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The supernatural folklore of Ireland, the identity of a nation born of poets and playwrights

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MASTER THESIS

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Supervised by: Street Anna

***The supernatural folklore of Ireland, the identity of a nation born of poets
and playwrights***

Le Mans University - Master Etudes Culturelles Internationales



College year 2021-2022

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Introduction

Ireland is a country with a rich history. A country with a rich cultural heritage. The culture of Ireland includes language, literature, music, art, folklore, cuisine, and sports which are associated with Ireland and its people. Even if the island of Ireland is relatively small, it has made a disproportionately large contribution to world literature in all of its different branches, in both the Irish and English languages. In terms of literature, Ireland has produced some big names in this domain such as William Butler Yeats, Samuel Beckett, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and many others. Irish folklore and mythology have inspired many stories, plays, and books written by Irish authors.

During the late 19th and 20th centuries Ireland was at a shift in its policy and culture. Politicians, artists and writers were at the center of this shift. The two poets, playwrights and friends Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats were two major actors of this shift and at the center of the Irish Literary Revival.

Isabella Augusta Gregory, borned Persee, was born on March 15, 1852 in the west of Ireland and more precisely in County Galway. In 1881 she married Sir William Gregory, who was a member of the Parliament and former Governor of Ceylon. Together they had one son named Robert Gregory, who died in Italy during World War I. Lady Gregory is best known for her work for the Irish Literary Revival and her different plays. During her lifetime, she spent a lot of time searching and working to bring back the old folklore of Ireland. She is well known for her work on the Kiltartan people and language but also for being one of the founding members of the

Abbey Theatre alongside William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge. She died at the age of 80 years old from breast cancer in 1932.

William Butler Yeats was an Irish poet, playwright and major figure of the Irish Literary Revival. He was born on June 13, 1865 in County Dublin and published his first works while studying at Dublin's Metropolitan School of Art in the mid-1880s. He became an accomplished and acclaimed poet and playwright due to his work that conveys messages during the Irish Literary Revival. He then became a political figure at the beginning of 1922 by serving as a governor in the new Irish Free State. Yeats wrote until his death and published some of his best works in the last years of his life.

For my master thesis, I chose to focus on the Irish playwright Lady Gregory and the Irish Literary Revival she encouraged and enabled. I chose this topic because I have always been interested in Irish culture and in literature, especially in theater. I chose to focus on one writer, and in particular Lady Gregory, because she embodied Irish culture and the link between the present and the past which is a great part of the Irish Literary Revival. I will be focusing on this tension between the past and present in Lady Gregory's plays because it dominates her work but also much of Irish literature and culture in general. I want to explore this fascination for the dead and the undead which is a great part of Irish folklore. I want to answer the question about how the old, the new, and rebirth are intertwined in Irish culture and how they operate in Lady Gregory's work. During my work on this topic, I hope to unveil more about Lady Gregory herself as she is often linked to other writers and not so often on her own, and also about her impact on Irish culture and on literature as a whole. My explorations naturally include the work and

vision of other writers who worked with Lady Gregory or who were inspired by her vision and her work.

During the Irish Literary Revival, the supernatural became a common theme in poems and plays due to all the stories and tales that were being translated but was also useful in order to convey messages. Several of those tales and stories often show strong characters which can sometimes be women. Strong female characters can be identified in several plays by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory like in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *Grania* for example. During his life, Yeats encountered many women that left a tremendous impact on both his life and his work. Among those women Lady Gregory stands out from the rest due to her great influence on all Ireland and on all Irish culture.

My research will strive to answer the following question: To what extent do supernatural elements and entities dominate Irish culture? How is the nation of Ireland defined by the vital resurgence of the dead among the living? How have Lady Gregory's plays in particular been operative in fostering a fascination with bringing the dead to life in the development of Irish culture and literature? To try and answer these questions, I will first provide a brief introduction to the myths and the folklore of Irish culture itself, notably the different figures and aspects of the supernatural in Irish culture. Then I will explore how Lady Gregory's life and opinions influenced her work in comparison to other Irish writers, such as Yeats, Beckett, Shaw, Joyce or Wilde. By providing such contextual elements, this study will contribute to a better understanding of Lady Gregory's work and point of view on her surrounding world.

My goal is to learn more about Lady Gregory's work and influence on Irish culture and literature, but also to learn more about the mythology and folklore which is present in Ireland.

The first part of my thesis will deal with the notion of the denial of death in the personification of Ireland. Here I will present the history and politics of Ireland before discussing the life and political point of view of Lady Gregory as one of the main actors and influences of the Irish Literary Revival. Finally, I will outline the various tensions around the project of building the Irish nation. My second and last part will be devoted to the folklore, culture, and literature of Ireland and its link with supernatural elements such as ghosts, spirits and mythical creatures. I will first deal with the place of the supernatural in folklore and culture, notably William Butler Yeats' preoccupation with the occult in his work such as *The Celtic Twilight*. Then I will explore how Lady Gregory's life and work also revolved around the supernatural and the study of such phenomena. Finally, the last chapter will be an analysis of several of Lady Gregory's plays around the topic of old Irish and Gaelic folklore and history.

Part 1: The denial of death and the personification of a nation

The foundation of a nation often comes from a history full of war, conflicts, and fights all in the name of freedom. Unfortunately, a great price comes with all those conflicts and this price comes in the form of many deaths. However, those conflicts and losses are often used to define and personify the nation. Depending on the culture, the relation and meaning of death can drastically change. The word “death” has several definitions. The Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries¹ give five definitions of the word. All those definitions explain that “death” is synonymous with the end of things, it could be the end of life or the destruction of something, like an idea or a political movement. But Merriam-Webster also refers to “the destroyer of life” which is a well-known personification of death. In Irish mythology, this personification of death comes in the form of Donn, also known as “the dark one”, who was believed to be a god of the dead and an ancestor of the Gaels. However, the Irish Tuatha dé Danann had their own personification of death, known under the name of Dagda, the god of life and death but also the god of agriculture and fertility.

The concept of a nation can be difficult to define because it depends on several elements and can change from one culture to another. The Cambridge Dictionary² defines a nation as “a country, especially when thought of as a large group of people living in one area with their own government, language, traditions, etc.” This definition shows that a nation is not only a question of places, but it can also be seen as a more intellectual and abstract notion that

¹ Oxford Dictionary. “Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries | Find Definitions, Translations, and Grammar Explanations at Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries.” *Oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com*, 2017, www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/.

² Cambridge University Press. “Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus.” *Cambridge.org*, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>.

is based on ideas and opinions. The best example to understand this is the several nationalist movements that exist in different countries. The concept of a nation is also often linked to a figure, which serves as a way to personify a nation. Many examples exist in our world nowadays such as Marianne in France, Uncle Sam in the United States and also Kathleen Ni Houlihan³ in Ireland. The case of Ireland's nationalist history is an interesting one because Ireland had to fight for its identity over and again throughout the centuries. This is why the notion of identity and the necessity of belonging to a nation or a movement is very important in Irish politics and culture.

This first part will be about the two notions of death and nation, more precisely the denial of death and the personification of the Irish nation. The three different parts of this chapter will progress from a more

general to a more precise perspective, focusing on Lady Gregory and her work.

This first part will be divided into three different chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to the history and politics of Ireland, focusing particularly on the transition from Celtic sun worship to Christianity via St. Patrick, the mixing of the old and the new, the death of the Gaelic, the Penal laws which were restricting Catholics from owning land and the oppression of



Portrait of Lady Lavery as Kathleen Ni Houlihan by Sir John Lavery, 1928

³ Lavery, John. "Portrait of Lady Lavery as Kathleen Ni Houlihan," *Wikimedia Commons*, 1928.

Irish culture and their traditions. The second chapter will focus on the Irish Literary Revival and the role of Lady Gregory. Finally, the third and last chapter will be about the tensions surrounding the project of building the Irish nation.

Chapter 1: Irish history and politics

The actual political environment in Ireland is complex due to the fact that Ireland is separated between the Republic of Ireland, which is independent from the rest of the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland which is still part of the United Kingdom. The division between the two Irelands came after the Irish War of Independence that took place between 1919 and 1921 which was followed by the Irish Civil War, between 1922 and 1923 which led to the establishment of an Irish Free State. Ireland has been inhabited for thousands and thousands of years now. This island has seen many different populations, cultures, and beliefs throughout time. Around 1200 BC, the Celts came to Ireland and their arrival on the island had a lasting impact on Ireland's culture, even until nowadays. At that time, the Celts spoke a language called Q-Celtic, which is explained by James MacKillop in his book from 2004 entitled *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*⁴ as "a division of the Celtic languages into Q- and P-families depends on whether they retained the Indo-European qu- or substituted a P-. The substitution of P- for QU- probably took place in the first millennium BC in central Europe and spread to the west, but not as far as Ireland or the Celtic areas of the Iberian Peninsula." Over the centuries this evolved into Irish Gaelic by being mixed with the other Irish inhabitants who were already there. This language and their culture created a division between the Irish Celts and the rest of the

⁴ Mackillop, James. *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

populations in Europe. The Celts were well versed in terms of art and literature because they wrote beautiful poetry and drew impressive artworks such as carved stones and sculptures, which remain to this day.

Later, by the end of the eighth century, the Vikings arrived in Ireland from Scandinavia with the aim to pillage and steal Irish treasure. During that time, many places were victims of the wrath of the Viking invaders and many people were killed in the process. Around two centuries later, the power of the Vikings over the island of Ireland had greatly diminished. The year 1014 marked the end of the Viking era in Ireland after being defeated by Brian Bóru at the battle of Clontarf. Brian Bóru was famed as a warrior and is considered Ireland's greatest King even though he died during the battle of Clontarf when he was killed in his tent. The Viking invasions had, in fact, shown the strength and the weakness of the Irish position. The fact that power had been preserved at a local level in Ireland enabled a maximum of resistance to be made against the Vikings and, even if the invaders managed to establish some maritime strongholds, they never achieved any real sort of domination comparable to their control of eastern England or the northwestern part of France.

Religion in Ireland was at first focused on natural elements such as the sun, the wind, fire and water. The first recorded missionary to Ireland was Palladius, who was probably from France, which was known as Gaul at the time. He was sent by Pope Celestine I to be bishop to the Irish who believed in Christ.⁵ Saint Patrick himself stated that Palladius' mission was a failure. However, other historical documents from outside Ireland indicate that the mission of

⁵ Charles-Edwards, T M. *Early Christian Ireland*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Palladius was very successful, at least in Leinster, and that he set up a number of churches. Tradition says that Palladius' visit to Ireland was in the year 431. It is widely believed by historians and by many people that the missions of Saint Patrick were embellished and enshrined by his monastery at Armagh in their bid for primacy over the church in Ireland. In creating what is referred to as the "Cult of Saint Patrick"⁶, Armagh exaggerated the importance of Saint Patrick and diminished the importance of the other missionaries, possibly even attributing some of the work of these other missionaries to Saint Patrick. That said, Saint Patrick is such an important part of Irish culture that it would be a mistake to ignore him.

According to his own "Confession", he was born in Roman Britain, probably near Hadrian's Wall in northern England, the son of a wealthy official. His mother may have come from Gaul. When he was 16, sometime in the early 400s, he was kidnapped by an Irish raiding party and sold into slavery in Ireland. As Roman Britain collapsed, it was increasingly common for Irish, Pict and Saxon raiders to pillage its coastal settlements and it seems that Patrick fell victim to one of these raids. Saint Patrick worked as a slave for 6 years tending sheep, traditionally believed to be on Slemish Mountain, county Antrim, but it seems possible that he was, in fact, somewhere near the Atlantic Ocean in county Mayo or Sligo.

Saint Patrick says in his *Confession* that he discovered God during his time of captivity and took to praying a hundred times a day. After 6 years, Saint Patrick managed to escape from captivity, walked the 200 miles to the east coast and succeeded to negotiate passage aboard a trading ship to Gaul. There, he probably trained to be a Christian Priest and spent time in

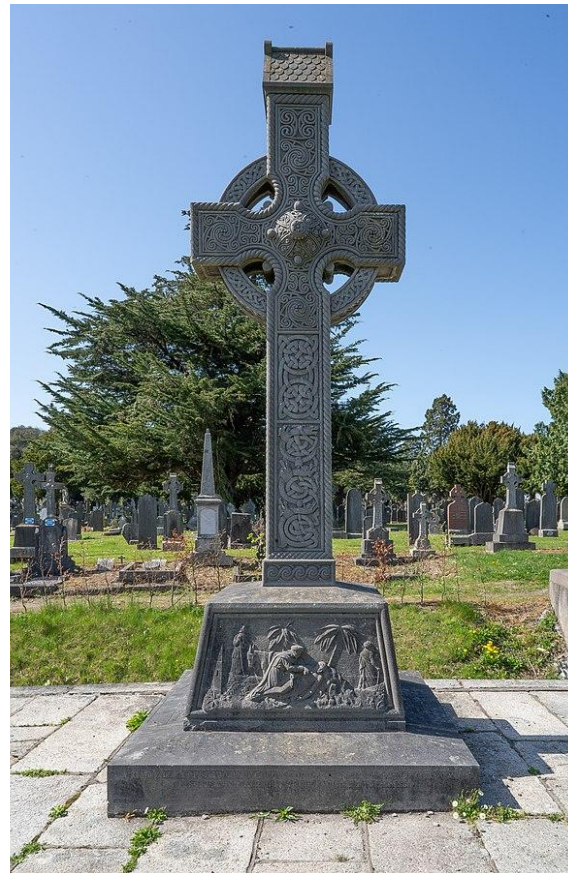
⁶ Cunningham, Bernadette, and Raymond Gillespie. "The Most Adaptable of Saints': The Cult of St Patrick in the Seventeenth Century." *Archivium Hibernicum*, vol. 49, Catholic Historical Society of Ireland, 1995, pp. 82–104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25529628>.

Auxerre. He then received prophetic dreams wherein he heard the people of Ireland near the “western sea” call him to come and walk among them again. He then traveled to Ireland as a missionary, and it seems that he never left. The year traditionally given is 432, but it seems more likely to have been around 460.

Saint Patrick concentrated his work in north-east Ireland, and his first church was at Saul, near present-day Downpatrick. He preached to the Kings and their households and met with varied levels of success. One of his methods was to “Christianize” the Celtic pagan festivals. For example, Saint Patrick reputedly lit an Easter bonfire on Slane Hill near the Hill of Tara while the King was having his own Pagan bonfire there. The King was enraged, but he took the opportunity to preach and managed to make some converts. He is famously said to have used the 3-leaved shamrock to explain the concept of the Trinity: God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Saint Patrick died in Ireland and is traditionally believed to be buried on the Hill of Down in Downpatrick, in the county of Down. A stone marking the traditional burial spot was added in 1901 and the site is now a popular tourist attraction.

Saint Patrick had this idea of mixing the old and the new. He tried to use the beliefs of the past such as the symbols and meanings of Celtic elements while adding his own elements to bring a new meaning and to implant Christian beliefs in Ireland. One of the best examples of this mixing between two different beliefs is the High Cross. The origin of this very important symbol has been debated by many different writers, and each of them offered a theory. Those theories differ very much because some writers such as Montelius, Coffey and Mason place the

origin of the High Cross in the Neolithic or Bronze Ages.⁷ Romilly Allen suggested that the High Cross originated from the Early Christian Art era.⁸ The High Crosses or the Celtic Crosses as they are also known, are found throughout Ireland on old monastic sites. Along with the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow, these High Crosses⁹ are Ireland's biggest contribution to Western European Art of the Middle Ages. Some were probably used as meeting points for religious ceremonies and others were used to mark boundaries. The earliest crosses in Ireland were made of wood and metal and probably much smaller than the great stone monuments we see today. It was generally accepted that the Western Ossory group was amongst the earliest examples of High Crosses to be found in Ireland. Their design imitates the wood and metal crosses before



Celtic High Cross at Glasnevin Cemetery

them; but a recent study suggests they may not be 8th century but possibly mid-9th century. These crosses are mainly found within a few miles of each other at Kilkieran, Kilree, Killamery and the finest examples at Ahenny. The majority of scriptural crosses are also believed to have

⁷ Roe, Helen M. "The Irish High Cross: Morphology and Iconography." *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 95, no. 1/2, Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1965, p. 213, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25509591>.

⁸ J. Romilly Allen. *Early Christian Symbolism in Great Britain and Ireland before the Thirteenth Century. The Rhind Lectures in Archeology for 1885. By J. Romilly Allen.* London, Whiting, 1887, p. 92.

⁹ Murphy, William. "High Cross of Glasnevin Cemetery," *Wikimedia Commons*, 2018.

been erected around the 9th century and there are several local groupings: the North Leinster group includes Kells, Monasterboice and Duleek; the Midlands group includes Clonmacnois Tihilly and Durrow; and another distinct group of granite High Crosses are those of the Barrow valley that includes Castledermot, Graiguenamanagh, Moone, St Mullins and Ullard.

Ireland's contribution to early Christian art is nothing short of exceptional. The high cross tradition represents one of the greatest artistic achievements of monasticism during Ireland's Golden Age of Saints and Scholars that foreshadowed the great Romanesque movement of the twelfth century. Just as the illuminated manuscripts used text to illustrate biblical messages, the high crosses used imagery to convey the great depth of knowledge of the Irish monks and to elucidate the foremost teachings of the Bible. Though much of the symbolic significance of the cross's interlace and geometrical ornament is lost to us, and many interpretations of their rich biblical imagery have proven to be controversial, it can be agreed that the creation of the crosses was a colossal undertaking and even after a thousand years, they cannot fail to impress. Furthermore, the artistic indulgence represented by such lavish monuments cannot be clarified with any one simple explanation. Though the crosses may have been viewed as symbols of Christianity and instrumental in teaching the Christian message, some of the larger crosses may have been erected as a symbol of authority as much as a reflection of Christianity. Though the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the late twelfth century heralded the beginning of the end of high cross production in Ireland, the 250 or so monuments that still survive on the Irish landscape today hold a special significance and to many, have become an emblem of Celtic identity. They act as a constant reminder of our unique artistic past and of Ireland's outstanding contribution to art, architecture, and education.

The relation between Ireland and England began in the twelfth century when the Normans arrived in Ireland. The beginning of this relationship is seen as the starting point of an 800-year struggle between Ireland and England. From that point on, the relationship between Ireland and England became more and more difficult. Several centuries later, at the beginning of the 17th century, several English families went to Ireland and took lands from Irish landowners. This event is known as the Ulster Plantation, which refers to the province of Ireland in which settlers came for the most part from southern Scotland and northern England and is dated between 1609 and 1690. This occupation from Great Britain's settlers marked a great cultural difference between them and the native Irish. The Ulster Plantation divided the country, and that division is still in place nowadays. This division can be seen with the existence of Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland stretching to the south of the island. However, this occupation is not seen as the pinnacle of the conflict between Ireland and England. The arrival of Oliver Cromwell in Ireland was an important date in the history of Ireland and in its relationship with England. His arrival took place in August 1649, in Dublin and he came to Ireland to make an end to this Irish problem. He considered that his mission was the work of God. So with that in mind, he and his army killed many people, burned many houses and farms and destroyed several Catholic churches. Oliver Cromwell is considered as one of the most hated figures in Ireland's history.

Almost two centuries later, one of the most famous and devastating events took place in Ireland. It is known as "The Great Famine". It began as a natural catastrophe when the potato crops failed to grow several years in a row. "The Great Famine", also known as "The Irish Potato Famine" happened between 1845 and 1852. During that time, about a million Irish people died

of starvation or disease, and another around two million people emigrated in almost a decade. This famine was a terrible blow to Ireland and to all Irish people, and the famine is the reason why nowadays there are many Irish people and cultures all around the world, like for example in the United States and in particular on the east coast. Although the Irish had other ways of supplying food such as cattle and sheep, potatoes were a huge part of their supplies. They were forced to sell these due to the high rents on their stolen land that the English demanded. If the Irish could not pay the exuberant rent, they were thrown out and evicted from their houses and land. In the late 1800's, Charles Stuart Parnell, one of Ireland's best politicians, rose and pushed for Ireland's independence from England. He was at the head of the Land League and tried to promote a political way to deal with the issues with the English. He promoted what is known as "shunning" which meant that Irish people should always refuse any deal with any landlords who unfairly evicted their tenants, but also any Irish who took up the rent of newly available land. This marked the debut of what is called the "Land War". Unfortunately, Parnell never achieved his dream of an independent Irish Parliament, but he certainly paved the way for Ireland's greatest uprising which took place in 1916 on Easter weekend.

On the day of April 24, 1916, Ireland saw its most iconic and greatest uprising come to life. The Irish Volunteers and the Irish Civil Army launched an insurrection against the British government in Ireland. At the start, the uprising was supposed to be on a national scale, but after a series of mishaps it was confined to the city of Dublin alone. The insurrection was planned by Patrick Pearse, Tom Clarke, and several other leaders of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a revolutionary society within the nationalist organization called the Irish Volunteers; the latter had about 16,000 members and was armed with German weapons

smuggled into the country two years before, in 1914. The Irish Citizen Army was an association of Dublin workers formed after the failure of the general strike of 1913, and by the small Sinn Féin party which is often linked to the famous group known as IRA, the Irish Republican Army.

The Sinn Féin party was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905 which later became one of the most influential movements of modern Irish history. The name Sinn Féin came from the Gaelic and means “Ourselves” in English and this idea of independence was at the base of the creation of the party. The party aimed at political independence and economic self-sufficiency for Ireland. The goal was to achieve this through a policy of passive resistance and of civil disobedience to British rule and economic nationalism. Those ideas led to the illegal establishment of the Irish parliament, called Dail Eireann which means “Assembly of Ireland”, in 1919. Until the Easter Rising in 1916, the party had little importance in Ireland but after those events of 1916, the Sinn Féin party became a rallying point for extreme nationalist ideology, which was referred to as Republicanism. In 1918, under the leadership of Eamon de Valera, the party won 73 of the 105 Irish seats in the British Parliament. The year after, the members of Sinn Féin declared themselves the parliament of an Irish republic which set up a provisional government in order to rival Ireland's British administration. Right after that the Anglo-Irish war, also referred to as the Irish War of Independence, started and ended in 1921 after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This treaty was negotiated by some representatives of Sinn Féin, such as Michael Collins, and by British officials like Prime Minister David Lloyd George. However, the treaty did not give total independence to Ireland because 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland became what was called the Irish Free State which was still under the status of dominion within the British Empire until 1949 when it was withdrawn from the Commonwealth. The remaining

six counties, which are often referred to as the province of Ulster, continued to be part of the United Kingdom. The signing of that treaty has left a huge mark on the party, because after the signing of the treaty the party was split into two groups: one supporting the treaty under the leadership of Michael Collins and the other totally against the treaty following the leadership of Eamon de Valera¹⁰. This split in the party led to the Irish Civil War in 1922 that ended a year later with the defeat of de Valera's group. Three years later, in 1926, de Valera resigned as Sinn Fein leader and went to found another party named Fianna Fail, which means "Soldiers of Destiny". After the elections of 1927 when the Sinn Fein party earned only 2.7% of the seats in the Irish Parliament, the party did not campaign until 1957 when it earned only 2.6% of the seats¹¹.



Photography of Éamon de Valera, 1922

The disappearance of the Irish Gaelic language can be explained by several different factors. Even if Irish Gaelic, an EU official language and the official language of Ireland, is used in signage, in official announcements and in broadcasting, and even if it is also taught in schools, this language can be classified as an endangered language. Irish Gaelic is losing ground to

¹⁰ National Photo Company, and Library of Congress. "Éamon de Valera," *Wikimedia Commons*, 1922.

¹¹ Arthur, Paul and Cowell-Meyers, Kimberly. "Sinn Féin". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sinn-Fein>. Accessed 17 November 2021.

English and fewer and fewer Irish citizens are using it.¹² The reasons behind this phenomenon are multiple: culture, religion, politics and the way the world evolves on a more worldwide scale. The oppression of Irish culture and traditions led to the Irish Gaelic language being less and less spoken and used. Ireland has suffered oppression from England for centuries, and all those years of conflict have left many wounds on the Irish culture and language. The 2016 census in Ireland found that only about 10.5 percent of respondents spoke Irish on a daily or weekly basis, and that dropped to 4.2 percent when looking at regular, active speakers. There is a region of Ireland where Irish is spoken as a first language: the Gaeltacht. These are rural parts of the country that are scattered on the various coasts. The history of the Irish language dates back thousands of years. The earliest Irish writing is found on the Ogham stones, which show a form of Irish writing that dates back to perhaps the 4th century CE. This writing is a version of Primitive Irish, the earliest form of the Irish language after it broke off from proto-Indo-European.

During the following centuries, the Irish language slowly evolved in random ways, similar to how all languages change over time. The island of Ireland was constantly fending off invasions from Normans and Vikings, and the Irish speakers spread from Ireland to what are today the Isle of Man and Scotland. While it can be kind of arbitrary to divide a language into developmental stages, linguists usually place Old Irish in the 8th through 12th centuries, which then became Middle Irish from the 12th to 15th centuries. Modern Irish covers the Irish language from then to the present. If everything had continued as it was, Ireland would likely still largely speak Irish today, but the English put a stop to that. England had tried many times to

¹² McGee, Peter. "Endangered Languages: The Case of Irish Gaelic." *Training Language and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 4, 30 Dec. 2018, pp. 26–38, 10.29366/2018tlc.2.4.2.

conquer the island, but Ireland was able to fend the invaders off in a series of bloody conflicts throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. But the British were slowly able to get a majority in the Irish parliament, and then imposed measures to gain power at the expense of the Irish citizenry.

In 1801, Ireland officially joined with England to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. It's not much of a coincidence that at this same point, Irish transitioned from being the majority language of Ireland to a more minor one. The English forcibly tried to stamp out Irish in the 19th century by imposing English through schools, church, and the government. But the country stayed diglossic, meaning there were two languages used in two different situations: English was used by officials and members of the upper class, and Irish was used by the regular people. Through war and famine, Irish was strongly challenged, but the English hadn't completely eliminated the language by the time Ireland got its independence in 1922. Over the past decade there have been various attempts to resurrect it, and groups like *Conradh na Gaeilge* have pushed for the teaching of the language. In 2003, Irish was named an official language of Ireland, though most business continues to be held in English.

For centuries, the country of Ireland has been pushed down by foreign religious belief and by laws, trying to prevent the inhabitants from living their lives as they wanted. One of the examples of those laws are the Penal laws. Penal Laws were laws passed against Roman Catholics in Britain and Ireland after the Reformation that penalized the practice of the Roman Catholic religion and imposed civil disabilities on Catholics. Various acts passed in the 16th and 17th centuries prescribed fines and imprisonment for participation in Catholic worship and severe penalties, including death, for Catholic priests who practiced their ministry in Britain or Ireland. Other laws banned Catholics from voting, holding public office, owning land, bringing

religious items from Rome into Britain, publishing or selling Catholic primers, or teaching. Sporadically enforced in the 17th century and largely ignored in the 18th, the Penal Laws were almost completely nullified by the Roman Catholic Relief Act from 1791, the Catholic Emancipation Act from 1829, the Roman Catholic Charities Act from 1832, and the Roman Catholic Relief Act from 1926¹³. Ireland's history is a history of battle, conflict, and quest for independence. Throughout the centuries Ireland and its people have fought for what they believe in. Their culture and religion have been the targets of oppression but the writers, artists, and politicians of the island of Ireland have done all they could to protect their cultural heritage.

Chapter 2: Lady Gregory's life and point of view on Ireland's politics

The cultural history and legacy of Ireland is a complex one, due to the will of many writers, artists, and politicians to bring back their past traditions and language. The phenomenon of the Irish Literary Revival is one of the only examples of a part of a population trying to bring the past into their contemporary era. The Irish Literary Revival originated from the beginning of the 20th century. At that time, the world witnessed a remarkable Celtic Revival that took shape in several different forms and domains. The nature of this revival had multiple faces: aesthetic, literary, and political.¹⁴ The Irish Literary Revival, also known as the Irish Literary Renaissance, was closely allied and linked with a strong political nationalism and a newly found interest in Ireland's Gaelic literary heritage. The nationalistic pride reflected by the Gaelic

¹³ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "Penal Laws". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Penal-Laws>. Accessed 26 January 2022.

¹⁴ O'Driscoll, Robert. "Foundations of the Literary and Musical Revival." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, [Canadian Journal of Irish Studies, Canadian Association of Irish Studies], 1986, pp. 48–70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45331842>.

League was the starting point of the revival after the creation of the League in 1893 in order to revive the Irish culture and language. The movement developed into a flourishing literary force which was centered on the well-known Irish poet and playwright William Butler Yeats.

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 with the aim of restoring the Irish language. Eugene O'Growney was one of the founders, along with Douglas Hyde and others. The Gaelic League ran Irish language classes all around the country. They also taught native speakers in Gaeltacht areas how to read and write in their own language. The Gaelic League had a great impact on the status of the Irish language. It introduced a standardized way of writing the language which made it easier for people to read and write in it. They also published many new texts in Irish. O'Growney had a great reputation as an Irish speaker. He was appointed Professor of Irish at Maynooth College. As part of his efforts to revive the Irish language, he published a series of lessons called *Simple Lessons in Irish* in the newspapers of the time. The lessons were also published in book form by the Gaelic League. O'Growney's *Simple Lessons in Irish* brought the language to the attention of many people and inspired them to learn it. At no point, the Gaelic League was created to be a political organization. The goal of the league was to protect and bring to the light the traditional heritage of Ireland.¹⁵ The doctrines of the Gaelic League were later incorporated in Arthur Griffith's Sinn Fein policy.¹⁶

The foundation of the Abbey Theatre on December 27th of 1904 by Yeats and fellow playwrights Lady Gregory and Edward Martin, which was the first national theater, was a turning point in the Irish Literary Revival. The Abbey Theatre witnessed the birth or rebirth of

¹⁵ Clery, Arthur E. "The Gaelic League, 1893-1919." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 8, no. 31, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 1919, p. 398, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30092777>.

¹⁶ Clery, Arthur E. "The Gaelic League, 1893-1919." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 8, no. 31, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 1919, p. 401, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30092777>.

Irish culture and language thanks to many very talented playwrights throughout the years. We often remember W.B Yeats' contribution to the Irish Literary Revival, however, Lady Gregory was at the start of the revival and was also one of the main actors in this movement. Both in terms of producing work to promote Irish culture and language, but also politically speaking.

The Irish playwright known as Lady Gregory was born under the name Augusta Persee in 1852 at her family's County Galway Big House in the estate of Roxborough. At the age of 28, in 1880, she married Sir William Henry Gregory. During the Great Famine which took place between 1845 and 1852, Sir William Gregory had sponsored the "Gregory Clause", which stated that tenants who possessed holdings over more than one-quarter of an acre had to give up their land if they wanted to receive relief. A year after her wedding, she met Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, an English anti-imperialist poet with whom she had an affair for eighteen months. This affair inspired some of her first attempts at literature. She wrote a series of sonnets about their relationship and Wilfrid Blunt published them anonymously in one of his volumes of poetry entitled *A Woman's Sonnets*. During this affair with Blunt, Lady Gregory became more and more acquainted with his anti-imperialist ideas and came to share them.

Many years later, after the death of her husband in 1892, her study of the Irish language and her gathering of Irish folklore became more and more influenced by her increasingly fervid Irish Nationalist affinities. She published a number of volumes which were retelling of Irish mythology which she called "Kiltartanese" ("Kiltartanese" is Lady Gregory's term for English with Gaelic syntax, based on the dialect spoken in Kiltartan, a barony and civil parish in County Galway). We can also find the use of this dialect in her plays, and Kiltartanese was also an important influence on the dialect used by a fellow Irish playwright, J.M. Synge.

In 1896, Lady Gregory met William Butler Yeats at the home of her neighbor, a Big House Catholic landlord called Edward Martyn, and this meeting changed all of their lives forever. The three of them co-founded the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, which later became the Abbey Theatre. For decades, her contributions to Yeats' drama were suppressed, even her co-writing of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* in 1902. A year later, in 1903, she began writing plays on her own, and after the Abbey Theater's founding, these were some of the theatre's most popular productions. Her standout works include *The Rising of the Moon* in 1903, in which Lady Gregory shows her understanding of and sympathy with the Nationalist cause for someone. In 1904, the play entitled *Spreading the News* came out, in which she made fun of the rural Irish hunger for gossip. Lady Gregory's masterpiece came out in 1912 and is entitled *Grania*. This play is a retelling of an Irish legend known under the name of the Diarmuid and Gráinne; this story echoes Gregory's affair with Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. Finally in 1913, she wrote the play *McDonough's Wife* in which she pays tribute to the Irish traditions and Galway city through the use of character, an ornery and proud piper who pays eloquent and moving tribute to his late spouse.

Lady Gregory kept a diary between the years 1919 and 1923, when the first the Irish War of Independence and later the Irish Civil War were raging. In this diary, she wrote detailed accounts of some of the many atrocities and conflicts that were occurring around her. The content of this diary is very valuable today for understanding what people lived through in those years. In 1893, W.B Yeats published *The Celtic Twilight*¹⁷. This book is a collection of

¹⁷ Yeats, William Butler. *The Celtic Twilight: Myth, Fantasy and Folklore*. Bridport, Dorset, Prism Press ; Garden City Park, New York, 1990.

supernatural tales Yeats had gathered in his native county of Sligo, in the northwest of Ireland. After reading this book, Gregory commented that she was “jealous for Galway.”

The Irish Literary Revival is well remembered for the increase of literary and intellectual engagement in Ireland in the late 1890s and into the early 20th century. This literary movement was deeply engaged in bringing back the interest in Ireland’s Gaelic heritage but it was also interested in the growth of Irish nationalism, especially during the 19th century.¹⁸ This growth of nationalism in Ireland showed the urgency and the need for Ireland to gain their own national identity. In the 19th century, a series of revolutionary changes occurred in Ireland.

The vast majority of the agriculture in Ireland in the early 19th century was based on the potato due to the fact that it is an easy crop to grow. When the Great Famine occurred in the 1840s, the population crashed from around nine million to seven million people and shrunk to four million people by 1900. ¹⁹ After 1850, a semi-commercialized agriculture plan was developed. This came to help along in part by land purchase and redistribution schemes of a penitent British government, large farms being bought up under a government scheme by Catholics in the 1850s, and small farms being given on low rent hire-purchase to the rest of the tenants in the 1880s. In his paper, Tom Garvin indicates that: “In 1873, the land of Ireland was owned outright by about three thousand individuals or institutions; half of the land (the better half) on the island was owned by three hundred”.²⁰ After years and years of wanting to become an independent nation, Ireland had no choice but to get help from its British neighbors.

¹⁸ Hu, Jane. "Irish Literary Revival." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*. : Taylor and Francis, 2016. Date Accessed 27 Jan. 2022 <https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/irish-literary-revival>. doi:10.4324/9781135000356-REM1480-1

¹⁹ Garvin, Tom. “National Identity in Ireland.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 95, no. 379, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 2006, p. 247, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30095838>.

²⁰ Garvin, Tom. “National Identity in Ireland.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 95, no. 379, Irish Province of the Society of Jesus, 2006, p. 247, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30095838>.

Apart from the agricultural change, one of the other revolutionary changes was education. English was generally made available due to mass education, and by 1860 most of the population was more or less literate in the English language. This led to an acceleration of the Irish language's decline. The third and last revolutionary change was, what Gravin calls, the "Devotional Revolution". In an article dating back from 1972, the historian Emmet Larkin²¹ argued that in the beginning of the second half of the 19th century Irish Catholicism underwent what can be called a "devotional revolution" that made "practicing Catholics of the Irish people." Prior to the Great Famine, he maintained, the church lacked the human and material resources to address the spiritual needs of the growing, nominally Catholic population. Adverse ratios of clergy to laity were complicated by scandalous lapses of clerical discipline in some dioceses, and in many districts, there was seriously deficient lay compliance with canonical obligations.

The feeling of Irish nationalism became more and more present in Ireland over the years, especially among artists, writers and politicians. Among all those people, Lady Gregory was more and more involved in this quest towards an Irish national identity and towards the revival of Irish and Gaelic culture and language. During the Irish Literary Revival, she became a very important figure of the movement. She has been described as the "woman behind the Irish Renaissance" by Mary Lou Kohfeldt in her book published in 1985, entitled *Lady Gregory: the Woman behind the Irish Renaissance*.²² Her contribution to Irish literature and to Irish

²¹ Larkin, Emmet. "The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 77, no. 3, [Oxford University Press, American Historical Association], 1972, pp. 625–52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1870344>.

²² Mary Lou Kohfeldt. *Lady Gregory : The Woman behind the Irish Renaissance*. London, A. Deutsch, 1985.

nationalism is often overshadowed by her more famous colleagues such as William Butler Yeats, Douglas Hyde or Geroge Morre for example. Through her work, she managed to reveal many things about the exclusive nature of nationalist ideology and the different impacts it has on women, who are traditionally used as voiceless allegories of nations. During the Irish Literary Revival, Lady Gregory like many others turned to the past in order to find inspiration, and especially to the myth and legends of ancient Ireland. However, unlike her male contemporaries, her work also included criticisms about the patriarchal nature of nationalism which excluded women from having an active involvement in the formation of the Irish nation. Ironically, as pointed out by Noelle Bowles in her article *Nationalism and Feminism in Lady Gregory's "Kincora," "Dervorgilla," and "Grania"* ²³, by the end of the 19th century the use of women as patriotic allegorical figures was well established in western culture. France with Marianne, England with Britannia and the United States with Columbia were all representations of their nations. As a political allegory, the Irish woman was stuck in the position of a maiden or crone, totally unable to take action on her own behalf. In Ireland, the main allegory is named Cathleen ni Houlihan and she is at the center of Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats' co-written play²⁴ of the same name. In this play, their allegorical Ireland is depicted as both an old woman and young maid. This play exposes the bloodthirsty nature of patriotic mythology, but men still take action for their nation.

²³ Bowles, Noelle. "Nationalism and Feminism in Lady Gregory's 'Kincora,' 'Dervorgilla,' and 'Grania.'" *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, vol. 3, no. 3, University of St. Thomas (Center for Irish Studies), 1999, pp. 116–30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20557586>.

²⁴ Gregory, Lady, and William Butler Yeats. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. 1902. Lavergne, Tn, Digireads.com Pub, 2011.

Lady Gregory's nationalist interest began with her rejecting direct action. She found interest in an anti-Turkish Egyptian officer named Arabi Pasha. Even if he was receiving some bad press in London due to his nationalist ideology, Lady Gregory was truly captivated by this man and the values he stood for. In 1882, she published a pamphlet entitled *Arabi and His Household*²⁵ which shows her interest in this man but also in his ideas that may have echoes with hers at that time. Her essay in his defense and her contribution to his legal defense were directly challenging England's right to govern over Egypt. In her autobiography she wrote:

That was the end of my essay in politics, for though Ireland is always with me, and I first feared and then became reconciled to, and now hope to see even a greater independence than Home Rule, my saying has been long, "I am not fighting for it, but preparing for it." And that has been my purpose in my work for establishing a National Theatre, and for the revival of the language, and in making better known the heroic tales of Ireland. For whatever political inclination or energy was born with me may have run its course in that Egyptian year and worn itself out.²⁶

By saying "preparing" for, rather than "fighting" for, Irish independence, Lady Gregory was removing herself and her work from the masculine world of action into the feminine world of preparation. However, after that she never abandoned politics and was still a strong believer in women's ability to further the cause of Irish independence. Those beliefs can be found in several of her plays, like for example in her 1912 play entitled *Grania*. In this play, Lady Gregory is confronting traditional literature and patriarchal nationalism, and she is offering a feminist critique of the nature of the nationalist movement.

²⁵ Gregory, Lady. *Arabi and His Household*. Kegan Paul, & Co.: London, 1882.

²⁶ Gregory, Lady, and Colin Smythe. *Seventy Years : Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory*. Gerrards Cross, Smythe, 1974.

Lady Gregory was mainly interested in what can be called “cultural nationalism”. In other words, her involvement in the quest for an Irish national identity would take place through the use of culture, literature and language. Apart from her works, the one element of her contribution to the Irish Literary Revival that is still present nowadays is the Abbey Theatre. Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn planned, with Yeats and Moore, the establishment of what would become a national theatre. Every folktale collected by Yeats and Lady Gregory was further ammunition in the struggle for a separate identity.²⁷ When Moore returned to Dublin to live in 1901, he painted the door of his house in Ely Place green as if nationalism was now on the agenda, his own included. This project came as a sort of “replacement” for the Irish Literary Theatre which Yeats and Lady Gregory founded in 1899, which in 1902 was taken over by the Irish National Dramatic Society. Two years later, in 1904, the Abbey Theatre was established thanks to a group of playwrights including Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge. Founding members also included the Fays, Arthur Sinclair, and Sara Allgood. The founding of the Abbey in 1904 came at a moment when the energies of the European movement for free theatre combined with those of a gifted generation of Irish dramatists. Between 1907 and 1909, the Abbey Theatre went through harsh times due to changes in personnel that affected the management of the theatre. The Fay brothers, whose commitment to nationalism conflicted with Yeats’s art-theatre outlook, chose to depart for the United States. Annie Horniman, the Englishwoman who had funded the purchase and renovation of the theater, withdrew her support and the theater struggled to maintain a consistent managerial team. The onset of World War I and the Irish Rebellion of 1916 almost caused the closing of the theatre. As I will

²⁷ Pierce, David. “Cultural Nationalism and the Irish Literary Revival.” *International Journal of English Studies (IJES)*, vol. 2, 1 Dec. 2002, 10.6018/ijes.2.2.48681.

discuss later, the Abbey Theatre has been the place of many displays of riots and of violence because of the provocative nature of some plays that were produced at the Abbey throughout the years.

The Irish Literary Revival and the Gaelic League are two examples of the will of Ireland to gain its own independence and its own identity as a nation. The focus made by writers, artists, and politicians on the culture and the language prove that a conflict can be fought not only in battles but also in the mind of people.

Chapter 3 : The tensions surrounding the nation building project.

The whole project around the Irish Literary Revival and the growth of Irish nationalism was for Ireland and all its people to finally build their own national identity. However, a project as big as that was very difficult and complex to put in place and many tensions surrounded the nation building project in Ireland. The cultural aspect in this nation building project was a key notion for all the different actors of the Irish Literary Revival. The foundation of the Abbey Theatre, as I said before, was a turning point in this project. Several plays that were played at the Abbey were written or partially written in old Gaelic. Plays such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan* by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory, which was one of the very first plays that were produced at the Abbey, had its title written in old Gaelic and the story itself revolves around the folklore surrounding the allegory of the nation of Ireland.

The Abbey Theatre has been the place of many plays throughout its years of existence. The Abbey's staging of Synge's satire *The Playboy of the Western World*²⁸, on Jan. 26, 1907,

²⁸ Synge, J. M. (John Millington), 1871-1909. *The Playboy of the Western World*. Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1970.

stirred up so much resentment in the audience over its portrayal of the Irish peasantry that there was a riot. When the Abbey players toured the United States for the first time in 1911, similar protests and disorders were provoked when the play opened in New York City and Philadelphia. This play tells the story of a young Irish man, Christy, who has killed his father and brags about it to a group of men and women at a pub. His actions gain him admiration and attention from the local crowd and from the pub owner's daughter, Pegeen, in particular. She and Christy begin to fall in love and become engaged. However, it is revealed that the man's father has not actually been killed. The locals learn of this and turn on Christy as he attempts to kill his father a second time. Pegeen rejects him and the man leaves in shame with his father as Pegeen laments her situation. This play, written by Synge in a style meant to copy the bawdy language and approach of the Irish peasant class, caused a series of riots in which audience members shouted down actors in a conglomeration of hisses, boos, and calls for the murder of the author. So intense and unrelenting was the protest that the actors transitioned into mimicking the actions of the play in a dumbshow. The play appeared to critique the morality of Irish women in particular thanks to the single line, "a drift of females standing in their shifts." A shift is a female undergarment, and the line referencing it was extremely offensive to audiences. In fact, in a note written to Yeats, Lady Gregory claims that the riots began the moment that word was used. Yeats declared the piece genius, and eventually, the riots petered out.

The emergence of the playwright Sean O'Casey also stimulated new life in the theatre, and from 1923 to 1926 the Abbey staged three of his plays: *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars*, the last a provocative dramatization of the Easter Rising of 1916. In the early 1950s the Abbey company moved to the nearby Queen's Theatre

after a fire destroyed its playhouse. *The Plough and the Stars*²⁹, which is the third installment of O' Casey's Dublin trilogy, received a similar but less intense reception to that of *Playboy*. The Irish people resented its portrayal of a sympathetic British supporter, Bessie, and declared it not nationalist enough. Overall, the play reads as a critique on the uprising and thereby on the movement towards Home Rule itself. Yeats, in frustration once again with the one-minded Irish audience, chastised O'Casey's critics for being unable to recognize genius in its time. A new Abbey Theatre, housing a smaller, experimental theatre, was completed in 1966 on the original site. While the Abbey today retains its traditional focus on Irish plays, it also stages a wide range of classic and new works from around the world.

The notion of language, as I explained earlier in my thesis, was at the center of the Irish Literary Revival. Language being the vector of culture and traditions, both written and oral. In the case of Lady Gregory, a trip to Inisheer in the Aran Islands in 1893 re-awoke for Lady Gregory an interest in the Irish language and in the folklore of the area in which she lived. She organized Irish lessons at the school at Coole and began collecting tales from the area around her home, especially from the residents of Gort workhouse. One of the tutors she employed was Norma Borthwick, who would visit Coole numerous times. This activity led to the publication of a number of volumes of folk material, including *A Book of Saints and Wonders* (1906), *The Kiltartan History Book* (1909) and *The Kiltartan Wonder Book* (1910). She also produced a number of collections of "Kiltartanese" versions of Irish myths, including *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902) and *Gods and Fighting Men* (1903). ("Kiltartanese" is Lady Gregory's term for English with Gaelic syntax, based on the dialect spoken in Kiltartan.) In his introduction to

²⁹ O'Casey, Sean. *The Plough and the Stars*. Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1991.

Cuchulain of Muirthemne Yeats wrote "I think this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time". James Joyce was to parody this claim in the Scylla and Charybdis chapter of his novel *Ulysses*. Her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* is still considered nowadays as a good retelling of the Ulster Cycle tales such as Deidre, Cuchulainn, and the Táin Bó Cúailnge stories. Thomas Kinsella wrote "I emerged with the conviction that Lady Gregory's *Cuchul-ian of Muirthemne*, though only a paraphrase, gave the best idea of the Ulster stories". However, her version omitted some elements of the tale, usually assumed to avoid offending Victorian sensibilities, as well being an attempt to present a "respectable" nation myth for the Irish, though her paraphrase is not considered dishonest. Other critics find the bowdlerisations in her works more offensive, not only the removal of references to sex and bodily functions, but also the loss of Cuchulain's "battle frenzy"; in other areas she censored less than some of her male contemporaries, such as Standish O'Grady.

As the 20th century opened, political tensions increased. In 1914 the Irish Party, through the Government of Ireland Act, secured Home Rule for the country, but when World War I erupted several months later, the act was suspended. For some years before the outbreak of the war, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB; popularly known as Fenians), who had been quiescent since the failure of their rebellion in 1867, had been secretly reorganizing. When war came, they made plans for another rebellion against the British. With the help of the Irish Citizen Army, a small volunteer workingmen's corps, and the Irish Volunteers (a militia partly under the influence of the IRB), a rebellion was launched on Easter Monday, 1916 (also known as Easter Rising). Leaders of the movement proclaimed an Irish Republic and formed a provisional government. The rebels occupied buildings in the center of the city, which they held

for a week. Commerce and industry came to a halt, and a quarter of the city's population of 390,000 went on public relief. Defeated, the surviving rebels were marched through the streets of Dublin to the jeers and abuse of the populace. But the establishment of martial law in Dublin, the execution of the leaders within 10 days, and the mass imprisonment of those thought to be implicated in the uprising roused Irish public opinion as the rebellion itself had not. Guerrilla warfare by the Irish Republican Army spread through the country in 1919, continuing through two years of terror and counterterror. Dublin was one of the worst-affected areas in Ireland and for much of those two years was subject to martial law.

A compromise treaty was concluded in 1921 establishing the Irish Free State, but an anti-treaty contingent of the IRA opposed it and took possession of the Four Courts building in 1922. That summer the rebels were driven out by force, an event that marked the start of 11 months of bloody civil war between the factions that were for and against the treaty. Once again Dublin suffered heavily in the conflict. The end of the civil war in 1923 did not mean the end of gunfire in the streets, however. Political assassinations and armed raids continued into the early 1930s, and hostilities remained a marked feature of Dublin life for more than a generation.

The social and economic changes that came about after the end of World War II inevitably put pressure on historic Dublin, and an energetic conservation movement developed. In 1988 Dublin celebrated its millennium, arousing much thought and comment about its past and future, especially concerning the quality of its urban life. The city's regeneration was recognized in 1991, when Dublin was designated that year's European City of Culture.

From all those events, those conflicts, and from the foundations created by the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Revival, the world saw the formation of the modern Irish nation-state. Several scholars have worked on what is called “Irish modernism”. Writers developed new, often abstract, forms of expression as a means of responding to political and cultural instability. Among the most recent scholarship on Irish Modernism, it has addressed the collaboration of writers and other artists, but also emphasizes the interrelationship of literature with the visual and plastic arts. Carol Taaffe wrote in 2010 alongside Edwina Keown a book entitled *Irish Modernism*³⁰, in this interdisciplinary volume they presented a sustained analysis of the emergence, reception, and legacy of modernism in Ireland. The central concerns of the book include definitions of and critical contexts for an Irish modernism, but also the issues of production, reception and the marketplace, new dialogues between literature and the visual arts in Ireland, modernism and Catholicism, and Irish modernism's relationship with European and Anglo-American modernism. The nation building project of Ireland has been at the center of the politics and cultural goals throughout the 20th century. The results of this project, even nowadays, are unsure and complex to analyze. Several scholars are working on this topic, and many others will still be working on it in the years to come.

³⁰ Keown, Edwina, and Carol Taaffe. *Irish Modernism : Origins, Contexts, Publics*. Oxford ; New York, Peter Lang, 2010.

Part 2: Supernatural in Irish culture, folklore and literature

Supernatural entities such as ghosts and spirits are common in many different cultures and folklores all around the world. The Cambridge Dictionary³¹ defines the supernatural as: “something caused by forces that cannot be explained by science.” Ireland is no exception to those entities and due to its past of war and conflicts, there is an omnipresence of ghosts and spirits in Irish folklore. This omnipresence has inspired many writers and artists in Ireland throughout the years and especially during the Irish Literary Revival in the 20th century. In Ireland, ghosts are known as *Thevshi* or *Tas*, and they live in a state between the life of the living and the next life.

The supernatural is a great part of what the world has seen of Ireland over the centuries. From the early Christian period, the Irish literature gave us testimonies of the existence of the beliefs of ghosts and spirits in the ancient times. However, much of its content seems to indicate that those beliefs could have existed before the Christian era in Ireland. Irish and Anglo-Irish literature also bears witness to the continuation of such belief in Ireland down the centuries and leading into modern times. Thanks to the collection of the modern folk belief and to the large part of oral tradition over the last hundred years in Ireland, we have at our disposal comprehensive and intimate documents showing the persistence of the belief in the supernatural, as well as the variety and richness of its expression and its importance in the lives of the people sharing those stories and documents. The large distribution of the belief in the supernatural in Ireland indicates that it became a common property of the Irish people over the centuries. Even nowadays such beliefs keep a position as an important element in the thoughts

³¹ Cambridge University Press. “Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus.” *Cambridge.org*, 2021, dictionary.cambridge.org/.

and habits of some people in some areas of Ireland, such as Irish-speaking (*Gaeltacht*) and English-speaking (*Galltacht*) places, but also as passive bearers of traditions.

Irish folklore is full of haunted places and well-documented supernatural entities. Those spirits could often be found in castles and other haunted houses, while one of the most famous and scariest of Ireland's spooks, the banshee, still pursues noble families in both countryside and city streets. For example, the ghost of Helena Blunden is said to haunt the former mill where she once worked during her life and the haunting cry of her last moments echoes between the walls of the linen mill. This story is not about a traditional spook or some Halloween phantom but much more about the tragic tale of a talented young woman who got her life cut short in the early years of the last century. In Ireland there are a lot of stories revolving around ghosts and spirits, and many of those stories are deeply embedded in the culture and folklore. Throughout the years, several artists and authors have been inspired by those stories about spiritual beings and the complex relation between life and death.

In this second part, I will discuss the place and importance of the supernatural in Irish culture and folklore. In order to do so, I will first focus on the place of those spiritual entities in the folklore of Ireland and the relation of William Butler Yeats with the occult. Secondly, I will be focusing on Lady Gregory and her relation to spirits and ghosts in her life. Finally, I will analyze the role and meaning of the undead in Lady Gregory's plays.

Chapter 1: The place of the supernatural in Irish folklore, and its representation by William Butler Yeats in *The Celtic Twilight*.

The country and culture of Ireland is synonymous with ghosts, mythical creatures and other supernatural phenomena. It can be easily identified thanks to all the ruins and castles spread around the countryside of the island. For the most part, those myths and legends are known by the people of Ireland living in those areas but because of the Irish Literary Revival and the different authors associated with this movement, some of those tales came to the light and are now being read and known around the world. During the movement, the stories that were transmitted by oral tradition were written and became more accessible to everyone.

Due to the Gaelic traditions, the country of Ireland basks in an aural tradition that survived centuries of complex political issues, oppression and national calamity. Ireland's origins are shrouded in a thick mist obscuring the gaze of several historical researchers, even the most dedicated ones. For example, the decorations that we can observe in the great passage tombs of Boyne valley, Newgrange and Knowth are highlighting the technical skills and mathematical precision that are shown behind the construction and creation of the Egyptian pyramids. Those decorations are exquisite lines, whorls and spirals. However, those elements precede these well-known wonders by more than a thousand years. The mysteries behind the builders of those constructions are deep and captivating for many scholars, and their religious beliefs and lives are only sources of hypothesis and can only be guessed at for now. In Ireland, the great houses were not built or designed to benefit the indigenous population but more for the comfort of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. These owners were often absent and were employing the best craftsmen and architects possible in order to create builds that would reflect their fortune,

family properties but also their beliefs in their own importance. Several of those big stately homes in Ireland were the main seats of great, powerful and noble families but many were holiday homes such as summer retreats where the proprietors could invite their English friends hoping to impress them with their wealth.

Over the centuries these houses became symbols of subjugation and due to the rising level of Irish nationalism that spread throughout the country in the early 20th century, they became a main focus as people were rising up in order to free themselves from the oppression of England. As a result, many of those once great houses are now nothing more than hollow shells that lie in the peacefulness of forgotten places, abandoned and mysterious ruins whose crumbling walls and appearance reflect an ancient era of grandeur and glory. Discovering them is a wonderful and incredible experience and standing in the middle of those ruins and contemplating the former glory and the ghosts of the past can bring shivers even to the brightest days of summer. Between the late 12th century and the early 18th century, more than three thousand castles were built all across Ireland. To this day, we count more castles in Ireland than in England, Scotland and Wales combined, yet since a majority of those castles were constructed with the intention of oppressing the indigenous population, the native Irish have never had any affection towards those constructions spread around the landscape of Ireland. However, several of Ireland's castles are now little more than some withered piles of stone that stand entirely abandoned in the middle of the countryside or are also stuck between more modern buildings. Some are perched perilously on the edges of crumbling cliffs, although many of them are totally abandoned and left to decay in gardens with their stones removed to be used for other building projects in the locality. In recent years, a small proportion of those

buildings have been restored and rebranded into elegant homes for rockstars, actors and celebrities or else have been converted into hotels where one night at a bed and breakfast costs quite a sum, which in the past could have kept a whole family safe for several generations. The gifted storytelling of Irish people has given a rich display of phantoms to these castles and is an important part of the tales of wandering spirits haunting the different ruins and castles of Ireland.

Many Irish writers were greatly fascinated by the supernatural and the occult. Being part of those writers, William Butler Yeats who was born on June the 13th of 1865 is one of the greatest and well-known Irish poets, playwright and prose writers of the 20th century. In 1923 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Alongside Lady Gregory, he became one of the major actors of the Irish Literary Revival and one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre in 1904. During his life he wrote several plays and poems revolving around the supernatural and the occult in Irish folklore. The occult is defined by the Merriam-Webster³² dictionary as “matters regarded as involving the action or influence of supernatural or supernormal powers or some secret knowledge of them” and William Butler Yeats was first introduced to the study and practice of the occult while in art college in Dublin. This fascination with the occult, metaphysics and paranormal activities remained with him for the rest of his life.

His father was deeply skeptical about religion and especially about Christianity and this led William Butler Yeats to found new beliefs. According to Yeats' biographer Roy Foster³³, he needed to believe in something so it increased his interest in supernatural and spiritual life

³² “Dictionary By.” *The Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary*, www.merriam-webster.com. Accessed 22 Apr. 2022.

³³ Robert Fitzroy Foster. *W. B. Yeats: A Life. 1, the Apprentice Mage, 1865-1914*. Oxford Etc., Oxford University Press, 2008.

which led him to found an alternative system of beliefs. Throughout his life, he tried to contact spirits and ghosts through the use of occult research and practices for which he wrote about. As Foster points out in his biography, Yeats' involvement in the occult was bound up in his complex relationships with several women with whom he shared beliefs, and almost all of the women who became inspirations for his poems were involved in the occult. While he was studying at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, Yeats met fellow poet, dramatist and painter George Russell who stimulated his interest in mysticism and gave him a copy of A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. His occultism goes well in an Irish Protestant literary tradition including Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Maturin, Bram Stoker and Elizabeth Bowen. Notions and concepts such as reincarnation, communication with the dead, mediums, supernatural phenomena and Oriental mysticism were real fascinations for Yeats throughout all his life. In 1885 he became one of the founding members of the Dublin Lodge of the Hermetic Society alongside Russell. Five years later, in March 1890 he joined a secret and shady society which was practicing magic named the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in London because he was seeking deeper answers. Other members of the society included Maud Gonne, the actress Florence Farr, Welsh author Arthur Machen and English author Evelyn Underhill and also Aleister Crowley. At one point, Yeats was frustrated due to the lack of a classical marriage, so he and Maud Gonne decided to conduct a spiritual marriage through the Golden Dawn society in order to channel Yeats' frustration. In 1914, William Butler Yeats' future wife George Hyde-Lees joined the order. He remained an active member of the Golden Dawn for over 30 years and became involved in the power struggles inside the Order with both Farr and McGregor Mathers. After the organization disbanded and splintered into various groups, Yeats stayed with Stella Matutina until 1921.

Yeats' poetry had an immense influence coming from the occult and was imbued with the spiritual and the unknown. In his book *W.B Yeats and the Muses*³⁴ Joseph Hassett explains that the marriage between Yeats and Hyde-Lees was a way for him to escape the emotional turmoil of his relationship with Maud Gonne but also that he feared that settling down would cut down his poetic inspiration. However, only four days into their honeymoon, the new bride shocked him by pretending to be coming from another world, with a lot of secrets to share. He learned that the moment of sexual union was a sort of a portal to access the knowledge of the spiritual world, which is a knowledge embedded with a language rooted in a complex system of power and richness. Following that, it was the beginning of an experiment using the psychic phenomenon of "automatic writing". Yeats and his wife held many sessions of this experiment which led to the production of nearly 4,000 pages that he studied and organized. Those sessions gave Yeats enough information to formulate several theories about life and history. This allows him to create a system of spirituality mapping the development and reincarnation of the soul. For Yeats fate is at the center of many things such as history and its plan are revealed in moments during which the human and the divine interact together.

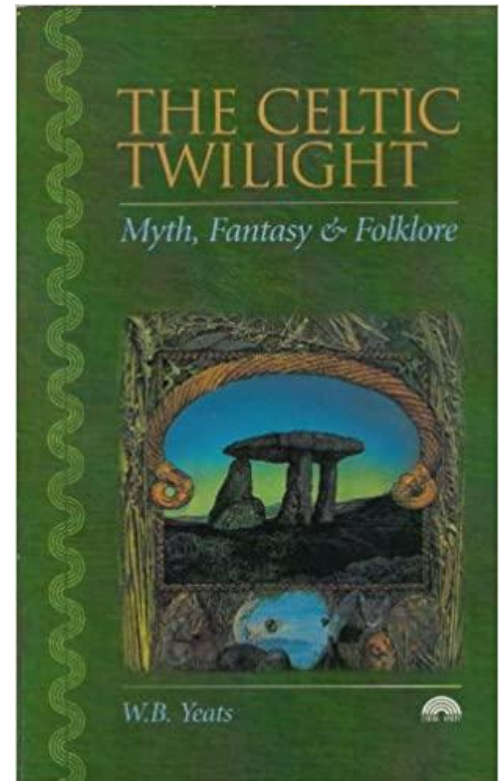
During his life, William Butler Yeats wrote several books and pieces of poetry revolving around the myths and legends of the occult and various supernatural elements. As shown in his book *The Celtic Twilight*³⁵, we can clearly see Yeats' interest in all the mythical and magical tales of the world of fairies, ghosts and spirits. Yeats refers to his book as "this handful of dreams" that first appeared in 1893 and the title comes from the pre-dawn hours, which was when

³⁴ Langan, Michael D. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 100, no. 399, 2011, pp. 384–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23059686>.

³⁵ Yeats, William Butler. *The Celtic Twilight: Myth, Fantasy and Folklore*. Bridport, Dorset, Prism Press ; Garden City Park, New York, 1990.

druids were performing their rituals. This book is made of stories that Yeats learned about from his friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. Even if the book is a faithful transcription of those narratives, Yeats includes his own experiences as a form of commentary.

Written in 1893, Yeats' volume of essays entitled *The Celtic Twilight*³⁶ was his first try but progress was slow until 1898 when he met the woman who would later become his close friend and fellow playwright, Lady Gregory. At that time, she was already collecting old stories, lore, and folklore of the west of Ireland. He found that this lore collected by Lady Gregory echoed with his beliefs for ancient rituals and for pagan beliefs that were never truly destroyed by Christianity. This gave him the feeling that with all that he could create around it in a new strict but high style, he created original poetry while he was seeking and moving toward his own identity in his



Front cover of Yeats' *The Celtic Twilight*, 1990

personal life. From 1898, Yeats started to spend his summers in Coole Park in the home of Lady Gregory before eventually purchasing an ancient, ruined Norman castle named Thoor Ballylee. This structure, under the name of the Tower, would later become an important symbol of several of his last and best pieces of work. *The Celtic Twilight* offers a mixture of what the author learned about the mystical world of dhools and faeries, but he also made several comments on those stories like many other writers of his time have done. It is important to note

³⁶ Yeats, William Butler. *The Celtic Twilight: Myth, Fantasy and Folklore*. Bridport, Dorset, Prism Press ; Garden City Park, New York, 1990.

that he never degrades the beliefs of the peasantry as superstition or mirages produced by a lack of education, which was not the case of every person who could have been less open-minded. On the contrary, Yeats perceived Ireland as a land full of magic and he even reported some strange incidents that he experienced himself. He also translated stories that were told to him into a more modern language and wrote them down as precisely as possible. The protagonists or witnesses of those stories were men and women of Ireland who lived peacefully and fully with this world of magic around them. However, these people were not stubbornly tying themselves to their pagan heritage and past which had disappeared almost everywhere else because they accept the idea of being part of a world where much more can be accomplished due to science and the progress it has made for centuries. All this contributed to give Ireland a natural and charming aura that we can observe nowadays. Yeats argues that translating an oral folktale into a written one necessitates a specific literary style to truly make it alive. To balance the absence of gesture and speech, folklorists would use performances, but the tale would only become an empty shell of what it was before. This is why Yeats thought of a style that is said to be "the fair equivalent for the gesture and the voice of the peasant tale teller." In a review of *Irish Wonders*, Yeats talked more on the subject of accuracy and honesty by indicating a perspective on what he considered to be the limits of the fictional approach. The writer must create the storytelling of an event but not the event itself. Yeats tried to incorporate his own supernatural beliefs and ideas into those stories, but he also believed that such ideas must be rooted in the thoughts of generations. Yeats' book *The Celtic Twilight* is a great example of what he wanted to do with Irish folklore and traditions. Irish folklore revolves in great part around mythical creatures such as fairies, demons and elves and has inspired many authors and

artists such as Lady Gregory as we can see in her poetry and plays, but also William Butler Yeats as we saw with his essays in *The Celtic Twilight*.

Chapter 2: The aspect of the supernatural in Lady Gregory's life and in her work

Supernatural creatures have influenced many plays and stories in Irish folklore and literature throughout history. During her life, Lady Gregory studied and read about those stories and was truly interested in the notion of the undead in her native culture. She dedicated her life and career to the rebirth and the preservation of Ireland's forgotten history. As we can see in all the works she produced during her life, the notion of the supernatural (which include ghosts, spirits, undead and strange elements) and the past have been an important inspiration for her. This became even more than just an inspiration for her works but also the goal in her life as a human being. During her life she faced death several times, either with the death of her relatives or the death of artists and authors that she knew.

During her life Lady Gregory had her own share of tragedies and other difficulties, besides her husband's death in 1892. Over the years, she lost several siblings and nephews, and she was also forced to undergo three operations for breast cancer. At the beginning of the first World War in 1915, Lady Gregory's nephew Hugh Lane died on the ship named Lusitania after it had been torpedoed. Hugh Lane was a collector of Impressionist art and also the director of the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin. For many years, Lady Gregory fought for his collection of paintings to be exposed in Dublin rather than London. However, she never achieved this during her lifetime but in 1959 the paintings were exchanged between the two cities' galleries every five years. Three years after the death of her nephew, Lady Gregory lost her son Robert in a

plane crash during the first World War. Robert was a promising artist very close to his mother and the circumstances around his death were never known by Lady Gregory because it is said that his plane was shot down by friendly fire. Robert was married and had three children, and his tragic death had an important and devastating effect on Lady Gregory. She transferred some of her affection for her son to her grand-son Richard, Robert's oldest child. Robert's two daughters named Anne and Catherine spent most of their childhood alongside their grand-mother at Coole Park. Later, Anne wrote an engaging memoir talking about their various escapades during those years, entitled *Me and Nu: Childhood at Coole*, Nu being Catherine's nickname. After Robert's death, his widow Margaret became the owner of Coole but she wanted to sell it, which she did in 1927. It was sold to the Irish Land Commission with a stipulation allowing Lady Gregory to rent it for a small fee as long as she was alive. Four years later in 1931 she published an elegy entitled *Coole*. However, she never managed to feel the same affection for the house that she had for her childhood home at Roxborough. Yet she loved what is called "Seven Woods" at Coole and was often involved in taking care of the woods by maintaining and planting new trees.

During her childhood, Lady Gregory was educated at home and she had a strong influence for her future career from the family nurse, Mary Sheridan who was a Catholic and native Irish speaker who introduced her to the history and legends of the local area. As a young woman she became a reader of Tennyson and saw a potential for the dramatization of the folklore she had collected under the influence of Tennyson's poetry. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and Sir William Gregory were mentioned as influences for her. Blunt gave her the chance to go and see the Eastern colonies and Sir Gregory showed her the point of view of how the colonizer

should treat the colonized and how to maintain a good relationship between the two sides. The combination of those two views allowed Lady Gregory to understand the essential role of women in the colonies but also in Ireland. Due to her interest and work on both Gaelic and Irish folklore, she became an influence for the following generations of writers and artists in Ireland. She left a significant impact thanks to her work with the Abbey Theatre which became synonymous with the Irish Literary Revival.

In her 2018 monograph³⁷ Eglantina Rempert focuses on Lady Gregory by taking a thematic approach to her life, work and relationship with other writers. The analysis of this study is divided in five main angles revolving around Lady Gregory's social, educational and artistic ideals. Topics such as her education on visual arts on the Grand Tours, Celtic mythology and Victorian Hellenism are discussed in this study but also education, social and constitutional reform. Rempert's study emphasizes the importance of the symbiosis between visual and text-based arts but also between political philosophies and social reform. The relation between Irish and English language in literature is also depicted in the study. She shows the importance that Lady Gregory had with the implications of those topics in the Irish Literary Revival. Following the death of William Henry Gregory in 1892, Lady Gregory became more and more interested in Irish folklore. During the month of October 1893, she decided to travel alone to Inisheer which is one of the three islands called the Aran Islands a few miles offshore in Galway Bay. There she was mainly surrounded for several days with many people who spoke primarily Irish and with a link to the old Irish culture still intact. Lady Gregory's interest in folklore was mainly inspired from her learning from Hyde's works about Irish poet and fiddler Anthony

³⁷ Sorcha De Brún, « Eglantina Rempert, *Lady Gregory and Irish National Theatre: Art, Drama, Politics* », *Études irlandaises* [En ligne], 45-1 | 2020, mis en ligne le 24 septembre 2020, consulté le 18 mai 2022.

Raftery who died in 1835. Raftery was born in County Mayo and was blinded by smallpox as a child, but he became a wandering bard. Even decades after his passing many people were still familiar with his works such as his poems and songs. Irish history was not part of the educational system, so children often learned it from Raftery himself. In the Royal Irish Academy, Hyde found a manuscript of several of his poems and also found the house where he was born. Lady Gregory was truly impressed by his life and what he has accomplished with his work, so she felt a deep connection with Ireland's creative past. She wrote an article about him and included some of his works in her first book, *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish*³⁸, published in 1902. She also made for a stone to be erected on his grave with the word "Rafterei" inscribed on it. She helped to establish an annual festival (feis) in his honor.

Ireland's rich tradition of myths and sagas dates back from antiquity and can be divided in four cycles: mythological, Ulster, Fenian, and historical. The myths and legends of Irish folklore were at first diffused by oral tradition but from the seventh century monks started to write those down in the old Irish language. In 1900, a publisher suggested to W. B. Yeats that he should translate some of those stories into English, but he declined due to a lack of time. However, he talked about it to Lady Gregory, and she agreed to work on it. Before that, numerous authors had translated those stories from the old Irish to English, but their English was a bit unnatural. Instead, Lady Gregory decided to use a type of English that she learned after hearing people speak it that she called "Kiltartanese". This English dialect is also known as "Hiberno-English" and has its own syntax, idioms and rhythms of the original Irish. During conducting interviews, Lady Gregory noticed that many of her Irish-speaking interlocutors were

³⁸ Gregory, Lady, 1852-1932. *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish*. Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1974.

also speaking English which shows the influence that English people have had on native Irish people. The result that Lady Gregory managed to achieve for this language was a more naturally-sounding English compared to other translations. This gave a great appeal and made her translations quite popular. Lady Gregory dedicated some of her works to the people of Kiltartan. Lady Gregory herself described the Kiltartanese dialect as “plain and simple words, in the same way my old nurse used to be telling me stories from the Irish long ago, and I a child at Roxborough.”³⁹ William Butler Yeats and others were quite skeptical about its success at first but famous men such Theodore Roosevelt and Mark Twain were truly intrigued and admirers of Lady Gregory’s translations.

Lady Gregory spent many years of her life studying about Kiltartan people and folklore, and so she wrote several books on this topic. She wrote about the history of Kiltartan and also wrote a poetry book written in the Kiltartan language that she has developed. After developing a unique style, she wrote most of her plays, folklore stories and translations in this style or slight variations of it which would be inspired by the way of speaking of Irish tenants in County Galway and also based on the rhythms of the Gaelic language. The use of Kiltartan was a major feature of Lady Gregory’s plays, which were often short plays. Her familiarity and expertise about the Irish speech patterns allowed her to give a certain authenticity and humanity to her characters which could explain the vast popularity of her plays, especially her comedies. In 1909 she learned about the death of fellow playwright J.M Synge and that left a deep impact on her, but she managed to devote herself to her work again. She wrote *The Image and The Travelling*

³⁹ Gregory, Lady, and W. B. Yeats. *Lady Gregory's Complete Irish Mythology*. Smithmark, 1996. pp.329-330.

*Man*⁴⁰, and translating Molière's *Miser* and some other of his plays. She also published *The Kiltartan History Book*⁴¹, a folklore collection, and *Seven Short Plays*⁴², which was perhaps her favorite of her own publications.

Due to several dates that she left in her notebooks, we know that Lady Gregory collected the legends for *The Kiltartan History Book* between August 1898 and March 1923 or 1924. When she resided at Coole, her tenants would seek her help for all kinds of things and she only wanted to hear stories in return for her help. During that time, she had a close relationship with her neighbors which was a source of great joy and satisfaction for her. Many stories came to Lady Gregory at her doorstep, often from regular visitors to Coole as for example Curley the Piper, Power the Basket maker, and Mary the Dance, whom Lady Gregory called Wandering Mary and who achieved literary immortality as Yeats's Crazy Jane, but also other people whom she met along country roads near Coole. She managed to collect even more folklore tales and stories in London drawing rooms. Those stories are the ones that made up the "Folklore in Politics: Mr. Gladstone and Ireland" in her memoir *Seventy Years*⁴³. The information that is written in *The Kiltartan History Book* was collected from both Irish and English-speaking informants. During the five first years of her gathering of information, between 1897 and 1902, were the years during which she was greatly involved with the work of the Gaelic League. Most of the stories that she collected in Irish were transcribed in English in her notebooks but the few traces written in Irish are mainly exercises, song and poems which for the most part appear

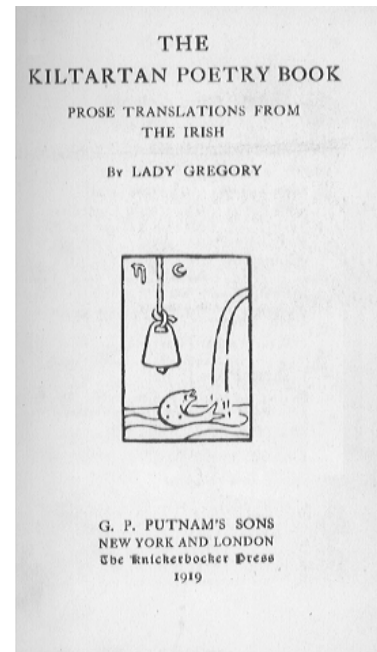
⁴⁰ Gregory, Lady. *The Travelling Man/ By Lady Gregory*. London: G.P. Putman's Soms, 1927.

⁴¹ Gregory, Lady, and Robert Gregory. *The Kiltartan History Book (1909)*. Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007.

⁴² Gregory, Lady Augusta and The Perfect Library. *Seven Short Plays (Perfect Library)*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.

⁴³ Gregory, Lady, et al. *Seventy Years*. Macmillan Publishers, 1976.

written in Kiltartan dialect in *The Kiltartan Poetry Book*⁴⁴. However, there is no means of knowing exactly if those stories were edited by Lady Gregory at all. Beyond the importance of gathering a collection of oral traditions, Lady Gregory wanted to use those stories in order to create a link between both past and present but also to find and give her definition of the history of Kiltartan people by giving a perception of the “myth in the making”. Throughout the years she became more and more proficient in reading and translating Irish, but she was still struggling to fully understand spoken Irish and often needed the help of an interpreter to collect from



Front cover of Lady Gregory's *Kiltartan Poetry Book*, 1919

Irish-speaking people. Due to the fact that she spent much of her life studying the old Irish and Gaelic language and history, we can easily find traces and influences of these in her works. By doing so she left her mark on Irish folklore and literature and became a figure synonymous with Ireland and its literature.

Chapter 3: Irish ancient folklore in Lady Gregory's plays

Besides writing articles, translating sagas and myths, founding and managing theaters, and helping other playwrights with their “country dialog,” Lady Gregory realized that she herself had an aptitude for the writing of plays. During two and a half decades, she wrote more than nineteen plays going from comedies to tragedies but also historical and religious plays. One of

⁴⁴Gregory, Lady, and Oliver Wendell. *The Kiltartan Poetry Book : Prose Translations from the Irish*. New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1919.

her first plays was a collaboration alongside William Butler Yeats entitled *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. As a playwright she wrote comedies based on Irish folkways and picturesque local speech, which goes at the opposite of most of the tragic tones of the drama from Yeats and J.M Synge. The creation of the Abbey Theatre in 1904 opened more possibilities for the development and continuation of Irish literature. This also gave the opportunity to extend the ancient folklore and to bring it into the light toward the present and future. The opening also gave the opportunity to young playwrights to send their works to be read and performed, which Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats read for years.

During her career, Lady Gregory wrote and translated nearly 40 plays. Her first dramatic work, *Seven Short Plays* in 1909 is seen among her best due to its colorful dialogue and characterization. Comedies such as *The Image* and *Damer's Gold* were published in 1910 and 1913, and a few years later she published what can be defined as her strange realistic fantasies entitled *The Golden Apple* and *The Dragon*, in 1916 and 1920. Lady Gregory also worked on arranging and writing the narratives based on various Irish sagas and tales, translating them into her Kiltartan dialect. These were published as *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* in 1902 and *Gods and Fighting Men* in 1904. Supernatural elements and ghostly features are part of Lady Gregory's plays and are used to illustrate her convictions that led to the development of the Irish Literary Revival movement. In this final chapter, I will study and analyze the role of ghosts, spirits, and supernatural elements in five of Lady Gregory's most known plays, both in the text and in the representations.

The play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*⁴⁵ talks about Ireland's long and difficult fight for its independence. The exact event that is depicted in the play is the landing of French soldiers at Kilala which was one of the many battles in the struggle to free Ireland. The French invasion failed, but it marked a true milestone in the history of Ireland toward the formation of a nation. This event was used by Yeats as a rallying point for the Irish independence movement at the beginning of the 20th century which was only beginning when the play came out. Many secondary themes are explored in the play such as the poverty and hard life of Irish peasants who live in a small cottage. The family's delight at being able to purchase ten acres of land, the absence of any money until the arrival of the dowry, and the anguish of the mother and father when Michael gives up the dowry to fight with the French are also important aspects and topics of the play. The play is based on the penchant of Irish people for the mysterious elements. In *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, Ireland is depicted through an allegory which is a female spirit capable of transforming herself from an ancient and old woman to a young and beautiful queenly woman. Whether as an old woman or as a young queen, the assaulted and mistreated land is still able to convince young men to go to war for her defense and her glory. This play can be perceived as a call from both Yeats and Lady Gregory to all young people to seek their personal desires, which echoes 1798 and other attempts to gain freedom for them and for Ireland. The old woman in the play is a typical folk figure much like the old witch in the forest that is often used as allegories. Like other spiritual figures she has strange and inexplicable powers to lure young men to help her cause. In the case of the play a young man is lured away from his loving bride by the dowry which will ultimately ease the level of poverty of the whole family. The sense of

⁴⁵ Gregory, Lady, and William Butler Yeats. *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. 1902. Lavergne, Tn, Digireads.com Pub, 2011.

mystery is intensified by the use of folk songs on the topic of death and persecution, and Yeats' poetic prose style contributes greatly to this feeling of mystery. There are also several ordinary questions such as "Will you have a drink of milk, ma'am?" that receives an odd and strange answer: "It is not food or drink that I want." What seems to be an ordinary discussion is in fact riddles coming from an uncanny world. The scene is the simple preparation of a poor farmer's wedding, but Yeats and Lady Gregory set a few actions leading to a rebellion in the name of a new nation. The play follows a romantic tradition full of mystic and inexplicable in ordinary circumstances, which participate to thicken the sense of mystery. To make the mystery more believable, the action of the play takes place in another century and in a rural peasant's cottage. There is a feeling of entrapment that is conveyed by the realism of the situation, but it is also "long ago and far away" which serves as an entry point for supernatural forces.

When the collaboration on the play between Yeats and Lady Gregory was revealed, the different styles that were used in the text became much easier to track and to recognize. In *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, the language used by the family heavily contrasts with the pattern of speech of the old woman. Thanks to her acquaintance with the Irish language, Lady Gregory wrote the Gilane lines to be as close as possible from reality. For his part, Yeats focused on the aspect of occult and mythical in the play, through songs and allegories for the titled character. This collaboration between Yeats and Gregory is the perfect example of two major aspects of the Irish Literary Revival. The first one is to bring back and elevate the connection between peasants and their Irish-ness. The second aspect is to bring back to life the ancient folklore of the Gaelic culture which is reflected by the use of the allegory of Ireland and the old woman. The play is a fable and fairytale but also full of political ideas. In the play, the old woman

manages to convince Michael through the use of very convincing language to make him join the cause, but the language is reinforced by her supernatural powers. Michael is still under her spell after she left, and he is completely convinced by her cause. The spell even made him totally unable to marry Delia Cahel. When, at the end of the play, Peter and Bridget ask Patrick if he saw an old woman coming up the path as he came back to the house, he responds that he saw a young woman with a queenly appearance. Political conviction in the play is reinforced by magical powers and reinforces its place as an important theme of the play. The play was first designed and presented to an audience familiar with Irish history and traditions, so people quickly realized that the old woman was a personification of Ireland itself.

In 1912, Lady Gregory published *Irish Folk-History Plays, 1st series. The Tragedies: Grania, Kincora, Dervorgilla*⁴⁶ regrouping three of her tragedies. The same year she also wrote a second volume with tragic-comedies that are *The Canavans, The White Cockade* and *The Deliverer*. Among her many plays *Grania*⁴⁷ is one her texts e, such as stories and articles, exploring Irish history, culture and folklore. While the play was finished and published in 1912, it has never been produced during Lady Gregory's lifetime mainly because she refused to do so. Her refusal to produce the play is a mystery but it can be explained by her controversial depiction of the epic figure that is Grania. She is a fierce female protagonist, victim of her actions but not responsible for the ruined relationships that she has with both Finn and Diarmuid. Lady Gregory herself acknowledged her desire for Grania to be a powerful female character with a powerful will, an idea that would not have been fully supported in Ireland, or in

⁴⁶ Gregory, Augusta. *Irish Folk-History Plays: The Tragedies, Grania Kincora Dervorgilla (Classic Reprint)*. Forgotten Books, 2018.

⁴⁷ Gregory, Lady. *Grania*. Irish Folk-History Plays First Series ed., London, Putnam, 1912.

most of the world, in the early 20th century. When the play *Grania* was written, it was at a time where Ireland just recently improved its policy about gender equality in education, but activists were still fighting for a complete equality between men and women. At that time once a woman got married, her rights to property, her work, and her opinion were not taken into consideration most of the time. Lady Gregory herself must have experienced similar discrimination as a young woman who married a man who was successful and respected, but more than twice her age. The main character in *Grania* faces a similar experience because she happily leaves her home to marry a much older man but only to discover that what she truly wants is love and, more importantly, a choice. Lady Gregory explained that “Love itself, with its shadow of Jealousy, is the true protagonist” of the play but it also explores the notions of love and jealousy. The play also questions the place of women in the society and their rights to get married as they wish and to find true happiness. In recent years, *Grania* has been produced to celebrate and discuss feminism in the Irish culture. In her writing of *Grania*, Gregory dealt dramatically for the first time with nations and aspects that had already been covered by George Moore and Yeats in both *Diarmuid and Grania* in 1900, and by J.M Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* in 1910. Her idea for *Grania* may have been greatly influenced by Synge's play, for she worked to piece *Deirdre* together with Yeats when Synge's death in 1909 left it incomplete. She was familiar with the legend of Diarmuid and Grania because she worked on it for her translation and compilation of Irish myths for *Gods and Fighting Men* from 1904. Lady Gregory's play and characterization of Grania differs from previous sources, like it is the case in two of her other plays, *Kincora* and *Dervorgilla* with the representation of feminine desires and their frustration. For several commentators the play has a deep personal dimension mainly due to

the parallels between the love triangle in the play and the relationship between Augusta, her elderly husband, and Wilfred Scawen Blunt with whom she had an affair between 1882 and 1883. During her affair, she wrote a series of passionate love sonnets, as well as *The Gaol Gate*, in memory of his incarceration in Galway during the Land War in 1887. Lady Gregory's *Grania* is a reworking of the famous Irish tale about a young woman, promised to the aging hero Finn, who falls in love with Diarmuid, his right-hand man. She persuades him to run away with her. In different versions of the story, their passion is fated because of Diarmuid's love spot, the hall siers, which is a mark of vigor and strength. Due to his oath of loyalty toward Finn, he and Grania live in chastity for a period of time. Finally, driven by jealousy, he makes love to her but Finn catches them, causing the death of Diarmuid. William Butler Yeats and George Moore's version of the story in their play *Diarmuid and Grania* from 1901 was a problem for both writers because they never managed to resolve the problems that they encountered with the translation of this epic tale. This version focuses on Diarmuid's psychology which leads to bitter but heroic death. Diarmuid's dilemma is that he can only keep Grania's love in a course of action that will lead to his death. There is a clear link between the character of Grania and Greek archetypes of Helen and Leda. She is chosen by gods to lure Diarmuid to his fatal fate. Despite several attempts to modernize the play by stripping away supernatural elements and by being more focused on the different characters, Grania remains a time-worn cypher, beautiful and unfathomable. In her plays, Lady Gregory used her studies and knowledge to bring ancient Irish folklore back to life. Those elements that we could find in her plays testify of the development of her own style, and it's the same style that inspired many other authors and playwrights long after Lady Gregory's passing.

Conclusion

As I learned from my research, Ireland was at a turning point in its history during the 20th century, both in terms of politics and culture. Due to the Irish Literary Revival, Ireland reconnects with its past and ancient folklore. Playwrights and artists such as William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory were at the center of this movement and were immensely influenced by all of their studies about Gaelic folklore and the past of Ireland. Yeats and Lady Gregory's influence on Irish culture and literature have been discussed by scholars throughout the years. The deep connection between Ireland and its past was brought back into the lights thanks to politicians, intellectuals and by the people of Ireland. The omnipresence of the supernatural and the occult have been highlighted during that time with all the translations and rewriting of myths and tales. As seen during my research, culture and folklore took a great part of the life of many individuals in Ireland during the Irish Literary Revival. The political life of the country truly changed during that time. The Easter Rising of 1916 is still remembered as an important date in Ireland both due to the tragedy of the event but also due to all the political implications that preceded and followed that event. The project around the founding of the Irish nation was complex and difficult and took years of conflict both physical and cultural.

Due to her work and her political implication in this project of building a free Irish nation, Lady Gregory became a leading figure of the Irish Literary Revival. Her quest to reclaim and put in the spotlight the Gaelic legacy of Ireland made Lady Gregory an important figure in Ireland. She left an incredible legacy, the Abbey Theatre being a great example of it, and many masterpieces behind her that deserve to be read and studied. Her determination and powerful will helped her through rough times during her life when she faced the loss of people close to

her. The mysterious folklore of Ireland has been studied and translated by playwrights and poets during the 20th century but Yeats and Lady Gregory are among the few names at the center of those works. Yeats' *The Celtic Twilight* is a reference regarding the study of the occult in Ireland and gives us nowadays a great and deep analysis of the tales he learned about. Due to her work and her influence in Ireland, Lady Gregory became the embodiment of Irish culture and the modern personification of the nation, a modern version of Kathleen Ni Houlihan.

In most tales and stories that were published during the 20th century in Ireland, we can observe strong female mythical figures such as Grania and Kathleen Ni Houlihan. Those ancient stories that were brought into the light by the different authors in the Irish Literary Revival and the 20th century saw the increase of the involvement of women in many domains. Feminism in Ireland has played a major role in shaping the legal and social situation of women, and those effects are still clearly visible nowadays. The role of women has been influenced by numerous political changes in the second part of the 20th century, especially in the 1970s.

Ireland managed to greatly deal with its past through literature, language, history, and politics. Nowadays the different plays and stories that were written and performed throughout the 20th century are still well-known by the people of Ireland. Many scholars around the world have studied the work of Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, and many other Irish writers and what they brought to the nation of Ireland. Thanks to its past full of mysteries and supernatural elements, Ireland managed to captivate people all around the world. We can wonder if such a phenomenon could be specific to Ireland or could such a thing happen somewhere else, even in our modern era.

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