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## Lady Augusta Gregory as Patron and Playwright of the Irish Theatre

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LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY AS PATRON AND PLAYWRIGHT  
OF THE IRISH THEATRE

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BY

FRANCES HOBAN BRANSON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts  
In  
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## PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to make a critical study of the life and works of Lady Gregory in relation to the Irish Literary Revival of the late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. A consideration of the role the author played both in the production of drama and in her assistance to contemporary dramatists will be included in this study.

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Lady Augusta Gregory was plunged into the very beginnings of the Irish Theatre Movement through a chance meeting with William Butler Yeats in 1898.<sup>1</sup> This encounter resulted in a life-long friendship and marked the birth of the Irish Theatre of today. Lady Gregory became one of its staunchest supporters until her death, at the age of eighty, in 1932. Her contributions to its existence were varied, of a practical as well as an artistic nature.

Lady Gregory was born Isabella Augusta Persse in Roxborough, County Galway in 1852. She grew up as the youngest daughter of an Irish country squire, Dudley Persse, and became one of the great beauties of her day, widely known for her wit and her Irish charm.<sup>2</sup> Of the family George Moore says, "...the Persses are an ancient Galway family; the best known branch is Moyaude, for it was at Moyaude that Burton Persse bred and hunted the Galway Blazers for over thirty years... till his death. Moyaude has passed away, but Roxborough continues, never having indulged in either horses or hounds, a worthy but undistinguished family in love, in war, or in politics, never having indulged anything except a taste for Bible reading in the cottages. A staunch Protestant Family, if nothing else,

1. Lady Augusta Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1913), pp. 5-7 (Will be referred to as Our Irish Theatre).

2. "Lady Gregory," Literary Digest, June 11, 1932.

the Roxborough Persses certainly are. Mrs. Persse and her two elder daughters were ardent soul-gatherers in the days gone by. But Lady Gregory did not join them in their missionary work, holding always to the belief that there was great danger in persuading anyone to leave the religion learnt in childhood, for we could never be sure that another would find a place in the heart. In her own words 'early association has so much to do with that religion which is the secret of the heart with God.' ...the Gospels were never read by Lady Gregory round Kiltartan.<sup>3</sup>

At twenty-nine she married a former Governor of Ceylon, Sir William Gregory of Coole, an M.P., by whom she had one son, an artist, who was killed in the World War. Of her then, George Moore says, "I like to write of Lady Gregory from the evening that Edward (Martyn) drove me over to Coole, the night of the dinner party... A slim young woman of medium height and slight figure; her hair, parted in the middle, was brushed in wide bands about a brow which even at that time was intellectual...she conveyed to me - an air of mixed timidity and restrained anxiety to say or do nothing that would jar. On the whole it was pleasant to pass from her to Sir William, who was

<sup>4</sup>  
3. George Moore, Hail and Farewell, Vol. 3, pp. 182,3.  
(This book will be known as Hail and Farewell).

4. "Lady Gregory," Literary Digest, June 11, 1932.

more at his ease, more natural.. if we are considering Lady Gregory's rise in the world, we must admit that she owes a great deal to her husband. He took her to London, and she enjoyed at least one season in a tall house in the little enclosure known as St. George's Place; and there met a number of eminent men whose books and conversation were in harmony with her conception of life, still somewhat formal. One afternoon Lecky, the historian, left her drawing-room as I entered it, and I remember the look of pleasure on her face when she mentioned the name of her visitor, and her pleasure did not end with Lecky, for a few minutes after, Edwin Arnold, the poet of The Light of Asia, was announced...it was some years afterwards that I heard, and not without surprise, that she had shown some literary ability, in the editing of his (Sir William Gregory) Memoirs...." "and did the work well. So at core she must have been always literary, but early circumstances had not proved favourable to the development of her gift, and it languished till she met Yeats."

Upon her husband's death in 1892 Lady Gregory undertook to edit Sir William's autobiography and found for 5. Hail and Farewell, Vol. 3, pp. 184-186.

6. Ibid., pp. 270-276.

the first time that she had a liking and a talent for writing herself. A little later, in 1898 she published Mr. Gregory's Letter Box, being the correspondence of Sir William's grandfather, who was an important Dublin Castle official - Under Secretary for Ireland - during a stormy period, the years from 1812 to 1830.<sup>7</sup> Lady Gregory's intense nationalism was disclosed at this time, when discussing the book with a friend, Sir Frederic Burton, he remarked: "I see a tendency to Home Rule on your own part," and she answered, "I defy anyone to study Irish History<sup>8</sup> without getting a dislike and distrust for England."

It was in London in the beginning of 1898 that Mr. Yeats disclosed his idea of a little theatre to Lady Gregory. He, with the aid of Florence Farr, an actress, wished to take or build a little theatre to produce romantic drama, his own plays, Edward Martyn's and one of Bridges'. He was also trying to interest Standish O'Grady and Fiona Macleod to write plays for it. He believed there would be a reaction to the realism of Ibsen and that romance would have its turn on the stage.<sup>9</sup> Later in the year Lady Gregory was staying at Duras with an old friend of her husband's Count de Basterot, when Edward Martyn, a neighbor, called to see the Count,

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7. Irish Literature, (J. D. Morris and Co., Philadelphia, 1904), Vol. 4, p. 1426.  
 8. Our Irish Theatre, p. 55.  
 9. Ibid., pp. 2, 3.



bringing Mr. Yeats with him. Lady Gregory was not well acquainted with Mr. Yeats at that time, but she had been gathering folk-lore under his direction by visiting at the thatched cottages in Galway, encouraging the peasants to tell her the stories they remembered of the ancient heroes of Ireland, and taking down their words in the native Kiltartan dialect. Under Mr. Yeats' guidance she accumulated a vast knowledge of the thoughts, beliefs, and customs of the people of Galway, in whose cottages she was a well known and welcome visitor....<sup>11</sup> "he (Yeats) began to draw her attention to the beauty of the literature that rises among the hills... and encouraged her to learn the original language of the country, so that they might add to the Irish idiom which the peasant had already translated into English, making in this way a language for themselves."<sup>12</sup> Lady Gregory confessed that she had never been interested in the theatre before this visit at Duras, but nevertheless the talk turned to plays.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Maartyn had written two, The Heather Field and Maeve. They had been offered to London managers with little success and he thought of trying to have them produced in Germany where there seemed to be more room for new drama than in England. Mr. Yeats said that a theatre to produce plays

10. Ibid., pp. 3, 5.

11. Andrew E. Malone, "The Plays of Lady Gregory," Yale Review, April, 1925.

12. Hail and Farewell, Vol. 1, p. 286.

13. Our Irish Theatre, pp. 6, 7.

had always been a dream of his, but he had of late thought it an impossible one, for it could not at first pay its way, and there was no money to be found for such a thing in Ireland. As they talked, the idea seemed to grow possible and before the end of the afternoon the plan was made. It was to have a certain sum of money guaranteed and to give a performance of The Heather Field and The Countess Cathleen in a Dublin theatre. Lady Gregory offered the first guarantee of twenty-five pounds.<sup>14</sup> A few days later at Coole a formal letter was sent out to their friends presenting the aims for such a theatre and asking for financial support.

The sum asked for was three-hundred pounds and it was proposed to make the experiment for three years. It read:

"We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the Spring of every year, certain Celtic and Irish Plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is

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14. Ibid., p. 7.

not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all 15 the political questions that divide us."

The results were on the whole encouraging, as Edward Martyn, A.E., Standish O'Grady, and others prominent in various departments of Irish life, associated themselves with the proposal and soon a sufficient number of guarantors were found to bring the Irish Literary Theatre into 16 existence. Edward Martyn and Mr. Yeats went to see George Moore in London in 1899 and to talk of the founding of the Theatre. Moore, against his will, but persuaded by the two friends, interested himself in the rehearsals of The Heather Field and The Countess Cathleen in London. 17

The first performance was announced for May eighth, 1899, nearly a year after the talk on the Galway coast, at the Ancient Concert Rooms. Just before the plays were staged some opposition was raised against The Countess Cathleen on the ground of religious unorthodoxy. A pamphlet Souls for Gold

15. Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

16. Ernest Boyd, The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, (Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1919). p. 6.

17. Hail and Farewell, Vol. 1, pp. 40-45, 70-79.

was circulated by a writer who had a political quarrel with Mr. Yeats, On the opening night, in spite of some hooting and booing in the gallery, the police offered ample protection against an attack on the players. Enthusiasm from the critics, among Max Beerbohm, cheered the group and plans were made for future offerings.

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The next year English actors were again brought over to play, this time at the Gaiety Theatre, in The Last Feast of the Fianna, an heroic drama of ancient Ireland written by Alice Milligan - her only contribution of importance to dramatic literature.

Maeve and The Bending of the Bough, founded by Mr. George Moore on Mr. Martyn's Tale of a Town, were produced on the evening of February twentieth, 1900. "The Bending of the Bough," Lady Gregory told us, "was the first play dealing with a vital Irish question that had appeared in Ireland."

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In the third year, 1901, Mr. F. R. Benson of Trinity College took the burden on his shoulders and gave a fine performance of Diarmuid and Grania, an heroic play by Mr. George Moore and Mr. Yeats. The Twisting of the Rope, (Casad-an-Su-gan) written by Dr. Douglas Hyde, the founder of the Gaelic

18. Our Irish Theatre, pp. 20-24.

19. Ibid., p. 27.

League, was next produced. Of it Lady Gregory wrote:

He himself (Hyde) acted the chief part in it and even to those who had no Irish, the performance was a delight, it was played with so much gaiety, ease, and charm. It was the first time a play written in Irish had ever been seen in a Dublin Theatre.

Mr. Yeats commented at length in Samhain concerning the production of plays in Gaelic: 21

Whether the Irish Literary Theatre has a successor made on its own model or not, we can claim that a dramatic movement which will not die has been started. When we began our work, we tried in vain to get a play in Gaelic....We wrote to Gaelic enthusiasts in vain, for their imagination had not yet turned towards the stage, and now there are excellent Gaelic plays by Dr. Douglas Hyde, by Father O'Leary;...and the Gaelic League has had a competition for a one-act play in Gaelic,...There have been successful performances of plays in Gaelic at Dublin and at Macroom and at Letterkenny, and I think at other places;...We have turned a great deal of Irish imagination towards the stage. We could not have done this if our movement had not opened a way of expression for an impulse that was in the people themselves. The truth is that the Irish people are at that precise stage of their history when imagination, shaped by many stirring events, desires dramatic expression.

In October, 1901, the Irish Literary Theatre ended its official career. Its achievement was the performance of six plays in English, and one in Gaelic, all with Irish themes, but played, with the exception of the last, by

20. Ibid., pp. 28, 9.

21. Plays and Controversies (Macmillan and Co., London, 1923), pp. 4, 5.

English actors. While an important step had now been taken in the direction of a National Theatre, the essential condition of national drama, namely, native interpretation, was lacking. The group thought it time to play oftener and to train actors for an Irish company. Mr. Yeats had repeatedly attacked the methods of the ordinary theatre, in gesture, in staging, and in the speaking of verse.<sup>22</sup>

At this time, Lady Gregory wrote to Mr. Yeats saying that: "If all breaks up, we must try and settle something with Fay, possibly a week of the little plays he has been doing through the Spring."<sup>23</sup> This note was just a hint of the subsequent close association of the Fays with the Theatre in Dublin which was to aid so materially in building a permanent national drama.

In the same year another element aided in the dissolution of the organization. The partnership of Yeats, Moore, and Martyn was broken through a clash of motives concerning the aim for which the theatre had been planned. But the association had lasted long enough to lay the foundation for the movement which was to give Ireland a national theatre.

The brothers William and Frank Fay, had organized the Ormond Dramatic Society in Dublin. Work with this society

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22. Our Irish Theatre, p. 29.

23. Ibid., p. 30.

had shown them the possibility that lay in the extension to Anglo-Irish plays of the advantages of native interpretation enjoyed by the Gaelic, when Frank read the first act of A. E.'s Deirdre in All Ireland Review, they decided to make this play the starting point of their experiment. William had a genius for comedy, Frank's ambitions were for the production of verse. A little hall in Camden Street was hired for rehearsal and the actors had to prepare the play at night as they were engaged in other work through the day. Deirdre and Kathleen ni Houlihan were played at St. Theresa's Hall in April of 1902 by the newly organized W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company with W. B. Yeats as president and A. E. as vice-president. The following October, in the second issue of Samhain, the successor to Beltaine as the organ of the Dramatic Movement, the Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company was formally recognized as the legitimate successor of the Irish Literary Theatre, and the second phase of the movement was inaugurated. Lady Gregory and others rallied to this new association, and it became certain that the Irish Theatre was definitely committed to a program somewhat unlike that conceived by Mertyn and Moore. <sup>24</sup> Yeats gave his dramatic doctrine in

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24. The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, pp. 33-34.

Samhain, and stated the intentions of the Society as fully as he and Lady Gregory had done for its predecessor just five years before:

Our movement is a return to the people... and the drama of society would but magnify a condition of life which the countrymen and the artisan could but copy to their hurt. The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions. Plays about drawing-rooms are written for the middle classes of great cities, for the classes who live in drawing-rooms; but if you would ennoble the man of the roads you must write about the roads or about the people of romance, or about great historical people. We should of course, play every kind of good play about Ireland that we can get, but romantic and historical plays, and plays about the life of artisans and country-people, are the best worth getting. In time, I think, we can make the poetical play a living dramatic form again, and the training our actors will get from plays of country life, with its changing routine, its abundant speech, its extravagance of thought, will help to establish a school of imaginative acting. The play of society, on the other hand, could but train up realistic actors who would do badly, for the most part, what English actors do well, and would, when at all good, drift away to wealthy English theatres. If, on the other hand, we busy ourselves with poetry and the countrymen, two things which have always mixed with one another in life as on the stage, we may recover, in the course of years, a lost art which, being an imitation of nothing English, may bring our actors a secure fame and a sufficient livelihood. 25



The year 1903 saw the arrival of three new names, J. M. Synge with The Shadow of the Glen, Mr. Padraic Colum's Broken Soil, and Lady Gregory as the author of Twenty-Five.

The same year the players made their first trip to London, which Mr. Yeats first reported as a great success, saying he had never seen a more enthusiastic audience. This was the first of several London visits and the good audience and press notices were a great encouragement to the entire company. <sup>26</sup> But more important perhaps, was the interest awakened in an Englishwoman, Miss A. E. Horniman, who had, for several years, devoted herself to the repertory theatre. She was so deeply impressed by the qualities of the Irish players and their plays, that she resolved to give substantial form to her approval. She obtained the lease on the Mechanics' Institute in Dublin, a small theatre devoted to vaudeville of the roughest kind. She enlarged and rebuilt it, and in 1904, under the name of the Abbey Theatre, it became the home of the Irish players, rent free, for a period of six years. Miss Horniman also granted it a small annual subsidy which was withdrawn in 1910, when the theatre was purchased from her by popular subscription. <sup>27</sup> The

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26. Our Irish Theatre, pp. 37-38.

27. The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 38.

Patent from the Crown was granted to Lady Gregory after violent opposition from the popular theatre managers who feared the new theatre might interfere with their gains. <sup>28</sup>

The first night Cathleen ni Houlihan and Spreading the News were so well received that the future of a permanent theatre was no longer in doubt. The final form of the often-charged title of the group was adopted soon after the company entered its new quarters at the Abbey Theatre. The Irish Literary Theatre had become the National Theatre Society, which name it retains today. <sup>29</sup>

During these early years so many people were interested in the company that it is difficult to measure the credit due each for its ultimate success. Lady Gregory and Mr. Yeats were always its prime movers, finding no task too mean for their attention. But so closely related are players and playwrights that it is sometimes difficult to decide the just credit due to each for his contribution.

The work of the Fay brothers cannot be underestimated. They remained with the company until 1908, with W. Fay in the roles of producer, manager, and chief actor. After 1903

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28. Our Irish Theatre, pp. 39-42.

29. The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, p. 39.

he was set free from his other work to devote his entire time to its practical and artistic aims. The details of the Fays close connection with the entire movement are admirably set down in The Fays of the Abbey Theatre.

Lady Gregory's appreciation of the Fays' invaluable aid is written in her own words, "even large sums of money would have been poor payment not only for William Fay's genius and his brothers' beautiful speaking of verse, but for their devotion to the aim and work of the theatre, its practical and artistic side."<sup>30</sup>

But the Fays left the theatre in 1908, at a time of disagreement with other members of the company, and Lady Gregory and her friends had just begun the slow work of building up an audience for their plays.

There was not always peace inside the theatre and there came from time to time that breaking and rebuilding that is in the course of nature and is probably all for good in the end. Mr. Yeats thanked Lady Gregory for her patience and attention to the numerous details of management in his reminiscences, Plays and Controversies,<sup>31</sup> by reminding her that,

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30. Our Irish Theatre, p. 46.

31. Plays and Controversies, p. 199.

"of recent years you have done all that is anxious and laborious in the supervision of the Abbey Theatre and left me free to follow my own thoughts."

We may add to this Stephen Gwynn's statement in his recently published Irish Literature and Drama;

Henceforth the Irish dramatic movement was fairly launched; it never lacked talent of writers or talent of actors; encouragement and applause were always heaped on it wherever there was a centre of literary intelligence beyond the Irish channel. But what it still lacked in Dublin for a long time was an audience naturally responsive as that which had listened to the first performance of the Cathleen ni Houlihan.

Men and women of intelligence from both camps were constant in the stalls - the admirably cheap stalls; not only the intelligensia, as the phrase goes, but an orthodox Tory judge like Sir John Ross or an equally orthodox leader of loud agitation like John Dillon. But the less intelligent mass, whether of Catholic or Protestant bourgeois gentry, preferred the commercial theatre; and the working class left the gallery empty; In short, though the theatre was created in less than ten years, it took thirty to create the public. 32

In this instance again, praise was given to Lady Gregory for her extremely practical ability in creating an audience for the plays, when Frank Fay attributed this added role to her in his book The Fays of the Abbey Theatre:

A constant source of worry was combining the necessary publicity with our strictly limited means. It meant among other things that we had to make as many friends as we

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32. Irish Literature and Drama, (Thos. Nelson and Sons, London, 1936), Stephen Gwynn, p. 164.

could among those who were interested in our project. Here we were helped by Lady Gregory's genius for entertainment. She was able to bring all sorts of people to the theatre to see the plays and to keep them afterwards to have supper on the stage with us, and this became the regular custom on all first nights. Our guests got to know the actors, behind the footlights as well as in front of them, and gave us valuable hints by listening to the impressions made by each new play and by hearing remarks, expressions and criticisms not intended for repetition which had been overheard by those in front. Some proportions at least, of these remarks were friendly or flattering, and this with the social occasion increased our confidence. A new sympathy grew up between us and our audience. 33

Not the least of the patron's work was the staging of the  
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 plays in America. Her first trip across the Atlantic in 1911, saw much opposition to the staging of Synge's Playboy of the Western World. Liebler and Company, theatrical managers had offered the players a three or four month tour following a successful summer at the Court Theatre in London. Lady Gregory, on reaching Boston, rehearsed the company in their roles and presented the much-discussed play on October the Sixteenth. The theme was widely criticized in the daily newspapers and the Gaelic American pledged it-

33. W. G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre (Rich and Cowan, London, 1935), pp.186-7.

34. Our Irish Theatre, (The following material on the staging of The Playboy of the Western World has been taken from the above source, pp. 169-252).

self to "drive the vile thing from the stage." The audience, however, received the plays with acclaim and the tour continued through the New England states and down to Washington, where Lady Gregory talked before the Gaelic Association, making friends for herself and her theatre. Her own comedy, Spreading the News, was offered there to a very enthusiastic audience. But the antagonism against The Playboy culminated in New York where the play was so continually interrupted that it had to be reacted before it could be heard. The players continued on and Lady Gregory remained with them, going next to Philadelphia where a demonstration in the balcony of the theatre delayed the action for some minutes but was quelled, through the aid of the police and many university sympathizers. Finally, the players were technically arrested at the instigation of their enemies in New York on warrants found on a bill passed forbidding immoral and indecent plays. After innumerable annoyances the company played through the west ending in Chicago where again many threats were made and the Mayor appealed to halt the performance. The Playboy, however, finished a successful five days' run and the company sailed on March sixth, 1912, feeling it had had a great victory. The trip not only strengthened the Celtic movement but did much to inspire the American Little Theatre movement. This was just the first of many tours made by the Abbey Players under the guidance of Lady Gre-

gory. She returned in 1912, and also in 1914 and on each successive trip new friends were made and a large appreciative audience built to receive the new school of drama from Ireland.

CHAPTER II.

Lady Gregory did not confine her boundless energy to the production of drama for the Irish Theatre; she extended it as well to the dramatists who found the Abbey Theatre an incentive to their art. Her home at Coole, near Dublin, with its Garden of the Seven Woods, was a Meca for young Irish Geniuses, and there were written many of the works of George Moore, Edward Martyn, J. Millington Synge, and W. B. Yeats. There the so-called Celtic Renaissance had its deepest source for Lady Gregory received some of the original manuscripts from these writers, for correction long before they met the eyes of a publisher.

It was with Yeats that Lady Gregory formed the closest literary partnership. Their work together at Coole began soon after the initial plans for the Theatre were laid in 1898, and some years before she herself had published a dramatic piece. Coole was beginning to be known to the general public at the time that George Moore went there to write Diarmuid and Grania with W. B. Yeats. Douglas Hyde had been there and had been inspired to write several short plays in Irish; one of them The Twisting of the Rope. AE had painted in the park where the hills were crowned by Hawthornes. Lady Gregory was always the media-

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35. Hail and Farewell, Vol. 1, pp. 344-5.



tor between Yeats and Moore when they attempted to construct the plot of Diarmuid and Grania. She objected to their collaboration on the heroic drama because she thought it unwise for Yeats to undertake any further work at the time. She took Moore into her confidence, telling him that Yeats went to Coole every summer because it was necessary to get him away from the intellectual distractions of London which Arthur Symons had inaugurated. She told Moore that all Yeats' early poems had been written in Sligo, coming straight out of the landscape and the people he had known from boyhood. She had been anxious to see him finish The Wind Among The Reeds which would never have been completed if she had not asked him to Coole. She wanted poems from him and thought that Yeats, if he should write the play, would work better alone. So it seems, she feared the influence of Moore's personality on Yeats' work.

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George Moore in Hail and Farewell painted a picture of this close association at Coole: "I looked around thinking that perhaps life at Coole was arranged primarily to give him (Yeats) an opportunity of writing poems....Lady Gregory led me into the back drawing-room and showed me the table at which he wrote, and I admired the clean pens, the fresh ink, and the spotless blotter; these were her special care

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36. Ibid., pp. 281-3.

37. Ibid., pp. 282-4.

every morning. I foresaw the straight sofa lying across the window, valued in some future time because the poet had reclined upon it between his fhyms....my eyes thanked Lady Gregory for her devotion to literature. Instead of writing novels she had released the poet from the quern of daily journalism... and we were talking of our responsibilities towards genius when the door opened and Yeats came into the room....Lady Gregory was appeased with the news that he had written five and a half lines that morning....she had put her case very well when she said that her fear was that my influence might break up the mold of his mind." She instinctively understood the capacity of his mind and arranged everything at Coole to be of service to him.

Mr. Yeats himself has attested to her great sympathy for him innumerable times throughout his reminiscences. He admitted that he could only acquire the idiom of the Irish peasant through her. She put her aptitude for this simple speech at his service and translated portions of Kathleen ni Houlihan into Kiltartan. Yeats had no mastery of the speech of the countryside when he began to write his Irish Plays, and in his collection of Plays in Prose and Verse 38

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38. W. B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse, (Macmillan and Company, London, 1922), pp. 420-1.

he said that he of all the group was most indebted to her for her generous assistance in writing the dialect for all of his plays.

Another of Lady Gregory's literary friendships, that with John Millington Synge deepened soon after he returned from the north Island of Aran where he too had been getting material from the fishers and sea-weed gatherers. Their common interest in folk-tales brought them into closer harmony at Coole where Synge frequently visited. He was much helped by his patron in the publishing of his book on Aran and his two plays The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea. The London publishers were very unsympathetic with The Aran Islands; and although Lady Gregory had it retyped and visited the publishers herself she found no immediate market for it. It was not published until 1907, when, as Lady Gregory said: "Synge's name had already gone up." He was helped too by her reading and correcting The Playboy, each act of which he submitted to her as it was completed. And after his death in 1809, from a lingering disease she worked with Mr. Yeats sorting out the material which was to be published from that which was set aside. Her fight to stage The Playboy in Ireland and in America after his death

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39. Our Irish Theatre.

40. Ibid.,

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was a fitting end to the friendship which had grown at the beginning of the century.

Another absorbing relationship in Lady Gregory's life was disclosed in 1921 with the publication of her book on Hugh<sup>41</sup> Lane. Hugh, the son of the elder sister Adelaide, became in a sense her protege until his death on the Lusitania in 1915. Her interest in him and his work grew from his early days in London, where she tendered him the assistance he often needed - financial and advisory -<sup>42</sup> to the biography five years after his death which explains fully his place in the artistic world of Dublin. She aided in securing the position he long had desired, that of Director of the Dublin National Gallery in 1914, which he held until his<sup>43</sup> death. An account written of the Gallery by one of its governors states that "between the years 1904 and 1915 Sir Hugh Lane, by his judicious additions to the Gallery, more than doubled its interest and importance. He made efforts to fill every gap in the collection, to make every group of painters representative, to give the whole a unity and<sup>44</sup> significance which it had not hitherto possessed."

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41. Lady Augusta Gregory, Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement (E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1921).

42. Ibid., p. 15.

43. Ibid., pp. 196-201.

44. Ibid., p. 208.

The foregoing relationship emphasizes the core of Lady Gregory's work in its entirety. It was always an effort to dignify the position of Ireland in world affairs. As she said in 1920, "my desire was less to seek Home Rule, self-government, than to make ready for it. I had tried to give a helping hand to any work that might put out of fashion those outlandish labels, jocose or sentimental, that had been affixed to us, in the course of Queen Victoria's reign; any work that might bring back distinction and dignity to Ireland. I was not content to rest on ancient heroic histories, splendid as are some of those I have helped to make known. So when Hugh came, free, with money in his hand, filled with the enthusiastic hope of his gallery, my heart leaped to meet him; it is no wonder I was filled with joy and pride. I had used my energy to turn other millwheels before coming to that last work of the Abbey Theatre."

She has brought distinction and dignity to Ireland in many ways; and not the least of these is through the publication of her numerous heroic histories and plays.

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45. Ibid., p. 46.

Lady Gregory in 1902 published the Cuchulain of Muirthemne, and followed in 1904 with Gods and Fighting Men. The former is a retelling of the Cuchulain legends whose substance goes back to the heroic days of the seventh and eighth centuries when Ireland, as Paul Elmer More says,<sup>46</sup> partly on account of her isolation from the tumultuous changes on the continent, blossomed out, just before the coming of the Norsemen into a civilization of rare and passionate beauty. The island was the sacred repository of the learning saved from the classic past and boasted to be the teacher of Europe. Besides this borrowed culture of Rome, she possessed a native art of a most peculiar sort. It was the trait of the Celtic people to honor the poet as the world has hardly elsewhere seen him honored. The bards formed regular schools with a chief poet at their head. Their education lasted from seven to twelve years and included a knowledge of more than three hundred and fifty different metres. The bard was supposed to have at his command more than two hundred and fifty prime stories and one hundred secondary ones. Out of this enormous activity two principal cycles of song and romance

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46. Paul Elmer More, "The Epic of Ireland," The International Quarterly, March, 1904, pp. 72-86.

shaped themselves of the heroic age in Ireland, deriving their substance in large part from the annals of the great families, but including confused memories of an ancient mythology.

Lady Gregory's book came at the end of a long line of publications of the sagas beginning with Standish O'Grady's History of Ireland: The Heroic Period in 1878; and its relative worth in comparison with these earlier works is sufficiently discussed in Ernest Boyd's Ireland's Literary Renaissance.<sup>47</sup>

Lady Gregory's edition has, however, much additional merit which must be explained in view of the fact that Mr. Yeats thought "this book is the best that has come out of Ireland in my time,"<sup>48</sup> and Paul Elmer More's criticism that he would prefer to hear that it is one of the great books of the world, - a greater book than many are likely to comprehend until its themes have been caught up and adopted into the body of English literature.<sup>49</sup>

We must try to understand why Lady Gregory thought the writing of the Cuchulain stories to be of value to the Literary Renaissance in Ireland, for all of her work was written with that end constantly in view, and what it ad-

47. Ernest A. Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, pp. 15-79, 394-7.

48. Lady Gregory, Cuchulain of Muirthemne, Preface by W.B. Yeats, p. 7.

49. Paul Elmer More, Op. Cit., p. 72.

ded to the translations already given.

She dedicated the volume to the people of Kiltartan because she thought there was little "of the history of Cuchulain and his friends left in the memory of the people, but only that they were brave men and good fighters, and that Deirdre was beautiful." She found in looking for the stories that the ones in Irish were too hard for most to read and the translations were confused, each one giving a different account of the same story. She then tried to take the best of the stories or whatever parts would best fit in, and to leave out the less interesting ones and "in that way to give a fair account of Cuchulain's life and death."

This she has done with great success as many have testified. "She has reproduced a body of Irish writings faithfully as regards their spirit and substance and closely as regards even their letter. At the same time she has made a version which possesses freshness and beauty and sustained interest. On the basis of the English idiom spoken by the country people of the West of Ireland, she has worked out for herself a style not only well adapted to render the Gaelic, from which its own peculiarities are largely derived, but also very appropriate, with its occa-

50. Lady Gregory, Op. cit., p. V.  
51. Ibid., p. VI.



sional archaisms of vocabulary.... to be the vehicle of popular or traditional narrative. One might have feared that there would be a suggestion of vulgarity or illiteracy about such a dialect, and that it would therefore prove unsuitable for the tales of ancient kings and heroes. But Lady Gregory has given it a grace and dignity which dispel all such misgivings. On stylistic grounds alone, she is to be credited with a very considerable achievement... she will be found to have dealt with her Gaelic texts as faithfully as one could ask. Her changes have been practically all in the nature of excision and condensation..."

52

Fiona Macleod, a Gaelic commentator, thought the choice of the stories was excellent and the language "in that spellbound prose which is born of the enchanted mind."

53

Stephen Gwymm said the Cuchulain and its companion volume Gods and Fighting Men did perhaps more than any other books to diffuse a general knowledge of Ireland's Epic literature.

54

Mr. Yeats in Ideas of Good and Evil wrote that:

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The Celtic Movement as I understand it, is principally the opening of this fountain (Gaelic Legends) and none can measure of how great importance it may be to coming times, for every new fountain of legends is a new

52. "Lady Gregory's Cuchulain", The Nation, April, 1904, pp. 334-5.

53. Fiona Macleod, "The Four Winds of Eirinn", Fortnight-Review, February, 1903, pp. 340-354.

54. Stephen Gwymm, Irish Literature and Drama, p. 181.

55. W. B. Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, pp. 293,5.

intoxication for the imagination of the world. It comes at a time when the imagination of the world is as ready, as it was at the coming of the tales of Arthur and of the Grail for a new intoxication....the Irish legends move among known woods and seas, and have so much of a new beauty, that they may well give the opening century its most memorable symbols.

In accepting these values placed on Lady Gregory's translations we foresee the stories as not only a gift to the people but as a source from which Irish writers may draw ideas and legends just as so many others did from the tales of the Round Table. The Golden Helmet of W. B. Yeats, produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1908 was founded directly on an old Irish tale "The Feast of Bricriu" from the Cuchulain,<sup>56</sup> and on Baile's Strand by the same writer tells the tragedy of Cuchulain's encounter with his son,<sup>57</sup> to mention only two of the plays which benefitted from the retelling of the stories by Lady Gregory.

Gods and Fighting Men treats of the gods and the Fianna in "one of the oldest worlds that man has imagined, an older world certainly than one finds in the stories of Cuchulain, who lived, according to the chroniclers, about the time of the birth of Christ."<sup>58</sup> Mr. Yeats adds that nothing need be said, "about the translation and arrangement of this

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56. Lady Gregory, Cuchulain of Muirthemne, pp. 48-61.

57. Ibid., pp. 313-319.

58. Lady Gregory, Gods and Fighting Men, Preface by W. B. Yeats, p. x.

book except that it is worthy to be put beside 'Cuchulain  
of Muirthemne.'"<sup>59</sup>

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59. Ibid., p. xxIV.

CHAPTER III

Lady Gregory's early dramatic contributions to the Irish Theatre grew out of a desire to balance the verse plays and more sombre works of Yeats and Synge with comic relief; as she told us in her book of reminiscences, "It is the existence of the Theatre that has created play-writing among us." Her practical experience in helping to produce the drama on the stage in Dublin, combined with her interest in the works of her colleagues urged her to try her hand at the construction of short plays for which she had collected abundant material. She had been helping others, Yeats especially, showing him the use of the country speech which she had learned from the people around her home. She began by writing bits of dialogue and when she was taking down Diarmuid and Grania, added sentences here and there to improve the speech. She also helped to fill the spaces in Where There is Nothing which later was rewritten as The Unicorn from the Stars. Of this play Yeats says,

I wrote in 1902, with the help of Lady Gregory and another friend, a play called Where There is Nothing, but had to write at great speed to meet a sudden emergency ... I asked Lady Gregory to help me turn my old plot into The Unicorn From the Stars. I began to dictate, but since I had last worked with her, her mastery of

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60. Our Irish Theatre, p. 98.

61. W. B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse, p. 425.

the stage and her knowledge of dialect had so increased that my imagination could not go neck and neck with hers.... and so after an attempt to work alone I gave up my scheme to her. The result is a play almost wholly hers in handiwork, which is so much mine in thought that she does not wish to include it in her own works....she has enabled me to carry out an old thought for which my own knowledge is insufficient, and to commingle the ancient phantasies of poetry with the rough, vivid, ever-contemporaneous tumult of the roadside; to share in the creation of a form that otherwise I could but dream of...

When Yeats, later in the same year for his Cathleen ni-Houlihan he turned to Lady Gregory to help him write it down in living speech. Of the Pot of Broth he said, "I hardly know how much of the play is my work for Lady Gregory helped me in every play of mine where there is part dialect, and sometimes where there is not."  
62

Lady Gregory's first independent effort was Twenty-Five, a sentimental drama, which has never been published since its performance in 1903.

Its immediate successor Spreading the News, was played at the opening of the Abbey Theatre in 1904. It is a clever little comedy, and the forerunner of the numerous ones with which her name is often associated today. The humor of the lengths to which gossip can spread in a small community is based on a typical situation in Irish character but is applicable to all types of people. A few introduc-

tory lines between the Magistrate and Mrs. Tarpey at a country Fair show us the trend;

Magistrate (to Mrs. Tarpey) Do you know this town well, my good woman?....

Mrs. Tarpey (Rising and ducking) Do I know the town? I do, to be sure.

Magistrate (shouting) What is its chief business?

Mrs. Tarpey, Business, is it? What business would the people here have but to be minding one another's business? 63

This little one-act play has lost none of its popularity since its first performance, and has been constantly shown since at the Abbey Theatre and elsewhere. Having found favour so early and so permanently, it may fairly serve as the prototype of the long series of similar farces that are collected into the two volumes, Seven Short Plays and New Comedies.  
64

The Jackdaw produced in 1907 was the second of the series of comedies of situation which their author so easily wrote. Its charm is found in the farcical situation created through the purchase of a jackdaw by the innocent Army Pensioner, Joseph Nestor, from Mrs. Broderick to prevent the seizure of her shop and goods by creditors in the Court. This bit of strategy invented to prevent her knowing that the donor of

63. Spreading the News.

64. Ernest Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 346.

the money was her much besought brother Michael Cooney, ended in the neighbors outdoing themselves in bird catching. The little comedy is finished with one of Lady Gregory's typical 'hanging ends' when Nestor beseeches Tommy Nally, a pauper, to hide him from the Sergeant who tries to unravel the tale, with these words, "Tommy Nally, I will give you five shillings if you will draw "Tit-Bits" over my feet."<sup>65</sup>

The Image, produced in 1909 is a three-act comedy based upon a story related by the poet "A.E." in which it is announced that the carcasses of two whales have been cast up on the shore of a West Irish village.<sup>66</sup> A heated argument follows as to the best use the village could make of the money that the oil would bring. During the wrangling it is decided that it be used to build a statue in the name of a hero so that all will come from far and near in envy of the riches of the men of Connacht. Then it is discovered that the oil has been taken from one of the whales by men from the neighboring village of Connemara, and that the other has been washed back into the sea.

Lady Gregory had other notions about The Image above that of most critics, who simply class it as a comedy of situation. She felt that she was portraying a group of personalities each

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65. The Jackdaw.

66. Andrew Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 161.

of whom disclosed his heart-secret. She told us in the notes written for the first edition that,

Brian Hosty's 'Image' was his native, passionately loved province of Connacht; but he boasted of it to some who could see its thorns and thistles with passionless eyes, looking over the mering wall. Mrs. Coppinger had her mind set upon America as a place where the joy of life would reach its summit, but that hope is clouded by the derision of one who has been there, and seen but the ugliness about him. Costello thought of an earth all peace, but when he spoke of peace 'they made themselves ready for war.' Thomas Coppinger dreamed of the great monument he would make to some great man, and old Peggy of one made beautiful through long memory and death; and Malachi of one who was beyond and above earthly life. And each of these images crumbled at the touch of reality, like a wick that has escaped the flame, and is touched by common air. And the more ecstatic the vision the more impossible its realization until that time when, after the shadows of earth, the seer shall 'awake and be satisfied.' 67

Coats, presented on the stage for the first time in 1910 is as slight as the two previous plays of situation, but it has even less substance. The two editors of rival newspapers have a quarrel so violent that it is hard to see how it can ever be healed, but the ordinary circumstances of life - in this instance, a waiter entering the dining-room - forces a reconciliation. 68

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67. The Image, Notes, pp. 97,8.

68. Coats, Notes, p. 158.



The Bogie Men, which was given at the Court Theatre in London on July fourth, 1912, was the last of the little comedies which the author wrote around a single situation. Two chimney sweeps, Taig and Darby, met after a lifetime of hearing the grand exploits told of each by their mothers. Instead of being disillusioned by the lack of wealth of his cousin, Darby said: "It is great things I will be doing from this out, we too having nothing to cast up against one another. To be quit of Timothy the bogie and to get Taig for a comrade, I'm as proud as the Crown of France!"<sup>69</sup> And so, after the amusing misunderstanding which forms the underlying situation is cleared, the two Irish peasants find it easy to substitute companionship for the more exacting relationship of living up to a wealthy cousin, after sweeping chimneys through the country.

The Rising of the Moon shows a transition from the comedy of situation to that of character and was produced in 1907. The idea came to Lady Gregory at her remembrance that, as a child, she had gone with her elders to Galway for their Salmon fishing in the river that rushes past the gaol, and that looking with awe at the window where men were hung she had wondered if ever a prisoner might escape in the darkness and

find friends to hide him in a fishing boat. The interest centers in a police sergeant who refrains from apprehending an escaped political prisoner who has one hundred pounds on his head. A conflict between duty to the government and sympathy for the leader of the people rages in the sergeant while the patriot in the guise of a ballad singer arouses his latent patriotism and finally is allowed to escape to his friends in a boat. The persuasion shows Lady Gregory as a master of dramatic technique and emphasizes her extreme patriotism for her country. Both of the characters are well drawn, - the sergeant in his confusion and the rebel in his ready ability to extricate himself from the hands of the law. Of its production on the stage, Frank Fay said;

71

I think the only really bright spot in this melancholy year was the production in March of The Rising of the Moon. I will not say it is Lady Gregory's best, or even second-best, but it is very good, and it has a real "rebelly" theme that immediately endeared it to the great heart of Ireland and did something towards placating our political "friends." It subsequently became as much a standby to the Abbey as A-Pot of Broth had been.

Damer's Gold likewise is in the transitional stage between situation and character portrayal. It was written in two acts and produced in 1912. The central character

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70. The Rising of the Moon, notes, pp. 197,8.

71. The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, p. 222.

is a whimsical old man called Damer "from a folkstory of a chandler who had bought for a song the kegs of gold the Danes had covered with tallow as a disguise when they were driven out of Ireland, and who had been rich and a miser ever after."<sup>72</sup> When Damer's relatives hear that he has been wounded in an accident, they journey to him to get his gold which he began to hoard when his luck left him at cards and the races. While they plot against him, through the daytime, he loses it at night to a young nephew who has shown him again the old temptation of cards and a more comfortable way of life. Damer divides the money with his companion, knowing the others would be better off without its temptation and the two plan to go off to the races at once, Damer saying, "Where heaping and hoarding that much has my years withered and blighted up to this, it is not to storing treasure in any vessel at all I will give the latter end of my days... I'm thinking as long as I'll be living I'll take my view of the world, for its long I'll be lying when my eyes are closed and seeing nothing at all!"<sup>73</sup>

Hyacinth Halvey is the first play of Lady Gregory's in which the comic character controls the situation. It was of her early comedies, being produced in 1906, and one which evokes the same applause today that it did twenty years ago.

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72. Damer's Gold, Notes, p. 160.

73. Damer's Gold, Act. II.

It is based upon a simple and universal philosophical truth, that reputation is in a great measure a matter of a password or an emotion and like the Jackdaw it has a hanging end; there is no denouement. The character grew, as Lady Gregory said in her notes to Seven Short Plays, when "I was pointed out one evening a well-brushed, well-dressed man in the stalls, and was told gossip about him, perhaps not all true, which made me wonder if that appearance and behaviour as of extreme respectability might not now and again be felt a burden." And so Hyacinth Halvey comes to Cloon as the new Sub-Sanitary Inspector with testimonials by the score of his great character. The town businessmen put such a burden of respectability on him that when he repeatedly tries to lower his name among them, he only succeeds in exaggerating it. In desperation he steals the sheep from the butcher's doorway to find himself again a hero and credited with hiding tainted meat from the Sergeant of Police. As a last recourse he steals from the poorbox of the Church, but the town ne'er-do-well is, as usual, blamed. To his disgust he is carried off to the town meeting with cheers for Hyacinth Halvey as the example of all that is good and a blessing to the town.

74. Barrett H. Clark, A Study of the Modern Drama, p. 347.

75. Hyacinth Halvey, Notes, p. 197.

In 1910, Lady Gregory tried to lay the ghost of Hyacinth Halvey in The Full Moon, by developing the humorous notion that most of us regard our neighbors as naturally cracked or someway queer.<sup>76</sup> While in the former play Hyacinth failed to find freedom through reason, in this he finds it through the madness gained during the full moon. Lady Gregory said in writing the second play, "It has sometimes preyed on my mind that Hyacinth Halvey had been left by me in Cloon for his lifetime, bearing the weight of a character that has been put on him by force...where he is now I do not know, but anyway he is free."<sup>77</sup> Bartley Fallon and Shawn Early were brought in from Spreading the News, and Mrs. Broderick from the Jackdaw to join the people who come under the influence of The Full Moon.

The Workhouse Ward, considered by many the best of Lady Gregory's short comedies, satirizes that tendency to quarrel about nothing which is marked in (though not peculiar to) Irish people.<sup>78</sup> As the writer says, "I sometimes think the two scolding paupers are a symbol of ourselves in Ireland - it is better to be quarrelling than to be lonesome."<sup>79</sup> The plot grew, as so many of them did, from an old tale of an old man in the workhouse who had been disabled many years

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76. The Full Moon, Foreword, p. 25.

77. Ibid., Notes, pp. 156,7.

78. Andrew Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 159.

79. The Workhouse Ward, Notes, p. 199.

before by a knife thrown at him by his wife in some passionate quarrel. Later his wife was brought in there, poor and sick. Lady Gregory wondered how they would meet, and if the old quarrel was still alive, or if they who knew the worst of each other would be better pleased with one another's company than with that of strangers. The idea changed to that of two old men, neighbors, who preferred to remain quarrelling in the workhouse, to being separated. The dialogue, throughout the play is charming, especially so when Mike McInerny tries to convince his sister, who comes to take him to her home, that two ailing old men would be better than one.

It is what I am thinking, Honor.... I do be weak an odd time... any load I would carry, it preys upon my side... and this man does be weak an odd time with the swelling in his knees,.. but the two of us together it's not likely it is at the one time we would fail. Bring the both of us with you, Honor... and the both of 80 us together will make one good hardy man.

The sister ignores the plea and leaves the two paupers scolding each other in their beds.

This popular little drama has two charms; its quaint old men showing the best of their character at a crisis, and its humorous, quick dialogue. It has little plot to recommend it but that lack is lost sight of in the delight of the comedy of words. Mr. Yeats who knew her work so well said,

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80. Ibid.,

81. W. B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, p. 142.

Lady Gregory alone writes out of spirit of pure comedy, and laughs without bitterness and with no thought but to laugh. She has a perfect sympathy with her characters, even with the worst of them, and when the curtain goes down we are so far from the mood of judgement that we do not even know that we have condoned many sins.

Lady Gregory wrote two peasant tragedies; The Gaol Gate in 1906, and McDonough's Wife in 1912. Like her peasant comedies, they do not show any extended plot complication, but rely on simple characters and situations and seize out-of-the-way episodes in peasant life.

The Gaol Gate was composed of three short incidents in Lady Gregory's life which wove themselves into the brief  
82  
play. One of them was the tale of a man arriving at a prison to find his brother dead before the gates had opened to him; the second, the sight of two shawled peasant women astray in a strange town; the third, the news that a fellow townsman suspected of being an informer, had been cleared at his trial. The mother, hearing that her son has been hanged for a political crime, keens his death in sorrow, broken-hearted at the thought that he could have been an informer in the Gaol. On finding that her son had gone to his death, witnessing against no one, she joyfully cries the news to the world that he died protecting his neighbor.

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Frank Fay wrote an interesting comment:

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82. The Gaol Gate Notes, p. 201.

83. The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, pp. 205-6.

The Gaol Gate was Lady Gregory's first tragedy and, short as it is, the poignancy of the story never fails for a moment. It is written in a lyrical prose, and has a "caoine" composed for it by Arthur Darley that was beautifully chanted by Miss O'Neill ....It is a wonderful little piece and I always think that Lady Gregory was happiest in writing these one-act plays, where she had to concentrate her material into half an hour or less. They certainly have a power and quality that are lacking in her longer works.

Stephen Gwynn thought, "her one poetic tragedy, The Gaol Gate, had a beauty more accessible than that of any play by Yeats, except the Cathleen ni Houlihan."<sup>84</sup>

McDonough's Wife, the story of a neighboring piper, was written on one of Lady Gregory's trips across the Atlantic with the Abbey Players.<sup>85</sup> The pathos is tempered with humor and the mood is less grim than that of The Gaol Gate. McDonough laid down his pride at the time of the burying of his wife and played his pipes through the town to attract mourners, to the grave. The neighbors had neglected his wife, because, her family name did not stand high enough with them. He had but to squeeze his pipes to get anything he was in need of.<sup>86</sup> This satire, Lady Gregory directs at the Irish peasants in a kindly way, showing them their weakness while she puts beside it the strength of the Irish peasants' loyalty to his wife.

84. Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama, p. 177.

85. McDonough's Wife, Notes, p. 164.

86. Ibid., p. 164.



Lady Gregory in 1912, published two volumes of folk-history plays. Devorgilla, the first to be produced of what she terms the "Tragedies," introduces an innovation in the writing of his torical drama. It was the author's purpose to make Irish history live in the popular imagination by interpreting legends and events in terms allied to those of the folk-play. Here again, Lady Gregory made use of the Anglo-Irish idiom which she termed "Kiltartan." Ernest Boyd said that,

she did not secure the beautiful effects of Synge; his ear for the harmonies of language and sense of poetic and dramatic style were part of his genius. But the Kiltartan dialect employed by Lady Gregory is a more faithful transcript of actual peasant speech, and, without being subjected to the selective and combinative process of a sensitive imagination it has a natural savour which makes its use...highly effective. 87

Devorgilla is a little one-act play unfolding the "swift unflinching, terrible judgement of the young!" with an interesting his torical background which Lady Gregory has given us in her notes to the plays.

88

In the play, the queen emerges from her retirement to distribute prizes to the people at their sports. A wandering songmaker wounds her by chanting the woes she has brought to Ireland. Her servant Flann drives away the singer, pursues

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87. Ernest Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 348.  
 88. Devorgilla, Notes, pp. 205,6.

him to the camp of the English, and is slain there by one of the soldiers. Flann's widow, Mona, in lamenting his death, discloses to the people the Queen's identity. Sadly they return their prizes and the queen accepts the rebuke as punishment from the hand of God for the harm she has brought on Ireland, saying, "there is kindness in your unkindness, not leaving me to go and face Michael and the Scales of Judgement wrapped in comfortable words, and the praises of the poor, and the lulling of psalms."<sup>89</sup>

The play has many interesting lines of speech in it; especially those of the wandering minstrel, when he tells the story of the first eat in Ireland, and again when he relates that "there was not made these forty years on song or any story in Ireland that was not sorrowful."<sup>90</sup> His remarks continually stress the tragic mood of the play and lend it its most interesting character.

One of the play's critics has written its highest praise in saying, "no audience could remain unmoved as the tragedy of the unhappy queen unfolds itself; there is strength, power, and nobility in it which will bear comparison with similar plays by Ibsen, Strindberg, or Hauptmann."<sup>91</sup>

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89. Devorgilla

90. Ibid.,

91. Andrew Malone, The Irish Drama, p. 160.

Kincora followed on the stage in 1909, although it had been produced at the Abbey in 1905 in an old version. It is an heroic drama of the legendary past and more ambitious than the former plays having three acts and ten characters.

William Fay contributes an interesting sketch of its first stage presentation,

92

In March we broke entirely new ground with a three-act play by Lady Gregory, which was particularly welcome because it dealt with a popular subject in historical legend - the life of Brian Boru, or "Brian of all the talents." You see that made it a safe proposition and it had the further advantage of being long enough to fill the whole evening without a forepiece. Special scenery and costumes were designed by Lady Gregory's son Robert and painted and made in the Theatre. In the case of the scenery it was Robert Gregory's first experience of having to enlarge a finished design to something many times the size of the original. But he was eager to learn and worked hard with me in the paint room. When the last scene, "The Wood of Clontarf," was finished it provided a new sensation for Dublin in those days; for, instead of the orthodox wood scene showing dozens of trees with every leaf stippled on to them, it was just a pattern of boles of trees with a leaf design applied in one colour the whole giving a rhythmic effect of greens and greys.

On the first night the theatre was completely filled for the first time since our opening night, and the play met with unqualified approval. The press for once was most friendly. Even The United Irishman agreed that the play was worth producing. Lady Gregory showed great skill in combining historical accuracy with dramatic matter. The play was further notable for being one of the earliest attempts to get rid of the "Tushery

Which has always been the bane of period drama.

The play derives its name from the royal seat of Brian, the tenth-century King of Munster who has invited Malachi, the High King of Ireland to visit and settle a permanent peace for the country. Brian who says, "Through all the generations my race was for fighting, my father, and my old father, and all that went before,"<sup>93</sup> wants only peace that his country might prosper. It is agreed that Malachi shall have the north of Ireland and Brian the South, but Maelmora and the Danes dispute this settlement and in the ensuing quarrel Malachi is forced to confer the high kingship on Brian. Through deceit Brian is led to meet the Danes in battle at Clontarf where he hopes at last to find his lasting peace - the peace of death. Throughout the play Gormleith, wife of Brian, former wife of Malachi, and sister of Maelmora, continually seeks the excitements of war and as the old people relate, "It was the wife brought him to his end....she was for war, and he was all for peace. And he got to be very pious, too, pious and old, and she got tired of that."<sup>94</sup>

A few words sum up the criticism of the play. "In execution, *Kincora*, is confused and uncertain, especially in the first of its three acts, where the task of introducing many characters, much history, and a complex story has

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93. *Kincora*, Act. 1.

94. *Ibid.*, Notes, p. 204.

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proved a sore test of Lady Gregory's powers. Certainly Lady Gregory writes more effectively in picturing a single situation or a small group of characters for few of her longer plays have the compactness of her one-act dramas.

Grania, which Mr. Malone thinks is the author's finest tragedy, has never been produced on the stage. <sup>96</sup> It is a three-act play, having only three characters and the simplest of plots, being based on one of the stories from Gods and Fighting Men. When Lady Gregory, having that "fascination of things difficult" that tempted her to write a long play with only three characters, told Mr. Yeats of her intention, he remarked incredulously, "they must have a great deal to talk about." And she said, "and so they have, for the talk of lovers is inexhaustible, being of themselves and one another. <sup>97</sup>" She turned to Grania because so many had written of "sad, lonely Deirdre, who when overtaken by sorrow made no good battle at the last. Grania had more power of will, and for good or evil twice <sup>98</sup> took the shaping of her life into her own hands."

Grania, daughter of the King of Ireland, is betrothed to Old Finn of Olmhuin, but meeting and falling in love with

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95. Frank W. Chandler, Aspects of Modern Drama, p. 248.  
 96. Andrew Malone, Op. Cit., p. 160.  
 97. Grania, Notes, pp. 195,6.  
 98. Ibid., p. 195.

one of his warriors, Diarmuid, she wanders with him through the wilderness. They live as brother and sister for seven years under a pledge to Finn. But one day Diarmuid, rescuing Grania from the King of Foreign, declares his love and for a month the lovers live together in happiness. Finn, knowing the vow is broken entices Diarmuid to battle, where he falls mortally wounded. In his weakness he repudiates Grania for Finn saying, "It would be a very foolish thing any woman at all to have leave to come between yourself and myself."<sup>99</sup> Whereupon Grania entices Finn to brave all jeers, crown her his queen, and return with her to his kingdom.

Here Lady Gregory is at her best. The story is well-developed from Grania's description of love, which foreshadows the action, "Three sharp blasts of the wind they said it was, a white blast of delight and a grey blast of discontent and a third blast of jealousy that is red."<sup>100</sup> to Finn's acceptance of the outcome,<sup>101</sup>

I thought to leave you and to go from you, and I cannot do it. For we three have been these seven years as if alone in the world; and it was the cruelty and the malice of love made its sport with us, when we thought it was our own way we were taking, driving us here and there, knocking you in between us, like the ball between two goals, and the hurlers being out of sight and beyond the boundaries of the world. And all

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99. Grania, Act III

100. Ibid., Act I.

101. Ibid., Act. III.

the three of us have been as if worsted in that play. And now there are but the two of us left, and whether we love or hate one another, it is certain I can never feel love or hatred for any other woman from this out, or you yourself for any other man. And so as to yourself and myself, Grania, we must battle it out to the end.

"In Grania" Ernest Boyd said, "Lady Gregory has caught something of Synge's rhythm and simple grandeur, and this tragedy stands out in contrast with the other plays of the group."<sup>102</sup>

In the same vein Andrew Malone writes;

Grania is Lady Gregory's highest achievement in historical tragedy, and here she is superior to the Ibsen of the Vikings of Helgeland, the Strindberg of Gustavus Vasa, or the Hauptmann of Florian Geyer. In emotional content and poetic intensity Grania can bear the comparison with Synge's Deirdre to which it has been subjected. 103

The second volume of Folk-History Plays concerns itself with later history, and in two of these The White Cockade and the Canavans the heroic strain is replaced by light irony.<sup>104</sup> The White Cockade, 1905, deals with an historical subject which is still the basis of acute controversy in Ireland - the Battle of the Boyne and directs its laughter at the run-a-way coward, James the Second.

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102. Ernest Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 348.  
 103. Andrew Malone, Op. Cit., p. 160.  
 104. Frank Chandler, Op. Cit., p. 251.

Lady Gregory, as she had done so often before, gathered stories of the Stuarts from the peasants around her home, and found only blame for James from those who praised Patrick Sarsfield. From these she pieced together the story of the Boyne and wrote the partly fictitious play in three acts.  
105

King James, after fighting against William of Orange in Ireland has retreated in sight of victory and plans to desert his gallant general Sarsfield, and leave on a French ship for safety. When the two, stumble into an inn, and find a company of the enemy's soldiers carousing, Sarsfield saves the King's life by a winning impersonation. The rough Williamites are won over to the Stuart's cause, but James, thinking only of his personal safety, climbs into an empty cask to be put aboard the ship. The soldiers, on tapping it for wine, have only scorn for His Majesty. When Sarsfield again permits the king to depart in safety he realizes that he has been betrayed,  
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Gone, Gone; he is gone - he betrayed me -  
he called me from the battle - he lost me  
my great name - he betrayed Ireland. Who is  
he? What is he? A King or what?

he says, as he pulls the White Cockade from his hat. But the soldier in him realizes that he himself must not be disloyal, and replacing the feather, he soliloquizes,  
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105. The White Cockade, Notes, pp. 191-4.

106. Ibid., Act III.

107. Ibid., Act III.



Why, Why? Who can say? What is holding me? Habit, custom. What is it the priests say? - the cloud of witnesses. Maybe the call of some old angry father, of mine, that fought two thousand years ago for a bad master!

"As a laughter-maker, the craven run-away King James as he appears in this play would be difficult to equal, and The White Cockade must be ranked as a high achievement. Though its satire is sharp, it is deserved, and its humor is spontaneous and unfettered." <sup>108</sup> Lady Gregory again is able to maintain the simplicity of the shorter plays using the historic background only as a setting for her characters, Mary Kelleher wishing for peace and a humble life, balancing a poor lady wanting the good days of the Stuarts. The very ordinary setting of a wayside tavern with its everyday characters brings this history play within the range of appreciation of the average theatre audience. Its humor is applicable to the universal rather than the local characterization on the stage outside of Ireland.

"In the Canavans, 1906, is satirized an aspect of Irish character that is too rarely subjected to such treatment. There are large numbers of Irish people who will be on the winning side at any cost, as there are no doubt, numbers of people in all other countries." <sup>109</sup>

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108. Andrew Malone, Op. Cit., p. 162.

109. Ibid., p. 162.

So Peter Canavan is ever on the fence "between loyalty to Ireland and respect for Queen Elizabeth because, as the neighbors see it, his great-grandfather ate a witch-hare. Anthony's inheritance is a hare-heart with the prophecy before him that he 'would get the big name and the branch for bravery' before ever he would come to his death."<sup>110</sup>

The historical back-ground is slight and serves only to exhibit the two eccentrics fulfilling their destinies. When Anthony unexpectedly returns to the mill after deserting the Queen's army the two are thrown into prison as rebels. Anthony, in female disguise, persuades a willing English Captain that he is Queen Elizabeth secretly coming to view this Apollo of her army and to know what Essex is doing in Ireland and the two escape. But Captain Headley, seeing the garments of the Queen stuffed in the chimney of the mill, accuses Anthony of her murder. This daring deed provokes admiration for its hero who fears his death after receiving a big name among the people. Peter, wishing to emulate his brother's bravery, in frenzy shoots at Lord Essex's men passing by. The shot was mistaken for a salute and Peter in admiration for his own bravery cries, "Let you

not be daunted! It is I will protect the whole of ye! where is fear? It is banished from the world from this day! The Strongest! Is'nt it the fool I was wasting time - wasting the years - looking here and there for the strongest? I give you my word, it was not till this present minute I <sup>111</sup> knew the strongest to be myself! " As Lady Gregory said, "The desire possessing Peter Canavan to be on the safe side, on the side of the strongest, is not bounded by any century or kept within the borders of any country, though it jumps to light more aggressively in one which, like Ireland, has <sup>112</sup> been tilted between two loyalties through so many generations

The Deliverer, although it is included in the second volume of Folk History Plays, introduces the allegorical and mystical elements in Lady Gregory's plays. In Kiltartan she was "told by one who had been present at the last meeting held by that deserted leader (Parnell) how those who had crowded to him before had left him by order, and how fiery his words were and how white was his face. " And it was said, "The ancient Jews turned against Moses in the same way." <sup>113</sup> The play in telling the old story of the unhappy leader of a thankless people, exhibits a bitterness against

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111. Ibid., Act III

112. Ibid., Notes, pl 189.

113. The Deliverer, Notes, p. 195.

man's ingratitude not often found in Lady Gregory's work, but as an Irish critic says, "that the bitterness is justified few will be found to deny."<sup>114</sup> The story brings the history plays down to contemporary Irish history and presents a political situation having many parallels in modern Ireland. Lady Gregory was preparing for Home Rule at the time she wrote The Deliverer, and must have realized the effect the presentation of the allegory of Parnell would have on her countrymen.<sup>115</sup>

The play loses much of its best effects because Parnell is identified here with the Moses of the Old Testament and also because he and the other ancient Hebrews speak the language of modern Hibernians.<sup>116</sup> Such incongruities as the mention of "Christmas" as a time of feasting and Shrove as a feast day among the Jews serve only to lessen the interest in the ideas of the play, and detract from the unity which it might have attained in an Irish setting.

The Travelling Man is much more successful in this vein than its predecessor. Lady Gregory is again dwelling on man's ingratitude but the theme is frankly religious; it is man's ingratitude to God which here invokes her wrath. Here is treated an old Irish belief that Christ himself might be in the person of any tramp of the roads. It is a charming

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114. Andrew Malone, Op. Cit., p. 162.

115. Lady Gregory, High Lane, p. 46.

116. Frank Chandler, Op. Cit., p. 237.

fable of a feast on Samhain night in a cottage kitchen where a child entertains a travelling man poorly dressed who has just come from "The Golden Mountain." He tells the child stories of a garden where flowers and fruit grow on a tree at the same time. As they imagine themselves riding off to the Golden Mountain the mother returns and drives the man away from her door. After his departure to his friends the "drunkards and thieves and shameless women, stones that have fallen, that are trodden underfoot, bodies that are spoiled with sores, bodies that are worn with fasting, minds that are broken with much sinning, the poor, the mad, the bad...." <sup>117</sup> the mother taking up the branch with "fruit and flowers on it" which he has left realizes that the stranger is the King of the World who has befriended her seven years before.

This simple moralized fable, written for the appreciation of children and adults alike, is closer to poetry than prose. Some of its lines contain charming pictures of the Irish countryside and bring remembrances of the language of the Chchulain Sagas:

I came over Slieve Echtge from Slieve  
na-n-Or, I had no house to stop in. I  
walked the long bog road, the wind was  
going through me, there was no shelter

to be got, the red mud of the road was heavy on my feet. I got no welcome in the villages, and so I came on to this place, to the rising of the river at Ballylee. 118

Most of Lady Gregory's work written after 1912, combined more than one of the ideas upon which her earlier plays were founded. As a whole, the latter group added little that was new to the former productions, and lacked their popular success on the Abbey Stage.

Shanwalla, produced in 1915, followed the tradition of the religious themes. It is a play concerning the return of the spirits in the life-after-death. Founded in the local traditions of the people, it relates the return of Bride Scarry to save her husband from an unjust charge. As Lady Gregory says in the notes to the play, "These people of lonely bogs and hillsides have still their intuition, their sensitiveness to the unseen; they do not reason about it, they accept it as simply as they do the sighing of the west wind or the colour of the sky."<sup>119</sup>

Dave, produced in 1927, is another of the mystical plays written around the lives of the people. Its theme, that "there is no child comes into the world but brings with him some grain of the wisdom of Heaven,"<sup>120</sup> centers around the

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118. Ibid.,

119. Shanwalla, Notes, pp. 222,3.

120. Dave.

neglected Dave, who is driven out into the world vindicated of wrong-doing after the failure of Timothy Loughlin to put a bad name on him.

The Story Brought By Brigit, a passion play in three acts, concerns the tradition in Ireland that St. Brigit was the foster mother of Christ who helped the Blessed Mother and the Child during their flight into Egypt. The play concerns the return of Brigit to the Holy Land to follow Christ through his last week on earth. Its simplicity, in Kiltartan dialect made it a contribution to the country, people, who could see the passion of Christ presented in their own language. It was presented on the stage in Holy Week, 1924.

The Three Wonder Plays, published in 1922, by Lady Gregory were written for the entertainment of children and made, just as the fairy stories of other lands, on stories of kings and queens and odd characters who are found in the folk-lore of the land. Their charm lies in their closeness to the other world in which children can so easily believe. In them, the work is furthered of making known in print most of the tales which formerly were found only in the memories of Irishmen.

Throughout the years of play-writing for the Abbey Theatre Lady Gregory accepted yet another task of the many which fell

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to her lot - that of translating and adapting plays of foreign origin for use on the Irish stage. Frank Fay relates

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how the need for this arose:

During our Spring Season we made an interesting experiment. As our patent allowed us to play foreign masterpieces, the directors thought it was time we did something to keep up our privilege. The question was whose play and which. It was not easy to decide, for with a company like ours where, with the exception of Frank and me, there was none over thirty years of age and some of them not yet twenty (an Irish twenty is a very unsophisticated one), the range of choice was surprisingly limited. One thing was obvious enough, that the play would have to be a comedy. Someone suggested a Moliere, as a classic and good for the schools. Also, it must be a simple comedy. What about Le Medecin Malgre Lui? I was quite willing, but pointed out that any translations of Moliere I had read were poor stuff, the English being so literal and sticky that it was almost impossible to speak. I ventured to suggest that Synge and I take the best English Version of Le Medecin Malgre Lui that we could find and rewrite it between us so that it would at least "Speak." Then up rose Lady Gregory, and said, "I will go home to Gort this day and I will make a translation in the Galway dialect that I have used in my own plays, and then it will be sure to suit our people." And so she did. When she brought the manuscript it was not a bit like the dead literary English of the standard translations that are used in the schoolroom. It had every bit as much vitality as her Spreading the News or Hyacinth Halvey, and behind it were all the power and imagination of the world's greatest master of comedy.

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121. The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, pp. 193,6.



It was a revelation of what can be done in colloquial dialect....Le Medecin Malgre Lui, or the Doctor in Spite of Himself, as we rather clumsily called it, went exceedingly well in Lady Gregory's version.

The success of Lady Gregory in this field is best shown at the time the plays were being produced, and in the words of one who had seen them, Professor Maurice Gerotwohl of Dublin, University, spoke at the Abbey Theatre after the production of the plays in 1909. He said:

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I am frequently asked, in my unfortunate capacity as a professional critic of French literature, whether these semi-Irish adaptations of Moliere do not strike me as being in a literary sense somewhat blasphemous? This question I answer most unhesitatingly in the negative - for I see no reason why the main scenes and business of "The Miser" for instance, which we find already in Roman garb in Plautus; then, again, in Italian garb, in Lorenzino de Medici or Ariosto - just as the main scenes and business of the "Rogueries", which are first to be found in Roman Garb in Terence's "Pharmis" supplemented by a few Italian additions in a farce called "Partalone" - the father of a family - should not find a congenial setting in Galway County, or, why not? in some Dublin metropolitan "Suburban Groove"! In fact, you will notice that if I have any fault to find with Lady Gregory's spirited versions it is that they are not altogether and avowedly Irish, Irish in mode of speech, costume, and locality.... in plays, such as "the Miser", or "Rogueries" both the plots and characterizations are so universal, alike in their conception and moral application, that no change of scenery or idiom would impair them as I think, in the slightest degree.

This work with foreign masters continued until Sancho's  
Master was written from Cervantes' novel in 1927, and formed  
an important part of the Abbey's efforts to spread a know-  
ledge of the classics through the vehicle of the stage.

CHAPTER IV

As a result of this study, we may say that Lady Gregory's life was mainly spent in furthering the spread of Irish culture through the channel of the Irish Theatre. Her associations and interests centered in the Abbey Theatre from the first meeting with Mr. Yeats in 1898 until her death in 1932.

Lady Gregory's efforts to make the Theatre a literary and financial success have been described somewhat in detail because, as George Bernard Shaw said, "she was the charwoman of the Abbey Theatre."

Through her sympathetic ability to interest the best talent around Dublin in the venture, she was able to draw the artists to her home at Coole where so many of the plans for staging the plays were made, and so many of the plays themselves were written. This quiet and charming home became the often-visited abode where the artists could rest from the tiring work of their new venture. It also provided an admirable meeting place for the circle, where ideas could be exchanged and points of play-writing discussed. Most of the work of the Irish dramatists who visited Coole has undoubtedly been influenced by this close association. Mr. Yeats, it is shown, turned Lady Gregory's thoughts to plays written in the idiom of the country people. Under his guidance she collected the stories which had been stored in the memories

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of the natives of Galway and turned these tales into dramatic pieces for the stage. In turn, she assisted Mr. Yeats in putting his Irish plays into living speech. Both were so helped by this close association that it is impossible to estimate its value to literature in Ireland.

Her friendship with Synge also deepened the interest each had in the folk-stories of the people of the West. Lady Gregory's prose works on Irish history and legends grew out of this study and later resulted in some of her best folk-history plays, notably the two volumes published in 1912.

Finally, Lady Gregory's championship of Hugh Lane's cause lifted her out of the ranks of purely literary interest in the Irish Revival and left her with a regard for the artistic aims of the country with Dublin as its center.

Her greatest contribution, however, was her large volume of publications, both prose and plays, for the use of the Irish Theatre and its audience. She was the most prolific writer of those who founded, or concerned themselves, with, the Theatre, writing thirty-one plays, translating seven, and publishing five books of prose. The latter have left a permanent record for the enjoyment of the people from whom she took them as well as a source from which future Irish writers may draw ideas and inspiration as did the English poets from the King Arthur legends.

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In a discussion of the plays - both comic and tragic - a consideration of the local interest is overshadowed today by the vogue created for one-act plays in almost every country where modern drama is produced.

The two volumes, Seven Short Plays and New Comedies have provided enough humor for the Irish stage and have lost little of their interest for us today. The Folk-History Plays collected into five volumes have given the stage a new dignity, fulfilling the aims of Mr. Yeats and Lady Gregory set down in their anticipatory letter sent to the friends of Irish culture in 1898.

Lady Gregory's plays contributed several innovations to the art of drama, which give them a permanent value in the world of the theatre. Although as she told us, "It is the existence of the Theatre that has created play-writing among us," <sup>123</sup> yet her talent, slowly developing from 1898 on, enabled her to write plays in which the style, folk characterization, plot, humor, and ideas were definitely a contribution to modern Irish literature, as well as to modern drama in the western world.

The first of these, her style, in writing, is seen as the fusion of several elements. The most important of these grew out of her intense interest in Irish myth and legend, and her publication of the three prose works on Celtic history and story. In these, she developed a style bordering 123. Our Irish Theatre, p. 98.

on poetry, and using to the fullest extent the beauty of the idiom of the peasant of western Ireland. This folk speech was carried over to her plays and forms the background for the full expression of the ideas of the peasants of Ireland. The next important source for this quaint idiomatic style lay in Lady Gregory's work with Synge, when both centered their interest in the Abbey Theatre. Cathleen's speech from Riders to the Sea shows to the best advantage the common elements of earthy words combined with beautiful imagery,

Ah, Nora, is'nt it a bitter thing to  
think of him floating that way to the  
far north, and no one to keen him but  
the black bogs that do be flying on  
the sea? 124

as does the Travelling Man of Lady Gregory,

I came over Slieve Echtge from Slieve  
na-n-Or. I had no house to stop in.  
I walked the long bog road, the wind  
was going through me, there was no  
shelter to be got, the red mud of the  
road was heavy on my feet. I got no  
welcome in the villages, and so I came  
on to this place, to the rising of the  
river at Ballylee. 125

Both writers expressed the language of the people in a new way, - a way which was more natural than any employed in modern drama before. It is full of local color, and yet is not limited to the appreciation of a local audience.

124. J. M. Synge, Riders to the Sea, (John W. Luce & Co., Boston, 1911.)

125. Lady Gregory, The Travelling Man.

The elements of folklore, superstition, sympathy, sorrow, and tragic intensity found in such pieces are not limited to one country.

The more immediate need of the theatre, - comedies, to balance the verse plays of Yeats and Synge, - directed these influences into the channel of prose plays in the peasant idiom and set Lady Gregory on the road to the peculiar prose she adopted for her most popular plays.

The plots for Lady Gregory's plays grew directly out of her experiences with the Irish peasants of Galway. It was no superficial play-writing by one of the upper class that charmed the middle class audiences at the Abbey, but carefully wrought plays, worked around a single, brief episode of deep interest to the native character of the Irish people. Lady Gregory did not attempt to introduce an involved plot of any length into her two volumes of early comedies; and it is chiefly on the popularity of these that her fame outside Ireland rests today. Her ability successfully to observe the unity of a single situation, as that of The Work-House Ward, in a single scene of one-act has added impetus to the production of one-act plays in little theatres today. Shortly after the Dublin players visited America in 1914, Little Theatres began to spring up throughout the country, and at the present time there are thousands in revolt against

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the commercialism of the professional theatre. These theatres owe a huge debt to the Abbey and its patron who taught the lesson of united effort, where the actor, playwright, and director equally worked for the success of the venture.

A few elemental ideas, as the value of a good name, and the spread of gossip in a small community, constitute the plots for the two first volumes of comedy. Spreading the News, is founded essentially on the peasant's idea of 'a good name' which has more virtue to him today than wealth. The idea, that a chance word of gossip could snatch away a good name built up through a lifetime, was repeatedly used by Lady Gregory as the core of a simple one-act play around which she placed the witty humor of the peasants. Hyacinth Halvey carried this slight theme through two plays; the first placing the weight of a good name on Hyacinth by force, and the second, The Full Moon removing the stigma through the nonsense of "those unruly ones who give in to no limitations, and dance to the sound of music that is outside this world." In the Gaol Gate the tainted name of "informer" brings down sorrow on a mother's head but her keening is soon changed when her son's name is cleared; and the tragedy of his death is slight in comparison with the tragedy of the loss of his good name. Again in The Bogie Men a rollicking happiness is restored to the two chimney-sweeps when the good name their mothers had falsely given each is replaced by a fine comrade-

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ship. Synge's Playboy, too, touches this theme when it pokes fun at the citizens who admire the courage of a man who acquired "a great name" for strength. McDonough's Wife carries the idea farther, by exhibiting a keener satire against the neighbors who would not follow the wife to the grave, because McDonough had brought her to the town without proving for her a good name.

Lady Gregory's satire in such themes, is never a sharp one for it is always tempered with pure comedy. Her sympathy for the petty weaknesses of her race overpowers her scorn.

Again and again this theme is played upon, often assuming a minor role in such history plays as Devorgilla when the lovely queen is reproached in her retirement for the bad name acquired in her youth. Here the rebuke is received as retribution for the wrongs committed and assumes a tragic significance not associated with it in the earlier plays. In The White Cockade Patrick Sarsfield laments the loss of his great name through the treachery of the weak James the Second.

Gone, gone; he is gone - he betrayed  
me - he called me from the battle-  
he lost me my great name - he betrayed  
Ireland. 126

And in the Canavans, Anthony wished to avoid a great name because of the prophecy that he would get the big name and the branch for bravery before ever he would come to his death.

Finally, in Dave, produced in 1927, the hero is driven out into the world to seek his ultimate destiny through the petty attempts of Timothy to put a bad name on him.

Another of Lady Gregory's contributions to plot development in one-act comedies, was the theme of gossip, harmless or otherwise, which she found to exist in the simple society of peasants in Ireland. She hinted that it could have tragic results but basically presented it as a comic protagonist in such plays as Spreading the News, where Bartley Fallon is sought as a jealous murderer after gossip followed his hasty exit from the town fair. In Hyacinth Halvey gossip spread the fame of 'a good name' and these two simple elements were combined in The Full Moon when Hyacinth lost his good name through gossip.

The folk-history plays of Lady Gregory like the comedies seized on short episodes and developed in an historical setting. Devorgilla reveals the swift, unflinching, terrible judgement of the young which is too thoughtless and unseasoned to consider alleviating circumstances. The Canavans portrays the idea that large numbers of people will be on the winning side at any cost. Lady Gregory felt that this idea was universally applicable and that people everywhere will be found 'on the fence' in social, political, and religious problems.

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Lady Gregory's contribution in plot development had its parallels in the Irish Literary movement in such plays as Synge's Riders to the Sea which, critical opinion says, surpasses any of her plays in sheer dramatic ability. Synge's plays, too, seize a slight incident, a mood, or a local bit of superstition to portray one of the universal ideas held in a simple state of society where "the dramatist, who would deal with spiritual life disengaged from the environment of an intellectual maze, must go for that experience which will beget in him inspiration for his art."

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The plots in Lady Gregory's plays are never involved, and usually are submerged under the humor of the characters and the irony of the simple situation which present the weaknesses of a strong people.

Lady Gregory's talents in characterization grew out of her slight comedies of situation and form the basis for some of her best known plays. In Spreading the News, the small town characters assume a definite shape but are submerged under the ideas of the plays. Such people as the magistrate are stock characters, showing the ordinary traits of an arrogant, meddling official assuming responsibilities for which he is hardly equipped. But the talent for characterization grew and in The Image a group of personalities emerged, each seeking his heart's secret. This play definitely established Lady

Gregory as a successful portrayer of humans who were far above mere types. Brian Hosty with a love for his native Connacht, could find peace at home in the rugged country which others could see as only thorns<sup>ns</sup> and thistles. Just as the image of each character crumbled at the touch of reality, the realistic comedy of Lady Gregory's early plays changed to one of more visionary and allegorical kind which eventually found full expression in such plays as The Travelling Man, where the visitor is a kindly one bringing messages of love and peace from other worlds.

The characters of the folk-history plays developed from the knowledge the Galway peasants held of them, and as such remain in the folk lore of the country. Grania, is faithful to the old stories of Diarmuid and Grania, in which she shaped her own life when Diarmuid and Finn had failed her.

When Lady Gregory attempted a three-act play with many characters, the result was a confusion not found in her simpler dramas. Her characterization of Brian Boru in Kincora was weakened through this effort and sent the dramatist back to her original simplicity of character and plot. Therefore, Lady Gregory's contributions to the drama in characterization as well as plot must be emphasized through her unity and simplicity rather than her complexity. Certainly her writing is more effective when she pictures a single situation or a few characters for none of her complex plays have

the unity of her one-act plays.

When Lady Gregory began to write, comedy, and not tragedy, was wanted at the theatre, to put beside the high poetic works of Yeats and Synge and so the comedies were written as 'pot-boilers.' But they did not remain in that classification for their peasant humor grew to be an important contribution to each year's work on the stage.

The humor in the plays is found at its best in the early comedies. It contains always an element of gentle irony which never grows to a stinging rebuke. It is spread throughout the plays to include tinker as well as shop-keeper. In The Jackdaw no one escapes this irony from the Magistrates who leave the courtroom to investigate the value of a jackdaw, to Tommy Nally, a pauper, who had to obtain a pass out of the workhouse to get into the story.

There is perhaps more humor in the language of Lady Gregory's plays than in the works of any other modern dramatist. It is not limited to character as in Hyacinth Halvey, but reaches to situation in Spreading the News, and dialogue in The Bogie Men.

We can best realize Lady Gregory's immense influence on Irish Culture and literature when we briefly review her interests from 1897 to her death in 1932. These interests form

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an inventory of her national, humanitarian, and social ideals and define her broad sympathies as revealed in her drama.

The fusion of these - intense nationalism - grew from her publication of Mr. Gregory's Letter Box and the Autobiography of her husband, Sir William Gregory. Of the former, she remarked to a friend, Sir Frederic Burton, "I defy anyone to study Irish History without getting a dislike and distrust for England." <sup>128.</sup> Again in her statement in 1898 asking for a guarantee fund for the theatre, she supported this feeling of nationalism by expressing a desire to represent Ireland as the home of an ancient idealism. She saw Ireland as the repository of a beautiful old culture in her Cuchulain and Gods and Fighting Men; continuing to draw upon these national themes for her plots in drama all through her lifetime. As is shown in Chapter III, the sources for all of her history plays lay in the historical past of Irish legend; while the modern folk-plays found their source in the peasants of the Irish countryside. Lady Gregory never felt the necessity for looking elsewhere for themes for a national drama, until the need arose for the playing of foreign masterpieces. These she readily translated into the speech of Kiltartan, offering them as semi-Irish adaptations. Her nationalism is emphasized again in her defense of Hugh Lane's efforts to make Dublin one of the new art centers of the world. Her intense

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128. Our Irish Theatre, p. 55.

love of Ireland enabled her to champion its many causes, expressing herself in a new type of drama which did not excuse the Irish vices but expressed the real virtues of a deeply imaginative race.

## CONCLUSION

In this study it has been shown that all of Lady Gregory's talents have been usefully directed into the core of the Irish Literary Revival, through the medium of the stage, in the capacity of writer, critic, director, and friend of the many who have been interested in the movement since its inception in the late nineteenth century.



## APPENDIX 1

### ALPHABETICAL LIST OF PLAYS AND DATES OF FIRST PRODUCTIONS.

Gregory, Lady Augusta.

Twenty-Five	March 14th, 1903.
Spreading the News	December 27th, 1904.
Kincora	March 25th, 1905.
The White Cockade	December 9th, 1905.
Hyacinth Halvey	February 19th, 1906.
The Doctor in Spite of Himself (Trs. Moliere)	April 16th, 1906.
The Gaol Gate	October 20th, 1906.
The Canavans	December 8th, 1906.
The Jackdaw	February 23rd, 1907.
The Rising of the Moon.	March 9th, 1907.
The Poorhouse (With Douglas Hyde)	April 4th, 1907.
Dervorgilla	October 31st, 1907.
The Unicorn from the Stars (With W. B. Yeats)	November 21st, 1907.
Teja (Trs. Sudermann)	March 19th, 1908.
The Rogueries of Scapin (Trs. Moliere)	April 4th, 1908.
The Workhouse Ward	April 20th, 1908.
The Miser (Mrs. Moliere)	January 21st, 1909.
The Image	November 11th, 1909.
Mirandolina (Trs. Goldoni)	February 24th, 1910.
The Travelling Man	March 2nd, 1910.
The Full Moon	November 10th, 1910.
Coats	December 1st, 1910.
The Nativity Play (Trs. Douglas Hyde)	January 5th, 1911.
The Deliverer	January 12th, 1911.
McDonough's Wife (Later McDarragh's Wife)	January 11th, 1912.
The Bogie Man (Court Theatre, London)	July 4th, 1912.
Damer's Gold	November 21st, 1912.
Shanwalla	April 8th, 1915.
Hanrahan's Oath	January 29th, 1918.
The Dragon	April 21st, 1919.
The Golden Apple	January 6th, 1920.
Aristotle's Bellows	March 17th, 1921.
The Old Woman Remembers (Dramatic Poem)	December 23rd, 1923.
The Story Brought by Brigit	April 14th, 1924.
The Would-be-Gentleman (Trs. and Adap- ted Moliere)	January 4th, 1926.
Sancho's Master	March 14th, 1927.
Dave	May 9th, 1927.

(Appendix 1 is taken from The Irish Drama, Andrew E. Malone).

APPENDIX 11

DATES AND PLACES OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCES OF NEW PLAYS PRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL THEATRE SOCIETY AND ITS PREDECESSORS.

- 1899 Irish Literary Theatre at Antient Concert Rooms  
The Countess Cathleen, W. B. Yeats.  
The Heather Field, Edward Martyn.
- 1900 Irish Literary Theatre at the Gaiety Theatre  
The Last Feast of the Fiauna, Alice Milligan.  
The Bending of the Bough, George Moore.  
Maeve, Edward Martyn.
- 1901  
Diarmuid and Grania, Yeats and George Moore.  
The Twisting of the Rope, Douglas Hyde (First Gaelic Play produced in a Theatre).
- 1902 Mr. W. G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company at St. Teresa's Hall, Clarendon Street.  
Deirdre 'A. E.'  
Cathleen ni Houlihan, Yeats.  
 Irish National Dramatic Company at Antient Concert Rooms.  
The Sleep of the King, Seumas O'Cuisin.  
The Laying of the Foundations, Fred Ryan.  
A Pot of Broth, Yeats.  
The Racing Lug, Seumas O'Cuisin.
- 1903 Irish National Theatre Society, Molesworth Hall.  
The Hour Glass, Yeats.  
Twenty-Five, Gregory.  
The King's Threshold, Yeats.  
In the Shadow of the Glen, J. M. Synge.  
Broken Soil, P. Colum.
- 1904  
The Shadowy Waters, Yeats.  
The Townland of Tamney, Seumas Mac Manus.  
The Riders to the Sea, Synge.  
 Irish National Theatre Society at the Abbey Theatre.  
On Baile's Strand, Yeats.  
Spreading the News, Gregory.
- 1905  
The Well of the Saints, Synge.  
Kincora, Gregory.  
The Building Fund, William Boyle.  
The Land, P. Colum.
- National Theatre Society, Ltd. (Abbey Company)  
The White Cockade, Gregory.

- 1906      The Eloquent Dempsey, Boyle.  
Hyacinth Halvey, Gregory.  
The Gaol Gate,  
The Mineral Workers."  
Deirdre, Yeats.  
The Shadowy Waters (A new Version) Yeats.  
The Canavans, Gregory.
- 1907      The Playboy, Synge.  
The Jackdaw, Gregory.  
Rising of the Moon, Gregory.  
The Eyes of the Blind, W. U. Letts.  
The Poorhouse, Gregory, Hyde.  
Fand, Wilfred Scawen Blunt.  
The Country Dressmaker, George Fitzmaurice.  
Dervorgilla, Gregory.  
The Canavans, " (New version)  
The Unicorn from the Stars, Yeats, Gregory.
- 1908      The Workhouse Ward, Gregory.  
The Golden Helmet, Yeats.  
and other plays.

(Appendix 11 is taken from Collected Works, W. B. Yeats, V. 1V).

APPENDIX 111

LADY GREGORY'S TRANSLATIONS OF THE FOLLOWING HAVE BEEN PRODUCED.

April 16, 1906.	<u>The Doctor in Spite of Himself.</u>	(Moliere)
March 19, 1908.	<u>Teja.</u>	(Sudermann)
April 4, 1908.	<u>The Rogueries of Scapin.</u>	(Moliere)
January 21, 1909.	<u>The Miser.</u>	(Moliere)
February 24, 1910.	<u>Mirandolina.</u>	(Goldoni)
January 5, 1911.	Nativity Play.	(Douglas Hyde)

(Appendix 111 is taken from Our Irish Theatre, Lady Augusta Gregory).

APPENDIX IV.

List of the Publications of Lady Gregory's Books.

Books published by John Murray, Albermarle Street, London.

1. Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster, Arranged and Put into English by Lady Gregory, with a Preface by W. B. Yeats, 1919.
2. Gods and Fighting Men: The Story of the Tuatha de Danaan and of the Fianna of Ireland, Arranged and put into English by Lady Gregory, With a Preface by W. B. Yeats, 1926.
3. Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish, 1903 (out of print).
4. Sir William Gregory, An Autobiography, Ed. by Lady Gregory, 1894 (out of print).

Books published by G. P. Putnam's Sons New York and London.

1. Irish Folk-History Plays,  
First Series, 1912.  
Grania  
Kinco ra  
Devorgilla  
Second Series, 1912.  
The Canavans  
The White Cockade  
The Deliverer
2. Mirandolina: A Comedy Translated and Adapted from La locandiera of Goldoni, by Lady Gregory, 1924.
3. New Comedies, 1913.  
The Bogie Men  
The Full Moon  
Coats  
Damer's Gold  
McDonough's Wife
4. Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography, 1913.

5. Seven Short Plays, 1909.  
 Spreading the News  
 Hyacinth Halvey  
 The Rising of the Moon  
 The Jackdaw  
 The Workhouse Ward  
 The Travelling Man  
 The Gaol Gate
6. The Golden Apple: A Play for Kiltarten Children, 1916.
7. The Image: and Other Plays, 1922.  
 The Image  
 Henrahan's Oath  
 Shanwalla  
 The Wrens
8. Three Last Plays, 1928.  
 Sancho's Master  
 Dave  
 The Would-be Gentleman
9. Three Wonder Plays, 1922.  
 The Dragon  
 Aristotle's Bellows,  
 The Jester
10. Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland,  
 Collected and Arranged by Lady Gregory: With two  
 Essays and Notes by W. B. Yeats, 1920, 2 Vol.

Additional Publications.

1. A Book of Saints and Wonders, Put down here by Lady Gregory according to the old writings and the memory of the people of Ireland, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1907.
2. Case for the Return of Sir Hugh Lane's Pictures to Dublin, The Talbot Press, Dublin, 1926.
3. Coole, The Cuala Press, Dublin, 1931.
4. Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, with some account of the Dublin Galleries, E. P. Dutton and Company, New York, 1921.

5. Ideals in Ireland, edited by Lady Gregory, Unicorn Press, London, 1900.
6. Mr. Gregory's Letter Box, 1813-1830, Edited by Lady Gregory, Smith, Elder and Company, London, 1898.
7. My First Play, Elkin, Mathews, and Marrot, London, 1930.
8. The Kiltartan Moliere, Translated by Lady Gregory, Maunsel and Company, Dublin, 1910.  
The Miser  
The Doctor in Spite of Himself  
The Rogueries of Scapin
9. The Kiltartan Poetry Book: Prose Translations from the Irish, Churchtown, Dundrum, 1918.
10. The Kiltartan Wondon Book, Maunsel and Company, Dublin, 1911.
11. The Twisting of the Rope, Douglas Hyde, Translated by Lady Gregory, Dublin, 1901.

## APPENDIX V.

### Bibliography

#### Books

1. Boyd, Ernest, Ireland's Literary Renaissance (Maunsell and Co., Dublin, 1916).  
The Contemporary Drama of Ireland, (Little, Brown, and Co., Boston, 1919).
2. Byrne, Dawson, The Story of Ireland's National Theatre, Dublin (The Talbot Press, Dublin 1929).
3. Chandler, Frank W., Aspects of Modern Drama (The Macmillan Co., 1914).
4. Clark, Barrett H., Representative One-Act Plays by British and Irish Authors (Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1935).
5. Cohen, H. L., One-Act Plays by Modern Authors (Harcourt, Brace, and Co., New York, 1921).
6. Fay, W. G. and Carswell, Catherine, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre (Rich and Cowan, London, 1935).
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15. Tynan, Katherine, Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences (John Murray, London, 1913).
16. Van Doren, Carl and Mark, American and British Literature Since 1890 (Century Co., New York, 1925).
17. Weygandt, Cornelius, Irish Plays and Playwrights
18. Yeats, William Butler, Estrangement (The Cuala Press, Dublin 1926).  
Plays and Controversies, (Macmillan and Co., London, 1923).  
Plays in Prose and Verse (Macmillan and Co., London, 1922).  
The Cutting of an Agate (Macmillan and Co., New York, 1912).

#### Periodicals

1. "Lady Gregory", Literary Digest, June 11, 1932.
2. "Lady Gregory's Cuchulain", The Nation, April 28, 1904.
3. Macleod, Fiona, "The Four Winds of Eirinn," The Fortnightly Review, February, 1903.
4. Malone, Andrew E., "The Plays of Lady Gregory;" Yale Review, April, 1925.
5. More, Paul Elmer, "The Epic of Ireland", The International Quarterly, March, 1904.
6. Yeats, W. B., "The Dramatic Movement," Samhain, 1904.

The thesis, "Lady Augusta Gregory as Patron and Playwright of the Irish Theatre," written by Frances Hoban Branson, has been accepted by the Graduate School of Loyola University with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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April 22, 1937

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May 3, 1937