

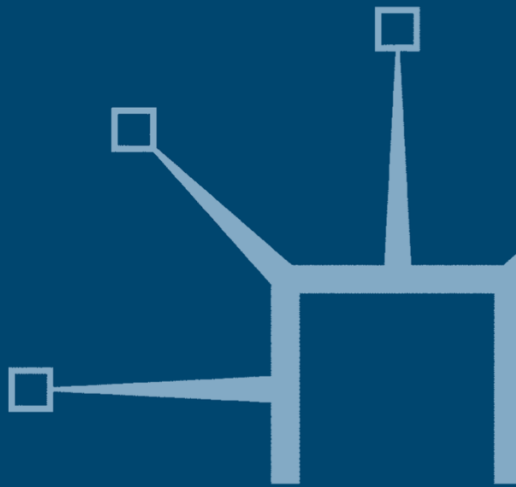
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Women in Irish Drama

A Century of Authorship and
Representation

Edited by

Melissa Sihra



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Women in Irish Drama

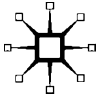
A Century of Authorship and Representation

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Melissa Sihra

Foreword by

Marina Carr



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For my Mother, Margaret, and Grandmother, Kathleen

*Oh, whatever men may say
Ours is the wide and open way.*

*Oh, whatever men may dream
We have the blue air and the stream.*

*Men have got their towers and walls,
We have cliffs and waterfalls.*

*Oh, whatever men may do
Ours is the gold air and the blue.*

*Men have got their pomp and pride –
All the green world is on our side.*

*Women's Rights,
Eva Gore-Booth, 1929*

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Foreword

Marina Carr

If you asked anyone, who are the women in Irish Theatre for the last one hundred years, I think you would be hard pressed to get a response beyond Lady Gregory and Maud Gonne. Playwrights? A blank. Designers? Another blank. Directors? A complete blank until you wander down to the eighties. One wonders why this is. Yes, there is the gender question. Yes, there is the whole history of the role of women in Irish society. There is all of that but there is also The Theatre itself. Is there something so public about the Theatre that seems to frighten women off, or that seems to be against the nature of women? One only has to look at the list of women poets, short-story writers, novelists in this country and abroad to realise that women do not seem to be drawn *en masse* to the theatre as a viable art form.

Why is this? I think there are several reasons. There is the structure of the Theatre, the collaborative nature of actually getting a play on, all the disparate voices, opinions, inputs that go into the producing of a play. There is the very public exposure of rehearsal and performance which goes against the nature of how women have been traditionally perceived. And sometimes against how women see themselves. There is the domestic factor. If you are child bearing, cooking, cleaning, night-feeding, how much time do you actually have to devote to the theatre regardless of desire to do so. The Theatre is a demanding art form. It sucks up time like no other form. And this factor, as much as anything I believe, has kept women away in their droves.

It is also incredibly difficult to bring a play to completion. I'm talking from the point of view of playwriting now. It will be three years at least. It will be several drafts. It will be warding off the chorus of voices suggesting change. It will be sifting this disparate chorus and taking the necessary advice and discarding the rest. A gift in itself that is not learnt in a day or a year or a decade.

It is also problematic dealing with the messiness of Theatre. If you write a poem, it stands or falls on the page. Or a novel. Or a short story. Not so with a play because plays are rarely read anymore. A play's survival in this day and age depends upon performance, production, design, lighting, direction. All of these disciplines have to come together at the same time in order for your play to work. It is not enough to have

written the thing. You must then be prepared to go on the extraordinary and frequently harrowing journey of play-making and all of the sacrifice of ego that jaunt involves. And your play will rise or fall according to how finely tuned your instruments are, your actors, your director, your set designer, your costume designer, your lighting designer, your audience. It is not an enterprise for the faint-hearted and I think one of the achievements of this book *Women in Irish Drama* is that it reminds us that given all the difficulties for women in Theatre traditionally, so many actually managed to work in it.

The joy of this book is the naming of these vanished women. Women we didn't even know existed in Irish Theatre. Who is Margaret O'Leary? Dorothy Macardle? Helen Waddell? Alice Milligan? Teresa Deevy? Patricia O'Connor? Who are these women? Where are their plays? Why have we never heard of them until now? How did they slip through the net? Are their plays any good? This will be the next very important question which follows the retrieval of these women from obscurity.

Does the work stand up? I certainly hope it does. It would provide us with several role models instantly. Irish women who have written for the Theatre long before we started to write. Playwrights whose work we could visit to learn something.

Let us hope the plays themselves will stand the brutal test of time. This will be the next stage of the journey. But for now the naming, the announcing, the retrieval is the thing.

Preface

You are about to read an extraordinary collection of essays about Irish Women playwrights. Perhaps it would be better to say ‘a collection of essays about extraordinary Irish Women playwrights’. No matter where the adjective goes, what it registers is a sense of discovery and surprise at the richness and complexity of the writing of Irish women writers in the twentieth century. Most scholars of theatre and avid theatre-goers will have heard of Lady Gregory and associated her with early Irish Nationalism. Others will have encountered contemporary writers such as Marina Carr or Marie Jones whose work is widely produced internationally in this new century. But few will know in any detail many of the women in between. The Appendix lists over 250 playwrights, making a large archival contribution to theatre studies. In addition to expanding the archive, Melissa Sihra gives us rich performance and textual analyses by a range of Irish scholars, and provides contextual ‘Interchapters’ of cultural and theatrical information to aid her readers’ grasp of the roles these plays have had in the unfolding histories of the Republic and Northern Ireland.

This is also a work of feminist scholarship in a moment too often considered post-feminist – not only because the volume is a project of recovery and documentation of the elided contributions of women to Irish arts and letters, but also because the volume disentangles real women from the mythical figures of female-as-nation, as mother, as abject that have populated accounts of the Irish stage. Sometimes these are historical women, such as Lady Gregory, whose co-authorship of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* went unacknowledged until 1988. Sihra writes, ‘Yeats’s attitude to Lady Gregory throughout the course of their acquaintance and collaborations clearly highlights gendered issues of authorship and authority, as well as the overall disempowerment of women in mainstream channels of artistic expression.’ Sometimes these are fictional women who, like Stewart Parker’s figure of the Phantom Bride in *Northern Star*, are able to transcend time and point up gender energies and their differences. Moreover, the vibrant work of younger women playwrights challenges patriarchy in ways that make it clear that independent and agential female figures are reconfiguring what it means to be Irish in the twenty-first century.

For me, a US scholar with little direct experience of the Republic and none at all of Northern Ireland, the most exciting essays introduce previously invisible women writing in the early part of the century, taking part in politics and suffrage, (Geraldine Cummins and Susanne Day), or going to prison and participating in the Republican hunger strike (Dorothy Macardle). These essays reminded me of recent work by Maggie Gale on British women writers of the 1920s and 1930s and Christine Gray's work on African American women writers before 1930 – scholarship of recovery, surely, but also of affirmation of an alternative 'tradition' or counter-canon, a concept Sihra develops in her introduction to the volume.

The familiar themes and stereotypes of Irish drama appear in this volume in order to be interrogated, contested and transformed. Many of the plays treat ironically or contest the linkage between women's bodies and the nation, and in Brian Singleton's words, 'de-essentialize the new woman and her position'. If not all characters escape from the confines of the past, the writers shape their dramaturgy to reveal the structures which constrain them. Marina Carr, preferring tragedy and therefore the downward arc leading toward death in *By the Bog of Cats*... also gestures toward apotheosis. Indeed, Melissa Sihra writes about the effects of her plays that 'Carr's conceptual spaces of otherness forge rooms where enactments of alterity are possible and female expressiveness can begin to take place', thereby reminding us that the effect or affect of a particular dramaturgy may be different from its literal trajectory.

Another interesting aspect of *Women in Irish Drama* is the inclusion of selected male writers (such as Stewart Parker) within the volume. Often, feminist scholarship is concerned with bringing forth women's voices about women's writing – and I myself have argued that that is appropriate to a political project of correcting the imbalance of representation of women scholars as well as artists. However, masculinity studies and treatments of gender differentials have contributed to a fuller understanding of the entire nexus of gender and sexualities, and several of the essays in this volume enrich its overall impact by focusing on male writers. Anna McMullan, well-known Beckett scholar, contributes a study of Beckett's early women characters from the 1930s and 1940s in order to argue that gendered embodiment is part and parcel of Beckett's developing form and 'the engine or dynamic of a gendered imaginary'. She also points out that Beckett's deployment of gender can provide a key to understanding the way gender functions in later post-independence male writers such as Brian Friel or Tom Murphy.

Sexuality – gay sexuality – is less represented in the texts and discussions that make up the volume than one might imagine. The Irish main stages have not fully explored the theme of women’s sexual love for women. While it might be easy to speculate on the effects of the Catholic Church on the repression of homosexuality and lesbian sexuality in particular, it is also a matter of legality: homosexuality was only decriminalized in 1993. When Frank McGuinness wrote *Innocence* for the Gate theatre in the 1980s, he reportedly received threats. My search for the missing lesbians led me to the slight gesture toward female/female desire in Stella Feehily’s *Duck* (in Brian Singleton’s essay), and also to Emma Donoghue’s plays listed in the appendix. More satisfying was Eamonn Jordan’s essay on women characters in plays by Frank McGuinness. Not only is McGuinness a male playwright who dares in his work to figure male homosexuality, he also surpasses his male peers in creating female characters that ‘deliberate, perform, accuse and fail in the same way that his male characters do’. Thus examining male writers alongside female writers provides a rich and complex account of gender representation and its intersection with sexuality.

At a recent six-campus teleconference at the University of California, graduate students asked Marina Carr about whether or not she feels a responsibility to counter patriarchy and put forth female themes in her plays. ‘Absolutely not!’ she responded. ‘The writer can’t do that, can’t carry that. We tell stories and it’s up to you critics and scholars to see what they might say or not about women and patriarchy and such things. It’s up to you!’ Sihra seems to have taken that to heart in this book, which brings together a group of theatre scholars who are able to interrogate representations by/of Irish women and draw some conclusions about what they might collectively achieve.

Janelle Reinelt

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I would like to extend my gratitude to Anthony Roche, Janelle Reinelt and Brian Singleton, who were immensely supportive in the early stages of this project. I would like to thank Hugh Odling-Smee, curator of the Performing Arts Archive at the Linen Hall Library, for his help with the Appendix, images and manuscript information. I also wish to thank Mairéad Delaney at the Abbey Theatre for her huge efforts in sourcing images and also for her input into the Appendix. Further gratitude goes to Amelia Stein, Tom Lawlor, Chris Hill, Ann Patten, Rob Reid and Colum O’Riordan for their generosity, expertise and advice with images. I would also like to thank Bróna Olwill and Sandra McDermott at the National Photographic Archive of the National Library of Ireland for their efforts in sourcing and providing images for the volume. For her tireless work on compiling the contemporary section of the Appendix, I wish to extend thanks to my Research Assistant Rhona Trench. For their contributions to the Appendix, I wish to thank Patrick Lonergan, Paul Murphy, Elizabeth Mannion, Anthony Roche, Ninian Mellamphy, Ros Dixon, Frances Clarke, Ann M. Butler, Charlotte Headrick, John Hildebidle, Loredana Salis, Patricia Lynch, Joan Dean, Dawn Duncan, Paul Davis, Julie Donovan, Lucy McDiarmid and Maureen Waters. I also wish to thank David Johnston and all of my colleagues at Queen’s University Belfast, where I began working on this book.

I wish to extend my gratitude to each writer in this collection, for their knowledge, passion, and commitment to the work and histories of women in Irish drama. I would like to thank my family for their immense encouragement, my father and mother, my friends Sorcha Duggan, Déirdre Carr and Jan Duffy, and Paul Murphy for all his wonderful support, discussions and feedback. I wish to extend immense gratitude to Paula Kennedy, Commissioning Editor of Literature and Performance at Palgrave Macmillan, for publishing the book and for her support and warmth over the last two years. I also wish to thank the Performance Interventions Series Editor Elaine Aston for her insightful feedback and encouragement throughout this enriching experience. I would like to thank Series Editor Bryan Reynolds, and all the staff at Palgrave Macmillan, especially Christabel Scaife, Ruth

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Notes on Contributors

Marina Carr is a playwright. She grew up in County Offaly in the Irish Midlands and graduated from University College Dublin in 1987. She has written 11 plays to date, including *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *By the Bog of Cats ...* (1998), *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), *Ariel* (2002) and *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006). She has been Writer-in-Residence at the Abbey Theatre (1997), Trinity College Dublin (1998) and Dublin City University (1999) and is a member of Aosdána. She received the E. M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2001 and the Irish American Fund Award in 2004. In 2003 Carr held the post of Heimbold Chair of Irish Studies at the University of Villanova. Her plays are published by Faber & Faber and Gallery Press and have been translated into many languages and produced all over the world.

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Olwen Fouéré became an actor 25 years ago and has been based mainly in Ireland. She has performed and toured internationally with many theatre companies in Ireland and the United Kingdom including the Abbey, the Gate, The Royal National Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company and the English Stage Company. She has created and performed her own work with Operating Theatre, a music-based theatre company which she co-founded with composer Roger Doyle in 1980.

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Eamonn Jordan is Lecturer in Drama Studies at University College, Dublin. He has written extensively on Irish Theatre. His book *The Feast of Famine: The Plays of Frank McGuinness* (Peter Lang, 1997), is the first full-length study on McGuinness's work. In 2000 he edited *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Carysfort Press) and in 2001 he co-edited, with Lilian Chambers and Ger Fitzgibbon, *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners*. He is also co-editor, with Lilian Chambers, of *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories* (Carysfort Press, 2006).

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Anna McMullan is Chair of Drama at Queen's University Belfast. She is author of *Theatre on Trial: The Later Drama of Samuel Beckett* (Routledge, 1993) and co-editor of *The Theatre of Marina Carr: 'before rules was made'* with Cathy Leeney. She has published many essays on Beckett's theatre and media plays and on contemporary Irish theatre and performance.

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Company and was Associate Director to Peter Hall on his production of *Measure for Measure*. She recently directed three new Irish plays; *Hurricane* in the West End, *Protestants* at the Soho Theatre and *The Half* at the Drama Studio at Queen's. She has published articles on Shakespeare and Irish theatre.

Mark Phelan is Lecturer in Drama Studies at Queen's University, Belfast. His research focuses on Irish theatre, specialising in theatre and performance in the North of Ireland. He has published a number of articles on nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish theatre and photography and is a member of the National organizing committee of the Irish Theatrical Diaspora.

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Melissa Sihra is Lecturer in Drama Studies at Trinity College, Dublin. She is a dramaturg and has worked at the Abbey Theatre and in the United States on productions of plays by G. B. Shaw, Brian Friel and Marina Carr. She is co-editor of *Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Colin Smythe) and is currently completing a monograph on the theatre of Marina Carr.

Brian Singleton is Head of the School of Drama, Trinity College, Dublin. He is former Editor of *Theatre Research International* (Cambridge University Press) and currently Vice-President for publications of the International Federation for Theatre Research. He has published two books on the life and work of Antonin Artaud, a monograph on Orientalism and British Musical Comedy, and co-edited collections of essays on contemporary Irish theatre for *Australasian Drama Studies* and *Modern Drama*.

Introduction: Figures at the Window

Melissa Sihra

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, theatre in Ireland has been a highly charged and controversial space of cultural enactment regarding notions of woman and gender. Since Augusta Gregory's and W. B. Yeats's 1902 drama *Kathleen ni Houlihan* it is important to interrogate the signification of 'woman' as idealized trope of nation and to look at the ways in which the work of later Irish dramatists either contests or perpetuates this legacy. The social and cultural position of woman has historically been one of symbolic centrality and subjective disavowal as both colonial ideology and nationalist movements promoted feminized concepts of the nation, while subordinating women in everyday life. Eavan Boland writes of women's iconographic prominence and lack of agency in *Object Lessons*:

What female figure was there left to identify with? None. The heroine, as such, was utterly passive. She was Ireland or Hibernia. She was stamped, as a rubbed-away mark, on silver or gold; a compromised regal figure on a throne. . . . Her flesh was wood or ink or marble. And she had no speaking part. Her identity was an image. Or was it a fiction?¹

The governing of gender, sexuality and the female body, in particular, as encoded by both the Catholic Church and the Irish Constitution, has had a huge impact on women's status and rights in the twentieth century and is reflected in many of the plays of this period. The mutually reinforcing ideologies of the Catholic Church and Irish Free State became embedded in Éamon De Valera's *Oireachtas* (government) Bills in 1937. At this time, severely confining roles for women were drawn up in consultation with ultra-conservative Archbishop John Charles McQuaid

2 *Women in Irish Drama*

and became enshrined within the constitution, many of which remain in place today. The monotheistic patriarchal meta-narrative valorized the heterosexual family unit and glorified the role of motherhood while intervening in issues pertaining to sexuality and morality. For precisely the last 70 years the position of women in Ireland has been officially located within the domestic sphere in De Valera's Family Article, the wording of which is only now under revision. In Article 41 'woman' is explicitly defined by the role of 'mother', and the two terms remain interchangeable. Plays by Irish women, in particular, have sought to challenge this limiting constitutional ideology and often display anxiety in relation to motherhood and home through dramatizing disillusionment and employing dramaturgical strategies which challenge conventional realist modes and realms of representation. Maryann Valiulis cites the Catholic publication *The Irish Monthly* from 1925, which promoted typically essentialist associations of woman and motherhood:

The [vocation] for which nature has admirably suited her is that of wife and mother. The woman's duties in this regard, especially that of bringing up the children, are of such far-reaching importance for the nation and the race, that the need of safeguarding them must outweigh almost every other consideration.²

The lack of positive outcomes for many of the female protagonists in plays by women, from all periods of the twentieth century, can be read as a potent response to the false legacy of the new State, and reveal an unresolved disaffection. The promise of equality in Article 3 of the 1922 constitution, which stated that 'every person, without distinction of sex, shall . . . enjoy the privileges and be subject to the obligations of such citizenship', was not followed-through in the following decade.³ Catriona Beaumont points out: 'In 1932 Fianna Fáil came to power under the leadership of Éamon De Valera. The new regime soon revealed its willingness to enact legislation which again differentiated between the citizenship rights of men and women.'⁴ From the 1930s on, women's perceived primary social function as wife and mother, and the implementation of the draconian 1932 public service 'marriage bar', which prevented married women from being employed as civil servants and as national schoolteachers, was used to limit their role and potential in public life.⁵

The recurring interior of the home on the Irish stage has come to signify an enduring association and conflation of family and nation. While ideals of family were promoted in the cultural life, 'home' in

Irish drama has remained a precarious space, denoting a lack of security and prone to invasion and penetration. Within this site of instability and violation, women seek agency and subjective accommodation. In Marina Carr's 1994 drama, *The Mai*, the eponymous character describes the house that she has built and her fraught relationship with it:

This house – these days I think it's the kind of house you'd see in the corner of a dream – dark, formless, strangely inviting. It's the kind of house you build to keep out neuroses, stave off nightmares. But they come in anyway with the frost and the draughts and the air bubbles in the radiators. It's the kind of house you build when you've nowhere left to go.⁶

Gaston Bachelard expresses how, 'All great, simple images reveal a psychic state. The house, even more than the landscape, is a "psychic state".⁷ In Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990), this 'psychic state' is apparent as the imminent crises that await the Mundy sisters are foreshadowed through the vivid metaphorical debilitation of the family home. Kate says:

You work hard at your job. You try to keep the home together. You perform your duties as best you can – because you believe in responsibilities and obligations and good order. And then suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile it can't be held together much longer. It's all about to collapse⁸

Potent threshold spaces such as windows and doorways emphasize issues of containment and transformation in performance, reinforcing the place of the body within history and culture. The *limen* of the window powerfully frames the emptiness that it outlines on stage. The *Mai* is continually seen passing by, or framed within, the 'huge bay window', while the five Mundy sisters fleetingly glance at modernity, hope and possibility through the small kitchen window in 1930s rural Ireland.⁹ As each of the sisters competes for a new perspective, it becomes apparent that escape and transition will not be an option. While the women attain a temporary reprieve through the physical act of dancing, this carnivalesque retreat to the realm of the corporeal serves ultimately to reinforce the dominant social structures with the return to order and suppression.

The window-frame is a device employed evocatively in Paul Vincent Carroll's 1937 Abbey play, *Shadow and Substance*, to explore spirituality and the role of institutional religion against questions of truth and justice. The central character, Brigid, a local Canon's maidservant, experiences vivid visions of St Brigid, and finally causes those around her to confront their own deep-seated prejudices. While the men in the play are regarded, like the Church itself, as hypocritical, selfish and lacking in humanity, Brigid and her Saint are the transformative 'substance' of truth. In the staging, the imagistic drawing-room window, with its '*beautiful long white curtains reaching to the ground*', is where Brigid encounters and embodies her beloved Saint.¹⁰ In Act III: '*The Canon stops abruptly to stare at Brigid who suddenly comes in by the window. She is dressed all in white . . . She leans against the curtains – a white picture in a white frame. All turn and stare at her.*'¹¹ Here, the suggestive site of the window is a portal between the myopia of the clergy and community and the realms of enlightenment and integrity embodied in Brigid.

Máiréad Ní Ghráda's 1964 Irish-language play, *An Triail* (On Trial), shows a young female protagonist, Maura, negotiating the traumatic interface of Church, State and her own sexuality when she crosses the site of the window to meet her lover. Her brother Liam says: 'And often-times I hear her slipping out the window in the night time'.¹² Maura pays the ultimate price for her transgression when, after becoming pregnant, she is abandoned by her family and incarcerated in a Magdalen Laundry. In Frank McGuinness's one-act play *Baglady* (1985), the nameless poor old woman of the title, another displaced Kathleen ni Houlihan, wanders the world as she attempts to come to terms with the sexual abuse she endured as a child. As she '*walks along the edge of her space*' she sings a nursery rhyme about a menacing figure at the window:

Who's at the window, who?
 Who's at the window, who?
 A bad, bad man with a bag on his back
 Coming to take you away.
 Who's at the window, who?
 Who's at the window, who?
 Go away, bad man, with the bag on your back,
 You won't take me with you today.¹³

Here McGuinness indicts the Catholic Church for its silence and collusion with the countless horrifying instances of child sexual abuse in Ireland which came to light in the 1980s and 1990s. Throughout the play

Baglady tries to release the heavy chain around her neck, to fully inhabit a space of her own and to stand before the windows of her past: 'In our house there's a room made of windows. I'm not allowed in, even to see out of it. But I can see it clearly.'¹⁴

Gregory's and Yeats's *Kathleen ni Houlihan* features at its performative core a woman passing by the cottage window and looking upon the family within, her body separated from the family by the filtering glaze of the window through which she gazes. Gregory and Yeats write: 'An Old Woman passes the window slowly. She looks at Michael as she passes.'¹⁵ From this moment, woman is framed on stage within the window of history as Ireland, drawing on the tradition of aisling poetry and feminine metonymic references such as the *Shan bhan Bhocht* (Poor Old Woman) and *Róisín Dúbh* (Dark Rosaleen). The aisling was an allegorical form that became especially popular among Irish poets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Gaelic word means 'vision' or 'dream image' and evokes a beautiful young woman as metaphor of Ireland. In a letter to Gregory, Yeats claimed that an aisling inspired the idea for the play *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. He says:

One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Kathleen ni Houlihan for whom many songs have been sung and for whose sake so many have gone to their death.¹⁶

While the majority of nationalists took inspiration from the concept of woman as nation, Eoin Mac Néill was one of the few political activists who recognized the 'danger implicit in a dream image whose force is emotional rather than rational'.¹⁷ In a memorandum to Pádraig Pearse and other members of the Irish Volunteers in February 1916, he wrote:

We have to remember that what we call our country is not a poetical abstraction, as some of us, perhaps all of us, in the exercise of our highly developed capacity for figurative thought, are sometimes apt to imagine – with the help of our patriotic literature. There is no such person as Caitlín Ní Uallacháin or Róisín Dubh or the *Sean-bhean Bhocht*, who is calling upon us to serve her. What we call our country is the Irish nation, which is a concrete and visible reality.¹⁸

Gregory's and Yeats's Poor Old Woman vividly embodies the unresolved confrontation between symbolic 'Woman' (Mother Ireland) and debilitated physical woman. She is a nameless, homeless wanderer, a simultaneously revered symbol of nation and exilic figure of abjection. Upon first seeing her pass by the window, Michael comments: 'I'd sooner a stranger not to come to the house the night before my wedding.'¹⁹ The Poor Old Woman is initially regarded with suspicion – an unquantifiable 'woman from beyond the world', whose ghostly transformation at the end of the play into 'a young girl [who] had the walk of a queen'²⁰ has traditionally been regarded as a powerful image of feminine agency related to the nationalist cause. Yet this 'transformation' served to preserve the female wanderer within a frame of sublimated desire. The Poor Old Woman of the play laments her history as homeless symbol of nation since the anti-Catholic Penal Laws of the 1690s, when coded narratives emerged due to the prohibition on explicitly naming Ireland in ballads and poems: '[I]t's long I'm on the roads since first I went wandering. . . . There have been many songs made for me.'²¹ While Gregory and Yeats are referring to the colonization of Ireland, Peter's comment, 'It's a pity indeed for any person to have no place of their own', can be read in terms of the dislocation of female subjectivity.²² In a poignant confrontation between 'real' woman and woman-as-nation, Peter's wife, Bridget, says to the Poor Old Woman: 'It is a wonder you are not worn out with so much wandering.'²³

The lack of accommodation of female subjectivity operates on many levels in this play. Yeats did not publicly acknowledge Gregory's collaborations with him on the script of *Kathleen ni Houlihan*. While Gregory accepted this initially, on the basis 'that his was the name that would sell',²⁴ she grew to resent Yeats for it as the years went by. In July 1928 she wrote in her journal: 'Rather hard on me, not giving my name with Kathleen ni Houlihan that I wrote all but all of.'²⁵ Gregory remained unacknowledged as co-author of the play until James Pethica's 1988 essay "'Our Kathleen": Yeats's Collaboration with Lady Gregory in the Writing of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*' confirmed her co-authorship from manuscript evidence.²⁶ In *Our Irish Theatre* (1913), Gregory clearly states her collaboration with Yeats: 'Later in the year we wrote together *Kathleen ni Houlihan* . . .'²⁷ Gregory quotes a letter she received from Yeats in the same passage, where he says: "'We turned my dream into the little play, *Kathleen ni Houlihan*, and when we gave it to the little theatre in Dublin and found that working people liked it, you helped me to put my other dramatic fables into speech.'²⁸ Yet, in the Norton Anthology *Modern Irish Drama* (1991), Yeats remains credited as sole author.



Figure 1 Maud Gonne in *Kathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). Courtesy of The Abbey Theatre.

The title role of *Kathleen ni Houlihan* was first performed by the striking nationalist activist Maud Gonne (see Figure 1). The triple convergence of Gonne's commanding physicality, her iconic status as political activist and her mesmerizing portrayal of woman as nation resonated deeply with audiences at the time. In her memoirs actress Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh, who attended the first performance on 2 April 1902 in St Teresa's Hall, Clarendon Street, passionately relates the powerful, almost transcendental, effect Gonne had in the role:

How many who were there that night will forget the Kathleen ni Houlihan of Maud Gonne, her rich golden hair, willow-like figure, pale sensitive face, and burning eyes, as she spoke the closing lines of the Old Woman turning out through the cottage door Watching her, one could readily understand the reputation she enjoyed as the most beautiful woman in Ireland, the inspiration of the whole revolutionary movement. She was the most exquisitely-fashioned creature I have ever seen. Her beauty was *startling*. Yeats wrote *Kathleen ni Houlihan* especially for her, and there were few in the audience who did not see why. She was the very personification of the figure she portrayed on the stage.²⁹