SECULAR MESSIANISM AND THE NATIONALIST IDEA
IN THE PLAYS OF ADAM MICKIEWICZ AND WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2002

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Polish and Irish drama in the formation of national identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both Poland and Ireland were victimized by imperialism—Russian, Prussian, and Austrian-Hungarian, in the case of Poland, and English, in the case of Ireland—that jeopardized the sense of national identity among the Polish and the Irish by supplanting their governments, languages, and folk traditions. This study focuses on the plays of two seminal dramatists who were important in the development of the Polish and Irish identities, namely Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). Each writer used history and folklore in his plays to promote a national culture as well as a national identity. Through weaving the theme of messianism in their work, Mickiewicz and Yeats reflected and expressed the national predicaments of Poland and Ireland, which both suffered a cultural and political “death.” The two playwrights planted the hope that their nations would eventually be reborn as independent entities and that their people would be free from foreign rule and domination. Mickiewicz and Yeats used the messianic theme in order to promote the nationalist idea, the concept of a people, a nation, sharing a similar background, history, values, and beliefs. This study investigates examples of messianism and religion in Mickiewicz’s Ballads and Romances (Ballady i Romanse), Konrad
Wallenrod, Forefathers' Eve, Part III (Dziady), Pan Tadeusz, and The Confederation of Bar (Konfederaci Barscy); Yeats' Cathleen Ni Houlihan, The King's Threshold, The Unicorn from the Stars, The Dreaming of the Bones, and The Death of Cuchulain are examined for their messianic and folkloric qualities.
For my mother, Danuta H. Krajewski
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Stratos Constantinidis for being the adviser every graduate student dreams of having. I thank him for his endless kindness and patience, in addition to all his advice and support of my work. I would also like to thank my committee members, Anthony Hill and Amy Shuman, for their much appreciated suggestions and encouragement.

I am grateful to Dr. Jim Bracken for his thoughtfulness and help in locating sometimes obscure documents linking Poland and Ireland and in obtaining various materials for the Main Library at the Ohio State University. I extend my gratitude to Elva Griffith and the ever-helpful members of the Rare Books Room for their efficiency and smiles.

My heartfelt thanks go to the Grzywiński family of Rypin, Poland, for their tremendous help not only in locating research materials in Warsaw and Gdańsk, but also in getting me to the various archives. Without their assistance, this study would not have been possible.

I am very fortunate to have such loving and supportive family and friends in the United States, Poland, Taiwan, and Japan. I thank them for cheering me on and for giving me the strength and courage to pursue my academic endeavors. I extend my
warmest thanks and appreciation to my mother and friend, Danuta H. Krajewski, who has encouraged me throughout my life and always believed in me. I am grateful for her love, understanding, and all the emotional and financial support which she has given me. I also thank her for reading my translations of the Polish texts and for helping me connect with my own "Polishness."

My research in Poland was financed by the Department of Theatre through a PEGS Grant. I would like to express my gratitude to the department in helping to make my research possible.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Siofra O’Donovan’s novel, Malinski (2000), two young brothers are separated from each other due to events beyond their control in Poland during the Second World War. The older brother, Stanislav, lives out the war with an aunt in Kraków, while the younger brother, Henryk, makes his way across Europe with his mother and eventually settles in Ireland. Henryk quickly learns English and adopts the customs and traits of the Irish, making them his own. He even changes his name to Henry and takes the surname of his Irish stepfather to further assimilate into the society of his new country. He attends Trinity College in Dublin, and to all those who know him, he is as Irish as Irish gets. After a number of years, however, Henry has a need to find his older brother who was left behind in the war and rediscover his Polish ancestry. He returns to Poland five decades later to meet with Stanislav. Just as Henry tries to understand his brother and the Polish way of life, Stanislav struggles to comprehend his younger brother’s transformation as well as Ireland. At one point, Stanislav questions in his own mind:

Why do they speak English in that country [Ireland]? Is it not the greatest defeat, to have your own tongue defeated? I have heard they have a language that is incomprehensible to the English. Would they not speak it, proudly?"
Stanislav has difficulty grasping Ireland's situation and his "Irish" brother, but despite the apparent differences, the two siblings are able to connect with each other in spite of the many years of separation.

Siófra O’Donovan’s fictional novel, *Malinski*, connects Poland and Ireland, two countries that have not previously been discussed together in creative literature as well as in literary criticism. In her novel, O’Donovan, reaffirms Polish and Irish ties that go as far back as the fifth century B.C.E.

The ancient Celtic tribes had settled an area that is today part of southern Poland. They had direct contact and relations with the early Polish tribes, which had been greatly influenced by Celtic culture and practices. Jerzy Topolski states in his book, *An Outline History of Poland*:

Celtic influence was strong; in two centuries it permeated the Eastern Pomeranian and other cultures contributing to the emergence of the more advanced Cist Grave culture, which had two varieties, the Przeworsk and the Oksywic culture (both named after the localities in which burial places from that period were discovered).

Early Poles had borrowed and adapted the funeral practices of the Celts, who cremated their dead and placed the ashes in urns that were buried in relatively large and flat cremation cemeteries or urnfields. In addition to funeral customs, other Celtic traditions and crafts, such as iron smelting and pottery, were passed on to the early Poles, who transposed their own cultural flair to these Celtic arts. The Celtic tribes later migrated westward and eventually occupied the British Isles. However, a number of Celts stayed behind in Polish territory where they were assimilated into the Polish tribes and continued to exert a considerable influence over the Poles:
...more advanced cultures, particularly the Celtic, influenced the formation of new cultural patterns. Even at the beginning of our era, when the remnants of the Celtic tribes had almost certainly been assimilated by the indigenous population, their influence is still plainly present.  

Ireland and Poland have developed from common beginnings through the ancient Celts and early Polish tribes. Although the Irish and Polish have had independent historical developments, they continued their cultural connection during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Poland was absent from the nineteenth century map of Europe because a series of three partitions that took place in the late eighteenth century—in 1772, 1793, and 1795—had divided Poland among Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary. With each successive partition, the borders of Poland had decreased in size until they were completely eliminated in 1795. Poles were then subjected to the regulations of the ruling powers and became second class citizens in their own lands. The strictness of rule varied among the three ruling powers, but some edicts were enforced in all three partitions. For instance, in all Polish territories, large Polish landowners were excluded from political power; the Polish language was banned in government offices, law courts, and business matters; Polish culture and its traditions were discouraged; Polish patriots were imprisoned and persecuted; and privileges of the Church were curtailed.  

The strictest and harshest control was that of Russia. In his preface to Adam Mickiewicz’s classic play, *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III*, Harold B. Segel explains that Count Novosiltsev, the Russian Commissioner who was in charge of the administration of the Russian controlled region under Alexander I and Nicholas I, was bent on destroying the Polish culture as well as the Poles themselves. Segel writes:
Novosiltsev... was the first man to give a rational basis to the Russian government's brutal and instinctive hatred of the Poles, regarding it as salutary and politic; he made it the foundation of all his work and aimed at the annihilation of Polish nationality. Thereupon all the lands from the Prosna to the Dnieper and from Galicia to the Baltic Sea were locked up and administered as a vast prison. The whole administrative machinery was transformed into a single great engine for torturing the Poles... The systematic Novosiltsev applied himself first to the torture of children and youths, in order to exterminate in the very germ the hopes of future generations. 7

Novosiltsev was the right-hand man of the czar, overseeing the police and military in carrying out the methodical torture and extermination of Poles.

The Irish similarly suffered under restrictions created by the English. Ever since the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland in 1169 at the prompting of Diarmuid MacMurrough, the deposed Irish king of Leinster, the English have exploited Ireland both economically and politically. 8 The Normans settled and Anglicized the eastern part of Ireland, and in 1541, Henry VIII of England declared himself the king of Ireland. The persecution of the Catholic Irish population by the English steadily increased over time. Henry VIII’s daughter, Elizabeth I, continued her father’s stance against the Irish. Later, James I would attempt to keep Ireland submissive to England by repopulating the region of Ulster (now Northern Ireland) with English settlers and others loyal to the crown of England. During the Interregnum period in England, Puritan leader Oliver Cromwell had Catholic churches in Ireland destroyed in addition to killing a significant part of the Irish Catholic population. Restrictions on Irish Catholics continued in the late seventeenth century. The 1801 Act of Union made Ireland a part of the United Kingdom, and England made every attempt to Anglicize the Irish population. The Irish Famine of the 1840s hastened the Anglicizing process. With the death of the greater part of the Gaelic-
speaking population, the Gaelic language and many Irish traditions began to fade and be replaced with the language and traditions of the English.

The comparable socio-political situations in Poland and Ireland during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries put the culture and identity of the people in each country in jeopardy. The Polish and the Irish, respectively, were both struggling to create a sense of fellowship among themselves by defining their common identity. The Poles struggled to retain their identity despite restrictions imposed upon the open expression of their culture by Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary. Likewise, in Ireland, the Irish had a need to establish their identity as being separate from the English, who for centuries had imposed their culture and traditions upon the Irish, in particular the Irish Catholics. Both the Irish and the Polish needed to define and redefine their identity, their “Irishness” or “Polishness,” in order to build and maintain a sense of community among their people. They needed to examine the source of their “ishness,” the aspects of their culture, such as language, history, and traditions, that united them and made them different from other groups, because their survival as a race was at stake. The question of establishing and maintaining identity is especially intriguing in nineteenth century Poland which, unlike the Emerald Isle, did not have definitive natural boundaries or even political borders.

In both Poland and Ireland, a small group of authors was instrumental in helping the Polish and Irish, respectively, retain and preserve their national identities in times of national crisis. These writers became a source of strength and inspiration for their fellow countrymen, and were seen as the true leaders of their people.
Through the writing of exiled authors, such as Zygmunt Krasiński, Adam Mickiewicz, and Juliusz Słowacki, Poles were able to sustain their language, traditions, and courage under the harsh socio-political conditions which they endured. These writers, whose work had to be smuggled into Polish regions, were Polish patriots determined to raise the morale and hopes of their people. They were inspired not only by the events and circumstances of the day, but also by Poland’s very patriotic national folklore and the country’s history as a great and powerful European kingdom.

Like the Polish, Irish poet-playwrights Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory, John Millington Synge, and William Butler Yeats attempted to reclaim their history and traditions. They looked to Irish folklore and legends of great Irish heroes of the past for inspiration, and they dedicated themselves to rebuilding a sense of Irish identity in their fellow countrymen during a time when the Irish saw their culture as an extension of the English. Through their poetry and plays, the writers began a historical period in the 1890s that became known as the Irish Renaissance, a rebirth of Irish culture. As with the Poles, the Irish were given courage and strength against their English oppressors through their poet-playwrights.

In both the Irish and Polish cultures, playwrights had a major role in sustaining and preserving national identity and pride at a time in which their countries were subjected to foreign domination and rule. In the absence of national leaders, the playwrights gave their kinsmen direction in how to endure and stand against their oppressors. Drawing inspiration from the “folk” or peasantry, which was seen as the keepers of the heritage, they helped the people to rediscover their ancestry, history, and
folklore, and sometimes redefined their identity through creating new myths from people and events of their own times. National identity evolves and changes as time progresses. The plays of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish and Polish playwrights were intended for the people of the times in which they were written, but they continue to affect and influence the people of the present who draw their own interpretations of national identity from them. Especially in times of national crisis, the populations of Ireland and Poland are strengthened and empowered by the examples of nationalism as presented in the plays; the patriotism and bravery of the various characters depicted serve as models for the public to follow.

*Adam Mickiewicz and William Butler Yeats*

The poet-playwrights have had a significant influence in defining and re-defining national identity in Ireland and Poland since the nineteenth century. In both countries, the poet, who is also regarded as a prophet, is seen as a type of leader whose role is that of the voice for his society that will guide his people to freedom from oppression. In Ireland, “ancient Irish tradition declares that the poet rules,” an aspect that is addressed in William Butler Yeats’ play, *The King’s Threshold.* In Poland, *wieszcz*, the word used for “poet,” also means “prophet,” “seer,” and “soothsayer.” Modern Poles, like their early nineteenth century predecessors, still believe that their poet-playwrights are leaders with extraordinary insights.
Although there are several playwrights in Poland and Ireland that have greatly impacted the national psyche, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) have risen to the level of national bards in their respective countries. They have not only written on topics of nationalism and politics, but they have also lived and practiced what they preached to their readers and audiences. They devoted their lives to the cause of their countries’ freedom from foreign domination. As a young man, Mickiewicz in 1823 was arrested and detained in a Russian prison in Wilno (Vilnius) due to his involvement with student societies at the University of Wilno.\textsuperscript{10} Later as a Polish exile, Mickiewicz helped organize several campaigns against the Russians from various European countries, such as France and Italy. He died of Asiatic cholera in Constantinople while organizing a legion against the Russians in 1855. Likewise, Yeats was involved in politics in Ireland. As a young nationalist in 1892, he helped found the Irish Literary Society to encourage Irish authors to write on Irish subjects.\textsuperscript{11} Yeats later had a more direct hand in Irish politics when he became one of sixty Irish senators in the first Senate of the Irish Free State in the 1920s.

The plays of Yeats and Mickiewicz are rich in various aspects, such as the numerous allusions that they make to their respective nations, paganism, Christianity, and folklore. \textit{Forefathers’ Eve, Part III}, which is commonly acknowledged by the Polish public and the Academy to be Mickiewicz’s dramatic masterpiece, is his response to the failed 1830 November Insurrection against the Russians. Incorporated into this particular drama are Mickiewicz’s own experiences as a captive in a Russian prison in Wilno and the political persecution of the Polish people by the Russians in the 1830s. The play is
rich in references to the pagan holiday of Dziady ("Forefathers"), after which the drama is named, that had evolved and merged with the Christian holidays of All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day. Czesław Miłosz comments on the play:

Only a man of extraordinary perspicacity could have sought the revitalization of drama in a return to the sacred spectacles of the past, still preserved in folklore. In Mickiewicz’s lifetime, peasants in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania still gathered on All Souls’ Day in remote chapels to celebrate the pagan rite of calling the dead and offering them food.\(^\text{12}\)

The other three parts of Forefathers are also rooted in the pagan-Christian holiday, and symbolic references to the situation of Poland during the nineteenth century abound in all parts. Mickiewicz’s references to Polish politics of his time continue from the four parts of Forefathers to The Confederation of Bar (Konfederaci Barscy). The latter unfinished drama that has yet to be translated into English, deals with a confederation against the Russians that is being formed by Polish general Pułaski, French officer De Choisy, Wojewoda, and Father Marek. Although the odds of success are against the confederation, the drama provides insight into the Polish psyche, showing how strongly Poles value freedom and how determined they are to obtain and keep it despite the risks. Konrad Wallenrod, Pan Tadeusz, and Ballads and Romances (Ballady i Romanse), also present the Polish values of freedom, determination, strength, and courage in difficult political times in Poland. These three dramatic works of epic proportions are often performed in Poland, and Pan Tadeusz was recently made into a film version in 1999 by renowned stage and film director Andrzej Wajda.

Yeats’ plays, like Mickiewicz’s work, demonstrate a blending of the elements of politics, paganism and Christianity, and folklore. However, unlike Mickiewicz, who
combines all these various elements into each one of his pieces, Yeats blends two or three elements into each play. For example, he may blend the elements of folklore, paganism, and Christianity together, but may leave allusions to Irish politics out of the combination, as can be seen in his play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*. This drama deals with a woman dissatisfied with her life who, against the warnings of a priest, calls upon the fairies to take her away from her dull house. Other plays are rich not only in references to Irish politics, but also to Christianity and Irish folklore. *The Countess Cathleen*, for instance, is the story of a good-hearted Christian woman who offers her soul to two demons in exchange for the souls of the peasants who had sold their souls for food. This play is a direct allusion to the situation created by the 1840s Famine in Ireland. As explained by Adrian Frazier:

> *Memory* indeed is too weak a word to express how the Irish psyche was convulsed by the Famine that began in 1845—by its end, the population was cut in half, millions dying, millions emigrating. Meanwhile, Protestant landlords offered to give them [the peasantry] soup if they changed their religion. Not many changed it, however, and those who did are remembered and ridiculed today—"soupers," they are called.¹³

Besides making a commentary on Ireland's political situation, Yeats also presents the psyche of the Irish in matters of Christianity and folklore. In plays such as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *The Dreaming of the Bones*, in addition to others, Yeats blends political commentary and guidance along with folklore and Christianity.
Conceptions of Messianism

The plays of Mickiewicz and Yeats share a number of similarities, and a theme that is prevalent throughout them is that of messianism, an intriguing and complex concept with multiple meanings and implications. A very basic explanation of the term, "messianism," is the idea of someone or something experiencing a period of persecution and eventually finding the means and the strength to end the suffering endured in order to bring about a new beginning or rebirth, a period of salvation. Messianism can be interpreted through different perspectives: religious, cultural, political, and national.

Messianism is a concept that is rooted in Judaism. Biblical messianism is the idea that the Jewish people, collectively, would act as a messiah or savior, helping to create "a world based on economic and social equity, harmony among nations and creative collaboration between humankind and nature." This conception of a messiah is therefore that of a collective messiah. Jewish historian Joseph Klausner explains:

In the books of Amos, Ezekiel, Obadiah, and in the Book of Psalms, there is only a collective Messiah: "deliverers" and "saints" redeem the world by their righteousness and piety....In Deutero-Isaiah and Daniel, the Messiah is not a person at all, but is the whole Jewish people. Likewise, in the Apocryphal books...there is no individual Messiah.

The idea of an individual messiah, rather than a collective, was very powerful during the time of ancient Rome when many people were persecuted by the Romans, who occupied territories across Europe and parts of Africa and the Middle East. People suffering under Roman rule wanted and needed to have the hope that someone, a great leader perhaps, would one day come to relieve them of their oppression. This hope of an individual
messiah was further supported by the Dead Sea Scrolls, which contribute to the idea that "there are three messianic figures: the high priest of righteousness, the Davidic king-Messiah and the prophet of the Last Days." In light of this, it is not surprising that a number of individuals appeared, claiming that they were the messiah. One such individual claiming himself to be the messiah was a Jew from Galilee named Jesus. He was not accepted as the messiah by Judaism because he "did not fulfill Jewish messianic expectations: neither war, nor poverty, nor injustice vanished from the earth; the grinding heel of Roman oppression was not lifted." Additionally, the claim that Jesus was divine goes against Jewish beliefs in a human messiah.

The belief in Jesus as a divine messiah and in his Second Coming, the Parousia, is the focus of messianism for Christians. According to Eva Fleischner, messianism, from a Christian perspective, is defined as "the belief in a messiah, or in a messianic age, when the sufferings and evils of life as we know it will be done away with." Christian messianism, then is twofold: the first part focuses on invisible, inner redemption through the crucifixion, death, and salvation of Jesus Christ; the second part is concerned with the "Christian belief in a long period [a thousand years] of unprecedented peace and justice on earth, either preceding and ushering in, or following the return of Christ." In general, to summarize, Christian messianism is the concept of an individual messiah of divine origin, while Jewish messianism deals with the idea of a human, collective messiah.

Although the concept of messianism is based in religion, Jewish and Christian, it has evolved over the centuries and has been applied to secular matters in addition to
religious issues. In the secular sphere, messianism, as a concept, can be applied to many things that experience a suffering and a death before a rebirth and salvation. Among the most common manifestations of secular messianism are cultural messianism, political messianism, and national messianism. These forms can be found in countries around the world, but in the cases of Poland and Ireland, they are exceedingly apparent in all three forms.

Cultural messianism, as the term implies, refers to the death and rebirth of a people’s culture. In the situations of both Poland and Ireland, cultural death was caused by external means: Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary attempted to smother Polish culture through restrictions on the use of the Polish language and customs, while England tried to supplant the Irish language and traditions with those of the English. The rebirth of the Polish and Irish cultures was brought about by the perseverance of the people to retain their ancient traditions, as prompted by the playwrights.

Political messianism is concerned with the death and rebirth of a nation, “an imagined political community” according to Benedict Anderson.²⁰ I also use the term, “nation,” in its geopolitical sense, referring to the actual tract of land inhabited by a group of individuals with common traits. With these definitions of nation in mind, political messianism, therefore, deals with the elimination and restoration of a nation’s political borders and its government. As a political entity, Poland ceased to exist on the map of Europe. There were no political borders, no government, no officials elected by the Polish population. Poland would re-emerge politically once more with political borders and its own government in 1918 after the end of World War I. Although Ireland
remained on the map due to its geographical borders, which correspond with its political borders, the nation was politically under the rule and dominion of England that had taken control over the Irish government. Ireland, in larger part, experienced its political rebirth through the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 and a self-ruling Irish government.

Lastly, national messianism deals with the idea of a group of people that is persecuted before experiencing a period of salvation and peace. The term, "nation," as it applies to national messianism, is not only used in its geopolitical sense, but also in the sense of referring to a group of people sharing a common background, history, culture, and beliefs. In the three Polish partitions during the nineteenth century, Poles were oppressed by outside powers assuming control. However, Poles enjoyed salvation and peace after 1918, at least until the start of World War II. Likewise, In Ireland, the Irish endured the restrictions of the English until a rebirth came in 1922, when most of the country was free from English rule.

Up to this point, I have discussed four major manifestations of messianism: religious (Jewish/collective and Christian/individual), cultural, political, and national. All four manifestations contribute to the idea of nation, or the nationalist idea, which concerns the concept of national identity that Michael Billig addresses in Banal Nationalism:

To have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood...Having a national identity also involves being situated physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally: typically, it means being situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within the world of nations.21
The national identities of Poland and Ireland, respectively, can be examined and
discussed through these four conceptions of messianism that are apparent in the dramas
of Mickiewicz and Yeats. The two writers make full use of the concept of messianism
through the incorporation of folklore, religious issues (pagan and Christian), and
historical events. In the process, Mickiewicz and Yeats reinforce a brand of messianism
that is specific to their respective nations: Polish messianism and Irish messianism. Both
Polish messianism and Irish messianism include the tenets of the four major forms of
messianism, but do so from Polish and Irish viewpoints. Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’
dramatic treatment of messianism, as it can be applied to the situations and national
identities of Poland and Ireland in all four manifestations, is the focus of this study.

Up to the present time, few scholars have made direct comparisons between the
dramas of Poland and Ireland, let alone comparisons between the two nations. Nina
Witoszek’s The Theatre of Recollection: A Cultural Study of the Modern Dramatic
Tradition in Ireland and Poland is a rare work that directly compares Irish and Polish
theatre and culture. It examines in the dramas of the mid- and late twentieth century the
expression of national identity through Irish funerary traditions and Polish nuptial
practices, claiming that “both rituals reconstruct the configuration of the larger cultural
whole.”22 Although Witoszek acknowledges the similarity between Irish and Polish
plays, stating that “the funeral is very often used in Polish drama,” she chooses to de-
emphasize the resemblance, ignoring the common Celtic roots of both Ireland and
Poland.23 Furthermore, the work does not take great strides in outlining the first
expressions of Irish and Polish nationalism in drama of the nineteenth century, containing
only brief references to earlier written plays by Gregory, Yeats, Mickiewicz, and Słowacki. Birgit Bramsbach, in her review of Witoszek's work, writes:

Although Yeats's and Synge's plays may not fit exactly or comfortably under Witoszek's umbrella of codes, I cannot agree with her when, without any real corroboration, she states that the wake as used by these two playwrights affects merely the plot and the characters....Yet it seems to me she has excluded the drama of Yeats and Synge for the wrong reasons. 24

Bramsback also points out that in addition to the lack of in-depth references to the plays of earlier dramatists, Witoszek does not provide a close analysis of the twentieth century plays that she has selected for her study.

I look further into the theatrical past of Poland and Ireland to highlight the plays of Mickiewicz and Yeats, and to examine how their plays demonstrate the various forms of messianism and the nationalist idea. Where appropriate, I incorporate views and firsthand accounts of productions and audience reactions to the work of the two playwrights. In discussing Mickiewicz's work in the theatre, I will relate to stage adaptations of Pan Tadeusz, Konrad Wallenrod, and Ballads and Romances, all of which are either poems or epic poems in their original form but are nonetheless highly theatrical. However, Mickiewicz's Forefathers' Eve, Part III and The Confederation of Bar are originally dramas, although the latter is unfinished. All of Yeats' theatrical work discussed in this study are plays in their original form.

In Chapter 2, I examine the dramas and theatrical adaptations of Mickiewicz, discussing their display and use of messianism in its four major manifestations—religious, cultural, political, and national. The five dramatic pieces under investigation include Ballads and Romances (1819-1831), Konrad Wallenrod (1828), Forefathers' Eve,
Part III (1832-1834), Pan Tadeusz (1832-1834), and The Confederation of Bar (1836). I examine how messianism is presented through pagan, Jewish, and Christian issues, which feature predominantly in these works of Mickiewicz, in addition to folk themes that exhibit Polish nationalism. I also discuss how Mickiewicz further develops the concept of Polish messianism, which dates back to sixteenth century Polish scholars, and how this concept promotes Polish identity and the nationalist idea.

In Chapter 3, I examine the plays of Yeats, addressing their presentation of the four conceptions of messianism through pagan, Christian, and folk themes, but with an emphasis on Irish folklore, which is the foundation of Yeats' work. The five plays analyzed are Cathleen Ni Houlihan (1902), The King's Threshold (1904), The Unicorn from the Stars (1908), The Dreaming of the Bones (1919), and The Death of Cuchulain (1939). The concept of Irish messianism is relatively new and seldom used, but nevertheless it is exceedingly apparent in the work of Yeats, who develops the concept along different lines. Irish messianism, as exhibited in Yeats’ plays, contributes to Irish identity and nationalism.

In Chapter 4, I make direct comparisons between the dramatic pieces of Mickiewicz and Yeats, which until this point are discussed in isolation. I explore the similarities between their work, showing how their plays exhibit the four forms of messianism and contribute to the nationalist idea in Polish and Irish societies. The two writers draw inspiration from their respective country’s national traditions, but in writing their dramatic work they also fashion new traditions that are now part of the cultures of the Polish and the Irish. Additionally, the reception of Mickiewicz’s work by the Polish
public will be addressed through theatre reviews, directors’ notes, and individual audience reactions. I also evaluate the reaction of the Irish public to the plays of Yeats through theatre reviews and personal accounts.

In Chapter 5, I conclude by summarizing that the dramas and theatrical adaptations of Mickiewicz and Yeats display the different conceptions of messianism through folklore and folk beliefs, paganism, and Christianity in order to further develop and encourage the nationalist idea. Their work is fundamental in maintaining the identity of the Polish and the Irish through difficult and trying times. Additionally, their dramatic pieces serve as the foundation for twentieth century plays that deal with the issue of national identity, particularly those of O’Casey, Friel, Wyspiański, and Różewicz, thus proving the value and endurance of Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’ work.
Notes to Chapter 1


5 Ibid. p. 23.


8 Diarmuid MacMurrough is known for abducting Dervorgilla, the wife of Teirnan O’Rourke, the Irish king of Breffny. After O’Rourke recaptured his wife, MacMurrough petitioned Henry II of England for military support, thus first bringing the English to Ireland. The story of MacMurrough and the arrival of the English in Ireland has become legendary and was dramatized in Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory’s play, Dervorgilla.


10 Mickiewicz was not permitted to write while he was imprisoned, and he was examined by the Russian Commission without a lawyer to defend him. As Monica Gardner explains in her book, Adam Mickiewicz: The National Poet of Poland, the Commission operated as follows: “Novosiltsev began with a pitiless cross-examination, in which every word uttered by these hapless boys and youths, as each stood alone before his persecutors, without a friend or advocate to say one syllable in his behalf, was wrested and turned against him. From threats and verbal persecution, the Commission passed to the more violent methods of the Russian prison. Solitary confinement, poisonous air, putrid food were the lot of some. Others were put for days on a fare of salt herrings and at the same time deprived of anything to drink. Others were flogged so cruelly that they died under the lash.” (See Monica Gardner. Adam Mickiewicz: The National Poet of Poland. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1971. p. 32-33.)


17 Ibid. p. 5.


19 Ibid. 13.


23 Ibid. p. 15.

CHAPTER 2

MESSIANISM AND RELIGION IN THE PLAYS OF MICKIEWICZ

Polish messianism is a concept that was especially popular during the nineteenth century with Polish Romantic writers, notably Adam Mickiewicz, but it is a concept that can be traced back to the sixteenth century writer, Stanisław Orzechowski, who felt that the Poles were a nation chosen by God.¹ The notion of Polish messianism was further developed in the following century by Wojciech Dębołęcki, a Polish Roman Catholic priest. Dębołęcki believed that “the Polish language was the only original and unmixed language in the world...and that the Poles would rule over other nations in the final, apocalyptic epoch of history.”²

To the religious-minded Poles, the idea of Polish messianism is bound together with religion (Roman Catholicism, in particular) and expresses the national situation of Poland, especially during the nineteenth century, when the nation was non-existent on the map of Europe as a result of the three partitions that occurred near the end of the eighteenth century.³ After the failed 1830 November Insurrection and the mass exodus of Poles to France and other parts of Europe, Poles began to regard Poland as a messianic

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nation that was experiencing a period of crucifixion. They reasoned that their country was suffering, Christ-like, for the materialistic sins of Europe and had died with the Third Partition in 1795 but would rise once again and be reborn (Poland’s rebirth as a political state would come in 1918, after World War I had ended). Modern Polish writer Czesław Miłosz explains that Polish messianism focuses on the idea that “Poland was to redeem the nations through her suffering, and the mission of the Polish pilgrims was to announce to the materialistic Western nations a new world spiritually transformed.”

Many examples of Polish messianism are apparent in the work of Mickiewicz, who was greatly influenced by Polish folklore and pagan beliefs, Christianity, and Judaism. As a young boy growing up near the town of Nowogródek in Lithuania, Mickiewicz fed on the folk stories and songs sung by girls spinning flax in his parents’ house. He was also greatly affected by his religion, Roman Catholicism, and by Jewish beliefs, which may be the result of his mother’s and his wife’s Frankist ancestry.

Indeed, Mickiewicz sympathized and identified with the Jews, and according to Andrzej Walicki, he

…developed a notion of Jews and Poles as two parallel nations in exile, and of a mysterious link between Jewish and Polish Messianism…he concluded that not only the Poles and other Slavs but the French and the Jews as well should lead mankind into the new epoch of the Holy Ghost and…that Judaism, as the foundation of the whole edifice of Messianism, should be preserved…

The Polish writer, as an exile in France, had taken part in synagogue services in Paris, most notably during the 1845 observance of the destruction of both Jerusalem Temples.

Although Mickiewicz also makes great use of folkloric influences and sources in his work, religious references—pagan, Jewish, and Christian—are exceedingly apparent.
He uses religious issues in order to evoke the past and tie it with the present, drawing messianic parallels with the national situation of Poland during the nineteenth century. Mickiewicz, who was a devout Catholic himself, knew the importance of religion to the Poles and understood that religious faith helped sustain his fellow countrymen in trying times. Through incorporating various religious allusions in his work, the Polish writer gave Poles the strength to persevere when faced with oppression and the hope that their nation would one day be free from foreign domination.

In this chapter, I discuss examples of messianism as can be seen through pagan, Judaic, and Christian influences in the five following dramatic works of Mickiewicz: Ballads and Romances (Ballady i Romanse), Konrad Wallenrod, Forefathers’ Eve, Part III (Dziady), Pan Tadeusz, and The Confederation of Bar (Konfederaci Barscy). Each piece exhibits various forms of death and rebirth as well as Polish messianism, both individual and collective. In some instances, there is a singular messianic hero, while in others the Poles, as a group, serve as a collective messiah that is thought to bring about the salvation of Poland. All messianic references, however, are either direct or indirect allusions to the Polish nationalist idea.

Ballads and Romances—Messianism in Folk and Pagan Beliefs

Mickiewicz’s Ballads and Romances, written between the 1810s and the 1840s, is a series of poems that incorporate elements from various Polish folk stories, songs, and beliefs. These poems very often exhibit dramatic influences, containing dialogue and
linear plot development complete with rising tension, climax, and denouement. In describing Mickiewicz’s ballad, “The Lilies” (“Lilije”), David Welsh states:

   Much of the story is presented through dialogue, often without the use of such stage directions as “he said.” Hence “The Lilies” gives the effect of a play, in which such indications are omitted altogether.

The dramatic quality of Ballads and Romances did not go unnoticed by twentieth century theatre artists, who adapted a number of the poems and produced them on stages throughout Poland. Some of the better known adapters include Irena Jun, Kazimierz Łastawiecki, and Piotr Szczerski.

   In this section of the chapter, I will first discuss the individual ballads and romances written by Mickiewicz that have been used in the stage productions of the three mentioned adapters. With a few exceptions, most of these poems have not been translated into English due to the difficulty of effectively rendering Mickiewicz’s writing from the original Polish and retaining its flavor. Therefore, I feel it is of benefit to readers to acquaint them with the particular ballads and romances used in the productions. After discussing Mickiewicz’s poems, I will then address the stage adaptations of Ballads and Romances, evaluating their effectiveness and faithfulness to the original poems through theatre reviews found in Polish periodicals.

Dziewczyna”), “Waiting” (“Czaty”), and “Mrs. Twardowski” (“Pani Twardowska”). All of these poems make use of Polish folk beliefs. However, for the purposes of this study, I am leaving out of the general discussion “The Shawm Player,” “The Three Budrys Brothers,” “The Gentleman and the Girl,” “Waiting,” and “Mrs. Twardowski,” since these five poems do not address issues pertaining to messianism, religion, or the supernatural. \(^{11}\)

“I Like That,” written in 1819, is the first ballad which Mickiewicz wrote. It is the story of a young poet who around midnight is traveling on a road that takes him by a meadow near a Russian church and graveyard. He senses that spirits abound in the ominous-looking surroundings in which he finds himself. The poet recalls his experience:

> Once, when I rode to Ruta in the nighttime,  
> The carriage with horses was standing on the bridge,  
> The driver in vain urged them to run,  
> “Hey!”—he shouted, whipped them to task.

They stood and then they jumped with all strength,  
> The thill at that same moment broke;  
> I was left alone in the field in the night,  
> “I like that”—I remarked—“I like that!” \(^{12}\)

Raz, gdy do Ruty jadę w czas noclegu,  
> Na moście z końmi wóz staje,  
> Próżno woźnica przynagla do biegu,  
> „Hej!”—krzyczy, biczem zadaje.

Stoją, a potem skoczą z całej mocy,  
> Dyszel przy samej pękl szrubie;  
> Zostać na polu samemu i w nocy,  
> „To lubię—rzekłem—to lubię!” (“I Like That” 136) \(^{13}\)
In a situation which most others would find hair-raising, the poet actually takes delight. Shortly after he exclaims the words, “I like that,” a dreadful ghost appears, prompting him to cry out, “Let Christ be praised” (“Niech będzie Chrystus pochwalony”) (“I Like That” 136). In response, the ghost says “Forever and ever” (“Na wielki wieków”) (“I Like That” 136). Perhaps these Christian-related words calm and embolden the poet, for he stays to hear the story that the ghost has to tell. The ghost is the spirit of Maryla, a beautiful young woman who in life had a wealthy father and everything she wanted. Maryla, however, treated everyone badly, including a young man named Józio, who died of a broken heart for her. Later, at a ball given by Maryla’s father, the spirit of Józio came to Maryla and choked her to death. He put a curse on her that forces her to remain in purgatory, roaming around the Russian church in a fearful form, until someone says that he likes her. The ghost tells the poet that by speaking the words, “I like that,” he saved her from purgatory and that she will be allowed to enter heaven. Just as she is about to tell the poet his future, dawn arrives and the ghost must leave to start her new existence in heaven.

This particular ballad, which has messianic qualities, is partly rooted in the folk belief that spirits roam around churches and graveyards at night, and partly on Mickiewicz’s experience meeting one of his lovers by a church at midnight.¹⁴ The obvious example of messianism in “I Like That” is that concerning Maryla, who experiences two forms of death and rebirth: the first being her actual death and her rebirth as a frightful ghost, the second being the termination of her stay as a ghost in purgatory and the beginning of her existence in heaven. Maryla represents messianism from a
Christian perspective in that her death and rebirth is individual. Her words sometimes
dallude to those of Christ. When she first speaks to the poet, she states:

Until the stars leave and until
The first cock crows,
I will tell you my story
So that you can teach others.

Dopóki gwiazdy zejdą i dopóki
We wsi kur pierwszy zapieje,
Opowiem tobie, a ty dla nauki
Opowiedz innym me dzieje. ("I Like That" 137)

The cock’s crow refers to Christ’s prediction that his apostle, Peter would deny him three
times. After the cock crows and the spirit of Maryla leaves near the end of the ballad, the
poet recites three Hail Marys for the souls in purgatory. Additionally, there is the
reference, near the beginning of the ballad, in the poet’s exclamation and the ghost’s
response.

"The Girl from Świtęże," is one of the handful of ballads by Mickiewicz that has
been translated into English by Dorothea Prall Radin. Written in 1821, it similarly
deals with a young woman who is resurrected as a ghost. The ballad begins with the
narrator talking about a young man and woman who can be seen walking by Lake Świtęże
at night. The young man attempts to court the young woman, not realizing that she is a
woman from Świtęże:

Will you always run through the woods like a frivolous doe,
Like a ghost roaming in the dark night?
Isn’t it better to stay with the one who loves you,
Stay, my love, with me.

Zawszeż po kniejach jak sarna płocha,
Jak upiór bładzisz w noc ciemną?
Zostań się lepiej z tym, kto cię kocha,
Zostań się, o luba! ze mną. ("The Girl from Świteż" 115)

The young woman, however, does not fall for the sweetness of the man’s words, for she replies:

Wait, wait—she answers—you haughty stripling,
I remember what my father said:
The grace of the nightingale is in the voice of a man,
But his heart has a fox’s cunning.18

Stój, stój—odpowie—hardy młokosie,
Pomnę, co ojciec rzekł stary:
Słowice wzdzięki w mężczyzny głosie,
A w sercu lisie zamiary. ("The Girl from Świteż" 116)

The woman continues and eventually makes the man promise that he will be faithful to her, but as time proves, the man is unable to keep his promise. Later, on the water of Lake Świteż, the man sees another beautiful woman and he “forgot his girl” ("Zapomniał strzelec o swej dziewczynie"), following this new woman to whom he is attracted ("The Girl from Świteż" 118). The “new” woman turns out to be the girl from Świteż in disguise, testing the man’s love for her. The poem ends with the lake swallowing the man, thus causing his death, and the narrator speaking of the ghosts of the man and woman who can be seen dancing on the ripples of the lake, completing the circle of the ballad.

Resembling “I Like That,” Mickiewicz’s “The Girl from Świteż” handles the theme of messianism through the characters of the young man and the young woman. Similar to Maryla in the last ballad discussed, the man experiences a physical death and rebirth in the form of a spirit that haunts Lake Świteż. However, unlike Maryla, he
undergoes a single resurrection rather than a double resurrection. It is safe to assume that from the very beginning, the woman, as a Świtezanka or inhabitant of the town of Świteż, is already a spirit who had undergone her death and rebirth through the miracles that took place during the siege of Świteż. Although there are no overt references to Christianity in this play, they are implied through the history of Lake Świteż and the town which shares the same name with the lake.

The 1821 ballad, “Romanticism,” has also been translated into English by Jewell Parish, another Mickiewicz translator. This ballad deals with the struggle between the heart and the mind, but more importantly, it addresses the Polish messianic concept of the bard as the leader of the people. The ballad opens on a young woman, Karusia, who is visibly distressed: she is mourning the death of her lover, Jan, whose spirit she believes she is seeing. All those around her pity her; they believe that Jan is near her even in death:

The girl caresses her lover with desire,
She follows him, cries loudly in anguish, stumbles and falls;
Witnessing her breakdown, hearing her voice full of pain,
A large crowd gathers.

Tak się dziewczyna z kochankiem pieści,
Bieży za nim, krzyczy, pada;
Na ten upadek, na głos boleści,
Skupia się ludzi gromada. (“Romanticism” 106)

An old man takes part in the scene and addresses the people, telling them:

“The girl feels”—I said modestly—
“The crowd’s faith lies deep;
Feeling and faith speak more to me
Than glasses and the eyes of a wiseman.”
The old man continues to speak to the crowd, saying that it is with the heart that truth can be seen and followed.

The character of the old man in “Romanticism” serves as a bard or wieszcz, the messianic character of the piece. The old man is able to lead the people and help them understand what it is that Karusia is experiencing, because as a wieszcz, he is able to see and understand things that the general public cannot comprehend. He has insight beyond that which is visible and tangible. Although on the surface this ballad appears to center on the character of Karusia, in actuality the focus is on the old man, the wieszcz of the piece.

The ballad written sometime between 1830 and 1831 called “The Flight” has clearly delineated allusions to Christianity as well as paganism. Of all the poems staged in productions of Ballads and Romances, “The Flight” has the greatest focus on and makes the most use of elements belonging to these two religious factions. In this ballad, a young girl loses her lover who dies in battle fighting in Mendog’s forces for Lithuania. She is told to marry another man, but she is not yet ready to give up her dead lover, claiming “I die when he does not live” (“Ja umrę, gdy on nie żyje”) (“The Flight” 336). In vain a priest tries to provide the woman with some solace and conducts her confession, but the woman is unable to find comfort in the priest’s words. The woman in her desperation visits a crone, a witch, who performs black magic to call back from the dead the woman’s lover, who comes against his will. The woman is delighted
to see her lover again, and she is happy to be taken away by him on his horse. However, something is amiss, as can be seen through the exchange of words between the woman and her lover:

"Where are you taking me?"—"Where?—home.
My house on Mendog’s mountain;
In the day all the roads are open,
In the night the way is hidden."

„Gdzie mnie wieziesz?"—„Gdzie?—do domu.
Dom mój na góry Mendoga;
W dzień otwarta wszystkim droga,
W nocy jeżdzim po kryjomu." (“The Flight” 338)

The woman does not piece together that the “house on Mendog’s mountain” refers to a cemetery and, more specifically, a grave since Mendog also died in battle and is buried on the mountain. As she and her lover ride on, her lover notices that the horse is weighed down, and so he asks her what she is carrying. It turns out that she has a prayer book, a rosary, and a small crucifix. He asks her to get rid of these things so the horse can run faster, and one by one she drops these items. When she drops the last item, the crucifix, she discovers that the person she thought was her lover is actually an evil spirit, who takes her to her grave. When the priest arrives in the cemetery at dawn, he sees the crucifix lying on ground that appears to be disturbed. The priest, sensing what had happened, stands for a long time by the grave and says a Mass for the woman and her lover.

“The Flight” not only addresses messianic issues but also the conflict between Christianity and paganism that continues to exist in Poland up to the present time. The woman, through the use of black magic, tries to resurrect her lover from death but instead
unwittingly summons an evil spirit, which leads her to her own death and a new existence as a spirit. Mickiewicz, who makes allusions to paganism not only in this ballad but also in a number of his pieces, is advocating in this piece Christianity as a proper and positive force over paganism, which he presents as corrupt and negative.

Messianism and the influence of Christianity on Polish society are again evident in the 1821 ballad, “Father’s Return.” In this piece, the children of a merchant, who is away to buy goods in another town, go to a religious shrine on a roadside outside their town to pray for the safe return of their father. Little do the children know that hiding near them is a small band of robbers waiting to rob the merchant of his goods when he returns. To the happiness of the children, they see their father coming, but their joy is dampened when the band of robbers come out of hiding to overtake them and their father. However, the unexpected happens: one of the highwaymen orders his comrades to release the merchant and his children and to leave them in peace. This highwayman apparently overheard the children praying for their father’s return:

I came today, saw between the brushwood,
The children praying to God for their father;
I listened, at the beginning I was filled with empty laughter,
And then mercy and awe.

I listened, and my mind was brought back to my home,
The club fell from my hand;
Oh, I have a wife! And at my wife’s knee
Is my little son.

Dzisiaj nadchodzę, patrzę między chrusty,
Modlą się dzieci do Boga;
Słucham, z początku porwał mię śmiech pusty,
A potem litość i trwoga.
Seeing the children praying for their father touches the robber; he demonstrates that he
also has a conscience and respect for God and religion. Letting the children and their
father go, he tells them to “say a prayer sometimes for my soul” (“za moją duszę /
Zmówcie też czasempaciórek”) (“Father’s Return” 128).

“Father’s Return” demonstrates the faith of all Poles from different walks of life,
from the righteous to the immoral, from the wealthy to the poor. The robber shows that
he has as much regard for religion, as well as family, as do the children who pray for their
father. Although there are no physical examples of death and rebirth, metaphorical
examples are apparent. The robber, through having a change of heart and changing the
course of his actions, confirms that he has undergone a kind of spiritual rebirth after
seeing the children pray. In this way, through the robber, messianism is presented.

The 1820 piece, “The Lilies,” is another ballad that has been translated into
English, also by Radin. In this rather lengthy and complex ballad, Christian influences
are seen along with pagan beliefs, similar to “The Flight.” Among the pagan beliefs
presented include the notions that the worlds of the living and the dead are not so distant
from each other and that the inhabitants of the two worlds can at times interact with each
other.27 “The Lilies” is the tale of an unfaithful woman who kills her husband and buries
his body by a brook at night. On his grave she plants lilies and chants:

“Grow high flowers,
As high as the lord lies deep;
As high as the lord lies deep,
Grow as high as that.”

„Rośnij kwiecie wysoko,
Jak pan leży głęboko;
Jak pan leży głęboko,
Tak ty rosnij wysoko.” (“The Lilies” 156-157)

After burying her husband, the woman goes to a holy hermit and makes a confession. She explains to him that for years her husband was in Kiev fighting in a war under King Bolesław’s command. While he was away, she was tempted and committed adultery, so to prevent her husband discovering her infidelity, she murders him upon his return. The hermit wonders whether the woman repents because of the crime she committed or because of the fear of punishment for it, but he eventually tells her that “only your husband can offer forgiveness; and your husband lost his life” (“Mąż tylko wydać może; / A mąż twój stracił życie”) (“The Lilies” 158). Feeling at ease with the hermit’s words, the woman returns home to her children who inquire about their father. She tells them that their father is in the forest but will return that evening. The children wait for their father night after night, but eventually they stop waiting. However, the woman’s crime weighs heavy on her conscience, which becomes even more uneasy when she begins to hear the spirit of her husband calling to their children, “It is I, children, your father” (“To ja, dzieci, wasz tato”) (“The Lilies” 159). Later, the two brothers of her husband come by to find out what happened to their sibling, and for months afterward, they stay with the woman and organize searches until they finally give up hope. Over time, the two brothers both fall in love with the woman and want to marry her. Once again, the woman goes to the hermit for advice as to what she should do; she needs to marry one of the
brothers to provide financial security for herself and the children, but she does not want to antagonize the brother she turns down. The hermit advises the woman to have each brother make a wreath of flowers, which will be placed by the altar in the church, and she will marry the brother whose wreath she chooses. On Sunday, the day of the wedding, the woman chooses the wreath made of lilies, which (she discovers from one of the brothers) is made of the lilies from her husband’s grave. A moment later, her dead husband walks through the church door and states:

“It is my wreath and you are mine! The flowers on it are pulled from my grave, Priest, bind us together; You evil wife, woe to you! It is I, your husband, your husband! You evil brothers, woe to you both! You got the flowers from grave, Stop this blood-thirsty fight. It is I, your husband, your brother, You are all mine, the wreath is mine, Further to the Otherworld we all go!”

„Mój wieniec i ty moja! Kwiat na mym rwany grobie, Mnie, księże, stulą wiąż; Zła żono, biada tobie! To ja, twój mąż, twój mąż! Żii bracia, biada obu! Z mego rwaliście grobu, Zawiesicie krawawy bój. To ja, twój mąż, wasz brat, Wy moi, wieniec mój, Dalej na tamten świat!” (“The Lilies” 167)

As soon as the husband finishes speaking, the church shakes and they all sink beneath the crypt of the church, buried, and on top of the ground grow lilies as high as the husband lied deep in the earth.
“The Lilies” addresses the theme of resurrection through the character of the husband, who rises from the dead to reclaim his wife. Additionally, the lilies themselves symbolize not only the husband but also messianism, for they grow once again in the ground over the crypt at the end of the ballad. Concerning religious elements that are evident in the ballad, Christianity is symbolized by the church, whereas paganism is represented through the woman’s chant at the beginning and by the interaction between the living and the dead. Throughout the ballad, the woman’s dead husband calls to her continually, and near the end, actually makes an appearance, interacting with both the woman and his brothers, leading the three of them to join him in death, in the Otherworld. Interestingly, the character of the hermit exhibits both Christian and pagan attributes. The hermit is referred to as holy and at times calls upon the name of God, but at other moments he discusses with the woman the nature of the dead, claiming:

The dead do not resurrect themselves,
The gate is hard for eternity;
And your husband will not return,
Unless you call him yourself.30

Martwy się nie ocuci,
Twarda wieczności brama;
I mąż twój nie powróci,
Chyba zawołasz sama. (“The Lilies” 164-165)

The hermit’s warning, which is of a Christian nature, is not understood by the woman who unwittingly calls upon her husband by choosing the wreath of lilies.

As mentioned earlier in this section of the chapter, a number of Mickiewicz’s ballads that have been adapted for the stage in Ballads and Romances—“I Like That,” “The Girl from Świteż,” “Romanticism,” “The Flight,” “Father’s Return,” and “The
Lilies”—exhibit various messianic and resurrectonal qualities. Some of these ballads present physical examples of death and rebirth, such as “I Like That,” “The Girl from Świtęź,” “The Flight,” and “The Lilies,” while others present death and rebirth in a metaphoric fashion as can be seen in “Father’s Return.” Additionally, there are ballads, such as “I Like That” and “Romanticism,” that display the Polish messianic element of the bard or poet as a leader of the people.

Mickiewicz’s Ballads and Romances, although dramatic in its own right, was not originally intended for the stage, but theatre artists recognized its potential for theatrical presentation. Several artists worthy of note made stage adaptations, some of which were well received by critics and audiences while others were not. At times, the critics have conflicting opinions about the same adaptation, but the one aspect on which they all agree is the difficulty of converting Mickiewicz’s work into a dramatic format that is faithful to the original and accepted by a Polish public well familiar with and able to directly quote from the writing of the Polish bard.31

Of the three major adapters of Ballads and Romances—Irena Jun, Kazimierz Łastawiecki, and Piotr Szczerski—Irena Jun has created the adaptation that is the most highly regarded and the most widely used by Polish theatre companies throughout the 1990s. Marta Poniatowska, a writer for Gazeta na Pomorzu, is impressed by Jun’s adaptation that was used in the 1995 production at the Teatr Współcześnie in Szczecin, Poland, feeling that Jun put new life into Mickiewicz’s ballads. Poniatowska comments:

Irena Jun (stage manager/adapter) used a well-tested method—to refresh that which seems to be crumbling with age with a fresh and unprejudiced perspective. Playing with words, breaking down the text into many characters, writing in spite of its meaning a theatrical movement and using
a comic parody convention—all of this took away the literary heaviness of
the Romantic Messenger and made the material graceful.

Irena Jun (reżyser) przyjęła sprawdzoną metodę—aby odświeżyć to, co
wydaje się już zmurszałe, należy to po prostu na nowo i bez uprzedzeń
odczytać. Zabawa słowem, rozbijanie tekstu na wiele postaci,
wpisać je w przekorny nieraz wobec znaczeń ruch sceniczny i
żartobliwie sparodiowaną konwencję—wszystko to pozbawiło ów literacki
Zwiastun Romantyzmu ciężaru gatunkowego, a uczyniło wdzięcznym
materiałem.32

Poniatowska, in her article, believes that the aim of Jun’s adaptation is to present some of
the strict morals addressed by Mickiewicz in his ballads in a lighter, warmer way to allow
audiences to connect more with Ballads and Romances and not be weighed down
emotionally. Artur Liskowacki of the Kurier Szczeciński agrees that Jun’s lighter
interpretation of Mickiewicz’s ballads is enjoyable for audiences and helps make the
poet’s work more accessible. He states that “Jun knows where are the borders that cannot
be crossed...the spectacle shows that Mickiewicz has a sense of humor, and in the
labyrinth of his dark poems is a playful flame of humor” (“Jun wie, gdzie są te granice,
których przekroczyć nie wolno...spektakl dowodzi, że Mickiewicz miał poczucie humoru, a
w gąszczu jego mrocznych wierszy tli się iskierka żartu, zabawy”).33 Indeed, Jun takes
Mickiewicz’s work, which is already close to the hearts and minds of Poles, and makes it
even more accessible through a light adaptation and the theatrical medium.

In an interview with Magdalena Zurad, Jun discusses Mickiewicz’s Ballads and
Romances, the appeal of the ballads, and her reasons for adapting them for the stage:

The ballads are very theatrical: they have action, dialogue, and are ready
for the stage. A goal of the production and adaptation of Mickiewicz’s
text is to bring to light the hidden meanings and adding extra theatrical
symbols that help in understanding the text....I like working “with
poetry"...I also feel that the ballads help us with understanding what Romanticism was and what it can be during our time.

Ballady są bardzo teatralne: mają akcję, dialogi, prawie gotowe sceny. Realizacja zmierza więc do odczytywania didaskaliów ukrytych w tekście, jak również dopisywania dodatkowych znaków teatralnych, które pomogą lepiej zrozumieć tekst....Lubię pracować „w wierszu”....Uważam też, że ballady pomogą nam wszystkim zrozumieć, czym Romantyzm był i czym może być w dzisiejszych czasach.34

For Jun as well as for other Polish artists and the public, Mickiewicz's work is living literature in that it still speaks to present day generations as it spoke to the people of Mickiewicz's day.

Piotr Szczerski’s adaptation of Ballads and Romances, which he wrote for the two hundredth anniversary of Mickiewicz’s birth in 1998, was well received by critics and audiences in Kielce, Poland, where it was first used in production, and also in London and Vilnius, Lithuania.35 This adaptation is faithful to the original ballads, and the production gave a light, humorous interpretation that was taken well by audiences at all the venues.36 Kazimierz Łastawiecki’s adaptation, which was written before 1955 and was used in productions through the 1980s, is considered to be a weak work that lacks a dramatic feel.

Although the ballads in Mickiewicz’s Ballads and Romances were not originally written as dramas, they exhibit dramatic qualities and are easily adaptable to the stage as is proven by stage adaptations created by theatre artists. Depending on the skill and talent of the adapter, some adaptations of Ballads and Romances are considered by critics to be better representations of Mickiewicz’s writing than others. Nonetheless, the structure of the ballads, which have rather well rounded plots with a clearly defined
beginning, middle, and end, allow the ballads to be easily transferred into one-act plays and scenes. The scattered dialogue found throughout the ballads also contributes to their adaptability for the stage. Ballads and Romances, however, is not the only theatrically successful work of Mickiewicz. Konrad Wallenrod, another literary piece, also proves to be successful as a theatrical work that further exhibits the theme of messianism.

Konrad Wallenrod—Individual Messianism as the Foundation for Collective Messianism

Similarly to Ballads and Romances, Mickiewicz’s 1828 work, Konrad Wallenrod, is not a drama in its original form but actually an epic poem that contains narration and dialogue. It is loosely based on the real life stories of two historical figures: Alfus, a baptized Lithuanian who lived in Malbork (Marienburg), the fortress and capital of the Teutonic Knights, and Konrad Wallenrod, a Grand Master of the Order of the Teutonic Knights. As he often does in his work, Mickiewicz draws upon the stories of actual people and events from both Polish and Lithuanian histories to create his own story and brand of folklore. Additionally, Mickiewicz makes references to paganism, Christianity, and Judaism. He presents the Teutonic Knights as religious zealots who use Christianity and the prospect of converting non-believers as an excuse for making conquests against Lithuania, whose people were formerly pagan. He also addresses the concepts of both Christian and Jewish messianism through the title character of the work, Konrad Wallenrod.
In this section of the chapter, I will first discuss the historical background and events of Poland and Lithuania during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in order to clarify the setting of Mickiewicz’s *Konrad Wallenrod*. After addressing the historical aspects of the epic poem, I will then provide a summary of the work, comparing Mickiewicz’s presentation of the historical events to the accounts given by historians. My focus will be on the protagonist of the epic poem, Konrad Wallenrod, the messianic hero of the piece who is an example of individual messianism, inspiring and instigating the collective messianism of the Poles and Lithuanians. Lastly, through theatre reviews and pertinent articles, I will address the key stage adaptations of *Konrad Wallenrod*, discussing their worth and adherence to the major precepts of Mickiewicz’s original work.

In order to gain an understanding of the world of *Konrad Wallenrod*, it is necessary to provide a brief history of the Teutonic Knights and a description of their fortress at Malbork, where the action of the epic poem is set. The Order of the Teutonic Knights was originally organized in 1190 by the Germans as a band of Christian crusaders with the purpose of freeing the Holy Land from the Muslims. The Teutonic Knights, who were attired in white cloaks with black crosses, were intended to serve as a “guardian order,” and their vows included protecting the poor and the sick, as well as fighting the pagans. After the Crusades were concluded, the nationless Knights, under Grand Master Hermann von Salza, turned their attention to Europe and sought to conquer lands in the eastern part of the continent, primarily those belonging to Poland and Lithuania, under the pretext of converting pagans to Christianity. Supported financially
by Western European nations, the Knights began the construction of Malbork sometime after 1274 along the banks of the Nogat, a branch of the Wisła (Vistula) River, in order to strengthen their rule. Malbork, built of brick and protected by the natural defenses of the Nogat and surrounding marshland, became the headquarters of the Teutonic Knights in 1309.

An awesome example of medieval architecture, Malbork is a very large and imposing castle comprised of primarily three sections—the Low Castle, the Middle Castle with the Grand Masters’ Palace, the High Castle—and when it was occupied by the Teutonic Order, it could be completely self-sufficient with enough stores of food in its basement to last during extended attacks and its own source of water. The formidable fortress is both an impressive and striking sight. For prisoners held inside the castle, escape was virtually impossible; the three sections of the fortress worked as multiple lines of defense from both within and without. Any prisoner who somehow managed to escape from the High Castle, where prisoners were usually held, would most certainly be re-captured in the Middle Castle or the Low Castle, the surrounding outlets from the High Castle. The only way a prisoner could successfully escape Malbork was with the help from someone on the inside, usually a spy or traitor, but very few opponents were able to work their way into the Order of the Teutonic Knights, let alone into the inner circle and favor of the Grand Masters.

Alfus, according to history, was such a person who had managed to become part of the Knights’ inner circle. Not much is known about this person other than the fact that he was a Lithuanian who was raised since his childhood by the Teutonic Knights,
converted to Christianity, and lived in Malbork. During the series of battles between the Knights and the Lithuanians that took place during the fourteenth century, Lithuanian leader Kiejstut (Kęstutis) was captured by the Teutonic Order in 1361 and taken to the Grand Master. Kiejstut’s life was spared when he promised to abandon his pagan beliefs and become a Christian, but he was not given his freedom. He was only able to escape Malbork with the help of his fellow countryman, Alfus, who disguised him in a Crusader’s uniform and gave him a horse.\(^{40}\)

Konrad Wallenrod, as mentioned earlier, was also a historical figure who was the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights during the fourteenth century. After Witold, the Lithuanian brother of Polish leader Władysław Jagiełło (Jogaila), betrayed the Knights by attacking every Teutonic castle from Kraków to Lithuania, the Order began to organize a crusade against Lithuania.\(^{41}\) Wallenrod, for reasons unknown, wasted time in attacking Lithuania; he left his army standing and failed to issue orders or provide his army with provisions. He returned to Prussia, abandoning his army which was defeated by the Lithuanians. Wallenrod died under mysterious circumstances, but it is believed that he was quietly disposed of by the Teutonic Knights, who supposedly held a secret court to determine his fate.

In Mickiewicz’s Konrad Wallenrod, the author combines the historical figures of Wallenrod and Alf to create his character of Konrad Wallenrod that he depicts in his epic poem, which is a presentation of the downfall of the Teutonic Knights. In George Rapall Noyes’ opinion, this work of Mickiewicz “is usually—and beyond doubt correctly—interpreted as justifying the use of treachery and deceit in order to defend one’s
Mickiewicz's Konrad is a Lithuanian boy who is raised by the Teutonic Knights as one of their own after the murder of his parents by the Order. As Konrad grows up, he learns the ways of the Teutonic Order and gains the trust of the Knights, but he does not forget his Lithuanian roots, to which he is steadfastly loyal and preserves in secret with the help of a Lithuanian bard named Halban, otherwise known as the Wajdelota. For years, he suffers a quiet, internal torment through adopting and displaying the practices and customs of his enemy on the surface, but he knows that in order for him to be successful in taking his revenge, he must bide his time until the moment is ripe for him to strike. Konrad eventually becomes a Teutonic Knight himself, for he realizes from his years of observing the Knights that the only way to destroy them is from within. He is later made the Grand Master, and from this position he brings about a great defeat of the Teutonic Knights in a battle against the Lithuanians that is waged for the alleged reason of converting the Lithuanians from paganism to Christianity:

Everything was lost, Konrad lost everyone;
He, who with arms obtained such glory,
He, who for so long was known for his wisdom:
In this last war became fearful, negligent...
Everyday the Germans died in misery in huge numbers...
His passion for the war was getting cold,
He was not moved by the tears of his people,
He did not use his sword in their defense;
With arms crossed on his chest
He meditated all day long and then talked with Halban.43

Wszystko zginęło, Konrad wszystkich zgubił;
On, co z oręża takiej nabył chwały,
On, co się dawniej roztrzęsieniem chlubił:
W ostatniej wojnie lekliwy, niedbały...
Codziennie z niedzy marły Niemców kroczy...
1 tak w zapale wojennym ostygnął,
Że ludu swego nie wzruszony łzami,
Miecz na jego obronę nie dzwignął;  
Z założonymi na piersiach rękami  
Cały dzień dumą lub z Halbanem gadał. (Konrad Wallenrod 124-125)44

By not providing leadership at a critical time, Konrad delivers a powerful blow to the Teutonic Knights and saves Lithuania from conquest. After this great betrayal, the Knights suspect that Konrad is an imposter of the true Konrad Wallenrod, who died in an unknown place according to an unnamed Knight:

When Count Wallenrod went to Palestine,  
There was in the count’s train someone in a squire’s garments.  
Shortly the knight, Wallenrod, was killed somewhere unknown;  
That squire, suspiciously after his murder,  
Left Palestine secretly  
And towards the Spanish coast he went.  
There in a skirmish with the Moors he gave a demonstration of bravery  
And in numerous tournaments he won awards,  
And everywhere under the name of Wallenrod he was renowned.  
In the end he took a monk’s vows  
And became the Master for the Order’s doom.45

Kiedy hrabia Wallenrod szedł do Palestyny,  
Był w orszaku hrabiego, nosił giermka szaty.  
Wkrótce rycerz Wallenrod gdzieś bez wieści zginął;  
Ów giermek, podejrzany o jego zabicie,  
Z Palestyny uszedł skrycie  
I ku hispańskim brzegom zawinął.  
Tam w potyczkach z Maurami dał męstwa dowody  
I na turniejach mnogie pozyskał nagrody,  
A wszędzie pod imieniem Wallenroda słynął.  
Przyjął na koniec zakonnika śluby  
I został mistrzem dla Zakonu zguby. (Konrad Wallenrod 127)

In a secret court, the Knights decide that they must kill Konrad for his treason, but Konrad still manages to get the better of them. Anticipating the Knights’ verdict, Konrad drinks poison just as the Knights make their way up the tower where he is waiting. When the Knights enter the tower room, Konrad tears off his cloak and his Grand Master’s
cross and tramples on these items, proclaiming his loyalty to Lithuania and his heritage just before he dies.

Konrad is the messianic hero of Konrad Wallenrod for several reasons. Firstly, Konrad experiences a personal, individual death that is initially metaphorical but later evolves to an actual, physical death. For many years he struggles internally with the death of his identity as a Lithuanian, unable to openly claim his heritage and its customs. In order to survive and eventually take his revenge on the Knights for killing his parents and devastating his nation and countrymen, Konrad, on the surface, must kill his Lithuanian character and adopt the customs, beliefs, and appearances of his enemy. He therefore undergoes a metaphorical death by suppressing his true emotions and thoughts. Konrad’s actual death comes at the very end of Mickiewicz’s piece, but through his death, his spiritual rebirth is able to occur. Just before he dies, he renounces his identity as a Teutonic Knight and Grand Master and reclaims his identity as a Lithuanian who is proud of his heritage. Konrad’s rebirth and death, metaphorical and actual, contribute to his classification as a messianic hero.

In addition to his personal experience of death and rebirth, Konrad is a messianic hero for serving as a leader striving to bring Lithuanians freedom by ridding them of persecution by the Knights of the Order. At times it appears that he is a savior or messiah-like character who takes upon himself the troubles and problems of Lithuania without giving much thought to his own welfare or happiness. He relinquishes all worldly pleasures, including a peaceful existence with his Lithuanian wife, Aldona, who
has become a nun and lives as a hermitess in a tower of the castle so that she can be near him. Ultimately he sacrifices his life for the good of his people.

A third reason why Konrad can be considered the messianic hero of Konrad Wallenrod is that through his example of individual messianism, he inspires collective messianism in the Lithuanian people, as a group, as well as in the Polish people. He serves as a model for both Lithuanians and Poles, sending them the message that together they can serve as their own messiah, saving themselves and future generations from foreign oppression and domination. Konrad gives his countrymen hope and the strength to rebel, and he implies, through his sly and covert measures, that any means used in the defense and preservation of one’s nation are permissible. To the present time in Poland, the term “Wallenrodism” (“Wallenrodizm”) is commonly used to describe the act of a person working undercover and doing all that is necessary to protect and defend his or her nation.

Konrad’s messianic qualities are also addressed by the character of Halban, who assures Konrad that his story will continue to live after his death:

“No, I will outlive...you, my son!—
I want to remain still, to close your eyes,
And to live—until the fame of your deeds
Are preserved in the world, renowned for the ages.
I will circulate around Lithuania, the castles and cities,
Where I do not go, my song will fly,
The bard for knights in battle, and women
At home will sing it to their children;
They will sing it, and sometime in the future
From this song will stand the avenger of our bones!”

„Nie, ja przeżyję...ciebie, mój synu!—
Chcę jeszcze zostać, zamknąć twe powieki,
I żyć—ażebym sławę twoego czynu
In this passage, Halban not only implies that Konrad will be reborn in song, but he also suggests that yet another savior or messianic character will arise to come to the aid of Lithuania. The bard speaks abstractly, however, and does not name who is this messianic figure. Mickiewicz, through Halban, is alluding to the major principle of Polish messianism that a leader will arise to lead Poles in their struggle against their oppressors, to help them overcome their enemies, and to allow them to live in freedom and peace.

During the twentieth century, various stage adaptations of Konrad Wallenrod were produced throughout Poland. Some of these adaptations are faithful to the epic poem’s original plot, while others take more liberties and even combine plot elements and characters from other epic poems and plays by Mickiewicz. Early adaptations in the 1950s were performed as staged readings of the epic poem, Konrad Wallenrod, but later adaptations use a more dramatic format, containing dialogue and sometimes narration, for an enhanced theatrical presentation. Just as with the different adaptations of Ballads and Romances, there are contrasting opinions about the stage adaptations of Konrad Wallenrod that range from commendable to unfavorable.

The adaptation of Konrad Wallenrod, created by Stanisław Wieszczycki, was produced as early as July 19, 1966, at the Państwowy Teatr Ziemi Opolskiej in Opole, Poland, and was later used in a production at the Teatr Ziemi Pomorskiej in Grudziądz.
that opened on December 5, 1968. Containing twelve scenes, the 1968 production opened to mixed reviews. In an interesting move, Wieszczycki has the character of Halban, the Wajdelota, begin the play by addressing the audience directly, which he continues to do throughout the production, but he does not serve as a narrator; Halban remains a participant in the action of the play with occasional asides and commentaries to the audience. In this way, Wieszczycki adapts for dramatic presentation the narrative segments of Mickiewicz’s epic poem. The action of the adaptation starts with Konrad becoming the Grand Master of the Order of the Teutonic Knights. In the opinion of some critics, such as Janusz Segiet of the Głos Olsztyński, Wieszczycki well elaborates this scene in which Konrad is elected as the leader of the Knights. Segiet feels that other scenes which Wieszczycki adapts closely to Mickiewicz’s original piece include the dinner scene featuring Konrad and the Knights as well as the secret court in which the Knights call for Konrad’s death. According to Segiet, Wieszczycki’s adaptation is clear and faithful to Mickiewicz’s text and possesses a dignity of its own. Segiet states, “I know the theatre in Grudziądz for years, and I have to admit that Konrad Wallenrod did not bring that theatre shame” (“Znam teatr w Grudziądzu od lat i muszę przyznać, że „Konrad Wallenrod‘ nie przynosi mu wstydu”). Other critics, such as Janusz Kryszak of Pomorze, are not as impressed by Wieszczycki’s adaptation of Konrad Wallenrod. In Kryszak’s opinion the adaptation loses the splendor of Mickiewicz’s language:

The author of the adaptation, Stanisław Wieszczycki, was of course forced to draw out from the text of the poem all of the fragments which he was able to translate to the specific language of the theatre, reflecting a dramatic format. It is understandable that he was forced to shorten and even often rape Mickiewicz’s poetic language....All the beauty of Mickiewicz’s language was gone.
Kryszał, in contrast to Segiet, believes that Wieszczynki’s adaptation is poor and does not do justice to Mickiewicz’s work.

Another 1968 production of **Konrad Wallenrod** was mounted in Tarnów, Poland on January 14, 1968 at the Państwowy Teatr Ziemi Krakowskiej im. Ludwika Solskiego with an adaptation by Mieczysław Kotlarczyk, who stays true to Mickiewicz’s work. Kotlarczyk’s adaptation is made of three acts: Acts 1 and 3 take place in Malbork, while Act 2 is set in Lithuania and depicts the song of the Wajdelota (Halban), which is actually the story of Konrad. The adaptation displays four major characters that include Konrad, Aldona, Halban, and **Komtur** (the “Commander” of the Knights). Kotlarczyk is innovative in making Komtur and a chorus the narrators of the play; he presents the story of Konrad primarily through Komtur, thus showing the perspective of a Teutonic Knight who distrusts the Grand Master of the Order, Wallenrod.

Aleksander Bednarz’s adaptation of **Konrad Wallenrod** was produced at the Państwowy Teatr Ludowy in Nowa Huta, Poland in October 1979 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the start of World War II and also to remind Poles of what it means to be Polish and how to fight for their country. This adaptation, in which Bednarz himself performed the role of Halban, differs significantly from Wieszczynki’s in that it combines elements of Mickiewicz’s play, **Forefathers’ Eve, Part II**, with **Konrad**
Wallenrod. Critic Krystyna Grzegorzewska explains that the “idea of this adaptation was simple: during Dziady, Guślarz from Forefathers’ Eve does not bring the ghosts individually but rather brings a sequence of historical events—the history of Grand Master Wallenrod” (“Pomyśl adaptacji był prosto: w noc ’zaduszek’ Guślarz z ’Dziadów’ wywołuje już nie pojedyncze osoby, lecz cały fragment dziejów—historię Wielkiego Mistrza Wallenroda”). Grzegorzewska, who is very positive towards the adaptation and the production, finds it interesting that Bednarz makes connections between two different works of Mickiewicz, transforming Konrad Wallenrod into another part of the Forefathers cycle through his adaptation. Zofia Sieradzka, critic for Teatr, is also receptive towards this adaptation but believes that Bednarz should pay more attention to giving a clearer interpretation of Mickiewicz’s original text.

In Konrad Wallenrod, the situation of Konrad, as a person biding his time for liberation and national resurrection, reflects the situation of Poland during the nineteenth century. At that time, Poland and her people were patiently waiting for their own salvation and deliverance from foreign control. Poles were anticipating a rebirth of Poland as its own national and political entity on the European map with its own government and rulers. Furthermore, Konrad is a representation of both Christian and Jewish messianism as he is not only a savior for his countrymen but an instigator for his people rallying together to become their own saviors, a collective messiah. The theme of messianism in its religious manifestation is furthered in Mickiewicz’s play, Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, which focuses on another savior-like figure with the name of Konrad who serves as a messianic leader for the Poles.
Of all his writing, Forefathers' Eve, Part III is not only Mickiewicz's most highly regarded work among scholars, but also his most popular among the general Polish population. Written as a drama in its original form between 1832 and 1834, it has been called "the noblest monument to suffering and persecuted Poland" by Mickiewicz biographer Monica Gardner. The play is the author's reaction to the unsuccessful November Insurrection of 1830, in which Poles attempted to overthrow Russian rule, and the persecution and deportment of insurgents to Siberia that followed, as well as the mass migration of Poles to France and other parts of Europe. Besides addressing the aftermath of the rebellion, Mickiewicz incorporates into his drama his own experiences and those of his friends in a Russian prison in Wilno in 1823. Many of the play's characters are based on Mickiewicz's friends and historical figures of the early nineteenth century.

As the title of the play suggests, Forefather's Eve, Part III is part of a cycle of four plays Mickiewicz wrote that is referred to as the Forefathers cycle. However, the other three plays, written at different times and out of chronological order, have little connection to the third part, which is the longest and the most elaborate. According to Wiktor Weintraub, the "use of this puzzling numeration was no doubt intended to alert the reader to the fact that what was offered was not to be treated as a rounded-off whole, but instead as...fragments of a presumed larger drama." Parts Two and Four were the first parts to be written in 1823, and as the title Forefathers' Eve (Dziady) implies, the action of both parts, as well as Parts One and Three that followed later, is linked with the
Polish pagan festival of Dziady. During this festival, which occurs on November 1 and is today connected with the Christian holidays of All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day, it is believed that one can call upon the spirits of deceased relatives and friends; the boundaries between the material world and the Otherworld disappear during this time, and it is thought that the inhabitants of both worlds can interact with each other. In accordance with pagan tradition, Poles hold a solemn dinner to invite spirits. As Frank Kmietowicz explains the pagan tradition in *Slavic Mythical Beliefs*:

> The family gathers around the table set with extra places for the invisible guests. For a while they eat and drink in silence, putting a bit from every dish into a separate bowl for the unseen participants. From time to time they may put their own spoons down near the main dish so that they may serve themselves.

> The entire feast takes place in an atmosphere of deep solemnity. Conversation comes only in short and broken sentences, hinging mainly on reminiscences of the dead. All listen intently for signs that the guests have arrived. Every rustle, every creak or motion, is taken as evidence that they are entering.

The festival of Dziady, spirits, and the Otherworld are prominent features in all four parts of the *Forefathers* cycle, demonstrating the influence of pagan practices in Poland and how these practices have been assimilated into Christianity. Additionally, the nature of Dziady is messianic in that the holiday revolves around the notion that the dead are able to rise again, if only for one night each year, and take part in the affairs of the living.

Messianism is a central theme in *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III*, which focuses on the character of Gustaw/Konrad, the play’s messianic hero. Mickiewicz opens the drama with a Prologue that depicts angels watching over a sleeping prisoner in a Russian prison in Lithuania. The prisoner is Gustaw, who awakes and looks through the window of his prison cell to see the dawn, the start of a new day that makes the world reborn. On this
morning, Gustaw reaches a turning point in his life: the forlorn lover resolves to put his
own personal sufferings aside, which seem small when compared to his nation’s turmoil,
and concentrate on working for the welfare of Poland. His resolution facilitates his own
rebirth that he represents through writing the subsequent inscription with a piece of
charcoal on the wall of his cell:

D.O.M.
GUSTAVUS
ORBIIT M. D. CCC. XXIII.
CALENDIS NOVEMBRIS

HIC NATUS EST
CONRADUS
M. D. CCC. XXIII.
CALENDIS NOVEMBRIS
(Forfathers’ Eve, Part III 129)62

Gustaw dies metaphorically and in his place Konrad is born. As Julian Krzyżanowski
explains, Gustaw “is metamorphosed into Conrad [sic], a new man suffering on behalf of
his countrymen.”63 It should be noted that Gustaw’s transformation and rebirth as
Konrad take place in November, the same month in which Dziady is celebrated. David
Welsh also recognizes the rebirth of Gustaw as a key moment in the play and offers the
following interpretation of the event:

The change of name, profoundly significant, symbolizes the pagan “rite of
passage” and Christian baptism. Both ceremonials are exercises of
severance; the individual’s mind or soul is radically divided from the life
he is leaving behind. The individual has died to the past and has been
reborn to the future. Natural man returns from the rite as a spiritual man.
The self-centered Gustav [sic] of Forefathers’ Eve, Part IV, has voluntarily
undergone rebirth; and, by investing himself with another name, he has,
by the same token, invested himself with another personality. In adopting
the name of Konrad for his protagonist, Mickiewicz hints strongly at an
association with the name Wallenrod—a character who placed his country
above personal love or happiness.64

54
Other scholars besides Welsh draw parallels between the Konrad of Forefathers' Eve, Part III and the Konrad of Konrad Wallenrod. Although the two Konrads share a number of similarities, most notably their selflessness in the name of country, they are two distinct characters and should not be confused.

Throughout the play, Konrad is presented as a messianic hero in different instances, but at no time more apparently than in the second scene, known as “The Great Improvisation” and studied as a literary work in itself. In this scene, Konrad is left alone to contemplate the situation of Poland and her people under Russian domination. He begins rather calmly, but as he continues his monologue, his tone becomes more tempestuous while his strength and passion increases:

Yes!—I am sensitive, I am strong and understanding.—
I never felt as I do at this moment—
Today is my zenith, my power today will overflow,
Today I will recognize who is supreme or only proud;
Today is the moment of destiny,
Today is the greatest strain of my soul’s arms—
This is the moment of Samson.

Tak!—czuł jestem, silny jestem i rozumny.—
Nigdym nie czuł, jak w tej chwili—
Dziś mój zenit, moc moja dzisiaj się przesili,
Dziś poznam, czym najwyższy, czyli tylko dumny;
Dziś jest chwila przeznaczona,
Dziś najsilniej wytęże duszy mej ramiona—
To jest chwila Samsona. (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 156-157)

Konrad starts to see himself as a leader gaining in strength and power. Although he recognizes that he is human, he puts aside limitations connected with his humanity when he states that he is a “creator born” (“twórca urodził”) (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 158).
Konrad’s frenzied momentum builds to the point that he believes for a moment that he is immortal and identifies himself with Poland in the following often quoted passage:

I and my country are one.  
My name is Million—because 
I love and suffer the tortures for the millions. 
I look upon my poor country, 
Like a son on his father broken on the wheel; 
I feel all the sufferings of the nation, 
Like a mother who feels within her womb the pain of her unborn child. 
I suffer, I rage—and You wise and happy
You always rule, 
You always judge, 
And they say that You do not err!67

Ja i ojczynna to jedno.  
Nazywam się Milijon—bo za milijony  
Kocham i cierpię katusze.  
Patrzę na ojczystą biedną,  
Jak syn na ojca wplecionego w koło;  
Czuję całego cierpienia narodu,  
Jak matka czuje w łonie bole swego płodu.  
Cierpię, szaleję—a Ty mądrze i wesoło
Zawsze rządzisz,  
Zawsze sądzisz,  
I mówią, że Ty nie blądżisz! (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 162)

He expresses and directs his anger towards God, whom he blames for Poland’s suffering by taking no active part in helping the Poles. Konrad, as a self-proclaimed leader of the Polish people, raises himself to the level of God, feeling that despite his humanity he can serve as a messiah-like figure to the Poles and lead them to salvation from Russian rule. When he is about to commit the ultimate blasphemy of accusing God of being the czar, he is prevented from doing so by spirits who intervene.

It is interesting that Mickiewicz combines both Jewish and Christian elements in the character of Konrad. Although Konrad exhibits super-human traits of an individual
Christian messiah and can be considered a wieszcz in his own right, he is still a human character, corresponding with Jewish beliefs in a human messiah. Through Konrad, who is often regarded by scholars and the public alike as Mickiewicz’s alter-ego, the author reinforces the concept of messianism and the idea that Poland was anticipating salvation from foreign control during the nineteenth century.

Even though Konrad is the primary and most visible example of a messianic hero who is reborn to lead his people to salvation, the references to a messianic hero and messianism do not lie entirely with the character of Konrad. Father Peter, a Roman Catholic priest who is often regarded as a counterpart to Konrad, experiences a rather cryptic vision in scene five of the play:

A tyrant has risen—Herod!—Lord, all of Poland’s youth
Is put into Herod’s hands....
Look!—ha!—a child escapes—grows up—the defender!
The nation’s restorer,—
From a foreign mother; his blood from ancient heroes,
And his name will be forty and four.

Tyran wstał—Herod!—Panie, cała Polska młoda
Wydana w ręce Heroda....
Patrz!—ha!—to dziecię uszło—rośnie—to obrona!
Wskrzesiciel narodu,—
Z matki obcej; krew jego dawne bohatery,
A imię jego będzie czterdzieści i cztery. (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 185-186)

It appears that Father Peter sees a messiah-like character who will deliver Poles from foreign control, but it is not clear who this savior will be. Little is known of this figure other than the possibility that his mother is not Polish and that his name is “forty and four,” which is puzzling and carries both Jewish and Christian significance. Welsh offers the proceeding interpretation of the meaning of the numbers:

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The enigmatic numbers “forty and four” used to express the name of the coming redeemer of Poland have been read as possessing some undefined caballistic traditional meaning, but no one has been able to state precisely what it is. Another suggestion is that Tsar Nicholas II, the forty-fourth king of Poland, is meant (Krzysztofowski). Forty has Biblical associations: the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness, the Flood lasted forty days and nights, Moses passed forty days and nights on the mountain, and Christ was seen forty days after the Crucifixion. The number four (quaternity) was discussed as a totality symbol by Plato, and experienced by Ezekiel in the vision of the four seraphs. Christian metaphysics recognized four Persons in the Trinity (plus the Devil).  

It is not apparent why Mickiewicz uses the numbers “forty and four” to distinguish the redeemer of the Poles, and the writer himself admitted that he only knew the significance of the numbers at the time he wrote the passage but later could not recall their meaning.  

Father Peter may be alluding to Konrad as the savior of his vision, but there are no references in the play to Konrad’s mother or to the likelihood that she is not Polish. It is also probable that Father Peter is referring to another messiah-like figure that has not yet arrived but whom he compares to Christ. In his vision, the priest sees a Polish savior who is put on a cross, and “Look—behold a Russian soldier with a spear pierces / And draws out the innocent blood of my nation” (“Patrz—oto żołdak Moskal z kopiją przyskoczył / I krew niewinną mego narodu wytoczył”) (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 186-187). The savior of Father Peter’s vision may be a representation of Poland and the Poles who are persecuted by the Russians. The priest additionally implies that resurrection will follow the crucifixion of this savior by stating, “Towards heaven, towards heaven he is going, towards heaven he ascends!” (“Ku niebu, on ku niebu, ku niebu ulata!”) (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 187). The theme of messianism is reinforced through Father Peter’s vision, which may refer not only to an individual unnamed messiah, but also to a
collective messiah comprised of the Polish people as a whole, thus explaining the numbers "forty and four," signifying more than one person.

Other references to messianism are evident in the last scene of the play that takes place in a cemetery on the night of Dziady. In this scene, which combines both pagan and Christian elements, a Wizard and a Woman are watching for spirits. The character of the Wizard opens the scene by commenting, "The crowd is already going to the church / And Dziady will soon begin, / The time is going for us, the night is already silent" ("Już idą w cerkiew gromady / I wkrótce zaczną się Dziady, / Iść nam pora, już noc głucha") (Forefathers' Eve, Part III 248). The Wizard is describing a common Polish folkloric tradition passed down through generations. Kmietowicz explains:

The Poles believed that at the strike of eleven on All Saints' night, all dead go in procession from the cemetery to the church, where a dead priest celebrates Mass for them and a dead organist plays the organ. No one of the living can attend it, because he would enrage the dead so much that they would tear him into pieces and scatter them on all graves in the cemetery.  

This bit of pagan folklore is still seriously heeded, so the vast majority of Poles today would instantly recognize and understand the meaning of the first lines of this scene. As the scene progresses, other aspects of the holiday become apparent. The character of the Woman expresses to the Wizard her wish to stay in the cemetery to learn whether her lover is still alive or a spirit among the dead. In response, the Wizard tells her, "Because at the meeting of the spirits / On this mysterious night of Dziady, / It is possible to call the living spirits" ("Bo na duchów zgromadzenie, / W tajemniczą noc na Dziady, / Można wzywać żywych cienie") (Forefathers' Eve, Part III 248). Soon, the spirits pass by, one after another, but the spirit of the Woman's lover fails to show. The Wizard concludes
that “your lover / Either changed the faith of his father / Or changed his old name” (“twój kochanek / Albo zmienił ojcow wiare, / Albo zmienił imię stare”) (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 254). From these lines, the reader pieces together that the Woman’s lover is none other than Konrad, formerly Gustaw. The Wizard, having mystic tendencies, is able to see in a vision that Konrad is being taken off by the Russians to Siberia. He tells the Woman, “Quite a few wagons are going / All of them going towards midnight / Going with all the might the horses can muster” (“Kilkadziesiąt wozów leci, / Wszystkie lecą ku północy, / Lecą ile w koniach mocy”) (Forefathers’ Eve, Part III 254-255). Konrad, as a messianic hero of the Poles, is experiencing at the end of the play his own period of crucifixion and suffering, similar to Poland and his compatriots, before he can hope for a resurrection and new beginning.

Forefathers’ Eve, Part III is a rather typical work of Mickiewicz in that it is rather serious in its tone and addresses, through folk traditions and historical references, the grave predicament of Poland and the Polish people during the nineteenth century. However, Mickiewicz does not always employ such solemnity in imparting the messianic theme, as is apparent through his monumental work, Pan Tadeusz, that is cherished by Poles as a depiction of Poland in its traditional glory.

Pan Tadeusz—Jewish and Christian Unity

Most scholars have difficulty categorizing Pan Tadeusz, Mickiewicz’s classic work that the author wrote between 1832 and 1834 while he was an exile in Paris.
Although poetic, it is neither a poem nor an epic poem in the strictest sense. Consisting of twelve books that contain narrative and dialogue, it cannot be classified as an ordinary novel or a drama for that matter. David Welsh suggests that Mickiewicz's piece "is, essentially, a characteristically Romantic work in the way it blends together a number of genres and exploits the individual qualities of each to achieve the poet's artistic purpose...from comic and even farcical scenes to tragic incidents, character studies, observations of nature and things, satire, lyricism, and description." No matter how one wishes to categorize Pan Tadeusz, which is now considered his masterpiece along with Forefathers' Eve, Part III, theatre artists saw possibilities for dramatic presentation and have developed stage adaptations of it as early as 1886 and continued to do so through the 1990s.

Subtitled "A Tale of the Gentry in the Years 1811 and 1812," Pan Tadeusz is a depiction of the Polish gentry in Lithuania during the last of their golden years just prior to Napoleon's Russian campaign, in which many Poles fought in the hope that the French leader would help the Polish cause and re-establish the political borders of an independent Poland. It can be described as the Slavic Romeo and Juliet: two families, the Soplicas and the Horeszkos, are feuding over the ownership of a castle, while their children, Tadeusz Soplica and Zosia Horeszka, fall in love with each other. This Romeo and Juliet story does not end tragically, however, but rather happily with the two families resolving their differences and the two young lovers preparing for their impending nuptials.
Pan Tadeusz is more, though, than the story of two families and their children. In this work, which has the most light and carefree tone of all Mickiewicz’s major pieces, the beauty of the Lithuanian landscape, folklore, and traditions are presented. It must be noted that a fine line exists between the Lithuania of fact and the Lithuania that the Polish bard presents, which can be described as a super-reality. Welsh explains the setting of Pan Tadeusz as “a landscape of the poet’s imagination” that has become, along with the characters, “as much a part of the Polish national mythology as Shakespeare’s blasted heath and cliffs of Dover have become of ours.” After writing the intensely political and emotionally draining Konrad Wallenrod and Forefathers cycle, Mickiewicz, as an exile, had a need to retreat in his mind to the Lithuania of his youth, to a happier time in his personal life when things were not so complicated and downcast. Thus, the Lithuania Mickiewicz depicts is one that is partly rooted in fact and partly rooted in the mists of memory, which often obscures reality to an extent and reshapes it slightly. Czesław Miłosz comments:

Because the world he [Mickiewicz] was describing was gone forever, he could achieve a perfect distance, visible in the kind of humor which permeates the lines. Indeed, the painting of a provincial microcosm was an extremely attractive undertaking for an exile in Paris who looked for solace…

Pan Tadeusz often has the tone of a fairytale, setting the scene of a beautiful, wondrous land for which Mickiewicz longed and to which he would never return in his lifetime.

Although Pan Tadeusz is a rather spirited piece that avoids the serious for the most part, Mickiewicz still addresses, albeit in a light manner, matters of importance to Poles, such as the necessity to unite against common opponents. He does this through the
characters of Jankiel, a Polish Jew and tavern owner well respected by the community, and Father Robak, a Roman Catholic priest with roots in the gentry and an unlikely past. These two figures are treated as leaders by the Polish community and can be regarded as such. However, their primary objective is to unite all Poles together—Jewish and Christian—in order to promote and encourage collective messianism, Poles acting as their own saviors helping themselves.

In the Lithuanian town of Sopolcowo, the fictional town where the action of Pan Tadeusz is set, Jankiel owns two taverns that interestingly promote relations between the Sopolcos and the Hereszkos, for both families respect the Jewish tavern owner and his honesty. Jankiel is also respected and admired for his Polish patriotism:

Though Jewish he had good pronunciation,  
And specially loved the ballads of the nation,  
And brought back many from his travels west,  
Galician songs, mazurkas and the rest.  
The rumour was, I know not whether true,  
That he had introduced when it was new  
Among the people of that place and time  
The song that now is known in every clime,  
And first was played in the Italian regions  
Upon the trumpets of the Polish legions..... 
He was a welcome guest and counsel giver,  
And knew the trade in grain along the river,  
Which in the country’s useful information;  
And was a loyal Pole by reputation.  

Chociaż Żyd, dosyć czystą miał polską wymowę,  
Szczególniej zaś polubił pieśni narodowe;  
Przywoził mnóstwo, z każdej za Niemen wyprawy,  
Kołomyjek z Halicza, mazurów z Warszawy;  
Wieść, nie wiem czyli pewna, w całej okolicy  
Głosiła, że on pierwszy przywiódł z zagranicy  
I upowszechnił wówczas w tamecznym powiecie  
Ową piosenkę, sławną dziś na całym świecie,  
A którą po raz pierwszy na ziemi Auzonów
In this passage in Book IV, it is apparent that Mickiewicz is creating his own folklore, as he occasionally does, by claiming that Jankiel, a talented dulcimer player, who performs the “song that now is known in every clime,” Dąbrowski’s march, which is today’s Polish national anthem.\textsuperscript{77} Mickiewicz, in this fashion, additionally demonstrates Jankiel’s Polish loyalty and nationalism; he even comments on the flawless Polish speech and pronunciation of the Jewish tavern owner.

Equally important as Jankiel’s nationalism is his ability to rally people together. In Book VII, he tries to prevent further discord and fighting among Poles by encouraging all to put their differences aside so that no one will be hurt or killed. Everyone hearing his words does not take them lightly, and by the end of the work, in Book XII, all are joined together by Jankiel through music and dance. In this famous scene near the conclusion, Jankiel is persuaded by Zosia to play the dulcimer for her betrothal. He plays “The Polonaise of May the Third,” and expresses his nationalism and patriotism for Poland, as well as elements of the country’s history, through his music\textsuperscript{78}:

\begin{quote}
And ever louder grew the music’s roar,
And you could hear the tramp of marching, war,
Attack, a storm, the boom of guns, the moans
Of children, and a weeping mother’s groans.
So splendidly the master’s art resembled
The horror of a storm, the women trembled….
But soon they lifted up their heads again,
The master raised the pitch and changed the strain….
That all the strings like brazen trumpets blared,
And from the trumpets to the heavens sped
\end{quote}
That march of triumph: *Poland is not yet dead!*
*Dąbrowski, march to Poland!* With one accord
They clapped their hands, and “March, Dąbrowski!” roared.

Słychać tysiące coraz głośniejszych hałasów,
Takt marszu, wojna, atak, szturm, słychać wystrzały,
Jęk dzieci, płacz matek.—Tak mistrz doskonalił
Wydał okropność szturmów, że wieśniacze drżały...
Ale je wnet podnieśli, bo mistrz tony wznosił,
Następ, takty zmienia, coś innego głosi...
Że struny zadzwoniły jak trąby mosiężne
I z trąb znana piosenka ku niebu wionęła,
Marsz tryumfalny: *Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła!*...
*Marsz Dąbrowski do Polski*—I wszyscy klasknęli,
I wszyscy: „Marsz Dąbrowski!” chórem okryknięli! (Pan Tadeusz 566-569)

Everyone is moved by this musical rendition of Polish history and nationalism, but

Jankiel stops playing Dąbrowski’s march when the person after which it is named makes
a personal appearance at the gathering. The Jewish musician’s sentiments are clearly
conveyed by the following lines:

And when at last his eyes Dąbrowski met,
He hid them in his hand, for they were wet.
“Our Lithuania has waited long for you,”
He said, “as Jews for their Messiah do.
Of you the singers long did prophesy,
Of you the portent spoke that filled the sky.
Live and wage war!” He sobbed, the honest Jew,
He loved our country like a patriot true.

Aż gdy na Dąbrowskiego starzec oczy zwrócił,
Zakrył rękami, spod rąk leż potok się rzucił:
„Jenerale, rzekł, Ciebie długo Litwa nasza
Częsta—długo, jak my Żydzi Mesjjasza,
Ciebie prorokowali dawno między ludem
Śpiewaki, Ciebie niebo obwiesiło cudem,
Żyj i wojuj, o Ty nasz!...” Mówiąc, ciągle szlochał,
Żyd poczciwy Ojczyznę jako Polak kocha! (Pan Tadeusz 568-569)
Jankiel, in addition to the historical Polish General Dąbrowski, inspires Polish unity and collective messianism. This unity is important, especially with the imminent Franco-Polish campaign against Russia, in which many Poles will fight together with the French in an attempt to secure Poland’s freedom from Russia. As Harold B. Segel explains, “Through Yankel [sic], Mickiewicz intended to demonstrate the compatibility of Jewishness and Polish patriotism.”

Jankiel is joined in his quest for promoting Polish unity by his friend, Father Robak, a priest who also works for the cause of a free Poland. It is rumored among the Poles of the story that the Jewish tavern owner and the priest are taking part in various covert operations:

...By night the Bernadine
Came often to the Jew for clandestine
And deep discussions; some indeed averred
The priest was smuggling...

...Robak często chadzał
Nocą do karczmy, tajnie z Żydem się naradzał
O ważnych rzeczach; słychać było, że towary
Ksiądz przemycał... (Pan Tadeusz 166)

It is apparent that Father Robak and Jankiel are involved in gathering Polish intelligence that may help Poland and Lithuania against the Russians. On the surface, Father Robak appears to be no more than an ordinary priest, but he is actually a Polish spy. Like Jankiel, he encourages Poles to join forces and fight their common enemies. To lift the spirits of the Poles, he brings snuff supposedly used by Dąbrowski from Częstochowa, where a shrine to Saint Mary associated with Polish nationalism is located. He tells them that it is possible to tell whether a battle of Napoleon’s is going well when the French

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commander can be seen using snuff. Later, in a secret conversation with the Judge,

Father Robak states:

“...To God and country all my life I give,
For worldly pride and fame I do not strive
But only as a Bernadine to live...
Who knows if I’ll return alive? And guess
What’s happening in Dobrzyn! What a mess!
The French are still far off—but how restrain
The gentry till the spring comes round again?
Perhaps I stirred them up too much, or they
Mistook...”

„...Że Bogu i Ojczyźnie poświęcony cały,
Nie służąc pysze, ziemskiej nie szukając chwały,
Żyłem dotąd i chciałem umrzeć bernadynem...
Kto wie, czy wrócę żywy! kto wie, co się stanie
W Dobrzynie! Bracie! wielkie, wielkie zamieszanie!
Francuz jeszcze daleko, nim przeminie zima,
Trzeba czekać, a szlachta pono nie dotrzyma.
Możemy zanadto czynnie z powstaniem się krzątać!
Pono żle zrozumieli!...” (Pan Tadeusz 350-351)

Father Robak plans to take an active role in the upcoming war between the French and
the Russians, but he ponders how he should lead the Poles as a unified force until the
French arrive in Lithuania on their way to Russia. He worries that although they are
prepared to fight at the present time, they will disperse by the time the French come.
Ultimately, when the Russians attack the Poles before the French arrive, the disbanded
Poles quickly join together in order to overcome the Russians.

It should be noted that there is more to Father Robak than his being a priest and a
spy. He is Jacek Soplica, who as a young man once loved and wanted to marry a
daughter of the Horeszkos, but was rejected by the Horeszko family. When the Horeszko
castle, which is under dispute in the present action of the story, was attacked by the
Russians, Jacek shot and killed the father of his beloved out of humiliation from his rejection, but contrary to popular belief, he never conspired with the Russians. After killing Horeszko, Jacek went into exile and had a change of heart, becoming a priest and dedicating himself to the cause of Poland, working together with Jankiel and other Polish patriots.

As the title, “Let Us Love Each Other!” (“Kochajmy Się!”), for Book XII of Pan Tadeusz suggests, collective messianism for the good of all Poles is a major theme of this particular work of Mickiewicz. The Polish writer conveys his sentiment that Poles of all backgrounds, Jewish and Christian, must join together in order to ensure their welfare and their survival, especially when faced with outside threats and when the promise of the future salvation of their nation from foreign rule is imminent. As Mickiewicz demonstrates through the depiction of a minor Russian siege, the Poles have little hope of faring well if they do not join forces. The Poles learn their lesson quickly, however, and at the prompting of Jankiel and Father Robak, they are prepared to rally together for Napoleon’s Russian campaign.

After Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, Pan Tadeusz is the most widely performed work of Mickiewicz in theatres across Poland since the late nineteenth century. There are a number of adaptations of Pan Tadeusz that have been performed over the years, but those that are the most acclaimed are the adaptations by Mieczysław Kotlarczyk, Adam Hanuszkiewicz, and Irena Jun. Each adapter approaches the transformation of Mickiewicz’s work from a literary masterpiece to a stage work in different ways.
Kotlarczyk’s adaptation, which was played sporadically between 1945 and 1966 at the Teatr Rapsodyczny in Warsaw for a total of 732 performances, serves as the model for other adaptations of Pan Tadeusz to follow. A doctor of philosophy, Kotlarczyk studied and drew his inspiration from scholarly texts on Mickiewicz and Pan Tadeusz. Altogether, he created six versions of Pan Tadeusz for the stage, each one emphasizing different qualities from the serious and reverent to the pastoral and idyllic; he tried to synthesize these six versions together into one version that exhibits the different aspects of the six adaptations. Ultimately, according to Jan Ciechowicz in the program notes of a 1994 production of Pan Tadeusz that was produced at the Państwowy Teatr im. Aleksandra Fredry in Gniezno, Poland, Kotlarczyk

...did not translate the epic poem into a language for the drama, he did not look for dialogue. Actually the opposite, he brought to the surface the values of narration, description, and storytelling...

...nie przekładał epopei na język dramatu, nie szukał dialogów. Raczej przeciwnie, wybijał walory narracji, opisów i opowiadań...

In his adaptation, Kotlarczyk relies considerably on Mickiewicz’s original text, wanting to present Mickiewicz’s work mostly intact. He believes that through words rather than gestures, the actors can become the roles they perform.

Some years after Kotlarczyk’s adaption, Adam Hanuszkiewicz, a celebrated Polish actor and director, developed his own adaptation of Pan Tadeusz for the theatre that was broadcast live on Polish television between October 18, 1970 and October 14, 1971. Hanuszkiewicz adapted each of the twelve books for an hour-long presentation; over the course of a year, a different book was presented in succession each month on a Sunday night. Ciechowicz states the following concerning Hanuszkiewicz’s adaptation:

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Hanuszkiewicz presented *Pan Tadeusz* in its entirety, without any cuts or changes in the text. In the television series, he realized what Kotlarczyk strove for without success, he gave completeness to Mickiewicz’s work. He allowed the public to listen to their fill of *Pan Tadeusz* in its best and truest adaptation.

Hanuszkiewicz pokazał całego Pana Tadeusza, prawie bez cieć i inwersji. W serialu telewizyjnym zrealizował to, do czego nadaremnie zmierzał Kotlarczyk, dał wyobrażenie całości. Pozwolił słuchać Pana Tadeusza do woli i to w najlepszym wykonaniu.81

Similar to Kotlarczyk, Hanuszkiewicz also places an emphasis on Mickiewicz’s words, but owing to the twelve-hour time limit allotted to him for television broadcast, Hanuszkiewicz goes further with his adaptation than he normally would be able had he done it for a two- to three-hour evening of theatre. Interestingly, Hanuszkiewicz developed another adaptation of *Pan Tadeusz* that was done strictly for the theatre and was produced in 1991 at the Teatr Miejski in Gdynia, Poland. Since this adaptation in Gdynia was performed after the fall of Communism in Poland, Hanuszkiewicz was able to take more liberties, presenting *Pan Tadeusz* as a political satire and commedia dell’arte piece combined. The 1991 adaptation was enthusiastically received and given a standing ovation by the audience. Four years later, the adaptation was again produced at the Teatr Miejski and was well received by the audience and critics. One writer for the *Dziennik Bałtycki* writes: “The production in Gdynia is colorful, alive, moving, and in spite of the piety of the epoch, it pulses with today’s nerves” (“Przedstawienie gdyńskie jest barwne, żywe, wzruszające i mimo piety zmu dla epoki, tętniące współczesnym nerwem”).82

Irena Jun, the previously discussed adapter of *Ballads and Romances*, continues her work with Mickiewicz through her adaptation of *Pan Tadeusz*, which was performed
in 1998 at the Teatr im. Wiliam Horzyca in Toruń, Poland. Janusz Milanowski, of the
Gazety Wyborczej, describes the adaptation as follows:

The adaptation was successful, the public was not tortured by the details of narration. The action was moving quickly with some cuts which did no harm to the sense of the epic poem....The public was not bored.

Tu jednak dokonano udanej adaptacji dzieła, nie zadręczając widza szczegółami narracji. Akcja biegnie wartko z pewnymi skrótami, ale bez uszczerbku dla sensu litewskiej epopei....Przede wszystkim nie nudzimy się.83

Apparently, Jun’s adaptation is faithful to Mickiewicz’s text but takes some privileges in making it more accessible to stage audiences, which in this respect is similar to her adaptation of Ballads and Romances for theatrical presentation.

Pan Tadeusz has long been both a literary classic and stage favorite that instills nationalism in Poles from generation to generation not only through the depiction of the folk, the gentry, and the landscape, but also through the recurring theme of messianism. As recently as 1999, the power of this particular work of Mickiewicz once again touched the minds and hearts of Poles in a film adaptation by Andrzej Wajda, who faithfully and beautifully adapted the text for dramatic presentation. The film version, like many stage productions, was treated by Poles as an event that was much talked about throughout Poland. Even though Mickiewicz’s play, The Confederation of Bar, is not as widely produced in Polish theatres as Pan Tadeusz, it is another work worthy of note that continues the tradition of the messianic theme in the Polish writer’s work.
The Confederation of Bar—The Priest and Polish Messianism

Mickiewicz’s 1836 piece, The Confederation of Bar (Konfederaci Barscy), has a rather interesting history. It was originally written as a drama by Mickiewicz in French under the title, Le Confédérés de Bar, while he was in exile in France. By writing it in French, the Polish bard had the hope that his drama would have a greater chance of being performed in one of the theatres in Paris and building French sympathy for the cause of Poland, which was then a nation lacking political borders, its own government, and freedom for its citizens. Mickiewicz made copies of his five-act drama and gave them to French actors and theatre artists, but none were interested in acting in it or producing it at the time. Eventually, the copies of The Confederation of Bar were either lost or destroyed; the only existing acts, I and II, were translated into Polish by an unknown translator, but the original French text has not been discovered. What we have then is a Polish translation of the original French (there is no published English translation as of yet).

As with much of Mickiewicz’s work, the play is loosely based on actual historical events, in particular the Confederation of Bar (1768-1772), after which the drama is named. This confederation was formed in the town of Bar (located in present-day Ukraine), not very far from the Turkish border. It was an armed Polish confederation, comprised primarily of the Polish gentry unused to warfare, and led by Józef Pułaski and Adam Krasiński, brother to Polish writer Zygmunt Krasiński. Józef Pułaski’s brother, Kazimierz, the future American Revolutionary general, later played a role in the
Confederation, which was an attempt to rid Poland of Russian influence and dissolve the ties of the Polish king, Stanisław Augustus Poniatowski, to Russia. The Confederation of Bar had a “markedly religious character” and was shaped considerably by Father Marek Jandołowicz, a Roman Catholic priest and prominent character in Mickiewicz’s play, along with Kazimierz Pułaski and French Officer De Choisy. Ultimately, the Confederation proved to be a failure and shortly after its defeat, the First Partition of Poland occurred in 1772.

In The Confederation of Bar, Mickiewicz presents the historical events through the perspectives of characters on different sides: Polish, Russian, and Polish and Russian teamed together. The play opens in a Kraków salon in the home of the Countess (Hrabina), where guests are waiting for her. The guests, comprised of the Polish nobility, reveal that they are displeased that the Countess is having an affair with the Russian Governor-General and doubt her loyalty to Poland. When the Countess returns from a visit to her father, the Wojewoda (leader of a voivode), she refuses to see anyone; she is upset by being ignored by her father, who is a Polish patriot, and his guests due to her relationship with the Governor-General. Through her conversation with her fifteen-year old brother, Adolf, we learn more about the Countess, who is in her thirties: her father had her marry a wealthy Polish nobleman who was a brutish alcoholic. When the Countess left her husband, her family tried to put her in a monastery, but she was able to obtain a divorce under Russian law. Shortly afterwards, she began her relationship with the Governor-General. Although the Countess is sympathetic to the Confederation and the Polish cause, her feelings are strained because of her personal history.
The Russian characters of the drama—the Governor-General and the Doctor—are justified in their concerns over the Polish Confederation, which seeks to undermine Russian influence in Poland. They are both aware that the Poles are planning an uprising, but they do not know the nature of it. The Governor-General shares the Doctor’s opinion that “even after death a Pole still conspires for at least twenty-four hours” (“Polak nawet po zgonie konspiruje jeszcze co najmniej w przeciągu dwudziestu czterech godzin”) (The Confederation of Bar 361). Unlike the Governor-General, who is interested more in facts, the Doctor tries to interpret groups of Poles meeting and exchanging hearty handshakes in a town square in Kraków. From his experience as a spy in Turkey, Italy, and Sweden, he senses that nothing good is to come of these public group meetings of the Poles. He tells the Governor-General:

I noticed in Constantinople, where I had the honor to be assigned to the imperial mission in character..., I observed in Constantinople that such signs always told news and deep discontent...

Otóż zauważałem w Konstantynopolu, gdzie miałem honor być przydzielony do misji cesarskiej w charakterze..., zaobserwowałem w Konstantynopolu, że taki objaw zapowiada zawsze głuche i głębokie niezadowolenie... (The Confederation of Bar 366)

The Doctor later notes in the same conversation with the Governor-General in Act I, scene 4 that it is difficult to obtain any information from Poles, because they enjoy talking a good deal but they talk without passing out information that is of any worth or importance. The only way he is able to get some real sense of the readiness of the Poles to fight the Russians is by measuring the strength of the right hands of Polish prisoners to estimate how they might yield swords. The doctor is very skeptical of the Poles: he wants to turn the Countess into a foreign spy, and he is against freeing Father Marek, an
emissary for Kazimierz Pułaski and member of the Confederation, who is presently being held by the Russians. The Governor-General, however, will pardon and free Father Marek.

Once the seventy-year old Father Marek is freed and returns to Pułaski, De Choisy, and his other compatriots in the Confederation, it is clear that this patriotic Polish priest exerts considerable influence over the Polish forces. He doesn’t feel that the time is yet right for the Poles to fight the Russians and questions Pułaski’s motivations for fighting, asking him, “My son, tell me openly, in the name of the Redeemer I conjure you to confess, do you still love that woman?...and do you think that when you see her, that when you welcome her as a conqueror, that you will win her, that through your suggested vanity she will not think of the worth of your patriotic plans?” (“Mój synu, powiedz mi otwarcie, na imię Zbawiciela zaklinam cię, wyznaj, czy kochasz tam jeszcze ową kobietę?...i czy myślisz, że ją zobaczysz, że ją powitasz jako zwycięzca, że ją pozyskasz, czy ta myśl przez próżność podsunięta nic nie waży w twoich planach patriotycznych?”) (The Confederation of Bar 392-393). Father Marek is aware that Pułaski and the Countess had a attachment for each other at one point and wonders whether Pułaski wants to fight the Russians to impress the Countess or for the sake of Poland. Pułaski convinces the priest that he has put the Countess out of his mind and Father Marek eventually blesses the Polish cause and the troops of the Confederation.

After Father Marek blesses the troops, the Wojewoda advises Pułaski and De Choisy to become one with the forest and fight the Russians from that location. The Wojewoda also instructs the fighters to kill everyone in league with the Russians. When
a forester asks, “How is that? The women?” (“Jak to? Kobiety?”), implying whether the Countess should also be included, the Wojewoda responds simply by saying “Everyone!” (“Wszystkich!”) (The Confederation of Bar 409). The second act ends shortly after with the words of the forester: “My God, what is happening? What is going on with us?” (“Boże mój, co się dzieje? Co się z nami stanie?”) (The Confederation of Bar 409).

Whether Father Marek actually appears in a scene or is merely alluded to by other characters, he is an omnipresent force in the Confederation of Bar. Despite his position as a Catholic priest, he is a Polish patriot who actively takes part in the Polish insurrection against the Russians. He is a messianic figure in the sense that he is a leader for the officers, the troops, and the Poles in general, trying to guide his countrymen in their struggle to achieve Poland’s salvation from foreign oppression. Father Marek represents messianism from both Christian and Jewish perspectives: according to the Christian view, he is an individual leader working to gain Poland’s freedom, but coinciding with the Jewish view, he is also part of the body of Poles collectively striving to deliver Poland from her enemies.

It may seem odd for a Catholic priest, a Church leader, to take an active role in leading a secular cause. However, this is nothing unusual in Poland, where priests have often taken part in Polish uprisings against foreign enemies and unjust causes. As late as the twentieth century, Polish priests and Church leaders have participated in rebellions and spoken openly against the Soviet-controlled Communist regime in Poland. The best example of this is Pope John Paul II, originally Karol Wojtyła from southern Poland, who preached against Communism and served as a leader to Poles, giving them hope and
strength in fighting against the Communist government then in power. He was an inspiration to the movement and union of Solidarity (Solidarność), whose followers looked to the Catholic Church for encouragement. Jerzy Kłoczowski explains:

In 1980-1 almost ten million people gathered in “Solidarity”, a trade union of a very special character. Religious elements, the Church, the pope and the cardinal primate as a symbol of cultural and political independence, mingled with the fundamental values and class elements, that is, with the resistance against the ruling party and national elements too….In the new situation [martial law] the Church immediately started to help and support people, to function as a shelter for many independent initiatives. The movement of committees helping internees and prisoners, their families and people in need was organised in churches.89

The Church and its leaders helped guide Poles during the trying Communist times.

Jerzy Popiełuszko is another example of a Church leader who took an active role in fighting for a free Poland during the Communist period. A young priest at Saint Stanisław Kostka’s Church in Warsaw, he said special Masses for Poland and spoke out openly against the Communist government and officials. On October 19, 1984, while he was traveling by car from Bydgoszcz to Warsaw, his car was stopped and Popiełuszko was murdered by secret service officers. His body was discovered in the water near Włocławek on October 30, and his funeral became a demonstration by Poles against the government. According to Kłoczowski, “Father Jerzy soon became an object of religious and national cult, very popular among the whole of society” and his grave in the churchyard at Saint Stanisław Kostka’s Church “became a little piece of free Poland decorated with banners and inscriptions left by the pilgrims.”90

Popiełuszko was not the only priest who said Masses supporting a free Poland and defied the Communist government. Other priests in smaller cities and towns across
Poland also did their part for the cause of country. In Rypin, a small city in central Poland near Toruń, Father Antoni Podleś was known locally for his open defiance against the government. During the 1980s, he continued to build Rypin’s Saint Stanisław Kostka’s Church with the help of the townspeople despite orders from government officials to discontinue the erection of the church. Building materials were funded by the people of Rypin and friends abroad, and the church was completed in 1990.

Priests have served as both religious and secular leaders of the Polish people throughout the history of Poland and continue to do so at the present time. Mickiewicz, in *The Confederation of Bar*, presents the rather truthful depiction of the Polish priest as a messianic leader in society. Father Marek, in life and in dramatic literature, proves himself as a spiritual and as a lay guide to the Polish officers and troops involved in the Confederation against the Russians as well as the rest of the Polish population.

As can be seen through examples presented in *The Confederation of Bar* and other dramatic pieces of Mickiewicz, messianism is a key theme that is used by the Polish writer to describe and elucidate the situation of Poland as a persecuted nation waiting for its salvation and rebirth during the nineteenth century. As discussed in this chapter, messianism is presented in different ways in *Ballads and Romances*, *Konrad Wallenrod*, *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III*, *Pan Tadeusz*, and *The Confederation of Bar*. At times it is presented as a concept through the events and circumstances depicted in a dramatic work, while in other instances it is embodied in a character that seems larger than life, such as Konrad in *Konrad Wallenrod* and Gustaw/Konrad in *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III*. 

78
Although Mickiewicz incorporates various elements of Polish history and folklore into his work, religion is a predominant component in his dramatic pieces. Aspects of paganism, Judaism, and Christianity are evident in the five theatrical works addressed, reflecting the influences and beliefs that have shaped and developed Polish society, as well as Mickiewicz. The pagan festival/ritual of Dziady and the beliefs of the Otherworld have had an impact on the imagination of the young writer raised in Lithuania, in addition to his exposure to Jewish influences from his maternal side and the Jewish Lithuanian and Jewish Polish communities. Elements of Christianity have also affected Mickiewicz and are seen in his writing. Religious features in the writer’s work helped promote the theme of messianism and convey a message of encouragement to Poles under foreign domination.

During a difficult time in Poland’s history, Mickiewicz attempted to strengthen the spirits of Poles, giving them hope and the stamina to persevere. He provided courageous leaders in his dramatic pieces to inspire Poles. He presented the stark reality facing the Polish population in works such as The Confederation of Bar, while showing a more idealized version of life in Pan Tadeusz. Mickiewicz looked to Poland’s past and folklore for inspiration for his writing, but he also put his own mark on traditional stories and history, thus creating a new folklore. Not only did he preserve elements of Polish identity from the past, he also re-created it and established new elements. Mickiewicz, through his writing, helped Poles take pride in their evolving culture and identity while also retaining their age old customs and traditions.
Notes to Chapter 2


2 Ibid, p. 240.

3 Although Judaism and other religions are practiced in Poland, Roman Catholicism continues to be the religion of the majority of the Polish population.


5 Lithuania had become a province of Poland in 1386, the year in which the Polish queen, Jadwiga, married a Lithuanian prince who became the Polish king, Władysław Jagiełło, thus establishing the Jagiellonian dynasty. The relationship between Lithuania and Poland can be compared to that between Scotland and England, two nations that are joined together as a kingdom.

6 Andrzej Walicki states that the Frankists were “followers of the eighteenth-century Jewish prophet Jacob Frank who embraced the truth of Catholicism without abandoning Judaism, and who proclaimed Poland to be a chosen nation.” (See Andrzej Walicki. Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland. p. 267.)


8 Ibid, p. 266.


10 A production of Ballads and Romances that originated at the Teatr im. Żeromskiego in Kielce, Poland in 1998 to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of Mickiewicz’s birth was taken that same year to London, where it was mounted at the Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny on King Street, and also to Vilnius’ Rosyjskiego Dramatycznego Teatru Litwy. (See Krzysztof Sowinski. “Górą Kielce!” Gazeta Wyborcza. 13 Feb. 1998.; Grzegorz Kozera. “Romans z Mickiewiczem” Słowo Ludu. 13 Feb. 1998.; and “Zadowoleni z Wilna.” Słowo Ludu. 4 Oct. 1998.)

11 “The Shawm Player” demonstrates the power of the bard in Polish society by centering on a poet who is the conscience of the Polish public by keeping a balance between right and wrong; “The Three Budrys Brothers” tells the story of three Lithuanian brothers who go off to war and are instructed by their father to return with various treasures but instead bring back Polish wives, who represent the strength of the Polish nation passed on
through generations; “The Gentleman and the Girl” addresses the courtship of a young gentleman and a peasant girl, symbolizing the rejuvenation of the nobility through the peasantry; “Waiting” is the tale of a servant who applies moral justice.

12 Except where otherwise indicated, the English translations of the Polish texts contained in this study are my own.

13 The Polish texts of the ballads quoted in this study are found in Adam Mickiewicz. Wierze. Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1973.

14 Mickiewicz had a number of affairs, often with married women. (See Joanna Knaflewska. Adam Mickiewicz. Czechowicz, Poland: Wydawnictwo Pidsiedlik, Raniowski, i Spółka, 1990.)

15 Radin translates “Świtezianka” as “The Nixie.” Her translation can be found in Poems by Adam Mickiewicz, edited by George Rapall Noyes (New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944).

16 Lake Švitež is located in Lithuania. Mickiewicz wrote another ballad, “Švitež,” in which he invented a story about this lake. “Švitež” tells the story of the inhabitants of the town of Švitež, whose ruler, Tuhan, is called upon by Mendog (Mindaugas), the leader of Lithuania, to bring his forces to help defend Lithuania in an attack by Russia.

Grudgingly, Tuhan takes his forces and aids Mendog, knowing that Švitež would be defenseless. After Tuhan leaves with his forces, the Russians attack Švitež. Tuhan’s daughter prays to God for help, and the town is miraculously flooded and the women are turned into flowers to preserve their purity. The Russians die the instant they touch the flowers, and through these miracles the town is saved.

17 Radin translates this stanza as follows:

Will you range through the wood like a heedless roe,
Forever a ghost in the night?
Stay rather with him who will love you so,
With me, O my heart’s delight!

(See George Rapall Noyes, ed. Poems by Adam Mickiewicz. New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 72.)

18 Radin translates this stanza as follows:

Nay, have done, haughty stripling, my father’s tales
Have forewarned me against your art:
For the voice of a man is the nightingale’s,
But the fox’s is his heart.

(See George Rapall Noyes, ed. Poems by Adam Mickiewicz. New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 72.)
19 See Note 16.

20 Jewell Parish's translation can be found in Poems by Adam Mickiewicz, edited by George Rapall Noyes (New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 67.).

21 Jewell's translation is as follows:
   Thus with endearing words, caresses vain,
   The maiden stumbles; pleads and cries aloud:
   Seeing her fall, hearing her voice of pain,
   Gathers the curious crowd.
   (See George Rapall Noyes, ed. Poems by Adam Mickiewicz. New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 68.)
   W.H. Auden translates the same passage in the following way:
   So, caressing, talking aloud to her
   Lover, she stumbles and falls,
   And her cry of anguish calls
   A pitying crowd to her.

22 Jewell's translation:
   I answer modestly: "The maid can feel,
   The common people to their faith are true:
   Feeling and faith to me far more reveal
   Than eyes and spectacles, though learned, do.
   (See George Rapall Noyes, ed. Poems by Adam Mickiewicz. New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 69.)
   W.H. Auden's translation:
   "Yet the girl loves," I reply diffidently,
   "And the people believe reverently:
   Faith and love are more discerning
   Than lenses or learning.

23 Wieszcz literally translates into "poet," "bard," "prophet," and "soothsayer." The wieszcz is seen as an unofficial leader of the Poles, who look to this person for a sense of their history, stories, and advice at various times under difficult political circumstances. Polish folk belief added the idea that a wieszcz is also a divinely inspired leader of the people. This figure is similar to the Irish bard, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

24 Mendog (Mindaugas), was the leader of Lithuania from 1236 until 1263. He was crowned the King of Lithuania in 1252, one year after he and his family converted from
paganism to Christianity due to the threat of invasion by the Teutonic Knights, who were originally crusaders organized by the Germans to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. Under Mendog, Lithuania became a Christian nation. After Mendog and his two sons were killed in a surprise attack in 1263, Treniotas, Mendog's pagan opposition, took over the throne and Lithuania returned to paganism. (See Stasys Samalavičius. An Outline of Lithuanian History. Vilnius: Diemedis Leidykla, 1995. p. 25-27.; Joseph B. Končius. History of Lithuania. Lithuanian American Community of the U.S.A., Inc., 1971. p. 5-11.)

25 According to popular folk belief, spirits that are called from the dead against their will transform themselves into evil spirits.

26 To this day in Poland there are a number of small religious shrines, decorated with ribbons and flowers, along roadsides throughout the country.

27 This is very similar to pagan Irish beliefs in the Otherworld, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

28 Radin translates these lines as follows:
   "Lily flowers, grow as high
As my husband deep doth lie;
As my husband deep doth lie,
Do ye lilies, grow so high!"
(See George Rapall Noyes, ed. Poems by Adam Mickiewicz. New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 79.)
David Welsh translates the same lines as follows:
   Flower, grow high,
   As my lord lies deep,
   As my lord lies deep,
   Do you grow high.

Welsh, unlike Radin, translated key lines and stanzas from "The Lilies" rather than the entire ballad.

29 Radin translates these lines as follows:
   "'Tis my wreath, and thou are mine!
From my grave the flowers were broken:
Bind with me, father, with thy stole!
Evil wife, by every token
I am thine! Curse be thy soul!
Curst be you, my evil brothers,
Who have thus despoiled my grave!
Cease your struggle for each other's
Life-blood. Mine the wreath you gave!

83
Wife and brothers, you shall go
With me to the world below!"
(See George Rapall Noyes, ed. Poems by Adam Mickiewicz. New York: The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1944. p. 88.)

30 Radin’s translation:
In the grave the dead will tarry,
For death’s gate is hard to storm,
And thy husband will appear
Only if thou call him here.
(Ibid. p. 86.)

31 In Literature and Nationalism in Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918, Stanisław Eile translates from Jarosław Rymkiewicz’s Mickiewicz czyli wszystko (p.151) the following:
We [the Poles] think like Mickiewicz, helped by Mickiewicz, continuously referring to Mickiewicz. They think like Mickiewicz and refer to Mickiewicz who do not even read Mickiewicz and look for his guidance; those too who never consider this problem. Mentioned or not, Mickiewicz is always present in Polish minds. His words constantly emanate invisible power. Even when ignored. He and his work have become one with the nation. Over here, he is always present.


35 Polish was the only language of the adaptation. When the production was mounted in London and Vilnius, the audiences were comprised primarily of Poles.

36 The production added elements that were not anticipated by audiences but well taken. For example, in “Romanticism,” the character of Karusia, which is traditionally accepted as pure and innocent, is attired in a low-cut dress with a high hemline. (See “Ballady i romanse” Rzeczpospolita 13 Jan. 2000.)


39 Henryk Sienkiewicz’s novel, The Teutonic Knights (Krzyżacy), provides excellent insight into the workings and affairs of the Knights. A 1960 Polish film adaptation of 84
Sienkiewicz’s novel was directed by Aleksander Ford and filmed in Poland at various castles of the Teutonic Knights.


41 Władysław Jagiełło was the Lithuanian husband of Queen Jadwiga of Poland. When she died in childbirth in 1399, Jagiełło became the ruler of Poland. (See Note 5.)


43 Irene Suboczewski translates this passage as follows:
   All is lost. Konrad caused their destruction.
   He who had garnered praise for his prowess,
   Who previously boasted of his circumspection,
   In this last campaign became timid and careless...
   Teutons died daily in droves, thus doomed...
   His desire for combat grew so slack
   That, impervious to his men’s request,
   He did nothing to save them from any attack.
   Standing with arms crossed on his chest,
   He mused all day or with Halban conversed.


45 Suboczewski’s translation:
   When Count Wallenrod left for Palestine,
   He was part of the retinue, dressed as a squire.
   When Count Wallenrod disappeared without trace,
   The squire, suspected of killing the sire,
   Stole away from Palestine apace
   And surfaced again on the Spanish shores.
   He proved his mettle in clashes with Moors.
   In tournaments, countless prizes he got,
   Gaining renown under the name Wallenrod.
   In the end he took his vows and in this wise
   As master caused the Order’s demise.

85
Mickiewicz bases the character of Aldona on two real life women: Agnieszka from Great Montawa and the nineteen-year old daughter of Kiejstut (Kęstutis). Agnieszka was a simple girl who went on a pilgrimage to Rome after she was widowed, and upon her return from Italy, she became a nun and stayed in one of the smaller towers at Malbork as a hermitess. Kiejstut’s daughter was brought to the Order by Walter von Stadion, who put her in the monastery of Saint Agnes where she became a nun. (See Program Notes. Konrad Wallenrod. Łódź: Państwowy Teatr Ziemi, Nov. 1965. p. 15-17, 22-24.)

Suboczewski’s translation:

“No, I'll remain...I’ll survive you, son!
I will stay to close your eyes and endeavor
To ensure that the glory of the deed you have done
Will be known to the world, remembered forever.
Through villages, castles, and towns I shall roam,
Or else my song in our land will take wing,
To knights in battle of you bards will sing,
Young mothers to children will do so at home...
All will sing your lay, and sometime it will
A future avenger of our bones beget!”


Ibid.


Many stage adaptations and productions of Mickiewicz’s were mounted in cities across Poland during 1979-1980 to stir support for the movement of Solidarity (Solidarność), which was then in its early stages.

Forefathers’ Eve, Part II is part of Mickiewicz’s Forefathers cycle, which contains four plays. In this part, a Wizard with a chorus serve the Feast of Shrouds on Dziady (Forefathers’ Eve) and invite spirits to come and take part in their feast. The spirits that come represent various characters in Polish society during the nineteenth century, including a landlord and those mistreated by him.


57 Mickiewicz and his friends were arrested on the grounds of their involvement with student societies while they were in attendance at the University of Wilno. The Russian Commissioner under Alexander I and Nicholas I, Count Novosiltsev, was determined to unearth some imaginary plot behind the meetings of the student societies; he was known for his ruthless persecution and interrogation of Poles.

58 The second part of Forefathers’ Eve, set near a chapel, presents a Warlock and chorus serving the Feast of Shrouds during evening of Dziady in order to call forth spirits. Throughout the evening they are visited by various spirits, representing figures from different parts of Polish society, sometimes in the form of shades, other times as ravens or owls. Forefathers’ Eve, Part IV depicts a Hermit/Gustaw (Gustaw/Konrad appears in Forefathers’ Eve, Part III) who visits a priest on Dziady to ask him to keep the pagan holiday because the spirits need to be remembered and have prayers said for them. The first part of Forefathers’ Eve, which is the least complete and the most fragmented of the entire cycle, presents a Maiden who is told by a chorus of men to pay for a church Mass for her dead husband. Meanwhile, a Warlock and a chorus of peasants prepare the rights of Dziady. Later, a Huntsman comes to Gustaw to tell him that a certain being watching over him wants to visit him in human form. Gustaw is then left to wonder the meaning of the Huntsman’s words.


60 The Irish counterpart to Dziady is the festival of Samhain, which takes place at the same time and shares many beliefs and features. Samhain will be further addressed in Chapter 3.


62 Polish quotations from Forefathers’ Eve, Part III used in this study are found in Adam Mickiewicz. Dziady, Cześć III. Utwory Dramatyczne. Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1979.


65 A common practice among the Romantic poets, an improvisation allowed an author to explore a subject at length through free association. Mickiewicz was known to have a
talent for performing improvisations in Polish and in French when in the company of friends. (See Joanna Knaflewska. Adam Mickiewicz. Czechowicz, Poland: Podsiedlik Raniowski i Spółka, 1990. p. 34-35.)

Harold B. Segel’s translation of this passage is as follows:

Yes, I have wisdom now, and love, and power!
Oh, never have I felt as at this hour!
This is my zenith, and my strength tonight
Has reached its height;
Now I shall know
If I be supreme, or only proud.

Segel’s translation:

My fatherland and I are one great whole.
My name is million, for I love as millions:
Their pain and suffering I feel;
I gaze upon my country fallen on days
Of torment, as a son would gaze
Upon his father broken on the wheel.
I feel within myself my country’s massacre
Just as a mother feels within her womb
The labor of the children whom
She bears. Yet you, still wise and cool,
Reigning in bliss, do rule,
And men will say that you can never err!
(Ibid. p. 107-108.)

See Note 23.

Segel’s translation:

A tyrant has arisen, Herod! Lord the youth of Poland
Is all delivered into Herod’s hands....
But see—a child escapes, grows up—he is our savior,
The restorer of our land!
Born of a foreign mother, in his veins
The blood of ancient warriors—and his name
Shall be forty and four.


74 Ibid. p. 143.


76 The English translations of *Pan Tadeusz* are those of Kenneth Mackenzie (See Adam Mickiewicz. *Pan Tadeusz*. Trans. Kenneth Mackenzie. London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1997.). In my opinion, his translations of Mickiewicz’s work are not only very faithful to the original Polish, but also wonderfully capture the sense of Mickiewicz’s use of language and rhyme in English. The Polish text quoted in this study is also from Mackenzie’s publication.

77 It is not known who is the composer of the Polish national anthem, which was originally a marching song that was sung by the Polish legions that fought under General Józef Dąbrowski with the French in northern Italy in 1797.

78 May 3, 1791 is the date of the Polish democratic constitution.


81 Ibid.


84 *The Confederation of Bar* was never performed on the stage in Mickiewicz’s lifetime. Its first production was in Kraków at the Teatr Krakowski on January 1, 1872. Since Kraków fell under the jurisdiction of Austria-Hungary, which exerted the least strict control over Polish territories compared to Russia and Prussia, a production was able to be staged in partitioned Poland. (See Tadeusz Sivert. *Mickiewicz na Scenie*. Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1957. p. 104.)
85 Before the partitions, part of the Ukraine belonged to the Kingdom of Poland.


90 Ibid. p. 335.

91 I had the honor of knowing Father Podleś, a charismatic man who was given the nickname of “Reagan,” after American President Ronald Reagan, for his stance against Communism and his ability to rally people together. He was a close friend of Pope John Paul II, as well as my grandparents, and shared many of the Pope’s political beliefs.
CHAPTER 3

MESSIANISM AND FOLKLORE IN THE PLAYS OF YEATS

The notion of Irish messianism is not as widely known or promoted as the concept of Polish messianism. Very rarely can one find references or allusions to Irish messianism by scholars in essays and critiques on Irish literature and drama. Nina Witoszek is one of the very few scholars who alludes to the idea of Irish messianism in her comparative study of Irish and Polish drama, but she does so in a footnote that is in regards to the Irish mythic hero, Cuchulain.¹

However, when we examine the plays of Yeats, especially in the context of the national situation of Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is evident that they display various forms of messianism. Death and rebirth, recurring themes in Yeats’ plays, are apparent in the folkloric, pagan, religious, and nationalist aspects of his dramas. Irish folklore, in particular, is a dominant feature in Yeats’ work and is reflective of the impact it had and continues to have on the collective Irish psyche.

Ever since the prehistory of the Irish, folklore has been entwined with the culture and the identity of the Irish people. Originally based on oral stories of historical happenings and beliefs in deities and the Otherworld, folklore for the Irish has over time
become a blend of reality and fantasy. As Jeffrey Gantz explains, the setting of Irish folklore is "both historical Ireland (itself an elusive entity) and the mythic otherworld of the Sídé [sic] (Ireland’s ‘faery people’, who live in burial mounds called ‘side’ and exhibit magical powers), and it is not always easy to tell one from the other." Stories of real life heroes have been embellished and made more fantastic with each succeeding generation of storytellers whose imaginations have added to the old tales, thus giving these characters a mythic quality.

Over the centuries, the Irish peasantry has served as the primary guardians and preservers of Irish folklore, keeping the old stories alive through narration and by passing them on to new listeners. One such listener was an impressionable young boy named Willie Yeats, who was enchanted by the stories he had heard while growing up in Sligo, located on Ireland’s west coast. Western Ireland is well known for its abundance of fairy lore and ghost tales, and Yeats could not get enough of the stories he had heard as a boy in Sligo and later as a teenager in Howth, where the family moved from London in 1880. He often went about collecting and recording tales told by the local peasantry, but in particular, he was fascinated by the stories told by Mary Battle, a servant in his uncle’s house who supposedly had "the sight." To this day in Ireland it is believed that there are special individuals with the ability to see and understand things that are not of the material world, such as spirits and fairies. In the household of George Pollexfen, Yeats’ uncle, it was commonly accepted that Mary was "a genuine, quite untrained seer." She not only taught Yeats a great deal about folklore and the supernatural, but also inspired him with her visions.

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Yeats, who was considered to be an authority on Irish folklore in his time due to his persistence in gathering and studying stories, published a collection of folktalesthe title, The Celtic Twilight, in 1893. Later, he would go with his colleague and friend, Lady Gregory, on folklore expeditions in the west of Ireland. Very often he incorporated the tales he heard into his poetry and plays, believing that Irish writers needed to pull themselves away from English models and return to their Celtic roots. He felt that only by turning to Irish folklore would Irish writers, including himself, be able to provide their fellow countrymen with a sense of their own Irishness and pride in their heritage. Yeats believed that reaching out to the Irish living in urban areas, where English influence was more pervasive than in the countryside, was especially important so that they would not lose their identity to that of the English.

Various aspects of Irish mythic and folkloric elements in the plays of Yeats and how these elements relate to the concept of messianism are examined in this chapter. The five plays under investigation—Cathleen Ni Houlihan, The King’s Threshold, The Unicorn from the Stars, The Dreaming of the Bones, and The Death of Cuchulain—exhibit allusions to Ireland’s distant and near past, personal states of being, and individual as well as collective sacrifice. Messianism is a common theme that weaves through these five plays. Different manifestations of death and rebirth also frequently recur in Yeats’ dramas, as well as in the work of his contemporaries, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge.
Cathleen Ni Houlihan—The Banshee and Mother Ireland, Messianism Personified

In collaboration with Lady Gregory, Yeats wrote Cathleen Ni Houlihan rather early in his career as a playwright. It was his third play that was performed before an audience in Dublin starting on April 2, 1902 and had the love of Yeats’ life, Maud Gonne, in the role of the title character. Yeats based this play in part on a dream that he had, which he described to Lady Gregory, and on the centuries-old mythical image of Ireland as a woman.⁵

The play is set in a cottage close to Killala, County Mayo, in 1798 just as the French, according to historical fact, are landing to help the Irish in an uprising against the English. It is the evening of the day before Michael, the eldest child in the Gillane family, is to wed Delia Cahel. Unexpectedly, an Old Woman, who has traveled far, arrives at the Gillane home for shelter from the cold. This Old Woman, looking for help from anyone willing, explains to Michael that she has the “hope of getting my beautiful fields back again; the hope of putting the strangers out of my house” (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 55).⁶ When asked by Bridget, Michael’s mother, for her name, the Old Woman responds, “Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan” (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 56). It soon becomes apparent that the Old Woman, otherwise known as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, has some kind of bewitching power over Irish men, rallying them together to fight against the English. Ultimately, Michael forgets his wedding with Delia and joins his neighbors in meeting the French ships in the bay.

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“Cathleen Ni Houlihan,” “Poor Old Woman,” “Dark Rosaleen,” and “Hag of Bear” are all metaphorical names for Ireland stemming from the seventeenth century. At that time, British Penal Codes forbade any written references to Ireland, which forced Irish writers to become inventive and create secret names for their country that would bypass English laws. As is evident by the various female names and titles, Ireland was seen as a country with a feminine connotation, a motherland rather than a fatherland as Germany and, more importantly, England are often regarded to this day. This view of Ireland as a woman or a mother figure dates back to the times of the ancient Celts, whose society was based on a matriarchy. In literature, “Cathleen Ni Houlihan” appears as the living embodiment of Ireland; she is Ireland incarnate, as is made clear by Yeats’ play.

Although there are no direct references to the “banshee” or “Woman of the Sidhe” in the play, an argument can be made that the Old Woman can represent or even be a manifestation of this character of the Otherworld so often discussed not only in other plays of Yeats, but also in folktales and popular Irish beliefs of the present time. The “banshee” (Anglicized from the Gaelic bean sì) has a variety of names and titles. Some of these titles include the “supernatural death messenger,” the “death messenger,” “a supernatural female death messenger,” “a female dweller in the sid,” and “a fairy woman,” among others (it should be noted that “ban” or “bean” mean “woman,” “sid,” “side,” and “sidhe” are all spelling variants and mean “fairy” or “wind” and refer to the Irish Otherworld). According to popular belief, the banshee is a solitary being, an old woman with white hair who visits those who are about to die to forewarn them of their impending deaths with her shrill cries. In his Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry,
Yeats includes several stories on this mythical being. In the folktale entitled, “How Thomas Connolly met the Banshee,” a rather lengthy physical description is given of this character:

The first thing I tuk notice to...was her hair, that was sthreelin’ down over his [sic] shwoldhers, an’ a good yard on the ground on aich side of her. O, be the hoky farmer, but that was the hair! The likes of it I never seen on mortal woman, young or ould, before nor sense. It grew as sthrong out of her as out of e’er a young slip of a girl ye could see; but the colour of it was a mithery to describe. The first squint I got of it I thought it was silvery grey, like an ould cron’e; but when I got up beside her I saw, be the glance o’ the sky, it was a soart iv an Iscariot colour, an’ a shine out of it like floss silk....but ‘twas that was the awfullest apparition ever I seen, the face of her as she looked up at me!...as pale as a corpse, an’ a most o’ freckles on it, like the freckles on a turkey’s egg; an’ the two eyes sewn in wid red thread, from the terrible power o’ crying the’ had to do; an’ such a pair iv eyes...as blue as two forget-me-nots, an’ as cowl’d as the moon in a bog-hole of a frosty night, an’ a dead-an’-live look in them that sent a cowl’d shiver through the marra o’ me bones. 8

Undoubtedly, through this description, the banshee is not a being that is pleasant to behold and today continues to be regarded rather coldly by the Irish, especially by those in western Ireland who faithfully retain their folklore and traditions.

The physical appearance of the Old Woman of Cathleen Ni Houlihan does not seem to be repelling, however, to the members of the Gillane household, including Peter, Bridget, and Michael. To these characters, the Old Woman is simply that: an old woman. Yeats does not specify how the Old Woman should look other than a line spoken by Michael who states that “she has a cloak over her face” (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 52). In regard to the Old Woman’s features, other than the fact that she is elderly, there is no evidence that she bears the frightful countenance that the banshee is said to have.
Nevertheless, the Old Woman suggests the banshee in her actions and words. After arriving at the Gillane’s home, the Old Woman in conversation with Michael tells him that “many a man has died for love of me….some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die tomorrow” (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 54). These lines can be interpreted as those that are spoken by the Mother Ireland side of the Cathleen Ni Houlihan character, telling of those men who have died and will die for the good of Ireland and her people. It should be noted, though, that the Old Woman’s prophesying that some men will die the next day is characteristic of the banshee, who announces impending death. Some of her other lines appear to give away her secret identity as the banshee:

It is not food or drink that I want. (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 55)

It is not silver I want. (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 55)

If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all. (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 55)

Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 56)

These lines suggest that the Old Woman is looking for something immaterial, possibly the souls of men. The last quotation listed strongly implies imminent death for certain individuals and a possible afterlife in “far countries” that may not be of earthly origin.

In addition to the Old Woman’s cryptic lines, the singing cries that she makes are also typical of the banshee, who is often described as a keening woman. Patricia
Lysaght, who has done considerable research on the Irish public’s perceptions of the banshee, explains the following:

Descriptions of the death-messenger’s cry make comparisons with the voices of humans, that is professional keeners, ordinary women in sorrow and weeping children. The sound is also compared with cat cries, the howling of dogs and the noises of some other animals and birds.¹

The songs that the Old Woman sings are mournful and have something to do with crying and death. The first song that she sings exhibits these qualities:

I will go cry with the woman,
For yellow-haired Donough is dead;
With a hempen rope for a neckcloth
And a white cloth on his head...

I am come to cry with you, woman,
My hair is unwound and unbound;
I remember him ploughing his field,
Turning up the red side of the ground... (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 54)

These lines in the song fit the crying or wailing that is distinctive of the banshee.

Additionally, the Old Woman makes further references not only to keening, but also to forthcoming death and burial:

Do not make a great keening
When the graves have been dug to-morrow.
Do not call the white-scarfed riders
To the burying that shall be to-morrow.
Do not spread food to call strangers
To the wakes that shall be to-morrow;
Do not give money for prayers
For the dead that shall die tomorrow.... (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 56)

These songs which the character sings in the play reinforce the notion that the Old Woman is the Irish death messenger, traveling by herself, who comes to herald the future deaths of men in the uprising that is to take place between the Irish and the English. By
any account, it is clear that the Old Woman is not a human character, but rather a character of a supernatural realm. At one point, Bridget asks her husband, Peter, whether this person is “a woman from beyond the world?” (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 55). The Old Woman’s transformation to a young girl going down a path with “the walk of a queen” emphasizes the mystical qualities of this particular character (Cathleen Ni Houlihan 57).

The Old Woman, through her striking resemblance to the banshee character of Irish myth and folklore, demonstrates in many ways that she is an embodiment of messianism. Although there are a number of references in the play to the Old Woman’s links to the deaths and impending deaths of a number of men, she represents a new beginning or a rebirth as well. Death, in its strictest sense, is the ultimate end, the termination of life, but death also marks a transition, the start of a new phase. The ancient Celts “regarded death merely as an interruption in a long life, as a stage between one life and the other.”10 The new phase can be the beginning of an afterlife in the Otherworld for those who have passed away. As Miranda Jane Green explains, the Otherworld is thought to be a place that is an improvement over the human, mortal world:

…the dead live again in a world very much like that of the earth but better. Here there is neither pain, disease, ageing nor decay; it is a world full of music, feasting and beauty…a timeless, ageless, happy place, a source of all wisdom, peace, beauty, harmony and immortality. Known as Tir na n’Og (the “Land of Forever Young”), it is a world full of magic, enchantment and music. It is a place perceived as an idealised mirror-image of the human world.11

Thus, in Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the deaths of those men who sacrifice themselves in the name of the Old Woman can be regarded as a form of rebirth, a beginning of a new and better life.
In a metaphorical sense the Old Woman, besides representing the rebirth of the fallen in the Otherworld, can also signify a rebirth in the mortal world, a new existence for the living Irish in a nation free from foreign domination and rule. With the impending battle between the Irish teamed with the French against the English, there is the suggestion that life will be different in Ireland from that point on. Nationalist feelings are stirred in the Irish who rush to the bay at Killala to join with the French troops. It is apparent that the Irish, proud of their identity and their land, are taking a more active position against their oppressors. Even Michael, near the end of the play, is reborn as a prospective Irish revolutionary who is prepared to sacrifice everything and himself for the cause of Ireland; his former self, that of a young man preparing for marriage and domestic life, is dead. The Old Woman, therefore, champions cultural and national messianism. Interestingly, she brings about her own rebirth by transforming herself from an elderly woman nearing the brink of death to a young girl representing life and exuberance.

As mentioned earlier, the banshee is a supernatural character of Irish folklore that Yeats uses not only in Cathleen Ni Houlihan, but also in his other plays, such as At the Hawk's Well and The Only Jealousy of Emer, both of which form part of the cycle that chronicles the life of the legendary Irish hero, Cuchulain. In the former play, the character of the Guardian of the Well is actually the banshee, who cries similarly to a hawk, thus explaining the title of the play. If there is any doubt as to the true identity of the Guardian, the character of the Old Man elucidates matters for the reader by stating:

The Woman of the Sidhe herself,
The mountain witch, the unappeasable shadow.
She is always flitting upon this mountain-side,
To allure or to destroy....
There falls a curse
On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes... (At the Hawk’s Well 141)

In this play, we have a depiction of the classic banshee character, complete with a description of her uninviting eyes. During the course of the play, we learn that for fifty years the Guardian tries to prevent the old man from drinking the water of the well, which is miraculous and is supposed to give eternal life to whoever drinks its water. Every time the water bubbles up in the well, the dancers in league with the Guardian deceive the Old Man, who never drinks the water in the present action of the play. In this way, the Guardian, or banshee, is able to carry out her self-serving agenda since the Old Man is unable to obtain everlasting life.

In *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, the Woman of the Sidhe, appearing as herself, comes for the soul of Cuchulain, who is on his deathbed. Reminiscent of *At the Hawk’s Well*, the Woman of the Sidhe had earlier appeared as a hawk to Cuchulain, as is evidenced by the lines that Cuchulain speaks:

I know you now, for long ago
I met you on a cloudy hill
Beside old thorn-trees and a well.
A woman danced and a hawk flew,
I held out arms and hands; but you,
That now seem friendly, fled away,
Half woman and half bird of prey. (*The Only Jealousy of Emer* 191)

This passage supports the image of the banshee with animal-like qualities. It also supports the folk belief that the Woman of the Sidhe, who is unable to find sexual love in the Otherworld, must find a human lover on earth, which further explains her interest in
Cuchulain besides his approaching death. It is only once Emer, Cuchulain’s wife, renounces her husband’s love that the Woman of the Sidhe has no power over Cuchulain. Bricriu of the Sidhe, in the Figure of Cuchulain, explains to Emer that the Sidhe can bargain, and on his advice she is able to save the mythic hero and return him to the mortal world through her selfless gesture.

In both At the Hawk’s Well and The Only Jealousy of Emer, the messianic theme is expressed through the aspect of rebirth. Although the Old Man in the former play is unable to drink the water that will give everlasting life, the hope and pursuit of obtaining it persists. In the latter play, death and rebirth are commanding aspects that influence and greatly contribute to the action of the drama and the fate of the characters. Cuchulain suffers from a malady and is on his deathbed, but he is given another chance at life by Emer, who forsakes his love so that he may live. In this way, Cuchulain is able to return from the Otherworld and recover from his illness, thus making him, in a sense, reborn. The theme of messianism, as expressed through a banshee character, is pervasive in these two dramas as it is in Cathleen Ni Houlihan. However, the expression of messianism differs in Yeats’ drama, The King’s Threshold.

The King’s Threshold—The Irish Bard and Messianism

In his 1904 play, The King’s Threshold, Yeats addresses another figure associated with Irish folklore and society—the Irish bard. Since the time of the ancient Celts, the bard has been an integral member of an Irish community. This person was not only a
poet, but also the preserver and the keeper of Irish folk songs, ballads, and history.

According to Timothy Joyce, the bard

...was an important member of the tribe. His task was to memorize thousands of lines of poetry to keep the traditions alive, as well as to compose new poems and songs to celebrate contemporary happenings. His sardonic “put-down” of a warrior was more devastating than a physical blow sustained in battle. So, too, warriors going into battle were accompanied by the bard proclaiming their genealogies and calling imprecations on the enemy. Bards might be present at a birth to greet the new Celtic baby with the songs of the tribe.12

The bard, therefore, had multiple functions in Irish society, making his own contribution to battles fought by the Irish and at the births of new members of the community.

Additionally, the bard played a considerable role in Irish feasts, which normally featured dancing, singing, the telling of stories, and poetry.13 It is appropriate to say that the bard was regarded as an unofficial leader of the Irish community.14

Although it is not clear exactly when the events of The King’s Threshold take place, it is safe to assume that the action occurs sometime prior to or during the Middle Ages, at which time bards had a greater role in Irish politics and law, serving as advisers to kings and nobles.15 The action of the play is set on the steps of King Guaire’s palace at Gort. Seanchan, an Irish bard, is lying on the steps where he is in the middle of his hunger strike in protest against the King, who bars him from an important conference of the State. In excluding Seanchan from this meeting, the King denies him the right of the poets that was “Established at the establishment of the world” and which gives the poets the privilege of being present at meetings addressing government affairs (The King’s Threshold 71). The King is pressured by government leaders to eliminate Seanchan from the meeting:
Three days ago
I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Who long had thought it against their dignity
For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At the great council of the State and share
In their authority....
I said that I was King, and that all rights
Had their original fountain in some king,
And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
Where there was the most honour. (The King’s Threshold 71)

King Guaire, at the bidding of his officials, belittles the honorary position of bards by
forbidding Seanchan his place at the council, an act which provokes the poet to start his
hunger strike. Seanchan’s decision to starve himself to death on the King’s steps is
rooted in an old Irish custom:

...if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve
Upon another’s threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King’s. (The King’s Threshold 70-71)

Seanchan is trying to shame the King into reinstating the right of poets in governmental
matters as well as in Irish society. Throughout the play, Seanchan’s fiancée, Fedelm, and
various government officials, along with the King, try to convince him to eat. Even
Seanchan’s pupils, at first believing that the “old custom’s not worth dying for,” try to
persuade him to eat and break his hunger strike (The King’s Threshold 71). Slowly, the
sentiments of his pupils evolve and change, and they eventually take his side. Even when
the King puts halters around the necks of the pupils, threatening their own lives if they
cannot convince Seanchan to eat, the pupils are willing to die along with their master for
his cause. Each pupil, from the oldest to the youngest, exclaims, "Die, Seanchan, and
proclaim the right of the poets" (The King's Threshold 92-93). Seanchan does indeed die
at the end of the play, but not without his dignity and upholding his principles.
Ultimately, the King does not restore the right of the poets, which leads the Youngest
Pupil to believe that "The ancient right is gone, the new remains, / And that is death"
(The King's Threshold 93). The pupils realize at the play's conclusion that feeding the
soul and standing by one's beliefs are more important than providing the body with
nutrition.

The character of Seanchan is the messianic hero in The King's Threshold. He
offers his life for a cause in which he strongly believes will help Irish society. Seanchan
feels that without the wisdom and advice of the poet, who is well familiar with the
achievements and faults of past Irish leaders, government leaders are unable to make the
best decisions regarding the administration of Ireland. It is possible for leaders to make
the same mistakes of their predecessors if they do not have an adviser with knowledge of
past events to guide them. Seanchan, through his hunger strike and death, brings
attention to the magnitude of the poet in affairs of the State. He is unable to convince the
King to change his position on the poet's role in government, but he is successful in
conveying the importance of the poet to his pupils, whom we can assume will carry on
his legacy. The mission of Seanchan is reborn in his pupils. The pupils, after Seanchan's
death, will most likely become the new poets who will continue to preserve Irish history
and the stories of old, but their position in society is changed by King Guaire and by the
death of their master. As the Youngest Student proclaims, the new right of the poets is
not a place of honor in government but rather death. Seanchan’s pupils are left to struggle towards a rebirth of the poets’ position in society, a rebirth of the poets’ right.

It can be argued that Seanchan is a loose representation of Yeats, who served as a modern day bard in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish society. Yeats’ intention in his plays, as well as in his poetry, was to preserve Irish folklore and history, both distant and recent. He tried to resurrect Irish stories, long forgotten by the general Irish population, and bring them back into the common consciousness. Little did Yeats probably know when he wrote the play in 1904 that he would serve as a senator in the first Senate of the Irish Free State established eighteen years later. In a way, Yeats himself completed the circle that he left open in The King’s Threshold; Yeats was a bard who was given a place among other leaders of the Irish government and was able to offer his knowledge and advice to make an impact on these leaders. Seanchan and his mission is not only reborn through his students in the world of the play, but also through Yeats outside of the action of the drama.

The King’s Threshold focuses on folk beliefs similar to Cathleen Ni Houlihan, but unlike the drama dealing with Mother Ireland incarnate, there are no supernatural elements in the play. Seanchan, the King, and the pupils, in addition to the other characters that appear, are all flesh-and-blood figures. Although the characters that Yeats displays in The Unicorn from the Stars are human, elements of the supernatural are again addressed to demonstrate their impact on the material world.
The Unicorn from the Stars—Being “Away” and the Human Messianic Hero

Most of Yeats’ plays, such as Cathleen Ni Houlihan and The King’s Threshold, are rather short in length and have a one-act structure. The Unicorn from the Stars, which Yeats wrote in 1908 in the middle of his career as a playwright, is atypical of his plays in that it is comprised of three acts rather than one and has a greater number of events and complex themes.

The play, set in the early nineteenth century, revolves around the character of Martin Hearne, who toils in his uncle’s workshop building coaches and who, at the beginning of the play, is in some sort of mystical trance. The priest, Father John, is able to do little to bring Martin out of his trance other than offer prayer. Eventually, Martin awakes from his trance and later remembers the dream he had while being in a catatonic state: horses that change into unicorns that trample the world to numerous pieces.

Interpreting his dream as a command given to him by some greater, unearthly power, Martin believes that he is the one chosen to bring destruction to everything around him—the Church and the laws of the English—so that a reformation and rebirth can occur.

After going through another trance in the play, Martin claims that his interpretation of his previous dream was wrong; he learns through his most recent dream that his “primary business is not reformation but revelation” (The Unicorn from the Stars 243). This new view, however, comes after Martin causes damage and destruction by burning local property, and the English are seeking retribution and punishment. Martin ultimately dies.
of a gunshot when his friends try to prevent a Constable from taking Martin away to account for his actions.

A predominant theme and issue that is addressed in *The Unicorn from the Stars* is the folkloric concept of being in a trance-like state, which is also commonly referred to by the Irish as being "away." When a person is in such a state, he or she appears to be either ill or asleep, as is the case with Martin. The body is very much alive and well in the mortal world, but the soul of the person is thought to be away elsewhere, usually in the Otherworld, the Sidhe, hence the phrase being "away." There are some among the Irish who believe that people are able to travel in the Sidhe in their dreams.17

At this point, it is pertinent to discuss the Sidhe and its various functions. The Sidhe refers to the pagan Irish Otherworld, the location of which is not clear. Sometimes it is believed to be "to the west, over the sea; sometimes it is in the south-west of Ireland (where it may be called the 'House of Dond', Dond being a chthonic deity); but usually it is found in the great pre-Celtic burial mounds of the Sídhe [sic]."18 The Sidhe is also referred to as "the middle kingdom" that is between Man and God, the fine line or middle ground that separates the mortal from the immortal, the natural from the supernatural. This fine line between these two worlds is thought to become almost non-existent during the pagan festival of Samhain, the beginning of the Celtic year that falls on November 1, when it is believed that the mortal and immortal can interact. Furthermore, the Sidhe, besides being the pagan Otherworld or the middle kingdom, is held to be the immortal fairy kingdom that resembles the mortal, earthly world in every way except for its flaws.19
The Sidhe not only refers to a mystical place, but also to the inhabitants that dwell in this place. Just as with the location of the Sidhe, it is not certain who are the inhabitants of this domain. Some among the Irish, including Yeats, believe that the Sidhe are either fallen angels or old gods of pagan Ireland, while others feel that they are fairies or the spirits of the dead.20 They are immortal beings that are everywhere on earth and can take whichever shape they want. According to folk belief, they are rather temperamental and do not like being discussed by mortals, which explains why many among the peasantry do not feel comfortable calling the Sidhe by any name (many, though, refer to the Sidhe as “the good people” so as not to upset these supernatural beings). Any person is susceptible to being taken away by the Sidhe, but the more vulnerable include children, handsome men, women who are in childbirth, and those who are good dancers, since the Sidhe are known to enjoy dancing.21

From the very beginning of The Unicorn from the Stars, it is evident that although Martin’s body is still alive in the mortal world, his soul is not. Father John, who is praying over Martin tells Thomas Hearne, Martin’s uncle, that “it is not doctor’s medicine will help him in this case....It is not any common sickness that is on him now” (The Unicorn from the Stars 214). He recognizes that some otherworldly force has possession of Martin’s soul. Even Thomas, who is skeptical of trances and the Otherworld, acknowledges that there is something strangely amiss:

I thought at the first it was gone to sleep he was. But when shaking him and roaring at him failed to rouse him, I knew well it was the falling sickness. (The Unicorn from the Stars 214)
The “falling sickness” is another phrase referring to the state of being “away,” and Thomas realizes that something odd is happening to Martin despite his lack of belief in trances. Through the discourse between Father John and Thomas, we learn that the flashing shine of a lion and unicorn coach ornament that Martin was polishing had probably sent him into this state. Father John advises that Martin be left to come out of his trance on his own, which Martin soon does.

Martin, who as a child had dreams and visions of horses and bright people or the fairies, asserts that while he was “away” he had a dream of horses turning into unicorns. He later remembers more of this dream in Act II, as well as the command he was given:

I saw the unicorns trampling in my dream. They were breaking the world. I am to destroy; destruction was the word the messenger spoke. (The Unicorn from the Stars 226-227)

Father John recognizes the symbolism of Martin’s vision and recalls that a French monk had once told him that the unicorns meant “virginal strength, a rushing, lasting, tireless strength” (The Unicorn from the Stars 220). After Martin tells the priest the order he was given in his vision, Father John discloses to Martin that he had the same vision of the unicorns, and because of this dream, which he had told to his confessor, he was “sent to the lonely parish where I am, where there was no one I could lead astray” (The Unicorn from the Stars 227). Apparently, this vision of both Martin and Father John is rather provoke, as we later learn from the beggar and Irish nationalist, Johnny Bocach:

There is the unicorn with the one horn, and what is it he is going against? The lion of course. When he has the lion destroyed, the crown must fall and be shivered. Can’t you see it is the League of the Unicorns is the league that will fight and destroy the power of England and King George? (The Unicorn from the Stars 231)
Martin’s and Father John’s apocalyptic dream foretells an Irish uprising against the English. The unicorns represent the Irish as the pure, innocent race wronged by the much more powerful and dominant English, who are represented by the strong figure of the lion. The unicorn, the mythical animal with magical powers, also represents the more mystical nature of the Irish.

Throughout the play, it is revealed that Martin and Father John are not the only characters who have various visions and experiences with the Otherworld. Andrew Hearne, Martin’s brother, has his own insight into the Sidhe, as can be seen through a conversation between the two brothers in Act I:

Andrew: O, but wait. I understand you. Thomas doesn’t understand your thoughts, but I understand them. Wasn’t I telling you I was just like you once?

Martin: Like me? Did you ever see the other things, the things beyond?

Andrew: I did. It is not the four walls of the house that keep me content. Thomas doesn’t know. O no, he doesn’t know. (The Unicorn from the Stars 223)

Apparently, Andrew has the same ability as Martin to experience visions, hear “the laughter and the music beyond,” and to slip “away,” but he manages to keep his experiences secret from others (The Unicorn from the Stars 223).

By Act III, Martin is “away” for the second time in the play. When Martin returns from his second trance, he claims to have heard the “music of Paradise” that strangely is “made of the continual clashing of swords” (The Unicorn from the Stars 242). Martin’s vision does not suggest Heaven as much as it does the fairy world. It is believed that in the Sidhe there is an ongoing battle between the good, sociable fairies—

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the fairies of water, air, fire, and earth—and the evil fairies, which are usually the solitary fairies, such as the banshee, the leprechaun, the pooka, and Far Darrig, among others.22

The “clashing of swords” that Martin hears is the continuous clashing between the sociable and solitary fairies. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the visions are spurred not by Heaven but rather by a fairy origin. Paudeen and Father John also acknowledge through their dialogue that Martin’s visions are not Heaven sent:

Paudeen: It seemed as if he [Martin] was talking through honey. He had the look of one that had seen great wonders. It is maybe among the old heroes of Ireland he went, raising armies for our help.

Father John: God take him in His care and keep him from lying spirits and from all delusions! (The Unicorn from the Stars 244)

Paudeen feels that Martin is seeing Irish heroes of old, while Father John is praying for Martin to be protected from the evil spirits he is encountering. Martin himself, meanwhile, mistakes the music of the Sidhe for that of Heaven when he tells Father John, “Heaven is not what we have believed it to be. It is not quiet, it is not singing and making music, and all strife at an end” (The Unicorn from the Stars 245). Martin’s visions while being “away” may serve as a forewarning of his own death in a struggle.

In The Unicorn from the Stars, the folkloric concept of being “away” is a dominant theme that Yeats ties to Irish messianism and the Irish messianic hero, that is embodied in the character of Martin. At the beginning of the play, Martin’s messianic qualities are not clearly evident. However, near the end of Act I, Martin shows the first signs of being an individual, human messiah-like figure who will lead his people to a
better life. His last words in the first act, that are spoken to Johnny, foreshadow his developing role as an Irish messianic hero:

Gather your people together here, bring them all in. We have a great thing to do, I have to begin—I want to tell it to the whole world. Bring them in, bring them in, I will make the house ready. (The Unicorn from the Stars 225)

Martin’s words have both literal and metaphorical meanings. On a literal level, Martin may very well be preparing his family’s home to receive the guests he is anticipating, but on a metaphorical level, he is preparing himself to serve as a leader to his fellow countrymen. He is mentally bracing himself for his new role and his new objective—“I have to begin.” The “it” that Martin wants to tell to all the world is the command given to him by “a bright many-changing figure” while he was “away”: “‘Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver! Destroy!’” (The Unicorn from the Stars 225). This command has a messianic quality in that it refers to destruction, which brings about death while ironically giving life simultaneously. Martin interprets this command as an anti-English message. He believes that he must be instrumental in ridding Ireland of the English and their institutions. Martin states later to Johnny and Biddy in Act II:

We must bring men once more to the wilderness of the clean green earth....We must destroy the Law. That was the first sin, the first mouthful of the apple....The ancient [Irish] Law was for the benefit of all. It is the Law of the English is the only sin. (The Unicorn from the Stars 232)

Martin is increasingly seeing himself as a leader for the Irish who must eliminate the presence of the invader in his country.
Other characters in the play start to see Martin as a leader and give credibility to the visions that Martin experiences while he is “away.” Johnny’s nationalistic pride begins to swell as Martin talks with him and Biddy. At one point, Johnny questions:

Who was it the green sod of Ireland belonged to in the olden times? Wasn’t it to the ancient race [the Irish] it belonged? And who has possession of it now but the [English] race that came robbing over the sea? The meaning of that [Martin’s vision] is to destroy the big houses and the towns, and the fields to be given back to the ancient race. (The Unicorn from the Stars 232)

Johnny expresses the sentiment felt by many of his fellow Irish in the early nineteenth century. He conveys the resentment and bitterness of the Irish towards the English for coming to their land and taking control of it, imposing English laws and customs on the Irish. Johnny supports Martin and his stance, as do others. In Act III, Johnny, Paudeen, and the other beggars are concerned when Martin goes “away” for the second time.

Johnny, whose hopes in defeating the English rest in Martin, comments:

There is no satisfaction at all but to be destroying the English, and where now will we get so good a leader again?...If he had held out and held up, it is my belief he would have freed Ireland! (The Unicorn from the Stars 238)

Martin, by Act III, becomes a leader and hero for the Irish, who look to him for their freedom from English rule and oppression. Although there is no question that Martin is human, his inspiration is thought to come from some divine origin. Paudeen acknowledges this at one point when he exclaims that Martin “had surely some gift from the other world, I would say but he had power from the other side” (The Unicorn from the Stars 239). At one point, while Martin is still “away,” Johnny becomes anxious for his return. He states that it “is a pity he not waken at this time and to lead us on to
overcome the troop of the English” (The Unicorn from the Stars 240). Johnny demonstrates the faith he and others put in Martin for a future that is free from the English. Curiously, Martin is made into a heroic character very similar to Cuchulain, the mythic Celtic warrior who delivered his countrymen from their enemies and brought freedom. Like Cuchulain in The Only Jealousy of Emer, Martin is “away” but eventually returns to the mortal world of the earth. Most importantly, though, in this second trance or vision is the clarification of the command given to Martin during his first experience “away.” He claims that he

...had not heard the command right....My business is not reformation but revelation....The battle we have to fight is fought out in our own mind. (TUFTS 243)

Martin realizes that freeing Ireland from the physical presence of the English is not the entire battle. The Irish also need to mentally rid themselves of English oppression, to return to their “Irishness,” their sense of what it means to be Irish. They need to return to their history, culture, and traditions. Only that way can the Irish fully triumph over the English.

Martin fulfills his role as an Irish messianic hero in several ways. His fellow countrymen regard him as a leader striving towards a better future, a new beginning for his nation. He tries to rebuild Irish identity and nationalism; he attempts to instill in the Irish a pride in their past. Martin’s experience of being “away” at different times represents a metaphorical death and rebirth. Lastly, Martin, after being shot in the struggle between his beggar friends and a Constable, dies for the cause of his country and his countrymen.
Another play of Yeats that utilizes the folkloric concept of being “away,” as well as that of the Irish messianic hero, is The Only Jealousy of Emer. The character of Cuchulain is teetering between the earthly world and the Sidhe; his body is still alive, although barely, in the mortal world while his soul is already in the Otherworld. Unlike Martin, however, who appears to be sleeping while he is “away,” Cuchulain seems to be rather ill, another indication that a person’s soul is among the Sidhe. Cuchulain is able to wake from his state of being “away” and be safe from the power of the Woman of the Sidhe once Emer renounces her love for him. He realizes what had happened to him, which is apparent when he tells his mistress, Eithne Inguba, “I have been in some strange place and am afraid” (The Only Jealousy of Emer 193). Cuchulain, in a sense, experiences a type of death and rebirth. As with Cuchulain and Martin Hearne, characters in The Dreaming of the Bones also undergo a kind of death and rebirth, thus further conveying the theme of messianism.

The Dreaming of the Bones—Spirits of the Past Reborn

Although Yeats’ 1919 play, The Dreaming of the Bones, borrows heavily from the traditions of the Japanese Noh drama through its use of musicians that serve as a chorus and through the masks worn by two of the play’s three major characters, the drama is essentially Irish in its allusions to folklore and historical events from both the near and distant past. The time in which the play is set—1916—in addition to direct references, attest to the fact that this drama is Yeats’ reaction to the 1916 Easter
Rebellion that the Irish mounted in Dublin against the English. The Rising ultimately failed and spurred the execution of a number of Ireland’s nationalist leaders, including Patrick Pearse, James Connolly, and John MacBride, Maud Gonne’s husband.\textsuperscript{23}

The drama unfolds in County Clare, not long after the Easter Rebellion has taken place, where a Young Man who had taken part in the Rising is seeking refuge from the English in the pre-dawn hours. He encounters a Stranger and a Young Girl, and when prompted he tells them, “I was in the Post Office, and if taken I shall be put against a wall and shot” \textit{(The Dreaming of the Bones 277)}.\textsuperscript{24} The Stranger, recognizing the seriousness of the Young Man’s predicament, offers to put him in a safe place, which turns out to be a graveyard near the Abbey of Corcomroe. Once in the graveyard, the Young Man recognizes on one of the tombstones the name of Donough O’Brien, who rebelled against the King of Thomond and whom the Young Man believes “made Ireland weak” \textit{(The Dreaming of the Bones 280)}. He is quite passionate in his reaction against the deceased traitor, and his nationalistic pride increases when the Young Girl raises the subject of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, two lovers who are notorious in both Irish history and folklore for bringing the English into Ireland.\textsuperscript{25} At first, the Young Girl speaks vaguely about the spirits of the traitors without mentioning them by name, and the Young Man initially feels pity for these lovers whose “lips can never meet” until he realizes of whom the Young Girl is speaking \textit{(The Dreaming of the Bones 281)}. The Young Man’s repulsion and shock increases when he connects that the Young Girl and the Stranger are actually the spirits of Dervorgilla and Diarmuid, who are seeking forgiveness for their crime from an Irish individual, which would allow them to embrace each other once more. He
reprimands himself, stating with disgust, "I had almost yielded and forgiven it all—Terrible the temptation and the place!" (The Dreaming of the Bones 284).

The Dreaming of the Bones devotes a great deal of attention to the historical and legendary characters of Dervorgilla and Diarmuid, whose actions brought the English to Ireland. Since their arrival in 1169, the English have exploited Ireland's resources as well as oppress the Irish population, particularly the Catholic, with a succession of restrictive laws. Over the centuries, the historical figures of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla have become mythologized and incorporated into Irish folklore and drama, as can be seen through Lady Gregory's play, Dervorgilla, which manipulates the story of the seditious lovers.26

Yeats, likewise, plays upon the story of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla by having their spirits intermingle and contrast with a flesh-and-blood character who has participated in another significant event in Irish history. In this way, Yeats is not only recalling Irish history and folklore, but refashioning it and giving it new meaning according to the events of his time. The continuing quest of the lovers' spirits to find an Irish individual to forgive their sin reflects the continuing problems of the Irish with the English; Ireland is experiencing an ongoing crisis.

The time of day in which the play is set is no accident. Dawn and, especially, twilight are considered by the Irish to be the times of peak spiritual activity. In the half-light and half-darkness of these times of day, nothing is as it seems; objects and movement are not as clearly discerned as during the hours of full daylight. It is as if the dawn and the twilight are mixtures of two different worlds, the natural and the
supernatural. Therefore, from a folkloric perspective, it makes perfect sense that Yeats chooses to set The Dreaming of the Bones just before dawn when the mortal world, represented by the Young Man, and the spirit world, signified by the Stranger and the Young Woman, meet and interact with each other. The play would not carry the same symbolic significance if the action is set in the middle of the day. The pre-dawn setting further emphasizes and promotes the idea of a fine line existing between the mortal and immortal worlds.

The title of the play itself alludes to the unrest of spirits in the Sidhe and their continued presence among the living. The “dreaming bones” are those that are not at peace; they are the remains of those spirits, such as Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, that are still searching and longing for that which will appease them. The First Musician at one point in the play sings, “The dreaming bones cry out / Because the night winds blow” (The Dreaming of the Bones 280). This musician is not only referring to the perturbed spirits, but also to the lack of calm in the Sidhe, since according to folk belief the inhabitants of the Sidhe can be found in the wind.

In addition to spirits of the past visiting the living, the play makes several references to birds, particularly the owl and a red bird. The owl is first mentioned in the play through words spoken by the First Musician after the Stranger, the Young Girl, and the Young Man start to make their way to the Abbey of Corcomroe. The First Musician comments on their short journey:

They’ve passed the shallow well and the flat stone
Fouled by the drinking cattle, the narrow lane
Where mourners for five centuries have carried
Noble or peasant to his burial;
An owl is crying out above their heads. *(The Dreaming of the Bones 279)*

A short while later, the Young Man talks with the Stranger as they travel, remarking about his distaste with traitors such as Donough:

My curse on all that troop, and when I die  
I’ll leave my body, if I have any choice,  
Far from his ivy-tod and his owl. *(The Dreaming of the Bones 280)*

The owl is traditionally believed to symbolize evil and the world of demons, and by using this imagery in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, Yeats is creating a sense of foreboding, especially concerning the characters of the Stranger and the Young Girl.29 Additionally, Yeats makes use of the imagery of a red bird in the play in lines that are sung by the First Musician:

Red bird of March, begin to crow!  
Up with the neck and clap the wing,  
Red cock, and crow! *(The Dreaming of the Bones 279)*

It is significant that the bird is red rather than another color, since red is the color of magic, and the caps of magicians and fairies are customarily red.30 Therefore this red bird alluded to in the play can represent the mystical world of the fairies or the evil, solitary fairy, Far Darrig, otherwise known as the Red Man, who is believed to be a joker that has control over bad dreams. The bird imagery in this play, which is rather negative, can also be seen in Yeats’ other dramas, including *The Countess Cathleen*, *At the Hawk’s Well*, and *The Shadowy Waters*.

In addition to the various historical and folkloric aspects of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, references to messianism are found in the play. Diarmuid and Dervorgilla are reborn as the Stranger and the Young Girl, respectively. Both characters have died
centuries earlier, but they return to Ireland in their new incarnations. As mentioned earlier, they are seeking forgiveness for their misdeed from an Irish individual so that they can begin a new life in the Otherworld with each other. Both characters are hoping for another rebirth, a new beginning for themselves.

The Stranger, in conversation with the Young Man, refers to the messianic qualities of spirits. Soon after the opening of the play, the Stranger, as he hides the Young Man in the graveyard, tells him:

    I will put you safe,  
    No living man shall set his eyes upon you;  
    I will not answer for the dead. (The Dreaming of the Bones 278)

The Stranger suggests, through these lines, that the dead are more active than many would think. The Young Man, however, does not seems to be unaware of this as he comments, “My Grandam / Would have it they [the dead] did penance everywhere; / Some lived through their old lives again” (The Dreaming of the Bones 278). The idea that the dead are not completely gone does not disturb the Young Man, who takes it matter of factly. The Stranger further explains to the Young Man the experiences of some spirits of the dead:

    And some for an old scruple must hang spitted  
    Upon the swaying tops of lofty trees;  
    Some are consumed in fire, some withered up  
    By hail and sleet out of the wintry North,  
    And some but live through their old lives again. (The Dreaming of the Bones 278)

In this passage, the Stranger again emphasizes the qualities of death and rebirth that a spirit possesses. The title of the play itself also supports the idea that the dead are not
entirely gone from the world of the living since they, the bones, are able to dream, to consider the past and the future, as we see the spirits of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla do.

The Young Man is the only character from the three that is living, but he promotes Irish messianism. As a participant in the 1916 Easter Rebellion, he is fighting to bring about change in Ireland, a rebirth of his nation after purging it of English rule and domination. Ireland is not to experience its rebirth through this uprising, but the messianic qualities of the Rebellion are evident. The Young Man can be regarded as an Irish messianic hero, not only because he is fighting for the cause of Ireland, but also because he understands that his life may be sacrificed in the name of that cause. If he were to die for that cause, he would have a rebirth in the Otherworld according to folk belief.

The spirit world and the interaction between its inhabitants and those of the mortal world are major themes that are seen in a number of Yeats’ plays. In The Dreaming of the Bones, there is a clear interaction between a human and the spirits of historical figures. In other plays of his, Yeats explores different types of human and non-human relationships, particularly that between humans and fairies, as can be seen in The Land of Heart’s Desire, in which a Faery Child visits and claims a young bride who is unsatisfied with her life and wants to be taken away by the fairies. He also examines the interactions between humans and angels in plays such as The Hour Glass or the relationship between humans and God in Calvary and The Resurrection. Yeats continues to present relationships between human and divine characters, reality and spirituality,
history and myths, along with the messianic theme, in his final play, *The Death of Cuchulain*.

**The Death of Cuchulain—The Divine Messianic Hero**

Yeats’ last play, which he wrote not long before his death in 1939, focuses on the approaching and eventual demise of the mythic Irish warrior, Cuchulain. Many scholars, such as A.S. Knowland and Keith Alldritt, note the irony that Yeats had written a play about the death of the legendary hero shortly before his own and even suggest that the character of Cuchulain is Yeats’ alter ego.31 Perhaps Yeats had the gift of “sight” that Irish poets are thought to possess and was able to foresee his own coming death! For source material for this play, Yeats drew upon Lady Gregory’s *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, which is a translation and adaptation of the Ulster cycle of myths concerning the heroes of the Red Branch of Ulster.32

In the House of the Red Branch, Cuchulain was the most prominent of the warriors who was known, since he was a young boy, for his daring and courageous accomplishments. At the age of seven, he was able to compete successfully in war-like games against 150 sons of kings at King Conchubar’s court at Emain Macha.33 In addition, he defeated the vicious hound of the smith, Culain:

> When he came to the lawn before the smith’s house, the hound heard him coming, and began such a fierce yelling that he might have been heard through all Ulster, and he sprang at him as if he had a mind not to stop and tear him up at all, but to swallow him at the one mouthful. The little fellow had no weapon but his stick and his ball, but when he saw the hound coming at him, he struck the ball with such force that it went down
his throat, and through his body. Then he seized him by the hind legs and dashed him against a rock until there was no life left in him.\textsuperscript{34}

This description of how Cuchulain defended himself from this animal shows Cuchulain’s bravery and strength even at an early age. His defeating the hound is also partly responsible for Cuchulain’s acquirement of his name. To appease Culain, who was rather upset by the death of his hound, Cuchulain offered to serve as Culain’s watchdog until he was able to find and train a dog to be as good as the one he had killed. As a result of this offer, Culain changed the boy’s name from Setanta to Cuchulain, the “Hound of Culain.”\textsuperscript{35} Cuchulain was a valiant warrior of Ulster up until the time of his death, the events leading up to which primarily concern Yeats in his play.

The Death of Cuchulain, besides being the last drama written by Yeats, is also the fifth and last play in a series of plays that Yeats wrote involving the character of Cuchulain.\textsuperscript{36} The play opens with an Old Man serving as a narrator who states that the audience “must know the old epics and Mr. Yeats’ plays about them” (The Death of Cuchulain 438). It would seem that Yeats flatters himself with this remark. After the Old Man’s introduction, the main action of the play begins with Eithne, Emer’s messenger, telling Cuchulain of the destruction wrought in Emain Macha and on his own home in Muirthemne by Connacht warriors. She urges Cuchulain to fight the warriors, but a letter from his wife, Emer, tells him otherwise, claiming that Cuchulain will not live if he goes to battle. Against Emer’s wishes, Cuchulain fights the Connacht men and is mortally wounded. He manages to bring himself to a pillar stone and tries to fasten himself around the stone with his belt so that he can die upon his feet, but he has difficulty in completing this task. By chance, Aoife, the mother of his son, comes by and
helps fasten Cuchulain to the stone with her veil. Her gesture, however, is not done out of kindness as she wants to kill Cuchulain herself. Ironically, it is not Aoife, but a Blind Man who kills Cuchulain. The Blind Man, shortly before he performs the deed, claims:

Somebody said that I was in Maeve’s tent,
And somebody else, a big man by his voice,
That if I brought Cuchulain’s head in a bag
I would be given twelve pennies… (The Death of Cuchulain 444)

It is in self-interest that the Blind Man decapitates Cuchulain with the same knife he uses to cut his food. It should also be noted that the Blind Man, seeking a payment of twelve pennies for Cuchulain’s head, is reminiscent of Judas Iscariot, who receives thirty pieces of silver for delivering Christ to the authorities to be crucified. After the Blind Man carries out his gruesome deed, the Morrigu, the goddess of war, later appears with Cuchulain’s head and places it upon the ground near the heads of six men who inflicted wounds on Cuchulain in his last battle. Once the Morrigu leaves, Emer comes to dance, and according to the stage directions, she

…so moves that she seems to rage against the heads of those that had wounded Cuchulain, perhaps makes movements as though to strike them, going three times round the circle of the heads. She then moves towards the head of Cuchulain….She moves as if in adoration or triumph. (The Death of Cuchulain 444)

After Emer conducts her dance, the play ends with a Singer performing a song that ties the story of Cuchulain and his fellow warriors to Irishmen, such as Pearse and Connolly, who had fought at the Post Office in Dublin during the 1916 Easter Rebellion.

Yeats’ debt to Irish folklore is clearly evident in The Death of Cuchulain. He borrows heavily from Lady Gregory’s Cuchulain of Muirthemne but also departs from her adaptation of The Tain to create his own version of the Cuchulain story. For instance,
in Lady Gregory's "Death of Cuchulain," that is contained within her Cuchulain of Muirthemne, the Irish hero is first forewarned of his approaching death by the wine brought to him in vessels by his mother, Dechtire; the three times that Dechtire brings her son wine vessels to bid him farewell, the vessels contain blood. Later, as Cuchulain journeys to the battle against Maeve’s army, he is given another forewarning of his death through the sight of a young woman, who is actually the Woman of the Sidhe with an atypical appearance, washing red clothing that is symbolic of Cuchulain’s blood that will be shed. Instead of being killed by a Blind Man in this version of the story, Cuchulain is given a fatal wound by Lugaid in battle:

Then Lugaid threw the spear, and it went through and through Cuchulain’s body, and he knew he had got his deadly wound; and his bowels came out on the cushions of the chariot, and his only horse went away from him, the the Black Sainglairn, with half the harness hanging from his neck, and left his master to die upon the plain of Muirthemne.37

Cuchulain, as in Yeats’ play, brings himself to a pillar stone, but he is capable of tying himself to it with his belt. Although Cuchulain’s fellow warriors try to defend him, Lugaid “came and lifted up Cuchulain’s hair from his shoulders, and struck his head off.”38 Emer’s reaction to Cuchulain’s death in Lady Gregory’s adaptation differs from Yeats’ in that Emer wishes to be buried with her husband:

...Emer bade Conall to make a wide, very deep grave for Cuchulain; and she laid herself down beside her gentle comrade, and she put her mouth to his mouth, and she said: “Love of my life, my friend, my sweetheart, my one choice of the men of the earth, many is the woman, wed or unwed, envied me till to-day: and now I will not stay living after you.”

And her life went out from her, and she herself and Cuchulain were laid in the one grave by Conall. And he raised the one stone over them, and he wrote their names in Ogham, and he himself and all the men of Ulster keened them.39
It appears that Emer wills herself to die of grief since there is no specific mention of her harming herself in an act of suicide. In Yeats' play, there is no indication that Emer dies; the last time Emer is seen, she is standing motionless as the stage lights dim on her, according to Yeats’ stage directions (The Death of Cuchulain 445).

As with The Dreaming of the Bones, Yeats fuses Irish folklore with modern day events not only to refashion the traditional stories, but also to create a new folklore of his own time. With the exception of the presentational elements of the drama, such as the Old Man who speaks at the very beginning of the play and the Singer who performs at the end, there is nothing obvious in the main action of the play that connects it to the events of Yeats’ time. However, the rather short song of the Singer sheds light on the significance of the Cuchulain story in regard to the story of the men who fought and died in the Rising. A particular passage of the song that the Singer performs is worthy of closer examination:

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What stood in the Post Office
With Pearse and Connolly?
What comes out of the mountain
Where men first shed their blood?
Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed
He stood where they had stood? (The Death of Cuchulain 446)
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Through these lines, Yeats is comparing the bravery of the men involved in the Easter Rebellion to that of Cuchulain in battle against his enemies. Cuchulain and the men of 1916 had given their lives in the name of their country and their people, and thus exemplify Irish messianism and the Irish messianic hero.

As the Irish messianic hero, Cuchulain satisfies the role of a savior-like character who is selfless and unafraid to sacrifice his life in the struggle to liberate his fellow
countrymen from their enemies and oppressors. Throughout his life, he fights against the enemies of Ulster to protect his countrymen and their land. Even though he is forewarned of his approaching death, which is made apparent in Yeats’ play as well as in Lady Gregory’s adaptation of the legend, he gives little thought to his own welfare and is determined to fight Maeve and her warriors in the name of Ulster. He makes the ultimate sacrifice through his death in battle. Additionally, Cuchulain is given the promise of a rebirth in the Otherworld.

Patrick Pearse, whom Yeats names specifically in The Death of Cuchulain, is the messianic hero of the 1916 Easter Rebellion. Sean Cronin, in his book, Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology, explains that Pearse “is a most important figure for three reasons: he represents the Gaelic ideal, he symbolized the 1916 Rising, his political writings were treated as Holy Writ in the first fifty years of the Irish state.” Pearse believed in Irish independence from the English, and he strongly felt that the Irish should fight the English for Home Rule. Interestingly, he “saw no contradiction between the pagan virtues of the Celtic hero Cuchulainn [sic] and the Christian virtues required of schoolboys in the Ireland of his time.” Pearse is a messianic hero similar to Cuchulain in that he fought selflessly for the cause of Ireland. He was eventually shot by the English, along with his compatriots, after the Rebellion was defeated.

Yeats addresses the concept of Irish messianism in a number of his plays, including The Unicorn from the Stars, as discussed earlier, The Countess Cathleen, and Calvary. In The Countess Cathleen (1892), Yeats presents the title character as one who uns selfishly sacrifices her soul to two demons in exchange for the souls of the peasants,
who had sold their souls for food. The character of Cathleen can be seen as a representation of Ireland and the Irish who are exploited economically by the English, who are represented by the demons appearing in disguise as the Merchants. *Calvary* (1920), which offers an interpretation of the Crucifixion of Christ, is an obvious example of messianism that can indirectly suggest parallels between the sufferings of Christ and those of the Irish population. *The Death of Cuchulain*, however, concludes Yeats’ treatment of the messianic theme that is found in the playwright’s various dramas.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the source materials of Yeats’ plays are Irish folktales and folk beliefs that the Irish playwright had heard as a young boy growing up in Sligo, as well as Yeats’ own research conducted in the British Museum and with Lady Gregory, through their trips in the countryside among the peasantry. Lady Gregory’s *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, an adaptation of the Irish epic *The Tain*, has also served Yeats as a major source for his plays, particularly the five plays that comprise his Cuchulain cycle. He believed that Irish writers and playwrights needed to separate themselves from English models and influences and to look to their own roots for inspiration for their work. Concerning the theatre, Yeats was interested not only in giving the Irish a sense of their identity through folklore, but also in eliminating the image of the stage Irishman, usually a stereotypical view of the Irish created by English playwrights. He wanted to regain the dignity and heritage of the Irish both on the stage and through his writing.

The five plays that are focused on in this chapter—*Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, *The King’s Threshold*, *The Unicorn from the Stars*, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, and *The Death of Cuchulain*—span Yeats’ career as a playwright and show his development.
They also deal with key aspects of Irish folklore and Irish messianism, such as the banshee, the role of the Irish bard, the state of being “away,” the fine line between the human world and the Sidhe, and the mythic warrior Cuchulain. All five plays exhibit references to major events and figures of Ireland’s near and distant past. Sometimes the past and the present are tied together, as can be seen in The Dreaming of the Bones and The Death of Cuchulain. Additionally, Yeats follows the Irish literary tradition of combining the natural and the supernatural, at times erasing the boundaries between the human world and the Sidhe.

The theme of Irish messianism, of death and rebirth, is evident in all five plays discussed in this chapter and is customarily born out of sacrifices that the characters make. Usually the theme of messianism concerns the metaphorical death and rebirth of Ireland: death is first experienced through English subjugation and exploitation, and rebirth is attained through the promise and eventual liberation of Ireland from English rule, at least in the southern and western provinces. In Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Michael Gillane sacrifices his impending marriage, and possibly his own life, in order to join his countrymen and the French in a rebellion against the English; he fights in an attempt to bring about Ireland’s rebirth as a land free from English domination. The character of Seanchan in The King’s Threshold does sacrifice his life, however, for the poet’s place in Irish society so that the poet can have representation in governmental matters and help keep Ireland strong as a nation through imparting his wisdom to Irish leaders. In The Unicorn from the Stars, Martin Hearne also sacrifices his own life in order to help Ireland and the Irish become strong and organized in their struggle against the English. He
speaks of visions he experiences that instruct him to be at the forefront of a new beginning: “We must put out the light of the stars and the light of the sun and the lights of the moon..., till we have brought everything to nothing once again” (The Unicorn from the Stars 245). According to Martin’s vision, everything needs to begin again from nothing. The Dreaming of the Bones presents a Young Man who participated in the 1916 Easter Rebellion, a failed effort to defend Ireland and achieve Home Rule, a rebirth for the country. In a similar fashion, Cuchulain in The Death of Cuchulain, fights for Ireland, Ulster specifically, and sacrifices his own life in the process.

Irish folklore and Irish messianism are used as fundamental components in the plays of Yeats, and they help provide a sense of the Irish heritage and character. These components distinguish Yeats’ drama as having an Irish essence.
Notes to Chapter 3


6 All quotations from Yeats’ plays that are cited in this study can be found in W.B. Yeats. The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952.


11 Ibid. p. 72-73.


13 Ibid. p. 7.

14 The Irish bard bears a number of similarities to its Polish counterpart, the wieszcz (See Chapter 2, Ballads and Romances—Messianism in Folk Beliefs).


16 The idea of being “away” or in a trance is also a key aspect of Romantic art, and Mickiewicz, as a Polish Romantic writer, was known to have written some of his most
highly acclaimed pieces, such as “The Great Improvisation” of *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III*, in a possessed, trance-like state.


20 Ibid. Chapter 4.

21 Ibid. Chapter 4.

22 Ibid. Chapter 3.

23 Maud Gonne, the actor and political activist working for the cause of Ireland’s freedom and independence from England, was Yeats’ life long love. Yeats had proposed marriage to her twice and twice she had turned him down.

24 Although the fighting associated with the 1916 uprising took place in various locations around Dublin, the center of the fighting was located at the Post Office.

25 See Chapter 1.

26 In Lady Gregory’s play, Dervorgilla is shown as an elderly woman who regrets the role she played in bringing the English to Ireland as well as her betrayal of O’Rourke.


28 Mickiewicz also uses the symbolism of the owl in *Forefathers’ Eve, Part II*. See Chapter 2, Note 58.


32 Lady Gregory bases her adaptation of the Cuchulain myth on the Book of Leinster version of *The Tain*, which is considered to be Ireland’s epic tale. *The Tain* is to Ireland as *Beowulf* is to England or *The Song of Roland* is to France. The Irish epic is believed to have first existed in oral tradition and storytelling before being written by monastic scribes sometime in the twelfth century. The Book of Leinster version of *The Tain* also dates back to the twelfth century and contains the complete story of the House of the Red Branch. (See the Introduction to Thomas Kinsella’s translation of *The Tain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.)

33 According to Irish folk belief, Conchubar was the King of Ulster.


36 The other four plays—*On Baile’s Strand* (1904), *The Green Helmet* (1910), *At the Hawk’s Well* (1917), and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919)—deal with different key moments in the life of Cuchulain, such as his encounters with the Woman of the Sidhe, his experience with the mythic Red Man, and his battle with a stranger who turns out to be his son, whom he kills.


38 Ibid. p. 684.

39 Ibid. p. 693-694.


41 Ibid. p. 101.
CHAPTER 4

MESSIANISM AND THE NATIONALIST IDEA

Examples of messianism as presented in the plays of Mickiewicz and Yeats have been discussed up to this point. Although each writer looks to the history and folklore of his respective nation for inspiration for his writing, incorporating various influences that have impacted the Polish and Irish populations for centuries and continue to do so, certain influences prevail over others. In Mickiewicz’s dramatic work, it is clear that the Polish bard makes extensive use of Polish history, as well as Lithuanian, in Konrad Wallenrod and The Confederation of Bar, in addition to using folktales and folk beliefs as the basis for Ballads and Romances, Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, and Pan Tadeusz. However, the predominant influence seen in all five pieces of his that are considered in this study is that of religion. Whether it is paganism, Judaism, or Christianity, religion is a major aspect of Mickiewicz’s work, and it is through this element that the writer conveys the major theme of messianism. Similarly, religion—pagan and Christian—as well as history are apparent in Yeats’ plays that are discussed in this study, especially Cathleen Ni Houlihan, The Unicorn from the Stars, and The Dreaming of the Bones, but
folklore comprises the foundation of all five plays of the Irish bard that are addressed and
is the medium through which Yeats expresses the messianic theme.

Both Yeats and Mickiewicz use the theme of messianism in their work in order to
reflect the comparable circumstances of Ireland and Poland, two nations persecuted by
dominant foreign superpowers that attempted to hasten the demise of the Irish and Polish
cultures, languages, and governments. Messianism works effectively as a major theme in
the dramas of the two writers to emphasize the historical facts surrounding national
persecution and death, while simultaneously building hope in future nationhood. It
should be recalled and noted that messianism not only deals with the notions of suffering
and death, but also with the ideas of rebirth and salvation. Through instilling the hope
that Poland would persist and be reborn after crucifixion and death by the three
partitioning powers, and that Ireland would be a free, sovereign state after persecution
under England, Mickiewicz and Yeats help promote the nationalist idea, the idea of
nationhood and national identity, in their native countries.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’ plays are addressed separately to
make clear the messianic examples seen in the individual works of each writer. The
purpose of this chapter, however, is to discuss the works of Mickiewicz and Yeats
together to demonstrate that the two writers set out to accomplish the same goals of
promoting national identity, nationhood, and political consciousness. Interconnectedness
between the two writers, their objectives, and their nations is apparent in their dramas.
Both Mickiewicz and Yeats draw ideas for their plays from the past and already extant
stories and culture, but they reshape these elements to fit their own times, thus re-
developing and re-creating national identity. The two writers use the concept of messianism as the theme and means by which to re-shape nationalist ideas.

The Issue of National Identity

In Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities, Anna Deavere Smith opens her play with various Jewish and African-American characters addressing the subject of identity. Ntozake Shange, an African-American playwright, poet, and novelist, speaks the first lines of the play:

Hmmm.
Identity—
it is, uh... in a way it's, um... it's sort of, it's uh...
it's a psychic sense of place
it's a way of knowing I'm not a rock or that tree?

The difficulty of defining the term, "identity," is reflected and expressed through the verbal pauses and ellipses in Shange's monologue, which is based on an interview Smith conducted with the writer over the phone.

At its simplest and most basic level, identity, an intangible element, is a way by which individuals describe their personal traits that distinguish them from other individuals; it is a way of describing unique characteristics that give each person a sense of self. However, identity can go beyond the individual. When a number of individuals exhibit like traits, identity can be applied to the group of individuals as a whole, therefore establishing the concept of collective identity. Once we begin to consider the collective
identity of a group of individuals, we venture into the realm of ethnicity that often leads to national identity and nationalism.

At this juncture it is necessary to discuss the terms, “national identity” and “nationalism.” In Chapter 1, it is stated that the concept of “nation” refers not only to a specific geographical area with politically mandated borders, but also to the inhabitants of that area who share similar characteristics, such as history, common experiences, cultural traditions, and beliefs. The similar characteristics of the inhabitants are what constitute their national identity, that which unites these people as their own group and that which distinguishes them from other groups with different characteristics. As Terry Eagleton states in his essay, “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment”:

Nationalism, like class, would thus seem to involve an impossible irony. It is sometimes forgotten that social class, for Karl Marx at least, is itself a form of alienation, canceling the particularity of an individual life into collective anonymity....The metaphysics of nationalism speak of the entry into full self-realization of a unitary subject known as the people.²

The irony that Eagleton addresses is that of both nationalism and national identity. Nationalism is the sentiment that promotes and exalts national identity, bringing some people together as a group while excluding others. Contrary to Marx’s beliefs in and hopes for a classless society, nationalism and national identity promote classes, albeit along political lines rather than economic.

In the cases of Poland and Ireland, it is interesting how collective identity functions and eventually develops into a re-defined and re-created national identity by Mickiewicz and Yeats. The two bards are largely responsible for re-shaping the identity of their countrymen according to the times in which they wrote and lived. Their writing,
as well as the productions of their plays, re-define the identities of the Polish and the Irish by applying legendary warriors, ancient beliefs, and traditional customs to current events. But how were the Polish and Irish identities first established? What elements are at the root of the construction of the national identity of a people?

It can be said that national identity begins with the shared experiences of individuals that unite these individuals together, forming a common, collective bond that ultimately becomes part of history and is sometimes transformed into stories or myth. As with the people of other nations, the Polish and the Irish each have their own stories and folklore that address their beginnings, their heroic warriors, and other key persons and events in their histories. Folklore and history are key sources for both Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’ writing. Both believed that history is the key to Poland’s and Ireland’s present and future. Walter Benjamin explains the following in “Excavation and Memory”:

He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil.¹

In order to maintain and later re-develop identity, Mickiewicz and Yeats unearthed their nations’ past to uncover the meanings of “Polish” and “Irish.” They needed to know and understand their heritage.

For Mickiewicz, history and religion are the main gateways to discovering Polish identity. He uses Polish and, to some extent, Lithuanian history to develop his works. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ballads and Romances combines historical people and events, folklore, paganism, and Christianity; Konrad Wallenrod deals with both history and religion as well as folk legends; Forefathers’ Eve, Part III makes use of events in
Mickiewicz's time in addition to ancient pagan rituals and Christianity; and lastly, The Confederation of Bar focuses on a particular event in Polish history. Although Mickiewicz looks to historical fact, folklore, and religion as a base for his writing in order to remind Poles of their past and traditions, he alters some aspects of these elements to suit his goal of applying them to fit the circumstances of his time. For instance, as addressed earlier, Konrad Wallenrod exhibits various persons and events from history, but Mickiewicz combines and changes certain facts to convey the messianic theme that is fitting to Poland's circumstances in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Forefathers' Eve, Part III is based on people and events familiar to Mickiewicz; again, the messianic theme is stressed to parallel the situation of Poland. Through these dramas, Mickiewicz re-defines Polish national identity by asserting the idea that the Poles are a messianic people with messianic leaders who will endure despite difficulty and oppression and who will bring new life to Poland, thus making their nation and, in a sense, themselves reborn.

History, religion, and especially folklore are major sources of inspiration for Yeats in writing his plays. Chapter 3 addresses these sources and how they relate to the messianic theme that is developed in Yeats' work. As with Mickiewicz, Yeats roots his play, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, in historical fact surrounding a 1798 Irish rebellion against the English, in addition to folk beliefs concerning a Mother Ireland figure and a supernatural female character of the Otherworld; The King's Threshold deals with historical precedents and folk beliefs of the bard as a significant leader and keeper of history in Irish society; The Unicorn from the Stars is concerned with aspects of everyday life and the supernatural to impart the messianic theme; The Dreaming of the Bones, like
Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod* and *Forefathers' Eve, Part III*, combines current events of Yeats' time with various historical and folk elements; and *The Death of Cuchulain* uses the story of a mythic and legendary Irish warrior to strengthen and embolden the Irish of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yeats uses various elements from the Irish past to remind his countrymen of their heritage, empower them against the dominant English, and to encourage national identity and nationalism. The theme of messianism, shown in the five plays discussed in this study, promotes the hope of a new beginning and future for the Irish after a period of persecution. Similar to his Polish predecessor, Yeats molds Irish history and folklore in order to have greater meaning and connection to the Irish public at the turn of the twentieth century. By portraying Irishmen fighting for their nation in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and having a young rebel from the 1916 Easter Rebellion in *The Dreaming of the Bones* interact with the spirits of historical Irish figures, Yeats brings the past and folk beliefs closer to the Irish people so that they can relate to them; he helps the Irish develop pride in and a connection to their past. He wants his countrymen to know their heritage in order to have a better sense of their identity as the Irish. Additionally, Yeats re-defines Irish identity by establishing that the Irish are not simply an oppressed people with a supplanted culture, but a people with a rich history and folk traditions of their own that are resurrected. The Irish, like the Polish, are a messianic people who eventually experience a rebirth and a new life free from English domination.

Mickiewicz and Yeats are both responsible for looking to the past for inspiration and examples of elements that promote and build national identity. They remind their
people of their history and traditions, but at the same time, the two writers re-shape historical events and customs in order to fit the circumstances of the nations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries so that they can have meaning and relevance. Interestingly, by re-shaping certain elements, Mickiewicz and Yeats re-create Polish and Irish identities to a certain extent. Today, not only do Poles define themselves by traditions and events that occurred centuries before the partitions of Poland, but also by Mickiewicz’s writing, which is commonly seen to be the ultimate declaration of Polish identity and nationalism. According to Stanisław Eile, Mickiewicz’s “defence of ‘faith and feelings’ against empirical arguments are claimed to carry on a moral message still topical in Poland.”*4 Eile goes further by stating that “for over 150 years the works of Mickiewicz…have been regarded as the school of patriotism and the sacred heritage of the nation.”*5 In Ireland, Yeats’ work also plays a considerable role in promoting and recreating national identity in the twentieth century. In particular, Cathleen Ni Houlihan continues to have a great effect on the Irish, and as Anthony Bradley asserts, there “can be little doubt that Yeats’s treatment of the legend added fuel to the fire of Irish nationalism.”*6 Although some plays, such as Cathleen Ni Houlihan and The Dreaming of the Bones, are more popular and more often produced in the theatre in the mid- and late twentieth century than other plays of Yeats, the overall impact of the playwright’s dramas is evident in the expressions of Irish national identity and nationalism.

Both Yeats’ and Mickiewicz’ work continue to influence national identity at the present time. It should be noted, however, that even though the writers’ message of nationalism is originally intended for Polish and Irish audiences, their message can speak
to audiences of other persecuted nations. Regarding Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Yeats believed that the importance of the play could apply to other countries besides Ireland that are striving for independence throughout the world. The same can be said of Mickiewicz’s work, which can easily speak to other nations that are oppressed and struggling for sovereignty.

_Messianism and the Nation_

The concept of messianism in its four major manifestations—religious, cultural, political, and national—is apt in describing the histories of Poland and Ireland, as well as the predicaments in which these two nations and their people found themselves in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The two nations, with populations that were and continue to be overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, can be expressed in terms of religious messianism. The Polish and the Irish looked to leaders whom they believed to be divinely inspired, such as Mickiewicz, Yeats, and other writers, or at the very least have unique abilities to lead their countrymen to freedom and salvation from foreign oppressors. The belief in an individual messiah is expressed in Mickiewicz’s _Forefathers’ Eve, Part III_ through the character of Konrad, a human character with unrivaled strength and the ability to lead, and also in Yeats’ _The Unicorn from the Stars_, through the human messianic character of Martin Hearne, and _The Death of Cuchulain_, through the divine messianic Irish warrior. The Polish and the Irish can both be regarded as two groups of people who were suffering
under the domination of a superpower and waiting in hope for deliverance and salvation through an extraordinary individual. Besides looking to individual leaders, such as Mickiewicz and Yeats as well as other Polish Romantic writers and writers of the Irish Renaissance, the Polish and the Irish served as their own collective messiahs, working together as groups to save themselves from foreign domination. Mickiewicz demonstrates in *The Confederation of Bar* the ability of Poles to rally together in order to bring about their own salvation, and Yeats presents that the Irish can act as a collective messiah working to bring about their freedom in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.

In addition to considering Poland and Ireland from the perspective of religious messianism, the two countries can be described according to the tenets of cultural messianism. Since the arrival of the English in Ireland in the twelfth century and the three partitions of Poland by Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary in the late eighteenth century, Irish and Polish cultures were under attack and suffering a slow death. In both the Celtic nation and the Slavic country, the native culture was replaced with the culture of the oppressor. Traditional practices and public celebrations of the native culture, the use of the native language in public matters and business, and the instruction of native literature in schools were not permitted. In Yeats’ *The King’s Threshold*, the ancient customs and rights of the bards are denied to Seanchan, while in Mickiewicz’s *Konrad Wallenrod*, the traditions and language of the Prussian Teutonic Knights are imposed on Konrad since he was a young boy raised by the Knights after his Lithuanian parents are killed. Both Yeats and Mickiewicz present in their dramatic works the situation of a culture faced with the threat of death, but simultaneously, they provide hope in cultural
resurrection. By the steadfast resolution of Seanchan’s pupils to support their teacher’s decision to claim the right of the poets even at the risk of their own deaths, Yeats shows that culture will be reborn and continue so long as there are those willing to uphold it. Likewise, Konrad Wallenrod, otherwise known as Alf, proves that Lithuanian culture will never perish as long as there are people like him with the courage and strength to claim their identity and renounce the imposition of the oppressor’s culture.

Political messianism is also descriptive of Poland and Ireland as political entities. With the Third Partition in 1795, Poland’s political borders were completely eliminated by the dividing powers and its government was dissolved. As a political nation and entity, Poland ceased to exist until its political borders and government were re-established in 1918 at the end of World War I. In this way, Poland experienced its political rebirth and salvation. Ireland’s situation was slightly different from Poland’s in that as an island nation, its political borders geographic borders correspond, but in governmental matters, Ireland stopped being its own political sovereignty in 1801 when it became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland under the Act of Union. Through this act, Ireland suffered a political death, being ruled by English leaders rather than its own Irish leaders. Ireland did not have its own elected government officials until 1922 when the nation, in greater part, was given its political freedom through the establishment of the Irish Free State, which was comprised of the western and southern parts of the island, with an elected Irish government. Yeats addresses issues of political messianism in The Unicorn from the Stars, in which oppression of the Irish under the English is shown along with attempts to rid Ireland of English rule and domination. The
same issues are presented in Mickiewicz’s work, such as *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III* that shows the aftermath of the 1830 November Insurrection in which the Poles tried to overthrow Russian rule and oppression. These issues are also shown in both *Konrad Wallenrod* and *The Confederation of Bar*, two politically charged dramatic pieces that deal with insurrection on both an individual and collective basis. In Yeats’ and Mickiewicz’s work, political resurrection and salvation does not materialize, but the hope and promise of it in the future are apparent. Political strife and struggle against an oppressive foreign force may not succeed with the first attempts of rebellion, but the hope in later success perseveres provided that there are others to continue the struggle where their predecessors left off.

Finally, national messianism sufficiently describes the Polish and Irish nations as two groups of people and their predicaments under foreign domination. Without their own rulers and laws, the Polish and the Irish were forced to abide by the dictates of the dominant nation or face the consequences, which often involved imprisonment and sometimes death. In Poland, especially, the Poles were threatened not only with the death of their culture and identity, but also with their own extinction due to the policies of Senator Novosiltsev, whose aim was the extermination of the Polish people as a whole. This predicament is dealt with at length in *Forefathers’ Eve, Part III*, which addresses young men imprisoned or transported to Siberia for hard labor and their eventual demise. In Yeats’ *The King’s Threshold*, the hunger strike of Seanchan mirrors the situation of imprisoned Irish individuals who held hunger strikes as a means by which to end English rule in Ireland; these hunger strikes risked the death of a part of the younger Irish
population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In both Ireland and Poland, the population was persecuted as a whole by a foreign oppressor, and a part of the population gave their lives in the hope that their countrymen would enjoy peace and salvation from domination.

Messianism, in its different manifestations, is appropriate in describing the histories and experiences of the Polish and Irish populations, and it is addressed in different ways in the works of Mickiewicz and Yeats. Quite naturally, as a Pole and as an Irishman, the two writers believed that Poland and Ireland had the right to exist in peace as their own sovereign entities, nations in their own right. Other Europeans and European thinkers, like Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, believed likewise. At the end of 1847 and even more so in 1848, Marx and Engels felt it was proper and necessary for Poland to become an independent nation once more in order to annihilate “Russia’s domination over Eastern and Central Europe, and, by the same token, of destroying her ambitious plans to rule over the world.” The two theorists were writing in an era in which those that suffered through colonialism, such as the Polish and the Irish, were rebelling against the imperialist practices of superpower nations. Twentieth century theorist Edward W. Said describes this period as, “a climactic insurrectionary stage, the massive upheaval of anti-imperialist resistance in the colonies, and of metropolitan anti-imperialist opposition that has been called the age of decolonization.” The seventeenth anniversary of the 1830 November Insurrection and the second anniversary of the 1846 uprising in Kraków were the impetus for Marx and Engels to examine Poland’s situation
and history more closely, and their interest in Poland is evident in speeches they gave in London in November 1847 and in Brussels in February 1848.10

On November 29, 1847, at an international meeting in London to commemorate the 1830 November Insurrection in Poland, Marx and Engels both gave speeches in support of a free Poland. In his address, Marx states that Poles “have rather everything to gain by the downfall of the old society, which is the condition for the establishment of a new society.”11 Marx, like Mickiewicz and Yeats, is an advocate of messianism, but rather than focus on its four manifestations that have been discussed up to this point, he approaches the concept of messianism from an economic perspective, believing that Poland’s “existing property relations must be done away with, for these property relations involve the exploitation of some nations by others: the abolition of existing property relations is the concern only of the working class.”12 In his typical fashion, Marx feels that Poles and Poland will be able to resurrect themselves in the nineteenth century by changing their economic system and by becoming a new, classless society.

Engels supports Marx’s belief in a liberated Poland, but offers a slightly different perspective. In his speech, given on the same occasion as Marx’s, he states:

For we German democrats have a special interest in the liberation of Poland. It was German princes who derived great advantages from the division of Poland and it is German soldiers who are still holding down Galicia and Posen. The responsibility for removing this disgrace from our nation rests on us Germans, on us German democrats above all. A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations. The liberation of Germany cannot therefore take place without the liberation of Poland from German oppression.13

Engels does not believe that Germany can be a truly free and model nation as long as Germans and Prussians dominate the Polish population. As he writes in a letter published
in *La Réforme* on December 5, 1847, "Germany had a special interest in the freedom of Poland because the German governments exercised their despotism over a part of Poland. German democracy ought to have at heart the ending of this tyranny which shamed Germany."\(^{14}\) According to Engels, Germany demonstrates a paradox in proclaiming itself to be democratic while Germans and Prussians rule over Polish territory and people like a colonizer over the colonized.

Engels goes further in the speech he made in Brussels on February 22, 1848, to mark the second anniversary of the Kraków uprising. He states that "the latest struggle of Poland against its foreign oppressors has been preceded by a hidden struggle, concealed but decisive within Poland itself, a struggle of oppressed Poles against Polish oppressors."\(^{15}\) Similar to Marx, Engels views the situation of nineteenth century Poland more in economic terms by claiming that ridding the nation of social classes would encourage economic rebirth and democracy.

Marx, in his Brussels speech, once again champions economics and economic messianism in regards to Poland's situation. He comments:

The men who led the Cracow [sic] revolutionary movement were deeply convinced that only a democratic Poland could be independent, and a democratic Poland was impossible without the abolition of feudal rights... The Cracow revolution has given a glorious example to the whole of Europe, by identifying the national cause with the democratic cause and the emancipation of the oppressed class.\(^{16}\)

Marx feels that if the Polish economic structure is altered, it will encourage freedom for the oppressed and democracy for the nation. It should be noted that in the course of this same speech, Marx connects Poland with Ireland in economics and politics. At the end of his speech, he states that the revolution of Kraków "sees the confirmation of these
principles in Ireland, where the narrowly nationalist party has gone to its grave with O'Connell, and where the new national party is above all reforming and democratic.\textsuperscript{17} Marx compares the struggle of the Irish Confederation, founded in January 1847 to attain Irish independence and democratic reforms, with the Kraków uprising of 1846.

Engels, like Marx, links Poland and Ireland, as can be seen in a letter that he addressed to Marx years later on November 24, 1867. In this letter, Engels speaks of Ireland’s situation under England and of Fenian martyrs. He writes:

Only the execution of the three [Michael Larkin, William Allen, and Michael O’Brien] has made the liberation of Kelly and Deasy the heroic deed as which it will now be sung to every Irish babe in the cradle in Ireland, England and America. The Irish women will do that just as well as the Polish women.\textsuperscript{18}

Through these lines, Engels compares those who have died in the name of Ireland with those who have died for the cause of Poland. He alludes that the Polish and the Irish both understand each other and each other’s predicament concerning politics and the national situation.

Engels was well aware of the oppressive rule of the English over the Irish, and saw the effects of it firsthand while touring Ireland in May 1856. In a letter to Marx dated May 23, 1856, Engels effectively describes the predicament of the Irish:

The country was completely ruined by the English wars of conquest from 1100 to 1850 (for in reality both the wars and the state of siege lasted as long as that). It has been established as a fact that most of the ruins were produced by destruction during the wars. The people itself has got its peculiar character from this, and for all their national Irish fanaticism the fellows feel that they are no longer at home in their own country. Ireland for the Saxon! That is now being realised. The Irishman knows that he cannot compete with the Englishman, who comes equipped with means superior in every respect; emigration will go on until the predominantly indeed almost exclusively, Celtic character of the population is gone to the
dogs. How often have the Irish started out to achieve something, and every time they have been crushed, politically and industrially. By consistent oppression they have been artificially converted into an utterly impoverished nation and now, as everyone knows, fulfil the function of supplying England, America, Australia, etc., with prostitutes, casual labourers, pimps, pickpockets, swindlers, beggars and other rabble.¹⁹

He acknowledges at some length the long history of English oppression and colonization in Ireland, remarking on the effect on the Irish character and on the situation of the Irish people in the nineteenth century. According to Engels, the English rule of “repression and corruption” has greatly harmed the Irish people, their government, and their economy.²⁰

Engels and Marx both support the concept of messianism, but rather than emphasize the religious, cultural, political, and national manifestations, they focus on messianism from an economic perspective, relating to the nineteenth century predicaments of Poland and Ireland. Mickiewicz and Yeats, however, do not address economic issues in their writing but rather moral and national issues. The two national bards more closely reflect the perspectives of eighteenth century French theorist Joseph de Maistre, who writes in Chapter IV of his Study on Sovereignty:

Nations are born and die like individuals….Nations have a general soul [sic] and a true moral unity which makes them what they are…Sometimes a nation lives in the midst of another much more numerous, refuses to integrate because there is not sufficient affinity between them, and preserves its moral unity.²¹

Indeed, Mickiewicz and Yeats demonstrate in their work that Poland and Ireland do not correspond with the dominant foreign nations.
Messianism Developing the Nationalist Idea

Messianism is an influential force in various ways through its different manifestations that are seen in the dramas of Mickiewicz and Yeats. To better convey the messianic theme, the two writers looked to history and folklore for inspiration, finding examples of messianism in the past and in folk beliefs and myths that would speak to audiences during their lifetimes and encourage them. Whether the audience was an audience of readers or a live audience in the theatre, the impact of Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’ writing was profound. Their dramas not only gave audiences a sense of their collective past as the Polish or the Irish people, but also a greater sense of nationalism and the idea of independent nationhood free from an oppressive foreign regime. Mickiewicz and Yeats both used in their plays messianism as the tool to develop and promote the nationalist idea in their times. Little did the two bards realize that their plays would continue to forward the nationalist idea in Poland and Ireland after their deaths.

In partitioned Poland, the staging of Mickiewicz’s work, which was mostly performed in fragments, depended on the nation governing a particular partition. Restrictions placed on the theatre and on the plays produced for a viewing public varied among the partitions. For instance, the theatre in the partition controlled by Austria-Hungary enjoyed the most freedom of the three partitions. However, the most freedom was not complete freedom. In the Austrian-Hungarian partition, non-threatening Polish plays, such as the comedies of Aleksander Fredro, Mickiewicz’s contemporary, were often staged.22 Theatres in the Russian-controlled partition were the most strictly
regulated and did not permit productions of plays that exhibited the Polish character or Polish issues, especially those written by Mickiewicz and other Polish Romantic writers. It is paradoxical, though, that in the Russian partition the use of the Polish language was prohibited everywhere except in the Roman Catholic Church and in the theatre. Kazimierz Braun discusses this paradox of the nineteenth century Polish theatre in Russian-controlled territory:

…the theater was the only public, lay institution where Polish could still be heard….Whatever the reason, the fact remains that in the collective consciousness of the Poles, a link and an analogy were forged between the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish theater. This strong covenant between the Church and the theater became a primary source of the originality and distinctiveness of the Polish theater. It endowed the theater with a special dignity and placed on it responsibilities over and above purely artistic ones, giving it authority to intervene in matters of conscience, morality, and politics.23

In the preceding passage, Braun makes clear why Mickiewicz, along with other Polish Romantic writers, employs a number of religious allusions in his dramas. Religion and the theatre were tied together as expressions of nationalism in the minds of Poles. Therefore, it was not a great stretch for Mickiewicz to present religious aspects and, in particular, the messianic theme, in order to further promote and develop the nationalist idea.

Mickiewicz’s dramas had a phenomenal effect on the Polish public from the very beginning. According to Braun, the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish Romantic theatre “became the strongholds of Polish identity and repositories of the national spirit, on both of which the nation lavished its attention.”24 In all the partitions, but especially in the partition ruled by Russia, Mickiewicz’s work had to be smuggled to Poles by
traveling Jewish merchants because it was banned. The dramas of Mickiewicz were often read by Poles in their homes at night; usually one or two people would serve as a lookout to warn of government officers who were on the watch.\textsuperscript{25} Anyone who was caught reading Mickiewicz’s writing risked imprisonment or banishment to Siberian mines. One seventeen year-old boy, who was arrested for being found with a copy of Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, burned himself to death in prison rather than disclose the names of those who read the play with him.\textsuperscript{26} Poles risked their personal well-being to derive hope and strength from their national bard, whom they regarded as Poland’s “greatest moral teacher, her spiritual guide, the Moses who would lead her to her promised land.”\textsuperscript{27}

Although Mickiewicz’s plays were most often read due to restrictions on the theatre, they were given dramatic readings in the partition controlled by Austria-Hungary. The earliest recorded staged reading of Mickiewicz’s work is a fragment of Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, that went by the title of Senator Novosiltsev, or The Investigation of High Crime in Lithuania, A Historic Fragment from the Poem “Forefathers” by Adam Mickiewicz (Senator Nowossiltzoff, czyli Śledztwo zbrodni stanu na Litwie, ustęp historyczny z poematu „Dziady” przez Adama Mickiewicza) on September 3, 1848, in Kraków. Directed by Juliusz Pfeiffer, this reading was the only drama of Mickiewicz to be officially staged during the writer’s life.\textsuperscript{28} Although Forefathers’ Eve, Part III has been performed in fragments as staged readings and as cantatas in the Austrian-Hungarian partition, primarily in Kraków, Stanisław Wyspiański’s 1901 Kraków production was the first that was theatrically realized in its entirety. This production was
praised for its scenery and costumes but little, if any, commentary can be found on the reactions of the public in a nationalistic sense. Indeed, it is difficult to find nationalist commentaries on performances of Mickiewicz’s work, since freedom of speech was curtailed in the three Polish partitions and later in Communist Poland. Any theatre reviews or books published in Poland between 1945 and 1989 must be read skeptically; one must read between the lines in order to discern what were the actual reactions of audiences to Mickiewicz’s work. At best, reviewers and other writers note the enthusiasm of an audience to a production but mostly refrain from giving personal opinions outside of theatrical elements, such as design and acting, to avoid problems with censors.

However, some nationalist reactions to Mickiewicz’s work can be found, usually in theatre programs. In the theatre program for a production of Pan Tadeusz that premiered at the Teatr Polski in Warsaw in March 1981, after the birth of the Solidarity movement (Solidarność) in 1980, some nationalistic comments by a number of Poles are printed, showing the effect of Mickiewicz’s writing on the Polish public. Stefania Woytowicz, one of the commentators listed in the program, states:

Adam Mickiewicz—the great Wieszcz, the great Pole, a symbol of patriotism....To think and to say, Pan Tadeusz, we know that is Poland. My attitude to this work—is my and all the Poles’ attitude towards the nation, the nation with all its brilliance and shadow, beauty and calamity. All the Poles, anywhere on this earth....For me Pan Tadeusz is a whispering sea of grain, a rural manor house, it is rebellion and hope, it is horrible longing and great love, it is the music of words.

Adam Mickiewicz—wielki Wieszcz, wielki Polak, symbol patriotyzmu. ...Myśląc i mówiąc „Pan Tadeusz” wiemy, że to Polska. Mój stosunek do tego dzieła—to mój i wszystkich Polaków stosunek do kraju, narodu z jego wszystkimi blaskami i cieniami, urodą i klęską. Wszystkich Polaków,
Woytowicz's attitude towards Mickiewicz and Pan Tadeusz, as she states, is the same as other Poles. She expresses her Polish nationalism, which is supported by Mickiewicz's piece that deals with the Polish land and its features. Jerzy Maksymiuk also contributes his sentiments saying, "Might emanates from Pan Tadeusz, as well as the might of the old culture and customs—so old and so deeply contemporary" ("Moc, emanująca z 'Pana Tadeusza', to także moc prastarej kultury i zwyczaju—tak odległych, a tak poglądających współczesność"). The continuing topicality of Mickiewicz's Pan Tadeusz is seen in Maksymiuk's quote. Mickiewicz's writing speaks to Poles in the nineteenth century as well as to those in the twentieth century, presenting sentiment towards the countryside in addition to honored and cherished customs. Older Polish culture and traditions, according to Maksymiuk, are as much a part of the present as they are a part of the past. Mickiewicz's writing speaks to Poles of different times and circumstances. A moving example of the effect of Mickiewicz on the individual and collective consciousness of the Polish is evident in the remembrances of a World War II concentration camp survivor, Alina Przerwa Tetmajer:

Auschwitz-Birkenau...Block 17. On the "berths" are four critically ill women. On the highest berth where are the dying, a pale girl who looks to be fourteen recites: "and the sun's sleepy eye opened up"...

And in the dusk of the gloomy barracks, among sighs, sometimes the last ones, floats the melody of words—we see as "through tree branches, like a candle through a crack in a plank of wood." We see "fields painted with various grain," we hear a call of the hunt and "that year..." full of hope. Haneczka Pioterczyk is seriously ill with tuberculosis. We know what that means. But at this moment
we see a smile on her face, we feel a breeze of hope—Poland, my nation...

Pan Tadeusz was written by us in that way, all who remembered the proceeding part of the recited stanza—wrote it. On slips of brown packing paper were more and more recollected poems. I, myself, remembered Books I, IV and XI.

Besides other poems and combat songs—Pan Tadeusz was everyday the bread of our hope. Someone smuggled the notes from the camp, but they did not survive the journey.

Auschwitz-Birkenau...blok 17. Na „kojach” po cztery ciężko chore. Na najwyższej koi wyniszczone ostatecznie, blada dziewczyna wyglądająca na lat czternaście deklamuje: „a oko słońca weszło, jeszcze nieco senne”...

I w mroku baraku, wśród westchnień, niekiedy ostatnich, płynie melodía słowa—widzimy jak „przez konary błyskało, jako świeca przez okienic szparty”. Widzimy „pola malowane zbożem rozmaitem”, słyszymy nagonkę i „o roku ów...” rozbrzmiewa nadzieją. Haneckza Ploterczyk jest ciężko chora na gruźlicę. Wiemy, co to znaczy. Ale w tej chwili widzimy uśmiech na jej twarzy, czujemy wiew nadziei—Polsko, Ojczyzno moja...

„Pan Tadeusz” był pisany przez nas w ten sposób, że każdy kto pamiętał dalszy ciąg deklamowanej strofki—dopisywał. Na szarych, z pakowego papieru kartkach było coraz więcej przypomnianych wierszy.

Sama pamiętałam księgi I, IV i XI.

Obok innych wierszy i pieśni bojowych—„Pan Tadeusz” był codziennym chlebem naszej nadziei. Ktoś wyniósł obozowe kartki, ale nie przetrzymały transportu.31

From a nationalist perspective, Poles recall Mickiewicz’s writing to give them hope during the darkest moments of Polish history, from the three partitions to the German occupation during the Second World War. For Tetmayer, Mickiewicz’s words not only built hope for herself and for the other women in her barracks, but also nationalism. She paraphrases the opening line of Pan Tadeusz, changing it from “Lithuania! My nation” (“Litwo! Ojczyzno moja”) to “Poland, My nation” (“Polsko, Ojczyzno moja”).32 Tetmayer and the other women used Mickiewicz’s writing to give them faith in their nation as well as in themselves, nourishing and strengthening their spirits. Pan Tadeusz continues to instill the Polish with nationalistic pride. It reminds them of the Polish countryside, their
history, and their traditions. For the most part, Pan Tadeusz is a nostalgic, relatively peaceful work of Mickiewicz that is a direct contrast to Forefathers’ Eve, Part III in tone and in public reaction. While twentieth century theatre productions of Pan Tadeusz in Poland sparked no riots or public demonstrations, productions of Forefather’s Eve, Part III did quite the opposite, especially in Communist Poland.

According to Polish director Kazimierz Braun, Forefathers’ Eve, Part III “made a special contribution to theatrical development, both artistically and politically,” adding that each production was “a festive and important event.”33 Of the productions mounted in the Communist era, the 1967 production at the Teatr Narodowy and the 1979 production at the Teatr Wybrzeże are of particular significance due to the reactions they elicited from audiences, the Polish population as a whole, and the authorities, which were dictated by the Soviets. These productions of Forefathers’ Eve, Part III built and reinforced sentiments of nationalism among the Polish people.

Forefathers’ Eve, Part III was often banned in Poland by the Polish government, under orders from the Soviet Union, because it had “a strongly anti-Russian character, which could function as an anti-Soviet metaphor.”34 However, a production of considerable importance was the 1967 production at the Teatr Narodowy in Warsaw that was directed by Kazimierz Dejmek. It was staged at a time when dissatisfaction with Władysław Gomułka, Poland’s leader in the 1960s, reached a peak among the Poles after he failed to act upon Khrushchev’s second de-Stalinization campaign in 1961. Therefore, Mickiewicz’s anti-Russian lines in the play had a greater significance and a more anti-Soviet character with Polish audiences. Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, in The Persistence of
Freedom: The Sociological Implications of Polish Student Theatre, describes the reaction inside the Teatr Narodowy:

Spoken lines in the play became cues for political demonstration by the audience....And the audience responded so enthusiastically with applause that a serious analytic question arises for the observer—Was this essentially theatre or politics?\textsuperscript{35}

Since the Communist regime forbade newspapers and other media to discuss the political conditions of the country, the theatre became the venue where the subject of politics was addressed, albeit in sublimated messages in the dramatic works. Goldfarb further illustrates the reaction of the audience:

The audience responded to the play as an opportunity for political manifestation of anti-Soviet attitudes, breaking down the conventions of theatrical decorum.... With the medium of theater as a political medium having been closed down, politics subsequently found more confrontational media—street demonstration, the writers' resolution, struggle through newspapers, Party purge, and so forth.\textsuperscript{36}

The audiences of Dejmek's production of Forefathers' Eve, Part III seized upon the opportunity that the production presented to bring then current politics out into the open and involve other Poles in the struggle. Tensions continued in Poland from various events, such as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and demonstrations led by both students and workers across the country in the 1970s.

On January 30, 1968, Dejmek's production of Forefathers' Eve, Part III was closed by the Soviet-run Ministry of Culture. Immediately following the last performance, "two hundred students marched to a nearby statue of Mickiewicz (itself a symbol of Polish independence) denouncing the closing of the play."\textsuperscript{37} A number of students were arrested when they refused to leave the statue after a militia ordered them
to do so. A month later, on February 29, 1968, the Warsaw section of the official Polish Writers’ Union, in a surprise move, adopted a proposal that condemned the closing of the production rather than support a government sponsored proposal denouncing the student protests. Across Poland, demonstrations led by students continued for some time, and in March 1968, a “nationwide hunt for dissident intellectuals and students” began after clashes between the students and the police.\textsuperscript{38} The theatre, unknowingly then to the authorities, functioned as a societal safety valve permitting Poles to have their political concerns addressed. As can be discerned from the reactions to the 1968 production of Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, this safety valve was very unstable and could be broken at any time when tensions ran high and were provoked.

In 1979, Maciej Prus challenged the Communist authorities with his strongly political staging of Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, at the Teatr Wybrzeże in Gdańsk. Prus brought anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments to the forefront in his production of Mickiewicz’s drama. His interpretation of the play added to the steadily increasing tensions in Poland due in part to the election of Polish cardinal Karol Wojtyła as the Roman Catholic Pope on October 16, 1978. Pope John Paul II, as Karol Wojtyła became known worldwide, encouraged Poles and those living in other Communist countries in Eastern Europe to take a stand against Communism. The patriotism and nationalism of Poles were renewed and assumed a greater urgency. Since Mickiewicz’s play deals with religious as well as political issues, Forefathers’ Eve, Part III yet again had special meaning for Polish audiences in 1979 after the appointment of Pope John Paul II. According to Braun, Prus’ production in Gdańsk “contributed to the electrification of the
political climate and thus prepared for the strikes in the Gdańsk Shipyard. It is also important to note that the Teatr Wybrzeże, where Prus’ production was mounted, is located only a few blocks away from the shipyard where the Solidarity movement would be born in 1980. It is also worth noting that on August 27, 1980, the twelfth day of the strikes in the Gdańsk Shipyard, actors from the Teatr Wybrzeże joined the striking workers who welcomed them warmly. The actors sang songs and recited poetry to demonstrate their union with the workers, and the actors’ performances for the striking workers “became a popular feature of Solidarity’s folklore over the months that followed.” Prus’ production, not only contributed to Solidarity, but also encouraged the nationalism of Poles.

Just as productions of Mickiewicz’s work, especially Pan Tadeusz and Forefathers’ Eve, Part III, had elicited strong responses from Polish audiences, building the nationalist idea through the theme of messianism, of suffering before death and eventual rebirth, productions of Yeats’ plays in Ireland contributed to the Irish nationalist idea through the messianic theme as well. Audiences watching Yeats’ plays in performance had their nationalistic sentiments stirred; they were reminded of their Irish heritage and identity, as well as the situation they were dealing with as a virtual colony of the English at the turn of the twentieth century. After seeing productions of Yeats’ dramas, they became more aware of Ireland’s predicament with England and were incited to fight for change in their country, bringing about a new beginning or rebirth. Three politically charged plays of Yeats that have moved Irish audiences both emotionally and
physically include Cathleen Ni Houlihan, The King’s Threshold, and The Dreaming of the Bones.

Of the three plays, Cathleen Ni Houlihan has had the most profound effect on Irish audiences. Since its first performance by the Irish National Dramatic Company at St. Teresa’s Hall in Dublin on April 2, 1902, the play was performed regularly in Dublin through 1916, the year of the Easter Rebellion. It was “immediately recognized as extremely effective theater and an explosive piece of nationalist propaganda.” Bradley claims the following of the play and the production:

The metamorphosis of the stooped old woman into a queenly girl was a powerful traditional symbol of nationalist hopes that was all the more inspiring for the casting of Maud Gonne in the title role. In this particular production of the play, the messianic theme as expressed through the Mother Ireland character of Cathleen Ni Houlihan is not the only means through which nationalism and pending rebellion are expressed. Maud Gonne, an actor and revolutionary, in the title role of the play contributed to and furthered the audience’s nationalism. The impact of this play and its production is demonstrated by critic Stephen Gwynn, who writes:

The effect of Cathleen Ni Houlihan on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot….Maud Gonne’s impersonation had stirred the audience as I have never seen audience stirred.

The 1902 audience was deeply affected by seeing a highly visible and recognizable political activist of their own time portray a legendary character from Ireland’s past. According to Joseph Holloway, the diarist of the Irish Literary Theatre and audience member for this production of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the play
...made a deep impression. Most of the sayings of the mysterious “Cathleen”...found ready and apt interpretation from the audience who understood that Erin [Ireland] spoke in “Cathleen,” and they applauded each red-hot patriotic sentiment right heartily, and enthusiastically called for the author at the end, and had their wish gratified.45

Yeats’ words and the portrayal of Cathleen Ni Houlihan by Maud Gonne, the real life rebel and the Irish mythical figure combined, worked on the collective Irish mindset for years to follow. Bradley states that there “can be little doubt that Yeats’s treatment of the legend [of Cathleen Ni Houlihan] added fuel to the fire of Irish nationalism, and contributed in particular to the self-sacrificial mentality of the 1916 insurrection.”46 Indeed, a production of Cathleen Ni Houlihan played on April 24, 1916, at the Abbey Theatre, just prior to the Easter Rebellion, and was scheduled to run from April 25 through April 29. Similar to the 1968 production of Forefathers’ Eve, Part III in Poland, Cathleen Ni Houlihan incited audience members to revolt against the oppression with which they were living that was imposed upon them by the dominant English. Seeing the reactions of his fellow Irish to his play, the rebellion, and the aftermath of the uprising, Yeats realized the hold his words had on others and even wondered whether Cathleen Ni Houlihan had sent a number of his countrymen to their deaths, fighting for the cause of Irish independence. According to Bradley, it “was not until the Easter Rising of 1916 that Yeats fully realized how much he had contributed to the ideal of political martyrdom that inspired the leaders of the insurrection.”47 Cathleen Ni Houlihan continues to be a popular piece of Irish nationalistic theatre today.

Although The King’s Threshold did not achieve the same height of popularity with Irish audiences as Cathleen Ni Houlihan, its impact on the collective Irish
consciousness has been considerable nonetheless. The play was first produced by the Irish National Theatre Society in Molesworth Hall in Dublin on October 8, 1903, and featured Frank Fay, a well-known Irish actor of the time, in the role of Seanchan, the poet protesting the edict of the King by undergoing a hunger strike. Originally, the ending of the play was rather positive, with Seanchan being victorious and allowed to sit at the council table as was the right of the poets. Yeats, however, changed the ending in 1922, making it more tragic through the death of Seanchan. This change was in response to political developments since 1903. Bradley explains the change of the ending:

By this time [1922] the tactic of hunger strike had been used as political protest by many Irish patriots, including Terence MacSwiney, mayor of Cork, who died in 1920 after a seventy-four-day hunger strike in an English jail. While Yeats had anticipated the use of the hunger strike as a political weapon in modern Ireland (though it had often been used in ancient Ireland, as is pointed out in the play), there can be little doubt that he was moved to give the play a tragic ending by contemporary events.  

The story of Seanchan, though based on the folktales, Seanchan the Bard and the King of Cats, spoke to audiences of Yeats' time, bringing attention to the hunger strikes that a number of the Irish were holding as captives in English prisons to protest oppression and domination.

Yeats' combination of history and legend with contemporary events and circumstances are also apparent in The Dreaming of the Bones, to which audiences responded rather strongly. Its first production was at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin on December 6, 1931, and was received enthusiastically by audiences. Centering on a Young Man who had participated in the 1916 Easter Rebellion and his interactions with the infamous Diarmuid and Dervorgilla of Irish history and legend, audiences were able
to identify with the Young Man and the contemporary circumstances presented. Additionally, audiences were able to connect with the idea of human and supernatural interaction that is a large part of Irish myth. For reasons that are unclear, The Dreaming of the Bones is not often staged, although rather successful productions were staged in 1961 by the Lyric Players Theatre of Belfast at the Dublin Theatre Festival and the Yeats International Summer School in Sligo.

As is apparent, Yeats’ dramas as well as Mickiewicz’s work have contributed considerably to the nationalist idea in both Ireland and Poland, especially through the use of the theme of messianism. For both writers, messianism is the vehicle which carries the nationalist idea, reflecting and symbolizing the situations of Poland and Ireland as oppressed, colonized nations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the Polish and the Irish either read or saw the dramas of Mickiewicz or Yeats performed, they did not put their national troubles and their personal problems aside. Instead, they carried with them the weight of both their individual and collective situations and used drama and the theatre as a forum to address their concerns, which was aided by the plays of writers like Mickiewicz and Yeats. Polish and Irish audiences, therefore, did not need to stretch their imaginations far to recognize the parallels between what was portrayed in the dramas and what they were living with in their everyday lives. Various forms of suffering and death presented in the plays of Mickiewicz and Yeats represented the restrictions placed by the dominant nations on Polish and Irish life, the strict regimes that curtailed and tried to eliminate the cultures of Poland and Ireland.
More importantly, though, the presentation of different examples of rebirth in the plays gave audiences the hope, strength, and determination to actively do something to bring about change in their lives and in their nations, to fight against and overthrow unwanted and oppressive foreign regimes. The Polish and the Irish took matters into their own hands to function as their own collective messiahs; encouraged by messianic leaders of the people, such as Mickiewicz and Yeats, they rebelled and formed insurrections against their oppressors. Some of these insurrections were successful while others were not, but all of them contributed to the notions of collective salvation and national identity, rallying together people of the same background and with the same hope in future independence.

Mickiewicz and Yeats, through their plays, reminded their countrymen of their common past, experiences, and traditions in order to help them unite as a people, as a nation. Additionally, they re-created the nationalist idea in their nations by emphasizing, through the theme of messianism, that their countrymen were people who refused to be repressed in their own lands by outsiders. By promoting examples of messianism in their work, the two writers implanted the idea of nationalism and the importance of it in the collective consciousness of their countrymen.

In conclusion, the plays and objectives of Mickiewicz and Yeats are discussed together in this chapter to demonstrate not only the similarities that they share, but also the connections between the Polish and Irish nations that continue to persist since their first interactions with each other that occurred over two thousand years ago. Even
Mickiewicz felt a direct affinity with the plight of the Irish against the English. Monica Gardner claims the following:

His [Mickiewicz’s] favourites among foreign refugees were the Irish. The last English book that he ever read, and which was found lying on his bureau after he started on the journey to the East from which he never returned, was a work by an Irish Nationalist.49

Unfortunately, Gardner does not name the Irish nationalist whose work Mickiewicz read before going off to Constantinople, where he died in 1855 while organizing a legion against the Russians.

Both the Polish writer and the Irish writer began their work with their nations’ history, myths, and traditions to create a foundation on which to build and promote national identity that in turn develops nationhood and encourages political consciousness. Identity is a non-tangible element that is difficult to define but plays a large role in individual and later collective development. National identity, the collective identity of a number of individuals, has a great part in creating the mindset of a group of people with similar and shared characteristics, values, beliefs, and traditions. In their plays, Mickiewicz and Yeats present the national identities of the Polish and the Irish based on established precedents, but they apply past stories and historical figures to their own times, thus re-creating the national identities of their own countries.

While Mickiewicz and Yeats associate the concept of messianism with their nations in four manifestations that include religious, cultural, political, and national, Marx and Engels associate economic messianism with the situations of Poland and Ireland in the nineteenth century. The theorists believed that once Poland and Ireland were free of domination by oppressive foreign powers, the Slavic nation as well as the
Celtic would both experience an economic rebirth that would eventually help bring about social change through the implementation of a different economic system that was not based on a feudal society but rather on the elimination of classes. Unlike Marx and Engels, Mickiewicz and Yeats do not address issues of economic messianism in their work; their views are more reminiscent of Joseph de Maistre, who believed in the soul of a nation that distinguishes one nation from another and that does not permit a nation to be dominated by another.

Lastly, Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’ works use the theme of messianism to ultimately develop and promote the nationalist idea in Poland and in Ireland. The nationalist idea is not merely an idea locked between words that are either read or spoken. Like theatre, it is a live concept put into practice as demonstrated by both the Polish and the Irish living under oppression, reacting in the theatre and outside it to the nationalistic dramas of Mickiewicz and Yeats. The plays of the two writers promoted nationalism in their countrymen in their own times and beyond.
Notes to Chapter 4


5 Ibid. p. 49.


7 Ibid. p. 81.


10 The Kraków insurrection, which was against Austrian-Hungarian rule that controlled Kraków and the southern part of Poland, began on February 20, 1846, and was crushed within days. (See Aleksander Gieysztor. *History of Poland.* Warsaw: PWN—Polish Scientific Publishers, 1979. p. 409-413.)


12 Ibid. p. 388.

13 Ibid. p. 389.

14 Ibid. p. 392.

15 Ibid. p. 550.

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16 Ibid. p. 549.

17 Ibid. p. 549.


19 Ibid. p. 84-85. It should be noted that Engels incorrectly marks 1100 as the year the English arrive in Ireland. The correct date is 1169.

20 Ibid. p. 85.


22 Aleksander Fredro (1793-1876) is known for his Moliere-like social comedies of character. Born into a wealthy family that lived south of Lwów, Fredro was often criticized for not taking up the cause of Poland in his dramas as the Polish Romantic writers, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and Krasiński (although Fredro was a contemporary of the Polish Romantics, he was not a Romantic writer himself). It should be noted, however, that he was in Napoleon’s army of the Duchy of Warsaw until the end of the Napoleonic empire. Fredro’s comedies, such as Ladies and Hussars (Damy i Huzary) and Vengeance (Zemsta), were popular in his own time and continue to be enjoyed by audiences in the present. (See Czesław Miłosz. The History of Polish Literature. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1983. p. 249-254.)


24 Ibid. p. 6.

25 This is what caused a number of scholars to argue that Mickiewicz’s plays were intended to be closet dramas, besides the great scenic demands that were beyond the capabilities of the early nineteenth century theatre.

26 Mickiewicz heard of this incident, which haunted him for the rest of his life.


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30 Ibid. p. 10.

31 Ibid. p. 12.


34 Ibid. p. 74.


36 Ibid. p. 141.

37 Ibid. p. 139.


39 Ibid. p. 76.

40 Ibid. p. 92.


42 Ibid. p. 79.

43 Maud Gonne, though born in England to a captain in the British Army, sympathized with the Irish and their quest for Home Rule at the turn of the twentieth century. Identifying herself with the Irish, she took an active part in demonstrations against the English. She was Yeats' lifelong love interest, but she did not regard the Irish writer as more than a friend and fellow Irish nationalist. (See Keith Alldritt. W.B. Yeats: The Man and the Milieu. New York: Clarkson Potter, 1997.)


47 Ibid. p. 81.


CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study of the plays of Mickiewicz and Yeats was to not only emphasize the similarities in their poetic writing style and nationalist tendencies, but also to bring attention to the fact that Poland and Ireland are nations whose ties to each other can be traced back more than two millennia. The Polish and the Irish have had a mutually positive and beneficial relationship with each other since the earliest times, sharing their skills, crafts, and traditions with each other. Although the mass populations of the two peoples have been separated geographically from each other after the western migration of the Celts to the British Isles and eventually to Ireland, the two groups continued to be joined through similar circumstances and experiences that they endured. For centuries, the Polish and the Irish have both braved domination by foreign superpowers exploiting their lands and attempting to supplant their culture and national identities. Many have drawn parallels between the similar predicaments of Poland and Ireland, including Irish patriot and freedom fighter Patrick Pearse, who commented on Ireland's situation, "It is not more terrible than the enslavement of the Poles by Russia, than the enslavement of the Irish by England."¹ The two nations were in danger of losing
their languages through restrictions placed on the use of the vernacular in schools, businesses, and government offices, as well as their identities and cultures to those of the dominating nations. In nineteenth century Poland, which lacked its own political borders and sovereignty, Poles risked losing their identity due to decrees by foreign governments curtailing their language and traditions. Meanwhile, in Ireland, the Irish culture was being replaced by that of the English, especially after the famine of the 1840s and most notably in the cities, where a large number of people were losing ties to their heritage.

Mickiewicz and Yeats both proved to be instrumental in delving into the rich history, traditions, and folklore of their nations in order to create a literature and a drama that would help their countrymen regain a sense of their identity as a Polish people or an Irish people. Mickiewicz often looks to key events in Polish history as well as Polish pagan and religious rites as a basis for his work that is meant to instill Poles with pride in their past and to carry that pride with them in the present and into the future with succeeding generations. Likewise, Yeats uses Irish folklore and Irish history as a foundation for his plays that are intended to help the Irish rebuild their identity as an ethnic group that is separate from the English. Through the recurring theme of messianism that is interlaced through the work of Mickiewicz and Yeats, the two writers develop metaphors for the predicaments of their nations while simultaneously giving their countrymen the hope for future freedom from dominating powers. By implying in their writing that there is the possibility of national rebirth and salvation after a period of suffering and crucifixion, Mickiewicz and Yeats give their people the strength, perseverance, and patience to continue. Both writers use the theme of messianism not
only to reflect the situation of their countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also to further develop the nationalist idea, the idea of the Poles or the Irish as being a distinct people with the right to their own culture, political borders, and rulers.

Throughout Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, I discussed specific works of Mickiewicz and Yeats, respectively, and demonstrated the various examples of messianism that are apparent and made familiar the not so widely known dramatic pieces of both writers, who are more often regarded as poets rather than playwrights. Especially with the dramatic texts of Mickiewicz, which are little known in the English-speaking world and are seldom performed outside of Poland in either Polish or English, I brought attention to a major world writer and dramatist who is given less attention than is deserved beyond the borders of Poland, Russia, and Eastern Europe. Additionally, besides giving attention to one of Poland’s greatest writers, I gave greater exposure and an understanding of Mickiewicz’s work, the Poland of his time, and the mindset of the Polish people of both yesterday and today. Although Yeats is well known and highly regarded, his poetry is usually emphasized above his plays, some of which have elicited strong reactions from Irish audiences at the Abbey Theatre in the writer’s day. In this study, I gave heed to Yeats’ well constructed theatrical writing to emphasize his talent as a playwright and in promoting Irish identity through combining in his plays the Ireland of myth and the past with the Ireland of fact and the present.

Through text and in performance, the dramatic work of Mickiewicz and Yeats has had a great impact on Polish and Irish audiences and continue to do so to the present time. As I discussed in Chapter 4, their plays had a considerable role in rebuilding and
retaining national identity through Polish and Irish themes as well as through the concept of messianism in the time in which they were written. However, they serve a purpose today in maintaining national identity, becoming part of the heritage of Poland and Ireland. Stage productions of Mickiewicz’s and Yeats’ plays still draw large audiences and have special meaning, reminding the public of their history and the rich traditions of their culture. In addition to theatre artists, filmmakers are beginning to see the potential for film versions of the bards’ dramatic work that can be seen by larger audiences. In 1994, Yeats’ play, Words Upon the Window Pane, was made into a film by director Mary McGuckian and featured Geraldine Chaplin in the role of Miss McKenna and Gemma Craven as Mrs. Mallet. Several years later, Andrzej Wajda, created a 1999 film adaptation of Mickiewicz’s Pan Tadeusz with some of Poland’s finest actors, such as Daniel Olbrychski as Gerwazy and Bogusław Linda as Father Robak.

The work of Mickiewicz and Yeats has its effect on the collective consciousness of the Polish public and the Irish public, respectively, and has even influenced proceeding generations of playwrights. In Poland, Stanisław Wyspiański, one of the most noteworthy Polish playwrights and theatre practitioners since Mickiewicz and his contemporaries, had written plays in the tradition of the Polish bard. The Young Poland movement, in which Wyspiański had a large part, was a movement led by writers and artists that looked to the Polish romantics for inspiration at the turn of the twentieth century; it was a brief return to the romantic style. Wyspiański’s most well known play, The Wedding (Wesele), deals with the messianic theme similarly to Mickiewicz but with a rather apocalyptic ending in which the Polish guests at a wedding feast are dancing to
the music of a straw man (Chochoł) as there is not a leader or a true wieszcz to lead them to their salvation. If there is any doubt as to Mickiewicz’s influence on Wyspiański, it should be noted that Wyspiański was the first theatre director to stage the Forefathers cycle in its entirety in Kraków in 1901. In Ireland, Brian Friel is a worthy follower in the tradition of Yeats in promoting Irish history and identity. His play, Translations, addresses the issue of the English supplanting the native language and customs of the Irish, while Dancing at Lughnasa uses a traditional pagan festival and other folk beliefs as a basis for its action set in mid-twentieth century Ireland. Wyspiański and Friel, among other playwrights and theatre artists, prove that the connections to Mickiewicz and Yeats remain strong.
Notes to Chapter 5

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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