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Priming the Pump into Action:

Institutions of Culture, Amateur Drama and Paradigm Shift in 1950s Ireland

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Summary:

Focusing on case studies that deal with An Tóstal and the North Cork Drama Festival, this paper argues that amateur drama festivals, supported by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, dynamically contributed to the paradigm shift that took place within post-war Irish society.

Abstract:

The seventieth anniversary of the passing of the first Arts Act (1951) and the establishment of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon provides an opportunity to reflect on the impact of amateur drama festivals on 1950s Irish society. This research considers the commissioning of the *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (1948), the passing of the first Arts Act (1951), the establishment of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (1952) and the initiation of An Tóstal (1953), as a series of fundamental cultural responses on the part of the government to the reality of a post-war changing society. Consequently, the research on which this paper is based argues that the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon support for local communities that fostered cultural appreciation was an essential element to the state's response to this deteriorating economic situation. Focusing on case studies that deal with An Tóstal and the North Cork Drama Festival, this paper argues that amateur drama festivals, supported by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon,

dynamically contributed to the paradigm shift that took place within post-war Irish society. Despite a perception that Irish culture was in decline a plethora of literary output, coupled with evidence from the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon / An Chomhairle Ealaíon archive, demonstrates that these festival communities looked to culture as a means of creatively addressing that which 'could not be spoken of in official Ireland' (Garvin and Fanning, 2014, p. 186).

Key words: The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon; Paradigm Shift; Cultural Policy; Amateur Drama; Festival; Cork

Introduction

The seventieth anniversary of the passing of the first Arts Act (1951) and the establishment of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon provides an opportunity to reflect on the impact of amateur drama festivals on 1950s Irish society. At its inaugural meeting in January 1952, both the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera and opposition leader John A. Costello remarked on the economic and social benefits of cultural development. According to a precis of those speeches, de Valera remarked that,

> The task that lay ahead for An Chomhairle Ealaíon was difficult. We were living in a world where material forces held sway…He hoped the efforts of the Council would succeed and win for our nation a worthy place in the realms of culture (Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon 1952a).

Costello echoed de Valera's sentiments about materialism and emphasised the economic importance of the development of art and culture to industry (Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon 1952b). In his reply, the director PJ Little TD expressed the hope that the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon's work would 'instigate and inspire cultural activities - so to speak to prime the pump into healthy action' (Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon 1952c, p.4).

Truth emerges from how society conceives of itself and deals with the challenges it faces (Foucault 1984). As the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon sought to culturally 'prime the pump into healthy action' the state began to experience a contraction in the buoyancy associated with Ireland's engagement with the European Recovery Programme or Marshall Plan (Whelan 2000). Despite the initiation of many capital projects by the end of 1952, the social consequences of this economic contraction soon became apparent (Irish Independent 1952, p.6; Donegal Democrat 1955, p.10). Unemployment rose and emigration, which had been a reality of life for almost two centuries, devastated local rural communities and led to the widespread expectation that by the end of the decade, Ireland as a nation would be extinct (Keogh *et al.* 2004). Joe Lee (1989), Brian Girvin (2010) and Timothy McCarthy (2011) have argued that a lack of engagement with new economic and social thinking underpinned this crisis.

In this context, my research considers the commissioning of the *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (1948), the passing of the first Arts Act (1951), the establishment of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon (1952) and the initiation of An Tóstal (1953), as a series of fundamental cultural responses on the part of the government to the reality of a post-war changing society. Consequently, one can argue that Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon support for local communities that fostered cultural appreciation was an essential element to the state's response to this deteriorating economic situation. Like CEMA in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland before it (Moggridge 2005), by providing grants and guarantees against loss for amateur drama festivals, the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon engaged in the creation of cultural communities at a time when Irish society was severely challenged economically, politically and socially.

A recent essay by Finian O'Gorman argues that amateur drama in Ireland tends to be seen as a springboard to professional theatre rather than as a

cultural entity in its own right (O'Gorman 2019, p.205). My research examines the cultural impact of the amateur drama movement on the paradigm shift that began in 1950s' Irish society. While this is the broad context, the research on which this paper is based, focuses on the role of amateur drama festivals within rural Ireland and the various ways in which amateur drama articulates a cultural response on the part of rural Ireland to the crisis facing society in the 1950s and 1960s. Such responses included the establishment of the An Tóstal and the North Cork Drama Festival which are the subject of this paper.

Institutions of Culture: State engagement with Cultural Development

In his *Report on the Arts in Ireland* Professor Thomas Bodkin (1949) argued that in the first two decades after Irish independence, the development of culture had regressed rather than developed in stature within the state. Though there had been a Ministry of Fine Arts established in the 1920s, subsequent cabinet changes had resulted in the diminution of the place of culture in government policy (Bodkin 1949). Though the development of cultural policy was promoted by PJ Little TD and Erskine Childers TD, it was not until after the 1948 general election before it was considered by the government (McCullagh 2010).

Established under the first *Arts Act* (1951), the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon was the second of what became a global movement. This arts council movement emerged from the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain which succeeded the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) under the direction of John Maynard Keynes in 1946 (Sinclair 1995). Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, the arts council movement spread to other countries with a colonial past including Canada, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, the United States of America and Australia (Upchurch 2016). The global spread of national arts councils, together with Article 27 of the *United*

Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1949) which focuses on the development of cultural life, provides a global context for the work undertaken by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Keynes' cultural vision sought to empower society through the development of culture and envisaged a world where people worked to live rather than living to work (Moggridge 2005). Bodkin, like Keynes, saw the broader social impact of cultural education and the development of cultural communities throughout society. He was at pains to demonstrate the economic and social benefits that an arts education and appreciation would have for the state (Bodkin 1949). These benefits included industrial design, the income generated by artists, built heritage as well as an increase in employment along the 'western seaboard and in districts in our country where our people are living upon a bare subsistence level' (Dáil Éireann 1949). The Dáil and Seanad debates which took place before the passing of the first Arts Act also scrutinised the spiritual, economic and social benefits of culture to the state.

A year after the publication of the *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (Bodkin 1949), Senator W.B. Stanford speaking in the Seanad on the local government bill, argued that artists and writers make a significant economic contribution to the finances of the state through the sale of their works that would be equal in value to that of farming or industry. He lamented the lack of support for artists and writers and contrasted this support with that shown to the farming and manufacturing community (Seanad Eireann 1950). In the same debate, Senator Eleanor Butler challenged those listening to realise that cultural and political change came from 'millions of ordinary people like ourselves' (Seanad Eireann 1950).

Faced with an emerging crisis, influenced by the successful Festival of Britain, and the Marshall Plan's encouragement to develop the tourism industry, in 1952 the Inter-party government initiated a National Festival,

known as An Tóstal (Irish Times 1952a; Whelan 2000). As a consequence of An Tóstal, towns and villages throughout the country established numerous festivals of Irish culture and amateur drama that were supported by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon. Between 1952 and 1968, it supported approximately seventy-four cultural festivals and amateur drama groups in towns and villages throughout the country. These festivals took place in Dublin, Bray, Athlone, Tubbercurry, Galway, Wexford, Bundoran, Charleville, Cobh, Laois, Waterford, Gorey, Ballyshannon, Sligo, Dungloe, Ballinrobe, Clonmel and Cork amongst others. The promotion of An Tóstal and support of associated festivals was rooted in a new understanding of the potential economic benefit of cultural tourism (Kennedy 1990). Festivals and organisations which received support at this time included the Wexford Opera Festival, Tuarim, Comhaltas Ceólteorí Eireann, the Yeats International Summer School, the Clare, Western, the All Ireland (AIDF) and the North Cork Drama Festival's (NCDF). Despite a perception that Irish culture was in decline a plethora of literary output, coupled with evidence from the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon archive, demonstrates that many communities looked to arts and culture as a means of creatively addressing that which 'could not be spoken of in official Ireland' (Garvin and Fanning 2014, p.186) during a time of socio-economic strife.

The national festival was organised through a voluntary effort which resulted in the establishment of twenty-two local An Tóstal councils that were expected to expand to 'between 50 and 60' nationwide (Irish Times 1952b, p.4). Supported by An Tóstal staff, these councils had voluntary responsibility for the development and encouragement of tourism in the locality. The national organiser of the festival, Major General Hugo MacNeill, stressed, that An Tóstal was cost-neutral for the state while increasing tourism 'by up to 50%' (Irish Times 1952b, p.4). The travel industry had demonstrated significant interest in the festival with expectations that An Tóstal visitors would spend up to '£189,000' over the three weeks of the 1953 festival (Irish Times 1952b, p.4).

While An Bord Fáilte and Fógra Fáilte had both been allocated £250,000 for their expenses that year, some of which had been allocated to An Tóstal, '[t]he financing of the scheme throughout the country [was] being done locally…with Tóstal councils raising their own funds' as the national headquarters were prohibited from making grants due to a lack of available resources (Irish Times 1952b, p.4).

McNeill's comments about how the responsibility for An Tóstal events lay with the local committees while the national festival would be 'cost neutral' indicates the reality of cultural investment at the time. In 1951, Costello had encouraged the Dáil, despite the 'present pressing matters of economic, financial and social policy,' to take responsibility for the development of art within 'our national tradition' (Dáil Éireann 1951). However, at that time, Costello acknowledged that in comparison to 'Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Portugal', the financial allocation for the development of the arts contained in the Fine Arts bill was 'of insignificant dimensions' (Dáil Éireann 1951).

The 'Living Irish Theatre:' Rural Ireland responds to State Cultural Development

In October 1952 at the invitation of those organising An Tóstal, the Amateur Drama Council of Ireland (ADCI) was formed by representatives of ten pre-existing drama festival committees, Bord Fáilte, An Tóstal and Westmeath County Council (Donegal Democrat 1952, p.3; Irish Times 1952c, p.4). In time such collaboration would see the development of an informal cultural network involving the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, Foras Eireann, the Cultural Relations Committee and the Carnegie Trust, among others. The *Irish Times* (1952c, p.4) noted that provision was to be made to include 'the nominees of the Enniskillen, Ballymoney and Newry festival committees, and any other Northern Ireland festival committees who may be interested.' The festival director, Cecil Ffrench Salkeld, welcomed committees from Northern Ireland

'as it was desirable that they should compete and take part in the movement' (Irish Times 1952c, p.4; Allen 2009).

The first All-Ireland Drama Festival (AIDF), which had been proposed in 1951 by Matt Devine, director of the Western Drama Festival, took place in Athlone in 1953 (Smith 1977). From the beginning, drama groups and producers from Northern Ireland staged several plays at the AIDF (Mallon and Pollak 2019). The reciprocal arrangement between the AIDF and the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals was recognised in 1974 by both Prime Minister Harold Wilson and An Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave. Both premier's commended the organisations for their continued commitment to cross border amateur drama co-operation (O'Brien 2002). It is remarkable at this early stage in the development of what would become the amateur drama movement that there was a determination to establish an event that would anchor and promote amateur drama in all provinces (Donegal Democrat 1952, p.3). The decision by the newly formed ADCI to invite participation from drama festivals and companies from Northern Ireland indicated a shift on the part of ordinary citizens that attempted to transcend politics and use culture to build unity across communities (Smith 1977).

The North Cork Drama Festival

As rural Ireland struggled with emigration, emerging festivals provided entertainment, community engagement and political criticism through the adjudication of plays performed on the amateur drama circuit of the time (Smith 1977; Wills 2015). Like the AIDF, the first North Cork Drama Festival (NCDF) had been initiated by St. Colman's Players in Charleville as part of An Tóstal in 1953. The need for a regional drama festival had been 'apparent for many years' and benefited not only Cork amateur drama but became 'a source of interest and entertainment to the general public' (Limerick Leader 1953, p.12). The success of An Tóstal defied expectations and buoyed by the

experience many communities pursued the development of these cultural events.

In April 1953, the *Limerick Leader* (1953, p.12) reported that the first NCDF had made 'a useful contribution to Ireland's cultural revival.' The paper commented on the positive progress made in developing the organisational infrastructure and the venue of the Parochial Hall in Charleville which was supported by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon scheme for the development of stage facilities in local halls. However, for The Kerryman *(1954, p.3)* the real achievement of the NCDF was that it had

> proved to thousands of people in North Cork and Limerick that the living Irish theatre...is a native Irish culture of which our people are becoming keenly conscious to a degree that was not thought possible a decade ago.

The breadth of local community drama groups present at the festival demonstrated an appreciation of theatrical culture within the lives of ordinary people coping with the reality of austere living (Limerick Leader 1953, p.12). These groups included: Coachford Dramatic Society, Co. Cork, Ballylanders Dramatic Group, the Rathluairc Gaelic Players, Killeedy Dramatic Society, Newcastle West Dramatic Society, Dromcollogher Drama Circle, Shandrum Gaelic League, Mitchelstown Drama Society, the Parteen Players, Limerick and the Abbeyfeale Players among others. The engagement of these drama groups together with the manuscript competitions and autumn drama schools enhanced and developed this lived experience of rural Irish theatre. In this respect, the 'living Irish theatre' was a response on the part of these local communities to the reality of post-war living in rural Ireland.

A powerful impression of the social and cultural importance of amateur drama for rural Irish society was evident in adjudicator Bryan MacMahon's remarks at the opening of the 1956 North Cork Drama Festival;

> in rural Ireland, with its many ills, there were three outstanding places which had done something to use their own resources; they were Charleville, Tubbercurry and Scariff. If everybody in rural Ireland did as much, the country would have fewer ills (Limerick Leader 1956, p.13)

Festival plays like Walter Macken's *Mungo's Mansion* (1946), and *Home is the Hero* (1953), Joseph Tomelty's *All Souls Night* (1955), John B. Keane's *Sive* (1959) *and* Tom Murphy's *On The Outside* (1959) presented aspects of the social issues to which MacMahon referred. Domestic violence, slum living, the arranged marriage of minors, illegitimacy of birth, lack of adequate sanitation and prevalence of preventable disease were portrayed on the festival stage. Such portrayals were staged in the years following Dr Noël Browne's resignation from the government as a consequence of the political controversy surrounding the provision of day-to-day health care of mothers and children (Irish Times 1951, p.1). Because of the failure to observe social expectations, many women and their children were harshly treated and hidden in Industrial schools, Magdalene Laundries, as well as Mother and Baby Homes, to which the Irish government delegated and abrogated responsibility for their care to religious orders. The social expectations surrounding marriage and the plight of those born outside them was a theme explored by Keane's *Sive* at the Clare, North Cork and All-Ireland Drama Festivals in 1959.

The *Report on the Arts in Ireland* (Bodkin 1949), had argued that the development of an informed audience was central to the promotion of culture in Ireland. Echoing Bodkin (1949), in 1958 Brendan O'Brien, director of the All-Ireland Drama Festival, attributed the strength of the movement to the increased participation of drama groups who 'have the audiences behind them' (Cork Examiner 1958a, p.5). As the festival grew in popularity among drama companies, audiences grew proportionately, with capacity audiences recorded by the popular press on each night of the festival. The 1956 festival

attracted an audience of 4,500 people over twelve days which had, according to MacMahon, ‘put Rathluairc in the forefront of Irish Drama’(Irish Press 1956, p.7). Throughout the twelve days, one hundred and forty-seven amateur actors had staged ‘[t]hirteen full length plays and six one-act’ placing the festival on a sound financial footing (Irish Press 1956, p.7). In 1959, the festival staged ‘the largest, most interesting and varied selection of plays’ to an audience of ‘over 4,000 people’(Cork Examiner 1959a, p.16). Such mass movements of people, which were replicated in other festivals throughout the decade, indicated not only the success of these cultural events but an incremental shift within the population as festival audiences were challenged to question social issues that were theatrically addressed on stage.

Consequently, as James Stack recognised, amateur drama festivals made ‘an important contribution to a more liberal culture’ (Cork Examiner 1958b, p.7). According to Stack, ‘[d]rama...broadens our sympathy, enriches our imagination, enables us to understand human nature a little better and helps us to become wiser and more balanced men and women’ (Cork Examiner 1958b, p.7). The balanced impact outlined by Stack could be seen in the presentation of plays by Joseph Tomelty, John B. Keane and Tom Murphy at the festival which served as a commentary on the socio-political reality of Irish society at the time.

In encouraging those present to be engaged with the development of theatre, Mr O'Brien remarked that 'the professional theatre is in the doldrums at the moment' (Cork Examiner 1958a, p.7). Mindful of Archbishop McQuaid’s objection to certain plays at the 1957 and 1958 Dublin Theatre Festival’s, O'Brien urged his listeners to 'steer away from the sordid paganism of outside influences, while at the same time rising above the unhealthy mediocrity of much that passes for drama' (Cork Examiner 1958a, p.5; Cooney 1999; Cullen and Ó hÓgartaigh 2012). Such outside influences included the emergence of popular music, radio, cinema, television and newspapers all of

which during the 1960s would provide a challenge to the success of the amateur drama movement.

A year after Archbishop McQuaid's disastrous engagement with the Dublin Theatre Festival, Stack's view was echoed by Canon T.F Murphy, parish priest of Buttevant, Co. Cork when he opened the 1959 NCDF on behalf of the Bishop of Cloyne, John Ahern. Indicating the shift from rural to urban living taking place during this decade, Murphy argued that rural drama groups 'come to the drama festival, to teach us, who live in towns, the true way of the stage' (Cork Examiner 1959b, p.7). For Murphy, urban society 'had not measured up to their opportunities in matters dramatic' producing 'very little for dramatic art, comparatively speaking'(Cork Examiner 1959b, p.7). The rigour of the drama festival served as a corrective to such an experience in that it equalised all groups before the 'highly critical and intelligent audiences and the cold searching balanced judgement of adjudicators' (Cork Examiner 1959b, p.7;5). Taking up Canon Murphy's theme, the chairman of the festival, Father Barry reminded the audience that it was for the 'humble group, which had never won an award and which was, perhaps making its first appearance at a drama festival' that 'the amateur drama movement was founded.'(Cork Examiner 1959b, p.5). Despite Archbishop McQuaid's, negative engagement with drama festivals, it appears that outside the pale, many clergy and religious did not necessarily share McQuaid's view of drama.

Between 1953 and 1968, the NCDF staged a total of 272 plays. Sixty-one per cent of these entries were full-length, and thirty-nine percent were one-act plays. Throughout Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon minutes a qualification that 'plays by Irish Dramatists should form a larger part of the Company's productions than heretofore' was placed on many drama companies (Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon 1954). Consequently, sixty-eight percent of plays performed at the North Cork Drama Festival between 1953 and 1968 were by Irish playwrights. The Arts Council/An Chomhairle

Ealaíon was committed to the promotion of Irish drama and literature which it appeared to do by making this a condition of the awarding of grants. Arguably, in this and a later emphasis on funding theatre companies that staged plays by Irish dramatists, one can discern an early example of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon using its funding strength to influence the direction of the art form.

Emerging Playwrights

In 1954, Bryan MacMahon had suggested that the NCDF include a manuscript competition 'because somewhere in the country there might be a budding playwright who could do honour to their festival' (Kerryman 1954, p.3). According to O'Gorman (2019, p.15), Tom Murphy's and John B. Keane's playwrighting careers emerged from the amateur drama movement where 'Murphy and O'Donoghue considered it possible to reject the Abbey's ethos because they felt emboldened to write and stage a play themselves.' Playwrights whose work broke new ground at the festival included Tom Coffey's three plays *Anyone could Rob a Bank* (2020a), *Them* (2020b) and *The Call* (2020c); Tom Murphy and Noel O'Donoghue's play *On the Outside* (1959) as well as Samuel Beckett's play *Come and Go* (2009). In 1959, returned émigré John B. Keane's first play *Sive* marked a turning point in the life of amateur drama in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This play proved to be a significant moment in the stories of the North Cork and All-Ireland Drama Festivals, provoking an argument about the combination of melodrama and realism throughout the early 1960s (Evening Herald 1963; Smith 1977; O'Gorman 2019).

In Keane's play, the titular character named Sive, is an illegitimate orphan whose parents both died in tragic circumstances (Keane 1959, p.13). Her uncle Mike Glavin and aunt, Mena, together with her grandmother, have cared for Sive throughout her childhood. Though still at school, she is legally

old enough to marry as in the 1950s the legal age for marriage was 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy (Childers 1972; Daly 2016, pp.161–3). Sive's aunt and uncle collude with the matchmaker, Sean Rua in making the arranged marriage with Seán Dota, a man of elderly years with the prospect of a payment of 'Two hundred sovereigns' which Mena will receive following the successful exchange of vows (Keane 1959, p.20).

Marriage as a contract between two individuals is dependent on the provision of full and free consent of both parties. The transactional arrangement of this marriage against Sive's will is an aberration of social equality and the removal of agency in her life. In arranging the marriage, Sive's guardians rationalise that they are rescuing her from the shame surrounding her birth, guaranteeing her a secure, if unhappy, life. In contrast, Sive focuses her hopes for a better life on education and a wish to marry Liam Scuab, a distant relative. Her ambitions for social advancement are curtailed by the decisions made by the adults in her life; placing their need for financial security above that of the child.

Aged unions, whereby a bachelor would put off marriage until later life to secure and farm the land had been a widespread practice since the famine (Ferriter 2009). Young brides in rural Ireland were favoured because of their ability to engage in hard work and produce children (Ferriter 2009). However, as depicted in the play, for some such arranged marriages proved to be detrimental to the women's physical and mental health (Ferriter 2009). The outcome of such an unhappy future for Sive's character is despair and eventual tragic death. In another indication of the emerging paradigm shift of the 1950s and 1960s, as young men and women asserted greater freedom to choose their life partner, the need for such marriages of convenience declined (Daly 2016).

Though taking issue with Sive's lack of agency in the third act, Aileen Coughlan's (1959, p.8) exploration of the plot and characters of the play treats the declining social convention of arranged marriage without judgement in the context of its time. The play's characters evoke horror, rage, sympathy and terror as audiences are challenged to reflect on issues of consent, responsibility, freedom, feminism and class that are portrayed on stage. Hugh G. Smith (1959, p.1) in his *New York Times* column compared the excitement surrounding *Sive* to that which greeted Sean O'Casey's work in the 1920s. For him, the success of *Sive* provided 'a good prelude to the ambitious second [Dublin] International Theatre Festival' which, as already alluded to, had been abandoned due to 'controversies over the inclusion of Sean O'Casey's play, *The Drums of Father Ned* and Alan McClelland's dramatisation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Smith 1959, p.3). Smith expressed shock at the rejection of the play 'by the directors of the Abbey Theatre [which was] acclaimed by the people as a work of the moment'(Smith 1959, p.3).

Conclusion

One can argue that the paradigm shift of the 1950s and 1960s is a reinterpretation of the essence of Irish culture by a post-war generation (Williams 1961). In the plays presented at the North Cork Drama Festival, one can see the challenges of agency, the desire of the young to forge a future society that meets their needs. The older generation, which also dreamt of a post-civil war society that promised to provide for their needs, in striving to control the environments in which they find themselves are coping with the disappointment of governmental failure to deliver that which the 1916 proclamation promised. In another way, the young adults depicted in these plays are manifestations of Raymond William's (1961) process of the inter-generational transfer of culture. However, there is a continuity of tradition (Girvin 2010; Daly 2016), which it can be argued transmits the essence of Irish culture through a variety of cultural networks that change from generation to

generation This continuity of tradition, ensures that the culture of a previous generation remains connected with, and influential on, contemporary life.

One can see the struggles of that handover depicted by Mena and Mike in failing to care appropriately for Sive, Kathrine's lack of trust in *All Souls Night* and the blunt description of social control in *On the Outside*. This tension is also demonstrated in remarks made by those opening the festivals including Bryan MacMahon and Brendan O'Brien. One can also detect such resistance in the controversy surrounding Archbishop McQuaid's objection to the Dublin Theatre Festival as well as the Abbey Theatre's initial rejection of *Sive,* the repercussions of which reverberated throughout the early 1960s. One generation represents the culture that has emerged from poverty and suffering, the impatience of a younger generation with that which has gone before, represents the emerging culture that finds expression in a more open and yet still oppressive 1960s Irish society.

It is notable that throughout the 1950s the ever-present crisis and chaos produced by the Cold War was a continuous aspect of the reporting of news alongside the mundane aspects of the development of cultural festivals like those in North Cork and Athlone. This ongoing embrace of culture at a time of significant global and national challenge illustrated the need of these communities to find a means of encouraging solidarity, co-operation and wellbeing. What is also notable is the encouragement by adjudicators of criticism and discussion of plays at the festivals which, considering the cold war reality of post-war Ireland, included the application of insights from the plays to daily living.

Though the adjudicator awarded points and prizes, his / her insights were not the last word on the play itself. The encouragement of audience debate on the play, the performance and the interpretation by the adjudicator provided opportunities for audiences to engage critically with issues arising from such

plays that went, beyond the 'thinking that culture was measured by the number of facts learned by heart'(Cork Examiner 1957, p.5). The development of a critical audience through participation in the festivals demonstrated that the assertion that 'knowledge was too much for other people,'(Reuters 1957, p.5) did not apply to amateur drama. It also demonstrated that, as James Stack recognised, once engaged with a high standard of festival play and production, audiences became more critical in their thinking and open to expanding their cultural horizons.

The amateur drama festivals generated a type of social power through their engagement with An Tóstal and the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon. Through various adjudicators and openers of festivals, audiences engaged with philosophical responses to the issues of the day. The cultural communities that supported these festivals were held up as examples of how to engage society's challenges constructively. These challenges include the ravages of unemployment, emigration, lack of opportunity, partition, the impact of new media, and globalisation on society's social fabric. Through the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and associated bodies, the government sought to develop culture so that it could maintain morale (spirituality) and take advantage of the resulting economic benefits. The All-Ireland Drama Festival and North Cork Drama Festival, among others, transcended the government's intentions, questioned the impact of state policies and engaged the development of meaning within society. Such was the value of these festivals, born at a time of national crisis, that their work continued until the global pandemic of 2020 severely restricted the production and performance of live theatre.

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