

DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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**A MONSTER WHO FORGETS – THE IMPORTANCE OF DION BOUCICAULT IN
THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRISH THEATRE.**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to argue against a belief created by the Irish Literary Theatre and carried on by its contemporaries that there was no Irish Theatre prior to the dawn of the 20th century. The theatre that absolutely did exist before then has to a large degree been discarded for various different reasons, the main one being its apparent un-Irishness. By denying the relevance of this „pre-Irish Theatre“ Irish Theatre a historical void has been created, it seems to be an attempt whether intentional or not to throw off history. The ideas behind this belief point towards a notion that there exists no link between early-modern and modern Irish Theatre, the goal of this argument is to prove the existence of this link and thus fill the void its denial has created.

The main rallying point for this argument will be the Irish playwright and performer, Dion Boucicault who was possibly one of the most successful Irish playwrights in history and definitely one of the most successful playwrights worldwide of the entire 19th century. In contemporary times however his huge significance has faded into almost complete obscurity, his works are seldom mentioned, studied or taught apart from a literal handful of published academic works. These are the effects of the denial of the link between early-modern and modern Irish Theatre, this thesis by using the career and works of Boucicault will attempt to bridge that gap.

The thesis will begin with a chapter on the history of theatre and its practice in Ireland from just before the United Irishman rebellion up until the beginning of Boucicault’s career. The purpose of this is to show the difficulties faced by the Irish of that time in their want for and drive to a National Irish Theatre and an end to the misrepresentation of the race as-well as why neither of these things happened. This information is required as it is essential to know

just what these problems were because in the eyes of the 19th Century Irish, Dion Boucicault overcame every one of them.

The second chapter will serve the purpose of discussing the career of Dion Boucicault to show just how significant his accomplishments were and how he was received by his worldwide audience. This will prove that he was no small or easily forgettable playwright; he managed to rise above the problems of the Irish at home by using the massive numbers of displaced Irish immigrants abroad to effectively internationalize Irish Theatre and created a new and acceptable image of the Irish people. By proving or rather re-establishing his importance and popularity in the 19th century we should see that he serves a vital place in history.

The third chapter will focus solely on Boucicault's three most famous Irish plays; *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughraun* which have since been formed into a loose trilogy. The purpose of this is to address the apparent un-Irishness of these plays and to show that they are progressive works that spoke for the plight of the Irish people. All three of these plays offer a composite image of Ireland which is a style that has since fallen out of taste and has been labelled as „Paddywhackery“ Firstly these plays were written against the „Paddywhackery“ of their day and were hugely successful and accepted at that task so it is essential to ignore the latter-day distaste to gain a better understanding of what these plays meant to the Irish then for they are little but novelty today.

This thesis will conclude by bringing all of this information together to establish that it is obvious that Boucicault was trying to further the cause of the Irish people. He was representing them and their troubles on stage in a way that the world could see. He did not cry for rebellion but instead opted for reconciliation and hope for love between the two peoples of England and Ireland. These might sound like lofty aims and perhaps they were for

rebellion won out in the end so perhaps that is another reason why Boucicault with his ambition, flair, romance and brogue faded. His works are far from genius but their staggering popularity and undeniable influence makes denying them relatively impossible because they paved the way for the continued internationalization of Irish Theatre by its next champions – The Irish Literary Theatre.

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Firstly I would like to thank my mother for being there and Dr. Paul Hollywood for getting me through this. I would also like to thank Napoleon Bonaparte because I have never had the chance to do so and Tom Madden for showing me that Boucicault existed.

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In 1972, Brian Friel made the claim that “no Irish theatre existed prior to 1899”.¹ This is a similar statement to the one made by W.B. Yeats in his 1923 Nobel prize acceptance speech, in which he stated that “modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish War, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891.”² Both of these statements represent the beginning and continuation of a belief within Irish Theatre that its pre-20th century predecessors bear little or no relevance to modern Irish theatre.

These statements are very defining and precise with the years that are chosen to represent the beginning of modern Irish Theatre. However there is no mention of any form of bridge between the two eras simply the apparent end of one and the beginning of another. Friel’s statement which is from his article *Plays Peasant & Unpeasant* declares that the theatre that existed in Ireland before the 9th of May 1899 was not actual Irish Theatre “scrap all those men who wrote within the English tradition, for the English stage and for the English people, and . . . go back no further than 1899, on the night of May 9th, the opening of the Literary Theatre.”³ The article also displays a particular distaste to the performance of Dion Boucicault’s works at the Abbey describing him as so “Boucicault capers on the Abbey stage” while “Irish audiences laugh tolerantly, whether at the play or at the Abbey directors”⁴

This chapter will begin an argument in opposition to this belief about the relevance of pre - 20th century Irish theatre to its modern day predecessors. This chapter will show the problems faced by theatre practitioners from before the United Irishman Rebellion up until after the Great Famine in order to explain why there was a void of material and an unhappy population

¹ Theatre History and the Beginnings of the Irish National Theatre Project, Lionel Pilkington, Theatre Stuff : Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre, Carysfort Press, 2009.

² www.nobelprize.org

³ The Irish Play on the New York Stage: 1874 – 1966, John.P.Harrington, University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

⁴ The Irish Play on the New York Stage: 1874 – 1966, John.P.Harrington, University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

looking for an Irish character they could recognise on stage. This will provide the foundation to help better understand the significance of the place that Dion Boucicault holds in Irish history.

Theatre in 18th century Ireland was as vibrant as the century prior in which saw the opening of the first official theatres despite events such as the Cromwellian Invasion and Williamite–Jacobite War. It was a vibrant part of the island's culture and had been expanding continually since its „official“ inception in the 1600's when the Lord Deputy of Ireland began holding performances in Dublin Castle. Towards the end of the 1700's there were theatres in the counties & towns of Cork, Belfast, Derry, Limerick, Waterford, Antrim, Lisburn, Newry, Ennis, Wexford, Sligo, Athlone, Castlebar, Clonmel, Tralee, Youghal, Bray and New Ross⁵. This inarguably shows a thriving theatrical life but does not immediately show a thriving „Irish“ theatrical life. Just that there was in fact a firmly established network of theatres in Ireland and audiences to support them by the end of the 1800's.

So the Irish were undeniably creating and performing theatre but the state of this „pre-Irish Theatre“ Irish Theatre is a slightly more complex topic for a number of reasons. Unlike English theatres which had the available population base to cater specifically to audiences of a chosen class, Irish theatres were mostly limited to one per city for a long period of time and so had to open their doors to people of every class from working to the aristocracy. There are multiple reasons for this; the first being due to the smaller population base there was simply not enough money to support what could be achieved in London. In Dublin a play was lucky to run for more than a week earning the playwright around £50 whereas in London it could be upwards of a 3 to 4 week run and bring in revenue of thousands earning hundreds for the playwright.⁶ Another far more

⁵ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁶ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

significant problem was the 1786 *Act for regulating the Stage in the City and County of Dublin*⁷ which was enacted under King George III and served to severely limit the population of Dublin's ability to create or even perform theatre, a huge imposition that restricted any theatrical development – “That from and after the first Day of *June* One thousand seven hundred and eighty-six, no Person or Persons shall, for Hire, Gain, or any kind of Reward whatsoever or however, act, represent, or perform, or cause to be acted, represented, or performed, any Interlude, Tragedy, Comedy, Prelude, Opera, Burletta, Play, Farce, Pantomime or any Part or Parts therein, on any stage, or in any Theatre, House, Booth, Tent, or other place within the said City of *Dublin*, or the Liberties or Suburbs, or County thereof, or within the County of *Dublin*, under any Colour or Pretence whatsoever, save and except in such Theatre or Play-House as shall be to established or kept by Letters Patent as aforesaid, under Penalty of forfeiting the Sum of Three hundred Pounds Sterling”⁸ In short the meaning of this was that any sort of performance was limited to a building which had received a Letter Patent from the Lord Governor and so there was literally a handful of Dublin theatres all of which were now firmly in the British sphere of influence. This act was not amended until 1898 with support from the Irish Literary Theatre; it was changed to allow the occasional granting of a performance licence as long as the profits were for a charitable cause or for a society. It was of course removed after the War for Independence so it had little or no influence in the 20th century. The Act proved to be an extremely restricting pressure on Theatre in the capital as it removed the ability for anyone to put on a play, instead, giving power to a small few theatre managers who were often English. “Dublin can afford no more than one audience”, wrote an anonymous pamphleteer⁹ in reaction to these new laws which

⁷ Name of Act initially found in - *A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000*, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁸ Sourced - National Library of Ireland, Printed 1811, George Greirson of Dublin

⁹ *A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000*, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

shows how little stage and audience space there was in the capital, the city that was also the centre of theatre in Ireland and once the second city of the English empire.

As mentioned before the small population base of individual cities in Ireland led to a very small number of theatres per city. This forced audiences to become a sort of mixing pot for people from different social and political groups which often proved to be a dangerous combination due to the extremely divided nature of society at that time. These theatres were volatile places - "Play-going in eighteenth-century Ireland was, at the best of times, a noisy, boisterous, contact sport, a public bear pit in which servants, parliamentarians, butchers, Trinity students, haberdashers and „ladies of quality“ debated art, sex, politics and fashion”¹⁰ Often this led to violence whether in the form of fighting, full blown riots or the now dead art of orange throwing. The reasons for these reactions ranged from something not liked within the play to clashes of different groups of peoples amongst the audience.

Basically there were too many people trying to find space within the one room. The world outside the theatre was not left at the door upon entering. Audiences did not line up and take their seats in the quiet, ordered and respectable fashion we are accustomed to today. Their behaviour to put it lightly was probably the polar opposite of these standards. The theatre was treated more akin to a forum rather than a simple performance space "many people still thought of the Irish stage as a sort of alternative parliament, both an embodiment of Irish rights and the place in which rights denied could be debated – or, if necessary, demanded".¹¹ The Irish people were under colonial subjugation so the stage and audience spaces were used to give a voice to this population. Theatres were the centre of Irish social and often political life.

¹⁰ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹¹ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

As it is aptly put in *A History of Irish Theatre 1601 -2000* - “Choosing an Irish play for such an audience was sometimes like choosing a bomb that would do the least damage”¹². This meant that the playwrights had to pander to their audiences for fear of violent reactions from or between the many groups within the audience. The effect of this was to limit the type of material that was produced for fear of retaliation. There was little or no nationalistic Irish theatre because it was literally not allowed to be performed and displays of it were often shouted down by various groups within the audience. There were attempts at creating an image of the Irish character on stage in the 18th century most notably by the Sheridan’s but more often than not the influence from England in one form or another prevented this from happening and no widely accepted example of Irish Theatre was produced. Another crippling factor of this was the magnetic pull English theatres particularly those in London had on Irish theatre practitioners. The issue of not being able to generate enough revenue from Ireland’s comparatively small population led to large numbers of Irish playwrights and actors leaving for England to produce English material. This drain of talent is why so many Irish people were English playwrights; a easy example being Oliver Goldsmith. This added to the problem of the distinct lack of Irish Theatre because it was easier and more economically viable to leave it behind to make more money in England. Theatre in Ireland grew continually over the course of the 18th century but Irish Theatre was always left struggling either for acceptance as a form or its performance on stage.

As mentioned before, Theatre space in Ireland was treated as a place where wants and needs could be voiced and so revolutionary theatre sprang up amongst and alongside the United Irishman Rebellion. Robert Owenson, the father of Lady Sydney Morgan, opened and managed a theatre on Fishamble Street which was known as The Music Hall or the City Theatre. Owenson is one of these people who tried to work with the Volunteer movement in

¹² *A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000*, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

the hope that it would support a national theatre.¹³ He “believed this patriotic fervour would support a „national“ theatre”¹⁴ and performed for these new audiences, which were now full of uniformed militiamen from all walks of life that gave an new sense of unity to the heavily divided audiences. Owenson performed a mixture of different plays in this short career but the most prominent of these were tragedies from foreign writers that he adapted by changing the usual displays of landscape and music to ones more inclined towards the Irish cause.

On the 8th of August 1783 in Kirwan’s-Lane Theatre, Galway, Owenson and his group performed a play called *Douglas the Scotsman*, John Home. “*Douglas* is one of a group of heroic tragedies (including Rowe’s *Tamerlane*, Addison’s *Cato* and Voltaire’s *Mahomet*) that were very much a part of the rhetoric of rebellion in the years leading up to 1798. *Douglas*, for instance, was published in at least five Irish editions before 1814: three in Dublin, and significantly, one each in Belfast (1766) and Newry (1786), the heartland of the Volunteer movement”¹⁵ This performance was backed by a Volunteer Colonel called Richard Martin who was the largest landowner in Connemara and surprisingly included the young Theobald Wolfe Tone (at that time he was tutor to the Martin Family) amongst its cast. *Douglas* is a Scottish play but it was adapted simply because this play could fill a void. It was a Scottish play adapted for an Irish audience in order to fill the void that was left by the lacking of our own National Theatre. It was a representation of what was wanted to be wholly Irish but unable to, due to a lack of proper material. This is an example of a want or drive towards National Theatre prior to 1899. Yes the material was not Irish but the people and the demand for it was. Unfortunately however just like the rebellions of 1798 and 1803 the attempt of Robert Owenson failed. As is quoted in the *Freeman’s Journal* about the performance of *Douglas* “Were it not that the Manager’s singular and forcible merit in droning out planxties

¹³ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹⁴ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹⁵ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

and acting spalpeen characters, secured him a round of heel-applause from his good friends in the gallery, we should be apt to stile the *Prelude*, performed last night, a jumble of the greatest balderdash that ever insulted the stage”¹⁶ Now the *Freeman’s Journal* was “at that point in its long history a government organ virulently opposed to Volunteer politics”.¹⁷ This means that the only reliable thing that can be taken from the above quote is where the applause came from, the „upper galleries“ or rather the lower peoples who could not afford a better seat and in turn could not generate enough revenue to support any form of theatre. These were the group from where the most support for a national Irish theatre in both form and function could be found. It is unfortunate also that in no way could their meagre ticket prices support the type of theatre that was so obviously wanted.

This is only one example of a playwright who tried to move towards some form of National Theatre. His failure was not only caused by the lack of money or failed rebellions but also by his “hopeless managerial skills”.¹⁸ Owenson is just one example of a person who tried to assist the push for change. Others can be found from all across Ireland but the fact is that the rebellion they were all part of failed. The success of a national drama tied in with a rebellion depends completely upon the success of the rebels and this case it failed quite badly, once again crushing any hopes the Irish people had for nationality or independence in any form for over a century. The failure of the United Irishman Rebellion happened for various different reasons none of which bear much relevance in this essay. However what does bear relevance is the huge effect the failure had on theatres at the time.

If there was a positive influence however small, that the building and enacting of the rebellion had on theatres, its failure caused a drastic blow to be inflicted on theatrical life in Ireland. On the 30th of March 1798 martial law

¹⁶ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹⁷ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹⁸ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

was declared for eight weeks in reaction to the arrest of the United Irish Leaders which caused the closing down of theatres throughout Ireland leading to uncompensated monetary losses for their owners. This happened once again after the secondary rebellion of Robert Emmet in the summer of 1803, “In the short term, the failed rebellions of 1798 and 1803 – whatever else might be said about them – were bad for theatre business”¹⁹ Despite that they “would have long, lingering afterlives on the Irish stage, and by the end of the 19th century the 1798 play would be a well-established genre.”²⁰ As a result of this the end of the 18th century marked a low point of theatre in Ireland one which would continue until after the Great Famine.

The 19th century saw theatre of the Irish rise from this low period to greater and greater heights, ones which a century previous would have been almost impossible. For the first couple of years there were few significant events happened save for the continuation of the demand for proper Irish material on the Irish stage. A man named Frederick Jones was at the time the most significant theatrical manager in Dublin as he had recently taken over the patent of Smock Alley Theatre after closing down his previous theatre on Crow Street to end competition between the two. This led him to become unpopular amongst many groups due to “him for neglecting Irish plays, and for casting English actors in Irish roles”²¹, Lady Sydney Morgan is quoted in a pamphlet “pointing out that Jones had a „despotic monopoly”²² on the theatres of Dublin, Cork and Limerick”. He still however proved to be a capable as he was able to draw in a full audience and generate enough revenue to eventually in 1819 pass on his patent of Smock Alley to an Englishman named Henry Harris. Harris as a result of this success “was able to demolish the old Crow Street Theatre, and commence work on a much

¹⁹ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁰ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²¹ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²² A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

larger replacement, the Theatre Royal in Hawkins Street, just outside the walls of Trinity College.”²³

The Theatre Royal was the first major 19th century Irish Theatre and marked a point when audience sizes and numbers of theatrical buildings began to slowly but steadily increase. This also happened alongside a veritable explosion of theatrical writing in Ireland. This writing came in the form of daily magazine publishing which “provided a breathless day-by-day account in which social life revolved around the rowdy, boisterous experience of going to the theatre”.²⁴ This shows how much enthusiasm still existed for theatre; it was still the centre point of Irish social life and an integral part of our culture.

Harris continued the trend made popular in the prior century by “simply trying to bring in as big an audience as possible by not offending anyone”.²⁵ Harris’ management or rather his productions created further demand for more Irish material on stages. “In its 7th March 1821 edition, *The Theatrical Observer* commented that it had no objection to an Englishman – Harris- managing „our national theatre“; however, it did object to a steady theatrical diet of the plays from the London stage as a consequence. „If a native of India of the Hindoo Cast, were to succeed Mr Morrison as the keeper of his Tavern“, the *Observer* continues, „he might aswell insist on his Guests eating no dishes but such as Hoschenee, Hurrabubbub, Rice, and Cayenne Pepper soup, because the inhabitants of India prefer those viands to Beef Steaks and Potatoes“.²⁶ What this witty observation in short is saying is – Why should the Irish people be forced to watch London plays just because an Englishman is managing our largest theatre. The demand for more Irish material was not just focused on Henry Harris. It was a nationwide want as there was nationwide dissatisfaction. “Some theatre managers resorted to

²³ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁴ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁵ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

the expedient of introducing Irish songs into existing plays, giving the stage a delightfully absurd production of *Faust* in which the characters sang popular Irish ballads”.²⁷ This bastardized style of theatre did nothing for anyone; the people knew that there was an established Irish Theatre from the prior century the problem was that they could no longer see it in their current one. “The daily theatre press of the 1820’s, for instance, launched a series of campaigns for more Irish plays, and reprinted large sections of Hitchcock’s *Historical View of the Irish Stage*²⁸ to give ballast to the argument that a distinctive Irish theatrical tradition existed and needed to be maintained”²⁹ The want for or drive to a National Irish Theatre might have been temporarily diminished or hindered as a result of the failure of the United Irish Rebellion but as this material shows, it didn’t completely disappear. As time passed it once again began to grow with greater and greater intensity.

If 18th century Ireland was defined by its great rebellion the 19th was defined by its Great Famine. The Great Famine of 1845 – 1849 was a result of three failures of four potato crop harvests and is an unavoidable topic when discussing this period of Irish history. In brief these are some quick facts - Due to outbreaks of Potato Blight (*Phytophthora Infestans*) the cause of which has never fully been proved, upwards of 1 million people perished mostly from disease caused by starvation. Both the level of mortality and level of people whom emigrated to America, Australia and England caused the overall population to drop by over a fifth. This decrease was so significant that only very recently has the population of Ireland regained its previous high water mark. The poor were the social group that suffered the worst as they were the people who relied most upon the potato as a staple part of their diet. For example, before the famine there was over 2,000,000 acres of potato

²⁷ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁸ Robert Hitchcock, Published 1788

²⁹ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

crops whereas after, the number was around 250,000. The fallout from this event was catastrophic and is today treated as one of the darkest chapters of Irish history.

The poorer classes were devastated by this and considering this was also the very classes where the most enthusiastic support could be found for a seeing National Irish Theatre on stage it is worth discussing what effect their suffering had on the theatres that they could no longer attend with their former regularity. The toll the famine took on the poor, for a time caused Theatres to separate from Irish life. While there are still examples of playwrights in the first half of the 19th century attempting to create Irish theatre, this goal, would not really begin to be achieved until the latter half of the century. For example- “For much of the 1840’s and 1850’s the stage of the Theatre Royal had been taken up with opera, and the single most profitable evening in Irish theatre history before 1861 had been the 1848 appearance of the Swedish soprano, Jenny Lind, for whom prices were raised to the „preposterous pitch“ of £1 10s for the dress circle, bringing in a reputed £1,600. That a Swedish soprano singing in Italian should have been the theatrical highlight of a year in which tens of thousands of Irish people died of hunger suggests how far the Irish theatre had drifted from the rest of Irish culture in the 1840’s”³⁰ The huge levels of displaced Irish people as a result of this famine, meant that there was now an Irish audience to be found in almost any major western city, which as time wore on became a very important part of both Irish culture and the development of Irish theatre.

The „opening up“ of America to the world with the invention of the steam engine allowed Irish people to leave the influence of England behind and be free Irish, albeit on foreign soil. This happened at a time when the different issues, presented in this chapter, had combined to almost stop theatre of the Irish from moving forward at all mid 1900’s. It was a thing that people debated about in pamphlets and articles while other English and continental European

³⁰ A History of Irish Theatre 1601 – 2000, Christopher Morash, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

theatre dominated Ireland's stage space. However the displaced Irish immigrants combined with the New World, set the stage for an early international Irish audience that would come to recognize Dion Boucicault as their long awaited champion for the next few decades.

This theatre history reads the same as Irish history before independence; dissatisfaction, violence, foreign imposition and influence, infighting, pandering and an underlying and continuous drive for proper establishment and representation. There is no defining example of Irish National theatre but what is evident is that the want for, and drive to continued regardless of impositions that were inflicted upon it. It existed long before the desires of the Irish Literary Theatre and due to all of these repeated unfortunate circumstances it never materialized. The Irish people were aware of the situation their theatre was in and longed for change to come. The next chapter will explain how this very change was brought about by Boucicault at least for the next fifty years.

The Stage is set. Enter – Dion Boucicault.

“I am encouraged to hope . . . that other greater men, of finer genius and abilities than I possess, may hereafter give you plenty of Irish plays”³¹

*Dion Boucicault, New York Tribune,
30th March 1860.*

This chapter will begin a two part discussion for the purpose of showing the legitimacy of Dion Boucicault as a practitioner of Irish theatre and the significance of his place in history. Firstly the historical impact of Boucicault’s work will be dealt with. The questions being asked are; how the chosen plays came to be and were received, the purpose each of them served, and how, Boucicault’s Irish plays were accepted as proper representations of the Irish people. The second part of this discussion will focus solely on a detailed analysis of his Irish Trilogy and will take place in the third chapter. The individual plays of the Irish trilogy, which is actually not a trilogy but a latter-day grouping of his three most successful and what are considered to be his best Irish plays. These plays; *The Colleen Bawn (1860)*, *Arrah-na-Pogue (1864)* and *The Shaughraun (1874)* are only three out of over 200 plays Boucicault wrote in his life, but are considered three of his most important works.

Dion Boucicault or Dionysus Larder Boursiquot was born in Dublin at some point in the early 1820’s. The exact date is not known as Boucicault was a fan of false information involving his personal life. This was possibly due to the fact that he came from a broken family and might have been an illegitimate son to a childhood friend of his mother. The family moved to London in 1828 due to financial difficulties. In London, Boucicault was schooled; found his interest in drama and from there began his career as a playwright. At twenty he had his first major theatrical success with *London Assurance (1841)* but the method used in England to pay playwrights proved, as it always did, to be too little to support life in

³¹ Dion Boucicault – *Irish Identity on Stage*, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012

London. This method, which has been touched upon in the previous chapter, was to pay the playwright a fixed sum of money that was negotiated before a play's run. The amount would not change no matter how popular the play was. Boucicault was then advised to travel to France where a regular income could be got by adapting French plays to English and selling them. This was a very common method used by both English and Irish playwrights at that time to balance a relatively poor income. After another hit in London with, *The Corsican Brothers* (1852), he left for America to pursue his career further. Five years later in 1857 he had his biggest American hit with *The Octoroon*, a play about slavery. The play was performed a little over a year before the start of the American Civil War and "was clearly a product of a precise time in American social affairs"³²

This is a very short summary of his early career and does not do much justice to his other success", of which included numerous technical innovations in the construction of the stage and effects used through his performances. However since this is a thesis on the importance of his work as an Irish playwright, his Irish plays and the second half of his career will garner the most attention.

Something that must first be established, however, is the image of the Irish person both on and off-stage that Boucicault was going to work against. The Irish were usually represented in works of theatre and other mediums as ape-like sub-humans. This notion was cemented firmly in the minds of many by the famous anatomist Robert Knox who, in his pseudoscientific book *The Races of Men* (1850) "considered the Irish to be the lowest form of civilized man".³³ The Irish were not thought to be a „white“ race; instead they were compared to darker skinned peoples, who at that time held a much lower standing in the eyes of white Europeans. The phrase „Paddy“ was a derogatory term used by the English just like the phrase

³² Dion Boucicault: *Irish Identity on Stage*, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

³³ Dion Boucicault, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 2, Nationalism, race and class in *The Coleen Bawn*

„Nigger“ was used by the Americans. The Irish were not people; they were paddies unless they anglicized themselves and blended in, as so many did.

One year after his success with *The Octoroon*, Boucicault happened across a novel called *The Collegians* by Gerald Griffon. The book itself is set in Ireland, more specifically in Limerick and tells the story of a murder. It is from this novel that inspiration was drawn for the writing of *The Colleen Bawn*, it was drawn very quickly too, for the play was written barely three or four weeks after first picking up the novel. It is important to note that this play was an adaptation and could almost be called an accident as Boucicault literally happened across the book. This was not some new art form the world had never seen. It was a tried and tested method of creating a quick play and was formed using the tried and tested melodramatic format. However Boucicault's talent as a playwright added new function and content to this „old way“. This function and content was the fact that it was a wholly Irish play not just an English piece set in Ireland.

After a successful run of the play in New York and an extremely successful one in London, where all previous box-office records were broken, *The Colleen Bawn* arrived in Ireland. The play was put on a short run of twenty-four nights in the Theatre Royal, Hawkins Street. The run was short when compared to London which was ten months but again the small population led to small audiences. Despite this minor detail, “Boucicault was welcomed back by his countrymen as a prodigal son. He and Agnes were lionized by Dublin society, they were entertained by Sir William and Lady Wilde (the parents of Oscar, who was to become a friend) and whenever they left Gresham's Hotel, where they were staying, crowds of admirers followed them through the streets.”³⁴.

³⁴ Dion Boucicault – A Biography, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, London, 1972.

The play itself was hailed by the Irish as the long awaited national drama “A national drama is, perhaps, the most essential part of a national literature. It not only affords the evidence upon which the verdict of posterity will be based, but it sets a country and its people in their true aspect before those whose opinion is certainly more valuable to them than that of posterity - the inhabitants of other lands. Yet, never was a country better abused by strangers than Ireland by its own dramatists. With the best and most abundant material for a true picture of national life and manners, they content themselves with the success that is to be obtained by raising a laugh at the expense of their own country. It is to their productions and not to the injustice of strangers, that we owe the disparaging estimate of the Celt which, until recently, prevailed in England. A thing of rags and tatters, of blunders and mischief-making, of noise and absurdity – a compound at best of rollicking good nature, impracticable obstinacy and effervescent courage, was the stage Irishman. If Mr Dion Boucicault did no other service, he rectified this ridiculously false impression of Irish character, and upon *The Colleen Bawn* he may fairly found a claim to the gratitude and support of Dublin playgoers”³⁵

For Boucicault at this point in his career the problems that had previously hindered the development of Irish Theatre were insignificant. This „true impression“ of the Irish character was developed away from England. It confirmed itself first with the Irish of New York, who were the largest immigrant group in the city at that time. The play itself is detached from any real issues between England and Ireland, there are hints and nods at different topics but for the most part, the play is simply itself. It was received extremely well in England for its high melodrama and, Boucicault was considered as an English writer there since his career started in London. This detachment from Irish issues, however, did prove to aid its popularity with the New York Irish population, “Boucicault“s portrayal of Ireland contrasted starkly with that

³⁵ *Irish Times*, 8th November 1864, Dion Boucicault – Irish Identity on Stage, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012

as represented by the great influx of destitute Irish immigrants, and undoubtedly also offered an escape from the social reality of that immigration”³⁶. In short, the play reminded the displaced Irish of their real home and gave the Irish at home, the theatre they had been looking for.

Arrah-na-Pogue is a 1798 play which is described by Richard Fawkes as “that rarity, an original Boucicault play”³⁷. This being said it still bears more than a slight resemblance to its predecessor. This resemblance is purely aesthetic however as *Arrah-na-Pogue* is far more grounded in reality. This play is set in Wicklow in the aftermath of 1798 during the period of martial law. Wicklow saw some of the worst fighting of the entire rebellion “marked by horrific and unforgettable atrocities on both sides”. This provides the real backdrop to the actual stage backdrop which was a peaceful image of Glendalough. The hero of the story is an escaped rebel leader while the Irish characters seem to get one-up on the English at every turn. This does not mean that the English are lampooned though; it is all just part of the fun.

Arrah-na-Pogue had more immediate significance for the history of the Irish stage than *The Colleen Bawn* which took more than a year from its initial premier to be performed in Ireland. The reason for this, is that *Arrah-na-Pogue* had its premier in Dublin. Although Boucicault had originally thought of Manchester, he chose his city of birth instead. “For once, Dublin could have first comment on the work of an international playwright, and, as the *Nation* declared „*Arrah-na-Pogue* did not come before a Dublin audience bearing the stamp of a London audience”’s approval.”³⁸. As is obvious from the former, there was a particular pride taken in the fact that this play came from Ireland rather than too it. It was almost as popular as *The Colleen Bawn* on the English stage but proved not to be so. What is interesting

³⁶ Dion Boucicault, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 2, Nationalism, race and class in *The Colleen Bawn*.

³⁷ Dion Boucicault – A Biography, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, London, 1972.

³⁸ Dion Boucicault, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012,

to note within this play is the singing of „The Wearing of the Green“, an Irish rebel ballad, which was sung for a period on English stages. The reason for this is timing. *Arrah-na-Pogue* was performed initially at a time of peaceful relations between England and Ireland, so it was allowed through the net at first probably because of Boucicault’s popularity. Eventually the play had to be rewritten to remove the song, which proved to be the first of many rewrites as the play toured the world. Despite the exclusion of the song from the play it was still sold in sheet music and eventually became the unofficial anthem of the Fenian movement³⁹. “Boucicault evoked the revolutionary spirit of that year and all its connotations while avoiding direct links to contemporary politics”⁴⁰. The year being 1798, enough time had passed for the subject of that rebellion to hold less sensitivity on audiences. To the English it was a funny little play about what goes on „over there“, in Ireland. While to the Irish it had far more resounding implications in the form of its subtle and in the case of its song, not so subtle displays of resistance towards the established, allowed treatment of the problems between England and Ireland.

The Shaughraun is considered to be Boucicault’s finest work and in a similar vein to *Arrah-na-Pogue*, has broader scope than *The Colleen Bawn*. The goal of this play, it seems, is to present the audience with an acceptable image of Ireland and the Irish. It takes a strange turn at the very end of the play and raises an idea on the topic of fighting between English and Irish which is where the similarity with *Arrah-na-Pogue* occurs. This content will be dealt with properly in the next chapter, now the topic is what this play came to stand for.

³⁹ Dion Boucicault – A Biography, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, London, 1972.

⁴⁰ Dion Boucicault, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 3, Music, Myth and censorship in *Arrah-Na-Pogue*

Once again the premier was in New York in Wallacks Theatre “Located at the corner of Broadway and 13th street”⁴¹ on the 14th November 1874. At this time Boucicault had retired from acting apart from the occasional appearance since his official last role in a performance of *Arrah-na-Pogue* in Dublin 1868. Since Boucicault was at that point *the* Irish playwright of the 19th century, he had fully embraced his birth nationality. Despite the fact that he lived most of his time either in London or New York, the city which he was also eventually buried in. Boucicault was seen to be actively involved in the affairs of the Irish at home and abroad. His activities culminated in a letter sent by him, to the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in 1876, in which he tried to use the popularity of *The Shaughraun* amongst the English people to gain freedom for Fenian prisoners that had not yet been pardoned. His work in this area was cut short however after his eldest son, Willie, was killed in a railway accident. This happened twenty-one days after his letter to Disraeli was received just when he began to see “himself as being in a position to take positive action on the Irish Question”⁴²

After this and *The Shaughraun*, Boucicault never had another hit anywhere near the size of any one of his Irish trilogy. His career continued with a few plays of some note but in the end “He was sixty-seven and unable to take the strain of touring anymore. He was also broke. The spiralling costs of touring, the failure of his last three plays, the lessening attraction of his old favourites, his lavishness with money, and the cost of defending the divorce action, had left him penniless. It wasn’t a new situation for him to be in. He had made and lost fortunes in the past, and each time he’d had only to write a new play for his problems to disappear. There was to be no such solution on this occasion. His facility for turning out a hit had deserted him. The man who for so long dictated public taste, no longer knew what that taste was. The

⁴¹ Dion Boucicault, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 5, *The politics of exile The Shaughraun in New York*.

⁴² Dion Boucicault – A Biography, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, London, 1972.

shift in standards and what was, or was not, acceptable confused him.”⁴³ Two years later Dion Boucicault died and it was evident that he had lost touch with playwriting and his material got old quickly. His plays got old quickly because of the amount of times they were performed in Ireland, England and America caused them to effectively lose meaning. They were the safe old options, the initial impact and meaning forgotten or overlooked from being too familiar. The plays that were once considered a new form were themselves replaced in the popular culture for new and more innovative forms.

These three plays were referred to by W.B. Yeats as “that triptych of Irish Theatre”⁴⁴ and are part of what is being referred to in the Irish Literary Theatre’s manifesto as „Buffoonery & Easy Sentiment“. From their massive international popularity to their acceptance as the long awaited Irish play as-well as the improvement in representation, it is obvious that these plays were more than that simple but oft repeated phrase. This chapter has solely dealt with the history of these plays and Boucicault’s career. The next will cover an analysis of the texts as they stand today. This will bring the discussion to a close by showing that the plays were not just simple melodrama pieces but legitimate examples of Irish Theatre from before 1899 or 1891.

⁴³ Dion Boucicault – A Biography, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, London, 1972.

⁴⁴ Dion Boucicault – Irish Identity on Stage, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

An analysis of Boucicault's Trifecta of Irish plays.

This chapter will present a detailed analysis of the three plays discussed in the previous chapter; *The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughraun*. Through an examination of the form and content of each work, this chapter seeks to prove their merit against the criticism of Yeats and Friel. We will explore each text with regards to Boucicault's use of the language, setting, interaction between characters and the message contained within each plot.

The style of language used in these plays is Hiberno-English. All characters, save the English and some of the Anglo-Irish, speak with a very pronounced Irish country „brogue“. This is used as a cultural mark, a declaration of Irishness. The titles of these plays bear example to this, as they are each in the Irish language but spelt with English phonetics. This is similar to the „brogues“ or accents the Irish characters speak with, the dialect is spelt out in English to draw emphasis on the difference of the Irish accent, “It was part of what he had to purvey, the otherness of Ireland.”⁴⁵ These voices are written to be distinctly Irish, their spelling and pronunciation firmly point that out. Rather than just being an English play set in Ireland, in which the characters all spoke the King's English, as was often the case. These were plays about Ireland and Irish people, shown using Irish and English characters at level with each other.

*The Colleen Bawn*⁴⁶ is set sometime before 1798. The play opens on the Banks of Killarney at the Creegan residence. This is not a simple cottage as might be assumed, but an Anglo-Irish household; the centre of the barony that this play is set on. The Creegans are living on the remains of an estate brought to financial ruin by „the Irish extravagance“ of Mrs Creegan's late husband. She is trying to save their home by setting up a well arranged marriage between her son, Hardress Creegan and Anne Chute who is another wealthy landowner. The problem that Mrs Creegan is faced with is, that Hardress is already married in secret to the peasant

⁴⁵ The Politics of Irish Drama – Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel, Nicholas Grene, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 2ndEd

⁴⁶ All text quoted from – Irish Drama Selections 4, Selected Plays, Dion Boucicault, Colin Symthe Limited, 2010, 2ndEd

girl; Eily O'Connor, who is the *Colleen Bawn* of the title, and the most beautiful girl in Connaught. Hardress visits her every night by being taken across the lake which forms part of the backdrop by his faithful companion Danny Mann. Danny is a representation of the then stereotypical stage Irish-man, "Boucicault's comic Irish servants are legitimate descendents of the tricky slaves of Plautus and Terence"⁴⁷ Danny fulfils the role of the villainous Irish servant in this piece. Although the actions he has to carry out are done so under mistaken information which is common plot device in melodrama. The main villain is a magistrate, a type of glorified tax-collector and judge, named; Mr. Corrigan. Corrigan is the „middle-man“ a role which appears in these three plays, all being the villain. These „middle-men“ get painted in a pretty bad light so it will be important to draw comparison with similar characters from *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughraun* before their positions can be fully comprehended.

Eily is a simple Kerry peasant and knows little of codes of behaviour expected from Anglicized women like Anne Chute. Hardress realizes his mistake of marrying Eily. Only after fully realizing the situation his family is in, to which he comments on the idea of bringing his secret wife home "What will my haughty, noble mother say, when she learns the truth! How can I ask her to receive Eily as a daughter? Eily, with her awkward manners, her Kerry brogue, her ignorance of the usages of society" Eily's unsuitability rises from her Irishness, she is a Kerry peasant born and bred, as a result of this is shunned by her „betters“ or those of a more noble birth. Hardress' family whether intentionally or not – closer ties to England and the English. Hardress loves Eily for her looks but dislikes her mannerisms and her origins (the daughter of a rope-maker), to his society she is a „vulgar barefooted beggar.“

⁴⁷ The Politics of Irish Drama – Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel, Nicholas Grene, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 2ndEd

The story of this play is that Hardress needs to marry his childhood friend Anne, to save his family's land. This cannot happen for two reasons the first being that Hardress is already married and the second, is that Anne is in love Kyrle Daly, a college friend of Hardress's. A mix-up occurs where Danny is mistakenly given the order to kill Eily and when Anne confuses Hardress travelling to Eily as Kyrle going to see a secret mistress. As a result of this Eily is almost drowned, while, Danny is shot accidentally by the local poacher and poiteen distiller; Myles-na-Coppaleen. Anne almost has to marry Hardress but in the end, everything works out well, except for Corrigan, who gets thrown in a pond.

There are some interesting comments on what it took for Irish people, in this case women, to climb the social ladder, as built by England. It is most clear during a conversation between Hardress and Eily, where she desperately tries to speak proper English –

Eily. I'll thry, aroon – I'm sthrivin' – „tis mighty hard, but what wouldn't I undert-tee-ta – undergo for your sa-se – for you seek.

Hardress. Sake – Sake!

Eily. Sake – Seek – oh, it is to bother people entirely they mixed „æn up! Why didn't they make them all one way?

Hardress (aside). It is impossible! How can I present her as my wife? Oh! What an act of madness to tie myself to one so much beneath me – beautiful – good as she is –

For Eily to be acceptable to the social circles of Hardress, she must „clean herself' of her brogue, the one cultural identifier she has in this play. This topic is only mentioned twice, this being the first and the second being an incident with Anne. She loses her temper and her brogue slips out causing her to swear in Irish rather than the proper accent she has throughout the play. An analysis of this play can be viewed as problematic because it is an adaptation and not an original work. This fact was declared by Boucicault about a number of his plays. The

above comment is the only component of the plays make-up, that could be directly related to similar issues in 19th century Ireland.

*Arrah-na-Pogue*⁴⁸ is a very different play from *The Colleen Bawn*. The play contains a far more noticeable strain of anti-England sentiment through-out, however that is neutralized by Boucicault's treatment of the English. If this play is anti-England, it certainly isn't anti English. This may sound strange, but, the English characters are all respectable, kind and honourable but are driven by a horrible unseen force called „duty“. The duty of these characters which has to be carried out at times, is always done so with the utmost compassion as these Englishmen, basically, apologize their way through Wicklow. These characters are not here as invaders, instead they are portrayed as ordinary, decent people, who are stuck in a situation that forces them to do terrible things. This is quite a complicated component of the play and is not overtly obvious. It exists solely in the dialogue of the two main representatives of the English military – Major Coffin and the unnamed Cockney Sergeant.

This play has far more depth to it than *The Colleen Bawn* even though it is contained within the same melodramatic form. There are more occurrences of characters connecting with the real world that is outside the theatre door rather than staying contained within its own boundaries. Central to these connections is the historical setting of the United Irishman rebellion. So rather than just being set in a place called Ireland like *The Colleen Bawn* while avoiding the reality of the actual island, this play is physically grounded in Ireland. *The Colleen Bawn* as an adaptation itself, could be easily again be adapted and set in any other part of the world; it is a simple story about the troubles of a beautiful girl. In opposition to this, *Arrah-na-Pogue* is defined by its setting in Ireland and its links to Irish history both recent (at the time) and distant.

⁴⁸ All text quoted from – Irish Drama Selections 4, Selected Plays, Dion Boucicault, Colin Symthe Limited, 2010, 2NDEd

The play opens on a picturesque scene of Wicklow “The Ruins of St. Kevins Abbey, the Round Tower, the Ruined Cemetery, the Lake and Mountains beyond” This magnificently sumptuous picture is symbolic of a time in Ireland before the coming of England, a link to the past and an independent history. “This image of Ireland is linked to its early Christian and mythic heritage, and thus has no links to Britain or to British rule.”⁴⁹

The plot is as follows. In post-1798 Wicklow, martial law has been declared and so it is illegal to travel without a road-pass. The rebel hero, Beamish MacCoul, has returned from exile in France, to marry his lover and escape to America. Firstly though, he steals from a tax collector in a Robin Hood manner to distribute money to the poor. He is almost found and captured at Arrah Meelish’s house during her wedding to Shaun the Post, a cart driver an Irish rogue character similar to Conn the Shaughraun and Myles-na-Copalleen. Beamish escapes but Shaun is imprisoned in his stead. Arrah bears the name of the title because she passed Beamish a key by way of a kiss, that broke him out of prison. Beamish cannot face Shaun being imprisoned and so decided to give himself up to the highest authority in the play; the Secretary of State of Ireland. Unknown to Beamish though, he has already been pardoned for his rebel activities. This information has been suppressed by Bagenel O’Grady, the villain of the piece and another magistrate, in an attempt to steal Beamish’s wife from him. In the end, Beamish is granted a pardon as long as he never set foot on Irish soil again. Everything ends as planned for the other characters, with marriages for most, while O’Grady redeems himself and his „tricky slave“, Feeney is thrown off a cliff. This is similar to the way Boucicault depicted *The Colleen Bawn* but the historical nature of its background alongside its treatment of that history gives rise to a far more significant piece of theatre.

⁴⁹ Dion Boucicault – Irish Identity on Stage, Deirdre McFeely, Cambridge University Press, 2012

The two main English characters deserve further analysing as they are central to this play. What is important is the way Boucicault depicts English/Irish relations.

The Major's very first line reveals him to be a gentleman, he enters and is addressed by O'Grady but before responding, he bows and addresses Fanny as „Miss Power“ and offers her, his service. The Major's plan is to descend upon the house of Arrah to capture Beamish which is what happens in the next scene. Establishing the Major as a gentleman first is important as it reveals to us that there is more to this officer than just his uniform, he is a man first, then an English Major which leads to conflicts contained within this one character later in the play.

Upon his exiting a later scene O'Grady comments “There goes a kind-hearted gentleman, who would cut more throats on principle and firm conviction than another black-guard would sacrifice to the worst passion of his nature” The Major's vision of Ireland is that “the country is agitated” and that “prompt measures are required to restore order”. He hopes that an execution will bring peace to a peace that was disturbed by a very bloody and bitter uprising. The hanging of a civilian in an attempt to bring peace to troubles caused by civilians a rather pointless gesture but the only gesture that the Major knows or is trained to act out. He is a good man a „kind-hearted gentleman“ who is misguided by the principle and firm conviction that stems from the power he represents to become a killer of men. By showing us he is a good man firstly, just like any of the other characters and placing him in the position of executioner we can feel sadness for this representation of England. Rather than hating the Irish, as would be the stereotypical portrayal, he is just the man who is unfortunate enough to be placed in the situation by events beyond his control to have to commit Shaun to death.

The Sergeant is the next character that will be analysed, Boucicault depicts him in a similar manner to the Major. Firstly he throws Feeney out of Shaun's cell despite Feeney being in possession of papers signed by the Major allowing him access to Shaun "Clear out! You mistake the place. This is a man in trouble, and not a badger in a hole to be baited by curs like you." Shaun then begins to weep over his situation in reaction to this, the Sergeant actually comforts him "Come, prisoner, keep up your pluck, don't give way like a girl. This will never do – come, come, heads up, eyes right, you are not at the foot of the ladder yet" His compassion, which is established, here extends further and further throughout the rest of this scene to the point that it becomes one of the most significant moments in the play. After this comforting moment Fanny enters and asks the Sergeant how long Arrah has been waiting outside the prison, to which he responds "Well, miss, she has been lying there all night; the sentry warned her off and I told her that dogs and women were agin the regulations in barracks, but we didn't like to drive the poor thing away, as she promised to be quiet, so there she is." Not only is the Sergeant allowing this poor woman to linger around the barracks he was going against regulations to allow it, just because he could not face having to drive her off. This is a man going against the rules that were laid down by the controlling force in this play, because he does not like action it demands him to act out. The Sergeant is in this play, not because he is part of the scenery like so many other characters that represented a symbol of the foreign influence that England had over Ireland, such as the background soldiers in *The Colleen Bawn*. However instead of acting as a tyrant or being cruel as the English are portrayed as in "The Wearing of the Green" he is a likeable and honest character whom at the very end of the scene is brought right down to the same level as the Irish peasants by two simple lines. The first line is by Arrah who during Fanny's discussion with Shaun about the upcoming trial asks him what an alibi is. Shaun only has a slight idea and tries to explain it to

her. Just as Shaun is about to be led out to the trail he has a short conversation with the Sergeant which establishes one last fact about the character of the Sergeant to us.

Sergeant – Eh, prisoner, how’s the courage, eh? Can I get you anything to get your heart up before the trail?

Shaun – Well, Sergeant dear, have ye such a thing about you as an alibi? Or would yea borry it of a friend?

Sergeant – A halibi! Is it anything in the way of furrin’ liquor?

This conversation goes on but the important part is already established and it is that the Sergeant does not know what an alibi is either. Shaun displays some level of knowledge in his dialogue with Fanny “I don’t rightly know, jewil, but it’s what lawyers always want when a man’s in trouble” which admittedly is not much knowledge but far more than the Sergeant who thinks it might be a type of alcohol. The effect that this has is that it exposes to us that the Sergeant is or at least was also a peasant. So rather than just being an English Sergeant completely separate from the Irish peasants, he is brought down to their level, portrayed as somewhat equals. He sympathizes with the Irish prisoner and helps him in his time of need, the only bad feelings stem from Feeney, an Irish person in service to England

Upon Shaun’s judgement and his depature, O’Grady apologizes for not being able to further help after which an important few lines of dialogue pass –

Major – Colonel, permit me to remark that these observations coming from the Court are subversive of its dignity.

O’Grady – Ah, Major look at that poor girl that lies broken hearted on the body of the man she loves, knowing that there’s not a day’s life in the brest she’s clinging to. It is a hard duty

that obliges a gentleman to put a rope around that boy's neck, while dignity forbids him to say that he's mighty sorry for it.

Major – Prisoner, we deeply regret the sentence, which it is incumbent upon us to pass upon you; but the Court knows only its duty and the penalty ascribed to your crime. The sentence of the Court is – (*the Officers remove their hats*) – that you be taken hence to your prison from whence you came, and tomorrow at daylight, you suffer death, and Heaven have mercy upon you! (*The Officers replace their hats.*)

Shaun – Well, yer honour, I don't blame ye, for you have done your jooty, I suppose, by the King that made ye what ye are – longlife to him! – and that jooty is now to hang me; and I have done my duty by the man that made me and mine what we are, and that's to die for him. I could do no more, and you could do no less. I dare say you would have let me off if you could, so God bless ye, all the same.

The Major's first line, is what he as a judge *has* to say, it is his duty, which is what brings about O'Grady's response as he knows the judge and is the first to inform us that he is a „kind hearted gentleman“. The Major then apologizes to Shaun as he sentences him explaining that he is driven by duty, a duty that is an outside influence being forced upon him by “the King that made ye what ye are”. Shaun puts him and the Major on different sides of the same coin; they are both powerless in their situation and actions, in these circumstances because of their duty to others. It is very clear that neither of them wants to be there going through the motions of unavoidable duty. This is another act of levelling, despite Shaun and the Major being on opposing sides of the bar, they manage to draw a comparison that show how helpless either man is to the events that are forced upon people due to a sense of duty. In this play the English characters lack as much independence as their Irish counter-parts. This

portrayal of the two peoples as equals is an example of progressive Irish Theatre; the Irish were not here considered to be lesser people than the English.

The Shaughraun (1874) is the most contemporary of Boucicault's Irish trilogy as it was set after the failed Fenian uprising of 1867 in contrast to the previous two plays which are each set in the 1790's, respectively pre and post 1798. It is a "romantically pro-Fenian play"⁵⁰ that was again hugely popular in London, Dublin and New York despite representing Irish rebel movements on-stage throughout. This representation and its astounding successes on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and Irish Sea are remarkable for their ability to cross the many divides created by the very subjects which are being treated. There is a subtle part of the story that sets a very different stance for this play on the topic of the problems between English and Irish. This is possibly one of the more significant parts of the play and will be the central part of this analysis. Firstly however a short plot summary is required.

The action centres on Robert Ffolliott a „distinguished Fenian hero“ who is returning to Ireland after being sprung from an Australian prison colony. He was sprung from the colony by Conn the Shaughraun who is the embodiment of Ireland, Irish character or Irishness. The play opens on another idyllic, picturesque location; the cottage of Arte O'Neal at Suil-a-Beg, County Kilkenny but the geographical accuracy of this isn't to be relied upon. At the cottage is Claire Ffolliott who meets the leading English character, Captain Molineux who is an upright and honourable officer. Molineux has been sent to Suil-a-Beg with a detachment of soldiers to track down Robert, a task which he finds a "deuced bore, not to say ridiculous." Molineux and Claire soon begin romancing and at the end of the play; marry. This is significant not just because it is an inter-marriage of Irish/English but also one of rich and poor.

⁵⁰ The Politics of Irish Theatre, Nicholas Grene, Stage Interpreters Pg 9, Cambridge University Press, 2002

The main villain of the play is Corry Kinchela, a magistrate and Harvey Duff, his accomplice. Kinchela is plotting to kill Robert, claim his family home and marry his sister. He is the reason that Robert was sent to prison in the first place which is revealed in a single line of dialogue from Harvey Duff "Was it my jooty to come down here among the people disguised as a Fenian delegate, and pass myself off for a head centre, so that I could swear them in an" denounce „em?" This shows that the Fenian uprising was nothing more than a set-up and its returning hero was never a real rebel. Both of these facts are never revealed to the rest of the characters. Upon returning home Robert has to flee from Molineux"s search but fails and is caught because as the local priest Father Dolan is forbidden to lie when asked about Robert"s hiding place, Robert chooses to give himself up to save the priest from shame. He is then sent to prison where he is broken out by Conn, they both flee with the aim of getting Robert on a boat to America. Robert escapes but Conn is shot by one of Kinchela"s men, Arte and Moya who is Conn"s love interest get kidnapped by Kinchela. Conn remains in his „deathly" state for the purpose of finding out who knows where Art and Moya are from listening to people at his own wake. Robert also returns when it is revealed to him that the English government ordered the release of Fenian prisoners, information which was suppressed by Kinchella for his own ends.

Boucicault portrays the wake scene in a farcical manner with Conn getting up from where he is laid to drink and observe the mourners. He gets the required information from two fellow peasants and an assault on Kinchela"s position by the Irish peasants led by Robert/Conn and the English soldiers led by Molineux. Kinchela is apprehended, Harvey Duff jumps off a cliff and there is a triple marriage. Just before the final marriage between Conn and Moya ends, Conn turns to the audience and presents the situation to them asking for them to hold out their hands and „go bail" or vouch for him and the play he has just handed over.

What is it that makes *The Shaughraun* „Irish“ theatre? It could be the way that it portrays Ireland and the Irish to its audience because this play is attempting to make a „composite“ image of Ireland and the Irish character. The Ireland that is represented in this play is as Nicholas Grene puts it “a composite idea of Ireland which Boucicault offers to his audience, its picturesque scenery, its dialect, its traditional music, all of them equally strange and yet thoroughly familiar in their strangeness.”⁵¹ This is actually his description of the Ireland seen in all three of these plays. They all share the same mixed-up not totally accurate description of place or setting but use the method as an attempt to glorify Ireland’s difference. Boucicault is trying more in *The Shaughraun* than the previous two plays to show a bigger, stranger and more beautiful picture of Ireland and the Irish which explains the inclusion of the wake and why Conn “is there as audience sponsor to inhabit and comfortably interpret the Irish scene.”

As this is a Fenian play it is important to delve further into that matter. As was mentioned before the „rebellion“ of this play is a set-up, a pure fabrication of the magistrate Corry Kinchela which is overcome by an Anglo-Irish alliance. What is being suggested by the former machinations of Kinchela and Harvey Duff is that „middlemen“ are to blame for this fighting between two nations. That all of the trouble is not caused by the individual peoples, who as we see in this play can unite under a common banner, but rather “The agent who stands between the landlord and tenant, unscrupulously exploiting both”. What this play offered more than anything though with its Anglo-Irish marriage and alliance was “an optimistic myth of reconciliation”⁵² This play could “appeal to the inherited sentimental patriotism of Irish-Americans, allay the fears of the English and satisfy the national self-esteem of the Irish.

To conclude, it can be easily seen that there is a lot more to these plays than just melodrama, particularly *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Shaughraun*. The majority of this conclusion will be

⁵¹ The Politics of Irish Drama, Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel, Nicholas Grene, 2002 2nd Ed

⁵² The Politics of Irish Drama, Plays in context from Boucicault to Friel, Nicholas Grene, 2002 2nd Ed

left to the final chapter. These three plays certainly left a mark on history, they are not held in great esteem but they hold an important place in the development of the Irish stage. The plays expose openness and a humanizing outlook towards English/ Irish relations which can be considered mature of its time. There is no denying that these plays and their characters were Irish, it is written in the pages of history by how they were received and what they meant to their Irish audiences.

A monster who forgets – Conclusion.

This thesis began with the unpopularity of 19th century Irish theatre among some quite influential 20th century Irish people. What has been shown throughout these three chapters is the popularity and power theatre always had in Ireland particularly the works of Boucicault. His significance has suffered the worst but what is most obvious out of all of this is that the decline in interest of his works comes not from being bad or un-Irish theatre; it is a matter of taste changing with time. Boucicault was left behind in a world that was rapidly modernizing. In the course of his career he went from being the new and innovative to the old and tired theatre that the Irish Literary Theatre was so adamant to work against in an attempt to create something more fitting for the new age. As we have seen before in the opinions of Yeats and Friel that these works should be left in the 19th century and had no relevance to the 20th. Fortunately for Boucicault however, there were many other Irish playwrights and artists who thought differently and drew inspiration from his works. It is said that George Bernard Shaw drew directly from the court scene in *Arrah-na-Pogue* for the court scene in *The Devil's Disciple*⁵³ and the same for the setting of *John Bull's Other Island*.⁵⁴ In Sean O'Casey's autobiography, he stated "Shakespeare's good in bits, but for colour and stir give me Boucicault".⁵⁵ It is well known that O'Casey, Synge and others as children saw Boucicault performing on stage. Even Jack.B.Yeats has a picture entitled *Of Boucicault and Bianconi* that hangs in permanent residence in the National Gallery of Ireland. Boucicault inspired the next generation of Irish artists in many different ways so it is obvious, that in a historical context, Boucicault is a very significant person in the development of Irish Theatre but as he said shortly before his death "It has been a long jig and I am beginning to see that pathos of it. I have written for a monster who forgets".⁵⁶

⁵³ Dion Boucicault, *Irish Identity on Stage*, Cambridge University Press, 2012

⁵⁴ Dion Boucicault, *Irish Identity on Stage*, Cambridge University Press, 2012

⁵⁵ Dion Boucicault, *A biography*, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, 1979

⁵⁶ Dion Boucicault, *A biography*, Richard Fawkes, Quartet Books, 1979

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