‘We Belong to the World’: Christine Longford’s War Plays During Irish Neutrality

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Despite the critical and popular success of Christine Longford’s dramas she is now rarely celebrated as a playwright but more often remembered as simply the wife of Lord Edward Longford and a financial supporter of the Gate Theatre. There are multiple reasons why her eighteen plays and numerous adaptations for the stage have suffered neglect. Chief among these is the bias against the examination of women’s work for the stage but a further reason her dramas are overlooked is that the majority of them were staged in the 1940s, a period often dismissed for producing parochial and uninspiring theatre unworthy of critical attention. It is the intention of this chapter to show that Christine Longford’s plays are deserving of investigation for their complex negotiations of Irish identity within international contexts, criticism of censorship and advocacy for women’s rights.

Christine’s venture into the world of theatre began in 1930 when Edward financially saved the Gate Theatre from bankruptcy (Cowell 10). Edward, upon learning the Gate would otherwise close, bought the remaining shares of the theatre and effectively became the majority

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shareholder (Fitz-Simon 66). From that point forward, the Longfords became increasingly involved in all aspects of the administration and artistic output of the theatre until finally splitting into Longford Productions in 1938 – still housed at the Gate but separate from ‘the Boys’, mac Liammóir and Edwards (Billington *xii*). This split was a result of growing tensions over whether the theatre should participate in a tour of Egypt. Mac Liammóir and Edwards were for the tour, and Edward against (Fitz-Simon 89). Ultimately, the decision was made that ‘the Boys’ would operate under the name Edwards—Mac Liammóir Dublin Gate Theatre Productions Ltd., and the Longfords under Longford Productions, each group occupying the theatre space for half a year at a time (Fitz-Simon 93, 95).

With Longford Productions, Christine wrote and produced numerous scripts and found her footing as a playwright. She continued to work closely with the Gate well past her husband’s death, right up to her own. In fact, after Edward’s death in 1961 Christine helped to dissolve the separation between ‘the Boys’ and Longford Productions and became a Director of the Dublin Gate Theatre Productions and acted as the Gate’s manager for many years (Fitz-Simon 237). While her administrative roles gave Christine prominence, her achievements as a writer are well worth noting, particularly since they have never received due recognition. This chapter will look specifically at three plays Christine Longford wrote in the early 1940s. These plays are a departure from Longford’s earlier work in terms of content and tone. Each drama centres on a historical war or rebellion, but Longford uses these historical moments to indirectly critique the government, specifically the role of women in Ireland, as well as Irish neutrality during World War II. As Cathy Leeney has noted, Longford’s writing critiques ‘the failure of the new state to fulfil the idealism that informed its foundation’ (178). This is especially true of the history plays Longford wrote in the 1940s, which critique both women’s limitations in Ireland and the idea of the country being insular, reflecting on the ways Ireland was and continued to be culturally international.

The 1940s was in many ways the most restrictive decade of the twentieth century for Irish women. The passing of the 1937 constitution enshrined the government’s view that a woman’s place should be within the home, and increasing censorship made it difficult for women to fight back against this oppressive legal framework. This decade was in large part defined by Ireland’s neutrality in World War II, a period from 1939 to 1945 known locally as ‘The Emergency’. The name derived from a

constitutional amendment called the Emergency Powers Act that allowed for stricter governmental control. The act itself stated:

The Government may, whenever and so often as they think fit, make by order such provisions as are, in the opinion of the Government, necessary or expedient for securing the public safety or the preservation of the State, or for the maintenance of public order, or for the provision and control of supplies and services essential to the life of the community. (*Emergency Powers* 2.1)

Effectively, this meant that the government had the means to secure control over almost any area of society and social expression they wished. Censorship was not new to Ireland. For example, in 1923 the Censorship of Films Act established an official censor to certify that pictures were 'fit for exhibition in public' (*Censorship* 5.1). This act gave the censor the right to withhold any film that was deemed immoral, specifically 'indecent, obscene or blasphemous' (*Censorship* 7.2). What changed within the Emergency was that limitations on what could be censored expanded widely, and the basis for restrictions became vaguer. No longer were censors looking only for obscene or blasphemous material. Now any material deemed threatening to 'public order', or offensive to 'friendly foreign states', could be disallowed (Wood 86). This meant that any material that spoke out against Ireland's neutrality could be censored.

The language of the Emergency Powers Act did not specifically reference theatre and stage plays as opposed to, for instance, print publications. This lack of explicit proscription provided theatre makers with a unique ability to push the boundaries of political and social critique. Nevertheless, as Ian Wood notes, 'as in peacetime, [...] theatres could be licensed or have their licences taken from them, and the latter was a threat that theatre managements knew they had to accept as a reality' (93). Given the vagueness of official proscription, and the overarching censorship that prevailed in areas such as film and journalism, the risk to use the stage as an outlet for critique was palpable, making Longford's achievements even more notable.

In November 1940, for example, the Gate Theatre was urged to withdraw its production of *Roly Poly* by Lennox Robinson due to the unsympathetic portrayal of a German soldier (Ó Drisceoil 52). While not officially told to remove the play, 'the producers were approached by the Department of Justice and "reminded" of the equivocal position of the

Gate under the 1745 Act relating to the licensing of theatres' (Ó Drisceoil 52). Christine Longford navigated these risks during the 1940s with her own plays, using both her work and position to critique the rampant censorship present in Ireland.

One of the few accounts of Longford's life is found in *No Profit but the Name*, written by John Cowell, an actor who worked closely with the Longford Players. In this account, it is clear that Christine and her husband Edward's lives were considered very much entwined. Overall, Edward Longford is far more remembered in theatrical history, thanks to his own plays and his financial contributions to the Gate Theatre, but Cowell notes: 'it is opportune to point out to readers of this book, and particularly to feminist readers, that every time Edward's name appears, Christine's, if not specifically mentioned must be understood to be implied' (Cowell 58). Cowell reiterates the Longfords' influence on each other and in this way points out that Christine had more authority in theatrical endeavours than it may have appeared. Leeney notes that Longford 'was in the very positive and fortunate position of having access to a theatre to stage her work' and was thus perhaps more privileged than other women writers of the period (163).

Christine wrote numerous novels but concentrated solely on play-writing after her fourth novel was published in 1935 (Billington *vii*). While her first play, *Queens and Emperors* in 1932, was neither a huge flop nor a big success, Longford continued to grow as a writer, subsequently reflecting that 'I did better later' (qtd in Cowell 89). As time went on, Longford's writing became increasingly focused on Ireland, and during the 1930s her plays and novels centred on characters of Anglo-Irish background. However, her focus on Irish 'Big Houses' and the comedy of house parties did not satisfy Longford for long. In looking back on her 1937 play *Anything But the Truth* later that same year, Longford said: 'At the time I thought it was amusing. The jokes hit their mark and I had an excellent cast. Still, what was the point? What was the idea, if any? I imagined I had one, but somehow it failed to emerge.' (qtd in Cowell 118) In the following decade, she would dedicate herself to addressing her own concern by writing plays that intended to stimulate debate and pack a punch.

From 1941 to 1943, Christine Longford wrote and produced three plays. No longer a writer of social comedies, she instead dramatized stories

of heroism and sacrifice in times of crisis. *Lord Edward* (1941), *The United Brothers* (1942) and *Patrick Sarsfield* (1943) were all performed during World War II. Based on historical Irish uprisings and battles, they all take war as their subject. Despite Ireland's neutrality, the world war did have an impact on the daily lives of Irish people. Clair Wills observes in *That Neutral Island* that 'as the Irish government was keen to emphasise, neutrality was not peace. While the violence of the conflict may have seemed remote to most people, everyday life in Ireland was shaped by the hardships, constraints, and psychological pressures of surviving in a war-torn world' (4). Irish people still dealt with increasing censorship, economic hardships and limitations regarding gender roles. These history plays, though not set in the twentieth century, indirectly comment on the experience of Longford and citizens of Ireland living during the 1940s.

The first of her history plays, *Lord Edward*, shows women asserting their positions on politics in a time and place where they are told they have no voice and no vote. Longford uses her women characters in this play as key figures in carrying out political and rebellious action, highlighting the ways in which women continue to be active political participants even when government silences them. It is worth noting that for a period of time after the 1937 constitution was adopted, Irish women did attempt to assert authority and agency politically. As Ian R. Walsh describes, this period ran from the formation of the Women's Social and Progressive League (WSPL) in November of 1937 until the election of 1943, during which the WSPL ran four candidates, all of whom unfortunately lost (31). Longford's *Lord Edward* was written and produced during this brief period of mobilization for women. Additionally, this play began to explore the question of what it means to be an Irish woman, and who has a claim to that role, a question Longford continued to consider throughout her history plays.

Lord Edward was first produced in Dublin by the Longford Players at the Dublin Gate Theatre on 10 June 1941 (Longford 1941, *i*). The play was well received and an *Irish Times* reviewer asserted that breathing life into historic Irish figures was a 'most desirable national service' which 'Lady Longford has done [...] remarkably well by giving the Gate Theatre a play that will be greatly liked not there alone, but wherever the story of Lord Edward can stir to life once more the memory of our patriot men' ("Lord Edward" at Gate). The same reviewer went on to describe the strong acting in most roles and also stated that this play was a deviation from Longford's normal class comedies. The play was so successful that it

was retained for a longer run than originally planned, allowing audiences a full extra week to see the show ('Gate Theatre' 1941).

Lord Edward is set amid the 1798 Rising in Ireland. Named after the national figure Lord Edward FitzGerald, who was an Irish aristocrat turned revolutionary, this play looks at his contributions to the Irish cause and his untimely death; but this is not simply a play that depicts an Irish hero in the conventional way. In her script, Longford carefully delineates the supporting characters in Edward's life, making them just as central to the story she is telling. By emphasizing the women in Edward's life as integral to his cause, Longford highlights and critiques the disempowerment of women within her own contemporary Ireland.

At the start of the play, the characters give us some background about the politics of Ireland at the time and the rumblings of war. It is March of 1798, just a few months before the outbreak of rebellion. We are led to believe that Ireland is under more scrutiny than ever, and the parallels to the neutral Ireland in 1941 are blatant. The men in the play are reluctant to admit that Ireland is in trouble, despite consistently referring to the 'state' of things. Longford uses Lady Sarah, Edward's Aunt, to highlight this male reluctance, and in doing so, pokes fun at Ireland's contemporary situation:

Lady Sarah: I'm sick of hearing of the state of the country. What *is* it? Is it a state of war?

Mr. Conolly: Oh, no, not exactly. God forbid.

Lord Castlereagh: Certainly not. Not yet. (13-14)

During the Emergency, censorship prevented both men and women alike from sharing their thoughts and opinions on the war. Ian Wood articulates the breadth of censorship in his book *Britain, Ireland and the Second World War*, in which he outlines that, beginning in 1939 with the Emergency Orders, censorship in Ireland was expanded to newspapers and radio programmes (88-90). This gave the government widespread control of the information to which most of the Irish population would be exposed. Increasingly strict rules made it difficult for people to disseminate information about what was going on in the war. Even sharing the local weather on the radio was censored and seen as a threat to Irish neutrality, since it could be useful to outside forces seeking footholds in nearby water or airspace (Wood 87). Clair Wills recounts how news of the war in newspapers, while able to be reported, ended up being devoid of opinion and comment, creating oddly blank descriptions of events and at

times full omissions of actions that could not be reported without eliciting non-neutral response (274).

Despite this censorship, and rather perhaps because of this censorship, this period led to a marked increase in activism on a number of fronts, including women's rights. This is seen through the formation of the independent women's party WSPL referenced above, a culmination of multiple groups all determined to run a party based on women's issues to contest an election. Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, a major voice for women's political mobilization, ran a campaign with WSPL in 1943, though ultimately failed (Walsh 31). This period of increased agency for women is reflected in Longford's characters. The spirit of political participation is seen in Longford's Lady Sarah who pushes others, especially women, to think critically about the information they are being fed and to create their own opinions and ideas. She insists upon being politically engaged. For example, she urges Lady Louisa to have her own voice:

Lady Sarah: It's clear as daylight. Use your imagination, Louisa. Imagine something quite simple. Imagine that not only the Catholics were emancipated, but that we were emancipated as well.

Lady Louisa: But we are. What do you mean?

Lady Sarah: Can you vote in an election?

Lady Louisa: Of course not.

Lady Sarah: Then supposing you could, would you vote for Edward or for Lord Castlereagh? (3)

Lady Sarah is presenting herself as a woman knowledgeable of the political climate, and one who has a stake in its outcomes. She is left to ponder how she would partake if she had the ability and also incites others to reflect upon this injustice. Thus, while Longford's script addressed issues of war and peace that resonated with Emergency-era audiences, it simultaneously highlighted the absence of women's rights, both in the past and the present.

Despite Sarah's overt political statements, it is actually Pamela, Edward's wife, who plays an integral part in the plotline in which privileged information needs to be passed among rebels. Pamela is pregnant with her third child and she is often excused from conversations throughout the play due to her 'delicate' condition. The idea that being a mother makes women weak is asserted time and again by male characters in this play. When British soldiers arrive at their house and turn it inside out to search for communications about the rebellion, they

discount Pamela. They do not see her as a threat, dismissing her as someone without knowledge of politics or war. They leave with nothing. After the soldiers are gone, Pamela reveals that she in fact had the letters that they were searching for the whole time on her. She pulls them out of her dress and says 'It's a great pity, the new fashions are not so suitable for conspiracy as the old. It was easier when women had more stuff in their dresses.' (46) Pamela uses the tools made available to her by her gender (in this case both the dress and the probability that she will be underestimated by men) to swiftly deliver important documents into the hands of another rebel. This act uses the patriarchal constraints imposed on women's dress as a means to undermine both male political ambitions and British control.

Beyond Pamela's inspired manipulation of the limitations placed upon her as a woman, this scene again hints at censorship in Longford's Ireland. Ian Wood notes that during the Emergency, 'most censorship employment was created by the interception and checking of mail. All letters and packages to and from any destination beyond Éire's borders were liable to be opened and examined' (87). Complaints were lodged with the postal service from Irish citizens who found their letters delayed for long periods of time, and when they finally arrived to have been cut up and, in some instances, made unreadable (Ó Drisceoil 70). Longford's depiction of British soldiers using their 'right' to check mail and ransack Edward and Pamela's home may be viewed as likening the contemporary Irish government to the British government it has only recently replaced.

At the end, Pamela is forced to leave Ireland, despite wanting to stay. Her own connections to Ireland parallel those of Longford's. Longford was born Christine Trew on 6 September 1900 in Somerset, England. Though born in England, Christine had Irish blood through her father's side, and she was always fascinated with Ireland (Cowell 12-14). It wasn't until she married Edward that Longford actually moved to Ireland. Christine's character of Pamela was born in France, and thus, despite her marrying an Irishman and living in Ireland, is considered 'other'. After Edward's arrest, Pamela bribes her way into his cell to tell him the news and ultimately say goodbye:

Pamela: Your Government has said I must leave Ireland. (*Cries, they embrace.*) But I will not go.

Lord Edward: Is it an official order?

Pamela: Oh, yes. The police came. I said I would not go. I said I would stay with you in prison. They said no, I am a Frenchwoman, and I must leave Ireland. (83)

Pamela's experience of being cast out due to her background is one that Longford faced in an important sense herself, as an English-born woman living in Ireland. While she lived in Ireland for much of her life, and was never forced to leave, living as an English woman in neutral Ireland during a major war must have taken some toll on her sense of identity and belonging. In 1935 the government passed both the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act as well as the Aliens Act which together effectively defined Irish citizenship and classified British citizens as aliens (Jackson 295). While this act likely did not personally affect Longford, the aim of these acts was to imply that to be Irish was distinct and different from being British, even though many people within the country had ties to both Ireland and Britain. These acts show the permeating feelings in Ireland against the previously dominant Anglo-Irish minority. Lionel Pilkington asserts that 'throughout this period many nationalist intellectuals argue the need for a more representative Irish culture' (163). There was a push for a cultural focus on the majority population of the nation, Irish Catholics. Within theatre this was seen in the controversies surrounding *The Silver Tassie* at the Abbey Theatre in 1935 in which people protested the drama's anti-Catholicism and anti-nationalism (172). Pilkington notes that these controversies were about much more than the one play, and instead about a feeling that the Abbey Theatre was dismissing the 'social and cultural life of the majority' (172). Longford's work engages with this struggle by writing Anglo-Irish characters and questioning the continuing validity of those pre-independence labels.

Ireland – and Dublin in particular – was at the same time becoming much more international during the Emergency: indeed, Clair Wills observes how '[t]here was more rather than less high-class travel to Ireland, principally by those for whom Dublin would have been off the map before the war. Now they were attracted by good food, entertainment, and the absence of blitz' (282). Internationals found their artistic homes in Dublin: the White Stag group was comprised of international artists and poets and contributed to what Wills describes as the 'beacon of creative freedom' which turned Dublin into a European city during the 1940s (284). This dichotomy between being Irish and being international or European is present in the character of Pamela. Longford

highlights the tragedy of Pamela being cast out of her home, and in doing so demonstrates her belief that Ireland should be lauded for its international qualities.

Longford's next history play, *The United Brothers*, produced the following year, continued to foreground women's place in an Ireland in the immediate proximity of war. Longford called into question the expectations of freedom for women within an independent Ireland and forced contemporary audiences to ask themselves whether these freedoms had been achieved. In this play Longford also utilized the symbolic Mother Ireland motif to underscore the double standards for men and women in Ireland.

Staged at the Gate Theatre in April of 1942, *The United Brothers*' plot runs concurrently with that of *Lord Edward*, beginning a year before the 1798 Rising and ending after the rebellion in July of 1798. Like her other history plays, this production also met with success. Maxwell Sweeney, reviewer for the *Irish Times*, said of the play: 'this is the best thing seen at the Gate so far this season' (1942). Its run was also extended by a week, like that of *Lord Edward* ('Gate Theatre' 1942). While named after John and Harry Sheares, who were republican figures, the script's main character is clearly Maria Steele, the eighteen-year-old love interest of John Sheares. The Sheares brothers were revolutionaries who took up leadership in the Rising after Lord Edward's arrest, but unfortunately were eventually also captured themselves. The tragedy of the Sheares brothers' fates is played out through the lens of Maria's eyes and most of the action against the brothers occurs offstage – the main playing area being the home of Maria and her mother. Maria is obsessed with literature, much to her mother's chagrin, and falls in love with John as they write poetry and read histories together. When John asks Maria's mother for her hand in marriage, he is denied on the grounds of his financial standing and his political beliefs as a republican. Maria herself refuses to run away to America with John, believing she must respect her mother's wishes, and also asserting that she is unready to wed.

A commentary on the current state of Ireland comes later in the play, during a dinner party at which the Sheares pontificate upon what Ireland will look like once it is free and how so many wrongs will be made right. Julia, the Sheares' sister, and Sally, Harry's wife, participate actively in the conversation being led by the men:

Julia: In the new Ireland, there will be no more drunken country gentlemen, no more riotous students, no more insolent officers.

Sally: No more bad manners, and no more unhappy women.

John: Women will be respected, and educated like men. They will take their place with men in philosophy and the arts and sciences. (58-59)

John responds to Sally's comment about unhappy women with talk of education, assuming that the solution to their unhappiness lies in areas in which they face inequality. While it may be debatable whether Irish women during the 1940s had gained 'respect', it was clear that women did not have the same presence in philosophy, the arts, the sciences or politics during this period.

In fact, during the mid-twentieth century, regressive legislation was enacted under the guise of respect for women. In 1937, journalist Gertrude Gaffney observed of women's place within the new constitution that 'we are to be no longer citizens entitled to enjoy equal rights under a democratic constitution, but laws are to be enacted which will take into consideration our "differences of capacity, physical and moral, and of social function"' (qtd in Luddy 178). Beyond inequality in education, women were also banned from the workforce. Maria Luddy points out that Irish women were much more concerned with economic inequality because the language of the new constitution could potentially limit women's abilities and opportunities for work (183). Hearing John discuss the promises of new Ireland, Irish women may have been forced to confront the fact that independent Ireland did not live up to its promises for women.

At the dinner party, Longford also uses the gendered symbolism that so often accompanied Irish nationalism to demonstrate men's urges to force women into specific ideals and symbols. Maria, the obedient daughter, is literally made into a symbol of Ireland during the dinner party:

Armstrong: What is the toast I've drunk in the clubs? 'Mother Erin dressed in green ribbons by a French milliner, if she can't be dressed without her.'

Maria: Were you looking at *me*, sir, when you said 'Mother Erin'? I *am* wearing green ribbons, but I think the lady is somewhat older than I am.

Armstrong: I beg your pardon, madam. My eye was straying. You are certainly much less mature in figure than that lady.

John: I don't think so. I think Miss Steele is ideally suited to be the symbol of Ireland. (57)

In many ways, John is right that Maria is suited for this symbolic image. Maria is young, she is intelligent enough, but other characters mark her as unpolitical in their musings. Julia criticizes Maria for being too concerned with fashions to care about politics. She says, 'Maria considers everything from the point of view of upholstery' while Julia and the men, John and Armstrong, discuss what an Irish senate would look like, quickly dismissing Maria's contributions (60). Julia vilifies Maria for being more concerned with priorities such as the home, marriage and children.

Maria is made to leave the dinner party early because her mother is worried about her staying out while the fighting continues. As she leaves, John remarks: 'alas, the symbolic figure of Ireland is carried off by her nursemaid' (62). This comment shows that both Maria and Ireland are seen as needing to be cared for – looked after as children. John sees himself as a caretaker to both, being a suitor for Maria as well as a stalwart supporter of the rebellion. However, by the end of the play, Maria is unable to live up to this ideal. Her very last line, referring to Harry's wife, is: 'No, it's not worst for her. She has been married and has children. I have lost a lover I never had'. (97) Maria is of course grieving someone that she cared about, but she also lingers on the role she lost with John's death. Maria has lost her chance (at least with John and within the scope of this play) to fulfil what so many Irish women are told completes their identity: getting married and becoming a mother.

The last lines of this play highlight the absurd ways in which women are tied to the men in their lives and how their grief brings them to reflect on their own roles. Lady Steele, Maria and Julia all reflect on the women left behind after the Sheares brothers are hanged and discuss who has the most unfortunate lot in life. Successive arguments are made for who has it worst – the boy's mother for having no sons any more, Harry's wife for being a widow, Maria for losing her prospects, or Julia for losing her two brothers and in turn her hope for her country. Each of these women perceives their lives to be drastically changed due to the loss of these two men. Longford uses these lines to show that no role for women could be considered 'settled' with the loss of the men in their lives. Longford repeats the line 'it's worst for her' three times in a row, as one by one Julia, Lady Steele and then Maria utter the words (96–97). The Sheares brothers are dead but it is the women who are left to pick up the pieces. No one has it 'worst', but rather they are all in positions that are unfavourable as women. In this repetition, Longford heightens the impact of these words and demonstrates how these women attempt

to find agency as a collective after tragedy. Whether they succeed in this is left unexplored by the end of the play, but the character of Julia does demonstrate potential success in gaining power.

The United Brothers ends with a message of hope delivered by Julia. She says: 'I have lost my two brothers, and I have lost my hope for my country. But not for ever. Their sacrifice will not be in vain. Their light is not out.' (97) With this line, Julia takes up the torch her brothers left behind. Having just taken part in a conversation about their dismal prospects, this seems an odd place for Julia's mind to go. However, if the audience recalled Julia's avid participation in the dinner party conversation of Act II, and her strong advocacy of women's rights throughout, they may well have interpreted Julia's hope for her country as being tied directly to the state of these women's lives. If so, then, the play's end may have been understood as a prospective memory strategy, which Ruud van den Beuken describes as a dramatic technique by which 'historical action [...] is explicitly endowed with the quality of something *that should be remembered*' (200). Longford, in employing this tactic, urged the audience to consider the relevance of a woman leading this nationalist effort, and the state of women's progress in 1942.

With her next history play, *Patrick Sarsfield*, Longford revisited the idea of Irish identity as complicated by familial background, and how particular backgrounds could be doubly limiting for Irish women. Longford used her female characters to once again assert their right to a voice within politics and also placed the women in positions of power. This play also presented a more critical view of neutrality, emphasizing that imposed restrictions on Irish identity became even more limiting during war.

Patrick Sarsfield premièred at the Gate Theatre in May of 1943 and takes place a century earlier than both *Lord Edward* and *The United Brothers*. This play was also extended to run for a third week after initial success of the production ('Gate Theatre' 1943). The setting for this drama is the Williamite War of 1689-1691, which was fought mostly on Irish soil and was the last attempt of King James II, a Catholic, to take back the crown from his Protestant son-in-law, William III (Childs 2-4). The play begins in 1690 and once more, female characters give us insight into the world of the play and the current state of Ireland and the war. These women are all part of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, Elizabeth Rosse and Fanny Dillon, the daughters of the Duchess as well as Honora, Patrick's wife. The women discuss identity and begin to quantify the idea of Irishness:

Elizabeth: We were brought up in France.

Fanny: And we were very poor, too.

Elizabeth: But not unhappy. We loved it, we loved France. We're not so Irish as you are.

Honora: You can't be 'more Irish' or 'less Irish.' You must be Irish or not.

Fanny: Yes, I'm Irish. Our father was Irish.

Elizabeth: And our mother is English.

Fanny: But she married two Irishmen, one after another. First our father, and then Uncle Dick. We always called him Uncle Dick. And she loved them both madly, and she's more Irish than the Irish themselves. (5)

This idea of quantifying Irishness was not only personal to Longford, but extremely relevant to Longford's Ireland. Despite being born in England, Longford's connection to Ireland was always strong, and she felt she was an Irish republican long before she married an Irish lord. In her memoirs, she wrote, 'I was determined to be oppressed and not an oppressor' regarding her connection to Ireland (Cowell 19). The characters of Elizabeth and Fanny contemplate their heritage and ask how many parts Irish versus English make them Irish, but Honora stays firm that being Irish is a stable identity, and one either is or is not. Both sides of this argument are problematically absolute, and the play continues to interrogate these ideas.

These questions of identity and belonging within the play are intimately tied to the larger Williamite War. King James urges others to remember what is happening off the shores of Ireland and he stresses that the war is affecting other parts of Europe as well. When the war does not seem to be going in James's favour, he lets everyone know that he needs to go to France and spend time there. General Luttrell, an Irishman, comments 'He's King of England and Ireland and Scotland, God help him. So he must go to France. Is there any logic in that?' (Longford 1943, 26) Luttrell's comments are representative of the characters in the play, whose only loyalty is to Ireland and who take little consideration of the world outside. The conflicting views between the King and his supporters were bound to resonate with audiences in 1940s Ireland, who knew that a world war was happening, but, due to censorship, experienced this war far differently than others. It is also reminiscent of how some people viewed 1940s Ireland as a time of stagnation for the country, while others viewed it as a time of booming international culture (Wills 8). F.S.L. Lyons said of Ireland in the Emergency that the country

was in total isolation and 'the tensions – and the liberations – of war, the shared experience, the comradeship in suffering, the new thinking about the future, all these things had passed her [Ireland] by' (557). This complete seclusion of Ireland, however, would have been impossible given the number of Irish people who fought in the war, and the fact that both Allied and Axis power countries were allowed to maintain embassies and presences within the country. Longford stresses this idea that Ireland is part of a larger picture within the play. After Honora tells Berwick there is only Ireland for her, he responds: 'we belong to the world. To Europe and the world' (77). Longford thus emphasizes the necessity to recognize Ireland's international place.

Further complicating the notions of identity within the play, religion is brought up as another identifier. There are rather strict lines made between Catholicism and Protestantism, where Catholics support James and Protestants support William. Despite this seemingly hard line, Longford litters the play with characters who cross those boundaries and blur these hard and fast distinctions. The Duchess, and other unseen relations within the world of the play, have converted to and from Catholicism and Protestantism – based on what was politically or socially more advantageous for them at the time.

The Duchess has a scene in which she speaks with Dr. King, a Protestant minister who is imprisoned. Their interaction seems to be a common occurrence as the two have built up a rapport. Out of all of Longford's history plays, this is the one scene in which a woman is definitively and openly in a position of power over a man: Dr. King as prisoner and the Duchess as prisoner (or at least representative of her male family members who imprison him). Despite this, the two debate rather equally about the state of the war. The Duchess argues that due to 'the emergency' (a phrase she uses twice in the conversation) it is all right that the Protestants are being treated harsher than in the past. When Dr. King asks the Duchess if a Protestant could be expected to take orders from a Catholic, the Duchess responds: 'ah, that's the whole trouble, sir. Why not? (*Pause*). Until they learn to do that, we shall have no peace' (45). This dramatic exchange is one that could highlight the struggle for power and sovereignty that Ireland fought for and was in the process of re-asserting with its declaration of neutrality. Furthermore, this question of power may also be a reflection of the attitudes of the former Protestant Ascendancy after Ireland became independent, facing a world in which they were no longer the dominant political power.

The Duchess's control over this scene and conversation resonates at two levels. On the one hand, it appears as though the audience are led to be on her side in the debate (meaning the Catholic side) since the main characters and the heroes of the story are on that side, but by the end of the scene the Duchess concedes that she does 'not believe there is any matter of conduct in which a good Protestant should act differently from a good Catholic' and that since she was born as a Protestant she has seen that there is little difference between the two identities (48). Longford uses this time away from the main plot with the Duchess to demonstrate that no identity within Ireland is wholly one thing or another, further emphasizing her view of the country as a cosmopolitan place and suggesting that these delineations no longer have a purpose in Ireland.

Longford's history plays bypassed the critical censorship of Éire laws by using these past wars to indirectly critique the world she was living in. With *Lord Edward*, Longford placed women at the centre of espionage and rebellion, asserting their political prowess and the importance of granting women voices. *The United Brothers* took this a step further by demonstrating the dichotomy between women involved in politics and women made into vapid symbols without opinions to promote certain politics. With this play, Longford reminded audiences of the expectations for women and women's rights that came with the nationalist movements, and questioned whether those expectations have been met. *Patrick Sarsfield* focused on questions surrounding Irish identity and highlighted how seclusion, both within the world of the play and within Ireland, further restricted Irish women.

Longford's history plays demonstrate a dramatic shift in her writing style and reflect the author's sharper focus on the world around her. There is no evidence that these plays were revived, which is surprising given that they were all well received with reviews suggesting the critique of contemporary Ireland that she offered was, to some extent, understood and appreciated by audiences. Further, each play also enjoyed extended runs, and they all centred on major historical figures often lauded in Irish life. Critic Maxwell Sweeney noted in his review of *Patrick Sarsfield*'s only known run that 'Lady Longford in this, as in her earlier historical plays, has shown herself to be both a painstaking historian and a painstaking playwright.' (1943) Almost every review of Longford's plays applauds her skill as a writer. The neglect of these dramas is all the more striking in the face of the fact that Longford questioned 'the point' of her plays written

before the 1940s, and saw greater meaning in the work that came after. An *Irish Times* review of *The United Brothers* claimed that 'we are given many witty and homely touches which bring the Dublin of 1798 almost as near to us as the Dublin of today'. ('Gate Theatre: The United Brothers') Longford managed to address key issues regarding gender roles, censorship and Irish identity, contesting the limitations placed on Irish citizens during the Emergency through these history plays.

Evidence of Longford's success as a playwright raises questions about why she has been left out of the Irish canon. In examining this it is worth noting the composition of the Irish canon and the dearth of celebrated plays written by women in this period (and indeed throughout most of the twentieth century), as well as the lack of scholarship about these plays. Irish women during the 1940s faced repressive legislation and within the arts faced difficulty in getting productions and recognition for their work. In spite of these obstacles, Christine Longford and other women writers who have been left out of the canon wrote plays worthy of analysis and examination. Longford worked cautiously within an oppressive system to find and maintain success while still turning a critical eye on the circumstances around. A further challenge Longford faced in gaining recognition for her work was that her characters were often of Anglo-Irish descent. This period was largely unsympathetic toward the Anglo-Irish as seen with the passing of legislation such as the Aliens Act. Not only was Longford writing unpopular ideas surrounding women's rights and censorship during a time of extreme repression, but she was also doing it from a perspective that had a rather antagonistic relationship with the Catholic majority Irish government.

Theatrically, Micheál Ó hAodha – for instance – noted that the legislation of the Free State and of the following era in the 1940s 'created a climate of repression which was not conducive to the free expression of ideas' and asserted that Irish theatre during this time had become 'indifferent', indicating that the work of this period was not particularly noteworthy (134). However, Christine Longford's history plays contravene this widely shared perspective, as they did in fact engage with the political, social and cultural issues of the period by placing women in central positions within politics, bypassing censorship and utilizing historical stories to critique the ethos of 1940s Ireland.

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