Hacettepe University Graduate School Of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

WEAVING THE ANCIENT GREEK MYTHS INTO IRISH IDENTITY: JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE'S *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* AND TOM PAULIN'S *THE RIOT ACT*

Zeki Cem KAÇAR

Master's Thesis

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Zeki Cem KAÇAR tarafından hazırlanan "Weaving the Ancient Greek Myths into Irish Identity: John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act*" başlıklı bu çalışma, 05/09/2024 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Zeki Cem KAÇAR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

KAÇAR, Zeki Cem. *Weaving the Ancient Greek Myths into Irish Identity: John Millington Synge's The Playboy of the Western World and Tom Paulin's The Riot Act.* Master's Thesis. Ankara, 2024.

Myths have always preserved their importance for their powerful representation of the socio-cultural development of a nation as they transmit the collective experience of the heroism of the past to ascertain the continuation of the nation's integrity. However, England's intrusion into and manipulation of Ireland and Irish culture resulted not only in the cultivation of myths but also created a space to investigate what the Irish society lacked and what it needed to reclaim its nationalist voice via the reconstruction of them. Therefore, the major aim of this thesis is to analyse the use of certain reconstructed ancient Greek myths in the selected plays of different playwrights from different eras from the twentieth century to observe the reconstruction of these powerful stories: *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by John Millington Synge (1871-1909) and *The Riot Act* (1984) by Tom Paulin (1949-). The thesis focuses on how the reconstruction of myths plays a crucial role in the reclamation of Irish identity through the gradual reawakening of Irish socio-political culture. Although being long-usurped, dormant, and underappreciated, Ireland and the Irish culture are indebted their reclamation to two essential events: firstly to the movement of the Irish Renaissance, or Irish Literary Revival, with the establishment of the Abbey Theatre in 1904, which remarks the emancipation and revival of social and political contexts of Ireland and Irish culture; secondly, to the Northern Irish Troubles of the 1960s during which the civil instability shaped Ireland's political stance. In this context, how and why these playwrights reconstructed and re-functionalised the myths of Oedipus, and Antigone and Creon, will be discussed concerning the socio-political structure of Ireland and Irish culture. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) is examined as the play that subverts the myth of Oedipus to connote the urgency of reclaiming Ireland and Irish culture and being free from the oppression of imperialist England through self-actualisation. Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984) demonstrates the Northern Irish Troubles of the 1960s; the play presents politics of resistance, deprecation of the oppressed groups, and a rebuttal to the unionist policies of the time through the conflict between Antigone and Creon via translocating the ancient myth to the tumultuous times of Northern Ireland. Hence, this thesis aims to demonstrate that the playwrights reconstructed certain ancient Greek myths for the Irish contexts to raise awareness for the long-lost autonomy of Irishness, which was caused by England's cultural manipulation, and to link the misrepresented Irish identity and culture to the long-established and well-respected Antiquity, which primarily used the theatre to educate the society in the light of social concerns, to remind and emphasise the true essence and value of Ireland.

Key Words

Reconstruction of Greek myths, Irish identity, John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act*

ÖZET

KAÇAR, Zeki Cem. *Antik Yunan Mitlerinin İrlanda Kimliğine İşlenmesi: John Millington Synge'in The Playboy of the Western World ve Tom Paulin'in The Riot Act Başlıklı Oyunları*. Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Ankara, 2024.

Mitler, bir ulusun sosyokültürel gelişiminin güçlü bir temsilini sağladıkları için her zaman önemlerini korumuşlardır; geçmişin kahramanlıklarını toplu deneyim olarak aktararak ulusun bütünlüğünün devamını sağlarlar. Ancak, İngiltere'nin İrlanda ve İrlanda kültürüne müdahalesi ve manipülasyonu, mitlerin geliştirilmesine yol açmakla kalmayıp, aynı zamanda İrlanda toplumunun eksikliklerini ve milliyetçi sesini yeniden inşa ederek yeniden kazanması gerekenleri araştırmak için bir alan oluşturmuştur. Bu nedenle, bu tezin ana amacı, yirminci yüzyılın farklı dönemlerinden farklı oyun yazarları olan John Millington Synge'in (1871-1909) *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) ve Tom Paulin'in (1949-) *The Riot Act* (1984) adlı eserlerinde yeniden inşa edilmiş belirli antik Yunan mitlerinin kullanımını analiz etmektir. Tez, mitlerin yeniden inşasının İrlanda'nın sosyopolitik kültürünün kademeli olarak yeniden uyanışında ve İrlanda kimliğinin ıslahında nasıl kritik bir rol oynadığını ele almaktadır. Uzun süre gasp edilmiş, durağan ve değersiz görülmüş olsa da İrlanda ve İrlanda kültürü geri kazanılmasını iki önemli olaya borçludur: birincisi, 1904'te Abbey Tiyatrosu'nun kurulmasıyla birlikte, İrlanda Rönesansı veya İrlanda Edebi Uyanış Hareketi ile İrlanda'nın ve İrlanda kültürünün sosyal ve politik bağlamlarının özgürleşmesi ve canlanması; ikincisi, 1960'ların Kuzey İrlanda Sorunları sırasında, sivil istikrarsızlığın İrlanda'nın politik duruşunun şekillenmesi. Bu bağlamda, bu oyun yazarlarının Oedipus, Antigone ve Creon mitlerini nasıl ve neden yeniden inşa ettikleri ve işlevselleştirdikleri, İrlanda'nın ve İrlanda kültürünün sosyopolitik yapılarıyla ilgili olarak tartışılacaktır. Synge'nin *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) eseri, Oedipus mitini altüst eden ve kendini gerçekleştirme yoluyla İrlanda'yı ve İrlanda kültürünü yeniden kazanmanın ve emperyalist İngiltere'nin baskısından kurtulmanın aciliyetini ifade eden bir oyun olarak incelenmiştir. Paulin'in *The Riot Act* (1984) eseri, 1960'ların Kuzey İrlanda Sorunlarını göstermektedir; oyun, Antigone ve Creon arasındaki çatışma yoluyla antik miti Kuzey İrlanda'nın çalkantılı dönemlerine taşıyarak direniş politikalarını, ezilen grupların küçümsenmesini ve dönemin birlikçi politikalarına karşı bir tepkiyi sunar. Bu nedenle, bu tez, oyun yazarlarının belirli antik Yunan mitlerini İrlanda bağlamında yeniden inşa ettiklerini ve İngiltere'nin kültürel manipülasyonunun neden olduğu uzun süredir kaybedilmiş İrlandalılığın özerkliğini yeniden kazanma farkındalığını artırmak ve yanlış temsil edilen İrlanda kimliğini ve kültürünü, esasen toplumu sosyal kaygılar ışığında eğitmek için tiyatroyu çağlar boyu kullanmış ve saygı duyulan Antik Çağ ile bağlantılandırmak amacıyla yaptıklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Yunan mitlerinin yeniden yapılandırılması, İrlanda kimliği, John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act*

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INTRODUCTION

"...before we'll be controlled

Before that, we'll surrender our property to thee

We'll fight like Irish hearts of oak and gain the victory"

"Captain Colston," Andy Irvine (1965)

This thesis investigates the reconstruction of Greek myths in the context of Irish drama, exemplified by the works of playwrights such as John Millington Synge with *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and Tom Paulin with *The Riot Act* (1984). These plays aim to shed light on the revival of the Irish identity and to illuminate the Irish audience on reclaiming their oppressed identity. While Synge's approach in *The Playboy of the Western World* is more personalised, focusing on individual enlightenment and self-actualisation, Paulin's *The Riot Act* aims to offer a national standpoint by highlighting the Irish quest for identity, justice, and autonomy. By examining these deliberate efforts of Irish playwrights in utilising Greek myths to draw parallels between Antiquity and Ireland's sociopolitical and cultural struggles under English colonial rule, this thesis explores the revival of Irish identity and the restoration of the Irish image through strategically taking advantage of the highly regarded and thematically rich Greek myths into Irish drama to resonate with a broader audience, given their global recognition, to highlight the enduring sociopolitical and cultural impact of colonialism on Ireland and to create a solid global Irish image. Through this multifaceted approach, this thesis contributes to the exploration of sociopolitical and cultural themes, shedding light on the enduring impact of colonialism on Ireland while reimagining Irish identity through the lens of classical myths.

Myths retain their significance by serving as potent narratives that encapsulate the socio-cultural evolution of a society. They act as conduits of collective memory, echoing tales of past heroism that reinforce the ongoing unity and identity of a nation. These stories assume a pivotal role in the exploration of the historical trajectory of nations, serving as repositories of national identity and collective experiences transmitted across generations. Whether conveyed orally or in written form, these sociocultural narratives are incredibly

rich stories that comprise the identity and imagery constructed by nations over centuries, conveying invaluable insights which are essential for the perpetuation of cultural heritage and societal continuity. Therefore, examining the myths of each nation is vital and inevitable in national identity studies. Despite being largely fictional and fantastical, myths, with their themes, central motifs, and unique characters, reflect national distinctiveness and are a major source for constructing national consciousness, fostering a profound sense of communal belonging and identity. Thus, it can be claimed that the national consciousness and what constitutes the national identity are collected, stored and transmitted by the myths. Many established and renowned mythologies, such as those of Ancient Greece, and Rome, have provided substantial elements for themes and content in various national literatures. Particularly, Ancient Greek myths have permeated literature worldwide across different eras with diverse interpretations and readings since Ancient Greek myths vividly portray the virtues and flaws inherent in individuals and society, enabling a profound examination of their essence. Many different readings of such myths can be found in different literary works of various prominent writers of English literature from Shakespeare to John Milton, Lord Byron, James Joyce, and Seamus Heaney. So, it can be seen that Ancient Greek myths have been preferred to be employed by literary figures alongside their national myths, and at times even more extensively, in exploring identity themes within various literature such as French, Italian, and German – especially during the Renaissance from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries (Chami 20). One of these kinds of literature is of Ireland as Ireland has always been very significant when examining the question of national identity, and sociopolitical and economic awakening because they gradually redeemed their voice, culture, and independent stance both through bitter and violent fights on the battlegrounds, fuelled by the English imperialist interests for centuries and, also, by reconstructing myths in their literature to rectify the false Irish identity constructed by England and resurface their true identity which had been dormant for centuries, which will be studied in Chapter 1.

The true image of national identity is contained and preserved in various cultural forms such as folklore, traditions, historical events, monuments, architecture, language, literature, art, music, and even legal and political institutions. These aspects contribute to shaping and maintaining the national image and identity of a country by showcasing its

unique heritage, values, beliefs, and collective memory. Among these cultural forms, Ireland, myths hold a great significance in studying Irish identity. Irish myths play a crucial role in studying Irish identity due to their deep-rooted connection to Ireland's history and cultural heritage. These myths serve as a bridge between generations, preserving traditions, values, and beliefs that have shaped Irish society over time. They often depict themes of struggle and resilience, reflecting the Irish people's historical experiences of colonisation and resistance. Moreover, these myths contribute to a unique national narrative that defines Ireland's cultural identity offering valuable insights into the complexities of Irish identity formation.

It is of utmost importance to first study the native Celtic myths in order to see what was usurped from Ireland and subverted by the long English command for centuries about Ireland. The earliest traces of Ancient Ireland can be traced back to the culture of the Celts. Even though these Celtic people lived throughout the whole British Isles, as Bottigheimer proposes in *Ireland and the Irish*, Ireland was "the only place [that] remained intact" (15). After Caeser's campaign to Southern England in the first BC, the whole island gradually started to be colonised, and the Romanized Celts progressively adopted Roman administration, religion, and culture (15). The influence over the British Isles furthered with the arrival of the Germanic invaders, who not only majorly altered the vernacular but also "set up settlement patterns, legal systems, and widespread customs" (17). However, he argues that "Ireland […] stayed untouched, and an 'ethnic gulf' was created" because of Ireland's archipelagic formation (17). It is also proposed that these Roman and Germanic invasions greatly shaped the life and culture in Britain, however, the influence had little effect on life in Ireland. However, Christianity received a very positive response in Ireland and vice versa in all other parts of the Kingdom. In his book *Mere Irish & Fíor-Ghael,* Leerssen argues that "[a]lthough Ireland received the Christian message comparatively later than England, by the sixth and seventh centuries the Irish monasteries propagated it back so successfully that Ireland became known as 'The Isles of Saints and Scholars'" (264). Thus, it can be understood that the religious fabric was tightly woven into the Irish identity from a very early age and constituted a very significant part of Irish life afterwards. However, upon the arrival of the first settlers, Ireland was heavily conquered by the Celts originating from Central Europe, who began

migrating to Ireland around the fourth century BC (Ó Corráin 1). Cambrensis states that the Gaels, who inhabited the island last, brought their Gaelic culture, "a rich oral history and a complex and sophisticated legal system" (9). So, while various populations have inhabited Ireland over time, it is widely acknowledged that the Celts have had the most profound influence on its society. Their influence permeated various aspects of Irish life, from religious practices and social structures to art and folklore. The intricate patterns of Celtic art, the spiritual significance of their druidic practices, and the lyrical beauty of their Gaelic languages all contributed to shaping the distinct character of early Irish society. Elgenius explains that

> [t]he representation of symbols such as flags, coinage, anthems, uniforms, monuments and ceremonies reminds the members of a community of any given kind of their common heritage and cultural kinship. Therefore these symbols contribute to the strengthening and exaltation of their sense of a common cultural identity and belonging. In Ireland this can be seen in the frequent use of Celtic ornaments in very different domains of life, for example, Celtic interlace ornaments on water main covers, Celtic ornaments on logos, Celtic interlace on shop-windows and walls, but also just the use of the term 'Celtic' in company-names. (71)

However, one of the most influential cultural aspects that shaped Irish identity is the Celtic mythology and folktales. What can be called as 'true Irish identity' can be found within the characters from these Celtic myths and tales, which influenced, preserved, and conveyed the sense of belonging and collected image of Irishness throughout centuries for Irish people. The mythological characters like Cú Chulainn and the deeply rooted Celtic tradition of storytelling provide "[e]lements that are traditionally related to Celticness […] [as] […] the wild, pagan, 'uncivilised,' uncontrollable and impulsive" (Hezel 42). These mainly orally transmitted stories illustrate the Celts as proud, naturally strong, and free-hearted and their "Celticness [is] also contained in the traditional love for land and place" as these people are known to have a "society that […] is a very local and community-related one with strong internal bonds" (42). As the ancestors of the current Irish, the Celts were depicted to have an "ability and power of imagination, idealism and emotionalism […] especially admired by Synge, Yeats and other writers of the Irish Literary Revival" (42). Therefore, it is understood that the essence of 'true Irish identity' is intricately woven within the characters of Celtic myths and tales, acting as enduring sources that preserved and transmitted a deep sense of belonging and Irishness

over centuries. The mythological characters and the Celtic storytelling tradition embody traditional Celtic traits of wildness, paganism, strength, and profound love for the land, reflecting a society based on strong community bonds and local connections. The Celts, as ancestors of modern-day Irish, are portrayed with a remarkable imagination, idealism, and emotional depth that has been admired by prominent figures in Irish literature. Through these narratives, the Irish identity is portrayed as a narrative steeped in pride, strength, and communal ties, offering valuable insights into the complexities of Irish cultural heritage and identity formation, which continue to resonate with contemporary Irish society.

However, with the systematic cultural oppression by England especially from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the image of Celtic and Irish was drastically altered into what is known as the 'Stage Irishman.' The wild, strong, idealist hero was exaggeratively caricatured as a "garrulous, boastful, unreliable, hard-drinking, belligerent (though cowardly) and chronically impecunious" man (*The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* 534-35). With the heavy influence and control over Ireland and the Irish, English media successfully marketed this falsely representing Irish image for many years both throughout the Kingdom and also in the United States of America via many successful stage productions; thus, the Stage Irishman and the idea of an Irishman were eventually the same. Nevertheless, through the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of national awakening and the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, many prominent figures fought for the true Irish identity which the English media and stage productions have usurped for over two centuries. Playwrights such as Dion Boucicault, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J. M. Synge produced plays which are embedded with native Celtic culture, and Irish characters who were real to reclaim the true national identity of Ireland, which will extensively be studied in Chapter 1.

Though a small island country, because of neighbouring one of the most powerful colonial forces in the world, Ireland had suffered a lot from economic sanctions and cultural repressions and persecutions by England as its condominium throughout the centuries such as land confiscation by forcing out indigenous people and establishing a strong Anglo-Irish landowner class; restricting Irish trade with other European nations

and impeding Ireland's economic growth by making it dependent on England (via The Wool Act of 1699); repression of the Gaelic language and culture by the deliberate discouragement of using Irish in formal contexts or schools, in favour of English, assimilating the Irish people and erasing their unique cultural identity; and even closely observing and regulating the media to silence dissenters and restrict access to information. This, unfortunately, resulted in a long-dormant and underappreciated Irishness, and stagnation of Irish culture for a long time, which provided an environment that was prone to resentment and mistrust. This continuous sociopolitical and cultural discomfort eventually led to a series of significant events that ultimately defined the essence of Irish identity and helped it reappear: The Irish Renaissance at the beginning of the 1900s, and the Troubles of the 1960s[1], all of which will be extensively studied in Chapter 1. These events are of utmost importance for Ireland as they mark a significant point in Irish history as the long-inert and falsely represented Irish national identity was successively regained from the English step by step. This thesis will individually focus on each period offering different perspectives on how Ireland restored its image throughout the twentieth century within the literary field: The Irish Renaissance as the episode of the representation of the true image of the Irish, and the Troubles as the episode of the resolution of the unstable political and civil image caused by England. These events will be studied through a literary perspective as they can be considered the most impactful periods of Ireland's quest to restore its autonomy and voice. The major aim of this thesis is to study these significant playwrights and their plays from each period: John Millington Synge and his *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) for the Irish Renaissance, and Tom Paulin and his *The Riot Act* (1984) for the Troubles, since each play explores and critiques the causes and effects of each period on Irish identity by reconstructing and employing significant Ancient Greek myths.

To begin with, after centuries-long exploitation as the *de facto* colony of England, the religious and cultural opposing sides in Ireland started to sharpen and deepen as a bitter consequence of the Act of Union of 1801 which contributed to the complicated national and political disputes and divisions in the country throughout the twentieth century. As Robert Kee explains, due to socioeconomic inequalities, the North and South were

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[1] Henceforth, it will be mentioned as 'the Troubles'.

separated during the 1800s. The north flourished as industry and manufacturing progressed extensively and the conditions of living improved, whilst, in the south, the unequal distribution of land and resources - Anglican Protestants owning much of the land – led the Catholic majority to poor living conditions (*The Green Flag* 465-66). The majority of Irish Catholics wanted complete independence from Britain, "[but] Irish Protestants feared living in a country controlled by Catholics" (Stewart 137). The British introduced the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 in an attempt to satisfy both sides, dividing Ireland into two independent political entities, each with some self-government capabilities. Ulster Protestants supported the Act, however southern Catholics opposed it, insisting on "absolute independence for a united Ireland" (138). As a result of this deepening schism in society due to the unification through the end of the nineteenth century, it was abundantly clear that the Irish required cultural and political defiance caused by the Government of Ireland Act and the differing desires of Ulster Protestants and southern Catholics. This defiance was necessary to assert their identity and autonomy in the face of continued British influence and the push for self-government. The Irish Home Rule movement and the succeeding Irish War of Independence (1919-1922), thus, remarked significant moments for Ireland's resistance as they captured the country's desire for self-determination and political sovereignty. Irish Home Rule was a significant political movement in Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aiming to secure a form of legislative independence for Ireland while remaining part of the British Empire. The Home Rule movement sought to "address the grievances of the Irish people regarding limited domestic autonomy and political representation within the broader British context" (Jackson 835). The significance of Irish Home Rule for Irish nationalism and identity was significant in that the movement represented a crucial step towards affirming Irish national identity and asserting Irish autonomy within the larger British framework. The pursuit of Home Rule was intertwined with the broader nationalist sentiment in Ireland, "reflecting the desire for political self-determination and cultural distinctiveness. […] Home Rule was seen as a means of restoring Irish pride, language, and customs, fostering a sense of nationhood […] separate from British rule" (837). The movement laid the groundwork for future developments in Irish political history, such as the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921 and eventually the Republic of Ireland in 1937. The struggle for Home Rule underscored the enduring quest

for Irish independence and self-governance, shaping the trajectory of Irish nationalism and identity in the decades to come (Geoghegan 217-18). As is seen, the status of the Irish identity and national independence progressively ameliorated in light of these historically remarkable events, which will be examined in Chapter 1.

Such efforts were made not only on the battlegrounds but in the literary field as well. Some of the most influential repercussions of this period are to be observed with the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, founded by prominent figures such as W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn, with the aim of creating a national theatre that would reflect and elevate Irish culture and identity. The motivation behind this initiative was to provide a platform for Irish playwrights and to combat British cultural imperialism by promoting stories and themes that resonated with the Irish experience. Yeats, in his speech at the Royal Academy of Sweden, explains the necessity of such a theatre, "the great mass of the Irish people were accustomed to political speeches and read little, so from the very start they had felt that they needed a theatre of their own" (Elbir 5). However, the theatre faced considerable difficulties, including financial instability and challenges in attracting audiences, leading to its closure in 1901 (Ansari 66). Despite its short lifespan, the Irish Literary Theatre played a pivotal role in galvanising the Irish cultural revival and setting the stage for subsequent theatrical endeavours, significantly influencing the landscape of Irish drama and literature. The initiatives spearheaded by the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre ultimately culminated in the establishment of a national theatre in Dublin. In 1903, the Abbey Theatre was inaugurated with substantial financial support from Miss Horniman, a prominent English theatre matron (Harding, *Staging Life* 208). Her generous contributions were pivotal in realising the vision of a theatre that would not only showcase Irish talent but also elevate Ireland's presence within the broader context of Western drama. The Abbey Theatre served as a vital platform for Irish playwrights, allowing them to present narratives that highlighted the complexities of Irish life and culture. This endeavour marked a significant step in asserting Irish identity on the international stage and laid the groundwork for a rich tradition of theatrical excellence in Ireland.

Ireland's centuries-long status as a colony had resulted in the Catholic Irish being viewed as subordinate, barbaric, and uncultured compared to the dominant Protestant ruling class, especially through stage productions. Numerous Irish authors believed that reclaiming their true Gaelic heritage was essential for achieving independence from English colonisers and ending the long cultural and political mockery. The time of the establishment of the theatre and the first productions coincided with the emergence of a movement known as the Irish Renaissance, which aimed to raise awareness of the long-usurped and misrepresented Irish culture and identity. As Özçeşmeci argues the process of decolonisation inspired the Irish to envision a self-image reflective of their identity prior to English colonisation. Naturally, this emerging identity directly challenged the stereotypical depictions of the Irish that had been constructed and maintained on the English stage throughout the years (17). Hence, as the quest for independence progressed, Irish writers looked to their indigenous cultural roots to restore their lost identity and utilised artistic expression to advocate for Irish nationalism. Ansari argues that

> [b]ecause of prolonged subjugation of Ireland by the British, [Ireland's] own cultural ethos had almost ceased to find expression in any worthwhile native literature. The English language had inundated the Irish linguistic milieu to such an extent that Gaelic, the traditional language of Ireland, was relegated to the status of the rustics' medium of social interaction. ("The Emergence of Irish National Drama" 65)

It can be asserted that the profound impact of British colonialism on Irish cultural expression illustrates a critical disconnect between Ireland's indigenous identity and its literary output. The dominance of the English language marginalised Gaelic, relegating it to a mere tool of everyday communication among rural communities, thus stripping it of its potential literary and cultural richness. This loss of linguistic and cultural identity galvanised Irish writers and dramatists associated with the Irish Literary Theatre, who sought to reclaim and celebrate their heritage through their dramaturgical works. Many prominent literary figures endeavoured to revive Irish culture and language "which had fallen into disuse" (Heininge 151). Douglas Hyde, in "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland" argues that the Irish should "cultivate what they have rejected and build up an Irish nation on Irish lines" (154). Therefore, it was quite clear that should cultural emancipation be achieved, anything English ought to be rejected in turn since, as Heininge states, "the salvation of the Irish people would come about through literature in

the native language" (Heininge 155). William Butler Yeats, as one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre and one of the preeminent figures of the Revival, believed that an Irish theatre, a national theatre, would necessarily elevate the people through better representation, and when people began to see themselves in a better light, they would raise themselves as well (Yeats et al. 87). Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, and W. B. Yeats were the first Abbey Theatre playwrights to use the Irish language in their plays. These writers helped to shape Irish theatre by infusing aspects of Irish language and culture into their work at the Abbey Theatre. Thus, steadily, the Abbey Theatre gained recognition as a significant accomplishment of the nationalist movement due to its esteemed status as "the most original and vigorous theatre to have existed in the British Isles since the Elizabethans" (Gillie 171). W. B. Yeats, while not mainly a playwright, used the Irish language and mythology in plays such as *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) and *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894). Lady Gregory included Irish language phrases and elements into her plays, including *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), which was co-written with Yeats, and *The Rising of the Moon* (1903). J. M. Synge often employed Irish language terms and settings in his writings, particularly *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). In his *Playboy*, Synge not only employs Irish aspects to foster the sense of Irishness but also reconstructs the myth of Oedipus Rex to support the necessity for bringing together the disbanded Irish cultural accumulation. Overall, the period of the Irish Renaissance and the foundation of the Abbey Theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century marks a very crucial moment for a unified nationalistic movement toward sociocultural and political freedom in Ireland by resurrecting themes rooted in Gaelic folklore, mythology, and national history, aimed to articulate a renewed sense of Irish identity and purpose. The endeavours were not only an artistic restoration but a potent expression of Irish nationalism, as the dramatists as mentioned above strove to forge a narrative that encapsulated the complexities and aspirations of the Irish people in the face of colonial subjugation.

Another significant struggle Ireland faced during its reclamation of this reawakening and emancipation was the turbulent times during the 1960s that resulted from civil discomfort by extreme political opposition, which is known as the Troubles. Dixon explains that "[t]he socio-economic disparity between Catholics and Protestants combine[d] with

social segregation to nurture widely contrasting ideologies which perpetuate[d] division and conflict" (29), so this period of civil unrest and political conflict stemmed from deep-seated divisions between nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland. Violence between Catholics and Protestants had lowered significantly since the 1921 agreement, but discomfort flared up again in the late 1960s, with riots breaking out in Londonderry and Belfast in 1969 (McAvoy 27). The direct impact of the English policies continued to be seen as the Troubles escalated in the late 1960s due to various factors, including systemic discrimination against the Catholic nationalist community by the predominantly Protestant unionist government, leading to widespread social and economic disparities (Dixon 70-71). The English exerted a major and complex impact on Northern Ireland's Troubles in the late twentieth century. The policies and approach to the conflict significantly influenced the dynamics of the Troubles and uncompromising policies towards Northern Ireland contributed to heightened tensions and violence in the region. Her refusal to grant political prisoner status to Republican inmates led to increased support for paramilitary organisations and escalated the conflict (Tonge 122-23). Thatcher's policies, which were "distinguished by a firm stance and a concentration on security measures, alienated the nationalist community in Northern Ireland" (Tonge 123), and widened the separation between the two groups. One pivotal event during this period was the Bloody Sunday massacre on January 30, 1972, in Derry, when British soldiers opened fire on unarmed civil rights protesters, killing thirteen individuals. This tragic incident further inflamed tensions and galvanised support for both nationalist and unionist causes. The Troubles "persisted for nearly three decades, [characterised by] bombings, […] assassinations, [and] acts of terrorism" (Dixon 23) by various paramilitary groups on both sides. Moreover, Thatcher's government implemented the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, "which aimed to improve cooperation between the British and Irish governments but received immediate opposition" (Murray 89) from Unionist politicians and paramilitary groups. This agreement further strained relations within Northern Ireland and failed to bring about lasting peace or reconciliation (Bew 77). Efforts to address the underlying grievances and bring about lasting peace culminated in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which established power-sharing arrangements and laid the groundwork for a future in Northern Ireland that is more inclusive and stable.

Throughout this turbulent period in Irish history, the struggles and aspirations of the Irish people for self-determination and peace were reflected through their art, literature, and cultural expressions, echoing the enduring quest for a unified and harmonious society. Irish theatre during the Troubles was also an effective medium for expressing the multifaceted feelings and experiences of a people divided apart by political violence. Playwrights such as Brian Friel, Christina Reid, Conor McPherson, and Tom Paulin successfully handled the many complexities of the conflict, providing profound analyses of its effects. Friel's *Freedom of the City* (1973*)* presents a fictionalised yet incisive critique of the British army's employment of armed force during one of the most tragic events in Northern Irish history—the Bloody Sunday incident on January 30, 1972 – while Reid captures the complexities of life during the Troubles and sheds light on the human cost of the conflict in *The Belle of the Belfast City* (1987) by focusing on the lives of working-class characters as they navigate the challenges of everyday life amidst political violence and social unrest. McPherson's *The Weir* (1997) uses mystical elements to portray the conflict's eerie legacy. In his play *The Riot Act* (1985) Tom Paulin, also, critically explores the effects of political violence on interpersonal relationships and personal identities while examining the Troubles in Northern Ireland from the perspective of a family drama by translocating the myth of Antigone in Irish lands. Together, these plays depict the complexity of the Irish experience at a turbulent time of social and political unrest.

In these tumultuous times and many problems which arose consecutively on the path toward sociocultural and political emancipation in Ireland, it is of utmost importance to draw attention to one particular pattern observed in the field of literature: the use of myths. Myths hold an essential part in a nation's integrity as they are socially impactful stories that "[resonate] with the nation's historical […] collective experience [to] inspire great heroism and self-sacrifice by the members of [it]" (Buxton 326). Thus, it can safely be argued that the importance of myths is relevant for Ireland, especially during such turbulent times of the Anglo-Irish conflicts. Edward Said states that "nations are formed from the process of imperial or hegemonic decline" (qtd. in Buxton 331), and "[a]s the imperial state contracts, it becomes possible for the postcolonial nation to emerge" (331). In order to awaken and inspire the Irish for the nationalist revivalist cause, different

methods were employed by various playwrights in their plays; and the most frequently used one was *mythopoeia*, or mythmaking, in the Irish context. The term is originated from the Greek word *μυθοποιία* (mythopoeia), which means "[t]he making of myths" (*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*). Though considered a complete narrative genre in which the writer creates an artificial and niche mythology, Irish playwrights used *mythopoeia* respectively in their plays to "support and define the nature of the political revolution in a postcolonial liberation context" (Buxton 327) for Ireland rather than inventing a whole fictitious narrative about Ireland. Especially with the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, many prominent playwrights focused on various mythologies by which they could foster a sense of shared community among the Irish people. The time of the establishment of the Abbey Theatre and the first Abbey productions coincided with the emergence of a movement known as the Irish Literary Revival which aimed to raise awareness of the long-usurped and misrepresented Irish culture and identity. As mentioned earlier, W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory led this tradition of employing myths in their respective plays to revive the Gaelic stories for the sake of the long-dormant Irishness. Together with the decline of imperial England during the First World War, which was a great incentive for Ireland to recover what they had lacked for centuries, the Irish playwrights started to employ different mythological narratives by reconstructing the very nature of these socially powerful stories in their plays with the aim of providing an unconventional perspective to the reader to commemorate Ireland's colonised past and culture and presenting hopes for the future as "the effort of nationalists to craft [or reconstruct] a mythology … mobilizes the masses more effectively than the imperialists' mythology that seeks to justify their continued hold on power" (Buxton 333).

In conclusion, Ireland's reawakening and reclamation of its true identity and value is not a linear line but a complex web of causalities incorporated with threads of resilience, struggle, and transformation. This intricate narrative of desire for independence, economic shifts, political conflicts, and cultural blossoming which collectively shaped Ireland into the nation it is today, offers a nuanced understanding of Ireland's multifaceted past and its remarkable evolution. As it is quite a complex and multilayered subject to study, each chapter of this thesis will have a certain focus to provide a clearer examination of how these multiple layers come together to intervene, influence and shape each other

and, consequentially, to play an incredibly instrumental role in shaping the image and identity of Ireland today. As is aforementioned, the essence of Irish identity, throughout history, was shaped by the heritage of Celtic culture, especially through mythical aspects such as the invincible hero Cú Chulainn. However, with England's oppressive intrusion from the twelfth century into every aspect of the country from politics to language, major stagnation and the accompanying erosion of Ireland's true identity began to emerge. In the nineteenth century, however, it was realised that the deep fatigue caused by these erosions must be shaken off by a national revival in order to reclaim the lost identity of Ireland. The consecutive movements such as the Irish Renaissance, and the Troubles progressively reshaped and reintroduced who the Irishman was to the world.

Chapter 1 will provide an extensive study of Anglo-Irish relations from the first invasions until the end of the twentieth century focusing on Ireland's controversial *de facto* status as a colony, the Irish Renaissance, the Abbey Theatre and their significant impact on the ignition of Ireland's reclamation of its identity. The chapter will also shed light on the pattern of reconstructing Ancient Greek myths and try to provide a solid explanation as to why, over a century, Irish playwrights preferred employing such myths over the Gaelic myths by examining the processes of how and why the Irish playwrights interpreted and reconstructed some of the most influential Ancient Greek myths in their plays.

Chapter 2 will examine J. M. Synge's impact on the reclamation of the true Irish identity by studying how he subverted the Oedipus the Rex myth in one of his most influential plays *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) in order to represent the true rural image of Ireland. Synge's subversion of the Oedipus tragedy into a comedy can also be regarded as a way of confrontation between the Irish society and the disillusionment of Ireland's heroic past they had been in.

Chapter 3 will examine Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984) in which the tumultuous period of the Troubles in the 1960s is examined. The play portrays themes of political resistance, marginalisation of oppressed factions, and a direct challenge to the prevailing unionist strategies through the confrontation between Antigone and Creon. By reimagining the classical myth in the context of the turbulent era of Northern Ireland, Paulin underscores

the deep-rooted societal conflicts and power dynamics that mirror the socio-political struggles and divisions of the time.

In the conclusion part, the underlying reason for the reconstruction of Greek myths in these Irish plays will be discussed in order to assert that reconstructing these Ancient Greek myths in these Irish plays is to connect the misrepresented Irish identity and culture to the long-standing and highly esteemed Antiquity, which primarily used theatre to educate society considering social concerns, to emphasise and remind people of Ireland's true essence. By conducting a comprehensive multifaceted analysis of Anglo-Irish relations, Irish identity and reconstruction of Greek myths, this thesis contributes original insights about the interplay between historical narratives and cultural identity formation in Ireland. It highlights how the reinterpretation of ancient myths serves not only as a medium of reclamation of Irish identity but also as a means of negotiating historical grievances and contemporary socio-political dynamics. Additionally, the thesis elucidates the ways in which Greek mythology is adapted and recontextualised within the Irish literary canon to address themes of resistance, belonging, and cultural continuity, thereby offering a unique perspective on the resilience of national identity amidst colonial legacies.

This thesis represents a significant contribution to the field by synthesising the exploration of Ancient Greek myths and literature with the complex historical trajectory of Irish identity, a discourse that has predominantly been conducted separately within existing academic literature. While previous studies have examined the rich tapestry of Greek mythological elements as they manifest in Irish drama, and others have critically analysed the evolution and formulation of Irish identity throughout its tumultuous history, a comprehensive intersection of these two areas remains largely unaddressed. On one hand, Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton's *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy* (2002) provides a solid background as to the ways in which Greek myths and Irish drama intersected; nevertheless, the book does not directly touch upon the Irish identity concern. Instead, the articles in the book examine the elements of Ancient Greece integrated into selected Irish plays, analysing what these integrations represent from a historical perspective. Brian Arkins' *Hellenising Ireland* (2005) can be

considered to have the closest scope to this thesis since the book aims to demonstrate how Irish writers have, for more than a century, adapted Greek and Latin texts to serve their own creative purposes. Nevertheless, his main emphasis is on how Joyce utilises Homer. The book includes substantial discussions of both Yeats and Joyce, along with considerable attention to contemporary Irish poetry and drama. In contrast, contemporary fiction appears to draw the least from classical sources. His other book, *Irish Appropriation Of Greek Tragedy* (2010), focuses on methods of appropriation and identifies three distinct approaches to appropriating Greek tragedies for the modern Irish stage: 'straight translation,' a 'version,' and 'loose adaptation.' Aikaterini Gotsi's dissertation titled "Irish *Antigones*" (2012, emphasis in original) and Kady Anne D'Addario's thesis titled "'I Can Nor Bend Nor Sell:' Field Day's The Riot Act and The Catholic Habitus" (2014) restrict their scopes to the investigation of Sophocles' *Antigone* in selected plays composed during the Troubles of the 1960s. Both of these works provide detailed close readings of selected plays in which the myth of Antigone is utilised. Similarly, Katherine Anne Hennessey's dissertation "Memorable Barbarities and National Myths: Ancient Greek Tragedy and Irish Epic in Modern Irish Theatre" (2008) presents a comprehensive chronological examination of appropriations of Ancient Greek myths in Irish theatre over a hundred years; however, her focus is on productions rather than literary analyses. On the other hand, pioneering figures such as Declan Kiberd, Anthony Roche and Christopher Murray propound detailed investigations of Irish drama and theatre, and Irish identity with a holistic and historical perspective. Their books such as *Inventing Ireland* (Kiberd 1996), *The Irish Writer and the World* (Kiberd 2005), *After Ireland* (Kiberd 2016), *The Irish Dramatic Revival 1899-1939* (Roche 2015), *Irish Drama in Transition 1966-1978* (Murray 2015) provide thorough background research and examination; however, they do not study Irish plays from a literary perspective. It can be understood that Irish drama and Irish identity have been studied separately by pioneering scholars. Thus, the contribution of this thesis to the Irish drama corpus is its comprehensive approach to both of these subjects, of which developments are examined closely together. This thesis aims to bring together the works of the scholars of Irish dramatists and the works of Irish historians to investigate the intricate connections between Greek mythology and the evolution of Irish identity in the context of modern theatre. By bridging these two fields, the thesis aims to provide a solid understanding of

the ways in which classical influences have shaped the representation of Irish identity, particularly during periods of social and political upheaval. This synthesis not only fills a critical gap in existing scholarship but also offers fresh insights into how Irish playwrights have reinterpreted Greek themes and narratives to comment on their own culture and history. Also, rather than studying the plays as sole literary works which reconstruct the Greek myths in their own ways, this thesis aims to find an essential link within the pattern of reconstruction, which would enable a discussion of a tradition in Irish drama. To achieve this, this thesis – different from the others within the literature – provides an extensive sociopolitical, cultural and historical investigation of Anglo-Irish relations to establish a basis for the tradition. In that case, in this thesis, it will be argued that it is safe to consider Synge's play *The Playboy of the Western World* as the first example of the reconstruction of a Greek myth in an Irish play, thereby commencing the tradition. Another contribution that this thesis seeks to provide is to put forward Paulin's dramatist character with an in-depth discussion of his play *The Riot Act* from the perspective of the representation of the effects of political struggles on the Irish identity through reconstructing a Greek myth since he is mostly known with his political persona and poetry.

CHAPTER 1

IRISH IDENTITY THROUGH TIME: EXPLORING HISTORY, IDENTITY, AND MYTH IN IRELAND

The structured division of the chapter into three headings serves as a strategic framework to provide a detailed exploration of the intricate layers comprising Irish identity through a historical, cultural, and mythological lens. It begins with a historical overview of Anglo-Irish relations up until the 1990s and sets the foundation for understanding the complexities inherent in Irish identity formation. By examining key historical events, power dynamics, and socio-political influences, the first section offers insights into the historical background that shaped the Irish identity narrative. The second section delves into the cultural repercussions of England's 'Irish representation' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; hence, the focus shifts towards examining how Irish identity underwent significant metamorphoses in response to various sociocultural movements, literary revivals, and nationalist sentiments which peaked in the period of the Irish Renaissance. This section dives deep into cultural expressions that contributed to redefining Irish identity during pivotal historical periods. Furthermore, the third section on the significance of ancient Greek myths for Irish drama highlights the enduring impact of mythology in reshaping cultural narratives and artistic expressions. By exploring how ancient myths were reinterpreted and integrated into Irish drama, the section provides a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between myth, culture, and identity redefinition in the context of the reclamation of Irish identity. Therefore, the structured division of the chapter into these three headings offers a comprehensive and layered exposition on the evolution of Irish identity, showcasing the intricate interplay of historical legacies, cultural dynamics, and mythological inspirations that have contributed to the rich tapestry of Irish identity through time.

1.1 THE HISTORY OF ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS (1171-1998)

The history of Anglo-Irish relations, which spans centuries, is a complex narrative of war, cultural disputes, power struggles, conquest, interference, and belittlement that coexisted with persistent resistance and a fierce adherence to a distinct identity. A tense centuries-long relationship began when England's expanding imperial ambitions set their sights on neighbouring Ireland. This colonial interest from the twelfth century onward significantly impacted Irish identity by subjecting the Irish people to a series of challenges that shaped their sense of self and cultural resilience. England's interventions in Ireland led to the imposition of English law, land ownership patterns, and language, eroding aspects of traditional Irish customs, governance systems, and Gaelic culture. The progressive marginalisation of the Irish language and culture, coupled with discriminatory practices and economic exploitation, contributed to a sense of alienation and disempowerment among the Irish population. The development of Irish identity has been deeply influenced by centuries of complex interactions with neighbouring powers, especially England. This interconnected history shaped not only the Irish sense of self but also how they were perceived by external forces. The geopolitical significance of Ireland, marked by fertile lands and a strategic location, intertwined with religious affiliations, particularly concerning Catholicism, underscored the intricate dynamics that affected Irish identity amidst shifting imperial ambitions. The country was seen as both a strategic asset and a disruptive neighbour. Peyrol-Kleiber explains that

> [t]he island became of interest to its neighbour for two main reasons: fertile and – from the English perspective – underexploited land, and Ireland's geographical position. Indeed, in an age where different empires were expanding, the English considered Ireland as potentially dangerous since most Native Irish were Catholics, and therefore potentially close to other Catholic empires such as the French and Spanish, England always feared Ireland could be used as a springboard for an invasion of their territory. Therefore, controlling it was strategically crucial. (par. 1, par. 5)

The quotation above proclaims that England's interest in Ireland was motivated by a combination of territorial advantage and religious concerns, reflecting a broader narrative of power struggles and cultural clashes that would later have a direct influence on Irish identity formation. The amalgamation of Ireland into the English crown became significantly important to have more solid control over the land in that such sovereignty

was able to provide the strategic upper hand to England in order to secure its dominance and power in the area, especially during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The invasion of Ireland roots back to the twelfth century when "[t]he Anglo-Normans began the conquest of Ireland, they introduced feudalism into the new lands," (Maple 64) thereby prompting the English crown to strengthen its control over the land. Henry II's visit to Ireland in 1171 ensured that the barons governed their Irish territories not as sovereign kings but as tenants-in-chief or vassals. These individuals controlled vast estates, totalling hundreds of thousands of acres. Each lord, irrespective of their rank, was focused on maximizing the utilisation of available resources (Maple 65); however, this 'visit' ignited the troublesome relationship between England and Ireland by thoroughly intervening and altering the political executive with the apparent abuse of feudalist distribution of lands, which eventually resulted in "the early failures of Anglo-Norman government in Ireland and the abuses of the barons and royal officials" (Duffy 227). So, to prevent any further rebellious acts on the side of the Irishmen, Henry II, prior to his death, "made all the persons to whom he had entrusted the custody thereof do homage to himself *and* to his son John and take oaths of allegiance and fealty to *them* for their lands in Ireland" (Howden, qtd. in Duffy 227, emphasis in original). Although this oath of fidelity did not directly unite the two countries and provided the Irish lords with the right to rule their lands, Ireland became one of the three kingdoms of James I of England, VI of Scotland and thus it was part of the realm and not a foreign colony until 1534 " [when] Henry VIII decided to change his title of *Lord of Ireland* to that of *King of Ireland*, establishing his supremacy over the native kings of Ireland" (Peyrol-Kleiber par. 4, emphasis in original). However, the political and cultural stance of Ireland from the very early times was rather controversial since the country and nation were under constant British exploitation. The evolving dynamics of Irish society faced significant shifts as initiatives for equal partnership between native Irish, and settlers were thwarted by acts of territorial expansion and the dispossession of Irish lords. The construction of new castles and subsequent waves of colonisation further accentuated the unequal power dynamics of the time. This shift in governance highlights a significant departure from earlier intentions of coexistence and collaboration between the native Irish and the incoming settlers. As the dynamics evolved under John I's rule, the possibility of achieving a status of 'equal partners' diminished rapidly. Duffy notes,

the prospect of the native Irish and the settlers being 'equal partners' was abandoned, [… The acts of] involving territorial expansion, dispossession of Irish lords, new castle-construction, and a further wave of colonisation, left no room for an equal partnership with the Irish. John, in this, his first direct intervention Irish affairs, showed no desire to act as an impartial lord of both native and newcomer; he was clearly an advocate of the latter's interests. (232)

This deliberate discriminative bureaucracy of King John I solidified and escalated the confusion and discontent that the Irish lords and people had toward the English monarchy on whether they were a part of the kingdom, or a mere piece of land to be exploited by the kingdom. This systematic discrimination, which significantly contributed to and perpetuated a palpable sense of injustice and marginalisation and a deep-seated resentment, created a deepening chasm between the native Catholics and the Protestant settlers. The widening gap between these two groups, fuelled by discriminatory policies and unequal treatment, likely reinforced distinct cultural identities and solidified the narrative of Irish identity as one rooted in a history of colonisation, resistance, and a struggle for autonomy amidst external dominance. Heather K. Crawford questions the perplexing situation that the Irish had at those times as "[a]mbiguities surrounding Irish self-definition […] complicated by the impossibility of allocating a defined character to early modern Ireland: was it an English colony or had it the status of 'kingdom,' with all the implications that either status carried for identity-formation?" (55). Irish institutions and culture were frequently disregarded and undermined as Ireland was rather prone to be perceived as a 'colony.' The amalgamation of Ireland into England and the first sanctions are to be considered a thorough reflection of a larger colonial mindset that sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction and alienation, which originally emerged between Irish Catholics and English Protestant settlers. As Crawford further explains,

[t]he first stereotype [attached] to Protestants is that of 'invader' and 'land grabber'. A form of time contraction operates, seeing Henry II's Anglo-Norman barons as the equivalent of later Protestant settlers under the Tudors. […] This fusion of Protestant with usurper created other heads of conflict leading to 'a set of socio-cultural and ideological differences; a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality; and a tendency towards communal polarisation'. (55)

The national identity in Ireland started to distinctly split as the Catholic 'colonised' and the Protestant 'coloniser' because of this 'polarisation,' which was caused by the Anglo-Norman invasion and the privileges that first Anglo-Protestant settlers acquired right from

the beginning were the first step of the long-fought battles of national and cultural emancipation in Ireland. The emergence of a distinct split in national identity in Ireland along religious lines with Catholics perceived as the 'colonised' and Protestants as the 'colonisers' was a direct consequence of the polarising effects of the Anglo-Norman invasion. The initial privileges granted to the Anglo-Protestant settlers laid the foundation for a socio-political hierarchy that perpetuated unequal power dynamics and entrenched divisions based on religious affiliation. This polarisation not only deepened the sense of cultural and national identity among the Catholic and Protestant communities but also set the stage for long-standing struggles for emancipation and autonomy within Irish society. As the Protestant colonisers benefited from preferential treatment and held positions of authority, the Catholic population faced marginalisation and limited opportunities for socio-political advancement, which furthered the divergent paths of Irish identity, with Catholics identifying more closely with a history of subjugation and resistance while Protestants aligned themselves with positions of power and influence within the colonial structure.

As these identities solidified, the threads of Anglo-Irish discrepancy became more pronounced and entrenched over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The local population was further marginalised by the imposition of English law, or the Common Law, and authority through the Plantations in Munster and Ulster, which disrupted traditional Gaelic society and deprived them of their land for

> [t]he Tudors experimented with different forms of control [with] the plantations of the late 16th and early 17th century [sic] [...] This process of confiscating land and giving it to investors who would speculate on their price and sell them to prospective settlers – from England and Scotland mainly – is crucial since it was repeated [...] and other colonies were colonized according to those strategies. Part of the Gaels, as well as the Old English, were displaced and put under the authority of the new landlords, mostly Protestants, were they English or Scottish. (Peyrol-Kleiber par. 6)

The English crown imposed its imperial power through these plantations as the first step towards turning Ireland into a colony. The Tudor plantations of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries marked a pivotal period in Irish history, where English interests in asserting control and colonisation strategies had enduring consequences on Irish identity. The systematic confiscation of land, redistribution to investors for

speculation, and subsequent settlement by English and Scottish migrants not only altered the socio-economic landscape of Ireland but also sowed the seeds of cultural displacement and disempowerment among the native Gaelic and Old English populations, shaping the trajectory of Irish national consciousness towards a struggle for cultural preservation, defiance against external dominance, and a quest for reclaiming autonomy within the turbulent currents of Ireland's historical narrative.

When James I of England succeeded Elizabeth I in 1603, he negotiated with powerful Irish lords such as the Earl of Tyrone and the Earl of Tyrconnell. The Irish lords were to preserve their estate holdings and receive immunity from any form of prosecution in return for their oath of allegiance to the English Crown (Braa 195). This transaction between the Crown and the Irish chieftains resulted in the establishment of the Ulster plantations. Braa states that "Ulster became one of the earliest and most important colonial holdings of the English Crown" since "all the rents and services (socage) of all the new land-holders was a considerable source of wealth and manpower" (196). The Plantations were a vital part of the colonial interest of the English Crown as "[s]ending Anglican Englishmen to take up Irish land in the province of Ulster meant infusing Englishness into that 'wild territory'" (Peyrol-Kleiber par 8). As was already a common perspective deriving from the very early expeditions in the twelfth century, Ireland was considered to have a "barbarous and rebellious […] Gaelic culture that should be wiped out" (Ellis 296). The seeds of the ostracising image of the Irishmen were being planted firmly in the society through these plantations with the religious, cultural, and political chasm between the people in Ireland deepening gradually. Therefore, with the Plantations and the consecutive enforcement of the English law upon the Irish authorities, the colonisation of Ireland was profoundly secured as these sanctions enabled England to intervene more in Irish politics by disempowering the Irish Catholics through expropriation and legislative limitations. This limitation created an English-Protestant ruling class that stripped Irish Catholics of their lands and wealth. Thus, the importance of forming solidarity against the ostracising ruling class to reproduce the Celtic-Irish identity started to be manifested gradually in the nineteenth century.

The Penal Laws, a suite of legislative enactments in Ireland, in the meantime, were strategically crafted to assert dominance over the Catholic population, thereby facilitating the consolidation of Protestant hegemony. Therefore, the Protestant Ascendancy not only secured a firm authority over the political sphere but also established control over economic resources, consolidating Protestant power within both the governmental and the economic landscape. Although "'the strategy would seem to have been to reduce the Catholic Irish to ignorant savages and ... deprive them of all civil life,' the laws were applied selectively to deprive the Catholic aristocracy and gentry of the basic means of production, the land," (Crawford 55) it still added another layer of oppression by explicitly targeting Irish Catholics in an attempt to extinguish their cultural impulse and uphold English Protestant domination through the Education Act (1695), the Banishment Act (1697), the Registration Act (1704), and the Disenfranchising Act (1728), all of which perpetuated, as a part of the Anglicisation movement in Ireland, the pressure of England on the country. Consequentially, Irish life was heavily influenced by the English language and culture, frequently at the expense of deeply cherished traditions. The Penal laws, through consecutive acts, throughout the sixteenth century, brought bans and strict limitations to the Catholic Irish such as exclusion from most public offices and the parliamentary franchise, ban on foreign education, ban on buying land on lease, or inheriting Protestant land and many more (McGrath 13-48). Expectedly, Ireland gradually became an arena of conflict for opposing interests with England's desire for power confronted by unrelenting resistance from a people determined to preserve their distinct character. However, Irish resistance was a constant strand running through the *de facto* colonisation narrative at this time. Gaelic chieftains opposed English control and uprisings such as Tyrone's Rebellion (1593-1603) arose consecutively. Despite frequently facing severe repression, these acts of rebellion functioned as symbols of the Irish character refusing to be fully subsumed by English rule.

The Act of Union in 1801 officially incorporated Ireland into the United Kingdom, thereby suppressing the long-problematic relationship between the two countries. The incorporation, effectively subduing the longstanding problematic relationship between Ireland and England, can be viewed as a solution from a political and administrative perspective in terms of consolidating control and unity within the British Isles. However,

from the standpoint of Irish national identity and aspirations for autonomy, the Act of Union represented a continuation of subjugation and erasure of Irish sovereignty. Ultimately, while the Act of Union may have temporarily stabilised the Anglo-Irish relationship in a governance framework, it did not address the underlying complexities of historical grievances, cultural preservation, and aspirations for self-determination since the Act, which encountered strong opposition, denoted the total subjugation of Irish sovereignty and the strengthening of English power solidifying the history of mockery and intervention. This legislative measurement was a defining event that, as Thomas Bartlett argues, signified "the complete surrender of Irish sovereignty […] and the reinforcement of English supremacy" (*Ireland: A History* 710-11). Through this legislative enactment, Ireland's political landscape underwent a profound transformation, laying the foundation for complex power dynamics and enduring tensions within the United Kingdom. By effectively subsuming the Irish Parliament into the United Kingdom, the Irish Parliament was abolished and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was formed. The Irish identity underwent a significant challenge as the total English dominance, this Act marked, was now in total control of the whole country. Moreover, The Act of Union had a significant impact on Irish identity. It contributed to the erosion of Irish cultural autonomy and reinforced feelings of subjugation among the Irish population. Robert Kee argues that the act resulted in the loss of the Irish Parliament, which had been a symbol of Irish self-government and identity (*The Green Flag* 538). This period saw the emergence of cultural and political movements that aimed to preserve and promote Irish identity in the face of English dominance. Overall, the Act of Union of 1801 played a crucial role in shaping Irish identity by fuelling resistance, fostering a sense of distinctiveness and ultimately contributing to the development of Irish nationalism.

The nineteenth century, in particular, was a crucible of turmoil, with the Great Famine (1845-1852) standing as a catastrophic event that reshaped the demographic and social landscape. This period, marked by the devastating potato blight and its subsequent mass emigration, was a stark reminder of the socio-economic disparities exacerbated by British rule. It was a period of immense suffering and hardship with the devastating potato blight leading to widespread famine, disease, and death. This catastrophic event reshaped the

demographic and social landscape of Ireland in profound ways. To illustrate the profound changes occurring during this period, O'Tuathailgh's analysis is of significance:

> Census data indicated a total population in 1790 of 4,763,000 and a figure of just over 8,000,000 in 1841, an increase of 40% in 50 years. Around 90% of this increase was in the total number of Irish peasants. The census of 1841 indicated that out of a population of slightly over eight million, five and a half million (66%) were dependent on agriculture. But the really striking aspect of Irish agriculture was the often tiny size of the individual holdings. In 1841, Ireland had 685,309 holdings which supported 952, 631 families. Of the 685,309 holdings, 135,134 were less than one acre (20%). (129)

The data on population growth, heavy reliance on agriculture, and the prevalence of small landholdings in pre-famine Ireland underscores the precarious socio-economic conditions that made the Irish population particularly vulnerable to the catastrophic impact of the Great Famine. What intensified the effects of the famine on the Irish was indeed the economic sanctions applied by the English Crown. As was mentioned earlier, the Celtic-Irish community was known to be "a very local and community-related [society] with strong internal bonds" (Hezel 42). The Irish had a traditional land distribution system which was known as 'rundale' "derived from two Celtic words: 'roinn' which refers to sharing or division of something and 'dail' which usually refers to a meeting or assembly" before the Famine (Braa 200). So, a rundale is a "form of communal ownership of land and distribution of social product" which is all based on "shared lineage (clan) membership" (201). According to this system, crops were planted, grown, and harvested by communal labour thus "reproduced […] the recognition of various kinship (lineage) bonds" (202). However, as a result of the British conquest, some rundale communities were subject to "estate rents" and they "were destroyed and replaced" by what was similar to Ulster plantations, which resulted in the "increased number of peasants and the decreased availability of land" (205-206). The change into a tenancy system from communal land ownership profoundly affected the progression and shape of the Irish community and identity as many handy peasants, before the Great Famine, left Ireland. Read states that from 1780 until 1845, slightly over one million Irish citizens emigrated to the United States or Canada, while approximately 600,000 moved to Britain. This migration rate was remarkable, especially considering that the total population of Ireland in 1841 exceeded eight million (51). These mass movements of people out of Ireland

during this period, particularly before the Great Famine, significantly altered the demographic composition and social fabric of the country. Such high rates of emigration relative to the total population of Ireland in 1841 indicate the magnitude of the impact of land ownership changes on Irish society and the widespread repercussions on Irish identity and diaspora communities. In conclusion, the shift from communal land ownership to a tenancy system in Ireland prompted significant emigration patterns, fundamentally reshaping the Irish community and contributing to the formation of Irish diasporas across the United States, Canada, and Britain.

The image of the Irish was affected by such a major emigration as "[m]any of the Irish emigrants in England became part of a developing mass of industrial proletarians" (Hobsbawm 119) as the Irish workers often occupied the lowest segment of the British workforce and the quality of these emigrants' lives and the social status they received from the English Crown were apparent in "the heaviest, least desirable and lowest paid manual labour" (Braa 209) that they were appointed. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1958), Frederick Engels describes the neighbourhood (ghetto) of the Irish emigrants of Manchester in 1844, "[t]he cottages are old, dirty, and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned […] and darkened by the smoke […] In short, the whole rookery furnishes such a hateful and repulsive spectacle as can hardly be equaled" (71). Though they formed a major cheap labour force in England, the Irish labourers were provided with terrible living and working conditions, which proves Ireland's position and image for England.

As to the Great Famine of Ireland in 1845, it had a profound impact on Irish identity. The traumatic experience of the famine, characterised by widespread suffering, death, and mass emigration, became a significant point of discussion in Irish historical studies. "The most obvious change was demographic – a drastic population reduction. Ireland's official population in 1841 was 8,175,124; by 1851, two years after the famine, it had dropped to 6,552,385" (Woodham-Smith 309). It can be observed that Ireland lost approximately 2.5 million either to severe starvation or emigration. The famine reinforced a sense of Irish resilience in the face of adversity, fostered solidarity in communities, and deepened anti-

British sentiments as many perceived British policies as exacerbating the crisis. Lord Coffin (1784-1862), a member of the Parliamentary Relief Commission, stated that there was "a great inconsistency in the importation of supplies in to country [Ireland] which is at the same time exporting its owen [sic] resources" (qtd. in Woodham-Smith, 70-71). It is known that "at least 100,000 tonnes of grain (wheat, oats, barley) were exported from Ireland during each of the worst famine years […] [thus] it [export of food products] was a sight which the Irish people found impossible to understand and impossible to forget" (Woodham-Smith 72). Thus, the traditional agrarian Irish peasant society came to an end with the Famine. Overall, the impact of the Great Famine in Ireland should be attributed to the legacy of English/British colonialism, which laid the groundwork for socio-economic structures that perpetuated vulnerability among the Irish population. By the early twentieth century, the traditional landlord system and plantation economy had been dismantled, giving way to a transition towards independent family farms and corporate entities that served the capitalist demands of Europe. This shift marked a significant evolution in Irish agriculture, reflecting both the enduring influence of colonial history and the adaptation to changing economic dynamics in Ireland and beyond. The memory of the Famine also influenced cultural expressions, literature, and political movements, contributing to the shaping of a distinct Irish identity rooted in a shared history of survival and resilience in the face of tragedy. Works such as *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) by Dion Boucicault and *Famine* (1977) by Tom Murphy address themes of loss, suffering, and resilience, reflecting the struggles faced and socio-political consequences during and after the Famine.

The emergence of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in 1858 represented a significant manifestation of the Irish desire for self-determination and independence from British rule. Especially after the tragedy of the Great Famine and "[t]he failure of the Irish Confederate risings of 1848-49, the collapse of tenant-right agitation and the disintegration of the Independent Irish Party at Westminster, had left the country sunk in political apathy" (Boyle 44). The Irish Republican Brotherhood, founded as the Fenian Brotherhood in North America in the nineteenth century, sought to achieve Irish independence through active revolution and resistance against British control. Their membership was drawn from the working class, including small farmers, mechanics,

artisans, labourers, and petty shopkeepers (44) who were directly affected by the decrease in population, widespread emigration, rise in livestock numbers, surge in evictions, and a shift in the nature of English governance in Ireland – "government only instrument of landlords (and usurers)" (Marx, qtd. in Boyle 46). Operating covertly as a clandestine organisation, the IRB sought to break free from the constraints imposed by British colonialism. This ambition found its pinnacle in the bold and defiant Easter Rising of 1916, orchestrated by members of the IRB and other nationalist groups. The Easter Rising of 1916 marked a significant turning point in Ireland's struggle for independence. The IRB's meticulously planned and strategically executed uprising sent shockwaves through the British establishment and galvanised support for the Irish nationalist cause immediate aftermath saw the leaders of the rebellion executed, igniting widespread public outrage, and further fuelling the flames of resistance. Amidst the fervour of the War of Independence, the IRB's influence continued to shape and steer the direction of the movement. They organised and orchestrated guerrilla warfare against British forces, demonstrating a commitment to achieving independence through armed struggle (Noonan 370-85). Furthermore, the IRB's impact on Irish national identity was profound and enduring. Their unwavering dedication to the cause inspired "a sense of patriotism and solidarity among the Irish people," (385) fostering a collective consciousness that transcended regional and social divisions. The struggle for independence became intertwined with "the very fabric of Irish identity, shaping the nation's narrative for generations to come. Although the initial response from the Irish public was somewhat indifferent, the subsequent execution of the Rising's leaders "ignited widespread public outrage, fuelling fervour for independence, and sparking the flames of the ensuing [War of Independence]" (Kelly 45) from 1919 to 1921. The War of Independence, characterised by guerrilla warfare tactics against British forces, marked a tumultuous chapter in Irish history. The conflict culminated in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, which led to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. However, the treaty's provision for the partition of the island, creating Northern Ireland as a separate entity within the United Kingdom, introduced a divisive element that sowed the seeds of future tensions.

The establishment of the Irish Free State (1922-1937) heralded a form of limited independence for the majority of Ireland, yet the unresolved issue of partition left a bitter legacy and laid the groundwork for continued strife and conflict (Coleman 26-28), most notably seen in the decades-long period known as 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland. The events surrounding the IRB, the Easter Rising, the War of Independence, and the subsequent treaty negotiations are integral to understanding the complex dynamics that shaped Irish identity, politics, and relationships with Britain in the twentieth century. The birth of the Irish Free State in 1922 marked a pivotal moment in Irish history, ushering in a new era brimming with political, economic, and social challenges. This period of transition was marked by efforts to assert Ireland's independence from British influence and define its national identity (Carroll 87). The adoption of the new Constitution of Ireland marked a significant change in the country's legal framework, replacing the earlier 1922 Constitution. This new constitution came into effect on December 29, 1937, shaping the country's governance and legal system (Carroll 93-94). Its provisions reflect the evolving socio-political landscape of Ireland at the time, establishing principles and structures that continue to influence the nation's institutions and legal practices. In 1949, the Republic of Ireland formally declared its status as a republic by severing its ties with the British Commonwealth, solidifying its sovereign status as an independent nation.

Politically, the later twentieth century was overshadowed by the Northern Ireland conflict known as the Troubles (1968-1998). This period was defined by sectarian violence, political unrest, and a significant British military presence. As D'Addario suggests "Northern Ireland has been the site of dramatic and severe social strife throughout the 20th century," (2) so many paramilitary groups emerged from both nationalist and loyalist ideologies in Ireland. The nationalist perspective is often represented by the Irish Republican Army. In contrast, the loyalist or unionist stance is linked to various groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Force. Both sides experienced collateral damage and violence as a result of their involvement. This prolonged strife not only resulted in significant impact but also fuelled sectarian problems, which contributed to the complex and deeply rooted issues surrounding identity, politics, and historical grievances in Ireland. Gotsi suggests that "[r]eligion in Ireland is a sensitive issue full of complexities" and thus "[t]his inevitably shapes the organisation of social life and affects

the impact that the divine has on people's lives" (192). Therefore, it is understood that, in Irish society, the pervasive influence of religion plays a significant role in structuring social norms and values, ultimately influencing how individuals perceive and interact with Catholicism in their daily lives. "Catholicism has had a disproportionately big impact […] especially in rural areas, affecting - despite the seeming secularization of the society - the social norms, even the political life of the country" (Gotsi 192). As is illustrated by Girvin, "[t]his rural, Catholic, English-speaking and proprietorial society imposed specific social norms on the political culture. These reflected the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, […] narrowly moralistic in family and sexual matters, and inculcated an anti-intellectual 'intellectual' environment" (124-25).

Another aspect that sets Ireland apart from other Western nations is the "overlap between religious and national identities" (Kearney 240). Irish history has been marred by sectarian animosity, with deep-rooted historical and cultural rifts tracing back to the sixteenth and notably the seventeenth centuries. This legacy of religious and political divisions has profoundly influenced Irish identity, shaping the collective conscience and social dynamics of the nation. The persistent echoes of historical conflicts continue to resonate in contemporary Irish society, impacting perceptions of identity, belonging, and inter-community relations. The complex interplay between these enduring divisions and efforts towards reconciliation underscores the ongoing evolution of Irish identity within the context of its turbulent past. Hickey provides an extended review of the division evident in Ireland during the 1980s:

> [A] 'Protestant' is a person who believes he is 'British', is conscious of a cultural heritage which is British - few Protestants learn the Irish language - and has a great respect and admiration for the British sovereign. He also supports one or other of the Unionist parties, opposes the idea of a United Ireland and goes to a 'church' on Sunday where he worships with his fellow members of one of the non -Roman catholic sects or denominations. A Roman Catholic, on the other hand, is a person who believes he is 'Irish', is conscious of a cultural heritage which is Irish - if he doesn't actually learn the Irish language he does approve of its preservation - and regards the British sovereign as the symbol of an imperial power. He also supports some form of Nationalist or Republican party, is in favour of a united Ireland and goes to a 'chapel' on Sunday where he worships with his fellow Roman Catholics. (57-58)

Since religious ties have a large influence on interpersonal relationships, education, and career perspectives, religion continues to be a major social and political concern, particularly in the North of Ireland. Regarding the differences between the two sects, it is noteworthy that in the North, the discipline of elementary and secondary education was "strongly segregated by religion for both children and teachers, with less than two per cent of children attending the newly formed integrated schools" (Cohen 49). Moreover, Hickey reports that in spite of the profound societal shifts that occurred in and around 1981,

> in Northern Ireland there are effectively two educational systems, replicating each other and rigidly divided on religious grounds. On the one hand there is the system controlled by the Roman Catholic Church, through which all Roman Catholic children are supposed to proceed, and on the other hand there is the State system which is effectively Protestant. The data that exist indicate that the segregation between the two is virtually complete. (115)

Religion has always been significant in this regard since many Irish people still believe that their identity is inextricably tied to their religion in some elusive but profound way. The early 1980s presented other challenging circumstances for the Irish population. Central to their social and political environment was primarily the country's poor financial condition, given that "net foreign debt (when external reserves had been deducted) [...] at the end of 1983 had reached the frightening figure of £6,703 million" (Brown 316-17). This affected the Republic's politics as well, "the dreadful state of the economy […] went a long way towards forcing the emergence of coalition governments, headed either by Fine Gael or, from 1989 by Fianna Fáil as the norm in Irish politics" (Bartlett 527). According to Brown, some of the "social results of this depressing economic picture" included a million people becoming dependent on social welfare payments, a startling increase in crime, a gradual rise in young people abusing drugs, a decline in the number of births, and a halt in marriages" (*Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* 317-18). The challenges related to the Northern Ireland conflict, conservative influences, the significant presence of the Catholic Church in Irish society, and the perceived shortcomings of political leaders collectively contributed to the complexity of issues that afflicted Irish society during that period:

> The failure of politicians to make any progress over the problem of Northern Ireland; the stagnation of the coalition government, dominated by conservatives; the obscurantism of the majority as manifested in the referenda that backfired, on the 'right to life of the unborn' and on divorce, the reluctance to liberalise laws governing homosexuality or illegitimacy, offset at the same time by a tolerance towards harsher standards of 'criminal justice'; and the general atmosphere of economic retrenchment and caution, related to high unemployment, comparatively high inflation, and a much - complained - of tax system, have all contributed to a pervasive sense of inertia in modern Ireland. (Murray 285)

The peace process started with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 which was "to bring to an end the current intense phase of conflict by bringing the structural and institutional power of each community into line" (Ruanne and Todd 98). This hailed as a landmark in Irish history in that "[f]or the first time an agreement came into existence that was supported by all Northern Irish parties. This made a success in the referendum possible and could start a new era in Northern Ireland," (McKittrick and McVea 29) and it brought about devolved government in Northern Ireland and sought to address longstanding political and societal issues. Advancements in the political sphere coincided with improvements in the country's financial status within a relatively brief timeframe, influencing the mindset of the Irish people.

England's influence on Northern Ireland was a key factor that greatly intensified the violence during the Troubles. The British government carried out a strategy characterised by an aggressive military presence and a distaste for a real engagement with the nationalists started on 5 October 1968 when "The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) dissolved a Catholic civil rights march by using violence. Although Britain was not involved into this incident it was the beginning of British direct interference" (McKittrick and McVea 4). By August 1969, escalating tensions between the Protestant and Catholic communities prompted the deployment of British troops to Northern Ireland. Initially perceived as saviours by the Catholic population, the British military's true intentions soon became apparent, eroding any favourable perceptions held by the Catholic community (Dixon 117-20). Catholics perceived the British army as a 'foreign force' safeguarding 'British interests' in Ulster by upholding and supporting Protestant supremacy in Northern Ireland. This stance led to a decline in Irish trust in Britain, reigniting historical animosities. The British military's presence symbolised this deep-

seated animosity. The British government implemented policies such as internment without trial in 1971, aimed at combating paramilitary violence but resulted in backlash and further radicalisation. The events of Bloody Sunday in January 1972, where British troops shot unarmed protesters, escalated violence and anti-British sentiments (McKittrick and McVea 5). D'Addario proclaims that "[t]he most well-known event of the Troubles, known as Bloody Sunday, took place in the Catholic neighbourhood of the Bogside, and left 14 dead at the hands of British soldiers" (8). In that sense, many referred to the army's initiative as another instance of British colonialism. The fact that the world now knew what was happening in Northern Ireland made things much worse for Britain. There was no longer a crisis since, for many, there was still conflicting war in Northern Ireland. Britain felt compelled to take action as the situation was not getting any better. Initially, the Emergency Provisions Act (E.P.A.) was passed by Britain. It granted the security forces in Northern Ireland a number of new rights such as extended detention of suspects for up to seventy-two hours (Dixon 105). The British parliament should have evaluated this legislation annually and it should have only been in place for a set amount of time, but no one ever questioned the E.P.A. "Britain got the image of an undemocratic occupier" (McKittrick and McVea 10) among the Catholic community as a result. Furthermore, Northern Ireland appeared to be ruled by Britain from above. The Irish identity during the Troubles was deeply influenced by perceptions of British rule and its impact on the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. The Catholic community viewed Britain as an 'undemocratic occupier,' which contributed to a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement among Irish Catholics. The image of being ruled 'from above' stressed a lack of self-governance and autonomy, further fuelling grievances and a sense of marginalisation within the community. Nationalist sentiments, political alienation, a strengthened sense of Irish identity and a desire for self-determination were rooted in resistance to British rule. The impact of British rule on Irish identity remains a significant aspect of the historical and social dynamics that shaped the complexities of the conflict in Northern Ireland. In conclusion, the post-independence period in Ireland was marked by a complex interplay of historical legacies, economic challenges, and strategic initiatives that guided the country towards a path of modernisation and prosperity.

One other significant point of discussion in the history of Anglo-Irish relations is to determine the discourse to examine Ireland's position in the context of colonisation. From the tumultuous history of Ireland's relationship with England, the position of Ireland and the treatment that it received as a nation was legislatively apparent, yet culturally received various contrasting reviews. Stephen Howe approaches the question of Irish identity from a postmodernist perspective, and he asserts that "the current landscape of Irish historical and cultural debate, or even of Irish studies in its broadest sense, is dominated by two starkly opposed intellectual camps: revisionist and postcolonialist" ('Was Ireland a colony?' 141). According to Howe, these two points of view conflict since, on the one hand, "[l]iterary scholars and cultural historians have tended to be far more receptive to colonial frameworks for understanding Ireland than have political, social or economic analysts," and on the other hand "[b]oth Irish historians, and historians of the British Empire, have tended overwhelmingly to be empiricists, if not positivists," thus "they have tended in Irish, as in other contexts, to associate the use of colonial and postcolonial models with all those unwelcome tendencies, and even with a total disregard for historical specificity and accuracy" (141). The profound complexity of the problem of Irish identity manifested itself in literary and history studies of the subject itself. While the literary scholars developed a more inclusive study of Irish identity to investigate the progression of Ireland under imperial subjugation, some historians believed that such postcolonial analyses of social, economic, and cultural developments of the country would derail the historical precision and context as, in fact, "Ireland, in effect, was a *junior partner* in that vast exploitative enterprise known as the British Empire" (Kennedy 176, emphasis added). Furthermore, Victoria Hales states in her article, "Britain's Forgotten Colony?":

> Ireland was for many centuries under the control of the British. The British government had political control, English landlords had economic control, and the Protestants had religious control, which was followed predominantly by English migrants to Ireland.

> Thus Ireland was almost completely dominated by England; in much the same way as England dominated parts of Africa during the nineteenth century. However, the Irish people have always engaged with the British government, rather than just accepting orders from it. For instance, they have always been represented in the House of Commons. This suggests that perhaps Ireland was not a colony in the same way as other colonies such as India. The majority of colonies have no political input at all. The Irish were not necessarily seen as subordinate to the British, for they always had a role in the British government. (np)

Alternatively, Luke Gibbons explains that the matter with Ireland and postcolonial studies is that "a native population which happened to be white was an affront to the very idea of 'white man's burden,' and threw into disarray some of the constitutive categories of colonial discourse" (*Transformations in Irish Culture* 149). He suggests that Ireland defies the parameters of a global postcolonialist conception by being a white population in contrast to the 'categories of colonial discourse,' the category that primarily includes what Hales considers 'other colonies such as India,' or those of African or Asian colonial territories. Contrarily, David Lloyd draws attention to the overall detrimental impacts on the Irish labour pool, the nation's backdrop, and the psychological damage that was done to the country as "[t]o reject Ireland's postcolonial status is to undermine the postcolonial literary project of other national literatures. Ireland's postcolonial status can make no claims as to being the same as another colonial situation, but no colonial situation is exactly the same" (*Ireland After History* 10-12). All in all, it is clear that such divergent perspectives are very much required in Irish studies in that the very nature of Ireland and Irish struggle is of a multilayered narrative which necessitates a divergent approach to deeply analyse this matter, and it could, also, further explain why Ireland's emancipation from the colonial shackles required such a long time.

Therefore, to understand the intricate relationship between England and Ireland throughout centuries, it is of utmost importance to move beyond a simplistic view of domination and resistance as it is a story of complex interactions, fuelled by imperial ambitions, religious tensions, and the struggle for cultural identity. However, within the scope of this thesis, it is accepted that Ireland had suffered as a colony of England in that its culture, language and identity were reduced to the point of marginality, often relegated to the periphery of mainstream societal recognition even though Ireland has one or two political priorities such as political representation in the Parliament. The cultural reduction was exacerbated by the imposition of Anglo-centric narratives, which systematically devalued Irish heritage and sought to erase its distinct cultural expressions. As a result, the Irish people faced a struggle not only to preserve their language and traditions but also to assert their identity in a landscape marked by colonial dominance. This thesis posits that understanding the dual themes of oppression and resilience is essential to comprehending how colonisation shaped contemporary Irish identity,

influencing both artistic expression and social dynamics. In examining this complex relationship, the thesis aims to illustrate how the reclamation of cultural narrative through theatre has served as a means of resistance and a pathway toward self-definition, ultimately contributing to the ongoing dialogue about what it means to be Irish in a post-colonial context. By examining the diverse strands – the dismissive attitudes, the interventions, the rebellions, and the cultural resilience – this thesis aims to unravel the rich and complex tapestry of this historical relationship more clearly.

1.2 THE IRISH IDENTITY IN THE 19TH – 20TH CENTURIES AND THE IRISH RENAISSANCE

The importance and function of drama since ancient Greece can be seen as a reflection of its capacity to explore complex social, political, and philosophical themes. Ancient Greek drama, particularly in the forms of tragedy and comedy, served not only as a vehicle for entertainment but also as a medium for societal reflection and moral instruction. Playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides utilised theatrical performances to engage audiences in conversations about fate, justice, and the human condition, pushing the boundaries of ethical considerations and societal norms (Arkins 19-21). For instance, Aeschylus' *Oresteia* explores themes of justice, vengeance, and the evolution of societal laws, which culminate in the establishment of a court system that emphasises reason over retribution. Similarly, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* delves into the complexities of fate and free will, as the protagonist grapples with prophecies that seem to govern his life, ultimately leading to tragic consequences and prompting audiences to reflect on the limits of human agency. Euripides, on the other hand, often challenged traditional moral views in plays like *Medea* where the protagonist's drastic actions—motivated by betrayal and the quest for justice—complicate the audience's understanding of morality and womanhood, inviting a re-evaluation of cultural perceptions of female agency. Collectively, these playwrights not only entertained but also forced their audiences to confront difficult questions about ethics, governance, and the human psyche, thus demonstrating the transformative power of drama as a medium for cultural introspection. Moreover, the theatre provided "a communal space […] [where] citizens could gather to witness and participate in discussions about current events," (Murray 2) fostering a sense

of civic identity and social cohesion. The structure of Greek theatre, with its emphasis on dialogue and character development, laid the groundwork for subsequent dramatic traditions and influenced not only the language and narrative techniques of the Western canon but also the thematic exploration of human experience. This is evident in the works of many prominent literary figures of drama; for instance, William Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604) and *Hamlet* (1623) explore complex characters and existential themes reminiscent of Greek tragedy (Golden 143, 151). Hamlet's inner turmoil and Macbeth's moral descent reverberate the tragic flaws seen in Greek heroes, demonstrating how personal struggles can drive narratives. Additionally, playwrights like Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov drew upon these foundations in works such as *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Three Sisters* (1901), using nuanced dialogue and subtext to reveal characters' inner lives, much like their Greek counterparts (Dawson 432-33; Taplin 58-60). Thus, the legacy of Greek theatre is evident in the thematic and structural elements that continue to shape Western literature. So, it can be concluded that drama has maintained its relevance through the ages by evolving to address contemporary issues while preserving its foundational role as a site for critical engagement and cultural discourse.

It is no different for Ireland to functionalise drama as a vehicle for exploring its own complex social, political, and cultural identity. As P. P. Howe explains in his preliminary work *J. M. Synge: A Critical Study* (1969), "[d]rama by its nature, can come into being only when men are moved powerfully and suddenly to record the circumstances of life" (13). It can be inferred that drama is fundamentally a reflective art form, emerging from profound emotional or social experiences that drive playwrights to articulate and convey the intricate nature of human life as influenced by their contemporary contexts. Irish playwrights particularly engaged with the pressing social and political issues of their time, creating works that resonated with the lived experiences of their nation. By addressing themes such as identity, conflict, and cultural heritage, these playwrights crafted narratives that not only mirror the complexities of Irish society but also provoke critical thought and dialogue about the intersections of personal and collective identities. This engagement with immediate realities enabled their plays to serve as both artistic expressions and historical commentaries, reinforcing the idea that drama can be a powerful instrument for exploring and interrogating the human condition within a specific

cultural framework. Irish playwrights such as Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, and W. B. Yeats utilised the theatre to reflect on the nation's tumultuous history, its struggles for independence, and the ongoing tensions between tradition and modernity in a very crucial period of Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Through works that interrogate themes of nationalism, class, and identity, these playwrights harnessed the power of drama to engage audiences in critical conversations about Ireland's past and present. For example, Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* (1907) addresses issues of Irish identity and autonomy, framing the struggle for independence in terms of both cultural pride and societal change. J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) explores the complexities of heroism and the nuances of rural life, challenging stereotypes and inviting audiences to confront their perceptions of Irish identity. Similarly, Yeats's plays such as *The Countess Cathleen* (1892) often intertwine myth and politics, invoking a sense of cultural heritage while questioning contemporary realities. Together, these playwrights not only illuminated the societal issues at play within the nation but also resonated with broader themes that continue to engage global audiences, reinforcing drama's role as a pivotal medium for cultural discourse and exploration.

The concept of nationalism manifested itself most prominently in Irish literature between the years 1890 and 1920. This period, during which nationalism was a prominent theme, has been designated the 'Irish Literary Revival' (Hutchinson 87). The Irish sought political independence, as well as socio-cultural and economic freedom. However, in order to achieve this goal, they had to become self-sufficient. This in turn depended on a collective awakening in society since the British Empire sought to eradicate from the Anglo-Normans all memory of Ireland's past and to prevent its recollection. Consequently, the traditional folklore and mythological narratives of Ireland were concealed for an extended period. However, the Irish people, imbued with a spirit of freedom and nationalism, were determined to ensure that their traditions were not forgotten and that the vestiges of their past were not erased. They endeavoured to safeguard their heritage, which they regarded as sacrosanct, by concealing it from view. The Irish people opposed the British to ensure the continued existence of their cultural heritage. Ireland has a rich sociocultural heritage, and its people were determined to resist subjugation and preserve their cultural identity. This was due to their desire to safeguard

their traditions, customs, and culture. Critics use various terms to describe the movement, each of which implies a distinct interpretation of the historical events during that period. These interpretations, in turn, convey different perspectives on Ireland's connection to the world. Heininge provides a detailed insight into the scopes of the different naming of the period:

> *The Irish Revival*, a term most often used to discuss the literary movement, implies that the greatness of a people can be resuscitated after it has been nearly lost, and is thus a term in keeping with a nationalist agenda. *The Celtic Twilight*, a term coined by W. B. Yeats, is a more sentimental and mystical rendering that suggests the illumination and reinterpretation of a previously underappreciated culture, and is a term in keeping with the transition from a romanticized concept of tradition to a modernist consciousness. *The Irish Renaissance* seems to be the term currently used most often, a term that appears to acknowledge the colonial (and postcolonial) implications of Irish history. (Heininge 151, emphasis added)

As is understood from the quotation above, from a nationalist and literary standpoint, the term 'Revival' suggests a belief in the restoration of past greatness through the embrace of Irish culture and language. In contrast, a modernist viewpoint, favouring the term 'Celtic Twilight' emphasises the enduring yet underappreciated national tradition, benefiting from a fresh outlook. A postcolonial perspective, aligning with the term 'Renaissance' focuses on reclaiming lost glory across all facets of Irish life, not solely literary, reflecting a more comprehensive and political understanding of the historical events in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Each term provides a partial insight into the era, but 'Renaissance' captures the idea of a rebirth and encompasses a broader political context of the period. Therefore, in this thesis, the period will be referred to as 'the Irish Renaissance'. Examining two distinct Irish plays, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by Synge and *The Riot Act* (1984) by Paulin, all of whose literary contributions contain significant sociopolitical and cultural repercussions of progressing Irish identity, the progress of the restoration and liberation of Irishness from the colonial oppression of England is examined through a multilayered sociopolitical and economic context.

It was not until the late eighteenth century that any form of 'national drama' could be identified in Ireland. In the nineteenth century, a traditional revival of Celtic folklore occurred. These activities constituted the foundation for the 'Irish Literary Movement'

(Robinson 20). This revival was characterised by a renewed interest in indigenous myths, legends, and folk dramas, reflecting a collective aspiration to reclaim and celebrate Ireland's unique cultural heritage. The synthesis of traditional narratives and modern literary techniques not only enriched the Irish theatre landscape but also fostered a sense of unity and purpose among writers and audiences alike, marking a pivotal moment in the articulation of a distinctly Irish aesthetic. Therefore, the beginning of the twentieth century marks a crucial turning point for the movement of socio-cultural and political emancipation and renascence for Ireland. Established in 1892 in London, the Irish Literary Society, along with the National Literary Society formed in Dublin during the same year and the Irish Literary Theatre inaugurated in 1899 by Edward Martyn (1859-1923), William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), and Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) shared a common vision: to create a theatrical landscape that genuinely reflected the richness of Irish culture free from the shackles of political fanaticism (Heininge 159). Although the works produced by these societies were not explicitly designed as instruments of political propaganda, they were often perceived as such by nationalist factions, which deemed plays portraying stark truths as affronts to the dignity of Ireland. The Irish Literary Theatre in 1899 accelerated the movement that took place at the turn of the twentieth century with the aim of fighting for independence and reawakening by theatricalising the negative outcomes of the virulent policies of England over the whole of Irish society. Due to a lack of funding, the Irish Literary Theatre was closed in 1901 (Kavanagh 201). However, W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory were persistent in their venture of reclaiming the long-discarded Irishness and "bring[ing] upon the stage the deeper emotions of Ireland" (201). Thus, with the substantial financial support provided by Miss Annie Horniman, the Mechanics Institute in Abbey Street and adjoining property on Marlborough Street were converted into the Abbey Theatre (Kavanagh 166-7). The inaugural performance was held on 27 December 1904, comprising three shows, including the premieres of *On Baile's Strand* and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* by W.B. Yeats, and *Spreading the News* by Lady Gregory.

The centuries-long colonial interests and subsequent sanctions led to a cultural and sociopolitical collapse in Ireland. This period saw the erosion of the Irish language, traditions, and social structures as well as the marginalisation and subjugation of the Irish

people, contributing to a crisis of identity and a struggle to preserve and redefine what it meant to be Irish amidst colonial domination and suppression. Heininge argues that "[t]he famine of the 1840s marked a change in thinking about Irishness and power; the certainty that England could not be relied upon for support was driven home to many, and autonomy was more desirable than ever," (154) thus, it can be deduced that this realisation intensified the desire for autonomy, fostering a growing sentiment among the Irish people that self-determination was essential for ensuring their survival and well-being, ultimately laying the groundwork for future movements advocating for Irish independence. This sentiment culminated in the establishment of organisations such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Gaelic League, advocating for Irish independence and cultural revival. In 1884, Michael Cusack founded the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) to promote Irish sports such as hurling and Gaelic football (Slominski 5). Another important endeavour of the Irish Renaissance was to revive the Irish language. Due to England's social and political oppressions, the Irish language had fallen into disuse. Heininge suggests,

> [i]n order to remain economically viable participants in their own country, to say nothing of the rest of the world, Irish citizens learned English. In colonial practice, the ruling people impose their language on the colonized, partly for fear of allowing communication (and subversive behavior) in a language that the colonizers cannot understand. By many accounts, children were punished for speaking Irish, and teachers were punished for teaching Irish, presumably ensuring that future generations would not be exposed to Irish. (155)

The imposition of English as the dominant language in Ireland not only served as a tool of colonial control but also led to a significant erosion of Irish linguistic and cultural heritage. The suppression of the Irish language resulted in a loss of cultural identity, for instance, by punishing children for speaking Irish and teachers for instructing in Irish, the colonial authorities sought to sever the connection between the Irish people and their linguistic and cultural roots, aiming to assimilate them into English-speaking society. The struggle to reclaim and revitalise the Irish language became intertwined with efforts to reaffirm Irish cultural distinctiveness and assert a sense of national pride and autonomy in the face of centuries of colonial subjugation. Documents such as Douglas Hyde's "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland," published in 1894, insist that the Irish people should "cultivate what they have rejected, and build up an Irish nation on Irish lines,"

(120) in turn rejecting England and everything which was English. Encouraging the establishment of the Gaelic League in 1893, Hyde urged the Irish people to reclaim the language they had abandoned and revive its use. As he states,

> [w]e must teach ourselves to be less sensitive, we must teach ourselves not to be ashamed of ourselves, because the Gaelic people can never produce its best before the world as long as it remains tied to the apron-strings of another race and another island, waiting for it to move before it will venture to take any step itself. (Hyde 161)

This sentiment aligns with the ethos behind the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, which aimed to provide a platform for Irish playwrights and actors to showcase their talents and narratives independently, without being attached to foreign theatrical traditions. By fostering a space where Irish voices could flourish authentically, the Abbey Theatre contributed to the cultural renaissance and empowerment of the Irish people, enabling them to assert their unique artistic heritage and perspectives on a national and international stage. Founded by Edward Martyn, W. B. Yeats, and Lady Gregory in 1904 (Heininge 159), the Abbey Theatre served as a stronghold of Irish literary and dramatic tradition, promoting works that reflected the spirit of Irish nationalism and cultural resurgence. It became a pivotal institution in the Irish Renaissance, providing a platform for Irish playwrights to express the evolving sense of Irish identity and aspirations for independence. The major aim of this theatre was to shape Irish cultural identity by providing a platform for the exploration of Irish heritage, history, and contemporary issues through the medium of live performance, contributing to the enrichment and preservation of Ireland's cultural legacy which England damaged over centuries. In *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography*, Lady Gregory presents the statement of the founders of the Abbey Theatre:

> We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will insure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in the theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people,

who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (9)

This nationalist, in Gregory's words, 'school of dramatic literature' was designed to liberate Irishness from England's repressive colonial web and to achieve such a wide-ranging understanding, the playwrights of the period such as W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge, in their plays, rekindled many aspects from Irish traditions to make the Irish aware of how heroic the Irish culture was, yet how usurped it had been due to certain suppressive processes. All the Abbey Theatre playwrights sought to revitalise Irish identity and culture by bringing Irish folklore and respected historical narratives to life on stage and linking them to each other closely. It is because of the fact that "if [a group] were to create a truly national literature, they must also gather a national audience. If they were to invent Ireland, they must first invent the Irish" (Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 136). The symbiotic relationship between the creation of national literature and the invention of a national identity highlights the crucial role of literature and the arts in shaping and reflecting the essence of a people. Through their works, the Abbey Theatre playwrights endeavoured to revive Irish identity and culture and engage and resonate with a broad Irish audience, thereby forging a connection between the narratives on stage and the nation's collective consciousness. Through their works, they contributed to the development of an authentic Irish identity, fostering cultural pride and continuity that resonated with audiences and solidified the foundation of an evolving Irish nation.

In each of their plays, the playwrights of the Irish Renaissance period competently integrated Irish myths to revitalise the long-usurped, oppressed and misrepresented Irish identity, which the British media had given different pejorative and 'othering' personifications to demonstrate the Irishman more inferior. Feminising language in colonial discourse is employed to portray the colonised population as weak and passive, reflecting societal perceptions of femininity as inferior. Through such language, the colonisers sought to justify their dominance by depicting themselves as masculine figures bestowing order and civilisation upon the feminised and ostensibly uncivilised colonised populations; for instance, once "Britain represented Ireland as Erin, a young, beautiful but weak woman who needed to 'marry' her strong masculinised neighbour for control

and protection" (Walter 19). It could be argued that Ireland and the Irish were portrayed as a feminised and effeminate group embodying both positive artistic and charming traits traditionally associated with women, as well as their negative attributes. Slominski asserts that "[t]his feminisation of land changes with the viewer's position: within the would-be national territory, the land is a bountiful (or barren) mother or a protected virgin, while in the eyes of the coloniser, the land is naked, a maiden to be deflowered" (42). Numerous media representations illustrate the hostility between Ireland and England through gender-related portrayals, especially demonstrating how and where England positions Ireland in terms of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. "Irishness in Ireland is thus deeply gendered while appearing to encompass all members of the nation in a common image" (Walter 21). As a matter of fact, this is of utmost significance in that "the personification of Ireland as a maiden requires the gaze of a male protagonist who strives to protect or liberate the woman-nation he loves" (Slominski 55). This dynamic underscores a power relationship where the male protagonist is positioned as the protector or liberator of the personified Ireland, emphasising notions of masculinity and dominance. In this context, the depiction of Ireland as a woman creates a narrative of dependence and intervention by the male gaze. Moreover, because of the centuries-long colonisation process, the characterisation of the Irish constantly fluctuated due to the absence of a stable framework (Özçeşmeci 3). Thus, for centuries, the Irish had been portrayed as primitive and lacking civilisation, with stereotypes influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, and social class.

Before the establishment of the national theatre in the early twentieth century, theatre productions had a long-standing history in Ireland. The first theatre in Dublin, the Werburgh Street Theatre, was founded in 1635 by Scottish John Ogilby, who was also a translator and cartographer under English authority. The earliest known play by an Irish writer, *Landgartha* was staged under Ogilby's management in this colonial theatre, which operated until its closure in 1641 (Kavanagh *Irish Theatre* 206). In 1786, the government implemented the Stage Act, establishing regulatory measures for theatrical activities. From the seventeenth century onward, 'The Wake' plays emerged throughout the country, resembling traditional theatre. These performances, held in anticipation of the deceased, were conducted in brief and wordless segments, relying solely on movement to

convey their narrative (Kavanagh 207). The Celts also celebrated masked performances at festivals linked to seasonal transitions and harvest times. These productions combined masks, costumes, dance, and music, forming an essential part of Celtic culture (Rosenberg 18). Such performances not only served entertainment purposes but were integral to the community's social fabric, allowing the Irish people to maintain their ancestral customs and cultural practices even in the face of British colonial rule. Throughout this pre-national theatre period, theatrical expression became a means of resistance and reaffirmation of identity for the Irish populace. The arts emerged as a critical avenue for the Irish to voice their collective experiences, aspirations, and grievances, thus fostering a sense of unity amid the contentious landscape of colonial rule. The cumulative legacy of these earlier theatrical forms "[set] the stage for the eventual rise of more structured and politically conscious theatre movements, [which] heralded by the establishment of national theatres" in the early twentieth century (Kavanagh 200). In doing so, they laid a crucial foundation for a vibrant theatrical tradition that would continue to evolve in response to the cultural needs and historical challenges of Ireland.

The emergence of nationalism and initiatives concerning Irish identity in Irish theatre can be seen beginning in the eighteenth century. Prior to this, Irish theatre primarily served as a medium of entertainment within English courts. In response to centuries of cultural and identity degradation, Irish playwrights sought to instil a sense of nationalism and to rectify and promote the true Irish identity through their works. These writers can be examined in three distinct generations. The primary objective of the first-generation playwrights was to focus on the concept of Irish identity and delve into its essence. J.C. Greene suggests that notable first-generation playwrights include George Farquhar, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan, and Dionysius Lardner Boucicault, who are regarded as some of the most important figures of this era (*Theatre in Dublin* 19). These writers, in their quest for identity, particularly sought inspiration from legends and mythologies to discover a sense of self (20). This pursuit became essential for a society that had long lived under English oppression as it needed to uncover its own values and cultural heritage. The playwrights, striving to revive the forgotten values of Irish culture, turned to their works as a means of seeking a way out of this cultural deprivation.

One of the greatest misconceptions held by the writers of this period was the belief that Irish identity was tied to a singular element. They perceived Irishness as "a clear and fixed concept," (Murray 7) believing that culture was static and immutable. By concentrating on a single concept, these writers left behind a significant legacy for second-generation playwrights. Their endeavours and characteristics helped the subsequent generation recognise that there was no single concept of identity, but rather that multiple identities and cultures needed to be acknowledged. Ultimately, what mattered was the nationalist approach to these identities.

George Farquhar (1678-1707), a prominent playwright of the first generation of Irish theatre, is one of the most influential writers during the transition from the Restoration period to the bourgeois era. His first play *Love and a Bottle* premiered in 1699 at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, receiving a positive reception, and was followed by *The Constant Couple* in the same year. The sequel, *Sir Harry Wildair*, was released in 1701. Between 1702 and 1704, he adapted several works from French, including *The Inconstant* – which was inspired by John Fletcher's *Wild-Goose Chase* (1621) –, *The Twin-Rivals*, and *The Stage Coach*. Farquhar's true contribution to Irish drama came with the productions of *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707), which he completed on his deathbed the following year. In these plays, he showcased a verbal wit and a love for character – elements predominantly associated with Elizabethan playwrights. His works played a vital role in enriching the theatrical landscape and establishing a distinctive voice within Irish drama. Farquhar diverged from the comedic tendencies, moving towards a style that reflects the emotionality characteristic of bourgeois theatre (Stockwell *Dublin Theatres* 225). His works prominently display influences from his provincial upbringing, evident in various elements throughout his plays. Farquhar created characters that consistently tested the audience's acceptance of social norms, often in an almost improvisational manner. Romanticism and socialism are intertwined with the emotionality that complements bourgeois theatre, and these themes permeate Farquhar's plays. Notably, his works also contain elements of anti-Catholic sentiment. While he was one of the most influential writers during the transition from the Restoration period to the Bourgeois era, his dramatic writing can be seen as setting a

precedent that marks a starting point for the first generation of Irish theatre. In this regard, Farquhar serves as a pivotal figure in the evolution of Irish dramaturgy.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) also significantly contributed to Irish drama and the formation of Irish identity through his nuanced portrayal of societal dynamics and individual character struggles. Despite limited biographical information, Goldsmith's works reflect a profound understanding of the complexities of human nature and the cultural tensions of his time. His play *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) exemplifies this by blending elements of Restoration comedy with themes relevant to the Irish experience such as the pursuit of true love and familial approval within a rapidly changing society. His ability to adapt the distinctive features of Restoration comedy to resonate with Irish audiences underscores his role in shaping a uniquely Irish theatrical voice.

Goldsmith's use of satire and psychological insight allowed him to explore themes of identity and morality, which were particularly pertinent during the transition from the Restoration period to the burgeoning aspects of Irish nationalism (Seitz 407). In works such as *The Good-Natur'd Man* (1768), he engages with the notion of the 'good person' amidst societal expectations, reflecting the challenges of Irish identity in a colonial context (Jeffares 19). Through his exploration of romantic relationships and family dynamics, Goldsmith not only entertained but also prompted critical reflection on the nature of Irish society, ultimately consolidating his status as a key figure in the development of Irish drama and the exploration of Irish identity.

On the other hand, Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan (1751-1816) made significant contributions to Irish drama and the exploration of Irish identity through his innovative use of comedic forms and character portrayals as another first-generation Irish playwright. His early works, such as *The Rivals*, reflect a critical engagement with the stereotypes of Irish characters, particularly through the figure of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, who subverts typical 'Stage Irishman' representations by embodying both a comedic ambition and a degree of autonomy (Auburn 262). By introducing a more multifaceted portrayal of Irish identity, Sheridan engaged with the cultural complexities of Anglo-Irish relations, pushing back against reductive stereotypes often found in Restoration comedy.

His ability to blend sharp satire with character-driven narratives allowed him to craft a distinctly Irish voice within the broader context of British theatre.

Sheridan's most acclaimed play *The School for Scandal* (1777) illustrates how he further evolved the comedic style initiated during the Restoration period, infusing it with themes of morality and identity. This work, alongside *The Critic* (1779), reinforced his status as a key figure in late eighteenth-century theatre while also serving to interrogate societal norms and the nature of reputation within the rapidly changing landscape of London. Through these plays, Sheridan "not only entertained but also prompted audiences to reflect on issues of nationalism and identity, demonstrating the ongoing evolution of Irish theatrical expression" (Wiesenthal 319). His ability to navigate cultural tensions and challenge contemporary perceptions of Irishness established him as an important architect of Irish drama and an influential figure in the development of Irish identity within the literary canon.

The first-generation writers faced significant challenges in their pursuit of a coherent Irish identity as they often sought a singular and fixed concept of what it meant to be Irish. This quest proved elusive, leading to difficulties in achieving clarity in their works. Their struggles, however, laid the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of identity among subsequent generations of writers. The efforts of these early authors highlighted the complexity of Irish identity, prompting second-generation writers to recognise that multiple identities and cultures needed to be acknowledged in their narratives. These later writers shifted the discourse from a monolithic notion of identity to a more pluralistic one, emphasising the importance of nationalist perspectives that incorporated diverse cultural influences. This evolution in thought underscored that Irish identity is not static but dynamic, shaped by the interplay of various cultural and historical factors. By moving beyond the confines of a singular identity, the second-generation authors were able to reflect the rich tapestry of Irish life, ultimately enriching the narrative of Irish literature and fostering a broader cultural dialogue.

When examined, it can be observed that the prior first-generation playwrights such as Farquhar, Sheridan, Goldsmith, and Boucicault – whose contributions are going to be

detailed in this chapter – were not involved in the narratives of ancient Greece. There is no evidence of Greek elements in their plays; instead, these playwrights focused on producing plays that would promote Irishness in response to the derogatory representation of the Irish in English plays of their times. Among these first-generation writers, Sheridan can be considered the "most conscious and proud of his Irishness," (Clare 386) and, as Elizabeth Bowen states, "Sheridan, like other Irish-Anglican playwrights before and after him, swoop[ed] down on the English, passing satirical comment on them" (qtd. in Clare 386). For instance, "the character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger from [Sheridan's] *The Rivals* [1775] subverts the traditional figure of the absurd Stage Irishman," (386) and his two-act farce *St. Patrick's Day* (1775) examines Ireland's political circumstances and English attitudes towards the Irish, while specifically showcasing Sheridan's notable sense of Irish pride. However, the investigation of Irishness was done through characterisation in the plays of the first-generation playwrights in that they mostly produced Comedy of Manners of which "business of comedy […] depends on a realistic copying of the characters and manners of the time" (Hume 304). So, it is understood that the author intends to evoke contempt rather than anger and to elicit an intellectual response rather than an emotional one. This can be considered as the fundamental theory of Comedy of Manners. Considering how Sheridan and his contemporaries functionalised their characters as a response to the character of the 'Stage Irishman' – which is going to be detailed in this chapter – David Clare argues that "there is a tendency among Irish writers to depict English males as either 'racist, officious hypocrites' or 'sentimental, romantic duffers'. […] The Irish trope of depicting these as the two main sides of the English male character dates back to Sheridan's *St Patrick's Day*" (388). So, it is clear that the emphasis on characterisation within the framework of Comedy of Manners allowed for a critique of both English stereotypes and Irish societal norms, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of cultural identity. By employing satire and subversion, they not only defended Irishness but also sought to reshape perceptions of the Irish in a manner that encouraged intellectual engagement, ultimately laying the groundwork for future explorations of national identity in Irish theatre.

Second-generation writers recognised that the concept of Irishness could not be tied to a singular element; rather, it emerged from the interplay of multiple components. Their

works reflect this complexity, showcasing a blend of nationalist currents alongside the burgeoning influence of aesthetic movements during this period. The use of a cynical narrative style and a simplification of expression became hallmarks of these writers, representing their unique literary arsenal. Central themes included the fragmented cultural interactions and linguistic influences resulting from Ireland's colonial history, alongside a persistent exploration of cultural displacement. Despite the evolving landscape, the commitment to nationalism remained significant with strong calls for Ireland's complete independence from British colonialism. Lady Gregory, George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, Oscar Wilde, Sean O'Casey, Brian Friel, and Frank McGuinness can be considered second-generation playwrights, and they placed great importance on representing and authentically conveying reality; they aimed for their narratives to resonate as credible to their audiences. Their focus on depicting various societal segments and cultivating distinct cultural identities marked a crucial development in their literary approach. They scrutinised established institutions including the church and societal norms while challenging entrenched cultural values. Moreover, a critical discourse emerged on traditional notions of religion and family, especially women's empowerment, highlighting the importance of breaking free from oppressive constraints and endorsing a more liberated and equitable society.

Lady Gregory is a notable Irish playwright and a significant figure of the second phase of the Irish Literary Renaissance. As a co-founder of the Abbey Theatre, she played a crucial role in the development of modern Irish theatre. Born in 1852 in Roxborough, she completed her education through private tutors. In 1881, she married Sir William Gregory, and both shared nationalist sentiments, which influenced her later work. After the death of her husband in 1892, she began writing, and her collaboration with W. B. Yeats fostered a new literary movement rooted in Irish culture (McDiarmid 94). From 1902 to 1912, Lady Gregory published numerous works that contributed to the evolution of the Abbey Theatre. Her plays often emphasised educational and didactic themes focusing on issues of success and frugality. Her close connection with Irish peasants and the incorporation of the West Irish dialect in her writing are considered key to her success (Hill 35). Gregory drew on styles that aimed to revive the spirit of ancient Ireland, through which she aimed to entertain and educate Irish villagers through her works. However, this

dual focus sometimes limited her broader impact. Regarded as a prominent figure in the nationalist movement, especially during the era of second-generation writers, Lady Gregory's influence was bolstered by the foregrounding of nationalist ideas. Many of her plays feature elements of Irish culture and mythology, exemplified in her work *The Image*, which integrates nationalistic themes alongside mythological motifs. By combining humour with nationalism, she played a significant role in educating the Irish public. Her plays are characterised by their simplicity, making them easily stageable. While it may be challenging to label her as the most important writer of her time, it is accurate to assert that she was a crucial author who connected with the public. Each character in her works resonated with the audience, allowing individuals to identify themselves within the narratives, thereby facilitating a clearer understanding of the intended messages (Trotter 201).

Another significant second-generation playwright, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), recognised as an Irish poet and playwright, is one of the most prominent literary figures of the twentieth century. He is particularly regarded as a pioneer of the Irish literary Renaissance. Yeats was a co-founder of the Abbey Theatre and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923. Yeats, who had a fascination with Irish legends and occultism, published his first work *Mosada* (1886) which clearly expressed his interest in magic. His nationalist sentiments are distinctly showcased in *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889) (Yeats et al. 97). Yeats's multifaceted work reflects his interest in Irish folklore, Eastern mysticism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, William Blake, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, and Western magical systems. As he expressed in a letter to John O'Leary, these practices were central to his life: "The mystical life is the center of everything I do and think and write..." (Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight* 9). Growing up in an English Irish family with strong connections to the Irish Church, Yeats's upbringing was influenced by the fact that his father was "a positivist and a student of John Stuart Mill" (Yeats, *Memoirs* 19). John Butler Yeats encouraged his children's education in art and literature by reading poetry to them. W.B. Yeats began to cultivate a lifelong connection with Irish peasant and pagan traditions, which would nurture his spiritual longing and lead his explorations into the realms of mysticism. According to his mother, Susan Terrence Brown, Yeats was a conduit through which "the energy of a folk tradition rooted in pagan, pre-Christian

Ireland flowed to the aspiring poet. […] It introduced him to the traditions of story, narrative, myth, folk tradition, and belief" (*Memoirs* 23).

William Butler Yeats particularly drew attention with his works emphasising Irish nationalism. It is not inaccurate to say that his works are infused with elements of Irish mythology and occultism. Coming from an Anglo-Irish family that embraced Protestantism, Yeats also held an anti-English stance. This context significantly shaped his political and literary ideas. In his works, he primarily focused on individuals who became heroes within the folk context and on legends. In 1888, he compiled *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* and published the poetry *collection The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems* in 1889. That same year, inspired by his relationship with Maud Gonne, he reflected this in his first play performed in Ireland, *The Countess Cathleen*. Yeats's plays began to be staged after the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre. His works followed a path aimed at raising general awareness among the Irish people. However, he avoided addressing political and military themes (Trotter 211). His primary goal was to narrate Ireland's literary history, allowing the public to recall the folk legends and heroic figures from the past, thereby fostering a nation that valued its culture and heritage. Yeats aimed to unify societal divisions and create cultural richness, defending nationalism throughout his works by frequently referencing Celtic culture and ancient folk heroes (213). He sought to revive the shared cultural wealth in his writings, reminding the Irish living under British colonial rule of their past and encouraging them in their struggle for independence. Thus, in his quest to create a fully independent and happy environment for Ireland, Yeats incorporated many remnants from the past in his plays. Nevertheless, due to his avoidance of political, religious, and military topics, he faced critical backlash from religious leaders and groups who embraced nationalism (Mahony 223). It is possible to say that the inspiration for Yeats's writings came from Celtic mythology and fairy tales. He believed it was necessary to utilise literary heritage to create distinctly Irish literature and to evoke Ireland's true identity.

Yeats highlighted the importance of nationalism, stating, "[w]ithout nationalism, there can be no great literature; without literature, there can be no great nationalism" (qtd. in McHugh 7). He considered nationalism crucial for Ireland's progress in all aspects. In an

article dated May 14, 1892, in the *United Ireland* newspaper, he expressed his thoughts as follows: "Ireland is caught between two millstones from below and above – under the influence of America on one side and of England on the other, but which is more quickly de-identifying us is difficult to say" (Paulin 102). For this reason, it can be said that his main aim was to create a sense of national literature for Ireland. His approach consistently reminded people of their ongoing struggles throughout history and encouraged them to cherish their cultural heritage. He did not include provocative expressions in his writings. Yeats fundamentally aimed to highlight Ireland and its artistic heritage, creating general awareness and pride among the Irish people.

One of the features that distinguished Yeats from other nationalist writers was his avoidance of political, religious, and military topics in his works. "[Yeats] created pieces that appealed directly to the public," combining nationalism and literature, "and aimed to awaken thoughts of independence among the populace" (Sternlicht 54). For Yeats, theatre served as a means to actualise these goals. He frequently referenced folk legends in his plays. Striving to create cultural awareness, Yeats showcased elements reflecting his culture to emphasise the importance of Irish traditions, nature, and national pride. In thematic terms, he placed greater emphasis on stories of heroism and what he considered noble sacrifices. Many people perceived a decline in Ireland's romantic inclination; however, due to his more emotional narrative style, he was reluctant to dwell on the poverty experienced during that period. Unlike his contemporaries, Yeats viewed Ireland not as an old, greedy, and despotically governed nation but as a queen renowned for her beauty.

Yeats also held another great significance for Irish drama in that his interest in ancient Greek stories – especially of Sophocles – coincided with the establishment of the Irish Literary Theatre, and thus he brought an important aspect to the plays and the productions of this newly emerged national theatre. Yeats's engagement with Greek tragedy, on the other hand, became an essential catalyst for the development of a distinctively Irish theatrical tradition that acknowledged its roots while simultaneously addressing contemporary issues, allowing audiences to connect with their heritage on a profound level at the turn of the twentieth century. Marianne McDonald argues that "[a]ll Greek

tragedy ultimately deals with death, and thus necessarily with life: one defines the other. […] By dealing with death in the theatre, [one] [has] a chance to live a life" (*Colonialism and Greek Tragedy* 58). The Greeks were aware of the pain associated with freedom, leading to the emergence of Greek tragedy. Similarly, these Irish writers appear to be channelling the powerful essence of Greek tragedy to drive political and social transformation instead of preserving the existing order. Considering the Irish nationalist movement of the twentieth century, Ireland was in a resurrection period in which the country was trying to 'die' from its colonial shackles and 'live a life' of independence and native culture. As Camus concurs, "tragedy can be produced at a time of transition between a sacred society and a society built by men," (qtd. in Arkins 22) it can be understood that through their remarkable skill in adaptation, the Irish effectively leverages the potency of Greek tragedy, utilising it not only to convey individual emotions but also as a means to articulate the collective voice and societal issues faced by the Irish people. It is no coincidence that the ancient Greek stories re-emerged during the tumultuous time of Ireland as they re-examined the moral questions surrounding their sociopolitical and cultural progress. Arkins argues that "Greek tragedy allows for the exploration of issues of nationalism, of gender, of resistance to authority, or questioning religion" (22) so it is of utmost convenience that the Irish playwrights favoured functionalising Greek myths in their plays. As a strong-willed nationalist, Yeats found Sophoclean tragedies suitable for the Irish stage in that "Yeats wanted Irish dramas to possess elemental or folk characteristics based on an extravagant imagination and to play to an unsophisticated audience, Sophocles' mythical characters could be regarded as possessing that type of imagination" (Arkins 45). Yeats, with his *King Oedipus* (written in 1904; premiered in 1926[2]), introduced the story of "a terrible affirmation of man's subordinate position in the universe, and at the same time with a heroic vision of man's victory in defeat," (Knox 96) which is a parallel story of Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Yeats's contemporary and another second-generation playwright, J. M. Synge, also demonstrated an interest in ancient Greek stories. According to Walton, the founders of

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[2] Clark, David R. *W.B. Yeats: The Writing of Sophocles' King Oedipus (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society).* The American Philosophical Society Press, 1989. Print.

the Abbey Theatre, Lady Gregory and Yeats did not share the same sentiment toward Greek stories: As thoroughly invested in Celtic/Irish culture, Gregory did not tend to invest in another source of content; however, "Yeats seem[ed] to have felt that any concentration on Greek mythology was at the expense of Irish history" (9). Synge was also in favour of Greek stories, and he even wrote to Lady Gregory "implying that the only reason for the Abbey to produce classic plays such as Moliere and Sophocles would be to 'illuminate the work of Irish playwrights on Irish themes'" (9). It can be observed that Synge's plays such as *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World* include elements from Greek tragedies such as form and content. The latter play will be analysed in the next chapter in that it can be considered as the first example of an Irish play which appropriates a Greek myth for the sake of Ireland and Irish identity.

It can be deduced that the impact of Yeats and Synge's venture into Greek myths within the Abbey Theatre was tremendous in that many playwrights produced many prominent plays either containing elements from Greek tragedies or as an appropriation of such tragedies spanning about a hundred years. Arkins provides a very comprehensive list of the Irish plays which are based on Greek tragedies:

> **Aeschylus:**
> Edward & Christine Longford > *The Oresteia* (1935)
> Louis MacNeice > *Agamemnon* (1936)
> Tom Murphy > *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975) – based on *Oresteia*
> Tom Paulin > *Seize the Fire* (1990) – based on *Prometheus Bound*
> **Sophocles:**
> J.M. Synge > *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) – based on *King Oedipus*
> W.B. Yeats > *King Oedipus* (1926)
> W.B. Yeats > *Oedipus at Colonus* (1927)
> Sydney B. Smith > *Sherca* (1979) – based on *Philoctetes*
> Aidan Mathews > *Antigone* (1984)
> Tom Paulin > *The Riot Act* (1985) – based on *Antigone*
> Brendan Kennelly > *Antigone* (1986)

Seamus Heaney > *The Cure at Troy* (1990) – based on *Philoctetes*

Frank McGuinness > *Electra* (1997)

Desmond Egan > *Philoctetes* (1998)

Mary Elizabeth Burke-Kennedy > *Oedipus* (2000) – based on *King Oedipus*

Conall Morrison > *Antigone* (2003)

Seamus Heaney > *The Burial at Thebes* (2004) – based on *Antigone*

Eamon Grennan & Rachel Kitzinger > *Oedipus at Colonus* (2005)

Euripides:

George Bernard Shaw > *Major Barbara* (1905) – based on *Bacchae*

Brian Friel > *Living Quarters* (1978) – based on *Hippolytus*

Brendan Kennelly > *Medea* (1988)

Desmond Egan > *Medea* (1991)

Derek Mahon > *The Bacchae* (1991)

Ulick O'Connor > *The Oval Machine* (1986) – based on *Hippolytus*

Brendan Kennelly > *The Trojan Women* (1993)

Aidan Mathews > *Trojans* (1995)

Marina Carr > *By the Bog of Cats ...* (1998) – based on *Medea*

Colin Teevan > *Iph…* (1999) – based on *Iphigeneia in Aulis*

Colin Teevan > *Bacchae* (2002)

Edna O'Brien > *Iphigenia* (2003) – based on *Iphigeneia in Aulis*

Frank McGuinness > *Hecuba* (2004). (23)

It becomes clear when the list above is reviewed that the history of appropriation of Greek tragedies is very long within the Irish drama because it demonstrates a sustained and evolving dialogue between Irish playwrights and classical Greek works that spans more than a century. This dialogue reflects not only an artistic engagement with the themes and structures of Greek tragedy but also a deep reflection on the socio-political landscape of Ireland. The continued interest in and appropriation of Greek tragedies by diverse playwrights from Yeats to McGuinness suggests that these ancient stories provide a timeless framework for exploring issues of justice, freedom, and human suffering, resonating profoundly with the Irish quest for autonomy and cultural expression. Thus, the legacy of Greek tragedy remains a critical source of inspiration for Irish theatre,

serving as a vehicle for addressing contemporary concerns while simultaneously connecting audiences to their rich cultural heritage. The repeated invocation of these archetypal narratives underscores the persistent relevance of Greek tragedy in articulating the complexities of the human condition, particularly within the context of Ireland's tumultuous history and ongoing search for identity.

As mentioned earlier, during the nineteenth century, the stereotypical depiction of the Irish was intertwined with racial theories and justified through scientific rationale, contributing to a complex and enduring portrayal of the Irish people. This confluence of stereotypical images and pseudo-scientific justifications perpetuated negative perceptions of the Irish as a racially inferior and culturally backward group, influencing how they were viewed and treated by society at the time. This intertwining of racial theories with stereotypes about the Irish further intensified discrimination and prejudice against this group, shaping their societal experiences and interactions. De Nie asserts that "many Britons already strongly suspected that the Irish were naturally inferior to the Anglo-Saxons in almost every way" (6). This view is also apparent in an article in *Punch* written in 1862: "A creature manifestly between the gorilla and the negro is to be met with in some of the lowest districts of London and Liverpool [...] It belongs in fact to a tribe of Irish savages ...When conversing with this kind it talks a sort of gibberish" (qtd. in Kinealy, "At Home" 92). Such portrayals served to reinforce negative stereotypes associated with Irish identity. *Punch* magazine, a popular satirical publication of the time, also contributed to perpetuating these stereotypes through its caricatures and illustrations, which further embedded these representations within English social consciousness.

The racial stereotype linked to Irish identity included a diverse set of characteristics assigned to individuals of Irish nationality. These generalisations often included beliefs about the Irish being lazy, uncivilised, and prone to violence, perpetuating harmful biases that affected how they were perceived and treated in society. As Joy D. Richmond explains Irish nationality "ranged from the blundering, drunken Irish servant or the braggart warrior type, both with Irish bulls and blarney dripping from their lips, to the more insidious Irish rebel of the second half of the nineteenth century" (20). In his book *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (1971), L. Perry Curtis, Jr.

examines images of the Irish found in English political cartoons from the 1860s through the early 1900s, which, he argues "illustrated a shift in views about the Irish that transformed Irishmen from drunken, happy-go-lucky peasants to dangerous ape-men" (vii). This stereotypical figure, which was mostly known as 'the Stage Irishman,' was present across all aspects of English society and culture from the sixteenth century – especially during the nineteenth century, including the stage, literature, media, political discourse, and illustrations. In *The Stage Irishman* (1937), C. G. Duggan provides a detailed description of the Stage Irishman:

> The Stage Irishman habitually bears the generic name of Pat, Paddy or Teague. He has an atrocious Irish brogue, perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking; ... he has an unsurpassable gift of blarney and cadges for tips and free drinks. His hair is of a fiery red: he is rosy-cheeked, massive, and whiskey loving. His face is one of simian bestiality, with an expression of diabolical archness written all over it. He wears a tall felt hat (billycock or wideawake), with a cutty-clay pipe stuck in front, an open shirt collar, a three caped coat, knee breeches, worsted stockings, and cockaded brogue shoes. In his right hand he brandishes a stout blackthorn, or a sprig of shillelagh, and threatens to belabour therewith the daring person who will tread on the tails of his coat. For his main characteristics [...] are his swagger, his boisterousness and his pugnacity. He is always ready with a challenge, always anxious to back a quarrel, and peerless for cracking skulls at Donnybrook Fair. (289)

Thus, depending highly on the political atmosphere, the English perception of the Irish encompassed a wide range of negative characteristics including laziness, alcoholism, aggressiveness, irresponsibility, perceived femininity, childlike behaviour, lack of control, excessive sentimentality, wildness, untidiness, violence, superstition, lack of intelligence, perceived foolishness, poor education, and illiteracy (Richmond 20). As these conflicts escalated in the nineteenth century, additional violent traits like a predisposition for murder and sexual assault were attributed to the Irish according to English stereotypes. Likewise, the Irishwoman received a stereotypical representation: According to Deborah Fleming, stereotypes depicting Irishwomen were "overtly sexual and slovenly, […] with broods of dirty, unkempt children hanging off every limb" (11-13) and she was also depicted as "the naive and simple, though beautiful, Irish colleen – Hibernia - younger sister of Britannia (the masculinized female representation of England), who needs protection from Irishmen, whom she feared and who were the cause of all her troubles" (Richmond 6-7). Overall, such exaggerated, comic, foolish caricatures of the Irish people were England's way of justifying their continued colonisation of

Ireland. This 'meta-narrative,' as Joy D. Richmond defines the Stage Irishman, assisted England's colonial purpose since "it controlled the cultural discourse about the Irish: they were wild, uncivilized, and incapable of governing themselves; they, therefore, needed the British to take care of them and to civilize them" (8). The perpetuation of the Stage Irishman archetype, which prioritises English culture over indigenous Irish heritage, maintained a distorted and denigrated representation of Irish identity. This distortion not only reinforces the marginalisation of Irish culture but also perpetuates a colonial legacy that diminishes the authenticity and complexity of the Irish experience.

During the early twentieth century, Irish cultural nationalists made significant efforts to eliminate the particular portrayals of Irish identity that were deemed undesirable or inaccurate, and it was Dionysus Lardner Boucicault (1822-1890), mostly recognised as Dion Boucicault, whose plays started to draw attention to these nationalist goals on the stage in the nineteenth century. He rejected the deliberate false representation of an Irish person, the Stage Irishman. Boucicault wrote successful plays like *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1864), and *The Shaughraun* (1874)*,* which received popularity in Ireland and London. Nonetheless, Boucicault's audiences, more accustomed to comedic portrayals of the Irish, often struggled to grasp the nuances of his theatrical intentions fully. Audiences had predetermined expectations of Irish characters on stage. Despite Boucicault's efforts to redefine and present a more nuanced portrayal of Irish figures, audiences tended to respond with laughter, irrespective of the characters' intentions or actions. Robert Hogan cites that "[Boucicault] acted in many roles, and even when he was attempting to play a great dramatic role, everyone thought he was hysterical because of his 'great Irish brogue'" (39). This highlights the nature of stereotypes and audience perceptions that may have hindered a deeper understanding and appreciation of Boucicault's attempts to challenge and subvert traditional representations of Irishness on stage. As Heininge explains,

> [r]ecognizing the difficulty with trying to change stereotypes overnight, Boucicault included some familiar comic stage Irish figures, […] but he begins to tweak these figures so that they have a subtle, sly power that they exert over the more powerful characters. He also includes Irish characters whose roles grow increasingly complex, while he explores themes that invite greater thought about the stereotypes, […] Without Boucicault's work in redeeming 'Irishness' as more than comedy, there would not have been a sympathetic audience for […] literary retelling[s] of the

> legends of ancient Ireland that is often pointed to as the beginning of the Celtic
> Twilight, as it led to a resurgence of interest in the old stories, […] [which] led the
> way for Lady Augusta Gregory and John Millington Synge as well as [W.B.] Yeats
> to explore the lives and stories of the Irish rural population, […] that changed the
> way the rest of the world saw Ireland. (158-59)

His work paved the way for the emergence of a more receptive audience at the Abbey
Theatre, enabling subsequent playwrights like Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, and W. B.
Yeats to delve into the complexities of Irish identity. This transformative period in Irish
theatrical history not only revitalised interest in ancient Irish stories but also reshaped
global perceptions of Ireland, positioning the Theatre as a beacon of cultural revival and
redefinition as it was regarded as "the most original and vigorous theatre to have existed
in the British Isles since the Elizabethans" (Gillie 171). Using an Irish perspective, these
Irish playwrights successfully examined universal themes prevalent in Irish mythology.
Their art frequently sought to reclaim Irish cultural identity and investigate common
human experiences from an Irish perspective. Yeats believed that establishing an Irish
Theatre would raise the public's self-perception by offering better representations. As the
Irish audience saw themselves more positively and favourably reflected, they were
inspired to strive for self-improvement accordingly. In the Preface to Lady Gregory's
Cuchulain of Muirthemme, Yeats asserts that

> [t]o us Irish these personages [of Irish epic] should be more important than all others,
> for they lived in the places where we ride and go marketing, and sometimes they
> have met one another on the hills that cast their shadows upon our doors at evening.
> If we will but tell these stories to our children the Land will begin again to be a Holy
> Land, as it was before men gave their hearts to Greece and Rome and Judea. When
> I was a child I had only to climb the hill behind the house to see long, blue, ragged
> hills flowing along the southern horizon. What beauty was lost to me, what depth of
> emotion is still perhaps lacking in me, because nobody told me, not even the
> merchant captains who knew everything, that Cruachan of the Enchantments lay
> behind those long, blue, ragged hills! (np)

Therefore, it was of utmost importance for Yeats and the Abbey Theatre playwrights to
integrate the long-neglected Irish heritage into their plays and stagings so as to ignite the
need for reawakening in Irish society. In his preface to *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish
Peasantry* (1888), he commended the precision with which Irish storytellers have
preserved their bardic narratives, viewing it as proof of a consistent literary legacy linked
directly to Ireland's ancient history, "the long tale of Deirdre was, in the earlier decades

of this century, told almost word for word, as in the very ancient manuscripts in the Royal Dublin Society" (Welch 3). Thus, these unchanging epics influenced and shaped Yeats' poetry, thereby determining the vision of the Abbey Theatre. In the introduction to the initial publication of *The Celtic Twilight* (1893, 1902), he declares that retelling is a manifestation of personal creativity: "The things a man has heard and seen are threads of life, and if he pulls them carefully from the confused distaff of memory, any who will weave them into whatever garments of belief please them best" (Welch 108). By incorporating Irish epic into his literary works, the Abbey playwrights found a distinctive chance to connect the longstanding gap between the local and the universal, the temporary and the everlasting, and to showcase his interpretation of the hero and heroic actions. Yeats' plays such as *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) together with Lady Gregory, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1903), *On Baile's Strand* (1904), *At the Hawk's Well* (1916); and Lady Gregory's plays such as *Spreading the News* (1904), *The Rising of the Moon* (1903), *The King of Inishowen* (1904), and *Grania* (1913); and *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1906), *The Well of the Saints* (1908), and *The Shadow of the Glen* (1919) by J. M. Synge broadly incorporated Irish and Gaelic myths to be able to represent Ireland, resonate with the audience, and to revitalise Irish cultural identity at the beginning of the Irish Renaissance.

However, it can be stated that what makes the Irish Renaissance period significant is the fact that Irish playwrights at the Abbey Theatre were not only drawing upon Irish folklore and historical narratives, but they were also frequently integrating some elements of Greek mythology into their works. As Marianne McDonald states, "[i]n the twentieth century, there seem to be more translations and versions of Greek tragedy that have come from Ireland than from any other country in the English-speaking world" (*Amid Our Troubles* 37). In fact, Greek culture was not foreign to the Irish as they "became acquainted with the classics indirectly through the Catholic Church and […] [they] also became acquainted with the classics both in the forbidden 'hedge schools' and in the sanctioned schools that the British set up" (37). Upon the Cromwellian conquest in 1650, England started to establish the sanctioned schools in which the students were sanctioned by being imposed on the English language; however, "[t]he British occupiers thought that some of the classics would offer healthy examples of the governed accepting the power

of government. The Irish turned this on its head and finally used this literature in the twentieth century to feed their own subversive protests" (37). It is because of the fact that classics offer 'a literature of protest' through which the oppressed groups can express their dissatisfaction and unjust rule. Kiberd proposed that no one assumed that "Irish students of Shakespeare [would] treat his works like captured weapons which might one day be turned back upon the enemy" (*Inventing Ireland* 271). In Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980), for instance, Hugh says in response to an English lieutenant's remark about Wordsworth: "Wordsworth… No. I'm afraid we're not familiar with your literature, Lieutenant. We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island" (*Selected Plays* 417). By integrating Irish and Greek mythologies, these playwrights explored universal themes and added layers of depth to their storytelling, creating rich cultural symbols and resonances in their plays. The integration of Greek mythology into Irish drama expanded the thematic scope of the Abbey Theatre's works and signified a deliberate effort to position Irish cultural heritage within a broader, global context. By incorporating Greek mythological elements, the playwrights at the Abbey Theatre demonstrated a sophisticated cultural exchange that bridged classical traditions with Irish narratives, underscoring the richness and complexity of Irish identity which had been usurped by England's distorting representations. This integration helped to construct a nuanced sense of Irishness that was both rooted in local traditions and connected to wider cultural legacies such as the well-respected Antiquity, thereby contributing to the reclamation and revitalisation of the Irish identity on a global stage (Hennessey 8). During the first years of the Abbey Theatre, Yeats focused on Greek associations as much as he focused on Irish mythology because "associating […] ancient Irish epic with the towering achievements of ancient Greece" was the manifestation of the "marrying the philosophical wisdom of ancient Greek civilization to the newly rediscovered beauties of ancient Irish literature" (Hennesey 17). However, it should be noted that such associations were not exclusive to the twentieth-century Irish drama as "early Irish historians constructed elaborate genealogies linking the Irish to the Scythians, Phoenicians, and Carthaginians" all the way back to the twelfth century (Cullingford 99). This sparked a practice that later Irish historians, writers, linguists, and others would carry on for centuries, extending into the early 1900s. They continued the tradition of honouring

the history and cultural accomplishments of these believed ancestors. The historical circumstances influenced Yeats's intellectual, literary, and political endeavours.

Apart from Yeats and Gregory's profound focus on Irish tradition, however, benefiting from the national myths was limited in number during and after the period of the Irish Renaissance. The impact of Ancient Greek myths preserved its importance and recurrence throughout the century. Irish drama in the twentieth century has displayed a notable pattern of reconstructing ancient Greek myths, drawing upon timeless themes and archetypes to explore Irish identity, social issues, and universal human experiences. In the early twentieth century, Irish playwrights such as J. M. Synge began incorporating elements of ancient Greek mythology into their works. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), and Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) echo the tragic elements and fatalistic undertones of Greek drama tackling themes of family, loss, and destiny in a distinctly Irish environment. The reconstruction of ancient Greek myths in Irish drama served as a means of exploring both Irish cultural identity and universal human experiences by drawing parallels between Greek myths and Irish narratives. Reconstructing ancient Greek myths in Irish drama in the twentieth century held significant importance for the revitalisation of Irish identity. As Welch states, "the main river of European literature has its source in ancient Greece, of course; elsewhere Yeats, like numerous 19th century commentators before him, stresses the similarities between Celtic and Greek mythology, Cuchulain and Apollo, Celtic peasants and their Greek counterpart," (141) thereby drawing upon classical themes and narratives, Irish playwrights were able to tap into a shared cultural heritage that transcended borders and resonated with universal human experiences. The fusion of Irish storytelling with ancient Greek mythology allowed for a deeper exploration of themes such as heroism, fate, and morality, providing a rich tapestry through which Irish identity could be reimagined and redefined. Additionally, the reconstruction of ancient Greek myths served as a means of reclaiming cultural agency and asserting a distinct national identity in the face of historical and colonial challenges. This revitalisation of Irish identity through the lens of ancient Greek myths enriched Irish drama and contributed to a broader cultural conversation that celebrated the interconnectedness of diverse traditions and the enduring

relevance of classical narratives in shaping contemporary expressions of identity and belonging.

However, it might be observed, especially as of the second half of the twentieth century, that many Irish playwrights incorporated various Greek myths into their plays, which might seem like a dominating pattern in Irish dramatic tradition. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the influence of Gaelic-Irish mythology in Irish drama did not necessarily fall behind that of Ancient Greek mythology; instead, there was a complex interplay between the two. Irish playwrights at the Abbey Theatre and elsewhere were seeking to express themes that were universal and not confined merely to Irish experiences. They found that Greek mythology provided a well-known framework that audiences could easily relate to, which allowed them to explore these universal themes within a familiar context. Moreover, the turn to Ancient Greek mythology could be partly attributed to the educational standards of the time when the classics, which included Greek and Latin literature, were a significant part of the curriculum for the educated class. The movement reflected the dynamic nature of the Irish literary renaissance, showing how Irish playwrights contributed to and innovated within the larger landscape of Western literature. Meanwhile, the use of Ancient Greek mythology provided a broader canvas that transcended local boundaries, enabling Irish playwrights to address universal themes and engage with a wider literary tradition. Gaelic-Irish mythology typically infuses Irish drama with distinctly national themes, drawing upon the rich tapestry of local legend, folklore, and mythic history. These include stories of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the hero cycles, and other indigenous tales. The use of these narratives often serves to uncover and reexamine Ireland's own past and mythology, contributing to a sense of national identity and offering commentary on contemporary Irish society. In both cases, these mythological frameworks were not merely decorative or superficial; they were integral to the exploration of deeper themes and issues. Gaelic-Irish mythology could be utilised to reclaim and reassert a unique cultural heritage in the face of historical colonisation and the loss of native traditions. Culturally, Ancient Greek mythology provided Irish drama with a means to align itself with the classical foundations of Western literature, signalling a connection with a broader intellectual tradition. The use of Irish myths and folklore functioned as an assertion of cultural uniqueness, revitalising ancient stories and

integrating them into contemporary artistic expression to foster a sense of pride and unity. Irish playwrights used mythological tales as allegories to address contemporary socio-political issues.

1.3 THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF RECONSTRUCTING ANCIENT GREEK MYTHS IN IRISH DRAMA

For centuries, the term 'myth' has preserved its significance for many fields of studies expanding from classical philosophy to contemporary cultural studies. The term found a solid place for itself in the works of the classical philosophers Plato[3] and Aristotle[4] as they explored the implications of myth in understanding truth and morality; German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger[5] examined its role in shaping human experience and existence; in the realm of psychology, neurologist, and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud[6] analysed myths as reflections of the unconscious mind, suggesting that they reveal deeper truths about human behaviour and desires; semiotician Roland Barthes[7] contributed to the discourse by critiquing the use of myths in contemporary culture, asserting that they serve as vehicles for ideological meanings and representation; French philosopher and psychoanalysts Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari[8] engaged with myths to challenge traditional narratives and explore the fluidity of meaning and identity. Given this multifaceted engagement, it becomes essential to reconstruct myths to understand not only their historical contexts but also their ongoing significance in shaping cultural narratives and human consciousness. By revisiting and reinterpreting these myths, scholars can uncover valuable insights into the ways in which they continue to influence contemporary society, identity, and values.

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[3] See Partenie, Catalin. *Plato's Myths*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
[4] See Bos, A. P. "Aristotle on Myth and Philosophy." *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1983, 1–18.
[5] See Gordon, Ḥayim, and Rivca Gordon. *Heidegger on Truth and Myth a Rejection of Postmodernism.* Peter Lang, 2006.
[6] See Downing, Christine. "Sigmund Freud and the Greek Mythological Tradition." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1975, 3–14. Also see Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by A. A. Brill, Wordsworth Editions, 1997.
[7] See Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang, 1972.
[8] See Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. Also see Deleuze, Gilles. *Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis :University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Marianne McDonald states that "Greek tragedy is a theatrical Rorschach, and we can learn a lot about national differences from the adaptations in various countries," ("Dionysian Excess" 95) meaning that these ancient stories are capable of being interpreted and reshaped in ways that reflect the unique cultural, social, and political contexts of different nations, thereby revealing insights into their collective identities and values. The enduring significance of myths is particularly evident in Irish theatre where the infusion of ancient Greek myths creates a rich intersection of cultural narratives that invites extensive exploration and reinterpretation. This reconstruction not only revitalises age-old tales but also aligns them with Ireland's contemporary social and political landscapes. As Irish playwrights engage in a dialogue with the past, they effectively harness the allegorical power inherent in Greek tragedy and epic to reflect on and critique modern Irish identity and history. Such efforts extend beyond mere artistic expression; they serve as vital mechanisms for cultural introspection, enabling the reclamation and reshaping of cultural memory within the Irish theatrical tradition. Delving into the history and multidimensionality of myths highlights the necessity of understanding cultural narratives and their potential for transformation within this dynamic realm. Ultimately, the intricate interplay of these cultural expressions cultivates a profound appreciation for the lasting relevance and adaptability of mythological narratives, reinforcing their crucial role in Irish drama and beyond.

Myths have always been defined in various ways due to their multidimensional nature. They encompass a wide range of cultural, historical, and symbolic elements that can be interpreted differently depending on the perspective and background. Myths can be approached from different lenses such as literary, anthropological, psychological, sociological, or religious viewpoints, leading to diverse interpretations and definitions. Additionally, myths are often complex narratives that involve symbols, themes, and metaphors that can be open to multiple understandings and analyses. In his seminal book *Myth* (2008), Laurence Coupe examines the intricate structure of myths as follows:

> The word 'myth' is used so frequently that one can expect to come across it not only in most books on literary or cultural studies, but also in most forms of popular entertainment. The usage is often rather loose, however. In literary and cultural studies 'myth' is frequently used as synonymous with 'ideology', as in 'the myth of progress' or 'the myth of the free individual'. In entertainment it is frequently used

as synonymous with 'fantasy', as in 'Enter the mythical world of *Dungeons and Dragons*!' In either case, it is being used to imply some sort of illusion, whether one is an academic exposing the hidden agenda of a literary or cultural text, or one is a games manufacturer trying to attract customers. While it is true that there is some overlap between myth and ideology, and between myth and fantasy, it is not helpful to use them interchangeably. (1; emphasis in original)

As a result, the diversity of interpretations of myths reflects the richness and depth of mythological storytelling and its significance across different disciplines. Coupe delves into the intricate relationship between myths and paradigms. He suggests that myths have a liberating quality that transcends traditional boundaries by exploring how myths intersect with "other modes of existence" (2). Don Cupitt extends this notion by exploring the diverse nature of myths as sacred stories with universal themes intertwined with rituals and superhuman elements revealing their vital role in guiding and legitimising human experiences:

> So we may say that a myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community and is often linked with a ritual; that it tells of the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historical time in primal or eschatological [i.e. last, ultimate] time or in the supernatural world, or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history; that the superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic [i.e. humanly formed] ways. (*The World to Come* 29)

The definition of a myth as a traditional sacred narrative with universal significance tied to rituals, depicting the actions of supernatural beings in anthropomorphic forms outside historical time, establishes a framework for understanding the essence of myths. When applied to the reconstruction of myths in Irish drama, this characterisation illuminates how ancient Greek myths have been reimagined to resonate with Irish cultural contexts, serving as a means of cultural introspection, memory reclamation, and creative evolution within the Irish theatrical tradition. These myths have been reimagined in Irish theatre by integrating local themes, folklore, and historical struggles, allowing contemporary audiences to explore their cultural identity and heritage while reflecting on universal human experiences. As McDonald proposes,

> [t]he Irish use the great power of Greek tragedy, not only for the expression of personal feelings, but the expression of all the people and their public concerns. All Greek tragedy deals with death, that face of the Medusa that petrifies life. Some

Greek tragedy deal with freedom, its necessity, and the price one pays either to have it or not to have it. These are the main issues in the plays selected by the Irish poets. These Irish writers seem to be harnessing the energy of these works (the snakes of Medusa's hair) to inspire political and social change rather than maintain the status quo. […] Each in [their] own way addresses 'the Irish question.' What do people do when their country is occupied and exploited? How do they deal with the powerful when they have been systematically made weak for years? Ireland is England's Trojan Women, its Medea exploited by Jason, its Antigone, who still has a sense of justice. (95-96)

By infusing these archetypal narratives with Irish perspectives and nuances, the process of reconstructing myths in Irish drama perpetuates a dynamic interplay between universal themes and localised interpretations, providing a creative dialogue that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. What allows such an interpretation and reconstruction is, as Cupitt explains, the complex structure of myths: "[T]heir powers are more than human and often the story is not naturalistic but has the fractured, disorderly logic of dreams; that the whole body of a people's mythology is often prolix [i.e. lengthy, wordy], extravagant and full of seeming inconsistencies," and thus myths serve to explain, unite, direct actions, or justify a fundamental role for human in seeking coherence in cosmic, social, and personal realms (29). This primal and universal function of mythmaking is essential for society and individuals, providing a narrative framework that intertwines personal stories within a broader societal narrative, which grants purpose and significance to human existence through storytelling.

The intrinsic human function of mythmaking, which is essential for constructing cohesive narratives that encompass social orders, provides individuals and societies with profound meaning and understanding. Ricoeur views myths as tools that unveil alternate realms, serving as "gateways to exploring" and "understanding the complexities of human existence" beyond the tangible world and "a genuine dimension of modern thought" (*History and Truth* 5-6). These perspectives collectively emphasise the multifaceted nature of myths, and their capacity to simultaneously entertain, educate, and guide, which are to illuminate various facets of the human experience through narratives that transcend time and cultural boundaries. These diverse functions of myths emphasise their enduring relevance and potency across different cultures and periods. In the context of the integration and reconstruction of ancient Greek myths in Irish drama from the twentieth

century onwards, these perspectives mark the significance of how the revitalisation of ancient Greek narratives in a contemporary Irish setting serves to enrich cultural progression, ignite creative reinterpretations, and create a deeper understanding of universal themes within a unique cultural framework. As Walton claims, "[m]yth can reveal you to yourself," it was of utmost importance for Irish playwrights to turn to classical narratives to, "through myth, […] unmask themselves" (4). So, through the integration and reconstruction of ancient Greek myths in Irish drama from the twentieth century onwards, the revitalisation of classical narratives not only enriches cultural progression and sparks creativity but also plays a foundational role in the Irish Renaissance, facilitating the reclamation of a genuine Irish identity by delving into the profound depths of mythological storytelling.

To fully grasp the complexities and implications of integrating ancient Greek myths into Irish theatrical traditions and to explore the philosophical underpinnings, underlying motivations, symbolic values, and transformative power of myths from antiquity, delving into the philosophical insights of ancient Greek philosophers on myths becomes imperative to appreciate the intricate context of mythological storytelling in Irish drama. Walton suggests that "Greek tragedy was born from a corpus of myth that went back to the sagas of Homer and the other composers of epic cycles" (6). It thus can be claimed that myths are as old as thousands of years considering that Homer is believed to have lived in the ninth or eighth century BC. These myths formed the foundation of Greek cultural stories and beliefs, providing rich material for the creation of tragic plays. Myths were essential for ancient Greek drama as they provided a rich source of cultural narratives and beliefs that resonated with the audience. These myths offered complex characters, moral dilemmas, and grand themes that enriched the plots and characters of the dramatic works. Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC), in his exploration of mimesis and catharsis in tragedy, recognised the enduring influence of these foundational myths on the development of dramatic art and the representation of human experiences on stage. Aristotle's approach to myths is quite significant in terms of literature and the context in which 'myth' would flourish. In Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BC)*,* he viewed myth with a

more critical eye. He saw it as a form of imitation (*mimesis*[9]) that did not necessarily reflect reality but rather human experiences and emotions (Dutton 6). While myths might contain fantastical elements, they explored universal themes and evoked emotions like fear, pity, and wonder, making them valuable tools for learning and entertainment. Aristotle saw myths as integral to the narrative structure and emotional impact of dramatic performances. Mimesis becomes a central term when Aristotle discusses the nature and function of art. In *Poetics*, he defines tragedy

> as an imitation of human action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with every kind of artistic ornament, the various kinds being found in different parts of the play; it represents man in action rather than using narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotion. ("Book IV" 51)

According to Aristotle's perspective, mimesis represents an intrinsic aesthetic process inherent in human nature. He claims that "imitation is given us by nature and men are endowed with these gifts, gradually develop them and finally create the art of poetry" (*Poetics* 43). Aristotle posits that poets do not merely replicate reality but actively generate reality through mimesis. Poets engage in the recreation and reorganisation of familiar elements, offering a novel and captivating presentation of known truths. Mimesis is not only the "origin of art but also a distinguishing quality of man, since imitation is natural to mankind from childhood on," and thus, "all men find pleasure in imitation" (Aristotle 44). He claims that there are "things that distress us when we see them in reality, but the most accurate representation of these same things we view with pleasure" (Aristotle 44). In this sense, *catharsis* is not primarily a moral or psychological issue, but rather, it is the inherent outcome of the aesthetic process as Isenberg discusses,

> [f]ear and pity are dangerous emotions: painful and troubled feelings arise from the imagination of an imminent evil and cause destruction and pain. Pity, in particular, is a kind of pain upon seeing deadly or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve. However, in the representation of such feelings one feels empathy and gets rid of them. So, a work of art gives a man an opportunity to get rid of painful and troubled feelings arising from the imagination of an imminent evil that may cause

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[9] The noun 'mimesis' as well as corresponding verb *mimeisthai* refer to the re-enactment and dance through ritual and myth. In Athenian drama the re-enactment is equivalent to acting out the role of a mythical figure and 'mimesis' in such a context connotes the imitation of the earlier re-enactment of the myth and rituals. (Baktır 168)

destruction and pain on the part of the citizen. (*Aesthetics and Theory of Criticism* 294)

The profound connection between myth, mimesis, Aristotle's insights, and the concept of *catharsis* is apparent in the transformative power of drama. Through the emotional journey evoked by the depiction of fear and pity in artistic works, individuals are offered a cathartic experience that enables them to confront and ultimately purge themselves of distressing emotions rooted in the contemplation of imminent suffering and tragedy. This purification process highlights the unique ability of art to not only reflect reality but also to serve as a powerful mechanism for emotional release and psychological healing (Baktır 175), emphasising the enduring relevance and impact of Aristotle's theories on aesthetics and the human experience. In ancient Greek literature, especially drama, myths played a central role in shaping narratives, characters, and themes. They provided a rich source of material for dramatists to address societal issues, ethical dilemmas, and metaphysical inquiries, especially in their tragedies which were written to narrate "[a]cts of revenge, acts of treachery, acts of sacrifice, acts of resistance" (Walton 9). For example, in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex,* the myth of Oedipus serves as a foundation for exploring themes of fate and free will through Oedipus' tragic downfall, illustrating the consequences of defying divine prophecy. The tragedy highlights the tension between individual agency and predestined outcomes. The use of the Oedipus myth in this context allows the audience to reflect on the complexities of human existence and the limits of human knowledge. By weaving mythological elements into the narrative, Aeschylus raises questions about the nature of justice, the role of gods in human affairs, and the transformation of societal norms (Walton 13). Overall, the significance of myths and mythology in ancient Greek literature, particularly drama, lies in their ability to transcend mere storytelling and offer profound insights into the human experience. By engaging with myths, playwrights could explore ethical dilemmas, existential truths, and metaphysical concepts, creating works that resonate with audiences across generations and facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexities of life and society.

So, one might question the relationship between such ancient stories and a recent dramatic tradition which formed the basis for the sociocultural revival movement in Ireland in the 1900s. The reconstruction of Greek myths in Irish drama during the twentieth century

signifies a unique intercultural dialogue that bridges ancient narratives with modern theatrical expressions. The interaction between Greek myths and Irish drama in the twentieth century encapsulates an interplay of cultural heritage and artistic reinterpretation. Irish playwrights navigated ethical predicaments and existential truths, which mirror the enduring relevance and universal appeal of these narratives through reconstructing ancient Greek myths within the context of Irish theatre. J. Michael Walton explains, in *Amid Our Troubles*, the reasons behind the appropriation of classical myths in twentieth-century Irish drama:

> It is no accident that it is Irish settings which have given these Greek classics a new dimension: for Ireland has the last English-speaking contemporary drama that still sees the theatre as the natural place to juggle ideas [because] what the myths have in common is their antiquity. What the myths have in common is their novelty. What the plays have in common is their attachment to issues from then. What the plays have in common is their attachment to the now. What the Greek playwrights had in common was their belief in the theatre as a serious place for ethical and political debate. … What those first Greek audiences did accept was the presentation of stories, conflicts and debates in the form of dramatic parable from a deep and barely penetrable past. (8)

As understood from the quotation above, it can be deduced that the timeless themes and the continued vitality of the myths of Antiquity are significant for it to be a platform for critical reflection and intellectual exchange. The acts and conditions of humans which "form the spine of the Greek tragic canon […] can be generalised, inviting the audience to home in on a single issue. Or they can be made specific, in a specific theatrical context, from which again, the audience may draw the parallel" (Walton 34). By intertwining the antiquity of myths with the freshness of new interpretations, the transformative power of incorporating Greek classics into Irish settings showcases a profound engagement with timeless themes while addressing current societal concerns. Playwrights used the stage of ancient Greek theatre to present powerful issues that the audience was aimed at being educated through, what Aristotle coined as *catharsis*, tears of joy or sadness. The infusion of Greek mythological motifs into the fabric of Irish drama can, thus, be claimed to have the same purpose: confront the Irish society with the acts of oppression, cruelty, violence, sacrifice, and resistance which had been directly impacting the Irish society, identity, and the nation itself throughout centuries. So, by enriching storytelling and resonating with

diverse audiences, this fusion deepens the collective understanding of human experience and society in Ireland for the Irish.

However, this deep connection and dedication to reconstructing the ancient Greek myths does not mean that Irish playwrights abandoned using Celtic myths in their plays. There had been as many plays containing elements from Celtic myths as plays containing elements from Greek myths at the Abbey, Gate[10] and Field Day Theatres. Katherine Anne Hennesey provides an extensive list of such productions spanning over a hundred years: *Diarmuid and Grania* (1901) by Yeats and George Moore, *Deidre* (1902) by George Russell, *On Baile's Strand* (1904) by Yeats, *Deidre* (1906) by Yeats, *Deidre of the Sorrows* (1910) by Synge, *Diarmuid and Grainne* (1928) by MacLiammoir, *Fighting the Waves* (1929) by Yeats, *The Ford of the Hurdles* (1929) by MacLiammoir, *The Melians* (1931) by Edward Longford, *Where Stars Walk* (1940) by MacLiammoir, *Diarmuid agus Grainne* (1947) by MacLiammoir, *Deidre* (1980) by Synge and Yeats, *Rise Up Lovely Sweeney* (1986) by Tom MacIntyre, *Faith Healer* (1990 and 2006) by Brian Friel, *By the Black Pig's Dyke* (1994) and *A Cry from Heaven* (2005) by Vincent Woods, *Homeland* (2006) by Paul Mercier and *The Grown-ups* (2006) by Nicholas Kelly (18). It is clear that Irish playwrights have maintained a rich dialogue with both ancient Greek and Celtic mythologies, reflecting a duality in their narrative explorations. This dedication to reconstructing diverse mythological sources demonstrates the playwrights' commitment to cultural identity and heritage. The integration of Celtic myths alongside Greek influences enriches the theatrical landscape, allowing for a more nuanced engagement with themes of identity, belonging, and history. As Hennessy illustrates through her comprehensive list of productions, the prevalence of Celtic myth elements in Irish theatre is notable, with plays such as *Diarmuid and Grania*, *Deidre*, and *Faith Healer* resonating deeply within the cultural consciousness. Such works not only illustrate the versatility of playwrights in drawing from their cultural roots but also signify the enduring relevance of these ancient narratives in contemporary settings. Therefore, it is of great significance to note that the rapid development of interest in Greek myths within Irish drama over a

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[10] The Gate Theatre was established in 1928 by Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir, along with Daisy Bannard Cogley and Gearóid Ó Lochlainn. For further information, see Corporaal, Marguérite, and Ruud van den Beuken, editors. *A Stage of Emancipation: Change and Progress at the Dublin Gate Theatre*. Liverpool University Press, 2021.

hundred-year period does not mean that the Irish playwrights denied their Gaelo-Celtic origins and acknowledged ancient Greek as their cultural foundation. Rather, they engaged in a dynamic interplay between these two rich mythological traditions, recognising that their Gaelo-Celtic origins coexist and inform their interpretations of Greek myths. This acknowledgement allows Irish playwrights to both celebrate their ancestral narratives and explore the themes presented in ancient Greek stories, resulting in a more layered theatrical expression. The engagement with Greek myths does not negate the value of Gaelo-Celtic heritage; instead, it complements it, enhancing the playwrights' exploration of universal themes such as identity, destiny, and the human condition. The synthesis of these traditions serves to enrich the narrative framework of Irish theatre, providing multiple lenses through which to view and understand contemporary Irish realities. In this context, ancient Greek mythology becomes a tool for Irish playwrights to articulate their cultural identity, while still firmly rooting their narratives in the indigenous myths of Ireland. The interplay between Greek and Celtic myths in Irish drama underscores the complexity of cultural expression and the playwrights' role in negotiating their artistic voices amidst these rich mythological traditions. Therefore, the continued incorporation of Celtic themes is not merely an alternative to Greek influences but a vital part of a broader literary tapestry that captures the essence of Irish storytelling and collective memory.

Within literary studies, the examination of various modes of reconstruction serves as a lens through which ancient narratives are reinvigorated and reimagined. The methodologies of subversion and translocation serve as fundamental tools for playwrights to engage with the timeless essence of classical texts in a modern context. In the context of twentieth-century Irish drama, the infusion of ancient Greek myths takes on a profound significance, resonating with the ethos of a culture deeply rooted in storytelling and theatrical tradition. By delving into seminal works such as J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984), a rich exploration of Irish identity unfolds, intricately studied with the threads of Greek myths and historical upheavals. In Chapter 2, it will be discussed that Synge's thorough rework of the myth of Oedipus through subverting the whole genre into a comedy enabled him to investigate the essence of Irishness and the significant role of self-actualisation in the process of

revitalising Irish identity at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Chapter 3, the method of translocating a myth into another setting will be examined as a powerful tool for reviewing the tumultuous political atmosphere in the 1960s in that it enabled Paulin to investigate the harsh communication between two political ideologies in Ireland at the time. This intricate interplay redefines the boundaries of theatrical expression and sheds light on the intrinsic connection between myth, history, and contemporary socio-political landscapes. Through an analysis of two pivotal periods— the Irish Renaissance and the tumultuous Troubles of the 1960s— against the backdrop of Greek myths in Irish drama, a narrative emerges that transcends mere retelling, offering a profound reflection on the complexities of human experience and cultural evolution.

Central to the exploration of literary reconstructions in Irish drama is J. M. Synge's seminal work, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), chosen for its poignant representation of the true Irish rural identity. Situated within the context of the Irish Renaissance movement, Synge's play stands as a significant artistic endeavour aimed at confronting the complexities of Irish identity under English oppression. By imbuing the tragic essence of Oedipus Rex with elements of comedy, Synge navigates the delicate balance between humour and harsh reality to present a nuanced portrayal of the subverted Irish identity imposed by external forces, particularly English oppression. This artistic transformation acts as a motivation for challenging rooted societal norms and destabilising the received narratives prevalent in Irish society at the time. Through the lens of comedy, Synge not only invites introspection into the complexities of Irish identity but also prompts a revaluation of historical constructs and cultural perceptions. The juxtaposition of tragedy and comedy in Synge's subversion not only creates a theatrical experience that is both compelling and thought-provoking but also stresses the transformative power of artistic expression in questioning established paradigms and reimagining collective identities. Synge's reconstruction of the Oedipal myth serves as a compelling vehicle for self-actualisation, particularly emphasised through the theme of parricide. The protagonist, Christy Mahon, embarks on a profound journey of identity formation that mirrors the broader search for Irish identity in the early twentieth century. By confronting the presumption surrounding his father's death, Christy unravels the false narrative crafted by the townsmen, who initially deem him a hero. This 'father-killing'

element transcends a mere literal act; it symbolises a metaphorical confrontation with authority, societal expectations, and the historical dominance of English power. As Christy actively asserts his narrative against a backdrop of local gossip and preconceptions, he not only challenges the boundaries of societal norms but also reflects the emergent quest for a distinct Irish identity amid colonial subjugation. By shedding the burdens of expectation imposed upon him, Christy's dynamic transformation resonates with the aspirations of a nation seeking to define itself outside of the constraints of British rule. Synge, through Christy's evolution, articulates a profound commentary on the fluidity of identity, underscoring that self-definition often necessitates the dismantling of imposed myths and the reclamation of one's narrative. Thus, Synge's subversion of the myth of Oedipus serves as a powerful vehicle for stimulating dialogue, fostering critical engagement, and reshaping the Irish cultural consciousness.

In contrast, Tom Paulin's play *The Riot Act* (1984) emerges as a potent critique of the civil unrest and societal discord during the Troubles, a tumultuous period in Irish history. Drawing inspiration from the tragedy of *Antigone* by Sophocles, Paulin translocates the thematic essence of the play to directly confront the political and social challenges faced by Ireland at the time. He creates a resonant parallel that transcends temporal boundaries and underscores the enduring relevance of classical themes in modern contexts. The transposition of the tragedy to the Irish landscape serves as a deliberate artistic choice, allowing him to not only engage with the universal themes of power, authority, and resistance inherent in *Antigone* but also to address the specific sociopolitical dynamics of Ireland at the time. Through this translocation, he confronts his audience with a reflection on the complexities of governance, morality, and individual agency in the face of systemic oppression and societal upheaval. Paulin's work serves as a powerful testament to the legacy of classical literature as a mirror to contemporary societal challenges in Ireland, offering a compelling platform for critical examination and introspection. Each of these works contributes to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between ancient narratives and modern Irish identity, offering profound insights into the complexities of cultural reconstruction and historical reinterpretation within the realm of Irish drama.

CHAPTER 2

'A SOFT LAD THE LIKE YOU': SUBVERSION OF THE OEDIPUS MYTH IN *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* BY J. M. SYNGE

"*The Playboy* is not a play with a 'purpose' in the modern sense of the word, but, although parts of it are or are meant to be extravagant comedy, still a great deal that is in it and a great deal more that is behind it is perfectly serious when looked at in certain light"

Irish Times (1907)

This chapter is dedicated to analysing John Millington Synge's incorporation of an ancient Greek myth within his seminal work *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), showcasing a level of intricacy surpassing that found in his earlier plays which typically featured either Irish or Greek elements. Revered as Synge's magnum opus, *The Playboy* stands as a multifaceted and nuanced play, meticulously crafted with rich details essential for delving into the complexities of Irish identity. This work is the ultimate culmination of his life, academic pursuits, and artistic approaches. It serves as a cornerstone for understanding Synge's creative evolution and thematic preoccupations, offering a narrative into the Irish psyche and societal dynamics. Through an initial comprehensive examination of Synge's background, this chapter endeavours to unfold the layers of symbolism, social commentary, and cultural reflections embedded within *The Playboy* by majorly focusing on how Synge subverts the myth of Oedipus, originally a tragedy by Sophocles, into a modern comedy. By exploring how Synge blends diverse influences and narrative elements, a deeper appreciation of the play's profound impact on Irish theatre and its enduring relevance in interrogating notions of identity, tradition, and representation of Irish can be achieved.

John Millington Synge's indelible legacy within the accounts of the Abbey Theatre is marked by a transformative artistic vision that redefined the representation of the authentic Irish identity on stage. Through his seminal works such as *The Shadow of the Glen* (1903), *Riders to the Sea* (1904), *The Well of the Saints* (1905), *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), and *The Tinker's Wedding* (1908), Synge not only captured the rugged beauty of rural Ireland but also delved into the very soul of the Irish people, giving voice to their joys, sorrows, and aspirations. Synge's profound exploration of the Irish landscape, its traditions, and its inhabitants served as a revelation, illuminating the intricacies of an evolving society grappling with its tumultuous past and envisioning its bright future embellished with true Irishness. By infusing his plays with authentic Irish speech and the vivid imagery of Irish life, Synge provided a mirror reflecting the multifaceted layers of Irish identity, unearthing the essence of a people yearning for self-determination and cultural authenticity. His masterful use of language, rich characterisation, and sentimental storytelling not only captivated audiences but also inspired a renaissance in Irish theatre, establishing the Abbey Theatre as a crucible for the exploration of the Irish spirit. Synge's enduring impact resonates beyond the confines of the theatrical stage, serving as a testament to the enduring power of art in illuminating the complexities of national identity, heritage, and the human experience.

In order to fully grasp the profound influence of his experiences on his works, an exploration of his life becomes essential. Born in April 1871 in Rathfarnham, Dublin, John Edmund Millington Synge (1871-1909) was the youngest son of a conservative Protestant Anglo-Irish family. Hailing from a background that typified the Ascendancy, his upbringing and heritage deeply shaped his perspective and artistic endeavours as "the powerful English Protestant minority in Ireland which called itself Anglo-Irish and governed the Catholic Irish majority until early in the nineteenth century" (Tracy 136); however, at the time of Synge's birth, the Ascendancy had lost its aristocratic influence, yet still maintained a status of superiority over the Catholic middle classes in terms of social status. Synge belonged to a privileged and well-educated family. His father worked as a lawyer, specialising in land conveyancing, while his mother focused on raising their children (Collins 19). Yet, Synge had complex ties to the Ascendancy and mostly favoured his Irish heritage over his English roots. He introduced himself as follows:

> [M]y Christian names are John Millington, my family were originally called Millington, and Queen Elizabeth is said to have changed this name to 'Synge' they sang so finely. Synge is, of course, pronounced 'sing', since then they have been in Ireland for nearly three centuries, so that there is now a good deal of Celtic, or more exactly, Gaelic blood in the family. (qtd. in Collins 22)

Due to his ill health, Synge received his first education at home and his upbringing under a devout Protestant mother undoubtedly influenced his life significantly. His reflections on his childhood emphasise the rigid environment in which he was raised, highlighting the pervasive influence of religion in nineteenth-century Ireland. The religious atmosphere in Ireland during that period was marked by a "deeply ingrained adherence to strict religious beliefs and practices," (Gerstenberger 4-5) shaping individuals' worldviews and societal norms. Synge's experiences under his mother's devout Protestantism likely exposed him to the religious zeal of the time, which influenced his artistic perspectives and undertakings. As Harrington suggests, "[t]he product of a long-established Church of Ireland family with strong evangelical leanings, J. M. Synge, a freethinker who dabbled in music, languages, and philosophy, became disenchanted with his parents' religious views at an early age" (210). Despite coming from a background rooted in the Church of Ireland with strong evangelical inclinations, Synge deviated from his family's religious beliefs at a young age. Being a freethinker engaged in diverse pursuits, his exploration of various disciplines likely contributed to his disillusionment with his parents' religious perspectives. Synge states that

> [b]y the time I was sixteen or seventeen I had renounced Christianity after a good deal of wobbling, although I do not think I avowed my decision quite so soon. I felt a sort of shame in being thought an infidel, a term which I have always — and still — used as a reproach. For a while I denied everything, then I took to reading Carlyle, Stephen and Matthew Arnold, and made myself a sort of incredulous belief that illuminated and lent an object to life without hampering the intellect. This story is easily told, but it was a terrible experience. By it I laid a chasm between my present and my past and between myself and my kindred and friends. Till I was twentythree I never met or at least knew a man or woman who shared my opinions. (qtd. in Greene and Stephens 9)

This early departure from his family's religious views showcases Synge's independent and inquisitive nature, reflecting his willingness to question established beliefs and forge his own intellectual path. Harrington argues that due to his family's strong commitment to their faith, the young Synge's decision to renounce it resulted in significant conflict

within the family, leaving him feeling unsettled as he searched in different places for a culture he could identify as his own (210). Therefore, experiencing a growing sense of isolation, Synge chose to depart from Ireland in a quest to discover his true identity. Consequently, he sought to address his spiritual void by immersing himself in a profound fascination with Irish culture. Synge states: "Soon after I had relinquished the Kingdom of God I began to take a real interest in the kingdom of Ireland" (qtd. in Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* 422). In this sense, as Synge writes in his Introduction to *The Aran Islands*, "he no longer regarded himself as a Christian, but as a worshipper of a new goddess, Ireland" (xviii). His shift in perspective from traditional religious beliefs highlights a profound reverence for Irish culture. Through his writings and experiences, Synge portrays a transformation from relinquishing his previous spiritual views to embracing a deep connection and devotion to Ireland, which symbolises a shift in his sense of belonging and purpose.

In February 1889, Synge enrolled at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, and completed his degree in 1892. Following his graduation, he went to Germany to pursue further studies in music. However, by 1895, he abandoned his aspirations of becoming a professional musician upon studying music for eighteen months and instead pursued postgraduate studies in French literature, comparative phonetics, and later, Irish and Homeric civilisation while residing in Paris (Collins 20-21). His studies there were of utmost significance in shaping his literary perspective and approach, especially towards the Irish. In her seminal book *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival*, Sinéad G. Mattar discusses that in the 1890s and early 1900s, Synge participated in lecture courses in Paris with French Celtologists like Anatole le Braz and Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville. Their detailed studies in comparative science and primitivism significantly influenced Synge's literary perspective. Additionally, the insights he gained from comparative mythologists, philologists, and folklorists within Continental Celtology contributed to the modernist elements in Synge's work for the Irish theatre (Garrigan-Mattar 1-2). Primitivism, which is a post-Darwinian ideology, "relied instinctively upon the notion of man as an organic part of the natural world" (2). The invocation of primitivism as a post-Darwinian ideology alludes to a philosophical perspective that perceives humanity as an integral component of the natural world. This conceptualisation aligns with Synge's

thematic preoccupations, wherein his characters frequently exhibit a profound connection to their environment. Such portrayals suggest an implicit critique of modern urbanity and a nostalgic yearning for a more authentic, elemental existence. By synthesising insights from Celtology and primitivism, Synge articulated narratives that not only celebrated the richness of Irish cultural heritage but also engaged with broader existential themes concerning humanity's relationship with nature. This was a distinguishing perspective to have among the modernist writers let alone the Irish playwrights. The primitivist discourse enabled Synge to develop empathy and unbiased observation of the capacities of the primitive peoples. As Elizabeth Gilmartin suggests, "[i]n *The Aran Islands*, Synge describes the culture of the native islanders with an anthropologist's eye and linguist's ear" (63). Synge portrays the islanders as inherently natural and unaffected by the negative influences of modernity throughout the entirety of the work as "he uses primitive/modern binary that celebrates the elements of the lifestyle of the Aran Islands that resist the influence of mainland Ireland" (63). As a prominent figure in the Irish Renaissance movement, Synge played a key role in shaping modern Irish culture by revitalising indigenous art, literature, and mythology. His interpretation reflects numerous contradictions that highlight the conflict between traditional and contemporary elements in Ireland during that period. Moreover, as Gilmartin states, "[l]ike other writers of the Renaissance, such as W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory, he reifies the image of the Irish peasant, but his conception of the primitive peasant differs from that of his contemporaries" (63), and most apparent division is that his understanding of Irishness was "liberated […] from the debilitating mists of the Celtic Twilight" (Garrigan-Mattar 5) unlike the rest of the founders of the Abbey Theatre. Declan Kiberd argues that "[s]o obsessed was he with heroic myth and with the lies which it seemed to foster among his fellow-dramatists, that he sought to expose it fully in *The Playboy*. Here he attacked the idea of heroism with its own inner contradictions" (*Synge and the Irish Language* 111). He believed that the revitalisation and reproduction of the heroic Gaelic past "was growing … the hero-cult … among the nationalists and even among the writers of [his] own day" (111). This 'hero-cult,' which was arguably developed through the Celtic heroic cycles such as the Cuchulain cycle, can be considered a manifestation of the heroic ideal that the nationalist playwrights of the Irish Renaissance such as W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory strived to emphasise: "In all of these works, the central theme was the skill of

Cuchulain in glamorised combat, his capacity to make violence seem heroic" (112). However, Synge directly engaged with the harsh realities of violence that were prevalent in rural Irish communities, shedding light on the presence of violence and its impact on daily life. He expressed disapproval towards the emerging glorification of heroic acts of violence within Irish society, which conveniently seeds "mindless brutality in the lives of the peasants" (112). In *The Aran Islands*, Synge depicts the intrinsic violence in rural life: "Although these people are kindly towards each other and to their children, they have no feeling for the suffering of animals, and little sympathy for pain when the person who feels it is not in danger" (163). *The Playboy* contains references to the disturbing enjoyment that rural residents derive from mistreating animals. Marcus Quin engaged in activities such as injuring ewes for fun, while others would go to great lengths to witness the cruel spectacle of a dog being hanged "screeching and wriggling three hours at the butt of a string (73). The play also alludes to additional brutal activities such as sports, including the participation in violent challenges to "slit the windpipe of a screeching sow" (71). Synge's perspective deriving from the post-Darwinian ideology of primitivism mentioned earlier, distinct from the romanticised portrayals of his contemporaries, allowed him to offer authentic and detailed representations of the native Irish population and their daily pastimes. This novel approach marked a significant and enduring contribution to Irish theatrical tradition highlighting and motivating the representation of the true essence of Irishness instead of creating glamorised images embellished with past tales.

In addition, Synge's integration of primitivism into language through the language he used for stage directions, depictions, and characters' speeches in his literary works enriched the description of Irish characters and transformed the portrayal of linguistic authenticity in theatre. His innovative application of primitivism to language further solidified his impact on the representation of Irish culture and identity on stage as he believed that "modern Ireland would be a truly European country, rich with interaction with the Continent that would be achieved through the English language" (Gilmartin 63-64). Even after spending four years studying Irish on the Aran Islands, Synge maintained the belief that the waning of the Irish language was both unavoidable and potentially advantageous for Ireland in the long run: "The linguistic atmosphere of Ireland has

become definitely English enough, for the first time, to allow work to be done in English that is perfectly Irish in essence" (*The Aran Islands* 384). However, the language Synge used in his works is not standard English which was imposed upon the Irishmen for centuries. The language of his plays is known as Hiberno-English, as described by Cusack, which is "a fusion of two entirely familiar languages, his audience's declared 'native' tongue and the tongue they most commonly spoke and understood" yet "the actual product was unlike anything Synge's audience had heard before" (132). Even the origins of Hiberno-English as a dramatic medium can be traced back to the Elizabethan times "pointing out an increasing preference over time," (Sullivan 208) the popularisation and inspiration of it in the literary works around Synge's time can be dedicated to Douglas Hyde and his literary works such as *Beside the Fire* (1890) and *Love Songs of Connacht* (1893), both of which were translated from the original Irish into an Anglo-Irish (Bliss 38). This recently popularised dialect was an "intersection of Irish and English cultures," (Gömceli and James 109) thereby emphasising the importance of incorporating elements of both traditions and innovation in the new language model, rather than completely excluding either aspect. It is because Hiberno-English, Gaelic English, or Irish English, is significantly impacted by the traditional Irish language and displays variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax. So, it can be understood that "Synge's use of Hiberno-English indicates his defiance against the British hegemony and his strategic plan to express an Irish identity through language" (Chang 185-86). He did not simply favour English over the Irish language. Synge saw the opportunity of merging the two languages into one in order to provide the optimum medium for Irish culture and identity to be profoundly explored and represented. In the Preface of *The Playboy,* Synge himself asserts that

> [i]n writing *The Playboy of the Western World*, as in my other plays, I have used one or two words that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers. … I am glad to acknowledge how much I owe to the folk-imagination of these fine people. 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. … This matter, I think, is of importance the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form. (iii-vi)

Synge articulates his appreciation for the influence of the Irish peasantry on his creative endeavours, recognising the wealth of folk imagination present in their cultural expressions. He claims that the unconventional elements in his works compared to the fantastical narratives commonly exchanged in rural Ireland. Synge underscores the significance of representing the vibrancy and genuineness of the Irish language and customs in his literary compositions, emphasising the capacity for writers to merge linguistic richness with a sincere portrayal of reality, or "[i]n other words, [he] considers wild nature in the countryside crucial in providing Irish writers with creative imagination, making their writings exceptional" (Chang 185). The significance of Hiberno-English in Synge's works lies in its ability to authentically capture the linguistic nuances and cultural essence of the Irish population. By employing Hiberno-English, he was able to portray the Irish characters in a realistic and relatable manner, adding depth, and authenticity to his narratives. This linguistic choice not only enhanced the audience's connection to the characters but also contributed to the representation of Irish identity and cultural heritage in his plays.

Another significant contribution of Synge to Irish drama can be found in his thorough incorporation of myths. His integration of myths not only added depth and richness to his plays but offered a unique perspective on Irish culture and identity, as well. Synge skilfully fused elements of folklore and mythology into his works, creating a narration that resonated with audiences and spoke to the essence of the identity. By utilising the rich heritage of myths and legends, he infused his plays with a sense of timelessness and universality, engaging viewers with themes that transcended the confines of the stage. His theatrical works exemplify his profound interest in and engagement with the mythological narratives of both Irish and Greek cultures as he merges components from these intricate storytelling heritages to construct compelling plots that surpass conventional cultural confines. Infusing myths into Irish literary works was in fact not a novel attempt at Irish literary tradition as Kiberd states that the

> Bardic poetry had been filled with learned references to the texts of ancient Greece and Rome. As early as the twelfth century, the first Irish-language translation of Virgil … made its appearance: and thereafter texts abounded with comparisons between local heroes and Aeneas, local beauties and Helen, local scholars and Ennius. The collapse of the bardic schools after 1600 in no way blunted this

commitment to the classics. On the contrary, it gave to their study (still linked to the study of Irish) the glamour of an outlaw activity (allied to the more virtue of defending ancient tradition). (*Amid Our Troubles* vii-viii)

The amalgamation of Irish heritage and Greek mythology in literature proved to be a powerful blend during the colonial era of Ireland. Writers drawing analogies with ancient Greece often conveyed similarly subversive implications that would resonate in later periods. As opposed to how England integrated the tradition into their education system in order to lay "great emphasis on the study of Latin as a character-forming activity" by implanting the imperial and administrative mentality "to initiate students in the rhetoric of empire," for the Irish "[t]he classics … provided a discourse in which the various forces contending for power in Ireland could be represented" (Kiberd ix-xi). This focus is logical when considering the unique position of the 'classic' in Ireland, where it was more commonly utilised to challenge the notion of Ireland as a genuine alternative to the class-based society of imperial Britain rather than to endorse imperial endeavours. The undermining of these ideals did not originate internally but externally; unlike in England and elsewhere in Europe, there was no internal conflict between "'unhealthy' romanticism [and] 'healthy-minded' neo-classical aestheticism" (Kiberd xii) in Ireland. The concept of literature as a reflection of a superior social consensus persisted and even grew stronger, negating the need for a romantic movement in Irish literary tradition. Walton states that "the rewriting of Greek tragedy becomes such a crucial part of the critical response to the political situation both north and south of the border in Ireland," (11) particularly from the beginning of the twentieth century when Ireland went into a tenacious fight for reclamation of sociocultural and political emancipation. The engagement of the Irish with the classical drama aimed to "dissect the manner in which drama in Ireland has staked out the battlefields of struggle and debate" and to "draw attention to the manner in which drama has functioned as both macrocosm and microcosm" (11). Synge's primitivist approach had great cooperation with how the myths of Antiquity are employed in Irish drama: the realistic and authentic representation of the Irish people and the design of the story and plot define the microcosmic function of the myths he engages with, and the greater picture in which the socio-cultural and political image of Ireland is discussed and interrogated constitutes the macrocosmic contexts of those myths in his plays. As one of the pioneering playwrights of the Irish Renaissance,

Synge abundantly benefited both from his own Irish heritage and the long-appreciated and aspired Ancient Greek myths. In *Riders to the Sea*, he delves into Irish mythological elements by exploring the relationship between the inhabitants of the Aran Islands and the sea. The relentless power of the sea and themes of loss and fate in the play are reminiscent of Irish myths surrounding nature and death. Moreover, *The Tinker's Wedding*, showcases Synge's use of Irish rural life and traditions, intertwining themes of love, marriage, and societal expectations (Özçeşmeci 62-63; 95-96). However, his masterpiece *The Playboy of the Western World* deserves the most notable mention since his engagement with the myths goes beyond simply employing mythical elements to provide direct and transparent repercussions of the Irish heritage on the Irishmen. Here, Synge melds Sophocles' mythical tragedy *Oedipus the Rex* into his "wholly Irish play" (Arkins 49), altering and subverting the original tragedy into a comedy. This transformation aims to depict the essence of the true Irishman and highlights the dangers of disillusionment due to the glorified representations of the Irishmen through Gaelic-Irish mythical heroes by his contemporaries such as Yeats and Lady Gregory. Synge's innovative approach not only showcases his literary prowess but also challenges traditional perceptions of Irish mythology and its significance in the changing socio-cultural landscape of Ireland which was at the dawn of its reawakening.

The Playboy of the Western World, widely regarded as a groundbreaking work in both Irish and English modern comedic drama of the twentieth century, ignited fierce controversies and tumultuous reactions among audiences from the moment of its debut performance on 26 January 1907, at the Abbey Theatre (Özçeşmeci 123). Within the creative circles of the Theatre, there was a sense of expectation regarding the potential for unrest, stemming from the history of Synge's previous works which had already proven provocative among nationalist audiences in Dublin. The upheaval and criticisms surrounding *The Playboy* unfolded in a manner that mirrored the reception experienced by Synge's earlier theatrical endeavours, marking a consistent pattern of fervent reactions elicited by his narratives. However, *The Playboy* received the harshest reaction from the Irish audience because the play "examines the dynamics of an entire village, not an isolated cottage, and as a result, the criticism launched by *Playboy* strikes far more powerfully at the audience's perception of rural Ireland as a whole, with all the political

implications that criticism generates" (Cusack 15). Synge foresaw the strong negative response his play would receive from audiences. William Fay asserts that when crafting *The Playboy,* Synge aimed to retaliate against an audience that had found his earlier works, particularly *The Well of the Saints* objectionable as, for the audience, the play "seem[ed] very unsatisfactory by comparison with" the great performance of *Riders to the Sea* (Greene 103). Fay further recalls that "[Synge] would not forgive the crass ignorance, the fatuity, the malevolence with which *The Well of Saints* has been received. […] 'Very well, then,' he [Synge] said to me bitterly one night, 'the next play I write I will make sure will annoy them.' And he did" (211). However, it would be a false argument to claim that Synge only aimed at writing an offensive play out of a grudge; in fact, "Synge was gradually improving his art of writing with these plays […] [and] ultimately completed his great play, *The Playboy of the Western World* which is probably the most controversial play in Irish social and theatre history" (Özçeşmeci 122) as he meticulously constructed an 'honest' play which was able to truly represent the dynamics of the rural Irishmen within their home. The play's controversial nature stems from its deep-seated themes and the deliberate provocations employed by Synge to challenge societal norms and evoke strong reactions from audiences. The play's exploration of morality, the nature of heroism, and the consequences of 'making your own myth' started the violent reactions as, in the play, the protagonist Christy Mahon reclaims his identity and builds a 'false' reputation among the villagers through making his patricide an epic story. With *The Playboy*, Synge received many a praising comment from his contemporaries and later scholars; for instance, Eugene Benson considers the play as "Synge's masterpiece, the play which brought him international fame" (*Synge* 112). Christopher Murray also positively comments on the play and states that it "encompasses the full gamut of [Synge's] extraordinary powers" (80). Nonetheless, the primitivist composition of the play, which shed a penetrating and 'honest' light through the true essence of its characters – indeed the Irishmen – ignited lots of inquiries, as well. Maurice Bourgeois poses a question essential for a comprehensive understanding of the play: "What is the 'comedy' about?" (194). What caused such harsh riots during the staging of the play was indeed this notion of comedy. The Irish nationalist found that a whole village of people was described as in awe with a story of killing and showing an incredible interest in patricide was no less humiliating and questionable than this story was

composed by a member of Ascendancy. However, such inquiry delves into the nuanced interplay between comedy and societal reflection in Synge's work, inviting a deeper exploration of the multifaceted layers of the play.

Although, at first, seemed like a mere comedy which centralises on a murderous son who soon becomes a hero, Synge's *The Playboy* proves the playwright's prowess when analysed profoundly due to its intricately constructed layers of primitivist depiction of its characters, employment of Hiberno-English, and the integration of mythical elements. Unlike his earlier plays, *The Playboy,* instead of providing a close observation of the elements of Irish culture, brings an unexpected touch of social confrontation through the subversion of myths. Synge required the Irishmen to accept their true Irish identity while striving for their sociopolitical and cultural independence from the oppressive English authority. For him, what should be reclaimed was to be the true Irishness instead of an embellished and glamorised character with the Gaelic-Irish heritage as R. R. Sanderlin argues that the play is "in fact a direct satire on Irish romanticism. […] [A]nd the Mayo men […] are all satirised and that it is unreal to distinguish between the imaginative playboy and the prosaic 'fools of earth'" ("Ironic Hero" 289-301). Declan Kiberd argues in *Synge and the Irish Language* that *The Playboy of the Western World* evokes the action and excitement of the Cuchulain cycle at many points, the better to mock the puny latter-day reality of life among the peasantry," (109) or as T. R. Henn also describes the play as "a semi-parody of the Celtic heroic cycles" (qtd. in Kiberd 111) and that "Christy Mahon, it has been claimed, is a parody version of Cuchullain [sic] – or at least 'has done a deed equivalent to Cuchullain's modern peasant terms" (Grene 133). Moreover, Synge composes the play first as a farce as was apparent in its initial title 'The Murderer: A Farce', "in which the action was to begin with the fight between father and son in the potato garden, and to end with Christy's exposure just as he has been elected County Councillor in Mayo" (Grene 136). So, the main structure Synge built the play upon was a farce and "[i]ts central device is what Bergson called the 'snowball' – the preposterous growth of a misconception" (136). This farcical structure can also be regarded as another layer of the *Playboy* since "[i]t is such a mechanism … which gathers speed and momentum as the action progresses, that we find in *The Playboy*" (137). The base of the

play lies in simple theatrical forms, which Synge then advances towards greater complexity.

However, his integration of mythical elements is not limited solely to Irish cultural heritage; he also integrates the Sophoclean tragedy *Oedipus the Rex* into the protagonist's progress throughout the story. His integration is not as direct and apparent as the integration of Irish myths such as in *The Tinker's Wedding* or *The Well of Saints*. Synge, in his masterpiece, uses an untraditional literary element and technique for the period to further his investigation of the Irish identity: reconstruction of myths. He subverts the original structure of the myth of Oedipus as a parricide in a tragedy, and, the protagonist of Synge, "Christy the parricide [becomes] a mock Oedipus" (Grene 133). Synge's intent in writing a 'mock-Oedipus' tale was not to ridicule the tragedy but to portray an Irish character through the lens of Oedipus' fate, using comedic elements to ultimately arrive at his central focus of 'disillusionment'. By deconstructing created myths, he suggests that a genuine Irish identity can be reached by freeing oneself from the myths built around it. He achieves this by subversion of the tragic myth.

Subversion means "to overturn, overthrow, undermine, weaken or uproot, especially by covert action, structures of authority and order pertaining to a country, a government or apolitical regime" (*OED* 3127). However, in a moral sense, subversion is carried out "in favour of another, marvellous, 'super-reality'," (Goya 3) which can be interpreted as an act of altering the current reality, the current story, or the current character to be able to create a space to achieve the better version of them. Ross claims that "subversion may very well lead to revolution," however these two terms are not interchangeable as "the latter is as brutally sudden, disruptive and definitive as the former is slow and subtle, […] and generally based on indirection" (*Sub-Versions* 1). So literarily speaking, the revolution that subversion leads to a transformation that is gradual, nuanced, and often indirect, where the existing norms, narratives, or characters are challenged and redefined subtly. This process of subversion paves the way for a potential revolution, which contrasts the slow and intricate nature of subversion with a more abrupt, radical, and definitive upheaval of the status quo. Hence, the subversion of myths in literary works has the same purpose: to create a narrative which transmits past experiences to future

generations in a way that challenges conventional beliefs and societal norms, ultimately paving the way for a re-evaluation of history and a deeper understanding of the complexities of human experiences.

Building upon the theme of mythic subversion, the works of Synge exemplify a distinct approach to challenging traditional narratives. By subverting the archetype of Oedipus and reimagining it within the context of Irish rural characters, Synge aims to demythologise the nationalist vigour of the twentieth century which might hinder the Irishmen acknowledging their identity in that the successive retellings of the Irish heroic past can cause misleading acceptance. Declan Kiberd provides a thorough explanation of Synge's purpose in writing *The Playboy* as

> [t]he play is not simply a critique of Yeats's and Lady Gregory's Cuchulain, nor is it just another sally against the Gaelic League's idealisation of the countryman. It is a challenge to both schools to concede the essential continuity of both traditions and to recognise the savagery, as well as the beauty, which lies at [the Irishmen's] heart. (114)

Through this innovative reinterpretation, Synge's narrative unfolds as a testament to the transformative power of mythic subversion in deconstructing and reconstructing established mythologies and reinvigorating cultural interpretations. One might easily assume when considering the relationship between *The Playboy* and *Oedipus the Rex* that the former can be a parody of the latter insofar as "the boisterous Irish comedy of bungled attempts at father-killing is so far removed in tone and spirit from the austerely beautiful *Oedipus Rex*" however "[w]ith no attempt to imitate Sophocles' style, and with a plot and characterization remarkable for their vigour and freshness, the comic effect is clearly independent of any familiarity with the original" (Sullivan 242). Synge, in his work, delves into a profound reality concerning the human condition as some critics have noted a sense of 'disenchantment' in the play. Salerno remarks that the life "is not simply an amusing game, a ritual of the ridiculous, but that underneath that ritual men play with disaster" (419). In *The Playboy*, thus, the subversion of the Oedipus myth unravels the complexities of human existence. By reshaping the tragic narrative of Oedipus within an Irish context, Synge sheds light on the inherent struggles individuals face and the consequences of confronting societal norms and expectations. Ultimately, through mythic

subversion, Synge prompts a reflection on the intricate connection between fate and free will, offering an exploration of the human condition in all its multifaceted dimensions.

Synge integrates and subverts the Sophoclean parricide myth through the development of the protagonist, Christy Mahon. In Sophocles' rendition of the Oedipus myth, when King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes have a son, Oedipus, an oracle predicts that he will kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid this fate, they abandon Oedipus on a mountain, but he is rescued and raised in Corinth. Unaware of his true parentage, Oedipus leaves Corinth to evade the prophecy. On his journey, he unknowingly kills King Laius at a crossroads and later saves Thebes from the Sphinx. He then marries Jocasta. However, years later, a plague strikes Thebes due to the unsolved murder of Laius, leading him to seek the truth as the city's king. Oedipus, the ruler of Thebes, is determined to uncover the truth behind the plague. Through his investigation, he discovers his own tragic fate - that he unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy by killing his father, King Laius, and marrying his mother, Queen Jocasta. Horrified by this revelation, Jocasta takes her own life, and Oedipus blinds himself in a moment of intense despair. The play concludes with him being exiled from Thebes, accepting his guilt and facing the consequences of his tragic actions.

So, what is the connection between the tragedy of Sophocles and the comedy of Synge, then? Sullivan suggests that Synge continuously emphasises the parricide committed by the protagonist in a way that such resemblance would echo in the minds of the audience throughout the play (242). The character of Christy Mahon, who gains notoriety after claiming to have murdered his father, mirrors the archetype of the tragic hero found in Greek mythology and is a close reference to Sophocles' Oedipus in that both characters commit patricide. He is called or introduced as "the man who killed his father," with like phrases, many times throughout the play (*The Playboy* 20-50). Even the accounts of Christy's and Oedipus' attacks are similar to each other: Christy recalls the event, which is later to be revealed false, as "I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack," (*The Playboy* 21-22) which echoes Oedipus' version, "[b]y one swift blow from the staff in this hand he was rolled right out of the carriage, on his back" (*Oedipus the King* 153). Another implication that

Oedipus is revitalised in Christy Mahon can be found in the relationship between Christy and Widow Casey in that it resonates with "the second aspect of Oedipus' crime, marriage to his mother" (Sullivan 242). Christy, in horror, protests his father's plan to set a marriage between Christy and Widow Casey as Christy states "'I won't wed her' says I, 'when all knows she did suckle me for six weeks when I came into the world" (*The Playboy* 53). However, Synge cleverly distorts the parallel between these two characters regarding *The Playboy* as the subversion of the original myth of Oedipus. As Grene suggests, "*The Playboy* is a comedy and it plays comic games with the tragic legend of Oedipus: Christy does *not* succeed in killing his father, and he does *not* marry either of the available mother-substitutes" (*The Politics of Drama* 95) who are Pegeen Mike and Widow Casey. While Oedipus actually kills his father and faces rejection upon the revelation of his actions, Christy falsely claims to have killed his father, which is revealed at the end of the play and is revered as a hero. Christy is appointed as a potboy at Michael James Flaherty's pub where he captures the romantic attention of Pegeen Mike as her communication oscillates between a romantic interest and a maternal speech:

> PEGEEN – I'm hard set to know what way a coaxing fellow the like of yourself should be lonesome either. … Would you have me think a man never talked with the girls would have the words you've spoken to-day? … I'm now understanding why you'd be worse than another, Christy Mahon and you a fine lad with the great savagery to destroy your da. (*The Playboy* 63-64).
>
> …
>
> PEGEEN, *sharply*. – Christy. … Come here to me. … Lay down that switch and throw some sods on the fire. You're pot-boy in this place, and I'll have not have you mitch off from us now. (64)
>
> …
>
> CHRISTY, *astonished, slowly*. - … and I can stay so, working at your side, and I now lonesome from this mortal day. (65)
>
> …
>
> PEGEEN *kindly, but a little embarrassed* – I'm thinking you'll be a loyal young lad to have working around. (65)

Here, Pegeen first is seen as she expresses her confusion at Christy's apparent loneliness despite his charming and persuasive nature. She is intrigued by his ability to speak so convincingly, considering him different from less expressive men. Pegeen's romantic inclination towards storytellers and poets influences her attraction to Christy. However,

as the dialogue continues, she reclaims her matriarchal voice as the keeper of her father's shebeen in the absence of his. Her discourse seems to evolve into a more formal and business-like, yet it is apparent that she develops an interest in Christy, 'the man who killed his da' as her tone is mostly "*kindly, but a little embarrassed*" (65). Her idealisation of Christy leads her to persuade her father to approve their marriage over Shawn who embodies a contrasting persona to Christy. However, this idealisation will be crucial in determining Christy's identity -through which Synge tries to demythologise the Irishness- through the end of the play in that, as the truth about Christy's father being alive emerges, Pegeen's romantic notions give way to a sense of betrayal and disappointment. Her initial infatuation with Christy fades as she realises his capacity for violence, which challenges her romanticised view of him and reveals her underlying naiveté in misjudging his character in which she sees "a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed" (126). Thus, in a way, Christy subverts what the fate of Oedipus requires and does not marry one of the two maternal figures. The other one is Widow Casey. The Widow Casey serves as another maternal figure similar to Jocasta, displaying both maternal desires and protective instincts towards Christy throughout the play; yet, as mentioned above, Christy does not consider her as a spouse figure in any way for she breastfed him when he was a baby. Hence, the second mother figure is also discarded from the incestuous relationship which leads Oedipus to his tragic downfall. Akin states that "[i]n the Oedipal myth, Oedipus transgresses the blood -or kinship rules- by marrying and having sexual relations with his mother. The immorality of incest, based on the idea that blood relatives should not mate the progeny of such unions are tainted and unnatural, is at the heart of Sophocles' tale" (57). It can be proclaimed that the incest committed by the protagonist in *Oedipus the Rex* highlights the severe consequence of the downfall of morality in individuals and, thus in society. So, in *The Playboy*, Synge reverses such a calamity by completely subverting the plot of the tragedy in his comedy by portraying Christy's rejection of both maternal figures, Pegeen and the Widow Casey, as potential spouses. By deviating from the incestuous relationships central to the Oedipal myth, the play challenges the notion of immorality and tragic consequences associated with such taboo unions.

Furthermore, Synge's depiction of parricide can be considered to have a deeper message stretching beyond its 'subverting' nature. The act of parricide in J.M. Synge's *The*

Playboy of the Western World serves as a metaphor for the protagonist's liberation from a pre-existing identity shaped by paternal authority. This familial conflict, reflecting the broader Ireland/England dynamic, illustrates a struggle between two opposing identities. In this scenario, the identity constructed by the authorial figure subsumes the other, suggesting that the son's annexation of the father's persona reinforces the father's authentic self while suppressing the son's individuality by imposing a predetermined identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, England enforced centuries-long sociopolitical and cultural sanctions on Ireland to suppress and control the country. It always had a mechanical endeavour to define Ireland as 'the other.' As modernity reached its peak, Western notions of civilisation became increasingly introspective, focusing on its own identity. This self-reflection was often couched in a framework that marginalised Ireland, reinforcing the colonial dichotomy that positioned England as the benchmark of civilisation in contrast to the perceived backwardness of Irish identity. Consequently, this complex interplay of identities reveals the layered tensions in colonial narratives, illuminating how modernity both shaped and constrained cultural perceptions on both sides of the relationship. As Declan Kiberd argues, "[e]ach nation needed the other, for the purpose of defining itself," (*Inventing Ireland* 2) it can be understood that self-reflected authentic identity inherently depends on its imposition of a delimiting framework upon 'the other,' much like the paternal figure exists amid the authoritative cacophony of autocratic voices that resonate within the son. This imposition creates a relational dynamic where the identity of the self is defined not only in isolation but through opposition and dominance over the other. Thus, the father's voice becomes a metaphor for broader societal pressures that constrain individual identity, suggesting that selfhood cannot fully emerge without confronting and negotiating the influences of external authority. This interplay illustrates the complexity of identity formation where autonomy is often intertwined with, yet simultaneously limited by, established hierarchies and power relations. Robert J. Bocock associates the symbolic father with "the severe enforcer of authority, above all as the prohibitor…[that] has reserved all creativity" (*The Symbolism* 209). Bocock's contextual insight regarding the loss of authenticity can indeed be expanded to encompass the consequences of domination. The autocratic control establishes a realm in which latent subjects are diminished to mere subjection, thereby compromising their autonomy. In this dynamic, the father figure assimilates the son's

ontological authenticity into his own identity spectrum, effectively erasing the son's individual essence. This integration highlights the disempowerment inherent in hierarchical relationships where the son's self-definition is subsumed by paternal authority, resulting in a fractured sense of self that reflects a disjointed reality. The denouement of this interaction emphasises the profound implications of power structures on identity formation, revealing how domination stifles genuine selfhood and perpetuates cycles of subordination. For instance, some degree of self-indignation is apparent in Christy's words when he speaks of his father, "(*in a very reasonable tone*): He was a dirty man, God forgive him, and he getting old and crusty, the way I couldn't put up with him at all" (*The Playboy* 18). It can be deduced that the authentic self of his father ('dirty,' 'old and crusty') felt like an entrapment which he sought to escape ('couldn't put up with,'). It becomes more apparent in each word of Christy recalling his past with his father that he wanted to leave the "bitter life he had for [him]" (*The Playboy* 26). Tabitha Freeman calls this process a "separate identity," (Concepts of Fatherhood 122) in other words, the father embodies a 'symbolic separation'[11] of his son's identity from his authentic self, illustrating the complexities of relational dynamics in identity formation. This separation occurs as the father's authority and expectations impose a framework that distorts or suppresses the son's inherent qualities and individuality. In Christy's case, Old Mahon's attempt to marry his son to a maternal figure can be regarded as a reason for Christy's committing parricide. Instead of fostering the son's authentic self, the father's presence creates a bifurcation between the son's genuine identity and the external persona shaped by paternal influence. This symbolic separation suggests that the son's identity becomes a mediated construct characterised by the need to navigate the expectations and limitations set forth by the father. Consequently, this dynamic not only reinforces the power imbalance inherent in their relationship but also highlights the psychological struggle of the son to reclaim a sense of authenticity amidst pervasive paternal control.

As noted previously, the father's role can be likened to that of a 'psychic colonialist,' exerting control and influence over the son's identity. This metaphor extends to historical contexts such as the relationship between England and Ireland where England's

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[11] For further information, see Verhaeghe, Paul. "Lacan's Answer to Alienation: Separation" *Crisis & Critique*. Edited by Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda, vol. 6, no. 1, 2019.

dominance over Ireland resulted in a systemic and pervasive form of cultural subjugation. The colonial experience effectively 'catapulted' Ireland into a state of pre-fabrication, wherein the authentic essence of Irish identity—including language, religion, and cultural practices—was undermined and redefined according to the dictates of the colonial power. Kiberd suggests that, metaphorically, England's imperial intervention can be visualised as an attempt to create a 'portrait' of Irish identity using "cruel brushstrokes" emblematic of so-called enlightened dignity (*Inventing Ireland* 1). Deprived of autonomy while living under the 'protection' of the father, the 'othered' Irish identity was subjected to colonisation by the authority and moral influence of the father's presence, or in Kiberd's words, an English Unconscious started to dwell in the Irish body (15). Thus, whether considered on a symbolic level or within a broader framework, the focus on 'colonialism' concerning identity is unwavering. Consequently, as previously noted, this framework effectively confines the potential individual to a state of impossibility regarding their authentic self-expression. Thus, for Synge, it can be stated that the revisiting of the Oedipal myth of parricide provided a convenient ground to investigate Ireland's colonial identity through Christy Mahon's 'claiming' his own authentic self. Christy, as a son, embarks on a journey toward his own freedom and personal individuation. He transforms himself into his own tailor, intricately weaving his identity with expressions of authenticity. In this process, he not only asserts his individuality but also imbues his identity with elements that reflect his unique experiences and perspectives:

> CHRISTY – I'm telling you, and he a man never gave peace to any…(*with depression*) the way it was a bitter life he led me till I did up a Tuesday and halves his skull.
>
> […]
>
> WIDOW QUINN – It should have been a great and bitter torments did rouse your spirits to a deed of blood.
>
> CHRISTY – It should, maybe. (*The Playboy* 26-28)

In this context, the coming together of fragmented elements emphasises the importance of parricide which symbolises a revolutionary act that reveals the potential for marginalised individuals—such as the son and Ireland—to find authenticity through their independence. For example, Christy's powerful declaration can be seen as a bold rejection of servitude, indicating his revival from feelings of alienation and his commitment to

individual identity when he states, "I've *won me* in the end of time…till I'm thinking this night wasn't I foolish fellow not to kill father on the years gone by" (*The Playboy* 31; emphasis added). This act of defiance represents his refusal to accept imposed identities and his pursuit of a self-determined life. Moreover, this image of parricide can be extended to Ireland, conveying a powerful message that emphasises the necessity of rejecting colonial authority to reclaim an authentic identity. The metaphorical call to 'kill your father' signifies the need for Ireland to dismantle the dominant power structures that inhibit self-regulation and true autonomy. In doing so, the nation can embark on a path toward self-determination and genuine self-expression, free from the constraints of external control. Overall, Synge's reinterpretation of Sophoclean tragedy reveals complex dualities, particularly relating to the theme of losing one's identity due to the dictatorship imposed by others, as seen in the dynamic between England and Ireland as well as between the father and the son/Christy Mahon and Old Mahon. In this context, symbolic parricide emerges as a transformative act that embodies the idea of 'refusal to submit to authority'. This act is essential in fostering a self-regulating and authentic identity while addressing the alienation from one's true self. Thus, the notion of parricide not only challenges oppressive influences but also paves the way for personal and national reclamation of authenticity.

Both *The Playboy* and *Oedipus Rex* depict a community where a man arrives as a stranger, unfamiliar even to himself, and is appreciated as a hero by society due to a past heroic act that has revitalised the land in need. Both Christy and Oedipus arrive at the place with unknown and incomplete identities of which the facts and mysteries about them "uncover a truth which proves too harsh for the society to accept—with the result that [both men are] forced to leave it as [they] came, a stranger and alone" (Sullivan 243). Viewed in this manner, Synge's comedy can be interpreted as a purposeful reinterpretation of Sophocles' tragedy concerning the exploration of mythology's influence on human affairs despite its stark contrast in tone. He demonstrates the enduring relevance of how mythology, serving as a "'constructive lie'" (243) enables individuals with the heroic potential to fulfil a transformative societal function and, in the process, discover their own identity. Moreover, he emphasises that while myth initially empowers individuals, true heroic fulfilment is achieved when one can progress beyond it, delving deep into the

uncomfortable truth at its essence. Oedipus' greatness, according to this interpretation, is found in his act of demythologising himself as he insists on uncovering and accepting, despite the grave consequences, the reality of his identity. As Sullivan suggests, "Synge pointing out that his protagonist's heroic stature depends finally on his ability to do what the ordinary man cannot do—unmake the myth and accept the truth it had hidden" (243). Furthermore, with a comedic approach instead of a tragic one, Synge aims to achieve a similar objective as Sophocles but through a contrasting method. He reverses the fundamental narrative, demonstrating not only the deconstruction of the myth but also the process of its creation. So, Christy Mahon should be read as "the very antithesis of the Aristotelian tragic hero" (Arkins 49). He is described as "a small, low fellow," and "a dirty, stuttering loud" who gradually becomes a laughingstock of the village (*The Playboy* 70-74); in contrast, Oedipus is "the accursed defiler of this land" (*Oedipus Rex* 133). Christy receives unexpected endorsements and receives total acclaim for his crime ("Well, you're a marvel! Oh, God bless you! You're the lad surely!" [*The Playboy* 55]). While Oedipus, feeling ashamed, is concerned about the ruined hopes of his children ("who shall be the man, my daughters, that will hazard taking unto himself such reproaches … ?," [*Oedipus Rex* 180]) Christy is assured of marrying Pegeen Mike and receives the generous approval of her father too as Michael Flaherty appraises him: "A daring fellow is the jewel of the world, a man did split his father's middle with a single clout should have the bravery of ten, so may God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you, and increase you from this mortal day" (*The Playboy* 115). Synge's comedic reversal, coupled with his need to reach an audience less familiar with mythical elements compared to his predecessors, necessitates condensing both the creation and destruction of the myth within the play's narrative. This results in a perceived stronger focus on the benefits rather than the consequences for the protagonist in his quest for truth. In a similar vein to Sophocles, Synge, through a comedic lens, emphasises the necessity of demythologising and illustrates the significant impact it has on the protagonist. Christy Mahon, albeit on a smaller scale, undergoes a relentless journey towards confronting his own harsh reality, mirroring the compelling pursuit seen in the tale of Oedipus. Walter Kaufmann in *Tragedy and Philosophy* says, "[t]he central spring of the action of Sophocles' tragedy is not, as it well might have been, fate but rather Oedipus' imperious passion for truth," (122) thus, what truly matters is not whether the hero falls victim to fate or personal flaw,

but rather the acknowledgement that his ultimate triumph stems from his relentless dedication to seeking truth for the sake of truth itself. In the same manner, "Synge's play is a satire on Irish romanticizing, to overlook what he sought to make clear by linking his play with Oedipus Rex, that his hero's victory is of the same kind, if not degree, as that of Sophocles' hero" (Sullivan 244).

Both plays depict the hero's journey towards self-discovery through a series of interactions with others. In each narrative, exposure to differing perspectives compels the hero to reassess his self-perception in light of unexpected revelations, which leads to a transformation of identity. In Oedipus' case, encounters with Teiresias, the Messenger, and the Herdsman gradually reveal the harsh truth until he confronts the devastating realisation of being the fated murderer. Conversely, for Christy, who acknowledges being a 'father-killer,' the transformation progresses in a contrasting manner:

> [I]n his successive encounters with others—the tavern men, Pegeen, Widow Quin, the village girls—he adopts their different view of himself only temporarily, almost like a near-sighted man trying on various spectacles until he finds a pair that provides a satisfactory view. Once the 'creative lie' has done its work, however, and Christy has found in it release for his latent powers as poet and 'playboy,' he too must endure the dissolution of the myth, putting aside the borrowed viewpoints and facing unflinchingly the stark truth about himself. (Chaudhuri 44-45).

In examining the journeys of both Oedipus and Christy in their quests for self-identity, it is evident that their encounters with other characters play a crucial role in shaping their self-perception. Oedipus' revelations through different characters lead him on a path of gradual discovery, ultimately culminating in the shattering realisation of his fate as the cursed killer. On the other hand, Christy's interactions with the villagers depict a process where he temporarily adopts varying viewpoints of himself, akin to trying on different perspectives before settling on one which offers a satisfactory perspective. However, as the 'creative lie' aids Christy in unleashing his poetic and adventurous nature, he too must confront the dissolution of the myth he has constructed and face the unadulterated truth about himself. This parallel journey stresses the transformative power of self-discovery and the inevitable confrontation with one's authentic identity, free from borrowed perceptions and illusions.

The subversion and unmaking of the myth of Oedipus in *The Playboy* is significant for Synge to establish the ultimate notion of 'mythmaking' for the Irishmen. Synge dismantles the established archetype, reflecting on the process of mythmaking itself. The play's protagonist, Christy, inadvertently contributes to the creation of a new myth surrounding himself as the 'father-killer,' which initially serves as a liberating force, allowing him to embrace latent qualities as a poet and rebel. Sullivan explains the steps of this revelatory process:

> [T]he making of myth as a social act compris[es] two distinct elements: first, the potential hero's need for an image of greatness to conform to, an image he can only derive from the accepted values of the community in which he finds himself; and second, the need of that same community for a man capable of embodying its preconceived image of greatness, who can then liberate it from a sense of limitation by performing high exploits with such ceremonial or ritualistic style that they take on a semi-religious or transcendent dimension. (245)

To support the idea that the aspiring hero relies heavily on societal norms to define heroic conduct and can only shape his identity by adhering to communal standards, Synge presents Christy Mahon as a character with an ambiguous self-perception, making him highly vulnerable to external perceptions of himself. On his arrival in Mayo, as a terrified fugitive, Christy admits his own confusion with his own state: "It's little enough I'm understanding myself" having lived a life of ignorance and scolding (*The Playboy* 64). "Up to the day I killed my father, there wasn't a person in Ireland knew the kind I was, and I there drinking, waking, eating, sleeping, a quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving me heed," he tells Pegeen, "There wasn't anyone heeding me in that place saving only the dumb beasts of the field" (32). Should the villagers recognise him, he would be insulted and called "the looney of Mahon's" (77). Such assessment was the reason why Christy committed the father-killing crime and escaped from his own family and community. He has no substitute 'myth' to replace 'the looney Mahon,' not until the unexpected reaction of the tavern crowd to his confession of killing his father introduces an interesting new opportunity: He cannot believe that Pegeen praises him:

> PEGEEN. – You should have had great people in your family, I'm thinking, with the little small feet you have, and you with a kind of quality name, the like of what you'd fine on the great powers and potentates of France and Spain. … you a fine, handsome young fellow with a noble brow.

> CHRISTY, *with a flash of delighted surprise* – Is it me? (28-29).

The interest initially shown by Pegeen in Christy -later to be spread to the whole village-provides an optimum space for Christy to develop his own myth as he embraces the belief that he truly possesses heroic qualities as he believes that he is " a seemly fellow with great strength in [him] and bravery" (35). This transformation in Christy Mahon's self-perception highlights the significant impact of societal norms and external validation on identity formation. Initially characterised by self-doubt and insignificance, Christy's interactions with the villagers—especially through Pegeen's affirmations—catalyse his metamorphosis into a figure of perceived heroism. As he internalises their admiration, he begins to embrace the qualities of strength and bravery that he previously questioned. This shift underscores a central theme in Synge's work, which is that individual identity is largely shaped by societal perception and the collective imagination of the community, illustrating the complex dynamics between personal aspiration and communal endorsement in the pursuit of heroism.

To emphasise that the emerging hero requires an external perspective of himself to realise his heroism, Synge employs several stage devices like props, costumes, and the connection of characters to measure Christy's progression towards authentic self-awareness. Sophocles employed similar techniques by utilising visual motifs of sight and blindness to hint at Oedipus' eventual physical blindness when he comprehends reality. According to Sullivan, "Synge relies on the simple, concrete, and mundane object" to demonstrate the significance of external appearance for Christy's mythmaking process – "structuring of a self-image" (245-46). The looking glass, featured in the second act when the local girls gather to admire the "man who killed his father," serves as a tool through which Christy can observe himself from an external perspective:

> CHRISTY, *to himself, counting jugs on dresser.* – Half a hundred beyond. Ten there. A score that's above. Eighty jugs. Six cups and a broken one. … (*He puts them down and goes by degrees to the looking-glass.*) Well, this'd be a fine place to be my whole life … smoking my pipe and drinking my fill, … wiping a glass, or rinsing out a shiny tumbler for a decent man. … Didn't I know rightly I was handsome, though it was the divil's own mirror we had beyond, … I'll be growing fine from this day, the way I'll have a soft lovely skin on me and won't be the like of the clumsy young fellows do be ploughing all time in the earth and dung. (44-45)

In re-evaluating his self-perception, it is intriguing that he attributes the shift in perspective to the influence of the new mirror rather than acknowledging any internal change or personal development. He perceives the mirror as merely reflecting a more accurate representation of what he had deep down always suspected about himself, suggesting a complex interplay between external validation and internal belief in shaping one's sense of identity. Similarly, the clothes Christy wears function as a tool through which he gains insight into how he is perceived by others, consequently informing his self-image and guiding his outward presentation of self. Shawn Keogh bribes Christy with "[his] new hat; … and [his] breeches with the double seat …; and [his] new coat … woven from the blackest shearings" (67) for him to leave Pegeen and Mayo for good. Widow Quin convinces Christy to put the clothes on before deciding and then she says, "[i]f you seen yourself now, I'm thinking you'd be too proud to speak to us at all" (71). Indeed, "Christy *is* 'seeing himself' now," (Sullivan 247, emphasis in original) and the clothes serve as an insight into the societal expectations placed upon him and aid in his understanding of the image he is expected to embody. It is in the final scene that he demonstrates the ability to differentiate between his external appearance and his intrinsic identity. Faced with a hostile crowd and rejecting Widow Quin's offer of escape through a demeaning disguise of a shawl and petticoat (123-25), he resists compromising his newfound sense of self-worth, thus refusing to disavow his heroic status: "[A]nd I a proven hero in the end of all" (123). Sullivan argues that "the rejection shows that he is, even at this stage, still associating appearance with behavior; he will be truly self-actualised only at that point when he can see himself a hero while the jeering crowd binds him and drags him off to be hanged" (247).

Synge establishes the initial element of mythmaking by highlighting the hero's imperative for a persona to adhere to. Concurrently, he portrays the second facet - the community's craving for a hero - with equal clarity. Similar to the plague-stricken Thebans who revered Oedipus as their saviour, the Mayo villagers are eager to embrace any individual capable of ameliorating their desolate existence. In the opening scene, Pegeen recalls the history of Mayo as a "place where you'll meet none but Red Linahan, has a squint in his eye, and Patcheen is lame in his heel, or the mad Mulrannies were driven from California and they lost in their wits"; however, as the men of the glorious days are now gone, Pegeen asks

"Where now will you meet the like of Daneen Sullivan … or Marcus Quin, God rest him, … to tell stories of holy Ireland … Where will you find the like of them, I'm saying?" (4). By portraying Christy as an acknowledged parricide in this scene, Synge highlights the themes of suppression and illustrates the community's profound sense of subjugation as Christy's act of violence garners not only approval but also envy among them. In introducing Christy as not merely a murderer but specifically as the killer of his own father, Synge effectively taps into the deep-rooted psychological connotations associated with the father figure as a representation of constraint, inhibiting an individual's complete realisation of their humanity. This is apparent in the play when "the convention-bound Shawn Keogh confesses to a jealousy of Christy for having had such an opportunity" (Sullivan 248) when he states, "[o]h, it's a hard case to be an orphan and not to have your father that you're used to, and you'd easy kill and make yourself a hero in the sight of all" (*The Playboy* 69-70). The consensus is that patricide elevates Christy to a status deserving of significant trust and responsibility, which contributes to the space in which Christy unmakes his past myths to find his essential identity.

Moreover, Christy begins to realise that to evolve into the hero destined to be the 'playboy of the Western world,' he must transcend mere violent actions. The depiction suggests that pure violence alone does not suffice to constitute heroism; rather, it necessitates a narrative imbued with an aesthetically enriching design of epic magnitude capable of evoking a sense of wonder and reverence. For instance, Widow Quin stands apart from societal acceptance despite having committed a spousal murder, however, her action lacked the imaginative style that would typically elevate such deeds to a realm of artistic merit as Pegeen describes the event, "[s]he hit himself with a worn pick, and the rusted poison did corrode his blood the way he never overed it, and died after" (38). Christy's initial portrayal of his deed mirrors the crude nature of the act of Widow Quin, lacking the sophistication and artistic refinement that typically accompany narratives of heroism or grandeur: "I just riz the loy and let fall the edge of it on the ridge of his skull, and he went down at my feet like an empty sack, and never let a grunt or groan from him at all" (21-22). However, as he becomes more aware of the interest he receives from the villagers, he masters the art of delivering to his audience precisely what they want by the second narrative:

> With that the sun came out between the cloud and the hill, and it shining green in my face. 'God have mercy on your soul,' says he, lifting a scythe; 'or on your own,' says I, raising the loy. … He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet. (54)

His readers' reactions of awe ("That's a grand story," "He tells it lovely" [54]), free his poetic instinct and he builds on the natural background, uses grand speech and dramatic gestures to create suspense, and uses rhythmic analogies, the touch of the supernatural, and ritualistic movements ("I turned around with my back to the north" [54]) to heighten suspense and suggestiveness. Synge is now prepared to demonstrate the demythologisation process in action. In contrast to mythmaking, this process does not involve a collaborative endeavour between a hero and the community; rather, the general population opposes the necessary steps to dispel the myth and is apprehensive about the outcome. "Jocasta's anguished cry to Oedipus – Mayst thou never come to know who thou art!' - represents the ordinary human tendency to turn away from harsh truth into illusion or evasion; the crowd which turns on Christy so quickly in anger and frustration is revealing the same reaction" (Sullivan 250). By illustrating their main characters as able to transcend the natural inclination for a diluted version of reality, both Sophocles and Synge highlight the inevitable solitude that comes with heroic status. The ultimate trial of heroism lies in one's capacity to endure the weight of truth while isolated from others. This scenario notably mirrors the classic archetype of mythical heroes: the individual who saves their society is ultimately betrayed or left alone by the very community they rescued, with society acknowledging the hero's greatness in solitude only upon reflection. Oedipus' most significant trial is indeed exile, and his most heroic deed is self-imposed sentencing: "Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me more" (*Oedipus Rex* 178). Christy's triumph also lies in his ability to decide to depart from his current surroundings and voluntarily return to what he calls the 'torment' of solitary life: "I must go back into my torment is it, or run off like a vagabond straying through the unions with the dusts of August" (*The Playboy* 118). While Oedipus' fate may overshadow Christy's struggles, Synge effectively portrays the torment of solitude for his protagonist through sentimental moments of lamentation from the very beginning: "I was lonesome all times, and born lonesome, I'm thinking, as the moon of dawn … What would any be but odd men and they living

lonesome in the world? … And I not lonesome from this mortal day" (62-63). Synge portrays Christy's yearning for acceptance within the community by illustrating his persistent and anxious attempts to establish connections with others through shared experiences or attitudes, reflecting his desire to discover commonalities with those around him. However, though develops a romantic interest, Pegeen cannot associate herself with Christy's 'myth': "I never cursed my father the like of that, though I'm twenty and more years of age … I never killed my father, I'd be afeard to do that" (31-34). Unlike Christy's struggle to connect with others in the community, the Widow Quin readily embraces the opportunity to associate herself with Christy: It's of the like of you and me you'd hear the penny poets singing in an August Fair" (38). She tells him when Pegeen explains how Widow Quin 'destroyed her man.' Widow Quin acknowledges that the similarity between herself and Christy lies not only in their boldness but also in their shared experience of loneliness: "You'll be doing like myself, I'm thinking, […] when I did destroy my man" (81) and when she states "I am your like, and it's for that I'm taking a fancy to you," (82) as well. Widow Quin acknowledges that both she and Christy are realist individuals who grasp the essence of myth and its constraints. As Sullivan puts forth, "having discovered the falsehood of his father-killing story […] [b]oth understood that they must keep the secret of Old Mahon's reappearance from Pegeen and the other villagers who need the myth and who will turn on Christy as soon as it appears in jeopardy" (252). The indication of the change occurring is evident when Christy admits to the unresponsive crowd that while the myth has revitalised him, he is prepared to allow it to fade and embrace the solitary reality. "For if you're after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie, you're setting me now to think if it's a poor thing to be lonesome, it's worse maybe to go mixing with the fools of earth" (*The Playboy* 120). The villagers distance themselves from the consequences of Christy's actions, which they had previously tried to partake in its glory, as the myth around Christy is unmade. However, despite this dissociation, Christy not only embraces his distinctiveness from others but perceives it as evidence of his superiority, "frightening the crowd with great full-mouthed curses in which he promises to have 'a gay march down' to the gallows, taking some of them along for a 'gallous jaunt'" (Sullivan 252).

As examined above, Synge subverted the very nature of the Sophoclean protagonist whose destiny resulting in a tragic downfall is determined by the myths of parricide and incestuous relationship surrounding him. Oedipus' 'myths' can be considered as inevitable so the tragic *dénouement* would be an important cathartic lesson for Sophocles' audience. However, Synge subverts the myth and provides another alternative path for Christy Mahon where he gradually confronts and denies the 'myths' (imposed by his 'colonial father') in order to be able to reclaim and acknowledge his own identity at the end of the play. Thus, it can be concluded that Synge's subverting the myth of Oedipus enables the 'tragic hero' not to have a tragic end. Christy achieves self-actualisation by stripping off the myths which have been falsely representing him. However, from a more comprehensive perspective, one should also notice that Synge's play is composed as a comedy of which foundational elements are, indeed, adapted from a tragedy. This subversion of the genre can be considered deliberate because of the fact that had Synge written a tragedy instead of a comedy during the times of the Irish Renaissance and independence, it would have failed his initial purpose of writing this story. The audience who had been suffering generational historical trauma caused by centuries-long colonial oppression and famines would not have been able to interpret the play as a 'cautionary tale' if it had been a tragedy. Rather, it might have added to their sense of despair and hopelessness. By choosing a comedic framework, Synge allows for exploring serious themes related to identity and colonialism while fostering a sense of hope and resilience among his audience. Thus, the combination of tragedy and comedy in Synge's work invites a multifaceted interpretation, ultimately encouraging a reconciliation of the past and an affirmation of personal and national identity.

In conclusion, both Irish and Greek myths have indeed left a lasting mark on Irish drama, throughout centuries, with notable influences apparent in J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Synge's play, set in a rural Irish village, showcases themes of betrayal, identity, and societal expectations reminiscent of classical Greek tragedies, timeless themes prevalent in ancient Greek literature. Additionally, Mahon's complex portrayal and the ensuing reactions from other characters echo the dramatic tensions seen in Greek plays. Synge's adaptation of these elements into an Irish context demonstrates the enduring appeal and adaptability of ancient Greek myths, showcasing how such

narratives continue to resonate and find relevance in diverse cultural landscapes. Upon analysing Synge's play in comparison to Sophocles', one concludes that Synge aimed to highlight his affinity with the great classic dramatist in their shared belief that while myth is essential for uncovering mankind's heroic capabilities, it is through dismantling the myth that these potentials are truly realised. The profound seriousness underlying the apparent light-heartedness of *The Playboy of the Western World* can be attributed to Synge's realisation that even within comedy, he was edging towards the brink of tragedy. In this multifaceted play, Synge employs various approaches. He utilises a primitivist approach to depict the rural characters in a manner that captures their essence authentically. Additionally, he subverts the myth of Oedipus to question society's initial reaction to the inherent violence that Irish individuals unknowingly possess within themselves. As a pioneering playwright of the Irish Renaissance, Synge developed a distinct sense of representing Irishmen. His ultimate goal was to make aware of the Irish people who were struggling to find their true voice and spirit due to England's centuries-long sociopolitical and cultural oppression by making the Irishmen acknowledge what their identity essentially holds instead of creating another myth around them, which would be able to create a loop of senselessness. Furthermore, Synge's reinterpretation of the Oedipal parricide myth unveils intricate dualities, particularly highlighting the struggle for identity within the oppressive dictatorship imposed by external forces, specifically the longstanding England/Ireland discrepancy. Within this framework, symbolic parricide emerges as a powerful and transformative act of refusal to yield to authority. By embracing this idea, characters are able to foster a self-regulating and authentic identity while confronting the alienation from their true selves. Consequently, the concept of parricide not only serves to challenge oppressive forces but also facilitates the reclamation of personal and national authenticity.

CHAPTER 3

"I CAN NOR BEND NOR SELL": TRANSLOCATION OF THE ANTIGONE MYTH IN *THE RIOT ACT* BY TOM PAULIN

> "In times of trouble,
> when the relationship between political loyalty
> and individual conscience is at stake,
> there seems to be an irresistible urge
> to return to Sophocles's *Antigone*"
> - Fintan O'Toole (*Irish Times* 2003)

> "Drama deals with disobeyers"
> -Declan Donnellan (*The Actor and the Target* 2005)

When studying the impact of drama on Irish identity, Field Day Theatre Company is no less important than the Abbey Theatre, especially during the tumultuous times of the Troubles. Founded by playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea in 1980 in the city of Derry (D'Addario 3), to achieve their "goal of open and peaceful dialogue" Field Day company preferred "to avoid any overt connections or representations to either side of the sectarian divide" between Catholicism and Protestantism, which was the fundamental cause of the troubles at the time. The premier of *Translations* by Friel in Derry's Guildhall on 23 September 1980 was "in every sense, a unique occasion, with loyalists and nationalists, Unionists and SDLP, Northerners and Southerners laying aside their differences to join in applauding a play by a fellow Derryman and one, moreover, with a theme that is uniquely Irish" (qtd. in Regan 26). Field Day deliberately chose to operate within the domain of theatre, emphasising the connection between theatre and identity in that they were "essentially concerned with the forging of a new sense of cultural identity for Ireland, creating a space in which it might be possible to contemplate a settled existence beyond the brutal realities of [the 1960s]" (Regan 26). Having established a board of directors comprising individuals such as Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, and

Tom Paulin, the company has seen substantial growth in its literary pursuits and ambitions. Richtarik states that "[t]hroughout the 1970s and early 1980s, as people lost confidence in political actions, the idea of culture as an alternative to politics gained ground" (6); hence, concerning Ireland in particular, "Field Day Theatre Company was the leading artistic collaboration in" political drama (Gotsi 162). Friel and Rea started "to establish a theatrical voice free of the constraining influence of either London or Dublin" and to offer that voice to Irish people, "primarily in the North, who had lacked access to professional theater" (Riddel 127). The company was located in Derry, a city of which name was a point of controversy because the city was "referred to as 'Derry' by Nationalists and as 'Londonderry' by Unionists" (Gotsi 163). Therefore, the choice of location was intentional; as Seamus Deane noted, up to that point, the North had never experienced a significant cultural or literary movement and secondly, "Derry was in the north, but right on the border between North and South, 'right on the dangerous edge of things in Ireland'" (184). The location was convenient to create political drama for the Irish to depict the instability of the country and the consequences of the violent acts of the Troubles. There was "symmetry between religious/political convictions […] essential in helping the Field Day steer away from one monologist identity in Northern Ireland" (Steinberger 68). Field Day, as a result, emerged as a cooperative effort among like-minded individuals with a common vision to establish, as Rea articulated it, a "people's theatre" (qtd. in Riddel 131). So, in a 'people's theatre,' as Gotsi explains "[i]deas would be a central part of the communal experience of the plays and would hopefully present something that those people would be able to use to connect to one another and their community as a wider whole" (5). In that sense, Field Day tackled global issues like colonialism by focusing on Northern Ireland's local context. By studying the ways in which colonialism impacted Northern Ireland, Field Day aimed to show how local experiences connect to global issues. This approach helped to explore the effects of colonialism in-depth and highlights that these discussions are relevant worldwide. Field Day Theatre Company had a notable impact on Irish identity during the Troubles, a period of conflict in Northern Ireland. With thought-provoking plays such as *Translations* (1980), *Making History* (1988), and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) by Brian Friel; *The Riot Act* (1984) by Tom Paulin; *The Cure at Troy* (1990) by Seamus Heaney and many more, Field Day Theatre Company often delved into complex issues surrounding identity,

politics, and history in Ireland, which offer audiences a fresh perspective on the events of the Troubles.

It is important to acknowledge that two major theatre houses contributed greatly to the reclamation and construction of the long-usurped Irish identity in their unique manners: Field Day Theatre Company approaches Irish identity through a critical lens, questioning established narratives and offering multifaceted interpretations of what it means to be Irish, emphasising its diversity and the influences of history, politics, and language on shaping national consciousness through aforementioned plays above. The Abbey Theatre, on the other hand, is Ireland's national theatre and has a long history of promoting Irish culture and identity through its productions. While both the Abbey and Field Day Theatre Company contribute to the exploration of Irish identity on stage, they differ in their approaches and focuses. The Abbey Theatre tends to present a more traditional view of Irish identity, celebrating cultural heritage and national pride, while the Field Day Theatre Company adopts a more critical and deconstructive stance, challenging established ideas about Irish identity and history.

Arguably Ireland's best-known polemicist Tom Paulin (1949-), despite being born in England, was raised as a Protestant Unionist in the North of Ireland (Weyenberg par. 14). In his book *Ireland and the English Crisis*, he describes how he envisions a non-sectarian republic that unites Catholic republicans with Protestant dissidents whose heritage "went underground after the Act of Union and has still not been given the attention it deserves" (Weyenberg par. 17). He recalls the day when he was asked to write *The Riot Act* (1984) as "[e]arly one snowy January morning in 1984, Stephen Rea phoned me in a dull little town called Charlottesville where I was living […]. Stephen asked me would I do a version of *Antigone* for the Field Day by the end of march" (*Amid Our Troubles* 165). Thus, it can be said that the retellings of the Ancient Greek myths and tragedies were becoming popular again as Paulin states that "there were three different versions of *Antigone* produced in Ireland in 1984. […] But as I wrote I didn't know that Brendan Kennelly and Aidan Carl Mathews were hard at work on the play" (166). The multiple adaptations of Antigone in 1984 in Ireland, as noted by Paulin, indicate a growing tendency toward a contemporary reinterpretation of classical works that continues to

captivate audiences through the exploration of enduring human dilemmas and moral complexities. In respect thereof, Marianne McDonald asserts that

> the Irish authors chose specific Greek tragedies for their own purposes, and in the second half of the twentieth century the political themes [took] precedence over the psychological. *Oedipus Tyrannus* and the *Oresteia* were initially popular as translations by the Irish [at the beginning of the 1900s], perhaps because these are plays about identity and social compromise, but the twentieth century has favoured more revolutionary subjects, where the debate is over human rights and the suffering of the oppressed: for example, *Antigone, Trojan Women* and *Medea.* There is inexorable evolution toward the search for freedom, human rights for all people, and an end to conflict. (*Amid Our Troubles* 40)

The resurgence of interest in *Antigone* in 1984, with the simultaneous reinterpretations of the play by three distinct writers – Aidan Mathews, Tom Paulin, and Brendan Kennelly – exemplifies the enduring appeal and interpretive richness of Sophocles' work in Ireland. That is why Paulin describes *Antigone* as "a play that belonged in Ireland" (166) in that he believed that "the year 1984 was important for human rights, and the rights of women in particular. This was the year the divorce referendum was rejected, just after abortion rights had been rejected" (McDonald 53). In this context, the themes of personal agency, moral convictions, and the struggle against oppressive authority embodied in *Antigone* found a parallel with the broader societal challenges facing Northern Ireland in the 1980s. In a more general perspective, the themes and characters in Sophocles' play resonate with Irish audiences due to the depiction of moral virtues and idealised character traits that align with Aristotle's views on the portrayal of noble individuals in literature. The juxtaposition of *Antigone* with the contemporary events in Ireland serves to illuminate the relevance and universality of Sophocles' work, transcending temporal and geographical boundaries to prompt reflections on the complexities of power, morality, and the individual's role in challenging societal norms. This convergence of ancient drama and modern struggles underscores the dynamic and transformative nature of theatre as a vehicle for engaging with pressing issues and fostering dialogue on matters of fundamental human rights and ethical principles. Paulin implies a cultural and ethical connection between the Irish context and the timeless essence of the play, highlighting the universal principles and values that transcend geographical boundaries. McDonald suggests that "*Antigone* is the first, and remains, the greatest play in Western literature about the consequences of individual conscience defying civil authority;" (51) thus, it can

be understood that Paulin aimed to emphasise the cultural and ethical connection between the Irish context and the universal themes of *Antigone* particularly the conflict between individual conscience and civil authority. This relevance is evident in Ireland's historical struggles against colonialism and the quest for justice, as Antigone's defiance resonates with those who challenge oppressive systems. Thus, the play transcends its original setting, highlighting how ancient Greek drama continues to inform contemporary conversations about integrity, moral courage, and resistance against authority, ultimately reflecting shared human experiences which shape the ultimate identity of a country.

Antigone's defiance of King Creon's edict regarding her brother Polynices reflects her unwavering commitment to familial duty and religious beliefs, as she chooses to honour her brother through a proper burial despite the consequences prescribed by the state. This act of civil disobedience demonstrates Antigone's determination to uphold divine laws over human decree, setting the stage for a tragic conflict between personal convictions and societal norms within the narrative. The enduring popularity of Sophocles' tragedy in the twentieth century can be attributed not only to its portrayal of resistance to civil authority but also to its exploration of conflicting principles that resonate with audiences across time. Various scholars have interpreted the play through different lenses; for instance, Woodard highlights the antinomies in the play: "[D]ivine versus human law, individual versus state, religious versus secular, private versus morality" (64). Porter, too, examines the divisions "between and within persons, division between man and god, division between loyalty to the family and loyalty to the state, division between and within words and phrases, divisions between intentions and results" (77). This multi-faceted examination of fundamental ethical dilemmas continues to captivate playwrights, audiences and scholars alike, underscoring the timeless relevance and complexity of the play's thematic depth and openness of the play to many interpretations.

From the nineteenth century onwards, many different versions of *Antigone* have been written and staged around the world[12]. Goldhill states that "[n]o play of the ancient world has been produced as often in modern times as Sophocles' *Antigone*" (135). Indeed, the

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[12] Fischer-Lihte (34) and Macintosh (286) report nineteenth-century productions of *Antigone*.

tragedy remains a timeless piece of literature that effectively raises profound political questions concerning citizenship, power dynamics, and the conflict between individual beliefs and state authority. Walton also asserts that

> [t]he Sophocles' play is easy to translocate into a different time, a different culture, a different set of political circumstances. A solitary figure standing up for her beliefs in the face of all that the law of the land can throw at her can offer a dozen parallels a day … Antigone is the resistance icon, hence the revival of the play at moments of protest in France, South Africa, or the Ireland of 1984. (23)

The play's exploration of these themes has contributed to its frequent adaptation and production as it serves as a reflection on the complexities inherent in governance, morality, and the interplay between personal convictions and societal norms for "Ireland […] an unusually rich testbed for the exploration of the role of Greek tragedy in the modern world," (28) asserts Gotsi. The reception of Sophocles' tragedies, particularly *Antigone*, in Ireland, provides a distinctive lens through which to analyse the intricate interplay of themes such as "war and peace, division and cohesion, religion and secularism, as well as isolation and internationalization" (Gotsi 28). Furthermore, another reason that makes such a Greek myth worth visiting successively is the fact that "Sophocles deals with non-conformists, those who take on difficult decisions and have to live with the consequences of their actions" (Walton 16). In the case of *Antigone*, "there is no reconciliation, only realization when it is too late of the real cost of the rigid stance … exhibited by the pathetic Creon whose obduracy and innate capacity to make wrong decisions and the wrong time" costs him a son and a wife "without even the bitter consolation of winning the argument;" (Walton 17) so, Sophocles invites audiences to contemplate the complexities of morality, the nature of justice, and the essence of human agency. In essence, the enduring allure of Greek myths lies in their ability to provoke introspection, encourage critical thinking, and inspire a deeper appreciation for the complexities of the human condition through the timeless lens of classical drama which offers an understanding of how these complex factors influence not only the audience but also the directors and playwrights involved in theatrical productions.

Unlike Synge, who completely altered the fundamentals of the Oedipus myth by subverting the tragedy into a comedy, Paulin avoided making such drastic adjustments in

his revisiting of the myth of Antigone. Instead, he 'translocates' the whole story into an Irish setting: Paulin transfers the myth into a society where it is gradually transposed from its original set. This whole process is, of course, done through language. Paulin changes neither the characters nor the setting; yet he uses a localised language, Hiberno-English, thus, the whole tragedy sounds as if it takes place in Ireland. However, "not [being] acquainted with the original Greek, all writers need[ed] at least one translation in English, on which they base their own work," (Gotsi 39) so in Paulin's case, negotiation is made between Sophocles' text and Paulin's in process of interpreting the myth from a translation since "the transfer can never be total; […] even when all the surface content has been extracted and transmitted, the primary concern of the genuine translator remains elusive […] because the relationship between content and language is quite different in the original and the translation" (Benjamin 79). Paulin himself accounts that he consulted Jebb's translation (*Amid Our Troubles* 165); therefore, the mastery lies in the ability of the playwright insofar as he is able to deliver a text which is "meaningfully translated to another culture," in that translating a dramatic text requires a more meticulous approach since

> a play is by default a genre where numerous voices are heard and accommodated; thus in a play, unlike in a novel, or a poem, [there] is not only the narrator's voice … but also the voices of each and every character. Issues of speakability and performability pile up on top of the difficulty in 'translating' characters through their words. (Gotsi 37)

Therefore, when considering the audience in the translation of a play such as Sophocles' works, the cultural background and expectations of the intended readers or viewers play a crucial role in shaping the decisions made by the translator. The notion of 'translation for translocation,' as Walton problematises, points to the translator's dilemma in deciding between a neutral, literal rendering of the text and a more dynamic, culturally specific adaptation that aims to transport the narrative and themes across different cultural boundaries since "the translator […] [has to] make retexturing a play within different social milieu from that of its own time, but a milieu which has its own precise cultural parameters" (33). In the context of ancient Greek drama like Sophocles' plays, which are deeply embedded in the cultural and philosophical ethos of ancient Greece, the translator must navigate the tension between preserving the authenticity of the original work and

making it accessible and meaningful to a contemporary audience in a different cultural setting. Paulin's *The Riot Act* as a reinterpretation of the myths, as Stephen Rea refers to as a 'version,' involves a delicate balance between fidelity to the essence of the original text and the creative license to adapt and reinterpret the material for contemporary audiences. The interplay between Sophocles' Greek texts, the English translations used as reference points, and the subsequent interpretations by writers like Paulin reflects a dynamic process of negotiation, adaptation, and reimagining that illuminates the complexities of cross-cultural communication, literary transmission, and creative engagement with classical myths in a contemporary context.

It is through the medium of language that Paulin localises and contextualises the myth of Antigone to investigate the problems that arose during the Troubles. Steiner claims that Paulin's focus was on the words "that have been used to justify political falsehood […] [and] massive distortions of history, and the bestialities of the totalitarian state" (4138). In Irish translations of Antigone, words are frequently depicted as causing division, posing threats, exerting manipulation, and inciting violence. Additionally, they are employed to conceal underlying malicious intentions beneath an outwardly innocent appearance. As Gotsi explains, "[t]he language of all Irish versions of *Antigone* is in striking contrast to the language of the Sophoclean text as there is proximity […] to the everyday, spoken language," (47) so it is clear that the transition from a formal to a colloquial language style mirrors the shift from narratives centred around royalty, deities, and legendary figures to the portrayal of the tragic struggles of ordinary individuals. Translators of *Antigone* in Ireland during the turn of the twentieth century found it fitting to employ a language style reflecting everyday speech in their renditions of the play so as to make their rewritings "more accessible to wider audiences […] and also [to achieve] 'the overwhelming sense that this play could have been written yesterday, and therefore that man has learned very little over the centuries" (Coll, qtd. in Gotsi 48). Writing in a highly stylised, formal, or even artificial manner in the late twentieth century, instead of enhancing the gravity of the play, would potentially result in a forced and unnatural tone. This shift could risk the play being perceived as comical rather than tragic by the audience. Paulin claims that "[he] used the Ulster vernacular as far as [he] could" (*Amid Our Troubles* 167). For instance, the uses of 'yet,' 'just,' 'like,' come at the end of the

sentences ("We've to taste yet," [*Riot* 9], "they're in the dark just," [15], "for myself, like," [20], "show me the door just" [62], inversions, omissions of pronouns, "use of singular verb in existential sentences despite a plural reference" (Hickey 42; 125). The title, *The Riot Act*, also indicates a leaning towards this concept, hinting at a political interpretation of the myth. Paulin also adds some Irish-English features such as 'ye'[13] and 'yous'[14] to "reflect the way the play is meant to sound" (Gotsi 51). The meticulous use of the Ulster vernacular, manifesting in linguistic features like sentence structures, word placement, and Irish-English elements *The Riot Act* serves to embrace the transference of the Greek myth into an Irish context and highlights a deliberate endeavour to infuse the play with a local identity and political significance. Through these linguistic nuances, Paulin successfully translocates the ancient narrative to contemporary Irish socio-political setting, creating a rendition that resonates with modern audiences while staying true to the essence of the original myth despite the fact that "Paulin tends to appropriate the myth, rather than translate its every detail. He omits names […] frequently than Heaney and Donnellan and when he decides to include mythic references in his version, he tends to adapt them to support the point he wants to make" (Gotsi 68). His perception of rewriting is to make his play perceivable as much as possible by his audiences; therefore, he becomes very selective "as to myths and other mythic references he incorporates" (Paulin 167). Paulin ensures that his audience can comprehend the narratives not through 'literal translation' but by expanding their scope. Making the myth understandable to the audience, as Paulin accomplishes, is crucial for grasping Sophocles' intention, and for preventing spectators from feeling overwhelmed by excessive information. However, Paulin's employment of colloquial language to situate his play within the context of Northern Ireland did not escape criticism. Joe Cleary argues that the use of colloquialisms is not inherently at odds with the conventions of Greek tragedy. She states that

> the interesting disjunction between the elevated classical style we expect of the Greek original and Paulin's heavily colloquial, slangy, often jokey language, along with his modes of characterization, which tend toward caricature at times, steering very close in the cases of Creon and the Messenger to satiric Northern stereotypes Such a deliberate mixing of styles so as to 'lower' the overall tone of a version of Antigone indicates, I think, a work that can never quite decide whether it really

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[13] "The old original input form of early modern English" (Hickey 123).

[14] "A constructed plural probably originating with speakers of Irish during the language shif period" (Hickey 123).

wishes to achieve a tragic-heroic or a satiric effect, so veers uncomfortably somewhere between the two. (Cleary 529)

The quotation above proclaims that the lack of clarity resulting from the use of colloquial language in a classical play blurs the play's resolution and purpose. This ambiguity may detract from the audience's understanding and emotional engagement with the narrative, thereby undermining the tragedy's overall impact. Nevertheless, it should be noted that translating a play extends beyond mere word-for-word translation, often leading to significant alterations and fresh narratives by the translator. The context in which the play is crafted and staged further moulds the story. This emphasises the significance of recontextualising characters by translocating the original myth, emphasising how reinterpreting and situating the story can profoundly shape character depictions. Besides the language, "the characters' actions – as well as the motives behind them – may be altered, played down, silenced or overstressed" (Gotsi 73). Therefore, it is significant to investigate in what context Paulin recontextualises the Sophoclean characters by experimenting with new approaches to their personalities in order to transmit their stories into modern Ireland.

Antigone and Creon are the main characters of Sophocles' tragedy in that the whole story revolves around their clash. Even though "the play is often performed as a veiled criticism of an abusive government to show that something is rotten in that particular state," (McDonald 51) the clash between the protagonist and antagonist may reveal many possible antinomies such as "defending the safety and security of the state against anarchy," "familial values and duty," "conflict with state interests," "personal issues confront[ing] public issues" (McDonald 52). Sophocles' tragedy, though from the fifth century, contains transcendental and timeless issues about humans, which makes the play have an everlasting impact. Paulin examines the discrepancy between Antigone and Creon on a greater scale and applies the whole situation to the Troubles. This application is not the first of its kind, nevertheless. Weyenberg explains that "Paulin's version of *Antigone* finds its origin in an argument with Conor Cruise O'Brien over the interpretation of the play. O'Brien was one of the first to apply the story of Antigone to the Northern Irish situation, yet rather than wholeheartedly sympathising with Antigone's predicament, he criticises her action and justifies Creon's behaviour" (par. 17). O'Brien proposes that

Antigone's resistance against the King was also a 'rash' for "Creon's authority, after all, was legitimate, even if he had abused it, and the life of the city would become intolerable if citizens should disobey any law that irked their conscience" (*States of Ireland* 157). Moreover, considering the Troubles, he argues that "after four years of Antigone and her under-studies and all those funerals … you begin to feel that Ismene's common sense and feeling for the living may make the more needful, if less spectacular element in 'human dignity'" (157). Paulin's critique of O'Brien's stance on obedience to authority as depicted in "The Making of a Loyalist" (1980) stresses a divergence in their perspectives. He finds O'Brien's emphasis on obedience as promoting acceptance of the status quo in Northern Ireland as problematic and indicative of passive submission (Weyenberg par. 17). By criticizing O'Brien's attribution of responsibility to Antigone for the conflict's victims, Paulin questions the implications of such a viewpoint. He likely sees this perspective as overlooking the complexities of the Northern Ireland conflict and the need for critical analysis and agency rather than unquestioning obedience to authority. Paulin rejects O'Brien's argument that Antigone's personal moral beliefs are less significant than Creon's political ethics and instead advocates for his own interpretation that "neither the right of family, nor that of the state is denied; what is denied is the absoluteness of the claim of each" ("The Making of Loyalist" 6). Weyenberg suggests that in order to delve more into the discussion with O'Brien, Paulin penned his interpretation of Antigone under the title *The Riot Act*, thereby creating a platform for a more comprehensive engagement with the conflicting perspectives on morality within the play. Indeed, their disagreement can be accepted as the initial translocation of the myth to the Northern Ireland context. Paulin applies his own philosophy to the underlying motive of the play, "culture is an argument … ideas should be flying about and banging into each other" because "if you occupy a static position then things sort of ossify" (6-7). The divergence in perspectives between Paulin and O'Brien unveils a thought-provoking reappraisal of Antigone through Paulin's reinterpretation of *The Riot Act*. This new perspective facilitates a profound investigation into the moral intricacies of the play and embodies Paulin's philosophical tenet that culture thrives on dialectical discourse, a concept fundamental in preventing intellectual stagnation and fostering a vibrant exchange of ideas.

As previously articulated, translating a play transcends the mere mechanical process of converting words between languages. The translator's involvement with the original text can vary significantly, sometimes resulting in a radically altered version or an entirely new storyline. Even when adhering closely to the original plot, the interpretation and presentation differ among translators, shaped by the socio-temporal context in which the play is both written and performed. It can be argued that character is particularly susceptible to the effects of re-contextualisation given the disparate conceptualisations of character in Greek tragedy and modern works. Abrams and Harpham argue that modern characters are "the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it – the dialogue – and from what they do – the action," (42) which means that contemporary interpretations of character are largely rooted in concepts of individuality and distinctiveness. The Greeks, however, "were interested in individuals as part of a community much more than in the individual's unique private experience, a difference of attitude which is sometimes hard for us to share or appreciate" (Easterling 129). As a result, we frequently conceptualise Sophocles-inherited characters in a way that is reflective of contemporary culture. Easterling explains that "that character-drawing in Greek tragedy was a very different thing from what we meet in the modern theatre, […] perhaps more limited or rudimentary," (121) so, in this context, the linguistic nuances may lose their inherent significance or acquire new urgency absent in the original setting. The characters' actions, along with their motivations, might be modified, diminished, suppressed, or emphasised differently. D'Addario argues that "[l]anguage in *The Riot Act* creates an essential dialogue between that of power and powerlessness. Antigone is representative of powerlessness, where Creon is a voice of essentially unquestionable power" (26). So, it can be observed that Paulin employs language to highlight the distinctions between races, classes, and social positions. The play unfolds in two parallel settings: Thebes and Northern Ireland. Through his careful use of language, Paulin conveys this duality to the audience. Essentially, Antigone finds herself at a disadvantage in the power struggle; she cannot prevail against her uncle due to the imbalanced circumstances. Nevertheless, in the context of her own powerlessness, she possesses the determination and the support of the people for her cause. McDonald highlights that

Antigone deliberately chooses not to participate in the game of powerlessness through the lens of illusion or deceit ("Colonialism and Greek Tragedy" 62). Instead, she embraces her unwavering beliefs and moral convictions, which resonate deeply with the public. This acceptance of her truth by the people positions her as a formidable challenge to Creon's authority and his own interpretation of truth. McDonald argues that "[t]he dialectic of Antigone's right (personal, familial) confronting Creon's right (social, political) […] is destroyed by reducing Creon to a cardboard politician," (61) thereby standing firmly for what she believes is right, Antigone embodies a force that undermines Creon's power, revealing the fragility of his position in the face of authentic conviction and collective support. By contrasting the dialectical characteristics of the characters, Paulin effectively highlights the significant differences in language between the two opposing communities in Northern Ireland. McDonald acknowledges the emotional impact of this literary device, pointing out that the audience's recognition of "the precision of Pauline's depiction of Creon's power in Northern Ireland" (61) amplifies the sense of tragedy even more.

Regarding other characters in the play, Ismene and Haemon utilise Paulin's localised language infrequently compared to characters such as the Guard. Consequently, they emerge as the most neutral figures. In contrast, the characters representing the State such as Creon, the Guard, and the Messenger employ localised language more extensively. Jones argues that the characters "are given more specific, modern characterisation, made to articulate their positionality in the play's performance in more evocatively modern terms" ("Talking Amongst Ourselves" 236). Ismene, Haemon, and Antigone are portrayed as timeless characters (D'Addario 28), resonating strongly with audiences due to their universal themes of loyalty, moral conflict, and the struggle for individual agency. The well-known narrative of Antigone, a figure who defies authority to honour familial duty, allows audiences to connect with her motivations and actions on a deep emotional level. This familiarity fosters an understanding that transcends time and cultural differences, making her character's dilemmas both relevant and relatable. In stark contrast, Creon and other State representatives, such as the Guard and the Messenger, utilise a greater amount of localised language. This choice of vernacular roots their characters within a specific cultural and historical context, making them more

recognisable to modern audiences. Their speech patterns and regional expressions not only offer a sense of authenticity to the portrayal of power and authority but also serve to highlight the tension between state interests and personal beliefs. For instance, Creon expresses his irritation to the Messenger by stating that the man's voice "grates on" (*The Riot Act* 12) him, indicating his unease with the news being delivered. This interaction marks the beginning of a critical examination of Creon's motivations, highlighted by the Guard's response, which introduces the idea of a moral conflict: "Aye, does it sting your ears or your conscience?" (12). This question prompts Creon to reflect on his actions and their implications. When Creon defensively replies, "Why -- why should it?" (12) the Guard counters by suggesting that while his words may be unpleasant, there is a deeper issue at play, noting, "I may hurt your ears, but there's someone else has bruised your soul." This exchange reveals the tension between Creon's authority and the moral dilemmas inherent in his decisions. In this case, Ciarán Deane's distinction between "Hiberno-English" and a more polished accent underscores the social hierarchies present in the play. Creon's disdain for the lower-class accent reflects his elevated status and the inherent elitism of his character. Although Creon himself does not employ Hiberno-English, the characters of the Guard and the Messenger prominently feature localised language which serves to emphasise their connection to the everyday citizenry.

Creon embodies the archetype of authority and the mechanisms through which rule is enforced. In constructing Creon's character, Paulin meticulously crafts an identity that allows the audience to engage with the complexities of power and leadership. Through Creon's dialogue, actions, and interactions with other characters, Paulin illustrates the moral ambiguities and personal conflicts that arise in the exercise of power. Creon's speeches in *The Riot Act* serve as reflections of political rhetoric, sharply illustrating the character's authority and the stylistic elements of political discourse. His oratory is characterised by a formal tone, persuasive techniques, and a focus on the collective good, all of which are hallmarks of political communication. Roche notes that the audience listens to "a verbal medley of the two reigning powers in Northern Ireland, Westminster and Unionism" (qtd. in McDonald 74). Roche's identification of Ian Paisley in the characterisation of Creon is significant as it highlights the similarities between authoritarian leadership styles and the historical figure known for his commanding

political presence. Paulin's characterisation of Creon as "partly as a Northern Irish secretary" (Paulin, qtd. in McDonald 167) invites a complex reading of the character, infused with allusions to contemporary British political figures. The Chorus leader's reference to Creon as "the big man" not only echoes the larger-than-life persona of Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and a polarising figure among Irish Catholics but also serves to situate the play within a specific political context. This nomenclature reinforces Creon's dominant and authoritarian stance, drawing direct parallels between the character's uncompromising leadership and Paisley's vocal, often incendiary, rhetoric. Cleary describes Creon as a caricature in *The Riot Act* who "would then incarnate all the more unappealing aspects of Ulster unionism that compel Paulin to reject the political culture within which he was raised: its intransigence, its puritanical severity, its triumphalist swagger, and its absurd, even 'blasphemous,' fetishism of the state" (530). Goldhill too depicts "as a horrific man, smug at first in his public appearance, pushed into hypocrisy, bullying, and violence, as soon as he is crossed," (143) also commenting that "Paulin is attacking the political leaders in the Troubles (and their imitators and enforcers on the street)" (143).

Paulin's depiction of Creon reveals a significant shift in language that reflects the character's fluctuating authority and emotional state throughout the play. Initially, Creon addresses "the loyal citizens of Thebes" (*The Riot Act* 12-15) with polished rhetoric that conveys dignity and a strong sense of governance, reinforcing his authoritative role. However, as the narrative unfolds and he confronts personal conflicts, particularly in his antagonism towards the Guard, his language starkly shifts to rudeness and vulgarity: "[G]o you, dead quick, / and find who done it, / else I'll tear the skin / Off o'the whole pack o'ye / And roast you real slow" (22). This drastic shift in his language exemplifies Creon's abandonment of his earlier formal and polished speech as he interacts with the Guard. In this moment, Creon relinquishes the dignified mask typically associated with his authority, shedding the performative language of Paulin's contemporary politicians. Creon also uses lots of clichés which bring directly to mind the patronisingly subtle attempts of modern politicians to speak with subtlety:

> If I may, I would further like to take this opportunity of thanking each and every one
> of you for your steadfastness and your most exceptional loyalty. […] [F]or purely

technical and legal reasons - kinship to the dead and so on, the office of King therefore devolves upon me. Such a position brings with it a very, very heavy responsibility […] or even, we may say, of their professional limitations […] and it follows naturally from those same principles that I should wish to amplify the statement which was issued in my name yesterday evening. […] [H]owever, let me say this, and let me say it plainly right at the very outset.. […] [I]f I might further add - and I know that Zeus will support me here. […] [I]t was Polynices, you remember, who slipped into this country and tried to destroy our holy places. […] [I]t is in this spirit, and in this spirit alone. (*The Riot Act* 15-17)

Paulin meticulously designs stage directions for Creon such as he "often […] seems to be speaking purely for his own delight, savouring certain juicy vowels, whipping others into fine peaks" (*The Riot Act* 15). The writer aims to portray Creon as a reflection of a twentieth-century leader, emphasising dynamics of power and theatricality in his presentation. From the outset, Creon stands while the Chorus remains seated, establishing an air of superiority. He avoids direct eye contact with Chorus members, only offering "(*occasional public smiles in their direction*)" (15, emphasis in original). During his speech, he dons a pair of rimless spectacles to read from a prepared statement and concludes with a "stonewall smile" (17). This emphasis on theatricality suggests he is more concerned with appearance than genuine communication, resembling a politician who has meticulously crafted his posture and words for maximum impact. His preoccupation with public image is further highlighted during an interaction with his son, Haemon. Creon expresses concern not just over his son's challenge, but chiefly because it occurs in public: "[Y]ou've no respect then. To turn on me like this out here in public" (40). Haemon counters by targeting Creon's vulnerability, stating, "[i]f you weren't my father, I'd go tell all Thebes what wrong you've done," (42) rather than echoing the more traditional Sophoclean line, "If you were not my father, I would say you had no sense" (*Antigone* line 755).

Similarly, Creon emphasises the significance of listening, stating, "one of the soundest maxims of good government is: always listen to the very best advice," and pledging to engage in considerable listening and opinion-sounding in the future (16). However, the hollowness of this claim quickly becomes apparent when he allows only one minute for questions following his lengthy speech: "Thank you all for coming, and any questions just now? We have one minute" (17). This indicates that he is more interested in speaking

than truly listening. Paulin notes that Creon employs "the usual cliché about doing a great deal of listening," (*Amid Our Troubles* 167) paralleling the actions of Douglas Hurd, who had recently taken on the role of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and similarly invoked this cliché (Goldhill 147). In reality, Creon's commitment to listening is as superficial as that of his Sophoclean predecessor and many modern politicians. Antigone highlights the discontent among the populace, stating, "D'you hear the hush? They're only waiting," to which Creon responds, "I hear nothing," (*The Riot Act* 28) revealing his deafness to dissent. Moreover, Paulin's portrayal of Creon goes beyond the character in Sophocles' work, illustrating him as rude and arrogant. His treatment of the Guard is particularly contemptuous; he addresses him as "boy," (22) instructs him to share "simply what's on [his] tiny mind," (19) snaps his fingers to command him (19), threatens him with cruelty ("else, I'll tear the skin o'the whole pack o'ye and roast you real slow") (22), and ultimately mocks him ("a philosopher - guard would make us all weep," "a complete eejit," and "wee girl") (18; 23-24). The shift to familiar and informal language indicates a loss of composure and control, exposing the more visceral and aggressive aspects of his character. This transition emphasises the tension between his public persona and private frustrations, revealing how personal antagonism can disrupt the facade of authority. Through this abrupt change in language, Paulin illustrates not only the complexities of leadership but also the underlying vulnerabilities that often accompany positions of power. Creon's crude expression at this moment serves as a stark reminder of the human emotions that lie beneath the surface of political rhetoric. This contrast highlights the fragility of Creon's authority and underscores the tension between his public persona and private frustrations. By oscillating between formal and coarse language, Paulin critiques the performative nature of power, revealing the insecurities that often accompany leadership. Ultimately, this linguistic variability serves to explore themes of authority, authenticity, and the complex interplay between power and personal emotion within the context of governance.

Such echoes of real-life politicians within Paulin's script elevate Creon beyond a mere fictional character, transforming him into a representation of the complex intersections between power, identity, and the often-contentious landscape of Northern Irish politics. The deliberate invocation of these political allusions encourages the audience to critically

engage with the themes of authority and conflict, reflecting the enduring repercussions of historical political figures on contemporary discourse. This portrayal reflects the performative nature of leadership, where charisma and assertiveness often eclipse the complexities of governance. Just as Paisley mobilised support through his robust rhetoric, Creon's unwavering stance and fiery speeches resonate with the dynamics of both the play and contemporary politics. Through this parallel, Paulin invites the audience to critically assess the moral implications of such leadership, questioning the responsibilities and consequences attached to those who wield power with a dominating presence.

Paulin's portrayal of Creon lacks the intention to evoke sympathy from the audience. As noted by Fintan O'Toole, in Creon's opening speech to the people of Thebes, it is evident that he presents himself in a manner that discourages empathetic engagement, emphasising his authoritarian stance and commitment to law and order over individual compassion. His language is "rigid, dry, unimaginative and comfortable in his new public role; his idiom is distinctly formal, elevated - unlike the everyday, informal (colloquial, even) language of the rest of the play - and carefully chosen to make him sound more like a contemporary politician than a Sophoclean hero" (Gotsi 148). In his comparison of these two Creons, O'Toole points out the main difference between the characterisation by focusing on Creon's initial address to the people of Thebes in *The Riot Act* as follows:

> [It is] enormously enjoyable to spot the Irish parallels and to smile. But it immediately draws the theatrical sting of the play. *Antigone* works as a play because we are also interested in Creon as a man, concerned with his dilemma and the way he tries to cope with it. Sophocles' Creon is a tragic hero as well as a villain. By satirising him from the start, the drama of his conflict with Antigone is rendered impossible. (*Sunday Tribune* 27)

Paulin is primarily focused on dramatizing an alternate form of conflict, making his sympathies clear from the outset of the play. However, this artistic choice yields a downside: by not effectively challenging the audience to reassess their perspectives and balance their moral judgments, a crucial element of classical tragedy—the dynamic relationship between the on-stage characters and the spectators—is considerably diminished. Additionally, the reduced role of the chorus, both to fit the play into a fifty-minute runtime and due to Stephen Rea's recommendation to minimize their presence as

they may "be a bit of a bore," (Paulin, qtd. in McDonald 167) significantly contributes to this effect. Traditionally, the chorus serves as a medium through which various moral judgments of the audience can be expressed, and this diminishment restricts that engagement.

Regarding the characterisation, Paulin's adaptation of *Antigone* presents an intriguing departure from the original as he does not maintain the balance he ardently argued for against O'Brien—characteristic of Sophocles' work. In Paulin's version, Antigone's assertion that her loyalty transcends that to the state goes largely unquestioned. In contrast, Sophocles' portrayal includes consistent scrutiny of her choices and actions by her sister, her uncle, and the chorus. Antigone's need to react and assert herself through the act of burying her brother remains a powerful imperative, resonating just as profoundly in Paulin's adaptation as it did in Sophocles' original work. The repeated declaration, "I must bury him," (*The Riot Act* 10, 11) underscores her commitment to familial duty and moral obligation, reflecting her defiance against the edicts of authority. This insistence not only highlights Antigone's resolve but also evokes the themes of individual agency and resistance against oppressive governance that are central to both texts. In Paulin's interpretation, this repetition serves to amplify the emotional intensity of her struggle, reinforcing the idea that her actions are not merely an act of filial loyalty but a profound statement of identity and moral conviction. What is significant in Paulin's version is the fact that this familial and moral duty is not predestined by gods as it was in the Sophocles version (Gotsi 76). Paulin's Antigone tells her sister, "[i]t's my own soul and honour, I can nor bend nor sell" (*The Riot Act* 14). Paulin expands Antigone's sense of dignity by emphasising her imperative to "act from conscience," (qtd. in Gotsi 77) as noted by Stephen Rea. This focus on moral agency highlights Antigone's commitment to ethical reasoning that transcends adherence to societal laws. In this interpretation, she embodies a powerful resistance against authority, asserting the primacy of individual conscience over state mandates. That is why, Paulin's adaptation of the tragedy of Antigone can be intricately linked to the historical context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, a period characterised by intense political strife and sectarian conflict. Shaun Richards suggests that "'[t]ragedy is a term frequently used to describe the contemporary Northern Irish situation. It is applied both by newspaper headline writers trying to express

the sense of futility and loss at the brutal extinction of individual lives and by commentators attempting to convey a sense of the country and its history in more general terms" (191-2). Dermot Keogh describes Northern Ireland as a "tragedy foretold," (252) and in the same manner, Ken Wharton also sees Northern Ireland as a "tragedy just waiting to happen" (427). The connection between tragedy and the Northern Irish conflict can be considered as more than a linguistic coincidence; it is deeply rooted in the socio-political climate of Ireland, particularly during the late twentieth century. This era witnessed a surge in tragic narratives that reflected the complexities of the Troubles, using violence and turmoil as a backdrop for exploring profound human suffering and moral dilemmas. Irish political history plays a crucial role in how tragedy is received as the genre inherently grapples with themes of conflict and injustice—elements that resonate with the experiences of those affected by the Troubles, which makes Sophocles' *Antigone* one of the most suitable tragedies to reflect upon by Irish playwright. Hall states, "of all Sophocles' tragedies *Antigone* is the most overtly political, in that it directly confronts problems involved in running a *polis*, a city-state" (xvi). Joe Cleary, in the same sense, draws a parallel between domestic troubles that occurred during the Troubles and the dispute between Antigone and Creon as follows:

> In Paulin's play, Creon is clearly identified with Northern unionism and Antigone with republicanism. Creon's refusing Polynices' proper burial and the severity of his response when Antigone defies this edict are justified in *The Riot Act* on the grounds that Antigone has 'levelled [Eteocles] with a state traitor.' This recalls the recent hunger strike episode[15], since the British government's attempt, strongly supported by unionists, to deny republican prisoners political status rested on a similar insistence that a categorical distinction be maintained between the violence of the security forces who upheld the State and that of 'terrorist' paramilitaries who tried to undermine it. Like the republican campaign for political-prisoner status, Antigone's actions serve to destabilize Creon's absolute distinction between Eteocles (who represents legitimate state violence) and Polynices (who rebels against state authority), as does her insistence that there are higher laws than those of the state. (525)

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[15] The 1981 hunger strike, involving ten republican inmates protesting the British government's criminalisation of political prisoners, marked a critical turning point in the Northern Irish conflict. Their tragic sacrifice not only drew public sympathy but also transformed republican strategy from an armed struggle to a focus on building a mass political movement. This shift highlighted the complexities of the conflict, emphasising the struggle for political legitimacy and human rights amid state oppression and showcasing how personal sacrifice could reshape broader narratives and strategies in pursuit of justice. For further information, see Beresford, David. *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike*. London: Grafton Books, 1987.

As the quotation above demonstrates, the parallels drawn between Antigone's defiance and the political landscape of the Northern Irish conflict illuminate the enduring relevance of classical tragedy in contemporary socio-political contexts. The character dynamics in Sophocles' play resonate powerfully within the framework of the Troubles, where notions of loyalty, justice, and authority were rigorously contested. Just as Antigone embodies the struggle for ethical agency and moral autonomy in defiance of oppressive authority, so too do the Irish people represent a collective resistance against the Unionist government and its supporters. The Northern Irish context reflects a similar dichotomy between individual rights and systemic governance where the demand for justice and recognition echoes Antigone's determination to honour her brother. Her insistence on upholding what she perceives as higher moral laws challenges Creon's rigid adherence to state-sanctioned power. This tension echoes the struggles individuals and groups face navigating the complexities of authority and resistance in Northern Ireland. Thus, both the tragedy of Antigone and the historical realities of the Troubles remind audiences of the profound human implications of governance and the critical need for compassion and understanding amidst conflict. This tragic interplay of loyalty versus authority fosters a rich discourse on justice, identity, and the human condition, ensuring that the lessons of Antigone continue to resonate in modern societal struggles.

Just as Antigone represents the part of the Irish society who was willing to sacrifice for the sake of taking action against injustice and overpowered authority, her sister, Ismene, represents the other part of the society who was docile and lethargic. Gotsi explains that "[i]f for Sophocles' Antigone it is the action that matters whatever the price, for Ismene all that matters is the consequences" (79). In *The Riot Act*, Ismene's character emerges as a pragmatic figure, focused on self-preservation and calculated decision-making rather than emotional engagement. This portrayal contrasts sharply with Conor Cruise O'Brien's earlier interpretation of her as possessing "commonsense and feeling for the living" (*States of Ireland* 159). Instead, Ismene's interactions reveal a self-centred disposition where her primary concern lies with her safety and status. Her responses tend to be brief and dismissive, indicating a reluctance to engage deeply with the moral dilemmas faced by Antigone or the broader implications of their situation:

ISMENE – You're talking wild / it's Creon's order. (11)

[…]

ISMENE – Don't tell me it's not right / that's what is. (12)

[…]

ISMENE – I have my piety / as well as you, / but the state's not putty / and I can't force it. (13)

[…]

ISMENE – It's hardly worth it. (14)

This characterisation demonstrates a critical theme in the narrative: the tension between individual survival instincts and the ethical imperatives that challenge those instincts, ultimately raising questions about the nature of loyalty, duty, and personal sacrifice. In the play, Antigone confronts her sister and underlines the chasm between them considering the familial bond and love when she claims, "I love my brother, / so I must bury him. / You'd dodge and run" (*The Riot Act* 4). Antigone later asserts that acting in accordance with "what's right" is "sanctioned by the gods" (*The Riot Act* 5). Despite openly defying the law, she firmly believes that her actions transcend the state's legal framework. This belief leads to a conflict between Antigone and Ismene, who hold opposing views on the matter:

ISMENE – You burn for them, / but they're cold things, principles.

ANTIGONE – What thing ever I must do / there's one audience / (*looks away from audience*) / will understand.

ISMENE – You'll change nothing, / only make it worse.

ANTIGONE – I'll only do what's right / and sanctioned by the gods.

ISMENE – It's hardly worth it.

ANTIGONE – Ismene - Sister - / Don't make me hate you / When you talk that way / it's like you're sour / on everything that's sacred. / Go you on back / and leave me here. / It's never pride, / not pride that's pushing me - / It's my own soul and honour I can nor bend nor sell. (5)

For Antigone, the significance of acting 'right' by her brother and the gods far outweighs its importance for Ismene. The documentary *The Story of Field Day* emphasises that Field Day aimed to encourage 'genuine debate about Antigone's actions,' positioning Ismene

as a 'voice of reason'[16] not only for Antigone but also for the audience. This raises the enduring question of what is truly worth fighting for, applicable on both interpersonal and political levels. The audience is thus confronted with the dilemma of determining which form of betrayal—betraying familial loyalty or betraying the state and its laws—is more severe. While the relevance of Paulin's *The Riot Act* to recent events is evident, its significance extends far beyond mere parallels to contemporary issues, much like the depth of Sophocles' tragedy cannot be simply reduced to the conflict between Creon and Antigone. The play also explores the dynamic between Antigone, who upholds her perceived higher duty, and her sister Ismene, who emphasises the necessity of compromise and survival. Additionally, it delves into the tension between Creon and his son Haemon, whose pleas for more thoughtful decision-making are tragically ignored until it is too late. In this context, Paulin employs the Sophoclean text—not only to address the moral complexities and legitimate competing claims arising from a society recently affected by the trauma of the hunger strike—but also to evoke a broader resonance that transcends a straightforward allegorical interpretation of the circumstances.

It would be overly simplistic to interpret Paulin's play solely as another domestic tragedy about the Troubles that is merely disguised in classical attire. Although some narrative techniques may be akin to those found in traditional tragedies, the overall narrative dynamics differ significantly. In adapting the play to reflect the contemporary Northern Irish context, this approach presents the Catholic and Protestant communities as relatively symmetrical 'feudal' entities. Consequently, the two young protagonists symbolically embody a more progressive minority that is valiantly attempting to challenge and transcend the deep-rooted sectarian attitudes prevalent within their respective communities. Essentially, this device reframes the Northern Irish situation in such a way that a small, enlightened liberal cohort, represented by the tragic couple, is depicted as engaged in a noble yet ultimately doomed struggle to overcome the dual sectarianism that

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[16] *The Story of Field Day*. Provided by Ciarán Deane and the Field Day Theatre Company, BBC Northern Ireland, 2006.

characterises the broader population. Regarding the multifaceted composition of *The Riot Act,* Cleary argues that

> [t]he significance of Paulin's use of Antigone is best appreciated, then, if one grasps the extent to which it unsettles the construction of the Northern situation along the lines that romantic tragedies have established as normative. [...] [T]he Antigone narrative is to restore to the antagonistic parties in the Northern conflict some sense of their historical struggle not as a meaningless clash of rival atavisms (as it is commonly perceived) but as one which has grown out of antithetical ethical claims, each with a legitimate claim to recognition. (527)

In contrast to a simplistic dichotomy that pits a small humane elite against a regressive mass, Antigone portrays the broader population—represented by Ismene and the Chorus—as deserving of respect, as they navigate the middle ground between the extremes embodied by Antigone and Creon. While the play acknowledges the worth of the general populace, it does not idealise or sentimentalise the average individual. By adapting the narrative of Antigone to the Northern Irish context, Paulin recognises and respects the integrity of the conflicting parties in this struggle, each of which he has complex ancestral and ideological connections to—a notion that Winston Churchill once referred to, albeit with a condescending British attitude, as "the integrity of their quarrel" (qtd. in Cleary 528).

Ciarán Deane articulated a vision for Field Day that avoids rigid allegiances and the divisive "zero-sum politics" that characterised the Troubles (D'Addario 39), advocating instead for a dynamic and evolving identity that reflects the complexities of human experience. He posited that a fixed identity could engender significant societal challenges, highlighting the necessity for continuous adaptation as circumstances shift. In this context, Field Day consciously positioned itself as a representative voice for a diverse constituency, aspiring to foster dialogue and understanding while consciously avoiding the endorsement of any single faction embroiled in the conflict. It can be illuminated that this theme by drawing parallels between the timeless struggles presented in Antigone—specifically the tension between civic duty and familial loyalty—and the contemporary dilemmas faced by Northern Irish audiences divided by sectarian lines. Although *The Riot Act* may not enjoy the same level of acclaim as some of Field Day's other productions (D'Addario 40), it poignantly captures the themes of family, allegiance, and loyalty,

resonating deeply with the social fabric impacted by violence, sectarianism, and economic hardship during the Troubles. Ultimately, Field Day's endeavour through this production is to cultivate a unifying experience that transcends community divisions, engendering not only emotional connections within the audience but also fostering a sense of collective identity that is critical for healing and reconciliation in a fractured society.

In conclusion, the analysis of Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984) reveals a profound engagement with the Greek myth of the confrontation of Antigone and Creon as a tool for articulating the complexities of Irish identity amid the legacies of colonial oppression, the Troubles of the 1960s. Paulin's reinterpretation of classical themes not only emphasises the sociopolitical struggles faced by contemporary Ireland but also serves as a medium for a collective national consciousness, where the echoes of ancient narratives resonate with modern experiences. The characterisation of Creon, who embodies the arrogance and deafness of authority figures, reflects the broader challenges faced by the Irish in their quest for justice and autonomy. Through Creon's interactions, especially his dismissive treatment of the Guard and his failure to genuinely engage with dissent, Paulin draws a parallel to the oppressive structures imposed during colonial rule, highlighting the enduring impact of these dynamics. This exploration aligns with the overarching thesis, demonstrating how Irish playwrights like Paulin strategically leverage Greek myths to illuminate their sociopolitical landscape, thus fostering a revival of Irish identity. By offering a national standpoint that encapsulates the quest for self-actualisation and communal coherence, *The Riot Act* reveals that through the lens of myth, Irish playwrights are not merely looking back to the past but are actively reshaping and reclaiming their narrative in the face of historical struggles. This duality of personal and national identity, as seen in both Synge's individualised approach in *The Playboy of the Western World* and Paulin's broader societal critique, speaks to a deeper desire for understanding and renegotiating the Irish image on a global scale. Ultimately, this chapter illustrates how the reclamation of identity through classical myths allows for a richer understanding of the historical and cultural impacts of colonialism, weaving a tapestry that resonates with contemporary audiences while restoring dignity and pride in the Irish experience. Through this multilayered examination, the thesis contributes to an enhanced

comprehension of Irish drama's critical role in reflecting and reshaping national identity against the backdrop of a turbulent sociocultural landscape.

CONCLUSION

This thesis analyses how Greek myths are reinterpreted within Irish drama, particularly through the works of playwrights such as John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* (1984). Both plays aim to highlight the revival of Irish identity and to encourage the Irish to reclaim their heritage. Synge's work takes a more personal approach, focusing on the themes of individual enlightenment and self-realisation whereas Paulin's play adopts a national perspective, emphasising the Irish quest for identity, justice, and self-governance. By exploring how these Irish playwrights consciously incorporate Greek myths to draw parallels between well-respected ancient Greece and Ireland's sociopolitical and cultural struggles under English colonialism, this thesis investigates the resurrection of Irish identity and the reformation of the Irish image. By utilising these well-regarded and thematically rich Greek narratives in Irish drama, playwrights connect with a wider audience, thus accentuating the long-lasting sociopolitical and cultural ramifications of colonial rule over Ireland and cultivating a strong global Irish presence. Through this multifaceted approach, the thesis contributes to discussions on sociopolitical and cultural themes, illuminating the sustained impact of colonialism on Ireland while reimagining Irish identity through the lens of classical mythology.

The reconstruction of Greek myths in J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*, and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act* serve as a crucial bridge that purposefully connects the misrepresented Irish identity and culture to the revered Antiquity. Through a deliberate reconstruction of dramatic texts, these Irish playwrights emphasise the everlasting relevance and influence of Ancient Greek narratives and draw attention to the close sociocultural parallels between Ireland and Ancient Greece. The educational role that theatre traditionally played in addressing societal issues for both contexts. By intertwining Irish essence with classical motifs, these plays collectively reveal the enduring import of cultural reclamation and the necessity of preserving the authenticity of Ireland's heritage within the contemporary narrative landscape.

Synge and Paulin strategically incorporate classical motifs to foster a dialogue between ancient Greece and contemporary Ireland, illuminating the sociocultural parallels that resonate across time and geography. This intersection of cultures not only reveals the enduring relevance of Greek myths but also affirms the educational power of theatre as a medium for social reflection and change. By presenting Irish struggles for identity, autonomy, and justice through the lens of ancient narratives, these playwrights reclaim a sense of ownership over their cultural heritage. This act of cultural reclamation serves as both a challenge to colonial narratives and a reaffirmation of Irish identity, showcasing the transformative potential of theatre as a vehicle for social commentary.

Moreover, the interweaving of Irish essence with classical themes in these works highlights the necessity of preserving the authenticity of Ireland's heritage amidst ongoing cultural discourse. By drawing on the rich tapestry of Greek mythology, Irish playwrights facilitate a deeper understanding of the complexities of national identity and cultural memory. Such engagements prompt audiences to reflect on their historical narratives and the enduring impact of colonialism. The plays not only engage with the past but also speak to contemporary issues, demonstrating how the lessons embedded within these ancient stories remain pertinent today. The articulation of identity through these reconstructions emphasises the need for a nuanced understanding of culture that transcends simplistic binaries. In this way, the examination of Greek myths in the context of Irish drama emerges as a vital exploration of how reclaiming cultural narratives can empower communities and foster a broader appreciation for their unique histories in a globalised world.

Through this exploration of Greek myths in Irish drama, this thesis ultimately contributes to a richer dialogue surrounding the intersections of culture, identity, and power. By situating the works of Synge and Paulin, within both an Irish and a classical context, it highlights the intricate and often fraught relationship between memory, mythology, and national identity. The act of reconstruction not only allows for the revival of Irish identity but also positions these narratives within a larger discourse of postcolonial theory, emphasising the importance of cultural agency in shaping historical perceptions. As such, the interplay between antiquity and the contemporary periods of the playwrights deepens

our understanding of the complexities involved in cultural representation and the ongoing quest for autonomy and justice. The encompassing themes of identity, resistance, and remembrance that emerge from this thesis underscore the vital contributions of Irish drama to the global literary landscape and the universal struggle for cultural integrity and recognition.

The trajectory of Anglo-Irish relations and the evolution of Irish drama reveal a profound struggle for the reclamation of Irish identity amid colonial oppression and cultural misrepresentation. From the initial incursions of Anglo dominance in 1171 to the political usurpation embodied by the Act of Union and the sectarian violence of the Troubles, the historical narrative highlights a quest for self-determination and equity. Concurrently, early nationalist playwrights challenged derogatory depictions of the Irish in English theatre, laying the groundwork for movements such as the Irish Literary Theatre and the Abbey Theatre. Figures like Yeats and Synge significantly contributed to this evolution by incorporating Greek myths into Irish drama, elevating the genre by associating it with the esteemed traditions of Antiquity. This innovative approach enriched the depth of Irish narratives and established a tradition that would extend even into the twenty-first century. Playwrights such as Brian Friel (1929-2015), Brendan Kennelly (1936-), Frank McGuinness (1953-), Aidan Mathews (1956-), Marina Carr (1964-), Enda Walsh (1967-), and Colin Teevan (1968-) appropriated various Greek myths in their plays to examine different aspects of Irishness: political struggles in Ireland, condition of women in Irish society, and the complexities of national identity and historical memory, thus, continuing the dialogue about Irish identity and its multifaceted nature in a modern context. For instance, Brian Friel's *Living Quarters* (1977) references Euripides' *Hippolytus* with its subtitle: *Living Quarters: after* Hippolytus. The play investigates the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday by focusing on a dysfunctional Irish family. As Paulin's contemporaries, Brendan Kennelly in his plays *Antigone* (1984), *Medea* (1988), *The Trojan Women* (1993), and Aidan Mathews in his plays *Antigone* (1984) and *The Trojans* (1995) utilised the tragedies of both Sophocles and Euripides in their respective plays. Similarly, Marina Carr's plays *The Mai* (1994), *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), and *Marble* (2009) appropriate Sophocles' *Medea* to question the position of women within society. Conversely, her use of myth highlights the shortcomings of contemporary materialist society in fulfilling the

profound and heroic experiences of individual lives. Enda Walsh, as a contemporary Irish playwright, in his *Penelope* (2010), reconstructed the myth of Penelope (and Odysseus) to investigate contemporary Irish society after the Celtic Tiger period. In conclusion, the interplay between Anglo-Irish relations and the evolution of Irish drama underscores a continuous effort to reclaim and redefine Irish identity against a backdrop of colonialism and cultural misrepresentation. Colin Teevan's play *The Seven Pomegranate Seeds* (2014) is a collection of seven modern monologues for female speakers that have strong mythical connections and are thematically connected. These monologues, which are loosely adapted from seven of Euripides' female characters—Medea, Phedra, Demeter, Persephone, Hypsipyle, Creusa, and Alcestis—explore traditional mother-child tales in the setting of contemporary Britain. Through the incorporation of Greek mythology, contemporary playwrights have enriched Irish narratives, exploring significant themes such as political struggle, gender roles, and the complexities of national identity. The works of notable figures like Yeats, Synge, Carr, Kennelly, Walsh, and others exemplify an enduring tradition that reflects both the historical and contemporary realities of Irish society. By interweaving ancient myths with modern issues, these playwrights contribute to a dynamic dialogue that not only honours the past but also illuminates the ongoing challenges and aspirations of the Irish people in a rapidly changing world.

Though this thesis restricts its scope to the plays composed in Ireland during the Irish Renaissance and the Troubles, it should be noted that the Irish identity question expands beyond the borders of the country. After the Great Famine, many Irish fled the country just to be able to survive, thus, this emigration created another layer: Irish diasporas. It is also important to study the development of Irish identity in the US and Canada, too, in order to demonstrate the Irish identity fully. Irish drama became popular and successful in the United States with the first productions of Dion Boucicault's plays. One of the most significant plays which examines the struggles of the Irish diaspora is Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964). The play portrays the conflicting emotions of a young man who chooses to leave his homeland yet struggles to relinquish his emotional ties to his past. The memories depicted in the play are vital to identity, serving as vivid representations that fulfil internal desires. The characters' internal struggles and personal dilemmas mirror broader societal issues. In summary, while this thesis focuses on the

plays produced only in, it is essential to acknowledge that the discourse surrounding Irish identity extends far beyond national boundaries. The emigration spurred by the Great Famine contributed to the emergence of Irish diasporas, particularly in the United States and Canada, which are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of Irish identity, thereby enriching the ongoing exploration of Irish identity in a global context.

The reconstruction of ancient Greek myths in contemporary Irish drama offers a profound lens through which to explore themes of identity, social conflict, and resilience. J. M. Synge's subversion of Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex* into a comedic narrative exemplifies this transformative approach. In Synge's rendition, he effectively reinterprets the dramatic arc of exile and humiliation, reversing the traditional cathartic outcome into a self-actualisation journey. The protagonist, challenging the oppressive sanctions imposed by his father, symbolically 'kills' the paternal figure and attempts to reconstruct a new mythic identity, thereby acknowledging and harnessing his own capacity for autonomy and self-definition. This playful yet significant reimagining underscores the potential for personal and collective reclamation through myth. Similarly, Tom Paulin's translocation of *Antigone* into the context of Northern Ireland serves to highlight contemporary socio-political tensions. By utilising the localised Hiberno-English language, Paulin provides a nuanced lens to examine the fractious dynamics between Unionists and Republicans, paralleling the discord between Antigone and Creon in the original text. This juxtaposition not only draws attention to the historical and ongoing struggles within Irish society but also conveys a broader overview of resilience, showcasing the courage of individuals standing up for their beliefs amidst systemic oppression.

The timelessness of the term myth is essential across various academic fields, encompassing literature, psychology, and cultural studies, among others. In literature, myth serves as a powerful vehicle for expressing and understanding complex human experiences and societal narratives. The reconstruction of such myths within Irish drama emerges as a crucial means of reclaiming cultural identity. Through the reimagining of ancient stories, Irish playwrights endeavour to resonate with contemporary audiences while asserting a distinct narrative that reflects the struggles and aspirations of the Irish

people. This reclamation not only fosters a deeper understanding of their historical grievances but also paves the way for a renewed sense of national pride and unity, culminating in the ongoing dialogue surrounding Irish identity in the face of external and internal challenges. The synthesis of ancient myth with contemporary issues thus becomes not only an artistic venture but a vital socio-cultural movement aimed at the reclamation and affirmation of Irish identity.

This thesis offers a significant original contribution to the study of English literature by systematically analysing the transformation and reconstruction of ancient Greek myths within the context of Irish drama, illuminating the interplay between classical narratives and contemporary sociopolitical issues. By focusing on the works of J. M. Synge and Tom Paulin, it foregrounds the dynamic subversion of canonical texts such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone,* revealing how these adaptations serve as vehicles for the reclamation of Irish identity against the backdrop of historical oppression and cultural misrepresentation. These plays are specifically chosen among many other plays reconstructing various Greek myths, regarding the incorporation of Ancient Greek myths into the Irish identity for two main reasons: Firstly, this thesis investigates the representation of Irish identity through the integration of myths as a tradition, and Synge's play *The Playboy of the Western World* can be considered as the first example of reconstructing myths in Irish drama, thus, it can be claimed that Synge commenced this tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century. Also, considering the focus of the thesis on Irish identity reclamation, Synge achieves to provide a solid message to its audience through the myth of parricidal Oedipus. He associates Christy's killing of his father with Ireland's 'killing' of the colonial power of England. Paulin's play *The Riot Act*, on the other hand, is a definitive choice because the play demonstrates the sociopolitical struggle between the Unionists and the Nationalists in Ireland during the Troubles with its precise translocating of the myth of Antigone and clear-cut reductions, which hinders any other interpretation regarding the use of myth in the play. Paulin specifically focuses on the struggle to maintain a national balance through the chasm of opposite political identities in Ireland. This exploratory lens not only emphasises the fluidity and adaptability of myth as a literary tool but also situates Irish playwrights within a broader discourse on identity, resilience, and the power of narrative in shaping national

consciousness. Furthermore, the thesis highlights the intertextual connections between ancient and modern texts, enriching the understanding of how literary traditions can be reinterpreted to address present-day concerns. In doing so, it bridges classical literature and contemporary Irish cultural expressions, providing fresh insights that enhance both fields while affirming the relevance of myth as a timeless framework for investigating identity and sociopolitical dynamics.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORMS FOR THESIS WORK

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	FRM-YL-09 Yüksek Lisans Tezi Etik Kurul Muafiyeti Formu / *Ethics Board Form for Master's Thesis*	Revizyon No / Revü. No.	02
		Revizyon Tarihi / Rev.Date	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA

Tarih: 18/09/2024

Tez Başlığı (Türkçe): Antik Yunan Mitlerinin İrlanda Kimliğine İşlenmesi: John Millington Synge'in *The Playboy of the Western World* ve Tom Paulin'in *The Riot Act* Başlıklı Oyunları

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tez çalışmam:
1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır.
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne veya ruh sağlığına müdahale içermemektedir.
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	Programı	İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı

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		Revizyon Tarihi Rev.Date	25.01.2024

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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My thesis work with the title given above:
1. Does not perform experimentation on people or animals.
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4. Is not a research conducted with qualitative or quantitative approaches that require data collection from the participants by using techniques such as survey, scale (test), interview, focus group work, observation, experiment, interview.
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I respectfully submit this for approval.

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	Student Number	N20131572
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	Programme	English Language and Literature MA

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

APPROVED
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alev KARADUMAN

APPENDIX 2: ORIGINALITY REPORT

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		Revizyon Tarihi *Rev.Date*	25.01.2024

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞINA

Tarih: 18/09/2024

Tez Başlığı: Antik Yunan Mitlerinin İrlanda Kimliğine İşlenmesi: John Millington Synge'in *The Playboy of the Western World* ve Tom Paulin'in *The Riot Act* Başlıklı Oyunları

Yukarıda başlığı verilen tezimin a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 147 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 18/09/2024 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı %7 'dir.

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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	Programme	English Language and Literature MA

SUPERVISOR'S APPROVAL

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