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Woman & the Home: Questions of Literary Power

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“Woman & the Home: Questions of Literary Power”

Opening a copy of *Irish Literary Portraits* by W. R. Rodgers, one will find information on W.B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, George Bernard Shaw, George Russell (A.E.). Books such as this serve to demarcate ‘the greats’ of 20th century Irish literature, thereby both creating and reinforcing perceptions that the period’s preeminent literary group was comprised entirely of men. Perhaps the dearth of females in this group is specifically and ironically most notable, given the men’s mutual friend and literary colleague: Lady Augusta Gregory (née Persse). A contemporary dramatist and author in her own right as well as founder of the Abbey Theatre, Lady Gregory was a key figure and leader of the Irish Literary and Cultural Revival. This movement encapsulated the cultural effects simultaneous to the nationalistic political sentiment which swept the country, resulting in a surge of Irish literature which both developed and demonstrated national pride. Despite her prominent role in this facilitation, her independent work, and her collaboration with the aforementioned men, Lady Gregory is often unfairly afforded an unjust literary legacy. While books such as Rodgers’s do not omit her from literary history, the way in which they simply mention her in sections concerning these men and deny her a segment of her own minimalizes her importance.

Ironically, accounts that mention her in her own right are just as challenging as their portrayals subordinate her to the male authors with whom she closely worked. Because analysis of much literature either negates her presence or delegates her to a marginalized, traditionally female role, it is understandable that her legacy has been precisely that of a mere associate. The

issues that her literary legacy has faced is an intersection of contemporary sociocultural gender roles and problematic interpretation of how she practiced them. My research on Lady Gregory supports the idea that she employed contemporary gender roles to her advantage, turning restricting and controlling cultural structures into something that she controlled and developed into the vehicle for her literary pursuits. Analysis of her relationship with her male colleagues combined with consideration of traditional feminist interpretations of her demonstrate her strategic manipulation of multiple identities to transform imprisonment to empowerment.

Examination of her relationship with her male collaborators, especially William Butler Yeats, reveals how gender factors so heavily into (issues of?) Lady Gregory's legacy, as he was both her closest and most famous colleague. Despite their professional collaborative partnership and her own work, she is widely known simply as his patron. This inequity and marginalization exemplifies an effect of a larger, gender-based inequality. Male-authored literature has dominated the canon and has thereby served as the primary source of study for literary scholars and students alike. Thus, while analysis of Yeats's work may seem perplexing for our purpose of understanding Lady Gregory's literary legacy and image, Yeats's writing and speech are greatly influential due to his sex as well as his genius and have had significant influence on Lady Gregory's image and literary legacy and his works have served as the primary vehicle through which information about her has been gleaned. Analysis of Yeats's 1923 Nobel Prize Speech provides insight into how his words—both written and oral—offer an image of Lady Augusta Gregory which is rooted in contemporary sociocultural gender constructs.

“It was not, however, until I met in 1896 Lady Gregory, a member of an old Galway family, who had spent her life between two Galway houses, the house where she was born and the house into which she was married, that such a theatre became possible.”¹

Despite this recognition of their collaboration and acknowledgement of her influence, careful attention to his diction, reveals how he subtly marginalized while simultaneously recognizing her importance. His description of her is entirely and intensely preoccupied with her location, both in “an old Galway family” and her minimal travel from the “house where she was born” to “the house into which she was married.” Additionally, the passivity with which he discusses her is substantial. First, he recognizes their collaboration and her importance in a curious fashion, noting that the theatre was not possible until he met Lady Gregory, suggesting that he was the dominant force, merely needing mental and/or monetary support for its realization. Second, he objectifies her, as she is reduced to a body which is simply transferred from house to house.

That so much attention is devoted to her houses in one sentence without mention of Coole’s role as a literary workshop suggests Yeats internalized a deeper association between her and such structures; one cannot help but wonder if he equated them. Yeats’s repetition of “house” is not only likely rooted in traditional sociocultural perceptions of women and ‘the home’ but it also propagates this cultural mindset as the framework for her legacy. Regarding Lady Gregory in terms of both her contributions to the movement and, more generally, her literary legacy, it is essential to consider her estate, Coole Park. While it cannot be considered a literary salon in the true sense of the word, Coole played an integral part in much of the prominent literary creation of the movement, hosting all of the aforementioned men plus others, and causing it to gain recognition as the ‘workshop of the Irish Literary revival’ ().

¹ “William Butler Yeats - Nobel Lecture: The Irish Dramatic Movement,” The Official Website of the Nobel Prize, n.d., https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1923/yeats-lecture.html.

Furthermore, this public presentation of his perception of her does not differ from those in a more private setting; he often noted in journals and letters how she “has been to [him] mother, friend, sister and brother” and how he “doubt[ed] if [he] should have done much with [his] life but for her firmness and care.”² Undoubtedly, he cared deeply for her, as revealed in his admittance that he could not “realize the world without her.”³ However, without any mention of her as colleague or in a working role but instead as family or companion, the first quote illustrates Yeats’s understanding of Lady Gregory as one operating in the domestic sphere. Similarly, in the second quote he recognizes her support manifesting in “firmness and care,” quite like what one might receive from a mother. Yeats’s evident recognition of Lady Gregory more as a maternal figure rather than that of colleague or collaborator further suggests his understanding of her as one whose domain was ‘the home’ where she served as mother and hostess, and ultimately, a marginal figure who merely fostered the work of her male colleagues.

The sociocultural gender roles which undoubtedly fostered Yeats’s perception of her were not unknown to Lady Gregory herself. Lady Gregory was raised to adhere to these gender constructs, as she was undoubtedly a product of her Victorian upbringing. The gender roles and a cultural association of women with the home which influenced Augusta’s world were well established phenomena. Milton wrote that “nothing lovelier can be found in woman, than to study household good,” repeating the sentiments that had been expressed by others such as “Shakespeare and Scott [and] in Dante and Homer” who believed that “women are ‘infallibly faithful and wise councilors.’”⁴ Having been developed and perpetuated over millennia, these associations and rules were the subjects of books such as *The Women of England* by Sarah Ellis,

² Mary Lou Stevenson, “Lady Gregory and Yeats: Symbiotic Creativity,” *Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* 40 (January 1, 1978): 63.

³ Stevenson, 64.

⁴ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (Yale University Press, 1957), 351.

which details proper female actions and behavior.⁵ This work describes how women were expected to maintain and successfully run the domestic sphere and thus, as such, maintain the happiness of her family: “for Ellis, the sum total of human happiness is dependent upon women’s ... appropriate domestic action.”⁶ Management of the household meant that women were not only in charge of its daily operations but also of the happiness of those within it; this responsibility was significant, as they paralleled the domain over which they had chief responsibility, serving as foundation to the household. Some sources note how the connotation of female tasks was not negative but simply recognized as different from those of men: “for after all, a woman is *not* a man; she has her own nature and function in life, not inferior to his but entirely different.”⁷ However, other sources note how this subjugated and confined women; only thirteen years after Ellis’s book, H.T. Mill’s understands this role as one which makes the woman inferior in “a state of forced subordination to the other half.”⁸

As a daughter and later wife of wealthy Irish landowners, Augusta Gregory lived her entire life adhering to these gendered constructs which were compounded by her family’s elevated social status. From an early age, she was aware of her secondary status to men. First, her mother was “sorry that [Augusta] was not a boy” ; instead, she was “laid aside and forgotten” after birth.⁹ Second, favoring her eight brothers, her parents prioritization of them over her and her four sisters manifested in how the boys were given more freedom and education. Her mother “did not consider book learning of any great benefit to girls,” as they were not expected to be

⁵ Published in 1838, the full title of the work: *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*.

⁶ Caroline Austin-Bolt, “Sarah Ellis’s *The Women of England*: Domestic Happiness and Gender Performance,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 37, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 189, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08905495.2015.1030837>.

⁷ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*, 349.

⁸ Austin-Bolt, “Sarah Ellis’s *The Women of England*,” 107,192.

⁹ Gregory, *Seventy Years: Being the Autobiography of Lady Gregory*, 1st American ed (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 1.

concerned with intellectual pursuits; instead, she assumed that a good command of scripture and knowledge of the domestic sphere would be sufficient.¹⁰ In her twenties, Augusta's family relegated her to the subservient role of caretaker for her sickly elder brother.¹¹ Later diary and letters reveal that beyond simple adherence to these gender roles, Augusta internalized Victorian ideas of womanhood. After the birth of her granddaughter— she wrote, “I think it is a good thing having a girl, it will make the home more homey for Richard than if he had a brother going to school with him and no one to receive them at home,” illustrating her own understanding of the home as the female domain.¹² The triple repetition of ‘home’ indicates her solidified association between women and ‘the home.’ Similarly, she describes Richard as a “little bundle of life and fire” while “Anne is very much in the background, as a girl should be (in our family).”¹³

These comments not only demonstrate her firm understanding of a woman's place as secondary to a man's but also reveals her own acute awareness of the strictures placed upon her by both her class and gender. While women were associated with interiority, men were chiefly associated with exteriority, while also enjoying the freedom to move between the spheres. Women were associated with domesticity, interiority, and passivity in contrast to their male counterparts who were considered the active and dominant sex.

These general sociocultural and gender roles permeated subsets of society including the literary realm. As in society, men were considered active creators literary and designed, created and dominated the canon. Thus, Gilbert and Gubar offer a pertinent question: “where does such

¹⁰ Gregory, 4.

¹¹ Her reference to X as ‘my invalid’ in her autobiography reveals both her detachment and compassion. She does not affectionately use his name but reduces him to ‘invalid’—the state of his condition (and moreover the reason for their jointure). Nonetheless, Augusta claims him with ‘my’, which connotes the benevolence and sense of duty with which she accepted her charge.

¹² Judith Hill, *Lady Gregory: An Irish Life* (Wilton, Cork, Ireland: Collins Press, 2011), 365.

¹³ Hill, 365. The addition indicates her keen awareness of how gender roles varied by class

an implicitly or explicitly patriarchal theory of literature leave literary women?"¹⁴ Men were free to exercise their authority while women were generally excluded from the literary realm, as "the dull manage, of a servile house / is held by some, our utmost art and use" (Anne Finch). Simply, "Victorian women were not accustomed to choosing a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself."¹⁵ Feminist texts such as *Mad Woman in the Attic* demonstrate how women were trapped in layers of enclosure. They were literally "enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society" due to their physical location in the home and were also confined by sociocultural gender roles, with their literary experience mirroring their literal conditions.¹⁶ The result is that readers, students, and literary scholars alike must turn to the works of more famous, male contemporaries for information about and cultural perceptions of women; in these works, women were often confined to extreme stereotypes such as the angelic and chaste heroine or a wicked and insane woman. In addition to this confining representational binary, women were generally rejected from the literary domain, as they were often deemed incapable.¹⁷ In addition to the literal female association with interiority and the domestic sphere, women's literary experience has been described as one of exclusion as well as confinement demonstrated by the extent to which rhetoric of enclosure and imprisonment male-saturated discussion.

To more fully understand Lady Gregory, it is only appropriate to look to Yeats given both their close relationship and the fame of his work. Thus, analysis of Yeats's poems yields additional evidence which supports his perspective of her primarily as a domestic figure. Two

¹⁴ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), 7.

¹⁵ Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 21.

¹⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, xi.

¹⁷ The extent to which society was unreceptive to female intellectual efforts such as literary creation is perhaps best demonstrated in how, when Lady Gregory was plagued with headaches in the latter years of in the 19th century, her physician Dombrée Chepmell, diagnosed her "(mild) intellectual pursuits" as the cause (Hill, 115).

poems in particular, “Coole Park (1929)” and “Coole Park and Ballylee” provide significant evidence to the type of image Yeats works offers of her. That Yeats thought and wrote so extensively on location indicates the importance of place to both himself and his creative process. He discusses how he “meditates” upon “an aged woman and her house.” Though he describes Coole as her property which should afford her dominance/importance over the house, there is nonetheless a sense of equation in this pairing, thus provoking the relevant question of which Yeats thought more important. Just a few verses later, Yeats answers this question by noting that “[g]reat works [were] constructed there” (5). Although he is ambiguous about the author of these “great works,” it is fair to presume that Yeats was discussing— if not solely his own works—then certainly those of the male literary figures who frequented Coole. Attention to his verb choice further supports the likelihood of male implication, as ‘construction’ would have been understood to contemporaries as a male verb.¹⁸ Moreover, this verb not only establishes a greater connection with composition and Coole Park rather than composition and Lady Gregory but it also demonstrates Yeats’s alignment with the more general perception of literature as a very gendered sphere.

Furthermore, he notes the “glory that those walls begot” (8). Yeats further develops Coole’s association with literary creation but his verb choice also illustrates one of the patriarchal ideas surrounding literature.¹⁹ He suggests that Coole served as the structure which fostered the literary formation which was his creation, supporting Gilbert and Gubar’s understanding of “patriarchal western culture [in which] ...the texts’ author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative

¹⁸ In addition to the fact that as there was little in the way of female activities that involved construction, the verb describes is an intensely active and important action in both the literal or figurative sense and thereby...

¹⁹ xxxxx elab

power...the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim.”²⁰ With Coole as mother and womb, Yeats becomes that father and thus dismisses Lady Gregory from the literary procedure, supporting contemporary ideas that literature was both a male domain and creation, for “women are defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power.”²¹ Yeats’s verb choice demonstrates how that literary creation was a sphere with staunch patriarchal procedures dominated by men.

Where, then, does this leave Lady Gregory? He describes her as having a “powerful character” that “[c]ould keep a Swallow to its first intent”; she serves as guide and, fostering direction, she is the “compass-point” upon which these men depend and “find certainty” (). By contrast he emphasizes the lack of domain that he and his fellow male Coole guests enjoy: “[t]hey came like swallows and like swallows went” (17). Both their equation to swallows—traditional symbols of freedom— and the notation of how they “came” and “went,” he emphasizes their autonomy and independence. Yeats illustrates Augusta’s directional role which, in turn, fosters *their* literary creation. She remains a stationary guiding force, much like the estate itself.

Augusta only reiterates the enclosed and subordinate female condition. The problem that I would like to address is how the feminist interpretations of female literary works and lives have resulted in the reiteration of marginalization: as it is revealed, their marginalized status of literary females thus defines their legacy. Though exposing this denigration is important, examination of the female (literary) experience seems to conclude with an understanding of oppression and imprisonment and fails to take into consideration of women’s active agency within this imprisonment. In Lady Gregory’s case, only recognizing the ways in which she was

²⁰ Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, 6.

²¹ Gilbert and Gubar, 21.

marginalized further reduces her legacy, as it does not account for the ways in which manipulated female gender roles and thereby exercised considerable agency in her literary pursuits. While Lady Gregory undoubtedly internalized many of the expectations befitting one of her gender and class, evidence suggests that she was also acutely aware of them. For example, she knew that “for a good while after I married, I was my husband’s wife.”²² During their marriage, she was immersed in high society, hosting and attending gatherings of Sir William’s friends and acquaintances. When Sir William died, she was in her early forties; she could abandon the wifely duties that she previously needed to actively perform, such as serving as hostess and splitting her time between Ireland, England, and abroad and focus instead on her own interests.

Although now free to pursue literary interests, Augusta did so in a way which was in accordance with society’s strictures. First, as a conservative Victorian-principled woman at heart, she likely desired to maintain propriety both for herself as well as the sake of her son Robert for whom she was maintaining the estate. Second, she understood that other methods of entering the literary world might prove more difficult; while her status and financial resources may have aided her to an extent, had Lady Gregory attempted her pursuits on her own, she likely would have faced significant challenges, given society’s general adversity to serious consideration of female literary figures.²³

Five years after Sir Gregory’s death, in the summer of 1897 Lady Gregory invited Yeats to spend a couple of weeks at Coole. During this first visit she actively hosted him, cared for ,and attended to him. In his *Memoirs*, Yeats recalls how during that first visit, “the toil of dressing in

²² Written to Robert (information from Ben Kennedy session at the Lady Gregory Autumnal Gathering)

²³ Female writers were often limited to trivial, comical, or lighthearted topics, with the exception perhaps of instructional guides on behavior or subjects pertaining to womanly activities or realms, such as Sarah Ellis’s aforementioned book.

the morning exhausted me, and Lady Gregory began to send me cups of soup when I was called.”() Some may recognize her actions as a manifestation of her active willingness to accept a marginalized role. While menial tasks such as these may not strike others as significant or equitable to his creative efforts, nursing him to strength actually empowered her, as it fostered Yeats’s dependency on her. By repeatedly offering him unadulterated space to write and financial support, she provided crucial resources to his work and solidified his dependence. While this respite meant that Yeats was freed from the pressures of the outside world, this freedom was, importantly, in Lady Gregory’s domain. Not only did she thereby have free access to him but she also enjoyed complete control of the space and his time there. This unmitigated time provided the opportunity for her to become someone who he considered “mother, friend, sister and brother.” Intriguingly, one of the problems with Yeats’s maternal association with Augusta, however, is that “he was like a child [who is] unable to recognize the existence of a parent aside from the parent’s role of service to the child.”²⁴

Nevertheless, these actions demonstrate her acute sociocultural awareness and recognition of opportunity. Moreover, it is likely that Lady Gregory understood the implications of her time spent as nurse and mother during Yeats’s first visit: she developed a quasi-dependent relationship which would serve as the foundation for their joint literary pursuits and her role in the Irish Literary Revival. She recognized the role of hostess as a way to acceptably pursue her literary interests, given her consideration to herself, her social circles, and society at large. By outwardly conforming to traditional female roles of hostess, mother, and patron, she would neither be viewed as a threat nor risk being dismissed as irrelevant and trivial. Instead, this afforded her an opportunity for literary success while still being palatable to men who would be,

²⁴ Stevenson, “Lady Gregory and Yeats,” 76.

in essence, ‘admitting’ her to the realm of literature. The irony lies in how this ‘reduction’ served a means by which she obtained significant power.

Other writers such as John Millington Synge, George Bernard Shaw, and George Russell also frequented Coole. Some may find fault with the notion that Lady Gregory invited men into what could have been her own space; could she could have perhaps better employed the assets of her estate if she maintained it as a sacred space for her literary production devoid of men? In her famous essay, “A Room of One’s Own,” Virginia Woolf delineates her perspective of what the requirements are for female literary creation: a room of one’s own and financial independence.²⁵ While Lady Gregory had the latter, it is intriguing to consider that she could have followed Woolf’s guidelines in order to facilitate her own literary creation free from male presence. While Woolf found private, personal space essential to her own literary pursuits, Lady Gregory instead manipulated her role of hostess in order to gain access into a predominantly male sphere. She developed “passionate attachment to men or vision or genius,” recognizing that any independent efforts might have proven more difficult or even blatantly unsuccessful.²⁶

Breaching this opportunity for sacred space by hosting Yeats at Coole provided the foundation for not only a relationship between Yeats and Lady Gregory but also between Yeats and Coole, both of which proved crucial to the literary pursuits of each as well as the Irish Literary Revival. Lady Gregory ensured her contribution to in the literary creations by developing and deepening her guests’ affinity for Coole. Intrinsicly intertwined with the estate herself, she decreased the likelihood of elimination from the literary narrative by increasing writers’ connection to Coole. Mary Lou Stevenson recognizes the former as a relationship of

²⁵ Virginia Woolf and Morag Shiach, *A Room of One’s Own*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ.Press, 2000).

²⁶ Hill, *Lady Gregory*, 44.

“symbiotic creativity,” importantly identifying their equality by demonstrating how they each operated within the partnership for their own benefit: “she was using Yeats just as Yeats was using her.”²⁷ For example, in regards to Yeats poetry in which he admires Coole and appreciate it for how it has facilitated his work, one may understand it as her marginalization given that she is not explicitly mentioned.

Although others recognize this commonality between Augusta and Coole as structural elements, she chose an administrative structured role, as it afforded her control while maintaining social propriety. Far from marginalizing herself, she willingly activated this passive and traditionally feminine role to gain power. Another way in which Yeats marginalizes Lady Gregory in his poetry is in *Coole Park and Ballylee*: “[g]reat rooms where travelled men and children found / Content or joy” (29-30). While some may understand this verse to be completely devoid of Lady Gregory, she is inherently within the text by mention of the “great rooms.” Yeats develops such an association with her and Coole that she literally becomes the estate and like it, is expected to— by role of mother and hostess— foster others’ (i.e. “men and children”) discovery of “content or joy.” Her structural role, mirroring that of her estate, transferred to her legacy and solidified her image for posterity. Alternatively, by way of her estate, she is mentioned and thereby, inherently implied.

Analyzing an array of Lady Gregory’s work not only affords an appreciation for the way in which her varied literary voices demonstrate an acute awareness of audience but also provide a better understanding of the collaborative relationship between her and Yeats. While many would consider her 1920 collection of folklore— *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*—her most prominent work, one of her earlier folkloric accounts provides revelatory insight into her

²⁷ Stevenson, “Lady Gregory and Yeats,” 64.

literary career. The dedication of Lady Gregory's 1902 *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* offers evidence for her manipulation of traditional female roles to facilitate literary advancement. Its first few emboldened words inform the reader that Lady Gregory has dedicated "the Irish edition to the people of Kiltartan." While this statement is sufficiently informative, Lady Gregory chooses to subsequently elaborate the point in four additional paragraphs. That she structures her dedication as a letter intimates the personal, compassionate, and intimate tone that her address, "My Dear Friends" emphasizes. In addition to indicating her nationalistic instincts and interests, her dedication to the people demonstrates her compassion: "it is of you I was thinking."

Additionally, she demonstrates a sense of humility by noting "I am very glad to have something that is worth offering you." With consideration to providing information regarding the dedication of this work, this statement is superfluous, given the clear, aforementioned dedication. However, such explicit reiteration highlights her compassion and unselfish intentions to serve others. Her emphatic humility further reiterates how "Lady Gregory was preoccupied with service."²⁸

Moreover, the inclusion of a carefully detailed and elaborate dedication in and of itself suggests that she desired to control and wanted to guide readers' interpretation of her work. Painting herself as a servile, thoughtful woman and minimalizing her personal motives, within her work "is evidence of the great accuracy of her instincts in balancing her need for freedom and achievement against her need for emotional cover."²⁹

Repetition in her dedication suggests that she strongly desired to make her considerate instinct apparent to her audience, as this trait would have been understood by her audience as acceptable and standard female qualities. She emphasizes her thoughtful creation of the work,

²⁸ Stevenson, 71.

²⁹ Mary Lou Kohfeldt Stevenson, *Lady Gregory: The Woman behind the Irish Renaissance*, 1st ed (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 68.

noting that “I left out a good deal I thought you would not care about for one reason or another, but I put in nothing of my own that could be helped, only a sentence or so now and again to link the different parts together.” Similar to her opening sentiment, this phrase indicates how her first priority was consideration of her readers, while simultaneously minimizing the importance of her writing and thoughts by noting that she only included what was necessary to facilitate easiest comprehension of the material. While this comment seemingly belittles her writing, her specific reference to this exclusion indicates her manipulation: outwardly downplaying her writing actually implicitly reveals her ability to carefully craft unbiased material that speaks for itself.

In a similarly subtle and intentional manner, Lady Gregory incorporates a quip in her dedication about the lack of credit given to “Irish things,” claiming that “if there was more respect for Irish things among the learned men...this work would not have been left to a woman of the house.” This statement evidences her exceptional insight, as it not only reveals her feelings regarding the nationalist cause but is also perhaps the most striking example of her deft use of the traditional perception of women. Only toward the end of her dedication, having thus far satisfactorily appeased her audience, does she now feel comfortable including this comment. However, the way in which she makes this remark demonstrates her calculating handling of her self-projected status as a “woman of the house” to inspire nationalist action. Only by belittling herself and degrading her own status as such is she able to acceptably make this remark and be included in in “what has been traditionally a male role of nation building” (keeping).

By catering to common perception of traditional womanly nature, Lady Gregory carefully facilitated her entrance into the literary realm and controlled the reception of her work. This dedication can be understood as a product of her recognition that she must navigate her entrance into the literary world with care to avoid rejection. While the way in which Lady Gregory

strategically controlled her readers' reception demonstrates a skillful tactic, perhaps the best result of Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* was the recognition she gained from her close friend and fellow writer, Yeats. This work facilitated her literary collaboration with Yeats who "was slow in coming to believe I had any gift for writing and he would not encourage me to it, thinking he made better use of my folk-lore gatherings than I could do. It was only when I read him one day in London my chapter the "Death of Cuchulain" that he came to look at me as a fellow writer.³⁰ This journal entry provides valuable insight, revealing her acute awareness of the state of their working relationship prior his reading of *Cuchulain*. Describing him as "slow in coming" might indicate that she had been persistently attempting to demonstrate her capabilities. That he "would not encourage me to it" indicates not only that Yeats desired all effort to be directed towards his work—in which he could "make better use" of her gatherings— but perhaps also indicates how he felt threatened or insecure in addition to believing that she was better supplementary and assistant role. Only after recognizing her literary capabilities with *Cuchulain* did Yeats consider her worthy of— and therefore desire— collaboration.³¹

Unlike how modern contractual partnerships carefully delineate what work will be undertaken by each person, the partnership between Lady Gregory and Yeats left no known documented evidence of what aspects of their collaborative efforts were attributed to each. James Pethica notes how "though both writers frequently acknowledged the collaborative nature of their partnership, little attempt has been made to clarify either the degree or dynamics of their work together" (3) This accreditation quagmire proves problematic especially with *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. This extremely successful and patriotic play, rich in nationalistic themes and dialect

³⁰ James Pethica, "'A Young Man's Ghost': Lady Gregory and J. M. Synge," *Irish University Review* 34, no. 1 (2004): 1–20. Originally from *Seventy Years*

³¹ Is there any evidence to suggest that he encouraged her own works? Or did he simply desire to use her efforts?

was co-authored during Yeats's 1901 summer visit. Yeats pioneered the project, having received the idea for *Kathleen* in a dream; he "initially sought her help specifically to 'create peasant dialogue,'" given her familiarity with the Irish language and dialect.³² As a result of his increased confidence in Lady Gregory's literary abilities, he invited her to contribute more than dialogue: "the manuscript draft makes clear that she worked independently in developing the opening section of the play."³³ Although the original manuscripts exist, they do not provide much help: "given the nature of their collaboration, as well as the state of the surviving manuscripts... it seems essentially impossible to assign a particular passage to one or the other."³⁴

Despite the manuscript's sparse definitive assistance in determining what can be attributed to each collaborator, Lady Gregory's notations not only act as soft claims of authorship but also reveal her perceptive mindfulness regarding the collaboration/partnership. James Pethica notes that "[t]he most immediately revealing features in the draft are Lady Gregory's two pencil annotations: 'All this mine alone,' at the end of the first section of ten pages, and 'This with W.B.Y.' at the head of the second section."³⁵ While Pethica understands these annotations to be the product of Lady Gregory's increased confidence and therefore interprets them as having a "satisfied tone," they also have a defensive, protective quality. While her invitation to collaborate with Yeats likely gave Gregory a reassuring confidence boost, she probably recognized the dangers of her efforts, becoming lost among his and thereby attributed to him alone. While today these insertions are not recognized as an official judgement of

³² Pethica, "'A Young Man's Ghost,'" 13.

³³ Pethica, 9.

³⁴ Pethica, "'A Young Man's Ghost.'" Quote from Richard Finneran

³⁵ Pethica, 8.

authorship, they likely provided her with peace of mind, knowing that her work had been documented as her own.

Their origin was likely rooted in both Lady Gregory's simultaneous satisfaction with her achievements and her hesitation and heightened suspicion regarding what recognition that would be afforded her. While I do not suggest her distrust of Yeats, she would have had good reason for some unease given Yeats's vacillation in the degree to which he recognized her share of *Cathleen*'s creation. While he "privately acknowledged Lady Gregory's share in the work on a number of occasions," more public occasions seem to be times during which he maintained sole authorship. When in America, Yeats addressed an angry crowd, attempting to appease/calm them by informing them that "the author of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* addresses you."³⁶ Perhaps Yeats acknowledged Lady Gregory either only when required or to the extent that was necessary to satisfy propriety and avoid dishonesty.

Intriguingly, Lady Gregory's reaction was just as unpredictable as the degree of varying credit. Most often, she seemed content to allow Yeats to bask in the play's success and take ownership of it. Elizabeth Coxhead theorizes that she felt that "she could not take from [Yeats] any part of what had proved, after all, his one real popular success."³⁷ Ideas of propriety may also have influenced her: this inclination likely stemmed in part from Lady Gregory's internalized understanding that her place as a woman was not in the spotlight but in the background, just as she noted regarding her grandchildren.³⁸

³⁶ Pethica, "'A Young Man's Ghost'."

³⁷ Pethica, 15. This sentiment recognizes either her compassionate tendencies or her certainty in her abilities; while *Cathleen* may be Yeats's only success, she was confident that she would have other opportunities.

³⁸ Others have theorized that the fiercely nationalistic theme of the play was intended as a wooing tactic for Yeats's long-term love, Maud Gonne and therefore Lady Gregory did not desire to be entangled in his romantic efforts.

Privately, however, she expressed irritation: in her unpublished journals (#23), she notes that Yeats was “rather hard on me not giving my name with Kathleen ni Houlihan that I wrote but all of.” While perhaps this entry was added during a momentary flare of irritation, the possibility that this reflected her feelings generally regarding accreditation demonstrates her ability to privately express her anger while openly appearing content with little—if any—credit. The way in which each reacted to the success of the play as well as handled the question of its authorship offers insight into the nature of their relationship. Given the age gap between the two, the parallel of parent and child is not hard to imagine. Yeats seemed to react to *Cathleen* in the same way a young, independent adult might after having been aided by a parent: in less public settings, willingly acknowledging the help he received and at others demonstrating independence. And like a parent, Lady Gregory is content to allow him to take sole credit except when he presses too far.

In addition to analyzing the pair’s reactions to *Kathleen*’s success as well as questions of its authorship, analysis of the play itself provides further insight into their professional relationship as well as evidence of the way in which she strategically manipulated and exercised careful control of her literary career. Also, the thematic and linguistic qualities of the work provide suggestions as to which components can be attributed to Lady Gregory and Yeats respectively. Admittedly, Yeats required help with the country dialect; therefore the natural vernacular can be likely attributed solely to Lady Gregory. The transformative theme which is so central to the essence of the play itself is something which Mary Lou Stevenson also attributes to Lady Gregory, claiming that the “miraculous transformation of someone humble and weak into someone noble and powerful was an archetypal pattern Lady Gregory loved.”³⁹ Moreover, the

³⁹ Stevenson, *Lady Gregory*, 74.

frequency with which Lady Gregory incorporated this pattern into her work— compared to the lack of it in Yeats’s own—suggests that this element can additionally be attributed to her.⁴⁰ That transformation factors so prominently in Lady Gregory’s works indicates its importance to her; was this one of her favorite inspirational themes or was she perhaps writing what she knew, as Mark Twain and many other writers advised? With this consideration, the question arises of whether the theme’s incorporation was purposeful: was such repetition conscious or unconscious? If unconscious, such repetition suggests that her transformation was naturally reflected in her writing whereas its conscious incorporation indicates multiple possible purposes. Given her inclination for progress and change regarding Irish culture, she likely promoted this idea to foster such a development. However, on a more personal note, perhaps she wished people to understand and accept the idea of transformation, so they might recognize her own transformation from the socialite wife of a wealthy Irish landowner and politician to authoress and playwright who played a prominent role in the creation of an Irish Cultural Revival.

This transformation has influenced literary scholars’ understanding of the character Cathleen as well as the play in its entirety. Mary Lou Stevenson recognizes similarity between Lady Gregory and Cathleen herself: “and like Cathleen’s transformation, Lady Gregory’s career falls into the pattern of someone obscure and powerless who suddenly turns out to be famous and powerful. When half her life was over, Lady Gregory suddenly discovered her creativity, became a leader in the Irish Revolution, founded the Abbey Theatre with Yeats and kept it going through years of stress and battle.⁴¹ With Cathleen as a recognizable parallel for Lady Gregory, Michael can be offered as Yeats’s corresponding character. While it is unknown as to whether Lady Gregory and Yeats purposefully inserted or even recognized this parallel, consideration of Lady

⁴⁰ Leda and the swan—idea of temporary transformation

⁴¹ Stevenson, *Lady Gregory*, 74.

Gregory in relation to Cathleen and Yeats in relation to Michael offers further opportunity for understanding the dynamic of their collaboration and more broadly, their relationship.

If Lady Gregory carefully orchestrated this similarity, one might be inclined to think of Cathleen as Lady Gregory's idea. However, the idea of Cathleen's character came to Yeats in a visionary dream experience. Its origin might more broadly be attributed to the tradition: "early symbols of Ireland were women" who, moreover, were "grieving over the loss of freedom."⁴² Her character is complicated; although she is a powerful figure, Cathleen can also be understood negatively as "disturber of peaceful domestic life" who "calls the men of Ireland to war."⁴³ However, her impact on Michael is one which is strikingly similar to reality. As the Young Man, Yeats "falls under the spell of her words" and "follows her as if in a trance."⁴⁴ Like Yeats, he is aloof and poetic and "he doesn't hear a word..." In his distracted state, he only responds to Cathleen, a "mother-figure who personifies Ireland," who offers him direction and opportunity.⁴⁵ By offering financial support in addition to time at Coole Park each summer, Lady Gregory offered Yeats actual, similar opportunity.

Intriguingly, the play thematically treats interiority and exteriority, offering an intriguing compounding layer to the transformative theme and paralleling the experience of the professional pair at Coole Park. By quitting his house and fleeing to join the French, Michael trespasses the boundary of domesticity into the outer world, fueled by the promise and beckoned by the call of Cathleen. The way in which he crosses this threshold evokes the way in which Lady Gregory offered opportunity: invitation to Coole park. However, instead of enticing him outside of the

⁴² John A. Byars, "The Brief and Troublesome Reign of Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902-1907)," *South Atlantic Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (1975): 40, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3199186>.

⁴³ Byars, 42.

⁴⁴ Byars, 41.

⁴⁵ Joseph Chadwick, "Family Romance as National Allegory in Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan and The Dreaming of the Bones," *Twentieth Century Literature* 32, no. 2 (1986): 156, <https://doi.org/10.2307/441380>.

domestic sphere, she invites him within; however, both respectively offer the same liberating opportunities.

Mary Lou Stevenson recognizes Cathleen as a liminal character, as she “stands at the threshold of in and out, life and death, and choice and fate.”⁴⁶ Both characters dance between interior and exterior space, which highlights both their juxtaposition and similarity. Much like their real-life counterparts, the two are complementary and the symbiosis that exists between Michael and Cathleen is perhaps the most striking/realistic reflection of Lady Gregory and Yeats’s relationship. This balance extended beyond their literary capabilities into their working relationship more broadly, as it was something Lady Gregory recognized was essential and employed to her advantage: “she unconsciously realized she needed a man to whom she was superior in order to maintain her freedom of action and to whom she was inferior in order for him to be of any benefit to her.”⁴⁷

Ultimately, the ways Lady Gregory exercised agency by strategically manipulating these social strictures and gender constructs which prevailed during her lifetime demonstrates her awareness of how to best achieve her literary goals. The way in which I have analyzed these aspects of her life forces a reconsideration of quite a number of female writers and the under-appreciated control of their work, like Edith Wharton who will be the subject of the subsequent chapter.

⁴⁶ Stevenson, *Lady Gregory*, 141.

⁴⁷ Mary Lou Stevenson, “Lady Gregory and Yeats: Symbiotic Creativity,” *Journal of the Rutgers University Libraries* 40 (January 1, 1978): 76.

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