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**The representation of Irish nationalism and the War of
Independence in major Irish dramatic works in the first
half of the 20th century**

(diplomová práce)

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Prehlásenie

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Vlastnoručný podpis

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Introduction

Literature has always been one of the most powerful and important sources used to spread the ideas of independence and freedom, ideas that afflicted every oppressed nation. Political activities and events connected with the fighting for the freedom of the whole nation had major impact on every form of literary works. The War of Independence and its public figures, political movements and themes of patriotism and national pride, which are tensely connected to the mentioned war itself, can be traced in every form and genre of Irish literature in the first half of the twentieth century. The war and actual fighting against the English army was not the only way to express the mutual strength and involvement of the Irish people. Public figures that supported the war and the trying of the Irish to proclaim their longed-for freedom and independence realized the power and impact of literature on the people. Literature could be considered one of the means that was supposed to stir the feelings of the people, raise their desire for the independence of their country and awake their national pride and patriotic love that had been suppressed for many years by the sovereignty of the English rule.

The War of Independence and the themes of patriotism, national pride and cohesiveness became important topics in all genres of Irish literature. At first, the authors tried to incite the feeling of integrity and desire for freedom in readers and make them involved in the actions that were to follow. People felt motivated by their works and wanted to help to fight for their freedom not only mentally, but physically as well. As every war, the War of Independence was strongly influencing the lives of every single Irish citizen. They struggled to survive the escalating tension and violence that was present in their everyday lives and had strong impact on every citizen in the country. People were shocked by the events that happened, by the killing of innocent people and it left profound scars on their psyche. War ceased to represent something unknown and it became quotidian experience for them. It concerned everyone and the authors felt obliged to share their experience and their feelings about the war in their works.

Authors, of course, chose different ways how to express their feelings about the internal situation in their home country. The majority of them supported the idea of fighting for the independence, however, there were also authors who had

mixed feelings about the whole situation or even satirized the whole situation. They wanted to change the view of the war and underline its absurd meaning in an exaggerated form. They felt that people needed to share some laughs despite the tragedies they had to face in their real lives.

As I have previously mentioned, the topic of nationalism, patriotic love and the War of Independence itself, influenced all genres of Irish literature. I have chosen the dramatic works of the Irish authors that were published in the first half of the twentieth century. Drama has a special place in the history of the Irish literature because many of the authors who wrote prominent dramatic works were strongly connected with the independence movement. In this thesis, I would like to depict the representation of the nationalism and the War of Independence in both Irish comedies and tragedies. I would also like to provide a brief description of the influence of these topics on dramatic works in comparison with poetry and prose written in the same period, sometimes even by the same authors. My target is to express the different ways the authors used in their dramatic works in order to formulate their personal attitude toward the actions depicted in the works.

There are many Irish authors that wrote plays with national motifs, so I picked the most prominent ones, authors whose works provoked the most interest and became most popular or even controversial. I will concentrate on the Abbey Theatre, its dominance in Irish drama and the plays performed in this national theatre of Ireland. I would like to underline the force of these plays and their authors, their targets, their targeted audience and the reasons behind their popularity and success, or unpopularity and controversy.

In the first few chapters, I want to make a brief description of the roots of Irish nationalism and the patriotic love that had been an important factor for the Irish for many years before the outbreak of the War of Independence, then the war itself. I provide a depiction of the influence of these events on the literature in Ireland, prose and poetry involved and make a comparison of these genres with the dramatic genre. In the following chapter, I concentrate on the history of the Abbey Theatre from its foundation until it burned down in 1951, its most famous plays, authors and controversies. I would like to depict both the success of the theatre as well as its negative years when the theatre struggled to survive. In the

next chapter I put emphasis on the main authors of the most important dramatic works, such as Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey and a few others. My target is to provide information on their playwriting careers as well as on their attitude toward the events of this period and then I concentrate on the major dramatic works with national motifs written by each of these authors. I picked the most interesting and important plays, background information that led to their creation, the reception of the play by the audience, their criticism or praise, sources of inspiration for the authors as well as its influence on the following plays. With the plays I chose, my main aim is to illustrate how the concept of nationalism changed in different phases of the Irish history.

In order to interpret the prominence of the national motives in the mentioned dramatic works, I have used mainly anthologies and the texts of the plays from which I quoted the parts with recurrent national topics and the authors' attitudes to them. I have also used books concerned with literary criticism as a secondary literature to support my arguments and my personal views of the dramatic works and their significance.

1. IRISH NATIONALISM

1.1 Significance of Irish nationalism

Ireland is one of the countries that did not have the opportunity to claim itself independent and was oppressed by the English reign for many centuries. The Irish nation has always been proud of its national values, folklore and especially of their diversity from the English occupants. Irish nationalism has been one of the most important features that were prominent to the Irish nation throughout its whole history. It is important to underline the significance of Irish nationalism in comparison with other forms of nationalism and its diverse forms that developed throughout the centuries of Irish history in order to explain why it had such a great impact on the national literature, mainly in the 20th century.

Irish nationalism refers to any manifestation whatsoever of national sentiment, culturally; demanding autonomy from Britain, where it be complete independence or less; the Irish nationalists support any means to promote and bolster all aspects of Irish heritage, from language, culture to political movements. The roots of Irish nationalism and the feelings of patriotic love, national pride and feelings of national cohesiveness and integrity that are all involved in the meaning of the nationalism can be traced to the beginnings of the Irish history itself. Irish nationalism is tightly interconnected with the individual episodes of Irish history and its accompanying events and changes. It has evolved throughout the years of the existence of the Irish nation and it became so powerful and influential in the 20th century that it actually led to the independence and establishment of the Irish Republic:

Irish nationalism exhibits a composite of the Irish historical experience. The rhetoric of the Irish demand for sovereignty and its liberal democratic ethos represent the English impact on Ireland, conveyed through Old English Catholic and Anglo-Irish Protestant Patriotisms, and the values of British radicalism and Whiggery that Daniel O'Connell injected into the Irish freedom movement. Modern Irish nationalism found its structure and popular force in the agitation for Catholic emancipation when a religious identity became a national self-consciousness. In post-Famine Ireland, the struggle to transfer the

land of Ireland to its people gave Irish nationalism the passion and cohesiveness provided by the Catholic issue earlier in the century. Emigration added American egalitarianism to Irish nationalism, strengthening its democratic and republican dimensions. Journalism and literary genius, influenced by European romanticism, and Gaelic scholarship contributed a cultural ideology to Irish nationalism. In no country have literature and folklore played more significant roles in shaping, reflecting and explaining the desire for national independence in both cultural and political forms. ¹

1.2 Roots of Irish nationalism

The beginnings of Irish nationalism can be traced as far back as the 12th century, when the Irish were conquered by the English for the first time and became subjects to the English rule. The Irish in those times lived in small lordships and had no intention of creating an independent, centralized state. The problems became acute again in the 16th century when Ireland was conquered by the Tudor dynasty and they brought Protestantism as a main religion to Ireland. However, the Irish were Catholic and the religious difference was to become the most serious problem and the major cause of the conflict among the two nations. The English strictly preferred their religion and decided to fight against the Irish even by confiscating their land and settling the colony of Protestant Scottish and English settlers in Ireland during the 17th century.

The first significant movement, well known as the Irish Rebellion, took place in 1641. The Confederate Catholic of Ireland proclaimed that Ireland is an independent state that has the same monarch as England, but they demanded the autonomy, freedom of religion and banning the confiscation of land. This attempt was not successful and the Catholics were strictly punished. A similar movement emerged in the end of the 17th century when the Jacobites came up with their demands. They wanted the majority of the Irish Parliament Members to be Catholic, restoration of the land and the nationality of the future Deputy Lord of

¹ Thomas E. Hachey, Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Perspectives on Irish nationalism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989) 1.

Ireland to be Irish. Again, their attempts were not successful and they were defeated by the Protestant king William of Orange. This coupling of religious and ethnic identity, principally Roman Catholic and Gaelic, as well as a consciousness of dispossession and defeat at the hands of British and Protestant forces came to be seen as enduring features of Irish nationalism.

However, these rebellions were powered only by small groups of lords and clerics and did not represent the whole population of the Irish citizens, but mainly personal demands connected with the concern of gaining more power and possessions. Despite this knowledge, the movements and first rebellions of 16th and 17th centuries can be viewed as the beginnings of Irish nationalism as it awoke the feeling of national pride and feeling of being suppressed by the English reign. More prominent phases of Irish nationalism were to follow.

1.3 Irish nationalism in the 18th and 19th centuries

The attempt of the Irish Catholic patriots to regain their religious freedom and an independent Parliament that would be made up mostly by Irishmen who would defend the rights of their co-citizens was still pursued in the 18th century. Irish politicians, many of whom were descendants from previous colonial families that came to Ireland only two centuries before, inspired by the American War for Independence, established a political party called the Irish Patriot Party. Its main leaders were Henry Flood and Henry Grattan. Being influenced by the American colonists, the Irish refused to buy British products and pay taxes to support the British parliament. They demanded self-government, although they never asked for full sovereignty. These actions, supported by the activities of a large military group known as Irish Volunteers, resulted in success, as the Irish obtained legislative independence. The only link between the British monarchy and Ireland remained the Crown, represented by the viceroy.

Similar to Grattan's efforts were the efforts of the Society of the United Irishmen, a political group led by Theobald Wolfe Tone. The establishment of this society can be viewed as the laying the basics for later building and developing of the modern Irish nationalism with democratic aspects, as it proclaimed the idea of establishing an independent Irish Republic. One of the most important demands of this group was the end of the discrimination against Catholics in Ireland. These

activities were strongly supported and financed by France and it helped to develop a faith in the Irish people that they could finally defeat their oppressors. Revolutionary ideas resulted in an uprising known as the Irish Rebellion in 1798. This rebellion was the most serious outbreak of violence in Irish history. During a period of three months, thousands of people were killed. The casualties were said to be from 20,000 to even 50,000 Irishmen. All uprisings were suppressed by the English army and repressions were cruel.

The aftermath of the rebellion led into the Act of Union, unifying Ireland with Great Britain into one kingdom, so the Irish MP's were moved to London. These events, again, had a great impact on the rise of Irish nationalism as they resulted in creating Irish Republicanism, an organization with only one target-to establish an independent Irish Republic and to pursue this target by overcoming all obstacles which would come into its way. In opposition to this violent platform of Irish nationalism, Daniel O'Connell became a leader with a moderate platform, whose target was to search for more decent and non-violent means to seek some concessions from the British government. Despite the previous leaders of the revolutionary movements, O'Connell was Catholic and his main demand was Catholic Emancipation, providing full rights for Catholic believers. O'Connell refused the tradition of Protestant Nationalists and traditions of revolutionary groups that based their nationalism on the pagan and even mythical symbols taken from ancient Irish history and put the emphasis on the strengthening of the association of Irish identity with Catholicism. His other demand was self-government for the Irish nation, however, he had no success with this demand and his best result was restoring full rights for Catholics.

The 19th century was one of the most important periods of Irish nationalism. Irish nationalism became the major ideology in Ireland and more and more revolutionary movements and groups were formed. This period also saw the emergence of the militant republican movement called the Irish Republican Brotherhood that would have a major role in the fighting for the Irish independence in the following years. After the years of the Great Famine that afflicted the Irish nation in the middle of the century and cost about one million lives, the dissatisfaction, bitterness and anger grew among the Irishmen. They blamed the British government that it was not able to take care of its citizens. The

Irish land owners had to struggle with the famine a few more times in the following years. There were still many tenants who argued that their land was restricted by the English Protestants in the past and they had no right to obtain any more land. A severe depression struck the country in 1879, leading to a fall in prices and profits, but to a rising of rents and harsh punishments for tenants who were not able to pay their rents on time. Moreover, the land owners and tenants were afflicted by the harsh winter, as well. They were facing the famine again and so the land and the rights connected with land owning became a serious and prominent subject matter again. The tenants refused to pay their rents and they drew the attention of the Irish Republican Brotherhood that saw this protest as a very useful protest against the British rule. They were trying to make these tenants intervene in their fight for self-government. The British Army was sent to pacify the Irish and the British government had to withdraw by supporting the sale of the land to the tenants and protecting their rights. The Irish established a new political party, the Home Rule League, led by Charles Stewart Parnell.

Parnell and his party demanded the passing of Home Rule, meaning that an Irish Parliament would be created within the British Parliament. This demand was very distinct from the demands made by Daniel O'Connell, who required an entirely independent Irish state, formed even by using violence if necessary and being joined with Britain only in the person of the monarch, but nothing else. In the 19th century, two Home Rule bills were addressed to the British government but none of them passed both Houses.

Along with the political movements and efforts for self-government and autonomy of Ireland, another movement arose, a cultural one. The cultural movement had many supporters as its main purpose was to concentrate on and highlight the difference among the Irish and the English. The Irish put emphasis on their Gaelic historical tradition and their diversity in language, culture, folklore and customs. They supported all means of furthering the distinctive Irish identity. Many of the later political activists and important literary figures were linked with the intellectual movement later called the Celtic Revival that was formed in the end of the 19th century and pursued the underlining of the importance of perseverance of their individual native identity and culture, as well as the effort to conserve their native Gaelic language.

1.4 Irish nationalism in the first half of the 20th century

The question of the land and the rights of the tenants was important at the beginning of the 20th century as well. The Wyndham Land Act in 1903 finally abolished landlordism and brought the right for the tenants to buy the land and also obtain financial support provided by the government. Many rural laborers could finally purchase their own house with their own land and these laws and acts resulted in a distinct change of the rural Ireland which was inhabited by the majority of the Irish people. It could be viewed as minor social revolution. Having given the people the basic right to have their own homes and land, the Irish started to concentrate on the subject of self-government and the creation of an independent state that would belong to the Irish people and would be ruled by them. James Connolly founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party and was helping to protect the rights of the working class oppressed by the owners of big companies and factories where they worked.

Home Rule did not fall into oblivion. The third Home Rule bill was presented in Westminster in 1912 and it was finally passed in 1914. It took a lot of power for the Nationalists and the Irish Parliamentary Party, the political party that replaced the Home Rule League, to make the government agree with passing of the bill and putting Home Rule into validity. They were challenged not only by the British Conservatives, but also by the Irish Unionists, a political group that supported the Union with Britain and was mostly Protestant, which led into their fearing of the rule of the predominantly Catholic Irish Parliamentary Party. The tension and problems between these two factions were so strong that it seemed that it would lead to the outbreak of civil war in Ireland. After the long negotiating and sacrifices on both sides, the Home Rule bill passed. It was, however, suspended until the end of World War I, which had just begun and many revolutionaries, mainly the radical ones, did not believe that Ireland could ever become self-governed unless violent force was used.

With the beginning of World War I on the threshold, the Irish had to express their attitude toward the war itself and toward fighting under the flag of the United Kingdom of the Great Britain and Ireland. The majority of the Irish, represented by John Redmond, supported joining the British Army and fighting

together with the British soldiers. They thought that by expressing the loyalty to Britain, they would ensure the passing of the Home Rule bill and enlarge their rights in the future. In opposition stood the Irish Republican Brotherhood, later rejoined by James Connolly and his socialists, who entirely refused to neither help the British army nor join in any fighting in World War I. Connolly became one of the leaders of the broad political movement that led to the Easter Uprising in 1916 and proclamation of the independent Irish Republic. The rising was suppressed very quickly and the leaders of the revolution were executed according to the orders by General Maxwell. However, this publically well-known case of courage and patriotic love for the Irish nation that caused the death of the leaders, who were later seen as national heroes in the whole of Ireland, attracted the attention of the whole nation and focused their attention to national matters.

The Easter Uprising was seen by the British as treason in the time of war and they refused to give any new rights to the Irish. The attempts to pass the Home Rule bills again in 1916 and 1917 were both unsuccessful. The Irish became suspicious rebels and the British decided to rule them in a stricter way. The policy pursued by the British government, its attitude toward the Irish political parties and its actions such as arresting of the members of the Sinn Fein political party on false premises led to the high wave of dissatisfaction among the Irish people and their bigger and bigger support of Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein even won the general election in 1918, gaining the overwhelming majority of the votes. Its MPs refused to sit in Westminster with the British members of the Parliament and set up their own Parliament, declaring that the independent Irish Republic was officially in existence. In 1919, actual war broke out among one faction of the Irish Republican Army, previously called the Irish Volunteers, who backed the activities of James Connolly and Easter Uprising leaders, and the British security. These actions were marked as the beginning of the Irish War of Independence. Soon after the outbreak of this war, in Northern Ireland, the supporters of the Unionists attacked the Catholics in reprisal for the actions led by IRA. This conflict ran for another two years.

Considering the situation and the conflicts as very serious, the British government had to come up with a solution. The British attempted to solve the crisis by passing the fourth Home Rule bill, which divided Ireland into two parts,

the southern one, ruled by Nationalists and the northern one, ruled by the Unionists. The bill passed easily as the major Irish political party, Sinn Fein, was absent from the Parliament and the Unionists, unsurprisingly supported this offer. The Nationalists did not agree with the offer as they demanded an independent Irish Republic on the whole territory of Ireland. The conflict among both sides was concluded by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 that led to the creation of an independent Irish state belonging to the British Commonwealth, similar to Canada or Australia, but with its own government and with no British troops on their territory. The situation in Northern Ireland was opposite, the tension was rising and conflicts did not stop.

The Treaty was ratified by the Irish Parliament, but part of the Irish Republicans felt that this Treaty was a form of betrayal to the Irish Republic and they refused to swear loyalty to the British king. They were entirely refusing the concept of monarchy and wanted Ireland to become a republic. The British insisted on the ratification of the Treaty in the way it was written and admitted no possible changes in the document. The opposition of two groups, anti-Treaty IRA supporters and pro-Treaty supporters, led to the Irish Civil War in 1923, a war that cost more human lives than the War of Independence and that ended by the victory of the pro-Treaty supporters and by the withdrawal of the IRA from Northern Ireland, where they had been active in recent years.

The first general election in Ireland took place in 1923 and the government took up conservative social and economic policies. The New Free State had a very nationalistic character as the Irish language became compulsory in all schools and the Catholic religion had a major impact on the everyday lives of the citizens. For example, divorces and abortion were completely banned. Two new and most important political parties were born, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Fianna Fáil was replacing the more violent Sinn Fein, which refused to take any part in the new Irish Government. The state had many internal problems, fighting among the IRA and supporters of the New State continued and the state also had to face a profound financial crisis caused by complete economic stagnation.

The Free State was abolished in 1937 under the influence of the new constitution, which stated that the state would be called simply Ireland or Éire in

Irish. Ireland did not join any fighting activities during World War II and stayed neutral. After World War II, in 1948, Ireland withheld from the Commonwealth and refused to be loyal to the British monarch, which resulted in the creation of the Irish Republic. Northern Ireland was given the opportunity to decide on their own whether to join the Irish Republic or remain under the rule of the British monarch, which was the option that Northern Ireland chose, and which influenced the following years of the Irish history as the conflicts in Northern Ireland did not cease and are present until today, though in a lesser degree.

As it can be deduced from this brief depiction of the historical and political situation in Ireland, nationalism had a prominent role in the evolution of the Irish Republic and the patriotic love and desire for independence proved to be a vital factor for the Irish in order to pursue their national demands. Nationalism has always been closely and tightly connected with the public situation in Ireland and bred by the effort of the politicians and public figures to achieve their targets. As the political situation in Ireland changed and developed, having to embrace new aspects of the changing political climate in the whole kingdom, new ideas, new representatives and enemies, so did nationalism change. Their nationalism rose and grew up stronger when the Irish felt endangered, when they felt that they were losing their own identity and needed to stand up and protect their nationality. Finally, it grew so strong and powerful that it helped to establish many revolutionary movements that were able to win their long fight for freedom and independence that they had longed for so long and to which they sacrificed so many lives and efforts.

2. THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

All activities of Irish nationalists, who dreamt about obtaining the freedom from the Great Britain, climaxed in the War of Independence. This last act brought the Irish only one step away from their independence, and it naturally had a great impact on Irish literature. The authors expressed their attitudes toward the war in many different ways; the war became a symbol of the Irish struggle for freedom and the turning point in the process of Irish history. The War of Independence and its events and figures were depicted in many novels. They

became symbols and main motifs in the famous poems, and they also had a lot of influence on the dramatic works written in this period. For the better acknowledgment and illustration of the significance of the war, here is the brief description of the most important persons involved in this war as well as of the main events that shaped the development of this vitally important war for the Irish nation.

2.1 The War begins

The beginning of the War of Independence can be connected with the murder of two Irish Royal officers in small town called Soloheadbeg:

On 21 January 1919, with the killing of two policemen at Soloheadbeg in County Tipperary, the war for Irish independence began. Up until that point there was no policy on how a war should be prosecuted. The *raison d'être* for the Volunteers, existence was that they should exist as a threat. The action at Soloheadbeg changed all that. By the end of 1919 sixteen policemen and soldiers had died.²

These men acted on their own initiative, and the Irish officials had not yet accepted the idea of the war. However, the violence started to spread relatively quickly and the official representatives had to come up with the tactics that would be used in the war. The Volunteers continued to attack the prominent figures of the British administration and their first official victim was Resident Magistrate John Milling that had previously sent some of the Volunteers to the prison because of the unlawful assembly. These armed raids forced the Irish officials to solve the situation as quickly as possible. Some of them refused the open violence, and they came up with an idea that the civil disobedience would be a better way to express their dissatisfaction with the British rule, but the others proclaimed that civil disobedience never helped them enough and they used the example of the unsuccessful Easter Rising in 1916. Despite the idea that only armed struggle could help the Irish to achieve their target, the majority of the people were refusing the violence and so in the first year of the war, there was a relatively small number of killed persons.

² Joseph McKenna, *Guerilla Warfare in the Irish War for Independence 1919-1921*(Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011)125.

The main target of the IRA and the Volunteers remained the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) officers who were parts of Irish police but in very tight union with the British. It can be said that the RIC officers were giving out the majority of the information about the situation in the country to the British; therefore, they were naturally viewed as the traitors of the Irish nation and the principal ally of the hated British. This hatred resulted in the killing of 11 RIC officers in 1919.

Besides the attacks on the police officers, the Irish found another way of protesting in the strikes. They soon refused to handle any war material. The railways refused to carry the British goods and the drivers refused to carry the British troops. The situation was most serious in the county of Limerick and the strikes had massive support from the Irish citizens. These actions had lasted for more than a year and brought many problems to the British.

The west and south of the country were profoundly involved in these actions, and Irish officials had the full support of the Irish people. However, the situation in the northeast of the country was not so easy to predict:

Great swathes of the northeast were populated by the Loyalists-the same people who had raised an army to defend their link with Britain. While it is true that there was activity in South Down and South Armagh, the war waged in other provinces of the country could not by and large be waged here. The Roman Catholic population, particularly those living in Belfast enclaves surrounded by Protestant communities, were vulnerable to extreme reprisals. Nevertheless the abandonment of the isolated RIC stations in late 1919 saw their destruction, as at Mountfield, County Tyrone, where the local Volunteers literally demolished it so that it could not be used again.³

Even these small efforts in order to help the other inhabitants of Ireland fighting in other parts of the country caused problems to the RIC, and they had to abandon their stations and move to a larger town where they felt more protected.

³ McKenna, 131.

2.2 1920: Escalation of the War

As the RIC officers left the country and fled to the cities, big parts of the country in the west and south fell under the control of the IRA. This was their first success that changed the development of the war. The British administration in Ireland completely collapsed. The RIC officers were demoralized and many of them simply resigned. As the number of RIC officers was getting smaller and the country needed to be controlled, the Irish Republican Police was founded with the blessing of Irish officials.

More importantly, Irish citizens were encouraged by Irish politicians to raise funds for the young republic and its army. The Irish were thrilled by this offer and they massively helped to collect the taxes for the republic. It is important to mention that the young Irish Republic had a big support from Irish citizens living abroad, namely from the Irish Americans, who raised about 5 millions of dollars and sent them to Ireland in order to help with financing of the new Republic. The British, seeing that they are losing the control over the situation, had to reply to the conflicts and they cruelly punished the Irish by killing 77 persons in total, women and children among them, arrested all suspicious people and made raids in the houses of the Irish. These activities, however, only led into more violence and an escalation of the war.

One of the most important leaders of the independence movement was Michael Collins, who organized “the Squad,” a group of men whose only aim was to kill all British spies and police officers that helped the British. This group was supported by the general Irish population that gave the “Squad” the precious information about people who worked for the British. The British government reacted by sending the military forces to Ireland whose aim was to restore the order in Ireland. The situation did not improve as the British police officers and soldiers had very ill discipline and low moral credit, which resulted in mistreatment of the Irish and the rise of the disbelief in the British government. As there were too many warrants on the British soldiers, which of course, could not be tolerated neither liked by the British officers, the British issued the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act that suspended all coroners' courts, financial help for Irish local government and gave a free way to the death penalties without

trials. This Act that had been passed as a means to suppress the Irish rebellion only led to the increasing of the violence:

The Restoration of Order in Ireland Act brought about widespread acts of brutality on the part of the Crown forces, which resulted in a ruthless response on the part of the IRA in its dealing with the enemy, who operated without a clear code of discipline, burning villages and murdering innocent civilians. During the summer of 1920, the Crown forces systematically destroyed cooperative creameries, mills and bacon factories in reprisal, effectively destroying Ireland's agricultural economy. On 3 September, coroners' inquests were abolished in ten counties in Ireland and replaced by military courts of inquiry. Within the following three weeks, eighteen murders of unarmed persons could be traced to Crown forces, none of whom ever faced trial for the murders. This was the price that Ireland had to pay.⁴

Killing on both sides did not cease. "Seventeen highly placed members of Sinn Fein were murdered in October 1920 by members of the British secret service. Michael Collins responded on November 21 by having these British agents assassinated."⁵ November 21 can be viewed as one of the most violent days in the history of the War of Independence. As it was previously mentioned, the "Squad" of Michael Collins killed 19 persons in total, including British police officers, agents and some civilians. In response, the British army officers started shooting to the crowd during the football match and killed fourteen civilians. On the same day, now well known as Bloody Sunday, three more Irish prisoners were killed as they were said to be trying to escape from the prison. Only a week after Bloody Sunday, the members of the IRA killed seventeen more British army officers.

2.3 1921: The Peak of the Violence and the Truce

The fighting continued in the following year in the same way as in the previous one and the number of the killed persons increased. During the few months, 24 persons were executed by the British army. The IRA, on the other

⁴ McKenna, 133.

⁵ McKenna, 133.

hand, continued attacking the military targets, and they successfully attacked the ambushes and trains full of British army officers, which resulted in killing of 30 British soldiers. Some of the actions, however, failed and many IRA representatives were killed or captured. The results on both sides were very similar. The British realized that it was very difficult and maybe even impossible to defeat the IRA on the Irish soil and Irish officials feared that the attacks led by IRA men would not be sufficient enough to help them to win the war. They thought that the war in this situation directed to the standstill. The IRA soldiers lacked ammunition and weapons, so it was decided that the fighting had to be moved to England. The Irish planned the bombing of Liverpool docks and warehouses in England and Scotland; however, their plans were abandoned because of the truce among the states.

British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George insisted that the IRA had to surrender the arms, which was completely refused by the IRA representatives and it became the main obstacle for the possibility of negotiations among Ireland and England. The King George V was very unhappy about the situation in Ireland and dissatisfied with the results of the British army officers whose bad discipline was well known about in England. King insisted on the new negotiations among the representatives of both countries and on the ceasing of the violence. The British Prime Minister sent an invitation to Michael Collins, and he agreed to start the negotiations with the British government. Terms of the truce were signed on July 9 and became valid on July 11, 1921, which is marked as the official end of Irish War of Independence. The IRA officials, however, refused to accept the Anglo-Irish Treaty and their attacks on the RIC officers and British soldiers did not cease. Moreover, they resulted in more killings, in total about 24 more persons were killed by the IRA in the following year. The total number of killed persons throughout the whole lasting of the war reached to 1,400 on both sides. Refusal of the Anglo-Irish Treaty by the IRA and the supporters of the Republic who considered the treaty as a betrayal of their ideals, led to the further violence and to the beginning of the Irish Civil War.

The War of Independence, despite its casualties and political chaos that it brought, achieved the main target of its leaders. The Anglo-Irish Treaty was accepted and on January 7, 1922 Ireland became an independent state.

3. THE THEME OF IRISH NATIONALISM AND THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE IN IRISH LITERATURE

Literature and history have always been closely connected, and so it is not surprising that the major historical events find their description on the pages of most famous literary works. This statement is naturally valid in the case of Irish nationalism and War of Independence as the literary works about this important historical event can be found in every genre of Irish literature. Many leaders of the independence movements were also writers and members of the movement Gaelic Revival that was created in order to bring the revival of Irish literature and Irish language. These writers wanted to share their experience with their readers and furthermore leave the memory of the events they witnessed in the written form so everyone interested in the history could take part in the fighting for Irish independence on their own.

3.1 The theme of nationalism and the Irish War of Independence in prose

Irish prose has encountered the topic of Irish nationalism at the end of the 19th century. As the 20th century came and Irish nationalism rose together with the political activities, the most prominent themes were, of course, the themes of the independence movement. Talking about the prose in general, it can be said that the favorite genres used to depict the public figures and events in this period were novels with the topic of the war and fighting for the freedom, novels with nationalistic themes, autobiographies, biographies and memoirs of the most important politicians, writers and revolutionary leaders, literary anthologies that underlined the history of Irish literature, its independent development despite the English influence and the importance of the rich Irish literary tradition as well as folk stories and fairy tales that again concentrated on the importance of the native folklore, legends, myths and fairy tales of the Irish that evolved during the long centuries of the existence of the Irish nation and gave the insight into the traditional cultural identity of the nation.

The necessity of looking back at Irish history and resisting the English influence in the literature and common life, paying attention to the Irishness and

the Irish individual identity was mentioned for the first time at the end of the 19th century in the lecture given by Douglas Hyde, later the first Irish president, elected in 1938:

Hyde's lecture, delivered to the newly formed Irish National Literary Society in Dublin on 25 November 1892, is essential reading for the student of modern Irish culture and society. His critique and diagnosis of Ireland's problems, conceived in essentially moral and racial terms, acted as a clarion call which prompted some to join the Gaelic League and learn Irish, and which prompted others such as Patrick Pearse into rethinking Hyde's message in political terms. Hyde's influence can be felt throughout the 20th century, and not just in Ireland.⁶

Hyde openly expressed the necessity of de-Anglicizing of Ireland; he criticized an imitation of English only because it is English, failure of the Irish who voluntarily ceased to be Irish and praised the Irish national sentiment, the Irish nation, its traditions and cultural diversity.

Similarly to the tradition of Hyde, R.P. Carton wrote an essay for *The Irish Monthly* in 1895, in which he defends the literary tradition in Irish language. Carton intends to "show you what treasures of Irish poetry that school has given us instinct with Irish feeling, reviving and vivifying the Irish history and Irish romance, and set at all times in real Irish scenery."⁷ Carton continues to praise the literary history of Ireland, its myths, ballads, romances, verses and poems and underlines that although Ireland never had such an important poet as Scott or Wordsworth, the Irish still should be proud of their national poetry.

David Patrick Moran was another well-known literary person who published an essay that dealt with the problems among the Irish and English. His ideas were later collected in collection of essays *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*. One of his most important essays "The Battle of Two Civilizations" was published in the collection edited by Lady Gregory. He concentrated on the difference among the Irish and English as suggested by his famous phrase said by a friendly

⁶ David Pierce, *Irish writing in the twentieth century: a reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 2.

⁷ Pierce, 17.

Englishman: “Let us know more about Irishmen, and let Irishmen know more about us; we will learn to like and understand one another.”⁸ Moran admits that this statement is not helpful and he harshly criticizes the English, who see no other nationality than their own. However, he also criticizes the Irish for trying to be like English, even though they had completely failed in this effort. Similar essays concerned with the nationalities and their difficulties written in the tradition set by Douglas Hyde were later published by William Butler Yeats, who in his “The Literary Movement in Ireland” concentrated on the literary history of the nation and George Russell who focused on the outlining two paths, those of nationality and cosmopolitanism.

The importance of Irish language was described in an essay called “Revival”, written by Francis A. Fahy, who reminded that “for many at the time the ‘Revival’ meant not a literary but a language revival.”⁹ Fahy depicts the history of Irish language, its moments of fame and decline, its current usage and also arguments that the preservation of Irish language is a vital necessity for the Irish nation. The motif of Irish revival was also represented in the essay of George A. Birmingham called exactly like the essay by W.B. Yeats, “The Literary Movement in Ireland.” Birmingham was also well known as the author of the novels, he depicted the traditional Irish types and his novels were bashed by the other nationalists as he satirized the life in the provincial Ireland. Lynn Doyle also offered the humorous look at Irish country side in his short stories. His outlook was later compared with the view of Lady Gregory in her plays such as *Spreading the News*.

Political writing grew more and more important with the rise of the nationalism in Ireland that headed to the war for its independence. Arthur Griffith was one of the main leaders of the independence movement and he even joined the negotiations about the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921. “‘The Nation must depend upon itself alone’ was a phrase he alighted on in his reading of the Hungarian 19th century-history, Sinn Féin meaning ourselves or ourselves alone. In his *The Resurrection of Hungary* Griffith draws out the lessons for Ireland and outlines a

⁸ Pierce, 32.

⁹ Pierce, 63.

program for achieving independence from Britain.”¹⁰ The theme of the nationalism was also the domain of John Eglinton. His essay depicts the topics of nationalism and national identity and is similar in its ideas to essays of Hyde, Moran or Yeats. The only difference and a very important one, is that Eglinton believed that the nationalism was passing away.

The relations of the Irishmen living abroad, mainly in the United States where a large population of the Irish lived, with their home country, their memories and the desire to return were dealt with in the writing of Maurice F. Egan who lived in the United States, but his father was Irish and Egan dedicated a lot of his literary works to the Irish-American attitudes to Ireland. Similar topic, that one of the Irish immigrants in the United States, their home sickness and later return to Ireland, is treated in the short story of George Moore called simply “Home Sickness.”

The theme of the national history, folklore, literary tradition in myths, folk tales, songs and legends can be found in the works of Patrick Weston Joyce. He is the author of *The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places*, *A Social History of Ancient Ireland*, *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs* and *English As We Speak It In Ireland*. The last mentioned book is very important as it interprets the usage of the language in that period in Ireland in a very detailed way and it also depicts the usage of the language not only in the everyday common life, but also as it is used in the literary works of those times.

3.2 The theme of nationalism and the War of Independence in poetry

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in Irish poetry were marked by the presence of the Irish Literary Revival:

Where Modernism appeared avant-garde, poetry in Ireland seemed to be turning back to the past, while generally maintaining the forms and tones of

¹⁰ Pierce, 65.

the Victorian poetry. This was a part of a larger movement referred to as the Irish Literary Revival: long decades of antiquarian labor now bore fruit in a popular movement that touched many areas of life in Ireland- from farming to the fine arts. There was increased interest in the Irish language, Irish dance, Irish stories, songs and poems. [...] However, the opposition of the Modernism and the Revival is a false one. First, the Revival was a bilingual cultural phenomenon: it stressed the limitations of the English language for expressing certain aspects of Irish national character and thus changed literary idiom in order to accommodate these. Moreover, much of the work of the Revival involved translation from an oral tradition into English print culture. Readers were thus alerted to how difficult it was to convey the national spirit from one language to another.¹¹

It can be easily seen how important was the work of the authors of this period and how useful was the main idea of the Literary Revival as it brought the elder Irish poetry back into the life.

Besides the translations of the poetry from the previous centuries, the main topics in the poetry were the success and failures in Irish history, Irish mythology, Irish folklore, Irish experience, and many poems were written in the tradition of the former Gaelic poetry meaning that they used rich imagery, wild stories and unrestrained emotions. All these motifs helped to increase the feeling of the national pride and patriotic love in the Irish as they praised the history of the Irish nation, its legendary figures and the aspects that are characteristic only for the Irish and that help to create their national identity that is completely distinct from other national features.

Padraic Colum was an important novelist, playwright and also poet and his poetry is concentrating mainly on the problems of the country people. However, he also wrote poetry dealing with the political problems and in his poem “A Portrait (A Poor Scholar in Forties)”, he casts a critical eye over Irish culture and its relationship with Dublin politics. “The Forties in the title refers to the 1840s, a time of a revolutionary activity in Ireland with the Young Irelanders pressing for

¹¹ Justin Quinn, *The Cambridge introduction to modern Irish poetry 1800-2000*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 52.

the overthrow of British Rule in Ireland by force.”¹² The depiction of the rural Ireland can be also traced in the poems written by Joseph Campbell in which he described the simple life of the people living in the mountains, their conditions of life and everyday joys and pleasures as well as the cruel images of poverty.

Political movements were also mentioned in the poems of various authors at the beginning of the 20th century when the different political organizations and ideas hit Ireland. Eva Gore-Booth represents the female poetry in which she focuses on the typical problems of women, their rights and social issues. Women in her poetry are linked with nature and country life; meanwhile men are linked with an office work and a city life. She also uses the motifs from the Celtic poetry. The idea of hard work was not unknown for Booth so she also used the political motifs in her poetry, mainly in the defense of the women’s rights and in the defense of such political movements as pacifism and socialism.

The most prominent figures dealing with the political motives in the poetry were included in the group of the Poets of 1916. These poets are very well known as the revolutionary leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916 when they captured the General Post Office in Dublin and read the Proclamation of Independence of the newly created Irish Republic. Most important poets of this group were Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh and Joseph Plunkett. It is important to mention as we talk about the influence of the nationalism and the independence movement on all genres of Irish literature that all of these authors were not only poets, but also wrote short stories and dramatic works about the political events of the period. Talking about the plays written by these authors, Patrick Pearse published the play *The Singer* about the Easter Rising and Thomas MacDonagh is an author of the play called *When the Dawn is Come* about the vision of free Ireland. Their poetry is, as well as their plays, filled with the feelings of the patriotic love and pride of their native country, but it also focuses on the problems that Ireland had to face and criticizes the negligence of the Irish such as in the famous poem of Pearse “I am Ireland” where he in the name of the country of Ireland mentions the greatness of the glory of the nation, but also the “great shame as my own children sold their

¹²David Pierce, *Irish writing in the twentieth century: a reader* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000) 117.

mother”.¹³ Similar allegations can be traced in the poetry of Joseph Mary Plunkett who also added the motive of the heritage of the Irish people as well as condemnation of the violence used against the Irish by its oppressors.

The role of the most important, most prominent and most famous poet of the period belongs to William Butler Yeats who was similarly to the poets of 1916 also an author of the essays and dramatic plays. Nationalism had always had great influence on the literary production of Yeats, his first poems were written in the tradition of the literary revival and their main goal was to put emphasis on the beauty of the old Gaelic poetry and underline the diversity of Irish language used in the poetry and the diversity of the verses used in this poetry that lost their significance by being translated to English that could be considered as a main signal that Irish poetry should have remained written in Irish language because it is the part of a national and cultural heritage.

At the beginning of the 20th century and mainly in the times of the Easter Rising, Yeats used these events and the revolutionary leaders as the main protagonists of his poetry. He had lived before in London and he “felt England to be an example of a society corrupted by vulgar materialism and therefore progress for his native Ireland could only be achieved through independence from British rule.”¹⁴ It can be clearly understood from this attitude of the author that Yeats fiercely supported the efforts of the independence movement and its leaders whom he had even personally known from his visits in the Abbey Theatre.

The most well-known poems written in the nationalist tone are dedicated to the main protagonists of the Easter Uprising:

The Easter poems reiterate Yeats’s idea, formed in the 1880s, that only men of heroic mould can revive the old glory of Ireland. We see the comic figures transformed into heroes in ‘Easter 1916’. The first stanza shows the distance between the poets and the martyrs. They are considered comic figures, inhabitants of the land where ‘motley is worn’, but their heroic deed strikes the poet with awe. The change is not only in

¹³Maureen O’Rourke Murphy, James MacKillop, *An Irish Literature Reader: poetry, prose, drama* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006) 222.

¹⁴Suheil B. Bushrui, Tim Prentki, *An international companion to the poetry of W.B. Yeats* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990) 41.

situation and the comic figures but in the poet too. The people whom he considered comic figures are now heroes of the tragic dignity. The martyrs become familiar. [...] The concluding stanza brings us closer to the figures in the first stanza; the distance between them and the poet is reduced and what is a national loss becomes a personal loss too. They are named with tender love and affection.¹⁵

The poem “Easter 1916”, which is one of the best known poems about the Easter Rising, is only one of the examples of Yeats’s poetry influenced by the nationalistic feelings and by the events taking place in the period when he worked on his poems. Similar motifs can be found in the poems “Sixteen Dead Men” about the death of the previously mentioned leaders of the Easter Uprising, “The Rose Tree” that recalls the dialogue led by Pearse and James Connolly about the upcoming rebellion in Ireland and its possible negative consequences or “On political prisoner” dedicated to an important female nationalistic figure, Countess Markiewicz. The Irish fight for freedom remained a major motif in many other poems written by Yeats as he stated: “I hate international literature. The core of a thing must be national or local.”¹⁶ This motif also appears in the plays written by Yeats. Although he is praised mainly as a poet, it is important to mention that he also wrote a number of the dramatic works which were as well as his poems highly influenced by the nationalist themes and his works were tightly linked to each other.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF THE ABBEY THEATRE ON IRISH LITERATURE AND THE POLITICAL SITUATION

The Abbey Theatre is the national theatre of Ireland and it has vital role for the development of Irish drama. “One of the most remarkable literary and dramatic movements of modern times is associated, naturally and inevitably, with the name of the Abbey Theatre. That theatre was in a very real sense the cradle, as

¹⁵ M. P. Sinha, *W.B. Yeats, His Poetry and Politics* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist., 2003) 101-104.

¹⁶ Sinha, 110.

it has been for twenty-five years the home, of the Irish National Drama.”¹⁷ All major plays were performed in this theatre and the playwrights who worked for the Abbey Theatre have always been the most prominent ones. Besides its importance for the development of the dramatic genre, the Abbey Theatre had also influenced the political situation as many of the leaders of the revolutionary and independence movement were members of the Abbey Theatre. Authors whose main motif was the nationalism and freedom of the Irish used to meet in this theatre and it quickly became one of the symbols for the liberation of Ireland.

4.1 The foundation of the Abbey Theatre

The first idea of creating the Irish national theatre was born during the dialogue among two important literary figures, Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats. They found out that they both had been dreaming about the possibility of having the national theatre where the national plays would be performed as it was very difficult to find some room for Irish plays in the English theaters. This conversation took place in 1898 when Edward Martyn, the Irish playwright, wrote two plays and wanted to make them performed in Germany as he did not succeed in England. Lady Gregory stated that it would be very hard to find the finances for the establishment of the national theatre, but at the end of the dialogue, both, Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats decided to give it a chance. They made up a plan and agreed to dedicate their own money for the creation of the theatre. The first plays that should have been performed in the new theatre, if their idea succeeded, were the plays by Edward Martyn and the play *The Countess Cathleen* written by Yeats himself:

The first play to be produced was *The Countess Cathleen*, on May 8, 1899. *The Heather Field* by Martyn occupied the stage on the following evening. The second season opened in 1900 with the production of George Moore’s *Bending of the Bough*, succeeded by Martyn’s *Maeve* and Alice Milligan’s heroic drama *The Last Feast of the Fianna*. Finally, in 1901, came two plays: *Diarmuid and Grania* and Douglas Hyde’s

¹⁷Dawson Byrne, *The Story of Ireland's National Theatre: The Abbey Theatre Dublin*(Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2005) 1.

Casadh an t-Sugain (The Twisting of the Rope), the first Gaelic play to be produced in any theatre.¹⁸

However, the newly created theatre had to face serious problems right at its beginning. The plays had to be translated into English, which was negatively viewed by the Irish audience that found it strange to translate the Irish idiom to the foreign language. The reason behind this seemingly illogical decision was very simple- the actors who performed the plays were English, and so they, naturally, had to perform in their native language. After only three theatrical seasons, the Abbey Theatre faced its decline and closing.

Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats were not, in fact, the only ones who dedicated their efforts to the development of the Irish national theatre. In Dublin, there had already existed a small theatre company led by brothers Fay who were both experienced actors and dramatists. They had their own group in which they included young amateur actors who wanted to perform on stage. Inspired by the article in the newspaper about the Norwegian theatre that had been in the same situation as the Irish one now, meaning that all actors and plays in the theatre were performed by Danish actors and in Danish language until Henrik Ibsen did not write his first purely Norwegian play and the young amateur actors did not pick it up and drew the attention of the audience leading to the creation of the national Norwegian theatre step by step and inspired by the essay written by Arthur Griffith in which he made a parallel among the situation in Hungary and in Ireland and called for the independence of Ireland even in the cultural area, the brothers Fay decided to start rehearsing Irish plays with Irish amateur actors.

Their first play was the one written by George William Russell, *Deirdre*, and the play had a lot of success among the audience. W. B. Yeats, pleasantly surprised by the success of the play, dedicated his play, *The Countess Cathleen* to the theatre group as well. The group had been enlarging, and a lot of people wanted to help with the birth of the theatre that was finally performing only Irish plays and in Irish language. Women voluntarily helped with the props and the number of young actors interested in acting was increasing. Thanks to the financial help, the company was even able to rent a hall for further rehearsing of

¹⁸ Byrne, 3.

the plays. W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory saw the rising importance of this company, and they happily joined them. “Early in 1903, the Fays and their associates formed themselves into ‘The Irish National Theatre Society,’ with W.B. Yeats as President, George William Russell, Douglas Hyde and Miss Maud Gonne as Vice-Presidents. Up to this period Lady Gregory had not been connected with the company, but from this time on she wrote the pieces for them.”¹⁹ The society became so praised and well known that its members were invited to London in order to perform two plays.

The fear of performing in front of the big audience filled with various celebrities of those times was later replaced by delight as the plays had enormous success with the English audience and it was a wonderful experience for all persons involved. The English press was enchanted with the performance of the Irish and praised the theatrical society as “A.B. Walkley in the ‘Times’ wrote: ‘Only a day or two ago a little band of Irish men and women, strangers to London and Londoners, gave some us who, for our sins, are constant frequenters of the regular playhouse, a few moments of calm delight quite outside the range of anything which those houses have to offer...’”²⁰ Having achieved such a wonderful success, the theatrical society decided to continue to rehearse more plays. The main problem of the theatrical society was the financial situation. They needed money in order to rent the hall for rehearsals and performances, they needed the props and even though they did not pay any money to the actors who had their own jobs besides the theatre and were actors only because of the love for acting, the lack of money was a serious obstacle for them.

Finally they rented a hall at Camden Street, but this hall was in very dilapidated condition. It had no furniture and all furnishing including the scenery, the floor and the curtains had to be created and brought by the members of the theatre. Few plays were performed here and then the society had to move as the hall was too little and they decided to use it rather for the rehearsals only. The theatre moved to Molesworth Street.

¹⁹ Byrne, 18.

²⁰ Byrne, 19.

First controversy connected with the theatre came to life in 1903 after the first play written by John Millington Synge, *In the Shadow of the Glen*:

On the morning of the production one of the Dublin daily newspapers, forgetting the decencies of journalism, attacked the Society, evidently on hearsay, as the editor had never seen or read the manuscript, nor had he ever seen a rehearsal. This paper seemed to be prejudiced entirely against the plays for reasons not far to seek. It did not want to see a portrayal of the genuine Irish character. It was more accustomed to seeing caricatures of the Irish at the Queen's Theatre, the Gaiety, or the Theatre Royal. Like everything new the latest movement was bound to meet with the opposition, and it did to a marked degree. But unfavorable criticism and obstacles served only to arouse the authors, managers and actors to greater efforts.²¹

The year of 1903 was the year of the debut for Lady Gregory and her play *Twenty-Five* as well as for another play written by W.B. Yeats, *Hour Glass*. Few more plays were introduced in the same year, the debut was made by Padraic Colum who brought to the theatre his new play *Broken Soil*. Some of these plays were again performed in London. The purely Irish actors were again praised as they pleased the audience filled as usually with celebrities among whom Sir James Barrie, famous Scottish playwright could be found.

The wheel of fortune had finally turned in favor of the Irish actors and actresses as they found a generous sponsor in the person of Miss Horniman who agreed, after conversation with W. B. Yeats and because of her love for the theatre, to financially help the theatre. She rearranged and rebuilt the little theatre previously known as Mechanics' Institute Theatre and named it the Abbey Theatre. She later gave it to the Irish theatrical society for the period of six years.

4.2 The early years of the Abbey Theatre

On 27 December 1904, the Abbey Theatre opened its doors for the very first time after the reconstruction. The opening night featured W.B. Yeats's play *On*

²¹ Byrne, 29.

Baile's Strand and the play written by Lady Gregory, *Spreading the News*. Personal changes also occurred in the theatre as George Moore and Edward Martyn were not the members anymore and their plays that used to be performed in the past did not appear on the stage anymore. George Russell resigned and left the theatre and few more members left as their target was to work in the United States. Majority of the plays that were to be performed in the following years were written by the most famous playwrights of that period: Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats.

The next new play on the stage was Synge's *The Well of the Saints*, although previously it was speculated that a play by G.B. Shaw could be performed in the Abbey Theatre for the very first time:

Synge's play was not the one Yeats and Lady Gregory had been considering in the autumn of 1904, it was Shaw's extraordinary inversion of Irish and English cultural stereotypes in *John Bull's Other Island*. Shaw had promised a play for the Abbey Theatre as far back as 1900. Synge, liked Shaw's new play and wanted the Abbey to do it, but Yeats was uneasy with its relaxed brilliance and detached mockery. It was then eventually staged at the Abbey in 1916.²²

The reactions to the Synge's new play were again hostile. It does not surprise us that the main critic was Arthur Griffith who had previously criticized *In the Shadow of the Glen*.

In 1905, the theatre was fully controlled by the committee of three made by Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and J.M. Synge. The Abbey became a public limited company, with the three directors holding the majority of shares. The actors had no voting rights as it was stated that they needed to concentrate fully on their acting and therefore, were not bothered by the management of the theatre. The theatre was strongly influenced and managed by the personality of W.B. Yeats, who personally signed the contracts with all actors and sometimes even forced them to accept the conditions that were considered negative by the actors. The problems among the actors and other members of the theatre and W.B. Yeats

²² Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: form and pressure*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 33.

increased mainly in 1906 when four principal actors left the theatre, followed by Padraic Colum, who abandoned the theatre despite the begging of Lady Gregory to make him stay. "The grounds for this protest were many- that the 'new' Abbey would not be national enough, that the seats were too expensive- but the real reason for the protest was the sense that the actors were not accorded sufficient respect by the directors, especially Yeats himself, whose temper and manner were getting worse, although he was not above being calculating in his outbursts."²³ During this tough period for Yeats, the only person he could still count and rely on, was Lady Gregory who knew that the tension in Yeats was increasing mainly because Miss Horniman was developing pressure on him as she did not like the amount of political motives in the plays performed in the theatre:

Entirely sympathetic and partial to his view, she worried about the strain and tension he was suffering from as a result of the bickering and politicking in the theatre as he strove to counter assertions and rumors of anti-nationalism and West-Britonism. Adding to his difficulty was the fact that Miss Horniman was becoming more and more anti-nationalist in her attitudes, insisting that the Abbey steer clear of political afflictions.²⁴

Besides these supportive activities as Lady Gregory also wrote many letters to the press and to the previous members of the Theatre in which she was trying to explain the situation of Yeats and his reactions, she also produced two new plays, *Kincora* and *The White Cockade*.

New controversy shook with the theatre in 1907 as J.M. Synge introduced his brand new play *The Playboy of the Western World* on the stage. The play evoked huge protests from the audience and the theatre had to face serious accusations of satirizing the traditional Irish features and using immoral language:

Already Synge had given rise to suspicion with *In the Shadow of the Glen*, and it was not surprising that the new play should have led to scenes of riot such as are very rarely witnessed in the theatre. Early in the second act the disturbances began; missiles were hurled at the actors, and the assistance of the police had to be called to quell the disturbance.

²³ Welch, 35.

²⁴ Welch, 35.

Insistent demands were made in the press and on platforms for the withdrawal of the play and Lady Gregory's hope for liberty in the theatre was put to a severe strain. The play was not withdrawn and the Abbey Theatre vindicated its claim for freedom. The rioting with the subsequent public debate on the play drew the attention of the world to the Abbey Theatre.²⁵

Even the bad propaganda is still some sort of propaganda and so the Abbey Theatre began to be more and more known in the whole world because of this controversy and a few more that were to follow in the next years.

In 1908, another serious personal loss occurred when the brothers Fay, who helped to build the theatre with their hard work, left the theatre. The departure of brothers Fay was followed by another controversy on behalf of the Abbey Theatre connected with the introduction of the new play by G.B. Shaw. His play was censored in England, but as there was no censorship in Ireland, it could be performed in the theatre in Dublin. Lady Gregory showed her firmness and entire support of the play, and the play was performed on the stage. However, this was the last drop in the glass of Miss Horniman, who after seeing another nationalist play being performed on the stage in the theatre she financially supported withdrew her support in 1910.

4.3 The Abbey Theatre 1911-1928

After the death of J.M. Synge in 1907, the theatre began to struggle. The following period brought the financial problems, personnel changes in the position of the manager, departure of the actors, brief closing of the theatre and more struggling until the theatre was not saved by the famous plays by Sean O'Casey who became a popular playwright, following the steps of J.M. Synge. From 1911 to 1914, the Abbey Theatre made three American tours and performed Irish plays in the United States mainly for Irish Americans. In 1914, Lennox Robinson resigned from his function of a manager in the theatre. New manager Patrick A. Wilson was appointed, but he had to resign only one year after his appointment because of the corruption, and he was replaced by St John Ervine.

²⁵ Andrew E. Malone, *The Irish Theatre* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1939) 26.

The financial situation of the theatre in those years was seriously deteriorating and the salaries of the actors must have been reduced. The Easter Uprising took place in 1916, and the Abbey Theatre was closed down. The production of the new play, *The Spancel Death* written by T.H. Nally, was canceled. Several actors from the theatre took part in the Uprising and one, Sean Connolly, was killed. In May of the same year, few actors left the theatre in order to establish their own theatrical company called The Irish Players. St John Ervine who turned out to be a disastrous choice for the post of the manager was dismissed. He was a very controversial person as he was well-known for his open criticism of the Irish nation, even though he was working for the Irish national theatre and it was expected from him to express the support for Irish nationalism. He was replaced by J. Augustus Keogh.

Lennox Robinson returned to the Abbey Theatre in 1918 again, and he formed the Dublin Drama League with himself taking the position of the Secretary and W.B. Yeats became the President of the organization. The League was giving the productions until 1929. In the same year, all actors who had been the part of the theatre from its beginning left as they had decided to pursue their careers in the United States. The situation of the Abbey Theatre was critical. The actors had left, the financial problems were more and more profound and the Abbey Company was ultimately dismissed by Lennox Robinson. Because of the financial crisis, W.B. Yeats suggested to Lady Gregory the idea of handling the theatre to the Provisional government. In the following year, the financial crisis even deteriorated, and it was in such a bad state that the theatre could pay only three actors on full-time salaries.

It is not surprising that after a decade of problems caused by the chaotic political situation in Ireland, rebellions, uprisings, World War I, later the Irish War of Independence, events that forced the theatre to close its doors, limit the number of new plays produced by the theatre and dismiss its actors because of the financial problems, the theatre faced the bankrupt. Even though W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory were still faithful to the interests of the theatre and were trying to do their best in order to save the theatre, their efforts were not helpful. The Abbey Theatre found itself balancing at the edge of its existence.

Everybody in the Abbey Theatre must have hoped in some miracle that would save the theatre from its complete decline. That miracle happened when the theatre produced new play by Sean O'Casey, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, which together with his play, *Juno and the Paycock*, helped to save the theatre from the bankruptcy. Both plays had an enormous success with the audience:

Juno and the Paycock was without doubt the greatest and most astounding success in the history of the Abbey Theatre. The audience went wild with delight and kept applauding and cheering and calling for the author. But O'Casey would not appear until Lennox Robinson actually carried him from the stalls where he was crouching and hiding in a seat. The audience could not restrain themselves, a crowd rushed to round to the stage door and forced their way in to reach O'Casey in order to congratulate him. The play was on stage for three whole weeks and it brought the little Abbey Theatre once again into the spotlight of the world.²⁶

In 1924, Lennox Robinson joined W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory and became the third director of the National Theatre Society. As the theatre still faced serious financial problems, the directors decided to address their pleas to the newly born government of the Irish Free State. Lady Gregory was objecting against this suggestion as she did not want to sell the independence of the theatre, but in the end, she co-wrote the letter together with W.B. Yeats to President Cosgrave in which they offered to hand the Abbey Theatre over to the Irish government. In few months, the government decided to grant an annual subsidy and so the Abbey Theatre became the first state-subsidized theatre in the English-speaking world.

The career of Sean O'Casey that had begun in the theatre in such a pompous way was about to be finished in 1926 when the author produced his new play, *The Plough and the Stars*. The reaction of the audience to this play was completely different from the previous ones. If the first two plays had a major success and their author was praised and admired, this play brought disastrous results and led into another riot, similar to that one from 1907 that happened in the theatre during

²⁶*The Story of Ireland's National Theatre*, (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1929) 126.

the performance of *The Playboy of the Western World*. The actors were again facing the hatred and violence from the audience. One man even got to the stage and started to strike the actors, so the real fighting took place on the stage in the middle of the play. The situation was so acute that W.B. Yeats had to stand up and try to solve the problem. “In the midst of the terrible din Mr. Yeats had the curtain dropped, went in front of it, and tried to speak. But it was impossible to hear what he said beyond these few words: □ All great men who have tried to do anything for art at the Abbey have met with the same reception; J.M. Synge and others and now, Sean O'Casey.”²⁷ Despite the support of W.B. Yeats, O'Casey's career was at the end in the Abbey Theatre, and he had to leave. He moved to London.

The second major theatrical development in modern Ireland came nearly a quarter of a century after the Abbey's foundation. In 1927, two young actors met in a touring company run by Anew McMaster, a fabulous theatrical figure who traveled the country with a repertoire ranging from *Oedipus Rex* to *East Lynne*. They were Michael MacLiammoir, who had learnt his trade under Sir Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre, London, and Hilton Edwards, who hailed from north Finchley. MacLiammoir, whose talents ran from acting and painting to writing in Irish and English and talking with wit and fluency in every European language, was an idolater of Yeats and came to Ireland to try and put into practice his own ideas on the theatre, derived in part from Yeats.

In 1928, MacLiammoir and Edwards founded the Dublin Gate Theatre Studio. Their first productions were staged in the Peacock Theatre, a 102-seater experimental annex to the Abbey. Here, on a stage not much bigger than a Victorian dining table, they produced Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Wilde's *Salome* and other modern plays. “The real business of the Gate,” MacLiammoir wrote, “was with methods of acting, production and design...to create a vision of certain phases of national life other than that of the cottage or the tenement.” It was not, one would have thought, the happiest time to start an art theatre; Ireland was not a land of milk and honey and had just emerged from an agonizing civil war, besides at the time the cinema was beginning to attract growing audiences. However, the

²⁷*The Story of Ireland's National Theatre*, 131.

Gate flourished and in its early years held a reputation similar to that of Stavinlavsky's Moscow Arts Theatre at the turn of the century. Apart from concentrating on works of contemporary European and American dramatists, the Gate sought new Irish playwrights. Denis Johnson, whose *The Old Lady says 'No!'* was produced in the second season of 1929, was the most successful. Johnson, in fact, was the first to successfully introduce German expressionist techniques to Irish theatre. 'The Boys', as MacLiammoir and Edwards were called, were fantastic characters, and MacLiammoir, in particular, delighted in flamboyant behavior and stirring up reaction in the rigidly straight-laced Dublin of the mid-twentieth century. For years he claimed to have been born in Cork, but recent biographers have established that he was born in Willesden, London, and originally named Alfred Lee Willmore, and he was probably of Jewish descent.

As a youngster, MacLiammoir became fascinated with the Irish language and he joined a London branch of the Gaelic League. He spent hours in Finchley Road Library combing Dineen's Irish-English Dictionary and with his innate linguistic gifts made an excellent progress. When he settled in Ireland, the untranslatable Willmore became MacLiammoir, literally 'son of big William'. The new version caused pronunciation problems outside Ireland, but rolled sonorously off the tongue and looked good on a playbill. It also denoted its bearer's sustained enthusiasm for the language. The six books and three plays he wrote in Irish are today considered minor Gaelic classics. It should also be noted that the first theatre MacLiammoir founded in Ireland (with Professor Liam O'Briain) was an Irish speaking one, the Taibhdhearc (from taibhreamh, 'dream' and dearc, 'eye') in Galway. This significant institution went on to feature names like Siobhan McKenna and the actor-novelist Walter Macken. It opened in August 1928 with MacLiammoir's own interpretation of the legend Diarmuid agus Grainne.

Thanks to the better financial situation, the Abbey Theatre could afford to extend its activities and so in 1927, the Peacock Theatre, previously designed for the experimental productions and performances made by pupils of the Abbey School of Acting, joined the Abbey. Similarly, the Abbey School of Ballet was created in the same year. The theatre also produced a new play by W.B. Yeats, *Oedipus the King*. The play was marked as one of the greatest achievements made

both by Yeats and the theatre. This year is also remarkable for the production of a play *Sancho's Master*, written by Lady Gregory and based on the story of Don Quixote. Later, the play *Emperor Jones*, of an American author Eugene O'Neill had its premiere in Dublin. Sean O'Casey was trying his luck in the Abbey Theatre again, but his play *Silver Tassie* was rejected.

4.4 The Abbey Theatre 1929-1966

As the theatre got a lot of attention even abroad, it was decided that the new tours would be made. In June of 1931, the Abbey Company resumed its visits to America with a coast-to-coast tour. The performances were made in seventy three cities and in the period of the following six years, three more tours were made in the United States. One year later, Lady Gregory, one of the most praised and important personalities who dedicated her whole life to the development of the Irish national theatre and fiercely supported its activities throughout the years of its existence, died.

Three years after the death of Lady Gregory, new directors were appointed in the Abbey Theatre as W.B. Yeats had been dedicating most of his time to the revision of his works. The new directors were F.R. Higgins, Brinsley MacNamara and Ernest Blythe. MacNamara was a well-known playwright; his works mostly depicted the life in regional Ireland in a very realistic way. He decided to accept the play of Sean O'Casey *Silver Tassie* and only six months after being appointed as the director of the theatre had to resign as there were protests against the performance of that play. He was replaced by Frank O'Connor. In 1937, the Abbey Theatre again extended its activities by establishing the Abbey's Experimental Theatre under the direction of Ria Mooney. One year later, The Abbey Theatre Dramatic Festival was held for a very first time in Dublin.

W.B. Yeats did not live much longer than Lady Gregory and died in 1939. With his death, the main representatives and creators of the Abbey Theatre died out. Frank O'Connor, a famous short- story writer, who had worked with him for four years, resigned shortly afterwards in 1940. Throughout the 1940s the Abbey saw a decrease in the number of the new plays performed. There were only sixty- two new plays in this decade, in comparison, in the previous decade the number of the new plays was in total one hundred and four. The positive factor

was that the numbers of the audience increased mainly during the years of World War II, in which Ireland stayed neutral and so was cut off from the rest of the world. Many Dubliners considered going to the theatre as one of the pleasant activities that they could afford in these harsh times of the war everywhere around. Plays in the theatre had run for a longer time, and the theatre also hired new dramatists such as Joseph Tomelty or Louis d'Alton.

The idea of the Gaelic revival became important again and the director of the Abbey Theatre pursued the idea that the theatre hired junior dramatists only if they could write their plays both in English and in Irish. Some of the plays were on the decline:

The decline at the Abbey of the one-act play had also brought about the decline of the verse play, a tradition that the poet Austin Clarke claimed had been abandoned by the Abbey. He was encouraged by the verse play he had seen in the theatre and wrote his own cycle of plays about early Christian Ireland, in much the same way that Yeats had utilized characters from the heroic sagas. He also founded the Dublin Verse Speaking Society in 1943. Independently of the Verse Speaking Society, the Lyric Theatre was founded in 1944 'to save from neglect the tradition of verse drama left to us by Yeats' and it produced 27 plays in the period of eight years.²⁸

In the 1940s, majority of the popular plays were still performed, but although the audience enjoyed the well-known plays, there could be felt some sort of mediocrity in the plays performed. The plays lacked certain excitement and color, and it resulted in the frustration of the people. The decline of the number of audience was also marked by the dissatisfaction with the idealistic world depicted in the plays by Eamon de Valera that were performed throughout the 1940s and 1950s. His depiction of the peasant world sounded comic to the people knowing the harsh reality of their lives.

The old Abbey Theatre, as it had been known since the beginning of its existence, had reached its final stage in the 1940s. The beginning of 1950s,

²⁸ Fiona Brennan, *George Fitzmaurice: 'Wild in his own way' : biography of an Abbey playwright* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005) 120.

concretely the year of 1951, brought the end of the Abbey Theatre as it was known to the audience in the previous 50 years. The original building of the theatre was destroyed during the fire on July 17, 1951, and nothing remained. The burning left intact only the adjoining building of the Peacock Theatre. For the next years, the Abbey Theatre had to move into rental building until the foundation stone for the new Abbey Theatre was finally laid in 1963 thanks to the effort of the Irish president, Eamon de Valera, who was also well-known as the playwright. The theatre later re-opened on July 18, 1966.

4.5 The importance of the Abbey Theatre

The Abbey Theatre is without any doubts one of the greatest centers of art in the world. It brought many innovations in acting skills and producing of the plays. It was connected with the fame of many actors and actresses, and many playwrights built their careers on the plays performed in this theatre. Despite the hard past when all efforts of Ireland to establish a national theatre were inhibited by the harsh political situation and poverty of the people, despite the uneasy beginnings when the theatrical company had to face the financial problems, lack of professional acting, lack of the places that could be used for rehearsing and naturally, lack of the plays written in Irish tradition, people who loved acting and drama, did not give up. Thanks to their love for theatre, thanks to their determination to create a national Irish theatre that would be the home of the whole dramatic movement in Ireland and would help to spread Irish culture to the whole world, thanks to many giving ups, sacrifices and struggling to overcome the failures that came in the first years of the efforts, Ireland finally achieved the target of having the theatre of its own.

The Abbey Theatre had a major impact and influence on the revival of Irish culture and literature and on the development of the dramatic movement. It brought the new plays, famous and controversial ones; it established the recognition of its playwrights and theatrical companies. Thanks to its tours abroad, it also brought a taste of Irish culture into other countries and helped to heal the home sickness for Irish immigrants in the foreign states. Its founders and playwrights became the most famous representatives of Irish drama, and their plays became part of the worldwide dramatic canon. The plays depicted the lives

of the Irish as they really were, their hardship and their simple joys, lives in the cities and in the country, sometimes exaggerated or satirized, sometimes simply realistically depicted, they brought the ideas of pride and love for the Irish nation, its history and cultural identity and the Abbey Theatre helped to create and develop the love for the theatre and dramatic works in the Irish throughout its whole more than one hundred-year-old existence.

5. THE THEME OF NATIONALISM THE AND WAR OF INDEPENDENCE IN IRISH DRAMA

It is very natural that as the Abbey Theatre was and still is the national theatre of Ireland, many plays produced by the Abbey playwrights and performed in this theatre had national motives. Similarly, as the poetry and prose of that period, the drama was hugely influenced by the political situation in Ireland and by the rising of the patriotism. The dramatists were involved in the Irish Literary Revival, and so it is not surprising that they spread their nationalist ideas via their works.

In both, tragedies and comedies, we can trace the nationalist features. The plays were mostly tragedies, they depicted the poverty-stricken people, rural Ireland, and many plays were interconnected with Irish mythology. It was the part of the inclination to the literary revival that the authors were mostly occupied with the events from the past, and they picked up some mythological figures and legendary events and accustomed them to the modern situation. They were also using many motives from the traditional Irish folklore; the emphasis was mainly put on the language of the characters. The Irish idiom was translated into English, but in such a way that the characters did not lack their genuine Irish identity. The role of the dialects picked from the various parts of Ireland and of the language was to underline the richness and beauty of the Irish linguistic heritage, completely different from English one as it was based mainly on the Gaelic tradition.

Later, the psychological plays appeared that were concerned with the thoughts, actions and behavior of the characters in the edgy situations. Majority of

these plays took place again in the rural Ireland, the surrounding environment playing an important role in the lives of the characters and giving the distinctive features to the play. These dramas depicted the everyday lives of Irish peasants, their struggle with poverty, their hardworking, family relations, their attitude to the religion and customs. J.M. Synge used very precise and detailed descriptions of the habits and stereotypes of the Irish in his dramas. Sometimes he used it in such an exaggerated manner that it shocked the audience and led into the riots because the Irish identity was very fragile and the Irish wanted to protect and praise the characteristic features of their nation, they did not want to see them ridiculed or satirized as they considered it an attack on their individuality.

Further ridiculing and satirizing can be found in the comedies written by Sean O'Casey who openly criticized the society, mainly the life in Dublin as his plays take place in the city more than in the country. He strictly ridiculed even the nationalism, the fiery nationalist groups and the behavior of the prominent nationalists. The riots were made again after the performance of his play in which he transformed the nationally important political events into the laughable situation and therefore offended Irish nationalists who planned and took part in these actions as well as hurt the very sensitive side of the Irish that had not had enough time to cope with the burden of the past and the failures of the newly created state.

The first major attempt to create an Irish theatre that would be dealing with the nationalist issues was the Irish Literary Theatre conceived by the later founders of the Abbey Theatre Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and Edward Martyn. The importance of their role in the shaping of the Irish dramatic movement is undeniable:

Yeats was a rising star in the Irish revival in 1890s, noted as a poet, but just beginning his career as a playwright. He established nationalist credibility in the Irish revival with his poetry, and also with his activism, being one of the founders of the National Literary Society in 1892. Lady Augusta Isabella Persse Gregory, like Yeats, was an Anglo-Irish person with a strong interest in Irish cultural nationalism. She spoke fluent Irish, and turned her Anglo-Irish sense of noblesse oblige into an early

ethnographic project, travelling the Gaeltacht, or Irish-speaking areas of Ireland, capturing folktales and stories in their original tongue and translating them for a wider audience. Edward Martyn joined the venture. Part of an old Irish Catholic family, Martyn was deeply committed to the nationalist cause. He was deeply committed to Ireland and believed that an Irish dramatic movement could do for Ireland what Ibsen and his allies had managed to do for Norway only a few decades before.²⁹

This prominent group was later joined by George Moore who also came from a revolutionary Irish family. His great uncle was a leader in the Rebellion in 1798 and Moore, although he lived in London, did not hesitate to use nationalist motives in his novels and in some of his plays.

In the second season of the theatre, Alice Mulligan, well known activist in the nationalist movement, produced plays for the theatre including *The Last Feast of the Fianna*. Mulligan wrote many plays for various nationalist groups such as the Gaelic League and she also co-edited the nationalist women's journal, *The Shan Van Vocht* ("The Poor Old Woman").

Later acquisition for the theatre in the person of J.M. Synge revived the nationalist themes in the plays. Synge was a fluent Irish speaker and his interest in Irish language was also visible in his writing career:

Synge translated the idioms of the Irish language into an English language dialect designed to catch the aural and imagistic qualities of the Irish tongue. It is notable that he tried to make a language for the stage that, being neither 'proper English', nor 'real Irish', captures the spirit of the Irish language and though, while also illustrating, the dualities and duplicities inherent in the life experiences of many of their characters, who must negotiate maintaining their Irish identity, customs and beliefs within a colonial system that imposes a different, imperialist ontology, represented by English language and English law.³⁰

²⁹ Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Oxford: Polity, 2008) 18-19.

³⁰ Trotter, 26-27.

The importance of the nationalist themes in the art can be clearly found in the example of the Theatre of Ireland. The Abbey Theatre was producing the nationalist plays at the beginning, but after it was financed by Miss Horniman, the officials of the theatre had to agree with the motto of the art having more significance for their theatre than the politics. Some of its members left the Abbey and established the group of their own, The Theatre of Ireland (CluithcheoirinahEireann). Among those members were, for example, Patrick Pearse or Edward Martyn. In 1907, the Theatre of Ireland performing mainly nationalist plays had a great success with the audience and it played to full houses meanwhile the Abbey struggled to attract the audience with its plays. Therefore, it is easy to notice that “in a little over a decade, the Irish National Theatre Society, the Theatre of Ireland, the Gaelic League and the other nationalist theatres had laid the foundation for a political theatre intimately engaged with the nationalist movement’s questions about Ireland’s present conditions and future possibilities.”³¹

After this decade of the nationalist plays, the next world-renowned dramatist to arise from Irish theatre was Sean O’Casey. After 1922, when the Ireland got its independence, the concept of the nationalism was changed in the minds of the Irish. The writers did not hesitate to criticize the Irish Free State and the power of the nationalist motives weakened as the Irish had finally obtained what they were fighting for, and they concentrated on the faults of the new state then. O’Casey’s three most important plays deal with the Easter Rebellion, War of Independence and Civil War.

They are the bright example of the change of view of Irish nationalism by the authors of drama. “The plays are all set in the Dublin tenements he knew well, and they turned the Irish theatre for a while toward bitter social criticism with O’Casey’s dark thesis that the acclaimed and glorified birth of the Irish nation was accompanied by deep suffering, powerlessness and tragedy for the little-regarded common people who had been swept up in the raging torrent of history.”³² Even though O’Casey was considered an Irish nationalist, and he was supporting the

³¹Trotter, 34.

³² Sanford V. Sterlicht, *Masterpieces of Modern British and Irish Drama*(Westport,CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005) 31.

nationalist organizations such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood or the Gaelic League, he was not afraid to use harsh criticism of the nationalism, ridiculing and satirizing the nationalist organizations that brought a lot of ill will and dissatisfaction from the Irish people.

His attitude only underlines the shift of the point of view concerning the nationalism and its development during the years as it was influenced by the development of Ireland itself. At first, people yearned for freedom and independence and they voluntarily joined the nationalist groups, later when they achieved their target, they started to question the toll they had to pay in order to achieve it. The new state was established and they could involve themselves in social criticism of the society. The dramatic works performed in this period in the Irish national theatre beautifully illustrate this development and shift in their dealing with the nationalism that despite everything remained to be one of the most important topics in the plays.

6. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MOTIFS OF NATIONALISM AND THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE IN MAJOR IRISH DRAMATIC WORKS

As it was stated in the previous chapter, nationalism played a very important role in Irish drama. The previous chapter offered more general depiction of the influence of politics and nationalism in Irish dramatic works, in this chapter I would like to concentrate on the concrete plays. I have chosen the most famous plays, some of them even controversial, plays written by the most prominent authors as W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge or Sean O'Casey. All of these plays share nationalist features, although they are used in very different ways. They offer the insight into the development of the dramatic movement and its concern with the national themes during the first fifty years of the existence of the Irish national theatre. They also mark the changes in the attitude of their authors, in the acceptance of the audience and in the significance of these plays in the period when they were produced and later.

6.1 Edward Martyn, *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*

When Edward Martyn was announced as the new playwright for the Irish Literary Theatre, many people were surprised. Martyn previously lived in London and was not known as a playwright as his only successful play was published anonymously. Martyn was thrilled by having the opportunity to work with Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and George Moore, and he quickly agreed to join them and become one of the founders of the national theatre in Ireland. Martyn appreciated mainly the possibility to write the plays for the Irish audience that was completely different from the one he used to meet with while he lived in London. “In the second number of ‘Beltaine’ in an article entitled ‘A Comparison between Irish and English Theatrical Audiences,’ Mr. Martyn declares that he sees in Ireland, instead of the ‘vast cosmopolitanism and vulgarity’ of England, ‘an idealism founded upon the ancient genius of the land.’”³³ Martyn wrote a few plays, but only two of them had some success and were performed in the theatre, the rest of the plays, written mostly as satire, was rejected and that was also the cause of Martyn’s withdrawal from the theatre after only few years. The main difference among Martyn and the other playwrights was that his plays were not dealing with the country life and the peasants, characters typical for the plays of the other playwrights. Martyn was a landlord and so the big amount of his characters are landlords, priests and people from the same class as he was a part of.

It is also important to mention that Edward Martyn was a supporter of Ibsenism. He attended the lectures led by G.B. Shaw about the plays written by the Norwegian playwright, and he became acquainted with Ibsen’s ideas as well. As it was previously stated, Ibsen was one of the principal protagonists in the formulating of the idea and establishing of the Norwegian national theatre itself as well as a nationalist leading the wave of the refusal of the Danish influence. Being overwhelmed by Ibsen’s plays and his way of thinking, Martyn followed his example in writing and the most significant example of his works being influenced by Ibsen, is Martyn’s most successful play, *The Heather Field*.

The Heather Field is a play about an Irish landlord, Carden Tyrrell. He is represented as a man who spends a lot of time by reading the books in his office

³³ Cornelius Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1913) 75.

or talking to his friend who is a philosopher and student, Barry Ussher. Carden fiercely supports his brother Milles, who is also a student at the Trinity College in Dublin. However, Carden is not a scholar or philosopher himself, he loves to spend his time at the heather field and in the mountains that give a view of the sea. Carden loves Irish nature, the beauty that surrounds him and most of all, he loves his heather field that represents everything that his dreams and hopes are connected with. His wife, Grace has no understanding for his love of farming, and their marriage is struggling to survive. We later find out that Grace had never loved her husband, and their discussions always finish in blazing rows. The only tie between them is their son Kit. Carden took up farming and his main dream is to change the heather field into the fertile pasture-land. He needs to drain the field, and he invested all the money in the drainage project. His house and all wealth are put under the threat if he is not able to pay his mortgage. His wife, who has always been more pragmatic and practical, is shocked by his behavior, and she considers her husband mad. She brings the doctors to proclaim that Carden is really mentally ill, but she fails to do it as Carden's best friend, Barry Ussher intervenes. Loved landlord turns into the hated one as he is not able to pay his tenants because of his astronomic debts. Moreover, the heather field is not fertile at all and the situation is completely lost for him and his family. Meanwhile, Barry Ussher decides to save the family of his best friend by paying off his debts, Carden gets really mad as he turns back to his past and relives the years of his happy and idealistic youth, which is very hardly accepted by his wife and son whom he even does not recognize.

This play can be viewed as a psychological play about the decline of one family caused by the father of the family who invested everything he had in fulfilling his ideal dream. However, it cannot be forgotten that Martyn was a nationalist writer and so, we can find the parallel among the characters and situations in the play with the events that were happening in those times in Ireland. "Martyn being the first president of Sinn Féin, his play contains very clear political referents, with the landowner Carden Tyrrell, representing the Protestant Ascendancy, while the heather that outlasts him symbolizes the triumph of the native Irish spirit."³⁴ The efforts of Tyrrell represent the efforts of English

³⁴ Julia M. Wright, *A Companion to Irish Literature*, (Oxford: John Wiley and sons, 2010) 37.

Protestants, who were trying to change the Irish and transform them into a nation similar to themselves and ruled by the English. Tyrrell is using all various modes in an attempt to change the heather field into a pasture-land by digging the land and preparing the drainage project. His attempts are all unsuccessful as the heather field stays the same with the wild flowers growing on it instead of the grass that could be used for the pasture. The main idea of this play is the fact that the English can try as much as they want, but they will never turn the original Irish citizens into persons they would like to have them as. Moreover, these efforts cost Tyrrell everything as he lost all of his possessions, his family and finally, his sanity. He was condemned to live in the past years forever as the present could not be turned into his ideal. So the English can only live in their memories when they ruled Ireland, and they did not have to face the problems they were facing at the beginning of the 20th century when the independence of Ireland was becoming more and more concrete.

A very similar parallel can be seen in the relationship among Tyrrell and his wife. However, this parallel was used as an example of criticism of the Irish current society. There is a big difference and many misunderstandings among Grace and Carden, who both interpret completely diverse personalities. Grace is seen as a materialist, practical woman, while Carden is a thinker, philosopher and artistic soul, and he loves to live in his ideal reality and in his dreams. “The domestic drama drew parallels between the man driven insane by his attempt to quash his identity as an artist for the sake of his materialist wife, and the Irish people losing touch with their cultural identity in favor of Anglicization.”³⁵ The relationship of the spouses is aimed as a criticism of the Irish, who voluntarily gave up their Irish customs and their language and culture in order to be English. Martyn explains that the Irish cannot become English as the nations are completely different, the same as Grace and Carden, who cannot agree on anything. The more Grace is trying to change her husband, the more their marriage deteriorates until Carden becomes completely mad. The result leads into the moral lesson that the process of Anglicization, voluntary or obligatory one, cannot bring anything good to the Irish. The play appeals on the feelings of the

³⁵ Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Oxford: Polity, 2008) 19.

Irish to make them proud of their distinctive identity in order to save and protect their Irishness and wake the feeling of nationalism and pride in them.

Another significant play produced by Martyn for the Irish Literary Theatre was a play *Maeve*. Although it did not have the same success as *The Heather Field*, it was well received, and it contains many nationalist motives interconnected with the Irish mythological tale about Queen Maeve. Maeve is introduced as a character that is more abstract than a concrete, mythical, symbolical person. She is the character that was based on the typical Irish features and in whom the beauty of the Irish nature can be spotted. As George Moore wrote in the introduction to the play:

Maeve is a character evolved out of a place; she is made out of the light of the keen bright Irish spring and the loneliness of the Clare mountains that surround her home, of the round tower, the masterwork of Goban, on which she gazes with intense eyes; of the legends of the ancient Irish gods, of the beauty of the Irish Romanesque ornament, those exquisite traceries which are a reflection of the Byzantine, but more refined.³⁶

Maeve simply loves Irish nature, the place she lives in, she is proud about her history and spends all her spare time in the ruins of the castle where she dreams about Queen Maeve. As Moore states later in his introduction, Maeve represents the history of the Irish nation, and she moves the hearts of the audience and inspires them by her love for Ireland instead of love for her young English fiancé. “Maeve is the spirit and sense of an ill-fated race, and she portrays its destiny and bears the still unextinguished light of its heroic period.”³⁷ The evocation of Maeve and her historical predecessor, Queen Maeve brings the feelings of patriotic love and pride to the spotlight as it underlines the history of the nation that every Irishman should be proud of.

The story of Maeve is very simple. She is a young girl, daughter of former prince of Burren, who is now impoverished peasant and forces his daughter to marry a rich, young Englishman Hugh Fitzwalter. However, Maeve is enthralled with mythology and thanks to her maid, Peg Inerny, she begins to believe that she

³⁶ Edward Martyn, *The Heather Field and Maeve* (Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 2009) 26.

³⁷ Martyn, 26.

is the one that Queen Maeve wants to take among her fairies and marry her to her beloved one, the Irish hero. Maeve keeps on dreaming about Queen Maeve and the beautiful world of imagination that she introduced her to on the eve of her wedding day, and she wishes that Hugh had chosen her sister Finola instead of her. She is discovered dead in the morning, sitting frozen next to the open window, but Peg Inerny knew she did not die because of cold, but she left this world in order to become a fairy of Queen Maeve.

There are many explicit nationalist motives that can be found in the text of the play *Maeve*. The play was, of course, written in the tradition of connecting Irish mythology with the current events and the personality of Maeve that represents everything Irish refuses to marry to an Englishman, she refuses an alliance of England and Ireland as it is marked in her words: “Do you think I was ever really reconciled to my fate?”³⁸ She answers to her sister that she never could reconcile with her fate as she never wanted to marry an Englishman. Her sister wants to know the reasons hidden behind her decision and Maeve gives a very explicit and honest description of what the English mean to her:

MA. Oh, but if you were to see him, Finola, in the light he appears to me!

FIN. How does he appear to you, dear?

MA. (with sudden vehemence). A bandit, a plunderer!

FIN. Maeve, what are you saying?

MA. Yes, I say a bandit, like his English predecessors who ruined every beautiful thing we ever had.

FIN. (frightened). Sister, how can you accuse him of that?

MA. (bitterly). Yes, he has come finally to ruin every beautiful thing.³⁹

³⁸ Martyn, 243.

³⁹ Martyn, 245.

It can be very clearly seen from these words that Maeve, representing Ireland, completely hates her English fiancé who represents England. She has no love, no respect, and no affection or admire for him and the only feelings she connects him with, are the anger, resistance and repulsiveness as he portrays the country that stole everything beautiful from Ireland. The ideas of Martyn himself who expressed his feelings about England can be found behind the words of the main protagonist. England and everything English is seen as hostile, Englishmen are bandits who destroyed the beauty of Ireland and robbed them their pride and identity. In the later section of the play, Martyn again uses the mythological motive when he connects the story of Maeve with an even older story about the noble man Strongbow who was called by Irish Queen Diarmid to help her. However, Strongbow ruined the Irish Kingdom instead. Martyn underlines the fact that the examples of the English exploitation of Ireland can be found even in the oldest Irish stories.

In the end of the play, Maeve is found dead as she prefers dying and leaving to the world of imagination to marrying the English noble man. It is again a hint about Martyn's idea of rather sacrificing lives and fighting to the end than giving up and allying with the English.

It is also not surprising that he used the mythological motives as they were used in many plays because it was the main idea of the Irish National Theatre. "By retelling an Irish myth, Maeve encouraged Irish nationalists to commit themselves to Celtic idealism. Martyn's choice-psychological drama- received good reviews from the press in the spirit of supporting nationalist efforts."⁴⁰ Despite the nationalist motives that had a great success with the nationalism supporters and with the audience as well, the play was not as successful as the precedent one, mainly because of the poor acting.

Edward Martyn was not the most famous neither important playwright, but he was one of the founders of the Irish National Theatre, and his plays were performed among the first ones together with the plays written by W.B. Yeats. They had more success than some of the plays written by Yeats because those

⁴⁰ Mary Trotter, *Ireland's national theatres: political performance and the origins of the Irish dramatic movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001) 23.

were considered highly controversial and the Church severely criticized them. Martyn was the also the first playwright that wrote the Irish national plays, even though they were written in English and not in Irish language. His nationalist motives can be clearly found in his plays, and he had an important role in influencing the following playwrights with his nationalism connected with Irish mythology that were inspired by the Celtic revival and the example of Ibsen.

6.2 William Butler Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *The Countess Cathleen*

William Butler Yeats is one of the most famous Irish writers. Even though he is more known as a poet, he was also a very successful playwright, and he wrote 26 plays. As it is well known, he was a founder of the Irish National Theatre, and so it can be claimed that at the beginning of his play writing career, he focused on the themes of nationalism and the Celtic revival. He started writing about legendary, heroic characters of the Irish past that represented the tragic destiny of Ireland and later moved on to write tragedies influenced by the Noh theatre as one of the most important factors in his later plays became music, dance and masks.

Yeats had definitely brought the new ideas to the dramatic movement and his main inspiration was Ireland. He had the most important role in the creating of the movement itself and was the leading figure of the Abbey Theatre for many years to follow. The importance of Yeats was well known in the times of his presence in the theatre: “Another question altogether, a question outside of the question of the value as art of the writing of Mr. Yeats, which is what I am considering, is the question as to whether there would have been a dramatic movement at all comparable to what has been, if Mr. Yeats had not devoted so large a portion of his time to drama.”⁴¹ The explanation of the necessity of the benefactor which Yeats was, is very simple: “I believe there would have been a dramatic movement, but I am sure, from what I know of the other dramatic organizations in Dublin, that they would not have amounted to much unless some

⁴¹Cornelius Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights*(Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1913) 46.

other great writer as loyal to art as Mr. Yeats had played for them the beneficent tyrant.”⁴² The words of Cornelius Weygandt who lived in the same period as Yeats and depicted the influence of Yeats on the theatre of those times underline the vital importance of Yeats as “such great writer devoted to drama, is far to seek in Ireland as in other countries.”⁴³ Yeats was chosen as the motivator because the other founders of the theatre were not so experienced or so brave as Yeats. Douglas Hyde was occupying himself with propagandist literature, Russell did not have the nature to act directly for the benefits of the theatre and Edward Martyn was focusing on his career as a playwright, although he did not have such a big potential as the other playwrights. Yeats also expressed sincere interest in Lady Gregory and encouraged her in writing plays, so it was natural that he took on him the major share of duties connected with the foundation of the national theatre.

Naturally, it was Yeats’s play, *The Countess Cathleen*, which was performed at the opening evening of the Irish National theatre together with the play by Edward Martyn, *The Heather Field*. This play was despite its quality received in a very negative way. The plays aroused strong opposition, and it had to be performed with the police protection as the reactions of the audience were very hostile. He started writing the play in 1892 and finally completed it seven years later. The play depicts the famine in Ireland that is so serious that the poor people decide to sell their souls to the devil who sends his demons to take their souls in exchange for the money. When Countess Cathleen hears this news, she is terrified and prays for the well-being of her people. She does not manage to protect them and in the end, she offers her own soul to the devil in order to insecure a better life for the people in her county. Yeats brilliantly captured the struggle in Cathleen between her dreams and responsibilities and the struggle among her and the poet Aleel, who discouraged her from her actions.

Other principal characters, Shemus and his son Teigue, interpret the modern Ireland with their need for power and money. They are the first ones to sell their souls to the devil, and they persuade the others to do the same until the people realize what mistake they had done when they see Cathleen dying in order to save

⁴² Weygandt, 46.

⁴³ Weygandt, 46.

them. The fate of the country is described in the dialogue among two soul merchants by the words of the first merchant:

Some sell because the money gleams, and some
Because they are in terror of the grave,
And some because their neighbors sold before,
And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,
In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind;⁴⁴

Yeats wanted to depict the Celtic features of the characters, the fate of the country connected with the old story; he wanted to put the story of the play to the purely Irish background, but his play was severely criticized. On the next day after the premiere of the play, the article published in "Irish Times" named all faults in the play according to its critics, many of whom did not even see the play. "*The Countess Cathleen* is neither a play nor a presentment of either the ideals or actions or motives of Irish men and women...it is without action, without definiteness in the characterization and without consistency in the dramatic development, without truth in its reflection of Celtic temperament or life, and like all inferior plays it fails to excite the smallest genuine interest..."⁴⁵ The play was accused of having no tension, no climax, of being in contrast with the Irish Christian tradition, it was said to be offending Irish history and its dramatic effort was so weak that it was not put into serious consideration, and it was not even considered an Irish play at all.

The main criticism came from the Catholic Church in Ireland. Yeats insisted on saying that the play was put into unknown period in the history, but many connected the plot of the play with the big famine that struck Ireland in 1840s. Of

⁴⁴ W.B. Yeats, *The Countess Cathleen*(Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004) 36.

⁴⁵Alexander Norman Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats* (London: Routledge, 1997) 113.

course, the Irish felt that it was caused by the bad treatment of the Irish by the English. Critics accused Yeats that he was a Protestant noble man and his depiction of poor peasants was shocking and embarrassing, and he did not have the right to do it in the first place. The Catholic Church was angry that Yeats depicted the famine in which Protestants were the benefactors who helped the poor and Yeats being himself Protestant seemed to be helping Protestants to be more influential in Ireland much to the dissatisfaction of the prevalent Catholic Church. Cardinal Michael Logue openly criticized the play, although he had not seen it neither read it at all. Yeats did not hesitate with his reply to all critics:

The Countess Cathleen is a spiritual drama, and the blind bigots of journalism who have made no protest against the musical burlesques full of an immoral suggestion have called it blasphemy and a slander. These attacks are welcome, for there is no discussion so fruitful as the discussion of intellectual things, and no discussion so needed in Ireland. The applause in theatre has shown what party has the victory.⁴⁶

In spite of the attacks, the play became talked about, and it brought the name of Yeats as a playwright into the spotlight.

His following plays had a much better destiny. First openly nationalist play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* won the hearts of the audience. The play takes place in 1798 before the rebellion. We are taken into the cottage of Peter Gillane, who together with his wife Bridget, makes preparations for the wedding of their elder son Michael. The family is visited by the Poor Old Woman, who represents Ireland, and she makes such an impression on Michael that he decides not to marry but join the rebellion that was happening in those times and fight for his native country. The character of the Poor Old Woman was acted by Maud Gonne and her performance being breathtaking made a great impression on the audience:

The old woman with 'too many strangers in her house' and with her 'four beautiful green fields' taken from her, is so patently Ireland possessed by England, all four provinces, that one feels the deep humanity of the sacrifices of Michael Gillane for her, for his country,

⁴⁶ Terence Brown, *The life of W.B. Yeats: a critical biography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001) 127.

even though the sacrifice be on his wedding eve. Seen and listened to this play brings tears to eyes and chokes the throat with sobs, so intimately physical is the appeal of its pathos. It seizes hold of the Irishmen and even the outlander, little sympathetic to the cause of Ireland and holding patriotism a provincial thing, is moved in some strange way he does not understand.⁴⁷

It is important to mention that this play is only a one-act play so the characters and their speeches must be very powerful in order to achieve this sort of effect on the audience.

Yeats dedicated this play to his “mother Ireland” and to all those who died and would die for her and the play moved many people in such a way that they decided to join the fighting for the Irish freedom. Following Michael’s example, many joined the Easter Uprising and Yeats himself was impressed by this immense influence of his play on the Irish as he expressed his views in the very well-known quotation: “Did that play of mine send out certain men the English shot?”⁴⁸ This play marked the height of Yeats’s nationalism, and it created a history. “In the words of Richard Fallis: The Irish dramatic movement was conceived on the afternoon Yeats talked with Martyn and Lady Gregory in the great house in County Galway, but it was born at that production of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.”⁴⁹ At the beginning of the play, we are not aware of the dramatic intensity but the situation changes with the arrival of the Poor Old Woman. The family that was ignorant of the issues of Ireland is moved by the words of a woman representing Ireland.

It is not a surprising fact that the audience was enthusiastic and the effect was really tremendous when we read the words said by the Poor Old Woman:

It is a hard service they take that helps 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;

⁴⁷ Cornelius Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1913) 51.

⁴⁸ Alexander Norman Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats: a new biography* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001) 96.

⁴⁹ M. P. Sinha, *W.B. Yeats: his poetry and politics* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Dist., 2003) 59.

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 will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid.⁵⁰

The woman states that fighting will not be easy, and it will take many lives but those who will fight will be well rewarded and the success it will bring will be worth of the fighting and sacrifices. The woman begs for help as the strangers took her land, her green fields, and they settled down in her house. These words had a major impact on the young patriots, and it helped to raise the love and pride for the Irish nation in their hearts more than any other play before. Yeats himself being a nationalist just expressed the feelings that all Irishmen shared together, he did not intend to use this play as propaganda, and he simply wanted to share his thoughts and his love for the country with the audience. As he said: “It may be said that it is a political play of a propagandist kind. This I deny. I took a piece of human life, thoughts that men had felt, hopes that they had died for, and I put this into what I believe to be a sincere dramatic form.”⁵¹

In his later career, Yeats was still using the motives of the mythology, legends and old stories that he linked to the events and protagonists of the modern Irish history. All his legendary characters such as Cuchulain, Conchubar or Emer that were used in his plays *On Baile's Strand* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* were tragic characters who incorporated the tragic destiny of the Irish nation. He continued to write in accordance with the Celtic revival and underlining the importance of the past in Irish history, but he also put emphasis on the new techniques in drama. He focused on the surrounding effects of music and dance, paid attention to the speech that was very often dramatized and precisely written in verses with sensible lyrical impact, and he produced plays mainly for the smaller audiences with a more intimate atmosphere. However, no other play had such an importance and success as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* with its fierce nationalist undertone.

⁵⁰ W.B. Yeats, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006) 44.

⁵¹ Alexander Norman Jeffares, A.S. Knowland, *A commentary on the collected plays by W.B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975) 36.

6.3 Lady Gregory, *The Gaol Gate* and *Rising of the Moon*

Talking about the founders of the Irish National Theatre, Lady Gregory cannot be omitted. Although she started to produce the plays later than the other founders, and she wrote mostly comedies about the country life and the peasants, we can find the nationalist topics at least in two of her important plays and she also co-worked with W.B. Yeats on the play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Their co-operation was really fruitful and they influenced each other. Lady Gregory was impressed with the success and power of the nationalist plays written by Yeats, and she also wrote two successful nationalist tragedies, *The Gaol Gate* and *Rising of the Moon*. She was assisted by Yeats while writing the latter one.

Her first play, *Spreading the News*, is a comedy that is concentrating on the country people and their genius of myth-making. The play was written in 1904 and had a lot of success. In the next three years, Lady Gregory continued in writing one-act plays as they seemed to be impressive and successful despite their short duration, but she changed the topic of her plays and moved from the comedies to the tragedies.

The Gaol Gate was Lady Gregory's first tragedy and one of her favorite plays. It was written in 1906 and inspired by violence she witnessed in her neighborhood. This play was written with a strong nationalist tone as she clearly expressed her sympathy with the man who was executed and his mother and wife. "That a woman of her lineage and background could so acutely portray the native Irish hatred of British law and of informers, and so vividly dramatize the glorification of a man who has protected the murderers of a landlord and his agent, testifies strongly to her sympathetic understanding."⁵² Gregory explained in her essay that she was inspired by three events that she combined together and that were used as the base for her play. She heard about a man whose brother was executed before he could meet with him, she met two countrywomen who had never been far from their village, and she took care of them as they were completely frightened and lost, and the last inspiration was the story about a man

⁵² Cólín D. Owens, Joan N. Radner, *Irish Drama 1900-1980* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990) 31.

who was accused of giving information about the others but he was found innocent at the court.

The Gaol Gate was a play that Lady Gregory wrote as a rival play to *Riders to the Sea* written by J.M. Synge. When the play opens, we see two poor countrywomen standing in front of the gate of the jail where their son and husband is located. The women, mother and wife of the arrested man, talk about what happened, and they blame the neighbors who started the whole conflict. They brought the envelope that was sent to them, but they have no idea what is written there as they cannot read. They hope that Denis will be free to leave the prison and will leave with his wife and child to America where nobody knows them. However, the gatekeeper appears on the scene and announces to the women that Denis Cahel has already been executed and even buried. He handles them his things and tells them to leave. Mother and wife are broken and shocked and lament the death of Denis. They know that Denis was innocent and died bearing the guilt for his neighbor Terry Fury. The women keep on walking down the streets and they praise the dead. Mother promises that “she will never be tired with praising!”⁵³ In comparison with *The Riders to the Sea*, this play is completely different in its climax. Synge’s play ends with the prominence of the death, however, here the end of the play is marked with the triumph of both women.

The Gaol Gate never concretely names the murdered agent as an Englishman, Denis Cahel is imprisoned in the Irish prison and thus Gregory never openly stated this play is about the victims of the colonial English oppression. Nevertheless, people associated the landlord with the English, and the Irish informers who gave out the information to the English were hated among the Irish. The main idea of this play, therefore, is the fact that Denis Cahel preferred martyrdom over betraying his comrades and co-citizens. They were all Irish, all connected with the same feelings of hate for the English and love for their country, and they protected each other. So then when one of them fell into the hands of the enemy, he did not name his allies but rather died. The sympathy for this national cohesiveness is interwoven throughout the whole plot of the play.

⁵³ Owens, Radner, 37.

Continuing in the tradition with this play, The Abbey Theatre performed another nationalist tragedy by Lady Gregory *Rising of the Moon* only a year after producing *The Gaol Gate*. *Rising of the Moon* opens with a conversation among three policemen who install the placards with the image of the fugitive prisoner. The sergeant reads the notice with a description of the searched person, and he states that anyone who will find that man will definitely be promoted and that the reward of hundred pounds is not sufficient. He is depicted as a very dangerous criminal as no one has broken out of the jail before. The policemen are walking on the quay as they believe that the prisoner might come there and wait for his friends who will come in a boat. The policemen then leave and the sergeant is alone waiting at the quay for something to happen. He meets a man and the man informs him that he is just a poor ballad-singer. The man sings some ballads and says to sergeant that he met the man the police are looking for, and he is a very violent man. They smoke the pipes together and sing some popular songs, the man talks with the sergeant and persuades him that he might have known the man they are looking for, and they could have sung the patriotic songs together, making in this way an appeal on sergeant's feelings. The boat comes and the sergeant discovers the real identity of the ballad-singer, he is the man the police want to catch. The policemen return, but the sergeant does not say anything and saves the man. When the policemen leave again, the man thanks the sergeant and promises to help him if needed in the future. The sergeant stays alone wondering: "am I as great a fool as I think I am?" because he could have obtained hundred pounds reward and a promotion.

W.B. Yeats helped Lady Gregory with writing of this play, and it is an openly patriotic play that is marked even by the title of the play itself. *Rising of the Moon* was a popular patriotic ballad attributed to John Keegan Casey that was famous, mainly in the 19th century. The central theme of the play involves the actions from the beginning of the 20th century connected with Fenian nationalists who demanded the independence from the English to be granted to the Irish. The sergeant is Irish, and although he works for the Crown, he is torn by his loyalty to the British and his sympathy for those who fight for the freedom of Ireland. The songs that the man sings to the sergeant are all patriotic songs that are aimed to move the sergeant's feelings. Lady Gregory's argument was that the sergeant's

actions “were not a change of mind, but the release of a deeper instinct, his Irish heart and memory of youth that had been moved unconsciously to himself.”⁵⁴ This play can be viewed as a response to the calling of the Poor Old Woman in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Those Fenians that the play deals with went to fight directly for the freedom and when they escaped from the prison, the Irish police officers working for the English, were not able to resist helping them, even though they knew that they would face problems if it were found out and they would have to give up the material reward and recognition as well.

Rising of the Moon was considered to be the most significant one-act play written by Lady Gregory. It confronts the struggle among English law and Irish identity and despite the despair, it offers some gleams of hope. Although the pro-English persons did not like the play because of the policeman moved by Irish cause and the nationalists, on the other hand, argued that the policemen are depicted in favorable light, the play interested the audience. It again underlined the strength of the Irishness that can be found in every single Irishman, even in those who work in British services. This feeling of belonging to the Irish nation and feeling of compassion with the co-citizen, even if he is an escaping prisoner is stronger than the loyalty to those who employ the person. Irishness is the distinctive feature, it is the feeling coming from the heart that never disappears and that is much more important than the material rewards.

6.4 Padraic Colum and his plays

Padraic Colum was a well-known poet, but also a novelist and a dramatist. He was a member of the board in the Abbey Theatre, and his plays were performed quite often. He started writing influenced by the events surrounding him and his first successful play *The Saxon Shilling* was written in 1902. Colum was only 21 years old when he wrote this play, but he had already been a member of the Gaelic League and of the Irish Republican Army. The play was published in *The United Irishman*, newspaper led by Arthur Griffith, and it drew an attention of W.B. Yeats and of brothers Fay who all worked in the Abbey Theatre. They persuaded him to leave his career of a clerk and join their community. Colum

⁵⁴ Joseph Ronsley, *Myth and Reality in Irish Literature* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977) 31.

became an actor; moreover, he wrote a few other plays as *The Saxon Shilling* was a very popular and even prize-winning one-act play.

The Saxon Shilling is a story of a young Irishman, Frank Kearney, who had joined the English army and chose the death rather than killing his own people and burning their houses. He takes the gun of his father and begs his other comrades to go with him and fight although they know they will never come back from the battle. “The play’s moral, uttered in the line, ‘We can’t buy ourselves back with the money we sold ourselves for, ‘touched every Irish reader.’”⁵⁵ The play was written in a fervent nationalist tone and the officials at the Abbey Theatre feared the reactions of the public, so the play was performed only by the amateur acting groups.

The motif of Mother Ireland is present in this play again, similarly to Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*:

The play’s conclusion merits attention, for its emphasis on dedication of life to a Mother Ireland, as Seamus, who had also taken the ‘Saxon Shilling’ (joined the British Army) declares: ‘Mother, forgive me for Brideen’s sake. Let me, too, die for you.’ The notable feature is not so much the willing embrace of death for nationalist cause, but the fact that death is chosen so as to transform Ireland herself, into the state of youth, beauty and Freedom.⁵⁶

Seeing that he had a great potential and talent, Colum decided to emerge him into writing a play that could be performed in the Abbey Theatre. In 1903, he wrote *Broken Soil*. It brought the immediate recognition of Colum as a playwright that could depict the Irish country people in a very realistic way. Colum spent a lot of time with the country people while he was growing up, and he considered himself the only one capable of capturing the real Irish accents in his plays. “Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge, and all were doing it. But the truth of the matter is that I was the only one of the lot that knew what the real country speech sounded

⁵⁵ Sanford Sterlicht, *Selected plays of Padraic Colum* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006) 9.

⁵⁶ David Cairns, Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: colonialism, nationalism and culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 76-77.

like.”⁵⁷ The play was soon revised and had been given a new name, *The Fiddler’s House*. The play is an allegory on the freedom, and it depicts a peasant fiddler that chooses to travel, meanwhile his children decide to stay home and be farmers, feeling the strong connection with the native land.

A very similar theme can be found in the following play *The Land*. It again captures the beloved theme of country people and their hesitating if to stay at home and take care of the land they could finally possess or if to travel and go to America where a better life could be achieved. The land for the older generation represents everything precious in their lives, but it is the young generation that is vitally important for the future of Ireland. *The Land* is the most political play of Colum because: “In subject matter as well as language, *The Land* opened the theater to realistic peasant plays as Yeats’s Classicism and Synge’s Romanticism could not do, so that serious national problems could be discussed in the drama and the Abbey Theatre could become a forum for national social and political aspiration.”⁵⁸ Colum, however, does not glorify Ireland, but he shows the difficulties that the maturing nation has to overcome on its way to the desired independence.

In 1907, Colum left the Abbey as he was not satisfied with the leadership of W.B. Yeats. He later wrote one more important nationalist play. It was the play *Betrayal* written in 1912. Colum had previously faced the accusations of the nationalists that he was writing his plays for the English audience which he resolutely refused, and it was one of the main reasons why he decided to write another nationalist play, his last one, but the best one-act play about Ireland. The play was refused at first as it was considered too inflammatory, so Colum took it with himself to the United States. He went to Pittsburgh to visit his aunt, and he stayed there for the rest of his life motivated by the nationalist issues. “Colum did not want to aid the British war effort, and he believed he could further the cause

⁵⁷ Cólín D. Owens, Joan N. Radner, *Irish Drama 1900-1980* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990) 82.

⁵⁸ Sanford Sterlicht, *Selected plays of Padraic Colum* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006) 13.

of Irish independence as a propagandist in America.”⁵⁹ The play, therefore, had its premiere in 1914 in Pittsburgh, later followed by performances in Dublin.

The central theme is the resistance to a foreign tyranny and the betrayal of the opportunists who betrayed the old values of loyalty. Two brothers Lefroy who represent the British authority want the Irish to inform them who killed the British army sergeant. They come up with an idea of a pseudo-informer and abuse old Peg, the ballad singer, who comes to ask about the fate of her son. They present her as the informer. Her son was a deserter from the army, and he saved himself by being an informer. Peg is considered to be the informer as well, so she kills one of the brothers, Morgan Lefroy. However, she is completely disappointed by the behavior of her son. “Peg is a heroic symbol of Old Ireland, a peasant woman full of compassion, conviction, and strength.”⁶⁰ The play with its actual theme captured the feelings of hatred, anger and desperation that led to the Easter Uprising in 1916.

Betrayal was the last play written by Colum about Ireland. He later wrote a few more plays influenced, similarly to Yeats, by the Noh Theatre. However, his plays about the Irish issues brought him the fame in play writing and had an important role in the period when the idea of forming the independent Ireland was creating.

6.5 John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*

The arrival of J.M. Synge on the stage of the Abbey Theatre can be marked as the change of the moods connected with the nationalist movement. His plays made a real revolution and changed the viewing of the nationalist issues in that time. Synge had been living in Paris when he met there W.B. Yeats, whom he befriended and Yeats even convinced Synge to return back home. When Synge returned to Ireland, he found out that he finally found himself. He spent majority of his life observing the specific features of the Irish peasants and the lives they led. He traveled a lot and discovered places, which were not well-known neither

⁵⁹ Sterlicht, 15.

⁶⁰ Sterlicht, 16.

to the Irish themselves. He returned every summer to the Aran Islands where he learnt Irish and was so amazed by the simplicity of life of its inhabitants that he used many of these experiences in his later dramatic works.

His first play performed in the Abbey Theatre was *In the Shadow of the Glen* written in 1903. It is a one-act play that captures a very simple situation. The main protagonists are the married couple, Daniel and Nora Burke. Dan pretends to be dead and his wife already plans to marry another man. Dan wakes up and he sends her away from their home to walk the roads with a tramp. The play begins in a comic mode when we realize the absurd situation of the man who pretends to be dead in order to discover the infidelity of his wife, but in the end, the play reaches some tragic intensity. The play explores the topic of loneliness and fear. Nora Burke is feeling lonesome despite her marriage, because her husband has always been cold to her and she yearned for love and commitment.

Synge drew an inspiration for these plays from his observations of the peasants living in Wicklow glens. People there lived in scattered cottages and despite their enjoyment of the country life; they were confronted by fear, loneliness and confusion. Synge underlines the beauty and romanticism of life in the middle of the nature, but he also focuses on the difficulties that this life brings. He was also inspired by the folklore, by the songs about troubled love among a shepherd and a young woman. The play was not well received by the audience that considered it offensive to the Irish peasants and not nationalistic enough. Synge believed in nationalism and he declared that the main inspiration for this play was a story he heard, so he was trying to connect his play with Irish folk stories. However, he was accused of bringing the foreign interpretations of the characters to the stage and Nora was criticized for leaving her husband. The whole interpretation of the characters was viewed as disrespectful and rude.

Synge continued in the tradition of describing the life and its difficulties being inspired by his own experiences and one year later after *In the Shadow of the Glen*, he wrote another one-act play, *Riders to the Sea*. The play takes place on one of the Aran Islands and depicts the ill fate of an old woman, Maurya, who lost her husband and all sons to the sea. She has only two sons living at the beginning of the play, but she is expecting the news about the death of Michael as the corpse

was found on the shore. Her only surviving son, Bartley, leaves the home, even though she asks him to stay, and he never comes back alive. Bartley falls off the horse and gets drowned. Maurya remains alone with her daughter Nora, and they lament over the death of their family members. This tragedy is often said to be the best one-act play as it captures the tragic mood in a very powerful way. The sea interprets the fate of the family, they need the sea in order to survive, but the same sea steals their lives. The sea is always present throughout the play, and it adds to the special atmosphere of the play. Maurya represents the whole fate of humanity and its experience with the always present death, so the audience has a great opportunity to identify with her. This play moves the feelings of the people, and it had a much better reception than the previous one. The theatre was full and Synge had a lot of success so everybody was expecting what the next play would be like.

Similarly to the previous plays, Synge wrote another play concerning with the Irish countryside one year after. *The Well of the Saints* is a play about two blind beggars who believe themselves to be beautiful. When they get their sight back, being healed by the Saint, they realize they are not pretty at all. Next time they meet the Saint, they refuse his help, so they offend him and have to leave the little town where they used to live. The play is again filled with characters similar to those whom Synge met while he was wandering in Ireland and uses his experiences as the base for the incidents depicted.

For the next two years, there was no new play written by Synge, so when *The Playboy of the Western World* was performed for the very first time, it brought a lot of attention. The play was written in 1907 and first performed at the Abbey Theatre in January of the same year. The play is situated in the county Mayo, and it takes place at the beginning of the 20th century. Christy Mahon comes to Flaherty's tavern, and he claims that he killed his father and is on the run. Flaherty's daughter, Pegeen Mike falls in love with Christy, and he is praised by the villagers for his courage. She abandons her boyfriend Shawn because of him. Christy quickly becomes a hero of the town as he wins the donkey race and makes a lot of impressions on the women in the town. However, his status weakens when his father appears on the scene. He did not die, but was only injured, and now he finally found his son. Christy, being accused of being a liar and coward, kills his father again. Nevertheless, the villagers decide that he must

be hanged because they cannot bear the fact that he committed a crime in front of all of them. When Christy is about to be hanged, his father comes again having survived the second attack of his son as well. Pegeen marries Shawn and Christy is obliged to leave the town, so he goes to wander with his father.

The acceptance of this play was overwhelmingly negative, and it caused the riots that had not been ever seen in the Abbey Theatre before. People were offended by the depiction of the western Ireland that seemed to them to be portrayed in a very exaggerated and vulgar way. The audience was offended by the language used in the play that mentioned parts of female undergarment. The nationalists led by Arthur Griffith proclaimed that the play was not political enough, and it was “a vile and inhuman story told in the foulest language we have ever listened to from a public platform”. The play was also said to be putting a negative view on Irish women and the fact that it was based on the fratricide added to the animus of the audience.

The audience booed the play, and the police officers had to intervene and arrest those who caused disturbances. This action only added fuel to the fire. “Police representing an English government arresting Irishmen in the national theater raised the furor of many nationalist protestors, but the directors remained adamant.”⁶¹ Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats supported their playwright, and they refused to forbid the play. Lady Gregory warned the audience that they must take what the theater offers to them, and if they do not like it, they do not have to come.

The truth is that the Abbey Theatre gained a lot of money thanks to the polemics that rose after performance of the *Playboy*. “The week of the *Playboy* riots, the theater grossed one hundred pounds more than its usual take. The Abbey charged half the usual price for a seat at the debate regarding the *Playboy* and again the house was full. Considering that none of the speakers were paid, again the Abbey made a healthy profit.”⁶² People were interested in the play and the revolution that it created, but only few of them really made some disturbances. The numbers say it was only about forty persons out of five hundred.

⁶¹ Mary Trotter, *Ireland's national theatres: political performance and the origins of the Irish dramatic movement*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press,2001) 125.

⁶² Trotter, 125.

The debate about this play was joined by many prominent leaders of the nationalist movement. Synge had been already sick, so it was W.B. Yeats, who came to defend the Abbey. Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, leading nationalist, “declared that the play in his opinion was bad, the organized disturbance was worse and the methods employed to quell the disturbance the worst of all.”⁶³ Nationalists did not approve of the way in which the Abbey officials called the police to arrest the Irishmen, and they did not understand that the only reason for this was that Yeats wanted the audience to see and hear the play until its end what was impossible while there were the disturbances. The nationalists had already made a lot of accusations toward the Abbey as it seemed a little pro-nationalist. In other theatres, the audience was allowed to sing the patriotic songs and cheer the heroes during the plays, while in the Abbey they had to behave in a dignified way.

The debate put the question of the national theatre to the spotlight again. Nationalists were not satisfied with the choice of the plays; this was the peak of their dissatisfaction that the play that was defaming Irish identity and femininity was staged in the national theatre. “Synge’s critics believed that, to be national, an institution must reflect the popular sympathies of the nation, while the directors insisted that the nation’s identity could only be forged by artists working independently.”⁶⁴ The gap created between the nationalists and the Irish national theatre was widening.

It is important to mention that the first problems came right after the performance of *In the Shadow of the Glen* and *The Countess Cathleen*, however, it was after the performance of the *Playboy* that the Abbey had to admit that they were not sharing the same ideas with the leaders of the nationalist movement:

The directors could no longer portray themselves or their theater as an integral part of the nationalist community or their detractors as a few noisy extremists. Instead, they were forced to accept the Theatre’s estrangement from the nationalist community as complete and final and fell back to defending the play on purely artistic grounds. In so doing, the directors redefined the role of the national theater within Irish society,

⁶³ Trotter, 126.

⁶⁴ George Cusack, *The politics of identity in Irish drama: W.B. Yeats, Augusta Gregory and J.M. Synge* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009) 149.

making it in many ways an antagonist of the nationalist cultural movement rather than a part of it.⁶⁵

By doing so, the Abbey changed not only their relationship with the nationalist movement, but its playwrights changed the view of the nationalism.

The *Playboy* depicts the whole society, their perception of the rural Ireland, the political situation, and it does not hesitate to criticize the situation that was in Ireland. The play depicts the process of making a national hero by the society and underlines the power of the individual to change the society through language:

Synge presents the full cycle of Irish rebirth, as he saw it, from community to individual and back to community, but the characters who personify this vision are mocked at every turn, and by the end of the play, the cycle has completely broken down. This breakdown, we shall see, represents Synge's attack on contradictions inherent in the rhetoric of Gaelic nationalism and the monopoly it sought to establish over Irish discourse.⁶⁶

Synge believed in nationalism and he loved Ireland, but he brought the new view of the nationalist issues not only in his plays, but also in his ideas.

As we can see from his last play, *Deirdre of Sorrows* that was not finished by him, but by Yeats because Synge died before finishing it, he was inspired by Irish folklore and its stories and myths, and he used them in his play in a tradition with the plays connected with the Celtic Revival movement. He was interested in the past of his nation and underlined its importance and significance, but he believed that "the Irish nationhood could not come from a recreation of the mythic past, but only through a reconnection with the past which infuses its vitality into a modern subjectivity."⁶⁷ It can be said that the main innovation brought by Synge is in an idea that the nostalgic mood favored by Gaelic nationalists was considered as a failure by him, and he offered an alternative in progressive type of nationalism. Synge depicted the Irishness in a way he felt it, he portrayed how the Irish felt about their Irishness in those times, not in the past. He underlined the

⁶⁵ Cusack, 149.

⁶⁶ Cusack, 150.

⁶⁷ Cusack, 165.

idea that the English rule of Ireland cannot be erased, it is a part of their history, but Ireland has its own identity, and they need to focus on it rather than on the struggle with their past and the English. Synge did not urge the complete liberation of Ireland as he felt that the identity of the nation could live on its own. He felt that the nationalists concentrating on the oppression did not resist it, but they always brought it back and perpetuated in it what he considered as a wrong step.

J. M. Synge was not only a brilliant playwright, but he also marked the differences among the Abbey and the nationalist movement and from this point the ways of these institutions departed. As the history evolved, the nationalist ideas developed as well, and it was Synge, who made the first signal for the national theatre to change its point of view and modernize itself offering rather joy of living and having a specific identity than surviving on the bitterness and nostalgia connected with the past.

6.6 Sean O'Casey, *The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars*

The new view of the nationalism developed during the following years, and it changed according to the interpretation made by the most important dramatic representatives. Sean O'Casey was the most famous playwright in the 1920s, his plays were very successful, but some of them were also controversial, and he was quickly put into the position of the follower of J.M. Synge.

O'Casey was born in Dublin in a poor family. These two facts influenced his later life and his works as he wrote mainly about the inhabitants of Dublin and expressed a lot of sympathy for the poor laborers. O'Casey joined the nationalist institutions very soon; he was a member of the Gaelic League, The Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Citizen Army. He attended the performances at the Abbey Theatre and enjoyed the plays written by Synge. Although he was poorly educated, he loved to read books, and literature influenced him so much that he decided to write. He began writing about the history of Irish Citizen Army; he wrote a few articles about the labor movements and later moved to write the dramatic sketches for the Gaelic League. He was

trying to achieve some success with his dramatic works and was sending his plays to the Abbey.

His very first successful play, *The Shadow of a Gunman* was written in 1923, and it was finally accepted by the Abbey. The play was previously called *On the Run*, but O'Casey changed its title according to the suggestion made by the manager of the Abbey, Lennox Robinson. An inspiration for this play was the atmosphere of the War of Independence dwelling in the streets of Dublin. The premiere of the play took place in a very difficult time when the Abbey struggled with the lack of finances and the IRA threatened to close it. The play was set by the author to be a tragedy, and it describes the experiences of Donal Davoren, a poet, who comes to live to the tenement house in Dublin. He shares the room with Seumas Shields and many inhabitants of the house believe that Davoren is an IRA volunteer. He accepts their opinion as it brings him the interest and love of Minnie Powell, a young and beautiful woman living in the same tenement. Mr. Maguire, business partner of Shields and the real IRA volunteer, hides the bombs in a bag in Shields's room and is later killed in an ambush. Shields and Davoren do not find the bag. When the tenement is raided by the British troops and the bag is finally discovered, Minnie takes it with her, hoping that the troops would not hurt a woman. However, the bag is found by the troops and Minnie is killed while she is trying to escape. Her last words are: "Up with the Republic!"

The incident was inspired by the real event that happened to O'Casey while he was living in the tenement with his roommate Michael Mulligan and Davoren, as well as Shields share a lot of features of the author. It is important to mention that O'Casey ceased to support and believe in nationalism in 1916 after the Easter Uprising, and he stayed in the position of the observer, but never directly joined the efforts of the nationalists. *The Shadow of a Gunman* is aimed to criticize the cowardice of the Irish and the uselessness of the death of those courageous ones:

It displays the cowardice of several presumably representative Irishmen in the face of the Black-and-Tan harassment. At the same time, the courage unto death of Minnie and Maguire is made to seem futile. Maguire, the only genuine revolutionary, speaks a few lines early in the play and then disappears from the stage, so that the case in his favor is

never put to the audience. Donal reproaches himself for being a ‘poltroon’, but his real sin is not so much cowardice as the advantage he takes of the other tenement dwellers who mistake him for a gunman on the run.⁶⁸

The first play of the so-called Dublin trilogy sets the tone for the two plays to come in its direct criticism of Irish nationalists unable to defend themselves from the British but underlining their fierce nationalism.

The second play from the trilogy was written one year later, and it is *Juno and the Paycock*. The play was opened at the Abbey in March 1924. It deals with the events of the Civil War and the feelings of the war were still present. Even though the play concentrates on the family life of Juno and Jack Boyle, the actions of the war outside their flat play a significant role in the play. The main protagonist Jack Boyle is a retired merchant seaman that spends all his time by drinking with his friend Joxer Daly meanwhile his wife Juno has to earn the money and take care of their household. Jack claims he cannot work because of the pain in his legs. They have two kids, son Johnny, who lost his arm in the War of Independence and was severely injured in the Easter Uprising as well, and daughter Mary, who is on strike. An English solicitor, Mr. Bentham announces to the family that their relative died, and they will inherit his money. They are all very happy, and they spend a lot of money on credits as they promise to the people they borrowed the money from to return them the money when the inheritance is paid off to them. Meanwhile, Mary falls in love with Bentham and gets pregnant. The family is later confronted with the fact that they will not inherit anything because Bentham did not understand the meaning of the last will and moreover, Bentham himself returned to England and never sent a word about him. The tragedy reaches its peak as Johnny is taken by the IRA members and is executed as a punishment for the betrayal of his fellow comrade Tancred.

O’Casey used a typical Irish approach when he combined the features of comedy and tragedy into one play. Even though *Juno and the Paycock* is a tragedy, it does not share the typical tragic scheme. The play starts in a very

⁶⁸ J. R. Hill, *A New History of Ireland Volume VII: Ireland, 1921-84* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 491.

uplifting mood and the characters of Jack Boyle and his friend Joxer are entirely comic. However, the end of the play is purely tragic. All the events-pregnancy of Mary, death of Johnny, loss of the money- create a mood of an anguish and are very touching, but the play does not reach the catharsis as is well-known in the genre of tragedy. The combination of these features brought a big success to the play. Another important factor that added to the popularity of the play is the way it handles the current problems of that period:

Time so far has neither solved the Irish problems nor dimmed the impact of the play, for its power lies only superficially in its relevance to local political events. Rather, it deals compellingly with fortitude and resilience in the face of adversity, with the futility of violence as a social or political weapon, and with the inevitable victimization of the poor whenever great political movements are under way.⁶⁹

O'Casey interwove many themes into this play, and he continued to spread his ideas that every single man is responsible for the happenings in the society. Many people in the audience considered this play unpatriotic as it portrayed the horror of killing each other as a political solution. The glorious idea of fighting and dying for the nation is very sharply contrasted with the bloodshed and brutality that are depicted. O'Casey emphasized the difference among the abstract notion of the idea of heroism in the name of the nation and its cruel consequences that, in reality, bring the sorrow to many families.

The criticism of the violence and fighting for the nationalist causes reached its peak with the last play from Dublin trilogy, *The Plough and the Stars*. The play was performed for the first time in 1926 at the Abbey, and it caused riots similar to those after the performance of *The Playboy of the Western World*. The play takes place in Dublin, it begins with the preparations for the Easter Uprising in 1915, later it depicts the events of the uprising itself. Characters from the working class discuss the current situation and are full of expectations about the upcoming uprising. We meet the character of Jack, who joins the Irish Citizen Army after he learns that he was promoted to a commandant. It was announced to him in the

⁶⁹ Phillip G. Hill, *Our Dramatic Heritage: Reactions to Realism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991) 254.

letter that his wife Nora burnt because she does not want him to leave. The second act takes place in the public house; the prostitutes complain that the political meeting that takes place outside is not good for their business. Young men join the meeting led by Patrick Pearse, and they are full of emotions. They wear Irish flag and are determined to fight for their nation. In the following act, the actual fighting is depicted. Jack brings a wounded rebel home, his pregnant wife begs him not to go to fight again, but he refuses. Nora has a stillbirth and she is lying delirious dreaming about Jack. Meanwhile, it is announced that Jack is dead. The British army raids the house as they suspect that the civilians helped the rebellious sniper. Nora comes to the window and calls Jack. She is pushed away by Bessie Burgess who gets shot in the neck and dies.

The riot at the premiere of the play was led by Mrs. Sheehy-Skeffington, the widow of the prominent nationalist, the same one who openly criticized the *Playboy* and who died during the Easter Uprising. W.B. Yeats had to defend the playwright again, and he sharply attacked the rioters saying: “You have disgraced yourselves again. Is this to be an ever recurring celebration of the arrival of Irish genius? Synge first and then O’Casey.”⁷⁰ The riots hurt O’Casey and he left from Ireland and went to England where he stayed for good.

Despite the anger and frustration of O’Casey, it is important to mention that he is the only one to be blamed for the riots and hatred of the people in the theatre. O’Casey did not support the Easter Uprising, and he abandoned the structure of the Irish Republican Brotherhood frustrated by its activities. He was coming from the working class, and he felt that the efforts of the nationalists lead to the creation of the new middle-class. He strongly opposed this idea and argued that the nationalists neglected the poor people. His personal problem with the leaders of the Uprising can be traced in the play. He deals with the events and protagonists of the Uprising in a very inadequate way. “It indeed treats the Easter Rebellion as an absurd and inhumane theatrical event, a monument to male vanity and to Padraic Pearse’s sadomasochistic frenzy for Irish self-immolation.”⁷¹ The depiction of Pearse and the martyrs from the Easter Uprising as persons desiring the bloodshed because they considered it a cleansing act was a very wrong choice

⁷⁰ Harold Bloom, *Dramatists and Dramas* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2005) 201.

⁷¹ Bloom, 202.

for the playwright. The Irish were, naturally, proud of the martyrs who died during the fights for their independence and as the events depicted in the play happened only few years before, the majority of the people in the audience had very fresh memories of these actions. They could not admire the portrayal of the rebellion chosen by O'Casey.

After the disastrous reaction of the audience and the massive wave of riots, the Abbey Theatre decided not to perform more plays written by O'Casey. It was clear that ridiculing of the historical events so important for the Irish was not the right direction which the theatre should take. O'Casey left to England, and even though he was trying to be accepted at the Abbey again when he sent the text of his following play, *The Silver Tassie*, he was rejected. It took seventeen years until another play of his could be staged in Ireland, and still it was not staged by the Abbey.

O'Casey again changed the point of view of the nationalist actions. He drew the inspiration for his plays from the most important events in Irish history of the 20th century and depicted them in a very innovative way. He made a scheme of his attitude toward these events in the first play of the trilogy, spread it in the second one and reached its peak in the third one. It could be accepted that he had a personal problem with the actions of the IRB and the IRA, and he refused to support these activities. However, his rage against the persons that were viewed as martyrs was felt to be too much for the Irish. His aim was to underline the futility of the violence, fear, sorrow and pain it brings, and to focus on the fact that the violence does not solve the problems. He dismissed the idea of fighting each other, and he satirized and ridiculed the activities of the people who were fierce nationalists and fought for Ireland. Ridiculing the actions of the Easter Rebellion was too exaggerated, and it crossed the boundary of acceptance. With the first two plays, people could grasp its power, its dealing with the wars and cruelty of the violence, but the third one was the offense to their feelings and to the memory of those who died for Ireland.

In spite of all polemics, speculations and debates about the amount of satire and criticism in his plays, it must be stated that O'Casey had a very important role in the history of Irish drama. He raised the fame of the Abbey in 1920s, and his

plays saved it from bankruptcy. His plays were fairly popular and what is most important, he brought a new view of the nationalist issues. Before O'Casey, the nationalist motifs were used to fuel the people, to wake the pride and love for the nation in them. Synge attacked this view of nationalism by questioning its double significance and proposed a new alternative to the old one that was not progressing. O'Casey made even more. He did not hesitate to openly criticize, satirize and ridicule the nationalism and questioned the worth of nationalist causes if they lead to bloodshed. People may have a different attitude to his portrayal of nationalism, but it cannot be denied that he raised the issues of nationalism to completely diverse level.

6.7 Lennox Robinson, *The Big House*

Lennox Robinson is best known as a theatre producer and director of the Abbey Theatre. He was also a playwright and poet and launched his career as soon as in 1907 when he saw the performance of the plays written by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory. In the same year, he published his first poem and started to write a play. The play was produced and performed at the Abbey in 1908, and it was called *The Clancy Name*. The play dealt with a woman whose pride for her son was shattered when her son killed a man, but renewed after he died while trying to save a life of a child. One year after, Robinson became a manager of the Abbey. He had been a manager of the theatre until 1914 when he resigned after the unsuccessful tour in the United States and the criticism of his work by Lady Gregory. In this period, Robinson showed himself as a nationalist with two published plays, *Patriots* and *Dreamers*. The play *Patriots* depicted the fate of an old Fenian, who left the British prison after 15 years and expected to be considered a hero, but the people treat him with indifference. The plot of *Dreamers* was focusing on an Irish rebel, Robert Emmett and his unsuccessful rebellion in 1803.

Three more plays followed and Robinson also wrote one more novel. In 1919, he returned to the Abbey theatre and by 1923, he had already been a member of the board of directors. His life was completely dedicated to the Abbey as he spent the rest of life in the position of the manager, wrote plays for the

theatre, helped to establish the Peacock Theatre and after the Abbey burned down, he wrote the history of the theatre.

One of the most well-known and important plays written by Robinson is *The Big House*. It was written in 1926, so in the same period when O'Casey was producing his plays, but this play expresses a very different attitude toward nationalism. The plot of the play takes place in the period among the end of World War I and the Civil War in Ireland. It focuses on the family of Alcocks, who lost two sons in World War I. Their only daughter Kate is the main protagonist of the play that defends the nationalist ideas. The big house from the title is represented by Ballydonal House where the Alcock family lives. The house is constantly threatened- by the Irish guerillas first, during the Anglo-Irish War, and later by the Republicans during the Civil War, who in the end burn the house down.

Mother of the family, Mrs. Alcock is originally English, and her English manners are pictured throughout the whole play. When the house burns, she is happy because she can go back to England. She has never felt at home in Ireland. The play concentrates on the relations of the family and the other villagers, as the Alcock family is an Anglo-Irish Protestant family, meanwhile the majority of the villagers are Irish Catholics. The family feels it to be necessary to differ from the original Irish, who are depicted in a less positive way. Main example of the Irish is the young guy, Vandaleur O'Neill, who refused to frequent an English school and is pictured as a very simple, irresponsible boy. The family realizes that the assimilation with people such as O'Neills is impossible for them because of the differences in their classes, religion and education.

After Kate's nurse is murdered by the British troops, Kate realizes that she does not want to differ from the rest of the people in the village, but there is no such possibility because everyone considers her an outsider. Kate refuses to marry Captain Montgomery Despard, who is an English soldier, because she has no sympathy for the British troops. Even though she lives for some time in London, she comes back home and never returns to London again. After their house burns down and her parents decide to live in England, Kate informs them that she will come back to Ireland and live there. Kate feels that, deep down, she is Irish, and

she does not want to live in England, she feels at home only in Ireland. She made an agreement with her brother Ulick that they would take care of their house and never leave their village and after the death of her brother, she was the only one who could fulfill this promise.

The symbol of the house is very important in this play. Robinson was naturally inspired by the beginning of the 1920s when more than 200 houses were burnt down. He was concerned with the relation among the Protestant Ascendancy and their role in the newly made state. Kate needs to save the house as it has a more important role now, it is more than a house:

Kate's suggestion is that Ballydonal House must be rebuilt because now it has clear political role within the new state: that of declaring a hierarchical class structure to be solidly intact. For her, the role of the former Ascendancy in contemporary Ireland is to glory their *corps d'élite* status and not to reconcile themselves to the coarsening effects of democracy.⁷²

The play not only depicted the nationalism of Kate and her love for Ireland, but it also captured the vulnerability of the Protestant minority and that definitely added to the enthusiasm of the predominantly Catholic and nationalist audience.

The Big House was a successful play as it dealt with the current political events in the country depicted in a somehow sentimental way, it questions the relations and ties among the mixed Anglo-Irish families and the Irish ones, but also among the different classes and religions. The popularity of the play was marked by the character of Kate Alcock, who is one of the best pictured women in the modern Irish realism. She comes from the mixed family, and although she realizes her difference from the other families in their village, she feels that this is her home and she is in her heart Irish. She even supports the efforts of Irish revolutionaries, learns Irish language, and she never leaves Ireland. She feels that her role is important for the future of the village and the whole country and that the ties among different classes and religions do not have to be broken, and they can both participate in the creation of the Irish Free State side by side.

⁷² Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the state in twentieth-century Ireland: cultivating the people* (London: Routledge, 2001)108-9.

6.8 Denis Johnston, *The Old Lady Says No!*

Denis Johnston studied law at Harvard University and while he lived in the United States, he took part in performances made by American little theatres. He got impressed by the theatre and drama and decided to write a play of his own. His first play was called *Shadow dance*, but it was rejected by the Abbey Theatre. Lennox Robinson, the manager of the theatre sent the copy of the text back to Johnston with the note: “The old lady says no!” and Johnston decided to change the title of the play in order to annoy Lady Gregory (the old lady mentioned by Robinson) and the Abbey Theatre. The play was rejected by the Abbey, and so it was performed at the Gate Theatre.

The reason why the play was rejected by the Abbey is very simple. The play was written in a very similar manner as the plays written by O’Casey that expressed the dissatisfaction with the policy in Ireland and criticized or almost mocked the nationalists. The Abbey Theatre was still considered a national theatre of Ireland, and so it could not perform a play of this kind.

The Old Lady Says No! is an expressionistic play and it reflects author’s disregard for authority. “The play combines traditional Irish themes of revolutionary fervor, idealism, and sentimentality with trenchant and distinctly Continental critique of Stage Irishness and nationalistic true believers.”⁷³ The play begins by introducing the character of Robert Emmett, an Irish national hero, who died in 1803 after his unsuccessful rebellion when he wanted to say goodbye to his sweetheart Sarah Curran and got caught by the police officer, Major Sirr. The scene quickly changes and Emmett finds himself in Dublin in the 20th century. His personality is split in order to satirize the romanticism connected with his person. He wanders through the streets of Dublin looking for Sarah, but he cannot find her and people refuse to help him. They laugh at him and call him a liar because he is only an actor, not real Robert Emmett.

The original romantic depiction of the scene among Robert and Sarah is parodied because Johnston believed that the time of sweet and romantic narratives was over as Ireland was confronted by the wars in the previous years. His parody

⁷³ Alexander G. Gonzalez, *Modern Irish Writers: a bio-critical sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997) 120.

relies on the overabundance of romantic clichés performed by both main protagonists: “Sarah Curran’s opening speech, for example, takes the form of reverie on Ireland’s national splendors and the nationalist desire that these have generated in her beloved Robert Emmett. It is a speech made up almost entirely of quotes from well-known 19th century songs and poems in the romantic tradition.”⁷⁴ The speech of Emmett is similarly filled with romantic clichés and excerpts from various songs and poems.

Scenes that take place in the streets of Dublin portray the country that does not seem sympathetic to Emmett anymore. Johnston satirizes many Irish cultural fragments- urban language of O’Casey, Synge’s poetic speech, the ballads by Irish poets, Yeats’s idealization of Cathleen, Irish political speeches, death scenes, censorship of the arts, female heroines and child performers. “The effect of this sensory onslaught is a piece that manages to represent the performative conventions of Ireland’s national drama as a kind of realist false consciousness.”⁷⁵ Johnston uses the modern techniques inspired by the European avant-garde. His deconstruction of the vision of the former nationalist events gives the audience the opportunity to rethink the portrayal of Irish selfhood that is presented on the stage.

Denis Johnston brought an experimental manner to Irish drama and again switched the point of view of the nationalist issues. He is not only satirizing and parodying nationalist events and characters, but he splits the characters and deconstructs the historical facts putting in opposition the romantic view connected with some of them with the unromantic, civil reality. He forces the audience to deconstruct the structure of his play as well in order to capture the meaning made of the mixture of well-known cultural segments used in the past performed in a new satirizing way. Johnston was one of the best interwar authors of Irish drama and his perception of new techniques used in his plays brought a very refreshing experience into Irish dramatic works.

⁷⁴ Daniel K. Jernigan, *Drama and the Postmodern: assessing the limits of metatheatre* (London: Cambria Press, 2008) 69.

⁷⁵ Jernigan, 71.

Conclusion

Nationalism has played an important role in the history of every nation. It naturally influenced all spheres of public life, including literature and education. Ireland has always been considered to be one of the most nationalist countries in the world. This fact is caused by the complicated history of the country that had to search for its own cultural and historical identity, and in the same time had to manage to deal with the burden of the negative ties among Ireland and England that pursued its rule in Ireland for many centuries.

The nationalist efforts reached its peak at the end of the 19th century when the country began its cultural resurrection. The creation of the Gaelic Revival movement that put emphasis on the use of Irish language and establishment of Irish cultural institutions was the first signal for the Irish that the search for their cultural identity was finished. Language and literature have prominent significance for every nation and thanks to the literates whose aim was to support the heritage of the national literature, the Irish never ceased to praise their ancestry.

Irish literates were also the ones who decided to create another important cultural institution for the Irish nation that had not already existed, the national theatre of Ireland. The foundation of the Irish National Theatre marked the beginning of the active fight for the independence of the country. The most famous Irish playwrights wrote plays in the nationalist tradition, interconnected the legendary characters from Irish ancient and medieval myths, fairy tales and folk stories, used popular patriotic poems and songs and motives of Irish folklore in the modern plays and offered them to the Irish thrilled audience.

The playwrights did not forget the importance of the language. They learned Irish and extensively traveled through all Irish counties in order to get in touch with those inhabitants of Ireland, who represent its basic features. They drew the inspiration from their dialects, uses of speech, songs and folk stories. The main protagonists of the plays were Irish peasants, simple, generous people who shared with the audience their everyday problems and difficulties, but also joys of their lives in the middle of the beautiful Irish nature.

The nationalist plays attracted the audience, and the Abbey Theatre was full since its foundation. The plays had a lot of success, even though some of them drew an attention of the people because of its controversial character. The view of nationalism was dramatically changed throughout the period of the years at the beginning of the 20th century. First plays underlined the importance of the nationalism. Their aim was to provoke the feelings of patriotic love and pride in the spectators. They concentrated on the power of Irish cultural heritage, on the specific features shared by all Irishmen that could not be found in any other nation elsewhere. The feeling of Irishness could be felt by every Irish citizen, playwrights expressed their attitude toward being Irish, and how it felt to be Irish, what joys and obstacles it brought. The plays were dedicated to the people, and they were destined to achieve the fiery in the Irish hearts and explain to them that cohesiveness, love for their nation and determination to obtain their desired freedom were the best means in their fighting for the independence.

However, after the horrors of the Easter Uprising, the Anglo-Irish War and the Civil War, the concept of nationalism weakened. People were confused and frustrated, and they felt that the fighting against each other was not right. This attitude found its echo even in the playwrights who started to question the basics of the nationalism. They proposed the idea of forgetting the nostalgia of old times and adapt to the new conditions. Moreover, some authors saw the absurdity of the wars, its innocent victims and everlasting violence, and they blamed the fierce nationalists for these cruelties. They did not hesitate to criticize the nationalism and its harsh activities, the toll that it took on the human lives of the Irishmen, who fought for the freedom. Other authors considered the nationalism as something connected with the past, and they openly satirized and parodied the nationalists and their efforts.

As the nationalism developed throughout the centuries, as it raised and weakened according to the needs of the people until its culmination in obtaining the desired freedom, so did the dramatic works evolve. The ideas, confrontations, characters, scenes, events, props, techniques and the authors changed in accordance with or in opposition with the tradition of the mainstream. During one period of the lasting of the Abbey Theatre, this theatre offered to its audience tens of plays with various themes. The Abbey Theatre was founded in order to create

national Irish drama, and it had a major impact on the years of the development of the Irish State. Its founders and playwrights were closely connected with the nationalist movement and the theater itself became a place for the gatherings of Irish citizens.

The Abbey was born because of its necessity for the Irish and during its existence, it brought many plays with national motives that helped to change the history of the country. The Abbey is still alive, and it demonstrates the legacy on the previous Irish plays, but most importantly, the Irish must be thankful to the Abbey that for more than one hundred years it never ceased to evoke the feelings of love and pride for what the Irish are.

Summary

Dôležitosť národnej hrdosti a lásky k vlastnému národu je samozrejmosťou pre všetky národy sveta. Írsko sa radí medzi najnacionalistickejšie štáty sveta. Dôvod pre rozmach nacionalizmu v tejto krajine je veľmi jednoduchý, Írsko bolo po niekoľko storočí okupované Anglickom a samo hľadalo vlastnú identitu. Pre Írov nebolo nikdy jednoduché vyrovnať sa so svojou minulosťou a krivdami, ktoré museli prežiť pretože sa snažili získať nezávislosť od Anglicka. Nacionálne témy boli zahrnuté vo všetkých sférach verejného života a literatúra bola jeden z najdôležitejších prostriedkov na šírenie myšlienok vlastenectva.

Popri poézii a próze sa národné motívy samozrejme objavovali aj v dramatickej tvorbe. Počas niekoľkých storočí anglickej okupácie Írsko zažilo niekoľko povstaní a nepokojov, ktoré boli krvavo potlačené. Prvé sa vyskytli už v šestnástom storočí a napätie medzi oboma krajinami eskalovalo na začiatku dvadsiateho storočia. V priebehu niekoľkých rokov museli Íri čeliť krvavému potlačeniu Veľkonočného povstania, ktoré dalo Írsku novodobých martýrov v podaní signatárov Deklarácie o nezávislosti, nasledovala vojna o nezávislosť proti Anglicku a nakoniec aj občianska vojna medzi dvoma táborami, ktoré v Írsku vznikli a nevedeli sa dohodnúť či budú aj naďalej uznávať autoritu anglického monarchu alebo si vytvoria vlastnú a nezávislú republiku. Všetky tieto udalosti mali pochopiteľne obrovský vplyv na literárnu tvorbu týchto rokov.

Situácia v írskej dramatickej tvorbe nebola vôbec jednoduchá. Na konci devätnásteho storočia, keď sa objavili prvé národné drámy napísané Edwardom Martynom, si írski literáti uvedomili, že Írsko potrebuje svoje vlastné divadlo, kde by sa uskutočňovali predstavenia ich národných hier, ktoré nenašli pochopenie v Anglicku. William Butler Yeats a Lady Gregory spolu s Martynom boli hlavnými iniciátormi týchto aktivít. Po ich spoločnej debate vznikla myšlienka založiť národné divadlo. Začiatky neboli jednoduché najmä z dôvodu nedostatku finančných prostriedkov. Navyše, divadlo potrebovalo profesionálnych hercov, Írsko však vlastných profesionálov nemalo, a preto v prvých hrách účinkovali najmä anglickí herci. Vzhľadom na obsah divadelných hier sa neskôr do predstavení zapojili amatérski írski herci. Divadlo si prenajalo malé priestory, kam chodili herci nacvičovať hry a kde sa konali aj samotné predstavenia, ale

budova nespĺňala podmienky pre štatút národného divadla. Po niekoľkých rokoch sa divadlu konečne podarilo nájsť sponzora v podobe pani Hornimanovej, ktorá udelila divadlu finančný grant na desať rokov. Divadlo sa presťahovalo do nových priestorov a dostalo názov Abbey Theatre.

Prvé roky divadla boli veľmi úspešné, aj keď jeho hry vyvolali aj vlnu nevôle a kontroverzných pocitov. Najmä hry J.M. Syngea boli podrobené veľkej kritike kvôli jeho vyobrazeniu írskych sedliakov. Napriek niekoľkým nepríjemným skúsenostiam sa divadlu vcelku darilo. Kvôli prezentácii národných hier však stratilo svoju štedrú sponzorku a dostalo sa do finančných problémov. Počas búrlivých rokov plných vojenských konfliktov bolo Abbey dokonca aj zatvorené, čo tiež negatívne ovplyvnilo jeho finančný status. Abbey sa nedarilo prilákať divákov, kvalita hier už nedosahovala také parametre ako za čias predstavení najslávnejších dramatikov. Na pozícii divadelného riaditeľa sa v priebehu niekoľkých rokov vymenila celá plejáda ľudí a divadlo sa pomaly, ale iste dostávalo na hranicu svojej existencie. Nepomohlo mu ani zahraničné turné, ktoré sa skončilo katastrofálne.

Na začiatku dvadsiatych rokov bolo divadlo na pokraji bankrotu. Zachránil ho Sean O'Casey, ktorý divadlu postupne ponúkol tri svoje najlepšie hry, ktoré pritiahli pozornosť divákov. Prvé dve hry z dublinskej trilógie mali vďaka spracovaniu aktuálnych tém veľký úspech, tretia však opäť vyvolala nepokoje a rozhorčenie. Otvorená kritika, satira a paródia, ktoré autor použil, divákov pobúrili. Boli totiž namierené proti osobnostiam írskej revolúcie a proti aktivitám, ktoré neskôr viedli k osamostatneniu Írska.

V nasledujúcich rokoch sa v Abbey začali objavovať nové hry inšpirované nielen klasikou, ale aj novými avantgardnými postupmi svetovej literatúry. Národné motívy boli na ústupe a prednosť sa dávala experimentom s jazykom a technikou spracovania. Do popredia vystúpili skôr psychologické vykreslenia postáv, ich vnútorné rozpoloženie bolo konfrontované s aktivitami ich okolia. Dej sa sústredil na každodenné situácie z bežného života, na obyčajných ľudí a ich radosti aj starosti. Keďže Írsko už dosiahlo svoju samostatnosť, potreba pre používanie národných motívov utíchla. Tieto tendencie prevládali až do roku 1951, kedy divadlo Abbey vyhorelo a z jeho starej budovy sa nič nezachovalo.

Trvalo ďalších niekoľko rokov, kým sa vybudovalo nové divadlo, ktoré úspešne funguje až dodnes.

Keď spomenieme obsah hier a vplyv nacionalizmu na ich obsah, musíme podotknúť, že prvé nacionálne hry sa objavili už koncom devätnásteho storočia. Súviseli so založením hnutia, ktoré hlásalo návrat ku kultúrnemu dedičstvu Írska. Toto hnutie podporovalo Írov v tom, aby sa vrátili k používaniu svojho jazyka, írštiny namiesto angličtiny, a aby sa aj v literatúre spracovávali národné motívy. Írska história bola kultúrne veľmi bohatá a autori sa preto snažili čerpať z nej námety pre svoje hry. Inšpirovali sa írskymi mýtmi, ľudovými príbehmi, legendárnymi postavami z írskej histórie, populárnymi piesňami a básňami minulých storočí, ktoré v sebe častokrát niesli aj vlastenecký odkaz a samozrejme folklórom.

Dôležitým prvkom bol aj jazyk, s ktorým dramatici pracovali. Napriek tomu, že boli mnohé hry písané v angličtine, autori sa snažili využívať aj írštinu alebo minimálne írsku angličtinu a v jazyku radi zachytávali aj špecifiká dialektov z rôznych oblastí. Autori ako J.M. Synge či Lady Gregory intenzívne cestovali po celom Írsku, spoznávali jeho zákutia a svoje skúsenosti a poznatky neskôr spracovali vo svojich hrách. Nie je preto ničím výnimočným, že hlavnými protagonistami ich diel boli väčšinou jednoduchí, obyčajní írski sedliaci, ktorí obývali domčeky roztrúsené po údoliach a svahoch. Častokrát sa inšpirovali práve ich príbehmi, ktoré im vyrozprávali počas ich návštev.

Či sa už jedná o tragédie alebo komédie, írsky nacionalizmus v nich hral veľmi špecifickú úlohu. Je však prirodzené, že ako sa menili dejiny samotnej krajiny, menil sa aj vzťah ľudí k národnej otázke a ich celkový vzťah k nacionalizmu. Táto charakteristika sa dokonale odzrkadlila aj v dramatickej tvorbe. Na začiatku autori písali najmä hry plné nacionalizmu, ktoré mali nadviazať na pohnútky iniciované hnutím na podporu kultúrneho dedičstva. Dramatici tak vo svojich hrách využívali črty starých mýtov a legiend, prostredníctvom hrdinských postáv vyjadrovali svoj postoj k aktuálnym národným otázkam. Dôraz sa kládol najmä na fakt, že Íri majú bohatú minulosť, na ktorú majú byť patrične hrdí.

Diela boli naplnené citmi, či sa už jednalo o lásku a hrdosť alebo o nenávisť a rozhorčenie nad nespravodlivosťou páchanou na írskom národe. Lady Gregory vo svojich hrách otvorene vyjadrovala sympatie k írskym povstalcom, ktorí sa dostali do anglického väzenia, W.B. Yeats zašiel ešte ďalej a jeho hra *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* priamo nabádala ľudí, aby vzali zbraň a vykročili do ulíc bojovať za slobodu svojho národa. Emotívne slová hlavnej protagonistky, ktorá stvárňovala Írsko ako krajinu, ktorá je okupovaná cudzincami, ktorí zabrali všetky jej krásne polia a výzva, aby jej šli pomôcť, urobili veľký dojem na všetkých zúčastnených. Rovnako zapôsobili aj slová Maeve v hre Edwarda Martyna, ktorá odmietla vydaj za svojho anglického snúbenca, pretože nechcel dovoliť, aby sa ďalší Angličan zmocnil niečoho írskoho. Tieto hry vyvolávali v ľuďoch pocity spolupatričnosti, lásky a hrdosti, burcovali ich k použitiu akýchkoľvek prostriedkov, aby sa po storočiach konečne dočkali svojej vytúženej slobody. Vopred ich hnala spoločná túžba dosiahnuť cieľ a zbaviť sa nenávidených utláčateľov.

Prvým autorom, ktorý pozmenil vnímanie nacionalizmu, bol J.M. Synge. Hoci aj on patril k nacionalistom, jeho postoj sa odlišoval od tradičného postoja írskych nacionalistov. Synge sa dištancoval od melanchólie a nostalgie za minulosťou, apeloval na svojich spoluobčanov, aby zmenili svoje premýšľanie, a aby sa prispôbili novej, progresívnej dobe. Synge viac nechcel tvoriť v rámci predpísanej tradície, chcel vyjadriť svoje vlastné pocity, čo pre neho znamenalo byť Írom, snažil sa sprostredkovať svoje zážitky a skúsenosti, ktoré nadobudol počas ciest po Írsku, opísať ľudí, s ktorými sa stretol bez prikrášľovania, bez toho, aby ich musel vykresliť v hrdinskom duchu, jednoducho takých, akí naozaj sú a ich špecifiká, ktoré z nich robili Írov.

Po Veľkonočnom povstaní sa hrdosť a nacionalizmus opäť vrátili do povedomia írskoho národa. To však bolo otrasené prežitými hrôzami vo vojne o nezávislosť a v občianskej vojne. Preto sa opäť menil pohľad na nacionalizmus ako taký. Boli takí, ktorí naďalej vyjadrovali svoju hrdosť a otvorene sa hlásili k nacionalizmu aj vo svojich hrách ako napríklad Lennox Robinson, ktorý bol aj riaditeľom Abbey a preto sa jeho hra v národnom divadle tešila úspechu. Na druhej strane však boli aj autori, ktorí nacionalizmus kritizovali a satirizovali. Sean O'Casey pochádzal z chudobnej, robotníckej triedy a napriek tomu, že bol členom niekoľkých nacionalistických organizácií, sa od nich po Veľkonočnom

povstanie dištancoval. Jeho hlavným dôvodom bolo presvedčenie, že nacionalisti preferujú vytvorenie strednej vrstvy a tým pádom zanedbávajú najnižšie triedy a chudobných.

O'Casey síce najprv v Abbey slávil úspech so svojimi dvoma hrami o írskych vojnách, keďže veľmi aktuálne spracoval nedávne udalosti a vyobrazil ich pozitíva aj negatíva, pričom skombinoval žánre tragédie a komédie, čím vytvoril špecifickú írsku drámu, ale svojou treťou hrou si svoje renomé pokazil. Jeho tretia hra z dublinskej trilógie si pohnevala všetkých tých, ktorí mali ešte v živej pamäti udalosti z roku 1916 a ktorí vnímali vtedajších signatárov Deklarácie o nezávislosti ako hrdinov, ktorí zomreli pre svoj národ. O'Casey ich opísal ako krvilačných mužov hnaných vlastnou márnivosťou a túžbou po sláve, kruto skritizoval udalosti z daného obdobia a sparodoval ich hlavných protagonistov.

O'Casey sa svojou satirou a kritikou snažil poukázať na nepravosti a na fakt, že násilie bolo zbytočné a nikdy nevyriešilo problémy Írska, ale svoje emócie neustrážil, a preto musel Abbey nadobro opustiť. Rovnaký princíp vyznával aj Denis Johnston, ktorý vo svojej hre *The Old Lady Says No!* takisto satirizoval rozmanité črty írskej kultúry. Z írskeho národného hrdinu Roberta Emmetta spravil patetického hrdinu, ktorý sa vyjadruje len prostredníctvom kliše a úryvkov z populárnych piesní a básni. Emmett čelí svojej rozpoltenej osobnosti a je len na divákoch, aby premýšľali nad tým, aké poslanstvo prináša. Johnston parodoval romantickosť národných hrdinov, snažil sa poukázať na to, že doba sa zmenila a v írskej spoločnosti už romantizmus nie je aktuálny. Deklaroval, že Írsko si prešlo vojnami, ktoré akékoľvek pozostatky romantického ducha zničili. Vo svojej hre sparodoval aj politické prejavy írskych politikov, slávne balady známych poetov, ženské hrdinky či detské postavy použité v predošlých dielach.

Ako som demonštrovala na uvedených príkladoch, tak ako sa vyvíjali dejiny samotnej krajiny, tak sa menil aj pohľad na nacionalizmus. V dobe, kedy vzniklo írske národné divadlo, bol nacionalizmus v Írsku na vzostupe, lebo Íri vycítili príležitosť konečne sa osamostatniť. Postupne sa ich snahy rozvíjali a keď ich snahy vyvrcholili, na vrchol sa dostal aj samotný nacionalizmus. Po tomto vrchole prišlo reálne vytriezvenie, ľudia si uvedomili akú krutú daň si vyžiadali ich boj za

slobodu a keďže sa Írsko osamostatnilo, potreba pre nacionalizmus sa náramne zmenšila. Ľudia sa na veci začali dívať inak, zmenil sa pohľad na minulosť a na úlohu nacionalizmu v ich dejinách, najmä slepý a zarytý nacionalizmus bol kritizovaný a jeho absurdný charakter sa stal terčom paródií a satiry ako bolo dokumentované aj vo vývoji daných dramatických diel.

Divadlo Abbey vzniklo z myšlienky dvoch slávnych írskych literátov, ľudí, ktorí milovali svoju vlasť a uvedomili si akútnu potrebu vytvorenia divadla, kde by sa konali predstavenia v ich jazyku a pre ich ľudí. Toto divadlo malo nesmierne dôležitú úlohu pri zmene írskych dejín; jeho predstavenia, herci a autori menili myslenie ľudí. Poukazovali na slávnu minulosť svojho národa, na jeho rozmanitosť a krásu, vytvárali v divákoch vlastenecké pocity. Divadlo bolo aj miestom stretnutí dôležitých verejných postáv, ktoré napomáhali vývoju boja o írsku nezávislosť. Abbey produkovalo množstvo nacionálne ladených hier, ktoré sa stretli so slávou aj neúspechom, ale hlavne priamo ovplyvnilo snahy nacionalistov šírením myšlienok, ktoré nasmerovali myslenie Írov k zmene. Aj po vyše storočnej histórii má Abbey stále dôležité miesto v írskej spoločnosti a pomáha formovať povedomie celého národa.

Anotácia

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Krátka charakteristika: Práca popisuje vývoj írskoho nacionalizmu a jeho vplyv na írsku dramatickú tvorbu. Ďalej sa zameriava na vznik a rozvoj írskoho národného divadla, jeho hlavných predstaviteľov a rozoberá vplyv nacionálnych motívov na ich najdôležitejšie dramatické diela. Práca poukazuje aj na zmenu vnímania úlohy nacionalizmu na vznik samostatnej Írskej republiky a ako sa táto zmena odzrkadlila v dramatickej tvorbe.

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PICTURE GALLERY



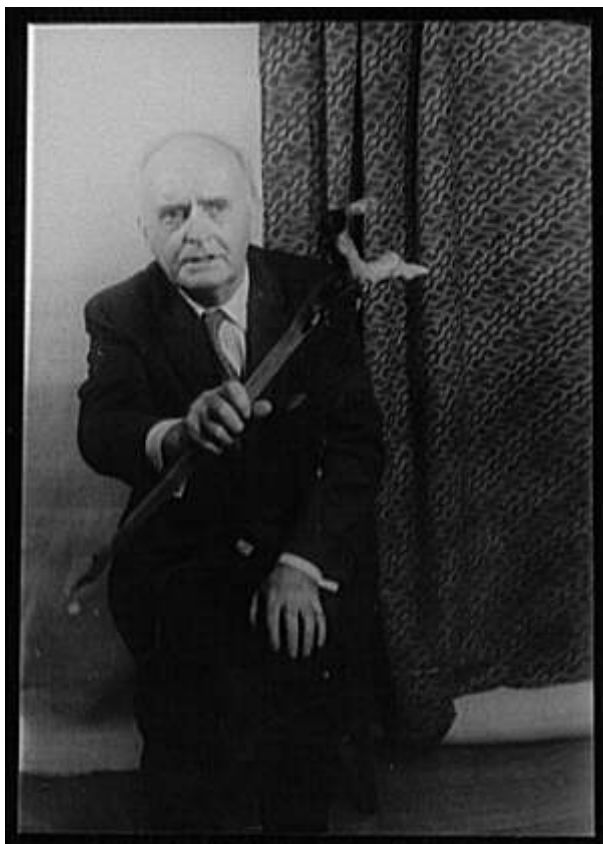
1. Edward Martyn



2. W.B. Yeats



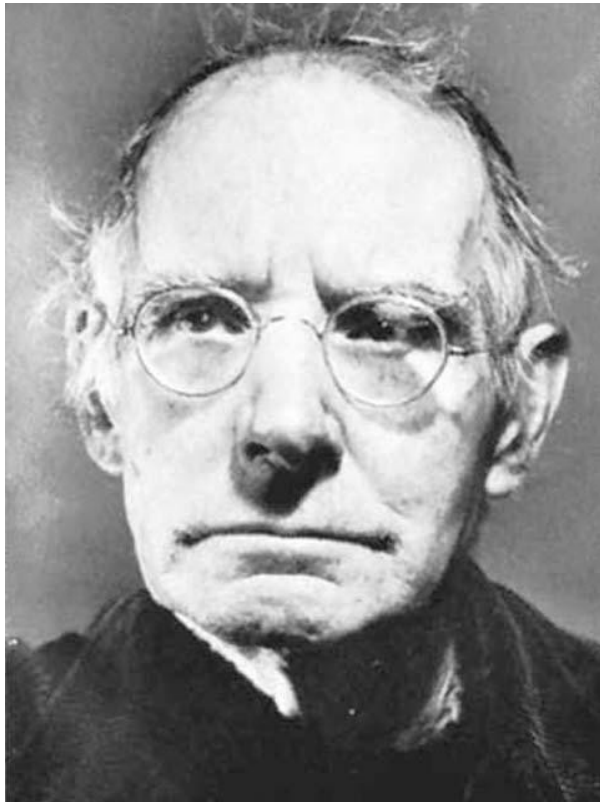
3. Lady Augusta Gregory



4. Padraic Colum



5. J. M. Synge



6. Sean O'Casey



7. Lennox Robinson



8. Denis Johnston

PROGRAMME.

Saturday, 26th January, 1907, at 8.15 p.m., for seven nights, and Matinée, Saturday, February 2nd at 2.30.

RIDERS TO THE SEA, A PLAY IN ONE ACT, BY J. M. SYNGE.

MAURYA	Sara Allgood
BARTLEY (her son)	W. G. Fay
CATHLEEN	Maire O'Neill
NORA	Brigit O'Dempsey
her Two Daughters	
MEN & WOMEN	Alice O'Sullivan, Annie Allgood, A. Power, U. Wright, J. M. Kerrigan.

SCENE—A Cottage on an Island off the West of Ireland.

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD, A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS, BY J. M. SYNGE.

CHRISTOPHER MAHON	W. G. Fay
OLD MAHON, his father, a squatter	A. Power
MICHAEL JAMES FLAHERTY (called "Michael James") a publican	Arthur Sinclair
MARGARET FLAHERTY (called "Pegeen Mike") his daughter	Maire O'Neill
SHAWN KEOGH, her second cousin, a young farmer	F. J. Fay
PHILLY O'CONNOR	J. A. O'Rourke
JIMMY FARRELL	J. M. Kerrigan
WIDOW QUIN	Sara Allgood
SARA TANSEY	Brigit O'Dempsey
SUSAN BRADY	Alice O'Sullivan
HONOR BLAKE	Mary Craig
PEASANTS	U. Wright, Harry Young

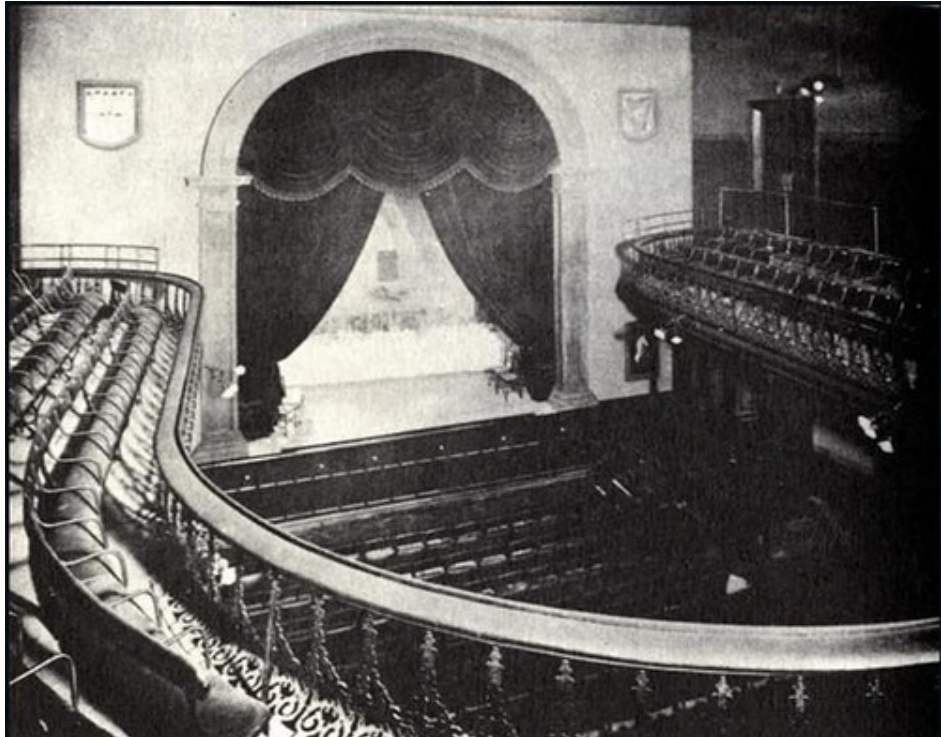
SCENE—Flaherty's publichouse.

The action takes place on a dark autumn evening and the following day, on a wild coast of Mayo.

9. Program from 1907



10. Old Abbey Theatre



11. Interior of the Abbey Theatre



12. First performance of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* with Maud Gonne in the role of the Poor Old Woman



13. The Abbey Theatre nowadays

