

Irish winters were a force to be reckoned with. So were limited facilities.

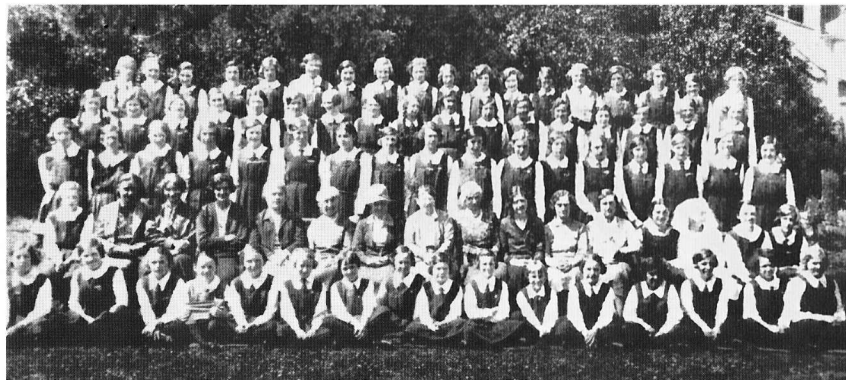
'I will never forget the cold.'... 'A lot of the girls got chilblains in winter. We used to all try and get near the fire ...' 'We were allowed hot water bottles, and rugs or eiderdowns for our beds. We would fill our bottles from the hot taps, and whoever was having a bath had a hard time getting us out before the water ran cold. One bath a week. We used to use the water from our hot water bottles to wash in the morning, the chill was off it.'

—*The French School, Bray, Remembered*, by Jennifer Flegg

This cold has seeped into Malyn Park's bones, too.

But if all one needed to write a play is the memory of one's schooldays, anyone could do it. *Women Without Men* is fiction, colored but not created by experience. If the playwright's memories inspired her setting, her people are the unique inventions of her brain. It is Hazel Ellis's imagination that brought Malyn Park and its inhabitants to the Dublin Gate nearly 80 years ago, and now to New York.

Welcome to the first day of school!



French School girls and staff 1932-33.

## A BIOGRAPHY OF HAZEL ELLIS

By Maya Cantu

The author of two "remarkably fine" plays marked by their "delicacy of treatment, subtle characterization, and sure dramatic instinct,"<sup>1</sup> Hazel Ellis cut a bright swath through the Irish theatre during her brief career as a playwright. Her richly textured plays blend tones, at once, wry and lyrical, tender and trenchant. Starting as an actress with the Gate Theatre, Ellis enjoyed great successes with her ensemble dramas *Portrait in Marble* (1936) and *Women Without Men* (1938), before virtually disappearing from the Dublin stage at the age of thirty.

The daughter of Arthur T. Ellis and his wife Florence, Hazel Beatrice Ellis was born on November 20, 1909 in Rathmines, a middle-class South Dublin neighborhood where her father worked as a solicitor. As a teenager, she attended the French School of Bray in suburban Dublin. A Protestant private girls' boarding school respected for the quality of its liberal arts and musical education, strictly run by its small female staff, the French School later supplied Ellis with the imaginative basis for *Women Without Men*. After graduating from the French School, Ellis attended Trinity College. "A young, attractive, golden haired girl" (as described by *The Evening Mail*), the soft-spoken Ellis blossomed as an actress with Trinity's Elizabethan Society Players, playing Ophelia in *Hamlet*, and continued her training with the Abbey Theatre's School of Acting.

In 1929, Ellis became a company member of Dublin's innovative Gate Theatre. Founded in 1928 by the actor-managers Hilton Edwards and Micheál Mac Liammóir, the theater flaunted a bohemian spirit, eclectic repertoire, and



Hazel Ellis sunbathing in the early 1950s.

charismatic acting ensemble. At the Gate, Ellis earned particularly strong praise for her comic acting, appearing in supporting parts in a wide variety of plays: from Denis Johnston's Expressionist satire *The Old Lady Says No!* (1929) and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1932), to a tongue-in-cheek revival of *Sweeney Todd* (1936) and Mary Manning's comedy of manners *Youth's the Season* (1931). "The modernist agenda of the Gate Theatre provided women playwrights with considerable opportunity for experiment"<sup>2</sup> in the 1930s, during which the Gate regularly produced work by dramatists such as Manning, Christine Longford, and Dorothy Macardle (the plays of Teresa Deevy, meanwhile, appeared at the Abbey Theatre).

In 1936, Ellis stunned the Dublin theatre world with her own emergence as a playwright. As an *Evening Mail* profile described her, "Miss Ellis is so quiet and unassuming that nobody would have expected that beneath it all, she

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was quietly arranging the substance of her play.” Exploring themes of romantic love versus Romantic freedom, *Portrait in Marble* detailed Lord Byron’s stormy relationships with his wife Annabella Milbanke, and brilliant lover, Lady Caroline Lamb—who thwart his attempts at a “marble heart.” The “unexpected success of the season,”<sup>3</sup> the period drama impressed critics as the twenty-five year old actress’s first effort: “*Portrait in Marble* has none of the patchiness and uncertainty that one associates with a first attempt... its admirable clearness and skill might be envied by a more experienced playwright,” observed *The Irish Times*. With Micheál Mac Liammóir as a dashing Byron, *Portrait in Marble* received further acclaim as part of the Gate’s 1936–37 tour through Egypt and the Mediterranean.

Ellis continued to develop her craft with her ambitious, all-female *Women Without Men*. As directed by Hilton Edwards, the play opened in November of 1938 and “attracted large audiences to the Gate.”<sup>4</sup> *Women Without Men* followed Christa Winsloe’s 1930 German play *Mädchen in Uniform* (or *Girls in Uniform*; produced at the Gate Theatre in 1934) and Lillian Hellman’s controversial *The Children’s Hour* (1934) in a popular 1930s cycle of girls’ school dramas. Focusing upon the relationships of teachers at the fictional Malyn Park Private School, *Women Without Men* set off Ellis’s distinctive voice as a chronicler of Dublin women—chafed by the tensions of the school, as well as an increasingly conservative Irish society (the 1937 Constitution of Ireland prescribed for women a “life within the home”). Of *Women Without Men*, *The Evening Herald* declared, “The play marks another step forward in Irish drama,” while *The Irish Independent* praised “characters drawn with remarkable skill, and interpreted by

(the) really intelligent acting” of a cast that included May Carey, Meriel Moore, and Peggy Cummins (later famous as a Hollywood femme fatale).

Seemingly on the verge of a major playwriting career, Ellis stepped behind the closed curtains of domestic life, although her two marriages were turbulent. In 1937, she wed Terence Dunne, a Dublin merchant who had also worked as an actor and singer. However, the union was troubled both by religious strife between the couple’s families, and by Dunne’s alcoholism, of which he died in 1947—leaving behind a young son, Peter. In recent correspondence with the Mint, Peter Dunne recalled, “At my father’s funeral, I met a lot of pleasant people, all members of his family. Why had we never met them before? I asked. Because they were all Catholics. I was very shocked.”

Suffering from her own battles with loneliness and addiction, Hazel Dunne sought treatment from Terence Noble—a former theater manager who had produced the Irish premiere of *The Glass Menagerie*. As her son recounts, “He was a hypnotherapist and she went to him for help with her alcoholism and smoking. But something deeper dawned between them, and I was very happy with their choice to get married” (in 1950). Although this second marriage soon turned rocky (and led to eventual separation), it established a close bond between the 12-year-old Peter and his stepfather, who coaxed the “withdrawn boy” out of his shell: “In thanks, I wanted to change my surname to ‘Noble.’ Impossible, they said. But I incorporated his family name ‘Haley’ into my name at my confirmation, something permitted in Ireland.”

In the second act of her married life, Hazel Noble stayed involved in the arts and pursued a growing interest in

animal rights activism. In 1967, she was appointed secretary of the Irish Council Against Blood Sports. Her love for the theater intact, she also continued to appear in local productions in Dalkey and Mill Hill, London, where she eventually relocated with Peter Haley Dunne. Of her appearance as the outspoken Paulina in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, at the Lantern Theatre in Merrion Square, Dublin, *The Irish Press* noted, “A nice quiet performance comes from Hazel Noble.”

Noble also continued to raise her voice as an avid letter-writer to *The Irish Times*. In 1956, the *Times* commended her for her acerbic parody of Yeats’s “Little Birds,” re-titled “Little Men” (“A dreariness seeps from the board-rooms where gather the mean little men”). In her *Irish Times* letters, Noble feistily opined on subjects ranging

from the 1973 royal wedding of Princess Anne (“a public circus that caused great inconvenience to all those who had to go to their normal work in London that day”) to recommendations of Irish nationalist poetry (LPs of Pearse and Yeats recorded by Mac Liammóir). On April 10th, 1986, after being ill with jaundice, Hazel Noble died at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, London—though Killiney Hill, Dublin was her final resting place. Her son remembers, “When she died and was cremated, I took her ashes and scattered them there. I never knew I could weep so much.” She was also survived by Terence Noble, who passed away of Alzheimer’s Disease in 1992.

While Hazel Ellis left behind a scant pair of finished works, *Portrait in Marble* and *Women Without Men* bristle with a sharp-



Hazel Ellis on Killiney Hill, a place of escape for Dubliners on summer days. When she died and was cremated, her son Peter took her ashes and scattered them there.

cut technique and pungently original voice, laced with flinty vulnerability. These plays also reveal compelling thematic patterns: the clash of poetic temperaments with prosaic surroundings; self-determination versus social expectation and censure; and the fierce urgency of women's hopes against hemmed-in horizons. In 2016, Hazel Ellis can be reclaimed not only as a vibrant contributor to Irish theater history and Dublin's legendary Gate Theatre, but to the expanding repertoire of Irish female playwrights still fighting to be heard in the present.

1. Quotes compiled from "Women Without Men" Review, *The Dublin Opinion*, Dec. 1938; "Between the Acts," *The Irish Tatler and Sketch*, Dec. 25, 1938; and "Portrait in Marble: Byron Play at the Gate Theatre," *The Evening Herald*, Sept. 30, 1936.
2. Meaney, Geraldine, Mary O'Dowd, and Bernadette Whelan. *Reading the Irish Woman: Studies in Cultural Encounter and Exchange, 1714-1960*. UK: Liverpool University Press, 2013, p. 196.
3. Fitz-Simon, Christopher. *The Boys*. Dublin: New Island Books, 2002, p. 98.
4. "Gate Theatre: *Women Without Men*," *The Irish Times*, Nov. 22, 1938.

## biographies WOMEN WITHOUT MEN

**MARY BACON** (*Miss Marjorie Strong*) Broadway: *Rock N' Roll*, *Arcadia*. Select theatre: Charles Busch's *The Tribute Artist*, *Harrison, TX* directed by Pam MacKinnon, *Happy Now* (Primary Stages), *Giant* (Public Theatre), *The Madras House* (The Mint), *Becky Shaw* (Second Stage), *Eccentricities of A Nightingale*, *The Late Christopher Bean*, *Happy Birthday* (TACT), of which she is a member. *The Widow Lincoln* (Ford's Theatre), *Just like Us* (Denver Center), *Outside Mullingar* and others (Dorset Theatre Festival), *Children* (Westport Playhouse/Williamstown), *Crimes of the Heart* (McCarter), *The Triumph of Love* (Seattle Rep/The Long Wharf), *Misalliance* (Old Globe), *The May Queen* (Chautauqua Theatre Festival). TV/FILM: *Blacklist*, *Madam Secretary*, *Donny!*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *The Good Wife*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Jonny Zero*, *Third Watch*, PBS's *Ameri-*

*Dr. Maya Cantu is a theater historian, scholar, and Dramaturgical Advisor for the Mint, where she has previously worked on Harold Chapin's The New Morality, Ferenc Molnár's Fashions for Men, John Van Druten's London Wall, and George Kelly's The Fatal Weakness and Philip Goes Forth. Maya is the author of the book, American Cinderellas on the Broadway Musical Stage: Imagining the Working Girl from Irene to Gypsy (Palgrave Macmillan 2015). In 2014, she received her Doctor of Fine Arts degree in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from Yale School of Drama.*

*can Experience*, Nickelodeon's *The Gaveltons*. Current commercials: T-Mobile's Binge On with Aaron Paul, and the demented mom in Snickers Crispers. BFA from Carnegie Mellon. Member of The Actors Center. Grand to be back at the Mint!

**JOYCE COHEN** (*Mrs. Newcome*) Broadway: *Once a Catholic*, Off-Broadway: Mint Theatre (*John Ferguson*) Playwrights Horizons, Westside Arts, Regional Theatres: Pioneer Theatre Co. (multiple seasons), Denver Center Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Salt Lake Acting Co. (multiple seasons), Peterborough Players (multiple seasons), Marthas Vineyard Playhouse. Henry Award Nominee (*Benediction*-DCT), NH Theatre World Nominee (*Granite State* - Peterborough Players), City Weekly Nominee (*4000 Miles*-SLAC), City Weekly Best Actress (*Molly Sweeney*-SLAC). Film/TV

credits (among others): *Christmas Under Wraps*, *Granite Flats* (recurring role), *SLC Punk*, *Independence Day*, *High School Musical*, *Pixel Perfect*, *Read it and Weep*, *My Dumb Diary*, *Touched by an Angel*. Sundance Institute Film and Theatre Labs, Cleveland Playhouse New Ground Theatre Festival, CO New Play Summit.

**SHANNON HARRINGTON** (*Dorothy Benson*) has recently finished a run at the Queens Theatre as "Scout" in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Shannon has worked at the prestigious Sundance Institute Director's Lab in Utah, and played "Susan Waverly" for two years on the National Broadway Tour of Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*, that included a month at The Kennedy Center in Washington DC. Regional: *Fiddler On The Roof* (Bielke), *George M* (Little Girl, Baton Twirler, Acrobat), *Gypsy* (Baby June). TV: Performed on NBC's *America's Got Talent* Season 5, Discovery Channel, Biography Channel, and Sprout TV. Shannon originated the role of Dolly in the new musical in development *Once 'Round the Circle*. Thanks to Jonathan Bank, Jenn Thompson, Judy Bowman, everyone at the Mint Theater Company, the amazing crew, and her wonderful teachers and schoolmates from "Malyn Park Private School". For more info: ShannonHarrington.us or Facebook.com/ShannonHarringtonActor

**KATE MIDDLETON** (*Miss Ruby Ridge-way*) Off-Broadway: *Shear Madness* (New World Stages), *The Late Christopher Bean* (TACT); *Asymmetric* (59E59 Theatres/Ground UP Productions); *Pratfalls* (Abingdon/Ground UP Productions); *Avow* (NYIT "Best Lead Actress"); *The Other Place* (MTC workshop). Regional: *Alabama Story* (world premiere), *Few Good Men* (Pioneer Theatre Company); *Circle Mirror Transformation* (Kevin Kline Award, St. Louis Rep); *Perfect Wedding* (GEVA/Cape Playhouse); *Noises Off*; *Boeing, Boeing* (Dorset Theatre Festival), *Marty* (Huntington), *August Snow* (Triad Stage), *Jack and Jill* (Playmakers Rep), *With and Without* (Bickford), *The Importance of Be-*

*ing Earnest* (Summit Playhouse/Ground UP Productions), *Carnival* (NJ Shakespeare), *Chicago*, *The Full Monty*, *Blithe Spirit* (Weston Playhouse), *South Pacific* (ArtPark), *Romeo & Juliet*, *As You Like It* (The Warehouse Theatre). TV/Film: "Mercy" (NBC, recurring); "Law & Order"; "Law & Order: SVU"; Comedy Central; upcoming indie feature *April Flowers*. Founder and Artistic Director of NYC's Ground UP Productions, TACT Company Member. www.katemiddletonactress.com

**AEDIN MOLONEY** (*Miss Margaret Willoughby*) recent credits include: At the Shakespeare Theatre of NJ she originated the role of George Eliot in the world premiere of *A Most Dangerous Woman*, followed by the role of Dol Common in *The Alchemist*. 8 lead roles at The Irish Repertory Theatre, most recently as Rose in the acclaimed *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Aedin is producing artistic director of Fallen Angel Theatre & has performed in 4 of their productions including *Airswimming*, *Eva the Chaste & Cell*. **TV**: Sister Mary Michael in Soderbergh's *The Knick*. **AUDIO**: *Ironwill* by Arthur Yorinks & directed by Jim Simpson. A full length audio performance of Molly Bloom from James Joyce's *Ulysses* with music by Paddy Moloney (release date 2016). **FILM**: Eva Joyce opposite Ewan McGregor in *Nora*. Aedin is delighted to be working at The Mint and she can next be seen in Fallen Angel Theatre's "*When I was a Girl I used to Scream & Shout*" by Sharman Macdonald at The Clurman Theatre, New York.

**ALEXA SHAE NIZIAK** (*Peggy Summers*) is honored to have been admitted to the Malyn Park School. Broadway: *Matilda the Musical*, *A Christmas Story The Musical*, *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*. National Tours: *Mary Poppins*, *A Christmas Story The Musical*. Regional/selected: *Far From Heaven* (Williamstown Theatre Festival), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (IRNE Nominee), *Once on This Island* (IRNE and Broadway World Nominee), *Gypsy*, *A Christmas Carol*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Honk!*. New York City Ballet: *The Magic Flute*. Workshop/Readings: *Far From*