MOTHER IRELAND AND HER DAUGHTERS: IRISH WOMEN WRITERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO IRISH LITERARY IDENTITY

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The most anxiety-ridden aspect of learning is taking the first step. I have found that fear of the unknown acts as a self-regulating compass, and those who are unafraid to pursue its path eventually find their way. This premier venture has taught me a great deal about personal responsibility, flexibility, and academic resilience. I am very thankful to have this opportunity to advance myself on personal and academic levels.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my undergraduate career, I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the humor, strife, and deep-seated rebelliousness that is characteristic of Irish literature. I enjoyed the discussions of James Joyce’s understated but complicated style in *Dubliners*, the companionship described in Brendan Behan’s *Borstal Boy*, the encrypted poetry of William Butler Yeats, and the horrific tension that accompanied Patrick McCabe’s *Butcher Boy*. With so many male authors showcased in the syllabus of my Irish literature classes, it was a relief to stray from masculine motifs and become familiarized with Edna O’Brien’s *The Country Girls* and Nuala O’Faolain’s *Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman*. As I continued to read more of O’Faolain in my spare time, questions regarding Irish women writers’ influence on the Irish literary canon entered my mind. Anne Owen Weekes, author of *Irish Women Writers*, examines similar sentiments about male and female authors: “Thus, one is forced to ask the question if Irish women have written fiction; and if so whether this fiction has any artistic or even historic value; and finally whether this fiction differs sufficiently from that of Irish men to merit the recognition of yet another category” (1). The exploration of women’s literary identities in relation to a larger national identity—the cultural impression a reader obtains from these works—demonstrates a disparity between the amount of recognition women writers receive and their true influence on their audience’s perception. Women’s literary voices
have radically complicated the reflective notion of history. Although history is sometimes perceived to be a reliable source, however partial, its recorders hold biases that attenuated the accomplishments of certain oppressed groups. Women writers’ existence, their works, and their impact on canonical distinctions were assumed to be nonexistent due to the male-dominated perception of measured literary acclaim. In the 1970s, a time where Women’s Studies reexamined the political, social, and historic influence of writers, Robin Morgan coined the term “herstory” in order to emphasize this gender misrepresentation that history presents (“Herstory”). Morgan’s play on words suggests that history from a woman’s perspective was remarkably different from what had been recorded by male scholars. This reassessment of women’s writings aims to understand how gender implications further limited their achievements and recognition. The expansive scope of a literary canon is not fully absorbed by the reader unless he or she is provided with a plethora of opinions and historical recollections from both genders. Therefore, women’s literary perceptions and voices should be reviewed in a canon’s literary chorus in order for readers to acquire a comprehensive cultural experience.

Although many female authors were not widely recognized to be influential components of literary spheres of their time, they used their creative works to explore historic commentaries and cultural criticisms that were otherwise hidden. Weekes explains the relationship between womanhood and historical exclusion by illuminating how “critics of Irish literature fail to distinguish differences, or the marks of gender, in women’s writing, but rather they view the whole spectrum through a single lens fashioned by male dictums of ‘literature,’ ‘greatness,’ and ‘significance’” (2). Through this investigation, I intend to analyze two specific authors, Emily Lawless and Isabella Augusta Gregory, and examine their selected works in order to discuss how
their perceptions were vital influencing future Irish women writers. Both Lawless and Gregory are considered to be influential to future Irish women writers; they experienced extreme difficulties when establishing their literary voices and perspectives due to gender stigmas.

In the second chapter, I will explain the intended mission of the Irish Literary Revival, a cultural movement that lasted from the 1890s to roughly the mid-twentieth century, and how the group attempted to develop its own voice by shaping its national identity during an exceptional time of political and social unrest. Both tensions fueled the Revival, which anchored its foundation to bringing about distinct and dignified Irish culture and literature. Augusta Gregory was accepted into the Revival, but she experienced heavy gender stigmas that reduced her to an asset rather than portraying her as a unique, literary force. Gregory used these stereotypes to manipulate Yeats and shield herself from the judgment of being perceived as anything aside from a ‘good woman.’ Her masterful persuasion established The Irish National Theatre Company, and she also managed the Abbey Theatre, a manifestation of Ireland’s emerging culture and nationalism. Her presentation of the Irish theatre figure initiated a new sense of pride and solidified the opposing goals of educating and entertaining the audience. She relinquished recognition for many of these plays, which reduced her literary authority, but ultimately kept her relevant to the Revival. Gregory exchanged her acknowledgment for her plays and overall significance; she was constrained by stifling masculine perceptions of women in literature.

In the third chapter, I will examine Emily Lawless’s novel *Grania (The Story of an Island)* (1892) in relation to her biography, political marginalization, and indifference toward the Irish Literary Revival. The manner in which Lawless frees herself from the collectiveness of the Revival spurs her authorial independence, which allows her to pursue literary avenues that are
authentic and interest-driven. Her political and feminist views manifest through her protagonist, who is modeled after one of Ireland’s strongest female symbols: Grania O’Malley. I argue that, even though the Revival’s scrutiny damaged her reputation, she acquired a higher, purer authorial status due to her intended distancing. Essentially, she sacrificed immediate inclusion into Irish literary history for her own literary pursuits, which illuminates the exclusion women experienced if they did not submit to celebrated masculine themes.

James Cahalan, author of “Forging a Tradition: Emily Lawless in the Irish Literary Canon,” explains that although both writers embraced similar themes, there was a stark difference between their literary statuses, which ultimately attributed the way in which the Irish populace viewed them (44). Their struggles exemplify the push-pull nature of the patriarchal literary sphere, and an analysis of their literary ‘wins’ and ‘losses’ helps to illuminate the rigid outlines of literary acclaim and its masculine constructs. In order to achieve a fuller understanding of Ireland’s cultural identity, it is critical that the audience is made aware of the manner in which women writers expand the scope of the Irish literary cannon. Their struggles to establish independent, literary identities reinforce a direct connection between Ireland’s national fight for independence. I hope to discuss and analyze the various spheres of limitation that Irish women writers experience when they are accepted or rejected by the Revival and how this relationship affected their authorial development. I will be addressing different interpretations of their work, significance of their unique literary themes and foci, and how their perceptions were altered by this association. By the end of this project, I hope to present a clearer understanding of the limited ‘space’ that Lawless and Gregory encountered as they developed their authorial identities.
CHAPTER II

THE OBSTACLES AND REWARDS OF THE REVIVAL:

AUGUSTA GREGORY AND THE CHALLENGES OF FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

The Irish Literary Revival began in the 1890s and was a critical nationalist movement that embraced one mission: to reintroduce their nation’s identity to its people by showcasing its creativity. Mary Lou Kohfeldt, author of *Lady Gregory: A Biography*, explains how members of the Revival—William Butler Yeats, Isabella Augusta Gregory (née Persse), J. M. Synge, George Moore, Douglas Hyde, and others—determined what cultural aspects were considered suitable to build a dignified, widely-recognized literary foundation (4). Revivalists identified the essential cultural attributes of Ireland to be its landscape, rural life, heroic figures, and language because these elements were perceived to be the last bastions of veritable representation (4). Christine Kinealy, author of *A New History of Ireland*, clarifies that Revival members “based [their creative work] on Celtic legends, some of which had been retained only in oral tradition” (190). Revivalist authors blended various elements of mysticism, romanticism, and poetry in their works to engage the audience on an intellectual level while providing entertainment (190). The romantic and nationalist themes that the Revival emphasized were perceived by group members to be most representative of the Irish spirit, expressing the nation’s bold, prolific character and inciting a great deal of national pride.

The group’s collective reputation became more renowned as political tensions between Britain and Ireland grew. Kinealy identifies the political and social demise of Charles Stewart
Parnell in 1887 and the failed reintroduction of Irish Home Rule by Sir William Gladstone in 1893 as the main catalytic events that spurred this political tension (182). The Irish engaged in internal debates about how the country should react to the failed attempt to gain national independence (182). In the late 1890s, Anglo-Irish Protestants became more conservative and, for the second time in the nineteenth century, unionism (the desired alliance with Great Britain) became popular for social, political, and economic benefits (183). Nationalism became the immediate response to unionism, and it captured the spirits of Irish men and women who wanted to be relieved of their colonial relationship to Britain (183). These contrasting viewpoints also caused concerns in Britain because Ireland’s national independence was viewed to be the first step in demolishing the empire (185). Members of the Revival were essentially caught in the middle of these ideologies; the multifarious group continuously confronted obstacles from both Great Britain and Ireland as they began to try and reform Irish culture and shape it to their vision.

Certain members of the Revival were expected to support unionism due to their political affiliations; these rigid expectations posed a threat to the imaginative nature of the Revival. Kohfeldt insists these Revivalists were “the more talented, energetic, and less economically fortuned of the landed gentry—sometimes one or two generations away from the great estate—who, pushed or leaping from their shrinking lives, made the quantum jump from a social to an artistic identity” (4). This artistic identity shielded writers from certain political binds, but the divide between the Irish nationalism and the Anglo-Irish reliance on Britain remained. Politics were the essence of this time period as well as the lifeblood of many creative Revivalist works and plays, which complicated the relationship between Revivalists and their presentation of nationalism. Mary Lowe-Evans, author of “Hyacinth the Wise Man: Lady Gregory’s Comic
Enterprise,” explains how the collective efforts of the Revival members anchored the country’s sense of nationalism (40). The Revival’s creative nature attracted writers who desired to use the assembly’s platform to launch their own authorial success. It dictated a specific set of authentic cultural standards and protected the assembly while it filtered upcoming literary talent. The Revivalists established a diverse set of aesthetic principles and political expectations that protected the messages its members presented to their audiences.

The relationship between Augusta Gregory and other Revival members was as complicated as the group’s relationship to Ireland. Augusta Gregory was the only female directly associated with the Revival; the majority of the Revivalists were men; thus their influence made the Irish literary canon at the time distinctly patriarchal. Gregory’s national sentiments are significant to the Irish literary canon because she introduced female heroes to the stage. She ultimately influenced historic insight regarding Irish legend and culture; many of her stories channeled the love for rebellion that she established during her adolescence. Her presence affected the course of the Revival and, in her works, she added female perspectives of marriage, loyalty, and duty through her characters. Anne Owens Weekes, author of *Irish Women Writers*, explains that “Despite centuries of oppressive conditions, Irish women have written, initially in Gaelic and English then latterly chiefly in English, and judging by what survives of their writing, they have written well” (2). Augusta Gregory is no exception to this statement; she has demonstrated the double life that most women writers embraced when they entered into literature, a sphere predominantly governed by men. Although she experienced wide ranging successes and hardships, and suffered many obstacles throughout her artistic career, she was a member essential to the Revival’s fundamental mission of cultivating national pride. Mary Lou
Kohfeldt, author of *Lady Gregory: The Woman Behind the Irish Literary Renaissance*, explains how Gregory could speak and translate Gaelic, a linguistic skill that she requested to learn in her adolescence, which was an influential component of her writing identity (30). Her translating abilities were instrumental in establishing a direct correlation between her audience and legendary Irish folklore. Her successes and contributions were dynamic from artistic and feminist viewpoints—she was a wife, a mother, an author, a shrewd business woman who recognized an opportunity when she encountered it, and a true Irish patriot. Throughout her writing career, Augusta Gregory was deeply aware of both national and gender politics, which importantly shaped her distinct influence on Irish culture and nationalism.

Gregory’s acceptance of feminine stigmas complicated how she was viewed in Irish history due to the patriarchal construction of the literary realm. According to Sandra L. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s “The Queen’s Looking Glass: Creativity, Male Images of Women, and the Metaphor of Literary Paternity,” they argue that if the sexual implications of phallic symbols are examined, Sigmund Freud asserts that power is reserved for males alone due to their generative reproductive power (5). Symbols such as a sword or pen represent this reproductive supremacy, which connects men to be viewed as an authority, especially in literature. Gilbert and Gubar describe the relationship between women who attempted to establish themselves in the patriarchal nature of literature by asking “If a pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can women generate text?...Or worse, what if the male generative power is not just the only legitimate power, but the only power there is?” (7). Both of these questions leave women writers with little hope of being seen as equally merited in literature. Augusta Gregory believed the association between males and authority; she intended to perform in a way that enveloped her
femaleness in order to establish a connection with the male Revivalists. She knew she would not be fully accepted, but the partial association satisfied her cravings for social prominence and allowed her to pursue a career in literature.

Augusta Gregory’s biography demonstrates how traditional feminine concepts became embedded in her personality. Isabella Augusta Persse was born in Roxborough in County Galway in 1852 and was a member of a very large family. Kohfeldt explains that she was “the twelfth of sixteen children of a Protestant landowner in the West of Ireland” (8). Her parents’ collective background had a large impact on her childhood because it was entwined with political and religious conflicts. She was a third-generation Protestant after her grandmother converted in the eighteenth century in order to flee the restrictions placed on Catholics (8). Her mother, Frances Persse, was less than thrilled that she had given birth to a baby girl. An account of Isabella’s delivery demonstrates the indifferent environment she grew up in: “the baby girl was laid aside and temporarily forgotten…when she was remembered, she was nearly dead. A quilt had accidentally been thrown over her” (14). After she was found, her mother rationalized the accident by saying that her death would have been a shame because her other children would not have had a baby with which to play (14). As she grew, she became aware of the story associated with her near-death experience and she interpreted it as a sign of her personal salvation (14). She was also made aware of the unimportance of her gender and how her existence centered on the concept of family, which remained a heavy, haunting lesson that she carried throughout her life.

Persse’s adolescent years further reinforced the limited future she was expected to endure as an Irish girl. Kohfeldt explains that she was responsible for the care for her younger brothers
because she was the youngest daughter, which means she bore the brunt of domestic responsibilities (14). The expectation to be eternally magnanimous was an extremely prevalent, traditional role for women in Ireland, and Persse internalized this at an early age (14). These duties towards her siblings did not provide a fertile ground for companionship. She became isolated, never engaging in emotional displays with family members (15). Persse’s perceptions of others reflected one message: “people were either inferiors or superiors, but none…returned her glance as an equal or gave her a sense of herself as being an individual” (15). Immediately, she was able to recognize a strict hierarchy within her household and how her responsibilities reflected its base. As a result, she removed herself from the act of viewing herself as an equal in the company of others. Her sense of emotional displacement forced her to form a protective barrier around her emotions. She, like many other young women in Ireland, was predisposed to accept her perceived inferiority. Although she internalized this lesson very early in life, it proved to be a constructive addendum to her personality and her future career as an author, and would help to deal with chauvinistic and self-appointed elitist leaders of Ireland’s cultural revival.

Along with the self-abnegating social expectations, Persse’s limited academic experiences were viewed to be insignificant by her mother. Kohfeldt reiterates how Augusta received sparse schooling, and how her mother insisted that education should not be her daughter’s prime concern. Mrs. Persse believed that religion, good manners, and posture were of the utmost importance for any young girl to learn in order to successfully marry, which was assumed to be the ultimate fulfillment for women (18). She became fascinated with reading poetry and used this solitary pastime to escape the sharp realities of her home life (29). Since the
little education she received was her only sense of joy at home, she continued to develop her own intellect through the acquisition of various languages. Her love of language prompted her to study with a neighboring German governess, and she learned German mainly through patriotic songs (30). She first “penetrated the meaning of Heine’s *Zwei Grendadier*, not realizing that she was reacting to a poem that could have come straight from *The Spirit of the Nation*” (30). After this exhilarating experience with learning German, Augusta acquired the Gaelic language and became fluent with a similar determination. She originally used a copy of *The Spirit of the Nation* to study, but eventually she sought guidance from her cousin Standish Hayes O’Grady, who was a renowned Gaelic scholar (30). Kohfeldt describes the importance of this linguistic acquisition, saying:

> All three O’Grady cousins, Standish Hayes O’Grady, Standish James O’Grady, and Augusta Persse Gregory, were, if not the fathers and mother of the Irish Renaissance, among its first participants because they discovered, or rediscovered, a path to glory besides that of futile rebellion, on which so many high-spirited Irish people had perished. (30)

Augusta Persse enjoyed the lessons, but she received another type of education as time passed—she saw the disparity between the expectations people had of her and those they had of her brothers. When each child grew old enough, he or she was allowed to leave the confined household and pursue his or her own future (15). Augusta Persse’s family ascribed to the “fully prevalent doctrine that a woman’s right to be loved depended upon her beauty. Augusta was very plain, and she grew so slowly…she had an attentive, intelligent face, dark eyes and straight
hair” (17). Starting at age ten, she watched her sisters marry away and “began to see that this emphasis on romantic love was simply a dangerous diversion that [distracted] young women whose real business was to make a socially correct marriage” (32). Through this opinion, one can plainly see how Augusta began to evaluate the marriage market. Although she would be tempted by the courtship of Mr. Henry Hart, an undergraduate of Trinity College, her father insisted that she be sent to Castle Taylor where she would continue her schooling (33).

Augusta’s solitary persona was encouraged by her education, but it did not cause her to be antisocial or remote. She often aligned with her brothers’ friends and enjoyed the company of men (28). Augusta associated men with authority, and the only way in which she could improve her status was to be in the presence of those who held power. She sought to improve her social status through the company of influential and lively men. Her pragmatism was her protection, and her association between men and power motivated her to increase her own status through amiable acquaintances.

Augusta Persse’s stern commitment to solitude changed as she drew interest in one specific person: Sir William Gregory of Coole. By 1877, Sir William Gregory was a sixty-one-year old man who was widowed and knighted shortly after (37). Augusta Persse first met him at a cricket match at Roxborough after she spent time studying French and Italian in Cannes (37). Despite multiple attempts by her mother to remove Sir Gregory from Augusta’s life, Augusta accepted his marriage proposal, and on March 4, 1880, they were married at Dublin’s St. Matthias Church (44). Although she performed the traditional duties of a wife, Augusta gained a different perspective on the relationship between landlords and tenants through her husband’s daily interactions (50). Indeed, Kohfeldt mentions that many of Augusta’s brothers had acquired
positions in local government, and she was watching how Parliament would react to Gladstone’s
tenants-rights bill (34). The affluence and prominence that accompanied her marriage
introduced her to circles of wealthy and intellectual acquaintances. Their first son, William
Robert Gregory, was born one year later. Augusta learned to love her child; this bond weakened
the defensive shell she originally developed to protect her secret, emotional self (Kearney 134).
In 1892, Sir William Gregory died, leaving Augusta and her son Robert unprotected by his
prominence or love (Kohfeldt 88). After her husband’s death, Augusta refused to wear anything
except black mourning attire and she could not bring herself to write in her personal diary for a
year (Kohfeldt 89). Augusta was responsible for her son and her own well-being; she carried on
with the solemn strength of a widow and the uncertainty of her newborn independence.

Augusta Gregory experienced the most trying time of her life after her husband’s death,
but also encountered acquaintances that helped to stabilize her life. Kohfeldt mentions that after
returning to Coole in 1896, Gregory was made aware of W. B. Yeats and his increasing
popularity among Irish writers, such as George Moore (103). “The literary group from Tulira,
consisting of Martyn, Symons, and Yeats, joined the family party at Coole,” and the group’s
discussions fortified her interest in Irish nationalism (105). In order to align with Yeats’s
mission, Augusta Gregory catered to his interests and published stories from native Irish servants
who lived in the estate (105). Soon, she realized that Yeats was financially insecure and in need
of assistance. She gave him Gaelic translation notes that she had previously acquired in order to
help him impress publishers with whom she was acquainted (105). By handing Yeats an
opportunity to increase his reputation as a writer, Gregory earned his trust and appreciation. She
continued to establish more connections with Yeats for two very distinct reasons: she generated a
great, personal interest in Irish folklore, and was drawn to the social influence of the emerging Revival leader. Gregory, being as socially strategic as she was intellectual, sought the opportunity to receive Yeats’s plutonic favor. Kohfeldt summarizes her emotions by saying:

In her devotion to the Irish people Augusta achieved the double-think that lies at the heart of many great plans for living. By becoming part of the great family of the Irish people, she felt both valuable and secure. She felt relieved of the need to achieve more value. She sensed that with this protection, and with this excuse, she would be capable of a dramatic expansion of her abilities that would lift her above the group…Under cover of service, she aimed for personal glory and she added another layer to her emotional camouflage, the primary layer of which was her widow’s black, worn when she was anything but mourning. (107)

By establishing a place in the Revival, the empathy she felt for her audience on a national level increased as she continued to develop herself as an author. Her devotion to her country was a force that drove her to become an influential figure in the efforts to rediscover the culture and nationalism of Ireland.

As a result, Augusta Gregory began shaping her artistic and political image; one of her first essay collections, entitled *Ideals in Ireland* in 1901, served as a central foundation for the remainder of her career (Kearney 134). This collection reflected the same views she originally established in her 1882 publication *Arabi and His Household* (134). She paralleled Ireland’s struggles with Britain with other countries experiencing conflict, such as Turkey’s desire to control Egypt (Kearney 134). Through these original writings, she cultivated a passionate
interest in politics, which strengthened her conversations with men of status. She progressed into the heart of Irish culture through translations of Ireland’s most popular Gaelic myths (such as *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*), through her artistic collaboration with Yeats, and the writing and production of her own plays (Keaney 135). James L. Pethica, author of “Lady Gregory (1852-1932),” explains that as a result of personal and collaborative successes, the Revival needed a distinct venue to showcase their plays to a larger audience. Gregory was responsible for acquiring funds to start the Irish National Theatre Company, and define its mission of sharing Irish culture with its denizens through theatre (Kohfeldt 159). Pethica, in “Gregory, (Isabella) Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852-1932)” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* explains how she pledged her own money in order to make Yeats agree, and then she solicited her wealthy acquaintances for the rest of the funding (“Gregory (Isabella”). Her strategy and activism established the Irish National Theatre Company, which was the initial step in a series of dramatic successes for the Revival members, and brought about one of Ireland’s most famous theatres: the Abbey. Established in 1904, the Abbey Theatre became an important, physical representation of Ireland’s artistic and cultural revolution (“Gregory (Isabella”). Augusta Gregory became “the most tenacious champion of the theatre she helped Yeats found, campaigning for funds, touring with and promoting the Abbey Company in England and America, and encouraging young writers” (“Gregory (Isabella”). Although she worked collaboratively with Yeats, she did not achieve the acknowledgment she deserved for responsibility for funding the Abbey. Not only did she showcase nationalist perceptions through her works, but she also established a physical manifestation of Ireland’s cultural reawakening through the Abbey.
The development of the Abbey and the Revival’s emphasis on collective performance review, which means a collaborative effort to critique plays before they were presented to an audience, encouraged writers’ idiosyncrasies to undergo significant transformations at the hands of other Revivalists. The manner in which Revival members collectively influenced each proposed play would muddle accents of Augusta Gregory’s writing style. Although this outcome seems likely, she became more and more confident as various audiences responded to her plays with high praise. Lowe-Evans explains how Augusta Gregory’s adolescent background merged with her theatrical character:

On the opening of the Abbey Theatre on 27 December, the bill had featured two Yeats plays, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and On Baily’s Strand (both of which had been enhanced one way or another by Lady Gregory’s modifications and inspiration) and only one play by Lady Gregory, Spreading the News. (44)

Although Yeats was the headliner on that particular bill, Augusta Gregory’s plays aimed to engage a larger audience and became widely acclaimed (44). Gregory’s patience with Yeats’s ego allotted her time to build her literary momentum and public favor. Not only was the audience aware of Gregory’s one-act plays, but they began to prefer them over time (44). Kearney highlights Gregory’s increased popularity among theatre goers and how her plays accrued acclaim from critics all over the world (134). He also explains how her responsibilities toward the Abbey grew over time: she became a patent holder, board member, actor, and consultant for the Abbey Theatre (134). Augusta Gregory was extremely active in the artistic
and political scenes of Ireland; she is remembered as influential Irish writer who shaped her nation’s cultural pride and independence.

**Lady Gregory and the Stage: The Importance of Myth and Nationalism**

Although Gregory did not take an interest in any nationalist group before she and Yeats met, she had developed a love for rebellion as a forbidden act that she could only experience through playwriting. Augusta Gregory was able to “transport Ireland’s ancient past to contemporary Irish consciousness, concurrently exploring the ‘Irishness’ of the Irish within an ethnic yet in universal framework” (Kearney 135). Her highest artistic aspiration was to champion Ireland’s culture and to spread this dignified symbol to national and global audiences. Initially, the greatest obstacle she encountered was the rewriting of the theatrical stereotypes for Irish characters (i.e. the stage Irishman). Michael Jaros in “Image-Makers and Their Discontents,” discusses the theatrical stigmatizations associated with common stage Irishmen: “In opposition to the stereotypical stage Irishman—drunk, blustering, buffoonish…the Irish Literary Theatre would stage an ancient, ideal Ireland that would, it was assumed, be supported by the good will and patient, quiet apprehension of all the Irish people” (57). These stereotypes were evidence of antagonistic perceptions of Ireland and its people; replacing them with more complex and humanistic traits would, through a self-fulfilling prophecy, usher in national pride. Compelling symbols of nationalism established a platform from which spectators could see affirmative representation of themselves. There were many obstacles that accompanied this endeavor, “But the perceived necessity for dignifying the Irish character brought about what amounts to a national psychic imbalance, a restless seriousness of purpose unmitigated (at least
officially) by intellectual playfulness” (41). She emphasized the most humanistic traits of the Irish in her plays; her decisions were vital to disseminating positive nationalist sentiments and building the audience’s emotional connections to their culture. Gregory’s plays are essential to the Revival because she encouraged support for Irish nationalism through heroic, mythological representations of men and women that were perceived as reflections of the audience.

**The Universal Language of Humor**

Nationalism was the lifeblood of Ireland’s rebelliousness, and Augusta Gregory channeled this through the retelling of Irish culture through mythology. Jaros explains that in 1898 she and W. B. Yeats created a document that functioned as a mission statement for the National Irish Theatre during the commemorative centenary of the 1798 Rising, when nationalist Theobald Wolfe Tone led the United Irishmen in a failed revolt against Britain (57). The recollection of Tone’s attempted insurrection aroused anger, regret, and admiration in the Irish, and these emotions were channeled and intensified through theatrical performances. Gregory did not voluntarily celebrate this martyr; she exaggerated her retelling to align with the Revival and compete with other Abbey writers, like Douglas Hyde and J. M. Synge. Aside from addressing rivalries, she experienced another obstacle: the belief that the Irish had to be taught to appreciate theatre and its imaginative, intellectual elements (57). Building her reputation as an author, she undertook the challenge of attracting Ireland’s political fractions to the Abbey’s in order to strengthen the theatre and her own authorial reputation. She wanted to affirm the cultural roots movement of the Irish by still emphasizing two of its most distinctive elements: the peasant and Irish mythology (59). This proved to be one of the most important distinctions of the Revival:
that the rural Irish peasant embodied the purity of the race. In him was uncorrupted Gaelicism. She sought to entertain and educate her audience simultaneously, which proved to be two demanding tasks.

Jaros explains how Gregory and W. B. Yeats’s 1902 production of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* embodied the political angst and artistic intellectualism that she previously desired (60). In Gregory’s autobiography *Our Irish Theatre*, she explains the significance of Cathleen: “She herself was Ireland, that Cathleen Ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung and for whose sake so many have gone to death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play, I could make others see my dream as I had seen it…we gave it to the little theatre in Dublin and found that the working people liked it” (54). The figure of Cathleen Ni Houlihan is a mythical, female representation of Ireland and her nationalist spirit intensifies in the face of oppression. The inspiration for this play originated from Yeats when he dreamt of her, but he found himself unable to capture the authentic language of peasant (Kohfeldt 143). Kohfeldt continues to examine how Gregory transformed Yeats’s dream to a creative reality: “[Yeats] went back up to his room to turn his dream into a play, but found he could not do it. He thought the language to be a problem. He had dreamed of peasant characters but could not reproduce the peasant speech” (143). Yeats’s request for assistance provided Gregory an opportunity to evoke the malcontent for the limited life she was offered as a young girl in order to convey anguish and celebrate resistance (143). By finding an outlet for her discontent, Gregory illustrated an emotionally-charged and authentic dialect that brought Cathleen to life. *Cathleen* is about a family discussing the future marriage of their son, Michael (143). During their discussion, an old woman wanders to their house and is perceived to be lamenting the loss of her four green fields,
which refer to the four provinces of Ireland (143). Michael feels compelled to help this woman rid her land of foreign occupation (145). He joins the other men who have dedicated their lives to this quest even after the old woman assures him that he will lose his life in the attempt to free her lands (145). This play was remarkably successful because of a supplemental twist Gregory designed the end of the play—after Michael commits, the old woman is seen by another townsperson who describes her as young girl with a regal stride (144). The effective theme of self-sacrifice in exchange for national independence would be used as a future rallying cry for many nationalist groups, and Gregory exercised a chief influence on the outcome of Cathleen’s image.

Even though she did not receive the acknowledgment that was rightfully hers for Cathleen, Gregory continued to develop her own writing style and perceptions that were firmly grounded in Irish mythology. The epic heroes that were presented in her original 1902 book Cuchulain of Muirthemne inspired the way in which she would craft various plays and other performances (Kohfeldt 149). In Our Irish Theatre, Gregory expressed the pride that came along with encouragement from J. M. Synge, saying “When my Cuchulain of Muirthemne came out he said to Mr. Yeats he had been amazed to find it in a dialect he had been trying to master…I say this with a little pride, for I was the first to use the Irish idiom as it is spoken, with intention and belief in it” (75). The display of pride was only suitable in her reflection, and she even masks her success’s intensity by using the word “little.” She employed words like these to increase passiveness and minimize her originally declarative statement. She used praise for Cuchulain to reinforce the importance of identifying Gaelic to be a direct connection to pure Irish culture and present it to her audience. Lowe-Evans explains that “Through her extensive travels with her
husband, Lady Gregory accrued perceptions of very different walks of life” (43). These experiences prompted her to establish a bond between her characters and the Irish audience through a more personable, *au courant* style (43). The purpose of this style was to stray from the distant nature of strict intellectualism and unite the audience while introducing them to their cultural roots. Keeping these two objectives balanced was taxing because Gregory was concerned about including the audience rather than confusing them with ambiguities or discreet literary allusions. Due to the academic nature of the Revival, some plays that other Revivalists presented were not well-liked by the audience because the performances were extremely dense with symbolism and specific literary encryptions (Kohfeldt 149). Gregory upheld the belief that an effectual play engaged the audience on sensory, emotional, and intellectual levels, and her opinion propelled her popularity as an author.

As her reputation increased, Gregory began to explore another successful method of establishing a relationship with her audience—comedy. Through the use of humor, she exposed the Irish to various controversial conjectures that would have otherwise caused offense. Lowe-Evans describes how Gregory arrived at this conclusion, saying “Quite consciously, then, she accepted the role of comic writer knowing that she was entering a dialogue about Irish identity. She would open the discourse of the National Irish Theatre to carnival, forcing the polemic of identity formation to become communal rather than autocratic” (44). Gregory understood from her social interactions that in order to successfully handle an audience, one must have tact, couth, and awareness. She identifies Gregory’s play *Hyacinth Halvey* as an example of the incorporation of humor into Gregory’s comedic enterprise (49). This play centers on Hyacinth Halvey, a new sub-Sanitary Inspector who has acquired a high office due to testimonials about
his sterling character (49). He is relocated to a house opposite of the town priest’s abode and he finds that he is expected to speak to local agricultural representatives (49). His willingness to steal a dead sheep from a local butcher is one of many schemes he employs to free himself from the self-induced puffery (50). In *Our Irish Theatre*, Gregory describes her malcontent with Synge’s negative review of her performance, saying that “He had under charming and manners in all things in life the absorption of his own dream…In the arts he knew no language but his own” (76). Her frustrations reveal that her passivity was unnatural and restrictive, especially in an environment of constant judgment. Gregory’s effective knowledge of her audience influenced how she wrote her plays and she formed valuable associations in the performance and message of *Hyacinth*.

Gregory’s *Hyacinth*, and several of her other plays, became extremely important to the Abbey. Lowe-Evans explains *Hyacinth*’s significance: “Unlike *The Hour Glass*, which begins and ends with a conservative moral, *Hyacinth*, conceived from a moment’s gossip, provides relief from the burden of respectability and an implicit lesson about the need to change rhetorical practices occurring in 1907 Ireland” (50). This proposed message targeted political puffery and appealed to the audience more so than prompted reflections of cultural status because the Irish were irritated with Britain’s national image. Ulick O’Connor, author of *Celtic Dawn: A Portrait of the Irish Renaissance*, explains that the audience’s connection and preference for these comedies was a influential staple for the Abbey itself; her plays were often seen to be favorites and they were showcased when increased ticket sales were needed (345). The Abbey was viewed to be a living representation of Ireland’s cultural development, and its survival was important. Without it, audience members would be robbed of a theatre that energetically
celebrated diverse aspects of their heritage and culture. The audience’s interest, apprehension, anger, gloom, and joy were distinct, emotional reactions to the Abbey’s productions, which were results of active audience reflection. Of these sentiments, pride and comedic distinctions that are associated with heroic myths and amiable comedies evolved and became the base from which Irish nationalism flourished. Augusta Gregory successfully implemented comedy in her plays to amalgamate the audience into one communal, national identity. Through humoristic performances, Gregory introduced a space that was reserved for the collaborative effects of laughter and absurdity. The relief that Gregory’s comedies provided the audience removed the stifling correlation between of prominence and trustworthiness, which made humanistic characteristics, such as selfishness and regret, to be more acceptable.

Although Gregory was well-liked for the most part by the Abbey’s audience, the constant defense of the Revival’s performances contested the influence of their political and creative works. One of the most infamous examples of this was the Playboy Riots. Seamus Deane describes how the 1907 production of The Playboy of the Western World, written by J. M. Synge, is “the story of Christy Mahon’s transformation from stuttering lout into the playboy poet who is finally master of his da and himself” (152). Seemingly harmless in its plot, audiences rioted for eight nights consecutively because “Synge managed to cast a slur on the fair name of Irish womanhood by having young girls of the district appear in their petticoats” (152). To the Irish audience, this was an outrage which incited violent rioting. This indignation also caused a reevaluation of Gregory’s plays, and Hyacinth was recognized as one of the culpable instigators. In response, Gregory writes in Our Irish Theatre:
Now as to the trouble of *The Playboy*. We were told, when we arrived [in Ireland], the opposition was being organized from Dublin, and I was told that there had already been some attacks in a Jesuit paper, *America*. But the first I saw was a letter in the *Boston Post*…the letter was headed in a large type, saying ‘Dr. J. T. Gallagher denounces the Irish plays, saying they are Vulgar, Unnatural, Anti-National, and Anti-Christian.’” (101)

Gregory was furious that a critic would include her play as being a misrepresentation of the Irish people. She describes her anger and writes “both [*Birthright*] and my own *Hyacinth* have been played not only at the Abbey but in the country towns and villages with the approval of the priests and Gaelic League” (Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, 101). Gregory knew that her play was just the beginning of the assault; she was receiving a critique as an author and a member of the Revival. This direct attack of her image and integrity, and she defended the right for the Abbey to continue to produce performances of *Hyacinth* and *The Playboy* to police commissioners in Ireland (Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, 103). Gregory protected the Abbey, which in turn protected her artistic career, in order to reestablish her important image and keep connection lines open to the development of cultural pride with her audience.

Augusta Gregory’s use of humor proved to be a very attractive quality attributed to her plays. She is a champion of the Irish cause because she focused on spreading nationalism to the widest audience she could amass. The retelling of epic stories grounded the Irish to the thrills of heroism and adventure, which were immense sources of cultural pride and celebration. Kohfeldt writes that the Irish “were long accustomed to feel subordinate and inferior to England, they
were surprised, they felt ennobled, to discover that Ireland had a heroic culture where England was still in the Dark Ages” (150). These epics demonstrated a distinct separation from British culture after being showcased by Gregory’s performances. The comedies she also produced lifted the rigid expectations of propriety and allotted space for the same entertaining spirit that accompanied Irish oral tradition. She opened up her audience through her humor in Hyacinth, even though it was unfairly associated with the defamed The Playboy of the Western World years later. Gregory reestablished legitimacy in theatre by introducing symbols of nationalism and myth to her audience, while simultaneously broadening the connective foundation between culture and humor for her audience.

A Compartmental Self: Power and Gender Politics of the Collective Revival

From her childhood, Augusta Gregory understood the rigid requirements expected of her gender: she was limited to satisfying domestic duties, embracing unquestioned loyalty and support of others, and maintaining a maternal image at all times. Although her wealth and prominence increased with her marriage, she still encountered situations where social obligations were expected to be more important than establishment of her authorial reputation. During her life, Gregory adapted to meet the needs of others; from the stiffness of social interactions to the manner in which she entertained guests at her home, she perpetuated a believable façade of femininity. The Revival’s collective review made it difficult for any one member to obtain full recognition for his or her works, and being the only female was a disadvantage, despite her linguistic talent and effective writing abilities. The gender expectations of duty, loyalty, and self-abnegation created stigmas that she exploited to ensure some degree of authorial protection.
By using Yeats as a shield and supplementing his creative ego, Gregory cloaked her social image under duty and was accepted to be a “good woman” in the eyes of the Irish populace. She had a great deal of influence over Yeats, a power that many Revival members, like George Moore, desperately coveted (Kohfeldt 138). Because Augusta Gregory was accepted into an assembly dominated by males, she employed a balance of authorial discretion and image management to retain a place of power in the Revival.

Augusta Gregory was limited to the restrictions of a particular set of Revival standards; she embraced the competitiveness that existed within the Revival. Gilbert and Gubar describe these limitations in their chapter “Infections of the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship” in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, saying

> For the great women writers of the past two centuries are linked with the ingenuity with which all, while no one was really looking, danced out of the debilitating looking glass of the male text into the health of female authority. Tracing subversive pictures behind socially acceptable facades, they managed to appear to disassociate themselves from their own revolutionary impulses even while passionately enacting such impulses.” (82)

This concept of covert rebellion is pertinent to Gregory’s strategic relationship with the Revival and its members. She was aware of the limitations she would encounter as a woman in a group of males; this was due to her interactions that led up to her marriage. This awareness allowed her to split her perceptions into two distinct parts: one of self and one of image. She would
continue to protect both; however, a battle would be waged regarding which one would be considered “dominant.” As a result, she embraced two specific identities, which allowed her to protect in inner most self from the harsh criticism that her image encountered.

In order to understand Gregory’s exchange of self for status, it is important to understand her influence over the Revival’s figurehead, W. B. Yeats. In “Gregory, (Isabella) Augusta, Lady Gregory (1852-1932),” Pethica explains how encouraging exchanges established useful footholds for Gregory: “Yeats had initially sought her help merely to supply peasant dialogue and realist folk details to offset his own tendency to symbolism, but their creative exchanges quickly developed into a more complex stylistic, ideological, and imaginative interdependence.” This statement places Gregory as an accessory rather than an important member of the Revival, whereas Yeats is illustrated as the authority. Anne Fogarty, author of “‘A Woman of the House’: Gender and Nationalism in the Writings of Augusta Gregory,” claims that “Undoubtedly, one of the chief factors in contributing to the misrepresentation of Gregory is the belief that her primary claim to fame derives from the ancillary role she played in sponsoring and fostering the career of W. B. Yeats” (102). She is described as a combination of a maternal figure and a friend, which undermines her true role in the Revival. Yeats did not take advantage of Gregory’s friendship, though she had more control over the social implications of their relationship and used him to guarantee herself a space amongst the other Revival members.

Through her interactions with Yeats, she constantly expanded her own writing, viewpoints, and intellectual abilities. Pethica also mentions how Gregory bargained with Yeats in order to keep a degree of control through friendly debt:
In July of 1897, Yeats came to Coole for the first of twelve consecutive long summer stays, and Lady Gregory at once helped to make his long-harboured ideas of founding an Irish dramatic movement a reality by offering the first monetary guarantee for the Irish Literary Theatre and persuading friends to underwrite most of the remainder needed. (“Gregory, (Isabella)"

Although she genuinely cared for Yeats and his personal life, her double-think (as Kohfeldt mentioned earlier) insured that she would be a widely recognized member of the Revival and used it to progress her own writings and perceptions. Gregory’s pragmatism delivers her from becoming completely immured in the backdrop of the Revival due to the expectations of duty and responsibilities that are traditionally associated with her gender. This balance of movement and restraint is very tricky because she does not experience as much artistic freedom as the male members of the Revival. She increases her own competitiveness in order to secure a metaphorical sense of space, or a merited belonging, in the Revival. She successfully accentuated these roles just to contradict them later, which enforced an unpredictability that upset the other Revival members. By hiding her true personality under a socially-acceptable image, she was secured in her reputation as a Revivalist and an influential writer in Irish history.

After her initial favor, Yeats became the head of the Irish Literary Theatre, and Gregory was rewarded when he insisted that her play Twenty Five (A Losing Game) go into immediate rehearsal (Kohfeldt 159). Lowe-Evans summarizes this first performance and its significance by saying “A woman in a man’s world for the most of her life, she was necessarily a keen listener and observer. Even the first of her comedies performed, Twenty Five— which represents the
returned lover of a young woman, now married to an elderly man, who generously saves the couple’s home—was likely inspired by her affair with Scawen Blunt” (43). Through this initial commitment, she was able to instigate a cooperative relationship with Yeats that eventually established the Abbey Theatre. She accomplished many literary successes and added her own feminist legacy to Irish history, however, expectations that accompanied her gender often eclipsed her literary accomplishments. Fogarty clarifies this relationship, saying “Moreover, while male artists such as John Millington Synge and George Moore are deemed to have transcended or at least transmuted their lives in creative endeavors, no such separation is admitted in the case of the female writer” (102). Augusta Gregory’s literary achievements were reduced to a circling insignificance due to belief that women were not capable of producing works that were equal to men. Historical perceptions of her literary influence distort her importance to the cultivation of Irish women writers, claiming that she was merely an assistant in the Revival rather than a literary force in her own right.

Although Gregory is frequently accredited with contributing to the collaborative aspect of a work, she was very reluctant to seek direct credit for her own writing. Kohfeldt explains how Gregory was discredited in terms of her acknowledged involvement in the development of Cathleen Ni Houlihan (150). This praised account of rebel Ireland was directly attributed to Yeats although Lady Gregory provided nearly all of the translated text before she produced the script itself (146). Easter 1916 was a major historic uprising that exemplified Ireland’s rage and malice for England, and symbols like Houlihan spurred intensified nationalism, which resulted in violence (150). Easter 1916 was an organized ambush, led by members of the Irish Citizen Army, on British troops in order to rid Dublin of soldier occupation (Kearney 202). The fighting
lasted five days and resulted in two-hundred and thirty Irish casualties and the killing of one-
hundred and thirteen British troops before two of the leaders Pearse and Connolly, surrendered
(Kearney 202). In the aftermath, Yeats pondered the effectiveness of his play of these artistic
symbols on young Irish rebels and their actions, even though it started out as an unarticulated
dream (Kohfeldt 150). Kohfeldt explains Gregory’s reluctance by saying she “never claimed
Cathleen. In years later, when her family protested, she would shake her head with a smile and
say she could not take from [Yeats] what was his only popular success” (151). In instances like
this, Gregory refused to contest the perception that that Cathleen solely belonged to Yeats. Her
inability to relieve herself from her sense of duty and loyalty hindered her reputation as an
important founder of Irish nationalism.

During her life, Augusta Gregory’s acknowledged contributions were drastically reduced
by her male counterparts. In James Pethica’s 1987 essay “A Woman’s Sonnets” he comments
on how her personal and professional distancing functioned through the examination of
Gregory’s reflective poems:

> Although Lady Gregory’s hand had already been suspected in ‘A Woman’s
> Sonnets’, a sequence of twelve poems which appeared in the Klemmscott edition of
> Wilfred Seawen Blunt’s poetry in 1892, it was not until the recent release of
> Blunt’s papers that her clandestine affair with him was confirmed.” (98)

Gregory, who dressed in mourning attire and dedicated one aspect of her persona to the
perceived feminine constructs of duty and loyalty, knew that public knowledge of her personal
life would have drastically reduced her favorable image and could have ruined her literary
career. Pethica considers “Her affair with Blunt was Lady Gregory’s best-kept secret, and necessarily so, for in Catholic Ireland the slightest hint of this buried past would have severely damaged her reputation” (“A Woman’s Sonnets” 121). The affair could have severely damaged the public’s opinion due to the conservative social stigmas that Irish women endured in the late nineteenth century. Gregory had to protect her perceived image, the distant self that she became when she represented the Revival. Due to the exceptionally personal nature of these sonnets, it is a travesty that Gregory was unable to display her “inner most heart” to her audience, which would make her appear to be more human (“A Woman’s Sonnets” 121). These sorts of secrets demonstrated how women writers were unable to embrace a sense of emotional and intellectual literary wholeness that was granted to men. By relinquishing her work to Blunt, she inevitably abandoned her claim to her own longing for companionship, but she was able to protect her surface identity and her reputation. As a result of her actions, the edited versions of Blunt’s final product remove the raw emotion and confessionary elements displayed in her poetry. One example of this is the comparison of Gregory’s tenth sonnet’s rhyming couplet and Bunt’s edited and adapted version. The rhyming couplet in Gregory’s tenth sonnet’s reads: “But now, for pardon now for grace I plead,/Forgive me dearest! I thy pity need,” and is full of powerful lament and emotion (“A Woman’s Sonnets” 110). In contrast to Gregory’s original, Blunt’s diluted “Forgive me this, that I too soon, too late/Too wholly gave a love desolate” removes the emotion and includes more of a distant voice (“A Woman’s Sonnets” 110). Blunt reconstructs the form as well as the message of those two lines by substituting a stoic tone for Gregory’s original frenzied plea. Through his own interpretation, Pethica also notes that “Lady Gregory’s pain of separation and wish to avoid seeing a slow falling-off in the love which has cost her so
much, are gone, and in Blunt’s hands the focus has been suggestively slanted towards the prospect of a next ‘quest’” (“A Woman’s Sonnets” 116). This misrepresentation of Gregory’s lament in exchange for the collection’s publication is exemplary of the sacrifice and marginalization she experienced as a woman in the male-dominated literary scene.

Augusta Gregory developed a mentality that associated apparent power with a negative characteristic of her gender. Kohfeldt describes this perception by saying “Like the heroes, Augusta attempted to make herself believe that activities did not involve competing with others to raise her status, but were simply services performed in the course of doing her duty to the Irish people” (141). If she was successful in forcing herself to embrace passivity, she would have become completely quiescent and been distanced from the Revival’s activities. This cloaked excuse for her activities shielded her from being perceived as a rampant, power-hungry woman, but it also reduced her authentic representation in Ireland’s cultural and literary identity. If the Revival is considered an extension of patriarchal society, along with reviews from the writers of The Irish Times, it is apparent that even women who are accepted into this masculine sphere experienced a more severe pressure than those who did not engage in this competition (150). Augusta Gregory struggled to steady the oscillation between gender expectations and her personal aspirations; she was entrenched in a perpetual stalemate against herself and her perceived image as a woman writer. The effectiveness of Augusta Gregory’s works and influence on the Irish literary canon have been grossly undermined due to the rigid boundaries that were associated with her gender.
Women’s Studies recognizes Augusta Gregory as an extremely influential aspect of Irish history, and nationalism of Ireland. Mary Lowe-Evans discusses the her influence, saying “Although students of Irish literature outside of Ireland generally come to associate comedy of the renaissance period with male writers like J. M. Synge and Sean O’Casey, the person directly responsible for providing the comic balance needed to successfully ‘image’ Ireland’s national character was Lady Gregory” (42). Her dynamic experiences with gender limitations and the liberating creative outlets propels her to be historically influential as well as awe-inspiring due to her struggles with personal and authorial identity. Kohfeldt reminds the reader that “As with Irish folklore, she found much in the epics to reinforce her own attitudes. The most important virtue is loyalty—though here there is an average of treachery” (140). Although she experienced stigmas of femininity, she employed certain strategies that strengthened her claim to the formation of Irish culture and literature. Her awareness of these restrictions and ability to use them to supplement her success increased her prominence as a writer, but she was also denied many of the acknowledgements and high praise that she deserved. The brilliance of Augusta Gregory’s plays showcases her ability to bring the Irish to various epiphanies about their own culture, while simultaneously exploring her own authorial identity and relation to Irish history.
CHAPTER III
SYSTEMIC INDIFFERENCE AND AUTHORIAL BRAVERY:
EMILY LAWLESS’ S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE IRISH LITERARY CANON

Exclusion is a strong thematic thread that runs through the fabric of the Irish literary

canon—from issues with censorship to religion-bound taboos, Irish authors have had their ideas
discredited and their works ignored. Many of Ireland’s greatest authors experienced this
exclusion. As a result, they learned to write freely and to develop their perceptions without
systemic restraint. In the late nineteenth century, Ireland was experiencing a movement to
rediscover its authentic culture through the Irish Literary Revival, an assembly that embraced the
mission of defining Irish culture. Emily Lawless was a writer who favored history in order to
produce a fictional work that explored questions relating to identity on the individual and
national level. Her contributions to Irish culture and literature were unique because she chose a
legendary Irish woman as a model for her protagonist and she explored the desire for a strong
sense of identity on personal and national levels. Lawless’s perception of her homeland in her
1892 novel Grania (The Story of an Island) compares Ireland’s cultural incapacitation to the vast
limitations that Irish women were forced to endure. Her intentional distancing from the Irish
Literary Revival damaged the chances for her novel to be widely circulated or praised in Ireland
during her lifetime. By concentrating on the tragic nature of Irish culture and relating it to the
smothering social obstacles that women faced, Lawless connected women’s plight to Ireland’s
overall desire to gain its own identity as an independent nation. Lawless derives this perception
from her personal experiences, historic background, and recorded observations of life on the
Aran Islands. Lawless’s work provides harsh cultural criticisms of Ireland and its social constructs, but her tragic hero is rooted in a larger message of the debilitating effects of fragmentation. Lawless asserts that Ireland and its female citizens were struggling against similar cyclical inhibitions to establish the same goal: creating a strong identity under conditions of unrelenting oppression.

Emily Lawless’s opinions of Ireland and her focus on history were derived from the layered identity from her childhood and early publishing experiences. According to Matthew J. Goodman, the author of “Emily Lawless” in the collection Irish Women Writers: An A to Z Guide, Lawless was born to the third Baron Cloncurry Edward Lawless and Elizabeth Kirwan in Lyon’s House, County Kildare, in 1845 (185). Christine Kinealy, author of A New History of Ireland, elaborates on the political perceptions of Lawless’s family, saying that Irish Protestants were perceived to have split loyalties when it came to the relationship between Ireland and England (151). She describes this hybrid group as being Anglo-Irish, fusing religion and politics in opposition to Catholicism and nationalism (151). The political perceptions Lawless displayed in her writing brought acclaim or criticism as she presented them to her British and Irish audiences. Amidst this period of political tension, she found herself alienated due to the preconceived notions of her parent’s political opinions. Lawless’s experiences with isolation ultimately led her to convey unique political outlooks and to demonstrate the complex process of establishing a literary identity.

Emily Lawless’s opinions of Ireland and her interest in history resulted from her home life and her natural curiosity. As young girl, Lawless was fascinated by insects (particularly moths), and this interest fueled her many adventures and explorations outside her home in
Kildare as well as her parents’ summer home in County Clare (Goodman 185). Through these childhood adventures, she developed a love for nature and the Irish landscape. These pastimes allowed Lawless to develop a keen sense of observation and attention to detail, which ultimately influenced her writings. Lawless developed a trust in this tangible method of observational learning, and it would echo in her future publications (Goodman 185). As for most children, this first-hand method of absorbing information was the most trustworthy way to garner knowledge about her world. As she grew older, she relied upon realism as her seemingly boundless domain began to become more and more marginalized.

In her later works, Lawless tends to associate Ireland with tragedy and treats it with contempt, which may have resulted from her adolescent traumas. Her novels expose many layers of disaster, isolation, and abandonment, which can be read from a biographical standpoint. Richard Tobias notes that Lawless’s father committed suicide in 1859, and it emotionally devastated the family (129). Lawless was just fourteen when she, her eight siblings, and her mother moved to the West End of London to establish a new home (129). After her father’s death, Lawless’s mother became a source of and embodied maternal strength for her and her siblings. She provided security in a time of uncertainty and despondency, and her image seeded itself in the back of Lawless’s mind, eventually leading to an epiphany regarding symbols of strength. As Lawless progressed as an author, her reflection of Ireland became a fusion of happy childhood memories and adolescent pain. She would never completely forsake her birthplace or forget the tragedies that she experienced as a young girl.

Living in London, Lawless faced other complexities outside of her personal life that affected her authorial insights. Richard Tobias notes that in 1867 her first article appeared in the
ninth volume of *Entomologist’s Monthly Magazine* in London (129). Lawless collected observational research and wrote a scientific article about the Irish Lepidoptera and its adaptations (129). This initial publication was very promising for two reasons: she staked her claim as a female researcher in a male-dominated scene, and she represented Ireland in a scientific London magazine. The *Entomologist’s Monthly Magazine* article demonstrated the double life she was presumed to lead as an Irish woman writer who was born into a wealthy Protestant family (Goodman 185). This initial success strengthened her reliance on research and also demonstrated the political divide that would follow her throughout her publishing career. Lawless’s publication in London was also significant because the relationship between Ireland and England was consistently at a point of political conflict. Although her first scientific article was a success, she struggled against nomadic literary wandering throughout her writing career. Later, Lawless’s authorial achievements became complex as she attempted to publish in both her birth place and her second home, England. Ireland was building internal, emotive momentum toward gaining national independence from her colonizer and Lawless received scathing, politically-driven criticisms. Lawless had loyalties to both her birthplace and London, which produced a fragmented authorial platform. Questions regarding her audience’s identity became apparent, and the realism of science seemed to be an escape from siding with one nation. She was caught between two groups that did not claim nor deny her, thus she temporarily remained in an authorial purgatory, unsure about her future.

Through personal hardships and literary nomadism, Lawless led an exceptionally efficacious life. As a fiction writer, historian, and poet, she independently published over twenty books in her lifetime and left her mark on Irish history and literature (Tobias 128). Lawless’s
commitment to her analytical nature uncovered avenues for naturalist commentaries as her writing career progressed. Her works have been reconsidered and reexamined in the late twentieth century by feminist scholars in order to better understand how women viewed themselves in relation to Irish culture. She spent the rest of her life tending to her garden in Surrey until 1913 (186). The story of *Grania* sheds light on the debilitating gender restrictions and expectations that women experienced in the late nineteenth century, and can be read from a biographical standpoint. In *Grania*, Lawless also asserts that women’s struggles to remain independent mirror Ireland’s struggles for national independence. The marginalization and abandonment that Lawless experienced as an Irish women writer is reflected in *Grania*, which exemplifies hidden perceptions and cultural critiques centered on Ireland’s gender biases and formative literary culture.

**Quid Pro Quo**

Lawless published her most influential works between 1880 and 1900, years that were exceptionally important in terms of her personal and literary growth (Tobias 128). During the 1890s, the Irish Literary Revival’s reputation grew, and it became one of the dominant movements attempting to establish Ireland’s nationalist pride and intellectual culture while the country was under British rule. To be recognized as a prominent contributor to Irish literary culture, aspiring authors had to align their attitudes with the Revival’s to gain acceptance. Matthew J. Goodman states that the members of the Revival had one central mission: to revive Ireland’s sense of authentic culture by emphasizing romantic ideas and reintroducing the nation’s mythology (186). The Revival focused on romanticized themes of nationalism, which added
grandeur and an artistic sentiment to the spirit of Irish culture (186). Kinealy expands on the assembly’s interests, saying that this sense of romanticism included the rewritings of Celtic legends with the authors’ additions of artistic commentaries and personal twists (190). Although there were some similar goals between Lawless and the members of the Revival, their merging was improbable due to differences of cultural interpretation. Both groups believed in the viability of Irish culture, but Lawless was apprehensive to write about myths and legends due to her preference for naturalist standpoints.

The complications Lawless experienced with literary cohesion are examined more comprehensively by Sandra L. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in “Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship.” These two authors identify Harold Bloom as one of the first to incorporate literary psychohistory analysis (46). Gilbert and Gubar analyze the questions surrounding the topic of women in literature, and Bloom initially explains the continuation of male dominance in literary circles. Gilbert and Gubar detail his perspective, saying “Bloom’s paradigm of the sequential historical relationship between literary artists is the relationship of father and son, specifically that relationship as it was defined by Freud” (47). Bloom is referring to the oedipal struggle, the desire for sons to nullify their fathers in order to establish an earned sense of self, when describing the history of literature (47). The base of Bloom’s postulation indicates that males are associated with power, thus the literary groups are seen to be extensions of patriarchal societies. Gilbert and Gubar assert that, “it would be foolish to lock the woman artist into the Electra pattern matching the Oedipal structure Bloom proposes for male writers” (50). They continue to explain that lack of preexisting examples of Irish women writers inhibits this type of analysis from being applied (50). The Revival is included in
this description, and, with Yeats as its figurehead, exemplified the preference toward masculine identities that provided no space for women to enter unchanged. Lawless, therefore, would be forced to exchange her unique commentaries and interests in order to achieve the Revival’s acceptance.

The testosterone-driven nature of the Revival was considered to be sterile ground for women writers. Originally, Lawless was deterred from pursuing further acclaim through the glittering platform the Revival provided male authors. James M. Cahalan notes in “Forging a Tradition: Emily Lawless and the Irish Literary Canon,” that “Lawless operated at a disadvantage not only as a Victorian Woman, but also as a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy who neither sought out nor was accepted by Yeats” (39). Lawless was originally marginalized due to her family history, and, during the time of the Revival, politics arose as a main focal point for discussion. Richard Tobias explains that Lawless was also harshly criticized by the Revival members for showing a sense of sympathy toward landowners in her 1886 novel *Hurrish: A Study* (129). According to Goodman, *Hurrish*, which describes the relationship between Irish tenants and landowners, was negatively received by her Irish audience but was popular in England, where she had first been successfully published (185). He also stated that she was judged for “the sympathy with which she treated English landowners and Irish peasants unfavorably[,] it was deemed a travesty to grant any pardon to the English” (185). Here, her audience diverged in order to remain inside their distinct, national and cultural boundaries. This early adjudication further reduced Lawless’s chances of being acknowledged in both Ireland and London. She was identified as siding with the enemy, a sympathizer, unfit for literary reconsideration in Ireland.
The separation she experienced from Irish critics was the exact opposite of her intended message in *Hurrish*. Marguerite Corporaal in “Memories of the Great Famine and Ethnic Identity in Novels by Victorian Women Writers” insists that Lawless viewed the Great Famine to be the catalyst of a nationalism that further impedes potential social cohesion between Ireland and England (144). She uses her characters to emphasize the complexity between these socially and politically charged conflicts, saying that both the Irish and English are at fault (146). She did not grant a pardon to Ireland’s colonizer; instead, she uses her characters to demonstrate her belief that England should not dominate Ireland, and both countries should work together to minimize potential future conflicts and deaths (146). Lawless also viewed the vengeful desires directed at Britain to be a dark scar on the hearts of her fellow Irish men and women while nationalists used it as a rallying cry (145). The criticism she received for her conciliatory sentiments was a black mark that severely damaged her reputation in her early literary career. Although her views were not widely shared, she offers a perspective that focuses on cohesion rather than fragmentation, a theme that would later cross into territories of gender.

After Lawless experienced severe criticism from the Revival, she was not restricted by the expectation to produce works that satisfied the assembly’s requirements. She was less concerned about conforming to a defined set of standards and more concerned about supporting her own perceptions and sentiments about her homeland. Heather Edwards states that Lawless was generally ignored by the Revival after her publication of *Hurrish*, but this exclusion would ultimately lead her to follow new avenues as an author (423). She is a sterling example for contemporary Irish women writers because she was unapologetic and unafraid to express her views even if they made her unpopular. In light of her marginalization, Lawless’s choice to
continue writing fortifies a pervasive sense of personal resolution and faith in her ideas. Although she experienced isolation on individual, cultural, and national levels, Lawless contributed the importance of determination and relentless dedication to be essential characteristics that Irish authors must eventually embrace. Lawless was able to remain true to her ideas and present perspectives to her audience in a way that opened their eyes to the negative aspects of unquestioned nationalism and desire for vengeance.

Though originally criticized for her conciliatory political views in *Hurrish*, Lawless was eventually reconsidered by the Revivalists. In fact, in 1895 Yeats included her history-based novels, *With Essex in Ireland* (1890) and *Maelcho* (1894), in a symposium in the *Freeman’s Journal*, which listed the “Best Hundred Irish Books” (39). Had this complement been issued earlier in her career, she may have been seduced by Revival’s literary prominence. Lawless knew better. Yeats’s inclusion of her works occurred three years after she had explored new literary terrain: feminism. Lawless’s 1892 publication, *Grania*, opened her mind to uncommon topics such as gender bias and social fragmentation. The Revival’s literary figurehead only praised her for her historic outlooks, and left her other works like *Grania* unexamined. This unbalanced criticism and acknowledgement solidified her indifference toward the Revival and reinforced her self-serving standpoint. The dissent she experienced with the Revival and its prescribed praise provided her with the courage to discover her own authorial identity.

After Lawless’s second encounter with the Revival, she understood that she would have to stay true to her own views in order to be fulfilled as an author. By the time she received praise from Yeats, she had already explored a position that focused on Irish women and their gender expectations. A historian, Lawless was well-acquainted with Ireland’s political failures, internal
religious wars, and cultural institutions that stifled its progress as a nation. She disagreed with
the Revival members who “ignored [recent history] in favor of a heroic past which seemed to
point towards a glorious future” (Kinealy 190). Although she was apprehensive toward the
development of Ireland’s complete political independence from Britain, her conflicting
viewpoints assisted the Irish people in terms of establishing a unique cultural standpoint—
Lawless was able to expose her audience to a darker side of Irish life through her protagonist’s
experiences in Grania (Cahalan 51). Lawless’s frustrations with her homeland were legitimate,
and she refused to simply blanket problematic stigmas with romanticized interpretations of Irish
culture. Her critical writings can be described as constructive criticism because she highlights
the dual-relationship between Ireland’s cultural eccentricities and its struggle to advance its own
national identity. If she intended to completely abandon her homeland, she would not have
written at all and left these problems under the blanket of indifference. Grania is a novel that is
embellished with Lawless’s personal experiences and observational research which culminates
into a specific gender and cultural criticism. Lawless did not hate her homeland because she
critiques it in Grania, she simply exposes gender and cultural impediments so that they could be
addressed and overcome through a collective, national effort.

An Overview of “Grania (The Story of an Island)”

After the criticism of Hurrish, Lawless sought to develop her own insights and
commentaries through her novel Grania. Since she was freed from the daunting task of seeking
the thematic approval of the Revival members, she set out to write a novel that was a realistic
account of Irish rural life. Grania (The Story of an Island) is considered to be Lawless’s most
complicated work, her masterpiece, due to its interwoven levels of personal, geographical, and cultural isolation (Tobias 131). The novel is about a young girl growing up on the island of Inishmaan, which is one of the three islands in the west of Ireland, off the coast of Galway, and the stigmas she encounters throughout her life. Heather Edwards explains “Grania generated considerable attention when it was published in 1892. The novel predates the ‘official’ appearance of the term New Woman in 1894 in the North American Review as part of the debate between Sara Grand and Oudia about the Woman Question,” which explored women’s role in society in relation to men and masculine constructs (422). Although Lawless’s novel was not the first to mention this concept, the way in which she depicts her rebellious protagonist and her emotional connection to the rugged landscape suggests that Lawless was already considering feminist perceptions near the middle of her career (422). Lawless contrasted the wild beauty of Inishmaan with the marginalized restrictions that island women were forced to embrace (422). Not only were women expected to be pious and self-abnegating, they were also find joy in being submissive to their husbands, even if they completed similar (sometimes more demanding) physical tasks. She explores Grania’s sense of independence and restlessness as a natural facet of her personality, and purposely mismatches her natural self with the unnatural expectations her community has for her. Grania’s self-awareness and questioning nature also reflects Lawless’s journey into her own literary identity. Lawless uses Grania to explore her own questions about gender and to situate herself in Ireland’s literary expectations for women.

In the subsequent chapters of “Part I” of Lawless’s novel, the reader is introduced to the island through Grania’s eyes. She looks upon the small island of Inishmaan with a verdant naiveté due to its natural beauty. She explores the wild splendor of the island and takes part in
the communal work at the age of eleven. Grania does not know the history of Inishmaan, but she focuses on the landscape and the sea because they are the most apparent aspects of her youth. Lawless uses an omniscient narrative style to expound upon the rugged and impoverished lifestyle that resulted from lack of industry. The O’Malley household, which is more financially secure than other residences on Inishmaan, consists of Grania, her stepmother, her father, and her stepsister, Honor. The two sisters are starkly different: “Honor herself was a saint—a tender, self-doubting, otherwise all—believing soul. The small sister was born a rebel” (32). Grania is described as being well-muscled and aggressive, whereas Honor is dainty and pious. Lawless purposely positions the sisters as foils, the obedient and the rebel, the inherently good and the unnaturally spirited. Lawless structures the first of four distinct stages in Grania’s life to seem full of potential, and this allows the reader to form a bond with her protagonist’s likeable personality.

In “Part II,” Grania slowly becomes aware of the expectations placed upon Irish women and how they intermingle with the social culture of the island. Her sense of desertion becomes apparent when the reader realizes that her father and stepmother have died, leaving Grania to care for Honor. When Murdough Blake is introduced, he immediately judges Grania in terms of her worth as a financial asset. Lawless enters into his train of thought: “She was immensely strong, he knew, the strongest girl in Inishmaan, as well as the best off, for both reasons evidently, the most suitable one as a wife for himself” (64). He is later described as being indolent and irresponsible, whereas Grania takes great pride in her labors and fulfills her responsibilities to her sister. The path before Grania is rigid, and she sees how many women have unhappily married and started families. Lawless foreshadows when she writes:
If all humans are themselves islands, as the poet has suggested, than this tall, red-petticoated, fiercely-handsome girl decidedly was a very isolated, and rather craggy and unapproachable, sort of island. In her neighbours’ eyes she was a ‘Foreigner,’ just as her mother had been a foreigner before her, and there was much shaking of heads and lifting of hands amongst the matrons of Inishmaan whenever her name was mentioned. (62)

The violent storm at the end of “Part II” also indicates a hidden, sinister side of the island. This first volume is devoted to exploring Grania’s childhood, talents, and optimistic attributes in order to have a seemingly positive outlook on all of the promises and the potential ensnarement that she could encounter.

In “Part III,” time has passed and Grania has grown into a young woman. She is responsible for maintaining the house as well as for providing food for her and Honor, who is bedridden from an illness. Blake is now Grania’s love interest, and she and Honor talk about how the marriage market deals nothing but “cruel hands” to women (131). Through Lawless’s narration, the reader is able to understand the psychological suffering that the protagonist experiences: “Grania suffered as strong people suffered. Not patiently, nor yet with any particular inclination to complain, but with a suffering that was a sort of fire in her veins” (173). Grania is presented with an opportunity to temporarily escape her responsibilities when Blake takes her to the mainland (Ireland) to sell goods (183). Grania is extremely anxious and terrified of the thought of this unfamiliar experience, and she makes Blake promise not to leave her side. Once they arrive in Galway, Blake abandons Grania for a period of time, and she is mocked by the mainlanders for her well-muscled body and social awkwardness (122). Grania’s anxiety is
increasingly amplified by her unfamiliarity with the fast-paced, industrialized lifestyle of the mainland. She sells her products for far less than what they are worth so she can escape the unfamiliarity of the industrialized mainland (218). Not only does Blake prove himself to be exceptionally untrustworthy, Grania experiences the horrifically unfamiliar, and seemingly unnatural, environment that the industrialized mainland produces. This specific chapter emphasizes how there are no successful escape routes for Grania, and this foreshadowing conveys to the reader that she is bound to suffer another method of abandonment in her future.

Still alone, Grania tries to return to the boat that will take her back to Inishmaan, but she gets caught in a torrential downpour. Once she finds shelter, she notices a woman who appears to be much older than her true age would tell. Grania notices that she is carrying a heavy pail of water back to her house, and she takes the pail from the woman for fear of her injuring herself. The woman says nothing, and Grania follows her to her home, which is an impoverished shack. Once they enter, she finds the woman’s husband to be so intoxicated that he is immobile. This scene grants Grania “a sudden sickening sense of disgust and yet of fascination, she turned and looked again at the man, still swearing and squirming in the corner” (239). This scene is enough for Grania, and she takes the experience as a warning for her own future if she decides to marry. She returns to the seaport with the horrid domestic scene echoing in her mind, and finally reunites with a heavily intoxicated Blake. This experience solidifies the importance of self-reliance for Grania. She fully embraces the notion that the men in her life have been disappointments and she refuses to resign herself to a life similar to the zombie-like woman she encountered.
She returns home in “Part IV” and discusses her trip with Honor. Grania begins to cry when she realizes that she will lose her only companionship when her sister dies. Confronting the issue of marriage is inevitable for Grania because her hand in marriage is considered to be exceptionally attractive offer for three reasons: her monetary status, physical abilities, and work ethic (Goodman 188). Grania refuses to marry Blake or give him money when they return to the island, which sends him into a rage. With her sister’s health declining rapidly, she becomes very anxious at the thought of losing her. In a moment of desperation, Grania gives Blake one more chance to prove his love for her by accompanying her to Aranmore to retrieve a priest to read Honor her last rites. A fog had encircled the island; Blake hesitates to accompany Grania, but eventually chases after her. She attempts to leave the seaport alone and her boat is overturned by thrashing waves; she drowns in the attempt to bring the priest back to the island. Blake’s hesitation proved to be deadly for Grania, but he ensured that a priest would read her sister her last rites. Honor is read her last rites, and Lawless alludes to a spiritual reuniting after her death. Lawless ends her protagonist’s life in a very obscure and tragic manner, which intends to raise questions about significance to her community.

Lawless’s account of her funeral is ominous, which suggests that there was little attention given to her death. Grania’s is a tragic hero because, in life, she was constantly responsible for those around her, yet she never received any sort of assistance or protection when it was needed. Her only confidant was Honor, yet the two sisters could only reach a superficial understanding of each other’s outlooks on life. Honor, who is the representation of traditional feminine ideals, could still not understand Grania’s forward thinking and refusal to relinquish herself to religion. Blake, who was the major male figure, is completely unreliable and selfish; it is not clearly
indicated whether he mourns deeply for her. It is implied that he brought the priest to Inishmaan for Honor in a sense of duty, but the brevity of Lawless’s description leaves room for reader inquiries. Lawless also uses Grania’s senseless death to illuminate her own feelings of abandonment and despondency regarding her own literary identity. She also discusses how her protagonist, who took on traditionally natural masculine traits of strength and rebellion, was still unable to supersede the limitations she encountered. Through Grania, Lawless conveys the limited nature of social and cultural confinement; this draws deep sympathy from the audience and provides a multilayered gender and national critique.

**Grania and Grace: The Foundation of a Tragic Hero**

Cahalan states that *Grania* is Lawless’s premier feminist novel, which makes it her first step towards the identification and exploration of her personal, female-focused ideas (46). *Grania* also serves as a milestone in Lawless’s authorial development because she originally left her female characters flat and unfocused (46). Lawless’s novel is a monumental example for Irish women writers because she reintroduced a contemplative, female protagonist in a time where stories commonly had male protagonists and concentrated on their lives (42). On the most superficial level, Lawless’s work asserts that a specific importance and attention should be used to understand girlhood and the obstacles that an Irish woman faced throughout their lifetimes. By exposing her audience to the hardships of a young Irish girl, Lawless oriented herself toward pursuing literary territory that had been completely ignored by Revivalists.

Because Lawless’s early literary career was founded on factual information, her protagonist was crafted with more diligence, thought, and observation than her previously
written works (43). Grania was Lawless’s first dynamic female character, and she chose to create her by using the historic avenue that she loved so dearly. While building inspiration for her protagonist, Lawless turned to Irish history and modeled her after one of the strongest women Ireland has produced: Grace O’Malley. This specific Irish woman was a woman of monolithic power on land and at sea. Cahalan states that she “was identified with such islands as Clare Island off Mayo, dominated the Connermara region of western Ireland during her heyday, and met with Queen Elizabeth in 1576” (47). The story of Grace O’Malley intrigued Lawless because she was raised to legendary status and was a strong symbol of female power. Lawless’s choice was extremely important because this specific legend continued to garner interest through future generations. Author and historian Anne Chambers shares this passion for examples of powerful Irish women who are derived from history. In the author’s note to Ireland’s Pirate Queen: The True Story of Grace O’Malley, Chambers describes how O’Malley has remained alive through the Irish conscious all these years:

I have become involved in other exciting and varied projects about [Grace]:

Documentaries for TV and radio, the most recent a drama-documentary for the Discovery Channel in 2003; innumerable articles for books and magazines, interviews, and lectures, dance dramas, musicals and ballads… it seems she has captured the imagination of everyone who reads about her, including mine. (viii)

The legend of Grace O’Malley is the inspiration for Lawless’s adaptive protagonist. Because O’Malley was a concrete, real-life legendary figure as a foundation for a contemporary critique, Lawless felt comfortable researching and creating her own literary adaptation. Lawless took one of the most powerful women in Irish history and put her up against the debilitating effects of
English common law. The background of Grace O’Malley is important so the reader can understand the contrast between the legend and the contemporary depiction.

O’Malley “was born into the clan of O’Mhaille, a hardy, seafaring people on the west coast of Ireland in 1530” (1). Her family was prominent because they were descendants of Brian Orbsen, who was a High King of Ireland, and they owned property near the Umhalls, later anglicized as the Owels (1). The family profited from tolls, competition with neighboring baronies, selling fish to various markets, and piracy—all of which contributed to her strong sense of independence (6). She was arranged to be married at age sixteen to the son of a chieftain of the O’Flaherty clan, and their union was a familial political strategy rather than one of personal interest (42). The new expectations of marriage strongly contrasted the environment of equality she experienced, but she filled the new role as a submissive wife and potential mother (44). She bore two sons, Owen and Murrough, and a daughter, Margaret, to her first husband but she superseded her husband’s power and persuaded his clansmen to leave Iar-Connacht (45). The men that followed her were mercenaries, so without successful pillages and payment their alliance would be compromised (42). Chambers states that she “had to lead by example, enduring and outdoing the men she led by land and by sea” (46). Because seafaring was an occupation dominated by males, Grace’s physical and leadership abilities are even more unique and impressive. By the early 1560s Grace was widowed, and she returned to her birthplace because she was the sole heir (52). The freedom from her first marriage, her physical strength, unmatched leadership abilities, and her superior resourcefulness at sea were essential to her success as she commanded her crew.
O’Malley married as a young girl, and after she was widowed she chose her second husband, Richard Boukre in 1567. This match was ideal for O’Malley because Boukre had wealth, influence in the Gaelic world, and the strategic location of his castle at Carraigahowley, known as Rockfleet (63). When it came to the art of piracy, she had two motives: to gain wealth and establish a strong reputation that was absent of remorse. She was brutal, strategic, and politically motivated to accrue as much power as possible. She was targeted by Sir Richard Bingham, who was the governor of Connaught in 1588, because she promised to use her crew to aid England and kill Spanish Armada members but she also helped transport them off of the island instead (101). She was deemed a traitor in the eyes of the English and she and her husband’s castle were attacked. Both of Grace’s sons were also leaders of a rebellion in Mayo, and tensions between her family and Bingham escalated to the point where increasingly senseless killings took place. In 1591 Grace’s eldest son was killed, and her youngest son was captured (118). Grace requested that she and Queen Elizabeth I meet in person to discuss the freeing of her son and her quarrels with Bingham, not England. Her meeting and request were successful, and Queen Elizabeth ordered Bingham to release Grace’s only surviving son. Bingham continued to force financial strains on Grace and her family, which led Grace in her later years to submit to Elizabeth I and sell her property. Grace O’Malley was a remarkable figure in Irish history because she lived her life without sacrificing her womanhood for her career at sea. She embraced both aspects of life and her ambition has captures the interest and adoration of many Irish historians.

Lawless is playing with a notion of female potential when she named her protagonist after the legendary O’Malley. The physicality, leadership, courage, and pragmatism that is
associated with O’Malley was intended to be recalled when the reader realized her connection to Lawless’s protagonist. This type of potential sets up a contrast between Grania’s natural characteristics—physical strength, curiosity, courage, and deep sense of personal responsibility— and to combat the widely accepted feminine image that Honor embraces. Although Grania’s name is taken from the feared Irish “Sea Queen” she does not fully embody the same sense of fierceness or the brutality that the original Grace O’Malley displayed in the sixteenth century (Cahalan 47). When Lawless first introduces Grania to the audience, she is fishing with her father and prides herself for learning this skill. By creating an intentional, striking resemblance between her protagonist and the Irish legend, Lawless is using the power associated with Grace and putting her childhood in a more modern context. According to Chambers, there is no documentation of Grace’s upbringing, but there are documents, such as property entitlements and cases of divorce, that demonstrate how Gaelic perceptions of gender stress more notions of equality than English Common Law (41). The original Grace O’Malley exemplified leadership through a blend of both masculinity and femininity; she was decisive, sharp, and physically strong without surrendering her femaleness. Through Lawless’s writing and previous experience with Irish history, Lawless embodied Grania with similar characteristics that enhanced her potential to break away from the cyclical nature of femininity, which served as a confine that entrapped most island women. Due to the conflicting forces of potential and limitation, the reader experiences a great deal of tension as a result of reading *Grania*. Once emotionally involved, the reader and the protagonist form a bond, which consists of moderate bouts of tension and anxiety. This promotes a desire to see Grania succeed in her endeavors, and, in a semi-conscious way, encourages the reader to reflect on these gender issues. Therefore,
Lawless suggests that the Grania she creates is hindered critically by the gender and societal expectations of Irish women.

Grania’s increased freedom was partially due to her physicality and committed work ethic. Because she was physically strong and mentally determined, she was able to learn skills and trades that were mainly reserved for men. Grania was shaped by the tough, rugged environment of Inishmaan, and she derived a strong sense of independence from her survival skills. Here, Lawless’s protagonist was able to secure feelings of independence on Inishmaan, but the experience is short lived. Similarly to the way that the “Sea Queen” had to succumb to Queen Elizabeth, Grania’s notion of self-reliance was stifled when her best defenses—her strong physique and work ethic—fail her as she tried to bring a priest back to her dying sister. Lawless emphasized the lack of companionship from Blake as the reason for her death. Although Grania learned the importance of self-reliance as a child, she becomes mentally and emotionally burdened by the immense amount of responsibility she holds for the people in her life. By providing her audience with a tragic ending to her novel, Lawless argues that, due to Ireland’s social and institutional fragmentation, even the strongest women with the most potential are not able to escape the gender entrapment that the island perpetuated.

Although Lawless’s perceptions were not popular in Ireland during the time of Grania’s publication, it is important to remember that her somber message was published and disseminated to an audience. Through her separation and rejection by Revivalists, Lawless was able to write Grania with an unhindered sense of curiosity. Gilbert and Gubar explain the significance of this freedom by saying:
What the lives and lines and choices of all these women tell us, in short, is that the literary woman has always faced equally degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world. If she did not suppress her work entirely or publish it pseudonymously or anonymously, she could modestly confess her female ‘limitations’ and concentrate on the ‘lesser’ subjects reserved for ladies as becoming to their inferior powers. If the latter alternative seemed an admission of failure, she could rebel, accepting the ostracism that seemed inevitable. (64)

Through her own sense of rebellion, Lawless created a protagonist who sheds light on the brutally limited future that women faced in the nineteenth century. During her youth, Grania appeared to have the natural potential to step beyond the limitations that most Irish and women writers experienced. The personal independence, physical strength, her rejection of various religious institutions, and pride Grania exemplifies makes her a distinct, feminist character. She argued that even the strongest woman cannot thrive in the system to which she is born unless some sort of cohesion occurs and she can find support in others. Although this seems pessimistic, Lawless was exploring her personal sentiments of constraint that she had experienced in her life up to this point. Gilbert and Gubar reference this negative image, saying “surrounded by the images of disease, traditions of disease, and invitations to both disease and dis-ease, it is no wonder that the woman writer has held so many mirrors up to the discomfort of her own nature” (57). This notion is reflective of the criticism she received about *Hurrish* when she proposed that the destruction that results from social fragmentation is damning for activists and witnesses alike. She also experienced this disintegration first hand through her own literary exclusion and layered views about the relationship between Ireland and Britain. By writing
Grania, Lawless rebels against the consolidation of the revival and explores her own literary identity in relation to the core objective of her writing: to explore new personal territories, even if her pursuits risk her reputation.

Inishmaan and the Connection between Women, Landscape, and National Identity

The setting of Grania is more than just an isolated community—it represents several contemplative analyses regarding feminism, history, and nationalism. Lawless embellished her novel with insight into the plight of the Irish women in relation to the nation’s emerging sense of identity by paralleling their mutual adolescences. Ireland’s colonization had a profound effect on its own colonial-consciousness in terms of the rediscovering of its essential characteristics. Eve Patten, author of “In Essex with India? Emily Lawless’s Colonial Consciousness,” argues that “Irish studies have been recently relating writers such as a Lawless, who experienced a hybrid upbringing, to the complex political relationship between Ireland and England” (285). Lawless’s biographical background demonstrates this separation in Patten’s statement: “If progress has been made in posing the vexed question of Ireland’s colonial condition, it results from a shift within Irish Studies to theoretical structures which refuse binary categorizations” (285). She continues to describe how imperialism, specifically England’s political and cultural dominion over Ireland, could not be understood as simply Ireland battling England because their relationship was much more complicated (285). When Grania was first published, “It immediately attracted attention because of the preoccupation in the nineteenth century with the West of Ireland being portrayed as the ‘real’ Ireland” (Edwards 424). This was largely due to its distance from the industrialized Irish mainland and British influence. The volatile environment
of Inishmaan had dual developmental effects on its citizens: the rocky terrain was a direct
catalyst to Lawless’s desire for independence, but its violent storms also threaten islanders’ lives
and homes. Lawless used the landscape’s brutal storms to explore the mounting sense of angst
and anxiety that occurred in the 1890s as Ireland’s nationalist groups gained power and influence
over the country’s political sphere. Because Inishmaan was depicted as a place where true Irish
culture thrived, it was viewed as a source of cultural authenticity. By emphasizing the physical
elements of the island, such as the rocky geography and the treacherous tempests, Lawless
explores abstract ideas of potential and limitation that reflect Ireland’s nationalist edge and
political uncertainty.

Lawless’s choice of Inishmaan was significant because Revival members identified the
peasant as an example of Irish culture that was untouched by British cultural influence.
According to Edwards, Lawless created her realistic descriptions of the island’s landscape by
observing its inhabitants and recording her findings (423). Her research predated J. M. Synge’s
*The Aran Islands* by over ten years, and she quickly realized how the geographical features of
the island impacted women and their responsibilities (423). Inishmaan was considered to be the
most primitive of the Aran Islands, and its inhabitants depended on certain survival skills, such
as fishing, and public welfare to reduce communal struggle (Cahalan 45). Lawless explores this
contrast between this primitive island and the industrialized mainland in a scene when English
tourists visit to Inishmaan:

The English female tourists highlight how Grania complicates the tendency to
stereotype the Irish as premodern and backward. The English, though they
imagine themselves as more advanced and modern, appear conventional in this
scene, not only in their adoption of stereotypes that they have heard and read about the Irish, but also in their own performance of womanhood. (Edwards 421) English women are unable to travel alone or move about the island because of their bulky dresses and impractical footwear. Although they are representations of a more wealthy, industrialized class, they are ineffectual when their environment changes. Lawless juxtaposes the culture of the mainland and the island and makes the tourists appear to be exceptionally frivolous and impractical. The author also argues that by embracing the physical limitations that are related to their style of dress, these English tourists are demonstrating the restrictive nature of femininity from the mainland culture.

Along with the importance of practicality in a rocky landscape, the geography of Inishmaan and the sense of independence demonstrated by Grania suggest that ruggedness is linked with autonomy. Lawless creates a deep connection between the geographical features of the island and Grania’s independence early in her novel, starting with the interactions between father and daughter. Con has two daughters, yet he only teaches Grania to fish and fend for herself to supplement his daily catch. The weight of daily responsibilities is too demanding for Con to carry alone, and this deficiency provides an opportunity for Grania to work alongside her father and acquire a skill that is considered to be reserved for men. This slight reduction of traditional gender roles is exemplified when Con teaches Grania to fish. Con encourages his daughter to be self-sufficient and to use the sea as a source of food. The emphasis on physical struggles that accompany island life—such as the development of maritime skills and the pursuit of possible trade opportunities—motivates Grania to take pride in the work that is essential to her survival. Lawless uses the environment of Inishmaan as a foundation for women to break away
from traditional gender roles regarding the domestic space. Women gain a stronger sense of worth on a personal and communal level because they transition from the domestic to supplement their husbands’ laborious efforts. Through her observations, Lawless creates an environment where physical labor reduces women’s dependency on men by blurring the line between domestic and nondomestic expectations.

By granting her protagonist unique physical abilities, Lawless suggests that the geography of Inishmaan has the potential to create modern women because the high labor requirements could not be completely satisfied by male inhabitants alone (Edwards 422). Through the communal struggle, which increases the value of personal survival skills, Grania is expected to be aware of the potential dangers and resources that the island provides instead of being solely dependent upon a man’s skill set. She reinforces her self-reliance and her work ethic while removing herself from complete male dependency. The environment of Inishmaan provides food to those who hunt for it, which presents an exchange: hard work for personal gain. Grania is taught from a young age that the land can be a source of beauty and a place where she can prosper if she has the right set of skills. This emphasis on independence is reflective of female modernity, or a change in traditional gender expectations. Grania experiences this modernity and her efforts blur the lines that defined traditional roles and expectations for women. Although England was perceived to be the more advanced nation, Lawless points out that there is a certain characteristic associated with the physical expectations of an island woman that promotes autonomy. Lawless argues that Grania has a stronger sense of self-confidence and initiative due to her upbringing; this trait is exceptionally progressive and is not demonstrated by the English tourists, who are perceived to represent cultural progression.
While Lawless introduced her audience to the trials and tribulations of a young Irish girl, she also used Grania to critique the national identity of her homeland. Choosing a woman to represent Ireland is not uncommon because Ireland is normally characterized as female. Grania is reminiscent of the figure of Kathleen Ni Houlihan, a symbol of mother Ireland. If *Grania* is read so that the protagonist represents Ireland, it is clear that Lawless implicates internal religious and gender restrictions among the institutions responsible for her death. Although Lawless was a constructive unionist, Grania’s death tragically comments solely on Ireland’s colonial history, which includes failed attempts to liberate herself from British control (Corporaal 146). In order to remove Britain from the critique, Lawless chose the setting of Inishmaan to frame her argument. The isolated island of Inishmaan is not heavily influenced by the politics and anxieties of the industrialized colonial center; thus it is almost untouched by British influence. Lawless is speaking from her own sense of cultural isolation in her novel by incorporating her hybrid upbringing into her perceptions of the Irish-British colonial relationship (Patten 286). This choice identifies a theme of physical isolation that ranges from the personal to the national standpoint. By creating this dual representation, Lawless argues that the oppression women experience exemplifies an authentic parallel to the nation’s struggle for independence.

Although there is a great sense of potential for women who are shaped by the demands of Inishmaan to create independent identities, Lawless uses foreshadowing to emphasize women’s limited future. In order to contrast Grania’s natural heroic characteristics, Lawless decided to include an unpredictable, natural element that threatens every island inhabitant: the destructive nature of sea-born tempests. Lawless chose to represent the mounting anger and anxiety surrounding feminism and nationalism through the manifestations of raging storms. Cahalan
further describes the weathered state of the islanders, and how their houses have been eroded by torrents of rain and strong winds (45). The continuous battery of these storms represents a long period of uncertainty and suffering, and their corrosive effects weaken the homes and overall wellbeing of the island’s inhabitants (45). The abundant amount of destruction personifies chaos and uncertain outcome of women’s lives and it can also be elevated to represent Ireland’s national conflicts (47). Lawless begins to connect the raging storms and high winds to the turbulent history of Ireland. From interior religious and political wars to failed attempts to separate from England, Ireland experienced a growing sense of authoritative contempt. Lawless identifies the mounting nationalism of the Irish as being a potentially brutal, self-destructive force. The internal religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants demonstrate a few levels of the marginalization, but Lawless includes gender differences to further emphasize lack of internal cohesion. The internal hierarchy is apparent in Ireland was a very strong divide, and Lawless did not give credence to the idea that nationalism could glaze over these internal issues. She uses violent storms to explore the mounting anxiety that the Irish experienced as the destructive nature of nationalism became a more realistic method of consolidation. Lawless identifies the Ireland’s inability to amalgamate its internal fragmentations as the main contributor to its failure.

By implementing natural threats to increase the difficulty of island life, Lawless’s decision to use Inishmaan as the setting for her novel forces the reader to experience the effects of isolation on various levels. The most superficial of these is the physical separation of Inishmaan from the other Aran Islands, let alone Ireland herself. Lawless argues that true Irish culture has been preserved on the island because it is unindustrialized and untouched by British
culture. This physical separateness is both helpful and dangerous because it identifies the need for assistance outside of the island. Grania’s death contributes to this idea because she represents an authentic Ireland. Lawless incorporates the importance of cohesion on a larger scale by forcing Grania to travel to another island in order to return with a priest for Honor. The physical separation of the island becomes one of the contributors to Grania’s demise, which argues that isolation can result in culture preservation or a deadly confinement.

Confinement reaches past the physicality of the island and into the lives of its inhabitants. Grania’s death also represents Lawless’s major critique: that Irish women and the nation herself cannot escape the repetitive nature of domination. Grania is a woman who, in both spirit and deed, solidifies Lawless’s critique of Ireland’s refusal to first address internal fragmentations before solely blaming Britain for the cultural ramifications that result. Through these layers of fragmentation, the creation of modern Irish women is diminished because it does not receive the nation’s attention. Grania becomes aware of the increasingly restricted social possibilities after she encountered the woman from the mainland who reflects a potential possibility for Grania’s future. After this encounter, she realized the gender and cultural brutalities of both Inishmaan and Ireland herself. Through Grania, Lawless highlights her frustrations that stem from her perceived limited status as a women writer in literary history, and she emphasizes the feeling of being constrained and isolated in her struggles.

Ireland’s cultural inhibitors, which are represented by Grania’s personal isolation, are amplified by the distinction between English and Irish women. This reversal nullifies the preconceived notion that the English are more modern than the Irish. Grania’s aggressive and courageous personality contrasts with and the English tourists’ confinement and need for
constant accompaniment. Due to the rugged expectations of island life, Grania experiences the brevity of independence as she is overtaken by the bombardment of demands she encounters. This sense of limitedness, or an ultimate fate, is a cultural critique that Lawless uses to confirm that Irish women are utterly alone in their struggles (Cahalan 47). Grania’s perceptions of marriage in light of Blake’s continuous abandonment demonstrate the institutionalized expectations of female dependency. The expectation that she will marry an unreliable man equates her situation with the English women’s sense of confinement. The danger of this internal fragmentation, specifically regarding the idealized concept of gender cooperation, is derived from cohesive expectations associated with the island community.

This feeling of entrapment is also illustrated later in the novel when Grania attempts to leave Inishmaan to retrieve a priest for Honor. Her death signifies that women cannot escape these expectations, but somehow they must work from outside of the masculine perception of women instead of submitting to it. Gilbert and Gubar examine this lack of space, which applies to Grania, Lawless, and Ireland, by asking “what does it mean to be a woman writer in a culture whose mental definitions of literary authority are, as we have seen, both overtly and covertly patriarchal?”(46). Women, or any entity that is cast in a feminine light, find this question impossible because this ‘space’ outside of the patriarch is seemingly nonexistent. At this time, Ireland is caught between very similar pressures and is in the process of losing herself entirely as it combats cyclical waves of political disappointments and cultural inhibitors. Lawless bridges the relationship between individual, geographic, and cultural isolationism, thus reinforcing the themes to multiple levels of isolation for her audience so they can understand it from a woman’s perspective.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

The different ways in which Emily Lawless and Augusta Gregory developed their writing careers demonstrate the strain and marginalization that Irish women writers experienced from the 1890s through the twentieth century. With literary prominence being defined and measured by males, these patriarchal notions left women with very limited choices regarding their authorial identities. Although Lawless and Gregory pursued similar routes to bring cultural awareness to the Irish, the sacrifices each writer made impacted the perceived significance of their work. Both writers exemplified the binary notions presented in Sandra L. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s chapter “Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship” in The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. Both authors describe the binary roles women in literature played—they were either angels, completely fitting the idealized image that men crafted for them, or madwomen who were perceived to be enraged and unpredictable (63). Through the examination of Lawless and Gregory, one can see the internal layers of isolation that accompany each perception. Although both Lawless and Gregory experienced authorial anxiety, their literary statuses demonstrate the hardships they experienced while using works to append female literary perceptions to the Irish literary cannon.

Lawless and Gregory were aware of each other’s writings during the 1890s. Lawless is mentioned twice in Kohfeldt’s Lady Gregory: A Biography, and the author explains when both Lawless and Gregory encountered each other (114). Even though both women were separated...
by their statuses, Lawless was able to help support Gregory’s career. When the Revival needed financial support to open the Abbey Theatre, Gregory sent financial requests to various authors and acquaintances. Kohfeldt explains by saying, “not everyone was enthusiastic. Her friend Emily Lawless pledged £1, but appended a long and sensible list of reasons why the project would fail” (114). After receiving unbalanced criticism and praise, Lawless still contributed financially to the Revival because of her friendship with Gregory. Lawless’s response to Gregory’s request demonstrates a form of support for women writers by other women writers. Lawless and Gregory represent the expansion of Irish literature because they both understood the need for a community of women writers.

Although Gregory was aided by the Revival’s prominence, Lawless was an independent writer who developed her authorial identity with significantly less restriction. Lawless is one of Ireland’s most courageous Irish writers because she expanded her authorial perceptions without the support of the Revival. Her refusal to align with masculine perceptions of Irish culture sets her apart from other writers during the late nineteenth century. Initially, she was viewed to be a monster, because of her messages of political cohesion regarding Ireland and Great Britain. The scathing political criticism she received regarding *Hurrish: A Study* released her from using the Revival’s platform as an attractive supplement to her writing career. Lawless distanced her writings from the Revival’s expectations to develop her career through a naturalist viewpoint rather than a mythical one. Because she was literarily ostracized, she was able to prepare her gender and cultural critique in her novel *Grania (The Story of an Island)*, which became very popular given its pertinence to the *Woman Question*. This literary isolation prompted her to explore other interests, which led her to establish connections between women and Ireland’s
struggle for independence. Lawless’s courage to remain unhindered by the Revival’s criticisms demonstrates her commitment to her audience and herself. By exploring these cultural, social, and gender limitations in *Grania*, she critiqued Ireland from the standpoint of one of its most marginalized groups: women in literature.

Although writers like Lawless and Gregory only received partial acknowledgment and even less praise for their writings, their works and messages contributed to building a larger foundation for future Irish writers. Theresa O’Connor’s 1996 collection of essays, entitled *The Comic Traditions of Irish Women Writers*, showcases Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s article “What Foremothers?” and further illuminates the question of establishing the importance of women’s writings to Irish literary history. It is here that Ní Dhomhnaill explores an argument between Eavan Boland and Anne Stevenson regarding Irish women poets (8). Stevenson attacks Boland’s essay “Outside History” because Boland claims that there is no evidence of poetic foremothers and that each female poet must struggle alone without preexisting guidance (10). Ní Dhomhnaill sides with Boland and explores the lack of acknowledged the ways in which female symbols are inherent to Irish culture (12). The author also explains that, “Because the fact of the matter was, though the literary canon was drawn up without [early women poets], there were women poets” that were not formally recognized by Irish literary recorders (12). Although this specific article focuses on Irish women poets, the momentum that women like Lawless and Gregory created through their works was evident of a growing extension of Irish literary history. Lawless, whose work was deemed insignificant by Revival members, was reexamined by scholars such as James M. Cahalan for its historical reference. Both writers demonstrated an occupied middle-ground and contributed to an ongoing struggle with establishing a platform for future female authors.
The struggle that Irish women writers continue to endure is an essential cornerstone of their literary history and is exemplified in both Lawless and Gregory’s writings and lives.

Through her adaptation of Grace O’Malley, Lawless encouraged Irish women writers to explore their own interests, even if they were unpopular. She created unique political and gender commentaries, which exposed her audience to alternative perceptions of Ireland in the 1890s. As a result of her isolation, she helped to increase the perceptions of the Irish literary canon by making her audience aware of political and gender issues that were controversial at the time of their publication. The different perceptions that were introduced to her national and international audiences enforced a reconsideration of mutually-exclusive opinions regarding Irish politics and gender issues. Cahalan explains Lawless’s significance, saying “Lawless’s daring entry into the mind of a female protagonist in *Grania* has been followed up by her twentieth-century successors” who explore “Irish peasanthood and womanhood as major themes” (53). The influence of her works continued to inspire other writers, such as Edna O’Brien and Julia O’Faolain (53). Her writings may not have been perceived to be monumental texts during the time of their publications, but Lawless established her place in the history of Irish women writers. In her essay, Ni Dhomhnaill points to isolation characterizing a successful Irish writer, something that Lawless engaged in:

> The publicity, the recognition, the literary round, all of these are just distractions, all these are ultimately distractions. The only thing that matters is the work. Important works, first and foremost, is produced in solitude, far from the noise of the world. Work requires retreat, and at least momentary indifference to the
social, even where an institution is needed for the work’s financing or publication.

It is not easy. (15)

Through her dedication and fearlessness, Lawless’s success as an independent author exemplifies how Irish women writers’ perceptions directly influenced Ireland’s literary and national identity.

Unlike Lawless, Augusta Gregory did not experience the same authorial freedom because of her commitment to the Revival. Augusta Gregory exemplified obstacles that women writers encountered while attempting to establish her literary career in a historically recognized group. As a result of these sacrifices, she was immediately credited with shaping Irish cultural history. Her ability to work inside of the gender typecasts that were placed upon was the result of her profound understanding of the sacrifices that accompanied her decision. She used many of these stigmas as a shield to keep her literary representation in her audience’s favor. The double standards applied to women, especially widows, were scrupulous in Ireland and she had to forfeit much of her deserved literary acclaim in order to preserve her positive image. By relinquishing personal sonnets to Blunt to publish, she relieved herself of potential gossip and media-perpetuated punishment. She essentially passed a tall order to Blunt, knowing that he would have endured the negative consequences that accompanied its controversial topic. Ultimately, Gregory was able to use the Revival’s platform to showcase her unique messages without being conspicuous. Augusta Gregory’s pragmatism and literary talent proved that women can forge an authorial identity within a masculine environment.

Despite the identity-related hardships she encountered, Augusta Gregory immensely influenced the manner in which the Irish viewed themselves. Pethica best describes her memory in “A Woman’s Sonnets” by saying “It was Lady Gregory’s avowed intention in writing plays to
interpret Ireland first to the Irish, then to the outside world, and in doing so make her contributions to the glory of her country” (304). Through Hyacinth Halvey and Cuchulain of Muirthemne, she united her audience through humor and presented heroic mythologies that were unique to Irish culture and language. Similar to Lawless, she also retold the legend of Grania, which offered audiences a great deal of insight into the true nature of true heroic tragedy. Gregory presented O’Malley as human, with anxieties, fears, and laments, which established a stronger emotional connection with the audience. Unlike Lawless’s freedom to pursue her own adaptive interpretation of Grace O’Malley, Gregory was able to create her own stage adaptation but she was monitored by the other Revivalists. Kohfeldt explains how Gregory chose to adapt Grania over a similar myth, Dierdre of the Sorrows, which is identified as the most popular love story of the Irish classics (213). Kohfeldt explains “Grania is a heroic attempt to explore her own personality…Augusta also felt more affinity for Grania because Dierdre was a legendary beauty, and Grania was not” (213). Grania united Augusta Gregory’s self and perceived image, which makes this play fulfilling on personal and authorial levels. Andrew E. Malone, author of “Lady Gregory: 1852-1932” explain how Gregory “is popularly known only as the author of little farces, and this is all the more regrettable because her best comedies are folk historic plays, and her best tragedy, Grania, is the best of folk tragedies” (41). By using legendary Irish women as inspiration for her plays, Gregory felt fulfilled on both personal and authorial levels and established a connection to the growing chain of powerful and influential women in literature.

The legendary life of Grace O’Malley is represented in contemporary Irish culture, and both Lawless and Gregory have helped to pass this legend to future generations. Historians like Ann Chambers continue to research, investigate, and present O’Malley’s life and voyages to
larger audiences who are interested in her legend. Aside from their different adaptations of O’Malley’s legendary life, Lawless and Gregory present external audiences (readers who are not Irish) and internal audiences (Irish men and women who are reflecting on their own culture) with a female representation of Irish culture and legend. Both writers agreed that the heroic nature of Grace O’Malley was a source of inspiration and provided encouragement for other Irish women writers to face literary adversity. Lawless and Gregory struggled to form their own literary identities while battling personal and systemic deterrents, but their distinct perceptions, authorial talents, and willingness to challenge patriarchal literary tradition created powerful examples for future Irish women writers.
CHAPTER V

WORKS CITED


