

Lady Gregory is often read as a significant figure and proponent of the Irish Literary Revival. However, this thesis analyzes eight of Lady Gregory's plays for the Abbey Theatre and examines the ways she critiques the Revival and anticolonial mainstream Irish nationalism. Chapter One analyzes *Hyacinth Halvey*, *Spreading the News*, and *The Rising of the Moon*. This chapter argues that Lady Gregory critiques the Catholic Church and colonial law's distortion of reality through the ideologies that they perpetuate. Lady Gregory also demonstrates the problems with harnessing Ireland's folk traditions and mythological past for political purposes. Chapter Two examines the plays *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Gaol Gate*, which explore the ways that the Revival misrepresents and overlooks the narratives of Irish peasant women in order to promote a specific political agenda. In *The Gaol Gate*, Lady Gregory asserts the importance of representing peasant women's material histories fairly and explores keening as a possibility for alternative female expression. Chapter Three investigates Lady Gregory's representation of women in *Grania*, *Kincora*, and *Dervorgilla* and the ways that these plays represent the past. Using the theories of Eve Sedgwick, this chapter examines ways that Lady Gregory explores possibilities for Irish women to defy gender expectations. These plays also resist the Revival's practice of idealizing women, instead recording the prioritization of the personal over the political. Ultimately, this thesis proposes that while Lady Gregory participated in the Irish Literary Revival and the Abbey Theatre's nationalist agenda, she was critical of reviving a past that depended on misrepresenting and oppressing women.

MISREPRESENTATION AND FEMALE EXPERIENCE

Lady Gregory's Critique of the Irish Literary Revival

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## INTRODUCTION

In his article, “The Fight of the Centenary: Irish Theater in 2004,” Diarmuid O’Brien describes the controversies surrounding the centenary of the Abbey Theatre’s founding. O’Brien states, “Whatever about being Ireland’s vanguard for the theatrical arts, the Abbey has rarely failed to provide controversy and high melodrama off the stage—and what better way to recognize one hundred years of unmerciful rows than with a gloriously unmerciful row?” (O’Brien 137).

O’Brien explains that a primary complaint about the centenary “abbeyonehundred” program was its inclusion of only one Irish language play and no plays written by women except for a single reading of Lady Gregory’s *Spreading the News* (O’Brien 137). The abbeyonehundred program was a financial disaster. Since the Abbey failed to secure proper funding from Ireland’s Arts Council, the program was expected to run at a loss; however, the program ran at more than double the loss that was expected (O’Brien 138).

One would think that the Irish theatre establishment would have learned its lesson from the backlash it received from underrepresenting Irish women’s contributions to its theater tradition. However, they made the same mistake during the centenary of Ireland’s 1916 rebellion against England. Ciara L. Murphy describes the social media protest to the Abbey Theatre’s “Waking the Nation” program for 2016:

A glaring omission was immediately clear: only one of these productions, *Me, Mollser*, was written by a female playwright (Ali White), and only three of these productions had a female director... As soon as this program went live many women—both inside and outside of the theatrical community—expressed their disdain. As this narrative became more prominent on social media, utilizing the hash tag #WakingtheFeminists, the Irish (and international) media began to cover the controversy, leading to a general outcry... The hash tag #WakingtheFeminists began to out-trend #WakingtheNation on Twitter. (C. Murphy 113)

Once again in 2015, the Abbey Theatre underrepresented women's significant contributions to the Ireland's theatre. This particular protest resulted in the Abbey hosting an open meeting to discuss the issue of gender discrimination in Ireland's theatre industry, which ultimately led to a balancing of gender representation in the Autumn-Winter Abbey program for 2016 (C. Murphy 113-114).

Ciara Murphy does not accept the change in the Abbey's programing as a solution for discrimination against women in Ireland. She argues, "For this to be a significant move towards change, however, this programming ratio needs to become normalized, not occasional" (C. Murphy 115). My thesis project seeks to contribute to normalizing fair representation of Ireland's wealth of female writers in our understanding of Ireland's theatrical tradition. My contribution to this somewhat daunting but undoubtedly essential project is a critical analysis of a well-known Irish literary figure not read as widely as her male contemporaries: Isabella Augusta Gregory, co-founder of the Abbey Theatre and major playwright and folklorist of the Irish Literary Revival. I aim to push beyond a simple recognition of Lady Gregory as a significant literary and historical figure of Ireland's artistic tradition. Instead, I provide a new reading of her plays, one that uncovers the careful critiques of and ambivalence concerning the cultural movement of which she is typically considered a symbol.

*Lady Gregory, the Abbey Theatre, and Ireland's Mainstream Nationalism*

Due to the part she played in founding Ireland's first national theater, Lady Gregory is recognized as important to Ireland's nationalist literary tradition at the turn of the twentieth century. The part of Ireland's nationalist movement on which I focus in this thesis spans roughly from the founding of the Gaelic League, a non-political Irish cultural organization dedicated to "preserving and encouraging Irish as a spoken language," in 1893 (Murphy 145) to the Easter Rising of 1916. This specific historical period is a product of the momentum of many nineteenth century artistic and political efforts responding to the Act of Union of 1800. This legislation redefined Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom, not simply a colony of England. The 1898 centenary of the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion sparked and facilitated the emergence of an increase in nationalist activity. Though, as Tanya Dean describes it, the 1798 rebellion "was a notoriously grim failure in the history of the Irish revolution" (Dean 79), late nineteenth-century revolutionaries like Maude Gonne harnessed this centenary's historical power and incited the violent 1897 Jubilee Riots that protested Queen Victoria's visit to England (Welch 2).

George Boyce argues that the Literary Revival also emerged after the fall of Charles Parnell, the Irish leader of the Home Rule movement, and the failure of the second Home Rule Bill in 1893 (Boyce 232-233). These depressing failures for mainstream Irish nationalism proved that waiting for political freedom from England before defining Ireland's artistic identity was not productive, for that freedom was no closer than it had been since the Act of Union in 1800 (Boyce 233). Boyce analyzes the origins of the Revival:

The literary revival, and the whole awareness of Irish art, culture, language, were inspired by a concern that the Irish identity was in danger of erosion, perhaps even disappearance... The Young Irelanders and the Fenians had felt this as well, for the crisis of identity in nineteenth century Ireland was a cyclical one, reflecting the growing Anglicization of the country, the disappearance of traditional ways of life, of the Gaelic tongue, and the industrialization of the north-eastern part of Ulster... now that the politics seemed of importance mainly to the politicians, it was natural for people to examine more closely what it was that politics should be advancing or preserving. (Boyce 233)

These large concerns regarding the preservation of Irish identity inspired Lady Gregory to sit down with her new acquaintance W.B. Yeats in 1897 and discuss the possibility of an Irish theater. Lady Gregory writes in her autobiographical *Our Irish Theatre*:<sup>1</sup>

... and though I had never been at all interested in theatres, our talked turned on plays... I said it was a pity we had no Irish theatre where such plays could be given. Mr. Yeats said that had always been a dream of his, but he had of late thought it was an impossible one, for it could not at first pay its way, and there was no money to be found for such a thing in Ireland. (*OIT* 19)

Lady Gregory offered a first share to their fledgling theatre of £25, which Welch estimates to be equal to £2,500 today, and thus their plan for the theater began, though the Abbey was not formally founded in Dublin until 1904 (Welch 2). Yeats and Lady Gregory drafted a formal letter to send out asking for financial contributions, which Lady Gregory remarks in *Our Irish Theatre*, "... seems now a little pompous" (*OIT* 20).

The letter's final sentence holds particular significance to my own analysis of Lady Gregory's artistic agenda: "We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us" (*OIT* 20). Misrepresentation of the Irish people is a concern that Lady Gregory explores in her own writing, specifically misrepresentation as a result of nationalist idealization. Lady

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviation: *OIT*: *Our Irish Theatre* (1913), Gregory



Gregory's earlier comedies focus on the ways that the practice of idealizing people to make them political symbols and mobilizing Ireland's folk tradition for nationalist gain are both damaging. Her later tragedies focus on the way that the Literary Revival and Irish history-writing itself continually misrepresents Irish women in the interest of men. This final line of the letter suggests that Lady Gregory believes that only through abandoning the practice of misrepresentation will Ireland unite despite its political differences.

A significant dimension of Lady Gregory's contribution to the Literary Revival is her expertise in Irish folklore. By the time she wrote *The Rising of the Moon* in 1903, Lady Gregory had successfully learned the Irish language. She even sought to establish a branch of the Gaelic League at her home estate, Coole Park (M. Murphy 145). She had also done extensive work collecting folklore from the Irish people and translating Irish language myths into English. This resulted in the publication of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* in 1902 and *Gods and Fighting Men* in January 1904 (Saddlemeyer 3,4). Both of these texts are exhaustive collections of Irish folklore, written in a distinctive Kiltartan dialect that became characteristic of her translations and the dialogues in her plays. Mary Trotter provides insight into this dialect and its relationship to modern Irish drama:

Synge and Gregory translated the idioms of the Irish language into an English language dialect designed to catch the aural and imagistic qualities of the Irish tongue.... it is notable that both playwrights try to make a language for the stage that, being neither 'proper English' nor 'real Irish', captures the spirit of the Irish language and thought, while also illustrating the dualities and duplicities inherent in the life experiences of many of their characters (Trotter "Imagining" 26-27).

Trotter's explanation of this dialect reflects Lady Gregory's masterful skill as a linguist and translator. It takes a certain level of ingenuity to create an entirely new way of speaking in order

to express uniquely Irish experiences. Clearly, Lady Gregory was invested in translating Irish traditional culture into her own contemporary moment, and the Kiltartan dialect was a comprehensive strategy to bring the Irish folk tradition to the popular stage of the Abbey Theater.

### *Theoretical Paradigms*

Before delving into the nuances of Lady Gregory's plays, I will explain several theoretical paradigms that inform my critical analysis. My discussion of theory in this section provides essential framework for the approach that I took with each of these plays, though most especially her contemporary comedies. None of these theories were written explicitly about Ireland, so I adapt many of them considerably so that I can relate them to Lady Gregory's plays. Theories about ideology offer a particularly valuable lens through which to view Lady Gregory's plays. When Karl Marx writes about ideology, he refers to a capitalist ruling class. In Ireland, capitalism did not develop as it did in mainland Europe due to Ireland's condition of being colonized. However, Ireland is still a part of an emerging capitalist system at the beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, a colonial ruling class exists in Ireland. This ruling class is primarily comprised of English colonial agents, typically represented as a Policeman, Sergeant, or Magistrate in Lady Gregory's comedies. However, the Protestant Ascendancy, or the Anglo-Irish landowning class in Ireland that Lady Gregory belongs to, also overlaps with an English colonial class. Together, these two groups produce an upper class analogous to Marx's idea of the ruling class. Therefore, the ruling class in Ireland engages with ideology in a similar way to Marx's ruling class.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx explains that the ruling class promotes specific ideologies that secure its own position of power and involve the proletariat in maintaining their own oppression. The aspect of this argument most essential for understanding Lady Gregory's plays is the idea that the ruling class produces its own systems of knowledge, or "the ruling ideas" as Marx calls them (Marx 64). These ideologies are society's dominant ideas purely because they justify the ruling class's position as superior and exploitative. In early twentieth-century Ireland, this practice manifested in ideological justifications for British colonial domination, such as the common assumption that the Irish were too poor, disorganized, and uneducated to properly run their own country (Martin 120-121). Lady Gregory investigates this misconception herself in *Spreading the News*.

Louis Althusser theorizes the different ways that the ruling class promotes and reproduces its ideologies in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." He describes two different types of institutions: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). RSAs function through the threat or use of violence, which the ruling class and by extension society as a whole agrees upon as an acceptable and necessary way to enforce order. Examples of RSAs include the police, army, and prison system. ISAs differ from RSAs in that ISAs rely on ruling class ideology instead of violence in order to oppress people. Althusser lists institutions such as the Church, the media, the nuclear family, and education systems as examples of ISAs. These apparatuses work through imposing certain ways of life and beliefs that manifest in material reality. As an example of ISAs' material existence, Althusser describes a person who believes in the Church so therefore participates in the ritual of sitting, kneeling, standing, praying, and donating money to charity every Sunday (Althusser 167-168). This

person's religious beliefs dictate their actions in material reality. Additionally, Althusser argues that there appears to be a certain level of agency in choosing which ISAs to commit oneself to; however, regardless of which ISAs one believes in, ideology still dictates material existence. In combination, RSAs and ISAs efficiently work to keep the working class in its place and perpetuate the power of the ruling class.

The ISAs that Lady Gregory's plays are particularly concerned with are the Church, in Ireland's case the Catholic Church, and the State, or the colonial presence of England as the main source of legal authority. Her contemporary plays, *Spreading the News*, *Hyacinth Halvey*, and *The Rising of the Moon*, each in their own way look at how the rural Irish are so deeply invested in and ruled by these ISAs that they fail to see their reality as it unfolds before them. Slavoj Žižek theorizes this phenomenon—how ideology begins to shape perception of reality—in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Žižek argues that ideology is effective only when those it oppresses both cannot discern ideology from reality and manage to turn moments that contradict ideology into support for it. Though he gives the example of anti-Semitism in World War II Germany (Žižek 48-50), this understanding of how ideology functions is explored in both *Spreading the News* and *Hyacinth Halvey*.

Althusser's idea of interpellation supplements an understanding of Lady Gregory's play *Hyacinth Halvey* and its specific concern with the transformation of human beings into political symbols. In order to illustrate interpellation, Althusser gives the example of a policeman hailing a person in the street. Althusser argues that in the moment of turning to answer the policeman's call and identify oneself, a human being constitutes themselves as subject to the ruling ideology (Althusser 174-175). Through the simple act of identification, the person being hailed admits to

being a part of society and, as a result, under the recognized authority of the policeman calling to him. Additionally, there is no way to resist being a subject to ideology, for Althusser argues that ideology regards human beings as “always-already subjects” (Althusser 176). He argues that a human being is born directly into family and religious ideological values and cannot resist them. Interpellation aids us in understanding Lady Gregory’s character Hyacinth Halvey, whose arrival in a small Irish village sparks his transformation into an idealized political symbol of virtue. Lady Gregory uses written testimonials as a way of interpellating a subject, and explores the written language’s power and ability to distort reality. She also demonstrates the futility of resisting interpellation through Halvey’s attempts to undermine the idealized figure that the village perceives him as. Lady Gregory ultimately critiques this practice of interpellation and the worship of a hero figure in politics when she shows the psychological strain on those being symbolized.

Additionally, Stuart Hall theorizes another aspect of ideology that Lady Gregory’s *Hyacinth Halvey* engages with. In his essay, “The rediscovery of ‘ideology’: return of the repressed in media studies,” Hall discusses the media’s inherent bias, that media representation of events can consistently support one side of a conflict and therefore shape a community’s understanding of that conflict (Hall 69-71). He cites this signifying of an event as a “site of struggle,” and therefore destabilizes ideology in suggesting that resistance is possible (Hall 70). Lady Gregory explores the dangers that coincide with the power to both signify an event and perpetuate ideologies about it. In Lady Gregory’s time, this power resides in the ISAs of the State, or the Catholic Church and England’s colonial presence in Ireland. However, in their efforts to challenge this imperial state, anticolonial nationalisms create their own sets of ISAs

and RSAs that counter the current ISAs and RSAs in place. Through their own ISAs and RSAs, anticolonial nationalisms imagine a new, independent Irish State. However, Lady Gregory critiques the anticolonial nationalist and Literary Revival's practice of representing Irish historical events only in ways that suits their own agenda. Lady Gregory demonstrates in her plays that this practice results in ideology being indistinguishable from reality.

Aside from examining the ways that the ISAs of anticolonial nationalisms follow the same logic of the English colonial ISAs in Ireland, Lady Gregory also critiques the ways that the Irish Literary Revival attempted to mobilize Ireland's Celtic folk tradition for ideological and political use. Dipesh Chakrabarty touches on the workings of minority, or as he calls them, "subaltern" (101), histories, of which Ireland's Celtic-mythological past and folk knowledge are examples. In *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Chakrabarty discusses the ways that modern history does not allow for the supernatural or fantastic elements that subaltern history oftentimes includes. He argues that this exclusion occurs due to modern history's strict standards and practices regarding evidence, reason, and rationality. Chakrabarty is critical of the fact that modern history typically views the past as a logical progression of causation to modern ideals such as democracy, socialism, or citizenship. Subaltern histories resist this definition of history, so therefore modern historians do not know how to approach them.

In order to illustrate the challenge of subaltern histories, Chakrabarty describes the example of the 1855 rebellion of the Santals, who cited their god Thakur as motivation for their rebellion rather than an agenda recognizably political (Chakrabarty 102-104). Chakrabarty describes the historian Ranajit Guha's difficulty in writing about the Santals's rationale for

rebellion, for the supernatural does not qualify as evidence in the procedures of academic historical research (Chakrabarty 104). Chakrabarty proposes a solution to this conflict: heterogeneity. He suggests that rather than existing purely in the past, subaltern history doubles as both an object to study as informing our understanding of a specific historical moment and as an alternative way of living our own lives (Chakrabarty 108). He then expands this idea to argue that subaltern history exists alongside everyday life, thus allowing historians to connect to the past from their own contemporary moment (Chakrabarty 110). It is this idea of heterogeneity, or the simultaneous existence of past and present, that connects Ireland's relationship with its own mythological past.

The Revival considered Ireland's Celtic past a high point for Irish art and folk tradition, so therefore the movement went through extensive efforts to bring its ancient language and customs to the contemporary moment. However, through her plays Lady Gregory criticizes the Revival's efforts to harness Ireland's folk traditions, for the representations that Irish cultural groups promoted were an oftentimes exclusive and commodified entity meant purely to generate enthusiasm for Irish independence. The Revival had little use for the supernatural elements of Irish history that Chakrabarty identifies as equally valuable except as they were useful to modernity. Lady Gregory engages most directly with the Revival's misrepresentation of the Celtic folk-tradition in the plays *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Rising of the Moon*. Lady Gregory sees potential and relevance in Ireland's mythological past just as the Revival does, but her engagement with Ireland's past yields very different results. *Grania*, *Kincora*, and *Dervorgilla*, Lady Gregory's folk-history tragedies, each employ popular myths about Ireland.

These plays critique the oppression and misrepresentation of women in the Revival's representations of Ireland's mythological past.

### *The Abbey and Ireland's Future*

O'Brien and Murphy conclude their analyses of the Abbey's commemorations with similar sentiments. O'Brien states, "As its theater enters a second century, it would do well to invest more attention in adapting to the future, rather than eulogizing the past" (O'Brien 143). Murphy similarly concludes, "In a year, and a decade, focused on remembrance, reflection, and commemoration, there can be no better way to honor the Ireland of the past than to improve its future" (C. Murphy 124). Both of these scholars emphasize the Abbey Theatre's duty to help shape Ireland's future even now as it enters its second century of giving Ireland its "very own cultural identity" (O'Brien 137). I believe that the Abbey is poised for defining this Irish identity now just as it was in 1904, and that Lady Gregory also focused on producing an Irish theatrical identity that engages with the experience of all Irish people, not just male figures in power.

Lady Gregory's critiques of the very concept of "revival" resonate with contemporary conservative movements containing revivalist elements, such as the conservative nationalism of Donald Trump's Make America Great Again campaign. In this slogan, the "Again" indicates a nostalgia for the restoration of an idealized past, a past that in reality was a time of violence and oppression for many. Though I make this connection at the risk of anachronism, I believe that the fantasy constituting Donald Trump's nostalgic and conservative-nationalist vision of America's past is similar to the Revival's ideological misrepresentation of Ireland's Celtic mythological past



to suit mainstream nationalist ideals. The ambivalence that permeates Lady Gregory's supposedly pro-nationalist plays indicates her difficulty with the oftentimes blind idealism of the Literary Revival and Ireland's wider mainstream nationalism. These plays demonstrate the necessity both in early twentieth century Ireland and in the present moment for equal and fair representation of all human being's experiences even in moments of turbulent political change.

## CHAPTER ONE

## FARCE AND MAINSTREAM NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

Lady Gregory sets her plays during various periods in Irish history. This chapter will examine the plays that are set contemporary to her own historical moment: the early twentieth century. Lady Gregory's *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906), *Spreading the News* (1904), and *The Rising of the Moon* (1903)<sup>2</sup> each explore interactions between the systems of knowledge that governed Ireland: the British colonial legal system, Catholicism, and the older Celtic folk traditions. These plays investigate the Literary Revival's attempts to harness the Celtic folk tradition for politics, thus transforming it into an ideological formation.<sup>3</sup> The interactions of these three knowledge systems produce a chaotic atmosphere for Lady Gregory's characters. In her plays, moral and legal "right" and "wrong" become indistinguishable. To illustrate this moral confusion, Lady Gregory employs comedic farce and a writing style influenced by her translations of the French playwright Molière. The ideological narratives that colonial law, Catholicism, and an intentionally politicized folk tradition perpetuate exacerbate the plays' atmospheres of disorder, typically causing a confusion of reality and fiction. Ultimately, these plays demonstrate the necessity for a new approach to understanding the complexity and reality of rural Irish existence.

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<sup>2</sup> All dates for Lady Gregory's plays and other works are from the chronology in *Lady Gregory: Fifty Years After*, eds. Saddlemyer and Smythe, Barnes and Noble, 1987, pp. 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Gregory explores politicizing the folk tradition in *Hyacinth Halvey* and *The Rising of the Moon*, but does not focus on it in *Spreading the News*.

*Setting and Genre: Ireland's Cultural Contrasts and Contradictions*

Lady Gregory's choices in genre and setting for these contemporary plays reflect the various influences on her writing and her larger literary and political agenda. Her decision to set her plays in her own historical moment rather than the ancient Celtic past is significant. In the beginning of her literary career as a folklorist and Irish language translator, she was thoroughly invested in Ireland's Celtic past. Her choice of setting exemplifies a primary goal of her plays: to contrast Ireland's romanticized Celtic past with early twentieth-century Ireland's political climate and cultural beliefs. Moreover, Lady Gregory decides to set these three plays in rural Irish towns: a village fair in *Spreading the News*<sup>4</sup> (SN 2), the "little town of Cloon" in *Hyacinth Halvey* (HH 17), and the "side of a quay in a seaport town" in *The Rising of the Moon* (RM 44). This decision about location focuses all of these plays on a major concern for the Literary Revival: the contradiction between a romanticized, rural Irish people and the everyday realities of these people's lives. Additionally, her choice of comedy as a genre connects her work to international dramatic trends. These plays showcase her own mastery and reworking of dramatic comedy's popular conventions. Her contemporary comedic plays contribute to the Abbey Theatre's overarching artistic enterprise while also exploring her own concerns about the Literary Revival's practice of idealizing Ireland's rural west.

Lady Gregory's fervent interest in folklore makes her decision to write plays set in her own time surprising. In these contemporary plays, she maintains a connection to the Irish folk

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<sup>4</sup> Abbreviations: SN: *Spreading the News* (1904), Gregory; RM: *The Rising of the Moon* (1903), Gregory; HH: *Hyacinth Halvey* (1906), Gregory

tradition through her use of her Kiltartan dialect to write dialogue. Robert Welch eloquently explains the power of Lady Gregory's Kiltartan dialect:

Her language, based on the Kiltartan dialect, she saw as a means of recreating an Irish community which would comprise the living and the dead figures of Irish legend. Again, she was thinking of her medium not just as a means of conveying the content of the old stories but as a mode of disclosing their living reality. (Welch "Language" 268)

With this in mind, one would think that Lady Gregory would write plays about ancient mythological subjects similar to her collections, *Gods and Fighting Men* and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. However, she does exactly the opposite, instead setting the first play she writes without collaborating with Yeats, *The Jackdaw* (1901, revised 1907), in the western Irish village of Cloon. This is the same location as *Hyacinth Halvey* (HH 53). The decision to deviate from her previous focus on Ireland's past emphasizes that the contemporary rural west holds particular significance for her.

While Lady Gregory's decision is clearly intentional, her contemporaries did not always recognize her creative decisions as deliberate. George Bernard Shaw comments on the environment that generated her plays in an address he gave on behalf of the Abbey Theater in London in 1910 (Bernard Shaw 274). He frames her work as an accident born out of necessity:

Yet it never, as far as I know, occurred to her spontaneously to write a play at all... but I feel quite sure that whenever anything was wanted, whether it was a scrubbing brush or an Irish play, Lady Gregory was appealed to as a general housekeeper to supply it. The scrubbing brush she bought, and may even have wielded; but as the oilshops did not keep Irish plays, and Mr Yeats and the other great writers on the staff could not keep up with the demand, she had to produce them herself; and thus was discovered one of the most remarkable theatre talents of our time. (Bernard Shaw 275)

Though essentially complimentary, George Bernard Shaw's description of Lady Gregory's role in the Abbey Theatre diminishes any intention she possessed when creating her plays. She is relegated to the gendered position of "general housekeeper," and her writing is equated to the act of buying a scrubbing brush. However problematically this passage represents female authorship, Shaw does provide one explanation for why Lady Gregory chose to write contemporary comedies: they were in high demand at the Abbey. Also, careful examination of these plays reveals that they do explore some of the questions that her later folk-history plays investigate. These questions include the conflict between the fantastical and realistic versions of Ireland and women's exclusion from Ireland's patriarchal and colonial systems. The contemporary plays are concerned with the Irish people's relationship to their nation and are not simply comedies meant for easy popular consumption.

George Bernard Shaw's speech also touches on her mastery of comedy. He says, "In this double command of the world of fancy, and the world of the vividest, funniest fact, Lady Gregory's genius strongly resembles that of Molière; and I am not surprised to learn that she has translated several of his plays for use by the Irish National Theatre" (Bernard Shaw 276). These translations of Molière heavily influenced Lady Gregory's comedies. Mary FitzGerald observes that Lady Gregory's translations of Molière were also born out of necessity, for in its 1904 patent the Abbey Theater was restricted to "contemporary Irish dramas and continental masterpieces" (FitzGerald 277). Lady Gregory's fluency in French and the popularity of comedy made Molière a logical choice for her to translate for the Abbey's stage (FitzGerald 278). However, she chose to translate Molière into her Kiltartan dialect, which, as Fitzgerald explains, "was partly the result of her major interest in the folklore of her native region and the language in

which she heard it expressed, partly a recognition of the folklore quality she recognized in the plays” (FitzGerald 278). She translated *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* (1906), *The Rogueries of Scapin* (1908), and *The Miser* (1910), which were later collected and published in *The Kiltartan Molière* (1910) (FitzGerald 277-78). She also later translated the *The Would-Be Gentleman* in 1926 (FitzGerald 296).

FitzGerald argues that Molière’s influence on Lady Gregory appears most strongly in her translation of *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*. FitzGerald argues, “Lady Gregory’s version of Molière sounds sufficiently like her own works that the Kiltartan phrasing seems almost natural to his characters” (FitzGerald 282-83). Lorna D. Young discusses more specifically Molière’s influence on Lady Gregory’s comedic dialogue, pointing to a moment in *Spreading the News*:

This early play exemplifies some of her most successful techniques. One of these is a pattern she adapted from Molière, where the beleaguered Bartley Fallon, hearing that his friend Jack Smith has been ‘murdered’, is reduced to the state of an automaton.... The effect in performance is hilarious. (Young 294)

Clearly her time spent translating Molière affected the way she approached her plays’ comedy. Her masterful use of the Kiltartan dialect in these French translations helped both to familiarize a Dublin audience with French comedy and to create similarities between Irish and wider European drama. This comparison emphasizes that Ireland’s drama was just as legitimate as the rest of Western Europe’s. Christina Hunt Mahoney comments on the idea of translation as legitimizing a nation’s art, claiming, “Yeats and Gregory both sought dramatic models for Irish writers to emulate and a means of circumventing English dramatic tradition as part of a broader nationalist agenda” (Mahoney 655). Therefore, Lady Gregory’s translations of Molière were a significant contribution to Ireland’s comedic theater tradition.

Drawing upon Molière as an influence, Lady Gregory is also able to reject another established Irish theater tradition. Lady Gregory and Yeats's letter asking for donations to the Abbey outlines this project precisely:

We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year, certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature....We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. (*OIT* 8-9)

This “buffoonery” and “easy sentiment” refers to the figure of the Stage Irishman, a stock character on the English stage for as long as England colonized Ireland. Declan Kiberd provides a history of the Stage Irishman, illustrating precisely what it was that the Abbey Theater challenged:

By the time the theatres of England were closed under the Puritan ban of the 1640s, the rudimentary image of the Stage Irishman had been formed: he wore trousers, drank endlessly, swore wildly, and spoke a broken but colorful brand of English, salted with Gaelic exclamations. In the eighteenth century, new features were added: now the character invariably carried a shillelagh under his arm, ate potatoes as a staple diet and frequently appeared with a pig in close attendance. (Kiberd “Stage Irishman” 21)

The Stage Irishman was built on problematic stereotypes and general English ignorance. At its heart the Stage Irishman reflects England's view of Ireland. The Abbey meant to complicate and to contest this Stage Irishman. Lady Gregory's plays should be considered a part of this endeavor to capture a complex Irish identity, something that the Abbey founders felt had never been depicted successfully on stage before.

*The Hero's Burden*

*Hyacinth Halvey*, first performed at the Abbey Theater in 1906, explores the interaction between Catholic ideology and the colonial legal system in “the little town of Cloon,” a village in Galway (HH 17). The titular character of the play is the new Sub-Sanitary Inspector named Hyacinth Halvey. When he arrives for the first time in Cloon, the local people are impressed by the testimonials he brings as letters of reference. After hearing about the testimonials, a local woman concludes, “...he must be a very *saintly* young man” (HH 19). Thus begins the residents of Cloon’s enthusiastic ascription of Catholic ideals onto Halvey. This is perhaps best demonstrated when Mr. Quirke, a local man, physically places an “anti-treating button,” or an anti-alcohol badge, into Halvey’s coat pocket despite Halvey’s protest that “I am no drinker, but I haven’t the pledge taken—” (HH 21). Here Mr. Quirke places Catholic and nationalist<sup>5</sup> virtue, in this case temperance, both symbolically and literally onto Halvey.

Lady Gregory focuses primarily on this kind of misrepresentation. She explores the dangerous implications of the villagers’ investment in a version of Halvey infused with Catholic and political ideals over the Halvey of reality. The village’s distorted perspective results in Halvey’s loss of identity and his inability to attain legal justice. This is a common political logic in various anticolonial nationalist discourses in Ireland, with figures such as Charles Parnell and Wolf Tone coming to represent Irish morals and political independence. Lady Gregory shows how Catholic morals and nationalist principles intertwine to create this specific type of

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<sup>5</sup> David Lloyd explains how nationalism became intertwined with the temperance movement in the late 1880s and 1890s: “Colonialism was a kind of intoxication of which intemperance was one among many effects. Accordingly, intemperance and political dependence stood in a reversible relation, such that the eradication of intemperance would lead to the eradication of British rule and vice versa” (*Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity* 104).



idealization. However, the play's eventual descent into moral confusion suggests that the village's investment in an idealized human being prevents justice from being carried out.

The testimonials about Halvey factor significantly into the way he is transformed into a symbol. The few excerpts from these letters of reference seem hyperbolic at best: "He possesses the fire of the Gael, the strength of the Norman, the vigour of the Dane, the stolidity of the Saxon," or Halvey is, "A champion of every cause that can legitimately benefit his fellow creatures" (*HH* 20, 21). Particularly in the second description quoted, Halvey is named a champion while the rest of mankind is characterized as "creatures," or bestial and animalistic. The ridiculous nature of these descriptions becomes clear when they are compared to Halvey's passive response to his symbolization. In reality he is a Sub-Sanitary inspector, or a petty bureaucrat, which contributes to the comedy of this misrepresentation. In the play, he does nothing to exhibit "fire," "strength," or "vigour," but instead ineffectively protests the virtuous identity that the villagers force on him. He attempts to change the villagers' perception of him by committing crimes, but this ridiculous tactic is unsuccessful.

The words of these testimonials most heavily influence the Sergeant. His character begins the play in search of someone to give a talk about the "moral development of the rural classes" (*HH* 19). After reading the testimonials about Halvey, The Sergeant arrives at the conclusion that "You are a newcomer—your example would carry weight—you must stand as a living proof of the beneficial effect of a high character, moral fibre, temperance—there is something about it here I am sure—(*Looks.*) I am sure I saw 'unparalleled temperance' in some place—" (*HH* 21). The Sergeant's complete deference to these testimonials points to how the bureaucratic system's devotion to written documentation interferes with the law's ability to fairly

judge reality. The power of the testimonials also interferes with the Sergeant's ability to judge a person's merit. Additionally, Halvey has no real knowledge on the topic of "the moral development of the rural class," so the village's deference to him as an authority problematizes the very idea of knowledge. Idealizing Halvey not only misrepresents him, but also misrepresents knowledge and truth. Furthermore, in the above lines the Sergeant immediately sees Halvey not as a human being, but rather as a "newcomer" and a potential "example." When the Sergeant claims, "I am sure I saw 'unparalleled temperance' in some place," he also misremembers what is actually in the letters. In this quote, the Sergeant remembers what he wants the testimonials to say so that they suit his agenda and his needs. This fabrication undermines bureaucratic documentation by suggesting that bureaucratic processes and the Sergeant's authority have no relationship to truth.

The Sergeant's investment in the symbolic Halvey over the Halvey of reality is perhaps best exhibited when the Sergeant reads the testimonials for the first time. Halvey's lines in response are: "I am no drinker, but I haven't the pledge taken—," "I am in no way wishful to be an example—," and "I wouldn't like to be a contrast—," (*HH* 21). This repetition of negation—"I am no," "I am in no way," "I wouldn't like"—emphasizes Halvey's resistance to being made a symbol. However, the dashes at the end of each line indicate an interruption of Halvey's denials as the Sergeant continues speaking. The Sergeant appears to willfully ignore Halvey's protests. These interruptions highlight how invested the Sergeant has become in the symbolic Halvey even when Halvey vehemently denies this identity. Through the Sergeant's investment in the testimonials, Lady Gregory represents the ways that distorting idealization has become central to

colonial bureaucracy and a colonial official. However, in other plays Lady Gregory explores the ways that anticolonial nationalism reproduces just this logic.

Lady Gregory is not the only Irish playwright to examine the dangers of making a human being into a symbol. John Millington Synge wrote *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, a year after Lady Gregory wrote *Hyacinth Halvey*. Synge's play explores a rural Irish village's idolization of a young man, Christy Mahon. When he arrives in their village, he claims that he murdered his father. Rather than condemning him, the villagers find his sensational story admirable, and he rises in popularity. When they discover that this murder never actually occurred, and Christy's father comes to town searching for him, the village is deeply disappointed instead of relieved that Christy is not a murderer. Heidi J. Holder examines this contradiction between the fantasy about Christy and reality, a contradiction that permeates *Hyacinth Halvey* as well. Holder argues that the focus of Synge's play "is the conflict... between the representational and the fantastic, the natural and the poetic" (Holder 528-29). This breakdown between fantasy and reality is apparent in *Hyacinth Halvey* as well, with the testimonials representing a fictional version of Halvey at odds with his realistic self.

Holder locates the conflict between fantasy and reality in *Playboy* in the ancient Celtic beliefs and myths of the Irish rural west: "The tales of weak and immature heroes who undergo strange trials and engage in unreal acts of violence in order to gain prizes of great value have undeniable structural and thematic similarities to the story of Synge's *Playboy*" (Holder 529). Holder's description of a Celtic myth's plot structure applies to Lady Gregory's play as well. Though the crimes that Halvey commits are very real, the image that the testimonials create

about him are completely false. Just as in Celtic myth, the fantasy element transcends the realistic.

However, I would argue that in *Hyacinth Halvey* there are other ways to understand this disconnect. Lady Gregory proposes the convergence of multiple knowledge systems as causing this split between reality and fiction. The following description of the lodgings that the villagers arrange for Halvey demonstrates the relationship between Catholic and legal knowledge systems:

MISS JOYCE: You will be near to the Sergeant in the lodging I speak of. The house is convenient to the barracks.

HYACINTH: (*Doubtfully.*) To the barracks?

MISS JOYCE: Alongside of it and the barrack yard behind. And that's not all. It is opposite to the priest's house.

HYACINTH: Opposite, is it?

MISS JOYCE: A very respectable place, indeed, and a very clean room you will get. I know it well. The curate can see into it from his window. (*HH 22*)

This description of Halvey's accommodations places his room "alongside" the barracks and "opposite to the priest's house," thus squeezing him between Catholic authority and the law's judgement. His lodgings emphasize that Halvey is literally positioned at the convergence of these governing ideological systems. The remainder of the play investigates precisely what happens to Halvey and the villagers of Cloon when Catholic ideology and the law converge.

Halvey's distraught reaction to being idealized marks the beginning of Lady Gregory's exploration of this practice's dangerous implications. One of Halvey's first moments of uninterrupted dialogue occurs when all the villagers except Fardy have exited the stage. Halvey says, "(*In a tone of agony*) I wish I had never seen Cloon" (*HH 23*). "Agony" is an intense word here, evoking not only mental distress but "extreme bodily suffering, often such as to produce writhing or throes of the body" (OED Online). The hyperbole of this language contributes to the

play's farce. However, the OED defines "agony" as having a Catholic sense, indicating "the mental struggle or anguish of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane" (OED Online). Thus, Lady Gregory's use of "agony" emphasizes the village's transformation of Halvey into a Messianic figure. This ridiculous comparison creates a comical moment; however, it also points to how distorted the village's perception of Halvey has become. Additionally, the physical suffering also suggested in the word "agony" emphasizes Halvey's rejection of this parallel. Because he is not Christ, he experiences bodily suffering for no reason and without the possibility of redemption. Through the comparison with Christ, Lady Gregory critiques turning a person into an idealized symbol with no basis for doing so.

Halvey desperately attempts to protest this new Messianic identity by committing a crime. This is the opposite of what a sacred or ideal figure would do. Upon vocalizing his fear that he will "...be too much closed in" (*HH* 23) by the village's idealization of him, Halvey immediately rejects being made a symbol. He exclaims, "I'll stop their mouths. I'll show them I can be a terror for badness. I'll do some injury. I'll commit some crime. The first thing I'll do I'll go and get drunk...then I'll make an assault—I tell you I'd think as little of taking a life as of blowing out a candle" (*HH* 25). The language in these lines indicates an extreme attempt to undo the ideals forced upon him.

Ultimately, crime fails in undoing the village's idealization of Halvey. Since the village promotes doggedly the specific ideology of a virtuous political symbol, he can do nothing to escape that identity. In this moment, interpellation and ideology work together to distort realistic

experience. Since the Sergeant and the wider village have interpellated<sup>6</sup> Halvey as an idealized subject, the simple act of responding to his name when other villagers address him causes him to participate in his own subjection. Since the Sergeant and the village now prefer the symbolic Halvey over the realistic one, when they address him they refer to that specific version of him. When he responds, he unwittingly complies with their rejection of his real self.

Unfortunately for Halvey, his plan to steal a piece of meat to show himself a criminal backfires. This plan does not work because of the Sergeant's persistent perception of him. Halvey inadvertently saves Mr. Quirke from the accusation of selling rotten meat to English soldiers (*HH* 26-35). However, regardless of the incident's outcome, Halvey does commit the crime of stealing. The Sergeant's botched investigation of this matter illustrates that his idealization of Halvey totally impedes his ability to perform his job. His refusal to arrest Halvey suggests that an idealized person somehow functions above the law's jurisdiction. Through Halvey's embrace of criminality, Lady Gregory indicates that being made into a political symbol fundamentally changes that symbol's relationship to the law.

Investment in the symbolic Halvey prevents real justice from being executed for each of the crimes he commits. For each crime, Halvey claims responsibility for what he has done: "No one saw it [the unwholesome meat] or brought it way but myself," and "It was I robbed the church" (*HH* 32, 42). In the first instance, when Halvey claims responsibility for his crime, Mr. Quirke idealizes him anyway and emphasizes his Catholic virtue: "Say! I say I am glad to hear what you said as if it was the Lord telling me I'd be in heaven this minute" (*HH* 32). The

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy*. translated by Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, 1971, p 176.

mentioning of “the Lord” and “heaven” each reinterpret Halvey’s actions as Catholic deeds. This indicates that the villagers’ perception of Halvey has become so skewed that they misread his crimes as holy language. Additionally, when the Sergeant hears of Halvey’s crime from Mr. Quirke, the Sergeant remarks, “That is much to his credit—helping the rural classes—” (*HH* 34). This remark reframes Halvey’s actions as a larger benevolent project. Instead of seeking true justice for his crime, the Sergeant and Mr. Quirke essentially ignore his confession. Lady Gregory uses Mr. Quirke and the Sergeant’s distorted perception to illustrate the pervasiveness of idealization.

The village reinforces the split in Halvey’s selves again when he robs the church at the end of the play. When Halvey claims responsibility for this crime, Mr. Quirke immediately reads the situation as Halvey taking the blame for Fardy. Mr. Quirke exclaims, “A walking saint he is!” thus canonizing Halvey even when he robs a church (*HH* 43). This helps to create the play’s farce, which aids the audience in understanding just how warped Mr. Quirke’s view of Halvey has become. Mr. Quirke then launches into an extensive speech about his interpretation of Halvey’s confession:

The preserver of the poor! Talk of the holy martyrs! They are nothing at all to what he is! Will you look at him! To save that poor boy he is going! To take the blame on himself he is going! To say he himself did the robbery he is going! Before the magistrate he is going! To gaol he is going! Taking the blame on his own head! Putting the sin on his own shoulders! Letting on to have done a robbery! Telling a lie—that it may be forgiven him—to his own injury! Doing all that I tell you to save the character of a miserable slack lad, that rose in poverty. (*Murmur of admiration from all*). (*HH* 43)

This passage is saturated with Mr. Quirke’s comparison of Halvey’s deeds to Christ’s actions in the New Testament. The idea that Halvey takes “the blame on himself” and says “he himself did

the robbery” is reminiscent of Christ’s sacrifice of himself to absolve humanity’s sins. The act of bearing the burden on *his own shoulders* recalls the image of Christ bearing his cross on his own shoulders before his crucifixion. Additionally, the idea that Halvey will go “before the magistrate” and “to gaol” recalls Christ’s trial before Pontius Pilate and imprisonment by Roman soldiers. Each of these connections identify Halvey with Christ, which places him far above any “talk of the holy martyrs.”

Of course, this comparison to Christ’s sacrifice is completely farcical and ridiculous. Yet this fact does nothing to change Halvey’s image, for the village gives a “*Murmur of admiration*” after hearing this comparison. In this moment, Lady Gregory anticipates Slavoj Žižek’s theory that ideology is strongest when it transforms contradictions into arguments supporting it. In seeing Halvey’s overt criminal action as holy, the village transforms breaking the law into evidence for virtue. Though the hyperbole of Halvey as a Christ figure certainly adds to the play’s comedy, more significantly it points to the villagers’ complete deference to the symbolic Halvey. Lady Gregory casts this deference as an inescapable blindness that prevents legal justice from occurring. This framing suggests that *Hyacinth Halvey* condemns the abstraction of human beings, a practice common in mainstream Irish nationalism that carries over into the anticolonial movement. This logic allows the creation of heroes around which to organize revolutionary efforts. It imagines an unproblematic figure representing the ideals of a collective, thus erasing that figure’s individuality. In *Hyacinth Halvey*, Lady Gregory is deeply critical of this practice.

The final moments of the play solidify the town’s erasure of Halvey’s original identity when Mr. Quirke and the Sergeant “(*Seizes Halvey and seats him in a chair*)” (HH 43). Here the two men actually move Halvey’s body against his will to position him as an “example and a



blessing to the whole of the town” (*HH* 43). These men have escalated beyond speaking about Halvey as if he is a Christ figure and now physically control his body. They treat him as if he is an inanimate object to use for their own agenda. They pay no heed to Halvey when “(*They all lift the chair with Halvey in it, wildly protesting*),” for in this moment it is clear that they no longer recognize the Halvey of reality (*HH* 43). In fact, they have almost obliterated any connection between this idealized Halvey and his realistic form. Additionally, the village physically elevates him on stage, which parallels his figurative elevation. Halvey’s final line of “O stop, will you—” is completely ignored, as the return of the characteristic dash indicates (*HH* 43). This moment holds dangerous implications, for Lady Gregory shows that ideology can justify the use of people’s bodies without their consent. By focusing on the Sergeant, Lady Gregory demonstrates imperial law’s lack of regard for individual will. In the context of Irish nationalist movements, this could manifest in the sacrifice of young men’s bodies, with or without their consent, for the cause of Irish independence. The mainstream nationalist movement’s treatment of Charles Parnell exemplifies this practice. It idealized Parnell as a symbol of Home Rule politics, then abandoned him when he began to deviate from its ideals.

In *Hyacinth Halvey*, Lady Gregory exposes symbols’ ideological power and their firm hold on people’s perception. Though the play appears to end on a positive note, with Mr. Quirke leading the people of Cloon through an enthusiastic “Hip! hip! hoora!” the audience does not have the luxury of ignoring Halvey’s “wild protestations” like the villagers of Cloon do. Halvey’s resistance and the negation of his self are never addressed, and he never faces any consequences for his crimes. The Sergeant never truly investigates them. The Sergeant’s devotion to the fabricated symbolic Halvey exposes the legal system as a complete sham. Thus,

Lady Gregory levels a serious critique of the power that political symbols have in the context of both colonial law and the nationalisms that oppose it.

*Expectation vs. Reality*

In *Spreading the News*, first performed at the Abbey Theater in 1904, imperial law, Catholic ideology, and the Celtic folk tradition compete to reveal the truth of the supposed murder of a local man, Jack Smith. However, Lady Gregory shows that the villagers' investment in these ideologies distorts their perception of reality. Lady Gregory employs the strategies of traditional farce, for the murder that the play investigates never actually takes place. Lady Gregory also exposes the close relationship between ideology and pure delusion. Rather than helping to govern and control rural Ireland, these dominant institutions compete with each other and create unsettling violence. This violence points to the necessity of a new way for people to relate to material existence that does not require domination by these systems of power.

In *Spreading the News*, the character of the Magistrate embodies colonialism's presence in rural Ireland. At the opening of the play, the Magistrate's dialogue and actions reveal him as out of touch with the Irish village under his control. His line, which opens the play, "So that is the Fair Green. Cattle and sheep and mud. No system. What a repulsive sight!" illustrates an exaggerated and caricatured British viewpoint of the drudgery of rural Irish life (SN 2). Importantly, it is the lack of a "system," or legal organization, that offends the Magistrate more than anything else. Rather than taking the time to understand the local cultural order, the Magistrate asserts that "When I was in the Andaman Islands, my system never failed" (SN 3). He

repeats the efficiency and superiority of his Andaman Island system twice more throughout the play (SN 12,16). This repetition emphasizes how invested the Magistrate is in his colonial system and his agenda to assimilate rural Irish culture to his idea of civilization.

The Magistrate's exchange with the Policeman exposes the various assumptions that underlie his imperial system. The Magistrate assumes that in Ireland he will encounter "Boycotting? Maiming of cattle? Firing into houses?" and he anticipates widespread "common assault" and "agrarian crime" (SN 2). That the Magistrate assumes this atmosphere of violence and crime at the weekly village fair indicates that his preconceived notions about rural Ireland outweigh observed reality. When the Magistrate automatically assumes that Mrs. Tarpey's stall will contain "unlicensed goods underneath—spirits or the like," this reveals how much his perception is shaped by stereotypes about Irish culture (SN 3). These interactions indicate that the Magistrate approaches the village invested in the idea that the Irish are criminals who cannot rule themselves. He will maintain that understanding regardless of what occurs in reality.

Eric Weitz examines the ways that Lady Gregory employs comedic strategies in order to convey the Magistrate's mindset to the audience. Weitz identifies the similarities between the Magistrate's dialogue with the Policeman and Molière's opening to *The Rogueries of Scapin* (Weitz 147). Due to the two plays' similarities, Weitz introduces the idea of the Mask, a "comedy-related shorthand between stage and audience" (Weitz 149) common in Molière's plays and other examples of *commedia dell'arte*. He uses the Mask to examine the character Bartley, a local man accused of murder in *Spreading the News*. He argues, "Through mask and physical bearing, Bartley's emphatically non-threatening essence would remain ever present, underscoring the comic ludicrousness of...the ongoing misconception" (Weitz 150). When

applied to the Magistrate, Weitz's idea of the Mask indicates that the characteristics in his first dialogue define his entire character. Lady Gregory's decision to entirely shape this character on his problematic assumptions emphasizes her indictment of imperial law's treatment of rural Ireland.

One of the Magistrate's questions to the Policeman foreshadows the centrality of his assumptions to the chaos of the play. He asks the Policeman, "I suppose there is a good deal of disorder in this place?" (*SN* 2). Here, the Magistrate likely means "disorder" in a legal sense indicating crime; however, ironically, miscommunication and assumptions cause the disorder that the play descends into, not an actual crime. Though no murder ever occurs, the villagers invest in a compelling rumor that insists upon this crime's existence. Because of his assumptions, the Magistrate perpetuates the fictionalized story of Jack Smith's death instead of approaching it critically with an effective investigation strategy.

The Magistrate's investigation reveals the role of colonial ideology in his perception of rural Ireland. The faults in his superior "system" appear when he asks the Policeman, "You heard the same story from everyone you asked?" and the Policeman replies, "The same story—or if it was not altogether the same, anyway it was no less than the first story" (*SN* 12). Here, the Magistrate relies on the Policeman's vague words, which admit that the witnesses' testimonies are inconsistent. The Magistrate even includes the statement, "He has a guilty look," as reason for initially questioning Bartley, which of course contains no concrete evidence of crime (*SN* 12). Lady Gregory uses comedic irony to illustrate the way that an upholder of the law so unsystematically investigates this crime. This biased system of justice assumes guilt on the basis of race and culture. Trotter comments on the Magistrate's damage to the village: "While

Gregory's farce appears at first to make fun of the gullibility of the villagers, it is really the magistrate's inflexible suspicion that leads to anarchy within the community, and a breakdown in identity for its citizens" (Trotter "Imagining" 27). That the Magistrate considers his suspicions true has dangerous implications regarding the law's judgement. The Magistrate's power to make this unsubstantiated decision is illuminated by Hall's idea that the ruling class has the power to signify an event or person. As the agent of colonialism, the Magistrate has state-sanctioned power to decide that Bartley is guilty without evidence. In this case, the Magistrate's anti-Irish prejudice perpetuates his decision about Bartley's guilt in the murder

As the Magistrate's faulty investigation takes course, Lady Gregory shows how Catholic ideology and Celtic folk tradition also distort reality. The play introduces these beliefs when the Magistrate asks Bartley, "I ask you for a third time, where is he [Jack Smith]?" and Bartley mistakenly answers that Jack would be in the afterlife since he supposedly died (*SN* 12). At first, Bartley answers this question according to the Catholic doctrine: "All that I know—Well, first there are the three estates; there is Limbo, and there is Purgatory, and there is—" (*SN* 12). The Magistrate dismisses these sacred and deeply-rooted beliefs with the exclamation, "Nonsense! This is trifling! Get to the point" (*SN* 12). This articulates yet another cultural divide between himself and these Irish villagers, this time religious. However, more significantly, Bartley's investment in the condition of Jack Smith's soul distracts him from what happened to Jack in reality. As further conversation with the Magistrate shows, Bartley fears what Jack will do to him in the afterlife more than the consequences of being investigated for murder. This moment doubles in highlighting both the Magistrate's disrespect and Catholic ideology's ability to distort reality.

Following his explanation of Catholic doctrine, Bartley expresses his understanding of Irish folklore and the supernatural. He mistakenly thinks that the Magistrate prefers the Celtic over the Catholic:

BARTLEY: Maybe you don't hold with the clergy so? That is the teaching of the clergy. Maybe you hold with the old people. It is what they do be saying, that the shadow goes wandering, and the soul is tired, and the body is taking a rest—The shadow! (*Starts up.*) I was nearly sure I saw Jack Smith not ten minutes ago at the corner of the forge, and I lost him again—Was it his ghost do you think?

MAGISTRATE: (*To Policeman*) Conscience-struck! He will confess all now!

BARTLEY: His ghost to come before me! It is likely it was on account of the fork! I to have it and he to have no way to defend himself the time he met with his death!

MAGISTRATE: (*To Policeman*) I must note down his words. (*Takes out notebook*) (*To Bartley:*) I warn you that your words are being noted.

BARTLEY: If I had ha' run faster in the beginning, this terror would not be on me at the latter end! Maybe he will cast it up against me at the day of judgement—I wouldn't wonder at all at that.

MAGISTRATE: (*Writing*) At the day of judgement—

BARTLEY: It was too soon for his ghost to appear to me—is it coming after me always by day it will be, and stripping the clothes off in the night time?—I wouldn't wonder at all at that, being as I am an unfortunate man! (*SN 12-13*)

In this exchange, Bartley articulates Celtic folk beliefs' significance to his current predicament.

Essentially, Bartley fears that Jack Smith's "shadow goes wandering," or that his ghost is haunting Bartley. His fear of Jack's ghost is exhibited in his body language, "*(Starts up)*," and the six exclamation points that punctuate his speech. This physical reaction indicates that Celtic folk beliefs affect him more deeply than the Catholic Church, whose doctrine he mechanically lists out as if reciting his Catholic school lessons.

This Celtic version of an afterlife, in which ghosts walk among the living, is much more concrete and immediate compared to Catholic doctrine. The Catholic version merely theorizes about hypothetical places such as purgatory and limbo, while the supernatural seems present in

everyday life. Though Bartley does mention fear about “the day of judgement,” his fear of the ghost that is “coming after me always by day it will be, and stripping the clothes off in the night time” is far more vivid. Ultimately, this fear articulates a contradiction between two worldviews, for he has no idea if Jack Smith resides far removed from him in heaven or if Jack Smith will haunt him as a ghost. These two systems of belief compete with each other to shape Bartley’s conception of reality. There is even a moment where Bartley remembers a real event—“I was nearly sure I saw Jack Smith not ten minutes ago at the corner of the forge.” However, this brief appearance of reality is immediately overtaken by the possibility of Jack Smith’s ghost. The folk beliefs and Catholic narratives supersede the possibility of Jack Smith being alive. Additionally, Bartley’s investment in these religious beliefs places him in a completely different and separate space from the Magistrate. Bartley’s world, ruled by already incompatible Catholic doctrine and Celtic folk beliefs, yet again is incompatible with the Magistrate’s supposedly rational and logical legal system. The unassailable divide between them contributes to the comical farce of the play. This farce is already produced by the incompatibility of Catholicism and a gothic belief in supernatural ghosts.

The Magistrate’s methods of investigating the fabricated murder are also farcical and undercut his position as an emblem of civilization and legal authority. The Magistrate recognizes Bartley’s guilt about possessing Jack Smith’s hayfork when he could have used it to fight off his supposed murderer. However, the Magistrate misinterprets this guilt as Bartley’s own confession and immediately “(*Takes out notebook*)” to record it. This emphasis on writing words down to make them true relates to the testimonials’ function in *Hyacinth Halvey*. Similar to the Sergeant’s treatment of Halvey, the Magistrate writes for himself the image of Bartley’s confession. In

reality, Bartley merely voices his confusion over Jack Smith's fate. The Magistrate's delusional record makes him appear as separated from reality as Bartley and his supernatural religious beliefs. In this way, the two characters have been equally divorced from reality. Through this confusion, Lady Gregory suggests that colonial ideology can be as delusional as the Catholicism it mocks.

The confusion intensifies when Jack Smith returns to town alive, and the village misinterprets him as a ghost returned from the grave. No one in the village sees reality: that he was never murdered in the first place. Instead, the village places various assumptions onto Jack Smith. A villager, James Ryan, asks the question, "Is it back from the grave you are come?" which signifies the religious confusion that extends to the entire village. Jack Smith's "being back from the grave" could indicate his return as a Celtic ghost; however it also acts as a resurrection, which is central to Catholic doctrine. The villagers' inability to believe that Jack Smith is truly alive demonstrates how powerful Catholic ideology is: it has displaced truth.

Unfortunately, Jack Smith's return from the dead does nothing to reveal to the Magistrate that there was never a murder. Therefore, the Magistrate's assumptions about the Irish have eradicated his relationship to truth.

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. (SN 16)

In this exchange, though the Magistrate claims to "see it all now," he still only sees what aligns with his own image of rural Ireland. There is still no doubt in his mind that "the scene of the



murder” and “the body of the real Jack Smith” do exist. The Magistrate defines the situation in his own legal terms of “a case of false impersonation, a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice.” The use of legal language places this event in the framework of colonial law, though this only works through ignoring reality. Just as in *Hyacinth Halvey*, this moment aligns with Žižek’s claim that ideology is most successful when it transforms contradictory information into support of an ideological assumption, essentially constituting a fantasy. Ironically, his stubbornly held ideas about a criminal village defeat “the ends of justice,” not the actions of Bartley or Jack Smith.

By the conclusion of the play, the Magistrate’s perception of reality is so clouded that it creates a potential for violence. Bartley fears that when the Magistrate locks him and Jack Smith together in a cell, “murder will be done that time surely!” (SN 16). This means that in trying to uphold the law, the Magistrate will actually cause a murder to be committed, essentially negating his own duty as promoter of justice and peace. Therefore, Lady Gregory proposes that imperial law promotes violence instead of preventing it. This occurs because of colonial agents’ pervasive and negative assumptions about rural Ireland. Lady Gregory makes a bold critique of England’s place in Ireland, for she claims that the damaging ideologies that the English perpetuate about rural Ireland ultimately prevent the English from effectively governing it.

At its core, *Spreading the News* points to the dangerous and chaotic confusion that Catholicism and colonialist racism cause in the rural world of this play. Just like *Hyacinth Halvey*, this play concludes without any sort of resolution to the disorder and misunderstandings that run rampant in its plot. This disorder suggests that the confusing layering of these various belief systems is destructive for rural Ireland. None of these systems of belief allow for material

reality or truth to be understood or even viewed. In *Spreading the News*, the law's preconceived notions about Ireland cause violence instead of preventing it. In highlighting the faults in these systems, Lady Gregory points to the disastrous result of subjecting rural Ireland to so many ideological imperatives.

### *Irish Folk Tradition's Resistance to Ideology*

Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, written in 1903 but not performed at the Abbey Theater until 1907, investigates the ways that the Celtic folk tradition resists the nationalist movement's attempts to harness it for ideological purposes. Unlike the Catholic Church and the English colonial state in Ireland, which are both traditional Althusserian ISAs that function through ideology, the Celtic folk tradition is not political in the same way. Instead, the folk tradition represents an ancient and indigenous Irish culture that was nearly lost due to colonization and the Great Famine. It does not exist to uphold the power of the ruling class or to push Ireland towards modernity, yet the Literary Revival quite successfully employs it to symbolize a past period of glory that is only attainable through Irish independence (Kiberd "Return" 133-135). However, through the character of the Sergeant, Lady Gregory suggests that the Celtic folk tradition may fail in this nationalist role.

In order to understand the representation of folk beliefs in the play, one must first understand the significance of moonlight to these beliefs. As its title suggests, throughout the entire course of the play the events and characters are bathed in moonlight. This is indicated by Lady Gregory's stage direction, "*Side of a quay in a seaport town. Some posts and chains. A*

*large barrel. Enter three policemen. Moonlight,*” (RM 44). This connection to moonlight is also emphasized in the play’s characters’ three repeated references to the brightness of the moon (RM 45,47,53). W.B. Yeats discusses the connection of the moon to Celtic storytelling in his preface to Lady Gregory’s collection, *Gods and Fighting Men*.

To lunar influence belong all thoughts and emotions that were created by the community, by the common people, by nobody knows who, and to the sun all that came from the high disciplined or individual kingly mind.... From the moon come the folk-songs imagined by reapers and spinners out of the common impulse of their labor, and made not by putting words together, but by mixing verses and phrases, and the folk-tales made by the capricious mixing of incidents known to everybody in new ways, as one deals out cards never getting the same hand twice over.... Is it because all that is under the moon thirsts to escape out of bounds, to lose itself in some unbounded tidal stream, that the songs of folk are mournful, and that the story of the Fianna, whenever the queens lament for their lovers, reminds us of songs that are still sung in country places?.... When we have drunk the cold cup of the moon’s intoxication, we thirst for something beyond ourselves, and the mind flows outward to a natural immensity.... (*Gods and Fighting Men* 7)

In this passage, Yeats ties the poetry and music of the “folk” to “lunar influence.” His synonymous use of “folk” and “the common people” of Ireland indicates that for him Irish storytelling is inextricable from the everyday Irish person. Most significantly, Yeats connects the stories of the common people to “the story of the Fianna,” which is a very early story in Irish mythology. This suggests that the common people’s folk songs are fundamentally tied to the folk storytelling tradition in Ireland. Therefore, Lady Gregory’s decision to set the play bathed in moonlight suggests that Yeats’s lunar-Celtic influence permeates the play’s atmosphere. As we shall see, Yeats’s claim that, “when we have drunk the cold cup of the moon’s intoxication,” or rather when one has heard these Celtic stories, “we thirst for something beyond ourselves,” ties directly into the events of *The Rising of the Moon*.

Out of all of Lady Gregory's plays, *The Rising of the Moon* connects most clearly to real historical events in Ireland. For example, Lady Gregory's emphasis on moonlight also refers to the Whiteboys of Ireland in the 1760s. Richard Gott defines this group as "secret anti-settler societies entrenched among the Catholic population in rural areas" (Gott 50). Resistance leaders in the Whiteboys often changed their names to fictional titles, such as Captain Moonlight, and sent threatening letters to Protestant landlords who claimed common land (Gott 50). The pervasiveness of moonlight in *The Rising of The Moon* links the escaped rebel to Ireland's longstanding tradition of local agrarian resistance to English colonialism.

The play opens with the Sergeant and two policemen patrolling the quays of a seaport town looking for a man recently escaped from jail. Upon reading one of the wanted notices they hang, the Sergeant exclaims, "They say he's a wonder, that it's he that makes all the plans for the whole organization. There isn't another man in Ireland would have broken gaol the way he did" (RM 45). This line explicitly connects the escaped rebel to the founder of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, James Stephens, and his escape from Richmond Bridewell prison in November of 1865 (Ramón 185-189). Stephens had a remarkable escape that received much publicity. Significantly, two Fenian sympathizers working at the prison aided his escape (Ramón 184-185). Through this historical resonance, Lady Gregory explores the role of the sympathizer in *The Rising of the Moon*.

In the Sergeant's description of the escaped rebel, his use of the word "wonder" suggests marvel and amazement. This betrays the Sergeant's grudging respect for the escaped man. "Wonder" also implies that the escaped man has supernatural abilities or surpasses the limits of a regular human being. This comparison indicates that the Sergeant believes there is something

exemplary about the escaped man even though he is a criminal. This moment of dialogue therefore introduces the Sergeant's identity as an ambivalent sympathizer. As a keeper of the law, the Sergeant should be steadfast in his condemnation of this criminal; however his language reveals that he is caught between his duties as an agent of the law and the revolution's seductive forms of folk tradition. The intriguing collective surrounding this criminal, signified in the phrase, "they say," has a pull on the Sergeant even in these early lines. "They say" also points to a community that the escaped man belongs to, one that the Sergeant also belongs to as an Irishman. The Sergeant's ambivalence emerges from his involvement in both colonial-legal and Irish communities. The Sergeant's reluctant sympathy complicates the idea that the law and justice are stable institutions that stand above community, cultural, and even nationalist ties.

The Sergeant's speech provides insight into his understanding of being an officer of the law. One of his fellow policemen complains that if they themselves catch the escaped man, then the reward for his capture will be deprived from a common Irish person (*RM* 45). In response, the Sergeant says, "Haven't we the country depending on us to keep law and order? It's those that are down would be up and those that are up would be down, if it wasn't for us" (*RM* 45). The language regarding "up" and "down" appears purposely vague. "Up" and "down" could indicate class or wealth, which would mean that the Sergeant views himself as a keeper of class divisions. In a way, the Sergeant is a sort of class traitor himself, for his position of authority elevates him above the escaped man despite their shared class. These lines could also refer to the morally "up," or the law-abiding and spiritually-guided, and the morally "down," or the criminal and corrupt.

This line also works as a reference to the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The “up” could indicate the English colonial power and the “down” could indicate Ireland as a colony. In this colonial reading, the Sergeant sees himself as an agent of colonialism required to subjugate Irish rebels like this escaped man. The Sergeant stands at the center of these various hierarchies in Irish society, so therefore his respect for the criminal suggests the fragile nature of apparently incorruptible imperial systems. Lady Gregory also portrays the Sergeant as vulnerable to folk beliefs, which indicates that from the beginning of the play he is positioned for influence by some outside force.

The language of “up” and “down” also appears in the physical stage directions. According to stage direction, the Man sits up on a barrel and the Sergeant, “*Gets up beside him on barrel, facing right. They sit back to back, looking different ways*” (RM 48). On this barrel these characters have been equalized. This indicates that the man’s identity as a rebel and the folk tradition he engages with are as powerful as colonial law. Their positions suggest that both anticolonial resistance and colonial law are viable ways to govern Ireland. This contradicts the longstanding English attitude that Ireland is primitive and unable to govern itself (Martin 120-121).

The physical position of these two characters also creates a mirror image on the stage. The two men sitting on the barrel back to back are perfectly symmetrical, and the only difference between them is the direction they face. This reflects the opposite paths that their lives have taken on either side of the law—one legal and one illegal. The mirror positioning could also represent the two available futures for Ireland: freedom and colonization. This mirror-like positioning reinforces the Man’s argument that very little separates him from the Sergeant:

MAN: Now I daresay, Sergeant, in your youth, you used to be sitting up on a wall, the way you are sitting up on this barrel now, and the other lads beside you, and you singing “Granuaile?”

SERGEANT: I did then.

MAN: And the “Shan Bhean Bhocht?”

SERGEANT: I did then.

MAN: And the “Green on the Cape?”

SERGEANT: That was one of them.

MAN: And maybe the man you are watching for to-night used to be sitting on the wall, when he was young, and singing those same songs.... It’s a queer world.... And isn’t it a queer world? Maybe it’s one of those boys you used to be singing with that time you will be arresting to-day or tomorrow, and sending into the dock....

SERGEANT: That’s true indeed.

MAN: And maybe one night, after you had been singing, if the other boys had told you some plan they had, some plan to free the country, you might have joined with them.... and maybe it is you might be in trouble now.

SERGEANT: Well, who knows but I might? I had great spirit in those days.... That’s a queer thought now, and a true thought. Wait now till I think it out.... If it wasn’t for the sense I have, and for my wife and family, and for me joining the force the time I did, it might be myself now would be after breaking gaol and hiding in the dark, and it might be him that’s hiding in the dark and that got out of gaol would be sitting up where I am on this barrel.... And it might be myself would be creeping up trying to make my escape from himself, and it might be himself would be keeping the law, and myself would be breaking it.... (RM 49-50)

In this exchange the Man appeals to the Sergeant’s identity as his fellow Irishman. The Man argues that they possess a mirrored experience of “sitting up on a wall” and “singing Granuaile.” The Man expresses this shared experience in a nostalgic story transmitted orally, just as Irish folk stories are traditionally told. “Granuaile” refers to the sixteenth-century Irish folk hero, Grace O’Malley, a pirate queen who confronted Queen Elizabeth I during a tumultuous time of conflict between England and Ireland (Chambers 1-3). The reference to Granuaile’s rebellion against England connects the Man to a long tradition of Irish insurgency. Additionally, the Man’s narrative potentially describes the Man’s own experience of recruitment as an Irish patriot.

However, as the play's conclusion shows, this narrative contains the power to affect material decisions that the Sergeant must make. Therefore, the narrative's function extends beyond that of mere storytelling or fantasy and makes a material intervention. The man's narrative behaves more like an ideology than a simple story.

The Sergeant's final response to the Man's proposition highlights how strongly the Man's ideas have taken root in him. The Sergeant admits that the Man's thought is "a true thought," which acknowledges the possibility of the Sergeant becoming a patriot in his youth. However, this "thought" is the Man's narrative, which is an idealized image of being a rebel. This moment exposes the complex nature of truth in an Irish context. In a legal sense, truth indicates what occurs in reality, not a story that another person constructs. However, Irish nationalism oftentimes harnesses the power of folk narratives and stories to create its own idealized representation of truth. The Sergeant's connection to the Man's narrative results from the transformation of the folk tradition into an idealized strategy. Rather than understanding material reality, the Sergeant invests in an ideology meant to distort reality just like the characters in *Hyacinth Halvey* and *Spreading the News*.

In his exchange with the Man, the Sergeant's very speech imitates the mirroring effect of the characters' positions on stage. At this point in their dialogue, the Sergeant's language repeats the structure of "It might be myself...., it might be him...." This parallel structure contains a certain symmetry, with the only deviation being the words "myself" and "him." The construction points to the Sergeant's internalization of the Man's ideology and identification with the Man himself. Song and memory are the root of this identification. The Sergeant is able to see himself reflected in the ideological narrative that the Man proposes, a scenario that quite possibly mirrors



the Man's own recruitment into the independence movement. In this dialogue, Lady Gregory suggests that even Irish men in the service of colonial law are susceptible to the folk tradition's influence and possess the ability to sympathize with Ireland's revolutionary cause.

In addition to powerful storytelling, the Man's repeated references to music help him sway the Sergeant into his alternative rebellious order. The Man refers to three different songs—"Granuaile," "Shan Bhean Bhocht," and "Green on the Cape"—each of which the Sergeant admits to knowing well. The fact that these characters know the songs establishes the common ground between them, for music is another mirrored experience. The songs "Green on the Cape," "Shan Bhean Bhocht," and "The Rising of the Moon" each appear one after another in H. Halliday Sparling's 1887 *Irish Minstrelsy: Being a Selection of Irish Songs, Lyrics, And Ballads; Original and Translated*. Each of these ballads are small stories about the 1798 rebellion in Ireland. "Green on the Cape" tells the story of an Irish croppy boy exiled to France and his conversation with a French general. This general promises to aid Ireland in its uprising against England (Sparling 10-12). Similarly, "The Shan Bhean Bhocht," or "The Poor Old Woman," another name for Ireland, is a narrative about the French arrival in Bantry Bay and the hope for Irish freedom in 1797 (Sparling 13-15). "The Rising of the Moon" narrates the gathering of Irish men wearing green and wielding pikes, ending with a final reference to 1798: "Well they fought for poor old Ireland, and full bitter was their fate; / O what glorious pride and sorrow fills the name of Ninety-Eight!" (Sparling 15-16).

These songs are significant choices because, just like the Man's own identity as a young rebel, they rely on idealizing Ireland's most well-known uprising, one that the English brutally suppressed. These representations of the 1798 uprising rely on idealization in order to appeal to

their listeners or inspire any action towards independence. These songs also depend on casting the rebels as folk heroes and not as the criminals that colonial law condemns, though the rebels simultaneously occupy these two positions. This doubleness looks forward to the split in the Sergeant's identity between imperial and nationalist duty at the play's conclusion.

One must remember Yeats's explanation of Irish storytelling and music in order to fully grasp the significance of music's place in the Man's dialogue. Yeats postulates that, "From the moon come the folk-songs imagined by reapers and spinners out of the common impulse of their labor," or that folk-songs emerge from lunar and Celtic influence. Additionally, Yeats predicts that, "When we have drunk the cold cup of the moon's intoxication," or when we have listened to these folk-songs, "we thirst for something beyond ourselves, and the mind flows outward to a natural immensity." This prediction suggests that once one has listened to folk-songs, a sort of transcendence will occur causing one to "flow outward" beyond oneself. In this play, the "flowing outward" that Yeats posits could be the Sergeant's ability to see himself reflected in the Man's ideological narrative. For when he contemplates the Man's words, the Sergeant reaches the ability to imagine himself in the position of a rebel. This exemplifies a newfound ability to step outside his role as an agent of the law and imagine a different identity from, or "beyond" as Yeats phrases it, himself. The concrete and detailed images in this imagined role, such as the specific actions of "hiding in the dark" and "creeping up trying to make my escape," emphasize that the Sergeant is able to imagine himself as another person.

Ultimately though, the Man's efforts to find common ground with the Sergeant are thwarted when the Sergeant realizes the Man's true identity as the wanted patriot. This disruption of their mutual understanding begins the resulting chaos of an interaction between the imperial

system and an ideological version of the folk tradition. The Man's appeal to the Sergeant starts to waver in the following exchange:

MAN: Sergeant, I am thinking it was with the people you were, and not with the law you were, when you were a young man.

SERGEANT: Well, if I was foolish then, that time's gone.

MAN: Maybe sergeant, it comes into your head sometimes, in spite of your belt and your tunic, that it might have been as well for you to have followed Granuaile.

SERGEANT: It's no business of yours what I think.

MAN: Maybe, sergeant, you'll be on the side of the country yet.

SERGEANT: (*Gets off barrel.*) Don't talk to me like that. I have my duties and I know them. (*RM 50*)

In this dialogue, the Man suggests that his story is actually the Sergeants's true past. The Man also pushes his narrative from the hypothetical into reality. This idea distresses the Sergeant so deeply that it forces him off the barrel, thus breaking their symmetrical mirror image. Since their positions enable empathy with each other, it makes sense that when he breaks this positioning the Sergeant loses the ability to relate to the Man. A note of hostility creeps into the Sergeant's dialogue in the line, "It's no business of yours what I think," thus indicating the return of his identity as agent of the law. However, this scene's stage direction places the Sergeant physically below the Man, who is still on the barrel. This new position suggests that the Sergeant is weaker, not the Man. When the Man's true identity as a rebel emerges, it suggests that he has reversed the previous hierarchy of their relationship. Therefore, the Man's transcendence legitimizes and even encourages rebellion against imperial law.

Adrian Frazier emphasizes the impact of stage direction and body language in *The Rising of the Moon*. He commends the realism of Irish actors's understated gestures, and quotes the English critic C. E. Montague's articulation of the Abbey's acting style: "Throughout one-half of

Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* there is scarcely a movement: merely that no one should strut or fret tickles you....They seem all alike to have seized on the truth that the way to do big things in art [...] is to become as little as a child...." (Frazier 236). According to Montague's statement, the overall minimalist movement thrusts any sharp or larger movement into focus, granting it more drama and power than if the actors wildly gestured throughout the whole play (Frazier 236). The effect of this restraint is that the Sergeant's jump from the barrel contrasts sharply with the stillness during their conversation. This contrast emphasizes the dramatic change that has occurred in the hierarchy of their colonial relationship.

The inversion of the colonial model on the stage is only the beginning of the confusion between what is legally "right" and what is morally "right." This confusion emerges from the Sergeant's illegal sympathy for the rebel cause. This conflict appears when the Sergeant's fellow policemen return. The Man pleads with the Sergeant, "You won't betray me.... the friend of Granuaile (*Slips behind barrel*)" (RM 51). Here the Man references Granuaile to connect with the Sergeant. Yeats's logic supports this strategy, for he argues that folk-songs emerge out of a "common impulse," and the Man's reference to Granuaile draws upon this bond of common sympathy for anticolonialism. Significantly, Lady Gregory's stage direction here states that the Man hides behind the barrel, in a way literally using their moment of equality and camaraderie on the barrel to protect him from the law. The Man places himself at the mercy of the Sergeant, who must decide to either turn the Man in or protect the Man's identity out of some sort of respect for their moment of equality. Through allowing the Man's narrative to influence the Sergeant's actions, Lady Gregory recognizes the powerful draw of an idealized folk tradition. However, the play's conclusion complicates the success of this strategy.

During the Sergeant's brief exchange with the other policemen, the play returns to the importance of moonlight in its setting. A policeman says, "Well, we'll leave you the lantern anyhow. (*Hands it to him*)," and the Sergeant replies, "I don't want it. Bring it with you" (*RM* 52). If one recalls moonlight's role as a Celtic influence on this play, then the Sergeant's refusal of an artificial light source suggests an embrace of the idealized folk tradition. A lantern would weaken the moonlight's effect on the play's setting. This embrace of moonlight supports the Sergeant's sympathy for the Man's identity as an Irish patriot and his change in allegiance to the Irish rebellion.

However, this reading ignores the gloomy darkness in which the lack of artificial light leaves the Sergeant. This darkness signifies the moral confusion and ambivalence resulting from his decision to betray his duty. His final moment of speech, addressed to the audience itself, indicates this ambivalence: "I wonder, now, am I as great a fool as I think I am?" (*RM* 53). In this line, the repetition of "wonder," used previously to suggest the Sergeant's grudging respect for the escaped patriot, seems to negate this previous feeling. Where before "wonder" meant "marvel," a more optimistic use of the word, here it signifies his lack of clarity. The interrogative form of this final sentence further emphasizes this. The darkness of the play's set combined with the confusion of his final sentence points to the Sergeant's betrayal of his allegiance to imperial law. The Man's ideology, however attractive, cannot obscure the real consequences of the Sergeant's actions. In the play's final moments, Lady Gregory does not let her audience forget the price of choosing to defy the law. She also demonstrates that the Man's ideology ultimately fails despite its ability to sway the Sergeant's actions. This demonstrates that the folk tradition can be harnessed to anticolonial struggle in powerful ways, but it still fails in converting the

Sergeant fully. Lady Gregory also suggests that the folk tradition will always exceed the politics that attempt to mobilize it.

The Sergeant's final sentence reveals the Man's failure to fully sway the Sergeant. The Sergeant questions whether he is a "fool," not whether he is a rebel or a hero. This suggests that his identity has been shaken and he is not sure if his actions were justifiable or not. This moment poses the question of whether rebellious actions are worth their illegal and violent consequences. Unfortunately for the Sergeant, at this point in the play "right" and "wrong" have been completely destabilized due to his change in allegiance. The act of defying imperial authority and letting the Man escape is correct for a rebel but treason for a Sergeant. As the term "fool" indicates, he does not entirely see himself as either of these identities. His embrace of rebellion has confused his sense of justice, thus making his actions difficult for both him and the audience to judge. The Sergeant's crisis exposes the Celtic folk tradition's resistance to being made entirely ideological. Though it does succeed in pushing him to commit crime, it does not successfully assuage the Sergeant's doubts. Instead, the Man's songs leave the Sergeant in a state of total ambivalence.

The Man's final lines shift to a beautifully idealistic image of a free Ireland: "Maybe I'll be able to do as much for you when the small rise up and the big fall down.... when we all change places at the Rising of the Moon" (*RM* 53). These lines offer a promise of Irish independence from England. The appeal of these lines lies in their simple framing of the transfer of power between Ireland and England. According to the Man, Ireland regaining its freedom will be as simple as Ireland taking a step up and England stepping down. The Man's lines totally ignore the bloodshed and sacrifice required of an organized rebellion, just as his previous story

ignores the complexity of declaring oneself a rebel. The entire struggle for independence is reduced to one single, easily performed action.

However attractive their simplicity, the Man's final lines do not seem to reassure the Sergeant at all about his decision to aid the Man. The audience has no sense whatsoever if the Sergeant is satisfied with breaking the law. That the final line of the play, "I wonder, now, am I as great a fool as I think I am?" (*RM* 53), is a question which will never be answered indicates that Lady Gregory does not necessarily have an answer to this dilemma. However, the Sergeant's insecurity emphasizes that pressing the Celtic folk tradition into a political and ideological role does not ease the difficulty of making these kinds of decisions. The Sergeant's moral ambivalence does not provide the audience with a satisfactory conclusion to the play. The upholding of the law and arrest of the Man, though they are the Sergeant's duty, appear to be morally incorrect. However, his actions supporting Ireland do nothing to alleviate the Sergeant's sense of guilt. This illustrates the failure of the folk tradition to function the way that the Literary Revival intends it to. It brings little comfort when confronted with the difficult ethical choices that the Sergeant faces.

### *A Woman's Perspective*

*Spreading the News* contains a glimpse of Lady Gregory's proposed solution to the issue of idealization. When Bartley's wife, Mrs. Fallon, hears the rumors about her husband being a

murderer, she gives a passionate speech. She directs her address to Mrs. Tully, who has just proposed that Bartley should be hung for his apparent crimes:

I tell you it's too much talk you have, making yourself out to be such a great one, and to be running down every respectable person! A rope, is it? It isn't much of a rope was needed to tie up your own furniture the day you came into Martin Tully's house, and you never bringing as much as a blanket, or a penny, or a suit of clothes, with you and I myself bringing seventy pounds and two feather beds. And now you are stiffer than a woman would have a hundred pounds! It is too much talk the whole of you have. A rope is it? I tell you the whole of this town is full of liars and schemers that would hang you up for half a glass of whiskey. (*SN* 9)

In this passage, Mrs. Fallon exposes the darker underside of her village, where a woman is strictly measured by her dowry. In the image Mrs. Fallon creates, money makes people cruelly superior. This is not an idealized depiction of a pleasant Irish peasantry. Her description does not fit with how the Literary Revival portrays rural Ireland. Mrs. Fallon exhibits greed and violence, and her line, "the whole of this town is full of liars and schemers," reflects the town realistically, for most are scheming for Bartley's death. Mrs. Fallon is the only character in this moment who sees through the rampant rumors about her and understands the material reality of the village's situation.

Significantly, a woman sees through these competing religious and imperial ideologies, not a man. Men dominate each of the plays that this chapter discusses: *The Sergeants*, *Hyacinth Halvey*, *The Man*, *the Magistrate*, *Jack Smith*, *Bartley*, various *Policemen*. In addition, the imperial and Catholic ideologies that Lady Gregory examines are historically patriarchal systems. However, Mrs. Fallon's moment of truth suggests that navigating the dangerous ideologies that these systems perpetuate requires a woman's perspective. Lady Gregory immersed herself in translating Ireland's folklore into English, which provided her with



knowledge of the power of the goddesses and mythic heroines in Celtic mythology. Additionally, her own position as a woman in early twentieth-century Ireland's nationalist movement called Irish gender politics to her attention. Her emphasis on a female perspective in representations of rural Ireland points to another important focus of her literary enterprise: the role of women in Ireland's narrative about itself.

## CHAPTER TWO

## REPRESENTING FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN THE REVIVAL

In his essay, “Regarding Ireland in a Postcolonial Frame,” David Lloyd discusses the duty of “postcolonial *projects*” (Lloyd “Regarding Ireland” 38) to recognize the different historical narratives and radical movements, specifically the social and feminist movements, that existed temporally alongside Ireland’s twentieth-century nationalist movement. He argues that these subaltern or counter-hegemonic narratives are not given the same amount of mainstream historical study as Irish nationalism due to their subversion of the Irish State’s conservative and narrow vision of what an ideal Ireland looked like. He writes:

Yet I would want to suggest that in fact at no moment in the longer course of Irish history—or indeed in virtually any colonial history—are such movements merely arrested. They are, rather, occluded, and fall under the shadow of the new state for, we might say, a moment of hesitation within the course of the struggle. They fall out of visibility or out of representation, which does not mean that they have been successfully truncated or arrested. (Lloyd “Regarding Ireland” 39)

In this passage, Lloyd’s ideas of visibility and representation are essential for understanding Lady Gregory’s greater dramatic enterprise. For if her contemporary plays—*Hyacinth Halvey*, *Spreading the News*, and *The Rising of the Moon*—expose the inherent flaws in Catholicism, colonial law, and the use of the Irish folk tradition, then her plays, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), co-written with Yeats, and *The Gaol Gate* (1906), focus on the ways that women’s experiences

are written out of nationalist narratives. In these plays, Lady Gregory makes visible a feminist narrative usually sidelined by the narrow focus of mainstream Irish nationalism.

Though female figures such as Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz are certainly visible in Irish history, they are represented as heroes because their politics match the Revival's vision for the country. Rather than focus on the already-visible women of her own class, in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Gaol Gate* Lady Gregory examines a different type of woman typically overlooked in plays about Irish history: the peasant wife. *Hyacinth Halvey* shows that Lady Gregory had an early interest in the peasant wife, for she wrote one of the play's longest and most emotionally engaging speeches for Bartley's wife, Mrs. Fallon. However, in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Gaol Gate*, Lady Gregory allows herself to explore more deeply how the nationalist movement both perceives and uses the figure of the peasant wife for its own ends, much in the same way it politicized and used the Irish folk tradition. Furthermore, in *The Gaol Gate*, Lady Gregory examines the emotional and material cost that women paid for the nationalist movement's patriarchal violence while also exploring unique modes of female expression and protest in the face of such circumstances. In many ways, these plays act just as Lloyd's postcolonial projects do, seeking to recover narratives that have fallen "under the shadow of the new state," and that challenge the Irish patriarchal norms of Lady Gregory's time.

### *Ireland's Female Cycle of Birth and Death*

Before delving into the complexities of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, it is necessary to note that this play has not always been properly credited to Lady Gregory, but instead was usually viewed as

one of Yeats's most popular and successful plays. It is still contested as to how much of *Cathleen* Lady Gregory and Yeats wrote respectively. Colm Tóibín answers this question of authorship decisively, claiming:

It is now absolutely clear that the play... *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, though credited to Yeats, was written largely by Lady Gregory. The idea belonged to Yeats and Yeats wrote the chant of the old woman at the end. But he could not write peasant dialogue, and the play depends on the naturalistic setting, the talk of money and marriage, the sense of ease in family life in a smallholding... Although Yeats gave Lady Gregory some public credit for this collaboration, he never acknowledged the extent of her work on *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. (Tóibín 45-46)

Nicholas Grene supports Tóibín's certainty in the above passage. He also cites the style of dialogue as proof of Lady Gregory's authorship, and cites the same archival evidence as Tóibín to back up his claim:

‘All this mine alone’, wrote Gregory assertively of the first scene of the play up to and including the entrance of Kathleen on the earliest surviving draft. Even without such evidence, this draft was easily identified as hers, with its concrete characterisation of the peasant family.... This is a Gregory genre scene with the typical concerns of the Irish country family etched in. (Grene 64)

Additionally, Marjorie Howes chooses to describe *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as “written collaboratively by Yeats and Lady Gregory” (Howes 74), though she focuses on it primarily as a part of Yeats's work. Susan Cannon Harris takes the middle ground, stating, “But while Yeats never again produced anything quite like *Cathleen ni Houlihan*—and while, depending on whose account one believes, some, most, or all of this play was actually written by Lady Gregory....” (Harris 28). Therefore, there is a scholarly consensus that Lady Gregory had an active role in collaborating with Yeats to write each part of the play, not simply the first scene. Once identified as an early work in Lady Gregory's career, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* provides meaningful insight into her early artistic concerns. This play, first performed in 1902 for the

official opening of the Abbey Theatre to the Dublin public, defines the rest of her work as a playwright.

*Cathleen ni Houlihan*<sup>7</sup> opens with an emphasis on the material reality of an Irish peasant's domestic space, a space highly idealized by the wider Irish cultural revival and the nationalist movement. However, Lady Gregory does not dwell on romantic generalizations about the Irish peasantry, but instead places the household's financial concerns at the forefront of the scene. Bridget—the woman of the house, Peter's wife, and mother of the groom-to-be, Michael—conveys this economic reality to the audience. Her first line in the play focuses on "Michael's wedding clothes," (CNH 3) which she later explains are far nicer than her husband's were at their own wedding. She complains to Peter, "You hadn't clothes like that when you married me, and no coat to put on of a Sunday more than any other day" (CNH 3). These lines expose both Bridget's awareness of the clothes' signification of increased affluence and her own resentment of the poverty into which her marriage to Peter placed her. As the remainder of the play shows, this concern with economic security and poverty becomes a central part of Bridget's character.

Lady Gregory stresses the difficulty of Bridget's position as a housewife in her longest moment of speech in the play:

BRIDGET: Well, if I didn't bring much I didn't get much. What had you the day I married you but a flock of hens and you feeding them, and a few lambs and you driving them to the market at Ballina? [*She is vexed and bangs a jug on the dresser.*] If I brought no fortune I worked it out in my bones, laying down the baby, Michael that is standing there now, on a stook of straw, while I dug the potatoes, and never asking big dresses or anything but to be working. (CNH 4)

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<sup>7</sup> Abbreviation: CNH: *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), Gregory

This passage outlines the specific hardships that Bridget faces as a poor peasant housewife while simultaneously illuminating society's expectations for women of her class. Her opening line, "Well, if I didn't bring much I didn't get much," highlights how heavily economic exchange influences marriage, for it establishes the quality of life that a married peasant couple will have. Since Bridget "brought no fortune" into her marriage, she was forced to create revenue from the only thing she possessed: her body. The phrase, "I worked it out in my bones," evokes an image of Bridget birthing profit out of her skeleton, the very architecture of her being. In producing from the body, Bridget does not have the luxury of turning raw materials into a product. Instead, she embodies every stage of production, acting as both the laborer and the raw material. Though birth is a common way to discuss a woman's productive role in society, Bridget's phrase contains none of the typical language regarding fruitfulness or joy associated with maternity. It instead refers bitterly to the birthing process as "work," the same word she uses to talk about digging the potatoes. She specifies Michael, her son, as the "fortune" she produces; however, there is nothing organic or loving in the language that she uses to refer to him. Bridget identifies a different, unpleasant sort of female labor as displacing the maternal. According to Bridget, she sees producing Michael as containing nothing as delightful as "big dresses or anything" in it for her own private profit and enjoyment. Significantly, there is no mention of her husband, Peter, in this description of reproductive and agricultural labor. Bridget's language casts her as producing for her family all on her own, both granting her power while also placing immense responsibility for the family's success entirely on her.

Peter's response to Bridget's tirade further emphasizes the importance of money and exchange to their relationship: "You are the best woman in Ireland, but money is good,

too” (CNH 5). According to his response, regardless of Bridget’s value as his wife, money will always be equally and perhaps more valuable to him. Therefore, economic concerns transcend emotional ties in this family. Both Bridget’s speech and Peter’s response illustrate the difficult familial role that peasant women occupied in rural Ireland. Through Bridget, Lady Gregory suggests that women were judged entirely by what they could produce from both their own bodies and their land, with little profit or pleasure to keep for themselves. Peter and Bridget’s fixation with their daughter-in-law’s dowry complicates the Irish nationalist vision of a happy and prosperous rural western Ireland. This family is not sitting around their hearth telling Irish stories, singing traditional Irish music, nor even speaking the Irish language. Instead they are discussing their son’s upcoming marriage as if it is a business transaction. Lady Gregory’s alternative narrative provides a more authentic portrait of the rural Irish, one concerned with representing their lives realistically and respectfully. In no way does this portrait suit a propagandistic nationalist agenda.

Joy Richmond’s discussion of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and its treatment of female characters aids our understanding of the way in which Lady Gregory offers a critique of the Irish Literary Revival’s representation of women. Richmond identifies two common types of female characters in Irish drama during Lady Gregory’s time: “woman and land” and “woman at the hearth” (Richmond 19). Richmond identifies Bridget and Delia, Michael’s fiancée who appears at the play’s conclusion, as women at the hearth (Richmond 26). Richmond explains that the ideals of the Irish Revival “also defined the role of the peasant farmer’s wife: her place was within the home as wife and mother, as domestic support for her husband and rearer of Ireland’s future—the children who would continue Irish civilization” (Richmond 23). Though Bridget

does fit this type, her negative and bitter language certainly complicates and resists her role as “rearer of Ireland’s future.” Bridget is much more concerned with her family’s financial well-being than with the greater good of Ireland. Lady Gregory’s representation of a woman who opposes the ideals of the Irish Literary Revival disrupts the movement’s vision of the peasant wife’s role. Ultimately, Lady Gregory exposes the Revival’s ideals as nothing more than ideological generalizations.

However, Lady Gregory does not stop at critiquing just one of the ways that the Irish Literary Revival commonly portrayed women. *Cathleen ni Houlihan* also contains an examination of the other female character type identified by Richmond, the “woman and land.” The figure of the Poor Old Woman, or the Shean Bhan Bhocht as she is known in the Irish language, appears as “the symbolic, embodiment of Ireland, who tells the story of Ireland in metaphoric terms” (Richmond 25). In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Cathleen first appears as an old woman before transforming into a beautiful young woman, so she embodies the Shean Bhan Bhocht figure at the beginning of the play. Her exchange with Bridget and Peter best displays her metaphoric language:

BRIDGET: It is a wonder you are not worn out with so much wandering.

OLD WOMAN: Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When the people see me quiet, they think old age has come on me and that all the stir has gone out of me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking to my friends.

BRIDGET: What was it put you wandering?

OLD WOMAN: Too many strangers in the house.

BRIDGET: Indeed you look as if you’d had your share of trouble.

OLD WOMAN: I have had trouble indeed.

BRIDGET: What was it put the trouble on you?

OLD WOMAN: My land that was taken from me.

PETER: Was it much land they took from you?

OLD WOMAN: My four beautiful green fields. (CNH 7)



In this dialogue, the Old Woman's responses make little sense if she is not the allegorical figure of Ireland speaking of its years of British colonization, or of having "too many strangers in the house." Here, the phrase "four beautiful green fields" refers to the four provinces of Ireland: Connacht, Munster, Leinster, and Ulster. Her claim that "all the stir" has not gone out of her when "the trouble" is upon her holds a promise to the audience that Ireland still has the strength for a revolution. This symbolic and coded language would have been easily understood by a nationalist audience, which was precisely the audience for which *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was first performed for in April of 1902 at the Abbey Theatre's opening.

Mary Trotter explains the Abbey Theatre's awareness of its audience's politics and how this awareness contributes to *Cathleen's* dramatic power. Trotter explains:

In both *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *Deirdre*, the audience saw actors they recognized as activists, like Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, Dudley Digges, and Æ. Thus, the actor's body carried a triple signification in performance: character being played, actor playing the character, and activist taking on the task of acting as both political and artistic labor....When [Maud] Gonne appeared on stage as the poor old woman calling the men of Ireland to die for her protection and freedom, they naturally heard the echoes of her years of similar calls to Ireland's men and women in her political activism. (Trotter "Imagining" 23)

The brilliant casting of Gonne contributes yet another layer of signification to the figure Cathleen. Not only does she represent an oppressed Ireland, but she also harnesses Gonne's significance as a hero of the nationalist movement and women's suffrage. Through this casting, the Poor Old Woman comes to possess both the power of an ancient history of dogged rebellion and the contemporary nationalist movement's own power, which had been building since the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893.

Lady Gregory reinforces the Poor Old Woman's power through her language, which consistently breaks out of regular prose into verse. The Poor Old Woman slips into song at five different moments during this short one-act play, thus suggesting that her message cannot be contained in ordinary dialogue. This invocation of song calls back to the ancient bards of the Celtic folk tradition, who gained power from composing their verses. Additionally, when the Poor Old Woman does speak in prose, her speech is heavy with repetition. For example, we see repetition of "give me" in her line, "If anyone would give me help, he must give me himself, he must give me all" (*CNH* 8) and the repetition of "I must" in the lines, "I must be going to meet my friends. They are coming to help me and I must be there to welcome them. I must call the neighbors together to welcome them" (*CNH* 9). The repetition in her language acts as a sort of refrain to her speech, connecting her language to music instead of ordinary conversation. This repetition also creates a hypnotic effect in her speech, thus casting Cathleen as a siren-like figure calling young men to sacrifice themselves to her.

This repetition returns in the Poor Old Woman's final song to Michael, which reads as more of a chant than a proper song:

They shall be remembered for ever,  
 They shall be alive for ever,  
 They shall be speaking for ever,  
 The people shall hear them for ever....  
 They shall be speaking for ever,  
 The people shall hear them for ever. (*CNH* 10-11)

This song, with its consistent repetition of "They shall" and "for ever," itself repeats as a whole, for it appears once towards the end of the play, is interrupted by dialogue between Bridget and her family members, and then repeats again at the very conclusion of the play when Cathleen

persuades Michael to follow her. This return of the song creates a cyclical rhythm in Cathleen's speech and creates a feeling of inevitability. The song's return suggests that Cathleen will always return to entice more young men to her cause, so as long as Ireland remains colonized.

Additionally, the song includes different temporalities, with "shall" implying the future, forever implying eternity, and "be remembered" implying the past. This inclusion of all of Ireland's time lends itself to the way that the song evokes inevitability. The temporality suggests that Ireland will go through this cycle of sacrifice and death for all of eternity, or until Ireland is freed from England. The repetitive mentioning of sacrifice also speaks to the innumerable young men who did and who will sacrifice their lives for Irish freedom. This song reminds its audience successfully of the unrelenting necessity for further blood sacrifice for Ireland's freedom.

Moreover, the breaking of the repetition in the song to include "The people" as the subject instead of "They" emphasizes the fact that the people, or the nation of Ireland, will make these countless sacrifices meaningful through speaking about them and hearing stories told about them. The specific phrase "the people shall hear them for ever" emphasizes the oral transmission of these stories, most likely through songs such as this one. The shift from "They" to "the people" works to remind the song's audience of the nation's duty in romanticizing and eulogizing in oral tradition the men who have sacrificed themselves for Ireland. In many ways, the promise of honor and glory after death works to lure men to Cathleen's cause just as much as the hypnotic, siren-like elements of her song. Lady Gregory's almost excessive use of repetition certainly points to the sheer determination of the Irish nationalist movement and its oath to always rise up against English colonial domination. However, the Poor Old Woman's chanting and metaphorical language also serves to contrast how very different a woman like Bridget is

from a woman like Cathleen. Through these two characters, Lady Gregory contrasts the ways that women work as symbols with the material realities of peasant women.

Richmond articulates the problems that these specific portrayals of women cause: “....while many (if not most of these plays) reinforced the woman’s place in the home, they also often revealed an irreconcilability between the ideal expressed in the nationalist construction and the reality of peasant life, most notably for women” ( Richmond 25). This irreconcilability defines Bridget’s relationship to Cathleen. In many ways, Cathleen is an abstraction, for she speaks in song and symbols, and her primary goal is to seduce men to her cause.<sup>8</sup> In exploring these two versions of Irish womanhood, Lady Gregory invites the question of how an everyday woman like Bridget, concerned with supporting her peasant family, is supposed to participate and believe in the Irish Revival. Through Cathleen and Bridget, Lady Gregory points to the disconnect between the history of women as political symbols and women’s material history in Ireland.

The play concludes with Michael following Cathleen out of his family home, deaf to the cries of his mother and fiancé. His younger brother, Patrick, remarks that he does not see an old woman leaving the house. Instead, in the final line of the play, he remarks, “I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen” (*CNH* 11). The language in this line further emphasizes the weird impossible identity that Cathleen inhabits. In this moment, a magical transformation has occurred, thus transforming the play’s conclusion from realist to gothic. The phrase “the walk of a queen” is a direct quote from Lady Gregory’s translation of the Irish myth

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<sup>8</sup> Tanya Dean makes a similar argument when she writes, “Figures like Hibernia and Cathleen Ní Houlihan serve as a key example of Marina Warner’s theory of how public representations of women are usually mythic or allegorical, while those of men are of historical figures” (Dean 79).

“Midhir and Etain” (*Gods and Fighting Men* 73), which she translated into English in her collection of folklore. In this story, Etain is a beautiful woman who seduces the king of the Tuatha de Danaan, Midhir, causing him to leave his wife and live with her. Just like the Poor Old Woman, Etain disrupts the domestic order, calling a husband away from his family. In invoking the ancient Celtic story, Lady Gregory firmly places Cathleen in the realm of myth, a sphere totally separate from the material reality that Bridget inhabits.

However, rather than treating this mythological transformation as superior to and more important than the drudgery of Bridget’s life, Lady Gregory carefully exposes the violence inherent in Cathleen’s message. No matter how enticing her songs are, the sacrifice that the Poor Old Woman asks of Michael and the rest of her followers is unquestionably their death. Lady Gregory does nothing to hide this fact, but rather has the Poor Old Woman explicitly name “yellow-haired Donough that was hanged in Galway....He died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me” (*CNH* 7) and repeat twice the warning that “Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked” (*CNH* 9-10). Additionally, every time that she breaks into song, she sings about blood sacrifice and death. Tanya Dean provides the historical context for the specific setting of the play, Killala in 1798, explaining, “Yet Killala was a notoriously grim failure in the history of the Irish revolution....In actuality, [Michael] would have been part of an inglorious loss for the Irish forces, and would almost certainly have been subjected to ruthless punishment and most likely execution” (Dean 79). According to Dean, Michael would have been an unnecessary martyr for the Irish cause, providing a literal blood sacrifice to Cathleen. Harris asserts that a sacrifice like Michael’s “was an important motif in Irish literature throughout the Irish literary revival,” and, “reached its high point, perhaps, in the rhetoric of Pearse and the

1916 Easter Uprising” (Harris 3). Lady Gregory indicates that the death of Ireland’s young men is necessary for Cathleen’s transformation from the Poor Old Woman to the young girl with the “walk of a queen.” However, Lady Gregory’s emphasis on how little Michael’s death will matter in the liberation of Ireland invites her audience to question the worth of this sacrifice.

According to the Literary Revival’s expectations for women, the peasant wife should accept and even encourage her son’s sacrifice. As the mother of her family, Bridget should produce more men to keep the sacrificial cycle in motion, just as she should keep growing potatoes to keep her sons strong and ready to fight. Her life is reduced to supporting the anticolonial struggle and Irish nationalism. The two women, Cathleen and Bridget, create a cyclical relationship of production and destruction, with peasant wives like Bridget producing young men and Cathleen leading them to their deaths. This ideological view of women reduces them down to their reproductive, maternal, and agricultural capacities, seeing them as means of production instead of individual women. However, Lady Gregory complicates this view in her dissatisfied characterization of Bridget, who Lady Gregory places at the very forefront of the play before Cathleen ever takes the stage. Bridget’s protest about being reduced to her ability to produce sons is even more central at the play’s conclusion, when she yells for Michael to return to the house and ignore Cathleen (*CNH* 10-11).

Through Bridget, Lady Gregory does not allow her audience to accept easily the ways that nationalism reduces women to their abilities to produce. Instead, Lady Gregory exposes the hardships of Irish peasant wives as a critique of this narrow vision of the worth of women. Additionally, in destabilizing the figure of Cathleen, the allegorical figure of Ireland, Lady Gregory levels a serious critique at the sacrifice of young men that the nationalist movement

requires. The play's conclusion features the stage direction of: "[BRIDGET takes DELIA, who is crying silently, into her arms.]" (CNH 11). This moment highlights the tragedy, loss, and pain that Bridget and Delia face in losing Michael to Cathleen. Lady Gregory leaves her audience with the question of what happens to peasant women like Bridget and Delia. By ending a supposed triumph for the nationalist movement—the willing sacrifice of Michael—on such a tragic note, Lady Gregory challenges both the Revival's need for the death of Ireland's young men and its poor treatment of Ireland's peasant women.

### *The Peasant Wife's Keen*

In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Lady Gregory leaves Bridget and Delia without the very thing that defines their positions in Ireland's patriarchal society: in Delia's case, the man she marries, and in Bridget's case, the son she produces. In *Cathleen*, Lady Gregory does not take the time to explore the fate of these women after the death of the man central to their lives. However, in *The Gaol Gate* she devotes an entire play to peasant women in this very predicament. A play entirely focused on the lives of two poor, ordinary Irish peasant women was rare for Lady Gregory's time. In her essay, "Translating Women into Irish Theatre History," Mary Trotter comments on the lack of multidimensional female characters in Irish drama. She says, "And from Yeats and Gregory's *Kathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) to McDonagh's virgin/whore 'Girleen' in *The Lonesome West* (1997), Irish female characters have embodied the nation, the land, the desires or responsibilities of male characters, but rarely have they been authentic, complex, autonomous women" (Trotter "Translating" 601). According to Trotter, Irish playwrights almost never

considered women independently from men, or even outside their role in the nuclear family. However, as my analysis of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* suggests, Lady Gregory was pondering this issue even as she helped to write and produce various plays for the Abbey Theatre that ignore women altogether, such as *The Rising of the Moon* and *Hyacinth Halvey*.

It is not until Lady Gregory wrote *The Gaol Gate*, which was first performed in 1906, that she found the space to devote an entire play to the character of the peasant wife. *The Gaol Gate* tells the story of a mother, Mary Cahel, and her daughter-in-law, Mary Cushin, who travel to Galway by themselves to see Denis, Mary Cahel's son and Mary Cushin's husband, who has been imprisoned with his friends for committing some unspecified crime against the English. Upon arrival, the two women learn that Denis has been hanged as a criminal and buried before they are able to reach him. In this play, Lady Gregory considers what it truly means for a peasant woman to exist independently from her husband in early twentieth-century Ireland. She explores both the feelings of loss that do not fit into the nationalist narrative of necessary sacrifice and the ways that women express their interior experiences of this loss. Through each woman's moment of keening, Lady Gregory reveals the shortcomings in the nationalist movement's transformation of young men into martyrs for independence. Ultimately, she exposes nationalist ideology's inability to ease the bleak reality that women face when their husbands and sons die for Ireland.

Before delving into Lady Gregory's treatment of the two peasant women, it is important to note the specificity of their physical location. Lady Gregory places them, "Outside the gate of Galway Gaol," and in the first line of the play, Mary Cahel says, "I am thinking we are come to our journey's end" (*GG* 92).<sup>9</sup> This locates the two women decidedly outside of the domestic

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<sup>9</sup> Abbreviation: *GG*: *The Gaol Gate* (1906), Gregory



sphere and in a public space, already making them different from most female characters in Irish drama during Lady Gregory's time. This is also a liminal space, signifying their change in status from stationary housewife to traveling woman. These women are neither of Richmond's female character types—the “woman at the hearth” nor “woman and land”—but instead exhibit their independent mobility and control, for they have already completed their own journey before the play's beginning. Dawn Duncan remarks on the power that these women hold in the play's narrative: “It is the women who are on the journey; it is they who are sorely tired, emerge alive, and bring back the boon to the community.... In fact, the women are at the core of the action; they are the heroes” (Duncan 138). Duncan goes on to argue that in *The Gaol Gate* Lady Gregory proposes “a middle road” where her female characters fulfill the requirements of a hero-archetype while simultaneously resisting “one universal pattern in [their] particular femininity” (Duncan 133). Thus, Lady Gregory makes the peasant wife the protagonist of her play in a way rarely explored by her literary contemporaries.

In the beginning of the play, Lady Gregory is also quick to place these women in the space of oral culture, a tradition that Angela Bourke asserts lies outside of “the mainstream of male-dominated literary endeavour,” or written literature (Bourke 287). Mary Cahel laments, “Isn't it a great pity for the two of us to be without learning at all?” (*GG* 93), confirming that these women are illiterate. Therefore, these women exist in an Irish cultural tradition that lies entirely outside of the written word. This stands as a counterpoint to the Sergeant in *Hyacinth Halvey*, who is so devoted to written testimonials about Halvey that they cloud his perception of reality. Bourke describes Irish culture as inherently feminine due the customs surrounding keening, an oral tradition of Irish lament poetry composed primarily by women (Bourke 287).

Lady Gregory represents the keens that Mary Cushin and Mary Cahel compose upon learning the details of Denis's death, and the contrast between these two different lamentations exposes the failure of nationalism's romanticized ideologies when dealing with moments of violent loss. Mary Cushin's keen comes first, before they find out that Denis died because he refused to inform on his fellow comrades to the English. Without this key information, Mary Cushin believes that Denis has tarnished his family name forever and has left her to deal with the consequences:

MARY CUSHIN: (*Who has sunk on to the step before the door, rocking herself and keening.*) Oh Denis, my heart is broken you to have died with the hard word upon you! My grief you to be alone now that spent so many nights in company!

What way will I be going back through Gort and through Kilbecanty? The people will not be coming out keening you, they will say no prayer for the rest of your soul!

What way will I be the Sunday and I going up the hill to the Mass? Every woman with her own comrade, and Mary Cushin to be walking her lone!

What way will I be the Monday and the neighbours turning their heads from the house? The turf Denis cut lying on the bog, and no well-wisher to bring it to the hearth!

What way will I be in the night time, and none but the dog calling after you? Two women to be mixing a cake, and not a man in the house to break it!

What way will I sow the field, and no man to drive the furrow? The sheaf to be scattered before springtime that was brought together at the harvest!

I would not begrudge you Denis, and you leaving praises after you. The neighbours keening along with me would be better to me than an estate.

But my grief your name to be blackened in the time of the blackening of the rushes! Your name never to rise up again in the growing time of the year! (GG 95)

Though this keen opens with genuine grief, worded with the typical expression, “Oh Denis, my heart is broken,” the focus of the keen quickly shifts to Denis’s “blackened” name in his community and the very tangible consequences it will have on Mary Cushin and her child. These kind of material, everyday consequences are typically written out of history, but Lady Gregory brings them to her audience’s attention and asserts their importance. In this keen, Mary Cushin shifts from worrying about the state of Denis’s soul—“they will say no prayer for the rest of your soul!”—to lamenting how she and her child will be affected by his crimes, focusing primarily on how the workings of her household will be disrupted. She points to the fact that if no man will bring in the turf to warm their home, she will be required to step outside her specific gender role and bring it in herself. This transgression of gender expectations returns again in her observation, “What way will I sow the field, and no man to drive the furrow?” Without a man, her household will cease all material production unless she either remarries or does the work herself. In her final line, the phrase “your name never to rise up again” points to her inability to produce sons without her husband, thus eliminating her own way of reproducing for the benefit of her household. Without Denis, her ability to produce for her family in every sense is eradicated. Lady Gregory does not allow her audience the luxury of ignoring the difficult position that the death of her husband places Mary Cushin in. Thus, Lady Gregory critiques the practice of silencing this everyday experience of loss in dominant representations of history.

Tragically, the harsh judgement from the members of her community suggest that no man will be eager to marry Mary Cushin due to her husband’s blackened name. She therefore is left with almost no options and a child to care for. Though her keen does point to a sort of female-run household in the line, “Two women to be mixing a cake, and not a man in the house to break it!”

her obvious anguish at the thought of this way of life negates it as a viable option. Lady Gregory does not provide any sort of solution to Mary Cushin's keening, thus reinforcing the tragedy of her situation and suggesting that there is no way out of her predicament. Lady Gregory uses Mary Cushin's keen to illustrate the harsh reality, free from any sort of romanticization, that peasant wives face when their husbands are killed fighting for their country.

The tragedy is exacerbated by the revelation from the Gatekeeper at Galway's Gaol that Denis "is buried since yesterday in the field belonging to the gaol" (GG 96). At this news, which confirms that Denis was not given proper burial rites, Mary Cushin's agony intensifies. She calls upon divine retribution for the wrongs against her and her husband:

MARY CUSHIN: O Denis, was it they that made an end of you and not the great God at all? His curse and my own curse upon them that did not let you die on the pillow! The curse of God be fulfilled that was on them before they were born! My curse upon them that brought harm on you, and on Terry Fury that fired the shot! (GG 96)

According to Bourke, Mary Cushin's intense anger in this passage is perfectly justified, for, "[t]o bury a body, even that of a total stranger, unlamented, was to show it no more honour than one would to a horse or a cow" (Bourke 290). Mary Cushin explicitly demands justice and retribution for this injustice, invoking "The curse of God" and "my curse," or her own power as a woman, to right this wrong. Mary Cushin's keen links her to the lamentation of the ancient Greek tragic hero Antigone, who protests her brother's improper burial. The connection to Antigone has a material history. At the end of September 1906, the same year *The Gaol Gate* was first produced, Yeats and Lady Gregory discussed having her son, Robert, translate *Antigone* for the Abbey's

stage.<sup>10</sup> Though *Antigone* was never produced at the Abbey, the Abbey's playwrights were discussing its potential for an Irish audience.

Antigone engages in political protest similar to Irish keening when her brother is killed as a traitor to Thebes and left "unwept, untombed," (Sophocles 22) or without the proper death rites of Ancient Greece. Antigone's protest reveals the failure of the state, or polis as it was known in Ancient Greece, to account for personal and familial ties in a political sphere. In Sophocles's play, Antigone decides to bury her traitor brother even though she knows that Creon, the king of Thebes, has outlawed this act. When Creon confronts her about her crime against the polis, she owns her actions, replying plainly, "I knew—of course I knew. The word was plain" (Sophocles 37). When Creon asks why she broke the law with full knowledge that she was going against Creon's decree, Antigone replies:

For me it was not Zeus who made that order.  
Nor did that Justice who lives with the gods below  
mark out such laws to hold mankind.  
Nor did I think your orders were so strong  
that you, a mortal man, could overrun  
the gods' unwritten and unfailing laws. (Sophocles 37)

In this passage, Antigone points to the separate spheres that the law and the divine inhabit. For Antigone, the right to bury her brother does not lie in Creon's authority at all. Instead, Antigone views family life as governed by the gods, not a mere "mortal man." She does not allow Creon and the polis to interfere with her familial right to bury her brother. Antigone's language in this moment parallels Mary Cushin's keen in that Mary Cushin also recognizes a divide between God

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<sup>10</sup> According to Clark and McGuire in *W.B. Yeats: The Writing of Sophocles' King Oedipus*, a discussion of potentially producing *Antigone* is recorded in W.B. Yeats's letters with J.M. Synge and Lady Gregory from August and September of 1906.

and “they that made an end of you,” or the Irish policemen in the Galway gaol. Both women argue that the divine and the personal are not subsumed and subordinated to the political. They protest the ways that the state has unfairly interfered in their familial relationships.

In addition to the connection with Antigone, Mary Cushin and Mary Cahel’s names connect them to the Virgin Mary and her lamentation of Christ, a Christian story that Bourke states many Irish peasants see as keening’s origin (Bourke 290). In enacting a ritual that extends back to Ancient Greek tragedy and the Gospel, Lady Gregory inserts Mary Cushin into a female tradition of protesting wrongs that patriarchal authority—enacted through State power in both Antigone and the Virgin Mary’s cases—have committed. Keening allows these women to express their grief and anger in a mode outside of patriarchal authority and even, as David Lloyd argues, outside of modernity (Lloyd “Closing” 59). Lloyd discusses how the primary strategy that the English used to subjugate the Irish was through “the subordination of that most undisciplined of Irish orifices, the mouth” (Lloyd “Closing” 60). The Great Famine, a form of colonial violence, resulted in the loss and destruction of the Irish language and Irish oral culture. By participating in oral expression, Mary Cushin subverts this history of oppression and calls back to an earlier time when Irish oral culture prospered. In the only way available to her—her voice—Mary Cushin rebels against the English just as her husband and the rest of the nationalist movement does. However, her female mode of rebellion is not legitimized by the Irish nationalist movement in the way a formal military revolt would be. As her keen indicates, the tragic material reality of her husband’s death far outweighs any satisfaction she gains from her keen’s “curse” of protest.

In placing Mary Cahel’s keen soon after Mary Cushin’s, Lady Gregory invites a comparison between the two women’s emotional expressions. Mary Cahel’s keen responds to the

news that Denis was killed because his footprint was identified at the scene of the crime, but that his comrades were all set free because Denis refused to inform on them (*GG* 96). This news eradicates any “blackening,” of his name and restores his reputation in the community. Though Mary Cahel’s keen mimics Mary Cushin’s in form, it differs dramatically in content. Rather than lamenting the death of her son, as Irish death rituals require, her keen declares her son a hero for the Irish nationalist cause. Her eulogy begins with a call for recognition from the community, ordering, “Tell it out in the streets for the people to hear, Denis Cahel from Slieve Echtge is dead. It was Denis Cahel from Daire-caol that died in the place of his neighbor!” (*GG* 96). Mary Cahel’s demand for public recognition of his sacrifice aligns with Susan Cannon Harris’s own analysis of the mechanics of sacrifice in Irish drama. According to Harris, Irish nationalist sacrifice “requires, also, a female counterpart—the mother/wife/lover who accepts the sacrifice and whose body can then fulfill the more ‘natural’ role of transforming that death into a rebirth” (Harris 4). Mary Cahel fulfills this role perfectly, unlike the grief-stricken and unaccepting Mary Cushin, who focuses on Denis’s death rather than his rebirth.

Mary Cahel’s eulogy progresses from calling for public recognition to idealizing Denis wildly. She exaggerates his characteristics until he becomes a heroic symbol separated from his real self: “It is he was young and comely and strong, the best reaper and the best hurler” (*GG* 97). This repetition of superlatives mimics the Sergeant in *Hyacinth Halvey*, who prefers the Halvey hyperbolically represented in testimonials over the criminal Halvey of reality. Mary Cahel pushes her idealization further, claiming, “Gather up, Mary Cushin, the clothes for your child; they’ll be wanted by this one and that one. The boys crossing the sea in the springtime will be craving a thread for a memory” (*GG* 97). His mother canonizes him, making him a saint, for

she asserts that the threads from his clothing function as holy relics do—physical fragments of a dead saint that contain religious power simply from once being worn by him. However, Mary Cahel’s language betrays that she does not stop at comparing Denis to a saint. She claims, “One word to the judge and Denis was free, they offered him all sorts of riches. They brought him drink in the gaol, and gold, to swear away the life of his neighbor” (*GG* 97). This narrative parallels the story of Satan’s temptation of Christ in the desert. Therefore, Mary Cahel draws the connection between Denis’s temptation and sacrifice for his comrades and Christ’s own temptation and crucifixion. This comparison is perhaps the highest form of idealization that Mary Cahel can create, and it completely ignores Mary Cushin’s previous raw grief. If Denis’s death is as glorious and Christ-like as Mary Cahel asserts, then any pain over his death appears unnecessary and even selfish. Of course, the narrative about the police offering Denis riches simply cannot be true, but that fact does nothing to inhibit Mary Cahel’s wild idealization. In this moment, truth about Denis disappears, and he is replaced by an imagined messianic figure.

In many ways, Mary Cahel’s eulogy treats the dead as various forms of Irish nationalism do, indicating that nationalist politics has co-opted her *keen*, a mode of expression that is supposed to be specifically a women’s cultural form. Nationalist politics transforms tragedy into celebration, ignores the material consequences of the severe loss of men in Ireland, and frames martyrdom for Ireland as an honor to be attained rather than a violent end to avoid. Mainstream Irish nationalism depends on this ideology in order to continue its militant resistance of colonial domination, for the price of gaining independence and decolonization is the death of many Irish men. However, Lady Gregory’s inclusion of Mary Cushin’s *keen* resists this ideology. Though the play apparently ends on Mary Cahel’s triumphant exclamation, “Denis Cahel died for his



neighbor!” (GG 97), her eulogy does not offer any solutions to the fracturing of Mary Cushin’s household and her obvious emotional pain. Lady Gregory does not allow Mary Cushin’s tragic pain to be written out of her plays in favor of Mary Cahel’s uplifting keen. Mary Cushin’s keen resists, as David Lloyd suggests, the ways that similar subaltern histories are overlooked in favor of Irish mainstream nationalism. Even though Denis can now be praised as a hero, Mary Cushin is still left with next to no options for maintaining her household’s material demands aside from remarrying. Her son will grow up never knowing his father, and she has lost the man that she loves. No amount of idealization nor the canonization of Denis can alleviate the persistence of this loss.

### *Women’s Alternative Expressions*

Through the peasant wives that she first introduces in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and then later explores in *The Gaol Gate*, Lady Gregory proposes keening as a uniquely female way of protesting the situations into which the male-dominated nationalist movement has forced these women. Though they are in some ways powerless to act against their positions of loss and poverty, keening at least allows peasant wives the outlet to voice their experiences. Harris comments on the ways that women are not permitted to be historical actors in nationalist sacrifice, arguing, “Within the confines of that tradition, women are not symbolically eligible for the role of sacrificial victim, and playwrights are reluctant to allow them to fill it” (Harris 3). If peasant wives are not allowed to die for their country, then other than keening there exists no real female participation in Ireland’s independence movement, whether that participation be political

or military. The only other option would be to act as a real-life Cathleen figure, but Lady Gregory exposes this figure as little more than a vehicle for political and male-dictated ideals, not a woman grounded in Ireland's material realities.

This restriction on female involvement in Irish politics affects Lady Gregory herself, though she does have far more privilege than a peasant wife as a member of the Protestant Ascendancy. Still, as a woman she must participate in male-dominated politics differently, and is even belittled when she contributes to the patriarchal world of Irish drama. In a way, her own plays act as Mary Cushin's keen does, exposing the oppression and exclusion she faces as a woman participating in a male-dominated career. Lady Gregory's protest, conveyed through the figure of the peasant wife, begs the question of whether alternative avenues of female participation in the Irish nationalist movement exist—avenues that do not involve highly abstracted, Cathleen-like figures or tragic peasant wives keening their lost loved ones. In her later folk-history plays, *Grania* (published 1912, never staged), *Kincora* (1905, revised 1909), and *Dervorgilla* (1907), Lady Gregory proposes an answer to this question by turning to the form of Irish culture she holds most dear: Irish folk mythology.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### REVIVAL IN THE FOLK-HISTORY PLAYS

In some ways, Lady Gregory's later tragedies align with the greater Irish Literary Revival's agenda, just as her earlier short comedies use popular theatrical forms despite the potent critiques they also contain. Like the cultural efforts that the Abbey Theatre and the Gaelic League pioneered, *Grania*, *Kincora*, and *Dervorgilla* also look to Ireland's past in order to guide the country towards a future of political and artistic independence from England. Lady Gregory herself admits to having in mind education about Ireland's folk culture and mythological history when writing these plays. She comments in her notes for *Grania*, "I hoped then and still hope that we may give a week or more in every year to a sequence of history plays, or perhaps play them at schools, that schoolboys and schoolgirls may have their imagination stirred about the people who made history, instead of knowing them but as names" (*Irish Folk-History Plays* 200). These three plays do just that, retelling versions of popular Irish myths that she herself collected and translated for her book *Gods and Fighting Men* (*Irish Folk-History Plays* 195). In this note, Lady Gregory's concern for Ireland's younger generation not only reveals her own wishes for the wider dissemination of Ireland's mythological past, but also supports the Literary Revival's agenda.

Cathy Leeney discusses how these plays, *Grania* specifically, also have important similarities with theater outside Ireland. She examines how Lady Gregory engages with many of the naturalist movement's conventions in mainland Europe. Leeney explains:

In theatre, writers associated with the naturalist movement commonly placed representations of the female at the centre of their dramas: Therese Raquin, Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie, Mrs Warren. Concerned with women's moral, emotional, and financial independence, and with their destiny as individuals rather than as mothers or wives, these plays dramatized situations arising from the then current oppressive patriarchal binaries of female identity: the angel in the house, the monstrous whore outside it....As Gregory, Yeats, and Synge wished theatre to be a serious site for cultural and personal reflection and imagination, so the aim of the naturalist movement was to cut through the complacent clichés and conservatism of boulevard 'well-made' plays. (Leeney 157-159)

Though Leeney observes that in Ireland "the cultural project of national identity took precedence over proto-feminist concerns" (Leeney 157), and that "A nationalist agenda compromised a gender one" (Leeney 158), in many ways the focus of *Grania*, *Kincora*, and *Dervorgilla* on the representation of women still parallels theater on mainland Europe. Thus, Lady Gregory's decision to focus on the psyches of heroines in Ireland's mythological past appears to follow the conventions of both the Literary Revival and the wider European naturalist movement.

However, to regard these plays as products of the artistic movements of Lady Gregory's time overlooks their radical elements. These plays critique of the very idea of cultural "revival." Through these plays, Lady Gregory legitimizes a female narrative that, as David Lloyd observes, "fall[s] under the shadow of the new state," (Lloyd "Regarding" 39) or is sidelined in favor of the more mainstream nationalist movement. Lady Gregory resists idealizing women in her plays, a convention central to the Literary Revival. Additionally, the women in these plays differ from the two representations of women already popular in Irish drama: the symbolic woman-nation,

like Cathleen ni Houlihan, and the submissive peasant wife, like Bridget and Mary Cahel. Instead, Lady Gregory's heroines are of Ireland's mythological royalty and circulate among powerful kings and heroes. Though they still exist in a patriarchal society, these women create historical agency for themselves in this system. In these plays, their agency emerges as they test the boundaries of the gender constraints that male characters assign to women. These women choose courses of action that suit their own ends, not the desires of men, and as a result they step into male gender positions. As Maria-Elena Doyle observes, this particular vision of female agency "reveals much about Gregory's particular brand of feminism," one rooted in "social recognition" and "active engagement" (Doyle 40-41).

Therefore, Lady Gregory does employ the Revival's strategy of looking to Ireland's mythological past for ways to represent women that challenge Ireland's gender hierarchy. However, she investigates simultaneously the limitations of that past, for even mythological Ireland was still a patriarchal society that subordinated women. By representing the ways that women are publicly shamed for stepping outside of their gender roles, Lady Gregory illustrates the strict constraints that men imposed upon these women. Lady Gregory shows how women exist primarily to facilitate interaction and exchange between men, and oftentimes are blamed for the political consequences of male aggression and competition. In representing women's oppressive gender expectations in Ireland's mythological past, Lady Gregory exposes an aspect of Irish society that she would rather not have the nationalist movement revive. Lady Gregory also encourages a more nuanced approach to the entire idea of cultural revival. This approach advocates for realistic representations of both women and Ireland's mythological past.

*Avoiding Idealization: Lady Gregory's Heroines*

Existing scholarship examining Lady Gregory's later tragedies recognizes her focus on representing women accurately in these plays. Maria-Elena Doyle compares *Grania* to Eva Gore-Booth's *The Buried Life of Deirdre* (1908). Doyle asserts, "Yet even the existence of these authors' quiet challenges to the authority of the women-nation ideal reveals a budding awareness of the inability of such a symbol to define satisfactorily Irish experience for all residents of the nation" (Doyle 35). In *Grania*, Doyle identifies the gender imbalance of the play's three characters (two men and one woman), as Lady Gregory's examination of a woman acting for her own interests in a space "literally surrounded and outnumbered by men" (Doyle 39). Noelle Bowles discusses all three of the tragedies, concluding, "Gregory's tragic heroines present a forceful argument for the inclusion of women in the broader public sphere; they are individual agents without whom there would be no legendary heroes for nationalists to emulate" (Bowles 130).

In addition to Doyle and Bowles, John McAteer examines the masculine qualities that Lady Gregory creates in the character of Gormleith, Brian Boru's wife in *Kincora*. McAteer interprets this masculinity as an artistic response to Irish historian Standish O'Grady, author of *History of Ireland: Heroic Period* (1878) and a significant figure in the Irish Literary Revival. McAteer asserts that Lady Gregory challenges O'Grady's patriarchal conception of Ireland's mythological history. He argues, "In granting these [masculine] qualities to a woman, Gormleith, the influence of O'Grady's sense of history on Gregory is evident but so too is her capacity to advance beyond him to a point where the connection he draws between heroism and masculinity

breaks down” (McAteer 104). Doyle, Bowles, and McAteer point to Lady Gregory’s awareness of the subordination of women in Irish society.

Even though these three plays explore alternatives to the Literary Revival’s problematic representation of women, Lady Gregory was wary of gender equality and what we might think of as modern feminism in her own time. Lady Gregory was critical of the early twentieth century women’s rights movement. Judith Hill explains, “she avoided the movement and ran from domineering female aristocrats who espoused the cause....” (Hill 129). According to Hill, Lady Gregory even maintained in her own family “the assumption that girls should take second place in the family” (Hill 247). Her aversion to gender equality helps us to understand her decision not to completely break down society’s gender expectations in these plays. Though Lady Gregory rejects much of what we would recognize as modern feminism today, she still engages in a critique of the Literary Revival that in certain ways we could consider feminist. Lady Gregory still explores possibilities for women to step out of their subordinate position and into the position usually reserved for a male superior. In many ways, this mimics her own movement into the typically male role of Irish playwright. Her challenge to gender expectations is perhaps possible because these plays are set in the distant past and not her own historical moment. This temporal distance allows her to think more freely about constraints that perhaps seem indisputable in her own time.

Perhaps Lady Gregory’s most radical critique of the Literary Revival’s representation of women is her complete refusal to idealize her heroines. These plays resist the types of idealization that she satirizes in *Hyacinth Halvey*, in which an ordinary man is transformed into a political and religious Messiah figure. In contrast to *Hyacinth Halvey*, Lady Gregory allows her

heroines in the folk-history plays to make selfish choices without apology to the men they manipulate and hurt. Unlike Halvey, whose attempted crimes are reclaimed by the village and legal authorities as selfless acts, these women successfully move outside their gender constraints. In resisting any political idealization of her heroines, Lady Gregory points to the value in representing women accurately and refusing to subordinate women's experiences to the narratives of the nation.

For example, Lady Gregory represents Grania's control of her sexuality rather overtly, which Doyle argues is a primary reason why it was never produced on the Abbey's stage (Doyle 41). *Grania* tells the story of Grania's decision to run away with her love, Diarmuid, instead of marrying the man to whom she is betrothed, a much older Finn. Diarmuid promises Finn, his leader and close friend, that he will send Finn a loaf of bread, "white and round and unbroken at every moon of the year....as a sign of my own oath is in the same way clean and whole and unbroken" (*G* 20).<sup>11</sup> This unbroken loaf is meant to represent Grania and Diarmuid's chastity. However, when Grania presents to Finn a piece of broken bread after Diarmuid and she have consummated their relationship, Grania claims her loss of virginity. In the following passage, Finn is disguised as a beggar, so Grania does not recognize his true identity:

Tell Finn, the time you meet him, it was the woman herself gave that to you, and bade you leave it in his hand as a message and as a sign!....And if you have one seeing eye, cast it upon me, and tell Finn you saw a woman no way sad or afraid, but as airy and high-minded as a mountain filly would be challenging the winds of March! (*G* 37)

Clearly, these are not the words of a woman ashamed of her sexuality, for she is "no way sad or afraid," and certainly not concerned about Finn's wrath. In this passage Grania expresses her

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<sup>11</sup> Abbreviation: *G*: *Grania* (1912), Gregory



experience of both sexual and societal freedom. She sees herself as “high-minded” and specifically as a *mountain* filly, which both refer to height and transcendence. Instead of viewing the loss of her virginity as reducing her value, Grania’s language suggests she perceives it as elevating her in some way. It suggests that she has risen from her subordinate position of woman into a new status perhaps equal to or even higher than a man’s. Additionally, “filly” also implies youth, so rather than viewing her loss of virginity as an end to her value as a woman, she considers this loss the beginning of a new, liberated life. Grania also claims that she has found the power through her loss of virginity to “be challenging the winds of March,” or to counter strong forces of nature. The language that Grania uses in this passage does not follow strict Catholic and Victorian sensibilities that police women’s sexualities and circumscribe women’s power.

Lady Gregory also explores the relationship between shame and womanhood when depicting Grania’s embrace of her sexuality. In her confession of love to Diarmuid, Grania explicitly speaks about herself in her marriage bed thinking of Diarmuid instead of Finn. She argues, “It would be a terrible thing, a wedded woman not to be loyal—to call out another man’s name in her sleep” (*G* 17). Rather than avoiding the topic of adultery, she directly refers to it by describing the act of calling out another man’s name in bed. When articulating her sexuality so explicitly, Grania does not exhibit any shame in using her sexual desire to achieve her own ends nor shame about desire and pleasure. The moment when Grania exclaims, “But I am not ashamed,” (*G* 17) she boldly articulates her ability to reject shame. Grania demonstrates her mastery of shame when she threatens to leave Diarmuid and Finn as they argue over ownership of her. She exclaims, “It is on me the blame is entirely! It is best for me to go out a shamed

woman” (G 19). In this quote, Grania does claim the type of female shame she typically denies feeling. However, in this moment claiming shame helps her to manipulate Diarmuid into protecting her from Finn, which allows her to leave Finn. In these two contradictory uses of shame, Grania demonstrates her skillful use of her sexuality in order to manipulate the men around her. Through Grania, Lady Gregory represents a woman who refuses to ignore her sexual desire. Lady Gregory’s assertion of Grania’s sexuality is significant in that it disqualifies Grania from fulfilling the role of idealized woman-nation, a figure infused with Victorian restrictions on women. This connects *Grania* with Lady Gregory’s earlier play *The Gaol Gate*, which also examines women who lie outside of the woman-nation ideal. In choosing to represent Grania this way, Lady Gregory suggests that there is value in representing women typically absent from the Literary Revival’s narratives.

In *Kincora*, Gormleith does not comply with the Revival's expectations for the idealized woman-as-nation figure any better than Grania. When Brian finally subdues the rival kings in Ireland and creates an era of peace, Gormleith rejects her husband’s newfound piety. She is roused to anger when the beggar woman visiting Kincora entices Brian to hang up his sword for good, complaining “It was to a great king I came as a wife, not to a monkish man serving heaven on his knees” (K 145).<sup>12</sup> She sees his turn to Christianity as “His mind is as if slipping away to some place I cannot reach to, that I do not know,” (126-127) and when her brother follows Brian into peaceful religious complacency she says “But I myself see great shame in it. I see you growing dull and soft and gentle, like an old man that would be nearing his end” (128). In these moments, Gormleith is more in favor of war than the warriors that surround her, for she

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<sup>12</sup> Abbreviation: K: *Kincora*, (1909), Gregory

perceives it as the only way for Brian to secure his own glory. In many ways she takes on stereotypically masculine qualities and critiques the men's own masculinity, scorning the men around her for being weak because they desire peace. Through the adoption of a position typically associated with the masculine, Gormleith pushes against the expectation to support her husband regardless of his political decisions.

The language of Gormleith's complaint—"It was to a great king I came as a wife, not to a monkish man serving heaven on his knees"—expresses her frustration with religious passivity as well. Noelle Bowles interprets Gormleith's frustration with religion as an extension of her dissatisfaction with Ireland's gender expectations. Bowles asserts:

The religious and charitable works that were the only employment opportunities acceptable for middle and upper-class women are abhorrent to Gormleith—not, we sense, because she is heretical or lacks compassion for the poor, but because she feels she must 'keep [Brian] to the strength and power of a king' (*K* 73)" (122).

According to Bowles's analysis, Gormleith interprets her own intervention in Brian's career as her wifely duty. This separates her from an idealized woman-nation figure because she has personal reasons for instigating the battle, not national reasons. The woman-nation figure is expected to seduce Irish men to fight for her freedom, not participate in the male-dominated battles to selfishly further her own husband's career. Essentially, Gormleith's interpretation of gender expectations contradicts the representations of an idealized woman-nation figure, for she acts through men in order to incite more violence that will secure Brian's victory.

As a further departure from the Literary Revival's ideals, Gormleith's efforts to break the religious peace in Kincora result in treason. She agrees to sign treaties that will allow Danish invaders into Ireland. She exclaims "I am breaking away from Brian, I am breaking Brian's

peace...Go and call your king, so, and give me up to him” (*K* 145). Though she has a few moments of regret about this decision (*K* 149, 151), she never attempts to conceal her involvement in this crime. This thoroughly undoes any possibility of her assuming the woman-nation role, for her actions literally harm Ireland. Gormleith explains, “I thought myself to be wise, to drag things here and there, to do some great thing, moving men with big words....I did my own part, I have no mind to deny or to hide my own share in it all” (*K* 152). Here, Gormleith frames her actions as entirely selfish, with little regard for her husband’s wishes or Ireland’s political interests. Gormleith also claims authority over her husband, asserting that she knows what is best for him even when he disagrees. In writing an entire play about the selfish actions of Gormleith, Lady Gregory proposes that there is value in telling the story of a traitor, for even counter-hegemonic narratives are an essential part of Ireland’s history. In *Kincora*, Lady Gregory represents a woman who outrightly defies the woman-nation ideal and betrays Ireland’s national interests.

Though Dervorgilla displays much more remorse than Gormleith for her actions and their consequences, she also never shies away from her decision to betray her husband, O’Rourke, and run away with her lover Diarmuid. She explains, “O’Rourke was a good man, and a brave man, and a kinder man than Diarmuid, but it was with Diarmuid my heart was. It was to him I was promised before I ever saw O’Rourke, and I loved him better than ever my own lord, and he me also, and this was long!” (*D* 181).<sup>13</sup> In this explanation, Dervorgilla reveals her commitment to her original love over the arranged political marriage between her and O’Rourke. This asserts the priority of the personal over the political, a decidedly anti-nationalist and anti-Revival idea.

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<sup>13</sup> Abbreviation: *D*: *Dervorgilla* (1907), Gregory

Just like Gormleith, Dervorgilla claims ownership of her actions: “Oh Diarmuid, I did not dread you. It was I myself led you astray! Let the curse and the vengeance fall upon me and on me only, for the great wrong and the treachery done by both of us to Ireland!” (*D* 181). In Dervorgilla’s case, the wrong she committed was running away from her husband, O’Rourke, thus causing a war between him and Diarmuid. This war forced Diarmuid to seek aid from the English, which the English gave in exchange for the province of Leinster (206). Lady Gregory explains, “It is so the English were first brought into Ireland” (*Irish Folk History Plays* 206). This is the origin myth of the British conquest of Ireland. Significantly, in the grammatical construction of Dervorgilla’s statement, “It was I myself led you astray,” she claims authority and power over Diarmuid, framing his battle with O’Rourke as her own doing rather than Diarmuid’s. Though she deeply regrets the harm she does to Ireland, and has spent all of her life “kneeling and praying, kneeling and praying, fasting and asking forgiveness of God” (*D* 185), she never tries to escape the consequences of her actions. This claiming of her wrongdoings also disqualifies Dervorgilla from the role of the Literary Revival’s woman-nation. *Dervorgilla* acts as another example of Lady Gregory prioritizing the stories of women who defy nationalist ideals. Her dedication to these narratives’ absence from Irish history asserts that Irish history is incomplete without them.

In the characters of Grania, Gormleith, and Dervorgilla, Lady Gregory does not challenge “that is the thing brings mostly all mischief into the world, the changeable wagging nature of a woman” (*D* 175). Rather than idealizing her heroines as Cathleen-like figures or submissive peasant wives, Lady Gregory embraces “the changeable wagging nature of a woman,” and has her heroines intentionally commit serious political crimes against Ireland’s ancient kings, thus

prioritizing their personal desires over their nation. She represents these women in the midst of the Revival movement that would seek to blame them and silence their personal histories.

In setting these plays in Ireland's past, Lady Gregory appears to argue that at one time in Ireland women did have the opportunity to question the constraints placed on women. Lady Gregory's most explicit push against the gender expectations of her own time occurs in *Kincora*, when Gormleith's brother, Maelmora, says to her about Brian:

Do not be grudging him his own comfort in fasting and in psalms. To be worrying yourself starts wrinkles. Keep the flowery look in your face and do not be managing more than your share. Did you learn yet to put thread in a needle? The clasp is gone from this cloak. (*K* 126-127)

Maelmora's language in this passage outlines the expectations for wives in his society and expresses his frustration with Gormleith for refusing to comply with them. He emphasises her duty to maintain her physical attractiveness, or "that flowery look," and he silences any ideas or critiques that she has for Brian's kingship. His question, "Did you learn yet to put thread in a needle?" also stresses Gormleith's failure to perform the basic domestic duties of a wife.

Gormleith replies to his accusation, "I will sew no clasp upon the cloak....I will not give in to it!" (*K* 128). Here, her choice of "give in" to describe her struggle suggests that her gender constraints are an oppressive force always acting upon her, and that it takes great strength to resist its demands. In this moment, Gormleith challenges her own position as subservient wife and rejects the subordination of women to men.

Lady Gregory appears to argue that women in Ireland's mythological past were not afraid to transgress expectations of their gender or pursue their own desires. However, Lady Gregory embeds her recognition of these heroines' anti-nationalist personal desires within male-

dominated political conflicts. While recognizing possibilities for women to defy their subordination, Lady Gregory simultaneously emphasizes the ways that a patriarchal society uses public blame and the erasure of personal desires to create its own hegemonic history. Therefore, Lady Gregory does not propose Ireland's past as an ideal to be imitated in Ireland's future. Ultimately, these plays highlight the ways that women are silenced in the effort to create an ideal history of Ireland.

### *Asymmetrical Love Triangles and Historical Representation*

In *Grania*, *Kincora*, and *Dervorgilla*, Lady Gregory works with an explicit conceptual contradiction in the way that the Revival looked to and recuperated Ireland's past. In many ways, these plays are radical in depicting women that are of no interest to the Revival's agenda, for these women place their own personal desires above Ireland's interests. However, these plays also expose the roots of sexism and patriarchy in Ireland's ancient past, which complicates the argument that Ireland's past flourished with independent, multidimensional, and respected women. In highlighting this contradiction, Lady Gregory critiques the practice of emulating Ireland's past without recognizing its continual subordination of women. Lady Gregory constructs her critique through the use of love triangles between the characters in her plays. Through these triangles, she represents the ways that women exist merely as property through which men act out their rivalries with each other. Lady Gregory also investigates the blame that her heroines face when they step outside their gender roles.

In her book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provides a useful lens through which to understand the triangular relationships between Grania, Finn, and Diarmuid in *Grania* and Dervorgilla, O'Rourke, and Diarmuid in *Dervorgilla*.<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick builds her argument about male homosocial desire on the writings of René Girard in his book, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Sedgwick 21). Sedgwick identifies Girard's argument as claiming:

....in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of "rivalry" and "love," differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent....In fact, Girard seems to see the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle as being even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved. (Sedgwick 21)

Sedgwick develops this argument further, pushing against Girard and Freud's argument that a triangulated relationship's "structure would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants" (Sedgwick 23). Instead, she argues that the patriarchal power exchanged and guarded in relationships between men maintains the inferior status of women (Sedgwick 25). Therefore, the "gender asymmetry" of these triangulated relationships works to keep power away from the love object, who is typically gendered female in Western society (Sedgwick 25). To support her development of Girard and Freud's theory, Sedgwick cites Gayle Rubin's theory of "the traffic in women," in which Rubin argues that women are exchanged as property in society in order to solidify the bonds between men (Sedgwick 26). Essentially, Sedgwick seeks to expose the uneven

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<sup>14</sup> *Kincora*'s cast of characters does not lend itself quite as well to the triangular relationships that Sedgwick investigates, so this discussion will primarily focus on *Grania* and *Dervorgilla*.



distribution of power within love triangles in literature and to explore the relationships between male rivals on a spectrum ranging from the homosocial to the homosexual.

Sedgwick's theory helps us to understand the triangulated relationships in *Grania* and *Dervorgilla*. Lady Gregory uses these relationships to represent how women are subordinated in dominant representations of Irish history. Lady Gregory examines this triangulated dynamic most thoroughly in *Grania*, though *Dervorgilla* also deals with the complicated aftermath of a love triangle. *Grania* differs from *Dervorgilla* in that it explores the nature of the relationship between the two rival men in the love triangle. Leeney identifies the same-sex relationship between Finn and Diarmuid as "intense love" and further argues "The emotional axis of *Grania* pivots on same-sex passion, and because of this, gender polarities are interrogated" (Leeney 165). Their love for each other is apparent in Finn's declarations to Diarmuid that, "You are more to me than any of my comrades or my friends," (*G* 15) and, "....you are my son and my darling, and it is beyond the power of any woman to put us asunder, or to turn you against me anymore" (*G* 58). Diarmuid agrees with Finn's depiction of their relationship, stating on his deathbed, "It would be a very foolish thing, any woman at all to have leave to come between yourself and myself. I cannot but laugh at that" (*G* 59). Diarmuid's devotion to Finn over Grania is also apparent in his failure to recognize her during his death scene, for he appears blind and deaf to her presence and only communicates with Finn (*G* 57-59).

Lady Gregory represents this relationship between men, or homosocial relationship as Sedgwick would describe it, as maintaining an asymmetric power dynamic in its triangular construction where the rival males have more power than the subordinate female. However, Lady Gregory complicates this structure by allowing Grania to take on masculine qualities and rise

above her lower position in the love triangle. Bowles argues, “the woman of Gregory’s play becomes fully conscious of how society constructs her as a medium through which men communicate, compete, and bond. This radically self-aware Grania confronts and attempts to counter assumptions about the status and power of women” (Bowles 126). Lady Gregory does not challenge the structure of male and female gender roles outright, but instead switches Grania’s position in the love triangle with Diarmuid’s without compromising its structure. Through feminizing Diarmuid and masculinizing Grania, Lady Gregory asserts that the feminine role will always have less power. Bowles supports this reading, arguing, “the true struggle lies between Grania and Finn, with Diarmuid as the object of desire” (Bowles 126).

Grania’s masculine dominance emerges most clearly in her confrontation with Finn after he tracks down the lovers and pushes Diarmuid to fight with the King of Foreign. She shouts at Finn:

It was you sent Diarmuid out! It was you came between us! It was you parted us! It was your voice he obeyed and listened to, the time he had no ears for me! Are you between us always?—I will go out after him, I will call him back—I will tell him your treachery—he will make an end of it and you. He will know you through and through this time. It will fail you to come between us again. (*G* 54)

In this moment, Grania identifies Diarmuid’s love for Finn as the force preventing her relationship with Diarmuid. Her repetition of “you” creates the passage’s accusatory tone. She articulates her perceived solution to her relationship issues with Diarmuid in the line “I will tell him of your treachery” which would result in her destroying the relationship of trust between the two men. Though this action would allow Grania to destroy the more powerful homosocial relationship in the triangle, Lady Gregory only allows Grania this through the forced loss of her femininity. This loss is most apparent in her decision not to keen Diarmuid at the end of the play

(G 61). The act of refusing to kneel doubles as both a deliberate decision not to respect the death of Diarmuid, her chosen husband, and as a sacrifice of her right to practice this uniquely female mode of expression. The triangle does not allow for the female role to ever achieve its own power. The entire structure depends on the subordination of the female, and Grania can only step out of this in becoming masculine.

Grania also embraces her masculinity at the conclusion of the play, placing the crown Finn offers her onto her own head and referencing her own sexual fulfilment in the question, “And why should I be always a widow that went so long a maid?” (G 65). However, she is forced to confront the shame that her decision to pursue power in marrying Finn causes. The laughter of Finn’s men nearly prevents her from stepping into this new life: “*She opens the door herself. Finn puts his arm about her. There is another great peal of laughter, but it stops suddenly as she goes out*” (G 67). This stage direction, the final lines of the play, represents the sacrifices that Grania must make to attain the power she accesses in embracing masculinity. These lines also make clear the way that shame operates in maintaining gender hierarchy. Though Grania apparently controls her own actions in opening the door for herself, Finn’s arm is still around her, thus signifying her required submission to him in marriage. Though she initiates their marriage, giving Finn no choice in the matter, her agreement to be his queen is contingent upon her reassuming femininity and submission. It is only when she steps back into her role as Finn’s wife that the soldiers stop laughing. This moment highlights the power of public shaming. When Lady Gregory represents the soldiers’ success in forcing Grania to submit, she suggests that Grania’s elevation into a male position is not sustainable.

Though this marriage does grant Grania some power and sexual fulfillment as queen, these are still dependent on her submission. Therefore, neither masculinity nor feminine actions allow Grania to escape her subordinate role in the love triangle. This explicit contradiction emphasizes the impossibility of an alternative structure that does not depend on oppressing the female love object. Lady Gregory focuses on the impossible choice that Grania is forced to make in this binary structure. Though Lady Gregory may not imagine a society that defies the Victorian gender expectations she herself respects and inhabits, she certainly recognizes the difficulty in being forced to inhabit the subordinate position in Ireland's gender hierarchy. In representing this difficulty, Lady Gregory exposes the way that Ireland has represented male power through the oppression of women.

Lady Gregory uses love triangles again in *Dervorgilla*. This play is more concerned with the oppression of women that occurs when representing Irish history according to nationalist ideals. The representation of history that occurs in *Dervorgilla* doubles as a critique of the Literary Revival's own practice of using Ireland's mythic past in the service of contemporary politics. In *Dervorgilla*, a visiting Songmaker retells the story of England's first arrival in Ireland and the love triangle that made possible the English invasion. The first part of the Songmaker's song focuses on Diarmuid's role in giving the English a stronghold in Ireland:

Through Diarmuid's bad sway we are wasted today,  
It was he brought away the Queen of Breffny;  
And when O'Rourke raised Connacht against him,  
Gave the English pay to come to Ireland. (*D* 173)

This song identifies Diarmuid and O'Rourke as the primary instigators of the war that invited in the English. The lines, "he brought away the Queen," and, "when O'Rourke raised Connacht,"

are both in the active voice, making these men direct agents of their history. Though not as apparent grammatically, “It was he.... Gave the English pay,” also identifies calling on the English as Diarmuid’s doing. Therefore, this part of the song clearly identifies the two men’s actions as causing war, indicating that Dervorgilla did not have direct involvement in the official war politics. Though the song does not discuss the relationship between Diarmuid and O’Rourke, Diarmuid’s abduction of Dervorgilla demonstrates Gayle Rubin’s argument that the trafficking of women establishes relationships between men. In this case, Diarmuid and O’Rourke assert their own power through fighting over Dervorgilla as their property.

Dervorgilla is only inserted into the narrative in later stanzas of the song:

He [Diarmuid] cares little for life, puts trust in a wife,  
It is long it is known they go with the wind;  
A queer thing a woman was joined with O’Rourke  
To show herself kind to a pet from Leinster.

The rat in the larder, the fire in the thatch,  
The guest to be fattening, the children famished;  
If t’was Diarmuid’s call that brought in the Gall,  
Let the weight of it fall upon Dervorgilla! (*D* 175)

Here, the focus has entirely shifted to Dervorgilla’s crime in running away from her husband, and the song blames Dervorgilla for all of Ireland’s hardships. This is an explicit contradiction, for Dervorgilla is excluded from the political decision of going to war and then later blamed for war’s consequences despite not ever being involved. Even though the song refers to the treaty with the English as “Diarmuid’s call,” the song ceases to fault Diarmuid, instead identifying Dervorgilla as the true villain behind the English “guest to be fattening” while the Irish “children famished.” This song essentially transforms Dervorgilla into a scapegoat for the wars that Diarmuid and O’Rourke wage. Failure to recognize Dervorgilla’s part in the conflict would

overlook her radical act of leaving her husband's control. However, the way that the song frames this conflict places an uneven amount of blame onto Dervorgilla when Diarmuid and O'Rourke are equally responsible. Just as Sedgwick argues that power is asymmetrically distributed among a triangulated relationship of two men and one woman, blame also appears to be asymmetrically placed onto the woman for the trio's equal wrongdoing.

In placing a historical song, an artistic representation of the past, at the center of her own play that seeks to represent the past, Lady Gregory creates a kind of meta-commentary. In other words, the Songmaker's verse creates the same kind of literary representation of the past as the Revival and thus reveals what is distorted in this artistic process. This meta-commentary encompasses her own play and the Literary Revival's efforts to represent and revise the past for specific ends. In proposing that the Songmaker's representation of the first invasion of Ireland depends on scapegoating a woman, Lady Gregory makes a greater critique of shifting blame onto Irish women when representing Ireland's history. In *Dervorgilla*, Lady Gregory shows how the Songmaker does not do justice to Dervorgilla's character. He completely ignores her lifelong efforts of "kneeling and praying, kneeling and praying, fasting and asking forgiveness of God," (*D* 185) instead reducing her to this one moment of selfish action. In contrast, Lady Gregory devotes the entire remainder of her play to articulating the parts of Dervorgilla's narrative that the Songmaker leaves out. Her life and arc of religious redemption exceed the capacity of the Songmaker's narrative. In fact, the Songmaker has trouble even identifying Dervorgilla, referring to her as, "a queer thing," first and, "a woman," second. This points to the difficulty he has in constraining such a nuanced figure into his simplistic song. The Songmaker is not interested in representing every aspect of this woman's history, for it works better for the

drama of his song to villainize and blame her. The young men's refusal at the play's conclusion to recognize the parts of Dervorgilla's history that exceed the Songmaker's representation of her exemplifies the power of these incomplete yet still attractive narratives (*D* 185-186). Even if biased in framing its source material, this song has the power to shape history for these young men and to erase Dervorgilla's entire story even as she desperately explains it to them.

### *The Limitations of Revival*

The distortions and limitations of the Songmaker's song illustrate the ways that the Literary Revival only represents aspects of the past that align with its nationalist aims. Lady Gregory represents in *Dervorgilla* the type of women's narratives that are overlooked when history is revived with a specific agenda in mind. In writing *Grania*, *Kincora*, and *Dervorgilla*, Lady Gregory asserts that representing women that exceed the constraints of an ideal woman-nation figure is essential for creating a true representation of Ireland. She also exposes, as Leeney argues, "the failure of mythic structures to accommodate the subjectivity and aspirations of her heroine" (Leeney 165). In highlighting this failure, Lady Gregory critiques the Literary Revival's primary methodology even as she herself engages in it. If Revivalist ideologies exclude Irish women who resist gender norms and expectations and refuse to prioritize national politics over the personal, then these ideologies are not truly representative of Ireland. My reading of Lady Gregory positions her not only as an active participant in the the Literary Revival's efforts, but also as a figure who is critical of its tendencies to misrepresent. Lady Gregory remains true to the Abbey's original mission to represent those Irish people "who are weary of

misrepresentation” (*OIT* 20) even if her contemporaries at the Abbey Theater strayed from this original vision.



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