

---

## THE FREEDOM OF THE THEATRE IN THE IRISH FREE STATE 1922-1929; OR, THE BULLET DODGED

by Joan FitzPatrick Dean

**D**espite strict regulation of print and film, Ireland never institutionalized stage censorship. Although many writers proudly proclaim that there is no stage censorship in Ireland, *de facto* instances of censorship—ranging from the withdrawal of support by a patron or funding agency to riots—regularly occurred throughout the twentieth century. Periodically, literary figures as well as religious and political organizations have called for a dramatic censor. The theater, however, has long enjoyed an anomalous standing in regard to censorship in Ireland. The criteria for censorship remain among the most sensitive indicators of a culture's sense of itself—always wedded to a particular time and a particular place.

How and why theater eluded the threat of censorship is rightly seen in the larger contexts of the movement toward and resistance to the legislation of censorship and of Irish stage history between 1922 and 1929. From a legal perspective, part of the answer lies in the fact that the regulation of printed materials was unrelated to the licensing of stage plays for production. The Theatre Act of 1843 and previous legislation that created and established the pre-production licensing of plays by the Lord Chamberlain did not apply in Ireland. The Free State legislation to censor printed material passed in 1929 repealed a British act that dealt specifically with publications, not with stage performances. Although stage plays were often published, the British laws regulating publications were independent of those governing theatre. But beyond this legalistic understanding lies a more revelatory tale of how and why theatre eluded institutional censorship.

During the earliest years of the Irish Free State pressure steadily mounted to legislate censorship. As Robert Welch notes, “an increasingly pious set of public opinions on morality, sex, and belief . . . had formed very quickly after the foundation of the Free State, as if in reaction to the anarchy of revolution and its aftermath.”<sup>1</sup> Film censorship was quickly enacted “under cover of night”<sup>2</sup> in 1923 and its scope widened to include film advertisements in 1925. Legislation affecting printed material and theater, however, was fiercely contested. Between the appearance of articles by Rev. Richard S. Devane, S. J., in 1925, the government's Committee of Enquiry's Report in 1926, Devane's *Evil Literature* in 1927, and the eventual passage of legislation in 1929, opposition to censorship was expressed by government ministers, writers, and others. Perhaps the most prominent vocal opponent of censorship legislation was Minister of Justice Kevin O'Higgins. Frank O'Connor argues that O'Higgins's opposition to censorship was so forceful that “it was not until after his assassination in 1927 that a censorship bill could be introduced.”<sup>3</sup> Two years after O'Higgins's death, on July 16, 1929, the Censorship Act repealed the Obscene Publications of 1857 and instituted an administrative censorship.

Among the goals of both the legislation and the committee's 1926 proposal was the protection of the young, the poorly educated, and the vulnerable. Young, poorly educated, and vulnerable, however, were hardly descriptive of theater audiences, especially at the Abbey Theatre. Although theater-going in Ireland in the first half of this century was preponderantly

an urban phenomenon in a predominately rural society, calls for regulation of the stage emanated from diverse sources: urban and rural; secular as well as religious; fevered as well as closely-reasoned. The Irish Vigilance Association and the Catholic Truth Society, for instance, were extremely active in their censorship crusades at the same time that the latter organization was conducting a vigorous literacy campaign. As a vigilance society, the Catholic Truth Society encouraged members to identify if not seek out obscene or objectionable material for censorship, but as a literacy advocate it also organized lectures and published hundreds of inexpensive booklets. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s it not only annually reported its record of success in having works banned or withdrawn but encouraged literacy by promoting its own publications.<sup>4</sup> Theater censorship was well within its purview. For organizations like the Catholic Truth Society, a distinctly Irish censorship, consonant with its conception of Ireland as a Catholic country, was one of the prerogatives if not obligations of the Irish Free State.

A more ambiguous attitude toward censorship could be found in *Honesty*, a muckraking Dublin weekly, the readers of which included Sean O'Casey. In 1925 and 1926 *Honesty* covered a wide spectrum of issues ranging from tax reform and medical quacks to animal cruelty and public health. Although many of its concerns now appear risible or alarmist, *Honesty* was surprisingly progressive in candidly addressing issues not consonant with the conception of Ireland as a Catholic country: divorce, married women working outside the home, illegitimate children, and prostitution. Its interest in public mortality focused on dance halls, cinema, and music halls, all which were considered far more dangerous than the "legitimate" stage. As in the legislation eventually enacted, the accessibility of young or poorly educated audiences figured prominently in the remedies proposed.

A blueprint for censorship appeared in the February 1925 issue of the eminently more respectable *Irish Ecclesiastical Review*. In "Indecent Literature" Devane called for legislation to censor a wide range of works, including newspapers, books, pictures, and photographs as well as stage plays. For the next twenty-six years, until his death in 1951, Devane tirelessly campaigned for censorship of foreign publications. In response to the Catholic Truth Society, *Honesty*, Devane, and many and varied other calls for censorship, the Cosgrave Government appointed a five-member committee of enquiry that conducted public hearings in 1926, and subsequently moved into private sessions.

"To help maintain public interest" in censorship, Devane published his account of the committee's public hearings accompanied by his own refutation of witnesses and recommendations in 1927 in *The Committee on Evil Literature: Some Notes of Evidence*.<sup>5</sup> The Committee of Enquiry on Evil Literature, which had been established by the Cosgrave government the previous year, had neither acted with the haste nor produced the results Devane and others believed the censorship question demanded. Devane argued against three "stock objections" to censorship: first, that the need for censorship was grossly exaggerated; second, that existing laws were adequate to deal with indecent printed material; and third, that such censorship would interfere with the freedom of the press. Like the Committee's final report, Devane's argument was constructed through a comparative analysis of censorship in other English-speaking countries, a common feature of arguments both for and against censorship. Devane refers, for instance, to the Canadian model for blacklisting works such as Joyce's *Ulysses* and books by Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes. He also draws on evidence given in the 1923 hearings of the Select Committee on the Matrimonial Causes Bill in England, which examined the impact of salacious newspaper coverage of domestic disputes and divorce proceedings.

Devane's was not an overtly anti-intellectual approach. He disclaimed, for instance, the notion that his proposals would compromise the freedom of the press and, in fact, paid tribute to Irish journalism:

We are not dealing with the liberty of the Irish press, but with the license of the extern press. Hence, I suggest that the proposed legislation be not directed against the home press, but to the outside press. To my mind Irish journalism and the Irish press are as near perfect in this matter as any press can be. (16)

Devane's nationalism compounded his indignation over foreign publications. Assuming that Ireland was morally superior to England, Devane called for "a new legal definition of 'indecent' or 'obscenity' in harmony with the standards of sexual morality obtaining in Saorstát Éireann" (52). Censorship, he argued, would protect the fledging Free State press and publishing industry. Couched in praise of and solidarity with ordinary Irish people, Devane anticipated objections to his draconian proposals from "cranks . . . erotic bohemians, [and] 'unconventional' highbrows" (46). And draconian his proposals were: state licensing and taxation of wholesale and retail news vendors with provisions for fines and imprisonment; a National Vigilance Association "not alone as regards printed matter, but also in relation to the stage, the music halls, the commercialized dance halls . . ." (40); and an admittedly "prohibitive" (23) tax of fifty percent on most foreign periodicals. In a flourish of rhetorical legerdemain, he argued for "a protective tax as a further and final test of the Government's unqualified sincerity in its attempt to Gaelicize the nation's youth" (22) and to nurture native Irish journalism. Devane took particular care to refute Minister O'Higgins's assertion that existing laws were adequate to deal with indecent and immoral printed materials. What was needed, Devane said, was "*drastic legislation of a prohibitive character*" (38, his italics).

In comparison with Devane's suggested remedies, the 1926 report of the government's Committee of Enquiry was less extreme.<sup>6</sup> There was considerable weight given to the medium, cost, and availability of works that were to be censored, which certainly drew attention away from the stage. Low-cost paperbacks were targeted, as were English Sunday papers that carried detailed reportage of divorce cases. The Committee's report made specific mention of only two works of fiction: James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which it noted was banned in Canada at the time, and an edition of Rabelais which drew the Committee's notice because it was not only unexpurgated but also cheap. Like the legislation enacted in 1929, the Committee's nominal target was neither the serious literature nor the Irish press but sleazy newspapers, inexpensive paperback editions of raunchy books, and anything that dealt with birth control. The Committee's recommendations were not, however, comprehensively accepted in the 1929 legislation. For instance, its call for a "large censor board, numbering at least 30" was rejected.<sup>7</sup> Although the Committee of Enquiry as well as Devane's *Evil Literature* had urged the banning of Joyce's *Ulysses*, it was not then nor at any time since banned.<sup>8</sup> Just as the Committee of Enquiry's recommendations moderated Devane's proposals, the legislation moderated the Committee's proposals. In the process, theater censorship was either overlooked or sidestepped, not least as a consequence of the controversies surrounding the decade's most famous playwright, Sean O'Casey.

At the beginning of the decade, the atmosphere in Dublin was hostile if not inimical to theater. The curfew in Dublin was moved back from midnight, to ten, then to nine, and finally to eight. By March 1921 all but the Theater Royal had closed and would remain closed,

even after the truce of July 11, until August of that year. Lennox Robinson recalled “a dreadful day in the spring of 1921”<sup>9</sup> when he had to dismiss the Abbey Company. After the curfews of 1920 and 1921 were lifted, venturing out for an evening performance could still be dangerous; consequently theater attendance fell off sharply. Amidst the violence and disorder of the Civil War, the nation could not agree on what the nation should be, let alone on an agenda for its national theater. Moreover, as Hogan and Burnham note, “by 1922 many more people were getting their drama in the cinemas than in the theaters.”<sup>10</sup> During 1923, in response to threats of violence against theaters that did not close on days when IRA prisoners were scheduled to be executed, armed guards were posted at the Abbey to permit the theater to remain open in relative safety.

After the Civil War, the atmosphere was hardly conducive to theater going. Several explanations for the continued lack of audience interest were suggested. The Abbey was faulted for relying too heavily on a limited repertory of plays. In February 1924 Lennox Robinson lamented to the Oxford University Irish Society that “the patrons of the theatre consisted almost entirely of visitors to the city . . . members of neither university seemed to take any interest.”<sup>11</sup> The Irish audiences that did make their way to the theater were often chastised in the press for unruly, disruptive, and impolite behavior, especially inappropriate laughter. Worse, Abbey actors were criticized as unprofessional and occasionally reprimanded for their mugging, scene stealing, “gagging,” and interpolation of extraneous dialogue. After the uncertainties and disruption of the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars, Robinson lamented that “the starriest of the [Abbey] players sought their living elsewhere.”<sup>12</sup>

The Abbey’s ability to attract Dublin audiences reached a celebrated turning point in April 1924 with the appearance of O’Casey’s *The Shadow of a Gunman*. With the subsequent premieres of *Cathleen Listens In*, *Nannie’s Night Out* (both 1924), and *Juno and the Paycock* (1925), O’Casey quickly established himself as what the Abbey had lacked since Synge’s death: a native playwright who would not only win international acclaim but also attract Irish patrons. The two-week rule, restricting the number of consecutive performances of any given play, was soon waived for the sensationally popular *Juno*.<sup>13</sup>

In the mid-1920s vigilance societies continued to target specific stage productions for protest. In 1925 the Gaiety Theatre produced Leon Gordon’s *White Cargo*, which premiered in New York on November 5, 1923, and proved a commercial success in several American cities as well as London. It dealt explicitly with a sexual relationship between an unmarried West African woman and one of four white men living on a rubber plantation. Although its Dublin run was uneventful, *White Cargo* caught Devane’s attention and was singled out in *Evil Literature* as demonstrable proof of the need for stage censorship.

By 1925 the state subsidy of the Abbey vastly complicated the question of theatrical censorship. In November 1923, the Free State established a precedent for theatrical subsidy through an annual grant of 600 pounds for An Comhar Drámaíochta, the consolidated Irish-language company. In the face of growing Abbey debts, Yeats and Lady Gregory wrote President Cosgrave on 27 June 1924 to “offer the Abbey Theatre, its entire contents, scenery and wardrobe and the property it owns to the Irish Nation.”<sup>14</sup> Fourteen months later, the Abbey received a subsidy of 850 pounds from the Free State. The subsidy mandated government representation on the Abbey Board, bringing the number of directors to four: Yeats, Gregory, Robinson, and now the economist George O’Brien, the first director who was not a playwright. Although repeated stipulations specified that no measure of control or

ensorship would be afforded the government representative, O'Brien was conscious of the vigilance societies and nationalistic organizations that were prepared and eager to stage their protests against the Abbey.

Only a month after the subsidy was announced, in September 1925, O'Brien expressed reservations over the language and the suggestion of incest in Lennox Robinson's *The White Blackbird*. To Joseph Holloway, he voiced his fear that the "Catholic Truth Society might picket or demonstrate."<sup>15</sup> But like *White Cargo*, Robinson's play did not arouse the public animus.

O'Brien's anxiety over *The White Blackbird* was, however, only prelude to much graver anxieties over *The Plough and the Stars*. On 5 September 1925, O'Brien wrote Yeats to argue that Rosie Redmond's "professional side is unduly emphasised."<sup>16</sup> His most vigorous objections to O'Casey's play, specifically to the song sung by the prostitute Rosie and to the use of the word "bitch," were addressed in cuts before rehearsals began. The other directors, Yeats, Gregory, and Robinson, offered more general assurances that more cuts would occur during rehearsals. O'Brien's concern, at least as expressed to Yeats and Lennox Robinson, was that he act not as censor but "as the watchdog of the subsidy," guarding against attacks on the theater and, concomitantly, its state funding.<sup>17</sup>

The ensuing and now legendary battle over O'Casey's play was central in assuring that stage censorship was never enacted in Ireland and, as Julia Carlson asserts, was never seriously considered.<sup>18</sup> Language was the primary concern, both for O'Brien, who focused on "objectionable expressions" and "vituperative vocabulary,"<sup>19</sup> and for Michael J. Dolan, O'Casey's detractor and the play's original producer, who found the language "beyond the beyonds."<sup>20</sup> In rehearsal, the actress Eileen Crowe objected to her character, Mrs. Gogan, saying that none of her children had entered this world within the boundaries of the Ten Commandments. With O'Casey's consent, some cuts were made, but, on 10 January 1926, he wrote to Robinson to protest what he described as "a Vigilance Committee of the Actors . . . to avoid further trouble, I prefer to withdraw the play altogether."<sup>21</sup> Even before the play opened on 8 February 1926, it had already survived challenges from many fronts: O'Brien and others successfully argued for cuts and alterations; the rejection of certain lines by actors necessitated recasting; at least three clerics, consulted by O'Brien, Eileen Crowe, and May Craig (the actress who eventually played Mrs. Gogan), vetted the play; Lennox Robinson replaced Michael J. Dolan as producer; O'Casey himself had threatened to withdraw the play.

No opening night in Dublin was more anticipated in the decade. The first week was sold out—the best houses, reported Lady Gregory, since *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* in 1909. The opening night audience included prominent politicians, statesmen, and artistic figures. The well-documented Dublin reviews were very positive, some ecstatic. Box office for the second week was very strong. Despite all the pre-production challenges *Plough* faced, the premiere itself was a huge and conspicuous success.

So conspicuous was its success that *Plough* became an obvious target, and the Abbey Theatre again became the very public staging area for a wrenching but profitable cultural confrontation. The exact nature of what transpired in the theater has been the subject of widely disparate, even contradictory, accounts. Several of the cast members recalled the violence visited upon them. Others reported disturbances or protests. Yeats famously proclaimed the disorder as O'Casey's apotheosis. Writing in the *New Statesman* only a month after the premiere, R. M. Fox noted that "[t]he play nearly provoked a riot when it was produced at the Abbey Theatre, and it was held up one evening while a protest was made."<sup>22</sup> For others, however, especially

for American critics of the past quarter century, what happened was a riot: Robert Lowery, in *A Whirlwind in Dublin*, subtitled his book "*The Plough and the Stars*" Riots; David Krause, the editor of O'Casey's letters, described a "rioting Irish mob."<sup>23</sup>

The disruptions of the play's fourth performance exposed how numerous and how diverse objections to the play, its author, the Abbey, its subsidy, and the Cosgrave government were. Most of the pre-production challenges focused on language, often on individual words, but subsequent challenges shifted the focus to the political dimension. Although Mrs. Gogan's line about the Ten Commandments remained and no one else appears to have found the line disturbing, the coarse language was still a source of complaint. Joseph Holloway took umbrage at the Irish prostitute, Rosie Redmond. Others objected to bringing the Irish flag into a public house. Still others complained that O'Casey's Citizen Army was portrayed as cowardly. In *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* Margaret Ward asserts that the "relatives of some of the men of 1916--Mrs Barrett, sister of Sean Connolly, . . . Fiona Plunkett, Sheila Humphreys, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Maud Gonno--together with members of Cumann na mBan and the IRA all turned up to protest that 'their men didn't drink.'"<sup>24</sup> Among the widows and sisters of the 1916 martyrs, the most outspoken and articulate, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, attacked the Abbey subsidy by speculating: "Could one imagine [Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 1* being received with enthusiasm in the French theatre of the time, subsidised by the State?"<sup>25</sup> She and others vigorously objected to the use of police to quell the demonstrations. She also asserted that there was no basis for a moral objection to *Plough*; her protest was on national grounds alone. Under the aegis of "national grounds," however, would have fallen resentment over, first, the government subsidy of the Abbey; second, the play's treatment of the 1916 rebels; and third, the fact that the Cosgrave government not only subsidized the theatre but turned out in force for this premiere. (Three of the protesters, Dorothy Macardle, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, and Kathleen Pearse, would all serve on the Fianna Fail Executive formed in opposition to the government later in 1926.)

The precedents for the disruption of *Plough*, especially the turmoil surrounding the 1907 Abbey production of *Playboy* and the more recent 1914 Westport riot over George A. Birmingham's *General John Regan*, assured demonstrators what they most coveted: extensive, sustained press coverage. Lady Gregory, who traveled from Coole to Dublin after learning of the Thursday night demonstration, dismissed the protesters as habitual publicity hounds: "These disturbers were almost all women who have made demonstrations on Poppy Day and at elections and meetings; have made a habit of it, of the excitement."<sup>26</sup>

The ensuing debate over *Plough* recapitulated many of the arguments over censorship in general and over the landmarks of stage controversy in Ireland: Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* in 1899, *Playboy* and *The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet* in 1909, and *General John Regan*. Peter Kavanagh, for instance, argues that "the situation was reminiscent of Edward Martyn's objection to *The Countess Cathleen*, for it was said O'Brien had also submitted *The Plough and the Stars* to a theologian."<sup>27</sup> Yeats's inaudible denunciation of the disruption from the Abbey stage initiated the linkage of *Plough* and *Playboy*. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington extended that linkage to support her position by citing Arthur Griffith's argument that in suppressing protests of *Playboy* Yeats had compromised the freedom of the theatre:

Mr. Yeats has struck a disastrous blow at the Freedom of the Theatre in Ireland. It was, perhaps, the last freedom left to us. Hitherto, as in Paris or Berlin to-day

or Athens two thousand years ago, the audience in Ireland was free to express its opinion on the play. Mr. Yeats has caused that freedom to be taken away. It is the Freedom of the Theatre for the playwright to produce what he pleases and for the audience to accept or reject as it pleases.”<sup>28</sup>

This assertion of Freedom of the Theatre, as capitalized by her, cut two ways: both the advocates and detractors of *Plough* used the identical argument, that they were exercising a cherished and by now distinctly Irish freedom—to hear or to disrupt a play—that their enemies would deny them. In the protracted and well-documented exchange of letters and articles in the press, as well as in the public debate between Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and O’Casey, the question of the audience’s freedom to express offense by disrupting the performance (by booing and hissing and, in this case, throwing shoes and storming the stage) was hotly contested. So diverse were complaints about language, slurs on Irish womanhood, the perceived cowardice and drinking habits of the Citizen Army, the precedent for bringing the tricolor into a public house, the mission of a national theater, the propriety of a government subsidy, and the nature of the Freedom of the Theatre that the threat of stage censorship was diffused rather than intensified.

The most immediate effect of the disruption and subsequent debate was seen at the box office. Yeats was once again correct in recognizing how good for business controversy was. Perhaps that is why before he strode on stage to deliver his now famous “You have disgraced yourself again” speech, Yeats had not only prepared his remarks but also arranged for their distribution to the morning newspapers.

So politicized were the disruptions of and debate over *Plough* that the threat of stage censorship diminished. Many of the attacks on *Plough* implicitly embraced the ideal of a morally superior Catholic Ireland, but Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington was largely correct in positing that objections were made not on moral but political grounds. Although O’Casey openly provoked moral outrage, over the neglect and death of Mollser, for instance, the attacks on *Plough* did not rise to his challenge. In the year of the tenth anniversary of the Easter Rising, *Plough* exposed how little political consensus there was in the Free State and how impossible stage censorship would have been to legislate.

The models for stage censorship, especially those that might have been drawn from Britain, were unworkable if not unthinkable in Ireland. Living or recently deceased public figures were proscribed in London but commonplace in Ireland—as seen in several plays from the 1920s, including *Plough and the Stars*. Dramatizations of Irish history, such as Frank Dalton’s 1924 *Wolfe Tone* or Dorothy Macardle’s 1925 *The Old Man*, not only brought historical figures on stage but would have been seen as treasonous by the Lord Chamberlain. The phenomenal growth of Irish theater in the early twentieth century owed much to nationalistic inspiration that was outside and in some ways antithetical to much of the better studied and documented work of Yeats, Gregory, and Synge. Its history included nationalistic plays performed by small companies like Countess Markievicz’s that regularly produced plays that blatantly defied British standards. Lady Gregory and others brought to the Irish stage passion plays, mystery plays, and moralities that sometimes drew not upon the lives of the saints, but the lives of martyred Irish nationalists. The Lord Chamberlain’s ban on plays that depicted Christ or that dealt with religious figures ruled out such works, including several by Lady Gregory such as *The Story Brought by Brigit* (1924).

In the 1920s, despite if not because of the disruption of *The Plough and the Stars*, Irish

theatre claimed a privileged and anomalous place that it has retained ever since. The Irish stage gloried in flaunting its freedom from the Lord Chamberlain. In much of the thinking and writing about censorship in Ireland in the 1920s and beyond, considerable attention was paid to the likely prospective audience or readership and theater, especially the Abbey Theatre, was the least susceptible on this count. Two years later, the Catholic Truth Society protested the Limerick production of *Biddy*, “in which the priesthood was caricatured,”<sup>29</sup> and forced the cancellation of plans to honor the playwright, Laurence Cowen, in Dublin, but its energies now focused on printed material, not on the theater. The Irish stage eluded the draconian censorship Devane had proposed and remained *sui generis* not only in comparison to the harsh censorship of printed matter that emerged in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s in comparison but also to Britain and other English-speaking countries. Like their counterparts in 1899 and 1907, the most conspicuous theatrical protesters in 1926 were neither hostile toward theater nor enthusiastic about censorship. In November 1928, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington denounced the pending censorship legislation as a “ridiculous and impossible” instance of Free State paternalism “fostered or suggested by the monastic, celibate type.”<sup>30</sup>

Three decades later, in 1956, Sean O’Faolain would speak of seven censorships affecting printed material in Ireland.<sup>31</sup> At least that number (potential censorship by producers, by directors, by government representative, by actors, by playwright, by public disruption, by mob action) were overcome in the 1926 Abbey production of *Plough*. Also in 1956, Norman St. John-Stewas, in *Obscenity and the Law*, wrote that since uproar over Synge’s plays in Ireland “there have been various demands for the institution of a theater censorship, but these have met with little response. As a result the Irish theater has been considerably freer than the English . . .”<sup>32</sup> The fledgling Irish Free State was not even four years old when O’Casey’s play illustrated that its citizens were hardly monolithic in their values, their sense of Irish history, let alone their understanding of the freedom of the theatre.

## Notes

1. Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 94.
2. Michael Adams, *Censorship: The Irish Experience* (University, AL: U of Alabama P, 1968), 17.
3. *A Short History of Irish Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1967), 223. In 1927 the Catholic Truth Society actively lobbied political candidates in the General Election, “to give an undertaking to use his or her influence, if elected, to secure that full legislative effect will be given the Committee’s findings, as soon as possible.” Less than one third of the 376 total candidates, made such a commitment. Of the 112 who did, only 50 were elected. See Catholic Truth Society, *Report for Year Ended 30th June, 1927* (Dublin: Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 1927), 7.
4. The publications of the Catholic Truth Society included a number of stories or novellas by J. Bernard MacCarthy, the Cork writer, whose plays *The Supplanter*, *Kinship*, *Crusaders*, and *Gurranabraher* (or *The Long Road to Gurranabraher*) were performed by the Abbey. In 1928 the Catholic Truth Society reported that it had effectively checked the purchase by Catholics of the “anti-Catholic” *Children’s Encyclopedia*. See Catholic Truth Society, *Report for Year Ended 30th June, 1928* (Dublin: Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 1928), 6.
5. Rev. R. S. Devane, S. J. *The Committee on Evil Literature: Some Notes of Evidence*. (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1927). Subsequent references given in the text refer to this edition. Earlier versions appeared in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 28, in August 1926 (357-77), November 1926 (449-66), and February 1927 (583-95) as “The Committee on Printed Matter.”
6. F. O’Reilly, *The Problem of Undesirable Printed Matter: Some Suggested Remedies* (Dublin: Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 1926).
7. O’Reilly, 45-46.

8. R. S. Devane, *Evil Literature: Some Suggestions*. (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1927).
9. Lennox Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey Theatre: A History 1899-1951* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1951), 120.
10. Robert Hogan and Richard Burnham, *The Years of O'Casey 1921-1926* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1992), 116.
11. Hogan and Burnham, 188.
12. Robinson, *Curtain Up: An Autobiography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1942), 55.
13. Eileen Crowe, "Eileen Crowe Tells Her Story," *The Abbey Theatre: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. E. K. Mikhail (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 131.
14. Gregory and Yeats to Cosgrave, 27 June 1924, in Robinson, *Ireland's Abbey*, 125.
15. Hogan and Burnham, 274-75. Holloway "assured him that none of these things would occur. That the worst thing that would befall the piece was a falling off in the audiences during the week." See Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre*, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1967), 246.
16. George O'Brien to W. B. Yeats, 5 September 1925, *The Letters of Sean O'Casey 1910-41*, ed. David Krause, vol. I (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 144.
17. O'Brien to Yeats and Robinson, 13 September 1925, quoted in *Letters of O'Casey*, 147.
18. See Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer* (Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 1990), 3.
19. O'Brien to Yeats, 5 September 1925, *Letters of O'Casey*, 145.
20. Dolan to Lady Gregory, 1 September 1925, in *Years of O'Casey*, 282.
21. O'Casey to Lennox Robinson, 10 January 1926, *Letters of O'Casey*, 166.
22. R. M. Fox, "Sean O'Casey: A Worker Dramatist," *New Statesman* (London), 26 (10 April 1926), 805.
23. Krause, *Letters of O'Casey*, 226.
24. Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (London: Pluto, 1983), 205.
25. Letter to the *Independent*, 23 February 1926, quoted in Holloway, 260.
26. *Lady Gregory's Journals*, quoted in *A Whirlwind in Dublin: The Plough and the Star Riots*, ed. Robert G. Lowery (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984), 54.
27. Peter Kavanagh, *The Story of the Abbey Theatre* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1950), 135.
28. Arthur Griffith, "The Playboy of the West," *Sinn Fein*, 9 February 1907, 2. I have quoted Griffith's original words, which are condensed and reordered in Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington's letter to the *Independent* cited above.
29. Catholic Truth Society, *Report for 1928*, 6.
30. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, "Woman's View of Censorship," *Irish Times*, 23 November 1928, 11.
31. Adams, 150.
32. Norman St. John-Stevas, *Obscenity and the Law* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1956), 178.