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0521660513 - The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel

Nicholas Grene

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In this book Nicholas Grene explores political contexts for some of the outstanding Irish plays from the nineteenth century to the contemporary period, including *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Plough and the Stars*, with the famous riots they provoked. The politics of Irish drama have previously been considered primarily the politics of national self-expression. Here it is argued that Irish plays, in their self-conscious representation of the otherness of Ireland, are outwardly directed towards audiences both at home and abroad. The political dynamics of such relations between plays and audiences is the book's multiple subject: the stage interpretation of Ireland from *The Shaughraun* to *Translations*; the contentious stage images of Yeats, Gregory and Synge; reactions to revolution from O'Casey to Behan; the post-colonial worlds of *Purgatory* and *All that Fall*; the imagined Irelands of Friel and Murphy, McGuinness and Barry. In reinterpreting its politics, Grene offers a new conception of Irish drama.

NICHOLAS GRENE is Professor of English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin. Grene has lectured widely on Irish literature and is the author of *Synge: A Critical Study of the Plays* (1975); *Shakespeare, Jonson, Molière: The Comic Contract* (1980); *Bernard Shaw: A Critical View* (1984) and *Shakespeare's Tragic Imagination* (1992).

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For Antoinette, Brendan and Terence

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## Acknowledgements

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## Chronology

Dates given for plays are those of first production at Abbey Theatre, unless otherwise indicated; titles given in **bold** are analysed in detail in the book.

DATE	THEATRICAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1860	Boucicault, <i>The Colleen Bawn</i> (Laura Keene's Theatre, New York)	
1864	Boucicault, <i>Arrah-na-Pogue</i> (Theatre Royal, Dublin)	Fenian rising
1867		Execution of 'Manchester martyrs'
1869		Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland
1874	<b>Boucicault, <i>The Shaughraun</i></b> (Wallack's Theatre, New York)	
1879		Establishment of Land League
1880		Parnell elected leader of Irish parliamentary party
1886		First Home Rule Bill

DATE	THEATRICAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1890		Parnell divorce case
1891		Death of Parnell
1893		Second Home Rule Bill
1894	<b>Yeats, <i>The Land of Heart's Desire</i></b> (Avenue Theatre, London)	
1897	Establishment of Irish Literary Theatre	
1899	First season of Irish Literary Theatre	
1902	<b>Yeats and Gregory, <i>Kathleen ni Houlihan</i></b> (St Teresa's Hall, Dublin)	
1903	Irish National Theatre Society founded	Wyndham's Land Act
1904	<b>Synge, <i>The Shadow of the Glen</i></b> (Molesworth Hall, Dublin) Opening of the Abbey Theatre	
1905	<b>Shaw, <i>John Bull's Other Island</i></b> (Court Theatre, London)	Establishment of Sinn Féin
1907	<b>Synge, <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i></b>	
1909	Death of Synge	
1910	<b>Gregory, <i>The Travelling Man</i></b>	
1912		Third Home Rule Bill Ulster Covenant against Home Rule Dublin lockout Home Rule enacted but suspended for duration of war
1913		
1914		

1916	Easter Rising
1919	Establishment of Dáil Eireann Beginning of War of Independence
1920	Introduction of 'Black and Tans'
1921	Anglo-Irish Treaty
1922	Establishment of Irish Free State Outbreak of Civil War End of Civil War
1923	<b>O'Casey, <i>The Shadow of a Gunman</i></b>
1924	<b>O'Casey, <i>Juno and the Paycock</i></b>
1926	<b>O'Casey, <i>The Plough and the Stars</i></b>
1928	O'Casey's <i>The Silver Tassie</i> rejected by the Abbey Establishment of Gate Theatre Company, Dublin
1929	<b>Johnston, <i>The Old Lady Says 'No!'</i></b> (Gate Theatre Company, Peacock Theatre)
1932	Death of Gregory
1937	Fianna Fail government of De Valera New Irish Constitution
1938	<b>Yeats, <i>Purgatory</i></b>
1939	Death of Yeats
1949	Death of Shaw
1950	Abbey Theatre destroyed by fire
1951	Establishment of Pike Theatre, Dublin
1953	<b>Behan, <i>The Quare Fellow</i></b> (Pike Theatre)
1954	Ireland declared Republic

DATE	THEATRICAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1956–62		
1957	<b>Beckett, <i>All that Fall</i></b> (Broadcast BBC, Third Programme)	IRA Border campaign
1958	<b>Behan, <i>The Hostage</i></b> (Theatre Royal, Stratford East, London)	
1961	Murphy, <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i> (Theatre Royal, Stratford East)	
1964	<b>Friel, <i>Philadelphia Here I Come!</i></b> (Gaiety Theatre, Dublin)	
1966	New Abbey Theatre opened	
1967	<b>Friel, <i>Lovers</i></b> (Gate Theatre)	
1968	Murphy, <i>Famine</i> (Peacock Theatre, Dublin)	
1969	<b>Murphy, <i>A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant</i></b>	Beginning of violence in Northern Ireland
1972		Bloody Sunday, Derry
1973	Friel, <i>Freedom of the City</i>	Ireland joined EEC
	Leonard, <i>Da</i> (Olympia Theatre, Dublin)	Sunningdale agreement for power-sharing executive in N. Ireland
1974	<b>Murphy, <i>On the Outside/On the Inside</i></b> (Peacock Theatre)	Power-sharing executive brought down by Ulster Workers' Council action
1975	Establishment of Druid Theatre Company, Galway	
1977	Kilroy, <i>Talbot's Box</i> (Peacock Theatre)	
1979	Friel, <i>Faith Healer</i> (Longacre Theatre, New York)	

1980	Establishment of Field Day Theatre Company <b>Friel, <i>Translations</i></b> (Field Day, Guildhall, Derry)	Hunger strikes in N. Ireland
1981		
1983	Murphy, <i>The Gigli Concert</i>	
	Reid, <i>Tea in a China Cup</i> (Lyric Theatre, Belfast)	
1984	Parker, <i>Northern Star</i> (Lyric Theatre)	
1985	<b>Murphy, <i>Bailegangaire</i></b> (Druid Theatre) Murphy, <i>A Thief of a Christmas</i>	Anglo-Irish agreement
	<b>McGuinness, <i>Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme</i></b>	
1986	Kilroy, <i>Double Cross</i> (Field Day, Guildhall, Derry)	
1987	Parker, <i>Pentecost</i> (Field Day, Guildhall, Derry)	
1988	McGuinness, <i>Carthaginians</i> (Peacock Theatre)	
1990	Friel, <i>Dancing at Lughnasa</i>	
1994	Carr, <i>The Mai</i> (Peacock Theatre)	
1995	<b>Barry, <i>The Steward of Christendom</i></b> (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London)	
1996	McDonagh, <i>The Beauty Queen of Leenane</i> (Druid, Town Hall, Galway)	
1997	McPherson, <i>The Weir</i> (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs)	
1998		Good Friday agreement

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited texts.

Barry	Sebastian Barry, <i>The Steward of Christendom</i> (London: Methuen, 1995, repr. 1997).
Beckett, <i>CDW</i>	Samuel Beckett, <i>The Complete Dramatic Works</i> (London: Faber, 1986).
Behan	Brendan Behan, <i>An Giall</i> , ed. and trans. Richard Wall / <i>The Hostage</i> , ed. Richard Wall (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press; Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987).
Boucicault	Dion Boucicault, <i>Plays</i> , ed. Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
Friel, <i>Lovers</i>	Brian Friel, <i>Lovers</i> (Dublin: Gallery Books, 1984).
Friel, <i>SP</i>	Brian Friel, <i>Selected Plays</i> (London: Faber, 1984).
Gregory, <i>CP</i> , I–IV	Lady Gregory, <i>Collected Plays</i> , ed. Ann Saddlemyer, 4 vols. (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970).
Gregory, <i>SW</i>	Lady Gregory, <i>Selected Writings</i> , ed. Lucy McDiarmid and Maureen Waters (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).
Johnston, <i>Old Lady</i>	Denis Johnston, <i>The Old Lady Says 'No'!</i> , ed. Christine St. Peter (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press; Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992).
McGuinness	Frank McGuinness, <i>Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme</i> (London: Faber, 1986).

*Abbreviations*

Murphy, <i>P1</i>	Tom Murphy, <i>Plays: One</i> (London: Methuen, 1992).
Murphy, <i>P2</i>	Tom Murphy, <i>Plays: Two</i> (London: Methuen, 1993).
Murphy, <i>P4</i>	Tom Murphy, <i>Plays: Four</i> (London: Methuen, 1997).
O'Casey, <i>A</i> , I–II	Sean O'Casey, <i>Autobiographies</i> , 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1963; repr. New York: Carroll & Graf, 1984).
O'Casey, <i>SP</i>	Sean O'Casey, <i>Seven Plays</i> , ed. Ronald Ayling (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985).
Shaw, <i>CPP</i> , I–VII	Bernard Shaw, <i>The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with their Prefaces</i> , 7 vols. (London: Max Reinhardt, 1970–4).
Synge, <i>CW</i> , I–IV	J.M. Synge, <i>Collected Works</i> , 4 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1962–8).
Yeats, <i>CPI</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Collected Plays</i> (London: Macmillan, 2nd ed. 1952).
Yeats, <i>VP</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats</i> , ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 3rd ed. 1966).