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Folklore and mythology of the Irish "Country People"

Re-imagining Ireland in the works of William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge

Master's thesis in English literature - Teacher Programme

Supervisor: Yuri Cowan

May 2020



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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the impact literature had on Ireland's cultural identity and national identity as a whole during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Leading up to the secession from Britain in 1922, the Irish cultural identity was heavily influenced by how the British had chosen to depict the Irishmen throughout the years, namely as ignorant, filthy and drunken apes. Through the authorship of Revivalist writers such as William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge this thesis explores how the Revival writers utilized the mythological aspects of native Irish culture, the folklore found in the Irish countryside and how their nationalistic political views influenced their literature. Furthermore, this thesis will shed light on how the Irish Literary Revival managed to bridge the political and religious gap in Ireland through the writers' poems, prose and plays. Reviving the culture found in the Irish countryside by translating, categorizing, re-telling and re-imagining it.

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Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Chapter 1: the need for a literary revival in Ireland.....	3
2.1 National identity	3
2.2 Irish cultural history and religion.....	4
3.0 Chapter 2: W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge	9
3.1 Yeats' s collected folklore, poems and plays.....	9
3.1.1 <i>The Celtic Twilight</i>	11
3.1.2 <i>Fairies and Folklore of the Irish Peasantry</i>	14
3.2 John Millington Synge.....	18
3.2.1 <i>Riders to the Sea</i>	19
3.2.2 <i>The Playboy of the Western Wind</i>	20
4.0 Sean O' Casey	23
5.0 Chapter 3: Conclusion.....	25
6.0 Bibliography	27
7.0 Appendix.....	30
7.1 Relevance for teaching	30
7.2 Bibliography.....	31

1.0 Introduction

After several failed attempts at secession, Ireland successfully gained their independence from the United Kingdom of Britain in 1922. By rising up and demanding independence the Irishmen were about to embark on a new chapter of their history. The Irish national identity heavily relied on the British perception of them and was not of the favourable kind, as their relationship for decades had suffered from Ireland's attempts at being independent, and the religious divide within Ireland itself. Religion and politics often intertwine, and the religious divide within Ireland soon became a political divide as the unionist Protestants, often of Anglo-Irish descent, wanted to stay within the protection of the UK, while the nationalist Irish Catholics wanted independence. However, since the Catholics held a considerable majority in Ireland at the time, their efforts had a better chance at eventually succeeding. Being a divided nation also meant that constructing a national identity would be a difficult challenge, as including the historical, social and cultural elements of Ireland would potentially mean to choose either side in the religious and political conflict. However, defining national identity and how it came to be is not a straightforward process. In his book *Imagined Communities* (1992) Benedict Anderson defines nationalism and national identity as imagined political communities, both as sovereign and as constitutionally limited (Anderson 6). Even though inhabitants of a country imagine their lives in communion, most people have never met, spoken to or even heard of each other (Anderson 6). Consequently, nationalism can't be considered an "awakening of a nation's self-consciousness", rather it constructs nations that does not exist (Anderson 6). When defining a national identity, all we do is construct a fantasy-version of what some people might consider to be elements of high significance to the country in question. Nationality, nation-ness, nationalism, are all based on cultural artefacts that has to be seen in light of how they came into historical being, how their purpose transformed over the years and, perhaps most importantly, why they demand such deep sentimental validity today (Anderson 5).

During the late eighteenth- and early twentieth century the literature produced in Ireland was heavily influenced by certain cultural artefacts that came to bring the sentimentality of the Irish countryside into the light. Elements such as mythology, celticism, occultism and peasantry emerged through movements such as the Irish Literary Revival (also called the Irish Literary Renaissance and the Celtic Twilight), a movement that kept gaining recognition and influence during this time. The main driving force within the movement was to preserve and promote the Gaelic language in Ireland, as well as the Irish games and sports through the Gaelic Athletic Association. Yet, it soon became so much more. Behind the movement, writers such as William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, Sean O'Casey and Lady Gregory, to mention some, were ready to bring it to life and construct a version of Ireland that was independent from the British Isles. This group of intellectuals had the idea that national literature and culture was vital to the Irish national identity, and that it was the road to independence from Britain. By strengthening their cultural heritage, they would eventually reach nationalistic political success as well. Yeats and Synge are particularly interesting characters in the Irish Literary Revival; both being Irish nationalists and protestant from English descent while struggling to fit in in with the rest of the population. However, through their writing they managed to reach out to a larger audience and spread their idea of Ireland.

After the Great Famine, the country people became the core of Irish nationalism, as their purity and simple life in rural areas came to represent freedom and spiritualism (Hirsch 1991). The country people somehow became the definition of "the moral law" as images of origin, and they were free from the religious forces the rest of the country

experienced (Hirsch 1991). Because they lived in rural areas, they were not as inf by the church as the big cities and were free to retain other mythical ideas, such as folklore and Irish mythology including stories of the "Otherworld" (Tír na nÓg/Mag Mell/Emain Ablach), fairies, leprechauns and other mythological beings. Yet, Catholicism still influenced the rural areas, as well as the urban cities in Ireland at the time. What happened in Irish cultural history and literature to make the country people and mythology such important cultural artefacts in the construction of the Irish national identity? More specifically, why were the Irish nationalists so interested in the fairies? This thesis will argue that the writers behind the Irish Literary Revival utilized the mythological belief-system and folklore found in the Irish countryside to shift the focus from the political and religious conflict in Ireland to that of the native Irish cultural heritage. By collecting, restoring, translating and re-imagining the folklore found in the Irish countryside Revivalist writers such as William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge would attempt to unite the nineteenth century socially, politically and culturally divided Irish nation. Being brought up in Anglo-Irish protestant homes meant that Yeats and Synge were outsiders and they struggled to find their place in Ireland. However, through their focus on the folklore of the country people they managed to infiltrate the Irish cultural discourse and influence the development of an Irish cultural identity.

2.0 Chapter 1: The need for a cultural revival in Ireland

2.1 National identity

Political participation is an essential part of any nation and the construction of its identity (Verdugo and Milne 26). The importance of political participation is mainly due to the framework it creates for organizing national communities, as well as the effect it has on constructing an impression of a "we", especially in modern times (Verdugo and Milne 26). However, this is not always as easy as it may seem, seen as most nationalist movements fail, and according to Ernest Gellner (researcher on nationalism), this is most vividly represented by the fact that there are approximately eight thousand languages in the world, yet, only two hundred states. National identity has two sides fighting against each other; firstly, it claims to establish a "Self", and as a result leave room for different archetypes trying to determine "the ancestral spirit" (Verdugo and Milne 27). Consequently, identity is seen as essence, or rather as a metaphysical bond that forms between us, such as ideals, meaning, behavior and so on (Verdugo and Milne 27). Secondly, one could argue that national identity is constructed through history and will never stop evolving (Verudo and Milen 27). Nevertheless, constructing a national identity is above all challenging because the actions carried out by humans will always be characterized as a conscious search for identity (Verudo and Milen 27). Meaning that even though we believe identity is never changing, something picked up from the past and implemented into the future, it will always keep evolving.

Ireland as a nation, experienced a lot throughout the years, which ultimately led to a high degree of emigration and in later years immigration. After the Great Famine many left Ireland, whilst most returned as soon as the economy stabilized (Stedman and Hawk 114). As Ireland has had limited encounters with immigration in the past, they struggled to construct an Irish identity (Stedman and Hawk 114). Yeats was of the idea the literature was the means in which to construct a nation's cultural identity as long as the country was free from political motives (Stedman and Hawk 19). However, Yeats's literary works would come to influence the political situation in Ireland, with poems such as *Easter 1916* (1916) having a major impact on the Republican Brotherhood and the uprising against British rule. Yeats was not on either side of the nationalist/unionist conflict in Ireland; he did not support the violence used by the nationalist movement and he was not an Anglophobe (Stedman and Hawk 19). In Yeats's mind, *Easter 1916* was supposed to present the Easter Rebellion as a "terrible beauty"; the beauty in fighting for independence, but, at last, a catastrophic and damaging form of nationalism (Stedman and Hawk 21).

The works of William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge is, arguably, best seen in the light of New Historicism. Their works reflect a period of time in Ireland of high historical and social relevance, and their influence on the nation as a whole is perhaps what they are most known for today. If the reader were to avoid the social and historical context of these literary works, many significant aspects of their literature would disappear. In Yeats's 1916 poem *Easter 1916* which comments upon the armed Irish uprising where the Irish Republicans sought to end British rule in Ireland, the Easter Rising. In this poem Yeats reflects on his own hesitation to join the political debate, as well as whether the rebellion, based on how many people who died, was worth it at all. The most famous line from the poem, being repeated thrice throughout, and that encompasses the main idea says it clearly: "*A terrible beauty is born.*" (Finneran 152). Yeats addresses the fact that one can find both beauty and misery in the same situation. This oxymoron embraces the situation many Irishmen found themselves in at the time. Fighting for independence, the camaraderie and pride that came with that, but also the

suffering and despair that would impact the people in the following years. Taking this poem out of its social and historical context, and read it as an independent poem, would provide the reader with some satisfaction, Yeats was after all a great poet, yet, taking the knowledge of the "Easter Rising" and the fight for independence from Britain, as well as Yeats's personal inner conflicts, into consideration adds an invaluable effect to the poem as a whole.

2.2 Irish cultural history and religion

The Revival writers did not treat the country people as individuals, rather they were aestheticized, meaning that they were streamlined into a single group of people, instead of representing a diverse nature of people (Hirsch 1117). The country people were somehow reconstructed and replaced by made-up ideas of what their life should look like, ultimately losing their individuality and identity in the eyes of the audience (Hirsch 1118). The target audience for these writers were city people, and all the city people wanted to see was the country portrayed in a romanticized fashion, a version of history that did not coincide with reality. Consequently, for the Irish Revivalists, the peasants of rural Ireland became a symbol of Irish identity; they were more important for what they represented in the eyes of the public rather than for what they truly were. The construction of this fantasy version of the peasants was a result of Revivalist writers such as Yeats and Synge (Watson 13). However, each writer took it upon themselves to create versions of the Irish country people who were, in many cases, completely different (Hirsch 1117). They wanted to create an independent Irish literature, by Irishmen for Irishmen and increase the interest in the occult, such as Gaelic legends, as well as the Irish language. Ireland was under immense social, religious and political pressure in the late nineteenth century, and the country people came to symbolize the core of the Irish national identity, as the untouched and native population (Watson 13). To many revivalist writers, and perhaps especially to Yeats, the country people were held higher than "regular" humans, meaning that he saw them as being in closer touch with the spirit kind (Foster 209). They were untouched by commercialization and urbanism and were closer to the mythological beings and supernatural aspects of life, rather than conforming to the religious constraints held in place by the Church. The country people represented a part of Ireland that dealt with ideas and symbols of poverty. For instance, the Gaelic language was seen as a language of the poor and was mostly spoken by the country people. Furthermore, only half of the Irish population were monolingual Gaelic speakers by the seventeenth century. However, this was about to change as Ireland had historically fallen victim to many instances of grief and hardship, especially during the nineteenth century. Literature became one of the means in which to climb their way out of the situation they found themselves in. The texts published by some of the most influential writers proved that literature could be a founding element in constructing a national identity. Yet, because the movement was led and constructed by Irish Protestants, the revivalist writers found it difficult to reach an audience beyond the anglicized Protestants in Ireland. By taking advantage of the stories found within the Irish countryside, however, they managed to at least include the rest of the population in their journey for an independent nation.

When it came to construct a unified cultural identity, Yeats was inspired by the Nordic countries (Karhio 223). Norway and Finland were especially interesting to Yeats as these countries had managed to recreate the indigenous folk tradition that once existed, and as a result restored a unified national identity (Karhio 223). Like Ireland, both Norway and Finland had historically been colonized by other nations, yet, were able to separate themselves culturally due to their strong cultural history. Romanticism and the

quest for a national identity heavily influenced Europe during the nineteenth century. For instance, folklore from the Norwegian countryside were collected and published by authors such as Asbjørnsen and Moe and the Finnish epic poem *Kalevala* (1835) collected by Elias Lönnrot, would prove to have a massive influence on the respective countries in years to follow. These examples, and perhaps especially the *Kalevala*, proved to Yeats that it was possible to restore the Irish folk literature and implement it into the contemporary literature (Karhio 225). According to Yeats, the English poets had misused the nineteenth century mythology by focusing on the materialistic uses of it and not the spiritual aspects it offered (Karhio 225). Furthermore, the *Kalevala* became a symbol for the Finnish in the way it united the mutual ancient heritage of the Finnish people, as well as their belief in natural magic (Karhio 225). The unifying tendencies of the *Kalevala* therefore proved that it would be possible to do the same in Ireland, and that it might have the same effect. The way Yeats understood the *Kalevala* also made him appreciate the importance of art's role in society. The unifying effect of the arts would also make sure that the country in question would stand together when facing difficulties, rather than create opportunities for civil unrest and war. In Ireland the Protestants and the Catholics needed to see that they shared a reference system, they only needed to be reminded of its importance by someone willing to restore, collect and write about it. Both Yeats and Synge were tired of the Irish ballad writers that would consume the middle-class literary traditions of the nineteenth century. They wanted to pursue the "living folk tradition" of Ireland, and found it by travelling the Irish countryside, reading the folklore of the country people and collecting it (Karhio 232).

The Irish Literary Revival became a movement that would revive the Irish mythology and folklore from the past, translate it from Gaelic to English and publish it. As a result, it soon became public domain. Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory and O'Casey all contributed using different methods but having a common goal. In Yeats's case, he was critiqued for being too personal in his approach. The reader would never know if the story Yeats had collected was an original version, a version based on memory or overall fiction imagined by Yeats himself (Karhio 235). However, seen as both Yeats and Synge were Anglo-Irish Protestants belonging to an upper-middle class society, their main target group would eventually be the urban city people rather than the rest of the population. Therefore, by mediating the culture through the perspective of people like Yeats and Synge, something would ultimately be lost in translation. Yeats and Synge had a goal to revive the Irish mythology and folklore, but on their own premises. The stories from the countryside were presented through some of the most privileged people in Ireland, making the power dynamic between the original storyteller and the story collector considerable.

The quest for national identity did not, however, have its origin in the late nineteenth century. Even before Ireland started constructing plans for liberation and independence from Britain, there was a search for what made Ireland special and unique. For, even though the Irish history of independence from Britain had suffered from many losses throughout history, it had the allure of the tragic and romantic heroine (Watson 90). The contrast between the international, especially British, and the national perception of Ireland became clear, and the Revivalist writers saw it as their mission to, through their literature and art, get rid of the stage-Irish stereotype and bring back respect to Ireland. Nineteenth century Ireland experience many changes and was about to fight for independence from the Britain. New political ideas emerged, and the nationalists grew larger in numbers constructing plans and ideas for the "new Ireland" taking all Irishmen into consideration. The Catholic church, which had an established history in Ireland became more prominent and the religious divide between the Catholics

and the Protestants grew larger. Ireland's history resonated with Yeats as his life had been a series of lost causes and the story of Ireland therefore had a strong connection to his own life. He identified with being recognized as different and a failure, while at the same time identifying with Irish spirituality through romanticism, literature and idealism (Watson 90).

The bad reputation the Irish experienced abroad was especially evident in the major cities in England and in other urban areas of the country. The English had always ridiculed the Irish by comparing them to apes, calling them "Paddy of the ape", and continuously portraying them as drunk, stupid and dirty (Watson 17). The term "Paddy" derives from the anglicized version of one of the most common Irish names "Patrick" (from "Padraig"), and mostly referred to the Irish peasants, used at the time as a derogatory term. In fact, being called peasants in itself was considered degrading, and therefore the peasants themselves preferred to be called "country people". John Tenniel, a British comic- and caricature writer for *Punch Magazine*, was especially known for ridiculing the Irishmen. One of his best-known comics, *The Irish Frankenstein* released in *Punch* (20th of May 1882), illustrates the Irish as terrorist monsters with ape-like features (Bran, 2000). By portraying the Irish as such, the English were responsible for dehumanizing the Irish, while at the same time mis-representing the cultural, social and political situation Ireland found themselves in during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Moreover, in *The Irish Frankenstein* the creature representing Irishmen is holding a knife dripping blood and a gun, while an upper-class man (probably an Englishman) tries to stop him. The contrast between the two portrays how the Englishmen saw themselves in relation to the Irish. The well dressed and groomed Englishman on one side, and the dirty and ragged Irishman on the other. Still, in the bigger picture, the British did not pay a lot of attention to the Irish. England had a lot of issues at the time, and for them, Ireland was just one of many problems. For Ireland, on the other hand, England was *the* problem (Watson 15).

However, not all magazines depicted the "Paddy" in the same fashion as John Tenniel. In magazines such as *Fun* and *Judy*, they were rather drawn as poorly dressed or as deceitful or sly peasants (De Nile 257). One character that often returned to the comic strips was that of "Erin", a character meant to represent Ireland, drawn as a charming maiden (De Nile 257). "Erin" was never dehumanized in the same manner as the Paddies, and was supposed to represent the hurt, innocent and Anglicized version of the Irish population (De Nile 264). She was in many ways the opposite to the Irish nationalists and was supposed to sway the "inbetweeners", namely those who did not support the nationalists, nor the unionists. On the 29th of October 1881 she appeared in a publication of *Punch* in a comic named *Two Forces*. The comic shows the drunken Paddy with an "anarchy" hat harassing "Erin" while she is being protected by "Britannia" who is standing on a "Land League"-banner (De Nile 257). Furthermore, "Britannia" is protecting Erin with a sword with the words "The Law" written on it, as if England is the law and Ireland the criminals. Ultimately, this was the idea England wanted to portray to the public and by discrediting the Irish and their efforts for an independent republic, they also mocked the cultural history in Ireland. This only led to an even more progressive development of the Irish cultural identity, as the whole idea behind and the goal of the Irish Literary Revival was to combat the misinterpretation falsely constructed by the Englishmen. The English managed to draw the Irish people in different directions and relied on the protestant part of the population to keep the peace and status quo.

In addition to both the Englishmen dividing the country and the Irish allegiance to the unionists or nationalists' side of politics, religion was a dividing factor in Ireland. Not only did it represent where your faith belonged, but also your cultural and social

heritage. Being a protestant generally meant that you were of English descent, while Catholics were considered the true Irishmen (Watson 18). All in all, there were a lot of factors contributing to further accentuate the gap in Ireland; there was the Anglo-Irish vs. the native Irish, the Catholics vs. the Protestants, the city people vs. the peasants, the nationalists vs. the unionists and the mythology. Yet, perhaps the most noticeable and the core of the dividing issues was that of religion.

As soon as a person was born in Ireland, they were categorized as either Catholic or Protestant by baptism, which had a major impact on a child's future, concerning individual identity, as well as the overall identity of Ireland. Additionally, being brought up as agnostic or atheist was an active choice with similar consequences. This religious divide, especially in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, created implications for many aspects of everyday life in Ireland, specifically in regard to the ethnic frontier, the religious boundary, the political border and the electoral divide (Coakley 5). Furthermore, as sub-groups, religion impacted geopolitical plans, ethnic identity and what you chose to vote at election (Coakley 5). Most people would agree that the Irish Catholics and the Irish Protestants are radically different groups of people. Perhaps most noticeable of a difference between the two religious groups was the political influence it carried in Ireland at the time. Most Catholics wanted independence from Britain, while the majority of Protestants wished to stay within the union. Consequently, being categorized into a religious group at birth had implications for the social and cultural divide Ireland experienced. Secondly, Protestants and Catholics were to a certain degree geographically separated, with a Protestant majority on one side of the border and a Catholic majority on the other (Coakley 8). However, seen as the Catholic population stood for 75% of the population in 1911, they obviously dominated most areas (Coakley 10). The only area where the Protestant population was in lead was in Antrim and Down in Northern Ireland, however this zone had a considerable Catholic population as well (Coakley 8). People's recognition of ethnic identity relied heavily on the how the country was constructed geopolitically. Drawing these lines between people created a barrier and even though Protestants and Catholics often got along, communication between them suffered a lot due to the separation they experienced.

Additionally, religion had a major social significance and created a class system people found it hard to fight their way out of. The higher degree of esteem and occupation one had, the less connection a person had to Catholicism, especially in the period between 1861 and the early twentieth century (Coakley 10). For instance, in 1861 only 12,5% of the titled nobility consisted of Catholics, while 88% of farm laborers and servants were of Catholic descent (Coakley 11). Consequently, religion had a strong connection to ethnic as well as general individual identity. Still, many Irishmen identified with several groups, such as being Ulster, Irish, European or British. Yet, many felt a stronger affiliation to one of them (Coakley 12). As with any other country where the population is distinctly divided, it ends in conflict and discrimination at some point. Fortunately, even though Irish Catholics in Ulster perceived themselves as "truer" Irishmen, they, together with the Anglo-Irish Protestants that lived side by side with them, started constructing a sense of a "northern Irish" identity (Coakley 14).

Ireland is a great example of how the historical and cultural artefacts of the past was reincarnated by the literature in order to manifest and evolve the cultural identity, especially when considering that Ireland was on the brink of becoming an independent nation. Mythology, and specifically the fairies, became important elements in bringing respect and dignity back to the Irish, and perhaps more importantly the country people. The "Otherworld" and the mythological creatures it inhabited was a vital part of the belief system in the Irish countryside. Even though religion played a significant role in the rural

parts of Ireland, the folklore had an equally important role. By degrading the Irish country people to that of drunk and dirty monsters, the English lit a fire under the Revivalist writers and saw to it that this portrayal would be met with the wondrous and fantastical world that the Irish countryside had to offer.

Yeats's earlier works focused more on the rural countryside of Ireland and the folklore, mythology and legends he discovered, collected and invented on his travels. These stories built the foundation for what later became known as the Irish Literary Revival. By shedding light on these aspects of life in Ireland, Yeats hoped to eliminate the theological and ethnic differences within the nation and the conflicts that separated the population (Stedman and Hawk 19). Both Yeats and Synge heavily influenced Ireland's cultural and national identity with their focus on the Irish countryside, the peasants and mythology. Their active choice to eliminate religious aspects from their literary works helped to take away a poisonous conflict from the Irish Literary Revival. As a result of eradicating theology as a factor in their literature, it is plausible to state that, Yeats especially, had a dream that the Irish Literary Revival would change the way people perceived Irish nationalism. They wanted to change theology from being the foundation on which Irishmen saw themselves and others and from the way they separated themselves into categories and groups. Instead they introduced mythology and pastoralism from the Irish countryside as means in which to unite the people of Ireland and construct a universe that was truly Irish. Religion did not have the same roots in Ireland as the folklore. The core of Irish mythology and folklore was the country people and the belief-system they had built around it for centuries. Consequently, the magical creatures of the "Otherworld" were as legitimate to them as Jesus was for the Christians.

3.0 Chapter 2: W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge

3.1 Yeats's collected folklore, poems and plays

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was born into a protestant middle/professional class family, being of an Anglo-Irish stock who despised the nationalist movement. Yet, he somehow ended up being one of the most prominent advocates for Irish nationalist movement through his literary works. For Yeats, his social and cultural heritage conflicted with his perception of himself (Watson 89). He did not identify with the English and felt as if his inherited family values and beliefs drove him away from the country and the people, he surrounded himself with. In 1901 he wrote as follows: "Moses was little good to his people until he had killed an Egyptian; and for the most part a writer or public man of the upper class is useless to his country till he has done something that separates him from his class." (Yeats 89). Founder of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, James Stephens, claimed that he had once overheard Yeats wanting to be reincarnated into a Gaelic-speaking peasant (Foster 206). One literary work that clearly illustrates his allegiance to the nationalist movement in Ireland was a play he wrote together with his partner Lady Gregory called *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1901) (*Kathleen, daughter of Houlihan*). The play was set in the west of Ireland in the revolutionary year of the Irish Rebellion in 1798 (Watson 88). The Irish Rebellion began when the Irish caught news of the French Revolution and saw it as a chance to gain independence from Britain. With French revolutionary soldiers by their side they sought to end the aristocratic and monarchic ideas of the British. However, the rebellion was short-lived, as the British ultimately came out victorious within five months. Taking this event into consideration, Yeats's and Lady Gregory's one-act play portrays "The Poor Old Woman", a personification of Ireland, who ends up as a youthful woman with the stride of a queen, showing how Ireland had the potential to stand up and fight for their independence (Watson 89). The ideas and symbolism displayed in the play further motivated the leaders of the Rising and the play itself continues to keep its position within the mythology of the republican nationalism in Ireland today (Watson 89). Furthermore, in relation to politics and religion in his literature, a literary piece representing Yeats's ambivalence to his religious upbringing, is that of *The Cold Heaven* (1914). Originally this was a poem of mourning and Yeats's sorrow over losing the love of his life Maud Gonne. However, in the last lines of the poem, he questions his faith, writing:

Out naked on the roads, as the book says, and stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment? (Yeats "Collected Poems" 102).

It is almost as he struggles with the fact that people follow the guidelines of the Bible ("as the book says"). The strict regime set in place by the Catholic church during this time period made him question what good it could do in the face of real endeavours. The last line also references Christianity, and questions whether God is the one to punish the people on earth. The line ends with a question mark, almost as if it is a rhetorical question; the sky will not provide any answers, it will only ask questions.

Yeats's quest for his own identity intertwines with his quest to discover the Irish identity. His motivation for writing about Ireland may therefore be a step on the ladder in order to win over the audience and become part of the culture and land he was born into, but never fully accepted by. The "Anglo-Irish solitude" as he coined it, kept him from fulfilling his literary potential as he would always be seen as a foreigner in Ireland. Embracing the cultural, social, religious and political ideas of the "Irish" meant that he

could reach a bigger audience and become included in Ireland's history. Furthermore, he saw it as a main objective to rid Ireland of its reputation abroad, especially their portrayal in English comics, such as Tenniel's *Punch* (Watson 90).

Easter 1916 and *The Cold Heaven* examine two different aspects of Irish cultural identity, the political and the religious. However, Yeats wrote poems that would come to encompass both in addition to addressing the English influence on Ireland. In the same collection as *Easter 1916* is found, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, Yeats wrote *The Rose Tree* (1921). *The Rose Tree* comments on the how the country has decayed as a result of English influence. The poem is based on an imaginary conversation between James Connolly and Padraig Pearse, both influential and important figures in the fight for Irish independence.

'O words are lightly spoken,'
Said Pearse to Connolly,
'Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree;
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea.' (Yeats "Collected Poems" 154).

Furthermore, in this stanza, Yeats implies that "a wind that blows" (England) is ruining "the rose tree" (Ireland) and all that the country has to offer. Additionally, the political debate in Ireland had been going on for too long, and little action had been taken. The next stanza addresses what they should do in order for the Irish cultural identity to "blossom".

"It needs to be but watered,'
James Connolly replied,
"To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden's pride. '(Yeats "Collected Poems" 155).

Ireland needed to be nurtured and literature was an answer to make the country stand out. They would have to shed light on the cultural artefacts that made the country unique, such as the mythological beings found in the Irish folklore. The poem puts into words Yeats's ideas of Ireland and which means would have to be taken in order to restore Ireland's cultural identity. In the last stanza of the poem this becomes even more evident, as Yeats wrote:

"But where can we draw water,'
Said Pearse to Connolly,
"When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree'" (Yeats "Collected Poems" 155).

Especially the last two lines contributes to the idea that the only way to construct an independent nation is to take advantage of the Irish history and the population to make Ireland right again. The passage "our own red blood" reference religion in that Jesus sacrificed himself to create a new world for the people. Just like Jesus, Ireland would

have to shed their own blood in order to construct an independent nation. All in all, the poem seems to be an attempt to direct the politicians towards the heart of Ireland while suggesting that literature is the answer.

Yeats's life had been a series of lost causes and the story of Ireland therefore had a strong connection to his own life. He identified with being recognized as different and a failure, while at the same time identifying with Irish spirituality through romanticism, literature and idealism (Watson 90). The imagery of "Paddy the Ape" created a version of Ireland that did not coincide with reality. Yet, at the same time, the romantic portrayal of the Irish country people did not necessarily match with the real world either. Two completely different versions of the same story, with two sides fighting to get their version recognized. "The drunken buffoon Paddy", or "the dangerous ape-man", played a huge role in dehumanizing the Irish population, and the Irish Literary Revival found it their first mission to change this representation by transforming the Irish stereotype of the peasants into a personification of Celtic ideas and Irish spirituality (Hirsch 1119).

Being brought up in an Anglo-Irish protestant home meant that Yeats had to make double the effort to gain respect from his Irish audience. Writing about Ireland was one thing, making it recognizable to the reader and finding the Irish national identity was another. What most separated the Irish writer from the English writer was the complexity of the Irish identity, history, culture and religion (Hirsch 1121). This is why the Irish writers resorted to the most Irish people they could think of, namely the peasants (Hirsch 1121). Consequently, the peasants became of symbol of Ireland and its pure state of national culture (Hirsch 1121). Anglo-Irish writers such as Yeats constructed a version of the peasants that did not necessarily reflect the reality of peasant life, yet, it played a big role in developing the Anglo-Irish literature as well as the rise of the Gaelic League (1893). The idea of the simple peasantry life was also a way of criticizing the materialistic and monetary life of cities like London, as they promoted what they saw as a freer and more spiritual Ireland (Hirsch 1122).

On the other hand, being part of the upper-middle-class Protestants created a barrier between the Revivalist writers and their subjects. Writing about the peasants was exotic for the Anglo-Irish authors and their storytelling came to resemble that of an adult trying to remember the bliss of childhood (Foster 205). Catholic folklorists were not as likely to have the same curiosity as Anglo-Irish "outsiders". Furthermore, the Catholics could not write about their fellow men the same way out of fear, shame and politeness (Foster 205). The Anglo-Irish writers had less to lose in the face of their fellow countrymen and could infiltrate their society from a different perspective. Being an observer rather than a part of the community granted the Revival writers with an edge as they could communicate the stories from an outsider perspective which in turn gave them a larger audience in the urban cities. Yeats was careful not to mention who told him the stories, or who the story was about. In contrast, his partner, Lady Gregory always made sure to at least mention the occupation, age and gender of her storytellers (Foster 209).

3.1.1 *The Celtic Twilight*

The country people as symbols for Irish national identity and as a focus in Irish literature was not necessarily a new phenomenon in the late nineteenth century. Writers had been implementing characters such as the country people for centuries, yet, the key Revival writers approached it in other ways than their predecessors. In addition to the glorification of the country people, they saw to it that they created their own independent version of them. However, there were mutual understandings of country people to a

certain extent and the writers used their shared reference system to create stories that the reader sometimes believed to be true, for instance the rural life of the countryside. Another example from Yeats specifically is his collection of stories in *The Celtic Twilight* (1894). The book includes stories of Ireland, re-imagined by Yeats and it still holds great importance in Irish national culture and identity till this day. The stories are made as real as possible in a quest to convince the reader of Ireland's supernatural beings and world. The Celtic Twilight was also a nickname for the Irish Literary Revival, and therefore served as a nod to the movement, as well as representing everything the movement signified to Yeats.

Ireland's folklore and legends had for centuries been protected, and subsequently owned, by the Gaelic speaking areas of the country. It wasn't until the early nineteenth century that the stories were finally translated into English, and more people were able to enjoy it (Alspach 404). The "discovery" of these texts created the catalyst for the Celtic Revival; an important piece of the national identity had finally been made available for everyone. Yeats argued in the June 1894 issue of *The Bookman* that: "the recent revival of Irish literature has been very largely a folk-lore revival" (Alspach 404). In *The Celtic Twilight* which was published a year before Yeats made this statement, he had uttered a wish for Irish writers to include these stories in their authorship, wanting to include the Irish peasantry and countryside as a way to enrich and strengthen their position in the Irish national identity. One of the lesser known, but more influential translator and collector of Irish folklore was an owner of a bookstore in Dublin named Patrick Kennedy (Alspach 405). His store was full of stories from the Irish countryside from stories he had recovered and given a new life in English. Yeats praised Kennedy in his introduction to *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* in 1888, writing: "Kennedy, an old bookseller in Dublin, who seems to have had a something of a genuine belief in fairies... is wonderfully accurate, giving often the very words of the stories told in" (Alspach 405). Some writers even went as far as calling Kennedy by the name of "The Irish Grimm" (Alspach 405). Yeats was so intrigued by the stories Kennedy collected that he chose to include seven of them in his 1888 collections yet making no reference to him other than mentioning him in the introduction. Lady Gregory, however, made sure to give credit to Kennedy in her retellings of his stories.

The Celtic Twilight can be considered a unique combination of a story and an essay (Hirsh 1). Yeats manages to merge both folk- and fairytales with fiction and "non-fiction" through almost 40 individual short stories. The stories themselves are a culmination of Yeats' travels through the Irish countryside and project what James Joyce would later refer to as "delicate scepticism" as the book is written with a kind of narrative irony (Hirsch 3). Moreover, as mentioned, the stories portrayed in *The Celtic Twilight* attempt to convince the reader that the stories are true by linking the supernatural and real world together. Yeats aimed to write in a style that was "the fair equivalent for the gesture and the voice of the peasant teller." (Hirsch. 4). What is perhaps most interesting about the short stories in *The Celtic Twilight*, however, is the narrative techniques Yeats applies throughout. All of the stories echo himself, just as if the book is a semi-autobiographical story of Yeats's travels, using himself in first person instead of using different narrative voices (Hirsch 8). The story "The Old Town" is perhaps the best example showing off his narrative techniques; both his ways of making a "fairy-tale" realistic and his use of narrative perspective. Yeats starts the story in first person narrative with the line: "I fell, one night some fifteen years ago, into what seemed the power of the faery." (Yeats "Celtic Twilight" 137). Furthermore, he adds that he is together with "Friends and relations of my own" (Yeats "Celtic Twilight" 137). Thoroughly establishing himself as the main character, as well as letting the reader know that the

story is from his perspective. Further into the story, Yeats includes a passage that increases the validity and believability of "The Old Town". He discusses whether he should have told the story at all, and that, to him, it all seems unreal; "We saw it all in such a dream, and it seems all so unreal, that I have never written of it until now, and hardly ever spoken of it, and even when thinking, because of some unreasoning impulse, I have avoided giving it weight in the argument" (Yeats "Celtic Twilight" 138). "The Old Town" also reference the peasants as country people, meaning that Yeats respected the country people's integrity in this short story: "One wonders whether creatures who live, the country people believe, wherever men and women have lived in earlier times, followed us from the ruins of the old town?" (Yeats "Celtic Twilight" 140). However, this consideration is not consistent in the other stories in the collection. "The Old Town", in particular, showcases how Yeats breaks the wall between fiction and non-fiction through graceful hesitation using his personal engagement with the supernatural. Consequently, the line between author and the stories themselves become blurred, and as mentioned, *The Celtic Twilight* can in many cases be perceived as a semi-autobiographical piece. Yeats wanted to relate to and be accepted by the Irish countryside and the country people, and by constructing a version of himself through his literary work and including himself in the stories, he was automatically part of that history and culture. *The Celtic Twilight* also claimed its importance by confirming the existence of the supernatural and proving the country stories with affirmation so that their stories would not be lost in the wake of the urban industrialization (Hirsch. 11).

Daniel Hoffman, journalist at *The Irish Times*, wrote that "The identity between Celtic heathendom and ancient Greece was of pivotal importance to Yeats, for this supposition gave him warrant to imagine both the folk religion of Ireland and the stories of the Celtic pantheon as central to the great tradition of European culture." (qtd. in Hirsch 14). Other stories in *The Celtic Twilight* with the same traits as "The Old Town" is "The Sorcerers", "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni", "A Voice", "The Golden Age" and "The Eaters of Precious Stones". According to Yeats, he got most of the stories in *The Celtic Twilight* from a man who went by the name of Paddy Flynn (Flanagan 50). In his recollection, Yeats met Flynn as Flynn was eating from a can of mushrooms and then fell asleep under a hedge (Flanagan 50). However, some researchers have had a suspicion that instead of getting all his stories from Paddy Flynn, Yeats had gone from village to village searching for its "resident idiot", luring stories out of him or her and claiming that they all came from the same person (Flanagan 50). Yeats's story of the little man sleeping under the hedge after eating a can of mushrooms who proceeds to give him several stories from the Irish countryside does seem a bit out of the ordinary. Yet, so was most of the stories in *The Celtic Twilight* themselves. As previously mentioned, Paddy was a derogatory nickname for the Irish country people and was well used in English periodicals as a way to ridicule the Irish. Yeats and other writers of the Irish Literary Revival wanted to reconstruct the Irish reputation, especially in regard to the rural country people of the Irish countryside. Naming his main source of stories after "the Paddy" could be an attempt to take the name back to Ireland. Today, when visiting any souvenir shop in Ireland one will find the word "Paddy" on most apparel and accessories, such as the cute and friendly "Paddy Bear" who often makes an appearance in the shelves. A tourist with little knowledge of the Irish cultural history, would never know that "the Paddy" was once a negative term for the Irish people. Consequently, one could say that the Irish Revivalist writers succeeded in taking the name back and making it something to be proud of rather than ashamed of.

3.1.2 Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry

In his anthology *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) Yeats specifically mentions five informants who helped him along the way. However, as mentioned, in his short stories Yeats did not always make a clear line between author and collector, author from storyteller or short story from folktale (Foster, 1987, p. 208). In the introduction to his collection of folk tales, Yeats elucidate the background of the stories and their meaning and role in Irish life and culture. The people of Ireland were divided; some meant the fairies were gone a long time ago as they were of "old professions" and their songs were "Ave Marias" (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" ix). However, the fear of not believing was still strong, especially amongst people of practical professions; an old man referring to the fairies: "Amn't I annoyed with them", and a village woman stating that the fisherman do not like seeing mermaids, as they bring bad weather (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" ix). Additionally, people were still anxious to sit thirteen people at the dinner table at a time, walking under a ladder, finding a lonely magpie flickering his chequered tale or being handed salt (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" x). So, after all, the fairies and the superstition had not yet left Ireland, and the people kept following the ancient rules of the "Otherworld". According to Yeats the elderly women in the countryside knew the most about the fairies. Some of them were fairies themselves but would never speak about them in great detail as the fairies kept many secrets and resented people talking about them (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xi). This secrecy was and is the most powerful agent in any belief system. What you can't see, touch or feel is part of constructing an alternative world that would always provide an answer in mysterious situations. For instance, keep blaming the mermaids for the bad weather or faulting the fairies if someone went missing. As with any belief system, it is important that the stories line up and that it is a cohesive system, so to give the stories credibility. Yeats explained how the fairy- and folk tales were kept intact over the years and refers to statistician William Shaw Mason's book *Parochial Survey of Ireland* (1814). Folk tales were usually passed on by word of mouth through generations, making small local changes to the discourse as time went by. Mason explains how storytellers would meet and share the stories they had gathered, and if the same stories differed, they would vote on the one story they found as best fit for the Irish people (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xi). After the storytellers started gathering and discussing their stories, the accuracy of their folk tales would gain a higher recognition. A great example is the long story of *Diedre*, which still is almost identical to the original MS. in the Royal Dublin Society (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xi). However, according to Yeats, folklorists had one great merit from the writer's point of view, and one great fault from the point of view of others. The work had become literature instead of science, meaning that the stories were of the Irish peasantry rather than that of a primitive religion (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xiv). In order to be treated as scientists the folklorists should rather focus on classifying the tales, for instance by itemizing characters such as "the fairy queen", "the fairy king" etc. (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xiv). By choosing not to follow guidelines of science however, the folklorists managed to capture the very essence of the Irish people. The mission of the Irish Literary Revival was to construct a cultural identity, not further the science of a primitive religion. The goal was to reach out to as many readers as possible in an act to unite the Irish population and construct a cultural history the country possessed as independent from Britain. The "Otherworld" as a belief system in itself had a place in the Ireland, but in the events of the succession from Britain the cultural aspects of the fairies, goblins, leprechauns and other creatures were more important as means to unite the nation's identity.

This is perhaps why Yeats was so insistent on mentioning the character of Paddy Flynn as an inspiration and person of information regarding fairies and folk tales in this collection as well. Flynn lived in a small cottage, almost dilapidated, in the Village of B; "The most gentle - i.e., fairy - place in the whole of the County Sligo", according to Flynn himself (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xii). Other people of Ireland Yeats met and discussed matters of fairies and superstition had divided opinions. The Sceptic, as Yeats nicknames him in his introduction, was a well-traveled man who did not believe in fairies, nor ghosts and suspected hell was invented by the priests so that they would have something to do (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xiv). A priest, on the other hand, said, shaking his head while quoting the priest Thomas A'Kempis: "They who travel seldom come home holy" (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xiv).

In the last pages of his introduction, Yeats offers a few words on the main folklorists he has collected his stories from. He mentions Croker and Lover, two writers who focus on the reckless nature of the Irish gentility, seeing everything as humorized and not paying attention to the gloom, tragedy or passion the Irish population (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xv). However, the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848 and the famine soon caught up with them and brought them down to earth. Patrick Kennedy, the old bookseller from Dublin, is also mentioned by Yeats, and Yeats appoints him great honor. Yeats describes Kennedy's stories as "Wonderfully accurate, giving often the very words the stories were told in" (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xv). Second to last, Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends* is given praise as full of pathos and tenderness (Yeats "Folk and Fairy" xv). In Yeats's mind, her stories touch deep into the soul of the Celt and the time they grew to love after decades of persecution (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xv). Lastly, Mr. Douglas Hyde is mentioned, as he knew Gaelic and would translate the stories directly, consequently making his stories the most trustworthy of them all. Furthermore, Hyde combines the wonderful worlds of Croker, Love and Lady Wilde in his works whereas his stories are neither mournful or humorous; rather they just depict life, as simple as it may appear (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" xvi).

Another interesting aspect in Yeats's collection, found in the very beginning is who he chose to dedicate this collection to. Before the introduction the reader finds a page consisting of seven words: "Inscribed to my mystical friend, G. R." (Yeats "Fairy and Folktales" v). The mystical friend Yeats refers to is George Russell, perhaps better known under the pseudonym of AE/Æ. In addition to them both being writers at the time, they also had Theosophy in common. Theosophy is a religion founded by the Russian immigrant Helena Blavatsky (Madame Blavatsky) in the US and is categorized within the frames of occultism and takes inspiration from philosophy, Buddhism and Hinduism. Furthermore, Yeats himself believed in the supernatural and spent a great deal of his life researching the supernatural, attending seances with Madame Blavatsky, studying horoscopes and automatic writing. When he was asked whether he believed in the supernatural or not, Yeats answered: "Whatever we build in our imagination will accomplish itself in the circumstances of our lives." (Harper 55). The reader experiences this side of Yeats in their reading of him. The fact that Yeats himself truly believed in the stories he produced, re-told or constructed by himself, makes the reading experience even more interesting. His attempts to convince the reader of the validity in the stories could be considered as an attempt at distancing the Irish people from the Church and reignite the faith of their ancestors.

In addition to his collected works, poems and plays, Yeats utilized the British magazines and periodicals to publish his works. In the 1899 September issue of *The Contemporary Review*, Yeats wrote a piece named "Ireland Bewitched" in which he writes about the mythological beings of Ireland, as well as people who possess magic. *The*

Contemporary Review was a London-based magazine established in 1866 by a party of intellectuals, led by publisher Alexander Strahan. Their intention was to promote the contemporary issues they faced through intelligent and independent opinions while complementing the ideas of the church. Writing for a magazine such as *The Contemporary Review* in some ways contradicts what Yeats wanted to achieve in Ireland. By supporting English journalism and the views they shared in the magazine one would think Yeats would be distancing himself from the Irish nationalism and faith. Yet, in the piece in question, Yeats promotes Irish core values and stories and shares both ancient and contemporary views the Irish had, especially in the West. The article is a collection of stories Yeats had heard while travelling and the impact they had on Ireland. He addresses the fact that it is important to win the loyalty of the "people of the West" in Ireland in order to gain access to their perspective on the world (Yeats "Bewitched" 388). He describes them as people living in a dream, surrounded by mythological beings and beautiful fields (Yeats, "Bewitched" 388). However, the main focus seems to be that of illness and how to cure it through magic. There has become a distinction, Yeats writes, between that of ordinary illness and that of illness implemented by "the others" (the fairies). Before, all diseases were thought to be caused by the fairies, but this soon changed. The blacksmiths were one of the few occupations that had the magical powers to heal/cure individuals from illness caused by the fairies. They possessed magical powers and could protect themselves and others from the "Otherworld".

Yeats pays special attention to a woman by the name of Biddy Early, who it was known could cure any disease. Early was not welcomed by the priests and the priests urged people not to visit her. There were many rumors and myths surrounding this woman, referencing old folklore and strengthening the Irish faith in the "Otherworld". The priests were worried that she would convince people not to believe in Christianity and that they would lose much of their following to the belief in folklore, mythological beings and magic healing. Yeats exemplifies this by referring to a conversation he had with a "better off" woman of the Christian faith, whereas he writes: "Some of the better off think her power unholy, and one woman says: It is against our religion to go to fortune-tellers. She didn't get her powers from God, so it must have been from demons." (Yeats, "Bewitched" 393).

In a 1890 October issue of the magazine *The Leisure Hour* Yeats again raised awareness of the Irish peasantry and their belief in fairies. Like *The Contemporary Review*, *The Leisure Hour* was a London magazine with strong ties to Christianity. The magazine itself consisted of everything from historical pieces to genres of fiction. In Yeats's article, simply named "Irish Fairies", he aimed to shed light on the Irish belief in fairies. He opens by stating that most people doubt him when he would tell them that the Irish peasantry still believe in fairies (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 811). Perhaps even more shocking, Yeats claims that it is not just the people on the countryside, but people close to the cities also had a strong belief in the ghosts, the goblins and the fairies (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 811). One of the more interesting stories Yeats presents in his piece is that of a young girl who went missing in the fields of Sligo. The people were full of excitement, as they believed the fairies had taken her to the "Otherworld". In order to get her back, the police insisted that everyone would burn their bucalauns (ragweed), as these were sacred to the fairies (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 811). While burning the bucalauns, the constable would repeat spells over and over again, until, the next day, when the girl was found in the fields (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 811). As a conclusion to this story Yeats writes that "I will not pretend to find out what really happened" (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 811). The question should not be focused on whether the story is true or not, rather the audience should make an effort to understand the cultural heritage of the Irish folklore.

There is no point in finding evidence, because there will most likely be no proof other than the tales told through generations, and as result the importance of these stories are with the people and their faith.

People were not entirely sure of the fairy's intentions, whether they were kind or terrible, or whether the "Otherworld" was a good place to be or not. However, one fact they did know for sure was that the fairies could not be trusted (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 814). Lastly, in his piece, Yeats remind the English that they have forgotten all about the fairies, even the English peasantry has forgotten (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 814). It is up to the Irish and Scots to keep the faith alive, and Yeats, by writing and publishing the stories told to him, helped keep the folklore of the British Isles ever so present. In conclusion, Yeats writes:

"The world is, I believe, more full of significance to the Irish peasant than to the English. The fairy populace of the hill and lake and woodland have helped to keep it so. It gives a fanciful life to the dead hillside, and surrounds the peasant as he ploughs and digs with tender shadows of poetry." (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 814).

Whether you believed in the "Otherworld", the "The Others" and magical abilities, or not, it was, and still is today, a major part of the Irish cultural identity. I once heard a story when visiting the "Leprechaun Museum" in Dublin, the young guide explained that even though most Irishmen do not believe in the "Otherworld" today, the stories never really leave your mind. He told the audience that one night, after he had gone to bed, he suddenly woke up to an incredibly loud scream. Terrified, he could not think of a better reason for this scream other than that it had to be a Banshee. He, after a while, gathered the courage to look out of his window, yet, there was no Banshee outside, it was a fox screaming at him. This story showcases the impact these stories had on the population, both when they were first told or published, and till this day. The most powerful message presented by the folklore is perhaps the consequences you face if you don't believe in it. The fear of the unknown played a massive role in British folklore and was especially evident in the West of Ireland. In Yeats's article "Irish Fairies" he tells another story from Sligo where there existed a white square in the limestone that many believed to be a door into the "Otherworld" (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 311). Nobody dared go near it, not even the mountain goats, and the story had it that every night the door would swing open and let out all kinds of mythological beings (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 312). Moreover, according to the tales, the creatures kidnapped the villagers, mostly new-born babies and newlyweds, as well as peasant mothers. These were taken away to help the fairies in the "Otherworld" (Yeats "Irish Fairies" 312). As we know, this scenario is quite impossible, yet, the fear that it might happen if you cross the boundaries or decide not to believe in the fairies, would be enough to stop you. The same applies to most organized religion; there is no evidence of the events described in the holy texts, however, the fear of the consequences if you choose not to abide the holy laws is too great, and the faith you have in the religion too strong. So, in addition to the Catholic and Protestant church in Ireland, there were a lot of people, especially in the countryside, but also in the urban areas of Ireland, whose faith belonged to the Irish mythology. Consequently, the national identity relied heavily on these stories as part of the native idea of what Ireland consisted of and who it belonged to.

There is a great deal of identity found within ancient mythology as they are so specific to the places of their origin. It is within close proximity and is not so distant as religions from other parts of the world. Additionally, local folklore was often based on families one knew and could relate to. People appropriated the stories to be about

themselves, their lives and adventures. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, mythology is often based on experience and as means to solve questions that do not necessarily have an obvious answer. For instance, in the story of the guide at the Leprechaun Museum in Dublin; the unimaginable sound could be nothing else but a Banshee, as this, in the guide's head, was most probable. Consequently, believing in mythology is not as strange as one might think mainly because it is relatable and a part of the national identity.

3.2 John Millington Synge

Like Yeats, John Millington Synge was born into Protestantism, but his family belonged to the narrowly orthodox evangelical Protestantism where Synge was taught by his mother to fear God from an early age (Watson 36). Yet, as an adult Synge started disengaging in the religious aspects of his life, stating that: "Soon after I had relinquished the Kingdom of God, I began to take a real interest in the kingdom of Ireland" (Synge 82). He did not identify with the Gaelic League as it predominantly consisted of middle-class Catholic Ireland and struggled to find an organization that resonated with his own background, values and beliefs (Watson 38). In contrast to Yeats, Synge's Anglo-Irish background was less apparent in his outward image (Watson 40). Yet, similarly to Yeats, Synge struggled to find his place in Ireland. Neither the Protestant aristocracy nor the Catholic upper-class seemed to pique his interest, he rather tried to fit in with the lowest order in the Irish society, the peasants (Watson 40). His attempt to identify with the peasants was one of his own imagination. Synge constructed his own version of the country people where the peasants were free from any influence from the upper-class and romanticized in a way in which Synge's version did no longer reflect reality. However, on the Aran Islands, a remote group of islands on the west coast of Ireland, Synge found what he had been looking for. It was Yeats who had urged Synge to travel to the Aran Islands saying: "Tell the Bourgeois that I met Synge in Paris long before he had ever been in Aran. I met him in 1896, and our conversation about him going to Aran was published in the introduction to the first edition of *The Well of the Saints* during Synge's lifetime." (Declan 37). However, critics claim that Synge would eventually go to the Aran Islands anyway, as his path would always lead him there, the suggestion from Yeats was what finally pushed him to go (Declan 37).

The population on Aran was as close to Synge's imagination of the country people as it could possibly get. The people living there were far from the urban cities and were free from any influence of the bourgeois. Furthermore, Synge decided to downplay the Catholic aspects of life on the Aran Islands in order to fully bring his imagination to life. Still, critics argue that Synge did not decide to suppress the religious aspects of life on the islands as means of being discriminating or going against Catholicism, but rather as a tool to construct a version of the islanders as less complex beings, where social class and religion are to a smaller degree prominent (Watson 46). The Aran Islands became a foundation for Synge's future literary works. Even though he only used them as a backdrop for one of his plays, *Riders to the Sea* (1904), the myths, legends and stories he learned during his stay, as well as the way the islanders spoke, played a huge role in some of his most famous plays such as *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) (Watson 47). In a letter written in 1907 Synge wrote: "I look on *The Aran Island* as my first serious piece of work – it was written before any of my plays. In writing out the talk of the people and their stories in this book, and in a certain number of articles on the Wicklow peasantry which I have not yet collected, I learned to write the peasant dialect and dialogue which I use in my plays." Synge, in addition to writing plays based on life

on the Aran Islands, wrote a book about the place. The book consists of four parts and are written in the form of journal entries, focusing on the geography of the islands as well as the experiences he made while living there. This book became instrumental in his development as a nationalist writer and came to represent the very essence of his literature.

3.2.1 *Riders to the Sea*

The islands occupied mostly Gaelic speaking country people of native Irish descent, and soon became a safe haven for Synge and other Revivalist writers to draw inspiration from (Foster 95). In the wake of the new nationalism and the emergence of the Gaelic League in 1893, the Aran Islands became a symbolic place that would represent where Ireland would be reborn (Foster 95). Nobody, not even the Vikings, had infiltrated the islands, making it one of the few areas of Ireland that was still left unconquered. Additionally, the islands became, to many philologists, an important sanctuary for the Gaelic language, consequently it also became a destination for pilgrimage and students of the language (Foster 95). After travelling to the islands and joining in on a Gaelic League meeting, Patrick Pearse, one of the Easter Rising leaders, was convinced Gaelic would never disappear from the islands, stating that "It will never be allowed to decay, but will be fostered until Aran is a college and a lantern of learning for the Gaels of Ireland once again, as it was in the olden days." (Foster 96). Synge's perception of the Aran islands was of a medieval, pagan, prehistoric and illiterate description, yet, he found that some of the islanders were being influenced by the bourgeois and as a result became more "civilized" (Foster 99). The idea he had of the islands became contaminated and he decided to start visiting Inishmaan instead, writing to Lady Gregory that: "It is probably even more primitive than Aran and I am wild with joy at the prospect". (Foster 99).

As previously mentioned, *Riders to the Sea* (1904) is the only play of Synge that is set on the Aran Islands. Furthermore, *Riders to the Sea* is a rather short play, made to finish in one act and constructed like a short story. What is especially interesting about this play is that the plot itself seems to be derived from one of Synge's own experiences on one of the islands. In the play the reader/audience meet Maurya who is the protagonist, her daughters Cathleen and Nora, and her son Bartley. Most of the men in Maurya's life has drowned on sea, and she only has her sons Bartley and Michael left. The play opens as the daughters try to identify articles of clothings as belonging to their brother Michael, which has been missing at sea for three weeks. They do not want to disturb their mother with possibly bad news and hides the clothing's from her. Bartley insists on moving a horse and a donkey by sea and gets blessings from the island priest to do so. His mother, however, will not, after seeing Michael's lifeless body, give him her blessing as she strongly believes that he will not survive the journey. We later learn that the donkey kicked Barley off the boat, leading to his death at sea. In chapter four of his novel *The Aran Islands* (1907), it is evident that some of the events in the play is inspired by the people on the islands and their experiences. A young man is found in the seashore, missing his head, after being lost at sea for three weeks (Synge "Aran Islands" 140). The young man was supposed to move two horses by boat, but never made it, additionally, Synge recalls in his memoirs from the Aran Islands, the young man's mother foresaw that her son would drown in a vision (Synge "Aran Islands" 140). Thus, it is apparent that the two instances are connected, and that Synge would directly derive his own experiences into the plays he wrote. Another interesting idea about this play is that even though the family depicted in the play is heavily religious, the emphasis is put on mythology. For instance, the island priest's blessings were not as powerful as Maurya's superstition. In Irish mythology, seeing a dead man together with a living man

is a bad sign and implies that the living man will die, and such is the case in Synge's play. Maurya is convinced the priest will force Bartley to stay on the island saying to her daughters: "He won't go on this day with the wind rising from the south and west. He won't go in this day, for the young priest will stop him surely." (Synge "Four Plays" 5). Cathleen insists that he will still travel and that the priest has blessed him to go, however, after Maurya has seen Michael's dead body, Nora says: "Didn't the young priest say the Almighty God won't leave her destitute with no son living?" (Synge "Four Plays" 13). The young priest in Synge's play is portrayed as an incapable and vulnerable man that have no clue what he is up against. No one is above the sea, not even God. The country people who live on the island, however, think more clearly and know the dangers the ocean offer. Their superstition is based on experience and knowledge of their surroundings. In *Riders to the Sea* Synge manages to combine theology and mythology and bridge the gap between them to give the audience a better understanding of the Irish country people farthest to the West. The country people are symbolic in that they represent the mythology and the folklore, while still having faith in Catholicism and therefore illustrate two core aspects of Irish nationalism. According to Conor Cruise O'Brien (Irish politician and writer) there were, of course, other factors that would have to be taken into consideration, such as being of "native Irish stock, from Gaelic speakers and holding some form of the general political opinions held by most people of settler stock in Ireland, and the Protestant religion: to the extent that these cast their own lot with people in the first category, culturally or politically, or preferably both" (O'Brien 51).

3.2.2 The Playboy of the Western Wind

In 1907 Synge wrote his most infamous play *The Playboy of the Western World*. The play was an unusual and unexpected addition to the Irish theatre and was met with a lot of harsh critique. In the preface to the play Synge wrote that: "In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry." (Synge "Four Plays" 76). Most plays written by Yeats and Synge were performed at the Abbey Theatre, founded in 1899 by Yeats himself, along with Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn. The theatre served as a national and cultural institution, yet, they were not afraid to produce plays of the more shocking quality. In fact, most plays performed at the Abbey Theatre were not well received by the audience (Tenorio 426). It was expected that the Abbey National Theatre would convey a cooperative message in regard to the Irish culture (Tenorio 426). However, seen as everyone engaged in the Abbey Theatre Society consisted of people of the same mindset, culturally, socially and ideologically, most of the plays written and performed for the Abbey Theatre clashed with the expectations of the viewers (Tenorio 426). Yet, even though they were of the same mindset, they would eventually employ different methods and have different aims in their works. Whether the play was artistic or political, based on Irish or European preferences or whether they were passionate or refined, all writers at the Abbey Theatre had a goal of redefine the Irish cultural identity and construct a contemporary cultural tradition based on their ideological view of Ireland (Tenorio 427). The audience was used to seeing melodrama on stage, characters surrounded by the Irish ambience they had seen a thousand times before, with consistent features such as the "Stage Irishman", the funny, clumsy and pathetic clown (Tenorio 428). Consequently, the reactions that followed both Yeats's *Countess Cathleen* (1889) and Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* failed to provide the audience with what they sought after. Yeats's and Synge's aim to create a new version of the Irish cultural identity had its origin in shock value and the quest to

show that the Irishmen were so much more than what the previous literature had made them out to be. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, the language is particularly different from what the urban Irishmen were used to. The story might seem hard to believe through the perspective of the Catholic audience with their own conservative moral principles at the time of its premiere. However, seen in light of the Celtic mythology and the Irish history, the play is not in any ways beyond reason (Tenorio 437). In the preface to the play, Synge himself argued this point, stating that "Anyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesala, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay." (Synge "Four Plays" 75). The city people were completely unfamiliar with the subcultural tendencies of the countryside. By presenting the perspective from the rural areas to the urban areas of Ireland, the playwrights contributed to the unionizing of a divided nation. In addition to the new take on language and gender roles in urban plays, religion was also presented in an unfamiliar manner. In *The Playboy of the Western World* religion plays a major role in the life of the people in the small village of Mayo, where the play takes place. Even though the people rely on the moral laws provided by the Church, they, more often than not, suppress religion in favour of their own interests. For instance, the people of Mayo celebrate the fact that Christy has murdered his own father, and the more details Christy gives them, the more they like him.

Christy [twisting around on her with a sharp cry of horror]: Don't strike me. I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.

Pageen [with blank amazement]: Is it killed your father?

Christy [subsiding]: With the help of God I did, surely, and that the Holy Immaculate Mother may intercede for his soul.

Philly [retreating with Jimmy]: There's a daring fellow.

Jimmy: Oh, glory be to God!

Michael [with great respect]: That was a hanging crime, mister honey. You should have had good reason for doing the like of that.

(Synge "Four Plays" 87).

The community in Mayo seems desperate for something new, something to take them away from the small village life they have grown to be bored of. Perhaps that is the reason why the people were so quick to accept his story. Even Pageen drops her engagement to Shawn after facing the foreign and daring gentleman. Synge's play manages to highlight the real life of Irishmen in the countryside, while having to dim the language down in order for the city people to be able to accept it. Yet, neither they, nor the church, found the play remotely acceptable. Yeats also met challenges from the Church. In 1899 Yeats premiered his play *The Countess Cathleen* at the Irish Literary Theatre in Dublin. The protagonist, Countess Cathleen, sells her soul to the Devil in order to save Ireland from starvation. Towards the end Cathleen is seen as she "ascends" to heaven, sacrificing herself in order to save the country. The Catholic Church found the play heretical and gathered their members to sign a petition denouncing it. The petition was fronted by Dublin's Cardinal Michael Logue and he managed to get all the students of the University College to sign, all except James Joyce. This is just one of many instances in which Yeats had trouble with the Catholic Church. As a result, after the premiere and critique Synge experienced surrounding his play *Playboy of the Western World*, establisher of the Abbey Theatre, Annie Horniman, advised Yeats to rather write for the English than the Irish. To which he responded:

"I am not young enough to change my nationality it would really amount to that. Though I wish for a universal audience, in playwriting there is always an immediate audience also. If I were to try to find this audience in England I would fail through lack of understanding on my part perhaps through lack of sympathy. I understand my own race and in all my work, lyric or dramatic, I have thought of it . . . I shall write for my own people, whether in love or hate of them matters little, probably I shall not know which it is." (Ellman 254).

The ambivalence expressed towards his own country and the people in it is clearly shown in this quotation. Yet, his nationalism and patriotism trump his own feelings of doubts. Furthermore, Yeats expresses that he would not be capable of writing for an English audience because you would have to understand a nation to write about it, otherwise it would be insincere. Yeats had written poetry and prose for nearly three years before he started writing about Ireland (Ellman 16). John O'Leary, who for a time served as president for The Republican Brotherhood, came to be an inspiration for many young Irish writers, including Yeats, at the time. O'Leary had for a long time observed that the Victorians did not bother to use literature as a means in which to express nationalism (Ellman 16). He was of the impression that Irishmen should write poetry about Ireland and further develop "the spirit of the nation" (Ellman 17). Yeats found this intriguing and was encouraged to actively include his patriotism in his literary work; however, he did not fully agree with what he saw as sentimental nationalism (Ellman 17). In a letter dated to 1890 Yeats wrote: "We should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and glittering ones we wonder about." (Ellman 18).

Like Yeats, Synge also wrote for *The Leisure Hour*, and in June of 1902 he published a story on Lady Gregory's folk-tale collection *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* called *The Epic of Ulster*. The article resembles that of a book review, where Synge critiques Lady Gregor in her the way she conveyed and translated the stories in the collection. The importance of Lady Gregory's book, Synge remarks, is that "the beauty and wonder of old literature is likely to have an influence on the culture of all classes" (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 284). Moreover, he adds that this will most likely provide the many "lukewarm" Irishmen with a more sympathetic and less ignorant attitude towards Ireland's true tradition (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 284). The Irish Literary Revival needed the old stories to convey a message of Irish identity. They created a feeling of nationalism and home that the Irishmen, perhaps especially in the urban areas of Ireland, had not felt for a long time. Additionally, the last twenty years, Synge comments, "the intellectual movement" in Ireland had managed to provide recognition towards the peasants, their surroundings and their language (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 284). Consequently, collecting the stories, translating them and having them be published in great numbers had a massive influence on the nation as a whole. Suddenly, the peasants were front and center and had a permanent place in the Irish cultural history. Irishmen could relate to the tales as they took place within their own country and the stories were about Irish people. However, Synge does criticize Lady Gregory, mostly for the way she applied the language through translation and consequently, the way this distanced the texts from that of the original manuscripts (MSS). Synge comments that it is hard to tell when she is thinking of the talk of the peasant or referencing a paragraph from the Old Testament (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 284). In regard to the artistic freedom in her collection, Synge urges students of Irish folktales to double-check their research with that of German scholars, as the German's texts were translated without hesitation (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 285). Lady Gregory's collection is based around the Irish mythical hero Cuchulain and was the first collection with a focused timeline for

the events. Irish folktales never used to be organized because, just when the modern time allowed for such research, coordination and translation, the country was interrupted by the introduction of Christianity as well as Northern pirates (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 284). Collecting and translating these works were not considered a priority and would not surface until the Irish Literary Revival. The collection had been published once before, by Miss Hull, yet, according to Synge, the translation in this publication was of poor quality and lacked consistency (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 248). Lady Gregory's version was as close as one could get to a cohesive collection that closely resembled the country people of Western Ireland (Synge "Epic of Ulster" 248).

4.0 Sean O'Casey

In addition to Yeats and Synge, other nationalist writers would make their debut. One of them was Sean O'Casey who was born in 1880 in the slums of Dublin as one of thirteen children, however, of his twelve siblings only four was to survive childhood (Watson 245). Growing up in urban poverty together with his confliction towards his parent's dedication to Protestantism while being surrounded by Catholics, made O'Casey isolated as a child (Watson 245). In his adulthood, however, O'Casey soon found his place as he became increasingly interested in nationalism and soon joined the Gaelic League in the Republican movement. Furthermore, he experienced first-hand the devastating ways in which the Irish nationalist attempted to create modern Ireland, such as The Dublin Lockdown (1913) and The Easter Rising (1916). From these incidents, O'Casey set the background for many of his most well-received plays, all performed at the Abbey Theatre (Watson 245). Unlike Yeats and Synge, O'Casey was an urban writer as he directly challenged the history of his own time, making his drama more realistic than most playwrights at the time. Overall, O'Casey's plays are argumentative in that they are saturated by Irish social life, politics and history (Watson 247). His two most known plays, *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923), are based on these events, whereas *Juno and the Paycock* is set during the civil war in Ireland and *The Shadow of a Gunman* deals with the guerilla war (Watson 248). What is perhaps even more interesting is the similarities *The Shadow of a Gunman* shares with Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Many critics argue that it is an urban version of Synge's play, as the whimsical imaginations of the people surrounding the protagonist constructs a new personality for him (Watson 249). Yet, O'Casey lacked the creative possibilities of fantasy and how this element can suffice both positively and purposefully. The two protagonists, in their respective plays, Davoren and Christy Mahoon, end up quite differently whereas Christy really change throughout the play, but Davoren remains as despicable as he started out as (Watson 248). Furthermore, while Christy is genuinely in love with Pageen, Davoren does not love Minnie, because he can only love himself and only pays Minnie attention because she confirms his thoughts about himself (Watson 251). This is especially evident in act two when Seamus says to Davoren: "You think a lot about her simply because she thinks a lot about you, an' she thinks a lot about you when she looks upon you as a hero." (O'Casey 29). It was not uncommon for the Irishmen to romanticize violence and, moreover, counter that romanticism with violence (Watson 252). Sean O'Casey added another layer to the Irish cultural identity as he wrote about what he knew and experienced, both while growing up and as an adult. He used the uncomfortable truths surrounding the succession process as a tool to portray the reality of urban life in Ireland. Furthermore, he was a vital part of the process of constructing the Irish cultural and national identity because he was one of the people who kept the nationalist ideals alive in the literature. O'Casey leaned on the heritage of people like Yeats and Synge and built on their legacy with his own experiences. Even

though their perception of what made Ireland special differ, together they constructed a nuanced version of history that took both the peasantry and the city people into consideration.

5.0 Chapter 3: conclusion

The quest to define a nation's cultural identity was prominent all throughout Europe during the Romantic era. The Irish people were in a difficult position as they, in addition to being on the verge of secession from Britain, were struggling to unite the country. Religion, mythology, social heritage and language were all factors that separated the country, both geo-politically and culturally. The Irish Literary Revival and the writers behind the movement wanted to prove that literature and culture was the means in which construct a united nation that included the whole of Ireland's population. With inspiration from countries such as Finland and Norway, Yeats and Synge travelled to the rural areas of Ireland in an attempt to collect, restore, categorize and translate some of its most important folklore and mythology. The Irish nationalist's interest in mythology, and especially the fairies, was a way to distract from the religious conflict in Ireland as well as bringing a piece of the countryside to the urban cities. It created a common ground for the population as everyone in Ireland could in one way or another relate to the folklore. Implementing cultural artefacts such as the fairies, the otherworld and Gaelic legends in their stories, plays and prose made it respectable and notable for everyone. The majority of Ireland wanted independence and by gaining support and recognition from influential people such as Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory and O'Casey they were one step closer to receiving the validity necessary to sway the political powers in Ireland.

Yeats and Synge both used the mythology and folklore found in the Irish countryside as their means to influence the cultural identity of Ireland. For Synge it was important that the stories and plays he wrote was as close to the original source as possible. He would value the language, the traditions and the culture of the countryside and either re-tell their stories accurately or make clear that the work was from his own perspective. With Yeats, on the other hand, the reader would rarely be able to tell whether he imagined the stories himself, copied from another source or wrote an autobiographical piece. Furthermore, by being born into Anglo-Irish Protestant homes they both managed to bring the native Irishmen's and the Catholic's stories to a larger audience. As mentioned, the Irish Protestants held the highest positions within the nobility and Yeats's and Synge's political activity with the nationalists meant that they would have had some influence regarding the direction Ireland would have to take in order to become an independent republic.

The Irish cultural discourse was heavily influenced by stereotypes imposed by England. Through comic strips found in magazines such as *Punch* and *Fun and Judy* and the overall portrayal of the stage-Irishman, the English had degraded and dehumanized the Irishmen, and especially the country people, to such extent that the reality of life in Ireland was failing to shine through. The Revivalists managed to remind the world of the wondrous and whimsical world found within the folklore that was stored and collected by the Irish country people. Furthermore, the Irish Literary Revival possessed an enormous amount of power when it came to develop a cultural identity on a national scale. Yeats and Synge could have chosen anything in Ireland as their main focus in their literature, but chose the mythology, folklore and country people. Whether the movement would have had achieved the same success if writing about the urban protestant bourgeoisie or the catholic priests we will never know. What we do know is that the Irish Literary Revival did enjoy some success in uniting nineteenth century Ireland socially, politically and culturally by reviving the ancient folklore, reclaiming the Irish cultural stereotypes and by influencing the political powers to become an independent republic.

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7.0 Appendix

7.1 Relevance for teaching

This thesis has dealt with literature of the Romantic era in Ireland seen through the perspective of the social, political and cultural effects it had on the country. Furthermore, it discusses the question of national identity, ancient literature and methods used to restore and collect it. These elements are useful in fulfilling several competence-aims in the English curriculum such as: "interpret literary texts and other cultural expressions in a cultural-historical and social perspective" and "discuss the cultural position of the US and Britain today and the circumstances that led to it" (UDIR). Managing to look at literature from the perspective of its context is highly relevant in teaching as it adds another layer to the discussion of literature. One would have to understand the political and social landscape of Ireland in order to fully understand the impact William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge had, especially when considering their efforts on the construction of the cultural identity in Ireland. I have always been fascinated with literature in context; who was the author? How did he/she grow up? What were the circumstances in which the text was published? And so on. Or in this case, why was it so important for Synge to give the country people a voice in his literature? Asking these questions can create many interesting projects for the students.

In the thesis I used methods such as close reading, which is an important element in teaching as well. By analyzing what the texts says, how the text says it and what the text means one can find so many clues and surprises along the way. This valuable information teaches the students that there is so much more to a poem or a play than what you can see with first glance.

The concepts of national identity and cultural identity are both very interesting topics and could provide a compelling comparable study. For instance, in researching how the Norwegian and Irish cultural identity were constructed and differences and similarities one could find by comparing Yeats and Synge with Ambjørnsen and Moe, or Irish fairies and leprechauns with Norwegian trolls and wood nymphs. National and cultural identity are always evolving and, in some ways, subjective. In which case, an interesting question could be "what does it mean to be Norwegian?" or "what separates us from other nations?". These questions open for discussion and reflection around individuality, politics, globalization, culture and so much more.

All in all, my dissertation has discussed topics that can be applicable in teaching, both in regard to the methods used throughout and the main topics themselves. Having an awareness of what traits and cultural elements makes your country special or different, and realizing that it is a social construction created to separate us from others, is a valuable insight into society and culture all around the world.

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