

■ W. B. Yeats, Cultural Nationalism, and Disempowered Women

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Abstract

Irish people have been preoccupied with decoding their national identity, while gender issues are comparatively obscured. It is well-known that nationalism is unfavorable to the development of female identity, yet political nationalism aside, the subordination of Irish women is entangled with the practice of cultural nationalism. This paper aims to discuss the formation and operation of Irish patriarchy by bringing Yeats's poetry and plays into discussion. Section One is an overview of the role Irish women play amid the always already male-dominated Irish culture. Section Two presents a feminist re-reading of Yeats's three lyrics, "Easter 1916," "No Second Troy," and "A Prayer for My Daughter." This focus on Yeats's poetry is followed by Section Three, in which the canonized mythical hero Cuchulain and the demonized female characters in Yeats's plays like *On Baile's Strand*, *Caitheleen ni Houlihan*, as well as *The Countess Cathleen* are discussed. The final section recapitulates how Irish women are disempowered and disfigured in the works of this well-acclaimed cultural nationalist.

Keywords: W. B. Yeats, cultural nationalism, Irish women

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Introduction

For centuries Ireland's traditional bards had been glorifying women through idealized, mythopoeic woman-figures which misrepresented actual women. They had done this in order to urge their countrymen to help liberate their nation and reclaim their land, their "Mother Ireland." Yet formed through centuries of hard experience as a cultural and political colony of England, Ireland as a nation had long been pushing women to the periphery in terms of actual power, for nationalism is intrinsically a patriarchal philosophy (Mayer 1-2). Thus, as an island dominated by nationalistic fervor, Ireland was a place, which remained, even for most of the 20th century, a man's world.

Political nationalism aside, Irish women suffered from subordination and marginalization from still another quarter, the so-called cultural nationalism. The well-intentioned actions proposed by the cultural nationalists proved to be another accomplice of force imposed upon women in order to exclude them. In the campaign of Irish cultural nationalism, in other words, women were similarly estranged from the center. According to Antoinette Quinn, although the Gaelic League was more willing to allow female membership, the patriarchal ideology imposed upon Irish women time and again manifested itself. The brochure of the Gaelic League, for example, highlights women's conventional role as caretakers and preservers of the national culture: "the characters of the future citizens of the country are built in the chimney corner, where a woman tells stories in the twilight to wide-eyed listeners . . . the spark struck on the hearthstone will fire the soul of the nation" (qtd. in Quinn 41). It is crystal-clear that Irish women were constantly forced to fulfill the duty of motherhood and were in consequence subordinated as the helping maid of Irish nationalism. While Irish women limited themselves to household chores, they were compelled to shoulder the responsibility of cultural preservation at the same time.¹ The Gaelic League was characterized by its advocacy of Irish language and cultural revival, yet it could hardly escape from the patriarchal dominance closely associated with Irish nationalism, let alone some other organizations with a stronger penchant for masculinity. Roy Foster is thought-provoking in proclaiming that members of the Gaelic League and Gaelic Athletic Association were chauvinists, "defining

¹ In her discussion of women and the nation-building enterprise, Nira Yuval-Davis asserts that women basically play two roles: the biological reproducers and the cultural reproducers. In the second role, women are always fabricated as the symbols of nationality, connection, liberation and so forth. These constructions of womanhood, however, are mostly utilized in the domination and resistance of national relations (116). In a nutshell, except for serving as tools of national business, women take no place.

cultural identity as a matter of negation and exclusiveness rather than as an affirmation of pluralism" (*Paddy & Mr. Punch* 25).

In addition to the Gaelic League, the cultural nationalism peculiar to Ireland in the early modern period also found its support from the Irish Literary Theater inaugurated by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. With the rehabilitation of indigenous Irish culture in mind, these cultural zealots strove hard to channel nationalism into the construction of artistic perfection and to kindle people's awareness of Irish-ness as opposed to the encroaching British imperial culture (Faggen 232; Nolan 161). These cultural nationalists succeeded in propagandizing traditional culture and Irish identity, yet like their counterparts from the Gaelic League, they failed to do justice to the contribution of women in the nation-building process. Yeats, for example, repeatedly paid tribute to the heroic actions taken by the Irish Republican forces, mostly dominated by men. His contribution to the Irish nationalist cause is so significant that Edward Said refers to him as a national poet that "articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision" of a colonized people (220). No wonder in his critical collections *Anomalous States* David Lloyd asserts that politics and aesthetics were mutually entangled in Yeats's poetry from the earlier writings to the later writings (60). Meanwhile, women's concerns were left far behind.

Subjugated Women

In his well-known poem "Easter 1916," Yeats recounts his acquaintances, eulogizing those humdrum lives transformed by the sanctified fight for freedom from "casual comedy" to "terrible beauty" (181).² The Easter Rising in 1916 aroused so much commotion and sympathy that Irish people became much more involved in fighting against the British army. Nevertheless, from another angle, Yeats's over-emphasis on the contribution of the male nationalists vehemently cements the unbalance between the valiant nationalist and the silenced women in Ireland. Linda McDowell's comment testifies to this disparity between the opposite sexes. For her, while men's sacrifice in war and their bravery and persistence are pervasive in the records in modern history, women in Ireland are attached to the idealization of virtuous housewives (22). Yeats's "Easter 1916" evidently demonstrates how man warriors marginalize submissive woman servants from matters of great importance. In her analysis of Irish literature and art, Catherine Nash

² All the following quotations regarding Yeats's poems are from *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* edited by Richard J. Finneran.

points out that “while the idea of woman remained the embodiment of the national spirit and the allegorical figure for the land of Ireland, this land now became the domain of the overly masculine” (47). In other words, in Ireland affairs of the nation tend to be run by men, whereas the land belongs to women. However, the feminization of the land is not so much a real respect for women as a measure taken by chauvinists to elicit Irishmen’s pity and sacrifice for their feeble motherland and to help facilitate their political enterprise.

The image of female subordination and the subsequent ostracism of women from the politically correct nation-building enterprise is similarly set forth in Yeats’s lyric “No Second Troy.” For Yeats, Maud Gonne’s activism in politics is far from something laudable. At best, Maud Gonne has “taught to ignorant men most violent ways” (91).

What could have made her peaceful with a mind
 With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
 That is not natural in an age like this,
 Being high and solitary and most stern?
 Why, what could she have, being what she is?
 Was there another Troy for her to burn? (91)

In Homer’s *The Iliad*, Troy is said to be a cursed land strewn with conflict and devastation—conflict because it is torn between the nobility of man and the voracity of humanity; devastation because Troy ends in ruins. According to the ancient myth, the cause of this devastating war is less Achilles or Agamemnon than the sexually demonized Helen. In consequence, Helen as an object of beauty is the very reason Troy is demolished. By contrast, heroes like swift-footed Achilles and wise Odysseus are portrayed as heroes so as to arouse readers’ pity and admiration. Maud Gonne in “No Second Troy” is for Yeats analogous to Helen of Troy, the embodiment of marvelous beauty and disastrous annihilation. So passionately immersed in the political liberation of Ireland is Maud Gonne that Yeats is obliged to express his anxiety over her indulgence in Irish politics. Such a concept is by no means startling, for it well corresponds to the very logic underlying nationalism—men take the lead in political campaigns while women take care of domestic affairs. As McDowell demonstrates, “the rhetoric of nationalism, in whose name these men have sacrificed, is a profoundly gendered one in which women take their familiar and familial place as the guardian of the family, keeping home and hearth together in time of hardship” (22-23).³

³ Roger Sawyer even comments that in her passionate pursuit of nationalist actualization Maud Gonne puts nationalism ahead at the cost of women’s rights (56-57).

The idea of female docility likewise is depicted in Yeats's "A Prayer for My Daughter," in which the poet speaker reiterates his ideal of female beauty and urbanity. For Yeats, a woman blessed with mere prettiness is not necessarily endowed with completeness and happiness. Helen and Aphrodite, for example, are both beautiful, yet the speaker proposes that they are far from his standard of ideal women because neither of them succeeds in securing partners with fit qualifications. "Helen being chosen found life flat and dull/ And later had much trouble from a fool" (188). Aphrodite fares no better than Helen in that the former, with all her beauty and power among the deities, is finally married to Hephaestus, "a bandy-legged smith for man" (188). There is no denying that Helen and Aphrodite are true beauties; nevertheless, their lack of gentleness and culture is for Yeats something to be criticized. "It's certain that fine women eat/ A crazy salad with their meat/ Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone" (188). Then what can be the ideal image of women?

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place. (189)

As is evident in these lines, the ideal image of women for Yeats is closely bound up with natural beauties like trees, flowers, and birds. However, a woman with culture is not supposed to run wild in the wilderness, and nor is she allowed to have an argument with others. The allusion to the chase of Apollo and Daphne in Greek myth exemplifies the poet speaker's ingrained chauvinism. The laurel is looked upon as the symbol of honor after Apollo fails to win Daphne's heart, but it is simultaneously confined to being an everlasting fixation owing to Apollo's love. Beautiful and romantic as the laurel appears, it is doomed to stay put with little chance of transformation. The poem then ends with lines in harmony with such emphasis on female subjection to convention and decorum. While custom, culture, and tenderness are highlighted, personal opinion, intellectual cultivation and political participation are thoroughly left far behind the poet speaker's concern when referring to his ideal womanhood.

How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born
Ceremony's name for the rich horn,
And custom's for the spreading laurel tree. (190)

The aforementioned analysis of “No Second Troy” and “A Prayer for My Daughter” lays bare the operation of masculine hegemony/ female subordination latent in Irish cultural nationalism. Undoubtedly the virus of patriarchal domination penetrates throughout all aspects of life in the disguise of pure, elevated, artistic apparel, so much so that unsuspecting readers tend to remain ignorant.

Feminized Ireland and Irish Women

The over-emphasis on masculine *chivalry* in Irish cultural nationalism is in truth associated with the feminization of Ireland over a long period of history. Early in the nineteenth century, Irishmen were characterized by scholars of ethnography as a feminine people. Ernest Renan, for example, affirmed such a Celtic feminine tendency in saying: “If it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals, we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race . . . is an essentially feminine race” (81). In addition, Matthew Arnold asserted such feminine nature characteristic of the Celt. In *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), Arnold discriminately labeled the Irish race as sentimental, passionate, sensual, sensuous, feminine, undisciplined, anarchical and turbulent by nature (61-65). He tried every means possible to justify the colonists’ disempowerment of the colonized, thereby looking upon the Celtic race as innately sentimental. Arnold thus asserted: “No doubt the sensibility of the Celtic nature, its nervous explanation, have something feminine in them, and the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy; he has an affinity to it; he is not far from its secret” (65). Theories proposed by Renan and Arnold to a certain degree help contribute to the justification of British colonialism. From the British colonizers’ perspective, the impotence and inefficiency typical of Irish people may well rationalize their imperial governance in the hope of civilizing, domesticating, and empowering their feeble Celtic subjects. Geraldine Meaney affirms such feminized image common to colonial societies:

A history of colonization is a history of feminization. Colonial powers identify their subject people as passive, in need of guidance, incapable of self-government, romantic, passionate, unruly, barbarous—all those things for which the Irish and women have been traditionally praised and scorned. (233)

Against such stereotypical femininity attached to them, Joseph Valente suggests, modern Irish writers like Pearse, Moran, Griffiths, and Yeats manage laboriously to reiterate Irish masculinity and capability in their works in order to counterbalance the long-standing feminine label fixed on them (193). In

consequence, the contrasting images of powerful men and disempowered women are normalized. With regard to such extreme insistence on Irish masculinity and femininity, Ashis Nandy proposes the idea of “hyper-masculine,” by which he indicates the reaction nationalists have when the colonized are burlesqued as being emotional, crippled, and unruly. However, while trying to actualize the hyper-masculinity of men, (male) nationalists wittingly or unwittingly push their female compatriots to the extreme of hyper-femininity (7-10). Under such circumstances, the always already male dominance and female subordination in the colonized country are intensified.

Yeats’s description of male force and dominance finds no better example than in his depiction of Cuchulain. In Irish myth, Cuchulain is identified as a Hercules-like hero, supernatural, all-powerful, gallant, and invincible. In “The Statues,” Yeats refers to Cuchulain as the very embodiment of Irish spirit.

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
 What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
 What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
 We Irish, born into that ancient sect
 But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
 And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked,
 Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
 The lineaments of a plummet-measured face. (337)

As the idealization of Irish heroism, Cuchulain is imagined as the spiritual predecessor of the Easter Rising in front of the Post Office in Dublin. With the emulation of this great hero in mind, Irish nationalists spare no efforts to devote themselves to the actualization of their anti-colonial revolutions.⁴ Without doubt, such sanctification of Cuchulain benefits Irish nationalists in their endeavor to repel British encroachment and to construct their own motherland. Yet this is not without contradiction because the canonization of Cuchulain and his deeds invariably reinforces the image that only men are endowed with the gift to rival with obstacles, either from humans or nature. It follows that Irish nationalism is dominated by men, while women’s participation is downgraded.

Yeats’s eulogy of Cuchulain is significantly exhibited in his plays like *On Baile’s Strand*, *The Green Helmet*, *At the Hawk’s Well*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, and *The Death of Cuchulain*. In these plays, Cuchulain is faced with a series of

⁴ According to Thomas Flanagan, young Yeats is smitten by Samuel Ferguson’s works, so much so that Yeats even acclaims Ferguson as the greatest Irish poet because his works are imbued with national spirit. In addition, Flanagan suggests that several other writers with a strong sense of the nation and its indigenous culture in the Victorian Ireland, including John Mitchel, John O’Leary, Standish O’Grady, are respected by Yeats (75).

challenges, but with insurmountable strength and courage he can always tear dangers into pieces. His power is supreme and his fame universal.

Cuchulain has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air. (*On Baile's Strand* 14)⁵

From this excerpt recited by the Fool again and again, we know that Cuchulain is regarded as an omnipotent hero because he can terminate menaces in different forms: politics, nature, and woman. So threatening an antagonist is he that even Conchúr mac Neasa, the great king of Ireland, has to ask for his service and loyalty. Consequently so many Irish nationalists resort to Cuchulain as their spiritual Father in their political campaigns. Yeats himself once acknowledged that he was a Nationalist and that all Irish plays were supposed to work for the National cause ("An Irish National Theater" 388). The eulogy and sanctification crowned upon Cuchulain then becomes easy access to the glorification of a national hero and Ireland as well.

However, in great contrast to the masculinity and capability of Cuchulain, women in *On Baile's Strand* are invariably demonized. Female characters, for example, are comparatively obscure compared with their male counterparts. Once women appear on the stage, they are either an unidentified women group like the chorus or Cuchulain's evil enemy, Aoife. Aoife is no ordinary woman, for with "a stone-pale cheek and red brown hair," she is like a fierce woman-warrior (19). In a sense, Aoife is different from the norm of Irish women in that she is singularly equipped with the power to fight. However, her fearlessness is never eulogized but disparaged instead. To begin with, she is schemed to be Cuchulain's antagonist and doomed to be defeated. Then in the fighting she is mastered by Cuchulain physically and bears him a son. Afterwards, her hostility toward Cuchulain is so severe that she trains her son to kill his own father. In a dialog with Cuchulain, Conchúr thus describes Aoife:

For I know well that you are praising Aoife—
Now hates you and will leave no subtlety
Unknotted that might run into a noose
About your throat, no army in idleness
That might bring ruin on this land you serve. (19-20)

In these lines, Aoife is regarded as a devil that harbors vengeance in mind and tries hard to retaliate against her rivals. As Medea cruelly kills Jason's bride and even

⁵ Quotations referring to *On Baile's Strand* are from *Modern Irish Drama*. All the remaining textual references to Yeats's plays are from *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats*.

her own sons, so Aoife frantically manages to put Cuchulain to death regardless of her son's life. Helen turns Troy into ashes, which for Conchúr foreshadows the detriment Aoife will do to Cuchulain and Ireland as a whole. Taken together, these indictments betray the insanity and irrationality bundled with women. This accusation of Aoife smacks of "No Second Troy" in denying women the right to fight. Accordingly, instead of acting heroically like Cuchulain, Aoife, a wizard-like monster, can bring nothing but catastrophe to the motherland.

The three unidentified women in *On Baile's Strand* are offered little space to say anything, and when given the chance, they never refer to themselves but rather to Cuchulain and things around him. What is worse, sometimes they even play the role of censors worsening the name of women. The demonized female characters, the "Shape-Changers" according to the three women, are destined to ruin the king's hall thoroughly. The following song sung by the three women accentuates such condemnation of women.

Gather on the wind and drive
The women none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay. (21-22)

Violent and destructive like the whirling wind, women, or more accurately witches, are vilified as unruly and insignificant. Like Helen of Troy, they bedazzle kings and demolish the kingdom. Actually, all characters in the play assert that Cuchulain must have been captivated by the witch. "Witchcraft has maddened you" (27). Women then become the scapegoat of everything evil, be it the bewilderment of the hero or the destitution of the nation.

The predominance of nationalism and the subordination of women are also self-evident in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Pervasive in the play is the atmosphere of nationalism. The setting at a cottage near Killala in 1798, for example, is reminiscent of the crucial year when Irishmen planned to rebel against their British colonizer.⁶ From the outset, the sound of cheering around the village is mentioned many times, which indicates Irish people's excitement over the revolution and the possibility of national liberation soon afterwards. At the same time, while people outside are hailing the coming emancipation, family members inside Peter's house are busy preparing for Michael's marriage. Against such hilarious backgrounds inside and outside, an old woman, later identified as Cathleen, comes and thus changes the fate of the bridegroom. The old woman

⁶ See Foster's "Ascendancy and Union," 182-84.

Cathleen in effect stands for the motherland of ancient Ireland. She comes for help because her four beautiful fields, the traditional provinces of Ireland, Ulster, Munster, Leinster, and Connacht, are taken by usurpers. In great despair for the loss of her land, Cathleen begs for Michael's assistance to reclaim her belongings. In her song Cathleen sings:

I am come to cry with you, woman,
My hair is unwound and unbound;
I remember him ploughing his field,
Turning up the red side of the ground,
And building his barn on the hill
With the good mortared stone;
O! We'd have pulled down the gallows
Had it happened in Enniscrone! (7)

As Cathleen explains to Michael later, the song is about a yellow-haired man named Donough that is hanged in Galway. Obviously, she is bewailing the fate of the victim's woman. The cause of Donough's death might have something to do with anti-colonial rebellion. The word "gallows" smacks of the repression, punishment, and inhumanity characteristic of colonial hegemony. It is this very authoritative control that the speaker would like to resist against. Cathleen undoubtedly identifies with such rebellious consciousness, for she herself suffers from the same problem of being intimidated and deprived of her land.

Metaphorically speaking, Cathleen's dispossession of land corresponds to the deprivation of Ireland. For the retrieval of their motherland, Irish nationalists try hard to invoke their countrymen's devotion and sacrifice. Likewise, Cathleen, harboring the hope that she is capable of reclaiming her lost land, comes all the way to ask for Michael's identification. Inspired by Cathleen's touching story, Michael goes so far as to abandon his marriage to join the nationalists' revolutionary activities. In this sense, his fiancée Delia Cahel is discarded, and so are the concerns of women and family. In the face of such dire matters as national rehabilitation and reconstruction, women are once more renounced.

Ironically enough, this relinquishment of women's rights is based on another image of women as old hags desperately in need of help, a motif popular in the old Irish literary tradition. Such a bardic tradition of Irish writing that dates back to at least the 9th century has been characterized by the notion that the land was a woman to be worshipped, wooed, and won. The conceit of land-as-woman might derive from an earlier conceit, according to which the male poet is figured as a *female* poet, one who is betrothed to her lord (patron) and forced to share his bed. Thus in the hag of Beare poetry, which began to appear in the 9th century, the speakers are exhausted and abandoned harlots who are forced to return to

their earlier lovers before retreating to monasteries (or nunneries) (Kiberd 283). Here the female poet figure is a transformation of the traditional wandering male poet who, after serving a series of chieftains, finds nowhere to go except the monastery. Such feminization of the male bardic speaker is also characteristic of numerous later and more modern Irish poems. When asked how she can get her land back, Cathleen replies;

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 tomorrow. (She gets up.) 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. (9)

The outside help Cathleen alludes to is the French army landing near western Ireland to support Irish nationalists against British control in 1798. This foreign help in fact serves as the significant background, against which Cathleen is confident that victory will surely come. Just like what happens in the hag of Beare poetry, Cathleen as the epitome of her land (motherland, Ireland) calls for help from her sons (young men, Irishmen). In addition, at the end of the play Cathleen is transformed to a fair lady after she successfully musters male aid to help her reclaim the land. Unlike the old hag image in most Irish literature, Cathleen is now said to be “a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen” (11). However, no matter as an old hag or a fair lady, Cathleen can at best be regarded as a medium through which something much more pressing is to be achieved—the anti-colonial nationalism. Under such circumstances, by no means is a woman a self-sufficient entity but rather an auxiliary to her more substantial counterpart, the man. What is worse, a woman like Cathleen is utilized by nationalists to arouse (or seduce) the countrymen’s recognition and willingness to fight for the mother (land, motherland, Ireland). Kathryn Conrad even regards Cathleen as “the double woman”—both the allegorical figure of Ireland and a destroyer of Michael’s family at the same time. Consequently, Michael is valorized due to his love of country, whereas Cathleen is denied valorization and remains “seductive and therefore disruptive” in the play (46-47). Besides, the transformation of Cathleen from an old hag to a fair lady demonstrates the fate of women in nationalistic revolutions. Whereas the old woman image is taken advantage of to the benefit of nationalist causes, the fair lady image similarly illuminates the fact that women function not so much as the protagonists of nationalism as simply foils to men. Purity and beauty are the only attributes they are known for. All in all, poor as a hag or pretty as a lady, a woman has no place in the construction of the nation.⁷

⁷ The name Cathleen, closely associated with other idealized feminine types like Hibernia, the Hag of Beare, and the Aisling, has in fact become a well-established trope in personifying Ireland as a woman.

Though women are denied prominent position in the construction of the nation, they nevertheless are required to serve for the country when the men in charge find it convenient. For example, Cathleen in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, either as an old hag or a fair lady, serves as the enticement of male support. The identification of Cathleen with woman, mother, land, motherland, and Ireland is conspicuous throughout the play. Moreover, in *The Countess Cathleen* Yeats portrays another Cathleen closely associated with the land rather than the nation. Set against the background of famine-struck Ireland in old times, the countess Cathleen comes to rescue as an outsider when the land and its people are in danger. So destitute is the land that seldom can Irish people find sufficient food or shelter for even daily necessities. The misery even deprives people of their faith in God. In one character Teigue's words, squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth (4). It is at this critical moment that Cathleen comes from afar to save her compatriots from poverty and famine. In order to keep her people from deteriorating physically and spiritually, Cathleen is willing to sacrifice herself by selling her soul to the devil-merchants in exchange for five hundred thousand crowns for the well-being of her fellowmen.

This outside help from far away is intriguing, for unlike most male rescuers prevalent in Irish literature, the saving agent is a woman rather than a man. Such uncommon female outside help from Cathleen does not necessarily mean the overthrow of the man/woman dichotomy embedded in modern Irish literature. First of all, it is a woman instead of a man that comes to save her countrymen from poverty and destitute mainly because the land is so closely bound up with feminine attributes. In a sense, Cathleen's sacrifice reinforces the stereotype of the feminized land, the motherland, and Ireland. Consequently, the land becomes a woman's only purpose, to which she is supposed to devote herself wholeheartedly. In addition, Cathleen's selling of her soul to the devil is not without controversy, for from the traditional religious point of view it would be an inexorable damnation to have such a sin. In other words, she is a cursed female Faustus that signs her compact with Mephistophiles. Although at the end of the play the angel tries to justify Cathleen's sacrifice by claiming that God "looks always on the motive, not the deed," (50) undoubtedly Cathleen's action is regarded by religious fundamentalists as a sacrilege. Cathleen does keep her people away from devils, yet

In her research on Yeats and his works, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, however, argues that Yeats adopted an effeminate style and feminine subject position in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and that Yeats's connection with the discourse of patriarchy was full of ambiguities. Such contradictions derive from the fact that on the one hand, Yeats belonged to the white, middle-class, Protestant citizen of the British power structure and the dominant literary tradition, and on the other hand Yeats as a colonized Irishman was inevitably self-conscious of oppression and marginalization (5-6).

she at the same time plunges herself to hell. In this sense, like the old woman in the Hag of Beare poetry who has to sacrifice her sons for the benefit of her motherland, Cathleen manages to preserve the land and protect its people at the cost of her own life. Daring as she is, she resembles more a Madonna-like woman of chastity and mercy than God-like hero with power and authority. Women, in other words, can at best be the selfless contributors to their motherland; they are excluded from the center of political affairs.

Conclusion

The concept that nationalism tends to be bound up with male participation is maintained by many critics. Robert Young, for example, proclaims that “it was men who made empires, and that the empire was a field for the exercise, or imagining of all sorts of forms of masculinity” (360). In addition, it is proposed that the colonial and post-colonial milieu is inevitably submerged in a male texture (Peterson 9). Nationalism, according to Radhakrishnan, becomes an all-encompassing “macro-political discourse” around which women’s issues are marginalized (191). Under such circumstances, women are vehemently thrown into the verge of their existence and are consequently imprisoned inside the Labyrinth guarded by the monstrous Minotaur, symbol of overwhelming masculine dominance. To fly alive away from this maze of patriarchy takes not merely wings of wax and feather but pluck, patience, and perseverance. Anti-colonial revolutions are customarily accompanied by the ideal of equalities in every aspect, yet ironically the equality of both sexes is absolutely only a myth. The present analysis of Yeats’s works contributes to the demythologization of sexual equality in early 20th century Ireland.

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葉慈、文化國族與弱勢女性

摘要

國家認同問題向來困擾著愛爾蘭人，影響甚鉅，性別議題則相對未受重視。國族主義頗不利女性自我認同的發展，但除了政治國族思想之外，愛爾蘭女性亦深受文化國族主義之害。本文藉由閱讀葉慈詩歌與劇作，討論愛爾蘭文化國族與父權宰制的關聯。第一部份為導論，主要介紹在歷年來男性宰制的愛爾蘭文化當中，女性所扮演的角色。第二部份從女性主義的角度出發，重讀葉慈的三首詩歌（〈復活節一九一六〉、〈沒有第二個特洛伊〉、以及〈為吾女祈禱〉）。第三部份討論的重點則為葉慈的戲劇（例如《在貝里的海濱》、《凱撒琳·尼·胡利漢》、還有《凱撒琳女伯爵》），剖析其中男性神話英雄古哈嵐總被神聖化，女性角色卻遭到妖魔化的現象。最後一部份則總結前文，說明在葉慈這位備受讚譽的文化國族作家筆下，愛爾蘭女性如何遭到曲解與失去權力。

關鍵字：葉慈，文化國族主義，愛爾蘭女性