Theatre and Archival Memory

Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories 1951–1977

Barry Houlihan
Theatre and Archival Memory

“Barry Houlihan’s Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories, 1951–1977 is rich in new archival information relating to a fascinating period of Irish cultural and social history. Written by a professional archivist, this book comprises an indispensable resource for Irish theatre scholars as well as scholars of late twentieth century Irish cultural history.”
—Lionel Pilkington, Professor, Department of English, NUI, Galway

“Breathtaking in its precision and originality, Barry Houlihan’s monograph offers a dynamic engagement with the archive which expands the canon of Modern Irish Drama as we know it. This study offers a living-history which moves beyond textual analysis to release the sensory power of live performances, events and places. Productions and key figures are brought to glorious life through Houlihan’s unrivalled range of source materials, interviews, artefacts and ephemera which illuminate previously unknown histories of gender, class and social conditions in Twentieth Century Irish Theatre.”
—Melissa Sihra, Head of Drama and Associate Professor, Trinity College Dublin

“This timely book is an invigorating call to (re)witness Irish theatre history; Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories 1951–1977 compellingly articulates a history of theatre-going in modernising Ireland, thus creating a revelatory portrait of a State and theatre in transition. Houlihan’s thoughtful and forensic scholarship into the material and archival history of Irish theatre and society uncovers a trove of neglected plays and playwrights. This book challenges outdated views on the history of Irish theatre by expanding and enriching our understanding of the artists, institutions and societal forces that shaped Irish theatre practice. An invaluable and illuminating resource for all scholars, historians and practitioners of Irish theatre.”
—Tanya Dean, Programme Chair: BA in Drama (Performance), Technological University Dublin
“Barry Houlihan’s *Theatre and Archival Memory* analyses a pivotal but under-explored period in Irish theatre history—showing us an Ireland that was beginning to embrace globalization, liberalism and industrialisation, but which was also inexorably heading towards the tragedy of the Troubles. This book explains how the Irish theatre both encouraged and analysed those societal changes, focussing on major dramatists from Brendan Behan to Brian Friel to Edna O’Brien, as well as writers who have been unjustly neglected. It also dedicates much-needed attention to Ireland’s other theatre-makers: its directors and actors, its designers and producers, and perhaps most importantly its audiences. Using a staggering array of archival sources—many of which have never before been written about—this book will have a transformative impact on Irish theatre history and historiography.”

—Patrick Lonergan, MRIA, Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies, *NUI Galway*
Barry Houlihan

Theatre and Archival Memory

Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories
1951–1977
For Cathal and for Rachel
With Endless Thanks.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Towards an Archival Memory—Performance and Archive

On 29 April 1970, a protest against the lack of vision for new forms of Irish drama took place outside the Peacock theatre space at the Abbey Theatre. A small group had gathered to picket a new production of Lennox Robinson’s 1928 play, *The Far Off Hills*. A light comedy about the relationships of the Clancy family, Robinson’s play was a staple of the Abbey’s repertoire for decades, having had over thirty-six revivals up to 1970. Its reappearance, in April 1970, on the stage specially designated for the exploration of new forms of experimental Irish drama, provoked a demonstration from the members of an amateur theatre group, the Demona Players.¹ The group carried banners with slogans “Abbey Directors Over the Hill”, “The Abbey—The Cultural Wasteland” and “Experimental Theatre? Yes, 1930s style”.²

Directed by Frank Dermody,³ the production was reported to be of a slow pace and traditionally realist in its production and acting style. The

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¹ No information can be traced as to the origins or membership of the Demona Players amateur theatre group.
³ Frank Dermody joined the Abbey Theatre in 1939, replacing Louis D’Alton, who had recently stepped down from the Board of Directors. Dermody directed, designed and acted in many plays at the Abbey Theatre over his association of close to forty years. Dermody directed three further plays at the Peacock Theatre, the space reserved for experimental work, following his production of *The Far Off Hills* in 1970. These plays included *Grogan and the Ferret* by George Shiels (1970), *In The Shadow of the Gunman* by Sean O’Casey.
production ultimately failed to meet the remit of the Peacock Theatre space as a hub for experimentation and new dramatic forms. David Nowlan, theatre critic of the Irish Times, noted that Dermody’s direction of the play was ‘curiously static’, with the sets ‘strangely ugly and irrelevant.’ Yet, despite the public misgivings about this non-experimental play being presented in the studio space, Nowlan concluded his review by stating that ‘a night of Brecht’ was to be surpassed every time by the likes of the performances seen in The Far Off Hills.4 A spokesperson for the protesters commented, “the Peacock should be producing plays that had some relation to Irish life now”.5

The complexity presented in both these polarising opinions regarding the condition of contemporary Irish theatre offers an opportunity for questioning the form and content of theatre performed at this time. The protesters were at odds with the archival memory of the early Abbey Theatre, of Lennox Robinson’s pleasant comedy of half a century earlier, reappearing in faithful mimetic proportions and taking the space of new experimental work. Such questions include: How does the archival record of modern Irish drama affect our understanding of marginalised histories? How did new Irish drama seek to reflect the changing society and life in ‘modern Ireland’? What form did these plays take? How did new venues and a new generation of playwrights, producers and actors afford new outlets for an expression of an alternative dramatic representation of Ireland? How have and can lesser-remembered plays, and their dramatic composition, now be re-evaluated in order to enhance critical understanding of socially reflective theatre for the post-war period in Ireland?

To begin to evaluate these questions, some useful evidence is presented in an exchange of correspondence between playwrights Brian Friel and Thomas Kilroy. In May 1976, Friel wrote to Kilroy expressing his concerns for contemporary Irish theatre. Friel’s concerns centred on what a new drama for modern Ireland would look like. Friel was aware of the need for a theatre to be responsive to contemporary Irish society and recognised its influence by international theatre and culture, in particular that of the United States. Friel wrote:

(1973), and Coats by Lady Augusta Gregory (1973), plays which premièred at the Abbey Theatre in 1933, 1923 and 1910, respectively.


I think we are all conscious of being in at the beginning of something … what I think we’re all attempting in our scattered plays is to exorcise ourselves of our intimately private obsessions & fears in a medium that is best suited to the exploration of public [expressions].

Friel’s comments reveal a chief concern for the modernisation of Irish drama and for the Irish State that simultaneously developed—an exorcism of the self, a delving into the private realms of memory and archive and to push forward in establishing a new identity.

This book offers a focused study of plays, playwrights, artists and events which are largely outside the canon of Irish drama but which have served to shape this critical period of the 1950s through to the 1980s, and which also had a profound influence on Irish theatre-going audiences. In the words of Christopher Murray, “the closely-knit nexus of the artist and the audience” shows that “collectively these writers addressed issues central to the developments shaping the new Ireland and that individually they felt themselves to have a role as artists in a changing society”.

Nicholas Grene recognises the beginning of a new and modern drama emerging in 1964, with plays such as Bran Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* The plays that emerged thereafter did so from a time and place of rapid modernisation for Irish society. Grene also states that

whether the playwrights gave their plays urban or suburban settings (as Kilroy and Leonard did), or as in the case of others, preferred traditional subjects in Irish rural and small-town life, there was a new acerbity of social analysis, different angles and some marked changes in dramatic style and technique.

I also suggest that this time period needs re-assessment and on more terms than just chronology. The emergence of a ‘modern’ Irish drama needs to reconsideration on grounds of gender, class, casting and race. Where we might begin to consider calling ‘a new Irish drama, and also consider the

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6 P103/536 (3-4) Letter from Brian Friel to Thomas Kilroy, 5 May [1976], Thomas Kilroy Archive, NUI Galway. The ‘we’ that Friel here mentions includes Thomas Kilroy, Tom Murphy and Tom MacIntyre.

7 Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up to the Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 164.

form of that drama, are certainly evident as early as 1951, more than a full decade earlier than the 1964 Dublin International Theatre Festival presented new works by Brian Friel, Eugene McCabe and others. The form of that evidence, as a new archival memory, is the chief examination of this book.

The historiography of Irish theatre in modern times can greatly benefit from a deeper and engaged relationship with the archive and records of the time. If we move beyond a textual history to a wider critical study of plays, playwrights, actors and also audiences, cognisant also of the time in which the plays were produced and received, a more complete and transparent archival history is attainable.

**Can We Witness (or Rewitness) Theatre History?**

This book is a journey through Ireland’s theatre history. I have focused on a critical period from the mid-twentieth century, from the early 1950s, through to the end of the 1970s. Within the book and in examining marginalised plays and events, I aim to present the liveness of the archival record. The record of performance can only be a static presence, a fixed entity, if the archival memory is absent or ignored. It is within this memory space, an archival memory, that we can attempt to move beyond suggestion or estimation of the past and arrive at the experience of liveness of past performance with more certainty, if not also with a deeper sensory understanding. Can we begin to imagine what it was like to sit in the Pike Theatre on Herbert Lane in the 1950s and see the late night Follies bring a new brand of theatre culture to Ireland? Or, to be seated in the Abbey Theatre in 1968 when Tom Murphy’s *Famine* was premiered? What was it like to be one of the 15,000 people clambering to get into the tiny theatre above an electrical appliance showroom in Dun Laoghaire and see Genevieve Lyons as Sally Bowles in the Globe Theatre Company’s *I Am a Camera* during its run in Autumn 1956? Is it possible to hear the beat, rhythms and songs from James McKenna’s rock musical *The Scatterin’* produced by the Pike Theatre at the Abbey Lecture Hall in September 1960? These are all questions of experience, of liveness and of theatre-going and the archive can show us directions to finding the answers.

Reading the texts of these examples above, and of the many more outlined within this book, can get us only so far to experiencing the past liveness or the social context that surrounded their reception and production. It is when we move into an archival space, an active remembering and reanimation, that you can begin to feel yourself settle into your theatre
seat, sense an audience take theirs around you and await a curtain to open before a stage.

The ‘present absence’ that the archive manifests is established throughout this book. Works that were unpublished can only be experienced (or re-experienced through text) within their archival liveness. However, publishing industries in drama and theatre are traditionally fewer that in other literary forms. Drama publishing in Ireland in the early and mid-twentieth century has been limited to small independent presses with limited print runs, and which are today long closed down and with the playscripts out of print. Names like Talbot Press, Candle Press, James Duffy Press, De Burca/P.J. Burke Books, Dolmen Press, Co-Op Books, among others, ensured that early published texts by, for example, Irish women playwrights, playwrights of working-class backgrounds and emerging writers found a reading audience and also potential new generations of theatre-makers to take on their plays in performance.

Today however, many of these works are limited to specialist university or national library collections and archive repositories only, limiting the accessibility to a select and privileged few. Christine Longford, for example, wrote over twenty plays for the Gate Theatre but the scripts lay largely out of the public domain. As Erin Grogan has observed, “Despite the critical and popular success of Christine Longford’s dramas [Longford] is now rarely celebrated as a playwright but more often remembered as simply the wife of Lord Edward Longford and a financial supporter of the Gate Theatre”. Lady Augusta Gregory wrote over forty plays, with the major body of Gregory plays and criticism published by Colin Smythe Press. Production histories teach us about what plays are produced and when, but also about what works and figures are excluded from our stages and literary and cultural histories, national or otherwise. Since Gregory died in 1932, only thirteen of Gregory’s plays have been produced in the following eighty or so years (twenty-two plays were produced during her lifetime in the first thirty years in which the Abbey existed), leaving many of her plays still unproduced professionally today.

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Publication is but one form of preservation. In order to move performance archives out of a fixed preserved literary form, and away from a canon of selective memory, an archival memory produces a multi-sensory record of kinetic liveness. This serves to reduce the emphasis (and dependence) on the construct of canon, itself a result of patriarchal and class bias in the provision of accepted or approved works to be remembered and re-performed. In the case of many Irish women playwrights, publication was not a channel frequently afforded to their work, ensuring a move at least from manuscript (privately held) to published typescript (publicly sold). As writer Doireann Ní Gríofa notes, “the absence of a female name is not evidence of the absence of a female presence”.11 The archive can offer a restorative and activist presence to absent documented lives. Melissa Sihra reinforces the importance of challenging these restrictive histories, confined by the contours of a mapped patriarchal heritage that is propagated between successive generations. Sihra outlines the need for a matriarchal lineage with ‘flowing genealogies’ that accurately reflect the creative legacies of women artists that lies beneath strata of enforced silence.12 The archival memory can speak and make heard the absent presence.

The archive of Irish drama is also a social record of the Irish State and its people. As a nation such as modern Ireland moves through various forms and existences, from colonised country to Free State to Republic, so too does its national drama also undergo major change, redefinition and self-reflection. The cultural record of Ireland, moving through its post-Emergency experience as a neutral and economically (and politically) isolationist country to a nation embracing an internationalist stance drew a considered theatrical and cultural response. From the late 1950s, these great changes reflected Ireland’s gradual pivot to an industrial expansionist ‘modernity’, the growth of a new and increasingly Catholic middle class, the globalising of Irish culture and media as well as the development of a new wave of Irish theatre-makers who developed an experimental form of artistic introspection of a society and its people. New plays by Irish writers, as well as the influence of international works staged in Ireland, provoked a new Irish drama. The record from these formative years, much of which has fallen to the periphery of canonical memory finds new reanimation in archival memory.

Modernising Ireland—Society, Class and Experimental Form

Dramaturgical as well as directorial experimentation in post-World War II Europe fermented a new radicalism within theatrical production, from texts, to form, to practice. Henning Fülle outlines these “new forms of production praxis and dramaturgy” propagated by playwrights and directors who pushed production beyond the form as text alone. Fülle identifies those such as Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, the French absurdists, Jean Genet and the British authors Harold Pinter, Edward Bond and Arnold Wesker.13 During the 1960s and 1970s, Fülle also cites the emergence of Eugenio Barba, Robert Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine, Luca Ronconi and others who contribute to the focus of theatre (and theatre art) of authenticity in terms of contemporary social(ist) realism in European theatres, the trademarks of whom include exploratory theatre art for an audience of contemporaries that refers to their time and the Zeitgeist while tackling the demand to treat present-day perception and enable and mediate experiences for their audience … processing stories of political and societal reality and developing the art of perception as a central technique for the evolution of civilisations, and as a vital coping mechanism for post-industrial cultures.14

In the exploratory form of such theatre (or theatre art, as Fülle defines) the unifying characteristics in form and visualisation (more than purely textually), work as a means to communicate to mass audience appeal, developing new the forms of performance that was influenced by contemporary avant-garde performance art and popular culture.

Building on this emergent form in European theatre production and direction, new experimentation in popular forms of drama as a mode of political protest and resistance was also growing in popularity in Ireland


14 Ibid.
from the 1950s onwards. Susanne Colleary\(^\text{15}\) and Elizabeth Howard\(^\text{16}\) respectively recover the highly significant contribution of community arts, independent theatre, devised production and amateur theatre.

Theatre academic Christopher Murray explores the work of Sean O’Casey in connection to its depiction of the urban space, in particular Dublin City, in terms of the relationship between the individual and society and as a site of injustice to the poor.\(^\text{17}\) The dramatisation of such locations is a central and important motif within the work of O’Casey, representing an archival memory of space and community and of how this influences (and also documents) the authentic record of experience within Dublin urban and tenement life of the early twentieth century. The geopolitics of place and class as crystallised through performance symbolises the progression of community and family in dialogue with the state. Class as a social construct dominated much of the new experimentalism in contemporary Irish drama in the post-Emergency era. Michael Pierse’s study on class in Irish literature and drama defines working-class perspectives in terms of being a qualitative and distinct entity, owing to its habituation to the extremes of social experience, and which finds adequate expression in non-realist forms of performance and expression.

The family, conscious of such class-based social constructs, became synonymous as a microcosm of Irish society on the Irish stage. Within the performance of family, both on stage and in society, class disparity, power and authority combined to support the official silencing and removal of unmarried mothers and their children to the periphery of their communities by Religious and Government collusion. Networks such as Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries were institutions that functioned as an official surveillance network upon the bodies and actions of women within the Irish family. Such memory, outside of the state’s official narrative, is explored within the archival memory of plays and through the response of society as outlined in this book.


Actor Cyril Cusack was among those who in the early 1950s also calling for a new form of Irish drama, one that could be modern, experimental and reflective of contemporary times. Cusack approached Sean O’Casey as a possible source for just such a new work:

I am in search of the new play, modern and of Irish inspiration, in a desire to break new ground creatively and productively. Theatre here is very much in the experimental stage again—I suppose it always is and should be—and I think there is a real desire to find a more modern expression.\(^{18}\)

A week later, writing again to O’Casey, Cusack explains that his fifteen-year association with the Abbey Theatre “has left me with a violent antipathy towards the present management which my jaundiced eye sees as being anti-theatre”.\(^{19}\) Within less than a decade, in O’Casey’s view, little has changed. Writing to a Thomas Buggy in Cork, who was offering to establish a ‘Sean O’Casey Society’ (an offer O’Casey declined) O’Casey stated he was sorry to hear that no young Irish playwright was producing work that approaches greatness. “If this happened in Ireland”, O’Casey wrote, “we know that instead of being opened, the door would be locked, bolted and barred against his entry.”\(^{20}\)

Modernity in expression needed to be facilitated by cultural change. In a cumbersome organisation like the Irish National Theatre Society, change came ‘dropping slow’, to quote W.B. Yeats.\(^{21}\) Roland Jaquarello, a young director who was brought into the Abbey Theatre in the early 1970s by Lelia Doolan, described how reforming and rejuvenating new figures who came into the Abbey were met often with resistance and frustration. Doolan was appointed Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre in 1971. She had worked previously in Raidió Teilifís Éireann (R.T.É), the newly formed Irish national broadcaster, where she had been a successful producer/director until she left R.T.É in 1969. As Jacquarello notes:

\(^{18}\) Letter from Cyril Cusack, Dalkey, to Sean O’Casey, 28 April 1954, Sean O’Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 38,060/1.
\(^{19}\) Letter from Cyril Cusack, Dalkey, to Sean O’Casey, 5 May 1954, Sean O’Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 38,060/1.
\(^{20}\) Letter from Sean O’Casey to Thomas Buggy, 6 April 1963, Sean O’Casey papers, National Library of Ireland, MS37, 933.
The [Abbey] company was stuck in its ways and needed a kick into modernity. Most importantly, [Doolan] had a vision for what was necessary … It was a brave decision to bring in voice and movement coaches and to try and loosen up the Peacock as a genuinely experimental space rather than a mini-Abbey. Unfortunately, most of the experienced actors rejected her ideas and did their best to voice their discontent.22

Doolan’s new vision for the Abbey Theatre is discussed in more detail in Chap. 7 of this book. The extent of impacts initiated by a number of new theatre-makers who emerged in Dublin from the onset of the 1950s, from the Pike Theatre to Project Arts Centre, can now be traced through detailed archival analyses. This period witnessed the growth of a movement whereby Irish professional drama was developed and radicalised to its largest extent since the foundation of the Irish National Theatre Society in 1904. This book will address key case studies, events and people, as well as providing a critical analysis of the reception of these works through their archival documentation and the embodied social memory within such breadth of source material. This archival analysis enables a deeper understanding of contemporary Irish drama and its hitherto unexplored archival memory.

**Constructing Archival Memory: Reclaiming the Record, Reinterpreting Historiography**

The works outlined within this study are positioned largely outside the canon of Irish drama. The recovery of such works from a hitherto unstudied body of Irish theatre archives also show the breadth of social and political issues addressed by dramatists within the years of this book’s study. Issues such as mental illness, (il)legal adoption, domestic abuse, class inequality, sexism and female inequality, racism, contraception, sexuality and other such issues were broadly addressed within Irish contemporary drama. The point must also be made that as these works were often produced in smaller fringe venues and so received comparatively smaller audiences than those at the major national or commercial venues, inevitably these productions have a reduced collective memory and archival source pool to draw from.

Without a body of records and a holistic performance archive, the evidence from which to build a counter-argument to existing historiographies can be scant. Some media outlets of the time, for example, were largely unsympathetic to works by women authors. Plays by such as Edna O’Brien and Mary Manning, as addressed within this study, received uniformly harsh reviews that frequently took the form of personal and sexist attacks of character and morality rather than objective commentary on the artistic merit of their respective plays. Such reviews are often the only evidence on record for plays with one-off or minor production histories within traditional repositories. They can act as continual barriers to any later study or encounter of the play by new generations, continuing and perpetuating the exclusion of these works from wider study and appreciation.

To support my argument, and in exploring the social memory of Irish theatre history, I turn to work by memory studies and sociology scholar Andreas Huyssen, who argues in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* that the past “is not simply given in memory, ‘but it must be articulated to become memory’.” The articulation that Huyssen calls for comes in the form of archival reconstruction. The past must be given a chance to be remembered and shaped into a navigable entity through which experience can be extracted (and re-experienced through performance). Such historiography must be considered within our contemporary perspective and reflected upon as significant to understanding our historical narrative. Advances in digital preservation and restoration of fragile manuscript and obsolete audio-visual sources has also enabled this project to examine digitally preserved performance records. These sources include sound files and scores for various productions as well as stage management files, annotated prompt-scripts, production images, correspondence, marketing files and ephemera, and other key series of files that form the corpus of primary source material examined. The combined study of these resources offer a reconstruction of the mechanics of performance and production as well as its reception, from the past, within the present.

Scholars Davis et al. present a study and methodological examples of how approaches to theatre history can seek to overcome some of the

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difficulties encountered in pursuit of the theatrical past.\textsuperscript{24} Davis et al. draw on the distinction between ‘the past’, being an irrevocable and intransient temporal state, and ‘history’, the documented narrative through which we try to interpret and discern the past. Bruce McConachie foregrounded such turns in theatre historiography in the mid-1980s. Davis et al. present a duel focus of such studies of theatre history that draw on two central components: firstly, epistemological (recognising the interplay between modern and contemporary knowledge systems and the contested event within its own past setting) and secondly, hermeneutical, an approach of analysis based upon the interpretation of the forms of analyses themselves.\textsuperscript{25} These two strategies of approach to history allow for reconsideration of past events (such as the theatre production) being a product of and a challenge against a contemporary event/time and how our current knowledge of that past allows us to consider the past across a temporal divide.

The second point relates to our understanding of previous modes of historical evaluation at particular moments, being cognisant of development of various modes of historical investigation between the past and present time. These forms of addressing performance histories allow for a contesting of constructed and assumed normative narratives: those that were constructed from and in particular historiographic styles, which were typically solely text-based and non-reflective of sociological influences on contemporary production and reception.

Diana Taylor questions the apparent ‘fixity’ of the repertoire and the binaries of residual memory. Taylor outlines how ephemeral memory of performance persists against the grain of national and powerful narratives. She forewarns against the prescribed reliance of scholars and historians upon what objects or artefacts are preserved and stable within the archive, rather than within the collected repertoire that form ‘embodied memory’: “performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-producible knowledge”.\textsuperscript{26} Maggie B. Gale expands on this point in her acknowledgement that “the archive, as concept, as resource, as location, as site of power relations, as

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\textsuperscript{25}Davis et al. (2011, 91).  \\
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signifier of the historical and cultural division and ownership of information and knowledge—has centred in recent years on for whom it is created and how it is used … a vital cultural tool as a means of accessing versions of the past”.

Clare Cochrane and Jo Robinson have examined the ethical responsibility inherent with any project of theatre historiography and performance scholarship. They examine the position of ‘ethical spectatorship’ that the historian and scholar occupies. The power dynamics of history-shapers (archivists) and history-makers (historians) necessitate practice whereby any examination of the past deconstructs the order of privilege that created and supported the historic context and experience of the past.

There is a significant contribution to be made by archivists and librarians towards the formation of a wider, inclusive and socially reflective archive and historiography of Irish drama; one that looks beyond the canon. Collection and acquisition strategies of institutions should reflect, to the fullest extent, the records of dramatic works marginalised from public awareness. The manuscripts and printed/published works of women playwrights, directors and artists, of artists of immigrant backgrounds, works from outside the Anglophone tradition, works by artists of disability, theatre which reflects working-class communities, as examples, can all contribute to this diversity of Irish theatre history, countering existing notions of tradition, nation and identity.

Archives and institutions can function as formal barriers between the wider public and the performance record, serving to perpetuate a perception of academic elitism dominated by male-centred, class-specific histories. Recent scholarship by historians such as Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam and Lucy Noakes, has indicated that methodological and theoretical approaches to broader social and cultural histories can transform current insights and reframe historical narratives to recognise and include a broader range of sources and evidences.

The failure of realist forms of theatre to adequately express working-class concerns, for example, Pierse argues, is also symptomatic of

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bourgeois realism’s failure to represent the realities underlying their experience. Pierse cites Terry Eagleton’s concerns that expressionism as a form feels the need to transcend the limits of the naturalistic aesthetic and assumes the ordinary bourgeois world to be solid and authentic—the refusal of reality. As Cochrane and Robinson state, the primacy of the task is to “explore the ways in which theatre historians apply ethical thinking to the truthful representation, recovery or revising of the different ways and means by which theatre-makers in the past have enacted scenarios related to human experience”.\(^{30}\) I expand and emphasise this point through the course this book in able to move towards an ethical and archival memory of Irish drama.

**Theories of Social Remembering—Memory and Political Resonances**

Ric Knowles demonstrates the breadth of possible new understanding of performance and its context and how this can be achieved through an expanded semiotic methodology that encompasses social and cultural factors to a fuller meaning of how theatre is produced.\(^{31}\) Part of Knowles’ methodology looks to the production of meaning. This presents a focus to a greater objective level and seeks to understand creative production and public reception, reinforced by socio-political conditions. This process is enabled by the documented components of performance being contextualised through extra-performative records—the social context. This enables a ‘meaning of production’ to be extrapolated from the performance as well as ‘the production of meaning’.

In order to experience the past, it must be located, remembered and interrogated. Davis Dean, Yana Meerson and Kathryn Price argue that as/for historians and practitioners in performance arts, scholarly practice is being transformed by exposure and assimilation of complimentary methodological practices. In this way, historical investigation is both representative and performative. Memory is thus constructed and re-lived. Dean et al. foreground how “memory acts as a shared crucible of discovery and a distorting lens through which history and theatre engage with the past”.\(^{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Cochrane and Robinson, eds. (2016, 4).


Diana Taylor further questions the often problematic means of transmission and recording of this ‘crucible of memory’ through documentation (physical) and repertoire (performative). She posits the question: “is performance that which disappears, or that which persists, transmitted through a non-archival system of transfer that I came to call the repertoire?” To apply these questions to an Irish context, there is neglected memory in terms of both the physical record (the archive) and the performative record (the repertoire).

Sociologist, Barbara A. Misztal, develops studies and theories that expand on the rapid growth of sociological interest, scholarship and practice from the post-1980s era. Memory, Misztal argues, “is the essential condition of our cognition and reflexive judgement. It is closely connected with emotions because emotions are in part about the past and because memory evokes emotions … and is the central medium through which identities are constituted.” By drawing on changes in heritage and memory, commemorations and re-evaluations of national pasts in a European context, the realm of social change through various facets of memory is questioned. In her study, Misztal builds a collective memory through various facets of memory and documentation and acknowledges the varied social frameworks in the process of remembering. This also requires an ethical remembering. As theatre scholar Katherine Newey states, “making visible women’s lives, work and relationships to power is an ethical imperative for feminist history”.

The documentation of audience and its reception of work is being addressed by scholars through varying interdisciplinary methodologies. Memory, recalled, remembered or reconstructed, can embody multiple forms of experience. Memory is residual evidence and subject to conditions of experience, event, role and function of the subject who is ‘performing’ or recalling memory. Memory and its recollection can be emphatic, redeeming, cathartic or indeed also traumatic. Performance scholar Miriam Haughton investigates traumatic memory in contemporary Irish performance. Haughton states that the embodied moment of

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33 Diana Taylor, xvii.
live performance disappears the moment it manifests, while the memory of the moment lives on, in flux from the performance environment to the wider public sphere and is subject to the socio-economic and cultural conditions which interact there.37

The non-remembering or non-documentation of particular works of Irish drama—works which offered a counterpoint of opinion and context to national histories, skew the record of our communal memory. This schism in performance documentation—that of remembered versus unremembered—can be redressed through archival memory, a process of reanimation of both the Irish theatrical repertoire and the forms of theatre that were historically performed.

**REMEMBERING IRISH THEATRE—POLITICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEMS**

Theatre academic Baz Kershaw presents frameworks around the questions of performance efficacy. Kershaw’s treatise builds upon the ability of theatre and performance to effect the experience, thinking and actions of theatre audiences (as a collective). This is achieved through the post-performance culture and legacy of the production through “the immediate and ephemeral effects of performance—laughter, tears, applause and other active audience responses”.38 Kershaw clarifies this point by an explanation of the granular detail that this process can entail an important record of social response to performance within the audience and within specific environmental contexts, so that the possibility that the immediate and local effects of particular performances might—individually and collectively—contribute to changes within communities and society.39

Throughout this study I build upon this process of exploration, as presented by Kershaw, and place it within the context of the modernisation of Irish society, from the period of the early 1950s through to the end of the 1970s. This study is an act of archival reclamation for many of the works, their authors, producers, actors but also of the memory of their original production and reception.

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39 Ibid.