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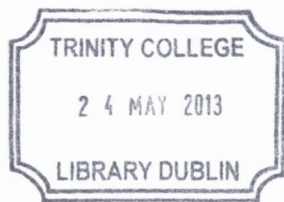
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'Historically revealing': A cultural analysis of four recovered plays by Irish women,
1900-1925

Mary Elizabeth Velma O'Donoghue Greene

A thesis submitted to The School of Drama, Film and Music at the University of Dublin,
Trinity College, in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2012



Thesis 9982

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*For my family
&
In loving memory of my parents,
Breda and Tim O'Donoghue*

Summary

This thesis concerns the retrieval and analysis of four plays written in two distinct collaborative configurations by early twentieth-century Irish women, Geraldine Cummins (1890-1968), Susanne Day (1876-1964) and Hester Travers Smith (née Dowden 1869-1949). The focus on these previously un-critiqued playwrights emerged from consideration of 28 plays and associated material uncovered in the 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' in the Cork City & County Archives. The project takes a multi-disciplinary feminist approach using a four-chapter structure to examine the paired collaborations of Cummins and Day, and of Dowden and Cummins; their contribution to the emergent Irish theatre movement and the relation of their work to Irish cultural and feminist discourses.

The methodology employed is informed by feminist cultural studies regarding notions of women and gender in relation to cultural heritage and the subsequent effect on Irish theatre history and canon formation which, in post-independence nationalist narratives, omitted diverse contributions of women playwrights. This approach required the exploration of the body of plays and associated material located in the 'Cummins' Collection' and the selection of four plays which allowed for consideration of their relationship with Irish theatre and the Irish women's movement. Chapter 1, which provides a framework for Chapters 2 and 3, describes the feminist theatre history project of recovering dramatic works by women writers by placing the lives and work of Cummins and Day within the socio-political conditions they inhabited. This chapter includes a discussion of the playwrights' involvement in the suffragist and early women's movement in Ireland and provides an overview of the plays, playwrights and commentators involved in the Abbey Theatre's second decade.

Of the four plays selected for analysis in this thesis, two, from a group of three peasant plays by Cummins and Day reached the stage of professional production; a 2 Act drama *Broken Faith* (1913) and a 3 Act comedy *Fox and Geese* (1913) were produced by the Abbey Theatre. These plays are discussed in Chapter 2 within the context of the authors' philanthropic and suffragist activities and their Anglo-Irish heritage. The lack of a body of contemporaneous reviews and absence of evidential dramaturgy required analyses of the plays largely informed by autobiography, published and archival documents and by social and cultural studies scholarship of the period. In respect of recent scholarship I draw on the work of Geraldine Meaney, Maria Luddy, Rosemary Cullen-Owens, Cliona Murphy, David Lloyd, David Cairns, Shaun Richards, Steve Wilmer, Cathy Leeney, Ian Walsh, Lisa Fitzpatrick, Mark Phelan, Jacky Bratton, Melissa Sihra, Paul Murphy, Margaret Kelleher and particularly Mary Trotter; all of whose extensive cultural research of Irish society and women in the Irish theatre has opened the historical field for further exploration and analysis.

In Chapter 3 Cummins' and Day's 1 Act tragedy *Fidelity* is explored through a material feminist and cultural reading. This approach reveals the feminist subtext within this play which was rejected several times by the Abbey Theatre. My analysis of *Fidelity* is informed by the work of the aforementioned scholars and also the seminal work on women and playwriting in the nineteenth-century of Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin who posit the notion of 'sociability' as a theoretical concept by which to analyze the vast numbers of women actively involved in the theatre. This chapter also includes a reflective account of two contemporary productions of '*Fidelity*' in which I argue that the process of production can illuminate the interrelationship or 'kinship' between the disciplines of theatre practice and theatre history. This experimental methodology is informed by the work of Tracy C. Davis' scholarship in performance studies.

In Chapter 4 attention shifts to the later collaborative writing partnership of Geraldine Cummins and Hester Dowden which began in Dublin and continued in London to where they relocated after the outbreak of the First World War (1914-18). In contrast to the feminist concerns and social realism of the plays Cummins' wrote with Day, her collaboration with Dowden emerges as an attempt to make public their shared interest and livelihoods within the field of the paranormal. The first sub-section of this chapter contextualizes the phenomenon of occultism amongst middle-class society in *fin de siècle* Ireland and England and examines Cummins' and Dowden's involvement in this area. Primarily occupied as mediums in the practice of the paranormal and their work for The Society of Psychical Research, Cummins and Dowden co-wrote the final play examined in this thesis, a 3 Act melodrama *The Extraordinary Play*. This un-produced play was written in 1924 following a series of séances in which the women purported to have been in contact with the spirit of Oscar Wilde. *The Extraordinary Play* opens up avenues of discourse regarding questions of authorship, the creative process and the use of the occult as a means to create a dramatic text. Interrogating the writing strategies of these Anglo-Irish women who lived unconventional, autonomous lives in British society, this chapter is informed by Bette London whose innovative scholarship examines the gender-specific strategy of mediumship and collaborative writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries.

Whilst problematic to a degree, the paucity of material clues in respect of all four plays examined in this work does not diminish the value of submitting these texts to material feminist, cultural analysis. In fact, doing so provides a textual framework within which the culturally-specific female voices of the authors, placed at this interesting juncture in Irish theatre and Anglo-Irish socio-cultural history, can be revealed. In terms of Irish theatre studies these reclaimed authors' voices represent an important opportunity with which to analyze the gender values and dynamics within their writing, and to explore and address the gaps in historical knowledge of women's 'cultural economy' - particularly in respect of the produced plays of Cummins and Day.

*I am writing
a woman out of legend.
I am thinking
how hard it is - this story.
How hard it will be to tell.*

'Story' Eavan Boland (1994)

Introduction and Critical Considerations

The winds of change that reconfigured perceptions of global history in the latter decades of the twentieth century continue to inform the field of Irish theatre history, particularly in relation to the cultural significance of women playwrights. Recent publications include *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland*;¹ *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*;² *Modern Irish Theatre*;³ *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*;⁴ *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women Writers and Traditions Vols. IV and V*;⁵ *The Dictionary of Munster Women Writers*;⁶ *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*;⁷ *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama, 1899-1949*;⁸ *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage*;⁹ *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships*;¹⁰ and *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles and Imitations*.¹¹ Such studies reflect a wealth of material evidence that support and promote re-evaluations of women's contribution to Irish theatre history. In seeking to add to the growing bank of knowledge in terms of women playwrights this thesis introduces and provides analyses of four recovered plays co-authored in two distinct collaborations by early twentieth-century Anglo-Irish women, Geraldine

¹ M. Kelleher, & J.H. Murphy, eds., *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997).

² Mary Trotter, *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Dramatic Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

³ Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

⁴ L. Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵ A. Bourke, S. Kilfeather, M. Luddy, M. MacCurtain, G. Meaney, M. Ni Dhonnchadha, M. O'Dowd, & C. Wills, eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing. Vols. IV. & V.* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).

⁶ Tina O'Toole, General ed., *Dictionary of Munster Women Writers 1800-2000* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005).

⁷ Melissa Sihra, ed. *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave & Macmillan, 2007)

⁸ Paul Murphy, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Writing 1899-1949* (Basingstoke: Palgrave & Macmillan, 2008).

⁹ Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2010).

¹⁰ Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (London: Ithaca, Cornell Publishing Press, 1999).

¹¹ John Stokes, *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles and Imitations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Cummins and Susanne R. Day,¹² and also by Geraldine Cummins and Hester Dowden.¹³ Associated documents, including autobiography and memoirs relating to the lives and writing practices of these women open up new avenues of exploration in respect of women's playwriting legacy and women's social history. This thesis will show how Cummins and Day, who were concerned with gender/class issues of equality, integrated political acumen and moral arguments into their co-authored works. The value of subjecting recovered women's texts to cultural analysis is further proven when the lens of exploration in this thesis focuses on a play from the dramatic collaboration of Cummins and Dowden; particularly in respect of their unique strategy of constructing a play from material purportedly acquired through psychic practices.

The impetus for subjecting these hitherto un-critiqued plays to theatre scholarship emerged from a sense of frustration experienced when, as an undergraduate student, I was surprised by the limited representation of women playwrights in Irish Theatre history.¹⁴ Subsequent research of the Abbey Theatre archives revealed a substantial volume of women-authored plays submitted to the Abbey Theatre from 1912-1920, of which only 3 were accepted for production.¹⁵ With the exception of Lady Augusta

¹² Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day co-wrote a group of 3 peasant plays: *Broken Faith* (1913); *Fox and Geese* (1913); and *Fidelity* (1913)

¹³ Geraldine Cummins and Hester Dowden co-wrote 4 plays: *Happy Paupers* (1917); *The Ivory Fan* (1917); *Witchery* (1919); and *The Extraordinary Play* (1924)

¹⁴ Prior to contemporary studies of recovering women dramatists, Lady Augusta Gregory was the exception in respect of a body of scholarship relating to women playwrights' contributions to Irish Theatre; however, Gregory's role in the early National Theatre movement was largely presented as that of theatre manager and occasional creative muse of W.B. Yeats. One other woman author given consideration on my undergraduate course was Teresa Deevy who, whilst popular as an Abbey playwright in the period 1930-36, was all but forgotten until the resurrection of her plays in 1995 prompted closer scholarship. For examples of studies on Deevy, see Cathy Leeney, Eibhear Walshe and Christie Fox

¹⁵ The Abbey Theatre submission archives show that from 1912-1920 there were 109 women-authored plays submitted for selection through the standard Abbey Theatre submission process - see Abbey Theatre Archives. Lr. Abbey St. Dublin. However, during this period just 28 of the plays produced by the Abbey Theatre were women-authored. Of these plays, only 3 are recorded as reaching production through the Abbey Theatre submission process - *Broken Faith* (prod. 1913) and *Fox and Geese* by Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day (prod. 1917), and *Aliens* by Rose McKenna (prod. 1918). The Abbey archives demonstrates that the majority of Abbey productions of women's work from 1912-1920 includes 20 plays from Lady Gregory - *McDonough's Wife* (2 productions 1912/13); *The Workhouse Ward* (31 productions including 9 on tour); *Dergovilla* (2 productions 1912/13); *The Rising of the Moon* (34 productions including 10 on tour); *The Gaol Gate* (13 productions including 2 on tour); *Spreading the News* (23 productions including 5 on tour); *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, co-authored with W.B. Yeats (28 productions including 10 on tour); *Coats* (7 productions including 3 on tour); *Hyacinth Halvey* (21 productions including 7 on tour); *The Jackdaw* 10

Gregory the majority of the women playwrights whose work was produced by the Abbey Theatre in this time-frame achieved just one production each. However, I was interested to find that co-authors, Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day realized a modicum of success as Abbey playwrights by having two of their plays produced, a 2-Act drama, *Broken Faith* and a 3-Act comedy, *Fox and Geese*.¹⁶ Subsequent research revealed a published text of *Fox and Geese* in a 1917 series of Abbey-produced plays by Maunsel & Co. (Dublin);¹⁷ and in the National Library of Ireland I found information relating to Geraldine Cummins' primary occupation as a published writer in the field of psychical research. From this source I also learned of the existence of the 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', housed in the Cork Archive Institute,¹⁸ which contains a body of documents and original play scripts including *Broken Faith* and *Fox and Geese*. I decided to base my undergraduate dissertation on these collaborative plays by Cummins and Day but was disappointed to learn there was no research access to the Cork Archive Institute at that time and had to reassess my dissertation plan.¹⁹

My interest in marginalized or forgotten Irish women playwrights generated a desire to continue the project of recovery through postgraduate research and, as access to

productions including 1 on tour); *Damer's Gold* (6 productions including 2 on tour); *The Canavans* (2 productions 1913/14); *Mirandolini*, translated by Gregory (3 productions in 1913); *Bogie Man* (on tour in 1912 and produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1919); *Kincora* (2 productions in 1914); *Shanwalla* (3 productions in 1915 including 2 on tour); *Hanrahan's Oath* (a single production in 1918); *The Dragon* (2 productions in 1919); *A Nativity Play*, co-written with Douglas Hyde (a single production in 1919) and *The Golden Apple* (a single production in 1920). The remaining 5 plays produced by the Abbey Theatre from 1912-1920 came to the stage outside of the submissions process and include 1 play from Gertrude Robins, *The Homecoming* (1913); 1 play from Mrs Bart Kennedy, *My Lord* (1913); 1 play from Dorothy McCardle, *Atonement* (1918); 1 play from Sadie Casey (also cited as Mrs Theodore Maynard) *Brady* (1919) and 1 play from Katherine Frances Purden, *Cradle and Crib* (1920).

¹⁶ *Broken Faith* was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1913 (April 24-26); the play toured with the Abbey Players to Tralee (April 28-May 1) and the Town Hall in Mallow (May 2-3) and was revived on the Abbey stage in Dublin (October 27-29). *Fox and Geese* (written in 1913) was produced in 1917 by the Abbey Theatre (February 2-7) and revived in December 1917. This play was also presented by Arthur Sinclair and the Irish Players at the Opera House, Cork in February 1918 and during the summer of that year was programmed on the Abbey tour in London. ** For reviews of the Irish productions see Ch.2

¹⁷ Susanne Day and Geraldine Cummins *Fox and Geese* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co. Ltd. 1917)

¹⁸ 'The Geraldine Cummins Collection' (Cork City & County Archives, Cork). **In 2007 The Cork Archive Institute was renamed Cork City & County Archives

¹⁹ My dissertation ultimately focused on the analyses of two women's plays produced by the Abbey Theatre during the 1930's: *Katie Roche* (1936) by Teresa Deevy and a previously unexamined play, *The Patriot* (1937) by Maeve O'Callaghan. Both of these plays revealed a social critique of conditions for women in the newly independent Irish Free State.

the Cork Archive Institute and the ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ was once again available, I began to research the afore-mentioned plays of Cummins and Day with a view to including these authors within a broader study of early twentieth-century Irish women playwrights. My attention to Cummins and Day intensified however when I discovered that while much of the ‘Cummins Collection’ contains material relating to Cummins’ primary career as a respected and published ‘automatic’ writer in the field of psychical research, a substantial proportion of the collection comprises a body of 28 original typescripts of plays²⁰ including Cummins’ and Day’s 2 plays produced by the Abbey Theatre, *Broken Faith*²¹ and *Fox & Geese*.²² Whilst this collection has been frequently accessed by individuals with an interest in Cummins’ principal occupation, that of a successful medium and author of psychic works, the material relating to the dramatic endeavours of Cummins, Day and Dowden has been largely overlooked.²³

Encouraged by the volume of plays within the collection, most of which were registered with the London Society of Authors and Playwrights, I wanted to discover what these women had to say and to discover if, how, and when any further plays within the collection were produced either professionally or otherwise. My interest was further supported by the existence of Cummins’ handwritten autobiography, in which she describes her youthful experiences as a suffragist and emergent dramatist, and also by fragments of documents relating to Cummins, Day and the third playwright discussed in

²⁰ When I first accessed the collection it was un-collated and the material was randomly distributed in boxes numbered 1-6. In 2009 the Cork Archive Institute moved location within the city and the ‘Cummins Collection’ was catalogued into 49 boxes of original manuscripts which separate the psychic material from the literary. A holding for first editions of Cummins’ published psychic and literary work has also been created. See Appendix for the complete catalogue listing.

²¹ S. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith* (1913). Unpublished MS, ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’. U206. Box 25 Item 197 Ref. 2.35. (Cork City & County Archives, Cork).

²² S. Day & G. Cummins, *Fox and Geese*, original MS in ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’. U206. Box 25 Item 198 Ref. 13.5 (includes a letter from St John Ervine in praise of the play).

²³ Dr Ger Fitzgibbon (Theatre & Drama Studies U.C.C) accessed the ‘Cummins Collection’ for a study on Susanne Day in 2004/5. Bette London (Rochester Uni. N.Y.) accessed the collection for her 1999 book *Writing Double*, which explores the dynamics of authorship and the writing collaborations of mediums.

this thesis, Hester Travers Smith (née Dowden).²⁴ The body of 28 plays in the collection comprises 7 collaborative works, 3 of which are co-authored by Cummins and Day and 4 co-authored works by Cummins and Dowden. Cummins claims sole authorship for 18 plays and a further 3 cite Susanne Day as sole author.²⁵ All the plays in the collection span a period between the closing years of British colonialism in Ireland, up to and beyond the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922.

The large amount of un-collated material in the collection necessitated many field trips to the Cork archive where I read the original type-written manuscripts of the plays and Cummins' journal written in her near illegible handwriting.²⁶ To happen upon original plays by women writers from this period is an exciting and challenging experience and, after close examination of the plays in the 'Cummins Collection', I focused on a group of three plays co-written by Cummins and Day in 1913 and on one co-written play by Cummins and Dowden. The plays by Cummins and Day present an interesting group of Irish peasant dramas in that the playwrights, who were actively engaged in suffragist and philanthropic activities at that time, were writing of the Irish peasantry from a privileged Anglo-Irish perspective. In considering the history of nineteenth-century women playwrights, Tracy C. Davis shifts the focus of investigation from individual "women of genius" and their inclusion or exclusion in literary and theatrical canons to the entire class of women writing for a broad variety of reasons, and

²⁴ Hester Travers Smith (née Dowden) published under both her married and her maiden name. After she was divorced in 1914, the author's preference was for her maiden surname (Dowden) and is the name used throughout this study (except where publications deem otherwise).

²⁵ The 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' also contains fragmentary documentation claiming that an (unnamed) single-authored play concerning English life by Geraldine Cummins was produced by the Chanticleer Theatre, London, and that a further (unnamed) play authored by Susanne Day was produced by Annie Horniman's avant-garde theatre, The Gaiety, Manchester. See: The 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U 206 Box 9 Item 70 Ref. 1/87 (Cork City & County Archives).

²⁶ An explanation for Cummins' poor handwriting is found in descriptions of her psychic writing practices in several of her psychic memoirs – for example *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider & Co. 1951) in which Cummins describes writing at speeds of several hundred words per hour in a trance-like state (where an attendant has to rapidly change and place sheets of paper) – the frequency of this scribal activity no doubt resulted in her illegible style. Typewritten manuscripts of Cummins' autobiography *A Sense of Sin* emerged when the 'Cummins Collection' was catalogued in 2009.

wonders, 'Should we be looking in the first place, for the incidence of women writing plays along with the meanings of this practice in terms of social relations?'²⁷ In this respect, Davis offers a means by which to explore how the social and political concerns of Cummins and Day became manifest through their strategy of collaboration, and in terms of the issues they addressed in their three plays. Davis further observes that, 'Women had a great deal at stake in writing plays, for it represented in the composition, publication, reading, and performance, widespread and important modes of participating in the political act of sociability'.²⁸ Within these terms, the subject matter of two of Cummins' and Day's group of peasant plays, an unproduced 1-Act play, *Fidelity*, and a 2-Act play, *Broken Faith*, address serious, political issues of social justice and gender inequality - issues that Cummins and Day regularly witnessed and worked towards improving in their Cork locale. The third play by Cummins and Day, *Fox and Geese*, is written in 3 Acts and, as I argue in Chapter 2.2, contributes to cultural discourse by presenting a condescending, class-oriented satire on Catholicism and marriage customs within the Irish peasant class. I was intrigued by the notion that these women, as emergent dramatists, were experimenting with dramatic form by constructing their group of plays into one, two and three Act formats; an endeavour that indicates their desire to engage with the craft of playwriting in order to avail of the opportunities for self-definition and agency that the theatre offered. In respect of women's contribution to the Irish dramatic legacy and of women's social history, I realized that by exploring Cummins' and Day's success as minor playwrights with the National Theatre of Ireland, new avenues might be opened from which to broaden knowledge of women's response to the cultural movements and dramatic conventions of their time. Consideration of the

²⁷ Tracy C. Davis, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p17

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.18

dynamics of Cummins' and Day's writing partnership, perceived as an extension of the collaborative nature of their shared pursuits and activities within the women's movement in their community, offer theatre scholarship and the canon 'new' plays that address the conditions of femininity in early twentieth-century Ireland.

Personal letters, journals, long-forgotten public documents, female suffrage publications and newspapers are the fields from which to harvest what David Lloyd terms '[the]... recovery of silhouettes that rise up on the horizon of official discourse.'²⁹ In this way it is possible to acknowledge and respond positively to the concerns of the playwrights examined in this thesis by realizing the inheritance of what Lloyd describes as, '...the survival of alternative social imaginings...'³⁰ Lloyd's ethnological approach was particularly valuable in the examination of Cummins' and Day's produced plays in which the playwrights' opinions of social justice are expressed. Cummins' and Day's position on women, politics and class are evidenced through political pamphlets, letters, autobiography,³¹ novels,³² and in a biography on the writer Edith Somerville by Cummins.³³ In tracing the development, use and value of gender analysis in the context of women's history, Mary Cullen outlines how, while early investigations provided diverse interpretations of nineteenth century women's experiences and activities there was a connecting thread between them,

...in the history of society after society, to be born a female or a male had different political, social and economic consequences... each woman's life and her set of opportunities were influenced

²⁹ David Lloyd, *Ireland, After History: in Association with Field Day* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), p.77.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.78.

³¹ G. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures* (London Rider & Co. 1951) and Cummins' unpublished autobiography 'A Sense of Sin' 'Cummins Collection' U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 Cork City & County Archives.

³² S. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1916); *Round about Bar le Duc* (London: Skeffington & Son Ltd., 1916). G. Cummins, *The Land They Loved*, (London: Macmillan, 1919); *Fires of Beltane* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1936); *Variety Show* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1959)

³³ *Dr E OE Somerville: A Biography* (London: Andrew Dakers Ltd., 1952)

by her sex and, as a consequence, were different to those of her father, brother or husband.³⁴

Cullen further observes that those consequences, ‘... shared a common characteristic in seeking to direct power and control of resources to males, curtail female autonomy and define women’s role in society in terms of relationship and service to men.’³⁵ Cullen’s scholarship was useful in the textual analysis of Cummins’ and Day’s un-produced play *Fidelity* for which there is scant background information. Following my textual analysis of *Fidelity* I decided to produce the play as an experiment to examine how the process of staging might further illuminate its feminist content, and Chapter 3.3 includes reflective analyses of two contemporary productions of *Fidelity*.³⁶ This experimental methodology is informed by Tracy C. Davis’ scholarship on the emergence of the ‘performative turn’ in the development of theatre studies and the trans-disciplinary nature of performance. In this instance, performance offered a *means* by which *Fidelity* and its authors become part of the discourse relating to the history of women in Irish theatre.

Cummins’ later writing collaboration with Hester Dowden took place between 1917 and 1924. Whilst Cummins’ earlier collaboration with Susanne Day expressed their shared social, feminist and class concerns, her collaboration with Dowden yielded plays that differ both in content and style; their four co-authored plays being decidedly apolitical and neutral in terms of gender or class commentary.³⁷ Cummins and Dowden did however incorporate their shared interest in the supernatural in their dramatic writing in all but one of their plays, *The Happy Paupers* (1917). This simple melodrama, set in

³⁴ M. Kelleher, J.H. Murphy, eds, *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, (1997), p.6.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The first contemporary production of *Fidelity* was staged in Players Theatre DU (2004); the second production was staged in the Granary studio, UCC (2005) in tandem with a specially convened conference – ‘Munster Women Playwrights’.

³⁷ The co-written works by Cummins and Dowden include a 3-Act play, *The Happy Paupers*(1917), a 3-Act play, *The Ivory Fan* (1917), a 1-Act play *Witchery* (1919) and a 3-Act play, *The Extraordinary Play*(1924)

Rathmines, Dublin, concerns the Kennedy family who, living in shabby conditions, are desperately trying to maintain their dwindling values of late-Victorian gentility. Their complicated familial and romantic relationships are exacerbated by prejudice, pride and bigotry which are ultimately made worse by a large and unexpected financial legacy. Harmony is finally restored and romantic betrayals resolved after the legacy is contested and won by a distant relative, leaving the Kennedy's poor once more, but resolutely happy in their poverty. In terms of this play's social value, it could be argued that the playwrights were attempting to promote Christian values of charity, unselfishness and honesty. However, with its slight plot and stilted dialogue, *Happy Paupers* was insufficient in terms of advancing knowledge of women's authorship.

In the same year, Cummins and Dowden wrote *The Ivory Fan* (1917), in which they address a topical subject of the time concerning the academic debate between the veracity of communication with spirit entities versus psychiatric explanations of such phenomena. This metaphysical debate is portrayed by means of a romantic melodrama that moves between past and present events. The action is set in a haunted English country home 'Shirley Grange' where the moral dilemma is presented as a choice between commerce and artistic sensibilities. The main protagonist, Philip, who has no interest in material gain, suffers from Neurasthenia³⁸ which manifests in his dream-like behaviour and a preoccupation with the ghost of Edgar (who owned and resided in 'Shirley Grange' 100 years before). In contrast, Phillip's brother, Robert, is obsessed with making money and is energetic, ambitious and insensitive. The female protagonist is Lily, whose father wants her to marry Robert, but she is more attracted to Philip and

³⁸ Neurasthenia is an out-dated term for what is now commonly perceived as a stress-related nervous condition. In the nineteenth-century Neurasthenia was a recognized disorder brought about by a result of exhaustion of the central nervous system. Patients presented with symptoms of dizziness, fatigue and the condition manifested in episodes of fainting. Initially, it was women of the upper class who were most commonly diagnosed with Neurasthenia; however it became increasingly associated with males due to the rise of 'urbanization' and the rigours of the increasingly competitive business environment. Treatment consisted of 'rest cures', often in a relaxing environment.

his non-materialistic values. The romantic story convolutes around Phillip's conviction that he is re-living Edgar's life, which mirrors his own dilemma in that they are both victims of a psychological disorder and a romantic conflict. The plot turns on a bid by Robert to win Lily by proving that Phillip is mad, and he arranges for a psychiatrist to hypnotize Phillip by means of a series of relaxation and visualization exercises that mirror Freudian practice at the time. However, the exercise serves to reinforce Phillip's conviction that he is Edgar and, whilst in the trance, he (as Edgar) experiences a premonition of both his and his lover's untimely deaths and subsequently feels unable to offer Lily a future. While Robert feels his assessment of Phillip's mental state is proven, his love for Lily is ultimately left unrequited. The unsatisfactory conclusion to all the characters' situations seems to allegorize the debate between spiritual and scientific positions on the paranormal which remains equally ambiguous at the play's conclusion. Although Cummins and Dowden were members of The Society for Psychical Research and this play points to their interest in the paranormal, *The Ivory Fan* reveals little about the playwrights' writing practice and was therefore of no significant value in terms of further analysis for this thesis.

Cummins' and Dowden's 1 Act play, *Witchery* (1919), set in eighteenth-century France during the Revolution is a slight melodrama that utilizes the trope of spiritualism, including séances and ghostly apparitions to address themes of rural poverty, Religious corruption, the excesses of the aristocracy, male conquest of women by force and women's triumph by various means of deception. While the play goes further in terms of expounding the playwrights' interest in the paranormal, the play was uneven in terms of

plot and I decided instead to focus on the last play they wrote together, *The Extraordinary Play* (1924).³⁹

The Extraordinary Play is the most interesting of the four plays written by Cummins and Dowden in terms of both its construction and content.⁴⁰ Set in bourgeois late nineteenth-century London this play, as previously mentioned, was constructed from material gathered during several séance sessions and is explicit in its representation of Cummins' and Dowden's beliefs regarding the existence of an afterlife. In selecting this play I was influenced by the independent, determined lives these women led and in the strategies they employed in order to succeed in the male-dominated world of the theatre and of publishing. Various practices of the occult were fashionable forms of entertainment within the upper and middle classes of London society when Cummins and Dowden, as working mediums were collaborating authors, and it is within this context that analysis of *The Extraordinary Play* (Ch 4) raises interesting questions in relation to women playwrights and popular culture. An interesting conflation of Melodrama and Symbolism in the structure of this play suggests the playwrights' may have experimented with form and technology in what may have been an attempt to disrupt the theatrical conventions of realism and the comedies that were popular during the inter-war period in British drama.

Cummins' autobiographic memoir of her psychical work, *Unseen Adventures*,⁴¹ describes the circumstances in which she became acquainted with and later worked alongside Dowden in the field of psychic practice and research (Ch. 4). Consideration of the unusual séance conditions influencing the construction of *The Extraordinary Play* is

³⁹ H. Dowden & G. Cummins, *The Extraordinary Play* (1924). Unpublished MS., in 'The Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206 Box 43. Item 307 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork).

⁴⁰ The co-written plays by Cummins and Dowden include *The Happy Paupers* (1917), *The Ivory Fan* (1917), *Witchery* (1919) and *The Extraordinary Play* (1924); Unpublished MSS in 'The Geraldine Cummins Collection, U206. Box 43, Items: 317; 312; 313 & 307.

⁴¹ G.D. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider & Co. 1951).

informed by publications of both Dowden's and Cummins' accounts of their psychic 'communications' with Oscar Wilde, opening interesting questions relating to feminist social history in terms of the creative strategies employed by women to fashion productive possibilities for their cultural participation in early twentieth century society. In this respect, the seminal work of Bette London, exploring the creative processes of mediumship and collaborative writers in nineteenth and early-twentieth century literature, has informed my analysis of *The Extraordinary Play*.

Feminist deconstructive theories, as employed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her collaborative research and analysis with the Subaltern Studies collective (of revisionist historians - India 1985) offer direction in consideration of retrieved cultural artifacts. Landry & MacLean describe the work of the collective as '...rewriting the history of colonial India from below, from the point of view of peasant insurgency.'⁴² In the absence of autobiographical evidence or material documentation from subaltern testimonials, the collective sought to reveal the presence of a rebel (insurgent) consciousness embedded within colonial narratives and documentation.⁴³ Spivak observed a reluctance of her colleagues to realize the full import of their work - which identified functional changes in sign-systems, which she terms 'discursive displacements', and the subsequent effects of this identification on official historiography,

[T]hey generally perceive their task as making a theory of consciousness or culture rather than specifically a theory of change... Indeed, a general sobriety of tone will not allow them to emphasize sufficiently that they are themselves bringing hegemonic historiography to crisis. This leads them to describe

⁴² Donna Landry & Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.203.

⁴³ Ibid. Landry & MacLean cite Ranjit Guha (a founding member of the collective) who termed colonial texts and archival documents 'the prose of counterinsurgency', arguing that while this narrative 'takes its shape from the will of the colonial administrators... it is also predicated upon another will, that of the insurgent.' p.203.

the clandestine operation of supplementarity as the inexorable speculative logic of the dialectic.⁴⁴

Spivak argues that a theory of change presents a situation where, ‘...the site of displacement of the function of signs is the name of the reading as active transaction between past and future.’⁴⁵ She also draws attention to gaps in subaltern historiographies that leave gender and the female figure unexplored and points to, ‘...the significance of the simple exclusion of the subaltern as female (sexed) subject.’⁴⁶ In this respect Spivak illustrates how, despite female collusion in the perpetuation of societal systems mainly through kinship and communal modes of operation, their omission from subaltern texts of their ‘crucial instrumentality... as symbolic object (sic) of exchange...’⁴⁷ warrants further study into the, ‘...subject-deprivation of the female in the operation of this mobilization and this solidarity.’⁴⁸ Drawing on Spivak’s analysis of gender exclusion from historical narratives and the ontological implications of such omissions, I argue that Irish women, across class divisions, experienced dis-empowerment through the ‘non-subject’ effect on the insurgent colonized in Irish society at the beginning of the twentieth century - and that many women, aware of this prejudice, became actively engaged with dissident groups from both sides of the political and religious divide in the changing political and cultural landscape in bids to challenge the prevailing hegemony. When Spivak’s theory of ‘discursive displacement’ is applied to the female (as ‘sign’) within Cummins’ and Day’s plays, particularly *Broken Faith* and *Fidelity*, and indeed to the lives of the three playwrights discussed in this thesis, a closer consideration of the historical past, in terms of the ‘subject-deprivation’ of women and cultural

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.206.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.206.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.228.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.227.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

representation, is encouraged. Within this theoretical framework the use of original material in the form of autobiographical and other literary and political writings, particularly by Cummins and Day, both support and reinforce interpretations that displace surface meaning, revealing signs and subtexts within the research material, particularly in terms of the original typescripts of the plays, that reconfigure historical notions of Irish women in society and in Ireland's theatrical past and which offer renewed life to the plays selected for analysis in this study.

Chapter 1

Cummins and Day: Recovered Writers Contextualized

1.1 Recovering Women's writing – a feminist project

To encounter the work of Elizabeth Sharp, Elizabeth Owens Blackburne, Julia Kavanagh, or Katharine Hamilton is at once an encouraging and discouraging experience; the discovery of predecessors brings with it the salutary reminder of still more re-invented wheels.

Margaret Kelleher (2001)⁴⁹

In the above citation, taken from a discussion concerning the challenges surrounding contemporary works of retrieval, Kelleher notes that the abundance of feminist projects seeking to reclaim women's writing since the late twentieth-century are a continuation of endeavours that began during the nineteenth century in response to the under-representation of women poets and prose writers. Kelleher observes the significance of nineteenth-century female critics and anthologists, noting that their concerns resonate with, and offer a perspective on, similar issues of occlusion and assumptions that were problematic for the recovery of women's writing in the late twentieth century and which continue to pose challenges in the present time.

Kelleher's article includes a discussion of the retrieval work in Elizabeth Sharp's *Women's Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems by English, Scotch and Irish Women*,⁵⁰ which '...spans two centuries of writing from 1685-1887 with selections from over eighty poets...'⁵¹ Some of the writers Sharp included, such as Rosa Mulholland and Rose Tynan, having survived historical occlusion, are familiar to feminist historians; however, Kelleher notes that:

⁴⁹ M. Kelleher, "Writing Irish Women's History" in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 9. No. 1 (2001), pp. 5-6.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Sharp, *Women's Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems by English, Scotch and Irish Women* (London: Scott, 1887).

⁵¹ M. Kelleher, "Writing Irish Women's History" in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No.1 (2001), p.6.

...Many of Sharp's selections such as, Elizabeth Carew (Elizabeth Casy), Lady Winchelsea (Anne Finch) and Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle (Margaret Cavendish) would still, a century later have the status of "discoveries".⁵²

Kelleher indicates how Sharp anticipated many of the criticisms that could be made against her anthology, noting that the tone of the Preface to the work contains a '...curious oscillation between assertion and apology'⁵³ and that Sharp's '...cautious negotiation of concepts of literary value, the anticipation of the charges of bias, the aspiration for criteria "without prejudice", carry a more than familiar ring.'⁵⁴ In commenting on the obstacles encountered by creative women during the nineteenth-century Kelleher considers the claim of one of Sharp's contemporaries, Catherine Hamilton, who, in her collection of biographical sketches *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways* (1892)⁵⁵ argued that the social and personal position of women has a bearing on the quality of their writing. Kelleher uses the example of Hamilton's analysis to advance an argument against the '...linear model of history implicit in the concept of "fore-mothers" ...employed by many late twentieth century feminist critics...'⁵⁶ observing that Hamilton's '...attempt to understand the relationship between women's creativity and their social context remains a rare pursuit among female literary historians.'⁵⁷ In her comments on the various positioning of contemporary retrievals of women's writing into categories such as David Lloyd's 'non-élite' subaltern histories⁵⁸ or Rita Felski's claim that retrieval of women's writing can, '...surely only ground itself

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Catherine Hamilton, *Women Writers: Their Works and Ways* (London: Ward, Lock and Bowden, 1892).

⁵⁶ M. Kelleher, "Writing Irish Women's History" in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No.1 (2001), p.8

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ See David Lloyd, "Outside History: Irish New Histories and the 'Subalternity Effect'" in D. Lloyd, *Ireland After History, Critical Conditions; Field Day Essays* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), pp. 77-88.

in a political commitment rather than an epistemological claim for the necessary truth',⁵⁹ Kelleher calls for contemporary researchers of women's writing to engage with a deeper understanding of literary history in relation to, '... the concepts of literary access, production and influence [that] are operating within the current project of retrieval.'⁶⁰

In recent years, despite negotiating a pathway through postmodern challenges to epistemological 'truth' claims and indeed through post-feminism essentialist concerns, questions of literary value and bias concerning the position of women's writing within historical narratives remain problematic. Kelleher's argument, that a necessary consolidation of feminist research and more robust attention to '...the "meanings, values and effects" which have accrued and continue to accrue to women's writing'⁶¹ is a primary concern which must be addressed in order to resist discontinuities of women's writing and to secure a place in future canons. Concurring with Kelleher's strategy this thesis contributes to the endeavour of contemporary retrievals of Irish women's writing by engaging with inter-disciplinary methodologies in order to illuminate the historical significance of the recovered dramatic texts of Cummins, Day and Dowden.

Kelleher's identification of the continuing lack of knowledge with regard to women's 'cultural economy...'⁶² has been addressed by various contemporary recovery projects of women's writing since the latter decades of the twentieth century; the research illuminating female resistance to sex-prescribed roles - particularly from women of the privileged class in *fin de siècle* Ireland. Seminal works by Margaret Ward, Rosemary Cullen-Owens, Carol Coulter, Cliona Murphy and Mary Trotter have uncovered and documented comprehensive accounts of women's political and creative

⁵⁹M. Kelleher, "Writing Irish Women's History" in *Irish Studies Review* Vol. 9 No. 1 (2001) p.9; citing R. Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.33.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.10.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.11; citing R. Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.33.

⁶² Ibid. p.11.

activities in the feminist and nationalist movements at the beginning of the twentieth-century (Ch.1.3).⁶³ Equally revealing studies of gender operations in Irish society by Richard Breen, Damian Hannon, Chris Curtain, Pauline Jackson, Barbara O'Connor,⁶⁴ and by Kelleher, have provided new historical perspectives for scholarship. For example, Kelleher describes the separate spheres of 'public' and 'private' realms of individuals' activities in Victorian society as, 'a cultural and rhetorical construct', adding that 'it was no less powerful for its fictive basis.'⁶⁵ The writings of women subjects of the period reveal many diverse responses and ways by which they challenged notions of the immutability of this construct.

In terms of women and the Irish theatre, Mary Trotter enlivened the field of enquiry with her detailed study of women's political performances in the early twentieth century, highlighting presentations of the propagandist *tableaux vivants* (living pictures) staged alongside short dramas or recitations, at suffragist events, which both framed and emphasized the political messages the women conveyed (Ch.1.3). Such revisionist studies engender alternative views of the Irish theatre movement and re-considerations of women who, positioned within a matrix of disparate forces that constituted *fin de siècle* Irish society, were involved in its formative years. This was the time when female activism (within the Irish avant-garde political and nationalist movements) had grown to an unprecedented level, and the period that provides the background to my analyses of the plays *Broken Faith*, *Fox and Geese* and *Fidelity* by Cummins and Day (Chapters 2 and 3) and of the playwrights' historical significance within the second decade of the developing Irish National Theatre.

⁶³ For details of publications by M. Ward and M. Trotter; op. cit. p.1; for publications by R. Cullen-Owens; C. Coulter and C. Murphy, see bibliography and Chapter 1.2.

⁶⁴ See bibliography for details of publications by: R. Breen; D. Hannon; C. Curtain; P. Jackson and B. O'Connor.

⁶⁵ M. Kelleher & J.H. Murphy, eds., *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), p.17.

In a recent critical study describing the value of retrieving women's writing and the attendant implicit challenge to dramatic and literary canons, Claire Bracken responds to negative comparative reviews of *The Field Day Anthology Vols IV & V*,⁶⁶ arguing that the critiques betray an inability of the 'law' [of the father] to connect in a 'spirit of difference' with the 'partial and multiple knowledges produced by Vols IV & V.'⁶⁷ Advancing a claim for altered contexts that present new pathways to knowledge, Bracken draws attention to the 'open-ended process of critic-text interaction'⁶⁸ engendered by these volumes that has fostered 'inter-relations' between women engaged in creative writing, writing history and in literary criticism.⁶⁹ In her essay, Bracken adopts a psychoanalytic engagement with Irish women's writing, offering an example of the many coherent responses within Irish literary and theatre scholarship to questions of women's historical representation and contemporary production of knowledge. A diverse range of critical responses, in terms of dramatic literature, is demonstrated in Melissa Sihra's seminal publication of essays, *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*.⁷⁰ Reviewing Sihra's edited volume, Margaret Maxwell observed that the work:

...fulfils its declared intent of widening the debate concerning the representation of women on the Irish stage ...[I]ts most striking achievement is the exposure of little-known work by female playwrights and the appended directory is an inspired move which provides an invaluable resource⁷¹

⁶⁶ A. Bourke, et al. eds. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions, Vols. IV & V* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).

⁶⁷ C. Bracken, "Becoming-Mother-Machine: The Event of Field Day Vols IV & V" in P. Coughlan & T. O'Toole, eds., *Irish Literature Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2008), p.236.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Bracken discusses how these interactions are furthered within technological spaces created by Irish feminist research; such as online retrieval projects, electronic resources and databases. A primary model cited is Tina O'Toole's, *Dictionary of Munster Women Writers* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005), which offers a detailed online (and print) bibliographical record of Munster women writers and playwrights.

⁷⁰ Melissa Sihra, ed., *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷¹ M. Maxwell, "It Is Not Enough To Have Written The Thing" a review of Melissa Sihra, ed., *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation* in *Journal of Irish & Scottish Studies* (2008) http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/Reviews/Maxwell_

In the introduction to the volume Sihra says, '[T]he project of recovering plays by women is crucial to the renegotiation and pluralizing of Irish theatrical traditions.'⁷² Reifying Kelleher's view, Sihra claims that, '...there needs to be a thorough interrogation of the very process of what constitutes the "canonical" and of the premises upon which such standards are judged and validated.'⁷³ I would add that performance of recovered women's plays provides a useful, additional methodology in terms of making women's writing visible and available - both for academic critique and for cultural appropriation by contemporary theatre practitioners and audiences - and as such, analysis of the experimental productions of *Fidelity* by Cummins and Day (Ch.3.3) constitute a concrete response to Sihra's notion of 'pluralizing Irish theatrical traditions'.⁷⁴

Whilst history can never inhabit the 'lived' space of past readers, Gillian Beer suggests that the impulse to recovering past texts ought to 'bypass relevance' of those works to our present concerns. She emphasizes the need to recognize the 'difference' of past writing and past concerns:

...[T]he task of the literary historian is to receive the same fullness of resource from past texts as from present: to respect their difference, to revive those shifty significances which do not pay court to our concerns, but are full of meaning of that past present.⁷⁵

Extant, original material, contemporaneous documents and published writings of the playwrights examined in this work comprise ample evidence to support and acknowledge the 'different' concerns of women in the early twentieth century. In particular, analyses of Cummins' and Day's autobiographies/memoirs read within the context of feminist

⁷² Melissa Sihra, ed., *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship & Representation* (Basingstoke (UK); New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.10.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Gillian Beer, "Representing Women: Re-presenting the Past" in, C. Belsey & J. Moore, eds., *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the politics of Literary Criticism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997).

theories of selfhood, identity and subjectivity, become guides with which to consider how the ‘personal as political’ become manifest in their plays. In a volume examining the theoretical and methodological practices of engagement with life-writing, Pauline Polkey claims:

Not only does this approach have far-reaching consequences about the way in which we position the lives we read and/or represent, but it also opens up a vigorous and incisive challenge to the conventional – ‘unique’ subject – critical model.⁷⁶

An early entry in Cummins’ unpublished, handwritten autobiography, written under the pseudonym ‘Jane Massey’,⁷⁷ offers materialist evidence that aids analysis of her dramatic writing. The title Cummins chose for this manuscript, *A Sense of Sin*, indicates her unconventional attitude towards life, which is reinforced by the tone of her descriptions of the various activities she undertook. The following extract clearly states the constraints she encountered as a woman writing in the early twentieth century and offers a context within which to understand the impulses that formed her aspirations towards a literary career:

Literature and journalism beckoned alluringly... I happened to be a fantasy weaver, the suppressions in my nature yearned for expression, so I persuaded my father to buy a typewriter... Between 1910 and 1914, I composed about thirty short stories, one novel and two plays, and earned fifty pounds... It must be remembered, however, that I did not possess a room of my own, and the privacy, even of the attic was disturbed on an average about every twenty minutes by my mother and members of the family (sic) unless I rose at daybreak to entrap my flights of fancy...⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Pauline Polkey, *Women’s Lives into Print: the Theory, Practice and Writing of Feminist Auto/biography* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), p. xiii.

⁷⁷ G. Cummins, (pseudonym ‘Jane Massey’) *A Sense of Sin*; MS Unpublished autobiography, ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’, U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork).

⁷⁸ G. Cummins, “Low Living and High Thinking” in, *A Sense of Sin*. Ch.12, MS. Unpublished autobiography, ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’, U206. Box 4 Item 35 Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.1.

Using autobiography in the analysis of marginalized works is encouraged by the innovative models of contemporary historical analysis in Tracy C. Davis' and Ellen Donkin's co-authored study, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*.⁷⁹ Davis and Donkin challenge the traditional dramatic canon by privileging and making visible the '...vast range of activity which women undertook in writing plays'⁸⁰ and ask pertinent questions, '... that seek to undermine assumptions about where to look for evidence, what authorship means, why locale matters and how genre functions.'⁸¹ This is expressed by Davis who, by distancing herself from the 'public-private' binary and the exclusivity resultant from its critical operation posits an alternative idea of 'sociability' as a theoretical concept to analyze the '...enormous groundswell of theatrical activity by women... in an effort to understand it as a form of cultural participation.'⁸² Davis' theory operates to offer new resources for interpretations of the cultural past.

As practicing mediums Cummins and Dowden were fully engaged with what was a popular cultural activity in early twentieth-century society and in Chapter 4 of this thesis I examine the implications of their attempt to create a drama that would both offer popular entertainment and promote their belief in an afterlife. Bette London's seminal scholarship on women and collaborative writing, in which she explores authorship within the writing practices and creativity of psychic mediums, has proven a useful investigative strategy in my consideration of *The Extraordinary Play* by Cummins and Dowden. Although the play was unsuccessful in accessing production within the male-dominated sphere of the early twentieth-century British theatre, and was never submitted to the Abbey Theatre, Cummins' and Dowden's published accounts of this collaborative

⁷⁹ Tracy C. Davis & Ellen Donkin, eds., *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.5.

⁸² *Ibid.* p.6.

project demonstrate their success in generating literary interest in its construction. In terms of the ongoing project to retrieve women's writing, the playwrights' descriptions of their collaborative project are instrumental in developing an understanding of the value and meaning of this recovered play. In responding to Kelleher's call for contemporary researchers of women's writing to engage with notions of literary access, the retrieval of plays by Cummins, Day and Dowden offers an opportunity to illuminate women's participation in Irish social and cultural history.

1.2 Women's stories: (i) Cummins and Day (ii) The 'first-wave' Women's Movement in Ireland;

(i) Cummins and Day

Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day embraced the social, political and cultural exigencies of their time, and in so doing, responded to contemporary concerns for the immediate future of Ireland. The family backgrounds of these women furnished them with a penchant for independent thought and social responsibility and as such, have a significant bearing on understanding the playwrights' motivations in their engagement with the cultural movements they allied themselves to.

Geraldine Dorothy Cummins (1890-1969)

Geraldine Cummins hailed from a medical lineage - her grandfather was a medical practitioner and her father, Professor Ashley Cummins M.D., a surgeon in U.C.C., was honoured locally as 'the poor man's doctor' in recognition of his continual efforts to improve conditions for the poor of Cork city. Of Cummins' siblings, two brothers and two sisters followed in the family tradition of medicine whilst one sister was a senior scientist experimenting in peaceful atomic research with the British government. A further sister, having obtained a civil engineering degree, was the first woman to be made

a member of the Irish Institute of Civil Engineers.⁸³ Cummins was tutored at home until her mid-teens and, as a result of regular visits to the Cork Opera House where Frank Benson's company toured annually with their productions, developed a love for Shakespearean tragedies.⁸⁴ Unlike her sisters and many other privileged Protestant females who took advantage of the Royal University Act, Cummins chose to acquire secretarial skills and moved to Dublin in order to earn a living while pursuing her literary, dramatic and journalistic aspirations. Cummins recorded her experiences during this period of her life in her unpublished autobiography, *A Sense of Sin*; in this, and in other documents housed in the 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', Cummins' literary influences are demonstrated. She professes her admiration for Shakespeare and in particular mentions the influence of G.B. Shaw, with whom she corresponded. Her journal also contains a detailed, though veiled, narrative of her early experiences in Dublin where her admiration for W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory are clearly drawn (see

⁸³ During the nineteenth-century, education in Ireland, particularly for women, underwent a seismic shift. From 1831, when the National School system of education was established, Protestant proselytizing societies actively pursued reform ideas, influenced by developments in England; in order to broaden the scope and rigour of education for girls and thus enable them to avail of training for governess positions or teaching careers. Soon after 1850, The Ladies Collegiate School, Belfast was founded by Mrs. Byers, whilst in Dublin, Anne Jellicoe founded Alexandra College; these colleges offered education based on university standards - although university degrees were not then open to women. In 1878 a uniform second level system was implemented by the Intermediate Education Act, and in 1879 the Royal Universities Act allowed women to sit university examinations. The Intermediate Education Act (1878), allowed young women to avail of the Intermediate examination system - a result of tireless campaigning by Isabella Tod of the Ladies Institute, Belfast and Mrs Byers of the Ladies Collegiate. This was followed by the establishment in 1882 of the Central Association of Irish Schoolmistresses (CAIS) who lobbied to broaden the range of academic subjects open to girls, and for women's admittance to universities. Within a year the Royal Universities Act (1879) allowed women admittance to university examinations. The Catholic convent schools, however, faced challenging opposition from the bishops who felt that girls' education should not exceed basic skills of literacy and numeracy and that greater importance should be placed on their domestic training. Eventually, in 1883, the Dominican College, Eccles Street, Dublin was founded to allow girls to sit the Intermediate examinations, followed in 1887, by the Ursuline Order in Cork who established St. Angela's. In a chapter on education in the *Field Day Anthology of Women's Writing*, editor, Anne V. O'Connor observes that the Catholic poet, Katharine Tynan, "...urged that a Catholic women's college was needed, along the lines of Alexandra College... as she felt it did no service to the Catholic church to "have the balance of education and power and wealth on the Protestant side", (*Tynan, K. 'Catholic World' Aug.1890*) [By] this stage some of the bishops were of the same opinion' (O'Connor, *Field Day Vol V*. p.654). However, for many Catholic girls, it was the close of the century before the opportunities became a reality. A small but significant group of middle-class Catholic parents' exerted pressure on the bishops to allow the establishment of collegiate convents whereby girls could avail of both the Intermediate and university examinations. Their success resulted in the foundation of high achieving Dominican and Loreto schools around the country. See A.V. O'Connor, "Education in Nineteenth-Century Ireland" in Angela Bourke, et al, eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol. V* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), pp. 647-666.

⁸⁴ G.D. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider and Co. 1951), pp. 16-18.

Ch. 2.2). In her published autobiography/memoir, *Unseen Adventures*,⁸⁵ which focuses on her later career as a practicing medium and automatist (automatic/psychic writer), Cummins' dramatic aspirations are discerned in her accounts of séances she participated in with W.B. Yeats, Lennox Robinson and other literary figures well known in the cultural and avant garde movement in Dublin at that time (see Ch.4.1).

Cummins possessed a strong sense of her Irish identity and stated her allegiance to Ireland in *Unseen Adventures*, in which she claims paternal ancestry to the Gaelic Clan Cumain. Relating a family legend concerning the sacred *Lia Fail* (Stone of Destiny)⁸⁶ Cummins claims that a member of the Cummins Tribe '... travelled from Northern Ireland to Scotland' and '...taking with him his clan's sacred treasure... this emigrant removed the Stone to Scotland to found a branch of the Cummins clan there.'⁸⁷ The *Lia Fail* is said to bestow good fortune on the country where it resides and, demonstrating the flair for humour with which much of her fictional work resounds, Cummins writes that so far there have not been any requests for it to be returned to Cashel Cathedral under the guardianship of her clan. Cummins' pride in claiming Irish identity is reiterated in her description of her maternal lineage which, emerging from ancient Anglo-Saxon ancestry, forged a tradition of patriotism for Ireland within the Aylmer family. Tracing a descent from King Ethelred, brother of Alfred, Cummins describes how a branch of that family emigrated from Cornwall to Dublin in the eleventh century, '...keeping a stronghold in Co. Kildare for the last 500 years of Ireland's troubled

⁸⁵ G. Cummins, op. cit. p. 5

⁸⁶ Much controversy surrounds various legends of the *Lia Fail*. Said to be the stone or seat upon which Jacob rested, a popular version believes the Stone was brought into Ireland by the Tuatha-de-Dannon and was used as a coronation seat in Tara by ancient kings of the de Dannon and the Milesian races. The Stone was sent to Scotland in the sixth century by the Monarch Murcheartach Mór Mac Earca for the coronation of his brother Fergus Mór Mac Earca, the founder of the Scottish monarchy in Scotland where it was used for centuries at the coronations of Scottish kings. In the thirteenth century, King Edward the First invaded Scotland and took the Stone to England where it was placed under the Coronation seat at Westminster Abbey.

⁸⁷ G. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider & Co., 1951), p.12.

history.⁸⁸ Cummins gives an account of the seditious activities of one of her English ancestors, Sir Gerald Aylmer, a Chief Justice of Ireland who was imprisoned in the Tower of London,

... because he had, with others, presented a petition to the reigning English monarch "...for government by their own nation" and for the removal of the penal laws that heavily oppressed Irish Roman Catholics⁸⁹

Despite these strong statements of patriotic integrity, Cummins' personal writings in her unpublished autobiography contain few references regarding her attitude towards the nationalist/unionist politics in play in Ireland during the early twentieth-century. Instead, her political interests focus on the Irish women's movement and in gaining the franchise for women. In *A Sense of Sin*, Cummins relates an incident during a trip to London which seems to have been her first encounter with the suffrage movement. Cummins and one of her sisters played hockey on the Irish international team and had travelled to London for a match against England. During their visit, they witnessed a large suffrage demonstration and Cummins' observations in this regard offer an insight into her subsequent involvement with the Irish women's movement (quoted in section [ii] of this sub-chapter). Whilst working for the Munster Women's Franchise League (MWFL), an Irish suffragist organization, Cummins collaborated with Susanne Day in writing their group of three peasant dramas analyzed in this thesis: *Broken Faith* (1913); *Fox and Geese* (1913) and *Fidelity* (1913).

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought new tensions to existing divisions between unionist and nationalist communities in Ireland. At this time, Cummins abandoned her suffragist activities and moved to Dublin to work, to establish

⁸⁸ Ibid. pp.12-13.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

her writing career and, after forming a friendship with Hester Travers Smith (née Dowden) who was a practicing medium, to develop her own growing interest in the paranormal. Many families and friends in Ireland were divided by polar attitudes to the war; Cummins' delayed response indicates a resigned acceptance of her duty to England,

This war, I loathed. It was slowly drawing into its octopus embrace all my kin. I could not stand aside ...when in two or three months Dick (*her brother*) would be at the front, and he would expect me to play my part in England or wherever volunteers were needed... No glowing patriotism inspired my decision ...to go to London where I might release some man for service in the army. It was love of Dick and guilty fear of his opinion which governed my actions in that restless time.⁹⁰

At the commencement of the Great War (1914-18), Cummins was in Dublin, lodging with Dowden whilst working as a librarian in the National Library of Ireland. Dowden, nearing her mid-life, had begun to develop her psychic skills following her marital separation and she and Cummins, who had also recently begun to experiment in the paranormal, became firm friends. Describing their friendship, Dowden's biographer, Edmund Bentley writes:

Hester made a lifelong friend of Geraldine Cummins, who came frequently to Hester's house from 1914 onwards... and she [Cummins] became a member of the circle which held bi-weekly sittings in the house in Fitzwilliam Square...but it was during the First World War that her psychic power was developed and trained along with Hester Dowden's.⁹¹

Before the end of 1914 Cummins had moved to London where she worked in several secretarial positions, including a position as a personal assistant to a publisher, and continued to develop her creative writing.⁹² In early 1921 after Dowden had

⁹⁰ G. Cummins, "Hurdlestown-by-the-Sea" Ch. 12, in *A Sense of Sin.*, MS Unpublished autobiography, U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), pp. 2-3.

⁹¹ E. Bentley, *Far Horizon: A Biography of Hester Dowden*, (London: Rider and Co. 1951) p.35

⁹² Cummins' published novels include *The Land They Loved* (1919); *Fires of Beltane* (1936); and *Variety Show* (1959).

completely severed all ties with her husband she also moved to London accompanied by her daughter Dorothy (Dolly), who later married the playwright and Abbey Manager Lennox Robinson. Cummins stayed for lengthy periods in Dowden's home and as Dowden combined her work as journalist and features writer, the two women further developed their psychic skills, and in 1922 Dowden made the decision to launch a business as a professional medium. In 1923, Cummins met and established a friendship with E. Beatrice Gibbes, an investigator for the Society of Psychical Research (SPR), and became increasingly occupied as an automatic writer conducting research and investigations for the SPR in a relatively short space of time. Like Dowden, Cummins' preoccupation with the occult developed into a career and she subsequently moved into Gibbes' house in Chelsea where she lived for eight months of each year, returning home to Ireland for the remaining four months. As Cummins' business partner in spiritualist practice Gibbes oversaw publication of the many books Cummins wrote on parapsychology and the practices of spiritualism and automatism.⁹³ Cummins and Gibbes worked together for many years and upon Gibbes' death her house was bequeathed to Cummins.

Cummins' early acquaintance (by means of her involvement in the MWFL) with the novelist Edith OE Somerville also developed into a close friendship.⁹⁴ From 1927, Cummins spent many holidays at Somerville's home in Drishane (Cork) and, following Somerville's death in 1949, wrote the first biography on this author.⁹⁵ The biography is testament to the mutual respect and admiration that existed between the women, its narrative is presented through Cummins' memories of the times they spent together,

⁹³ See Ch. 4.2 and Appendix for a comprehensive list of these and Cummins' published psychical works.

⁹⁴ Cork novelist, Edith OE Somerville and her second cousin, Violet Florence Martin ('Martin Ross') lived together, co-authoring a series of successful humorous novels based on the Irish gentry. Despite the untimely death of Ross in 1915, Somerville, engaging with the practices of spiritualism and automatic writing, continued to credit Ross as co-author of their publications from 1915-49.

⁹⁵ Cummins, Geraldine, *Dr. E.OE Somerville: A Biography* (London: Andrew Dakers Ltd. 1952).

stories related by Somerville to Cummins during these visits, and also in the many letters exchanged between the women. In the Preface, Lennox Robinson eulogizes Somerville, comparing her ability to write character and scene to that of Lady Gregory, Jane Austen and Turgenev. In championing Cummins' authority as Somerville's biographer, Robinson writes that Cummins, '...has had the great advantage and privilege of being Edith Somerville's intimate friend for many years... I am proud [to] write this brief foreword to this charming book about a fellow Corkwoman [sic].'⁹⁶

In recent years, gay and lesbian studies have positioned Somerville and her cousin Violet Florence Martin ('Martin Ross') as icons of early twentieth-century lesbian Irish writers and in this respect questions of Cummins sexuality have surfaced in the course of my research. Part of my research included interviews with surviving relatives of the playwrights, and, during a conversation with Cummins' great-nephew, he spoke of the many times he spent with his great-aunt during the late 1950's and early 1960's, including his witness of her 'automatic' writing practices. This gentleman portrayed Cummins as, '...a very independent, outspoken, non-conformist, literary woman who wore mannish clothes (corduroy trousers) and who smoked heavily - using a long cigarette holder'.⁹⁷ Despite this anecdote, Cummins' sexuality was, and remains, a subject generally avoided within her family. Whilst Cummins' close friendships with women and her same-sex living arrangements have promoted speculation of her sexual orientation, there is no evidence, either in research pertaining to her lifestyle or in any of her published or unpublished writings to support a view that she was a lesbian.

In her unpublished autobiography, *A Sense of Sin*, Cummins alludes to her all-encompassing love of one of her older brothers, whom she refers to as 'Dick'. Several

⁹⁶ Lennox Robinson, in the Preface to Geraldine Cummins, *Dr. E.O.E. Somerville: A Biography* (London: Andrew Dakers Ltd. 1952), p.xii.

⁹⁷ Interview with R.D. Hearn, M.A., Cork (December, 2005).

entries in this fragmented manuscript clearly illustrate the deep closeness she obviously felt for ‘Dick’ (who was killed during the Great War 1914-18) and also her devotion to her father. These entries suggest the likelihood that no man could hope to match the qualities of these two significant male presences in Cummins’ life; and could well have influenced her single status throughout her life. In *A Sense of Sin*, Cummins recalls in the chapter entitled “Literature (Jane) and Politics (Ernestine),”⁹⁸ that during several months of enforced convalescence following a serious knee operation, she reflected on the direction her life was taking:

This enforced repose led me to realize that I was drifting like a rudderless ship. I didn’t intend to get married; my devotion to Stephen (my father) and my love for Dick satisfied the needs of sentiment; but the time had come for me to shape a new course.⁹⁹

Cummins was disparaging on the subject of matrimony, viewing it as a state of servitude for women. She writes of one of her sisters who, having abandoned her medical studies to marry and have a family, decided to return to university:

The Courtney’s had three children and struggled along on an income of four hundred a year. So, after years of domestic drudgery, Maeve’s old spirit flared up again and, defying convention she set to work for her medical degree, thereby scandalizing the gossips of Garryvoe; and distressing the members of her tribe who held that children, a husband and a parish were the only legitimate employments for a clergyman’s wife, even if the farmers lived as poorly as the farmers.¹⁰⁰

Describing her life during the War years in London, Cummins appears to have had little interest in romance; in Part 2 of *A Sense of Sin* she writes, ‘I found all that was

⁹⁸ Cummins used the name “Ernestine” when referring to an Amazonian, fearless aspect of her normally genteel, reserved (late Victorian) character. She claims to have inherited her reckless trait from a female warrior antecedent; and which, while generally dormant, emerged during times of great fear or anger against injustice –for example, it is the name she ascribes to herself when writing of experiences during certain suffragist meetings.

⁹⁹ G. Cummins “Literature (Jane) and Politics (Ernestine)” in *A Sense of Sin*, MS unpublished autobiography, Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork)pp. 1-2

¹⁰⁰ G. Cummins “A Political Martyr” in *A Sense of Sin* MS. Unpublished autobiography, ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’, U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.1.

necessary to sentiment in admiration and affection for my clan...' Throughout this period Cummins was grieving for her brother "Dick" who, having survived a serious injury in the early years of the Great War, was reassigned to Gallipoli where he was subsequently killed in action. The following extract expresses Cummins' deep sense of loneliness and describes how she found solace in somnambular, dream-like states in attempts to experience a sense of her lost brother:

... and now, at a lovely time in this dark, eager love for Dick, in delight in his presence, in heartache at his absence, and in the happiness of fanciful dream when I succeeded in my search for innercommunion [sic] with him during the time he was living a remote life from mine. But such happiness might not be summoned at will. "Like the wind I come. Like the wind I go". These words expressed this elusive rapture after its rare visits that invariably brought the peace that follows the satisfaction of a dream-desire.¹⁰¹

Cummins' language here is intimate and suggestive of a deep passion, such as one might use to speak of a lover who is lost or deceased. As Cummins' autobiography continues in this section it becomes ever more puzzling to determine the feelings Cummins held for her brother. She could be describing a pure, esoteric love, or this could be the dialogue of pure grief and confusion as Cummins attempts to absorb the horror of his untimely death:

A love of the head; or rather, of the imagination - Was it for that reason evil? I did not question or analyse it in those days. I only knew that other men meant nothing to me, left me untroubled, amused me, but could not kindle any emotion, and they seemed far away, a race entirely apart. At times I was ashamed of my coldness, of being different from most women, so inverted, so [sic] delicate of body as to feel no need of physical passion. Later I argued that this offence against society might be forgiven, that all that really mattered was to love, to preserve at least some warmth of heart, that to be alive was nothing beside it.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ G. Cummins, *A Sense of Sin: Part 2* MS Unpublished autobiography, 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', Box 4, Item 33, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.287

¹⁰² Ibid. p 287

Other passages in the autobiography describe “Dick’s” good looks and the pleasure these two siblings enjoyed in each other’s company inviting speculation that the love that Cummins professes for her brother may have been more than familial; however, there is no clear proof to support this view or to speculate that the passion was reciprocated. Additionally, the gaps in the narrative of *A Sense of Sin* and Cummins’ prolific use of pseudonyms imbue the text with uncertainties that preclude empirical evidence of such a notion.

Cummins clearly enjoyed close female friendships and her encounters with men are described in cerebral rather than emotional terms. That she experienced social intercourse in the company of men is clear, and in Part 2 of *A Sense of Sin* Cummins offers amusing descriptions of the attentions she received from two male friends after she moved to London; one of the men was serious enough about her to propose marriage, which Cummins very briefly considered before rapidly declining the invitation. Cummins’ friendship with the second man, named “St. Cuthbert” in her autobiography, was based on what Cummins believed to be an intellectual meeting of minds and a shared love of poetry and philosophy. However, it became clear that this man was married and was hoping for a paramour and Cummins quickly extricated herself from his clutches. Soon after this embarrassing experience, Dowden and Cummins were discussing relationships between the sexes. Dowden had claimed that Cummins had a fear of life and that she, “kept people at arms’ length... afraid of being drawn into the current – carried away on a flood, perhaps”,¹⁰³ Cummins writes that she refuted this, replying:

...“I just feel that until human beings realize their essential aloneness and learn to delight in it, there can be no real serenity for them...” Ann [Cummins’ pseudonym for Dowden] had her

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.354.

intuitions. Suddenly her eyes became hazy and full of dream, and she exclaimed, as if uttering the dream and not her own thought, "I know there was someone once in your life, Jane, who mattered more than anything; for whom you'd have sacrificed the whole world." I turned away, determined that Ann should not see my face at that moment.¹⁰⁴

Cummins' reaction implies that the lost love Dowden referred to was "Dick". Dowden either intuited or, more likely, was conscious of Cummins' depth of feeling for her brother as demonstrated in the following extract:

... she [Ann] continued mercilessly, "There was some barrier between you that could not be crossed... perhaps he's dead now... anyway, he's come and gone. And since then, you can't bear other people to be intimate with you..." Ann's eyes darkened... "I believe that, in any case, you could never have married this man... in consequence you'll never marry, or be any man's mistress."
"Yes that's true, but the reason for it is probably to be found in my queer inherited sense of sin".
"That sense led you originally to turn to someone who could never be anything to you in a sheerly [sic] physical way... and now he's gone from you. And that's why... in order to escape your grief and sense of loss, you search eagerly for serenity"¹⁰⁵

While Dowden's empathy and support may not have affected Cummins lifestyle choice in terms of forming romantic relationships, it is interesting to note that a previously cited extract from Cummins' typewritten manuscript (see fn 101 & 102 pp31-32), describing her attempts to connect with her brother, in passionate and singularly intimate terms, is scored through and an arrow directs the reader to a handwritten passage that rewrites Cummins' sense of loss, but which describes the familial bond in entirely more innocent terms of childhood nostalgia, and which also includes five of her ten siblings in her account. This amendment to Cummins' autobiography suggests that at a later date,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.354.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p.355.

Cummins regretted baring her earlier raw expression of grief and had come to terms with her loss:

...and now, at a lovely time, in the happiness of fanciful dreams when my mind wandered among the memories of pre-war days, when Michael, John, Barty, Dick, Maeve and I lived a life withdrawn from other children; quarrelling, playing games, climbing trees together, utterly confident that there was NO family like ours, NO clan that could rival it in charm, interest and natural ability. "Like the wind I come. Like the wind I go". These words expressed this mood of memory which visited me at rare intervals; and always brought peace with it at anxious hours.¹⁰⁶

Susanne Rouvier Day (1890-1964)

Susanne Day's father, Robert Day J.P., M.R.I.A. was a highly-regarded Justice of the Peace in Cork for many years and also ran their long-established family saddlery business in Patrick St. Cork. As a learned antiquarian, archeologist and bibliographer, Robert Day was a leading member of the Royal Irish Academy and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Antiquaries. He was President of the Cork Historical and Archeological Society at the time of his death in 1914 and a trustee of various other esteemed scientific, financial and charitable societies. The Day family claims a well-established Anglo-French connection to Cork. Susanne Day's father was a direct descendant of Philip Day from Bedfordshire (UK) who settled in Youghal, Cork in the early eighteenth century. Philip Day's great-grandson, Thomas, married Susan Rouviere, a daughter of Jean Rouviere, a Huguenot. Jean Rouviere, (son of Anthony Rouviere of des Arnous, an officer in Louis XIV's army), fled from Languedoc at the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, became a British subject and, as a Captain in the Galway Regiment of Horse Guards, fought under William III at the Battle of the Boyne (1690). The maternal

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Located on an un-numbered sheet (inserted opposite p.287)

line of Robert Day's family includes a Thomas Welsted who came to Ireland with Cromwell and was rewarded with a grant of land in Co. Cork.¹⁰⁷ Susanne Day's mother, Rebecca (née Scott), was a direct descendant of Captain John Scott, an officer in William III's army who fought at the Battle of the Boyne and who, following his retirement from active service, married a daughter of The O'Keefe (head of the clan).¹⁰⁸ Rebecca Scott's father was a successful business man who established a large ironmongery business in King St. (now MacCurtain St.).

There are very few autobiographical traces of Susanne Day's early life; however, it is clear from family anecdotal information and in a recent private publication of Robert Day's diary including photographs taken by Robert Day¹⁰⁹ that, as the youngest of ten children, Susanne Day enjoyed a privileged upbringing in the large family home at Myrtle Hill House in Tivoli, Cork. The opportunities and benefits Day enjoyed were not however taken for granted and her political awareness of sex discrimination became manifest in 1910 when she founded the Cork branch of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL). Opposing the militant tactics of the IWFL Day subsequently co-founded the non-militant Munster Women's Franchise League (MWFL) in 1911 along with Cummins and the novelists Somerville and Ross (see section [ii] in this sub-chapter).

Like many women of the genteel class Susanne Day involved herself in philanthropic activities, and this was particularly the case after she witnessed at close quarters, during her suffragist work, the living conditions of the poorer classes. In 1896 legislation had given women the right to be elected as Poor Law Guardians and in 1898

¹⁰⁷ Susanne Day, "The Family of Day of Cork and Youghal": from a family document, kindly donated by Amy and Chris Ramsden, Passage West, Cork.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Chris Ramsden, ed., *Diary of Robert Day FSA: Antiquarian, Archeologist & Collector, (1836-1914)*. Private publication: Copyright of diary & photographs (Amy & Chris Ramsden, Neptune Lodge, Glenbrook, Passage West, Cork).

this was extended to include the Local Government Franchise. In 1911, deciding to become pro-active in dealing with the social challenges she witnessed, Day stood for election as a Poor Law Guardian (PLG) topping the poll in the north-east ward of Cork and becoming one of the first women PLGs in her local parish. The harrowing social conditions she encountered in this capacity and her struggles at frustrating board meetings to validate her position as a woman, a suffragist and a Protestant operating in the overwhelmingly male, predominately Catholic, public sphere of local government provide the factual background to and satirical material in *The Amazing Philanthropists*.¹¹⁰ This epistolary novel, written in the form of letters from a female PLG ('Lester Martin') to a feminist confidante in England ('Jill'), was published at a time when feminisms within Irish society were impacting in many areas and was a bold contemporary critique of social conditions and political governance.¹¹¹

As a testament of social history in Ireland, *The Amazing Philanthropists* contains many resonances for present day society in terms of the moral injustices it addresses; and in respect of women's engagement and visibility in the cultural past it constitutes an important text in the canon of women's writing. The accounts of the circumstances Day experienced illustrate the positive difference she and other Guardians attempted to make to the lives of the workhouse inhabitants, whilst clearly identifying her resourceful and determined nature. A graphic example in *The Amazing Philanthropists* offers a description of the horrendous conditions endured by workhouse inmates in which Day's social and political sense of outrage and frustration is illustrated,

...Jill, as I write, only adjectives like cancerous, infamous, appalling, rise to my mind. I feel that no words in the world are

¹¹⁰ S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick, 1917).

¹¹¹ The 'letters' are most frequently addressed to 'Jill'; however, some of them refer to 'Gillian Dorothy' – Cummins' given initials (G.D - Geraldine Dorothy). Day's book was published in 1918, four years after their writing collaboration had concluded and Cummins was living in London; suggesting the notion that Cummins was Day's model for 'Jill'.

too strong, too ugly, too blasting to be used in description of what experts call the General Mixed Workhouse. ...when you see hundreds of little children growing up behind those walls, and know that they will have to go out into the world, branded – well, you just have to... fight like a demon against the conviction that no work you can do will be of any use; that the whole system is wrong from the bottom up, and any attempt at reform is like putting sticking plaster upon a sloughing abscess...¹¹²

The 'New Ireland' critic known as 'David', reporting in a contemporary review, said that *The Amazing Philanthropists*, '...under the thinnest disguise, pilloried the local councillors and officials so effectively that the Cork City Librarian refused to put the book upon the shelves of the Carnegie Institute...'.¹¹³ The text offers historians rich, first-hand accounts that revise, and reify an appreciation of, the very real living conditions in rural Ireland that impelled the rise of the realist peasant plays after 1909 and which, in terms of Cummins' and Day's dramatic writing, inform both subject matter and characterization of their plays. Day also sole-authored a short feminist play *Toilers* (1913) which highlights the tragic effect of poverty on young women forced into prostitution (see section [ii] this sub-chapter).

Day's strong views on the need for social change are illustrated in two significant articles she wrote for 'The Irish Review (Dublin)' which comment on social issues regarding the response within Irish society to the poor. The first article "The Crime Called Out-Door Relief"¹¹⁴ is a blistering critique of the Out-Door Relief system¹¹⁵ - containing certain resonances for present-day post-'Celtic Tiger' Ireland - while the second article "The Workhouse Child"¹¹⁶ draws attention to the deplorable conditions

¹¹² S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick, 1917), 'Letter no. 12' p.47.

¹¹³ 'David', in R. Hogan, *The Modern Irish Theatre. Vol V: Art of the Amateur 1916-20* (Portlaoise: Dolman Press Ltd., 1984), p.86.

¹¹⁴ Susanne R. Day, "The Crime Called Out-Door Relief" in *The Irish Review (Dublin)*, Vol.2. No.14 (April 1912), pp. 72-80.

¹¹⁵ Out-Door Relief was a form of social welfare in operation at that time under the Poor Laws in Ireland and Britain.

¹¹⁶ Susanne R. Day, "The Workhouse Child" in *The Irish Review (Dublin)* Vol. 2. No.16 (June 1912) pp.169-179.

and prospects for children living within the Workhouses in Ireland at that time. A summary of Day's first article is given here to demonstrate her knowledge of conditions for the poor and to provide a contextual framework for the analysis of the tragi-dramas she co-wrote with Cummins; while extracts of the second article are used in Chapter 2.2 in specific relation to their play *Broken Faith*.

In "The Crime Called Out-Door Relief", Day's commitment to increasing public awareness of abuses of the Poor Laws is illustrated in a description of the methods of its administration through the Out-Door Relief system; and her challenging call to end poverty by the abolishment of this method. Her opening argument outlines the necessity for provision of social relief,

...the poor we always have with us and so the giving of out-door relief is considered an inevitable, concomitant of modern economic conditions. It lightens the burden which rests - or ought to rest - upon the social conscience, and, though it may be deplored as a weak expedient, we put up with it rather than undertake the drastic reforms which its total abolition would entail.¹¹⁷

After sketching the method by which Boards of Guardians set up committees to assess the needs of applicants, Day's main critique describes how some Boards had a fair system, allowing a certain amount of money allocated to either adults or children, while the amounts given by other Boards '...is left entirely to the discretion of the Guardians present.'¹¹⁸ Day then proceeds to castigate the practice of some Guardians who, '... with an eye upon the next election - press individual cases...' ¹¹⁹ She describes the role of the 'Relieving Officer', who, once an individual or a family were granted assistance from the Board, was tasked with regular assessments of their needs, and she claims that '...the

¹¹⁷ Susanne R. Day, "The Crime Called Out-Door Relief" in *The Irish Review (Dublin)* Vol.2. No. 14 (April 1912), p72.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.73.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

multifariousness of his duties allow little time for supervision.¹²⁰ Day illustrates graphic case histories to support her argument that a better way must be found to ensure an end to unnecessary, grinding poverty endured by those, who through no fault of their own did not receive enough assistance to lift themselves out of a spiral of descent and a system that supported the abuse of those ‘...whose lives are merely negative, who are not actively criminal, immoral or intemperate, but who drift through the world in slovenly fashion, leading careless, useless existences which better nobody, least of all themselves.’¹²¹

Arguing that similar abuses in the provision of charity by voluntary organizations act, either through administrative costs or naivety, ‘... rather to aggravate than to cure the disease of poverty,’¹²² Day advocates a new system that would install a Central Relief Committee in every Union of Parishes; wherein suitably qualified and experienced investigators would,

...work alongside the Labour Exchange, the Education Authority and the officer of Health, who will take a close personal interest in every case under his or her care (women are peculiarly suited to such work), and who will continue friendly supervision even after the case has passed beyond the need of active assistance – after care being an essential practically ignored by the present-day methods.¹²³

Day concludes this article with a policy suggestion for her imagined alternative organization that clearly demonstrates her own social conscience, ‘...instead of resorting to the demoralizing method of “relief works” (where nobody works because idleness

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.74.

¹²¹ Ibid. pp.74-75.

¹²² Ibid. p.77.

¹²³ Ibid. p.79.

pays better), they should unite in a determined and practical effort to develop the natural resources of the country.’¹²⁴

Day’s philanthropic leanings and a sense of social justice impelled her to engage with the effects of the First World War. A biographical entry in a local history series of Cork, states that in 1916,

...Day left Cork to take up relief work among refugees of the First World War in France. She spent twenty months with a Society of Friends (Quaker) relief organization, which included dealing with the devastating effects of the Battle of Verdun.¹²⁵

Day chronicled her experiences of this time in a 1918 publication, *Round About Bar-le-Duc*, in which she describes herself as ‘...a wild Irishwoman with all the native and national love of a row boiling in my veins.’¹²⁶ Her book captures a vivid sense of the appalling conditions endured by dispossessed refugees during this time, outlining her training for the work of nursing ‘...over four thousand people...suffering from Diphtheria, Typhoid and septic poisoning.’¹²⁷ Day’s admiration for the fortitude of the French citizens and her abhorrence of the war is described in many descriptions of people she met during her time in Bar-le-Duc and its environs:

...Stenay must find another historian, but even while I refuse to become the chronicler of atrocities, every line I write rises up to confute me. For was not the invasion of France an ‘atrocit y’? Is the world so circumscribed in its meaning that it only contains only arson, murder and rape? Does not the refinement of suffering inflicted upon every refugee, upon every sinister e, upon the basket makers of Vaux-les-Palamies as upon Madame Lassaunne and poor old creatures like the Lablans fall within it too – and would not the Germans stand convicted before the Tribunals of such narratives even if the gross sins of the uncivilized beast had never been laid at their door?¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.80.

¹²⁵ Tom Fitzgerald, ed., *An A to Z of Cork: the History and People of Corcaigh* (Cork: Pah! Nah! Publishing: a unit of ICI. 2009), p.44.

¹²⁶ Susanne R. Day, *Round About Bar-le-Duc* (London: Skeffington & Son Ltd., 1918), p.218.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.30.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.99.

Whilst Day's social conscience is clearly demonstrated in her narrative, her identity as an Irish woman is ambiguously juxtaposed with her southern unionist allegiance to England in *Round About Bar-le-Duc*, where she both invokes the poetry of Padraic Colum to express her empathy for the refugees, 'I am praying to God on High/ I am praying Him night and Day/ For a little home, a home of my own/Out of the wind and the rain's way,'¹²⁹ whilst also claiming an identity with England that disavows Irish history, stating:

... What can we, sheltered and safe in England know of such sorrow as this? To say we have never known invasion is to say we have never known the real meaning of war. It may... press hard upon us but it does not grind us underfoot... does not set its iron heel upon our hearts and laugh when the red blood spurts upon the ground; doesn't rob us of our liberty, nor does it break our altars...¹³⁰

Little is known of Day's life after the war; no personal papers have come to light and only a very few family anecdotes remain. What is certain is that she settled in England soon after the World War ended, where she continued to display her socialist and humanist principles. According to family anecdotes, Susanne Day was a member of the medical corps, driving ambulances for the Red Cross in Spain during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930's. Further evidence of her civic-mindedness is noted in the aforementioned *A-Z of Cork* publication, which offers the information that, during World War Two (1939-45) Day worked as a firefighter in London, '...dealing with the effects of the *Luftwaffe*'s bombing blitz.'¹³¹ While Day is believed not to have married, there is little known of either her personal or literary activities since 1933 - when a historically informative and humorous narrative and photographic account of her travel experiences

¹²⁹ Ibid. p.147.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p.255.

¹³¹ Tom Fitzgerald, ed., *An A to Z of Cork: the History and People of Corcaigh* (Cork: Pah! Nah! Publishing: a unit of ICI. 2009), p.44.

in Provence, *Where the Mistral Blows*, demonstrating Day's literary skill was published.¹³²

(ii) The 'first-wave' Women's Movement in Ireland

The development towards gaining women's franchise in Ireland was engendered and motivated by the social concerns of women involved in philanthropic works within peasant communities throughout the course of the nineteenth-century. The movement gained momentum during the 1870's when legislative rights allowed women greater access to education and employment opportunities as well as a voice in local government. In 1867, following a brave but ultimately futile attempt by John Stuart Mill, M.P in the House of Commons to have women's franchise included in a franchise Reform Bill,¹³³ women made their demands by more visible means.

The first suffrage organizations established in Ireland were the North of Ireland Women's Suffrage Society (also known as the Irish Women's Suffrage Society - IWSS) founded in 1873 by Isabella Todd in Belfast, and the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association, (which became the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association - IWSLGA) founded in 1876 by two fierce defenders of the poor, the Quakers, Anne Haslam and her husband Thomas. The pre-twentieth-century Irish suffrage societies attempted change through non-militant, parliamentary processes; this being most likely due to the class and religious affinities of the majority of their members. An understanding of the turbulent political and social landscape of *fin de siècle* Ireland up to the second decade of the twentieth century is a significant factor in terms of providing a context within which to consider the situation of women in Irish society and

¹³² Susanne R. Day, *Where the Mistral Blows: Impressions of Provence* (London: Methuen and Co. 1933).

¹³³ John Stuart Mill, Radical MP., attempted to include women's franchise in the 1867 Reform Bill. See R. Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement 1899-1922* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1984), pp. 20-34.

the contemporary significance of the content of Cummins' and Day's dramatic output during this time. The position of the suffragists involved and their supporters, who mainly comprised middle and upper-class protestant unionists, was such that they trod a fine line between their demands for the vote and their opposition to Home Rule¹³⁴ in a period when Ireland was fiercely divided in terms of religious and nationalist/imperialist aspirations. Growing rapidly over the successive two decades the number and diversity of suffrage societies reflected those oppositions in Irish society, and it was only a matter of time before several factions of suffragist organizations on opposing sides of the Home Rule question (unionist and nationalist) became impatient and turned their tactics

¹³⁴ 'Home Rule' was the term coined to describe a political initiative, instigated in 1870 by an Irish lawyer and former Conservative M.P., Isaac Butt, for a new federal relationship between Ireland and Britain that would facilitate an Irish government to be set up to conduct Irish affairs whilst retaining fiscal and civic allegiance to Britain. One of the main political issues during this period was the discourse surrounding Home Rule. The purpose of the initiative, championed by the nationalist Irish Members of Parliament - and many southern unionist Members of Parliament - was to alleviate the severe difficulties that had, since the Act of Union in 1800, resulted in widespread social unrest caused by an unjust land system that held no rights for the predominantly Catholic peasantry; the social unrest was compounded by the devastation of the Great Famine (1846-9). These conditions engendered the rise of Fenian resistance and land agitation throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and the 'Home Rule Party', as it came to be known, was supported by most of the southern Irish Parliamentarians, (nationalist and unionist). Following the death of the founder of the 'Home Rule' Party, Isaac Butt (1879), the 'Home Rulers' were led by Charles Stewart Parnell who achieved both widespread popularity and political success up to the last decades of the century. By 1885, the party, now known as the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) had seen the implementation of Land Acts and, in 1886, the British Liberal Prime Minister, Gladstone, introduced the first Home Rule Bill; which, although defeated, ensured that Home Rule was firmly on the political agenda for the Irish Party.

Towards the end of the century, during a Conservative Party term of office, a resurgence of agrarian unrest effected a split between unionist and nationalist members of the IPP, which became more divisive following the fall from grace of Parnell in the wake of publicity surrounding his indictment in the divorce proceedings between his long-term partner Mrs. Kathleen O'Shea and her husband, Capt. William O'Shea. The polarities in the party became more apparent following Parnell's death in 1891. A second Home Rule Bill (1893) was orchestrated by the new leader of the IPP, John Redmond. This Bill, again introduced by Gladstone, whose Party returned to power in 1892, passed through the House of Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords. The impact of the nationalists' persistent attempts to obtain devolution of power (on sectarian tensions in Ireland during this period), motivated Randolph Churchill's support for Ulster Orangemen in 1886, which led to increase of political power for that group where, '...the extremism of their leaders and the wild speeches of the Ulster Unionist MP's embarrassed British and southern unionists alike' (R.Rees, *Ireland 1905-25 Vol. 1 Text & Historiography* (Co. Down Colourpoint Books 1998) p.100. While southern unionists began to fear economic collapse and loss of their lands and privileged positions in southern Ireland should there be an Irish Parliament, many nationalist activists were tiring of the bickering within the IPP. These political events provide specific context for Cummins' and Day's dramas, *Broken Faith* (Ch 2) and *Fidelity* (Ch 3).

In 1908, Irish Parliamentarians, John Redmond and William O'Brien, were struggling, by opposing means, to obtain Home Rule for Ireland. Between 1905-1908 Arthur Griffith's organizations, National Council and Cumman na nGaedheal working together to press for independence from Britain, eventually established Sinn Fein as an alternative to the IPP; they were supported by *Inghinidhe na hEireann* (The Daughters of Erin - an Irish women's nationalist organization, founded in 1900 by Maude Gonne McBride) and IRB sympathizers in the Gaelic League, a nationalist, cultural organization set up by Douglas Hyde to preserve Irish culture and language. In the event, the 1910 General Election resulted in a minority Liberal government which was dependant on the support of the Irish MP's and eventually, in 1912, the third Home Rule Bill was introduced. The Ulster Unionist Party challenged this situation with vehemence, and in April 1913 formed and armed the Ulster Volunteers. In November 1913, John Redmond, responded by establishing an armed nationalist force, The Irish Volunteers.

towards more militant suffragette-style methods. This change can be ascribed partly as a result of political inaction on the ‘woman issue’ by the government and also by the entrenched and politically-motivated opposition to women’s franchise by John Redmond and his followers in the Irish Parliamentary Party who were fearful of the threat to Home Rule posed by the increase of unionist voters should the suffragist women win out.

Influenced by the English radical suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst, who, in 1903 formed and organized the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) on the British mainland, Irish suffragists, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins broke from the IWSLGA in 1908 to found the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL) – emphasizing the militant, non-party stance of their new society. The IWFL were frustrated by the inadequacy of Press coverage, which, in terms of cohesion for the Irish women’s movement in its entirety, they considered necessary. In their view, press reportage was condemnatory, as pointed out by Rosemary Cullen Owens who cites an editorial from *The Leader*, a nationalist weekly paper which complained, ‘...the movement in Ireland rather smacks of imitation of the English, and we do not regard it as a native and spontaneous growth...’¹³⁵ The editor of that newspaper, D.P. Moran, referred to Irish suffragists using the derogatory terms “Suffs” and “Suffers”. Cullen Owens further observes a Catholic argument against the suffragists given by the ‘Irish Ecclesiastical Record’ ‘...which stated that “allowing women the right of suffrage is incompatible with the Catholic ideal of the unity of domestic life.”’¹³⁶ The only women’s journal available at that time, *Bean na hÉireann*, (Irishwoman)¹³⁷ emphasized

¹³⁵ R. Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Woman’s Suffrage Movement 1889-1922* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1984), p.45.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Bean na hÉireann* was the socialist, feminist women’s journal of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a nationalist women’s movement society, founded by Maud Gonne in the fin de siècle as a response to women’s exclusion from nationalist organizations.

a strong nationalist bias that alienated unionist suffragists and as a result, the IWFL decided to establish their own newspaper.

In May 1912, their newspaper, *The Irish Citizen* was launched, co-edited by James Cousins and Francis Sheehy Skeffington¹³⁸ with the aim of providing an effective medium by which to disseminate information about suffragist events and to enable the views of the many disparate suffrage societies to be expressed - this paper however, possessed its own bias which naturally promoted the use of selective militancy. In its first issue, *The Irish Citizen* disclosed the existence of ‘...well over 3,000 suffragists’¹³⁹ working towards women’s franchise. Many of these suffragists were members of non-militant groups, including the Cork branch of the Munster Women’s Franchise League (MWFL), founded in 1911 by novelists, Edith OE Somerville and ‘Martin Ross’ (Violet Florence Martin)¹⁴⁰ along with Susanne Day and Geraldine Cummins. Cliona Murphy describes the MWFL, which claimed three hundred or so members, as, ‘... a rather strange organization in that it embraced nationalist and unionist women’ and that it was ‘... non-militant, non-sectarian and non-party.’¹⁴¹ The MWFL members were generally middle-class, literary women whose primary aim was, as described by Susanne Day in a suffragist article for the MWFL; “Women in a New Ireland” (1912) simply to, ‘... obtain the vote for women as granted to men.’¹⁴² Although viewed in a rather patronizing tone as a ‘vague talking shop’ by the more militant editors of *The Irish Citizen*, I argue that

¹³⁸ James Cousins and Francis Skeffington were feminist supporters and the husbands of the founders of the IWFL.

¹³⁹ R. Cullen Owens, *Smashing Times: A History of the Irish Woman’s Suffrage Movement 1889-1922* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1984), p.45.

¹⁴⁰ Novelists, Edith O’Ene Somerville (1858-1949) & Martin Ross (Violet Florence Martin 1862-1915) achieved considerable literary success from 1889-1949. Together with Day, Cummins and other literary women from the Cork area, Somerville and Ross provided (through the MWFL), an environment conducive to women’s political/social and literary discourse. Despite the untimely death of Ross in 1915, Somerville, who engaged with the practice of spiritualism and automatic writing, continued to credit Ross as co-author of their publications from 1915-49.

¹⁴¹ Cliona Murphy, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), pp. 24-25.

¹⁴² Susanne R. Day, “Women in a New Ireland”, pamphlet for the Munster Women’s Franchise League (1912) p.3; cited in Cliona Murphy, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p.21

the discourse of the MWFL was crucial in terms of the necessity for public and intellectual debate, and for the dissemination of information regarding the franchise and other feminist issues, that were carried throughout the rural areas by their members - many of whom, like Day, were involved in local politics.

The political and social impact of the MWFL, whose executive were well-educated women, was highly effective both in terms of lively outdoor meetings and in their involvement in local issues. Cliona Murphy has observed how Day's documentary-styled fiction *The Amazing Philanthropists* served as a contemporary platform for women to become engaged in local and in national politics '[As] Day shows, it was not unnatural that women who were seeking to better their interests in the industrial, educational and local government spheres should wish to extend it to the Parliamentary sphere.'¹⁴³ Murphy cites from an article written by Day for the MWFL (1912), in which she describes the effects of the legislative benefits gained by women:

In profession after profession they have proved their merit. On County Councils, Boards of Guardians and Committees they have vindicated their public-spiritedness. But her position on administrative boards has only increased women's demands for the vote. In administering the law she has learned how to criticize it, and its weak spots stare up at her in helpless and often tragic confusion.¹⁴⁴

Susanne Day and Edith Somerville were also leading figures in the Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation; a non-party, non-militant organization, founded in 1911 by Louie Bennett and Helen Chenevix which acted as an 'umbrella' group to co-ordinate the work done by diverse suffrage groups around the country. This group organized propaganda, outdoor meetings, conferences and educative programmes - as well as lobbying Irish and

¹⁴³ Ibid. p.15.

¹⁴⁴ Susanne R. Day, "Women in a New Ireland", pamphlet for the Munster Women's Franchise League, (1912), p.3; cited in Cliona Murphy, *The Women's Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p.21.

English ministers and facilitating the publication of many articles and letters penned by Day and Somerville. Bennett, assisted by Day, also founded the Irish Women's Reform League (IWRL), a separate non-militant organization that held a particular appeal for Day's philanthropist nature - as the IWRL focused on social and economic reform for women.

Between 1913 and 1915, many suffragist, feminist and nationalist dramatic events were staged by women's groups and societies around the country. A notable occasion was the 1913 suffrage conference in Dublin, organized by the Irish Women's Suffrage League, where the *Pageant of Famous Women*, including Constance Markievicz's famous portrayal of St. Joan of Arc, was presented. Productions of suffrage dramas include the English suffragette play, *How the Vote was Won* (1909) by Cecily Hamilton and *The Prodigal Daughter* (1914) by Francis Sheehy Skeffington as well as plays of feminist interest, including a one-act play by Susanne Day, *Toilers* (1913) which criticized the prevailing social conditions that forced young girls into prostitution; Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* (1886) and G.B. Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893) and recitations such as Laurence Housman's *Woman This and Woman That*, performed by former Abbey theatre actress Una O'Connor, member of *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* (Daughters of Erin)¹⁴⁵ in 1914 at the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) Daffodil Fête. The text of Susanne Day's aforementioned one-act play, *Toilers*, which addresses the plight of two young girls driven to prostitution by poverty, is unfortunately lost; however, a record of its performance remains in *The Irish Citizen*. Reporting on a speech made by a Miss Abadam in the Sackville Hall on using the stage as a propagandist strategy the article states how Miss Abadam informed the audience that,

¹⁴⁵ *Inghinidhe na hÉireann* (Daughters of Erin) was a women's organization founded in April 1900 by Maude Gonne. *Inghinidhe na hÉireann*'s agenda was political, social and feminist; it opposed Home Rule, supported the Irish-Ireland movement and was later allied to Sinn Féin.

‘The Irish Women’s Reform League added practice to their precept by staging a new one-act play by Miss S.R. Day, PLG of Cork, entitled *Toilers*’.¹⁴⁶

While Geraldine Cummins was never a member of the IWFL, she expresses admiration for the militant English suffragettes in her unpublished autobiography. During her (previously mentioned) trip to London as part of the Irish hockey team, Cummins and her companions witnessed an English suffragette demonstration. In her journal she decries the ‘Victorian spirit’ and submissive behaviour of Irishwomen who ‘...are distinctly the silent sex on public matters. They rule the home with their tongue, but they will never rule a nation with it,’¹⁴⁷ and compares them to the ‘riotous’ activities of her English ‘sisters’ who, ‘...broke the law, joyfully went to prison, laid siege to such revered institutions as Cabinet Ministers and Houses of Parliament, ...broke up and disturbed the vast serenity of the London Police Force...’¹⁴⁸ Admitting that she ‘...craved to stay in this lawless metropolis...’,¹⁴⁹ Cummins writes of her admiration for the English Suffragettes who, ‘...tore up convention and practiced every conceivable disorder, defying the tyranny of the Irish Members who made it possible for Asquith ... to continue to deny a whole sex political liberty.’¹⁵⁰ Despite this claim of veneration, Cummins was clearly unwilling to follow suit in terms of suffrage militancy in Ireland. However, she records, with some pride, the unpredictable and sometimes dangerous consequences of public oratory on behalf of women’s suffrage during a speaking-tour of Munster in 1914. This tour was undertaken with Susanne Day, who, in Cummins’ autobiography, is cryptically disguised as “Mrs. Peter Parnell”, ‘...an eloquent and

¹⁴⁶ *The Irish Citizen* (Dublin: The Irish Citizen Publishing Co. 13th Oct. 1913).

¹⁴⁷ G. Cummins, “The Passing of the Athlete”, in *A Sense of Sin*; MS unpublished autobiography, ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’, U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork). p.2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.3.

discursive lady ...founder of the Garryowen Women's Franchise League.'¹⁵¹ In this entry, Cummins describes her experiences with Day as they:

...boldly made a tour of the province, speaking in the halls of little country towns to gaping farmers and labourers who only associated politics with Home Rule and were much troubled by the militant suffragists because they heckled the Irish members. One woman had actually heaved a battle axe into John Redmond's carriage, this proffered emblem being taken as an insult to Ireland's martyrs instead of being courteously accepted as a gift.¹⁵²

When they visited, '...Carvin, a remote town in the mountains,'¹⁵³ they were warned by a local policeman that they would probably be lynched if they spoke that evening in the Carnegie Hall; Cummins narrates Day's response, a surprisingly aggressive portrait of a non-militant suffragist, 'Lynch – how are you!... I'll lynch them... I'll skin and scorch their souls. Blathering on about freedom and denying us women freedom. God Almighty, I'll talk to them... I'll shame them!'¹⁵⁴ The constable again tried to dissuade the women by describing the danger they faced:

All the same, Ma'm, the mountainy men are very fierce. Squibs and stones they've gathered; and 'tis unknown the mischief they'll work on man, woman, dog an' divil once they have porter taken... once the blood is up!¹⁵⁵

While Day refused to be intimidated, Cummins ruefully admits in her journal that she was 'decidedly daunted' herself. In a further entry however, Cummins bravery is demonstrated in her account of an incident which occurred while addressing a group of female factory workers during their lunch hour. She describes the factory women's political affiliations as placing, '...John Redmond (the Irish leader and opponent of votes

¹⁵¹ G. Cummins, "Literature and Politics" p.2, in *A Sense of Sin*; MS unpublished autobiography. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork)

¹⁵² Ibid. p.4.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p.5.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

for women) a little higher than the saints, a little lower than the angels'¹⁵⁶ and describes how a mob of these women:

...surged down the road with whoops and yells... the crowd in countenance, resembled a pack of snarling hyenas... some of its members concealed slings of stones under their shawls... yelling like hell-hounds the two hundred girls started pelting us with stones and offal...¹⁵⁷

Cummins' lip was split by a stone and an English suffragette who was with her group received a severe cut to the head as they ran for the safety of the factory manager's house. Cummins describes how she faced down 'this pack of sluttish shawleys'¹⁵⁸ as her two companions ran for safety:

A strange humour of anger swept over me, as leaping forward, I placed myself between them and the wild brood behind us, Oh, God, for a stick or a revolver – “You dirty beasts – you filthy cowards and curs” I roared ... shaking my fists at the women as blood spouted from my plucky companion's forehead.¹⁵⁹

Cummins' response momentarily stopped the mob in their tracks allowing her companions to reach the house, as she backed away slowly 'my fists ready'¹⁶⁰ before she turned and ran, barely escaping to the safety of the house as three women made a grab for her coat.

Cummins' and Day's involvement with the suffragist movement in Ireland is an important element towards contextualizing and assisting cultural feminist analyses of their co-authored plays, *Broken Faith* (Ch. 2.2) and *Fidelity* (Ch. 3). Whilst the women's movement is not overtly addressed in either play, the position of women as subjugated citizens of Ireland is portrayed through the female protagonists in both dramas. The

¹⁵⁶ G. Cummins, "A Political Martyr" p.2 in *A Sense of Sin*, MS unpublished autobiography 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p.4.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p.5.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p.5.

issues for women raised by the playwrights in these plays related to feminist concerns of the period and were equally addressed in the personal writings of both playwrights.

1.2 Representation and Representatives on the Abbey Theatre stage 1910-17

In 1909, following the death of Synge, there was a fear that the Abbey was in decline. Under the terms of their theatre patent, owned by the English heiress, Miss Annie Horniman, who had funded the Abbey Theatre from 1904, the Abbey directors constantly required new Irish-authored plays written in English or Irish on Irish subjects; or such international plays that would interest or educate the public in the higher works of dramatic art. Horniman, who had been closely involved with the management of the theatre until 1907, much to the chagrin of Lady Gregory, Willie Fay and many of the Abbey players with whom she was constantly bickering, had established a further repertory theatre (The Gaiety) in Manchester and, while still patron of the Abbey, was not intending to renew her patent in 1910. Sheila Gooddie, Horniman's biographer, notes that:

Annie was still on good terms with Yeats who... had got over his pique at her independent move to Manchester and accepted that she was not coming back to the Abbey. He was probably relieved, but worried about the theatre's economic future. Annie's funding had given the company an artistic freedom which they would not be able to enjoy any longer.¹⁶¹

The situation became more urgent however on May 7th 1910, on foot of Horniman's dispute with the Abbey directors regarding her perception of events surrounding Lennox Robinson's failure, as a young and inexperienced manager, to close

¹⁶¹ Sheila Gooddie, *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer in the Theatre* (London: Methuen House 1990), p.128.

the theatre as a mark of respect following the death of King Edward VII.¹⁶² Despite apologies in a public letter to the press from Lady Gregory, Horniman was not appeased - as Lady Gregory's statement of regret 'owing to an accident' was accompanied by the announcement of a new play by the very person responsible for Horniman's pique, Lennox Robinson. Goodie claims that the ambiguity of the apology only served to increase Horniman's outrage, which was further fuelled on Yeats' return from France when, after an outpouring of nationalist indignation at what was perceived as Horniman's over-reaction, Yeats flatly refused to make further apology.

The acrimonious episode severed the last connection between Horniman and the Abbey Theatre and, as Horniman refused to pay the theatre's subsidy for the remainder of the year; fundraising became a great priority for Lady Gregory and Yeats. The directors, particularly Lady Gregory, made use of their social positions to appeal for private sponsorship and to establish an Abbey Theatre Endowment Trust. Over the following three years, Gregory and Yeats and a new Board of Trustees obtained their own patent and organized a series of three fundraising tours to America with the 'First Company' of Abbey Players between the years 1911-13 and also established regular tours to London, Manchester and Birmingham up to 1918.

Throughout the politically unstable, poverty-stricken years surrounding the *fin de siècle* in Ireland, the theatres in Dublin provided both a welcome diversion to its citizens and, particularly in the Abbey Theatre after 1909, a platform for individual articulations of social ills. At the same time, commentators within Dublin's artistic community adopted polarized positions on the aesthetic requirements of the Irish National

¹⁶² Robinson, who had decided that whatever he did would be seen as a political act, was intending to remain open for the Saturday matinee performance. Yeats was in France and Lennox sent a telegram to Lady Gregory's home at Coole Park to ask for her advice. Lady Gregory advised him to close as a matter of courtesy; however, delivery of her telegram arrived too late to prevent the performance of the matinee. When Horniman discovered that the Abbey had remained open she was incensed and immediately withdrew her support for the theatre.

Theatre¹⁶³; a theme which has provided lively discourse since that body's inception. Both within the movement itself and in the public and journalistic spheres, the arguments for either poetic drama or social realism as the preferred genre for stage representations of Ireland jostled for supremacy. During the Abbey Theatre's second decade, W.B. Yeats' poetic symbolist plays, the heightened realism of Synge and the peasant comedies of Lady Augusta Gregory were being rapidly replaced by social plays that mirrored the grim realities of life in rural Ireland.

Contributing to the Abbey Theatre Festival in August 1938, Andrew Malone delivered a lecture on realism in the Abbey and observed that while the earlier realism of folk dramatists, Padraic Colum, Lady Gregory and William Boyle were '...fascinated by the language and speech of rural Ireland...'¹⁶⁴ that the Abbey's second decade was of a different significance, presenting actual conditions in Irish life and that '...the more important... of those playwrights all came from the county of Cork, a fact which has its consequences in the general reference to the group known as "The Cork Realists".'¹⁶⁵ Noting that realist playwrights were to be found in all provinces, Malone opined that the lilting dialogue and particularly harsh themes of playwrights from Cork were particularly striking, Malone claimed that the realism of Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Galsworthy and Granville Barker influenced the younger realist playwrights in Ireland during a, '...sociological age when life was real and earnest, and the problems of the social system

¹⁶³ The theatre critic, Andrew Malone, appreciated realism in the Abbey Theatre and, in discussing the plays of Padraic Colum; Lady Gregory; J.M.Synge and Wm. Boyle observed that it had been a feature of Irish drama from the outset, '...realism in Irish drama was no importation from outside...' (A. Malone, "The Rise of the Realistic Movement," in L. Robinson, ed., *The Irish Theatre: Lectures delivered during the Abbey Theatre Festival, Dublin 1938* (New York: Haskell House Publishing, 1971), p.93. However, the poet, AE (George Russell) was less than complimentary, '... they say they are holding up the mirror to Irish peasant nature, but they reflect nothing but decadence. They delight in the broken light of insanity, the ruffian who beats his wife, the weakling who is unfortunate in love, and goes and drinks himself to death.' (See: E. Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Dublin: The Talbot Press Ltd., 1918), p.164.

¹⁶⁴ A. Malone, "The Rise of the Realistic Movement" in Robinson, Lennox, ed., *The Irish Theatre: Lectures delivered during the Abbey Theatre Festival, Dublin 1938* (New York: Haskell House Publishing, 1971), p.93.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

pressed heavily upon the general mind.’¹⁶⁶ The Cork playwrights, Lennox Robinson, T.C. Murray, R.J. Ray and J. Bernard MacCarthy played a significant role in securing the growing fame of the Irish ‘peasant play’ from 1909.

Lennox Robinson’s first play, *The Cross Roads* (1909), a cautionary story of an educated country girl whose patriotic desire to improve conditions in rural Ireland leads her into a misguided marriage to a brutal farmer, was followed by his play *Harvest* (1910), which explores a negative consequence of higher education on rural communities through the tragic story of a farming family torn asunder by the financial constraints and inflated expectations of educating all but one of their children. With these plays, Robinson set a pattern for didactic peasant dramas that confronted various struggles within families and communities in contemporary rural Ireland and in his later, plays, *Patriots* (1912) and *The Whiteheaded Boy* (1916). Robinson’s maturity and confidence in his treatment of themes confirmed his status as a leading playwright in the realist vein. Referring to T.C. Murray’s plays - *Birthright* (1910) which examines contentious issues around land inheritance, and *Maurice Harte* (1912) which portrays the tragic effects on a farming family who have sacrificed everything for years to send their only son to a seminary, only for him to return saying he has no vocation for the priesthood; Andrew Malone remarked, ‘[In] these two studies of peasant life, Mr. Murray went a long way towards consolidating the position of the “peasant play” in the repertory of the Abbey Theatre.’¹⁶⁷

The plays of Robinson, T.C. Murray and those of R.J. Ray and MacCarthy, all fellow Cork playwrights of Cummins and Day were, alongside the influence of European realistic dramatists, the most likely inspiration for the contemporaneous social dramas

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p.108.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p.112.

written from a female perspective by these women. Contemporary theatre historian, Mary Trotter has commented that the Cork realists, inspired by Ibsen, discovered in their locale:

...a shrewd and powerful adaptation of the form to describe the stultifying social experiences the dramatists found in the county's small-town life; and like Ibsen, show that these problems are not natural or caused by individual will, but the result of larger, socio-political systems...¹⁶⁸

Trotter's assessment of the wider social impulses that lay behind the rise of Realism in County Cork was most certainly true in terms of Cummins' and Day's tragic dramas, as is demonstrated in my analyses of *Broken Faith* (Ch. 2.2) and *Fidelity* (Ch. 3.2).

The aforementioned Abbey tours, after 1910, necessitated long absences of the founding directors and it was during these years that many of the new 'social-realist' peasant dramas were given their debut. During this period the Abbey Theatre operated under several managers; Lennox Robinson had several tenures up to 1954 as a manager; his first being from 1910-14; and it is quite conceivable that Robinson may have been instrumental in promoting Cummins' and Day's first production, *Broken Faith*. The contemporary observances of Lennox Robinson - and of Abbey diarist, Joseph Holloway - clearly indicate the popularity of the developing genre of social realism, which had resonances for the greater proportion of the Abbey's relatively small Dublin audience - many of whom were reluctant migrants from rural Ireland who showed a keen appreciation for the airing of social taboos on a public stage. In considering the plays of Cummins and Day within the steady stream of peasant plays, farces and social dramas presented at the Abbey during this period of crisis, aspects of genre and gender are revealed as significant in terms of the specific gender issues residing in Cummins' and

¹⁶⁸ Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge; Malden, USA: Polity Press, 2008), p.54.

Day's work and in reflecting on the imbalance between the number of male and female-authored productions.

As a founding member of the National Theatre Society, Lady Gregory set both a precedent for women playwrights and also challenged the cultural hegemony of patriarchal, late-Victorian Ireland by transgressing the gender boundaries of her sex and class. Encouraged by her example, Cummins and Day were just two of many 'New Women' who responded to the cultural call by actively writing plays in and from an Irish context. In her description of playwriting as a sociable and participatory activity during the late-nineteenth century, historian, Tracy Davis observes that:

Women had a great deal at stake in writing plays, for it represented in the composition, publication, reading and performance, widespread public and important modes of participating in the political act of sociability, construing this as politics not in the sense of administering the state, but as Jeff Weintraub puts it, "discussion, debate, deliberation, collective decision making and action in concert"¹⁶⁹ [Weintraub 1997: 11]

Viewed within these terms, playwriting offered a more immediately powerful form of agency and citizenship to the growing population of literary women, who, from the mid-nineteenth century had increasingly transgressed the boundaries of the more private and sociably acceptable forms of literary production available to them i.e., poetry and the novel, to engage with the more communal and immediate form of drama. The significant number of women who submitted plays to the Abbey Theatre in Dublin during the period 1912-17 demonstrates women's recognition of the power of the theatre, and their endeavours to have their views embodied in a public arena - the Abbey Theatre

¹⁶⁹ Tracy C. Davis & Ellen Donkin, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.18; (includes citation from J. Weintraub, "The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction" in Weintraub and Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 1-42.

submission records¹⁷⁰ show that one hundred and twelve women-authored plays were offered during this five-year time span. Of those, just three were accepted; the two co-authored plays of Cummins and Day, *Broken Faith* (produced 1913) and *Fox and Geese* (c1913 produced 1917); and a play entitled *Aliens* by Rose Mackenna, (produced 1917). Apart from these three plays, there were eleven women-authored plays included in a total of seventy-two productions at the Abbey during this period. The remaining eight plays from women included five from Lady Augusta Gregory and one each from Gertrude Robbins, Mrs Bart Kennedy and Dorothy Macardle - all of whom came to the Abbey stage directly through their connections with the Abbey directors. Omitted from early historical narratives of the Irish theatre movement, most of the women-authored produced plays along with information regarding their playwrights, with the singular exception of Lady Gregory, are lost.¹⁷¹

Cummins and Day were not alone in having their work bypassed. Of the plays produced by the Abbey during 1909-17, relatively few have received the consideration afforded the exciting work produced in the first decade. For both Lady Gregory and the majority of the aspiring playwrights of that period, including Cummins and Day, the exigencies of political events dwarfed their contributions to the second decade of The Abbey's existence - principal exceptions being the realist plays of William Boyle, Lennox Robinson and T.C. Murray, and to some extent, Brinsley MacNamara. However, this neglect may also have been influenced by certain contemporary commentators - for whom the new work produced during this period was deemed unworthy of attention for varying reasons of form, content or aesthetic quality. In *The Irish Review*, Earnest Boyd voiced his view in a blistering critique of the realist drama, in

¹⁷⁰ The Abbey Theatre submission records are lodged in The Abbey Theatre Archive, Lower Abbey St., Dublin.

¹⁷¹ Whilst much information regarding Lady Gregory's life and her prose writings was published, she was therefore acknowledged to a degree in traditional historical narratives. However, it is only in recent years that the large body of her dramatic writings have been recovered and critiqued for contemporary, revisionist theatre histories.

which he described T. C. Murray's *Birthright* and Lennox Robinson's *The Cross Roads* as '...the sordid brutalism of newer dramatists.'¹⁷² Boyd castigates the realist peasant plays on offer contrasting them unfavourably with Yeats' former poetic dramas; and bemoaning the loss of Synge, claiming:

...On all sides complaints are heard of the general mediocrity of the plays most frequently produced, and the general degeneration of a promising movement... [U]nless some radical change is made in the conduct of the Abbey we may regard the present situation as the beginning of the end.¹⁷³

Constance Markievicz, a nationalist suffragette and a socialist, responded to Boyd's essay in a letter to *The Irish Times*, reminding him that the purpose was to create an Irish theatre and that the National Theatre:

...began with nothing...but their own brave hearts. Many of the plays are good; some may be bad; but all are very Irish. The movement is still in its infancy... They give us what they can; we must help them to give us more. All honour to Mr. Yeats, Lady Gregory and their little band of pioneer authors and actors; and all success to them in their uphill task.¹⁷⁴

Markievicz was clearly more aware of the value of the many young Irish playwrights and actors who, despite the impact of severe practical and aesthetic constraints on the Abbey where there was little room for the luxury of intensive training or decent wages, had managed against the odds to form a decent 'second' repertory company. A chapter of Cummins' unpublished autobiography offers insight into her experience as a fledgling Abbey playwright, illustrating the enthusiasm that Markievicz was defending in her aforementioned letter. In the following extract Cummins describes advice she received

¹⁷² Earnest A. Boyd, "The Abbey Theatre" in the *Irish Review* (Dublin), Vol.2 No. 24 (Feb.1913), p268.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p.633.

¹⁷⁴ C. Markievicz, *The Irish Times* (March 1913).

from one of Yeats' sisters (possibly Lily - with whom she subsequently became friendly):

The poet had returned to England... His sister, the owner of a printing press and an artist of real ability, invited me to her house and told me my fortune with the Tarot cards... I basked in the sunshine of her praise "Be arrogant, Miss Massey, as regards your work. Sacrifice everything to it and you will become a fine literary artist. Don't allow a philanthropic vampire like Mrs Peter Parnell to suck you and so destroy your art. Don't allow family, a false sense of duty, this war, the need of money or anything else to interfere with you or draw you away from the lovely road you've chosen to follow"¹⁷⁵

Whilst Cummins appears to have agreed in principle, an innate Victorian sense of responsibility and her desire for independence from her parents prevailed, and she resisted a return to Cork:

...where I might write another play in the atmosphere in which it alone could be successfully created if designed for the "Cloister Theatre" [her pseudonym for the Abbey Theatre]. I must [the phrase '*ought to*' is crossed out and replaced by, '*must*'] continue this secretarial course, learn to be self-supporting...¹⁷⁶

The many edits in Cummins' handwritten manuscript, and indeed in the original typescripts of the plays she wrote with Day and Dowden, present significant clues that assist an understanding of their aims with their dramatic writing and offer a way to illuminate their micro histories. Cummins' autobiography clearly conveys her aspiration towards becoming a dramatist and a determination to devote her life to literary pursuits. Attention to the pseudonyms she employed in her handwritten autobiography, whilst frequently cryptic, provide amusing and intriguing clues that indicate her attitude towards her subjects and the places she describes. For example, the pseudonym of

¹⁷⁵ Cummins, G., (pseudonym 'Jane Massey') "Hurdlestown by the Sea" in *A Sense of Sin*. MS Unpublished autobiography, 'The Geraldine Cummins Collection,' U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p 2.

¹⁷⁶ G. Cummins, (pseudonym 'Jane Massey') "Hurdlestown by the Sea" in *A Sense of Sin*. MS Unpublished autobiography: 'The Geraldine Cummins Collection,' U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.3.

‘Cloister Theatre’ for the Abbey Theatre is an interesting choice both in terms of its allusion to the religious interpretation of an abbey as a communal place of holiness and meditative learning, and also in terms of the efforts she and Day made to become part of the elite group of artists who desired to have their writing housed within the sanctuary of that theatre.¹⁷⁷ Other pseudonyms in this manuscript relating to Cummins’ experiences at the Abbey Theatre include, ‘Hurdlestown-by-the-sea’ (Dublin) – full of hurdles for aspiring playwrights; ‘Harley Monk’ (W.B.Yeats),¹⁷⁸ – the ‘Abbot’ of the ‘Cloister Theatre’ described by Cummins as ‘the greatest living poet of the age’;¹⁷⁹ ‘Lady Ann Carmichael’ (Hester Dowden) – described as a widowed writer who inspired and uplifted Cummins in her first venture as a playwright and ‘Miss Mary Monk’ (Yeats’ sister, possibly Lily) – who as a fellow psychic, befriended and advised Cummins following her first production. It is perplexing however to find that Cummins’ account of her successful debut as an Abbey playwright in her unpublished autobiography is written as though she were the sole author of the play as there is no acknowledgement of her co-authorship with Day. The play she writes of in her journal bears the title ‘Cockpit Lane’ where the description of her agonizing witness of the rehearsal process and subsequent audience reception suggests that she used her journal to reflect on her own inner feelings towards her debut as a dramatist rather than describing the actual event:

...A play of mine named “Cockpit Lane” was accepted by the director... I was suffered to attend the rehearsals. These for me were full of pain. For as there was a change of bill at the

¹⁷⁷ ‘Abbey: n. the building occupied by a community of monks or nuns...’ cited in, R.E. Allen, ed., *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary: Eighth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p.2; Cloister: n. a covered walk... esp. in a convent, monastery, college or cathedral, usually having a row of columns on the inner side. Cloistered: adj.1, secluded, sheltered, cited in, R.E. Allen, ed., *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary: Eighth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.212.

¹⁷⁸ Cummins’ original use of this pseudonym for Yeats was intriguingly crossed out and replaced by the pseudonym “Antony Keene”. There is a note in the margins directing replacement of “Antony Keene for Harley Monk throughout”. This direction also applied to “Mary Monk”- the poet’s sister (Lily Yeats). *A Sense of Sin* Chapter 12 “Low Living and High Thinking” MS. Unpublished autobiography; ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.8.

¹⁷⁹ Cummins, G., “Low Living and High Thinking” Ch.12, in *A Sense of Sin*, MS. Unpublished autobiography; ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ U206 Box 4, Item 35 Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.3.

Repertory Theatre almost every week, and with the exception of the principals, the members of the company were compelled to earn their daily bread by other employment, they had apparently only enough time to learn their lines while consuming their food or in the hours allotted to sleep. At the dress rehearsal the play seemed to me not unlike an undigested lump of cheese. The players were very far from being word perfect.¹⁸⁰

Cummins describes her anxiety in a conversation she had with one of the actresses, “Delia Falvey”, who attempted to reassure her:

“Half their lines not learnt! My God, what else can they do but fail; they’re not superhuman” I groaned. “They are when Harley Monk comes to the first night. You know he arrived from England this morning.” She referred to the founder of the theatre, to the greatest poet of the age, “Harley Monk (*crossed out and replaced by ‘Antony Keene’*) present?” I gave a gasp of delight, and then groaned again. .. “If he doesn’t hear the words I’ve written for ‘Cockpit Lane’ how can he like or dislike the play?”¹⁸¹

Cummins also expresses her excitement when Miss Keene (Lily Yeats) presented Cummins to Antony Keene (Yeats) in the Green Room of the theatre during an interval on the first night of the play:

He fixed his strange dim eyes upon me... I felt myself to be in the presence of Divinity. “Yours is the best first play we have so far received” he remarked in the tones of a Catholic bishop graciously giving his blessing...continuing, “I thought “Cockpit Lane” was the work of a man. I find it hard to believe that a woman was capable of writing a drama of such power.” Other kindly words were spoken; but my memory did not hold them. For all objective things became remote, the figures about me blurred and ghostly, such ecstasy was mine.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Ch.12, in *.A Sense of Sin*, MS. Unpublished autobiography; ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), pp.2-3.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Ch.12, in *.A Sense of Sin*, MS. Unpublished autobiography; ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.3. In the handwritten autobiography, the poet’s name, ‘Harley Monk’, is consistently scored out and replaced by ‘Antony Keene’.

¹⁸² Ibid. Ch.12, in *.A Sense of Sin*, MS. Unpublished autobiography; ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.6.

Cummins' account of the performance and audience reception of the play equally captures her great delight in becoming a part of the artistic movement of Dublin:

The Cloister Company did not fail me on that first night. Their fine Natural sense of drama made up for any shortcomings of memory... Frantic and lengthy applause... Calls for author... A queer choke in the throat... I groped among scenery and props, staggered on to the stage, and blinking owlshly, made awkward bows to the dazzle of footlights and to the dim auditorium... I am able to record the first night of "Cockpit Lane" as being the gayest, happiest night in all my life. The madness of this mood was of course largely inspired by the blessing of that pontiff of letters, Antony Keene¹⁸³

Despite its ambiguity, the document offers interesting material in terms of its portrayal of this young woman playwright's experience of a first Abbey production, and its impressions of the avant garde preoccupations of the people she encountered. While Cummins neglects to include Susanne Day in her reminiscences of their debut at The Abbey, she acknowledges Day's co-authorship of *Broken Faith* in her published memoir *Unseen Adventures*, 'My friend Susanne Day and I had recently collaborated in a play, *Broken Faith*, which was performed by the Irish Players at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.'¹⁸⁴

In the absence of pre-existing studies on Cummins and Day, the information gathered from their personal and published writings, placed within the context of the women's movement in Ireland (and their involvement in that movement), serves to offer a framework within which to facilitate analysis of the plays they co-wrote during this period. Their concerns with social inequities and commitment to attempting change are clearly expressed through their political activities, while their class loyalties are discerned in the tone of their autobiographical writings. While there is little

¹⁸³ Ibid. Ch.12, in *A Sense of Sin*, MS. Unpublished autobiography; 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), pp. 7-8.

¹⁸⁴ G. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures*, (London: Rider and Company 1951) p.20.

documentation relating to their dramatic collaboration all of their dramas were written with the intention of public performance, as evidenced by their submission of plays to the Abbey Theatre and by registration of their plays with the Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers in London.¹⁸⁵ Aside from Boyd's 1918 compilation of contemporary Irish Drama¹⁸⁶ early theatre history narratives, compiled within the ideological focus of post-Independence nationalist and masculine identities, overlooked many contributions made towards maintaining the profile and continuance of the national theatre during the Abbey Theatre's second decade, acquiescing to more negating contemporary opinion by moving swiftly from Synge to O'Casey.¹⁸⁷ However, revisions of the theatrical past from the latter decades of the twentieth-century up to the present time, including the recovery of neglected work, address the gendered nature and lacunae of these earlier theatre narratives¹⁸⁸ admitting re-considerations of the past that previously denied comprehensive expression of a period that was richly informed by, and responsive to, the contemporary social conditions. The recovery and analysis of the co-authored plays by Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day further contributes to this ongoing dialogue within Irish theatre history scholarship.

¹⁸⁵ For play submissions see: Submission records in the Abbey Theatre Archive, Lower Abbey St. Dublin.

For registration of plays by Cummins, Day and Dowden with the Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers (London) see: Original MSS in the 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Cork City & County Archives, Gt. William O'Brien St. Blackpool, Cork.

¹⁸⁶ See, E. Boyd, *The Contemporary Irish Drama* (Dublin: The Talbot Press Ltd., 1918).

¹⁸⁷ See Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (London: Methuen, 1939).

¹⁸⁸ See Hugh Hunt, *The Abbey: Ireland's National Theatre 1904-1978*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., (1979); Fitz-Simon, Christopher, *The Irish Theatre*. London: Thames and Hudson, (1983); Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

Chapter 2

Cummins and Day: Abbey Dramatists

2.1 Introduction to *Broken Faith* and *Fox and Geese*

This chapter considers Cummins' and Day's Abbey produced plays, the two-act social drama, *Broken Faith* (Ch.2.2) and the three-act comedy *Fox and Geese* (Ch.2.3). Both of these plays, whilst materially constructed from the common source of rural peasant communities in Cork, differ widely in both genre and dramatic quality. Not least in this respect is the superior construction and theatrical devices found in *Fox and Geese*. Cummins and Day adhered to thematic conventions of the contemporary realist peasant play advocated by the aforementioned Cork playwrights, T.C. Murray, R.J. Ray, and Lennox Robinson. However, the characters in their co-authored plays resonate with a clear sense of their authors' class, idealism, avant-garde influences and feminist concerns. Cummins' and Day's involvement in the 'first-wave' women's movement in Ireland, in philanthropy and in national and local political issues provide a context within which to analyze their peasant plays. The playwrights' observation of poverty, gender inequality and discrimination become particular issues that are located in the actions, characterizations and dialogue of the fictive characters in *Broken Faith*. This play raises questions concerning received historical notions of female representations on the National Theatre stage, as it specifically focuses on the gender constraints of women that prevailed in Irish society during the second decade of the twentieth century. The female characters in both *Broken Faith* and *Fox and Geese* are the main protagonists, providing the present-day reader with perspectives of early twentieth-century Irish feminism and social documentary at work.

Autobiographical evidence, as previously described, suggests the artistic and intellectual sensibilities of Cummins and of Day who were both encouraged towards independent, autonomous futures by their liberal-minded families. The playwrights' wider education and their political nous was sharpened by their suffragist experiences, their working lives and their travels - as evidenced in Cummins' unpublished autobiography and in subsequent published writings of both of the women.¹⁸⁹ Susanne Day's cognizance of the wretched social conditions and urgent needs of the most vulnerable inhabitants within the post-famine community where she and Cummins grew up were passionately mirrored in the harsh themes and images informing their first dramatic collaboration in which, like other realist playwrights from the Cork region, they challenged social injustices. The off-stage rural landscape of *Broken Faith* is strewn with evictions, destitute families, abandoned women and children and land-grabbing gombeen men,¹⁹⁰ the effect of which is narrated from within the single set of the peasant cottage.

Whilst its two acts are roughly fashioned *Broken Faith* is severe in its criticism of social conditions for the poor in rural Cork, and specifically highlights the playwrights' feminist concerns through the situation of their main protagonist and heroine, Bridget Gara, who embodies the highly-charged ethical tone of the play. The moral didactic is crystal clear in its allusion to conflicting issues attending the impetus towards Home Rule of the Irish Parliamentary Party; and southern unionists' attempts to provide alternative solutions to continuing challenges in rural Ireland is revealed as a useful example of early feminist social drama and of the humanism that Cummins and Day advocated and expressed through their writing.

¹⁸⁹ See Appendix for a full list of published works by Cummins, and Day.

¹⁹⁰ 'gombeen men' was the common term used to refer to unscrupulous moneylenders in southern Irish society during and after the Great Famine period (1845-49) who preyed on the misfortunes of starving families by charging grossly over-inflated interest rates.

The playwrights' use of emotive dialogue in *Broken Faith* is particularly reminiscent of the affective language employed by Lady Gregory in her folk-tragedies.¹⁹¹ Mary Trotter has described how, as '...fluent Irish speakers,'¹⁹² Lady Gregory and J.M.Synge translated the particular expressions of the Irish language into an Anglo dialect that, '...was designed to catch the aural and imagistic qualities of the Irish tongue.'¹⁹³ Cathy Leeney further observes that, 'Language in Irish theatre not uncommonly defines a sense of tribalism or fetishized identity reactive to an increasingly uniform world...'¹⁹⁴ and that Lady Gregory's Kiltartanese dialect:

...in both its comic and tragic frames is... a source of defining dramatic energy... confirming an individual vision as well as innovating a precedent where the Hiberno-English spoken by rural Irish people... whose nobility was enhanced and not compromised by their speech.¹⁹⁵

Drawing attention to critiques of Gregory's language that claim a 'sing-song simplicity that often drifts closer to British melodrama than Irish modernism;'¹⁹⁶ Trotter defends 'Gregory's Kiltartan dialect and Synge's elaborate turns of phrase,'¹⁹⁷ by noting that these playwrights' did not make literal translations of Irish but that their stage language,

...being neither "proper English" nor "real Irish", captures the spirit of Irish language and thought, while also illustrating the dualities and duplicities inherent in the life experiences of many of their characters, who must negotiate maintaining their Irish identity, customs and beliefs within a colonial system that imposes a different, imperialist ontology, represented by the English language and English law.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ For examples see Lady Gregory: Folk tragedies - *The Gaol Gate* (1906); *The Rising of the Moon* (1909) and *McDonough's Wife* (1913); and the Tragedies - *Dergovilla* (1907); *Grania* (1910); *Kincora* (1905 – revised 1909).

¹⁹² M. Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008) p. 26

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 26

¹⁹⁴ C. Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (New York, Peter Lang Pub. 2010) p.25

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 25

¹⁹⁶ M. Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008) p. 27

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 26

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.27

Cummins' and Day's attention to language in *Broken Faith* similarly provides a significant double-purpose which is demonstrated in their familiarity with local customs, dialects and idioms, and in their construction of strong character 'types' for both female and male actors to work with - the text being amply supported by the specific character traits and motivations detailed in the stage directions. My analysis of *Broken Faith* includes consideration of the curious absence of critical reviews in respect of the play's subject of the effects of poverty; pertinent in terms of the timing of its production amidst the volatile political and social unrest in Dublin in April 1913; and particularly within the context of its second Abbey Theatre production in October 1913 when Dublin was in turmoil owing to the widespread union strikes and subsequent 'Lockout' by Dublin's employers.¹⁹⁹

Cummins' and Day's three-act comedy *Fox and Geese* diverges in both form and content from *Broken Faith*; displaying a superior dramatic construction that, in the absence of dramaturgical evidence, was arguably born out of experience gained from the production of their earlier play. Whilst the setting of *Fox and Geese* remains in rural Cork, Cummins and Day made use of a 'split set' in order to present one exterior and two interior acts, each tightly controlled in the style of the well-made play. Cummins' and Day's rather brief collaboration yielded plays that were composed around issues of marriage, land, and emigration, yet their contrasting treatment of these issues in the two

¹⁹⁹ During this period, Socialism had become a growing strength in Ireland since the arrival in Dublin of Jim Larkin, who, in 1912, alongside of James Connolly, formed the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU). Larkin's nemesis was William Martin Murphy, the Catholic owner of the "Irish Daily Independent" newspaper and the Dublin United Tramway Company, and who was one of Dublin's biggest employers. Responding to poor pay and working conditions, the Dublin tram-workers called a strike in early 1913; the tram-workers were supported by other unions and the strike spread throughout other unions in the city. In August 1913, Murphy, supported by the Catholic clergy, sacked all union members, resulting in the infamous 'Lockout'. The resultant widespread poverty and violence in the capital was a disgraceful indictment of both government and the Catholic Church, and caused immeasurable suffering to innocent people. Women's socialist and suffragist organizations, and Quaker groups worked tirelessly in Liberty Hall (headquarters of the ITGWU) and on the ground to alleviate the suffering and although *Inghinidhe na hEireann* had by 1913, almost ceased to exist, remnants of that organization came together to help. Eventually, in the early spring of 1914, the starving strikers gave in.

Abbey Theatre productions is significant. While *Broken Faith*, afforded the playwrights a platform for their feminist, socio-political critique of the material and spiritual poverty that they witnessed and abhorred in rural Cork; *Fox and Geese* was presented as a entertaining, light-hearted comedy in which the authors again used the opportunity through the medium of drama to present a strong female protagonist in the character of young Mary Fitzgibbon who is fiercely independent in thought and deed and is portrayed as a figure of a modern, outspoken, confident Irish woman.

The influence and style of Lady Gregory's peasant comedies, particularly her effective dialogue used as a means to drive plot and characterization,²⁰⁰ is observed in Cummins' and Day's use of language in *Fox and Geese*, specifically evidenced in this play by their employment of local superstitions and customs which are portrayed through the lively interactions between the characters. Cummins and Day made more realistic and economical use of Munster speech patterns and idioms in this play than may be said of the heightened, self-conscious language of their characters in *Broken Faith*. Whilst *Fox and Geese* was undoubtedly presented as a comedy, subjecting the text to a cultural analysis reveals a subtext that suggests the play is a racial parody of rural mores and peasant customs and which clearly and particularly lampoons both men and women alike – most of the characters being satirized as wily, uncultured, uneducated and small-minded

When this play was written in 1913 class and social tensions between Protestant and Roman Catholic nationalist communities were deteriorating and Anglo-Irish concerns regarding the imminent prospect of Home Rule and the uncertain future for Protestant communities in Ireland were an unsettling reality. My reading of the play

²⁰⁰ For examples, see Lady Gregory's folk dramas: *Spreading the News* (1904); *Hyacinth Halvey* (1909); *The Workhouse Ward* (1909) and *The Jackdaw*(1909).

draws on Pilkington's consideration of the political strategy of constructive unionism²⁰¹ in *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People*;²⁰² in which Pilkington argues that the influence and embodiment of constructive unionism in the founding ethos of the Irish Literary Society (ILS) and the Irish National Theatre Society opened the way towards establishing an Anglo-Irish cultural dominance by, '... expressing a distinctive cultural response to Ireland's envisaged future, a response that has its roots in *fin de siècle* southern unionism.'²⁰³ From a class perspective, the configurations of the characters in *Fox and Geese*; their deceptions, hidden agendas and disguised identities converging in a convoluted dance of relationships and possible marriages, read as a political metaphor for the complexities of Ireland's nationalist and unionist positions in relation to Britain and the discourses surrounding the proposed third Home Rule Bill in 1913.

Analysis of this play also draws on Paul Murphy's seminal investigation of the relationship between class and gender in the context of Irish theatre history;²⁰⁴ and in particular his discussion of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy associations of J.M.Synge, W.B.Yeats and Lady Gregory and their efforts to construct an idealized trope of the peasant in order to maintain cultural superiority within the rapid modernization of the political and social landscape of Ireland. Murphy's findings, reinforced by consideration of the political and sectarian tensions in Dublin when *Fox and Geese* was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1917 strengthen my proposition that an Anglo-Irish anxiety pervades Cummins' and Day's representations of the Irish peasantry in this play.

²⁰¹ Constructive unionism describes the efforts of the Conservative party, supported by Irish unionist M.P's during the latter decades of the nineteenth century to appease nationalist agitators in Ireland in the wake of the Land War, by enacting several Bills that allowed greater autonomy to tenant farmers and by establishing local government.

²⁰² L. Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge 2001).

²⁰³ *Ibid.* p.3

²⁰⁴ Paul Murphy, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama 1899-1949*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2008)

Despite the achievement of four Abbey productions (including the tours) of *Broken Faith*,²⁰⁵ three productions of *Fox and Geese*²⁰⁶ and also the publication of *Fox and Geese* by Maunsel & Co.,²⁰⁷ neither play was adequately critiqued at the time nor considered for subsequent historical analysis. The scant information regarding productions of the plays includes a review of *Broken Faith* by *The Irish Citizen* (Ch. 2.2) and, in terms of *Fox and Geese*, the theatre critic for *New Ireland*, known as ‘David’, registered his interest in the emergence of Day and Cummins prior to the first production of *Fox and Geese* (Ch. 2.3). This play received favourable reviews from several Dublin critics in February 1917, however, a less-than encouraging review of *Fox and Geese* from critics in their ‘home-ground’ appears in *The Cork Constitution* following its production at the Cork Opera House in Feb. 1918 (see Ch. 2.3).

2.2 ‘Women speaking for women’, in *Broken Faith*: a two-Act drama

The determination of Cummins and Day to have their work produced by the National Theatre is demonstrated in the Register of Play Submissions to the Abbey for the period between 1913 and 1917 where several entries referring to these playwrights show how they submitted and, if refused, re-submitted the same plays under different titles and/or name of author/s.²⁰⁸ However, this was not the case for their first play, *Broken Faith* (initially entitled *Mother and Son*) and was accepted on its first submission

²⁰⁵ *Broken Faith* was first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin from April 24-27th 1913; the play then toured with the Abbey Company to Tralee in Kerry April 28- May 1st and to the Town Hall, Mallow, Cork from May 1-3rd 1913. For reviews, see Ch 2.2. *Broken Faith* was revived in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin from October 27-29th 1913 – no reviews have surfaced for this second production.

²⁰⁶ *Fox and Geese* was first produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin from February 2-7th 1917 and was revived in from December 4-8th 1917. The play toured with the Abbey to Cork (Feb.1918) and was also selected for the 1918 ‘Abbey Season’ in London.

²⁰⁷ S. Day & G. Cummins, *Fox and Geese* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co. 1917).

²⁰⁸ See: The Abbey Theatre Archives, Lower Abbey St. Dublin.

in February 1913. The play was produced in April of the same year bearing the more appropriate title of *Broken Faith*.²⁰⁹

Broken Faith addresses a feminist issue at that time of women's lack of autonomy, particularly in respect of the subjugated position of married women in the poorer class; the text also offers a socio-political critique of the material and spiritual poverty that the playwrights witnessed and abhorred in rural Cork - these conditions persisted despite the post-famine changes that were occurring in rural societies brought about by land legislation and the effects of constructive unionism.²¹⁰ *Broken Faith* was performed by the Abbey's second company²¹¹ and ran for three nights on a double bill that included George Fitzmaurice's *The Magic Glasses*. In a study of Irish Realism in the early Irish theatre, Hogan et al note that *Broken Faith*, '...received a good deal more attention than did *The Magic Glasses*'²¹² but added, '...fuller summaries in other journals make it evident that there was considerable awkwardness in the handling of the plot, particularly in the offstage incidents and characters.'²¹³ The production of *Broken Faith* received the following review from *The Irish Citizen*:

...perhaps because the writers are well-known suffragists, the press professed to find some unfairness to the male sex and tendency to exalt women. We have been unable to find in the play any justification for this charge... [T]he authors are to be congratulated on holding the scales so evenly balanced between the sexes.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ *Broken Faith* shared a double bill at The Abbey Theatre with George Fitzmaurice's play *The Magic Glasses* from April 24th-27th, 1913. Produced by Lennox Robinson, *Broken Faith* toured to Cork and Kerry from April 28th-May 3rd 1913 and was revived in October the same year - an Abbey custom during this period was to revive 'spring season' plays in the quieter autumnal months.

²¹⁰ For a description of 'constructive unionism' see this thesis: fn. 201. p.68

²¹¹ The First Company of the Abbey Theatre was in America on a fundraising tour.

²¹² 'The Citizen at the Play' *The Irish Citizen* (May 3rd 1913) p.397; cited in R. Hogan, R. Burnham and D. Poteet, eds., *Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History Vol. IV. The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p.250.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p.251.

²¹⁴ 'The Citizen at the Play' in *The Irish Citizen*, (May 3rd 1913).

Broken Faith was revived in October of the same year in the midst of the devastating labour strike and employers' 'Lockout' in Dublin (1913) when, as previously mentioned, the topical resonances within the play's thematic message, as a struggle against oppression, went unnoticed by Dublin's theatre critics.

This play concerns the murder by Michael Gara of a local money-lender, or 'gombeen' man (Reilly), and Michael's subsequent despicable attempt to escape justice by bullying his loyal wife (Bridget) into accepting culpability for his crime. Michael Gara is a 'smallholder' farmer who, through his own laziness and resentful attitude, has managed to practically lose his property to Reilly, to whom he is now mortgaged and in rent arrears. Michael, Bridget, their three small children and his elderly, over-protective mother are barely surviving in a tiny cottage whilst Reilly is living in their former farmhouse. Michael and his scheming mother almost persuade Bridget to confess to Reilly's murder - which would result in Bridget being sentenced to penal transportation or to death on the gallows - when she is saved by the witness account of Dan Hourihan, a prudent, successful 'middling' farmer and former suitor of Bridget. Dan Hourihan provides a balanced contrast to Michael Gara's disreputable character; still in love with Bridget, Dan's mission in life is to protect her as much as decency allows and he serves as a constant reminder to Bridget of the poor marital choice she has made.

Day's observations of the realities for many cottiers and small farmers in rural Cork are documented in her epistolary novel, *The Amazing Philanthropists*. In the following entry, Day describes the living conditions of some of the people she met while canvassing as a candidate for the election of Poor Law Guardians in her parish:

... a tiny grate set in the wall. The furniture consisted of a table, two chairs with broken backs, some cracked crockery, and – nothing else... Further up the road we found a cottage – one-roomed. Earthen floor. Window immovable and un-openable. The nearest pump two or three hundred yards away. Sanitary

arrangements – none whatsoever. Inhabitants, a family of six... eat, live and sleep in that one infection-ridden den.²¹⁵

The stage directions for *Broken Faith* clearly imply that Day was influenced by the poor living conditions she witnessed both in her election campaign, and later as an elected local Guardian:

*SCENE: ...a door at the back, a little to the right. Beyond it is the window. On the left is a wide open hearth opposite to which is the dresser. Above the dresser is a door leading to an inner room. A table stands in the centre.*²¹⁶

Act 1 introduces all the characters of the play and delivers exposition of the social and personal tensions which ultimately drive Michael Gara to his crime. In the opening conversation between Mrs. Gara and Bridget Gara we learn of Michael's reluctance to work and the debts he owes to the local 'gombeen man', Reilly. Michael's idleness has resulted in his now reduced status to that of labourer and has consigned his family to a life of poverty. In the first scene, Bridget enters the cottage having been refused credit for food at the village shop. She laments their precarious existence to Mrs. Gara, voicing her hopes for their survival which may depend on Michael's acceptance of a job offer to build roads - little knowing that Michael has refused the road contract:²¹⁷

BRIDGET: 'Tis Reilly has changed them. They're saving and scraping... to pay him their dues... [B]arry's do be owing a hundred pound. So maybe they're no better off than ourselves.

MRS GARA: ... Whatever will we do at all, Bridget and you not able to raise a thraneen²¹⁸ in the village below?

BRIDGET: ...but there's the contract for the Caherlag road. Maybe we could raise a bit out of his [Michael's] expectations on that.

MRS GARA: You think a deal too much of that road contract, Bridget. I'd not be counting on it meself.

²¹⁵ S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1916), pp.36-37.

²¹⁶ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' U206. Box 25, Item, 197 Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.1.

²¹⁷ The road contracts related to the Government's instigation of Relief works, which took the form of rural road constructions, in an attempt to counteract high unemployment.

²¹⁸ Thraneen – a straw; a rush; a stem of dried grass; something of little value.

BRIDGET: And why not then? Haven't we it promised?
MRS GARA: (*enigmatically*) Ye have.²¹⁹

Dan Hourihan enters the cottage with news of a meeting which may allow a Co-operative society to be established in Ballindhulish, the fictional townland of *Broken Faith*:

BRIDGET: ...it's ruined we are, Dan. We're owing Reilly two years rent. If it wasn't for the contract we'd be starving on the roadside in a week.

DAN: Well now isn't Mike the flyboy? Didn't he tell you Tim Coll is raisin' the countryside against Reilly? ...Isn't there a grand new society to be formed that will break the power of the Gombeen men ...[T]he co-operative society they calls it. And Tim Coll is to be secretary with lashings of money from the Government to buy fat stock and hens and the devil knows what all to pay off Reilly and clear the farms of debt.²²⁰

Dan acts as the mouthpiece for the playwrights to incorporate the innovative ideas of the Protestant landowner, Horace Plunkett,²²¹ into the play. The historian, Russell Rees, describes that Plunkett hoped the establishment of creameries would, '...not only bring material benefits to Irish farmers but would also help to restore their self-respect.'²²²

There are a number of comments in Day's novel, *The Amazing Philanthropists*, where she refers to the suspicions with which the minority Protestant community was regarded in rural Cork; and which she counters with non-sectarian, bi-partisan solutions to the shared difficulties that are in line with Plunkett's apolitical ideas.²²³ In the scenes that follow, the playwrights' outline Plunkett's vision through Dan's character. When

²¹⁹ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.3.

²²⁰ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53, (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.6.

²²¹ Horace Plunkett was a moderate and essentially apolitical unionist landowner who had been helping to combat the evil of money-lenders in rural Ireland by encouraging government investment in new techniques and new machinery in order to establish Co-operative societies and creameries across the country. By 1894 new, well-organized creameries all around the country were fostering links between existing organizations leading to the creation of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society of which Horace Plunkett acted as President. Plunkett's efforts helped towards the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Institution in 1899 by the Conservative government's Chief Secretary to Ireland, Gerald Balfour.

²²² R. Rees, *Ireland 1905-25 Vol 1: Text and Historiography* (Newtownards: Colourpoint Books, 1998), p.46.

²²³ For examples see, S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1916), pp.15;35;90;92

Michael Gara comes in he is cynically dismissive of Dan's news, 'What talk ye have of Reilly. What chance would Tim Coll and his like have against him? ...'.²²⁴ Dan Hournihán's attempts to convince Michael of the benefits of the Co-operative society offer evidence of the playwrights' familiarity with the Government's economic plan to assist small farmers with reasonable interest loans.²²⁵ Upon hearing that there is a chance to get his farm back, Michael begins to show interest:

DAN: ...The young man from Dublin that told me of it said the Government is going to give a hundred and seventy thousand pounds to be divided among the farmers

MICHAEL: (*incredulously*) A hundred and seventy thousand pounds... and Tim Coll is to be secretary?

... Did you say Tim Coll was coming up here this afternoon?... I was thinking maybe he'd tell us something about the society.

DAN: Sure he have all the information... he was telling me... the creameries would bring great wealth to the country. And the new trade... would be the saving of the farmers... he said the Gombeen men would be driven out... and the farmers could borrow money at fair interest instead of paying through the nose as they do now

MICHAEL: Damn him [Reilly], there isn't a sod on the farm that's not mortgaged to him... he threatens to put me out in a week because he wants the land for grazing²²⁶

Michael decides to support the Co-operative scheme, stating that he will buy stock and graze the farmland himself. The references made in the play regarding changes in agricultural practices from tillage to grazing illustrate the very real transformations in

²²⁴ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53, (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p. 9.

²²⁵ Russell Rees describes how the Conservative Government's legislation of The Ashbourne Act, (1885) '...firmly established the principle of land purchase. The Treasury allocated £5 million to provide loans to tenants wishing to purchase their holdings from landlords who had expressed a willingness to sell... Of crucial importance to the tenants was the stipulation that no deposit was necessary... the sale price could be borrowed from the government at four per cent interest repayable over 49 years. Further protection was made available to tenants under the 1887 Land Act, and in the following year Balfour's Land Purchase Act provided an extra £5... Balfour's major contribution... came with the 1891 Land Purchase Act which provided an extra £33 million of funding... while this ... legislation enabled some 47,000 tenants to purchase their holdings, its overall impact fell well short of Balfour's expectations... [M]ore successful was the second part of the 1891 act which established the Congested Districts Board... an administrative agency... given jurisdiction over some 3.5 million acres in the west ... covering the poorest parts of Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Kerry and Cork... [T]he board was charged with responsibility for promoting local industries and developing forestry and fishing... the Congested Districts Board was given powers of compulsory purchase, which allowed it to amalgamate uneconomic small holdings into economically viable units...' See: R. Rees, *Ireland 1905-25 Vol. 1 Text and Historiography* (Newtownards (N.I): Colourpoint Books 1998), pp. 44-45.

²²⁶ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*, Act 1 Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), pp.10-12.

farming that had reconfigured the Irish countryside throughout the nineteenth-century and which had affected the working lives of men and women by the turn of the century.²²⁷ In the post-famine world of *Broken Faith* there were few opportunities for either sex to find work and for Bridget Gara, whose husband's response to her plea for him to take the road contract was , '...[C]an't I work or not as I choose? There's no money in road contracts, 'tis a damned lie for them that says there is,'²²⁸ the future was indeed bleak.

At this point in this play, there is no mention of any opportunity for Bridget Gara to obtain paid employment; her survival, and that of her children, is depicted as being completely dependent on her feckless husband. However, in the final scenes of *Broken Faith*, women's aptitude for work is clearly stated. The issue of women's right to work was of importance to the women's movement, and is inferred in the subtext throughout this play where the contrasting gender representations between Bridget Gara and her husband, in terms of willingness and ability to work are clearly drawn. Maria Luddy's comprehensive collection of documentation relating to the public and private aspects of Irish women's lives during this period²²⁹ includes an anonymous contribution to the *Dublin University Magazine* (Dec.1872) which discusses the importance of employment for women, and the right of women to equal pay:

...However suitable it may be for women to look to their husbands for support, what shall be done in the case of those who have no husbands?... [T]hen too, the tables may be turned. The husband from inefficiency or vice... may fail to discharge his duty, and the burden fall on the wife... [t]o women, comparatively few avenues are fairly open... [I]n the pin

²²⁷ In the mid-nineteenth century a Co. Meath magistrate noted '...one of the most melancholy sights I know... a type of solitude everywhere found. Tillage there is none, but in its stead one vast expanse of pasture land extends. Human habitations are rarer than the bare walls of roofless cottages... where once a population dwelt, and as a consequence, see how lonely and untrodden are the roads.' See: Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Uni. Press, 1983).

²²⁸ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*, Act 1 Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U 206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), pp. 9-10.

²²⁹ M. Luddy, *Women in Ireland 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995).

factories, beginning at the age of five, the girls used to work from ten to sixteen hours: and this in civilized Christian lands where man boasts his gallantry and protecting care. ...[I]s there, then, nothing for her but marriage, starvation, or dishonour? ²³⁰

Towards the end of the first act the playwrights illuminate an associated and equally serious social issue by addressing public health care provision. They portray the general lack of confidence in that service, as expressed by the poorer sectors in Irish society that they witnessed in their own locality. Bridget Gara's son has an accident in the yard and Dan Hourihan suggests that the boy should be taken to the dispensary; however, Mrs Gara is vehemently opposed to this idea:

MRS GARA: Dr. Flynn! Yerra don't talk to me of Dr Flynn! The time Judy O'Grady had the diphtery in her stomach she rose from her bed to milk the cows, and the doctor invoked such maledictions on her it went to her head, struck her dumb... and if the Twelve Apostles themselves came down from Heaven they couldn't draw one word from her this minnit. ²³¹

In *The Amazing Philanthropists* Day records a specific incident during her canvass to be elected as a Poor Law Guardian which clearly implies the source for the above scene in *Broken Faith*. The entry recounts a peasant woman's complaints of poor health care administered to her daughter:

...I tuk her to Doctor O'Carroll, and into the hospital with her says he. What ails her, says I. 'Difftheery of the stummick' he says, 'and it's dead she'll be... if it's not quick you are'...when she got there whatever the doctors done to her, the diftheery swept out of her stummick and rose to her brain, and God rest her soul, she never spoke afther. ²³²

²³⁰ Ibid. pp. 207-209.

²³¹ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*, Act I Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U 206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p 11.

²³² S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1916) p.37.

A further entry in *The Amazing Philanthropists*, informing Day's view on the quality of medical care available to the poor, records a visit to a slum tenement where Day and her colleagues found an old woman living alone who was dying of cancer:

...The other people in the house complain because her moans and screams keep them awake at night. Ah, Jill, if workhouse hospitals are half as bad as their reputation they must indeed be Hell upon earth. This poor creature was in the cancer ward for two months. She will endure any torment rather than go back there.²³³

Cummins was also cognizant of the deficiencies in health care for the poorer classes. In her published autobiography/memoir, *Unseen Adventures*, she describes her father and grandfather as 'overworked physicians'²³⁴ and that her father:

... fought, among other battles for the poor, one against corrupt officialdom, in order to get decent conditions for the thousand inmates in the workhouse hospital... Because of his kindness and the special attention he gave to many poverty-stricken patients, he was, in Cork, popularly known as "the Poor Man's Doctor".²³⁵

Day records several incidents in *The Amazing Philanthropists* that refer to the tireless work of a 'Dr. Aylmer' – as previously mentioned Aylmer was Cummins' mother's maiden name, and Day is most likely referring here to Cummins' father.²³⁶ The addition of the cameo scene of the child's injury in the play implies that the playwrights', informed by their lived experiences, took the opportunity afforded by their drama to publicly criticize the state of public health care in rural Ireland.

²³³ Ibid. p.38.

²³⁴ G. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider & Co., 1951), p.12.

²³⁵ Ibid. p.15.

²³⁶ In 'Letter no.13' in this work, Day specifically refers to 'Jill' as 'Gillian Dorothy' (possibly referring to G.D.Cummins), 'We met Dr. Aylmer this morning... near the children's hospital, and he told us that in the upper ward, which has accommodation for sixteen, as many as forty patients are packed for months at a time in winter... suffering from pulmonary or surgical tuberculosis. He has drawn the attention of the Board to this overcrowding again and again. It has been going on for years, deaths are distinctly traceable to it, recoveries are seriously retarded, but, bless you; do you think the Board has listened to him? Not it!... Dr Aylmer is going to send a pungent letter to the Board...Meanwhile the doctor is raging over another grievance...' S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1916), pp.52-53.

A damning portrait of social animosities in rural communities is conveyed in this play through the richly-flavoured narratives of Timothy Coll whose character, whilst seeming to depict a sentimental and witty dramatic descendant of Dion Boucicault's creation of 'Shaun the Post',²³⁷ functions as a pompous and verbose purveyor of the offstage events. Coll bears close resemblance to the male members of the 'Ratepayers Amalgamated League' ('the RAL') described in Day's epistolary novel, *The Amazing Philanthropists*. In 'Letter No. 11' in *The Amazing Philanthropists*, Day describes the 'type' of men drawn to local Council committees:

...This august and venerable body... meets every fortnight ostensibly to protect the ratepayers of Ballybawn from the depredations of Town Councillors, Guardians and such like... but actually to gossip about the peccadilloes of its neighbours.²³⁸

The stage directions in *Broken Faith* describe Timothy Coll as wearing a felt top hat '*...generally the mark of officialdom... he carries a stick which he never relinquishes, and which plays an active part in his oratory,*'²³⁹ and that:

*... as a Town Councillor, his success would have been assured... possessing the two gifts most needed for that much sought after honour – that of torrential speech and a noble contempt for the value of time. As it is he is a brilliant member of the Rural District Council, a leading politician and a likely candidate for membership in the first Irish Parliament*²⁴⁰

In *The Amazing Philanthropists*, Day portrays the predominantly male Board of Guardians, with some derision, '*...oh, my dear, if anyone ever tells you again that woman's [sic] is the talkative sex don't you believe him. If you heard these men*

²³⁷ 'Shaun the Post' in Dion Boucicault's *Arrah na Pogue* (1911) was one of several stereotypical 'stage Irishmen' created by Boucicault in his popular melodramas.

²³⁸ S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1916), p.3.

²³⁹ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U 206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.13.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.13.

spreading themselves! Time is cheap in Ireland'.²⁴¹ In *Broken Faith*, Timothy Coll establishes his self-importance with a long preamble, creating an atmosphere of expectation around the outcome of the meeting. Michael asks him if it was a success and Coll's reply indicates that he is no hurry to impart his information:

COLL: To be sure it was. Didn't I speak for forty minutes? T'would have done your heart good to see the boys, and not a sound out of them all the time I was on me feet... [*complacently*] 'Tis a wonderful gift. I've often wondered why 'tis meself is blessed with it. But sure we never know where Heaven's blessings will fall, and the meek and the lowly are often singled out for the gifts of the Great Man above.²⁴²

Michael presses him on the outcome, but Coll is not to be rushed and proceeds to describe the people and places in the surrounding neighbourhood who attended the meeting. After a lengthy, grandiose description on the content of his own speech, Coll describes the Co-operative societies as, 'the first note that is struck for freedom in Ireland... the dawn of Home Rule after centuries of oppression...'²⁴³ Michael's newly acquired hopes and sense of liberation are dashed however when Coll finally tells him that, in order to prevent the project from going ahead, Reilly has bribed the farmers – most of who are in debt to him - and has threatened to sell more than Michael Gara's lands for grazing if the farmers vote for the Co-operative Society:

COLL: ...No sooner did I sit down... than up jumped Barry, and whirling his stick over his head. "To hell with co-operative societies" says he. "Where do they come from... who'll give ye the money?" says he. "The English Government" says I. "And did you ever know any good to come out of England yet?" And with that, he up and hit One-eyed Leary that axed for a job under the Society a crack on the head, and after that – Begob it was all up!

MICHAEL: But what has Reilly to do with that?

²⁴¹ S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1916), p.44.

²⁴² S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U 206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.14.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* p.14.

COLL: Sure he had them bribed. Is it cutting his own throat he'd be? If the Co-operative Society was formed in Ballindhulish Reilly would never lift up his head again. There isn't a man of them that doesn't owe him money, and if they'd voted agen him today he'd have sold them up as sure as my name is Timothy Coll...²⁴⁴

Coll's character and loquacious speeches act as a device to bring the public domain firmly within the private space of the cottage, accentuating the social and political instabilities in rural Ireland and resultant negative effects on local communities and individuals that *Broken Faith* depicts. Coll's description of the behaviour of the men at the meeting is indicative of the suspicion and fear, both of officialdom and of each other, that abounded among the poor and the aspiring farmer class in post-famine rural Ireland where self-serving 'types', such as Reilly, were reflected in various contemporary observations of Irish commentators and writers of both unionist and nationalist persuasion. An example of unionist condemnation includes W.B.Yeats' poems *To a Wealthy Man...* (c. Dec. 1912 – January 1913)²⁴⁵ and *September 1913* (c. July/Aug. 1913),²⁴⁶ written in relation to the 'Hugh Lane controversy'.²⁴⁷ In the former poem, Yeats calls on the cultured classes to set an example to 'Paudeen' and 'Biddy', and in the latter, castigates the mercenary attitudes and lack of discipline of the rising Catholic middle classes who, '...fumble in a greasy till - And add the halfpence to the pence – And prayer to shivering prayer...'²⁴⁸ Between 1900-14 James Joyce interrogated and

²⁴⁴ Ibid. Act 1 pp.15-16.

²⁴⁵ W.B.Yeats 'To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures', in D. Albright, ed. *W.B. Yeats: The Poems* (London: Everyman, 1994), pp.158-9.

²⁴⁶ W.B.Yeats 'September 1913', in D. Albright, ed. *W.B. Yeats: The Poems* (London: Everyman 1994) pp. 159-160

²⁴⁷ Philanthropist, Hugh Lane (a nephew of Lady Gregory) owned a large collection of French Impressionist paintings. He planned to donate them to the Dublin Municipal Gallery on the proviso that they build a gallery overlooking the River Liffey, otherwise he would leave the paintings to London, where esteem of art seemed greater. The controversy took on an interesting dimension when, in 1915, Hugh Lane's untimely death by drowning (on the ill-fated sinking of the 'Lusitania' by a German submarine), it transpired that whilst his Will stipulated the collection should go to London, an un-witnessed codicil, written just before his voyage to America, specified Dublin as the preferred location. This began a second controversy regarding the permanent 'home' of the paintings which continues to the present day. See Notes to; 'To a Wealthy Man...', in D. Albright, ed. *W.B. Yeats: The Poems* (London: Everyman 1994), p.526.

²⁴⁸ W.B.Yeats 'September 1913' in D. Albright, ed. *W.B. Yeats: The Poems* (London: Everyman, 1994), pp.159-160.

pilloried Irish society in his focus, within the short stories included in *Dubliners*, on the 'scrupulous meanness' he observed in *fin de siècle* Dublin.²⁴⁹ In *The Amazing Philanthropists* Day describes to 'Jill' how countless hours were spent in rancorous debate over whether samples of food intended for the workhouse should be brought to the Board Room for inspection, '...but when the samples turn out to be legs of mutton and sirloins of beef, pig's cheeks and scores of eggs, well then one wonders.'²⁵⁰ The humorous images she draws of grown men using their fingers to gorge meat and arguing over who was most glutinous among them is tempered by her critique of the waste of ratepayers money. A similar portrayal of self-serving attitudes in rural society is conveyed by the playwrights through Timothy Coll's narrative.

Upon hearing the disappointing news Bridget encourages Michael to finish the day's work he has obtained at 'Kearney's' farm. Michael refuses to go and a row ensues as she reminds him that this job was the only work he'd had all winter. Michael's temper rises; his refusal to listen to reason, his lack of concern for his children and his insulting language finally provokes Bridget into a lengthy articulation of her frustration. Her speech, suffused with pathos, articulates feminist criticism of gender injustice and oppression:

BRIDGET: Then hear me now. I've said little all these years. I've worked... God knows how I've worked... and I've hoped – waited and hoped the spirit would rise up within you and the little childrens' arms around your neck and their soft voices calling in your ears, would win you from your wasteful idling ways. And I've held me tongue while one by one the fields melted away, and the cows were sold and never another bought in their place. And the debts grew larger and larger and you, God help me, the man I

²⁴⁹ For example, the self-important but dis-spirited attitudes of local politicians in *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*; the petty snobberies of Mrs. Kearney in *A Mother*; and the self-deception of Little Chandler in *A Little Cloud*. See: J. Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1914).

²⁵⁰ S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1916), pp. 54-55.

married, spent your days sleeping under the hedge and your nights swilling in Casey's Sheebeen.²⁵¹

Michael dismisses her outburst and Bridget resorts to criticizing his refusal to take the road contract which only serves to inflame their disagreement. Eventually, Bridget sharply reminds him of his parental responsibilities and that if he'd only stop talking and work, '... there'd be no trouble about besting Reilly.'²⁵² Michael reacts in fury, 'Best him! It's easy for you to talk, you with your tongue and your blather. Much you know about Reilly, curse him!'²⁵³ Losing control, Bridget taunts Michael, 'Aye, curse him, Michael, curse him. You aren't man enough to fight him... Oh, if only I was a man I'd raise all hell before I'd let Reilly grind me under his feet.'²⁵⁴ Bridget's challenging words impel Michael to action and Act 1 is brought to its dramatic close as Michael storms off stage with the clear intent to confront the 'gombeen man', '... You think I'm not man enough to face him -You've dared me to it this day, Bridget - I'll show you what I can do - I'll teach Reilly...'.²⁵⁵ In this portrayal of shifting power-relations within these characters' gendered positions, the indisputable moral high ground that Bridget originally held in the interchange is somewhat undermined by the playwrights' use of her verbal diminution of Michael's masculinity and the inference of violence as a solution. However, the scene operates to imply Day's and Cummins' frustrations with male-management of society; their original presentation of women's submissive and malleable position within the patriarchal family structure in the opening scenes is shown to be a fragile assumption which, when challenged by extreme circumstances, becomes nothing more than a social construct, readily disabled. As independent-minded

²⁵¹ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 1, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U 206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.19.

²⁵² Ibid. Act 1 p.19

²⁵³ Ibid. Act 1, p.22.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. Act 1 p.22

²⁵⁵ Ibid. Act 1 p.22

feminists, Cummins and Day witnessed women's passivity in a male-dominated society - particularly amongst the peasant classes when canvassing for women's rights - and this scene in the play illustrates a notion that women, particularly when faced with the primal need of survival and the protection of their young, have an equal power to that of men in generating autonomy in their lives.

Act 2 opens as Bridget, who has been out searching around Reilly's farm for Michael, enters the cottage. When Michael comes in, acting in a furtive manner, Bridget questions him closely, concerned that he may have acted on his threats against Reilly. She is interrupted by a great shout from outside and Mrs Gara, commenting from the window of the cottage, tells them that Reilly's barn is burning. Despite Bridget's pleas Michael refuses to go down to help and she realizes in horror that he is responsible. A group of people approach the cottage and Michael half-blurts out that Reilly is in the barn. Not fully realizing Michael's words Bridget tries to find out if he has seen Reilly, but Michael hides in the inner room telling the women to say he is not at home. Timothy Coll, who leads the group, brings news that Reilly is missing and the whole village is out looking for him. Once more the offstage action in the public domain is graphically narrated by this 'messenger':

COLL: ... the boys have traipsed the country looking for him...
'tis a wonderful thing how ye'd be mistaken in a man. I'd never
have believed that Joe Reilly would be the one to see his own
barn on fire and he not there to help to put it out.²⁵⁶

Coll's speculation on how the fire could have started when the barn door was locked from the outside, and his wonderment at Reilly's disappearance, increases Bridget's fears. When Coll leaves, Mrs. Gara, who is observing external events from the cottage door, comments on the offstage action and the terrible progress of the fire as Bridget

²⁵⁶ Ibid. Act 2, p.6.

desperately attempts to discover what Michael has done. The parallel dialogues in this scene create a rising tension that brings the play to its climax and are worth quoting in full:

BRIDGET: ... I don't like it. I don't like it at all
MICHAEL: There'll be others than you not liking it before the day is done
BRIDGET: *[catching her breath with a great sob]* Michael!
[another shout, much louder, is heard from outside]
MICHAEL: *[starting in terror]* My God, have they found him?
BRIDGET: Michael... You've killed him...
MRS GARA: *[at the door]* They're making great shouting... Something's happened.
MICHAEL: *[to Mrs. Gara]* What is it? Can you hear what they're saying?
MRS GARA: No... Wait now... It's the roof... it's the roof of the barn, it's fallen in... The sky is red like blood...
BRIDGET: Like blood! His blood... It's staining the earth... it's staining the sky... it's on our hands... on Michael's. Oh, Mother of Christ what have you done this day? *[buries her face in her hands. Mrs. Gara looks from the one to the other, a great trouble shadowing her face].*²⁵⁷

Michael admits to the women that he killed Reilly but cruelly places blame on Bridget for inciting his anger. His mother readily agrees and Michael begs them to keep quiet as no-one but Bridget was around the barn. Bridget protests; claiming that Dan Hourihan saw her looking for Michael in the area; but Mrs. Gara, pouncing on that information, insists that if suspicion falls on Bridget her own son will be saved from punishment and his children saved from shame. This scene may be read in terms of the weight of what Cathy Leeney, in a reading of Lady Gregory's *The Gaol Gate* (1906), has termed '...the prejudicial power structure...'²⁵⁸ referring to social survival within small

²⁵⁷ Ibid. Act 2, p.11.

²⁵⁸ Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (Irish Studies Vol. 9. ed. R. Mahoney; New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), p.30. **When it transpires that Denis is dead, both women feel the burden of carrying his shame. In the final denouement, it is revealed that he has been hanged but had not informed against anyone, and while Mary Cushin laments her husband's death but reproves him for leaving her and their child vulnerable, his mother transforms her condemnation into a song of praise for her heroic son, the martyr, who will be remembered and hailed as a patriot for all time.

Irish communities. In Gregory's *The Gaol Gate*, two women wait outside a gaol for news of Denis Cahel (husband of Mary Cushin, and son of Mary Cahel) who has been arrested as an informer. His mother states that if he is guilty she will send him away, sell their holding and go to the workhouse taking her grandchild with her rather than face the shame of the community. In *Broken Faith* Michael Gara and his mother close in on Bridget to coerce her to take on Michael's shame by means of emotional blackmail and intimidation in equal measure:

MRS GARA: ...We'll be saying nothing, Michael and me. Only... if Hourihan seen you and made talk among the neighbours 'twould keep the polis off Mike. [*Michael rises and comes slowly to the table beside which Bridget is sitting. He and Mrs. Gara close in on her trying to coax her*]. Sure they wouldn't harm you, a woman that always lived kindly and hurt no one – they'd let you go free. If you were to say nothing - just at first like.²⁵⁹

Rumour, as a common trope of the peasant play, comes into operation as Mrs Gara continues to harangue Bridget thereby illustrating the power of gossip in a small village.²⁶⁰ She warns her daughter-in-law, '...when dark deeds is done there's great talk and wonderment, and suspicion do be falling on one and another and tongues do be running around.'²⁶¹ The scene is interrupted by Timothy Coll who rushes in with the information that Reilly's body has been found inside his locked barn and that stories have begun to circulate that Bridget is the prime suspect. Michael Gara makes a feeble, involuntary attempt to confess, but his protective mother intervenes and accuses Bridget saying that Michael is only trying to protect his wife. As Coll hurries away to fetch the

²⁵⁹ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 2, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.14.

²⁶⁰ Mrs. Gara's language in this scene invokes images of Lady Gregory's play *Spreading The News* (1904), where her stereotyped portrayal of the imaginations of the peasants cause an innocent man (Bartley Fallon) to be arrested for a murder and accused of infidelity, neither of which events had actually occurred.

²⁶¹ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 2, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p. 15.

sergeant, Dan Hourihan arrives to confront Michael - having witnessed Michael going into the barn with Reilly. Bridget has decided to sacrifice herself to save her children from the shame of their father's crime and begs him not to interfere. Dan reluctantly agrees and holds the police off for a few minutes while Bridget speaks with her husband. In the long scene that follows, Michael outlines his plan to flee to America and Bridget asks for his promise that he will take proper care of the children should she be convicted. However, Michael callously insists that they should either stay with his mother or survive on their own in the workhouse. The dialogue at this point reflects Susanne Day's extremely strong views on parental responsibilities, the subjugation of women and the conditions for children in workhouse institutions; and I argue that this scene highlights her concerns:

MICHAEL: There's worse places than the workhouse. T'would be the height of folly for me to saddle meself with them at all.

BRIDGET: So it's deserting them you'll be? ...the poor-house is no place for little childher at all.

MICHAEL: You're too particular. Much harm 'twill do them.

BRIDGET: Much harm! And it's for this I'm giving meself up?

MICHAEL: Women do be always expecting too much of a man... it's the sorry fool I'd be to go traipsing off to the States with three young children on me hands; much chance I'd have of succeeding... Aren't they a dale better off here where all the world knows them?

BRIDGET: They are, and the truth lies straight and clear at last. I was searching hard and surely to save you and them, but now I see 'twas wrong I was, for you're meaning to desert them, Michael. You'll save yourself and leave them to shame, and I'll not have it!²⁶²

An article written by Day for the *Irish Review* concerning the living conditions of children living in workhouses, suggests a radical alternative to the 'care' currently being provided. In this essay, "The Workhouse Child", Day demonstrates her abhorrence of the current system by offering several graphic descriptions of the dangers for children in

²⁶² Ibid. Act 2, pp. 21-23.

some workhouses, and she discusses the long-term effects of the prejudices which children learn to endure:

...within its four walls, everything that is or has been of evil may be found in its symptoms or effects, embodied in men or women whose souls are seared with the brand of vice... [And] there too are the children, daily exposed to sights and sounds which cannot but have a deteriorating effect... ..old and young, idle and drunken, vicious and unfortunate may be herded promiscuously together with pitiable results to the child mind thrust into such unsuitable surroundings...²⁶³

Day's strong criticism of the grinding repetitiveness of institutional life and its dulling effect on the minds and spirits of workhouse children - who are further shunned by the townspeople of communities in which they reside - is a clear indicator of the source from which the playwrights' drew for their expression of Bridget Gara's fears for her children.

Finally, making clear that she will not take the blame for Michael's crime, and despite his pleas and his swearing that he will take the children, Bridget is resolute, '[looking at him searchingly] I don't believe you... you'd fail me again as you failed me all along... I'll never believe you again.'²⁶⁴ Bridget's final speech reads as a clear call from the playwrights for Irish society to become more child-focused; and for Irish women to overcome situations of male oppression and become more responsible in shaping their society and their futures:

BRIDGET: ...Yes. The children you'd leave to strangers in the cold, pitiless workhouse wards ...[her voice softens] It's love little children wants in the world, and it's me they must look to now, me, that will love them, and won't be leaving them to strangers, but will care for them, work for them and toil for them night and day.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Susanne Day, "The Workhouse Child" in *The Irish Review (Dublin)*, Vol. 2. No.16 (June 1913), pp.170-171.

²⁶⁴ S.R. Day & G. Cummins, *Broken Faith*. Act 2, Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 197, Ref. 3/53 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.23.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Act 2. p.24.

With this reference to women's ability to work and to provide for their family without the support of a man a central point is made in the *dénouement* of this feminist play which ends abruptly on a high note of melodrama. Dan Hourihan confirms the truth of the murder to the police sergeant who is about to arrest Bridget and the curtain falls as moral justice prevails.

In *The Amazing Philanthropists*, the tone of Day's accounts of several daunting incidents that she witnessed as a Guardian oscillate between horrified sympathy for the plight of workhouse inmates and impoverished local families in her locality, and startlingly condescending descriptions of committee meetings presided over by the mainly Catholic, male Guardians. She described the workhouse system as a 'colossal business run by amateurs... which breeds and perpetuates the very evil it was designed to kill.'²⁶⁶ Other descriptions of workhouse conditions contain violent adjectives such as, 'cancerous', 'appalling', and 'infamous' ; and of the inmates, 'coarse', 'vicious' and 'brutalised', with 'Women like some awful curse-ridden witches, slobbering and leering' and of 'little children... hands rolled in bandages to prevent them from tearing, scratching or maiming one another.'²⁶⁷

Discussing the myriad ways in which women have intervened in the social space by means of writing plays, Tracy C. Davis' suggests that playwriting is, '...an act of the associative public sphere, necessarily implicating publicity (publicness);'²⁶⁸ that as a public act, playwriting takes a position against doing nothing, and:

...forces the question of how to regard women playwrights as "representative citizenry" when, in an official sense they are neither representative of citizens (enfranchised men) nor fully authorized as citizens who make representations of things (such as artists). Are they representative of women sharing their class

²⁶⁶ S.R. Day, cited in, Tom Fitzgerald, ed. *An A to Z of Cork* (Cork: Pah Nah Publishing, 2009), p.43.

²⁶⁷ S.R. Day, *The Amazing Philanthropists* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1916), pp.46-47.

²⁶⁸ Tracy C. Davis *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) p.22

and background, of other playwrights, or perhaps of women in general through the characters they created?²⁶⁹

By highlighting the plight of women from the poorer class in *Broken Faith*, Cummins and Day meet Davis' criteria for 'sociability' by '...stepping in to the discursive realms of the public and private and of communities of speech and action.'²⁷⁰ In using their drama as a platform for debate, Cummins and Day gave representation to the classed and gendered subalterns of rural Cork. *Broken Faith* constitutes an example of the playwrights' determination to contribute to the cultural discourse of their time by presenting a play that both responded to the dramas of social realism being presented on the Abbey stage and which commented on particular social issues affecting women and the poor in rural communities. The *Irish Citizen* reviewer, recognizing the feminist significance of the work wrote, '[It] is a sordid tragedy, redeemed by the heroic character of the woman as indeed we should expect to find in the work of a lady who adds no small share of dramatic ability to her well-known feminist and philanthropic activities.'²⁷¹

2.3 Where did all the rioters go? - Un-noticed transgressions in *Fox and Geese*

... (F)rom the earliest religious difficulties encountered with Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*, through the granting of a patent, the riots caused by Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, the confrontation with the castle authorities over the staging of Shaw's *Blanco Posnet* and storms of protest at O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*...- the Abbey had a rough passage.

Alasdair Macrae²⁷²

Alasdair Macrae's concise summary marks notable occasions in the Abbey Theatre's early history when its directors and playwrights affronted their audiences and

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p.22

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p.23

²⁷¹ "The Citizen at the Play" in *The Irish Citizen*, (3rd April 1913).

²⁷² Alasdair Macrae, *W.B. Yeats: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.100.

the British authority of the Lord Lieutenant, under the administration of the Chief Secretary for Ireland in Dublin Castle, with their representations of Irish identity; particularly in their portrayals of Irish women. Despite revisionist re-interpretations of events, that saw Catholic/Nationalists and Imperialists arguing over first Yeats, Synge and Shaw and, as the above quote points out, the subsequent post-independence controversies between Republicans and Free Staters in response to O'Casey, the traditional images linger, of an early twentieth-century Abbey audience that both lived up to and opposed the stated aspirations of its founders for an educated, passionate response to their work. The fact that no riots erupted in protest at Cummins' and Day's representation of Ireland on this controversial stage in 1917 is, despite the title of this sub-section, simply a rhetorical and retrospective observation made on foot of analysis of *Fox and Geese*, which argues that elements of Anglo-Irish anxiety and female acts of transgression reside within the play's gender characterizations and dialogue. My reading of *Fox and Geese* considers the political, class and social tensions attending Irish society both in terms of when this play was written in 1913 and in respect of the political position of the Anglo-Irish Abbey directors when the play was produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1917.²⁷³

²⁷³ Following a decade of political machinations between Redmond, Asquith (who succeeded Gladstone as leader of the Liberals), the Conservative leader Balfour and the southern and northern unionists, the third Home Rule Bill was passed by Parliament. However, the Government of Ireland Act 1914 was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War (1914) and its implementation deferred for the duration of the war. With the outbreak of the war, militant nationalists in Ireland began to imagine the possibility of insurgence whilst England was otherwise occupied. On Easter Monday 1916, a minority group of Republican nationalists made another military bid for independence by occupying administrative and strategically positioned buildings in Dublin and declaring Ireland to be an independent Republic. The British response was swift and severely punitive; creating political martyrs and awakening a new wave of militant nationalism in Ireland. These conditions prevailed when Cummins' and Day's comedy, *Fox and Geese*, was staged at the Abbey Theatre in February and December 1917. ** The ensuing War of Independence (1918-22) ensured that the Third Home Rule Act would not be implemented. In 1920 a further Government of Ireland Act passed into law, however, this Act was not recognized by the Provisional government of Ireland and ultimately was made unnecessary by the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922. For a comprehensive account of the effects on literary Ireland of the Great War and the 1916 Uprising in Dublin, see Declan Kiberd, "Revolution and War", in D. Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: the Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp.191-247.

The Anglo-Irish attitudes and allegiances of Cummins and Day are read within the context of Lionel Pilkington's consideration of the influence of constructive unionism in the formation of the National Theatre Society. Pilkington challenges assumptions historically perpetuated by Yeats' and Lady Gregory's early accounts of the Abbey's history, '... that the Irish national theatre movement was a nationalist cultural initiative...belonging to a sphere relatively uninfluenced by the politics of the British or Irish states.'²⁷⁴ Noting that while Yeats attributed the emergence of the national theatre movement to a '...crucial shift in attitude in the years that followed the death of Parnell in 1891...',²⁷⁵ Pilkington argues that letters and articles Yeats wrote at that time suggest otherwise. He claims that for Yeats, the defeat of the second Home Rule Bill in 1893 and the overwhelming victory of the Conservatives in the 1895 General election, '...heralded a major cultural opportunity',²⁷⁶ and points to a letter from Yeats to Katharine Tynan in 1895, in which Yeats perceives that Parnellism and Gerald Balfour's²⁷⁷ Local Government initiative, '...has nationalized the more thoughtful Unionists.'²⁷⁸ Yeats' vision of an emergent Irish unionist audience for Irish literary culture was encouraged by praise from the Parnellite weekly journal, 'United Ireland' who applauded Yeats' view of an Irish national literature which, '...rescued Irish poetry from "the ruck of Young Ireland rhetoric [so as to} place it... on the floor of English and international literature".'²⁷⁹ The Abbey directors' claim to political neutrality is further undermined by Pilkington's critique which argues that Yeats' and Gregory's insistence that a national theatre should not acquiesce to nationalist intellectual views by providing

²⁷⁴ L. Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p.2.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.11

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 11

²⁷⁷ Gerald Balfour: Chief Secretary for Ireland, (1895-1900).

²⁷⁸ L. Pilkington, *Theatre and State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p.11.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.11.

a forum for the expression of majority orthodoxies, but rather should offer ‘...a means to critique dominant, widely held opinions from a critically skeptical perspective’;²⁸⁰ represents an expectancy of some form of political devolution in which unionism would be safeguarded from the ‘traumatic prospects of majority rule’.²⁸¹ Pilkington further claims that for Yeats and Gregory, ‘...the idea of a nationally accepted aesthetic based on the critical importance of a minority perspective constituted an important reassurance’²⁸² within their imagined future for Ireland. Pilkington highlights the irony and ambiguous identity of the Irish theatre movement by pointing to its:

...function under British rule – asserting the existence of an Irish public sphere, while simultaneously criticizing nationalist militancy – and its (later) role as a state subsidized national institution, articulating national consensus and yet engaging in frequent scabrous critiques of republican militancy.²⁸³

Lady Gregory’s privileged Ascendancy position obscures to a large degree her ability to tread a fine line between the two worlds she inhabited. In an essay examining gender and nationalism in Gregory’s writings, Anne Fogarty, arguing that women’s writing, in terms of innovative experimentation or independent striving, has been critically neglected offers a persuasive analysis of Gregory’s hybrid nationalist stance. Fogarty notes that, ‘...sympathetic renderings of the conflicts inherent in nationalist beliefs form the cornerstone of her dramatic and political writings’²⁸⁴ and that Gregory utilized her privileged Ascendancy position and her position as a woman to, ‘...probe the divisions as well as the unifying values of the imagined Irish communities that she stages

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p.3.

²⁸¹ Ibid. p.4

²⁸² Ibid. p.4.

²⁸³ Ibid. p.4

²⁸⁴ Anne Fogarty, “‘A Woman of the House’: Gender and Nationalism in the writings of Augusta Gregory” in K. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press Ltd., 2000), p.118.

in her plays'.²⁸⁵ Gregory undeniably claimed nationalist sympathies; in her memoir, *Our Irish Theatre*, she quotes her reply to the painter, Sir Frederick Burton, who remarked on her 'tendency to Home Rule', 'I defy anyone to study Irish history without getting a dislike and distrust of England'²⁸⁶. Gregory's response to her great friend, Douglas Hyde's, founding of the Gaelic League are recorded in *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*, in which she states:

Through it country people were gathered together in the Irish speaking places to give the songs and poems, old and new, kept in their memory. This discovery, this disclosure of the folk learning, the folk poetry... the ancient tradition, was the small beginning of a weighty change... It was an upsetting of the table of values, an astonishing excitement... (T)he imagination of Ireland had found a new homing place²⁸⁷

Despite these sentiments, Gregory's influential and persistent use of class connections to further the cultural aims of the founders of the nascent Irish National Theatre, ensured that the 'ancient tradition' of 'the people' would be represented by the 'weighty change' of Ascendancy values, thereby establishing that social class as a dominant force within the cultural and indeed the socio-political future of Ireland. However, from the beginnings of the venture, it was clear that the 'imagination of Ireland' that Gregory and her fellow directors purported to house was not to be so easily corralled.

The well-documented literary and dramatic aspirations of Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn were realized with their foundation of the early Abbey Theatre in 1904 under the mantle of patronage from Annie Horniman and others from the British, Protestant, moneyed class. Annie Horniman's patronage however, being highly conditional, alienated nationalist audiences and Abbey players alike. James Flannery

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p.118

²⁸⁶ Lady A. Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (New York & London: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1913), p.41.

²⁸⁷ Lady A. Gregory, *Kiltartan Poetry Book: Prose Translations from the Irish* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1918), Introduction, p.vi.

observes, ‘From the very opening of the Theatre... Miss Horniman found herself to be involved, and in turn caused the Theatre to become involved, in a conflict... with the extreme Irish nationalists.’²⁸⁸ The first dispute arose after Horniman insisted there were to be no six penny seats ‘...so as to prevent cheap entertainments which would... lower the value of the Hall.’²⁸⁹ Maud Gonne told Yeats that he was ‘lost’ to the nationalists and D.P. Moran of the Irish *Irelander’s* publication *The Leader* scoffed that if Yeats’ “illustrated chanting” were truly representative of “real Ireland” then ‘...it would not have been left to a woman of the English to supply the Society with a theatre.’²⁹⁰ However, Yeats, Gregory and later, Synge, in their determination to establish the Abbey as a bedrock for their vision of an Irish national theatre, accepted Horniman’s continual criticisms of their efforts. From the Fay brother’s management of the Abbey Players, to the particular style of acting in the early Abbey, Horniman continued to wield power and discontent, by means of the ‘purse-strings’ until her bitter withdrawal, as previously described, as benefactor of the Abbey in 1911. Read within these terms, *Fox and Geese*, in its parody of the peasant class, articulates an Anglo-Irish desire to express an identity discrete from the mores of peasant society and the Roman Catholic Irish; and in terms of the timing of its production in 1917, could be perceived as a cultural response to an inferred threat of increased papal influence born from the growing mood of republicanism and uncertainty concerning the future governance of Ireland.

A sense of cultural superiority that may be said to reside in Gregory’s peasant comedies and wonder plays is located in her familial identification with the Irish peasantry; which sits uneasily beside overblown representations of character that betray the class division between the indigenous and Anglo-Irish identities struggling to shape

²⁸⁸ J. Flannery, *Miss Annie Horniman and the Abbey Theatre* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970), p.16.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.16.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.17.

an Irish nation. Positioning Gregory as precursor and role model for upcoming women playwrights, Cummins and Day were just two of many so-called 'New Women' from privileged Anglo-Irish backgrounds who responded to the cultural call of the Abbey directors in submitting plays to the Abbey. Within the context of their experiences in rural Cork, Cummins' and Day's treatment of theme, comedy and character in *Fox and Geese* betray attitudes that reflect Lady Gregory's clan superiority and the heightened class consciousness of the Ascendency gaze, suggesting that the playwrights' understanding of nationalist concerns sat uncomfortably with their allegiance to and perception of their own social class.

Paul Murphy describes the three major Ascendency dramatists, Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge as sharing a '...trait of constructing the peasantry as fantasy objects, functioning as the key components in an ideological assault on *bourgeois* economics and a defence of aristocratic virtues.'²⁹¹ In discussing Synge's play, *The Well of the Saints*, Murphy, refers to Synge's notebooks written during his stay on the Aran Islands and discerns the Ascendency gaze in Synge's revulsion of the Catholic *petit bourgeois* he observed in the north island, comparing them unfavourably with the peasants in the south island who are subsequently constructed as fantasy objects as a means by which to transfer '...his own Ascendency desire for poetry, nobility and prelapsarian purity on to the poverty-stricken lives of the south island peasants'.²⁹² I argue that the language used by Cummins in her (previously cited) account of a dangerous and negative reception she and Day received as they toured the province giving talks on 'Votes for Women' (Ch. 1.2 pp.48-49) similarly betrays Cummins' snobbery, superiority and intolerance towards the peasant women's ignorance of their subjugated situations. Day, in her epistolary

²⁹¹ P. Murphy *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama 1899-1949* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2008) p.29

²⁹² *Ibid.* p.34

novel *The Amazing Philanthropists* also displays elements of class prejudice in several descriptions of her fellow Guardians who were from the Catholic *petit bourgeois* class and in her descriptions of habitual inmates of the workhouse. The privileged lives of Cummins and Day, being grounded in a Protestant sense of duty and order, clearly influenced a prejudicial attitude towards some of their suffragist/philanthropic encounters with the lower class and, in this instance, with the subject matter and characterizations in *Fox and Geese*, in which most of the characters, particularly the females, are portrayed as gullible and selfish.

Fox and Geese, unlike Cummins' and Day's earlier play *Broken Faith*, endured an uncertain passage before being accepted by the Abbey Theatre for production. Submitted and rejected in August 1913, *Fox and Geese* was re-submitted under the pseudonym 'Ogilvey Communifer' in December 1915 but was once more refused. However in January 1916, under their real names, Cummins and Day were successful with the third submission when the play was accepted by St. John Ervine after he requested a revision to its ending. In a letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats declared, '...Now comes the problem of 'Fox and Geese'. I dislike this play. It contains no feeling for life, but it will not, I am afraid, bore an audience...'²⁹³ Despite its acceptance, the play was not produced until February 1917²⁹⁴ when 'New Ireland' theatre critic, 'David', including Day and Cummins among, '...the remarkable group of Cork dramatists within the Abbey movement...',²⁹⁵ observed that:

... Miss Day, a well-known Quakeress, has devoted herself to literature with a purpose... with her fellow townswoman, Miss

²⁹³ W.B. Yeats: letter to Lady Gregory (22nd Feb.1916) National Library of Ireland MS 18 -732; cited in R. Hogan & R. Burnham, eds., *The Modern Irish Drama. A Documentary History: Vol. V. The Art of the Amateur 1916-20* (Portlaoise: Dolman Press Ltd., 1984), p.87.

²⁹⁴ The first two productions of *Fox and Geese* were staged in the Abbey Theatre in Feb. and Dec. 1917. The play was also programmed as part of the 'Abbey Season' in the Court Theatre, London in the summer of 1918.

²⁹⁵ R. Hogan & R. Burnham, eds., *The Modern Irish Drama. A Documentary History: Vol. V. The Art of the Amateur (1916-20)* (Portlaoise: Dolman Press Ltd.,1984), p.86.

Cummins... (She) has collaborated successfully on another occasion at the Abbey, and as the only partnership in the present dramatic movement, there is a more than usual interest in their forthcoming work... The Misses Cummins and Day are identified too with the so-called forward movement in suffrage and many other questions, and one day we should have from one of them a striking drama on feminism of the day²⁹⁶

This review interestingly acknowledges but fails to expound on the implications, in terms of encouraging more women to write, of Cummins' and Day's co-authorship status. The reviewer also makes ambiguous and slight reference to the women's suffrage and philanthropic activities but fails to make mention of the issues the playwrights' addressed in their previous play for the Abbey Theatre, *Broken Faith*, or of Susanne Day's suffrage play *Toilers* (Ch. 1.2). The neglect of Cummins' and Day's dramatic output can be in some part attributed to a lack of contemporary critical reviews.

The first production of *Fox and Geese* took place almost twelve months after the devastating events surrounding the 1916 Easter Rising and its aftermath amid diverse preoccupations of a period in Dublin when sectarian tensions were high; as Catholic nationalists elevated the executed leaders of the 1916 insurrection to the status of martyrdom thereby garnering support for the Republican movement. World War I was still raging and the uncertain conditions in Dublin were compounded as lists of the Irish servicemen and women who were missing, or had lost their lives in the war, were published with depressing regularity in the daily newspapers. Within this atmosphere however, Yeats' aforementioned prophecy in relation to the play's probable attraction for audiences proved correct; as *Fox and Geese* played for two weeks to enthusiastic audiences and received fulsome praise from *The Irish Times* reviewer, who declared:

Don't miss it... with the natural humour of the Irish countryside as visualized on the Abbey stage, have been allied ideas

²⁹⁶ Ibid. pp.86-87.

familiarized by Shakespeare and Shaw... [I]t is a legitimate idealising of its germ and in consonance with Abbey traditions. It is at least on a level with any of the old Abbey traditions...²⁹⁷

It could be argued that the theatre critics deliberately avoided drawing attention to the barely-disguised class and gender commentary within this play; as to do so could conceivably have exacerbated the existing social tension in Dublin. *Evening Herald* theatre critic J.J. Rice, known as 'Jacques', made what might be considered a slight allusion to possible class-controversy, calling the play '... the drollest and most audacious farce... ever been seen in Dublin for a long time...'²⁹⁸ whilst diluting his comment by adding, '... from the point of view of exciting the audience to laughter, its success was complete...'²⁹⁹ A lack of negative audience reaction to the portrayal of Irish peasantry in *Fox and Geese* could be attributed to the prevailing social conditions – perhaps the Abbey spectators were content to receive the play on its surface level and to accept the theatricality of farce as a welcome diversion to the unrest outside of the auditorium. If this were the case and Abbey audiences needed to escape into laughter this boisterous play seems to have provided the means for that to happen.

Augusta Gregory's comedies and wonder plays are distinguished by a sense of what she termed the 'soul' of the native Irish character.³⁰⁰ Her attention to localized idioms *vis-à-vis* the Kiltartan dialect and cultural traditions in her dramas has been well documented. In *Fox and Geese*, Cummins and Day, in a similar style, utilized their familiarity with the distinctive Cork idioms, dialect and local superstitions to colour their

²⁹⁷ 'Excellent New Comedy' *Irish Times* (5th Feb. 1917), p.2, cited in R. Hogan & R. Burnham, eds., *The Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History: Vol. V. The Art of the Amateur (1916-20)* (Portlaoise: Dolman Press Ltd., 1984), pp.88-89.

²⁹⁸ (*Evening Herald* 3/2/1917 p.2, cited in Hogan, R., and Burnham, R., (eds.) *The Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History: Vol V. The Art of the Amateur (1916-20)*. Portlaoise: Dolman Press Ltd., (1984), p.88.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.88.

³⁰⁰ See Lady Augusta Gregory's contemporaneous comedies: *Damer's Gold*, (1912); and *Shanwalla*, (1915).

portrayal of the inhabitants of their fictitious Irish village.³⁰¹ *Fox and Geese* conform to the style of the well-made play and is set in a small rural village where the central focus revolves around matchmaking and marriage. The practice of arranging marriages by means of economic bargaining had been a feature of ancient Gaelic custom that, following colonization, had largely disappeared. However, the Ashbourne Act (1885); the Land Act (1887); the Land Purchase Act (1891) and particularly the Wyndham Land Act (1903) gave new freedoms to Irish tenant farmers that resulted in a return to this ancient tradition as farmers sought to firmly consolidate their lands. David Fitzpatrick in *Marriage in Ireland* shows that the ‘match’ became a more general and, owing to economic conditions and the spread of impartible inheritance, a more restrictive aspect of life in post-famine rural Irish society:

...twenty year olds in rural Ireland consciously confronted three alternative futures: to be matched, to be dismissed as unmatchable, or to emigrate. Both the jargon and procedure of matchmaking varied between regions and over time, and frequently the services of a hired matchmaker were dispensed with. There was however a standard principle common to all variants of the match. This was the concept that marriage was a symbol of the pooling of property, usually of male land with female cash but quite often the converse. Since both resources were controlled by the respective parents, it followed that the making of the marriage should be controlled by parents. This deal was distinct from, say, the sale of a heifer, since the bride had to pay for her grazing rights.³⁰²

³⁰¹ It is also possible to read other influences, in terms of character types in this parody – for example that of Molière, whose plays Gregory had adapted and translated in 1908/9 - the five central characters in *Fox and Geese* are easily compared to Molière’s commedia stock characters as the play contains a pair of lovers, a Pantelone figure, a braggart and a sly servant type

³⁰² David Fitzpatrick, “Marriage in Post-famine Ireland” in Art Cosgrove, ed., *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin: College Press Ltd., 1985), p120. **Fitzpatrick’s study observed how, after the famine, “...the growing need to compensate parents and siblings for waiving their claims to land tightened the association between the value of the groom’s farm and the size of his wife’s fortune. The dowry served ... as a means whereby the inheriting son secured from his family the right to hold the farm. ...[By] 1880, small farmers in Connaught were frequently lodging bank deposits of fifty or one hundred pounds against their daughters’ weddings, and their daughters “naturally” became very furious if the parents raided the deposits for other purposes since “they cannot get married without money”.’ p.121.

There are three storylines in *Fox and Geese*, which intersect and connect around the concerns of marriage, land and differences between the sexes. All of the characters are well-drawn types, their function being to drive the farcical action with sparkling dialogue, repartee and idiomatic turns-of-phrase. The farcical scenes in *Fox and Geese*, satirizing the peasant women's proclivity to marriage, operate to portray Cummins' and Day's' cognizance of the powerfully subversive mask of writing comedy. Much has been written in contemporary feminist criticism in relation to women's history of appropriating comedy as a means to infiltrate and disrupt prevailing gender perceptions. Feminist critic, Regina Barreca comments that women who write comedy do so in order to, 'intrude, disturb and disrupt; that comedy constructed by women is linked to aggression and the need to break free of socially and culturally imposed restraints.'³⁰³ In an essay examining the use of humour in Aphra Benn's writing, Jorge Figueroa Dorrego claims that 'Humour is empowering ...can uphold dominance or, contrariwise, can be rebellious and transgressive...'³⁰⁴ Describing a tradition of women's appropriation of humour for unruly purposes, Dorrego cites Audrey Bilger, who, in her consideration of satire in the writings of Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, claimed that '...the emergence of the novel as a major vehicle for humour, provided unprecedented opportunities for middle-class women to engage in comic writing from the late-eighteenth century onwards.'³⁰⁵ However, while *Fox and Geese* was presented as a comedy, I argue that the play blatantly lampoons the intellect of the Irish peasantry and evidences a disintegration of the '... paradox of the peasant figure as symbolically central yet socially subordinate to the competing ideologies prevalent in the early years

³⁰³ Regina Barreca, Introduction *Womens Studies* Vol. 15 No. 1-3 September 01 (1988) p.6

³⁰⁴ Jorge F. Dorrego, "Disputing Patriarchy, Disrupting Romance: Humour in Behn's *The Lucky Mistake* and 'The Wandrin' Beauty'" See: <http://www.websuvigo.es/angelestome/disputing.pdf> p.106.

³⁰⁵ Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1998) cited in J.F. Dorrego, J.F., See: <http://www.websuvigo.es/angelestome/disputing.pdf> p.107.

of the ILT and Abbey Theatre from 1899 to 1909',³⁰⁶ a trope of the peasant described by Paul Murphy as a 'national paradox' in his psychoanalytical interrogation of the Ascendancy gaze in J.M. Synge's plays.³⁰⁷ Cummins' and Day's misrepresentation of the peasant manifests in the frenzied machinations of the women in the play to ensnare men into marriage by means of deception, and in the openly derisive characterization of the Catholic faith which raises an issue of ethical representation.

The main characters of the play are introduced in the opening scenes, Mary Fitzgibbon, portrayed as a strong-willed and outspoken young woman, and the older, more gullible Katie Downey, are keen to get married for quite different reasons. Mary, described as (*dark-haired, with a clear skin and a twinkle in her shrewd practical eyes*) is in love with Timothy James Maguire, a poor farmer; however, she is constrained by the determination of her uncle (John Fitzgibbon) that she should be 'matched' with Malachi Phelan, a prosperous eligible farmer. In contrast to Mary's sharp-witted character, Katie Downey is on the verge of spinsterhood and she sees Malachi as her last chance. The stage directions describe her demeanor as (*...about thirty years of age and has once been pretty, but matrimonial disappointments have soured her. Her face is thin, and if not careful, she will be a shrew when she is forty*).³⁰⁸

Mary's uncle, John Fitzgibbon, has 'notions' of ancestral grandeur, claiming a blood-line back to the High Kings of Tara. Hoping to encourage a match for his niece, John Fitzgibbon describes Malachi as, '...the richest man in the parish, with a fine dairy and a hundred sheep on the mountains'.³⁰⁹ Malachi however, tells John and Timothy

³⁰⁶ Paul Murphy, "J.M.Synge and the pitfalls of national consciousness" in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 28 No. 2, July 2003, p.127.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fox and Geese* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1917), p.1

³⁰⁹ Ibid. p.15.

James that his now deceased mother had made him promise not to marry without her consent:

MALACHI: Sure, 'twas in terror she always was I'd take up with some common caubage of a creature from the village, for I was always a soft man with the women...and now, God rest her, she's dead and I'll go a single man to me grave.³¹⁰

Malachi however, enjoys the attention he receives from all the single women in the district and is merely playing with their hopes and fears, having no desire to give up his position as an independent, prosperous bachelor. One of his early speeches conjures up the spirit of Synge's 'Playboy', as he boasts in an pseudo-injured tone,

MALACHI: First there was Joola Quiney that came to borrow a scraping of butter, then there was Maggie Coakley to know if her little Government hen had strayed into our haggard.... There's whips of them women lining me fences this minnit.³¹¹

The authors of this play were as equally confirmed in their single status as their fictional bachelor, Malachi. Geraldine Cummins stated in *A Sense of Sin* that she would never marry as she had signed an oath of celibacy as a young girl. Describing the marital state in terms of servitude and loss of freedom, she refers to the influence of G.B. Shaw in Chapter 12 of her journal, '...my spiritual father, my guide in morals and matrimony. So be damned to romance. Love and courtship were a matter of "chemical attraction". He [GBS] had made this quite clear in "Man and Superman", the modern girl's bible'.³¹²

³¹⁰ Ibid. p.10.

³¹¹ Ibid. p.9.

³¹² G. Cummins, *A Sense of Sin*, Ch. 12 MS. Unpublished autobiography, 'Geraldine Cummins Collection.' U206. Box 4, Item 35, Ref. 1/52 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork). In this section, Cummins also relates a conversation with one of her sisters (pseudonym 'Maeve') who had romantic notions regarding a civil servant. Cummins (pseudonym 'Jane'), quoting Shaw, advised her sister to consider her future as a physician, telling her 'not to throw her life away'. Her sister's response '...lawyers who know nothing about chemistry had much better leave that branch of medicine alone,' prompted Cummins' to write, 'Such a reaction to Shavian wisdom struck me as extremely sinister. Maeve clearly had romantic notions... born in the hour of her fame.' (Cummins' sister had recently won university honours and a scholarship).

The whole of Act 1 concerns talk of marriage. Mary Fitzgibbon is contemptuous of the ploys used by the other women of the village to ensnare Malachi Phelan; her dismissive attitude towards Malachi operates to balance the fawning behaviour of Katie Downey and infuriates her uncle. In the first act, Mary refuses to be impressed by the stories of all the women that are chasing after Malachi, 'Faith, I never seen a man yet I wouldn't change for threepennorth of Peggy's Leg on a Fair Green ...Heaven forgive you, Mr. Phelan, for the good opinion you have of yourself.'³¹³ When Malachi asks her who, but himself, would have a good opinion of him, she replies, 'The Widow Burke, Mr. Phelan, that's hard of hearing, or Joola Quiney that's so blind in her eyes she kissed the scarecrow in your own oats field, and she never knowing it wasn't yourself!'³¹⁴ Malachi leaves with an air of injured pride and John Fitzgibbon berates his niece for putting his plans for her marriage in jeopardy. However, in a double-deception, Mary – stating her belief in a prophesy she was given from 'the wise woman of Ballindisk' that she was to marry a man with one hundred sheep – mollifies her uncle by pretending to him that she is feigning disinterest in Malachi in order to attract him; whilst in actuality she later urges Timothy James Maguire (TJ) to 'beg, borrow or steal' one hundred sheep so she can marry him instead.

As the second Act opens, John Fitzgibbon, whose optimism has returned, dismisses the hopes of Bidy Maguire that Mary will marry her son, Timothy James,

JOHN F.: Tisn't every boy would please a Fitzgibbon, Bidy. For we always were a choice family. Not but that Tim is very well in his way, but Mary will be looking higher. She has great notions.³¹⁵

³¹³ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fox and Geese* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1917), p.14.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.19.

From the inception of the Irish National theatre the trope of the supernatural as a dramatic device was explored by Yeats, Synge and Augusta Gregory, who all averred the Celtic affinity to the metaphysical. Between 1892 and 1920 Gregory learned Gaelic, studied written and oral Irish lore, published several books on these subjects—such as *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902) and *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, a collection of transcribed conversations with native Galway people, relating to their supernatural beliefs. The stories she gathered inspired the dialogue and many of the subjects in her dramatic writing. Synge too, reworking stories of Irish folklore and folk tradition he collected from the Aran islands explored the comedic effects of subverting the idea of superstition and/or the supernatural, for example, *Shanwalla* (Gregory 1910) and *In the Shadow of the Glen* (Synge 1903). In *Fox and Geese*, Cummins and Day juxtaposed local superstition and religious belief from West Cork in a style reminiscent of Synge's, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1904-7), and using the Cork idioms to heighten the comic tension. The central comic device in this play occurs in Act 2 and revolves around a devious plan contrived by Maurice Downey (Katie's brother), Katie Downey and Biddy Maguire. These three characters conspire to lure Malachi into Biddy's kitchen, where in a comic 'slapstick' scene, Katie disguises herself as Malachi's dead mother's ghost, whereupon the 'ghost' demands that Malachi must marry Katie,

KATIE: (*In high glee*) A wedding will come of it, Biddy, or my name's not Katie Downey. Here now, give me the loan of one of your caps – (*Seizes a check apron of Biddy's and ties it around her waist*)

BIDDY: (*fetching a cap*) Much good 'twill do you, who'd take you for a ghost, and your hair not white.

MAURICE: Yerra, that's easy settled. (*He dashes to the flour bin and seizing a great handful of flour, flings it at Katie's head*)

KATIE: (*Sneezing and choking*) Bad cess to you, Maurice Downey. What in the name of God are you doin'?

MAURICE: 'Tis for your hair. Stand still can't you till I rub it in. (*Maurice scrubs in the flour and Biddy tries agitatedly to put the cap on Katie upside down*)

KATIE: (*Pushing him off*) Glory be, you have me destroyed. (*Sneezes violently*) Here, get out of this the two of yez and let me alone – Much ye know about ghosts – playing dog’s tricks like that – (*tries to tidy herself*)

MAURICE: (*almost hysterical with excitement*) Will I run over to the Wise Woman for a score of corpse lights?

BIDDY: Do, asthore, do. God help me, where in the world did I put them sheets. (*Hunts about distractedly*)

MAURICE: (*as he goes out the door*) Well, Glory be to God, t’will be a great day for Lisladeen when a ghost walks on the floor. Merciful Powers, here’s Malachi Phelan coming up the lane!³¹⁶

More comic business follows as Katie and Maurice run out and Maurice re-enters for the sheet then again for a safety pin before Malachi arrives. Biddy leaves Malachi alone in the kitchen and as darkness falls the ‘ghost’ of Hanora Phelan appears and delivers the order for Malachi to marry Katie Downey. Malachi is left, quaking and on his knees as the Act concludes. The inclusion of ghosts and spirits in the play intimates Geraldine Cummins’ growing interest in the paranormal and also seems to have provided her with an opportunity to satirically illustrate the contradiction of the common fears and perceptions of the spirit world held by a community who believed in divine miracles.

As in Lady Gregory’s prior work, *Spreading the News* (1904), the device of myth-making is employed to comic effect in *Fox and Geese*³¹⁷ and Act 3 opens in the Fitzgibbon house where outrageously embellished tales are circulating around the village regarding the visitation of Hanora’s ghost in their midst and the startling news that Malachi is to marry Katie Downey. The scene is crowded with various farce-like business as characters come and go in rapid succession. Malachi arrives and Mary teases him about the ‘ghost’; after she leaves, T.J. arrives and procures a loan of a hundred sheep from Malachi so that Mary will marry him. As T.J. rushes off to collect the sheep,

³¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 30-31.

³¹⁷ In Lady Gregory’s play, *Spreading the News*, gossip feeds human failings to the point where an innocent man is accused of a murder that has not occurred.

Katie Downey arrives, and as she attempts to entice Malachi with her domestic prowess he, realizing he has been tricked, dashes Katie's marriage hopes, by declaring there was a curse put on him by a cross-eyed woman at a fair that if he should see a ghost, he would die shortly after. The language and gullibility of the characters represented in the play conveys a condescending attitude towards peasant culture, particularly in the portrayal of peasant women's proclivity to marriage as being the only means of achieving success in their lives, an attitude abhorred by Cummins who, as previously demonstrated, was vehemently opposed to female subjugation through marriage.

In the closing scenes of the play rumour operates to lampoon Catholic Bishops and implies the incredulity of the Catholic Church itself. Cummins' and Day's attitude towards the tenets of the Catholic Church and their assumption of the 'blind faith' of its followers becomes apparent in their use of blasphemous language in the final scenes; suggesting, by its open irreverence, the culturally insecure Anglo-Irish position at the time of the play's construction when the divisions in Irish society with regard to the future political landscape in Ireland was a real and present anxiety for all classes and creeds. Liberal Republican, Flann Campbell (1919-94) describing racism and politics in Northern Ireland, observed that the contemporary sense of Protestant cultural superiority was summed up by G.B.Shaw in 1898:

Irish Protestantism was not then a religion: it was a side in a political faction, a class prejudice, a conviction that Roman Catholics are socially inferior persons who will go to Hell when they die, and leave Heaven in the exclusive possession of Protestant ladies and gentlemen³¹⁸

The language of the peasants in *Fox and Geese* is particularly indicative of a racially pejorative and pervasive attitude of Protestant superiority in its fetishisation of

³¹⁸ Flann Campbell, *The Orange Card: racism, religion and politics in Northern Ireland* (London: Connolly Publications, 1979), p.15.

Catholicism. Telegraphs and messages arrive in the village, heralding the arrival of the Parish priest, the Bishop, a host of newspaper reporters and a delegation from the ‘Society of Wandering Spirits’ from Dublin, who all want to hear about Hanora Phelan’s ghost,

T.J.: Sure the whole country is blazing with the news of the ghost. Father Tom is below at our own place waiting to hear of it... ‘tis great honour and glory Hanora Phelan put on us last night

BIDDY: Here! Malachi Phelan – Malachi Phelan... there’s a letter from the Bishop!

MALACHI: He’s coming over tomorrow to investigate the ghost. ‘Tis a great honour surely, and yourself will have the rich tale to tell him, Biddy. Sure, ‘tis elevated among the Holy Saints and Canons you’ll be now... And your little house too - pilgrims of all sorts crowding to it. From all over the known world they’ll come, telling their rosaries and making their rounds.³¹⁹

Whilst the *Evening Herald* theatre critic, ‘Jacques’, generally admired the use of language in the play, he strongly criticized, ‘the number of times the players were called upon to repeat pious ejaculations which by their constant repetition became almost impious... there is no necessity for this sort of thing’.³²⁰ In his observation ‘Jacques’ was particularly affronted and quoted Malachi’s remarks to Biddy in the above speech adding,

[“And] the Sainted Spirits of the dead shining in on you from the door,” et cetera. (*sic*) All this is mockery. Such allusions to things held sacred by the largest section in any Irish audience should have no place on a stage farce. The work can win success without these meaningless jibes at religion...³²¹

However, when *Fox and Geese* returned to the Abbey stage in December of the same year, Holloway’s encouraging report suggests that ‘Jacques’s’ sensibilities of the play’s

³¹⁹ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fox & Geese* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1917), p.48.

³²⁰ ‘Jacques’ *Evening Herald* (3rd Feb. 1917): cited in R. Hogan & R. Burnham, eds., *Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History: Vol. V. The Art of the Amateur, 1916-20* (Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1984), p.90.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

implied criticism of the Catholic faith was not shared by the Abbey management or, indeed by the Abbey audience:

I was in the Abbey last night where an amusing comedy, 'Fox & Geese' was revived with success... The Abbey Co. under Fred O'Donovan is becoming quite a good repertory company of very capable players.³²²

The Abbey theatre manager, Arthur Sinclair included *Fox and Geese* on a tour to Cork in February 1918 where its Cork-born playwrights' were given no partisan treatment from *The Cork Constitution*. On the contrary, the review of their play was scathing; reflecting a Catholic condemnation of the Protestant ideology discerned within the play that was generally overlooked in Dublin:

If their object was to give anything like a faithful picture of life as it really is amongst the farming community, they have sadly missed the mark, and evidently know nothing whatever of the habits and customs, language, or indeed anything else of those whom they took upon themselves to depict. An utter stranger to our country could not possibly be guilty of such absurdities and unreal representation... a distinct disappointment, and the frequent and altogether unnecessary use of the name of the Creator, with such expressions as "My Cripes!" "Holy Saints!" "Glory be to God," etc., chilled the audience...³²³

In the summer of 1918, *Fox and Geese* was revived for inclusion on the programme for an Abbey tour in London – however, no reviews conveying the English response to the play have yet come to light. In 1923, following the establishment of the nationalist government in Ireland, the dramatic critic Andrew Malone reviewed the first two decades of Abbey productions where, once again, the elements of cultural

³²² Joseph Holloway, in R. Hogan, & M.J. O'Neill, eds., *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: A Selection From His Unpublished Journal: 'Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer'* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press; Feffer & Simons 1967), p.194.

³²³ 'Amusements' *The Cork Constitution* 14/2/1918 p.3: cited in R. Hogan & R. Burnham, eds., *Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History: Vol. V. The Art of the Amateur, 1916-20* (Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1984), p.176.

superiority in this play went unnoticed. On the contrary, Malone wrote of *Fox and Geese*:

...it is 3 Acts of fun... as likely to evoke laughter in any other country as in Ireland... it is somewhat surprising that such a laughter-maker as 'Fox and Geese' should have escaped the attention of Theatre managers in Britain and America.³²⁴

It would seem that, unlike 'Jacques' and the lone review from Cork, the Abbey directors, Dublin audiences and theatre critics concurred with, or overlooked the underlying superiority and stereotyped portrayals of the rural peasantry of Cork as represented by Cummins and Day.

³²⁴Malone A. *Irish Theatre Review*, (1923) **N.B. Equally curious is the existence of a receipt for £25.00 in the Cummins' Collection in the Cork City & County Archive, dated 1954, stating that producer Michael O'hAodha accepted *Fox & Geese* for a Radio Eireann broadcast; however, there is no further information or evidence to suggest it was actually produced.

Chapter 3

Writing women, for a modern Ireland

3.1: An introduction to *Fidelity*

This chapter examines the unpublished and, until recently, believed to be unproduced one-act realist peasant play *Fidelity*, co-written in 1913 by Cummins and Day.³²⁵ The playwrights' original manuscript of *Fidelity* evidences their erasures and amendments to its title in response to rejections from the Abbey Theatre. The Abbey Register of submissions show that in May 1913 *Fidelity*, submitted as *The Law of Life* by 'Miss Day', received a second opinion before it was rejected in June. The following month it was re-submitted under the title of *The Worth of the World* by a 'Miss Madden' from Glanmire (Cummins' Cork address). Three years later, in 1916, Cummins submitted their play for the last time as *The Way of the World*³²⁶ but again it was refused. The original typescript of the play in the 'Cummins Collection' titled *The Way of the World* has been scored out and replaced by what seems to have been their definitive handwritten title, *Fidelity* - which is particularly appropriate in view of the play's subject matter and of the playwrights' commitment to this work in terms of their tenacious attempts to have *Fidelity* produced by the Abbey Theatre. This feminist play works allegorically to suggest changing conditions in *fin de siècle* rural Ireland and I argue that it reflects the playwrights' opinions on women striving against obstacles to gain influence and equal consideration in their male-dominated society. The female protagonists in *Fidelity*, as speaking subjects, privilege these feminist concerns whilst the

³²⁵ *Fidelity* was first produced by the Dublin University Players at Trinity College (April 27-May 1) 2004. This is believed to be the first public performances of the play; *Fidelity* was directed by Clare Neylon. The second production was staged in the Granary Studio UCC (1-3 December 2005) where one performance was presented in tandem with a mini-conference on Munster Women Playwrights (2 December 2005).

³²⁶ Here the playwrights' plagiarized the title of William Congreve's Restoration play *The Way of the World* (1700)

themes and cultural context are particularly relevant, specifically in respect of recovering women-authored plays, to the exploratory nature of contemporary theatre history.

In *Fidelity* the playwrights' expression of the negative physical, social and psychological repercussions of the Great Famine in Ireland (1845-49)³²⁷ on lives and relationships are revealed through feminist cultural and text analysis. Issues of land-ownership, post-famine emigration and rural marriage patterns of the poorer farming community constitute the thematic background to the play; however, these typical tropes of the peasant play genre serve to frame more subjective authorial concerns in relation to the position of women. It is possible that the storyline of this play may have been inspired by Rosa Mulholland's cautionary novel *The Return of Mary O'Murrough* (1908) in which the central character returns from America where she emigrated in order to work for her dowry.³²⁸ *Fidelity* similarly relates the sorry tale of a returning emigrant, Maggie Moynihan, who has been working in America to save for her dowry; however, the central theme in these texts do not extend beyond the figures of women whose purpose was to emigrate for economic purposes. Mulholland's returning protagonist discovers that her fiancé has been jailed, whilst in *Fidelity* Maggie Moynihan's dream evaporates when her fiancé, Larry Macarthy, spurns her in favour Katie Drinan – who is younger, healthier and prettier – and, whilst Mulholland's novel ends in resolution Cummins' and Day's play ends in ambiguity for their returned emigrant.

Honour is a focal point throughout *Fidelity* and is initially represented through the character of Larry McCarthy who, though strongly attracted to Katie Drinan, has waited faithfully for his first love the 'beautiful Maggie Moynihan' who has been slaving

³²⁷ The Great Famine (1845-49) began with the potato blight which failed over successive years and was exacerbated by Britain's refusal to offer assistance to millions of starving small farmers. The abundance of alternative food crops was appropriated by the British government and taken from Ireland for consumption by the British workforce. Millions died from starvation or fever and many hundreds of thousands emigrated or died on famine ships.

³²⁸ Rosa Mullholland, *The Return of Mary O'Murrough* (Dublin: Phoenix Publishing, 1900).

for her dowry for five years in America. There has been no communication between the lovers simply an understanding that one day Maggie would return. Larry's dilemma worsens when his sister, Ellie, reinforces the cultural importance of his familial duty by openly encouraging his relationship with Katie. When Maggie returns unexpectedly to the village in poor health with her former beauty diminished Katie proceeds to try to oust her by devious means. After Larry discovers Maggie's presence he is shown to be helpless in the face of stark reality and divided loyalties and, in the final scene when Larry has to choose between the women, he cannot and does not. Ultimately it is Maggie who determines their future paths by silently accepting defeat and walking slowly away.

When Cummins and Day wrote *Fidelity* in 1913, rural Ireland remained in a state of post-traumatic recovery from the effects of the Great Famine. As previously discussed [Ch.1.2] opportunities for some women to receive a measure of equality in education had been available in Ireland since the mid-nineteenth century; this important juncture in women's history had effected an improvement in career prospects for many women from the privileged classes. Cummins and Day had strong views regarding the value of financial independence and women's equal competence in 'male-dominated' professions.³²⁹ Their concern for the education of less-privileged members of society, particularly women, is clear from their documented work in the community and in their writings. A consideration of the ever-present issue of land ownership/tenancy and cultural imperatives in rural Ireland at that time reinforces my contention that these conditions are motivating factors, determining the responses of the characters in *Fidelity* to their specific situations.³³⁰ In the immediate post-Famine decades, landlords and their

³²⁹ Coming from a large, Anglo-Irish, middle-class professional family, Cummins worked out of necessity. In contrast, work was optional for Day who came from a wealthy Anglo-Irish merchant family.

³³⁰ In pre-famine years, landlordism encouraged sub-division of tenant farmers' holdings. This practice supported early marriages, larger families and further sub-division of the land. Following the devastation wreaked by poor management, the years of potato blight (1845-49) and the failure of government to address the tragic situation of its

agents re-leased forsaken lands to surviving peasant farmers. A two-tiered class of Irish tenant farmers emerged as 'land-hunger', driven by fear of further disasters, gripped the imagination of the rural populace. The countryside was in constant demographic turmoil both from the effects of continued emigration and from agrarian unrest.³³¹ Historian, David Fitzpatrick, describes how, in the face of overwhelming poverty, land division came to an abrupt halt during the last third of the century and was replaced by a system of impartible inheritance and 'stem family' succession:

...the favoured son would be encouraged to bring a wife into the family upon the enfeeblement or death of his father. A quite rapid transition followed, during which, non-inheritors were compensated, dowered or emigrated - this arrangement meant that a farmer's son was unlikely to marry... until his father had reached his sixties.³³²

Consequently, rural men and women left their homes in droves, seeking opportunities in urban areas in Ireland and abroad.³³³ By the turn of the century in an effort to consolidate family lands and future security, it had become the custom for neighbouring tenant farmers to arrange marriages for their eldest sons and/or daughters.³³⁴

It is within the reality of this oppressively bleak situation of limited choices and rigid social structures in rural Ireland that events in *Fidelity* take place. The tradition of land consolidation is as central to the situation of Larry Macarthy as it had been for his deceased father, Denis, whose absence from the dramatic action does not diminish his

subjects, abandoned smallholdings littered the Irish landscape. The subsequent reduction in population (from 8.5 to 6.5 million) through fatal disease and emigration profoundly altered the social and cultural structures of life in rural areas.

³³¹ 'Land League' rent boycotts and destruction of property became a common response to evictions and harsh landlord practices. The 'Land League's' efforts, alongside of Parnell's constitutional, parliamentary strategies, eventually succeeded in securing tenancy rights for Irish farmers in 1881.

³³² David Fitzpatrick, "Marriage in Post-Famine Ireland" in A. Cosgrave, ed., *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin: College Press, 1985), pp.116-131.

³³³ Poverty in Ireland was widespread – the workhouses over-populated with dispirited men, women and children. Many women joined religious communities to escape starvation, while the Catholic Church at this time was encouraging young men from the farming classes to train for the priesthood.

³³⁴ Commonly referred to as a 'match', the contract was usually in the form of an exchange of male land with female cash (the dowry).

continued patriarchal influence on the family, an influence that is clearly supported by Larry's sister, Ellie Drinan. The post-Famine changes in agricultural practices, by rendering large tracts of land usage from tillage to pasture, had made farm work less labour-intensive³³⁵ thereby significantly altering the dynamics of available occupations. The resultant depreciation of rural women's economic value, loss of their previous status as shared breadwinner and their relegation to the domestic sphere led to common usage of the term 'woman of the house' – which resonates with both negative and positive meanings for some commentators. Joanna Bourke argues that notions of an Irish female identity emerged out of ideas propagated by such publications as the *Irish Homestead*³³⁶ which contributed to the construction of an ideal Ireland. Bourke contends that the Journal's '...affirmations of woman's domestic role came to restrict the possibility of their involvement in public life'.³³⁷ In contrast, James MacPherson argues that women '...made the domestic sphere their own and used it as a base from which to gain power through control of the household economy.'³³⁸ MacPherson cites a mission statement from the *Irish Homestead* which claimed to be, '...aware of the change in the social and economic status of women and saw the growing power of women as a foundation for a new social order in rural Ireland'.³³⁹ In a further study, Maria Luddy describes how women from across the sectarian/political divide, came to work together in rural Ireland to effect progressive change for Irish society in the new century:

Nationalist, unionist, suffrage and cultural organizations co-existed in the first decades of the twentieth century claiming the attention of Irish men and women. Sir Horace Plunkett, the pioneer of the co-operative movement in Ireland, founded the

³³⁵ See Chapter 2.1 (this thesis).

³³⁶ The *Irish Homestead* was a weekly publication of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS).

³³⁷ J. Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.268.

³³⁸ J. MacPherson, "Ireland Begins in the Home: Women, Irish National Identity and the Domestic Sphere" in *Eire Ireland: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol XXXI: III & IV. p.131. (1990)

³³⁹ *Ibid.* p.131

United Irishwoman in 1910 with Mrs Ellice Pilkington... The organization encouraged the development of rural society and expected women to serve their local communities.³⁴⁰

In *Fidelity* Katie and Ellie belong to the emergent, elite farming class in Ireland and as such are portrayed as relentless in their desire to establish their security and influence in the new order. Homi Bhabha's principle of 'sly civility' as it applies to the colonial desire to maintain governance by preserving, '...the liberty of the Western individualist "public sphere" as well as a strategy for policing the culturally and racially differentiated colonial space'³⁴¹ is useful when the women in *Fidelity* are placed as cultural 'others' in this play. Gender issues emerge from a feminist, cultural analysis of the women's economic and socially subordinated position that allow comprehension of the characters' motives and strategies to share power with males within the patriarchal hegemony. In an essay concerning the double-ness of colonial discourse and relationships of power in Maria Edgeworth's novel *Castle Rackrent*, Colin Graham utilizes Bhabha's ideas of 'sly civility'³⁴² as it is applied subversively to 'the gap between dominance and liberality in Western thought...'³⁴³ Graham uses the theory to '... build a notion of textuality in which texts can be inscribed with both dominant and counter-discourses'.³⁴⁴ The actions of the characters in *Fidelity* draw attention to the dominant discourses operating in gender relations within domestic and public spheres in rural Ireland at that time. The use of Bhabha's notion of 'sly civility' applied as a counter-discourse is most apparent in *Fidelity* through the character of Katie Drinan. In

³⁴⁰ See M. Luddy, "Irish Women and the Co-operative Movement" in *Women in Ireland 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p.327.

³⁴¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, Routledge, 1994), p.94

³⁴² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): cited in Graham, Colin. "History, Gender and the Colonial Moment" in M. Kelleher & J.H. Murphy, eds., *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), p.94.

³⁴³ Colin Graham, "History, Gender and the Colonial Moment" in M. Kelleher & J.H. Murphy, eds., *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), p.94.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.95.

the opening scene of the play, in dialogue with Larry, Katie appears to accept her submissive position as a woman; however, this is shown to be an outward persona, a role played in order to survive within the patriarchal system. When her role as 'woman of the house' is threatened, Katie's compliancy is belied by clever manipulation of Larry's emotions and she abandons her submissive persona until her position is re-secured in the last scenes of the play when she once more reverts to quietly 'serving' the male head of the household.

Analysis of *Fidelity* also reveals an interesting collision between conformity to and subversion of both dramatic convention and social mores. The *mise en scène* places *Fidelity* firmly within the peasant play genre, whilst at the same time presents characters that, notwithstanding the controversial plays of J.M.Synge,³⁴⁵ disrupt traditional gender representations of that genre. The gender concerns in *Fidelity* posit the characters as representatives of the conditions in *fin de siècle* rural Ireland poised between the old and new values of a rapidly changing society. Consideration of the relationship between the characters and their individual positions in the contemporary world of the play demonstrates how specific societal changes affected the personal and political choices for women experiencing the legacy of the Great Famine, resulting in a focused reflection by Cummins and Day on their witnessed accounts of lived experiences and positions of women belonging to the rural peasant class. In this respect the use of autobiography in relation to analysis of *Fidelity* has proven fruitful. The use of autobiography in the analysis of *Fidelity* is not undertaken to determine specific 'authorial' intention but rather to map and evidence the socio-politic affinities of the playwrights in order to consider, within the terms of Tracy C. Davis' notion of 'sociability', whether the play worked to represent Cummins' and Day's feminist concerns in respect of the autonomy of women.

³⁴⁵ *In the Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), *The Tinker's Wedding* (1908)

While a conventional reading of the play offers a simple story concerning loyalty in affairs of the heart, a closer examination reveals ambiguities in its title and content. Using symbolic, patriarchal images to frame the beginning and the end of the play, *Fidelity* comments on societal and familial constraints in early twentieth-century Irish society and draws particular attention to women's post-famine struggle for status and security. The word 'fidelity' has different connotations for all the characters in *Fidelity*, particularly the three females who are central to the action and to the decisions made. The single male character, Larry, is portrayed as a passive figure; 'waited on' by the women on the one hand, and on the other, is critiqued by them for his lack of moral fibre.

Post-Famine cultural imperatives inform and determine the specific motivating factors, and the responses, of the two main female characters (Maggie and Katie) and those of the supporting female character (Ellie Drinan) to the issues of loyalty, land ownership, women's emigration and marriage that *Fidelity* addresses. Maggie is described in her absence by Larry as beautiful and as a woman who espouses qualities of faithfulness, purity and dignity – 'feminine' qualities ascribed to Ireland, and to Irish women, by nationalist ideology and iconography. Maggie's adversary, Katie, however, offers a strikingly different portrait of Irish womanhood as she resorts to deception and cruelty in her determination to secure her future with Larry. Ellie's character represents collusion with the masculine hegemony that underpins the situation of each character in *Fidelity*. While the male-dominated society, established in the first scene of the play, is somewhat disturbed by Katie's and Ellie's challenging dialogue and action, the final scenes reinforce patriarchal order as Maggie leaves, dignified in her rejection by Larry, who, once more alone with Katie, compliantly sits down to eat the evening meal she has prepared for him. The exploration of 'famine effect' in *Fidelity*, portrayed through restricted choices for the protagonists within the specific political and social context, is

made clear in the characters' actions and dialogue offering alternative historical representations of 'woman' as 'subject'. The overarching theme of the value and cost of human relationships is illustrated by Maggie's efforts to conform to social mores; and her 'fidelity' to Larry, which is rendered valueless, invites a critique of the pressing social and moral issues of the day and demonstrates the socio-political concerns of the co-authors.

3.2 *Fidelity*: a text analysis

The opening scenes of the play work to construct both the theme of a preoccupation between values of physical attractiveness in relation to rural marriage customs, and tests of loyalty for Larry. Larry's position is complicated by fidelity to the land he has inherited, and by his responsibility towards perpetuating and strengthening the family hold on that land. The patriarchal environment of rural Ireland is evident in the opening scene of *Fidelity*. Larry Macarthy, enjoying a smoke, is leaning over the half-door surveying his fields, while Katie Drinan sits quietly at the kitchen table. He describes his day at the cattle fair, where '...the buyers were snapping at the cattle like trout at a fly.'³⁴⁶ Larry notes that Katie's father, Matt, did very well and speculates on Katie's future inheritance, suggesting that being female, financial concerns are outside of her sphere:

LARRY: ...Old Matt must be making great stores of money these times, 'tis yourself will be the rich woman one of these days

KATIE: Maybe so. I'm not knowing

LARRY: (*laughing*) Matt's close. He wouldn't be telling you anyway

³⁴⁶ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fidelity* (1913), Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25. Item 204, Ref. 11/5 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.1.

Katie's response, 'I'm not knowing', demonstrates a strategic essentialism common to subaltern groups – in this respect it is women surviving within patriarchal conditions - which goes completely unnoticed by Larry whose sense of power remains stable. The representation of patriarchal order blurs as the play progresses and traditional gender portrayals of masculinity/femininity are challenged by the words and actions of Katie and Ellie. Katie's social status matches that of Larry and, in her ruthless determination to shape her own future, she not only adopts attitudes traditionally deemed 'male' but also reads as an example of how women in rural Ireland were beginning to demand a measure of control of their own lives.

Katie, described in the stage directions as, '...extremely pretty; about twenty-three years of age',³⁴⁷ has just discovered that Larry, the object of her desire, is engaged to Maggie Moynihan - another reputed beauty. Larry pleads against Katie's accusations of duplicity but admits that his sister Ellie (married to Katie's brother) had persuaded him to silence. He relates the personal tragedy of his ill-fated romance with Maggie who, being left destitute after the death of her alcoholic father, was excluded from the patriarchal order. Larry's late father, Denis, in post-famine class-conscious prejudice had vigorously opposed their marriage, threatening to disown Larry if he disobeyed. In tone and language, Larry purports to hold Maggie in high esteem:

LARRY: T'was the money he was after; but I'd have taken Maggie and welcome, and she without a thraneen to her fortune... she was ever and always a fine woman was Maggie Moynihan³⁴⁸

Larry's fidelity to his father and to his position as a potential landowner proved a stronger imperative than his love for Maggie; however, Larry mitigates his decision to let

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. p.4.

Maggie go by stating that she was too proud to marry without a dowry, had chosen to leave, and that he was faithfully awaiting her return. Maggie's 'history' in the play however reflects the prejudices that surrounded the causes and effects of the relentless 'emigration trail' in *fin de siècle* Irish society;³⁴⁹ clearly Maggie had no choice other than to emigrate and make money in order to attempt entry to the male-dominated system. Her position of female independence and of making her own way in the world, perceived within the patriarchal system as a masculine pursuit, represents the playwrights' portrayal of the discrepancy between the late-Victorian ideology of femininity and the reality of women's experiences.

Stage directions in *Fidelity* invest the characters with specific attitudes. Katie responds, '(slowly) Meg Clancy was saying t'was rare and beautiful she was.'³⁵⁰ The stage direction for her slow response to Larry's narrative is reinforced by the absence of the qualifying sign of a 'question mark' on the printed play-text; clearly demanding that Katie should adopt a feigned, disinterested attitude. This direction signifies a dual purpose in both masking Katie's desire to discover the extent of the threat to her future; and in revealing her insecurity in terms of her physical ability to attract Larry. The notion of 'sly civility' can be applied here to read Katie's response in terms of a woman negotiating a secure future for herself in rural Ireland. Her strategy has the desired effect, as Larry, having earlier professed his love and admiration for Maggie, confesses that he has been uncertain of his emotions since Katie moved to the village:

LARRY: I never seen a woman in the village to touch her...but yourself Katie. There was times when I used to think that God Almighty himself couldn't make a comelier woman than Maggie,

³⁴⁹ The dramatic focus on female experience found in *Fidelity* contributes to the growing scholarship of Irish women's emigration histories. For a comprehensive study and documented accounts of Irish women's emigration, see: M. Luddy & D. McLoughlin, eds., "Women and Emigration from Ireland from the Seventeenth Century", in, Angela Bourke et al. eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing. Vol V* (Cork: Cork University Press., 2002), pp. 567-588.

³⁵⁰ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fidelity* (1913), Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25. Item 204, Ref. 11/5 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.5.

but then ...I seen you... (*Speaks slowly – as if realizing Katie’s loveliness for the first time*)³⁵¹

Ellie’s arrival and the ‘matriarchal’ control she exerts over her brother operates to suggest her compliance with patriarchal systems and the continued presence and influence of their deceased father; Ellie reinforces the cultural expectations that compound Larry’s dilemma. However, the provocative image of a realistic, pragmatic woman exerting power over an emotional, deluded man also reverses conventional gender perceptions in a style reminiscent of Synge’s dominant females such as the Widow Quinn and Pegeen Mike in *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Hosts of unseen characters ‘accompany’ Ellie’s entrance as she describes their various neighbours and regales Katie and Larry with all the local news. The dramatic convention of the messenger/narrator operates here primarily as a structural form to ‘lift’ the rhythm and tone of the play and is an opportunity for the playwrights to record local traditions and preoccupations. Most of the locals Ellie mentions are ‘matched’ and are to be married before Shrove-tide, following the Lenten custom for Catholic farmers at that time:

ELLIE: News? Yerra the town’s swimming with it... and Pat Leary has made up that match with that girl of the Delaneys after all. Fifty pounds he’s getting with her and God knows it’s little enough, and she as ugly as bespoke, and there’s only two sheep now and a Government hen between the Cadogenans of Keimaneagh and Long Joe Rafferty of the Gap...³⁵²

Ellie’s rich description is of a community that was continuing to observe its own survival by demanding adherence to social codes of behaviour from its members. Ellie had taken care to ensure that Katie remained in ignorance of Maggie’s existence and she reacts passionately when she hears that Meg Clancy has enlightened Katie:

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid. p.10.

ELLIE: Devil's cure to her then for a long-tongued magpie!
Why couldn't she mind her own business. I declare to God that
one would talk the skin off a goat. But indeed you needn't be
minding her at all. Katie; there's no one would be believing what
the like of her would say³⁵³

Despite this setback, Ellie continues to encourage Katie's marital ambitions towards Larry. She is determined that Larry will produce heirs and knows that Katie, being young, healthy and attractive, is the obvious candidate to assist him. Ellie resorts to chastising her brother in an effort to rescue both the situation and her own integrity:

... Ah, whist now, whist, and listen to me awhile. Maggie's gone
and sorra the likelihood she'll ever come back. Is it wasting the
years you'd be, waiting for her and watching the shadows creep
under the door and the hearthstone growing colder and colder?
**There's many the woman has gone to America to earn her
marriage portion... but how many have come back, Larry
Macarthy?** Five years Maggie's gone and small blame to meself
or any honest woman to be making a match for you now³⁵⁴
[my emphasis]

Ellie's reference to emigration, highlighted (in bold) in my citation of this speech, demonstrates Cummins' and Day's awareness of the harsh realities of emigration to which many women at that time were exposed. The ellipsis in the above quote, which is present in the original type-script, is an ambiguous textual indicator that in directing Ellie to pause invites both innocent and condemnatory interpretations. Maggie could have been legitimately employed, or married, but the deliberate 'pause' in Ellie's speech infers more probably that she suspects, or wants Larry to consider, that women who emigrated exceeded prescribed gender boundaries and were engaged in risqué activities in order to make a living – possibly even prostitution. By commenting on the topical issue of women's emigration in this way the playwrights' seem to have attempted a challenge to

³⁵³ Ibid. p.11.

³⁵⁴ Ibid. p.12.

notions regarding the boundaries and constraints of women's experience and financial responsibilities.

Ellie's design and intention for Larry within the world they inhabit is clear. Married to Katie's brother, Ellie is already a beneficiary of the prevailing male-ordered system and wishes to perpetuate the thriving state of their family and the future security of their farmland. In this respect her deception of Katie and Larry are understandable. Within the changing rural situation Ellie is a role model for Katie, who would certainly concur with Ellie's reasoning. Katie proceeds to add weight to Ellie's argument by recounting inquiries made to her regarding a wedding date between Larry and herself. In a powerful association of women with the land, Ellie then entreats Larry to act:

ELLIE: There, what did I tell you? T'is you're the fool me boyo, waiting for a woman that maybe you'll never see again in this world or the next, **and the prettiest girl in six parishes leaning into your hand. Let you be said by me, Larry Macarthy, cut the oats that's ripe, t'will bring you a better harvest**³⁵⁵
(my emphasis)

The highlighted (in bold) section of Ellie's comments in this speech reveal specific cultural reasons for the value accredited to female attractiveness in their locale. Katie's assured dowry, and her physical attractiveness indicate that she will not be single for too much longer. A further union between the two families would undoubtedly be preferable to the prospect of Larry unwed and childless, or married to 'dower-less' Maggie. In her unsentimental attitude towards Larry's emotional loyalty to his fiancé Ellie emerges as a strong advocate of the concept of fidelity as it applied to family survival and prosperity. Her single-minded preoccupation and 'masculine' identification with land works to portray actual sentiments, roles and mores of social behaviour onto the stage. Through

³⁵⁵ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fidelity* (1913), Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25. Item 204, Ref. 11/5 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.13.

Ellie's character the uncertain world, and the cultural exigencies of the environment outside of the cottage, become part of their tragic drama. Larry's conflicting loyalties are clearly illustrated in his attempt to explain his situation to Katie:

LARRY: (*very much distressed*) I...I...Katie...I...God help me...I...Katie – I can't do it. It's not fair to Maggie...She's counting on me. Oh, it's sorry I am to hurt you, but I thought you knew all along –Ellie told me you knew – and I promised Maggie.'Twas over at the style [*sic*] the night before she went away. I told her I'd wait...and she's counting on me...she'll be coming back... and there was never a woman in all the world as beautiful as Maggie Moynihan (*he goes out in a sort of blind impulse to escape further argument. Katie turns away to the fireplace*)³⁵⁶

Larry's 'manly' composure in the opening scenes of the play fragments into confusion caused by events beyond his control. By openly displaying his emotion and indecision Larry reveals what were considered 'essential feminine' traits; in this way the playwrights demonstrated that males were not fixed within perceived masculine behaviours of stoic self-control. While contemporary mores considered the display of 'feminine' traits in males weak and ineffectual, particularly in public, Larry emerges from this portrayal as a caring, if naive individual who, through his predicament, elicits sympathy by highlighting the societal pressures accompanying the fragility of 'masculinity'.

The "value" afforded to female beauty and concepts of loyalty influence the dilemmas and choices that face the characters in *Fidelity*. An expectation of Maggie's physical beauty is set in motion from the start of the play; she is the subject of lengthy discussion by the other characters right up to her entrance midway into the action. Her unannounced arrival significantly disrupts this expectation. The stage directions (reproduced and underlined exactly as they appear in the original typed manuscript) are

³⁵⁶ Ibid. p.14.

specific in determining the dramatic image of Maggie's entrance. Katie is alone in the quiet cottage where the lack of dialogue as this scene unfolds creates a heightened tension:

*(Katie listlessly puts the parcels away in the cupboard then takes the kettle from the floor; fills it and hangs it on the fire; spreads the cloth on the table and sets the table for the evening meal. A woman walking slowly passes the window. She appears at the door. She is tall, well-made, once slender but now almost emaciated. Her features are regular but her face is drawn and worn, her colour sickly. Her hair is tinged with grey. She has evidently once been good-looking, but is now a physical wreck, made old before her time by hard unremitting toil. She knocks lightly against the door).*³⁵⁷

Maggie's demeanor is one of quiet relief to be home, and she has complete confidence in her impending marriage to Larry. However, Katie's shock and relief at the loss of Maggie's beauty is clear, and it is through Katie's character that the conflict in the play between female beauty and honour comes sharply into focus. Despite the fact that Larry has deceived her Katie intends marry him, and this aim supersedes the ethics of her subsequent actions. Being aware of Larry's strong sense of loyalty, Katie knows that unless she disposes of Maggie before he returns her future remains uncertain. She questions Maggie in order to assess her situation:

KATIE: You must have worked very hard in America?

MAGGIE: *(with a little shiver)* I did... work hard

KATIE: *(persistent)* But you made money?

MAGGIE: *(as before)* ...yes...I made it. With the flesh of me body and the sweat of me heart I made it. Early and late, day in day out. Many's the time I'd have given over, only for Larry...and he waiting. I'd struggle on, but God knows I was weary...³⁵⁸

Here, the stage directions clearly demand Katie's persistence in discovering if Maggie has money saved. One possible interpretation is that Cummins and Day, confirmed

³⁵⁷ Ibid. p.16.

³⁵⁸ Ibid. p.19.

suffragists and feminists, may have been attempting to pose a moral question through Katie's dialogue by suggesting a notion of female solidarity. However, the more likely interpretation for Katie's question about Maggie's means is that she wants to discover if she has returned with money – because if not she is clearly no threat to Katie. Upon discovering that Maggie has indeed made money Katie's uncompromising attitude betrays the primacy of her survival instinct, over any concept of 'sisterhood', within the harsh reality of the rural Irish community. Maggie's references to the difficulties she experienced in America serve to reinforce Ellie's earlier observation of women surviving alone. Maggie's response to Katie's query as to her financial situation is ambiguous and could be interpreted as a reference either to prostitution or to manual labour; nevertheless Maggie's reply operates to draw attention once again to the diverse realities of some women who, through necessity or choice, were operating outside of familial systems or conventional gender-determined spheres. Maggie's decrepitude ultimately provides the impelling force behind Katie's subsequent callous and insensitive words and actions.

Katie is unmoved by either the hardships Maggie describes or her love for and fidelity to Larry and, although Maggie has returned with money, Katie, sure in the knowledge that she will be the more attractive to him, insidiously reveals Larry's recent confession and declared attraction to her. As Maggie professes Larry's faithfulness the fact of her weakened physical condition provides Katie with the means by which to ensure victory. Katie hands Maggie a looking-glass,³⁵⁹ stating that Larry could never love an ugly woman. Once more, the emphasis and clarity of the underlined stage directions in the original typescript of the play guide character, tone and attitude:

KATIE: (*with horrible cruelty*) Look at her, Maggie Moynihan
(*she holds the glass before Maggie*). Will you believe it now?
(*Maggie looks in the glass and realizes for the first time the*

³⁵⁹ 'looking glass' refers to a mirror.

*ravages the years have made in her face. She gazes horror-stricken, the truth slowly burning itself into her brain)*³⁶⁰

On the surface, Katie's actions seem unnecessarily heartless; however, the reality of cultural conditions, particularly the limited opportunities for young, single women in rural Ireland, forms the driving impulse behind her actions. In terms of the marriage stakes for women physical attraction extended beyond a pleasant countenance to embrace the requirement of youth, health and the promise of child-bearing ability. Katie's advantage in this respect is in no doubt. However, in order to overcome the problem of Larry's sentimental and honourable character Katie resorts to the drastic measures described. There is no Victorian 'finesse' or 'manners' in her treatment of Maggie which has the desired effect on her rival, and Maggie, having added to her early harsh life experiences with her recent hardships in America, accepts defeat.

Realizing she has missed her chance of marriage to Larry, Maggie is in the process of leaving when he returns to the cottage. Larry's horrified reaction to Maggie's appearance confirms her new fears of his reluctance to honour his promise to her, and also assures Katie that her future with Larry is certain. Larry attempts and fails to remain in control of the situation - his conflicting loyalties render him speechless and physically unable to respond. In the final scene a parodic repeat of Maggie's and Larry's shared history plays out as Maggie, once again driven by necessity and external pressure, is the one who resists paralysis by taking control and physically leaving an impossible situation thereby locating the agency of change in the female corporeal form. Maggie's actions highlight the injustice of her situation by emphasizing the enforced nature of her independence and by documenting the limited options for females within the ideological

³⁶⁰ G. Cummins & S. Day, *Fidelity*. Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box 25, Item 25, Ref. 11/5 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.23.

construct of gender discrimination. The female representations within the main body of the play depict the actuality of women's experience within a patriarchal framework implying essentialist survival strategies of rural women and point to a displacement of the conventional 'sign' of 'woman' as traditionally represented on the Irish stage.

Cummins' and Day's positioning of Maggie as a tragic figure operates to question the moral values of their contemporary society. The action in the closing scenes infer that Maggie receives no reward for virtue; once more she is determined by patriarchy and has no option but to leave in the face of Katie's overwhelming physical advantage and Larry's submission to cultural constraints and male desire. As Maggie slowly departs Larry stands by in impotent silence while Katie anxiously observes the outcome; the stage directions again provide tone and subtext for a feminist reading of the scene:

MAGGIE: *(as she goes out)* Five long years ago.
(A silence. She passes the window with bowed head. With a little inarticulate exclamation, Larry goes to the door and gazes after her. Katie lifts the kettle from the hearth and fills the tea pot)
KATIE: Your tea is ready, Larry
*(He comes down and sits at the table. As she pours out his tea and hands it to him, the curtain falls).*³⁶¹

By thus attending to her domestic 'duties' Katie re-establishes the patriarchal order that was disrupted by Maggie's presence and upholds the social systems and expectations of femininity. The tableaux that 'frame' the beginning and conclusion of *Fidelity* serve to reinforce the male-ordered social structures under which rural Ireland operated at the time and highlight the oppressiveness of these structures for women like Maggie who were exiled from them. In this way Cummins and Day present an image of Irish rural women who are constrained by their circumstances and have little agency with which to transcend their situations.

³⁶¹ Ibid. p.26.

The ambiguity of the ending of the play where Maggie's 'fidelity' is spurned and her future uncertain while Katie's cruelty appears to be rewarded, demonstrates the playwrights' own 'fidelity' to social realism and a disturbance of the melodramatic genre. Cathy Leeney identifies a resistant strategy of disruption employed by many women playwrights in order to disturb dramatic conventions which is distinguished by, '...self-conscious use of recognizable conventions to expose their coercive impacts and to overturn their stability as makers of meaning'³⁶² and she claims that, '...ending plays in ambiguity and in a spirit of questioning, casts the audience into the role of arbiter, judge and agent.'³⁶³ Within these terms, the ending of *Fidelity* leaves the audience with more questions than answers regarding the outcomes for the characters of Maggie and Katie. I argue that while Maggie is a victim of the self-interest of others she emerges with her dignity intact. Having experience of the wider world she is now financially independent and has the economic means to attempt to recover her health. Moreover, despite humiliation and rejection, the stoicism she displays suggests that she has the ability to rise above adversity, embrace reality and move on, refusing her prerogative to insist that Larry honour his commitment to her. From this perspective, Maggie may be read as a positive female role model and an advocate for early twentieth-century women's economic and emotional independence. Ironically, whilst Katie achieves her objective and demonstrates that within the domestic sphere she is by no means subservient, she has no such visible autonomy. In English Common Law, which was in operation at that time, a husband gained control over any estate a wife brought to a marriage and custody of their children should the marriage fail. However, as previously described, rural Irish women were shaping and re-defining their roles and identities

³⁶² Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010) p.199

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

within the confines of a patriarchal system, and, having all the prerequisites for admission to this system, Katie chose and fought to stay within it. It could then be argued that both Katie and Maggie offer images of women encountering and attempting to overcome the prejudices and expectations of their gender.

Employing gender as a category for analysis identifies how the female characters in *Fidelity* portray attitudes and/or experiences generally considered the province of males in early twentieth-century society. Katie's determination to succeed and her assertive language, Ellie's 'land hunger' and, albeit not from choice, Maggie's economic independence are all signifiers of the changes for women that were taking place in modern Ireland. Whilst all the characters within *Fidelity* are destined to be controlled by the patriarchal hegemony, Cummins' and Day's portrayal of Larry inverts conservative representation of male characters in the 'peasant play' genre and affords an opportunity to consider and evaluate the specific perspectives and reflections of women involved on the 'fringes' of the suffragist and avant-garde movements in early twentieth-century Ireland.

3.3 Staging the Past: A modern adaptation of *Fidelity* by G. Cummins and S. Day

Theatre has a peculiar effect on time. In its practice of making the past present, of embodying texts... theatre introduces fragments of history into the present: constructing, creating and imagining pasts that are distinctly theatrical. (Aoife Monks 2007)³⁶⁴

The close identification between feminism and the theatre as a political platform in early twentieth century was arguably a factor in the repeated rejections of *Fidelity* by the Abbey Theatre. *Fidelity* addresses, more overtly than in Cummins' and Day's Abbey-

³⁶⁴ Aoife Monks, "Predicting the Past: Histories and Futures in the Work of Women Directors." In E. Aston & G. Harris, *Feminist Futures?: Performance Interventions* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.88.

produced plays, feminist issues of patriarchy, the growing autonomy of women in the rapidly changing political and cultural landscape of Ireland and, central to its plot, a representation of women's emigration experiences. These were daring dramatic subjects for women to broach in the early decades of the twentieth century and the rejection of the playwrights' endeavour in their time encouraged a notion to take *Fidelity* from 'page-to-stage' in a contemporary production. I believed that the project of recovery and analysis of this play (as far as can be evidenced the only un-produced work from Cummins' and Day's group of peasant plays) would be enhanced by performance and would provide a means by which to consider its feminist qualities and historical significance; for as Monks describes, it is within, '... its practice of making the past present, of embodying texts... theatre introduces fragments of history into the present...'.³⁶⁵ I also wanted to explore if and how the process of production of this play might illuminate the interrelationship or 'kinship' between the disciplines of theatre practice and theatre history; linked as they are by a shared interest in the aesthetic of story, character and event in dramatic texts.

Describing the emergence of the 'performative turn' in the development of theatre studies and the trans-disciplinary nature of performance, Tracy C. Davis admits the 'rhetorical devices' of performance but states that, 'beyond metaphor they convey how performance itself is a tool for innovative exploration, flexing under many circumstances, transforming when necessary... [It] is both the *subject* of study and often the *means*.'³⁶⁶ In this case, performance offered a *means* by which *Fidelity* and its authors might become part of the discourse relating to the history of Irish playwrights. Elaine Aston observes the influence of Judith Butler on theatre's '...feminist theoretical

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Tracy C. Davis, *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.2.

project of *doing* gender-resistant work: of arguing theatre's own ability to *make* 'gender trouble'.³⁶⁷ In this respect the women-centred themes, thought-provoking narrative, clearly delineated characters and a realistic dialogue portraying the specific and poetic vernacular of West Cork are the conditions which indicated that *Fidelity* would 'work' in production.³⁶⁸ A contemporary staging of *Fidelity* would ensure that Cummins' and Day's attempt to 'trouble' gender representation on the Irish stage in 1913 could re-surface - almost a century later - to 'trouble' and contest traditional canonical assumptions of a comprehensive or definitive Irish dramatic repertoire.

In respect of engendering historical knowledge my decision to undertake an explorative production was influenced by reading Professor F. Thomas Trotter, who claims that, 'To be able imaginatively to enter history is one of the great gifts of being human...'³⁶⁹ Mourning the relegation of imagination to 'fanciful reflection', Trotter calls for universities to return to a more holistic vision in terms of nurturing the minds and futures of young people. Trotter constructs an erudite argument for the primacy of imagination over reason which he states is, '...the basis of all art, poetry and in a special sense history.'³⁷⁰ Trotter's lecture, whilst aimed at colleges of Theology, has a resonance for all scholars of history where imagination is required in order to appreciate and write about past times, lives and concerns with integrity. Robert A. Rosenthal has confronted the challenge to historians in our unstable post-modern world, with all its shifting paradigms, by engaging with alternative methods of writing histories. Following Hayden White's lead of almost half a century ago, Rosenthal promotes experiments in describing

³⁶⁷ Elaine Aston, in Sue-Ellen Case, Re-issue: *Feminism and Theatre*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p.xv.

³⁶⁸ It is also the case that the decision to produce *Fidelity* was influenced by the neglect of women playwrights in the Abbey Theatre centenary programme - where even Lady Gregory's prolific contribution was overlooked and her comedy *Spreading the News* (1904) was merely given a reading in The Peacock Theatre.

³⁶⁹ Thomas F. Trotter, 'Imagination and History'

Accessed 10/09/11 <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=523>.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

the world, that reflect the changing nature of our own increasingly technological lives in ways that have:

...helped alter our ways of seeing, telling and understanding our realities... [for] the past three decades, the possibility of innovative historical writing, the notion of playing with new forms of narrative, has floated around the edge of the profession... and in recent years the notion, if not the practice, has even made its way into some formal programmes. But little innovative historical writing has appeared in print... and there have been virtually no outlets or rewards for writing the past in ways that abandon traditional models and adapt to the sensibility of the present moment.³⁷¹

The methodology of 'creative non-fiction', as expounded by writers such as Hayden White and Peter Burke and more recently Lee Gutkind, challenges historians to step beyond nineteenth-century positivist modes of writing history to recognize that which we can never know about the past. Describing an experiment in theatre historiography which utilized 'creative non-fiction' as a methodology, Joseph Bromfield and Jennifer J. Cavanaugh sought to write a history of the actress Annie Russell, who, whilst well-known during her life as G.B. Shaw's original 'Major Barbara' and as one of Charles Frohman's stars, has drifted into obscurity.³⁷² Bromfield and Cavanaugh cite from Rosenstone's editorial in the first volume of *Rethinking History* where he wrote, 'We believe that the writing of history can be an art and that innovation in any art calls for boldness, audacity and the courage to try out things that can seem strange, even to the author.'³⁷³ Within these explorative frameworks of inquiry and in response to the occlusion of women writers from Irish theatre history narratives the idea to produce *Fidelity* was encouraged. My chief concern lay in locating opportunities from which to

³⁷¹ Robert A. Rosenthal, *Experiments in Rethinking History* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), p.2.

³⁷² Joseph Bromfield & Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh, "A Historiography of Informed Imagination" in, *Theatre History Studies*, Vol. 29. (2009), pp. 52-80.

³⁷³ Robert A. Rosenstone, "Editor's Preface," in *Rethinking History*, Issue 1, Vol 1. 1997 citing: <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/13642529.asp> in Joseph Bromfield & Jennifer Jones Cavanaugh, "A Historiography of Informed Imagination" in, *Theatre History Studies*, Vol. 29. (2009), pp. 54-55.

explore the diverse ways of ‘knowing’ history and to seek to demonstrate how the adaptation of hitherto forgotten, unseen or neglected dramatic texts can enrich academic scholarship.

The remainder of this chapter describes the subsequent production processes of and performance reflections on two productions of *Fidelity* undertaken in 2004 and in 2005.³⁷⁴

Whilst the immediate experience of live performances cannot be conveyed events can be recorded and mediated through a variety of technologies, and in this respect the Appendix includes photographs and video evidence from the second production of *Fidelity* in order to provide a tangible link with the material traces of Irish women playwrights from the past.³⁷⁵

Fidelity Players DU (April 2004)

A view of theatre production as a precarious and demanding activity for many women, where often, the demands of domestic responsibilities intersect and compete with those of the theatre, is expressed by contemporary playwright Marina Carr in the foreword to Sihra’s volume of essays.³⁷⁶ According to Carr, such difficulties are a contributory factor in the paucity, and the survival, of plays by women. Carr’s remarks seem particularly relevant when considered in light of the way my record of the first experimental production was impeded by external circumstances. On the opening night of *Fidelity*, I was unexpectedly forced to withdraw from the project (for personal family

³⁷⁴ The first production of *Fidelity* was produced in Players Theatre D.U. April 2004, directed by Clare Neylon. The second production of *Fidelity*, again directed by Clare Neylon, was staged in conjunction with a conference on ‘Munster Women Writers’ in The Granary Studio, U.C.C. in Dec 2005 - at the latter end of Cork’s tenure as European City of Culture.

³⁷⁵ See Appendix for programme from the 2004 production of *Fidelity* (Players DU); programme/video/photographs from the 2005 production of *Fidelity* in the Granary Studio UCC; and the transcript of an interview with Clare Neylon, the director of both productions.

³⁷⁶ Melissa Sihra, ed., *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship & Representation* (Basingstoke, U.K.; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.10.

reasons) and subsequently missed all the performances. However, while evaluation of this first production is thus limited, analysis remains possible from evaluating the production process and the responses to interviews with the cast and director and questionnaires completed by the stage designer and one of the actors.³⁷⁷

As producer of *Fidelity* I was necessarily responsible for managing the financial aspects of mounting the production and appointing the creative team. A budget of 1500 euro for this first production was secured from my personal investment of 500 euro, a production grant of 150 euro from Players D.U., and the remaining 850 euro was raised from private sponsorship and from various fundraising events. Rehearsal spaces were booked both from Players DU, which was also secured as the venue for the production, and from within Trinity College facilities offered for TCD Student Societies. The creative production team comprised of former and current student colleagues of mine who were specifically chosen on the basis of their commitment to the project of the performance of recovered texts. I particularly approached an undergraduate colleague of mine, Clare Neylon, to direct the play as I had long admired her innovative work and had performed under her direction in a student production of *Vinegar Tom* by Caryl Churchill. Similarly, the lighting designer, Simon Williams, a former undergraduate colleague, was invited on the basis of his extensive experience and enthusiasm for the project. The set designer, Elizabeth Mannion, is an academic who became involved as her own PhD research project concerned the recovery of forgotten or marginalized texts from the urban repertoire of the Abbey Theatre. Another post-graduate colleague, Jennifer Beckett, undertook stage management for the show and a friend and professional costume designer, Jean Pouch, volunteered to manage the costumes for the production.

³⁷⁷ See Appendix

As I needed to maintain a creative objectivity with which to interpret this work 'in performance' it was very important that Clare Neylon should engage with the play on her own terms. Consequently, I gave the play to Neylon with little associative dramaturgy and subsequently maintained an aesthetic distance from the processes of rehearsal. Neylon approached this play with a 'sense of freedom' and a professional/academic curiosity, commenting that '...[If] I, as director, and the actors can identify with the story and the arc of the characters through the play, then less dramaturgical information cannot really impede understanding'.³⁷⁸ Neylon was clear in her opinion on the value to theatre studies of the performance of recovered plays by women:

I believe the theatrical canon, especially in Ireland, has been influenced by the lack of belief in women's creative talents and in the past by the belief that their position in society did not warrant remembering their achievements outside the home. As a result we have lost a rich and exciting theatre heritage. Through the writing of women we get a completely new insight into our history. If we only produce the work of male writers a whole chunk of our past is lost.³⁷⁹

This connection between women playwrights and theatre practitioners is vital if a heritage of women's playwriting is to be recovered and maintained in order to influence current and future women's investment in Irish cultural history.

With her requirements for a theatrical engagement with a drama being met by *Fidelity*, particularly in terms of character and narrative, Neylon's own research of the prevailing social conditions of the play was conducted to establish motivation for the characters' actions. Her identification of feminism in the text was '...based mainly on the fact that the story centres on the lives and plights of women in a time when [in the

³⁷⁸ From interview with Clare Neylon Dec. 2005 (see Appendix)

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

theatre] that would have been unusual'.³⁸⁰ Neylon found that the strongest feminist theme was related to Maggie's survival after Larry's rejection and was inspired by what she read as Maggie's strength and ability to endure. When asked if she found any contemporary resonance in the play, Neylon's response, pertinent in terms of describing motivation for direction, identifies ways which in her view *Fidelity* justifies its performance on the contemporary stage:

... In the play, men are judged by their power and wealth – while youth and beauty judge the women. In our contemporary world, the same values often apply... Alongside these themes was of course the age-old struggle for love and acceptance, which can resonate with any era.³⁸¹

Dramatic representation of *Fidelity* contributes to emergent stories of Irish women's experience of emigration³⁸² and the unfolding of new historical understandings. In observing that, '... [T]he injustice of Larry's decision, and his fickleness - at the end of the play - proved only to highlight Maggie's strength and courage',³⁸³ Neylon demonstrates how she inferred from the text itself, in the absence of dramaturgy, an identification of women's independence as a feminist concern in this play - a view supported by my research of the preoccupations of the playwrights.

It was important to me that, in terms of investing in the wider academic project of recovering women's writing, an ensemble commitment to the text and production would enable a significant performative role in 'making-history'. I was therefore invited to be involved with casting actors for the production and, along with Neylon, was very clear that the actors' enthusiasm for the project and interest in the characters' stories was as

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² For example: Maria Luddy & D. McLoughlin, eds., "Women and Emigration from Ireland from the Seventeenth Century" in Angela Bourke, et al, eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Vol V*. (Cork: Cork University Press 2002) pp.567-588; Ide O'Carroll, *Models for Movers: Irish Women's Emigration* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990);

J. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland 1885-1924*, (Lexington, [Ky]: University Press, 1989); H. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America*, (Baltimore [MD]; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

³⁸³ From interview with Clare Neylon Dec. 2005 (see Appendix)

vital as were their physical attributes and competency as actors. Neylon demonstrated an understanding of the central issue in this play *vis á vis* a critique of marriage in rural Ireland and its practical and psychological repercussions for Irish rural societies by deciding that the actors playing Maggie and Katie should look very different from one another in order to make Larry's choice even more clear cut for an audience.

From a feminist perspective, Neylon's decision to set the play in its own period is pertinent:

I never considered... any other time or place... [I]t would have been awkward and difficult to set it at any other time, ...in order to be faithful to Maggie's story and the stories of other women like her... As modern women, we don't truly understand the lives of women at that time and I really wanted to bring it to light for a modern audience.³⁸⁴

Other factors that encouraged Neylon to firmly situate the story within its own context included the dialogue and references to places which influenced her decisions regarding the rhythm and accent of the actors' speeches. Neylon describes how a connection between this period play and a contemporary audience was created when, 'Instead of changing anything about the setting, we tried to give it a modern twist, using the songs of contemporary Irish singers'.³⁸⁵ The songs used in the production were, *Lay me Down* by The Frames; *Living* by Paddy Casey (bonus' track no. 9); and *I Remember* by Damien Rice.³⁸⁶ The song lyrics were selected by Neylon to emphasize specific emotional moments for characters in the play. It was important to Neylon that the music was Irish, but she felt that using modern songs might help the audience to connect with an unknown play from a hundred years before; so the songs were chosen because they were Irish and because the lyrics resonated with the story of the play. In this way Neylon

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ See Appendix for video extract from the Cork performance 2005.

shows how the expression of past concerns finds resonance with those of the present through creative, empathic interpretations of the material. In terms of her decision to have a live vocalist, she says:

As these songs are written and recorded by three different artists, I felt that having one singer performing live would give more of a sense of unity to the sound. I also wanted to have them sung in the Seanos style, a very Irish and ageless sound that gave these modern songs a sense of timelessness. It also matched the setting of the play, in that Seanos would have been sung at that time and predominantly in country areas. The sound of live music is very different to that of recorded music, particularly acapella, and I wanted that haunting feeling of a live singer for the show.³⁸⁷

The inclusion of the haunting sound of vocalist Laura Lee Conboy's singing of the contemporary songs interspersed within the action of the period stage provided a link between audience, actor and the resonating subject matter of the play.

On the question of how thematic impressions and/or the specific stage directions influenced her decisions on style/genre of production Neylon decided on a realistic staging (in terms of acting, accents and costumes) to tell the story in a way that was true to the character's experiences. For Neylon, close attention to stage directions in rehearsal was important in terms of the relationship between Katie and Maggie '[T]he stage directions were a strong influence in terms of how these characters interacted with each other physically'.³⁸⁸ Regarding the play in terms of the transforming processes of rehearsal, Neylon affirms the advantages of embodying this text in performance - as a strategy in realizing the power of the subtext:

...[T]his is a text that definitely comes alive in the playing. None of the emotions or motivations of the characters were as strong in reading as they were in performance. The viciousness of Katie's attack on Maggie near the end was much stronger in performance, as was the ending - suggesting Maggie's strength of

³⁸⁷ From interview with Clare Neylon Dec. 2005 (see Appendix)

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

character as she walks away. In rehearsals, we found more hope in the ending, where at first it had seemed an extremely sad end to the story.³⁸⁹

Neylon's comments concur with my cultural exploration of the playwrights' feminist concerns and subsequent reading of the social positions of and future prospects for the characters of Maggie and Katie at the end of the play - supporting a reading that perceives Cummins' and Day's attempt to negotiate the genre of the 'peasant play' as a platform for their feminist-orientated social comment in *Fidelity*.

Dialogue is a strong element in the *mise-en-scène* of *Fidelity*, particularly in terms of women characters in the play, whose use of language traverses persuasion, vitriol, humour, pathos and poetry. Whilst a generic Cork accent was initially used, the value of field research was clearly proven when I organized a visit to Ballingearry, Co.Cork towards the end of the rehearsal process. The local accent in Ballingearry is very specific as we discovered when we asked some local women to read a scene for us. As Neylon remarks in her interview, '...we realised that the accent was very different and the actors had to adapt quickly, which was challenging'.³⁹⁰

My reflections on the productions of *Fidelity* also include the responses of the actors to a questionnaire, and in particular the response of Caroline Coffey, who played Maggie in both productions of *Fidelity*.³⁹¹ Coffey initially saw the play as a melodrama of lost love and the post-famine plights of women and men; however, she discovered through working on her character and the rehearsal work on inter-character relationships that her character (Maggie) was 'very strong-willed and determined',³⁹² and felt that Maggie would survive the heartache at the end of the play. All the actors reported

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ See Appendix for Caroline Coffey's response to questionnaire (2005)

³⁹² Ibid.

(during the rehearsal process 2004) that while the text is simple to read; it is loaded with complex expressions of selfhood, and gender issues, which became clear through their rehearsals as each actor became acquainted with their role and relationships within the play. They also commented that the specific and poetic nature of the West Cork accent within the play enabled their emotional engagement with their characters; the day trip to the region having afforded the cast an opportunity to experience the geographic setting and to listen to and practice speaking in the local Ballingearry nuances of language. On the question of reviving women's plays from the archive, Coffey felt that it was important to have plays in the repertory that map a genealogy of women's writing. The value of performing this play appealed to Coffey, who claims, '...it is a powerful way of engaging with theatre history.'³⁹³ In terms of recovered plays and the theatrical canon Coffey states, '... [T]here's plenty of room for more - and especially for such themes as seen in *Fidelity*... [it] would increase interest in the wider preoccupations... [and] circumstances of the time'.³⁹⁴ The responses to *Fidelity* clearly evidence the pedagogical value of producing marginalized plays as this production proved instructive for the practitioners throughout the rehearsal process primarily by stimulating discourse in terms of feminist theatre history.

The collective and co-operative nature of play production resonates with the collaborative processes within feminist projects for the survival of women's writing, and in this respect, the narratives of the lighting and set design of this production demonstrate the engagement of theatre practice with historical document to co-create new and informing theatrical experiences. Lighting designer, Simon Williams' reading of the text suggested the over-arching atmosphere of power and patriarchy in the play. Along with

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

the director and set designer he determined that the lighting scheme worked with the dialogue and action in the text to support, signify and respond to events in the naturalist setting, and to break through the naturalism at points in the play both where the songs occurred and at the central moment of dramatic climax. While the design was not overly technical Williams focused on the atmospheric effect of the lighting design. There were few lighting cues, the main body of the play requiring natural daylight; however, a Millennium Gold spotlight with a 'hard edge' was used to light the vocalist for her three 'live' performances during the play's action. The lighting and direction of the production cohered in this way to break through the naturalism of the text, creating contemporary references and connections between the audience and the on-stage action. The central action occurs when Katie forces Maggie to look at herself in the mirror, and here Williams washed the stage with a Deep Blood Red that momentarily obliterated action before reverting back to naturalist lighting; this was the only moment in the play where the lights were centre stage. Here again, the intention was that in disrupting the naturalist setting the audience would be drawn towards the emotional elements within the play. The dramatic cue change ensured full impact of the vicious act visited upon 'Maggie' - the image Williams hoped would remain in the spectator's memory after the lighting restored the natural order of the scene. Whilst time was less important than atmosphere in the production, the action moves from day to evening and a Profile amber spot was used when Katie 'lit' the oil lamp in the closing scenes.

The set designer for this production, theatre scholar Beth Mannion, offers a pertinent and valuable evaluation of this production. Concurring with Neylon, she appreciates the exploratory aspect of working on archival material in this way:

I feel very strongly that previously marginalized plays should and must be brought into the discourse of Irish drama studies... Unearthing marginalized works allows us to appreciate a fuller

view of the richness of the early 20th-century Irish playwrights and helps us to more fully understand the period--both in terms of how people were negotiating their place in the society and in terms (by what was and was not produced) of what the 'gate-keepers' were willing to let be produced.³⁹⁵

Mannion was surprised to learn that this play had not been previously produced. Her response highlights the relationship between the theatre historian and the dramatic text that this experimental production sought to illuminate. Mannion's description of the factors that informed her functional, minimalist set design clearly demonstrate how it is both in reading and seeing these works that openings for discourse are revealed:

I found the script very Synge-like and so that probably influenced my set design more than anything else. That there was scant background information on the authors or the play, was less a factor than my reading it as the set needing to reflect character, which is something that always struck me about Synge's work. The set was character-driven and served to reinforce the conflicts within this play ...[T]he characters definitely impacted my decision to keep the set extremely matter-of-fact. The combination of the characters 'feet-on-the-ground' pragmatism and the rather ethereal circumstances of their hopes/desires was a contributing factor in trying to measure reality against surrealism.³⁹⁶

Mannion's insight showed how the characters' positions in *Fidelity* were reinforced through the *mise-en-scène* and by performance, thus concurring with Neylon's assertion that the text '...comes alive in the playing'. When asked if the performance of archival plays could prove useful in terms of informing pedagogies for faculties of theatre studies Mannion says, 'Absolutely; my own research (on the urban repertoire of the early Abbey Theatre) is very archival in nature, so I am completely on board with the need for us to unearth marginalized texts'.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ See Appendix for set designer's response to questionnaire (2010)

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

The debut production of *Fidelity* was staged in Players Theatre D.U., in April 2004.³⁹⁸ The contemporary technical aspects available for the production of this archival play in a theatre setting allowed staging possibilities that helped to reveal and foreground its compelling feminist subtext. In pedagogical terms, the comments from the director, actors, lighting and set designers from this production of *Fidelity* bear witness to the possibilities that exist for faculties of theatre studies to facilitate projects within theatre history courses where students are encouraged to engage in a creative way with recovered texts, combining historical research with text analysis and the practical theatre skills of directing, production and performance. In terms of audience reception, Neylon says:

The play was extremely well received - the audiences were drawn into the story and really enjoyed following the characters' relationships. The overwhelming sense was that it was too short - they were hungry for more. Almost all of the feedback was very positive, with a lot of people expressing surprise that these plays are not better known and more widely performed.³⁹⁹

Fidelity: Production No.2 Dec. 2005

After an untimely absence of eighteen months 'off-books' I was in a position to return to the project; to once again produce, and finally to witness, performances of *Fidelity* in a three-day event at which one performance was staged (and contextualized) alongside my convening of a mini-conference on Munster Women Playwrights in the Granary Studio, UCC (Cork).⁴⁰⁰ New research at the conference was presented by Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick on Margaret O'Leary: *The Woman* (1929);⁴⁰¹ by Dr. Ian Walsh on B. J.

³⁹⁸ No evidence has yet come to light to suggest that this play was produced either professionally or otherwise prior to this contemporary production

³⁹⁹ From interview with Clare Neylon Dec. 2005 (see Appendix)

⁴⁰⁰ Dr. Ger Fitzgibbon, Chair of Theatre & Drama Studies (UCC) gave the opening address.

⁴⁰¹ Lisa Fitzpatrick, "Margaret O'Leary's, *The Woman*(1929): A Feminist Reading"

McCarthy: *The Whip Hand* (1942);⁴⁰² and by Professor Cathy Leeney, who presented a critical analysis of the plays of Teresa Deevy.⁴⁰³ The conference was held in the Granary studio space – where conference participants sat at the same farmhouse table that was used in the set for *Fidelity*. This proved to be an unexpected, but ontologically interesting experience which brought the academic and performance elements of the event into close proximity in a symbolic relationship that served to illustrate how theatre research and theatre practice can work together in knowledge production and discourse. I also co-ordinated a contextual exhibition on Cummins and Day in the theatre lobby thereby to coincide with the event - thereby extending the signifying tools of performance to embrace spectators in the process of understanding the project of recovery.⁴⁰⁴ This exhibition, constructed in support of the production/event with the co-operation of the Cork Archive Institute, demonstrates how links between the academy, performance and the wider community may be expressed.

The budget for the Cork production was achieved by means of my personal investment of 1500 euro and also relied heavily on private sponsorship of 1500 euro from friends to make up a total expenditure of 3000 euro. Rooms for casting and rehearsal were once more facilitated by TCD whilst the venue was booked in the Granary studio UCC. I also rented a cottage in Ballygeary for the week prior to the production in order to acclimatize the actors to the environment of the play and to facilitate a technical rehearsal in the Granary studio. For this second production of *Fidelity*, I undertook the role of set, lighting and costume design. I was assisted with the production by post-graduate student Anna Galt and a visiting student from Australia, Caitlin Weston.

⁴⁰² Ian Walsh, "Shame and Laughter: An Examination of Gender in B.G. MacCarthy's *The Whip Hand* (1942)."

⁴⁰³ Cathy Leeney, "The Paradigm of Persophone in Teresa Deevy's Plays of the 30's."

⁴⁰⁴ Several of Cummins' and Day's descendants were present for the performance on the day of the conference which, for them, was a significant event.

Director, Clare Neylon, vocalist, Laura Lee-Conboy and one actor from the first production, Caroline Coffey were again available and Neylon's comparative comments on this second production prove useful in considering the pedagogical value of performing marginalized works in both theatre and non-theatre spaces:

I was extremely excited to direct this play again; the original process had been so creative and interesting. It also gave me an opportunity to look at what I had done before and what could be done differently the second time around. I felt like I had had time to think about it more and could bring fresh insight into the text.⁴⁰⁵

Neylon's overall vision for the second production was unchanged; however, she made some minor, logistical adjustments and one major change by adding a mimed prologue to the play:

...the decision was based mainly on my, and the actors' belief, that the love story between Larry and Maggie was under represented in the text. I felt it would add a layer to final scene and an extra sense of poignancy if the audience had had the opportunity to see them 'in love' at the opening of the play. Also the audience had the chance to recognize Maggie when she entered in the final scene and see how time and hard work had ravaged her.⁴⁰⁶

Neylon's creative response to the text demonstrates how performance can enhance meaning, particularly when informed by dramaturgy as was the case for this second production. Having previously directed the play Neylon brought her experience to her perception of story and character in this second production. Most of the rehearsals for the Cork production took place in Dublin; however, as described the cast lived in Ballingearry for the week prior to the production which Neylon found extremely helpful. Coffey, having been re-cast in the role of 'Maggie' found that with more time spent in

⁴⁰⁵ From interview with Clare Neylon Dec. 2005 (see Appendix)

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

the area she, and the other cast members, appreciated the nuances of dialect more keenly.

The Granary studio is a non-theatre space with little or no facilities for theatre performance and this affected our staging decisions, particularly in terms of set/lighting design. The set was pared down and the lighting was minimal but for the essential spotlights. In her evaluation and reflection of the performance of the play in a non-theatre space, Neylon observes:

... I don't think it was less effective, in a way it was more personal, more intimate. There was a small audience and they were almost part of the performance by being in a room together with the show. There wasn't that same distance there can be with a stage and audience. From the reactions of the audience afterwards, I don't think it lost effectiveness.⁴⁰⁷

When asked about the value to practitioners and spectators of producing recovered or marginalized work Neylon is clear:

[T]his play is a hidden treasure of our history...if people had more information about the playwrights and their plays I have no doubt that they would be really interested in seeing them produced. The reactions of the audiences at both productions were really positive. I believe people want to see recovered work.⁴⁰⁸

One of the most exciting elements of this approach to examining recovered plays by women is that the plays are explored in the theatre environment for which they were clearly written. With the creative attention of theatre practitioners and the attendant dramaturgy; scholarship and the repertory are enriched by Irish women's playwriting history. As to the significance of performing these recovered plays in terms of feminist theatre history, Neylon clearly agrees:

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

...I think it's important when looking at any research that there is a practical side to it, how the research can be applied. In this case, as we're talking about theatre and bringing to light the work of two prolific playwrights - work that has been forgotten - there is a need to attempt a staging. Without staging the play, you can never really know how well written it is; whether an audience can connect with it; or whether it works as a performance rather than just a reading.⁴⁰⁹

The three plays by Cummins and Day constitute a group of 'peasant' dramas that are thematically and textually informative in terms of the social history of Irish women and Irish women playwrights and, of course, the playwrights' own cultural and political positions. The embodiment of the gender positions identified within *Fidelity* renders such history both visible and accessible for contemporary practitioners and audiences whilst concretizing the research and cultural materialist analysis that initially revealed this play and its authors as feminist. Offering an academic review of the production, one of the conference participants, Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick wrote:

The play is a provocative one, particularly in its depiction of the relationships between the characters. Larry is peculiarly passive... He is in the cottage for most of the action, unlike the women – Ellie enters from the marketplace; Maggie travels to America. Yet, despite his passivity, the action of play centres around him. Maggie's departure, broken-hearted, is ...difficult to interpret. She has the independence and the means, now, to build another life for herself. Yet the authors never hint at what possibilities that life might hold. This is a curious play, with clearly delineated characters and effective dialogue. Its representation of gender behaviour raises questions which the play does not attempt to answer. It seems almost to reverse gender stereotyping ... Maggie's description of her experiences in America... raise questions about the kind of work she did. The phrases about flesh and the 'sweat of her heart' almost suggest prostitution, though this would seem to be completely out of keeping with the... tone of the play... Overall, this is a thought-provoking play which is surprisingly fresh and vivid in performance.'⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick, Peer Review. February. 2006

Following the Cork production of *Fidelity* the *Irish Times* theatre critic, Sara Keating observed:

‘...[T]he small scale production of ‘Fidelity’...certainly proved that their [Cummins’ and Day’s] work merits contemporary revival for its insights into issues ignored in wider social histories such as the plight of Ireland’s female emigrants and the cruel affiliation of love and economics that dominated Irish life up until the 1960’s.’⁴¹¹

Keating’s article also discussed the new research on plays of later women playwrights Margaret O’Leary, B.G. McCarthy and Teresa Deevy, which demonstrate the rich field of information that exists to enable new histories of Irish dramatists. She wrote that these emergent plays ‘... reclaim some of Ireland’s finest lost literature through a series of dramas worthy of recovery on their own merit’.⁴¹²

In terms of illuminating Irish women’s dramatic writing, the comments regarding the experimental productions of *Fidelity* attest to the value of utilizing theatre practice as a research methodology in the exploration of recovered plays. The contemporary staging enhanced the feminist qualities inherent in the text and accentuated the significance of exploration of women’s theatre history and their writing practices in early twentieth century Ireland.

⁴¹¹ Sara Keating, “Revealing Women’s Hidden Lives”, Arts Section, *The Irish Times*, Wed. January 4th (2006), p10.

⁴¹² Ibid.

Chapter 4

Dowden and Cummins – supernatural collaborators

4.1 An introduction to *The Extraordinary Play* (1924)

STRANG: Do you believe in the Supernatural, sir?

GERALD: No, Strang. I do not even believe in the natural. Belief is the refuge of those who are too dull to imagine.

The Extraordinary Play: Act 1 ⁴¹³

On August 11th 1924, the Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers, London, registered a 3-Act play purportedly inspired and dictated by the discarnate spirit of Oscar Wilde. Suitably entitled, *The Extraordinary Play*, the work emerged from alleged communications ‘received’ by means of a ouija board, and through ‘automatic’ or ‘spirit’ writing; the material having been shaped into dramatic form by playwrights and respected mediums, Hester Travers-Smith (née Dowden)⁴¹⁴ and Geraldine Cummins. The notion of constructing *The Extraordinary Play* most likely originated during the previous summer of 1923, when Hester Dowden had performed several séances in which she claimed to be in ‘communication’ with the ‘spirit’ of Oscar Wilde. These sessions were witnessed by members of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), including Geraldine Cummins, whose role was to record the proceedings and a Dr. Soal (or ‘Mr. V’)⁴¹⁵ who often assisted Dowden at the ouija board

⁴¹³ H. Dowden & G. Cummins, *The Extraordinary Play* Act 1, Sc. 1. Unpublished MS. ‘Geraldine Cummins Collection’ U206. Box 43, Item 307 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.2.

⁴¹⁴ As previously stated (Introduction p.2) Hester Travers Smith separated from her husband in 1914. Although some of her writing is published under her married name, she generally used her maiden name (Dowden) after her divorce, which is the name ascribed to her in this work.

⁴¹⁵ Dr Soal was a Professor of Mathematics at the University of London who was a researcher for the Society of Psychical Research. He was the automatist for several of the initial Oscar Wilde ‘communications’ in 1923.

by holding the ‘traveller’ and was the automatist⁴¹⁶ at several of the initial ‘Oscar Wilde Communications’.

Dowden’s subsequent publication of her ‘conversations’ with Oscar Wilde, *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde*⁴¹⁷ was preceded by regular extracts of the ‘Oscar Wilde Communications’ published in the *Occult Review*⁴¹⁸ prior to publication of her book. By these means, the women claimed not only the attention of their peers in the field of psychical research, but briefly held the interest of a wider readership. Cummins submitted an article entitled, “The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde” for the *Occult Review* in February 1924 giving a detailed overview of the ‘Oscar Wilde Communications’; and advancing an argument to explain her acceptance of evidence which could not be explained away by other means, such as telepathy or through subconscious impersonation, ‘...for the first time in a fairly wide experience of psychical research, I felt that, here in this case, the explanation that the personality of Oscar Wilde survived and was communicating seemed more probable and plausible.’⁴¹⁹ At the end of this article, Cummins’ natural skepticism re-appears when she writes:

...it is a pity that in psychical research there is no centre party, which in controversy would weigh and sift and hold the balance impartially between the skeptics and the spiritualists... perhaps it would be better still to adopt the irresponsible attitude of one of the characters in the drama called “The Extraordinary Play,” which is being communicated at the moment from what purports to be Oscar Wilde. It is as follows...⁴²⁰

Cummins continues by quoting a section of humorous, ‘Wildean-like’ dialogue from the opening scene of Act 1 in the play, that concerns the survival, or not, of the human

⁴¹⁶ An automatist is a scribe who, in a trance-like, somnambulist state, writes messages that are allegedly ‘channelled’ through the medium from the discarnate spirits of human beings who have passed to the spirit world.

⁴¹⁷ Hester Travers Smith (née Dowden) *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1924).

⁴¹⁸ *The Occult Review* was a British monthly magazine for occultists and authors, published between 1905-1951, edited by Ralph Shirley and published by William Ryder and Son Ltd.

⁴¹⁹ G.D. Cummins “The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde” in *The Occult Review*, (February 1924), p.102.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.* p.110

spirit following death, between a Manservant (Strang) and his Master; The Hon. Gerald Barends, (see the quote at the beginning of this chapter: 4.1). Cummins may have been utilizing a rare advertising opportunity afforded to Dowden and herself, by their exotic connection to Wilde, which could bring forth likely sponsors of the play she and Dowden were writing. However, it is also possible that by generating public interest around authorship of the script, Cummins created a space for discourse between spiritualism and the creative process, an achievement that in terms of Cummins' and Dowden's work with the SPR would have been of great value. In her article for *The Occult Review*, Cummins describes a physical presence of personality in the messages coming from the 'communicator' (Wilde), the playwrights' stated 'author' of the play:

[He] is at present communicating a play with a clever intrigue in the Wilde style of the nineties. He writes and rewrites his dialogue and becomes furiously impatient if interrupted, or if his ideas are not instantly understood. We have asked him to modernize the play... so it might have a more popular appeal. But this he seems quite unable to do... it is now decidedly old-fashioned ...⁴²¹

Whilst Dowden and Cummins are the acknowledged co-writers of *The Extraordinary Play*, it is fair to suggest that the presence of Dr Soal ('Mr. V'), and Dowden's daughter, Dolly, who both acted in the role of the medium's 'partner' to Dowden at some of the early sittings, may also have played a part in Dowden's and Cummins' creative processes. Although 'Mr. V' is not cited with any involvement in the subsequent construction of *The Extraordinary Play*, 'Wildean' epigrammatic statements, 'automatically' written by 'Mr. V' in the published 'communications' are discerned in the first two acts of Dowden's and Cummins' play. The question regarding authorship of *The Extraordinary Play* is only one of several intriguing aspects of analysis of the play

⁴²¹ Ibid. p. 108

that this chapter explores; other questions regarding the play's unusual genesis, its content and subject matter and the playwrights' identification with Wilde are equally compelling. Consideration of these elements of analysis is assisted by the literary scholarship of Bette London, whose seminal research on nineteenth and twentieth-century co-authorship of mediums opened a broad field of study to marginalized, non-canonical texts, (see Ch.4.2).

Cummins' creative writing, though sidelined by choice, resulted in a body of plays and prose that she wrote in brief intervals throughout her life in between publishing the many unusual psychic scripts and articles that emanated from her psychical work. In this respect the 'Oscar Wilde Communications' may be seen to have represented an opportunity for Cummins to combine her two great passions, playwriting and psychical research. Dowden was not as prolific a creative writer as Cummins although the women co-wrote four plays (unproduced) during their long friendship.⁴²² With regard to the psychic material used in the construction of *The Extraordinary Play*, Cummins describes in her memoir, *Unseen Adventures* (1951), that the record of the scripts 'obtained' from Oscar Wilde which appear in Dowden's book, *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* were incomplete:

...Subsequently, further evidential communications were obtained by Mrs. Dowden on the ouija-board. I was the recorder as she read out the messages. In this way was recorded a three-act drama appropriately called "The Extraordinary Play", both on account of the manner in which it was transmitted and of the resemblance of the style to that of the ostensible author, O. W.⁴²³

⁴²² Geraldine Cummins & Hester Dowden, co-authors of: *Happy Paupers* (1917); *The Ivory Fan* (1917); *Witchery* (1919) and *The Extraordinary Play* (1924), Unpublished MS U206 assorted plays; in the 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' (Cork City and Council Archives, Cork).

⁴²³ Geraldine Cummins, *Unseen Adventures: An Autobiography covering Thirty-four Years of Work in Psychical Research* (London: Rider and Company, 1951) p.116

The intention to produce *The Extraordinary Play* is evident in a letter from Hester Dowden to the Society of Authors in September 1924, in which she describes the proposal of a Mr. Heseltine to write music for the third act.⁴²⁴ Dowden's biographer, Edmund Bentley, claims that while the play interested Sir Gerald du Maurier, '... he finally decided not to produce it. Probably its psychic nature scared him'.⁴²⁵

A useful avenue from which to approach analysis of *The Extraordinary Play* is to consider its construction within the context of Dowden's and Cummins' mediumship practice and their writing partnership within a tradition of Irish women's writing. In discussing ways to approach a genealogy of history Michel Foucault notes:

A genealogy of values, morality, aestheticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their 'origins', will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning (...) it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other.⁴²⁶

Foucault's terms offer a framework from which to articulate a reading of the play that, in the absence of peer review or any production history, utilizes primary sources and related materials, including autobiographical writings of Dowden and Cummins, as a means towards valuing this work both as an example of women's social history and as a phenomenological response by the playwrights' to the *zeitgeist* of their age. The means by which *The Extraordinary Play* was constructed constitutes an interesting example of the predominantly female strategy of collaborative play and prose writing in late Victorian Ireland and England. In a comparable notion to that of Donkin's

⁴²⁴ See: 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' U206 Box 4, Item 44 {fragments} (Cork City & County Archives, Cork).

⁴²⁵ Edmund Bentley, *Far Horizon: A Biography of Hester Dowden: Medium and Psychic Investigator* (London: Rider & Co., 1951), p.72.

⁴²⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Genealogy, Nietzsche, History' in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.80.

‘sociability’,⁴²⁷ Susan Bennett, discusses a revisionist method of ‘autobiographing’ – a term coined by dance historian Sarah Davies Cordova and described by Bennett as, ‘a process which insists on the multiple contributions of women to the cultural practice we recognize as dance’.⁴²⁸ The employment of a similar process to explore the epistemic value and potential theatricality of *The Extraordinary Play* reveals an understanding of how Dowden and Cummins negotiated the literary terrain to participate, by means of their ‘creative mediumship’, in their particular cultural moment. I again draw on Foucault, who argues that genealogy:

...must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history; ... in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolutions but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles.⁴²⁹

The fragmented histories and unusual occupation of Dowden and Cummins, perceived in Foucauldian terms, as an ‘unmasking’ of the face of the ‘other’ work to provide images of how women could, and did, circumvent the gender constraints of their time in order to pursue their artistic endeavours which, in this instance, was by unusual means.

Empirical evidence to prove the survival and collaboration or otherwise of the discarnate spirit of Oscar Wilde in the creation of the play is both impossible and outside the concern of my thesis. However, reference to the occult and its impact on Dublin’s literati in the early twentieth century is integral to my analysis of the work and the position of its writers within a history of Irish women playwrights. Exploration of the

⁴²⁷ See this thesis pp. 6;22 & 89.

⁴²⁸ Susan Bennett, ‘Theatre, History, Historiography and Women’s Dramatic Writing’ in Maggie Gale & Viv Gardner, eds., *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.54.

⁴²⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.76.

amorphous phenomenon of the occult and the psychical writings, memoirs and autobiographies of Dowden and Cummins, operates to draw specific attention to the playwrights' position in, and response to, their environment.

In order to contextualize *The Extraordinary Play* within the metaphysical and literary discourses of its period, a brief summary of the nature and influence of paranormal phenomena on Dublin's avant-garde community during the first decades of the twentieth century is useful. Paranormal activities, discredited after the dawning of the Enlightenment and the rise to prominence of science, re-emerged during the Romantic era. A striking and enduring example is that of the scientist Emanuel Swedenborg who claimed to have received visions of angels in the after-life. Following Swedenborg, the German philosophers Kant and Schopenhauer, in considering the dichotomy between Newtonian physics and the existence of ethics, sought to prove that mind, not matter was the paramount reality. Metaphysical thought over this period inspired imaginative poetic and visual response from artists such as the mystical Blake and the later 'Romantics', Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley. Tracing the trajectory of theatre performance during the nineteenth century, W.D.King looks back to the causal influences of visionary literatures on this period. King cites Paul Ilie who comments:

Reason's authority loses ground to the extent that its rhetoric is not adaptable to non-empirical discourse... [M]oreover, visionary authors redeem irrational language through the vehicle of extra-sensory imagination⁴³⁰

Clearly, the 'unknowable' aspects of human experience would not conveniently disappear for empiric discourses seeking to offer a definitive explanation for human existence and the nature of the universe. The intervention of science provided a solution

⁴³⁰ Paul Ilie, *The Age of Minerva: Counter-Rational Reason in the Eighteenth Century 2 Vols.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1993 LI) pp.373-374, cited in W.D. King "'Shadow of a Mesmeriser': The Female 'Body' on the Dark Stage" in *Theatre Journal* Vol. 49. No.2 (May 1997) p.193.

in which the discordance between opposing attempts to describe the world were accommodated by the advent of physical means, by which claims of the paranormal might be measured, codified and tested. The resultant plethora of physical manifestations of spiritualist phenomena from the mid-nineteenth century (such as table-rappings, levitations and messages from ouija boards) were encouraged by the popular press. A concomitant rise in various forms of mystical beliefs such as Eastern Theosophy posed further ontological challenges to Christian authority in Western societies in the closing years of the century. John Beloff describes how, in 1888, the Society for Psychical Research developed and secularized a scientific position from this confusing metaphysical scenario:

[I]t was not the metaphysicians who were responsible for the advent of parapsychology. Rather it was the success of empirical science which convinced certain dissident thinkers of the late nineteenth century that, only by taking the scientist on... by accepting strict criteria for distinguishing between genuine phenomena and bogus claims, that any serious challenge to the mechanistic universe could be mounted.⁴³¹

The emergent disciplines of Psychology and psychoanalysis initially engaged with psychical notions of unconscious reality. However, objective investigation was impossible, and the epistemic moment passed for the psychics, whose claims were once again open to suspicion and derision. Freud demonstrated his fascination with the paranormal in several papers exploring the potentiality of telepathy in the interpretation of dreams for psychoanalysis; and in his membership in the British and American Societies for Psychical Research. Despite his interest, Freud's scientific explanation necessitates the description of channeling-like phenomena in psychological terms of wish-fulfillment, and the re-emergence of material repressed into the unconscious.

⁴³¹ John Beloff, *Parapsychology: A Concise History*. (London: Athlone, 1993), p.14.

Freud's contemporary, C.G. Jung took a more open-ended view; his doctoral thesis, "The Psychology and Pathology of a So-called Occult Phenomenon" in *Psychology and the Occult*⁴³² focused on the study of a specific medium. Jung considered most of the phenomena he studied to be:

Invisibles... shadowy personifications of unconscious contents, conforming to the rule that activated portions of the unconscious assume portions of the unconscious assume the character of *personalities* when they are perceived by the conscious mind.⁴³³

However, in his conclusions Jung states that 'I have not distinguished myself by any original researches in this field; however, I do not hesitate to declare that I have observed a sufficient number of such phenomena to be completely convinced of their reality. To me they are inexplicable, and I am therefore unable to decide in favour of any of the usual interpretations.'⁴³⁴ Jung's theories of the collective unconsciousness, complexes and archetypes embrace the notion of a 'spirit' element to human creativity. Frieda Fordham writes that for Jung:

...direct expression of the collective unconscious emerges when the archetypes, as primordial images, appear in dreams, unusual states of mind, or in psychotic fantasies. These images seem to possess a power of their own ... (They) inspire both creation and destruction, a work of art or an outburst of mob frenzy.⁴³⁵

Many creative artists and philosophers before and since Jung have subscribed to the notion of unknown creative energies that inform their work. In *The Republic* (Book X), Plato claimed that. '...all good poets composed their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. There is no invention in him until he has been

⁴³² C. G. Jung, *Psychology and the Occult* (London: Ark Paperbacks 1987)

⁴³³ Ibid. p.138

⁴³⁴ Ibid. p.140.

⁴³⁵ Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.27.

inspired, and is out of his senses,⁴³⁶ and William Blake declared, ‘... [T]he eternal body of man is the imagination, that is, God himself...’⁴³⁷, whilst Percy Shelley said, ‘... A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one.’⁴³⁸ C.J. Jung was equally unable to make empirical claims for his theories, although he professed and described many successes from their clinical application.

Occultism predominated within several Protestant communities in Ireland during the 1880’s, emerging in such forms as, The Hermetic Society, The Theosophy Society and various spiritualist groups. Its appeal finds various explanations, espoused in terms of the cultural, spiritual and political instabilities that threatened to undermine the dominant position held by Protestants in Irish society at that time. Historian Selina Guinness, in a critique of R.F. Foster’s account of the esoteric aspects associated with the work of W.B Yeats, observes:

[Foster’s] solution...is to repatriate the esoteric by accommodating it within a tradition of Protestant superstition, running parallel to, and informing, Irish Gothic fiction of the nineteenth century.⁴³⁹

Guinness cites Foster’s biographical summary of writers such as Charles Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker as an example:

[T]hey stem from families with strong clerical and professional colorations, whose occult preoccupations mirror a sense of displacement... and an escapism motivated by the threat of a takeover by the Catholic middle-classes....⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ Plato *The Republic (Book X)* cited by Jon Klimo in, *Psychics, Prophets and Mystics* (Wellingborough (UK): Aquarius Press, 1998), p.312.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. citing William Blake

⁴³⁸ Ibid. citing Percy Shelley

⁴³⁹ Selina Guinness, “ ‘Protestant Magic’ Reappraised: Evangelicalism, Dissent, and Theosophy” in *Irish University Review* Vol. 33. No. 1. Special Issue: New Perspectives on the Irish Literary Revival (Spring/Summer 2003), p.14.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

Adopting a similar argument to that of Pilkington's description of constructive unionism⁴⁴¹ as a means of class survival in an uncertain landscape, Guinness posits an opposite notion of how the occult facilitated a Protestant engagement with, rather than an escape from, Irish history. Her politicized reading of the appeal that the first Dublin Lodge of the Theosophical Society held for its predominantly Protestant membership, argues for the '...transformative energies of historical movements such as theosophy.'⁴⁴² Guinness cites the Ulster Evangelical Revival of 1859 as a major component that inadvertently prepared the spiritual climate for the advent of Theosophy and the writings of its founder Madame Blavatsky into Ireland.⁴⁴³ Commenting on the particular significance of Theosophy to young Irish Protestants, Guinness describes how these young people were:

...schooled from the pulpit in their dissatisfaction with Darwin and hopeful of literary careers... Blavatsky's belief that the civilizations of the East could redress the lacunae that had opened up in the relationship between theology and the natural sciences must have provided an exhilarating alternative to outright atheism.⁴⁴⁴

This was certainly the case for W.B. Yeats and AE (George Russell), who, having met in 1884 as students at Dublin's Metropolitan School of Art discovered a shared love of mysticism, which precipitated their first experiments with the occult and influenced Yeats' later writings for the Irish Literary Revival. One of Yeats' major poetic influences was the mystical figure of Blake whose appeal for him, as observed by Alisdair Macrae, lay partly in that Blake, '...had formulated a total system which could

⁴⁴¹ See Ch.2.1 (this thesis fn 201. p. 68).

⁴⁴² Selina Guinness. " 'Protestant Magic' Reappraised: Evangelicalism, Dissent, and Theosophy" in *Irish University Review* Vol. 33. No. 1. Special Issue: New Perspectives on the Irish Literary Revival (Spring/Summer 2003), p.25 [see Guinness Fn2].

⁴⁴³ Ibid. Guinness claims that, '...the presence of so many members from an Ulster evangelical background in the Dublin Lodge can be read as expressing dissent from the increasing sectarian identities, on offer from the 1880's - 1890's, in favour of securing a critical position, seemingly removed from, but none the less engaged in contemporary debates about Irish nationality.' p.15.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. p.17.

accommodate and account for all human behaviour'.⁴⁴⁵ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford has written of W.B. Yeats' participation as founding member and president of the Dublin Hermetic Society in 1885. Cullingford describes how Yeats became fascinated in equal measure by the secret doctrines of Theosophy and the voluminous figure and character of Madame Blavatsky, whom he met in London in 1887. Having been involved in the Theosophy Society in London, Yeats was expelled in 1890 for his esoteric experiments. However, he remained a member of the Dublin Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn, a Masonic-type group who, unusually, admitted women and who emphasized Western and Christian philosophical traditions rather than those of Buddhism and Hinduism. Cullingford shows how Blavatsky's mission statement '...to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, colour, sex, caste or creed',⁴⁴⁶ particularly claimed the attention of young women, eager for emancipation and social change.

The emergent women's movement had, since its inception during the eighteenth century, posed a constant threat to patriarchal Western societies. The pervasive denigration of women had reached new heights in response to women's organized politicization - as witnessed in the popular press, who coined the pejorative term, 'New Woman'. Claire Kahane writes of the '...complicated effects of the era's attempt to control the representation of women's nature'⁴⁴⁷ citing Nina Auerbach's perceptive reading of the Victorian Woman, '...women's very aura of exclusion gave her imaginative centrality in a culture increasingly alienated from itself'.⁴⁴⁸ Hester Dowden

⁴⁴⁵ Alasdair Macrae. *W.B. Yeats: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) p.3

⁴⁴⁶ Elizabeth. Butler Cullingford, "At the Feet of the Goddess" pp. 41-72, in D. Toomey, ed., *Yeats and Women 2nd Edition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997).

⁴⁴⁷ Claire Kahane, *Passions of the Voice: Hysteria, Narrative, and the Figure of the Speaking Woman 1850-1915* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p5.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

and Geraldine Cummins, enjoying independent, autonomous lives, free from domestic censure or constraint, were two such 'New' women who, like many other women of their social class were attracted to the spread of theosophical societies and psychical phenomena. Feminists such as Annie Besant, Eva Gore-Booth, Charlotte Despard and Margaret Cousins, participated in Theosophic rituals and meditations. The actress, Florence Farr, and Yeats' later theatrical patron Annie Horniman were also members of these groups, as was Maude Gonne for a short period.

The first President of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was the philosopher Henry Sedgwick, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, England and Members of the Council included Spiritualist and non-Spiritualist researchers and investigators. Hester Dowden's biographer, Edmund Bentley, describes her initial entrée into mediumship and how Dowden's independent, inquiring nature led her towards becoming involved with the genesis of the Society for Psychical Research in Ireland. In 1912, Sir William Barrett F.R.S. invited Hester Dowden and her more credulous sister Hilda to join his Dublin branch of psychical research. According to Bentley, Hester Dowden maintained an objective distance towards the phenomena she experienced, an attitude she maintained throughout her subsequent psychic career. However, the more impressionable Hilda's experiences resulted in a nervous breakdown and she avoided further contact with the practices of spiritualism. Hester Dowden, who had initially aspired to a classical music career, hailed from a strong Protestant Unionist background. As the daughter of Professor Edward Dowden, the eminent Shakespearean scholar and English lecturer at Trinity College Dublin, her early literary and spiritualist influences were coloured by her father's friendship with the painter J.B. Yeats (Snr) and the frequent visits to their home of W.B. Yeats. Dowden was a cousin of Violet Martin,

(‘Martin Ross’), of the successful writing partnership of Somerville and Ross, from Cork⁴⁴⁹ with whom she shared an interest in psychic phenomena.

Geraldine Cummins, as previously described (Ch.1.2) moved to Dublin to pursue an independent writing career, supporting herself by means of secretarial and journalistic work.⁴⁵⁰ Cummins’ experience in mediumship began after meeting Dowden in Paris (1914) and attending a séance held in Dowden’s hotel room where she discovered that she possessed a psychic talent; on their return to Dublin, Cummins lodged in Dowden’s home. The two women inhabited the same social circles as the iconic figures of the Celtic Revival in Dublin and shared a fascination with, and a respect for, the occult with W.B.Yeats and his sisters; AE (George Russell); Lennox Robinson and St John Ervine amongst others. In her published autobiography/memoir, *Unseen Adventures*, Cummins describes several fascinating instances of experimental séances experienced with this group. One of these events concerns Dowden and Lennox Robinson, who received communication, purportedly from the famous art expert (and friend of W.B.Yeats), Sir Hugh Lane, stating that he had drowned on board the passenger ship the ‘Lusitania’. Prior to the séance, Dowden and Robinson had seen news posters reporting the sinking, but apparently, were unaware that Hugh Lane was on the ship. Cummins writes:

(S)ubsequently, Mrs Dowden received many communications purporting to come from Hugh Lane... I remember Mr Yeats saying that when he went anonymously to a certain medium [in London] she at once remarked that a drowned man had followed him into the room, and she described a scene at the bottom of the sea.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Dowden’s family originated from Cork (her father’s family owned a successful drapery business on Patrick St.). Dowden’s many connections in Cork and her cousin, Ross’s involvement in the Munster Women’s Franchise League, almost certainly contributed to Dowden’s awareness of Geraldine Cummins prior to their partnership in psychical research from 1914.

⁴⁵⁰ See Ch. 1.2 (this thesis p.22).

⁴⁵¹ Geraldine Cummins, *Unseen Adventures*, (London: Rider & Co. 1951), p.25. Cummins also describes an interesting séance in which she had to convey a difficult message to St. John Ervine, ‘Mr. St. John Ervine, the playwright and dramatic critic, was present at a few of our sittings. On the eve of his departure for France, he came to Mrs Dowden’s house anxious to learn about his future...Only my fingers were on the traveler when Astor [Cummins’ spirit communicator] described Mr. Ervine as “streaming in blood” and said that “this wound will leave a mark on him

A focus on the lifestyles of Dowden and Cummins has a particular bearing on my reading of *The Extraordinary Play*. These women resided in same-sex households, usually with other mediums. Dowden was divorced, Cummins chose not to marry and both women claimed the dangerously perceived and mysterious practice of mediumship as their main occupation. I suggest that these choices reflect a desire and a determination to escape from the constrictions and attitudes of their society. Within their ambiguous social space, these women are positioned as subject 'Other-Others'. This double distinction of 'otherness', with its implication of further exclusion from agency, conversely worked to empower the women, allowing them to pursue their interests and giving them control within their chosen profession. The centrality of Oscar Wilde in Dowden's and Cummins' enterprise raises interesting questions regarding their use of Wilde's style and oeuvre in *The Extraordinary Play*. In choosing to live specifically unconventional lives, did these Anglo-Irish women adopt, knowingly or not, a comparable, though less visible, and less scandalous principle of originality in their lifestyles as had Oscar Wilde, who was vilified for his overt 'difference' within society? While it is possible that the dramatic, atmospheric conditions of the séance created a theatrical environment which encouraged a subconscious identification with Wilde from which, the imaginative purloining of his material could become manifest in their play, it is equally interesting to note that of the many 'spirits' who allegedly 'communicated' with Dowden and with Cummins, the notorious Oscar Wilde, standing out as the figure who would probably command most interest from the general public, is the one they emulated.

for life... Later Mr. St. John Ervine played a very gallant part at the front and was seriously wounded... [H]is leg had to be amputated,' *ibid.* p.27.

Dowden's and Cummins' public approach towards the occult was of a secular, circumspect nature; both women generally professing a 'healthy skepticism' towards their experiments with the paranormal. This caution becomes clear when consideration is given to the serious pitfalls attending their lifestyle; women who engaged in the practice of mediumship at this time often found themselves vilified as 'cranks' and/or dangerous hysterics. Many mediums of the period secreted this aspect of their lives, fearing public condemnation and scorn. One such woman was Mrs Coombe-Tennant, a highly-placed British government official, the first woman to be elected to the League of Nations, and a fierce defender of women's rights. Coombe-Tennant's psychic pseudonym was 'Mrs Willett' – a famous personality in psychic circles who went to great lengths to preserve her anonymity. Her real identity was revealed several months after her death, by which time the 'spirit' of 'Mrs Willett' had allegedly been communicating on a regular basis with Cummins. Once her identity was publicly revealed, the 'spirit' allegedly dictated the experience, of her earthly 'double' existence, to Cummins in a series of communications that were later published as the 'Cummins-Willett' scripts in, *Swan on a Black Sea*.⁴⁵²

Dowden and Cummins presented outwardly conformist attitudes and the scientific positioning of their psychical practice can arguably be perceived as a strategy to deflect possible charges of female eccentricity in order to validate their writings in this mode - whilst at the same time, allowing them the creative indulgencies offered by the meditative séance environment. Despite the scientific distance Dowden and Cummins claimed to have from their experiments and client 'sittings', I argue that the procedures and 'performative' rituals they employed to create the required environment were vital to

⁴⁵² Geraldine D. Cummins, *Swan on a Black Sea: The Cummins-Willett Scripts* (London: Routledge & P. Keegan, 1965).

the creative processes employed, particularly in the case of *The Extraordinary Play*. In *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* (1924) Dowden describes the physical conditions for, and the obstacles that prevent a successful séance:

[S]atisfactory conditions chiefly consist in freedom from distraction of any kind whatever. Physical upset makes communication almost impossible, mental worry still more mischievous ...windy weather etc.; all injure the quality. Trance or 'somnambulism' is the most favourable state...⁴⁵³

What is apparent from this and other descriptions is the complete confidence and control that the mediums exerted over their environment and their 'performance' of the séances. Mediumship was predominantly female territory, despite participation in occult practices by men. However, the men seem to have mainly performed the objective role of observers and investigators, whilst the majority of women engaged on a more subjective and physical level with the experience. This gender preference had its downside for some, as the earlier reference to Hilda Dowden's breakdown makes clear. Hester Dowden and Cummins however, utilized the practices of 'automatic writing' and the ouija board to enhance their creative ambitions.

As previously described, the lifestyles of these women have a particular bearing on my reading of *The Extraordinary Play*. Following Hester Dowden's divorce, which at the time stigmatized female, but not male, divorcees, she reverted to her maiden name and never re-married. Moving from Dublin to the anonymity of London in 1919, Dowden supported herself and her daughter, Dolly, by taking in lodgers, teaching music and practicing as a medium and psychical researcher; Dolly Travers Smith later married the playwright and Abbey manager, Lennox Robinson. Cummins, (as described in Ch. 1.3) also moved to London to work during the war years and whilst living as a paying

⁴⁵³ Hester Dowden, *Psychic Messages From Oscar Wilde* (London: T.Werner Laurie, 1924) pp. 76-77

guest in Dowden's London home she practiced and developed her own psychic abilities. Although Cummins persisted with her 'conscious' writing of plays and prose writing during this time, her ambitions in respect of creative writing were diluted after meeting and developing a professional psychic partnership with another medium, E. Beatrice Gibbes in 1923.

Gibbes acted as Cummins' agent, organizing séances and overseeing publications of Cummins' psychical writing. Their life seems to have been very ordered, with Cummins' living for eight months of each year in Gibbes' house in Chelsea, the remaining four months being spent with her family and friends at home in Cork. Their psychical work consisted of non-profit making personal sittings and specific experiments in co-operation with the Society for Psychical Research. Publication of these respected experiments contributed to scientific and psychic discourses and resulted in a large oeuvre of erudite psychic writings.⁴⁵⁴ Their relationship continued up to Gibbes' death in 1951, after which Cummins, who, as previously mentioned, had inherited Gibbes' house, continued her pattern of dividing her time between London and Cork until she eventually moved back to her family home in Ireland. In one of her psychic publications, *Swan on a Black Sea*, Cummins relates how, on her death-bed, Gibbes begged Cummins to promise to abandon her literary ambitions and concentrate on their

⁴⁵⁴ A selection of Cummins' publications in the field of parapsychology include, "The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde" in *The Occult Review* (Feb. 1924); "W. B. Yeats and Psychical Research" in *The Occult Review* (April 1939); *The Scripts of Cleophas* (London: Rider & Co., 1928); *The Road to Immortality* (London: Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1932); *Beyond Human Personality* (London: Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1935); *Perceptive Healing* (London: Rider & Co., 1945); *The Childhood of Jesus* (London: F. Muller, 1937); *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider & Co., 1951); *The Fate of Colonel Fawcett* (London: Aquarian Press, 1955); *Mind in Life and Death* (London: Aquarian Press, 1956); and *Swan on a Black Sea: the Cummins- Willett scripts*, (London: Routledge & P. Keegan 1965). **See Appendices for full list of Cummins' published and unpublished works.

Dowden's publications include, *Voices From the Void* [published under her married name, Travers Smith] (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1919); *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1924) & published in USA as *Oscar Wilde From Purgatory* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1926); Contemporary publication - *Oscar Wilde From Purgatory* (Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2004); available on www.google.ie/books?id=OjR2fjXIEf8C.**[also published in USA as *Oscar Wilde From Purgatory* reprinted by Kessinger Publishing 2004]; *Talks with Elizabethans revealing the mystery of William Shakespeare: [through automatic scripts]* (London; New York: Rider & Co., 1947).

psychical research, a promise to which Cummins agreed.⁴⁵⁵ Although Cummins and Gibbes worked closely together it was not uncommon within the community of psychic practitioners for mediums to work either alone or in various partnerships, and Dowden and Cummins, friends as well as psychic partners, often engaged in shared 'sittings' or acted as recorders of each other's communications with the 'spirits', as was the case in the 'Oscar Wilde Communications'.

Dowden's and Cummins' social circle comprised of a variety of successful and influential people from literary, intellectual and scientific backgrounds, most of who were interested in the paranormal. Bette London remarks that at this time '...authors and mediums were seen to have a certain affinity for each other... Cummins' mediumship, like Hester Dowden's, brought her into contact with some of Ireland's leading literary figures: AE (George W. Russell) and W.B.Yeats.'⁴⁵⁶ In an article for *The Occult Review*, written after the death of W.B.Yeats, Cummins described the proceedings of an early twentieth-century sitting where W.B. Yeats was present and where her 'control' Astor, communicated with Yeats:

Mr. Yeats had a remarkable influence on a séance and undoubtedly had a great capacity for conveying thought to controls. On one occasion when he was present at a sitting my control, Astor, gave me an illustration of this power. I will quote from a record made by one present at the time and published later. "The control described an old castle and told Mr. Yeats that the place was haunted... involved a romantic story of old times... At last I said to Mr. Yeats, 'Do you think we should let this communication wander on like this? Does it interest you?' He replied, 'Very much. This is the plot of my new play'..."⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Geraldine D. Cummins, *Swan on a Black Sea: The Cummins-Willett Scripts* (London: Routledge & P. Keegan, 1965), p.156.

⁴⁵⁶ Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 154-5

⁴⁵⁷ G. D. Cummins, "W.B.Yeats and Psychical Research" in *The Occult Review* Vol. LXVI. No. 2, (April 1939), p.133.

It was within such a selective and contained artistic milieu that the conditions for the creative writing practices of Dowden and Cummins evolved and were developed. Dowden's *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* had generated many notices from literary critics and the popular press in England and the United States. Bette London observes:

...the work [also] received much serious attention and respectable notice. Declaring that many of the 'literary compositions' of 'the alleged Oscar Wilde would, 'not be out of place in any selection of his acknowledged writings', the Times Literary Supplement distinguished this work from 'the usual dreary or trivial matter of "spirit records"' ⁴⁵⁸

Dowden's record comprises edited extracts from the initial scripts, including modern literary criticism peppered with 'Wildean-like' epigrams and witty descriptions of the spirit world, followed by Dowden's own comments on, and discussion of, possible explanations for the alleged phenomena. The 'appearance' of 'Wilde' was not, however, so unusual; John Stokes, writing on myths and appropriations of Wilde, comments on various claims of Wilde's 'spiritual' visitations and remarks that Dowden's 'Wilde', '...represents an act of biographical re-interpretation that, however much she would deny it, reflects her own involvement in current debates about the reality of the spirit world'. ⁴⁵⁹

4.2: Wild(e) Imaginings in *The Extraordinary Play* by Geraldine Cummins and Hester Dowden.

Contemporary theoretical approaches towards historicizing marginalized subjects are evident in Bette London's interrogations of the writing practices of women in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth-centuries. In her work, *Writing Double: Women's*

⁴⁵⁸ Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships*. (Ithaca N.Y; Cornell University Press), p.157.

⁴⁵⁹ John Stokes, *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles and Imitations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p.7.

Literary Partnerships,⁴⁶⁰ London explores how the process of collaboration, traditionally perceived as being beyond the norms of literary production, was subject to more stringent inspection than solitary authorship. London's unique exploration of collaborating authors includes three chapters relating to the phenomena and practice of 'automatic' or 'spirit-writing' as a mode of literary production during this period. In this respect, she examines questions of authorship and agency in the case of Cummins' and Dowden's psychic collaboration by considering the *Psychic Communications from Oscar Wilde* by Dowden, alongside the psychic writing of other collaborating teams: Somerville and Ross; Cummins and Daly; and W.B. Yeats and his wife 'George'. London argues that by:

[M]aking authorship visible in unexpected ways, literary collaboration thus put into relief the rules its own practice resisted, illuminating the very structures that necessarily excluded it from the category of authorship... collaboration provided a platform to return to certain fundamental questions: What is an author? Who gets counted under this rubric? What forms of scholarship are sanctioned, and what forms marginalized at a given historical moment? What does it mean to say that the author is dead? Can 'dead' authors still communicate?⁴⁶¹

These are pertinent questions in this case where the status of authorship relates closely to the development and the 'end product' of Cummins' and Dowden's dramatic project. The process that moved from gaining the initial psychic scripts to the completion of a three-act play seems to mirror to some extent the blurring of authorship in the collaborative processes of modern devising practices. It is clear that despite foregoing the academic opportunities available to them, these women were erudite and politically informed. As published authors at the time they constructed *The*

⁴⁶⁰ Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999)

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.7.

*Extraordinary Play*⁴⁶² the women would have been aware that their successful participation in the exotic and uncanny nature of mediumship, and their social connections, afforded unique publishing opportunities and entrée into philosophical, psychical and literary discourses of the period. These opportunities could also be problematic as Cummins discovered in 1926, when she became embroiled in a legal case with an architect, a Mr. Bligh Bond, who had been present at several of the ‘sittings’ with Cummins where she obtained the *Scripts of Cleophas*.⁴⁶³ During his visits, Bond, as an observer, had taken no part in the psychic proceedings; however, he had been allowed to punctuate and type the scripts for Cummins and Gibbes. Cummins relates in *Unseen Adventures* how Bond held the view that ‘... the writings were the composition of a spirit called “The Messenger of Cleophas” and that, as these communications were addressed to him, and had been typed by him, he was the person who was entitled to the copyright of the production.’⁴⁶⁴ Cummins explains that while Bond’s counsel invoked British law, in which a spirit has no property-rights in this world, her counsel retorted that ‘...it might just as well be said that the copyright in Keats’ *Ode to the Nightingale* was vested in the Nightingale. The case went on for two whole days, at the end of which, Mr. Justice Eve gave judgment with costs in my favour’.⁴⁶⁵ The judge decreed that if the writings were the compositions of a spirit, that Cummins’ brain had been used to interpret and write the scripts and so they belonged to her. The case excited lawyers and brought a certain amount of fame to Cummins when it made History in British law by establishing a precedent.

⁴⁶² Hester Dowden, *Voices From the Void* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1919); Geraldine D. Cummins, *The Land They Loved*, (London: Macmillan, 1919 - a novel); G. Cummins and S. Day, *Fox and Geese* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1917).

⁴⁶³ Geraldine Cummins *The Scripts of Cleophas* London: Rider & Co. (1928) ** Concerning Cummins’ alleged ‘communications’ with a 1st Century Roman who converted to Christianity.

⁴⁶⁴ Geraldine Cummins *Unseen Adventures* (London: Rider & Co. 1951) pp. 112

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Examination of *The Extraordinary Play* within its historical context identifies two ways in which it appears to reflect the playwrights' personal philosophies. In the first instance the play is a dramatic embodiment of their stated belief in the survival of the human spirit following bodily death, the content of the play being entirely focused on this theme and, despite their general claim to objective skepticism, particularly with regard to Cummins, both playwrights attested their belief, based on certain evidences, that this was indeed the discarnate spirit of Wilde. Secondly, consideration of the alternative lifestyles of these strong-minded and highly individual literary women renders entirely possible a reading that explores the notion of a 'transgressive' identification by Cummins and Dowden with the notorious and dramatic figure of Oscar Wilde; a reading that reinforces Bette London's view of a sexually transgressive aura that surrounded women's mediumship during that time:

...[M]ediumship was generally perceived (...), as involving, if only metaphorically, some form of sexual transgression – even if its transgressions were most often cast in terms of heterosexual relations.⁴⁶⁶

Cummins and Dowden stated that they had little knowledge of Wilde's work or his life; however, neither of the women could have been unaware of his infamous reputation and in *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde*, Dowden tells the 'spirit' that she admires his work and also records that 'Mr. V' had read *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, *De Profundis* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.⁴⁶⁷ In their claim to having experienced intimate 'ghostly' conversations with this notorious figure, and in their attempt to publicly demonstrate this communication by means of constructing *The Extraordinary Play*, I

⁴⁶⁶ Bette London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), p.129.

⁴⁶⁷ Travers Smith (Dowden) *Oscar Wilde from Purgatory* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1926); pp.7, 9, 16.

argue that Cummins and Dowden transgressed the prevailing gender boundaries of their social mores to embrace post-war shifts in modernist social discourse

The Extraordinary Play embodies a concept of the survival of the human spirit after physical death and in this respect, Cummins and Dowden experimented with and conflated Wildean dramatic genre by juxtaposing his melodramatic and symbolist styles in order to present this concept in dramatic form. The first two acts constitute an unashamed intellectual plagiary and a parody of Oscar Wilde's oeuvre, particularly his unique body of period 'society' melodramas where, in a conflation of themes, style and character templates, several of Wilde's works are used to construct a framework for these acts. Wilde's texts, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) and *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) are easily identified as the primary sources. In the third act, the dramatic genre moves from realism to symbolism and utilizes themes from Wilde's *De Profundis* (1897), and the symbolist aesthetic of 'Craigian' lighting, in order to create an ethereal spiritual world for their characters based on the playwrights' alleged 'communications' with Wilde.

Set in a fashionable area of late-Victorian London, this gothic play concerns the manifestation of a spirit to its previously human form of Cyril L'Estrange.⁴⁶⁸ The embodied spirit of L'Estrange, assuming the fictitious persona of 'John Franklin' in order to avoid detection, has returned to the physical world for the express purpose of extinguishing a sexual passion that led to his early demise following a duel with his lover's husband, twenty years previously in Spain. L'Estrange has been prevented from evolving to higher spheres of enlightenment in the spiritual realm by his continual,

⁴⁶⁸ The naming of characters in this play, as with the play's title, indicate a humorous, 'tongue-in-cheek' aspect within the writing

jealous passion for this woman (the Countess Velotti), and he intends to take her to his purgatorial world in order to be freed from the 'rags' of his obsession.

Oscar Wilde's comedies are peppered with characters whose lives are complicated by fictitious personas and misunderstandings, and in this respect, the first two acts of *The Extraordinary Play* mirrors Wilde's melodramatic style. Cummins and Dowden also incorporated, and made central use and adaptation of, Wilde's notion in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *vis-à-vis* attributing 'uncanny' qualities to an inanimate painting. In this case, energy from the living body of a successful society artist, the Hon. Gerald Barens, travels by what can only be termed 'spiritual osmosis' through the portrait, insidiously draining the artist of his life in order to allow the reincarnated spirit of L'Estrange to adopt the human form of 'John Franklin'. L'Estrange ('John Franklin') is also draining the life-force from his former lover, the Countess Velotti, who, in an attempt to escape from her scandalous past, has also assumed a fictitious persona and is known in the world of the play as 'Mrs Agatha Garvin'. This character's secret, notorious past closely resembles the prejudicial and socially precarious situation of another Oscar Wilde character, 'Mrs Arbuthnot', from *A Woman of No Importance* (1893).

Whilst initially accepted as 'Franklin', the spirit's strange, unconventional demeanour isolates him and he subsequently becomes the focus of fascinated gossip, speculation and suspicion. However, 'Franklin' attracts the infatuation of Beatrice Bertram, a young debutante, whom the artist, Gerald Barens hopes to marry. Beatrice, in her naiveté, echoes both the innocence of 'Sybil Vane' from Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and the coyness of 'Gwendoline Fairfax' from *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and she is fascinated by 'Franklin'. The character of her disapproving aunt, Lady Bertram, clearly drawn from Wilde's 'Lady Bracknell' from

The Importance of being Earnest, is central in creating a recognizable Wildean character in the first act of the play, set in Gerald Barends studio.

From the outset, it is clear that Gerald Barends is regretting his commission to paint 'John Franklin's' portrait as he has been feeling overwhelmed by 'Franklin's' presence, yet he fails to prevent 'Franklin' from attending a small social gathering in his studio. Gerald's visitors are intrigued by the portrait of 'Franklin' which the artist keeps hidden under a sheet, and they press him for information about this secret client. However, 'Franklin's' strange habits and esoteric conversations unnerve most of the characters in this act, including Lady Bertram who questions Gerald:

LADY B: This is a most extraordinary person, Gerald. Who is he?

GERALD: I know very little about him. He is an uninvited guest.

LADY B: Guests should invariably be invited, Gerald. Please do not introduce him to Beatrice. It is dangerous for her to meet unconventional people.⁴⁶⁹

Beatrice however, has already fallen under 'Franklin's' influence and, craving independence from her aunt, persuades Gerald to pretend that 'Franklin' is a long-lost brother of Beatrice's step-father, so that she can spend more time with him. During the course of Act I, 'Agatha Garvin' is shocked to recognize 'Franklin' (L'Strange), who tells her that he has come to take her away. Assuming that her former lover had escaped death, Mrs. Garvin initially resists his advances and then agrees to meet him later that evening. Beatrice has been engineering a trip to the Haymarket Theatre in the company of her long-lost 'uncle' and as Act 1 closes, a collective decision is made that all the group will attend the theatre, where Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is showing.

⁴⁶⁹H. Dowden & G. Cummins, *The Extraordinary Play Act 1* Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection', U206. Box43. Item 307, p.9.

The playwrights claimed they had little knowledge of the four Wildean texts identified in *The Extraordinary Play*; however, Cummins' 1924 article for the *Occult Review* records the fact that she and Dowden actually went to the Haymarket Theatre to see *The Importance of Being Earnest* during the period in which the initial psychic sittings took place and before *The Extraordinary Play* was constructed. Dowden claims she was 'accompanied' to the Haymarket Theatre by the spirit of Wilde, who allegedly critiqued the modern production rather severely:

In a communication on the ouija board, 'Oscar' stated that he had been able to use Mrs. Travers Smith's eyes in order to see his play. He then spelt out a bitter, caustic criticism of the production, and also of the audience, of about fifteen hundred words in length. Persons who had known Wilde during his lifetime, declared the style... to be characteristic. I was the recorder; it came through at the rate of about seventy words a minute...⁴⁷⁰

In the first scene of Act 2 of *The Extraordinary Play*, the characters move in and out between the (off-stage) auditorium and (on-stage) lobby of the Haymarket Theatre, where the dialogue comprises witty epigrams concerning *The Importance of being Earnest* that the characters are ostensibly viewing. The conversation turns around the meaning of art and beauty and a commentary on modern fashion for women metatheatrically echoing material concerning Wilde's views on topical issues that are found in the initial 'Oscar Wilde' scripts. The conversations of the characters, cloaked in satiric Wildean style, operate to mask the insecurities of Gerald and Mrs. Garvin, and to increase Beatrice's admiration for 'Franklin', who continues his machinations to lure 'Mrs. Garvin' to a place where he can execute his plot to take her back to the spiritual world.

⁴⁷⁰ G.D. Cummins "The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde" in *The Occult Review* (London: February 1924) p.108

In Scene 2 of this Act, the action returns to Barens' apartment (a few days later). It is his birthday and several people are visiting in the hopes of seeing the portrait unveiled. When 'Franklin' arrives, Gerald tells him he is going to destroy the portrait as he feels that 'Franklin' has turned Beatrice against him and that his compulsion to paint 'Franklin' had depleted him of his energy and creativity. 'Franklin' informs Gerald that the painting has to be shown to the person it was painted for and then he will go. Beatrice arrives, declaring that she can never marry Gerald as her passion is focused on 'Franklin', and despite Gerald's appeal to her to consider 'Franklin's' strange behaviour, is devastated when she learns that 'Franklin' is planning to leave. The play reaches its climax at the end of Act 2 when all the guests are assembled, including a much weakened and ill-looking Mrs. Garvin. Gerald makes a last attempt to keep the portrait hidden; however, 'Franklin' pulls the cloth away from the painting, revealing a fine likeness of Cyril L'Estrange, and, as several of the assembled company recognize that 'Franklin' is the notorious L'Estrange, the spirit discloses his sinister, other-worldly intentions as Gerald Barens' life expires. The characters of L'Estrange (Franklin) and the artist, Gerald Barens in this play, could arguably be interpreted as the mirror-images of Oscar Wilde's artistic and transgressive personas and as a comment on Wilde's artistic discourse within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The youthful folly and gullibility of Beatrice mirrors that of Sybil Vane in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and attendant characters in the society settings within the first two acts, capture and reflect a familiar Wildean tone of compassionate superiority towards the naivety and innocence of youth.

In Act 3, the genre blurs - stage directions dictate 'Craigian' lighting, which, together with precise musical directions, suggest a poetic, symbolist stage. This uncanny space portrays a kind of 'twilight zone', serving as a 'holding ground' or purgatory for the newly-dead (who are termed 'travellers'), and for 'trapped' spirits such as that of

L'Estrange, The playwrights' portrayal of the after-life is represented as a place of redemption and reconciliation, where colour-coded costumes distinguish the varying stages of spiritual enlightenment. In this space, souls and spirits drift rhythmically to and fro, recognizing family, friends and enemies from life. The stage directions are specific:

It must be set as Gordon Craig would set it without any roof visible to the hall, merely lofty columns stretching upwards. At the back a species of sky of an artificial character, so that a sense of space is given. The place must apparently be in the open air... no walls ... with a luminous haze – golden like sunset on a misty evening... Standing at the corners of the back are two figures, tall and motionless. They are dressed in loose flowing robes... of the most brilliant scarlet. The souls are clothed in delicate yellow... of the quality of honey... At the left side is a deep shadow: the rest of the stage is most brilliantly lit... There is music at the beginning of this Act, a music very full and extended in tone... produced by strings and wind, not brass. There must be no feeling of gloom and terror...⁴⁷¹

The play draws on the spirit of repentance found in Wilde's *De Profundis* to narrate the journey of the spirit's (Wilde's?) initial resistance to death and relinquishment of earthly desires, towards atonement, forgiveness and ultimate enlightenment. The playwrights' accentuate the dreamlike quality they wish to convey by adopting the slow, poetic repetitive delivery of the symbolist theatre as influenced by Paul Fort, Villiers de L'Isle Adam and Maeterlinck:

4th TRAVELLER: I remembered for a moment

1st TRAVELLER: What did you remember?

4th TRAVELLER: I remembered another life. We have left life behind us. We are travelling very far away from it.

VOICE: (*from the distance*) Life like a mighty tide comes surging from the world

4th TRAVELLER: Why does the voice speak of the world? We have left the world. Let us return to it.

⁴⁷¹ H. Dowden and G. Cummins *The Extraordinary Play Act III Sc. 1*. Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' U206. Box 43, Item 307 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.1.

A TRAVELLER: (*who has been sitting with his chin on his hands*) I have *been listening* and I hear the sound of dying.
5th TRAVELLER: Dying? (*A Pause*) What is dying? Are we the newly dead?⁴⁷²

While the play possesses a decidedly melodramatic structure in terms of plot, emphasis on the symbolist delivery is established and maintained in the third act and is demonstrated by the characters' short speech patterns which, as indicated by the stage directions, are overlain with a repetitive, ethereal, off-stage chorus of voices that punctuate the scenes. Within this 'purgatorial' sphere, the characters of L'Estrange and the spirits of his (now deceased) victims, Mrs Garvin (The Countess) and the artist, Gerald Barens, illustrate the playwrights' belief of survival in the after-life:

3rd TRAVELLER: I have just wakened
L'ESTRANGE: You have just died
3rd TRAVELLER: (*starting*) Dead? Is it possible? I feel my body still.
L'ESTRANGE: Your body is a husk you left behind you when your soul had come to ripeness. Your world is gone, space is gone, time is gone⁴⁷³

Distraught at his predicament, Gerald receives new hope when Beatrice suddenly appears in their midst. It transpires that she has happily taken her own life in order to follow L'Estrange to his world. In the course of this act, the four central characters find enlightenment and reconciliation in a conventional melodramatic finale. L'Estrange and the Countess sever all passionate ties to each other and cast off their earthly concerns in the knowledge that they will ultimately discover eternal peace, each with a different soul mate. Beatrice casts off youthful infatuation and discovers her eternal destiny with Gerald. Despite their abuse by L'Estrange these lovers find reward in spiritual ecstasy.

⁴⁷² H. Dowden & G. Cummins, *The Extraordinary Play*. Act 3. Unpublished MS. 'Geraldine Cummins Collection' U206. Box 43, Item 307 (Cork City & County Archives, Cork), p.3.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.* p.6.

Beatrice has the last word as she reassures Gerald they will never drift apart; ‘Never; we are the two halves of the whole. We are completeness’.⁴⁷⁴ John Stokes’ aforementioned observation that Wilde’s ‘communications’ to Dowden and Cummins followed the publication, between the years 1902-16, of four critical studies on Wilde’s work, life and demise is pertinent when considering the allusions to *De Profundis* in Dowden’s scripts from the initial séance sittings that were identified and commented on by Dowden. The scripts suggest a moral sympathy for Wilde that was made manifest by the playwrights in *The Extraordinary Play* through the figures of the sensitive artist and tormented, trapped ‘spirit’, who are both offered redemption in the final act of the play.

The appropriation of Wilde as their dramatic model and mouth-piece enabled Dowden and Cummins to comment on social, aesthetic, literary and metaphysical issues with authorial impunity, and in the knowledge that their ‘uncanny’ association with Wilde was likely to affect public interest in their work. An article by Cummins in, ‘The Occult Review’ in February 1924, “The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde”, clearly anticipates such interest. Having described the conditions under which the scripts, containing ‘Wilde’s’ literary criticism and *The Extraordinary Play* evolved, Cummins claimed that:

Doubtless with the publication of the script of all the Oscar Wilde messages, much contention and argument will be aroused. If so, it would be well if all the various points in the case were considered in relation to each other and not separately. Style, handwriting, personality, the speed of the communications, the facts unknown to the mediums should all be carefully considered before any judgement is passed thereon.⁴⁷⁵

Analysis of this play demonstrates how Dowden and Cummins attempted to engage with spiritualist discourses of their time by employing the unusual stance of claiming a

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. p.22.

⁴⁷⁵ Geraldine Cummins, “The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde” in *The Occult Review*, (Feb. 1924).

'spiritual' dramatist as the author of their play; and how they achieved a level of publishing success through the publicity that the original scripts had fostered. Cummins claimed that her psychic writing was often far superior in quality to that of her consciously creative work and it is interesting to speculate whether she would have achieved the same level of success as a playwright had she not been drawn to psychic writing.

Conclusion

The lack of critical attention afforded to women authors in Irish literary and theatre history discourses until the mid-twentieth century testifies to women's lack of agency in terms of knowledge production. While Geraldine Meaney acknowledges the 'extraordinarily productive' twenty years of multi-disciplinary feminist scholarship that reflected the enormous social changes in Irish society preceding the groundbreaking publication of *Field Day Vols. IV & V*, in which many forgotten histories have been reclaimed; literary historian Cliona Ó Gallochoir confronts persistent Irish hyper-masculine literary histories that continue to subordinate and/or distort the concerns of women in an essay that explores the emergence of the literary concept of, and value distinctions made between, public and private spheres in Ireland.⁴⁷⁶ Drawing attention to the important work of Siobhán Kilfeather, who has shown in *Field Day Vols. IV & V* how availability of print and publishing houses alongside of intense political upheaval in Ireland from the end of the seventeenth century impelled the rise of the women author,⁴⁷⁷ Ó Gallochoir argues that Kilfeather's identification of women's penchant for allegory in their fiction, '...suggests a construction of private and public which gives primacy to the public "national" [crisis]...the only way for private experience to signify politically is to be overwritten by a national allegory.'⁴⁷⁸ Concurring with the findings of Anne K. Mellor's research on eighteenth century women's participation in political discourse, which discards the binary of separate spheres, replacing them with a 'more nuanced and flexible paradigm' that embraces the diversity of '...class, religious, racial and gender

⁴⁷⁶ Cliona Ó Gallachoir, C., "Foreign Tyrants and Domestic Tyrants: the Public, the Private and Eighteenth Century Irish Women's Writing," in Patricia Coughlan & Tina O'Toole, eds., *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press Ltd., 2008), pp. 17-38.

⁴⁷⁷ Siobhán Kilfeather, Introduction to "The Profession of Letters" in Angela Bourke et. al. eds., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vols. IV & V*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002). p.272

⁴⁷⁸ Ó Gallachoir, C., "Foreign Tyrants and Domestic Tyrants: the Public, the Private and Eighteenth Century Irish Women's Writing," in Patricia Coughlan, & Tina O'Toole, eds., *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press Ltd., 2008), p.25.

differences in this historical period,⁴⁷⁹ Ó Gallochoir offers an alternative to binary restrictions in a reading of the novel *Irish Tales*, by little known eighteenth century writer Ann Butler, to demonstrate how, by admitting the strengths of the private domain, it is possible to ‘admit the Irish historical experience alongside the expression of a female subject position.’⁴⁸⁰

The gender-based public and private divisions in literary criticism and hierarchical evaluations that Ó Gallochoir refers to in her argument are similarly challenged by the feminist, cultural materialist readings of the early-twentieth century plays discussed in this thesis. Consideration of both the private and public concerns of Cummins, Day and Dowden, in which personal documents and contemporaneous dramatic and social discourses are illuminated, serves to reflect these women’s responses to national questions, and reveal their contribution to Irish society; to the women’s movement and, in the case of Cummins and Day, to the repertoire of the early Abbey Theatre. Within a framework of feminist subaltern studies, the recovery of Cummins’ and Day’s work in particular, makes visible the neglected concerns and perspectives of Anglo-Irish female dramatists, and historically re-positions their work alongside the topical dramas of social realism written by their male counterparts. The lived experiences of these playwrights’ suffragist and philanthropic activities particularly impelled the subject matter of *Broken Faith* which in its confrontation of the subjugated position of peasant women and the common issue of the political instabilities of post-famine rural Ireland, provides a significant dramatic example of the social history of women and the family within the domestic space. Analysis of *Fox and Geese* offers an example of female-authored Anglo-Irish dramatic representation of Irish peasant life that considers the anxious

⁴⁷⁹ Anne K. Mellor, cited in Cliona Ó Gallachoir, “Foreign Tyrants and Domestic Tyrants: the Public, the Private and Eighteenth Century Irish Women’s Writing,” in Patricia Coughlan & Tina O’Toole, eds., *Irish Literature: Feminist Perspectives* (Dublin: Carysfort Press Ltd., 2008), p.26.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

position of the minority southern Irish Protestant community in an uncertain political landscape, and, in so doing, contributes to contemporary revisionist and feminist historical discourses.

The analysis of Cummins' and Day's specific focus, in *Fidelity*, on the consequences of the famine vis-à-vis emigration and marriage offers a narrative to the theatrical canon that illuminates the position of women and men in rural communities who were forced into difficult choices in their struggle to survive. In discussing the lack of critical attention afforded to Irish women playwrights, Cathy Leeney points to the theatre genres of melodrama, comedy or tragedy where women playwrights may resist the conventions of gender positioning,⁴⁸¹ and in this regard *Fidelity*, by subverting the dominant male gender representation within the peasant play genre, positions this play as a feminist text.

The description of the two experimental productions of *Fidelity* presented an opportunity to demonstrate how previously excluded female-authored indigenous period plays can enter into theatrical discourse through performance. The act of producing *Fidelity* draws attention to projects of recovery and, as demonstrated, also provides 'new' plays to the repository of Irish theatre. With regard to the traditional dismissal of women playwright's thematic choices in their work as subordinate to 'cultural master-narratives', Cathy Leeney observes that, '...the issue of performance is crucial in defining meaning: the vital presence of the performer on stage creates a field of energy which the dramatic narrative may stifle, or even destroy.'⁴⁸² This point was demonstrated in performances of *Fidelity* where the narrative of this short one-act play, revealed broader themes identified by the director, performers and designers throughout

⁴⁸¹ Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), p.199.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.* pp.198-199.

the rehearsal process, and which were reinforced for audiences by the presence of the actors within the *mise en scene* - as evidenced in the reflections and reviews of the productions.

In terms of exploring strategies employed by women authors to access production or publication of their writing, Chapter 4 of this thesis considered the collaborative strategy through the practices of mediumship, employed by Cummins and Dowden, as a means by which to participate in the cultural life of the Irish and British societies they inhabited. Bette London describes the practice of 'automatic' writing as '...a serious practice of authorship, sharing the ambiguity – professional, sexual, textual – of other forms of collaborative writing.'⁴⁸³ Cummins and Dowden, whilst openly practicing as mediums, maintained highly respectable personas by confining their activities to their social milieu and to private sittings. Their alignment with the male-dominated scientific institution of the Society for Psychical Research undoubtedly reinforced this position of respectability and ensured their credibility as objective reporters and critics of psychic claims, thereby opening doors towards publication of their work. The collaborative process and 'hidden' nature of the creation of *The Extraordinary Play* reads as a metaphor of the frustrated and marginalized literary position of its women writers. Consideration of the play revealed an unusual strategy, employed by these middle-class literary women in their efforts to disseminate their creative work into the public realm.

Examination of the plays in this thesis reveal Cummins' and Day's three dramas as a unique group of early twentieth-century realist peasant plays that present clear evidence of women playwright's contributions to the emergent Abbey Theatre. Cultural analysis has revealed these plays as examples of informed feminist playwriting by identifying

⁴⁸³ Bette London, B., *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships*, (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1999), p.128

how the overriding concerns of these Anglo-Irish women were expressed through their writing. In contrast, the selected play from Cummins' and Dowden's collaboration offers an illustration of women's writing strategies in the early twentieth-century. Consideration of *The Extraordinary Play* uncovers the creative means by which these playwrights constructed this drama. Analysis suggested that Cummins' and Dowden's appropriation of Wilde's non-conformist style generated a creative freedom from which they conflated the genres of melodrama and symbolist theatre in order to express their conviction of the survival of the human spirit.

While the recovery and analysis of Irish women's writing remains an unfinished project, in respect of tracing a comprehensive historical narrative of Irish women playwrights, it is important that the research continues. Analyses of the four plays and discussion of the three playwrights discussed in this thesis contribute to historical discourses within feminist theatre scholarship that seek to enrich our knowledge of the past.

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Appendix

a) Authors: **Geraldine D. Cummins; Susanne R. Day and Hester Dowden**

Geraldine D. Cummins

Published prose works:

The Land They Loved. London: Macmillan, (1919)

Fires of Beltane. London: Michael Joseph Ltd., (1936)

Dr.E OE Somerville: A Biography. London: Andrew Dakers Ltd. (1952)

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Psychical scripts, articles and publications:

“The Strange Case of Oscar Wilde” in *The Occult Review* (Feb. 1924)

The Scripts of Cleophas , London: Rider & Co.(1928)

The Road to Immortality, London: Nicholson & Watson Ltd. (1932)

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The Childhood of Jesus, London: F. Muller (1937)

“W. B. Yeats and Psychical Research” in *The Occult Review* (April 1939)

Perceptive Healing, London: Rider & Co. (1945)

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The Fate of Colonel Fawcett, London: Aquarian Press (1955)

Mind in Life and Death, London: Aquarian Press (1956)

Swan on a Black Sea: the Cummins-Willett scripts, London: Routledge & P. Keegan (1965)

Susanne R. Day

Prose works & articles:

“The Crime Called Out-door Relief” in *The Irish Review* Dublin Vol. 2 No. 14 (April 1912)

“The Workhouse Child” in *The Irish Review* (Dublin) Vol 2 No. 16 (June 1912)

The Amazing Philanthropists. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, (1916)

Round About Bar-le-Duc London: Skeffington & Son Ltd., (1916)

Where the Mistral Blows: Impressions of Provence. London: Methuen & Co., (1933)

Hester Dowden

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Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde, London: T. Werner Laurie (1924) & Published in USA as *Oscar Wilde from Purgatory*. New York: H.Holt & Co. (1926) Contemporary publication - *Oscar Wilde from Purgatory* Kessinger Publishing LLC (2004); available on www.google.ie/books?id=OjR2fJXIEf8C

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Plays

Most of the following plays were lodged with the Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers, London, U.K.

Collaborative Plays

Susanne R. Day & Geraldine D. Cummins:

Broken Faith (c.1913 – first produced by the Abbey Theatre 1913)

Fidelity (c.1913 – first production presumed to be by Dustyworks @ Players D.U. 2004)

Fox and Geese (c.1913 first produced by the Abbey Theatre 1917)

Hester Dowden & Geraldine D. Cummins:

The Extraordinary Play (1924) - unproduced

Witchery (1919) - unproduced

The Ivory Fan (1917) -unproduced

Happy Paupers(1917) - unproduced

Single-authored plays

Geraldine D. Cummins: (in the absence of documentation these plays are presumed to be unproduced)

Man and Superwoman (1945)

Till Yesterday Comes Again (1931)

A Pampered Conscience (1938)

I Can't Say No (1946)

Romeo In The Rain (1939)

They Hang The Wrong Man (?)

Cave Man Dick (1921)

Lest We Forget (?)

The Second Chance (?)

Mops (1921)

Mr. Freud's Fun (?)

The Cork Shawley (1924)

Making Divorce Difficult (?)

Cathleen (?)

Old Time New Time (?)

Susanne R. Day

The Dogs of War (or A Night Adventure) (?)

Toilers (1912)

Dark Horse (?)

b) Photographs of the playwrights

(i) Geraldine D. Cummins

(ii) Geraldine D. Cummins (1950's)

(iii) Susanne R. Day

(iv) Hester Dowden (at the ouija board)



Geraldine D. Cummins. (1890 – 1969)

Frontispiece photograph: Cummins, G. D., *Unseen Adventures*, London, Rider & Co. (1951)



Geraldine D. Cummins. (1890 – 1969)

Photograph: c. 1960's, Chelsea; by Lord Snowdon (Anthony Armstrong Jones)

Reprinted with the kind permission of Dan Hearn M.A. (Great-Grand nephew of G.D Cummins)



Susanne R. Day. (1890 – 1964)

Photograph: Brooks Hughes, Cork. c.1911

c) Contextual photographs of Cork life by Robert Day (1835-1914)



Cork Harbour Commissioners – c. 1860 s

Photograph by Robert Day, J.P., M.R.I.A., F.S.A., 1836-1914) - Antiquarian and Photographer.

Photograph reprinted with the kind permission of Amy & Chris Ramsden, Neptune House, Cobh, Cork.



Blarney children - c. 1880 s

Photograph by Robert Day, J.P., M.R.I.A., F.S.A., (1836-1914) - Antiquarian and Photographer.

Photograph reprinted with the kind permission of Amy & Chris Ramsden, Neptune House, Cobh, Cork.

d) Contemporary Productions of *Fidelity*:

- (i) Interview with Director, Clare Neylon: December 2005
- (ii) Questionnaire – actor 2004/5 productions, Caroline Coffey
- (iii) Questionnaire - set designer of 2004 production, Elizabeth Mannion
- (iv) Players D.U. (2004) – Programme & flyer
- (v) Granary Studio, (2005) - CD: Still photographs & video extracts;
Programme and conference schedule.

DU PLAYERS PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE PRODUCTION OF

FIDELITY

by Abbey Playwrights
Geraldine Cummins
and Susanne Day

Directed by Clare Neylon

Mon 26th April @ 5pm

Tues 27th April - Sat 1st May @ 8pm

New Players Theatre, Trinity College Dublin

Featuring:
Eva Bartley
Stephen Kelly
Sinéad Hackett
Caroline Coffey

Vocals: Laura Lee-Conboy
Guitar: Rob Greene

Reads
of Nassau Street

DU PLAYERS PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE PRODUCTION OF:

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Guitar: Rob Greene

Mon 26th April @ 5pm

Tues 27th April ~ Sat 1st May @ 8pm

*Friday 30th April performance will include a sign-language interpreter

Clare Neylon – Director: Questions relating to premiere production of ‘Fidelity’ –
Players Theatre TCD 26th April – 1st May 2004

- What were your initial thoughts on directing an unknown archival play?

Very excited and intrigued. It was a real sense of freedom, something like working with a new piece of writing, knowing that the audience would be watching and judging the show, without any preconceptions.

- Did you have any strong feelings about the play, knowing it was co-written by unknown women playwrights?

In a way I was nervous, before I had read the piece, unsure of what standard to expect from the quality of the writing. That was to do with them being totally unknown, the fact that it was written by two women was encouraging to me, as many of my favourite playwrights are women. I was also really curious to see what slant they would take on the peasant play and whether they would tell the stories of the women of the time. As it turned out that’s exactly what they did.

- Did scanty dramaturgical information on the play/its authors impede your understanding or give greater interpretive freedom? Did you conduct any research?

The lack of dramaturgical information was not a big problem for me, but then as a director I am less concerned with the dramaturgy of a piece than the story it tells. If I and the actors can identify with the story and the arc of the characters through the play, less dramaturgical information can’t really impede understanding. I knew the area and the standing of women in Irish society at the time and that certainly helped with interpreting the material. To a certain extent it did give us more freedom, as we had very little instruction or information from the authors to control our telling of the story.

Most of the research I did was related to the time and place in which the play is set, I looked into the areas mentioned by name in the text and managed to roughly locate the (probably fictional) village in an area of west Cork. I also looked into the social conventions of the time and really tried to get a handle on why the characters would have behaved the way they did, to discover what it was about their lives and places in society that motivated their actions.

- What were your first impressions of the text?

I was delighted. The peasant play genre is not one I am very familiar with as a director and not one I would normally choose to work in. Therefore it helped that this was a good, solid story, built around characters who were empathetic and at the same time struggling with real human traits and failings.

- Did you identify this text as a feminist play?

I identified the text as a feminist text, based mainly on the fact that the story centres around the lives and plights of women in a time when that would have been very unusual. It tells the story of a strong and independent woman, who refuses to be a charity case and takes her life into her own hands. Ultimately, although Maggie loses her Fiance, she gains freedom, thank to the money she has earned over years of hard work. Also, knowing some of the background of the writer's lives, it was clear that they would have written their plays from a feminist perspective.

- What contemporary resonance, if any, did you find in the play?

Although the play was written over a hundred years ago and is set in that time too, the strongest themes running through it are still totally relevant today. In the play the men are judged by their power and wealth and the women by their youth and beauty. In our contemporary world, the same values often apply. Men gain worth in society as they age, accumulating life experience, positions of power and amassing wealth, whereas women's value decreases with age, the inability to reproduce and "loss" of looks. Alongside these themes was of course the age-old struggle for love and acceptance, which can resonate with any era.

- What, in your opinion, were the strongest themes in 'Fidelity'?

As I mentioned, the juxtaposition of male and female positions and value to society, love in many forms, a struggle for position in society, lack of self-worth relating to money and good looks. The strongest feminist theme, for me, was related to Maggie's survival after Larry's rejection. Her strength and ability to endure was inspiring.

- Can you describe your vision for this play?

Most of all I wanted to tell the story (Maggie's story) of the Irish women who left their homes and loved ones in search of a better life through emigrating to the US

and other countries. In many cases these women never returned and when they did it was often to find the place and people they had left behind changed forever. In some cases it was they themselves who had changed. The injustice of Larry's decision at the end of the play and his fickleness proved only to highlight Maggie's strength and courage. We set the play in the approximately the time it was written in order to be faithful to Maggie's story and the stories of other women like her. For me, it was almost unbelievable that someone would suffer so much for the sake of pride. As modern women, we don't truly understand the lives of women at that time and I really wanted to bring it to light for a modern audience.

- Did the site-specific references (to Ballingear/Cork) and the dialogue in the play determine the 'period' setting of your production?

Yes, the setting was very important, I never considered setting it in any other time or place, because the dialogue and references to places, as well as the story itself all fit to the time so perfectly. It would have been awkward and difficult to set it at any other time. Instead of changing anything about the setting, we tried to give it a modern twist, using the songs of contemporary Irish singers. The references to specific places in Cork also influenced decisions regarding the rhythm and accent of the actor's speech.

- How did your text/character analysis inform production/casting decisions?

The casting was mainly done on the basis of which actor fit the role and gave the best audition on the day. Their enthusiasm for the project and interest in the characters was also important. Naturally there were some pre-requisites, I decided that the actors playing Maggie and Katie should look very different from one another as that juxtaposition on stage would make Larry's choice even more clear cut. In particular, I felt it was important for them to have very different body types, Katie being healthy looking and curvy in contrast to Maggie's slightly gaunt appearance. This would highlight the girls' potential to work hard around the house and bear children, which would definitely have been a factor in Larry's decision. Otherwise, the casting and production decisions were strongly influenced by the text in terms of staging, body language and set design.

- Did your thematic impressions and/or the specific stage directions influence your decisions on style/genre of production? – How?

Only in the sense that I decided on a realistic staging (in terms of acting, accents and costumes) to tell the story in a way that was true to these women's experiences. The stage directions were a strong influence in terms of how the characters interacted with each other physically.

- What were your concerns when determining the attitudes/intentions of the two main protagonists (Katie/Maggie)? – Did the stage directions influence your direction in this respect?

I was unsure at first how the relationship would be between the two main protagonists. A lot of the interaction between the characters of Maggie and Katie came from the rehearsal period and the actors own interpretations of the characters. I knew from the text analysis that they would be at war from the moment Maggie arrived on the scene, but how vicious and ruthless Katie would be only became clear as the characters developed during rehearsals. The stage directions helped us to determine their basic interaction, but the main relationship came from the characters that evolved through rehearsals.

- Did the input of the designers (lighting/set) influence your decision to conflate realism (performance/costume) with stylised set? – How did this work?

The decision to use realism in performance and costume was mainly to give the play a sense of setting in the time and place that it was written and to tell the story in a truthful and honest way. The fact that the set was more stylised came partly from budget, but also because, for me, the story and characters were the most important element of the production. I find that when the audience is engrossed in an interesting story, they tend not to notice how real and full the set is. We wanted to create their world through lighting and characters rather than a big, full set. The ideas of the set designer certainly influenced the final set, and probably made it more stylised.

- What were your main concerns for and during the rehearsal process?

My main concern for the play was that it would be well received and have resonance with a modern audience. For this reason, during rehearsal, we learned a lot about the time and place in which it was set and discussed the characters

relationships and motivation for every action. A second concern was that the music and songs I had chosen wouldn't fit the performance of the text. For this reason I began using the music in rehearsals immediately and asked the actors for feedback on how it fit into the production. In the end, the songs were perfect, and I feel they really added something to the show.

- Were any of the staging decisions for the production developed through the rehearsal process?

Most of the staging ideas evolved during rehearsals, the main body of the play was easy to stage, by simply following the stage directions and looking at the characters relationships. However, the movement sections at the beginning, middle and end of the play, which we added ourselves were completely improvised and staged through rehearsals. Katie and Maggie's interaction also evolved mostly through rehearsals.

- Did the process of working through the rehearsals alter your perception of the play in any way, vis-à-vis character intention/action?

In a way it just made the emotion and feeling stronger. This is a text that definitely comes alive in the playing. None of the emotions or motivations of the characters were as strong in reading as they were in performance. The viciousness of Katie's attack on Maggie near the end was much stronger in performance, as was the ending and Maggie's strength of character as she walks away. In rehearsals, we found more hope in the ending, where at first it had seemed an extremely sad end to the story.

- What informed your decision to include contemporary songs in the production? – Why were those particular songs chosen?

I chose to include the songs because I love music and songs in theatre, especially when there is only action, but no dialogue. The power of the lyrics for the audience can be extremely moving in context. I was lucky enough to find 3 songs where the lyrics perfectly matched the moments in which I wanted to use them. I also chose to include modern songs by Irish singer/songwriters. It was important to me that the music was Irish, but I felt that using modern songs might help the audience to connect with an unknown play from a hundred years before. So the songs were chosen because they were Irish and because the lyrics resonated with the story of the play.

- What lay behind your decision to have the vocalist appear 'live'?

When I had decided to use three songs and the way in which I would use them, I knew that I wanted to have a live vocalist, mainly to pull the songs together. As they are sung by three different singers in original form, I felt having one singer live would give more of a sense of unity to the sound. I also wanted to have the songs sung in the seanos style. This is very much an Irish sound and ageless, so it gave these modern songs a sense of timelessness. It also matched the setting of the play, in that Seanos would have been sung at that time and predominantly in country areas. The sound of live music is very different to that of recorded music, particularly a cappella and I wanted that haunting feeling of a live singer for the show.

- How did the actors respond to the text/characters/language?

The first reactions of the actors were extremely positive, interested in the project of reviving the play and excited by the story. The lack of back story for the characters and the shortness of the text sometimes created difficulties in determining the relationships and motivation of the characters. We worked through these issues by looking at the history of the time and using improvisation to create stories for these characters before the opening of the text. The language of the play didn't pose many problems, although we did have to figure out the meaning of some words. Getting the accent right was one of the more difficult aspects for the actors. As we didn't have a precise location for the story at the beginning of rehearsals, we used a generic Cork (city) accent and then when we visited the area a week or so before opening, we realised that the accent was very different and the actors had to adapt quickly, which was challenging.

- Was the day trip to Ballingeary (Cork) helpful, in terms of acquainting the actors with the area and specific local dialect in the play?

It was extremely helpful, not only in catching us out using the wrong accent, but also for the cast to get a feel of the place. The love of the land and the countryside of home is a strong theme in the play, particularly for Maggie and it helped the actors a lot to see the countryside and picture the characters' lives there. We also made recordings of the local accent which was invaluable in helping the actors to change over to the right accent in a short time.

I think the overall vision was the same. I still wanted to tell the same story and connect with the audience in the same way. Some small changes in production improved the quality of the production, but did not affect the overall vision.

- When and why did you decide to insert the very effective prologue

We added this during the second production, it was the main change from the original staging and the decision was based mainly on mine and the actors' belief that the love story between Larry and Maggie was under represented in the text. I felt it would add a layer to final scene and an extra sense of poignancy if the audience had had the opportunity to see them in love at the opening of the play. Also the audience had the chance to recognise Maggie when she entered in the final scene and see how time and hard work had ravaged her.

- Only one actor, and the vocalist from the original cast of 'Fidelity', were available for the Cork production – did your prior experience of working with the play alter your casting requirements for the three remaining characters in this instance?

The previous production had confirmed the ideas I had had at the beginning of casting, I followed more or less the same ideas in casting the second production. I was looking for actors who could identify with the characters, enjoyed the play and were interested in telling the story. We were also lucky to have a Cork actress in the second production which helped the other actors with the accent and knowledge of the area.

- How did the rehearsal process differ for this production?

There was more focus on the new actors, giving them a feeling for the story and the characters. We had time to explore the text in more detail and we did more improvisation and character work.

- The cast lived in Ballingearry for the week of the production – was this helpful in terms of their acquaintance with the play?

It was extremely helpful, not only to familiarise the actors with the accent and the area, but to gel as a cast and get to know each other better. They felt more comfortable with the characters and their home. It was especially good because there were so many new actors who hadn't been on the original trip.

- The Cork production was staged in a non-theatre studio space with little or no facilities for theatre performance – how did this affect performances and staging decisions, particularly in terms of set/lighting design?

- Did audiences of the performances in Players receive the play well?

The play was extremely well received. The audience was drawn into the story and really enjoyed following the characters' relationships. The overwhelming sense was that it was too short-they were hungry for more. Almost all of the feedback was very positive, with a lot of people expressing surprise that these plays are not better known and more widely performed.

- Did you encounter any problems during the run?

We had a few technical hitches, but no problems that were out of the ordinary for the run of a show.

Questions relating to 2nd production of 'Fidelity' – Granary Theatre (studio) Cork 1-3 Dec 2005

- As a theatre practitioner, how did you feel when asked to direct the play again?

I was extremely excited, the original process had been so creative and interesting, I was delighted to be asked to direct it again. It also gave me an opportunity to look at what I had done before and what could be done differently the second time around. I felt like I had had time to think about it more and could bring fresh insight into the text. Also it was wonderful to be part of the celebrations of Cork being the European capital of culture, and to bring the play 'home' on that occasion.

- Do you think it is important to recover and experiment with, through production, early feminist plays by women?

Most definitely. I believe the canon of theatre, especially in Ireland, has been influenced by the lack of belief in women's creative talents and in the past by the belief that their position in society did not warrant remembering their achievements outside the home. As a result we have lost a rich and exciting theatre heritage. Through the writing of women we get a completely new insight into our history. If we only produce the work of male writers a whole chunk of our past is lost.

- Did you make any changes to your overall vision for this production?

Everything was simplified. We pared down the set, the lighting was minimal, but we were able to keep our essential spotlights, it did affect the atmosphere to some extent but in the end we were happy with the staging.

- There was little opportunity for rehearsal in the Granary studio – how did the actors respond?

It was a little difficult for the cast, but we had blocked and rehearsed within a set space and once we had established that same sized space in the performance area, it didn't affect the actors much. We re-blocked anything that needed to be changed and I think the actors were comfortable that they were already well rehearsed enough to deal with it.

- In your opinion, was 'Fidelity' less effective in a non-theatre space? (My own view, having missed the TCD production, is that the play, and your direction, was very powerful – I wish I'd seen it properly in Players)

I don't think it was less effective, in a way it was more personal, more intimate. There was a small audience and they were almost part of the performance by being in a room together with the show. There wasn't that same distance there can be with a stage and audience. From the reactions of the audience afterwards, I don't think it lost effectiveness.

- Did the smaller audiences for the 3 productions of this production (whilst appreciative as I remember) affect in any way, your opinion of the viability of a contemporary staging of 'Fidelity'?

No, not at all; I think that people need to know what is out there, what hidden treasures are lying in archives that can tell us so much about our history. If people had more information about the playwrights and their plays, I have no doubt that they would be really interested in seeing the plays being produced. The reactions of the audiences at both productions were really positive and I believe people want to see recovered work.

- What is your opinion on the research value of staging archival feminist plays?

I think it's important when looking at any research that there is a practical side to it, how the research can be applied. In this case, as we're talking about theatre and bringing to light the work of two prolific playwrights that has been forgotten, there is a need to attempt a staging. Without staging the play, you can never really know how well-written it is, whether an audience can connect with it and whether it works as a performance rather than just a reading. (Plus it's so exciting and great fun to work on something like this!!)

Caroline ('Maggie' TCD & Cork Productions)

- What were your initial thoughts on performing in an unknown, previously un-produced, archival play?

I was excited about doing the play, especially about exploring unknown material. With no other productions to compare it to, you know you can put your own stamp on it and approach the character and play with a fresh and personal perspective.

- Did scanty information on 'Fidelity' or its authors impede your understanding or give greater freedom in your interpretation of the character you played?

I think you can approach any text with little or no information. The text explains itself but it was the research/ learning that was done throughout that added the

necessary layers to my understanding of the play and it's characters and it's place in time.

- Did you conduct any research - personally, or with Clare?

Most of my learning was from brief descriptions of the authors and their works, as well as my own knowledge of Irish theatre.

- What were your first impressions of the text?

My first impressions were about the language used and how it seemed quite lyrical. Maggie's character certainly seemed to have a rough ride in the play and it was difficult to imagine how she could change so much over 5 years. I liked the family banter in the middle and thought it gave a good picture of family and rural life.

- Did you identify 'Fidelity' as a feminist play? Why?

Initially, no; I saw it as a play about lost love and emigration and the plight of women and men who must suffer the consequences. However, after further research and learning about the authors and the character of Maggie more, I do identify it as a feminist play. Maggie, is a strong willed, independent woman who makes a life for herself to secure the life she wants. Although she doesn't secure her love in the end, she still has her independence and will.

- What contemporary resonance, if any, did you find in the play?

The use of contemporary songs gave a contemporary resonance. In the play itself, the themes of love and love lost and rivalry are always contemporary. Emigration and the desire to better oneself financially etc is also always prevalent in today's society.

- What, in your opinion, were the strongest themes in 'Fidelity'?

Themes of love, loyalty, emigration and will to survive/ achieve your goals are very strong.

- What were your thoughts concerning the attitudes/intentions of your character?

I loved the way Maggie was so determined despite the heartache she had to endure when leaving, whilst away and then at the end. But yet, it was interesting to juxtapose the two and see her still maintaining her dignity and strength when walking away. Although heartbroken, she is not broken permanently and you know she will survive.

- Did the conflation of period costume and original dialogue with stylised set and insertion of contemporary songs affect your perception/performance of this play?

The costume, shoes etc gave it all a period feel and the a cappella singing, although of modern songs, still gave it the same. The lyrical language and accents used did the same. The set, although, minimalist still depicted a period setting which helped to achieve a sense of the time and daily preoccupations.

- What were your main concerns during the rehearsal process?

For me, they were just the usual concerns.. learning lines, getting a good grasp of the accent etc. Not every one was really trying the proper "Ballinageary" accent (as opposed to a Generic Cork/ country accent) though which was a bit frustrating, as it didn't sound as consistent from all actors as it could have been.

- Were any of the staging decisions for the production developed through the rehearsal process?

Yes, all the blocking etc. was decided upon in the rehearsal period. I believe the set, props etc were too.

- How did the process of working through the rehearsals alter your perception of the play, viz a viz your character's intention/action?

As with any play with adequate rehearsal time, you can always find so many more layers to a play and character based on research, getting off the script and interaction with the other actors/characters. Discussions with Velma and Claire helped hugely as we discussed the authors, theatre history of the time and conditions in the country at the time. Through Maggie's eyes, I was able to have a great sense of the plight of many emigrants and their changing circumstances and how this forms the basis for the play.

- Was the day trip to Ballineary (Cork) helpful, in terms of building your character and engaging with the specific setting/dialects in the play?

It was definitely helpful. Maggie has to have a huge love and memory of the landscape in the play and describes it, so actually going there and seeing and smelling that countryside helped me as an actor to be genuine in my description of it on stage. There was not enough time to really engage in learning the proper accent but talking to some locals in the shop helped a bit.

- Were you happy with the finished production? Can you explain your answer?

Yes, I was very happy with the finished performance. I was able to engage in the emotion of it fully and I think "The Players theatre" was a lovely spot for it's staging. I don't think accents were up to scratch however. I was really trying the proper Ballineary accent but it almost sounded out of place then to the other generic country/ Cork accents. Apart from that, I was delighted with the performance and it's emotional and historical impact.

- Do you think that performance is a useful way for theatre students to engage with and study theatre history? Can you explain reasons for your answer?

Absolutely. For those of us who find (Theatre) History difficult to remember, a visual performance of life at a given time is a powerful way of engaging with theatre history, especially if we engage with it emotionally too. Rather than the history being words on a page or said out loud, a performance will give a concrete representation of actual life and meaning in a given time period.

- Do you think that 'Fidelity', as an example of an early feminist play, could/should be included in the contemporary repertoire of Irish period plays? Can you give any reasons for your answer?

I think it should definitely be included in the contemporary repertoire of Irish Period plays, not just as an example of an early feminist play but as a play in it's own right. Much of our knowledge of period plays is based around W.B. Yeats and co., J.M Synge and Sean O' Casey. There's plenty of room for more and especially for such themes as seen in Fidelity. As A feminist play, there is a whole new angle there too and I believe if known about more, it would increase further interest in plays of the time and other preoccupations and circumstances of the time.

- As an actor, did the play 'work' for you? Why/ Why not?

It definitely worked for me. I love plays with some hard hitting emotions and getting the chance to play them. I also think it was concise and effective in the delivery of it's themes. I loved the language... it was a challenge to work with it's poetic nature.

- How did you feel about performing the play again (in the Cork production)?

I really enjoyed the Cork production. The new group of actors had more time to rehearse and improvise together so the end production was more solid than the Player's production. The addition of the parting scene between Larry and Maggie at the beginning really added a whole new poignant and realistic dimension to the play and characters.

- Given that the the Cork production was in a non-theatre space, how did this impact on your response to the play?

My response to the play itself was the same although, the lack of proper house lighting took away from the theatre auditorium experience. It felt like we were performing in a rehearsal space rather than a theatre, mostly just because of the daylight though. Anywhere can be a theatre space.

- What were the major differences with this production - for you as an actor? - i.e. did the play have the same impact on you?

Performance wise, I preferred the Cork production. Because of the addition of the parting scene, new actors, better rehearsal time and better attention given to the accent, this was a much tighter show with better enthusiasm and engagement from all. Spending time in Cork really helped too with the accents and general sense of location. I did prefer " Players Theatre" as a venue though as it just really suited the play and we had proper lighting and better furniture etc. I got an even deeper sense of how to play Maggie second time round as a result of the above factors so I loved playing her even more.

- Would you like to act in this play again? Why/Why not?

I would love to play Maggie again. As described above, I love the emotional, thematic and historical quality of the play. I think people should be made aware of this play as an important piece of drama and I would be very proud to a part of it's production again.

FIDELITY

April 2004 -Players DU

Set designer: Beth Mannion

E-mail response to Questionnaire

- 1) What were your initial thoughts on participating in an unknown and previously un-produced archival play?
 - I was (and remain) no experienced theatre person with regard to production. Apart from performing in some school and summer stock plays, I had never participated as a crew member. To be perfectly honest, my motivation to get involved was entirely your friendship. You needed some help, and I wanted to do whatever I could to contribute. That it was archival/unproduced was actually a bonus for me. There was no template to be measure against.

- 2) What were your first impressions of the text?
 - I seem to recall being quite captivated by the text and surprised to learn that it had not been previously produced. Its rather overt haunting qualities mixed with realism intrigued me. Still does.

- 3) Did you identify 'Fidelity' as a feminist play?
 - No, I did not consider it a feminist play. But I can appreciate the possibility that at the time it was written it might have been considered such since so few plays of that period were written from a woman's point of view.

- 4) What contemporary resonance, if any, did you find in the play?
 - I don't recall the script well enough to answer this question, I'm afraid.

- 5) What, in your opinion, were the strongest themes in 'Fidelity'?
 - Again, I don't recall the script well enough to answer this one.

- 6) Did scanty information on 'Fidelity' or its authors impede or give greater freedom to your interpretation of the play in terms of your set design?
 - I remember finding the script very Synge-like and so that probably influenced my set design more than anything else. That the authors and the play had scant background information was less a factor than my reading it as the set needing to reflect character, which is something that always struck me about Synge's work.

- 7) What were your thoughts concerning the attitudes/intentions of the characters?
- did these thoughts influence your design?
- Yes. The characters definitely impacted my decision to keep the set extremely matter-of-fact. The combination of the characters 'feet-on-the-ground' pragmatism and the rather ethereal circumstances of their hopes/desires was a contributing factor in trying to measure reality against surrealism. The surrealist quality was met, I think, in part by the lighting.
- 8) What were your main concerns during the production process?
- To not completely let you down. Which, I fear, I did on some points, due to my crazy workload.
- 9) Were any of the staging decisions for the production developed (or changed) through consultation with the director during the rehearsal process?
- Not that I can recall.
- 10) Did the inclusion of a 'live' vocalist and contemporary songs (during the performance) influence your set design in any way – How did this work?
- I honestly don't recall.
- 11) Were you happy with the finished production?
- I would like to have done more with the set with regard to little details. Not having a great deal of access to the space in advance really shocked me. It prevented me from being able to feel the space as much as I would have liked, so that I could have filled in holes with regard to items on display and the floor in particular.
- 12) Did you encounter any problems during the run?
- Not that I can recall.
- 13) Following your experience of working on this marginalized play, would you agree that performance of archival plays can be a useful/exciting pedagogy in faculties of theatre studies?
- Absolutely. My own research (on the urban repertoire of the early Abbey Theatre) is very archival in nature, so I am completely on board with the need for us to unearth marginalized texts. I am not an overtly theory-based person, but do feel strongly that historicist and theorist must work hand-in-hand for a complete picture to emerge and be wrestled with.

- 14) Do you think that 'Fidelity', as an example of an early Irish feminist play, could/should be included in the repertoire of Irish period plays?
- I feel very strongly that previously marginalized plays should and must be brought into the discourse of Irish drama studies. So many canonical works have gotten in the way of our seeing the full picture. Like you, I work on the marginalized and so am quite keen to see what lies beneath the canon. Unearthing marginalized works allows us to appreciate a fuller view of the richness of the early 20th-century Irish playwrights and helps us to more fully understand the period--both in terms of how people were negotiating the place in the society and in terms (by what was and was not produced) of what the gate-keepers were willing to let be produced.
- 15) In your opinion (as a theatre academic) does this play 'work' in a contemporary production ?
- Absolutely. My memory is that the script was particularly helpful in providing insight into the issue of emigration. Forgive me, if I am recalling the script incorrectly here, but that was my most profound impression.

Feel free to send me a copy of the script, if you need more detailed responses

dustyworks theatre presents

fide- lity

A one act play (circa 1914) by Abbey Playwrights;
Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day

The Granary Theatre, (Studio), UCC
Admission: 6 Euro

Thurs. 1st Dec at 1.15pm

*Fri. 2nd Dec at 4.00pm (conference
performance and post-show discussion)*

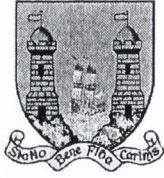
Sat. 3rd Dec at 1.15pm

This contemporary production of *Fidelity* remains faithful to the context of its creation, whilst exploring the resonances in the work for modern audiences. The Irish exodus to the United States following the famine exacerbated a pattern of emigration that had developed as a response to recurring economic crises in Ireland since the mid-eighteenth century. The recourse to emigration, supported by both Church and State, continued in 'waves' throughout the twentieth century. Whilst emigration from Ireland is currently a choice rather than a necessity, modern Irish society struggles to come to terms with its new role as an immigrant destination.

The experiences and responses of the characters in *Fidelity* to their situation(s), offer a timeless and timely reminder of how external events and societal pressures can devastate the lives of individuals, and the difficulties that face people forced to leave their homelands, friends and families.

We hope you enjoy the production!
Velma O'Donoghue Greene & Clare Neylon





Conference Programme

**'Munster Women Playwrights' Friday, 2
December 2005, The Granary Theatre (Studio), U.C.C.**

10.00am	Opening Address by Dr. Ger Fitzgibbon, Chair of Theatre & Drama Studies (U.C.C.)
10.15am	Dr. Cathy Leeney (U.C.D.) 'The Paradigm of Persephone in Teresa Deevy's plays of the 1930's'
11.00am	Tea & Coffee
11.30am	Ian Walsh M.A. Doctoral Research Student (U.C.D.) 'Shame and Laughter' : An Examination of Gender in B.G. MacCarthy's 'The Whip Hand'
12.15pm	Lunch
1.45pm	Dr. Lisa Fitzpatrick (University of Ulster) 'Margaret O'Leary's 'The Woman': A Feminist Reading'
2.30pm	Short Break
2.40pm	Velma O'Donoghue Greene, Doctoral Research Student (T.C.D.) 'Writing Women: Early Twentieth Century Feminist thought in "Fidelity" by Geraldine Cummins & Susanne Day'
3.30pm	Tea & Coffee
4.00pm	Performance of 'Fidelity' by Susanne Day and Geraldine Cummins (1914) directed by Clare Neylon Graduate of the School of Theatre & Drama Studies (T.C.D).
4.40pm	Post performance discussion of 'Fidelity'
5.00pm	Wine