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Emma Calabrese April 14, 2014

The Mother of a Nation:

A Historical and Theatrical Exploration of the Devolution of Mother Ireland

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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Mother Ireland personified Ireland from prehistory through the present day through incarnations that stretch from the Celtic Sovereignty goddess, Medb, and the Morrígan to the early modern Róisín Dubh and the nineteenth century's Shan Van Vocht. In the twentieth century, Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, O'Casey's Juno, and Carr's Hester Swane continued to reinvent Mother Ireland for the modern era. Mother Ireland became a symbol of opposition to England's political domination of Ireland, which began in the twelfth century and continued to the twenty-first century. Mother Ireland's association with violence caused her to begin to represent more negative traits than positive ones. For this reason, the *aisling*, or vision poetry, that first emerged in the seventeenth century marks a critical moment when colonialism began to distort Mother Ireland's role. Ultimately, *aisling* poetry serves as the catalyst for the devolution of Mother Ireland. Tracking Mother Ireland's gradual diminishment from prehistory to the present day demonstrates why, at the close of the twentieth century in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), Hester, the most contemporary representation of Mother Ireland to be discussed, not only needed to die symbolically, but also had to kill her daughter. Suicide and murder allowed Mother Ireland to move into the twenty-first century. While the devolution of Mother Ireland can be documented and analyzed in a paper, her progression from her initial role as a representative of Irish society and its land to a misused political figure that finds more freedom in death than life is best understood through the visual and oral tradition from which she emerged. Creating a physical representation of Mother Ireland's lineage shows how history shaped her both as a woman and as a symbol of the nation. In order to engage with this literary figure, I developed a performance piece entitled *Máthair*. The development of this script can be charted along the timeline of Irish history. Ultimately, the script attempts to embody the progression of the physical representation of the Mother Ireland tradition.

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CHAPTER 1

MOTHER IRELAND IN PRE- AND POST-CHRISTIAN IRELAND

Introduction and Early History of Mother Ireland

Mother Ireland has personified Ireland from prehistory through the present day through incarnations that stretch from the Celtic Sovereignty Goddess, Medb, and the Morrígan, to the early modern Róisín Dubh and the nineteenth century's Shan Van Vocht. In the twentieth century, Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, O'Casey's Juno, and Carr's Hester Swane continued to reinvent Mother Ireland for the modern era. Throughout these depictions, Mother Ireland appears both fierce and loving. Therefore, as a goddess, she corresponds to both war and fertility. However, Christianity changed Mother Ireland's demeanor. She moved from her role as goddess to become a common fairy and then was envisioned as a victimized woman who relied on men for power, rather than one who gave men the right to rule. After colonialism, Mother Ireland became a symbol of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This change perpetuated Mother Ireland's symbolism, but it also linked her to the bloodshed that occurred during this period over the course of numerous uprisings, rebellions, and wars. The association with violence wounded Mother Ireland, causing her to represent negative traits rather than positive ones. For this reason, the *aisling*, or vision poetry, that first emerged in the seventeenth century, marks a critical moment when colonialism began to distort Mother Ireland's role. Although Mother Ireland first began to change significantly following the introduction of Christianity, it was not until the invasion of Ireland by England that Mother Ireland's identity permanently shifted. Ultimately, *aisling* poetry serves as the catalyst for the devolution of Mother Ireland. Tracking Mother Ireland's gradual diminishment from prehistory to the present day demonstrates why, at the close of the twentieth

century in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), Hester, the most contemporary representation of Mother Ireland to be discussed, not only needed to die symbolically, but also had to kill her daughter. Suicide and murdering her daughter allowed Mother Ireland to stop serving as a destructive force within Irish culture, allowing the nation to move peacefully into the twenty-first century. Mother Ireland, although powerful as a Celtic goddess, could no longer represent Ireland after Christianization, colonization, and nationalism. Removing her serves as the only way that Ireland, as both a nation and a culture, could adapt to the future.

The Celts, who lived in societies spread throughout Europe and the eastern seaboard of Asia Minor, came to Ireland in roughly 150 BCE and persisted there until 1400 CE, "linked by a common language and various characteristics in their appearance, dress and way of life."[1] The Celts were polytheistic and worshipped a primary female goddess called the Sovereignty.[2] In Celtic lore and tradition, women held an important symbolic role in the supernatural and the home and women "dominate[d] the world of the supernatural." [3] It was believed that women could inhabit the space between two worlds and were more predisposed to magical power. Because of this perceived natural affinity with the supernatural, many of the central gods of Celtic culture were women.

The Sovereignty is a Celtic goddess who is an amalgamation of many divine qualities. She represents the connection between life and death, and in her "the aspects of war, fertility, and sovereignty are closely connected; in fact, all three [were] combined in a single female character." [4] Despite her role as both a fertility goddess and a territorial goddess, the Sovereignty goddess

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[1] T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 4th ed. (Cork: Mercier Press, 2001), 23.
[2] Ibid., 25.
[3] Rosalind Clark, *The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrígan to Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (Worcester: Billing & Sons Ltd., 1991), 2.
[4] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 1.

additionally was "associated with violence and destruction." [5] While this characterization is inconsistent with her role as the fertile mother, it elevates her power as both life giver and destroyer: she becomes at "once the source of life and the repository of life after death. Moreover, the welfare and fertility of a people depend on their security against external aggression." [6] The Sovereignty therefore serves not only a mother, but also a deity of protection, as the Celts struggled with outside invaders as well as the bloody conflicts within their own society.

The Sovereignty emerged from an oral folklore tradition. For this reason, there are no original texts from the era of her existence. No manuscript dated before 800 CE regarding her role in Celtic society exists.[7] Without a primary source, examining the Sovereignty is difficult. There are many Irish myths in existence today concerning her, although none of the recorded myths date back to her historical time.

Additionally, the interposition of Christianity heavily influences all of these myths. The Christian monks recorded many of her stories in order to further their agenda of replacing pagan morals and symbols with their own. The Sovereignty first appears in work they wrote, such as the *The Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon* and *Wooing of Etain*. Both of these stories have origins tracing back to 400 CE, but all written recordings of them occur well after that. The earliest written account of both these stories appears to be around 1400 CE. Throughout these stories, the Sovereignty consistently emerges as a "many-shaped lady" who appears as three different women in different stages of life.[8]

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[5] Maria Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 91.
[6] Ibid., 92.
[7] Arthur F. Beringause, "The Presentness of the Past in Ireland," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16, no. 2 (1955): 240.
[8] John T. Koch, ed., *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe & Early Ireland & Wales* (Wales: Celtic Studies Publications, U.S., 2003), 37.

She often refers to herself as "The Sovereignty of Erin" and leads men to the hill of Tara where she bestows Kingship upon them.[9]

The Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon is an early Irish myth from around 400 CE that tells the story of the Celtic King Niall and his encounter with the Sovereignty goddess, who anoints him High King of Ireland. The myth of Niall and his brothers serves as an origin myth for Niall's right to rule the Ulster Kingdom and it reveals the common process of divine right that existed in the early Irish monarchy. While out in the woods, Niall and his four brothers encounter an old woman guarding a lake. Each brother approaches and begs for water to which the old woman replies, "I will give it but first give me a kiss." [10] Every brother refuses except for Niall: "I would give a few kisses for it [. . .] [B]esides giving thee a kiss I will lie with thee." [11] Niall offers himself fully to the old woman. The old woman rewards Niall, by revealing to him her true shape as the Sovereignty goddess. A blazon gives readers a description of not only the Sovereignty, but of Erin itself:

> Then he threw himself down upon her and gave her a kiss. But then, when he looked at her, there was not in the world a damsel whose figure or appearance was more loveable than hers! Like the snow in trenches was every bit of her from head to sole. Plump and queenly forearms she had: fingers long and slender: calves straight and beautifully colored. Two blunt shoes of white bronze between her little, soft-white feet and the ground. A costly full-purple mantle she wore, with a brooch of bright silver in the clothing of the mantle. Shining pearly teeth she had, an eye large and queenly, and lips red as rowanberries. "That is many-shaped, O lady!" said the youth.[12]

This serves as a moment of transformation where the goddess leaves behind her hag-like shape and reveals her true identity. The Sovereignty uses the guise of the withered hag to test the men of Ireland and their loyalty and love for the country.[13] Niall's devotion and sacrifice to her, even when she was withered with age, leads her to reward him. The goddess looks upon him and says, "O king of Tara, I

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[9] Ibid., 37.
[10] Ibid., 38.
[11] Ibid., 38.
[12] Ibid., 39.
[13] Ibid., 39.

am the Sovereignty: I will show thee its great goodness. [. . .] the kingship and the domination will forever abide with thee."[14] King Niall utilized this myth as a way to establish himself as ruler of Ireland. Although Niall is, in the myth, honoring the Sovereignty by sacrificing his body to her and the land, it is clear that the myth of the Sovereignty is a tool of the king. Niall uses her blessing to establish his divine right after the destruction of the previous dynasty.

The Sovereignty also represented an important innovation in Celtic mythology, because she served not only as the mother of the land and its people, but also as the mother of the gods themselves.[15] The Sovereignty was believed to be the Mother of the Tuatha de Danann, "a race of mythical gods that descended upon the country from heaven."[16] The Sovereignty possessed great power as the Mother of the Gods. Her matriarchal power gave her dominion over the gods themselves.

The Sovereignty is also ruler of all Celtic kings. The Celts believed that her "union with the rightful king [would] result in the fertility and prosperity of the land. Her union with the sacral king was signaled by her metamorphosis from hag to beautiful young girl."[17] Each King would have to consummate his marriage with the land and acknowledge her power as his wife. Once the king was pledged to the Sovereignty, it was her right as fertile mother of the land to judge the king's worthiness, and either to bless his people or to bring famine and war upon them.

The Sovereignty is a triple goddess, who embodies the three phases of the life cycle of a woman. Her flexibility as a symbol demonstrates her essential role within Celtic culture. She transitions between "a young beautiful maiden, the powerful sexual woman, and the hag or death

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[14] ibid., 39.
[15] Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses*, 97.
[16] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 3.
[17] Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses*, 92.

goddess" and her three incarnations serve as representations of physical characteristics of the land.[18] The young girl represents the land as healthy and the hag represents the land in times of strife and famine, but it is the middle phase, the fertile mother, which serves as the most essential in the goddess's power. The Sovereignty's middle phase depicts her sexual power, which is also the root of her divinity and the method by which she grants kingship. Stealing this central incarnation from the Sovereignty diminishes her power because erasing her middle aspect, "the most powerful and positive one," utterly limits her.[19]

Ultimately, the arrival of Christianity in 432 CE leads to the removal of the middle version of the goddess so that the Sovereignty could fit Christian ideals. The commonly accepted story of the arrival of Christianity centers on St. Patrick, a missionary, and "his apostolic mission to Ireland [that] resulted in the creation of a new Christian culture in that Celtic Island."[20] Historians concur, based on Irish writings in the late eighth and ninth centuries, that in the fifth century a missionary named Patricius arrived in Ireland in order to convert the Irish Celts to Christianity.[21] This introduction was transformative, as it would dramatically shape Ireland and Irish culture in the future. Ultimately, Christianity started a new chapter in the national history of the Irish people. But, in order to secure Christianity's presence, monks repurposed the stories of the Celtic goddesses to fit their beliefs. Afterwards, Mother Ireland can "be seen as young, beautiful but inaccessible, or as a hag, the dispenser of death," but she can never be the fertile mother of the middle phase again.[22]

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[18] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 21.
[19] Birgit Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities: Rewriting Mary Magdalene, Mother Ireland and Cu Chulainn of Ulster* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), 193.
[20] Robert E. McNally, "St. Patrick: 461-1961," *The Catholic Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (1961): 305.
[21] McNally, "St. Patrick: 461-1961," 306.
[22] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 193.

Christians reinterpreted traditional Celtic folklore in light of their doctrines in order to solidify their religious presence in Ireland. The pagan goddesses disappeared from worship; instead, they were turned into "pseudo historical queens and tribal ancestors."[23] Kings now emphasized their "divine right," which was understood to mean that kingship was "a gift from great father God."[24] God was now the only power that could grant kingship, which stripped the Sovereignty of her role as a kingmaker and mother of her people.

Christianity denounced the matriarchal rule of the tri-fold goddess, introducing instead its divine patriarchal trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, Christian ideology did allow for the persistence of the image of Mother Ireland, but only under Christian conventions so that she could serve as a tool of the monarchy. Eventually, the new Christianized goddess lost all of her influence over the king. Her role as the embodiment of sovereignty became an empty symbolic image. This was especially true when Christianity forced the Irish goddesses to "conform to Christian ideals of womanhood" by becoming chaste.[25] Under this rule of chastity, the sexual pagan goddesses transform into reincarnations of the Virgin Mary. With the Sovereign goddess's sexuality denied, kings could only receive their throne from God, rather than the Celtic goddesses.

The Irish monarchy underwent a transformation after the introduction of Christianity, which further influenced the role of Celtic pagan goddesses and gods on the politics of Ireland. Under Celtic rule, Ireland existed as a sort of feudal state, divided loosely into provinces, each ruled by a separate king. At the same time, there was also a high king of Ireland that presided over all four districts: Leinster, Munster, Connacht, and Ulster. Christianity spread throughout Ireland due to religious reform, which was sorely needed after a period during which

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[23] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 3.
[24] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 133.

[25] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 6.

> many abuses had crept in and moral standards had dropped, was not only undertaken but was carried through to the point where the church in Ireland [. . .] had a basic diocesan organization which could look to the pastoral care of its flock.[26]

The introduction of the national church and the ascension of Brian Boroma as the High King of Ireland in 1100 CE allowed Ireland to become a more centralized monarchy, despite the ongoing strife between the various provinces and dynasties. Brian Boroma, better known as Brian Ború, emerges as one of the most celebrated of the ancient Irish kings. He formed one of the greatest noble lines in Ireland and "the steady advance of Brian [. . .] to the unchallenged lordship of the whole island supplies an excellent example of how an Irish king was made."[27] God's divine right was also a significant element of the rule of an Irish king, giving the king legitimacy once only available through the power of the Sovereignty Goddess.

The Mother Ireland figures that appeared just after the establishment of Christianity in Ireland demonstrate the bridge between the Sovereignty goddess of the Celtic tradition and the Mother Ireland figures found in the twentieth century. These middle figures show the origins of Mother Ireland as a political instrument. The most famous of these icons that bridges this gap and reflects the influence of Christianity on Celtic myth is the warrior Queen Maeve.

Medb and The Morrígan:

The Early Goddesses

With the emergence of Christianity, the religious power of the goddess began to diminish. Many goddesses were appropriated and became saints, queens, or malicious deities. In these early years of Christian influence, before English colonization took hold, Mother Ireland figures were

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[26] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 209.
[27] Standish O'Grady, "The Last Kings of Ireland," *The English Historical Review* 4, no. 14 (1889): 288.

used as weapons against the pagan beliefs of the Celts. Christian monks transformed and twisted them to fit into Christian tradition, eliminating the core of the Celtic belief systems. According to Arthur Beringuase,

> So badly has the dovetailing of the Christian and the pagan parts been managed in most of the older romances, that the pieces come away quite separate in the hands of even the least skilled analyzer, and the pagan substratum stands forth entirely distinct from the Christian accretion.[28]

Two important manifestations of Mother Ireland during this time were Medb, Anglicized as Maeve, and the Morrígan. Medb and the Morrígan represent splits sides of the Sovereignty goddess and both of them appear in the Irish epic the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* as examples of the failings of Celtic goddesses and Celtic beliefs.

Medb is an ancient Queen who deemed herself the embodiment of Erin. She is a central character of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and functions as the primary antagonist. The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is an Irish epic that originated in the first century CE, but was first written down in the twelfth century. Many historians utilize this epic as a window into the Irish Iron age, because "it is generally thought that these sagas [. . .] were based in an oral tradition contemporary with the Irish Iron Age."[29] The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* still colors the understanding of Iron Age and its relics in Ireland to this day.[30]

The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is one of three epics that make up the *Ulster Epic Cycle*; it describes the battles of Queen Medb and her husband Ailill against the Irish hero Cú Chulainn. Medb, in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, exhibits many characteristics of the Sovereignty Goddess. However, she also serves as a vessel for the critique of Celtic tradition through Christian values. The aspects of her

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[28] Beringause, "The Presentness of the Past in Ireland," 240.
[29] James A. Delle, "Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age," *American Antiquity* 61, no. 1 (1996): 163.
[30] Ibid., 164.

that suggest pagan divinity, such as her unnatural female cruelty, promiscuity, and fierceness in battle, are condemned in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, marking the downfall of Mother Ireland before she can be reborn as a political symbol during the twentieth century.

Medb in traditional Irish folklore was the goddess warrior queen of Connacht. However, "she underwent a humanization process whereby the goddess, or better aspects of her, were turned into an actual queen."[31] This humanization diminished her goddess-like powers and amplified certain negative characteristics. Where once she was linked to the Sovereignty goddess, she now becomes a destructive, ambitious, and promiscuous mortal. Medb sends many young men to die in an attempt to establish her power over the men in her life and take back the kingdom of Erin for herself:

> Bind it as it please thee,
> By kings' hands and princes',
> Who will stand for thee!
> Lo, I will repay thee,
> Thou shalt have thine asking,
> For I know thou'lt slaughter
> Man that meeteth thee![32]

Medb is a powerful speaker and uses her position as a woman and queen to entice men into battle for her. Medb functions similarly to Mother Ireland figures of the twentieth century here; however, she differs because she rides into battle as well and is noted for her own strength. She says at one point "'twas I was the bravest of them in battle and combat and strife."[33]

In the *Táin Bó Cúailnge,* Medb is jealous of both her husband Ailill and the cattle lord of Ulster, Dáire macc Fiachna, who both own coveted mystical bulls. These bulls elevate Ailill and Fiachna's status above her own. Medb attempts to steal the bull of Dáire to prove her superiority over her husband. Several times in the narrative it is made clear that, despite her

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[31] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities,* 116.

[32] Joseph Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge* (London: 1904), 20.
[33] Ibid., 21.

accomplishments in battle and extensive wealth, Medb will never attain the power of the kings because she is a woman. This is first established in a section of Joseph Dunn's translation of the epic called "Pillow Talk," when Medb and Ailill argue over who has the right to rule their marriage and consequently Medb's own kingdom of Connacht. This concern is a legitimate argument because "according to Celtic law, whichever spouse possessed more goods could direct the household affairs and also dispose of the goods of the other."[34] Ailill owns the coveted white bull, Finnbennach, and so has more wealth than Medb. According to Celtic law, this makes Ailill the dominant figure of the couple.

Throughout the epic, Medb attempts to shift the power dynamic in marriage back to her favor. She sets out to steal a rival bull and gain control over the marriage and the kingdom. Ailill provokes Medb through an attack: "'it was a wealth, forsooth, we never heard nor knew of,' Ailill said; 'but a woman's wealth was all thou hadst, and foes from lands next thine were used to carry off the spoil and booty that they took from thee.'"[35] Ailill thinks of Medb's status as inferior to his own because she only possesses a "woman's wealth."[36] However, Medb is the true Queen of Connacht and has more right to rule than Ailill, as her status was bestowed on her by the High King of Erin, Eocho Fedlech, who happens to be her father. Ailill's status as king is only a product of his marriage to Medb, which suggests that she has inherently more right to rule. The power between the couple shifts further in support of Medb when she reminds Ailill of their courtship: "It was I plighted thee, and gave purchase price to thee, which of right belongs to the bride [. . .] for a man dependent upon a woman's maintenance is what thou art."[37] Ailill played the role of the woman in their courtship, and Medb the more masculine part by paying the

[34] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 116.
[35] Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge*, 10-11.
[36] Ibid., 12.
[37] Ibid., 12.

dowry to Ailill's family. Medb holds the kingdom not only through wealth, but also through inheritance.

However, her right to the throne and her status as an incarnation of the Sovereignty goddess is trivialized by her gender's new social inferiority to men. Despite Medb's legitimate right to the throne and its subsequent power, Ailill uses patriarchy and his possession of a single bull to counteract her argument. Celtic law dictates that male heirs inherit the throne of Ireland before female heirs, despite the matriarchal hierarchy of the gods. Medb is a superior warrior and the eldest daughter of the High King, while Ailill is the youngest of three sons. However, Ailill possesses a distant familial claim to Medb's kingdom and renders useless her claims to the throne, no matter their legitimacy: "I heard of [a] province in Erin under woman's keeping [. . .] And for this I came and assumed the kingship here as my mother's successor; for Mata of Muresc, daughter of Magach of Connacht, was my mother."[38] Ailill's right to the throne through a distant connection supersedes Medb's direct descent from the high king. This shift in a Christian society establishes the superiority of men over women and it further weakens the Sovereignty's role. Christian recordings of this story emphasize Ailill as the true king, a choice that implicitly denounces the power of the mother goddess.

Medb's power diminishes further when Ailill reminds Medb that she does not possess superior wealth. They were equal,

> Except only there was an especial bull of the bawn of Ailill, and he was a calf of one of Medb's cows, and Finnbennach ('the Whitehorned') was his name. But he, deeming it no honor to be in a woman's possession, had left and gone over to the kine of the king. And it was the same to Medb as if she owned not a pennyworth, forasmuch as she had not a bull of his size amongst her cattle.[39]

[38] Ibid., 20.
[39] Ibid.,15.

The possession of this single bull diminishes Medb from a powerful warrior queen to simply Ailill's wife. The bull himself looks down on her for being a woman and chooses Ailill, elevating his wealth and status. The dispute over the worth of a single bull was a significant argument of the time. In terms of Irish wealth, bulls possessed a special significance in this time, because "everything of value had to be reckoned in numbers of livestock."[40] Cows and bulls held the most monetary value of all domesticated animals.

These laws regarding wealth force Medb to confront her weakness, which is, ultimately, her status as a woman. The idea of a woman ruling or controlling anything seemed so abhorrent that not even an animal could abide by it, because there is "no honor to be in a woman's possession."[41] Medb is portrayed as weak, inferior as a ruler, and cold. Her anger over the dismissal of her gender drives her to ruthless ambition. She violently attempts to steal a second magical bull, causing destruction and death.

Medb's character traits are at odds because she is split between Christian and Celtic norms of behavior. Medb's roots lie deep in the pagan Irish goddesses, like the Sovereignty, who were worshiped for their strength and fertility. However, after Christianity establishes its cultural dominance, these previously celebrated qualities take on negative associations. She is "despised for her cold-bloodedness, unscrupulousness, unfaithfulness and for her position as bringer of death to many kings and heroes."[42]

In addition, the etymology of Medb's name links her with self-destructive behavior, because Medb translates as "the inebriating one" who has "the nature of mead."[43] Her name refers not only

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[40] Beringause, "The Presentness of the Past in Ireland," 242.
[41] Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge*, 103.
[42] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 118.
[43] Mark Sullivan, "Divine Appetite," *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal* 20, no. 2, (2001):58.

to a state of drunkenness, but the idea that she "personifies the honey-based power that inebriates, inflames, expands, dissolves, and radically transforms consciousness. This power was a divinity."[44] Medb is connected with the unpredictable, destructive, and emotional nature of drunkenness. This connection suggests that the pagan traditions she emerged from are characterized by a state of heightened emotion and violence.

Unlike the Sovereignty, Medb is truly human, and her humanity makes her fallible and open to weakness. As with her association with liquor, in the Christian interpretation of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge,* these qualities become negative. For example, she believes she has the right to determine kingship and in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* she claims "she mated with nine Kings because no one would come to rule at the throne of Tara without her approval."[45] However, this promiscuity now becomes immoral. Where once Maeve was viewed as a sacred sexual goddess of sovereignty, she now becomes a power hungry queen. The influence of humanity on her appears, ultimately, to be negative. She also uses her sexuality as a tool to command men in battle. Medb sends one of her strongest fighters to defeat Cú Chulainn: "Medb murmured sore that Fergus foreswore her combat and battle. They bode the night in that place. Early on the morrow Fergus arose, and he fared forth to the place of combat."[46] The exchange of sex for loyalty and strength in war shows how Medb has become a diminished imitation of the Sovereignty. Despite her overt sexuality, she is still represented as an antagonist, while Cú Chulainn is called a hero for facing down her whole army single-handedly.

The overt promiscuity of Medb, as well as her portrayal as a mortal queen, shows her to be a repressed version of the Sovereignty goddess. This "repression or splitting-off of Medb's archetypal

[44] Ibid., 59.
[45] Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge,* 15-16.
[46] Ibid., 19.

pattern in Judeo-Christian patriarchal culture" demonstrates devolution of the Mother Ireland figure into a mortal woman who is easily manipulated by greed and jealousy.[47] Medb is represented as fickle in love, over-sexualized, and continuously overpowered by her supposedly weaker male counterparts. Where once she was celebrated as a goddess of the land who married the king and blessed him with the right to rule, she now becomes a violent jezebel under Christianity. Medb marks the early influence of Christianity on Mother Ireland and the whitewashing of the pagan tradition to fit the identity of a new Ireland.

Medb was not the only fraction of the Sovereignty to be repurposed by Christianity in early Irish epics. The Morrígan, who also appears in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, serves as a counterpoint to Medb and represents the more savage and violent aspects of the Sovereignty goddess of ancient Ireland. The Morrígan becomes sinister as a result of Christian morals being laid over pagan myths. In the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, the Morrígan appears overly sexual and nearly evil. The previously celebrated qualities of the goddess, such as her history as cow goddess and a goddess of plenty, are manipulated to become frightening. She takes cows instead of blessing them or giving them. Furthermore, she is demoted from the status of goddess in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* to the role of a fairy queen. While this title may not seem to be a demotion, it reduces her status from a creator to just a figure within a myth who is subordinate to greater forces. Instead of a goddess shaping her country and people, she is now a part of the "Sid, who interfere in the affairs of men, but have a separate existence."[48]

[47] Sullivan, "Divine Appetite," 59.
[48] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 36.

The Sid, or *Aes Side*, are "the people of the Fairy Mound," and are often considered invaders in Ireland.[49] The Sid invaded the isle from the North, took up residency, and have caused trouble for the native people ever since. Associating the Morrígan, who was previously a mother goddess, with the invasive species of fairies dilutes her power. While Irish fairies do retain elements of the gods and often become godlike in appearance, they are not actually gods. Rather, they possess "the fair brightness usually associated with divinities."[50]

Ultimately, the Morrígan exists in an in-between state, stuck between her role as the Sovereignty goddess and a malicious fairy. In the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, she is depicted as a sinister troublemaker, "she manipulates the action [and] she foretells the future and brings it to pass."[51] The Morrígan has power to see the future but chooses to remake it to amuse herself. She often interacts with the characters of Medb and Cú Chulainn in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and helps and hinders each of them without any true purpose or loyalty to either side. For example, "it was on that night that the Morrígan, daughter of Ernmas, came, and she was engaged in fomenting strife and sowing dissension between the two camps on either side."[52] The Morrígan revels in destruction. She is a goddess of war and, she incites it:

> Blood shall gush
> In combat wild!
> Skins shall be hacked
> Crazed with spills!
> Men's sides pierced
> In battle brace.[53]

[49] Norreys Jephson O'Connor, "The Early Irish Fairies and Fairyland," *The Sewanee Review* 28, no. 4., (1920): 545.
[50] O'Connor, "The Early Irish Fairies and Fairyland," 547.
[51] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 37.
[52] Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge*, 26.
[53] Ibid., 26.

The Morrígan visits the camps of both Medb and Cú Chulainn in order to rile them up with her passionate speech. She wants to see a great battle, so she supports both sides of the conflict to increase the bloodshed. For this reason the Morrígan is a depiction of all the darkest elements of the Celtic Mother Ireland figure.

The *Táin Bó Cúailnge* represents the Morrígan as a multi-formed goddess. She is able to take on the shape of animals, an old hag, and young women. This ability to shift her form directly links her to her ancestor, the Sovereignty goddess. Ultimately, her lack of empathy and connection with the king, people, and land paint her now as a violent pagan deity who enjoys bloodshed and feels no loyalty to her people.

The Morrígan and Medb reconceived the idea of Mother Ireland. Previously, her personification of the land was a result of her role as the Sovereignty, but under Christian influence, Mother Ireland becomes irrational, violent and sexualized. The *Táin Bó Cúailnge,* as a preserved text, distances the people of Ireland from their pagan heritage, leaving the legacy of Mother Ireland in a state of upheaval. She no longer can serve as a central religious figure or kingmaker. Instead, she becomes a status symbol used by the monarchy and the Christian church to legitimize the throne of the kings, but not to bestow it. These two goddesses are transitional figures that led to the political image of Mother Ireland that is so familiar in the twentieth century. A corruption of the original power of the Sovereignty and a layering of Christian morals over pagan beliefs, the figure of Mother Ireland can be easily manipulated in order to fit political needs. The invasion of England provides the catalyst for her final transformation into this limited political image.

The Bitter Hag:

Aisling Poetry

Mother Ireland's evolution into a nationalist figure in the twentieth century begins with the emergence of the Irish tradition of *aisling* poetry. *Aisling* poetry is a pivotal moment in the development of Mother Ireland's character because it portrays her as a victim who is desperate for the help of men to save her from colonization by England. This desperation begins the tradition of young men going out to die for their mother and their land, which links Mother Ireland to the death and destruction of war instead of the fertility and sovereignty she used to represent.

Aisling poetry, which is often referred to as vision poetry, or dream poetry, became popular in Ireland in the eighteenth century as a result of the colonization of Ireland by England. The tradition of *aisling* poetry personified Ireland "as a woman and the poet's love for her [became] the vehicle for an expression of his love of Ireland."[54] D.K. Wilgus, in his examination of the *aisling* tradition, cites three types of poetry that are important in the development of the figure of Mother Ireland. The initial *aisling* poetry that emerged was called "the love or fairy-*aisling*," in which a "beautiful woman appears and entices the poet." The second type is "prophecy-*aisling* poetry": this form focuses on the "direct prophecy of the 'poet or *file* as seer . . . praising or encouraging a patron or giving expression to the hopes that one reposed in him.'" However, it is the final type of *aisling* that becomes truly influential. The allegorical-*aisling*, which is an amalgamation of the other two types, consists of a "female visitant, an allegorical

[54] Justin Quinn, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry, 1800-200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22.

figure representing Ireland, [and] provides a message of hope for the subjugated people."[55] It is the allegorical-*aisling* poetry that takes on the role of wartime propaganda and transforms the face of Mother Ireland. Allegorical poetry draws on the names of mystical Irish mother figures, like Medb and the Sovereignty, and displays them in a diminished capacity. The Mother figure, because of this, begins to adopt a haggardness and weariness that came to symbolize "the erosion, [and] the gradual decline and ruination of Ireland under colonial rule."[56]

Colonization is the key event in the development of Mother Ireland and *aisling* poetry. Conflict between Ireland and England is extensive, spanning many generations from 1100 to the present day. Many attempts at fully conquering Ireland were attempted by the English, but it was King Henry VIII who succeeded in gaining dominion over the island. Henry VIII rose to the throne of England in 1509. Due to his ruthless pursuit of expanding English power, he also became King of Ireland in 1541. Henry was so successful in his military conquest that he was able to pass down something unique to his successors: "the [complete] conquest of Ireland. Not only [was he] able to bring the whole country for the first time under the control of a central government, [he] ensured that that government would be an English one."[57] It was this domination by English invaders that prompted the evolution of *aisling* poetry as way to motivate the subjugated Irish people to fight their oppressors. It also led to the devolution of Mother Ireland from a tri-form goddess to the bitter and broken hag, whom only men could save.

The *aisling* poets drew on early Irish literature in order to develop their new "vision poetry." Their poems were pieces of propaganda encouraging the Irish people to strive to return

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[55] D.K. Wilgus, "The *Aisling* and the Cowboy: Some Unnoticed Influences of Irish Vision Poetry on Anglo-American Balladry," *Western Folklore* 44, no.4 (1985): 255-256.
[56] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 86.
[57] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 355.

to Ireland's past and what they called "the idealized west."[58] To obtain to this mythological West, poets of this tradition drew from early Irish lore.

An early predecessor and influence on *aisling* poetry was the poem "The Hag of Beara," an anonymous poem written in the ninth century. There have been over thirty translations and rewrites of "The Hag of Beara" since the ninth century. "The Hag of Beara" focuses on a Mother figure lamenting, in monologue form, about the loss of her land, country, and power. The Hag represents a significant moment in the lineage of Mother Ireland, because, while she is a contemporary of Medb and the Sovereignty, she herself is separated from her goddess past and retains little to no aspects of the pagan tradition. She serves as a middle ground between Medb and the *aisling* tradition of the 1600s. The Hag was also one of the earliest "documented literary personifications of the 'sovereignty goddess' in terms of the land (nation)."[59] The Hag, speaking as Ireland, laments about her lost beauty, the death of the land, as well as her exile from court. She says,

> Pity me: only a wretch,
> Every acorn rots away.
> The feast of bright candles is over
> And I am left in this darkened cell.
>
> I had business once with kings
> And drank their mead and wine.
> But I drink whey-water now
> With other withered ancients.[60]

[58] Wilgus, "The *Aisling* and the Cowboy," 255.

[59] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 85.
[60] Anonymous, "The Hag of Beara," in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, ed. Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 26.

The banishment to the "darkened cell" shows the Hag's isolation from the land, which is her very being.[61] Not only is the Hag banished, but also, in her exile, she is forced to watch the land rot away, acorn by acorn. As she weakens and withers, even her king abandons her.

The Hag of Beara, sometimes known as the Hag of Cailleach, is a manifestation of the end of the pagan goddess. She represents the fading ideals of the Irish West, which are thought to be the purest representations of Irish culture. The Hag lives in "the house farthest west in Ireland."[62] Despite being the epitome of Ireland, she is also a symbol of the hold of Christianity and the end of pagan traditions. Christianity's influence can be seen in her name, Cailleach, which means "one who wears a hood or veil and may equally well apply to an old woman with a hood, an 'Auld Wife' or 'Hag' and to a nun who has taken the veil."[63] It is unclear if this image of the Hag as a nun—which may be a later Christian imposition—becomes fundamental. Nuns swear purity through their marriage to God. Therefore, this role strips her of her most fundamental power: the ability to bestow sovereignty through her marriage to a worthy king. She becomes chaste and pure, thus alienating the Hag from both the young maiden and fertile mother forms that are a part of the Mother's triumvirate tradition.

The Hag of Beara is one of the first manifestations of "the wailing hag."[64] Unable to fulfill the role of her previous incarnations, the Hag becomes instead a victimized old woman crying out over the decay and destruction of her land. The Hag observes the influence of colonization as a great flood drowning Ireland:

I hear their phantom oars

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[61] Ibid., 26.

[62] Eleanor Hull, "Legends and Traditions of the Cailleach Bheara or Old Woman (Hag) of Beara," *Folklore* 38, no. 3 (1927):226.
[63] Ibid., 226.
[64] Wilgus, "The *Aisling* and the Cowboy," 255.

> As ceaselessly they row
> And row to the chill ford,
> Or fall asleep by its side.
>
> Flood tide
> And the ebb dwindling on the sand!
> What the flood rides ashore
> The ebb snatches from your hand.
>
> Flood tide
> And the sucking ebb to follow!
> Both I have come to know
> Pouring down my body.[65]

The Hag is pulled back and forth by the tide of invasion. The image of the "phantom oars" powerfully depicts the colonizers as an otherworldly force surrounding her in a perpetual attack. The Hag is forced to adapt to the new reality of Irish society as colony, and this results in a near-acquiescence. The lines, "both I have come to know/ Pouring down my body," reiterate the endlessness of invasion and the Hag's adjustment to her drowning. [66] It is this specific sentiment that then fuels *aisling* poetry, as well as later poems and theater concerning Mother Ireland as late as the twentieth century. This first poem also helps to establish the nationalistic image of the mother that *aisling* poetry began.

Nationalism heavily influences the next manifestations of Mother Ireland. Nation is defined as a country under a singular government that consists of "a group of people of common descent."[67] However, this definition does not convey the emotional resonance of a nation. Ernest Renan describes the sentimental values of nationalism when he writes

> A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. [. . .] A heroic past, great men, glory (by which I understand genuine glory), this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in

[65] Anonymous, "The Hag of Beara," 26.
[66]Ibid., 26.
[67] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 57.

> the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more—these are the essential conditions for a being a people.[68]

The profound emotion that the word "nation" invokes often lies dormant until it wakes during times in which the nation appears threatened. Nationalism manifests as a powerful desire to glorify the past and protect the potentially dying nation, which works by "creating powerful myths which are able to invoke and sustain a confident feeling of national pride."[69]

Mother Ireland's relationship to nationalism further ignited in the 1800s when conflict with England intensified. Ireland's desire to break from England strengthened, as conditions become worse and the oppression of an absent government increased:

> Irish problems existed in plenty. The most serious of these problems, we can see now on looking back, was the question of the land. The land of Ireland was simply not sufficient to feed all those who were trying to get a living off it. Population was increasing rapidly. This led to competition for land and drove up rents, thus reducing still further the people's resources.[70]

In addition, due to declining living conditions, the English Protestants living in Ireland instituted many laws that limit the Catholic Irish. The people of Ireland resisted. In 1840, Daniel O'Connell, a famous Irish Catholic lawyer, formed a Repeal Association to fight for a split with Britain. Ultimately, while he did achieve emancipation for Catholics, O'Connell and his supporters could not overthrow Britain. Agitations build up while appearances of Mother Ireland grew. It is also in 1840 that an image of Mother Ireland emerges, an image that summons for the first time national patriotic fervor.

One of the most well-known *aisling* poems emerged during O'Connell's fight for Catholic emancipation. Poet James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849) wrote a poem entitled "Dark Rosaleen," which is a retelling of an old sixteenth century song *Róisín Dubh*. Mangan further

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[68] Ernest Renan, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 19.
[69] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 58.
[70] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 515.

romanticizes the image of Mother Ireland and the nation. However, he altered the previous image of Mother Ireland by further separating her from her previous role as a sexual pagan goddess and by taking personal ownership of her. He painted Dark Rosaleen as an absolutely chaste being, describing her as "the saint of saints" and "my virgin flower, my flower of flowers,"[71] This presentation of an idealized Christian national image "barred the way for the goddess, represented by sexuality, to enter discourse. [. . .] It was then that the national ideal began to influence and shape the lives as well as mould the identity of actual Irish women."[72]

"Dark Rosaleen" (1840) took hold not only as a glorious image of Ireland itself, but also as an ideal to which all women should aspire. However, by the time Mother Ireland becomes Rosaleen, she does not reflect her source in Celtic myth. Instead, Mangan's poem reiterates the central themes of the *aisling* tradition: its nationalist agenda. The narrator observes the allegorical figure of Dark Rosaleen as a weakened personification of Ireland, who is full of "sweet and sad complaints."[73] Mangan's narrator goes on to make a prophesy about Dark Rosaleen's fate:

> But yet will I rear your throne
> Again in golden sheen;
> 'Tis you shall reign, shall reign alone,
> My Dark Rosaleen!
> My own Rosaleen! [74]

He tells her that he, speaking on behalf of all Irish men, will return her to her throne. He commands her to wait for their help: he goes on to inform her that he "shall give [her] health, and

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[71] James Clarence Mangan, "Dark Rosaleen," in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, ed. Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 273-274.
[72] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 87.
[73] Mangan, "Dark Rosaleen," 274.
[74] Ibid., 274.

help, and hope."[75] He offers her the ability to reign alone, but those words are diminished by the possessive claiming of her in the repeated phrase "my Dark Rosaleen." Yes, she will gain her throne, but she will acquire it only through the help of men. This further suggests that she can be the property of any man, not just the king, which foreshadows how she will later be used for political purposes.

"Dark Rosaleen" remains an image for the Irish people to unite behind through the nineteenth century. She serves as a motivation for survival as well as an inspirational image for women. It is not until the Irish National Theater is formed and Yeats and Lady Gregory begin to write that a new Mother Ireland icon replaces her. In the twentieth century, poetry is replaced by theater as the primary vehicle for Mother Ireland. Mother Ireland's most famous incarnation would appear in the guise of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, who retains the supernatural qualities of earlier goddesses while being rooted in a contemporary milieu of resistance to English colonization.

[75] Ibid., 274.

CHAPTER 2

MOTHER IRELAND IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

World War I Ireland:

The Recruitment Effort and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*

Mother Ireland in the twentieth century faced a disintegration of her positive traits, including her role as a fertility and Sovereignty goddess. She began to embody a political agenda, as illustrated by her ability to willingly sacrifice her people to achieve power. This vampiric quality of Mother Ireland allowed her to become associated with conflict, a characteristic that casts her as an unsuitable national image. Ireland's Civil War further complicated Mother Ireland's meaning because she could not represent a cohesive national identity during a time of inner conflict. As a result of this association, Mother Ireland disappeared during the middle of the twentieth century, and did not re-emerge until the century's end, when the Irish Troubles rendered her as a negative figure allied with death. In the twentieth century in Ireland, particularly during the Troubles (1969-1998), nationalism becomes linked with the idea of terrorism due to the violent activities of paramilitary groups in Ireland and Britain. This connection tarnishes Mother Ireland's figurative role as a unifying symbol to the point that she is no longer an appropriate image for the country to support. Therefore, death becomes the only way to rehabilitate Mother Ireland. Mother Ireland's death is what Marina Carr explores in *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) when Hester kills her daughter and herself, thus ending a destructive lineage.

Mother Ireland also becomes a more visually present image in the twentieth century. She transitions from appearing in poems and stories to being found in visual imagery such as posters,

money, and art, and begins to appear on stage. It is this increasingly visual presence that makes Mother Ireland a potent symbol for the independence of an Irish free state as well as an image of war and violence.

In 1900, Ireland was still a colony of Britain. Previous attempts to establish Ireland as an independent nation by Irish politicians such as Daniel O'Connell proved fruitless. The English Protestants continued to oppress the Catholic Irish. At the end of the nineteenth century, Ireland was left in a desperate and exhausted state. The great potato famine from 1845-1851 destroyed Irish agriculture and reduced the population by two million.[76] Ultimately, because of the devastation and struggles of the nineteenth century, the

> spirit of resistance to British rule now burned very low, Ireland's population was more deeply divided than ever between the minority, largely protestant who supported the union, and the majority, almost entirely catholic, who were alienated from it.[77]

England also became entangled in World War I from 1913 to 1918. The English desperately needed soldiers and instituted drafts and recruitment efforts in all of their colonies. In Ireland, this recruitment and forced participation "acted as a catalyst, pushing Nationalists and Unionists further apart."[78]

As England attempted to force Ireland into World War I, Mother Ireland was still present symbolically and proved influential to the Irish public. However, her role now appeared differently than in any previous incarnations. In order to take command of the Irish population and appeal to their personal national feelings, Britain appropriated the image of Mother Ireland as a tool of recruitment. Mother Ireland had always served as a symbol of Irish independence,

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[76] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 570.
[77] Ibid., 575.
[78] George Boyce, "Dividing Ireland: World War I and Partition," *The English Historical Review* 114, no. 458 (1999): 1019.

but during the struggles of WWI, she served as a tool of the oppressors of Irish liberty to justify their role. Her dispossession from her intended role as a representative of Ireland led her now to invite "young men to glorious death for the sake of [her] freedom."[79]

The most influential example of a Mother Ireland under British control is a series of recruitment posters put into circulation by the government. For example, a poster entitled "For the Glory of Ireland" depicts "a woman holding a rifle, gesturing to a distant shore in flames, as she addresses a man with a walking stick."[80] The text of the poster reads "For the glory of Ireland, will you go or must I?"[81] The image is a direct reference to both the incarnation of Mother Ireland established by the *aisling* poets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as William Butler Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902). The "wailing woman," who is shown in the poster, calls upon men to die in her place.[82] This image also refers back to poems like "My Dark Rosaleen" and others. There is a manipulative nature to the poster, because by calling on an image so associated with Irish nationalist culture, Britain is threatening Ireland. The poster suggests that if the Irish do not fight, then the woman in the poster, who represents Ireland, will die.

Thousands of Irish men did fight for Britain in WWI, but there was always a distinction between Nationalists and Unionists in the army. The divide was so great that "even when the Nationalist soldiers were severely tested in battle" and assisted by troupes of Unionist soldiers, the Unionists regarded the battle "as a place of bonding, not between the two Irish traditions, but

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[79] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 2.
[80] "For the Glory of Ireland," Library of Congress: Posters: World War I Posters, Last modified January 5, 2013, accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/wwipos/item/2003668400/
[81] Library of Congress, "For the Glory of Ireland"
[82] Clark, *The Great Queens*, 14.

between Britons and their kin in the dominions."[83] The war made the divide absolute and "imperial patriotism and not the common experience of Irishmen held the field."[84] The constant division of Irish loyalties as well as the ongoing attempts by Britain to take control of Irish nationalism, through the appropriation of images such as Mother Ireland, led to a series of minor skirmishes between Irish rebels and the British army.

The Irish people also responded to the conflict with Britain through the arts. During this time, many movements emerged to reestablish Irish artistic vision and take back Irish icons. It was in these movements that the contemporary Mother Ireland emerged. William Butler Yeats played a crucial role in establishing a national literature of Ireland. He believed that "without an intellectual life of some kind, the Irish could not long preserve their nationality."[85] Yeats was a nationalist and patriot, but he disliked the violence that could result from patriotism. In order to demonstrate his loyalty, he wrote one of his most famous works, the short play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902).[86] *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* although written before WWI, directly influences all Mother Ireland literature that follows.

Yeats wanted to create a national revolutionary icon. In order to do so, he invented the Mother Ireland image we know today. Yeats wrote that he

> had a dream almost 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 about whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death.[87]

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[83] Boyce, "Dividing Ireland: World War I and Partition," 1018.
[84] Ibid., 1018.

[85] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 649.
[86] W.B. Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama,* ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 3-11.
[87] W.B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmilan, 1961), 12.

However, Yeats did not develop Cathleen by himself. Much of the play was written by Lady Augusta Gregory, his longtime friend and collaborator. Lady Gregory shaped the plot of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* as well as the "transaction between Michael Gillane (the play's central character) and the eponymous Old Woman," adding depth and complexity to the representation of Mother Ireland.[88]

Cathleen Ni Houlihan is a one-act play about "an old woman stealing a fertile youth in return for sterility and death."[89] In the narrative, an old woman begs the help of the youth of Ireland to help her recover her land, asking them to abandon family, friends, and life itself for the sake of her liberation. The theme of sacrifice is integral to the play. As the Old Woman says,

> it is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks now will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid.[90]

By sacrificing the body and blood of men to the land, Cathleen is able to regenerate. But, in order to achieve her independence, she must convince young men that sacrificing their lives for her is better than living a life with their family. Cathleen uses nationalism as a manipulative tactic to persuade Michael to join her cause, by promising glory and immortality in exchange for his death. This dichotomy is persuasive, because even though Michael will die in battle, he will live on as part of the glorious tradition of Ireland. Cathleen offers meaning and a dream of immortality in exchange for the sacrifice of the comfort home.

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[88] Henry Merritt, "Dead Many Times: Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Yeats, Two Old Women, and a Vampire," *The Modern Language Review* 96, no. 3 (2001): 645.
[89] Ibid., 644.
[90] W.B. Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama,* ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 9-10.

Cathleen Ni Houlihan focuses on the theme of transformation and "faith in the regenerative power of the nation through the sacrifice of her young men."[91] This regenerative quality, which is achieved through spilling blood, casts Mother Ireland as a type of vampire. The idea that Mother Ireland feeds from her children directly subverts her pagan roots, when she circulated as a symbol of fertility and security. In the version of Mother Ireland created by Yeats and Gregory, Mother Ireland becomes predatory. Instead of giving to her children, she takes from them.

Cathleen's use as a national symbol becoming compelling because a nation "is a soul, a spiritual principle."[92] In order for the soul and the nation to survive, it must draw on its people and their collective being because "shared experience is essential to the survival and destiny of such collective identities."[93] The nation itself is vampiric; Ireland maintains its independence by feeding on the blood of the country. By manifesting as a symbol of the nation and not just the land, Mother Ireland must switch from provider to taker. Mother Ireland feeds off of the sacrifice of young men, but there must be a reward in this sacrifice. Yeats and Gregory suggest in *Cathleen* that this reward is surviving in the country's collective memory: "They shall be remembered for ever. / They shall be alive for ever."[94]

Cathleen rejoices in the sacrifice of Irish men in a way no other image of Mother Ireland ever has before. The shedding of Irish blood in battle invigorates her. Cathleen functions as an enticing symbol for the "restoring of the country from its oppressed state of colonization to

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[91] John A. Byars, "The Brief and Troublesome Reign of Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902-1907)," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (1975): 41.
[92] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 57.
[93] Ibid., 59.
[94] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* 9-10.

renewed sovereignty."[95] She is a seductress, who appears to Michael as "an old woman coming up the path" but, even in her hag state, she still seems to hold some sort of sexual power over him.[96] Cathleen refers to the men who go out and die for her as "lovers," saying to Michael "with all the lovers that have brought me their love I never set out the bed for any."[97] This connection between sacrificial solider and lover is reiterated when Cathleen seduces Michael away from his wedding. Michael attempts to resist Cathleen by citing his familial obligations and his upcoming wedding, but Cathleen is not dissuaded: "It is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help [. . .] if anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all."[98] Cathleen desires for Michael to give himself completely to her in both a spiritual and physical marriage.

This sexual submission is a perversion of her original role as the Sovereignty goddess. The Celtic king would marry the land and the Sovereignty goddess when he rose to power. This marriage was a deeply religious symbol of uniting king and country; however, in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* the union becomes a manipulation that she uses to achieve her own needs. Diane Bessai describes the basterdization of this ritual in her essay "Who was Cathleen Ni Houlihan:" "the embrace of the prince-lover in the sovereignty stories with its echoes of an ancient custom of ritual marriage is modified into an idea tantamount to ritual sacrifice."[99] Cathleen is stuck in the hag form of the ancient pagan goddess, and the only way for her to transition into another stage is to take advantage of her position and sacrifice men in exchange for youth.

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[95] Nicholas Grene, "Strangers in the House," in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 428.
[96] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* 11.
[97] Ibid., 8.
[98] Ibid., 9.
[99] Diane Bessai, "Who Was Cathleen Ni Houlihan," *The Malahat Review* 42, no. 4 (1977): 114-142.

Cathleen does not grieve or weep for her sacrificed children; instead, she celebrates the youth their sacrifice provides her. At the end of the play, she becomes unrecognizable because she is so changed by the sacrifice she demands:

> **Peter** [*to Patrick, laying a hand on his arm*]. Did you see an old woman going down the path?
> **Patrick.** I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.[100]

Michael's death, although not completely certain at the end of the play, is foreshadowed. His sacrifice gives Cathleen her youth. Her revitalization shows the vampirism that has become the predominant feature of her as a Mother Ireland figure. Cathleen's misuses her traditional role.

The Sovereignty, through sex and the sharing of her body, was able to grant the right to rule to a potential King. However, Christianity's co-opting of the Sovereignty as a symbol strips her of her sexual power and role as giver of sovereignty, leading her to lose both. Yet, the Sovereignty and other Mother Ireland icons require a bodily connection to the men of Ireland. In *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* this bodily connection, while sexual in nature, becomes a sacrifice of blood in order to restore her to glory. What was once a ritual about giving power to a king now becomes one that drains power from men in order to revitalize their deteriorating mother. The appropriation of the ritual sex between Sovereignty goddess and Celtic king as a blood sacrifice to serve the national agenda suggests that Mother Ireland is becoming an unstable image more associated with violence and the death of Irish men instead of with the life of the land and its people.

Cathleen Ni Houlihan became iconic due to its patriotic appeal; the play drew a predominantly nationalist audience, which became so passionate about its message that a critic said *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* "made more rebels than a thousand political speeches or a hundred

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[100] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* 11.

reasoned books."[101] Using such a powerful and important Irish image as Mother Ireland became almost reckless, as it led to an extreme response. Some people, like Stephen Gwynn, even speculated on the ethical responsibility of producing a play like *Cathleen*: "Plays like *Cathleen* should not be produced unless one [is] prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot."[102] The unsympathetic nature of the Cathleen figure also prevents the audience from understanding the true consequences of Michael's sacrifice. The actuality of death is dismissed in favor of the glorious memory of the dead that Cathleen offers. Cathleen goes so far as to advise against mourning death at all:

> Do not make a great keening/ When the graves have been dug to-morrow/ [. . .] Do not spread food to call strangers/ To the wakes that shall be to-morrow;/ Do not give money for prayers/ For the dead that shall die to-morrow/ They will have no need for prayers.[103]

Therefore, It is not until the end of World War I at the height of the English-Irish conflict that the full sacrifice requested by Cathleen makes itself known.

The Regretful Mother:

Mother Ireland and the Two Great Irish Wars

Mother Ireland was radically transformed by Anglo-Irish authors during the evolution of the British and Irish conflict. The image of Mother Ireland during the twentieth century gained "strength and realism by becoming a peasant instead of a princess."[104] However, humanity cost Mother Ireland her association with the land and the king. Mother Ireland was left with only her

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[101] Grene, "Strangers in the House," 428.
[101] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* 8.
[102] Clark, *The Great Queens,* Stephen Gwynn 179.
[103] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* 9.
[104] Clark, *The Great Queens,* 185.

"ability to metamorphose into a young girl when she [is] worshipped by Irish patriots"[105] Under the oppression of Christian morals, Mother Ireland lost the sexuality of her previous incarnations, becoming more associated with the sacrifice of her subjects rather than their prosperity.

The patriotic nationalists of Ireland "take the place of the king. The patriot replaced the king as the hope for Ireland's political salvation."[106] Mother Ireland shifts from being matched with a king to representing a political faction. She becomes an unstable symbol, due to the loss of her role as a fertility goddess as well as due to her strong association with political revolution. Under these conditions, and in the new postcolonial Ireland, she can no longer persist as a national icon. Ireland's struggles over the Anglo-Irish treaty, regret for the subsequent violence and deaths of the Civil War, and the need for forward movement caused by the sudden achievement of the Free State, all generated new national imperatives. The regretful mother, represented by Juno in *Juno and the Paycock* (1924), and in Ireland's own shift away from nationalist fervor, led to the dismissal of Mother Ireland from the public culture.

The image of Cathleen Ni Houlihan as the definitive Mother Ireland figure held power in Ireland through much of the early twentieth century, especially during World War I. At first, World War I provided a distraction for Ireland from the Anglo-Irish conflict, for "the outbreak of war in 1914 put the question of home rule in cold storage, but the heat that been generated over the past few years was not readily turned off."[107] However, this distraction did not last, because Britain's continued recruitment efforts in Ireland led to mass dissent and opposition to British

[105] Ibid., 185.
[106] Bessai, "Who Was Cathleen Ni Houlihan,"122.
[107] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 665.

rule. The rebel armies in Ireland "decided on an insurrection to take place before the ending of the war. [. . .] The outcome being the Easter rebellion of 1916."[108]

British reaction to the Irish uprising was swift and firm, as the British quickly attempted to secure absolute control over the Island before a rebellion could gain a foothold. Skirmishes broke out constantly in order to attempt to drive the British occupiers out of Ireland. The most famous attack was the uprising on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916. The events of this week in 1916 are essential to Irish history, as a group of

> rebels took their stand against British occupation at a moment when Irish "Home Rule" seemed to have been conceded—with implementation deferred to war's end—although it was apparent that a fragmented Ireland was in prospect, because of the fierce resistance of Ulster Unionists.[109]

These Irish republicans, whose goal was to end British rule in Ireland, seized several key locations in Dublin, proclaiming an Irish Republic that was free of Britain's authority. The rebellion was comprised of several Irish nationalist radical groups, including the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Volunteers. However,

> at the heart of the Rising lay not an officer of the Volunteers nor of the Citizen Army, but a small group of activists [. . .] who had clandestinely promoted their own plans for an armed rebellion against British rule.[110]

Several important Irish figure participated in this small group of activists during the rebellion. The most noteworthy, in terms of the evolution of Mother Ireland, were Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins.

De Valera and Collins were iconic members of Ireland's fight for independence between 1916 and 1921. Ultimately, it is the division between their beliefs surrounding the results of the

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[108] John Cunningham, "*Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* by Charles Townshend," *The Journal of Military History* 71, no. 3 (2007): 937.
[109] Ibid., 937
[110] Michael McNally, *Easter Rising 1916: Birth of the Irish Republic* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007), 17.

Anglo-Irish treaty and the end of British Home Rule that results in the alienation and banishment of Mother Ireland from public sphere. Guerilla warfare grew to such an extent that it took on an almost theatrical nature. The Easter Rising "was guerrilla theater deigned to motivate an unsupportive public—imagined as an audience—to participate in the struggle for independence."[111] In 1921, Britain sought to end the violence by establishing the Anglo-Irish Treaty. This treaty would allow Ireland to exist as a Free State that still swore allegiance to the British monarchy.

Conflict around the treaty developed when Michael Collins, an "efficient organizer and leader of the military resistance which opposed British attempts to smash Sinn Féin," agreed to this treaty, which went against the Irish Nationalist agenda because it did not guarantee Ireland's existence as an entirely independent nation.[112] A great controversy arose around the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, which "ended the war of independence and set up the Irish Free state, [which] applied to the whole of Ireland, but Northern Ireland was given the choice of opting out of the agreement and retaining the status it had secured."[113] In addition, due to the North's continued existence under British rule, the Irish Free State had to swear allegiance to the British crown and its military force. Éamon de Valera, president of the Irish rebel parliament and senior surviving volunteer officer, denounced Collins and his treaty. This move split the Catholic Irish nationalists into two distinct groups: the Free Staters who supported Collins and the treaty and the Nationalist Republicans who backed de Valera and opposed the treaty.[114] These factions, comprised of men who had formerly worked together, led to the outbreak of the Irish Civil War

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[111] Aaron Krall, "S*taging the Easter Rising: 1916 as Theater* by James Moran," *Theatre Journal* 58, no. 4 (2006): 718.
[112] Moody and Martin, *The Course of Irish History*, 682.
[113] Ibid., 694.
[114] Ibid., 680.

in 1922. The Irish Civil War was more violent and vicious than the War of Independence had been, leaving Irish society divided for generations.

With the outbreak of civil war, a unified national identity became less important to the structure of Irish culture. The figure of Mother Ireland that appeared in the 1920s following the Civil War was that of a grieving mother, regretful of her actions. The Mother Ireland seen at this time became one of the last theatrical presentations of the character for fifty years, and so represented Ireland's own realization of the death toll of war and the sacrifice Irish men had made. Ireland was faced with the reality that its national fervor had created. Therefore, Mother Ireland became credited with the grief and destruction caused by both the War of Independence and the Civil war, as it was she who sent her children to die.

Sean O'Casey's play *Juno and the Paycock* (1924)[115] demonstrates how Mother Ireland became a grieving mother through its titular character, Juno, who also represents the monstrosity of the humanized goddess. Juno is distraught over the death of her son, Johnny, who dies during a conflict between Irish Unionists and Nationalists. Forced to face the sacrifice she has asked her son to make, her final soliloquy is a lament for the son she sent out to die:

> I forgot; your poor oul' selfish mother was only thinkin' of herself. [. . .] I'll face th' ordeal meself. 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 a Stater, but only a poor dead son.[116]

Juno's realization of the humanity of her son directly opposes Cathleen's voice in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* which celebrates Michael's death as "a symbol of the nationalist cause."[117]

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[115] Sean O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*, in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 197-247.
[116] Ibid., 244.
[117] Clark, *The Great Queens,* 178.

Sacrifice allows Cathleen to be "renewed by the young men willing to die for her."[118] Her enjoyment of the rejuvenation of sacrifice contrasts with the grief clear in Juno's final speech, as she confronts the difference between a son and a soldier. As a mother, Juno is forced to feel the pain of carrying and losing a child: "what was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave."[119] Juno initially dismisses the death of Irish men as a necessity of war and rejuvenation, saying about the death of Mrs. Tancred's son, "in wan way, she deserves all she got; for lately, she let th' Diehards make an open house of th' place."[120] Juno justifies Mrs. Tancred's son's death because she supports a cause against Juno's own firm nationalist beliefs.

Juno's initial callousness towards death is representative of Mother Ireland as represented in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. However, when Juno's son dies as metaphorical sacrifice to her (Juno's name is borrowed from that of the goddess), Juno instead is forced to confront the toll and grief of sacrifice. She accepts, the blame saying I, "will face the ordeal meself" and laments her role in the war. She wants the cold, distant goddess identity—Cathleen's identity—taken from her. She says, "sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, an' give us Thine own eternal love!"[121] This line expresses the replacing of the cold, vampiric mother of *Cathleen* with the regretful mother who is held accountable for the death toll. Even her son Johnny comes to understand that the glory of battle is not worth death. Right before he is shot, he speaks with the men who will execute him:

> **Johnny.** Are yous goin' to do in a comrade?—Look at me arm, I lost it for Ireland.
> **Second Irregular.** Commandant Tancred lost his life for Ireland.

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[118] Ibid., 178.
[119] O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*, 245,
[120] Ibid., 228.
[121] Ibid., 245.

> **Johnny.** Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me! Mother o' God pray for me—be with me now in the agonies o'death!. . . .Hail, Mary, full o' grace. . .the Lord is. . .with Thee.[122]

When faced with the sacrifice of not just his limb but also his life, Johnny panics and prays for salvation from his obligation not only to Ireland, but also to Mother Ireland.

Juno and the Paycock is representative of Ireland's regrets about the death toll of the Irish Civil War and the reckless nationalism bred during the War for Independence. This play marked one of the last appearances of Mother Ireland in Irish popular culture for the next fifty years. This absence was reinforced by the reinvention of women's roles in Irish society. Éamon de Valera was elected as the first president of Ireland after the end of the Civil War. Subsequently, he revised Ireland's constitution and the way women were perceived. This new perception of women limited their visibility in Irish culture and art and further denied Mother Ireland her role as a central cultural figure.

The Absence:

Oppression of Women's Rights in Ireland and the Effect of the Absence of Mother Ireland

A figure becomes a national icon through its presence in a nation's culture; however, the absence of a previously idolized figure speaks to both a nation's evolution and devolution. By eliminating Mother Ireland as a prominent figure from literature and art, Ireland developed a scapegoat for its past while also protecting her from further slander. Her absence is a positive step in the development of Mother Ireland: her return to public life at the end of the twentieth century is evidence that she has not become fully rehabilitated as a symbol. However, her absence frees Mother Ireland from the guilt manifested by the end of the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. Additionally, revisions to the Irish constitution and Éamon de Valera's

[122] Ibid., 243.

proposed view of women in Irish society further isolate Mother Ireland from the main public culture. De Valera limited women's rights, making it clear that their role was to serve as homemakers, not as members of the workforce. Because of de Valera's objectives, Mother Ireland came to represent an outdated, aggressive femininity. Nevertheless, female poets used her as an expression of their creative agency and opposition to patriarchal nationalism.

In 1937, Éamon de Valera instituted wide political reforms, targeting the 1919 constitution in order to redefine the role of women in Irish society. He wanted women to take on traditional roles, a move that reversed the progress made by women of the previous generation, such as Maud Gonne, who was a prominent figure of Irish National Theater, an activist, and a political speaker. Mother Ireland in her previous incarnations defied this "perpetuation of traditional views on women's role in society."[123] She was an iconic, persuasive, and powerful woman in all her incarnations.

Many Irish males supported de Valera's constitutional reforms. Surveys investigating the attitudes towards women have shown that the "majority of the population espoused traditional attitudes towards the role and status of women."[124] De Valera in his famous St. Patrick's radio address (1943), "On Language & the Irish Nation," described his vision for the country:

> the ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit—a land whose countryside would be bright with cozy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sound of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age.[125]

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[123] Yvonne Galligan, *Women and Politics in Contemporary Ireland: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London: Pinter, 1998), 29.
[124] Iibd., 28.
[125] Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera: 1917-1973* (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 466.

This depiction was empowered by de Valera's new constitution, which limited the rights of women in several passages, including "section 4 (2) of Article 45 [. . .] [which] takes from women the right to choose their own vocation in life. The state is given power to decide what avocations are suited to their sex and strength."[126] Exiling women to the home and limiting their participation in Irish society to roles suitable to their gender reduced not only the presence of women in Irish politics, but also the opportunity for women to serve as icons of Ireland. A woman could no longer serve as a viable image of the nation because women were not visible in society.

The politics of gender are crucial to Mother Ireland's existence. The revised constitution further diminished her symbolic role, leading to her removal from Irish society and, ultimately, her absence during the middle decades of the twentieth century. However, "it was against such distorted conceptions of womanhood in the context of the nation that contemporary Irish women writers have set their various preconceptions of Mother Ireland."[127] During the absence of Mother Ireland, fringe groups of female authors, who were looked down upon in comparison to their male counterparts, attempted to reinterpret Mother Ireland under their female vision.

The political culture of Ireland made it very difficult for a female poet to become prominent during the twentieth century because the literary legacy of this time was largely "shaped by an almost exclusively male dominated public."[128] The tradition of the female poetic voice was not available until the second half of the twentieth century and "a reason for their long silence was the traditionally sacred status that male poets held in Irish society."[129] Never the less,

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[126] Angela Bourke, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing vol V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 163.
[127] Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities*, 90.
[128] Ibid., 90.
[129] Ibid., 90.

despite the struggles facing female poets, several have attained national prominence and many of them became drawn to the banished Mother Ireland figure as a representation of their own social isolation. Therefore, in the end, it is the female authors themselves who represent the absence of Mother Ireland. They portrayed this absence as a positive time and expressed that her death would actually be a type of freedom.

Many female poets emerged during this time of absence, such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Eavan Boland, Kerry Hardie, Paula Meehan, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, and Mary O'Malley; all became prominent then and continue to be successful today. Among these female poets, were Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Eavan Boland.

Nuala Ní Dhomnhaill's poem "Caileach/ Hag" (1979) depicts a mother interacting with her daughter and each generation's connection with the figure of Mother Ireland.[130] The narrator of the poem, the mother, recounts a dream she had

> Once I dreamt I was the earth, [. . .]
> The side of the mountain
> My shanks and backbone,
> That the sea was lapping
> The twin rocks of my feet,
> The twin rocks of Parkmore
> From the old Fenian tales.
>
> That dream was so real
> That when I woke next morning
> I glanced down to see if, perchance
> My feet were still wet.[131]

As she imagines herself in the role of Mother Ireland, the narrator feels a connection to that figure and the land itself through their shared role as mothers. This connection established between the narrator and Mother Ireland seems to be a positive one, as the narrator remembers

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[130] Nuala Ní Dhomnhaill, "Caileach/ Hag," in *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry*, ed. Peggy O'Brien (Wake Forest: Wake Forset University Press, 2011), 294.
[131] Ibid., 294, lines 1-16.

Mother Ireland fondly. However, this positive relationship contrasts with the narrator's daughter's reaction to Mother Ireland. The daughter, who represents the new generation and the new perception of the Mother figure, becomes frightened by her presence: "'O, Mama, I'm scared stiff,/ I thought I saw the mountains heaving/ Like a giantess, with her breasts swaying,/ About to loom over, and gobble me up."[132] The daughter is afraid of the supernatural power Mother Ireland represents. This divide between the two generations shows the devolution of Mother Ireland into a negative icon that represents fear, vampirism, and the supernatural. The little girl views the land as mythical giantess who wants to consume her and use her. The title "Caileach/ Hag" also suggests that Mother Ireland is withered and old, reiterating her outsider status as well as referring to the *aisling* view of the mother as a hag.

Eavan Boland is also influenced by the figure of Mother Ireland and devotes many of her poems to exploring the absence of Mother Ireland and her abandonment of her land and children. Boland's poetry is celebrated because it

> challenges traditional images that have long been taken as 'natural' within the construction of female subjectivity. Socialized to be passive and silent or to avoid taboo subjects such as the female anatomy and sexuality or devalued topics such as maternity or children.[133]

Boland's poem "Mise Éire" (1987), which translates from Gaelic as "I am Ireland," examines the transformation of Mother Ireland under colonial rule.[134] The narrator of the poem appears to be Mother Ireland herself, who resists being pulled back into central Irish culture:

> I won't go back to it—[. . .]
> The small farm,
> The scalded memory,
> The songs

[132] Ibid., 294, lines 30-33.
[133] Laura Malojo Rodriguez, "Female Iconography and Subjectivity in Eavan Boland's 'In Her Own Image,'" *Atlantis* 28, no. 1 (2006): 89.
[134] Eavan Boland, *New Collected Poems* (London: Carcanet Press Limited, 2005), 128.

That bandage up the history,
The words that make a rhythm of the crime

Where time is time past
A palsy of regrets.
No. I won't go back.
My roots are brutal.[135]

Boland's Mother Ireland has accepted the violence of her path and even acknowledges that this violence was ignored in favor of the celebration of victory, a conclusion that can be seen explicitly in the lines "the songs that bandage up the history,/ the words that make a rhythm, of the crime."[136] This passage refers back to *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and her celebration of the death of young men in song. Previously, Ireland attempted to mask the tragedy of the past wars under the guise of the musical tradition of Mother Ireland. Mother Ireland has absorbed all the regrets and anger of Ireland. Even she does not want to go back to the culture that banished her.

The narrator talks about language, specifically the elimination of Gaelic as the primary language in Ireland by the British, and how colonization has stripped language, like her, of an original glory:

A new language
Is a kind of scar
And heals after a while
Into a passable imitation
Of what went before.[137]

If Mother Ireland is forced to return, she will only be a "passable imitation," a scar, and a reminder of the goddess she once was. When the Mother Ireland figure emerges again in Irish culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s during the Irish Troubles, she begins to represent the outdated ideas of nationalism and myth that modern Irish people fear.

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[135] Ibid., 128, lines 1-17.
[136] Ibid., 128 line 11-13.
[137] Ibid., 128, lines 40-44.

Many of Boland's poems center on the same ideas brought up in "Mise Éire." Two of the most explicit explorations of Mother Ireland in Boland's collections are "Mother Ireland" (1998) and "Anna Liffey" (1994), which both explore the event of Mother Ireland leaving.[138] Boland does not exonerate Mother Ireland from her actions, but rather she views Mother Ireland from both sides: Mother Ireland is portrayed as an absent mother and her children become runaways. "Mother Ireland" specifically examines the relationship between Mother Ireland and the land. This relationship is a difficult concept because Mother Ireland is the physical land of Ireland, but she also exists independently of it as a personified female character. Boland's poem explores the difficulty of separating these two identities, so that the political figure of Mother Ireland has little to do with the actual island of Ireland.

The first line of "Mother Ireland" establishes the narrator's or the mother figure's own disconnection from the land and her two unique identities. The narrator says, "At first I was land"; and it is this use of "at first" that shows that the narrator is now separate from the land.[139] However, the narrator seems confused about which incarnation or story truly represents her:

> I learned my name.
> I rose up. I remembered it.
> Now I could tell my story.
> It was different
> From the story told about me.[140]

Boland's narrator struggles between public perception of her and her original story.

Boland views Mother Ireland's abandonment of the land as both a painful wound and also a necessary part of the cycle of motherhood. The Mother Ireland of this poem leaves the land, becoming an outsider, a figure on the fringes of the public. This separation is painful,

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[138] Ibid., 230-245 and 261-262.
[139] Ibid., 261, 1-2.
[140] Ibid., 261, 15-19.

however, and she states, "I could see the wound I had left/ in the land by leaving it."[141] This figurative wound is the manifestation of Mother Ireland's attempt to help the land by leaving it, as a mother would allow her child to gain independence. In Boland's poetry, this absent mother is crucial as Boland attempts "to create an independent female subject, which necessarily requires a subversion of previously established yet ineffective icons."[142] Boland endeavors to speak against the previous icon of Mother Ireland popularized by *aisling* poetry and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Boland's Mother Ireland therefore leaves her land and children to save them. She recounts "come back to us/ they said./ Trust me I whispered."[143] In this context, Boland's Mother Ireland shares a similar outlook with O'Casey's Juno, who must leave the stage because of the weight of her guilt. By creating an alternative to either encouraging or mourning sacrifice, Boland displaces a negative symbol with a neutral one.

The subversive mother of Boland's poetry appears again in her poem "Anna Liffey," where she relates Mother Ireland not only to a goddess, but also to the source of the river Liffey. The poem attempts to examine the relationship between the body of a woman and a river: "she asked that it be named for her./ The river took its name from the land./ The land took its name from a woman."[144] This connection to the river is significant because rivers deliver water and sustain life: "I praise/ the gifts of the river."[145] In this poem, Boland continues to create a mother who can provide, even when absent.

Despite the constant presence of the river as it flows through the country, the mother of "Anna Liffey" is not present and still remains an outsider:

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[141] Ibid., 261, 22-23.
[142] Rodriguez, "Female Iconography and Subjectivity in Eavan Boland's 'In Her Own Image,'" 90.
[143] Boland, *New Collected Poems*, 262, 32-34.
[144] Ibid., 230, 7-8.
[145] Ibid., 231, 25-26.

> The nation which eludes me.
> Fractions of a life
> It has taken me a lifetime
> To claim. [. . .]
> I had no children. No country.
> I did not know the name for my own life.[146]

Mother Ireland does not hold any direct power over the country. Her separation, both from her children and her nation, contributes to her loss of identity: "I did not know the name for my own life," she says, suggesting that while still functioning as a river and a source of life, she no longer truly represents the country and therefore has lost her status as a goddess and a national icon.

The question of "Anna Liffey" appears to be: what becomes of a national icon that no longer serves as a symbol for nationalism? And should this icon, once banished, ever return? The narrator of this poem contemplates this query,

> Make of a nation what you will
> Make of the past
> What you can—
> There is now
> A woman in a doorway.
> It has taken me
> All my strength to do this.
> Becoming a figure in a poem.
> Usurping a name and a theme.[147]

The Mother Ireland of this narrative has usurped the title of Mother Ireland, gaining strength and a new identity on the fringes of Irish culture. The use of the words 'nation' and 'past' are crucial in the psychology of this new mother figure's strength, because these words indicate acceptance. She has made of the past "what you can" and is ready to exist under a new name and role. This

[146] Ibid., 231, 40-50.
[147] Ibid., 235-236.

new-found strength also pushes Boland's narrator to separate herself from the land and stand independently: "a River is not a woman/ [. . .] Anymore than/ a woman is a river."[148]

The new strength of this figure, both as an icon and as a woman separate from the land, does not completely fix the problematic nature of Mother Ireland. In Boland's poem, Mother Ireland is still represented as a hag figure who is unable to return to the tri-form goddess form of her roots. Because of this limitation, Mother Ireland can still be manipulated. This vulnerability makes itself apparent because Boland directly relates "Anna Liffey" to "The Hag of Beara." As previously established, "The Hag of Beara" is an influence on *aisling* poetry and begins the depiction of Mother Ireland as a weak, older woman dependent on the help of others: "look at my arms: you will see/ nothing but narrow bones./ They are not worth lifting up."[149] Bitter about the loss of her youth, the Hag rails against her age instead of accepting and finding power in her new position: "young girls fill with pleasure/ when Beltain comes round,/ but misery suits me better,/ an ancient thing, past pity."[150] The hag seeks to return to the "summer of her youth" and become "yellow-haired" again.[151] The way to achieve this, however, is the vampiric nature of the Mother Ireland of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* who can be saved from age only through the sacrifice of men.

Boland's Mother goes against the Hag's perceived ideas of age and its negative symbolism. The narrator of "Anna Liffey" separates herself from the hag saying,

> An ageing woman
> Finds no shelter in language.
> She finds instead
> Single words she once loved
> Such as "summer" and "yellow"

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[148] Ibid., 232.
[149] Anonymous, "The Hag of Beara," 24.
[150] Ibid., 24.
[151] Ibid., 25.

> Have suddenly become dwellings
> For someone else.[152]

The reference to summer and yellow in this stanza refer to "The Hag of Beara" and her discussion of her own lost youth. The narrator of "Anna Liffey" accepts that seeking to define herself in terms of the language of past memories and incarnations is impossible. She instead acknowledges that her evolution prevents her from ever inhabiting her past selves, a realization that allows her to progress beyond them.

Ultimately, the mother of "Anna Liffey" accepts that her absence is beneficial, for it is her role as a source that matters, rather than her physical presence. She remarks, "In the end/ It will not matter/ That I was a woman. I am sure of it. / The body is a source. Nothing more."[153] This comment is critical because the return of Mother Ireland is not only unnecessary, but also problematic.

Boland saw the Mother Ireland figure as better off faded and forgotten, as did many female poets who emerged during the absence of Mother Ireland in the middle of the twentieth century. Some, like Boland, showed her as a shade, existing only as a source for life and not a visible icon. Others, like the poet Mary O'Malley in her poem "A Young Matron Dances Free of the Island," represent Mother Ireland as a woman trapped by the domestic life of marriage who is seeking to free herself. O'Malley writes in her own voice when she describes Mother Ireland saying, "feck it, she said, startling the neighbors,/ it's go now or be stuck here forever/ Chained to this rock like that Greek."[154] The mother of O'Malley's poem seeks escape from the burden of

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[152] Boland, *New Collected Poems*, 234.
[153] Ibid., 236.
[154] Mary O'Malley, "A Young Matron Dances Free of the Island," in *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry*, ed. Peggy O'Brien (Wake Forest: Wake Forest University Press, 2011), 379.

history and the "men laid out in coffins."[155] She runs from Ireland and the chains it represents, even as the country "drove her out again/ to where there was no going back."[156] The only true escape she can achieve is through death, which frees her completely of the land and the distorted ideas she has come to represent. In the end she throws herself off a cliff:

> There should be a moment,
> A shared of glass to hold against the light,
> A checkpoint to pass before the end.
> They say her hair caught the sun
> As she waltzed over the cliff, haloing beautifully down.[157]

Suicide, though it goes against the Catholic tradition, which is so essential to Irish culture, liberates Mother Ireland from those who seek to use her.

The absence does not last. Mother Ireland manifests herself again as prominent physical image. Conflict continues to build between the Unionists of Northern Ireland and the Nationalists of the South, resulting in the Troubles from 1969 through 1996. The Troubles continued the opposition between the Protestant Unionists and the Catholic Free Staters, but now the violence became terrorism. Additionally, this period coincided with the Celtic Tiger, a time of prosperity in the Republic. Dragged back into the spotlight, the Mother Ireland of the late twentieth century adopts the role of the traveler who is feared by settled people in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*.

The Death of Mother Ireland:

The Three Generations of Mother Ireland in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*

The political conditions of the end of the twentieth century led to a reemergence of popular literature focused on Mother Ireland. However, Mother Ireland's symbolism changed

[155] Ibid., 379.
[156] Ibid., 379.
[157] Ibid., 379.

significantly: she became a scapegoat, rather than an icon for nationalism. Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) specifically explores the various generations of Mother Ireland and her role as symbol of fear for the people of Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s.[158] During this time, Ireland enjoyed prosperity due to industrialization, which left little room for supernatural figures within the national imagination. People become afraid of what Mother Ireland represented, and so she became twisted by their perceptions and grew to be unstable, violent, and dangerous. Ultimately, the only reprieve for her alarming symbolic development became death. Carr's protagonist, Hester Swane, draws on the actions of previous mother figures to free herself and her future incarnations through a murder-suicide.

The end of the twentieth century in Ireland was a period of economic and industrial growth as many people moved from the country into the city. The need to live in the ideal West that de Valera talked about in his constitution had faded, and was replaced by interest in the employment opportunities major cities offer. However, this growth and success was hampered by the reemergence of conflict between Northern Ireland and the rest of the country. Between roughly 1970 and 1996, Ireland entered the period now known as the Troubles. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and the partition of Northern Ireland only postponed war. The Troubles began with the "transition, chaotic and rapid, from a civil rights movement (1966-8) to a bloody inter-communal strife (1969)."[159] The Irish Catholic minority of Northern Ireland sought equality with their Protestant neighbors, forming in the late 1960s a civil rights movement that the Protestants came to resent. Tension exploded due to the "majority Protestant backlash, and the outbreak of

[158] Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats,* in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 252-400.
[159] Ronnie Munck, "The Making of the Troubles in Northern Ireland," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 2 (1992):211.

shooting which led to the return of British troops to the streets of Ireland."[160] Intermittent guerrilla violence occurred for the next twenty years.

The Troubles differed from both of Ireland's past conflicts, the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War, because each side of the conflict relied on forms of terrorism to subdue the other. Terrorism can be defined "as destabilizing acts perpetrated by deviant elements within a society."[161] These deviant elements often are groups driven by political or religious intentions.[162] The paramilitary groups of Ireland during the Troubles very much fit this description. While many paramilitary groups existed at this time, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (Provisional IRA) was the most famous. The PIRA generated a substantial amount of terrorism:

> the Provisionals had bombed out much of Belfast and Derry, had forced the British to prorogue the Northern Ireland government at Stormont and institute direct rule from London, and had become strong enough to make the British willing to negotiate a temporary cease-fire.[163]

With this rising conflict in the North, words like "nationalism" took on a darker edge because they were associated with terrorism. Unlike the previous violence of the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War, the strategies used by the PIRA and others were considered by the majority of people in Ireland to be terrorist actions, rather than military tactics.

Nationalism's association with an even worse form of violence caused Mother Ireland to return as a symbol of nationalism in this new war. However, her return was not celebrated; instead, she became deeply associated with the supernatural, the past, and violence.

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[160] Ibid., 211.
[161] Bruce Grindal, "Terrorism in Northern Ireland," *American Anthropologist* 87, no. 1 (1985): 194.
[162] Ibid., 194.
[163] Robert W. White, "From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War: Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army," *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 6 (1989):1277.

One of the most significant appearances of Mother Ireland appears in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998). Two years after the troubles officially ended, Carr published her play, which deals with the perception of the controversial mother both in terms of the Irish Troubles and the Irish Celtic Tiger. Carr's play "flout[ed] literary convention, subverted the pieties of church and state, and exposed the darker side of Irish Life."[164]

By the Bog of Cats is a play about three generations of women. Each generation represents a different stage of the devolution of Mother Ireland and her ultimate fate. These three characters represent the different stages of the Sovereignty, who was a tri-form goddess. Big Josie Swane represents the hag, Hester Swane appears as the middle fertile and sexual woman, and little Josie is the young maiden. Carr manipulates each generation to explore phases of Mother Ireland. For example she employs "the myth of Big Josie Swane as an alternative to the romanticized literary Mother Ireland figure."[165] Big Josie is descried as "a harsh auld yoke, [who] came and went like the moon."[166] Big Josie recalls *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* because she is a mother figure; however, she contrasts with Cathleen's example, as Big Josie is described as having "a brazen walk," while Cathleen has "the walk of a queen."[167] [168] Cathleen retains aspects of her past as the Sovereignty, while Big Josie is an outcast, "marginalized from the so called 'settled community.'"[169]

Big Josie is no longer the graceful, queenly, and well-spoken mother who represents her nation as an ideal land. Instead "the nation as a female is now depicted as an overweight, erotic,

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[164] Ben Howard, "Audacious Ireland," *The Sewanee Review* 114, no. 3 (2006): 404.
[165] Melissa Shira, "A Cautionary Tale: Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats,"* in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 582-586.
[166] Carr, *By the Bog of Cats*, 385.
[167] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, 11.
[168] Carr, *By the Bog of Cats*, 385.
[169] Shira, "A Cautionary Tale: Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats,"* 584.

foul-mouthed transgressive energy."[170] These negative qualities, paired with her heritage as an Irish traveler and her connection to the supernatural, make her a figure of fear. The settled people of the community fear her and do not understand her:

> Let me tell ya a thing or two about your mother, big Josie Swane. I used see her outside her auld caravan on the bog and the fields covered over in stars and her half covered in an excuse for a dress and her croonin' towards Orion in a language I never heard before or since. We'd peace when she left.[171]

The references to an incomprehensible language—which suggests Gaelic, the banished language of Ireland after colonization—and to dancing under the stars create an image of Mother Ireland as figure of nature and power, but one that is repressed and feared by the people of the settled cities. Yet there still appears to be a desire for this older mother figure, due to the connections she maintains to nationalism and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Big Josie is described as a "song weaver" who is sought out by the settled community: "there was a time round here when no celebration was complete without Josie Swane. She'd be invited everywhere to sing. [. . .] And it wasn't so much they wanted her there, more they were afraid not to have her."[172] The settled people invite Big Josie into their homes, even when they are afraid of her. However, their need is dampened by their lingering fear of her. Those that invite Big Josie into their house "never axed [her] to stay, [. . .] to sit down and ate with them, just lapped up her songs, [. . .] and walked [her] off the premises."[173]

This fear of Big Josie lingering connects back to *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and the role of Mother Ireland as a temptress. In both *By the Bogs of Cats* and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan,* "Cathleen

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[170] Ibid., 582.
[171] Carr, *By the Bog of Cats,* 369.
[172] Ibid., 386.
[173] Ibid., 386.

and Big Josie have the power to compel and to seduce those around them."[174] The settled try to remove Big Josie quickly. Even though they still cling to her, they fear she will drag their sons into the violence she has come to represent. Ultimately, this fear and mistreatment of Big Josie drives her away, compelling her to abandon her daughter, Hester—who is left to step into the role of Mother Ireland and continue the lineage.

Hester represents not only the current generation of Mother Ireland in *By the Bog of Cats,* but also the most powerful of the tri-formed goddess's stages: the middle character who represents the fertile woman between girl and hag. This positions Hester to be incredibly powerful, in terms both of supernatural gifts and of her connection to the land. Hester possesses greater power than does her Mother, Big Josie, or Catwoman, the seer who lives on the bog, who tells Hester that "you're my match in witchery, Hester, same as your mother was, it may even be ya surpass us both."[175]

Hester is trapped because she—unlike her mother—cannot return to her former exile. She is stuck on the Bog of Cats, bound to the land and the public perception of her. Hester resents her situation, but loves the land she inhabits:

> I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days. I've as much right to this place as any of yees, more, for it holds me to it in ways it has never held yees.[176]

Hester struggles with her need to stay with the settled people on the one hand and the pull of her "tinker blood" on the other. However, Hester's disappointment in her mother's abandonment keeps her on the bog. She is bound by the decisions of her mother and the fate of her lineage: "I watcher her walk away from across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her

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[174] Shira, "A Cautionary Tale: Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats,"* 583.
[175] Carr, *By the Bog of Cats,* 357.
[176] Ibid., 366.

return."[177] Ultimately, Hester must follow in the footsteps of her mother. Hester has a daughter named little Josie. Hester realizes that Little Josie too will be trapped by their shared lineage.

Carr, like many writers of the late 1990s, presents Mother Ireland as a figure feared by the general public. However, Hester is not what the settled community perceives; rather, she *becomes* what they believe because it is what they force upon her. Consistently, "Irish culture [has] appropriated and revised Irish iconography to repeat universal archetypes, such as the passive and virginal maiden, or the ferocious and sexualized mother, or a hybrid of these two figures."[178] Hester exists not only as an appropriation, but also as representative of her time. Cathleen, like Hester, appears as a wanderer; however, the Irish people welcome Cathleen into their homes, while Hester is rejected and pushed out: "I can't lave till me mother comes. I'd hoped she'd have come before now and it wouldn't come to this. Don't make me lave this place or somethin' terrible'll happen."[179] Hester, like her mother Big Josie, is not wanted anymore, yet she continues to be present in the Irish tradition.

Hester represents the reintroduction of Mother Ireland to popular Irish literature. However, this reemergence becomes negative, ultimately leaving Hester trapped in a lineage of abandonment and despair, as she waits for a mother who will never come. It is only the promise of death that offers Hester any freedom from the lineage of Mother Ireland. She is visited by a Ghost Fancier, a type of grim reaper who is "ghoulin' for a woman be the name of Hester Swane."[180] The Ghost Fancier gives Hester only a day to live and vanishes. It is this promise of death that allows Hester to free herself from the bog and from her obligations as a mother,

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[177] Ibid., 371.
[178] Jayne Steel, "'And Behind him a Wicked Hag did Stalk': From Maiden to Mother, Ireland as Woman through the Male Psyche," in *Irish Women and Nationalism: Soldiers, New Women and Wicked Hags*, ed. Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 112.
[179] Carr, *By the Bog of Cats*, 381.
[180] Ibid., 353.

leading her to burn her home, as "that's what the tinkers do, isn't it, burn everythin' after them?"[181] When travelers move, they burn their homes down and destroy their past and any remnant of their life. Hester destroys her history, ending the connection between her and the land as well as her relationship to the settled people of Ireland. This frees her from any obligations to act as Mother Ireland.

Hester must also free herself from life to truly end the lineage of Mother Ireland. She begs the Ghost Fancier to come and take her: "I'm here waitin' for ya."[182] However, Hester cannot escape her responsibility to her daughter. Little Josie not only represents Hester's direct link to motherhood; she is also the future of Mother Ireland. Hester's decision to leave is problematic because it will make Josie into Hester. After Hester tells Josie she is leaving, Josie says to her "Mam, I'd be watchin' for ya all the time 'long the Bog of Cats. I'd be hopin' and waitin' and prayin' for ya to return."[183] It is this statement from Josie that leads Hester to commit her ultimate sacrifice. Hester murders her daughter in order to save her from "waitin' a lifetime for somewan to return, because they don't."[184] Hester slits Josie's throat, keeping her from "the mercy of all yee's around here."[185] Hester ultimately finds that peace can only come by destroying any remnants of Mother Ireland, which frees her from the manipulation of politics and nationalism.

Conclusion

Tracking the lineage of Mother Ireland through history provides insight not only into Mother Ireland's role as a woman in Irish culture, but also into the importance of nationalism to

[181] Ibid., 385.
[182] Ibid., 387.
[183] Ibid., 394.
[184] Ibid., 395.
[185] Ibid., 395.

Ireland as a country. The Irish relied on Mother Ireland to serve as an icon for their patriotism as well as a magnet for their anger and resentment over English home rule. Throughout history, various authors, playwrights, and poets have imagined and defined Mother Ireland. However, all of them sought to use her as a political tool. Although Mother Ireland originated as a goddess who presided over Ireland and controlled the Irish monarchy, she came to serve as a symbol of the nation without any real power. Additionally, she became progressively alienated as Irish culture moved away from the idealized ruggedness of the Irish West in order to focus on urbanization and industrialization. Mother Ireland therefore no longer served an immediate purpose in Ireland's national imagination. This lack of usefulness manifested itself in literature by Mother Ireland's acceptance of death and the destruction of her progeny. However, exploring the history and theory of Mother Ireland does not fully explain the connections between each work of literature. Therefore, I decided to investigate Mother Ireland by adapting her various guises in a theatrical form.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPT

While the devolution of Mother Ireland can be documented and analyzed in a paper, her progression from her initial role as a representative of Irish society and its land to a misused political figure that finds more freedom in death than life is best understood through the visual and oral tradition from which she emerged. Creating a physical representation of Mother Ireland's lineage shows how history shaped her both as a woman and as a symbol of the nation. In order to engage with this literary figure, I developed a performance piece entitled *Máthair*. This theatrical work explores the historical and literary tradition of Mother Ireland. The development of this script can be charted along the timeline of Irish history. Ultimately, the script attempts to embody the progression of the physical representation of the Mother Ireland tradition.

To create a physical representation of Mother Ireland, I set out to devise a performance piece that walked the historical and literary path of Mother Ireland from pre-history to present day. In addition, the history of representing Mother Ireland on stage shows that theater is an inherently familiar genre for her to occupy. However, in all her incarnations, Mother Ireland never voiced her own story. Rather, people used her to convey their own agenda.

In order to give voice to this figure, I developed a script and performance centered on the lineage of Mother Ireland in order to draw her many voices into one body. Ultimately, this unification allowed me to see how unstable Mother Ireland is as a national icon. This instability occurs because of the misuse Mother Ireland endured, for she changed both her age and her personality to best suit others' whims. Despite her fractured personality, however, Mother

Ireland at her core is a single figure. By uniting all the voices of her various incarnations together into a single performer, I felt I could identify how history shapes both her body and her voice.

At first, I attempted to develop a script comprised solely of previously existing literature, poetry, and theatrical dialogue about Mother Ireland; however, as the script took form and the character's diminishment through time became apparent, I realized that weaving my own voice into the text would enhance my project. Big Josie Swane, the unseen mother of Hester Swane in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), became my narrator. The use of Big Josie as a theatrical device was a crucial development, because she allowed me to inhabit a body and voice as I explored the moments of transition within my script. She represents an absent mother, one who never had a voice; however, by giving her a voice, my voice, I could easily move between the multiple Mother Irelands I wished to represent. Additionally, by playing historical transitions as a character, I found that Mother Ireland's own struggle between her many forms became clearer. For example, the transition between "The Story of Christianity in Ireland" and the start of "Pillow Talk" was only possible because of the use of Big Josie.

After the introduction of Christianity to Ireland, I found that Mother Ireland splintered into many personas. And this division left Mother Ireland confused until Christian monks appropriated her myths in texts such as the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. Big Josie embodied this confusion: I could step into her character and acknowledge the transition that history wrought in Ireland's persona.

> It's a sad story, isn't it? My life. I told you my roots were brutal. I am an absent mother now, a narrator of events no one remembers. I am not sovereignty anymore or Eire; for now you may call me Big Josie. I used to be all of Mother Ireland. Complete. And now I am a fraction of her. But I long to be what I used to be. I grew up hearing stories of Queen Maeve, the Warrior queen of Erin. My

> favorite story as a child was about Queen Meave, Queen of a country that used to bow to a woman.[186]

Using Big Josie as a narrator enabled me to portray how the public perceived Mother Ireland through time.

The more I worked on my feet with the Mother Ireland material, specifically the passages from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and those from *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), the more I realized that Irish history had to have a major presence in my theatrical piece. Mother Ireland's relationship with history and cultural developments is essential because, of course, she represents the personification of Ireland and all its struggles. Once I accepted history's role in my piece, I developed one of the most crucial sections of the script, "Colonization." This section depicts the enormous impact that colonization had on both the country of Ireland and Mother Ireland herself. "Colonization" serves as turning point in my script, shifting Mother Ireland away from the Celtic goddess of Sovereignty and Maeve to the twentieth century figure of Cathleen Ni Houlihan. I found that this turn in history was supported by a transition in the Irish literary tradition as well. *Aisling* poetry, which emerged in the seventeenth century, represented the literature of colonization, marking this critical shift.

Exploring historical developments as theatrical events helped me with my research, because it allowed me to imagine how Maeve could become the Hag of Beara. The violence and the subjugation Ireland endured under colonial rule manifested itself in "the wailing woman." She emerged as a cry of Ireland's grief—which then became a tool that allowed the nation to manipulate individuals to fight on its behalf.

The men of Ireland conquered and subjugated Mother Ireland to serve their purposes in the same way England had subjugated Ireland. This similarity between the way colonization

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[186] Emma Calabrese, *Mathair*, (2014), 5.

affected Mother Ireland and the way Irish politics used her resulted in a monologue that explored the relationship of the conqueror and the conquered. This section allowed me to see how the mother figure of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* could transform into a vampiric mother who used her children instead of providing for them.

I used dialogue to explore the dual subjugation Mother Ireland suffered. Big Josie, who I used as the voice of this colonization, says this about England's invasion:

> I am a colony now. There are boots marching over my face to claim the last inches of land. England tightens its grip. And I am choking on the Union Jack being stretched across my mouth. I can't fight them on my own.[187]

Mother Ireland exists at the mercy of English power; however, she is also at the mercy of the Irish nation: "I will give the men of Ireland my body, if only they will go out and die for me. [. . .] I am too young, or too old. So I surrender, and give myself up to the hands of men."[188] Where once she granted power to kings, Mother Ireland now becomes just a tool of the nation, due to the subjugation at the hands of both Ireland and England. From "Colonization," I laid out the rest of the script along the axis of Irish history, pairing Irish literature with history in order to unify my research into one continuous lineage.

In an attempt to create a fully realized character called Mother Ireland, I sought to include the voice of Mother Ireland's incarnations not just from theatrical representations, but also from novels, myths, and poetry. By utilizing all of these forms, I was able to develop one cohesive voice for this character. The amalgamation of literature into a single voice also put all these different interpretations of Mother Ireland into dialogue with one another. Each piece spoke to the next, and so placement of poems and dialogue became essential in the layout of my script. The sections of the script had to follow history, but they also had to speak to whatever

[187] Ibid., 9.
[188] Ibid., 10.

conclusion the previous section brought up. These conversations became particularly important between the sections of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *Juno and the Paycock* (1924). In the transition between these two plays, I had to represent the history of the War of Independence as well as the Irish Civil War and de Valera's constitutional revisions, but *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *Juno and the Paycock* still had to directly speak to one another. Juno, as a mother figure, offers a conclusion to *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Where *Cathleen* ends with the exit of Michael off to join the war effort, Juno picks up with the death of these young men in the battle for Irish freedom.

Juno represents the regret of a mother for sending her son to die. However, the history between these two plays is important in understanding how Juno comes to feel this regret. De Valera's speech served as a catalyst for Cathleen's change into Juno, and as a transitional acting beat. Cathleen is a political woman and wanderer who does not have a husband or a need to settle down. De Valera sought to keep women in the home away from political positions, thus making Cathleen's existence in his Ireland impossible. In my piece, I use de Valera's speech as the shift from Cathleen to Juno, bound at home in her house yet still advocating death for the salvation of Ireland. I wanted to link these two plays because they both show a mother figure sending a son to fight for their country, but the two plays have different conclusions. The blood shed for her transforms Cathleen into a young girl, while Juno—overcome in her grief—exits the stage after her final speech and does not return. Juno's exit from the stage catapulted me into the absence section of *Máthair*, and into the emergence of female Irish poets.

My goal was to create a dynamic journey for this mother figure from goddess to poor tinker woman. I wanted to explore how one person could transition through the many phases of her existence. This struggle with multiple voices was most difficult during the section on absence, because Mother Ireland was not present in the prevailing culture of Ireland. Her absence

was largely a result of the Irish Civil War. Civil wars tend to repress national identities because they represent a clash of warring identities, each trying to stake its claim as the primary one. In this section of my script on absence, I wanted to give voice to the various female poets of late twentieth-century Ireland, but still retain the unity of a single voice. I pieced together poems, trying to form a new poem that spoke to each woman's aesthetic while also voicing Mother Ireland's absence. What I found in this exploration of poetry was the unifying theme that Mother Ireland should remain an abstract image, a voice, instead of being seen as a woman physically manifested. Throwing herself off a cliff and dying became a way for Mother Ireland to escape the misuse of the political agenda of Ireland. This self-sacrifice was the second critical turn in the psychology of my central character.

The idea of suicide as freedom first originated in my script at the end of absence section in the form of Mary O'Malley's poem "A Young Matron Dances Free of the Island;" however, the ultimate destruction of Mother Ireland comes in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*. *By the Bog of Cats* never made sense to me as a Mother Ireland piece until I linked it with the poetry of absence, because Hester's isolation and embrace of death at the end seemed to go against all the previous incarnations of Mother Ireland. I could not understand the transition between figures like the Shan Van Vocht, Juno, Cathleen, Dark Rosaleen and the figure of Hester, until the poetry selected provided both the historical transition and the acting beat between Hester and the earlier mothers.

In my first draft of my script, *By the Bog of Cats* made up about half of the total text, because I had incorporated the whole plot of the play. However, during the revision process, I discovered that using all of *Bog* was not necessary to my exploration of Mother Ireland's devolution. Ultimately, the relationship between Big Josie, Hester, and Little Josie became the

focus of my investigation. The relationship between these three women and the final outcome of the play led me to my thesis's conclusion: that death is how Mother Ireland saves herself and her lineage.

Big Josie, Hester and Little Josie became an important triumvirate of characters for my script because they represented three core aspects of Mother Ireland. Big Josie and Hester both become Mother Ireland, while Josie is merely a potential incarnation; because of this, I wanted to distinguish between the actual mother figures and the future one. In my script, a separate actor plays Little Josie in order to show that she, while connected to Mother Ireland, only represents a possible continuation of her lineage. Big Josie, my narrator and my voice in the piece, can therefore represent the abandonment of each previous mother figure, each of whom merely leaves, allowing a new Mother Ireland to form in her place. Hester represents the end of the lineage, and her actions at the end of the play break the cycle of disappearance and reemergence. I wanted a final a moment that allowed all three of these women from these different generations to inhabit the stage together, and so after Hester's death, I added a moment when Big Josie returns to her daughter. I used Big Josie's final speech as the narrator to unify Hester with the mother figures before her, as well as acknowledge that Hester was a good mother, even though she murdered her daughter. Big Josie releases Hester from her obligations: "there won't be anymore of us. Little Josie won't be like us, Hester. She won't kill her children like we had to."[189] Whereas mothers like Cathleen, Juno and Dark Rosaleen had sent their sons to die at the hands of the enemy in order to protect them, Hester kills her child with her own hands to protect her.

[189] Ibid., 28.

For a time, my script lacked clarity in relationship to *By the Bog of Cats* because I struggled with Hester's actions at the end of the play, which contrasted with the pattern of actions that all previous Mother Irelands followed. Clarity finally came when I realized that Hester's significance as a mother figure comes from the fact that she was able to break the pattern that all the others had not. I discovered this in rehearsal of the script when my co-actor Madeline Teissler remarked that the other mother figures sent their children to die at the hands of others, whereas Hester killed her child with her own hands. "What does that mean?" she asked. I realized then that it was the destruction of the traditional role of Mother Ireland that led to Hester serving as one of the last Mother Ireland figures. Hester's actions also force her to take responsibility for them. She acknowledges that she's murderous but she doesn't distance herself from the destructive impulses in her. Hester embraces the vicious side of herself and through this acceptance finds a cathartic release.

Ultimately, Hester's destruction of this pattern answered the question I sought to understand through my thesis research and performance. She unifies Mother Ireland into one character that begins as a goddess, who suffers, accepts increasingly lower social roles, becomes culpable for the bloodshed of war and terrorism, and then kills herself to stop the perpetuation of violence related to nationalism. By creating a theatrical performance based on historical research and literary analysis, I began to understand how such transformation could occur. My research gave me a path, but it was the development of the script that allowed me to connect each event and literary piece into a single voice of a woman who sacrifices herself and her child out of mercy.

My script represents a theatrical manifestation of my research; however, it advances this research because it puts history and literature in conversation with each other through the device

of one voice. While each of these myths, poems, plays and songs depicts the same mother figure in a different guise, hearing all of them from a single performer illustrates the transformation that Ireland has undergone. She is a national record of struggle and independence. I believe performance speaks to her devolution from goddess to tinker better then an analytical investigation, because it allows an audience member to see each phase (from goddess to tinker) knitted together within a single lifetime instead of thinking of each incarnation as a separate character.

CHAPTER 4

Script with Annotations

Máthair

A theatrical exploration of Mother Ireland.

2014

Cast

Mother Ireland…… Emma Calabrese

God, Ailill, Michael, Gabriel,

The Poet, The Shan Van Vocht,

The Ghost Fancier, and Little Josie…….. Madeline Teissler

Máthair

Croonin' towards Orion

(At the start of the play, no actors are on stage. The set is simple. In one corner of the stage there are a few blocks and a chair for a gypsy caravan. In another corner are two chairs and a side table for a simple Irish cottage. There is no set in the middle of the stage. During the first voiceover, Big Josie enters.)

Voice off Stage: Your mother. Your mother taught ya nothing. Let me tell ya a thing or two about your mother. I used to see her outside her old caravan on the bog and the fields covered over in stars and her half covered in an excuse for a dress and her croonin' towards Orion in a language I never heard before or since. We'd peace when she left. And yee's don't belong here either.[190]

(*Big Josie starts to croon at the moon.*)

Mise Éire

Big Josie:

Mise Éire

Sine mé ná an Chailleach Bhéarra

Mór mo ghlóir:

Mé a rug Cú Chulainn cróga.

[190] Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats,* in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama,* ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 369.

Mór mo náir:

Mo chlann féin a dhíol a máthair.

Máthair.[191]

I am Ireland:

I am older than the old woman of Beara.

Great my glory:

I who bore Cú Chulainn, the brave.

Great my shame:

My own children who sold their mother.

Mother.

but

I won't go back to it –

to the small farm,

the scalded memory,

the songs

that bandage up the history,

A palsy of regrets.

No. I won't go back.

My roots are brutal:[192]

I am Máthair.

Máthair, flaitheas. Mother, Sovereignty. These were my only names when I was first called upon

[191] P.H. Pearse, "Mise Éire," in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, ed. Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 319.
[192] Eavan Boland, *New Collected Poems* (London: Carcanet Press Limited, 2005), 128.

in my native tongue by scared men and women desperate to understand things they could not explain with their hands or eyes, like why the sun set each day and would it come back the next. They asked who poured water on them from the sky, and created the white pin pricks of blazing light that they called stars. They needed me. Máthair, they called. Mother. Help us. So I made myself known to the *filidh*, the poets. They were entrusted to tell stories to my children that I couldn't. Storytelling is how I kept my children alive. It's how I raised them and gave them their traditions and rituals. I was the center of every home, living in the warmth of their hearth and belief and sometimes even their fear. I was a fierce mother then. I could be cruel if I felt they were straying from their path, unforgiving. But I did it all to raise them. They knew I loved them dearly. I gave them such beautiful fields. Have you ever seen it? The rolling green fields of Erin, or the vast rocky plains of the Burren covered in wild flowers of every name. The sharp drops of Moher and the blue of Clew Bay. In the land they saw I loved them. Every inch of it was a section of my body laid out for them. Sacraficed to their needs. What wouldn't a mother give her child? I was a good mother. I was a good Mathair. But I couldn't lead my children. I had to give them kings. But never would I let a king rise who did not first pledge his loyalty to me, marry me, to show his love to the land. I gave those men that were worthy power because it is a mother's right to decide.

But it is not like this anymore in Ireland. The language that created me is dead and the old words and belief in me are gone. There is a new tongue, and I have countless names in it, so many that people are forgetting what they even mean.

And a new language
is a kind of scar
and heals after a while

into a passable imitation

of what went before.[193]

I can't tell what I was back then. I don't know who Máthair is. I want to tell my story but it is so different from the ones told about me.

(*Big Josie crosses to chair by audience. She sits and pulls out a book to read a story to them like they were her children*.)

The Story of Christianity in Ireland

Big Josie:

Once upon a time.

Eire, the story goes,

Was the daughter of Cannan,

And came to the plain of Kildare.

She loved the flat-lands and the ditches

And the unreachable horizon.

She asked that it be named for her.

The river took its name from the land,

The land took its name from a woman.[194]

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[193] Boland, *New Collected Poems*, 128.

[194] Boland, *New Collected Poems*, 230.

And for a while Eire was all the land needed. She gave it children and life, and things were well. But she was not the only creator in the vastness of the world, and soon Eire had to open her home to the others.

(*God enters with hand puppets of Patrick and Silent Monks. He acts out the story as Josie reads it. God says God's lines*.)

One Creator who called himself God came and brought with him a man named Patrick, a monk. Patrick crawled out of his boat and onto the rocky shores that Eire had created with her own hands, scraping stone with her nails till each rock was cracked and worn to perfection. Patrick told the people a new story of a man named Jesus. Patrick brought the word of God. Eire was intrigued by God and wanted to see what another such as her could create, but quickly she realized Patrick and God were not here to share their story but to rewrite hers. God started his work by asking the people of Erin to love him more than they loved her. But to win the people to his side, God had to rename Eire. God conferred with Patrick for many nights and finally decided that if she could not be one thing, she would be many things instead. So God had Patrick take her stories from the poets and write them down differently, each with a different name. Soon she was Sovereignty, Bridget, Maeve, Morrígan, Shan Van Vocht, Róisín Dubh and many others. So God replaced her with the Father and the Son, and he told his people that they could still have their mother but only as a symbol, because no women could give a man the right to rule – only God could. Eire saw that her role as creator was done, but she couldn't leave her children, even though they now looked to God instead of her and called themselves Christian. God warned her that if she stayed, she would continue to splinter and only be a fraction of what she was before. But she replied to him, "so be it. A mother never leaves her child if she can help it."

“Isn’t it better to leave now and be a glorious memory of their past?” God asked.

“No,” she replied, “let them use me as they will. Anything I can give them I will give, just to be near them.”

“You should go, Máthair! Please!” God begged, “By the end you won’t recognize yourself, by the end you won’t even remember who you were!”

“Maybe I won’t remember, but I will always be Máthair.”

God allowed her to stay. Years and years passed, more and more names were given to her, and more and more blame was laid on her. She became a symbol of the glory of Ireland and a scapegoat for its pain and anger and violence. Until she ended it.

(*God exits.*)

It’s a sad story, isn’t it? My life. I told you my roots were brutal. I am an absent mother now, a narrator of events no one remembers. I am not Sovereignty anymore or Eire; for now you may call me Big Josie. I used to be all of Mother Ireland. Complete. And now I am a fraction of her. But I long to be what I used to be. I grew up hearing stories of Queen Maeve, the warrior queen of Erin.

(*Big Josie begins to transition into Maeve and moves to Maeve’s space on the stage. She puts on a crown.*)

My favorite story as a child was about Queen Maeve. Queen of a country that used to bow to a woman.

(*Ailill enters and crosses to Maeve for an intimate moment.*)

Fect n-oen do... Once upon a time Ailill and Maeve had spread their royal bed in Cruachan, the stronghold of Connacht. Such was the pillow talk betwixt them.

Pillow Talk[195]

Ailill: True is the saying, lady, she is a well-off woman that is a rich man's wife.

Maeve: Aye, that she is, but wherefore thinks thou so?

Ailill: For this, that thou art this day better off than the day that first I took thee.

Maeve: As well off was I before I ever saw thee.

Ailill: It was a wealth, forsooth, we never heard nor knew of, but a woman's wealth was all thou hadst, and foes from lands next thine were used to carry off the spoil and booty that they took from thee.

Maeve: Not so was I, the High King of Erin himself was my sire. Of daughters had he six but I was the noblest and seemliest of them. ‘Twas I was the goodliest of them in bounty and gift giving, in riches and treasures. 'Twas I was best of them in battle and strife and combat. Hence hath my father bestowed one of the five provinces of Erin upon me, Connacht; wherefore “Maeve of Connacht” am I called.

Ailill: Men came from across the isle to seek thee for a wife.

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[195] Joseph Dunn, *The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúailnge* (London: 1904), entire work.

Maeve: And my fortune is greater than thine!

Ailill: I marvel at that, for there is none that hath greater treasures then me. For I have the white bull Finnbennach.

(*Maeve pulls away from Ailill.)*

Maeve: There was an especial bull of the herd of Ailill, and he was a calf of one of my cows, and Finnbennach the Whitehorned was his name. But he, deeming it no honor to be in a woman's possession, had left and gone over to the herd of the king. And it was the same thing as if I owned not a pennyworth, forasmuch, as I had not a bull of his size amongst my cattle.

Ailill: It was beneath him to be owned by a woman, even one who embodied Erin herself.

Maeve: It was beneath him to be owned by a woman.

(*Maeve crosses back to Ailill.*)

You have the bull Finnbennach, tis true, and so more wealth then I, but I have greater power.

Ailill: Men came from all provinces, to seek thee for a wife.

Maeve: I refused them.

Ailill: For you wanted a bride-gift, such as no woman before you had ever required of a man of the men of Erin.

Maeve: A husband without avarice, without jealousy, without fear. Such a husband have I found, namely in thee thyself, Ailill. Thou wast not churlish; thou wast not jealous; thou wast not a sluggard. It was I who seduced thee, and gave purchase-price to thee, which of right belongs to the bride – for a man dependent upon a woman's maintenance is what thou art.

Ailill: Nay, not such was my state. but two brothers had I; one of them over Temair, the other over Leinster. I left the kingship to them because they were older but not superior to me in power and bounty. Nor heard I of province in Erin under woman's keeping but this province alone. And

for this I came and assumed the kingship here as my mother's successor; for Mata, daughter of Connacht, was my mother. And who else could there be for me to have as my queen than thyself. Tis I who is King by right and hath greater riches and treasures with Finnbennach in my herd. (*Maeve crosses downstage from Ailill.)*

Maeve: He infuriated me with his cool logic, for at every turn he had me with this fecking bull!

Ailill: Who choose a man over the mother of the land.

Maeve: I have never been discarded because of my sex before. I was celebrated for it. I mated with nine kings because I will never allow any mortal king to rule at the court of Tara unless he submit himself to me. For it is my right as a Queen Mother of this land to judge the worthiness of the king. But I cannot defeat you Ailill – not with the power of my sword or the strength of my will.

Ailill: You are unequal.

Maeve: When did it happen? They are trying to make me mortal, strip me of the grace I have as Máthair. What can I do Ailill but fight you and try to win my power back?

Ailill: Tis law that whichever spouse controls the most wealth can control the house, the family, and all the possessions of both man and wife.[196]

Maeve: If you win, you will take my kingdom, and I will just be a glittering symbol of your undisputed right to rule me and my body and the land I protect . . .but there was a second bull, an equal to Finnbennach, a bull of great power and legend. His name was Donn Cúailnge.

Ailill: If you have him, we will be equal again.

Maeve: Then I will take him. (*To audience.*) I waged war over a bull. I cut men down on the battlefield over a bull. How can a woman be so cold? But you see I am a remnant something

[196] Birgit Breninger, *Feminist Perspectives on Cultural and Religious Identities: Rewriting Mary Magdalene, Mother Ireland and Cu Chulainn of Ulster* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), 116.

from the past fighting to linger here in this world on the cusp of a new religion that wants to silence me and give me a place. So I fight. In those battles my sword is a continuation of my arm, another piece of my body, and I can feel every inch of it as it slices through enemy soldiers. Those foolish Irish men who thought they could defy me. I don't remember anymore how I did it, but at the last moment, the last second, I somehow managed to take the second bull! I had him. I had a bull equal to Ailill's, and I thought a man would never put me in my place again. I was so foolishly arrogant. I should never have brought the two bulls together, because it is their destiny that always they will fight and destroy each other.

Ailill: Finnbennach killed your precious bull.

Maeve: I have no bull now. I am less then all of these men. I am more though. I am Erin. I am a Queen. I am Máthair. But I am less.

(*Maeve transitions into Big Josie. She gives her crown to Ailill by crowning him. Ailill exits.*)

Colonization

Big Josie: Have you ever been colonized? Had your body violated by armies of men searching to own you? At first it feels like ants crawling out of their boats onto the side of you that meets the ocean. They send out drones to explore the topography of your untouched body. They push forward single-mindedly, moving in a straight line, laying down a path so other ants will follow. It almost tickles, the drag of their exoskeletons across the sensitive stretches of skin on your hips and neck, and then a pleasant wriggling across the fields of your stomach into the towns that live on your legs and arms. It's just a trickle at first, a few here and there, but then before you can defend yourself, it's an invasion. You're being invaded. And cities you don't want built are hammered into your skin, bogs you want to see live are burned, and you smell the smoldering peat like it was your own hair on fire. But its not just you they are here for. The colonizers want

more than the grass and dirt of your body. They want your children, who live on every inch of you. So you watch your children cry out under the weight of English boots. Their very language is ripped from their throats and cast into the wind leaving only an echo. Language becomes a scar, a reminder of their struggle. Then thousands of your children are dead. Buried without shroud or coffin. And you feel the sharp prick of each grave dug for them. Each body in the ground a new splinter in your foot. And you realize for the first time that your children are buried in you.

I am a colony now.

There are boots marching over my face to claim the last inches of land. England tightens its grip. I am choking on the Union Jack being stretched across my mouth. I can't fight them on my own. They keep whispering in my ear that I am old now and weak. An old hag. The Hag of Beara.

Pity me: only a wretch,
Every acorn rots away.
The feast of bright candles is over
And I am left in this darkened cell.
I had business once with kings
And drank their mead and wine.
But I drink whey-water now
With other withered ancients.[197]

(*Poet Enters.)*

But always

I hear their phantom oars

[197] Anonymous, "The Hag of Beara," in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, ed. Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 26.

As ceaselessly they row.

Flood wave.[198]

Being colonized is like being flooded over and over again. Drowning perpetually. No wonder they call me hag. I can't remember being anything other than withered. My skin is pruned from the flood of invaders. But the men are talking to me again. They want me to stand for my country. A new word becomes the center of my being. Ireland. There used to be another word. A word for mother, for the land, one in my old tongue. What was it? But I am ready to lead them again. Men will save me. I will give the men of Ireland my body, if only they will go out and die for me. Their blood makes me young. It fills in the wrinkles of my skin till I am smooth. A young girl again – but they quickly force a crown onto me. I must look ridiculous: a girl dressed as some ancient queen, with only the *walk* of a queen. I am too young, or too old. So I surrender, and give myself up to the hands of men. I hear a song in a tongue I no longer recognize. (*Softly hums*.)

But more and more this song is drowned out by the voice of a man, and I know in my heart that this man is rewriting it, changing the story. My story maybe. . . .

(*She is cut off by the voice of the Poet.*)

The Poet:

O my Dark Rosaleen,

Do not sigh, do not weep!

The priests are on the ocean green,

They march along the deep.

There 's wine from the royal Pope,

[198] Ibid., 26.

Upon the ocean green;

And Spanish ale shall give you hope,

My Dark Rosaleen!

My own Rosaleen!

Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,

Shall give you health, and help, and hope,

My Dark Rosaleen![199]

(*As the Poet speaks he slowly surrounds Big Josie. Each "my" should bring him closer to her as if he is about to swallow her whole*.)

Big Josie: When I woke up again. I was standing on a stage. And I had forgotten what mercy was.

***The Poor Old Women*[200]**

(BJ dresses herself as Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Offstage voice begins to speak as she dresses.)

Voice Off Stage: Michael, don't keep the poor old women waiting.

Cathleen: God save all here! You have good shelter here. There is a hard wind outside. I have travelled far, very far; there are few who have travelled so far as myself, and there's many a one that doesn't make me welcome. There was one that had strong sons I thought were friends of mine, but they were shearing their sheep, and they wouldn't listen to me.

Voice off Stage: It's a pity indeed for any person to have no place of their own.

Cathleen: That's true for you indeed, and it's long I'm on the roads since I first went wandering. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart.

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[199] James Clarence Mangan, "Dark Rosaleen," in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, ed. Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 273-274.

[200] W.B. Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), entire work.

Voice off Stage: It's a wonder you are not worn out with so much wandering. What was it put you wandering?

Cathleen: Too many strangers in my house. And I have had trouble indeed. My land that was taken from me. My four beautiful green fields.

(*Michael enters and crosses to Cathleen.*)

Michael: What is that you are saying ma'am?

Cathleen: Talking I am about the fields that were taken from me and the men who died for the love of me. Many a man has died for love of me. There were others that died for love of me a long time ago in the West.

Michael: Is it in the west that men will die to-morrow?

Cathleen: Come nearer, nearer to me. If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all.

Michael: Have you no one to care for you in your age, ma'am?

Cathleen: I have not. With all the lovers that brought me their love, I never set out the bed for any. I only have my thoughts and my hopes. The hope of getting my beautiful fields back again; the hope of putting the strangers out of my house. I have good friends that will help me. They are gathering to help me now. I am not afraid. If they are put down to-day, they will get the upper hand to-morrow. I must be going to meet my friends. They are coming to help me, and I must be there to welcome them. I must call the neighbors together to welcome them.

Michael: I will go with you. I want to go with you but it's not your friends I have to go and welcome; it is the girl coming into my house that I have to welcome.

Cathleen: It is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help. You see some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

Michael: I think I knew someone of that name once.

Cathleen: Come over to me, Michael.

Michael: But I have a family. I need to go to them. I can't leave them.

Cathleen: It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born, and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that had red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake; and for all that, they will think they are well paid.

They shall be remembered forever,

They shall be alive forever,

They shall be speaking forever,

The people shall hear them forever.

(*Michael becomes transfixed by Cathleen and crosses towards her.*)

Michael: No! Michael, remember your wedding. Oh . . .I had forgotten that.

Cathleen: (*Sings.)*

Come all ye young rebels, and list while I sing,

For the love of one's country is a terrible thing.

It banishes fear with the speed of a flame,

And it makes us all part of the patriot game.[201]

(*Michael runs out!)*

Cathleen: The boys are all hurrying down the hillsides to join the French.

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[201] Dominic Behan, "The Patriot Game," *The Dubliners (1964):* Song.

(*Gabriel enters. He is a man very much like Michael.*)

Gabriel: A man has died for your sake. Michael doesn't hear a word you are saying anymore.

Cathleen: They shall be speaking forever; the people shall hear them forever.

(*Gabriel turns to exit.*)

Did you see an old woman going down the path?

Gabriel: (*Pauses*) I did. I saw her. But I swear I saw her as a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen. [202]

Cathleen: (*Sings.*)

This Ireland of ours has too long been half free;

Six counties lie under John Bull's tyranny.

But still De Valera is greatly to blame,

For shirking his part in the Patriot game.[203]

(*Gabriel exits. Cathleen's song is cut off by a recording of de Valera's St. Patrick's Day Radio Address.)*

Happy Maidens

De Valera: The Ireland that we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cozy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens,

[202] Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, 11.
[203] Behan, "The Patriot Game," 1.

whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.[204]

Men

Josie: No he'd be nothin' today if it weren't for me. This is the thanks I get for all that I did for him . . .for them? For the glory of Ireland? I wiped up every drop of blood with my bare hands so they could be blameless. Now they want to push me aside. Lay out laws to organize my body. Split the sexes? And leave women as hollow, smiling shells. De Valera wants us to go back to the west, to the purity of Ireland's roots, but they are dead. You can't hide us in the corners of this country. You cannot keep us from the center of things. Women are a part of this country. What did we fight for? A treaty. 1921 was supposed to change things. But nothing's changed. You don't want a free woman; you want a body, a tool that pulls at the hearts of this country. You used me, didn't you? Promised me my fields, and in return I was your puppet. My voice was a script written by your agenda, your war. Men died for the love of me. But no one shall speak of them, or hear them ever again. They will become shades, memories on the edge of myth. Like me. All this, and still we are not free. Part of my body is still in foreign hands, and I can't breathe when I feel those fingers wrap tighter around me. They are pulling me apart, laying a permanent claim. I have lost feeling in my leg. The one that makes up the north of the country. It's severed. Cut off at the knee, bleeding protestant orange. This country is mostly scar tissue now.

The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.

They buried us without shroud or coffin

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[204] Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and Statements by Eámon de Valera: 1917-1973* (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 466.

And in August . . .the barley grew up out of our graves.[205]

But the body of this land won't heal, and I will be forced out because two men who were supposed to be friends are at each other's throats. Who needs a national identity when the enemy is each other? Civil War. My country is moving forward without me. But couldn't you let me stay a while longer? Let me walk on the stages of the National Theater for another moment? I won't bother any of yee's. No, no, of course not. I can't stay because it was beneath them to be owned by a woman. Oh god. I don't recognize myself. I have forgotten who I am. I forgot. . . (*Big Josie puts on Juno costume*.)

Poor Oul' Selfish Mother[206]

Juno:I forgot, I forgot; your poor oul' selfish mother was only thinkin' of herself. I'll face th' ordeal meself. 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!

(*Poet Enters.*)

Ah, why didn't I remember that then he wasn't a Diehard or a Stater, but only a poor dead son! It's well I remember all that she said—an' it's my turn to say it now: What was the pain I suffered, Johnny, bringin' you into the world to carry you to your cradle, to the pains I'll suffer carryin' you out o' the world to bring you to your grave! Mother o' God, Mother o' God, have pity on us all! Blessed Virgin, where were you when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets, when me darlin' son was riddled with bullets? Sacred Heart o' Jesus, take away our hearts o' stone, and give us hearts o' flesh! Take away this murdherin' hate, and give us Thine own eternal love! I forgot. Your poor old mother forgot.

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[205] Seamus Heaney, *Door into the Dark* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 12.
[206] Sean O'Casey, *Juno and the Paycock*, in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 244-245.

The Poet:

O, the Erne shall run red,
With redundancies of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
And flames wrap hill and wood,
And gun-peal and slogan-cry
Wake many a glen serene,
Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
The Judgment Hour must first be nigh,
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,

(*Juno exits.)*

My Dark Rosaleen![207]

(*Poet exits. Big Josie enters.*)

Trust Me

Big Josie: Absence. The lack of something. An emptiness. A country fighting itself does not need a mother. So she becomes the negative space of its borders, an outline of the country made by the surrounding sea: she traces the contours of what used to be her body. She waits on the wet edges of it and lingers and hopes to return. Like a wave softly washing ashore, she tests the land to see if it's ready for her to fill it again. She strokes the edges of her land, soothing it as only the

[207] Mangan, "Dark Rosaleen," 274-275.

tides of the ocean can. She loves that her country is an island that she can surround utterly even in her absence. Always she is a mother even though she is gone. She waits. What else can you do when you are gone? When you are absent? What can I do but wait?

At first
I was land
I lay on my back to be fields
and when I turned
on my side
I was a hill
under freezing stars.
I did not see.
I was seen,
Night and day
words fell on me.
Seeds. Raindrops.
Chips of frost.
From one of them
I learned my name.
I rose up. I remembered it.
Now I could tell my story.
It was different
from the story told about me.
And now also

it was spring.

I could see the wound I had left

in the land by leaving it.

I travelled west.

Once there

I looked with so much love

at every field

as it unfolded

its rusted wheel and its pram chassis

and at the gorse-

bright distances

I had been

that they misunderstood me.

Come back to us

they said.

Trust me I whispered.[208]

And went on my way.

Summer is Spent

The Hag/ Big Josie:

The summer of my youth

and the autumn, too, are spent.

And winter that ends it all

[208] Boland, *New Collected Poems*, 261-262.

--its first days have touched me.

Lovely the cloak of green

My king loved to see it on me.

I had business once with kings

And drank their mead and wine.

But I drink whey-water now

With other withered ancients.[209]

And will Ireland then be free?

Crying Out

Achill Woman/ Big Josie:

The grass changed from lavender to black.

The trees turned back to cold outlines.

You could taste frost

the planets clouding over in the skies,

the slow decline of the spring moon,

the songs crying out their ironies.[210]

And will Ireland then be free?

Conversations with the Shan Van Vocht

Big Josie: Soon I will have more names then I can remember. 100 titles that all try to claim me as something: Sovereignty, Maeve, the Hag of Beara, Shan Van Vocht, Dark Rosaleen, Anna Liffey, Cathleen, Achill Woman, Juno, Maurya, Mother Ireland, Hester, Big Josie. If I am all

[209] Anonymous, "The Hag of Beara," 26.
[210] Eavan Boland, *Outside History: Selected Poems, 1980-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1990), 36-37.

these women, am I anything at all? Each name takes a part of me. Consumes what I was and leaves me empty. My memory grows hazier each time. I remember less. I begin to feel that being 100 women is like being no one at all – but what was my first name? I can't remember. Only I know it was in a language that was not my own. I want to know her. The one who had my first name?

I will ask to meet her at the borders of Kildare.
It will be cold.
The hazel willow will be frozen by the wayside.
The rag-taggle of our history
will march by us.
They will hardly notice two women by the roadside.
I will speak to her.
Even though I know
she can only speak with words made by others.[211]

(*The Shan Van Vocht enters. She is wearing the exact same costume Big Josie wore at top of show as Sovereignty.)*

And I will tell her you were betrayed, do you know that? By 100 different women and their names. We failed you. I don't recognize you. I am sorry.

Shan Van Vocht: (*Sings.*)

Come all ye young rebels, and list while I sing,
for the love of one's country is a terrible thing.[212]

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[211] Eavan Boland, *Domestic Violence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008), 110-111.
[212] Behan, "The Patriot Game," 1.

Big Josie:

There is still time, I will tell her. We can still

Grow older together.

Just stop, it used to be different.[213]

Shan Van Vocht: (*Sings.*)

It banishes fear with the speed of a flame,

And it makes us all part of the patriot game.[214]

Big Josie: STOP! Stop it!

(*SVV turns to leave unable to understand her modern counterpart.)*

No! wait!

We loved the same things,

or at least some of them. Once in fact, long ago—

(*SVV leaves.*)

I almost loved you.[215]

I am absent. Gone from the center of things.

This Side of the Pale

Big Josie:

I was born on this side of the Pale.

I speak with the forked tongue of colony.

But I stand in the first dark and frost

of a winter night on the edge of Ireland and imagine

[213] Boland, *Domestic Violence*, 110.
[214] Dominic Behan, "The Patriot Game," 1.
[215] Boland, *Domestic Violence*, 110.

my pure sound, my undivided speech

traveling to the end of this country.

As if to find me. And I listen: I hear

what I am safe from. What I have lost.[216]

And then I am gone again a faint note on the wind. Will Ireland then be free?

The Body is a Source

Anna Liffey/ Big Josie:

This nation eludes me.

Fractions of a life

It has taken me a lifetime

To claim.

My country took hold of me.

Make of a nation what you will

I am sure

The body of an aging woman

is a memory

and to find a language for it

is as hard

as weeping and requiring.

I feel it change.

My children are

growing up, getting older.

[216] Eavan Boland, *New Collected Poems,* 256-257.

My country holds on

to its own pain. In the end

It will not matter

That I was a woman. I am sure of it.

The body is a source. Nothing more.[217]

Big Josie:

An aging woman

Finds no shelter in language.

She finds instead

Single words she once loved

Such as "summer" and "yellow"

Have suddenly become dwellings

For someone else -

Rooms and a roof under which someone else

Is welcome, not her. Tell me,

Spirit of place,

How is it

As the Irish sea takes

The names you made, the names

You bestowed, and gives you back

only wordlessness?[218]

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[217] Ibid., 230-245.
[218] Ibid., 234.

So you cannot speak. I left a daughter in a bog. That's how I was written. I was a cruel mother because I didn't love her enough not to leave.

(*Big Josie crosses to Hester's jacket and brings it to the caravan. She also brings the knife with her.*)

I know my daughter will be the next one. My Hester. The next Mother Ireland. I know because I hear the words again. Ireland! One Ireland! The country whole again! Anger is burning and I feel something festering in the leg that they cut off long ago. The North is rotting. They call for me again. But it's not me they call. Big Josie is leaving. Everyday a bomb goes off, killing in the name of a united Ireland, in the name of Mother Ireland. I see her soaking up the blood. My Hester. She can't leave like I did; she's stuck on the nine square mile of wretched bog, because where else can she go? A town? They're afraid of her now. They want nothing to do with the supernatural and the patriot game.

(*BJ goes off stage to get the swan. She returns.)*

No men will die for her, though she will call for them. Bloody Sunday is too common a term now, and people want someone to pay. People will destroy their memories of Mother Ireland, and what will Hester do then? I have to leave now. Count my name among the many others as a memory of Mother Ireland. A notch in the broken body of the land that used to look like a woman. And will Ireland then be free?

Dancing Free of the Island

Big Josie:

There should be a moment,

A shard of glass to hold against the light,

A checkpoint to pass before the end.

They say her hair caught in the sun

As she waltzed over the cliff, haloing beautifully down.

As I waltzed over the cliff, haloing beautifully down.[219]

Yes then Ireland will be free.

(*Big Josie shifts into Hester. Hester crosses to the Gypsy Caravan and picks up her jacket and Old Black Wing. Hester begins to wander the bog.*)

***A Black Swan*[220]**

(Ghost Fancier enters during song.)

Hester: (*Sings.*)

I know where a black swan sleeps.

On the bank of grey water,

I have lain outside her lair,

My hand upon her wing.

I wish I was a black swan

And could fly away from here,

But I am Hester Swane,

Without wings, without care.

(*Song ends.*)

Who are you? Haven't seen you around here before.

Ghost Fancier (GF): I'm a ghost fancier and where there's ghosts there's ghost fanciers.

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[219] Mary O'Malley, "A Young Matron Dances Free of the Island," in *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry*, ed. Peggy O'Brien (Wake Forest: Wake Forest University Press, 2011), 379.

[220] Marina Carr, *By the Bog of Cats,* in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 252-400.

Hester: That so? So what do you do, Mr. Ghost Fancier? Have love affairs with ghosts?

GF: Dependin' on the ghosts. I've trailed you a while. What're you doing draggin' the corpse of a swan behind ya like it was your shadow?

Hester: This is auld Black Wing. I've known her the longest time. Wance I had to lave the Bog of Cats and when I returned years later this swan here came swoopin' over the bog to welcome me home. Found her frozen in a bog hole last night, had to rip her from the ice, left half her underbelly.

GF: No one ever tell ya it's dangerous to interfere with swans, especially black wans?

Hester: Only an auld superstition to keep people afraid. I only want to bury her. I can't be struck down for that, can I? But you, Mr. Ghost Fancier, what ghost are you ghoulin' for around here?

GF: I'm ghoulin' for a woman be the name of Hester Swane.

Hester: I'm Hester Swane.

GF: You couldn't be, you're alive! Is it sunrise or sunset?

Hester: I certainly am and aim to stay that way. And it's that hour when it could be aither dawn or dusk, the light bein' so similar. But it's dawn, see there's the sun comin' up.

GF: Then I'm too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies. I'm sorry for intrudin' upon you like this. It's not usually my style.

(*GF exits with a flourish.)*

Hester: Come back!—I can't die—I have a daughter. There's no wan, but ya know this auld bog, always shiftin' and changin' and coddin' the eye. I could swear the age of ice has returned. Wouldn't ya almost wish if it had, do away with us all like the dinosaurs. I'm goin' nowhere. I was born on the Bog of Cats and on the Bog of Cats I'll end me days. I've as much right to this place as any of yee's, more, for it holds me to it in ways it has never held yee's. And as for me

tinker blood, I'm proud of it. It gives me an edge over all of yee's around here. Why're yees all just standin' back and gawkin'. Think yee's all Hester Swane is getting' more than she deserves? I just wanted somethin' for meself. And I'm not talkin' about love. Love is for fools and children. But. . .the child, Hester, ya have to pull yourself together for her, you're goin' to have to stop this broodin', put your life back together again. Wasn't me as pulled it asunder?

(*Hester exits. Josie enters singing and playing. She might be skipping around the bog*.)

Josie: (*Sings.*)

By the Bog of Cats I dreamed a dream of wooing.
I heard your clear voice to me a-calling
That I must go though it be my undoing.
By the Bog of Cats I'll stay no more a-rueing

(*Josie stops singing and looks about for Hester.*)

Mam—Mam—

(*Josie stops searching and returns to singing.)*

To the Bog of Cats I one day will return,
In mortal form and in ghostly form,
And I will find you there and there with you sojourn,
Forever by the Bog of Cats, my darling one.

(*Josie finishes her song and turns to the audience. She walks up to them and interacts with them.)*

Did ya see me Mam, did ya? Did you see her wooshin' by on her broom half an hour back?

(*Pause. Josie looks around.)*

Mam—Mam—

(*Josie walks off stage calling for Hester. Hester enters lost in thought, dragging Auld Black Wing*.)

Hester: I'm the Keeper of the Bog of Cats in case ya forgotten? I own this bog. (*Pause.)* Ya own nothin'. What do you have, Hester? Nothin'. No mother. I heard stories about me mother. She left me chained like a rabid pup to this auld caravan, but don't you look down on me! I'm me mother's match in witchery; it may be even that I surpass her. I can tell you about me mother. I only remember small things—like how ya'd often hear her voice comin' over the bog at night. She was the greatest song stitcher every to have passed through this place. But somewhere along the way she stopped weavin' them songs and became small and bitters and mean. By the time she ran off and left me, no one could abide by her. Yet still there's a longin' in me for her. But I shouldn't long for Big Josie Swane. The night I was born she took me over to the black swan's lair, and laid me in the nest alongside her. And when later I axed her why she'd do a thing like that with snow and ice everywhere, ya know what she says, Swane means swan. I know what sort of woman me mother was. I should just forget about her and lave this place now or I'll never lave.

(*Hester Exits. Josie enters. She is utterly alone.*)

Josie: I always win when I play me Mam. Snap—Snap! SNAP! (*To the audience.)* Do yees know how old I am? Seven! Snap—Snap! J-o-s-i-e K-i-l-b-r-i-d-e. That's me name Josie Kilbride. Granny says I'm not a Kilbride. I'm a Swane. S-w-a-n-e. I'm Hester Swane's little bastard. I wish me Mam'd come soon.

(*Hester enters.)*

Hester: I'm afraid of meself. I'm up to me neck in another life that can't include me anymore. They say I'm an unfit mother.

Josie: What's wrong of ya, Mam?

Hester: Go on off and play, you're far too demandin'.

Josie: Yeah well, just because you're in a bad humor it's not my fault. I'm fed up playin' on me own.

Hester: You'll get a clatter if you're not careful. I never bothered me mother, you're spoilt rotten, that's what ya are. Believe me, Josie Swane.

Josie: Me name is Josie Kilbride.

Hester: That's what I said.

Josie: Ya didn't, ya said Josie Swane. I'm not a Swane. I'm a Kilbride.

Hester: I suppose you're ashamed of me too.

(*Hester pushes Josie away and walks to the opposite corner of the stage from her.*)

Josie: Granny says you're like your mam. She says she used to see yer mam outside her old caravan on the bog dancing about. Granny says were better off without her. And yee's don't belong here either.

Hester: Times were there'd be ne'er a sign of this mother. She'd go off for days with anywan who'd buy her a drink. And I would be chained to the door of the caravan with maybe a dirty nappy on if I were lucky. Lies! All lies! Dear God on high, what have ya in store for me at all?

Josie: Mam. . .I'm sorry. I didn't mean it.

Hester: Ya have her eyes.

Josie: Whose eyes—whose eyes, Mam?

Hester: Big Josie Swane's, me mother.

Josie: Granny said me real name is Josie Swane.

Hester: Don't mind your Granny.

Josie: Did ya like her, Big Josie Swane?

Hester: --More than anythin' in this cold white world.

Josie: More than me?

Hester: I'm talkin' about when I was your age. Ya weren't born then, Josie—Ya know the last time I saw me mother was down by the caravan, a beautiful summer's night and the bog like a furnace. I wouldn't go to bed. I don't know why I wouldn't, I always done what she told me. I think now—maybe I knew. And she says, I'm goin' walkin' the bog, you're to stay here, Hetty. And I says No, I'd go along with her, and made to folly her. And she says, No, Hetty, you wait here, I'll be back in a while. And again I made to folly her and again she stopped me. And I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return.

(*Josie exits.*)

Have you ever been discarded . . . the way I have been discarded. Yee's don't know what it's like, to be flung on the ash pit and you still alive. But please . . . just let me stay. Yee's want to make out that I never existed. But I can't lave the Bog of Cats—ya see me mother said she'd come back here—I can't lave till me mother comes. Don't make me lave this place or somethin' terrible'll happen. Ya know me Mother's alive. I can smell her. Every day I forget more and more till I'm startin' to think I made her up out of the air. She came and went like the moon. And there was somethin' cold and dead about her except when she sang and then I declare ya'd fall in love with her. There was a time round here when no celebration was complete without Josie Swane. She'd be invited everywhere to sing, funerals, weddin's, christenin's, birthdays of the bigger farmers, the harvest. And it wasn't so much they wanted her there, more they were afraid not to have her. And they never axed us to stay, these people, to sit down and ate with them, just

lapped up her songs, and walked us off the premises, for fear we'd steal somethin', I suppose. I don't think it bothered her, it did me. This thirty-three years and it's still like she only walked away yesterday.

Well, it's dusk now and long after and where are ya, Mr. Ghost Fancier. I'm here waitin' for ya, waitin' for ya to take me away from this place. Maybe you're not comin' after all, maybe I only imagined ya.

(*Josie enters carrying top hat.)*

Josie: Mam—Mam!

Hester: You'll listen to me, Josie Swane, and you listen well. Another that had your name walked away from me. And you'll walk from me too. Well, I want to tell ya something you won't see me again. I'm going away tonight.

Josie: Mom, I want to be where you are. Mom, I'd be watching for you all the time along the Bog of Cats. I'd be watching and praying for you to return.

Hester: Don't be saying those things to me now.

Josie: Just take me with you, mom.

Hester: No, you don't understand. Get away from me (*Hester tries to push her away*).

Josie: (*clings to her mother*) No mom please! Let me go with you.

Hester: Alright, alright! Shh! It's alright, I'll take you with me, I won't have you as I was waiting a lifetime for someone to return, because they don't Josie, they don't. It's alright. Close your eyes. Are they closed tight?

(*Hester cradles her close and slits Josie's throat.*)

It's because ya wanted to come Josie.

(*Hester lays her body on the ground.*)

I knew something terrible would happen. I never thought it would be this.

(*Josie sits up and becomes the Ghost Fancier.*)

What have I done? Yee's all thought I was just going to walk away and leave her at your mercy. I almost did.

(*Josie as the GF moves to stand behind Hester. She has the knife in her hand.*)

But I wouldn't have her waste her life dreaming about me. But none of you will forget me now. When all of this is half-remembered take a walk along the Bog of Cats and wait for a purlin' wind through your hair. That'll be me an Josie ghosting ya.

(*GF prepares to kill her.*)

Take me away, Mr. Ghost Fancier. Take me away from here.

GF: Alright, my lovely.

(*GF stabs Hester. She dies in his arms. GF exits. Hester remains alone on stage.* After a lengthy pause, *Hester sits up and moves away from where she was just the body. She is now Big Josie. She looks at the space the body would inhabit. She has a conversation with the body. This is the first time Mother and Daughter have been on stage together*.)

Big Josie: (*Softly singing.*)

The love of one's country is a terrible thing.[221]

(*Song stops.*)

It's okay, my love. I came back. There won't be anymore of us. Little Josie won't be like us, Hester. She won't kill her children like we had to. They don't need us anymore. We're a bad reminder of the things they did for freedom.

We will become

[221] Behan, "The Patriot Game," 1.

The mountains heaving

Like a giantess, with her breasts swaying,

About to loom over, and gobble them up.'[222]

It won't be so bad. I hear you on the wind now Hester. Your voice once more the cry of the land like mine was before you, and my mother before that. But all these voices are echoes now, fading vibrations like the phantom bell tolls that ring in peoples heads long after the clapper has gone still. Echoes sounding through Ireland off every tree, rock, and person till they finally reach the edges of the land and of our body and are gone. Silence again . . . and then we will be the land again. Mise Eire. I am Ireland. Rest now. They won't be able to use us anymore. You are good mother, Hester. You are a good Máthair.

(*Big Josie freezes. Slow fade to black.*)

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[222] Nuala Ní Dhomnhaill, "Caileach/ Hag," in *The Wake Forest Book of Irish Women's Poetry*, ed. Peggy O'Brien (Wake Forest: Wake Forset University Press, 2011), 294.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS ON PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE

Process

My attempt to understand Mother Ireland through historical research alone proved ultimately unsuccessful. While she can be understood through her historical contexts, the connections between each of her incarnations are not fully clarified until they can be seen together in a performance piece. The unifying element of a performer and a stage explicitly links the voice of each mother figure together in a way that is impossible to demonstrate in an analytical paper. As an actress, it was a challenge to translate historical research and literary analysis into acting beats and monologues, but I believe that the difficulty of this translation led me to better understand the devolution that Mother Ireland experiences. This chapter serves as a report on my rehearsal experience, and it examines my creative process throughout the project as well as my final reflections on the performance.

Writing the Script

I have never written a script or taken any formal playwriting course, so the process of constructing a play was difficult and the revision process extensive. I spent the majority of the fall drafting and redrafting my text in an attempt to develop a set series of theatrical conventions to guide the journey of Mother Ireland. I began with the historical research and used index cards to lie out a timeline of Irish history and a timeline of Irish literary mothers. From there I was able to weave these two timelines together in order to create an initial spine for my piece. In my original draft, I focused primarily on the text of Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998). I originally assumed that this play would represent the core of my research and that I would not compose any of the writing of my play myself. However, my first draft lacked any real story.

There was no driving thread that united all the elements and literature. My thesis adviser, Professor Tim McDonough, offered me some advice on this subject after reading my first draft. He suggested that I look at the through lines of the piece. He thought by looking at the through lines, I could better see what the narrative arc of the play should be.

I discovered that my piece was following four major through lines. So I defined each through line with both colloquial terms and dialogue from my script so that I could have an example to draw on when I was discussing each development. Each through line was to be stated in terms of opposing energies in the emerging play: A versus Z. The first one I established is “I forgot, your poor old selfish mother forgot” versus “I am Ireland,” which could also be understood as “confusion about identity” versus “certainty about identity.” This narrative arc explores the tensions between Mother Ireland’s confusion over constant shifts in identity and the certainty of identity she expresses when she first adopts a new guise.

The second major through line is “at first I was the land” versus “I am a free woman,” which can also be understood as “the body of Mother Ireland as the land” versus “the body of Mother Ireland as a woman.” In this arc, I am seeking to investigate how Mother Ireland struggles between herself as a manifestation of the physical land of Ireland and her identity as a woman. This sequence of moments explores the importance of gender and nationalism.

The third through line I have been working with is “I am ready to stand for my country” versus “this nation eludes me”; however, this can also be understood as “national image” versus “absent image.” Within this arc there is a consistent struggle between Mother Ireland’s history as a central national icon and the exile she is forced to endure from her own land and people.

The final one I created while developing my script is “women are a part of this country” versus “men will save me,” which is better understood as “women as leaders” versus “woman

subjugated to men." In this series of moments I attempt to understand the dynamics of gender that are at play throughout all of my work regarding Mother Ireland. This final through line deals with the politics of gender and whether Mother Ireland is ruled by a female voice or a male voice.

These four through lines helped guide me during my script revisions as well as in my initial rehearsals. As an exercise, I put together a number of role throughs. A role through consists of a series of contrasting moments for each through line. I could physically construct the conflict between the two energies of each through line and work on the A vs. Z dynamic. This exercise helped me discover which opposites to play in my acting score and helped me to see where the major moments of conflict should occur.

I also developed several theatrical devices to help during script development. The use of a narrator was essential. Big Josie allowed me to act transitions and moments of history that existed outside the literature I was working from. She also gave me a central character that the audience could use as a base. I always returned to her so that it appeared that Big Josie was falling into each version of Mother Ireland. She was how I united all the voices into a single being.

Another key development of my script was the inclusion of a second actor. At first I considered doing my show completely alone, which would lead me to portray how the voices of men and Mother Ireland might come from the same being, but ultimately, I could not make it work. I chose instead to include a second actor who played all the male characters in the show as well as Little Josie. Working with a second actor impacted my rehearsal process significantly, because she offered her own perspective. However, having a second person that was deeply involved in the material with me proved essential, especially during the early drafts of the script.

My co-actor Madeline Teissler was immensely helpful because she gave voice to several characters. Through her performance, I was able to see if the transitions between pieces were working. While I performed as Mother Ireland, who remains similar in many ways, Madeline had to completely alter herself in each role. As the men in the play made more and more sense, I felt I was succeeding with my script's organization.

It was difficult for me to edit the script once it was finalized. Until two days before my performance, I was still cutting moments here and there. I know there are still areas to be trimmed or tightened in order to more readily convey my characters' desires and actions. Furthermore, editing helped me to shape the play and discover the narrative arc of the original goddess who becomes an outcast tinker. As I cut and was forced to focus on the beats between characters and section transitions, I found I was able to allow each incarnation of Mother Ireland to interact. By cutting down the script significantly and removing some of the major plot elements in *By the Bog of Cats*, such as the conflict between Hester and her ex-lover Carthage and Hester and her brother, I was able to show how important motherhood is as a theme in Marina Carr's play. Trying to do a paired-down version of the entire play would have been useless to my piece, but by eliminating certain sections and refocusing the play on just the relationship between the three Swanes, I was able to bring out the Mother Ireland story without going through unnecessary side plots.

Despite my lack of experience with playwriting, I felt that the script development was a key to the development of my thesis. I believe that if I had worked on a performance of one specific Mother Ireland figure, such as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and used an existing script, I would not have been able to discover the relationship between death and freedom that all aspects

of the literature on Mother Ireland provided. Creating my own piece gave me room to shape the material and bring together the literary excerpts that were meant to be in conversation.

Rehearsing with a Co-Actor

The theatrical piece I devised for my final presentation was not entirely a solo performance. It featured a second actor who inhabited the roles of all the men from my various plays, novels, and research on Mother Ireland. I worked with Emory graduate Madeline Teissler. Together, we developed her characters to represent the voice of men. She played God, Ailill, Michael, Gabriel, the Poet, and the Ghost Fancier. However, she also embodied two female characters, both for very specific reasons. She performed both Little Josie and The Shan Van Vocht. My intention was to set Little Josie apart from Hester and Big Josie. Little Josie is not a true Mother Ireland figure; she is only a potential Mother Ireland, so by establishing a second actor as Little Josie, I could demonstrate to the audience that while she is part of the lineage, she is not an official incarnation of it. Similarly, with the Shan Van Vocht, I wanted Teissler to embody an incarnation of Mother Ireland that the current Mother Ireland could not recognize. The Shan Van Vocht emerged in my script during the time of absence as a reminder of Mother Ireland's past. By dressing my co-actor in one of my costume pieces I linked her to me. However, because she is a different actor, it established that she is not the same persona. This created an interesting moment of alienation between the Mother Ireland of the present and the Mother Ireland of the past, because they no longer resembled each other in anyway.

Including a co-actor also proved helpful because Teissler provided insight into problematic moments. She offered feedback on the sections of the script that I wrote and helped me to develop the narrator's voice. She would push me to clarify certain elements for her in rehearsal, which in turn clarified both my script and my acting. Additionally, working with a

second actor also forced me to analyze my script and blocking to ensure that it provided a clear arc for her to follow. I enjoyed having Teissler on stage because she provided a source of energy I could play off.

Although my piece was not a true solo performance, due to my work with Teissler, I still acted as the director and performed stretches of solo work within my larger piece. Creating my own physical and vocal score as well as creating the script and all the theatrical conventions still provided a significant individual experience. Therefore, I feel I developed a successful solo piece with the help of a co-actor.

Solo Direction

The theatrical work I developed for my final presentation was the first solo work I created. I acted as performer, director, designer and playwright. Adapting to all these roles proved difficult; I struggled with self-motivation. At first, I overly focused on script development until I realized that true development could only come once the script was tested. I began to put the script on its feet; however, the physical score of the piece remained elusive. Video and audio recordings allowed me to take note of what physical and vocal moments were successful.

In addition, rehearsal with Professor Tim McDonough, my advisor, allowed for a more specific analysis of my developed score. Professor McDonough offered suggestions on how to further shape the trajectory I had begun to develop. However, I continued to lack blocking. It proved difficult to devise a body language for all these Mother figures that also matched the central figure.

The definitive moment in my solo direction came with my discovery of space. As a designer, I needed to define the parameters of my stage. By creating various areas for different characters to inhabit, I began shaping the stage as a representation of Ireland. Ultimately, center

stage took on the role of “settled Ireland” and was a place of power for Mother Ireland at the height of her dominance. In turn, the edges of the stage become a place of absence and alienation. Defining the center and the edges of the stage allowed me to define the physicality of different historical times, as well as Mother Ireland’s physical relationship to the nation. The more center stage I am as Mother Ireland, the more connected I become with the country. Similarly, the further off stage I am, the more disconnected Mother Ireland is from her nation and its people.

The defining of space was pivotal to my solo direction because it gave me a basic framework from which the rest of my physical score could be created. The development of the vocal score was more difficult, but by using recordings as well as Professor McDonough’s feedback, I was able to gauge the effectiveness of each section of the script. One key principle was taking in—that is, a focus on taking events and discoveries, so that the performer is responsive *in the present moment*. This approach to dialogue lends itself to a strong vocal and theatrical score.

Inside Mother Ireland:

Costume to Define Identity

Creating clear distinctions between each incarnation of Mother Ireland became a challenge as I continued to work on my presentation. Each figure, while different, also shares deep similarities, which prevents them from appearing significantly different in their physicality. Physicality amongst the mother figures also must be somewhat consistent because my goal was to represent many voices through one figure. In order to achieve this, and simultaneously to provide as much clarity as possible for the audience, I realized I would need some sort of costume convention to help define each mother figure.

Ultimately, I decided that using a base black costume with small additional pieces would help to define characters. Maeve's costume became a simple crown and Juno's a plain shawl. By giving each character a single piece of clothing, I was able to create distinctions between each, even if their physicality remained similar. The access to each costume piece also provided a challenge as I went through the rehearsal process, because I realized that the quick changes between pieces did not lend themselves to full exits. Exiting would have gone against Mother Ireland's consistent presence in the literature. The solution was to utilize hooks and have each figure represented in the space by having their costume hang on the walls. This benefited me because the other mothers became a part of the piece before they even emerged. The idea of a single performer assuming different outfits also lent itself to my investigation of a single woman representing many women. The costumes also contributed to the through line of "confusion" versus "certainty" that I had been developing, because as Mother Ireland struggles with confusion about her identity, she becomes lost amongst the various costume pieces and is unsure which best represents her. When she experiences moments of clarity, she is able to shift easily into the next costume piece and figure.

Discovery

The rehearsal process of a solo piece is not easy. The motivation and commitment it requires are extensive and intense. However, it was rewarding due to my discovery of how my thesis concept could be performed. As I neared the performance date and began to see how my script, vocal score, physical score, design, and costumes as identity indicators all came together, I realized that the figure of Mother Ireland could be represented in a single body.

Specifically, I benefited from the process of dress rehearsals because they gave me a sense of my piece as a total performance. In a dress rehearsal, it became clear that the section on

By the Bog of Cats was not connecting as universally to the script as the others were. I made this note to myself:

> Hester's disassociation from the settled community seems to mirror itself in her disassociation from Mother Ireland, and her own lineage. Is Hester perhaps too bound by the Medea Myth? Can she be a representative of Mother Ireland and a retelling of Medea?

This note forced me to examine Hester's relationship with the other images of Mother Ireland, because Hester is also a clear representation of Medea.

I had to keep Hester's roots in Greek mythology in my mind through my next dress rehearsal in order to explore how her Medea aspect relates to the personification of Mother Ireland. Through performance, I began to see that Medea couldn't define Hester. Instead, she serves as a way to support the underlying Mother Ireland myth. I discovered that Hester mirrored the fear of abandonment own fear of abandonment felt by other Mother Ireland figures. Cathleen feels abandoned, for example, because she has been reduced to a wanderer and has had her fields taken from her. This shared abandonment provided a catalyst for the start of *Bog* in my performance and connected these mothers together for me so I could see them as a lineage.

Performance Reflections

The performance of my piece for an audience provided the last crucial element: feedback. While I did not conduct a formal feedback session, the very presence of an audience and their visceral response to my piece offered its own commentary. As I moved through the performance, I realized that the convention of one body for many voices was effective in terms of the overall storytelling. The audience was able to engage with a central character layered with elements from different personas.

The process of layering one character onto another created contrasting energies in my narrator that was ultimately seen as a struggle within the self. This struggle against self added a

crucial layer to my performance because it suggested that Mother Ireland, ultimately, is not content with her own identity and struggles with herself and with the various traditions she has come to define.

I particularly could feel this struggle between the characters of Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Hester Swane, who represent dramatically different mothers. However, they do share a similar life of wandering: Hester is a tinker and Cathleen has lost her lands, which forces her to wander Ireland. Their shared nature as outsiders allows them to be in conversation with each other. However, they do possess contrasting priorities, for Cathleen is a nationalist while Hester dissociates from the nation.

The final performance is what led me to understanding the different relationships between these literary works. Rehearsals developed the foundations for my analysis of the literature, but the performance, when I was able to feed from the audience's experience of the narrative of Mother Ireland's fall, allowed me to understand how Mother Ireland became a central symbol, amalgamated from all of these figures.

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