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The Allegorical Ireland Figure in the Irish National Theatre, 1899-1926

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE ALLEGORICAL IRELAND FIGURE
IN THE IRISH NATIONAL THEATRE, 1899-1926

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY
Svetlana Novakovic

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the empty spaces in the yard planted with flowers and for her compassionate intelligence, for understanding small and great sufferings in a simple gesture. Juno Boyle and Mrs. Breydon couldn't have captured my heart so intensely if I didn't already know them in you. And I would like to thank my father for teaching me so early on that everything in the world was a story, and perhaps the world itself, and for filling my childhood with stories of Serbian rebels, Croatian peasants, Muslim hodjas --and a gypsy bandit here and there. My first encounter with Synge's peasants, so many years later in college, felt like the acting out of a memory. I would have never understood the powerful allure of a decrepit old woman named Cathleen Ni Houlihan without the "historical memory" you imparted to me each time you recounted the colonial struggles and displacement that mark Yugoslavia's history in each generation, including the present one.
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INTRODUCTION

If you want to interest [an Irishman] in Ireland you've [sic] got to call the unfortunate island Kathleen ni Hoolihan and pretend she's a little old woman. It saves thinking. It saves working. It saves everything except imagination.

G.B. Shaw, John Bull's Other Island (1907)

The allegorical representation of Ireland as Woman has a long intricate history traceable to the sovereignty goddess from Pre-Christain Gaelic myth. Medieval heroines like Queen Maeve and Deirdre are humanized versions of this goddess. It was only after Tudor colonization, however, and the subsequent shift to the English language that the figure began to assume the political cast (i.e. an anti-colonial, anti-British stance) that became its defining characteristic in modern nationalist literature.¹ Issues of gender, political power, and Ireland's colonial identity intersect in each of the Ireland figures discussed in this dissertation.

The long-standing Irish tradition of celebrating the national self in the feminine was complicated by Britain's colonial rhetoric, beginning in the sixteenth century, which engendered Ireland as a woman in order to legitimate

¹There is also a rich tradition of the Ireland figure in the visual arts beginning in the nineteenth century: oil paintings romantically depicting Eire with a harp as well as more contemporary recruiting posters for both the Irish nationalists and the British.
political dominance. The collision of native tradition and colonial ideology in a shared trope complicated and enriched the Woman as Nation allegory in Ireland, where, George-Denis Zimmerman claims, it was developed to a far greater degree than in any other country (54). The figure's popularity is evident in the various female appellations for Ireland in both Gaelic and English --Hibernia, Eire, Erin, speirbhean, Mother Ireland, the Poor Old Woman, the Shan Van Vocht, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and Dark Rosaleen, to name a few. As popular as the figure was before the inception of the Irish National Theatre, however, it was only after W.B. Yeats transposed the figure to dramatic form in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) that the most popular literary version of the trope was created. The intense enthusiasm aroused by Yeats's play inspired several imitations in the National Theatre and even more counter-responses over the following decades; thus, the tradition of the Ireland figure was effectively transposed by Yeats to drama where, I will argue, the trope reached its most complex forms.

In retrospect, it seems only natural that the Ireland figure became a focus of interest in the early dramatic movement --four figures appeared in the first five years-- whose manifesto professed "to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland" (Lady Gregory, *Our* 8-9). This statement presumes an authority to define and express the Irish 'soul,' the common core of Irish nationality, and
implicitly assumes the right to determine which segment of national society is "the real Ireland," or the "Irish Ireland." The Ireland figure had been utilized for this purpose for centuries, as poets changed her features to promote their changing definitions of "Irishness." Modern Irish playwrights, participating in a theatre movement with explicitly nationalist intentions, followed suit. Yeats found the real Ireland in the poetry of the peasant imagination, so he created a Cathleen Ni Houlihan that embodied Ireland's ballad tradition; Synge found the essence of Irish nationality in the tragedy of a peasant mother; O'Casey saw the same national essence encapsulated in the struggles of a proletarian woman. The Ireland figure's long-standing tradition provided each of these playwrights rich and various source materials with which to convey their personal vision of 'Irishness'; each of the chapters in this study will explore the ways these source materials, and the Gaelic traditions they reflect, were molded into new figures, each more relevant than the two-dimensional political symbol that the Ireland figure had become by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Although the Ireland figure was traditionally used to project a symbolic sense of cultural unity, a communal concept of Irishness never emerged in the Irish theatre. Instead, as Mary FitzGerald observes, "Subtle notions of nationality --or, more precisely, perceived nationality--
played a somewhat divisive role in the early Irish theatre" (148). The succeeding chapters will show how the clash of national visions expressed itself in the ways each playwright purposely revised previous Ireland figures -- especially the repeated attempts to deconstruct the first and most influential figure in this study, Yeats's overtly political Cathleen Ni Houlihan. The first play considered will be *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) rather than the equally allegorical *The Countess Cathleen* (1899), because of its far more influential status, evident in the numerous imitations it inspired and the standard of expectations it created.

(Contemporary critics like Arthur Griffith and Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington note their disappointment with later Ireland figures in the theatre by using Cathleen Ni Houlihan as a standard of comparison.) The rigid patriotic expectations this play established left Irish playwrights -- even Yeats himself -- the task of deconstructing the figure and defying the audience. Catherine Innes briefly calls attention to the inter-textual dynamics surrounding the figure in the early Irish theatre:

The continuing influence of Cathleen ni Houlihan can be seen in the work of the authors with whom the Irish Literary Revival is most often identified, but it is an influence modified and complicated by a (generally) subtextual dialogue which takes place between those writers, the one frequently reacting to the other, sometimes in contexts which are analogous to another kind of father/son conflict, the reaction of a younger writer to his literary predecessors described by Harold Bloom as the 'anxiety of influence.' (Woman 49)
This dissertation is the first extensive study of the "subtextual dialogue" Innes identifies but no critic has undertaken to explore in depth. Each chapter will explore the dialogue each subsequent Abbey playwright created with Yeats's formative play. J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey each subversively adapted Cathleen's characteristics into their own realistic female characters such as Maurya, Nora, and Bessie. The chapters on Deirdre explore the ways in which Synge's and Yeats's Anglo-Irish identity problematized their relationship to the nationalist sentiments embodied in Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and their subsequent attempts to create an alternative anti-establishment figure in Deirdre. Cathleen Ni Houlihan's pivotal position in this study continues to the last chapter, which shows O'Casey deconstructing the same figure that Synge tried to undermine twenty years earlier through his presentation of Maurya in Riders to the Sea (1902).

I have tried to justify the allegorical classification of each character I have included in this study with evidence from the plays and secondary sources, particularly those which evince the playwright's intentions. My standard of selection is important since most of the characters in question are realistic and therefore not overtly symbolic. I classify a character as an allegorical Ireland figure if she exhibits definitive characteristics of a traditional Ireland figure such as the Shan Van Vocht (Bessie Burgess bears a
striking resemblance to the Shan Van Vocht and Maurya to the Caillech, for example); or, if she is conceived by the playwright as a symbolic embodiment of a fixed concept of Irish nationality (the Anglo-Irish conception of Deirdre or the economic conception of the Irish struggle in Juno Boyle). None of the playwrights in question used the allegory in a strictly political sense, i.e. the Irish 'nation' defined by a governmental body and geographic borders. The figures in this study embody a much more complex sense of Irishness which subtly weaves together strands of history, culture, myth, and class identity. (Even Yeats's overtly allegorical Cathleen Ni Houlihan embodies a cultural rather than political definition of nationality.) My work is distinguished from critical approaches which attempt to discern rigid allegorical patterns of the political type. In their most basic form such essays go something like this: one character represents the Irish nation, another England, and their discord acts out the colonial conflict. O'Casey's plays are especially prone to become victims of this approach because of their political settings. Richard Corballis provides an example:

Charlie Bentham symbolizes England, and the will whose

2 O'Casey's Kathleen Listens In (1923) -- whose plot focuses on an allegorical character driven to distraction by the various political ideologies prevalent in post-independence Ireland -- is the only exception to this rule. However, O'Casey's most significant explorations of nationality occur in his more complex realistic figures.
execution he bungles symbolizes England's promise of independence for Ireland. The Boyle family therefore symbolizes the Irish nation, whose prospects of a legacy (alias independence) turn to ashes (alias "The Troubles" --Boyle actually exclaims, "More trouble in our native land", when he first hears about Mary's pregnancy). More specifically, Mary Boyle, seduced and abandoned by Bentham, represents Cathleen Ni Houlihan.(76)³

This is a reductive approach: the simplification necessary to reach such conclusions diminishes the aesthetic richness of the play and ignores the complexity --even ambiguity-- of the allegorical figure itself. By contrast, I intend to explore the plays' subtle allegorical suggestiveness rather than fixed allegorical schemes. Even more importantly, I will show how the elements of the dramatic genre, such as a live audience, complicated the allegorical trope --a factor totally ignored in the allegorical approach cited above.

A play is what happens between the audience and the stage; it is the interaction between what the playwright is saying and what the audience is thinking. In the productions of the early Irish National Theatre, the playwright's 'Ireland figure met and clashed with the audience's differing conception of the same figure. In a few cases the allegorical status of a female character was due more to the audience's perception than the playwright's intentions --Synge's Nora

³The Plough and the Stars was also a popular target for this approach. Corballis identifies the fading Mollser as Cathleen Ni Houlihan (79). Heinz Kosok more reasonably finds the ensemble of characters in the play embodiments of representative attitudes of the Irish people in 1915: the socialist Covey, the revolutionary Jack, the Protestant Unionist Bessie, and the passive victim of social injustices Mollser (75).
Burke, for example--a phenomenon which only affects the trope once it has been transposed to the theatre. When the playwright seemed to reinforce the audience's conception of the allegorical figure, the result was an inspirational experience, almost religious in its intensity, that many described after the first production of Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. The immediacy of the theatre's real space and time gave the Ireland figure a more intense and, often, threatening power than it had in any other genre—which explains why riots were consistently focused on the controversial presentation of female characters on stage.

It is surprising that critics have ignored the provocative role the Ireland figure played in the National Theatre between 1899 and 1926. They attribute the violent objections provoked by Synge's and O'Casey's female characters to the Victorian attitudes of nationalists without any meaningful reference to the long history of defining the Irish nation in a female symbol and the metaphorical use of her sexuality as a transaction of political power. This dissertation will attempt to fill this gap and thus provide a fuller understanding of the conflict between playwright and audience. As the Ireland figure evolved on the national stage it recurrently clashed with the expectations created by more politicized figures, like the militant Mother Ireland demanding sacrifice of her sons or the fiercely anti-British and asexual Cathleen Ni Houlihan, which flourished
simultaneously in nationalist rhetoric. This is evident in the response to both Synge's Nora in *Shadow of the Glen* and O'Casey's Nora in *The Plough and the Stars*; demands were made in each case for a return to the conventional nationalist figure of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. In response to the riots that greeted *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926, O'Casey appropriately metaphorized the hostile audience in the form of a scurrilous Cathleen Ni Houlihan, who promoted convention at any cost.4

As the historical accounts of the Abbey riots show, theatre provided a public and, therefore, instantaneously interactive arena for the clash of national visions and the appropriate ways these visions would be reflected in a female image. The public dimension of the dramatic genre further enriched the already multifaceted tradition of the allegorical figure in Ireland. I will argue that the tradition reached its highest degree of complexity --and deconstruction-- in the National Theatre because elements of the dramatic genre served to complicate the two dimensional, 

4In *Inishfallen Fare Thee Well*, O'Casey describes his own reaction to the uproar and his revulsion against the audience's idealistic-sentimental definition of Irish nationality: "For the first time in his life, Sean felt a surge of hatred for Kathleen ni Houlihan sweeping over him. He saw now that the one who had the walk of a queen could be a bitch at times. She galled the hearts of her children who dared be above the ordinary, and she often slew her best ones. She had hounded Parnell to death; she had yelled and torn at Yeats, at Synge, and now she was doing the same to him. What a snarly gob she could be at times; an ignorant one, too" (240).
emblematic use of the figure in poetry and rhetoric. As Joseph Leersson posits: "Poetry tends to reduce the complex terms of opposition to more straightforward terms of a binary polarity between Gael and Gall" (451). Leerssen shows how the generalizations and simplifications implicit in such a polarity first broke down in eighteenth-century Irish drama (that is, drama written in the English language by the Anglo-Irish). Irish characters began to appear in drama, representing for the first time a "hybrid or undifferentiated" sense of nationality which conveyed the complex and intermediary position of the Anglo-Irish (430; 451). The modern Anglo-Irish playwrights in this study -- Yeats, Synge, and O'Casey-- also looked to drama as a vehicle to deconstruct the simple opposition between Irish and British that excluded their in-between position as descendents of the colonizer. The dramatic genre allowed the Ireland figure an ambiguity that simply did not exist in political poetry. There exists a tension between the complexity of the real and the 'ordered' aesthetic in dramatic representation. On stage, the mythic Ireland figure is trapped in the imperfect flesh of an actress and conveys in every move a tension between the mythic and the mundane, which is continually reinforced by the underlying presence of an unpredictable reality. The figure is also given dialogue and through it, unavoidably, a subjective and independent will. (Previously it was the poet who conveyed the Shan Van
Vocht's message or the speirbhean's prophecy.) In drama the figure presents herself, giving the actress plentiful opportunity to subvert conventional expectations. All these elements became the seeds of the figure's inevitable deconstruction in the National Theatre.

Aesthetic movements like Realism and Naturalism in modern drama no doubt reinforced this effect. Synge provided realistic portraits of Irish women with psychological impulses and sexual desires that denied the simplistic concepts of virtuous motherhood advanced by nationalists. O'Casey went even further by creating rough tenement women who resisted the constraints of propriety and actively opposed the militaristic values of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Even Yeats's overtly patriotic play distinguishes the call of Cathleen Ni Houlihan from the call of the real mother who urges Michael not to leave. George Bernard Shaw briefly identifies the role Realism played in this deconstructive tendency:

The modern Irish theatre began with the Cathleen Ni Houlihan of Mr. Yeats and Lady Gregory's Rising of the Moon, in which the old patriotism stirred and rung its victims; but when the theatre was thus established to call on Young Ireland to write plays and found a national school of drama, the immediate result was a string of plays of Irish life --and very true to life they were-- in which heroines proclaimed that they were sick of Ireland and [be]rated their Nationalist husbands for sacrificing all the realities of life to senseless Fenian maunderings. ("Note" 81)

The overall organization of this dissertation shows the progressive deconstruction of the Ireland trope from the
patriotic climax of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* in 1902. The trope became the place in which visions of nationality were developed through modernist aesthetics and intensely evaluated by an audience steeped in nineteenth-century nationalist ideology.

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13

CHAPTER 1

THE LITERARY TRADITION OF THE ALLEGORICAL IRELAND FIGURE

Medieval Irish tales refer to a female allegorical figure -- 'flaithius,' translated 'sovereignty' -- which represents the kingship of Ireland. Although this is the first direct reference to sovereignty as a literary character, the medieval figure developed from an earlier tradition in which the land was personified as a woman, usually in the form of a goddess who was thought to protect the tribe and bring fertility. In the earliest, 'goddess' phase of the tradition, the figure had powerful religious associations and was worshiped in sacred festivals at special sites. The goddess had the power to bring both good and bad luck from the Otherworld and bestow it on people as pleased her. Her supernatural power ran parallel with a distinct political function. She validated each new king in an elaborate ritual called the "banfheis rigi"; she conferred political legitimacy on the king through a ritual act of sexual intercourse which was often accompanied by a symbolic libation.6 The king's ritual drunkenness at the inaugural

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6An early example of this figure can be found in The Second Battle of Mag Tuired. The Morrigan goddess ensures victory for the Tuatha De Danann by sleeping with the Dagda, one of their chief gods.
feast might be interpreted as an image of the sacred orgasm in which he was united with the goddess (Clark 126). With the encroaching influence of Christianity in the sixth century, the actual rite was eventually purged of its blatantly physical aspects, but the sexual element remained "deeply ingrained in the tales and poems which provide endless variations on this basic theme of king and goddess" (Mac Cana, "Women" 521). The prevalent sexual element reflected a less restrictive view of female sexuality in early Christian Irish society before the Norman invasion of 1169 (MacCurtain and O'Corrain 11).

The goddess's active sexuality was also focal because of her direct association with the land, the harvest, and fertility. In tales which highlighted nature associations, the goddess's body often took on a decrepit, hag-like form, reflecting the ancient quality of the land itself. This particular version of the early Ireland figure was called the Caillech and it is illustrated in the famous tenth-century poem, "Caillech Bhéara" ('The Hag of Beare'). The poem is structured around the voice of a hag who associates her physical demise with the natural features of an ancient land surrounded by the sea:

The coward sea

7 In "The Loathly Lady," G.F. Dalton posits the thesis that this ritual was a theatrical event with masks, and that the transformation was enacted with an actual woman playing the role of the goddess.
Slouches away from me.
Fear brings back the tide
That made me stretch at the side
Of him who'd take me briefly for his bride.

The sea grows smaller, smaller now.
Farther, farther it goes
Leaving me here where the foam dries
On the deserted land,
Dry as my shrunken thighs,
As the tongue that presses my lips,
As the veins that break through my hands. (Kennelly 63-4)

The hag's connection to the sovereignty goddess is made explicit when the old woman laments the loss of her many princely lovers.

Unless the sovereignty goddess accorded a warrior her favors he could not be the true king. Since she represented both the abstract sovereignty and the physical substance of his kingdom, both his rule and his land were affected by her favor. During the reign of a king favored by the goddess, military victory was assured and the land was fertile and prosperous. The converse was also true: when she withdrew her support, the king was often destroyed by a political rival and his kingdom plagued by natural disaster or military defeat. Maire Bhreathnach comments on the menacing aspect of the goddess:

Her role here seems to be that of a death goddess, in that she provokes the downfall and death of the unjust king when the union between them and his realm has been irreparably damaged by his actions and when, thereby, his reign has ceased to be productive. (255)

Centuries later Yeats would appropriate the "death" aspect of this early goddess in his Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure: "They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake and
for all that, they will think they are well paid" (86). She tells Michael "many a man has died for love of me" (82) and her ballads stress heroism through physical annihilation: "If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all" (84). The sacrifice of young men rejuvenates Yeats's figure into a young girl with "the walk of a queen" (88). Later playwrights like O'Casey objected to Yeats's dangerous use of the death goddess to advance modern political ideology. Nevertheless, Yeats was tapping into a deep Gaelic tradition of the goddess -- ignored during the period of the popular aisling poems in the eighteenth century and of sentimental political ballads in the nineteenth -- when he made Cathleen a death figure.

In the Irish mythological cycle, which were oral legends predating Christ but left to us only in the manuscripts of monastic scribes between the eighth and thirteenth century, we find remnants of the mythology of the early goddess.  

8Rosalind Clark identifies the eighth-century tales "The Wooing of E'tai'n" and "The Destruction of Da' Derga's Hostel" as good examples of the implicit sovereignty myth (115-125).

9Macha, the goddess of Emain Macha (the capital of Ulstermen), is a good example. Sovereignty is only one of her roles; in diverse stories she appears as a warrior-fertility goddess and territorial goddess. Maeve is presented as a mortal queen; however, she retains the destructiveness of a Celtic goddess, gives her sexual favors to any lover she chooses, and confers the kingship on her many husbands. All these characteristics, as well as the translation of her name as 'the intoxicating one' (which
are humanized but still associated with fertility and the granting of political authority. Sexual assertion is also a central quality of these female characters, especially of Maeve, who boasts that she never had one man without another waiting in his shadow (Kinsella, *Tain* 53). The concept of sovereignty plays an important part in the mythological cycle although it is not specifically labeled as such. For example, remnants of the ritual wedding can be discerned in the story of Deirdre; she initiates a sexual encounter with the young warrior Naoise in order to avoid a misalliance with the aged king, Conchubar. No specific allegorical meaning, however, is attached to the tales since the stories concerning the central female characters are too complex to be interpreted as a straight-forward allegory.

The Ireland figure evolved into an explicitly 'allegorical' symbol in the Middle Ages when she began to be specifically referred to as *flaithius*, translated as 'the Sovereignty' of Ireland. With the advent of Christianity the figure could no longer be worshiped as a goddess --although her symbolic role in the inauguration rites remained the same; consequently, she began to take on a more static and less threatening symbolic form than the powerful earth

defers to the ritual libation), proclaim her to be a sovereignty goddess. Proinsias Mac Cana identifies the mortal and pseudo-historical queen Mor Mumain as another example of the sovereignty figure in mythological tales; she unites first one husband, then another, thus bestowing the kingship upon them ("Aspects" 98).
goddess. In pseudo-historical tales which began to be written after 1000, the Sovereignty gradually becomes an allegorical figure, "a very conventional medieval way of dealing with the problems of the pagan goddesses" (Breatnach 333). The overtly allegorical sovereignty tales and poems belong to the 'king cycle' which includes pseudo-historical narratives concerning the historical and psuedo-historical kings of Ireland. The best known story and most illustrative of 'Sovereignty' conventions is "The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon," whose central hero is Niall of the Nine Hostages. When Niall and his four step-brothers are lost in the woods hunting, they take turns to go look for water. The first brother finds a well guarded by an old woman, a hag black as coal with hair like the grey mane of a horse, green teeth, and diseased skin. When the hag demands a kiss for the water, he refuses. Two other brothers come in turn and refuse to kiss her. The last one to encounter the hag is Niall who not only kisses her but offers to sleep with her. He throws himself down upon her and she is transformed into a beautiful lady and tells Niall that she is the Sovereignty of Ireland:

And as though hast seen me loathesome, bestial, horrible at first and beautiful at last, so is the sovereignty; for seldom it is gained without battles and conflicts; but at last to anyone it is beautiful and goodly (Cross and Slover 511-2).

The brothers fail because they have no virtue or kindness and, even more importantly, they have no penetrating vision.
Niall is set apart from his brothers because he divines the hag's true nature (Bowen 22).

The hero has to give himself sexually based on a faith that transcends physical appearance, and in the process, he achieves the legitimacy to become king. The hag is the mythological archetype of what Jean Markale calls 'the submerged woman' -- a female who reflects knowledge, wealth and power all at the same time. In aristocratic patriarchal societies the possession of these qualities can only belong to the privileged; as a result, the desires of ordinary mortals are diverted away from her by the means of taboo and fear stemming from her ugliness. The breaking of taboos is then a magical act accomplished by the man who loves, who has overcome his repugnance and is resigned to annihilation in order to win all (Markale 60). The true king does not seek individual glory but honor that is defined by communal responsibility. As the future king, he needs to embrace the "the ambiguity and tragic consequences of the human condition" embodied in the hag's deformed body (Condren 24). Attributes of wisdom are more necessary than attributes of physical conquest in the future king. Once again, Yeats

10 Hideous appearance is not the only deterrent. Two other major patterns can be discerned in these stories: a wild wandering woman restored to sanity and beauty and a royal child brought up among cow-herds (Mac Cana, "Aspects" 64).

11 Philip O'Leary clarifies the very real, and indeed central, difference between the honor of the warrior and that
skilfully adopts these early Gaelic elements into his own figure. Michael has the vision to see beyond Cathleen's hideous appearance and understand his obligation to her, while his materialistic father only sees a decrepit, witless woman who might ask for money. Michael is able to divine the hidden beauty which is revealed to all at the end of the play when Cathleen, like the medieval sovereignty figure, is transformed into a queen.

The transformation motif was the focal point of the medieval figure (it does not exist in prior, pre-allegorical myths). The puella senilis, the hag who is transformed into a beautiful woman, is a distinctly Irish feature of Indo-European kingship myths (Bretnach 334). Certainly, Irish poets used the image of the allegorical puella senilis for four hundred years after the actual high kingship was destroyed in the sixteenth century (Clark 144). As the representative story of Niall illustrated, the encounter with the puella senilis, the coition, the metamorphosis, and finally the bestowal of sovereignty are central features of the medieval tales (Bretnach 334). Unfortunately, in these of the king in early Irish literature. The ideals of king and warrior are incompatible because the nature of their heroic valor is different: the king aims for caution and moderation whereas the warrior seeks individual military glory and the risks to achieve it. 'Justice' (jurisprudence) is central to regal courage and regal generosity (9). Eire's later anti-colonist stance was developed partly from the way she embodied the non-militaristic values of kingship; Eire could deny political legitimacy to invaders who govern by military force rather than by the test of knowledge and communal honor.
stories, the Sovereignty has become a diminished figure, a mere device after centuries of embodying all the power and varying aspects of the Celtic goddess. Rosalind Clark explains:

She is limited to two things: a description of physical beauty (or ugliness) and one symbolic significance which is stated by the author. All the mystery and ambiguity of the goddess fade away. She becomes nothing but the simplest kind of symbol: she represents the High Kingship of Ireland. She is more like a paste-board figure than a goddess. She ceases to be a person at all; she is merely a personification of an abstract quality. (151)

The *puella senilis* is a simplified form of the early goddess; she is either young, beautiful, and good, or old, hideous and sinister. The figure's evolution into a merely allegorical symbol destroyed the ambiguity of the goddess and her ability to combine so many different qualities in ever varying ways.

The medieval 'Sovereignty' figure, with its rigid and simplistic duality, remained a central though static figure in Irish poetry as well as allegorical tales. In bardic poetry (approximately 1200 to approximately 1600), the official court poetry of the Irish Middle Ages, the main task of the poet was to praise his noble patron by reciting his genealogy, on which the patron's rank and possible claim to his chieftaincy rested. The allegorical figure symbolized the political right each king had to his title, in other words the legitimacy of his rulership. The figure's association with legitimacy became especially relevant after British colonization and the questions of political right
that surrounded it. The scope for the imaginative development of the medieval figure had been limited until after she became an anti-colonial figure in the seventeenth century.

During Tudor expansionism, the figure underwent significant changes reflecting the devastating cultural assault on Gaelic institutions -- law and custom as much as questions of land ownership and political allegiance. 12 Vulnerability and degradation became the figure's defining characteristics beginning in the early seventeenth century. After the decisive Battle of Kinsale in 1601 and the resulting exile of the surviving Gaelic chiefs O'Neill and O'Donnell (Flight of the Earls in 1607), O'Donnell's bard, Eoghan Rua Mac an Bhaird, wrote a poem using a figure that would become standard for the next three hundred years: that of Ireland as a young woman, left without protection and exposed to the advances of dishonorable men.

Now is Inisfail, nurse of the children of Mil of Spain, taken at disadvantage: her strength is reft, she is caught unwarded; denizens of all strange countries flock towards her. All men have challenged her for their own, her evils and uncertainties are many; her 'unglory' for a while past is evidence of her derangement that was the old home of saints and sanctuaries. No friend falls now for her sake, for her no fight is fought; woe is me for the plight in which she is today: no utterance is heard from her. (Quoted and translated in Leerson 217)

12 The Battle of Kinsale in 1601 was a decisive factor in the English conquest. During the seventeenth century native Gaelic institutions began to collapse. The Battle of Aughrim in 1691 was the final blow to the Irish aristocracy, many of whom were either killed in battle or became exiles.
The poem's references to 'derangement' and 'prosperity' recall the sovereignty goddess, but an essential difference exists: 'protection' replaces 'coition' as the center of the allegory. Political power is no longer the marriage between nature and man-made laws, between the goddess and the king. The new, colonial reality reflected a hierarchical and antagonistic relationship between the Gaels and the 'foreigners.' The central institution of Gaelic society which the goddess embodied, the kingship, had been destroyed. As a result, Gaelic society began to be represented in the inferior and dependent social status of the mortal woman. Her physical vulnerability reflects the brute oppression Gaels experienced from the militarily dominant British. The figure's victim image, however, provided the Gaels with the weapon of moral righteousness: Eire is a passive but honorable and aristocratic victim of brute force. She embodies a set of aristocratic cultural values, "an economy of honor and nobility" that made the Gael superior to the

13 The relationship between the supernatural goddess and (mortal) political ruler represented a balanced and complimentary opposition between nature and law. As Maire Herbert points out: "According to early Irish ideology...the relationship of female/male, nature/culture was not one of simple evaluation on the level of inferiority/superiority, but rather a system of complementarity in which the fortunes of the sociocultural domain were linked with respect for the power vested in the natural world" (18). It is not difficult to imagine how Britain's colonization of Ireland destroyed this balance, which was so central to the idea of Gaelic kingship.
foreigner despite his oppression. In several poems, the figure is identified as 'Uaisle,' which translates as 'Nobility' (Leersson 208). Eoghan Rua establishes another aristocratic version of the figure when he has Eire appear as a lonely mourner at the family tomb of the exiled chief O'Donnell in Rome (220). The symbolic forcefulness of the grieving widow figure is evident in her subsequent popularity, which reached its height in the twentieth century.

In the seventeenth-century, the Gaelic poet begins to place a specific focus on the protection of Eire's sexuality; after all, the exchange of the goddess's sexuality had been the vehicle for the legitimization of new political authority for centuries. Not surprisingly, British oppression was metaphorically translated into the threat of rape, and a whole series of poems portrayed Ireland as a dishonored widow. The colonial situation effected a radical shift in the way the Gaels presented the sexuality of their figure: restraint became an essential feature in order to deny the foreigners the legitimizing act of coition with the goddess. This attitude is a definite departure from the pre-colonial

14 According to Leersson, the seventeenth-century Gaelic order was "characterized, not by political structures of government, administration, geographical integrity or constitutional sovereignty . . . but rather by a set of bardic, aristocratic values such as genealogical commitment to clan, sept or lineage; cultivation of the old histories of the exploits of the ancestral Gaels; liberality to poets and their craft" (214).
celebration of the goddess's forceful and even whimsical sexuality. Reflecting her degradation from goddess to mortal woman, the figure loses the ability, even the right, to have control over her body, a control which is undermined from the outside by force or, in a more striking development, her own weak --i.e. promiscuous-- nature. In the seventeenth century, the figure appears, for the first time in Gaelic poetry, as a promiscuous woman, granting many foreign churls access to her body. There were specific historical reasons for the popularity of the 'harlot' figure at this time, for the reason that Eire was held partially responsible for her downfall and perceived as a willing participant in her own degradation. The bards were critical of the ways Gaelic lords capitulated to the colonial system in the interest of self-preservation. The fact that so many native chieftains subscribed to the new system, sued for and accepted English re-grants, added an element of self-humiliation and betrayal to the English conquest. Consequently, poets saw Ireland as a fallen woman brought to shameful actions by altered circumstances but no less partly responsible for her condition.

Keating's "Ireland Has Aroused My Pity"(1644) provides a highly explicit example of this type of figure, "a harlot without respect or honor," which also recurs later in the poems of Donncha Mac an Chaoilfhiaclaigh and Da'ibhi' O'Bruadair's. The latter refer to her as a 'tramp' though
"aggrieved of what has been done." These poems reproach Ireland for being "a fickle and faithless woman, no better than a 'meirdreach' who gives her love to every foreign adventurer," "a mother who has shamefully disowned her children and suckles instead a foreign brood" (quoted in O'Rahilly 19 ). Leerssson makes the important distinction between the less judgmental tone of these poems and the moralizing nineteenth century translations which project a Victorian confusion of 'shame' and 'guilt,' promoting the former at the expense of the more accurate latter word. The original poems tend to pity rather than condemn Eire's inability to withstand dishonor: "Ireland is forsaken by her kin as much as vice versa; a victim as much as a hussy, she may be 'more sinned against than sinning'" (Leerssson 247). The earlier poets were concerned with Eire's sexual loyalty rather than her sexual purity: the focus of the seventeenth century allegory is to retain some vestige of political power (at least rhetorically) through sexual control versus the moral control that would be the focus of later colonial figures. The figure's initial colonial phase in the seventeenth century establishes the circumscription of Eire's sexuality as a central (symbolic) mechanism for the preservation of Irish patriarchy. The connection between anti-colonial sentiment and sexual restraint would remain in effect up until Ireland's independence, and even after, although it came to be worked out in new ways and taken to
new puritanical extremes in later figures. In the next phase, for example, when the English solidify their colonial power, the figure's sexuality would be etherealized in order to make her totally inaccessible to the British: even their brute force cannot make a harlot out of her.

According to Daniel Corkery, the elegiac widow figures of the seventeenth century were the origins for the tremendously popular speirbhean figures of the eighteenth-century (129). Poets of the dying Gaelic civilization like O'Rathaille and Owen Roe O'Sullivan pictured Ireland as a beautiful woman passively awaiting a Jacobite prince to return and end her oppression. The woman was called the speirbhean and she became the central figure in the popular political poetry called aisling, or vision poem. The standard aisling always has the same subject: the poet takes a walk in an idyllic country setting, falls asleep, and dreams that a beautiful lady appears before him. The lady is described in intricate detail, with elaborate poetical ornamentation. And when the poet asks if she is Venus, Helen, or Deirdre, she answers that she is Eire, and she is sorrowing for her husband, the true king, who is exiled beyond the seas. She goes on to the sorrows of her suffering children, the Irish people, and concludes by declaring that God will send help, and the invaders will be defeated by the faraway Stuarts (since theirs was the only cause that promised the reversal of Ireland's hard doom). The aisling
is defined by a Jacobite political stance: 'Erin claims that her true mate is, according to the date of the composition, either the Old or the Young Pretender and the poem ends with the promise of speedy redemption on the return of the King's son' (Corkery 129). The focus on the distant English king in very formal verse creates poetry that lacks, as Corkery convincingly states, a warmth and directness of expression (132). The formal political tone of the aisling genre sharply contrasts the engaging intimacy and urgency of seventeenth century poems which foreground a mourning widow in order to express the poet's personal sense of loss and dislocation.15

The speirbhean's body is regarded simply as an attractive object rather than the vehicle for sexual expression or fertility. Physical beauty becomes an indispensable feature of the allegory for the first time. Aogan O'Rathaille's aisling poems (ca. 1675-1729), which were the first to stress feminine attractiveness, gave all subsequent poets in the English language a generic prototype

15These seventeenth-century poems are characterized by an "identification of public loss and private grief, this mixture of the grand historical scale and the intimacy of the bard's own mourning"(Leersson 219). The widow figure is a projection of the poet himself: the bardic poet had traditionally looked at himself as the chief's bride since he was "more than a mere retainer, but not quite the king's equal" and in current circumstances, with the loss of his patron and chief, the poet had in fact been widowed (173). Through her ritual grief he expresses his personal anguish and political despair.
to emulate. A central convention of *aisling* poems is a catalog listing of the figure's physical features which add up to a wholly "feminine" beauty. O'Rathaille's famous poem "Brightness most Bright" illustrates the catalog convention:

Brightness most bright I beheld on the way, forlorn. Crystal of crystal her eye, blue touched with green. Sweetness most sweet her voice, not stern with age. Colour and pallor appeared on her flushed cheeks. Curling and curling, each strand of her yellow hair as it took the dew from the grass in its ample sweep; a jewel more glittering than glass on her high bosom --created, when she was created, in a higher world. (O Tuama and Kinsella 151)

The convention of cataloging features was borrowed from French courtly love poetry, but physical attractiveness had an important political no less than literary purpose.

Leersson explains:

[The *speirbhean*] harks back to the oldest poetical conventions and sovereignty myths and instills into them, and into the political issues that are dealt with, all the attractiveness that a beautiful maiden can provide. Love of the fatherland is thus explicitly yoked to love between the sexes. (248)

The original sovereignty goddess used ugliness to test the vision of the future king; the *speirbhean* uses beauty to sell the abstract idea of 'nation' by making it comprehensible, attractive, and worthy of commitment to each oppressed (male) Gael. In the guise of the eighteenth-century *speirbhean*, the figure became a two-dimensional

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16 The *aisling* genre began to draw on the tradition of French (Provencal) *reverdie* or *pastourelle*. Sean O'Tuama has shown that the French tradition made its way to Ireland in the wake of the Hiberno-Norman Barons (Leersson 271).
political symbol embodying, for the first time, a sense of Ireland as more than a combination of bardic cultural values, but rather as a incipient nation defined by a religious and political stance and set in opposition to another nation, Britain. This was the first stage in the figure's modern political use, which came eventually to include the ideological arm of the modern nation-state: nationalism. The figure's sexuality was redefined to serve her new ideological role.

The speirbhean engages others not through the assertion of her sexual impulse but through the far more passive display of her attractive physical features. She merely inspires erotic desire in others (the poet exhibits the physical ailments of lovesickness), while hers lies dormant. In order to continually sustain sexual interest she must only deny the desire she arouses. The most central feature of the Ireland figure's sexuality in the eighteenth century is no longer 'restraint' but 'inaccessibility.' The poet, and by

According to Leersson, the concept of Eire begins to embody Ireland as a whole and undergoes a certain shift away from the older bardic usage which emphasized the dynastic/territorial divisions that were so central to bardic thought. The development of the aisling and the concept of Ireland as a nation were inextricably linked: "In the aisling the nascent national ideal (to be sure, a Gaelic rather than an Irish one) becomes inextricably linked to the medium of poetry as its natural form of expression: at this early period in its development, the sense of 'nationality' is a field between the poles of literature and politics, a political form of literary inspiration and a literary expression of a political ideal" (273).
extension the audience, is left miserably unfulfilled and lovesick, "nerve-shaken, downcast and morose." In the speirbhean, 'desire' rather than 'coition' or 'protection' is the governing impulse of the allegory. The figure's inaccessibility is conveyed in several ways. Her beauty is formidable, an ideal "from a higher world" beyond the reach of the poet, or audience. (The earthy hag as a figure for sovereignty has disappeared by this time.) Her ideality also implies her chastity. But even more significantly, the speirbhean literally belongs to another world for she is a supernatural figure, a faery mistress from the 'sid' who traditionally enticed men into the Otherworld with impossible promises.

Once again, there are specific historical reasons why the figure took on a supernatural aspect at this point. The Jacobite cause was not a hopeful one. After the defeat of Charles Stuart at the Battle of Culloden in 1745 there was no hope. There was nothing left for the poets to do for their cause but write poetry. A retreat into otherworlds and the

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18 This is the last line of O'Rathaille's "Brightness Most Bright," quoted more extensively above.

19 The process of transformation --an essential aspect of the hag allegory-- became unfeasible. Since the country had no rightful king, the idea of the miraculous renewal became increasingly improbable: a vain hope rather than a vigorous certainty. Therefore the old hag transforming to a queen, the puella senilis, as a figure for sovereignty seems to have dropped out of sight by the eighteenth century (Cullingford 5).
celebration of an impossible desire for an ideal became convenient ways to escape the bleak choices that the real world presented. Richard Kearney claims that political failure was, indeed, at the root of the figure's idealization:

The more dispossessed the people became in reality the more they sought to repossess a sense of identity in the realm of ideality. Woman became as sexually intangible as the ideal of national independence became politically intangible. Both entered the unreality of myth. They became aspirations rather than actualities. (76)

The escapism of *aisling* poems is evident in their visionary and supernatural aspects. At the very least, these poems convey an inability to find any solution --or hope of it-- in the dire circumstances of the tangible world or the present (*aisling* always look to past glory and future miracles).

As Rosalind Clark remarks:

For ostensibly political poems, the *aisling* poems do not show much practical initiative. All hope must come from a foreign land (Spain or France) or from God. The Sovereignty and the poet are both helpless. Instead of energy, the poems contain wistful melancholy, a brooding sense of wrong, and a longing for an impossible 'Otherworldly' solution to Ireland's problems. (156)

The *speirbhéan* loses the fierce energy of pre-colonial Gaelic figures. The goddess actively engaged in the world of mortals and fulfilled a down-to-earth function by granting them protection and fertility; the *speirbhéan* is passive and powerless in this world, often begging mortals for help. Her only engagement with the mortal world is with the poet. Indeed, the poet must leave the normal realities of life to see his vision: "The simple fact that she comes to him in
his sleep takes away some of her credibility as a forceful figure" (Clark 159). Her role in the world, as well as the anti-colonial struggle, is not as actor but inspirational muse. Through the translations of such scholars as Eugene O'Curry, and the poetical "transformations" of Samuel Ferguson and James Clarence Mangan the speirbhean was transmitted almost without change into the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish tradition.

In the nineteenth century, the figure flourished in ballads, which were English language translations -- "transformations," some critics argue-- of late eighteenth-century Gaelic ballads. The aisling itself was essentially a song genre and established the popular use of the figure in folk songs. Eire's transformation from aristocratic widow or speirbhean (of early aislingi) to a more populist figure in ballads is essential to her role in the nineteenth century. After the upheavals of Tudor expansionism, aristocratic bards displaced by the loss of their patrons, joined the peasant class and began to compete with strolling minstrels in order to win a precarious living. The archaic language and difficult syllabic meters of their aristocratic craft had to be changed into simple stressed folk songs in order to accommodate the peasant audience which was versed in a rich oral tradition but not the intricate form of formal court poetry. The poet (known or unknown) took a familiar tune, usually that of a love song, and composed patriotic words to
The name of the girl in the love song was retained because it provided a ready indication of the tune to which the new words were intended to be sung, and this name was applied in allegorical fashion to Ireland' (O'Sullivan, Songs 142). Thus we get Kathleen Ni Houlihan, Granuaille, Kate O'Dwyer, Shiela O'Gara and Kathleen Tyrel. Names rather than formulaic motifs become signifiers of the political allegory, allowing a flexibility which made it possible for a name to be borrowed from an expressly political poem to politicize another. This exchange between songs, which Leersson calls 'intertextuality,' was a characteristic habit of the new formal breakdown of poetry from the aristocratic manuscript to the oral tradition. The flexible nature of folk poetry was responsible for the creation of a poetic code in which female names came to signify an unambiguous political ideal:

Female names like Cli'ona na carriage (from O' Rathaille to Uilliam Dall O' hIfearna'in), Cathleen Ni Houlihan (from O' hIfearna'in to Yeats), Grainne Mhaol (from the original Grainne O' Malley via Sea'n Clar'rach to the broadsides of the nineteenth century), Si'le Ni' Ghadhra, Cait Ni' Dhuibhir, Me'idhbhin Ni' Shu'illeabha'in became the signifiers of a modern Irish national stance (Leersson 283).

Of all the allegorical code names that developed during the late eighteenth century, Cathleen Ni Houlihan and the Shan Van Vocht, in particular, are central to this study because aspects of each were skillfully conflated by Yeats in his own dramatic version of the Ireland figure, presented in
Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902). Although both of these figures were conceived in Gaelic ballads, it was only in the nineteenth century and their transposition to the English language that they achieved their widespread popularity. "Cathleen Ni Houlihan" was translated by Anglo-Irish scholars and reached the height of its popularity through the medium of print. The "Shan Van Vocht," however attained its popularity in the oral tradition, through the unskilled craftsmen of broadside ballads. These ballads were often sung by street singers and sold on single-sheets on street corners; they were aesthetically cruder than their Gaelic precursors and contained newly radicalized political sentiments. Diverse figures flourished in broadside ballads, including a vulgarized form of the aisling spierbhean, but

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20Cathleen herself identifies this dual source: "Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan" (85).

21A tradition of broadsides in English had existed among the Anglo-Irish population since the seventeenth century. In the early part of the nineteenth century the broadside ballads became as popular in the Irish countryside as they had been in the cities long before (Zimmerman 21). Only about one-fifth of the total ballads actually dealt with politics, but the ones that did were often written by arch nationalists and "obtained considerable circulation" (Croker 329).

22Zimmerman explains the transition from the 'literary' spierbhean to the more crude figure in nineteenth-century broadsides: "At the end of the eighteenth century the aisling tended to die away as a literary form; good texts were no longer written, but this type of poem wedded to simple tunes made a great impression on the popular mind" (90).
to all other names the broadside rhymers preferred by far Granuaile\textsuperscript{23} and the Shan Van Vocht (Zimmerman 55). The latter figure, whose name means 'Poor Old Woman,' stood apart from all the Gaelic code names not only because of its popularity but also because of its conception, which excludes the conventional amatory (allegorical love-song) formula because of its atypical origin.

At the close of the eighteenth century there existed a scurrilous song in Gaelic dealing with the theme of a young man married to an old woman. The stanzas alternate between the abuse of the young man and the old woman's spiteful replies such as "'Tis I that made the gold,/Says the poor old woman."\textsuperscript{24} In 1796 a French fleet was threatening invasion

\textsuperscript{23}At the time of the United Irishmen, Granaile (Granu Waile is an alternative spelling) was a popular allegorical figure, but her history stretches back to the sixteenth century. Grainne Mhaol --in English Grace O'Malley--was the chieftain of a district in County Mayo. She was described in 1576 as "famous for her stoutness of courage and person and for sundry exploits done by her by sea," and in 1593 as "the nurse of all rebellions in the province for the last forty years" (Healy 3). Two songs in Irish are preserved, the oldest anonymous, describing in rude terms Grainne Mhaol as pestered by the English boar and the other written by the Jacobite poet Sean Clarach Mac Domhnaill, foretelling that Charles Stuart would come back to espouse her (Hardiman Vol 22, 64-5 and 144).

\textsuperscript{24}A translation of a few more lines of this song, as collected by Bunting in 1792, is as follows:
"I'm sorry I ever married you,
O poor old woman,
I'm sorry I ever married you,
O poor old woman.
I have been married too long,
For I regret my youth,
And may God take you to Yougal
O poor old woman!" (O'Sullivan, \textit{Bunting} 10-12)
and an anonymous patriotic song in English was composed to the tune of this song and simply kept the original refrain:

Oh! the French are on the sea  
Says the Shan Van Vocht;  
The French are on the sea,  
Says the Shan Van Vocht:

Oh! the French are in the Bay,  
They'll be here without delay,  
And the Orange will decay,  

The addition of political words made the the Old Woman a spokesperson for patriotic sentiment. In fact, the Shan Van Vocht reduces the figure into basically a voice --a disembodied voice as close examination of the poem's text suggests. As Diane Bessai points out:

the Poor Old Woman of the Shan van Vocht ballad tradition is not a character, but merely a name and a voice, howbeit she is a vigourous voice reflecting a note of defiance and hope. ("Who" 118)

This is a striking departure from the speirbhean, who is defined by her physical beauty and passive complaining, both of which must be communicated to us through the medium of the male poet. The Shan Van Vocht personifies defiance and

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25Note that the Shan Van Vocht's allegorical inception, unlike Cathleen Ni Houlihan's and other ballad figures', began in the English language. Donal O'Sullivan claims that prior to the 1790s "there is no trace in Irish or Anglo-Irish literature of any such allegorical conception" (Songs 130). The most famous variant is said to date from 1797, though it was not until 1840 that a printed version appeared in The Nation (Zimmerman 56).
resistance and projects them through her forceful voice; through her direct account, the confidence of her prophecy of success, and her insistent repetition of the refrain. Even so, Bessai's assessment of the figure merely as a voice is not exactly correct because the form of the Shan Van Vocht's body is implied by the song's title, "Poor Old Woman." Her aged body evokes earlier hag figures and, as has been the case in each version of the figure, contains timely political implications.

The Shan Van Vocht's unattractive appearance sharply contrasts the amatory dynamics underlying the speirbhhean and code name figures like Cathleen Ni Houlihan. As a political symbol, she works in an entirely different way that by-passes erotic allure and returns to the awe-inspiring nature goddess, hag figures. The Shan Van Vocht's 'ancient' quality represents her indomitability, a connotation not lost on nineteenth-century nationalists: the perennial life of the land transcended the mortal rule of individual kings --or the centuries-long rule of colonizers. The hag embodied the everlasting earth, a woman literally "as old as the hills." The Shan Van Vocht's decrepitude and poverty are a reminder of Ireland's oppression and the urgent need for political changes.

26It must be noted that although the Shan Van Vocht is a hag figure she is not the puella senilis since the act of transformation to youth is not part of her conception. In the twentieth century, Yeats makes her into one by including the transformation element in his influential Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure.
rejuvenation (the Gaelic sovereignty figure turned into a hag to signal the need for a new king). Her demeanor reflected the new tone of aggressive defiance evident in nineteenth-century nationalists, in the militancy of the Young Ireland movement, the violence of agrarian secret societies or, on a larger scale, the mass boycotts of the Land War. The ethereal lady-like speirbhhean was not up to the belligerence and practical vision necessary for mass political mobilization. (It must be noted, however, that the speirbhhean does not totally disappear in the nineteenth century.) Modern nationalism also chose the Shan Van Vocht to reinforce its inclusive and secular objectives. Her age-old body, stripped of amatory connotations, was a simple representation of Ireland as a geographic entity, as Mother-Land. Amidst sectarian animosities that existed in the nineteenth century, emotional attachment to the land was a rare unifying identification among all sectors of the population. The Shan Van Vocht became a central focus in the Anglo-Irish attempt to build a secular concept of Irish nationality, one that did not exclude them as the religious minority. Yeats turned to her for these very reasons, but he called her Cathleen Ni Houlihan, borrowing the title of another Gaelic song.

Cathleen Ni Houlihan originated with the blind Gaelic poet Heffernan in the late eighteenth century. Heffernan's poem, a rousing ballad that promises Irish freedom "When the Prince is seen with Cathaleen Ni Houlihan," endows Cathleen
herself with no qualities at all (O'Sullivan, Songs 141-2). It was only in the latter half of the nineteenth century that Cathleen began to be favoured over other personifications of Ireland, because of the popularity of two poems by Clarence Mangan (1803-49); one a translation of Heffernan's poem and another more famous reworking of Eugene O'Curry's literal translation.27 In the latter, Mangan gives his figure a hag-maiden duality which is absent in the original Gaelic version:

Think her not a ghastly hag, too hideous to be seen,
Call her not unseemly names, our matchless Kathaleen;
Young she is, and fair she is, and would be crowned a queen,
Were not the king's son at home here with Kathaleen Ny-Houlihan! (173)

Mangan adopted the puella senilis's transformation motif, and passed it on to Yeats, but he bypassed all the earthy associations the hag embodied in early Gaelic literature. All associations to the cycles of nature and fertility are suppressed in favor of a spiritualized lady-like figure. Mangan's Cathleen Ny-Houlihan was a distinctly nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish figure, and nowhere is this more evident than in the presentation of her sexuality -- or, more precisely, her lack of it. Nineteenth-century Irish poets appropriated Gaelic models by translating eighteenth-century

27 Diane Bessai believes Mangan is "perhaps most responsible for the transmission of the [Ireland figure] convention into English" and indeed his translations covered the whole range of aisling poems and allegorical love songs, including such figures as Moirin O'Cullinan, Celia O'Gara, and Little Black Rose ("Dark" 63).
political ballads and, in the process, sanitizing them to conform to Victorian moral codes and their attendant influence on literary tastes. Eugene Curry's literal translation of the verse quoted above begins

Suppose not yet that a decayed slut,
    Or a hairy crone,
    Or a puny hag, is the maiden soft. (Quoted in Bessai, "Who" 126)

A question of morality exists in the original Gaelic version but it has to do with loyalty rather than purity --as we have seen with the seventeenth-century 'harlot' figures. In the nineteenth century the Ireland figure's loyalty could not even be called into question for the simple practical reason that she has no sexuality to give away. The closest that Mangan can come to acknowledging the unseemly aspects of the original is to say "Call her not unseemly names."

The shifting of emphasis onto a sexual purity that is absolute is, according to Rosalind Clarke, one of the most important features of the sovereignty in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (170). The speirbhean's chastity was merely implied and had been only one of several elements that made her as inaccessible as Ireland's freedom. Furthermore, the eighteenth-century figure had the power to sexually arouse, and the poet makes clear that it is specifically her erotic beauty which inspires his devotion to her. She is ethereal but sexual experience is implied in her reference to her "husband." Mangan's figure is virginal and
celibate, beyond the reach of any partner --royal, supernatural, or otherwise-- beyond inspiring any base desire. Her purity deserves a spiritual, almost religious, devotion. Mangan's popularization of the 'Roisin Dubh' figure works in exactly the same way. The earlier folk version combines political allegory with frank sexual imagery and desire typical of the earlier mother-goddess. In Mangan's "My Dark Rosaleen" (1846), the political allegory remains and is even elaborated, but the sexual imagery and

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28Roisin Dubh, meaning 'Little Black Rose,' was a beautiful dark woman in a Gaelic love song; the figure acquired an ambiguous allegorical dimension when Thomas Furlong translated the song into English in Hardimann's Irish Minstrelsy (1831). Hardimann, however, established a clear allegorical context in his introduction when he called the song "an allegorical address from Hugh [Ruadh O'Donnell] to Ireland" (351). In 1834, Samuel Ferguson skillfully contested Hardimann's politicized translation of the Gaelic song and provided his own alternative reading of "Roisin Dubh." Ironically, Clarence Mangan used Ferguson's careful literal translation as the basis for the most overtly political Roisin Dubh yet, in "My Dark Rosaleen" (1846), which rivaled Cathleen Ni Houlihan in popularity by the end of the nineteenth century. Mangan also wrote another version, "Roisin Dubh" (1849). Many have used the image since Mangan including de Vere, Carbery, Pearse, Plunkett, and Yeats.

29The combination of political allegory and sexual imagery is illustrated in the first and fifth stanza:

"Roisin, have no sorrow for all that has happened to you: the friars are out on the brine, they are travelling the sea, your pardon from the pope will come, from Rome in the East, and we won't spare the Spanish wine for my Roisin Dubh.  
[ . . . ]  
If I had six horses I would plough against the hill--  
I'd make Roisin Dubel in the middle of Mass--  
I'd kiss the young girl who would grant me her maidenhead  
and do deeds beyond the lios with my Roisin Dubh."

(Kinsella, Oxford 274)
desire are diluted and etherealized; the 'earthiness' of the Earth-goddess is suppressed.\footnote{Mangan renders the fifth stanza of the folk song quoted above thus:}

This de-sexualizing process continued into the twentieth-century tradition of the figure, especially during the first years of the National Theatre. The ethereal Countess Cathleen (1899) resembled the pallid ladies of the Celtic twilight in what Richard Ellmann has termed Yeats's "ninetyish conception of the relation of the sexes" (Identity 82). Even the resurrection of the ancient Caillech in \textit{Cathleen Ni Houlihan} (1902) excluded the central sexual element of the original Gaelic conception. Yeats has her explicitly declare her sexual purity: "With all the lovers that brought me their love I never set out the bed for any" (84). A similar thing can be said about Synge's own sexless Caillech, Maurya (1903), although he was restrained by the limits of realism, which were not considerations for either of Yeats's Cathleen figures.
Yeats' made several statements about Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902) which indicate both his awareness of the allegorical tradition he was working in and his skilful conflation of the various strands of that tradition into the definitive Ireland figure of the twentieth century. Yeats identifies his play as an aisling and himself as an aisling poet; he describes his inspiration as a dream almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung...and for whose sake so many have gone to their deaths. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it. (Variorum Plays 232)

Yeats's figure, however, is no beautiful speirbhean; she is a decrepit old woman like the early Caillech or the more recent Shan Van Vocht. Yeats retains the centrality of voice over body that is essential to the conception of the

31The second of The Stories of Red Hanrahan, "Hanrahan and Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan," contains Yeats's first literary use of the figure. Hanrahan's song establishes Cathleen differently from the implacable hag familiar to us from the play. The refrain characterizes her as daughter rather than mother: a speirbhean not a Caillech. Cullingford suggests that Hanrahan's image of Kathleeq with flame in her eyes and quiet feet, a pure candle standing before the Holy Rood, "suggests the effusions of nineteenth century mariolotry"(10).

32Nuala NiDhomhnaill praises Yeats for recovering the Caillech and choosing her over the idealized Ireland figures (quoted in Cullingford 11). The first part of this credit is not correct. The hag figure existed in the nineteenth century in an implicit though clear form in the popular "Shan Van Vocht" song.
latter figure in ballads. Cathleen's allure is in her words. She is old and ugly, yet she can easily lure the young Michael away from his beautiful young bride -- but not with political rhetoric. Yeats expands his source by aestheticizing the voice of his Poor Old Woman figure. The original figure voiced a political prophecy and advocated political defiance; Yeats's figure recites ballads and offers Michael immortality in a centuries-long national art that was also political. Throughout his career, Yeats bestowed great respect on the diverse poets who created an allegorical vision of Ireland in verse:

The political poetry of these men was no light matter in its day. Because of it they were hated and pursued by the powerful and the rich, and loved by the poor. They disguised their meaning in metaphor and symbol. The poet goes out in the morning and meets a beautiful spirit weeping and lamenting, a 'banshee' with 'a mien of unearthly mildness'. On her he lavishes the power of description, and then calls her Ireland. Or else he evades the law by hiding his sedition under the guise of a love-song. Then Ireland becomes his Kathleen Ny-Houlahan, or else his Roisin Dubh, or some other name of Gaelic endearment. (Uncollected Prose 149-50)

It is obvious that Yeats had absorbed the tradition of the figure mostly through an education in the amatory political ballads of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century translations or recastings of them. He evinced a special interest in the blind poet Heffernan, who wrote the original Cathleen Ni Houlihan ballad in Gaelic.33

33Nancy Rutkowski Nash explores Yeats's interest in "Yeats and Heffernan the Blind."
Diane Bessai believes that Yeats's appropriation of the *puella senilis* transformation motif from Gaelic sources is central to the play ("Who" 125). I do not believe this to be the case. We see Cathleen only in her decrepit aspect, which she remains in for just about the entire play, and although her (unseen) transformation serves as some kind of climax to the action, it is not central to the ideological conception of Yeats's figure. (The transformation is also not as original as some critics believe since Mangan attached the motif to his own Cathleen Ni Houlihan only fifty years previously.) Yeats's manipulation of two other sources, which add a peasant and supernatural element to his figure, are far more central. Joseph Holloway implicitly referred to these elements when he observed in the first production that the combination of the very matter-of-fact circumstances of a peasant family preparing for a wedding and "the weird, uncanny conduct of the strange visitor" for him made "a very agreeable concoction" (17).

Yeats restores the Ireland figure's supernatural aspect, which had dropped out of sight since the early faery aislingi.34 Before the audience even sees Cathleen, other characters speak of her ominous presence. Patrick looks out

34 In the play's first production Maud Gonne's interpretation emphasized this supernatural element (Bessai, "Who" 114). Holloway testifies to the powerful otherworldly effect achieved by the croning and chanting of Maud Gonne's "mysterious" Cathleen (17).
and identifies her as "the strange woman," while Michael, also feeling the danger of her presence, says, "I'd sooner a stranger not come to the house the night before my wedding" (80). There is a feeling of superstitious belief here, of the danger of inviting strangers into the house, which is a theme in *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894). According to peasant tradition, it is dangerous to give hospitality on May Eve because it might give the faeries -- the 'sid' -- power over the giver. The ensuing interchange between Cathleen and Michael reflects a conventional encounter with a faery woman of the 'sid'. Cathleen's offer of the ideal -- expressed in supernatural beauty, immortality, art -- puts Michael in a trance which obliterates his conscious will, destroys his memory (he fails to remember anything about his wedding), and lures him to his death, while his family helplessly stands by. In another veiled allusion, Cathleen asks Michael to come to the sea to meet the French which have landed in the bay of Kilalla. Yeats's early poems make it clear that the sea is the point of entry into the Otherworld, the point of demarcation between the physical world of decay and the immortal world of the spirit. In "The Wanderings of Oisin," for example, the faery Niamh lures Ossian on a ride

To the shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,
Where men have heaped no burial-mounds,
And the days pass by like a wayward tune.
*(Collected Poems 356)*
Like Michael, Ossian's conscious will is annihilated, as well as his memory and physical existence, all in a quest for the ideal that the faery woman embodies. Clark briefly examines the prevalence of this theme in early Gaelic literature:

In the earlier tales of 'visions' of fairy mistresses, there was a similar desire for something beyond this world. This desire gave the hero a sickness (as in Aislinge Oenguso and Serglige) or made him unfit for this world, so that he left it forever (as did Connlia and Bran). The aisling poems have the same mood. (156)

In fact, indigenous aisling poems, prior to the eighteenth-century and continental literary influences, focused on the spiritual quest without any reference to politics. Ironically, Yeats's much touted patriotic play is much closer in structure and theme to pre-political aisling poems in Gaelic. The powerful desire for the ideal ("immortality" in art) is at the core of Yeats's conception of Cathleen Ni Houlihan; it invests his play with a spiritual dimension that greatly transcends contemporary figures, and, at times, even undercuts the figure's political "message." (I will explore tensions of this kind in the next chapter.) In another departure from the political aisling, Cathleen's supernatural power comes, not from her physical beauty, but from her poetic words. In a strikingly original development, Yeats gives his female figure the power of poetry rather than beauty. He also gives her the experience of a peasant woman rather than an aristocratic one --which brings us to the second major dimension in Yeats's version of the Poor Old Woman figure.
Most previous figures in both the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish tradition were explicitly or implicitly royal -- even the hag-like *puella senilis* was really a queen -- and not fundamentally peasant. The Shan Van Vocht (*Poor Old Woman*) ballad implied the poverty and suffering of the central figure, but since the original Gaelic poet invested the Old Woman with no personal qualities, the peasant aspect remained undeveloped in the popular ballad. Yeats, with the help of Lady Gregory, who had more practical experience in these matters, added a peasant aspect to the figure that is central to her allegorical conception as the soul and imagination of Ireland. The play's peasant setting and characterizations will be discussed in the next chapter; but perhaps the most provocative peasant element of all is the way Yeats conveys the suffering of his Ireland figure through specific peasant experiences. Instead of a deserted princess, Ireland has become an evicted peasant woman, disinherited of her "four beautiful green fields." The importance of hearth and land to the peasants adds a poignancy to the fact that her land is taken away from her and that she has been sent wandering by "Too many strangers in the house." Eviction loomed in both

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35 James Pethica examines Lady Gregory's significant contribution to this play and comes to the conclusion that she was responsible for most of the concrete details about peasant life and the peasant vernacular dialogue (written in her handwriting in the early drafts). Refer to "'Our Cathleen': Yeats's Collaboration with Lady Gregory in the Writing of Cathleen Ni Houlihan."
the historical and personal memory of many Irish. The early colonization of Ireland involved the mass displacement of the indigenous population. In the more recent nineteenth-century, peasants were often evicted so that newer tenants who might have more money could take their place. In *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* the Ireland figure gains strength and realism in the guise of a peasant by conveying a suffering that was all too real and recognizably so. This is especially evident when Yeats's figure is compared to the original Cathleen Ni Houlihan, a beautiful queen who pines for a distant Stuart king. The aristocratic and romantic elements of the original ballad remain almost ridiculously detached from the real experiences of the majority of Irishmen and women. In the next chapter I will show how Yeats skillfully incorporated subtle aristocratic elements into his own peasant figure, creating a complex and effective combination that would turn out to be the definitive Ireland figure of the twentieth century.

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36 A translation of the original Gaelic ballad goes as follows:

"How charming her face, did we but live
To see the foeman routed,
And the silken banners on the breeze a-floating,
With victory to the dame;
    And royal plaid from her crown descending
Down to her heels,
By the King's son placed upon Caitileen Ni Uallachain."
(O'Curry's translation quoted in Bessai, "Who" 126)
Yeats's play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* has become the Ireland figure's best known literary vehicle. The arrival of the "Poor Old Woman" in a household preparing for the marriage of the eldest son, and her easily understood metaphorical account of her/Ireland's tribulation over the generations from "Too many strangers in the house," induces the bridegroom to abandon his wedding to join a rebellion. The Old Woman promises those who serve her that "They shall be remembered forever" and presents the choice between serving narrow, personal ends and self-sacrifice on behalf of the Mother/Nation --with consequent immortality in ballads for those who serve her. After the bridegroom has gone to fight, his younger brother announces that national sovereignty, in the female form of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, has, vampire-like, been rejuvenated: the Poor Old Woman becomes a beautiful Queen. Yeats wrote the play for Maud Gonne, who agreed to play the politically inspired role of Mother Ireland. Her powerful portrayal of the title role in the first production in 1902 brought enormous popular success: Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory that 'great numbers could not get in . . . . Crowds have been turned away from the doors every night"
(Letters 368). For both the playwright and the audience, Maud Gonne embodied the spirit of the Sovereignty goddess to perfection. The nationalist fervor that the production inspired is summed up in the words of the parliamentary Nationalist MP Stephen Gwynn, who wrote afterwards that he went home asking . . . if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot. Yeats was not alone responsible; no doubt but that Lady Gregory had helped him get the peasant speech so perfect; but above all Miss Gonne's impersonation had stirred the audience as I have never seen another audience stirred. (Howarth 127)

Cathleen Ni Houlihan turned out to be the rare Irish play that satisfied conflicting public expectations about what a national theater should be. The play was aesthetically sound enough to gain the approval of artists and nationalist enough to inspire the enthusiasm of the politically orientated portion of the public. Militant nationalists interpreted the production as a clarion cry to political action, and in the years ahead, although Maud Gonne never again played the title role, Cathleen Ni Houlihan became one of the sacred works of Sinn Fein and Republican movements. The tensions involved in the play's political message and Yeats's ability to create

37Yeats remembered the play in 1908: "Miss Maud Gonne played very finely, and her great height made Cathleen seem a divine being fallen into our mortal infirmity" (Variorum Plays 233).

38Refer to Dorothy Macradle, The Irish Republic (58) and John J. Horgan, Parnell to Pearse (33-34).
an Ireland figure complex enough to subtly embody those tensions will be the focus of this chapter.

Conor Cruise O'Brien claims that Yeats' *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was "one of the most powerful pieces of nationalist propaganda ever written" ("Passion" 227). The most propagandistic element in Yeats's play is its glorification of violence in bringing about a new order. Cathleen's ballad about "yellow-haired Donough that was hanged in Galway"(82), for example, does not shy away from being explicit about the violent but spiritually purifying death Irish heroes experience. Violence is not merely historical necessity but imbued with a nobler religious meaning, with the possibility for a quasi-religious transcendence (immortality) for the individual caught in history ("They shall be remembered forever"). The spiritual call is set in opposition to the practical demands and pleasures of everyday life. Yeats follows the example of nationalist ballads when he has Cathleen call for the unconditional and total sacrifice of all personal ties and interests to the service of Ireland: "If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all" (84). It was easier for the state to induce an individual to sacrifice his life for an abstract patriotic purpose once he was detached from the responsibilities towards his personal family --a necessity acted out in Michael's abandonment of his mortal bride and family for his spiritual bride, Mother Ireland. By
appropriating the old mother figure to convey a spiritually justified violence for a patriotic purpose, Yeats reiterated well-known nationalist sentiments circulating in Ireland at the turn-of-the-century. It is no surprise, then, that the play became a sacred work among nationalists despite the underlying tensions that exist in the text.

Yeats crossed as far into the realm of propaganda as he was ever going to do in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, where "he celebrated a certain kind of public hero in a semi-propagandistic way" (Zwerdling 118). While the play's nationalist tone is undeniable, however, Yeats found its patriotic dimension too problematic to embrace unconditionally: many years later, he said, "*Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was propaganda, but I was not conscious of it at the time" (Mc Cartan 417). Whether or not Yeats was totally sincere, this statement reveals the uneasy compromise *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* made with the notion of literature as propaganda. Yeats's made the distinction between political rhetoric and his own, more aesthetically orientated, nationalist spirit:

I am a nationalist . . . I had a very vivid dream one night, and I made Cathleen ni Houlihan out of this dream. But if some external necessity had forced me to write nothing but drama with an obviously patriotic intention, instead of letting my work shape itself under the casual impulses of dreams and daily thoughts, I would have lost, in a short time, the power to write movingly on any theme. I could have aroused opinion, but I could not have touched the heart. (Explorations 116)
The problematic relationship Yeats the artist had with nationalism was exacerbated by his identity as an Anglo-Irishman born into a Protestant class not traditionally associated with nationalist circles.

G.J. Watson claims that Yeats's alignment with the nationalist credo of which Cathleen Ni Houlihan is such a passionate expression was "very much an act of severance [from his class], and an attempt to assert a sense of identity with an uncompromised 'Irishness'"(417). Yeats belonged, not to the 'Ascendancy' in the strict sense of the word, but to the Protestant middle-class of merchants and professional people. Yeats did not feel English despite the traditional Unionism of his class and further felt that his membership in that class cut him off from the majority of his fellow countrymen, especially his Catholic countrymen and the nationalist movement, which increasingly came to be associated with the concerns and culture of the Catholic majority. In 1901 just before writing Cathleen Ni Houlihan he wrote:

Moses was a little good to his people until he had killed an Egyptian; and for the most part a writer or

39"The Protestant Irish stock from which Yeats came was no longer a ruling class but still a superior caste and thought of itself that way" (O'Brien, "Passion" 211).

40"By the end of the nineteenth century, Catholicism had been institutionally reformed and re-invigorated. The direct and indirect influence of the Catholic church had been increased through intensified contact between priests and people' (Cairns and Richards, Writing 63).
public man of the upper classes is useless to his country till he has done something which separates him from his class. (Explorations 83)

Ostensibly, Yeats seems to achieve such a separation in the play by choosing peasant forms over aristocratic ones.

In *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, the nation is represented in the body of an old peasant woman—a conscious rejection of the more popular, and aristocratic, *speirbhean*; the national voice is embodied in the peasant art of folk ballads.

Nationalism, as Earnest Gellner observed, 'usually conquers in the name of the putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants' (57). Even more significantly, the aristocratic values of the Ascendancy seem to be rejected in favor of the populism and political militancy of Fenian myths. The nationalist movement, after all, was democratically orientated and geared to the mobilization of mass political consciousness. The individual was only as important as his contribution to the whole society or the whole anti-colonialist movement over time. The fervent enthusiasm surrounding the production of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, even among those who would later criticize Yeats's plays as reactionary, attests to the ability of the play to fulfill the expectations of a politically conscious audience. I believe, however, that the success of the play was based not on Yeats's actual 'severance' from his Anglo-Irish concerns but on the fact that this seemed to be the case. Yeats
subtly incorporated Anglo-Irish elements into a populist symbol of Nation, all the while giving those aristocratic values a strategic superiority in the symbol that seemed utterly natural, even to democratically orientated nationalists. He achieved this feat by making the concrete elements of the play 'peasant' (the scenery and characters, for example) but defining the more abstract elements, like the concept of heroism, according to aristocratic values such as individualism (Michael acts for self-fulfillment rather than social purpose).

Motivated by the desire "to achieve influence through an act of association and appropriation rather than identification and (self)absorption," Yeats used the figure of Cathleen to associate himself with the politics and culture of the Catholic majority (Cairns and Richards, Writing 25). Yeats found he could create a "sentimental attachment" to the Catholic majority through art, through the peasant tradition of poetry, without absorbing any of this group's populist bourgeois and lower-class values. Yeats's play evokes the Irish ballad tradition, which takes the controversial elements of historical struggle between colonized and colonizer as its subject. No matter on what side of the colonial struggle the Anglo-Irish fall historically, they are fundamentally unified with the colonized majority in the literary tradition they share.41
As a symbol of the ballad tradition, Cathleen is a projection of the only type of unity possible: a cultural symbol of Ireland that reaches beyond political factionalism. Like Protestant nationalists before him, Yeats appropriated the powerful Eire figure by emphasizing her Gaelic cultural associations to promote a national unity based on secular identifications — thus including a space in Irish nationalism for the increasingly marginalized Anglo-Irish class.  

Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan differs from the figures of his Anglo-Irish predecessors—Grattan, Davis, and Ferguson most prominently—by promoting a complex combination of peasant elements and aristocratic values. Cathleen symbolically unifies several diverse and complex strands of Irish nationality as it was perceived by Yeats. The complexity of the combination was a revolutionary development in the evolution of the allegorical figure. In contemporary ballads and rhetoric Eire was a one-dimensional symbol, simplified to represent all Irish groups by not specifically relating to the values of any. She was simply defined by

41 Anglo-Irish scholars were among the first to preserve and translate Gaelic ballads into English. Joseph Leersson explores Antiquarian interest and the Anglo-Irish in chapter six of Mere Irish and Fi'or-Ghael.

42 Cairns and Richards examine this appropriation in a cultural context more general than my specific examination of the Eire figure: the Anglo-Irish began "an attempt to structure discussion and interpretation of the cultural products of Ireland's past . . . to ensure that these [products] could be mobilized to the advantage of the Ascendancy" (Writing 30).
her universal role --Eire the great Irish Mother (or Lover)-- which obligated all Irishmen, regardless of sectarian or class identification, to act chivalrously in her behalf. Vaguely defined 'Gaelic' associations established her "Irishness." It is no coincidence that the deepening of the figure --in several ways a return to her origins in sovereignty myths-- occurred at the same time as her first transposition to the dramatic genre. Drama opened new possibilities for the representation of the allegorical figure by its progressive humanization from Yeats's Cathleen to O'Casey's heroines. This humanization is evident even in the most overtly political play, Maud Gonne MacBride's *Dawn* (1904), where the Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure, Bride, is presented as an actual Irishwoman suffering --and articulating-- the very real effects of eviction and starvation. In drama the figure is transformed from a static symbol to a complex character allowed direct speech.

The successful combination of features that turned out to be Cathleen Ni Houlihan was achieved only after Yeats learned from the failure of his very first allegorical Ireland figure, the Countess Cathleen (1899). In his earlier

43 Without the transposition of Cathleen from ballad to drama, Yeats would not have been able to present her as the source of the entire ballad tradition. His figure is not a poetic trope fixed to one particular ballad or set of ballads, but rather Cathleen encompasses the entire tradition; she embodies all struggles and all poems. The dialectic nature of a single play can contain and 're-live' limitless poems.
play, Yeats faced the same struggle that other Anglo-Irishmen like Davis and Ferguson did with their own Ireland figures: allegorical symbols of nation had to be vigilantly protected from any religious associations, from any attempts to conflate Mother Ireland with Mother Mary, a central icon of the Catholic identity. By the end of the nineteenth century when Yeats's was writing, this vigilance was even more necessary because the conflation of Erin and Mother Church and Mother of Christ became even more prevalent in the rhetoric of nationalists (Innes, Woman 23). Yeats's Countess Cathleen (1899) made the distinction between Mother Ireland and Mother Mary clear: the Countess character is given allegorical dimensions (her actions save the whole country), but her brand of sacrifice is placed in clear opposition to the Catholicism of the peasants. Her motives are based on a 'purer' Celtic heroism. The drama is set during a famine in which Irish peasants, languishing from hunger, barter their souls for gold and food. The landlord, Cathleen, saves the lives and souls of the peasants by sacrificing her own soul. She becomes a replacement for the

44 Fighting off easy religious associations proved difficult, as Ferguson's impassioned rejection of Hardiman's "Roisin Dubh" translation attests. Davis's ballad anthology Spirit of the Nation is careful to separate the identity of Erin and Mary as two distinct figures. He attempted to strip the Ireland figures of broadsides, "the Granu Waile and Shan Van Vochts of the Catholic agitation," of their narrow Catholic (and peasant) associations (quoted in Zimmerman 222).
Virgin, a kind of aristocratic Madonna figure, who is, at the end of the play, straightaway assumed into heaven. A scene in which one of the peasants kicks a shrine of the Virgin Mary to pieces became the focus of controversy, but a more general antagonism towards the play developed around the seeming vindication of feudalism (and the Ascendancy by implication) through the actions of the Countess and, not surprisingly, around the perceived negative portrayal of Catholicism.

Fr. Hugh O'Donnell's pamphlet, "Souls for Gold," gave enough details about The Countess Cathleen to satisfy his readers that Yeats's play was politically and theologically suspect. Yeats defended his play by arguing that 'what they had to do' in the Irish Literary Theatre 'was to spiritualize the patriotism and drama of Ireland (Hogan and Kilroy, Literary 50-1), and The Countess Cathleen was but a stage in this program: "The play is symbolic: the two demons . . . are the world . . . the Countess herself is the soul . . . The symbols have other meanings, but they have this principal meaning' (Letters 319). Yeats attempted to put forward an explicitly Celtic version of the Eire figure with

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45Cardinal Archbishop Logue condemned the play on the basis of O'Donnell's pamphlet and was later to write to the Daily Nation in 1899 to say that "an Irish Catholic audience which could patiently sit out such a play must have sadly degenerated, both in religion and patriotism" (Hogan and Kilroy, Irish Literary Theater 43). Hugh O'Donnell's pamphlet is discussed on pp. 31-2.
all the attendant emphasis on ancient Gaelic spirituality that such a label suggests. The Celtic element in The Countess Cathleen might have provided a viable basis for a public symbol of national unity, but the aristocratic and religious elements of the play interfered. These elements worked in a divisive way, alienating Yeats from the Catholic majority that was essential to a national allegory. The vehement protests against the play made Yeats realize that in contemporary Ireland certain symbols had meanings which were unproblematically clear for his audience and in order to make a character of Eire work as a public symbol he had to work with an understanding of the larger tradition of the figure—a point confirmed when he saw his other play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan go on to become a nationalist classic. In Cathleen Ni Houlihan aristocratic elements are camouflaged and—in the tradition of Davis's and Ferguson's Eire—the contentious issue of religion is left out altogether.

To reinforce the secularity of his second national allegory, Yeats sets the action of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in 1798 near Kilalla, the setting of Wolfe Tone's unsuccessful though much mythologized rebellion.46 Tone's brand of

46Wolfe Tone was a leading figure in the United Irishmen's rising of 1798 which attempted to proclaim a Republic separate from England based on non-sectarian political (but not social) egalitarianism. The revolutionary group was plagued by government counter-measures, misfortune, and their own administrative incompetence. The open insurrection was put down decisively by Protestant militias throughout Ireland.
nationalism, attempting to reconcile the religious divisions that created conflicting political allegiances, was very attractive for patriots of Protestant or Ascendency stock like Yeats or Lady Gregory. In 1898, four years before writing *Cathleen*, Yeats assumed the presidency of an association formed to commemorate the centenary of Tone's death. With the help of John O'Leary and Maud Gonne, Yeats succeeded in the monumental task of bringing together Unionists, Nationalists, and political extremists for at least one day of ceremonial observances (*Autobiographies* 353-66). The theme of unity among Irishmen became the focus of the Tone Centenary; protests were directed "against the dissension which had riddled Irish politics since the fall of Parnell in 1890" (Flannery 97). The complex issues concerning unity eventually made their way into the play.

Yeats incorporates the allure of Tone's heroic gesture into an inclusive and secular system of values and behavior called Celticism. Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* embodies a unity based on a spiritual Celtic essence above 'party' and purged of any reference to the ethnic and linguistic roots of the Celt (references which would have otherwise associated the symbol exclusively with the indigenous Catholic majority). All the diverse groups of the Tone centenary could claim membership in Yeats's secular allegory of nation. In a speech to a Wolfe Tone banquet in London on April 13, 1898, Yeats refers to 'the Celt' as the underlying identity
of all "parties and sections" and the distinct element that separates Irish character from the utilitarianism of the British colonizers:

My interest in [the '98 Tone Celebration] is that they will bring the union of the Gael nearer by persuading all parties and sections to work for a common object. We have struggled to keep from being identified with any party, and I think we have succeeded (hear, hear) . . . The political movement which has just passed away did some things which had to be done, but it left Ireland reft in pieces and full of an intense skepticism. It was utilitarian, and the Celt, never having been meant for utilitarianism, has made a poor business of it. (Quoted in Ellmann, *Mask* 114-115)

As is made evident in the Tone Centenary, Yeats's interest in Celticism intersected with his participation in Fenian politics. Yeats's ability to combine the two, if only temporarily, in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* provided for the play's overwhelming popularity. Shortly after the successful production of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, when Yeats's subsequent plays no longer embraced such overt Fenian elements, many members of the radical republican movement deemed Yeats's Celticism a fraud and contrary to 'real' political objectives.47 More recent criticism attacks Yeats on moral grounds for the same dangerous combination of heroic Celticism and Fenianism, for his promotion of political violence and death as a form of poetic transcendence, for the confusion of the Celtic ideal and real political action with

47D.P Moran charged Yeats's"'Celtic note' . . .[was] one of the most glaring frauds that the credulous Irish people ever swallowed" (quoted in Cairns and Richards, *Writing* 68).
dangerous consequences. Conor Cruise O'Brien, for example, blames the deadly nature of IRA ideology on an attempt to seek in history an immortality promised in literature:

One permanent feature of such a movement is the conception of history as a series of blood sacrifices enacted in every generation . . . Now this is most essentially a literary invention. The great propagandist of this notion, as far as Ireland is concerned, was the poet Yeats. (O'Brien "Unhealthy" 5-6)

The conception of Irish history as cycles of blood sacrifice, however, did not originate with Yeats. In the later eighteenth century, when the Irish nation began to define itself as a historical community as well as a social one, 'a tendency developed in literature to synoptically unify all past struggles as diverse as Brian Boru's and O'Connell's into avatars of a single timeless principle --the ideal of a Gaelic Ireland struggling against British domination' (Leersson 418). This feature was elaborately developed in the Irish ballad tradition. Eager to promote military action, nineteenth-century Davisite ballads stressed the warrior nature of historical personages, and inevitably what began as an ongoing national 'struggle' turned into more specific military insurrections in each generation. Yeats's Cathleen similarly unifies the wholly dissimilar historical episodes of Red Hugh O'Donnell (1571-1602), Donal Sullivan Beare (c. 1560-1618), and Brian Boru (926-1014). Cathleen lures Michael into patriotic sacrifice by sitting down with him by the hearth and spinning out a narrative of Irish
history that unifies, in the tradition of Davisite ballads, all historical struggles into one anti-British struggle.

In a departure from ballad tradition, however, Yeats highlights the element of sacrifice over struggle: Irish history is unified by heroic defeats, by grand yet impossible gestures of resistance. The fact that failure was insured made the gesture more heroic. The heroes in Cathleen's speech do not engage in productive political activity. Their individual glory—as well as national glory—lies in their deaths:

There was the red man of the O'Donnells from the north, and a man of O'Sullivans from the South, and there was one Brian that lost his life at Clontarf by the sea, and there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die tomorrow. (83)

Contrary to many critical assumptions, Yeats's chosen focus on death and defeat was not part of a political ideology. As we shall see, his sources for the 'death mystique' were Gaelic rather than Fenian, literary rather than political. This is an essential distinction that is all too often unacknowledged. Yeats had an emotional and spiritual commitment to lost causes which can be traced throughout his life and through his shifting political allegiances (Watson 418). Yeats's attraction to defeated causes corresponded to

48This point is reinforced by a passage in Explorations written in 1934: "Even our best histories treat men as function. Why must I think the victorious cause the better? Why should Mommsen think the less of Cicero because Ceasar beat him? . . . I prefer the defeated cause should be
the romantic image of the defeated Gael that was so prevalent in the Celtic movement. His 'death mystique' can be traced to the Gaelic sources, to death goddesses and the faery women of the 'sidh,' who demand the physical annihilation of their lovers as a prerequisite for entry into Immortality. Yeats took a prevalent idea in Irish culture, the 'death mystique', gave it a concise symbolic formation in Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and placed it in the real time and place of a public stage. Only in the adaption of the 'death mystique' to drama was Yeats doing something totally original.

Observers, critical and laudatory, noted the astonishingly powerful effect Cathleen Ni Houlihan had on the audience to act. By adapting the figure to drama and having her embody a subtle combination of Celtic, peasant, and Fenian elements, Yeats greatly enhanced the figure's appeal; however, the play's political effectiveness cannot be separated from the state of mind the Dublin audience brought into the theatre, from their immersion in the longstanding use of the Ireland figure in ballads, stories, and nationalist rhetoric. The rhetorical effectiveness of the

more vividly described than that which has the advertisement of victory" (398).

49Stephen Gwynn's well-known comment about the play's effect is quoted in the beginning of this chapter. Constance Markiewicz who went out to fight with the men of 1916 and was condemned to death for her part in the Rising, wrote in a letter from prison: "That play of Yeats was a sort of gospel to me" (Markiewicz 155). In 1938 Yeats asked, "Did that play of mine send out/ Certain men the English shot?" ("Man and the Echo" Collected Poems 345).
play relied heavily on the emotive power of the folk traditions which converged in the image of the peasant Shan Van Vocht who is also a queen. There is clear evidence that many important Irishmen, including among them two leaders of the Easter Rising, Patrick Pearse and Joseph Mary Plunkett, believed in 'Mother Ireland' and 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan' as powerful personalities. Pearse reflects:

When I was a child I believed that there was actually a woman called Erin, and had Mr. Yeats Cathleen Ni Houlihan been written then and I had seen it, I should have taken it not as an allegory, but as a representation of a thing that might happen any day in any house. ("Political Writings" 300-1)

Yeats took an icon who came to elicit a passion almost religious in its intensity and power to transport and placed her on a public stage. Members of the contemporary audience described the effect as a quasi-religious rapture; the figure of the old woman on stage was not only a representation but an actual embodiment of the spirit of Mother Ireland. This blurring between art and reality occurs in religious theater and was further encouraged in this instance by the confusion between Cathleen Ni Houlihan 'the persona' and Maud Gonne 'the revolutionary personality'. Gonne played Cathleen in emotionally charged performances that were subsequently recorded by several notable individuals. The association between the two became

50 Constance Markiewicz makes the association between Maud Gonne and Mother Ireland in her Prison Letters (155). Maire Nic Shiubhlaigh, in her memoirs, conveys Maud Gonne's
indissoluble, even in the mind of Gonne herself.51 Her performance in Cathleen Ni Houlihan was a striking instance of drama's power to make individuals act in the real world. This is evident in contemporary observations that express concern over the dangerous consequences of the play, mainly its ability to make men shoot and be shot. Even the cool-headed George Bernard Shaw acknowledged to Lady Gregory: "When I see that play I feel that it might lead a man to do something foolish" (Lady Gregory, Journals 444).

Yeats was well aware of the inspirational power of theater. All his plays previous to Cathleen Ni Houlihan were, in his term, "miracle plays." Although he evinced surprise at the reaction to Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Yeats

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startling effect on the audience and the impression that she was "the inspiration" of, rather than a member in the nationalist movement: "How many who were there that night will forget the Kathleen ni Houlihan of Maud Gonne, her rich golden hair, willow-like figure, pale sensitive face, and burning eyes, as she spoke the closing lines of the Old Woman turning out through the cottage door . . . Watching her, one could readily understand the reputation she enjoyed as the most beautiful woman in Ireland, the inspiration of the whole revolutionary movement . . . Yeats wrote Kathleen ni Houlihan specially for her, and there were few in the audience who did not see why. In her, the youth of the country saw all that was magnificent in Ireland. She was the very personification of the figure she portrayed on stage" (19).

51 Maud Gonne opens her autobiography A Servant of the Queen with a vision of Cathleen, who tells her that she is one of the stepping stones upon which Ireland will progress to freedom. Elsewhere in the book she asserts even more glamorous self-identifications. She is the woman of 'The Sidhe,' the 'Triumphant One,' the 'woman of prophecy.' (MacBride 134; 136; 241). "Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland," which included the Cathleen figure, was her favorite Yeats poem.
understood that in Ireland the fusion of spiritualism and political conflict would have a profound effect when it was intensified by the immediacy of theater. The theater was the answer to the issue of political divisiveness (a contentious issue that he experienced first hand in the Tone Centenary). After unsuccessful attempts at writing patriotic ballads, Yeats turned to drama as the vehicle to achieve his goal of a national 'unity' based on an adherence to the Celtic principles of spiritualism and poetry. Yeats understood that theater held the power to transform isolated individuals into a unified audience. He felt "most alive," he tells us, "at the moment when a room full of people share the same lofty emotion" (Plays and Controversies 416). Yeats thought of the unity of a nation in similar terms. A nation, he said, should be "like an audience in some great theatre," and he quoted Hugo: "In the theatre a mob becomes a people" (quoted in Flannery 66). Yeats believed, during the time of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, that the public art of theater could achieve a unified national consciousness --through the appreciation of authentic Irish (Celtic) art-- and translate it into a political unity. It is important to examine

52"One of the principal reason for Yeats's involvement with the Irish National Theatre Society was his realization that it placed him in direct touch with politics" (Flannery 323). The fact that Cathleen Ni Houlihan was one of the very first plays that was produced by the Irish National Theatre Society attests to Yeats's active engagement in popular nationalist politics during the theater's inception.
briefly the political vision that contributed to Yeats's idea of a 'national theater' just before the conception of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* in 1902.

The specific form of politics that Yeats had in mind when he established the theater was that which ultimately developed into the militantly nationalistic Sinn Fein movement under the leadership of Arthur Griffith. At first Yeats's theater was supported almost unconditionally by Griffith; he even supported Yeats's controversially anti-clerical *The Countess Cathleen*. The difficulties in this alignment, however, were to reveal themselves soon after *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* as the two sides became openly antagonistic to each other leading to the final explosive breach in 1907 during the controversial production of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. Although *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* is Yeats's most enthusiastic expression of nationalist ideology, I believe that certain key underlying tensions exist in the play and that the Cathleen figure is not the total embrace of Fenian sentiment that many critics and audiences assume. This will become evident when I compare Yeats's figure to the Erin that Fenians created for themselves in ballads. But first Yeats's complex relationship to Fenianism must be delineated.

Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, Irish political initiative flowed from the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), called the Fenians, an elite
conspiratorial band of militant and battle-hardened nationalist partisans. The Fenians believed in violence, and at the root of all their behavior was the certainty that England would never surrender control of Ireland unless confronted by a superior Irish force, ultimately military. By Yeats's time "Fenianism" became synonymous with "physical force." Many Fenian sentiments were incorporated into the long-standing tradition of political ballads which became available to Yeats under the tutelage of the old Fenian, John O'Leary. O'Leary advocated a brand of nationalism that was inseparable from literature, a belief that Irish poetry must be national, and Irish nationalism poetic. It is important to understand that even Yeats's most fervent participation in organizational politics was always in the context of O'Leary's brand of poetic nationalism. Furthermore, at the inception of the theater, when Yeats first sought to align himself with the militantly nationalistic Sinn Fein movement, politics were less a paramount concern of that movement than

53Into the twentieth century the Fenians pursued their single goal-- full separation of Ireland from the Union with Great Britain. They scheduled an insurrection for 1865 (year of Yeats's birth) and tried again in 1867. 'Later some of them turned to bombing campaigns. Later still, they formed groups inside the respectable cultural and political organs of the constitutional nationalists' (Brown, Politics 6).

54Yeats came under the influence of O'Leary in the 1880s. In 1885 O'Leary was one of the most distinguished revolutionaries still alive, unbroken, out of jail, and at his post in Dublin. Under O'Leary's guidance Yeats studied anthologies of patriotic ballads, folklore and Irish history.
a kind of cultural consciousness-raising.\textsuperscript{55} The Fenian elements that Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan espouses are the ones that were common in the ballads that O'Leary gave to Yeats.\textsuperscript{56}

From the very beginning Yeats experienced Fenian politics through an aesthetic rather than an ideological orientation, and this attitude is clearly reflected in his play. There are no specific political, economic or social issues raised in \textit{Cathleen Ni Houlihan}: "[Yeats] had nothing to say about economic questions and little about practical politics. Nor was he concerned with the introduction of new Irish Home Rule bills in parliament" (Ellmann, \textit{Mask} 114). It was only through the presence of a rich aesthetic element in political literature that Yeats could relate to the politics at all. This is evident in \textit{Cathleen Ni Houlihan}, in the fact

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{55}]To prove this point James Flannery reproduces a program that Yeats and Griffith, leader of the militant nationalists, drafted for a nationalist club in 1900 (323).
\item[\textsuperscript{56}]Through the efforts of Thomas Davis and Young Ireland, political ballads became the prime element of national popular culture in the nineteenth century and the most important vehicle to promote nationalist ideology. Most of the poetry Yeats read under O'Leary's guidance was published in countless ballad books which had enormous circulation, two of the best known being Charles Gavan Duffy's \textit{Ballad Poetry of Ireland} (1845) and \textit{The Spirit of the Nation} (1873). The ballad tradition was multifaceted in Ireland: "In the main this popular poetry came from two separate Irish traditions: that of patriotic verse written by numerous literate nineteenth century Irishmen, few of whom had any real talent; and that of a relatively small number of translations from the Gaelic, which came out of a rich and long-established folk tradition, oral and written, folk and literary" (Meir 1).
\end{itemize}
that it is immortality in art that motivates heroic sacrifice. The ultimate goal of heroism in battle is aesthetic, merging in death with the perfect aesthetic form—a ballad of the people which translates into immortality. It is Cathleen's promise of personal 'immortality,' not national 'independence,' that lures Michael to his death. It is only after Cathleen recites her poem of immortal heroes that Michael first engages her in conversation: he remained dormant throughout her previous discussion (in prose) of eviction and her stolen green fields. In **Cathleen Ni Houlihan** the spiritual struggle is more fundamental than the political one, although the two cannot be totally separated. This interpretation is supported by a production of the play in Stockholm during Yeats's Nobel-award festivities when a Swedish producer, not recognizing the "strangers" and never having heard of "Killala" before, was forced to depart from the the classic political interpretation of the play. Yeats reported that the Swede's alterations were most agreeable to him, since the play was really "symbolic," that is, nonreferential and as relevant to any random time and place as to Mayo-Sligo in 1798 (**Autobiographies** 338-9).

The absence of political reward in **Cathleen Ni Houlihan** is especially obvious if one compares Yeats's play to Maud Gonne MacBride's tableau, **Dawn** (1904), on the same subject. Like Cathleen, Bride is an older, homeless woman who walks her green fields, who speaks of redressing historic wrongs,
and who, as a result, is perceived as mad. The same anti-materialism runs through Dawn: "It's not money she cares for, it's her land she wants. It is vengeance for her dead she wants"(76). Gonne MacBride's emphasis, however, is on redressing real social grievances rather than attaining personal spiritual fulfillment. The play opens with a conversation between men working on the famine relief project and throughout the short play specific incidences of starvation, eviction, and murder are highlighted. Furthermore, Bride is less a mythological archetype than a flesh-and-blood woman who loses a real daughter to eviction and, consequently, starvation. Maud Gonne MacBride's play is just as specific about the means that must be used to overcome this oppression: open insurrection. The motivation for sacrifice is not personal immortality but the political benefits of national self-rule and, even more immediately, vengeance. Dawn is filled with vows of vengeance directed against 'the stranger':

it's [the stranger] that's the cause of all the trouble and the hunger that is on us, so it is. Look at all that he's left of Bride's good house, and he killed her husband too, for defending it, and sent her boy, Patrick, to jail, and he got his death there. (74)

The conflict of the play is basically political and international, between Irish martyrs and British oppressors.

Unlike Bride of Gonne MacBride's play, Yeats's Cathleen is an embodiment not of political struggle itself but of the Irish ballad tradition which takes political struggle for its
subject. For Yeats political action is subservient to art, though a necessary component of it, and not the other way around. The diametric opposite was the case with nationalist ballads whose primary focus, like that of Dawn, was action in the service of an anti-colonialist political goal: the purpose of the ballad was to glorify to the widest possible audience the sacrifices necessary to achieve this goal. In these ballads Irishmen were propelled by real grievances, "blind misrule" and "armed lies" (Davis 153), and expected real relief, "freedom" from slavery. That is why military-style action rather than aesthetic/spiritual revelation is the central crux of these ballads. Consider the following ballad in Thomas Davis's Spirit of the Nation:

Does Erin's fouly slandered name
Sufferst thy cheek with generous shame--
Would'st right her wrongs- restore her fame?--
Come, then, the soldier's weapon claim--
    Come, then, and wear the White Cockade. (138-9)

The focus on Erin's restoration is expressed through imperative verbal phrases that encourage specific action. This is a typical element in ballad anthologies. Verbs like 'strike,' 'awake,' and 'go' are rhythmically repeated within songs to create a hypnotizing effect. To further reinforce the focus on military action, many ballads include references to specific weapons and the phrase "Erin's cause," which denotes the underlying influence of political ideology. The songs promote military action that will lead to inevitable success:
As sure as ever there's power
that makes the grass appear,
Our land shall smile with Liberty,
the blade time shall be here. (Davis 141)

The tone of Irish political ballads was essentially utilitarian, worldly, optimistic (Brown, *Politics* 54). Their linguistic style reflected worldly goals as well. Unlike the language of Yeats's *Cathleen*, the vernacular language of the ballads was not mystical in tone or subject; its common denominator was plain truculence --vengeance against Erin's detractors:

Make the false Saxon feel
Erin's avenging steel!
Strike for your country
--O'Donnell abu. (Davis 202)

The most obvious difference between Yeats's play and nationalist ballads is the way each approaches the blood-sacrifice theme.57 Death is necessary for Yeats's hero to achieve spiritual transcendence. In Fenian ballads, death is an accepted possibility of warfare: "If death should come that martyrdom/ Were sweet endured for you/ Dear Land "(Davis 23). For Yeats in 1902 martyrdom is a necessary step toward glory, and the entire play operates on what came to be labeled as the 'death mystique.' The body must be extinguished as a prerequisite for spiritual transcendence

57Ironically it is precisely this issue that many critics use to excoriate Yeats for promoting the more destructive elements of Fenian ideology. O'Brien's previously quoted association of IRA ideology with Yeats is a good example.
and entry to the world of the ideal. The practical consequences of martyrdom, both in a personal sense (Michael's family) and a larger political one (Ireland's freedom), are secondary and almost irrelevant. Michael gives up his family and, the play implies, even his life for the immortality in ballads that Cathleen promises: "They will be remembered for ever." At the end of the play, Michael's conflict is resolved with the exchange of mortal life for immortality in art, a resolution that overtly excludes any reference to the consequences of his sacrifice in political terms. It is telling that the chain of events from the moment Michael leaves his home to his (implied) death and future in ballads is never referred to. The specifics surrounding Michael's defiant act remain unknown, the agent of his death is never mentioned, and the political consequences of his act are never speculated upon in any significant terms.

The lack of focus on consequences separates the 'death mystique' of Yeats's play from the pragmatic political goals of Davisite and Fenian ballads, and this is an essential difference. Malcolm Brown points out that the cult of the lost cause "is in no Fenian utterance" (Politics 214). The Fenians never regarded their cause as hopeless nor their military projects as beautiful suicide. The statements of many arrested and even executed Fenian leaders do not focus on 'immortality' or transcendence but on the condition of the
present and the historical forces leading up to it; "not the slightest interest in the 'death mystique' can be found among any of their statements of purpose" (215). Conversely, the glorification of death as an end in itself lies at the very center of Yeats's allegory and he exploits all the sentimental associations of a suffering mother figure to promote it.

The concept of the 'death mystique' is inextricably tangled with the concept of motherhood, a fact evident in the numerous ways poets and politicians rhetorically used the Mother Ireland figure to inspire acts of sacrifice among Irish 'manhood.' In Cathleen Ni Houlihan the purpose of each man's sacrifice is centered in the mother's own fulfillment. Since Yeats's mother figure serves the primary role of inspiring sacrifice and since the agent of death is missing in the play, the distinction between sacrificing 'for Mother Ireland' and sacrificing 'to Mother Ireland' becomes blurred. The mother takes on the role of destroyer. With each mention of glorious death Cathleen asserts herself as the actual object toward which the sacrifice is directed: "[yellow-haired O'Donough] died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me"(82). Cathleen's explanation of sacrifice mentions no condition to be corrected, no fame or virtue to be restored. The mother is the ultimate end of the sacrifice and consequently she takes on the role of 'destroyer.' This dangerous aspect connects Yeats's figure with Gaelic death
goddesses (which will be explored in the next chapter). One needs to put criticisms about the destructiveness of Yeats's "vampire" in proper perspective by understanding that Yeats gives Cathleen the power of creation as well.

Cathleen Ni Houlihan is not presented as a military leader like Britannia but in the role of the artist absorbing heroic tragedy as subject matter. Cathleen is a creator as well as a destroyer; violence is necessary material for her ballads. Not since the ancient sovereignty goddess has the allegorical figure been given such an active and important role. The eighteenth-century speirbhean was simply a muse, inspiring the poet with her message -- but the poet was the actual creator of the poem. Various amatory figures like Roisin Dubh never speak at all; they provoked inspiration by their beauty, just by existing. In Cathleen Ni Houlihan Yeats gives the Ireland figure not only a role as subject and creator but specifically as artist, a profession of highest regard for Yeats, as evident in the The King's Threshold.

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58 Refer to Patrick Keane's, Terrible Beauty p. 17.

59 Yeats's expansion of the figure's role as creator is especially evident if one examines her marginalization in another contemporary play. Pearse's play, The Singer (1915), rewrites Cathleen Ni Houlihan and dispenses with its central female representation of Ireland. His central male hero MacDara is both poet and warrior, the source of inspiration and action, the ballad and the heroic action, while the old woman figure (MacDara's mother) is marginalized to the passive role of grieving over dead warriors (Literary Writings).
Yeats restores the act of creation to the mother and this fact problematizes Cullingford's interpretation of the play as 'disastrously and influentially recasting the figure's sexual/political agenda in terms of death' (12). Yeats developed an already existing association between Mother Ireland and the death-mystique in ways that complicated rather than simplified, the figure's destructive militancy.

Malcolm Brown identifies the literary origin of the 'death mystique' decades before Yeats's play in T.D. Sullivan's popular ballad "God Save Ireland" (1867), whose refrain concludes,

. . . "God Save Ireland," said they all,
"Whether on scaffold high, or the battle-field we die,
"Oh, what matter when for Ireland dear we fall!"
(Deane, Field 2: 106)

The object was to die for Erin; the forms that could take did not matter. The Fenians accepted the ballad because it reinforced their glorification of the battle casualty, but ultimately its defeatist attitude conflicted with their pragmatic approach to politics. Sullivan was not a Fenian; in fact, he was an opponent of Fenianism, 'transforming Fenian insurrection into a lost cause, most deeply lamented' (Brown, Politics 212). Yeats didn't think much of Sullivan's "God Save Ireland." Early in his career he created a scandal

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60The King's Threshold (1903) is a drama centered around the conflict between Seanchan the chief poet of Ireland and the king who refuses to grant him the respect he demands. The poet protests with a hunger strike and Yeats's sympathies are obviously with him.
by publishing an anthology of Irish nationalist verse from which Sullivan's popular ballad was defiantly excluded. It is ironic that the most controversial and provocative element of Yeats's so-called 'Fenian' play was not Fenian at all. There is no literal historical referent for Yeats's "romantic" death-loving Fenian, nor is the maudlin sentimentality of Sullivan's brand of the death mystique a likely influence. The source of Cathleen Ni Houlihan's defeatism must be sought elsewhere.

Yeats found attractive sources for Cathleen's 'death mystique' in the discourse of Celticism. Defeatism and Celticism first came to be associated with each other in 1760 in James Mac Pherson's influential Fragments of Ancient Poetry, which purported to be the remains from a great epic by a third century bard, Ossian, son of Fingal. Ossian symbolized a new type of Gael, one who embodied values of bravery, lyricism, and sublime melancholia. He projected a romanticized image of a Celt who was brave in battle but always fell. Ossian was the last survivor of a dead generation and celebrated the heroic defeat of a noble soul displaced by a new, pragmatic, militaristic age. Although the epic was proved a forgery, Ossian remained a force as a literary persona as the defeated though noble Celt, until Yeats's time (Leersson 398). Mathew Arnold, drawing on the philological study of Earnest Renan,61 concluded that the Celt
was indeed emotional and melancholy by nature and that is why he belongs to an ineffectual and defeated race. Both Arnold and Renan used this distinction to place the Celts in a complementary position to the industry and rationality (and brutality according to Renan) of the Germanic element in the English race. Arnold further exploited this distinction to justify British colonial domination over ineffectual Celts as 'natural.' Yeats accepted the classifications of Arnold's discourse, repeatedly comparing the industrial and rational British character with the more spiritual and intuitive Irish soul in his works, but with one essential difference: he inverted the hierarchy of the Celts in relation to the British. Yeats identified the failure of his country, politically and economically, with spirituality and a higher kind of power than the merely material, the power of poetry, romance, and idealism. These are the three basic qualities of the Celtic hero that Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan tests. Cathleen appeals to Michael's Celtic sensibility while his materialistic father, Peter, sees only madness in Cathleen's inspirational words.

Yeats also adapts the gender associations that Arnold claims underpinned the colonial relationship between Britain

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61 Renan's influential essay, "Poesie des Races Celtiques," influenced, via Arnold, Irish writers and intellectuals of the later nineteenth century by using philological discourse to assign linguistic and cultural values to the Teutonic and Celtic languages. Arnold's essay "On the Study of Celtic Literature" is especially relevant to this discussion.
and Ireland. The Celtic nature, Arnold says, has something feminine and therefore sensual and ineffectual in it, and the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of feminine idiosyncrasy; he has an affinity to it; he is not far from its secret. (347)

Associating the Celt with the femininity of a nineteenth century bourgeois woman assured him of the inferior status of the charming and necessary "other," the supplementary cultural and political unit in the colonial relationship. Unlike many nationalists who responded to this insult by asserting an exaggerated masculinity, Yeats acknowledged and celebrated the "feminine" idiosyncrasy of the Irish in contrast to the rationality of the British. It was the 'feminine' sensibility of the primitive and 'backward' Irish soul that elevated it over the souls of more developed and industrialized European nations. In this context an old peasant woman seems the most appropriate symbol to embody the Irish spirit; Yeats's old mother projects not feebleness, but an irrepressible defiance towards modernization. The subversiveness of Yeats's old woman figure is evident in the contrary way contemporary British political cartoons presented Eire: as a passive and physically attractive young woman. (This is in stark contrast to the simian representation of Irish men in those same cartoons.) Eire's beauty assures her femininity and her ideal position as the cherished but slightly inferior other, whether as wife or
colony. Interestingly, feminine Erin was often portrayed coupled with the militant and martial Britannia.\textsuperscript{62} One can see just how Celtic Yeats's Cathleen is when one compares her to contemporary allegorical figures like La France or Britannia. The latter is young, beautiful and always dressed in martial clothes—the accoutrements of the Roman warrior reflect Britannia's origin in Roman military history.\textsuperscript{63} She is aggressive, secular and impenetrable in her metallic attire, like a modern industrial nation. There is much that is conventionally 'masculine' in her aggression. Britannia's threatening as well as triumphant military gesture (one hand raised brandishing a sword) iconographically reflects the colonialist spirit. The worn but resilient Cathleen is her counterpart as the enduring colonized spirit clinging to its ancient identity. The contrast between the war-like Britannia and the bard-like Cathleen precisely illustrates Arnold's classifications and Yeats's revision of them.

Through the assertion of Cathleen as Celtic Mother Yeats puts forward a symbol of decolonization. She insists on a

\textsuperscript{62}Refer to Illustration Figure 1.

\textsuperscript{63}In \textit{Monuments and Maidens}, Marina Warner traces the martial origins of the Britannia allegory (45-9). She also explores the dynamics underlying the traditional representations of female allegorical figures. Most of the book explores medieval/Renaissance figures and their classic origins. The book does not deal with any specific Irish allegories or with the more general issues of colonialism and allegory.
new historical narrative for her people: the ignominious
Irish defeats in official (English) history books are turned
into glorious acts of heroism; the comic, simian-like
Irishman in British cartoons is transformed into a brave young soldier;\textsuperscript{64} historic grievances against British colonization are given tragic weight in the dignity of the Poor Old Woman's suffering and displacement. Michael embodies the potential in the Irish to pursue idealism at great personal cost, in contrast to the materialistic and utilitarian motives of the British character. These are the aspects of the play that moved contemporary nationalists so deeply. Despite all these anti-colonialist elements, yet another counterforce militates against the comfortable assessment that \textit{Cathleen Ni Houlihan} is conventionally nationalist.

Michael's idealism is contrasted not to negative British qualities --an approach which would be standard in any nationalist rhetoric of the time-- but rather it is placed in stark opposition to the greed of another Irishman, his father, Peter, who speaks only of his 'fortune,' refuses to

\textsuperscript{64}Michael's Celtic heroism is Yeats's response to the buffoonery of the stage-Irishman stereotype. An account of the audience's inappropriate response to the first production of \textit{Cathleen} in 1902 reveals just how revolutionary a heroic Irish character was even to an Irish audience: "the speeches of \textit{Kathleen} were received by laughter by a section of the audience who were apparently so much accustomed to associate dialect with humorous characters in the Queen's Theatre melodramas that they saw humour where none was intended" (Hogan and Kilroy, \textit{Foundations} 12)
give the Poor Old Woman any money, and trivializes her as a raving rambler: "She doesn't know well what she's talking about, with the want and trouble she has gone through"(83). In Yeats's early works, Celtic anti-materialism and spirituality were initially directed at England, but as Yeats encountered increasing hostility to his ideas within nationalist Ireland, he discovered elements there, too, inimical to the Celt's spiritual essence.65 The play is essentially about Michael's choice of Irish brides and the struggle in his soul to transcend the snares of materialism—expressed in their most extreme form in his own father's greed.

The intra-Irish tensions that exist in the play call into question Joseph Chadwick's argument that the conflict of the play is defined by anti-British sentiment: "Cathleen Ni Houlihan . . . forms the basis of an extremely idealistic national (and nationalist) allegory, one which defines a clear-cut conflict between colonizer and colonized as the fundamental problem facing Irish society" (159). Many critics and audience members like to see the play as an unequivocal anti-British statement, as unambiguously

65 In 1899 Yeats warned that writers of a 'new Class', 'without breeding and ancestry,' this new Catholic bourgeois class's 'new art' had interposed itself between the 'hut and the castle' and the 'hut and the cloister' (Essays 10-11). Yeats similarly condemned the clergy, arguing that they embraced materialism and that the cause of true spirituality had now devolved upon 'the arts' (193).
nationalist and political. To justify this conclusion all textual tensions have be ignored, as well as the scarce references to the colonial situation. The British are never mentioned directly, only once as the "strangers" (albeit an unambiguous reference for a contemporary audience). Malcolm Brown claims that this omission is due to the influence of O'Leary's injunction against the over worn and trite "cantic abuse of England" (Politics 321). Although this seems like a plausible explanation, it cannot explain the total absence of any, even indirect, reference to the (future) British agent of Michael's death. Furthermore, colonialism is not referred to in any direct or substantial way as the cause of Ireland's trouble. Brown observes that this silence is universal in Yeats's work (Politics 322). I believe that the reason why Yeats chose not to focus on the national/foreign conflict in Cathleen Ni Houlihan is that he found the more critical conflict within his own society, defined increasingly by the tension between the values of his Anglo-Irish class and the Catholic nationalist majority. When Yeats speaks of spirituality, idealism, and poetic sensibility, he is referring to the values of his own, previously aristocratic class, which was increasingly

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66 O'Leary argued that the "Abuse of England is too often but the mere stock-in trade of cantic agitators, frequently the imperfect utterance of the illiterate." (O'Leary 2: 141)
challenged by the 'materialism' of the Catholic bourgeois classes.

Tensions between Yeats's elitist values and those of the majority manifested themselves in his choice of sources, in his ambivalent attitude toward peasant balladry --especially its audience. The Irish political ballad, as influential as it was, presented formidable problems to Yeats. His early attempts at Davisite poems ended in failure (Varioum Poems 709-15; 737-8). 'The model was by that time too well defined, its audience's expectations too pragmatic, for him to be able to develop it independently' (Cairns and Richards 66). By 1895 Yeats was fully aware that there was nothing to be gained in continuing the attempt to reach Davis's popular audience with his own poetry. In his introduction to A Book of Irish Verse, he now dismissed Davis as "in the main an orator influencing men's acts, not a poet shaping their emotions," and his criticism became outspoken against the Young Ireland movement (xxi).67 (This distinction reinforces the one made earlier in the chapter between the practical focus of Davisite ballads and the spiritual focus of Yeats's play.) Just before the turn of the century Yeats began to declare openly his purpose to work for an elite, not a

67See the following articles by Yeats; "Irish National Literature," "The New Irish Library," "Young Ireland." (After 1900 there are numerous references in Yeats's published prose to the narrowness of the Young Ireland ideal.)
popular, audience. Consequently Yeats's original enterprise, to elevate both literature and nationalism by producing works that appealed to the popular imagination, had changed. Although *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* is Yeats's most popular and accessible work, a sense of individualism is discernable in Cathleen's appeal to Michael's sense of personal fulfillment. The ultimate aim of his sacrifice is his personal 'immortality,' not the freedom of the entire race of his countrymen. Yeats later reflected on the difficulty of reconciling this type of individualism with the concerns of 'the masses' when he claimed that Douglas Hyde sought the 'peasant,' whereas he and Lady Gregory sought the 'peasant imagination' (*Explorations* 401).

This distinction was Yeats's way of distancing himself from the responsibility of satisfying the concerns or values of the masses while still retaining the elements of their art that he found vital and useful. By rejecting the masses as an audience, Yeats made it clear in 1900 (just before he wrote *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*) that what he discovered about the 'peasant imagination' was not addressed to the peasant himself. This paradoxical attitude is evident in Yeats's well-known statement in which he gives Lady Gregory credit for giving the play the necessary peasant element, especially its peasant dialogue, which he was not able to supply from the "high window" of his own art:

One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight
and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage, there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen ni Houlihan for whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it, but I could not get down out of the high window of dramatic verse, and in spite of all you had done for me I had not the country speech. One has to live among the people, like you . . . before one can think the thoughts of the people and speak with their tongue. (Early Essays 240)

Note that Yeats described the inspiration for the play in the aisling dream vision form, an aristocratic bardic form structured around the private relationship between the muse and the individual poet, rather than the collective oral ballad tradition, a popular tradition that was the actual source of the Shan Van Vocht and Cathleen Ni Houlihan figures. Yeats saw his own art as fundamentally aristocratic even when he utilized the popular trope of an old peasant woman. Yeats brings together, with the help of Lady Gregory, aristocratic values and the "peasant imagination," creating a unity of culture for his Cathleen figure to embody.

In subject matter, 'imaginative nationalism' meant a shift from popular balladry to the material of folk-lore and legend (Meir 29). This also meant a shift back to the aristocratic values of individual glory that early Gaelic society esteemed. In many ways Yeats's Cathleen is much closer to the Ireland figure's origin in sovereignty myths and folklore than most figures since the colonization. By the twentieth century the Erin figure in ballads had been
stripped of most of her associations with the sovereignty goddess. Her associations with nature, sexuality, and Gaelic systems of kingship had been deeply repressed. Most versions of Erin at the turn of the century were "lady-like," closer to the ideal beauty, virtue, and passivity of the courtly love speirbhean. (While it is true that the Shan Van Vocht was a central figure in contemporary oral ballads as well, her connection with the Caillech was mostly limited to superficial physical attributes.) Yeats restores associations to nature in his figure; her non-human lifespan --like the Gaelic goddess, Cathleen's "lovers" span centuries-- and ancient body is specifically equated with Ireland's "four beautiful green fields"(81). Nuala NiDhomhnaill praises Yeats for having recovered the figure of the Caillech, which had been abandoned by aisling poets (quoted in Cullingford 11). Yeats rejects the passive speirbhean beauty for an ancient hag who embodies the actual land, actively solicits (spiritual) suitors, and is miraculously transformed, like the medieval puella senilis, into a young girl with the walk of a queen. The only major sovereignty convention Yeats rejects in Cathleen Ni Houlihan is the centrality of coition to the allegory; his version of the Caillech demands not sex but death. By tapping the Gaelic roots of the Caillech figure, Yeats was free to express the complexities of a national 'essence' based on ancient cultural associations rather than the rigid
ideological and political associations the Ireland figure had accumulated in ballads. Yeats's choice of the Caillech figure allowed for the restoration of culture as the basis of national identification: the Caillech figure is far less Fenian than Gaelic. This was not true of the Erin/Cathleen Ni Houlihan/Shan Van Vocht figures of ballads who came to be associated with a militant anti-British stance--and the Catholic middle-classes.

I believe that Yeats was restoring the aristocratic source of Irish nationality by recovering the bardic embodiment of the Irish identity in the Caillech. The hag-like goddess tested each of her potential suitors according to aristocratic standards. Her dangerous aspect is brought out by her ugliness which repels most men. But she has a fundamental ambiguity which also attracts the very few men who will succeed in possessing her, and this selection is the basis of aristocratic societies like that of the ancient Celts. Jean Markale explains how the Caillech operated as a central symbol of aristocratic societies like the Celts:

Access to forbidden domains is restricted to the privileged. Since the caillech represents knowledge, wealth and power all at the same time, logically she cannot belong to everybody, or so aristocratic patriarchal societies would have men believe. It is therefore necessary to divert the desires of ordinary mortals away from her by means of taboos or fear... The breaking of taboos is then a magical act accomplished by the man who loves, who has overcome his repugnance and is resigned to annihilation in order to win all. (60)
The dynamics in the play work according to this aristocratic code of selection. Michael is tested, forced to choose between the youth and beauty of his bride and the ugliness of the decrepit Cathleen. He chooses the latter, shocking all those around him who see the choice only in terms of the superficial, physical reality; thus his spiritually heroic choice initiates him into the timeless world of poetry. The process of selection is based on individual vision, action, and reward --Michael achieves personal immortality. This aristocratic individualism contrasts strongly with the mass-orientated rhetoric of the nationalists, especially the latter's emphasis on collective pronouns like 'our' and 'we' and plural nouns like "countrymen." Note in the following stanza how patriotic spirit and action is expressed as a communal rather than an individual experience:

No! a heart-roused people's action
Cannot die like storms of faction.
Long a mute but master feeling
In the millions' breast was nursed. (Davis 152)

Michael's heroism springs neither from the illusion of righteousness nor of duty to the collective but from "a lonely impulse of delight," a heroic and poetic passion that Yeats identified with the aristocratic ideal.68 The last incident of the play, after all, is the transformation of...

68"A lonely impulse of delight" is a phrase Yeats used in his poem,"An Irish Airman foresees his Death" (Collected Poems 135). The aristocratic dimensions of the "impulse" are evident in Yeats's choice of the poem's subject --Lady Gregory's son, Robert.
the old peasant woman into a queen. This metamorphosis happens discreetly off-stage, but it represents the climax of the action in many ways. On the surface, the transformation is a mere replaying of sovereignty legends, but ultimately it reveals the complex and problematic duality of Yeats's figure. The peasant imagination had produced a long tradition of oral ballads, and the aristocratic imagination (transferred from the Gaelic bards to Anglo-Irish scholars) provided a tradition of individual heroism and leadership. By utilizing the hag's dual associations to the goddess and the peasant, Yeats fused diverse social elements in one unifying symbol. Cathleen would be Yeats's last attempt at this type of unity in an allegorical figure. In his next figure, Deirdre (1907), Mother Ireland the peasant/queen becomes a tragic, unmistakably aristocratic, queen reflecting the fate of the Anglo-Irish in the modern world.
CHAPTER 3

MAURYA: SYNGE'S REALISTIC PEASANT ALTERNATIVE TO CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

J. M. Synge's Riders to the Sea was written along with In the Shadow of the Glen during the summer of 1902. In a 1907 letter, Synge clarifies, with emphasis, that he had written Riders first, although it was performed second. The written order provides a convenient transition from Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan since Riders is, in many ways, a counterpart and response to the nationalist dimensions in Yeats's play. Synge sets up parallels to Yeats's play in order to subvert and redefine the central issues of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and assert his own non-political vision of 'Irishness.' Both plays are set in a peasant cottage near the sea, where the main action is introduced by the examination of clothing; shortly after, the action is interrupted in both plays by an old woman at first off-stage. Both of the old women, Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Maurya, repeatedly name or describe the deaths of men linked to them, and both lose sons named Michael, who are central to the drama. However, the

69Synge wrote a letter in December 1907 to Leon Brodsky: "By the way 'Riders' was written before the Shadow of the Glen, though Shadow of the G. was the first played" (Collected Letters 103).
threatening metaphysical presence that intrudes in Synge's play is nature --the sea-- rather than the force of nationalist history one feels so strongly in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Synge's play is set in the harsh and primitive world of the Aran Islands, where Irish men and women struggle for their meagre existence against the overwhelming power of the sea, apart from any political action. The old woman at the center of the story, Maurya, has lost seven men of her family to the sea and tries to hold back her last son, Bartley, from going out on the sea. Failing to stop him, Maurya must come to terms with her final and total loss and resign herself to accepting the arbitrary destructiveness of the sea. Synge advances a realistic 'peasant' version of Mother Ireland that has everything to do with ancient Irishness, preserved in the daily struggles of the Aran peasant, and nothing to do with the abstraction and idealization of nineteenth century political nationalism.

*Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and Maurya are both mother figures associated with death; *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, however, avoids referring to any financial, emotional, or physical consequences of death in order to glorify sacrifice for political purposes. Michael leaves the stage to die in a vaguely defined time and place; the effect of his death on his family is irrelevant to the spiritual struggle that defines the play. This avoidance is a stark contrast to the startling intrusion of Bartley's realistic corpse in *Riders*
to the Sea. In Synge's play, Bartley's death is abrupt and devastating, not the result of a glorious choice of heroic destiny but rather of the pursuit of simple commerce. Like his father and brothers before him, Bartley dies in the course of trade, carried on to bring the bare necessities to his mother and sisters. In Riders to the Sea, heroism consists not in great patriotic gestures, but in day-to-day living, in the pursuit of basic survival. Unlike Cathleen Ni Houlihan, who urges Michael to give up the objects of this world (including his new bride), Synge's characters gradually take on nobility through their involvement in this world. Synge rejects the abstract heroism and hence abstract nationalism or mere patriotism associated with the Mother Ireland trope. The glorification of patriotic death is dependent on the ability of the spirit to transcend the impermanence of the mortal body. Bartley's sacrifice provides no glory, no transcendence. The violence of the sea is arbitrary and cannot be explained by any ideological purpose or alleviated by Christian consolation.

Mothers bury sons in the harsh world of Aran where the natural order of life and death, of the old dying before the young, is inverted by a brutal environment that cannot be morally challenged in the way that British oppression is challenged in Cathleen Ni Houlihan. The everyday struggle of the Aran peasant replaces the struggle for political independence as the heroic essence of the Irish historical
experience. The tragedy of Maurya's serial losses of menfolk is specific to the Irish experience and distinguishable from that of the world that lies beyond Ireland --"the big world." Maurya, an old woman incongruously burying a young son, exemplifies the tragedy of Aran:

In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old.(100)

It is important to note that Synge never allows allegorical dimensions to overshadow his realistic portrait of an old peasant woman. In fact, it is Synge's ability to portray the national experience through a convincingly realistic portrait of personal experience that makes Maurya unique. As an Ireland figure, Maurya represents a shift away from broadly defined symbolic figures lacking any subjective impulse to more complex figures that embody Irishness through their psychological semblance to actual Irish women. Maurya's nationality comes not from a political stance but from the accumulated experience of living in a peasant society, from the attitudes and circumstances that are part of growing up in an Irish locality. (This trend would be developed more fully by O'Casey.) Maurya is a woman whose condition is based on life-long experiences on the Aran islands, especially the many deaths at sea she knew of as a girl, then as a wife. Her familiarity with the rituals of burial and keening are stressed in the dialogue of the play, especially in the closing scene when a villager exclaims:
"It's a great wonder she wouldn't think of the nails, and all the coffins she's seen made already" (106). Maurya is enclosed within social and psychological structures built by her very specifically Aran experience which cannot be separated from its Irish locality.

To Synge, the simple though stark lifestyle of the the Aran peasant was the quintessence of Irishness because it was not adulterated by the forces of modernization such as industrialization, forces antithetical to Ireland's Gaelic heritage.70 Maurya becomes a cultural embodiment of the purest essence of Gaelicism still surviving, though barely, in the modern world. Her language, gestures, and beliefs are close living links to an ancient Gaelic culture. The mundane objects scattered around her cottage represent a simple, though difficult, way of life: the nets and oilskins on the walls give a sense of the sea as a rich womb sustaining life, compensating with fish for the bareness of the rocky Aran earth,71 while the white coffin boards give a visual reminder not only of death but of the infertile and treeless soil of the island, boards which needed to be imported from Connemara to be on hand for a burial. These objects, along with

70In The Aran Islands Synge speaks of the 'natural aristocracy' of the peasants whose culture possesses the 'refinement of old societies' and the 'absence of the heavy boot of Europe' (I-II, 29).

71"The land is so poor that a field hardly produces more grain than is needed for seed the following year . . " (Aran I-II,28).
spinning wheels and keening rituals, represent a world threatened with extinction by Synge's time.

As an embodiment of Aran, Maurya represents a fading presence, a figure on the brink of being lost into Ireland's past. The tragic dimensions of Synge's figure are based on a sense of cultural loss as well as historical suffering. It is this pessimistic vision of Ireland's condition that makes Maurya a tragic and noble figure, that justifies her "broken" spirit in the closing scene, and that directly contrasts with Cathleen Ni Houlihan's ability to rejuvenate into a beautiful maiden. Yeats's conception of Cathleen was not based on the mundane reality of an actual flesh-and-blood peasant but on the elements of the "peasant imagination" and therefore could be resurrected in the future by force of the artistic mind, hence her rejuvenating nature. Cathleen Ni Houlihan could remain a relevant and "living" symbol long after a western peasant like Maurya became extinct in the modern world.

In order for Maurya, Synge's realistic revision of the Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure, to succeed, the elements of the play had to appear unquestionably authentic. Synge closely based the plot on actual incidents he encountered on the Aran Islands. He converts local and realistic details like

72 In Synge's biography, David Greene and Edward Stephens give a detailed account of the Aran experiences which were incorporated in the playwright's first tragedy (128). There are two specific passages in The Aran Islands
spinning wheels, nets, and boards into visual metaphors that reinforce the major issues of the play. George Roberts records a painstaking attempt in the first production to create convincing replicas for such items, including a frustrating attempt to make "pampooties" from actual peasant materials in the first production (Hogan and Kilroy, Foundations 114). Add to this the effect of natural language --the peasant dialect of the islands-- a new and central element in the national theater's aesthetics. Like Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Maurya is given a formal speech to conclude the play but her language, though elevated and poetically heightened, is still recognizable as peasant vernacular and lacks the aesthetic stylization of Cathleen's ballads and speech:

which can be identified as sources for the plot of Riders to the Sea. In the first we are told of a drowned man whose identity can only be established by a close scrutiny of his clothing. At last the sister of the man missing "pieced together all she could remember about his clothes, and what his purse was like, and where he had got it, and the same of his tobacco box, and his stockings. In the end there seemed little doubt that it was her brother. 'Ah!' she said, 'it's Mike sure enough, and please God they'll give him a decent burial!'" (Prose 136).

The second passage provided Synge with the second thread of his plot:
"When the horses were coming down to the slip an old woman saw her son, that was drowned a while ago, riding on one of them. She didn't say what she was after seeing, and this man caught the horse, he caught his own horse first, and then he caught this one, and after that he went out and he was drowned" (Prose 164).

Errol Durbach explores the "macrocosmic implication in the microcosmic objects" that fill the stage-set of Riders to the Sea from the nets to the spinning wheel (366).
Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want that? No man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied. (106)

It is important to recognize that the rhetorical effectiveness of Synge's Mother Ireland figure was based not so much on actual peasant reality but rather on what the Dublin audience sensed to be peasant reality. Ironically, Dubliners were often not altogether familiar with the details of peasant life: George Roberts describes the difficulty of finding a peasant woman in Dublin to teach the actresses how to keen (Hogan and Kilroy, *Foundations* 114). The Dublin audience demanded idealized portraits of Irish peasantry and Maurya seemed to pass the test: though she was not nearly so enthusiastically received as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, notable contemporary critics did mention her haunting presence.74 Synge, after all, gives his peasant mother a nobility and stoicism that made her heroic, especially to nationalists who promoted the image of the oppressed peasant as the essence of 'Irishness.' Furthermore, the absence of any 'moral' controversy (i.e. sexuality in the central female figure) made *Riders to the Sea* the only 'safe' play among Synge's dramatic works,75 and Maurya the only female character whose

74Arthur Griffith, who became the dominant nationalist voice involved in the criticism of the National Theatre, conceded that the play's "tragic beauty powerfully affected the audience" (Greene and Stephens 170).

75After the Playboy Riots, Yeats decided that *Riders to the Sea* was the only safe play of Synge's to offer during
'Irishness' was not questioned by contemporary critics. Maurya was accepted, by the small Dublin audience who saw her, as an authentic representation of Irish (peasant) womanhood and --as an extension-- of Irish nationality as well.76

Maurya embodies Irish nationality not only as a living peasant link to a Gaelic past but also as an evocation of an ancient Gaelic archetype. The Caillech was a hag-like figure which embodied the life and death powers of nature; she is related to what Marija Gimbutas identifies as the ancient 'Killer-Regeratrix' goddess known to all European folklore. The general European archetype is a crooked old woman, yellow and lean, who is responsible for the creation of life and, in time, its destruction and regeneration; she acts out the cyclical forces of nature. Her old body is a striking metaphor for the everlasting earth, which renews itself seasonly. It is important to note, however, that the destructive actions of the Killer-Regeratrix goddess, though awesome and feared, seem to be nothing other than a control of nature's cyclical power over life and death: nature needs to destroy in order to regenerate (Gimbutas 210-11). There

the tour to Waterford, Cork and Kilkenny and later during the American tour (Greene and Stephens 296). Synge protested but was persuaded by Yeats and Lady Gregory that the decision was necessary.

76 'The audience which saw Riders to the Sea was a small but enthusiastic one, and Synge was called before the curtain to be applauded' (Greene and Stephens 170).
is no "evil" motive underlying the goddess's "killer" role or her decrepit visage because death is an amoral force of nature. This idea is often referred to, in criticism, as the pre-Christian pagan vision of death in Synge's play. Synge restored the stark amorality of the original nature goddess after Yeats reformulated her killer impulse to suit his blood-sacrifice theme. (Cathleen Ni Houlihan encouraged and morally glorified the bloody sacrifice of young patriots in order to rejuvenate herself.) The difference between Yeats's and Synge's vision of Irish nationality is evident in the way each playwright reconceived the Caillech, and the Gaelic traditions she represented for their respective plays.

Although the Caillech had roots in general European culture her eminent position in literature since the middle ages was a specifically Gaelic tradition. In medieval Europe, the goddess's respected status changed considerably when the killer hag was reinterpreted and aggressively recast in moral terms until she became the loathsome witch of fairytales. The goddess's power to kill, as a prelude to regeneration, was degraded to a menacing "evil" force that operated arbitrarily on the innocent rather than through the systematic and equalizing forces of nature (Gimbutas 210). In Ireland, however, positive associations with the goddess remained intact, as my first chapter has shown. Many well-known female figures in Irish folklore and literature are related to the powerful old hag. The goddess Morigan (or three sisters, Neman, Macha, and Morrigan) is an early Irish example. The name of the legendary Grania, who eloped with the young warrior Dermot while pursued by the old warrior Finn, too, suggests this figure's association with the nature hag archetype as well. The original meaning of grainne is "ugliness"; thus, Grania is the Old Hag of Celtic myths (Burl 66). The other meaning of grainne is "grain, seed," which suggests the figure's association with regeneration (Gimbutas 210). The magically powerful Irish hag presented rich allegorical possibilities for a timeless and unifying nationality up to the time of Yeats and Synge.
In *Riders to the Sea*, Synge rejects the nationalist associations the Caillech figure accumulated after the success of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*; he does this by creating several intentional parallels to Yeats's play only to subvert the political connotations of this influential play by offering realistic counterparts in his own portrait of an old peasant woman. In Yeats's play the Caillech inspires a young hero to leave his home and go down to the sea to join the French; in Synge's play the old woman does all she can to keep her son home after he insists on going down to the sea to sell their horses. Yeats's Michael is preparing for a wedding, which he rejects for immortality, while Synge's Michael is being prepared for a funeral with all the attendant grief displayed before the audience. Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the metaphorical mother of Irish heroes, glories in the list of dead sons; Maurya, biological mother of peasant men, painfully recounts her list of dead sons. Most importantly, Yeats's figure offers transcendence through death, a post-pagan spiritualism; Synge's figure, based on the indifferent life-death cycles of nature, offers a stoic understanding of the finality of death and the unavoidable obliteration of the individual. After her realization of loss, Maurya's distraction and dishevelled appearance evokes the wandering goddess of sovereignty myths, whose loss of the true king precipitates mental and physical derangement. In Synge's humanized version of the figure no possibility of
transformation exists. Her white hair and decrepit body cannot be regenerated to youth. She will continue to live on, "broken" though she is, but her body will never be able to recreate the sons she has already lost.

Yeats focused on the "regeneration" aspect of the original nature goddess and infused it with political, literary, and spiritual dimensions. In Gaelic sources, the concept of regeneration in nature was symbolically manifest in the hag's ability to transform herself from a nightmarish creature to a beautiful woman and back (Gimbutas 210). Yeats used the goddess's transformation to represent metaphorically spiritual, literary, and political forces in modern Irish society, forces alien to the simple life-death nature cycles of the original goddess. Yeats's play denies the power of physical death by offering immortality and thus radically changes the "Killer" role of the original hag goddess. Cathleen implies that Michael will surely die but that he and his fellow martyrs will "live forever," nonetheless, in her ballads:

> They shall be alive for ever,
> They shall be speaking for ever,
> The people shall hear them for ever.

Maurya's final words, "No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied" (106), echo and refute the promise of Cathleen Ni Houlihan.

Synge rejects the spiritual optimism of Cathleen Ni Houlihan by retaining the pagan conception of the original
goddess as an embodiment of nature's amoral duality of creation and destruction. The Gaels interpreted the hag's power to destroy as a necessary, though brutal, aspect of nature. Nature's regeneration offers no personal fulfillment ("immortality") but rather operates as part of a cycle that is beyond the individual human will. Maurya's daughters look at pieces of Michael's clothes and comment on the stark and final obliteration of life: "Isn't it a pitiful thing when there is nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?" (101).

Like the original Caillech, Synge's Maurya comes to accept that death, far from being a threshold for spiritual-patriotic transcendence, is simply part of the indifferent cycles of nature, the sea --and by extension, herself. Maurya reaches this understanding through a vision by a spring well. Her preternatural knowledge of the death of both sons reveals yet another link to the original goddess, who is a seer --she 'knows'-- and usually engages in visions (Gimbautus 210). (The hag goddess was also often found near a well trying to solicit young warriors.) In Maurya's vision her two sons appear before her, one dead and one doomed, confirming the ineluctable power of the sea to destroy even the most virile members of a human community. She returns to the cottage shaken and keening but slowly begins coming to terms with what she has seen, and its implications:

Maurya. [Starts so that her shawl falls back from her head and shows her white tossed hair . . . ] I've seen
the fearfulllest thing any person has seen since the day
Bride Dara seen the dead man with the child in his arms.
I went down to the spring well, and I stood there
saying a prayer to myself. Then Bartley came along, and
he riding on the red mare with the grey pony behind him.
[She puts up her hands, as if to hide something from her
eyes.] The Son of God spare us, Nora! . . . I looked up
then, and I crying, at the grey pony, and there was
Michael upon it. . (102-3)

At this critical point when Maurya accepts the sea's
destructive power, a subtle but essential stage direction
shows how the forces of nature are made manifest in Maurya's
body, a brief description which turns out to be a striking
evocation of the goddess archetype. The exposure of the
"white tossed hair" reveals the one concrete visual
correlation between Maurya's body and the sea. Errol Durbach
explains:

The whiteness of death, of the coffin boards, of the surf
and the rocks against which Bartley is dashed are all
subsumed in the old woman's spray-like hair as she
confronts for the first time in the drama, the
interrelationship of life and death as a single
process.(370)

Maurya's body, like the body of the Caillech in sovereignty
myths, functions as a visible presence through which Synge
articulates the invisible rhythms of the natural world, the
double movement towards both life and death. Maurya is, like
the sea, the womb of life; however, in giving a life which
must inevitably come to an end she is also the source of

78For comparison, refer Back to "Caillech Bheara" on
page 14, which presents the voice of a hag who associates her
physical demise with the natural features of an ancient land.
death. By the end of the play Maurya comes to speak about the
death of her sons in the same sentence as their births:

I've had . . . six sons in this house--six fine men, 
though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them 
and they coming into the world --and some of them were 
found and some of them were not found, but they're gone 
now the lot of them . . .(103)

Synge humanizes the archetypal goddess by showing how 
Maurya's human suffering, her physical and psychological 
pain, is an inseparable dimension of her Caillech duality, 
expressed in her pain at her sons' birth and her pain at 
their deaths. In Maurya, Synge both humanizes the 
emotionless goddess and restores her direct associations to 
nature's creation-destruction duality.

Maurya achieves a detached awareness of the duality of 
motherhood during her vision --which explains her sudden 
accepting attitude toward her son's inevitable death. The 
prominent symbols in the vision link life and death into a 
single process; dead men hold living children and a somber 
grey pony runs behind the red pony of youth and vitality. 
The intermingling of the living and dead exists in less 
heightened symbolic forms elsewhere in the play. The dead 
are clothed in fresh garments while the living wear the 
clothes of the dead; bread baked for Bartley is eaten by 
those who make his coffin; the table that women knead their 
bread on is washed down for Bartley's dead body. Maurya 
finally faces this duality in her vision by the well, when
she confronts her own participation in the cycle of nature -- manifested in her spray-like hair.

By the end of the play Synge expands Maurya's consciousness to match her newly assumed symbolic and universal dimensions. At the beginning of the play she is concerned only with Michael's fate. By the end of the play she engages in formal speeches about the fate of all sons and the grief of all mothers. In her last speech her reference expands twice from her own sons to all of mankind:

May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley's soul, and on Michael's soul, and on the souls of Seamus and Patch, and Stephen and Shawn (bending her head); and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world... 

Michael has a clean burial in the far north, by the grace of Almighty God. Bartley will have a fine coffin out of the white boards, and a deep grave surely. What more can we want than that? No man at all can be living for ever, and we must be satisfied. (106)

In this formal speech over the body of her dead son Maurya also conjures up iconographic associations to the Christian archetype of Mary, the grieving, universal Mother of mankind --a figure that Maurya's name suggests. The sorrow that overwhelms her consciousness at this point in the play evokes a more striking affinity with the grieving spirit of the Virgin Mary than the emotionless pagan "killer". She keens over one son lying before her, but her grief encompasses the previous deaths of five sons and is extended, through the symbolic ritual of keening, to all dead sons. Errol Durbach underscores the presence of Christian archetypes in Synge's
play by drawing attention to the scattered boards and nails and clothes and the "broken" mother -- all evocative of a Christian context, "loosened from their original content and reassembled in a wholly naturalist medium" (364). In the closing scene Maurya evokes a combination of Christian and Gaelic archetypes that infused peasant society in Ireland.

It is Maurya's pagan vision of life overlaid with Christian elements that most powerfully embodies a pre-modern Irishness. Maurya clearly represents not merely the Irish peasant, but also the Irish peasant trapped between two cultures --the ancient pre-Christian one and the new one of the priests and bishops. Robin Skelton calls Maurya as "culturally confused" as the peasants Synge described in Aran and the Glens of Wicklow:

She holds to the old ways, getting holy water from the pagan well, and believing in the efficacy of the old blessings, yet finds herself referring constantly to the spiritual world in terms of the Christian "Almighty God." (J.M. Synge 37)

This conflict dramatically expresses itself in the way characteristics of the pagan sovereignty goddess and the Christian Mary manifest themselves and collide in Maurya's character throughout the course of the play. Maurya's connection to the pagan Caillech has already been extensively delineated, but her ability to evoke the Mary archetype is important as well. Maurya's defiance of fate places her in opposition to the Christian acceptance of God's purpose. Mary accepts all; Maurya cannot. Mary submits; Maurya
unconsciously takes command at a crucial point in the play and resists the powers larger than herself by attempting to stop Bartley—even by undermining him herself through the denial of bread and blessing. Mary never asserts herself this way.

The ultimate dominance of Maurya's pagan vision over its Christian elements is expressed in her attitude towards the embodiment of official Christianity in the play, the young priest who looks forward to compensation for suffering in an after world. Maurya as mother, who invests herself entirely in the creation and nurture of life in this world, cannot. Maurya's understanding of her world goes even deeper and is older than Christianity; the god of the sea is older and more indifferent. Maurya is old enough to outlive the menfolk of three generations; the priest is "young" enough to misread the pre-Christian context of the sea's power. When Nora mentions the priest's reminder about God's compassion, Maurya says, "It's little the likes of him knows of the sea"(103). The unfolding events that lead to Bartley's death prove her right.

79Although subject to the limitations of literary realism, Maurya's longevity echoes the tradition of the ancient goddess, regarded as both the mother and the spouse of the rightful king and the ancestress of the royal line (Mac Cana, "Aspects" 88). Maurya is old enough to transcend generations of the male line, for she outlives her father, husband, and sons.
Christian compensation only alleviates the sense of loss in a superficial sense; Maurya faces a starker, more fundamental, pagan sense of death—and the nothingness beyond it. Synge's remarks in *The Aran Islands* reinforce the limitation of Christian belief to explain such a difficult life: "There was irony in these words of atonement and Catholic belief spoken by voices still hoarse with the cries of pagan desperation." Indeed, when the priest's words are first quoted in the play, rather than evoking the omniscience of God's word, they seem humanly transient, undercut by the looming presence of the sea, interrupted first by a door blown open "by a gust of wind" and a second time by Cathleen's inquiry about the condition of the sea—a more precise indicator of her brother's fate (96). The young priest has a fixed role in society, offering advice and ritual, but his services provide more social utility (ceremony) than spiritual understanding. Maurya, in contrast, understands the forces of the universe that preexisted good or evil.

In his Maurya figure, Synge does not dismiss the Christianity that was so pervasive in the majority of Irish lives in the way that Yeats's purely pagan Cathleen Ni Houlihan did. Maurya, as Mother Ireland, encompasses a vision more ancient than the priest's but without hostility to the religion he represents. The struggle between pagan and Christian forces in *Riders to the Sea* ends in victory for
paganism, but this should not be considered as intentional blasphemy, nor as satire on Irish peasant attitudes. Sensing this, the Dublin audience did not object to Synge's treatment of Christianity as they vociferously did to Yeats's treatment in *The Countess Cathleen*, where the Countess was perceived as a replacement for Mary set in opposition to Catholicism. In Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Deirdre, Yeats by-passed the issue of religion altogether by going back to ancient Gaelic figures. This retrogressive approach was impossible for Synge's dramatization of a realistic present-day figure. As a result, Synge openly combined essential paganism with elements and rituals of Christianity in his figure. Unlike the authors of other figures who attempt to cover the jagged seams in such a combination, however, Synge allowed the allegorical pagan dimensions and Christian dimensions to collide openly. Christian ritual is superimposed on a pagan essence. The paganism of the Maurya figure provided a non-sectarianism that all the Irish in the audience could relate to, including Yeats's and Synge's Ascendancy class.
Synge's celebration of the peasantry as the embodiment of true "Irishness" was shared by other Anglo-Irish writers of the Ascendancy class, including Lady Gregory and Yeats. But what the relatively non-controversial play Riders to Sea fails to reveal is that Synge, unlike many of his co-writers, did not confuse celebration with idealization. Maurya was accepted by contemporary critics because her characterization did not challenge standard conventions of morality, especially those governing the delicate subject of female sexuality. With Nora in In the Shadow of the Glen, on the other hand, Synge moved into the riskier territory of naturalistically representing a young woman before desire is wilted by old age. Critics, especially those with a nationalist bias, found the mother figure more agreeable because her sexuality, where it existed at all, was safely directed toward procreation. By the turn-of-the-century there were far more mothers than maidens on the pages of the

80In his famous preface to The Playboy of the Western World Synge states: "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy" (Plays and Poems 174). This attitude is reflected in his rejection of Yeats's early drama in what he described as an "unmodern, ideal, breezy [sic], springdayish, Cuchulainoid National Theatre" (Letters 76).
contemporary nationalist press (Hywel 26). Synge challenged this trend with Nora Burke -- the first sexualized peasant woman of the National Theatre. In fact, *In the Shadow of the Glen* is a play in which the expression of a vigorous female sexuality is central. Nora's loveless marriage to the "always cold" (83) and much older Dan Burke has deprived her of children, brought her to the horrors of loneliness in an isolated Wicklow cottage, and to the unending drudgery of its work. Nora searches out male companionship to counter her oppressive circumstances and satisfy her passionate sexuality. After her suspicious husband feigns death, Nora searches out her lover Michael who is a mere shadow of her previous and now dead love interest, Patch Darcy. By the end of the play her indiscretions are exposed and she is turned out of doors with the poetic Tramp, who can compensate, if only partly, for the hardships of homelessness with his "fine bit of talk."

The psychological complexity of Nora's sexual desire makes her an unlikely candidate for an Ireland figure. Furthermore, Synge's conception of Nora as an Ireland figure has little to do with the evocation of Gaelic archetypes central to Maurya (and Cathleen Ni Houlihan).81 Nora is a

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81 Eugene Benson claims that Nora is connected to the Gaelic archetype Sheelagh na Gig, the embodiment of sexuality and death, desire and horror (15). Indeed, many speeches emphasize Nora's intense awareness of the imminence of death as well as the use of her sexuality to overcome isolation and the threat of old age.
radical departure from the formulaic generality (i.e. mother or chaste maiden or poor old woman) that defines the conventional femininity of traditional Ireland figures. By advancing a naturalistic representation of a peasant woman with its attendant complexity of motives and desires, Synge provides an anti-figure in Nora, a negation of a rhetorical stereotype through the restoration of a female subjectivity. Synge individualizes the concept of "Irish womanhood" --a concept that had become trapped in the idealized yet powerfully pervasive figure of Mother Ireland. The Ireland figure served as an expected guide for real Irish women: the columns of Sinn Fein and the pamphlets of the Gaelic League exalted Irish women who served the nationalist cause best by modeling themselves on emblematic mothers or desexualized spiritual maidens.82 Nora's characterization challenges the artificiality of figures that claimed to be representatives of Irish womanhood yet denied the "realism" of female individuality, especially the expression of sexuality.

It is not surprising that Synge would create an anti-figure in 1902 for he had defined his nationalism in opposition to the Ireland trope since adolescence. Born into a long established Protestant landlord family, Synge rejected his family faith (extreme form of Protestantism) and politics (aggressively anti-Catholic and pro-British) and turned to

82Refer to Elin Ap Hywel's "Elise and the Great Queens of Ireland" for a detailed study of this topic.
what he called, in a notebook of 1896-98, "a temperate nationalism":

Everything Irish became sacred . . . and had a charm that was neither quite human nor divine, rather perhaps as if I had fallen in love with a goddess, although I had still sense enough not to personify Erin in the patriotic verse I now sought to fabricate. (Quoted in Skelton, "Personal" 48)

Ireland was already gendered a female "goddess" in Synge's mind, but the conventional Erin trope, the statement implies, was too limited and narrow to express his own love of Irish things. The tension between Synge's nationalism and conventional political thought and symbology reached its first climax when he resigned from Maud Gonne's "revolutionary and semi-military movement" (Letters 46), the Association Irlandaise in 1897. The extremism of Maud Gonne's group no doubt disillusioned Synge, but he clashed with nationalism in other profound ways. Irish Nationalism was fueled by the same middle class notions of respectability, self-control, frugality, and devotion to duty that accompanied other nineteenth-century nationalist movements in Europe (Mosse 5). In Ireland strict codes of morality were reinforced by Catholicism, the religion of the majority of the Irish peasantry and middle-class. The notebooks of Synge's early nationalist period indicate that it was precisely the narrow puritanism of Irish bourgeois morality that most disturbed him about his country (Skelton, "Personal" 48). Contrary to many like Yeats, who considered
him "unfitted to think a political thought," however, Synge was not totally excluding himself from the cultural/political regeneration of Ireland. In the letter of resignation from Maud Gonne's group, Synge goes on to say that he wished "to work in [his] own way for the cause of Ireland" as he had his own "theory of regeneration for Ireland" (Letters 47). In this letter Synge does not specifically define his "theory of regeneration," but the consistent and urgent exploration of themes involving personal freedom in his work gives us a strong indication of what he meant. Synge used his controversial female peasant characters to dramatize the belief that the revolution required (although not desired) in Ireland was of the sensual --and frequently female-- individual. The controversy surrounding his presentation of the sensual Nora Burke indicates the intense resistance the Dublin audience had towards the sexualizing of the female figure in Irish art --especially the public art of a "national" theater.

In the Shadow of the Glen presents a community in which sexual desire is subordinate to economic necessity. Nora

83 Robin Skelton proves Yeats to be incorrect by making the distinction between political activism and political "attitude." By resigning from Maud Gonne's group, Synge was rejecting the former but not the latter: "it seems a bit unlikely that a man whose plays aroused so much ire in so many politicians should have no political attitudes at all"("Personal" 47). Skelton delineates Synge's political influences (especially the socialism of William Morris) and "political program."
agreed to a marriage with an older man but realizes her mistake when she contemplates the cost of security. The misty grim environment is a dramatic externalization of her relationship to Dan. He is just as cold and empty as the world around: "Maybe cold would be no sign of death with the like of him, for he was always cold, every day since I knew him ... and every night, stranger" (83). Deprived of the sexual warmth she yearns for, Nora, it is implied, has found satisfaction with the now dead Patch Darcy and intends to do so with young Michael Dara. Desire revolts against a repression enforced by economic necessity, and it is precisely through the assertion of her sexual impulse that Nora is able to retain her individualism. In an assertion of her need for vitality and passion, Nora leaves with the Tramp, whose imaginative talk is the richest embodiment of sensuality in her stark world, while the "community microcosm of Dan and Michael Dara settle back into slothful security" (Cairns and Richards, Writing 77). The impending hardships of a life on the road bring Nora's liberation and the play to a problematic conclusion.85 The alternative to a

84As Janet Nolan observes, the half century after the Famine brought with it new attitudes toward sexuality and social relationships: "As the arranged match replaced romance as the preferred prelude to matrimony, sex and procreation were subordinated to the family's economic well-being. Strict gender segregation and sexual puritanism both within the home and in the community as a whole replaced the friendly interaction formerly enjoyed by men and women in daily life" (35).

85Nora's fate of homelessness is a realistic outcome of her defiant actions: "There was no toleration [in the
loveless marriage is less than ideal, but Synge is unequivocal, nevertheless, in his attack on the moralistic materialism which denies Nora the right to self-expression within the institution of marriage.

The first production of *In the Shadow of the Glen* in October 1903 met with disturbances in the theater, prompted by advance claims that the situation it presented, in which a country woman leaves her husband to go off with a tramp, was an insult to Irish womanhood. Of all the five major Dublin newspapers only *The Daily Express* had favorable comments and found satisfaction in the realism of Nora's characterization. Even *The Irish Times*, which catered to people without any nationalist interest, expressed its dissatisfaction with the "excessively distasteful" play (Greene and Stephens 158). Many critics judged the play by an aesthetic and ethical standard rather than a political one. *The Freeman's Journal* asserted that Synge was "preoccupied with the sex problem" (Hogan and Kilroy, *Abbey* 19), and most critics agreed by dismissing Nora's assertive sexuality as an extraneous and prurient element in what was supposed to be high-minded national drama. Nora's scandalous behavior was seen as a reversion to the sensationalism of popular theater. Although these objections seem excessive in hindsight,

post-famine peasant community] for sexual deviation, and young women who strayed from the prescribed path found no social safety nets for themselves or their illegitimate children" (Nolan 35).
critics were reacting to a revolutionary new element in serious drama: the naturalistic representation of female desire in a realistic character. Synge's foregrounding of sexual energy is undeniable both in the text and in production. Nora's sensuality reveals itself through the dialogue: "...and if it's a power of men I'm after knowing they were fine men" (89). Both actresses associated with the role of Nora, Maire Ni Shiubhlaigh and Molly Allgood, under Synge's direction emphasized her sexuality (Montague 54). Synge did not deny that the sex element was central to his conception of Irish women characters. On the contrary, its prevalence in his plays makes the free expression of sexuality seem the likely focus of his "regeneration for Ireland." Nevertheless, Synge vehemently denied the charges of prurience and countered them by claiming that he was merely "restoring" a natural balance to the Irish character that had been long absent in Irish letters:

Heaven forbid that we should ever have a morbid, sex-

86 In Women in Modern Drama, Gail Finney explores the unique prominence of female characters in turn-of-the-century European drama and traces the revolutionary impulses among some playwrights to create sexually "liberated" heroines while other playwrights, just as enthusiastically, modeled reactionary "hysterics" and femme fatales as a defense against large-scale social changes. In her chapter on Synge (pp. 105-122), Finney examines the elements in Synge's heroines that put him in the avant-garde and, inevitably, in conflict with the Dublin public. Theater, after all, is "a public and social institution, and therefore has been historically the most conservative of all the arts" (16).
obsessed drama in Ireland, not because we have any peculiarly, blessed sanctity which I utterly deny . . . but because it is bad drama and is played out. On the French stage the sex-element of life is given without the other balancing elements; on the Irish stage the people you agree with want the other elements without sex. I restored the sex element to its natural place, and the people were so surprised they saw the sex only. (Quoted in Greene and Stephens 169)

Synge met resistance not only from those who wished to keep the messy issue of sex out of serious theater but also those who cherished the popular idealized version of the Ireland figure and were unwilling to see it replaced by a more natural --i.e. sensual-- model of Irish womanhood. It was the latter issue that was either directly or implicitly at the source of many nationalist attacks against Nora. The two newspapers which attacked Synge most severely had a nationalist cast --**The Irish Independent** and **The United Irishman** (Skelton, "Personal" 50). The latter was founded as a weekly paper by Arthur Griffith, the editor of the least

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**87**The Irish Independent was founded to support Parnell at the time of the disintegration of the Nationalist party and his fall from power. It continued to support parliamentary nationalism and the gaining of Irish freedom by constitutional means (Skelton, "Personal" 50-1).

**88**Arthur Griffith became politically influential in Ireland by helping to set up the Free State in 1922, when he became its first president. During the time of our discussion he was known as the editor of the nationalist newspaper **The United Irishman**, but he believed neither in violence nor in the establishment of a republic. He founded the Sinn Fein party in order to support a movement for total independence and a dual monarchy on the Hungarian model. Although it seems easy in hindsight to dismiss Griffith's arguments as narrow, one must recognize that his newspaper, 'despite a strong political bias was also a literary journal of high calibre, one that nurtured new literary talent, and most of the significant new Irish writers appeared in it. It
read of all Dublin newspapers but the most influential among the small group of extreme nationalists (Greene and Stephens 159). Griffith was one of the most eloquent nationalist critics, but it was his long public debate with Yeats over Synge's Nora, over the parameters within which a female Irish peasant could be represented in "national" art, that makes him a central player in our discussion. Not only did Griffith believe that Nora was a "strumpet," but he insisted that her corruption had a national dimension, that it could be extended to all Irish womanhood, and by implication all Irish manhood as well. Nora, one must remember, presented one year after _Cathleen Ni Houlihan_ (1902) and during a tense time of nationalist activity, embodied inescapable allegorical dimensions for a contemporary audience and therefore could not be separated from an expression of a

should also be noted that although Griffith vehemently attacked Synge's play he gave considerable space to its defenders' (Hogan and Kilroy, *Foundations* 76).

Yeats defiantly advanced Synge's position, while Synge remained silent except for one public response—a letter which Griffith neglected to publish—in which he matter-of-factly enclosed a copy of the Irish source for the play, told to him by an old man of Aran in 1898 (Greene and Stephens 187). We have no record of Synge's response to the controversy since he stopped keeping a diary five days before _In the Shadow of a Glen_ was performed (161). But there does exist a short piece "National Drama: A Farce," in which he satirizes the attacks against the play and provides his own definition of national drama: "An Irish drama that is written in Ireland about Irish people ... will and must be national in so far as it exists at all ... If you do not like a work that is passing itself off as national art you had better show that it is not art. If it is good art it is vain for you to try and show that it is not national" (Synge, *Collected* III 220-6).
national identity. The fact that Nora was specifically interpreted as a "new" Ireland figure is evident in the numerous comparisons made—by both sides of the debate—to previous Ireland figures. Yeats analyzed the attack on Nora by recounting the controversy that surrounded the reception of his own Countess Cathleen. 

Griffith claimed that the National Theatre was attempting to "substitute Kathleen ni Houlihan by the Widow of Ephesus [Griffith's derisive name for Nora]" (Hogan and Kilroy, *Laying the Foundations* 79). Griffith's fear seemed to be reinforced by the program of the first production: *In the Shadow of the Glen* followed *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on the same bill. Once Synge's character is put in the context of a substantial history of politicized female figures, one can begin to understand the complexity of the objections against Nora's sexuality, objections based not merely on Victorian propriety but on the tradition of representing the integrity of the Irish nation in a female emblem.

As was shown in the first chapter, the Irish progressively desexualized the Ireland figure in order to make her symbolically inaccessible to the brute material force of the British colonizers. The Irish employed this process to combat Britian's rhetorical aggression as well:

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90This comparison can be found in a well-known essay "The Theatre, the Pulpit, and the Newspapers" in which he answered the first attacks on Synge's play (*Explorations* 119-23).
to express colonial purpose, the British employed images of the sexual debasement, violation, and marriage of the "tender colonial bride" Ireland. From the early sixteenth century English writers figured Ireland as a beautiful maiden, as a virgin inviting the penetration of virile explorers (Jones and Stallybrass 164). By the end of the century the contradictions and problems in the colonial relationship manifested themselves in an elaboration of the metaphor. Luke Gernon, for example, writes in his Discourse of Ireland (1620):

Ireland is at all poynts like a young wench that hath green sickness . . . She is very fair of visage, and hath a smooth skinn of tender grass. Indeed she is somewhat freckled (as the Irish are) [with] some parts darker than others.(3)

What seemed like pure virgin land is now spotted by corruption, reflecting the ongoing difficulties of colonization. The dark spots are probably references to Ireland's bogs and forests --problematic areas where rebels lived. Ireland's "green sickness" reinforces the genderized metaphor because the condition was associated with "the pallor symptomatic of a wandering womb, supposedly needing to be fixed in place by intercourse"(Jones and Stallybrass 164). Whatever the problems of colonization, the figuration of Ireland as a beautiful other to the imperial Britain continued to (and past) the time of Synge's play. English cartoonists of the late nineteenth century represented Ireland as a beautiful, dark-haired woman called 'Erin' or
'Hibernia.' Civilized courtship replaced physical force as the central metaphor for the relationship between the two countries; this was, after all, the time of parliamentary rather than military struggle over Ireland. The rape metaphor that sixteenth-century English writers like Edmund Spenser mobilized is temporarily subdued and civilized, but the underlying message remains the same -- Britain's sexual possession of Erin. British illustrations portrayed Eire's indigenous suitors as unacceptable in order to make room for Britain as the true "mate" and the colonial relationship as the true marriage.91 The Fenian nationalist, for example, is portrayed with repellent simian features, while John Bull is comforting and protective. The sexual dynamics get even more complicated when the martial, man-like Britannia substitutes for John Bull as alternative "suitor."92

Most turn-of-the-century nationalists were aware of this line of representation and attempted to counteract it by promoting a de-sexualized, though still feminine, figure. The more ethereal and pure the Ireland figure could be kept the less she would be susceptible to the brute force (rape) or seduction of English power. In Nora, Synge restores sexuality to the figure and radically alters the formula that had underpinned the figure's representation since the advent of

91Refer to Illustration Figure 2.

92Refer to Illustration Figure 3 and 4, respectively.
colonialism. The result was disturbing for an audience accustomed to the denial of sexuality as a symbolic defense against the colonizer and many critics accused Synge of treasonous intentions by presenting a "flawed" female character to help the British in the propaganda war.

The figure's purity needed to be guarded in order to make her physically inaccessible to Irishmen as well. By the late nineteenth century a Victorian version of the Ireland figure had gained currency and provided the form that Synge was to contend with. To turn-of-the century Dubliners, Erin's physical vulnerability and passivity was a badge of her femininity and added to her delicate beauty. As a quintessential Victorian maiden, she had no sexual desire.93 L.P. Curtis describes the convention of Erin that Dublin cartoonists observed from the 1860s to World War I:

Erin was a stately as well as sad and wise woman . . . Her hair was long and dark, falling well down her back; eyes were round and melancholy, set in a face of flawless symmetry . . . Erin suggested all that was feminine, courageous and chaste about Irish womanhood, and she made an ideal Andromeda waiting to be rescued by a suitable Perseus. (75)

93The popular and influential Victorian physician Dr. William Acton typifies the accepted opinion of the age: "the majority of women (happily for them) are not much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind . . . As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desires of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions." William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857) (31).
In both visual and literary representations of Ireland figures during Synge's time, sexuality was offered only to be denied, for the desirable young maiden was "pure" and beyond the reach of the viewer's (and her own) base desires: "'Woman' could only ever be an eternal essence beyond the physicality which suggested other, darker, demands and desires" (Cairns and Richards, *Writing* 77). Sexual desire in the reader/viewer is sublimated into a nobler, spiritual love for the feminized abstraction of nation. Nationalist rhetoric redirected men's passions to a higher patriotic purpose by projecting a stereotype of human beauty which transcended sensuousness, especially a supposedly "passionless" beauty for women (Mosse 10-11).

In Nora, Synge offered an earthy sexuality based in Nora's own sense of physicality. Critics expected a figure akin to Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, who employs sexual phrases ("With all the lovers that brought me their love I never set out the bed for any" [84]) but redirects them for political purposes. They would also have accepted a non-political though non-sexual figure like Maurya. In the context of such expectations it is not all that difficult to understand the disruption that Nora, embodying such a potent sexuality governed by the force of her own subjective will, caused. The immediacy of live performance and the intimacy of the small "naturalistic" production of 1903 only exacerbated the shock. Just as Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan
derived her power from the transposition of the Ireland figure to the immediate and communal experience of theater, so did Nora provoke negative feelings of the same intensity. But unlike the stylized and otherworldly Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the realism of Nora's characterization further intensified the powerful effect of live theater.

The live and realistic image of Maurya keening over a naturalistic corpse became too distractingly morbid for critics who were accustomed to the popular sentimentalized 'Pieta' version of Mother Ireland. Maurya's all too realistic grief challenged the static and "noble" grief of conventional figures. Nora's complexity is even more realistic, her personality and sexuality even more defined, and, consequently, nationalist critics, intuitively sensing the power of realism on the stage, responded defensively by trying to prove that although Nora was realistically presented she was not 'typical' and, therefore, ineligible as an Irish figure. According to them, Nora's realism offers the promise of accurate representation, while her scandalous behavior undermines the authenticity of that representation. Her realism is false and misleading and therefore she is worse than simply ineffectual -- she is a "lie." Once again Griffith expresses this view most competently. In the following comparison between Nora and the ethereal Countess Cathleen (of whom he approved), note the way in which Griffith sets up a standard of typicality to combat the
subversion of Synge's realistic and dangerously defiant embodiment of Irish womanhood:

There is no real similarity. When Mr. Yeats drew the Countess Cathleen he drew her as a being apart. The outcry against the Countess Cathleen --where it was not dishonest--was ignorant. Mr. Synge --or else his play has no meaning-- places Norah Burke before us as a type --"a personification of an average"--and Norah Burke is a lie. (Hogan and Kilroy, *Foundations* 79)

According to this view, a realistic figure like Nora had to meet certain standards that the stylized Countess Cathleen did not. A realistic figure must be representative of a "type" or it loses its legitimacy --"has no meaning." Nora provided a realistic model of uncontrolled sexuality and thus threatened the possibility of such disruptive impulses in real life. It became all too important to deny that Nora was typical of Irish women.

Much argument centered in the question of Nora's "typicality," an argument subsequently leveled against all Synge's peasant characters. Phrases such as "a typical picture," "the standard," and "average peasants" abound in reviews of Synge's play. Daniel Corkery chastises Synge's untypical "freak" versions of peasants. Typicality denoted an authentic Irishness, a proximity to the 'real thing' which was conveniently the safe, moderate 'average.' Critics meticulously sifted the play to find details that were

94 These phrases can be found in Hogan and Kilroy *Abbey*, pp. 19, 21, 45, and 45, respectively.
questionably Irish --greetings, phrases, manners, etc.-- to undermine Nora's authenticity. But the most glaring un-Irish element, according to nationalists, was the moral vision governing the play, especially the central female character. Note the bitter conviction with which Arthur Griffith dismisses the character of Nora in January 1905 (almost a year and a half after the first production) when controversy over the play again broke out:

Mr. Synge's Norah Burke is not an Irish Norah Burke. His absurd ignorance of the Irish peasant is shown in every line of the play. Mr Yeats never heard an Irish tramp in Wicklow or elsewhere address a peasant-woman as "Lady of the House," nor did he, Mr. Synge or any other human being, ever meet in Ireland a peasant-woman of the type of Norah Burke --a woman devoid of all conception of morality, decency and religion. She is Greek --a Greek of Greece's most debased period, and to dress her in an Irish costume and call her Irish is not only not art, but it is an insult to the women in Ireland. (Hogan and Kilroy, Abbey 12)

Many nationalists joined Griffith in the effort to prove that Nora's assertive sexuality was so rare in Irish society that it rendered her a ridiculous and unconvincing example of an Irish woman, let alone a typical example of Irish womanhood. Irish women, it was asserted, were the most virtuous women in the world. The typicality of a straying Irish wife would have been difficult to accept even if it were a statistical truth --which was most likely not the case. When the standard of typicality dominated the public debate, Nora and Synge were at a great disadvantage. A few critics, however, took Yeats and Synge's side in the debate and defended the
"essence" of truth in the play rather than the typicality of its substance.\textsuperscript{95}

There were legitimate reasons why a contemporary audience searched for Irish types in a character like Nora. The National Theatre, after all, promised to replace the stereotypical 'stage Irishman' with noble Irish heroes. Since the theatre was still new by the first production of \textit{In the Shadow of the Glen} (1903), characters were judged as representative of the theatre's direction. The National Theatre was, after all, an important new public forum for Irish art --and, patriots hoped, for nationalist propaganda as well. The latter argued that the word "National" in the title of Synge's theatre implied a national art form and, by extension, (acceptable) national character types. Several critics scolded the theatre by saying that if it continued to produce inappropriate, un-Irish characters like Nora, it should take the "National" out of its title and accept the freedom --and marginalization-- of an art theatre. According to this view, national art was responsible for producing

\textsuperscript{95}\textit{The Daily Press} was one example: "It has qualities which mark it out as quite apart from, and in some sense beyond, the usual type of production at the National Theatre. There is a convincing ring of truth, not necessarily in the sense that the characters represented are typical of Irish life; but truth, as meaning that the actions and characters are quite possible in real life, consequently in Irish life" (Hogan and Kilroy, \textit{Foundations} 75).
dignified Irish 'types' to counter the negative ones propagated by the British.96

The Dublin audience was especially sensitive to the fact that Nora was a flawed peasant figure since the peasant was a much idealized, almost sacred, symbol of Irish nationality during Synge's time. During the drive for independence, the Irish attempted to define their own national identity, to assert the shape of their Irishness in new Irish-controlled 'types' defined in opposition to the identity imposed by the colonizer. Nationalists (as well as many artists) responded by advancing a purity of image in the traditional Irish peasant which could identify and speak for the national spirit in its original and uncontaminated form:

The native culture is said to be agrarian, pastoral, innocent; the colonizer contaminates it with a way of life that is urban, materialistic and corrupt -- he is the serpent in the Celtic . . . Eden." (Innes, Devil's Mirror 26).

For many nationalist intellectuals who attacked Nora, the peasant showed forth "an image of the Irish in which the avoidance of the English vices was achieved through acceptance of the rigid moral guidelines of Irish Catholicism" (Cairns and Richards, Writing 71).97

96There existed a complex and often contradictory system of offensive images of the Irish that British colonial power propagated to either subtly or crudely justify Ireland's subjugation: in drama, the drunk and boisterous stage Irishman; in political cartoons and rhetoric, a simian-like Irishman; and in literature it was Matthew Arnold's effeminate, ineffectual Celt.
clear that Nora did not embody the moral vision that was required to make an acceptable peasant figure; furthermore, Synge's insistence on showing weaknesses in his peasant characters made him susceptible to the criticism that he was betraying the nationalist cause by reinforcing English attacks on Irish character. In the words of one critic, *In the Shadow of the Glen* "shows [Synge] to be as utterly a stranger to the Irish character as any Englishman who has yet dissected us for the enlightenment of his countrymen" (Hogan and Kilroy, *Foundations* 78).

In an attempt to deflect criticism, Yeats claimed that the peasants in Synge's plays "were not typical peasants -- that there was no necessity why a dramatist should select typical peasants"(Hogan and Kilroy, *Foundations* 45). The first part of Yeats's statement in which he refers to Synge is only partially true. It is true that Nora's rebellion is not typical; few individuals would have had the courage to defy the expectations of the small community upon which they were utterly dependent socially and economically. (Remember that Pegeen fails to rise to the challenge and rejects Christy when her community does.) But Nora's repressed condition was far too typical. The economic condition of

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97Although many nationalists considered themselves independent of the Church's political influence this did not make them independent of its moral influence --to the contrary. To non-religiously aligned nationalists like Arthur Griffith the absence of deference to the clergy meant that soundness in morals (and faith) had to proved all the more strongly in other ways.
many of the rural areas, especially those affected by the practice of familialism, where all personal desire was made to conform to financial considerations, was at the source of the widespread condition of loveless marriages. At the time Synge was writing, about 50% of Irish husbands were ten years older than their wives, and marriage for economic reasons rather than romance was the norm (Innes, Woman 52).

Synge directly observed these effects during his first travels to the west of Ireland. The Aran Islands contains scenes that evoke Nora's entrapment, scenes of sexual and personal waste. He writes of girls doomed to "drudgery" and notes that people in the Aran Islands "are nearly as far from the romantic moods of love as they are from the impulsive life of the savage" (III-IV 34). There is no

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98 Amongst the tenant farmers, sex was subsidiary to a more important, material, transaction—the passage of farms and dowries from generation to generation. Studies indicate the enormous energy devoted to regulating the forms in which sexuality could disturb the system of familialism (Connolly 214-18). Cairns and Richards explore the nationalist construct of "Woman" within the context of a familist economy which was dependent on the proscription of sexual activity outside marriage and the rejection of the sensations of the body and sensual pleasure. "Even where extra-marital pregnancies or elopements took place small farmers could not comprehend that these might be driven by desire rather than greed for land or dowries" (Writing 61).

99 K.H. Connell's influential study Irish Peasant Society shows how post-famine prohibitions on courtship and the segregation of sexes left boys and girls disinclined to make their own matches, acquiescent instead in their fathers' choice. Connell quotes George Moore: "'If you do not let them walk about the lanes and make their own marriages, they marry for money'" (159).
"walking out" (courtship) on the islands, only marriage. Synge's friend Michael is "unaware" of the half-naked women on the Galway Beach, but his interest in a horse is "intense" (I-II, 92). Synge's observations underscore that Nora is typical in her repression but atypical in her strength of defiance. As a figure for the "regeneration" of Ireland she represents the (imperfect) possibility for spiritual freedom. It would be excessive to claim that Synge wanted Irish women to copy Nora's actions; instead, the question seems to be one of recognition that sensual desire is a fundamental element of human dignity and no economic or religious force should be allowed to stifle it. The ambitious scope of Nora's characterization was not lost on John Butler Yeats, who wrote a short review of the play in which he emphatically states, "Mr. Synge has attacked our Irish institution, the loveless marriage" (Hogan and Kilroy, Foundations 76).

Nationalists could not realistically deny the less than ideal situation of Irish marriages, but they consistently viewed Ireland's problems in the context of historical oppression. That is why it is likely that the most disturbing aspect of Synge's attack on Irish institutions was the implication that oppression was self-inflicted; that there was an even more profound enslavement than British imperial power --the enslavement of the self. Indeed, Synge's play does not explore the historical circumstances
that caused the destitution of rural areas. *In the Shadow of a Glen*, in common with Synge's other plays, "represses" the brutal facts of "famine, eviction, military repression and landlordism, the characteristic facts of late nineteenth century Irish rural existence for the peasantry" (Deane, *Celtic* 59). Although the poverty of the rural community is an essential part of the play, it is never explored in the context of oppressive political authority. Synge is less concerned with the causes of deprivation than the consequences which are experienced more intensely by Irish women, who are more vulnerable to restrictive codes of behavior caused by economic and social policies like familialism. Female characters like Nora are less victims of economic oppression than of sexual (and spiritual) oppression. The former was much easier to link directly to the evil of colonialism, the latter was imbedded in the

100Although colonial issues are repressed in the plays, Synge was not unaware of them and explored them in other works. For example, he wrote a series of articles for *The Manchester Guardian* in 1905 in which he described in detail the conditions and issues surrounding the deprivation of rural areas as a consequence of the Famine, British policy with regard to Irish trade, and an outmoded and harsh feudal system sustained by the landlord class.

101According to Janet Nolan, "Women were affected more than men by the intensified sexual segregation of post-Famine society. . . . while social networks outside of the home existed for men, none developed for women. Women's lives had become so narrow, in fact, that their attendance at mass on Sundays was their only opportunity to mingle with neighbors" (36-7). Under these social prohibitions, women experienced growing isolation not only from men but also other women (26).
limitations of human nature and the stifling traditions of the local community. Seamus Deane describes how Synge is able to circumvent the issue of colonialism: "Synge aestheticizes the problem of oppression by converting it into the issue of heroism. The oppression is finally understood as self-inflicted by the community" (Celtic 60). The effects of destitution are not necessarily remedied by political programs but rather by the heroic defiance of the individual will to carve out an autonomous space for the expression of his/her sensuality or imagination. In the play this autonomy is represented by the Tramp, who exists outside rural economic structures and can pursue an imaginative life by cultivating his "fine bit of talk." Nora's escape from domestic confinement occurs when she joins forces with the Tramp at the end of the play.

Nora's assertion of the self over society can be interpreted in the context of Romanticism, which claims the superiority of the individual self over the norms of the restrictive world. Maurya is Synge's tragic Ireland figure embodying the cultural essence of primitive Ireland; in Nora

102K.H. Connell explores the elements in the Irish peasant's environment that made sexual gratification and marriage suspect. The system of land inheritance made restrictions on marriage and sexuality a necessity. Connell's discussion of the clergy's contribution to restrictions on courtship and sexuality is especially enlightening and can be found in the last essay of his book, "Catholicism and Marriage in the Century After the Famine" (113-160).
Synge presents the first Romantic Ireland figure. Joan Templeton claims that Synge found the romantic struggle of the individual particularly poignant in Irish women:

From first to last it is the conflicts of the women in his plays that embody the possibilities for this freedom, and, more particularly, it is in the drama of their personal struggle that Synge voiced his lament for the impoverishment, both spiritual and sociopolitical, of puritan, Philistine Ireland. (152)

The liberation of Synge's Romantic heroine, however, is tempered by a strong tone of irony. The Tramp's lyrical outburst about the birds and songs that will greet their life on the road is undercut by Nora's simple but realistic reply about the harsh conditions of homelessness. Clear-eyed and bitter, Nora has no illusions about her alternative to a loveless marriage. The romanticism of escape is tempered by the reality of cold and hunger that accompanies homelessness.103

Nevertheless, this Ireland figure, this indirect descendent of the sovereignty goddess, is coupled not with an exemplary representative of the community but an outsider -- the "stranger." One must remember that the maiden-hag-maiden cycles of the ancient sovereignty goddess were governed by a

103Dan sadistically reminds Nora that life on the road will entail begging, prostitution, and physical demise: "Let her walk round the like of Peggy Cavanagh below, and be begging money at the cross-roads, or selling songs to the men. To Nora. Walk out now, Nora Burke, and its soon you'll be getting old with that life, I'm telling you; it's soon you're teeth'll be falling and your head'll be the like of a bush where sheep do be leaping a gap" (92).
transition from a misalliance (with an incompetent chief) to a proper alliance with the newly tested chief of a new line. In a move that mirrors that of the goddess, Nora renews herself by extricating herself from a misalliance with Dan Burke, the old and grotesque embodiment of moralistic materialism, and initiating an alliance with the Tramp, the embodiment of the Romantic Irish imagination. Dan's and Michael's talk is practical and unimaginative, focusing on morals and money, respectively. The Tramp's language is metaphorically rich, as is evident in his vivid description of the maddening effects of loneliness:

**Tramp speaking mournfully:** Is it myself, lady of the house, that does be walking round in the long nights, and crossing the hills when the fog is on them, the time a little stick would seem as big as your arm, and a rabbit as big as a bay horse, and a stack of turf as big as a towering church in the city of Dublin? If myself was easy afeared, I'm telling you, it's long ago I'd have been locked into the Richmond Asylum, or maybe have run up into the back hills with nothing on me but an old shirt, and been eaten by the crows the like of Patch Darcy —the Lord have mercy on him— in the year that's gone. (84)

Note how this passage evokes the romantic power of the imagination to create a larger more intensified version of reality, to turn a rabbit into a bay horse and a stack of turf into a towering church. Nora, like the Tramp, is acutely aware of the madness that lurks in the shadows of the isolated glen and uses imaginative speech to fill an existential void in her lonely world. Dan complains about this noise, about both Nora's ceaseless "talk" and the Tramp's "blathering"; at the end of the play Dan settles down
with the "quiet man" Michael Dara and assumes a new, "quiet life" (94). In an ironic twist two new alliances are formed: Dan and Michael embody "quiet" respectable Ireland while Nora and the Tramp embody the lyrical Romantic Ireland.

It is not difficult to see how Nora's heroic drive for individual fulfillment would offend nationalists who depended on the primacy of community to establish a cohesive national spirit and identity. Land League organization was based on strong communal ties, shared common assumptions, practices and beliefs --which also underpinned familialism. As in Cathleen Ni Houlihan, individuals were asked to sacrifice personal interest and sacrifice themselves to the good of the larger community, to Ireland's "cause." Plays that encouraged communal values, even in a non-political context, were enthusiastically promoted in nationalist circles: Douglas Hyde's Casadh an tSuga'in (The Twisting of the Rope) (1901) is a vivid example.104 The action of the play, set in a Munster farmhouse, supports the supremacy of communal values with the same enthusiasm that Synge's play

104Cairns and Richards claim that the play was central to the nationalist culture of the period because it idealized the Irish peasant character --and Gaelic language (Writing 86). The play was written and performed in Gaelic to a scenario provided by Yeats, translated into English by Lady Gregory and staged in 1901 by members of the Gaelic League Amateur Dramatic Society with Hyde in the principal role. The audience response was enthusiastic and Synge, who reported on the production for a French journal, observed: "the soul of a nation had entered the theatre" (Hogan and Kilroy, Literary 113).
critiques them. The community attempts to protect Oona from the attentions of the outsider Hanrahan, whose fascinating strangeness threatens to entice her away from her fiance, Seamus. This rural community proves intelligent and resourceful in ridding itself of Hanrahan's threatening unconventionality. Furthermore, Hyde gives the final word to Seamus, who asserts domestic and communal values: "Isn't it a fine thing for a man to be listening to the storm outside, and himself quiet and easy by the fire?" (148). The domestic connotations of the word "quiet" are positively asserted in contrast to the connotations of the same word at the end of Synge's play, where it is associated with the conformity and limited vision of Dan and Michael. It is important to note that even the folktale source of In the Shadow of a Glen, told to Synge by an Aran Islander in 1898, resolves the conflict between individual desire and social order with a similar affirmation of community values: the tramp helps the husband set up and punish the transgressing wife and lover (Aran Islands I-II, 37-40). When Arthur Griffith challenged the ending of Synge's play, he perceptively contested the authenticity of Nora's final defiant action which was, in fact, Synge's personal addition to the tale:

Mr. Synge's mode of attack is not one to be commended. Man and woman in rural Ireland, according to Mr. Synge, marry lacking love, and as a consequence, the woman proves unfaithful. Mr. Synge never found that in Irish life. Men and Women in Ireland marry lacking love, and live mostly in a dull level of amity. Sometimes they do not--sometimes the woman lives in bitterness --sometimes she dies of a broken heart --but she does not
Griffith concedes the existence of loveless marriages in Ireland, but he nevertheless unequivocally asserts the supremacy of the communal good over the freedom of the individual—especially the sexual freedom of the female individual, which in Nora's case was responsible for her rejection of husband, home, and finally her community.

To negate the force of Synge's radical new formulation and break from tradition, Arthur Griffith challenged the source of Nora's characterization and therefore her legitimacy (or more precisely, her illegitimacy) as an embodiment of Irish nationality. Implicit in Griffith's focused attack was the idea that a symbol that does not have an Irish history cannot be a legitimate Ireland figure. (That is why the Gaelic archetypes for Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Maurya were so essential to their formulation as Mother Ireland figures.) Griffith remained staunchly committed to his uncompromising view of Nora's non-Irish source despite Yeats's skillful arguments to the contrary. Griffith accuses Nora of being the Widow of Ephesus (by Petronius), a decadent "Greek dame," and not the character of an Irish folk story. The plot of In the Shadow of a Glen, according to Griffith, was invented by the wits of decadent Greece: "It is a staging of a corrupt version of the old-world libel on womankind—the "Widow of Ephesus", which was made current in Ireland by the hedge-schoolmaster" (Hogan and Kilroy,
The urgency of Griffith's accusations stems from the accurate realization that Nora was a radical departure from the tradition of the allegorical figure, that she was, in fact, the beginning of the deconstruction of the tradition which was continued by O'Casey, and was, therefore, unacceptable. The same argument over sources could have been leveled against the Greek and Roman elements in Maurya's characterization, but Synge's nonsexual old Caillech was not threatening to Griffith and other nationalists, for she did not challenge the primacy of community values nor the cherished allegorical formulas of Irish nationalism (even though Synge subtly and indirectly attacked them in the way Riders subverts the plot of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*). Synge did not engage directly in the debate with Griffith, but he recognized the importance of the argument. He subsequently tried to establish the Irishness of his peasants by pointing out that his sources for dialogue and character were found in his visits to the Aran Islands. Synge went to lengths to prove that his sources were purer than those of the accusatory nationalists because they existed in the living present rather than in a glorified literary recreation of the past. The sense of living sources is prominent in Synge's often quoted introduction to *Playboy of the Western World*.

105 For example, D.S. Neff has an article about Maurya entitled "Synge's Hecuba."
(1907), a play whose controversial reception paralleled that of *In the Shadow of the Glen*.

The rejection of Nora fed into the even more vehement protests against this later play, which reworked some of the same issues. All the female characters in *Playboy* display an assertive sexuality and are drawn to the vitality of the newcomer Christy, but social codes, embodied in the invisible Father Reilly, insist on the more dependable yet obsequious Shawn Keogh as the proper mate for Pegeen. The conflict between economic necessity and female sexual desire is provocatively explored in the earthy Widow Quin: she propositions Christy to be her lover and then, upon rejection, pressures him to provide her with goods ("a mountainy ram and a load of dung at Michaelmas" [209]) in exchange for her help. The play ends with the image of Pegeen anguished at the loss of the potential vitality that only Christy embodies, shawl over head, ironically resembling the weeping Ireland figure of contemporary cartoons. This image of frustration and regret at the denial of desire is in a sense more dangerous than Nora's departure because the source of dissatisfaction is left to fester in and trouble a community which assumes it can settle back into passive complacency. Pegeen does contain an allegorical potential as an Ireland figure,¹⁰⁶ but self-actualization is focused in the

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¹⁰⁶Ann Saddlemyer claims that it is the hag-like Widow Casey who is given allegorical dimensions: "half-
central male figure. Therefore, the audience's rejection of *playboy* is rooted in issues more general than, though not separate from, those surrounding the female Ireland figure, issues dealing with the idealization of the Irish peasantry—both male and female. (Audiences were outraged at the portrayal of a traditional Irish community that would first worship then torture a father-killer.) Nevertheless, the sexual-political dynamics of the Ireland figure are present in the *Playboy* controversy; only they are subsumed in larger issues. *The Freeman's Journal* called the play an "unmitigated, protracted libel upon Irish peasant men, and worse still, upon Irish peasant girlhood" (Hogan and Kilroy, Abbey 125). The expression of outrage in the audience was superficially focused on the reference to the word 'shift' (a female undergarment), suggesting indecorous behavior by Irish womanhood and so affronting nationalist and Victorian sensibilities. It is precisely at the point that the sexual Widow Quin made her appearance on stage that the first wave of serious protest among the audience erupted.107 There exists another interesting parallel between Synge's two controversial plays. *Playboy* was preceded on the same bill

107According to W.G. Fay, Widow Quin's entrance was when the "rough stuff" began: "Obviously they couldn't abide her" (214).
by a popular counterpart: throughout the week of riots *Riders To the Sea* was attentively followed and applauded (Hogan and Kilroy, *Abbey* 126). The management of the theater was probably trying to strategically balance Synge's controversial Ireland figures with accepted ones --as they previously did when they played *In the Shadow of the Glen* with *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.
CHAPTER 5

YEATS'S DEIRDRE (1907) AND THE TRADITION OF THE LEGEND
LEADING UP IT

Between 1850 and 1950, Deirdre appeared as the central character in over thirty-five Irish plays (Innes, Woman 33). C.L. Innes believes that Deirdre's appeal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries probably has something to do with her analogy to the figure of Erin, a figure fought over and betrayed (34). Writers who looked at her in this way turned Deirdre into another version of the Ireland trope. Certainly as the maiden-queen who summons young men to fight and die for her in order to liberate her from an oppressive suitor, Deirdre has much in common with the figure of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and no doubt the two images reinforce each other. The story's central concern with abusive power made it an attractive vehicle to express Ireland's colonial experience, which began centuries later. Deirdre's rebellion against political authority begins before her birth when she cries out from her mother's womb during a warriors' feast. Catvod, the druid, prophesies Deirdre's destructive beauty, but King Conchubar, nevertheless, arrogating to himself control over Deirdre's life, has her reared apart from society so that she may become his queen upon maturity. Deirdre defies the will
of the king and elopes with the king's young warrior, Naoise. The pair seek refuge from the wrath of Conchubar, but after some time other influential Ulstermen in Conchubar's court attempt to heal the breach and return Naoise and his band of warriors to Ireland. Finally, however, the king reneges on his promise of safe-passage, so that instead of reconciliation the exiles are greeted by death and further schism within the warrior band as Fergus and his followers abandon the treacherous Conchubar and take service with his enemies.

The legend's central conflict held obvious parallels to a colonial relationship: Conchubar treats Deirdre as simply a possession and does not acknowledge her personal will. Thomas Moore, author of the astonishingly popular *Irish Melodies* (published 1808-34), exploits the legend's anti-colonialist potential in a ballad that Seamus Deane calls one of the earliest celebrations of the Deirdre legend in English (*Field* Vol 1, 1062). In Moore's version, conflicts resulting from British imperialism in Ireland, especially the struggle between political autonomy and oppression, are imposed upon the main elements of the legend. The intra-Irish conflict between Naoise and Conchubar is recast into a conflict between the Irish "hero" and the British "tyrant."

Furthermore the ballad calls for political action in the present; the vow of vengeance governs the general tone:

> Avenging and bright fall the swift sword of Erin
> On him who the brave sons of Usna betray'd!—
For every fond eye he hath waken'd a tear in,
A drop from his heart-wounds shall weep o'er her blade.
(Deane, Field 1: 1062)

The legend's central theme of abusive power was also explored by Yeats and Synge, politically marginalized (by the time they wrote their Deirdre plays) Anglo-Irish writers who identified the legend's transgressive political authority not with the British but with their own countrymen. Their Anglo-Irish Deirdre figures are defined in exclusively cultural terms rather than in the narrow political terms embodied in Moore's Deirdre. Three versions of the Deirdre legend appeared in the first decade of the Irish National Theatre: A.E.'s *Deirdre* (1902), Yeats's *Deirdre* (1907), and Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1909). Each of these Deirdre plays differs greatly in thematic and aesthetic conception, but all convey, through Deirdre's characterization, the sense of isolation that defined the Anglo-Irish experience in a Catholic country. Each playwright has Deirdre, isolated and betrayed by official structures of authority, turn to personal standards of wholeness and integrity. A.E.'s Deirdre, for example, turns to visionary mystical symbols to understand the contradictions and betrayals that plague her world. The system of mystical knowledge that defines the play was influenced by A.E.'s life-long interest in Theosophy. Yeats gives his Deirdre an exultant lonely intensity that marks the ideal aristocrat in many of his works and conveniently links her to a specifically Anglo-Irish
nationality. Yeats condenses the time of the play to the last phase of the story, the unfolding of Conchubar's treachery, in order to show the disastrous effects of corrupted aristocratic values. Synge's Deirdre, like the playwright himself, does not look to aristocratic traditions to achieve personal wholeness in exile. She seeks something other than 'society' altogether; she seeks total freedom in nature. Synge's Deirdre is not a helpless victim but a woman who, having experienced an existence involving choice and freedom, cannot assent to one of control and confinement. In the Deirdre plays of both Yeats and Synge, personal standards of integrity replace corrupted communal ones; both playwrights explore anti-patriarchal themes that associate freedom with women and nature, both of which operate outside of patriarchal structures. Their Deirdre figures embody the possibilities for defining oneself as "Irish" at a time when a communal consensus of nationality is no longer possible.

All three playwrights chose source materials according to their differing conceptions of Irish nationality and interests; in order to understand their individual choices we must briefly consider the long-standing tradition of the Deirdre legend in Irish literature. The earliest extant version of the legend exists in the Lebor na hUidre manuscript written in early Christian Ireland, probably in the eighth or ninth century. The written story is a Christian reworking of the legend's oral version, dated to
the century before Christ (Jackson 28-43). An earlier twelfth-century manuscript survives as the Book of Leinster, which contains a much more consistent narrative; this version became popular among poets and scholars, though the language bears a "generally florid and adjectival style" not found in the sparse tone of the earlier manuscript (Kinsella, Tain xi). By the seventeenth century Deirdre's story had assumed a prominent enough position in the Irish consciousness to be considered historically valid. For example, Geoffrey Keatings in 1634 included a version of the story in the form of a pseudo-history, a genre which became popular through the nineteenth century (Fackler, "Sources" 59).

A specifically Anglo-Irish tradition developed around the Deirdre legend beginning in the nineteenth century. The

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108 This later manuscript became the basis for O'Grady's translation (1898) and Lady Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne (1902).

109 The Deirdre legend appeared in several notable works in the seventeenth century. The historian Ceitinn gave a short retelling in his influential work. There is also a seventeenth-century revision, written in Ulster, which gives a more detailed description of some of the episodes, while in Scotland a lay was composed which tells the story in a more conversational form (OhOgain 155-6).

110 Stephen Barlow's History of Ireland (1814) accepts the legend as true; Thomas Leland's History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II (1814) comments on bardic literature as if it were a true account of the society in which it appeared; Christopher Anderson's Historical Sketch of the Native Irish (1840) also suggests the literary and historical value of the literature (Fackler, "Sources" 59).
Anglo-Irish who claimed a non-geneological and mythic link to the Gaelic past found Deidre, who commanded the authority of a historical figure yet could not be factually linked to the present, an attractive figure. In the nineteenth century, several Anglo-Irish scholars translated the original Irish texts of heroic legends, while other writers popularized the same legends in poems and stories. In 1834 Sir Samuel Ferguson published the first "avowedly literary telling by an Anglo-Irish poet" (Fackler, Tragic Queen 2), but later versions by Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde were especially influential. These in turn became the sources for two major Deirdre plays in the first years of the National Theatre. Yeats' Deirdre was based on Lady Gregory's rendition (Jeffares and Knowland 76), while Synge went back to the early manuscripts in Gaelic. A.E.'s dramatic version drew on O'Grady's work (Kiberd 176).111

One important feature that defines the differing interpretations of the Deirdre legend is the question of Deirdre's culpability. A brief survey of the changing

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111 Although none of these three playwrights used oral sources, the romance of Deirdre survived in the folk tradition as well in many different versions which include distinctive innovations not found in the formal manuscript. Two recurring elements are prominent in the oral tradition: Conchubar puts Naoisi and his brothers in a house with a leaden roof and burns them; Deirdre is buried in the same graveyard as Naoise, and a tree grows from each grave and the branches intertwine (OhOgain 155-6).
attitudes, over centuries, toward Deirdre's culpability is important to our understanding of the seemingly novel anti-patriarchal dimensions in Yeats's and Synge's Deirdre plays. What seems novel was, in some ways, a return to the attitudes of ancient Gaelic texts. In pre-Christian myth, Conchubar's first major transgression is the selfish possession of Deirdre, an embodiment of nature which must be respected as an equal and willing partner to political authority -- as in sovereignty myths. (The second major transgression was Conchubar's betrayal of the Sons of Usna.) But the Christian scribes recorded the oral tale through the lens of a patriarchal perspective that harbored less sympathy for Deirdre. Maire Herbert explains:

From a patriarchal perspective, Deirdre had broken free from the legitimate authority of Conchubar, and had entered into unlawful union with Naoise. When returned to the custody of the just king, she had committed a sin abhorrent to Christianity, by taking her own life. Therefore, her depiction had to be made to reflect her culpability. (21)\textsuperscript{112}

Versions that stressed Deirdre's culpability remained popular. Deirdre was often punished for her rebellion by grotesque forms of death that elaborated the plot or descriptive passages with added gore and humiliation. A harrowing and unusual end is expected for one who has broken

\textsuperscript{112}Herbert claims that scholars respected the tradition of the story by leaving the original narrative framework intact but created a new bias by insertions "which manipulated the rhetoric of the characters so that woman as subversive, as a denier of rightful authority, could be brought into focus" (21).
the rules of community and convention. (In the oldest existing story, Deirdre spends a year under Conchubar's control before she throws herself out of a chariot and breaks her head open.) Hyde's influential *Literary History of Ireland* de-emphasizes the fatality of the tragedy and the human powerlessness in face of prophesied events in order "to highlight Deirdre's moral fall in her refusal to accept the framework within which her life has been placed" (Hywel 31). Yeats --and Synge for that matter-- allow Deirdre to die in a controlled and dignified manner before the humiliating year spent under Conchubar's sexual control. Yeats and Synge forgo the sexual humiliation and gore and allow for a death that provides a consistent closure to Deirdre's self-possessed life. In the closing scenes of Yeats's play, Naoise searches for a death that is neither ostentatious nor common. The quiet, stoic death is essential to Yeats's version because it is an expression of Deirdre's (and Naoise's) aristocratic courage and dignity. The heroine who defies patriarchal authority to pursue her own passionate vision of life deserves a stately death.

A.E.'s *Deirdre* (1902)

A.E's *Deirdre* was performed in April 1902 by the first combined effort of W.G. Fay's Irish National Dramatic Company and the National Theatre. It was the first Irish myth
presented on an Irish stage, written and acted by Irish artists.\textsuperscript{113} Despite flaws of construction, the play was enthusiastically received by the Irish audience as a concentrated and idealistic expression of nationality through art. These sentiments are evident in the review in The Daily Express:

Deirdre is not, strictly speaking, an acting play . . . It is only fair to add that, despite this drawback, the writer, in common with the rest of the audience, followed the play from start to finish with deep attention, for the language of the drama is eminently poetical, and the sentiments have a true heroic ring. (Hogan and Kilroy, Foundations 13)

This first production revealed Deirdre's untapped potential to powerfully express Irish nationality, in a cultural sense, through the communal experience of theater. Nineteenth-century writers like Samuel Ferguson and Standish O'Grady had attempted to show how Irish myth remained alive in contemporary Irish society; the first production of Deirdre in front of a live audience of contemporary Irishmen was a concrete enactment of this idea, a concrete juxtaposition of the ancient Gaelic past with the nationalist present.

The audience no doubt found the romantic and tragic aspects of A.E.'s play accessible because they were an extension of material found in popular nineteenth-century

\textsuperscript{113}Some controversy surrounded the appropriateness of the subject. Standish O'Grady the author of the influential mythical history of Ireland objected to A.E.'s dramatization of the old myth, starting a minor controversy over the use of Celtic myth as a basis for heroic drama.
sources. In fact, nineteenth-century sources had tended to stress romantic sentimentality at the expense of the development of individual characters and psychological motivation. A.E.'s sentimental, romantic leanings clearly encouraged him to follow in this tradition rather than turn to the starkness, barbarism, and incidental crudeness of the early Gaelic manuscripts (Fackler, Intro 3). A.E.'s nineteenth-century sources are especially relevant in his characterization of Deirdre, whose girlishness stands in stark contrast to Yeats's and Synge's self-possessed queens. A.E.'s Deirdre is an ingenue-type who is beautiful but has little knowledge and relies on intuition. It is easy for her to interpret dreams as reality because her isolated existence has limited her knowledge of the world. Her sexuality is subdued and she does not initiate the action of the play.

There are original elements in A.E.'s play, especially in the focal character Lavarcham, Deirdre's caretaker, whose keen insight and advice is ignored by Deirdre, Naisi, and Conchubar, all of whom follow their inclination and use their visions as an excuse to do what they are inclined to. In the end they are each finally destroyed by the truth they chose to ignore. Their refusal to heed Lavarcham takes the play

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114 Fackler cites Samuel Ferguson (Deirdre 1880), Aubrey de Vere (The Sons of Usnach 1884), and R.D. Joyce (Deirdre 1876) as probable sources (Intro 2-3). Yeats criticized the play precisely because it retained the superficiality and sentimentality of these sources.
beyond a simple dramatic enactment of Cathvah's prophecy before Deirdre's birth. The main characters are not merely acting out their fate; their reckless pursuit of their own desires despite warnings from Lavarcham makes them at least partly culpable for the tragic consequences. They play a role in their own destiny: "by basing all their actions upon the prophecy and allowing it to become the controlling factor in their lives they make it true" (Fackler, Intro 4).

Yeats's Deirdre (1907)

Since the 1880s Yeats had realized that Irish myth had the potential to embody symbolically the "heart" of Irish nationality. Yeats proclaimed in the Dublin University Review in 1886:

Of all the many things the past bequeaths to the future, the greatest are great legends; they are the mother of nations. I hold it the duty of every Irish reader to study those of his own country till they are familiar as his own hands, for in them is the Celtic heart. (Quoted in Bushrui 108)

Even so, in 1899 and 1902 Yeats chose characters from common folklore to be his Ireland figures. A shift in Yeats's nationalism, however, begun in the first few years of the twentieth century, made the aristocratic elements in Irish myth more appealing material for his new figure, Deirdre (1907). Yeats turned aside from Irish politics for several reasons. The special anti-clerical circumstances in Irish politics that enabled Yeats to create a secular and popular
image of unity like Cathleen Ni Houlihan, one that embodied romantic values of nationalism that transcended religion and class, disappeared. Furthermore, the values of the middle class increasingly estranged Yeats from the nationalist movement that inspired Cathleen Ni Houlihan. His alienation was heightened by the death of John O'Leary in March 1907, which marked for Yeats the end of the romantic conception of Irish nationality on which the literature of the Revival had been founded (Cairns and Richards, Writing 97). Yeats did not cease to be a nationalist but he adopted an aristocratic nationalism, and in many ways Deirdre, the story of a Gaelic Queen, embodies this aristocratic refocusing.

The contrast between the peasant/queen duality of Cathleen and the aristocracy of Deirdre echoes the shift in Yeats's political thought at the turn of the century. Conor

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115 By 1900 and the unification of the Irish party, the clergy had recovered most of their former authority, and "life among the nationalists must have become proportionately depressing for Protestants" (O'Brien, "Passion" 223).

116 Yeats was temperamentally, socially, and intellectually isolated from the Irish movement which he saw as dominated by "a new class . . . without exceptional men" made up of "shopkeepers and clerks" and dominated, it is implied, by Sinn Fein and the Gaelic League (Essays 259-60). Deirdre operates in an aristocratic world of nobles and peasants with no middle class publican to be found.

117 This was not a very practical position since the aristocracy was entirely unionist, that is to say anti-nationalist. This unpopular position also contributed to Yeats's sense of social isolation, explored in the later part of this chapter.
Cruise O'Brien has argued that before 1900 Yeats's cultural politics were "popular and active" but after 1900 became aristocratic and archaising ("Passion" 222), a move which Peter Kuch has identified with a shift in Yeats's poetry and criticism from Celticism before 1900 to a subsequent concentration on the peasant and the aristocrat (140). The prose of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was a culmination of some of the populist elements of the first stage, while *Deirdre*, written in verse, was a definite reaction against that same populism. Yeats hinted that Deirdre was a replacement for the earlier figure when he not only compared *Deirdre*'s potential dramatic appeal to *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*'s popularity but wrote to Katherine Tynan that his new play would be an even greater artistic achievement [than *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*] because it would be written in verse and still appeal to an audience (*Letters* 482).

The shifting focus of Yeats's nationalism was mirrored in his choice of sources. Cathleen Ni Houlihan originates in the peasant world and folk art; for Deirdre Yeats went to Gaelic legends produced by aristocratic bards --or, more precisely, to Anglo-Irish translators of those legends. Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* is cited as Yeats's official source (Jeffares and Knowland 76), but in certain ways Samuel Ferguson's play *Deirdre* (1880) is more central to the conceptualization of Yeats's Deirdre figure. Ferguson began a specifically Anglo-Irish tradition of the Deirdre
story that subsequent writers were aware of writing in.\textsuperscript{118} Yeats was unrestrained in his praise of Ferguson's flawed 1880 play,\textsuperscript{119} but there is little proof of its artistic influence on Yeats's own version. This apparent discrepancy is not as contradictory as it first appears. What Yeats's inherited from Ferguson was not the aesthetic but the ideological conception of the Deirdre legend. As Malcolm Brown asserts, it is to Ferguson that one must go in order "to penetrate the confusing mists that envelop Yeats's 'Irishness'"(\textit{Sir} 16). Yeats's conception of Deirdre as an Ireland figure has a precedent in Ferguson's previous use of Deirdre to symbolize an aristocratically determined Irish nationality --one that granted a privileged position to the values of the Anglo-Irish class.

Ferguson refined the mythic connection between the Gaelic aristocracy found in legends like that of Deirdre and the present-day class system that favored the Anglo-Irish. Deirdre enabled Ferguson to counter a sense of political marginalization and potential exclusion by arguing a place for the Anglo-Irish based on their claim to ancient (i.e. aristocratic) Irish qualities like individualism, codes of

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honor, and respect for ceremony and tradition. His view was reinforced in the influential *Bardic History of Ireland*, in which another Anglo-Irishman, Standish O'Grady, sets up a romantic and aristocratic vision of Ireland's history to demonstrate that the roots of his increasingly embattled class were embedded in the fabric of Ireland. He told his fellow members of the Ascendancy "that all Irish history is on your side, every page redolent of captaincy and soldiership, of strong rule, and of allegiance and loyalty to the death" (*Toryism* 252). Ferguson used Deirdre to promote not only the Ascendancy's claim to social prestige but its Irish nationality as well: the Ascendancy, being descendents of the colonizers, was not connected to the ancient Gaels by blood or language like the Catholic population but by the values of class, by aristocratic codes of behavior. All Gaelic heroes had the potential to embody symbolically these connections --in fact, male figures like Cuchulain did become popular-- but in Deirdre, who "dominated Ferguson's imagination from youth to age" (*Lady Ferguson* I: 50), Ferguson could exploit all the connotations of national unity that the tradition of the female Ireland figure had accumulated since the eighteenth century. Deirdre represented a unified national consciousness found, not in any historical memory, but in a mythic golden age of the past that predated the sectarian divisions of two centuries. In Deirdre national unity could best be represented in the hierarchical
social/political divisions of an aristocratic model. This is in direct contrast to the most popular Ireland figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, which were designed to be populist and to de-emphasize the differences between classes.

Ferguson's influence is evident in the aristocratic aspects of Yeats's Deirdre. His Deirdre revises Cathleen Ni Houlihan by rearranging the aristocratic/peasant unity of the earlier play in a hierarchical formation in which aristocrat and peasant are no longer two aspects of one person. In contrast to the peasant/queen duality of the Caillech Cathleen, the elements of 'Peasant' and 'Queen' are separate though interacting elements in Deirdre. Yeats adds three peasant women to the Deirdre story, but these women are individuated neither by names, personalities, nor actions. They represent the impersonal creative force that fuels the "peasant imagination." The women perform an essential function not through direct action but through influence on the major characters, by imparting wisdom and art, but their non-artistic contributions are inconsequential to the movement of the plot. These musicians have an essential role in the story --the transmission of poetic tradition and tales of aristocratic heroism from generation to generation--but not in the plot. Just as the musicians sing the tragic story of Redstripe to Deirdre and Naoise, they will also sing the tragic story of Deirdre to the next generation of heroes
(some in the Abbey audience). As an Ireland figure Deirdre embodies exclusive aristocratic values, but her interaction with the peasant women in the play shows how those values, in their pure form, have a symbiotic relationship with the peasant—or, more specifically, with the peasant's artistic (rather than social, religious or political) vision. The union of aristocratic values and peasant art underlies the concept of Irish nationality that informs Yeats's Ireland figure.

One of the supreme aristocratic values, in Yeats' mind, was the refinement of spirit that encouraged the patronage of art and the esteem of artistic knowledge. Although the lovers are exiled from Conchubar's court for seven years, they retain their bardic esteem for poetic tradition. Throughout the play Yeats associates appreciation of art—balladry—with Deirdre and, to a lesser extent, Naoise, in opposition to Conchubar and Fergus. Deirdre is a patron of the arts and supports the itinerant musicians:

I have never met any of your kind
But that I gave them money, food, fire. (183)

Even more importantly, she grants a deep respect to the knowledge imparted in their songs and the wisdom in their advice. Being poets, the three peasant women can see beyond the surface reality and understand the true motives behind human behavior, even behind the desires of social superiors like an old and fading king. Both Deirdre and Naoise understand the importance of literary tradition; both
acknowledge the relevance of the past, as embodied in myths and poetry, as a standard for conduct in the present. They look to the story of Lugaidh Redstripe and his queen -- playing chess in the face of imminent death -- as an example for their own behavior. Unlike the wiser Deirdre, Naoise does not grant the peasant musicians much credence, but he is well enough versed in Gaelic literature to recognize the chessboard as an element in the Redstripe story (179). Unlike Fergus, who looks to the story as entertainment (literally 'background music'), Naoise understands that the present embodies forms of the mythic past. When he looks to the Redstripe ballad as a model of "truth," Naoise's suspicions grow and he comes closer to divesting himself of his illusions and understanding his own predicament. Naoise ultimately allows warrior (i.e. masculine) codes of conduct to take precedence over poetic ones for he allows Fergus -- who lacks the tradition of poetry -- to influence his judgment. Fergus, though well intentioned, is a representative of a rational system of thought which can coexist with poetry but never fully participate in it.

Yeats associated narrow rationality with the modern commercial and democratic society of Dublin, especially the middle-class "paudeens." Throughout his writings, Yeats

120The chessboard itself was an aristocratic symbol. The game of chess as well as the costly and richly decorated royal chessboard is often referred to in old bardic tales (Jeffares and Knowland 77).
attacked the growing power of these forces, especially their antagonism toward the cultivation of artistic tradition as well as the artistic sensibility in general. The conflict between art and commerce crystallized three years after *Deirdre* was written in the controversy over Hugh Lane's generous gift of Impressionist paintings to Dublin. Yeats bitterly attacked what he saw as the petty financial considerations that interfered with the building of a proper museum and caused the loss of a great collection of art. Yeats had sensed the ominous ascendency of commercial interests over artistic ones for years before the controversy; it is no surprise, therefore, that Yeats created an Ireland figure in which the esteem of art was a central part of Irish nationality. Each Irishman should conduct his life conscious of literary tradition in order to avoid the tragic failure of Fergus's limited non-poetic vision — and Conchubar's. The King's appearance on stage coincides with the marginalization (and death) of the forces of art. The role of the musicians is active throughout the play — Deirdre consistently summons their art and advice — but is drastically diminished with the entrance of Conchubar, whose rigid rationality is antithetical to art and passion. When the lovers die, the effect is even more noticeable; the musicians announce the death quietly because the new circumstances caused by the Conchubar's prevalence are hostile to a grand poetic gesture of lament. As one musician
says, "Though we are bidden to sing, cry nothing loud" (202). The closing scene of the play reflects the defeat of the artistic spirit by the forces of rationalism. The music of the women has been overcome by the rational language of the men who wield the institutional power of government and the military, men who battle not over poetic interests but the assertion of the ego through power.

In *Deirdre* Yeats consistently associates the poetic voice with women and nature; in other words those, like Deirdre and the peasant women, that operate outside of patriarchal structures of power. The anti-patriarchal element in Yeats's conception of Deirdre as an Ireland figure reflects Yeats's uneasiness with Irish political forces, forces which existed separately from British colonial power. Conchubar is an Irish not a colonial king who tyrannizes over his own subjects; therefore, Deirdre must seek justice and freedom in a world outside of society altogether. Previous Ireland figures were constructed to bolster the interests of traditional, though indigenous, male-centered political structures. When Cathleen Ni Houlihan spoke of freeing her "four green fields" she meant the transfer of power from the hands of Englishmen to the hands of Irishmen. Ailbhe Smyth notes that anti-colonial revolution in Ireland did not entail any change in the patriarchal ideology that underpinned British power in Ireland:

The liberation of the state implies male role-shift from that of Slave to Master, Margin to Centre, Other to Self.
Women, powerless under patriarchy, are maintained as Other of the ex-Other, colonized of the post-colonized. (10)

In traditional Ireland figures, emphasis was given to features (motherhood, beauty, purity) that could best be mobilized to serve symbolically and sustain the patriarchal structures of power, especially male-centered endeavors like war, insurrection, parliamentary politics, or, to a certain extent, literary tradition governed by a patriarchal perspective. Yeats's *Deirdre* subverts the male centered concept of Irish nationality. In the figure of Deirdre and throughout the play, Yeats gives the feminine sensibility which is associated with nature and poetry an integrity and prominence over male perspectives based on law -- the "word."

Though Fergus often uses the word "natural" to assert the indisputability of his judgements, he is invariably wrong. His knowledge is of the rules of society which he mistakenly believes are as immutable as the laws of nature; the audience -- and Fergus -- comes to see by the end of the play that society's laws are too easily corruptible. Deirdre and the itinerant peasant women are children of nature and, therefore, better understand the "natural" way of things: their assessments of Conchubar's motives are invariably correct. For example, the women thrice interrupt Fergus's lengthy rationalization about Conchubar's ostensible change of heart with the simple statement, "Yet old men are jealous" (174). The clash between male and female structures of knowledge is reflected in a complex system of metaphors
that refer to human language. Naoise condescendingly tells Deirdre that he "will not weigh the gossip of the roads/ With the King's word" (184). Note the contrast between "gossip," voice of women, and "word," the assertive voice of patriarchal power. The tension that builds up to Conchubar's entrance is sustained by the clash between the female voice, governed by an understanding of poetry and nature, and the male voice governed by an understanding of law and the codes of warrior society. During the unfolding argument (184-6) words like "speak," "gossip," and "word" and references to the parts of the face that deal with speech, "mouth," "lips," and "golden tongue" are repeatedly used. The women of both the aristocratic and the peasant class are threatened with silence throughout the play; they are threatened with the tools of institutional power --with condemnation, banishment, prison, and even death. Deirdre responds to Naoise's command to be silent by associating herself with an image of nature threatened with restriction and silence:

Am I to see the fowler and the cage
And speak no word at all? (184)

Naoise uses Deirdre's association with nature to prove that her suspicion of Conchubar's "word" is based on a limited and marginal experience in the forest:

You would have known,
Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten. (184)
Naoise is inevitably proven wrong; in an old king, sorrow runs deeper than the "word." As a female outsider on the margins of patriarchal society, Deirdre is capable of a freedom of thought and expression --like the peasant artists-- that lacks confidence in easily corruptible structures of power and their definition of truth or beauty.

The anti-patriarchal elements delineated above are especially interesting if one considers the fact that Yeats presents an Ireland figure that simultaneously embodies aristocratic tradition as well as anti-patriarchal sentiment. This seemingly contradictory combination is explained by the fact that Deirdre embodies Yeats's Anglo-Irish nationality, a nationality associated with Gaelic traditions and yet estranged from the political authority of the present. Through Deirdre's isolation and oppression, Yeats expressed his own political precariousness as an Anglo-Irishman. During the middle years of the nineteenth century the Protestant Ascendancy suffered severe political and economic losses and thereafter "few could fail to see the writing of dispossession on the wall" (MacDonagh 27). These changes were accompanied by social estrangement.121 The Anglo-Irish,

121 "Throughout the nineteenth century middle-class urban Anglo-Irish had been comfortable enough in a sort of social apartheid which had secured them in an Irish 'world' rarely intersecting with that of their Catholic counterparts. Their relative insulation from the rest of Irish life did not seriously affect their territorial identification with Ireland in general, and with their town or city in particular" (MacDonagh 29).
descendents of the colonizer, began to be identified as 'outsiders' in the second half of the nineteenth century when the majority Catholic population began to define the Irish nation according to its own values. Yeats found a deep solitude to be a central feature in his own personal Anglo-Irish identity. It is no wonder, then, that he makes it a prominent element in his characterization of Deirdre. The landscape "suggests silence and loneliness" (171). Deirdre refers to herself as a "wanderer"(186) and "friendless"(191). She believes that the posthumous story of their bravery will gain them friends they never had in life: "Our way of life has brought no friends to us,/ And if we do not buy them leaving it,/ We shall be ever friendless" (189). Deirdre bids the musicians to tell her story to all for it is only through art, through the immortality of the musicians' ballad, that Deirdre will gain respect from the wider community that rejects her (or is indifferent at the very least) during her lifetime. This is a sentiment that Yeats applied to his own theater which was rejected repeatedly by the wider middle-class community of Dublin.

122Note the observations Yeats makes when describing a portrait of himself by Augustus John:"an unshaven, drunken bartender, and then I began to feel John had found something that he liked in me, something closer than character, and by that transformation made it visible. He had found Anglo-Irish solitude, a solitude I have made for myself,an outlawed solitude" (Explorations 308).
The patriarchal structures that governed early twentieth-century life in Dublin had to be opposed by Yeats because of their stifling effect. The new ruling power advanced middle-class values of commerce, democracy, and bureaucracy inimical to the aristocratic codes of Gaelic tradition embodied in the present-day Anglo-Irish. The world of Deirdre and Naoise and the world after their death, in which nobility and courage cannot exist, represent the fate of Anglo-Irish values in a world of middle-class materialism. In Yeats's retelling of the legend, the English strangers who stole Cathleen's green fields are replaced by an Irish authority which betrays the personal dignity of its citizens. Conchubar is not only a hollow example of his own aristocratic class, but his narrow self-interest, his defiance of traditional codes of conduct, and oppressive political authority make him more accurately a representative of the middle-class in Yeats's world view. Conchubar is "a solid bourgeois citizen" who "stands for reason's click-clack" (Donoghue 102). According to this allegorical pattern, the story of Deirdre separates the Irish nation into two distinct and opposing forces: the minority Protestants (and those who accept their values) clinging to their doomed world

123Deirdre's ancient aristocracy was rapidly being replaced by a commercial society whose faith was in money and equality. Bureaucracy became the final end of democratic government. "Materialistic skepticism or mere lip service to traditional forms of religion replaced the passionate faith of former times" (Zwerdling 43).
of nobility and the materialistic and rational classes who are the implied successors to the heroic world of the Gaels.

Anti-patriarchal elements in the play are especially foregrounded in Deirdre's assertive sexuality which brazenly defies the will of Ireland's most powerful political authority. As we have seen in previous chapters, the sexuality of the Ireland figure was mobilized—or, more precisely, restrained—to promote the traditional social views of nationalists and their "cause." Deirdre pursues her desires in spite of the far-reaching political consequences which lead to the burning of Emain; this action reverses the Ireland figure's traditional subjection of sensual desire to the communal good, which demanded "purity" of its women in order to insure the integrity of Ireland's "cause." A self-possessed female who conveys a sense of unashamed gratified sexuality better represented Yeats's new non-conformist nationalism, which began to emerge in the years just after *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902). One must remember that both of Yeats's previous Cathleen figures were not given a sexual will, the lack of which conveniently kept them within the expected boundaries of feminine behavior since neither was anti-patriarchal. Deirdre's expressive sexuality is central to her characterization. She exhibits a great awareness of her sensuality and often expresses her feelings and thoughts through images of her body. Note how Deirdre refers to her feelings and even her fate in terms of her body:
And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs is mockery. (185)

When she considers her death she sums up the accumulated
knowledge of life in the sensual experience of the body
sparked by her first bewildering kiss with Naoise:

Bend and kiss me now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that's over, we'll be different;
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.
And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement bewildering kiss. (192)

Deirdre wants to experience the sensual power of the body for
the last time before it is extinguished by death. Achieving
appropriate closure, Deirdre's body will die as it was
awoken, by a kiss from Naoise. Furthermore, she accepts sole
responsibility --though not guilt or shame-- for her
assertive sexual passion in order to win Conchubar's
forgiveness of Naoise. Note how she once again focuses on
parts of her body as the center of experience and the
manifestation of her will:

The very moment these eyes fell on him,
I told him; I held out my hands to him;
How could he refuse? At first he would not--
I am not lying--he remembered you.
What do I say? My hands? --No, no, my lips--
For I had pressed my lips upon his lips--
I swear it is not false--my breast to his;
Until I woke the passion that's in all,
And how could he resist? (197)

Deirdre's sexuality is anti-patriarchal not so much
because of its intensity but because it is placed in a
heroically defiant opposition to institutional power
structures. The anti-patriarchal dimension is nowhere more
obvious than in Yeats's refusal to make Deirdre culpable for her rebellious actions, a striking departure from the traditional tellings of the legend which stress Deirdre's responsibility. (Even if she does not deserve what happens to her, she is responsible for her predicament.) There is no indication in Yeats's play that the tragic outcome owes anything to Deirdre's having broken the rules of community or convention. To the contrary, Yeats places the responsibility of the tragedy solely on Conchubar by undermining any claim the King can possibly have to Deirdre. Yeats's play, according to Elin Ap Hywel,

suggests that it is not Deirdre's willful sexuality which has transgressed against the stability of a patriarchal order (as represented by Conchubar), but rather the rigid structures of Conchubar's understanding of the relationship between sexuality and community which has transgressed against Deirdre and Naoise's love. (32)

Yeats's emphasis on Conchubar, rather than Deirdre, as the transgressor is evident in the structure of his play. Yeats begins the play in the final phase of the legendary story, with the lovers at the height of their passion for each other. By doing so Yeats establishes the union of the young lovers as the status quo and Conchubar's claim to the restoration of his bride as an unjust intrusion. The musicians introduce the story by drawing attention to Conchubar's advanced age, an approach which emphasizes the unsuitability and the unnaturalness of his claim over Deirdre. Furthermore, Yeats revises a key element in the original myth to further undermine Conchubar's claim. The
oldest surviving Gaelic myths had Conchubar intercede on (the
unborn) Deirdre's behalf after the other warriors insist on
killing her; therefore, it is only after Conchubar saves
Deirdre's life that he selfishly hides her in the forest to
be his bride upon maturity. In Yeats's version Conchubar
accidentally falls upon a beautiful and mysterious child in
the woods, making his claim to her slight and accidental --
and, therefore, not as inevitable as in stories that stress
the prophecy. Yeats makes it clear that it is Conchubar who
initiates the the tragic chain of events; it is only after
Conchubar "lost peace," years after the prophecy, that
"Deirdre's tale began" (172). The musicians reinforce the
transgressive quality of Conchubar's behavior by emphasizing
the pettiness of his jealousy throughout the rest of the play
and even his pathetic attempt to use magic spells to create
an "unnatural" sexual attraction between a young woman and an
old king. All of these revisions underscore Conchubar's
culpability, his intrusion into Deirdre's life rather than
Deirdre's rebellion against fate.

Yeats also chose to highlight Conchubar's transgression
in the structure of his work by focusing the play on the
actual time and space it takes for Conchubar to initiate and
carry through his treachery. Material that is not directly
related to Conchubar's trick is relegated to the musicians'
introductory song. In contrast to Synge, who emphasizes
Conchubar's first mistake against nature by arrogating to
himself control over Deirdre's life, Yeats chooses to totally skip that first transgression which would distract from his central aristocratic interest in the Deirdre legend by focusing the conflict on the struggle between forces of society and nature. The focus on the treachery of the second half of the original tale allows Yeats to explore and critique the corruption of Conchobar's aristocratic values by revealing the petty ways he compromises his honor to win the prize, Deirdre, and restore his public image.124

Conchobar, as king and exemplar of aristocratic society, is held to the strictest loyalty to the "word" because it is the governing code of patriarchal society:

And being himself,  
Being High King, he cannot break his faith.  
I have his word and I must take that word,  
Or prove myself unworthy of my nurture  
Under a great man's roof. (179)

Yeats does not mock the "word" in itself; honor is a noble quality in the true aristocrat. (Yeats seems to criticize those who are naive enough to think that the "word" is a supreme indicator of human actions and, therefore, cannot be corrupted by the irrational forces of human desire.) In an uncorrupted aristocratic society the King's promise of safe-

124 The threat of public mockery haunts Conchubar and motivates his petty treachery throughout the play. Fergus refers to it (186) and Deirdre exploits it to blackmail Conchubar into allowing her a last look at Naoise's body. This weakness is also apparent in Conchubar's insistence that Deirdre make a public entrance into his home in order to repair the public humiliation her elopement caused (195).
passage would never be broken. Indeed, Naoise deserves some sympathy for his unwavering, though tragic, loyalty to his king. Naoise's integrity highlights Conchubar's corrupt aristocratic values. Yeats makes it clear that Naoise is tricked, not necessarily because he is naive or overly optimistic like Fergus, but because he unwaveringly adheres to rules of honor in a corrupt society where treachery has become the efficient method of operation. His integrity will not allow him to adopt ways of cunning in order to survive and, therefore, he must die. Naoise's death, after he has been trapped in a net, fits into Conchubar's ignominious pattern of betrayal. Conchubar fights, not like a true king on a battlefield with even odds, but like a surreptitious "hunter" whose prey is his victim. During the course of the play Yeats reveals the layers and layers of Conchubar's corruption.\textsuperscript{125} When political authority is motivated by pettiness and greed rather than noble aristocratic values, all that an individual can do is retreat to nature and re-

\textsuperscript{125}As in all aristocratic societies the adherence to small rules of conduct reflects loyalty to larger ones. Appropriately, Conchubar's treachery is revealed little by little in the details of his conduct. Deirdre suspects Conchubar's motives when they are brought into a small bare cottage. Being the king he should provide the highest example of the ceremonious and gracious host. Deirdre states her suspicions by saying, "There's none to welcome us," and when Naoise tries to dismiss her objection, she articulates her protest more clearly:

\textit{An empty house upon the journey's end!}
\textit{Is that the way a king that means no mischief Honours a guest?} (180)
create himself or herself in art and heroism—which makes the raw material for art. Salvation lies outside the influence of patriarchal society altogether.

The anti-patriarchal theme in the play can be easily misinterpreted as an anti-society, pro-nature sentiment. The distinction between these two views is important because it sets Yeats's vision of Deirdre apart from Synge's. Images of natural, elemental and instinctual energies are associated with both Synge's and Yeats's Deirdre. But Yeats's use of the word "wild" can be misleading. In earlier drafts, Deirdre is called the "wild bird of the sea" and "wild Deirdre," and her passion is the product of a "wild will" (Rohan 45). In the final text the word is used by Naoise and Fergus (187) to describe Deirdre's transgressive speech, especially her criticism of the King. Naoise apologizes for Deirdre's "slander":

I will not weigh the gossip of the roads
With the King's word. I ask your pardon for her:
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage. (184)

Deirdre's "wild" will is associated with nature through the bird metaphor, but the context of this particular scene shows that the image specifically expresses Deirdre's defiant thought and language ("slander") set in opposition to the restrictive patriarchal "word." Nowhere in the play is "wild" meant to indicate uncivilized, in the positive sense of the word, behavior. "Wild" could potentially encompass an anti-society sentiment in addition to the anti-patriarchal
one explored above if it were used to refer to a sort of primitivism or, as in Synge's case, a romantic emphasis on the simple and uncultivated forms of human life that flourish in nature (Synge turns the royal lovers into peasants). This is simply not the case in Yeats's play. Deirdre and Naoise are exiled from the civilized society of the court, but they carry within themselves aristocratic codes of behavior that have everything to do with cultivation, tradition and learning. Like the true poet, the true aristocrat must balance this cultivation with an understanding of primal forces of nature, a balance reminiscent of the ancient chieftain's marriage to the sovereignty goddess. Critics who read a clear delineation between court and nature in the play fail to fully understand the central aristocratic element in Yeats's vision of the Deirdre figure. For example, Virginia Rohan claims:

What is at the heart of Yeats's play is this clash between the ceremonious, the reasonable, and the restraining forces of society, represented in the life of the court, and the untamed energies of the passionate life. (46)

Court society is not set in direct opposition to passion -- the lovers practice many ceremonious rituals of the aristocratic court: music, poetry, chess, wearing splendid jewelry and regal clothing.\(^{126}\) Instead, Yeats contrasts the

\(^{126}\)Note 125 (above) demonstrates the efficiency with which Deirdre and Naoise understand and interpret aristocratic codes of conduct, thus further undermining the
rational, measured aristocrat like Conchubar and the aristocrat who retains the passionate intensity found in nature, an intensity that when coupled with cultivation inspires love, heroism and poetry, an intensity found in Deirdre. Synge, however, rejected any aristocratic formulation of Irish nationality, and, therefore, had his Deirdre figure seek autonomy away from civilization altogether, in the primitive lifestyle offered by nature.

theory that the play places rules of the court in opposition to the lovers in nature.
Synge knew the saga material much more intimately and
directly than other writers of the Revival since he intensely
studied the Gaelic language at Trinity College and Gaelic
literature with the noted Celtic scholar de Jubainville in
Paris (Greene and Stephens 77). However, unlike other Anglo-
Irish playwrights, Synge did not initially use myth in his
dramatic works. In fact, his concept of a modern Irish
drama had no place for mythological subjects. When Synge's
close friend, Stephen MacKenna, urged him to write a play on
the old mythological characters, Synge responded, in a much
quoted statement:

I do not believe in the possibility of a purely fantastic
unmodern ideal breezy spring-dayish Cuchulainoid National
Theatre. We had the Shadowy Waters on the stage last
week, and it was the most distressing failure the mind
can imagine.

He goes on to say:

No drama can grow out of anything other than the
fundamental realities of life which are never fantastic,
are neither modern nor unmodern and, as I see them,
rarely spring-dayish, or breezy or Cuchulainoid. (Quoted
in O'Tuama 2)

Although Synge would never voice the same criticism publicly,
it is clear that his own plays were a counter-response to the
popularity of the mythic subject in the Irish theater. Both
A.E.'s and Yeats's *Deirdre* plays portray a glorified Celtic world and promote a nostalgia for an Irish past so idealized and distant that it bears no actual relationship with contemporary Ireland—or the brutal elements of ancient Ireland for that matter. To Synge, the very glorification of an aristocratic Deirdre obscured her relevance for the modern world and especially the modern Irish audience. The plays of the early Abbey reveal contradictory stylistic trends: A.E., Yeats, and Lady Gregory were interested in a vision of the Gaelic court sanitized of the brutal elements present in original manuscripts, and Synge was interested in the "fundamental realities of life" set in the peasant communities of Wicklow, Mayo or the Aran Islands. Synge wanted to recreate the popular story of Deirdre based on his own aesthetic principals. In *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1909) Synge found, for the first time, an original way to express contemporary or rather timeless Irish realities through a mythic subject. The task of finding contemporary elements in an ancient text was an ambitious one; Synge's aesthetic attempt to marry present reality and mythic past is controversial among major Synge critics, who see his Deirdre play, left unfinished at his death, as an experimental though unsuccessful departure from his earlier work.127

127 Yeats had anxieties about the play: "Lady Gregory and I felt the strain of our doubts and fears. Would it seem mere disjointed monotony? Would the second act be intelligible?" (*Autobiographies* 523). Distinguished Synge
Synge made Deirdre familiar to a contemporary Dublin audience through informal, though poetically heightened, peasant speech. He believed that "it is impossible to use our own language or feeling with perfect sincerity for personages we know to have been different from ourselves" (Collected IV, 393). Synge set out to make Deirdre like "ourselves" and the result is jarring to some notable critics. Sean O'Tuama argues: "the language is completely inadequate tonally to create a milieu in which kings and princes can operate" ("Synge" 12-13). One can infer that the proper "tonality" O'Tuama seeks is the refined poetic forms of aristocratic literature, much like that of the original manuscripts as well as Yeats's Deirdre play. However, it is more accurate to say that the incongruity between the royal names of the characters and their peasant language is ideologically central to Synge's conception of the Deirdre legend. By including such an unexpected juxtaposition between name (status) and language in his play, Synge purposefully challenges the artificial way ancient mythic icons were promoted in the Irish Literary Revival as well as in the general nationalist movement. From Synge's perspective, Deirdre should not have been handled as a static archaeological artifact discovered by Anglo-Irish scholars, dusted off, and given to the Irish people in its archaic form. Critics like Robin Skelton and Sean O'Tuama see the language of the play as an unsuccessful departure for Synge (Dasenbrook 137-8).
as a symbol for an untouchable Irish past -- a past all the more glorious because it resembled nothing real, nothing recognizable in contemporary Irish society. This approach was a denial of the living past that existed in turn-of-the-century Ireland.

Synge's version of Deirdre embodies the vitality of a Gaelic imagination still living among the Irish peasants. Their forms of language provided the only direct cultural and genealogical connection with the Gaelic "minds" that created the original myths. As a result, Synge made a sound aesthetic decision in giving Deirdre a peasant language in which to express herself. As skillfully as Yeats or A.E. could craft verse for their Deirdre plays, the forms of their language were post-Gaelic and modern. Although the dialogue in his play is not naturalistic, Synge retained aspects of authentic peasant speech which are not found in the other versions. However, Synge did not utilize the peasant source of the legend. Although the Deirdre legend had an extensive oral tradition in folklore,\textsuperscript{128} in language close to the colloquialism of \textit{Deirdre of the Sorrows}, Synge based his play on early manuscripts. This approach contrasted with his

\textsuperscript{128}Douglas Hyde points out the pervasiveness of the Deirdre tale, known "over all the lands of the Gael, both in Ireland and Scotland" in \textit{A Literary History of Ireland} (303). Daniel Corkery, in his study of eighteenth-century Ireland, \textit{The Hidden Ireland}, declares that Deirdre is one of the "brightest queens in the Irish sagas," the central figure of "a great tale which would be familiar from childhood even to the common people" (166-7).
usual method of working directly from a folk tale or incident of peasant life. In assessing Synge's choice one must consider, however, that it is Synge's reformulation of the traditional material of his contemporaries, his insertion of peasant dialogue into the aristocratic narrative form, that is at the heart of his defiant version of the Deirdre legend. He was attempting to breathe life into the 'rare and royal names wormy sheepskin yet retains,' as he phrased it in his poem, "Queens" (Collected I, 34). It was his way of reinvigorating a subject that had become so rarified and stylized by "educated" people that it had lost the simplicity and passion Synge found in the primitivism of the western peasant and in their living language -- a language as passionate though unfortunately also as transitory and doomed as Deirdre herself.

Granting Deirdre a living, though poetically heightened, language was one way Synge humanized the popular mythic figure. Granting complex human motives, especially those based on a deep understanding of feminine psychology, to a figure who had lost human potency through idealization was another. As Synge wrote to Lady Gregory two months before he died:

I have done a great deal to Deirdre since I saw you -- chiefly in the way of strengthening motives . . . and recasting the general scenario. (Collected IV, xxix).

Synge's reworking of the legend, his reformulation of Deirdre as a peasant, resembles in some respects his reworking of
Cathleen Ni Houlihan by offering the realistic grief of Maurya or the complex sensuality of Nora as more realistic aspects of Irish womanhood. In Deirdre he once again utilizes psychological realism to inject vitality into a symbol of Irish womanhood which had become over-simplified in the rhetoric of cultural nationalists and artificially idealized in the myth plays of Anglo-Irish writers. At the same time that Synge added psychological complexity to his Deirdre figure, he reinforced the ordinariness of her desires in contrast to her status as a celebrity, in contrast to the "specialness" of her social --and literary-- rank. Synge gave his Deirdre the characteristics and concerns of an ordinary Irish woman. As a result, her relevance to the modern Irish audience was not contained in her aristocratic refinement but rather in her passionate feeling for the simple though profound quests of life --freedom from authority, the pursuit of everlasting youth, and love--quests equally central to a peasant's as well as a queen's life. (These desires were the defining motives of his peasant figure Nora in 1902 as well.)

The threat of old age, death, and loss of love motivates the heroic narrative that reaches a climax in the destruction of Emain. The return of the lovers to Ireland is brought about, not by Conchubar's machinations (even Naisi sees through them in Synge's version), but by a complex set of psychological factors. Deirdre does not want to experience
the ugliness of growing old and the attendant loss of love, she would prefer a quick glorious death to a mundane life, and also she is sick with loneliness for Ireland. Naisi concurs: "We'll go surely, in place of keeping a watch on a love had no match and it wasting away" (255). Even in the heightened tragedy of the final death scene Synge brings the action down to a human level by including a petty quarrel between the two lovers to convey realistically the ugly manifestations of human desperation. Deirdre and Naisi suddenly become jealous of each other, wondering if the other will take a lover if only one of them were to survive. The rift widens when Naisi wishes to join his brothers, who are fighting Conchubar's forces. When Deirdre tries to keep him with her and he refuses to stay, she responds harshly:

I'm well pleased there's no one this place to make a story that Naisi was a laughing-stock the night he died.

Naisi, startled, responds bitterly:

[looking at her aghast] And you'll have me meet death with a hard word from your lips in my ear. (266)

Although this quarrel is a strident note in the play, its inclusion is Synge's way of maintaining the emotional realism of his characters to the end, especially against the heightened heroic tragedy of the death scene.

The emotional realism of the play continues after Naisi's death, when Deirdre confronts not only the end of her life and her lover's but the beginning of her myth. A comparison with Yeats's Deirdre will be helpful here because
the earlier figure's highminded attitude towards literary
glory and immortality in art underscores the realistic human
dimensions of Synge's figure. Yeats's Deirdre fully
understands her legendary status. She acts with the
understanding that each gesture is not merely her own but is
glorified forever in poetry. Yeats's lovers consciously
craft their image for posterity: they play chess in order to
project a heroic image for posterity, an image modeled on the
actions of the famous hero Redstripe and his Queen. At the
end of the play Deirdre instructs Naisi to fight heroically
in order to glorify their reputation for posterity.
Furthermore, Yeats's Deirdre looks to her impending mythic
stature as a transcendence of death, an immortality in art (a
similar promise motivated Michael to sacrifice himself in
_Cathleen Ni Houlihan_). In Synge's figure no such
transcendence is offered. The desperation and anger at
impending death strike a more realistically bitter tone: art
cannot compensate for the immense and irreversible finality
of death. Just after Naisi's death Lavarcham tells Deirdre
that she will take her to a safe place where she can become a
romantic icon:

> If it's keening you'd be come till I find you a sunny
place where you'll be a great wonder they'll call the
queen of sorrows, and you'll be taking a pride to be
sitting up and pausing and dreaming when the summer
comes. (269)

Deirdre is so consumed with the loss of her love that she
answers Lavarcham by recalling Naisi's voice that "from this
day will be dumb always" (269). Without openly denying the legitimacy of Lavarcham's romantic image Deirdre undermines its potency by showing that real --rather than glorified-- death results in irreversible silence rather than the immortal voice of poetry. This is not to say that the latter is not desirable --Synge was too much of an artist to deny the romantic power of poetry; it is just not an emotionally true possibility when real loss is in question. At the climactic death scene, no ballad could compensate for Naisi's absent voice. Deirdre cannot achieve transcendence through art in Synge's version of the legend. Deirdre is not intent on making herself a myth, and her indifference to Lavarcham's suggestion is Synge's way of rejecting the inflated heroic glory that plagued the re-tellings of Irish myths. The glory that immortality in art grants for Yeats's mythic Deirdre is not a bit consoling to Synge's humanized figure, who grapples with the psychological effects of real loss. Her rejection of a false but consoling spiritual transcendence as well as her sad acknowledgement of the transience of life mirrors Maurya's rejection of Cathleen Ni Houlihan's promise of immortality. Both Yeats and Synge use the theme of transcendence through poetic tradition to position their own figures ideologically within --or in Synge's case, in opposition to-- the literary tradition of the Deirdre legend.

Synge's characterization of Deirdre, like Yeats's, was inspired by his experience as an Anglo-Irishman, but, unlike
Yeats's figure, she has nothing to do with aristocratic values or Ferguson's conception of Deirdre as a connection between the Protestant Ascendancy and Gaelic society. Synge felt the same Anglo-Irish "solitude" that defined Yeats's nationality; but Synge experienced a second detachment from his own aristocratic class. By the time of his graduation from Trinity in December 1892, Synge had renounced the Anglo-Protestant tradition by totally rejecting Evangelicalism and Ascendancy values. Moreover, he was embarrassed by the notoriety of the Synges and the Traills (his mother's family) in relation to ruthless evictions in recent Irish history (Casey 5). Synge found no possibility of reconciliation with his strict Protestant family on matters of faith, morality or politics. Thus a "loner," he found himself alienated from family and friends:

I laid a chasm between my present and my past and between myself and my kindred and friends. Till I was twenty-three I never met or at least knew a man or woman who shared my opinions. (Collected II, 11)

Synge experienced a double isolation because he was estranged from both the Catholic society of the majority and the Anglo-Irish society he was born into. Synge's Deirdre embodies a similar sense of complete isolation. She is an exile from the official society of Conchubar's court and yet cannot form a new society in exile in Scotland, where she has lived in a tent for seven years. Unlike Yeats's figure, she does not carry within her a microcosm of aristocratic society that she
can transplant to Alban to establish a rival court on however small a scale; she does not utilize heroic ballads, ceremony, or chess games to reinforce the continuity of her aristocratic identity despite the disruption of her life. Instead, as we shall see later in the chapter, she finds fulfillment outside the bounds of human society altogether, in society's very antithesis: in nature. This mirrors Synge's own adjustment to the loneliness caused by his Anglo-Irish background. Synge's autobiography reveals an early immersion in nature, his long walks in the Dublin mountains collecting eggs and his "amorous fellowship" with birds (Collected, II 7). By later adolescence he saw nature as a replacement for the forms of society that stifled his personal development; Darwinism, for example, became a replacement for Protestantism. Furthermore, in his writing nature is emphatically associated with 'Woman.'\(^{129}\) In place of the Christian religion, Synge vowed he "with Earth's young majesty would yearning mate" (Collected I, 6).

The association between nature and 'woman' is not original by far, but once we consider that to Synge 'nature' embodied an unreserved pursuit of the sensual and sexual in opposition to societal restrictions on behavior, especially for women, we begin to realize the revolutionary implications

\(^{129}\) Bonnie Kime Scott explores the positive connection between nature imagery, the feminine, and the artist in Synge's works in her article "Synge's Language of Women." Look especially at pages 183-187.
that Synge's nature/woman association had for the traditional Ireland figure. The traditional Mother Ireland trope possessed attributes of fecundity by implication, but these were stressed at the expense of any expression of individual sexuality.

Synge's early sources for *Deirdre of the Sorrows* reinforce the thematic use of nature as a contrast to society, especially the scenes involving the events just before Deirdre's birth and her adolescent years spent in isolation. Synge was fascinated by the Deirdre story for many years, and for his play he returned to the primary material in the Irish language. Original versions of the tale in the *Book of Leinster* and the *Yellow Book of Lecan* were both available to him in the library of Trinity College, Dublin (Begnal 87). Declan Kiberd claims that Synge's version of the tale is an amalgam based on published redactions from the early, medieval and modern periods (176-95). In these stories the cry of an unborn child intrudes an unpredictable natural force into the ordered world of society. Instead of accepting nature on its own terms, Conchubar exerts his own control over this unpredictable and intrusive force. This takeover of the infant's life is a prideful transgression of power:

*By arrogating to himself control of Deirdre's life, the king exceeds the limits of just authority. His sin is fundamentally, one of pride, an assertion of the self, rather than the transcendence demanded by his status.*

( Herbert 16)
Since Deirdre, as a fetus, is the epitome of uncivilized nature, Conchubar's aggression is directed against a version of the Nature as Woman/Goddess who, in Gaelic literature, must be respected as an equal and willing partner.

Synge does not include the pre-birth feast scene (neither do Yeats or A.E.). Nevertheless, he focuses much attention on Conchubar's transgressive 'control' of nature at the expense of Conchubar's second "social" transgression -- the breaking of the King's promise. Interestingly, Synge rejects the more convenient second transgression which occurs within the time frame of his play. Synge de-emphasizes the betrayal of safe passage -- a central element in the moral code of the original\textsuperscript{130} as well as Yeats's Deirdre-- by making the lovers fully aware of Conchubar's trick and, therefore, in part responsible for their own doom. Conchubar's treachery has no real effect on the outcome of the story; the lovers choose their doom at his hands. The clash between political power and nature obviously appealed more to Synge than the profound breach of aristocratic conduct which was central to Yeats's interest in the legend. Synge's Conchubar is no corrupt aristocrat but a man vainly

\textsuperscript{130}Upon Deirdre and Naisi's elopement, the Ulstermen reproach the king for allowing excellent members of his warrior band to suffer danger on a woman's account. When Conchubar kills Naisi after the promise of safe passage, there is a definitive breach within the warrior band, and Fergus leads the warriors in the destruction of Emain, not because Deirdre was betrayed, but because such an excellent warrior as Naisi was betrayed (Herbert 15).
struggling to change his nature. Synge creates a vivid psychological portrait of an aging Conchubar, who wants to possess Deirdre not because she is a beautiful trophy, proof of his power, or even a simple object of his sexual desire, but because she embodies a wild and youthful nature that is free from the weight of experience that burdens an old man, especially a man with the responsibilities of kingship like himself. Conchubar tells Deirdre:

The like of me has a store of knowledge that's a weight and terror. It's for that we do choose out the like of yourself that are young and glad only. (236)

Not only does Deirdre embody the levity of wild nature unconstrained by society, but also in her youthfulness she reflects its power of regeneration. Conchubar wants to escape from his own nature and his impending death:

How would I be happy seeing age coming on me each year, when the dry leaves are blowing back and forward at the gate of Emain? And yet this last while I'm saying out, when I see the furze breaking and the daws sitting two and two on ash-trees by the duns of Emain, Deirdre's a year nearer her full age when she'll be my mate and comrade, and then I'm glad surely. (237)

Unfortunately what Conchubar does not see, despite Lavarcham's warnings, is that he will spoil the very qualities he loves in Deirdre because of the unnaturalness of their match and the futility (and vanity) of Conchubar's desire to possess the youth and freedom he cannot, by nature, have as an old king. The absurdity of his desires is evident in his contradictory actions. He is drawn to Deirdre's recklessness but speaks of "taming her like"(235) because
that same quality that draws him interferes with his ultimate power as king — social control. He is drawn to possess her innocence as a counterpoise to his own weighty thoughts: "it'll be my share from this out to keep you in the way you'll have little call to trouble for knowledge, or its want either" (236). Yet he ignores the fact that her forced marriage and entry into court would undoubtedly inspire a corrosive cynicism. He offers Deirdre the luxurious fruits of establishment, "knowledge" and a "safe and splendid" place. These are large offers in one sense but small and pathetic in another: an old man can only offer large "things" to substitute for his shriveled body and the reckless virility of the young hunter Naisi. Conchubar's desire to possess Deirdre is not motivated by the pride that rankles Yeats's king but rather by an even more unattainable quest to alleviate his sense of deterioration and stall his own death. His ultimate failure to possess Deirdre has psychological dimensions that are no less profound than the burning world around him. His final words acknowledging defeat are spoken "with the voice of an old man" (273).

Like Yeats, Synge associates the feminine element in his Deirdre play with nature, but unlike Yeats the word "wild" conveys both anti-patriarchal and anti-civilization sentiments. Deirdre's childhood spent apart from a larger human society has given her a freedom and purity simply not present in the characters of court society. Deirdre is
portrayed as a wild child of nature, "running out and in with mud and grasses on her feet," roaming the hills, gathering twigs and listening to birds (234). Now that she has reached womanhood Conchubar would like to incorporate her into his patriarchal world where he wields the ultimate power as king. It is essential to note that Deirdre protests against being Conchubar's wife not because of her love for Naisi, her proper mate, but because she wants to preserve her personal "freedom on the edges of the hills"(237). Synge's play is the only version of the legend in which Deirdre makes a forceful case for her independence separate from her interest in Naisi. As a matter of fact, Deirdre seeks out Naisi only after her freedom is threatened and she perceives the urgent need for an alternative mate to Conchubar. The central conflict is not between two warriors over one woman but rather between Conchubar's desire and Deirdre's will:

You don't know me and you'd have little joy taking me, Conchubar . . . I'm a long while watching the days getting a great speed passing me by. I'm too long taking my will, and it's that way I'll be living always. (238)

Not only is Deirdre a child of nature but it is only in nature that she, as a woman, can retain her independence. Conchubar's court is the ultimate patriarchal structure; the final act introduces her disastrous reinsertion into the patriarchal world she has tried to avoid all her life. Naisi --a skillful hunter who flourishes in the feminine realm of nature-- rather than Conchubar is her appropriate counterpart. Deirdre tells Conchubar that Naisi is more like
her, a child of nature, and therefore the more suitable mate. Indeed, Deirdre finds her first images of Naisi in nature: she seeks a mate with a skin like snow and "lips like blood spilt on it" (236). Naisi and Deirdre flirt in language filled with nature imagery and are wed by natural not institutional authority: "by the sun and moon and the whole earth" (247). Unlike Yeats, who gives Conchubar and Naisi social parity, Synge emphasizes their differing status in Irish society. When Naisi and his brothers first enter Conchubar's house on Slieve Fuadh, they comment on its opulence, and their awe reveals the simplicity of their own lifestyles. Naisi's inferior social status is underscored in the third act when Fergus, failing to tempt Naisi with the profered life of a king, notes condescendingly, "It isn't much I was mistaken, thinking you were hunters only" (253).

The foregrounding of Deirdre's independent will makes Synge's version of the Deirdre legend original among those of his contemporaries; nevertheless, it is a return to his Gaelic source material, an evocation of the powerful self-possessed queens in Irish myth before the influence of Christianity.131 Deirdre is described by the wise old women

131 Thomas Kinsella in his introduction to The Tain remarked on the powerful role certain women have in the Ulster Cycle, that the action continually turns on their "strong and diverse personalities." Deirdre is on this list: "It may be as goddess-figures, ultimately, that these women have their power; it is certainly they, under all the violence, who remain most real in the memory" (xiv-xv).
as a girl with a great instinct for her own pleasure -- "having her own pleasure, though she'd spoil the world" (240) -- which recalls such figures as Queen Maeve, who was known to have many husbands and act according to the urgency of her sexual will. Synge has Deirdre assume her queenly status (prior to Naisi's entrance in her life) by dressing herself in the opulent clothes of a queen, proving that she retains the ability to choose and assume her identity in defiance of powerful social and political forces. She becomes a queen before wedding either of her potential suitors. Deirdre's single name, like that of Maeve, stands at the center of her legend. Deirdre achieves respect and status not by marriage but by carriage. Whereas Yeats's Deirdre instructs her musicians to tell stories of famous pairs of lovers, Synge's Deirdre instructs her women to weave the story of the independent Maeve first (243). She vows to be "Emer in Dundealgan, or Maeve in her house at Connaught," self-possessed queens who passionately pursued the fulfilment of their desires. Naisi is an important part of Deirdre's life story, but the powerful force of her desire defines her character more than the male object of it.

If we compare the self-possessed womanhood of Synge's Deirdre to versions heavily influenced by Victorian

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132 Lavarcham, a controlling mother figure up to this point in the play, notes the new development (243) and begins to answer Deirdre in the diffident tone of a servant, which she adopts for the rest of the play.
prescriptions of femininity, A.E.'s delicate figure for instance, or Hyde's version of the Deirdre legend "couched in language which does more to evoke the polite drawing room of Victorian fiction than the brutal great outdoors of the twelfth century" (Hywel 31), we realize how far Synge succeeded in evoking the directness of an early Gaelic tradition, especially in the restoration of Deirdre's sexual will. Deirdre recollects sensual moments with a directness that goes much farther than the suggestive language audiences hissed in *Playboy of the Western World*:

> It's a long time we've had, pressing the lips together, going up and down, resting in our arms, Naisi, waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses, and listening to the birds in the branches that are highest. (254)

There is an even more sinister and disturbing directness in Naisi and his brothers when they first appear on stage as an unruly pack ready to take what they want by force. Naisi rudely condescends to Lavarcham:

> At your age you should know that there are nights when a king like Conchubar would spit upon his arm ring and queens will stick their tongues out at the rising moon. We're that way this day, and its not wine we're asking only ... Where is the young girl told us we might shelter here? (242)

They demand the young girl so forcefully that even the resourceful Lavarcham cannot control them (she controls the "civilized" Conchubar much more easily). These disturbing elements of sex and violence are a return to the realism of the original source, stark elements that "informed the relationship of Queen Maeve and Aillil in *The Tain*, a
directness that most of the Celtic Revivalists like Lady Gregory did their best to ignore or transcend" (Begnal 89). Synge's Deirdre shows up the many cases in which "mainstream nationalism's view of female sexuality prevented it from adequately mining the ore of what it claimed to be its cultural heritage" (Hywel 24). Vivian Mercier ascribes the choices many of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors made in retelling the Deirdre tale to a "socio-moral" discomfort with handling such issues as suicide, sexuality, and bodily functions of all sorts, including pregnancy (224-31). Synge's inclusion of stark Gaelic features in Deirdre of the Sorrows is yet another way in which he challenged the "artificial" idealization and Victorianization of contemporary retellings of the Deirdre legend. Synge's overall conception of Deirdre as an Ireland figure was a challenge to the various ways in which she was artificially idealized by 1909 in the Literary Revival.
CHAPTER 7
O'CASEY'S JUNO BOYLE: THE TENEMENT MOTHER IRELAND

O'Casey utilizes the Cathleen Ni Houlihan trope in his short comic play *Kathleen Listens In* (1923), where he portrays the nation distracted to frenzy by all the various suitors of post-independence Ireland --Sinn Fein, Free State, and Labour. O'Casey employs the allegory directly, though humorously, choosing not to challenge the assumptions supporting the allegorical formula. He engages the complex issues informing the Ireland trope elsewhere, in the plays of his Dublin Trilogy: *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926). O'Casey uses realistic female characters, as Synge had done earlier, to challenge the rhetorical simplicity and militancy of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. However, O'Casey could not simply turn to a cultural embodiment of Irish nationality like the peasant Maurya to replace the militant Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Maurya was a relevant figure for the Ireland of

133 Although O'Casey did not particularly like the play, he was disappointed by its failure on the Abbey stage. In his autobiography he called it "a jovial, sardonic sketch on the various parties in conflict over Irish politics --Sinn Fein, Free State, and Labour." Many years later O'Casey stated: "it was written specifically to show what fools these mortals were in the quarreling factions soaking Ireland in anxiety and irritation after the civil war"(O'Riordan 33).
1902, which looked to cultural pursuits to define Irish nationality, to societies and clubs that studied language and literature, like Hyde's Gaelic League and Yeats's Irish Literary Society and National Theatre. By the time O'Casey had his first play produced, Ireland had been traumatized by several violent events; a massive brutal strike, a guerilla war that turned into a civil war, and a series of executions, assassinations, and reprisals.\(^\text{134}\) Robert Lowery explains the essential difference between Synge's Ireland and O'Casey's:

the Ireland of 1907 was going somewhere; the Ireland of 1926 had been there. The former had its head in the clouds; the latter had crashed to earth. In 1907 there was life; in 1926 there were only martyrs.\(^5\)

In *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), O'Casey notes how this historical change manifested itself in the new militancy of the Ireland trope. Seamus claims he believed in Cathleen Ni Houlihan

when there wasn't a gun in the country; I've a different opinion now when there's nothin' but guns in the country . . . An' you daren't open your mouth, for Kathleen ni Houlihan is very different now to the woman who used to play the harp an' sing 'Weep on, weep on, your hour is past', for she's a rakin' divil now, an' if you only look crooked at her you're sure to get a punch in the eye.\(^110\)

\(^{134}\) The events were cataclysmic: "The Ireland of Synge was not the Ireland of O'Casey. By 1926 the country had been through a psyche-shattering culmination of political and social events which claimed the flower of a generation as victims. Within a space of nine years (1913-1922), the Dublin working class was crushed, leaders were executed, cities and towns were burned and terrorized, and documents and treaties were bandied about while a Kafkaesque civil war raged" (Lowery 4).
Cathleen Ni Houlihan's harp and ballads had been displaced by guns. Consequently, the condition of O'Casey's Ireland called for a more direct and politically pointed deconstruction of the trope and all its violent implications. The subtle inversions of *Riders to the Sea* (explored in chapter three) were totally inadequate to counter the violent momentum that Cathleen Ni Houlihan had acquired by the 1920s. The ambivalence and complexity inherent in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (explored in chapter two) were ignored -- especially Yeats's clear distinction between the call of the real Irish mother and the abstract national mother. Although Cathleen Ni Houlihan offers the ultimate glory, Yeats distinguished between the terrible claims of Mother Ireland and the protective response of a biological mother: unwilling to sacrifice her son for her country, Bridget Gillane urges her husband to "Tell him not to go" (87). When Maud Gonne and Padraic Pearse, both ardent nationalists, wrote their own versions of Yeats's play they failed to observe this vital distinction and a tradition of artificially conflating the interests of Mother Ireland and real Irish mothers was established. We must briefly explore this tradition in order to understand the urgency with which O'Casey attempted to subvert it with his own mother figures in *Juno and the Paycock* (1924).

In the late nineteenth century there were far more mothers than maidens on the pages of the contemporary
nationalist press, where the passive maiden of aisling poems had assumed the more militant guise of a mother summoning her sons to war (Hywel 26). Several factors contributed to the popularity of the 'mother' version of the trope. Cultural and political movements were attempting to redefine Ireland—its history and culture— independent of its colonial relationship with Britain. The symbol of 'mother' connoted a sense of rootedness in a specifically Irish past which had been forfeited since the colonization of Ireland in the seventeenth century, when Britain uprooted and alienated the Irish from their original sense of themselves by controlling the colony's official history. In the role of mother, 'Ireland' was a symbol of defiance because she embodied a colonial culture's return to the security of its forbidden maternal origins. Note Patrick Pearse's implied use of a mother image to promote a return to the long suppressed Gaelic culture:

We had first to learn to know Ireland, to read the lineaments of her face, to understand the accents of her voice; to repossess ourselves, disinherited as we were, of her spirit and mind, re-enter into our mystic birthright. For this we went to school in the Gaelic League. (16)

By the second decade of the twentieth century Mother Ireland was conflated with two other key mother figures of Irish nationality: the mother church of the Catholic revival and the mother-tongue of the Gaelic revival (Kearney 74-5).135
(This conflation reached its peak in the poems of Padraic Pearse.) However, there was another more insidious, non-cultural dimension behind the popularity of the mother symbol. As mother, the Ireland figure took on a more militant guise than ever before by aggressively summoning her faithful sons to sacrificially shed their blood in order to redeem her from colonial violation. The critical difference between the twentieth-century mother figure and earlier versions was the insistence that it was only through the shedding of blood that Mother Ireland could become free and pure again, "restored to her pristine virginity of language, land and liturgy" (Kearney 77). A connection between death and motherhood was forged by nationalists to promote symbolically the new focus on violent military action and blood sacrifice. Jane Marcus describes

the matrix of signs linking the inimical concepts of life and death, motherhood and war. They have no natural affinity but are coupled anew for every war to glamorize destruction and keep women producing cannon fodder for the next. (64)

Political rebellion required a unity of purpose and action (an ambitious goal considering the sectarian and social divisions in turn-of-the-century Ireland) which a mother figure could symbolically achieve by demanding that all her

\[\text{135}\] The symbol of the mother appealed to cultural nationalists like Douglas Hyde who recognized the literal importance of the mother tongue to the mother land and how both these concepts were best advanced symbolically in the figure of the Irish mother: "mothers were both front-line and bastion against the loss of the Irish language" (Hywel 25).
sons join together in their communal obligation to act in her behalf --violently, if necessary. The ways in which the militant mother of the twentieth century totally recast the political/sexual agenda of previous Ireland figures is evident in Padraic Pearse's famous poem "I Am Ireland": Pearse recast the Old Woman of Beare, a humanized version of the nature goddess who laments the loss of her sexual powers over kings, into a sexless national mother who blames her (would-be warrior) sons for neglecting to act in her protection.136 To O'Casey, this demand for sacrifice was the most artificial, as well as dangerous, aspect of Mother Ireland.

The mothers in Juno and the Paycock struggle to keep their children alive in the midst of an internecine civil war and expose, through their own actions, the artificial values that underlie the militant Mother Ireland figure. There was nothing realistically maternal in Cathleen Ni Houlihan's demand for blood sacrifice; to the contrary, the militaristic values inherent in Mother Ireland's demand are 'masculine' in conception and promote the exclusion of real

136Here is the greater part of the poem:

"Great my glory:
I that bore Cuchulain the valiant.
Great my shame:
My children that sold their own mother.

I am Ireland:
I am older than the Old Woman of Beare"(Collected 323).
women (daughters are rarely referred to) and their life-affirming values. The ballads of Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan totally exclude the heroic suffering and martyrdom of real mothers like Juno and Mrs. Tancred and daughters like Mary Boyle. O'Casey departs from the male-centered images of sacrifice and establishes a long-absent balance by exposing the feminine face of martyrdom in Ireland. All the martyred men in *Juno and the Paycock* are referred to in connection with the names --and suffering-- of their actual mothers: Mrs. Tancred's son, Mrs. Travers's son, Mrs. Mannin's child, etc. (47). In contrast to the glorious rebels in political ballads, these women embody the more mundane yet more relevant, in O'Casey's view, struggle against oppressive economic and social forces because they bear the greatest burden of poverty. Note the way that O'Casey describes Juno:

She is forty-five years of age, and twenty years ago she must have been a pretty woman; but her face has now assumed that look which ultimately settles down upon the faces of the women of the working-class; a look of listless monotony and harassed anxiety, blending with an expression of mechanical resistance. Were circumstances favorable, she would probably be a handsome, active and clever woman. (6)

The concrete struggles of Irish womanhood are embodied most poignantly in the women of the Dublin tenements who prove their heroism by defying the grinding effects of poverty, not the British Empire. And this is one of O'Casey's most revolutionary contributions to the tradition of the Ireland trope. O'Casey creates characters like Juno, Nora, and Bessie, working-class and urban, as the purest embodiment of
Irish nationality and womanhood -- a radical move considering the long-standing tradition of using the peasant mother to best represent the moral and cultural center of Irish nationality. The peasant had been popular precisely because he or she was a symbol of a pure pre-modern Irish society that stood in opposition to the commercialism and industrialization of English civilization. The peasant of industrial society, the slum-dweller, was not uniquely Irish and much too near to middle-class nationalists to be idealized. By constructing a tenement Ireland figure O'Casey was promoting a more realistic and representative figure of twentieth-century Irish nationality and the new urban nationalism. William Thompson notes the changing focus of Irish nationalism: "In many ways the evolution of the ideological movement from 1902 to 1916 is seen in the manner in which the Dublin slum-dweller comes to distract our attention from the Connacht peasant" (65). By the first decade of the twentieth century Dublin was a city troubled by a great pool of unskilled laborers who had fled the countryside only to encounter the worst slums in Western Europe. O'Casey updates the trope to match the emerging industrial society that Dublin had become and includes, in his mother figures, the attendant changes in the conception of femininity and motherhood required by this new tenement setting.
Juno Boyle's dynamism and independence as mother are forged in part by personality, but mostly from necessity. The necessary assertiveness in tenement mothers is missing in the ideal of Irish womanhood that informed the traditional Ireland trope. Note the static almost iconographic stillness of the traditional ideal of the Irish Mother that Elin Ap Hywel claims prevailed in nationalist rhetoric in the beginning of the twentieth century:

On the whole, the Good Irishwoman was the Good Mother, spiritual, fixed at home, transmitting Irishness to her children. The emphasis was on conservation and conservatism. (30)

The call of Mother Ireland was militant but otherwise, as an ideal of Irish womanhood, she was passive. This passivity was rhetorically essential because her helplessness evoked a chivalric code of responsibility that obligated men to act in her service. In the late nineteenth century the chivalric element was further intensified when the category of "the Gael" began to emerge in the work of writers and political activists such as D.P. Moran and Michael Cusack who sought to negate the British anti-Irish stereotype of the effeminate "Celt" by insisting on a counter stereotype of "hypermascularity" (Cairns and Richards, "Woman" 46). The idealization of conventional, passive femininity was needed to ensure the stability of the Gael's hypermasculinity.137

137For example, Pearse's works "set up a clear division between an active male warrior Cuchulain who fights for his country, and dies for it, a Christlike redeemer and
O'Casey subverts this entire chivalric formula by showing how Juno sacrifices herself for the men (and women) in her family; she takes on the responsibilities relinquished by her lazy husband and helpless son; she repeatedly "goes out" to seek temporary low-paying jobs in order to compensate for the inactivity and inaction of the males. Joxer tells the Captain: "It's a good job she has to be so often away . . . when the cat's away, the mice can play!" (11). O'Casey shows the many different ways tenement mothers had to be dynamic, performing miracles of thrift and resourcefulness and displaying considerable physical bravery, to protect their brood from all the dangerous forces lurking in tenement society. None of O'Casey's working-class women can afford to be fixed at home. O'Casey's plays are replete with images of women engaged in dynamic action, like Bessie searching the bullet-ridden streets for a doctor and Nora for her husband. It is precisely the ability of these tenement women to transcend the ideal of "conservation and conservatism" and actively engage their environment, mentally and physically, that makes them the only stability in the "state o' chassis."

The most obvious --and controversial-- way that O'Casey undermined the Mother Ireland trope was by deconstructing the connection between motherhood and blood sacrifice, a Messiah which is also a traditionally iconographic male, and the passive female figure of Mother Ireland who waits to be redeemed, or perhaps inspires, and then accepts the sacrifice of her sons" (Innes, Woman 60).
connection expressed most powerfully in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Just as Synge's realistic mother, Maurya, tries to keep her son Bartley safe at home, so does Juno plead with Johnny not to go out and join the fight: "God knows I went down on me bended knees to him not to go agens the Free State"(9). No glory can compensate for the sacrifice of her child. In the character of Juno, O'Casey shows how inimical motherhood is to any "principle," patriotic or otherwise, that threatens the welfare of children. "You lost your best principle," Juno tells her son, "when you lost your arm; them's the only sort o' principles that's any good to a workin' man"(27). Juno also derides Mary's participation in a strike and her "principle" of worker's unity: "Wan victim wasn't enough. When the employers sacrifice wan victim, the Trade Unions go wan betther be sacrificin' a hundred"(8). By employing the negative connotations of the word "sacrifice," Juno calls into question all the glorified religious associations built into the concept of sacrifice in nationalist literature since the nineteenth century. Juno can only comprehend the concept of personal rather than abstract loyalty and, therefore, she does not understand why Mary wants to sacrifice and strike for Jennie Claffey, whom Mary didn't like in the first place. It is important to acknowledge the limitations in Juno's vision in order to understand O'Casey's conception of her as a realistic Mother Ireland figure. Although one can easily sympathize with
Juno's pragmatic attitude toward the idealism of her children, given her economic circumstances, her attack on their "principles" can, nonetheless, seem rigidly dogmatic, even cynical on occasion. Juno's argument with Mary reveals how she lacks any understanding of the ideas underlying collective action. Nor does she seem to recognize any ethical validity in the social or political views of her children. Both Johnny and Mary respond to her cynicism with programmed cliches---"a principle's a principle"; therefore, Juno's limited vision is never adequately challenged in the play. Insofar as Juno is an embodiment of Irish motherhood, however, she cannot be anything but hostile to ideas that put the physical well-being of her children at risk in order to promote the abstraction called "the collective good."

O'Casey explicitly stated that the goals of motherhood and the goals of abstract ideologies are based on differing and mutually hostile values when he defended the anti-nationalist views of his controversial Nora Clitheroe, who tries to retrieve her husband from the 1916 street fighting in *The Plough and the Stars* (1926):

> Nora voices not only the feeling of Ireland's women, but the women of the human race. The safety of her brood is the true morality of every woman. A mother does not like her son to be killed ---she does not even like him to get married. (Quoted in Lowery 59)

This statement elicited hostile responses in the Dublin newspapers from a public steeped in a rhetorical tradition which assumed Mother Ireland was an emblematic abstraction
that embodied the virtues --and views-- of the 'typical' Irish mother. Nora Clitheroe committed sacrilege when she vehemently differed from this patriotic assumption: "An' there's no woman gives a son or husband to be killed --if they say it, they're lyin', lyin', against God, Nature and against themselves!" (184). Nationalists foregrounded the support of real mothers for their cause in order to maintain the mobilizing power of the Mother Ireland trope and the pressure to sacrifice oneself. The artificial conflation between the interests of Mother Ireland and real Irish mothers was especially prevalent in the time leading up to and just after the Easter Rising, the setting of *The Plough and the Stars*, a time in which the glorification of blood sacrifice reached its peak. Note the striking difference between Nora's and Juno's derision of patriotic "glory," their outright rejection of political sacrifice, and the accepting and transcendent mother in Padraic Pearse's famous poem, "The Mother" (1915):

I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
And break their strength and die, they stand and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed . . .

Lord, thou art hard on mothers:
We suffer in their coming and their going;
And tho' I grudge them not, I weary, weary
Of the long sorrow --And yet I have my joy:
My sons were faithful, and they fought. (*Collected* 333)
O’Casey disassembles the connection between motherhood and blood sacrifice by having the women, especially the mothers in his plays, actively deconstruct the "glory" and "joy" of sacrifice by bearing witness to the brutality involved in war. Compare the glory of Pearse's mother to Nora's angry description of a mangled victim and the nervous soldiers that try to ignore it:

An' in th' middle o' th' sthreet was somethin' huddled up in a horrible tangled heap . . . His face was jammed again th' stones, an' his arm was twisted round his back. . . . An' every twist of his body was a cry against th' terrible thing that had happened to him . . . An' I saw they were afraid to look at it . . . An' some o' them laughed at me, but th' laugh was a frightened one . . . An' some o' them shouted at me, but th' shout had in it th' shiver of fear. . . . I tell you they were afraid, afraid, afraid! (185)

In a similar vein, Juno catalogues the mutilations on Johnny's body for each new visitor, verbally exposing the far from glorious results of patriotic sacrifice, revealing the consequences of Mother Ireland's call. At one point in act 2 she catalogues all the cases of mutilations and murder in her tenement building and refuses to defer to her husband's dismissive attitude (46). Each time Juno uses the word "Diehard" there is an urgency of protest in her words that exposes the pun inherent in the term.138 The myth of glorious sacrifice is incongruent with the more realistic

138"Maybe I didn't feel sorry enough for Mrs. Tancred when her poor son was found as Johnny's been found now -- because he was a Diehard! Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Diehard or Stater, but a poor dead son!" (71).
images of difficult, tortured deaths that haunt the women in *Juno*. Tancred is given a glorious Republican funeral that never supplants the image of his dead body that Mary opens the play with: "seven wounds he had --one enterin' the neck, with an exit wound beneath the shoulder blade; another in the left breast penetratin' the heart, an' . . ." (6). Mrs. Tancred resurrects his bloody image once again at the end of act 2 with the added sense of deep personal loss: "to think that he was lyin' for a whole night stretched out on the side of a lonely countrystyle lane, with his head, his darlin' head that I often kissed an' fondled, half hidden in the water of a runnin' brook" (46). By having mothers repeatedly expose the mutilated and degraded bodies of their martyred sons, O'Casey directly challenges the death mystique and the symbolic use of the 'mother' to promote it. Mrs. Gogan in *The Plough and the Stars* is the only mother figure who participates in the death mystique; however, her comically morbid indulgence in gruesome details is obviously parodic. The audience is meant to sympathize with Fluther's sarcastic remark about Mrs. Gogan's new role as grieving mother: "she's in her element now, woman, mixin' earth to earth, an' ashes t'ashes an' dust to dust, an' revellin' in plumes an' hearses, last days an' judgements! (208). Through Mrs. Gogan, O'Casey makes the same criticism of the death mystique that he does through Juno, but in a comic rather than a tragic vein.
Each time O'Casey questioned the central role of the mother in the death mystique he was battling a religious association which reinforced the connection between accepting mother and martyred son. By the beginning of the twentieth century Mother Ireland was conflated with the Virgin Mary. Mary became a convenient anti-colonial symbol because of her association with the indigenous Catholic religion: "Mariolatry in Ireland must be understood as a deliberate identification of a conquered people with a cult which was anathema to their Protestant oppressors" (Cullingford 2).

Therefore, it is not surprising that Mother Ireland, Mother Church and the Mother of Christ began to merge in the rhetoric, drama and poetry of nationalists. The merger reaches its epitome in the speeches and writings of Padraic Pearse, Catholic leader of the 1916 Easter Rising. Pearse's last poem written on the eve of his execution, and printed and reprinted in newspapers and broadsides, was entitled "A Mother Speaks." The Mother is primarily Mother Ireland, but identifies with the Mother of Christ and her faith in redemption through sacrifice: "Dear Mary, I have shared thy sorrow and soon shall share thy Joy." Posters soon after the executions of the 1916 leaders showed

the martyred Pearse reclining pieta-like on the bosom of a seraphic celestial woman brandishing a tri-colour: a mixture of Mother Ireland, the Virgin Mother of Christ and the Angel of Resurrection. (Kearney 19)

139 Refer to Illustration Figure 4.
Mary's dignified acceptance of her son's martyrdom glorified sacrifice for Ireland by association: "As it took the blood of the son of God to redeem the world, so it would take the blood of Irishmen to redeem Ireland" (Pearse 36). The typical Irish mother, by extension, should understand, like Mary, that her loss is necessary for a higher, glorious purpose --the redemption of Ireland.

The mothers in Juno deconstruct this artificial --though politically expedient-- connection which aligns the bitter grief of real mothers with the unconditional acceptance and glory of the Virgin Mary. There is no hint of transcendent purpose, patriotic or otherwise, in Juno's list of suffering:

Hasn't the whole house, nearly, been massacred? There's young Dougherty's husband with his leg off; Mrs. Travers that had her son blew up be a mine in Inchegeela, in Co. Cork; Mrs. Mannin' that lost wan of her sons in an ambush a few weeks ago, an' now, poor Mrs. Tancred's only child gone west with his body made a collandher of. (47)

Mrs. Tancred, also, refuses to find any glory or larger purpose in the death of her son. Told to find consolation in the ultimate victory of the Republican cause, she retorts: "Ah, what good is that to me now? Whether they're up or down --it won't bring me darlin' boy from the grave." She refuses to see her son's death as "noble" and responds to the suggestion that his comrades will "bury him like a king" with the bitter comment: "An' I'll go on livin' like a pauper"(45). Mrs. Tancred finds no possibility of redemption in her suffering; instead, she expresses the
absurdity of a bloody civil war and the division of people into political "sides":

I'm told [my son] was the leadher of the ambush where me nex' door neighbor, Mrs. Mannin', lost her Free State soldier son. An' now here's the two of us oul' women, standin' one on each side of the scales o' sorra, balanced be the bodies of our two dead darlin' sons.(46)

In contrast to the glory of the Pieta, a real mother's grief does not ennoble the death of her son; to the contrary, O'Casey shows how a mother's suffering only multiplies the sense of meaningless loss. Unlike the Virgin Mary or Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Mrs. Tancred is broken by the martyrdom of her son --"I won't be long afther him"(45)-- and Juno only gets older through the suffering of her children --"Were circumstances favorable, she would probably be a handsome, active, and clever woman"(6). The Virgin Mary never despaired like Mrs. Tancred nor would she express Juno's opinion that "it's nearly time we had a little less respect for the dead" (49). Real mothers resist, rather than accept, the patriotic sacrifice of their sons because they recognize that political designs do not measure up to divine ones: they recognize the difference between Mother Ireland and the Mother of God.

Each time the Virgin Mary is evoked in O'Casey's play she is placed in contrast to forces associated with Mother Ireland. Mary is called in to neutralize not ennoble Mother Ireland. Juno and Mrs. Tancred call to her to reverse the hatred caused by the brutal fighting (46; 72). The
contradictions inherent in the identification of Mary with Mother Ireland in nationalist literature are especially pronounced in Johnny's intimate emotional connection with the statue of Mary throughout the play. In his militant moments Johnny refers to Ireland as his spiritual mother: "Ireland half free'll never be at peace while she has a son to pull the trigger" (27) --a "programmed" phrase reminiscent of contemporary nationalist propaganda. Abstract sacrifice is attractive to Johnny only when it is safely in the past or future. When danger is imminent, Johnny identifies himself as Mary's "son": "Blessed Mother o' God, shelter me, shelter your son!" (38). The irony is that Johnny calls to the Virgin Mary to protect him from the forces unleashed by Mother Ireland, represented in the threatening presence of the man in a dark trench coat in act 1 (19). In fact, every subsequent time Johnny is faced with the forces of Mother Ireland, O'Casey evokes the Virgin Mary to provide a contrapuntal and, no doubt, ironic effect. When the Irregular soldier summons Johnny to a meeting (which turns out to be his execution) at the end of act 2, the audience is left with the image of the one-armed Johnny insisting he has done enough for Ireland while a Hail Mary is heard faintly in the distance (50). When the soldiers drag Johnny off to his execution he calls to Mary once again for protection and those are the last words the audience hears from him (69). By placing Mary's protection in opposition to Mother
Ireland's violence, O'Casey shows the incompatibility between the ideological systems that support each figure --and the hypocrisy inherent in their conflation in nationalist rhetoric.

In the popular Mother Mary/Ireland figures of Pearse, Christianity is reduced to a cultural identification of nationality and its central maternal symbol exploited to glorify political martyrdom--and hence political violence. In _Juno_ O'Casey restores the maternal, non-political values to the Virgin Mary figure; her unconditional forgiveness, protection, and personal loyalty, none of which are based on any abstract idea of justice --whether that abstraction is nationalism, socialism, or the law. Johnny knows he has betrayed Tancred, and his cause, but he can still turn to Mary for mercy because her compassion transcends the judgement of men. The Virgin Mary's non-physical presence is a striking moral force in the play for she is the figure that most purely embodies the basic Christian humanism of what David Krause calls O'Casey's 'anti-heroic vision'(66). One of the very first things that O'Casey describes about the home of the Boyles is the picture of the Virgin Mary (5) which is referred to intermittently throughout the play. But it is important to note that the Mary figure remains the ideal embodiment of Christian values and thus only a symbolic rather than actual force in the mundane world of the Dublin tenements. The calls to Mary remain unanswered and the
tragic tone of the play is deepened by the absence of her intervention. Even such faithful believers as Juno and Mrs. Tancred ask "Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin son was riddled with bullets?" (46; 72). Juno answers her own question when she impatiently responds to Mary's dismissal of the Virgin by saying that the Mother of God is no match "agen the stupidity o' men" (70) --or the violence of Mother Ireland for that matter. The real mothers are the only active arbitrators of protection, mercy, and forgiveness in the tenement world of O'Casey's Dublin plays.\textsuperscript{140} O'Casey identified the "hope" in the play in Juno's speech of reconciliation and forgiveness --something Lady Gregory independently recognized during the first production.\textsuperscript{141} Through Juno and Mrs. Tancred and all the various suffering mothers in \textit{Juno}, O'Casey restores the Christian values of real Irish mothers to the symbol of the Virgin Mary, making sure we see both real and ideal embodiments of maternal

\textsuperscript{140}For example, despite Johnny's calls to the Virgin, the only mother that could possibly protect him from the Irregulars, is his real one, but she isn't home. In a previous scene, Johnny calls to the Virgin Mary to protect him from Tancred's corpse but then turns to his mother for actual protection: "Sit here, sit here, mother . . . between me an' the door" (38).

\textsuperscript{141}In a letter to Mrs. Helen Kiok of New York (August 3, 1955) O'Casey states: "The play doesn't 'end on a note of despair'. Read Juno's last fine words to Mary as she & her daughter go forth to begin again." This letter is reproduced in \textit{Sean O'Casey Review}, III (1976) p.50. Lady Gregory's comments can be found in \textit{Journals}, p.76.
values in stark opposition to the militancy of Cathleen Ni Houlihan.
In *The Plough and the Stars* Nora Clitheroe, the pregnant wife of one of the Easter Rebels, attacks the myth of Mother Ireland even more fundamentally than Juno, who merely criticizes its destructive effects. Nora questions its fundamental assumptions, the myth's glorification of violence by linking it to concepts of bravery and manhood. After an excursion into the street battle, Nora comes back to report fear in the rebels (185), exposing their ambivalence about sacrificing themselves for Mother Ireland. She tries to undermine her husband's trust in his comrade Brennan by pointing out the self-preserving fear that eclipses any hint of impervious bravery:

Jack, look at th' anger in his face; look at th' fear glintin' in his eyes . . . He himself's afraid, afraid, afraid! . . . He wants you to go th' way he'll have th' chance of death sthrikin' you an' missin' him! . . . His very soul is cold . . . shiverin' with th' thought of what may happen to him . . . It is his fear that is thryin' to frighten you from recognizin' th' same fear that is in your own heart! (197)

In order to keep her husband safely home, Nora must caustically recast the myth of heroic glory that Cathleen Ni Houlihan used to lure men away from their families. In
contrast to the image of Eire inspiring men to battle, Nora actively works to keep her husband from participating in the nationalist struggle: she refuses to go to the political meeting (151); tries to sabotage Jack's political career by destroying General Connolly's summons; and finally, searches bullet-ridden streets to induce her husband to return home (158). At one point in the play she refers to the myth of sacrifice as a "lie" (184). One contemporary nationalist, Sean O'Shea, forcefully articulated a widespread sense of outrage when he chastised O'Casey for placing Nora's interests and actions in opposition to the call of Mother Ireland: "our women --wives, sisters and mothers--were a source of inspiration to our men during the revolt and urged them on --not hindering them" (quoted in Lowery 62). Most controversially, Nora repeatedly ascribes motives of vanity to her husband's seeming heroism.

It is no surprise that the Dublin audience found Nora's mockery of the much glorified Easter Rebels unacceptable. In the weeks that followed the first Dublin production, critical discussion centered on many of the same issues that were involved in the protest against Synge's far less abrasive Nora Burke. For example, the imperfect picture of Irish womanhood --and manhood by extension-- was interpreted as a national betrayal because it aided the British in their derogatory images of Ireland. Critics responded to a
non-idealized portrait of Irish womanhood, once again, by questioning the "typicality" of the character. Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, wife of an Easter martyr and the leader of the protesters, most clearly expressed this opinion:

May I suggest that when Mr. O'Casey proceeds to lecture us on "the true morality of every woman" he is somewhat beyond his depth. Nora Clitheroe is no more "typical of Irish womanhood" than her futile, sniveling husband is of Irish manhood. The women of Easter Week, as we know them, are typified in the mother of Padraic Pearse, that valiant woman who gave both her sons for freedom. Such breathe the spirit of Volumnia, or the Mother of the Gracchi. (Quoted in Lowery 80)

As a corrective replacement for Nora Clitheroe, the leader of the protesters offers Pearse's mother, the epitome of the mythic connection between blood sacrifice, motherhood, and the transcendent suffering of the Virgin Mary --a connection that O'Casey deliberately set out to deconstruct in all three of his Dublin plays. Although Sheehy-Skeffington cites Roman rather than Irish matrons --"Volumnia, or the Mother of Gracchi"-- her examples reinforce, rather than question, the maternal glory in a son's patriotic sacrifice. The most

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142 For example, F.R. Higgins wrote about the play, "the main questions at issue are merely based upon a revival of that arrogance of the Gall [Irish for "foreigner"], recently dormant, towards the Gael" (quoted in Lowery 72). Some accused O'Casey of pandering to the British: "Is it merely a coincidence that the only soldiers whose knees do not knock together with fear and who are indifferent to the glories of their uniform are the Wiltshires?" (79). Mrs Sheehy-Skeffington concluded her verbal protest during the first performance by saying "The play is going to London soon to be advertised there because it belies Ireland. All you need to do now is sing 'God Save the King' (31).
cherished of mother figures was of course Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Further proving that Nora was, in fact, being measured and found wanting as an Ireland figure, Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington mentions the "earlier ideals" of Cathleen Ni Houlihan as a point of comparison (quoted in Lowery 58) --a strategy Griffith had used earlier against Synge's Nora.143

The attempt to make Nora, wife of an Easter Rebel, into a proper Cathleen Ni Houlihan can be attributed to the central position the trope held in the Rising; it was widely used to mobilize psychologically the forces of the insurrection. This is evident in a cautionary statement made by Eoin MacNeill, a leader of the Irish Volunteers, during the mobilization:

We have to remember that what we call our country is not a poetical abstraction. There is no such person as Caitlin ni Uallachain or Rosin Dubh or the Sean-bhean Vocht, who is calling us to serve her. What we call our country is the Irish nation, which is a concrete and visible reality. (Quoted in Dalton, "Tradition" 352)

The leaders not only used the trope in their poetry leading up to the Easter Rising but also on the first day of the rebellion when they proclaimed the Republic of Ireland as a sovereign Mother Ireland:

In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom. (Quoted in De Rosa 268)

143See above p.132.
This act transformed the trope from an inspirational political symbol to a founding truth in the minds of subsequent generations. The pressure to take on the role of Cathleen Ni Houlihan extended to other female characters in O'Casey's Rising play --though Nora Clitheroe, as the wife of an Easter Rebel, had the most important and, consequently, the most sensitive role to play in promoting nationalist myths. Rosie the prostitute and the belligerent Bessie Burgess both deconstruct the Ireland trope in more complex and subtle ways. Neither is a straightforward version of Mother Ireland, but both evoke defining aspects of the traditional figure which O'Casey remolds to suit his own subversive purposes.

Rosie's name suggests "the rose of England and the leader of Ireland's pro-England Parliamentary party," which is probably more than a coincidence since John Redmond had a high profile role in the events leading up to the Easter Rising (Thompson 214). During World War I, Redmond was busy trying to win Irish recruits for England, so Rosie's attempted solicitation of The Covey --the embodiment of the proletarian consciousness in the play-- can be interpreted as the English seduction of the Irish working class (214). But the fact that O'Casey's sympathies in the scene seem to lie with the rejected Rosie rather than the priggish member of the proletariat reveals a counter, more fundamental allegorical dimension to the prostitute figure in the play.
In all fundamental ways except for her last name, Rosie is an Ireland figure rather than an England figure. The harlot had become a fairly popular Ireland figure in the late seventeenth century, but the changing attitudes toward women and sexuality in the nineteenth century made it no longer acceptable to mention Ireland as a harlot: if Ireland is to be ideal, she cannot be a harlot, even under Britain's duress (Clark 170). In Rosie, O'Casey restores the prostitute figure and her aggressive sexuality but re-examines the exchange of her sexuality from an economic perspective rather than a colonial one: O'Casey's prostitute sells herself to Dubliners for money rather than Englishmen for sovereignty. Rosie's illicit sexuality is necessitated by economic survival and, therefore, cannot be remedied by the anti-colonialist aims of the Easter Rebels, or of nationalists in general. In Red Roses For Me, we get a hint of the reasons why a prostitute figure allegorically embodies, for O'Casey, the real struggle of Ireland, especially the impoverished city of Dublin:

_Finnoola. It's a bleak, black, an' bitther city._

_1st Man._ Like a batthered, tatthered whore, bullied by too long a life.

_2nd Man._ An' her three gates are castles of poverty, penance, an' pain. (196)

O'Casey's focus on economic rather than political struggle is evident in the various ways he foregrounds Rosie Redmond's aggressively businesslike attitude toward her job
against the backdrop of the heroic Easter Rising. This approach would prove to be most controversial to the contemporary audience, which broke up in riots during the opening week. The self-appointed censor, George O'Brien, warned O'Casey to de-emphasize Rosie's "professional side," which was "unduly emphasized in her actions and conversation" (O'Casey, Letters 144). The clarity with which O'Casey emphasizes Rosie's cynical and professional acceptance of sex as an economic transaction was disturbing to a Dublin audience. Rosie was essential, by O'Casey's own admission, to the conception of the entire play. He told Ria Mooney after opening night that her effective portrayal of Rosie had saved the play: "If the people had disliked Rosie the other two acts would have failed" (O'Connor 196). The success of the opening night, however, was misleading; by the third night Dubliners had violently expressed their "dislike" of Rosie Redmond.

On the third night muffled protests were heard just after Rosie's entrance, and shortly thereafter a voice called loudly from the front, "O'Casey out," while others shouted "Rosie Redmond." The Irish Times stated that "Shocking epithets were hurled at Miss Ria Mooney while she played Rosie Redmond in Pantomine" (quoted in Lowery 33). The Abbey actor Gabriel Fallon wrote, "I can still hear the Joxer-Daly-like accents of that fruity Dublin voice that wanted 'that wumman taken offa th' stay-age" (92). As Rosie
recurrently interjected herself into the action the commotion escalated and act 2 proceeded in dumb show until about a dozen women and two men rushed the stage, climbed onto the set, and attacked the actors. The rioting was eventually subdued by the police, but the attack on Rosie continued in the press throughout the next week, and the actress Ria Mooney recounted the terror she lived in during the production, the threats made to her professional reputation and even an attempt by nationalist supporters to kidnap her (O'Connor 200). On the surface, objections toward Rosie seemed to stem from a moral revulsion against the first realistic image of a Dublin prostitute --complete with the dialogue of the tenements-- on an Irish stage. The provocative realism of the character is evident in the way the audience responded during the performance with shouts of 'Honour Bright,' a reference to a recently murdered Dublin prostitute, and the casual way even drama critics used the name of the actual prostitute to refer to Rosie herself. Many audience members wrote to Dublin newspapers and dismissed Rosie as a sensational, "unnecessary" element in the play. But a close examination of the ensuing controversy in the press shows that the real issues surrounding the audience's rejection of Rosie were political. Mrs. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington stated that the protest was [not] directed to the moral aspect of the play. It was on national grounds solely, voicing a passionate indignation against the outrage of a drama staged in a supposedly national theatre, which held up to derision
and obloquy the men and women of Easter Week. (Quoted in Lowery 57)

As we shall see, the focused attack on Rosie shows once again that representations of Irish womanhood on the stage of the National Theatre were unavoidably connected to issues of national identity, a connection continually reinforced by the long and popular tradition of Ireland as Woman tropes.

Despite the fact that other "socially undesirable" male characters mock the rebels in Act 2, among them a loafer and a Communist, the middle-class Dublin audience focused its spontaneous anger on Rosie because as a female character her derision of the rebels contained much larger symbolic dimensions than the dismissive comments of the male characters. As an example of Irish womanhood Rosie, like Nora Clitheroe, had an essential and expected role to play in sustaining nationalist myths of the male fighter: ideally, she was to cherish privately an image of his vigorous "manhood" and project it back mythically enhanced into the daily life of the family, the community, and even history -- as Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan does in her ballads.

Throughout the nineteenth century, political poems, especially those of Thomas Davis and Young Ireland, used the word "manhood" to emphasize the duty of each Irishman to act in the protection and service of Irish womanhood, especially Mother Ireland. Therefore, the Irish woman's unwavering belief in the fighter sustained the mobilizing power of chivalrous values in nationalist rhetoric. In *The Plough and*
the Stars, however, O'Casey assaults the audience's expectations by having Rosie call in question, of all things, the sexual prowess of the rebels. After all, their single-minded pursuit of political revolution has taken a toll on her business and she opens the scene by complaining:

They're all in a holy mood. Th' solemn-lookin' dials on th' whole o' them an' they marchin' to th' meetin'. You'd think they were th' glorious company of th' saints, an' th' noble army of martyrs thrampin' through th' streets of paradise. They're thinkin' of higher things than a girl's garters. (162)

Rosie deconstructs the "manhood" of the rebel fighters by parodying the various forms of sexual denial as exhibited by Catholic saints and clergy. Note Rosie's response to The Covey's rejection: "Jasus, it's in a monasthery some of us ought to be, spendin' our holidays kneelin' on our adorers, tellin' our beads, an' knockin' hell out of our buzzums!"(166). In direct contrast to the traditional Ireland figures, Rosie has no use for a "manhood" that is idealized larger than life and that redirects its sexual energy away from flesh and blood women.

The juxtaposition of Rosie's sensual womanhood with the demands of war is especially provocative at the very end of Act 2. Rosie's song expresses a bawdy affirmation of life, interrupting the marching commands by Officers:

I once had a lover, a tailor, but he could do nothin' for me,
An' then I fell in with a sailor as strong an' wild as th' sea.
We cuddled an' kissed with devotion, till th' night from th' mornin'had fled;

An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin boy
Was dancin' a jig in th' bed!
Dancin' a jig in th' bed, an' bawlin' for butther an' bread. 
An' there, to our joy, a bright bouncin' boy
Was dancin' a jig in th' bed! (179)

Rosie's song expresses the delighted spirit of life which got left out of the call of Pearse for a death-dedication to the Republican cause. The fact that this life spirit comes from the margins of working-class life rather than the respectable maiden figures of nationalist symbology is especially relevant to O'Casey's conception of the Ireland figure. Despite oppressive economic circumstance and political upheaval, Rosie has created a boy animated with celebratory life, 'dancin' a jig in the bed' —whose celebratory jig for new life contrasts with the measured and monotonous marching movements of the soldiers to their death outside the window. Rosie's lewd song

explains with perfect dramatic concision why [the marching] order is futile and will lead to defeat. At the same time it provides a spark of hope by juxtaposing the damn-all joy in life, 'dancin' a jig in th' bed', with the military order barren of all hope and directing the marchers toward death. (Lindsay 188)

For over two centuries, since the advent of the aisling sky-woman, the Ireland figure provoked desire through her ideal beauty only to deny it through her chastity and inaccessibility. The sexual energy she mobilized in the patriot male was naturally redirected into political service since the beautiful woman was no mere mortal but Ireland herself. O'Casey subverts this tradition by putting Rosie's sexuality in active opposition to the political construction of Irish "manhood." She tries to seduce the men in the pub,
actively trying to corrupt the "saints" and "martyrs" and undo the formula that sublimates the sexuality of the rebel men into patriotic action. Her aggressive business-like sexuality let loose among the political events of act 2 is one of the most politically subversive forces in the entire play. The Dublin newspaper Voice of Labor made this point by referring to Rosie as a force of "degeneracy" and then chastising O'Casey for allowing that force to "corrupt" the nobility of the martyrs, "an unforgivable thing" in the journalist's view. Indeed, O'Casey positions Rosie's seductions so that they compete with the solicitations of the Voice outside. (The Voice's words are actual excerpts from the speeches of Pearse, which the contemporary audience would have recognized.) Throughout act 2 Rosie and the Voice compete for influence and manipulate, in different and self-serving ways, myths of "manhood": the Voice offers glory and redemption for manly action on the battlefield while Rosie offers praise for men who succumb to her sexual charms: she tells the Covey that he is "no man" for rejecting her advances (175) in contrast to the receptive Fluther, a man of

144"Rosie Redmond, a woman of the streets, is used to intensify that antagonism [between a nobility and a degeneracy], . . . The nationalism of Pearse may have fallen amongst strange companions in the days that witnessed its first manifestations, but it never lost its nobility. Mr O'Casey, whatever his purpose may be, takes away that, an unforgivable thing" (quoted in Lowery 52).
the world, according to Rosie, and excitingly "terrible" for
the women (177).

O'Casey achieves a contrapuntal effect in the second
act as Rosie and the Voice unintentionally interrupt and
subvert each other's statements, twisting the meanings of
each other's words and ideas, shaping them to comply with
their differing world views, in order to advance their
differing interests. Another important example of this
effect is found in the Voice's urgent call for men to embrace
"arms," i.e. guns, to gain Ireland's freedom:

> It is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of
> Irishmen. We must accustom ourselves to the thought of
> arms, we must accustom ourselves to the sight of arms, we
> must accustom ourselves to the use of arms . . .(162)

The irony exists in the timing of the Voice's statement which
interrupts Rosie's complaint about the difficulty of selling
her own arms --and her lassie's legs-- to pay the rent.
Rosie's arms represent the means for survival in the Dublin
slums, the commodification of pleasure for survival rather
than the pursuit of it for enjoyment. Unlike other Ireland
figures, the offering of Rosie's arms, even in the midst of
rebellion, has nothing to do with political victory.
O'Casey exposes the incompatible values of Irish womanhood
and nationalism by juxtaposing the sensual with the martial
in the word "arms." (The juxtaposition of sensual and martial
is also achieved, as we have seen, in the way the baby's
spontaneous jig in Rosie's song contrasts with the artificial
and rigid marching sounds outside.) The question is which
arms, Rosie's or the Voice's, will end up in the "hands of Irishmen" by the end of act 2.

Another important example of double meaning occurs in the word "slavery." The Voice states, "There are many things more horrible than bloodshed, and slavery is one of them!" Rosie responds, "It's th' sacred thruth, mind you, what that man's afther sayin'"(162). Rosie ostensibly agrees with the Voice in order to gain favor with potential nationalist customers in the pub, but later she, or rather O'Casey, redefines the concept of "slavery" in Rosie's own image. She says to the Covey,"'they're not goin' to get Rosie Redmond . . . To fight for freedom that wouldn't be worth winnin' in a raffle!'"(165). The political freedom that the Voice speaks of is inconsequential to the life of Rosie, a twenty-year old tenement girl forced into prostitution by poverty. Rosie's freedom can only be achieved through viable economic opportunities and protections, a freedom achieved sooner through a winning raffle ticket than a successful political rebellion against the British. Rosie is a slave of economic forces that are larger than herself . The Voice's recruitment speech interrupts Rosie's complaint about her low wages and high rent:

It's no joke thryin' to make up fifty-five shillin's a week for your keep an' laundhry, an' then taxin' you a quid for your own room if you bring home a friend for th' night. . . . If I could only put by a couple of quid for a swankier outfit, everythin' in th' garden ud look lovely ----(162)
Note how Rosie implicates the landlord in her prostitution; his habit of 'taxin' her customers, after all, brings him profits from the selling of Rosie's body. It is clear that the forces that enslave Rosie are Irish and, therefore, not remediable by the anti-colonialist goals of the Easter Rising. Nor can these economic forces, which O'Casey believed defined the real struggle for most Irishmen and women, be adequately encompassed in the traditional Ireland figure with its narrow and obsessive focus on the Irish-British political conflict.

O'Casey's promotion of Rosie as the purest embodiment of Irish slavery connects her in yet another way to popular Ireland figures. There was a long-standing tradition which flourished in the nineteenth century of portraying the Ireland figure as England's female slave with the attendant images of chains and shackles. It pervades Thomas Moore's popular Irish Melodies as well as the more militant verse of Thomas Davis and Young Ireland. It is also found in the more contemporary work of the poets involved in the Easter Rising.145 This image, oversimplistic to begin with, was so

145Pearse's use of the image can be found in poems such as "The Dord Feinne" and "The Rebel" (Ryan 23; 27). A typical early example of the tradition can be found in Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies:

"Erin, oh Erin, thus bright thro' the tears
Of a long night of bondage, thy spirit appears.

Unchilled by the rain, and unwak'd by the wind,
The lily lies sleeping thro' winter's cold hour,
Till Spring's light touch her fetters unbind,
redundant and stale by the writing of The Plough that it was
easily caricatured, and indeed within the play the Covey
mocks Peter's patriotism with his own satiric version of the
allegorical slave trope:

Dear harp o' me counthry,¹⁴⁶ in darkness I found thee,
The dark chain of silence had hung o'er thee long--

When proudly, me own island harp, I unbound thee,
An' gave all thy chords to light, freedom an' song!(146)

The slave trope with its British-Irish, colonizer-colonized,
master-slave dichotomies held little relevance to the
struggles against poverty in the Dublin tenements. Rosie,
the prostitute of the Dublin slums, not Eire the ideal
maiden, was the most realistic and modern embodiment of
slavery in O'Casey's Dublin. James Connolly typifies the
Irish Labor movement's view on this subject:

In Ireland the woman's cause is felt by all Labour men
and women as their cause . . . The worker is the slave of
capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of
that slave. In Ireland that female worker has hitherto
exhibited, in her martyrdom, an almost damnable
patience.(190)

Rosie's greedy landlords seem much more oppressive than the
British Tommies. The dismal environment of the tenements,
seething with disease, poverty and crime, evokes a much more
ominous threat than the abstract concept of England's
colonial power invoked by the Voice. As the Covey says,

And daylight and liberty bless the young flower.
Thus Erin, oh Erin, thy winter is past,
And the hope that liv'd thro' it shall blossom at last.
(Deane, Field 1; 1061)

¹⁴⁶Eire was often portrayed with a harp.
"more die o' consumption than are killed in th' wars" (208). In Rosie, O'Casey offers a realistic symbolic corrective to the tradition of portraying Ireland as a slave by displacing the colonial context with an intra-Irish class conflict. The commodification of Rosie's sexuality embodies in concrete terms the Covey's socialist theories and surpasses them in directness and poignancy. The Covey talks about economic forces; Rosie embodies their effects on a tenement girl who has adapted to those forces. She responds to Covey's ideological jargon with a much more concrete indicator of economic necessity: "It's heartbreakin' to see a young fella thinkin' of anything, or admirin' anything, but the silk thtransparent stockin's showin' off the shape of a little lassie's legs!" (165). Rosie's adaptability to the humiliating exchange of commerce provides her with survival skills; in fact, she is one of the few central female characters to remain alive, as far as we know, at the end of the play.

The riot no doubt reflected the discomfort the middle-class nationalist audience must have had with O'Casey's recasting of the national struggle into a struggle between intra-Irish forces. And just as had happened with Synge's Nora Burke, the audience challenged the authenticity of an Ireland figure that suggested that the enslavement of the self was more dangerous than colonial enslavement. Many critics used the word "unnecessary" to describe O'Casey's
prostitute character even though she fit into the realistic cross-section of slum life in the play; others went so far as to suggest incredulously that there were no prostitutes in Ireland. In a revealing exchange recorded by Lady Gregory, the poet John Donoghly met Joseph Holloway, the Abbey historian, who insisted, "There are no streetwalkers in Dublin." When Donagh stated that he was accosted by one last night, Holloway countered, "There were none in Dublin till the Tommies brought them over" (*Journals* 99-100). O'Casey's prostitute figure was shoved right back into the colonial context he worked so hard to displace. In *Plough* O'Casey redefined the national struggle as one against economic destitution and the human degradation that attends it --a combination most provocatively embodied in a realistic tenement prostitute like Rosie.

In Bessie Burgess O'Casey repeats this process of displacing the colonial context with an economic one. Bessie's symbolic importance in the play is partly reflected in her stylized and explosive entrance into the house, emerging --like Cathleen Ni Houlihan-- from the background sounds of military action. Vincent De Baun describes O'Casey's use of non-naturalistic elements to abstract and highlight Bessie's first appearance:

Toward the end of act 1 . . . Bessie makes a drunken entrance. In the distance is the sound of marching feet, a brass band, and soldiers singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." Her intoxication has inspired one of her occasional surges of religious fervor, and she is speaking in tag-lines from Scripture. Her speech is
weirdly prognostic...This strange whirl of metaphors, spoken in half-light by a dishevelled harridan, is an unusual device in a naturalistic play. (257)

The image of a militant and dishevelled older woman, perambulating through scenes and offering prophecies, bears a striking resemblance to the popular Shan Van Voct figure. This symbolic dimension is reinforced each time Bessie's neighbors call her "hag" or "bitch" in response to her belligerent actions. However, Bessie goes through a transformation, like the Shan Van Voct, that reveals her hidden nature; by the end of act 4 Bessie, more than any other character of the play, ascends to the role of a universal mother, nursing the victims of political as well as economic forces and holding a vigil over the dead. Bessie's heroic transformation is based on a nature that is the diametric opposite of Yeats's idealized young "queen," for her aggressive compassion is acquired by a life-long, physically debilitating struggle with poverty. The action of the play culminates in Bessie's claustrophobic tenement room, defined by an "unmistakable air of poverty bordering on destitution" (200), where both the living and the dead are sheltered. Bessie's protective space is placed in opposition to the dangerous battlefield of the traditional Shan Van Voct, but it proves, ultimately, to be no match for the intrusions of political forces, mass arrests, and soldiers' bullets.

All the elements in Bessie's characterization that evoke the Shan Van Voct are placed in an awkward juxtaposition with
her pro-British militancy -- not only is she a Protestant but her son is fighting with the British in WWI. She repeatedly invokes Cathleen Ni Houlihan's arch enemy, the young and martial Britannia. Bessie's political opinions are pro-Unionist and she mocks the Irish rebels as traitors. In a complete reversal of tradition, O'Casey has his Shan Van Vocht figure prophesy not Ireland's inevitable victory but the nation's "deserved" political defeat. Bessie's hostile behavior towards the rebels reaches its climax in the "choke th' chicken" sequence of act 3. Her obnoxious behavior alienates the sympathies of the audience just before her heroic action in act 4. O'Casey separates Bessie's narrow political vision from her much nobler moral vision when he brings her ideological fanaticism to a frenzied climax and then undermines its importance by making politics inconsequential to her heroic behavior in act 4. Where Juno is indifferent to politics, Bessie transcends her politics and through her heroism subverts the nationalist formula that defined moral vision according to a narrow political stance -- to be Irish was morally pure and to be British morally corrupt. Furthermore, Bessie's pro-British political stance does not affect the Irishness of her experience. Bessie is a product of the Dublin tenements, and her struggles are those of the working class, no matter what political view she holds. O'Casey was an active nationalist in the early part of his life, but he came to believe with a fierce conviction
that the labour struggle, which was ideally based on an international unity of the proletariat, was much more important. It is no coincidence that the martyred child of O'Casey's version of Mother Ireland is not her soldier son but the consumptive Mollser, whom Bessie tries to revive with glasses of milk, a futile but tenderly maternal response to the overwhelming forces of disease-causing poverty. O'Casey's Mother Ireland shifts the emphasis from the second to the first part of her title: Bessie viciously mocks the Irish rebels yet maternally nurtures the more numerous Irish victims of war, poverty, and disease. O'Casey shows that one's political stance is inconsequential to true Irishness and, consequently, deconstructs the Ireland figure's anti-British tradition. Synge restored the pre-colonial, non-political Caillech figure in the wake of Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan; in the wake of the Rising, the war with Britain, and the civil war, every issue had been given an unavoidably political cast. O'Casey necessarily includes politics in his Ireland figure only to show how detachable they are from Bessie's real values; it is the compassion not the political loyalty of Bessie's Irish womanhood that allows her to achieve ultimately the larger symbolic stature of a Mother Ireland figure.

Bessie's belligerence serves a purpose beyond the separation of political and moral vision explored above for it connects her with the pre-colonial Ireland figures.
O'Casey continued --and surpassed-- Synge's attempt to de-idealize the Caillech by restoring the unpleasant aspects of the original figure in sovereignty myths. In Bessie, O'Casey strips away the idealization and restores the vulgarity and crudeness that were so central to the conception of the original Caillech. Far from exhibiting the noble restraint of other contemporary old women figures, Bessie verbally (and at times physically) attacks her neighbors: "General Clitheroe'd rather be unlacin' his wife's bodice than standin' at a barricade" (194). Bessie's manner will allow romanticizing of neither love nor patriotism; she openly mocks and deflates the aspirations of those around her, whether it's Nora's claim to respectability or Clitheroe's attempt at heroism. There is no false sentimentality or nobility even in Bessie's martyrdom, as is evident in her last words to Nora: "I've got this through . . . through you. . . through you, you bitch, you!" (215). Till the end, her magnanimity coexists with her earthy and vulgar nature.

O'Casey de-idealizes Bessie to such an extent in the vicious "choke th' chicken" sequence that she was no doubt alienated from the sympathies of the contemporary, politically sensitive audience.  

147 The "choke th' chicken" sequence shows Bessie viciously taunting the insurgents and their civilian supporters from her window. When Clitheroe and Brennan enter, helping the badly wounded Langon retreat from the firing line, Bessie shows her insensitivity toward men facing
to her conception as a modern-day Caillech figure. The audience sees Bessie in her most belligerent and annoying form just before she is transformed into the hero of the play. Robert Ayling compares this distancing effect to Brecht's "alienation" effect (185), but a fuller understanding of the way it operates in Bessie's characterization lies in her evocation of the Shan Van Voct: a similar distancing device played a central role in the Gaelic conception of the hag goddess. The ugliness and unpleasantness of the hag in sovereignty myths tested the vision of future kings who could see beyond the surface, beyond the ugliness, to the special humanity of the hag. In these myths the hag is suddenly transformed into the sovereignty "through the act of love with a male who was man enough to take her on" (Dhomhnail 193). O'Casey, limited by realism, omits the sexual element but retains the hag's dangerous and provocative aspect as a test for the audience, tricking them into a shallow evaluation of Bessie's character in act 3 and then revealing the misleading nature of surface reality in act 4. For three-fourths of the play Bessie is too crude for the average eye to appreciate, her humanity hidden underneath a rough exterior, but then at the very end of act 3 she transforms before our eyes during Nora's heavy odds. Her shouts and jeers—'Runnin' from the Tommies . . .choke th' chicken! Runnin' from th' Tommies . . .choke th' chicken!" act as a jarring counterpoint to the poignant struggle taking place in the street below, with Clitheroe torn from his wife and helping his dying comrade.
breakdown, and reaches her ascendancy and martyrdom in the fourth act.

The contrast between rough exterior and a deeper inner humanity plays an important role in the working-class aspect of O'Casey's Shan Van Voct figure. Nobility in the world of the tenements has none of the conventional beauty and purity central to the romantic versions of Ireland figures and their brave sons. O'Casey puts forth a realistic image of working class heroism with all the inconsistencies and ambivalences produced by a life of poverty. Synge responded to Yeats's Cathleen with a symbol of Irish womanhood that gains nobility through her involvement in this world; O'Casey offers a symbol of Irish womanhood that gains nobility through her involvement with the modern world. Destitution is not absent in Riders to the Sea, but the modern industrial slum bred evils unknown in Synge's peasant play. Throughout Plough O'Casey examines the far from ideal adjustments individuals make to survive the dehumanizing effects of an industrial city.148 Slum life is shown in all its ugly

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148For example, much of the way people relate to each other in Plough is based on the claustaphobic experience of tenement life and its detachment from nature. The play opens with several actions occurring in a small space. Since conflicts are unavoidable, characters bicker constantly but reconcile, of necessity, a short time after since they cannot escape each other in such a small living space. O'Casey's tenement characters possess a humorous attitude toward life, a native vigor and shrewdness that becomes a means of survival against despair. The tenants cannot afford to take each other's foibles seriously, otherwise they will be distracted to a frenzy as Peter is by The Covey. O'Casey's
facets: death through disease (Mollser), prostitution (Rosie), insanity (Nora), drunkenness (Fluther, Bessie, etc.), as well as pervasive unemployment, low wages and high rents. The "fantastic" Dublin death-rate (Larkin 42) is symbolized in the way dead bodies pile up in Bessie's claustrophobic tenement room, some victims of the Rising, but others like Mollser victims of appalling living conditions. Tenement men play cards over a coffin, revealing the close and accepted proximity between life and death. All the dehumanizing experiences of the Dublin slums change, for O'Casey, the definition of sacrifice, heroism, and national identity that lie at the core of the traditional, i.e. respectable, Mother Ireland figures popular at the time. A tenement Ireland figure meant not simply a more tattered hero, the labor leader Jim Larkin, brought the problem of space to national attention:

"The poor crowded into these foul dwellings in incredible numbers. Nearly 26,000 families lived in 5000 tenements, while over 20,000 families lived in one room, and another 5000 had only two rooms. Of the 5000 tenements, over 1500 were actually condemned as not only unfit for human habitation, but condemned, in fact, as incapable of ever being rendered fit for human habitation. The total of Dublin's 'slum jungle' population came to about 87,000 people, or 30 per cent of that city's population of nearly 300,000" (Larkin 42).

The pervasive threat of death lies at the root of Fluther's overreaction to Mrs. Gogan's suggestion that his simple cough might really be something deadly. In the light of Mollser's tubercular condition, Mrs. Gogan's seemingly ridiculous prognosis is all too possible --her own experience has taught her about the lurking presence of death. The irony of the scene exists in the 'unnaturalness' of tenement life, which makes absurdities all too real possibilities.
appearance but more importantly, as the socialist O'Casey fully understood, the attendant change in values and behavior that defines one class in contrast to another.

In order to comprehend exactly how subversive Bessie-- and Rosie-- were to a contemporary audience, one must understand that 'respectability' was an essential characteristic of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Ireland figures. The ways in which Mother Ireland upheld conventions of purity, restraint, and common sense reflected the ideal self-image of the nation (as defined by nationalists). O'Casey's deconstruction of the trope in Plough reveals his awareness that codes of respectability were governed by values defined by the middle class and promoted as natural and universal --especially in regard to feminine propriety. Chaste and modest Woman as Nation figures "fortified bourgeois ideals of respectability that penetrated all classes of society during the nineteenth century" (Mosse 90). When Fluther begins to get sentimental about "th' Shan Van Vok," Covey retorts by

150 For example, the peasant symbol (based on a sociological group as separate from the Dublin middle-class as you can get) was especially subjected to the scrutiny of middle-class standards because of its importance as a distinctly pre-colonial symbol of Ireland (in political rhetoric). As was shown in Chapter 4, the Dublin audience expected Nora Burke's sexual behavior to work according to middle-class, not peasant, standards of behavior (they weren't all too familiar with real peasants), and her failure to act respectably rendered her unfit for a national stage. Synge challenged the artificiality of such assumptions by showing an authentic peasant.
connecting the figure to "the Boorzwawzee" (174), expressing O'Casey's own view that the nationalist movement -- and by implication its symbols -- was governed by the values of middle-class materialism (O'Faolain 177-8). The unidealized portraits of tenement women like Rosie and Bessie challenge the hypocrisy in applying bourgeois values to all classes and thus creating a false and unattainable standard that reinforces the inadequacy of the poorer classes. Women of the tenements have neither the luxury nor the motivation to pursue middle-class codes of conduct in such a hostile slum environment. Bessie would not have been able to survive the onslaught of poverty with a modest demeanor; she learned how to be belligerent in order to scrape enough out of the world to survive. Her coarse and unpleasant brawling is poverty's cumulative effect on a strong personality constantly confronted with obstacles of destitution and indifference. In her drunkenness, dishevelled looks, and unrestrained behavior Bessie Burgess is the diametric opposite of middle-class refinement and modesty. Yet all the "unpleasant" adjustments Bessie makes serve to protect her spiritual and compassionate nature. Rosie's prostitution represents yet

151 Bessie's neighbors repeatedly refer to her lack of sense (150): Fluther says Bessie is "a female person that has moved out of th' sight of ordinary sensible people" (169). Sensible behavior, refined manners, and orderly relations are a standard of "polite society" and bear no relation to slum life. The middle-class ideal encouraged 'the restraint of passion in order to sublimate energy into productive rather than pleasurable outlets' (Mosse 5).
another form of adjustment to poverty; O'Casey reveals the hidden dignity in Rosie's pursuit of survival, in her vitality, cleverness, and indomitable spirit despite difficult odds. Characters, like Nora Clitheroe, who value and attempt to achieve middle-class respectability are self-conscious of their inferiority and become disastrously disillusioned. By contrast, O'Casey's most heroic women are those who adapt to, and even attempt to improve, their impoverished world without internalizing stifling codes of respectability. Much had changed in the tradition of the Ireland figure since Yeats first put his majestic and virginal Cathleen ni Houlihan on the stage of the National Theatre.

Red Roses For Me (1942)

Almost two decades after Plough, O'Casey attacked the association of Cathleen Ni Houlihan with bourgeois respectability even more directly in the visionary third act of Red Roses for Me. The traditional version of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in the play is promoted by Roory O'Balacaun, a narrow sectarian idealist and Irish Irelander, possessed with nationalist fervor. As in the earlier Dublin plays, O'Casey reveals the indifference, even hostility, Irish nationalism, as embodied in Roory, displays toward the real economic struggles of the Irish poor. When Ayamonn, a socialist
reformer, stops to recruit the dispossessed, Roory counters "hotly":

An' d'ye think talkin' to these tatthered second-hand ghosts'll bring back Heaven's grace an' Heaven's beauty to Cathleen ni Houlihan? (197)

The representative of Irish nationalism in the play reduces the suffering poor to insubstantial ghosts and conveniently dismisses their invisible plight from his own patriotic vision. Their existence is less than problematic; it is negligible for the poor are the 'unthinkable.' (Even the compassionate Rector cannot afford to think about the dark misery in act 3.) Roory's attitude no doubt reflects what O'Casey believed was the inadequacy of a nationalist movement which obsessively focused on the colonial struggle and completely ignored the far more urgent class struggle. Roory's esteem of an idealized Cathleen Ni Houlihan not only reflects his ideological narrowness but also reinforces his inability to accept anything that does not meet the level of respectability that was necessary for membership in the middle-class (note his use of "tattered" and "second-hand" to further insubstantiate the impoverished ghosts by emphasizing their lack of material refinement). He finds no transcendent quality or "Heaven's grace" in the impoverished women he sees around him because his humanity is too narrow to detect the true Irish struggle embodied in the real and less than ideal Junos, Bessies, and Rosies. Even more importantly, Roory uses an idealized symbol of Ireland to rhetorically exclude social
untouchables from membership in the "respectable" nation that his Cathleen Ni Houlihan embodies. That is why so much of Red Roses for Me is devoted to alternative Ireland figures that are both proletarian and inclusive of the urban majority. Ayamonn Breydon is the inspirational source for all but one of the tenement Ireland figures in Red Roses For Me.

The play centers on Ayamonn Breydon, a socialist reformer, who is the most autobiographical of O'Casey's characters. He is a young, self-educated Protestant railway worker who has been reared in poverty but emerges with strong social convictions and personal loyalties, especially to his hard-working and sacrificing mother. Because of his tenement background, Ayamonn understands the limitations of Roory's Cathleen Ni Houlihan. He expresses O'Casey's most straightforward statement about the tension between the real and the ideal that informs the popular version of the Ireland figure:

Kaithleen ni Houlihan has th' bent back of an oul' woman as well as the walk of a queen. We love th' ideal Kaithleen Ni Houlihan, not because she is false, but because she is beautiful; we hate th' real Kaithleen ni Houlihan, not because she is true, but because she is ugly. (197)

152 As we have seen, O'Casey already attempted to subvert the insidious political values that informed idealized figures in Plough by elevating the crude yet compassionate Bessie Burgess above all other Irish heroes -- even the Easter Rebels.
Through Ayamonn, O'Casey reinterprets Cathleen's traditional hag-queen duality as a conflict between truth and idealization, between unpleasant reality and a romanticized, self-serving perception of ourselves. Unlike Yeats, O'Casey gives precedence to the uglier aspect. His life experience in the Dublin tenement made imperfection --and even ugliness-- a more convincing representation of reality. Juno, Rosie, and Bessie have shown us that dark, worn things often harbor hidden qualities of true nobility, compassion, and self sacrifice. In *Red Roses for Me* we are also given tenement versions of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in Mrs. Breydon and in Ayamonn's three working-class neighbors, Finnoola, Dympna, Eeada, who realistically embody the Catholic working-class through their struggle with poverty, their desire for a marriage that would alleviate their suffering, and their devotion to the Virgin Mary --the latter is the source for a comic subplot focusing on a stolen statue of the Virgin in act 2. The three Catholic women achieve allegorical status in act 3, where they participate in an expressionistic enactment of Ayamonn's vision of a new Dublin that includes social justice and economic opportunity for the poor. Before we explore the vision in detail we must examine the first Ireland figure that appears in the play in Ayamonn's ballad.

In act I, Ayamonn offers his own version of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in an *aisling*-type poem. In defiance of tradition, poverty and suffering --symbolized by the woman's shabby
clothing and the thorns in her roses, respectively—are the figure's defining characteristics.

A sober black shawl hides her body entirely,
Touch'd by th' sun and th' salt spray of the sea;
But down in th'darkness a slim hand, so lovely,
Carries a rich bunch of red roses for me.

Her petticoat's simple, her feet are but bare,
An' all that she has is but neat and scantie;
But stars in th' deeps of her eyes are exclaiming
I carry a rich bunch of red roses for thee!

In the third stanza Ayamonn reveals, by point of contrast, the pretentiousness and materialism that underlay the queenly aspect of Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure—or Roory's for that matter:

No arrogant gem sits enthron'd on her forehead,
Or swings from white ear for all men to see;
But jewel'd desire in a bosom, most pearly,
Carries a rich bunch of red roses for me!(150-2)

Ayamonn finds glory in a Cathleen that can offer the promise of hidden, beautiful things despite her poverty. It is precisely through her suffering that she achieves nobility. When Ayamonn tries to make his lover, Sheila, into the woman with the black shawl, however, she resists the abstraction and the glorification of suffering, and we get a hint of the old tension between real and ideal embodiments of Irish womanhood:

Sheila. Now, really, isn't it comical I'd look if I were to go about in a scanty petticoat, covered in a sober black shawl, and my poor feet bare! [Mocking] Wouldn't I look well that way! (171)

Ayamonn [quietly]. With red roses in your hand, you'd look beautiful. (171-2)
Although Sheila's resistance inspires sympathy, it is not entirely motivated by noble reasons. Sheila's character, her unheroic conventionalism, doesn't allow her to participate in Ayamonn's idealism and thus she, like Nora Clitheroe, is a flawed Ireland figure. Sheila is motivated by middle-class values of social advancement and respectability, values that corrupt the spirit. She belongs to Roory's vision of Cathleen Ni Houlihan until the very end, after Ayamonn's death, when she rejects the Inspector, the embodiment of institutional authority, and assumes the role Ayamonn envisioned for her by carrying a bunch of red roses (222). 153 It is Ayamonn's three Catholic neighbors, however, that become the central symbolic embodiments of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in the play.

Finnoola, Dympna, and Eeada open act 3 selling their flowers around a bridge of the working class section of Dublin. The darkness of the impoverished district is barely disturbed by the rays of the dying sun, struggling to break through the "gloomy, grey sky"(185). The dreariness of the scene is interrupted by the stunning enactment of an aisling vision, the first ever adaptation of the aisling form to the three dimensional space of a stage. As if invoked by the power of Ayamonn's words, "Take heart of grace from your

153 By the end of the nineteenth century the rose was allegorically associated with Ireland. However, this association was not, as Yeats liked to believe, an ancient Celtic conception. According to Diane Bessai, the rose became a simple patriotic symbol only after the popular success of Mangan's "Roisin Dubh."
city's hidden splendour" (198), magnificent light sweeps across the bridge on the forefront of the stage so that the transformation, not only of the city, but the poor themselves, is immediate and breathtaking. Like the traditional aisling poet, Ayamonn imagines an idealized vision of Dublin visited by a glorious Madonna-Cathleen figure wearing "a gleaming green mantle over her bare shoulders" (198) --a Cathleen Ni Houlihan who is "Shy an' lovely, as well as battle-minded!" (199). It is Ayamonn's neighbor, Finnoola, who assumes the role of the green-mantled figure while Eeada and Dympna assume equally bright colors that establish their equally symbolic roles. Ayamonn appropriates an aisling convention when he lists diverse heroes from the Celtic past (Ayamonn himself looks like the "severed head of Dunn-Bo speaking out of the darkness"). Like eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political ballads, Ayamonn's declaration unifies the history of Ireland, "Home of th' Ostmen, of th' Norman, an' th' Gael," into a single continuous struggle --although not the expected colonial struggle:

Fair city, I tell thee our souls shall not slumber
Within th' warm beds of ambition or gain;
Our hands shall stretch out to th' fullness of labour,
Till wonder an' beauty within thee shall reign. (200)

Once again Ayamonn sets his Cathleen Ni Houlihan in opposition to Roory's bourgeois figure of "ambition and gain." O'Casey appropriates the aisling form but fundamentally recasts it into an urban and socialist vision
of Ireland's future. O'Casey's *speirbhean* figure wears a green mantle and appears not in an idyllic pastoral setting but the dingy slum area surrounding the bridge. The nature of the *speirbhean*'s oppression has also changed: before the transformation, Ayamonn calls Dublin "a battered, tattered whore, bullied by too long a life"(196) rather than the British. This metaphor evokes the 'harlot' allegory of Gaelic tradition but recasts the figure's degradation from a colonial to an economic context. According to Ayamonn, the Irish are fully responsible for the prostituted condition of Mother Dublin: "She's what our hands have made her. We pray too much and work to little"(196). It is within the power of the Irish themselves to restore her glory. The prophecy of help from Spain or France --a staple characteristic of *aisling* poems-- is supplanted by Ayamonn's prophecy of self-transformation into a fuller life. He tells Finnoola just before her own transformation:

> Friend, we would that you should live a greater life; we will that all of us shall live a greater life. Our sthrike is yours. A step ahead for us today; another one for you tomorrow. We who have known, and know, the emptiness of life shall know its fullness. All men and women quick with life are fain to venture forward. The apple grows for you to eat. The violet grows for you to wear. Young maiden, another world is in your womb. (198)

Ayamonn's vision is not the private affair of the aristocratic bard (who used his special poetic talent to access the *speirbhean*, a figure invisible to the masses --or the chieftain for that matter), but a vision that engages and depends on communal involvement in order to bring it to
culmination --like drama. Each person takes a symbolic part in the dramatic enactment of the aisling: "The men have slid from the parapets of the bridge, turning, too, to look where Ayamonn is pointing. Their faces are aglow, like the women's, and they look like bronze statues, slashed with vivid green" (199). In the vision, which works like a play-within-a-play, each realistic character assumes a symbolic character and contributes to the enactment of a new imaginary world, a new Dublin. O'Casey's transplantation of the aisling conventions to the dramatic genre reinforces Ayamonn's --or equally-- O'Casey's ideological promotion of socialist revolution because it calls for a group of individuals to enact the meaning of an idea or a text. More akin to the labor leader Jim Larkin than the aisling poet, Ayamonn inspires others to act for themselves, to find the seeds for change, the apple or the violet, within their own natures. Ayamonn encourages others to transform themselves and then the world through their newly acquired self-knowledge. This idea lies at the core of O'Casey's proletarian conception of the Ireland figure in Red Roses For Me, embodied in Ayamonn's three working-class neighbors, Eeada, Dympna and Finnoola, during the vision and, in the final act, in Sheila and Mrs. Breydon.

As glorious as Ayamonn's vision of Cathleen Ni Houlihan is in act 3, it is intimately dependent on the actions of flesh-and-blood Irish women to enact it. The traditional
speirbhean was entirely the supernatural creation of the poet; her only corporeal existence was in his mind and his poem. The three flower-sellers who take on the symbolic role of Cathleen Ni Houlihan in Ayamonn's vision have names and existences prior to (and after) their symbolic role in act 3. (Ayamonn's three female neighbors are woven into the action of the first two acts, which involves the disappearance of their cherished statue of the Virgin; their casual conversation before the vision also reveals the memories, disappointments, and desires of actual proletarian women.) Furthermore, it is their own actions that reveal the hidden colors within themselves. Each of the women has "a sober black shawl hide . . . her body entirely" until she is transformed by the suggestiveness of Ayamonn's vision, at which point the shawl slips away to reveal rich green mingled with silver (199). The ideal is hidden in the darkness of the everyday world; Cathleen Ni Houlihan is hidden in the toughened bodies of Dympna, Beada, and Finnoola, bodies "traversed with seams of poverty and a hard life"(136). For O'Casey, the visionary ideal must always be linked to the real. Ayamonn creates a Cathleen Ni Houlihan that is accessible and therefore relevant and useful to actual Irish women --and Irish men for that matter. Ayamonn's socialist Ireland figure, however, is left in an ambiguous and fragile position at the end of the play. The people cannot unlearn their empowering experience so some shred of hope remains for
the future, but the present is hostile to Ayamonn's version of Cathleen Ni Houlihan: the strike has failed miserably, and Ayamonn, the author of the *aisling*, is dead. However, one Mother Ireland of the Juno variety remains wholly intact in Ayamonn's mother, Mrs Breydon. Her symbolic role becomes obvious in the last act when she gives her son's death a transcendent purpose despite the defeat of his vision.

The first act opens with Mrs. Breydon in a rich blue velvet cloak (rehearsing Shakespeare with her son), anxious to return to her dark modest clothing which is more in accord with her simple Christian humility: "I betther take this fancy robe from off me, lest it give me gorgeous notions" (135). In fact, O'Casey's first description of Mrs. Breydon emphasizes her modest clothes although they remain hidden from our view until way into the act, and then notes, as if an afterthought, the temporariness of the blue velvet robe. Although an audience would see her in colors first, Mrs. Breydon is in her dark clothes during the last two acts, during her ascendency as the central moral force in the play. She is in colors when she is acting out a Shakespearean

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154 The stage directions are as follows: "She is dressed in a black jacket, fitting close, marred by several patches, done very neatly, dark-blue shirt, a little faded, and rather heavily-soled boots. At the moment this is all covered with a rich blue velvet cloak, brodered with silver lace" (128). The primacy that O'Casey gives to Mrs. Breydon's dark clothes problematizes Carol Kleiman's interpretation of the blue robe as a link to Mary: 'she is both the black-shawled Cathleen and also the blue-robbed Madonna' (51).
character; she is in black when she is acting out her own impulses. There is an important reason why Mrs. Breydon's transformation (the exposure of "sincere" dark clothes from underneath artificially colorful ones) is the opposite of that of Eeada and Finnoola, who shed their dingy exterior to reveal brilliant colors underneath. Mrs. Breydon's evolution as Mother Ireland works in a completely different way. Mrs. Breydon is completely absent from the colorful third act and does not participate in Ayamonn's aisling vision which inspires Eeada and Finnoola to become Ireland figures. This is because Mrs. Breydon is not dependent on Ayamonn's poetic (and political) vision to attain the status of a Mother Ireland figure in the play; she does so entirely through the force of her own moral vision, which is more humble and practical than colorfully glorious, through her more mundane acts of sacrifice (helping her dying neighbor) and heroism (intervening to save Mullcanny's life from the mob) that happen offstage and often go without much notice.155 Mrs. Breydon's moral vision is based on a very Christian sense of unrequited compassion and selfless devotion. It is best encapsulated in act 1, in a short exchange with her son. Ayamonn's impatient response reveals the ways in which Mrs. Breydon, as an Ireland figure, extends beyond Ayamonn's vision:

"Mrs. Breydon. I couldn't sit quiet knowin' the poor woman needed me. I'd hear her voice all through the night complainin' I never came to give her a hot dhrink, settle her bed soft, an' make her safe for th' lonely hours of th' slow-movin' night.

Ayamonn. A lot they'd do for you if you happened to need help from them.

Mrs. Breydon. Ah, we don't know. A body shouldn't think
Breydon is heroic but not self-consciously so; she doesn't need the glory that Ayamonn's vision offers. She quietly goes about her ministrations with her appropriately modest black shawl, "thin" according to Sheila (140), which is the symbolic shawl of poverty in Ayamonn's ballad --although he does not recognize it as such on his self-effacing mother. He chooses the young though far more narrow Sheila to be his Ireland figure because she is beautiful. Mrs. Breydon ascends to the role of a universal mother figure not through the glorification of her beauty --like Juno, "she bears on her cheeks and brow the marks of struggle and hard work" (128) --but through the ceaseless exercise of her maternal devotion and basic Christian values. Mrs. Breydon, unidealized and unassuming in her dark clothes, becomes the figure of poverty and suffering in Ayamonn's ballad through the force of experience rather than art, and thus grants a practical viability to his aisling vision which can carry on in the real world even after the poet's death.

On the surface O'Casey seems to be returning to the formula that elevated Juno into a tenement Mother Ireland figure. Both mothers heroically struggle with poverty and exercise complete maternal devotion. Furthermore, Mrs. Breydon has the same maternally realistic attitudes about her son's dangerous involvement in the Railway strike as Juno had of that, for such a belief would dismay an' dismantle everything done outside of our own advantage. No harm to use an idle hour to help another in need" (138).
toward Johnny: "Ah, when he comes, sir, speak th' word that will keep my boy safe at home, or here" (209). However, Mrs. Breydon surpasses Juno in one important way by understanding, if not agreeing with, the idealism that motivates her son's principles:

His mind, like his poor father's, hates what he sees as a sham; an' shams are powerful things, mustherin' at their broad backs guns that shoot, big jails that hide their foes, and high gallows to choke th' young cryin' out against them when th' stones are silent" (210).

She even lets him go with her blessing at the final moment: "Go on your way, my son, an' win. We'll welcome another inch of the world's welfare" (213). Mrs. Breydon's moral vision stands apart from her son's political vision but does not nullify it. The same compassionate impulse lies at the root of both. In fact, Mrs. Breydon is the only one left after Ayamonn's death who can reinvigorate his seemingly defunct vision. In the last scene Mrs. Breydon evokes Christ's body in order to add spiritual meaning and the sense of a larger purpose to Ayamonn's death and her own suffering:

There's th' three he loved, bare, or drenched with blossom. Like himself, for fine things grew thick in his nature, an' lather came the berries, th' red berries, like th' blood that flowed today out of his white body. (227)

She celebrates Ayamonn's blood sacrifice through the sensual imagery of red berries. In his earlier Dublin plays, O'Casey was impelled to deconstruct the dangerous association between the soldier's sacrifice and Christ's, between the grief of the Irish mother and that of the Virgin Mary. After two decades of exile in England, O'Casey revisits these old
associations from a more tolerant perspective; he allows his Mrs. Breydon to find a shred of hope in her own pain, as the Virgin Mary did, by recognizing the transcendence in her son's death --something the mothers of Juno, faced with the pervading sense of incessant and meaningless destruction, never do. By acknowledging the socialist vision of her son as a transcendent force, Mrs. Breydon becomes O'Casey's highest development of the Ireland figure: in her O'Casey foregrounded what he believed to be the moral potential of Ireland's future.
O'Casey was both a deconstructionist and a revisionist before it was either popular or profitable to be known as either. As late as 1966 the organizers of the fiftieth commemorative celebrations of the Easter Rising asked the Abbey not to stage *The Plough*. The same year an article by Fr. Shaw condemning the 1916 rebellion as unnecessary was deemed too controversial by the editor of *Studies* and had to wait till 1972 to be printed (Murray 223). However sacred the Easter Rising remained, the dramatic deconstruction of the Ireland trope continued after O'Casey and extended beyond the Abbey. The need to break free of the constraining trope of the "Old Woman" and the grip of the past was forcefully articulated by Sean O'Faolain in his first editorial in *The Bell* in 1940: the time was ripe for the abandonment of the "old symbolic words. They are as dead as . . . the Shan Van Vocht . . . Roisin Dubh . . . Cathleen Ni Houlihan" (Mc Mahon 13). The primary focus for deconstruction became Cathleen Ni Houlihan's conception of Irish history as a series of blood sacrifices enacted in every generation.156 O'Casey's *Fluther*  

156 Conor Cruise O'Brien believes the idea of generational sacrifice "is most essentially a literary invention. The great propagandist of this notion, as far as Ireland is concerned, is Yeats" ("Unhealthy" 5-6). Yeats's
character alludes to this myth in *The Plough* as the "shadow-dhreams of th' past leppin' to life in th' bodies of livin' men" (163), but the most rigourous reevaluation of this particular aspect of Cathleen Ni Houlihan was left to playwrights after O'Casey; as the twentieth century wore on the implications of cyclical blood sacrifice became more and more destructive. Cathleen's myth of generational violence had culminated in a cycle of inescapable violence that perpetuated itself by continually redefining the enemy; by 1929, Ireland had experienced thirteen years of bloodshed, seven of them under the Free State.

Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says No!* (1929) is a response to Ireland's tragedy and Cathleen Ni Houlihan's responsibility for it. According to Johnston, the vicious circle of abortive attempts to realize mythical hopes needed to be broken. Over fifty years later, Thomas Murphy's *Bailegangaire* (1986) revisits the same issue of cyclical violence from a contemporary historical perspective which necessarily considers the myth's responsibility for the continuing violence in Northern Ireland, eighty years after the Easter Rising. This brief afterword in no way represents a general survey of the Ireland figure after O'Casey.¹⁵⁷

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¹⁵⁷For example: Stewart Parker's television drama *Lost Belongings*, shown on British television in 1987, is a latter-day version of the Deirdre myth. The contemporary Cathleen figure unifies Irish history in her ballad by stringing together the sacrifices of Irish heroes that span centuries.
Instead I will briefly examine two plays that suggest the ways the tradition of the Ireland figure in theatre continued outside the Abbey and into contemporary drama. Two shared characteristics make Johnston's and Murphy's plays appropriate choices to conclude this study: 1) both adapt O'Casey's deconstructive approach in the light of new historical developments (bringing with them new implications for the myth of Cathleen Ni Houlihan) 2) both specifically focus on the particular forms the Ireland figure assumed in the early National theatre. Johnston's Old Flower Woman and Murphy's Mommo refer back to the first figure in Irish drama, Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan.

Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says "No!"*(1929)\(^{158}\) opens with the "Shan Van Vocht" ballad as an overture and contains many references to various Ireland figures throughout, usually in the context of famous patriotic ballads.\(^{159}\) The most extensive allusions, however, are

Deirdre, daughter of a scandalous cross-sectarian love affair, is pregnant by her Catholic boyfriend and narrowly escapes from imprisonment by her hard-line Unionist uncle -- a situation which has clearly deranged her. She is finally picked up by a RUC patrol car and miscarries. Whereas the classic trope saw death as redeeming and transforming --the old woman becoming the young girl with the walk of a queen-- Parker inverts the sequence and shows the degeneration of youth and beauty caused by adherence to rigid modes of thought inherited from the past ("Tropes" 135).

\(^{158}\)Johnston's play was first staged in 1929 at the Peacock Theatre, produced by the newly formed Dublin Gate Theatre.

\(^{159}\)Johnston uses the 1796 version of the "Shan Van Vocht" by Michael Doheny (57). He also refers to the
specifically focused on Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan. The central character of Johnston's play is a dazed actor playing the Irish Rebel hero Robert Emmet. As a consequence of a blow he receives, the actor begins to believe he really is Emmet and in the guise of the early nineteenth-century rebel he anachronistically stumbles through the post-treaty Ireland setting of the play. Both his costume and his claims seem ridiculous to the people on the street, who ignore, ridicule, and reject him. However, he finally finds acceptance at a party that is being held by post-treaty Ireland's ruling class, where he is asked to recount his "wonderful experiences in the Troubles" (100). In a binge of falseness and insincerity, he joins in the sentimental reminiscing about Ireland's glorious past. His forgetfulness, bizarre appearance, and identity crisis make him a very image of contemporary Irish nationhood. To represent the dangerous and far less comical side of Irish nationalism, Johnston following songs throughout the text: "The Fair Hills of Eire, O!" by Donagh MacCon-Mara (57), "Eire" by William Drennan (59, 60), "Dark Rosaleen" by Clarence Mangan (59), "Kathleen Ny-Houlahan" by Clarence Mangan (73), "Mary Ann Magilligan" which is another avatar for Cathleen Ni Houlihan in a popular barroom song (74). Johnston also refers to Deirdre several times (58, 60) and includes a comic character called Maeve who is studying at The Banba School of Acting, Lower Abbey Street (93).

The explicit references to Yeats's play are as follow: "Me four bewtyful gre-in fields" (71); "for when th' trouble is on me I must be talkin' te me friends" (72); "the walk of a Qu-een" and "It's not food or drink that I want" (85); "Do not call the white-scarfed riders/To the burying" (91); "yellow haired Donough is dead" (117).
turns to a Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure represented by an Old Flower Woman. Emmet first encounters her when he attempts to board a bus to reach his lover, Sarah (the historical Emmet was captured because he insisted on a last meeting with Sarah Curran). Emmet does not seem to recognize the tattered Old Flower Woman as Cathleen Ni Houlihan even after she recites the memorable lines of Yeats's figure: "Me four bewtyful gre-in fields" (71). Emmet eventually does give heed to the Old Woman's recurrent demand for blood. He shoots one of the Irishmen he wants to liberate, Joe, a young man in the crowd who refuses to let him pass and turns out to be the Old Woman's son. In a parodic imitation of Yeats's figure, she immediately shows signs of rejuvenation after this act of violence. While Joe lies dying, the Old Flower Woman sexually propositions her son's murderer, Emmet. Johnston's old whore turns out to be even uglier than O'Casey's "old snarly gob" who becomes "a bitch at times." Emmet tries to justify his senseless act of violence as unavoidable in the fight for Ireland's freedom. Underlying this scene is Johnston's view that the interpretation of such deaths as meaningful leads to the glorification of nationalism and to the endless repetition of such killings. Johnston also shows the responsibility poets bore for such violence: "In every dusty corner lurks the living word of some dead poet, and it waiting for to trap and snare them"(109). The poet's
responsibility is reinforced in the play through the numerous subversive references to nationalist poems and rhetoric.

Johnston was no doubt aiming his fiercest criticism at Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the National Mother of Poetry, who uses her ballads to artificially unify Ireland's history into a series of connected colonial conflicts spanning centuries. Johnston's play locates the source of national betrayal precisely in Yeats's figure of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, which promulgated the love of violence through a powerful public art form. Johnston specifically criticizes the dramatic tradition of the Ireland figure which had flourished, as this dissertation has shown, by the time he wrote his play in 1929. As Johnston wryly explained:

> When asked by an English journalist 'just who is this Kathleen-ni-Houlihan' ... I can only stammer confusedly that Miss Houlihan is a well-known Abbey Theatre actress. (Quoted in St. Peter 6)

Indeed, many of the Old Flower Woman's lines are bastardizations of the famous inspirational lines of Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure. For example, the Flower Woman purposely asks for money that Yeats's figure emphatically rejects, and she goes about her solicitations echoing Cathleen's words in a crude vernacular: "Spare a copper for yer owin old lady, for when the trouble is on me I must be talkin' te me friends"(72). We finally discover that it is not even silver that she really wants but something even uglier -- blood, "the cheapest thing the good God has made"(85). And in a final reversal of Yeats's transformed
Queen, Emmet accepts the harridan aspect of the Old Mother, previously a cause of horror, as the true face of Cathleen Ni Houlihan.\textsuperscript{161} This is the critical moment in the play when Emmet finally understands the nature of his prophetic role and accepts responsibility for the failures of the past and the ugliness of Cathleen Ni Houlihan.\textsuperscript{162} In the final scene Emmet sees his Old Mother, "the Strumpet City," walking the streets of Paradise "Head high and unashamed"(123).

Like O'Casey, Johnston uses a prostitute figure to represent allegorically modern Dublin and a tenement room as the symbolic environment for the modern Cathleen Ni Houlihan. No doubt both of these elements are savage comments on Dublin's social and economic realities which the conventional trope never considered as relevant aspects of the national experience. Johnston restores the balance with a bitter tone. The play ends with Emmet sleepily looking down over Dublin calling it "Our city . . . our wilful, wicked old

\textsuperscript{161}Up to this point in the play Emmet was searching for the beautiful Cathleen when he searched for his young lover, Sarah; she represents the ideal half of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and therefore eludes him. Johnston referred to the story of the play as that of "Emmet and his Sarah Ni Hooligan" (quoted in St. Peter 39).

\textsuperscript{162}In the first version of the play Emmet's acceptance is made even clearer:

"The world is very weak and wan and sad
But I myself have made her as she is
And prize her as she is, until I make
A newer and a better world to bear the flame of my desire"
(quoted in St. Peter 26).
city," foreshadowing the dreamy conversation between Ayamonn and the people by the bridge in Act 3 of *Red Roses for Me*.

Emmet's closing ballad, however, reveals the extent to which Johnston's play surpasses *Red Roses for Me* in bitterness toward the traditional Cathleen Ni Houlihan:

> Strumpet city in the sunset
> Suckling the bastards of Scots, of Englishry, of Hugenot.
> Brave sons breaking from the womb, wild sons fleeing from their Mother.
> Wilful city of savage dreamers,
> So old, so sick with memories!
> Old Mother
> Some they say are damned,
> But you, I know, will walk the streets of Paradise Head High, and unashamed. (123)

Johnston savagely recasts Padraic Pearse's sentimentalized Old Mother as a strumpet in the tradition of the seventeenth-century Gaelic bards.163

Thomas Murphy examines the limitations of the trope from a contemporary perspective in a realistic play set in the west of Ireland, "in the year of 1984" as the text reminds us more than once.164 *Bailegangaire* takes place in the country kitchen of the traditional three-roomed thatched house (42). The set, along with the play's focus on the old woman Mommo,

163The opening of Emmet's ballad resembles a seventeenth-century Gaelic poem:

> "O brazen Fodla, it is shameful you do not see it were fitter to nourish Mile's sweet high race. Not a drop is left in the plain of your smooth bright breast --drained dry by the litter of every alien sow" (O Tuama and Kinsella 85).

164*Bailegangaire* was first staged at the Galway Druid Theatre in 1985.
evokes early Abbey plays of "peasant quality" and the image of Ireland as the Shan Van Vocht. The juxtaposition of Ireland's rural past and the technologized present, evident in the radio, electric light, and later references to a Japanese computer factory that is on the verge of closure, confirm that the set is symbolic of the condition of modern Ireland which Murphy intends to dramatize. Mommo is a senile old woman who obsessively retells an extended narrative of "how the place called Bochtan . . . came by its appellation, Bailegangaire, the place without laughter" (43). Mommo's narrative is a mock-epic account of how two mighty men encounter each other in a pub and engage in a laughing contest, driving each other into competitive paraxysms by using their misfortunes as subject matter. Although the story is told in third person, Mommo's occasional slips into first person intimate the personal nature of the tragedy. Many years before, Mommo and her husband had gone to the fair to sell their products; while they were delayed first by the frost and then the laughing contest, their grandson, left alone at home with his two sisters, threw too much paraffin into the fire and died of burns. It is this death, together with the near simultaneous death of her husband (beaten up by the people of Bochtan when he won the laughing match), which Mommo will not face, and which makes her unable to get to the end of her story. The child's death also links the continuously repeated unfinished story with the lives of the
two surviving grandchildren, Mary and Dolly, who are present in the play.

Mommo's constant re-telling of a past tragedy that finds no resolution in the present resembles in key ways Cathleen Ni Houlihan's story of Ireland's misfortunes. An epic tone is conveyed through her repeated reference to "the people" and through her vivid account of the fierce conflict between the people of Bochtan and "the strangers." Accounts of famine and misfortune -- and even the serial loss of her sons -- are contained within Mommo's overall narrative, evoking Cathleen Ni Houlihan's ballad of historic wrongs. Furthermore, Mommo's intermittent use of Gaelic phrases, some translated others not, serves as a continuous aural reminder of the joint linguistic inheritance of the Irish nation. All these elements, along with the striking physical resemblance that the dishevelled and distracted old woman who talks to her imaginary children bears to Cathleen Ni Houlihan, establish Mommo's allegorical dimension. However, it is in the distinct way that Mommo's story differs from Cathleen's that Murphy achieves the "tropological deconstruction" of the Ireland trope that Cairns and Richards claim is at the center of this play ("Tropes" 137). In Yeats's play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan's ballads were a symbol of Ireland's preoccupation with its own history as a mythology to inspire its people. In Murphy's play, Ireland's is a story told over and over again by a senile mind frozen in the past, a story which
Mommo seems incapable of bringing to an end. It is a compulsive, jumbled, fragmentary telling of history. Like Murphy's Ireland, Mommo is locked into a narrative the conclusions and implications of which she is incapable of finishing or facing. As a result, Mommo sees little in or of the present surrounding her; she is totally detached from the real social, economic, and emotional problems that face her granddaughters. Murphy implies that the Cathleen Ni Houlihan trope had also achieved this stifling archaic quality by 1984; symbolic images of Ireland were still fixated on the colonial past and therefore not responsive to the real problems of the present. Seamus Deane's view is that the current struggles in the North are informed, on the nationalist side, by concepts of an eternal, immanent, national identity embodied in the Cathleen Ni Houlihan trope, concepts recycled from the Literary Revival a century before. Deane concurs with the resolution of Murphy's play: "The dissolution of that mystique [of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Romantic Ireland] is an urgent necessity . . . Everything, including our politics and literature, has to be rewritten -- i.e. reread" (Deane, "Heroic" 58).

The descendents of the old woman are bound to suffer from Mommo's fixation until Mary, realizing the ways in which the story is interwoven in the difficulties of all their lives, recognizes that it is only by exorcizing the memory of bleakness and death which has scarred the past that any of
them can come to terms with the present and free the family from its tragic inheritance. Mary wakens Mommo and helps her bring the story to a conclusion, using, as Anthony Roche observes, "the power of storytelling as a means to take imaginative possession of the past and shape it in the light of present possibilities" (124). The resolution of Murphy's play allows the nation to transcend Cathleen's past-obsessed mythology. Mary urges that they "live out the--story--finish it, move on to a place where, perhaps, we could make some kind of new start" (70). In the final words of the play, Mary redirects Mommo's past-fixated narrative into a mutually enacted present:

> in whatever wisdom there is, in the year of 1984, it was decided to give that --fambly . . . of strangers another chance and a brand new baby to gladden their home. (77)

The resolution of Murphy's play includes the acceptance of life and family --the opposite of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, which ends with Michael's rejection of the hearth and even life itself.

Mommo resembles another character in the Abbey's Ireland figure tradition: Synge's Maurya. Both women are defined by a tragic loss, which they confront in the emotional climax of each play. Both women struggle to relate to the unnatural premature deaths of young males and an overall absence of men altogether in their lives (Roche 117). Mommo's admission of her grandson's death by fire finally enables her verbal evocation of the fate of all her male children. Mommo's
monologue evokes Maurya's great lament at the end of *Riders to the Sea*:

Her Pat was her eldest, died of consumption . . . An' for the sake of an auld ewe was stuck in the flood was how she lost two of the others, Jimmy and Michael . . . Her soft Willie was her pet went foreign after the others . . . soft Willie, aged thirty-four, in Louisaville Kentucky, died, peritonites [sic]. (74)

We are made to feel compassion for Mommo's losses rather than the heroic pride (and obligation) that Cathleen Ni Houlihan elicits. And unlike Maurya's stoic acceptance, Mommo's memories of her sons are more psychologically complex for she struggles with feelings of remorse and guilt. When Mary asks about her nine children, Mommo responds, referring to herself in the third person: "Them (that) weren't drowned or died they said she drove away" (45). As Nicholas Grene states, part of the play's power derives from Murphy's ability to remake the previous Ireland figures of Synge and Yeats:

So Mommo is like Synge's Maurya imaginatively extended, with griefs complicated by the awareness that they are partially self-inflicted; she is a Cathleen Ni Houlihan *de nos jours*, grotesque and pathetic, an incubus to whose maudering voice we still listen to and try to understand. (248)

By revising both of these influential Ireland figures, Murphy positions Mommo against the Abbey's Ireland figure tradition. As Nicholas Greene has stated, *Bailegangaire* "stands in such significant relation to the tradition of the Irish national theatre movement" (239) -- and, more precisely, the tradition of the Ireland figure in that movement. I have shown that the same is true of Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says "No!"*. 
The way in which all the plays in this study, spanning the eighty years between 1904 and 1984, look back to Yeats's turn-of-the-century *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* reveals its powerful influence on the consolidation and perpetuation of the myth of Ireland's national identity. Ironically, this influence continued despite the deconstructive attempts of major Irish writers and Yeats's own changes of heart, qualifications, and self-criticisms about *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. He expressed a genuine concern about the effect of his figure when he asked the famous question in 1938:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?
("Man and the Echo" in *Collected Poems* 345)

As Cairns and Richards have stated, "the lasting impact of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on contemporary audiences is as

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165 Major nondramatic writers parodied the trope as well. Among the most well-known examples are James Joyce's old milk woman described as a "lowly form of an immortal," one whose "Old shrunken paps" promise no sustenance (*Ulysses* 12), and Samuel Beckett's deliberately provocative description of Miss Counihan in *Murphy*: "Standing in profile against the blazing corridor, with her high buttocks and her low breasts she looked not merely queenly, but on for anything" (123), and Paul Muldoon's contemporary poetic evocation of "Anorexia" in a savage inversion of the traditional *aisling* (*Quoof* 39).

166 After the Rising Yeats wrote: "Now I began running through the years from my youth up & measured my responsibility for an event that has been a great grief to me & many mothers" (Typescript of *Vision A*; quoted in Cullingford 13). After the internecine violence of the Civil War, Yeats included himself among many who reconsidered his own myth of blood sacrifice: "It is not wholesome for a people to think much of exceptional acts of faith or sacrifice, least of all to make them the sole test of [a] man's worth"("Modern Ireland" 266).
difficult to assess now as it was for Yeats in 1938" ("Tropes" 129). I hope that this dissertation has answered this difficult question, at least in part, by showing the masterful way Yeats assimilated his literary sources to create a complex political symbol that defied the ideological simplifications of nationalists and the parodic simplifications of later writers. This dissertation has also attempted to show how the provocative force of theatre as a public art form gave Yeats's version of the Ireland figure an even more intense life in the national memory, a life which lasted beyond his own objections, beyond the revisions of other playwrights, and throughout the various historical events that mark twentieth-century Ireland.
APPENDIX

ILLUSTRATIONS
Figure 2. "How Happy Could She Be With Neither": Erin ignores the advances of both the Home Rulers and the Devolutionaries. Reprinted in C.L. Innes, Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880-1935 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993; title page frontispiece).
Figure 4. "Two Forces" was first published in *Punch*, October 29, 1881. Refer to L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1971; p.38).
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