

Abbey Theatre Programme, Easter Monday, 1916

Introductory questions

P 1: Name the Abbey Theatre director who is also a well-known poet.

P 3: Examine the list of authors. Which one is known as a “war poet”?

P 4: Under the advertisement for the Abbey’s tea room, there is a note that the “theatre is disinfected throughout with Jeyes’ fluid”. What does it tell us about concerns over cleanliness in Dublin at this time?

Activity One

Theatres had to publish advertisements to increase their income.

Examine the advertisements on pages 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8.

The advertisements promote carpets, bicycles, insurance, “billposting and street advertising”, hairdressers and wig-makers, printing, Irish-produced goods, and books.

What can these advertisements tell us about the type of people who would come to the Abbey to see the plays?

Select details from the advertisements to back up your opinion.

What can we learn about life in Dublin from this programme?

Activity Two

W. B. Yeats’s play, “Kathleen Ní Houlihan”

This play was to be performed in the Abbey Theatre on Easter Monday.

Kathleen Ní Houlihan was a female figure who represented Ireland.



This female figure, representing Ireland, dates from 1886, and is waving farewell to a boat, carrying its quota of emigrants. Note the shamrock detail at the bottom of her dress. A green flag flies from the stern of the boat, with the motto, "God Save Ireland".

Yeats wrote http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/behind_the_scenes/article/yeats_on_his_play_kathleen_ni_houlihan in 1902 about the theme of the play, "Kathleen Ní Houlihan":

"My subject is Ireland and its struggle for independence. The scene is laid in the West of Ireland at the time of the French landing. I have described a household preparing for the wedding of the son of the house ... Into this household comes Kathleen Ní Houlihan herself, and the bridegroom leaves his bride, and all the hopes come to nothing. It is the perpetual struggle of the cause of Ireland and every other ideal cause against private hopes and dreams, against all that we mean when we say the world. I have put into the mouth of Kathleen Ní Houlihan verses about those who have died or are about to die for her, and these verses are the key of the rest"

(*The United Irishman*, 5 May 1902)

In 1903 W. B.

Yeats wrote http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/behind_the_scenes/article/yeats_on_his_play_kathleen_ni_houlihan to Lady Gregory, including the following quotation that is included on the programme:

"One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen Ní Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung and about whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it"

1. What, according to Yeats, was the subject of the play?
2. What happens when Kathleen Ní Houlihan enters the house where the wedding preparations are taking place?
3. What type of speech does Yeats place in the "Mouth of Kathleen Ní Houlihan"?
4. In the second passage, Yeats gives more detail about the physical appearance of his Kathleen Ní Houlihan. Who does he describe her?
5. What was his purpose in writing the play?

Activity Three

Seán Connolly - an Abbey actor in the rising. He was due to play the role of Peter Gillane in the play. On that day, he spent Easter Monday leading a group of rebels in an attack on Dublin Castle. Connolly and other actors and staff members at the Abbey Theatre took part in the Easter Rising.

Is there any indication in this Abbey programme, or in the comments of Yeats, to suggest why some of the actors who worked in the Abbey would have been attracted to the idea of Rising in Dublin?

Read the entry for Seán Connolly in the Dictionary of Irish Biography, accessible free of charge through the Schools' Broadband Network. Access via Scoilnet Post-Primary page.

Activity Four

Other members of the Abbey staff took part in the rising. Select any one of them, and see if you can find any sources that describe their role in the Rising.

Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, the Abbey's first leading lady;
Helena Moloney (a member of the Citizen Army);
Ellen Bushell;
Arthur Shields;
Barney Murphy;
Peadar Kearney (author of the National Anthem)