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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

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**MacLiammoir and His Contribution to the Theatre
and Arts in Ireland**

By

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INTRODUCTION

Micháel MacLiammoir was one of the most influential people in shaping the development of Irish theatre. The focus of his talents are not solely evident in theatre but can also be seen in his book illustrations, his writings, stage and costume designs. This thesis proposes to discuss and analyse his transition from a London child actor to a respected prolific designer, writer and actor within Irish culture.

The first chapter concerns his early childhood and the awakening of a visual awareness. MacLiammoir focused his talents and love of theatre and design in Ireland to form the Gate Theatre in Dublin.

Irish influences in particular, Yeats, the Irish language and culture formed an essential core in all areas of MacLiammoir's work. The second chapter will deal with these as well as other talents such as acting, writing and designing which were also practised by MacLiammoir.

The final chapter analyses his visual influences and the development of stagecraft and design in his work. He was greatly influenced by Bakst and this allows for comparison and contrasts to be drawn between both artists. Beardsley, Jellett and Craig also inspired MacLiammoir during his career and through discussing and analysing their work this will give a more informed understanding and knowledge of MacLiammoir's own style.

CHAPTER ONE

His Early Years and The Gate's Beginnings

Michael MacLiammoir was born Alfred Wilmore in London in 1899. His childhood was marked by a successful early stage career.

Wilmore's earliest stage appearance was in 1911, when he played the double role of Reggie and King Goldfish in The Goldfish produced by Miss Lila Field. The Daily Express quoted Miss Field saying "*He will surely be heard of again*". (Fitzsimon, 1994, p. 25) In the same year, in June, he appeared in Flyaway Land and in August he visited His Majesty's Theatre where he was introduced to Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree who offered him the part of Macduff's son in MacBeth. He received positive reviews but one was of particular interest to him. As shown in Plate 1 The Evening Press accompanied the review with a drawing initialled A.W. of "*Master Wilmore as he sees himself*". (Pine, 1978, p. 2) It described him as an actor - artist whose drawings were very credible for a boy of ten. Towards the end of 1911 he was cast as Michael Darling in Peter Pan. He was engaged in Peter Pan for five months each year from December 1911 until March 1914. It was during the touring of Peter Pan that he first visited Dublin. Here he used to spend a lot of time at the Abbey Theatre watching Irish plays where he became especially interested in the work of Yeats. According to Edwards.

W.B. Yeats was probably the greatest single influence in his early life and it was the poet's passionate nationalism that awakened in him, as in so many others, the urge to return to his own country and share in the work for its remaking.

(Edwards, 1963, p. 3)

MacLiammoir, as he later became known, in his autobiography describes how, when he first read Yeats's Ideas of Good and Evil it had an enormous effect on his life. He remembers reading through the book "*in a rapture of joyful revelation*" (Pine, 1978, p.3)

MacLiammoir's greatest acting opportunity came in 1912 when he was offered the lead in Oliver Twist. It was here, at His Majesty's that he met with Anew McMaster. They became firm friends. McMaster later became his brother-in-law. Living in London he gave MacLiammoir the opportunity to see the Russian Ballet. He was entranced by Bakst's decor. Bakst's designs had a sense of movement which was further animated by the dancing of Nijinsky, Karsavina and Pavlova. MacLiammoir's portfolio at that time contained impressions of Nijinsky. He was truly inspired by the explosion of colour and movement and the overall atmosphere of the ballet. It was here that he seemed to understand that it was not necessary to paint every leaf on every tree as was done by the scenic artists of that

ALFRED WILLMORE—ACTOR ARTIST.

Across the tragic, stormy pathway of "Macbeth" there comes one delightful scene, showing a little curly haired boy swinging in an English garden.

The little boy is Alfred Willmore, who plays the part of Macduff's son, and is dragged out of this charming setting to be murdered by hired villains. Alfred loves the good scream that he has to give when the murderers seize him, but he regrets

Lady Macduff & her son



Master Willmore As He Sees Himself

that Sir Herbert Tree very wisely decided that it would not please the audience to see him "stage-murdered" before their eyes.

Alfred plays robbers and pirates by himself at home, and likes good "killing" parts. His other hobby is drawing, and he has quite a fine collection of "Macbeth" sketches, very creditable for a small boy of ten.

PLATE ONE: Master Willmore as He Sees Himself



time, but it was possible to provide the right atmosphere using specific shapes and colours.

MacLiammóir attended the most prestigious Art Academy in the U.K. - The Faculty of Arts in London's University known as the Slade School. The Star newspaper, in that Summer of 1915, printed an article on the outstanding "*London Boys*" achievement. MacLiammóir was just 15 at this time.

To have attained some measure of success both as an actor and an artist, and that at the early age of 15, is an achievement beyond the powers of the average youthful prodigy and only three weeks ago a clever drawing from his pen appeared in "Punch", that exclusive Academy of Black and White Artists.

(Pine, 1978, p.3)

Mr. R. Mumford - the Head of the Slade School at that time, did not realise MacLiammóir had sent his work out, yet was enthusiastic and proud of the print in Punch magazine (See Plate 2). As a recruiting poster to encourage enlistment The Damsel I Left Behind Me was MacLiammóir's youthful contribution to the war effort. Mumford noted that *"It was a little ambitious to choose that high level for his venture, and to have succeeded is something of which the school is justly proud"*.

(Pine, 1978, p. 3)

Significantly, Michael Oh Aodha describes MacLiammóir's drawing as an *"extremely competent black and white sketch in the Beardsley Manner"*.

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p. 16)

MacLiammóir, while at the Slade school met and befriended Maire O'Keefe. Maire had an Irish father and it was she who began to spin *"the web of her imaginative Irish dreamworld"* (Oh Aodha, 1990, p. 19) around MacLiammóir. Maire lived with her mother who grew very fond of MacLiammóir and she became known as his *"Aunt Craven"*. In 1917 MacLiammóir arrived in Ireland with Aunt Craven and Maire. Originally they lived in Sandymount but later moved to Howth, *"their land of hearts desire"*. (Oh Aodha, 1990, p. 28) He spent his first few years painting water colours and writing essays and stories. Even in his early work, the influence of writers and artists such as Beardsley, Yeats and George Moore, is discernable. His watercolours were mostly based on Celtic themes consistent with his search for an Irish identity.



PLATE 2: The Damsel I Left Behind Me
Punch Magazine 1915



In April 1917 he went to visit Joseph Holloway - Architect at the Abbey and a regular first nighter. Holloway wrote in his diary about his first meeting with MacLiammóir.

He is youth with real talent has a fondness for Jack B. Yeats' work and produces some very clever imitations of his style in colour, but with a more refined line that emphasises the crudeness of the method he mimics. Some of his black and white designs are really beautiful and clever, and all his work in whatever medium is full of imagination, such as those who talk of the Celtic Note and Celtic Twilight Worship..... He has all the modesty of an artist he fears that Jack B. Yeats is a bad one to try to form one's style on "*as there is only one Jack B. Yeats*". He is a clever youth who is likely to go far.

(Pine, 1978, p. 23)

Holloway introduced MacLiammóir to the Abbey players in the Green Room of the Theatre. He acted for the Abbey in minor parts but became more widely known for his drawings. MacLiammóir's first attempt at stage design was for Regina Eyre by Edward Martyn. He designed steep rocks against the sky on the tiny stage. These were to represent Carrantuohill, the highest mountain in Ireland. It proved to be a very unsuccessful design. Holloway wrote.

There was a long delay between Acts 3 and 4 to make ready the mountain top scene which seemed to consist of impossible rocks against an azure sky. Here all the characters assembled and spoke a lot about cleansing their souls on mountain tops.

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p. 33)

MacLiammóir himself recalled that the stage was inadequate. He continued drawing and illustrating and received some commissions as a book illustrator for the Talbot Press. MacLiammóir illustrated T.H. Nally's Finn Varra Maa - An Irish Fairy Pantomime in December 1917 (Plate 3) and went on to illustrate Seamus O'Kelly's Waysiders and Daniel Corkery's A Munster Twilight. In 1922, his own book of illustrated children's stories was published. Oidhcheanna Sidhe (Fairynights) was a bilingual collection of four fairy stories with his own black and white illustrations. The stories dealt with the ancient festivals of Bealtaine, Lunasa, Samhain and La Bride, and had an English translation on alternative pages (Plates 4, 5 and 6).

The line drawings are careful in technique and attractively composed - there is an especially fine one of children playing around a bonfire on St. John's Eve - but the colour frontispiece is garish and entirely derivative of the worst excesses of Arthur Rackham: a coy little girl peers through the foliage at 4 foolish-looking elves seated on unusually phallic toadstools, the predominant colours are mauve, purple and crimson.

(Fitz-Simon, 1994, p. 43)

FINN VARRA MAA

T. H. NALLY



DUBLIN:
THE TALBOT PRESS LIMITED

PLATE 3: Finn Vara Maa - An Irish Pantomime
1917





PLATE 4: Illustrations for Oidhcheanna Sidhe 1922



PLATE 5 : Illustration for Oidhcheanna Sidhe 1922



COUCHING
1/2/2



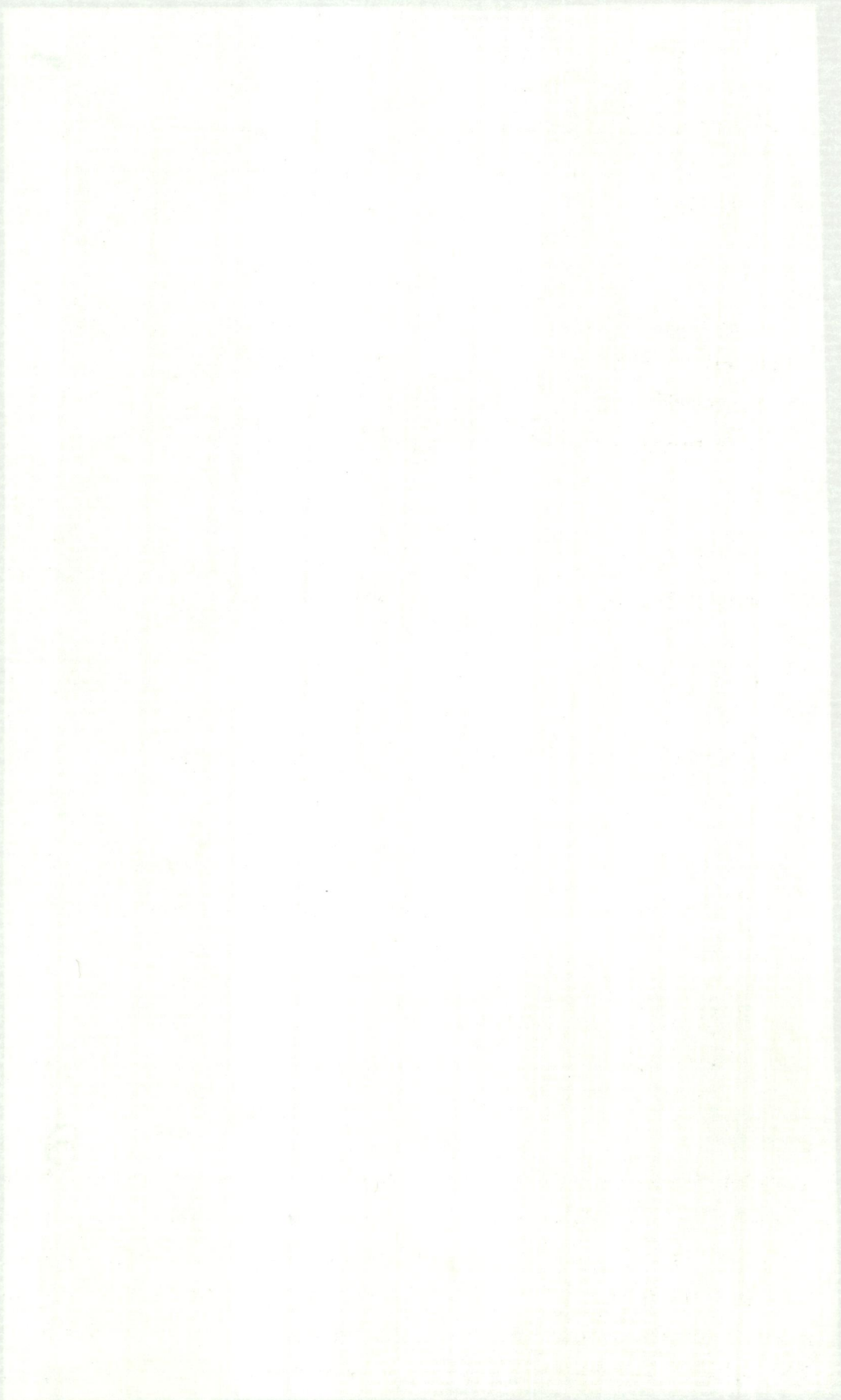


O'feac si trid na crainnte
(She peeped through the trees).

PLATE 6: Illustration for Oidcheanna Sidhe 1922

"O'feac si trid na crainnte"
(She peeped through the trees)

Page 8



In 1927, Marie O'Keefe died from pneumonia, MacLiammoir was devastated and decided he needed a focus in his life. He wrote to Anew McMaster telling him of his desire to act again. The McMaster Company was touring Ireland and England at that time, and so MacLiammoir joined them in the Spring of 1927. It was in this year that he met with Hilton Edwards. Hilton Edwards was a young actor of considerable and varied experience, which included four years with the Old Vic Shakespearean Company.

"From the time of their meeting the foundation of some new organisation must have been inevitable". (Corrigan and Wilson Ltd. 1940, p.1).

While travelling with the McMaster Company in Galway, Professor Liam O'Briain, Professor of Romance Languages at Galway University gave MacLiammoir and Edwards the opportunity to stage MacLiammoir's Diarmuid agus Grainne.

The play was performed in a disused hall in Middle Street in Galway City and this hall later became known as An Taidhbhearc - meaning 'illusion' or 'place of magic'. It was Ireland's first serious attempt in staging Irish mythology and had a great effect on the Irish people. Ernest Blythe recalls seeing this production in Galway. He described how it was a new thrill and experience, something he had never seen before in the Irish language and an experience he has never forgotten. (In conversation on the Late, Late show 1969).

MacLiammoir was very much involved in the early days of An Taidhbhearc - as director, author, translator and actor. The accomplishment of staging his first Irish play was a major achievement but more importantly, perhaps was the setting up of An Taidhbhearc. Using the Irish language, the young actors and producers achieved high artistic standards. These standards still exist today.

MacLiammoir and Edwards were both very enthusiastic about putting on plays new to Dublin. They wanted to set up a theatre where they could explore and experiment. They convinced Gearoid O'Lochlainn (an Irish speaking actor and drama enthusiast in the Department of Education) and D. Bannard Cogley (an active member of the Labour Movement who ran a theatre club at 29 Harcourt Street) to join with them as directors of this new venture. The theatre was to be known as the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio and it began in October 1928. They proposed to start out in the Peacock Theatre - the experimental annex to the Abbey.

A mailing list was prepared and subscribers were invited to become members of the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio. In an announcement, mailed to subscribers the Committee proposed their ideas. Their main concerns were with the production of modern and progressive plays dealing especially with a continental repertoire. They proposed to produce plays fortnightly each of which would run for 12 nights. The Committee also were determined to hold lectures, discussions and exhibitions of paintings.

It is not the intention of the Studio to encroach upon the activities of any existing Dublin theatrical organisation; rather it is the desire of the Gate to introduce a new element, both in the play and its production.

(Luke, 1978, p.13)

The Abbey Theatre was the leading Irish theatre of that time. MacLiammóir and Edwards never set out to challenge the Abbey, their aim was to complement rather than compete. The Gate was to be an alternative to the Abbey, where contemporary and classical drama could be presented which were outside the scope of the Abbey. The Abbey was showing Ireland to the world, the Gate wanted to show the world to Ireland.

Our policy is the exploitation of all forms of theatrical expression regardless of nationality. It embraces upon occasion the naturalistic play; but its concern has always been with the whole gamut of the stage. The Gate is not a national theatre It is simply a theatre.

(Pine, 1978, p.35)

The Gate theatre was to be the location where both MacLiammoir and Edwards could realise their ambitions: MacLiammóir to awaken the visual aspect of theatre, and Edwards to experiment with new production ideas. Their ambitions were compatible enabling them to work side by side without too much interference from the other. The Gate theatre's business was to be theatrical and this is what it achieved in being.

What differentiated the opening of the Abbey and the Gate was that, although they were both as MacLiammóir has observed, almost ostentatiously small, the former opened in an atmosphere of austerity and of faith, whereas the Gate raised its curtain on an almost reckless display of colour in which austerity can have played no part.

(Pine, 1978, p. 27)

The first play they produced was Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Edwards took the leading role while MacLiammóir concerned himself with the stage and costumes. MacLiammóir's first stage design attempt for the Gate did much to overcome the

limitations of the fifteen foot square stage at the Peacock. The Irish Statesman critic - C.P. Curran commented.

The freshness of the mountain farm, the dark encounters of the night, the grotesque horror of the troll's hall within the hill - filled with the vileness of creeping things - were treated in stage scenes of great skill.

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p 70 - 71)

The Gate theatre's first venture was an undoubted success. This success continued throughout the first season, from October 1928 to January 1929 with O'Neils The Hairy Ape, an English version of Diarmuid agus Grainne, Wilde's Salome, Elmer Greensfelder's Six Stokers Who Own The Bloomin Earth and another play by O'Neill Anna Christie. MacLiammoir designed the costumes, while Hilton was involved in production and direction. The second season opened on March the 1st with Tolstoy's The Power of Darkness followed The Adding Machine, Karel Capeks R.U.R., Paul Raynel's The Unknown Warrior and a series of three short plays Tristram and Iseult by D.J.H. Pollock, John Galsworthy's The Little Man and Merry Death by Nicolai Evreinov. The final play for the second season was Denis Johnston's The Old Lady Says No a reject from the Abbey which proved to be an enormous success for the Gate. MacLiammoir played the lead role of Robert Emmet, the revolutionary hero and Edwards masterly handled a "*difficult expressionist text*".

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p.76)

The Old Lady Says No was the play the Gate had been looking for and its opening night on 19th June 1929 caused a real sensation. Rutherford Mayne, the Irish playwright wrote to Denis Johnston to congratulate him on his play.

You have written one of the most original plays I have ever seen and used a new form of expression of stage techniques in a masterly way..... I couldn't help going behind to congratulate Edwards and MacLiammoir on a most wonderful production.

(Fitz-Simon, 1994, p. 59)

MacLiammoir and Edwards had proved that Ireland was willing to accept, as they had expressed in the memorandum to potential subscribers. "*The work of other writers and other countries, if only to further her understanding and appreciation of her own*".

(Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.51)

In all, the Peacock housed 15 of the Gate theatre's productions. The Gate also produced two plays in the Mansion House - The Ford of the Hurdles by MacLiammoir in September 1929 and a revival of Diarmuid agus Grainne.

To further develop the theatre, new premises were desperately needed. With the help of Michael Scott, an architect, and occasional actor, they discovered the Rotunda assembly rooms. Richard Johnston had designed the building in 1785 to house concerts, routs and soirees, which were organised to fund the hospital. The Old Concert Hall was a large 18th century room with a platform at the other end of the present stage. It housed a fine seven bay facade with its classical columns and pediment and the 18th century plasterwork gave *"an air of opulence and occasion"* (Fitz-Simon, 1995, p.60). (See Plate 7) It was ideal for MacLiammoir and Edwards Gate Theatre.

On Christmas Eve, 1929, 'The Dublin Gate Theatre Company Limited' was registered. Gordon Campbell - later Lord Glenavy, and Norman Reddin an enthusiastic supporter were appointed as the two new directors. The business and legal acumen at the two new encouraged a sufficient amount of subscribers to enable the Gate Theatre Company to leave the Rotunda building.

(See Plate 8 & 9)

Initially they had problems with Dublin Corporation whose interest was with the protection and comfort of the public and players. Shortly before opening Mr. Higginbottom, who was in charge of buildings of public resort declared the theatre unsafe and insisted on putting in steel tie-bars under the auditorium floor. Scott felt they were unnecessary and would *"Scar this architectural gem"* (Luke, 1978, p.20) but they still remain there to this day. Scott built a raked floor in the auditorium and provided a small fore-stage so that intimacy was created between actors and audience. Also there was a small curtained side stage for musicians.

MacLiammoir involved himself with the interior decoration and painting of the proscenium curtain - a huge figure throwing open a symbolic gold gate on a black background (Plate 10). The new auditorium was painted in bronze and black.

On the 17th February 1930 the Gate Theatre Company, under MacLiammoir and Edwards opened with Goethes Faust.

MacLiammoir and Edwards soon learned that they could not run a theatre on box office receipts alone and ran into debt. Unless they could sell the 1,200 one pound shares, the theatre would be forced to close. Lord Longford offered to buy them all and the Gate theatre was saved from extinction. It was the beginning however of a lifelong friction between MacLiammoir, Edwards and Longford. Longford and his wife, Christine took an active role in the Gate theatre and many of their plays were produced. MacLiammoir did not take kindly to being told



PLATE 7 : Original 18th Century Plasterwork in
The Gate Theatre





PLATE No. 8:

Photographs of Rotunda
buildings as they appear
today

Plate No. 9



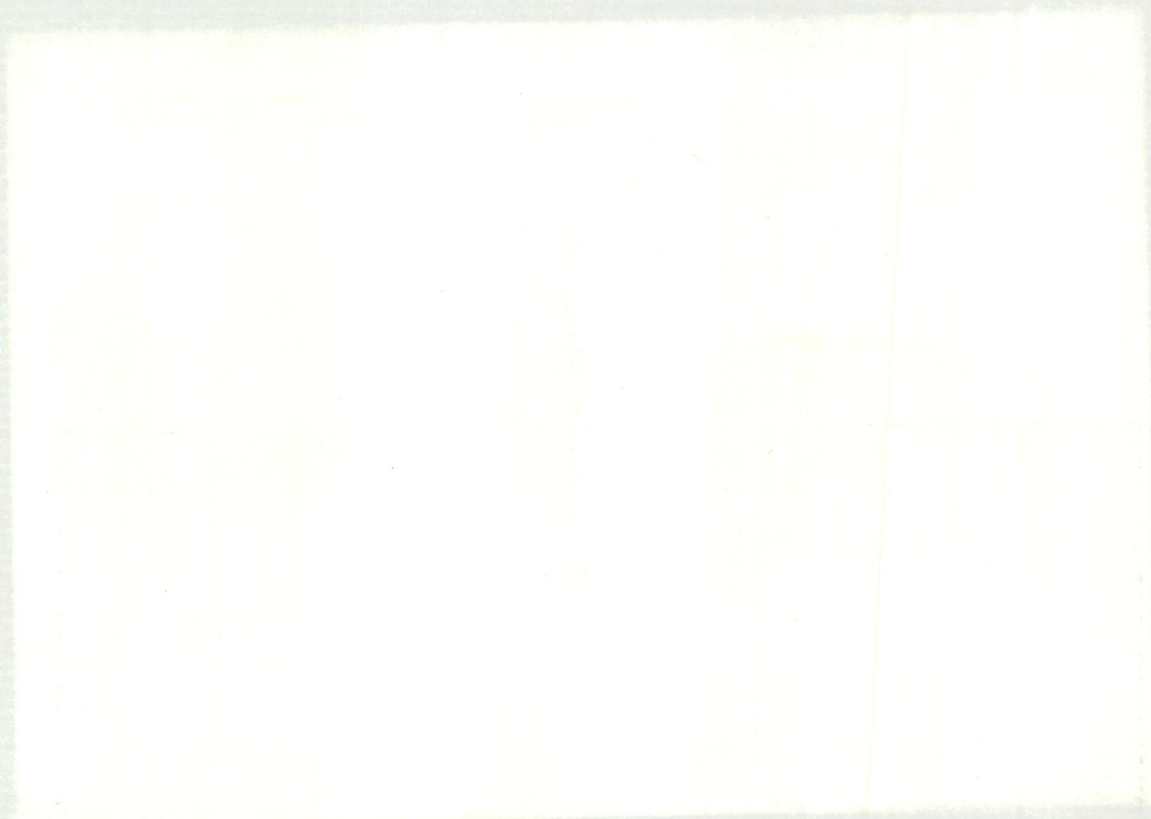




PLATE 10 : Front of Curtain



Longford and his wife, Christine took an active role in the Gate Theatre and many of their plays were produced. MacLiammoir did not take kindly to being told what to do and how to do it and it was unevitable that one day there would be a clash.

CHAPTER TWO

Irish Influences and His Contribution to the Arts.

Michael MacLiammóir's most outstanding feature is undoubtedly his versatility which has proved to be as much a disadvantage to him as a virtue.

(Edwards, 1973, p.1)

He was primarily an actor but also proved to be a successful playwright, translator, author of many successful semi-autobiographical books in Irish and English, as well as being a graphic artist and illustrator. Central to each of these aspects of his extraordinary career was his over-riding interest in Irish history and culture which permeates every aspect of his life. Despite the undoubted complexity and interconnectedness of his work, it will be examined here in four parts: MacLiammóir's interest and influences from Irish culture and history, his work as an actor, as a writer and as a designer.

We Irish are accused eternally of brooding over the images of the past, but in reality it is the future, more it may be than other people in the world, that we are driven. It is for the vision of a most questionable posterity that we walk out from our homes, that we dream and plot and play the fool, that we suffer and we have created a past for ourselves that we may the more clearly see the future of our hearts desire, and in the continual striving and sacrifice offered up for that future lies perhaps the only Irish virtue.

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p.49)

During the late nineteenth century, between the fall of the Irish Leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, and the outbreak of the First World War - Cultural nationalism emerged. This form of nationalism emerged through such new organisations as the Gaelic League, Gaelic Athletic Association and through the literary revival. Together these groups expressed a growing concern about the anglicisation of Ireland. In 1891 the Irish Literary Society was founded in London. The following year the National Literary Society was established in Dublin. The founders were the young poet, William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory. They were dedicated to cultivating a public for the literature and legends of Ireland.

The Nationalist Movement needed a cultural stimulus to capture the imagination of the non-political elements in Irish society, of the common people and of the Bourgeoisie.

(Pine, 1978, p. 23)

Yeats and Lady Gregory set up the Abbey theatre in 1904. It immediately came to symbolise Ireland's political and cultural emancipation. It was at this time that Yeats wrote a collection of essays entitled Ideas of Good and Evil, in which he discussed Art, Theatre, Ireland and Literature. Yeats pleads with all young Irish artists.

We who care deeply about the arts find ourselves the priesthood of an almost forgotten faith, and we must, I think, if we would win the people again, take upon ourselves the method and fervour of the priesthood.

(Yeats, 1904, p.320)

MacLiammóir, while touring with Peter Pan in Ireland, read the essays and became interested in Yeats and his writings. In his essays, Yeats describes how he might have discovered more of Ireland if he had written in Irish.

MacLiammóir took this into account and learned the Irish language. Yeats felt that it was his duty, and the duty of other artists, to lead the Irish people back to the arts and to find within themselves a passion and stirring for them. He believed the work that one does, must be a journey within oneself towards truth and beauty.

Yeats's work was written in a period which came to be known as the Celtic twilight. This was a period in Irish history when artists and authors drew inspiration from the Celtic tradition. Celtic legend offered an alternative way of seeing and representing the world, an intermixture of the sensual and spiritual. Yeats's ambition was to achieve a poetic and legendary drama within a symbolic and decorative setting. His idea of theatre was that it would draw from the Irish tradition, both the Celtic and the Christian which would provide "*A focus for future national and nationalistic aspiration*". (Edwards, 1973, p. 1)

MacLiammóir, in his autobiography All for Hecuba (Plate 11) felt that Jack Dunne only half approved of him as an exponent of the Celtic twilight. He tended to agree with Dunne, believing that his earlier work wallowed in the classical framework of the nineteenth century Celtic twilight.

Although he believed one must look to the past in order to learn for the future, he perceived that immersing oneself in the Celtic twilight hindered his art rather than helping it.

Mary Manning, the playwright, author and critic wrote in 1935 that she felt that the Gate theatre had emerged from the Celtic twilight and dragged into the light of day young writers and artists who might otherwise have withered away in obscurity.

Yeats had always wanted to create in the theatre an atmosphere of illusion, an imaginary world yet real enough to have an effect. He believed in a concept called "*aesthetic distance*", which he explored in his earlier poetry.



PLATE 11 : Front Cover of his Autobiography

"ALL FOR HECUBA"

Correspondingly he wanted a stage picture which suggested a remoteness but 'near' enough to have a dramatic effect.

In the first production at the Gate of Ibsens Peer Gynt. (Plate 12 & 13) MacLiammoir translated this concept into practice. He and Edwards painted the back wall of the stage a neutral blue grey to give the illusion that the stage extended into the distance. Flooding it with light it looked like "*a shadowless infinite sky*" (Pine, 1978, p. 40)

A structure was built in the form of two black steps back to back creating the mountain which silhouetted against the sky. These steps worked both visually and structurally - they looked like mountain peaks and the actors could ascend and descend according to the script.

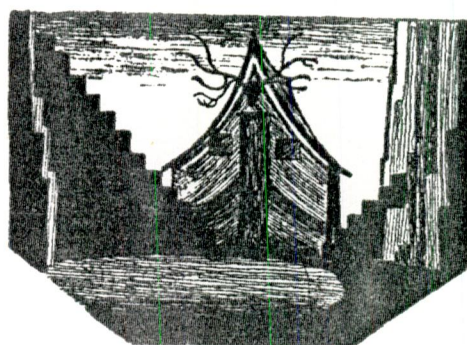
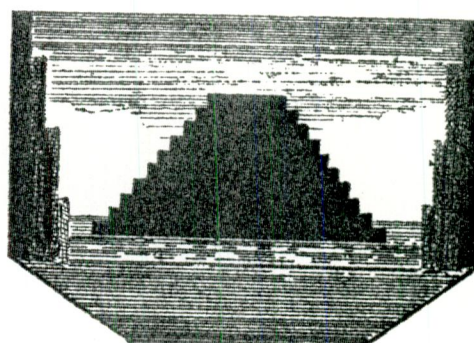
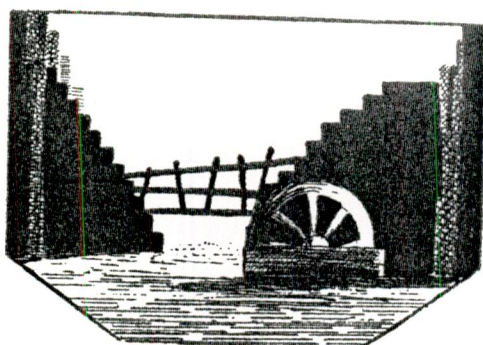
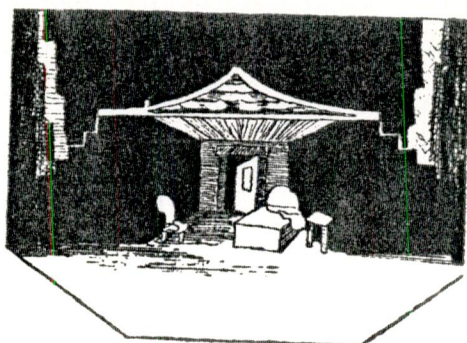
MacLiammoir later described how he felt that his first production of Peer Gynt did not succeed entirely. The black steps achieved what he wanted but he felt his mountains demanded the stage to themselves.

He described how he felt that his "*painterly instinct*" (Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.54) took over and this meant that he was "*mixing the idea of significant shapes with that of something approaching pictorial realism - the very thing he set out to avoid*".
(Fitz-Simon, 1995, p.54)

He described the more subtle design of "*a collapsing backcloth, a door that has got stuck, creates more of a sensation than any set design*".
(Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.54)

From the beginning, MacLiammoir attempted to bring Irish folklore onto the modern stage; he did this in Ill Met by Moonlight. (Plate 14) by creating an atmosphere of distortion achieved by the dimming of lights which caused the scenery to change its look and shape. In effect, he wanted to combine the mythological world of Yeats with the modern world. Appropriately Ill Met by Moonlight tells the story of Sebastian Prosper whose home is built within a fairy rath in Connemara. Yeats had believed that the Celtic movement was the start of great things to come and he stressed how important it was for the future. "*For every new fountain of legends is a new intoxication for the imagination of the world*".

(Yeats, 1902, p.293)



PEER GYNT, BY HENRIK IBSEN (FIRST AND SIXTH SEASONS).

SETTINGS BY MICHEAL MACLIAMMOIR.

PLATE 12 :



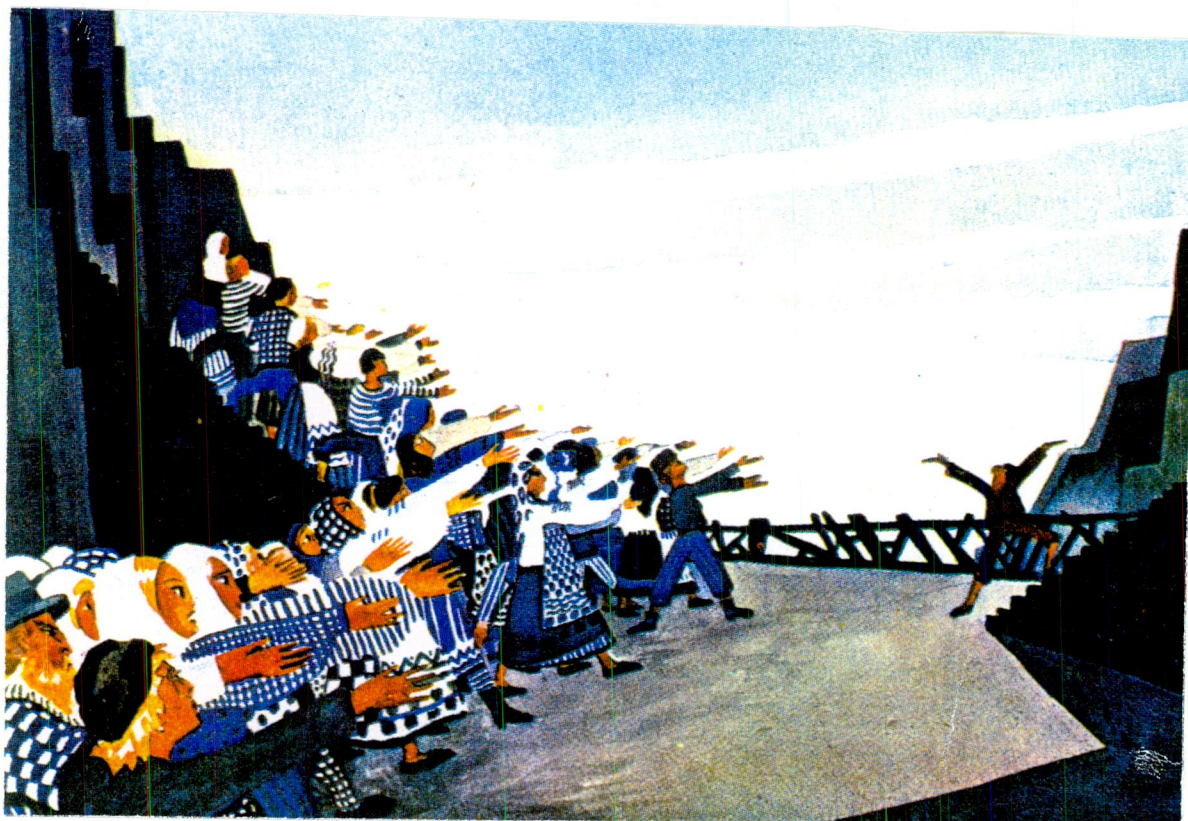


PLATE 13 : Peer Gynt





PLATE 14 : Potrait ILL Net by Moonlight 1969

Edwards believed MacLiammóir always brought this sense of "other wordliness" (Pine, 1978 p.72) to his work. He brought a romantic beauty an evocation of things other than the obvious and the commonplace to all aspects of his work be it designing, writing or acting.

MacLiammóir the actor, demonstrated his versatility by playing in tragedy to Pantomime. He felt very passionate about acting and regarded it '*as a thing of the Spirit*'. He sought out in his inner being the qualities which made any part he did distinctly his own. MacLiammóir said.

To act is to live for a moment with an intenser life, to pass bodily into the sphere of sorrows and of joys greater than our own, to thrust the shoddy surface of what we call real life upwards to a transforming radiance; and while the painter must see and the poet and the musician hear with passion before they hurry to canvas or to paper and ink, the actor must note all down with calmness and precision and must then give to the single moment everything he possesses, soul and voice and body, the inner and outer selves. (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.156)

Yeats called him "*A magnificent actor*" (Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.55) after seeing him in 1929 in The Unknown Warrior at the Peacock. This was truly a memorable tribute for MacLiammóir from a man he respected and admired. In The Old Lady Says No by Denis Johnston in 1929, MacLiammóir clearly welcomed the idea of playing Robert Emmet.

The young romantic hero and ill-starred lover never found as fine an interpreter as MacLiammóir. It was one of these rare occasions in the theatre where the part - the Mask - had become the person. (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.76)

MacLiammóir was quite headstrong and any arguments between Edwards and himself as to who should play the lead, were quickly resolved by not producing the play at all! With rare exceptions, either MacLiammóir or Edwards took the leading parts. One of the few exceptions was when McMaster was invited to play Othello at the Gate and on the second Egyptian tour in 1937. In 1931 MacLiammóir and Edwards met Orson Welles. Welles began his stage career at the Gate. He appeared in several productions in small cameo roles. Welles had informed MacLiammóir and Edwards that he would stay longer if he was cast the lead in Othello but they put him off with promises of important parts in further productions which they then postponed interminably. Welles was, therefore, not very complimentary about his time spent at the Gate. He attributed his allocation of small parts to MacLiammóir's jealousy of his (Welles) "*man to man relationship*" (Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.74) with Edwards. Welles did admit,

however, to his biographer, Barbara Leaming in 1983 that MacLiammóir's Hamlet in 1932 was a great performance. *"Indeed, MacLiammoir's Hamlet was the outstanding performance not just of Orsons time in Dublin but of that decade in the Irish theatre".* (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.88)

MacLiammóir had thought deeply on his approach to Hamlet, searching for an interpretation deeper than his own inner nature. He planned a more poetic interpretation than Dublin audiences had seen. Edwards advised him to stop theorizing part and to just act the part in accordance to his own insights. MacLiammóir took his advice.

MacLiammóir acted Hamlet with a conviction and sincerity that made a lasting impression on both seasoned playgoers and young people seeing the play for the first time. (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.89)

Playwright David Sears, theatre critic of the Irish Independent wrote *"I have never used the word genius in a theatre notice, but I have no hesitation in applying it to the Hamlet of MacLiammóir".* (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.91)

The success of Hamlet enabled the Gate Theatre Company to tour abroad. In 1993 and 1935, they went to the Westminster Theatre in London producing such plays as Yahoo by the Earl of Longford, and Johnston's The Old Lady Says No. They even travelled to Cairo, and later to Alahambra in Alexandra. Longford disapproved of the Cairo trip, but due to MacLiammóir's and Edwards' personal interest and finances in the tour, the company, under the billing The Dublin Gate Theatre Company, were allowed to travel to the Cairo Opera House. When the Gate Company arrived in Cairo, the director of the Opera House questioned their credibility as actors from the Gate, as he had read in a London Sunday newspaper that the Gate Company were at that time, reputed to be in Westminster staging O'Neill's Ah Wilderness. The question arose how could there be two companies playing in two different parts of the world simultaneously. It emerged that Longford had recruited new actors to play in the O'Neill comedy and billed them falsely as the Dublin Gate Theatre. Meanwhile, the Gate Theatre Company in Cairo had to prove themselves the valid company by performing in the Opera House. Consequently, as a culmination of this incident and many others between Longford, MacLiammóir and Edwards, the original Gate Theatre was dissolved.

On their return there was a mutual decision to form a new company - The Longford Productions. They would appear in the Gate Theatre for six months and travel for the remaining six, and so too, would the Edwards - MacLiammóir Company, as they now became known.

In 1940 the Edwards - MacLiammóir Company began their first season in the Gaeity. They continued acting here until the late sixties. MacLiammóir and Edwards continued travelling during the forties and in 1949, MacLiammóir answered a call from Orson Welles in January to appear in his film version of Othello playing the role of Iago. The filming was very unorganised, Welles apparently never seemed to know what or where he wanted to film next. March 1950 saw the end of MacLiammóir's role in the film when he went on to Paris to join Edwards in Welles new play The Unthinking Lobster and Marlowe's Doctor by Faust.

1952 saw MacLiammóir's last performance of Hamlet. He was now getting too old for the part. And so he *"now saw many of the parts in which he had excelled entrusted to younger actors"*. (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.151)

He never re-achieved the original status of his earlier years, until 1960 with his one man show The Importance of Being Oscar, (See Plate 10) in which he crafted an excellent representation of the life and work of Oscar Wilde. His performance was described as his *"Magnificent Best"* (Oh Aodha, 1990, p. 166). The Daily Express was completely captivated. *"Genius meets genius it is an explosion of incomparable richness, boldness, passion and beauty"*.

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p.166)

Howard Taubman of the New York Times wrote *"He is an Irishman proudly proclaiming a compatriots expression in himself and in his work of the spirit of Ireland"*. (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.168)

MacLiammóir finally got the worldwide recognition he had always deserved. He travelled widely with this show and then produced another. I must be talking to my friends - A personal anthology selected from those writers who had meant most to him.

In 1963 his solo performance Talking About Yeats was performed as a tribute to the Centenary of Yeats' birth. MacLiammóir was conferred in 1961 by Trinity College with an honour degree of LLD and went on to receive Freeman of the City with Edwards. He went on performing his one man shows in Ireland and abroad including New York and London.

On the 13th December 1975 he appeared for the last time on stage at the Gate in The Importance of being Oscar. His wonderful stage career had ended due to his deteriorating health and the gradual disimprovement of his sight.

The greatest of all the distinguished parts he played was not that of Hamlet, of Robert Emmet, of Iago or even of Oscar Wilde in ectoplasm, but the creation of the character known as Micheal MacLiammoir.

(Oh Aodha, 1990, Back Cover)

MacLiammoir's work as a visual artist can be divided into three areas - his costumes and settings, his work as an illustrator and graphic designer and his series of paintings.

MacLiammoir's stage designs have evaded preservation due to the fact that his designs were merely made as guidelines for the carpenters and dressmakers. In addition, his commitment as an actor prevented him from finishing his drawings and therefore only a few are actually completed. His stage designs, however, are strongly individualistic; although Edwards believed the nature of his designs have "*developed a flexibility demanded by the requirements of many periods and many different styles of presentation*".

(Oh Aodha, 1990, p.1)

MacLiammoir's stage designs were always created with the actors and the script in mind. As an actor himself he knew the importance of good practical stage design. In his drawings he rarely had human figures in his set designs. (Plate 15) *They were always waiting in the wings beyond the confines of the paper on which the set has been drawn.*

(Luke, 1978, p.79)

MacLiammoir often used a permanent setting which many believed was boring and monotonous. He defended the permanent setting saying it contributed to the unity of the play which was often scattered and confused due to continuous changes. He explained that in certain production swere it has been necessary to paint entirely different structures for each scene the results often did not link up properly. In a permanent setting this unity is automatic. He used this form of permanent setting in Peer Gynt and Berkeley Square.

MacLiammoir believed that his earlier designs were unhindered by their lack of finances.

I started out and made a lot of coloured designs, pleasant enough, I hope, and showing certain qualities of pattern and colour and dramatic value, a certain inventiveness, and not a little economy, thank God, for we had hardly a penny. (Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.54) (See Plates 16 & 17)



Micheál Mac Liammóir: *Tristan und Isolde*. Proposed design for Covent Garden

PLATE 15 : In 1958 They were not accepted because, in the view of David Webster, The Director, and Rafael Kubelik, Conductor, they conveyed a "RACHAM BEARDELY FEEL"

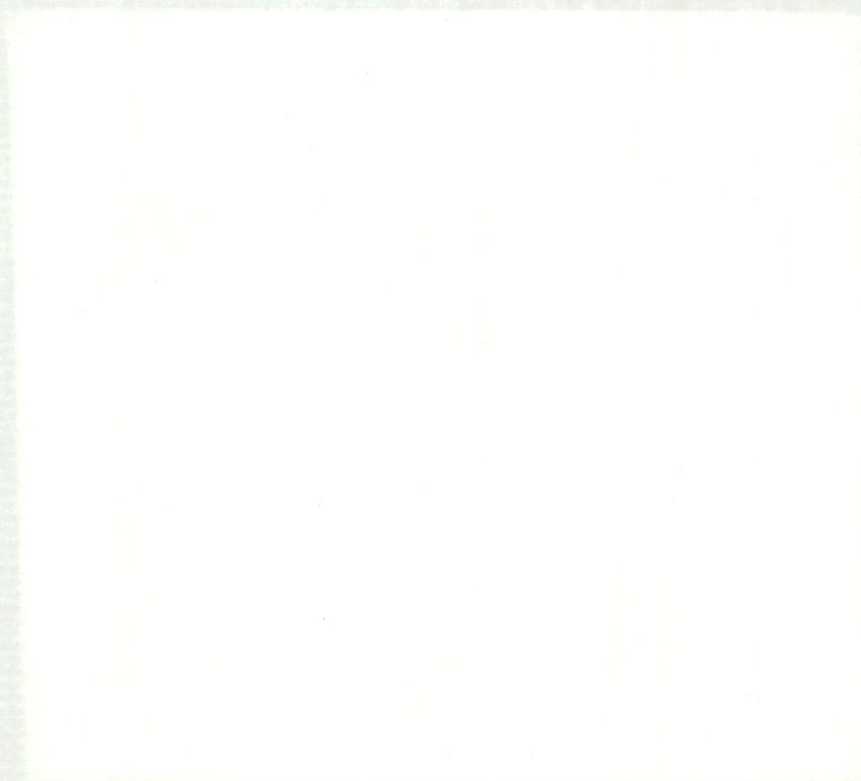




Paper Mache
Masks

Believed to have
been made for
"HAMLET"







Head Sketches
recently found
on shutters in
MacLiammoir's old
Dressing Room



MacLiammóir when contemplating a play looked at all aspects - the visual, the technical and the performance. One production Fitz-Simons mentions in his biography was Mogu and he believed that MacLiammóir had an ulterior motive in selecting the play. (Plate 18)

It was probably chosen because it gave a splendid opportunity for MacLiammóir to draw upon Islamic art for a series of richly patterned gauzes and cloths. (Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.15)

MacLiammóir believed that

It had never been the purpose of art to make uglier the ugliness of things, but to transform and make the already beautiful more beautiful, and in following this purpose, art shields us with sweet influence from the dark sorrow of our weakness. (Luke, 1978, p.81)

When designing costumes, MacLiammóir always took into account the actors who would be wearing his designs and the dressmaker who would be making them. In creating a design, he knew what type of fabric, trimmings and accessories would be used in the making up of the garments. He was consequently very meticulous in his drawings

An Ideal Husband by Oscar Wilde was produced in the Gate theatre in 1932. MacLiammóir decided to dress the actors in 1890's dress rather than contemporary costume. In his sketches for Eileen Long - the Gates' dressmaker, he describes to her his ideas for Mabel Chiltern's dress. (See Plate 19).

Darling Eileen, do you think there would be enough material (in that lovely, quite unusable in its present form, pink lace mantles for the outer cover for his design for Mabel in An Ideal Husband. The top indicated in this, by circular pattern would be of a different sort of lace: also the bodice and sleeves, a swathed sash divides it from the skirt, so you'd only want to make a skirt from the overskirt, underskirt perhaps a deeper coloured rose silk. What do you think?

Love Michael.
(Gate Theatre (Dublin) Archive)

MacLiammóir felt that clothes should express a person's character and this was reflected in his designs. In An Ideal Husband he has the designs perfectly matched to the character. Mrs. Chevely's costume - a sharp bottle green and gold afternoon outfit-suits her villainous character and Mabel Chiltern's first dress - flimsy white, with a neckline of red rose-buds suits her character as "*innocence personified*" (Irish Press, 1972, Kennealy). MacLiammóir loved designing for women especially, declaring that women's figures appealed to him aesthetically.



PLATE 18: Set Design for Mogu of the Desert

Padraic Column 1931





PLATE 19 : MacLiammoir's drawing for Mabel Chiltern's Dress

for "THE IDEAL HUSBAND"



He felt his design ideas lived in the past rather than the present. He believed his imagination "*Stops dead at 1900*" (Luke, 1978, p.80) but his ideas in designing for the theatre were both imaginative and modern and a vital force in the development of the modern theatre.

MacLiammóir's first published article was Politdheacht (Politics) in 1917, in which he discussed how the language revival movement should go hand in hand with politics. In a letter to the editor of "*Fainne and Lae*" in March 1918 he made a plea for drama in the Irish language. In 1922, he wrote Oidhcheannta Sidbhe (Fairy Stories) which was reprinted in 1988. MacLiammóir travelled in Europe in the early 1920's and wrote descriptive pieces about the Alps and Sicily, displaying a keen interest in the visual aspects of his surroundings.

His own first play was Diarmuid agus Grainne written in 1927, a new version of the Irish saga in which Grainne, the daughter of the High King of Ireland, was betrothed to Fionn MacCumhaill, the old leader of a group of warriors, The Fianna, famous in Irish mythology.

The Gate theatre magazine Motley (Plate 20) first appeared in March 1932 and MacLiammóir contributed articles throughout the magazines existence. He wrote The Hectic Twenties describing the changes that had developed in Dublin. He also wrote an article on acting in Spain, passing on his travelled experience. In 1929 MacLiammóir prepared a script The Ford of the Hurdles, which covered seven episodes in Dublin's history, from the Viking invasion to the insurrection of 1916. He wrote it for a pageant to be staged at the Mansion House during Dublin's civic week.

MacLiammóir wrote memoirs on his life's experiences throughout his career which were published by the Methuen Press in 1946.

Most of MacLiammóir's plays were theatrical. He drew a clear "*distinction between drama as literature and drama as theatre*". (Oh Aodha, 1990, p.135) Where Stars Walk 1940 and Ill Met by Moonlight 1946 are examples. In 1950 he wrote Theatre in Ireland for the department of External Affairs in which he explored the growing taste for the west end and commercial success, where performances were slightly second rate, and had been performed better elsewhere.

In 1952 MacLiammóir wrote an account of his travels with Orson Welles filming the Shakespearian play in his book Put Money in thy Purse chronicles the tour of Europe and North Africa, from Ireland to Paris, Rome, Marrakesh, Magadar, Safi

MOTLEY



PLATE 20: Front Cover of GATE THEATRE MAGAZINE : "MOTLEY"
Page 35



Casablanca and back to Dublin and Belfast. He went on to write Each Actor on His Ass, 1961, An Oscar of No Importance, 1968 and Enter a Goldfish : Memoirs of an Irish actor young and old.

He was concerned that he was involved in too many areas of the arts, failing to realise the impact he submitted to them.

I believe in so many people doing a job and I've tampered about and flirted with too many of the muses to become the perfect lover for any of them, that's my honest opinion of myself.

(In conversation on the Late Late Show).

CHAPTER THREE

Stagecraft and Visual Influences

In which naturalism, realism, illusionism, expressionism et cetera all have their place, it will quickly be realised that from the beginnings of the Gate, consideration of repertoire and stagecraft dominated, the discussions of Edwards and MacLiammoir and their associates.

(Pine, 1984, p.11)

MacLiammoir and Edwards insisted that stage designs and costumes were just as important as the script, stressing the need to keep a balanced harmony between them. They believed in the stage picture and that it was the main strength of a production. They insisted on the symbolic relationship between the stage, the actors and the script; they wanted the "*Stage Picture*" to come alive.

The stage picture is a beautiful thing, it is part of the strength of the theatre, and it must remain a powerful weapon of our craft. But it must not limit us any more than anything else must limit us.

(Hobson, 1934, p. 24)

In a talk he gave in Cork in 1956 he spoke of the theatre in Ireland and his own beliefs. He spoke of the importance of colour and design and of the "*Subtle and most hypnotic bond between audience and player*". (Fitz-Simon, 1994, p.110) He also spoke of the necessary part taken by author, actors, producers, designers and audience to achieve the best out of the theatre.

As the partnership between them developed, the union of MacLiammoir's decorative ideas and Edwards' stagecraft can be seen. MacLiammoir's work for the stage was relevant and appropriate to the productions and complemented the direction of Edwards to such an extent that this consistency of professionalism continued throughout both their careers. Edwards felt that the design was predominant and it was due to this that they learned one essential lesson.

However beautiful the design might be and however exalted its inspiration it must serve the essential purpose of the play - it must be appropriate, underlying the significance of the action at every point and not obtrude as scenery or costume in its own right. (Pine, 1984, p.33)

MacLiammoir and Edwards aimed to create the illusion of reality, to this end they adopted the style of naturalism. Naturalism is the close adherence to nature and reality in art and literature. They felt, however, that when a play was concerned with the world of the imagination, that its presentation in a naturalistic medium can be misleading.

When works, which have not been written with a view to the expression of normality, when characters and incidents are portrayed that belong to the World of Imagination, their presentation in the naturalistic medium

destroys any impression of their probability and realism becomes no longer a valuable asset to the theatre, but a menace.

(Hobson, 1934, p. 22)

In their productions the presence of overall harmony was essential. This harmony is evident in the 1932 production of Romeo and Juliet. (See Plate 21) The programme note described how the designer (MacLiammóir) based his idea on an Elizabethan stage but without actually following its structure. The note commented on the producers and designers treatment of the play and how their aims were to create *"a rich simplicity unhampered by extraneous detail accentuating not only its lyrical quality but the fundamental simplicity of the story"*.

(Pine, 1978, p.49)

The Old Lady Says No by Denis Johnston was another play that MacLiammóir and Edwards produced to complement the tone and daring of Johnston's writings. They took into account the fact that *"the whole concept of good production aims at a unity which should make the choice of the style of setting and of playing at one with each other as well as with the intentions of the author."*

(Edwards, 1958, p.35)

The Old Lady Says No was a difficult play to produce and gave MacLiammóir the challenging task of designing the stage without losing sight of the play itself. MacLiammóir designed a series of three curtains with bold caricature designs (See Plate 22) which would be swept across the stage and removed into the wings. *"The surreal quality of the painting greatly aided to the nightmare quality of the drama."*

(Hobson, 1934, p.47)

The three cloths illustrated a romantic moonlit garden, a middle class drawing room *"Satirising the lifestyle of a Minister for Culture in the Free State Parliament"* (Hobson, 1934, p.47), and the third and final cloth shows a room in a backstreet tenement *"setting for a parody of O'Casey's The Plough and The Stars"*. (Hobson, 1934, p.47) This, final cloth shows the contrast between life in the impoverished classes compared to the wealthier classes in the second cloth drop. The idea behind these cloths was to show that even though Ireland was now independent, little had changed in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. Society had not fundamentally altered and there remained an air of discontent among the different classes. It showed how the new age of independence after Easter 1916 was being converted into a myth sympathetic to continual anarchic rebellion.



PLATE 21 : Set Design For
"ROMEO AND JULIET"





PLATE 22: Set Design for
"THE OLD LADY SAYS NO"

MacLiammóir from his early days learnt that one could convey a mood by colour and it was with this point in view that he set about designing for Oscar Wilde's Salome.

Here he used not only a definite scheme of design for all the costumes, but a definite scheme of massed colours; black and yellow for the Jews; green and violet for the Court; and white for the Roman Ambassadors. Herod was dressed in black and silver and green, crowned and entwined with purple roses. The set was a matt black picked out in metallic silver against a sky of jade, and lit with a peculiar peacock-blue-green flood obtained by an admixture of colours.

(Hobson, 1934, p.26)

Pine, in his description of the play, observes that MacLiammóir, was heavily influenced by Charles Rickett's recollection of staging Salome. (Pine, 1978, p.). In The Art of Stage Decoration, Rickett's proposed "*a black floor upon which Salome's white feet would show..... the sky was to be a rich turquoise, blue ... the Jews should be in yellow, the Romans were to be in purple, the soldiers in bronze green, and John in white.*"

(Pine, 1978, p. 42)

MacLiammóir believed that although they were the first to produce Salome in the British Isles, he felt that they were forced to do it and the cast was the best they could collect wondered whether it would have been better if they had not attempted it at all. He believed the production looked the professional outlook he sought to achieve. Richard Pine saw the production and said "*I personally am glad that I saw Salome in the Peacock of 1929, and with all deference to MacLiammóir I think he is wrong now in thinking he was wrong then.*"

(Pine, 1978, p.42)

In spite of the slowness of the action inevitable in this particular play its dramatic effect was great and its reception enthusiastic.

The Gate theatre developed their own style of pictorial effect and strive for aesthetic perfection. They realised that this

As part and parcel of our entire venture was of value, not merely as an aesthetic ambition, but as necessary to the very existence of the theatre as a whole; and not merely the existence of the art theatre, or the repertory theatre, or the experimental theatre, or the commercial theatre, but of the theatre as opposed to the cinema or any other form of expression or entertainment.

(Bulmer, Hobson, 1934, p. 32)

MacLiammóir was greatly influenced by a number of artists who helped shape him into an individual artist with his own style.

From an early age he had been enthralled by Baksts' decor. Leon Bakst is best known for his stage and costume designs for the Ballet Russes. He had an extraordinary daring flair for rich costume characterised by bright colour and decoration. Bakst once described his choice of colours in Robert's The New Russian Stage.

I have often noticed that in each colour of the prism there exists a graduation which sometimes expresses frankness and chastity, sometimes sensuality and even bestiality, sometimes pride, sometimes despair the painter who knows from the spectator the exact emotion which he wants them to feel.

(Spencer, 1973, p.70-71)

The main influence in MacLiammóir's use of colour was Bakst, it was he who taught him the importance of colour. MacLiammóir developed his own personal style in dealing with line, colour and movement. Richard Pine, believed a description written by Arsene Alexandre in 1913 about Leon Bakst is relevant and summarises a major aspect of MacLiammóir's theatrical achievements.

Bakst

Was acclaimed a master of the harmony of line and colour in movement, and with each successive production his work has been more clearly recognised as an essential factor in, and an integral compliment of the enchanting inventions of the poets and musicians with whom he has worked.

(Pine, 1978, p.71)

The influence of Bakst is central to MacLiammóir's work. MacLiammóir adopted the Harlequin motif from Bakst, which he drew constantly. It can be seen in several designs including his designs for Harlequin in Nicolai Evreinov's A Merry Death (1929) (Plate 23) which bears a strong resemblance to Bakst's designs for Le Carnival in 1910 (Plate 24).

MacLiammóir's designs for Full Moon for the Bride in 1968 were intended for the Ballet "*reconciled to the Celtic world of twilight, fairy and tragicomic herosim*" (Pine, 1978, p.74) The projected ballet is set in Connemara before the Famine. The story concerns a house in the wilds of Connemara mountains which is occupied by a wedding feast. MacLiammóir believed that in a ballet, the story should be simple or even non-existent, as he had intended for his ballet.



PLATE 23: MacLiammoirs Designs
For A MERRY DEATH



PLATE 24: Baskt's Design for
Le Carnival 1910



Alexander Schouvaloff in his book on Bakst quotes him saying "*The less story it seems the better.*" (Schouvaloff, 1991, p.54)

The influence of Bakst is evident in MacLiammoir's two drawings Prince of the Sidbhe (See Plate 25) and Woman of the Sidbhe (See Plate 26) resembling in particular the Bakst's designs for spectre in Le Spectre de la Rose (1911) (Plate 27). They are similarly adorned, from head to toe, in decorative costume and the arms have bracelets wrapped around the higher arm and wrists.

MacLiammoir's drawing Prince of the Sidbhe is very similar in the sense that both are like paintings, painted onto the human body - It is interesting to note that in "*Spectre de la Rose*" the original costume design was virtually sewn onto a body stocking worn by Nijinsky as if it was painted onto the body. Similarly Bakst often '*painted the costumes directly onto the gauze - clad bodies of the dancers*'.

Bakst's designs interpreted the oriental and the exotic. MacLiammoir tried to absorb these exotic elements onto the Celtic world (Pine, 1978, p.74). Bakst wanted to convey the mood from the ballet's music through his colour, he thus chose his colour scheme by listening to the music. MacLiammoir wanted to bring to life a mood in a play through his stage and costume designs. He chose his design ideas from his knowledge of the play and the mood and atmosphere he wished to portray.

He learned the quality and importance of colour and movement from Bakst but Beardsley taught him the use of line to create movement.

The fatality of an influence such as Beardsley which, while teaching purity of line and immeasurable value of space, by its very individuality thrusts those who are enthralled by it into servility.

(Edwards, 1973, p.1)

Aubrey Beardsley, born in Brighton in 1872 was one of the greatest illustrators in the history of British Art. He often drew in pure black and white, but mostly tinted these or coloured them to achieve subtlety in tone. MacLiammoir learned from Beardsley the economic use of line "*partly because he wanted to fill Beardsley's monochrome with a wealth of Bakst colour*". (Pine, 1978, p.29). MacLiammoir would be the first to admit that "*he was over-influenced by Beardsley*." He tended to heavily outline his earlier work with "*a frightening definition of line*". (Pine, 1978, p. 74) yet he created

" A definition of space by an economic use of line and contrasts which, relieved and enlivened by Michael's use of colour, distinguished theatre designs and established



PLATE 25: MacLiammoirs Drawing for
Prince of the Sidhe



Plate 26: MacLiammoirs drawing for
Woman of the Sidhe



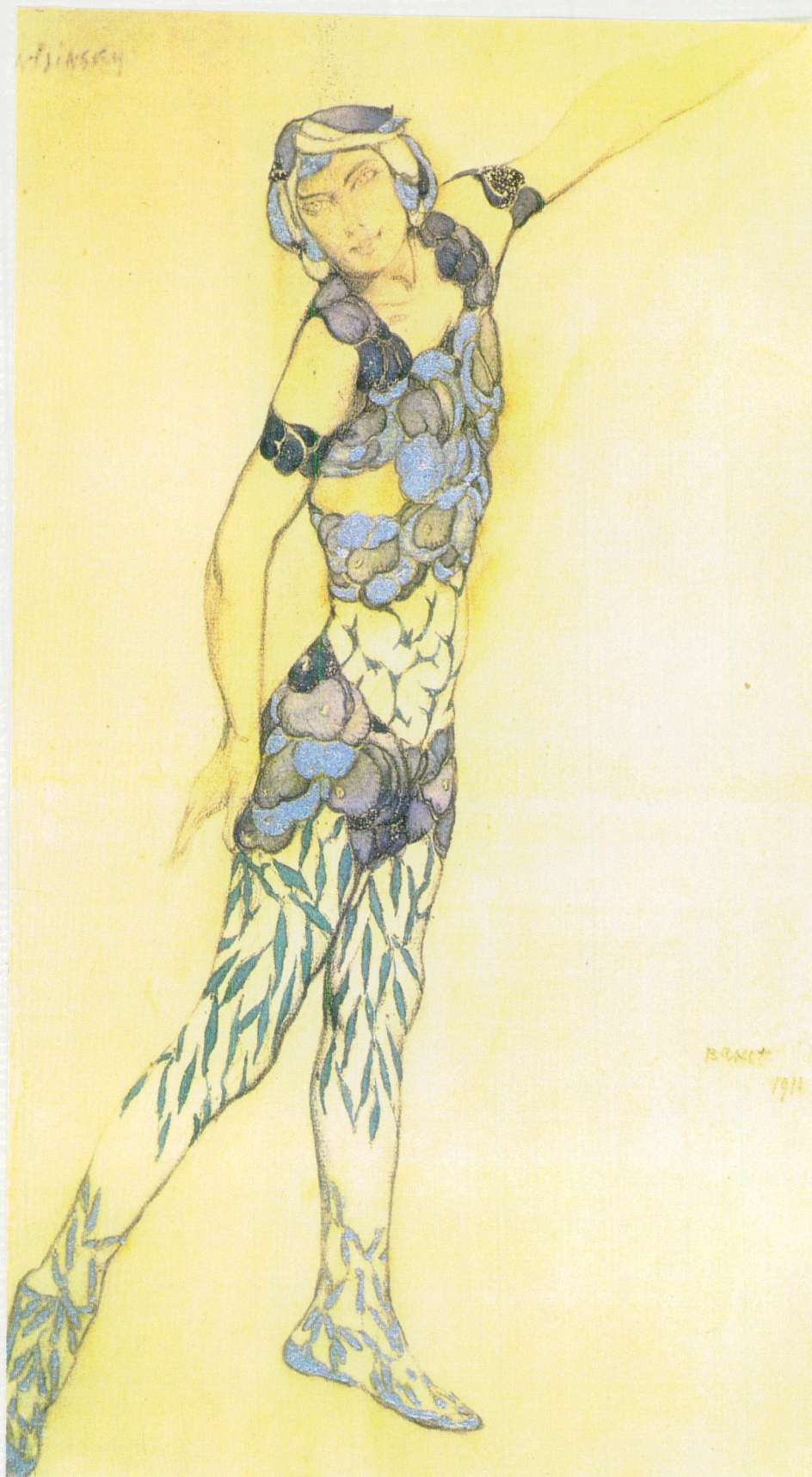


PLATE 27:

Baskets Design for
"SPECTRE de la ROSE"



him. His drawing The Damsel I Left Behind Me, 1915 (See Plate 2) shows a distinctive similarity with that of Beardsley "How La Beale Isould wrote to Sir Tristram" - One of his many Morte d'Arthur drawings (See Plate 28). A better example is Beardsley's The Toilet in 1896 (See Plate 29), the sheer detail and quality and varying line gives it a sense of ornamental texture. MacLiammóir in his drawings for Oidhcheanna Sidbhe (Plate 30) displays this skilful relationship between plain black and white.

The Beardsley influence in the black and white, hermaphrodite masked, self-abusive, yellow-nineties sense did not dominate Micheal's work for any length of time.

(Pine, 1978, p. 73)

He went on to say that Bakst had redeemed MacLiammoir from his indebtedness to Beardsley and gave him the encouragement he needed to translate his feelings from immediate colour and line into dramatic movement.

(Pine, 1978, p.73)

MacLiammóir's choice in theatre was bound to be exotic. The influences of Aubrey Beardsley and Leon Bakst was not likely to find suitable subjects for illumination in the Abbey repertoire. Pine, in Theatre in Focus believed that some Irish plays, predominantly those of Yeats, were "*ideally suited for treatment for a designer of MacLiammóir's artistic temperament and had already been designed in Ireland*" (Pine, 1984, p.21) He goes on to point out the Gordon Craig (Stage Designer) had clearly influenced MacLiammóir's choice of career and approach to the stage.

Gordon Craig was a source of inspiration to MacLiammóir and Edwards. An actor himself - he discovered that to draw and to act was to see a piece in the theatre as a whole.

W.B. Yeats was very impressed with Craig's ideas and work, and the Abbey theatre were the first to use his pointed screens. His screens were the scenery which were lit up with a colour to create a mood for the scene. Craig's work suited Yeats symbolic drama (as did MacLiammóirs). Yeats believed that the actor should be merely instrumental to the play and the playwright, as did Craig.

Craig's training as an actor gave him a broad experienced background. To Craig designing a production meant everything from scenery, costumes, and props to lighting and movement. The partnership of MacLiammóir and Edwards shared these responsibilities to present a united production involving all these elements.



PLATE 28: One Of Beardsleys Drawings
for MORTE d'ARTHUR





PLATE 29: One of MacLiammoirs pen Drawing for
OIHCHEANNA SIDHE



PLATE 30 : The Toilet by Aubrey Beardsley 1896



Craig's revolutionised stage design. He once said "*Honesty doesn't interest me, effect does*". He was constantly dreaming of a theatre of the future - "*a theatre that would appeal to the emotions through movement alone*" (Experimental Theatre - James Roose - Evans), but it was Craig's design ideals that affected and influenced MacLiammóir and Edwards "*There was stylization in his symbolic use of light, and beauty in his unification of sound, movement, light and colour*". Craig believed that the artist and director should work together towards unifying the spirit of the theatre. Mainie Jellett was also concerned with the interaction of form and colour.

Mainie Jellett (1897 - 1944) was a cubist painter who developed "*an art form which took its inspiration from Egypt, from Celtic art and made live things of non-representational material*" Jellett through her art and philosophy influenced both MacLiammóir and Edwards. She wrote some of her ideas in an essay entitled The Dual Ideal of Form in Art. Jellett describes how the surface, whether on wall or canvas

Was considered as a space to be harmoniously filled with forms and colour relating to the particular exterior shape of that surface. She believed a picture ought to be complete and although the painting was on flat surface it should give the illusion of being three dimensional.

(Arnold, 1991, p.101)

Jellett had a sense of rhythm in her geometric patterns, which is evident in her painting Seated Nude, 1946. (See Plate 31) MacLiammóir drew from her ideals to create his designs for Elmer Rice's "*Not for the children*" were drawn in the cubist manner of Mainie Jellett. (See Plate 32). MacLiammóir's set design shows a definite interaction of form and colour and of pattern and rhythm.

MacLiammóir's work was hardly ever cubist in style but certain paintings and drawings in his earlier work, Jellett's influence is evident. The original design MacLiammóir drew for his autobiography All for Hecuba is painted in a cubist manner. (See Plate 11) He creates a harmonious balance between shape and colour reflecting Jellett's ideals.

In an exhibition held in Cork in 1973, on display was a man of designs and illustrations by MacLiammóir spanning a period from 1917 to 1972. A Mrs. Geraldine Neeson opened the exhibition proclaiming

The evidence of Michael's brilliance in another aspect of the theatre is here on the walls for you to see, his work in this line has sometimes been too easily faulted as too redolent of Bakst and Beardsley. They have, influenced him, of course, in the same way that Mozart influenced Beethoven.

(Cork Examiner, 17th April 1973)

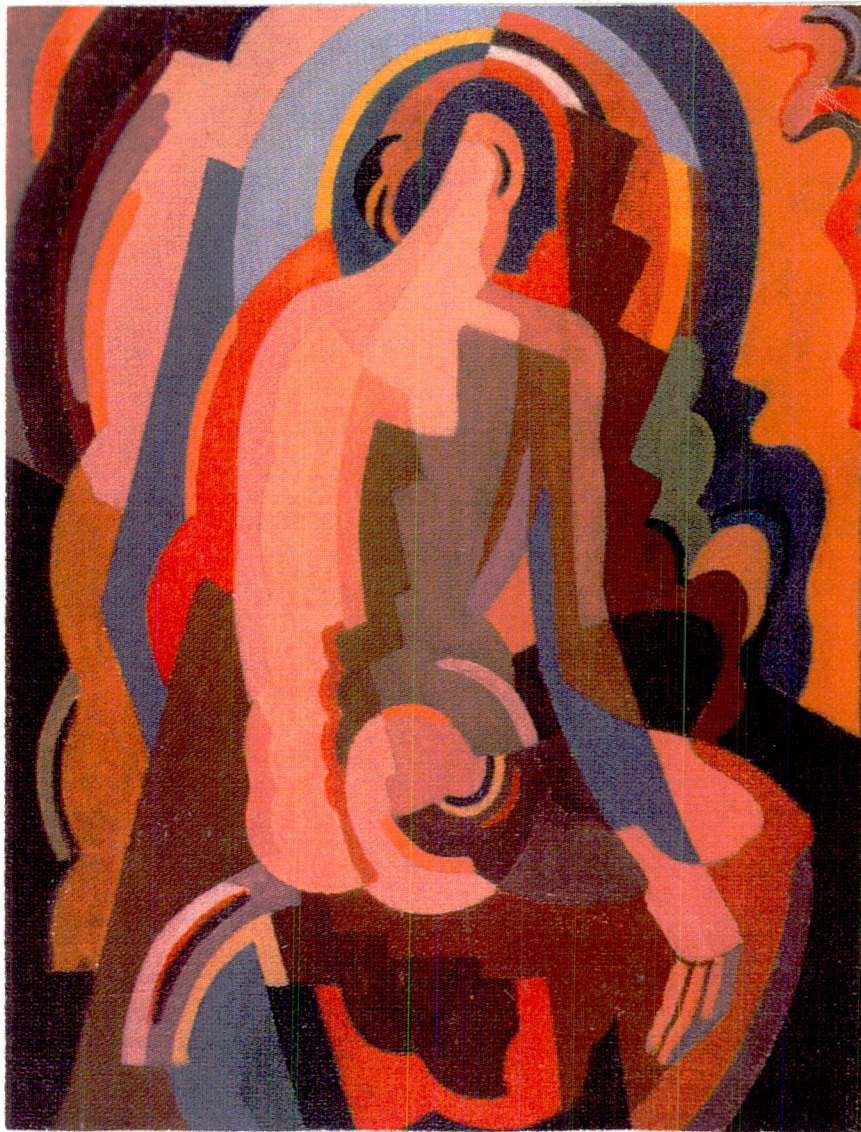


PLATE 31 : SEATED NUDE by Jellett.

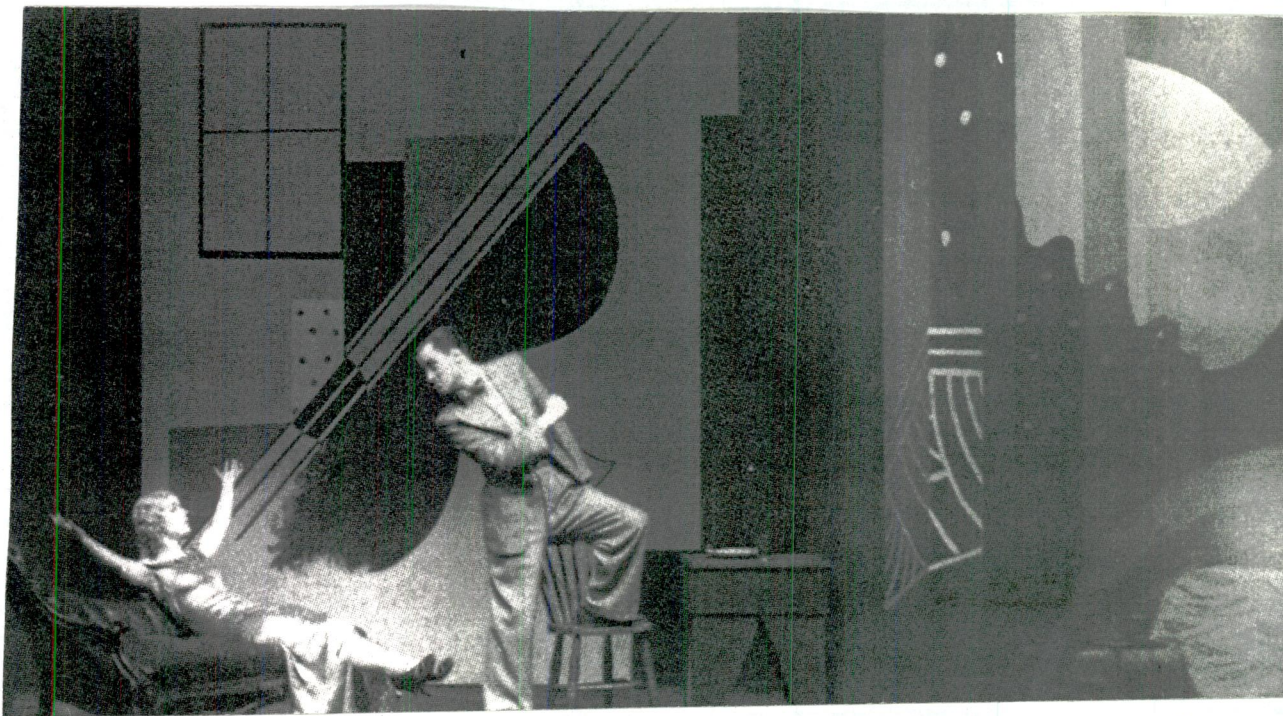


PLATE 32 ; Elmer Rice "NOT FOR THE CHILDREN" Design MacLiammoirs



CONCLUSION

MacLiammoir's outstanding contribution to the Arts in Ireland is evident in his work as a designer, actor and writer. Although greatly influenced by a variety of artists, he developed his own individual styles and techniques.

The Irish influence, is predominantly the most important for it helped shape his outlook and vision in theatre in Ireland. He realised in the Irish people a passion for the visual.

His commitment as an actor, unfortunately, prevented him from further developing his talent in painting and designing. His first love was always acting, yet fortunately, for us his early years as a designer and illustrator produced most of his best design work.

Along with Edwards, they made a country with no tradition of visual appreciation and little of stagecraft aware of the wholeness of its production techniques. The influence of the partnership still exists today in the use of lighting, the application of pictorial line and colour in set and costume design, and the stimulation of new thinking about production and direction. Many directors and actors today throughout Ireland can be said to have received encouragement and instruction from this partnership.

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