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'Irishness' on the New Zealand Stage 1860–1920: The Boucicault and Allgood Tours

Peter Kuch

This paper, which grows out of the Irish Theatrical Diaspora (ITD) project,[1] focuses on two major theatrical events that took place in New Zealand, one during the 'colonial' period and one during the 'dominion' period.[2] The first is Dion Boucicault's five-city tour of colonial New Zealand in 1885; the second is Sara Allgood's extensive tours of dominion New Zealand in 1916 and 1918.[3]

Both tours intersected with major events in Ireland. Boucicault arrived in New Zealand at the height of Parnell's power and on the eve of the First Home Rule Bill, while the atrocities arising from the Land War, from boycotts and from evictions, were being periodically and sometimes

[1] The Irish Theatrical Diaspora Project (ITD) has been running for six years with the aim of producing a cultural history of the performance of Irish Theatre in provincial Ireland, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand and Australia. Nicholas Grene (Trinity College) is directing the project and has taken responsibility for Ireland; Richard Cave for the United Kingdom; Ann Saddlemyer for Canada; John Harrington for the United States; and I have responsibility for New Zealand and Australia. To date there have been five major conferences: the first at the Mansion House in Dublin, in conjunction with the Royal Irish Academy; the second at the National Portrait Gallery in London, in conjunction with the Institute of Advanced Studies at London University; the third at Glucksman House in New York, in conjunction with the University of New York; and the fourth at The Project Theatre in Dublin as part of the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Dublin Theatre Festival, and the fifth in Lille in mid-2008. There are some forty-five researchers associated with the project.

[2] Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Penguin, 2003), 280: 'Among the many changes which took place during the term of the Liberal Government was that in 1907 the country ceased to call itself a colony and became a dominion, implying the beginnings of a sense of independent identity'.

[3] Dr Lisa Marr, who is working with me as a researcher on the ITD project, has prepared detailed itineraries of the tours, and a vignette of Sara Allgood (see Appendix).

fulsomely reported in the New Zealand and Australian press. Arguably, the failed Fenian Rising of 1867, the trial of the Manchester Martyrs (1867), the explosions at Clerkenwell Prison (1867), the abortive Fenian invasion of Canada (1870), the *Catalpa* escape (1876), and the brutal murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish and his Secretary T. H. Burke in Phoenix Park (1882), were all still fresh in living memory. Sara Allgood arrived in New Zealand in the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising, the execution by firing squad of fifteen of the revolutionaries, and the hanging of Sir Roger Casement. She was in New Zealand just after the Dunedin editors of *The Green Ray* were arrested, tried and imprisoned; in the dying days of the Battle of the Somme; when both conscription crises erupted; and when the Armistice was signed. Her brother was killed in the War; her daughter died at birth; and she lost her husband in the influenza epidemic – an epidemic that killed more New Zealanders and Australians than all the battles of the First World War.

Boucicault's tour of New Zealand: 22 October 1885 – 5 December 1885

Without doubt Boucicault was the leading dramatist of the day, having taken the London stage by storm as a twenty-year old in 1841 with *London Assurance*.[4] A prolific playwright and highly accomplished character actor, he had written some one hundred and twenty-five plays,[5] produced almost two hundred, and won and lost several fortunes[6] by the time his New Zealand tour was announced in *The New Zealand Herald* on 16 September 1885. As a playwright and a celebrity he was no stranger to local audiences, the 'news items' in the Theatre columns of the major papers regularly reporting his new projects,[7] major events in his

[4] *The New Zealand Herald*, 1 December 1885, 6.

[5] Material relating to the Boucicault tour of Australia and New Zealand is held at the Templeman Library, University of Kent.

[6] In a deposition tended by his wife who was suing him for divorce, (as reported in *The New York Times* 9 June 1881) Boucicault's income was estimated at $50,000 per year, while his personal fortune was said to be in excess of $1,000,000. It was reported in *The New Zealand Herald,* 26 November 1885, 5 that Boucicault was earning £118 per week in royalties from a revival of *Arrah-na-Pogue* at the Adelphi. If a 2/- ticket equals $NZ35 this equates to approximately $NZ35,500 per week.

[7] *The New Zealand Herald,* 7 February 1885, 7: 'A special performance of Mr Dion Boucicault's new drama *Robert Emmett*, has been given at the Greenwich Theatre for the purpose of securing the English copyright'. *The New Zealand*

life,[8] and his many triumphs on the English, French, Irish and American stages. In fact, before he arrived, Auckland had been favoured with a production of *The Shaughraun* mounted by the MacMahon and Leitch Company that had opened at Abbott's Opera House on Saturday night 26 June 1885.[9]

In the 16 September 1885 issue of the *Herald* readers were informed that Boucicault's New Zealand tour was to follow his tour of Australia, and that his seventy-five nights in Melbourne and Sydney had drawn audiences upward of 140,000.[10] Supported by the MacMahon and Leitch Company, and accompanied by his new wife, Louise Thorndyke, by his son Dion Jnr. and his daughter Nina, the Boucicault company were contracted by the Melbourne-based firm of Williamson, Garner and Musgrove for a twenty-six night tour that would take in Dunedin, Oamaru, Timaru, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland.[11] The plays to be performed were listed as: *The Colleen Bawn,*[12] *Arrah-na-Pogue,*[13] and *Conn the Shaughraun*,[14] plays that had premiered in 1860, 1864,

Herald, 4 April 1885, 4: 'Mr Dion Boucicault is engaged in the composition of a new five-act drama in the style of *London Assurance* and also dramatising Ouida's story, "Two Little Wooden Shoes".'

[8] *The New Zealand Herald,* 30 May 1885, 4: 'Mr Dion Boucicault has cancelled his dates in London, sold his London house and furniture and announced his intention of residing in future in the United States'.

[9] As announced in *The New Zealand Herald*, 26 June 1885, 5. George Leitch had taken over the lead part of Conn the Shaughraun from Boucicault for the final 100 performances in the original Adelphi production. It was hoped that Boucicault, who was en route to Australia at that time on the *Zeelandia*, would arrive in Auckland to see the performance. See *The New Zealand Herald,* 27 June 1885, 5. In the event the *Zeelandia* arrived on Sunday afternoon.

[10] Boucicault himself has given a very detailed account of his time in Australia. The unsourced document is published in Harold Love (ed.), *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History* (Kensington, 1984), 102–6.

[11] See Appendix.

[12] *The Colleen Bawn* [*The Fair Haired Girl*], or *The Bride of Garryowen,* was based on Gerald Griffin's novel *The Collegians,* and was first staged in New York on 29 March 1860, then at the Adelphi Theatre in London on 10 September 1860. The London season ran for 278 performances and was seen three times by Queen Victoria.

[13] *Arrah-na-Pogue* [*Arrah of the Kiss*] or *The Wicklow Wedding* premiered at the Dublin Theatre Royal on 7 November 1864. It opened in London on 22 March 1865 at the Princess's Theatre, running for 164 nights.

[14] *The Shaughraun* opened at New York's Wallack's Theatre on 14 November 1874 and at Drury Lane on 4 September 1875. It was also mooted that *Kerry*, also titled *Night and Morning,* which had premiered at the Prince's Theatre,

and 1874 respectively and that had enjoyed long runs on the New York and London stages. *The Colleen Bawn,* for instance, ran for 278 performances in its first season, during which it was seen by Queen Victoria three times. The Queen and the Prince Consort even made a visit to the Lakes of Killarney, where, as Boucicault himself once mischievously quipped, 'the events never took place'.[15]

To mine the newspapers of the day is to be gently reminded of cultural and social continuities. *The New Zealand Herald* reported on the opening night of the performance of *The Shaughraun* in Dunedin that: 'the theatre was densely crowded last night in every part, and many had to be turned away before the commencement of the performance'.[16] Neither the size of the audience nor the Dunedinites reticence to book in advance should come as a surprise. Needless to say Christchurch, Wellington, and Auckland, vied with one another in providing a Mayoral welcome. But it is Boucicault and the **etic** (Irishness as seen by the non-Irish, extrinsic), **emic** (Irishness as seen by the Irish, intrinsic), and **situational** (performative within a specific context and often with reference to stereotypes or specific socio-political circumstances) representations of Irishness that are of particular concern in this discussion.

Arguably, there were four main etic images of Irishness at large while Boucicault was touring New Zealand. One was of the Irish as pre-human, as a race yet fully to evolve, yet to enter civility. The vehicle for this trope was simianisation (*pace* Darwin)—as evidenced by the numerous cartoons in *Punch* and the popular press depicting hairy people with low foreheads and gangly limbs uttering gibberish.[17] After the Phoenix Park murders, the Irish as Frankenstein, as barbarous, rampant ape-like monsters, also gained currency. Another image was of the Irish as Celts—as an ancient people, untouched by Graeco-Roman civilisation, lyrical of speech and intensely imaginative, worshippers of nature, possessing a mythopoetic consciousness, and so peculiarly unfitted for the practicalities of contemporary industrial urbanised society against which, it was believed, they were perpetually in revolt. This was a trope popularised by Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold, buttressed by the

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Manchester, on 7 September 1871, might also be included in the programme.

[15] 'Mr Dion Boucicault on Ireland and Irishmen', *The Auckland Weekly News,* 17 October 1885, 7.

[16] *The New Zealand Herald,* 27 October 1885, 5.

[17] See, for example, Lewis P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot, 1971) and Peter Gray, '*Punch* and The Great Famine', *History Ireland*, I, ii (1993).

archaeological finds of Sir William Wilde, and promoted by the proliferation of antiquarian societies. 'Celticism' reached its apogee in the pan-Celtic societies of early twentieth-century Europe and is still remarkably robust. A third image was of the Irish as the swarming, multitudinous, post-famine poor–idle, illiterate, lawless, deeply superstitious, in thrall to a religion that denied them intellectual independence, calculatingly subservient, cunning, opportunistic, treacherous and perennially unreliable. The fourth was the Stage Irishman–a stock character in English theatre, at home in melodrama and comedy, with origins that go back to Captain Macmorris in Shakespeare's Henry V. The role was crisply delineated by the drama critic of *The New Zealand Herald* in his review of the MacMahon and Leitch production of *The Shaughraun* that premiered on 26 June 1885 in Auckland, four months before Boucicault's tour: 'The typical Stage-Irishman is unfortunately too often but a vulgar buffoon, with no distinctive characterisation but a "brogue" and the adventitious adjunct of a pipe and a shillelagh';[18] in other words a receptacle for whatever prejudice was then in fashion.

The principal emic image of Irishness that Boucicault encountered among the diaspora Irish in Australia and New Zealand was of a people who, in countries that governed themselves, had triumphed over the stereotypes, realised their potential, and were proudly taking their place as valuable, patriotic, peace-loving citizens advancing the prosperity and participating in the governance of the new colonies. Irish successes in Australia and New Zealand, it was argued, proved that self-government unleashed potential; and so granting self-government to Ireland would enable those Irish living at home to fulfil their destiny. Ireland would thereby gain an equal footing with New Zealand, Australia and Canada, and would proudly take its place 'among the nations of the earth'. Thus, the illuminated *Address* presented to Boucicault by the Auckland Irish prior to his departure for San Francisco requested him 'to take the message [to our countrymen at home] that we watch over their destinies with unflagging solicitude, that we long to hear of better days dawning upon them, that we attribute our contentment and prosperity here to the right of self-government which New Zealand enjoys, so different from the lot of our native land…'[19] While Boucicault himself fulsomely reiterated the same argument in the various responses and public speeches he gave while on tour, remarking that 'Irishmen might be as valuable at home as abroad if they

[18] 'Abbott's Opera House', *The New Zealand Herald,* 29 June 1885, 5.

[19] Ibid., 1 December 1885, 6.

had the chance',[20] he repeatedly emphasised that it was through his plays and his acting that he hoped 'to clear away the prejudices that unfortunately exist concerning the Irish people and the Irish character'.[21]

This clearing away proceeded on several fronts. The first involved eliminating the Stage Irishman and replacing him with a protagonist whose character not only challenged etic images of Irishness but also possessed those attributes that were perceived to be necessary for bringing about a peaceful solution to Ireland's problems. As a Wellington theatre critic observed of the playwright who wrote the roles of Conn the Shaughraun, Shaun the Post, and Myles na Coppaleen:

> [Boucicault] had an aim in mind. It appears to have been to crush out of existence the stage Irishman, with his wild antics and shillelah [sic], and show to the world the character of the Irish peasant in his true and better phase—rollicking if you please, light-hearted under any circumstance, but true as steel to a benefactor or friend, loyal and faithful in his affection, and as a man, worthy to associate with the noblest of any race.[22]

The key images here are 'loyalty', 'faithfulness' and 'manliness'. But where New Zealand audiences were particularly fortunate, the Auckland theatre critic for the *Herald* pointed out following a performance of *The Colleen Bawn*, was that they were privileged to see these roles interpreted by their creator:

As Myles, Mr Boucicault seems to have a double purpose in view. It is to eliminate from the Stage Irishman the mere character of a rowdy, but he has also to show to those who have often seen the drama the way in which the part should be played. There is nothing *outré* in his whole conception. However, pathos, tenderness and self-abnegation spring from Myles with direct spontaneity.

So to 'loyalty', 'faithfulness' and 'manliness' can be added 'self-abnegation'. Coincidently, these were the very qualities that Parnell was advocating his fellow Irishmen must exhibit if Ireland was to achieve Home Rule.[23] It was

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[20] Ibid., 20 November 1885, 5.

[21] Ibid., 20 November 1885, 5.

[22] Ibid., 24 November 1885, 5.

[23] Note also Parnell's stricture circa 12 August 1885: 'Our movement this winter should be distinguished by its judgement, its prudence, its moderation'. Quoted in F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London 1977), 293.

reported in *The Auckland Weekly News* on 26 September 1885 that at a banquet held in Dublin in support of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Parnell had 'dwelt upon the importance of securing loyal and self-denying members in the next Parliament'.[24] This is not to say that Boucicault was a Home Ruler *avant la lettre*–that the *Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, and *The Shaughraun*, were anything from twenty-five years to a decade ahead of Parnellism. In fact only one use of the term 'Home Rule' has been found in the many speeches Boucicault gave while on his Australasian tour, and that in a throwaway line at an impromptu speech in Clontaff in Sydney.[25] Nor is it to claim that Boucicault's plays, as popular as they were, influenced the Irish Parliamentary Party; though Boucicault himself confided to his Auckland-Irish audience that not only had he been invited to advise the Party on the support they might expect from America but that he had also been offered a seat in Parliament.[26] He was also proud to recount that the Duke of Leinster had confided to him that 'his Irish dramas were doing a very great deal of good in England', and that 'many people had reformed their ideas of the Irish peasantry from the pictures they had seen on the stage in *The Colleen Bawn*'.[27] But what I would like to claim is that the image of Irishness dramatically enacted in the *Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, and *The Shaughraun*, particularly when Boucicault himself led the cast, resonated strongly with what New Zealand audiences were being told were the qualities that Parnell considered the Irish should exemplify if they were successfully to negotiate Home Rule.

Finally, there were other aspects of the *Colleen Bawn, Arrah-na-Pogue,* and *The Shaughraun* that would not only have challenged etic images of Irishness held by colonial New Zealanders, but would also have resonated strongly with local audiences. While all three plays are set at times of patriotic struggle, the intensity of that struggle is defused by eliding its more controversial aspects. Those characters who espouse extreme nationalism are marginalised in the vein of the villains of melodrama, while those characters, whether Irish or

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[24] See Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell,* 292–7, for the context of this dinner.

[25] *The Auckland Weekly News,* 17 October 1885, 7: 'During his stay in America, from the Chief Justice of New York, Mr Daley, to the Bonanza King of San Francisco, Mr Mackay, he had met with Irishmen in every position and he could speak of the benefit to them of self-government–(applause)–or, as he was going to say "Home Rule".'

[26] *The New Zealand Herald*, 1 December 1885, 6.

[27] 'Mr Dion Boucicault on Ireland and Irishmen', *The Auckland Weekly News*, 17 October 1885, 7.

English, who espouse domestic fidelity, romance and reconciliation are lauded. As Nicholas Grene has pointed out, issues of class played a significant role in this reconciliation, the more so since the largely middle-class New Zealand audience who could afford the ticket prices, even as they entered the Royal Theatre or the Royal Victoria Theatre, took up their positions in seating arrangements that 'emblematised a class hierarchy'.[28] In the *Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, and *The Shaughraun*, the Irish heroes and heroines are shown to possess a native refinement and a class consciousness that ensures, if not equality with the ruling elite, then at least a gracious acceptance by them. As Grene goes on to say:

> For such audiences, the social conservatism of the plays' politics, the reassuring picture of a pseudo-feudal bond of gentry and loyal peasants allied against greedy and unscrupulous bourgeois ambition offered an 'optimistic myth of reconciliation' in the colonial context of Ireland. In the magic space of melodrama the realities of Fenian politics, the power struggles as agrarian and national level, [were] susceptible to domestic solution.[29]

Thus, in 1885 those New Zealanders who were privileged to see Boucicault play the leading roles in these three plays would have been encouraged to see the Irish as manly, loyal, patriotic, faithful, dismissive of extremism and somewhat restrained (perhaps even to the point of self-abnegation), but possessing a degree of self-assurance, wit and civility that eminently fitted them to be given the right to find a domestic solution to their own problems.

It is worth noting that during the decade 1891–1900–that is, allowing five years to pass after Boucicault's 1885 tour–*The Shaughraun* was performed at least thirty times in New Zealand; *Arrah-na-Pogue* at least thirty; and *The Colleen Bawn* at least twenty times. There were also performances of *The Flying Scud* (4); *After Dark* (4); *The Streets of London* (8) and its variant *The Streets of New*

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[28] Ken Stewart, 'Theatre Critics and Society', in Harold Love (ed.), *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History* (Kensington, 1984), 58.

[29] Nicholas Grene, *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (Cambridge, 1999), 17. See also Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601–2000* (Cambridge, 2002), 87–93, where Morash convincingly argues that 'holding together the ambivalent politics of these Irish plays of the 1850s and 1860s are two key conventions, both inherited from earlier theatrical conventions: the conciliatory ending and the rebel hero'.

York (4); *My Daughter's Debut?* (3); *Led Astray* (3); *A Living Wage* (1); *Jessie Brown* (6); *The Octoroon* (13); *The Irish Heiress* (1); *The Corsican Brothers* (8); and *London Assurance* (4); a total of at least 140 performances in ten years of which 83 of the 140 (60%) were staged in Dunedin – so much for the 'image' of Dunedin as a Scottish city, at least in the 1890s![30]

Sarah Allgood's 1916 (11 October–12 December) and 1918 (26 July–12 November?) tours of New Zealand

Sarah Allgood's 1916–18 Australasian tour came about as a result of two quarrels. The first erupted in 1915 and embroiled the management and players of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin over the dictatorial style of the manager, St John Ervine, the irregular behaviour of the business manager, the growing impatience of Yeats and Lady Gregory, and the players' fear that the Abbey was losing so many engagements and so much money that they would soon be out of work.[31] The second developed a year later and involved a more sedate, but nevertheless equally intense, power struggle between two Australian impresarios, the one side headed by J.C. Williamson and the other by the Tait brothers, who believed they could engage better plays and players and earn themselves more money by going into competition with what had become known as 'The Firm'.[32] What induced Sarah Allgood to leave the Abbey when she did, as she was one of their star players, was the invitation to tour J. Hartley Manners' *Peg o' my Heart* throughout provincial England. The play was a sure-fire winner. Written by Manners in 1912, when his leading lady, Laurette Taylor, later to become his wife, bemoaned the lack of good parts for Irish women, it became an immediate hit, running for 604 nights in the Cort Theatre in New York and for over two years at one of London's main theatres. As *The Dominion* informed its Wellington readers after the play had been announced for New Zealand: 'Laurette Taylor … acted the part

[30] Data from John Thomson, *The New Zealand Stage 1891–1900* (Wellington, 1993).

[31] See Peter Kuch, 'The 'Abbey Irish Players' in Australia', in Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds), *Irish Theatre on Tour: Irish Theatrical Disapora Series: 1* (Dublin, 2005), 70–5.

[32] Michael and Joan Tallis, *The Silent Showman: Sir George Tallis, the man behind the world's largest entertainment organization of the 1920s* (Kent Town, South Australia, 1999), 145ff.

1400 times before sheer fatigue compelled her to give it up to another'.[33] The most successful of those 'others' was Sarah Allgood, who after a successful tour, played Peg to great acclaim in New York, where she was spotted and engaged for an Australasian tour by the Tait brothers as their first venture into theatrical management.

New Zealanders first learned of the tour on 8 January 1916. In the ten months between then and the opening at the Grand Opera House in Wellington on Wednesday 11 October 1916[34] 'advance publicity' amounted to no fewer than twenty-four news items (not including the standard theatre advertisements) or sixty-eight column inches (173cm), either reiterating the success of the play in America and England, providing a brief outline of the plot and the main characters, describing its origins, or imparting discrete information about Sarah Allgood's life and career. The opening in Sydney was described in great detail, the high praise for Sarah Allgood in the title role ending with a euphoric account of the curtain calls – because 'at the end of the evening enthusiasm ran riot'.[35] The only slightly discordant note was in a report entitled 'The American Invasion' where it was pointed out that almost all of the plays currently running in Sydney and Melbourne and bound for New Zealand were American. As *The Dominion* correspondent somewhat ruefully observed:

> So far we have not been permitted to form an acquaintance with the beautiful plays that have been written by Somerset Maugham, [Horace Annesley] Vachell, and such later plays by Pinero as *His House in Order*, *The Thunderbolt*, *The Big Drum*, and to dream of dramatic refreshment by Shaw, Barker, or Galsworthy appears to be altogether out of the question. Yet *Justice*, by the last named English author, is one of the big hits of the present New York season. So it is to America one has to journey to see the best English plays.[36]

Plus ça change! From the 1880s to the 1920s the Irish believed the English were

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[33] 'Peg o' My Heart', *The Dominion*, 2 October 1916, 3. Similar report in T*he Southland Times*, 11 November 1916, 7.

[34] It was reported in *The Dominion* on 15 July 1916, 6, that *Peg o' my Heart* would transfer to Melbourne on 22 July 1916. Details of New Zealand itinerary were first published in, *The Dominion* 2 September 1916, 6.

[35] 'Sarah Allgood as "Peg"', *The Dominion*, 29 April 1916, 9.

[36] 'The American Invasion', *The Dominion*, 26 August 1916, 6.

vulgarising their theatre; the English thought the Americans were coarsening theirs; and the New Zealanders suspected that Australian impresarios–with their obvious preference for commercially successful American melodrama, musical and farce–were selfishly depriving them of cultural enrichment.

The advance publicity for the 1916 tour syndicated in the New Zealand papers is revealing of contemporary images of Irishness, or at least of an **etic** Irishness that is as winsome as it is aspirational, given the ways the savagery of the First World War daily intruded on dominion life. It also suggests that the Taits were as successful in choosing their publicity agents as they were in recruiting their plays and players. The role of Peg is progressively described as embodying the 'irresistible manner, the humour, wit, and pathos of an Irish-American girl',[37] as 'full of Irish wit and sentiment',[38] as 'full of Irish wit and sympathy',[39] and as 'sweet and beautiful'.[40] On stage Peg is said to be 'a dainty, sprightly, sparkling little lass, with a subtle touch of brogue,'[41] who evokes in the rest of the cast and the audience 'the laugh of pure joy and the tears of pathos'.[42] The play itself is described as 'an undiluted delight from beginning to end, and that almost exclusively from the perfect pleasure of a simple, fresh, comely, and outspoken maid, whose directness of speech gives shocks to the nerves of the ultra-refined rich relations'.[43] Its international success, it is claimed, citing a 'well-known London critic', '[is] due to the fact that the comedy [is] a comedy of youth, bubbling and vivacious, and full of [the] sheer healthy joy of living'.[44] 'The play is plainly written. There is nothing startling or outrageous or risky in [it]'.[45] 'It is,' moreover, 'an idyll all through, told in clean and crisp dialogue',[46] adorning a plot that is 'simple and direct in its appeal to the better side of everyone's nature'.[47] Sarah Allgood, early described as 'one of the first of Ireland's young intellectual actresses',[48] is portrayed as the perfect 'Peg': 'she has youth, good looks, and remarkable

[37] *The Dominion,* 8 January 1916, 9.
[38] Ibid., 15 January 1916, 9.
[39] Ibid., 22 January 1916, 9.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 5 October 1916, 3.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 3 October 1916, 9.
[44] *The Otago Daily Times,* 11 November 1916, 10.
[45] Ibid. *The Southland Times*, 18 November 1916, 6 makes exactly the same claim.
[46] *The Dominion,* 30 September 1916, 5.
[47] Ibid., 7 October 1916, 2.
[48] Ibid., 22 January 1916, 9.

dramatic talent; while the brogue which she brings from her Dublin home silvers the words that ripple from her lips'.[49] Her premiere performance on the tour is reported as evoking 'an essential charm mingled with a Puck-like spirit, which brought to mind the early triumphs of Nellie Stewart'.[50] In fact it is only as the Wellington opening is imminent that the publicity admits that *Peg o' my Heart* is 'a clever comedy story on somewhat theatrical lines'.[51] And, while Sarah Allgood's opening performance in Wellington, attended as it was by the Earl and Countess of Liverpool in all the splendour that Wellington's Grand Opera House could muster, was highly praised, the local reviewers were quick to point out that it was 'only a little play', that some of the supporting cast were either 'below pitch' or somewhat too comedic, and that the role, as charming and winsome as it was, disclosed 'the suggestion that the talent Miss Allgood possesses does not reach the limit of its resources in Peg'.[52]

The parallels between the New Zealand reception of Boucicault's plays and Sarah Allgood in *Peg o' my Heart* are worth emphasising here. In these plays the Irish protagonists courageously endanger their reputation and their freedom by willingly confessing to a crime they have not committed in order to save another person's reputation and freedom. In these plays the honesty, precision, clarity and forthrightness of 'brogue' is pitted against and unmasks what is claimed are the accepted niceties of upper-class English. In these plays the Irish are depicted as having a more subtle and seemingly more innocent grasp of the English language than their overlords. As Oscar Wilde once quipped: 'je suis Irlandais de race, et les Anglais m'ont condamné á parler le langage de Shakespeare'.[53] In these plays wit triumphs, not for its own sake, but because it is harnessed to a perspicacity that sees through English pretension, and to a genuine rather than an assumed class status. The Irish succeed because, in critiquing themselves performing expected roles, they are at once, as natural aristocrats, more alert and more responsive to others and to events. At home in the subtleties of language, they are quick to detect deceit, hypocrisy, or the formulaic language of imitated desire or assumed class. In

[49] Ibid., 3 October 1916, 9.

[50] Ibid., 29 April 1916, 9 quoting the Sydney *Herald*'s review of Sara Allgood's opening night of her Australasian tour.

[51] Ibid., 29 April 1916, 9.

[52] Ibid., 12 October 1916, 3.

[53] Oscar Wilde to Edmund Goncourt, 17 December 1891, in Rupert Hart-Davis (ed.), *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1963), 304.

these plays extremism is shunned, hero and heroine relying on conventional pieties, pieties that are unashamedly Catholic, for what in the end proves a resounding moral, economic, romantic, and political victory. Conn gets his lady; Shaun the Post gets his Arrah-na-Pogue; the Colleen Bawn wins her man; and Peg unwittingly but successfully woos her English Lord (possessed of what by the First World War proved to be the unfortunate name of Jerry). But, perhaps most of all, it is the fortitude of self-assurance that wins through. As one critic of the opening night in Wellington asserted:

> *It is the Irish in Peg* that saves her from breaking down under the steady pressure of [the Chichester's] insolence and contempt. Peg's heritage from her father includes an acute sense of humour, and whenever things are getting intolerable there is always something to make laugh-bubbles, and what she sees to laugh at the audience sees to laugh at, wherein lies the ingenuity of the author. But Peg is a sentimentalist as well as a humourist, and she has the power to induce tears if she would but postpone the joke that is rising to her tongue, while her eyes are still wet with tears.[54]

While laughter and tears are the stock in trade of melodrama, and central to the discourse of the late nineteenth century Celt, and while Yeats has rightly pointed out that 'the rhetorician would deceive his neighbours, / the sentimentalist himself, while art / is but a vision of reality',[55] what is of interest here is the degree to which the dominion audience is persuaded to identify with Irishness, whether or not that Irishness is uncritically etic, or authentically emic, or captivatingly situational.

In summary, it is worth observing that in the colonies at the time when Fenianism and the Land War were at their height, and again in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and the eruption of the conscription crises – in other words, at times when the British Empire was being most pressed by the nationalist Irish – the theatre, as popular culture, was offering an image of Irishness that was seen to be both personally sustaining and socially and politically desirable. Whether or not the effect of such plays was 'incalculably diffusive', whether or not they were in reality being manipulated by political

[54] *The Dominion* 12 October 1916, 3; partly reprinted in the *New Zealand Herald* 25 October 1916, 5: 'It is **only** the Irish in Peg…'. The emphasis is mine

[55] W. B. Yeats, 'Ego Dominus Tuus,' in Peter Alt and Russell K. Alspach (eds), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London, 1973), 369.

or economic imperialism, their success was in part at least attributable to local irritation with certain forms of English pretension; as one Wellington critic remarked

> The author has hit on an ingenious theme when he makes the members of one of the 'real old families' the butt of an attractive but unpolished Irish girl's witticisms. All the English-speaking world dully resents the airs and affectations of a certain silly section of the upper classes, and as Peg scores off nearly every line spoken by one of the Chichesters she has a fine sympathetic backing from the audience.[56]

What is indisputable is that New Zealanders (and for that matter Australians) flocked to the theatre in record numbers. Perhaps Patrick O'Farrell is correct. Perhaps for a New Zealander in 1885, and again in 1916 and 1918, buying a ticket to an Irish play when the British Empire was most under stress was one way, whether consciously or not, of contributing to that 'gradual growth and development, through confrontation and compromise, of a [New Zealand] people of distinctive quality and character, derived from and produced by cultures – majority and minority – in conflict'.[57] After all, as Victor Hugo pointed out, and Yeats often liked to quote, it is 'in the Theatre [that] the mob becomes a people'.[58]

'Peg' on Tour

The following table lists the itineraries for the 1885 Boucicault tour and the 'Peg o' My Heart' tours to New Zealand in 1916 and 1918. While the Boucicault tour and the 1916 'Peg' tour followed well-worn theatrical paths to the major cities and towns, the 1918 'Peg' tour explored rural tracks as well, moving into the provinces and smaller settlements. Our principal sources for what follows have been New Zealand papers from the period.

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[56] *The Dominion,* 14 October 1916, 16.

[57] Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia,* 3rd edn (Kensington, 2000), 10.

[58] Peter Alt and Russell K. Alspach (eds), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York, 1973), 836: 'A nation should be like an audience in some great theatre – 'In the theatre', said Victor Hugo, 'the mob becomes a people' – watching the sacred drama of its own history; every spectator finding self and neighbour there … '

'Peg's' success across the Tasman was noted in New Zealand periodicals,[59] and a tour to New Zealand was announced in late-August 1916. The company was to open their eight-week tour in Wellington at the Grand Opera House on 10 October; however, due to the late arrival of the *Moeraki* from Sydney, the opening performance actually took place the following evening, on the 11th. On this first tour, the company played the four main centres and visited several smaller towns and cities along the way, including Hamilton, Napier, Hastings, Oamaru, and Invercargill.

After an eighteen-month absence, in which they performed 'Peg' Australia-wide and briefly staged another J. Hartley Manners play, 'Out There',[60] the company returned to New Zealand. This second New Zealand tour opened in Dunedin on Friday 26 July 1918;[61] as in Australia, the company took the play to the smalls. From Dunedin, for example, they travelled to Invercargill, but then took in more than a dozen small and country towns on the way to Christchurch, towns such as Winton, Riverton, Bluff, Kaitangata, and Mataura. This extensive tour was scheduled to run for about eighteen weeks and to finish in Auckland in early December 1918.

One of the curiousities in this tour is the advertising. The advertisements assured locals that they would see the same production as audiences had seen elsewhere: the same 'scenery, mounting, and dressing […] on the same lavish scale, as in the larger towns'.[62] The advertisements stressed that patrons would see 'the original company'[63]–and, of course, the 'Incomparable Peg', as Sara Allgood was known. The Riverton paper, the *Western Star*, for instance, announced that Sara Allgood 'will positively appear'.[64]

Several life-changing events occurred for Allgood during her time in Australia and New Zealand. In her letters and upon her return to Ireland, she only talked about these events to her closest friends; as a result, they are little known. While meeting all manner of success in the role of Peg, Allgood experienced personal highs and horrific lows. In September 1916 in

[59] In Sydney and Melbourne, the play set various theatrical records.

[60] In addition, in the summer of 1918, Sara Allgood shot the film 'Just Peggy'–her first movie role; the film was released on 10 August 1918.

[61] The company arrived in Dunedin the week the fate of the *Green Ray* seditionists was announced.

[62] *Otago Daily Times,* 1 August 1918, 1. The management rescheduled the start time in some smaller towns so that all who wished to could attend the entire performance.

[63] *Otago Daily Times,* 1 August 1918, 1.

[64] 30 July 1918 [3].

Melbourne, she married Gerald Henson, the company's leading man.[65] By all accounts, Henson was a 'good' man, though not a particularly good actor.[66] While in Australia in 1917, Allgood was notified of her brother's death from 'wounds received whilst fighting in France';[67] this at a time when news of Ireland, printed in New Zealand, was often on the subject of conscription and recruiting problems. Then on the 18th of January 1918, Allgood gave birth to her daughter, Mary; the baby lived only an hour.

November 1918 produced, perhaps, the cruellest blow of all. In its tour of New Zealand, 'Peg' was doing 'excellent business', setting all kinds of theatrical records. In the second week of November, while the company toured Taranaki, the advance agent reached Wellington, placing around town advertisements and publicity pieces for the Wellington season, which was due to start on November 18. There was much excitement as, amongst other things, this was the first time the Wellington Town Hall was to be used by a professional comedy company.[68] By this time, however, the influenza epidemic had progressed rapidly through the country. In response, the authorities were taking every available precaution to halt the spread: schools and some work places were closed; public meetings, even some church services, and sports meetings were cancelled; theatres and other places of amusement were closed, too.[69]

The closure of public buildings in Waitara forced the 'Peg' company to abandon their dates and travel to Wellington to 'await developments'.[70] Within days of checking into their Wellington hotel, several members of the company fell ill—Sara Allgood and her husband, Gerald Henson, seriously so; it took several days to procure medical aid. Henson was removed to a temporary hospital in Alexandra Hall and died shortly after, on Sunday the 24 November, in what was called 'Black Week'. Within days of Henson's death, newspapers reported that 'Sara Allgood intends to leave for Australia by the first steamer sailing from Wellington';[71] however, shipping services

[65] Henson played the role of 'Jerry'.

[66] Elizabeth Coxhead, *Daughters of Erin: Five Women of the Irish Renascence* (Gerrards Cross, 1979), 202.

[67] *Otago Witness,* 16 May 1917, 46.

[68] *The Dominion,* 9 November 1918, 11.

[69] Schools and places of amusement closed in Auckland on 7 November. In Wellington, schools closed on the 11th and places of amusement, including theatres, on the 12th.

[70] *The Dominion,* 25 November 1918, 4.

[71] *The Dominion,* 27 November 1918, 2.

would not resume between New Zealand and Australia till late January the following year.

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Appendix

"Peg o' My Heart" Tour (1916)

Wellington	Wed. 11[72]–Thur. 19 Oct.	Grand Opera House
	(8 nights and a matinée on Sat. 14 Oct.)	
Gisborne	Mon. 23[73]–Wed. 25 Oct.	His Majesty's Theatre
Auckland	Sat. 28 Oct.–Tues. 7 Nov.	His Majesty's Theatre
	(9 nights and a matinée on Sat. 4 Nov.)	
Hamilton	Wed. 8 Nov.	Theatre Royal
Wanganui	Thur. 9–Fri. 10 Nov.	Opera House
Hastings	Sat. 11 Nov.	Municipal Theatre
Napier	Mon. 13–Tues. 14 Nov.	Municipal Theatre
Dunedin	Thur. 16–Wed. 22 Nov.	His Majesty's Theatre
	(6 nights and a matinée on Sat. 18 Nov.)	
Invercargill	Thur. 23–Fri. 24 Nov.	Municipal Theatre
Oamaru	Sat. 25 Nov.	Opera House
Timaru	Mon. 27–Tues. 28 Nov.	Theatre Royal
Christchurch	Wed. 29 Nov.–Thur. 7 Dec.	Theatre Royal
	(8 nights and a matinée on Wed. 6 Dec.)	
Palmerston North	at. 9 & Mon. 11 Dec.	Municipal Theatre
Masterton	Tues. 12 Dec.	Town Hall

[72] 'Peg o' My Heart' was scheduled to open on Tuesday 10 October. Due to the late arrival of the company from Australia, the opening performance was postponed.

[73] 'Peg' was to play Gisborne for four nights from Saturday 21 October. When bad weather and heavy seas led to shipping delays, the company had to cancel the Saturday performance.

'Peg o' My Heart' Tour (1918)

Dunedin	Fri. 26–Wed. 31 July	His Majesty's Theatre
(5 nights and a matinée on Sat. 27 July)		
Invercargill	Thur. 1 Aug.	Municipal Theatre
Winton	Fri. 2 Aug.[74]	
Riverton	Sat. 3 Aug.	More's Hall
Bluff	Mon. 5 Aug.	
Kaitangata	Tues. 6 Aug.	
Mataura	Wed. 7 Aug.	Horticultural Hall
Balclutha	Thur. 8 Aug.	Oddfellows' Hall
Milton	Fri. 9 Aug.	Coronation Hall
Gore	Sat. 10 Aug.	Princess Theatre
Mosgiel	Mon. 12 Aug.	
Palmerston South	Tues. 13 Aug.	
Oamaru	Wed. 14 Aug.	Opera House
Waimate?		
Timaru	Fri. 16 Aug.	Theatre Royal
Temuka?/Ashburton?		
Christchurch	Mon. 19–Sat. 24 Aug.	King's Theatre
(6 nights and a matinée on Sat. 24 Aug.)		
Greymouth	Tues. 27 Aug.	Opera House
Hokitika	Wed. 28 Aug.	Princess Theatre
Blackball	Thur. 29 Aug.	Mandl's Hall
Reefton	Fri. 30 Aug.	Princess Theatre
Westport	Sat. 31 Aug.	
Murchison	Mon. 2 Sept.	
Nelson	Tues. 3 Sept.	Theatre Royal
Motueka	Wed. 4 Sept.	Motueka Hall
Picton	Thur. 5 Sept.	
Blenheim	Fri. 6 Sept.	
Havelock	Sat. 7 & Mon. 9 Sept.	Town Hall
Dannevirke	Wed. 11 Sept.	Town Hall

[74] The following newspapers assisted in the compilation of small-town dates: *Otago Daily Times,* 1 August 1918, 1; *NZ Truth,* 31 August 1918, 2; *The Dominion,* 7 September 1918, 11; *New Zealand Herald,* 30 September 1918, 7; *Auckland Weekly News,* 10 October 1918, 15; and *The Dominion,* 15 October 1918, 3.

Feilding	Thur. 12 Sept.	The Drill Hall
Hunterville	Fri. 13 Sept.	
Marton	Sat. 14 Sept.	Town Hall
Ohakune	Mon. 16 Sept.	
Taumarunui	Tues. 17 Sept.	
Te Kuiti	Wed. 18 Sept.	
Te Awamutu	Thur. 19 Sept.	
Otorohanga	Fri. 20 Sept.	
Hamilton	Sat. 21 Sept.	Theatre Royal
Kaikohe?		
Morrinsville?		
Te Aroha?		
Dargaville?		
Whangarei	Sat. 28 & Mon. 30 Sept.	Town Hall
?		
Thames	Wed. 2 Oct.	King's Theatre
Cambridge	Thur. 3 Oct.	Town Hall
Rotorua	Fri. 4 Oct.	
?		
Tauranga	Mon. 7–Tues. 8 Oct.	
Te Puke	Wed. 9 Oct.	
Whakatane	Thur. 10 Oct.	
Opotiki	Fri. 11 Oct.	
Gisborne	Sat. 12 & Mon. 14 Oct.[75]	Opera House
?		
Hastings	Wed. 16–Thur. 17 Oct.	Municipal Theatre
Waipawa	Fri. 18 Oct.	
Napier	Sat. 19 Oct.	Municipal Theatre
Pahiatua	Mon. 21 Oct.	King's Theatre
Greytown	Tues. 22 Oct.	
Masterton	Wed. 23–Thur. 24 Oct.	Opera House
Carterton	Fri. 25 Oct.	
?		
Otaki	Mon. 28 Oct.	
Foxton	Tues. 29 Oct.	

[75] On Monday 14 and Thursday 17 October, the company performed Edward E. Rose's play 'The Rosary'.

Palmerston North	Wed. 30–Thur. 31 Oct.	Opera House
Woodville	Fri. 1 Nov.	Alexandra Hall
Kapiti?		
Shannon?		
Bulls?		
New Plymouth	Tues. 5–Wed. 6 Nov.	Good Templar Hall
Hawera	Thur. 7 Nov.	Opera House
Opunake?		
Patea?		
Eltham?		
Stratford	Sat. 9 Nov.	Town Hall
Inglewood	Mon. 11 Nov.	Town Hall
Waitara	Tues. 12 Nov. [tour abandoned]	
Wellington	18 Nov.	

Tour supposed to end in Auckland in early December