In 1928, the actors Hilton Edwards and Micheál macLiammóir founded the Dublin Gate Theatre, renowned for producing modernist plays and employing avant-garde staging techniques largely unknown to Irish audiences. Edwards and macLiammóir embraced transnational perspectives on identity and theatre and questioned the homogenisation of national identities and cultural forms of expression during Ireland’s anxious first post-independence decades, which were marked by censorship, cultural isolation and the promotion of state-approved literature.

The Gate’s exciting foreign repertoire constitutes only one aspect of Edwards and macLiammóir’s attempt at remedying nationalist insularity. It also produced works of several new Irish playwrights, who aligned themselves with an avant-garde theatre that sought to establish Dublin as a modern European capital. At the Gate, these homosexual theatre directors created an explicitly cosmopolitan stage on which they confronted a conservative and divided society with revolutionary modes of perception even as they questioned various repressive ideas about gender and sexuality.

The ubiquitous presence of women writers, designers, musicians and actors at the Gate, as well as its importance in creating a tolerant gay scene in Dublin, testify to its emancipation of marginalized groups. Furthermore, the Gate has fostered cultural exchange by importing foreign dramatic forms and staging techniques, to which its original playwrights have responded with theatrical modes that have, in turn, found expression on the Gate’s many tours across and outside Europe. Since the Gate thus promoted cultural exchange and social emancipation in Ireland and abroad, it offers a unique model for studying the ways in which cosmopolitan theatres (as cultural institutions that give expression to and engage with the complexities of identity and diversity in changing, globalised societies) have operated in the past and present.

Despite the praise received for stylistic innovation, the Gate has received relatively little academic attention, both in Irish and European avant-garde theatre research. To remedy this, a group of scholars based in the Netherlands, Ireland, the UK, the Czech Republic, France, Norway, and the United States have established the Gate Theatre Research Network (GTRN). Its purpose is to study the Dublin Gate Theatre in various international contexts by analysing its engagement with cosmopolitanism, cultural exchange and identity formation. In doing so, it aims to uncover marginalised histories and promote the wider use of archival resources, such as the holdings at the Charles Deering McCormick Library (Northwestern University) and the ongoing digitisation project at the James Hardiman Library (NUI Galway). The Gate Theatre Research Network is funded jointly by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), Radboud University Nijmegen, the National University of Ireland, Galway, and Charles University Prague.
On 6-7 September 2018, GTRN will host its first expert meeting at Radboud University Nijmegen, which will focus on the ways in which the Gate Theatre might be argued to constitute an alternative national theatre. Topics to be addressed during the expert meeting in Nijmegen in 2018 include

- the Gate’s promotion of original Irish playwrights, including women writers such as Mary Manning, Christine Longford, and Maura Laverty;
- its directors’ paradoxical notions of patriotism and cosmopolitanism;
- its associates’ involvement in Irish party politics;
- its support of Gaelic drama;
- comparisons with other European nationalist or regionalist theatres.

In addition to roundtable discussions and presentations by GTNR directors, core members and advisory board members, scholars who are working on the Gate Theatre and/or comparable theatre companies or institutions across Europe are invited to submit a proposal for a 20-minute paper on any of the topics listed above. Please send your 300-word proposal and 150-word biography to gatetheatre@let.ru.nl by 15 June 2018 (extended and final deadline). The GTNR directors will review all proposals and compile the expert meeting programme at their discretion. The expert meeting fee will be approximately €60 and will cover presenters’ lunch and dinner.

For more information about the network’s aims, deliverables, members and ongoing research, please visit www.ru.nl/gatetheatre.

Dr Marguérite Corporaal (Radboud University Nijmegen, Director)
Prof Patrick Lonergan (NUI Galway, Director)
Prof Ondřej Pilný (Charles University Prague, Director)
Dr Ruud van den Beuken (Radboud University Nijmegen, Assistant Director)