number of refugees through the Irish “Open Door” policy.⁸⁹ Previously, Ireland’s ethnic minority population remained “mostly anonymous and hidden, preferring to lead their lives apart from controversies about racism.”⁹⁰ The large numbers of immigrants, refugees and economic migrants from the newly established members of the European Union have increased the visibility of foreign nationals into Irish society, making it impossible for the hegemonic Irish culture to ignore the new members of their community.

Furthermore, the prejudice against Eastern Europeans has increased since their inclusion into the European Union when they were granted permission to work and live in Ireland as full members of the EU. In a sociological study, carried out by Phillip Curry, on the nature of the Dublin population’s attitudes towards foreign ethnic groups, the social distance for even European-born foreigners was extremely high. As Curry states:

Interestingly, Africans appear to be less distant than Bosnians, Romanians and Arabs, suggesting that simple skin colour is not as salient as other issues such as beliefs about the reasons for coming to Ireland. It may also reflect the influence of an “experimenter pleaser” effect. It is quite possible that in the current social climate, prejudice based on skin colour is perceived as politically incorrect while prejudice towards same skin colour groups is perceived as legitimate social judgement.⁹¹

⁸⁸ O’Connell, ed., *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland*, 3

⁸⁹ Walsh, “Policing Pluralism,” 153.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Philip Curry, ““She Never Let Them in”: Popular Reactions to Refugees Arriving in Dublin,” in *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland*, ed. Malcolm MacLachlan and Michael O’Connell (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), O’Connell, ed., *Cultivating Pluralism: Psychological, Social and Cultural Perspectives on a Changing Ireland*, 143.

Therefore, because of its distinct nature which does not fall in line with popular perceptions of racism, the hostility against Eastern Europeans in Ireland can be justified through social and economic issues and not considered racism by many members of the community. The Eastern European community are considered to have immigrated for purely economic reasons which provoke hostility from members of the local community who believe that they “have come to Ireland solely to exploit its social welfare system.”⁹²

Another notable omission in the *abbeyonehundred* program was the lack of full length productions in the Irish language. During the 1950s and 60s the Abbey Theatre produced numerous plays in Irish throughout their season. This tradition faded out as the years progressed, and now plays produced in Irish in the National Theatre feature rarely. Originally there was seen to be no work in Irish scheduled during the season, which provoked the anger of Siobhán ní Shúilleabháin from Newcastle, Galway in a letter to the editor of the *Irish Times*,

Ignoring Irish language plays in this manner has become the norm in Ireland, with the result that the term "Irish Theatre" is typically used to denote plays in English only, as if in fact the Irish language no longer existed. Our National Theatre, the Abbey, for instance, is celebrating its centenary without a single play in the Irish language.⁹³

With Irish recognized as a national language in the European Union and with ongoing attempts to revitalize the language, the lack of Irish voices at the Abbey has been a contested issue that was provoked during the 2004 season.

An Irish-speaking version of John Millington Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*, however, was produced on the Peacock Stage during the year. The production, which was performed alongside of William Butler Yeats’ *Purgatory*, and George Fitzmaurice’s *The Dandy Dolls*, was considered a critical success. However, as Victor

⁹² Curry, ""She Never Let Them in": Popular Reactions to Refugees Arriving in Dublin,"151.

⁹³ Siobhan Ni Shuilleabhain, "Fair Play for Plays in Irish," *Irish Times*, 28 February, 2004.

Merriman notes, the fact that it was presented in Irish was considered by Abbey as a reason for apology rather than acclaim:

The decision to perform an Irish-language version of the play was fully vindicated by the quality of the production, but it was accompanied by a hand-out which amounted to an apologia for using Irish in the national theatre. A detailed English-language synopsis was offered, 'for those who might find the Irish in *Chun na Farriage Síos forbidding*' (my emphasis). This to me put a question mark over how the Abbey feels about the Irish language, or how it feels its audiences feel about the Irish language.⁹⁴

As described by Merriman, the production which could have celebrated its use of the Irish language, focused more on the assumption that its audience could not, or would not, understand its use of a national language that was both alien and "forbidding" to the public.

Ironically, contemporary Irish feminist discourse has begun to look increasingly at the marginalized Irish traditions, in recent years, as a symbolic terrain for feminist practice. Mary N. Harris notes the increase in the 1990s of Irish women turning to Irish language writing as a genre for the under-represented to find a voice. As Harris describes the tradition throughout the century of marginalizing female authors "The largely subordinate role played by women in literary matters as teachers, translators, and writers of children's literature reflected the position of women in Irish society since the achievement of independence in the 1920s."⁹⁵ Irish folk traditions and the Irish language appeared an obvious focus for Irish women in the arts, who felt their own voice was marginalized by mainstream Irish culture. As Kilfeather argues, over the past ten years, there has been a "growth of interest in traditional forms of knowledge. This has involved a renewed commitment to the Irish language and to

⁹⁴ Irish Theatre Magazine's Critic's Forum, "On the Edge," 22.

⁹⁵ Mary N. Harris, "Beleaguered but Determined: Irish Women Writers in Irish," *Feminist Review* 51 (1995): 26.

folklore and the oral tradition,”⁹⁶ to emphasize the empowerment of female voices within a minority cultural media.

However, the genres of Irish language drama and literature are not the only areas to be examined by feminists and others as the media of the disempowered. Recently, the narrative of minority culture has also included communities previously ignored in Irish society. As Kilfeather establishes, there has been an interest “ in facilitating groups that have had difficulty in gaining access to the public sphere – travelers, the economic underclasses, sex workers, survivors of violence, lone parents, recent immigrants – to develop and present their own interpretations of their needs and objectives.”⁹⁷ Thus minority concerns beyond those of women have been incorporated into the inclusive narratives of current artistic and social practice. The voices of those previously silenced through Irish hegemonic society have continued to be fostered by feminists and other minority groups.

The Abbey Theatre’s marketing during the centenary embraced the recent Irish interest in diversity and multiculturalism. Like the *abbeyonehundred* brochure’s focus on its token female figures and playwrights, the company also emphasized Ireland’s position in the “New Europe” with Ireland’s increasingly pluralist society. Ben Barnes dedicated the first phase of the centenary, *The Abbey and Europe* to acknowledging Ireland’s 2004 Presidency of the European Union with productions which reflected Ireland’s connection with their European neighbours as well as offering a celebration of the recent entrance of certain Eastern European countries into the EU by hosting of one production each from Poland, Slovenia and Hungary. However, with the exception of the production of *Festen* by Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukow, most of the Abbey’s celebration of Europe included traditional interpretations of

⁹⁶ Kilfeather, "Irish Feminism,"112.

⁹⁷ Ibid.,112-13.

European dramatic classics translated by Irish writers and did not present new works by European authors. Indeed, it may be argued that the inclusion of works by Chekhov and Sophocles offered no innovation or risk on the part of the Abbey, and ignored the rich contemporary works by European dramatists that would have been less well known to Dublin audiences.

The inclusion of the European companies also offered an interesting paradox. Although these works by innovative directors definitely added a new shape to the Abbey Theatre's programme, they failed to acknowledge the lively Eastern European community currently living and working in Ireland. Though the productions presented by famous Eastern European directors during the early part of the centenary season were marketed as embracing the changes to the Irish community, the Abbey made little attempt to access audiences from the Eastern European communities living in Dublin. Produced as a part of the international Dublin Theatre Festival, the productions were not viewed as a part of the local Dublin community, but rather as international works highlighting Ireland's global connection to Europe rather than the "New Ireland." The Irish Polish community represents the largest immigration pool to Ireland in the 2000s and the lack of acknowledgement of this potential audience group as a reflection of the Irish nation was a major shortcoming of the programmes mission statement to foster "inclusion" and diversity on the Abbey stage.

Conclusion: Publics and Counterpublics

Arts organizations frequently question the role of the audience; they investigate ways to access "new audiences", create forums to find the needs of the public, and often find the audience both a blessing and a bane to their profession. The collective experience of theatre audiences, as well as their influence over artistic change and

ticket sales makes theatre audiences a driving force behind theatre company policies. Susan Bennett maintains that the audience shares a common bond through their collectivization in the performance arena, a collective experience which influences the audience's response to the event.⁹⁸ The audience, according to Michael Warner, "has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space. A performer on stage knows where her public is, how big it is, where its boundaries are, and what the time of its common existence is."⁹⁹ For the Abbey, however, this known and tangible audience does not exist. It is true, on any given night at the Abbey Theatre an audience appears under the houselights, "bounded" by their seats, focusing their attention upon the performance. Nevertheless, there is a much wider audience of the Irish National Theatre Society than the one who appear at the theatre; an audience less distinguishable, but no less powerful to the shaping of the company's reception, programming and reputation. As Lynne Parker of Rough Magic Theatre Company commented, "Anything the Abbey does will get reams of letters from the *Irish Times* with X-million opinions because people feel thoroughly possessive of their national theater and the Abbey's special in that regard. They don't always show up when you do the shows."¹⁰⁰ Ironically, as Parker pointed out, a wider public read and comment on Abbey Theatre productions and artistic policies than make up the theatre viewing audience, fostering conflicting needs and "obligations" between the theatre and its multiple publics throughout its history.

During *abbeyonehundred* the diverse publics and counterpublics of the Irish National Theatre Society challenged the company over the notion of representation. For the nation, the politics behind the Abbey Theatre's programming were perceived

⁹⁸ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁹⁹ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 50.

¹⁰⁰ Lynn Neary, "The Weekend Edition," in *National Public Radio News* (USA: Washington D.C., 2004).

as being privileged over the symbolic needs of creating a season worthy of a century of the Abbey Theatre's repertoire. Public debates over the representation of the nation, a sense of contemporary artistic vision and the inclusion of multiple identities on the stage were seen as problematic in the conservative season. Though the *abbeyonehundred* programme boasted of the Abbey's desire to promote a theatrical season that reflected a more pluralist society, the plays chosen for the centenary did little to manifest this mission. The Company's exclusion of any representation of Ireland's current multicultural society, and the limited amount of female playwrights, directors, or untraditional representations of women on the stage, all were criticized throughout the season. Many felt that as a powerful cultural institution, the Irish National Theatre Society could foster alternative representations of Irishness on the stage. In doing so, they might help to develop new audiences who feel disconnected from the current representations of Irishness in their national theatre. Due to the critique of the *abbeyonehundred* season, when the financial crisis became revealed later in 2004, many felt that the ineffectual choices for the season were a reflection of the increasing instability of the company.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPREADING THE NATION:

The Local versus the Global in *abbeyonehundred*

On 3 December 2003, the Irish National Theatre Society held a lavish commemorative event at the Metropolitan Club in New York City. The celebration was created as a fundraiser to launch the hundred year anniversary of the Abbey Theatre. With readings by Irish celebrities such as Gabriel Byrne, Milo O'Shea and Fionnuala Flanagan, the evening was held to boost economic support for the company among their American enthusiasts. The Abbey celebration in New York City was a mark of recognition of the longstanding connection between Ireland and the United States with the popular Irish actors who established their careers in the American film industry. However, as noted by the hybrid "Irish" celebrities (such as the Irish-American Brian Dennehy) who headlined the event, the very connection between America and Ireland emphasized by the fundraiser presented the global stage to its own local audience, namely that of the Irish diaspora. The Abbey Theatre throughout the century has exploited and depended—economically and artistically—upon the Irish Diaspora's continued loyalty to their Irish identity in their fostering of the international market for representations of Irishness.

During 2004, a significant strand to the Abbey's centenary celebration was *The Abbey on Tour*, which included domestic tours across Ireland, international tours to America and Australia of John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Tom Murphy's *The Gigli Concert* and, in 2005, and the tour to Great Britain of Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*. For the Artistic Director, Ben Barnes, the tour to

the United States was important as part of the season due to the fact that “The Abbey all through its history has had a very colourful engagement with North America.”¹ Barnes and the Abbey Board’s emphasis on this “colourful engagement” also manifested itself in ambitious fundraising schemes focused on the North American market. The expensive tours and the lack of success in the fundraising scheme were blamed for the ensuing financial crisis that developed during the centenary.² The company were criticized for their emphasis on the international market, especially their dependence on the United States, according to some press commentary, at the expense of the local Irish audiences. In actuality, however, the national tours performed at a deficit, while the international tours created a minor profit for the company.³ The touring expenses, however, were only partially to blame for the financial difficulties of the season, and the losses were greatly exaggerated by accounts in the media during 2004.

In the following months the company’s artistic policies towards touring came under attack because of its very practice of privileging international rather than national audiences. The neglect of domestic touring by the company has caused much discontent among the Abbey’s local public, especially those living outside the Dublin

¹ Ben Barnes, in discussion with the author, Wexford, Ireland, 6 June 2007.

² Ben Barnes acknowledged the extensive costs of the international tours in a private interview. According to Barnes, the international touring of *The Gigli Concert* to Australia and America has taken “quite a lot of the time and resources of the theatre,” and “additional venues to that tour has proven costly.” (Barnes, in discussion with the author).

³ Though the Abbey Theatre would not let me have access to the box office figures for the centenary season, some of the records were revealed in the Irish press in the summer of 2005, while other figures are noted in the investigative reports on the Abbey Theatre’s financial accounts for the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism. (See Committee of Public Accounts, “The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004,” (Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas, 2005). An investigation of the account figures for the national and international tour of *Playboy of the Western World*, for example is noted in an 2005 article of the *Irish Times*. The 2004 national tour of *The Playboy of the Western World* was allocated €650,000, however, according to an *Irish Times* article from 2005, the national tour of *The Playboy* was €250,000 over budget. As Fintan O’Toole argues, “The Abbey was therefore spending money on the tour that was not covered by any offsetting revenue except a fairly minimal return at the box office.” However, O’Toole also acknowledged that the international tour of *The Playboy* “made a profit of between €250,000 and €300,000.” (Fintan O’Toole. “All eyes on Abbey’s financial farce.” *Irish Times*, 20 July 2005: 12).

area. As Louise Donlon notes, “Audiences in the regions are rightly asking, where has all the theatre gone? While it is wonderful for them to be flying the flag for us in Sydney, New York, South Carolina and Edinburgh, is it not possible for them to be playing both at home and away?”⁴ Ben Barnes’s prevalent policy of catering to the tourist market both at home and abroad, and the longstanding neglect on the Abbey’s part of its national touring circuit, instigated a public debate over the changing role of the national theatre in contemporary Ireland. The debate raised questions about the relationship between global and local understandings of Irishness and who it was that Irish cultural institutions should be catering for. The Irish National Theatre Company’s international and national touring can be seen in this context as not one performance practice, but rather two disparate traditions of the company’s dependence on its global and local audiences throughout its history.

Much of the focus on international tours for the increasing *abbeyonehundred* deficit was due to scrutiny in the press over the contentious issue of international versus national touring amongst Irish arts organizations in recent years. The tension between the “global versus the local” has been debated in policy decisions between the Joint Committee of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council from 1995 to the present. The year before the centenary, 2003, also saw a cut in arts funding from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council which effected many arts organizations. Patrick Mason noted the decline in Abbey Tours since the 1990s was a part of a wider phenomenon in arts funding.

Between 1993 and 2000 the Abbey mounted over 40 national tours. The cessation or limiting of national touring in the last few years has also been a cessation of national touring by almost every other theatre company in Ireland because we simply can’t afford to do it.⁵

⁴ Louise Donlon, "Book Your Flights for Best of Irish," *Irish Times*, 29 August 2006.

⁵ Patrick Mason, "Abbey Debates: National Theatre and the Nation," 31 January 2004.

Due to the cost demands of local touring, many Irish theatre companies have curtailed their national touring policies due to the lack of funds. In a meeting on theatrical touring between the Joint Committee of Arts, Sport, Tourism and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Theatre Forum, Alan Stanford declared that there has been a building initiative since 1995 for new theatre's in the smaller communities across the country due to the government's decentralization policy. However, Stanford argued,

We have built centres that are sometimes less than economically viable in their size and scope and that are sometimes in areas that do not have the critical mass to produce the level of audience that is required. More importantly, we have provided the buildings but we have not provided anything to put in them.⁶

Stanford argued that this was due to the lack of government funding for national touring. The director queried why the government would create theatres in smaller regions if it did not plan on supporting the work that was to be produced in these artistic centres.⁷

Tours of large productions to the smaller cities in Ireland are not often considered economically viable for theatre companies due not only to the difficulties of transporting scenic and lighting equipment, but also the daily travel and maintenance fees for the large casts seen in many Abbey Theatre productions. In 2005, Donal Shiels of the Dublin St. Patrick's Festival, affirmed that the cost of touring would be approximately €3 million per annum, but he was quick to emphasize that funding of that amount would allow for exponential "return" on the investment through audience ticket sales, tourist income and other cultural, national and non-financial benefits.⁸ Despite the acknowledgment of members of the Oireachtas that theatrical touring was important for the nation, by 2007 not much improvement had

⁶ Alan Stanford, Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Arts in the Community: Presentations," (Dublin: Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 25 October, 2005).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Donal Shiels, Ibid.

been made in terms of providing funding for national tours. Deputy Deenihan of the Joint Committee of Arts, Sport and Tourism, complained that,

I do not exaggerate when I say touring companies are in crisis. There are very few tours. While the Abbey Company toured with *The Playboy of the Western World* this year, it is unlikely to come to a place like Kerry. When did the Druid Company tour last? I recently went to the Abbey Theatre and was glad to see it feature *The Dandy Dolls* by George Fitzmaurice. When I suggested bringing that play down to where it came from in north Kerry, I was told it would cost about €20,000. The resources simply do not exist to do this.⁹

During this debate, Mary Cloake of the Arts Council documented the new focus on national touring amongst the Arts Council, allocating €2 million of funding for arts projects to be toured throughout the entire “Twenty-six Counties.”¹⁰ The new funding policy implemented by the Arts Council caused Cloake to be optimistic that this funding would boost touring to communities often unable to access theatrical events from Dublin or Galway. While national touring was perceived as at a “crisis” point in recent years by the Arts Council and the Oireachtas, international touring was considered a priority. From 2000-2005, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism declared that the promotion of Irish culture abroad would assist in drawing tourists to Irish shores in an increasingly competitive market, as well as promote Irish culture.

Tension between local and global audiences raises fundamental questions about the function of a national cultural institution. If the focus is on spreading the nation abroad, then the international audience remains essential for the promotion of that culture; however, if the need is to provide artistic work for the nation itself, then the entire nation needs to be accessed through extensive local touring. This tension came to the forefront during *abbeyonehundred*. Ben Barnes’s prevalent policy of catering to the tourist market both at home and abroad, and the perceived neglect on

⁹ Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Arts Issues: Discussion with Arts Council," (Dublin: Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2007).

¹⁰ Ibid.

the Abbey's part of its national touring circuit, instigated a public debate over the changing role of the national theatre in contemporary Ireland. Furthermore, the enduring Irish governmental policy of looking to the international community for cultural legitimacy and their dependency on the Irish diaspora as a powerful "imagined community" of the Irish nation has created tension for the contemporary "local" community who feel disconnected to the diasporic community due to the vast societal changes affecting Ireland in the twenty-first century. Ireland's dependence on the global community for the affirmation of Irish cultural identity appears at odds with the changing notions of Irishness found within the country due to an increasingly multicultural society and economic changes in recent years. This chapter will examine the politics behind the Abbey Theatre's policies of local and global touring while also scrutinizing the practice of theatrical touring as a means of spreading cultural legitimacy and artistic power through the representation of Irishness at home and abroad.

SPREADING THE NATION

Much of the dependency on the international market for Irish policy is related to the legacy of emigration amongst the Irish nation. The significant number of emigrants to the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as other commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada, has deeply influenced the nature of Ireland's relationship with these countries. Ireland's relationship to its diaspora has influenced international relations, the tourist and heritage industries, as well as local business and education connections in both Ireland and nations with significant Irish diasporic communities. Though Ireland has depended upon its emigrants for trade and cultural capital throughout the twentieth century, Mary Robinson's Second Presidential Inaugural Address in 1992 brought the relationship between the Irish nation and the

Irish diaspora into the public domain. In her speech to the Irish Parliament, Mrs. Robinson clarified that, rather than limiting the definition of the “people of Ireland” through any exclusive policy, she would like to “widen it still further to make it as broad and inclusive as possible,”¹¹ by incorporating the Irish diaspora of (according to her calculations) seventy million people into the Irish national community. Mrs. Robinson described how the inclusion of both Irish emigrants and their descendents into the Irish nation would enhance the richness of collective identity within the Irish State:

In places as far apart as Calcutta and Toronto, on a number of visits to Britain and the United States, in cities in Tanzania and Hungary and Australia, I have met young people from throughout the island of Ireland who felt they had no choice but to emigrate. I have also met men and women who may never have seen this island but whose identity with it is part of their own self definition.¹²

By including those who define themselves, or a part of their identity, as “Irish”, Mary Robinson aimed to expand the idea of the nation to one which went beyond territorial boundaries of the traditional nation state, to create a more loose and inclusive definition of Irish national identity. The President emphasized the need to “cherish” the Irish diaspora, to look to the Irish communities abroad for the development of Irish culture and economic advancement within the country. Robinson’s policies and immigration laws which allowed the grandchildren of Irish born subjects the right to citizenship, foster a strong relationship between the Republic and its diaspora. To this day there is a candle in Aras an Uachtarain illuminated by Mary Robinson and continuing to burn in honor of the Irish diaspora. To the diaspora, who often define themselves as “Irish”, Mary Robinson’s acknowledgement of their importance to Irish

¹¹ Mary Robinson., "Second Inaugural Address," *Seanad*, February 1992.
<<http://www.emigrant.ie/emigrant/historic/diaspora.htm>>

¹²“Second Inaugral Address.”

national identity transformed their self-defined “imagined” status, into one of national legitimacy.

The continued policy of looking to the global market for national success has caused a growing concern in recent years over this emphasis on international success for the local community. In the decade after Robinson’s Second Inaugural Address, Ireland’s economic and social climate had changed causing new reasons for tension between the local and the global. Emigration is no longer heralded by the government as a societal problem, but rather concerns over the massive increase in immigration by asylum seekers, migrant workers and new members of the European Union coming to Ireland to work in the country’s booming economy. The exponential increase of immigrants to the population during the early twenty-first century caused a change of sentiment towards immigration in the Republic.¹³ Mary Robinson’s broadening definition of Irishness in the early 1990s has caused some concerns in the more multi-cultural Ireland of the early 2000s due to this very dependence on the global by the local.

The arrival of large numbers of new communities to Ireland has created widespread social change within the Irish community as well as the arts community. These changes to notions of national identity have greatly influenced new representations of Ireland in film, television and the theatre of the nation. Ireland’s relationship to its new immigrants versus the relationship between the Irish nation and the Irish diaspora foster a growing tension between the Republic’s local and global policies as well as for conflicting notions of Irishness. These tensions play themselves

¹³ According to the *Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform*, “The scale of legal immigration into Ireland in recent years is evidenced in the increase in the number of legally resident non-EEA nationals (from 29,000 in 1999 to 93,500 in 2002),” the study made in 2003, recognized the difficulties caused by such a dramatic increase in immigration over a three year period, as it went on to state, “Ireland has become a modern and thriving economy, and we are now experiencing the forces of migration in a new way, challenging long-held certainties and assumptions.” (*Strategy Statements: 2003-2005: 60-65*)

out on the cultural stage through the Irish theatre, television and film industries' approach to the "new" versus the "old" Ireland and popular representations of Irishness seen in arts festivals' across the country (including the St. Patrick's Festival, the Festival of World Cultures, and the Dublin Theatre Festival). The increasing gap between representations of Ireland for the local and global audiences has raised local criticism over the Irish State's emphasis on the global market for national achievement. In this way Ireland has multiple communities with variegated understandings of Irishness found within and without the island.

In the introduction to *Nation and Narration*, Homi Bhabha describes how the image of a nation begins in the minds of the people and is only then inscribed on the topographic face of the nation itself.¹⁴ It was Benedict Anderson who first described these "imagined communities" which create a flow of ideas of selfhood and community, a construction of the nation from collective imaginings, a trope that has become common in cultural theory.¹⁵ But the manifestations of these imaginings are not uniform. As G. Honor Fagan suggests, "Ireland was always part of broader flows of people and ideas; it was always globalized, and it was always a floating signifier."¹⁶ Ireland's unique relationship with their diaspora challenges notions of the nation as "bounded" by space and time, by physical borders and by communal allegiance.¹⁷ Ireland and its diaspora remain unbounded by geography or indeed by fundamental imaginings of the nation itself which allows for the spreading of identity beyond the nation-state into the global world market.

¹⁴Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture, Routledge Classics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

¹⁵ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁶ G. Honor Fagan, "Globalization and Culture: Placing Ireland," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 581, no. Globalization and Democracy (2002): 141.

¹⁷ Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, ed. E. George and James Clifford Marcus, *New Directions in Anthropological Writing: History, Poetics, Cultural Criticism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 6-8.

Traditional understandings of the State, the Nation, individual and collective identity and the community are evolving as our world becomes a web of global communities, immigration, international trade agreements, cross-communication and free-flowing information. The local community finds itself linked more and more to the global due to the ease of international communication. These radical transformations in society have caused more varied definitions of national identity and culture. Individuals may see their self-definitions of national and communal identity being challenged or transformed due to the very slippage of the lines between what is considered a national community in a trans-national culture and an increasingly global social structure. Alberto Schepisi, the former Italian Ambassador to Ireland describes this phenomenon:

In this new order of international society produced by globalization, it becomes more and more important for individuals to feel they belong culturally and spiritually in the sense of nationality, rather than legal and formally in the sense of citizenship.¹⁸

Conceptual understandings of “the nation and nationalism” become more about cultural identity and less about legal borders in an increasingly globalized society. With international laws becoming the norm in cross-national collectives of international trade and legal codes many individuals are looking for other forms of national identity. In this way, the diasporic communities become symbols of modernity and globalization with their “hybrid” selves, to adopt Bhabha’s term, embracing these shifting identities.¹⁹

Nonetheless, the very lack of totality amongst global networks has also caused concern within the local national community over the feeling that a collective sense of

¹⁸ Alberto Schepisi., "New Identities in a Time of Globalization: The Case of Italy," in *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change* (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2004). <<http://www.crvp.org/book/Series04/14-6/cahp-8.htm>>

¹⁹Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1

national identity is being compromised due to the fusion of cultures through globalization. This feeling has been augmented across Europe due to the increasing mobility of the European community through the European Union. In the early twenty-first century, nationalism and national identity become important once more for cultures that feel under threat by the effects of a globalized community. In this way, the conflict between the local and the global remain highly contested in contemporary society.

IRISH CULTURAL TOURING: DISPERSING THE NATION

From the early 1990s to the present, the cultural tourism industry has expanded in the Republic due to the boost to the economy, the peace talks in Northern Ireland, as well as the country's growing association with the European Union. Much of the Irish heritage and tourism industries that have built up between the mid-1980s and the present have been substantially funded by the European Union.²⁰ From 1994 to 1999 the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism created the *Operational Programme for Tourism* which "with support from the EU, introduced a number of methods to extend the tourist season, to secure large scale anchor projects, to develop culture and heritage projects" and to generally increase initiatives within the cultural tourism industry.²¹ Ireland's growing emphasis on cultural heritage to attract the tourist market remains an important element of the government policy in the present. Cultural heritage became necessary for government policy, not only for the preservation of cultural for the national community but also to attract interest from the global tourist market. The Irish government has associated since the 1950s with the

²⁰ Karen E. Volkmon and Ray M. Guydosh. "Tourism in Ireland: Observations on the Impact of European Union Funding and Marketing Strategies," Administrative Science Association of Canada, Meeting held in London, Ontario, 2001.

²¹ Jim Deegan, "A Longterm Perspectives on the Policy and Performance of Irish Tourism," *Visit Scotland Futures Lecture*, (The Moffat Centre: Glasgow Caledonian University, 2006) 13.

Irish Diaspora as a powerful component in the International market due to the practice of Irish Americans, and other diasporic communities, travelling to Ireland on “family heritage tours.”²² To signify the importance of tourism for the country, in 2004 the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O’Donoghue, held a conference at Dublin Castle on “Charting Tourism Success” to discuss Ireland’s approach to tourism in the increasingly competitive climate of international tourism in the early twenty-first century.²³

The emphasis on the development of Ireland’s cultural and heritage industries with a view to the tourist market has significantly affected Ireland’s policy towards the Arts. In 2005, the Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O’Donoghue, established Culture Ireland, a government agency created “for the promotion of Irish arts and artists abroad.”²⁴ The aim of Culture Ireland to “advance Irish arts abroad, create new opportunities for Irish cultural practitioners leading to a deeper understanding between Irish and other cultures and communities”²⁵ indicates the Irish government’s desire to develop and foster the arts industry for the nation through increasing its reputation abroad.

The arts industry in the Republic, have been increasingly concerned with cultural tours as a necessary practice for the development of national identity. As a member of the Irish Theatre Forum, Richard Wakely, argues:

It's important for our national theatre to grapple with its identity in the 21st century. One way of doing that is by interaction with colleagues abroad, and promoting Irish work abroad. We can find out, through that, what it means to

²² However, the changes to the United States Tourist Market after 11 September 2001 greatly impacted the Irish Tourism Market. Despite the increased tourism market from Europe and the United Kingdom in recent years, Ireland continues to depend largely on the U.S. for its estimates and policies towards tourism to Ireland. See: “Vote 35: Arts, Sport and Tourism,” Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, *Arts Funding 2004*, September 29 2004. For recent debates on tourism policies and the North American market see: *Arts Funding 2004*.

²³ John O’Donoghue, T.D., “Six Month Report on Developments in the EU by Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism”, *Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism Bi-Annual Report*, 1 January-30 June 2004.

²⁴ John O’Donoghue, T.D., *Arts Funding 2004*.

²⁵ Select Committee, March 21 2007.

be Irish. But it's not just about taking Irish work abroad. We also have to bring overseas work to Ireland as well.²⁶

By this rationale, the establishment of a cultural exchange or cross-pollenization between nations creates a vehicle for the Irish culture to “challenge and entertain” while, at the same time, influence and be influenced by global culture. In essence, Ireland can enter and establish itself in the globalized world and form itself as a globalized nation. For Wakely and many members of the Irish Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, the need for a two-way dialogue among nations and cultures is essential for Ireland to compete with other global economies. It is not enough to be an economic success, but also to establish an Irish culture that can compete in the international arena and influence other cultures while fostering its own.

Theatrical touring is frequently represented as catering for the tourist market evoking representations of identity which commodify an authentic ethnic centre of appeal to a broad international community. However, if we take into account the need for cultural exchange as argued by Wakely, the significance of catering to an international market goes beyond consumerism to a re-evaluation of the nation itself. Cultural tourism, in a way, helps to define national identity for that nation and their international public. The journalist Andrew O’Hagan contends that, “people want to believe that their national arts organizations speak volumes about the civilized nature of the country they live in or come from, the country whose name the company bears. It is like a highest form of cultural branding: your country is a logo.”²⁷ In the Irish context, cultural touring may go beyond the commodification of identity into one of dispersal. Rather than selling the nation as a cultural commodity to develop an

²⁶Christine Madden, "Making the World Our Stage," *Irish Times*, 2004.

²⁷ Andrew O'Hagan, "What's 'National' About National Arts Organisations?" *Daily Telegraph*, 7 May 2005.

economic “ethnic ‘niche market’ for a product or service”²⁸ as described by Piaras MacÉnraí, I would argue that their policy is more of a duologue between Irish cultural institutions and the Irish diaspora for the further development of Irish identity and Irishness at home and abroad. In this way, the nation is *spread* by the practice of cultural branding. The Irish National Theatre Society’s continuing practice attempts at developing or *scattering* burgeoning ideas of Irishness and Irish national identity across the world.

The Irish Abroad: Global Touring and the Abbey Theatre

Since early in the company’s history, the Irish National Theatre Society has always had one eye on the global market in its performance practice. In 1926, George Russell, a journalist from the *Irish Statesman*, wrote about the birth of the “Gaelic culture” movement at the turn of the century which he declared created a literary movement that had enough power to “win recognition from lovers of literature in Europe and America.”²⁹ Russell went on to describe the Abbey Theatre’s cultural legacy which had recently celebrated its twenty-first birthday with a special performance in honor of its founding. However, Russell emphasizes that it was the foreign acclaim which justified the company’s long-term worth to the fledgling nation:

The foreigner could recognize in this amazing activity the evidence of a nationality which was creative and living, while the words or deeds of politicians made no such universal appeal. There is, we believe, not a country in Europe from Russia in the East, to Spain in the West, where some work of the new Irish dramatic school have not been translated and staged. We doubt if that genius has been recognized as fully in Ireland, where it was born.³⁰

²⁸“Away with Ye!” *Irish Times* 2002.

²⁹ George W. Russell, “The Coming of Age of the Abbey,” *Irish Statesman*, 2 January 1926.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Whereas the early Abbey tours to Britain were designed to distinguish difference between the colonial power and Ireland, the tours to America were determined out of the sense of sharing Ireland with the global Irish audience. Though there were as many, if not more, Irish émigrés in England, the historical struggle between England and Ireland had not contained a legacy of sameness as part of the Abbey's touring objectives for that country; America offered a locus for the Irish theatre as a place for Irish national products to take form and spread both economically and culturally.

Within the first decade of the company's establishment on Abbey Street, the productions performed on the Abbey stage were considered in the context of presenting Irish identity for an international as well as national audience. Besides the strong tie the Abbey had to its American public, a significant presence in the Abbey's cultural agenda lay in the company's presentation of Irishness to its colonizer, the British Isles. Whether performed at home or in England itself, the audience and the company were acutely aware of their British audiences. In the midst of the riots which occurred during the premiere of J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, a concerned theatre-goer asked the question: "Could any Irish person accept this as a true picture of Irish life? Fancy such a play being produced in England!"³¹ The dismayed young woman was aware of the power of cultural representations of local identity to affect foreign perceptions of Irish national character. With the deeply-held rivalries between England and Ireland entrenched in the national consciousness, it was not how *Playboy* influenced local audiences that bothered the Dublin public, but the production's damaging power within international communities, especially that of the country's subjugator. Even today, the Irish relationship with its previous colonizer includes negotiations of power dynamics and a need for re-assertions of cultural

³¹ Mikhail, *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections*.

legitimacy by the United Kingdom. Postcolonial Ireland, as Fagan notes, could manifest itself through “a national consciousness that sees the need to struggle against imperial or external forces.”³² Though recent scholars have contested the practice of defining Ireland as a “postcolonial” society, arguably the social and cultural manifestations of the country’s long term occupation by the United Kingdom has influenced how the public relate to their former occupier, and how they perceive their own social history. If America engenders a familial relationship, England and Ireland remain entrenched in long-standing rivalries and networks of power.

The need for “authentic” representations of Irish life has always been of concern when it comes to exportation. The company’s productions abroad, though expensive to produce, were great revenue building sources. Lady Gregory and Yeats were also aware of how the international audience could foster their reputation as an Irish National Theatre, and spread a new theatre style abroad that was, so they claimed, distinctly *Irish*. The Abbey Tours abroad contributed greatly to the myths surrounding the company. Through touring, the Abbey manufactured its own identity along with that of Ireland and Irishness for cultural exportation. The international tours were quick to promote the company’s reputation for its international audience who were not abreast of news from the greater theatrical community in Dublin, and therefore the company could manufacture itself as a ‘unique’ organization that was salvaging Irish theatre from the dim past.

As early as 1904 when the Abbey began its legacy of touring abroad, they were commissioned by the London Irish Literary Society to perform in the Royalty Theatre on 26 March 1904. This modest beginning soon continued in yearly returns to England to perform their new plays and, in 1906-7, they began tours of the entire

³² Fagan, "Globalization and Culture: Placing Ireland," 136.

United Kingdom; by September of 1911 they set out on their first American tour which played to thirty-one cities across the country. The Abbey followed up with a second American tour in 1912 and a third in 1914. In 1968 and 1970 the company expanded their touring ventures to continental Europe with performances in Florence, Antwerp, Zurich, Frankfurt, Cologne and Vienna. The company's first tour of Australia was in the 1920s and performed by an off-shoot of the company known as the "Abbey Actors."³³

The Abbey founders often boasted of their influence over international theatre practices. The company's tours to America, which caused a great deal of interest among American theatre practitioners of the day, helped justify Lady Gregory and others claim that the Abbey Theatre tours were the impetus behind the American modern theatre movement. As Gerard Fay notes, the Abbey Theatre influenced "the 'little theatre' movement in the United States," as well as the British repertory theatre of the early twentieth century.³⁴ The founders also emphasized the importance of the Irish diaspora for the theatrical development of America with influential Irish American figures such as Eugene O'Neill. The company not only spread interest in Irish drama, but also highlighted in their rhetoric how they acted like a beacon spreading the new performance style for the unsophisticated abroad. By performing for a new audience, the Abbey ensured the spread of its innovative style, even when it was no longer new on the home front. The novelty of international influence continued to sway the American intelligentsia, while the Abbey's reputation for controversy and riotous performance also created its own interest among the public, fostering media attention which was sure to create success at the box office.

³³ See Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash, ed., *Irish Theatre on Tour*, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Irish Theatrical Diaspora Series* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2005).

³⁴ Gerard Fay, quoted in Mikhail, *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections*, 200-01.

Even in the early years, conflict occurred within Irish theatre circles over the local and global touring practice of the Irish National Theatre. Many contemporary commentators blamed what was perceived as a decline of artistic practice at the Abbey Theatre on the company's international touring practice. While the international circuit continued to laud the company as a promoter of Irish national culture, critics at home began to question the company's right as a national institution. Dublin audiences became disillusioned by the Abbey performances, claiming as early as 1912 that the company was caught in the past, producing revivals and pedestrian performances in place of their earlier "radical" productions. At the same time, however, the touring audiences began to establish the company's position as an innovative company of the theatrical vanguard. As Brinsley MacNamara of the *Irish Independent* noted in 1913, "The Abbey Theatre is at present in a state of collapse that has arisen out of inability to proceed beyond a point of achievement, which in itself is not of tremendous magnitude."³⁵ As MacNamara argued, the deterioration of the company was due to its dependence on international touring which diminished its role as a national theatre. In this way the company could be both backward and forward thinking at the same time. The tours offered a way to build revenue and help establish the Abbey's reputation as one of the great theatre companies of the twentieth century. As Christopher Morash posits, "...as Dublin audiences increasingly associated the theatre with undemanding rural comedies, the tours helped to forge the link between the Abbey and one of the lessons of modernism: art did not soothe or moralise – it surprised and shocked."³⁶ Abbey touring made the company less dependent on their local audience for both approval and financial control.

³⁵ Brinsley MacNamara, "The Abbey Theatre: Is It on the Decline?" *Irish Independent*, May 9 1913.

³⁶ Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 146-47.

While the company founders claimed it was they who established the new American theatre style, America also helped to establish the Abbey Theatre as a force to be reckoned with. The press, originally drawn by the riots surrounding the Abbey's American productions of *Playboy of the Western World*, and written reports by such influential figures as Edmond Jones and others, all added to the process of mythmaking which marked the company's early years. America established the Irish National Theatre as much as, if not more than, Dublin did. The company's American tours and their annual ventures to England both established the company in the global realm and made the Abbey Theatre seem to the international community the leader of Irish culture and Irish dramatic style.

However, the active Irish-American community also tried to influence the Abbey's cultural representations of Irishness in more direct ways. During the 1930s, the United Irish-American Societies requested that the Irish government withdraw its financial support of the Abbey Theatre because they believed the company's touring productions of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* were "giving wrong impressions of Irish life and character" to their American audiences.³⁷ The Fianna Fáil government of the time were so keen to appease their Irish-American relations that they attempted to ban the production of the two plays from the tour. Though Yeats persuaded the government to keep the productions in the programme, the company was forced to state that though subsidized by the Irish government, the government was in no way responsible for the content of the theatre company's work. Though the company largely depended on its diasporic community, they did not always appreciate the fervent commitment that the Irish diaspora had towards the representation of Irishness on the stage.

³⁷ Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978* [I.E. 1979], 146.

The Irish at Home: Local Touring and the Irish National Theatre Society

The Abbey Theatre had reduced its tours across the country in recent years.³⁸ Due to this reduction in touring, many commentators and national arts managers criticized the company for not making domestic touring a priority in their performance strategy. Ben Barnes argued that the company was forced to cut local tours in 2002 and 2003 due to the cutting of funding from the Irish Arts Council. As he argued, "If we had toured in 2003, we would have had to institute redundancies in certain areas of the operation here. And I felt that, if we cut staff, we would have been compromising the productions that we sent out on the road."³⁹ Despite a limit to the Arts Council's monetary resources, many commentators criticized Barnes' policies and argued that the lack of local touring by the company was a question of priorities. Commentators argued that for the Abbey Theatre, the local touring circuit was not considered as necessary for the company as international renown.

The neglect of domestic touring occurs across the Irish theatre circuit and is part of a widespread problem in Irish theatre practice outside of the national theatre. The lack of resources from the Arts Council to support national touring continues to cause resentment from local communities. As Louise Donlon, director of Dunamais Arts Centre, declares, "The absence of a touring policy and, crucially, the funding to back it up, is depriving a huge swathe of theatre audiences throughout the country of an opportunity to see the best that is available, and it is something which must be addressed as a matter of urgency."⁴⁰ The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism has attempted to address the question of decentralization in its current policies, but they

³⁸ The company had toured nationally in 2000 and 2001 with mid-sized productions such as *Eden*, but due to budgeting concerns, no tours across the country occurred from 2002-2003 (Ben Barnes, in discussion with the Author, 2007).

³⁹ Emer O'Kelly, *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 2004.

⁴⁰ Donlon, "Book Your Flights for Best of Irish."

have been criticized for not fully implementing any concrete policies or resources to bring more significant arts projects away from the capital city centre. In this way, the national theatre policies during the centenary brought to light more widespread issues about touring throughout Ireland, and the Abbey, as a national institution, fell under public scrutiny over national as well as company-driven touring policies.

In February of 2004, the Dáil allocated an extra €1 million for the Abbey Theatre's centenary year specifically to contribute to the company's national touring practice. Moreover, the government gave the money with the condition that the funds were not used "on day-to-day matters, on deficit or administration costs."⁴¹ The government speculated that the funds in part should be spent on "a strategic national touring programme and the commissioning and touring of Irish-language writing, two matters on which the Abbey has come in for strident criticism of late."⁴² Due to the limited tour across the nation in 2004 and the extensive international touring to the United States, Australia and Britain, many artistic managers across the country refused to accept Barnes's defence of budget constraints for his lack of attention on domestic audiences.

A TALE OF TWO PLAYBOYS: Local Rivalries and De-Centralization

The Abbey attempted to reconcile its position with international and national audiences during the centenary. However, the conflicting aims of the two markets caused friction and dissent among the company's diverse publics. The local audience often articulates its dissatisfaction with a company who seem to cater more for tourist tastes, while the international community often express their disappointment with the way the company represent the Irish nation. In 2004 and 2005, the tension between

⁴¹"Abbey Finds Itself in 'a Happy Place'," *Irish Times*, 28 February 2004.

⁴²Ibid.

the global and local audiences was highlighted through the local and global tours of two productions of *Playboy of the Western World* performed simultaneously by the Dublin-based Abbey Theatre and the Galway-based Druid Theatre Company.

The 2004 production of *Playboy of the Western World*, directed by Ben Barnes, publicly honored the Irish National Theatre Society's longstanding relationship with America by following the route of the original Abbey tour to the United States made in 1912. Though the Druid also took the play on international tour to both America and Australia, its publicity highlighted local communities in direct counterpoint to the Abbey's production. Whereas the Abbey Theatre's national touring of *Playboy of the Western World* included only the larger towns around the country,⁴³ the Druid's touring programme included small towns in the West and each of the Aran Islands, following the path originally made by Synge which inspired his writing of *Playboy*. The Druid's emphasis on their "unique relationship" with Synge and *Playboy* is a direct subversion of the Abbey's relationship with the play, thus provoking a counter-narrative of legitimacy for their public. The Druid's marketing and touring scheme is almost an appropriation of the rural "other", a departure from its urban tradition, as well as a challenge from West to East of the right to represent rural Ireland to its public. As the Druid elaborates, "Visiting venues and locations in many of the small communities that are at the heart of Synge's vision, this tour has built upon Druid's unique relationship with both Synge and his extraordinary play and provided audiences with an unique opportunity to experience an unforgettable cultural engagement."⁴⁴

The divide between the West and the East in Ireland that was highlighted in the riotous reception of the original production of *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907,

⁴³ The Abbey Theatre's national tour of *Playboy* performed in Galway, Sligo, Letterkenny, Dundalk, Kilkenny, Belfast and Cork.

⁴⁴ Druid Theatre Website. <<http://www.druidtheatre.com/press.php>>

has continued to the present in terms of Arts organizations, funding and even tourism. In 2007, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism expressed their concern over the travel to communities outside of Dublin. Deputy John Deenihan illustrated his concern over the development of tourist markets in the West:

A major gap is also developing between east and west. Although numbers are up, tourists come mostly to Dublin and for shorter stays. The typical tourist who spent two or three weeks in the west does not come to the same extent nowadays and that presents a major challenge.⁴⁵

The growing tensions between Dublin and the outlying communities can be examined through the tours of the two *Playboys*. The rivalry between the Abbey's and the Druid's productions started not only with their varying interpretations of the West of Ireland, but also with how those interpretations were perceived by the public. The marketing strategies of both companies show their desire to produce not just a production of Synge's work, but a battle of authenticity, quite in keeping with Synge's original trek to the Aran Islands in search of inspiration.

The rival productions accentuated the Abbey's practice of catering towards international touring, its neglect of its domestic audiences, and its relationship towards its own repertoire. The two *Playboys* highlighted underlying tensions between the Irish cultural centre of Dublin and its periphery, a conflict about representations of Irishness, questions of authenticity and cultural hegemony, and the significance of national and international touring in the twenty-first century. Though the two companies made few references to each other during their tours, all of these contested notions of identity played themselves out between the two *Playboys* in their own marketing strategies, and, most importantly, through the public and press commentaries on their productions.

⁴⁵ John Deenihan, *Arts Funding 2004*.

Druid had been considered a challenge to the Abbey Theatre since the company's hugely successful 1986 version of *Playboy*, directed by Garry Hynes, which toured nationally and internationally, and created a highly visible alternative version of an Irish classic. The production was singled out by the *New York Times* as an example of "why so many Irish and English critics think this new Galway company presents a healthy challenge to the long domination of Irish theater by the Abbey in Dublin."⁴⁶ The 2004 production of *Playboy*, also directed by Garry Hynes, included a high profile cast of film and television personalities, including Cillian Murphy, helping it to appeal to a mass audience. As Lynne Walker from the London *Independent* notes, "[The Druid] *Playboy* ... has been acclaimed for replacing 'the lush and languid with the raw and immediate' in which 'sex hangs in the air and dirt clings to the floor'."⁴⁷ Its highly comic, harsh, gritty production style played upon traditional representations of the Irish West, and both subverted and accentuated the depiction rural life seen on the stage.

Garry Hynes, a native of Ballaghaderreen County, Roscommon was declared by the *Irish Times* in 1985 as producing the "definitive *Playboy*," and has herself been hailed as the authentic western voice for these plays, traditionally noted for their supposed "authentic" stage representations of the rural community. Hynes, who was the Artistic Director for the Abbey Theatre from 1990 to 1994, is one of the founding members of the Druid Theatre Company. The 2004 production of *Playboy* was to launch the company's 2004-2005 season of "DruidSynge" where they were to perform all six works of John Millington Synge, the first time a theatre company would do so in a season. The touring of the productions, commencing with *Playboy*, were promoted as journeys to connect the theatre company even more with the

⁴⁶"Editorial," *New York Times*, 31 July 1986.

⁴⁷Lynne Walker, "Synge in Total Harmony," *Independent*, 25 August 2005.

playwright's work and to alternative audiences. As the Druid Company note on their web page: "*DruidSynge* productions in 2004 visited many of the places that are at the heart of Synge's vision, building upon Druid's unique relationship with both Synge and the communities in the peripheral areas that inspired and influenced his work."⁴⁸ The company's touring policy was directly linked with its campaign of cultural authenticity, declaring itself the definitive representative of Western Ireland performativity.

The Druid's touring programme, with performances in Galway and Dublin, included small towns in the West and each of the Aran Islands, and highlighted it as:

A unique tour along the Western seaboard, retracing (in reverse) the journey undertaken by the bold Christy Mahon after 'murdering' his father. Visiting venues and locations in many of the small communities that are at the heart of Synge's vision – Geesala, Co Mayo (where the play is set), Castlebar, each of the three Aran Islands, Tralee and Dun Chaoín in Kerry, this tour builds upon Druid's unique relationship with both Synge and his extraordinary play and provides audiences with an unique opportunity to experience an unforgettable cultural engagement.⁴⁹

Druid's emphasis on their "unique relationship" with Synge and *Playboy* is a direct subversion of both the Abbey's relationship with the play and an appropriation of the rural "other" from its urban tradition to provoke a counter-narrative about legitimacy and who has the right to represent rural Ireland to its public. Through the Druid's rhetoric, they desire the audience to see in the Druid a more *authentic* production of Synge's work; in this way, the Druid is marketing a more legitimate, indeed more *Irish*, cultural experience. As the Druid elaborates, "Visiting venues and locations in many of the small communities that are at the heart of Synge's vision, this tour has built upon Druid's *unique* relationship with both Synge and his extraordinary play and provided audiences with an *unique* opportunity to experience an unforgettable cultural

⁴⁸ Druid Theatre Website: <http://www.druidtheatre.com/press.php?id=22>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

engagement (my emphasis).”⁵⁰ The company also highlighted the small and meagre performance spaces they played across their local tour. Through performances in town halls, cultural centres, and at local school gymnasiums, the high profile cast and company illustrated their commitment to the poorer communities thus invoking a more grassroots, unaffected company policy than seen at the Abbey, and demonstrating that Garry Hynes “knows how to thoroughly you need to ground yourself at home.”⁵¹

The Druid’s publicity posters from this production highlight their relationship to the small communities and, by extension, their relationship to Synge’s own journey to the Aran Islands, with images of the production’s high profile actors walking around the wild Aran landscape in wool jumpers and peering into traditional whitewashed huts. These images accentuate the company on location, not just on tour, but journeying into the “West” and thus allying the cast with their performative terrain, legitimizing their production yet again as a definitive representation. However the sites chosen for these publicity images offer a selected rural locality, one which rarefies the rural images seen in the Aran Islands and County Mayo, not of contemporary rural Ireland, but rather the representation of Synge’s “West” as imagined at the turn of the last century.

Much of the connection between an imagined representation of Irish traditions and authenticity was also seen in the Druid’s production style. The Druid emphasized its location in Galway as a more authentic performance style with thick, some would say accentuated, rural accents and its dark, harsh stage design. The director, Garry Hynes, brought the cast to the Aran Islands before rehearsals began to help them understand the landscape which deeply influenced Synge in much of his work.

⁵⁰ Druid Theatre Website, <http://www.druidtheatre.com/press.php?id=22>

⁵¹ Karen Fricker, quoted in Brian Lavery., "Irish Masterpiece Returning to Its Bleak Home," *New York Times*, 17 March 2004.

She had wanted the actors to absorb the atmosphere so they would understand why, for example, Pegeen Mike, a barkeep's daughter and the play's love interest, is terrified to be left alone in the pub at night, "lonesome on the scruff of the hill," as she says, "'piling the turf with the dogs barking, and the cows mooing, and my own teeth rattling with the fear.'" One spot they visited was the ruins of a coarse country pub where Synge was said to have drunk.⁵²

Hynes was quick to call attention to the cast's "pilgrimage" to various sites of Synge's inspiration across the Western Islands in her press releases. The production became charged, in Hynes's mind and, through her, in the public's as well, with inspiration and research drawn from the bleak nobility of the Western landscape. The Druid's interpretation of *Playboy* would be framed as a production of the West and, through the company's marketing strategy, *for* the West as well.

The Druid's production of *Playboy*, like its marketing strategy, was arguably as much a product of the fetishization of Western Ireland and romantic displays of Irishness as any production produced at the Abbey. The dark sets and the strongly caricatured acting by film and television personalities appear to cater specifically for the tourist gaze. Why then was the Druid lauded for their more *authentic* portrayal of the Irish West? In many ways the audience response to the Druid is directly linked to their inclusion of, and emphasis upon, extensive local touring, especially to smaller communities across the West of Ireland. The Druid's success may, in part be due to the marketing policy which stresses the authenticity of its touring programme rather than any "authentic" representation that may or may not have appeared on the stage.

Ironically, however, Ben Barnes's production attempted to address traditions of "Stage Irishness" by producing a highly self-reflective production with dark overtones. The production begins with a Brechtian reading of Synge's introduction by a highly-stylized clown dressed to evoke the "Stage Irishman" of Boucicault that Synge was reacting against. Unfortunately, many considered this addition to the text

⁵²Ibid.

as extremely “self-conscious” and interfering with the play’s original theme. As Bruce Arnold noted in the *Irish Independent*, the clown character, Bellman’s “presence creates a quite different, episodic mood that undermines the play’s progress.”⁵³ The figure enters the dark stage clashing cymbals and leaves while introducing the dark, dirty Mayo cottage to the audience. Like the Druid’s production, the creation of authenticity, for Barnes, appears to be adding more dirt and mud to the playing field in order to present the peasants as grimy, filthy inhabitants of oppression. Unlike the Druid’s production, however, the Abbey attempted to subvert representations of Irishness by undermining the original comic elements of the play. The production presents a violent community with the attempted lynching of Christy Mahon and the *New York Times* criticized Barnes’s production for its sombre spirit which seemed, for American audiences as well as Irish, to countermand the playwright’s original design. As Charles Isherwood states:

The Abbey's centennial “Playboy,” directed by the company's departing artistic director, Ben Barnes, is self-conscious, wayward and dispiritingly grim. Mr. Barnes may be trying to update Synge's vision for a new century, accentuating its darkness to recast it as a lasting commentary on the persistence of loneliness, violence and delusion in human experience. But in so doing he has stamped out a generous portion of its ebullient spirit. Straining to present a masterpiece, Mr. Barnes forgets that the play must first be competent as a comedy.⁵⁴

The self-conscious style of Barnes’s production, rather than radically subverting the essentializing nature of Synge’s work, appeared to the critics to destroy the play’s subversive humour and satirical spirit.

⁵³ Bruce Arnold, "Too Many Playboys Mar Synge's Masterpiece," *Irish Independent*, 7 August 2004.

⁵⁴ Charles Isherwood, "A Seductive Fellow Returns, but in a Darker Mood," *The New York Times*, 28 October 2004.

CONCLUSION

Globalization has increased the multiplicity of cross-communication between nations and cultures, thus facilitating the cross-fertilization of the diasporic communities with their centre of origin. As Arjun Appadurai notes:

It has now become somewhat of a truism that we are functioning in a world fundamentally characterized by objects in motion. These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. This is a world of flows.⁵⁵

This “world of flows” emphasizes a permeation of the national centre by its periphery and the ultimate filtering of national identity across cultures and national communities. By examining the changing definitions of “the nation” and national identity amidst globalization, I illustrate the Abbey Theatre’s own interconnection with the Irish diaspora. The financial difficulties which occurred during the Irish National Theatre’s 2004 Centenary Celebrations brought to light the friction between the current needs of the local Irish public versus the Abbey and the Irish State’s practice of looking abroad for support and cultural legitimacy.

International tours help to produce cross-cultural exchange, but also aid in revenue building interest in Irish culture and Irish commodities for international audiences. According to Frank Kelly, the economic value of international touring allows for cross-cultural currency and nation-building in ways that exceed the exportation of material goods.

I have had the good fortune in the course of my work to be brought around the globe. As an experiment, I have dropped the names of Irish manufactured products in out of the way places in American states and Europe. People do not think of these products as being made in Ireland but they know exactly where they come from when reminded of the Broadway hit of Brian Friel. That is a significant part of our identity, our signature.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Arjun Appadurai, *Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 5.

⁵⁶*Arts Funding 2004*.

Though Kelly does not deny the value of the exportation of consumer goods abroad, he does not believe that they carry as much weight as the arts in terms of cultural currency. By spreading an interest and enthusiasm for Irish culture, Kelly argues, an interest in Irish consumer goods and tourism is also fostered: “I am not suggesting that I have a purely commercial approach to matters of an artistic nature, but the arts have as much a place in the fabric of our lives as commerce. It is by our art, writings and theatre known abroad that we are remembered.”⁵⁷ The power that the arts have to influence global interest remains potent and, even if indirectly, achieves material value for the Irish economy in the long term.

The danger of catering to this imagined Ireland of the Irish diaspora is that the company not only essentialized Irishness, but also the concept of the Irish diaspora themselves. During the centenary, and throughout the Abbey’s touring practice, the company catered for the Irish diaspora in their international tours to America, and to some extent Australia. Its tradition of looking to England for cultural validity began with the company’s founding, whereas its neglect of the national touring circuit in recent years has created justifiable resentment among the Irish communities outside of Dublin. In all, the controversy of the Irish National Theatre’s Centenary in 2004 offered an opportunity for the public to examine the Abbey’s policies of touring (locally and globally), and to raise questions about the function of the national theatre and its efficacy in twenty-first century Ireland.

⁵⁷ Joint Committee.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINANCING THE NATION:

abbeyonehundred and the Politics of Mismanagement

The cultural playing field of the theatre remains riddled with politics, both social and organizational. Arts policy makers address manifold difficulties such as increasing costs, falling audience numbers, friction between company directors and their boards, and as Judith Huggins Balfe claims, “pressures toward more inclusive definitions of arts worthy of state support.”¹ State support, however, also carries the burden of State control which often seeds tension between the governing financial body and the artists themselves.

In the case of the Abbey Theatre, issues of cultural politics were brought to the surface during the centenary year as a result of financial crisis which caused havoc in the company. The ensuing deficit and call for re-structuring of the Abbey’s management, artistic directorship, company policy and Board raised fundamental questions about the Abbey’s role as a national cultural institution. Public and government commentary queried how the national theatre of Ireland could reach such a financial crisis during the commemoration of its founding. The investigation of the reasons behind the fiscal difficulties at the Theatre uncovered serious inadequacies in the company’s structure. The Abbey’s financial issues also drew attention to the Arts Council’s funding and evaluation process. These inadequacies provoked a reassessment of arts organizations and their funding in Ireland from the last century to

¹ Judith Huggins Balfe, "The Arts and Arts Policy: Issues of Work, Money, and Power," *Contemporary Sociology* 19, no. 4 (1990): 518.

the next. This chapter outlines the politics of the Abbey's finances through the frame of cultural analysis. An examination of the nature of economic theory for the arts and how artistic value for society can be measured, addresses the difficulties the Irish National Theatre has in assessing and determining its value-exchange for its funders. A view of the politics behind the financing of the Irish National Theatre Society and that of other cultural institutions contextualizes the *abbeyonehundred* crisis in light of public policy and the arts in the twenty-first century.

TOWARDS A NETWORK OF CULTURE

Cultural networks create “multiple meanings” in a society whose very interpretation reflects the diverse complexities of society itself. Fears over the declining interest in the theatre as an art form for the nation became highlighted in public commentary over the Abbey's financial instability partially due to a concern over where Ireland is heading in the twenty-first century. This concern stems from criticisms over contemporary Irish society's loss of cultural identity and social worth due to Celtic Tiger expansion. Some view the increased wealth in the country as a mixed blessing where the traditional Irish value systems of religion, family and community are being swept aside by the new consumerism. Examining the reactions of the government, press and public to the events of the Abbey's financial crisis and the aftershocks during 2004 and 2005, as well as the company's reaction to these claims, exemplifies the increased anxiety amongst the public over the cultural future of Irish society. Additionally, public concern over the changes in Irish social life affected how the *abbeyonehundred* crisis was perceived by the community.

Societies are constantly re-evaluating themselves in terms of their current social, economic, political and cultural moment. As Harrison White documents, “all group boundaries, all organizations, all states or nations are not fixed but temporary

crystallizations of networks influx.”² Thus social change is witnessed and displayed through a series of interconnecting networks which comment upon and address the changes in society. These networks are constantly shifting, reasserting and re-forming individuals’ positions within their changing surroundings. The increase of wealth in Ireland has been the causal effect of a number of changes in the cultural value systems of Irish society. Critics of these radical changes argue that Irish society is becoming more materialistic, and its citizens overcome by consumerism and debt culture. As playwright Mark Doherty notes:

Sometimes, when I’m walking down a street in Dublin, I think this doesn’t represent me at all. I preferred us when we were really broke and there wasn’t hope for anybody. Now we’ve had this great period of prosperity, yet when I look around, I think, this doesn’t represent me at all [...] It’s just that idea of the world moving on and people getting left behind.³

Doherty’s identity crisis is bound up with his conception of what is perceived as valuable in society. The young playwright may not himself have experienced the realities of Ireland’s previous poverty, but he has intertwined the “€3 price of a cappuccino”⁴ with social and cultural value networks. For Doherty, the rising costs of contemporary Ireland are at the expense of moral and spiritual fulfilment.

In the Irish context, money, and the resources made available by that money, becomes entrenched with past and future social perceptions of the Irish nation. While Irish identity traditionally was perceived as poor and hospitable, the “country of a thousand welcomes,” contemporary economic and social changes to Ireland can no longer relate to past images of the nation. The lack of interest in the arts becomes highly politicized in the current climate of nostalgic backward glances at the lost values of Irish society. Though the cultural legacy of the country may not have been

² Harrison White, *Identity and Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). As noted in Randall Collins, "A Network-Location Theory of Culture," *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 1 (2003): 69.

³ Mark Doherty, quoted in Galway Arts Festival, "'Trad" Theatre Programme," (Dublin: Dublin Theatre Festival, 2004).

⁴ Ibid.

as widespread as contemporary representations of the past demonstrate, the close examination of past cultural values, in juxtaposition to current social models, displays an anxiety over where the country is heading in terms of the fabrication of social life. The increase of expendable income has caused an amplification of public spending on material goods and short-term entertainment. However, as Ireland surges ahead in its new found economic prosperity, the class divide in the Irish community remains significant. There is still a large amount of poverty in the country, made worse by poor education and widespread drug addiction.⁵ The change in Irish lifestyles has also added to an overwhelming increase of economic debt among consumers; the rise in Irish debt culture has developed a concern among the government and the media for the long-term welfare of the populace. Kathy McArdle, the former director of the Project Arts Centre, argues that much of the recent struggles in the Irish theatre stem from the public's shift to a highly consumer society based on *commodities*:

If you look at the crisis in theatre, that has to do with the level of commodification in contemporary culture, the emphasis on consumption. People come to the theatre expecting to consume a product rather than experience something. We want to know what is going to happen to us before we pay our money. It's becoming harder and harder to find an uncommodified space, and Project has to be about not seeing the artwork as a product but as an active process, on a whole lot of levels - not just intellectual, but on a physical, visceral level. The question is how you set about creating that uncommodifiable experience.⁶

Thus the struggle for "high art" is a struggle over the development of cultural tastes outside of consumerism. Interest in both high and low forms of entertainment is perceived by many to reflect the changing social values of the populace.

⁵ For further illustrations of the social and cultural topography in contemporary Ireland see Geraldine Moore, "Colonialism and the Celtic Tiger: Legacies of History and the Quest for Vision," in *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*, ed. Luke Gibbons, Michael Cronin and Peadar Kirby (London: Pluto Press, 2002). Also see Luke Gibbons, Michael Cronin and Peadar Kirby, eds., *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy, Contemporary Irish Studies* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

⁶ Kathy McArdle, quoted in Aidan Dunne, "Project's Prospects," *Irish Times*, 10 July 2001.

The Abbey Theatre's educative initiative in 2002 notes how their artistic policy needs to address the transformation of cultural life in recent years. "Profound changes in Irish society during the last decades of the twentieth century raise important questions about the nation's cultural life and its relationship to its citizens."⁷ The theatre's Education and Outreach Department emphasized how the company's artistic policies need to address the new cultural challenges and artistic sensibilities found in contemporary Irish society. Unfortunately, the rise in entertainment such as the film industry, music and alcohol consumption has not raised the participation figures for the theatre and what some would term "high art" consumption. Ben Barnes, who was highly criticized by the Abbey Board and the community for his role in the financial crisis, stated that the problems which have affected the Abbey Theatre are widespread among contemporary theatre organizations in their struggle for artistic innovation and financial sustainability. In an interview for the *Irish Independent*, Barnes assesses the theatre's value in society thus:

The truth of the matter is that theatre has become a minority art form unless you devise the most popular programme and shamelessly play to the lowest common denominator. To do this brings down the odium of the media art police, but not to do it risks the wrath of boards and finance committees with their focus on the bottom line.⁸

The arts' significance as a cultural civic product comes under attack in modern society as it has to compete with more mainstream entertainment such as television, film or the popular music industry.

Interest in the arts, especially "high art," is seen as "ennobling" the community and promoting education and social initiatives to aid the poorer classes. This arts

⁷ The National Theatre Outreach/Education Programme, "Interactions; the National Theatre's Education Initiative [1998-2000]," (Dublin: The National Theatre, 2002), 4.

⁸David McKittrick, "Dublin's Most Famous Theatre: From Drama to Crisis," *Independent*, 27 July 2005.

initiative policy is not entirely selfless however, as it is a policy to inform the lower classes of middle-class values of taste and social behaviour. As Sharon Zukin notes:

To counter [the poor community's] potential for fragmentation and conflict, the leading social classes that dominated [...] encouraged a redefinition of national culture stressing unity, conformity, and a certain amount of patriotism. Public institutions were enlarged and revamped – “modernized” we would say, if we were not aware of the ulterior motive –to facilitate social integration.⁹

In this way, the promotion of the arts for a wider class-based audience range can be seen as educating the community for social conformity. To reduce the gap in class differences also alleviates the threat of class warfare. Rather than allowing for difference, this emphasis on middle and upper class “taste” as sophisticated, and therefore morally superior, puts pressure on the lower classes or immigrant population to conform and adapt to the “correct” social systems of cultural hegemony.

Despite these potentially damaging motives for the promotion of the arts in society, advocates for the arts in contemporary Ireland argue that by supporting and increasing artistic endeavours in Irish society, the country may promote the restoration of communal identity and the continuance of Irish culture. In 1999, the Arts Council defended the need for the Arts in contemporary society through, “The value which we place on the realisation of the creative potential of all of our citizens is what will ensure that our sense of ourselves, and our distinctive voice in the world, is sustained in the future.”¹⁰ Therefore, the attempt to access a wider audience becomes a political cause, especially for the theatre. The promotion of wider audiences for more popular styles of the arts, such as pantomimes or rock concerts, are not viewed as educating or enlightening the public; indeed, such modes of art may

⁹ Sharon Zukin, “Art in the Arms of Power: Market Relations and Collective Patronage in the Capitalist State,” *Theory and Society* 11, no. 4 (1982): 428.

¹⁰ The Arts Council, “The Arts Plan: 1999-2001,” (Dublin: An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 1999).

be seen as damaging to the community's social education rather than raising it to "build a better society."¹¹

With regard to education, the lack of encouragement or funding for the arts in the Irish school system undermines future audiences and arts community members. As Banotti declares, there is a "need to examine the school curriculum because those at school will be the audience, the directors, writers and actors of the future."¹² With the lack of funding in the community for the arts and arts outreach, Ireland does not foster the continuance of artistic endeavours in the future. According to cultural economics consumer theory, the arts can be seen as "addictive," meaning that "an increase in an individual's present consumption of the arts will increase her future consumption."¹³ Therefore, the need to educate the community in the arts will perpetuate artistic pursuits and audience numbers for future generations. In 2004, Frank Kelly emphasized the importance of the arts to the Irish Committee on the Arts: "The arts form an intrinsic part of the fabric of our lives; they are not something extra or a luxury. They are not the property of an intellectual elite."¹⁴ Society needs the arts to foster community-building strategies and help educate the populace. As Kelly argues,

They make people realise we do not live to work, we work to live. What do our earnings buy us but fulfilment? It need not necessarily be the theatre, it may be music or dance, but these forms of expression are significant and without them the outlook is very bleak. We will work until we drop.¹⁵

Therefore, the arts are beneficial by creating a better, more educated society, and fulfilled social networks. Kelly's address to the Committee emphasized that the arts

¹¹ See Bruce A. Seaman, "Economic Theory and the Positive Economics of Arts Financing," *The American Economic Review* 71, no. 2 (1981).

¹² *Arts Funding 2004*.

¹³ David Throsby, "The Production and Consumption of the Arts: A View of Cultural Economics," *Journal of Economic Literature* 32, no. 1 (1994): 3.

¹⁴ *Arts Funding 2004*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

are not a “luxury” product, but an essential part of a just society.¹⁶ For defenders of the arts, cultural consumption increases the quality of life for both current and future society.

Abbeyonehundred: A Company in Crisis

Finances and financial control raise multiple issues about the overall structures of cultural institutions and their functions. Cultural politics, of which artistic taste, class association and power are all factors, remains a contested ground. As Herbert Gans illustrates in the case of the United States, “The most interesting phenomenon, in America [...] is the political struggle between taste cultures over whose culture will provide society with its symbols, values and world view.”¹⁷ The 2004 insolvency of the Irish National Theatre became more than just the revelation of dysfunction within an Irish cultural institution; it also revealed tensions within the national community over the changing face of Irish culture in contemporary society. With multiple issues of cultural politics at work, when the National Theatre found itself embroiled in such serious financial misdemeanours, all areas of artistic and organizational responsibility came under attack by the community.

After formal investigations into the Abbey Theatre’s insolvency, the investigatory team found that financial difficulties which arose during *abbeyonehundred* were already underway before the season began. During the previous year, the company had found itself in a fiscal crisis because of a dramatic increase in its deficit. In 2003, according to the company’s Statutory Accountant, John Purcell, the financial problems for the company were augmented when a deficit of €800,000 for that year doubled the existing overall debt. The substantial total debt

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Herbert Gans, “The Famine in American Mass-Communication Research: Comments on Hirsch, Tuchman, and Gecas,” *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no. 4 (1985): 378.

of €1.6 million made the Statutory Accountant ask for “reassurance from the company that action would be taken to bring it back to manageable proportions.”¹⁸ Purcell got the necessary assurance from the company’s managing director that measures would be taken in 2004 to reduce the deficit and this led him to give an “unqualified audit report on the 2003 accounts.”¹⁹ However the company manager’s optimistic assurances turned out to be misleading. As Purcell states,

When the accounts for 2004 were being prepared for audit, it became apparent that the deficit for that year was far in excess of the budgeted figure and the revised budgeted figure. This resulted in the board appointing an accounting firm to report on the facts underlying the discovery and disclosure that the company’s financial reporting system had been substantially under-recording the operating loss for 2004.²⁰

The financial difficulties of the 2003 fiscal year augmented problems for the company in 2004, as did the unclear system of budgeting already practiced by the company. As Purcell’s account of 2003 illustrates, the Abbey Theatre was already accustomed to disorganized accounting practices before the centenary year; it was the expansion of the centenary year’s programming that allowed the already unstable finances of the company to spiral out of control.

The Abbey’s centenary was an ambitious programme that exceeded the company’s budget threefold. The company carried on in spite of impending insolvency and found out quite late in the centenary season that they were unable to raise the necessary funds to pay the season’s debts. By September of 2004, the company were on the brink of insolvency. The declaration of an €800,000 deficit in the autumn of 2004 was found to be inaccurate and a much greater financial loss was uncovered by the independent international accounting firm hired to investigate the company’s finances, KPMG. The company’s Statutory Accountant, John Purcell,

¹⁸ Committee of Public Accounts, *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004*, 24 November 2005.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

acknowledged that the KPMG report illustrated budgetary inaccuracies dating back several years. However, these inaccuracies were not revealed until 2004, due to the dramatic increase in the company's expenses for the centenary season:

The accounting firm pinpointed the problem as emanating from the monthly management accounts which were not prepared in a way that showed the true financial position. These accounts, which were compiled from best estimates of expenditure at various points during the year, formed the basis of the board's and its finance and audit committee's monitoring of the company's finances. While the system of monthly management accounts had been operating for many years, its deficiencies had not caused material distortions until 2004, when the upsurge in activities associated with the Abbey Theatre's centenary programme pushed expenditure up to €12.6 million in that year, from €7.4 million in the previous year.²¹

The KPMG report instigated a widespread investigation into the Abbey's accounts and the structure of the company's management, into the Board and the role played by the Arts Council and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in the National Theatre's financial funding system.

Up until 2005, the Abbey Theatre was a private company limited by shares. It "carries out its purpose," according to John Purcell from the Committee of Public Accounts, through its two theatres, the Abbey and the Peacock, as well as through national and international touring. Purcell clarifies that,

In common with most, if not all national theatres, the company would find it impossible to exist on box office receipts and sponsorship and other income, so it is heavily dependent on the State for continuing financial support. For many years the annual operating grant has been channelled through the Arts Council. Even with this subvention the company has found it difficult to make ends meet.²²

The company found that even during a successful season the Abbey Theatre would struggle to remain fiscally sound and therefore was extremely dependent on national funding to supplement their expenses.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Due to a policy by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council of annual, rather than multi-annual, funding for artistic companies,²³ the Abbey Theatre was not fully aware of the amount of money they would receive from the Council until quite late in their planning of the *abbeyonehundred* season. As a company relied significantly on the Arts Council for financial support, the cuts to funding by the Arts Council for the 2004 fiscal year caused the Abbey to not receive the adequate amount to sustain their centenary season.²⁴ Nevertheless, the company carried on with its initial ambitious plans in spite of the disappointing financial subsidy from the government, and hoped to make up the shortage in funding from a fundraising scheme involving private donors.²⁵ Despite the raising of €3 million in fundraising by the Centenary Committee, and an additional grant of €2 million provided by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in the spring of 2004, the

²³ The Arts Council and Theatre Forum made a case for the allocation of multi-annual funding from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism over several years. The continued denial of this policy was shown by Tania Banotti of Theatre Forum in 2004 to hinder not only the Arts Council's ability to allocate funding, but also, Banotti argued, the ability for Irish arts organizations to effectively set up business and artistic strategies. "The question of multi-annual funding is not limited to the arts; it has been raised with the Government by the social partners and many other organisations. We work to a nine month timetable. We make our pitch for funding in August and funding for the following year is decided in December. If we plan ambitious shows, tour abroad or work with new writers and directors — it takes time to workshop new work — a nine month timetable is extremely difficult. The question of the Department of Finance moving to a three year funding envelope for the arts has been discussed. We believe we would be able to provide better value for money if we had a guaranteed minimum level of income, perhaps over two years." Tania Banotti, Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Arts Funding: Presentation," (Dublin: Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 29 September, 2004).

²⁴ Deputy Deenihan of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport and Tourism described the cuts to Arts Council budgeting that occurred in 2003, thus: "The arts community was devastated by the reduction in funding last year. The arts plan for 2002-06 was included in the programme for Government and funding for 2003 was supposed to be €53.7 million but the arts only received €44 million. People had planned for an increase with multi-annual funding and it created difficulties in the arts world." John Deenihan, Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Arts Council: Presentation," (Dublin: Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 15 October, 2003).

²⁵ Jocelyn Clarke stated that when he and other Abbey staff members asked about the money to fund the program, they were told that 'the money will be there.' He stated that the staff were deeply concerned about carrying through such an ambitious and expensive program without having the funding in place, but, as he stated, "why I think it's hubristic to say that some kind of research needs to be done in 2003, like what are we capable of actually delivering and what is the money that we actually have not notionally have, and waiting for somebody to drop down these imaginary angels is nonsense. But if the Board is in agreement with this, and if the Abbey Centenary Committee is in agreement with this —which is made up of Board Members, and if the Artistic Director are all telling you that it will be fine. You really have no choice." (Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author, June 2007).

company found that they were unable to meet their costs later in the season.²⁶ Ben Barnes described the shortfall in funding for the centenary:

So going into the *abbeyonehundred* [...] we had raised a certain amount and we were expecting additional funds from the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, which eventually, I think in February or March materialized. But the squaring of the circle of fundraising never materialized, which led to, which was one of the big contributing factor of what eventually happened.²⁷

Barnes argued that the failure of the fundraising scheme was in part due to the lack of funds provided before the season began to create an extensive marketing plan designed by Centenary Committee members John McColgan and Laura Glucksman, which would have helped boost *abbeyonehundred's* visibility to potential audiences and funders.²⁸

According to Purcell, the company became over budget due to “a shortfall in sponsorship income and a deficit incurred on the Abbey’s touring programme.”²⁹ Fundamentally, the company had created too ambitious a programme for their financial capabilities. Some blamed this on the Board’s lack of insistence upon the government to obtain more funding and their failure to obtain more private sponsors, while others blamed it on the overall lack of responsible budgeting within the company itself. Regardless of how the Abbey Theatre could have obtained an increase in funding, both the Board and the company managers should have been more realistic in what type of season they could financially afford for the centenary.

The press blamed the financial difficulties of the *abbeyonehundred* season on visible factors, such as the lack of ticket sales, but Ben Barnes argued that this indicated a lack of understanding in the media of the nature of economics in the theatre business. He stated that “There was a lot of criticism in the media which was

²⁶ Accounts, "The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004."

²⁷ Ben Barnes, in discussion with the Author, June, 2007.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

viewed by elements within the Board that some of the failure in the *Abbey and Europe* to engage the public in the way that it might have been done was some of the reason for us we were pulling our horns in later in the year, but that was not the case.”³⁰ According to Barnes, ticket sales are based on the difference between actual figures of tickets, due to concessions, complimentary tickets to members of the press and staff associates, as well as the removal of seats for set design changes.³¹ The theatre has a technical term for potential ticket sales called “Cash Capacity,” which is the number of sales the theatre could make if all of the seats were filled with customers paying at the full price. The “Cash Capacity” of the theatre in 2004 was an intake with 630 people paying full price. But, as Barnes maintained, this figure could never really occur,

But what was happening was the press was being briefed or were taking the ‘Cash Capacity’ figures. So if a show was achieving 50 or 60% but was only receiving 20% of ‘Cash Capacity’ figures, than the figure that was being quoted was that this show was only achieving 20% or 30%, whatever. And that was very damaging to me and very disruptive to the theatre.³²

Due to the notion of “Cash Capacity” and logistics amongst the audience formation of the Peacock Theatre, except under extraordinary circumstances, the Peacock Theatre productions run at a loss.³³ However, despite this argument for the financial difficulties of a working theatre, individuals in the Arts Council and the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism felt that the Abbey Theatre was decidedly unambitious in regards to the revenue building capabilities of the theatre.

In June of 2004, the Abbey found itself increasingly in debt and unable to cover the costs of the ambitious centenary season and the company were forced to cancel

³⁰ Ben Barnes, in discussion with the Author, June 2007.

³¹ As mentioned in Chapter Three, one of the factors of *The Shaughraun*'s failure to make money inspite of its popularity was due to the removal of several rows of seats for its set. This caused the production to lose money even when filled to capacity.

³² Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author, June 2007.

³³ Jocelyn Clarke, In discussion with the Author, June 2007.

two productions on the bill for the autumn of 2004.³⁴ By September, the company was charged with mismanagement of their programming and disputes between the Abbey Theatre Board, the Artistic Director and members of the company staff were mentioned daily in the Irish press for the rest of the centenary year. While Ben Barnes was in Australia touring with *The Gigli Concert*, the board held an emergency meeting to address issues of the impending financial crisis. The theatre announced its intent to “address the structural flaws” of their administration and publicly announced that a third of the staff contracts were to be cancelled by January of 2005.³⁵ However, as Brian Jackson, the Managing Director, commented, the cuts were only a small step towards recovering the enormous deficit caused by the 2003 and 2004 seasons.³⁶ Staff members protected by the union SIPTU protested against the cuts, thus creating more controversy for the company in the eyes of the public.³⁷

In late 2004, the company was found to have a deficit of over €800,000 for the centenary year alone, with an overall deficit of €2.5 million and was on the brink of insolvency. Though the management staff were not found to have embezzled any of the company’s funds, the KPMG report found that senior managers at the company were approving personal credit card expenses on the company budget, while the former Managing Director had not scrutinized the theatre’s monthly financial statements in detail allowing for discrepancies in terms of budget versus actual figures. The accounting firm called for a complete restructuring of the theatre’s administration and gave a detailed report on the many ways the company had inadequately dealt with their accounts. The company, according to KPMG, had no

³⁴ The production of both Lennox Robinson’s *The Drama at Inish* and Paul Mercier’s play (originally billed as *Smokescreen*, and finally produced in 2005 as *Homeland*) were later produced at the Abbey Theatre during under the directorship of Fiach MacConghail.

³⁵ Alan O’Keefe, "Thirty Staff at Theatre Now Face the Chop," *Irish Independent*, 6 September 2004.

³⁶ Bryan Jackson, Interview with Author, June 2007.

³⁷ Don Lavery, "Siptu Calls for Long Term Abbey Plan," *Irish Independent*, 5 September 2004.

formal limit on petty cash, no time limit on gift vouchers and signed blank cheques were not stored in secure locations.³⁸ The Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue stated that the deficit was found to be an additional €1 Million, unknown by the company, "due to human error;" for the Minister, the misuse of public funds on such scale "cannot be countenanced in a national institution in the future."³⁹ Due to the crisis both the Managing Director, Brian Jackson, and the Artistic Director, Ben Barnes, resigned after O'Donoghue censured the managerial staff's "gross incompetence."⁴⁰

Due to what was perceived as a systemic breakdown within the organization, the Government and the Arts Council refused to aid the Irish National Theatre Society unless they completely altered their entire management and organizational structure. After the Abbey's Artistic and Managing Directors, Ben Barnes and Brian Jackson resigned and the Abbey Board voted to dissolve the current company and the Board. The Board stated to the press that they were working intensively to create a "modern corporate governance structure"⁴¹ which would replace the current structure which has been running since 1904. The assets and liabilities of the old company, The Irish National Theatre Society Limited, transferred to the new company Abbey Theatre-Amharclann Náisiúnta na hÉireann. The former twenty-one shareholders of the Abbey Council stood down in the August of 2005, and a new structure for the company was created, consisting of a nine person board. The Chair of the new Abbey Board is now nominated by the Minister for Arts, as well as two members of Board itself. The other six members are appointed by a committee made up of the Abbey

³⁸Paul T. Colgan, "Managers Approved Own Expenses," *Sunday Business Post*, 24 July 2005.

³⁹Select Committee of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Vote 33 - Arts, Sport and Tourism (Revised)," (Dublin: Select Committee of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2005).

⁴⁰David McKittrick, "Dublin's Most Famous Theatre: From Drama to Crisis," *The Independent*, July 27 2005.

⁴¹"Extent of Crisis at Abbey Theatre Revealed," *Irish Times*, 20 July 2005.

Chair, the Chair of the Arts Council and “an independent person of standing in the arts sector nominated by the Minister of Arts.”⁴² With the appointment of Fiach McGonagall as the Abbey’s new, more administrative, Theatre Director, the Abbey has been significantly altered since the centenary year and is now under more direct control by the Irish Government, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, and the Arts Council.

VALUE EXCHANGE ECONOMICS AND THE ARTS

The highly publicized cost of the Abbey Theatre’s centenary mismanagement drew criticism of the company’s economic “worth” to society. The National Theatre’s dramatic example of mismanagement during 2004 and 2005 provided justification for the opposition of financial support for the Arts in Ireland. In a consumer culture, the nonmaterial value of the arts holds an uneasy place in a society that puts its value, and more importantly its estimation of value, on material cost versus gain. By looking at the arts in terms of output, the cultural product produced and consumed should add value to the community, value hard to obtain if the audience numbers remain low or do not reflect numbers of the community. As Economist, James H. Gapinski states, “Since culture is a service industry, its output measure should reflect the importance of the consumer in productive activity.”⁴³ By this rationale, the audience remains the most important force behind a theatre company’s justification of cultural value. Gapinski clarifies this: “Just as a barber, doctor, or teacher cannot produce output without a customer, patient, or student, neither can an artist produce output without an

⁴² Chris Dooley, “A New Era for the Abbey Theatre,” *Irish Times*, 6 August 2005.

⁴³ James H. Gapinski, “The Production of Culture,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 62, no. 4 (1980): 578.

audience.”⁴⁴ The company’s reliance on the audience for a measure of their output ability, or success, can be its own form of Darwinian control on company’s success or failure. According to the economist William D. Grampp, the arts should be entirely self-supporting due to the controlling factors found in a free market society that causes “healthy competition” which results in better, more valuable art.⁴⁵ The Abbey Theatre’s failing box office numbers raised questions of the company’s meretricious value to society.⁴⁶

The critics of funding for the Irish National Theatre have declared that the lack of audiences show the company’s lack of importance to the public good. The difficulty the company will have in the future, according to Lynne Parker, “will be convincing both the public and the government that Irish theatre is a commodity that deserves financial support.”⁴⁷ Thus the financial crisis over *abbeyonehundred* and the highly visible reports in the media of the company’s lack of funds throughout 2004 brought into question the Abbey Theatre’s exchange-value as a viable cultural product. The notion of economic “exchange-value” for the arts argues that theatre and other artforms are considered “public goods” which service the community through education and personal welfare. As Johnny Hanrahan declares, “Social health is dependent to a certain extent on artistic expression and freedom of imagination is an inevitable prerequisite for a free society.”⁴⁸ However, as theatre audiences are seen as a more selective a group within the overall community in terms of social status and

⁴⁴ Ibid. For further economic studies of the arts and their economic production value see: Victor R. Fuchs, “The Growing Importance of the Service Industries,” *National Bureau of Economic Research Occasional Paper*, no. 96 (1965).

⁴⁵ See William D. Grampp, *Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists, and Economics* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

⁴⁶ As Richard Waghorne remarked on the Abbey Theatre finances, “if a production can’t raise funds from ticket sales, there’s probably a reason. Incompetent management, political dependency, endless infighting, and a chronic identity crisis only count as entertainment in the *West Wing*. We now know the price of unattended plays and red tape and it’s pushing two million a year.” Richard Waghorne, “Abbey Theatre Funding,” *The Freedom Institute Ireland*, July 2005.

⁴⁷ Neary, “The Weekend Edition.”

⁴⁸ *Arts Funding 2004*.

education levels, the overall “public good” is given less consideration by some, than that of other, more popular, art forms. In this way, the civic value of the arts for society remains contested; in terms of public funds, this contestation opens itself to attack in terms of value-exchange cultural economics. Bruce Seaman highlights the debate over general public need of the arts with the realities of public funding concerning the arts:

...there is a difference between the hypothetical case of community-wide public goods and this case of art lovers’ public goods: the taxpayer community N is larger than the arts consumer population N_e . This is similar to the case of public secondary education, where the direct consumer are fewer in number than the total taxpayer population. In both cases, the consumers will face a lower price for the product via collective financing than with pure private financing, since *part of the costs of production are being paid by non-consumers* (my emphasis).⁴⁹

There is always the fear that the arts will benefit the few rather than the many, and therefore the funding of the arts perpetuates the privileging of the middle and upper classes over poorer communities.

Historically, financial assistance to theatres in opposition to hegemonic cultural tastes began with the rise of the labour movement in England and other European countries. The instigators argued that it was only with financial freedom that artistic creativity could be fostered independent from middle-class taste and values. This viewpoint considered the values of the middle-class as backward and reactionary in the face of social change.⁵⁰ Arts funding from the government and other cultural organizations would allow companies to be free to produce experimental work and thought-provoking social commentary, without the danger of having to cater to public taste or audience popularity. Thus innovative theatre companies could thrive outside of mainstream audience demands. Viewed in this light, a company’s lack of box

⁴⁹ Seaman, "Economic Theory and the Positive Economics of Arts Financing," 338.

⁵⁰ Zukin, "Art in the Arms of Power: Market Relations and Collective Patronage in the Capitalist State," 423-25.

office income would not necessarily mean a lack of quality or value in terms of overall social “worth.”

Since 2000, the arts have experienced radical shifts in their structure that reflect those occurring in Irish society as a whole. As Brian Farrell, the former chairman of the Arts Council noted in the Arts Report of 1999-2001, the combined political, economic and social development of contemporary Irish society has presented the arts with an opportune moment “to re-evaluate, re-organise and radically re-invigorate the place of the arts at the heart of Irish society and the larger world.”⁵¹ The 2004 Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism and Gaeltacht Affairs addressed how this “re-invigoration” was to be assessed in terms of economic value. The committee chairman, Deputy Cecilia Keaveney asked the Forum to describe the importance of the arts in the public’s lives and the value of the arts for educational purposes and social growth. Deputy Keaveney acknowledged the difficulty of assessing the economic value of the arts and asked the Theatre Forum to address issues of exchange-value for the Arts in 2004.

Tania Banotti, of Theatre Forum, illustrates the Forum’s examination of the topography of theatrical audiences in Ireland: “In terms of audience share — where we must first look in seeking value for money — are people really going to theatre or is this an élitist activity reserved for the few?”⁵² Banotti’s concern with the breadth of social status in theatre audience is a concern of value for money. If the Government is funding an organizational field that caters to the few rather than the many, then the government funding of theatre arts is open to attack. However, in defence of public funding for the Arts, Banotti emphasized how theatre tickets are openly accessible in Ireland and inexpensive due to public funding. The affordability of ticket prices

⁵¹ Arts Council, “The Arts Plan: 1999-2001.”

⁵² *Arts Funding 2004*.

allows access to a greater number of individuals from diverse income brackets, as well as the number of State supported, free events occurring throughout the year in Ireland. As she argued, “It is the public subsidy that helps to keep tickets affordable and accessible but as one can see, the public has not responded in kind.”⁵³ However, besides ticket prices, Banotti did not state any evidence of audience surveys to see if the lower ticket prices were reflected in the audience members’ economic and social status.

On 29 September 2004, the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs met with the Irish Theatre Forum to discuss the economic and social benefit of funding the arts in Ireland. According to Johnny Hanrahan, the previous meeting between the Theatre Forum and the Joint Committee occurred over a crisis in the arts in Ireland due to the previous years’ budget cuts to the Arts by the Irish government. As the Theatre Forum members attempted to explain to the Committee, “despite the relatively small amount of money involved, [the budget cuts] had a disproportionate impact on our capacity to produce.”⁵⁴ The difficulty the Theatre Forum encountered with the Government Committee occurred due to the ambiguous nature of measuring the value of the arts to society.

HISTORY OF ABBEY FINANCES

Theatre artists and business administrators are often portrayed as being at odds with one another. While the artist is imagined to be somehow “above” business strategies, administrators are often pictured as philistines whose role is to stymie the artistic process. However, through these representations both sides fall victim to essentialism. The Abbey Theatre’s tradition continues to promote the idea of artistry valued above

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

business strategy. Moreover, in the early decades of the company, the lack of financial security was, ironically, seen as a justification for the company's dedication to the Irish nation. The Abbey actors, originally unpaid amateurs, were seen to come "from the people" and would help build up the young company through "sheer idealism."⁵⁵ The original mismanagement and lack of professional structure was fostered and encouraged by the nationalist idealism which perceived the arts and the nationalist struggle as one, struggling against the demonic need for the kind of financial gain found in "big business." The company could promote an easy relationship with their audience because of their small theatre presence, whereas they could also be viewed as promoters of daring experimentation by flouting public opinion. Financial success and popularity therefore became synonymous with low-quality performance styles.

According to Adrian Frazier in *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre*, the economic and artistic endeavours of the Abbey found themselves at odds with one another during the first two decades of the theatre company. In 1904, William Butler Yeats obtained a grant from British heiress, Annie Horniman who purchased a lease on the Abbey Theatre building. However, even before the purchase of the new theatre, the relationship between the company founders and their financial benefactress was fraught with tension. Lady Gregory disliked the power Horniman attempted to hold over the company's artistic practice, and according to Frazier, declared that "Horniman, 'made the *building*, not the theatre.'⁵⁶ Horniman used her financial support in an attempt to influence the company's theatre programme and to control any artistic departures the company attempted which deviated from the initial agreement Yeats and Lady Gregory had with their financier. Horniman was quick to exert her control over the company, and,

⁵⁵Colgan, "Managers Approved Own Expenses."

⁵⁶Adrian Woods Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre, The New Historicism*; 11 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 152.

as she declared to the *Irish Times*, she “retains herself entire proprietary interest in the Theatre.”⁵⁷ The company, who continued to use Yeats’s rhetoric of “high idealism,” ended up at war with the business and economic pursuits of the woman who controlled their subsidy. As Frazier notes, “The difference between giving and buying, between empowerment and disenfranchisement, is obvious: for all the talk of the rights of artists, Horniman had in mind consumer rights and the rights of property.”⁵⁸ Horniman used her business agenda to organize the theatre company’s tours to London and control the ticket prices.⁵⁹

The ideological differences between the founding artistic community and their founding funding body became irreconcilable by 1910.⁶⁰ Despite further attempts by Yeats to acquiesce, Horniman and the company finally went their separate ways when the company refused to close their doors upon the day of the King’s death. Yeats and Gregory, instead of being dismayed over the removal of their financial subsidy, were exuberant. Moreover, they were optimistic that their separation from their patron would aid in their attempt to attract a government subsidy as an Irish national institution.⁶¹ Though a government subsidy would not be on the horizon for another two decades, in the meantime the company exulted in their new independence. As Frazier notes, “Having earlier been impressed with the side of the Horniman coin that declared *freedom through finance*, the Board of Authors had lately come to see the

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 177-178.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁹ According to Frazer, Horniman kept the ticket prices high in order to control the social strata of the theatre’s audience. The cheapest tickets exceeded the struggling average Dublin worker’s half daily wage. The high price of the company’s theatre tickets at the expense of the working class community caused many to criticize Yeats and Gregory’s national agenda. As Frazer notes, “Maud Gonne wrote a personal note to Yeats, saying he was ‘lost to nationalism,’ and in the *United Irishman* Arthur Griffith publicly called the price ‘undemocratic’ and ‘unpatriotic.’” Ibid., 169-72.

⁶⁰ See: Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 50-53. Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre*.

⁶¹ “Meanwhile [Yeats] settled down to the task of turning the National Theatre Society back into ‘a representative Irish institution’ with widespread support in Ireland, so that he could appeal for local government funding at the end of the patent period.” (Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre*, 206).

other side: *no freedom from interference*,"⁶² which made the removal of Horniman's dictatorial control outweigh any financial support she may have had to offer.

After independence in the 1920s, Yeats attempted to obtain a subsidy from the government for the theatre company. By 1922, the company's financial situation was in dire straits and the Abbey was almost on the verge of bankruptcy. Fortunately for the company, "three powerful members of the [Irish] Executive Council, Ernest Blythe, Eoin MacNeill and Desmond Fitzgerald, Minister for External Affairs, as well as the leader of the Labour Party, Thomas Johnson, were all keen patrons" of the Abbey.⁶³ Yeats also had recently been granted the Nobel Prize for Literature and was seen as a national figure. In 1925, the theatre was granted a yearly government subsidy by the newly established Cumann na nGaedheal government, because it "came to be seen as one of the key components in a distinctly Irish culture, which helped lead to Irish independence."⁶⁴ Though the newly established government were not prone to subsidizing the arts or cultural institutions of any kind in their fledgling nation, the Abbey Theatre was viewed as an educating force which would sway the populace towards the aims of the new Republic. The support of the Abbey Theatre, according to Lionel Pilkington, also presented the Irish government with a public relations exercise promoting tolerance and class inclusivity of Anglo-Irish members of the community. As Pilkington notes, "As a cultural institution, the Abbey Theatre possessed a reputation that was of particular symbolic importance to Ireland's ex-unionist and predominantly Protestant minority elite ... [Cumann na nGaedheal's subsidy of the Abbey Theatre] served to underline the tolerance and inclusivity of the Irish Free State, and thus provided a reassurance to nervous English investors."⁶⁵ The

⁶² Ibid.,205.

⁶³ Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978* [I.E. 1979], 135-37.

⁶⁴ Colgan, "Managers Approved Own Expenses."

⁶⁵ Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*,96-97.

company, previously self-declared as “national,” became national in fact with its honorary position as the first arts organization to be offered government funding in the Republic, an acknowledgement of the theatre’s importance as a “nation building” cultural institution.⁶⁶ For the 1925-26 Abbey season, the government under President Cosgrove gave a subsidy of 850 Irish pounds to the Theatre, and in the years following, the subsidy was raised to £1000.⁶⁷ Though the monetary value of this support may have been small, it was significant as a symbol of government approval and national validity.

However, as would be argued after the 2005 change of government policy towards the Abbey’s financial structure, the continuing governmental subsidy also allowed the government, as it had with Annie Horniman, to exert some control over the Abbey’s theatrical practice. As Hugh Hunt declared, “There were those who feared that the appointment by the government of Dr. George O’Brien, Professor of Economics at University College, Dublin, would entail a loss of that artistic freedom for which Yeats and Lady Gregory had fought since the earliest days of the dramatic movement.”⁶⁸ The much-needed financial support yet again meant that the company was not entirely autonomous. When O’Brien attempted to dictate certain artistic decisions, including a substantial revision of *The Plough and the Stars*, Lady Gregory refused, commenting, “Blythe had made no conditions in giving the subsidy, and certainly no hint of appointing a censor.”⁶⁹ Though O’Brien retracted his demands, with the increase of the subsidy in 1926 the possibility for further interference continued as the company’s dependence on their subsidy amplified.

⁶⁶ See *Ibid.*, 86-111.

⁶⁷ Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

In the 1930s, a new government came into power with Eamonn de Valera at its head. De Valera, who attempted to gain financial autonomy for Ireland, also provoked an economic decline for the country with his harsh fiscal policies during the time of economic depression affecting most of Europe and America. The new government decreased the Abbey's subsidy and attempted further control over the company's artistic policies. The new de Valera government brought in, according to Robert Welch,

An era of tightening censorship as the majority of Irish people identified ever more closely with the Catholic Church and its anti-modernist values, in an attempt to create a stable society after a century of disaster, upheaval, violence, and hunger.⁷⁰

After Lady Gregory's death, the company also went through a series of structural changes, transitioning from "a family theatre," according to Hugh Hunt, to an "oligarchy."⁷¹ With the decline of Lennox Robinson's abilities as managing director,⁷² and the chaotic organization of the company throughout the thirties, the creation of an "Advisory Committee" was proposed to offer advice to the Board of Directors on the theatre management of the company. However, this policy was considered unsuccessful, and the decision was made to increase the number of members on the Abbey Board who in turn hired a new managing director, Fred Higgins.

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, the increasing censorship and conservatism of the times was reflected in the Abbey Board who squabbled over the artistic choices of the National Theatre. The fear of disapproval by the increasingly conservative government caused the self-censorship of much of the company's work. The Abbey

⁷⁰ Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form and Pressure*, 103.

⁷¹ Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]*, 144.

⁷² Lennox Robinson was suffering from alcoholism which was incapacitating the Managing Director's ability to run the theatre; Yeats, who considered him a friend and colleague, refused to interfere in Robinson's directorship. According to Robert Welch, "From now on Robinson was sidelined more and more. He was drinking heavily and a morbid streak that Lady Gregory had discerned in his make-up very early on took hold. He was monosyllabic at board meetings. O'Connor's account of a difficult meeting with him, in which it became clear to O'Connor that Robinson was a broken but complex man, is devastating." Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form and Pressure*, 123.

Theatre, though performing to increasing audience numbers throughout the 1940s and 50s, presented more revivals, less new works, and concentrated most of its efforts on domestic comedies. It is interesting to note, however, that the early period of the Abbey Theatre, which has often been described as the Abbey's Golden Age, performed on average to a third of the box office capacity, whereas the company of the 1940s and 50s who were considered of mediocre artistic value even in their own time, often filled the house to capacity. This was notable considering that when the company occupied the Queen's Theatre on Pearse Street throughout the 1950s, the house had over 800 seats, several times the size of the previous Abbey Theatre.⁷³

After Higgins' death, the longstanding tenure of Ernest Blythe as Managing Director established a more traditional and mainstream approach to theatrical representation while, at the same time, the former government minister kept strong control over the company's administrative organization. Blythe was an advocate of drama in Irish and attempted to reflect state policy by actively producing works in the national language on the national stage. Through the establishment of an Irish speaking theatre company, and the placement of two members of the Irish speaking theatre, An Comhar, on the Abbey Board, Blythe not only carried out state policy but gained more financial backing by the government for the Abbey. As Welch illustrates, "Blythe was working to draw into the Abbey's coffers the government money annually earmarked for An Comhar Drámaíochta."⁷⁴ Blythe was successful in his attempt to steal this funding out from under the amateur dramatic troupe, and positioned the Abbey closer than ever in relation to the Irish Government and its policies.

⁷³ Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978* [I.E. 1979].

⁷⁴ Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 141.

During Blythe's three decade reign over the Abbey Theatre, he refused to alter the organization of the company. By the 1950s, the company suffered from stagnation of both its artistic and organizational policies. Despite his failings, however, Blythe did continue to foster a strong relationship between the company and the government, and through his powerful character, he was able to obtain the funding for the building of a new theatre after the previous one burned to the ground.⁷⁵ In 1966, the theatre company's re-establishment in a new theatre building coincided with the end of Blythe's tenure. The new theatre also established the first "Artistic Advisor" and the company looked forward to many innovations in its management as well as its artistic practice. Patrick Mason, the Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre preceding Ben Barnes, felt that the establishment in the 1960s of an Artistic Advisor which transformed into the Artistic Director was the "most important decision the theatre has made in recent history."⁷⁶ The movement of power from the Board to the Artistic Director was felt to move the company's development into an artistic rather than managerial direction.

The new theatre management of the company also coincided with a new Abbey Board and the introduction of the Arts Council as the major funding body of the Abbey.⁷⁷ After the departure of Ernest Blythe, the Abbey Board became a more powerful component of the company and had more control over the Artistic Director's policies. The establishment of an artistic "advisor" rather than director was to keep the

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 249.

⁷⁷ After the Arts Act of 1951, the Arts Council was established to "advise the Government on arts related matters when requested to do so. This limited the Council's role because Government Departments rarely asked for its advice. [...] More often than not, however, the Arts Council's advice was ignored. It had no power to implement recommendations or to insist that action be taken on them."(Kennedy, Brian P., *Dreams and Responsibilities*, 104). In 1973 the Arts Council expanded under a new constitution which to fund the Abbey Theatre, the Gate Theatre, the Dublin Theatre Festival, the Irish Ballet Company and the Irish Theatre Company and in 1977, the new funding system was implemented. Though the grants were channeled through the Department of Finance, the Arts Council became solely responsible for decisions on funding allocations to the different artistic companies. (Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]*, 234).

power in the Board's hands rather than in those of the theatre manager. According to Tomás Mac Anna, "The board wanted to retain control of artistic policy and feared the designation of 'director' might give whoever was appointed ideas above their station."⁷⁸ Hugh Hunt, however, in 1969, changed the role from "Artistic Advisor" to "Artistic Director" which it remained until the aftermath of the *abbeyonehundred* crisis. From 1966 to 2005, the control of the Irish National Theatre Society was split into thirty Shareholders who held twenty-five shares each in the company, five Directors of the Board who held 200 shares in the company, and the Artistic Director. The amount of shares allocated to each party indicated "that the board could out-vote the shareholders if they remained unified."⁷⁹ Since the late 1960s, the artistic directors have had a precarious relationship with the Board and this has caused frequent turnover of the position itself. Ben Barnes's traumatic relationship with the Board in 2004 was only a minor episode in the history of altercations between the Abbey's artistic directors and the company's managing body.

However, the relationship between board and director is only a small part of the struggle for artistic and financial control of the national theatre. In the 1970s, there was a change in policy of government grants to the arts. By October 1976, all grants for theatrical productions were to be made by the Arts Council which would get its funding, in turn, from the Irish Department of Finance. This increased the Arts Council's funding significantly – previously it had been giving only small bursaries to arts and amateur theatre organizations. The Irish National Theatre was the largest recipient of funding by the Arts Council. However, as the Arts Council was solely

⁷⁸ Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978 [I.E. 1979]*, 212.

⁷⁹ Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure*, 212.

responsible for the amount of money received by the company, the Council gained a large amount of power over the Abbey Theatre's artistic and financial policies.⁸⁰

According to Hugh Hunt, even at its inception, the relationship between the Abbey Theatre and the Council was fraught with turmoil over the control of budgetary allocations and the increasing costs of the company. Hunt describes an altercation, which occurred early in 1977, when the company and the Arts Council were up in arms against each other over the allocated funds to the company. The Council's allocation of £426,000 (Irish Pounds) for the fiscal year was considered unsatisfactory by the theatre who stated that it was a reduction of the previous year's grant: "Failing a satisfactory solution, the Board threatened to refuse to implement the national wage award increases. The Players' and Staff Councils not unnaturally resented being used as pawns in the struggle between the theatre and the Arts Council, and their Unions threatened industrial action if the Labour Court ruled that the increases must be paid."⁸¹ Fortunately for all concerned, however, the company and the Council finally reached an agreement and a grant was given to cover the wage increases. Nevertheless, the immediate hostility between both sides which arose so quickly after the implementation of the Arts Council's new role as the National Theatre's funding body, did not bode well for the future relationship between the two organizations.

The 1980s and 1990s at the Abbey witnessed multiple managerial and financial crises. Due to friction between the Artistic Directors and their Boards, as well as continued cuts to arts funding throughout the period, the Abbey Theatre had continuous turnover in their managers. Turnover had also occurred in the late 1960s through to 1973, but had been relatively stable under the directorship of Tomas Mac

⁸⁰Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre, 1904-1978* [I.E. 1979], 234.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 234-35.

Anna from 1973 to 1978. Joe Dowling replaced Mac Anna but resigned in March of 1985 due to a clash with the board. After a brief period with a reinstatement of Mac Anna for nine months in 1985, there was a quick succession of Directors in the post with tenures of two to three years until the instatement of Patrick Mason in 1994 after Garry Hynes brief tenure from 1990 to 1993.⁸²

ART AND GOVERNMENT

In Ireland the assessment of financial support remains an essential part of the process of government subsidies due to the meagre amount of money available and the high competition for the funds by arts organizations in the country. In comparison to the UK or many European countries, the Irish government is parsimonious in its funding of the arts. Tania Banotti suggests, “It bears repeating that we often think of this as a country that supports the arts and culture in a significant way and that we take pride in our writers and performers but the reality is different.”⁸³ In fact, the country offers the lowest per capital funding and one of the lowest funding as a percentage of GDP in comparison to the UK and other neighbouring EU countries. For a community as affluent as Ireland, the funds provided for public service and the arts are significantly below the mean.

The Irish National Theatre remains in a precarious position in terms of government funding. Unlike other Irish cultural institutions which are entitled to receive funding from departments like the Office of Public Works, the Abbey Theatre obtains its funding solely from the Arts Council, which is itself limited by the money it receives from the Government. The company’s statutory accountant, John Purcell

⁸² Artistic Directors within this period were: Christopher Fitzsimons from 1985-1987, Vincent Dowling from 1987-1989, Noel Pearson from April of 1989-December 1990, and Garry Hynes from 1990-1993. (Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure*, 212-13.)

⁸³ *Arts Funding 2004*.

contests that as a member of the NCI, it should be on equal footing with its colleagues, “If the Abbey is a national cultural institution, there is an argument for it to be put on a statutory basis in line with the National Museum, the National Library and the National Gallery which have been subject to moves in that respect.”⁸⁴ The more official the role the company has as a national institution, the more financial support the Abbey can have from the Government.

The Arts Council, whose members are nominated by the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism, provide funding for nine areas of the arts, including circus, music, dance and drama. The council’s budget for 2005 was €61.5 million to cover all nine areas of artistic practice. The Arts Council felt that it was necessary to fund as broad a spectrum as possible of arts activities in order to develop and support the Irish community at large. According to Mary Cloake of the Arts Council, “We have a good set of decision-making procedures in place because we feel strongly that decisions on the arts should be made by people with diverse perspectives. Money going into the arts will influence them for the next generation.”⁸⁵ By offering funding to a wide variety of artistic organizations, the Arts Council can help promote and develop the arts in Ireland. The Council allows for creative growth in the country and it remains the most powerful force behind the most prevalent artistic movements in contemporary Ireland.

A variety of arts organizations across Ireland all rely heavily on the Arts Council for their funding. Tania Banotti of Theatre Forum emphasized the Council’s importance to the Irish artistic community, “the Arts Council is still overwhelmingly the biggest source of funding. It is vital to the survival of theatres up and down the

⁸⁴*The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

⁸⁵Ibid.

country.”⁸⁶ Since 2001, however, there has been a significant drop in the Arts Council’s funding for arts organizations across the country. This reduction affected all areas of the arts, from the Dublin Fringe Festival to the Abbey Theatre.

From 2001 onwards, the funding offered by the Arts Council has been recognized as inadequate by the Council itself.⁸⁷ This is blamed on the Government’s cuts to the Council in the early part of 2002. Emer O’Kelly argued that the Arts Council has to battle with inadequate funding provided by the government:

The Arts Council grant to the Abbey this year was €4.55m, which the members of the Arts Council, of which I am one, admit is inadequate. All grants from the Arts Council to arts organisations in the country are inadequate, but the council does not have the luxury (under statute) of incurring a deficit: it is subject to funds made available by the Department of Finance, and these were cut drastically at the end of 2002.⁸⁸

The available funds for the arts question the value put on the arts by the Irish government, and the realistic cost valuation seen by both the council and the government bodies.

Some would argue that the point of government funding is so that a theatre company, or artistic group of any kind, does not have to rely on audiences for its survival which may curb its artistic freedom or experimentation. Fiach MacConghail seconded the motion from Mary Cloake that funding is essential for better creative scope among the arts, and at the Abbey. Knowledge of funding for the next few years,

⁸⁶ *Arts Funding 2004*.

⁸⁷ Mary Cloake of the Arts Council described the funding allocation to the Arts Council in 2004 and their relationship with the Abbey Theatre. Cloake summarized the activities by stating that, “Very broadly on the accounts for 2003 and 2004, the Arts Council received a grant from Government of €44 million in 2003 and €52.5 million in 2004, plus €2 million which has already been referred to as a special grant for the Abbey Theatre. These moneys are used primarily in the financial assistance of artists and organisations. Approximately 85% of its annual expenditure is directly in the form of grants either to organisations or to individual artists. The Arts Council also offers an advice and information service which accounts for approximately 5% of its expenditure on publications, conferences and other similar initiatives. Over those two years we have published reports dealing with the arts and young people, strategic support for the arts in the Gaeltacht and similar themes. Less than 10% of our funding goes to administration, with approximately €1.4 million spent on administration and €2.4 million on salaries. This is a summary of our activities.” (*The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004*).

⁸⁸ Emer Kelly, *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 2004.

MacConghail argues, will help the company have more artistic freedom and be able to plan for the long term, rather than year by year. MacConghail contests that, “In my experience of 20 years as a producer in theatre and film, the certainty of revenue, in the form of a grant from the Arts Council or the State, allows one to be more imaginative and creative, particularly if that certainty has a long lead-in period.”⁸⁹ However, as MacConghail insists, the reliance on funding by the Arts Council and the benefits that incurs for the company, are still based on fiscal, and not creative, control. The Arts Council remain “at arms length” from the Abbey in terms of what appears on the company’s stage.

THE ARMS OF POWER: Cultural Institutions and their Managers

With the needs of theatre audiences, theatre makers, governments and corporate funders all at odds over the benefit of the theatre product, the theatre remains a contested arena for disparate political and social agendas. The difficulties found at the Abbey Theatre in 2004, were augmented by pressures from the varied committees found within the organization, the management and the Abbey staff. Confusion also occurred over a feeling amongst the staff that the Abbey Board’s role was not clearly defined within the organization itself.⁹⁰ Due to tensions created by disputes amongst individuals, a feeling of betrayal and blame within the organization, and commentary amongst the media, the following delineates controversies occurring in other arts organizations to draw light upon the controversy between the Abbey Theatre and its Board in 2004.

⁸⁹*The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

⁹⁰ Orla Flanagan, In discussion with the Author, May 2007.

The Royal Opera House

The recent fiscal disaster at the Irish National Theatre Society evokes memories of the financial and management controversy of the United Kingdom's, Royal Opera House, which occurred in the late 1990s. Similarities between the two institutions occur on many levels. A longstanding struggle to obtain a new building for the company was marred by years of delays and expenditure difficulties and discoveries were made of a systemic lack of professional business structures existing in the company. The company's budgeting appeared to be highly erratic and in 1997, the Royal Opera House was investigated by the Houses of Parliament due to the company's declaration of complete insolvency. The financial and managerial crisis which lasted over several years, forced the resignation of a succession of Chief Executive Officers and the disbanding of the company's Board of Directors.⁹¹ As with the Irish National Theatre Society, the financial failure of the company incited public commentary questioning the need for arts organizations such as the Royal Opera, and challenging the misuse of public funds for a seemingly minority art form.

Between 1995 and 1998, the Royal National Opera and the Royal Ballet companies came under extreme public scrutiny due to their financial instability and management structures. In 1995, the Royal Opera House was granted £55 million from the National Lottery with the promise of an addition £23.5 million in the future

⁹¹ For a full history of the controversy at the Royal Opera House See Mary Allen, *A House Divided*, (Simon & Schuster, 1998), also see, Norman Lebrecht, *Covent Garden: The Untold Story: Dispatches from the English Culture War, 1945-2000*, (Northeastern University Press, 2001).

For a look at the House of Parliament investigation of the Royal Opera House, see: Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, "First Report: The Royal Opera House," (London: Houses of Parliament, 1998). Media Select Committee on Culture, Sport, "Second Report: The Royal Opera House," (London: Houses of Parliament, 1998). Media Select Committee on Culture, Sport, "Seventh Report: The Royal Opera House," (London: Houses of Parliament, 1999). Also see: Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, "The Eyre Review and the Royal Opera House: Government Response to the Seventh Report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Session 1997-98," (London: Houses of Parliament, 11 February, 1999), Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, "The Royal Opera House: Responses by the Government and the Arts Council of England to the First Report from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Session 1997-98," (London: Houses of Parliament, 18 February, 1998). Media Select Committee on Culture, Sport, "The Eyre Review and the Royal Opera House," (London: Houses of Parliament, 31 July, 1998).

to aid in the construction of a new building at Covent Garden for the ROH and the Royal Ballet. In December, however, a BBC documentary of the company, *The House*, revealed to the public internal turmoil in the company's management structures.⁹² The documentary brought the structural and managerial problems of the opera company into the public eye, which caused greater scrutiny on the institution's financial and managerial workings by the House of Parliament.

The filming of the BBC documentary coincided with difficulties the company were having over the establishment of a temporary site for the company, as well as the construction of a newly refurbished opera house at Covent Garden. In 1996, plans to build a temporary Royal Opera House at Tower Bridge in London were cancelled, and the Chief Executive Officer of the company, Sir Jeremy Isaacs, resigned due to structural infighting. By May of 1997, the next CEO, Genista McIntosh, also resigned and the former Arts Council Secretary General, Mary Allen became the new CEO later that year. Due to financial and artistic difficulties, the last production of the Opera House before the company closes its building for refurbishment, *Macbeth*, is cancelled in June, at a loss of £200,000. In July, the company closed for redevelopment and an additional £2 million loan was obtained to aid in the ROH's redevelopment scheme.

While construction on the new building at Covent Garden caused growing concerns of increased expenditures and delays, in the autumn of 1997, the House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee discovered that the touring season of the Royal Opera House had caused huge deficits due to lack of ticket sales. In November, the Culture Minister, Chris Smith, announced the investigation of the opera and ballet by Sir Richard Eyre. The *Second Special Report* from the House of

⁹² Kate Moss, *The House: Inside the Royal Opera House Covent Garden*, BBC Books: London, 1995.

Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee declared their outrage against the complete lack of budgeting found to exist within the Royal Opera House. They affirmed that,

It defies credulity that, some seven months after the publication of this Committee's Report and the subsequent furore, Sir Richard Eyre, in a Report dated 30 June, was still compelled to say that "it is impossible to prepare even broad-brush estimates of the Covent Garden studio theatre's operating costs and revenues. The utter confusion about the ROH's accounts is symptomatic of the continuing shambles. Sir Richard Eyre said in his Report that the ROH had an *accumulated* revenue deficit of around £5 million. The Chairman of this Committee stated during the Committee's hearing with Sir Richard Eyre on 16 July that he had been told by a member of the Board that the deficit had gone up since Sir Richard Eyre reported."⁹³

The Select Committee called for the resignation of Royal Opera House managers, and the Board of Directors and new CEO, Mary Allen, resigned. Lord Chadlington declared to the committee that the company was facing complete insolvency and £15 million was allocated to relieve the deficit. 1998 saw continued management struggles within the company and the Select Committee made demands for a complete restructuring of the company's business strategies, financial policies, management structures and relationships to their Board of Directors as well as the Arts Council.⁹⁴

The Irish Museum of Modern Art

In Ireland, struggles between artistic company boards and the company managers have caused a number of crises amongst cultural institutions in recent years. In 2000, the Irish Museum of Modern Art found itself in a controversy due to a growing tension between the Board of Directors and the museum's Director, Declan McGonagle, as well as through a dispute between the Board and the Minister for the Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands of the time, Sile de Valera. Under the

⁹³ The Culture, Media and Sport Committee, "Second Special Report: The Eyre Review and the Royal Opera House: Government Response to the Seventh Report," House of Commons: London, 1998.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

leadership of Declan McGonagle, IMMA had struggled since its opening in early 1990s to develop the museum with architectural and financial difficulties. During the celebration of their tenth anniversary in 2000, the Chairman of the Board, Marie Donnelly informed Declan McGonagle that they were advertising his position in an international search and that he could re-apply if he would wish, or they could arrange a severance package for him. According to an article in the *Irish Times*,

This triggered a court injunction from McGonagle, a long legal process, a final acceptance by the Museum that he was entitled to a new contract and, ultimately, his decision to leave with a substantial settlement. The damage to the Museum's standing was immense, and the financial costs were significant.⁹⁵

After this event, it became known to the press that there was a dispute between the IMMA Board and the Minister for the Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs, Síle de Valera. Although the Minister denied undue influence in the appointments of a new Director of the museum, political tension continued to mar the appointment of a Director for IMMA and several members of the museum's Board resigned in 2001.⁹⁶

Institutional Strife in Irish Culture Organizations

In recent years, more institutional strife has occurred within arts organizations in Ireland. In 2007, the dispute between the Wexford Opera Festival Board and their Chief Executive Office was taken to the High Court. Similarly to the dispute between Declan McGonagle of IMMA and the Board of Directors, the CEO of the Wexford Opera, Michael Hunt, took legal action against the Wexford Board of Directors for their decision to call for his resignation.⁹⁷ Michael Dervan detailed some of the recent controversies in an article on the Wexford Opera Crisis, for the *Irish Times* in 2007,

⁹⁵ "Politics Keep Kennedy Out," *Irish Times*, 20 December 2001.

⁹⁶ See: Carol Coulter, "Imma Crisis Deepens and Brian Kennedy Reportedly Rejects Director Job Offer," *Irish Times*, 30 November 2001. Also see: "Politics Keep Kennedy Out."

⁹⁷ (Michael Dervan, "Give Opera a Real Rattle," *Irish Times*, February 2008. See also: Dervan, "The Rumbles in the Arts Jungle.")

indicating concerns of widespread disputes amongst Irish arts organizations. The rift between the Wexford board and its chief executive followed shortly after the hugely controversial crisis at the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland, sparked by the board's decision to merge its two main orchestras, and the unexpected fracture at the National Chamber Choir, which saw both the chief executive and the artistic director resign due to differences with the board. These conflicts pale beside the upheavals at the Abbey Theatre in 2005 and the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 2001.⁹⁸

With all of these institutional confrontations in recent years questions of why cultural institutions have struggled with managerial turmoil on such a wide scale arise. In his article, Michael Dervan queried whether such controversies are fundamental to current managerial practice amongst art organizations:

Questions are, however, being asked about why so many major arts organisations have gone through or are going through such crises. The Arts Council has obvious concerns in this area, and last year published in print and electronic form 'A practical guide for board members of arts organizations.'⁹⁹

Some of the difficulty is caused by the precarious position of arts organizations in terms of the business world, and the nature of cultural institution's board of directors. Board of Directors are often appointed by government ministers, such as the Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism, and they tend to play a "behind the scenes" role in arts organizations. Primarily a voluntary position, artistic institutional Boards tend to obtain their members through government appointments. Made up of successful and well known individuals, Board members are often motivated by their patronage of the arts and also attracted to the prestige associated with being appointed a Board member. According to the Chairman of the Dublin Theatre Festival, Peter Crowley, many Board members are often deeply committed to their role on an artistic

⁹⁸ Dervan, "The Rumbles in the Arts Jungle."

⁹⁹ Ibid.

institution's board. However, the board members' function in acquiring funding for the institution can be extremely challenging and often, institutional board members are ill equipped with the necessary business experience to fulfill their role. Crowley argues that a successful board should be made up of members who balance between artistic and business interests,

What it takes, to my mind, is people who care about the arts yet still bring that sort of rigour and business sense of how the thing should run, from the point of view of knowing how the thing should be managed in a professional way, of how it should be marketed and financed.¹⁰⁰

The many challenges arts organizations have for survival has increased in recent years due to cuts in funding by the Arts Council and a continued pressure to become more "business savvy" as well continuing to maintain high levels of artistic quality within the organization.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, however, due to the highly public nature of many board committees, at times the members chosen for artistic boards are not necessarily up to the challenge of their role. The Arts Council has developed a document to help inform board members in their role within an organization and develop skills "in terms of business acumen."¹⁰² The controversies between institutions and their boards draw to the forefront questions of the clarity within organizations over the Board of Directors' role and level of business competence.

ART AND MANAGEMENT

For many, the criticism of the Abbey Theatre was not solely due to the company's financial instability, but the extremity of the situation. In what should have been a celebration of the company's history, a break down of management structures occurred in every area of the company. How did the company, the board and the

¹⁰⁰ Peter Crowley, quoted in Shane Hegarty, "Treading the Boards," *Irish Times*, 2 June 2003.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

government allow the financial problem to reach such a height? The investigation into *abbeyonehundred* revealed deep rooted problems in the national institution's structures dating back several years. John Purcell, the Abbey Theatre's company accountant, revealed that,

As the statutory auditor of the National Theatre Society Limited since 1994, one has to ask why did these internal financial problems not come to the fore. A completely different process was taken on board for the production of the annual accounts, which we audited. It was usually only at that stage that the specific financial position was determined. In that sense, we would not have to go near the management accounts as we could rely on the audited accounts. It was not until the big explosion of expenditure in 2001 that the fundamental flaws in that management reporting system came to light.¹⁰³

The government and the public felt that there was something fundamentally wrong with the company if such an extreme deficit could have taken the Abbey Theatre staff by surprise. The financial shortfall should have been anticipated through significant planning and budgeting.

Other factors in the ensuing crisis over the financial position of the company were due to the failure of efficient organizational structures. Planning for the programming of *abbeyonehundred* began about six months before the centenary began, which many felt was quite late for such an ambitious seasonal program. Several members of the Abbey staff argued that the delay in the planning process created a sense of panic from within the Abbey staff even before the centenary began. The undue haste caused confusion over planning procedures for the complicated season and this supplemented institutional confusion over the theatre's budgeting structures. Barnes maintained that there was an unclear notion of the actual figures involved in the *abbeyonehundred* program. For Barnes,

One of the problems with the *abbeyonehundred* programme was that it was never budgeted properly by Michael Bradley and Brian Jackson, and that came out in the May, 2005. It was underestimated, Sharon [Murphy] and I kept

¹⁰³*The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

feeding the information and it wasn't coming back in a detailed budget, so my feeling was that if they were saying we need an additional 3 million, we probably needed an additional 4.5, and that came out to be so.¹⁰⁴

Despite the potential for bias from Ben Barnes towards the events occurring in 2004, his testimony clearly indicates that there was a lack of transparency within the company of the actual expenditures for the season. The inability to obtain firm figures of expenses, aided by the lack of a clear understanding of available funds for the centenary, and the failure to produce realistic figures of fundraising capabilities, all indicated systemic problems in the business-like structures of the company throughout 2004.

Jocelyn Clarke, the Abbey's Literary Manager, reasoned that the misunderstanding of overall budgets for the centenary year was caused by departmental miscommunication. Clarke felt that the company never provided structured breakdowns of the departmental allocation of the *abbeyonehundred* budget and the lack of communication between staff members within the company caused internal confusion from early on in 2004. The feeling amongst the Abbey Theatre Board and Ben Barnes that at some point the money would appear seemed to Clarke as a desire for financial "imaginary angels" by the company managers. Clarke asserts that the scepticism over financial stability within the company staff added to a lack of confidence in the centenary program itself. As Clarke argues,

It turns out we were unable as an institution to deliver an ambitious programme [...] We did not have the financial wherewithal [...] and that is also an indication of how poor the communication was.¹⁰⁵

While making allowances for a level of bias within Clarke's statement, the increasing miscommunication between the Abbey staff, the Artistic Director, the Centenary Committee, the Abbey Board and the company shareholders increased the difficulties

¹⁰⁴ Ben Barnes, Interview with the Author, June 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author, June 2007.

the Abbey had in recovering from their crisis once the extent of the deficit became known. Due to the complete lack of communication or overall budgeting expressed by several members of the 2004 Abbey staff, the company was also not fully aware of the amount that they were over budget until after the government made an external audit upon the company in 2005.

Miscommunication amongst the company made these revelations in the press damaging to the company morale. Some members of the company felt they found out more about the mismanagement from reading the *Irish Times* than from working within the company.¹⁰⁶ Orla Flanagan argued that during the Dublin Theatre Festival, the company staff were being asked to work long hours for the company due to five productions being staged in repertory. During this difficult work schedule, the Abbey Board announced the redundancy of a large proportion of the company staff, while, for Flanagan, the daily notices in the media felt like a constant betrayal. Furthermore, the commentary in the press concentrated on the internal drama, and the staff felt that the season's production quality was being ignored by the public. Flanagan further acknowledged that there was a growing division between the Artistic Staff made up of the Literary, Management and Outreach Departments, and the more practical departments such as Costume, Set and other theatre makers during this period. For Flanagan, this internal friction added to a sense of hostility within the company's structure. She indicated that rumours and antagonism between staff members was making it more and more difficult for the company to function during the end of the centenary year.¹⁰⁷

In September, the company's fiscal position was announced in the press, and the managing director announced that the redundancy of a third of the Abbey's staff

¹⁰⁶ Confidential, In discussion with the Author, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ Orla Flanagan, In discussion with the Author, May 2007.

would be carried out in the near future. After the theatre announced staff cuts of over thirty members of the company, the Abbey Theatre's union, SIPTU, indignantly demanded the theatre address its financial deficit and give the union projections of how the company perceived their management and staff policies for the future. The union argued that cutting staff members should be a last resort, not an "easy solution" for the large deficit of the centenary year. Rather, as SIPTU argued, the Abbey needed to address the larger issues of why the deficit happened and how the company and their board allowed such a major financial crisis to take them by surprise in the middle of their commemorative celebration. SIPTU questioned the need for such a large number of redundancies at the theatre. As Barbara Kelly, the SIPTU spokeswoman, argued, "The success of businesses is due to employees, yet whenever things go wrong it is often the workers who are the first to bear the brunt."¹⁰⁸ Kelly remarked that the cut of a third of the Abbey staff appeared a hasty measure to cover up widespread problems with the company management; moreover, she emphasized that these concerns would not be removed by the deletion of such a dramatic proportion of the company's workers.

During the emergency meeting, the Board passed a motion of no-confidence in Ben Barnes's directorship. The board demanded his resignation due to mismanagement. On his return, the artistic director complained that he was being unfairly scape-goated for a problem which arose because of substantial cuts in arts funding by the Irish Government in recent years. In a private interview, Barnes stated that he felt tension developed between himself and the Board due to the Board members' refusal to acknowledge the collective responsibility of the Board and the company over the financial crisis. Barnes argued that the press commentary of 2004

¹⁰⁸ Alan O'Keeffe, "Thirty Staff at Theatre Now Face the Chop," *Irish Independent*, September 6 2004.

blamed the *abbeyonehundred* deficit on the low box office figures from the *Abbey and Europe* season, and the expensive touring season, all of which were blamed on the Artistic Director's negligence, while "the board were not standing up and saying, hang on, we're collectively to blame here, we had promised to raise this amount of money, we didn't actually do that, and there is a collective responsibility."¹⁰⁹ Barnes stated that towards the end of 2004 there was an increasing hostility between himself and the board.

For many members of the Abbey staff, there was a feeling that the Board were distancing themselves from the growing controversy at the Abbey Theatre.¹¹⁰ Orla Flanagan noted the common sentiment amongst Abbey Staff members that the Board were not supporting the company through the crisis and continued to take a back step as the controversy augmented in the later months of 2004. Departmental reports to the Board became non-existent by the end of the centenary year, while, due to the crisis, the breakdown of structures occurred in many aspects of management by December of 2004.¹¹¹ According to a member of the *abbeyonehundred* staff who would prefer to remain anonymous in respect to this issue, much of the tension between the Board and the company was due to a lack of understanding of the nature of the Board's role for the company.

I think their role was very unclear, and I think that was largely due to the selection process and I think the Minister for the Arts appointed a number of representatives on his behalf, and it was also in his head as to what they were appointed for and why they were appointed. It was just very unclear of what their role was. Do we have to report to them, do we have to treat them like they're celebrities –I think that was definitely an issue.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ben Barnes, in discussion with the Author, June 2007.

¹¹⁰ Concerns over the Abbey Theatre Board were raised by all of my interviews with staff members of *abbeyonehundred*. Some of the staff wished to remain anonymous with respect to the company board, but others, such as Orla Flanagan and Jocelyn Clarke stated for the record that they felt deserted by the board by the end of 2004.

¹¹¹ Confidential, in discussion with the Author, 2007.

¹¹² Ibid.

An investigation of the function of the Abbey Board amongst that of other artistic institutions Boards became the point of public scrutiny by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Arts Council after the events of 2004 were revealed to the public.

The miscommunication between artistic practitioners and individuals promoting business professionalism within the arts, often found on company boards, is widespread amongst the artistic community. At the Abbey Theatre, there was a general feeling of miscommunication amongst the Board and the staff. Jocelyn Clarke felt that the Board lacked “dynamism” to assist in promoting change. He also felt that the Board of Directors lacked the financial wherewithal to be able to help manage the company through the significant financial crisis of 2004,

Well the problem with the Board is that they are well meaning amateurs, but they actually may not bring a lot of experience to make avail of. I think Patrick Mason had a dynamic Board in that they rewrote the articles of the constitution, it looked at issues about fundraising and engaged very actively with the Arts Council. Ben Barnes didn't have that kind of Board, and so the Centenary Committee was made up of people who had access to money, but it was not necessarily very, very dynamic. We had a board member who was supposed to be responsible for the Literary Dept and I can't remember the name of him or her, but we barely ever saw them. [...] So there was a sense of them not being aware of what they were doing.¹¹³

Orla Flanagan, Sharon Murphy and other members of the company, also mentioned their lack of confidence over the Board's relationship with Barnes and the company throughout 2004. As *abbeyonehundred* director, Sharon Murphy, acknowledged, much of the institution's management structure depends on the relationship between the Artistic Director and its Board, if systems of communication breakdown between these groups, the overall structure of the company will also begin to dissolve.¹¹⁴ The growing feeling of distance and inapproachability by the staff of their Board

¹¹³ Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author, June 2007.

¹¹⁴ Sharon Murphy, in discussion with the Author, October 2007.

throughout the centenary year added to a loss of morale within the company in late 2004.

Vincent Dowling contends that the Abbey Theatre company suffers as a result of its poor relationship with the company Board. Dowling complains that as arts institutions' board members are appointed by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, they generally have either little understanding of the theatre, or they are notable theatre practitioners without much business acumen. Dowling, a former Artistic Director of the Abbey, would like to see the board complement the artistic director's orders and take responsibility for the company's failure rather than remain in the background while the Artistic Director, as the public face of the company, takes the brunt of criticism. For Dowling, the way the Abbey Board is structured often stymies the power to change institutional structures by either the Artistic Director or the Board itself.¹¹⁵

Difficulties in the management structure of the Abbey Theatre were acknowledged in a Government-led investigation of the company's financial crisis and a feeling that not only the Artistic Team, but also the institutional management structures of the Board, the Abbey Shareholders and the company's financial system needed a thorough overhaul. Many acknowledged that the institutional system was a continuation of out-of-date structures dating back to the 1960s. In 2005, the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism gave the Abbey Theatre €4.233 million to pay off their deficit and also fund some of the new structural changes of the company.¹¹⁶ As the Abbey's Statutory Accountant, John Purcell concluded, "It is to be hoped that this new beginning incorporating the ongoing change process will help to put the

¹¹⁵Vincent Dowling, quoted in Liam Collins, "I Believe the Abbey Is the Greatest Theatre Company in History," *Irish Independent*, 26 September 2004.

¹¹⁶ John O'Donoghue, Select Committee of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, "Vote 33 -Arts, Sport and Tourism (Supplementary)," (Dublin: Select Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 7 December, 2005).

national theatre on a much sounder footing for the future.”¹¹⁷ In his address to the Select Committee of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, John O’Donoghue defended the company’s recovery by arguing that the radical changes would be a positive step for the company in the future. The former Abbey Theatre’s institutional structures were criticized as “Victorian” in design. Ben Barnes argued that the difficulty in creating change from within the organization was due to structures in place for over half a century, which a new Artistic Director found very hard to change.¹¹⁸ The dramatic transformation of the company looked into some of the structural difficulties and attempted to create a more transparent organizational structure. The company’s dramatic changes in 2005 were viewed by John Purcell as the necessary purge of an outmoded organizational structure dating back several decades:

It may be a blessing in disguise in that the Abbey will now be put on a sounder footing. It has acted as the catalyst for the change in the corporate status of the Abbey, which was a bone of contention with the Arts Council and with the Department and many others over the years. It was an unusual type of animal in that it was almost a club that was being financed largely by the State. We have it on a reasonably proper footing now.¹¹⁹

Purcell optimistically noted his relief at the changes forced upon the company’s management structure which would rearrange this “club like atmosphere” in its entirety into a more contemporary businesslike configuration.

RE-STRUCTURE OF POWER

The misuse of public funds by a national cultural institution raised concerns over the accountability of national cultural institutions.¹²⁰ In November of 2005, the

¹¹⁷ *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

¹¹⁸ Ben Barnes, In discussion with the Author, June 2007.

¹¹⁹ *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

¹²⁰ During the Royal Opera House controversy in the United Kingdom similar concerns over the accountability of cultural institutions in their relationship with the UK Arts Council were raised by the House of Parliament. In the Eyre Report, “The relationship between the Royal Opera House and the

Committee of Public Accounts held a meeting on the Financial Statements of the 2004 National Theatre Society Limited, and the Committee engaged in a detailed discussion of all concerned in the company's insolvency. The Arts Council, Government, Board of Directors and the Abbey's administrative staff were all scrutinized for their part in the Abbey's financial crisis.¹²¹ The Arts Council and Irish government began a series of formal investigations into the company's structure that would continue through November, 2005. The new Board asserted that they would seek "clarity in figures and performance," according to the new Artistic Director, Fiach MacConghail, which would develop a strong relationship with the State over the amount of funding necessary to support the company. An investigation was carried out so the committee could fully understand the circumstances of the financial crisis of the Abbey. Moreover, the committee examined the Arts Council's role in funding cultural institutions like the Irish National Theatre Society, and how the Arts Council monitors the use of public funds by organizations came under scrutiny.¹²²

The Arts remain a volatile industry in terms of material and spiritual success. Because public taste remains fickle and production costs high for artistic pursuits, especially in the theatre, arts organizations cannot be assured of an economically successful outcome. David Throsby contests the peculiar nature of the arts industry: "both art lovers and artists themselves will argue that the inconsistencies, spontaneity, and unpredictability in behaviour in the arts will always defy rational explanation."¹²³ After such public controversies as that experienced by the Abbey Theatre in 2004,

Arts Council has epitomised how the accountability structure can fail. It has been characterised by arrogance on the part of the Royal Opera House and by a lack of assertiveness on the part of the Arts Council. The Royal Opera House has claimed more autonomy from its major funder than was its right, and has only been able to do so because it was allowed to." [Sir Richard Eyre, "The Eyre Report," ed. Media and Sport Department for Culture (London: Houses of Parliament, 30 June, 1998). : 103]

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

¹²³ Throsby, "The Production and Consumption of the Arts: A View of Cultural Economics," 4.

The volatility of arts organizations creates difficulties for the artistic community to reassure their funders of the net worth of their cultural output.

Due to the delicate balance between the government and cultural organizations in Ireland, the mismanagement of the Abbey Theatre represented a political embarrassment not only for the National Theatre, but for the arts in general. As John Smith asserts, “The arts do not really have a future if some of the fundamental aspects of how they should be managed are not adhered to.”¹²⁴ The funding body of any organization, governmental or private, seeks justification of the cultural output of their investment. When the funds are perceived to have been squandered, the capital-accumulating benefits of the arts product to society are perceived as non-existent.

¹²⁴ *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

CONCLUSION

One of the Abbey's many publications created to boost funding during the centenary was a pictorial day log entitled *The Book of Days: An Abbey Century*. After the financial crisis and the re-structuring of the company in 2005, Fiach MacConghail and the new managerial staff decided to destroy the remaining copies. The fate of *The Book of Days* highlights for me the extravagance and tragedy of the Abbey centenary. Expensive to produce, the €80,000 publication was designed in 2003 to boost ticket sales, help publicize the upcoming centenary to potential funders, and offer as a memento a day planner to interested members of the public. Due to the relatively high price of €50 and the large size of the volume, only around 200 of the 10,000 copies were sold between 2003 and 2005. The book presented a production history in pictures and included a short overview of the company's history with many arresting photographs of Abbey performances through the century. The *Book of Days* also provided a fitting tribute to the selectivity of memory in *abbeyonehundred*. The productions featured in the planner included only a few images from the period between 1904 and 1969, with the majority of images from the last thirty years of the company's history.¹ *The Book of Days* highlighted a central photograph of Ben Barnes along with other images of William Butler Yeats, Lennox Robinson and George Bernard Shaw on the opening pages of the volume.

With no dates on the "book of days" calendar and many interesting photographs from the Abbey archive, it would seem that the destruction of the volume

¹ The *Book of Days* included one image from productions of the period between 1904-1909, none from the decade 1910-1919, three from 1920-1929, none from 1930-1950, three from 1950-1959, four from 1960-1969, 35 photos from 1970-1979, 28 from 1980-1989, 24 from 1990-1999, and a disproportionate number of 35 images from 2000 to 2003.

was unnecessary as it might sell in coming years. However, the books were linked to the public embarrassment over the centenary itself and therefore perceived as “unsellable” by some members of the company. The destruction of the *Book of Days* is a powerful example of erasure and provides a fitting symbol for institutional amnesia. What is being destroyed along with the 9800 copies of an extravagant coffee table book is *abbeyonehundred* itself. For Jocelyn Clarke, the fate of the *Book of Days* was tied to the experience of working for *abbeyonehundred*. Though the book provided a great look at the events of the past century for the company, because of the controversies of the 2004 centenary, it was now perceived as useless. As Clarke declared, “To me, the only thing I wanted to take from the Abbey was that, because it’s a perfect metaphor.”²

Conclusions and New Beginnings:

Rather than the previously calculated €800,000 loss for the 2004 season, an external audit carried out by the international accounting consultancy firm KPMG revealed that the deficit for the centennial year was over €2 million and the company was battling a total debt of over €5 million.³ Nevertheless, despite the Government investigation over the many factors that created the financial and management crisis of *abbeyonehundred*, and the loss of many of the centenary’s chief orchestrators,⁴ the Abbey Theatre under the directorship of MacConghail was eager to distance itself from the centenary controversy. As MacConghail was quick to state at the investigatory meeting on the financial crisis held in November of 2005, both the

² Jocelyn Clarke, in discussion with the Author, June 2007.

³ See “The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004” by the Committee of Public Accounts, Vol. 95, Houses of the Oireachtas: 24 November, 2005.

⁴ The Artistic Director, Ben Barnes, and the Financial Manager, Bryan Jackson, resigned in early 2005 while many of the Abbey Theatre’s administration either resigned or were made redundant due to the financial crisis of 2004-2005. In total, by September of 2006 less than one third of the staff from the centenary year continued to work for the company. For a full list of employees from 2004 and 2006 see Appendices D and E.

Theatre Director and the new managing director, Declan Cantwell, were not members of the Abbey Theatre staff during the centenary. Therefore, though they would aid in the investigation of the Abbey Theatre's financial disgrace, they were not party to the events that led up to the controversy. Cantwell focused his attention on the poor management of the accounts previously practiced at the Abbey Theatre, and stated that there was an essential need to evaluate these past events to help in the restructuring of the company. As Cantwell suggests, "Good quality management reports are crucial in terms of letting management know what decisions they should make in future knowing what has happened in the past."⁵ Through qualifying statements such as those framed by Cantwell and MacConghail, the company and the Committee of Public Affairs focused their investigation on the instructional importance of the crisis to assist the future success of the company, rather than set out to hold any particular person responsible for the centenary events. The feeling that the events of the centenary should be left in the past while the new regime was focused on rebuilding for the future was the opinion held by many among the government and the Arts Council, as well as the Abbey Theatre itself. In another parliamentary debate on the Abbey Theatre, Patrick Sutton from the Arts Council emphasized the need to close the door on the past in a meeting with the Joint Committee for Arts, Sport Tourism and Gaeltacht Affairs. "It has been an extraordinary journey for the Abbey Theatre," Sutton argued, "culminating in the resignation of the managing director and the artistic director. We have reached the end of the journey, that road is closed, and we are now rebuilding."⁶ In this and other meetings with the Joint Committee, the Arts Council and the Abbey Theatre stressed the need to staunch the tide of ill feeling and public emphasis on the controversial undertakings of the Abbey Theatre company in

⁵ *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

⁶ *Meeting Notes.* Vol. 39 Joint Committee for Arts, Sport, Tourism and Gaeltacht Affairs, 19 October, 2005.

order to allow the National Theatre to recover its artistic reputation with the public and financial sustainability.

By emphasizing future rather than past actions of the Abbey Theatre, the Government, the Arts Council and the company desired to leave on public record positive changes for the Irish national institution, rather than damaging declarations of the company's past erroneous behavior. However, this practice illustrates a subtle but important distinction of how the centenary crisis was perceived by the government and the company itself in the aftermath of 2004. Moreover, this distinction continues a longstanding practice found amongst the government and the company towards the Abbey's managerial struggles throughout its history. The investigatory proceedings were therefore carried out with the assumption that no one currently at the Abbey was to be held accountable for past action, allowing the company and their new Board of Directors to concentrate on the future rather than the past. This assumption allowed the Abbey and its governing and funding bodies to actively bury past scandal and ill feeling over the Irish National Theatre Society. As Deputy Michael Smith, from the Committee of Public Accounts, emphasized, "In the long run, it is the assurances provided for future conduct that will count. While we do not like what occurred in the past, we cannot alter it."⁷ Therefore, with a new company management structure, the past financial and managerial controversies are ostensibly swept to the side as the company makes way for the future.

APPROACHING THE CENTENARY OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC

While the consequences of the Abbey's centenary radically altered the company's managerial and financial structures, the public criticism of the company's artistic as well as structural failings made throughout the centenary season effected the Irish

⁷ *The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.*

National Theatre's continuing artistic policies as well as its contribution to Ireland's wider community after 2004. By addressing the social, as well as financial, issues brought up during the centenary, the Abbey Theatre aims to create a national theatre that will ameliorate the social problems of Ireland as a whole, as well as those involving the theatre company.

This policy of the Abbey Theatre reflects widespread aims amongst Irish National Cultural Institutions leading up to another centenary, the 2020 centenary of the Irish Republic. According to the Chairman of the Council of National Cultural Institutions, Aongus Ó hAonghusa,

The impetus of the past decade must be sustained. It is critical that our newfound self-confidence and self-reliance extends to the provision of cultural facilities that match our contemporary economic maturity.⁸

Through the fostering of debates at the Abbey on multiculturalism, a new development initiative for talented young writers and directors, and changes to the Abbey's repertoire, the company aim to help future social and artistic development in Ireland.

The Abbey's new policies are a part of a development scheme for Irish cultural institutions in the 2000s. In 2006, the Council of National Cultural Institutions submitted their proposal in preparation of a new National Development Plan for the arts in Ireland. The plan was aimed in coordination with *Ireland 2020*, a widespread social, architectural, environmental and economic development plan for the country. Designed to end with the celebration of the upcoming centenary of the Irish Republic in 2021, the *Ireland 2020* Spatial Development Plan aims to alleviate current social and economic problems facing the "New Ireland." The Council of National Cultural

⁸ Council of National Cultural Institutions, "Submission to the Department of Arts, Sport, and Tourism in the Context of the Preparation of a New National Development Plan," (Dublin: Council of National Cultural Institutions, 2006), 2.

Institutions, made up of arts organizations including the Abbey Theatre,⁹ submitted their proposal emphasizing the importance of new arts policies within the country's overall plan for creating a better society. According to the Council, "Fifteen years ahead of the centenary of the birth of modern, independent Ireland, there is a precise timeline within which to complete the task of establishing a cultural infrastructure (broadly defined) worthy of a confident C21st European nation."¹⁰ *Ireland 2020*, for both cultural and political policy, was designed to assist the country's economic and social transition into a more pluralist society. The emphasis of the Spatial Development Plan's fruition to coincide with the celebration of the centenary of the Irish Republic, illustrates the government's intention to commemorate the past through present social change and development.

The Council of National Institutions stresses the importance of the arts within the government's plan for its centenary. As the Council states, national cultural institutions are "repositories and guardians of much of the accumulated cultural wealth of Ireland (and beyond)."¹¹ The Council emphasized the need of State support for the arts because of its importance as a symbolic signifier of culture: "Humans are the only species to engage in symbolization, in the generation and communication of complex meanings in symbol systems like language, image, ritual, mark-making and sounds."¹² The arts aid in the establishment of not only culture, but, according to the Council, humanity itself. "In making art we make ourselves. In understanding art we

⁹ The Council is made up of the Irish Arts Council, the Chester Beatty Library, Heritage Council, Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Archives, the National Concert Hall, National Gallery of Ireland, National Library of Ireland, National Museum of Ireland, and the National Theatre Society Ltd.

¹⁰ Institutions, "Submission to the Department of Arts, Sport, and Tourism in the Context of the Preparation of a New National Development Plan,"5

¹¹ *Ibid.*,1

¹² *Ibid.*,3

understand ourselves.”¹³ The INCI emphasized the importance of the arts not only for Irish cultural development, but also for human life.

Ireland 2020 was created to assist in alleviating tension which has developed through the social and economic changes occurring in the past fifteen years. Though the Council emphasized that there have been many positive developments caused by the economic boom, they state that the social concerns which have been aggravated in recent years need to be strategically addressed by the government:

Most social analysis, cultural commentary and political discourse acknowledge that the very rapidity of the economic growth achieved since the 1990s has caused or exacerbated some important social problems. There is consensus among most policy-makers and social partners that there are significant challenges to be faced in ensuring that the New Ireland is not characterised at once by a healthy economy and by a significant series of social problems, bound up with issues of dislocation and disaffection, caused by a combination of practical realities such as distance between home and work and more ‘felt realities’ such as an absence of ‘belonging’.¹⁴

The social problems created by the Celtic Tiger economy are actively addressed through the *Ireland 2020* Development Plan, including more pedestrian problems such as traffic congestion to more pressing concerns of poverty and racial equality.

The Council of National Institutions also stressed the concerns over changing understandings of Irishness in the “New Ireland.” Moreover, these changes affecting Irish identity are directly linked to the need for development of the arts in contemporary society. The arts and culture are essential “to the making and mediating of identity and to constructing and deconstructing the narratives of ‘belonging.’”¹⁵ The Council stressed the need for new cultural buildings that reflect the changes in society, the need of arts and culture that allow for the multivalent identities existing in the “New Ireland,” and a touring practice which assists in the relationship between the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.,7

¹⁵ Ibid.

Irish diaspora and the Irish Nation, as well as one which offers international communities the opportunity to understand and develop Irish cultural interests. According to the Council, the arts and culture have an important role in constructing *Ireland 2020* due to their “intrinsic value” to humanity, their relationship to the wider intellectual life of the country, and their importance in Ireland due to the “historic symbiosis” between culture and nation building:

The past fifty years, accelerated in the past twenty, have seen enormous changes in the domains of both the making and receiving of formal cultural experiences. Attention is drawn especially to the responsibilities now attaching to cultural institution deriving from new understandings of how meaning and experiences are ‘transacted’ when the public engages with cultural objects or events.¹⁶

The contribution the arts make to collective identity and community building, “realized through the core competency of people, services, organisations and institutions in the cultural sphere,”¹⁷ illustrate how intrinsic the government’s cultural policies are to the overall development plan of the twenty-first century.

A NEW ABBEY FOR A NEW AGE

Despite the desire to leave the centenary behind it, the Abbey Theatre, along with other cultural institutions, is developing strategies to conquer many of the issues raised during the centenary controversy. While plans for a new building continue to be delayed, and some commentators criticize the company’s lack of emphasis on new writing, as well as their limited inclusion of artists from the new immigrant communities in Dublin, the Abbey Theatre has reinvigorated its range to include performances from forgotten moments of the Abbey’s repertoire, such as Lennox Robinson’s play, *The Big House* in 2007, plays addressing tensions between the new

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

immigrant and traditional Irish communities, such as the adaptation of *Playboy of the Western World*, by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle, and new work from international playwrights such as the 2008 production of Charles L. Mee's, *Big Love*. With the introduction of talks on global pluralism and alternative identities, perhaps the company will begin to include more alternative viewpoints developing in contemporary Irish society and reinstate their commitment to new writing and the development of emerging Irish-based artists.

As the Abbey Theatre prepares for the Centenary of the Irish Republic, the company has the chance to benefit from past controversies and past mistakes and achieve a way to combine a present artistic practice that looks towards Ireland's changing social landscape while remaining faithful to its past legacy. At the introduction of the new Abbey Board in February of 2006, the Irish Minister of the Arts, John O'Donoghue argued that:

Critically, while there is of necessity a new emphasis and focus on accountability and efficiency, the new structures remain centered on what happens on stage, for this is and must always be the beating heart of a living theatre, particularly of a National Theatre. A National Theatre is not just a commercial venture, or an entertainment venue. It is certainly these things to a greater or lesser extent, but it is above all a place where the national consciousness can be expressed, where our changing nature as a people and society can be reflected, commented on, and challenged. To borrow a quote from Oscar Wilde '*the stage is not merely the meeting place of all the arts, but is also the return of art to life.*'¹⁸

With the introduction of a new structural system, the Abbey Theatre is attempting to address some of the concerns raised in the centenary year, however, the policy of institutional amnesia remains. Let us hope that rather than turn their back on the structures of the past, they will continue to investigate the artistic and institutional

¹⁸John O'Donoghue, Minister of Arts, Sport and Tourism, "Address to the Incoming Board of the Abbey Theatre." *Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism*, 1 February 2006.

issues brought to light in *abbeyonehundred* and similar controversies to truly, as O'Donoghue hoped, "allow the theatre to move forward."¹⁹

¹⁹ John O'Donoghue, Select Committee of the Joint Committee on Arts, "Vote 33 -Arts, Sport and Tourism (Supplementary)."

APPENDIX A:

abbeyonehundred Programme 2004

The Aristocrats, by Brian Friel, Directed by Ben Barnes (12 November 2003-24 January 2004)

The Abbey and Europe (January to May):

Festen by Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukow (adapted by BO hr. Hanen. Presented by Teatr Rozmaitosci, Warsaw), Directed by H (Gregorz Jarzyna), (Abbey Mainstage: 28 January – 31 January)

The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov (adapted by Tom Murphy), Directed by Patrick Mason (Abbey Mainstage: 12 February – 13 March)

Dance in Time by Pál Békés, Directed by Lázló Marton, (Abbey Mainstage: 17 March – 20 March)

The Burial at Thebes by Seamus Heaney (adaptation of *Antigone* by Sophocles), Directed by Lorraine Pintal (Abbey Mainstage: 31 March – 3 April)

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare (adapted by Andrej Rozman Roza), Directed by Vito Taufer (Abbey Mainstage: 12 May – 15 May)

The Abbey and New Writing (January to December):

The Wolf of Winter by Paula Meehan, Directed by Andrea Ainsworth (School Performances: 10 December – 16 January, Peacock Theatre Performances: 13 December – 17 January)

Finders Keepers by Peter Sheridan, Directed by Martin Drury (Peacock Theatre: 28 January – 6 March)

Defender of the Faith by Stuart Carolan, Directed by Wilson Milam (Peacock Theatre: 16 March – 24 April)

Savoy by Eugene O'Brien, Directed by Conall Morrison (Peacock Theatre: 5 May – 12 June)

Smokescreen by Paul Mercier, Directed by Paul Mercier (Peacock Theatre: 8 December – January 2005) (*cancelled from programme in August 2004*)*

Summer at the Abbey (May to September):

The Shaughraun by Dion Boucicault, Directed by John McColgan (Abbey Mainstage: 27 May – 31 July) (*extended for second run in Winter 2004-2005*)*

Heavenly Bodies by Stewart Parker, Directed by Lynne Parker (Peacock Theatre: 23 June – 31 July)

The Playboy of the Western World by J. M. Synge, Directed by Ben Barnes (Abbey Mainstage: 3 August – 11 September)

Beauty in the Broken Place by Colm Tóibín, Directed by Niall Henry (Peacock Theatre: 11 August – 11 September)

The Abbey and Ireland (In Repertoire 24 September to 27 November):

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme by Frank Mc Guinness, Directed by Robin Lefevre (Abbey Mainstage: 24 September -27 November)

I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell by Bernard Farrell, Directed by Martin Drury (Abbey Mainstage: 24 September – 27 November)

The Gigli Concert by Tom Murphy, Directed by Ben Barnes (Abbey Mainstage: 24 September – 27 November)

Riders to the Sea/Purgatory/The Dandy Doll by J.M. Synge/W.B. Yeats/ George Fitzmaurice, Directed by Conall Morrison (Peacock Theatre: 24 September – 27 November)

Drama at Inish by Lennox Robinson, Directed by Jim Nolan (Peacock Theatre: 24 September – 27 November) (*cancelled from programme in August 2004*)*

Portia Coughlan by Marina Carr, Directed by Brian Brady (Peacock Theatre: 24 September – 27 November)

APPENDIX B:

THE ABBEY ON TOUR (June 2004 to January 2005)

The Playboy of the Western World, by J.M. Synge, Directed by Ben Barnes

National Tour

Towns: Galway, Letterkenny, Belfast, Athlone, Cork, Kilkenny, Sligo

Dates: Thursday 10 June – Saturday 31 July

USA Tour

Cities: New Haven, Boston, New York, Chicago

Dates: Friday 24 September – Sunday 19 December

The Gigli Concert by Tom Murphy, Directed by Ben Barnes

Australian Tour:

Cities: Brisbane and Sydney

Dates: Friday 3 September – Sunday 19 September

The Plough and the Stars by Sean O'Casey, Directed by Ben Barnes

London Tour:

Dates: January 2005

APPENDIX C:

ABBEY OUTREACH PROGRAMME

The Abbey Debates:

National Theatre and the Nation (Saturday 31 January)

National Language and Identity (Saturday 20 March)

Memory and Repertoire (Saturday 15 May)

The Special Lectures Series:

19 February: *Curtain Up: Founding of the Abbey Theatre* by Cathy Leeney

11 March: *Top Ten at the Abbey: Director's Choice* by Conall Morrison

15 April: *Riots, Rebels and Rumpus through the Years* by Christopher Morash

20 May: *The Abbey's Treasures: From the Archives* by Mairead Delaney

17 June: *The Writer's Theatre* by Anna McMullen

15 July: *Can We Laugh at Ourselves: The Comic Tradition at the Abbey Theatre*
by Tom Hickey

19 August: *The Irish Art of Storytelling* by Peter Sheridan

9 September: *The Abbey and the Wider World* by Nicholas Grene

21 October: *The Art of the Actor* by Kathleen Barrington

2 December: *Facing the Future: The Abbey and Peacock Theatres* by Fintan O'Toole

Reading the Decades: Playreading Series

5 October: *Spreading the News* and *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet* by Lady Gregory/G.B. Shaw (1904-14)

6 October: *Autumn Fire* by T.C. Murray (1914-24)

7 October: *The Moon in the Yellow River* by Denis Johnston (1924-34)

8 October: *The Passing Day* by George Shiels (1934-44)

- 9 October: *The King of Friday's Men* by M.J. Molloy (1944-54)
- 12 October: *Home is the Hero* by Walter Macken (1954-64)
- 13 October: *The Death and Resurrection of Mr. Roche* by Tom Kilroy (1964-74)
- 14 October: *Time Was* by Hugh Leonard (1974-84)
- 15 October: *Prayers of Sherkin* by Sebastian Barry (1984-94)
- 16 October: *Give Me Your Answer Do!* by Brian Friel (1994-2004)

Abbey Birthday Celebration: 27 December 2004. The Amateur Theatre Collaboration (in association with the Drama League of Ireland),

Abbey Main Stage Performances:

On Baile's Strand by W.B. Yeats, Performed by Balally Players, Dundrum

In the Shadow of the Glen by J.M. Synge, Performed by Newpoint Players, Newry

Spreading the News by Lady Augusta Gregory, Performed by St. Patrick's Dramatic Society, Dalkey

Kathleen Ni Houlihan by W.B. Yeats, Performed by Ennis Players

Abbey Rehearsal Room:

Two Chairs – Nuala Hayes, Ellen Cranitch & Jack Lynch lead storytelling sessions based on Lady Gregory's versions of Irish folk tales.

The Sound of the Gong by Fergus Linehan and Tomas Mac Anna (Performed by Kathleen Barrington, Peadar Lambe, Máire Ní Ghráinne, Niall O'Brian & Maire O'Neill) Directed by Tomas Mac Anna.

APPENDIX D:

THE ABBEY STAFF 2004

The Abbey Board:

Eithne Healy (Chairman), Loretta Brennan Glucksman, Eugene Downes, John McColgan, Niall O'Brien, John O'Mahony, Michael J. Somers, John Stapleton

The Executive Staff:

Artistic Director:

*Ben Barnes²⁰

Managing Director:

*Brian Jackson

Executive Office:

*Orla Mulligan

ABBEYONEHUNDRED:

*Anne Marie Kane

*Sharon Murphy

*Jennie Scanlon

Abbey Players:

Des Cave

Clive Geraghty

Archive:

Mairéad Delaney

Assistant Stage Managers:

*Marella Boschi

Stephen Dempsey

*Pamela McQueen

Box Office:

Des Byrne

Clare Downey

*Adam Lawlor

Casting:

*Marie Kelly

Design:

*Laura Howe

*Maree Kearns

*Eimear Murphy

Development:

*Tina Connell

*Aine Kiernan

²⁰ * The star indicates that the Abbey Staff Member as of 2006 is no longer for the Abbey Theatre. Both the advisory council and the Abbey Board were disbanded and reformed in 2005.

Director of the Peacock:	*Ali Curran
Finance:	*Margaret Bradley
	*Margaret Flynn
	Pat O'Connell
H.R. Manager:	*Ciaran McCallion
Honorary Associate Directors:	Vincent Dowling
	Tomás MacAnna
Information Technology:	Ivan Kavanagh
	Dave O'Brien
Lighting:	Mick Doyle
	Brian Fairbrother
	Kevin McFadden
	Barry Madden
Literary:	*Jocelyn Clarke
	*Orla Flanagan
	*Karin McCully
Maintenance:	*Tony Delaney
	Michael Loughnane
Outreach/Education:	*Sinéad Delaney
	Elena Gamble
	Michelle Howe
	*Jean O'Dwyer
	*Anne O'Gorman
Press & Marketing:	*Lynn Dormer
	*Liz Halpin
	Lucy McKeever
Props:	Stephen Molloy
Reception:	*Sandra Williams
Scenic Artists:	Angie Benner
	*Rhonwen Hayes
	Brian Hegarty
	Jennifer Moonan
Sound:	Richard Barragry
	*Eddie Breslin

Stage Directors:

Cormac Carroll
***Finola Eustace**
***Audrey Hesslon**

Stage Door:

John Stapleton
Patrick Gannon
Patrick Whelan

Stage Managers:

***John Andrews**
Gerry Doyle

Technical:

Vanessa Fitz-Simon
***Tommy Nolan**

Voice Director:

Peter Rose
Tony Wakefield

Wardrobe:

Andrea Ainsworth
Sandra Gibney

Marian Kelly
***Sinead Lawlor**

Niamh Lunny
Vicky Miller

Joan O'Clery

ADVISORY COUNCIL:

Minister for the Arts, Sport and Tourism

Minister for Finance

Kathleen Barrington

Frank Cuneen

Paddy Duffy

Clare Duignan

John Farleigh

Clive Geraghty

Des Geraghty

Peadar Lamb

Fergus Linehan

John Lynch

Tomás MacAnna

Patricia McBride
Muriel McCarthy
Jimmy Murphy
Donal Nevin
Edna O'Brien
Ulick O'Connor
Pat O'Reilly
Peter Rose
John Stapleton

APPENDIX E:
ABBHEY STAFF 2006

The Board:

Bryan McMahon (Chairman), Catherine Byrne, Olwen Fouéré, Tom Hickey, Suzanne Kelly, Declan Kiberd, Dr. Jim Mountjoy, Eugene O'Brien, Maurice O'Connell, Lynne Parker, John Stapleton

The Executive Staff:

Director: **Fiach Mac Conghail**

Director of Finance and Administration: **Declan Cantwell**

Literary Director: **Aideen Howard**

Director of Public Affairs: **Catherine Carey**

Director of Technical Services and Operations: **Tony Wakefield**

The Artistic Staff:

Casting Director: **Holly Ni Chiardha**

Voice Director: **Andrea Ainsworth**

The Abbey Players: **Des Cave**
Aidan Kelly

Abbey Theatre/TCD Trainee Director: **Wayne Jordan**

Anglo-Irish Bank Writer-In Association: **Enda Walsh**

Associate Artists: **David Gothard**
Paul Keogan
Conall Morrison
Bairbre Ni Chaoimh

Honorary Associate Directors: **Vincent Dowling**
Tomás MacAnna

The Finance and Administration Staff:

Financial Controller:

Paul Meagher

Human Resources:

Keira Matthews

IT Manager:

**Dave O'Brien
Ivan Kavanagh**

Accounts:

**Suzanne Lowe
Pat O'Connell
Derek Garland
Paul Meagher
Ruth Kavanagh**

The Literary Staff:

Archive:

Mairéad Delaney

Litarary:

Aoife Habenicht

Temporary Senior Reader:

Conall Quinn

The Public Affairs Staff:

Box Office Manager:

Clare Downey (Acting)

Box Office:

**Des Byrne
Catherine Casey
David Clarke
Clare Downey
Anne Marie Doyle
Lorraine Hanna
Marie Claire Hoysted
Deborah McHugh
Iain Mullins**

Front of House:

**John Baynes
Stephen Brennan
Ian Cooke
Claire Devregille
Con Doyle
Adam Doyle
Gavin Foyler
Philip Hanna
Michelle Gilmore
Michael McCormack
David McMenamy
Conor Matthews
Dominick Neinart**

	Jane Nolan Brian O'Brien Aine O'Sullivan Magdalena Segieda Noelle Tracey
Marketing Manager:	Janice McAdam
Outreach/Education Programme Officer:	Elena Gamble
Outreach/Education:	Michelle Howe
Press & Publicity Manager:	Jane Nolan
Press & Publicity:	Siobhan Colgan Janice McAdam Jeanette McGerry
Keane	Lucy McKeever
Public Programme:	Dominic Campbell
Reception:	Donna Murphy
Stage Door:	Patrick Whelan
The Technical Staff:	
Construction Manager:	Peter Rose
Construction:	Brian Comiskey Kenneth Crowe Mark Joseph Darley John Kavanagh Bart O'Farrell Peter Rose
Head of Costumes:	Joan O'Clery
Wardrobe:	Marianne Brun Sandra Gibney Marian Kelly Niamh Lunny Vicky Miller Joan O'Clery
Head of Lighting and Sound:	Kevin McFadden
Lighting:	Brian Fairbrother Barry Madden

Maintenance: Mick Doyle
Michael Loughnane

Production: Vanessa Fitz-Simon
Andy Keogh
Jon Woodley

Props: Stephen Molloy

Scenic Artists: Angie Benner
Jennifer Moonan
Brian Hegarty

Head of Stage Management –Company Stage Manager: John Stapleton

Stage Management: Stephen Dempsey
Tara Furlong
Liz Gerhardy
Audrey Hession
Pam McQueen
Aisling Mooney

Stage Technicians: Pat Dillon
Gerry Doyle
John Finnegan
Patrick Gannon
Larry Jones
Shane Kenny
Mick Russell

Sound: Richard Barragry
Eoin Byrne
Cormac Carroll

Production Manager: Andy Keogh

Cleaning: Brian Kelly

APPENDIX F:

Investigation of Abbey Finances 2004, Committee of Public Accounts, Vol. No. 95

Vol. No. 95

Thursday, 24 November 2005

AN COISTE UM CHUNTAIS PHOIBLÍ

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy D. Boyle,	Deputy J. Higgins,
Deputy J. Curran,	Deputy J. McGuinness,
Deputy S. Fleming,	Deputy M. Smith.
Deputy T. Hayes,	

DEPUTY M. NOONAN IN THE CHAIR.

The committee met in private session and resumed in public session at 11.45 a.m.

Mr. J. Purcell (*An tArd Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste*) called and examined.

► **The Arts Council: Financial Statements 2003 and 2004.**

► **The National Theatre Society Limited: Financial Statements 2004.**

Chairman: The items on the agenda for today are the Arts Council financial statements for 2003 and 2004 and the National Theatre Society Limited financial statements 2004. We have some relevant correspondence, dated 15 November 2005, from Mr. Fiach MacConghail, director of the National Theatre Society Limited, re the management structure of the Abbey Theatre and also enclosing a statement from Ms Eithne Healy, chairman of the Abbey board, issued on 20 July 2005, outlining the board's response to an independent internal investigation carried out by KPMG into the financial accounts for 2004.

Witnesses should be aware that they do not enjoy absolute privilege before the committee. The attention of members and witnesses is drawn to the fact that as and from 2 August 1998, section 10 of the Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Compellability, Privileges and Immunities of Witnesses) Act 1997 grants certain rights to persons identified in the course of the committee's proceedings. These rights include the right to give evidence; the right to produce or send documents to the committee; the right to appear before the committee, either in person or through a representative; the right to make a written or oral submission; the right to request the committee to direct the attendance of witnesses and the production of documents, and the right to cross-examine

witnesses. For the most part, these rights may be exercised only with the consent of the committee. Persons being invited before the committee are made aware of these rights and any persons identified in the course of proceedings who are not present may have to be made aware of them and provided with a transcript of the relevant part of the committee's proceedings if the committee considers it appropriate in the interests of justice.

Notwithstanding this provision in the legislation, I remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. They are also reminded of the provisions in Standing Order 156 that the committee shall refrain from inquiring into the merits of a policy or policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government, or the merits of the objectives of such policies.

I invite Ms Mary Cloake, director of the Arts Council, Mr. Fiach MacConghail, director of the Abbey Theatre, and the representative from the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism to introduce their officials.

Ms Mary Cloake: I am accompanied by Ms Ellen Pugh, finance manager, and Mr. John O'Kane, arts programme manager.

Mr. Fiach MacConghail: I am accompanied by Mr. Declan Cantwell, director of finance administration at the Abbey Theatre.

Mr. Niall Ó Donnchú: I am assistant secretary at the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism and I am accompanied by Mr. Barry Murphy, principal officer at the Department.

Chairman: I invite Mr. Purcell to introduce the Arts Council financial statements 2003 and 2004 and the National Theatre Society Limited financial statements 2004.

Mr. John Purcell: I will begin with the easy one. The Arts Council accounts for 2003 and 2004 received a clear audit report from me. There were no material issues arising from the audit on which I felt I should report.

The situation in regard to the 2004 accounts for the National Theatre Society Limited is somewhat different. I had cause to include an audit supplement to my report in that case. The society is a private company limited by shares. It operates two co-located theatres, the Abbey Theatre and the Peacock Theatre. The society carries out its purpose through those two theatres and also by touring nationally and internationally. In common with most, if not all national theatres, the company would find it impossible to exist on box office receipts and sponsorship and other income, so it is heavily dependent on the State for continuing financial support. For many years the annual operating grant has been channelled through the Arts Council. Even with this subvention the company has found it difficult to make ends meet.

The financial problems started to become particularly acute in 2003, when a deficit of €800,000 was incurred which doubled the accumulated deficit up to that point. The

substantial rise in the scale of the ongoing deficit to €1.6 million prompted me to seek reassurance from the company that action would be taken to bring it back to manageable proportions. In this regard I received a letter of representation from the board to that effect and also received assurances from the then managing director that an operating deficit of €110,000 was budgeted for 2004 and that measures were proposed to reduce overheads which would have the long term effect of cutting the deficit.

On receipt of those assurances I was in a position to give an unqualified audit report on the 2003 accounts. The reality turned out to be totally different. When the accounts for 2004 were being prepared for audit, it became apparent that the deficit for that year was far in excess of the budgeted figure and the revised budgeted figure. This resulted in the board appointing an accounting firm to report on the facts underlying the discovery and disclosure that the company's financial reporting system had been substantially under-recording the operating loss for 2004.

The accounting firm pinpointed the problem as emanating from the monthly management accounts which were not prepared in a way that showed the true financial position. These accounts, which were compiled from best estimates of expenditure at various points during the year, formed the basis of the board's and its finance and audit committee's monitoring of the company's finances. While the system of monthly management accounts had been operating for many years, its deficiencies had not caused material distortions until 2004, when the upsurge in activities associated with the Abbey Theatre's centenary programme pushed expenditure up to €12.6 million in that year, from €7.4 million in the previous year.

The final amount of the operating deficit for 2004 was established by my audit at €1.85 million. However, that is before the application of €1 million of a €2 million stabilisation grant from the Arts Council towards the reduction of the accumulated deficit. The main contributory factors to the large deficit in 2004 were the costs of the activities associated with the Abbey's centenary celebrations being greater than anticipated, a shortfall in sponsorship income and a deficit incurred on the Abbey's touring programme.

The company's finances have not really improved in 2005. An audit for the first six months revealed a deficit of nearly €600,000 for the period. The company expects that the annual deficit to 31 December 2005 will be in the region of €900,000. Members will be aware that agreement has been reached on a new corporate structure for the operation of the Abbey and Peacock theatres. It is intended that the assets and liabilities of the company will be transferred to a new company, Abbey Theatre-Amharclann Náisiúnta na hÉireann, by 31 December 2005. An application will then be made to the Registrar of Companies to have the existing company voluntarily struck off the register. It is to be hoped that this new beginning incorporating the ongoing change process will help to put the national theatre on a much sounder footing for the future.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Purcell. Ms Cloake has indicated she does not wish to make an opening statement. Even in circumstances where a scripted opening statement is not made, the committee likes Accounting Officers to make preliminary remarks to give it some focus and set the agenda from the perspective of the body concerned. Will Ms Cloake do this, please?

Ms Cloake: Very broadly on the accounts for 2003 and 2004, the Arts Council received a grant from Government of €44 million in 2003 and €52.5 million in 2004, plus €2 million which has already been referred to as a special grant for the Abbey Theatre. These moneys are used primarily in the financial assistance of artists and organisations. Approximately 85% of its annual expenditure is directly in the form of grants either to organisations or to individual artists. The Arts Council also offers an advice and information service which accounts for approximately 5% of its expenditure on publications, conferences and other similar initiatives. Over those two years we have published reports dealing with the arts and young people, strategic support for the arts in the Gaeltacht and similar themes. Less than 10% of our funding goes to administration, with approximately €1.4 million spent on administration and €2.4 million on salaries. This is a summary of our activities.

Chairman: I invite Mr. MacConghail to make a similar statement. He also indicated he does not have a scripted opening statement. I invite him to throw some light on the crisis during the summer when we all gazed open-mouthed at the affairs of the Abbey Theatre and wondered how things could have drifted to the point that they got into such a sorry mess.

Mr. MacConghail: I will do my best. As a preface it is important to state that neither I nor Mr. Cantwell were working for the Abbey Theatre during 2004. I took up my position of director-designate on 1 May 2005. Arising out of the crisis the board invited me to forward my position as director-CEO of the organisation on 1 June 2005, which I accepted. I then appointed Mr. Declan Cantwell as interim chief financial officer in July 2005 and he subsequently won an open competition and interview and was appointed director of finance administration on 1 November 2005.

In that context we will endeavour to give the committee as much detailed information as it requires. Needless to say, the activities of the Abbey Theatre offstage were the focus of both the media and the public attention throughout the summer of 2005. This proves the interest and the stake which people have in the role of the Abbey Theatre in our society. It is also clear that the Abbey Theatre for many years had worked under very severe and extreme financial difficulties, namely, through its grant from the State and also by managing its own core business. The recommendations and findings of the report commissioned by the board of the Abbey Theatre from KPMG attest to this.

In the statement by Eithne Healy of 20 July 2005, the board has accepted the findings and recommendations of the KPMG report. The Comptroller and Auditor General will attest that we have come quite a long way in implementing them. This has included the reorganisation of the management of the organisation in terms of senior management, systems and controls and reporting to the stakeholders, namely, the Arts Council, the Department, the bank and its own staff.

We are very much on our way in terms of transforming the legal governance set-up of the Abbey Theatre and also the senior management structure. The way we do our business will become much more transparent and efficient as we move into 2006.

Chairman: I understand the present company will be liquidated and replaced by a new company structure. What is the timeline for that change? How will the new company be

structured and will it have a statutory basis?

Mr. MacConghail: Following one of the recommendations arising from its internal consultation with its shareholders, the Arts Council and the Government, an EGM of the National Theatre Society Limited in August recommended that the company would dissolve itself and move from a company limited by shares to a company limited by guarantee of which there would be 11 members. A process of nomination for the board has already been initiated. The Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism has appointed the chair, Judge Bryan McMahon, and two members, Suzanne Kelly and Tom Hickey.

What will happen next is that a selection process has been initiated. Three members on a selection committee will appoint the remaining members of the board under a very clear transparent skills matrix. The three members of the selection committee are Judge Bryan McMahon, as incoming chair of the new company, Abbey Theatre Limited, Amharclann na Mainistreach Teoranta, Olive Braiden, chairperson of the Arts Council, and a third outgoing member of the advisory council, John Fairley. Those three people are at the moment canvassing and selecting according to a skills matrix ranging from business and accounting skills to cultural and artistic skills. It is hoped that the board will be announced by the end of the year. I am not privy to the private deliberations of the committee and it would not be appropriate for me to respond to what those dealings are.

The process of transfer from the National Theatre Society Limited to the Abbey Theatre Limited is well on its way. The incorporation of the new company will shortly be done. In the meantime my colleague here, Declan Cantwell, has been in negotiations with the unions the employees and the stakeholders in terms of reassuring them and conforming to statutory and legal obligations in terms of the transfer of assets, liabilities and other assets that might pertain to the transfer.

To answer the Chairman's final question, it is not envisaged that the Abbey Theatre Limited would be established on a statutory basis. It will be a private company limited by guarantee with an appointment mechanism. It will be State-funded through the Arts Council.

Deputy M. Smith: The arts in various diverse forms play a very important role in our society and should always be supported. The past two years have seen a significant increase in grant aid which is probably close to 40%. I ask Ms Cloake the procedures when transferring grants between two different organisations to ensure the Arts Council knows as best it can know what is happening. It is not that the council should interfere with what is going on. However, it should have a reasonably good notion that the money is going where it is intended to go.

Ms Cloake: Organisations apply to the Arts Council on an annual basis in the autumn, in September or October. They submit a detailed programme for the year ahead. We take several weeks at the end of the year and subsequent to the Book of Estimates announcement we look carefully through all the competing demands on the table and make decisions on the basis of our policies. After the grant decisions are made by the council, for the bulk of our grants we set up the revenue programme which is the biggest programme we offer. In 2005 we spent €44 million in this way. Revenue funding enables organisations to pay their operating costs and something towards their activities.

A letter of offer is issued to the organisation once the decision is made. The letter of offer is based on the proposal for the activities the following year. The organisation responds and outlines the activities it can undertake on the basis of the offer. The council then proceeds to issue a document called “standard conditions of financial assistance”. It is a comprehensive document — I have copies with me — which outlines 22 conditions and checks the organisation must meet if it is to receive the funding. These include the submission of regular reports to the Arts Council, the submission of accounts on the preceding year and a general commitment to keep in touch on whether plans are going according to the proposal outlined at the beginning of the year.

When the end of the year comes around and the organisation applies for funding for the following year, we ask it to include a statement of its achievements so that we know that the money has been allocated to the purposes for which it was given. That is the annual cycle. During the year there is quite a lot of contact between our staff and the various members of staff of the individual organisations to see that things are going according to plan.

Deputy M. Smith: Did the Arts Council ever have any notion of what was going wrong with the finances of the Abbey Theatre?

Ms Cloake: In about 1997 or 1998 the finances of the Abbey were very healthy. The problems started in approximately 2001 when a small operating deficit showed for the first time. There was a pattern over the subsequent years, about which we were somewhat concerned. However, for the early years of this pattern of deficit we felt it could be brought under control. In 2003, as the Comptroller and Auditor General has pointed out, the situation worsened and we took some steps when we knew how bad the situation was. I will ask Mr. John O’Kane to set out these steps, particularly from June 2004 when it became apparent that the difficulties were going to be of very significant proportions.

Mr. John O’Kane: The main thing that happened was the decision by the Arts Council to introduce an independent consultant to have a look at the basis of the operational model of the Abbey Theatre. The consultant reported in November 2004 and made a series of proposals as to how the Arts Council might proceed. Arising from that, the council decided to apply to the Government for additional funding to offer to the Abbey Theatre. The Government agreed to provide an additional special funding grant of €2 million. When the offer of €2 million was made to the Arts Council, it was linked to a series of conditions which were intended to ensure the money was used to maximum effect. These included that half of the €2 million, €1 million, would go towards deficit reduction. This would still leave the Abbey in a position in 2005 where it faced a deficit, but it would be expected and required to trade out of it.

A series of investments in a change process around how the theatre was operating in 2005 was to be introduced. The payments drawdown of the balance of €1 million would be linked to the theatre achieving various targets. That was how the Arts Council responded at that time. A certain amount of progress was made in that regard in the early part of 2005, as I have outlined. It was revealed in May 2005 that the scale of the Abbey Theatre’s financial problems was much more serious than had been envisaged.

Deputy M. Smith: I would like to ask about the green document. Has the plethora of

conditions for the future allocation of grants, which has been outlined by the Arts Council delegation, been dramatically changed and enhanced? Does the Arts Council propose to make changes to the conditions?

Ms Cloake: Yes. The Arts Council is due to publish a reviewed version of the conditions to coincide with the 2006 grant allocations.

Deputy M. Smith: I wish to ask Mr. Ó Donnchú a question. I am familiar with the conditions of the sports capital grants programme. Not only do voluntary sporting groups have to produce title deeds, leaseholds and proof of planning permission before a grant is allocated to them, but they also have to raise 30% of the funds they require. To what extent was the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism aware of the matters under discussion? What conditions are applied by the Department when it is allocating the resources which have been mentioned? I compliment the Department on the system that is in place in respect of the grants with which I am familiar. The system works very well and many wonderful facilities have been provided. Is there a certain laxity in the conditions for the allocation of other grants? What does Mr. Ó Donnchú know about such conditions?

Mr. Ó Donnchú: I assume the Deputy is referring to grants which are offered directly by the Arts Council, rather than grants which are offered by the Department.

Deputy M. Smith: That would not be a very big assumption.

Mr. Ó Donnchú: The Arts Act 2003 provides that the Arts Council is independent of the Department in the exercise of its functions. Therefore, the Department does not have any direct role in the assessment of the applications which are received by the Arts Council, or in the formulation of the conditions which accompany the allocation of grant aid or which apply to the monitoring and implementation of projects which are grant aided. The Department is not aware of any particular “laxity”, to use Deputy Smith’s term, in the processing of such applications, in the awarding of grant aid or in the implementation of projects.

The degree of correspondence between the Department and the Arts Council at the time of the year when the council is being awarded its annual budget is extremely high. Such correspondence relates to overall programmes rather than specific projects. After the Arts Council has been awarded its annual budget through the annual Estimates process, the disposition of that budget, for example in the form of individual grant aid, is entirely a matter for the council.

Deputy M. Smith: Mr. MacConghail said that as he took up the cudgels from 1 May last, he would like the committee to be lenient on anything that happened prior to that date. The Arts Council had deficits of over €700,000 in 2002, over €800,000 in 2003 and over €1.8 million in 2004. Given that the council’s overall annual income is approximately €12 million, a deficit of €1.8 million is a deficit of approximately 15%. Notwithstanding the work of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, which imposed a second audit requirement, it is hard to understand why so many people, including the board members, did not know about a deficit that was quite sizeable — it was a gaping wound in the council’s finances — in the context of the council’s overall

operations.

Most Irish people are inspired by the imagination and everything else that is related to the diversity that exists in the community. We want to encourage such activity because it is a significant part of what we are — the spirit of the people and everything else. The arts do not really have a future if some of the fundamental aspects of how they should be managed are not adhered to. Can Mr. MacConghail enlighten the committee in that regard?

The KPMG report outlined the weaknesses in the financial controls. It mentioned that some problems were undetected and some costs were underscored. It made various recommendations. It staggers me to think that an individual at some level within the council, which is a sizeable operation, did not notice that it had exceeded its budget so significantly, especially as that similar problems had been experienced in 2002 and 2003. Hardly anybody noticed that the operational deficit in 2004 was more than twice the size of the deficits in each of 2002 and 2003. Can Mr. MacConghail explain how that happened?

Mr. MacConghail: I will attempt to give my analysis of the matter. I wish to highlight the two biggest beads on my rosary; clocha mo phaidrín, as it is said in Irish. My first challenge is to continue to establish the Abbey Theatre as Ireland's national theatre, with a responsibility to the nation it helped to found in the early part of the 20th century, when it articulated the views, emotions and thoughts of all communities in all corners of Ireland. The second obligation I have — the second bead on my rosary — is to manage public funds and the theatre's core business properly. That will not be possible if I do not have an active engagement with the theatre's stakeholders.

The business of the Abbey Theatre, as a company, is to run two theatres, the Abbey Theatre and the Peacock Theatre, with approximately 16 or 17 productions each year. It has a duty to organise at least one, if not two, national tours each year. It also has a responsibility to train, develop, cajole and harass writers, artists, actors and directors. The theatre needs State support if it is to do all these things. It is my understanding that the theatre received year-on-year increases of approximately 1.4% in its State support between 2002 and 2005 to enable it to do its work. Those increases do not take inflation, increases in the cost of living, normal benchmarking and pay awards into account.

It is evident that the management and reporting of the theatre's core business was not up to scratch in the past. The KPMG report pointed the finger at the board, the finance audit committee and the management, *inter alia*. The Comptroller and Auditor General will agree that the KPMG report made some significant, clear and detailed recommendations. I would like to reassure the Deputy by asking Mr. Cantwell to outline what the theatre has achieved since July. I cannot speak about what happened before then, but I assure the members of the committee that the alarm bells will go off earlier if they are needed again, which I do not think will be the case. We envisage that control and reporting procedures will be put in place to ensure that direct and clear information is given to the incoming board and the stakeholders.

Deputy M. Smith: Mr. MacConghail has said that the Abbey Theatre's grant was increased by between 1% and 2% each year for two years.

Mr. MacConghail: It was increased by 1.4% between 2002 and 2005.

Deputy M. Smith: The 2004 Estimate anticipated that the theatre would make a loss of €100,000 that year. At that stage, Mr. MacConghail or staff at the Abbey Theatre were aware of the level of grant aid.

Mr. MacConghail: Let me clarify that issue as it raises a difficulty facing the Abbey Theatre and the Arts Council. The latter has made an eloquent argument to Government about the fact that it receives its estimates around this time of the year and must make decisions on what funding will be allocated to each arts organisation from the date of receipt of funding and the end of January. As a result, the Abbey Theatre does not know until late January what funding it will receive and how it will support a programme for 2006.

Deputy M. Smith: While I support multi-annual budgeting, I am afraid we have multi-annual budgeting which throws us up on the wrong side.

Mr. Declan Cantwell: As Mr. MacConghail pointed out, I came on board in early July this year in the role of interim chief financial officer and subsequently took up the full-time position of director of finance and administration. On joining the Abbey Theatre in July, my first task was to help the board and management of the company to understand, as of 30 June, what costs had been incurred and what would be the deficit or surplus. In an effort to do this, we enlisted the help of Horwath Bastow Charlton chartered accountants to perform an audit of the first six months of the year. The outcome of the audit was that the deficit for the first six months was a figure of €592,000. Out of this exercise, the board and management of the company and I had a good understanding of what was the deficit and what are the costs of running the Abbey Theatre. In turn, this allowed us to prepare a budget, a forecast to the end of 2005 and a business plan covering the period 2006 to 2008.

The other exercise I performed when I joined the Abbey Theatre was to examine its internal controls and, in particular, the financial reporting infrastructure and model being used by the theatre. As the KPMG report pointed out, the methodology used by the company in producing the management accounts had a number of weaknesses, which perhaps boil down to two categories. The root of the weaknesses lies in the insignificant level of investment in the company's accounting system, that is, the reporting system used to produce the management accounts. What this meant was that the reporting capability of the system was not used in terms of its functionality and certain modules that could be attached to the accounting system were not being used. This forced those producing the management reports into a position in which they made assumptions about costs and revenues as they produced the management reports. They assumed that certain costs and revenues were in line with budgets with the result that, in certain cases, actual costs and revenues were different from those being reported by the management reporting system.

Deputy M. Smith: What would happen to a private business concern which operated on these types of assumptions?

Mr. Cantwell: That is a difficult question. Obviously, this approach is not an effective

way to produce management reports. Good quality management reports are crucial in terms of letting management know what decisions they should make in future knowing what has happened in the past. The management team and board of any company which did not have access to this sort of information would be at a disadvantage.

Deputy M. Smith: In the long run, it the assurances provided for future conduct that will count. While we do not like what occurred in the past, we cannot alter it. The witnesses already answered the Chairman's questions on the KPMG recommendations, timeframes, the establishment of a new company, the board and other matters. The Comptroller and Auditor General indicated the operating deficit thus far this year is between €800,000 and €900,000. Are the witnesses in a position to assure the committee that proper management financial controls will be in place during the ongoing process of fully implementing the recommendations and that, excluding the possibility that unforeseeable events may take place, the type of management practices and financial controls used in the past will be consigned to history? I hope the circumstances which came to light last year, when the board was described as too passive, too trusting and not robust enough, is changing.

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