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**MINDING ONE ANOTHER'S BUSINESS:
SCRUTINY OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OF IRISH COMMUNITIES THROUGH
HUMOUR IN *SPREADING THE NEWS AND YESTERDAY'S NEWS***

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Resumo

O presente estudo analisa o texto da peça *Spreading the News* (1904) como inspiração para o drama radiofônico contemporâneo *Yesterday's News* (2012). Cada peça é analisada separadamente levando em consideração seus diferentes gêneros e mídias em que estão inseridas, considerando seus contextos de produção. *Yesterday's News* é comparada a *Spreading the News* para avaliar como ambos os dramas expressam e examinam, pelo uso do humor, os traços sociais das comunidades irlandesas representadas. Em primeiro lugar, observam-se semelhanças entre *Yesterday's News* e *Spreading the News*, no que diz respeito ao uso de estratégias humorísticas para fundamentar a crítica social. Em segundo lugar, percebem-se semelhanças entre os dramas em relação à representação das pressões que as comunidades nas peças exercem sobre os personagens principais. Por fim, ambas as peças trazem à tona temas semelhantes relacionados à representação histórica das comunidades irlandesas, cada uma situada e referindo-se a suas realidades históricas específicas em diferentes contextos de produção.

Palavras-chave: Lady Gregory, Hilary Fannin, Teatro Irlandês, Drama Radiofônico, Intertextualidade, Estudos da Adaptação, Estudos Culturais.

Abstract

This study analyses the playtext of *Spreading the News* (1904) as a piece of inspiration for the contemporary radio drama *Yesterday's News* (2012). Each play is analysed separately regarding their different media and genres, taking into account their contexts of production. *Yesterday's News* is compared to *Spreading the News* in order to gauge how both dramas express and scrutinise social traits of the Irish communities depicted through the use of humour. Firstly, similarities between *Yesterday's News* and *Spreading the News* are observed, regarding their use of humorous strategies to underpin social criticism. Secondly, resemblances between the dramas in relation to the depiction of the pressures the communities in the plays put on the main characters are discussed. Finally, it remarks how both plays bring to light similar themes related to the historical representation of Irish communities, each one placed and referring to their specific historical reality fulfilled through their different contexts of production.

Keywords: Lady Gregory, Hilary Fannin, Irish Theatre, Audio Drama, Intertextuality, Adaptation Studies, Cultural Studies.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	7
1.1. Significance of the Study.....	8
1.2. Objectives.....	9
1.3. Research Questions and Hypothesis.....	9
2. Literature Review	10
2.1. Irish National Theatre, Lady Gregory and <i>Spreading the News</i>	10
2.2. Drama and Humour	13
2.3. The Influence of Theatre in Audio Drama.....	15
2.4. <i>Yesterday's News</i> and Contemporary Irish Drama	16
3. Method	18
3.1 Analysing <i>Spreading the News</i>	19
3.2 Analysing <i>Yesterday's News</i>	20
4. Analysis and Discussion	21
4.1. <i>Spreading the News</i>	21
4.2. <i>Yesterday's News</i>	27
5. Final Remarks	34
6. References	38
APPENDIX	40

Minding one another's business: scrutiny of social behaviour of Irish communities through humour in *Spreading the News* and *Yesterday's News*

1. Introduction

The rereading of seminal works provides plentiful ground for analysing distinct perspectives on similar topics over distinct periods of time. In this respect, the analysis of Hillary Fannin's *Yesterday's News* would then be a case in point. *Yesterday's News* is a radio drama released in 2012. The purpose of this research is to compare it to its main source of inspiration; Lady Augusta Gregory's acclaimed theatre play *Spreading the News*, first performed in 1904. Both productions were written by Irish women and touch on the judgement of citizens who are condemned by the assumptions made by their communities – this criticism of social behaviours is delivered through humorous strategies in the two plays.

Spreading the News is a theatre play written to be performed at the opening of the Irish National Theatre (later denominated Abbey Theatre) in 1904. Lady Gregory was a pivotal patroness of the arts throughout her lifetime, one of the founders of the Irish National Theatre, and a fundamental name when it comes to the Irish revival movement. Briefly, the play was written in the context of the Irish Republican Nationalism as a reaction to the British rule, which led to the independence of the Republic of Ireland in 1922. Regarding its mode of drama, the play is a social satire driven by strategies of 'humour of character'¹, which are used to deal with the social pressures of an Irish community and its effects on its members (WEITZ, 2004, p. 144).

On the other hand, the audio drama analysed, *Yesterday's News*, was launched in 2012 by RTÉ, on the website of the Irish radio channel. The author, Hilary Fannin, is a former actress, an award-winning writer with a swathe of highly-acclaimed books, a theatre and audio drama playwright, and a prolific columnist for the *Irish Times* media outlet. Her audio play is written in the context of a modern globalised society that is accustomed to the internet and technological gadgets that are used for communication

¹ In this study, the term used by Weitz (2004) is adopted when referring to Lady Gregory's humour strategy of calling attention to the "placement of character 'type' at the centre of comic development".

as well as a source of information. That is reflected in the audio drama's dramatic structure and on the techniques of the medium used in the play to make meaning. With regard to its structure, as *Spreading the News*, *Yesterday's News* is also a social satire driven by strategies of 'humour of character', used to shed light on the social pressures of the Irish communities portrayed and their effects on its members.

The influence of Gregory's work on modern Irish audio drama is apparent in the intertextuality between Fannin's audio play *Yesterday's News* and its source text. Gregory's sense of comedy, as identified by Eric Weitz (2004, p. 155), might inspire many writers to reassess the playwright's work along the same lines up to the present time. *Spreading the News* – a comic theatre play based on the small background of a provincial Irish village – still indicts society at many levels (p. 155). Hence, *Yesterday's News* is a contemporary demonstration that Gregory's work continues to influence Irish authors throughout the decades up to the present day. As a result, even over a hundred years after it was written, *Spreading the News* proves itself a source of inspiration for a contemporary Irish audio drama.

1.1. Significance of the study

The significance of studying Lady Augusta Gregory and her contribution to the history of Irish studies has been consolidated in the last few decades. Her legacy to Irish theatre is not only due to her role in the construction of a venue for the Irish National Theatre, but also due to the works she created. However, as Paul Murphy (2007, p. 29) mentions, despite Lady Gregory's acknowledged influence in Irish drama, the research concerning her work tends to be merely biographical or commemorative, and avoids a thorough examination of the cultural politics of her plays and their relationship to the social context in which they were written. Murphy also mentions that she is usually portrayed as an embodiment of an Irish monument – timeless and historical – and “while a great deal of scholarship has been produced about the plays of Yeats and J. M. Synge, only a fraction of that amount has been produced about Lady Gregory's plays” (p. 29). As a result, not as many re-readings nor adaptations have been made of Gregory's work as compared to those of her contemporary fellow playwrights.

Subsequently, Hilary Fannin's play is an example of a modern cross-medium adaptation of an established play, since it is an audio drama set in the contemporary

world surrounded by technology and rich in aural meanings. As Linda Hutcheon (2006, p. 8) explains, an adaptation can be described as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work” or “a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation”. That is observed in the inspiration from *Spreading the News* to *Yesterday’s News*, and subsequently, its adaptation to a different medium in a contemporary perspective. The audio play goes beyond the spoken word and uses the auditory sense to its utmost by the use of speech, sound effects, acoustic and music – adding depth to the story.

1.2. Objectives

My main objective is to analyse Lady Gregory’s *Spreading the News* (1904) and Hilary Fannin’s *Yesterday’s News* (2012) by comparing both pieces and focusing on their historical context in order to:

- Study each play in turn as to their contexts and modes of production.
- Compare both dramas by discussing their use of humour to indict social behaviours in Irish communities.
- Ascertain the relationship between *Yesterday’s News and Spreading the News*, in terms of how the former, as a modern audio drama, expresses and scrutinises some of the social traits of the Irish communities represented through the use of humour.

1.3. Research Questions and Hypothesis

In light of the considerations above, the questions that guide this research are based on the investigation of *Yesterday’s News* as a rereading of *Spreading the News*:

- With regard to their composition, how are both plays structured, considering their different media and genres?
- How does the play, from the beginning of the twentieth century, and the audio drama, from the early twenty-first century, make use of humour to depict and scrutinise social behaviours of Irish communities?
- Considering the differences in the context of production of *Spreading the News* (1904) and *Yesterday’s News* (2012), what are the implications in their historical representations of Irish communities?

Firstly, I hypothesise that there are similarities between the dramas with respect to their use of humorous strategies. Both dramas are expected to make use of techniques of humour, which underpin social criticism through the depiction of the pressures placed upon the main characters within their respective communities. Secondly, I expect to see resemblances in how *Yesterday's News* and *Spreading the News* bring to light similar themes related to the historical representation of Irish communities, even though they are placed in distinct historical realities and composed in different contexts of production. Based on a preliminary analysis, both plays seem to present topics which serve to depict Irish rural scenery and its occupants' relationship to the land, the expression of regional music, and the comparisons between Ireland and foreign lands.

2. Literature Review

In this section, I will survey Lady Gregory's impact on Irish theatre, then the influence of theatre on audio drama, humour and drama, and, finally, I will examine *Yesterday's News* as a contemporary Irish radio drama.

2.1. Irish National Theatre, Lady Gregory and *Spreading the News*.

The concept of nationalism has been of crucial importance in the history of Irish theatre. Shaun Richards (2004, p. 1) argues that "the idea of 'nation', as both theme and setting, has haunted the development of Irish theatre" – which is a result of the country's cultural and political history. Richards emphasises that "drama in its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century manifestation sought to define and determine the basis of Irish claims for political independence from Britain" (p. 1) – and that is perceptible in the letter²Lady Gregory and Yeats wrote in request for funds for an Irish national theatre.

Before the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the political landscape in the country was that of a complex Republican revolt against the British dominion. The nationalist wave that inspired these political movements strongly influenced the artistic works produced in the country, and the theatre was one of them. As Richards (2004,

² It is worth highlighting that Prof. Richards does not say to whom it was written, nor the source text he is quoting from.

p.2) mentions, the Irish nationalist intellectuals at the time had become alert to the implications of Irish portrayals in order to mobilise the population to assert its independence. These portrayals are referenced in Gregory and Yeats's letter in support of the creation of an Irish national theatre. They say that they had a desire to "bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland", and that they would "show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment" as seen in previous stagings, "but the home of an ancient idealism [...]" (FRAZIER, 2006, p. 182). What they problematise is that, even though there were local theatres in the country, which produced some number of regional plays, still a great number of Irish plays were performed in English theatres only. Therefore, there was a need for a central organisation for theatre in the country, so they planned to build an Irish National Theatre in the capital – Dublin.

The dramatic productions of the Irish Renaissance, encompassing the late nineteenth century until the early twentieth century, fuelled the urge to "unleash the still-unused energies from past images into the present" (KIBERD, 2006, p. 31). Lady Gregory was involved in these productions and in various cultural and political spheres of the country at the time, as her contemporary playwrights (MCDONALD, 2020). Gregory was deeply engaged in the political and cultural debates going on in Ireland during that time. Besides being well-travelled and a connoisseur of the arts, she could reflect seriously on the social value of art – and as such, she deepened her knowledge of the local culture, she recovered and translated many old Celtic legends (REMPORT, 2018 p. 52). These involvements contributed to her desire to support the Irish Revival movement, and one of her means of contributing was through drama.

Richards (2004) discusses that Lady Gregory's involvement in the composition of plays started with her contributions to the works of others, which paved the way for her own career as a dramatist. Richards also explains that she typed a translation of Douglas Hyde's *Casadh an tSúgáin* (The Twisting of the Rope) from his dictation and acted as a mediator between Yeats and George Moore in *Diarmuid and Grania* in 1900. Finally, "the successful collaboration on *Cathleen ni Houlihan* soon prompted Lady Gregory to write plays alone" (RICHARDS 2004, p. 63). As a result of those influences, Lady Gregory wrote *Spreading the News*: a tour de force of its time that was first performed on the opening night of the Abbey Theatre, the Irish National Theatre, in December 1904 (see Appendix I).

Gregory wrote the play amongst the cultural energies, anxieties and political struggles of the time. As McDonald (2020, p. 54) suggests, “a glance at the signal artistic institution of the Anglo-Irish Revival, the Abbey Theatre, reveals contesting positions and aesthetic agendas from the start”, and *Spreading the News* was involved in these productions from the early times of the theatre. On the one hand, Yeats “sought to incarnate an ideal, mythic theatre of the elite, written in verse with subjects from Irish mythology”, but on the other hand, “early Abbey playwrights, such as Edward Martyn or Padraic Colum, were drawn to naturalist plays of rural life” (p. 54). *Spreading the News* is an example of the latter, and one of the first examples of the peasant plays that were performed in the theatre for the first years. The play revolves around the social relationships of a rural neighbourhood among its citizens and the judgments of these connections from the perspective of outsiders – a magistrate and a police officer – who visit the village.

With the assistance of humorous strategies, Lady Gregory places character ‘type’ at the centre of comic development in *Spreading the News* and creates a character-driven social satire, providing “an optimum comic register for performance” (WEITZ, 2004, p. 144). As Eglantina Rempert (2018, p. 100) describes, the playwright’s subtle scrutiny of the Irish rural practice of *cooring* and its effect on members of local communities is transmitted ‘behind the veil of comedy’. The extract explains that the practice of *cooring* involved the lending of tools and family members from one family to the other, in order to assist the work carried out in households and the fields. The system required “a strict hierarchy in work practices and an unacknowledged consent both within the family and within the neighbourhood”, which “depended on the effectiveness of the control exercised by the community over its members” (p. 100) – which is seen within the community illustrated in the play.

The play was well-received at the time, and it was among the most popular pieces performed at the Abbey Theatre during the first decade of the 20th century (REMPERT, 2018, p. 103). According to Rempert, *The Irish News and Belfast Morning News* claimed that “*Spreading the News* and *Hyacinth Halvey* were ‘inspired by a natural spontaneous spirit of fun which never fails to meet with a ready response’”(p. 165), and “*The Theatre Notes* wrote that Lady Gregory’s *Spreading the News* and *Hyacinth Halvey* were ‘fascinating, and deliciously funny’” (p. 164). In addition, *The Observer* reported in 1905 that, “Quite different was the comedy by Lady Gregory ‘Spreading the News’, a clean-

cut bit of Irish life; immensely humorous and laughable.” (THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, 1905).

As when the play was first produced, it was celebrated for being one of the first plays ever staged at the Abbey Theatre and for its popularity in the early years of the house. On the centenary commemorations of the Abbey in 2004, the original plays of the opening night were performed, and the short farce was among them. In an article for *The Irish Times*, Gerry Colgan (2004) evaluates that “one of the distinctly better celebrations of the Abbey's centenary year was the production last Monday, for one performance only, of the first four plays ever staged there [*On Baile's Strand*, *Spreading the News*, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *In The Shadow of the Glen*]. Concerning *Spreading the News*, he advocates that it “is a quirky little comedy casting a beady eye on the heights of absurdity that small-town gossip can reach. It is a slight enough piece, but still amusing in its etching of rural stereotypes and their language” (GERRY COLGAN, 2004). Thus, although Colgan does not comment on the satirical aspect of the play, one may conclude that from its first ever performance, *Spreading the News* is still said to portray comically the behaviours of rural Irish citizens.

2.2. Drama and Humour

Since *Spreading the News* is widely known as a comedy, it is necessary to discuss the genre and set out an anatomy of the techniques of humour employed in the play. A comedy, among other definitions, can refer both to the induction of laughter and to a type of drama. While drama is concerned with the representation of a story, an event, a place, a person or an emotional effect, as Hand and Traynor (2011, p. 33) suggest. Stott (2014) comments that comedy uses stock characters in scenarios that require some kind of problem to be resolved, and asserts that “these plays end happily, often concluding with a communal celebration like a feast or a marriage, and the characters generally manage to resolve their differences without anyone being killed” (p. 1). Stott (2014, p. 1) also describes *comedy* as a dramatic style that can refer to a range of structures, such as pastoral, farce, burlesque, pantomime, satire, and the comedy of manners.

Amongst these styles, the main ones examined here are farce and satire. The first one can be defined as a dramatic work that is usually short, and which has as its sole objective to excite laughter through the use of broad, physical, visual comedy,

whose effects are pre-eminently theatrical and intended solely to entertain (DAVIS, 2013, p. 69). The latter, when staged, can present characters who are subjected to ridicule by having questionable attributes, that is to say; “they exercise not just power but an excess of power, or they show arrogance, greed, hypocrisy, cowardice, self-love, other faults that lend themselves to caricature by an artist who distorts or exaggerates the behaviour for comic effect” (SCHECHTER, 2021, n.p). According to Schechter (2021), stage satire has been applauded for thousands of years; it sets itself to explore flaws in human behaviour, by giving them faces, names, embodying them on stage with actors, and holding them to account in a specific time and place in order to provoke laughter. As Lady Gregory’s play for the opening night of the Abbey Theatre has been described as a farce and as a social satire, both terms are used in this research to analyse the play and compare it to *Yesterday’s News*.

Furthermore, in order to generate laughter through the text, a writer of these comedy styles may apply various techniques to generate humour. Aiming to explore such approaches, Arthur Berger (2011, p. 3) proposes 45 categories and techniques of humour in *The Art of Comedy Writing* (2011) that are used in this research. These techniques are categorised in four main groups, as detailed by Berger:

3

<i>Categories and Techniques of Humor</i>			
LANGUAGE	LOGIC	IDENTITY	ACTION
Allusion	Absurdity	Before/After	Chase
Bombast	Accident	Burlesque	Slapstick
Definition	Analogy	Caricature	Speed
Exaggeration	Catalogue	Eccentricity	
Facetiousness	Coincidence	Embarrassment	
Insults	Comparison	Exposure	
Infantilism	Disappointment	Grotesque	
Irony	Ignorance	Imitation	
Misunderstanding	Mistakes	Impersonation	
Over literalness	Repetition	Mimicry	
Puns, Wordplay	Reversal	Parody	
Repartee	Rigidity	Scale	
Ridicule	Theme/Variation	Stereotype	
Sarcasm	Unmasking		
Satire			
List by Berger (2011, p.3)			

³ In the analysis, the complete titles of the techniques named by Berger (2011) are used. The ones that were not mentioned on this list with their full titles are: “Absurdity, Confusion, and Nonsense”, “Disappointments and Defeated Expectations”, and “Embarrassment and Escape from It”.

2.3. The Influence of Theatre in Audio Drama

At around the same period that *Spreading the News* was being performed for the first time in the Abbey Theatre, in the America's Cup yacht race of 1899, the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi was credited with making the first radio broadcast – or 'wireless telegraphy', as it was first called, as Hand & Traynor (2011, p. 5) explain. According to Hand & Traynor, radio broadcasting was a result of years of scientific research on electromagnetism by scientists like James Clerk Maxwell and Heinrich Hertz (p. 5), which would be the start of a new era for entertainment around the world. The new media became so popular and widespread in the early nineteenth century that broadcasting became important for the political scenario as well, since political figures such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Hitler, and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill used the radio to reach their audiences in an attempt to popularise their message (HAND; TRAYNOR, 2011, p. 11).

As Hand & Traynor (2011, p. 33) mention, the real strength of radio "is an ability to infiltrate the mind, to unleash the most powerful dramatic weapon of all: the imagination of the listener", which is a characteristic that is shared with theatre. The 'imaginative function' of the radio would resemble the 'off-stage' in live physical theatre. Crook (1999, p. 08) describes audio drama plays as 'the Theatre of the Mind' . On that account, as well as theatre, radio has brought its own particular strength to the dramatic form (HAND & TRAYNOR, 2011, p. 33). It is also relevant to recall here the first influence of drama in audio transmissions even before the invention of the radio, the 'Théâtrophone', as it was called in French. As Crook (1999, p. 15) describes, it "involved telephonic transmission of live performances from theatres and music halls into domestic households and amplification of the sound through phonograph speakers"; The théâtrophone paved the way for an entire culture of audio transmission of drama about three decades before the advent of radio.

Along these lines, radio dramas became popular among radio audiences. Hence, the first radio dramas produced in the pioneering broadcasting centres such as in the United Kingdom and the United States were strongly influenced by the theatre, so much so that "in the United Kingdom, the experience of listening to radio drama was intended to replicate that of the theatre" (HAND; TRAYNOR, 2011, p. 33).

2.4. *Yesterday's News* and Contemporary Irish audio drama

The author of the radio drama analysed in this monograph, Hilary Fannin, was born in 1962. In the beginning of her career, she worked for many years as an actor for both stage and in television (DRAMA ONLINE, 2022). Fannin also worked as both an actor and author at the Abbey Theatre from 1987 to 1991 (ABBEY THEATRE, 2022). Furthermore, she was also a joint writer-in-association at the Abbey Theatre for the centenary year (DRAMA ONLINE, 2022). Her first play, *Mackerel Sky*, was performed at the Bush Theatre in 1997, and in 2001, she co-wrote with Martha Kearney her first radio play, *Dear Exile*, which was broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in 2001.

Nearly after one century after Lady Gregory wrote *Spreading the News*, Fannin started writing her first radio plays. However, her plays were not written in the beginning of the advent of the radio, but in an era in which the television was a common household appliance and the internet was becoming widespread throughout homes in developed nations. In 2012, RTE Radio broadcast *Yesterday's News*, a contemporary example of the influences of theatre in audio drama productions. Approximately ten years after her first radio play, the technological advances of the twenty-first century escalated, and the access to Wi-Fi and streaming platforms was common knowledge to most audiences.

The plot of *Yesterday's News* revolves around Bella, an Irish journalist who unintentionally publishes an article about assumptions made regarding a famous American rock star who retired and moved to a small Irish village in the countryside. The rock star, Kitty Kearny, who is a descendant of Irish grandparents and moves to their old property, becomes a target of malicious gossip from neighbours in the village. The satirical effect of the play relies on Bella's dilemma that consists in her decision whether to continue working in Dublin for an obnoxious boss or moving from her home country to Croatia in order to build a new life – which touches on some contemporary labour relations among Irish contemporary communities. Her aunt's dog named Gregory is an essential piece of humour to the play, and it is somehow involved in the incident of Bella's draft sent by email to her boss, who forwards the story via the internet, making it go viral.

Differently from *Spreading the News*, which is written in the colonial context of the early twentieth century, *Yesterday's News*, is set in twenty-first century Ireland as a Republic inserted into global media trends. "The 21st century's internet society seems to thrive on a harmonious three-way relationship among celebrities, audiences and fame

addiction. The global internet in turns moulds this three-way relationship and accelerates its dissemination and communication” (CHOI; BERGER, 2010, p. 316). The audio play expresses this distinct historical context through the social traits that are well known to the radio play’s audience: the global obsession of people (often influenced by the media) with the private life of celebrities and their fame.

The drama is described in the RTE streaming platform as a “contemporary exploration of reputation which was written as a response to Lady Gregory’s theatre play *Spreading the News*” (FANNIN, 2012). The audio drama attempts to follow Lady Gregory’s characteristics of character ‘type’ at the centre of comic development, explores similar topics when compared to its reference, and makes allusions to several character names and traits from *Spreading the News*. Moreover, the focus of the play on the issue of ‘reputation’ within the character’s labour relations is analogous to the issues that arose from the practice of *cooring* in Irish rural communities, as portrayed by Lady Gregory.

Based on the ideas put forward by Hand and Traynor, both theatre and audio drama present distinct dramatic forms according to the particular strength of each of their media – the first one’s strength being the spectacle, and latter’s being the imagination:

Each medium brings its own particular strength to the dramatic form. Theatre’s strength is spectacle; television and film bring realism; the written word’s strength is the intimacy of the relationship with the reader. Radio, too, can declare some aptitude in these, but its real strength is an ability to infiltrate the mind, to unleash the most powerful dramatic weapon of all: the imagination of the listener (2011, p. 33).

An example of the use of aural techniques used to create scenarios in the mind of the listener in Hilary Fanning’s *Yesterday’s News* is the wide use of multimedia technologies to convey meaning. Paige Reynolds (2020, p. 81) points out that contemporary Irish dramatists have been incorporating tactics drawn from mass media and technology in their pieces. Although Reynolds explores this idea in relation to literary texts, in the audio drama *Yesterday’s News*, the sounds of modern technological gadgets are easily recognisable and commonplace in the play. Vehicles such as email correspondence, telephone and mobile phone communication, and widespread internet

that are familiar to the contemporary audience add realism to the play, as Reynolds (2020, p. 83) suggests.

Furthermore, when compared to *Spreading the News*, *Yesterday's News* uses techniques of the genre in order to create similar imaginary Irish rural landscapes in the mind of the audience. As Hand & Traynor (2011, p. 34) point out; radio drama is dependent on the listener, who is an active collaborator that creates their own sceneries with their imagination. Thus, through the support of audio drama as “the Theatre of the Mind”, as described by Crook (1999, p. 8), the play uses sound effects, a script carefully written for the aural medium, and successfully carried out performances make reference to the established play.

According to Crook (1999, p. 62) radio is not a blind medium, and there are five dimensions that engage the senses of the listener: colour and visual depth, olfactory perception, touch and texture, imaginary sound and taste, and the imaginative spectacle. Crook also details a compilation of rules of sound design from producers and theorists such as Lance Sieveking and Michel Chion, who define specific techniques that can be used to construct meaning in audio dramas (p. 70). In *Yesterday's News*, the aural means are highly explored with various sound effects adding meaning to the plot, music used for diverse purposes, and different uses of speech to construct the narrative of the play.

3. Method

This study analyses how *Yesterday's News* serves as a fundamental intertext to its inspiration *Spreading the News*, and make a further comparison of both pieces as to how they portray comic devices to build a social satire. Taking into account their different contexts of production and drama genres, this research examines the dramatic structure of *Spreading the News* and the dramatic structure as well as sound design of *Yesterday's News'* so as to verify how they express and construct social satires concerning the social relations of Irish communities. While the analysis of *Spreading the News* is based on its playtext alone, the analysis of *Yesterday's News'* is based on its performance.

In order to investigate whether both playwrights make use of similar humorous strategies to amuse their audiences, this research applies Berger's (2017) comic

techniques arranged in the following categories: (1) humour involving identity, (2) humour involving language, (3) humour involving logic and (4) humour involving action or visual phenomena. The analytical tools used are borrowed from Berger (see above “2.2 Drama and Humour”). Here we seek to observe instances of allusion, absurdity, accident, analogy, burlesque, catalogue, chase, comparison, disappointment, embarrassment, exaggeration, ignorance, insults, mistakes, misunderstanding, ridicule, rigidity, sarcasm, satire, stereotype and theme/variation.

3.1. Analysing *Spreading the News*

In rich unfolding patterns of ridiculous events, Lady Gregory establishes solid foundations for burlesque characters, and constructs “a beautiful little machine, which achieves comic momentum through the ‘humour of situation’, but, crucially, is driven almost entirely by a ‘humour of character’”, that is to say, “a standardized character type” (WEITZ, 2004, pp. 145-146). The text itself, through “performative outlining” permits the possibility of the “incarnation” of laughter, planning its delivery through a distribution of ‘neighbourhoods’ – brief aspects of drawn-out elements added to the text as constructions to deliver humorous moments (WEITZ, 2004, p. 144). For the analysis of *Spreading the News*, these neighbourhoods are explored by means of textual analysis of the playtext rather than comedic elements in performance, which would be seen on stage, for instance.

After investigating its structure and considering the historical context in which the play was produced, it is relevant to think about the language of drama that is written to be performed on stage, which will be examined through Barnet, Burto and Cain’s guidelines on “How to read a play” (2008, p. 965). The chapter in question asserts that, when a text is written to be performed, it is necessary to “perform the play in the theatre of our minds” when reading on our own (p. 965). The authors outline six steps for reading a play, which are outlined below, and are used to investigate *Spreading the News*. Firstly, (1) observe the list of characters and their descriptions, (2) examine the gestures and costumes described or implied by the dialogue, (3) keep in mind the theatre for which the play was written, (4) envision the set clearly, (5) perceive whichever sound effects are specified, and (6) maintain a level of awareness regarding what the characters say (p. 947-950). Given these points, this study aims to study *Spreading the News* as a theatre play, taking into account its context of production, and to examine the piece as to how it humorously portrays its characters and provides scope for humour in

the form of a social satire. Although analysing any staging of *Spreading the News* is beyond the scope of this research, some aspects of its premiere performance will be taken into account when regarded as relevant.

3.2. Analysing *Yesterday's News*

The use of intertextuality in Hilary Fannin's audio play is further analysed. As mentioned by Graham Allen (2000, p. 205), explorations of intertextuality considering their manifestation through adaptation and appropriation are "inevitably interested in how art creates art", which is one of the concerns of this study. Allen also proposes that in new media environments, "a new outlook regarding the social and cultural role of art opens up and the intertextual nature of all texts is foregrounded" (p. 208).

With regard to transmedia adaptations, Allen (2000, pp. 207-208) emphasises that "the narratives and the art works we engage with are presented to us in a plethora of media", and "the technological ability to adapt or transpose texts from one form of representation to another is an increasingly significant object for our critical and cultural consideration". Following the theoretical tools proposed by Hutcheon (2006) to analyse adaptations, this research studies the context of production of the play (*where* and *when* it was produced) regarding *who* wrote it and *why*, describes *what* the form of the play is concerning its medium, and examines *how* it engages an audience.

As regards the comic devices of the audio play, its humorous aspects are investigated in order to discern whether it follows the depiction of character 'type' as a main comic device, building a structure grounded in 'humour of character' in the same way as *Spreading the News*. Further to this, the neighbourhoods of "performative outlining" that permit the possibility of the "incarnation" of laughter, as described by Weitz (2004, p. 144), is explored as well. In the case of the audio drama, the comedic elements of performance are taken into account, which also requires an analysis that is specific to the field.

It is also relevant to point out that, due to its different means of expression, *Yesterday's News* is studied in terms of its sound design, in order to gauge how it was used to convey meaning. In order to do so, the rules from producers and theorists of sound design, such as Michel Chion and Lance Sieveking, that are used in radio drama, are taken into account as detailed by Crook (1999, pp. 70-101) and Hand and Traynor

(2011, pp. 40-68). The various aural meanings used in the play such as ‘textual’ and ‘theatrical’ speech, music, and sound effects are described, as well as what they represent to the dramatic form of the piece. Regarding these characteristics, this monograph aims to investigate the audio drama *Yesterday’s News* on the same lines as *Spreading the News* as to how it humorously portrays its characters, and how it constructs an underpinned scrutiny of their behaviours as a community.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. *Spreading the News*

The play revolves around misunderstandings that happen due to poor communication and exaggeration as to what happens among the citizens of a community during a local fair. On the outskirts, in the course of a day, a magistrate, a police officer and various malicious neighbours (Tim Casey, Shawn Early, Mrs. Tully and James Ryan) make assumptions about a trivial misplacement of a hayfork and create an imaginary dispute involving adultery, which leads inevitably to a murder. Mrs. Tarpey, an old merchant with hearing impediments, becomes the so-called witness to the fight and reassures all the happenings and the following fictional burying of the dead (Jack Smit, who was said to be betrayed by his wife, Kitty Keary), to such an extent that an innocent man (Bartley Fallon) is convicted of the murder. The misunderstanding was such that his own wife, Mrs. Mary Fallon, is made believe that he had committed both adultery and murder even after trying to defend him.

In the setting of a country fair with a stand for selling goods in the foreground and newspapers on the walls of the yard in the background, the play’s scenery and plot staged a rustic Ireland (see Appendix II). The National Library of Ireland holds in the archive the leaflet referring strictly to the props to be used on stage and those that were to be carried by members of the cast, which included barrels, an apple stall, boxes, fruits, sugar and a basket, and the disastrous hay fork (See appendix III). In order to create an illusion of reality, the stage of the Abbey Theatre at the opening “was narrowed down to the scale of a peasant cottage during the rural scenes” and in the end the audience received pictorial facsimiles of cottages out of which actors and actresses created ‘living pictures’ (REMPORT 2018, p. 132).

Following Barnet, Burto and Cain's (2008, p. 965) guidelines for analysing plays, I will now resort to the characters' lines, the sound effects specified and the gestures and costumes described or implied by the dialogue, with the aim of identifying the types of humour present in the play. First of all, the humorous technique on which the plot has its base is *theme/variation*; the first visit of the new local Magistrate is what presents the community being portrayed. *Theme and variation*, as stated by Berger (2011, p. 43), is applied when a reaction from different nationalities, religions, occupations or members of social classes is shown regarding a specific matter. The contrast between the authority coming from a more developed part of the country to a countryside village's rural fair and its people is what sets the tone of the play.

This technique is juxtaposed with *stereotypes*. As Berger (2011, p. 42) explains, *stereotypes* refer to "a commonly held view about the characteristics and typical behaviour patterns of some groups of people", which, in the case of *Spreading the News*, is that of the ordinary peasant citizen of a rural village. Berger justifies this characteristic to present humour due to the fact that it provides an "explanation" of motivation for the characters, and because it provides plentiful ground for *ridicule*, *insult* and *exaggeration*.

In the opening scene, the dialogue between the Magistrate and the Policeman presents the use of *stereotypes*, by assuming that there was a great deal of disorder in the fair for its location in a lawless rural zone, "So that is the Fair Green. Cattle and sheep and mud. No system. What a repulsive sight!" (GREGORY, 1904). As mentioned before, this technique allows the use of *insult*, which is widely used by the Magistrate in the dialogue:

MAGISTRATE. I suppose there is a good deal of disorder in this place?

POLICEMAN. There is.

MAGISTRATE. Common assault?

POLICEMAN. It's common enough.

MAGISTRATE. Agrarian crime, no doubt?

POLICEMAN. That is so.

MAGISTRATE. Boycotting? Maiming of cattle? Firing into houses?

POLICEMAN. There was one time, and there might be again.

MAGISTRATE. That is bad. Does it go any farther than that?

POLICEMAN. Far enough, indeed.

MAGISTRATE. Homicide, then! This district has been shamefully neglected! I will change all that. When I was in the Andaman Islands, my system never failed. Yes, yes, I will change all that. What has that woman on her stall?

(GREGORY, 1904)

The use of *catalogue* – that is to say, lists that can be used to insult to obtain humorous effects (BERGER, 2011, p. 11) – is used to imply the stereotyped expectation of the officer to find crimes in the community. These assumptions are based on the notion that at that time in the country, agriculture was backward, farms were usually small, and the agriculturist was, as the result of historic causes, ignorant and lacking in self-reliance or initiative (SMITH and POTTINGER, 1921, p. 12). With the use of an *analogy*, Mrs. Tarpey contributes to the stereotypical image of the Irish peasant who, in the opinion of some critics, would not be suitable for business as an occupation (p. 12), which is illustrated in the dialogue between the Magistrate, the Policeman and Mrs. Tarpey:

POLICEMAN (shouting). The gentleman is asking do you know the town! He's the new magistrate!
 MRS. TARPEY (rising and ducking). Do I know the town? I do, to be sure.
 MAGISTRATE (shouting). What is its chief business?
 MRS. TARPEY. Business, is it? What business would the people here have but to be minding one another's business?
 MAGISTRATE. I mean what trade have they?
 MRS. TARPEY. Not a trade. No trade at all but to be talking.
 (GREGORY, 1904)

A recurrent technique applied throughout the text using the same topic is *comparison*, since they concern direct uses of correlations with the use of other techniques such as *insult* or *ridicule* to generate humour (BERGER 2011, p. 13). In *Spreading the News*, they are used to refer to America. During the European expansion to the Americas, the labour of Irish skilled settlers was welcomed in North America, and according to Howe Stephen (2000, p. 25), aboriginal Americans were thought to have lived without a formally constituted political society and systems of law.

BARTLEY – Indeed it's a poor country and a scarce country to be living in. But I'm thinking if I went to America it's long ago the day I'd be dead!
 – MRS. FALLON. So you might, indeed (GREGORY, 1904).

The reference to America as an ungovernable land can be seen in the first scenes until the last ones, when Jack Smith discovers the rumour that was spread about his wife leaving him to leave for America and marry his supposed murderer. These comparisons with the hyperbolic conclusions drawn by the inhabitants of the community show how they regards themselves as different from this alleged savage land, contradicting the Magistrate's presumption.

The tension of the plot is built mainly with the use of *mistake* and *accident*. Because of Jack Smith's inattention to his hayfork, Bartley Fallon tries to help his neighbour with his mistake and collects the tool, accidentally hitting it against his wife's basket (see Appendix IV), which then falls on the floor. These trivial happenings lead to *misunderstanding*, which, according to Berger (2011, p. 31), are similar to *mistakes*, but essentially verbal – and that is how these events are reported among the neighbours as seen in the scene:

TIM CASEY. Where is Bartley Fallon, Mrs. Fallon? I want a word with him before he'll leave the fair. I was afraid he might have gone home by this, for he's a temperate man.

MRS. FALLON. I wish he did go home! It'd be best for me if he went home straight from the fair green, or if he never came with me at all! Where is he, is it? He's gone up the road (jerks elbow) following Jack Smith with a hayfork. (She goes out to left.)

TIM CASEY. Following Jack Smith with a hayfork! Did ever anyone hear the like of that. (Shouts) Did you hear that news, Mrs. Tarpey?

MRS. TARPEY. I heard no news at all.

TIM CASEY. Some dispute I suppose it was that rose between Jack Smith and Bartley Fallon, and it seems Jack made off, and Bartley is following him with a hayfork!

MRS. TARPEY. Is he now? Well, that was quick work! (GREGORY, 1904)

However, the *misunderstanding* is not only caused by a simple “lack of effective communication” as Berger (2011, p. 31) describes, but also by *exaggeration* the characters produce by “enhancing reality and blowing things up far beyond the reality of the situation” (p.18). Due to Mrs. Fallon's agitation after her items were wasted on the floor and her rush to replace them, she utters a dubious statement and walks away, leaving Tim Casey with the information with which he starts the rumour. Here, *ignorance*, Mrs. Tarpey's main feature, is also used, since she contributes to the enhancement of the rumour even though she was present at the scene of the assumed fight: her hearing impediments make her into an ignorant character, who is a fool or stupid (p.21).

The comic effect in these delusions lies in the fact that the audience is aware of the truth, whereas the characters are not, thus producing dramatic irony. The characters' conclusions are drawn from trivial faults that create the perception of *absurdity, confusion and nonsense*. This technique centres on ridiculous statements that create an illogical situation (BERGER 2011, p.5). The assumptions the community

makes and firmly believes easily jump from a dispute, to an injury, death and adultery – all in front of the audience that clearly sees these exaggerations. Finally, all the characters present an array of portrayals based on the *burlesque* effect: their social behaviour appears ridiculous on account of their imitation in an incongruous manner (p. 10). As Berger explains, this technique illustrates the characteristics that are central to the plot, since *satire* is the same as “deriding and ridiculing stupidity, vice, and folly in individuals, institutions, and society” (p. 39), and *lampoon* is represented by the mockery of a society or an individual (p. 5).

Berger (2011) puts forward the idea that “there is often an implicit moral dimension to satire; by pointing out how foolish we generally are, it suggests that alternatives to the status quo should be considered” (p.39). In *Spreading the News*, this relates to the criticism towards the various pressures the members of Irish rural societies were suffering at the time as,

The majority of the local population has no work. Jack Smyth seems to be the only person contracted to a job but he appears to be a seasonal labourer only. Katie Donovan is right in summarising the plot as ‘a word-of-mouth collective fantasy, woven of misunderstanding jealousy and gossip’, leading to the destruction of Bartley Fallon’s life and marriage. The word ‘collective’ here is apt as no character seems to have any degree of autonomy in the community of Fair Green. Each community member falls for the machinations of communal gossip-mongering. (REMPort 2018, p. 101).

RempOrt calls attention to the fact that “Bartley Fallon is seen at the end of the play sitting quietly and forlorn, lamenting and accepting the charges brought against him by the community” (p. 101). The attitude of the character depicts the stereotypical notion of the common Irish peasant being one perfectly resigned to accepting fatalistically the external governance exercised on him, “rather than taking the weight of responsibility for his life on his own shoulders” (p. 101).

Finally, the techniques that mark the climax and resolution of the play are *chase scenes*, *disappointments and defeated expectations* and *embarrassment and escape from it*. Although Bartley Fallon is never reluctant of his faith and never tries to escape and there a lack of a literal “chase scene” in the final act, the neighbours promptly describe his schemes with his alleged mistress Kitty Keary to leave to America with the Magistrate and the Policeman after them:

SHAWN EARLY. With or without Kitty Keary, believe me, it is for America he's making at this minute. I saw the new magistrate and Jo Muldoon of the police going into the post-office as I came up--there was hurry on them--you may be sure it was to telegraph they went, the way he'll be stopped in the docks at Queenstown! (GREGORY, 1904)

When the officers, who legitimately go after Bartley, finally find the so-called culprit, at first they interpret his words regarding the matter as a confession and arrest him. They then proceed to approach the townspeople with the presumed culprit. On the way they meet Mary Fallon, and the confrontation begins with her rebuking the claims of the officers. However, Jack Smith eventually enters the scene and all their expectations are denied through misunderstanding, exactly as Berger (2011, p. 15) describes – a “person’s expectations (often of a sexual nature) are led on and then, at the last moment, denied as a result of an accident, coincidence, misunderstanding, or something of that nature.” Being finally confronted by Bartley, the crowd answers with an expression of *Embarrassment and Escape from it*, which would be represented by “characters who find themselves in situations in which they are made to feel uncomfortable, shamed, self-conscious or ridiculous” (p. 17):

JACK SMITH. I'll break the head of any man that says that! Who is it says it?
 (TO TIM CASEY) Was it you said it? (TO SHAWN EARLY) Was it you?
 ALL TOGETHER (backing and shaking their heads). It wasn't I said it!
 JACK SMITH. Tell me the name of any man that said it!
 ALL TOGETHER (pointing to BARTLEY). It was him that said it!
 (GREGORY, 1904)

In the closing scenes of the play, humour is achieved by the blame that falls on Bartley Fallon for having created the rumour and by not following the expectation of a resolution and his release.

MAGISTRATE (pointing to JACK SMITH). Policeman, put the handcuffs on this man. I see it all now. A case of false impersonation, a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice. There was a case in the Andaman Islands, a murderer of the Mopsa tribe, a religious enthusiast—
 POLICEMAN. So he might be, too.
 MAGISTRATE. We must take both these men to the scene of the murder. We must confront them with the body of the real Jack Smith. (GREGORY, 1904)

The use of the technique of *rigidity* can also be perceived in the play, in the character of the Magistrate, who arrests Jack Smith. As the final touch of satire in the play, the Magistrate is also mocked as a character who is “undeviating in [his] performance of

certain kinds of behaviour, who [is] unbending and dominated by an *idée fixe* or ruling passion” (BERGER 2011, p. 38).

All in all, *Spreading the News* is what Richards (2004, p. 5) defines as ‘the peasant play’, which was the dominant type of drama at the Abbey Theatre at the time. As Richards explains, these plays were “an idealised representation of the life felt to be expressive of the very core of the nation; a connection between the present and a precolonial authenticity”, and a great number of the audiences saw the Irish peasant as a symbol of their lost identity (p. 5). In face with the demand for popular pieces, Lady Gregory wrote this short comic play, in which she satirises and scrutinises social behaviours and stereotypes (p.5). The behaviours criticised are the pressures the inhabitants of a small Irish village exert on one another, the prejudice of outsiders belittling the Irish rural life, and the abundant comparison of Ireland to a foreign land, questioning whether life would be easier outside the country.

4.2. *Yesterday’s News*

Similarly to *Spreading the News*, *Yesterday’s News* is also based on the humorous techniques of *theme/variation* and *stereotypes*. The characters have different occupations (Irish journalists, a Croatian waiter, an American artist and a hotel manager), many of whom are represented by *burlesque*-based characters reinforcing *stereotypes*. The rural community in the audio drama is portrayed through the lenses of another type of outsider rather than a Magistrate: Bella, an Irish journalist who travels to the countryside, with her aunt’s dog whose name is Gregory, to interview a retired American rock star who moved to a small Irish village. The rock star, Kitty Kearny, who is a descendant of Irish grandparents and moves to their old property, becomes a target of malicious gossip from neighbours in the village. Bella and her dilemma about working for her boss Cat or moving to Croatia in order to build a new life with Varsi, the person with whom she is having an affair offers satirical criticism over contemporary labour relations among Irish communities. Another source of satire in the play is the local hotel manager, Mrs. Bartley Flanagan, who reports the rumours regarding Kitty to Bella, who in turn accidentally emails them to her boss, and who then publishes the story on the internet.

As Worton and Still (1990, p. 45) point out, “the form of representation of intertextual structures ranges from the explicit to the implicit”, and “these structures may be highly particular or highly general”. In *Yesterday’s News*, this intertextuality is made evident through the use of allusions and references to *Spreading the News*. The opening scene of the play after the metaphorical representation of the curtains opening with the use of *music as a link*, as defined by Hand and Traynor (2011, p. 50) is marked by the journalist singing *The Red-haired Man’s Wife*, as a direct reference to *Spreading the News*. In the audio drama, the song does not play a significant role in the plot as in the theatre play, but it represents the central focus of the first, which is not the same as in the latter. In *Spreading the News*, the fact that Jack Smith, a red-haired man, sings the song at the beginning of the play leads to the rumour that his wife Kitty Keary, who does not even appear in a single scene, was running away to America with his murderer. On the other hand, in *Yesterday’s News*, the plot is centred around a woman called Kitty Kearny, who was scolded by the rural community for having an affair with a younger red-haired man.

In the first minutes of the play, the sound effects tell the listener that Bella is on a journey with a pet. That is conveyed by dint of the *conventionalised effect*, or “‘average sounds’, easily identifiable” (CROOK, 1999, p.71), with the sounds of the car, sheep, and barking. Another use of the *conventionalised effect* is the phone dialling, which is a sound that is easily recognisable to a twenty-first century audience. Through the evidence that she is in a call, Bella narrates the beginning of the story, and the depth of the character is expressed through her meanderings over the phone. This adds a *textual* quality to the sound design of the play, to use Michel Chion’s vocabulary, as explained by Hand and Traynor (2011, p. 41) as information “which is most commonly achieved by narrator”.

The dog named Gregory – as a direct reference to Lady Augusta Gregory – is introduced by Bella in her call to Varsi. Regarding the humorous techniques used in the play, Gregory is the central comic source of the drama, at times representing *comparisons* when Bella describes him in “Gregory is two. Well, 14 in dog years. He spends most of his time trying to wrap himself around anything on four legs” (FANNIN, 2012), and at times representing *chase scenes*, since he is often running and sniffing about the place due to his adolescent canine energy, while Bella tries to contain him. Regarding sound design, Gregory’s barking, whining, growling, howling, sighing, and

groaning portray the *realistic, confirmatory effect*, or what Crook (1999, p. 70) describes as “a sound which amplifies a signpost rooted in the dialogue”, since these sounds also appear when Bella is talking to someone. This effect is also present in the first minutes of the play when Bella talks about the sheep on the road while driving through the countryside.

However, the comic aspect of the dog in the narrative is mainly represented by *embarrassment and escape from it*, since the journalist has to excuse herself several times due to his behaviour, as in, “If you can hear barking, that’s okay, it’s me, Bella. I mean, it’s not me barking... I’m not the one barking. It’s Gregory” (FANNIN, 2012). In addition, it represents the use of the technique of *accident* when the journalist sends the news by mistake for her boss to publish it, because Gregory’s restlessness forces her to cease her work urgently in order to walk him outdoors – that is to say, an accident caused through a chance occurrence.

Driving down from Dublin to a village in the west of Ireland, Bella says “I’m driving through the middle of nowhere, surrounded by sheep”. This description of the Irish countryside is a reference to the description of Fair Green by the Magistrate in *Spreading the News*. Bella and Cat suggest that she is held back by her journey in the countryside when the use of the humorous technique of *comparison* is used in her speech comparing her task to the one assigned to her co-worker and competitor for a promotion at the office – Phelim, who is in London interviewing Madonna. The plentiful comparisons of the Irish rural setting and lifestyle to the paradisiac Croatia, the modern London and the practical industrialised life in America characterises Ireland as backwards, which is analogous to what Holdsworth and Luckhurst (2008, p. 39) find in the analysis of *Bailegangaire* (1984), a post-colonial drama set in an Irish village at that time:

A thatched cottage in the west of Ireland is an immediately recognizable icon of the pastoral paradise cherished by the Celtic revivalists of the earlier twentieth century, such as W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, who looked to rural Ireland as a more vital and romantic alternative to dreary urban modernity (HOLDSWORTH; LUCKHURST 2008, p. 39)

Bella’s boss, Cat, is the other character who makes clear use of these comparisons – but in this case, various humorous techniques shape her discourse. Cat says, “I’d love to assume that technological revolution has stretched as far as Ballygo-shag-me sideways, or whatever god forsaken Boreen you have disappeared up. But I live in hope that you’ll get this message” (FANNIN, 2012), in a speech that is

marked by *insults*, *exaggeration* and *satire* – building a *burlesque*-based character. Cat also represents the outsider's prejudiced view of a city inhabitant when referring to a rural Irish site, characterizing the use of the technique *stereotypes*.

Akin to the Magistrate in *Spreading the News*, Cat's character is "dominated by an *idée fixe* or ruling passion" (BERGER 2011, p. 38). In this case, her *idée fixe* is the production of mass media content, signalling the humorous technique of *rigidity*. Cat represents the Irish urban citizen dependent on industrialisation, the pressure in work relations, and the dependency on sensationalist news by the media and entertainment platforms in the early twenty-first century. These pressures are clearly addressed in the use of *comparison* in Bella's line, "I'm Cat's mouse", and in "We are a heat-seeking communication rocket, Bella, not a Band-Aid. You're a journalist, not a social worker" (FANNIN, 2012).

Furthermore, the other characters which express the *burlesque* technique are Mrs. Flanagan and Bartley Flanagan, the proprietors of the Railway Hotel. The woman's character is also marked by the use of *insults*, *exaggeration* and *satire*, building a *burlesque*-based character. With the use of *insults*, mainly targeting her own husband, the character makes direct reference to Bartley Fallon, from *Spreading the News*. Bartley Fallon makes several self-deprecating comments regarding his misfortunes, "that's the way with me always: whatever I have to sell goes down and whatever I have to buy goes up. If there's ever any misfortune coming to this world, it's on myself it pitches" (GREGORY, 1904); while Mrs. Flanagan says her husband is "the most demure, benighted of men whose every illness has been stoically born", while she shouts at him and gives him commands such as "– Bartley! Here! Now!". Her speech, heightened with *exaggeration*, depicts an image of her husband as an ignorant character who is a gull, suggesting Berger's (2011, p. 21) humorous technique of *ignorance*. She also makes use of an analogy to exaggerate in the description of her husband's traits, as seen here:

The man has no luck. If it's going to rain, it will rain on Bartley Flanagan. If Bartley Flanagan is standing in a field of lightning alongside one hundred men with metal bars sprouting from their craniums, Bartley Flanagan in his non-conductive rubber boots would be the one struck down (FANNIN, 2012).

Kitty Kearny is the other target of Mrs. Flanagan's insults. Apparently, besides the affair the rock star was having with a younger neighbour, the hotel manager expresses

annoyance due to the fact that she denounced Bartley to the local authorities for invading her property: “and to think that cradle snatching harlot had the audacity to accuse my husband of stalking!” (FANNIN, 2012). Mrs. Flanagan’s discourse is also marked by Berger’s (2011, p. 7) humorous technique of *allusion* in, “Kitty Kearney is a man-eater! Plain and simple, a voracious insatiable man-eater. Young or old, there’s no one safe from her appetite. You’ve heard about the toy boy, no doubt?”, when she suggests that the artist would be interested in her husband (FANNIN, 2012). Bella’s short answers to Mrs. Flanagan when listening to these behaviours and ridiculous statements mark the use of *sarcasm* – in the sense by which they are uttered obliquely and not directly as remarks intended to insult, but through which, due to their tone, taunt and ridicule instead (BERGER 2011, p. 38). The characteristics of this interaction between the two signal the comic effects of *absurdity* and *satire*. These traits represent, in one single character in *Yesterday’s News*, all the social pressures that were expressed by the neighbours in *Spreading the News*.

As mentioned before, similarly to *Bailegangaire*, *Yesterday’s News* is set in a location which is perfectly suited for a play that relates both present and past (HOLDSWORTH; LUCKHURST 2008, p. 39). Besides the aforementioned comparisons, what makes reference to the present and modernity is the wide use of technology expressed through the various sound effects. As Reynolds (2020, p. 81) points out, many contemporary Irish novels seem to take place in a vacuum closed off to technologies that shape everyday life, and in the late twentieth century, this claim was borne out not only in novels, but also in performance.

Yesterday’s News is an example of this trait in the audio dramas of the early twenty-first century: all the interactions of the play involve media. In the first minutes, Bella sets out the narrative of the play through a phone call characterised by the *conventionalised effect*. Later, she receives a message from her boss, being narrated by herself, while the *realistic, confirmatory effect* shows that she is typing it down. Subsequently, she makes first contact with her interviewee by leaving her a message on her answering machine – also marked by the *conventionalised effect*. After that, Bella interacts with the local neighbour Mrs. Flanagan while she records the conversation for her article, and finally, because of the accidental publication of the rumours on the internet, Kitty Kearny agrees to take part on the interview.

Instead of having the news spread by word of mouth as in *Spreading the News*, in *Yesterday's News*, the principal method by which they are dispersed is via the internet. In contrast to *Spreading the News*, in the audio drama, the audience does not see all the happenings in which the Mrs. Flanagan's assumptions are based. The listener only knows both sides of the story, following Bella's investigations, so there is no use of the *misunderstanding* effect to explain the rumours put forward. Thus, the comic techniques of *accident* and *mistake* are the ones in charge of spreading the rumours in *Yesterday's News*. In the twenty-first century drama, the humour in the *mistake* lies in the fact that Bella sends the email by chance – she tries to save the draft she was writing, with Mrs. Flanagan's accusations, and unintentionally presses “send”, giving her boss plenty of sensationalist material to be published online. Here, the internet is an allusion, albeit in far greater proportions, to the gossip made by the rural neighbours in a small-secluded Irish village, with a comparison to the twenty-first century obsession with famous people and their private lives, as Bella explains:

I'm a journalist with Ireland Spy – Ireland's leading online publication. Ireland Spy prides itself on being at the cutting-edge of Irish life, especially with regards to media and entertainment: who is doing what, where and how often – kind of thing (FANNIN, 2012).

Besides Bella's conversation with the Flanagan's, the only other use of 'theatrical' words in the radio drama (HAND; TRAYNOR, 2011, p. 41), or dialogue is her talk with Kitty Kearny. In response to Bella's questioning whether various rumours including that Red (also known as “red haired man” in the community) had left her because she did not deliver her promises to make him famous, she answers: “I'm afraid I won't answer your questions, Bella. You'll just have to create more fiction.” (FANNIN, 2012). However, she ends up revealing details about her relationship with Red, “I certainly don't think love between consenting adults constitute a moral transgression” – criticising the scandal created solely because her affair took place with a much younger man. Kitty also mentions her Irish grandparents and her experience living in a cottage located in the west of Ireland, making direct references to the image of the idealistic Irish peasant life and the references to the past and present, in “this was an experiment, living here. The house, the land, the ocean... Swapping kitten heels for wellington boots”, and “my grandfather Jack and his sad old songs... he said that his soul laid dead in Ireland. [...] In Brooklyn, he said he was a walking ghost.” (FANNIN,

2012). In their conversation, various sound effects, such as the acoustic outside Kitty's cottage with the sound of the sea in the background (marking the use of the *realistic, evocative effect*) help build the picture of the place in the listener's mind (CROOK, 1999, p. 70).

Finally, *Yesterday's News* makes reference to the social pressures expressed in Lady Gregory's play through the dichotomy of modern individuality versus reputation. The description of the drama itself uses the word reputation, and most of the characters, such as Cat, Mrs. Flanagan, and Bella touch on the matter. In Bella's interview with the hotel manager, she mentions the importance of reputation several times, but she also claims that people of the village were occupied with their own business only:

BELLA – I'm looking for a little local colour.

MRS. FLANAGAN – Local colour! Oh! I'm sure we can provide plenty of local colour.

BELLA – Tell me about the town.

MRS. FLANAGAN – This is a town that prides itself in its reputation for friendliness, warmth and hospitality [...] This is a town without spice, this is a town whose businesses it is to mind our own. (FANNIN, 2012).

The dichotomy is reinforced by the contrast with the subjective tone of the narrative and the depth of Bella's character. Furthermore, towards the end of the play, the conversation between Bella and Kitty becomes highly personal, when Kitty gives her several pieces of advice such as, "You are the mistress of your own destiny", and "I think you should free yourself, Bella." Those lines lead to the final 'scene' in which the listener can hear the sounds of a call at the airport and the airplane turbines. These sound effects are *conventionalised effects* telling the audience that Bella left her job to travel to Croatia.

Considering all the above, *Yesterday's News* makes use of what Weitz (2004, p.146) describes as a "standardized character type", to depict figures that gain human significance from the context in which they find themselves, but for the way they are represented, they cannot be mistaken for the representation of actual human beings. The behaviours criticised through the satirical tone of *Yesterday's News* regard not only the pressures the inhabitants of a small Irish village exert on each other, but also the global trend, fuelled by the media, whereby celebrities in modern times are pressured to reveal intimate details about their personal lives. Furthermore, similarly to *Spreading the News*, *Yesterday's News* depicts the prejudice of townspeople belittling the Irish rural life, and the abundant comparison of Ireland to a foreign land in the interrogation

as to whether life would be easier outside the country. Finally, *Yesterday's News* also illustrates the dichotomy of the main character regarding her personal life and future – this suggests a central subjectivity in the audio drama, which is not seen in its intertext, *Spreading the News*.

5. Final Remarks

In conclusion, it is pivotal to bring to light the relevance of analysing literary works that, despite the huge breach in time, show similar attitudes towards their approach to the analysis of social behaviours. This research showed that in the case of *Yesterday's News* by Hilary Fannin as a rereading of *Spreading the News* by Lady Augusta Gregory, the satirical scrutiny of Irish communities remained intact. The main parameter used for this analysis was the techniques of humour that each play used to underpin social criticism.

Regarding *Spreading the News*, the main humorous technique used is *theme/variation*, which is juxtaposed with *stereotypes*. The ordinary peasant citizens of a rural village that are involved in these comic techniques justify the presence of humour through “explanation” of motivation for the characters’ behaviours, and because it provides plentiful ground for *ridicule*, *insult* and *exaggeration*. There is also the use of *catalogue* to imply the stereotyped expectation of the officer to find crimes in the community, and *analogy*, which Mrs. Tarpey uses to contribute to the stereotypical image of the Irish peasant who, in the opinion of some critics, would not be suitable for business as an occupation. The technique of *comparison* is used to refer to America, in reference to the role that Irish settlers played in the European expansion to the Americas. *Mistake* and *accident* support the plot, since Jack Smith’s misplaced hayfork and Bartley Fallon’s attempt to help, creates *misunderstanding*, since the villagers start imagining a dispute between those characters.

However, the technique of *exaggeration* is used to portray the neighbours as characters that overstretch things far beyond reality. Furthermore, *ignorance* is also used, since Mrs. Tarpey contributes to the spreading of the rumour due to her hearing impediments, which makes her an ignorant character, who is a fool or stupid. The techniques which mark the climax and resolution of the play are *chase scenes*,

disappointments and defeated expectations, and *embarrassment and escape from it*, and the character of the Magistrate, who arrests Jack Smith show the use of the technique of *rigidity*. Finally, since the audience is aware of the truth, it produces dramatic irony, and the perception of *absurdity, confusion and nonsense*. *Satire* is the main effect used in the play, based on the mockery of a society and an individual. Due to the fact that there is an implicit moral dimension to *satire*, *Spreading the News*, criticises the various pressures the members of Irish rural societies were suffering at that time. It addresses the lack of opportunities to work, the pressures of the small villages towards their citizens, and the stereotypical notion of the common Irish peasant being one perfectly resigned to accepting fatalistically the external governance exercised upon him. All in all, Lady Gregory addresses the pressures the inhabitants of a small Irish village exert on one another, the prejudice of outsiders belittling the Irish rural life, and the abundant comparison of Ireland to a foreign land.

On the other hand, Hilary Fannin presents a 50-minute audio drama that scrutinizes social and labour relations, resourcing similar humorous techniques to portray social behaviours and stereotypes regarding rural Irish citizens, but in distinct historical contexts. *Yesterday's News* is also based on the humorous techniques of *theme/variation* and *stereotypes*, since the characters come from different backgrounds and the drama is set in a rural village. Gregory, the dog, is the central comic source of the drama, at times representing *comparisons*, and at times representing *chase scenes*, since it is often running and sniffing about the place due to his adolescent canine energy, and mainly represented by *embarrassment and escape from it*, since the journalist has to excuse herself several times due to its behaviour. In addition, Gregory's behaviour is used in the humorous technique of *accident*, which is key to the plot; because the dog is involved in the moment the journalist sends the news by mistake for her boss to publish it.

The humorous technique of *comparison* is used in Bella's and Cat's suggestions that Bella is held back by her journey to the countryside. The plentiful comparisons of the Irish rural setting and lifestyle to Croatia, London and America characterises Ireland as backwards. Cat, in her comparisons, makes use of *insults, exaggeration* and *satire* – building a *burlesque*-based character. She also represents the outsider's prejudiced view of a city inhabitant when referring to a rural Irish site, characterizing the use of the technique *stereotypes*, and, analogous to the Magistrate in *Spreading the News*, Cat's

character has an *idée fixe*: the production of mass media content, signalling the humorous technique of *rigidity*. In addition to the *burlesque* technique used in the characters of Mrs. Flanagan and Bartley Flanagan, we find also the use of *insults*, *exaggeration* and *satire*, also building the *burlesque*-based characters. The comic techniques of *accident* and *mistake* are the ones in charge of spreading the rumours in *Yesterday's News*. In the twenty-first century drama, the humour in the *mistake* lies in the fact that Bella sends the email by chance. Also, *Yesterday's News* makes reference to the social pressures expressed in Lady Gregory's play through the dichotomy of modern individuality versus reputation. The dichotomy is reinforced by the contrast with the subjective tone of the narrative and the depth of Bella's character, suggesting a central subjectivity in the audio drama that is not seen in its intertext, *Spreading the News*.

All things considered, although the plays present different contexts in terms of production and history (being *Spreading the News* a theatre play first performed in 1904, and *Yesterday's News*, a radio play released in 2012), both dramas make use of humour to indict social behaviours in the Irish communities represented. On one hand, *Spreading the News* criticises the pressures the inhabitants of a small Irish village exert on one another – regarding the lack of work opportunities they faced at the time, whilst facing the prejudice of outsiders who belittle the Irish rural life, and addresses the abundant comparisons villagers make between Ireland and a foreign land.

On the other hand, *Yesterday's News* criticises social pressures in labour relations not from a rural origin, but in a modern industrialized company for journalists based in the capital of the country. Although the townspeople also play a pivotal role in pressuring visitors and creating rumours to be perpetuated in the latter, they only serve as the trigger, or the starting point from which small-village gossip can spread aided by the internet of the 21st century. There is also a dichotomy between modern individuality versus reputation. The dichotomy is reinforced by the contrast with the subjective tone of the narrative and the depth of Bella's character, and her work as a journalist who seeks to unveil the secrets of a popular rock star – suggesting a central subjectivity in the audio drama that is not seen in its intertext, *Spreading the News*. Considering the humorous techniques that were not similarly used in both plays, only *Yesterday's News* used the techniques of *allusion* and *sarcasm*, while *Spreading the News* presented the

use of *catalogue*, and *disappointments and defeated expectations*, when *Yesterday's News* did not.

Overall, there are similarities between the dramas with respect to their use of humorous strategies, which underpin social criticism through the depiction of the pressures placed upon the main characters within their respective communities. Secondly, there are resemblances in how *Yesterday's News* and *Spreading the News* bring to light similar themes related to the historical representation of Irish communities, even though they are placed in distinct historical realities and were composed in different contexts of production. Given these points, this study analysed the humorous strategies used in *Spreading the News and Yesterday's News* as plays inserted into their own context of production and examined the pieces as to how they humorously portray their characters and provide scope for humour, how they construct the social scrutiny of behaviours in a community, and which social pressures they unveil.

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APPENDIX I

Production for the first time on any Stage of *On Baile's Strand* and *Spreading the News*, on Tuesday, 27th December, 1904, and every evening till Tuesday, 3rd January, 1905.

**ON BAILE'S STRAND, A PLAY IN ONE ACT,
BY W. B. YEATS.**

CUCHULLAIN, the King of Muirthemne	F. J. Fay
CONCOBAR, the High King of Ullad	George Roberts
DAIRE, a King	Arthur Sinclair
FINTAIN, a blind man	Seumas O'Sullivan
BARACH, a fool	W. G. Fay
A YOUNG MAN	P. MacSiubhlaigh
YOUNG KINGS and	{ Maire Ni Gharbhaigh, Emma Vernon, Sara Algood, Doreen Gunning, R. Nash, N. Power, U. Wright, E. Keegan.
OLD KINGS	

SCENE—A Great Hall by the Sea close to Dundalغان.

Costumes designed by Miss Horniman.

**SPREADING THE NEWS, A COMEDY IN ONE
ACT, BY LADY GREGORY.**

BARTLEY FALLON	W. G. Fay
Mrs. FALLON	Sara Algood
Mrs. TULLY	Emma Vernon
Mrs. TARPEY	Maire Ni Gharbhaigh
SHAWN EARLY	J. H. Dunne
TIM CASEY	George Roberts
JAMES RYAN	Arthur Sinclair
JACK SMITH	P. MacSiubhlaigh
A POLICEMAN	R. S. Nash
A REMOVABLE MAGISTRATE	F. J. Fay

SCENE—The Outskirts of a Fair.

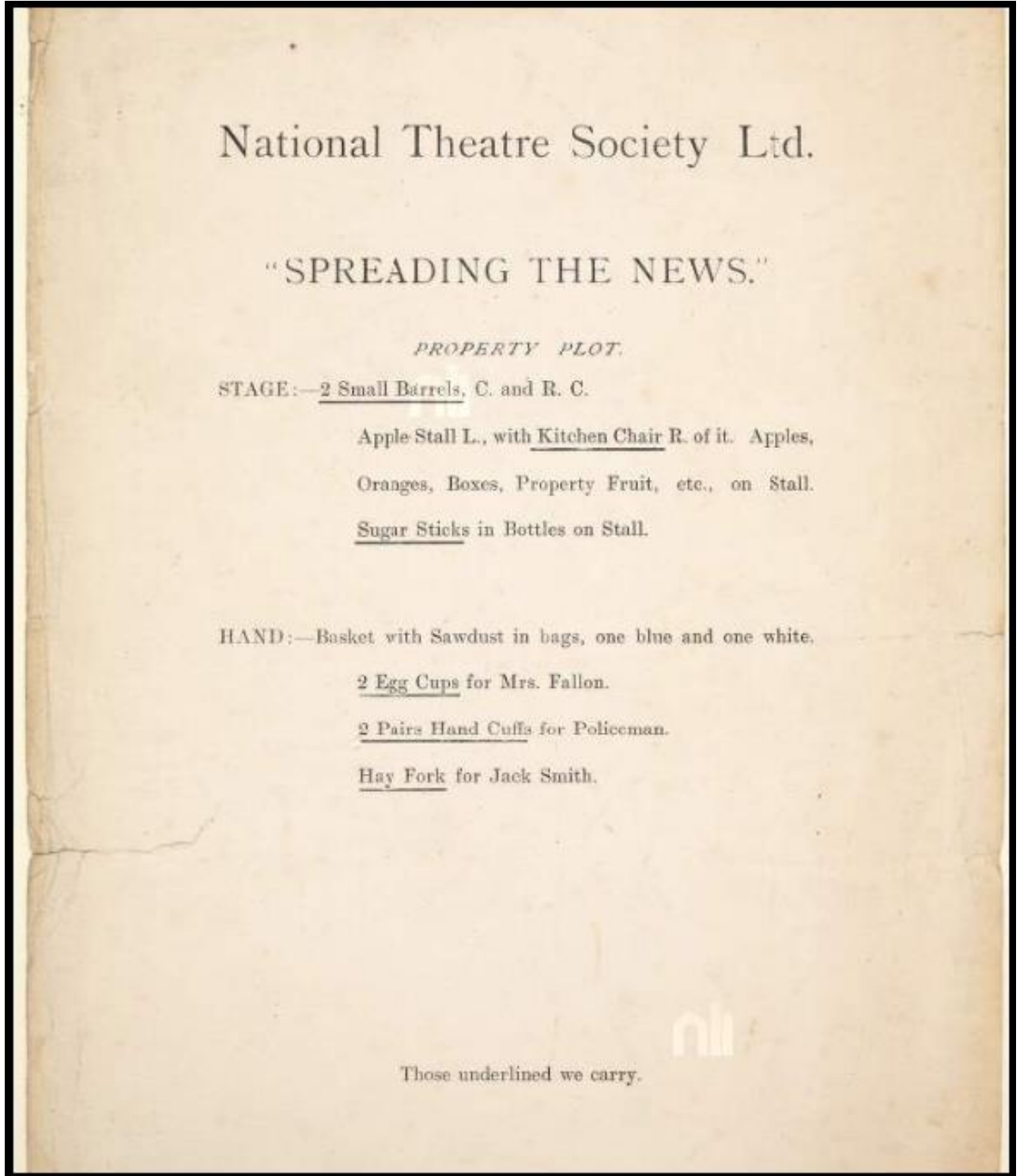
(ABBAY THEATRE, 1904)

APPENDIX II



(HELY'S LIMITED (DUBLIN) (PUBLISHER), 1904)

APPENDIX III



(NATIONAL THEATRE SOCIETY ,1904)

APPENDIX IV



(HELY'S LIMITED (DUBLIN) (PUBLISHER), 1904)